



The Goa Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education is planning to revise the history syllabus for schools. A committee of history experts, we are told, has been set up to oversee the proposed new syllabus, which is likely to have eight new topics, including the Cuncolim revolt, the Pinto Conspiracy, the Opinion Poll, and Statehood.

Now, one can ask many questions about the Board's proposed changes, and their choice of new topics. Like why only the failed Cuncolim revolt—why not Bijapur's revolt against Albuquerque's forces, which was 60 years earlier and successful too? What about Albuquerque's ban on the pernicious practice of sati, the first such ban in South Asia? What about the beneficial side-effects of religious conversion—like how Goan women achieved inheritance rights after converting to Christianity?

But this kind of what-aboutery can go on forever. Because, finally, topics are not really that important. The real question is: whose perspective is being taught through the history courses? Because history is a crucial subject, deeply connected to the creation of identity. And, as critics of the discipline—historians among them—have warned us, historians are not without bias. Today, one of the first things historians are trained to do is to try and ensure that their own biases do not seep into their work, but this is easier said than done. Therefore, the question of perspectives, or 'whose eyes?', remains important. And this applies to the present case as well.

What is worse is that, in India today, history is taught in schools to instill a sense of nationalism in the young. For, if nations are nothing but imagined communities, as Benedict Anderson called them, a skewed understanding of history is one of the most important methods deployed in imagining this community. And the end-product aimed for is not just love for the country, but love for—and loyalty to—its ruling establishment. Which in India means love for, and loyalty to, the dominant castes. This is why our history textbooks are all about glorifying the dominant castes and their culture. Bahujans, who are the vast majority of the country, are usually missing in these histories, or present only as passive objects rather than subjects.



The most glaring example is of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. He cannot be completely ignored by the textbooks, thanks to his outstanding global stature as a social scientist and champion of civil rights, reflected in his vision of the Indian Constitution, but mention of him in textbooks is miserable. While someone like Vivekananda, whose most celebrated achievement was a speech praising Brahmanical Hinduism, is glorified in textbooks (and also in the public domain, with hundred of major streets in major cities named after him). A Goan example is how so-called intellectuals like to start every discussion on Goa's history with the Brahmanical myth of the creation of Goa by Parashuram, which negates the history of the indigenous communities of Goa, as well as their origin myths, and which also clubs myth and history together as if they are one and the same.

The real revision of history syllabi that is required, then, is to introduce critical thinking about identity and historical bias, and to examine the past from the perspective of the Bahujan castes. The first step in this, as suggested by E. H. Carr (1961), would be to critically examine the historian herself. And a great source of inspiration in this endeavour, for those in India, is the book *Debrahmanising History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian Society*, by Braj Ranjan Mani (2005), which looks at the history of India from the point of view of what he calls the 'lowered' castes, a term that challenges the casteist term 'lower caste', and instead focuses on the process of how the elite castes dominated and oppressed the Bahujans.

This alternative history harks to the ideas of egalitarianism and rational-liberal thought in South Asian history, from the time of the Buddha, through the radical saint-poets, to nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinkers like Phule, Iyothee Thass, Periyar, and Ambedkar, much of which is ignored by school textbooks. The history of India has actually seen a continuous struggle between Brahmanism and its Bahujan opponents, says Mani, but this struggle is barely acknowledged in the standard writing of Indian history. Instead caste ideology, and the Brahminical texts that celebrate it—like the Vedas, Upanishads, and Smritis—have been institutionalised as if this is the only history of India. The reason for this, says Mani, is that the intellectuals who write history belong usually to the same dominant castes, and are thus apologists for the caste system and Brahminism.

Thus, we in Goa need to ask whether the committee overseeing the changes in the Goa

Board syllabus sees a representation of ALL Goan communities. For the casteist bias in history-writing here cannot be ignored. There is no discussion of the history and culture of Goan Bahujans in standard history texts. We learn nothing about the labouring communities who created Goa's unique landscape, agriculture, villages, food culture, and arts and crafts. Christian and Muslim Bahujans are in general completely ignored, while others are dismissed under the Hindu category, ignoring their specific identities and achievements. Another bias can be seen in the depiction of Goa as originally Hindu, ignoring the indigenous peoples and Muslim communities. Meanwhile we learn myths—in the guise of history—about the Hindu dominant castes, e.g. how they were oppressed and anti-Portuguese from the word go, when the record shows that they, like the Catholic dominant castes, were a crucial part of the Estado right from the days of Albuquerque (Pissurlenkar 1941).

Mani's book does not touch upon Goa. But what he has attempted is to deconstruct the casteist history-writing in the subcontinent. Goans need to take this up, to develop a radical and Bahujan history of Goa.

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