

Made by Academics, Marked by Politics: An Analytic Study of Gradually Vanishing Liberal Voices from Academic Curriculum

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Abstract

This study will investigate the removal of liberal voices from Indian university curricula. It will further discuss the gradual shift that is taking place in academia and how the academic policies are increasingly suppressed by the ruling elites in India and around the world. The paper will review the removal of Arundhati Roy's "Walking with the Comrades" from Manomaniam Sundaranar University and Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" from the Delhi University syllabus by naming them as anti-national and inappropriate for the students. The paper will also investigate the texts queued for exclusion from academic curricula. The paper will be a critical reflection of how liberal thoughts have been continuously marginalized in Indian educational institutions. And highlight the larger pattern of undemocratic encroachment on higher education, where curriculum censorship is undermining democratic values, freedom of expression, and critical thinking from the academia. The paper will draw attention to a governance theory, a critical theory, and an institutional perspective, and critiques the use of censorship by ruling elites as a strategy to shut out dissent and promote ideologically aligned narratives in the education system. The Study will explore the broader consequences of authoritarianism on democratic educational patterns and its impact on the intellectual perspective of students and on literary studies, paving the way for a deeper understanding of academic censorship and the evolving role of the humanities in a politically changed climate.

1. INTRODUCTION

Within a few years, the mechanism of academic structure has drastically changed. The educational policies and their impact on academic censorship can be measured through the academic decisions that took place in recent times. Academic censorship plays a vital part in balancing the whole educational and pedagogical structure. In recent years, the role of academic censorship has become a matter of discussion for the intellectual class. With shifting times and governments, the role of academics and academicians is quite important to shape the ideological perspective of upcoming generations. Academia plays a crucial role in shaping the social and political ideologies of common people through education. When the decision-making body does not remain independent and political involvement influences its decisions, it's high time to investigate the changing patterns of academic censorship and its long-term impact on the future of students.

this paper will investigate the removal of Mahasweta devi's "Draupadi" from Delhi Universities honors syllabus and Arundhati roys "Walking with the comrades" from Manonmaniam Sundaranar Universities (MSU) master's curricula. this works has been criticized and called inappropriate, anti-national and offensive to sentiment of particular communities and groups, while the intellectuals and Scholars opposed its removal by calling it the voice of marginalized and suppressed class that is intentionally silenced by the ruling

authorities. this study will offer a firm critique of academic censorship and its impact on democratic knowledge production in Indian higher education system

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the survey of Academic freedom index, Indian education policies are sinking and reducing the freedom of expression specially in the autonomy of institutions, campus related issues, teaching and research etc (Kinzelbach et al. 2020; Lührmann et al. 2023).Intellectuals, liberals and literary scholars are highly concerned about the changing policies and the shifting structure of academia influenced by the radical ideologies (Chandhoke 2018).The ideological filtering of syllabus in the name of appropriateness is the most visible shift in education policy (batra 2020).In the name of indianization of education many exclusions and inclusions are taking place. this usually linkup with the ideologies and policies of ruling parties and their attempt to reshape the historical context accordingly (Gupta 2022). such policies becomes literal threat to the marginalized and downtrodden people and will play crucial role in silencing their voices.It is claimed that earlier too the academic syllabus was used by the governments to impose their ideologies through education.the literature in academics was used as a tool to shape the ideologies of students in their preferred way and the same things are under revision currently. As a part of policy “Draupadi” by Mahasweta devi was removed from the syllabus of BA Honors from Delhi University in 2021 as well the removal of “Walking with the Comrades” by Arundhati roy from the syllabus of MA English from Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu. The suppression of feminists, Marginalized and downtrodden voices from syllabus in the name of mentioning decency is a matter of concern specifically for political science and literature students who needs to learn the complexities of society and analyze it for the future (Menon 2021; Gupta 2022).

