

# 'Selective' history condemned

*J - Edu & Culture*

*5/1 2/12*

**Statesman News Service**

BHOPAL, Dec. 30. - The 62nd session of the Indian History Congress today passed a resolution, condemning deletion of passages from NCERT history textbooks.

The books are written by Prof. Romila Thapar, Prof. Arjun Dev and Prof. Indira Arjun Dev, Prof. RS Sharma and Prof. Satish Chandra.

"The IHC deplores the project of deleting important facts from history and inserting imaginary or mythological ones in the name of religious values," said the first resolution. It said: "The practice of bans and proscriptions should be unacceptable in a free country and can only be promoted by those who feel that open debate is not conducive to their own views of the past."

The IHC minced no words in criticising Mr Murli Manohar

Joshi for describing some top historians as "intellectual terrorists whose activities are more dangerous than trans-border terrorism" and for proposing to get history textbooks approved by religious leaders. The HRD ministry, according to the IHC, is "encouraging a narrative of history which is at best speculative and often invokes mere belief and mythology rather than valid historical evidence."

The resolution said the NCERT's emphasis on "instruction in religion" was ultra vires of the Constitution and an attempt to promote a "biased, selective history."

The IHC criticised the NCERT for refusing to declare names of the people who would rewrite textbooks. The move does not augur well for the "quality and authenticity" of new textbooks, the resolution said.

The IHC urged non-CBSE

educational authorities to reject the changes in the curriculum and textbooks and adopt only such updates done in a scientific and unbiased manner.

Another resolution called upon the Indian Council of Historical Research for publishing the two volumes of the "Towards Freedom project," edited by Prof. KN Panikkar and Prof. Sumit Sarkar. The move to suspend the publication is "undemocratic."

The third resolution urged the Andhra Pradesh government to scrap its decision to withdraw history from the intermediate course curriculum.

The final resolution took exception to the Kerala government's move to abolish the Kerala Council of Historical Research.

Delegates of Hindi-speaking states staged a dharna to protest against the non-inclusion of Hindi papers in the proceedings of the conference.

THE STATESMAN

31 DEC 2001

# Historians parade to back text deletions

FROM OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

**New Delhi, Dec. 16:** Historians and archaeologists close to the BJP's viewpoint on rewriting history have called a news conference on December 21 to elaborate their "version" why the recent deletions in high-school texts are justified.

The panel includes S.P. Gupta, M.G.S. Narayanan, Mahesh Singh, K.S. Lal and Devendra Swaroop. Gupta, who is the chairperson of the Archaeo-

logical Society of India, and Lal have written extensively on the Ramjanmabhoomi issue and attempted to "prove" that a temple was razed on the spot on which the Babri masjid stood. Swaroop is a regular contributor to the RSS' Hindi weekly, *Panchajanya*.

The BJP's Rajya Sabha MP and former high commissioner to the UK, L.M. Singhvi, will also share the dais.

Swaroop and Gupta, however, denied that the BJP or the Vajpayee government had any-

thing to do with their news conference.

They said the panelists were members of the Indian History and Cultural Society which was set up in 1977.

"It has been called to explain to the media why the changes in the NCERT texts were necessary.

For the last several months, a virtual campaign is on to whip up opinion against the changes in the history texts and it's high time we spoke up," said Gupta. He explained Singhvi's presence as: "We are old

friends from the Allahabad University days. So why shouldn't he come?"

BJP sources, however, admitted such a forum was necessary to purvey its stand. Sources felt the only person speaking up for rewriting history was human resources development minister Murli Manohar Joshi.

Whenever the issue was brought up in the winter session by the Congress and Left, the only other person to defend the deletions in history books was V.K. Malhotra.

There was an admission that while the Opposition had creditably got across its point of view, the BJP was branded "fundamentalist" at the end of the debate. The Opposition had described the exercise as the "safefronisation" and "Talibanisation" of education — words which left the government red-faced.

The news conference, sources said, would harp on the 'M' factor, which in the Sangh's parlance means the combined effect of the Macaulayites, Marxists

and madarsas in shaping history texts.

Former editor M.V. Kamath, who has a column in the RSS' English mouthpiece, *Organiser*, wrote on the controversy in the latest issue: "The BJP may have its own agenda — didn't the Nehruvians and Marxists have one of their own? — and its own vision of India which certainly should be open to question. But to question its integrity is in poor taste and exhibits bias of the worst kind."

THE TELEGRAPH

17 DEC 2001

# History and religion

## Two ways of making sense

A strange argument that has often recurred in the debate over censorship — that is the word — that the NCERT is seeking to exercise over school textbooks is that children should not be exposed to any critical thinking as far as the history of their country is concerned, that they should be presented with a more harmonious version of events inspiring respect and noble feelings towards their community or national heroes. History is not about nation or character-building. The additional point that needs to be made is that such an approach towards our past can only breed a herd of dull conformists who might not be a threat to their environment, true, but who, on the other hand, may not have the creative spark necessary for all social and political renewal, that is for a better future for themselves and their children. It is to brainwash them into believing, early, that everything is right with society and the culture they are being brought up in and all its accepted values and norms are right, not only in the light of tradition, but also reason itself. In other words, that they must submit to the traditional ways of making sense of the world, most of which is derived from religion, wherefore the interest the Sangh Parivar takes in the question.

History is a threat because it is another and a more rational way of making sense of the world, albeit a disturbing one, because for it the world or any given social and cultural order is not eternal and immutable, but subject to large collective forces in dynamic evolution. The idea of human effort and progress is central to the discipline. It is liable, therefore, to call into question all categories of thought of judgment that are accepted, by a community, a society or a nation, in the present, as normal. Without a critical understanding of history, whose development is roughly concomitant to the demise of religion as a political and historical force in the late 18th century, there would have been no emancipation of women or the working class, or even of the bourgeoisie. It is because the study of the ancient world taught them that societies and cultures can undergo drastic change that men and women of 18th century Europe were able to recognise the objective changes that called for an abolition of the monarchy and a reduction of the church to a more private role, in their own time. Happiness, harmony, peace and the sort of items that are on the NCERT's menu are highly ambivalent. One can argue that the neanderthal man was happier and more in harmony with his world than we are. So, why did we make all this progress, minister? For nothing?

THE STATESMAN

18 DEC 2001

# Babri hurt BJP: Advani

11-5-27/12 9- minutes of N. Interpation

New Delhi, Dec. 26 (PTI): Home minister L.K. Advani today told the Liberhan Commission that the Babri Masjid demolition was a "big setback" to the BJP's cause as the party was committed to the rule of law and did not want to build the Ram temple by force.

"I could visualise that the demolition would be a big setback for the cause that the BJP was seeking to promote because the party's commitment was not only to support the VHP's movement for construction of Ram temple at the place supposed to be the birthplace of Lord Ram but we were also committed to the rule of law," he said.

Deposing as a witness before the commission probing the mosque's demolition, Advani said the BJP was committed to democracy, rule of law and to honour the court's verdict. He added that the movement was aimed at converting the "de facto" temple into a "de jure" temple lawfully or by a mutual agreement between the disputing parties.

The home minister said he had clarified in an article a fortnight after the demolition that "it (demolition) would affect our credibility, which is very crucial for a political party".

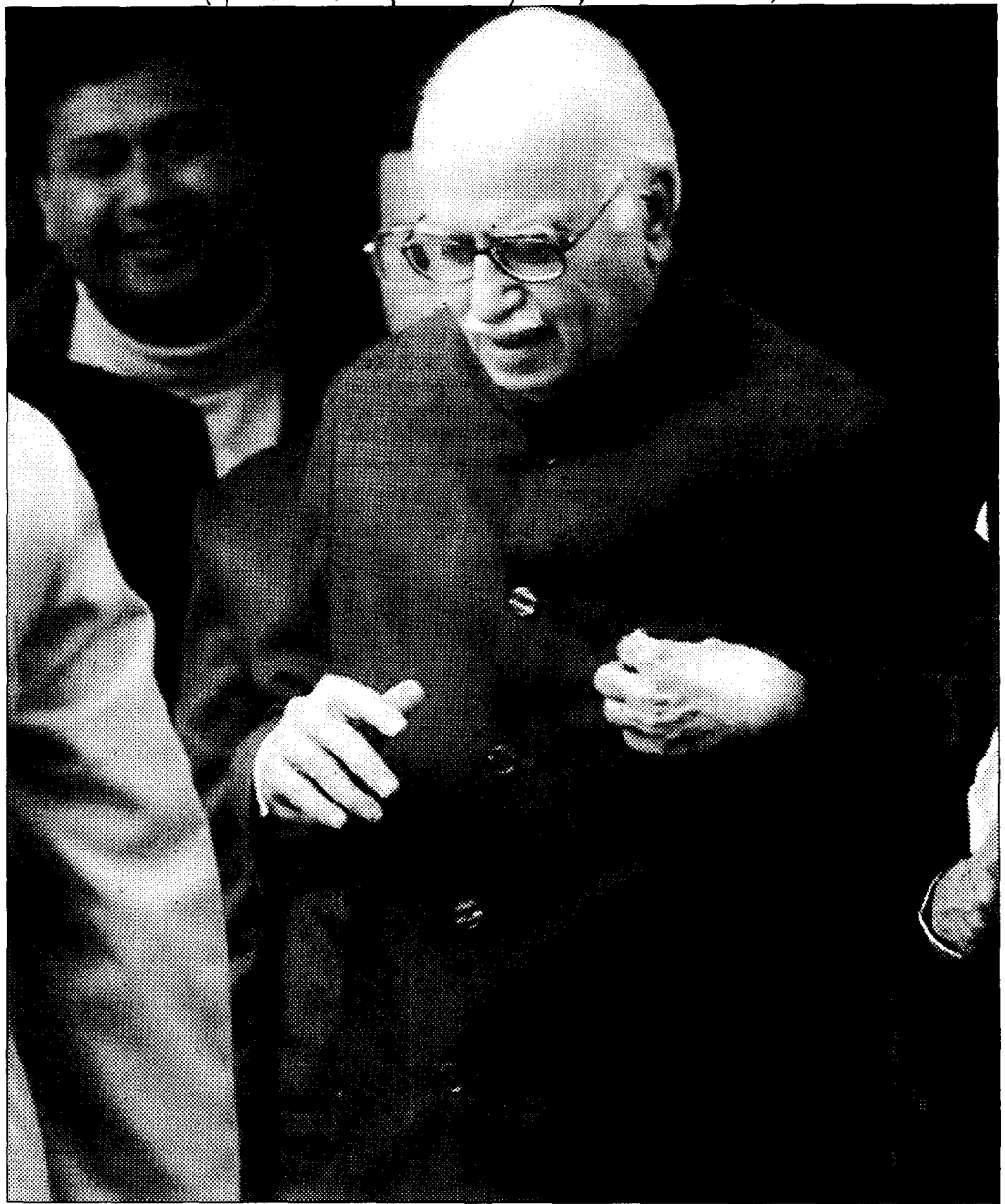
Advani said the movement was successful till the events of December 6, 1992. Due to the acts of "a few hundred people", who did not "heed" the appeals made by the leaders present there to come down from the domes, "we lost control over it", he said.

Considering the size and dimension of the movement, "we had succeeded in our effort right up to December 6 in giving it a kind of direction that we wanted it to have. But because of a few hundred people, suddenly we lost control over the movement," the home minister said.

Advani said principal leaders of the BJP, the RSS and the VHP were "shocked" and taken "aback" when they heard the "thud" of the first dome falling.

"...I could see that while among the leaders, most seemed shocked and taken aback that something unforeseen and unplanned was happening, among the crowd down below the dais, the mood was different," he said. "It seemed a mood of relief and in a section there was even elation."

Advani said when kar sevaks were carrying implements



LK Advani outside the court in New Delhi. (PTI)

and hammering away at the dome. Rajmata Vijayaraje Scindia had made a passionate appeal to them to desist. However, even the efforts of Uma Bharti and Pramod Mahajan to bring down the kar sevaks failed. He said VHP leader Ashok Singhal, who went to pacify the agitated kar sevaks, was manhandled by the crowd.

Advani denied ever calling for kar seva with "shovels and bricks" in his speeches during his rathayatra. The home minister said "he had disowned such statements attributed to him" after they came to his notice during the movement itself as "they were not correct".

When the commission's counsel, Anupam Gupta, suggested that his speeches then ended with the slogan "*Kasam Ram ki khate hain, mandir wahin banayenge*", Advani said: "It is possible, I don't remember."

"It was a popular slogan at that time but it is not correct that I invariably ended my speeches with this popular slogan," the home minister said.

Advani said the issue was to be seen from the background of 1949, several years after the mosque was "abandoned". A legal controversy had ensued over the discovery of Ram's idols and a court had ordered not to remove the idols from the

spot.

"And it was also on the order of the court that the place where the idols were found, was thrown open to the public and it became a de facto temple," Advani said.

Taking a dig at the media on the controversial slogans, the home minister said "a kind of negativism was in the air and stray slogans here and there were picked up by it and given prominence".

Advani said the attack on journalists and cameramen by some kar sevaks during the demolition was perhaps prompted by their sense of guilt that they wanted to hide.

THE TELEGRAPH

27 DEC 2001



DID MINISTERS SUPPORT SINGHAL PLAN?: CONG.

# Status quo in Ayodhya will not be disturbed, says Minister

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 7. Even as the Government reiterated in the Rajya Sabha that nobody would be allowed to violate the Supreme Court order to maintain the status quo at the disputed site at Ayodhya, the issue cast its shadow over the proceedings in the Lok Sabha which was adjourned for the day within a few minutes of the post-lunch session today.

The Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs, Mr. O. Rajagopal, assured the Rajya Sabha members that the Supreme Court order on maintaining status quo in Ayodhya would be "scrupulously adhered to".

The assurance came after the Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Manmohan Singh, sought clarifications on a news report that five Union Ministers had attended a meeting where the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leaders talked of a plan to build the "Ram temple".

Dr. Singh sought to know the Government's response to the report that the Ministers "cheered" the VHP leader, Mr. Ashok Singhal's declaration that the temple construction would start on March 12. He said if the report was true, then it was shocking that five Union Ministers were supporting a "patently illegal act" of the VHP and that such blatant defiance of law should be condemned.

Mr. Rajagopal said that the Ministers had already denied that they endorsed such a "declaration" and that the news report was

wrong. Even the Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, had told the House that no violation of the court's directive would be allowed.

In the Lok Sabha, the Opposition benches demanded an apology from the Government for not allowing the Congress chief whip, Mr. Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi, to speak.

The post-lunch session lasted for just 15 minutes with the Opposition beginning to protest as soon as the House re-assembled. The Congress, the Samajwadi Party, and the Bahujan Samaj Party members were on their feet, saying the Government's action amounted to an "assault on the ruling of the chair".

Farooq hints at tougher law: Page 11

First the Deputy Speaker, Mr. P.M. Sayeed, requested the members to let the business go on and then Mrs. Margaret Alva, who was in the Chair, reminded the members of the recent code of conduct but to no avail.

Even the BJP member, Mr. Kirti Azad — who wanted to raise a point of order with the rule book in one hand — went unheard amid the din.

Spearheading the Opposition tirade, Mr. Dasmunshi said "till the Government tenders an unqualified apology, we will not cooperate with it." He was supported by Mr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh (RJD), Mr. Ramjilal Suman (Samajwadi Party) and Mr. Rashid Alvi (BSP) who were also seen waving the copy of an English

daily which had on Thursday reported on the meeting.

Referring to the pre-lunch developments when the House was adjourned briefly, Mr. Dasmunshi claimed during zero hour that he was the first to give notice and therefore his turn to speak should come first. The MDMK member, Mr. Vaiko, got up to speak as he had also given notice. The treasury benches and Mr. Vaiko insisted that procedures be adhered to and the MDMK leader be allowed to speak first.

The Deputy Speaker said he had given the floor to Mr. Dasmunshi. As there was let-up in the uproar, he adjourned the House till 2 p.m.

Later, the BJP spokesman, Mr. Vijay Kumar Malhotra, condemned the Opposition behaviour in the Lok Sabha, saying that zero hour was not the monopoly of one party.

He charged the Opposition parties with showing scant regard for all norms of parliamentary democracy by stalling the proceedings. On the other hand, the Congress blamed the treasury benches for the disruption. Its spokesperson, Mr. S. Jaipal Reddy, charged them with challenging the decision of the Deputy Speaker saying it was something that was "unheard of and unfortunate." He also criticised the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, for deliberately ignoring the Deputy Speaker's request to intercede with his members.

# PMO rejects Singhal's claim

**NEW DELHI, DEC. 12.** The Prime Minister's Office tonight rejected the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) president, Mr. Ashok Singhal's claim that the Government had assured him that the acquired land in Ayodhya would be handed over to his organisation for construction of a Ram temple. "The Prime Minister has not given any such assurance to Mr. Singhal," a PMO spokesperson said.

Mr. Singhal had claimed at a

news conference in Ayodhya that Mr. Vajpayee had assured him that the acquired land would be handed over for building the Ram temple.

The Central Government would give the VHP all the land, except the 80 feet by 40 feet area on which the disputed structure had existed before its demolition on December 6, 1992, Mr. Singhal had claimed. — PTI

PTI reports from Ayodhya:

Addressing a press conference at Karsevakpuram, Mr. Singhal said the rest of the 67.5 acres in the acquired area was undisputed and the Government could hand it over to the VHP.

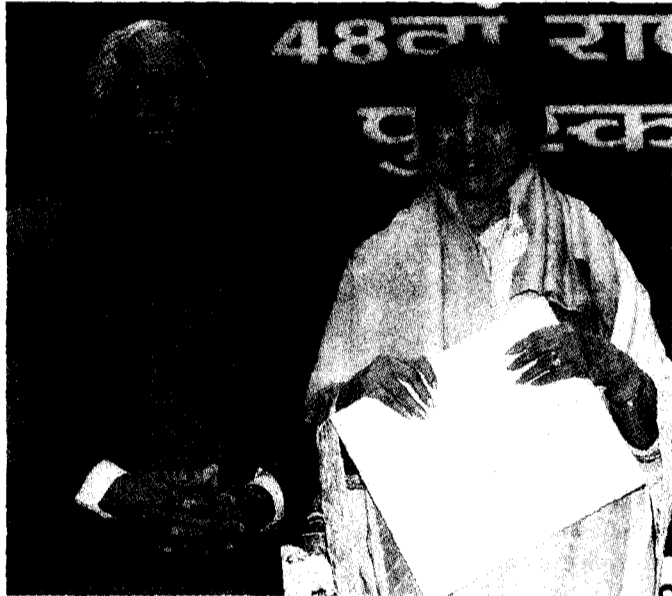
Mr. Singhal and the president of the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas, Mahant Ram Chandra Paramhans, had met the Prime Minister recently in this connection.

Replying to a question, Mr. Singhal claimed that the Sunni Waqf Board had withdrawn its claim to the rest of the acquired land in 1996 which was shown as a graveyard. To another question, Mr. Singhal said the Centre would transfer the land before March 12 next year.

## 'We met Central Ministers'

In a new turn to the controversy over the presence of Central Ministers at a meeting of VHP leaders in Delhi last week, Mr. Singhal said he had met several MPs, including Central Ministers, to explain the situation in Ayodhya. However, he regretted that Opposition MPs paid little heed to the VHP's views on the issue.

Meanwhile, in Jaipur, the VHP international senior vice-president, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, said they had met five Ministers in Delhi. "Yes, we did meet them...The Ministers just listened to us...They did not say a word on the Ayodhya issue...We will continue this dialogue with leaders of other political parties to resolve the issue amicably," he told newsmen. — PTI



**The President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, with Ms. Asha Bhosle, the Dada Saheb Phalke Award winner, at the 48th National Film Awards function in New Delhi on Wednesday.**

— Photo: Shanker Chakravarty

# Opp seeks PM's resignation over Temple dispute

## Journalists demand terror Bill

Station News Service

Mr Das Munshi who raised the issue last week was on his feet demanding a statement from the government.

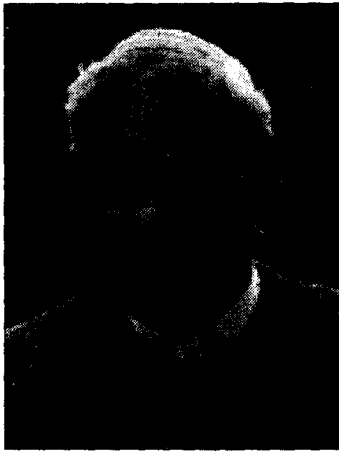
Sudesh K Verma in New Delhi

NEW DELHI, Dec. 10. — The Opposition today demanded the Prime Minister's resignation, alleging that five Union Ministers had attended a meeting with VHP leaders on the issue of building a temple in Ayodhya.

Raising the issue during Zero Hour, the Opposition said the ministers had violated the oath of secrecy under the Constitution's Article 375.

There was a heated debate on the subject. Mr PR Das Munshi (Congress) said the fact that the ministers who are accountable to Parliament were not disclosing what transpired at the meeting suggested a conspiracy to build the temple in violation of the Supreme Court order to maintain status quo ante at the disputed site.

The trouble started when the Deputy Speaker, Mr PM Sayeed, asked Mr Ananth Dighe (Shiv Sena) to speak. This was contested by Mr Shivraj Patil (Congress) who told the Chair that the Opposition should be given the first opportunity to speak during Zero Hour. There was no need to serve a notice to speak during Zero Hour.



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee

Prof VK Malhotra (BJP) disagreed with Mr Patil, saying members on the Treasury Benches should be allowed to raise issues of national and international importance during Zero Hour which should not be monopolised by the Opposition.

The BJP later said raking up the Ayodhya issue everytime was of no use because the government had already committed itself to maintaining status quo at the disputed site.

Mr LK Advani had clarified in Parliament that the government would come into action if someone tried to violate the Supreme Court order on status quo, Mr Malhotra said. He said anyone was free to meet religious leaders. The ministers had already denied that they had applauded Mr Singal's call for temple construction, he said.

Mr Malhotra sought to know why the Congress was getting irritated on issues affecting the Hindus.

The party should not forget that the "shilanyas" (foundation stone) for the temple was done during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure as the Prime Minister, he said.

Dec. 10. — The proposed Bill on prevention of terrorism has dropped the controversial clause that brought journalists and other persons within the ambit of Poto. It has reduced the term of the Act from five to three years and added a provision of a special court for aggrieved parties to appeal against forfeiture of property justified by the designated authority.

However, the action taken under Poto has been given immunity. "Any action taken under Poto would deem to have been done or taken under the corresponding provisions of the Act," the proposed Bill says. It is slated for introduction in the Lok Sabha tomorrow and may be taken up for discussion on Wednesday and Thursday.

The special court may either confirm or revoke such forfeiture and release the property forfeited by the designated authority. Because of this provision, the designated authority is the one which

THE STATIS SA

11 DEC 2001

# New education bill has many faults: Sonia

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

## Historians are perverts, says Malhotra

New Delhi, Dec. 4: Congress president Sonia Gandhi said on Tuesday there were serious lacunae in the Constitution Amendment Bill providing for the right to education which passed by the Lok Sabha last week.

Mrs Gandhi said it was essential that an appropriate law be tabled to take care of the faults at the earliest.

"Several serious lacunae were pointed out in the Constitution Amendment Bill with the intervention of many members, including myself.

It is important and essential that an appropriate law is tabled at the earliest to take care of these lacunae," she said in a letter to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Tuesday.

The formal recognition in the Indian Constitution with regard to a child's inalienable right to education was a major step in the right direction, she said, adding that the import and wide ramifications of this legislation made it all the more necessary that every possible step is taken for its effective and meaningful implementation.

Listing her concerns about the lacunae, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha said the constitutional amendments placed the entire onus and responsibility on the parents while the law was meant to empower mainly the poorer and disadvantaged classes.

"It is unfair to hold them (parents) primarily and almost solely responsible for the education of their children," Mrs Gandhi said.

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Dec. 4: The BJP, on Tuesday, virtually attacked eminent historians at a personal level, calling them "perverts," who distorted history.

BJP spokesperson V.K. Malhotra targeted internationally acclaimed historians, Mr R.S. Sharma and Ms Romila Thapar.

During a press briefing, Mr Malhotra flayed the historians saying that they were not taking into consideration the sentiments of various communities. "They are perverts," screamed Mr Malhotra. "These perverts were writing all lies. This shoaled not allowed," the BJP spokesperson continued.

When asked to name the "perverts," Mr Malhotra replied: "Woh Sharma (R.S.Sharma)." Asked to comment on Ms Thapar, he initially said: "She is subjective." Then he came out with his opinion on Ms Thapar: "It is a perversion of the mind." When someone asked: "Did we grew up on perverted history?" Mr Malhotra did not reply.

The BJP spokesperson earlier breathed fire against historians and political parties who were opposing the deletion of the so-called "controversial and objectionable" passages in history books taught in school all over India.

THE ASIAN AGE

5 DEC 2001

## ICHR chief hints at 'differences' with Union Ministers

By Our Staff Reporter

THRISSUR, DEC. 4. The Chairman of the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR), Prof. M. G. S. Narayanan, today hinted at "some difference of opinion with some Union Ministers who appeared to be possessing their own views on Indian history".

Participating in a 'face-to-face' programme on the topic 'Communalisation of History' at the Centre for Post- Graduate Studies here today, Prof. Narayanan said he would remain as the ICHR Chairman only till there were commonalities between his views and the perspectives of those Ministers on history.

He said the Government as such did not appear to have

designs" to impose any specific version of history. "But some of the Ministers seem to be nurturing their own views of history, and I will remain in ICHR as long as those views are in consonance with my own understanding of history," he said.

The BJP's historical perceptions had "mellowed down" compared to the times of old-time RSS and the erstwhile Jan Sangh ideologues. The Congress, which was now in a 'dormant state', does not possess its own views on history.

"The old-time RSS had a view on history. Earlier, the BJP and RSS leaders were abusing Gandhiji. Now, they were accepting his importance. The Hindu Mahasabha leader,

Sarvarkar, and RSS leaders such as Golwalkar had opposed Parliamentary democracy. But the BJP is now not only accepting it, but is putting it into practice as well. Moreover, opposition to Muslims as 'aliens' harboured earlier by the Hindu organisations was now changing. In my view, these organisations, including the BJP, are accommodative. On the other hand, the CPI and the CPI (M) have their own definite views on history and they are not attuned to change," he said.

Responding to a question on the UGC directive to teach astrology in universities, he said there was nothing wrong in teaching astrology as it was popular not only in India but also in the whole world. He termed the communists'

tirade" against the move was like "Don Quixote attacking the storm".

Referring to diverse opinions being aired about national leaders such as Subash Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru and Gandhiji, he said "we have to think whether this should be included in textbooks".

He justified the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) decision to withdraw references in "bad taste" against the Jains and lauded the body for showing "democratic decency" to withdraw the references.

History textbooks should be reviewed every five years. The present NCERT history textbooks had not been reviewed for the last 25 years, he said.

# Joshi swears by right to rewrite textbooks

By Rajesh Ramachandran  
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: Amidst a raging controversy over the 'saffronisation' of education, Union human resources minister Murl Manohar Joshi, speaking from a Sangh Parivar platform on Saturday, announced an "intellectual freedom struggle" and pledged to continue with his programme of changing the curricula until the country became "intellectually free".

Launching an offensive on critics of the Centre's education policy, he said, "Sangh Parivar leaders have taken the expression saffronisation as a complement because saffron is sacred and denotes renunciation and penance." Inaugurating a two-day 'national education conference' organised by the RSS-affiliate

Vidya Bharati here on Saturday, Mr Joshi attacked Marxists and followers of Macaulay, accusing them of denigrating ancient Indian scholarship. He emphasised that children must be taught about the country's past glory.

A resolution supporting Mr Joshi's programme was passed by about 30 former and serving vice-chancellors from various universities of the country and a host of senior officials from institutions like the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the National Council for Teacher Education, the National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration and the National Open School.

At a closed-door meeting on Sunday, the officials will discuss "how to change and what to change" further in the curricula. Speaking to this newspaper, gener-

al secretary of Vidya Bharti Dinanath Batra said it would be an informal discussion at which members would discuss ways to channelise the energy of youth.

The resolution passed at the meeting said the national education conference supported the efforts of the Centre to rewrite the curricula against all odds in order to bring about harmony between Indian education and the sources of Indian culture. Another resolution—on the orientation for value education at the higher learning institutes of India—was also passed. A third, on university education, which was

slated to be passed on Saturday, had to be re-phrased and will now be released on Sunday.

In his hour-long speech, Mr Joshi gave instances to

show that ancient Indian scholarship had been forgotten by the Marxists who, he said, believed that India did not have a history. Speaking about the Lithuanian President reciting the Bhagvad Gita to him, Mr Joshi wondered if the Indian President would be able to do so. Alluding to Aryabhata's contribution to the study of gravitational force, Bhaskaracharya's on calculus and Charaka's and Sushruta's on medicine and surgery, Mr Joshi said, "When we can be reminded of our defeats, we can also be reminded of the achievement of our ancient scholarship. It was Macaulay who devised a way to defeat the will of the country by teaching Indians that we had no learning and achievement."

He then rounded up with the assertion, "If talking about the Rig Veda and the Gita is saffronisation, then I am saffronising education."



M.M. Joshi

**If talking about the Rig Veda and the Gita is saffronisation, then I am saffronising education**

59-10  
M/12

# ICHR chief backs changes

*Govt of Culture*

ALOKE TIKKU  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

## HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

NEW DELHI, Dec. 1. - Even as politicians squabble over changes in history text-books, the man who heads the Indian Council of Historical Research today defended the changes. Politicians and academics alike may have missed an important point, Prof MGS Narayanan said. There is a difference between books on history and textbooks.

As for the corruption of history by the saffron brigade, Prof Narayanan believes "the corruption of history text books" started in the last century when historians subscribing to the Leftist ideology had a "monopoly" over history writing.

"Unfortunately, government text-books prescribed by NCERT were written in a political way, with authors belonging to one school of thought writing text books while others were left out. The corruption of history textbooks started at that time," Prof Narayanan told **The Statesman**. It is not that India did not have historians who subscribed to an alter-

nate school of thought but they were never given a chance.

The chairman, an expert in Ancient Indian history, rejected criticism against reviewing and rewriting history. "History needs to be rewritten continuously. It is a continuous process because as time passes, perceptions, interpretations, and the attitude towards history changes. Every generation has a different notion of history," he said. Over two decades have passed since the controversial textbooks were written. "It is time to revise them".

The ICHR chairman said he was on the committee which cleared one of the books mired in the recent controversy on ancient history. "But at that time, none of the communities involved were articulate or found the passages offensive," he said. Today they do.

Defending recent deletions in history textbooks on NCERT's directives, Prof Narayanan said it was important to keep in mind that "something which

may be acceptable for historians may not be sufficient reason to include it in history text-books at the school level".

"A historian has the complete freedom to interpret events according to his understanding. Others may not agree with them but that does not prevent him from publishing his views...But this argument does not hold good for school textbooks published by a government body. In a democratic country, these textbooks will have to take into view sentiments of the communities involved when offensive passages are noticed and reported," Prof Narayanan said.

"Writing a textbook is a different ball game all together. It is not like writing a book on history. With text books for children, you cannot be as free as you could be otherwise. Specially when it is published by a government agency. The people writing the textbook have to take into account the stage at which students would be in a position to judge for themselves. Their opinions and interpretations have to be balanced", he said. "It's a difficult task and I don't envy them."



11/12  
B. S. & C. S.  
11/12/12

# Does Indian history need to be rewritten?

**Yes. A history that is biased and insults national heroes, communalises events and downgrades a community is dangerous and needs to be corrected**



Tarun Vijay

The British wrote history to suit their empire and the Leftists distorted it to further their 'ism'. It's time now to correct these wrongs in a transparent and objective manner so that India benefits, not any 'ism' or party. Hence, Prime Minister Vajpayee is right in saying that distortions in history have to go. A history that is biased and insults national heroes, communalises events and downgrades a community is a dangerous recipe and needs to be corrected.

It is indeed ironic that unless we go on learning faithfully that Guru Tegh Bahadur had resorted to "plunder and raping", Shivaji's victories were merely "the growth of Maratha national sentiment", the "execution" (not martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur) "was due to the intrigues of some members of his family" and Jats were "plunder-

● **Wrong history needs to be set right**

● **If you don't teach and respect the Vedas in India, where will you do it—in Saudi Arabia?**

● **Talibanised Indian minds are destroying the spirit of Bharat**

ers", we are sure to be condemned as "agents of saffronisation".

