

Ideational Politics and Social Legitimacy: Role of Educational Propaganda in India

Saira Ayub* and Sumeera Imran**

Abstract

The study addresses the larger question of using education as a tool for perception building in ethnically diverse societies such as India. The article seeks to explore if ideologically motivated groups' educational revisionism aims at perception building for greater acceptance and social control. To explore interconnection, this study focuses on educational curriculum revisions by the Indian National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) in science, history and sociology textbooks in the year 2024. Within this context, the article focuses on Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) role in saffronisation of the educational curriculum, focusing on two main questions: a) why NCERT has revised the educational curriculum in India? and b), how educational revisionism (un)portrays manipulative tactics of social control by anti-secular identity groups such as RSS in India. The study employs the theoretical framework of political propaganda, using qualitative methodology with content analysis as the research method. The study furnishes empirical evidences to suggest the interconnection between RSS' ideologically motivated use of educational reforms as a tool for anti-secular and ideological agenda. Further, the study develops understanding of how ideologically motivated educational reforms may impact societal ethos and social cohesion in societies such as India. The study argues that NCERT reforms portray the RSS desire of expanding its ideological appeal in the Indian society.

Keywords: India, RSS, Social Cohesion, Religious Fanaticism, Educational Revisionism.

* The author is a researcher and M Phil Scholar at the National Defence University (NDU), Islamabad. Email: saira.ayub1998@gmail.com

** The author is Assistant Professor at the National Defence University (NDU), Islamabad. Email: drsameeraimran@ndu.edu.pk

Introduction

Textbooks play a pivotal role in shaping and influencing the society through providing structural knowledge. Also, their influence goes beyond academic learning, affecting cultural mind-set by knowledge dissemination and social development. Society at large accepts or at least bound to accept the credibility of academic material approved by the state. Textbook boards function as 'ideological gatekeepers' and patronise compliant authors in this regard.¹ The intent and purpose of textbook writers, particularly the compliant ones working under official policy guidelines, is of fundamental significance for this purpose. Official history is often considered as a vehicle of political brainwashing in a society. Textbooks not only mould but build opinion of the youth. Hitler's experience in Germany offers a significant case in point, where public opinions were moulded to invoke political change in society. This study unveils the consequences of educational reforms 2024 by the Indian National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) for societal cohesion and democracy in India. The study draws implications of ideologically driven education for the societal fabric of India in particular and the world community at large. The study explores how educational revisionism works as a tool to exercise social control, creating legitimacy in ethnically diverse societies such as India.

Propaganda tools such as use of manipulation, emotions and symbols have played a role in the realm of politics for altering public attitude to create social and political acceptability in governance and societies. Propaganda tactics are used by propagandists or ideologically motivated organisations with restricted or definite objectives.² Propaganda can be of any nature but the purpose is to seek political legitimacy and social control. It may be carried out privately or may also involve the use of open publicity. Its successful implementation significantly depends on the ways it is processed and the effect it may generate onto societies. A propagandist can be a socialist, ideological group, revolutionary leader, interest group or may as well be a political leader. However, a propagandist is always seeking

¹ Zahid Ahmed, *Attitudes of Teachers in India and Pakistan: Texts and Contexts* (Deakin University, 2007). <https://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30085795>

² "Apa PsycNet," American Psychological Association, <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1928-00716-001>

individual or societal support for instrumental or political purposes in society.³

Propaganda analysts have offered a diversity of angles to develop an understanding of the tools and techniques of propaganda. For example, Lasswell has offered a descriptive account of how a powerful discourse can be generated through different means such as repetition, manipulation, use of emotions and slogans.⁴ Jason Stanley has highlighted the role of the people in power or the elite in the use of propaganda as a tool to shape public perceptions and beliefs.⁵ Propaganda works to create an affiliation and resonance with society rather than presenting factual arguments. This leads to erosion of democratic values, by serving a specific ideological or political goal.⁶ Other analysts have emphasised the role of emotional exploitation by propagandists. For example, Douglas Walton, emphasising the role of emotions in propaganda manipulation, has argued that propaganda involves emotional manipulation and deception rather than straightforward truth to make people agree. The purpose of propaganda is to generate misperceptions and misinformation to distort reality which affects democratic discourse.⁷

Media plays an instrumental role in utilising propaganda tactics in the modern world. Noam Chomsky and E. S. Herman emphasise propaganda's significant role through media control to serve the power elites' interests.⁸ In this study, the authors introduce 'Propaganda Model,' which explains the role mass media plays in manufacturing consent and shaping the opinions of the general public. Elites in power have ownership of media channels and prioritise airing a narrow viewpoint while filtering realities and promoting their own interests. This is done mostly in the democratic states where media is free but is mainly owned by elites who have their say in politics,

³ "What Is Propaganda?," University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2015, <https://publish.illinois.edu/mirasotirovic/whatispropaganda>

⁴ "Apa PsycNet," American Psychological Association, <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1928-00716-001>

⁵ J. Stanley, *How Propaganda Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400865802>

⁶ Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*.

⁷ D. Walton, "What is Propaganda, and What Exactly is Wrong with it?," *Critical Review*, 30(1), 1-24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08913811.2018.1429820>

⁸ E. S. Herman, and N. Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (Pantheon Books, 2nd Edition).

too.⁹ A systematic ordering of manipulative processes is involved in the mongering of propaganda. Jacques Ellul terms it as a systematic manipulation of people's attitude and behaviour towards a specific goal and ideology. The author highlights the difference between education and propaganda. The former deals with providing knowledge, while the latter focuses on manipulation to serve the interest of those in power.

