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Don't let ideology distort the facts

Rajasthan's rewritten textbooks have changed history altogether

The case of the new Rajasthan textbooks is yet another chapter in the attempted politicisation of education in India. This is not the first time that changing content in textbooks has created news.

The textbooks in question claim that the lotus is a symbol of Indian culture, even going so far as to say, "Symbolically, the victory of the lotus is the victory of Indian culture over the western world... Under the subhead of 'meat consumption and health', a chapter on the effects of modern lifestyle on health reads, "Due to lack of social values and virtues in modern life, the dietary habits of people are changing and meat consumption causes a lot of harm to the body." Other than attempting to indoctrinate students with the values of certain headline Hindutva groups, the textbooks also take liberties with the history of the country. Veer Savarkar has been given pride of place, while relegating Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru to the sidelines of the freedom movement.

While it is understandable that each political party has its own ideology that it would like to propagate, there must be checks and balances in the system to ensure that the facts of history are not changed in school textbooks with every change of government. To suggest that all historians have thus far conspired to make one party look good or to claim that Gandhi and Nehru had nothing but a negligible role to play in shaping the history of India is to totally distort the facts. To encourage students to believe that consuming meat causes harm to the body is to make several thousand students who come from meat-eating families to feel inferior and under pressure to conform to beliefs that are not even scientifically corroborated.

The solution to this problem of politicising textbooks is to remove government interference in institutions such as education boards, especially in school education. While the arguments of the merits of one political or religious ideology over another are all very well for political parties, our students deserve better than indoctrination that claims that the political symbol of the ruling party is a symbol of "victory" of our culture over others.

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Astana's message: No more room for terror

New Delhi should use the SCO to moderate Beijing's influence in the region

Two years after the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation formally began the process, India has finally joined as a full-fledged member. The Astana summit in Kazakhstan also saw the parallel entry of Pakistan into the SCO, effectively spreading the boundaries of this Eurasian multilateral body all the way to the Indian Ocean. Prime Minister Narendra Modi made it a point to speak about the importance of countering terrorism in what amounted to India's inaugural address as an SCO member. This partly harks back to the 1996 charter of the so-called Shanghai Five under the title Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions. The SCO is a direct descendant of that nascent body and the then threat was the ethnic and political instability caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Today, it is the collapse of the Islamic State, the forever war in Afghanistan and Pakistan's sponsorship of terrorism that pose security challenges for the SCO membership. Which highlights another reason why India's mention of terrorism was appropriate – it reminded the SCO members that Pakistan is as much part of the problem as it is part of the solution.

India's has a broad interest in being at the table of any multilateral security and political body that is in its wider neighbourhood. The world is now afloat with an alphabet soup of new multilateral bodies, reflecting the decline of a US-dominated world order and the rise of new regional powers and threats. Sensibly, most governments want to be part of as many of them as possible if only because they are uncertain if one of these bodies becomes vitally important in the future. If so, they want to be part of the decision-making and agenda-deciding process. The SCO is one of these bodies that is both potentially significant but also amorphous in its present state. New Delhi should help add to the SCO's future agenda, especially if it can be used to channel China's preponderant influence in the region in non-threatening ways.

straightforward

SHASHI SHEKHAR



We don't need more Mandsaurs

Owing to political apathy towards farmers, the fires of dissatisfaction are raging in the country

What happened in Mand-saur last week is highly regrettable, but the flames of agrarian distress are singeing many parts of the country. The reason? For a large part of our population that resides in villages and small towns, a powerful Indian nation-state remains a dream. Shouldn't we be ashamed that a country that calls itself an agricultural nation doesn't even have a proper national agricultural policy?

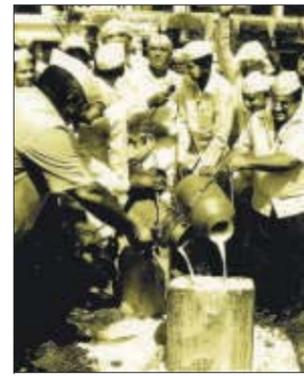
From 1947 to now, every government has just treated farmers as a vote bank. That's why villages are being deserted and cities groaning under the weight of unwelcome migrants. Politicians from big metro cities keep blaming migrants for the breakdown of their infrastructure. They forget that these outsiders haven't arrived in cities out of choice but they are victims of circumstance.

Recently when farmers from Tamil Nadu were protesting at Delhi's Jantar Mantar, they went to painful lengths to draw the media's attention. Some people called their agitation politically motivated. Shouldn't they be asked why farmers had to drink urine, eat mice or wear a chain of human skulls to draw people's attention towards their cause? Were the farmers from Punjab who littered

the national highway with thousands of tonnes of tomatoes also trying to create needless drama? Were the UP farmers whose potatoes rotted lying on the road politically motivated? Those who protested by pouring milk on Maharashtra's roads were beleaguered farmers, not callous politicians. How long will we keep ridiculing the truth?

