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CBSE REVISES SYLLABUS FOR THE SESSION 2020-21

On 7th July 2020, Human Resource Development (HRD) Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal announced the revised syllabus for CBSE classes of 9th to 12th for the session 2020-21 with a reduction of 30% in the syllabus in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic. While on the surface it looks like a progressive policy meant to reduce the burden on students amid the lockdown, a closer look at the new syllabus proves to be rather disappointing.

Instead of revising the syllabus such that the contents aren't affected, some chapters were removed entirely from the curriculum. These include topics like 'Food Security in India', 'Constitutional Design', 'Democratic Rights', 'Popular Struggles and Movements', 'Gender, Religion and Caste', 'Our Environment', 'Heredity, and Evolution' among many.

This overall exclusion of topics from the syllabus is definitely going to affect what students of these batches will learn. The most alarming topics to be excluded amongst these are the chapters on Democracy, Rights, Constitution, and Social Movements from the syllabus of class 9 and 10. Since students choose different streams after class 10th, this is the last opportunity for them to learn about Democracy in classrooms. One can't stress enough on how important it is to know and be aware about the Constitution and Rights in order to ensure responsible citizens.

Many often criticize CBSE's curriculum for not being satisfactory and up to the mark and a huge reduction in the syllabus is definitely an addition to the problem. It's important to realize the significance of the topics that have been omitted. These chapters cover contents varying from fundamental rights and duties, secularism, the Constitution, partition, different social movements, and their relevance. Students of these classes learn the most basic yet the most important aspects of our history and the political nature of our country. In a country with high dropout rates, this is also the last opportunity for many to learn all of these elements and leaves such students particularly at loss.

While the Ministry of Human Resource Development appeared to have turned its back towards the state of education in the country, it finally took some steps to reduce the burden on students. However, this looks like a reactionary policy at best. Schools were shut down across the country in March 2020 due to the virus outbreak. The Ministry had three months to look into it and devise a new, concrete plan, consult experts, but this only seems like a last-minute policy. While Mr. Ramesh Pokhriyal later said that schools have been advised to teach these topics to the students, it's tough to believe that the same will happen in an education system that prioritizes marks over true learning.

While the schools are still on a break, the authorities should reconsider this step and figure out a way to ensure that the students get to learn about the history and the democratic structure of the country. CBSE should re-examine the new exam pattern as it means an entire generation of

students not learning about these crucial issues. It becomes even more important in the current political state of the country when the citizens seem to be divided on almost everything. As Howard Zinn, an American historian puts it, “history is important. If you don't know history it is as if you were born yesterday. And if you were born yesterday, anybody up there in a position of power can tell you anything, and you have no way of checking up on it”.

Sources:

¹<https://www.thehindu.com/education/percentage-of-school-dropouts/article25909306.ece>

²https://m.economictimes.com/industry/services/education/uniformed-commentary-on-exclusion-of-topics-from-cbse-syllabus-hrd-minister/amp_articleshow/76870031.cms

MENTAL HEALTH: STIGMA, INSENSITIVITY AND ETHICS

Good health is considered to be a necessity for the proper functioning of humans, without which the productivity level and the normal daily life of an individual gets disrupted. The significance of maintaining health has been highlighted in the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2015 under goals 4, 5, and 6 which are 'to reduce child mortality', 'to improve maternal health' and 'to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases' respectively.¹ The same has also been recognised once again in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, particularly by goal 3 'good health and well being'.²

This leads us to questions arising about the different elements of health and well being. The World Health Organisation (WHO) constitution states: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." Therefore, SDG 3 takes it a step forward by not just including the physical fitness of people but also the wellness and emotional state of individuals across all age groups. Through this, the WHO also confirms that mental health is an integral and essential component of health. An important implication of this definition is that mental health is more than just the absence of mental disorders or disabilities.³ Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.⁴

Mental health takes supreme importance in carrying day to day life and is equal to physical health; both require attention, professional consultations, tests and therapies, and even medication at times. Thus having a balanced mental state is as important as a stable physical state. The only difference with identifying discomfort in physical and mental health is that the former can be seen, is clear and known to all humans whereas the latter isn't visible and can only be felt by the individual experiencing it. Often humans disregard giving attention to something they cannot see from their own eyes, mental health being one of them. The ignorance towards the issue has made humans less accepting of the fact that the mind needs to be healthy and they have created a stigma around it by labeling people with mental health problems as those who need to be admitted to mental hospitals.