With the use of mass media, propaganda has the potential of promoting or reinforcing ideologies. Propaganda results in marginalising or oppressing the dissenting views and can undermine democratic essences.¹⁰ However, all propaganda analysts have converged on the following points regarding the role, processes, and techniques of propaganda. The following points of convergence can be sifted out of the above-mentioned discourse on propaganda's role, technique and processes of manipulation:

- Propaganda diverges in its intent and purpose from the rationale of real education; it is used for the manipulation of people's attitudes and ideas by omitting certain realities and presenting diluted facts.
- Propaganda is mainly used to promote a specific goal or ideology which often aligns with power elites or a group in authority.
- Propaganda, through limiting and controlling the flow of information, in terms of its impact, plays a role in undermining democratic values.
- Media plays a crucial and sometimes central role in shaping people's perception and wide spreading of elite propaganda.

Research Methodology

This study seeks to explore the interconnection between tools of propaganda (independent variable) and social legitimacy (dependent variable) for political control. It relies on qualitative methodology with content analysis as the research method to review primary and secondary data. The data collected includes official websites of *RSS*, *Vidya Bharati*, *NCERT*, *Seva Sahayog*, *Rashtriya Sewa Bharati* and *Vidya Bharati- KMSVM* including a variety of primary educational materials, such as official textbooks used in Indian institutions and schools; Indian primary and secondary school

⁹ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*.

¹⁰ J. Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (Vintage Books, 1965).

textbooks and public pamphlets; media headlines used in promoting educational curriculum; official documents, public reports, policy briefs, and official guidelines related to NCERT educational reforms to obtain first-hand information for research. To understand the RSS main ideological vision, the official website of *Vidya Bharati*, patronised by RSS ideologues was also consulted. The RSS social service website i.e. *Rashtriya Sewa Bharati* focuses on the organisation's social work, which was helpful for collection of RSS data related to societal work. Similarly, to understand how NCERT regulates in India and the depth of its influence, NCERT website was consulted. The secondary data was taken from different journal articles, newspaper articles, blogs, electronic media, archives and reports. Starting from the ideology of Hindutva, the work of Savarkar was considered. His book, *Essentials of Hindutva*, was reviewed to conceptualise how RSS is serving as the organizational arm of Hindutva.¹¹ Much research work has been conducted on recent educational reforms in India. However, this study focused on the data, which had the potential to influence the general public's perception at large or had the ability to accommodate the ideological stance of RSS in the Indian society. To know how educational reforms have or have not played a role in the rise of saffronisation, articles from well-known sources such as *Al-Jazeera*, *Times of India*, *The Wire*, *India Tomorrow*, *India Today*, *Hindustan Times* and *The Guardian* were taken. Journal articles were taken from *Jstor*, *ISSI* and *Tandfonline*. Newspaper articles were taken from *BBC News*, *Zee News*, *Reuters* and *The Indian Express*. Similarly, recent reports conducted by *Human Rights* and *India Hate Lab* were analysed to see how these reforms may have created religious bigotry in a diverse Indian society.

Existing Literature on Religiously-Motivated Groups in India

A variety of literature has been on the functioning of religiously motivated ideological groups in India. In his study, *Roots of Hindu Fundamentalism*, Vithal offers an account of the functional differentiation of two main religions, what he calls as the native Indian religions, in the working of

¹¹ V. D. Sarvarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva* (India, 1922), https://savarkar.org/en/encyc/2017/5/23/2_12_12_04_essentials_of_hindutva.v001.pdf_1.pdf

Indian societies — the Abrahamic and the Hindus.¹² The author believes that religious groups become activated due to the insecurity they feel in front of other larger groups in the society. Groups feel threatened and hence look back to God as their protector. Changes in the Indian society make the upper caste Hindus apprehensive of their leadership position in multi-ethnic and multi-religious diversity of the Indian society.¹³ This has given birth of *bhaktis* movements in India.

Further, Badri has claimed that religious extremists and fundamental groups often seek societal legitimacy from the general public of which they are a part. He has argued that RSS-BJP tries to rewrite Indian history to back up their extremist narratives in the Indian polity.¹⁴ Muslims are cited as outsiders and invaders while Hindu ancestors are portrayed as heroes by the RSS narrative.¹⁵ Malini Bhattacharjee in his work on RSS Hindutva philosophy develops understanding of the cultural and societal appeal of the extremist organisation in the Indian society.¹⁶ The RSS seeks to connect to the Hindu component of the Indian society through Yogas and building of worship places such as construction of the Hindu temples etc. Similarly, Kusha Anand in his work on identity construction emphasised the interconnection between educational curriculum and narrative building in the Indian society.¹⁷ Aditya Mukherjee's work on rewriting history highlights the dangers of religious distortion by RSS script writing in India.¹⁸ The author argues that RSS has spread its ideological influence on children, bureaucracy, police and judiciary. Revision of the Indian educational curriculum has become the means to brainwash the students in

¹² B. P. R. Vithal, "Roots of Hindu Fundamentalism," *Economic and Political Weekly* 28, no. 8/9 (1993): 335-38, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4399430>

¹³ Vithal, "Roots of Hindu Fundamentalism."

¹⁴ Badri Narayan, "Memories, Saffronising Statues and Constructing Communal Politics," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 45 (2006): 4695-4701, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4418896>

¹⁵ Badri, "Memories, Saffronising Statues and Constructing Communal Politics."

