

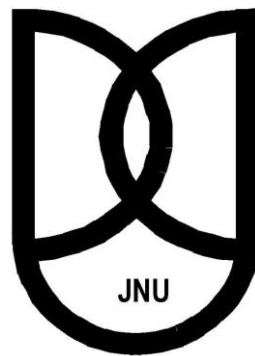
**THE NATION IN HISTORICAL IMAGINATION:
AN ANALYSIS OF NCERT TEXTBOOKS**

1966 – 2010

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the award of the Degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation entitled “**The Nation in Historical Imagination: An Analysis of NCERT History Textbooks 1966 - 2010**” submitted by me to the **Centre for Political Studies**, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of **Master of Philosophy** is an original work. It has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

Place: New Delhi



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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.



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**Dedicated
To
BAPSA**

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Abbreviations

BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CABE	Central Advisory Board of Education
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
EIC	East India Company
ICHR	Indian Council for Historical Research
IHC	Indian Historical Congress
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NCESE	National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education
NCFSE	National Curriculum Framework for Secondary Education
NCERT	National Council for Educational Research and Training
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NLM	National Literacy Mission
NRI	Non-Resident Indians
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SECR	Secondary Education Commission Report
SC	Scheduled Castes
ST	Scheduled Tribes
UPA	United Progressive Alliance

Introduction

History is one of the chief ingredients in the making of self-identity. This connection of identity formation with the historical need not necessarily be only applicable for an individual self, but also it remains crucial for the community. History plays a crucial role in the self-identity of communities irrespective of diversity of the possible primary axis such as nation, caste, religion, language, gender, etc. Our very normative sense of what is good and what is bad is also, to an uncomfortable extent, mediated by our own identity. Consequentially history even plays a crucial role for the conception of what is oppression and in offering pointers on how to emancipate from such oppression. This dimension of history makes it or at least the popular representation of it, so central to the functioning of politics.

Here, the history that is taken for analysis is textbook history. There are multiple envisioning of the past spread over, in different mediums, reaches people in diverse ways. Past as written history is merely one stream of the communication chain from which people derive their historical sense. Other forms include oral retelling of myths, movies, novels, stereotypes, anecdotes, etc. These cacophonies of different voices do not form a harmonious symphony. There were possibilities for both reinforcement and contestation among these different mediums and their respective representation of the past. Amongst this sources, the current study, only takes into account, the textbook history that was written for the instruction of school children by State-sponsored institution. Of course, my study while it's primarily centred on textbooks takes an occasional detour to the developments in the academic history writing.

The textbook writing might not be most powerful in shaping the historical consciousness, but nevertheless the NCERT publications, assumes heightened significance than any other project of representation of the past, for a few reasons. One, the project is State-sponsored and the end product is regarded as the 'official' history. Second, the textbooks were taught to lakhs of students, who will grow to become future citizens. Additionally, these history textbooks, unlike their professional or popular counterparts have the benefit of 'captive audience', who has to compulsorily read and, more often than not, memorize and reproduce their contents verbatim. Fourth, for most of the children, it is the first and only concerted effort to offer the narratives of the past.

From a purely statistical point of view, it has been noted that NCERT history textbooks, at best, constitute ‘no more than ten per cent’ of the total history books that have been taught.¹ But, in reality, NCERT textbook radius of influence cannot be strictly reduced to these ten per cent alone, as with numerous state textbook bodies it have been the custom to adopt the NCERT history textbooks with little or no modification.²

The ‘official’ textbook has a privileged position in terms of presence, circulation, its dissemination and repetition. The history textbooks are no exception to this. In this study, NCERT history textbooks that was published under different government and written by authors of different ideological and methodological persuasions were considered. The three set of NCERT textbooks were analysed. First set (referred to as ‘Congress textbooks’³) comprising of textbooks written by Romila Thapar, R. S. Sharma, Satish Chandra, Bipan Chandra, Arjun Dev and G L Adhya published in the 1960s and 70s. The second set (referred to as ‘NDA textbooks’⁴) was history textbooks that were published between the years 2002 and 2004. The last set of textbooks (which is referred to as ‘UPA textbooks’⁵) was published from 2007-2009.

The first chapter takes a broad survey of different facets of Education to trace the influence of nationalistic discourse. This chapter strives to show how much the aims of education were entangled with the agenda of nationalism and national building in so many levels. Accordingly, the chapter delves into different facets of education to show how Education commissions approach textbooks, how literacy was defined. In addition, the context of the formation of NCERT and its institutional aspects were studied. We, particularly, look in to foundational aspects of the National Council of Educational Research and Training and its contextual links with the project of National building Finally we see how the concerns and anxieties of nationalism shaped and guided the different Curriculum Frameworks that were formulated in India post-independence.

¹ Neeladri Bhattacharya, “Teaching History in Schools: The Politics of Textbooks in India,” *History Workshop Journal* 67, no. 1 (2009): 99–110, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbn050>.

² Sylvie Guichard, *The Construction of History and Nationalism in India: Textbooks, Controversies and Politics* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 5.

³ In its first spell, Congress was in power from the independence till 1977. Since all the textbooks were written under Congress regime, I call it Congress textbooks.

⁴ National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is a coalition which won the election in 1998 with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as the leader of the coalition. Despite the fact of coalition, as far the history textbook debate is concerned, the primary actor is BJP.

⁵ United Progressive Alliance (UPA) is a coalition with Congress as its coalition leader, which came to power in 2004 and subsequently took action to replace the earlier NDA textbooks.

Then, a bird's view of the NCERT History textbook controversy follows. It was designed to provide the reader, the necessary backdrop to understand the extra-textual debate that was revolving around the content that lies within the covers of those textbooks over a period of time. We see how in the 1977, the first NCERT textbook controversy took massive proportions. After we then proceed to investigate how the BJP-led NDA mounts the offensive on the dominant institutional historiography in general, and existing NCERT textbook in the period of 1998-2004. It also narrates how the BJP operationalized its variety of nationalism by first, by taking over the institutional reins of NCERT, and then articulated that vision in a concealed way in National Curriculum Framework for Secondary Education 2000, then deleting some passages out of the exiting NCERT history textbooks before finally culminating its statement in the new publication of history textbook from 2002. The Chronological narration helps one appreciate how the concerns that lie outside the educational domain, influence the debate on how the history should be writing for school-going students.

In the second chapter, one delves into the 'Ancient' and 'Medieval' history of India in NCERT textbooks to see what anxieties that shape the narrative contours of the past written by congress regime. Firstly, the genesis of the classification of Indian history into ancient, medieval and modern was traced. Further its implications on the framing for textbook history have been probed. This part demonstrates the strategies of secularization that was deployed in the framing of history that could be placed within the master-narrative of Congress Nationalism. I argue that by deploying the following strategies, the history textbooks of 1960s/70s advance the 'secular nationalism'.

- 1) Destabilizing/De-communalizing the temporal categories**
- 2) The narrative towards for political/geographical unity**
- 3) The discourse of amity, tolerance and concord**

Such an analysis brings to the fore the agenda of history writing that was motivated by the post-partition anxiety and the extreme rhetoric of national building.

Then we move on to the ideological analysis of history textbooks that were published between 2002 and 2004. These sets of textbooks received heavy criticism for their

‘communal’ content and disproportionate weightage to religion in the course of history. In these new textbooks, there were considerable variations as well as inheritance from the previous books. This variation relates to the strategies that were deployed by BJP to forward their version of National as opposed to the existing textbooks. Here the textbook analysis brings out the strategies of communalization that were deployed in NDA’s historical constructions.

- 1) The presentist discourse of the ‘Ancient’ past**
- 2) Collapsing of the Indus valley civilization and the Vedic Civilization**
- 3) Discourse of continuous conflict**
 - **Muslim invasion versus Hindu resistance**
 - **Temple destructions**
- 4) Degradation of the society during Muslim rule**

The core of the contestations over the NCERT history textbooks cannot be merely reduced to academic or pedagogic concerns. Rather the fierceness and the multi-dimensionality of this battle over history textbook betray deeper concerns that have to do with what kind of nationalism that one espouses and should be endorsed by the state. Why history textbook became the preferred ground of battle for the desirable version of nationalism?

“To forget—and I would venture to say—to get one’s history wrong, are essential factors in the making of nation”⁶

This quote of Renan on the unflattering link between nationalism and history, though provocative and open to debate, highlights the intimate relationship that nationalism has with history writing. While the political ideologies of the party determines the kind of nationalism they adopt, that kind of nationalism is in turn was made to reflect in the writing of history, to achieve two things at one stroke, vindicate and also reify the brand of nationalism one adheres to almost simultaneously.

⁶ Ernest Renan as quoted in M S S, Pandian, Nation Impossible, Thinking Beyond the Nation form, in Theorizing the present, Essays for Partha Chatterjee, Oxford, 2011, 188

For instance, the 'secular nationalism' makes use of tropes of amity, concord and toleration between the Hindu and Muslim communities, while in the (Hindu) 'cultural nationalism', the relationship between that of Hindu and Muslims is one of conflict and violence. These tropes should be anchored with the selection of historical instance to weave a narrative to vindicate the inevitability in the scheme of historical unfolding of the nationalism of their respective imaginations.

The third chapter delves in the interface between caste and nation in the NCERT textbook history writing. It explores how the question of caste, was legitimized in the NDA textbooks which idealizes caste with in its Hindu nationalist interpretive frame. A detailed analysis of ancient and Medieval history textbooks were undertaken to show how the discourse of caste in NDA textbooks were framed in a way to normalize and legitimize the existence of caste. And it also further advances the argument that the seeming contradiction between the Secular and Communal are squarely located within the common edifice of the interpretive frame of nationalism. This chapter gives a preliminary critique of how the national frame obfuscates and invisibilize the reality of caste along with, the unjust hierarchical social order.

Chapter 1

Education, Curriculum and Nationalist Ideology

The colonial beginnings of State's Intervention/Interest in Education

“East” or “India” attracted a whole lot of European traders and adventurers for its perceived and imagined wealth in the end of the fifteenth century. First the traders from Portuguese and the Dutch, then the English and French braved the open seas and found themselves in the coast of the subcontinent to establish trade links with the blessings of their home government. Initially scrambling for exclusive trading rights they fought with each other for gaining supremacy to make their claims permanent. On the earlier phase, Dutch and Portuguese were marginalized in the brutal skirmishes, then English, who was dominant in the Calcutta and Bombay region pushed back French zones in the Deccan region through the serious of what is called “Carnatic Wars” in the eighteenth century. The British India, as it came into existence, consists of chiefly the presidencies of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. Apart from the direct Governance of these regions, there are “Princely States” which are governed by the native rulers who recognized the paramountcy of the British Crown.

Around the nineteenth century, the British supremacy, south of Himalayas, was well-established. From then on, the British laid out elaborate contrivances to make their rule look legitimate and smoothen the process of revenue collection and raw material extraction. If economic interests are core of British colonialism, there is also a covering narrative of the burden of civilizing that was incumbent on the “enlightened” rulers. Operationalizing this was done primarily through the gradual and extremely limited introduction of colonial education and also through the modernization projects such as Construction of Railways and setting up of Institutions of governance mimicking the English schema.

The Charter of 1813 was significant for inaugurating of Colonial State's active interest in the Education of their subjects. In the year 1813, British Parliament renewed the charter of EIC for another 20 years. This charter required the East India Company (EIC) to spend 1,00,000 rupees on the education of the natives. Clause 43 of the Charter Act of 1813 which stated

“It shall be lawful for the governor general in council to direct that out of any surplus which may remain of rents, revenues, and profits arising from the said territorial acquisitions, after defraying the expenses of the military, civil and commercial

establishment and paying the interest of the debt, in manner hereinafter provided, a sum of **not less than one lakh of rupees in each year** shall be set apart and applied to the revival and improvement of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives of India and for the introduction and promotion of knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories in India”⁷

When the Charter of 1813 got closer to its expiry, an unprecedented debate on the nature of education is ensued amongst the stake holders. In 1833, the British Parliament played the host for claims and counter-claims either for the continuation of what was then known as ‘orientalist’ education or the introduction of ‘anglicist’ education. This contestation has to be placed within the context of British interests that are economic and political in nature.

Macaulay came to India as the Law Member of Governor General's Council in 1834. Bentinck, the Governor-general assigned him the responsibility of preparing education policy for India. The view that was taken by Lord Macaulay in his (in)famous “minutes” on the unsuitability of teaching what is considered as traditional knowledge is common sense. Following the Charter of 1813 by the British Parliament, a sum of 1 lakh rupees was allocated to the “revival and improvement of literature” and “introduction and promotion of knowledge of the sciences”.

Macaulay in his Minutes used all his means to argue for the establishment of Anglicist Education. Liberal education in the medium of instruction of English is Macaulay’s Choice. In terms of language, Macaulay insisted on English whereas languages such as Sanskrit and Arabic were lacking in history and even in the domain of literature. Macaulay states passingly in his Minute, resting on the strength of testimony of some unidentified or hypothetical orientalists,

“I am quite ready to take the oriental learning at the valuation of the orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia”⁸

This monumental disregard and distasteful evaluation of the previously hegemonic knowledge systems available in the British Indian territories are made on religious and ritualistic nature of the education that was imparted. Certainly ignorance and arrogance plays

⁷ Charter of 1813

⁸ Sathianadhan S., *History of Education in the Madras Presidency* (Bombay: Srinivasa, Varadachari & Co, 1894), Appendix i-x.

no small role in Macaulay's evaluation, but it is not without a grain of truth when he questions the logic of theologically oriented education that has no other sanction than the brahminical outlook

“...can we reasonably or decently bribe men, out of the revenues of the State, to waste their youth in learning how they are to purify themselves after touching an ass or what texts of the Vedas they are to repeat to expiate the crime of killing a goat?”⁹

The Macaulay's Minute's was immediately followed by Governor-General Lord Bentinck's Order that Anglicist Education will be given preferential treatment over the oriental Education in terms of financial support from the English Government. This set the tone for the propagation of English Education and also marks the beginning of State's intervention/interest in the affairs of Education. This also marks an important shift in the educational trajectory of India, as the fundamental premises of what is 'legitimate knowledge' or otherwise 'what is worth knowing?' itself underwent a radical change. There were well articulated arguments that English education was deployed to keep the colonial order intact.¹⁰ So, one can conclude that in the inception of English education itself, it was implicated with the ideology of colonialism.

Nationalist Ideology and post-independent Education

After the end of colonial British Government, the power was vested with the nationalist elites. Following is an exploration of how the course of nationalism influences the different dimensions of education such as textbook production, history teaching, institutional organization, Curriculum formation, etc. To trace the contours of this peculiar thought of having a 'uniform' textbooks prepared by 'experts' in the post-independence period one can go to Secondary Education Commission report (1952-53), popularly known as Mudaliar Commission report, which extensively deals with the question of 'appropriate/suitable' textbook for school-going children.

In all imaginations and proposals for reform and restructuring in the Educational sector, the curriculum, i.e., the content of what ought to be taught, occupies a versatile position. So, to

⁹ S., Appendix i-x.

¹⁰ Krishna Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education, A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2005).

decipher the changes and tilts that we see in the actual textbook, one has to revisit the official documents which set this process in motion. This process will provide us with a much better backdrop in which we get a clear perspective on the kinds of changes that are reflected in the change of content in the text books.

Mudaliyar commission and Textbooks (1952-53)

As an ambitious project to revamp the Secondary education, Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) at its 14th meeting held in 1948 ‘recommended the appointment of a Commission to examine the prevailing system of Secondary education in the country and suggest measures for its reorganisation and improvement’. Again in 1951, same call for the formation of committee was reiterated. Following that a 9-Member committee with the chairmanship of Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar then Vice-Chancellor of Madras University was formed in 1952 with a frame of reference which includes suggesting measures for the reorganisation and improvement with particular reference to ‘the aims, organisation and content of Secondary education’. This was the first commission to deal with the question of Secondary education in the post-independence era. As the scope of this commission included the ‘content of Secondary education’, significant amount of space is dedicated for the discussion regarding curriculum and textbooks.

Pertaining specifically to the textbooks, the recommendations were made

1. “With a view to improving the quality of textbooks prescribed a high power Textbook Committee should be constituted which should consist of a high dignitary of the judiciary of the State, preferably a Judge of the High Court, a Member of the Public Service Commission of the region concerned, a Vice-Chancellor of the region, a headmaster or headmistress in the State,’ two distinguished educationists and the Director of Education; this Committee should function as an independent body.
2. The Textbook Committee should lay down clear criteria for the type of paper, illustration, printing and format of the book.
3. No book prescribed as a textbook or as a book for general study should contain any passage or statement which might offend the religious or social susceptibilities of any

section of the community or might indoctrinate the minds of the young students with particular political or religious ideologies.”¹¹

Interrogating ‘literacy’: Literary, Education and Nationalist Ideology

Among the possible plethora of sources of the self, School curriculum becomes an increasingly dominant, modestly then in the colonial period, more aggressive in the post-colonial independent India. The school curriculum’s dominance in mediating the self’s interaction with the other is heightened by the compulsoriness of its consumption. Since School education is the pre-dominant way of acquiring literacy in India, the sustained increase in the literacy rate can act as a proxy for the percentage of the population that going under some sort of school education in most cases either under a State-board approved curriculum or Central board of Secondary education (CBSE) Curriculum.