¹United Nations Millennium Development Goals. (n.d.). United Nations. <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

²SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being. (2019, October 15). UN India. <https://in.one.un.org/page/sustainable-development-goals/sdg-3-2/>

³World Health Organization: WHO. (2018, March 30). *Mental health: strengthening our response*. World Health Organisation. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>

⁴What Is Mental Health? | MentalHealth.gov. (n.d.). Mental Health.Gov. <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/what-is-mental-health#:~:text=Mental%20health%20includes%20our%20emotional,childhood%20and%20adolescence%20through%20adulthood.>

Much to our dismay, the insensitivity of individuals towards mental health has always been quite prominent. Often people confiding in others due to psychological distress have been ridiculed publicly even though it is a very private matter. Rather than actually helping out a person or connecting them with professional help, others tend to completely dismiss the existence of the same and propagate it to be a mere transient feeling. It is of utmost urgency to understand how dangerous it is to avoid such a crucial aspect of health as these feelings might be symptoms of a greater problem requiring immediate attention. Such actions of people around a person suffering from emotional discomfort may give rise to feelings of shame and further force them to never seek assistance and lock themselves up in a threatening situation.

The continued inconsideration and unawareness of people about psychological health are also reflected when the terms of serious mental disorders like ‘Depression’ and ‘Obsessive Compulsive Disorder’ (OCD) are narrowed down to a way of feeling low, or being very tidy and organised respectively due to the incomplete knowledge and unawareness of people about the same.

Major Depressive Disorder is a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest. Also called Clinical Depression, it affects how an individual feels, thinks, and behaves which can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems. Depression may require long-term treatment and isn’t a situation one can just come out of.⁵ Similarly, OCD is an anxiety disorder in which time people have recurring, unwanted thoughts, ideas, or sensations (obsessions) that make them feel driven to do something repetitively (compulsions) and requires expert help to get treated.⁶ The careless usage of medical terms must be avoided at all times as they simply belittle the gravity of these conditions and also change the attitudes of people regarding them.

One thing that people are extremely ignorant about mental health is that a diagnosis should only be made by a trained psychiatrist, psychologist, or counselor. Self-diagnosis or diagnosis given by a person close to the affected person with no expertise about a medical condition such as a psychological disorder might result to be misleading and completely wrong. This may also give rise to new risks and difficulties. While listening to the problems of an individual is alright, a diagnosis must always come from a professional, similar to how physical diseases are tackled by learned doctors.

Taking this construct forward, people should indulge in opening up to their concerns and seeking assistance from skilled therapists who are bound to follow the code of confidentiality. Their profession and morality as an expert in this field demand them to be unbiased and provide their patients with medical help keeping their records completely safe. The mental health of a person is a part of one’s private domain and it is the principled duty of a professional to respect it and not reveal it in the public sphere of life. More important ethical factors that psychologists and

⁵*Depression (major depressive disorder) - Symptoms and causes.* (2018, February 3). Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/symptoms-causes/syc-20356007>

⁶American Psychiatric Association. (n.d.). *What is Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.* <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ocd/what-is-obsessive-compulsive-disorder>

psychiatrists must follow are them taking full responsibility for their opinions under all circumstances and seeking consent from the patients including all the information about the nature of the illness, method of treatment, factors associated with efficacy, and risk factors.⁷

Such an ethical code of conduct must also be followed by all humans to minimise the possible inconsiderate actions towards mentally distressed people. Someone's personal information must never be brought up for discussions; no one can recognise a person suffering from psychological discomfort just by looking at their face and stating insensitive judgements should be avoided. One such recent example that highlights the unsympathetic conduct of humans is linked to the unfortunate suicide of the Bollywood actor, Sushant Singh Rajput. Various news channels and people on media platforms openly discussed and debated over the condition of the late actor's psychological health. Bringing up an extremely sensitive and private matter to a national and global domain and then commenting, trivializing, and debating over the same was highly unprofessional, immoral, and thoughtless. This nature of downplaying the effects and consequences of mental health adopted by the people is highly harmful for the progression of our society.