¹⁶ Malini Bhattacharjee, "Building a 'Hindu Rashtra' through 'Seva,'" *Economic and Political Weekly* 56, no. 3 (January 16, 2021),

<https://doi.org/https://www.epw.in/engage/article/building-hindu-rashtra-through-seva>

¹⁷ Kusha Anand, "Education and National Identity Construction in India and Pakistan," in *Teaching India–Pakistan Relations: Teachers' Attitudes, Practices and Agency*, 18-51 (UCL Press, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2tsxmk4.6>

¹⁸ Aditya Mukherjee, Mridula Mukherjee and Sucheta Mahajan, *RSS, School Texts, and the Murder of Mahatma Gandhi: The Hindu Communal Project* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2008).

the Indian society.¹⁹ Farhat Perveen, in her book, *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)* offers an account on the formation of RSS in India.²⁰ Mainly an autobiography of its founder, Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, the book depicts RSS history, with a description of its present day branches spreading all over India, and its working in the Indian society. Dyahadroy's article on Hindutva throws light on the functioning of RSS women wing — *Dnyana Prabodhini*, which employs conception of Seva to inspire Hindu women role in the socio-political sphere of Indian society.²¹

Sikander's work on Indian Media throws light on its pivotal role in stimulating anti-Muslim hatred.²² To promote Hindutva ideology, media channels make questionable headlines in which Muslim ancestors are presented as invaders while Hindu ancestors are portrayed as victims in Indian society.²³ Dhriti Yadav in *Public Opinion and Role of Media* has argued on the role of the media in creating public perception and opinion building in society.²⁴ Yadav defines media as a means of communication at the government's disposal for narrative building. The author has explained how the media emerged as an important source of information for the layman as the wielder of influence and opinion building in Indian society. Devanur Mahadev's article, *RSS: Depth and Breadth*,²⁵ articulates how RSS has tarnished Muslim image by wiping out not just Muslim but every other religion, too. The author has questioned the role of Indian legacy, given RSS distortion of historical data. BJP has appointed RSS leaders and granted them key positions in literary and educational departments to design a new curriculum. The author is of the view that when this generation grows old, it is likely to have the same mind-set as the RSS.

¹⁹ Aditya, Mukherjee and Mahajan, *RSS, School Texts, and the Murder of Mahatma Gandhi*.

²⁰ F. Perveen, "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)," in *The Rise of Hindutva Fundamentalism*. (1st edn. Islamabad : Aziz-ul-Haque, IRS), 472-497.

²¹ Swati Dyahadroy, "Exploring Gender, Hindutva and Seva," *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 17 (2009): 65-73, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40279187>

²² Zainab Sikander, "Islamophobia in Indian Media," *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 6, no. 2 (2021): 120-29, <https://doi.org/10.13169/islastudj.6.2.0120>

²³ Sikander, "Islamophobia in Indian Media."

²⁴ Yadav Dhriti, "Public Opinion and Role of Media," Legal Service India — Law, Lawyers and Legal Resources, 2019, <https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-3258-public-opinion-and-role-of-media.html>

²⁵ Mahadeva Devanuru, "RSS: Depth and Breadth," <https://cdn.countercurrents.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Book-on-RSS-by-Devanur-Mahadeva-English-.pdf>

Scholars have drawn a comparison between Nazi propaganda and the RSS regime backed by BJP.²⁶ The former employed the tactic to stimulate anti-Jews' abhorrence and contempt; while the RSS strategised to inculcate anti-Muslim and anti-Christians mind-set in the Hindus of India. The RSS seeks the general public support to create resonance with them. Indian media serves as the RSS mechanism or tool for perception building of the Indian masses. RSS employs entertainment industry for the purpose by transforming or intrusion of the historical events.

Analysis

NCERT — an independent educational body has reviewed sociology, history and science textbooks to 'Indianise' educational curriculum. The Hindu right wing RSS rejects secularism, arguing that the Indian national identity is rooted in Hindu culture and civilisation. RSS — BJP's hardline ideologues have sought to Indianise educational curriculum since BJP's assumption to power in 2014. NCERT tried to alter the curriculum as much as three times since the BJP's rule at the center. Similarly, earlier attempts were thwarted whenever BJP made announcement of changing the national curriculum in favour of a Hindu Rashtra. For instance in 2000, BJP's government through NCERT introduced National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF), which was rejected because the Indian constitution prohibits religious teachings in state-funded institutions. The BJP-RSS agenda appears to rest at the complete Indianisation of the spirit and essence of the Indian society which it seeks to attain through the transformation of the Indian educational curriculum. Indian liberal and secular political parties and activists have openly criticised and condemned the NCERT reforms 2024 for spreading bigotry and religious fanaticism in India.

NCERT was created by the Indian government, envisioned with the task of preparing school-textbooks, replacing those in vogue during the colonial rule.²⁷ Under NCERT supervision, Indian historians followed a scientific approach and adopted an interpretative framework, distinct from

²⁶ "Propaganda by Nazis and the BJP-RSS Regime," Justice For All, May 18, 2023, <https://www.justiceforall.org/indiannazis-report/propaganda-by-nazis-and-the-bjp-rss-regime/>

²⁷ "NCERT," <https://ncert.nic.in/about-us.php?ln=en>.

colonial legacy and dynastic rule.²⁸ Despite their academic quality, the Hindu fundamentalists have been opposing the textbooks, blaming factual inaccuracies and biased interpretation. In 2014, the Hindu fundamentalists attempted to withdraw these books when they became partners in the government at the center. However, the attempt was abandoned given the protests and opposition from academia and the Indian liberal sections. But the intent and purpose of RSS was clearly revealed in recasting textbooks for projecting a saffronised view of the past whenever opportunity accrued.