About Mahasweta devi’s “Draupadi”

The short story of Mahasweta devi “Draupadi” had its old existence from 1998 in the curriculum of Delhi University in undergraduate program of BA English.In general the story revolves around the character “Dopdi Mejhen” and about how she has been exploited and victimized by the military (Roy, “Reading Mahasweta Devi’s Draupadi”).But in 2021 it had been removed from the syllabus of DU by calling it not appropriate for the undergraduate students. along with Mahasweta devi, the dalit authors like Bama and Sukirtharani were also removed (Sikdar). The chairman of the committee who removed the story from the syllabus argued that story’s graphicdescription about the private parts may disturb learners mind and make disturbance in inclusive learning (Outlook Editorial Board).This decision was criticized by intellectual class and feminist society along with the study expects of marginalized people. They all condemn it as a influenced move, inspired by certain ideologies. 15 members of Academic council disagreed with the decision and call it as “Maximum vandalism” and a deliberate attempt to abolish the voices of marginalized, backwards and harassed women (nayar,78). More than 115 faculty members of Delhi University issued a collective statement of criticizing the decision (The Telegraph).

In its opposite a small group of people defended the decision by calling it the part of “De-sensationalize” academic syllabus aligned with NEP 2020’s guidelines (Narayan). The educators like kritika narula who taught “Draupadi” in classrooms for years states that about the discomfort that it evokes is something that makes it powerful for teaching learning process, making student enable to learn about the criticalities of caste system and Gender violence

(Narula). According to the academicians the removal of such works from the syllabus will reduce the importance of liberalism from education system. The dialogue went on “Draupadi” cause its not about removing one chapter from syllabus but about silencing the down-trodden voices through political pressures and changing the pedagogy to change the mindsets of coming generations.

About Arundhati Roy’s “Walking with the Comrades”

After Mahasweta devi’s “Draupadi”, one more notable case that draw attention towards the role of censorship in academia and its long term impact on education policy is Arundhati Roy’s “walking with the comrades”. It was introduced in the course of masters in 2016-17 by Manonmaniam Sundaranar University (MSU) in Tamil Nadu. The eassy deals with the author’s experience with Maoist rebels of Chattisgarh. However it was removed from the curricula in November 2020 because of the influence of some external forces. The book was tagged as antinational and got charges of promoting the Maoism (Ilangovan).

The Akhil bharatiya Vidhyarthi parishad filed a complain against the university and asked to remove roys eassy from syllabus. According to them it was promoting naxalism and can harm the nationalism. In its response the vc of Manonmaniam Sundaranar University (MSU) made a review committee that finally suggested to replace the eassy with other collection of eassy by M. Krishnan titled My Native Land: Essays on Nature (Ilangovan). The reason provided for its removal was that it will be harmful for the ideological growth of students and ABVP even threatened the university for dragging this issue to union ministry of education unless the immediate removal of the book (“TN University Removes”). Many libralist and educationist opposed this decision and called it threat to freedom of expression in academics including the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader and Member of Parliament Kanimozhi arguing that such politically motivated decisions will end up the culture of critical thinking from Indian academia (“TN University Removes”). Wellknown literally platforms like the Frontline advocated that walking with the comrades is an internationally acclaimed work for human rights advocacy and its indepth journalistic insight. Critics also argued that the work is totally apropeate for the post graduate level students for matching and enhancing their critical thinking level. The author Arundhati roy responding by calling it state’s insecurity and abolition of marginalized voice in the name of sanitization (Ilangovan).

It is interesting that the conventional publications like “Swarajya” said that putting roys work without explaining its opposite ideology will not to be a fair decision. intellectual freedom can be only achieved by keeping both kind of ideologies together so that the balance can be maintained for analytic thinking. They suggested that a long with Arundhati roy’s works, nationalist authors like arun shourie and their worked must be included to make ideological balance rather than dominance (Neelakandan).