To be secular and a decently de-saffronised Indian citizen, it is necessary to learn that Savarkar, Khudi Ram Bose, Prafulla Chaki and Hardayal were terrorists and not freedom fighters and the oaths before Goddess Kali by Bengal revolutionaries were taken by terrorists. Aurangzeb was a "jinda pir or a living saint". In ancient India "people ate beef but not pork on any considerable scale", and Alauddin's attack on Chittor to get Padmini is a "popular legend" unacceptable to "many modern historians". These are some of the secular gems quoted from the books of honourable historians like Prof. Satish Chandra, Arjun Dev. Romila Thapar (who is also the distinguished resource person for Shah Rukh Khan's *Asoka*) and R.S. Sharma.

Our children should read what the West Bengal's leftist government is teaching kids. See an extract from the textbook for Class V: "Islam and Christianity are the only religions which treated man with honour and equality..." A job well done to please the party masters and neo-colonialists of the Marxist hue: Half-truths, half-lies, hypotheses presented as facts and

facts obscured. The arrogance of power and paisa make them use the word "saffron" abusively. It hardly matters to them that it is the colour of Bharatvarsha that is India since time immemorial and that it denotes renunciation, devotion, victory and strength. If the sky is expressed through blue and nature through green, India is expressed through saffron. If anti-saffronisation campaigners have their way, even the name of the nation would not be Bharat or Hindusthan. One smacks of "Sanskrit" and the other has a "Hindu" word in it! The hate and hostility for a different viewpoint, and especially for anything Hindu, is so evident that the Taliban would find their real comrades here.

The basic idea is to reduce the burden, provide value-based education and implement the S.B.



Sumit Sarkar

The Prime Minister has justified the deletion of ten passages from NCERT history textbooks (to be followed soon by their replacement and then the abolition of history as a separate subject till Class XI) on the ground that these books are "one-sided". How does he know? And how does being Prime Minister give him the authority to issue such a *fatwa*? It is nobody's contention that the NCERT books are perfect, but any revision must be based on at least a minimum level of competence in the subject. It is significant that the names of those writing the new textbooks are being kept strictly

obviously no "sentiments" worth bothering about.

Even more importantly, is it the function of history to ignore all "unpleasant" facts, and become a collection of moral fables or happy tales, its contents dictated by "religious" and/or "community" leaders chosen by the Sangh Parivar for its political games? Surely, education is worthwhile only if it stimulates rational thinking and questioning and much of inherited common-sense necessarily comes under scrutiny: as when children learn that, contrary to the evidence of their eyes, the earth moves round the sun. Maybe, the scientific explanation for eclipses should be banned, for it might hurt the belief that they are caused by Rahu? But it is dangerous to be sarcastic about such things, for we have a minister who might think this to be a good idea....

"History" of a particular kind is vital for the Sangh Parivar, to con-

## IN BLACK AND WHITE



TOI Illustration: Neelabh

● **Revision must be based on a minimum level of competence in the subject**

● **Is history a moral fable or fairytale dictated by religious and community leaders?**

● **Education is worthwhile only if it stimulates rational thinking and questioning**

Chavan Committee report submitted to Parliament. The curriculum commits itself to "scientific temper characterised by the spirit of enquiry, problem-solving, the courage to question and objectivity leading to elimination of obscurantism, superstition and fatalism..." (Page 40).

There is no reference to astrology but the government simply tried to take forward what previous Congress regimes were doing with regard to education about astrology in many mainstream universities like Rajasthan and Ujjain. If the Vedas aren't taught here, where would you expect them to be taught? In Saudi Arabia?

Talibanised minds indeed! They destroyed the Bamiyan Buddhas. These are destroying the spirit of Bharat. Wrong history needs to be righted otherwise the nation will stand wronged.

(Tarun Vijay is the editor of *Panchjanya*)

secret.

A second justification, offered by BJP spokesmen like V.K. Malhotra, is even more dangerous. The books are not factually inaccurate, but they are unsuitable because they hurt the "sentiments" of children of sundry communities and religions. Once again, who decides, when, and whose sentiments?

The passage in Satish Chandra's book about the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur, which no one had objected to even at the height of the Khalistani movement, suddenly comes under attack, and sadly, first of all from the Delhi Congress — just on the eve of Punjab elections. And what if "sentiments" are mutually opposed?

References to the oppressive aspects of the varna system and, no doubt soon, any criticism whatsoever of the ancient Brahmanical society, are to be deleted. Dalits, subordinated castes, women, have

solidate its claim to be the sole spokesman of the "Hindus" who have to be convinced that their interests and emotions are and have always been unitary and inevitably opposed to those of Muslims or Christians, regardless of differences of caste, gender, class, immense regional variations. There had once been a certain fit between such assumptions and the habit, derived in part from the British, of slicing up Indian history into "Hindu" and "Muslim" periods, treating religious communities as unchanging blocs and defining eras in terms of the religion of rulers. All this changed as history-writing came of age and progressed beyond the deeds of kings and great or evil men.

The BJP's doctoring of history, so reminiscent of totalitarian states, is an attempt to turn the clock back and, if possible, do away with history altogether.

(Sumit Sarkar is a professor of history at Delhi University)



## EDUCATION AS FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT

NOW THAT THE Lok Sabha has passed the 93rd Constitution Amendment, the desire to have the Right to Education (up to the upper primary stage) as a Fundamental Right guaranteed by the Constitution is closer to becoming a reality. And one would expect, given the stated objectives of the Union Cabinet and the resolve shown by the parties across the spectrum (evident in the fact that the Bill was passed unanimously in the Lok Sabha), its early passage in the Upper House and Presidential assent soon after. It is only a matter of time before the Constitution guarantees the Right to Education for all children between six and 14 years of age. In this sense, an objective set by the framers of the Constitution — that the state shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years — can be achieved at least in a decade from now. Eradicating illiteracy by 1960 (within ten years of the commencement of the Constitution) remained a dream for a host of reasons. There was no way for a citizen to seek enforcement of this objective as the Constitutional provision was only part of the Directive Principles of State Policy and hence was not enforceable.

The Constitution Amendment, now half-way through, is indeed the only way to correct this anomaly. For, with the insertion of a new Article (Article 21 A) to say that "the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six and fourteen years in such manner as the state may, by law, determine", it is now possible for any citizen to seek enforcement of the right by way of resort to writ jurisdiction under Article 32 of the Constitution. It is in this sense that the passage of the Bill in the Lok Sabha becomes significant. And given

the fact that it has a provision to amend Article 45 of the Constitution to include, as part of the Directive Principles, the need to provide early childhood care and education to all children until the age of six, the new Bill is certainly an improvement on the one introduced by the United Front Government (83rd Constitution Amendment) in 1997. One would expect the bitter experience — education for all by 1960 remained just a desire even in 2001 only because it remained a Directive Principle and hence was not enforceable — of the past will not be repeated once again. Early childcare is indeed an integral aspect of education and this must be taken as the guiding principle by the State Governments at least from now.

As for the financial commitment, the cost has been put at Rs. 9,800 crores every year. And the time-frame envisaged by the Government at this stage to achieve the goal of universal education for all children up to the age of 14 is 10 years. The annual expenditure estimated is approximately equivalent to a mere 0.5 per cent of the GDP. A small cost given the laudable goal. In real terms, achieving the goals would mean a three-fold increase in the expenditure the Union Government will be incurring this year for elementary education. This will have to be done. Meanwhile, activists and groups who have been mounting pressure on the Government all these days (particularly after the 1993 verdict of the Supreme Court in the Unnikrishnan Vs State of Andhra Pradesh case in which the apex court categorised the Right to Education as a Fundamental Right) will serve the cause in the right way by taking the movement further to ensure that the Fundamental Right is not infringed upon by the State Governments by way of reducing schools to mere sheds where children are herded together as it is happening in the one-teacher schools in several States.

THE HINDU

. 1 DEC 2001

# Govt. denies attempt to rewrite history

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, NOV. 26.** The Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, today termed the controversy over the circular and the Opposition walkout as "very unfortunate" and maintained that there had been no attempt to "rewrite history."

"There has not been any tampering with the books... only some objectionable portions have been deleted to restore the glory of the Sikh Guru, Tegh Bahadur. There is no question of withdrawing the circular," Mr. Mahajan told the Lok Sabha, responding to an impromptu discussion during zero hour.

Mr. Mahajan said the Opposition had not been able to give any proof to justify its allegation. He wanted to know if school children should be taught that Guru Tegh Bahadur was a "murderer" and that Jats, who had founded the State of Bharatpur, were "plunderers."

There could not be any "final word" on many controversial subjects in history as there was more than one version. The Education Ministry had set up a committee to look into it. The deletions in the textbooks had been ordered after the Delhi Assembly unanimously passed a resolution to this effect recently, Mr. Mahajan said.

The Samajwadi Party, the Congress, the RJD and the Left appeared dissatisfied with Mr. Mahajan and staged a walkout.

## 'Akin to Taliban'

Earlier, the Opposition benches protested the deletion and alleged that it was done at the behest of the Sangh Parivar. Raising the issue, Mr. Suresh Kurup (CPI-M), said the textbooks had been altered at the instance of the Sangh Parivar. He was supported by the members of the Congress, the Left parties, the Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Janata Dal. Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav of the SP said the BJP was doing what the Taliban was doing in Afghanistan.

Mr. Somnath Chatterjee (CPI-M) said the move was "diabolical" and a deliberate attempt at tampering with history. "This is amazing, you cannot impose it like this on the children... it shows a particular state of mind. They are obscurantist and fundamentalist people," he said, pointing to the ruling party benches. He also criticised the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, for supporting the move to

"change" history. The NCERT circular was defended by the BJP members, Mr. Vijay Kumar Malhotra and Mr. Sahib Singh Verma, who said "wrong teaching" should not be imparted to the school children.

Mr. Malhotra said the portions that had been deleted were highly derogatory to the Sikh Guru, Tegh Bahadur, the Jat community, the Aryans and the Jain community.

Though the Congress Deputy Leader, Mr. Shivraj Patil, did not criticise the deletion of the derogatory references and objectionable portions, he protested the way in which it had been done. "There should be a proper system of doing it. It should not aim at dividing the society." Recalling the controversy in Rajasthan over the removal of certain objectionable portions in textbooks, he said "when the Congress came to power in Rajasthan, it set up a committee and on the basis of the report, ordered the removal of such portions."

The former Prime Minister, Mr. Chandra Shekhar, felt that school children should not be taught what should be studied by research scholars. The Trinamool Congress leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, objected to the use of the word "Taliban" in the House and wanted the Education Minister to clarify the current controversy.

In the Rajya Sabha, the CPI(M) member, Mr. Nilotpal Basu, criticised the NCERT chairman, Prof. J.S. Rajput, for taking a "partisan view" of the deletions in the textbooks. He charged Prof. Rajput with following the RSS opinion on the issue.

Later, addressing a press conference, Mr. Malhotra criticised the Congress walkout, saying the party was trying to come close to the SP because of the coming Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls. Expressing "surprise" over the walkout, Mr. Malhotra said it smacked of double standards as it was the Congress Government in Delhi which had unanimously recommended the deletion of certain portions referring to Guru Tegh Bahadur.

The Congress spokesman, Mr. Anand Sharma, had a hard time trying to make amends for the stand taken by Mr. Patil in the Lok Sabha. What Mr. Patil meant was if a deletion had to be made, it should be done by an independent committee of historians and not by the Government, Mr. Sharma said.

THE HINDU

27 NOV 2001

# Govt stays firm, Opp walks out

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 26. — The Centre stood firm on the revision of history text books in the Lok Sabha today.

The Opposition had asked for the government's assurance that there would be no tampering with the text books on Indian History by the National Council of Educational Research and Training.

After the rejection of the demand, the Opposition walked out of the House.

During the Zero Hour, the matter was raised by Mr S Kurup (CPI-M), whose remark that the Sangh Parivar and Taliban were the two sides of the same coin invited strong protests from the Treasury Benches. Even Miss Mamata Banerjee objected to the word

Taliban' being used by some members. She asked the human resources development minister, Dr M M Joshi, to clarify the position on the controversy over the history text books.

While defending the government's policy, Prof VK Malhotra (BJP) said there was nothing wrong in deleting some portions of history books which were "objectionable".

Mr Somnath Chatterjee (CPI-M) saw some design in the Centre's policy of tampering with history books.

Mr Chandra Shekhar was of the view that children should not be taught something which is the subject of research. It should be left for the researchers to debate the controversy over veracity of historical facts.

## NCERT ISSUE

Mr Pramod Mahajan, the minister for parliamentary affairs, justified the deletion of the objectionable portions on Guru Tegh Bahadur and the Jat community.

There was uproar when the HRD minister left the House in the midst of a debate during Zero Hour. The Opposition members took exception to Dr Joshi's conduct of ignoring the House.

The Opposition walked out of the Lok Sabha in protest against the Centre's attitude on the controversy.

BJP stand: The BJP was peeved that the Congress staged a walkout to support the Left and the Samajwadi Party on the issue even when it did

not have the moral ground to oppose deletion of certain objectionable portions from the texts.

The BJP argued that the Delhi government under the Congress had recommended deletion of some of the portions related to description of Guru Tegh Bahadur as a robber.

In an effort to corner the Congress, the BJP spokesperson, Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra, said that the Congress should clarify whether it opposed deletion of the objectionable portions and also whether it wanted to continue the study of the portions already deleted.

According to Mr Malhotra, the Congress was confused and its walkout was an indication that it was trying to make a common cause with the Left and

the Samajwadi Party with an eye on the Uttar Pradesh elections.

In this context, he said the Samajwadi Party general secretary, Mr Amar Singh, was deliberately absent so that the Bill debarring person of foreign origin from holding top posts could not be introduced. This showed that both the parties were trying to come closer to each other, he said.

The BJP leader stressed that there would be no harm if students did not read the deleted portions from the history text books.

He said that the text books had been amended thrice earlier — in 1989, by the CPM government in West Bengal, in 1999 by the Rajasthan government (Congress) and this year by the Delhi government.

# Stage set for CDS appointment

SRINJOY CHOWDHURY  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 26. — With the Centre approving the layout of the Integrated Defence Staff last Friday, the stage appears set for the appointment of a chief of defence staff.

Though the Centre has cleared the CDS organisation, the CDS himself, Lieutenant-general Pankaj Joshi, has already been appointed vice-chief of defence staff several months ago. Last Friday, the Cen-

tre cleared appointments of four deputy chiefs of defence staff. Candidates for the posts are likely to be a lieutenant-general already involved in planning work for the chief of staff committee, a rear admiral in charge of operations, a lieutenant-general and a director-general of an arm as chief of the newly formed Defence Intelligence Agency. The Indian Air Force is yet to submit its candidate officially.

The director-general of the Armed Forces Medical Services will also be deputy chief of defence staff. The defence minister, Mr

George Fernandes, recently ruled that the DG, AFMS would be part of the CDS structure, overruling protests. The appointments will be made in phases as office space is scarce.

The three services have also decided on the brigadiers and colonels to be moved to the CDS staff. This would mean matching cuts in the number of staff in the three services.

At the commanders' conference today, senior leaders suggested that the chief of defence staff would be appointed very soon.

THE STATESMAN

# Decentralise defence administration: PM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 26. — The Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, today said a long term national defence policy and decentralisation of decision making was necessary to meet security challenges in the future was necessary.

Speaking at the combined commanders conference, he called for the institutionalisation of long-term perspective planning in the defence ministry and hoped that the integration of the service headquarters and the formation of a procurement board would ease the procurement process, making it more professional and cost-effective.

Mr Vajpayee also called for upgrading technical and human resources to meet security threats. He spoke of the revolution in military technology and said it is a major challenge to our defence research and development organisations. He shed out at the "unreasonable and discriminatory technology control regimes" that made matters difficult for the Defence Research and Development Organisation.

Speaking about the situation in Jammu and Kashmir and the North-east, the PM said our resilient democratic traditions and the vigilance of the armed forces can help to overcome these challenges.

The Prime Minister spoke of reliable response to unconventional security threats, pointing out that the 11 September attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon showed the "nature and extent of the asymmetry in the confrontation between terrorism and the civilised world".

During his speech, the defence minister, Mr George Fernandes, said the 11 September incidents had led to a "turnaround in global securi-

ty concerns". He said that recent reforms in the defence ministry were for better utilisation of scarce resources, higher operational efficiency and better coordination and flow of information. It would save time and money, quickening the process, he added. He said the capital budget for the services was now nearly 20,000 crores, up from over Rs 12,384 crores. Speaking about new additions he mentioned agreements to purchase tanks, Sukhoi-30 aircraft, upgrade MiG-27 and MiG-21 aircraft. The advanced jet trainer is going to be acquired without delay, he added. Speaking about the Light Combat Aircraft, he said the first series of flight tests were over and the second stage of the operations would take place soon.

Besides the Prime Minister and the defence minister, other members of the cabinet committee of security also spoke to senior commanders of the Army, Navy and Air Force. In his speech, the external affairs minister, Mr Jaswant Singh, is reported to have said that the events of Afghanistan are a virtual duplication of the division of Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh in Bangladesh.

He reportedly mentioned that the attitude of the USA has changed since the September 11 incidents and also, the Russians, though very strong allies, are more worried about the financial aspects of the matter.

Mr LK Advani, the home minister, said that the changes in Afghanistan would help India in the Jammu and Kashmir issue in the long term. He said Mrs Benazir Bhutto had said India had an apolitical army, a free Election Commission and an independent judiciary.

Mr Yashwant Sinha, the finance minister, said funds, if necessary, were available to the forces.

THE STATESMAN

2 NOV 2001

# HINDUTVA AND HISTORY

## A Tragedy Worse Than Illiteracy

By VALSON THAMPU

ABOUT two years ago, Professor Amartya Sen observed that illiteracy was India's foremost national tragedy. Having now gone through the National Curriculum Framework for Secondary Education, the Nobel Laureate would have revised his opinion. Education, as the Sangh Parivar envisages it, portends to overtake illiteracy as our prime calamity.

The National Curriculum Framework is a masterpiece in indirection. That is why it has aroused intense opposition, without yielding enough substance for its detractors to bite. Its true significance is not in what it states explicitly. It is in what it points to. The tragedy of Afghanistan offers a pointer to where this process could lead this nation. The woes of the people of that tragic land had their roots in the *mad-rasas* on the border with Pakistan. The Taliban are, literally, students! They stand a sinister warning on what retrograde education can do to a people, their worldview, their culture and their welfare. The crux of the Taliban syn-

drome is that a whole nation can be intellectually enslaved and ideologically drugged once their rational faculties are eroded through indoctrination disguised as education.

### DOCTRINAL BIAS

Doctrinal bias works both in terms of what is sought to be included and what is zealously excluded. This is most obvious in the case of history. The issue here is not merely that of the misrepresentation of some facts or the rejection of a sense of propriety and proportion in the historical narrative. Far more crucially, it is the keenness to rob the students of a sense of fact, something that history as a discipline seeks in particular to cultivate. This capacity of the educated mind is a source of vexation for ideologues in general, as this reduces the susceptibility of the people to blatant ideological manipulations.

One of the most striking features of the protagonists of Hindutva is their penchant for arbitrary assumptions and the corresponding impatience with facts. At the same time, they all seem to believe that they have a special and privileged sense of history!

Of course, history is what they will it to be. A case in point is the strident assertion that the Aryans were the native inhabitants of India through trumped up theories like Harappan script being pre-Vedic. This is not a finding arrived at via research, but an assertion for which evidence is being constructed. And this is called historical and archaeological re-

*The author is a member of the Minorities Commission.*

search.

The academic value of astrology and Vedic rituals in the heady ambience of cultural nationalism is not that it will revive indigenous systems of knowledge and skills. It lies, instead, in the creation of a mindset of sub-rational susceptibility wherein the distinction between fact and fantasy can be eclipsed in the twilight of faith.

Faith becomes the crucible in which fiction is alchemised into fact, as in the case of pinpointing the exact place of a god's birth that is assumed to

the adverse attention of several critics. But what most of them have overlooked is the fact that the bogey of religion is only a transit lounge in the process.

For the Sangh Parivar, religion is what the high castes practice. Other religions of Indian origin are mere sects of this religion.

Those who practise religions not strictly of Indian origin are "foreigners". Given this religious outlook, the "education about religions" that the Curriculum Framework proposes is likely to lead to a disparagement especially of the Semitic family of religions in

India, and the sowing of communal seeds in the minds of the students. The journey envisaged is not from secularism to religion, but from secularism to communalism, via religion.

A similar pattern is obvious in the shift from the scientific temper to obscurantism via astrology, *karmakand* and the like. The rational and scientific outlook is, arguably, a stumbling block in the way of fascist consolidation. But it is unwise to

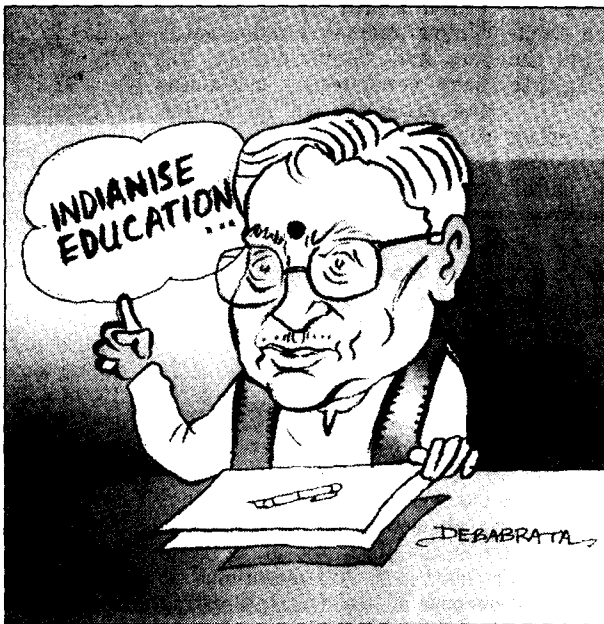
attack it outright in this day and age. The best option, in that event, is to disarm science from within, using the proven principle that one tradition of science is fought best by another science that is projected as an improvement.

### PURIST FETISH

In a like fashion, the document attacks our composite culture, which we are constitutionally obliged to preserve, by invoking the bogey of cultural nationalism: one nation, one culture, one people. The minorities can then be vilified and criminalised as the pollutants of this pure mainstream culture, the purity of which has been preserved for centuries by excluding the dalits and untouchables from the boundaries of culture and civilisation.

The HRD minister's eagerness to Indianise education is mocked by his government's zeal in promoting the cause of globalisation, which is eroding the very foundation of our indigenous cultures. His eagerness to discover new values from religions is belied by the deployment of every genre of subterfuge in the pursuit of power and the aggressive defence of corruption in public life.

This too, and not merely the finely crafted words and the hypotheses in the Curriculum Framework, makes many anxious about the stated objectives in that document. And the anxiety in question has to do more with the crippling of our collective psyche than with any political profit or loss that might accrue from this opportunistic entrepreneurship.



have taken place some 90,000 years ago. If, to take another example, it pleases Mulla Mohammad Omar to think, one fine morning, that the Bamiyan Buddhas are a slur on Islam, they must be rocket-blasted without any questions asked. It is this mindset that makes the people of Afghanistan overlook their subhuman life and respond passionately to the trumpet call to *jihad*, without ever asking how it is going to help them.

If this is the outcome desired, nurturing the rational faculties of the people can only seem a subversive activity. And education, suitably degraded, is the most potent tool for nipping this danger in its bud. Adapting the conviction that Mark Twain shared with Charles Dickens, we might say that the long-term harm that ideologically commandeered education can do to a nation far exceeds the devastation that a whole army, armed to the teeth, can do.

### BYPASSING REASON

As Professor Krishna Kumar argues, "The BJP is the only political party which has actively used education to nurture and expand its social base and to seek power."

The proposed Curriculum Framework is seen best as a penultimate phenomenon. It is like the bikini: what it reveals is interesting, but what it conceals is vital. And what is kept hidden is the sting in the tail. Consider these examples:

For the time being what the document advocates is a foundational shift from secularism to religiosity, assuming religion to be the prime source for value generation. This has attracted

MR STATESMAN

# History textbook cuts rock Lok Sabha again

**HT Correspondent**  
New Delhi, November 26

THE GOVERNMENT today firmly rejected the demand for withdrawal of an NCERT circular deleting certain portions from history textbooks and said it had not "tampered with" the books. This prompted an agitated Opposition to walk out of the Lok Sabha.

"We have not tampered with the books. We have not rewritten them. We have just deleted certain objectionable portions to restore the glory of Guru Tegh Bahadur and the Jat community. There is no question of withdrawal of the circular," Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan said.

During an impromptu discus-

sion during Zero Hour, Mahajan said the Opposition had not given a single proof to justify their allegation. He asked whether schoolchildren should be taught that Guru Tegh Bahadur was a "murderer and rapist" and that the Jats who founded the State of Bharatpur were "plunderers".

Mahajan said the Government had the right to alter textbooks in the interest of children. There are several issues in history on which there are conflicting versions, he said.

Defending the NCERT circular, BJP member Sahib Singh Verma said it had done a commendable job by removing the controversial portions as it was not right to teach wrong things to children.

BJP member Vijay Kumar Malhotra said there was nothing wrong in removing the objectionable portions from the books. But the Government's response failed to satisfy members of the Congress, Left parties, Samajwadi Party and the RJD and they walked out. Mahajan termed the walk-out as "very unfortunate".

CPI(M) members alleged that certain portions had been deleted from the textbooks at the behest of the Sangh Parivar and there was no difference between them and the Taliban.

Suresh Kurup of the CPI(M) said the NDA Government was out to "destroy" the education system. "The Taliban and Sangh Parivar are two sides of the same coin," he said, demanding

immediate withdrawal of the circular. Other Opposition members instantly rose in his support. There was uproar when Human Resource Development Minister Murlu Manohar Joshi left the House when CPI(M) member Basudeb Acharia rose to give his opinion.

Acharia said the education system was "Talibanised" and the secular fabric of the country was in danger. It was not proper for the Government to arbitrarily delete portions from textbooks written by eminent persons, he said.

SP leader Mulayam Singh Yadav said the BJP was doing what the Taliban had done in Afghanistan. Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee objected to the mention of "Taliban" and said

the Education Minister must clarify the situation and the matter should be fully discussed.

Congress deputy leader Shivraj Patil recalled the controversy in Rajasthan over the removal of objectionable portions in textbooks introduced during the BJP regime. He said when Congress came to power, it set up a committee and on the basis of its report, the State Government deleted the portions. He said there was a way to do it so that the society was not divided.

CPI(M) leader Somnath Chatterjee said the deletion was a "diabolical attempt" to tamper with the books and it could not be treated as a routine matter.

Former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar said it was not advisable to teach children what

should be studied by research scholars. If this was allowed, nobody could prevent disintegration of the country, he cautioned. In the Rajya Sabha too, there was uproar over the NCERT circular — chairman JS Rajput drew flak for taking a partisan view in the controversy over deletion of certain portions from the history textbooks.

CPI(M) member Nilotpal Basu said Rajput had refuted some of the points raised by members in the House during a discussion on the issue in a press conference recently. He alleged that Rajput was toeing the RSS line on the issue. "He has no right to take a blatantly political line. Being a bureaucrat, the NCERT chairman cannot take a partisan view."



PRAMOD MAHAJAN

# Textbooks and communalism

By Rajeev Dhavan

*Manipulating textbooks for children is unacceptable. India has suffered enough communalism. Leave textbooks alone.*

*Education 7/10/11*

**H**ISTORY HAS always been written and re-written. But by whom? A Dutch historian, Peter Gieyl, reflecting on various versions of the Napoleonic legend rightly called history "an argument without end". It is in that sense that Croce declared that "all history is contemporary history". But, history is a discourse. Official history by Government fiat is not history but propaganda. History by Government propaganda is the death of learning — destructive of the discourse of history and education itself.

The present controversy of the 'Talibanisation' of textbook history stems from the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) edict of October 25, 2001, to delete certain passages from wellknown prescribed textbooks. Students were warned that examiners "will not evaluate the students' understanding of the (excised) portions". The National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) obliged by deleting those passages not to the liking of the Sangh Parivar. The Government's support — indeed, directive — for these gross acts of censorship and propaganda is self-evident. On November 24, the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, said he was prepared for a debate on this. History has been re-written at the bidding of the Government. Students who deviate from knowledge of such history have been threatened with failure.

Banning and censorship are increasingly becoming a pernicious part of civil and political governance. The attacks on Husain's paintings, and Deepa Mehta's films, the civil injunction on Professor Jha's book on "beef eating in Ancient India", the illegal banning of Sahmat's posters, the Shiv Sena's threatened censorship of ideas and many other incidents enforce an aggressive climate of banning thoughts and ideas not to the liking of fundamentalists. It is true that shades of Muslim fundamentalism led to India's ban on Salman Rushdie's "Satanic Verses" — to be followed by disastrous global consequences. But, the dominant fundamentalism that menacingly threatens India today is an aggressive Hindu fundamentalism which is pugnacious in its tone and posture; and wholly uncom-

promising in according second class status to all other faiths and beliefs. Politically aligned to the concept of a newly-invented 'Hindu' India, Hindu fundamentalism physically and ideologically threatens those that oppose it or fail to accept its dominance.

The CBSE and the NCERT concentrated on the work of certain secular historians and commanded certain specific deletions on the eating of beef in ancient India, archaeological evidence rather than Puranic and other texts to historicise the Lord Ram and Lord Krishna legends, the role of brahmanical indoctrina-

## LAW AND SOCIETY

tion to sustain the caste system, facts relating to plunder by Jat rulers, new facts or assertions relating to the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur and so on. It has never been anyone's case that the textbooks are threats to public order requiring immediate action by the Government under the banning provisions of the criminal codes. In any case, fundamentalists invariably create an atmosphere of threats and violence to sustain their banning and censorship demands even where no controversy exists. Thus, it is clear that the actions of the Government, the CBSE and the NCERT constitute a politically-sponsored censorship of books and ideas.

The state's entry into the domain of textbooks can be traced to the landmark judgment of the Supreme Court in the Punjab Textbook case (1995) to the effect that the 'executive' power of the state extended to selecting and prescribing textbooks for schools recognised by it even without the authority of an enacted law in preference to the books of private publishers. In the MP Textbook case (1974), Justice Bhagwati's insightful judgment warns against arbitrary and capricious actions by the Government. In our present case, there is a bigger failure. Two other seemingly autonomous bodies have decided to succumb to fundamentalist pressures. The CBSE is an examining body which cannot play to political tunes.

Its textbooks have stood the test of time. For the CBSE to abjure its own books under Sangh Parivar pressure is wrong. It is even despicable for a Board which should be promoting the culture of critically examining ideas to send a menacing message to young students on pain of failure that they should not dare question the fundamentalist message of the textbooks. The NCERT has been equally pliant.

In the NCERT case (1992), the Supreme Court respected the autonomy of the NCERT by refusing to identify it with the

state on the assumption that the Government's role was simply confined

to overseeing the proper utilisation of funding grants. Today, the NCERT is unashamedly propagating the Government's and the Sangh Parivar's fundamentalism. The object of this entire exercise is not just electoral gains but a deeper quest to establish a Hindu hegemony to subordinate all other faiths, beliefs and ideas. This sets up an awesome nexus between education politics and religion which is contrary to the intrinsic secularism which holds a fragile India together. It is not for the NCERT to play politics. Concerned with academic excellence, it cannot act as censor or edit texts because the Sangh Parivar and its kindred spirits are upset. If the NCERT can be held to political and communal ransom, it does not deserve to exist or occupy the pivotal position by the Indian education system.

This is not a matter of parliamentary banter. Valuable parliamentary time was wasted in considering whether the term 'Talibanisation' was unparliamentary. Even though used as a political catch phrase, the term 'Talibanisation' cannot be said to be inappropriate. The Government supported censorship by the CBSE and, the NCERT is a form of 'Talibanisation' — both in terms of encouraging closed minds and the ferocity with which the new 'learning' is threatened to be inflicted on young examinees. It is to the credit of the Congress(I) Government

(1991-96) that it refused to implement even the recommendations of a committee of historians to review, ban or censor history books though it was under pressure to do so. There is a discipline about textbooks. Stray passages cannot be extracted for political scrutiny and censorship. No self-respecting academic will ever write textbooks if his or her work is excised peremptorily for political reasons and without any consultation.