The first assumption of political propaganda theory implies the use of propaganda tools (independent variable) to create social and political legitimacy (dependent variable) in ethnically and religiously diverse societies like India. The first assumption seems to apply well for the BJP-RSS endeavours to control educational and media ventures for propaganda mongering in India. The propaganda theory's second assumption relates to elite backing. This aspect of the propaganda theory's application is evident from the RSS enjoyment of political protection from its key ally BJP in India.²⁹

Educational Reforms in India-2024

States in India reserve the constitutional right to create own publications venues for educational institutions. However, NCERT coordinates in curriculum designing and textbook revisions, while undertake research, publication of textbooks, newsletters and journals, provide supplementary materials and necessary educational kits, develop digital materials, organise training sessions for teacher, and provides for innovating new techniques of education.³⁰ It also facilitates and finances student exchange programmes, offering diverse training facilities.³¹ NCERT in India is one of the most populous educational boards as almost 19 boards follow their published

²⁸ "NCERT," <https://ncert.nic.in/about-us.php?ln=en>.

²⁹ Kusha Anand, "Education and National Identity Construction in India and Pakistan," in *Teaching India-Pakistan Relations: Teachers' Attitudes, Practices and Agency* (UCL Press, 2023), 18-51. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2tsxmk4.6>

³⁰ "Objectives of NCERT," <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=132676>

³¹ "National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) | Ministry of Education, GoI," <https://dsel.education.gov.in/ncert>

textbooks and 23 states have been granted the copyrights of using and publishing NCERT material for their academic sessions.³² It includes the states of Goa, Himachal, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi. These states are using NCERT curriculum from Grade 1 onwards.³³ The national educational board serves as the main source for secondary education in India. Besides, NCERT also provides study material and guidelines for those students who plan on appearing in Indian Competitive Service Exam (ICS).³⁴ The regulatory body advises states to adopt NCERT prescribed text book resources since the latter offers students more chances to excel in board and competitive exams.³⁵ NCERT has revised Indian textbooks a number of times since its inception in 2016.³⁶ However, NCERT 25 member focus groups, created to develop the New Curriculum Framework for government schools, consists of five members of the Vidya Bharati — RSS education wing.³⁷ This group had the responsibility to write new academic books for schools. However, it is difficult to ignore the change in NCERT's stance this time. As long as 2016 and afterward, NCERT had viewed RSS textbooks as a way of creating 'religious fanaticism' and 'bigotry', labelled as 'severely concerning' for ethnically diverse Indian society. Since the inclusion of the RSS affiliates — Vidya Bharati, NCERT has updated and redesigned syllabus in Social Science text-books, mainly History, Political Science and Sociology under the RSS influence.³⁸

³² *Times of India*, "NCERT Books are being Followed in 23 States: RTI," July 10, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/allahabad/ncert-books-are-being-followed-in-23-states-rti/articleshow/92777906.cms>

³³ "NCERT Books are being followed in 23 States: RTI."

³⁴ "National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) | Ministry of Education, GoI," <https://dsel.education.gov.in/ncert>

³⁵ *Indian Express*, "Follow Only NCERT and SCERT Textbooks in Schools: NCPCR Writes to States," April 16, 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/education/follow-ncert-scert-textbooks-ncpcr-tells-states-8559101/>

³⁶ *Indian Express*, "NCERT Textbook Revision: Why It Happens Every Few Years & What Makes It Controversial," April 7, 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/revising-school-textbooks-ncert-8543190/>

³⁷ *Al Jazeera*, "How RSS Textbooks Are Reshaping Indian History and Science under Modi," <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/19/how-rss-textbooks-are-reshaping-indian-history-and-science-under-modi>

³⁸ "Hindutva Institutions in Education: The Spreading Network of RSS by Venkitesh Ramakrishnan 1998," <http://www.sacw.net/HateEducation/Ramak101198.html>

Scholars argue that the RSS has long aspired to change the narrative of historical events and seeks to alter the text books of the Indian history.³⁹ The RSS leadership is presumably believed to insist that the British legacy has dominated the Indian history and the need exists to spiritualise and nationalise the Indian educational curriculum.⁴⁰ Promoted by Sarvarkar, Hindutva for RSS implies having three characteristics: a sense of belongingness to India, which it defined as Bharat — Sindhu land (entire subcontinent of India); Hinduness — implying Hindu traits that natives should appraise India as both *Punyabhoomi* (holy land) and *Pitribhumi* (Land of ancestors); and the similarity of a common culture irrespective of the place of abode. It is important to know that Sarvarkar regarded Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs as having viable cultural affiliations with the Indian heritage.⁴¹ According to Savarkar, Hindutva highlighted the ethos of Hindu lifestyle with an exclusive emphasis on Hindu culture and religion.⁴² Muslims and the Christians were regarded by Sarvarkar as aliens for having their holy places reside outside India. Hence to Sarvarkar, the Muslims and Christian loyalties can never be trusted to align with India.

