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TEXT BOOKS IN INDIA

by

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"of textbooks," a popular catchword,

Nationalisation is a misnomer ~~here~~. One does not nationalise textbooks. Probably we are the only country that uses that term in that sense. What is really meant is a State monopoly of textbook publication at the level of the States. In some States there is a State monopoly; in others there is partial publication by the State and partially the publishing trade is allowed to perform this service.

On a point of theory, it is obvious that a State monopoly of text-books is a most dangerous institution in a democracy. The fact is that only Communist and Fascist dictatorships practise such a monopoly of indoctrination of children. It is obvious that, if the Government of the day is allowed to monopolise the kind of information given to young people in schools, then there is a danger -- I do not say the danger is always real; but the danger is there -- always present -- that some people in Government might misuse this power to give loaded information in order to indoctrinate children as is done in totalitarian regimes. That is a theoretical objection.

In fact, there is nothing new or novel or progressive about this so-called "nationalisation of text-books". It is only a reversion to the British imperialist practice from which we have emancipated ourselves in the recent past. From 1824, a Lipidhara, a Gannit, Bal Goshtee and several books were published and this went on for a century. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the publishing and book-selling trade developed in this country and Government very wisely withdrew from the field to a certain extent, allowing publishers of repute to publish their books and make them available for readers in schools. So, what started as a Government monopoly under British rule because a mixed economy under free India from 1947. This continued for the first decade of our freedom.

In 1942, a committee was appointed to investigate this matter and it came to the conclusion that there should be competition between publishers on the one hand and between publishers and Government on the other in regard to the publication of text-books. The Committee of 1942 said:

"We are strongly opposed to any scheme that may eventually restrict the freedom of authors and publishers in producing books. Secondary schools now enjoy freedom of selecting the books that are most suitable to them and in the interest of education they should not be deprived of the freedom. If this right of free choice of books is denied to schools, whether primary or secondary, there will be no experimentation with new methods of approach and new methods of treatment."

Secondly, it said:

"We are in agreement with the view that more than one set of books on the same subject are necessary to suit different environments and different teachers."

And thirdly, it said:

"We subscribe to the view that education should not be used as an agency of propaganda of any nature..."

Very wise findings come to by an official committee.

In September, 1957, at the State Education Ministers' Conference, when Maulana Azad was the Education Minister, this unfortunate move for what was called nationalising textbooks came up. Mr. Dinkarrao Desai Minister of Education from Bombay, vehemently opposed this move. He said that nationalisation of text-books was not a democratic policy and not for a democratic society. Unfortunately, Bombay was in a minority in holding this enlightened view and generally it was left to the State Ministers and Education Departments to do whatever they liked. The result has been this drift towards State monopoly in the publication of text-books in many States.

There were other committees that gave the same warning as that of the committee of 1942. The Mudaliar Committee was one of these. Another official committee said:

"The monopoly of State textbooks leads to regimentation of thought... danger of hack work compiled through lack of competition in an intellectual and economic ivory tower..."

But these warnings have all been ignored so far. Leave aside the theoretical dangers of a State monopoly of education in the way of text-books. Experience shows that it has been a miserable failure. Three facts have come to light in the last few years: first, that the text-books published by State Governments are, by and large, of poor quality; that they are published at high cost and at high prices and this is a disguised tuition fee actually raising the cost of education and that there is profiteering on the part of many State Governments; and, thirdly, that they are not even competent enough to put the books on the market and make them available to parents and children in time. Year after year, there is a scandal that text-books prescribed by State Governments are simply not available.

In regard to quality, the best comment comes from a judgment of the Madras High Court, a judgement by Mr. Justice Balakrishna Ayyar of the Madras High Court on 12th January, 1959, on a writ petition directing Government and the D.P.I. to withdraw from the list of text-books an abridged version of Sir Walter Scott's Quentin Durward. A lady called Mrs. Shanmugasundaram published a certain abridged edition and the petitioner went to the High Court to stop this pernicious abridged edition from being put on the market in the hands of young children. The High Court dismissed the petition on the ground that the examination was only a month away and that it would not like to

disturb things. But the Judge made some very interesting comments. The judgment of the Madras High Court said:

"One becomes less ready than before to condemn, as proceeding from a purely conservative attitude of mind, the view that matters of this nature are best left to private initiative and private endeavour. Attempts to create monopolies in the channels of learning are liable to be even more harmful than in purely economic fields.... I agree that the petitioner has just cause for his indignation. To literary virtue can this book lay any claim. It is badly written and badly printed. The author and the printer alike disdain the use of punctuation marks. In the matter of bad spelling, they had original views of their own and recognised allegiance to nobody. In the matter of grammar and syntax, the author was 'an individualist', who declined to be bound by the tiresome rules of good grammarians. The book is an example of what a good text book should not be".

