

# Prejudice as 'education'

The Sangh Parivar has intensified its efforts to promote communal hatred through its "intellectual violence" and by rewriting the standards of school curriculum revision.

IF Human Resource Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi has his way, our children and grandchildren will grow up believing that "Hindu culture", as the Sangh Parivar defines it, is the sole influence that has shaped India since the Vedic times. This culture, they will learn, has remained unchanged since time immemorial. All other cultures, civilisational influences and tra-

ditions are extraneous, impure", alien, not part of the Indian "heritage". They are at best only marginal to the values relevant to us. In this view, "Bharatiya culture" is mankind's highest achievement. It is at once all-encompassing, but also infinitely tolerant (never mind the contradiction between the hegemonic ambitions of being "all-encompassing", and respect for other views).

Among the other "truths" and "values" that textbooks will teach our schoolchildren:

\*The Aryans were India's original inhabitants; they never displaced or colonised Dravidians or indigenous tribal people and forest-dwellers.

\*According to the Ramayana legend, Sri Lanka was an opulent "city". It had "excellent houses, decorated with wonderful... jewels, golden archways, pearls, diamonds, gems, silver, etc.." But it was not "cultured". In "refreshing contrast, Ayodhya was both civilised and cultured. People were learned, free from greed, truthful and with no proclivity towards stealing or petty-mindedness".

\*There was no contradiction between Hinduism, on the one hand, and Buddhism or Jainism, on the other - despite rich evidence on the hounding and banishment of these faiths and their followers. Hinduism merely "absorbed" Buddhism.

\*Indians are "a race". More, they have "a mission" as a race. This race must

understand "the destiny it has to shape, the place it has to occupy in the march of nations..."

\*Hindu and Muslim "periods" clearly mark the relevant watersheds in Indian history.

\*It is "a fundamental postulate of Hindu thought that every way of life has its own contribution to make..." But "the ultimate reality" is defined by

Krishna alone. He proclaims a doctrine which is fundamental to all Hindu thought... Owing to this approach we are reinterpreting our own doctrines and doing readjustment (sic.) For example, we have absorbed Buddhism..."

\*"Our concept of the joint family is a unique contribution in the history of mankind. Generation after generation we have developed it." The break-up or some of the oppressive structures of the joint

family is thus not progressive, but a setback!

\*India, irrespective of who ruled it, has never tried to dominate or subjugate other people, cultures or lands - never mind our marauding kings, brutal rajahs or the fact that whole ministries were once assigned by "Hindu" kings to the specific task of destroying and looting temples!

\*"Bharatiya culture is the only culture which has understood the life problems (sic) in their totality and has made a continuous effort to solve them. In the history of the world, it is the only effort to see the science, philosophy, religion, psychology and social life in an integrated form." (sic)

\*"Spirituality is the core of our culture. We have tried to see the reality or truth hidden in the material world. This is the theme of Bhartiya life work. It is the backbone of her existence, the foundation of her being - the spiritualisation of the human race" (sic).

\*The "spirit of Bharat" and

"Bharatiyata" is Dharma. This is "the ultimate source of all values of human society". In the Vedic period, "there existed no state, no king, no penalty and no criminal, all protected one another by virtue of Dharma". The best description of Dharma is naturally to be found in the Manusmriti, "which gives ten characteristics which are related to human conduct..."

\*"Naturally, Bharat excelled in every branch of Science - Mathematics, Astronomy, Chemistry, Sculpture, Pharmacology, etc. Our sages realised reality lying in every sphere of life". Naturally, all of them, from Charak to Bhaskaracharya, were Hindus. Also, "in each and every field of art, architecture, sculpture, painting, dance, drama and music, we were the leaders". Our temples "...may perhaps be said to be infinitely superior to the cumulative achievements of our artists" (sic).

\*"When the central idea driving and inspiring the way of life ceases to exist, a culture dies along with its adherents. The cultures of Greece, Rome and Egypt died the day the representatives of those lands failed to find fulfilment in living up to its values. So it is our duty to preserve our ancient heritage..."

\*"We firmly believe in the Vedantic concept that each soul is potentially divine... We have to reach the concept of 'I am God'..." The basic task of education today is to inculcate this knowledge.