In Unnikrishnan's case (1993), the Supreme Court declared education to the age of 14 to be compulsorily provided. For the vast majority of students, the provider of such education will be the state through Government schools. The NCERT's job is to assist in this task with examinations to be conducted by objective agencies such as the CBSE. The pending 93rd Constitution Amendment Bill seeks to provide 'education for all'. This programme cannot be hijacked by the Government and political parties for disbursing communally-slanted education.

So far, India's textbook system through the CBSE and the NCERT has worked well precisely because it has striven for excellence to get the best known authors (and not any politically-selected rabble) to independently write good books. The 'Talibanisation' of textbooks put this system under threat. Till now, no one thought NCERT books were not good books or argued that texts cannot be updated or changed. But this cannot happen for political or fundamentalist reasons. India's Ministries of Education and related institutions were not created to be instruments of propaganda. If this continues, a new system insulated from political interference would have to be devised immune from communalisation and politicisation. But any new system must be carefully crafted so that the solution does not spread the disease. No doubt in the market place of ideas, each issue must be openly and strongly discussed — fairly and fiercely. But with the advent of fundamentalism, India is losing its capacity for such discussions. Manipulating textbooks for children is unacceptable. India has suffered enough communalism. Leave textbooks alone.

THE HINDU

08 NOV 2001



# A short history of India, or so says NCERT

SANJAY K SINGH  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 28. The NCERT has discovered a simple way to avoid controversy on history — teach less of it.

The prescribed integrated course for social science — to be introduced in the next academic session — has drastically reduced the proportion of history being taught to school students between classes VI and X.

The director of the National Council for Educational Research and Training, Dr JS Rajput, was not available for comment.

At present there are separate books for history, civics and geography but from the new session which begins in April, school students will have only one "comprehensive" text book on social sciences, including components

SUDESH K VERMA  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 28. — The Sangh Parivar dashed off a letter to the Union minister for tourism and culture, Mr Jagmohan, asking him not to go ahead with the plan to organise an MF Hussain exhibition. An RSS leader said "the government shouldn't promote a Hindu basher."

Mr Jagmohan refused to comment though some RSS leaders said the exhibition will be cancelled or postponed indefinitely. The minister said he wasn't aware if a decision had been taken. "I have asked for the details," he said. He refused to comment when asked what he thought of the RSS condemnation of Hussain.

of economics.

The acting head of the Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, Professor Savita Sinha, said the integrated text book for all classes between VI and X will comprise roughly 150 pages of printed material per

The former minister of culture, Mrs Maneka Gandhi, smarting from the embarrassment of having her wings clipped, confirmed that a decision to hold the exhibition was taken jointly by the culture and tourism ministries. The exhibition was to take place at the National Gallery of Modern Art after the one-week exhibition of Picasso's paintings scheduled to begin on 14 December, she said.

The RSS outfit, Samskara Bharati, wrote a letter to Mr Jagmohan on 21 November, two days after he took over as the culture minister, requesting the cancellation of the Hussain exhibition. The change made the Parivar happy as they always considered Mr Jagmohan their own man. "Mr Hussain had hurt the sentiments of Hindus by depicting Hindu goddesses in obscene nakedness," the letter said.

students but give them some breathing space to think of themselves," said Prof. Sinha.

Another professor in the same department confirmed that "much more importance has been accorded to geography and civics. This is because of

who are taught roughly 600 pages of history in classes IX and X will end up being taught barely 50 pages in these two classes.

Professor Dev said "the present system worked on the principle that a child when he or she finishes class X would have a basic understanding of the world and India as it evolved from pre-historic times to as recent developments as 1995."

Professor Dev cited a reference to British historian, EJ Hobsbawm's book *The Age of Extremes* where the author says he was asked by a student: "Sir, you are speaking of Second World War, does this mean there was a First World War?" Professor Dev feels a reduction in the history content taught to school students could create a similar situation here.

■ **Editorial: History wars, page 6**

THE STATESMAN

29 NOV 2000

# HISTORY WARS

Ed. 8  
Bowdlerising textbooks not education

THERE is something inherently objectionable about history textbooks written for schoolchildren by reputed historians such as Romila Thapar being bowdlerised by half-educated and anonymous bureaucrats within the NCERT. Is this the Talibanisation of education, as Arjun Singh has alleged? Perhaps not, or more precisely, not yet — but this could be the thin end of the wedge. Saffronisation of education was no part of the common programme of the NDA, but the Sangh Parivar has not been averse to floating trial balloons to see how far they can fly.

The following is a sample of the items found offensive and marked for deletion by the Central Board of Secondary Education — beef was an item in the diet of ancient Hindus — the caste system exploited lower castes — archaeological evidence should be given more weightage than the *Puranas* in determining historical facts. The first is a matter of incontrovertible fact, even if the BJP choose to consider it embarrassing. The second hits at the notion of a *rama rajya*, which is more mythological than historical, never mind that caste oppression is a brutal reality even today. The third seems a valid methodological procedure; if one accepts that the *Puranas* are accurate renditions of history and no further evidence needs to be considered one is indeed not far from a Talibanised view of education.

Despite staging a walkout in the Lok Sabha and forcing the Rajya Sabha to adjourn, the opposition was unable to forestall the BJP on the textbook deletions, principally because its leading lights, such as the Congress and the CPI-M, have skeletons in their own cupboards. The Congress supports the deletion of a reference to Guru Tegh Bahadur as plundering, raping and laying waste territory in Punjab, in a Class XI history text by Satish Chandra, although the text specifically mentions that these were the *charges* on which he was arrested and executed. If a class XI student does not understand that all charges made by governing authorities are not true, he has no business studying history or for that matter any subject.

Likewise, primary and secondary education boards in Left Front ruled West Bengal are being instructed to make syllabi and textbooks top-heavy with information about Communist stalwarts such as Marx, Engels, Lenin, Ho Chi Minh, but we are not sure if Castro is included. He is making overtures to the United States which deserved to have its twin towers in New York blown up to further the revolution. One can be sure that uncomfortable facts about the mass murders, labour camps and purges by Communist regimes, not to mention devastating famines caused by faulty economic policies when crops grown by Russian or Chinese peasants were seized by the state, will be found only under the carpet of the new syllabus. Why? Because, they may hurt dialectical materialism.

But then one has little defence if the NCERT deletes references to ancient Hindus eating beef on the ground that Hindu sentiments take precedence over facts. If history is merely an exercise in feeding the egos of dominant communities or political parties, it cannot bring about a disposition towards rationality or free inquiry, which is what education is supposed to foster. Perhaps Arjun Singh had a point, after all.

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17/10

## HISTORY BY FIAT

9-620 & culture ✓

THE LATEST DIRECTIVE by the Human Resource Development (HRD) Minister, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, to the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) to have the chapter on the Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur deleted from Professor Satish Chandra's book on medieval India for class IX, that has been in circulation for over two decades, is yet another instance of the persistent thought policing manoeuvres by the Sangh Parivar ever since it cobbled together a coalition at the Centre. Foremost, interference with the spirit of intellectual freedom is anathema to modern civilisation which has always nurtured the pursuit of scientific enquiry, even though invariably the fruits of such endeavours ran counter to established norms of viewing and understanding the world. Social enquiry presupposes a host of viewpoints and, consequently, grappling with these simultaneously is integral to the process of studying social sciences. Therefore, any attempt to write history that will "suit the needs of the present times" is antithetical to the endeavour of promoting human excellence, incidentally one of the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution.

Dr. Joshi in particular, at the helm of the HRD Ministry, has more than served the sectarian cause of the Parivar by first insisting on a rendition of the Saraswati Vandana at the Conference of State Education Ministers in 1999. This was soon followed up by the Indian Council for Historical Research's unceremonious withdrawal of the volumes comprising the "Towards Freedom" project compiled by eminent historians Professor K. N. Panikkar of the Jawaharlal Nehru University and Professor Sumit

Sarkar of the Delhi University, volumes that dealt with the communal riots of 1946 and the prominent role played by the communists in the freedom movement. One must also not lose sight of other dimensions of this broader campaign of cultural nationalism that saw a ban on the shooting of Deepa Mehta's film "Water" and the list is unending. The Bharatiya Janata Party has made no secret of its intentions to rewrite the history of the Indian nation-state, even if it has sought to rationalise such a proposal as falling within the framework of the New Education Policy drafted in 1986.

It is noteworthy that the explanation for the deletion of the portion in the NCERT book is couched in terms of the offence caused to people's religious beliefs, although it is obvious by now that the Sangh Parivar has no time for religious sensibilities whatsoever, except for the selective and systematic targeting of minority religious communities. If however, there is a growing popular misperception about the Sangh Parivar as a votary of Hinduism, it is on account of its relentless pursuit of a majoritarian agenda which seeks to identify Indian nationalism with Hinduism. The attempt at reconstructing history, first in terms of viewing ancient India as essentially an embodiment of the Hindu identity and much of the second millennium as falling neatly into Hindu and Muslim periods and the subsequent ascendancy of Hindu nationalism is part of the very same process. An appreciation of this is especially critical lest Dr. Joshi's fiat should be interpreted as seeking to safeguard religious sentiments from "secular" attack.

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# Joshi's fiat to NCERT *Ed. & Culture*

By Anita Joshua

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21/10  
NEW DELHI, OCT. 6. Unwilling to wait for the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) to "free history of objectionable attributes", the Human Resource Development Minister, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, today stepped in and instructed the NCERT to delete all references from history textbooks that hurt the religious sentiments of people. Simultaneously, the Central Board of Secondary Education has been asked to direct all affiliated institutions to stop teaching and asking questions on such objectionable portions in textbooks.

Dr. Joshi issued the instructions after a meeting with a delegation of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee which asked him to remove "certain objectionable comments on Guru Teg Bahadur's martyrdom" in the NCERT's Class XI textbook on medieval India as it hurt the sentiments of the Sikh community.

Published in 1978, an objection was raised for the first time in 1997 to two references pertaining to the Guru's execution: "The official explanation for this as given in some later Persian sources is that after his return from Assam, the Guru, in association with one Hafiz Adam, a follower of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, had resorted to plunder and rapine, laying waste the whole province of Punjab. According to Sikh tradition, the execution was due to the intrigues of

some members of his family who disputed his succession." The matter was taken to court, but the Punjab High Court saw no need to interfere and make any alteration.

Still, ever since the NCERT began talking about a new curriculum and revision of existing history textbooks, this was one "objectionable reference" that cited very often by the advocates of rewriting history within the Council and the Sangh Parivar.

But it was only after the Congress raised objections over their inclusion in the textbooks during a debate on saffronisation in the Delhi Legislative Assembly last month that the HRD Ministry decided to order their deletion. Denying that his account sought to cast aspersions on the patriotism of Guru Teg Bahadur and hurt the sentiments of the Sikhs, Prof. Satish Chandra told *The Hindu* that his critics had misunderstood his account on the Sikhs in the chapter on 'Climax and Disintegration of the Mughal Empire'. "They are quoting two sentences in isolation without reading the rest of the passage."

I have included some of the views available in different sources of information on that period. And, after examining all the accounts, I have concluded that the Guru had become a rallying point for all those fighting against injustice," Prof. Chandra said, adding there was more to the controversy than what meets the eye as objections were first raised two decades after the book had been in circulation.

THE HINDU

- 7 OCT 2002

# New heights for higher education

Universities as centres of learning and research have an important role in expanding the horizons of knowledge and providing intellectual leadership to society. Unfortunately, many of them have become mere examination-conducting bodies today. Steps should be taken to restore the universities to the original role expected of them. A few concrete suggestions:

Gradual dispensing with the system of affiliation; giving a fair trial to the concept of autonomous colleges...

Applied and meaningful research that directly addresses the questions relevant to community needs... Though we have a large system of higher education with around 240 universities and 9,000 colleges, nearly 40 per cent of the colleges are reported to be non-viable... With a large number of students receiving substandard education in ill-equipped colleges, we cannot expect to produce man power capable of meeting the challenges in different fields. Immediate steps need to be taken to improve the conditions of the colleges.

Feasibility of community system of higher education combining formal and non-formal systems and providing for horizontal and vertical mobility within the academic framework must be examined.

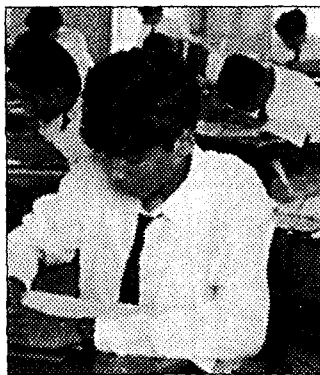
The new technological revolution particularly in the field of information technology has made a tremendous impact on the field of education at all levels... It has brought about a total paradigm shift with regard to the role of the teacher, the method of the pedagogy and the character of the educational institutions. How to adapt the new technology to our needs and conditions without allowing it to damage our values and identity is also a matter which deserves serious consideration.

One of the negative impacts of the invasion of new technology is the relegation of the basic sciences and humanities to the background. Both of them have great significance from the point of view of original research in different spheres of knowledge as well as from the point of view of quality of social and cultural

Extracts from the government of India's 1997 concept paper on "Education reforms: issues of priority"

life. Care should be taken to protect and promote these disciplines in a meaningful way.

Higher education is of crucial importance for the developmental process. Strengthening the system is the need of the hour... The argument that higher education is getting a greater share at the cost of primary education has little justification. Each has its own importance. Primary education must get all the due attention;



Subject of much debate

but neglecting higher education would be disastrous.

Private agencies do have an important role in the field of education. However, leaving the field open to the market forces in the name of privatization is a self-defeating proposition. Commercialization will not only denude education of all the noble values and ideals associated with it, it will also lead to widening the gap of social disparity. Therefore, commercialization of education needs to be curbed in the larger interest of education.

Expenditure on education is an investment for the future... Determined and time-bound efforts will have to be made to move towards reaching the target of 6 per cent of the gross domestic product on education. While the non-government efforts can play a sup-

porting role in this behalf, the major responsibility rests with the government.

The examination system should be thoroughly revised to make it a comprehensive system of evaluating the abilities and achievements of the students. It should cease to be a fault-finding and mechanical exercise. Teacher-training at all levels needs to be seriously considered for reformation. It is important that the teacher is equipped and motivated for the central role that he/she is expected to play in a meaningful educational system.

Special educational rights to the minorities must be properly defined so as to prevent such educational institutions from becoming insulated entities leading to a duality in the system. Inter-relationship between autonomy and government monitoring of such minority-managed educational institutions should be clearly defined. The duality between private and the state-owned educational institutions must also be debated within the broad perspective of national culture and national spirit.

The need for an independent and autonomous agency on the lines of the judiciary or the Election Commission, which will guide, co-ordinate and monitor the implementation of educational policies, has been voiced by several organizations and educational experts. This agency shall also be responsible for assessing and auditing the performance of educational institutions at all levels. Creation of such an agency will be a major step towards educational reform.

The purpose of this paper is not to provide any detailed plan of educational reform... What is attempted here is only to indicate some important areas where immediate action is needed. It is hoped that a wider debate on these issues will provide the necessary road map for future policy and concrete action. As it was correctly pointed out in the Kothari commission report, "no report, however good, can be a substitute for action". It is hoped that this occasion of introspection will also turn out to be a starting point for appropriate action.

# Elementary education is not universal yet

*62m 3*  
*Callan*

**T**he National Policy of Education, 1986 (as updated in 1992) and the Programme of Action, 1992 reaffirm the national commitment to universalisation of elementary education (UEE). Para 5.12 of NPE resolves that free and compulsory education of satisfactory quality should be provided to all children up to 14 years of age before we enter the 21st century. The NPE also specifies in para 5.5 that UEE has three aspects: (i) universal access and enrolment; (ii) universal retention of children up to 14 years of age; and (iii) a substantial improvement in quality of education to enable all children to achieve essential levels of learning.

Right from independence, India has persevered with the goal of UEE; even though substantial progress has been achieved, the goal still remains elusive. The additional participation in elementary education has to come from social strata and regions which are more difficult to reach. Therefore, the path that lies ahead in the march to UEE is more arduous; the journey ahead is a marathon calling for a higher intensity of effort and more systematic planning and implementation.

National experience with the pursuit of UEE had established the following: (i) UEE is contextual. The contextuality varies widely across the country. Even in states like Kerala where participation is near-universal, much requires to be done with respect to quality and achievement. In such states the pursuit of UEE would be mainly in the areas of quality, facilities and achievement. In other states participation and demand aspects need more attention.

(ii) Contextuality entails local area-planning with disaggregated targets and decentralized planning and management. Planning for UEE had hitherto been mainly at the na-

## Extracts from the government of India's guidelines for the district primary education programme

tional and state-level. Barring some states and Union territories, these entities are too large and heterogeneous for effective planning; they cannot provide contextuality. Ideally, the planning should be from below, right from the village upwards. But given the objective conditions, a beginning has to be made with the district

has been inadequate and needs to be augmented by: (a) a holistic planning and management approach which goes beyond implementation of a disjointed set of individual schemes, perceives the task of UEE in its totality, integrates all the measures needed to achieving UEE in the specific context of the district; (b) this holistic planning should incorporate a gender perspective in all aspects of the planning and implementation process and be an integral part of all measures needed to achieve UEE; (c) addressing the more difficult aspects of access, particularly access to girls, disadvantaged groups and out-of-school chil-



Our daily bread

as the unit of planning. The district plans are to be prepared through an intensive process of interaction with the local bodies, teachers and NGOs so that it is "owned" by all who are to be associated in implementation and it reflects the ground-level realities.

(iii) Resources are an important but not sufficient condition for achieving UEE. A host of measures, both financial and non-financial, both on the supply side and of the demand side, need to complement higher allocation of resources.

(iv) The strategies for UEE have hitherto emphasized, mainly access in terms of construction of classrooms and appointment of teachers. This

dren; (d) improving school effectiveness; (e) strengthening the alternatives to schooling, particularly the non-formal education system; (f) stressing the participative processes whereby the local community facilitates participation, achievement and school effectiveness; (g) toning up teacher competence, training and motivation; (h) stressing learning competence and achievement; (i) stressing the need for improved teaching/learning materials; (j) streamlining of planning and management with respect to both routine and innovative areas; and (k) convergence of elementary education and related services like ECCE and school health.

# Education: A fundamental right?

Will declaring education a fundamental right make any difference to the 35 million illiterate Indians? Should education be made free and compulsory?

We posed these questions to our panel of three experts

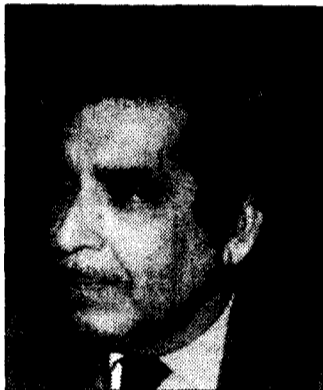
*J. B. G. & C. S. K.*  
**Yoginder K Alagh**  
Former union minister,  
Science & Technology

EDUCATION is a right of every human being. The "debate" I suspect is on whether it should be a legal or constitutional right. Simply declaring education a fundamental right is not going to make a difference. The real issue is to prepare for an organisational and support system, such that literacy and primary education gets to be within the reach of poor persons, particularly those who have been socially oppressed as a part of historical processes, for example through 'untouchability' as practiced as a part of Brahminical Hinduism in India. If such a system is not there, a legal provision will remain on the statute book. So, let us restate it to mean that if progress is otherwise being made, will a constitutional stipulation help? I would like to reason out that it will and that India has reached a state where this is particularly so.

Progress is particularly rapid in India in the recent phase towards literacy and enrolment. For example, apart from the results of the population census on literacy, the decline in workers' participation rates in the labour force are particularly high in age groups below 19, particularly among male workers in rural areas, which is on account of this factor. If you look at improvements in the literacy rate, India's rate went up from 28 per cent in 1960 to 62 per cent in 1997, which is the highest improvement in Asia (62 minus 28 = 34), apart from Indonesia, where the improvement figure is 40. Also as the UNDP's Human Development Report for 2001 brings out, India's Technology Achievement Index puts it among the rank of 'Dynamic Adopters' on a global plane and this is determined amongst other reasons, by mean years of schooling and science enrolment. Incidentally, countries like Russia, Switzerland and Turkey don't make the grade. A final assault, therefore, should now be possible on illiteracy.

This final assault will amongst other factors need three steps. The first is an effective school feeding programme,

the second is adequate resource allocation and the third is an adequate community involvement programme with the local school administration. School feeding programmes have known to be very effective in retaining children, particularly of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe and from other marginal farmer, landless labourer and poor artisan households in school. While the coverage of schools is fairly even in rural India by now, and there are hardly any habitations where there is no school within 2 kms, retention will not be possible, without adequate teaching and other support.



All realistic last mile programmes will need some more resources. PTAs, panchayats and NGOs have to get into effective supervision of schools and mobilisation of supplemental resources from civil society. None of this will be possible, without the state setting down the framework of participation and more effective

resource allocation. India is a poor country and claims on resources will always be severe. A constitutional stipulation will therefore help at the cutting edge.

Given the nature of the Indian state and implementation of social legislation, it is extremely unlikely that force will be used. The problem of autonomy of education in a democratic society is a real one. In the OECD countries, apart from the USA, fees account for less than an eighth of educational expenses and the state takes the big share. In USA also, state sponsored fellowship programmes are important. Lunatic groups to the left and right have been known to try to influence educational agendas. For some time and in some areas they have succeeded. More important educational institutions generally tend to be conservative and genuine questioning of a society's beliefs is rare. However, democratic societies in time put lunatics who hear voices in the air in place. Leaving the system to the mercy of the invisible hand alone and the tyranny of the status quo is not even an intelligent question. As a former Vice Chancellor of India's greatest University, I will only say that India will only be as free as it wants to be. Freedom is not given. You have to fight to take it and keep it.

**B K Chaturvedi**  
Secretary to the GoI,  
Primary education

EDUCATION is a basic requirement for a meaningful life. Literacy levels in India in 1951 were only 16 per cent. Ninety four per cent of the women were illiterate. In spite of a provision of free and compulsory education in Article 45 of the Constitution, implementation of this Directive Principle, which was to be fulfilled in 10 years, made slow progress. Today, literacy levels have gone up to 65

per cent. While 1990s have seen a decline in the overall number of illiterate persons in India by around three crores for the first time in the post independence era, the illiteracy levels are still unacceptably high particularly for women. NFHS surveys shows that nearly 79 per cent of the children in the 6-14 age group are attending schools. Rest

are either drop outs or did not join school.

The Supreme Court in its judgement in the case of Unni Krishnen J.P. vs state of Andhra and others has held education for children up to 14 years a fundamental right. This progressive interpretation of legislation based on right to life under Article 21 led to introduction of a Bill in the Parliament in 1997 bringing education as a fundamental right under the Constitution. The Bill was examined by the standing committee of HRD and the Law Commission in its 165th report. Recently, in a major decision, the government of India has announced that it will reintroduce a Bill making education for children for 6-14 years a fundamental right and making it the fundamental duty of every parent / guardian under Article 51-A of the Constitution to send their children / wards to school. These provisions are backed by a massive programme for Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) : called the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* under which nearly hundred thousand crores would be spent till 2010 by the central and state governments and through community efforts. The programme envisages facilities for school buildings, teachers, teachers' education and academic support through block and cluster resource centres, girls' toilets, textbooks for girls and scheduled caste and

scheduled tribe children, additional classrooms, community mobilisation, decentralised planning and implementation, constitution of village education committees and their training, use of mothers' committees and parent teachers associations, and innovative schemes to take care of special requirement of the concerned area.

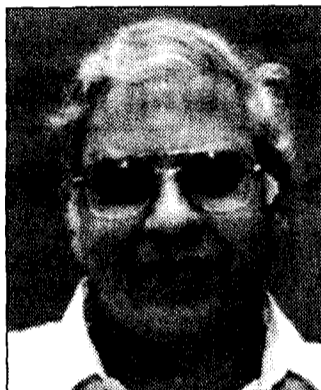
The objective is to see that within one kilometre of the habitation, there is a primary school. This is also supplemented by an Educational Guarantee Scheme providing for a school within a kilometre. The intention is to have eight

years of quality education. Special efforts are contemplated to reduce the major problem of drop out and provide quality education within easy accessibility. The scheme would cover both urban and rural areas. It is hoped that this project would enable all children to have five years of primary education till 2007 and eight years of elementary education till 2010. This level of investment and implementation of SSA would ensure the fundamental right to education.

The concept of free and compulsory education has to be appreciated in the Indian context. The compulsion is really on the state to provide the facilities for schooling of satisfactory quality. In India, today, there is a hunger for education. People want the children to go to schools. They want quality education.

There are, however, certain financial difficulties and social customs which inhibit children attending schools. The major motivation, therefore, has to be on providing schools, teachers and improving the quality of education which will make it a joyful learning experience. Whenever the village community in the rural areas is involved, the educational levels are clearly high. The intervention for UEE must address the causes which prevent parents from sending their children to school rather than on forcing compulsion. These would be emphasised in the central law.

Knowledge is gained through a process of learning. This implies certain levels of education. In all countries, the state has come forward to provide the basic education for about eight years. The process of learning has to be through self and with support from institutions.



# Saffronisation charges baseless, says Joshi

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

HYDERABAD, Sept. 6. - Mr Murli Manohar Joshi said the charges of saffronisation of education are baseless. "It's all politics and intended to turn the clock of the country's education backwards," he said.

He defended the teaching of astrology in universities because it doesn't violate any constitutional provision. Speaking at a press conference, he said astrology would be taught as an Arts course. The present situation is aimed to create confusion, especially "by the Marxist friends," he said. He charged a reporter with getting carried away "with what someone or Mr PM Bhargava (scientist) said". Mr Joshi pointed out that several newspapers carry regular astrological columns to question the media's reservations on the subject.

On the rationale behind introducing the subject, Mr Joshi said: "Astrology was being taught in 16 universities before the enlargement of the subject - 30 to 40 universities all over the world are giving astrology courses. Bharatiya Vidya Bha-

van gives regular courses that are attended by judges, journalists, advocates, professors and housewives and diplomas are given".

The subject doesn't violate the 1986 education policy, 1992 plan of action or the HRD's standing committees' reports. He has written to chief ministers about the matter and none spoke of any reservations. "No chief minister spoke against it, no one in Parliament said that its violative" he said. When told that Mr N Chandrababu Naidu said he is against saffronisation of education, he shot back: "Where's saffronisation?" About allies he said, "All my allies are convinced".

He said he gave the document twice to chief ministers and presidents of political parties with a request to discuss the matter in their respective legislatures and party fora and suggest how best the Centre should implement it.

"Nobody has objected to it. They have not explained saffronisation as yet. They don't know the meaning of saffronisation. I'll remedy it if you can convince

## NO POLITICS IN EDUCATION: TRINAMUL

KOLKATA, Sept. 6. - Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay today said the Trinamul Congress would oppose in Parliament any move to saffronise education. The party's stand comes close on the heels of the Trinamul's re-entry into the NDA "without pre-conditions". Political circles believe that Mr Bandopadhyay's statement is an indication of the Trinamul chief's rigid stand not to bow to the wishes of anybody. Mr Bandopadhyay said the question of saffron or scarlet is totally inconsequential to the party. "Our party's stand is that politics shouldn't be tolerated in education, be it saffron or scarlet. If there is any such move, we will oppose it in Parliament", Mr Bandopadhyay added. - SNS

me if it has violated any of the documents on education or the Constitution. Even now if you have a reservation please tell which word, paragraph or line is violating them" he said.

He asked, "You mean to say there should be no value education, no respect for all religions, no Information Technology education, no teaching about the heroes of the land to all the children?" "Astrology is a subject that people want to study. It's not a compulsion. If a university wants it can have it."

Later speaking to party workers, he cited this controversy as a conspiracy to create fissures in the NDA. He charged the

West Bengal and Kerala government with distorting history. "In West Bengal, they are taught that Lenin is one of the architects of modern India. Can anyone tell what his contribution is? In Kerala they have made EMS Namboodripad a historian" A textbook mentions, Guru Tej Bahadur was killed due to a family conspiracy. "Can we accept it?" he asked. If these books are reviewed then some people get uncomfortable, as they have distorted history, he said.

He charged the Opposition with being in a stage of delirium. "Don't worry we have the medicines that can cure it," he said.

THE STATESMAN

7 SEP 2001



Four CMs attend Buddha's meet

# Saffron syllabus opposed

*Education*  
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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Sept. 2. — Accusing the Centre of vitiating the Constitution's secular spirit by trying to saffronise education, the chief ministers of some Opposition-ruled states as well as J&K and Meghalaya (ruled by NDA allies), will write to the President and Prime Minister to caution them against the move, Mr Buddha-dev Bhattacharya said today.

The West Bengal chief minister had called a meeting of non-BJP chief ministers on the issue. Besides him, Mrs Rabri Devi (Bihar), Mrs Sheila Dikshit (Delhi), Mr Manik Sarkar (Tripura) and Mr EK Mawlong (Meghalaya) were present. Education ministers of 12 states, including J&K, also attended.

A resolution was passed saying that the country's education policy should be consistent with the secular and democratic values of the Constitution, and all decisions in this regard should be on the basis of consensus among the Union and states. The resolution, adopted unanimously, asked the academics and secular forces to thwart the Centre's covert and overt attempts to undermine values in education as it did not reflect the consensus of the nation.

It maintained that education

is a subject "not under the exclusive domain of any particular party", but of national concern.

Those present demanded that the Centre should withhold all decisions, orders, circulars and documents introducing new subjects like vedic astrology and rituals in the curricula and reconstitute the Central Advisory Board of Education. This should be followed by a conference of education ministers before going to Parliament for approval, the resolution said.

Rejecting the Centre's move, the J&K education minister, Mohd Shafi Uri, said the new curriculum was not part of the NDA agenda and the National Conference would not allow any such move. Mohd Shafi said no central decision on education was binding on the state as education was a state subject. The state governments would not support "saffronisation" of education.

Mrs Dikshit said the Centre is surreptitiously following a particular religious ideology. The states are not going to "follow" the directives of the HRD ministry on education till a national consensus on it is evolved by calling a conference of state education ministers and talks in Parliament.

■ Photograph on page 8

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SEP 20 1980

# 'Saffronisation' moves in education criticised

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, AUG. 29. The Human Resource Development Minister, Dr. Murlī Manohar Joshi, today asserted in the Rajya Sabha that the Government was neither saffronising education nor pushing in any hidden agenda.

Dr. Joshi assured the Elders that the Government was not willing to commercialise higher education in the country and strongly defended the process of preparing the National Curriculum Framework for school education.

In his 70-minute reply to a calling attention motion on recent circulars of the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the National Council for Education, Research and Training (NCERT), he said the Government was not willing to leave higher education to market forces, so long as he was holding the job and had not accepted the Birla-Ambani report on it.

The motion moved by the Congress and other parties witnessed heated discussion and noisy interruptions from both the Opposition and ruling NDA benches, leading to a ruling from the Chair that nothing except the Minister's reply would go on record.

The discussion also saw the DMK, a member of the ruling alliance, joining issue with the move to introduce astrology and Vedic maths as subjects of study in universities while the National Conference demanded that the Government at least consult the constituents in the NDA.

The Minister's contention that the Framework was finalised after the Ministry failed to elicit response from the 70 political party leaders it was circulated to, drew vociferous protests from the Opposition, which insisted that circulating it did mean concurrence. He said that the Framework was discussed in two conferences of State Education

Secretaries held in November, 1999 and April this year in which the NCERT made detailed presentation.

Dr. Joshi promised to look into NCERT books that carried 'objectionable references' to saints and national leaders thereby causing disharmony and delete them, a point raised by Dr. Mahesh Chandra Sharma (BJP) during his spirited intervention.

He said action and initiatives taken both by the NCERT-UGC in school and higher education sectors were in pursuance of and within the parameters of the 1986 policy with a view to bringing about quality upgradation and meeting emerging challenges.

Earlier, initiating the discussion, Mr. Eduardo Faleiro (Congress) criticised the Framework and moves in the UGC as a 'great leap backward to the dark ages' and charged that the Government was bringing into play 'its

regressive agenda'. Urging the State governments to 'reject' the Framework, he said the move to introduce Vedic maths and astrology were a 'caricature' of attempts to inculcate a scientific temper since it was based on tradition instead of logic and experiment.

Interestingly, Mr. P.N. Siva (DMK) was vehement in opposing the move and said this came at a time when there was need to usher in education to meet the demands of the next generation like information technology and bio-technology.

'The UGC is taking a giant leap backwards' in the face of stiff opposition from members of the scientific community, he said.

Another NDA partner, Mr. Mirza Abdul Rashid (National Conference) disputed the Government's claim to have discussed with all States.