Revisionism involving the omission and commission of certain data of history textbooks has been used as a tool to increase the RSS hold in the Indian society.⁴³ The RSS propaganda tactics have elite backing in the assistance offered by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the centre. The BJP-RSS sponsored NCERT induced revisionism in textbooks is viewed

³⁹ Ankit Rakesh, “How the Ban on the RSS Was Lifted,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 47, no. 16 (2012): 71-78. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23214601>

⁴⁰ Anand Arun, “RSS Roadmap for 21st Century India — Rewrite History, ‘Indianise’ Education, Museum Revamp,” *The Print*, September 30, 2019, <https://theprint.in/politics/rss-roadmap-india-rewrite-history-indianise-education-museum-revamp/298828/>

⁴¹ “Veer Savarkar: Ideologue of Hindutva,” UCLA logo Social Sciences, MANAS, <https://southasia.ucla.edu/history-politics/hindu-rashtra/veer-savarkar-ideologue-hindutva/>

⁴² Asian Marxist Review, “Ideology and Tactics of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh),” <http://www.marxistreview.asia/ideology-and-tactics-of-the-rss-rashtriya-swayamsevak-sangh/>

⁴³ *India Today*, “Attempt to Erase History: Opposition vs BJP over Edits in NCERT Books,” April 5, 2023, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/attempt-to-erase-history-opposition-vs-bjp-over-edits-in-ncert-books-2356208-2023-04-05>

sceptically by the Indian opposition, who blames the media for turning a blind eye to RSS activism [in the education sector].⁴⁴

A similar such attempt by the RSS in the past was vehemently opposed by academicians, opposition and historians during the 1990s.⁴⁵ Since 1952, more than 13,000 educational institutions and schools have been run by the RSS under its educational wing.⁴⁶ Realising the potential of the historical content in distorting the truth through educational curriculum, the RSS induced ideological content faced severe resistance by the opposition parties. But since Bharatiya Janata Party's assumption of power in 2014, RSS and its affiliate organisations have been demanding to 'Indianise,' 'spiritualise' and 'nationalise' the Indian educational curriculum. Alterations in text designing were carried out one after the other as 'reforms,' 'rationalisation of the syllabus' and to accommodate the student workload.'⁴⁷

RSS leaders believe that the Indian history curriculum is influenced by British colonial legacy and there exists the dire need to cleanse the educational textbooks of India. On rewriting history, the RSS hardliners believe that this is the real narrative of a Hindu India rather than the new narrative as proclaimed by the opposition.⁴⁸ Since the old narrative was inspired by British, it created a 'slave mentality.'⁴⁹ The false narrative of history dominated post-independence education which had to be eradicated. Criticising the 'leftists' for ruining their culture, RSS ideologues believe

⁴⁴ "Propaganda by Nazis and the BJP-RSS Regime," Justice For All, May 18, 2023, <https://www.justiceforall.org/indiannazis-report/propaganda-by-nazis-and-the-bjp-rss-regime/>

⁴⁵ "How RSS Textbooks are Reshaping Indian History and Science under Modi," *Aljazeera News*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/19/how-rss-textbooks-are-reshaping-indian-history-and-science-under-modi>

⁴⁶ "OUR AIM – VIDYA BHARTI – KMSVM," <https://kmsvm.in/our-aim-vidya-bharti/>

⁴⁷ *Times of India*, "India Will Take the Lead in Countering Left's 'War of False Narrative': RSS Chief," September 18, 2023,

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/india-will-take-the-lead-in-countering-lefts-war-of-false-narrative-rss-chief/articleshow/103744768.cms>

⁴⁸ "India Will Take the Lead in Countering Left's 'War of False Narrative': RSS Chief," <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/india-will-take-the-lead-in-countering-lefts-war-of-false-narrative-rss-chief/articleshow/103744768.cms>

⁴⁹ Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "Indian Government Accused of Rewriting History after Edits to Schoolbooks," *Guardian*, April 6, 2023, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/06/indian-government-accused-of-rewriting-history-after-edits-to-schoolbooks>

that the nation needs to counter their agenda with the truth. Others should give their support to the RSS mission of preserving India's essence from the destruction of the leftist ideology.

The RSS has employed Indian media to popularise its religious programmes and sacred texts as exposition of its Hindutva ideology. The central government revisions have met strong resistance by academicians, historians and the opposition parties.⁵⁰ Indian Parliament has rather raised a serious concern on media's involvement in RSS propaganda mongering.⁵¹ The RSS narrative portrays Muslims as invaders. Work and achievements of Muslim ancestors are removed and substituted with RSS history of splendid social services. Aditya Mukherjee argues RSS historical distortions brainwash the young minds, and result in spreading hatred through revision of the educational curriculum.⁵² The RSS attempts are increasingly branded as 'Saffronisation of the educational institutions,' in line with symbolism of the RSS flag.⁵³ Academicians and historians argue that educational revisionism and reforms should not be generated by political elite but academic experts.⁵⁴

Saffronisation of the Textbooks

The attempt of 'Saffronisation of educational curriculum,'⁵⁵ a term commonly used by the opposition to describe RSS propaganda activities is not new in India. Hindu nationalists have previously made multiple attempts at making the educational curriculum more Indian. Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government also attempted to bring RSS influence into the educational sector

⁵⁰ Hannah, "Indian Government Accused of Rewriting History after Edits to Schoolbooks."

⁵¹ "How Did Social Media Impact India's 2019 General Election?," Economic and Political Weekly, January 14, 2021, <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/how-did-social-media-impact-india-2019-general-election>

⁵² "RSS and School Education." *Hindutva Watch* (blog), December 6, 2019, <https://www.hindutvawatch.org/rss-and-school-education/>

⁵³ Hannah, "Indian Government Accused of Rewriting History after Edits to Schoolbooks."

