

# De-saffronise school books: Academics

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REVERSAL, REPAIR, re-assessment and review are the much-repeated words in the academic community's recommendations for the new government's education policy.

Also being sought is an immediate assessment of the damage to the institutions and to the education policy during in the last six years, and undoing the damage.

"It is like coming to a town after it has been hit by an earthquake. First, the damage done has to be assessed and then steps have to be taken to undo the damage," says Prof Krishna Kumar of the Central Institute of Education, Delhi University

The first concern seems to be saffronisation of school curriculum that the academics want reversed immediately, especially the use of history textbooks as an instrument of communal propaganda. Curricular reforms are needed with greater empowerment of the state and regional authorities within a national curricular framework, stresses Kumar.

Former head of the Social Sciences department in NCERT, Arjun Dev, feels the academic nature of the NCERT has been destroyed. "It no longer comprises academicians but people who implement an ideology. In fact, most appointments to academic institutions... consisted of people who would follow the ideological agenda of the BJP or those who would agree to implement their agenda. Those appointments ought to be reviewed," says Dev.

The universal elementary education programme is another area that the academics want to focus on. "The draft of the Right to Education Bill has many flaws that need to be reviewed," says Nalini Taneja, a Reader in history in the Delhi University

Noted historian Irfan

## Tinkering with class XII history text books

- **No mention of Shivaji's levy of chauth (one-fourth of revenue) and sardeshmukhi (an additional one tenth), which he exacted from areas not under his control. In levying these exactions, he did not differentiate between Hindus and Muslims**
- **No mention of Akbar's views on prohibition of slave trade, disapproval of sati and prohibition of involuntary sati**
- **No mention of Hindu Mahasabha's opposition to the Quit India Movement**
- **The book says the Vedas prescribe punishment for injuring or killing a cow. That is inaccurate: the cow was revered and treated as sacred, but it was also offered as food to guests**

Habib also feels that primary education needs a greater push. "The one-teacher schools have to be closed down so that children receive proper education. Such schools were given permission to operate so that the RSS could promote its ideology," says Habib.

Privatisation is another matter for concern. The academics explained how privatisation of universities and schools was taking education beyond the reach of the poor even as the government withdrew further from the education sector.

Undoing the damage done by the "ideological onslaught" of the BJP on the education sector and policy is the unanimous recommendation of most academics, which they feel ought to be started right away.