THE HINDU

30 AUG 2000

## SAFFRON LOGIC

Sir Joshi plans compulsory religion 20/8

SAFFRONISATION of education is most definitely no part of the common minimum programme the NDA government has framed for itself. But Murli Manohar Joshi believes he can pursue this agenda anyway, and a few semantic waffles will throw off those opposed to it, whose numbers include not just the entire Opposition but non-BJP members of the NDA. Joshi and his henchmen in educational planning bodies have evolved a series of euphemisms, such as "value education" for religious education; the latest on offer is a distinction he made, in the course of a parliamentary debate on saffronisation, between "teaching about religion" and "teaching religion".

Compulsory courses on religion, Joshi told parliament, will not just be about Hinduism, but will incorporate other religions as well; all this will be done on an impeccably "secular" basis. This highlights the mess created by a misunderstanding of secularism that is unfortunately widespread in India, shared even by parties opposed to the BJP. According to this interpretation, secularism is not delinking religion from government, but rather, in accordance with the *mai-baap sarkar* logic of Indian governance, offering equal patronage to all religions.

The possibilities of conflict that it can throw up are endless, with each religious denomination convinced that other religions are being favoured — which then becomes fertile ground for politicians to play divisive games. Consider, for example, the inane questions which will be thrown up once Joshi's premises are granted. Is the religion syllabus going to be divided equally between Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism, animism and occult sciences? Or, since Hindus are roughly 80 per cent of the population, should 80 per cent of the syllabus be given over to Hinduism? Is even the fig-leaf of "secularism" maintainable in that case? Or in an imitation of Akbar's *Din-i-Ilahi* exercise, is the "common ground" between religions to be stressed? In that case it ought to be noted that *Din-i-Ilahi* failed, and Akbar's motives were not suspect unlike Joshi's.

Those opposed to saffronisation shouldn't be fooled by Joshi's rhetoric; his own backers in the RSS aren't. As Joshi was dismissing the saffronisation charge, the RSS spokesman, MG Vaidya, commended Joshi for doing a good job of pushing saffronisation. Looking at religion as an area of private belief, where the government shouldn't intervene, offers several advantages secularists opposed to the sangh parivar should consider. It would make them less susceptible to the charge of "pseudo-secularism". It offers less to those trying to communalise religious identity. It advances the most complete rebuttal of the sleight of hand whereby Joshi tries to turn secularism into its opposite. And it cannot be deemed anti-religious: the RSS, or any other religious organisation, would still be free to open as many institutions to propagate religion as it wishes.

But government schools ought to be open to all, and cannot force-feed children, whether Hindus or others, with denominational beliefs. The NDA cannot afford to deviate from its common programme; the opposition must stand firm against compulsory religion. And Vajpayee should consider whether he can continue with a faddist, albeit one facile with words, as human resources minister.

Edn 8  
culture  
40-1  
2/8

# We have not changed Congress policy, says Joshi

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, AUG. 20.** The Human Resource Development Minister, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, today denied allegations of the Opposition that the BJP-led coalition Government at the Centre was pursuing a "hidden agenda" in framing the curriculum for schools.

Replying to a debate in the Lok Sabha on "Saffronisation of Education", Dr. Joshi asserted that the Government had not deviated from the National Education Policy of 1986 which was implemented during the Congress regime.

Though there were almost empty benches both on the Treasury and Opposition side, Dr. Joshi's more than an hour-long reply was interrupted frequently by the Opposition members who alleged that the Minister was trying to be evasive.

Dr. Joshi asserted that the proposed curriculum framework was sent to all the Union Ministers, Chief Ministers and State Education Ministers for ascertaining their views and said that none had rejected the document.

He said the document was prepared after several rounds of discussions and all the regional institutes of education were taken into confidence. Eminent academicians, educationists and scientists such as Mr. Kapila Vatsayan, Prof. Yashpal, Prof. Ravinder Kumar and Prof. S.Z. Qasim were members of the committee that examined the

curriculum framework.

The Minister said the document was sent to 67 political parties with a request to discuss it in their party fora. He said the curri-

culum framework was drafted with a view to improving the quality of education.

"No other Government has been so democratic and held such

wide consultations before preparing the framework of curriculum. It has been disseminated on a very wide scale. I say that this is only a curriculum under the 1986 National Policy of Education. If there is any deviation, kindly point it out. We are bound by the 1986 policy and the amendments carried out in it in 1992," he assured the members.

He said the Central Government could only lay down the policy and curriculum framework and the State Governments were free to draft their own syllabi. "I urge all the members to seriously study it and come up with suggestions and feedback," he added. The Minister alleged that there was a conspiracy to refrain from paying attention to the Government's version. "If you go on repeating lies and half-truths umpteen times, it tends to get portrayed as truth. This is a dangerous propaganda," he said.

Dr. Joshi said that all State Education Ministers were members of the NCERT and they had all attended the Council's meeting and accepted the document. He said the curriculum framework was an exercise in review and not aimed at changing anything. He said the curriculum framework was in favour of imparting education about all religions and not about religious education. "We are for equal respect to all religions and that is what the framework contains. Sanskrit is also an elective subject and not a compulsory one," he said.

## 'Do not go back to the Middle Ages'

**NEW DELHI, AUG. 20.** The allies of the Bharatiya Janata Party, including the DMK, the Janata Dal (J) and the Samata Party, today slammed the Vajpayee Government in the Lok Sabha for 'saffronising the education system' and warned that linking religion to the curriculum would have dangerous repercussions. They charged the Government with adopting a 'retrograde' approach towards education by including subjects like Astrology and Vedic Mathematics.

Participating in the resumed discussion on 'saffronisation of education', Mr. S.S. Palanimanickam (DMK) demanded that the Government withdraw its circular sent to universities on inclusion of Astrology and said superstition should not be mixed with scientific temper. "We should march ahead and not go back to the Middle Ages."

Ms. B. D'Souza (Samata Party) wanted to know the relevance of including Astrology and Vedic Mathematics in the curriculum

and warned that linking values to religion could be dangerous. She wanted to know whether the Government was attempting an education reform or a cultural revolution and said that Vedic Mathematics was akin to mysticism.

The Trinamool Congress said giving any colour to education was not good. The Trinamool member, Mr. Krishna Bose, said "it is best to leave it to academicians and educationists." Making a scathing attack on the Communists in West Bengal for making education 'scarlet' in the State, she said it was intriguing that the CPI(M) leader, Mr. Somnath Chatterjee, had initiated the discussion on the subject.

"Both (the Communists and the NDA) sides are missing the inner importance of the the subject," she said adding the West Bengal Government was even interfering in running of educational institutions by organisations like the Ramakrishna Mission. — PTI

## ALLIES OPPOSE 'SAFFRONISATION OF EDUCATION'

Edas  
Culture

# BJP stands isolated

HP-1

By Neena Vyas

**NEW DELHI, AUG 20.** The Bharatiya Janata Party finds itself totally isolated from its allies in the National Democratic Alliance on the issue of saffronisation of education. Leaders of the coalition parties have already let it be known that even if the Human Resource Development Ministry continues to push its agenda through, the States where they have their Governments will simply refuse to accept the new textbooks and the changes made in the syllabus. There is no way the Centre could force its view on the States.

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Mr. Yerran Naidu, Leader of the Parliamentary Party of the Telugu Desam which is supporting the NDA Government from outside, let it be known that his party was totally opposed to any changes made in the syllabus without a proper national discussion and a thorough debate in Parliament. "Any change can be made only with the full consent of the State Governments. Education is on the concurrent list and we will not accept the imposition of any new education policy," he emphasised.

When the National Agenda for Governance was drawn up, the BJP had agreed to leave behind all contentious issues, the leaders of allied parties said. Saffronisation of education is certainly a prickly subject on which the allies do not share the BJP's view. Irrespective of who wins how many brownie points in the ongoing parliamentary debate on saffronisation of education, the stance of the allies has made it clear that the Government cannot succeed in its effort.

### Against 'hidden agenda'

Besides the TDP, leaders of the DMK, Janata Dal (United), the Biju Janata Dal, and the Trinamool Congress (which is currently outside the NDA but is waiting for the green signal to re-join the alliance) have already spoken out against the attempt by the

HRD Ministry to bring the "hidden agenda" of the RSS into areas of Government policy. All these parties are of the view that the secular and modern content of the National Education Policy must not be tampered with.

To give an example: political parties from the south are particularly opposed to the RSS/BJP idea of history, which encourages the view that India's history began with the dominance of the Aryans who they see as the "original" settlers in the Indo-Gangetic plains. They reject the more favoured view of eminent historians that the Aryans were nomads who came into India from Central Asia and they then took to settled agriculture after pushing the Dravidian inhabitants south of the Vindhyas.

Mr. Devendra Prasad Yadav (JD-U) is also not impressed by the efforts of the HRD Ministry to introduce courses in astrology, change history textbooks with a view to glorifying the years of Hindu political dominance and denigrating the medieval period when the Mughal empire flourished. Neither in Bengal nor in Orissa where the Trinamool and the Biju Janata Dal have their base is the RSS view of history favoured.

It is being pointed out that most of the BJP leaders have not sent their children and grandchildren to 'shishu vidyalayas' run by the RSS or its various organisations. Why are they now trying to tamper with the education system which has by and large proved that it has kept up with the advances made in the West and elsewhere?

Another view was that the country had enough urgent problems that were crying for attention. What was the need to create an issue on which there are serious differences even within the NDA not to speak of the Opposition? Mr. Yerran Naidu recalled that his party had also opposed the offering of 'Saraswati vandana' at official functions when a controversy on this had been created by the HRD Ministry.

Joshi's reply: Page 11

AUG 2001

# 'Schools not to teach religion'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Aug. 20. - The Centre today denied the charge of framing a new education policy by introducing religious education or making Sanskrit a compulsory subject in schools.

The Opposition in the Lok Sabha had accused the government of trying to saffronise education. But Dr MM Joshi told the House that the NCERT's document was essentially the national curriculum framework for schools.

"There's no change or deviation from the accepted national education policy of 1986 and 1992 framed by the Congress government," the human resources development minister said. He asked the MPs to point out if the framework deviated from the accepted policy.

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The Centre won't interfere in preparing textbooks for schools; that would be done by the states. Sanskrit has been recommended as an "elective subject", according to the Supreme Court's 1994 decision, he said.

The Centre had decided to promote Arabic and Persian too. To prove that, Mr Joshi read out statistics for grants since 1998. The Indian Council for Promotion of Urdu too has been getting liberal grants, he said.

He read out letters to prove that the NCERT documents had been sent to all MPs, including Mrs Sonia Gandhi and Mr Somnath Chatterjee, chiefs of 67 parties, chief ministers and state education ministers.

"No chief minister had rejected the framework..., though some suggested taking precautions while introducing chan-

ges in the school texts."

Mr Joshi defended the NCERT document for making some changes in history books. He appreciated the Centre's move to make teaching of all religions compulsory. "It would not be religious teaching but teaching about religion." He assured the House that secularism would be the basis of the curricula.

Among the allies, Mr DP Yadav (JD-U), Mr Patrick D'souza (Samata) and Mrs Krishna Bose (Trinamul) cautioned the government against giving any saffron twist to education. Mrs Bose cited the example of the West Bengal curricula that had suffered because the CPI-M had "painted it a flaming scarlet."

Mr Somnath Chatterjee, the prime mover of the motion, walked out before Mr Joshi

could complete his reply.

**Furore over PM remarks:** NDA and Opposition members in the Lok Sabha today had a heated exchange over the Prime Minister's remarks that some Christian missionaries in India are driven by the "conversion motive".

Mr PR Das Munshi (Congress) raised the issue during zero hour. He quoted media reports on Mr AB Vajpayee's remarks on Saturday. He said the comment betrayed the BJP's "hidden agenda". Mr Vajpayee should come to the House and clarify the issue, he said.

Mr VK Malhotra (BJP) said Mr Vajpayee should be congratulated for his observations. Mr Vajpayee, he said, had praised the missionaries for their devotion and social service.

THE STATESMAN

21 AUG 2001

40-1 17/8

# Sonia, Somnath blast 'saffronisation' of education

Ed. S. /  
Lalitha

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, AUG. 16.** The Opposition today, for the first time, joined hands in the Lok Sabha to nail the Government for "saffronising" education in pursuit of its "narrow and divisive" agenda.

While the CPI(M) leader, Mr. Somnath Chatterjee, charged the BJP allies with strengthening the hands of the Sangh Parivar, the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, warned the Government against changing the National Education Policy of 1986 without the consent of Parliament.

The Opposition forced a discussion on the issue and found an ally in the Telugu Desam Party. The discussion went on for over four hours before the House was adjourned as the war of words got intense. The Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, therefore, could not reply.

Ms. Sonia Gandhi asserted that since the 1986 National Policy on Education was "sanctified by the endorsement of Parliament, it could be changed only with its consent".

Compared to Mr. Chatterjee and Mr. Vijay Kumar Malhotra of the BJP, Ms. Sonia's 15-minute speech, which ended with an assertion that "we will not let the Government get away with ideological sleights of hand", was fairly free of interruptions.

Of the view that the National Curriculum Framework for School Education did not have the mandate of the nation, Ms. Sonia said "we cannot and must not

accommodate the ideological idiosyncrasies of a particular school of thought, for to mix communal ideology with history textbooks and scientific facts is tantamount to playing with fire". Attacking the Government for substituting a national agenda with a hidden one, she questioned the powers that be for not making any headway on the long-standing Bill to make education a Fundamental Right.

Earlier, initiating what eventually became a thinly-attended-yet-acrimonious discussion under Rule 193, Mr. Chatterjee was critical of the BJP's allies for strengthening the hands of "this front organisation of the RSS" and facilitating its pursuit of a "sinister and divisive agenda".

Stating that the RSS knew only too well that education was the best vehicle for influencing the mind of a nation, Mr. Chatterjee accused the BJP's allies of being party to the bid to "communalise consciousness". The TDP member, Ms. Sugna Kumari, affirmed her party's commitment to secularism and a curriculum that celebrated the composite culture India has cherished till date.

Defending whatever the NDA was doing in the field of education, the BJP leader Mr. Vijay Kumar Malhotra, quoted Mahatma Gandhi extensively to show that much of the changes being introduced were in keeping with the vision the Father of the Nation had for India. Accusing the Communists of whipping up a frenzy over a non-issue, he said astrology was being studied in India since the days of Jawaharlal Nehru.

THE HINDU

17 AUG 2001

# Jyotirvigyan will be part of arts faculty

SOUGATA  
STATE NEWS SERVICE

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KOLKATA, July 20. - The UGC has decided that students applying for *Jyotirvigyan* will get a degree in arts. This has finally put an end to all speculations on whether the subject, based on Vedic astrology, will be considered as a part of the science discipline.

However, UGC officials had denied having received any objection on whether the subject should at all be considered for teaching in universities.

Rabindra Bharati University is among the 20 universities selected (41 universities applied) for holding a UGC-funded *Jyotirvigyan* department.

Madurai Kamraj University, Ranchi University, Mysore University, Lucknow Uni-

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versity and BIT Mesra are also among the institutions selected for offering BA, MA and PhD in the subject, officials said.

The Vice-Chancellor of Rabindra Bharati University, Mr Subhankar Chakraborty, however, denied having sent any such proposal. There must have been some "miscommunication", he said.

The university presently has a *Ved Charcha Kendra* which has been elevated to the rank of regional centre, Mr Chakraborty said. "We had asked for UGC funds for the expansion and development of this centre," he added.

Officials also confirmed UGC approval to 21 universities in India for introducing *Pourahitya* as a subject. Among them are Kurukshetra University, Utkal University, Saurashtra University, NEHU and Punjab University. Punjab University had

Edn & Culture  
also, simultaneously, applied for a Centre for Applied Human Genome Studies and Research and has got UGC approval.

Objections, however, have already been raised regarding the introduction of *Pourahitya* as it would mean violation of secular state principles.

Under a UGC scheme for introducing Sanskrit teaching centres in Indian colleges and universities, the commission had received 929 proposals. Among them, 509 have been sanctioned. These include 37 proposals from Kerala, 42 from West Bengal, 66 from Maharashtra, 84 from Karnataka, 54 from Tamil Nadu and 99 from Andhra Pradesh. Statistics reveal that a bulk of proposals have come from South Indian institutions, a region where Sanskrit is not considered to be the source language of the existing ones.



189-12

## TROUBLE IN THE ICSSR

2/7

THE DECISION BY the Union Human Resources Development Ministry to sack the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR) Chairman, Professor M. L. Sondhi, from his post may have been expected. Prof. Sondhi, after all, had emboldened himself in the past few months to go public against Mr. Devendra Swaroop, a former editor of the RSS mouthpiece, *Panchajanya*, and an influential member of the ICSSR. And given the commitment that the Union Minister for Human Resources Development, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, has displayed (ever since he assumed office) to render academic bodies into fora for Hindutva propaganda and also to accommodate persons associated with the various sangh parivar outfits, the developments need not be surprising. But then, Prof. Sondhi himself was among the few in the academic community to have openly associated themselves with the Bharathiya Jana Sangh. And he had even represented the Jana Sangh in Parliament. The battle between Prof. Sondhi and Mr. Devendra Swaroop from within the ICSSR, with the two of them hurling charges and counter charges during the past few months, is indeed baffling in this context.

Be that as it may, the immediate provocation for the Government to sack Prof. Sondhi seems to have been the stand he took as Chairman of the ICSSR that a "saffron caucus" in the Council (which according to him was led by Prof. Sardindu Mukherjee along with Mr. Swaroop) was conspiring to sabotage the India-Pakistan summit that has just concluded. Prof. Sondhi had made these charges in a letter to the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, at a time when the idea of holding the summit was only being discussed. And sparks began to fly more often when the summit schedule was drawn up and the ICSSR got involved in organising a conclave of social scientists from either side of the border as part of the buildup.

The removal of Prof. Sondhi, just a day after the summit was over and the fact that the announcement about his removal was made even while the ICSSR Chairman was in the midst of a seminar — to discuss the outcome of the summit — does suggest that the developments have a lot to do with the differences within the sangh parivar over the attempts to normalise ties with Pakistan. That sections within the sangh parivar — the saffron caucus in Prof. Sondhi's words — did not want the ICSSR as a body to celebrate the Agra summit seems to be a reason behind the sacking of the ICSSR chairman in such a fashion.

It is hence imperative for the Union Human Resources Development Ministry (the ICSSR is an autonomous body that comes under the Ministry) to explain the reasons for effecting the change. It is likely that the Sondhi affair could also be the fallout of a clash between individual leaders within the BJP; Prof. Sondhi, is understood to be close to the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, while the others (those who have been accused by him of being part of the "saffron caucus") seem to be having the blessings of a section within the party known to be hardliners. If the removal of Prof. Sondhi was a fallout of a clash of personalities within the Union Cabinet, it is only worse. And such explanations, at this stage, that Prof. Sondhi had flouted norms governing the ICSSR functioning — a charge was that he was not holding meetings of the council — will not hold good for the simple reason that the manner in which he was removed — executed and announced when the ICSSR Chairman was in the midst of a seminar organised by the institution — smacks of partisan political reasons rather than any serious concern about the functioning of the academic body. The ICSSR, meanwhile, needs an academician of standing as head.

## SC upholds curbs on global seminars

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The Union government on Thursday received a shot in the arm with the supreme court putting its stamp on the controversial home ministry order making it mandatory for the organisers of international seminars related to human rights or having participants from Pakistan, China, Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka to seek prior clearance from the home and external affairs ministries. *hdu & lulu*

The bench comprising chief justice A.S. Anand, Justice R.C. Lahoti and Justice Brijesh Kumar observed that the restrictions imposed were perfectly justified as the sovereignty of the country was concerned. *Q-1 1917*

There were several instances where under the cover of international seminars large amounts of illegal money had flowed into the country, the bench said while dismissing a public interest petition filed by the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL).

THE TIMES OF INDIA

# Artist kills self in Japan, body yet to reach MP

MD SHAHID PERVEZ  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHOPAL, July 10. – Even eight days after Jagan Singh Shyam, a tribal artist of Madhya Pradesh, committed suicide in Japan, his body hasn't reached Bhopal.

The 41-year-old Gond artist was hired by Mithila Museum at Oike village near Tokamachi in Japan for folk paintings for the museum. The museum has refused to bear the cost of sending Shyam's body to India because it "lacks funds". hence, the expense for bringing his body, estimated to be about Rs 6 lakh, would now be borne by the MP government, said Mr K.A. Kabir, director of the state culture department and Bharat Bhavan CEO.

Mr Kabir said Shyam's body is expected to reach Delhi by tomorrow evening from where it'll be taken to Bhopal.

Shyam was MP Shikhar Samman – the state's top award for of art and culture – recipient. Exhibitions of his paintings have been organised across the country and abroad, including France, England, Japan and the USA. Shyam was associated with Bharat Bhavan for 15 years.

Mr Kabir said the Indian embassy in Japan had faxed a letter to Bharat Bhavan informing of Shyam's death. Quoting Japanese police and Mithila Museum, the letter said Shyam committed suicide by hanging himself from the ceiling of his kitchen on 3 July.

Mr Kabir said Shyam had been hired by Mithila Museum through one Japan-born Kolkata-based Mrs Nigam, reported to be a museum agent. Shyam had been on leave from the Bharat Bhavan since April.

But Shyam's family members said he was "mentally disturbed and lonely" at the museum, for the authorities had allegedly 'detained' him against his wish.

Referring to their conversations over the phone and exchange of letters with Shyam, they said the artist was not in good health and desperately wanted to return to Bhopal but the museum didn't allow him to, saying that would be a breach of contract.

The museum used to "exploit" him by making him work very hard in lieu of the modest pay, they said. Shyam's three-month visa was reportedly to expire in July, but the museum had got it extended. The museum had arranged for his return on 27 July and Shyam might have been aware of that.

The MP government has ordered a CID probe into Shyam's death. Besides looking into how Shyam was taken to Japan, the CID team, headed by the assistant inspector general of police, Mr Sanjeev Singh, would probe into the nature of his contract with Mithila Museum. It will also probe into the allegations that Shyam was exploited and forced to stay at the museum. The team has been asked to submit its report within 15 days.

Shyam, a resident of a village in Mandla district, is survived by his wife and three children, all of whom live in Bhopal.

Observers here said Shyam's death had brought into focus the plight of the state's tribal artists and their exploitation. They alleged that some unscrupulous art dealers, both from the state (including Bharat Bhavan) and outside, often take the "naive tribal artists for a ride". They somehow take control of their creations or persuade them to sign an "essentially exploitative" agreement with some foreign art organisations. The folk art pieces are sold in the international market at huge prices, but the creators are paid paltry amounts.

# Final nod to college, university fee hike

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

**Kolkata, July 10:** The state on Tuesday approved a fee hike for state colleges and universities.

From the next academic session, students of higher courses will pay between Rs 60 to Rs 160 a month in colleges and universities affiliated to West Bengal State Council of Higher Education. The existing range is Rs 12 to Rs 18.

Higher education minister Satya Sadhan Chakraborty told reporters the state, however, still wants students from poor families to be charged minimum fees. "For innovative, professional and self-financing courses, fees will be determined by the institutes concerned," he said.

He said the hike was necessary with the expenditure on education having increased

enormously in the last decade, when new courses have been introduced and old ones modernised. He felt the existing fee structure does not match the present price index. "Now we can improve infrastructure in various institutes," he said.

Council sources said earnings from the hike will be used to pay salaries to part-time teachers. Mr Chakraborty warned of punishment to any college and university found guilty of harassing these part-timers. "Part-time teachers will now get Rs 2,000 per month. If any institute doesn't pay, it will be asked to explain why," he said.

Activists of Democratic Students' Organisation protested all over West Bengal against the decision. At Narayangarh in Midnapur, two DSO supporters were beaten up by activists said to belong to SFI.



Mr Satyasadhan Chakraborty

## Recommended

(Tuition fees per month)

MA and M.Com	Rs 125
MSc	Rs 160
BA (general)	Rs 50
BA (honours)	Rs 75
B Com (general)	Rs 60
B Com (honours)	Rs 85
B Sc (general)	Rs 85
B Sc (honours)	Rs 110

# Govt denies sacked ICHR chief's charges

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, July 3

THE HUMAN Resources Development (HRD) Ministry today countered the former chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), Prof K S Lal, saying both the appointments of new Chairman Prof M G S Narayanan and member-secretary Dr R C Aggarwal had been made according to established procedure.

Lal, who became head of Indian Council of Historical Research after the death of the previous chairman, Prof B R Grover, was sacked yesterday with the permanent appointment of Narayanan as chairman. He alleged that his differences with HRD Minister M M Joshi on the selection of member-secretary

led to his ouster.

Even though Lal's appointment letter mentioned that he was being appointed chairman "as a purely temporary measure", the appointee thought otherwise.

As Director Satish Kumar told *Hindustan Times* recently, "Prof Lal is entitled to hold office till the date on which Prof Grover would have retired: October 24, 2002."

The Ministry would perhaps not have acted so harshly in removing Lal had he not tried to block the appointment of Aggarwal as member-secretary on the plea that the post was redundant as the duties overlapped considerably with those of the director.

Later, when finally issuing the letter to Aggarwal, Lal diluted

*Lal had tried to block the appointment of Aggarwal as member-secretary on the plea that the post was redundant*

the powers of the member-secretary by assigning only academic duties to him while transferring all the administrative powers to the director.

The Ministry viewed this as completely unwarranted, holding that a temporary chairman should not seek to bring about fundamental changes in the Indian Council of Historical Re-

search's functioning.

The dismissal was however followed by a letter of appreciation to Lal for "superintending" the ICHR at a difficult time despite his busy schedule and hoping that his guidance and erudition would continue to be available to the organisation.

Meanwhile, the Ministry has instructed the Vice-Chancellor of Benares Hindu University (BHU) not to go ahead with making certain appointments as his term is ending shortly.

Last month, the Ministry withdrew the emergency powers enjoyed by the V-Cs of Central universities in certain specific cases, alleging widespread misuse of powers by the incumbents, and severely restricted the use of emergency powers in some other cases.

# No English from Class I for now

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, June 25

SCHOOL EDUCATION Minister Kanti Biswas today dismissed the prospect of reintroducing English from Class I at the primary level, saying no official decision had been taken in the matter.

To a question from Sonali Guha of the Trinamool in the State Assembly, the minister said the Government would review the decision from time to time in accordance with recommendations of the Pabitra Sarkar Committee. But its readiness to review the decision did not necessarily mean that the Government would change its stance, he said.

Biswas denied that the Left Front had made any pre-poll promise that it would reintroduce English from Class I even after some Opposition MLAs reminded him that none else than CPI(M) State Secretary Anil Biswas had spoken of possible reintroduction of English teaching from Class I.

The minister pointed out that experts, at both national and international levels, had recommended the mother tongue as the best vehicle of education.

He brushed aside Opposition claims that students from Bengal were lagging behind those from other States in competitive examinations because of the Left Front Government's flawed education policy. "It's just the opposite," he asserted.

Reports had earlier appeared in a section of the vernacular media saying the State Government had plans of reintroducing English from Class I. Today's statement by the minister sets the accounts straight.

# Budget to reflect English from class I and fee hike

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, June 17. — The LF is committed to revamping the state's educational infrastructure, Mr Anil Biswas said today.

The CPI-M state secretary said: "The LF poll manifesto has clearly spelt out the need to reassess the education system, remove the shortcomings and effect remedial measures. This exercise will be taken to its logical conclusion through discussions and experts' suggestions."

The plan for reintroducing English from Class I, hiking the fees for higher education and general toning up of the academic infrastructure are on the cards.

The education budget, to be

moved during the current session, is likely to reflect these changes, Mr Biswas hinted.

The restoration of English from Class I has been a thorny issue with the Left Front which first abolished the subject from the primary level and later reintroduced it in two phases.

## ■ Editorial: Return of English, page 6

First it was reintroduced from Class V and then from Class III, though it began to be taught informally from Class II.

The demand for the reintroduction of English from Class I continues to be voiced by both political parties and the people. Mr Biswas said the party has

advised the government to seek experts' opinion on the matter and also assess the people's demand for reintroduction of English from Class I.

Though the Opposition brands the LF's climbdown as a defeat of its language policy, the latter explains that the development is nothing but part of its policy of reviewing educational reforms in the light of new experiences.

Mr Biswas said the way prices of educational material have gone up, it has become imperative to raise the "incredibly low" fees of higher education.

"But any change in the fee structure will be done through talks with all concerned," he said.

THE STATESMAN

# Who decides what is obscene on hoardings?

Sharmila Banerjee  
Kolkata, June 16

SO WHO decides advertising strategy, the advertisement agencies or the Calcutta Municipal Corporation? The CMC has taken exception to what it calls "obscene hoardings", but advertising experts say there is a lot more to advertisements that have offended the CMC than scantily dressed women.

An advertising campaign, they say, is launched after long, brainstorming sessions where the target audience, the client's demands, the budget and several other factors are discussed.

The CMC says advertisements force on citizens an "indecent show of flesh and sexual innuendos", which it claims have hurt sentiments. It plans a committee that will screen hoardings before they are put up.

A debate is already under way over what is obscene and what is not. Many seem to think that obscenity and aesthetics are relative concepts open to interpretations. MIC Conservancy Minister Roy started it. An advertisement of a "fairness soap" shocked her, she said, with the way it featured Aishwarya Rai in a dark brown gown that showed off her shoulders. Roy's contention: "What is the need to dress the model in such revealing clothes? They could have easily used a picture of a child for the same thing."

Then the Spice telecom hoarding featuring Raima Sen with the catchline "I got spice" got the CMC's goat. Raima is dressed in a fuchsia top paired with a floral skirt. Post controversy (if there was one at all), many have tried to spot exactly what is obscene about the hoarding.

Not a single entry in the "letter to the editor" columns of papers circulated in the city was spotted which shared the idea. The publicity company responsible has not taken off the hoarding, which has only got more noticed after all the hullabaloo.

According to Roy, "the intention of the catch line is dirty". But a similar hoarding with



sive, said: "We don't think that any of the hoardings put up is offensive at all. But if the CMC wishes to come forward and comment on the content of the adverts, it should have proper written conditions."

Roopam Borah, creative director of Ogilvy and Mather, Kolkata said: "The CMC has more important things to look after. The city's sewerage system, the condition of heritage buildings, malaria control: all this needs urgent attention. Things like a hoarding here or there do not deserve the kind of attention they are getting. As long as an advertisement hurts the sensibilities of a child or insults women, there is no reason to waste so much of time on such issues."

But the CMC intends to go ahead with its plan of forming a committee to screen hoardings. Mayor Subrata Mukherjee said: "We have selected a group of advertising professionals, journalists and artists who shall henceforth see what is being put up on the hoardings."

So, much for hoardings, but what about the films churned out by Tollygunge packed with rain dance sequences? Or the thriving pornography racket that is an open secret?

Roy feels one has a choice in these things. One can switch off the television set, or throw away a newspaper if there is some thing offensive. One can't escape hoardings in a city.

But, as Subthro Roy (not his real name), a copy writer with a Kolkata-based agency, said: "Even here one has a choice. One can easily take a different route, or just turn away his eyes. The people of Kolkata can tell for themselves what offends them and what does not. They do not need any moral police."

But committee or no committee, censorship or no censorship, the question remains, do citizens and tax-payers need the hoardings in the first place? A IISWBM study has shown that hoardings do lead to accidents. There is a view that a ban on hoardings could be a good idea for Kolkata's skyline.

However, there is a rule that says the Municipal Commissioner can intervene if "the proposed site for any advertisement is unsuitable from the consideration of public safety, traffic hazards, aesthetic design or obstruction of view or of harmony with any heritage building".

But who determines the "aesthetic design?"

Mala Roy says obscenity cannot be defined. "You just feel uneasy about certain things," she says.

However, Arindam Nandy, creative director of Response Private Ltd says, "What is obscene to me could be outright normal to you. It depends upon an individual's exposure and the way they see things."

Vice-president of Hindustan Thompson Associates, Indrani Sen, whose company has produced adverts said to be offen-

## THE BIG DEBATE/CMC AS CULTURE POLICE

### 'Do you have to show women?'

Interview with Mala Roy, Mayor in Council (Conservancy)

ONCE THE committee is formed, the advertisers shall procure the sanction of the CMC before they can put up an advert on hoardings. Several hoardings around the town are intentionally made lewd.

Why does someone have to use a woman's photograph to promote a club or a show model wearing an off-shoulder dress to promote a soap? Are there no alternatives?

white sheet. Presumably, it has the authority to pull down spare sensitive citizens the "aesthetically displeasing" hoardings. But publicity companies checked by the CMC.