⁵⁴ *dw.com*, "Is the BJP Altering Textbooks to Promote Hindu Nationalism? – DW – 05/25/2022," <https://www.dw.com/en/india-is-the-bjp-altering-school-curriculum-to-promote-hindu-nationalism/a-61932435>.

⁵⁵ "Is the BJP Altering Textbooks to Promote Hindu Nationalism? – DW – 05/25/2022."

with the help of Murli Joshi, who at that time held the senior post of Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), increasing the expanse of RSS-sponsored Vidya Bharati (VB) schools from 13000 to 18000 during 1998 to 2002.⁵⁶ However, their attempt to nationalise the Vidya Bharati (VB) textbooks was not well received by other political groups.⁵⁷

As the BJP lacked full authority to overhaul the educational curriculum, it had to adopt a relatively moderate approach by focusing on RSS increase of its educational wing. However, educational reforms remain a long overdue project of the RSS. When the BJP took the office of government in 2014, it wasted no time in inducing Hindutva in the educational curriculum.⁵⁸ The RSS is commonly labelled as the operational wing for the spread of Hindutva ideology. With BJP coming to authority, RSS became more open and vocal in demanding to spiritualise and Indianise the current Indian curriculum.⁵⁹ NCERT reforms are RSS attempts of ‘nationalising’ and ‘spiritualising’ the Indian society on the basis of Hinduism through revisions in the educational curriculum. This time NCERT platform has been utilised at the state and centre. As the ruling government, presence of the BJP shows the Sangh Parivar and its affiliates’ power point.⁶⁰ From 2014, three attempts in curriculum development have been made so far.⁶¹ For example, the Chief Minister of Kerala has stated that Sangh Parivar is afraid of the historical facts. They know that history has to be rewritten and probably with fabricated stories.⁶²

⁵⁶ Joel Bäckman, “Saffronisation or Moderation? A Comparative Case Study of the Bharatiya Janata Party between Two Terms,” Diva Portal, February 28, 2020, <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1416811/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

⁵⁷ Joel, “Saffronisation or Moderation? A Comparative Case Study of the Bharatiya Janata Party between Two Terms.”

⁵⁸ Sumit Ganguly, “Secularism Is Dying in India,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), July 30, 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/12/11/secularism-is-dying-in-india/>.

⁵⁹ Radhika Desai, “A Latter-Day Fascism?,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 35 (2014): 48-58, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24480495>.

⁶⁰ Nandini Sundar, “Teaching to Hate: RSS’ Pedagogical Programme,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 16 (2004): 1605-12. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4414900>

⁶¹ *Al Jazeera*, “How RSS Textbooks Are Reshaping Indian History and Science under Modi,” <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/19/how-rss-textbooks-are-reshaping-indian-history-and-science-under-modi>

⁶² “BJP Government Is Rewriting Indian History Selectively,” <https://thediplomat.com/2023/04/bjp-government-is-rewriting-indian-history-selectively/>.

A lot of changes have been introduced into the traditional syllabus to omit the ‘slave mentality.’ The revised text books now speak of Savarkar as the greatest intellectual and most celebrated freedom fighter nation has ever produced.⁶³ The new syllabus portrays Muslims as invaders in the new history text-books. RSS founder Hedgewar had termed the Muslims as ‘Hissing Yavana Snakes.’⁶⁴

Changes in History Books

Indian history is incomplete without bringing up the Mughal leaders, who reigned over a long time on the subcontinent.⁶⁵ Mughal’s intermarriages with Persian royalties and Hindus added to the cultural and linguistic diversity of India. The work of Mughal emperors and other Muslim dynasties is removed from the Indian Social Science text books. Similarly, the Social Science textbooks have now omitted the contributions and achievements of the Delhi Sultanate such as *Khiljis*, *Lodhis*, *Mamluks* and *Tughlaks* in the textbooks of grade VII.⁶⁶ The new narrative portrays Muslims as invaders and foreigners, in line with Savarkar’s liking of the interpretation of envisioning India as a *Hindu Rashtra*.⁶⁷

Similarly, Gujarat Massacre has been now omitted from the history textbooks of grade 11 and grade 12.⁶⁸ Mention of India’s first Educational Minister, Maulana Abdul Kalam has been removed as well. The information

⁶³ Hannah, “Indian Government Accused of Rewriting History after Edits to Schoolbooks.”

⁶⁴ Hannah, “Indian Government Accused of Rewriting History after Edits to Schoolbooks.”

⁶⁵ DNA India, “How Many Years Did Mughals Rule India?,” <https://www.dnaindia.com/web-stories/viral/how-many-years-did-mughals-rule-india-1713243623042>

⁶⁶ *Al Jazeera*, “How RSS Textbooks Are Reshaping Indian History and Science under Modi,” <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/19/how-rss-textbooks-are-reshaping-indian-history-and-science-under-modi>.

⁶⁷ Iwanek Krzysztof, “The Textbook of Chanakya’s Pupils. Vidya Bharati and Its Gauravsali Bharat Textbook in Uttarakhand,” The ResearchGate. Archiv orientální, September 2015,

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289887052_The_Textbook_of_Chanakya's_Pupils_Vidya_Bharati_and_Its_Gauravsali_Bharat_Textbook_in_Uttarakhand.