Table-18: Literacy Rates

(In percentage)

Census year	Persons	Males	Females
1951	18.3	27.2	8.9
1961	28.3	40.4	15.4
1971	34.5	46.0	22.0
1981	43.6	56.4	29.8
1991	52.2	64.1	39.3
2001	64.8	75.3	53.7
2011	73.0	80.9	64.6

1951-1971: Aged group 5 and above, 1981-2011: Aged group 7 and above

Data Source: Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India
(website: <http://censusindia.gov.in/>)

Literacy is popularly considered as a status one acquires from one’s ability to read and write in any language of their choice. But the official The National Literacy Mission(NLM) defines literacy in the more expansive ways. Literacy is spelled out as acquiring the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic and the ability to apply them to one’s day-to-day life. But it’s not all there to it. The NLM stats that the achievement of ‘functional’ literacy implies the following:

- (i) Self-reliance in 3 R's,

¹¹ L Mudaliar, “Secondary Education Commission Report,” 1953, <https://www.scribd.com/document/323627321/Mudaliar-Commission-1952-1953-pdf>.

- (ii) Awareness of the causes of deprivation and the ability to move towards amelioration of their condition by participating in the process of development,
- (iii) Acquiring skills to improve economic status and general wellbeing, and
- (iv) **Imbibing values such as national integration**, conservation of environment, women's equality, observance of small family norms.

In the expectation of conventional ability to read and write, the 'value' of national integration is also smuggled into it quite surreptitiously. This is one example of how the agenda of 'National integration' was writ large across the Indian Educational scenario.

Bringing in the Education: Centre's role

Originally, the responsibility of School education is vested with the states in terms of constitutional mandate as spelled out in the seventh schedule. But, as the evidences suggest, the central government was mostly playing an interventionist role. In explaining the logic behind forming a national commission on education when it rightfully and constitutionally belongs to State List, Secondary Education Commission Report (SECR) of 1953 notes:

“...in view of its impact on the life of the country as a whole, both in the field of culture and technical efficiency, the Central Government cannot divest itself of the responsibility to improve its standards and to relate it intelligently to the larger problems of national life. The aim of secondary education is to train the youth of the country to be good citizens, who will be competent to play their part effectively in the social reconstruction and economic development of their country.”¹²

The Nationalistic ideology at work in directing the framework of education can be seen through various Policy documents and Committee Report regarding School education after the independence. The SECR of 1953 prescribes the agenda of education as one of containing the resurgent forces of 'provincialism, regionalism', etc., in order to strength the national unity. This is not atypical for the policy makers and even the educationalists under the congress regime of the post-1947 era to fix one of the primary roles of education as that of preserving national unity and promoting national integration. These 'national' concerns had a

¹² Mudaliar, 7.

heavy footprint on the writing of school textbooks, especially history ones often marginalising the pedagogic and socio-economic context of the student. SECR notes down with a great sense of urgency in 1953,

“There has been an accentuation in recent years of certain undesirable tendencies of provincialism, regionalism, and other sectional differences. This situation is fraught with serious consequences and it is as much the duty of statesmen as of educationalists to take steps to reorient people's mind in the right direction. If education fails to play its part effectively in checking these tendencies, if it does not strengthen the forces of national cohesion and solidarity, we are afraid that our freedom, our national unity as well as our future progress will be seriously imperilled.”¹³

Take note of the way how freedom is tied surreptitiously with the concepts of national unity and progress. Among other things, SECR also stresses that centre should assume ‘greater responsibility’ in ‘the production and selection of better textbooks’¹⁴. Further ‘Central Government should view education from an overall national angle and assume the duties of educational guidance and leadership’. Clearly in terms of setting the ‘basic educational objectives and policies’, Centre was propped up as indisputable favourite. Later in 1976, through the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, Education was transferred from State list to Concurrent list. This gave an official green signal for the Centre to pursue its educational agendas even with more vigour.

The Making of National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)

NCERT is an ‘autonomous organisation’ of Government of India. NCERT was registered as a Society as a literary, scientific and charitable Society under the Societies' Registration Act (Act XXI of 1860). Though on June 6, 1961 the society was registered, the establishment of NCERT was announced by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, in its resolution of July 27, 1961. NCERT ‘formally’ started its business on September 1, 1961. NCERT was an act of bringing together a handful of institutions that were already existing and streamlining it with a broad mandate as ‘apex national body to lead the change in school

¹³ Mudaliar, 5.

¹⁴ Mudaliar, 5.

education’. It is an assemblage of a variety of institutions that were involved in educational research, textbook writing, Vocational education, etc. Following are institutions along with their year of establishment that were welded together to form National Council of Educational Research and Training.

- 1) Central Institute of Education (1947)
- 2) Central Bureau of Textbook Research (1954)
- 3) Central Bureau of Educational and Vocational Guidance (1954)
- 4) Directorate of Extension Programmes for Secondary Education(1958)
- 5) National Institute of Basic Education (1956)
- 6) National Fundamental Education Centre (1956)
- 7) National Institute of Audio-Visual Education (1959)

In any case, NCERT is the first country-wide effort in introducing a uniform State-sponsored Curriculum and also a series of textbooks followed by them. This body derives its significance from the fact that these textbooks claim the twin authority of official legitimacy and academic eminence that the preceding set of textbooks published at various other levels have less of a claim to. NCERT’s scope of operation is universal within the India as it’s the apex body in domains of Textbook writing for schools, Educational research, Teacher training and Extension. It envisages itself a task of ‘transforming the system in terms of policies, programmes and practices in schools and classrooms across the country’.

The ‘National’ in NCERT: The context of its establishment

In the institution’s own retrospective introspection, it was setup “in the backdrop of a school system struggling to disengage from its elitist colonial past and create a common programme of school education that was universally accessible and reflected the pluralist character of India”¹⁵. By its own testimony, NCERT is a conscious carrier of Nationalist ideology, which frames its narrative through a peculiarly anti-colonialist and national integrationist perspective.

The formation of NCERT in 1961 and the consequent operation should be read along with other wider political climate rather than merely reducing it to an altruistic pedagogic concern.

¹⁵ Council of NCERT, *Leading the Change, 50 Years of NCERT* (New Delhi: NCERT, 2011).

Coinciding with the establishment of NCERT is that of the convention of National Integration Conference. It certainly cannot seem to be an incidental coincidence. Nehru, spearheading simultaneously the Government of India and also the Congress party, was trying desperately to settle all emerging conflicts of power-imbalance through the blanket discourse of 'National Integration'. Held in September-October of 1961, the intent of the conference is "to find ways and means to combat evils of communalism, casteism, regionalism, linguism and narrow-mindedness, and to formulate definite conclusions in order to give a lead to the country". This conference ultimately decided to set up a National Integration Council in order "to review all matters pertaining to national integration and to make recommendations thereon"¹⁶.

It does not require anyone's deep speculative adroitness to sense the link between the aforesaid conference and establishment of "National" Council of Educational Training and Research, when it's statement spells out its strategy for us

"National Integration cannot be built by brick and mortar, by chisel and hammer. It has to grow silently in the minds and hearts of men. The only access is the process of education. This may be a slow process, but it is a steady and permanent one... National integration is a psychological and educational process involving the development of a feeling of unity, solidarity and cohesion in the hearts of the people, a sense of common citizenship and a feeling of loyalty to the nation"¹⁷

A flurry of activities that are constantly flowing in the project of National integration is intelligible from the following extract from National Integration Conference Statement, September 1961:

"After a general discussion, the Conference considered the report of the National Integration Committee and, more especially, the decisions of the meetings of the Chief Ministers held on May 31, June and August 10, 11 and 12, 1961. These as well as the recommendations of the Seminar on National Integration organised by the University Grants Commission 1958, were considered and discussed at length."¹⁸

¹⁶ Background of NIC, http://mha.nic.in/hindi/sites/upload_files/mhahindi/files/pdf/NICBackG.pdf

¹⁷ NIC, "National Integration Conference Statement," n.d., <http://www.teindia.nic.in/mhrd/50yrsedu/u/47/3Y/473Y0H01.htm>.

¹⁸ NIC.

On the eve of the setting up of the NCERT comes the constitution of committee for under the chairmanship of Daulat Singh Kothari in 1964. The Education commission came into existence by Resolution dated 14 July 1964 “to advise Government on the national pattern of education” and also “on the general principles and policies for the development of education at all stages and in all aspects.”

This commission was remarkable for its scope as it is the first commission to look over the subject of education as a holistic whole.¹⁹ It was deemed to look into School education as well as the college/university education; structure as well as the content. The voluminous document running over 700 pages that took almost a period of two years to be submitted was ceremonially named “Education and National Development”. It further advanced the drive for uniformity and standardization across the country, which was perceived as a move to foster national integration and to preserve national unity.

NCERT and the Question of Autonomy

In the almost six decades of existence of NCERT, the experience has showed a few things, even though they are not in congruent with the written promise. In paper, NCERT is supposed to an autonomous academic institution whose mandate is to produce high quality textbooks. But as the experience has showed that it was too easy to replace the head of the institution and take over the body to one’s political and ideological advantage without any resistance. Rudolph and Rudolph, on commenting the status of NCERT, comments in 1983,

“Neither governments nor scholarly communities have succeeded in creating procedures or conventions that assure autonomy. Although committed rhetorically to autonomy, both Congress and Janata governments assumed they could and should intervene in a tutelary and patrimonial manner on behalf of their very different world-views and priorities”²⁰

The real tragedy is the picture hasn’t changed much. Though the UPA after coming to power in 2004 did relatively very well by relieving the task of writing text to broad based scholars, still the fundamental issue of institutional autonomy remains unsolved.

¹⁹ Excluding legal and medical education

²⁰ Lloyd I Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, “Rethinking Secularism: Genesis and Implications of the Textbook Controversy, 1977-79,” *Pacific Affairs* 56, no. 1 (1983): 15–37, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2758768>.

The role of ‘National’ Agenda in Curriculum Frameworks (1975, 1988, 2000, 2005)

There were four curriculum frameworks that have been formulated and forwarded from the day of independence till date. The first one *The Curriculum for the Ten-Year School: A Framework* was published in 1975, consolidating the suggestions offered in Kothari Commission (1964-66) and National Policy on Education passed approved and passed by the parliament in 1968. While some of the NCERT history textbooks for Middle schools, like Romila Thapar’s and Bipin Chandra’s were already in print before this document, other history textbooks such as that of R.S. Sharma’s and Satish Chandra’s were published after the 1975 curriculum document.

In this document the explicit overarching concern is of ‘national’. The creation of ‘national identity’ and the goal of ‘national integration’ were of overriding concerns while other aspects like pedagogical and ‘concerns of Social Justice and Democratic values’ do make an appearance.

“For the sake of uniformity of standards and of national identity, therefore, it is necessary to develop a common curriculum within a broad framework of acceptable principles and values... the school curriculum should be relation to national integration, social justice, productivity, modernization of the society and cultivation of normal and spiritual values.”²¹

While ‘National integration’ was deemed as ‘extremely important’, it was underlined that it can be ‘achieved only through a proper understanding and appreciation of the different sub-cultures of Indian and common bond that hold them together. Discrimination of any kind based on sex, caste, religion, language or region is to be look at with aversion because it is irrational, unnatural and harmful to the growth of modern India.’²²

Regarding textbooks and its content, it was said that

“The questions pertaining to social justice or national integration, for example, have to be dealt with imaginatively but not only in books in social studies or history and civics. The question of attitudes, such as attitude towards equality of sexes or towards

²¹ *The Curriculum For The Ten-Year School: A Framework* (New Delhi: NCERT, 1975).

²² *The Curriculum For The Ten-Year School: A Framework*.

untouchability, for example, is capable of being dealt with equal force in the social science and the natural sciences”²³

While the Curriculum framework of 1975 makes politically correct statement about social justice and countering the aspects of discrimination arising out of differences like that of caste and gender, it does not integrate this understanding into its pedagogical recommendations.

“The approach to the teaching of history should be objective and comparative, stressing the social, economic and cultural aspects against the background of political developments. While teaching the various aspects of life and society in different periods of history, it is desirable to link the past with the present. Without suppressing historical facts, the trends **towards synthesis and reconciliation** should be emphasized. Conflicts and tensions need to be understood in a proper historical setting. The method of presentation should help develop an appreciation of the national and cultural heritage.”²⁴ (emphasis mine)

In addition to this, “Children... should develop a love for their country and an appreciation of the achievement of a cultural synthesis from the contributions of people belonging to different regions, religions and linguistic groups. Participation in camps and projects with ‘One India’ as the focus will develop a feeling of tolerance and national integration.”²⁵

The 1988 document starts like this

“The child of today is the builder of the India of tomorrow. It is only through a well designed and effectively implemented educational programme the child could be equipped to ... meaningfully contribute to nation building”²⁶

The Curriculum frameworks starting from 1975 to the latest 2005 carries a rhetoric of ‘child-centeredness’. There was said to be a need for “reorientation of the present practices of developing curricular and instructional materials with a view to, making them child-centred and based on tested teaching and learning models.”

²³ *The Curriculum For The Ten-Year School: A Framework*, 7–8.

²⁴ *The Curriculum For The Ten-Year School: A Framework*, 37.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 36

²⁶ *National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education: A Framework Revised Version* (New Delhi: NCERT, 1988), iv.

But, on studying the problem of curriculum load, 1988 document, on the basis of earlier study, concluded that ‘the curriculum load was not so much a problem of curriculum development as that of perception and management, accentuated by resource constraints’. From this conclusion, the 1988 Curriculum Framework has, first, dismissed the issue curricular overload as mere ‘perception’. Second, it shifted the onus to the local level ‘management’.

Later, this problem of curricular load became acute and in 1993 Yashpal Committee was setup to examine and prescribe appropriate measure to mitigate this problem.

“strengthening of national identity is intimately associated with the study of cultural heritage of India...The compositeness of our culture and unity in diversity which is the main theme of our national unity should be reflected in the content and processes of education at all states of school education.”²⁷

The 1988 framework pushed forward and made explicit its agenda of prioritizing the ‘national’ over all other concerns. This approach argues for inclusion of content for the sole reason for inducing nationalistic sentiments amongst the school going children. Rather than making structural and material changes to remedy the power imbalance inherent in this division such as caste, religion, language and sex, it merely argues for invisibilization of such identities to produce a homogenous conflict-free India.

“At this point of our history, the most urgent need is to consciously develop national spirit and national identity. Education ... should ensure that its beneficiaries and products demonstrate a national consciousness, a national spirit and national identity which are considered essential for national unity. **This necessitates inclusion of specific content in the school curriculum designed to nurture national identity.** The curriculum as a whole should help in promoting development in the pupils of a profound sense of patriotism, non-sectarian attitude, capacity for tolerating difference arising out of caste, religion, languages and sex, etc. and ability to choose between alternate value systems, all directed to the sustained pursuit of unity and integrity of the country.”²⁸ (emphasis mine)

²⁷ *National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education: A Framework Revised Version*, 4.

²⁸ *National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education: A Framework Revised Version*, 5.

We can trace continuity, in terms of framing, with the earlier frameworks, when NCFSE 2000 declares that “In fact, curriculum is a device to translate national goals into educational experience.”²⁹ Like in the previous documents, the NCFSE 2000 also claims that its making was a result of ‘comprehensive debate and discussion throughout the country’. It was claimed that numerous national and regional seminar were held, though no evidence of their ‘comprehensive debate and discussion’ was offered.

It seeks legitimacy to itself by claiming continuity in terms of not only method but also content. The document says it ‘reaffirms’ the already held ideals of ‘social cohesion, secularism and national integration’. The commitment to ‘social transformation’ and ‘Equality of Education and opportunity’ does not seem to be the part of this continuity.

National Curriculum Framework which was worked out in 2005, have stepped down its emphasis on the nationalism in comparison to its predecessors. ‘The guiding principles’ of NCF 2005 did not enlist ‘national integration’ as one of its component. Rather it roots for ‘nurturing an over-riding identity informed by caring concerns within the democratic polity of the country’. While the previous curriculum frameworks were obsessed with the concerns of National identity, National integration and National unity, NCF 2005 makes a conscious departure from such approach. This departure is effected for many reasons such appreciating the diversity within rather than merely subsuming it in the overarching framework of nation and more importantly to not invisibilize the internal fault lines like caste and gender in the homogenizing and glorifying drive of nationalism. Now ‘multiple’ way of framing nation was suggested, that shows a shift that privileges the local.

“An epistemological shift is suggested so as to accommodate the multiple ways of imagining the Indian nation. The national perspective needs to be balanced with reference to the local. At the same time, Indian History should not be taught in isolation, and there should be reference to developments in other parts of the world.”³⁰

In addition to the ‘local’, the world-view of the under-privileged groups like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was also prioritized, which is an unprecedented shift. The educational policy documents and curriculum frameworks that precedes NCF 2005 refers to sub-ordinate caste groups, particularly dalits and scheduled tribes as only an object tagged for

²⁹ *National Curriculum Framework for Secondary Education 2000* (New Delhi: NCERT, 2000), http://www.ncert.nic.in/oth_anoun/NCF_2000_Eng.pdf.

³⁰ *National Curriculum Framework 2005* (New Delhi: NCERT, 2005), 7.

upliftment. The implication is that the problem lies with these groups, in their attitudes to education and their behaviour rather than on the systems. Now, this equation was destabilized by the proposed 'epistemic shift', that positions these very subject one capable of observing reality, and further that reality is hinted to the possibility of being academically acceptable option.

“In keeping with the epistemic shift proposed, these will be discussed from multiple perspectives, including those of the SC and ST and disenfranchised populations”³¹

Further the collusion between the dominant discourse of nationalism, secular or otherwise, and the invisibilization of subaltern caste perspective was noted in the Position Paper on problems faced by SC/ST,

“Dominant forms of inequality and hierarchy are made invisible in the discourse on common nationhood and common and equal citizenship, which the school curriculum propagates... Thus understandings of oppressive aspects of our traditional and contemporary structures, the historical construction of groups and communities are made invisible by the curriculum and not subjects of key curricular importance.”³²

The above concern while a common feature of curricular framing and textbook writing prior 2005, the 1998 BJP-led government was credited with 'Hinduisation' of the curriculum by arguing for Hindu Cultural Nationalism.