### 'Ad industry needs clear directives'

Interview with Indrani Sen, Vice-President, Hindustan Thompson Associates

THE ADVERTISEMENT industry is never out to break norms, but we need to have written directives. Ever since the controversy started, the advertisement bodies in Kolkata have not received any written objection or notice from the CMC. The authorities have been speaking to the media all along. If we can abide by the norms of the newspapers or Doordarshan, we can do the same with the civic body.

nie say they are under no obligation to get the content of their products checked by the CMC.



## 18/8/96 The hollow men of CU

CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY (CU) is busy being self-congratulatory. Months after Jadavpur University (JU) was awarded the status of a centre of excellence by the University Grants Commission, CU has been crowing that it has been accorded "five star status". It's tragic that one of the most venerable institutions in Bengal has been reduced to gloating about something that means so little. As a report in this newspaper indicates, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) gave the rating based on a self-appraisal done by the university. Knowing CU's penchant for beating its own drum, it's not too hard to imagine what that self-assessment report could have said. Worse, the NAAC team is said to have taken only about half an hour to crosscheck CU's report about itself before awarding the rating.

In private, the university's teachers are wary about being euphoric about the implications of the evaluation. University authorities, though, seem to have no such qualms. Ever since the rating has been public, they have been telling themselves and whoever has cared to listen that they are actually far better than what they are perceived to be. The trouble is, perceptions do matter. Particularly in this case, when they uncomfortably closer to the truth than university authorities care to

admit or would like to believe.

Teachers of the university posted to remote outbacks of Bengal have nightmarish tales to tell about how CU functions. These are stories that talk about an alarming lack of infrastructure and a disgusting lack of sensitivity for the young men and women who have chosen to take up teaching (or the corridors or academia as they love to call it in their self-deluding moments) as a profession. And these dots on Bengal's map are the places where one gets a true picture of what is going on in CU rather than in the colleges in Kolkata — though, to be frank, the scene is pretty bleak even in the run of the mill colleges within the city.

Teaching, learning and evaluation — three of the most crucial of the seven criteria on which the NAAC's rating is made — are less than cutting edge in CU. Teachers get away with neglecting teaching, researchers are left without either guides or topics (often both) and evaluation is delayed and characterised, in every university examination result, with embarrassing miscarriages of justice. It is only symptomatic of CU that instead of trying to set its house in order and improving on these key aspects of education, it would choose to tom-tom something that is as useless as it is hollow.

# The UGC — behind the times?

By Amrik Singh

LIKE SEVERAL other limbs of the Government, the University Grants Commission (UGC) too is planning its next round of activities to synchronise with the Tenth Plan which is about to begin in a year or so. The UGC convened a meeting in mid-May and to it came some of the leading lights in higher education. As far as one can anticipate, we will have a rehash of the kind of UGC plans that have been drawn up every five years. To put it plainly, it will be one more instance of repeating the earlier mistakes. As they say, unless the right kind of questions are asked, it is not possible to get the right kind of answers.

The biggest unsolved problem in higher education today is the astounding disproportion between undergraduate and postgraduate enrolments. According to UGC figures, 88 per cent of students are enrolled at the undergraduate level. Less than one per cent are enrolled for research and around 11 per cent are enrolled at the postgraduate level. Even at that level, 56 per cent of students are enrolled in colleges and not in University departments. This pattern is in evidence more in certain States than in others.

In all fairness, it must be acknowledged that the level of postgraduate education too in the country is poor. Even at the university level, competent staff are not easily available. Lack of academic rigour is responsible for this state of affairs. On top of it a substantial number of students are enrolled in colleges. The quality of teaching staff whom the colleges cannot but recruit is distinctly lower than in the University departments.

Meanwhile, it is important to raise two questions. What is the quality of performance of those 88 per cent students who are enrolled at the college level? Allied to it is the second question of the number of students who, after completing their senior secondary, go on to join college. According to data collected half a decade ago, the lowest figure, 51 per cent, of those who join college was in Uttar Pradesh, the most populous State in the country. Maharashtra colleges receive 79 per cent of those who pass out from the senior secondary schools or junior colleges. In Chandigarh, a Union Territory, the transition rate from

school to college is 100 per cent. In this situation, if colleges are growing at the rate of 500-600 a year, there should be nothing surprising about it.

Equally surprising is the complete apathy of the UGC to two issues which concern the undergraduate students intimately. The first one is the curricular aspect. In most universities, the curriculum is outdated. Not so long ago, an attempt was made to introduce a certain leavening of vocationalisation at the college level. The experiment did succeed to some extent. About 10 per cent of the colleges have experimented successfully with this innovation. Altogether however, during the last 50-odd years, we have not been able to either enrich or diversify under-

Tenth Plan, hardly anyone is really involved with undergraduate education. All emphasis is on research and problems connected with research. These are important problems without question. But then is it enough to consider only what concerns 10-11 per cent of the student (and perhaps 15-20 per cent of the teachers and leave out the rest?

Today undergraduates outnumber postgraduates heavily. The impact of this startling disproportion is felt in a variety of ways. One half of what is done at the undergraduate level is more or less either a repetition of what was done at the school level or what ought to have been done at that level. This means that the UGC has also got to worry about what happens at

*A situation has been reached where to neglect undergraduate studies would be to jeopardise higher education as a whole.*

graduate education. The second issue is the examination system. It has remained unchanged over the years. In contrast, every single School Education Board has been able to modernise and streamline the style of its question papers. There is something for the UGC to learn here.

Because of the innovation made at the senior secondary level, no student can leave out any portion of the syllabus. The questions asked are generally searching in their thrust and coverage. In consequence, the focus has somewhat shifted away from memory work to an evaluation of the related mental qualities. At the college level, exceptions apart, the kind of teaching done is generally casual and sloppy. The question papers set are traditional and it is possible for students to leave out large chunks of what they were required to learn. No wonder, in almost every single university, students work towards the end of the academic year for a month or so and clear the examination.

What requires to be underlined is that unless the UGC addresses itself to improving undergraduate education, it will have neglected 88 per cent of its responsibility. Of the members nominated to this expert committee to lay down guidelines for the

the school level. The Ministry of HRD will, therefore, have to be brought into this exercise if the UGC, in its own interest, is to influence the working of the senior secondary schools.

Odd things happen today. In 15-20 per cent cases, there is downright repetition at the college level of what is done at the school level. Not only that, there is no institutional mechanism of coordination between schools and colleges. The mode of assessment at the school level is professional as well as scientific whereas that at the college level harks back to the 19th century. And this brings us to the second crucial issue.

The mode of assessment has both technical and academic implications. If it is not done thoroughly as well as scientifically, the quality of teaching gets diluted. This is precisely what is happening at the undergraduate level. If the mode of assessment is rigorous, teaching cannot be indifferent or casual. Since the quality of teaching as a whole needs to be improved, the mode of assessment too will have to be modernised. This is something to which the UGC has never given serious thought.

In the early 1960s, inspired by the UGC under the leadership of C. D. Deshmukh

who had developed contacts with reputed professional experts, a beginning was made at the school level. Logically speaking, it should have led to changes at the college level in course of time. But then someone forgot what was to be done!

In the early 1970s, prodded by the Ministry of HRD, the UGC launched upon a mode of assessment for which the academic system was not prepared. Within a few years, the initiative petered out. In contrast, the NCERT had resolutely carried out the job of modernising the mode of paper setting. It did not only talk about the issue on an academic plane, it got down to real, solid business. About 3,000 paper setters were retrained. So, today every single School Board has a system of paper setting which is decades ahead of what the universities do.

When students join college, instead of being carried forward, they are sometimes thrown back. As long the numbers at the undergraduate level were comparatively small, matters were manageable but not in the last 10-15 years. Therefore, the UGC is already late by two-three Plan periods if it wishes to remodel the examination system at the undergraduate level; and it has no choice in the matter unless it chooses to fold up. Given the indifference of the State Governments to what has been happening to the colleges, things have deteriorated to the extent that today it has become an issue of seven million versus one million.

Except for a small proportion of students who go into professional courses, the rest of the seven million are lost for lack of direction. As a matter of fact, the number need not have reached the figure of seven million had the Ministry of HRD played a somewhat decisive role in making the States look at the senior secondary and college education as intimately dependent upon each other. It would be unfair to put the entire responsibility on the UGC. Some of its agenda of work can be carried out only with the help of the Ministry of HRD. However successful the UGC is in promoting postgraduate education and research, which sectors of activity are directly within its charge, a situation has been reached where to neglect undergraduate studies would be to jeopardise higher education as a whole.

5/1  
1/16  
**CU granted  
'five-star'  
status**

**STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE**

KOLKATA, June 1. - Calcutta University was granted "five-star" status by the National Assessment Accreditation Committee today.

The decision was communicated by the NAAC chairman in a faxed message to Dr Asis Kumar Banerjee, V-C of CU.

An 11-member NAAC team had paid a four-day visit to the university on 23 April. The five-star status will now decide all future fundings by the University Grants Commission.

The NAAC team has already graded Burdwan University as four star and Kalyani University and North Bengal University as three star.

THE STATESMAN

MYSORE'S PARENTS LIVE ON STREETS BUT DO NOT ALLOW HER TO DROP OUT, SILE PASSEUR SLLV

# Begging on street, she wrote a chapter in success

YOGI  
MYSORE, MAY 23

WHEN Nagarathna's classmates returned home after the day at school, she would go out into the streets, a begging bowl replacing her school bag. But she made it to the school every morning without fail — and gave her parents and teachers a reason to cheer about last week when she passed the SSLC.

Nagarathna's parents begged at the city bus stand. What they earned was barely enough for the family to survive on, let alone provide education to the child. "To meet school expenses, I begged on

the streets till I was in the 9th standard," she says.

It is not as simple as it sounds. "While begging in residential areas, I often came across the houses of my classmates," she says. "I used to run away as I could not swallow the shame." Sometimes, her classmates told her teacher, and at times the teacher "used to chastise them", she says.

Nagarathna's parents, father Ramalingam and mother Rajeshwari who is blind, hail from Dindigul in Tamil Nadu. They came to Mysore and lived in a "small hutment in KRS road which was destroyed by the rain", reducing them to abject destitution and a life



on a pavement in front of a hotel. But her parents refused to allow Nagarathna to give up her education, and part of the meagre amount collected through begging was used to pay for school fees and lunch.

Nagarathna, who pitched in to make things easier, used to beg from houses. St Antony's School in the city initially rejected her application for admission but relented when the staff of RLHP Asha Bhavan intervened on her behalf.

Life on the street was tough, she says. "Policemen used to trouble us; they hit us a couple of times," she says. But not many of her classmates knew how she lived and those

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

# NBU computer course mired in controversy

NIRAJ LAMA  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SILIGURI, May 12. — A much-publicised 'resource generating project' of the North Bengal University has got bogged in controversy.

The UGC's eastern regional office has questioned the feasibility of North Bengal University's decision to introduce degree courses on computer education through "collaboration" with a private firm, and asked the State Council of Higher Education to "clarify" the matter.

The university had signed a Memorandum of Understanding earlier this year with Zee Interactive Learning Systems Ltd (ZILS), the "educational arm of the Zee TV." It was decided that degree courses like "Bachelor in Internet Sciences" and "BSc in Software Systems", introduced by the university, will be imparted by Zed Career Academy centres country-wide.

The maiden session is set to commence from 1 July, and admissions are presently underway.

The UGC specified that the BIS and BISS courses don't have its approval, nor has ZedCA the necessary qualifications to merit a tie-up with a university.

In a letter the UGC had sought clarifications from Prof. Pabitra Sarkar, vice-chairman, State Council of Higher Education on 17 April, after advertisements of the course came to their

Excluding examination fees of Rs 1000, the course fee per annum is Rs 28,000. It said that ZedCA had made "a business offer."

When contacted, Prof. Sarkar said, the UGC had no clear guidelines on the modalities of collaboration that universities might enter into with corporate firms. He said the universities are these days being pressurised, even by the UGC, to generate its own resources, and North Bengal University's initiative must be viewed in that context.

However, he said he had asked the university vice-chancellor, Prof. PK Saha, to contact the UGC's head-office in Delhi for advice.

Prof. Saha is presently out of station. Registrar Dr TK Chatterjee stressed that the university had not broken any rules in its step to associate with the ZILS. He, however, declined to give further detail in vice-chancellor's absence.

According to Dr Chatterjee, North Bengal University was not the only university that had a tie-up with the ZILS. "Jadavpur University, Kurukshetra University and Guru Gobind Singh IP University are some of the institutions that also have entered into a similar pact with the firm," he said.

He emphasised there had been no compromise with the course-content and the faculty for the degree studies. Dr Chatterjee added that 30 per cent of the course fee will come to the university coffers.



An advertisement of the various courses being offered by North Bengal University in collaboration with other institutes. — The Statesman

UGC's due approval as an academic institution...ZedCA is neither an approved academic institution, nor have been affiliated by the university," the letter said.

Incidentally, the ZedCA centre at Siliguri claimed that they were "affiliated" to North Bengal University, while making queries as a prospective student.

The UGC has also taken note of the high course fees, saying there has to be compliance with UGC regulations.

# Govts sat over NCERT proposals to correct textbooks

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, May 8

THE RECENT controversy over the National Council of Educational Research and Training's (NCERT) move has brought forth a startling fact — school children have for long been forced to learn Indian history from defective textbooks.

And successive Governments, including the last Congress Government, sat over this serious shortcoming even though they knew on good authority that many history textbooks in use were incorrect.

All that the Vajpayee Govern-

ment has done is to take advantage of this long history of inaction and set in motion the process of weeding out those defective textbooks, many of which were authored by Leftist academics.

While the present move has fast acquired the label of saffronisation, the fact is that the NCERT in its secular-Leftist avatar had recommended either scrapping or drastically correcting history textbooks. Neither the Congress Government of the time nor the subsequent United Front governments, however, bothered to take any action on those recommendations.

It was in January 1993, that the National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation considered the reports prepared by the NCERT on history, Hindi and mathematics textbooks of UP, textbooks of Saraswati Shishu Mandir Prakashan and Markazi Maktaba Islami and the history syllabus and textbooks of West Bengal. Needless to say, the NCERT at the time was dominated by Leftist secularist academics.

The National Steering Committee met again in October 1994 to consider the NCERT reports on the history syllabi and textbooks of Andhra Pradesh,

Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh and the Sangh Parivar-affiliated Vidya Bharati's Sanskriti Jnan series.

While the committee endorsed the NCERT findings about the blatantly communal nature of the history textbooks in UP, its comments about the teaching of medieval Indian history gain in currency in the light of the present controversy.

"The committee has come to the conclusion," it says, "that while the changes that were made in these books in 1992 gave a blatantly communal orientation, even in the unrevised version, these books presented an

historically inaccurate and distorted view of India's past."

While this was true for the treatment of all periods of Indian history, the presentation of medieval Indian history abounded in historical falsehoods, the committee said.

The entire period of medieval Indian history had been presented basically as one of antagonism between Hindus and Muslims.

The treatment of the history of the freedom movement, which should have formed the main focus in the section dealing with the history of modern India, was perfunctory.

"It not only ignores the ideals and values cherished by the freedom movement but pays scant attention to even the major events and developments connected with the freedom movement," the committee added.

It also acknowledged the limited utility of the NCERT's supervision of the academic authenticity of textbooks.

"The problem of unscientific and communal, casteist, chauvinist and obscurantist distortions in textbooks has not been solved and the NCERT's efforts have led to little effective action in improving the quality of textbooks," it said.

# Theory and practice of priesthood

## Not the UGC's business

**I**F the chairman of the University Grants Commission (UGC), Hari Gautam, has his way, many universities in the country will soon have graduate and postgraduate-level courses in purohitya (priesthood). He says, "There are so many NRIs who crave for pandits to perform their rituals. As there are many ignorant persons masquerading as priests, a certified course would lend it credibility." The intentions are noble but, as the saying goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. The project, which comes in the wake of the UGC's grandiose plan to introduce courses in Vedic astrology, is skewed and outside the purview of universities.

At the root of the problem is the wrong perception the UGC has about priests. The ability to recite mantras in a rapid-fire manner is only one aspect of priestly training. While the universities may be able to impart such an ability, test a person on it and give a certificate of his passing/failing the test, it will not make him a priest. Far more important for a priest is devotion, priestly inclination, and, above all, faith which moves mountains. And who can deny that in the case of Hindus, the nobility of birth is also of paramount importance? These are some of the factors which cannot be taken care of by universities which are run on a secular basis.

It isn't that attempts have not been made to produce priests outside of the rigid caste system. In Kerala, inspired by egalitarian ideas, an attempt was made in the past to produce priests belonging to the Scheduled Castes. The state saw to it that they were given training in priestly duties and that they knew all the requisite 'mantras'. After the training, they were all posted in temples under the control of the Devaswom Board but the government had not foreseen that caste-conscious devotees would boycott temples serviced by SC priests. Soon enough many of these priests got disillusioned and gave up their jobs or were accommodated as clerks.

In Bihar, at the height of his popularity, Laloo Yadav attempted a similar social revolution when he got a few Scheduled Castes anointed as priests. That was the time when, as one of his biographers put it, "he stood belligerently opposed to all that was Brahminical, all rank and ritual, all ostentation and superstitions." But as he got mired in the fodder scam and turned superstitious, nothing is heard about those priests. If anything, it shows how hare-brained schemes can end up. In contrast, Mata Amritanandamai has in her temples proved that caste is not an inhibiting factor for anyone with an aptitude and necessary training for priestly

two traditions. It's not just a question of geographical difference as the rituals vary from temple to temple. It shows how difficult it is to standardise a course in purohitya.

Indians have been travelling within and without the subcontinent for hundreds of years and wherever they have settled, they have built temples and have managed to procure priestly services, either indigenously or by importing priests from India. Well-known writer, V.S. Naipaul, writes in his book, *India: A Million Mutinies Now*: "There had been so many pujas in my grandmother's family in Trinidad when I was a child, so many ritual readings from the scriptures and the epics." That



A.J. PHILIP

**It is not the job of the state or state-run universities to produce priests. Such priests will simply not carry conviction with the faithful**

functions. The kind of devotion and following that she gets is proof of her ability to penetrate the caste barriers of Hinduism. The reason why she has succeeded where the other two experiments failed is because her actions have the sanction of the community to which she belongs.

Priests have been in this country since the Rig Vedic period and, needless to say, without certificates from the UGC. That is how Hinduism has flourished for thousands of years. Tradition has a lot more to do with priesthood than education. Given the various traditions prevalent in Hinduism, it is indeed difficult to standardise priestly vocation. I have seen in some of the great temples of North India, worshippers entering the sanctum sanctorum and pour over the idols milk, ghee, Gangajal and other offerings while, in the south, they are kept at a distance. There is little in common between the practices of the priests in these

is how he got his introduction to the faith of his forefathers. He also narrates the story of the "Electric Pujari" in Mumbai, who had a flourishing business exporting cassettes containing the verses connected with the pujas mainly to the Gulf countries. He was so rich that he could afford to have long vacations in the US with his family. If anything, it shows the needs of the priestly market the world over are met by enterprising priests without any state intervention.

There are institutions like, for instance, the one headed by the Shankaracharya of Kanchi, which train priests. But his attempt to set up a 'ved padsala' at Mahishi in Saharsa district in Bihar, where the great savant Mandan Mishra had an intellectual duel with Adi Sankara, did not evoke a good response, as I learnt when I visited the village less than a year after its inception. Wild grass grew around the school, making it

difficult to approach the premises. But, on a recent visit, I found many Satras in Majauli, the world's largest riverine island in Assam, thriving. Hundreds of people are being trained in priestly duties in these Satras, which trace their origin to Vaishnava reformer Shankar Deva.

The point is, it is not the job of the state or state-run universities to produce priests. Such priests will simply not carry conviction with the faithful. Among the major religions of the world, it is, perhaps, Christianity which has the most established form of training of priests. However, the system of imparting theological and priestly training to Christian priests is relatively new. Though they have been in India since the first century, it was only in 1541 that the first seminary run by the Franciscans was set up at Cranganore in 1541. It took another 273 years for the first indigenous Orthodox theological seminary to come up in Kottayam.

Today, the Syrian and Protestant Christians have their own university at Serampore, near Calcutta, to which are affiliated their seminaries where education in theology or divinity is imparted. The Catholics have their own seminaries, many of which are affiliated to the church's own universities, like the Gregorian University in Rome. Nonetheless, a person does not become a priest merely by getting a B.Th or BD. In fact, every church has its own system to recruit priests from within its community.

While priesthood is an alien concept for the Muslims, they have their own seminaries which meet the religious needs of the faithful. The Buddhists have their own monasteries, where monks are initiated at a very young age. In any case, no religion has felt the need for the UGC to introduce courses in priesthood. As regards the plea that there is a great demand for priests outside the country, there are many other vocations which, too, require hands but that does not mean the UGC should introduce courses in them. It should leave religion to the religionists and concentrate on education.

INDIAN EXPRESS

7 MAY 2001

# Science, astrology and openness

By Manabi Majumdar & Parthasarathi Majumdar

Edging Culture

10-12/5/5

ON THE University Grants Commission's proposal to introduce astrology, vastushastra etc., into the science curricula of universities, its protagonists have often argued that one should 'keep an open mind' regarding these disciplines. According to them, there is no need to think of known laws of nature found in scientific pursuit as 'absolute truths'; indeed it is not unlikely, the argument goes, that these other disciplines may teach us more about nature than are to be found in standard scientific lore. Such enticing possibilities presumably justify classifying these disciplines on a par with standard scientific disciplines such as biology, chemistry or physics, and hence also their inclusion into university science curricula.

There is no doubt that laws of nature discovered in science are not 'absolute truths'. In fact, the notion of an 'absolute' truth is contrary to the epistemological basis of science itself, which in turn shapes the methodology of various scientific disciplines. A basic aim of scientific methodology is to try and delineate, as accurately or finely as possible, the errors committed in arriving at a certain result. In other words, any serious claim of a new finding in science must necessarily be accompanied by a statement, precise to the extent possible, of the uncertainties associated with such a claim. In the words of physicist Richard Feynman, "... what we call scientific knowledge today is a body of statements of varying degrees of certainty. Some of them are most sure, some are nearly sure; but none is absolutely sure."

'Self-policing' of this form is a distinguishing feature of scientific pursuit to an extent that it is almost an obsession with serious scientists globally. Such stringent scrutiny has the effect of determining the domain of validity of a certain result, as precisely as possible. This is essential for the future of scientific pursuit, for, deviations from known results form the basis of scientific discoveries. Thus, the 'openness of mind' to admit the possibility of something beyond that is known is the crucial prerequisite of any scientific pursuit.

A connected body of results and claims

that has withstood the 'grind' of careful global scrutiny for years (sometimes centuries) usually ends up as part of an edifice of scientific knowledge. Such edifices are usually distinguished by their rather large domains of validity, in that they appear to provide the unifying framework to understand and explain myriad diverse natural phenomena. These are accorded the status of 'natural laws'. A natural law is expected to be correct to a precision of better than

One may ask: is it not possible that there is another alternative law of force which will explain planetary motion? Yes, there could be in principle, but in practice, that new law will have to explain all planetary motion (among a host of other phenomena) to an accuracy of much better than one in a crore — a tall order indeed. Also, it will have to predict something entirely new, a phenomenon that could not have been discovered within the existing law.

influence depends on the distance between the source and the target. Now, from Jupiter (more than fifty crore km away) or Saturn (about twice as far), or for that matter any heavenly body, the distance to everything on the surface of the earth is the same (to an accuracy of better than one part in a lakh). So any influence or force of these heavenly bodies must act identically on all human beings, irrespective of whether the person is female or male, Dalit or Brahman, living in Chennai or Chikmagalur, having a 'Janmadasha' for having been born on a Saturday or not.

Given the sheer weight of accurate evidence that has been marshalled vis-a-vis planetary motion, to what extent can we vouch for an open dialogue, say, between astrology and astronomy? After all, one may argue, both these disciplines deal with 'stars and planets'. It is worth emphasising that the 'open window' through which astronomers gaze at reality, illuminates our understanding of planetary behaviour to such an overwhelming degree (i.e., with such a fantastically low margin of error) that correlatively, alternative explanations are in effect rendered irrelevant. So, even without the slightest prejudice against any alternative viewpoint (like astrology), it is reasoned openness (and certainly not closure) which demands that all perspectives cannot be equally privileged under all circumstances.

Undoubtedly it is in principle desirable, both in natural and social sciences, to have open conversations within and between their respective disciplinary terrains. But there are occasions where perspectival differences are so sharp as to be irreconcilable. In such situations we have to make hard choices and have to reckon with the fact that multiple ways of defining truth are not always available. In short, we need to avoid falling into the attractive but dangerous polemical trap that 'all good things go together'. Otherwise our integrity as knowledge-seekers will be at stake.

(The writers are with the Madras Institute of Development Studies and the Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai, respectively.)

***We need to avoid falling into the attractive but dangerous polemical trap that 'all good things go together'. Otherwise, our integrity as knowledge-seekers will be at stake.***

one part in a thousand. What this means roughly is that if a large number of experimental observations were made to test various consequences of the law, on more than 999 occasions out of 1,000 (or, equivalently, more than 99.9 out of a hundred) the observations would be in conformity with predictions of the law. In other words, nature shows only very minute deviations from the dictates of a natural law. Thus, a law of nature has more than just a ring of truth about it — it is largely true.

The moments of discovery of natural laws are the happiest for the scientific community. However, further extension and/or generalisation of a natural law is never ruled out. An example in point is Newton's law of gravitation (seeds of which are to be found in Aryabhata's treatises and later medieval works). Before Einstein appeared on the scene, Newton's law was known to be valid to a precision of about one part in a thousand. However, measurements were available of planetary orbits which were even more precise, and a discrepancy was noted between the prediction of Newton's law and the observed orbit of the planet Mercury. This delineated the domain of validity of Newton's law. Einstein's theory of general relativity, which extends and generalises Newton's law, soon accounted for this discrepancy.

The observation of such a phenomenon with an accuracy greater than the one for the existing law will be the prerequisite for accepting the new law as a replacement of the extant one. Any proposition that falls short of fulfilling this requirement does not merit serious consideration as a scientific proposition.

We emphasise that this rigorous requirement imposed on new ideas or proposals for alternative laws does not represent a lack of openness of mind. Rather it indicates how serious and exacting scientific pursuit is. There is simply no room here for casual armchair speculation. Consider for instance the speculated notion of an alternative long range force — an influence that travels over millions of kilometres between heavenly bodies, but is not attributed to gravitation. Can it not exist? Can its nature not be such that it is actually able to act differentially on different human (and indeed other living) beings on earth? The simple answer is no! It is known through centuries of observations, to an accuracy of better than one part in a crore, that the only possible long-range force between (electrically neutral) heavenly bodies (stars, planets) etc., is gravitation, as described by Newton's law together with Einstein's embellishment. According to the basic tenet of this law, the

THE HINDU

5 MAY 2011





#### OUR BUREAU

May 4: Whiff of beef in McDonald's French fries in faraway America had BJP activists stamping their hooves in Mumbai.

What better weapon to fight beef with than cow dung. That's what a group of about 15 protesters did at a McDonald's, splattering cow dung on a hoarding and the door (AFP picture above).

McDonald's India, just settling down into good business in a new market, was bleating in protestation. There's no animal extract in the French fries it serves in its fast-food outlets, the company said, a day after an Indian slapped a suit on McDonald's Corp in the US, accusing it of "secretly" lacing its French fries with beef fat.

The BJP's Mumbai president, Vinod Tawde, who led today's agitation, said tonight McDonald's officials would meet him tomorrow morning to "clarify their position".

Tawde said the BJP would intensify its protest if the global fast-food chain failed to come up with a "satisfactory" explanation. "Let's see what they have to say, but we are not going to let them go so easily," he said.

The BJP leader said the franchisees used the same recipe worldwide. "If they lace so-called vegetarian fries with beef in the US, they must be using the same stuff here too."

Tawde said the party had no objection if the company sold food-stuff containing beef, but it should make it known to its customers. "But, as of now, they don't. This is what we are objecting to."

McDonald's India has categorically said French fries served in India do not contain any beef or animal extracts.

In a statement, the company said: "We reiterate that right from the processing stage until it is cooked and served to the customer, we only use 100 per cent vegetable oil in India."

The company response came after reports appeared today of the lawsuit filed by Seattle-based attorney Harish Bharti who has accused McDonald's of "misleading vegetarians".

The controversy could have an adverse impact on McDonald's Indian operations most of whose numerous Hindu patrons would strictly avoid eating anything that may have beef content. Even the hamburger McDonald's serves in India is not made of beef, as it is elsewhere, and the company had taken pains to explain while it entered the country that it were so.

McDonald's serves about 30 lakh customers and has an average turnover of about Rs 15 crore a month across its 27 restaurants.

Bharti has cited an e-mail from McDonald's that discloses its suppliers use tiny amounts of beef flavouring. He said the CEO of the company himself had publicly promised in the early 1990s that its fries would be cooked in vegetable oil following a controversy.

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## Eureka, the foot-soldier is back

3/5

FROM THE superstitious to the grotesque. This seems to be the order of the day in the making of education policy. Along with the introduction of Vedic rituals and astrology as university subjects and the move to dislodge history as a stand-alone subject from the school curriculum is the government's increasing disregard for established norms and its bypassing of the states as well as Parliament in framing policy. But an act which took one's breath away was the appointment of a man to the executive board of the NCERT who had openly stated in his autobiography that he put a bullet through a Muslim woman during the Partition riots.

The book carried a preface by the current chief of the RSS. Hardly a wonder, considering that the author, K.G. Rastogi, is among the key organisers of the RSS' Vidya Bharti Shiksha Pratisthan. When 41 MPs protested to the Prime Minister against the appointment of such a person to the decision-making body of the NCERT, which frames school syllabi, the RSS foot-soldier was dropped. But this 'academic' has quietly slipped back

in, this time as a member of various advisory boards of the NCERT. But J.S. Rajput, the NCERT chief who is going 'eureka' about 'value education', is apparently unaware of Rastogi's reinstatement.

This little cleverness does more than subvert the instructions of the Prime Minister. Above all, it proclaims to the faithful that Murlī Manohar Joshi is in right earnest about saffronising education with the aim of propagating the Sangh parivar's ideal of 'cultural nationalism' (the upholding of Hindu cultural norms in place of a pluralistic approach). Perhaps aware that the country regards such divisive attempts with deep unease, the saffron brigade has decided to do away with the practice of consulting state governments in formulating policies — despite education being on the concurrent list. Moreover, breaking norms related to age and remuneration, Sangh parivar favourites are being roped in to shape NCERT policies and text-books in place of experts who have been asked to pack up.

### THINK IT OVER...

*Rock journalism is people who can't write, interviewing people who can't talk  
for people who can't read*

FRANK ZAPPA

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

3 MAY 2001

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# Saffron blues

By Harsh Sethi

*Like respect, autonomy for institutions and individuals cannot be handed over as largesse. It has to be fought for and won.*

EVER SINCE the BJP came to power and Acharya Murli Manohar Joshi assumed charge of the Ministry of Human Resources Development, liberal apprehension about the potential saffronisation of our educational institutions has touched a new high. The BJP, more so its pater familias, the RSS, is a firmly ideological body. And nowhere are its fixations more clearly expressed than in the domain of education and culture.

The script has so far evolved on predictable lines. Starting with the Ministry, changes were effected in a variety of institutions. Be it the NCERT, the NCTE, the NEIPA, the UGC, the Indian Institute of Advance Studies, the ICHR or the ICSSR — to name a few — we saw a rapid change in the composition of the Boards and in the appointment of chief executives. True, there was protest, but muted and ineffective. It seemed as if Mr. Joshi's victory was complete. While his colleagues in the NDA Government were occupied with turf battles over who would control what, Mr. Joshi had swiftly moved to place ideological fellow travellers and favourites in positions from where the cultural battle to rid the country of the ghosts of Macaulay and pseudo-secularism could be joined.

The tightest of scripts, however, have a way of coming unstuck. And nowhere has the drama assumed more grisly overtones than in the ICSSR presided over by the veteran diplomat and academic, Prof. M. L. Sondhi. For months now newspapers have been rife with stories about the deepening conflict between the Chairman, members of the Council, the professional staff and the Ministry. Of late, however, the conflict seems to have come to a head. We now have the unusual situation of the Chairman writing an article (*Hindustan Times*, April 15) that the ICSSR needs to be set right and accusing vested interests and entrenched lobbies — in the staff, among the Board members of the Council and the Ministry — of seeking to subvert the "liberal and pluralistic values to which he has adhered in political and academic life". Surprisingly, or not so, he argues that "the ICSSR is under unprecedented threat today. This is not from the RSS as a formal institution, but essentially from an ideo-

logical cabal within the ICSSR Council, led from the outside by an individual who functions as an extra-constitutional authority in the HRD Ministry".