⁶⁸ Hannah, “Indian Government Accused of Rewriting History after Edits to Schoolbooks.”

on Nathuram Gohdse, a steadfast member of RSS who killed M.K Gandhi after independence, which led to the government's imposition of a ban on RSS for one year, has been omitted. The newly amended textbooks omit information on Nathuram Gohdse as an affiliate of the RSS.⁶⁹ Hindu nationalists had a dislike for Gandhi and Nehru since the two appeased Indian minorities.⁷⁰ They criticised Gandhi due to his advocacy of a secular state in an ethnically diverse Indian society.⁷¹ The new textbooks have omitted a sentence on Gandhi's speech, stating that any attempt to change India into a Hindu state will bring immense damage. Instead, the textbooks are filled with praises for RSS role in social service during the tough times of partition.

Changes in Science Textbooks

The exclusion of Darwin's theory from science textbooks is another case in point. The RSS nationalists urge that this theory is built on imaginations and lies. A chapter in class 10th book, 'Heredity and Evolution' is replaced with just 'Heredity.'⁷² Remarks of the Indian Minister of Education made headlines regarding Darwin's theory of evolution as imaginative. The Indian minister asserted that 'rishis' (sages) and not monkeys were the ancestral heritage of the humans. His statement made a mockery all over India.⁷³ The RSS has removed Darwin's theory from the new textbooks of grade 9th to 12th. *Dashavatar theory* is portrayed as more credible by Hindu hardliners. Humans are the incarnation of God *Vishnu* and not evolved from apes.⁷⁴ With

⁶⁹ Hannah, "Indian Government Accused of Rewriting History after Edits to Schoolbooks."

⁷⁰ "RSS and School Education," *Hindutva Watch* (blog), December 6, 2019, <https://www.hindutvawatch.org/rss-and-school-education/>

⁷¹ *Al Jazeera*, "How RSS Textbooks Are Reshaping Indian History and Science under Modi," <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/19/how-rss-textbooks-are-reshaping-indian-history-and-science-under-modi>

⁷² *Al Jazeera*, "How RSS Textbooks Are Reshaping Indian History and Science under Modi," <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/19/how-rss-textbooks-are-reshaping-indian-history-and-science-under-modi>

⁷³ "Indian Education Minister Dismisses Theory of Evolution," *Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/23/indian-education-minister-dismisses-theory-of-evolution-satyapal-singh>

⁷⁴ "Dashavatar —The Original Theory of Evolution," *The Pioneer*, <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2023/state-editions/dashavatar---the-original-theory-of-evolution.html>

the removal of Darwin's work, it is highly likely that the *Dashavatar* will be introduced as the new evolution theory in Indian science textbooks.

Changes in Social Science Books

The revised social science textbook, "Exploring Society, India and Beyond" major changes are related to the inclusion of Madhya Pradesh, Saraswati civilisation instead of the Harappan civilisation, and omission of the caste discrimination system. The book challenges the western Greenwich Meridian, stating that Indian Madaya Pradesh was the oldest prime meridian.⁷⁵ Hindu nationalists argue that India had a prime meridian of its own before the European concept, which passed through the modern day Ujjai. Indian astronomers had a center for astronomy, and were well aware of the concepts of longitude and latitude⁷⁶.

Western archaeological terminology of the Harappan civilisation has been discarded due to its Pakistani origin and the fact that it represents a disoriented and lost civilisation. Also, the term Harappa ignores the spread of the Indian civilisation.⁷⁷ The concept is now revitalised in the new education policy as Sindhu Sarasvati civilisation. Aryan Invasion Theory proposed by Wheeler has been described as biased since it interprets Aryans as invaders in India.⁷⁸ The book removes the Vedic influence in the Indian caste system, which mentions how different castes were assigned different tasks. The lower caste Dalits are regarded as untouchables, due to the myth of their creation

⁷⁵ *Times of India*, "From "Madhya Rekha" to "Sindhu-Sarasvati": Major Shifts in Class VI NCERT Social Science Textbook," July 21, 2024,

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/madhya-rekha-sindhu-sarasvati-civilisation-heres-what-is-new-in-ncert-class-6-textbook/articleshow/111905337.cms>

⁷⁶ *Hindustan Times*, "India had its own prime meridian passing through Ujjain: New NCERT textbook," <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-had-its-own-prime-meridian-passing-through-ujjain-new-ncert-textbook-101721558409844.html>

⁷⁷ *Indian Express*, "Harappan Society Is "Sindhu-Sarasvati Civilisation," in NCERT's New Social Science Textbook for Class 6," July 21, 2024,

<https://indianexpress.com/article/education/harappan-society-is-sindhu-sarasvati-civilisation-in-ncerts-new-social-science-textbook-for-class-6-9465979/>

⁷⁸ *Times of India*, "From "Madhya Rekha" to "Sindhu-Sarasvati": Major Shifts in Class VI NCERT Social Science Textbook," July 21, 2024,

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/madhya-rekha-sindhu-sarasvati-civilization-heres-what-is-new-in-ncert-class-6-textbook/articleshow/111905337.cms>

from God’s feet, freedom and revolutionary stories against the upper caste Hindus have been omitted.⁷⁹ Ambedkar’s work is dismissed from the new Indian textbooks. Hindu Brahmin identity needs to be preserved and highlighted by erasing everything which has the potential of tarnishing their glorious image. RSS seeks to push a Brahmin friendly ideology in India.

The RSS long hailed and due agenda of exercising power by popularising Hindutva ideology. Lasswell’s model of communication emphasises role of propaganda in perception building. Lasswell introduces a communication framework to analyse propagandist’ use of ideology to achieve goals. The Sangh Parivar uses media to promote Hindutva, employing speeches, slogans, imagery in rallies, and creation of Bollywood films.⁸⁰ The desired impact is to increase its political and social legitimacy in Indian society. Table No. 1 shows the relationship between independent and dependent variables of the study.

