

Textual trouble

Books by Shivarama Karanth under fire

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in Bangalore

Gandhi era. The period was marked by wide-ranging differences between the moderates and the radicals of the movement. These were brought into sharp focus at the Surat session of the Indian National Congress, considered a landmark in the movement's history. The radicals, led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, made their presence felt and became very articulate throughout the country. *India* chose this line. The cartoons it carried - drawn by someone, whose identity is not known, as instructed by Bharati - were highly critical of the moderates as well as the British rulers. Each had a commentary, often long, by Bharati.

India published cartoons in almost each of its 185 issues, right from its inception till it was wound up in 1910 after its official editor-publisher, M. Srinivasan, was charged with treason, and the cartoons were closely watched by the alien government. *India* had to shift from Madras to pondicherry, then under French rule, because of repression and finally wind up following a ban of its entry into the Madras province.

The 87 cartoons Venkatachalapathy has collected are on a variety of subjects, ranging from the tussle between the moderates and the radicals to a strike by railway employees, the suppression of civil rights to the British policy of divide and rule which created tensions among different communities. While one cartoon is critical of the Minto-Morley reforms, another opposed the state entering the sphere of religion and *vice versa*. Yet another shows how the business community was hand-in-glove with the management in running down the strike by ay workers in Madras,

of them relates to the entry of mahatma Gandhi into Indian politics. Some lay stress on communal amity

I the need to wage a united struggle against British rule. The cartoons, many of them based on episodes from Indian mythology and Aesop's fables, show Bharati was far ahead of his time.

With the exit of *India*, Bharati's active political life virtually came to an end. He rejoined *Swadesamitran* towards the end of his short but eventful life.

The secret police of the British rulers had prepared a summary of the explanatory notes under the cartoons, and this enabled Venkatachalapathy to give an account of the missing ones also - what they were about, albeit in the police perception. The neatly-executed work throws light on a hitherto-neglected side of the multi-faceted personality of Subramania Bharati. •

EDUCATIONISTS and academicians in Karnataka have come out against what they say is the unscientific, erroneous and anti-humanist content of some books by Jnanpith award winner Shivarama Karanth and prescribed as primary school text books in the Uttara Kannada and Dakshina Kannada districts. Something of an institution in the Kannada literary and cultural field at 93, Karanth wrote the books between 1930 and 1950, and they have not been properly revised or updated.

The criticism levelled against the series titled *Oodhuva Aata* pertain primarily to the use of words and phrases denigrating certain classes of people, the presentation of anachronistic ideas with no bearing on the inventions and incidents of the past half century, the use of compound words and complex sentences as well as of line drawings with neither photographs nor colour illustrations to enhance visual appeal.

The freedom struggle and personalities such as Mahatma Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar find no mention, though it is compulsory reading under the guidelines for text books set down by the Karnataka Government (G. O. No: SWL 65 SEW 90, of April 10, 1991).

The previous Congress Government (led by M. Veerappa Moily) prescribed Karanth's books for standards one to three in Dakshina Kannada and Uttara Kannada districts, in preference to the 'Kannada Bharathi' series prescribed in the rest of the State. The latter series was recommended by the text book committee comprising educationists, subject specialists and teachers and was formulated in consonance with the National Education Policy (NEP) in 1986. Apart from other things, the NEP lays

down that text books in all States be uniform in content and presentation, with the objective of promoting national integration.

Correspondence between the Secretary, Education Department and the Department of Public Instruction (Primary) establishes the fact that the Congress Government prescribed these books violating the NEP guidelines. The letters state clearly that the books would be prescribed on an "experimental basis in the two districts". Subsequently, the Government provisionally introduced the same series for standards four to seven for the academic year 1995-96.

Academics G. T. Narayana Rao and G. K. Govinda Rao filed a public interest petition in the Karnataka High Court on November 21, 1994, seeking the withdrawal of *Oodhuva Aata* 1, 2 and 3 (at that time they were unaware that the series had been prescribed for standards four to seven as well. The first three were prescribed from the academic year 1992-93 and the rest from 1995-96).

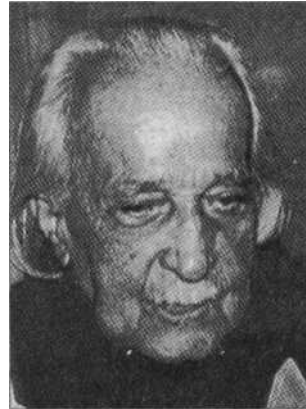
In a somewhat ambiguous order on January 25, 1995, the High Court ordered the Government to appoint a competent authority

to review the decision to prescribe the books for the subsequent academic years. The authority was to consider suggestions from educationists, including the appellants. The Director of Text Books appointed to examine the issue asked the appellants for suggestions seven months after this order.

According to Govinda Rao, "The Moily Government acted unimaginatively by prescribing these books. As Education Minister first and Chief Minister later, Moily was involved in this decision all through."

But Moily has defended his decision. "Karanth's books were prescribed only after a committee of experts and educationists went into it," he said.

Interestingly, R. Suresh, Commissioner, Department of Public



Shivarama Karanth...sees mischief in the campaign.