This, even in these unusual times, when propriety and decorum are not highly regarded values, is a statistical outlier. Heads of institutions are not expected to publicly protest against the functioning of outfits they are responsible for. True, years back, the late N.T. Rama Rao as Chief Minister went on dharna in front of the Andhra Pradesh Secretariat, complaining about non-cooperation from his officers. But then he was an actor-politician and probably found it difficult to resist slipping back into one of his screen avatars.

Are we then witnessing, as episodic reports in the press would have us believe, a battle between saffron hardliners and a beleaguered, liberal shairman for control over the premier body for funding and supporting social science research in the country? If matters were as simple there would be no dearth of support for Prof. Sondhi, this despite the fact that he too, like the cabal he castigates, was appointed by the same Ministry. There is the little matter over the invitation extended by the Council to Mr. Bangaru Laxman on his assuming the post of BJP president, ostensibly to deliver a lecture on national integration. Of course, now that post-Teluka Mr. Laxman stands discredited, no one is willing to own up to the decision.

Critics of Prof. Sondhi point out that despite being honorary chairman, he has been acting as the chief executive, the prerogative of the member-secretary. But then, the Council has not had a full-time member-secretary for some years. The previous incumbent, who too was only officiating, left because of undue interference. No meeting of the Council has taken place in months, with the result that no research projects or fellowships have been approved. Earlier this year, under pressure from some members of the

Council, a meeting was convened. But it witnessed such acrimony and trading of charges that it had to be abandoned without conducting any business. A bit like our Parliament in the last session.

Meanwhile, the Chairman is busy organising well-publicised seminars, one which reportedly cost the ICSSR close to Rs. 60 lakhs. This figure, of course, does not account for the expenditure on trips made by favoured members of the staff despatched to diverse locations in France, the U.S., the U.K., Canada, Israel, Taiwan and South Korea to personally hand over the invitations. When the ICSSR, like many of our higher education institutions, is woefully short of funds, and its grant budget for individual research projects and fellowships has sunk to Rs. 40 lakhs (2000-2001), such a style of functioning and expression of priorities is nothing short of scandalous.

Equally, it is unclear what one is to make of a decision to initiate a new research institute in Manali (Himachal Pradesh) in the name of Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, this when the existing corpus of 27 research institutes under the ICSSR umbrella are facing severe financial cuts. Would it be uncharitable to view the decision to set up an institute in Manali, a location that our Prime Minister is very fond of, as one of sycophancy? So also the renaming of its documentation centre as the Shyama Prasad Mookherjee Gateway to Knowledge.

It is true that many of the current members of the ICSSR Council, honourable exceptions apart, are not particularly known for their contribution to social sciences. Evidently, they were nominated to this position on account of their proximity to the Sangh Parivar. What they seem upset about is that despite being part of the faithful, they have been kept out of the decision-making and patronage loop. This, more than their proximity to Mr. Joshi (seen as hardliner) and the chairman to Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee (moderate?),

seems responsible for the stand-off. In the event, the net loser is the Council, its institutes and the social science research community.

There is little denying that the ICSSR today an institution in terminal decay. And while attempts to stack it with saffron faithful, as also the fallouts of sectional battles within the larger Parivar, has exacerbated the crisis within and without, an equal share of the blame must be laid at the doorstep of the original charter as also the lack of interest in our research community to safeguard the autonomy and integrity of its own institutions.

One is not pointing merely to the fact that the Council is fully funded by the MHRD. Or that the members, including the Chairperson and Member-Secretary, are Ministry nominees. It is equally that its entire rules of business — the procedures for grant making, the appointment of professional staff, the emolument structure — faithfully replicate government rules. It does, therefore, require both exceptional individuals and an enabling liberal environment for the institution to function professionally. Like respect, autonomy for institutions and individuals cannot be handed over as largesse. It has to be fought for and won. Nor can it ever be safely assumed that once present, it cannot be whittled away.

Let us not forget that for many years, the late Prof. Ravinder Kumar was able to convert and run the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library as the favoured site in the capital for meaningful research and debate. The NMML too is fully funded by the MHRD. Nevertheless, under Ravinder Kumar's able guardianship it charted out an autonomous course, provided space to a wide variety of dissenting imaginations, at no time sacrificing high standards of quality. In a city marked by a culture of backbiting and factionalism, it won reputation as a liberal and hospitable institution, including from those uneasy with the Nehru association.

More than complain about cabals and vested interests, Prof. Sondhi needs to take a leaf out of the NMML book. Maybe then the wider community too will share his distress and engage in battle.

THE HINDU

3 MAY 2001

# When a *jyotishi* teaches UGC science

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H.Y. SHARADA PRASAD

**T**here is widespread disappointment that the University Grants Commission has gone ahead with the decision to introduce courses in astrology at the degree level. This is an act of cowardice on its part. One needs courage only when one means to stand up, not when one chooses to surrender. If the chairman of the UGC had put forward the argument that government was the paymaster and if government wanted something to be done, it must be done, one could have sympathised with his helplessness. But he has gone out of his way to assert that astrology is a science and to attribute partisan motives to critics of the move.

That the minister of human resource development wanted it is well known. And it should cause no surprise that a Joshi is partial to astrology. As anyone familiar with Maharashtrian names and their etymology knows, Joshi is a variant of *jyotishi* or the village Brahmin who doubles as astrologer and priest. A sizeable group of Maharashtrian Brahmins migrated several centuries ago to what is now Uttaranchal and made it their home. It is from them that the Pantis and Joshis of Uttar Pradesh of today are descended.

It is natural for a government to want to mould the future according to its own design and leave its mark on the nation. This would be more true of a party which has waited for years to come to power. An additional reason for the hurry is the fear that there might be no second chance soon if the present one was missed. Partners in future coalitions might turn out to be more assertive.

It is this sense of urgency that has induced the present regime to reconstitute a whole lot of supposedly autonomous organisations and brush aside the conventions that had been developed over the years since Independence. When you place your confidants in key positions they will not only deliver what you want but anticipate your wishes. Some ministers are content to limit their intervention to the appointment of favourites; the more ideological ones have a more active agenda of intrusion.

The chairman of the UGC displayed the unmistakable signs of a courtier when he claimed that the scientific community as a whole was not hostile to the idea of introducing BSc and MSc courses in astrology and that the opposition was limited to a few hardened leftist scientists of Jawaharlal Nehru University. Either he is not in the habit of reading newspapers himself or his publicity officer



*FUTURE IMPERFECT: That the minister of human resource development wanted it is well known. And it should cause no surprise that a Joshi is partial to astrology. As anyone familiar with Maharashtrian names and their etymology knows, Joshi is a variant of jyotishi or the village Brahmin who doubles as astrologer and priest. A sizeable group of Maharashtrian Brahmins migrated several centuries ago to what is now Uttaranchal and made it their home. It is from them that the Pantis and Joshis of Uttar Pradesh of today are descended?*

has not brought to his notice the thought-provoking statement issued by a group of scientists from the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, which can by no means be dismissed as a leftist hide-out.

Another eminent scientist

**I**t is natural for a government to want to mould the future according to its design and leave its mark on the nation. This would be more true of a party which has waited for years to come to power. An additional reason for the hurry is the fear that there might be no second chance. Partners in future coalitions might turn out to be more assertive. It is this sense of urgency that has induced the present regime to reconstitute supposedly autonomous organisations and brush aside the conventions developed over the years. Some ministers are content to limit their intervention to the appointment of favourites; the more ideological ones have a more active agenda of intrusion

who has criticised the UGC plan is Dr Jayant Narlikar, the astrophysicist from Pune. Speaking more in sorrow than in anger, Narlikar calls the UGC decision a backward step which would take us back to the mediaeval age. Science, he points out, is a body of knowledge based upon universally accepted and verifiable principles. But astrological predictions are vaguely worded with each astrologer following his own definition and interpretation. Not being able to stand up to controlled experiments, astrology cannot be called a science, in Narlikar's view.

**B**ut the UGC chairman insists that his group of experts have accepted astrology to be a science. He does not mention their names. So we cannot know whether they include any who command widespread respect from the scientific community. It is not difficult to enlist the support of a few hand-picked persons and claim eminence for them. After all the never-failing definition of merit is "that which my man has and your man doesn't." But the reasons he has adduced for the UGC move, and the language in which they are couched, fail to carry conviction. We are told that "there is an urgent need to rejuvenate the science of Vedic astrology in Indian universities to allow scientific knowledge to reach Indian society at large and to provide opportunities for this science to be exported to the world." We are further told that "beneficiaries of these courses will be students, teachers, doctors, architects, and persons engaged in marketing, financial, economic, and political analysis." Overall this "sci-

ence" will make us "understand the nature of time and its effects on human life and events and help us to make optimal use of time."

The mention of export prospects worries me no little. I hope astrology will not be pack-

**H**eaven lies about us in our infancy, said Wordsworth in the famous *Ode to Immortality*. The self-righteous astrologer would take umbrage at this. He would have us believe that Heaven knows the full truth about us from the time of our arrival to that of

aged as a part of Information Sciences in which we are supposed to be a rising power! And the liberal reference to the uses of astrology as a tool in time management points to the possibility that holders of the astrology degrees might at some stage be made obligatory members of senior-level managerial task forces. After all, these new graduates would expect government to create avenues of gainful employment for them. With university degrees, they would deem it infra dig to work as village or small-town Joshis.

**I** remember to have read somewhere that in ancient India one of the sub-disciplines within astrology was military astrology. This will probably be revived to help our defence minister and National Security Adviser. The Planning Commission should also have the benefit of an Adviser (Astrology) who will forecast the anticipated figures of production. And perhaps the private sector, particularly the media organisations sympathetic to the RSS way of thinking, will respond by having election forecasting done by astrology experts rather than psephologists. The tribe has not exactly covered itself with glory of late, as we saw in the Bush-Gore election.

Heaven lies about us in our infancy, said Wordsworth in the famous *Ode to Immortality*. The self-righteous astrologer would take umbrage at this. He would have us believe that Heaven knows the full truth about us from the time of our arrival to the time of our departure. This is where the scientist acts as sceptic and spoilsport. He points out that the astrologer in his arrogance thinks that the human being is so central to creation that the Sun and the Moon and the Stars have no other purpose than to be determining what should be the future of every child that is born. Science, contrary to what the men of religion said about it, pleads with us to understand our own humble place in the Universe.

The most hilarious part of astrology is the prescription sheet it draws up for averting the disasters that the planets have in store for us. If Saturn is adverse, he can be propitiated through the donation of oil or black gram to the Brahmin. If some other planet is displeased the bribe or *daan* is something else. The beneficiary is always the Brahmin, often a kinsman of the astrologer. He pretends he is taking over your ill fortune in return for such little reward. This might have been one way of encashing the ability to read and write in an age of all-pervading illiteracy.

It can hardly be practised in a democratic and enlightened age when people require no intermediaries between them and their destiny.

H.Y. SHARADA PRASAD was formerly an advisor to the Prime Minister

THE ASIAN AGE  
2 MAY 2001

SAFFRONISING EDUCATION / PARLIAMENT, NCERT BYPASSED

## RSS men on syllabus panel

By Neena Vyas

**NEW DELHI, MAY 1.** Not only has Parliament been bypassed and State Governments ignored, it seems even the regular faculty of the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is being kept in the dark about the changes planned in the syllabus for schools and the preparation of new textbooks.

Worse, if criminalisation of politics is now a fact of political life, it seems that criminalisation of education is not to lag behind. For an RSS *pracharak* and self-confessed "murderer" of a "young and beautiful Muslim woman", Dr. K.G. Rastogi, has been appointed member to two committees of the Departmental Advisory Board. In this capacity, Dr. Rastogi attended the meeting of a committee of the Department of Education ('Measurement and Evaluation') on January 15 this year, and also participated in the deliberations of the committee on social sciences and humanities 15 days later.

In an autobiographical book published some years ago — with a preface Mr. K.S. Sudarshan, now RSS chief, then joint chief (*sah-sarkaryawah*), — Dr. Rastogi describes in some detail his life as an RSS soldier, and casually mentions that during a riot when some of them were attacking

Muslim households, "the crowd (of which he was part) was distracted by the sight of a young and beautiful Muslim woman." According to him, they began fighting among themselves to "establish control over her"; and he, Dr. Rastogi, mended matters by gunning her down — "*Us yu-vati ko goli maar di*" (I killed her with a bullet), for "*Na rahega baans na bajegi bansuri*" (I destroyed the root of the problem).

The same gentleman has now been handpicked to serve as member on two committees of the Departmental Advisory Board of the NCERT. It seems that though some Congress MPs brought this to the notice of the concerned Minister, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, nothing has been done. Mr. Eduardo Faleiro, Congress MP, has distributed documents to the press to prove this charge, including excerpts from the Rastogi autobiography to substantiate that he had indeed confessed to the crime.

About the bypassing of Parliament, Mr. Faleiro pointed out that the 1986 national education policy had an inbuilt clause which provided for a review every five years. So the Vajpayee Government is entitled to a review. But this has to be done in a transparent manner: it is mandatory to consult the State Governments by

calling a meeting of the Central Advisory Board for Education since education is on the Concurrent List of subjects. Finally, when the new policy has been approved by CABE, it is to be placed before Parliament for discussion and approval. None of this has been done.

Instead, some handpicked persons, many of them with Sangh credentials, have been picked (flouting well-defined rules) as advisers by the NCERT, and the policy document, in the shape of a framework, has been put together.

The social sciences faculty in the NCERT was kept ignorant, and instead "outside experts" were appointed. Though the rules clearly state that no retired Government servant over the age of 62 years can be appointed, Dr. O.S. Dewal (66) and Prof. C.L. Anand (67) have been able to get the consultancy at salaries of Rs. 20,000 a month (which is beyond the maximum of Rs. 13,000 allowed under rules).

Mr. Faleiro's allegation is that Dr. Dewal, with an RSS pedigree, has been appointed consultant in the non-existing International Centre for Special Needs Education. The centre was to have been set up with UNESCO funds, but that deal fell through.

THE HINDU

22 MAY 2001

22 MAY 2001

# Education for fundamentalism

By K. N. Panikkar

*Education is turning out to be nothing more than training, without any liberal content and social sensitivity. Such a system is likely to promote conformism and undermine the possibilities of dissent and protest.*

119-12  
21/4

**T**HE EDUCATION system in India, caught within the vicious web of fundamentalism and globalisation, is rapidly changing, both in its structure and content. State support to education is waning, private investment is on the increase and foreign institutions are seeking to enter the market. Even if education is a non-merit good for the state, private capital is not shy of investment, the motive being profit rather than social relevance. Simultaneously, the content is also undergoing change. The secular character of education that independent India has so far maintained is being systematically transformed into a religion-centered scheme, which tends to be obscurantist, retrogressive and uncritical. The present crisis in education is, therefore, not purely financial as is often highlighted; it is equally, if not more, in the content.

The present Government and its collaborators have taken several initiatives in the field of education. All of them are informed by a dual strategy: first, to impart a religious character to education and second, to devise education as the necessary groundwork for a conformist society. The much-touted value education is intended to achieve the first, while "A Policy Framework for Reforms in Education" authored by Mr. Mukesh Ambani and Mr. Kumaramangalam Birla, industrialists, at the instance of the Prime Minister's Office, serves the second. Both these strategies complement each other for bringing into being a generation supportive of a fundamentalist order.

The main argument in favour of the first is the need to impart a nationalist character to education, distinct from the colonial and the western, which independent India inherited and partly persisted with. An alternative to the colonial system has a fairly long history. It goes back to the early nineteenth century when Akshay Kumar Dutt, a rationalist and reformer, attempted a synthesis of all existing knowledge into a coherent system of national education. Such a perspective inspired several institutions set up during the national movement and continued to influence the education policy of independent India, as evident from the recommendations of several Commissions. The inadequacies and weaknesses notwithstanding it at least ensured a secular and liberal education.

In contrast, the system of education now

being proposed is unabashedly obscurantist, inward looking and self-centered. The policy framework for school education drafted by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the proposals placed for consideration at the meeting of the State Ministers of Education and the innumerable statements of the Minister for Human Resource Development are explicit about this shift. The NCERT document has aroused considerable criticism from educationists for lacking professional and coherent thinking. Its direction, however, is clear. It equates religious instruction with value education, privileges the indigenous system of knowledge and takes an uncritical view of the contribution of Indian civilisation. The task is well set out for future science education which is actually being implemented by the UGC through its recent circular to universities to start post-graduate courses in astrology. This comes in the wake of an earlier decision to introduce Vedic Mathematics and Karma Kanda.

These are not silly aberrations, but part of a larger project. There is indeed a meth-od in this madness that was revealed some time back when an RSS-prepared agenda was presented as an official proposal. The main burden of this proposal was to undermine secular education in favour of a Hinduised system which forms the necessary ideological groundwork for reconstructing the nation as Hindu. Almost all initiatives taken by the Ministry of Human Resource Development in recent times have consistently kept this objective in view. The rationale for such initiatives is the need for value education, the elements of which are recognised in and drawn from the tenets of religion. In fact, the section on value education in the NCERT document is almost entirely devoted to the need for a change from the secular to religious instruction, for which, the opinion of no less a person than Gandhiji is invoked! That the spirit of this document runs

counter to the universalistic perspective of Gandhiji is conveniently overlooked.

A more comprehensive education policy, as evident from the report of the Ambani-Birla team submitted to the Prime Minister's Council on Trade and Industry, is in the offing. The team, described as a special subject group on policy framework for private investment in education, health and rural development, has produced a document that promises a 'revolution' but recommends unconditional surrender to the interests of advanced capitalist countries and seeks to preserve the existing privileges of the ruling classes. The revolution proposed is the creation of 'competitive, yet cooperative, knowledge based society'. The prescription is as follows: "As the world moves on to forging an information society founded on education, India cannot remain behind as a non-competitive labour oriented society. India has to envision to being a competitive knowledge economy. India has to create an environment that does not produce industrial workers and labourers but fosters knowledge workers... Education and development has a major role to play in shaping knowledge workers and, in turn, placing India in the vanguard in the information age."

This grand design is to be implemented through direct foreign investment and privatisation. The rest, be it primary and secondary education or liberal and performing arts or 'disciplines whose scholars do not command a market', may be left to the patronage of the state. The unstated implication of the scheme is that it would generate two streams: one for the poor and the other for the elite. The education of the former would be limited to literacy while the latter would be the receivers of knowledge. But then the nature of the information society of countries such as India, as subordinate partners of advanced capitalist countries, would be nothing better than that of a service sector. Far from being

competitive and innovative they are likely to be destined to perform the chores such as the medical transcription and innumerable other labour-saving work for the benefit of transnational capital. This is not to argue that the opportunities opened up by the information technology are to be overlooked, but to suggest that it should not be viewed in isolation, as the Ambani report seems to attempt.

Considerable importance was attached to the liberal and social science education during the early days of the Republic. But liberal education is now being marginalised, if not completely eliminated, from the curriculum. In Andhra Pradesh, the heaven of investment in information technology, it is reported that social science subjects are being slowly weeded out from the colleges. Education is turning out to be nothing more than training, without any liberal content and social sensitivity. Such a system is likely to promote conformism and undermine the possibilities of dissent and protest.

And conformism which transnational capital is looking for is in fact the main burden of the Ambani Report. It advocates safeguards against "advertent or inadvertent creeping in of various isms". The suggested remedy for which is legislation "banning any form of political activity on campuses of universities and educational institutions". The politics on the campuses may not be ideal; in fact it requires serious rethinking by all concerned. But isolating the campus from all ideologies as suggested by the Report is against the spirit of universities and likely to contribute to an authoritarian order.

The nitty-gritty apart, the initiatives taken by the Ministry of Human Resource Development and the Prime Minister's Office have a wider political and social meaning. Their implications for future are quite unambiguous. They would foster the necessary ideological groundwork for a conformist and fundamentalist society. At the same time the intellectual capacity they would create would mainly help to enrich the life of those who control the transnational capital. The Indian middle class unfortunately cannot look beyond the small mercies that accrue from this fundamentalist and colonial project.

(The writer is Vice-Chancellor, Sree Sankaracharya University, Kalady, Kerala.)

THE HINDU

21 APR 2001



# UGC's new mantra: Passing out priests

Sridhar Kumaraswami  
New Delhi, April 19

IN A move that could attract further charges of saffronisation of the education system, the UGC has decided to start BA, MA and PhD courses in paurohitya (Vedic priestly rituals) from this July. This comes close on the heels of the UGC's decision to begin degree courses in Astrology.

The UGC has already formulated guidelines regarding various aspects of running the course, such as course duration, contents, faculty, fees and other finances. According to the guidelines, the beneficiaries of these courses would be students, teachers, professionals and the persons who are interested in

Karamkand and Vedic studies. The graduate level fees would be Rs 3,000 per annum and the post-graduate level, Rs 4,000 per annum.

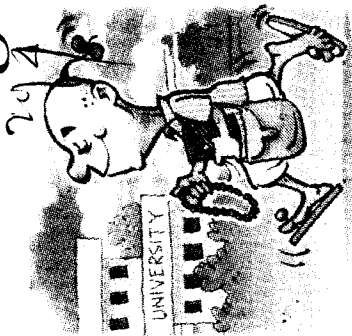
The decision to start these courses from this year follows an earlier decision on June 2000, when it was decided to create departments of Karamkand (priestly rituals) in Indian universities. UGC Chairman Dr Hari Gautam constituted a nine-member committee, headed by Education Secretary M K Kaw. It met on January 10 this year and submitted its recommendations, which were accepted by the UGC.

The Committee had recommended Karamkand be renamed as Paurohitya and that the various degrees be awarded under

cognate subjects and they in turn will meet the requirement of a large segment of the society, desirous of knowing and practising the path of action (Karma) coupled with Jnana (knowledge) and Bhakti (worship).

The guidelines make it clear that "our ancient Indian culture believes in *Jnana* (knowledge), *karma* (duty) and *upasana* (worship)" and that the ancient Indian texts related to these three are "rooted in the Vedas". The guidelines say that the new syllabus will "uplift a man from his physical pain and make him function at a higher level".

The graduate course will be of three years duration while the postgraduate course will be of two years duration.



the Faculty of Arts.

Karamkand covers the whole life of an individual. "Starting university courses in Karamkand will produce a trained group of young scholars with proficiency in rituals and other

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 APR 2001

# NCERT plans composite text to ease school children's load

MEGHA BAHREE  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 9

HERE'S what could be the new syllabus for students of pre-primary to Class XII as per the National Council for Educational Research and Training's (NCERT) plans: just one composite textbook for history, geography, economics and civics; no more logarithms, vital statistics and trigonometric tables; courses in "life skills" to make students street smart and worldly wise.

The sweeping changes are part of NCERT's attempt to lighten the crushing academic load in schools, a lot of which is considered deadwood. For example, the obsession with learning dates in history. R K Dixit, head of the Social Sciences department at NCERT and convenor of the curriculum group that drew up the syllabus, says endless stories of who conquered whom and what happened in which precise year is unnecessary. "Everyone in society doesn't need such detailed knowledge. Just the awareness of an inseparable link between the past and the present is sufficient. There is no use involving children in the controversies of the past," says Dixit.

NCERT has also recommended that Classes 6 to 8 eight study ancient, medieval and modern Indian history alongside the corresponding periods of world history. For classes IX and X, the new syllabus will focus on contemporary India, beginning with the freedom struggle and including current issues concerning land, globalisation, entrance of multinational companies and their impact on the economy and agriculture.

Savita Sinha, a member of the curriculum group, says the NCERT has worked at reducing content in the social sciences. "We intend including more practical activities as well. These days, history and geography can be taught just by reading newspapers," she says.

The economy is a far more important area of study, says Dixit. "Everyone is a consumer and deals with economics at some level or the other. Similarly, civics is an obligation since every citizen needs to know their rights and duties."

Also on the chopping block are complicated logarithms, symmetry, cyclic factorisation, vital statistics, sets, functions, nature of roots in quadratic equations and trigonometric tables in mathematics. "All obsolete and difficult things have been deleted. More

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

EXCESS  
BAGGAGE

INDIAN EXPRESS

11 APR 2001



## SAFFRONISATION IN EDUCATION

Agenda 2019  
11/11/19

# In Parivar's view, Hitler is still popular in Germany

**HT Correspondent**  
*New Delhi, April 9*

THE SITUATION was highly embarrassing for the two Germans. For, what the Indian "expert" was saying in effect was that Hitler and Nazism were still popular in Germany.

The "expert" rubbished the Indian textbook, *The Story of Civilisation*, for its leftist 'bias' in parts that dealt with Germany.

He didn't stop at that and said such textbooks would soon be replaced by "correct" ones. The two Germans, on the other hand, praised the book for being positive towards their country.

The Indian "expert", Atul Rawat, was unrelenting. "The need of the hour" he told a workshop, "Image of India in Germany and Image of Germany in India in High School Education", here last month, "is that Indian students are presented with a more positive and balanced account of the history

and ethos of Germany as a nation and its people."

As New Delhi's saffronisation drive intensifies, such contradictions are multiplying.

There is clearly a hurry to condemn the secular-leftist bias in education and in institutions of higher learning and research and introduce what is being described as an "nationalistic and indigenous" outlook in the entire educational system.

To quote Rawat, a consultant to the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT), "the most important requirement is that Indian students have to be taught to see the world through an Indian perspective.... emphasis is now being given on the task of relating thinking, experiences and innovations rooted in Indian tradition with global thinking."

The saffronisation drive over the last three years has, however, run into resistance, rein-

forced by many decades of liberal and secular thinking. This has in turn divided the entire

academic world, causing immeasurable damage to institutions and academic traditions. Among these are the Indian Council of Social Science Research (where Chairman M.L.Sondhi, himself a BJP member, has revolted against the saffronisation drive), Indian Council of Historical Research (which has led the way to disown and denigrate the secular-leftist tradition of scholarship and is according priority to Hindutva-related research subjects), Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, University Grants Commission, Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, NCERT, Indian Council of Philosophical Research and the National Film Development Corporation. The test case for the Vajpayee Government will be the adoption of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education which can only happen when states agree to its implementation.

New Delhi is keen that the

framework is adopted nationally. Human Resource Development Minister Murlu Manohar Joshi describes the framework as an instrument for "building a cohesive society based on the pillars of relevance, equity and excellence, inculcating and nurturing a sense of pride in being an Indian, patriotism and nationalism tempered with the spirit of 'World as one family', as well as universalising elementary education and linking education with life skills."

The opposition interprets this as giving education a sectarian and chauvinistic orientation in the name of value education, spiritual education and indigenous education.

It believes the framework actually camouflages the Hindutva agenda prepared by Vidya Bharati Shiksha Sansthan, closely identified with the Sangh Parivar, which Joshi had to withdraw when states stood firm against it.

**(To be concluded)**

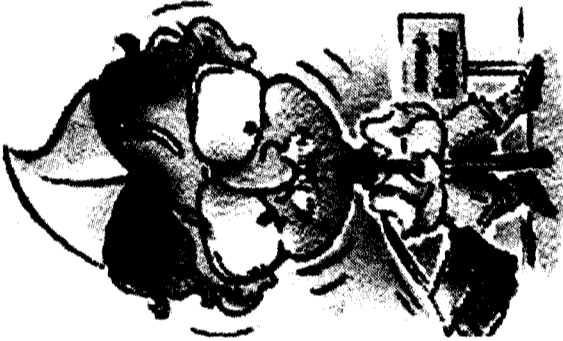


ILLUSTRATION: ABHIMANYU

forced by many decades of liberal and secular thinking. This has in turn divided the entire

# A helping hand for students in stress

Sourav Sanyal  
Kolkata, April 8

ACCORDING TO reports, 3,895 Indian schoolchildren committed suicide between 1995 and 1998.

In West Bengal, the number is 164 between 1994 and 1998. And they were all suffering from some form of mental disorder — depression, dissatisfaction or frustration. Lack of effective counselling and skilled handling of their problems on the part of the teachers eventually hurled them to the jaws of death.

To help those students who suffer from some sort of mental disorder, Mon Foundation, a voluntary organisation, will release a detailed instruction manual for the teachers to deal with students with mental problems at the Bose Institute tomorrow. The foundation will do this in collaboration with Child Relief and You (CRY) and leading psychologists and psychiatrists of the city.

The release of the manual is coinciding with the concluding programme of the year-long Mental Health Awareness Programme conducted by the State science and technology department, in association with the Mon Foundation. Practically, the book will be a guideline for a new breed of skilled teachers who would effectively double as counsellors and help to reduce the soaring graph of untimely deaths of the students.

The manual is the outcome of extensive research by a team of specialists over the last three years as part of a project — Mental Health Problems in Schoolchildren (Assessment and Intervention). The project was under taken jointly by CRY and Mon Foundation.

Global statistics place 10-20 per cent of the children under the age of 15 as having some kind of mental problems. In India, about 30 million children need some attention from mental health professionals. Given that, the ratio of such professionals to children in need is only

1:70000 in our country, says a spokesman of CRY.

“What we observed through our study was that the teachers were unaware of the ways they could come to the aid of the suffering students. The task of a teacher is not merely restricted to dictating notes and correcting answer scripts. It goes much beyond that. It is his/her responsibility to make sure that the students are comfortable in the classroom and talk to them individually in case of any problem. He/she has to take the child in confidence and try to identify the root cause plaguing the child's psyche.

This book seeks to equip the teachers with special skills needed to deal with the disturbed children. If the teachers devote a little quality time as outlined in the book with the students, they would be instrumental in cutting down the alarming trend of young talents being nipped in the bud,” said Dr Satyajit Ash, principal investigator, Mental Health Programme for School Children.

The book classifies mental disorders into three broad categories: Emotional disorders including obsessive and compulsive disorder, depressive disorder, agoraphobia, somatoform disorders and suicide; behavioural disorders including attention deficit, hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder and oppositional defiant disorder and psychoses including schizophrenia, and manic depressive psychosis.

The book also outlines other problems including speech problems, epilepsy, enuresis and specific learning disability.

The symptoms of each are followed by case studies and a step-by-step guideline for crisis management is outlined for the benefit of the teachers.

The book stresses the need of a concerted mental health programme across all schools in the city to reduce the growing incidences of suicide among the schoolchildren.

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মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসমস্যা



শিক্ষকশিক্ষিকাদের জন্য একটি নির্দেশিকা

মন ফাউন্ডেশন

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 APR 2001

# Not in the Stars

## UGC Seeks the Philosopher's Stone

By RAHUL ROY

ARE we moving forward or backward in time? The recent proposal of the University Grants Commission to introduce courses on astrology, *vastushastra* and Hindu mathematics in science curricula, has been greeted with exclamations of disbelief and protest by the scientific community. The UGC proposes to set up full-fledged departments of vedic astrology with five teaching posts; these departments are to be called Jyotir Vigyan, and they are to be set up from the academic session 2001-2002.

The human resource development ministry claims that it is for academics to decide whether to introduce these courses. But the truth is that the UGC, with the help of certain handpicked educationists, are offering cash incentives to cash-strapped universities to start these courses, obviously without any discussion within the academic community. We do not, unfortunately, need an astrologer to predict what will happen: several academics, most of them without any standing or credibility in the sciences, will fall over themselves endorsing the UGC proposals. The UGC circular states that "vedic astrology is not only one of the main subjects of our traditional and classical knowledge, but this is the discipline which lets us know the events happening in human life and in the universe on time scale."

To add to this, the circular continues: "There is an urgent need to rejuvenate the science of vedic astrology in India to allow this scientific knowledge to reach the society at large and provide opportunities to get this important science even exported to the world." We now need official pundits armed with university degrees to predict earthquakes, for example, presumably to spread even greater panic than they did recently in Gujarat. Perhaps the UGC thinks houses collapsed in Ahmedabad and Bhuj because of the absence of *vastushastra*, not because of poor construction by rapacious contractors.

Vedic astrology traces its origin to Maharshi Parasara's book *Brihat Parasara Hora Sastra*, a compilation of rules and guidelines with reference to marriage, children, illness, wealth and so on. There are also three Vedanga Jyotishas and 18 Siddhaantas (Surya Siddhaanta being one of the most notable among them), all of which codify astronomical knowledge — primarily to facilitate astrological calculations and elaborate on the rules of worship written in the Vedas. As early as 499 AD, Aryabhata's magnum opus

*Aryabhatika* differentiated between this real and false knowledge. He describes true knowledge as a jewel he took from the ocean of real and false knowledge with his own intellectual power.