In NCFSE 2000, the discourse of Nationalism was even more explicit and louder than its previous counterpart. The interesting aspect is co-opts even the emphasis on international outlook using home-grown expression of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. The location of National identity and unity lies in the cultural heritage of India. And what does this 'cultural heritage' actually mean? All reference to 'contribution' comes from the so-called Hindu antiquity that precedes the arrival of Muslim in India,

“The School curriculum must inculcate and nurture a sense of pride in being an Indian through a conscious understanding of the growth of Indian civilisation and also

³¹ *National Curriculum Framework 2005*, 53.

³² National Focus Group on Problems of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Children, *Position Paper*, (New Delhi: NCERT, 2005),

http://www.ncert.nic.in/new_ncert/ncert/rightside/links/pdf/focus_group/position_paper_on_sc_st.pdf

This is one of the 21 Position paper that was constituted to enquire about crucial educational concerns for the formulation on NCF2005.

contributions of India to the world civilisation and vice versa in thought and deeds. Strengthening of national identity and unity is intimately associated with the study of cultural heritage of India, rich with various hues.”³³

While the BJP’s curriculum framework is not short of disclaimers which make its assertions present a semblance of political correctness, it is unequivocal about the primacy of the nationalistic discourse. But, like we have seen before, it is not entirely a novel and radical idea of the right wing to argue to marshal ‘specific content’ on the service of nationalism. This idea of shaping the curriculum, and later textbooks, in service of the ‘national’ concerns prove to be a perennial source of manipulation in education, especially in the history textbooks.

“At no point of time can the school curriculum ignore the inclusion of specific content to forge national identity, a profound sense of patriotism and nationalism tempered with the spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, non-sectarian attitudes, capacity for tolerating differences arising out of caste, religion, ideology, region, language and sex, etc.”³⁴

The discourse of taking pride in one’s cultural heritage and taping it for the much needed nationalist fervour is not a new concept either. This urge for mobilising cultural heritage as the basis of nationalism is also inherited, or even one could say, right away lifted from NCESE 1988,

“...strengthening of national identity and unity is intimately associated with the study of cultural heritage of India... The compositeness of culture and unity in diversity which is the main theme of our national unity should be reflected in the content and processes of education at all stages of school education... The main objective should be to promote national pride and cultural identity and to foster national integration and greater understanding amongst different groups of people of India.”³⁵

³³ *National Curriculum Framework for Secondary Education 2000*, 12.

³⁴ *National Curriculum Framework for Secondary Education 2000*, 12.

³⁵ *National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education: A Framework Revised Version*, 4–5.

While most passage regarding cultural heritage and national integration was drawn from NCFSE 1988, C. N. Subramaniam³⁶ point out a crucial deletion in the case of NCFSE 2000, the following sentence which was about modernity.

“However, while highlighting the need to preserve the cultural heritage of our country, the school curriculum should also help in making our younger generation aware of the need to reinterpret and reevaluate the past and to adapt the new practices and outlook appropriate for modern society”³⁷

This deletion points out that the NCFSE 2000 was deeply uncomfortable with the notion of viewing the past either in one’s own terms or critically. This anxiety, Subramaniam argues, will have an adverse impact on the teaching of history. He argues

“Once national identity and integrity are linked to the teaching of cultural heritage there is little scope for a critical approach – in fact we will have a policy of appeasement of all kinds of prejudices. Cultural heritage as visualised by the community leaders can be taught without reference to their actual historical or social contexts with the sole purpose of glorifying the national identity”³⁸

For example, Subramaniam invokes an instance where a hagiographical and glorified account of Aryabhata’s heliocentric theory can be presented without ever either acknowledging the fact that his theory did not gain the acceptance of the Indian orthodoxy or the persecution he faced for his discovery.

But, on the other hand, NCF 2005 stress on the part which was left out by NCFSE 2000.

“To strengthen our cultural heritage and national identity, the curriculum should enable the younger generation **to reinterpret and re-evaluate the past with reference to new priorities and emerging outlooks of a changing societal context.**”³⁹ (emphasis mine)

Reinterpretation once again makes a comeback after its abandonment in the NCFSE 2000, one again emphasising the ‘cultural diversity’.

³⁶ C N Subramaniam, “NCERT’s National Curriculum Framework: A Review,” *Revolutionary Democracy IX*, no. 2 (2003).

³⁷ *National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education: A Framework Revised Version*, 4–5.

³⁸ Subramaniam, “NCERT’s National Curriculum Framework: A Review.”

³⁹ *National Curriculum Framework 2005*, 7.

In the preceding pages, we have seen in what ways the curricular frameworks of 1975, 1988 were deeply enmeshed in the ideological cobwebs of nationalism. While these were secular variants, a hyper national embedded in the communal notion of Hindu exceptionalism, influenced the making of NCFSE 2000. Finally, as a glimmer of hope, the last curriculum framework, NCF 2005, tries to resist the constrains that were put against it by the discourse of nationalism. This stepping away allowed it some leg room to be more creative and free in engaging with pedagogy and also to pay more attention to critical fault-lines in Indian society like Caste and Gender.

Chapter 2

Contextualizing NCERT History Textbook Controversy

The Congress regime textbooks (1960s/1970s)

The post-independence context gave the ground for political elite's extreme drive to foreground the discourse of nation-building. It leads to the interlocking of concerns of education, particularly that of history writing and teaching, to that of National Integration. Education, amongst all other things, was seen primarily seen as a tool of National Integration for imbibing the values of the Nation.⁴⁰

The story of how the project of writing NCERT history textbooks was started can be chiselled out from the 'Personal Memoir' of Romila Thapar recounting her experience with text-book writing. Romila Thapar, then in the 1960s, was fresh out of her doctorate from School of Oriental and African studies, University of London, which she has completed under the supervision of A L Basham. Then in the year 1961 she was approached by UNESCO to 'review a sample of textbooks used in the teaching of history in various schools in the Union Territory of Delhi.'⁴¹

After review of about twenty books, Thapar "was appalled by the quality of the information that was being conveyed in these books, with an adherence to out-dated ideas and generally colonial views of the Indian past, a totally banal narrative and predictable in illustrations of a poor quality."⁴²

Incidentally, this was the same year NCERT was established by the Central government, for whom one of the primary mandate is to formulate and publish high quality textbooks for school students. Offered with the offer to write a book on 'Ancient India', at first, Thapar declined as she 'had no interest or expertise in writing for children', but eventually Thapar was 'persuaded' and accepted the assignment of writing the school textbook as it was

⁴⁰ Almost all educational policies of the first fifty years post-1947 are explicitly and aggressively marked with concerns of Nation unity, National Integration and National building, See National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education (NCESE), A Framework, NCERT, 1988, 5; National Curriculum Framework for Secondary Education (NCFSE), NCERT, 2000, 12-13

⁴¹ Romila Thapar, "The History Debate and School Textbooks in India: A Personal Memoir," *History Workshop Journal* 67, no. 1 (2009): 87–98, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbn054>.

⁴² Thapar.

considered as 'a national cause'. Thapar was unapologetic about the nationalistic fervour that was prevailing in her and her social circles.

“My generation had been imprinted with the nationalism of the forties and early fifties. Its essential characteristic was the sense of enthusiasm that we were involved in the building of a nation.”⁴³

The Publication chronology

The very first NCERT history textbook *Ancient India* was published in 1966 for Middle school authored by Romila Thapar. The next year, *Medieval India* for Middle school was published, also penned by Thapar. The original plan was to have three books for Middle schools One for each period, Ancient, Medieval and Modern. The last of this textbook came after inordinate delay and published in the year 1973, the author being G L Adhya and Arjun Dev. Interestingly, the history textbook *Modern India* by Bipin Chandra, for students who opt for the discipline of History in Higher Secondary stage, was published in the year 1971 preceding the earlier periods of Indian history. The Higher secondary classes have to wait till 1977 and 1978 to get their textbooks on Ancient India and Medieval India respectively. The *Ancient India* was authored by Ram Sharan Sharma whereas the *Medieval India* was by Satish Chandra. These both textbooks were also intended for usage in higher secondary for teaching history optional. So, the Ancient, Medieval and Modern for Middle school were published in the year 1966, 1967 and 1973 respectively. And for the higher secondary it was published in the years, in their respective order of Ancient, Medieval and then Modern in 1977, 1978 and 1971. These six textbooks form the primary corpus of history teaching for students studying under the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). These textbooks were in circulation from their publication date till their replacement by the NDA Government in 2002. Some of these textbooks were in circulation for more than two to three decades as the official history textbook at the National level with minor revisions and corrections as deemed fit by the authors but on the main remained unchanged.

⁴³ Thapar.

The first textbook controversy (1977-79)

The first major instance in which the NCERT history textbooks captured the limelight happened to the same time when the Congress has lost its mandate after the imposition of emergency by Indira Gandhi. With the change of political actors comes the challenge to the framing of history. In 1977, Janata Party, an ad-hoc coalition of diverse actors formed against the dominance of Congress won the election and formed the first non-congress government in the national level. Morarji Desai became the Prime minister. The right wing Jana Sangh was also a part of this electoral coalition.

It was said that an anonymous letter was received by the then Prime Minister Morarji Desai accusing the official history textbook published by NCERT were ‘anti-Indian’ and ‘anti-national’. But it was considered an open secret that it was right wing’s hand is in this ‘anonymous letter’, particularly Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The textbooks that were red flagged by the letter were *Medieval India* (1967), by Romila Thapar; *Modern India* (1970), by Bipan Chandra; *Freedom Struggle* (1972), by Amal Tripathi, Barun De, and Bipan Chandra; and *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* (1969), by Romila Thapar, Harbans Mukhia, and Bipan Chandra. The first two were school history textbooks published by NCERT while the third one was published by National Book Trust. The fourth one’s contents were originally presented in a seminar organised by All India Radio and later published by People’s Publishing House. In 1977, during the height of controversy, R S Sharma’s *Ancient India* was published as a NCERT textbook, which also joined the ranks of the other controversial books. These books and textbooks under accusation were sent to Prime Minister with highlighting of the incriminating passages demanding for their retraction. V. Shankar, principal secretary to Morarji Desai writes in PM office’s note to Educational Ministry in expressing the PM’s interest in not only verifying the merit of received accusation, but ordered for a broad drive for ‘rectifying history’, the note reads,

“[S]imilar publications that may have been issued by the ... Education Ministry might be examined from the same point of view and suitable steps taken to ensure that readers do not get wrong ideas about various elements of our history and culture.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Note, dated May 28, 1977, P.M.'s [Prime Minister's] Office U/O No. 40 (277) 77 P [Prime Minister's Secretariat, as quoted in Rudolph and Rudolph

So, due to dangerous possibility of disseminating ‘wrong ideas’, PM office note suggests that these textbooks should be withdrawn from circulation.

“PM thought that the Education Ministry might consider withdrawing these books from circulation, particularly those which are intended to be textbooks in schools.”⁴⁵

This letter was leaked to the press which sparked off the public debate about the merit of such allegations. More than the ‘anonymous letter’ itself, the curious fact is that it was taken cognizance by the Prime Minister himself. Thapar found the issues that were raised by her critics were ‘routine and predictable’,

“Why did the books mention beef-eating? Why didn’t they state that the Aryans were indigenous to India? Where was the necessity to mention the disabilities of the lower castes? Why did we not consistently depict Muslim rulers as oppressors and tyrants? – and so on”⁴⁶

These were ‘routine and predictable’ because Thapar and her colleagues were acutely aware of the ‘political’ nature of the enterprise they were involved in. They were fully aware, if not always explicitly vocal about it, that their textbook histories were measured to fit and suit the imagined ‘secular’ nation. And to that end their framework was moulded in numerous ways in terms of commissions, omissions and emphasis and refutations. Thapar says,

“Writing a textbook was clearly not just an academic exercise... Those of us nurtured on the earlier anti-colonial nationalist tradition, as the members of Editorial Board had been, had no hesitation in contesting communalist use of religion as a political foundation”⁴⁷

Even before this controversy, in 1969, members of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee asked Thapar to state that the Aryans were indigenous to India. But the editorial Board and Thapar refused to make such changes.

PM ordered a probe to review the content of four books referred to in the anonymous memorandum. R. S. Sharma’s book which was published in 1977 ‘at the height of the controversy’ was banned in the next year. As for as the other books concerned, though they

⁴⁵ Rudolph and Rudolph, “Rethinking Secularism: Genesis and Implications of the Textbook Controversy, 1977-79.”

⁴⁶ Thapar, “The History Debate and School Textbooks in India: A Personal Memoir.”

⁴⁷ Thapar.

were not banned, their circulation was said to be ‘sharply curtailed’⁴⁸. This episode of intense controversy on the nature of history we should teach ends, kind of abruptly, when Congress came to power in 1980 with the restoration of the withdrawn textbook. Janata Party, along with it Jan Sangh losing its political power, the contention of the history receded into the shadows for the time being before it will take monumental proportion after two decades.

\BJP takes over history writing – ‘communalization of history’ (1998-2004)

After coming to power in 1998, in a relatively secure basis, than its previous 1996 bid which lasted only for a paltry 13 days, BJP immediately started its scrutiny over the State-funded and directed historiographical initiatives. Apart from history writing itself, as in the case of NCERT history textbooks and National Book Trust which published different historical accounts and biographies, it brought within its iron grip even other documentation activities of Government agencies. In 1998 itself, the Human Resource Development Ministry under Dr. Murali Manohar Joshi pulled the plug of a project of a five-year old project started in 1992-3 which would have produced India’s first “Dictionary of Social, Economic and Administrative Terms in Indian Inscriptions.”⁴⁹ This project was steered by the Prof. R.S. Sharma, Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib and B.N. Mukherjee most of whom was sarcastically labelled as ‘Eminent Historians’ and an purported effort to expose ‘their technique, their line and their fraud’ was undertaken by the then BJP Member of Parliament Arun Shourie in the same year.⁵⁰ The intended six volumes of the dictionary would have documented the inscriptions that were found in not only India but Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. This project was to serve the purpose of reliable empirical evidence as the inscriptions were to be evaluated for its authenticity by 54 historical principles. The reason for BJP to stop this initiative was claimed, by the authors involved, that this project would have restricted the way unsubstantiated evidence can serve the purpose of archaeological proof, as happened in the Ram Janmabhumi Movement/Ayothya Dispute.

In the year 2000, an ICHR’s on-going project ‘Towards Freedom’ met the same fate. Spearheaded by various prominent historians like Sumit Sarkar and K N Pannikar and thirty

⁴⁸ Rudolph and Rudolph, “Rethinking Secularism: Genesis and Implications of the Textbook Controversy, 1977-79.”

⁴⁹ Project on history terminated, The Hindu 3 November 1998

⁵⁰ Arun Shourie, *Eminent Historians: Their Technique, Their Line and Their Fraud* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2014).

years in the making, the project was an effort to present the archival materials ‘as they are’ covering the last ten years of British rule. This project was, in Ann Ninan’s words, ‘intended to counter the colonial view that India won freedom in 1947 not through a struggle but because the British decided to decolonize the empire’. Out of the planned 20 volumes, only two volumes were published till then. In this instance, B R Grover, the chairman of the ICHR claimed that ICHR’s decision to ‘review’ the Towards Freedom project as ‘just doing our job’. Further, for Grover, the two volumes that were already published were ‘very damaging in nature’⁵¹. It was observed that the main reason behind the shutting down of this project is to cover up the total non-participation of Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) the major Hindu right-wing organizations in the Quit India Movement of 1942.⁵² Other reason attributed was right-wing’s or Sangh Parivar’s ‘own complicity with British imperialism and fascist powers’ in the decades that preceded the independence of India at 1947. Even the right’s resolve to suppress left’s contribution to working class movements might be suggests as a reason.⁵³

The same B R Grover also ordered the withdrawal of the annual funding allocated for the proceedings of Indian Historical Congress (IHC) session. His reason for this is that the IHC receives fund from the Ministry and also host University of the respective state where the session is held. But the Parvathi Menon, sees this as an ‘assault on academic freedom’. The location of history writing was not only seen as an academic enterprise, but seen as a foundry where ‘nation’s identity is forged and ‘future’ is minted. History, history teaching and historical research have together become an area where a political battle for a nation’s identity and future is being waged.

It was also accused that BJP Government is proactive in installing members with close ideological affinity with RSS in the bodies like Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) and Indian Council for Social and Science Research (ICSSR). For instance, ICHR was reconstituted by inducting 19 new ‘right-wing historians, most of them retired and specialist in ancient Indian history.’⁵⁴ It was not a surprise that all these new appointees ‘lent public support to the existence of a temple that predates the mosque at Ayodhya’⁵⁵. In addition to

⁵¹ Ann, Ninan, India: Righting or rewriting Hindu history, Inter Press Service, February 2000

⁵² Tanika, Sarkar, The Communal Offensive and the Indian Council of Historical Research, April 2000

⁵³ Ibid.,

⁵⁴ Ann, Ninan, India: History writing takes a strong Hindu turn, Inter Press Service, 9 July 1998

⁵⁵ Ibid.,

that, many names of recognized historians were dropped from the list of experts in history that includes Romila Thapar, D.N. Jha, K.M. Shrimali and Sathish Chandra.