Very shortly after that, a newspaper in Madras, the Madras Mail of 28th August, 1959, commented on another book Oliver Twist published by the D.P.I., Andhra State. The Madras Mail had this to say on this other epic:

"It is regrettable that to them, when they are at an impressionable age, should be presented such expressions as, "show him a roof over his head," "opened his eyes on to consciousness again," "out on shopping," "The next die was cast," "Rose had gone in for a higher and dangerous fever," and "his week-days growth of beard." The rules of punctuation have been totally neglected or flouted. Such a book would hardly have been selected by a text book committee if it had not borne the imprimatur, which, no doubt, is tantamount to a command, of the Government....."

In other words, the danger is that the prescribing authorities will accept from the State text-book committee or board something that they would throw into the waste paper basket if a private publisher dared to put before them. The Madras Mail continued:

"Let it, by all means, publish books, but let these compete fairly with those produced by private publishers. The evils of monopoly will be obviated and the students will read the best books available. This is no more than fair and just. The public abhors the Government treating the publication of text-books as a source of revenue, and it distrusts the possibility of this monopoly being utilised for indoctrination."

This is not only an evil confined to Madras and Andhra. The Statesman of 10th March, 1964 made a survey of school education and it said that in U.P. and Punjab there is an extensive ^{resort} to the serious menace of sub-standard text books got approved for schools under pressure from appropriate quarters. This ~~is a comment from the Statesman of 10th March, 1964, which~~ shows that this evil is by no means extinct.

This matter came up as mentioned earlier in 1957, and at that time, I took the liberty of writing a letter to Dr. K.L. Shrimali, who was then the Deputy Minister of education, warning him a few days before this conference took place -- my letter was dated 16th March, 1957 -- and pleading with the Ministry of Education here to stop the State Governments from trying to make profit by selling text-books and reducing text-books to this kind of mockery. I am sorry that that kind of warning went unheeded. Today, after five years, we can see what damage has been wrought. It is necessary to look into the quality of the text-books put out by the State Governments and really to consider whether something should not be done to protect the children of this country from this kind of misinformation and poor quality of stuff which is put before them. If they do insist on publishing text-books, let the State Governments at least agree to compete with private publishers, so that some standards are maintained. At least, let there not be a monopoly. I realise that in some States that is the position today. But let the Ministry of Education at the Centre use its position to see that at least the doors are kept open to both State publications and free publications simultaneously; that at least would be a guarantee of some kind of standards being maintained.

As regards spurious and counterfeit books, I believe that this has now become a nation-wide evil, like the poor quality of nationalised textbooks. I understand that a body exists -- called the All India Anti-Spurious Text Books Committee, and I read a report in the press that they approached the Education Minister recently and put the facts before him.

Now, the facts here are that, according to a Press Trust of India report recently published, not less than seven States in this country have become the victims of a large-scale trade in pirated books and it is estimated that the result of this pirating of State-published books has resulted in a loss to the State Governments of about Rs.10 crores. According to the Anti-Spurious Text-books Committee the States affected are Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, West Bengal, Orissa and Maharashtra. The Government of Maharashtra had issued a denial saying that Maharashtra at least is not suffering in a big way from this evil,

The situation appears to be worst in Bihar. In Bihar, the Government established a Text-books and Education Sub-Committee five or six years ago, and the mischief started about the same time. Half the books are published by this Committee under the Education Department, and the other half are published by publishers who pay a royalty to the Bihar Government. In a journal called Rashtra Nirmata, the organ of the Bihar Teachers' Association, a great deal of valuable material is to be found in Hindi about this evil. Its January 1964 issue is, in fact, devoted exclusively to this aspect. It is called the Jali Pustak Virodhi Visheshank. It says that the rot set in six or seven years ago when Government came into the picture and published textbooks for standards I to XI. Government books proved to be no cheaper or better, and the production and distribution was so mismanaged that the field was thrown open for these counterfeiters to come in. This journal has published a table of 56 books published by the Bihar Government. The statistics have been taken from the Bihar Government