With being labeled as the 'world's most depressed country' by the WHO and having every 1 out of 7 individuals suffering from mental disorders, it is imperative to spread awareness about mental health.⁸ Only with the stigma and inconsideration towards psychological health and disorders gone, and ethical and moral practices in place would ensure the best growth of human beings. For the proper sustainable development of human resources, focusing on the mental well being of individuals is the need of the hour.

⁷Isaac, R. (2009). Ethics in the practice of clinical psychology. *Indian Journal of Medical Ethics*, 2, 70. <https://doi.org/10.20529/ijme.2009.024>

⁸Sharma, P. (2019, December 31). *In India, one in seven suffered from mental illness ..1990 to 2017, new large scale state-wise study reveals*. Firstpost. <https://www.firstpost.com/india/in-india-one-in-seven-suffered-from-mental-illness-between-1990-to-2017-new-large-scale-state-wise-study-reveals-7828701.html>

SCRAPPING OF ARTICLE 370 AND 35(A): FIRST ANNIVERSARY

August 5, 2020, marked the first anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370 and 35(A). Supporters of the revocation went for a 'Grand Celebration', and opponents marked it as a 'Black Day'. The move had a different impact in different parts of the state; people in the Jammu region were happy with the decision, unlike a small section of the Kashmir population.

A year back, the entire population of the state was puzzled about how this revocation would impact them. The move took place in extraordinary circumstances as nobody within Jammu and Kashmir was taken into confidence. Intellectual circles and former bureaucrats of India publicly expressed anguish over the decision. Perhaps, it was seen as a big jolt to the State-Centre relations which existed due to the very Article. Some former policymakers were of the view that such a step would add more fuel to the politically unstable atmosphere of J&K.

Pertinent to mention that on August 5 2019, the Government of India headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi ended the 70 years special status to J&K state and bifurcated erstwhile J&K state into two Union Territories –Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh with a resolution in both houses of the Parliament and later by the Presidential order. The move was seen as a surprise and shocked all political circles of J&K. Almost all the mainstream and separatist leaders were caged, including three former Chief Ministers. Communication avenues were also snapped, and the state was fully hedged. This decision left people in deep fraught and tacit, and there was silent widespread anger against the move.

However, according to the Government of India, it was an initiative towards the development of the erstwhile state and its greater integration with the nation while trying to tackle issues regarding the two articles. Under Article 370, the Centre needed the state government's concurrence to apply laws except in defence, foreign affairs, finance and communications and the erstwhile state's residents lived under a separate set of laws, including those related to citizenship, ownership of property, and fundamental rights, as compared to other Indians. As a result of this provision, Indian citizens from other states could not purchase land or property in Jammu & Kashmir. Meanwhile, Article 35(A) allowed the state legislature to define the Jammu and Kashmir's permanent residents as someone who was a state subject on May 14, 1954, or who had been a resident for ten years, and had lawfully acquired immovable property. It meant that no outsider could own property in J&K or get a state job. Among other things, it deprived the

state's female residents of property rights if/when they married an 'outsider'. The provision also extended to children born of any such women.

The Government aimed at removing this inequality between the citizens of the state and other Indians when it came to property rights. Their objective also helped in abolishing this unreasonable gender bias against the women of the erstwhile state and their right on their family and ancestral property. At the same time, this action was also focused on inviting investments by established firms, industries and MNCs in the region for the creation of new employment opportunities for the people of J&K and hence to assure them a better standard of living and earning.