Irfan Habib, the former chairman of the ICHR likened the efforts of BJP-led government's 'to distort history to Nazism'. D N Jha, Tanika Sarkar and Sumit Sarkar also liken the right-wing effort to reconstruct history to that of Nazis. Habib said that ICHR sanctioned 15 lakh rupees 'to chart the course of the dried up ancient river Saraswati. This might help to establish the 'true origin of the Aryan race that went from India'. Another 1.6 lakh rupees was spent 'to prove that Dravidian languages had no independent Indian roots.'⁵⁶

The accusation claimed that the right-wing historians were trying hard to establish the following type of myths to glorify the 'Hindu' period and to denigrate the 'Muslim period' on flimsy, non-existent or even fabricated evidences:

- i) The sameness of and continuity between the Indus Valley civilization and Vedic civilization.
- ii) Human race originated in India
- iii) Indians taught Egyptians the art of building pyramids
- iv) Taj Mahal and Fatepur Sikri are a Hindu monument or of Hindu origin
- v) Emphasising Saraswati over the Indus due its recurring mention in the Vedic texts
- vi) Medieval history as one series of temple destructions and plunder.
- vii) Floating the discourse 'forced' mass religious conversion, which then argued as the basis for ghar wapsi.
(D N Jha argues that growth of religion in Indian history is through voluntary embracement and assimilation and not through confrontation and violence: Vedic religion, Buddhism, Jainism)
- viii) Aryans developed Vedic astrology and astronomy, but they were actually developed in Mesopotamia and Iraq.

While these official efforts of directing 'historical research' within the framework of Academic Institution located in India are menacing enough, they are by no means the only source of Hindutva versions of history. An another stream of history writing, self-christened as Indo-American School of History writing, having its origin in NRIs who want to revive the glory of ancient Hindu civilization. This universe is mostly populated by persons who are

⁵⁶ Deepshikha, Ghose, Hindu zealots altering history: Scholars, Indo-Asian News Service,

originally technocrats, later taken to the writing of history. This includes N.S. Rajaram, S. Kak, and S. Kalyanaraman and also foreign nationals like David Frawley, G. Feuerstein, K. Kosternaier and Koenraad Elst. Amongst this group, Navaratana Srinivasa Rajaram who was born in Mysore in 1943 and currently a resident of United States is a leading exponent of Hindutva version of history. Though an Engineer by education, he identifies himself as an expert on ancient history. He hit the headlines in 1999 for claiming that he, along with a palaeographer D. Natwar Jha, have ‘deciphered the messages on more than 2,000 harappan seals’. The further elaboration was promised in his upcoming book ‘The Deciphered Indus Script’⁵⁷. But this was not novel for its attempt⁵⁸. But what Rajaram claimed to have figured ‘went far beyond those of any recent historian’. His main claim include that he has found a ‘horse’ seal and also it was written horse in that seal according to his decipherment scheme. In the context of ancient history, the horse which symbolises the coming of Aryans is now pushed back to the Indus valley civilization. It is said,

“He is currently credited with the insistence that the textual lacunae prevalent with the Harappan civilisation and the archaeological gaps pertaining to the Vedic period could be resolved quite simply by collapsing the two cultures into the same historical time-frame”⁵⁹

This ‘collapsing’ of chronology and existence of Indus valley civilization with Vedic Civilisation seems to be the central thesis of this book. This conclusion is quite contrary to the position of the historians of existing NCERT History Textbooks. But, nevertheless, this gained traction with the Indian Government recommended one of Rajaram’s books to National Book Trust for Publication and also later called him to serve on Indian Council for Historical Research which Rajaram declined citing his on-going research project and his wish to continue as a ‘independent’ scholar. But in 2000 Michael Witzel, a Harvard professor exposed the fact that Rajaram based his theory of presence of horse in the Indus Valley artefacts by manipulating the original evidence digitally.⁶⁰ Despite of this criticism, the view forwarded by the likes of Rajaram were given credence and prominence in the newly writing history textbook written in NDA regime.

⁵⁷ N. Jha and N.S. Rajaram, *The Deciphered Indus Script: Methodology, readings, interpretations*, (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 2000).

⁵⁸ In his 1996 book *Indus Age: The writing system*, Gregory Possehl has reviewed thirty-five attempts of decipherment which is actually considered to be one-third of the total attempts at deciphering the Indus script.

⁵⁹ Sukumar, Muralidharan, *The history Project*, Frontline 19, Issue 05, Mar 2002-15, 2002

⁶⁰ Michael Witzel, “Horseplay in Harappa” *Frontline* 17, no. 20 (2000).

In this atmosphere of innovations brought out by the BJP-led Government and the opposition by the erstwhile establishment scholars supported by left-liberal leaning historians, National Curriculum Framework for Secondary Education was released by Union HRD Minister Murli Manohar Joshi on 14 November 2000. T.K. Rajalakshmi accuses the BJP government for ‘targeting history’ to implement the agendas of Sangh Parivar (which connotes to a loose network of right wing organisations with RSS as its nucleus) through the changes introduced in the new National Curriculum Framework for Secondary Education (NCFSE) 2000. The NCFSE 2000 document argues for change in current textbooks in the higher secondary level and an ‘integration’ of history into the overarching head of social science. Regarding History in secondary level NCFSE 2000 states

“In order to make the social sciences education meaningful, relevant and effective, the concerns and issues of the contemporary world need to be kept in forefront. To this end, the quantum of history may have to be substantially reduced”⁶¹

With regard to retracting the existing history textbooks, it was said by R.K. Dixit, convenor of the Curriculum Group and head of the Department of Education in Social Sciences and Humanities, that

“There is nothing personal against anyone. But these books create problems, in the sense that we are supposed to be absolutely secular. If that is not happening, then things become inconvenient. What we mean is equal respect for all religions, for the followers of all religions and for the holy books of all religions”⁶²

R.K. Dixit, who was vested with an overarching institutional authority with regard to the curriculum with respect to history teaching, further elucidates the areas where the previous history text books fall short in his evaluation.

“We would prefer issues being put before the students in an open manner. If there is a question about some historical controversy, about whether Aryans came from outside, we should not say definitely that Aryans were outsiders and they drove away the original inhabitants. These questions divide the nation”⁶³

⁶¹ National Curriculum Framework for Secondary Education, NCERT, 2000

⁶² T.K. Rajalakshmi, Targeting history, Frontline, Volume 18, Issue 09, April 28 – May 11, 2001

⁶³ T.K. Rajalakshmi.

It is ingenious from the part of Dixit that he discusses the teaching of history without entangling himself with the veracity of what should be taught or not. Where the question is in the nature of historical veracity, the 'nation' comes there for rescue, but this concern for unity of the nation depends on the involvement of right people like that of Aryans. Otherwise, the 'nation' need not bother as with the case of Muslim population. Further elucidating on the nuances of his historical approach, Dixit says,

“Anyone who visits the Qutb Minar is tempted to know what it is. But at the other side of the Minar you have Quwwat ul Islam mosque. There is also a question about that. One reads that the Masjid was built on the debris of 37 Hindu and Jain temples. This is immediate history. I don't think we should ignore this.”⁶⁴

Though it was not very clear what Dixit refers to as 'immediate history', his way of viewing history, and the future educational vision based on it was going to influence, education in general and history in particular, along with it, the way millions of students were going to be access their most authoritative retelling of the past.

Deleting passages to remedy the 'Hurt Community Sentiments' (2001)

A notification from the Director (Academics) of the CBSE, Delhi dated October 25, 2001 directed "All Heads of institutions affiliated to CBSE" to immediately comply with the directions notified by the NCERT to the effect that "certain portions and statements from the history books of various classes published by them (NCERT) have been deleted with immediate effect" and that "these portions and statements are not to be taught in respective classes or discussed in the classroom..."⁶⁵. This notification was perplexing for even the critics as the new textbooks were anyway going to replace the existing ones as announced by the incumbent government.

J. S. Rajput, who was the director of NCERT then, defended the changed made by arguing that the NCERT has "been fighting court cases against certain communities which have felt hurt by some of the contents in history books. This had led him to accede to the demand "by various groups and sections of people to ensure that there are no biased and hurtful

⁶⁴ T.K. Rajalakshmi, Targeting history

⁶⁵ Circular no. 24, No. DIR(A)/HJST/2001/12932-19431) dated the 23rd Oct, 2001

statements in NCERT books"⁶⁶. Later he claimed that he had received 50,000 letters complaining against the NCERT textbooks and then eventually retracting his figures later⁶⁷.

But the sources of the changes may not have been from sudden upsurge of hurt sentiment of religious minorities. For one matter, Arjun Dev, who has been the director claims that, in his entire career of thirty years in NCERT, received not more than one hundred letters. The excessive haste shown in making these deletions even when there were plans of replacement of textbooks the following year made commentators speculate that it might have been planned to gain political mileage as election was around the corner in the state of Punjab as the deletions included the reference to Sikh and Jat identities.

We have a few pointers as to where these suggestions of changes might have come from. On 15 August 2001, an edited volume named 'The Enemies of Indianisation: The children of Marx, Macaulay and Madrasa' was published. Its author was Dina Nath Batra, the head of educational wing of the RSS. Interestingly, one can find an article which lists 41 'distortions' that were present in the NCERT textbook authored by Mr. Atul Rawat, who again a regular contributor for the RSS mouthpiece 'The Organiser'. Later even, Dina Nath Batra claimed that while 42 changes were initially suggested, but only 4 among them were actually executed⁶⁸. While other 'secular' historians claim that more changes from the RSS wish list were entertained in the deletions. These deletions were criticized widely by academics from various quarters for it being arbitrary and politically motivated. The authors of the respective textbooks claimed their consent was not sought out as per the agreement which made their consent necessary to make any changes to those textbooks.

The argument of hurt community sentiments

The prime reason forwarded for justifying the deletions of select passages from the 1960s/70s NCERT history textbooks was that the concerned passages hurt the religious sentiments of the Hindu, Sikh and Jain communities. But, it seems like the mainstay argument of hurt communal sentiments only applies to the Hindu religion and those religions are considered to be of Indian origin. Even then, interestingly, while Jainism and Sikhism were more readily appropriated, Buddhism seems to offer stiff challenge in this regard, as it historically challenged the Brahminical tradition more vehemently and directly than the rest.

⁶⁶ J. S. Rajput, "Why Revising History Textbooks is a Write Move for NCERT", in *The Times of India*, New Delhi, (May 25, 2001).

⁶⁷ J.S. Rajput, " ", in *Indian Express*, New Delhi (Nov 26, 2001)

⁶⁸ Dina Nath Batra, *Outlook* (Dec 17, 2001)

Nevertheless, Islam and Christianity are the religions that have to be kept outside the bracket of hurt sentiments as these are ‘foreign’ religions according to the right wing discourse.

Regarding the hurt communal sentiment argument many scholars have pointed out, the deletions made by October 2001 CBSE circular was neither applied to all religion nor was consistent in such removals. It was argued that rather than remedying the hurt community sentiment, it ‘was a clumsy attempt to whip up sentiments’.⁶⁹ Rameev Bhargava cites the following possible underlying assumptions that prefigure the decision to delete passages from NCERT textbooks,

“First, that the communal identity of persons is the only one they have. Second, those sentiments are naturally given, unalterable and cannot be morally evaluated. Third, that respecting a person or community always implies overlooking defects, refraining from being critical.”⁷⁰

While showing each of these assumptions to be unwarranted and arguing that ‘the cognitive content of feeling of hurt and resentment must ... be assessed by procedures of sound and valid arguments’ for which the state of the art interpretations of the available historical evidence can be a source. Bhargava finally concludes by saying,

“To my knowledge, history textbooks from which the selected portions are deleted do not condemn the way of life of any community. Therefore they show no disrespect for religion. They do, however, discourage a deferential attitude”⁷¹

Even, the authors of the previous textbooks themselves, or others who have held the official posts of NCERT themselves are not convinced with the hurt sentiment argument for the deletions as they vouch for the fact that there haven’t received much complaints regarding this in the thirty or more so years of career of these textbooks. While the defence of Brahmanism and the desire to put it in a positive light was inherent to the Hindutva ideology, the reference to the Sikhs and Jats, the scholars say, were calculated to boost BJP’s electoral changes in the coming Punjab assembly elections which were around the corner then. But then, the Congress, who is the self-proclaimed guardian of secular principles, was one initiated the discourse of hurt sentiments in Punjab context.

⁶⁹ Vishwa Mohan, Jha, A new brand of history, Frontline, Volume 20, Issue 04 February 15-28, 2003

⁷⁰ Rameev, Bhargava, History and Community sentiments, 02, January 2002

⁷¹ Rameev, Bhargava.

The response from the ‘eminent historians’ and other scholars

In this context of attack from the existing BJP-led Government on the NCERT textbook historians, they have responded by collective response in public opposition to the already executed and proposed changes by the BJP-led Government, while also insisting the role of RSS in the education planning. In January 2002, a group of Scholars including Bipan Chandra, Sumit Sarkar, said

“The ministry of human resources development, taking a cue from the RSS has pressurised the NCERT and the CBSE to distort the history and other social science syllabus at all levels of school towards a dangerously Hindu communal angle, besides deliberately underplaying and ignoring the contributions made by diverse groups in Indian society”⁷²

Numerous strategies were employed to oppose these many fold changes that the BJP-led Government introduced with regard to the writing and teaching of history. We have already seen BJP high-jacking ICHR with its own members jettisoning those who were appointed during the Congress regime, stopping Towards Freedom Project⁷³, deleting passages from the existing NCERT history textbooks. While these actions have received wide spread criticism from the professional historians, it reached its peak, when the new NCERT books were published during the 2002-2003 period. To counter this Government led campaign to rewrite history, many fold criticisms have been floated.

i) Factual errors and Communal distortions

Back in 2000 when the new curriculum framework came out, Indian Historical Congress (IHC), an organisation of professional historians on existence from 1935, in its 2001 Kolkatta session expressed its discomfort over the way history is treated. A resolution was passed in this regard. In its 2002 Amritsar session, IHC formed a committee to scrutinize the newly published history textbook. The committee was composed of Prof. Irfan Habib, Prof. Suvira Jaiswal and Prof. Aditya Mukherjee. After analysing four⁷⁴ of the newly published history textbooks, the committee has submitted an ‘Index of Errors’, which criticized the textbooks

⁷² Bipan Chandra, Yogendra Singh, Namwar Singh, G S Bhalla, Annie Koshy, Kamala Menon, Sumit Sarkar, and others, Communalising Education, Economic and Political Weekly, Volume 37, No. 10, 09 March 2002, p. 894

⁷³ This project aims to compile the archival document pertaining to the period of ten years towards the transfer of power from British i.e., 1937-47

⁷⁴ Makkhan Lal et al., India and World - for Class VI; Hari Om et al., Contemporary India - for Class IX; Makkhan Lal, Ancient India - for Class XI; and Meenakshi Jain, Medieval India- for Class XI

for their error of omissions, commissions and their overall communal bias.⁷⁵ And many other historians also point out numerous errors and interpretative bent that privileges Brahminical Hinduism in the new history textbooks.⁷⁶

ii) **Rehashing the Colonial/Oriental model of history**

Many historians identified the kind of reading the BJP-led government was eager to advance, especially regarding Ancient history with the Orientalist interpretation of associating the ancient past of India as the glorious period, and medieval as the decadent and following which the British came as force that stopped that decadence and put India in its progress. While the NCERT Ancient India textbook authored by Makkhan Lal explicitly associates the Orientalist school of historiography with its preference of Christian religious dogma than the professional history writing. In spite of this explicit denunciation, numerous historians point out that the present government interpretation of history is modelled on the Colonial/Orientalist model. Janaki Nair from JNU contends,

“Not only it is borrowed history from colonial writing but it endorses the worst aspects of Orientalism... This is being dressed up as a new, original, authentically Indian version of history. It is none of this. It merely repeats much of what was said in colonial histories of India and without even the sophistication of colonial authors.”⁷⁷

iii) **History by Non-historians**

The opposition camp led by BJP-led Government was charged with the lack of reputed historians. These attempts to modify history were seen as history written by non-historians. Often references to ‘Marxist distortions’ of Indian history was made by the right wing intellectuals. The authors of the old textbooks and those who were in solidarity with them, disagreed to the popular perception that this struggle for history is between the left and the right. Instead it was the fight between professional historians ‘concerned about the practice of history writing, the uses of evidence, methods of interpretation’ and ‘HRD Minister, administrators that he has appointed to education and research bodies and propagandists of the Sangh Parivar’ who see ‘history as a tool in their ideological campaign to construct a

⁷⁵ Irfan Habib et al, *History in the New NCERT Textbooks: A Report and an Index of Errors*, (Indian History Congress, 2003).

⁷⁶ Vishwa Mohan, Jha, A new brand of history, *Frontline*, Volume 20, Issue 04 February 15-28, 2003; Kumkum, Roy, ‘What happened to Confucianism’, *Seminar*, 522, February, 2003.

⁷⁷ Romila, Thapar, *History as Politics*, *Outlook*, 01 May, 2003

Hindu Rashtra'⁷⁸. In the context of on-going right-wing efforts to fuse Indus valley civilization and Vedic civilization, Janaki Nair, notes

“Some scientists and spiritual leaders have become strange bedfellows in their quest for a new historical method. They are united in one very important respect: they both share the singular goal of producing a uniquely Indian antiquity, one full of dead certainties and minus the distracting quibbles of the historian”⁷⁹

The New Textbooks under UPA regime – the cooling down of Nationalism (2004-2010)

After the electoral victory of UPA over the incumbent NDA in 2004, the Congress dominated UPA Government ordered a review of new textbooks published as per NCFSE 200) that was in circulation for varying amount of period ranging from one and a year to six months. A total and immediate recall of NDA textbooks was considered but then taking into account the amount of academic and administrative chaos it would lead to that idea was shelved. But, the decision was made that NCFSE 2000 textbooks was to continue only after issuing a guideline titled *Learning History without Burden* to all the schools that follows NCERT textbooks to mitigate the critical problems of the previous textbooks⁸⁰. After that under the Directorship of Krishna Kumar, a well-known and reputed educationalist, the process was set in motion to publish a new set of textbooks to replace the NDA ones. Accordingly, the National Curriculum Framework was published in 2005 along with Focus papers concerning specific areas such as social science, science, SC/ST Children, etc., which was supposed to act as the guiding frame work for the textbooks.