The controversy sparked by this two works shows the silently changing nature of academic censorship and deliberate attempts of making space for the works that promotes power governed ideologies. This kind of ancients is clearly highlighting the shrinkage for alternative opinions in the literary word

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper examines the governance theory as well as the critical theory to keenly examine the topic with a deep analytic eye. The governance theory provide the rules and regulations and

the role of government in structuring the elements of academic censorship. Here, the researcher has applied the concept of “Waves of academic freedom” this concept deals with the historical patterns of academic censorship and its flexibility and rigidity and how it changes with the changing governments and its ruling patterns. In addition the researcher also had a glance on institutional theory that informs us about the introduction and regularization of dominating ideologies through academical conformity (Fuchs 2022). The formula of “hacker’s veto” was also looked at because eventually through censorship, a deliberate attempt is made to mute the voices that may go against the vision and mission of the ruling class

4. METHODOLOGY

This study deals with a qualitative method to find out the concrete reasons behind the removal of Mahasweta Devi’s “Draupadi” and Arundhati Roy’s “Walking with the Comrades”. In this study, the researcher has applied the qualitative method because the paper is based on several facts, points of view, and suggestions, and doesn’t deal with the quantity and numbers (Creswell and Poth 7). The secondary sources include articles, journals, media reports, academic reports, and news websites etc. Moreover, to understand the views of common people, the data is gathered from published interviews and Television reports in the context of this issue. The researcher has keenly reviewed the data connected with the topic, including the official notification related to the material removal, administrative correspondence, and recommendations of committee members. These documents provide us with in-depth information on the decision-making mechanism of institutions (Kallet, 2004). The researcher has used thematic and textual analysis to find the themes and motifs covering the set of results (Braun and Clarke 79). The investigation does not just talk about the issue but also attempts to find the root cause and consequences behind it. The selected sources directly talk about the academic censorship and involvement of politics in interrupting its freedom. This study will try to reach out to both sides of the coin by analyzing and interpreting the facts and findings, utilizing the academic papers, articles, government orders, and media reports, and conducting an in-depth discussion of abolishing the mentioned work and its opposing voices to maintain a balance for analyzing and understanding the ongoing circumstances of academic censorship

5. CASE ANALYSIS: SYLLABUS EXCLUSIONS

The removal of Mahasweta Devi’s “Draupadi” from DU and Arundhati Roy’s essay “Walking with comrades” from Manonmaniam Sundaranar University reveals the reality of censorship and authoritarianism and how political ideologies can transform the academic structure by suppressing the realistic works, documenting the historical happenings. “Walking with the comrades” was taught at MA English syllabus but taken out after ABVP’s complain against the work and marked it as anti national. After that it was removed by the university and replaced it with M. Krishnan’s “My Native Land” (Frontline 2020). Similar kind of incident happened at Central University of Kerala in 2019 when a proposed work for Dalit studies, including Arundhati Roy’s writings, was taken off even before its implementation. The excuse was given that it can fuel political controversy in the future and can be harmful to the peace of the nation. So the real problem wasn’t its implementation in class but its pre-predicted future outcome. Eventually, the ruling elites have been given a choice of deciding what should be and what shouldn’t be taught in classrooms (The News Minute 2019; Fuchs 2022).

6. DISCUSSION

Impact on critical thinking and democratic values

Putting a seizure on the liberal works from the academic syllabus will make students less critical about the realities happening around them, will reduce their political sense to understand and analyze and prevent them from watching things with different dimensions. The suppression of the books that question the ideologies of the ruling class become a new trend at the international level. Such decisions will weaken the democratic values from the students of upcoming generations and make them think in a narrow way only (Audretsch et al. 2023; Fernandez et al. 2024). When it comes to the field of humanities, the critical thinking and keeping an analytic point of view plays the most crucial part. English literature, like social and political science plays an important role in constructing a student's future perspective for the further life and kind of literature they are exposed to, plays a vital role in it.

The state-aligned interference in the academic censorship is gradually becoming the part of higher education from a few years. The major changes in the syllabus are normalized in the name of sanitization. This perhaps will be a challenge for the constitutional academic independence and its operation. The faculties expressed their concerns in the interviews and were alarmed about the reduction in classroom discussions and freedom of expression and this is not limited to India only, globally such practices of silencing voices are taking place (Spannagel & Kinzelbach 2023).