The aftermath of the Revocation of Article 370 and 35A

The questions if the revocation of special status would help in normalizing the situation in J&K and how would the Indian Government reach out to people and convince them were raised. Reservations about allowing outsiders to snatch jobs from the people of the state have also arisen. The people of the entire Union Territory are in deep stress and anger; they are scared for the future of their generations. But one aspect of this revocation is that now private companies can invest in the state without any restriction. The move will bring investment which overall increases the employment in the state.

The removal of special status was followed by adequate security arrangements for the safety of lives and protection measures. In this aspect, the Government was successful in controlling any possible turbulence like what the erstwhile state witnessed massive in 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2016 which resulted in the loss of several lives. Now, the security situation in the state has improved, reduction in violence has been recorded, employment avenues have been created which continue to grow, developmental agenda has stepped in, and the dynastic rule will also come to an end.

However, many regional political parties have categorically rejected the move and openly demanded the restoration of the special status and statehood-ship. Since the August 5, 2019, decision, the political activities have frozen; leaders who were released hardly speak anything; and people have lost confidence in mainstream politics. There is some apprehension in some quarters that Domicile law can change the demography of the state and might have adverse impacts on people socially, politically, economically, and psychologically. But the truth is that earlier domicile policy was exclusive and discriminatory. There is a need to check and balance of the present policy of the state, which is essential to conserve the cultural heritage. But the same time no policy should allow to discriminate or alienate its own citizen. It seems to be very hard

for people to accept the current nature of political arrangements and transition. If the move was aimed to connect people with the rest of the country, questions about no comprehensive outreach plan formulated or implemented have risen. Absence of political process between J&K and GOI will not help to improve ground realities and the current situation. The change of Governor of the state is one of the steps which seems to promote political dialogues in the state. In earlier, regime the political process was too slow to yield any result.

Indian Home Minister, Amit Shah had claimed that the move would usher in a new dawn of development in the region, end militancy and corruption. However, after a good one year, people are waiting for the changes on the ground. There is no doubt that a major development project will take time, but the Government of India is trying to push development projects. Although the Government is trying to attract business houses to invest in J&K, it entirely depends on the security situation in the state. Delegation of Union ministers visited the UT twice and took stock of various problems faced by people.

Although the possible new openings in new firms and advertisements of around 12000 Public Jobs are widely appreciated and more expected in the near future, a former member of the Government of the erstwhile state, Satyapal Malik, confirmed that around 81000 posts are vacant in various government departments. Fifty thousand were expected to be fulfilled in the ongoing financial year, but the Covid19 pandemic affected the process.

Way Forward and Public Expectations

The Government of India must open channels of talks with the various stakeholders of Jammu and Kashmir. Those who were alienated by previous regimes should be given a space to express their views. Release of all political prisoners from mainstream camps, restoration of statehood, and initiation of direct political engagement with the public especially with the youth population can help the Government of India to win the hearts and minds of people. More engagement steps are also required like a special employment package, and framing of new policies and programmes according to public expectations. Issues related to domicile laws and possible implications if jobs were taken by outsiders need to be taken seriously. A sense of assurance needs to be created among the people of the Union Territory that nobody would take any of their rights and job.

Politics should have space and role to play; it is important to reduce dependency on security mechanisms; allow democratic methods to express thoughts and views; create an investment atmosphere and new employment opportunities; fill vacancies in public departments with fairness and based on merit rather than traditional ways like nepotism and favouritism based.

There is no doubt that the people in J&K are in favours of peaceful ways to sort out any state – centre differences and usher a new era of development and prosperity.

Sources:

[1https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/explainer-all-you-need-to-know-about-jammu-and-kashmirs-domicile-law/articleshow/77122595.cms](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/explainer-all-you-need-to-know-about-jammu-and-kashmirs-domicile-law/articleshow/77122595.cms)

[2https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/article-370-and-35a-revoked-how-it-would-change-the-face-of-kashmir/articleshow/70531959.cms](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/article-370-and-35a-revoked-how-it-would-change-the-face-of-kashmir/articleshow/70531959.cms)

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