Though the NCF 2005 provides for an overall pedagogic vision for the whole of school education, it owes its immediacy to the History. While many of the other textbook revision, at least how it was represented at that point of time, was pedagogical, whereas history while having wide scope for pedagogical innovations and improvements, is highly political. This context of Political tensions and contentions offers the necessary backdrop for any

⁷⁸ Anjali, Modi, History As Told By Non-Historians, Outlook, 12 February 2002

⁷⁹ Janaki Nair, Bulldozing the Past into Existence, Economic and Political Weekly, Volume 38, No. 40, 4-10 October, 2003, 4207-4209

⁸⁰ The new Director of NCERT (who replaced J. S. Rajput) and the then Education Secretary to the Government of India issued an advisory to all the schools. The short advisory note was meant to give some suggestions on how one could avoid the inaccuracies and use the earlier NCERT books for reference.

meaningful analysis of changes that were made to the representation of the history. There were some major departures in approach of writing History textbooks.

In this chapter we have seen how the envisioning of education itself was deeply enmeshed with the demands of nationalist ideology. The concerns of nation building and national unity often, in an overriding way, shape the way the different dimensions of education were designed and operationalized. In the next chapter, we are going to analyse how the Congress and BJP, both in their own ways, tried to mobilize history writing to support their version of nationalism.

Chapter 3

Textbook analysis:

Strategies of Secularization Versus Strategies of Communalization in making of the Nation

The nature and contour of NCERT history textbook controversy reveals us this is not of merely a few facts or a quibble there. Rather, to make sense of it, we were seeing these history textbooks as a manifestation of the respective government's articulation of nationalism. While we will deal with areas nearing consensus in the next chapter, here we deal with the divergences and conflicts that Congress and BJP version of nationalism manifest through their representation of the past through NCERT history textbooks in their respective regimes. In this textbook writing enterprise, there is of course, a question of how much the textbook history is influenced by mere considerations of ideological projection. For that we do have a clear cut answer, that Congress regime was content in the 1960s/70s to appoint and support historians who were broadly in agreement to the Secular Nationalist project, unlike the BJP government, which was highly motivated to force feed particular designs of Hindutva camp in a straight forward manner. Apart from the few changes which emphasize religious dimensions, the BJP textbooks reveal that they were for the most part in agreement, or just indifferent to the narration and interpretation of history by the 'secular' historians. So, in the following analysis, it is not the academic rigour which is going to be the weighing scale, but rather we are going to see what are the narrative paths and strategies that were employed to drive home the message of either 'secular nationalism' or 'communal nationalism' (BJP likes to call it 'cultural nationalism')

Strategies of Secularization

1) Destabilizing/De-communalizing the temporal categories

Categories influence us in ways we know and in ways we yet not aware of. Categories, in many cases, precede our contact to content and often predetermine how we are intellectually approaching it. Categories serve us as framework for understanding and acts as mental maps as how to locate our self in our effort to understand the categorized.

The Ancient, Medieval and Modern are de facto categories through which the discipline of history is organized first in the European academia, then in the Indian history department. This condition still prevails. The tradition of dividing the history into Ancient, Medieval and Modern, though an offshoot from the west, is more appropriately captured as the euphemism for Hindu, Muslim and British period as labelled by James Mill. The period from RigVedic times till the twelfth century was labelled as Hindu, whereas the period from twelfth century to the mid-eighteenth century is labelled as Muslim, after which the British Period starts. A battery of scholars mostly post-independence found this categorization scheme having communal implication and antithetical to the process of secularization. The first and crucial way in which the Romila Thapar, R. S. Sharma and Satish Chandra deployed their agenda of secularization is by redrawing the lines of these categories. To fully understand how these categories were constructed and came to be seen as communal and then reworked to make it secular, we have to trace the genesis of these categories as follows.

The logic of categorization: tracing the genealogy of Ancient, Medieval and Modern in Indian history

The representation of past as written history is an enterprise which is fraught with issues that was often capable of snowballing into a burning political question of the present day. This proposition can be very well substantiated by the acrimonious debate and political battle that was waged on for and against History textbooks published by the NCERT in recent times and also in the past.

The NCERT textbook controversy should be placed in its proper context to understand its linkage to other larger movements. The act of rewriting textbooks to represent one's ideological predispositions is just one aspect, though indispensable, with other aspects. While this reveals the role of the history to that of identity and politics, the notion of where history is located itself is now should be reconceptualised. Definitely, the academic history, or history written by university trained historians is not the sole axis of history, at least, in the expansive imagination of the right wing project of building a Hindu rashtra.⁸¹ While their urge to negotiate and manipulate the representations of past to fabricate a continuous existence of a monolithic Hindu consciousness is well documented, the strategic sites of their operation are given less attention. While the 'communal' variants of histories were looked down upon as 'unscientific' or mere 'myths' by left-liberal academicians, they also came to

⁸¹ K N Panikkar, *Outsider as Enemy: Politics of Rewriting History in India*

realise that these constructions cannot be merely wished away. So, an old question gained a new interest, particularly after the 1990s Ayodhya/Babri-Masjid incident, among the academics that why such histories persists and continue to enjoy legitimacy among such large masses. so, it becomes crucial to probe and to look within for the fault lines of the discipline itself to find some clue to this conundrum.

One such site the division of 'Indian history' into 'Ancient', 'Medieval' and 'Modern'. To trace the genealogy of the three-fold temporal division of Indian History, it would be instructive for us to take a snapshot history of history books themselves that were current in the colonial British India of nineteenth century. James Mill's History of British India, published over a period of time spanning a decade culminating in 1917, gave shape to India's past in an exhaustive way in ten volumes. James Mill, an enthusiastic evangelist of Benthamite Utilitarian school of thought. For him, the measure of things that is current or of past is its utility. So, James Mill wrote "The History of British India" acting as a jury to evaluate what is of utility from the past of "British India". In this study, James Mill is said to have initiated the custom of compartmentalizing and then parcelling separately so-called Hindu and Muslim civilization. Though there is a wide-consensus on this origin of the tripartite division of Hindu, Muslims and British, Harbans Mukhia contends that this is by no means 'a radical change'. He argues that the underlying concept of this type of categorization was already under the process of evolution for some time.⁸² He argues that since the historians working in the Muslim period was working with the explicit category of the Muslim period, thereby having an implicit assumption of Hindu period present,

"In some ways, James Mill formalised what had been a long familiar division from medieval times onwards. For, if the notion of a Muslim period of Indian history goes back to the medieval centuries, ..., it also implies the notion of an anterior Hindu Period"⁸³

On the Book II, Mill talks 'of Hindus' regarding the Chronology and ancient history of Hindus, classification and distribution of people, the form of government, Laws, Taxes, Religion, Manner, Arts, literature, and then finally ending with 'a general reflection'. Similarly, 'the Mohemmedans' were considered an exclusive homogenous group and

⁸² Harbans, Mukhia, Medieval India: An Alien Conceptual Hegemony?, *The Medieval History Journal*, 1, 1, 1998: 91-105

⁸³ Harbans Mukhia, "Time, Chronology and History: The Indian Case," in *Making Sense of Global History* (Oslo, 2001).

accordingly a separate Book III was dedicated as to ‘the first invasion of India’ to the ‘close of the Mogol dynasty’. This Book III’s last chapter is notable for the comparison that Mill undertakes to evaluate the Hindu civilization and Mohemmedan civilization, comparing and contrasting the merits, for the most part, favouring the latter to the detriment of the former.

In Mill’s estimation or in his scale of utility, ‘the Hindu civilization’ stands nowhere near to desirable. Particularly when evaluating the utility of Hindu documents for the purposes to ascertain the past events, Mill’s indictments were scathing. The capacity was history itself was considered absent due to unruly imaginations and too much familiarity of reality in the ‘Hindu civilization’

“The offspring of a wild and ungoverned imagination, they mark the state of a rude and credulous people, whom the marvellous delights; who cannot estimate the use of a record of past events; and whose imagination the real occurrences of life are too familiar to engage.”⁸⁴

In the following extract, it can be known how much of the role a proper chronology plays in the epistemology of the enlightenment historiography. In the first chapter of the Book II, Mill gives numerous instance of mathematical and logical contradiction that plagues puranic accounts of the past. He points out the discrepancy and/or impossibility of years involved in the cycle of yugas as projected in the Hindu Scriptures. Here the chorological misfit was projected as a strong criteria for disregarding all these records as of no use as a trustful source material for the reconstruction of the past.

“To the monstrous period of years which the legends of the Hindus involve, they ascribe events the most extravagant and unnatural: events not even connects in chronological series; a number of independents and incredible fictions. This people, indeed, are perfectly destitute of historical records”⁸⁵

Further in the section comparing the literature (Book III, chapter 5) of ‘Hindus’ and ‘Mohemmedan’, Mill writes,

“As all our knowledge is built upon experience, the recordation of the past for the guidance of the future is one of the effects in which the utility of the art of writing

⁸⁴ James, Mill, The History of British India, Volume 1,(London: Maddon and co,1848), 166

⁸⁵ Mill, 167

principally consists. Of this most important branch of literature the Hindus were totally destitute.”⁸⁶

The interesting thing here to note, the particular fourth edition of the *The History of British India* published by James Maddon and co, London was interesting for the fact that the editor of these volumes, who took enormous pains to annotate, supplement the already provided notes often contradicting the original, and also to add his own ones when, for him, it felt necessary. Though editing and annotation were standard academic tools, the special interest is of the orientation of the editor, Mr. Horace Hayman Wilson, who was a reputed member of the Royal Asiatic Society and of the Asiatic societies of Paris and Calcutta. While James Mill work has been seen as an utilitarian argument against glorifying approach of the oriental scholars, his work was responded point to point by Wilson, who was one of the top rung orientalist along with William Jones, Henry Thomas Colebrook and Nathaniel Halhed. James Mill, in his characteristic way, deems Hindus possess little advantage to ‘Mohammedans’ as far as literature is concerned. Here Wilson intervenes with a note saying, “The answer to this, in all, except in history, the superiority is with the Hindus.”⁸⁷

Here, what becomes apparent is even one of the hardest advocates of glorious quality of the ‘Hindu civilization’ and a leading orientalist was conceding the lack of history of Hindus, though in this particular case the admission is regarding the relative poverty, in this regard, of ‘Hindu civilization’ when compared to the ‘Mohammedan civilization’.

This notion of Hindus, or more broadly ‘Indians’ not having any ‘true’ historical account, according to Chatterjee was ‘a singular discovery of European Indology’⁸⁸. Though, the orientalist with their epistemic fidelity to methods of enlightenment western historiography discovered the lack of historical writings, they are not absolutely path-breaking in this regard. Even in the eleventh century, the observant Al-Biruni noted about ‘Hindus’ in the following words

“Unfortunately the Hindus do not pay much attention to the historical order of things, they are very careless in relating the chronological succession of their kings, and

⁸⁶ Mill, 522

⁸⁷ Mill, 522

⁸⁸ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments, Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 95.

when they are pressed for information and are at a loss, not knowing what to say, they invariably take to tale-telling”⁸⁹

These argument and notions stressed in writing by the orientalist and colonial scholars also played its role as the foundational assumption for colonial administration. The colonial interpretation of history as exemplified in the writings of James Mill, Elphinstone⁹⁰ etc. The nascent nationalist consciousness that was seeking ways to express its opposition was taken to history writing. The call for writing history from the Indian point of view was given.^{91 92} The following history sought to subvert the substance in the colonial history as much as possible, especially the denigration of Hindus as backward and superstitious. For this enterprise, the native historians found a great ally in the Orientalist camp. Then, the ancient India which was condemned for its backwardness was turned into an age of glory, where everything that the modern professes was already in its possession. There exists a consensus that colonial historians brought in the classificatory schema of dividing the Indian Chronology into Hindu, Muslim and British. From the middle of nineteenth century, this classificatory framework becomes the dominant under which the relevance of the evidences analysed and the historical details were ordered.

Sumit Sarkar commenting on the process of such categorical schemes acquiring dominance tries to problematize the way in which some categories were readily taken while others possibilities were left out for obscurity.⁹³ This tripartite categorization of temporal frame into Hindu, Muslim and British was later, in the Indian rendition got morphed into a euphemistic incarnation as Ancient, Medieval and Modern. As Harbans Mukhia says,

“This nomenclature for the tripartite division remained in force down to the 1960s, and even though another nomenclature, ‘ancient, medieval, modern’ was first used in Indian context in 1903⁹⁴, the two were continued to be used interchangeably, since

⁸⁹ Al-Biruni, *Al-Hind*, 1964, 10

⁹⁰ Partha Chatterjee refers to Elphinstone’s *History of India*, published in 1841, as ‘the most widely read British history of India until Vincent Smith’s books were published in the early twentieth century’ in his *The Nation and its Fragments*

⁹¹ Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments, Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, 76–77.

⁹² Umesh Bagade, *Ambedkar’s Historical Mehtod* (New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2015), 4–5. Bagade goes further in elucidating how the dominance of colonial agenda and its positivist thrust ‘conceded epistemological space to Brahminical system’ by granting the stamp of primary sources to classical Sanskrit texts.

⁹³ Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 17–19.

⁹⁴ Stanley Lane-Poole in his *Medieval India under Mohammadan Rule (AD 712-1764)* published in 1903 was first text to introduce this innovation as to divide Indian history into the ancient, medieval and modern. But

they shared the basic premise of equating history with dynasties and dynasties with their religion, except for the British or the modern period.”⁹⁵

The connotation of these categories from its western origin cannot be dismissed. The form does not travel in its mere pristine formalness rather the substance also was carried forward. In the Western Imagination, there was a glorious ancient period exemplified in Greek civilization which followed by dark Medieval age characterized by stagnation and decadence. Then this trend was then arrested and reversed into an age of progress by the arrival of enlightenment and Industrial revolution characterizing the Modern Period. This frame counter-posed to Mill’s classification of Indian History as Hindu, Muslim and British provides a mosaic combination for the nationalist’s adaptation. The major overhaul that needed was that the colonial interpretation projected British as the enlightening Modern force, while the nationalist wanted to wrestle that role from that of British and arrogate for himself. For this enterprise, early nationalist historians sought to glorify the ancient Hindu past and frame the medieval as Muslim and then the Medieval Muslim past as one filled with oppression and decadence. Often the Muslims assume the role of foreign invaders from which Hindu nation should wrestle away its independence. In the later career of ‘Secular’ Nationalism in the twentieth century, this framing was beaten down to fit the Muslims into it, at least on the level of public discourse.

Irrespective of their own preferences, the historians, academic or textbook, of the post-independence period has to deal with these categories which shaped the historiography of their predecessors, both colonial and nationalists.

Strategies of Secularization:

The 1960s/70s Congress textbooks: Destabilizing the Ancient-Medieval divide

As we have seen before, the concerns such as construction of national identity, maintenance of political unity and pushing for national integration were the primary factors that dominated the political life post-independence. The most extensive and intrusive impact of such a project of Nationalist discourse can be seen in educational planning and policies.

Lane-Poole was changing only the categorical nomenclature, neither its underlying communal premise nor its content as he himself made clear in his preface.

⁹⁵ Mukhia, “Time, Chronology and History: The Indian Case.”

Consequently, Textbook writing, especially history was considered as an effective vehicle for delivering the nationalistic message.

Central to the discourse of Congress nationalism is the allied discourse of secularism. While anti-colonial nationalism tries to exclude the British administration and population from its collective indigenous identity of Indianness, Secularism tries to secure the co-existence of multiple religious communities and their identities along with the majority Hindu population in the imagination of Indian identity. This twin agenda of nationalism and Secularism propels the history writing in the 1960s and 1970s under the congress regime.

In the year 1966, NCERT published 'Ancient India', a history text-book for the instruction of 'middle school' children of class VI approximately aged 11. Romila Thapar authored this text. The preface to this textbook refers to their content as tracing 'the history of India from the earliest times till the beginning of the medieval age'. What is these 'ancient' and 'medieval' stands for? The explanation of how the rupture was designated is described in following words

“In deciding when the ancient period of Indian history ends and the medieval period being, attention has been given not solely to dynastic changes but to major developments in the evolution of Indian culture and society”⁹⁶

The above excerpt does not address the concern of why there was a three-fold Chronological division, rather the author only refers to the emphasis has been shifted from being 'solely' dynastic to the changes in 'Indian culture and society'. There were further references to these divisions and what the authors want to mean it, but there was not any discussion on why it is so being essential for the study of Indian history itself.

In the textbook for class VII 'Medieval India' by the same author Romila Thapar was published the next year in 1967 which contains some elaborate note on what the text calls 'medieval' as referring to “many changes taking place in Indian society in about the eighth century A.D. and during this time these changes influenced many aspects of Indian society” like political, economic, social legal, religion, language and art, 'in short, almost everything',⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Romila, Thapar, Ancient India, NCERT, 1966, 7

⁹⁷ Romila, Thapar, Medieval India, NCERT, 1

The period labelled as 'medieval' spans from eighth century A.D. to the eighteenth century A.D, but the medieval period itself is not seen as one piece monolith. Rather it was further classified into two phases. The early part includes the rule of Pratiharas, Palas, Rastrakutas, Rajputs and Cholas spanning from 800 A.D. to 1200 A.D. and the later part begins from the establishment of Delhi Sultanate. Even though the inter-transition between 'Ancient' and 'Medieval' and the intra-transition between 'early medieval' and 'late medieval' periods are characterized by the ruling dynasties in power, the author claims that their significance was not considered central. As the author writes, "Change of rulers alone seldom leads to changes in society". This assertion is made in a specific and might have a specific function to play in the discourse field of historiography. This can be also linked to the narrative trajectory/constrain of this historiography which tries to prove that a certain 'people of foreign origin' are part of the 'Indian population'

"...despite the fact that the rulers of India from the thirteenth century were often people of foreign origin, we still call this the medieval period... In any case the Turks and the Mughals made India their homeland and became a part of the Indian population"⁹⁸

Here, the argument that has been forwarded is sharp and pointed as reply for some assumedly existing situation. Thapar, in the same year as the year of publication of the above mentioned text writes on *The Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* that

"The choice of events was conditioned by the historian's predilections and it in the nature of the choice that the historian's subjectivity can be seen. The interpretation is also influenced by the priority which a historian gives to his sources and the degree to which he is willing to be critical and analytical about his sources."⁹⁹

While at the same time, Thapar denies any particular effort, from her part, to give 'any other pattern of historical interpretation'. The end point of her critique of the communal is to get rid obstructions and move towards 'a more accurate understanding of our history'¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ibid., 3

⁹⁹ Romila, Thapar, *Communalism and the writing of History*, People's Publishing House, 2

¹⁰⁰ Romla Thapar, Harbans Mukhia, Bipin Chandra, *Communalism and the writing of History*, People's Publishing House, 1969

One aspect of this narrative strategy shows us clue to the historical roots of how these three-fold temporal division of 'Indian' history. The context of 'foreign' contact was described as follows:

“The coming of people from outside India during this period brought India into very close contact with the world outside. In order to understand the coming of these foreigners to India, it is necessary to know what was happening in Western Asia, Europe, Central Asia, China and South-East Asia”¹⁰¹

In the above short extract, the word “India” was used thrice and the binary of insider and outsider was strongly established. What is India itself was rarely mentioned in the course of history. It was felt that it's self-explanatory, from the maps dispersed all over the textbook.