Text Books and Planning Committee. As on 30th March, 1963, this tabulation shows that of the series of four Free India Readers published by the Bihar Government, 1,50,000 should have been sold, but, in fact, the sale for these four text-books were only 17,000, 16,500 and 1,200 and 1,100; in other words, much the larger part of the market was appropriated by the counterfeiters who put out spurious editions of the same text-books. The shortfalls in the series of seven arithmetic books are even more striking. Instead of ~~2-lakhs-copies-of-Part~~ selling 16½ lakhs of copies of Part I, only 24,000 were sold, instead of 2 lakhs copies of Part VII, only 25,000 were sold. In terms of money, the loss to the Bihar Government exchequer is put at over Rs.106 crores over the last three years. In other words, the Bihar Government have been losing around Rs.35 lakhs a year through this pirating of text-books.

There are two ways of printing text-books; one is to set them up again by letter press. Since no decent printing press will counterfeit a book, they have to go to shabby presses, and the result is that the original appalling quality of the Government text-books is further lowered by more mistakes made by the counterfeiters. Some other people are more progressive and modern in their technology. They photograph pages of books; that is fool-proof, because only the original mistakes are repeated!

For instance, Nesfield's Grammar which many of us studied at school, is done by photographic means. It is a Macmillan book which has been pirated and it is exactly page by page the same, and no mistakes have crept in. But in those books here, the quality of the contents and spelling and everything else goes down tremendously and spurious, noxious stuff is put in the hands of children.

In fact, it is safe to say that this kind of thing would not have happened if Government had not taken on the publication of text-books. There are three reasons why nationalised text-books lead to this kind of piracy. The first is that the prices are unduly high. The State Governments profiteer like all good monopolists, and that being so, the margin of profit is so high that the counterfeiter is attracted more to pirating a Government text-book than a private text-book because it gives a good margin. This is a fact -- that the margin between the cost and the sale price is much higher in the case of Government monopoly than when there is competition. This is a law of economics and nature, because all monopolists are extortionate and profiteering.

The second reason is that the Government books are not easily available and are not on time. The private publishers who want to make a profit see to it that their books are on the market when the schools open. The Bihar Government and other Governments default on this requirement. This gives a counterfeiter a wonderful opportunity to be first in the field, and when a child or a parent is given a choice of buying a book which appears to be authentic, because there is no sign that it is counterfeit, or of waiting for the Government text-book to come, he naturally buys the book that is available in the market.

The third reason is that the Government do not give a fair margin of profit to the trade. While private publishers give 15

per cent discount and credit to the book trade, Government give only 10 per cent discount and no credit but only on cash. The result is that the book-sellers therefore are tempted to keep the pirated edition and not the official edition. And lastly, Government books are easy to copy because of the poor quality of the original, and both look more or less equally bad.

There are two remedies for this. One is the legal remedy, and another is the more real remedy. You cannot make people moral by legislation. We have found that out in the case of prohibition; we shall find it wherever else we go against human nature. Now, you can amend the law. Somebody has suggested that section 482 of the IPC should be amended so as to make it a cognizable offence. Certainly, if that can help, let Government do that.

however,
The real remedy is to see to it that this State monopoly of text books is ended. Until that is done, there can be no check on counterfeiting for the reasons that I have given. The only thing is to throw the text-book trade open to those who know how to publish text-books and who know how to put them on the market at a reasonable price. When that is done, let those gentlemen fight their war against the counterfeiters, just as private manufacturers of dye-stuffs or soaps or other things are able to keep the evil of counterfeiting within certain limits. ~~so that~~ The problem of nationalisation of text books and of spurious text-books is ^{thus} a combined one.

I shall conclude by drawing attention to a very amusing Laxman cartoon in The Times of India of 15th February, 1964. The scene is in a book printing press, and undoubtedly it refers to nationalised text-books. This is what is said in the caption: One man says to the other:

"Don't forget to put in mistakes, don't make the facts and figures too precise and remember to maintain a sub-standard level -- Otherwise, they will find out we are issuing spurious text-books!"