After news emerged of five sons of the soil being shot dead in Mand-saur, I spoke to farmers in my village, in Mainpuri district. The bowl of dal has vanished from the tables of people. They make ends meet by having lunch and dinner that includes potatoes and locally grown green vegetables. There's a water scarcity as the wells had dried up many years ago. Today you have to dig very deep to even operate a hand-pump. The water is so saline it is impossible to drink. Women and children are malnourished. There was a time they broke into a dance at the sight of clouds in the sky. Today they get anxious thinking that even if the Almighty made every season conducive for agriculture, they may not manage to sell their crop.

For them loan waivers are not a long-term cure for a festering wound: just first-aid. Though Madhya Pradesh, where farmers are agitating, has displayed the highest growth rate in agriculture in the last five years. In 2014



Farmers pour milk on a road during a protest in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra

the growth reached 25% when it was around 4% in the rest of India. Despite such incredible agricultural growth, the farmers neither got the prices they deserved, nor the buyers.

If after every harvest the loan appears to increase rather than decrease, the farmers' anger appears justified. Statistics from the National Crime Records Bureau say 3,18,528 farmers committed suicide in India between 1995 and 2015. Similarly, between 2001 and 2011, nine million farmers left their ancestral homes and migrated to cities. A study sug-

gests more than 2,000 farmers head to cities every day to make a living. Why are human rights bodies and those who shed tears about terrorism blind to their plight?

Let us analyse the farmers' fury now. The outbreak of violence in Mand-saur was coming. The agitation began in Maharashtra on June 1 and the very next day spread to Madhya Pradesh. The problem with governments is that instead of finding a long-term solution they treat farmers' agitation as a law and order issue while taking decisions. If this wasn't the case and people in responsible positions not reacted childishly, those killed in Mand-saur would not have become victims of police firing. Until when will they keep the truth concealed?

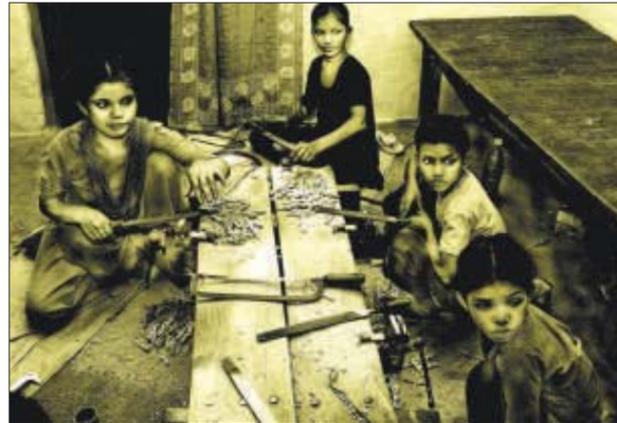
There was a time when Ram Manohar Lohia brought down his own government after farmers were shot at. Since then the manner in which the attitudes of politicians have changed is evident from the reactions in the aftermath of the Jantar Mantar and Mand-saur agitations.

No single politician or party but the entire power-hungry political establishment should be held accountable for this. That is why fires of dissatisfaction are raging in different parts of the country.

The time has come for New Delhi and state leaderships to think seriously about this issue. The police or paramilitary forces of independent India don't look good firing on their own people. We don't need more Mandsaurs.

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CHILDHOOD LOST



The new child labour Act does not clearly define family enterprises and leaves room for interpretations, exploited by those engaging children for work (Representational photo)

Child labour is on the rise in drought-hit states

More than 164 million Indian children affected by disasters last year were left vulnerable and in great danger



The colours of child labour have many touching hues. Shivani (name changed) from Lalitpur district in Uttar Pradesh has a story of anguish to share. When Shivani's father died due to an illness, two years ago, she was 13. He had left behind a debt of Rs 1 lakh. Shivani, along with her four sisters and mother, are now paying back the debt as well as earning their livelihood. "The family has mortgaged a part of their land and her mother has sold off her jewellery. Shivani was forced to drop out from school and now works in the farm. Shivani is among millions of children who have lost their childhood dreams due to drought and are working to support their families.

The theme of this year's World Day Against Child Labour on June 12 is the impact of conflicts on child labour. According to a recent estimate, more than 164 million children were affected by drought last year. The most vulnerable among them – girl children – have been pushed into child marriage, child labour, abduction and trafficking. Marathwada alone has seen 3,500 children sucked into child labour and trafficking.

Drought and the ongoing water crisis have left children defenceless. According to a UNICEF's report, children and elderly were

left behind in drought-affected villages, while adults migrated to the states of Maharashtra and Odisha. Deprived families saw children as earning members. Trafficking (Odisha) and child marriages (Maharashtra and Telangana) have seen a rise in drought-prone states.

Through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which has been agreed and signed by India, the government has committed that by 2030, all girls and boys will complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

The government also guarantees that it will take immediate and effective measures to eliminate child labour by 2025. Records of child labour, drought and exclusions have every potential to overpower these commitments.

The amendment to the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act passed in July 2016 by Parliament does not clearly define family enterprises and leaves room for interpretations, which are exploited by those engaging children to work. According to Census 2011, there are more than 4.3 million cases of child labour in the country. However, these could be underestimates.