To understand 'the coming of foreigner to India', there were many events in other parts of the world one need to comprehend, yet some events are more equal than other. Such importance was given to the seventh century A.D. Arabia and Prophet Muhammad. So the story of 'Turks, Afghans, and Mughals' who later came to establish empires in India starts with Prophet Muhammad and the new religion of Islam.

Thapar's *Ancient India* starts 'almost 300,000 years' back when the early man was a nomad. Her story of the country, 'which started many centuries ago' begins with food-gatherers and their transition to become food-producers. And it proceeds through the Harappan/Indus Valley civilization (Man takes to City Life) which was dated between 2500-1700 BC. Then comes the Life in the Vedic Age heralding the coming of the Aryans two centuries after the decline of Harappan/Indus Valley Civilization dated at 1500 BC. Following that were the rise and fall of empires all having their locus in the Gangetic plane, but possessing some clout beyond it. Thapar takes us from the 'Rise of the Kingdom of Magada' to 'The Mauryan Empire' which is followed by the unimaginatively title 'India After Mauryas'. As the last phase of Ancient, comes the 'The Age of the Guptas' after which the 'The Age of smaller Kingdom' commences. Then as a closure, a profile of export of 'Indian Culture' and import of 'a new culture' i.e. Islam (India and the world) is offered.

So, the chronology of 'ancient' conceptually spans from time immemorial from when the 'early man' was nomad, wandered in groups, used stones as tool and 'accidentally' discovered fire to the eighth century A. D. marked with the coming of Islam 'on the West

¹⁰¹ Romila, Thapar, *Medieval India*, NCERT, 1967, 3

coast of India'. On arrival of Muslims at the borders of 'India', we were told 'here they lived in peace with the local people, married amongst them and took part in the Indian trade with other regions of Asia'¹⁰²

2) The narrative towards political/geographical unity

The discourse of National unity and strategies of Secular discourse which was present in Thapar *Ancient India*, it becomes more vocal in *Ancient India*, published in 1977 with the authorship of R. S. Sharma, which was intended for Class XI.

Sharma's *Ancient India* projects a framework which unequivocally bases itself in the twin discourse referred to above. The preface by Satish Chandra, the chairman of History Editorial Board overlooking the NCERT history textbook writing, demarks the history of ancient India 'from prehistoric times to about the eighth century.' And it was added that 'effort has been made in this book to highlight the forces and factors behind the rise and spread of civilization and culture in India rather than present details of dynastic history'. The focus was said to be on the 'growth and diffusion of various aspects of civilization such as social classes, state formation, and political institutions'.

'The basic unity of India' was celebrated in the Congress era text. While voluntary and forceful integration of different regions and princely state have taken place, the congress felt a need to claim legitimacy for such an act. This we can find in these history textbooks. The 'ancient' history India was made to embody the unity of Indian nation.

"The ancient strove for unity. They looked upon this vast subcontinent as one land. The name Bharatvarsha or the land of Bharat was given to the whole country, after the name of an ancient tribe called the Bharatas and the people were called Bharatasantati or the descendants of Bharata. Our ancient poets, philosophers and writers viewed the country as an integral unity. They spoke of the land stretching from Himalayas tot eh sea as the proper domain of a single universal monarch. The kings who tried to establish their authority from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin and form the valley of

¹⁰² Romila, Thapar, *Ancient India*, NCERT, 1966, 141

Brahmaputra in the east to the land beyond the Indus in the west were universally praised. They were called chakravartins”¹⁰³

Further it was said with pride and assurance that

“This kind of unity was attained at least twice. In third century B C Asoka extended his empire over the whole country, except for the extreme south. Again, in the fourth century A.D. Samudragupta carried his victorious arms from the Ganga to the borders of the Tamil Land. In the seventh century the Chalukya king, Pulakesin defeated Harshavardhana who was called the lord of the whole of north India. In spite of lack of political unity political formations around the country assume more or less the same shape. The idea that India constituted one single geographical unit persisted in the minds of the conquerors and cultural leaders. The unity of India was also recognized by foreigners”¹⁰⁴

Through this narrative frame of geographical, political and a kind of metaphysical unity of ‘India’ preceding the contemporary to almost time immemorial was established to ensure the ideological basis for the then present boundaries of India. In these narratives of unity of India, the question of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan, such like things does not interfere at all, let alone regional variations that manifested with in the then present boundary of post-1947 India.¹⁰⁵

While talking about the ‘ancient epics’ like Ramayana and the Mahabharata and their widespread presence it was said ‘whatever the form in which Indian cultural values and ideas were expressed, the substance remained the same throughout the country’¹⁰⁶. This reveals one of the crucial underlying assumptions of the author. What such a statement presumes is the idea that an there is a timeless thing called ‘Indian Cultural values’ impervious to the vicissitudes of historical change, an underlying essence only camouflaged by the shifting ‘forms’ which again can be identified, exposed and brought down by the historian to reveal the unchanging sameness in content ‘thorough out the country’. This statement explicitly works towards deemphasizing the role of space in distinct and independent historical change.

¹⁰³ Ram Sharan, Sharma, *Ancient India*, (New Delhi: NCERT, 1982),, 1

¹⁰⁴ Sharma, 1

¹⁰⁵ Sanjay Joshi, “Contesting Histories and Nationalist Geographies: A Comparison of School Textbooks in India and Pakistan,” *South Asian History and Culture* 1, no. 3 (2010): 357–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19472498.2010.485379>.

¹⁰⁶ Sharma, *Ancient India*, 2

Sometimes, for the explaining the centre, the periphery helps in wonderful ways. Like that, in terms of explaining the intent of the authors and content of the textbook, the questions asked at the end of the chapter comes handy. Here in Sharma's Ancient India, the very first chapter ends with this question, 'In what ways does ancient Indian history show the basic unity of India?' It was point blank in getting to its agenda. Here, 'the importance of ancient Indian History' itself is conflated with the desired and projected notion of 'the basic unity of India'¹⁰⁷. Particularly interesting is the fact that the author of ancient India is not merely concerning him about the 'ancient Indian history' but rather as the question suggests, 'the basic unity of India' is taken to be an eternal phenomena for which the 'ancient Indian history' can attest to as a proof at a particular instance.

Representation in Maps

The cartographical representation is a curious analytical resource one employ to decipher the grey area bridging the intent and the content. Though in some case like that of sites of Harappan culture¹⁰⁸ with Afghanistan and Iran present in it and the map of West, South and South East Asia¹⁰⁹ with international borders presents an anachronistic marking of international borders, the rest of the maps of the subcontinent is only adorned with the selective major rivers and their tributaries and with the relevant places in question.

But curiously, from the very next, in Medieval India, in every single map, the current international borders were made visible. As a result, even in 'Indian on the eve of Mughal conquest'¹¹⁰, now one can clearly see Pakistan and Bangladesh. This anachronistic practice was entertained consistently from then on, assumedly for nationalistic reason, to demarcate the present-day international border even years before 'India' came into existence. This one can read as a subtle yet powerful strategy to etch the current day political boundaries of India as a picture of eternal existence in the minds of young children.

3) The discourse of amity, tolerance and concord

While the communalistic interpresation assert that the muslim rulers were outsiders, the NCERT textbooks of the 1960s/70s counters this narrative head on by declaring the Muslims as part of 'Indian Population

¹⁰⁷ Sharma, 2

¹⁰⁸ Sharma, 31

¹⁰⁹ Sharma, 134

¹¹⁰ Romila, Thapar, Medieval India, (New Delhi: NCERT, 1988), 65

“The Mughals did not come to trade. They came to acquire a kingdom and this they succeeded in doing. A bigger difference was that the Mughals made India their home. They settle here and became a part of the Indian population. They were concerned with the welfare of India. Nor were the Mughals interested in converting large numbers of Indians to their religion. There were many Muslims in India and the Mughals with the exception of Aurangzeb were tolerant of all religions”¹¹¹

Despite this assertion in the respective chapter on Mughals, we found contradictory statement which compares and likens Mughlas to that of English for the reason they both came first for trade and became rulers later,

“The Turks and the Mughals in Central Asia encouraged this trade. Later they came to India as conquerors. The pattern was the same with the Europeans who came at first as traders and then became rulers.”¹¹²

Akbar’s good intentions and his great dream for the unity beyond the borders of religious identity becomes a trope that recurs in the secular imaginations. This becomes an object of immense praise and was emphasized heavily.

“But Akbar in proclaiming his new religious teaching was not trying to destroy any religion. He was sincerely anxious to achieve unity in the country. The Din-i-Ilahi was his attempt at bringing the people of India together... Akbar’s great dream was that India should be united as one country. People should forget their differences of region and religion and think of themselves only as the people of India”¹¹³

Interestingly the ‘communal’ historians have more historical reasons to praise Akbar than their ‘secular’ counterpart. This is to portray Akbar’s generousness as an exception to the all the other Muslim ruler as bigots against the Hindu religion.

“In 1563, he inaugurated a new deal for the Hindus by abolishing the pilgrimage tax, which used to be levied on them when they visited their holy places (teerthas). The Emperor also permitted Hindus to repair old temples and build new ones. Moreover, all those who had been compelled to accept Islam against their will were permitted to revert to their old faith without fear of the death penalty enjoined by thee Sharia

¹¹¹ Thapar, 83-84

¹¹² Thapar, 6

¹¹³ Thapar, 94

(Muslim law). Akbar also prohibited the forcible conversion of prisoner of war, a common practice at that time”¹¹⁴

But in order to endorse the ‘secular’ principles, the ‘secular’ historian often taken an anachronistic turn to interpret the events to fit in the secular framework.¹¹⁵

“The recurrent cycles of liberalism and orthodoxy in Indian history should be seen against the situation which was rooted in the structure of Indian society. It was one aspect of the struggle between entrenched privilege and power on one hand, and the egalitarian and humanistic aspirations of the mass of the people on the other”¹¹⁶

In contrast, the secular historians when talking about the religion in the reign of Aurangzeb, takes refuge in the syncretic activities of prince ‘Dara’

“Despite some display of orthodoxy by Shah Jahan at the beginning of his reign and a few acts of intolerance, such as the demolition of “new” temples, he was not narrow in his outlook which was further tempered towards the end of his reign by the influence of his liberal son, Dara.”¹¹⁷

Under the head ‘Religion’ in reign of Aurangzeb, prince Dara Shukoh dominates as the most popular amongst the ‘liberal muslims’. We were introduced of his study of sufi and Vedanta philosophy. We were also told that he did translations of Upanishads into Persian in 1657. Then “unfortunately, Dara Shukoh was killed in the fight for the throne between him and his brother Aurangzeb”¹¹⁸

“Although he became an orthodox Muslim, Aurangzeb was sincere in his religious beliefs... He became unpopular when he reintroduced jaziya (the poll-tax for non-Muslims) and when he destroyed temples. What he did not realize is that the job of a king is to rule and to rule efficiently and that religion should not be allowed to interfere with the government”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Meenakshi, Jain, *Medieval India, A textbook for class XI*, (New Delhi: NCERT, 2002), 149

¹¹⁵ N. Bhattacharya, “Predicaments of Secular Histories,” *Public Culture* 20, no. 1 (2008): 57–73, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2007-016>.

¹¹⁶ Satish, Chandra, *Medieval History, Textbook in History for Class XI*, NCERT, 1990, 224

¹¹⁷ Satish, Chandra, *Medieval History, Textbook in History for Class XI*, NCERT, 1990, 223

¹¹⁸ Chandra, 108

¹¹⁹ Chandra, 109

R. S. Sharma presents a picture of harmony and seamless mixing as a central feature of the ancient Indian history. This assertion tries to invalidate any claims to authentic identities, especially the ones that arise out of one's racial and religious origins. So, Sharma foregrounds 'the intermixing of races' in the following way,

“Ancient Indian history is interesting because India proved to be a crucible of numerous races. The pre-Aryans, the Indo-Aryans, the Greeks, The Scythians, the Hunas, the Turks, etc., made India their home. Each ethnic group contributed its mite to the making of Indian culture. All these peoples mixed up so inextricably with one another that at present none of them can be identified in their original form.”¹²⁰

Again when it comes to religion a similar position of seamless intermingling of different religion was forwarded. This, one can infer, was to counter the communal assumptions that were strongly championed by the right wing that Hindu and Muslim religious communities were strictly distinct and were marked by fundamental difference.

“India since ancient times has been the land of several religions. Ancient India witness the birth of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, but all these cultures and religious intermingled and acted and reacted upon one another in such a manner that though people speak languages, practise different religion and observe different social customs, certain common styles of life thorough out the country. Our Country shows a deep unity in spite of great diversity”¹²¹

Strategies of Communalization:

Imagination of Nation in NDA History Textbooks

Lal et al, India and the world social science textbook for Class VI is criticized for clubbing history with other subjects thereby reducing the weightage assigned to the teaching of history. The older 'Ancient India' textbook of Thapar for 'Middle schools' is about 150 pages whereas the 2002 one where the respective history part is titled as 'people and Society in the Ancient period' is only 90 pages even with larger fonts which means lesser content. The Interesting part is this history starts with an elaborate section on 'Non-Indian

¹²⁰ Ram Sharan, Sharma, Ancient India, NCERT, 1982, 1

¹²¹ Ram Sharan, Sharma, Ancient India, NCERT, 1982, 1

Civilizations’ like Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Greek, Roman, Chinese and Iranian. The second book written by Makkhan Lal Ancient India is intended class XI. Taking them together, we analyse how the representation of ‘ancient’ past differs with the change of current regimes. While we have seen how the ‘Secular’ nationalism articulated itself through various ways of framing and emphasis, we, now going to analyse how ‘cultural’ nationalism, as envisioned by the BJP is operationalized through the new textbooks. It is interesting to note that despite the fact that Nationalism as concept only owes its origin to a few hundred years belonging to the ‘modern’ period’, the self-chosen ground for the battle of nationalism is ‘ancient’ period.

1) The Presentist discourse of the ‘Ancient’ past

The discourse of temporal continuity and sameness: From ‘Ancient’ to the present

Unlike the terms such as ‘country’, ‘India’ suggesting the preoccupation with geographical unity in Thapar and Sharma, Lal et al, starts his account which instead emphasizes on the temporal continuity by employing terms like ‘even today’. There was a persistent trend to emphasize the continuity between the ‘ancient’ past and the ‘modern’ present. Multiple instances can be cited in this textbook of this kind where an explicit and concerted effort has been made to establish this notion of uninterrupted temporal continuity. Throughout this sub-heading, I have taken the liberty of emphasizing the specific parts of the citations which project the discourse of temporal continuity to draw attention of the readers.

“Some of the remains of tool and other objects used by Human beings have survived till date. You will be surprised to know that some of those kinds of tools like axes, spears and grinding stones are used **even today**.”¹²²

This discourse of seamless continuity with the ‘ancient’ past manifests appear in multiple contexts thereby making it a dominant theme. In terms of tool and technology and even the meaning deciphered on them is said to be continuity with sameness. In terms of implements found in the Indus Valley civilization dated between 4600 BC and 1900 BC, it was said that

“Plough fields discovered at Kalibangan shows that their cultivation pattern was **same as today**.”¹²³

¹²² Makkhan Lal et al., *India and the World. Social Sciences Textbook for Class VI* (New Delhi: NCERT, 2002), 52.

¹²³ Lal et al., 82.

Further,

“Most of pots had painted designs such as leaves, fish, bird, animal, and stories etc. one of such stories painted on a pot is the story of the thirsty crow which we read in story books **even today**”¹²⁴

“During the Vedic period, almost all cereals **known today** were cultivated and also all the animals **were known**.”¹²⁵ (Lal 2002, 90)

The most prominent of such linkage of the ‘ancient’ past to the imminent present is projected in the domain of the religion and modes of worship. While the social-economic and political factors and set-up of the Indus valley civilization were deemed to the position of ‘It is difficult to be sure’¹²⁶, Makkhan Lal is more than sure about when it comes to the religious aspects.

“A male deity, ‘the prototype of the historic Siva’ is portrayed on a seal with three faces, seated on a low throne in the typical posture of a Yogi, with two animals on each side – elephants and tiger on right and rhinoceros and buffalo on left and two deer standing under the throne. The depiction shows Siva as Pasupati. There is also the last characteristic of the historic Siva in this figure, a pair of horns crowning his head with a central bump which appears like the trisula or trident of the Saivas”¹²⁷

“Some linga and yoni like objects have been found. Some scholars opined that these were not linga and yonis but gamesmen. However, the find of terracotta piece from kalibangan having linga and yoni in one piece, like the ones in the historical period, show that these were ling and yoni meant for worship. Whether they were worshipped independently or are symbolic representation of Siva and Sakti respectively, cannot be ascertained”¹²⁸

“A number of ‘fire-altars’ have been found which seem to have been used as sacrificial altars. Besides these the Swastika, a sacred symbol with Hindus”¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Lal et al., 84.

