

RAJYA SABHA

Friday, 1st March, 2013/10th Phalguna, 1934 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the clock,
MR. CHAIRMAN in the Chair.

REFERENCE TO THE VICTIMS OF FIRE IN A MARKET BUILDING ON SURYA SEN STREET IN CENTRAL KOLKATA

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. Members, as you are aware, about 19 persons reportedly lost their lives and several others were seriously injured in a massive fire which broke out in the market building on Surya Sen Street in congested Central Kolkata on the 27th of February, 2013.

The loss of so many lives in this tragedy is unfortunate and, indeed, sad. I am sure the whole House will join me in expressing our heartfelt sympathy and concern for the families of those who lost their near and dear ones.

I request Members to rise in their places and observe silence as a mark of respect to the memory of those who lost their lives in this tragedy.

(Hon. Members then stood in silence for one minute)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Introduction of Gender Sensitisation in school and college curriculum

*61. SHRI BHUBANESWAR KALITA: Will the Minister of HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether the recent cases of violence against women in Delhi and other parts of the country have drawn Government's attention to the need to tackle crime against women;

(b) whether the Ministry is planning to introduce Gender Sensitisation as a subject in various courses at school and college level; and

(c) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SHRI M.M. PALLAM RAJU): (a) to (c) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) to (c) The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 prioritizes gender as an important guiding principle in all curricular areas and stipulates that gender be an integral part of all disciplines offered to children at school stage. Gender concerns have been integrated in the curriculum and in the textbooks drawn up by the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) and widely used by schools affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and in several State Governments. The State Councils of Education Research and Training (SCERT) which prescribe textbooks for State Government schools have redesigned school textbooks to make these gender positive. The CBSE has decided to offer an elective course on 'Human Rights and Gender Studies' for classes XI and XII from 2013-14 session onwards.

University Grants Commission (UGC) has been writing to universities and colleges with regard to laying emphasis on gender sensitization and gender studies. Pursuant to the recent case in Delhi, UGC has reiterated the need for incorporation of gender concerns in all courses and has addressed all Universities in this regard. In addition, in order to promote Women's studies, UGC through a special scheme, has created 158 Women's Study Centres in the country of which 82 are in Universities and 76 in colleges.

SHRI BHUBANESWAR KALITA: Sir, the hon. Minister has reiterated what all has been done by the NCERT, SCERTs and the UGC. But, despite all that, violence against girl students, sometimes by fellow students, sometimes by staff and sometimes even by teachers, in Delhi and elsewhere, is reported in media almost everyday. I want to know whether the Ministry is contemplating to take concrete steps to make authorities in these institutions, whether private or Government, responsible.

DR. SHASHI THAROOR: Mr. Chairman, the issue of violence against students, whether in schools or colleges, including incidents of sexual harassment, has been troubling us. We have, certainly, given a renewed impetus to serious consideration of action on this issue following the horrific incident that galvanized the nation at the end of last year.

One of the things that has been done at the university level is that the UGC has set up a Task Force, which has been constituted with a number of eminent

experts. They will look into all measures involving safety on campuses. The Task Force has, in addition, been tasked with suggesting specific interventions. Letters have gone to all universities encouraging them to cooperate with the Task Force.

At the school level, we have, fortunately, fewer incidents of this nature, but we are proceeding, as the reply by the Minister has pointed out, to improve sensitization courses in schools. The CBSE has taken specific steps to develop a new kit on gender sensitivity, which will include a handbook for teachers so that they are also aware of gender sensitive issues. We are also, in fact, introducing a course now on Gender Studies and Human Rights starting next month in the next academic year in CBSE-affiliated schools.

So, we are moving forward, in addition to all the material that we are already working on and have been working on in this area; since December-January, we have taken these additional steps.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Second supplementary.

SHRI BHUBANESWAR KALITA: Sir, it is a mindset. I would like to move a step further in this question. With more and more privatization of schools, it is felt that the national obligations, and even patriotism, are taking a back seat in some cases. In some cases, even the National Anthem is not heard in functions organized by institutions, including even the Government schools! What concrete steps will the Government take in making compulsory for institutions the singing of the National Anthem in functions?

DR. SHASHI THAROOR: Sir, the National Anthem is respected by the entire nation. The standards that we expect the educational institutions to follow certainly include that. As you know, there are no specific instructions in this regard. The State Governments in any case have specific responsibility for guiding institutions in their own States. But, certainly, as far as the Ministry is concerned, this has not been an area where we have felt the need to take any specific step.

SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD: Sir, without showing any disrespect to the hon. Minister of State, I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Cabinet Minister to this issue of larger concern, which I propose to raise. Introduction of gender sensitization is a welcome step. But, the hon. Minister would surely appreciate that in schools when students are really preparing to become young boys after some time, the kind of study and the kind of course you select is of great importance. Of late, I am witnessing that the moral content in the textbook is conspicuously absent. Do you propose to address that issue? I wish to only inform you that in some of the textbooks I have gone through myself, while reading those poetries,

I felt ashamed myself as an adult. How would the student's young mind react? Maybe, some people have thought that these are 'progressive poems' which are required to be included. But when you take a larger consideration, there is a need to revisit. I would request you to please introduce the moral content of education in the syllabus and also revisit all the NCERT books, as far as courses for young boys are concerned. There is a lot to be improved upon. Many bodies have complained to us; they may have approached you as well. There is a need to revisit them in the light of the unfortunate experience we have seen over here.

SHRI M.M. PALLAM RAJU: Sir, I thank the hon. Member for raising this very pertinent issue—building up the character and moral values—especially in the younger population. We are particularly conscious of this both in the Government and in the Ministry that the demographic profile that we have today can be converted into an advantage if given the right skills and moral values. At present, we have the national curriculum framework which is the guide for setting the syllabus at every level—at the national as also for the States. Accordingly, both the Centre, the NCERT, and the States' SCERTs follow this in setting up the broader framework on which some of these issues, as far as views on nationalism are concerned, are non-negotiable. Beyond that, it is up to the States to set the curriculum where the SCERTs also have to be sensitized on some of these aspects. I hope, collectively we can raise the moral conscience. It is the collective responsibility, both of the Centre and the States. I think, the more we talk about it, I am sure, there will be a big difference in the coming years.

SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD: Mr. Minister, I cannot read some poems in this House because it will be dubbed as unparliamentary. Therefore, I am saying that I do not want to make it a political issue. Please revisit those poems meant for young boys in the books. They are very, very derogatory to women. I am very sorry to say that.

SHRI M.M. PALLAM RAJU: I am sure, everybody is as agitated as you are as far as the degradation in some of the contents is concerned. But, it is something which nobody can politicise. It is a question of our children's future. I think, we all have to act collectively on that.

DR. KARAN SINGH: Mr. Chairman, Sir, this question raises the broader point that Shri Ravi Shankar has just raised and the Minister has answered with regard to the value system which is required in our education. There does not seem to be any value orientation. Gender values, environmental values, social values, all these have to be integrated into our courses. We seem to have thrown out the

baby along with the bath water. We cannot have religion, fair enough; but that does not mean that we cannot teach universal values.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, I have a concrete suggestion. We have fundamental duties in the Constitution. Very few people are aware of that. If even those fundamental duties were to be taught in our textbooks at all levels, it should go a long way in helping us. Would the Minister kindly consider the possibility of making the fundamental duties in the Constitution applicable and readable in all the educational institutions?

DR. SHASHI THAROOR: Mr. Chairman, Sir, this is, in fact, being done. As far as the fundamental duties are concerned, the CBSE in its curriculum has actually insisted that Article 51A of the Indian Constitution, and specifically, the idea of fundamental duties should be taught to inculcate democratic values amongst the children. In fact, since the National Anthem was mentioned by the hon. Member, who asked the first question, respect for the National Anthem and the Flag is also part of the fundamental duties, and is, indeed, emphasized. On the broader point raised by the hon. Member, the issue of values has engaged our attention. In November, last year, the hon. Minister launched a new Values Education Kit, that will, in fact, cover all the issues the hon. Member mentioned, namely, respect for environment, respect for gender, respect for the kinds of values that people need to abide by living in modern society, and this is now available for various age-groups, right through the school curriculum. As you know, that means, all CBSE-affiliated schools will have to teach the values education system. So, we are completely in agreement with the concerns expressed on these two issues.

DR. T.N. SEEMA: Sir, the male-dominated value system in our society compels girls to become more and more submissive when they grow up. It really affects their self-confidence to defend themselves from attacks and other harassment. My question is: Will the Ministry consider to include martial arts and other kinds of self-defence mechanism in the curriculum, and make it mandatory in the school teaching?

DR. SHASHI THAROOR: Mr. Chairman, Sir, we have anticipated this concern. The Ministry wrote to all Secretaries of Education in all the States, just last month, end of January, saying specifically that from the upper primary classes, physical education classes should include training in self-defence for girls. So, this is, indeed, a very legitimate concern. We have always been anxious that physical education should not be seen as something for boys alone. We have always insisted that it be extended to both genders. But now, particularly, this new element has been added that training in self-defence should be an extremely important element of girls' physical education in all schools.