Table no. 1

Lasswell Model and RSS strategies

Who Presents?	Who Presents What?	Via Which Medium?	Says To Whom?	Result?
RSS Rulers	Spiritualising and Hinduisation	Revisionism in Education	To Indian majority	Increase in strengthening of RSS influence

Source: Author’s analysis of how RSS strategies, agendas and techniques fit Lasswell’s communication model.

The nexus of BJP-RSS has sought to spiritualise and Hinduise the political and social sphere of India. The aim is to cultivate minds and

⁷⁹ Robert Deliege, “The Myths of Origin of the Indian Untouchables,” *Man* 28, no. 3 (1993): 533-49, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2804238>

⁸⁰ Desai, “A Latter-Day Fascism?” *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 35 (2014): 48-58, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24480495>

produce a generation that resonates with the Hindutva ideology.⁸¹ Educational institutions have multiple students all over the country.⁸² RSS books cannot be referred to as scientific knowledge with zero awareness on life's evolution over ages. The course has been revised in a way that a scientific theory is replaced by a theory based on religious speculations. Darwin theory's omission from textbooks will also affect the scientific progress of the students in India. A generation of India will not know Darwin's theory but only *Dashavatar* — a religious myth. This is one reason why NCERT reforms faced criticism by academicians, scientists and researchers across India.⁸³

India media has been supportive of RSS initiatives and agendas, granting it limelight and supporting its aim. The RSS is presented as a social organisation working for the well-being of the Indian society.⁸⁴ However, the hatred spewed at the national level by RSS seniors is bound to have a communal effect on Indian society. Presenting Muslim ancestors as cruel leaders and inflicting atrocities to Hindus⁸⁵ is not a good idea for a secular state like India. A whole mass of history has been removed. Indian Muslims are referred to as 'infiltrators'⁸⁶ and 'hissing snakes'⁸⁷ and their posteriors are portrayed as 'cruel' and 'destructive.'⁸⁸ Data taught previously in

⁸¹ Pradeen Krishna G, "Rewriting India's History: How Entertainment and Education Are Damaging the Country's Future," Medium (blog), January 23, 2024, <https://medium.com/@pradeenmania123/whats-india-s-future-from-entertainments-to-education-rewriting-india-s-history-d2393e3ee033>

⁸² *India Today*, "The RSS Impact on New Education Policy," July 31, 2020, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/new-education-policy-rss-sangh-parivar-impact-sanskrit-1706340-2020-07-31>

⁸³ Hannah, "Indian Government Accused of Rewriting History after Edits to Schoolbooks."

⁸⁴ Hannah, "Indian Government Accused of Rewriting History after Edits to Schoolbooks."

⁸⁵ "The Need to Rewrite the History of India," American Institute of Vedic Studies, June 14, 2015, <https://www.vedanet.com/the-need-to-rewrite-the-history-of-india/>.

⁸⁶ Asia Nikkei, "India's Modi under Fire for Election 'Hate Speech' against Muslims," <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/India-elections/India-s-Modi-under-fire-for-election-hate-speech-against-Muslims>

⁸⁷ "RSS and School Education," *Hindutva Watch* (blog), December 6, 2019, <https://www.hindutvawatch.org/rss-and-school-education/>

⁸⁸ "The Need to Rewrite the History of India."

religious functions are now considered to be a part of national textbooks.⁸⁹ For example, *Deshavatar* theory, which contradicts Darwin's evolution theory, has now successfully made its place in Indian educational institutions. Harappan civilization has got a new label i.e. 'Sindhu Saraswati Civilisation.'⁹⁰ Invasion Theory of the Aryans is omitted because of its 'obsolete' nature.⁹¹ Religious text of the Hindus is implemented in curriculum due to its great hindsight.'

Conclusion

NCERT induced educational curriculum aligns with RSS ideology. Educational reforms show redesigning of Indian text books which was a long awaited project of the Parivar. The religious organisation has been trying to pursue this dream ever since its birth in 1925. With the BJP at the centre, it has now successfully achieved its objective. Indian institutions along with the current revised educational curriculum is one way of strengthening the RSS influence in ethnically diverse Indian society. RSS has recognised the value of textual symbols and education in building people's perception and shaping dominant narratives with implications for the secular values and democratic beliefs of Indian society. Given the fact that a society relies on educational content and main textbooks as the source of knowledge, it is safe to claim that the societal fabric of young Indian minds will be inspired by the Hindutva ideology. This will ultimately serve the RSS interests, which is the prime promotor of the Hindutva ideology in transforming secular values and strengthening its political clout in Indian society.

⁸⁹ Seema Chishti, "Rewriting India's History Through School Textbooks," *New Lines Magazine* (blog), March 9, 2023, <https://newlinesmag.com/argument/rewriting-indias-history-through-school-textbooks/>

⁹⁰ *Times of India*, "From "Madhya Rekha" to "Sindhu-Sarasvati": Major Shifts in Class VI NCERT Social Science Textbook," July 21, 2024, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/madhya-rekha-sindhu-sarasvati-civilization-heres-what-is-new-in-ncert-class-6-textbook/articleshow/111905337.cms>

⁹¹ "Why India Needs to Rewrite Its History without Falling into Jingoistic Traps," *Firstpost*, November 30, 2022, <https://www.firstpost.com/opinion-news-expert-views-news-analysis-firstpost-viewpoint/why-india-needs-to-rewrite-its-history-without-falling-into-jingoistic-traps-11722371.html>