¹²⁵ Lal et al., 90.

¹²⁶ Makkhan Lal, *Ancient India, A Textbook for Class XI* (New Delhi: NCERT, 2002), 79.

¹²⁷ Lal, 77.

¹²⁸ Lal, 77–78.

¹²⁹ Lal, 78.

“There is yet another aspect of the Harappan people that needs consideration. A large number of terracotta figurines depict the individuals in various yogic postures (asanas) indicating thereby that the Harappans practiced Yoga.”¹³⁰

“Some of the religious practices of the Harappan people are followed by the modern Hindus. Worship of pipal trees, bull, Siva-lingas is seen in the Harappan civilization. The Kamandalu which is seen in the modern days as one of the most auspicious possessions of ascetics is also found in the Harappan civilization. A large number of figurines in various yogic postures have also been found. Some terracotta figurines of women found at Nausharo still have vermilion in their hair-parting. This is the most precious and sacred symbol of married Hindu women.”¹³¹

“The swastika, the sacred symbol of the Hindu, is found on seals as well as in paintings. The fire-altars serving as havana-kundas are also very much a part of the Harappan Civilization”¹³²

“The pipal tree was worshipped and revered by the Harappans which continues to be worshipped **even today...**”

“Though the Harappan civilization disappeared by about 1300 B.C., number of cultural traits in this civilization can be seen **as a part of our daily cultural and material life**” pp. 81

One of the questions to reinforce the idea of continuing feature of ‘Harappan religion’ was framed in the following terms,

“Describe the religious beliefs of the Harappan people; Mention some of the characteristic features of Harappan religion **which are still continuing.**” pp. 81

Again, in the RigVedic period, it was asserted that the same type of worship continues from those times of ‘ancient’ antiquity to till now with an uninterrupted sameness. With regard to the Aryan people, we were told that

“These people also worshipped Siva in the form of linga which is done **today also.**”(Lal 2002, 83-4) “The Rig Vedic people worshipped many gods representing

¹³⁰ Lal, 78.

¹³¹ Lal, 91.

¹³² Lal, 91.

forces of nature such as fire, sun, wind, sky and trees. They are worshipped **even today**. In Harappan civilization we find depiction of many things like pipal tree, Saptamatrikas and Sivalingas which are revered by Hindus **even today**.” (Lal 2002, 90)

The religious practices of the antiquity is said to be same as in the present, but it was not certainly restricted to the religious alone, the politics too was implicated in the same way. In following way was the polity of the RigVedic period, followed by the later Kings were described

“There were rules which governed the debate and behaviour of members in Sabha and Samiti **like in our Parliament**” (Lal 2002, 89).

“The rulers were chosen by the people of the kingdom **like we choose our government today**” (Lal 2002, 93)

“As before, the King was assisted by a council of ministers. It was called the mantriparishad **like today**” (Lal 2002, 101)

“The empire was divided into provinces, called desah. These were further divided into districts known as pradesha. Officials in charge of a district were called ayukta and those in charge of provinces were known as kumaramatyas. These words **are still used in the administrative machinery of the country with the same meanings**” (Lal 2002, 120)

In addition to tools, religion and politics, town planning and scientific achievements can also be added. Not only the modern is conflated with ancient, Sometimes, the ancient even exceeds the modern. On describing the achievements of the Indus valley civilization,

“Streets were quite straight. They cut each other at right angles. This plan divided the city into large rectangular blocks. This kind of conscious town planning is not found in any other contemporary civilization of the world. **Even in the modern world this kind of town planning began only around the eighteenth century A.D.**” (Lal 2002, 82)

This statement was repeated in class XI textbook but with additional credits for the Harappan for their ‘civic sense’ and this time supremacy of the town planning of the Harappan Civilization over the whole ‘modern world’ but restricted it to the modern cities like London

and Paris. While discussing about the town planning skills of the Harappan Civilization, we were told,

“Further, the civic sense of people in this civilization was such that during the heyday of the civilization, no encroachment on the streets was to be seen. According to scholars, such town-planning was not seen even in the nineteenth century London and Paris.”¹³³

“They also knew that the earth moved on its own axis and around the sun. The moon moved around the earth. They also tried to calculate the time period taken by bodies for revolution and distances among heavenly bodies from the Sun. **These calculations are almost the same as calculate by the modern scientific method.**”¹³⁴

“In the field of mathematics and astronomy Aryabhata wrote Aryabhattiya. He reaffirmed that the earth revolves around the sun and rotates on its axis which is **accepted even today**. By astronomical calculations they could predict eclipses more accurately.”¹³⁵

While we have seen the how numerous patterns of living were imputed with continuity, there seems to be no relief from the discourse of continuity even in death. In relation to the megalith way of burying which was prevalent in the south of subcontinent it was said

“The practice of burying the dead and making at tomb over it or marking the place by erecting a stone **continues even today.**”¹³⁶

The legitimacy of these claims were said to be derived from the Indian exceptionalism (shared with China) for the ‘unbroken history’ which made ‘India’ to retain and keep all of its ‘distinguishing character’ from the earliest of the times to the present times

“After that you will learn about Indian civilization which **has unbroken history of about 8000 years** i.e. from the Neolithic times... You may be surprised to know that Indian and Chinese civilizations are the only ones which have survived right from the time they came into existence **till date**. They have **retained many of their basic and distinguishing characteristic features** which link them with the past. All other early civilizations have

¹³³ Lal, Ancient India, 71

¹³⁴ Lal, 91

¹³⁵ Lal, 117

¹³⁶ Lal, 106

disappeared and the present people/Civilizations have no connection with the past ones.”¹³⁷

2) Collapsing the Indus Valley civilization and the Vedic civilization: The discourse of internal sameness:

The Indus valley civilization which was discovered in the early twentieth century by the British archaeologists pushed the antiquity of ‘Ancient India’ further back in time. Earlier, the Aryan culture which gave rise to the Vedic times was considered as the beginning of ancient Indian history proper. In the earlier texts of Thapar (1966) and Sharma (1977), there were clear chronological and cultural demarcation between the representation of Indus valley civilization and the later Vedic civilization after the coming of Aryans; between the indigenusness of the Indus valley people and the foreignness of the Aryan people. In terms of chronology the former was dated between 2500 BC and 1700 BC while the latter’s arrival is dated 1500 BC, leaving a good two century gap between each other. Further, the most important distinction was the advanced nature of Indus Valley Civilization in terms of its urban settlements exemplified in its burnt brick multi-storied buildings, planned layout of towns and most distinctly the exceptional sanitary system in the form of covered drainage which was described as without parallel in those times. Whereas the RigVedic/Aryan civilization was described as ‘pastoral’ and ‘nomadic’, and it was stressed that they had neither a sophisticated political machinery to collect taxes nor flourishing trade, the Indus Valley Civilization was credited with flourishing trade and a stable political system was entertained as a possible hypothesis. For instance, Sharma (1977) states that ‘...once the Harappan civilization disappeared, urbanism did not appear in India for a thousand years or so’. This statement in no uncertain terms stresses that ‘the Rig Vedic society was primarily pastoral’. This being the attitude of Thapar and Sharma, Lal et al. takes on a different approach, in which the not only the civilization, but even the temporal distinctions were blurred, where the former follows the later, later precedes the former.

¹³⁷ Makkhan Lal, Sima Yadav, Basabi Khan Bannerjee and M. Akhtar Hussain, India and the World. Social Sciences Textbook for class VI (New Delhi: NCERT, 2002), 58

“The Vedic civilization appears to have been fairly advanced... On the basis of various similarities like the same geographical areas, advanced nature of civilization and religious practices many scholars think that **Rig Vedic and Harappan Civilizations are the same.**”¹³⁸

But

“...some scholars do not agree with this. They think that Harappan and RigVedic **civilizations** are not the same. This issue can be resolved **only after** the Harappan inscriptions have been deciphered”¹³⁹

The conclusion that both Rig Vedic and Harappan/Indus Valley Civilizations are the same, which was made on the basis of multiple factors mentioned above, is on the one side, and the conclusion which claims that both are not same for unrevealed reasons, is on the other side. This disagreement, where the ‘same’ness argument was made to look more legitimate (by enumerating the ‘basis of various similarities’) than the ‘not the same’ argument can be solved ‘only after’ the decoding of Harappan inscriptions. Till then, both claims need to be given equal legitimacy seems to be the import.

In case for anyone is in doubt of the ‘same’ness between the Harppan civilization and Rig Vedic civilizations it was reiterated in the last chapter which discusses ‘Major Religions’

“On the basis of the material remains found in the Harappan Civilization it can be said that many of the religious aspects of Hinduism began then. The worship of mother goddess, Siva Pashupati, Siva-lingas, pipal tree, etc. can be seen in the Harappan civilization also. You have already read that some scholars believe that Harappan and Vedic civilizations are the same”¹⁴⁰

“Many scholar think that Aryans were originally inhabitant of India and did not come from outside. It has been argued by such scholars that there is no archaeological or biological evidence which would establish the arrival of any new people from outside between 5000 B.C. and 800 B.C” pp. 89

¹³⁸ Makkhan Lal, Sima Yadav, Basabi Khan Bannerjee and M. Akthar Hussain, India and the World. Social Sciences Textbook for class VI (New Delhi: NCERT, 2002), 91

¹³⁹ Lal et al, *India and the World. Social Sciences Textbook for class VI*, (New Delhi: NCERT, 2002), 91

¹⁴⁰ Lal et al, 133

“Horse was an important animal in the Vedic period. Horse bones and terracotta figurines have been found at some Harappan sites.”¹⁴¹

As final word it was said,

“The above similarities, and many others found between the RigVedic and Harappan civilization have led a number of scholars to conclude that the Harappan civilization is the same as the Vedic civilization and Aryans did not come to India from outside. However there are other scholars who consider vedic culture as different from that of the Harappan civilization... It ends with a quotation that ends with ‘The Aryan invasion never happened at all’”¹⁴²

Further the representation of map also done in a way which connotes the sameness of Harappan and Vedic Civilizations. In the map representing the ‘early civilizations’, the part surrounding the Indus River was marked as Harappan and Vedic Civilizations. This suggests them as both being one and the same¹⁴³

Religious assimilation of invaders over mutual influence

A picture of unidirectional submissiveness is suggested in terms of the foreigners coming into India and getting assimilated in to Indian society ‘by accepting Indian religions’. This is in stark contrast with the way, Thapar and Sharma has offered the ‘foreign’ cultures to have a dialectical influence on the ‘Indian religions and way of life’ itself. So, in Lal et al, the foreign invasions were not endowed with the power to affect and mould the ‘Indian religions and way of life’, rather it can be only accepted and followed by the invaders, which, we were told, they did in a course of time.

“After the decline of the powerful Mauryas and Sungas in northern India, there were invasions of the Indo-Greeks, Sakas, Parthians and Kushanas. They all came from Iran or Central Asia following the route via Afghanistan and Bolan and Khaibar

¹⁴¹ Lal et al, 90

¹⁴² Lal et al, *India and the World. Social Sciences Textbook for class VI*, (New Delhi: NCERT, 2002), 92

¹⁴³ Lal et al 57

passes. They gradually settle in India and became a part of the Indian society by accepting Indian religions and way of life.”¹⁴⁴

The same message was reiterated again,

“It may be mentioned that most of the invaders who came to India during this period accepted one Indian religion or the other. They adopted the Indian culture and became a part of the Indian society”¹⁴⁵

3) Discourse of continuous conflict

For the very reason that the historiographical battle is framed in terms of ‘communal’ versus ‘secular’ interpretation of Hindu and Muslim identity, ‘Medieval’ period, which is conventionally connotes the arrival of Muslims in India becomes a controversial area. Here how does the NCERT textbook from two different regimes fare. What strategies they employ to make then sound either ‘secular’ or ‘communal’?

Under the Congress regime, two textbooks on Medieval India by NCERT was published; One by Romila Thapar in 1967 for Middle Schools, and the other one by Satish Chandra in 1978 for Class XI. Later under the BJP-led regime these NCERT history textbooks were replaced by Medieval India by Meenakshi Jain for Class XI in 2002, while the Middle school text by Thapar was replaced by the India and the World People and Society in the medieval Period written by Yadav et al in the year 2003. Because of its ‘integrated’ approach, history appears under the head ‘People and Society in the medieval Period’.

i) ‘Muslim’ invasion and ‘Hindu’ resistance

In the chapter that is dedicated to ‘the world of Islam’ appear several waves of determined and religiously motivated invasion into the borders of India. And then it is all about how the ‘Hindu’ kings used all their courage and tactics in their disposal to resist the ‘Muslim’ invasion.

In the first encounter itself it was felt necessary to know that the ‘Hindu’ lands were more challenging for the ‘Muslims’ to conquer in contrast to the lands that were populated by other

¹⁴⁴ Lal et al 111

¹⁴⁵ Lal et al 112

religions, thereby suggesting that the religious as the proxy for the military and political strength. It also suggests that the religion is a determining factor of victory and loss in battle thereby linking the non-religious to the religious thereby enlarging the domain of religious.

“While they (Muslims) had won relatively easy victories in Christian and Zorostrian lands, they were checkmated in Sind, Kabul and Zabul, three tiny Hindu kingdoms on the north-western frontiers of India for almost four centuries.”¹⁴⁶

Who is worthy of recounting and remembered is

“...Yashovarman in Kanauj. A reputed warrior, he is even said to have allied with China against the growing powers of Arbas.”¹⁴⁷

The constant trope of this text is how the ‘hindu’ kings have resisted the onward march of the ‘Muslim’ invasion in to India. An anachronistic imagination of Indian nation with its current territorial boundaries is so crucial for constructing a historical narrative as follows.

“While north India was saved by Nagabhata, a chief of the Gurjara Pratihara clan and rulers of Avanti, the Arabs were halted in the Deccan by the viceroy of the Chalukyan king of Badami”¹⁴⁸

“...as Kashmir receded from political prominence two new powers, Gurjara and Pratiharas and the Palas of Bengal tstrode in the north Indian state. The former, settled in Rajputana, stood as bulwarks against the marching Arabs”¹⁴⁹

A constant motif that recurs in these textbooks is the recounting of the onward march of ‘alien’ Muslim invaders and the ‘valorous struggle’ of native Hindu kings against this. Here particular care was taken to glorify the Hindu Kings. Here the unambiguous intention to anachronistically frame the Kings that lived and fought thousand years before as patriotic and nationalistic. For instance Hindushahi dynasty merits this description

¹⁴⁶ Meenakshi, Jain, Medieval India, A textbook for class XI, NCERT, 2002, 25

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 2

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 2

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 2

“The Arabs wages an inconclusive struggle in the region for 220 years; which was eventually continued by the Turks... Thus from the first Arab foray into Sindh the Turkish conquest of Lahore, it took the invaders nearly four hundred years to establish a foothold in the subcontinent... In their long contest with the Turks, the intrepid Hindushahis often shifted their capital (from Udhanddapara to Nandana) accordingly to the exigencies of the military situation. They expended four generation (Jaiypal, Anandpal, Tirlochanpal, Bhimpal) in their struggle.”¹⁵⁰

“Prominent kings of this (Chahamanas) dynasty include Ajayaraja, who recaptured Nagor from the Yaminiis and prevented a further Ghaznavid advance... His son, Arnoraja, also score a decisive victory over the Yaminiis... It was Arnoraja’s son, Vighararaja IV Visaladeva, whose date ranges from 1153-1163, who transformed chauhan kingdom into an empire... He was described as having freed Aryavarta from the invaders”¹⁵¹

Even the ruler whose name is unknown, supposedly whose ‘legendary history is mentioned in the Epics and Puranas’ had to be invoked for the reason that “he is credited with having defeated the Turushkas who seem to have been Turkish troops of the ruler of Sind”¹⁵² Of the Chandellas of Bundelkhand, the king Dhanga’s son, Gandha is credited for helping ‘Jaipal’s son Anandpal, against Mahmud Ghazni,’¹⁵³ Similarly Bhoja of the Paramaras dynasty was credited with that “he sent an army to assist Anandpal against Mahmud Ghazni. Subsequently, around 1019, he provided shelter to Anandpal’s son, Trilochanpal, when the latter was under pressure from Mahmud”¹⁵⁴

Vijaydhara of Chandellas, is projected as ‘the greatest of the Chadella kings’. And the first things that was said about him is that “He killed that last Pratihara ruler of Kanauj for surrendering to Mahmud Ghazni without a fight”¹⁵⁵

This above narrative was repetitive as the same has already recounted from the perspective of the king who was killed.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 26-27

¹⁵¹ Meenakshi, Jain, Medieval India, A textbook for class XI, NCERT, 2002, 38

¹⁵² Ibid., 38

¹⁵³ Ibid., 35

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 37

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 36

“The last king of that dynasty (Pratihara) to preside over Kanauj was Rajyapala. He was killed by the Chandella king Vidyadhara for failing to resist Mahmud Ghazni’s invasion of the city and thus deviating from the path of his ancestors”¹⁵⁶

“In the reign of Paramardi (1165-1203), the Chandella kingdom suffered a defeat at the hands of the Chauhan ruler, Prithviraj III, who raided the capital city of Mahoba. More serious was the attack of Qutbuddin Aibak on Kalinjar. After some resistance, Paramardi agreed to pay tribute. His minister, Ajayadeva, disapproved of the agreement, killed Paramardi, and renewed the fight against Aibak”¹⁵⁷

But later it was admitted that ‘but he himself was forced to surrender after a valiant struggle, due to shortage of water in the fort’¹⁵⁸

“In 1194 Muhammad Ghur marched against Jaichanddra, the Gahadavala king of Kanauj. Jaichandra’s vigorous defence perplexed the invading army, till an arrow hit him”¹⁵⁹

ii) Recurring theme of temple destructions

For instance, Quwwat al-Islam and Qutb Minar, was framed the following way in BJP regime’s text,

“Qutbuddin Aibak occupied the Rajput stronghold of Quila-i-Rai Pithroa and converted it into his capital. He desired a jami mosque to herald the new era and ordered that the large temple in the centre of the citadel be dismantled. Its plinth (chabutra) was enlarged and a mosque built over it. The Quwwat al-Islam mosque was constructed from the material of twenty-seven nearby Hindu and Jain temples. The famous Iron Pillar, uprooted from Mathura where it had stood for more than six hundred years, was placed in front of the mosque without its crowing figure of Garuda, the vehicle of Lord Vishnu.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 35

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 36

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 36

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp.29

¹⁶⁰ Meenakshi, Jain, Medieval India, A textbook for class XI, NCERT, 2002, 116

And further, Qutb Minar, we were told, was constructed ‘to proclaim the authority of Islam’. These framing accentuates the religious nature of this buildings and also emphasising that it is made out of the earlier ‘Hindu and Jain temples’ to make how the incoming of Islam directly confronts and undermines edifice of the ‘native’ religions.