These ideas form the core of the "discussion papers" being prepared by some of the principal institutions that draw up school curricula, including the National Open School (which has over a million pupils, and from whose document the verbatim quotes are taken here). Other bodies such as the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) are also about to adopt a similar approach to defining "Bharat" and promoting "Bharatiyata" through education. These papers not only stipulate the general objectives and goals that educational

## BEYOND THE OBVIOUS



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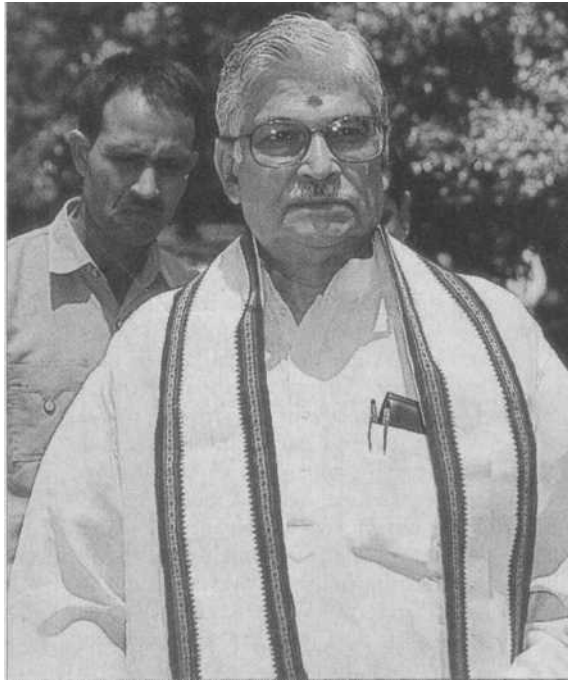
courses must achieve, but also substantially lay down some of their core content. The emphasis is on Hindutva with its exclusivist, chauvinist notions of nationalism.

All future writers of our textbooks will have to conform to these values, objectives and content descriptions. In practice, this will apply not just to the Central elementary schools and the CBSE systems, but to educational institutions at the State level too. Most of these participate either in the donor-driven District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), or the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan which Joshi has just inaugurated to consolidate all non-formal education - even as he has more or less dismantled the National Literacy Mission.

These include the Saraswati Shishu Mandirs and the Vanvasi Shiksha Kendras set up by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) pracharaks, schools run by Friends of Tribals Society of Sangh sympathiser P.D. Chitlangia, and other non-governmental organisations of the saffron variety. Joshi is also deviously using the coming amendment to the Constitution making education a fundamental right as a shield beneath which to promote the Sangh agenda.

This adds up to a massive brainwashing programme - to be accomplished through the simple device of an administrative fatwa issued by the Human Resource Development Ministry for curriculum revision. No one has ever exempted anything one-tenth as ambitious as Joshi has actually ordered into existence. Earlier, textbooks, especially history textbooks, were manipulated to introduce a communal bias. There have been many instances of extravagant claims about India's achievements and arrogant or disdainful statements about other cultures and peoples. But this is the first time that the whole curriculum for Classes X to XII is being so comprehensively rewritten. This is not revision with a view to updating it. It involves violent recasting and radical changes - in particular, changes in values and ideologies.

These "discussion papers" are reminiscent of the fatwas issued in Hitler's Germany to inculcate the spirit of "nationalism" among schoolchildren,



Human Resource Minister Murli Manohar Joshi.

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and to specify in the minutest detail what constitutes authentic "German culture", why the idea of racial purity, and the sacred nature of the Aryan "master race" must never be questioned. They come on top of many discrete measures that the government has taken over the past 18 months to alter the character of institutions such as the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the NCERT, besides setting up the J.S. Verma Review Committee on school syllabi. Another round of senior appointments is now coming up with the impending retirement of the Vice-Chancellors of some of our best-known universities, such as Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Jamia Millia Islamia, Aligarh Muslim University, and Santiniketan (founded by Rabindranath Tagore).

**M**URLI MANOHAR JOSHI is clearly the most dedicated hardcore

RSS Minister in the present government. An RSS insider has been quoted as saying: "We think Joshiji has done the best work. He is the most frequent to come here to consult RSS organising secretary K. Sudarshan. We know that our project of nation-building cannot be accomplished without basic education". Joshi is certainly a pillar of Hindutva. But not to be left behind are Ananth Kumar, Minister of State for Culture, and Arun Jaitley, Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting. Ananth Kumar is threatening to bring in legislation to protect India against "cultural invasion" from the West - read, promotion of traditional hierarchical values, along with grotesque forms of rampant consumerism and "VJ culture". Arun Jaitley has already shown his true colours by destroying the whole edifice of autonomy in Prasar Bharati through a single administrative fatwa, arbitrarily removing Romila Thapar and Rajendra Yadav from the board on the specious ground that there is a provision for retiring a third of all members by rotation.