Instruction, said: "No recommendations from educationists or litterateurs or anybody else, on the feasibility or relevance of these text books, was sought before prescribing them. Anyway, offensive and factually incorrect parts could be isolated from the books."

The Government has had no say in specifying the price or norms of production of Karanth's books. Text books in Karnataka are produced and distributed by private publishers. The prices are fixed at the rate of 5.5 paise a page, including the cover and colour illustrations. But the cost of Karanth's books, containing only black and white illustrations, work out to as much as 8-12 paise a page. Critics point out that the Government is losing out on the royalty on the five lakh books sold annually in the two districts; only the and the publisher benefit from .if sale.

"The students of Dakshina JCannada and Uttara Kannada districts have been discriminated against. They have been forced to study substandard, outdated and defective text books at unreasonable prices. This policy of prescribing separate text books written and produced by individuals, whatever their credentials, runs contradictory to the socialistic objective of the State," said Narayana Rao.

The Viswakarma community in Dakshina Kannada has disapproved of a lesson in *Oodhuva Aata* 6 which, its members allege, belittles them. In June, over 6,000 Viswakarmas belonging to nearly 150 organisations affiliated to the Dakshina Jilla Viswakarma Vokkoota (DJVV), demonstrated before Karanth's house in Saligrama, Dakshina Kannada district. And on just 2 and 3, the DJVV organised a -iiiar in Mangalore on the irrelevance of the books.

Leaders of the Mangalore Pradesh atholic Sabha, the Basel Mission and Sic Church of South India have also urged the Government to withdraw *Oodhuva Aata* 6 and 7 alleging they hurt Christian sentiments.

Said L. S. Sheshagiri Rao, former chairman of the Kannada Development Authority: "I have seen only three text books in the series and they are technically good. Karanth has used the right procedure in choosing as his subjects everyday facets of life. The vocabulary moves from the more familiar to less familiar words. Though Karanth maintains that the book has been revised, it is evident there has not been a thorough revision. I don't see why there should not be uniform text books throughout the State."

Karanth has countered the allega-

tions in his characteristic style. At a press conference in Bangalore, he accused "mischievous elements" of raking up the controversy. "Show me one objectionable point in the books. Those who are in the movement have not read my books. Decades ago when these books were prescribed in schools in the two districts, why didn't anybody protest? The people protesting are just disappointed people who wanted their books prescribed... If they don't want the books, let them burn them," he thundered.

Director of Text Books P. S. Ravindranath told *Frontline* he would

submit a report on the public perception of the book in the two districts to a Cabinet sub-committee set up to go into the controversy. According to highly placed sources in the Karnataka Education Department, the sub-committee will consult a literary committee comprising Govinda Rao, Narayana Rao and others before taking a final decision.

Withdrawal of Karanth's books can result in a backlash by his supporters in the two districts, while their continuation may escalate the issue. Wriggling out of this will require adroitness by the Janata Dal Government. •

Blatant bloomers

CHETAN KRISHNASWAMY

THE National Education Policy, a document published by the Government of India under the title "Challenge of Education: A Policy Perspective" (1985), makes the following statement on the role of education:

"To achieve the multiple but interdependent goals of personal, economic, social, political and cultural development, it is necessary to make appropriate provision for integrated programmes of education for people who happen to be living at different levels of personal and economic development, possessing different linguistic, social and cultural attributes. Such programmes will have to have a common core curriculum to strengthen unity within diversity and also to facilitate mobility from one part of the country to another... the level of educational attainments among people should not be too disparate between sexes, among social groups and across geographical regions."

Here are some samples from *OodhuvaAata*:

* From part 5, Lesson 5: What is 'Holethana?': The title of the lesson asks what it is that makes one a holeya (untouchable). The use of the word 'holeya' is not permitted by law. The poem goes on to describe the characteristics of a 'holeya'. It is obvious that the author's intention is to describe what makes one undesirable and ugly. But the use of the word in a book meant for children is wrong.

* From part 5, Lesson 8: What if there was no iron?: "... There are only two iron and steel plants in

India."

From part 6, Lesson 37: The Barber Ranga: "People should do only what comes naturally to them... The beggar's children should beg, shouldn't they? Only Ranga should do the hair cutting."

* From part 7, Lesson 6: Jesus Christ: "Jesus died. His philosophy didn't. But some of the enthusiasts who went about preaching his philosophy don't seem to have understood the true intent behind the teachings of Jesus... Although Christ never intended founding a religion, a religion was founded in his name by his disciples."

(This again, for 11 - and 12-year-olds.)

From part 7, Lesson 35: A Traveller's Letter: "Germany is now under Nazi rule. Hitler is the chief. The first thing that Hitler did was to throw out of the soil of Germany all these (Jews). This is the act of a small-minded person. But he must have had some excuse to do so... It is said that Jews are not quite patriotic... The ways of Jews who are not patriotic has been, they say, the cause of much loss to Germany."

(In a footnote, the author adds that Germany lost in the World War giving the dates of the war as 1938-1942. There is no mention of Hitler's persecution of Jews.)

* From part 7, Lesson 36: Poet Rabindranath Tagore: "Gitanjali is one of his poetic works... In it one can see how the poet looks at the problem of life. Calling death peaceful sleep, he says: "Come death, give me rest."

(Teachers find it difficult to explain this line to 11- and 12-year-old children.) •