The line separating astrology and astronomy was not drawn in a day; it was the result of over 15 centuries of painstaking study. But today, it is those who claim to be proud of our heritage that are erasing this line; decrying afresh Aryabhata's distinction between true and false knowledge; between science and pseudo-science. The old belief that the heavens influence events on earth is understandable. If seasons are governed by the movement of the stars, why not the fate of the kings and the common people?

But over the centuries, as we have unravelled the mysteries of nature, such notions have lost their power to explain the world around us. Many people may still believe in as-

(July 31, 1999), eminent mathematician SG Dani exposed this work as completely non-vedic in origin. Its value, he concluded, was at best "recreational". Dani's conclusion comes with a warning that "the pedagogical use (of this mathematics) has limited scope and it is important not to be carried away by motivated propaganda in this regard. The UGC circular nurtures ambitions of exporting to the world this knowl-

edge. Does knowledge now need state sanction or a visa or a nod from funding agencies to travel across borders? Intellectual achievements from all over the world, whether academic, artistic or cultural, have been imported and exported over the centuries without UGC approval. Just as we take whatever we find appropriate, the rest of the world also accepts whatever it finds useful in Indian thought without recourse to any "export" processing agency. And this has been happening for millennia — as illustrated by the acceptance of knowledge from the Mesopotamian civilisation in ancient Indian works, and the easy transition of mathematical knowledge among the Indian, Arabic and European schools.

In his inaugural address at the Indian History Congress this year, Amartya Sen drew attention to the need for openness and heterodoxy in any scientific enterprise. If science is stripped of independence and weighed down with tradition, it grows sterile. State patronage will have precisely this effect on the Indian scientific enterprise. Prof Zia Mian has, in his book on science in Pakistan, described the decline of science with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. In such a situation, knowledge of the Koran is a more essential qualification for a teacher of science than scientific knowledge. Leading Indian scientists have condemned the UGC proposal, calling it a giant leap backwards, undermining whatever scientific credibility our country may have so far achieved.

We cannot chant the mantra of globalisation of economic resources and markets but refuse to see that the needs of the human mind have always been global. Science and mathematics are universal; what is science in Australia is also science in Zanzibar. The UGC directives extolling disciplines like astrology and *vastushastra* will take us back to the age of alchemists, witch doctors and seekers of the philosophers' stone.

(The author is professor of mathematics, Indian Statistical Institute, New Delhi)

### IN BRIEF

- UGC's decision to introduce astrology and vedic mathematics in the science curricula is arbitrary
- Acts of faith cannot be confused with the practice and study of science
- State patronage could render science sterile

trology; but this is in the realm of belief, best left as part of personal faith. Acts of faith cannot be confused with the study and practice of science in the public sphere. Historians of mathematics have studied the mathematics of the Vedas since the 19th century, and quite a few books have been written on it. In 1983, the Indian National Science Academy brought out an authoritative book on the Sulva Sutras (dated between 800 BC and 500 BC) in the Vedangas; these, besides containing a commentary on the sutras, contain the original sutras as well as their translation. The vedic mathematics of the sort being promoted today has little to do with such historical probings of the advances in mathematics made by Aryabhata, Varahamihira, Brahmagupta, Bhaskara and others.

The "vedic" mathematics introduced in school textbooks in UP and other states is synonymous with the mathematics of a book titled *Vedic Mathematics* written by Swami Shri Bharati Krishna Tirthaji Maharaja in 1965. In an article in *Economic and Political Weekly*

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 7 APR 2001

# Yadav's charge UGC will formulate guidelines for entry of foreign varsities

ikes no sense,

ay PMO officials

The Times of India News Service

**NEW DELHI:** Officials at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) say they are surprised by the charges of phone tapping being levelled by Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav. One incensed official said, "If Yadav has the courage, why doesn't he attack the Prime Minister instead of levelling charges against a mere joint-secretary (Ashok Saikia)."

According to the official, the PMO is ready to face such a challenge directly. He was emphatic that "no phone tapping has been done at the instance of the PMO, and certainly not that of a senior opposition leader". He pointed out that such things were done according to strict guidelines and procedures and PMO officials at the level of Mr Saikia were not empowered to take such decisions.

The PMO official said that Mr Yadav "had no locus standi" to question Mr Saikia's appointment either. He said it was "the PM's prerogative to select the officers he wants to have in his office."

By Pallavi Mittal

The Times of India News Service

**NEW DELHI:** It is a signal that the *daddies* of higher education want to convey to foreign universities. That this country is not an open 'play-ground' for anyone wanting to set up shop and confer *phoren* degrees.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) and the All India Council for Technical Education have both sat down to formulate guidelines for the entry of foreign universities in India. "A committee has been formed at the direction of the government and has already met to discuss the issue," said UGC chairperson Hari Gautam. "Any university which has to operate may have to register with the UGC," he added. The final guidelines are in the process of formulation.

While UGC is the apex body for higher education in the country, mandated to ensure the education standards, AICTE, is responsible for the quality of technical educa-

tion.

Registration of universities, said Mr Gautam, will help the commission check out the credentials of the university including the course being offered, the fees charged, the infrastructure being made available and whether the students were being taken off-shore at all. This, he insisted, was necessary to ensure that the students were not taken for a ride.

Yet, a number of committees and sub-committees later, the UGC said that 'banning' the entry of foreign varsities is 'not practical' in this era of globalisation.

What is needed is 'Rationalisation', the officials added. And it is here that the commission is collaborating with the ministry of home and external affairs. "This will help prevent anyone from sneaking in," said Mr Gautam.

In the last few years, scores of overseas varsities and institutes have made inroads into India. "They are basically coming in to earn money and operate through a

network of agents," an AICTE official said.

"Many are offering correspondence courses, charging hefty sums for study material and examinations, with a foreign degree or diploma being conferred at the end without actually leaving the country," he said. The charges can vary from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 4 lakhs.

"In many cases, the foreign institutes are not accredited even in their own countries. They are not good universities like Harvard or MIT. Students should be very careful about all this or they will end up being cheated," says an expert.

But things are not that simple, an AICTE official averred. "The recommendations of both the UGC and the council will first go the government and a policy will then be decided," the official added.

The council is not too happy with the UGC's suggestions. "Most foreign universities are offering technical course like MBA, which come under the AICTE ambit," the official added.

# True lies: Is astrology a science?

ALL  
IN  
ALL



H.Y. SHARADA PRASAD

There would be quite a few people in the country who would welcome the decision of the University Grants Commission to introduce BSc and MSc courses in astrology in a number of universities. It is unthinkable that the idea would have been taken up if there hadn't been a powerful patron in the set-up now ruling the land. On the other hand, there would be many who would be outraged by the very thought of giving astrology the status of a science in our day and age.

Some amongst them might not have minded it if the subject was taught in a special institution outside the university system. In between the fervent supporters and the sceptics would be the bulk of the people who would not be ready to dismiss astrology as downright hocus-pocus. How can they when they religiously look up the "What the stars foretell" columns in newspapers and magazines and consult astrologers when arranging marriages in their families? It is a rare Indian who does not possess a horoscope. Even such a confirmed agnostic as Jawaharlal Nehru had counselled his daughter, when she gave birth to her first child, to be sure to get a reliable *janmapatri* drawn up.

The traditional mind has always believed that human beings are mere playthings in the hands of the unknown. To them astrology provides a glimmer of what the future holds. The placid are not too worried what the future has in store for them but the more adventurous cannot afford to be so unconcerned. The investor who risks his capital, the politician who fights an election, the general who leads an army to battle, all want to know whether they are going to succeed or fail. So would the lover who is waiting for a final word from the beloved and the candidate who is awaiting the result of a competitive examination. All of them turn to the astrologer to part the veil for them. They do not ask whether astrology is a science; they are content to accept it as a mystery. They are impressed by the fact that the astrologer can reel off so much about them by a mere look at their horoscope. How does he do it? That is what enables the astrologer to say that what he practises is not mumbo-jumbo but a science.

Science in our times is a synonym for truth. It establishes its credentials through laying itself open to challenge. "Disprove me if you can; if you can't, then accept me," — that is what science says. But it is not as though all scientists base their beliefs



ALL IN THE STARS: The traditional mind has always believed that human beings are mere playthings in the hands of the unknown. To them astrology provides a glimmer of what the future holds.

on reason and incontrovertible proof. Many are ready to make compromises and live in half-way houses. I remember an incident involving a distinguished physicist from Bangalore in the Thirties. He was held in high regard and was eminent enough to have acted as the director of the Indian Institute of Science on a couple of occasions. He was also a very orthodox gentleman. While he went to his work clad in three-piece woollen or silk suits and a

He acted as the director of the Indian Institute of Science on a couple of occasions. He

was also a very orthodox gentleman. While he went to his work clad in three-piece woollen or silk suits and a lace turban, once home, he wore a *dhoti* and caste marks and a gold-embroidered shawl. He was an ardent participant in doctrinal debates. Once he was asked how he could explain the anomaly that despite being a scientist he offered *tarpan* at the time of solar and lunar eclipses to prevent the sun and the moon from being swallowed up by Ketu and Rahu. He replied that in his place of work he believed in Newton but in his personal life and at home he followed our ancient sages

turban, once home, he wore a *dhoti* and caste marks and a gold-embroidered shawl. That is the garb in which he turned up at religious discourses. He was an ardent participant in doctrinal debates. Once he was asked how he could explain the anomaly that despite being a scientist he offered "*tarpan*" at the time of solar and lunar eclipses to prevent the sun and the moon from being swallowed up by Ketu and Rahu. He replied that in his place of work he believed in Newton but in his personal life and at home he followed our ancient sages. It only goes to show that not all scientists are scientific all the time.

I recall another worthy, also from the South. He too was a great believer in the sanctity of the horoscope. When his son's wife was with child, the gentleman went into a huddle with a famous astrologer and arrived at the most favourable moment for the grandchild's birth and so arranged with the hospital that the baby was delivered at the precise minute employing the Caesarean method. Quite an ingenious way of combining old knowledge and new obstetric skills. But it failed to work, for I am sorry to report that the child who had been programmed to live long and achieve uninterrupted happiness died an early and tragic death.

For every such instance of predictive failure, the champions of astrology would be able to reel off a dozen cases where the stars had been correctly read and the future brilliantly foretold. But there are many genuine believers who find it difficult to accept the notion that a person's entire future is mapped out at birth and that his life inexorably follows what has been ordained by the stars. Is there no scope then for divine mercy, and no role for human will? Are prayer and personal effort wholly pointless? If fate

is unalterable, what would be the point of following the numerous propitiatory rites and *daans* that the priests prescribe?

The spread of electricity, it has been said, dealt the death-knell to ghosts. Similarly the old astrology, which was based on an earth-centred planetary system, began to fall apart with the discoveries of Copernicus and Kepler that the earth and the planets rotated around the sun. In the magisterial words of the 1975 edition of the *Encyclopaedia*

The chairman of the UGC has not taken the public into confidence about the

consultations, if any, that the Commission had held with the academic community before announcing the decision to introduce BSc and MSc courses in astrology. Has the scientific community conceded that astrology is a science? Practicing astrologers will probably welcome the decision, for it will mean secure jobs for many of them at the now attractive UGC scales. But I have a feeling that many astrologers would want the profession to retain some of its mystery which it will lose if it begins to be taught in colleges. Another danger in the move is overproduction

*dia Britannica*: "Newtonian physics" eradicated a belief in astrology among the educated. The practice of the now pseudo-science continued among non-intellectuals in the West, gradually losing contact with its rich tradition and becoming more and more fraudulent, though in countries such as India, where only a small intellectual elite has been trained in Western physics, it manages to retain here and there its position among the sciences. Regardless of its validity, some Indian universities offer advanced courses in astrology.

The reference to "Western physics" is somewhat intriguing, just as the notion that what is pseudo-science in the west is regarded as science in India is invidious. But more surprising is the assertion that even in 1975 some Indian universities had been conducting advanced courses in astrology. Does it mean that Dr Murli Manohar Joshi is to be denied credit for being innovative?

The chairman of the UGC has not taken the public into confidence about the consultations, if any, that the Commission had held with the academic community before announcing the decision to introduce BSc and MSc courses in astrology. Has the scientific community conceded that astrology is a science? Practicing astrologers will probably welcome the decision, for it will mean secure jobs for many of them at the now attractive UGC scales. But I have a feeling that many astrologers would want the profession to retain some of its mystery which it will lose if it begins to be taught in colleges. Another danger in the move is overproduction. After all how many degree-holding astrologers would our society need, when we have so many amateur astrologers, palmists and assorted soothsayers, especially among our civil servants?

A society which uses the processes and products of modern technology more widely is not necessarily more rational than an "under-developed" community. Americans are about as superstitious as their benighted Indian brethren. You have only to go to any American hotel and look for the thirteenth floor. American journals are as full of astrological columns as ours here. You get to hear many stories about how President Reagan would not make any move without consulting his astrologer. It is said that when the American Association for the Advancement of Science suggested that every astrological feature in the press or on television should carry the caution that it should not be taken as infallible, similar to the one that is required to be carried with cigarette advertisements, the Reagan Administration turned down the proposal.

H.Y. SHARADA PRASAD was formerly an advisor to the Prime Minister of India.

H-9-17 **SAPRU HOUSE / ORDINANCE LAPSES, I'M THE BOSS'**

# Josh claims possession of ICWA

By Our Staff Reporter

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 4.** Seven months after the Centre took over the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) showing the door to its "democratically elected" president, Mr. Harcharan Singh Josh, the former ICWA chief re-occupied the Sapru House here today stating that the ordinance promulgated by the President in this regard had lapsed.

"Article 123 of the Constitution provides that an Ordinance issued by the President lapses in case it is not duly ratified by Parliament six weeks from the date of its reassembly. Even though Parliament is in session, the period of six weeks has lapsed," Mr. Josh said justifying his decision to re-enter the premises.

"Since the latest Ordinance issued by the President has expired, the ICWA headed by me stands revived," Mr. Josh claimed, adding that "the building was owned by the Society and as a democratically elected President, I am the legal heir".

Reacting to Mr. Josh's forcible takeover of the Sapru House premises, the Union Urban Development Minister, Mr., Jagmohan said, "We are in legal possession of it. He (Mr. Josh) has no *locus standi*".

Conceding that the Ordinance issued by the President had lapsed on April 2, he, however, asserted that the legal position was that the Sapru House was still in the possession of the

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). According to him, while the Lok Sabha had already passed the Ordinance, it could not be passed by the Rajya Sabha due to the Tehelka episode.

## Josh, 10 others arrested

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 4.** Mr. Josh, who was unceremoniously removed as the president of the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), and ten others were arrested today on charges of criminal trespassing and unauthorised occupation after they "tookover" possession of the Sapru House, housing the ICWA.

The arrests were made on the basis of a complaint by the former DGP, Mr. D.B. Ray, who was acting as secretary-general of ICWA, after the Government took over the building. They were later released on bail. — PTI

As per the position clarified by the Union Law Ministry, the Council constituted by the MEA and headed by its Director-General, Mr. P.S. Ray, will continue to be in-charge of the affairs of the ICWA till a new Council is constituted.

Mr. Josh, accompanied by his supporters, which included the Panthers' Party president, Dr. Bhim Singh, camped in one of the rooms of the building throughout the day. "I am waiting for the External Affairs Minister, Mr.

Jaswant Singh, who was appointed chairman by the Government after my takeover to come and hand over the keys to me," he was quoted as saying.

Soon after Mr. Josh entered the premises of the Sapru House today and attempted at taking over its possession, the Ministry of External Affairs lodged a formal complaint with police.

Thereafter, police surrounded the building and word went round that the Centre was trying to evict Mr. Josh from the premises. "It is the Urban Development Ministry officials who are illegally occupying the building. They should hand over possession peacefully," Mr. Josh said.

Incidentally, Mr. Josh has brushed aside the charges that the functioning of the ICWA had deteriorated over the years and its academic merit had also declined considerably. "We have held a large number of symposia and seminars on issues of national and international importance in the past. It is wrong to state that scholarship had declined", he said.

Arguing that Mr. Jagmohan had failed to muster support for the takeover, Mr. Josh said this was the main reason why he had not introduced a bill in Parliament but got an Ordinance promulgated, instead. "I have filed two defamation suits against Mr. Jagmohan and these are pending in the Delhi High Court", he said.

## KNOW THE FUTURE

It is a sign of the times that the University Grants Commission has decided to introduce undergraduate, postgraduate and research degrees in astrology. The aim is two-fold. First, the UGC wants to promote astrology as a subject of utilitarian value, and second, it wants to rejuvenate the science of Vedic astrology. There is no need to debate the point that astrology is not a science since such a debate can never be resolved to the satisfaction of the two sides which use two completely different idioms and therefore talk at cross purposes. There are reasons to question the validity of astrology on more profound philosophical grounds. Astrology assumes that the future of an individual is predetermined and therefore can be predicted provided one knows the adequate tools to decipher the signs. The doctrine of predestination is a matter of faith. It cannot be proved. Faith cannot serve as the basis of a project of knowledge. This rules out astrology as an academic discipline. It can exist in society as a practice or as a hobby to which the faint-hearted, the insecure and the gullible can be drawn. To this extent, for some people, astrology already has an utilitarian value. The move to endow it the status of an academic discipline can only be read as part of a wider cultural agenda driven by a particular ideology.

The propounded aim of rejuvenating Vedic astrology is a clue to identifying the ideology that powers the proposal. It is part of the broader goal to bring social and cultural life in India within the ambit of *Hindutva*. This ideology wants to shut off India from all external intellectual and cultural developments since it asserts that all wisdom and knowledge were known in India before the arrival of the Muslims. The contribution of Indians to the development of mathematics and astronomy is now widely acknowledged. It needed the acknowledgment of the West before India accepted its own scientific achievements. The concept of zero and infinity came back to India *via* the Arabs. But astrology is not one such body of knowledge because nowhere in the world is it taken seriously enough to be considered an academic discipline. By promoting astrology through the UGC, the proponents of *Hindutva* are trying to assert the superiority of Hindu learning. What is despicable in all this is the role of the UGC. It is an independent body which has allowed itself to become a puppet in the hands of politicians and ideologues. This is not new. The UGC has always donned the colour of its political masters: it was red under S. Nurul Hasan, and is now saffron under Mr Murli Manohar Joshi. By its own spinelessness, the UGC only underlines its own irrelevance. By advocating the cause of astrology, the UGC has just written out its destiny. It does not need an astrologer to say that it is destined to go into the junkyard of history.

**THE TELEGRAPH**

**- 3 APR 2001**



# Astrology courses kick off debate

New Delhi, April 1

THE UGC decision to introduce degree courses in astrology in Indian universities has led to a heated debate over admissibility of the subject as a rational branch of learning.

Notwithstanding its popularity, which has thrived on man's anxiety to read the future, astrology, say experts, still needs to be studied and researched thoroughly. But they are deeply divided on according it the status of a science, as understood in the modern context, or looking into the ancient texts on the subject with a view to understanding the history of Indian science.

According to Prof M G K Menon, former minister of science and technology, "these studies are important, but not in the way that is being done. It should be studied as part of history of mathematics and science."

"There is a case for studying the texts," says Prof Menon, but adds in the same breath that he disapproves of teaching it only in terms of specific planetary positions leading to particular predictions. In a similar vein, Professor Yash Pal, former UGC chairman, expresses utter displeasure over the decision to introduce the study of astrology as a separate discipline.

"Setting up, almost like religious seminaries, separate

departments protected from other sensible ways of thinking would be a horrible mistake," maintains Prof Yash Pal.

"Let us desist. I hope no self-respecting university would ask to start such a department," says Prof Yash Pal. But if the human resources development minister is to be believed, there are as many as 24 deemed universities including the Osmania university, Birla Institute of Technology in Mesra, near Ranchi, as also the Baroda University that have showed interest in offering such courses.

Already there is a department in the Banaras Hindu University, which teaches astrology. In India, there are a couple of autonomous institutions that offer courses in astrology and they are very popular, says Dr Nalin Jain, who teaches astrology at the Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, an autonomous educational institution here.

Even as many an academic asks "why astrology, in an age when the causes that are given for the happenings are not in anyway related? Jain, counters: "why not?"

The greatest argument against astrology as a science, points out Jain, is that principles of cause and effect as are applicable to other established subjects in the realm do not apply here.

PTI

## Govt tapping phones of Opp leaders, says Mulayam

HT Correspondent  
Lucknow, April 1

Mulayam Singh Yadav today accused the Vajpayee Government of tapping telephones of Opposition leaders after the tehelka expose.

(The PMO, however, dismissed his charges as baseless, reports PTI from New Delhi.)

Yadav, who said he would soon release a list of the leaders whose phones were being tapped, demanded the NDA Government's resignation. He also criticised the Centre for opening the floodgates for imports.

On the tehelka expose, he said Bangaru Laxman's statement was sufficient evidence in nail the Government. The Government, he said, had no way out of the mess but to resign.

He called for action against Brajesh Mishra and NK Singh of the Prime Minister's Office. The CBI raids on Custom officials, he said, were only a ploy to divert attention from the tehelka exposures.

Mulayam alleged that the Government was using Doordarshan for its own ends. He said he was seeking legal advice on allegations of irregularities in the Sukhoi deal. SP workers, he said, would file defamation suites against those making remarks about him on the subject.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 APR 2001

2 APR 2001



# EVILS IN THE AIR

## Misconceived plan to ban fashion channel

It is not surprising that a group of MPs have engaged in the hypocrisy of examining clippings from FTV, a French television channel dedicated to sartorial fashions, only to come to the conclusion that though it's "obscene" by Indian standards, there was no case for a ban. That was a relief not just for viewers but also fashion designers and students of fashion technology institutes. That Sushma Swaraj may not be able to emulate the UP chief minister who has clamped a ban on beauty pageants is also because the countrywide reaction is likely to be more strident. Apart from the moral question that finds politicians rushing to protect Indian "traditions", there is the question of whether ritual objections can be related to the move to open up the economy. Indian fashion designers have no reason to fear the ban in the light of expanding markets for Indian designs and the fact that the FTV is beamed to more than 100 countries. Why the minister thinks of imposing some kind of censorship by asking the French to "adjust to Indian cultural sensibilities" is beyond reason.

The point is that Indian television viewers have minds and tastes of their own. If Indian broadcasting is all about formulating guidelines in order to protect mind and morals, the first question is, in whose interest? Pramod Mahajan, tried the expensive but futile experiment to launch a counter-propaganda against Pakistan TV. Nor have any minister succeeded in clamping down on cable operators who serve adult fare at night with patronage from powerful political lobbies. In the new age of satellite technology, banning a channel is no longer an option. One must now learn to live with evils in the air — if they can be called evils. The MPs on the consultative committee have laboured long and hard and produced a mouse.

THE STATESMAN

23 FEB 2001

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# Vajpayee's 'preference' for English upsets RSS chief

By Sachchidanand Jha  
The Times of India News Service

PATNA: RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan on Saturday criticised Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee for his recent preference for English. He said that the PM had failed to do anything for the development of Hindi in the country while in office. He also criticised the Vajpayee government for giving a foothold to MNCs in the country by giving in to pressure from World Trade Organisation (WTO), World Bank and IMF. He said that MNCs would ruin the Indian economy.

He was delivering a speech to mark the existence of the organisation for 75 years. Mr Sudarshan said that a group of students who had been sitting on dharna outside the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) office to protest against the latter's English orientation were chased away by the police on February 16. He said former PMs like V.P. Singh, Mr Chandrashekar and even Mr Vajpayee had earlier supported their demand.

Mr Sudarshan said that it was ironical that students demanding the holding of UPSC examinations and

interviews in Hindi medium were chased away by the police during Mr Vajpayee's regime. Mr Vajpayee had created history 24 years ago by delivering his speech in Hindi at the UN Assembly, he pointed out. He said that even during his recent US visit, Mr Vajpayee had delivered his speech in Hindi on at least three occasions. Mr Vajpayee had gone on record saying that there was no better way of expressing oneself than

speaking in one's mother tongue, he recalled. Surprisingly, Mr Vajpayee's recent speeches indicated his preference for English, he added.

The RSS chief was also highly critical of the 'Mummy-Daddy' culture in India, saying the Indian parents felt humiliated if their children addressed them as 'Pitaji' and

'Maa'. Mr Sudarshan said that Indians were still carrying on the British legacy proudly.

He also said that the selection of Indian girls as Miss World was part of a big conspiracy hatched by multinational firms to capture the Indian market, as China had refused to provide space to them. He also decried beauty contests and the celebration of Valentine's Day.

## SUDARSHAN SAYS



- Criticises 'Mummy-Daddy' culture
- Calls for Indianisation of Islam
- Seeks creation of an Indian Church

THE TIMES OF INDIA

19 FEB 2001

19 FEB 2001

# 'If Valentine's Day is Western fad, so is Jackson'

By A Staff Reporter

MUMBAI: A cross-section of society interviewed by this newspaper felt that Valentine's Day had become commercialised, but disagreed with Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray who has called for a ban on it on the grounds that "such fads can destroy our civilisation".

Chittaranjan Shirodkar, secretary of the pro-RSS Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), said they would not support a ban on Valentine's Day because it was a personal matter. He, however, said the ABVP was opposed to commercialisation and vulgarisation of the occasion. "Some Valentine cards are obscene and several of the parties organised by various clubs on the occasion encourage licentious behaviour," he said.

Hema Shukla, secretary of the BJP's women's wing, supported the ban. "In India we do not express our love only on one day but round the year. Also, love in India is a sacred thing not meant for public display," she said.

Utkarsh Naithani, who organised inter-college festival, Malhar, as a St Xavierite in 1999, said he was against a ban on Valentine's Day although he did not approve of the way it was being hyped and vulgarised. "You can't stamp your personal opinion on society," he said, opposing the ban.

Citing a TV channel where the compere goes around campuses urging youngsters to declare their love on camera, he said Valentine's Day had lost its spirit. "The kind of stuff that goes under the name of Valentine's Day in the media is certainly not representative of Generation Next," he protested.

According to Rahul Khedkar of the National Students Union of India, Mr Thackeray's latest move showed that he had run out of ideas. Mr Khedkar said how an individual wished to celebrate an oc-



Santosh Bane

**HEART ATTACK: Workers wash cut the stains on the shop-front of a department store in Mumbai after Shiv Sainiks disfigured it with ink stains in an anti-Valentine's Day demonstration on Monday.**

casion must be left to him/her. "Anyway, how can the Sena be sanctimonious about these things when the party had organised the Michael Jackson show to raise funds for the Shiv Udyog Sena. Where was Mr Thackeray's concern for Indian culture when he attended Jackson's concert?" he asked indignantly.

Kalindi Mazumdar, former vice-principal of Nirmala Niketan, also was critical of the way Valentine's Day had been hyped up by the me-

dia and the accompanying vulgarisation. "Students get taken in by the hard sell and end up blowing up a lot of money on this craze," she said. She, however, opined that the event would not destroy Indian culture as Mr Thackeray had contended. "Such festivals have become part of Indian urban culture," she said, adding that Mother's Day and Father's Day also were imports.

M.R. Kurup, principal of Kelkar College at Mulund, said Valentine's Day was just one of the several occa-

sions like Rose Day and Friendship Day "to express one's emotions". He said there was nothing wrong in celebrating the day provided it did not disturb teaching activity in the college. Citing the popularity of Valentine's Day as a sign of changing times, Mr Kurup said banning it would have the opposite effect.

Meanwhile, Shiv Sainiks continued the drive against Valentine's Day, burning cards at different parts of the city and spraying ink on shop windows at Tardeo.

# Who is Thackeray to question us?

Sujata Anandan  
Mumbai, February 12

**B**AL THACKERAY seems not to have heard about Kamashutra or Khajuraho. If he had, he would not have been raging about love corrupting young couples in India. And this corruption he blames on western influence. Forget the fact that both the book and the temple are stronger on erotica than anything that westerners could ever dream up.

But then again it is not love that Thackeray seems to be against. Only the hype and the hoopla on Valentine's Day. Which is rather low key this year, perhaps due to the fallout of the earthquake. Or perhaps they took Thackeray's warnings to heart last year. The Shiv Sena chief, who had caught on later than the VHP and the Bajrang Dal to what Valentine's Day is all about in the year 2000, had promised he would take a leaf out of the VHP-BD book and Maharashtra in 2001.

Hype and hoopla essentially mean shops and hotels, card and gift companies and newspaper classifieds where a lot of teeny boppers place mushy messages for their beloved. Even Hindi and Marathi newspapers have caught on to the act. In fact, the entire Valentine's day phenom-

core supporters of the Sena. It is this under 25 lot which is now extremely irritated with the Sena chief.

"Who asked him to interfere with our emotions? Does he not have young grandchildren of his own? -- is the common cry of the irritated youngsters who have decided to cock a snook at Thackeray and go ahead. So have the hotels and gift shops. Although, there is a tacit acknowledgement that the Shiv Sainik might soon come calling at their doorstep to be pacified with a chunk, small or big, of the Valentine cake. They seem to be prepared to write it into their books.

That Thackeray's popularity is sinking is apparent from the fact that the Shiv Sena did not manage to collect much funds for the Gujarat quake, despite a star-studded rally last Sunday. Said a peeved Uddhav Thackeray, "if the Vajpayee Government had not slapped on a relief tax on the people, they would have opened their wallets up generously.

But it was not about tight fists. It was about closed minds. And the perception among the people that the Sena is out to make a fast buck for itself under whatever pretext and everything else be damned. In any case, Bar Thackeray is fast becoming synonymous with party pooper? and 'spoilspoil'?

## Sena's youth squads

THE SHIV Sena's Delhi unit on Monday announced that it had set up special youth squads to disrupt Valentine's Day celebrations in the Capital. The party's northern India chief Jai Bhagwan Goyal said "we have formed 25 squads comprising 50 members each to maintain a vigil".

HTC, New Delhi

ena is a media and cards and gift company driven phenomenon. But the build up has been slow this year. Accordingly, Thackeray's warning was also rather low key in the *Saamra*, the Sena mouthpiece, boxed and buried in the lower half of the front page. But it was not any less poisonous for all that. This time he seems to have crossed all barriers and actually openly exhorted his followers to go violent on Valentine's Day.

But there are few who seem to fear him any longer. And that seems to be part of the problem and the reason why, when the VHP and the BD are involved in earthquake relief, the Sena chief is pouring vitriol on a constituency that has won him a State government in the past. It is the under 25 voters who are said to be the

# Valentine's Day festivities: Sangh Parivar's culture cops at it again

Hemendra Singh Bartwal  
New Delhi, February 12

**AFTER RANTING** against beauty contests, fashion shows and "improper depiction" of women on TV, the Sangh Parivar culture cops are at it again. Their target this time is the innocuous Valentine's Day festival, celebrated by the romantically-inclined youngsters in major metros and cities.

The tirade was launched by a little-known Sangh outfit called the Hindu Jagran Manch in Kanpur last week when it threatened to publicly humiliate young couples found celebrating the occasion by visiting parties or functions organised to mark the occasion on February 14 evening.

The Manch zealots also warned shops selling Valentine cards and hotels organising celebrations to desist from such activities or be

prepared to face attacks.

A similar threat was held out by Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray in Mumbai soon after. He directed his party activists to disrupt such "uncultured" functions and destroy the Valentine cards as these were alien to the Indian culture.

Now VHP and Bajrang Dal too have joined the shrill chorus against Valentine's Day celebrations, supporting Thackeray's demand for a ban on a custom they believe to be a ploy to mislead the young generation.

VHP spokesman Manohar Puri stated that though they were against the Valentine's Day celebrations, yet they did not support any violent reaction to it.

Rajendra Prasad, general secretary of VHP Delhi unit, stated they were staunchly opposed to observance of such festivals as they were not only against the basic Indian

culture but also led to misbehaviour with women.

Defending the Hindu Jagran Manch's strong-arm tactics in Kanpur, Delhi VHP media in charge Ajay Devgun, said if people failed to pay heed to warnings, they would have to be reasoned with in a "language that they understood".

But he ruled out any plans for a similar muscle-flexing exercise in the Capital to dissuade the youngsters from observing the Valentine's Day.

RSS spokesman M G Vaidya said that there was no objection to young people meeting each other so long as there was no "obscenity" at such gatherings.

"We make a distinction between modernism and westernism. Modernism is good, but one should not mindlessly ape western practices," he said.

