

Gist of EPW July Week 1, 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- [1. Re-emergence of Gender as a Political Category](#)
- [2. Whose History Is It Anyway?](#)

1. Re-emergence of Gender as a Political Category

Introduction

- Nitish Kumar-led Janata Dal (United) announced the provision of 33% reservation of seats for women students in engineering and medical colleges run by the state through the Bihar Engineering University Act 2021 and the Bihar University of Health Sciences Bill in the upcoming assembly.
- The proposed bill is in continuity with the JD(U)'s promise of Sasakth Mahila-Saksham Mahila in its manifesto for the Bihar assembly elections in 2020.

Voter Categories and Electoral Arithmetics

- State-constituted categories, such as the Extremely Backward Class and Most Backward Class have saturated in terms of electoral potential aiming political majorities.
- These categories have struggled against the monopoly of upper castes in educational institutions but have no strong significance in present times other than in electoral arithmetic.

Gender Outlook for Political Gains

- The proposed bill has the intent of increasing the participation of women students and preventing education-led migration.
- The bill, together with other measures in the manifesto such as financial incentives for higher education and for women entrepreneurs, can be seen as a shift in the perception of women's role in the economy. However, issues of loan waivers for [self-help groups](#), mostly run by women, or land redistribution and ownership by women, are only on the fringes of political discourse.
- The demands of women have been often selectively represented to align with the good governance agenda of the government.
- The bill along with the policies aimed at women, such as reservation of seats in panchayats, and restrictions on the sale of liquor ascertains **women voters as a significant factor in elections**.
- Women voters outnumbered men in percentage terms, between 2005 and 2020, showing the reduction in the gender gap in elections, especially in the BIMARU states like Bihar.

Re-emergence

- In Indian politics, gender emerged as a political category in the 1920s.
- However, the re-emergence of gender since the 1990s needs critical evaluation.
- The re-emergence of gender as a political category needs a perspective that is based on ground ethnographic studies.

Overview

- Women's demands in today's day require a framework of rights that is structured beyond the political fittings of gender for electoral arithmetics.
- Also, women's demands need an all-inclusive rights framework and not patronage as is sometimes suggested in schemes that seem to further patriarchal norms such as schemes offering financial incentives for marriage.
- The proposed bill ensures some space in the direction of the reduced gender gap but it still segregates women, who will or will not gain from the bill.

2. Whose History Is It Anyway?

Context

This article highlights the implications of the recommendations of a report currently being considered by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education pertaining to school history books.

Public Policy Research Centre Report

- The Public Policy Research Centre (PPRC) prepared the report "Distortion and Misrepresentation of India's Past: History Textbooks and Why They Need to Change" in June 2021.
- Mr. Vinay Sahasrabudde is one of the most prominent members of the PPRC's board of directors, who is also a [Rajya Sabha](#) member and a national vice president of the Bharatiya Janata Party from 2014–20.
- Sumeet Bhasin and Nalin Kohli are other board members of PPRC. Nalin Kohli is the national spokesperson of the BJP while Sumeet Bhasin has had a 3 decades-old association with the party.

Highlights

- The insistence that the first Prime Minister of India was responsible for outsourcing the educational framework to the left-liberal lobby seems to be an outcome of sheer negligence.
- The curricular frameworks in the National Council of Educational Research and Training Textbooks have been changed since the first time they were conceived under Prime Minister Nehru, reflecting developments in the craft of history as well as the concerns of historians across diverse historical perspectives.
- R C Majumdar who is being celebrated for presenting the correct narrative on Indian history in the report played a crucial role in selecting the team of scholars for the first history textbooks of NCERT.
- Further, Romila Thapar who is an alleged name in the left-liberal lobby was invited to join the advisory board of the NCERT for textbook writing on R C Majumdar's letter during Nehru's prime ministership.
- Coming to recent changes, the National Curriculum Framework, 2005 was a landmark document, envisioning school education as inclusive.