The curriculum censorship is not a newly introduced phenomenon in India, earlier too in many parts of the world it is practiced and imposed to suppress opposing voices and reshape the ideological structure for future generations. As we have studied the facts about the abolishment of Mahasweta Devi's work "Drapadi" and Arundhati Roy's "Walking with Comrades", in a similar manner, in the United States, multiple subjects and topics related to gender, race and human rights were removed or banned including Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale" and Toni Morrison's "Beloved" in certain districts of the US (Johnson, 2015). These intermediations were being held under the impression of protecting the student's but it works in the same way how it worked in India, ended up by narrowing the scope for intellectual diversity and limiting the landscape of critical thinking. Comparable decisions witnessed in Turkey following the 2016 political circumstances, numerous works of authors that show the ideologies of opposition political parties were abolished (Akarli 142). In Hungary, the decision of eliminating Gender Studies was another eye-opening case of academic censorship where not just subjects but whole disciplines are at target (Pető 11). These cases show that at the international level all the ruling elites following the similar pattern of applying the state-preferred formal mechanism that will follow their suggestions and reshape the higher education patterns.

Banning of more than two dozen books in Kashmir

Recently a similar incident happened in Kashmir where 25 books written by authors acknowledged worldwide including works of Arundhati Roy's Booker Prize recognized "Azadi", Mo. Yusuf Saraf's "Kashmiris Fight for Freedom", Agnieszka Kuszewska, Piotr Balcerowicz's "Human Rights Violations in Kashmir" and Kanan Poshpora's "Eassar Batool". The mentioned books directly question the position of the state during the massacres and violence in Kashmir (Al Jazeera). The banning of these books in Kashmir shows a pattern of suppressing intellectual and rational voices from the country. Research experts have investigated

that law and political pressure are often used to control academic issues usually framed as protecting “security” or preventing “offense” (Taylor 612). The limits established by the government remain permanent because they reappear whenever authorities seek to control public discourse during times of conflict or political transitions (Taylor 624). Economic and Political Weekly has written on these restrictions for numerous years. In 2001, it observed how academic work on Kashmir was often treated with suspicion, making genuine research difficult (“Academic Freedom and Kashmir” 4721). By 2007, the journal described new forms of surveillance and administrative control in universities, which further narrowed freedom of expression in the Valley (“Academic Freedom in Kashmir and Elsewhere” 3603). These examples illustrate how temporary measures of “emergency” gradually become part of normal academic life. Scholars looked at it as a national dissent crisis which shows how laws and administrative powers systematically diminish the space for criticizing dominant narratives (Bhatia 6). The book bans establish a system which makes people self-censor their opinions. The fear of legal consequences and political repercussions leads publishers and teachers together with students to steer clear of sensitive topics (Bhatia 10). The unspoken pressure determines which materials get into educational spaces without requiring formal directives. Censorship in Kashmir maintains a direct relationship with the preservation of historical records and collective memory. The labeling of research that opposes official narratives as “propaganda” transforms historical scholarship into a dangerous political activity (“Academic Freedom in Kashmir and Elsewhere” 3603). The removal of materials from archives results in future students losing access to complete historical discussions. Almost all the writers and academicians view these bans as detrimental to society rather than protective measures. The “EPW” publication stated that book prohibitions fail to eliminate controversy because they weaken democratic institutions and restrict educational opportunities and prevent society from confronting its complex historical realities (“On Banning Books” 509). The book bans establish a system which makes people self-censor their opinions. The fear of legal consequences and political repercussions leads publishers and teachers together with students to steer clear of sensitive topics (Bhatia 10). The unspoken pressure determines which materials get into educational spaces without requiring formal directives. If we see in Indian as well as the broader context, the issue of academic censorship has extended beyond the removal of certain books by the particular authors. In fact it has impacted the autonomy of the whole pedagogical structure, limited student’s opportunity for critical engagement and allowed to introduce only state preferred teaching learning patterns, and not the universal approaches accepted by the world academicians, this will encourage the restricted and politically accepted education environment only.