This "retirement" makes a complete mockery of the idea of autonomy. Autonomy means,

quite simply, that the government has no business to interfere with Prasar Bharati's day-to-day working or its overall management. Legally, it is not empowered to remove or appoint directors. But it brazenly targeted two *individual* members. Under the principle of rotation, an *objective criterion* should have been applied, like drawing lots - a procedure the Prasar Bharati Board itself proposed. The government deliberately zeroed in on Romila Thapar and Rajendra Yadav, saying that the board needs more professional journalists. (It later contradicted itself by pleading for a "broad-based" board). The action was obnoxious, and was rightly termed as "intellectual violence" by former Information and Broadcasting Minister S. Jaipal Reddy. It was aimed at moving those members who put up a lot of resistance to the BJP's depredations and its attempt to take over Doordarshan and All India Radio.

**T**HERE is a clear pattern to the BJP's appointments - whether in Prasar

Bharati, or in educational and research institutions. This pattern goes beyond "Left vs Right" divides. Thus, it is irrelevant and improper to term Romila Thapar a "Marxist historian" or an "ancient Indian historian" with Marxist inclinations, and link this to her removal. The pertinent point is that she is a historian of exceptional eminence, whom any university in the world would be honoured to have. Whether or not she is a Marxist is as irrelevant as Anthony Giddens' appointment to the London School of Economics (LSE) is. Everybody knows that Giddens is Tony Blair's guru, the theorist of the Third Way, and yet no one has sought to remove him from the London School of Economics or question his intellectual eminence on this ground. Romila Thapar was removed not because she is a Marxist, but because she is an independent-minded intellectual who brooks no nonsense, and who truly believes in media autonomy.

The government and its apologists are deliberately misrepresenting the issue, thereby confusing the non-committed or undecided, even as it appoints unreconstructed Hindutva Right-wingers marked by intellectual mediocrity (and worse) to sensitive positions. This is *not* a contest between Right and Left. It is not as if the preceding 50 years were marked by some peculiar official fondness for the Left. What they did witness was a degree of (eroding) autonomy for many institutions and a certain porosity and openness, often combined with respect for quality. Whatever one might say about Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Pupul Jayakar or Kapila Vatsayan, it is undeniable that they were genuine scholars and serious institution-builders. The Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA) is being attacked for utterly despicable, petty, reasons by those who loathe and dread autonomy.

Institutions are vital to democracy. Running them well means appointing first-rate people committed to inclusivism and pluralism, and open to new ideas. Handing them over to bigots, philistines and people with sectarian and exclusivist agendas is the surest recipe for ruining them. That is why it

matters less that M.L. Sondhi is right-wing than that he is a mediocrity, who will damage the ICSSR with his agenda. Again, if B.R. Grover of the ICHR had some decent publications to his credit and a half-way respectable academic record, his sympathies for the communal school of history-writing might have been easier to forgive. As it happens, the man has nothing but Hindutva prejudice to show for himself.

It is not often (at least in India) that the Right produces distinguished intellectuals. People like Girilal Jain are rare exceptions. The run-of-the-mill right-winger, especially of the saffron variety, is insecure and paranoid, and far too vengeful to want to run any institution in a consensual, open, democratic way. He is unreceptive to new ideas. For the most part, his intellectual foundations are traceable to the early years of the century, and to V.D. Savarkar, M.S. Golwalkar and Jadunath Sarkar. Most communal historians, for instance, remain untouched by the new schools of historiography that go beyond the colonial and nationalist divides and, as Romila Thapar says, involve a paradigm shift. In this shift, history is "treated not as information laid out in a chronological order but an exploration and analysis of society and the past, all of which as deeply influenced by a range of ideologies". For communal historians, the *very purpose* of their (rigid) discipline is to glorify India.

It is of such stuff that Hindutva's education and culture project is made. This project is far more dangerous and insidious than the construction of the Ram temple. It involves manipulating minds, infiltrating hatred into them, encouraging them to think smugly in stereotypes, and making people's self-identity dependent on bigotry and false pride. Ultimately, the project means yoking the mind to a hateful, communal, nationalism - for generations to come. Textbooks are not revised frequently. The last major curriculum revision was way back in 1976. What happens to today's battle over school curricula will influence a whole generation. That's why Murli Manohar Joshi's despicable Project of Prejudice must not be allowed to prevail.

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