THE HINDU  
12 FEBRUARY 2001

# Culture cops on the rampage

*V-Day okay  
for Shiv  
Sainiks' hotels*

Sujata Anandan  
Mumbai, February 14

WHAT IS sauce for the goose is obviously not sauce for the gander. So, while Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray exhorts his Shiv Sainiks to disrupt Valentine's Day all over Mumbai, hotels controlled by Shiv Sainiks are going ahead with the celebration of love tonight.

The major embarrassment is two members of the Shiv Sena: Bombay Mayor Hareshwar Patil and Thackeray's daughter-in-law Smita. Their hotels in the far suburbs, The Chef in Dahisar and Green Village in Malad, respectively, have everything on the menu: drinks, dancing and special Valentine meals for two.

And both are confident that their Valentine's night will not be disrupted, at least by Shiv Sainiks. But some nosy reporters might come calling. So, after the distribution of a few invitations, both the managements are now shying away from admitting that they have written Valentine's Day collections into their books.

Smita Thackeray is on the board of the newly opened Green Village hotel in Malad. According to reports, she has assured its management that their celebrations will be uninterrupted.

But then Smita has not said much about being against Valentine's or otherwise. A spokesperson for her, though, told *The Hindustan Times* that she does not run the hotel. "Some partners are associated with it. She has nothing to do with their Valentine's day celebrations or anything".

One of the partners, Mr U. R. Shetty, though, seemed to think that Smita would keep the Sainiks off on Valentine's Day.

Mayor Patil, on the other hand, seems to have tied himself up in knots. He has described as "decadent" the culture of dancing together in a close clinch. But now he cannot explain away why The Chef, run by him in partnership with his brother - and already under investigation by the government for an alleged land scam - should have printed beckoning invitations to its Valentine's Day do.

He was earlier equally embarrassed when Thackeray had ordered the Indianisation of all western names but at least then was more honest. "I can hardly hope to extract clientele with a name like 'Shakahari Bhojanalaya'," he had said. Now he is simply in denial mode with the insistence that The Chef's bash is not happening. "I checked and they have no such function", he said. However, that leaves unexplained the printed menus for Valentine's Day celebrations that are floating around Mumbai.

• Another report on Page 3



Shiv Sena activists burn Valentine's Day cards and posters in the city on Wednesday. Photo: Subhendu Ghosh

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

13 FEB 2001

## Valentine's Day: Sangh parivar again clamours for Swadeshi

AMIT SHARMA  
LUCKNOW, FEB 11

96 712

WITH Valentine's Day fast approaching on Wednesday, the Sangh parivar's culture police is flexing muscles once again to "inculcate a feeling of swadeshi", into what they termed, "western culture-oriented minds".

With the Government backing them almost totally, a saffron brigade comprising activists of the Bajrang Dal and the Hindu Jagran Manch stormed into a few shops selling Valentine Day cards and damaged property.

### Thackeray sounds bugle - Pg 2

The police, the shop-owners alleged, remained a mute spectator, while the activists indulged in their destructive activities. "We will not allow western culture to invade our social values. We had announced in advance that sale of Valentine day cards will not be allowed because this is nothing but an expression of western model and the violators would have to face the consequences," one of the activists told *The Indian Express*.

The communally-sensitive Kanpur city has virtually become the headquarters of the Parivar's 'conscious-keepers' because all the

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

INDIAN EXPRESS

# 40-10 M Gujarat Govt. not to withdraw circular

By Our Special Correspondent

**AHMEDABAD, JAN. 20.** Even as the Congress today took out a protest rally, the controversy over the Gujarat Government's circular to schools to subscribe to a pro-RSS journal took a new turn with the education department insisting that the circular had not been withdrawn.

A spokesperson of the department said a second circular withdrawing the previous one was drafted at the instance of the then secretary, Mr. A.M. Bhardwaj, but was not issued to the schools.

Since Mr. Bhardwaj was suspended the

next day in connection with an alleged irregularity when he was the secretary of the civil supplies department in 1998, the revised circular stood cancelled. Considering the stand taken by the ruling BJP on the issue, there was no question of withdrawing the original circular, the spokesperson said.

Apparently encouraged by the success of the Opposition agitation last year, which had forced the Government to withdraw a similar pro-RSS circular, the Congress launched a State-wide agitation today with a rally in Ahmedabad led by the Pradesh

Congress president, Mr C.D. Patel, and the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Mr. Anarshih Chaudhary. "Copies" of the circular were burnt at the rally. Party leaders said they would not rest till it was withdrawn.

The BJP official spokesperson, Mr. Bharat Pandya, while reiterating Government support for the magazine, said there was no question of withdrawing the circular since it had only included the journal in the list of recognised publications, leaving it to the school managements' discretion whether or not to subscribe to it.

Meanwhile, several prominent citizens and literateurs in a letter to the Governor, Mr. Sunder Singh Bhandari, requested him to take up with the Government the withdrawal of the circular immediately and ensure that the Government machinery desisted from "such dangerously communal deeds."

Meanwhile, the United Christian For Human Rights convener, Father Cedric Prakash, said his organisation was likely to move the Gujarat High Court on Monday for directions to withdraw the circular if the Government failed to take the initiative till then.

THE HINDU

THE HINDU

21 JAN 2001

# ICHR fights History Congress tooth and nail over resolutions

DINDRILA MUKHERJEE  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Jan. 4. — With allegations flying to and fro, the close of the Indian History Congress' millennium session leaves more questions in its wake than answers.

Every resolution that was eventually passed by the congress was objected to by Mr BR Grover, the chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research.

The first resolution condemned the policy statement, "National Curriculum Framework Of School Education", recently issued by the NCERT. IHC members said the Framework sought to reduce the

study of history to a few selected areas, and was "designed to promote exclusivist and chauvinist ideas in young minds". The resolution stated: "With its emphasis on religion as the major source of value education, it undermines the values enshrined in the Indian Constitution".

Mr Grover wanted the resolution dropped "for the time being", until actual changes in syllabus were available for study. "Without knowing the content of the new or revised texts, a conclusion cannot be drawn," he said.

The ICHR's decision to suspend publication of the *Towards Freedom* volumes edited by Professors KN Pannikar and Sumit Sarkar drew

flak from the IHC. The resolution stated that the volumes had already been approved by the general editor, Prof S Gopal, and that the composition of the review committee left "justifiable doubt about its impartiality as well as competence". It further asked that the ban be lifted.

Mr Grover insisted that it was not a ban but a "temporary suspension". He said: "The first volume, edited by Prof Partha Sarathi Gupta, published in 1996, was found to have no index, plenty of spelling mistakes, and an unbalanced selection of

documents. There were around 400 documents about the Leftist government, and none about the Indian National Congress' role in the freedom struggle."

To Prof Sumit Sarkar's charge of incompetence, Mr Grover said: "The ICHR spent Rs 2 crore on these volumes. Don't we have the right to see the volumes when they go to press?" The matter is currently sub judice.

The third resolution dealt with the excavation of the Anup Talao at Fatehpur Sikri by the Archeological Survey of India. The resolution

alleged that the digging took place "without any reason or excuse".

Dr RC Agarwal, ICHR member in charge of the said excavation, said: "The digging was done one-and-a-half km away from Fatehpur Sikri. But IHC members did not let me point that out".

And Mr Grover added: "The excavation could not have been without reason. Who says that something could not exist beneath the Anup Talao? After all, Sikri was once a battlefield where Babar fought Rana Sanga".

In response to comments made by senior IHC members yesterday about ICHR chairman and members being "non-historians", Mr Grover said,

"Three of my books were published in the 1950s, *England and Europe*, *Public Administration*, and *Eighteenth Century Punjab Polity*. I was sectional president of the IHC in 1974, and served as director cum member secretary of ICHR when the Congress was in power. How can they make such allegations?"

With senior IHC members accusing the government of trying to distort history to suit their "hidden agenda of Hindu fundamentalism", and the ICHR chairman accusing the organisers of the session of using the IHC as a political forum to express their political views, the academic papers seemed to have become less important.

THE STATESMAN



# History & the enterprise of knowledge

By Amartya Sen



*There is also a systematic confounding here of mythology with history. An extraordinary example of this has been the interpretation of the Ramayana, not as a great epic but as documentary history which can be invoked to establish property rights over places and sites possessed and owned by others.*

IN AN often-quoted remark, Henry Ford, the great captain of industry, said, "History is more or less bunk". As a general statement about history, this is perhaps not an assessment of compelling delicacy. And yet Henry Ford would have been right to think, if that is what he meant, that history could easily become "bunk" through motivated manipulation.

This is especially so if the writing of history is manoeuvred to suit a slanted agenda in contemporary politics. There are organized attempts in our country, at this time, to do just that, with arbitrary augmentation of a narrowly sectarian view of India's past, along with undermining its magnificently multireligious and heterodox history. Among other distortions, there is also a systematic confounding here of mythology with history. An extraordinary example of this has been the interpretation of the Ramayana, not as a great epic, but as documentary history, which can be invoked to establish property rights over places and sites possessed and owned by others.

The Ramayana, which Rabindranath Tagore had seen as a wonderful legend ("the story of the Ramayana" is to be interpreted, as Tagore put it, not as "a matter of historical fact" but "in the plane of ideas") and in fact as a marvellous parable of "reconciliation", is now made into a legally authentic account that gives some members of one community an alleged entitlement to particular sites and land, amounting to a license to tear down the religious places of other communities.

I note the contemporary confounding of historical studies in India as the starting point of this lecture, even though I shall not be directly concerned with addressing these distortions. Instead, I shall be concerned with outlining some methodological issues that relate to the subject of truth and falsehood in general history. I will also try to develop and defend a view of history as "an enterprise of knowledge".

There will be occasions to take a fresh look at India's persistent heterodoxy, which includes not only its tendency towards multireligious and multicultural coexistence (a point emphasized in Rabindranath Tagore's "vision of India's history"), but also its relevance for the development of science and mathematics in India. For history is not only an enterprise of knowledge in itself, it cannot but have a special involvement with the history of other enterprises of knowledge.

The view of history as an enterprise of knowledge is, of course, very old-fashioned: I am not trying to innovate anything whatsoever. However, this and related epistemic approaches to history have taken some hard knocks over the last few decades. These have come not so much from sectarian bigots (who have barely addressed issues of method), but in the hands of sophisticated methodologists who are not only sceptical of the alleged virtues of modernity and objectivity (often for understandable reasons), but have ended up being deeply suspicious also of the idea of "truth" or "falsehood" in history. They have been keen, in particular, to emphasize the relativity of perspectives and the ubiquity of different points of view...

Indeed, describing the past is like all other reflective judgments, which have to take note of the demands of veracity and the discipline of knowledge. The discipline includes the study of knowledge formation, including the history of science (and the constructive influences that are important in the cultivation of science) and also the history of histories (where differences in perspective call for disciplined scrutiny and are of importance themselves as objects of study)...

A good point of departure is to ask: why is history so often invoked in popular discussions? Also, what can the general public get from history? Why, we must also ask, is history such a battleground?...

Historical connections are often invoked in the context of contemporary politics and policies. Indeed, present-day attitudes in politics and society are often strongly influenced by the reading — or misreading — of the history of past events. For example, sectarian tensions build frequently on grievances (spontaneous or cultivated) linked to past deeds (real or imagined) of one group against another. Since these uses of history are aimed primarily at contemporary acts and strategies, the countering arguments which too invoke

history, though in the opposite direction, also end up being inescapably linked to current affairs. Given the dialectical context, we may be forced to take an interest in historical disputations on battlegrounds that have been chosen by others — not ourselves.

For example, in defending the role of secularism in contemporary India, it is not in any way essential to make any claim whatsoever about how India's Mughal rulers behaved — whether they were sectarian or assimilative, whether they were oppressive or tolerant. Yet in the political discussions that have accompanied the activist incursions of communal politics in contemporary India (well illustrated, for example, by the rhetoric that accompanied the demolition of the Babri Masjid), a heavily carpentered characterization of the Mughal rule as anti-Hindu was repeatedly invoked. Since this characterization was to a great extent spurious and based on arbitrary selection, to leave that point unaddressed would have, in the context of the on going debate, amounted to a negligence in practical reason, and not just an epistemic abstinence...

Underlying the political debates, there is often enough a deeper issue related to the way we construct and characterize our own identities, in which too historical knowledge — or alleged knowledge — can play an important part. Our sense of identity is strongly influenced by our understanding of our past. We do not, of course, have a personal past prior to our birth, but our self-perceptions are associated with the shared history of the members of a particular group to which we think we "belong" and with which we "identify". Our allegiances draw on the evocation of histories of our identity groups.

A scrutiny of this use of history cannot be independent of the philosophical question as to whether our identities are primarily matters of "discovery" (as many "communitarian" thinkers claim), or whether they are to a significant extent matters of selection and choice (of course, within given constraints — as indeed all choices inescapably are). Arguments that rely on the assumption of the unique centrality of one's community-based identity survive by privileging — typically implicitly — that identity over other identities (which may be connected with, say, class, or gender, or language, or political commitments, or cultural influences). In consequence, they restrict the domain of one's alleged "historical roots" in a truly dramatic way. Thus, the increasing search for a Hindu view of Indian history not only has problems with epistemic veracity, but also involves the philosophical problem of categorical oversimplification.

It would, for example, have problems in coming to terms with, say, Rabindranath Tagore's description of his own background as "a confluence of three cultures, Hindu, Mohammedan and British". No less importantly, it cannot but be in some tension with the sense of pride that an Indian may choose to have, irrespective of his or her own religious background, at the historical achievements of, say, Ashoka or Akbar, or Kalidasa or Kabir, or Aryabhata or Bhaskara. To deny the role of reasoned choice, which can draw on the knowledge of the past, can be a very serious loss indeed. Even those who want to identify with India's historical achievements and perhaps take some pride in them (a legitimate enough concern) must also examine critically what to take pride in, since it is easy to be misled into a narrow alley through incitements to ignore India's capacious heterodoxy in favour of a constricted sectarian identity.

While discovery and choice compete as the basis of identity, knowledge and choice are essentially complementary to each other. Engagement with issues of identity enriches the enterprise of knowledge and extends its reach.

History is not only an enterprise of knowledge, its subject matter includes other enterprises of knowledge. The issue of heterodoxy, to which reference was made earlier, is particularly important here. Indeed, I would argue that there is a general connection between intellectual heterodoxy and the pursuit of science, and that this connection deserves more attention than it tends to get.

Heterodoxy is important for scientific advance because new ideas and discov-

eries have to emerge initially as heterodox views, at variance with established understanding. One need reflect only on the history of the scientific contributions of, say, Galileo or Newton or Darwin, to see the role of heterodoxy. The history of science is integrally linked with heterodoxy.

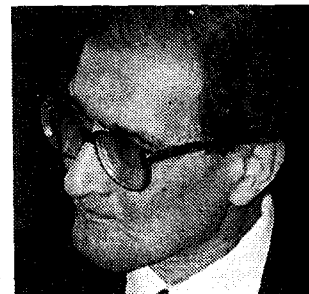
If this interpretation is correct, then the roots of the flowering of Indian science and mathematics that occurred in and around the Gupta period (beginning particularly with Aryabhata and Varahamihira) can be intellectually associated with persistent expressions of heterodoxies which pre-existed these contributions. In fact, Sanskrit and Pali have a larger literature in defence of atheism, agnosticism and theological scepticism than any other classical language.

The origins of mathematical and scientific developments in the Gupta period are often traced to earlier works in mathematics and science in India, and this is indeed worth investigating, despite the historical mess that has been created recently by the ill-founded championing of the so-called "Vedic mathematics" and "Vedic sciences", based on very little evidence. What has, I would argue, more claim to attention as a precursor of scientific advances in the Gupta period is the tradition of scepticism that can be found in pre-Gupta India — going back to at least the sixth century B.C. — particularly in matters of religion and epistemic orthodoxy. Indeed, the openness of approach that allowed Indian mathematicians and scientists to learn about the state of these professions in Babylon, Greece and Rome, which are cited in early Indian astronomy (particularly in the Siddhantas), can also be seen as a part of this inclination towards heterodoxy...

The expression of hereticism and heterodoxy patiently — if somewhat grudgingly — recorded even in the Ramayana (for example, in the form of Javali's advice to Rama to defy his father's odd promise) presents methodological reasons to be sceptical of the orthodox position in this field... In fact, Javali's disputation goes deeply into scientific methodology and the process of acquiring of knowledge: There is no after-world, nor any religious practice for attaining that. Follow what is within your experience and do not trouble yourself with what lies beyond the province of human experience. As it happens, the insistence that we rely only on observation and experience is indeed a central issue in the departures in astronomy — initiated by Aryabhata and others — from established theological cosmology.

The departures presented in his book Aryabhata, completed in 421 Saka or 499 A.D., which came to be discussed exten-

*The incursion of sectarian orthodoxy in Indian history involves two distinct problems, narrow sectarianism and unreasoned orthodoxy. The enterprise of knowledge is threatened by both.*



sively by mathematicians and astronomers who followed Aryabhata (particularly Varahamihira, Brahmagupta and Bhaskara, and were also discussed in their Arabic translations), included, among others: (1) Aryabhata's advocacy of the diurnal motion of the earth (rather than the apparent rotation of the sun around it), (2) a corresponding theory of gravity to explain why objects are not thrown out as the earth churns, (3) recognition of the parametric variability of the concept of "up" and "down" depending on where one is located on the globe, and (4) explanation of lunar and solar eclipses in terms respectively of the earth's shadow on the moon and the moon's obscuring of the sun. Observational arguments, based on what Javali calls "the province of human experience", are central to the departures initiated by Aryabhata in these and related fields (more on this presently). In the enterprise of knowledge involving the natural sciences, the intellectual connections between scepticism, heterodoxy and observational insistence, on the one hand, and manifest scientific advances, on the other, require much further exploration and scrutiny than they seem to have received so far.

The observational issue is important also for the particular subject of history of histories, or metahistories (as we may call them). Given the importance of perspectives in historical writings, history of histories can tell us a great deal not only about the subject of those writings, but also about their authors and the traditions and perspectives they reflect. For example, James Mill's "The History of British India", published in 1817, tells us probably as much about imperial Britain as about India. This three-volume history, written by Mill without visiting India (Mill seemed to think that this non-visit made his history more objective), played a major role in introducing the British Governors of India (such as the influential Macaulay) to a particular char-

acterization of the country. There is indeed much to learn from Mill's history — not just about India, but more, in fact, about the perspective from which this history was written. This is an illustration of the general point that the presence of positionality and observational perspective need not weaken the enterprise of knowledge, and may in fact help to extend its reach.

James Mill disputed and rejected practically every claim ever made on behalf of Indian culture and intellectual traditions, but paid particular attention to dismissing Indian scientific works. Mill was particularly dismissive of the alleged scientific and mathematical works in India. It is, in fact, interesting to compare Mill's History with another history of India, called Ta'rikh al-hind (written in Arabic eight hundred years earlier, in the 11th century) by the Iranian mathematician Alberuni. Alberuni, who was born in Central Asia in 973 A.D., and mastered Sanskrit after coming to India, studied Indian texts on mathematics, natural sciences, literature, philosophy, and religion. Alberuni writes clearly on the invention of the decimal system in India (as do other Arab authors) and also about Aryabhata's theories on earth's rotation, gravitation, and related subjects. These writings contrast sharply with Mill's history from a dominant colonial perspective, well established by the beginning of the nineteenth century...

Several Indian works on medicine, science and philosophy had Arabic rendering by the 9th century, and so on. It was through the Arabs that the Indian decimal system and numerals reached Europe, as did Indian writings in mathematics, science and literature, in general...

The connection between heterodoxy and scientific advance is indeed close, and big departures in science require methodological independence as well as analytical and constructive skill. Even though Aryabhata, Varahamihira and Brahmagupta were all dead for many hundred years before Alberuni was writing on their controversies and their implications, nevertheless Alberuni's carefully critical scientific history helps to bring out the main issues involved, and in particular the need for heterodoxy as well as moral courage in pursuit of science.

To conclude, I have tried to illustrate the different ways in which history has relevance for non-historians — indeed the general public.

First, there are diverse grounds for the public's involvement with history, which include (1) the apparently simple attractions of epistemic interest, (2) the contentious correlates of practical reason, and (3) the scrutiny of identity-based thinking. All

of them — directly or indirectly — involve and draw on the enterprise of knowledge.

Second, history is not only itself an enterprise of knowledge, its domain of study incorporates all other enterprises of knowledge, including the history of science. In this context, it is easy to see the role of heterodoxy and methodological independence in scientific advance. The intellectual connections between heterodoxy (especially theological scepticism) and scientific pursuits (especially big scientific departures) deserve more attention in the history of sciences in India.

Third, metahistories — or histories of histories — also bring out the relevance of an appropriate climate for the enterprise of knowledge. The pursuit of knowledge not only requires an open mind (the contrast between Alberuni's scientific interest and Mill's colonial predispositions radically differentiate their treatments of the same subject matter), it also requires an inclination to accept heterodoxy and the courage to stand up against orthodoxy. The plurality of perspectives extends the domain of the enterprise of knowledge rather than undermining the possibility of that enterprise.

Since the rewriting of Indian history from the slanted perspective of sectarian orthodoxy not only undermines historical objectivity, but also militates against the spirit of scientific scepticism and intellectual heterodoxy, it is important to emphasize the centrality of scepticism and heterodoxy in the pursuit of scientific knowledge. The incursion of sectarian orthodoxy in Indian history involves two distinct problems, (1) narrow sectarianism, and (2) unreasoned orthodoxy. The enterprise of knowledge is threatened by both.

(Excerpts from Dr. Sen's inaugural address to the 61st annual session of the Indian History Congress, Kolkata, Jan. 2. Dr. Sen is Master of Trinity College, Cambridge and Lamont University Professor Emeritus, Harvard University.)

# ICHR:

(Continued from page 1)

the ICHR. "The review committee is interfering with the IHC's day-to-day activities," said a source. IHC secretary Prof. Shireen Moosvi enumerated four main resolutions that will be announced officially at tomorrow's meeting, after being passed by the executive committee tonight. The first deals with the NCERT's proposal to change the history syllabus in schools and introduce new textbooks from the primary level.

"This is an attempt by obscurantist revivalists to distort history to suit their ends. For instance, the hind view of a bull, whose image figures on a Harappan seal, has been altered by computers to resemble a horse. Historians who study history on scientific lines, know that the horse was not a part of the Harappan civilisation. This is an attempt to absorb Harappa into the Vedic civilisation," an IHC member said. "The Murli Manohar Joshi team recommends the changes to manipulate impressionable minds from the primary level itself".

Another resolution condemns the excavation of the Fatehpur Sikri cellar by the Archaeological Survey of India. Prof. Moosvi said: "In order to find a Jain temple, they destroyed the cellar of a monument declared

a World Cultural Heritage by the Unesco".

The third resolution states that worship should not be allowed in any historical monument, unless it has already been continuing. Prof. Moosvi pointed out that this was in keeping with the ASI's constitution.

The IHC will also pass a resolution on the Towards Freedom volumes of "Documents on the Movement of Independence in India", edited by Partha Sarathi Gupta, Sumit Sarkar and KN Panikkar. The volumes were reportedly ready for release in 1998, when the ICHR, prompted by the review committee, wrote to OUP asking them to send the manuscripts for "perusal".

IHC members see this as an infringement of the right to free speech. The volumes document the role played by the Congress and Communists in the freedom movement, which is why the present government blocked their release. "The review committee chairman, Mr AK Ray, is a retired diplomat, with no background in history. What expertise do they have to review the work of the likes of Panikkar?" one of them said.

Although the IHC has received funds from the ministry of education, its members said it was clear that the IHC is not in the ministry's good books.

THE STATESMAN

4 JAN 2001

# Non-historian' tag on ICHR bigwigs

ONDRIKA MUKHERJEE  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Jan. 3. — "Leave History to Historians" is the unofficial motto of the Indian History Congress's 61st session. There was "a sharp polarisation" between "secular" historians and "the revivalists or saffron brigade, who are not sound historians", said a senior IHC member, who did not wish to be named.

The divide has now narrowed to a Centre versus IHC debate. The chairman of the Indian

Council of Historical Research, Mr BR Grover, yesterday said the IHC was using the present session as a political forum where speakers were expressing their political views.

An IHC office bearer today retorted: "Mr Grover is not a professor. He has no PhD and no books to his name. His sister, Ms A Grover, too, is not a professor and has never presented a paper anywhere." Senior IHC members, held in

high esteem by other historians, have gone on record saying that the ICHR, an autonomous body wholly funded by the Centre, is constituted of "non-historians". Prof. Suraj Bhan, department of Archaeology, Kurukshetra University; Prof. HC Satyarthi of Muzaffarpur University; Prof. KK Sharma of Muzaffarpur; and Prof. KL Tuteja, dean of Kurukshetra University, see

most members of the ICHR's governing body as "third-rate historians, whose writings have not made an impact". Some of the ICHR councillors they named are Hari Om, who contested the last elections on a BJP ticket from Jammu; KS Lal and VP Sinha, who served on the VHP committee set up to determine the existence of a temple at Ayodhya; and SC Mittal who reportedly was an RSS activist in Kurukshetra.

Mr Grover, however, refused

to comment on the allegations. The IHC member who wished

to remain anonymous, said: "The Council was reconstituted in June 1998, after the BJP came to power. None of the earlier members, including Prof. KN Panikkar and Prof. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, were re-appointed, though eligible for a second term."

On the eve of the IHC's business meeting, where resolutions will be passed, most of the members' wrath is aimed at

■ See ICHR: page 8

THE STATESMAN  
4 JAN 2001

# Sen hits out at Sangh Parivar for trying to 'rewrite history'

**The Times of India News Service**  
**KOLKATA:** They studied in the same college, but not at the same time. They studied literature and economics and have today reached the top in their chosen fields.

On Tuesday, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, former West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu and present incumbent Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee shared the same dais to express their views on a different subject—history.

Speaking at the inaugural session of the 61st and 'Millennium' Indian History Congress (IHC) on Tuesday, the trio launched a subtle, and some times scathing, attack on the Sangh Parivar and the rightist forces for "trying to misguide and brainwash the people" and attempting to "rewrite history and destroy the very entity that is India".

Quoting Henry Ford who once said "history is more or less bunk", Mr Sen in his inaugural address said, "As a general statement about history, this is perhaps not an assessment of compelling delicacy. Yet Ford would have been right to think, if that is what he meant, that

history could easily become 'bunk' through motivated manipulation." It was, as the galaxy of historians present at the venue observed, an obvious, though subtle, reference to the Sangh Parivar's attempts at 'rewriting history'.

Mr Sen's message to those arguing that Lord Rama was born at the exact spot where the Babri Masjid stood was clear: "It is not history that they are misusing but fables, myths and legends that are being called 'history' and then misused," he said.

Mr Sen quoted extensively from the early mediaeval Iranian scholar, Al Beruni's writings on India to show that history writing was objective only when the historian based his observations "after visiting a particular place. One cannot simply construe history and historical development in ones mind and then claim that to be the truth," he said.

In his speech, Mr Basu spoke about the saffronisation of education with particular reference to the attempts by the RSS to rewrite history. "Unfortunately, some religious

# Parivar for trying to 'rewrite history'

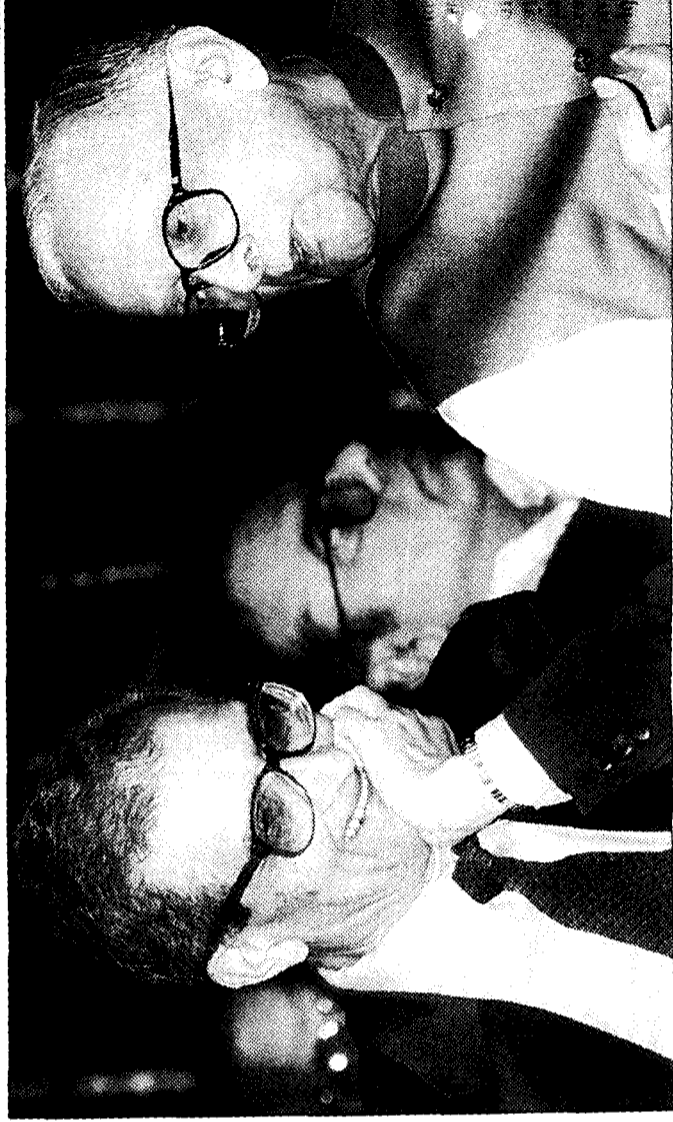
fanatics under the guise of historians, are using history today as a tool to take us backward. It is the duty of bodies like the IHC to come forward and help us in combating these evil forces," he said.

Mr Basu said the Sangh Parivar's "paid scholars" had drawn new maps of India in their own text books, where Myanmar, Bangladesh, Pakistan and parts of Nepal were shown to be a part of India. "I wonder what the people of these countries will have to say about it," he added.

Regarding the demolition of the Babri Masjid, Mr Basu said he would be presenting the audio tapes of top BJP leaders justifying the demolition to the Liberham Commission later this month.

Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee also joined in urging all professional and thinking historians to ensure that efforts to rewrite history were nipped in the bud.

The general sessions of the IHC began later in the day at the Alipore camps of the Calcutta University. Deliberations will continue till Thursday.



**Nobel laureate Amartya Sen (left) speaks with former West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu during the inauguration of the 61st annual session of the History Congress in Calcutta on Tuesday.**

Reuters

# Ramayana being misread, says Sen

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Jan. 2. — There has been a systematic distortion of mythology and history in modern India to further the sectarian interests of certain political and cultural outfits in the country, Prof. Amartya Sen, today said at the inauguration of the 61st annual session of the Indian History Congress here.

He cited the case of the Ramayana, which, he said, had not been interpreted as a great epic but used as a document of history to justify the demolition of the Babari Masjid.

His observation was opposed by the chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research

(ICHR), Prof. BR Grover, who said the Nobel laureate could not be taken seriously as he was a "non-historian".

Prof. Sen said the recent dominance of politics over history had seriously undermined the importance of knowledge in this discipline. The world came to know about Indian civilisation and culture through the works of Al Beruni, who wrote about the invention of the decimal system in India and about Aryabhata's theories on the earth's rotation and gravitation, he said.

Prof. Romila Thapar, Prof. Irfan Habib and Prof. Shirin Moosvi were present at the session, along with Mr Buddha-dev Bhattacharya and Mr Jyoti Basu.

The present and the former chief ministers rued that some historians had used history to propagate fundamentalism. Mr Bhattacharya said attempts had been made by different quarters to divert popular attention from caste-class convergence, gender equality and the nature of the freedom struggle, to "mandir-masjid-church" issues.

The ICHR chairman said: "Prof. Sen has every right to comment, but his comments should not be taken seriously since he is not a historian. I do not agree with politicians passing a verdict. This forum is being used for political propaganda. Speakers like Mr Basu, Mr Bhattacharya and Prof. Sen

have been expressing political views at what should be an academic forum." He said the real question was whether the temple existed at the 'controversial' site.

His sister, Prof. Amrita Grover, said: "The onus for the demolition of the Babari Masjid cannot be on this government alone as the controversy existed during British rule. Even British authors have testified to the existence of the temple at the site."

She said Prof. Sen's statements were "a complete misinterpretation of the situation" and that the IHC was deliberately inviting politicians

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