Exclusion of Mughal history from the NCERT books

If we look at the scenario beyond universities and colleges, we find the similar patterns are being followed by NCERT that is established for enhancing and developing the school education and framing curriculum and educational research. The removal of important literature related with the history of Mughal empire from the syllabus of NCERT books has evoked an intellectual debate among the scholars and it became a matter of concern for the academicians, specially for provoking certain sentiments and limiting critical and analytic point of views in education. The chapter that shows the law and order and governance pattern of Mughal empire “Lords and Chronicles The Mughal Courts” was completely removed from

the class 12 history curriculum that use to give details about The mughal court policies in the mughal rule (National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT, 2023).many references related to medieval regimes were overlooked , that shade light on India's prolific literal heritage (BBC News, 2023). Critics claims that these picky variations fulfill ideological ends nearly tied to political document that prioritize nationalist narratives. According to political scientist Suhas Palshikar, these exclusions constitute an “ act of rewriting ” reflecting repression of inconvenient literal data in favor of a little politically palatable interpretation of history(BBC News, 2023). prestigious annalist Romila Thapar also disapproved of the revised handbooks for presenting a “ politicized and malformed interpretation of India's history, ”. the NCERT has stated that the variations form a part of class vindication aligned with the National Curriculum Framework 2023 under the National Education Policy. The variations aim to reduce curricular cargo while apparently maintaining content of medieval Indian history emphasizing a “ balanced approach ” portraying both the “ bright and dark sides ” of Mughal rule (NDTV, 2025).

For example, the latest Class 8 Social Science textbook included a section called "Note on Some Darker Ages in History," which highlights examples of religious radicalism during that time and prospel social change and adaptability (NDTV, 2025). However, academic discourse has cautioned that such biased deletions endanger people's sophistication of complex textual realities and reinforce ideological biases that support critical thinking and establish a pluralistic understanding of Indian history among scholars. Aditya Mukherjee, an expert on Indian modern history, suggests that removal of such references could accelerate the collective polarization of a reportedly pluralistic social order and de-value the knowledge and understanding of India's immensely complex artistic elaboration (Economic Times, 2025). Moreover, academics worry that the removal of vital textual narratives undermines scholars' critical and rigorous readings of history, downgrades educational standards, and compromises India's development in the global scholarly community (Ahmed & Verma, 2023). The NCERT claims these changes in textbooks emerge organically from intellectual developments to enhance pedagogical efficiency.many historians and educators, based on their collective memories, believe such changes represent ideological pressures and are designed to reconfigure textual accounts to meet specific political needs. Similar developments warrant close vigilance about academic freedom and textual sensitivity, in order to safeguard the educational integrity of India.

Trimming of Darwins theory from NCERT curriculum

In the name of rationalization of textbooks, the National council of Research and Training (NCERT) in 2022-23 removed Charls Darwin's theory from standard X science chapters.the reason government gave behind the removal is to reduce the extra burden during the time of covid 19 .there are several books that NCERT during the time of pandemic and Darwin's theory is one of them.Earlier the name of that chapter was “Heredity and Evolution,” which is now named as “Heredity”. The NCERT believes that this action will lighten the mental burden of students and help in avoiding the reparative teaching exercise (NCERT).but the intectuals and scientist community sensed as deliberate attempt remove one of the most foundational idea of biology. Scholar's and expects from the whole country signed a petitioned to restore Darwins theory arguing that this evolution supports epidemiology ,modern day medicine practices and ecology (Breakthrough Science Society; Indian Express). Dharmendra pradhan ,The education minister later said that that was no other intention behind its removal then the rationalization of subject and admitted that Darwins context had been cropped from

the syllabus (NDTV).The expects on the topic argue that omission of such theories from school education indicates the imposition of certain ideological patterns in education that challenges the rationalistic narratives.The removal of such important documents from history, science and civics from the curriculum will impact the critical and rational thinking of future generations.(Hindustan Times; ThePrint). The future generation of science students will remain stranger with the thought of Charles Darwin and will be ill equipped to understand the important theory of biology.The scholars demands the restoration of this evolution because its not just about preserving the important science document but about protecting the academic freedom from ideological agendas.

