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Topic of Research: Nation-Building and the School Curriculum: A Critical Analysis of NCERT History Textbooks from 1966 to 2006

Findings

This thesis is a comprehensive and critical study of NCERT history textbooks in post-Independence India, examining their role in nation-building and the construction of historical consciousness. It investigates how educational policies, historiographical traditions, political contexts, and ideological debates have influenced the development, revision, and interpretation of history textbooks from the 1960s to the period following the National Curriculum Framework (2005).

The study is grounded in theoretical perspectives on nationalism particularly civic, cultural, territorial, pluralist, secular, and subaltern nationalism, and uses qualitative content analysis to evaluate policy documents and selected NCERT textbooks across different decades. It seeks to understand how themes such as secular nationalism, cultural nationalism, inclusivity, depth of coverage, and narrative interpretation have evolved over time. By situating textbooks within broader academic and political debates, the thesis highlights the dynamic relationship between state policy, historiography, and school education. Ultimately, it argues that NCERT history textbooks function as significant instruments in shaping national identity, democratic values, and collective memory in India.

The thesis consists of six chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework of the Study

Chapter 3: Review of the Related Literature

Chapter 4: Design of the Study

Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Interpretation

Chapter 6: Summary, Discussion, and Conclusion

The first chapter establishes the conceptual and contextual foundation of the study. It examines the relationship between education and nation-building in post-Independence India and discusses the aspirations of educational reform in shaping national identity. The chapter traces major educational policies and their impact on curriculum development, particularly focusing on the establishment of NCERT and the nationalisation of school textbooks. It highlights ideological challenges, political interventions, pedagogical shifts, and controversies surrounding NCERT history textbooks. The chapter further presents the need and significance of the study, defines key terms, outlines research questions and objectives, and delineates the scope of the research.

Chapter two provides the conceptual framework guiding the research. It discusses major theoretical perspectives on nationalism, including civic nationalism, cultural and ethnic nationalism, territorial nationalism, pluralist and secular nationalism, and subaltern and inclusive nationalism. The chapter also addresses the importance of textbooks as instruments of ideological transmission and examines historiographical challenges in writing national history. These theoretical perspectives form the analytical basis for evaluating textbook narratives.

Chapter Three critically reviews existing literature related to history education, textbook analysis, nationalism, curriculum reforms, and historiographical debates in India. It includes a review of relevant books and scholarly articles and provides an overview of recurring themes and research gaps. The chapter identifies the need for a longitudinal and comparative analysis of NCERT history textbooks across different political and policy contexts, thereby justifying the present study.

Chapter four outlines the research methodology adopted for the investigation. It explains the qualitative content analysis approach used to examine policy documents and textbooks. The sampling framework, data sources, tools, and techniques for analysis are described in detail. The chapter also discusses the development and validation of analytical tools, procedures for data interpretation, and ethical considerations observed during the study.

Chapter Five constitutes the core analytical component of the thesis. It begins with a critical analysis of key policy documents and commission reports from the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948–49) to NEP 2020, focusing on their recommendations regarding history teaching and nation-building. The chapter then presents a systematic content analysis of selected NCERT history textbooks published between 1966 and recent editions. It examines changes in breadth and depth of historical coverage, treatment of ancient, medieval, and modern India, representation of secular and cultural nationalism, and shifts in description and interpretation over time. The chapter identifies both continuities and changes in narrative emphasis, ideological orientation, and pedagogical approach.

The final chapter synthesizes the major findings of the study and situates them within broader historiographical and policy debates. It discusses how different political and academic contexts have influenced textbook production and interpretation. The chapter analyses continuities and changes in secular and cultural nationalist narratives and evaluates their implications for history teaching at the secondary level. It further outlines implications for teacher preparation programmes, professional development of history teachers, history writing, and classroom pedagogy. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the need for balanced, critical, and inclusive history education and offers suggestions for further research.