

Education policies and praxis: A Reference to the Free and compulsory Education Sill, 2004

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The Government of India has recently proposed the 'Free and Compulsory Education Bill, 2004'. Even a preliminary reading of the Bill raises several concerns that have serious implications for all minority schools and educationally backward sections of the country. Therefore, immediate and urgent intervention must be made so that the Bill does not become an Act in its present form. It must also be recalled that prior to this Bill, the Government was successful in introducing the National Curriculum Framework, 2000 (NCF) in school textbooks. This is equally harmful for minorities.

Background

The NCF prepared by the Government includes.

- * Origin and identity of Hindus since these are crucial to the definition of Hindu according to the ideology of an outfit of the NDA government. The main design of such an attempt is to project the minorities as aliens and the Hindus as the true natives/indigenous people.
- * The controversial connection of Indian civilizations with Aryan civilization, ancient period or the Hindu period as the golden age while simultaneously identifying the minorities such as the Muslims, Christians, Parsis as foreigners.
- * Imposition of Sanskrit, as the most preferable and suitable language on the National System of Education while the language has no connection with majority population in the country.
- * Introduction of differential education for girls and boys channelising boys and girls into
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gender stereotyped activities and courses with an idea to limit women to household domain by treating them as ideal housewives.



The controversial NCF that has now formed a part of syllabus in school textbooks began as early as 1998 when Vidya Bharati, an educational establishment of RSS, drew up a framework for introducing differential education for boys and girls and making Sanskrit a compulsory language in schools. During the same year the then government tried to push through the Vidya Bharati agenda unsuccessfully through the State Education Ministers' Conference that was cancelled due to the walkout of 16 ministers on the issue of Saraswati Vandana.

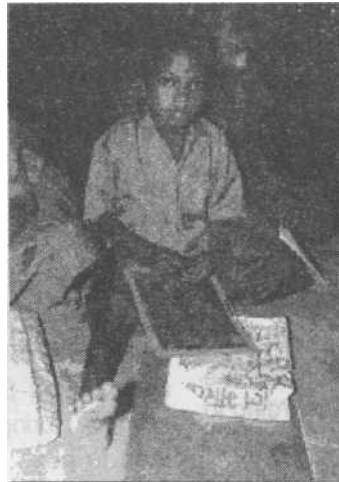
The government handed over the NCF to NCERT for its implementation. By incorporating the Curriculum Framework, NCERT prepared the books, which were finally published.

On these matters, unlike any other Government in the past, the NDA Government did not refer to CAGE (Central Advisory Board of Education) an official medium of consultation on school education that has been in existence since 1926. Secondly, the NCF has fundamentally opposed the core framework of NPE 1968, 1986, Programme of Action 1992 and various provisions of the Constitution that protect minority rights.

"The Free and Compulsory Education Bill, 2004"

Some of the fundamental problems with regard to the present Bill are highlighted below:

- * The Bill lacks national consensus and political debates.
- * Parents are held accountable for child's education even though it is the responsibility of the state.
- * The Bill excludes children less than 6 years of age. (Provision with regard to their education has been left in the Directive Principles of State Policy, Part 1V of the Constitution, which is a non-justiciable right).
- * The Bill, authorizes the 'Competent Authority', recognized by the government for recognition of schools and prescription of syllabus. This means that the State accords to itself the power to interfere in the syllabus of curriculum preparation and medium of instruction. The whole attempt will further marginalize the minorities from participating in school related issues.
- * The Bill has not addressed the issues of access to quality education and equity of education for all children. For example, Education Guarantee Schemes/Alternative schools/ Transitional schools meant for the disadvantaged children barely qualify what constitutes quality schooling.
- * The Bill refers to providing essential levels of learning for the elementary stage and its sub-stage specially meant for districts partly consisting of scheduled areas and is to be followed in all transitional schools indicating that poor quality schools must be provided to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled tribes children.



- * The Bill does not take into consideration the relevance of Common School Systems.
- * Ashram schools for tribal children are completely missing in the proposed Bill.
- * The Bill does not provide for special provision for homeless and destitute children, girl children, children of migratory population, children of sex-workers, children in situations of emergency and armed conflict and those facing genuine problems of attending formal systems of schooling.

Further, various sections, sub-sections, clauses and sub-clauses of the Bill clearly oppose basic premises of Education Commission 1964-66, Education Policies 1968, 1986, Programme of Action, 1992 etc., on which the main foundation of national school system is formulated. These policies emphasize need based considerations on the education of rural population with special focus on the deprived masses. The government has proposed the Bill without referring to state level School Committees, CAGE, National Policies on Education, Constitution of India and UN Convention on the Rights of Child

to which India is a party.

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