Governments should take immediate steps to set up institutional mechanisms and strengthen village social infrastructure to protect children affected by droughts and civil unrest. Or else, many more like Shivani may lose out on their childhood.

Joseph Wesley is a child protection specialist with World Vision India. The views expressed are personal.

pulp-it

R SUKUMAR



Still awaiting a business that defines the 2010s

The two preceding decades saw an industry or two emerge and grow. Will this decade also end on a high?

This decade – we are three years from its end – will be different from the 1990s and 2000s in India. Both those decades saw the economy expand sharply in the middle years, before slowing towards the end. That mid-decade bump has, unfortunately, been absent in the 2010s. There are good reasons why that did not happen – some have to do with India: some with the rest of the world – but for the purpose of this column it is adequate to just say that it did not happen.

The 2010s have been different in another way as well. Each of the two preceding decades saw an industry, maybe two, perhaps even three, emerge and grow. Many of these were relatively new industries that were around at the beginning of the decade but really came into their own during it.

In the 1990s, it was the turn of IT services and pharmaceuticals. India's IT services companies, Wipro Ltd, Infosys Ltd and Tata Consultancy Services Ltd, all came into their own in the 1990s. They grew in that decade, and grew faster in the decade that followed, creating shareholder value, wealth, and jobs.

India's copy-cat drugs or generics industry, again, took off in the 1990s, although it had been around for some time. Ranbaxy Laboratories Ltd, Dr Reddy's Laboratories Ltd and Cipla Ltd rode the wave in the 1990s and part of the 2000s.

Interestingly, both businesses are under stress now. Still, they did end the 1990s, even the 2000s on a high.

In the 2000s, it was the turn of telecom and private banking.

India's telcos grew rapidly after the government announced a move to a new revenue-sharing policy, and away from the previous licence fee regime, in 1999. Bharti Airtel Ltd and Vodafone India Ltd (which spent part of the decade in its earlier avatar as Hutchison Essar) were the companies at the forefront of the telecom boom. They engineered the mobile boom that, apart from cre-

ating wealth and jobs, also spawned allied industries. Today's fin-tech biggie, Paytm, was then a so-called Value Added Services provider, offering cricket scores and other content through phone messages on demand.

Private banks had been around for some time, but the 2000s saw them grow rapidly. HDFC Bank Ltd and ICICI Bank Ltd drove this growth.

Both businesses are at the crossroads now. Incumbent telcos are under financial pressure after being disrupted by an aggressive and well-funded new entrant which itself will not be making money anytime soon. The banks, similarly, face disruption by fin-tech firms, some of which have morphed into a new kind of bank (Paytm has now become a payments bank) even as they cope with the larger stress of bad loans that could cripple the Indian banking system.

Still, both businesses, telecom and private banking, did end the 2010s on a high.

A minor digression would be in order here. The 2000s also saw the rise of India's infrastructure companies, many, coincidentally, based in Hyderabad. Then, it also saw their decline. Thus, entities such as IVRCL Ltd and GVK Industries Ltd that were labelled companies to watch at the beginning of the decade ended the decade with the same label, but for entirely different reasons.

You know where I am going with this, Constant Reader.

Which are the businesses that have defined this decade, and, more importantly, will end it on a high? We are looking for businesses that have grown rapidly through the decade, created lots of jobs, and that will, by the end of the decade, be highly profitable. By then, they should have also created shareholder wealth.

With two-and-half years to go, we have candidates, yes, but no strong ones. By this time in the corresponding decades, it was easy to pick the businesses.

In June 1997, eight people out of 10 would have picked IT and pharma. In June 2007, 10 out of 10 would have picked telecom and private banking.

E-commerce is the only obvious candidate, but is still unprofitable, and given the economics of the business, unlikely to turn profitable anytime soon.

We are still looking – and that is just another problem with the 2010s.

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innervoice

THE DYING ART OF HAVING MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS

Ayushi Singh

We've all read the famous Stephen Covey quote, "Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply", on our social media newsfeed and wondered how true it is, when we relate it to our own set of experiences. Yet somewhere it is us, who fail to indulge in a "good" conversation precisely because of the lack of listening.

In this era of WhatsApp statuses, Facebook feeds and Snapchat stories, we all want

to be heard. Yet surprisingly we do not want to listen. Today, real discussions and discourses have become difficult. We are so immersed in our own sorrows that listening to other people's problems, stories or opinions is of little importance to us. In the middle of a conversation, people start equating the speaker's sorrow with their own. Even though it is likely that you have been hit with a similar experience, the speaker's insight could have something to offer. It could be a different perspective, a angle, a different justification or maybe a twist in the plot.

We need to understand that experiences are different for everyone. It is natural to get distracted in the middle of a conversation because thoughts strike in at the most random of all occasions. It is important to brush these thoughts aside to be in the conversation because, you cannot truly listen to anyone and do anything else at the same time. So listen, with full attention.

(Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers.)

The views expressed are personal

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