Additional Information About Censorship and Authoritarianism

From 2021 until today, NCERT's so-called rationalization of a newly emerged practice where textbooks are not fully removed but rewritten and trimmed according to the ruling ideology. This practice mostly happened in the books of social and political science, where many important chapters have been removed and rewritten with the excuse that "rewiring is required" (National Council of Educational Research and Training 4) and "in accordance with earlier regionalization, the first chapter is deleted" (National Council of Educational Research and Training 69). That is how, by giving it official recognition, many important historical chapters were removed from texts. In them, from the 10th standard's text, NCERT removed many chapters related to democracy like caste, religion, gender, and mass protest for social reforms in 2020. In the same year, from the 11th standard's political science books, chapters related to "Sandhivad," secularism, nationality, and patriotism were removed. Following the same pattern, from the 9th standard's textbook, topics related to constitutional rights and constitutional structure were deliberately removed. In addition, the role of freedom fighters like Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru is reduced or sidelined by trimming them from the curriculum.

Intellectuals don't count it as a neutral act of editing the text but as an intentional exclusion and inclusion of ideological strategy. The *Economic and Political Weekly* editorial on this subject cautions that "ideologically streamlining the curriculum in the name of rationalization will constrain the minds of students" (EWP). If we see the overall framing, the above evidence-based arguments suggest that trimming of the curriculum will not only erase the important parts of the social, political, and cultural history of India, but the future generation will also miss the opportunity for critical thinking and may lose the ability to rationalize things in their civic life.

7. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To save the freedom of expression and maintain transparency in academia specially in curriculum making, Indian universities must adopt some fruitful methods aligning with UGC regulations. The political ideologies and state interest shouldn't be considered while structuring the curriculum and maintain the flow by continuing the conventional text in syllabus. The academic freedom indicators should be integrated by national accreditation interference and panel should be made of multiple disciplines to maintain the authenticity. To address the threats over academic freedom following suggestions in policy making can be helpful

1. The free and unbiased curriculum making body > the text recommendation should be reviewed by the intellectuals of multiple disciplines or cross disciplines to maintain the transparency and to avoid politicized oversight (Lührmann et al. 12,13). Empowering autonomous institutions is important for protecting the academic freedom, since transformative actions are necessary for lasting and sustainable reformations (Lott 1013–14).

2. Compulsion on transparency protocols > Before the official removal of any text from the university syllabus or making any revision in curriculum, the details must be presented with concrete reasons of removal, its earlier approvals by the panels when it was introduced, for maintaining the academic integrity (Chandhoke 14). Before removing or adding any text, the universities should hold meetings with government officials as well as the scholars of particular discipline to discuss about its longterm impact .

3. Global connectivity for the academic network support > If the country associate's with international academic network, it will enhance the quality of education as well as allow the universities for new ideas and help in decision making by studying their policies like the international human rights and several educational group work together for successful outcomes (Spannagel and Kinzelbach 18). International participation will help in keeping the policies unbiased and rational as well as universal .

4. Legally enforced academic freedom policies > The education policies must follow guidelines of UNESCO concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (1997). This recommendations protects the rights of Academicians and Scholars and give them freedom to decide their teaching learning methods. This should also give assurance that opposing ideologies or point of view should also given place in curriculum (SAGE Journal 8).

5. Fair governance through student participation > Many theorists suggests that student delegation should be included in curriculum making committee so the democratic values can be maintained as well as it will help adding in intellectual diversity and vitalize the legitimacy of education system and well as its decision making body (Apple 119). The participant students should be from different caste culture and religion so the secularistic principles stay unaffected specially when it comes to a multicultural society like India.

Applying this reforms will help universities in achieving sustainable goals and in maintaining balanced curriculum that works effectively without any influences and suppression of ruling elites in academia. Its just not about adding or removing certain works but it's about the integrity of academia in any democratic nation that will serve in shaping the future of the world.

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