Recommendations

- The report recommends that the re-writing History project must emphasize the glorious part of Indian history, including our civilizational greatness and the contribution of Indian civilization to the world.
- The glorification of the [Delhi Sultanate](#) and the Mughal period must be brought to an end. The destructive nature of Islamic rule in India must be highlighted, including the systematic desecration of Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist temples as well as places of learning and knowledge.

- In order to erase the memory of the “Dark Age” of Indian history, the roads named after the Islamic invaders must be renamed.

Objections Raised in the Report

- NCERT books portray the ancient period as backward.
 - The Term “Backward”
 - The term “backward” was used once in Class 6 to explain how dates were calculated in terms of BC and AD, and once in Class 12 to explain how scripts were deciphered by moving backward from known examples to relatively unknown and earlier scripts.
- Medieval Period Glorification
 - The medieval rulers were referred to as “just,” “benevolent,” and “messianic” in the textbooks as per the report. However, the relevant textbooks for Classes 7 and 12 have no evidence of any of these terms.
- Vedas
 - The report raises a concern regarding the [Vedas](#) in the NCERT Textbooks.
 - The comparison of the NCERT textbook for Class 6, with the Gujarat state board textbook for Class 6 for the text on Vedas showed some minor differences which are insignificant to cause any variation in the content.
- Ambiguity of Statements
 - The report highlights the absence of words like Gupta in certain contexts in the NCERT Textbook which might potentially mislead the young learner who will not be in a position to verify.

The Constitutional Call

- The report hesitates to acknowledge the fact that caste and gender hierarchies have been part of our history and present, in ways more than one.
- The [Constitution of India](#) makes it imperative to acknowledge and address issues of discrimination rather than sweep them under the carpet as disrupting the image of a glorious past.
- Suppressing information about these discriminations would be violative of the [fundamental duties](#), especially **51A(a)** and **51A(h)**, which state: (a) to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem; (h) to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform.

Gender Approach

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee has called for recommendations to highlight the role of “great historic women heroes”.
- The report notes and celebrates the Gujarat textbook complementing the “chastity” of women when it declares that, “Rajput women (Rajputani) were known for their chastity and fearlessness”, sliming the glory of other women of Brahmin or “lower” caste background.

- The report completely ignores textbook languages that generally tend to be gender insensitive, with “man” being taken to be representative of humanity.
- The constrictive artifice of patriarchal power should be considered more problematic than the other worry point that the report makes.

Scope of The Report

- The report advocates jettisoning the pedagogical strategy in favour of a retreat to a litany of names—ideally of kings and occasional queens, of victories and defeats in battles, returning us back to a top-down approach to history.
- There is no scope or very little for discussing the lives of ordinary people—farmers, forest dwellers, pastoral people, craftsmen, the vast majority of the people, attempts to throw light on the significance of whose histories were one of the features of the NCERT books.

Concerns

- The report looks at historians to only tell inspiring stories about great men, and occasionally women.
- It is also assumed that people are what they are because of their religion, other considerations, such as those of caste, region, class, etc, are considered irrelevant.
- The source which is so crucial for any project of historical inquiry seems to be highly avoided in the case of the report under question.
- The closest that this “research report” comes to engage with the question of “sources” is at the end of the text with the reproduction of a right to information (RTI) appended as Annexure I.

Overview

- It is completely unwise if we ignore the advances made in recent decades in studying the histories of marginalized groups, environmental histories, and histories of gender relations amongst other themes.
- Last year, changes that were introduced into courses by the Central Board of Secondary Education excluded chapters on the environment (in a situation when one of the most pervasive challenges is from environmental degradation and climate change), evolution, reproduction, ecology, mathematical reasoning, federalism, popular movements, gender, caste, citizenship, and secularism among others.
- The broad understanding of the past is a necessity and any attempt to circumscribe the contents of history textbooks in order to converge at a one-point agenda on the basis of religion will not only hamper the past but also damp the present.

Read previous [EPW](#) articles in the link.