While the 1960s textbooks a sanitized version contends to say,

“The shape of these building was often similar to those of Persia and Central Asia, but the decoration was largely Indian because Indian craftsmen used to construct the building. The coming together of the two resulted in some beautiful structures. The Qutb Minar with the mosque nearby at Delhi was the earliest of these, having been built in the reigns of the Mamluks”¹⁶¹

Muhumd Ghazni, is of course the poster boy of Muslim aggression temple destruction. It is not the fact that he plundered temples and desecrated idols that was in contestation. But his purpose in doing such at is the bone of contention. We were told in NDA textbook

“...Mahmud Ghazni invaded India seventeen times. As a reward for his services to Islam, he received the title Yamin al-Dawla (Right Hand of the State) from the Abbasid Caliph His dynasty thus also came to be known as the Yaminiis... Everywhere he ravaged temples, pillages cities, and collected untold wealth. The attack against Nagarkot in A. D. 1008 has been described as his first great triumph against idolatry”¹⁶²

“Kanauj, long revered as the sacred capital of northern India, was the next to suffer Mahmud’s onslaught... The defenceless residents fled to the temples for refuge. The city was taken in just one day, tis temples destroyed and denuded of their treasures and great numbers of the fleeing inhabitants slain”¹⁶³

And the invasion of somath in 1925 becomes the culmination of his temple-breaking spree, in the discourse of Meenakshi Jain,

“Mahumud captured the city after a grim struggle in which more than fifty thousand defenders lost their lives. According to Al-Beruni, ‘the image was destroyed by the Prince Mahmud... He ordered the upper part to be broken and the remainder to be

¹⁶¹ Romila, Thapar, Medieval India, History textbook for class VII, NCERT, 1988 59

¹⁶² Meenakshi, Jain, Medieval India, A textbook for class XI, NCERT, 2002, 26-27

¹⁶³ Ibid., 27

transported to his residence, Ghaznin'. Further Al-Beruni was mobilized to show the plight of the 'Hindus' as they 'become like atoms of dust scattered in all directions... this is the reason, too,, why from those parts of the country conquered by us, and have fled to places which our hand cannot yet reach, to Kashmir, Banaras, and other places. And there are the antagonism between them and all foreigners receives more and more nourishment both form political and religious sources''¹⁶⁴

While the old Congress regime textbooks put the Mahmud's invasion in to the politico-economic framework, even before venturing into the 'facts' of the actual invasion. Then, the description makes a self-conscious effort to push the religious factors to backburner. The structuring of description suggests that 'breaking the temple' as merely the logical sequence one has to go through to take 'away the gold'. And the explicit enunciation of Mahmud himself of his religious intent in destroying temple was reserved for the last only to be added as an afterthought as 'another advantage'.

“Between A.D. 1010 and 1025, Mahmud attacked only the temple towns in northern India. He had heard that there was much gold and jewellery kept in the big temples in India, so he destroyed the temples and took away the gold and jewellery. One of these attacks which is frequently mentioned was the destruction of the temple in Somnath in Western India Destroying temples had another advantage. He could claim, as he did, that he had obtained religious merit by destroying images.”¹⁶⁵

And there is a disclaimer about these 'destructive'ness the Mahmud has caused in India

“...although Mahmud was so destructive in India, in his own country he was responsible for building a beautiful mosque and a large library.. He was the patron of the famous Persian poet, Firdausi, who wrote the epic poem Shah Namah.”¹⁶⁶

And also there were elaborate efforts to place him as someone who fought also Muslims,

“While Mahmud played an important role in the defence of the Islamic stats against the Turkish tribes and in the Iranina cultural renaissance, in India his memory is only that of a plunderer and a destroyer of temples. Mahmud is said to have made 17 raids into India”

¹⁶⁴ Al-Beruni as quoted in Meenakshi, Jain, Medieval India, A textbook for class XI, NCERT, 2002, 28

¹⁶⁵ Romila, Thapar, Medieval India, History textbook for Class VII, NCERT, 1988, 25-26

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 26

The initial raids were directed against the Hindushahi rulers who at the time held Peshawar and the Punjab. He also belonged to a Muslim sect to which Mahmud was bitterly opposed.

“The subsequent raids of Mahmud into India were aimed at plundering the rich temples and cities of northern India in order to continue his struggle against his struggle against his enemies in Central Asia... Mahmud also posed as a great *but shikan* or “destroyer of the images” for the glory of Islam.”¹⁶⁷

“His most daring raids however were against Kanauj in 1018, and against Somnath in Gujarat in 1025. In the campaign against Kanauj, he sacked and plundered both Mathura and Kanauj... Mahmud marched from Multan across Rajputana in order to raid the fabulously rich temple at Somnath without encountering any serious resistance on the way.”¹⁶⁸

The most scathing of the attack and contrast to Akbar comes in the name of Aurangzeb. If the book of aggressive temple-breaking religious Muslim zealot's first page is Ghazni then, it's fitting last page, for the 'communal' writers, seems to be none other than Aurangzeb. Meenakshi Jain uses, all tool at her disposal, facts and arguments, to persuade that Aurangzeb as an religious Zealot who destructed temples, oppressed Hindus and Islamise the whole population. The urge to upset the 'secular narrative' which goes easy on Aurangzeb of his 'intolerant' acts supposedly committed for politico-economic reasons , is a prime factor which orders the narrative of NDA history textbooks. Before Romila Thapar has smuggled Aurangzeb' reign under the head “The Age of Magnificence”, where the post 2000 textbook shifts Auranzab's regin to “Climax and Disintegration”. It complains

“Aurangzeb had shown intolerance towards Hindu sacred architecture well before he became Emperor. As governor of Gujarat, he had ordered the destruction of several such structures. In some cases, the idols were broken and the temples closed rather than demolished. After becoming Emperor, Aurangzeb learnt that new idols had been installed and worship resumed in those temples. Thereupon, he issued fresh instructions for pulling down those temples. Somnath was one of them”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Satish, Chandra, Medieval History, Textbook in History for Class XI, NCERT, 1990, 37

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 37

¹⁶⁹ Meenakshi, Jain, Medieval India, A textbook for class XI, NCERT, 2002, 174

“Soon after his accession, it became evident that Aurangzeb was determined to cast his regime in a strictly Islamic mould... Between 1659 and 1670, the Emperor issued several ordinances, which intensified the trend towards Islamisation”¹⁷⁰

So, most of the five pages that were dedicated to Aurangzeb was to establish his commitment to temple destruction and his street credits as temple breaker. And unlike many other cases, here the account is saturated with facts and it goes on to recount the historical chronicle of Aurangzeb’s religiously motivated actions and his instances of temple destructions.

As much as the ‘Secular’ historians want to shift their focus from merely dynastic history to social happening, they would not have enjoyed when the NDA text reproduces an account by Khafi Khan of protests against the imposition of jiziyah by ‘Delhi citizens’. The account reads

“The Hindus crowded from the gate of the fort to the Jama Masjid in such a large number for imploring redress that the passage of the people was blocked. The moneylenders, cloth merchants and shopkeepers of the camp Urdu Bazar (Army Market) and all the artisans of the city abandoned their work and assembled on the route of the emperor... (Aurangzeb) who was riding on an elephant could not reach the mosque. Every moment the number of those unlucky people increased. Then he ordered that the majestic elephants should proceed against them. Some of them were killed or trampled under the elephants and horses. For some days more, they assembled in the same way and requested the remission (of the jiziyah). At last they submitted to pay the jiziyah”¹⁷¹

While the ‘secular’ historians were very careful to not reveal any sources that describes conflict between Hindus and Muslim; then as a consequence of such glossing over evolves a logical picture of progressive (if not eternal) movement towards the expansion of tolerance and communal amity.¹⁷² Further they use their authorial authority to its maximum to exhaust the possibility of religious as a causal factor in history by replacing it with politico-economic forces, the ‘communal’ camp have their facts sorted that of Muslim invasions and

¹⁷⁰ Meenakshi, Jain, Medieval India, A textbook for class XI, NCERT, 2002, 172

¹⁷¹ Meenakshi, Jain, Medieval India, A textbook for class XI, NCERT, 2002, 174

¹⁷² Bhattacharya, “Predicaments of Secular Histories.”

corresponding 'Hindu' resistance; temple destructions, conversion drives, successful or otherwise; forms the core of the 'communal' historical enterprise.

4) The societal degradation during 'Muslim' rule

People and Society in the Medieval Period written Yadav et al. in 2003 for class VII and Meenakshi Jain's *Medieval India*, forms the corpus of history from approximately 800-1800 A. D. of NDA textbooks. The 'Medieval' in Yadav et al's textbook starts from the '700 A. D' to be precise according to the title of the chapter 10, But, the death of Harsha in the middle of the seventh century seems to be substantial divide between the 'Ancient' and 'Medieval'. 'The period between the death of Harsha in the mid-seventeenth century A. D. and the establishment of Delhi Sultanate in the twelfth century A.D., covers a span of over five hundred years. These centuries witness some important developments such as

- i) "Rise of important kingdoms in eastern, central, southern and northern India. However these acted as a **bridge** between different regions because **the cultural tradition of these kingdoms remained stable** even though they often fought among themselves.
- ii) There remained **a continuity in the field of economy, social structure, ideas and beliefs**. This was **perhaps** because the changes in these areas took place more gradually than the changes in political spheres. The close interaction among various regions resulted in the **formation of definite forms of some common cultural trends** which can be seen in the literature, education, art and architecture of the period"¹⁷³

A careful extension of 'continuity' of the ancient glorious phase till the twelfth century A. D. Yadav et al. achieves the safeguarding the positive representation of 'Hindu' period i.e., before the establishment of Muslim rule in India. Once this safe base for the pre-muslim society is established, it seems like it's time for 'Muslims' to bring in regressive things.

¹⁷³ Sima, Yadav, Basabi, Khan Banerjee, Sanjay, Dubey, and Themmichon, Woleng, India and the World. Social Science Textbooks for Class VII, (Delhi: NCERT, 2003), 93

The north Indian society “After coming into Muslim contact there began the purdah system. The practice of sati became more prevalent to save themselves from falling into the hands of invaders.”¹⁷⁴

While the contact with Muslims inaugurated purdah system and made sati more prevalent, the south which is still not contaminated by the Muslim contact was in its glorious phase where Brahmins were taken care of and Women were educated and honoured.

“The Brahmins enjoyed the goodwill of kings and respect of people because of their high moral character and learning. The traders and artisans commanded greater esteem in society than the officials of the state. Different sections of society joined together for common purposes. The cooperation among the people was visible in the functioning of different village assemblies. Women were held in great honour and enjoyed freedom. They were imparted education in various branches of learning and fine arts.”¹⁷⁵

There was further decline in the freedom of women almost commensurate with the rise of Muslim power in India. Two seemingly contradictory phrases were connected in just one line. While hospitality requires openness and kindness, caste rules restrict one in a closed world. But somehow they seem harmonious for the author as he may individually consider both as sign of positivity as far as the ‘Hindus’ are concerned.

“The society consisted mainly of Muslim and Hindu population. The Muslims formed the ruling class who belonged to Sunni and Shia sects. Majority of them belonged to foreign countries. Ibn Battutah praises hospitality of the Hindus and says that the caste rules were strictly followed in marriages. The freedom of women was much restricted. Purdah became common in the society. There were also a large number of slaves in the services of the Delhi sultans. In this regard the record of Firoz Shah Tughlaq is notable. He had in his payrolls about 1,80,000 slaves”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ ¹⁷⁴ Sima, Yadav, Basabi, Khan Banerjee , Sanjay, Dubey ,and Themmichon, Woleng, India and the World. Social Science Textbooks for Class VII, (Delhi: NCERT, 2003), 99

¹⁷⁵ ¹⁷⁵ Sima, Yadav, Basabi, Khan Banerjee , Sanjay, Dubey ,and Themmichon, Woleng, India and the World. Social Science Textbooks for Class VII, (Delhi: NCERT, 2003), 110

¹⁷⁶ ¹⁷⁶ Sima, Yadav, Basabi, Khan Banerjee , Sanjay, Dubey ,and Themmichon, Woleng, India and the World. Social Science Textbooks for Class VII, (Delhi: NCERT, 2003), 122

Regarding the Mughal period, which is celebrated as ‘the age of magnificence’ in ‘secular’ text, it was said,

“The general nature of the society continued as before. The Mughal nobility along with landlords form the upper section of society. These were mainly Turanis, Iranis, Afghans, Shaikzadas and a few Rajputs. They received high salaries, but their habits were also extravagant and they live a life of great pomp and luxury.”¹⁷⁷

‘The generable picture’ painted before the Mughal Empire as we have just seen isn’t pretty at all. It is a projection, Where ‘Muslim’ is a ruling class Identity. And women’s position is dismal. And there are lakhs of enslaved. This is what the ditto of ‘continued as before’ means and probably this is what the author wants it to mean.

But again there are exception of Hindu excellence further down the line in the south Indian ‘Hindu’ kingdom of fifteenth century, there is mere description of Varna enforcement. Juxtaposing it with the narrative that women is educated and placed in a honourable position, without any comment, suggests that the strict enforcement Varna system is also considered as desirable.

“The society of Vijayanagara was organised on the system of Varna. The kings considered it their duty to protect and promote the social order based on varnashrama system. The merchant classes were divided into velangais and Idangais. Women occupied honourable positions and were educated. Widows could remarry.”

¹⁷⁷ ¹⁷⁷ Sima, Yadav, Basabi, Khan Banerjee , Sanjay, Dubey ,and Themmichon, Woleng, India and the World. Social Science Textbooks for Class VII, (Delhi: NCERT, 2003), 142

Chapter 4

The Caste and Nation in NCERT historiography

While the dominant historiography was critiqued at various instances by scholars for its blindness to the perspectives and struggles of marginalized groups^{178 179}, such kind of critique was not found much space in this NCERT history textbook controversy over the decades. While the communal-secular binary and its respective variant of nationalism were hotly debated and scores of scholars and historians were compelled to tell the other camp what their 'nationalism' meant. But this conversation went for the most part, without any reference to the caste. One hypothesis that could be forwarded is that there is a consensus on the representation of the trajectory and role of caste in Indian history from both the camps. The role and function of caste in Indian history in addition to its origin, utility, and desirability have always been a contested topic, but that contentiousness have not been reflection in the textbook controversy debate.

The historiography of India was trapped in the structures spawned by the twin binary of Colonial-National and Communal-Secular. This methodologically underprivileges the identities that arise out of other considerations than that of nation and religion. The two axes, nation and religion, rests on the premise of difference, overshadows the identities which are not based merely on difference but on hierarchy. There has been a documented 'reluctance' on delving deep into the intimate linkage between the discourses of caste, secularism and communalism in the academia.¹⁸⁰ While nationalistic history, in itself, has a tendency to obfuscate difference that arise from other axis than nationality. It is central in the nationalist history and instrumental in the nationalist discourse to minimize or delegitimize the differences that arise out of, in the Indian context, religion, caste, sex, region and religion. In this listing out of non-essential differences one crucial distinction amongst the listed categories need to be emphasized. For the categories like religion, region and language, the mode of difference can be attributed to diversity, but as for the caste, the crucial factor that differentiate between the other axis of difference, is the idea of hierarchy and inequality inherent in its conception. This difference which is peculiar to caste difference was often

¹⁷⁸ Aloysius G., *Natiionalism without a Nation in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹⁷⁹ Braj Ranjan Mani, *Debrahmanising History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian Society* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2005).

¹⁸⁰ Dilip M. Menon, *The Blindness of Insight, Essays on Caste in Modern India* (New Delhi: Navyana, 2011), 2.

glossed over and preserved in order to not offend the dominant castes. So, consequently the nationalist discourse on all these matters become one of 'tolerating differences arising out of caste' and not abolishing the hierarchy of castes.

Relegating caste to obscurity was a fashionable practice in the Nehruvian era intellectualism. The discourse of 'Unity in Diversity' which is supposed to serve as an umbrella category of strategy for subjugating the power claims arising out of the fault line of all diversities and differences also intended to cover the 'diversity' that arise out of caste. While being a creative act to weld together different identities to that of Indian, in case of caste it fails to differentiate its peculiarity.

If there is a lack of adequate understanding of the multiple dimensions of caste in the dominant academic historiography, it does not correspondingly lead to the conclusion there is no scholarly investigation on caste itself. Ambedkar being one of the earliest sociologists of India has done extensive studies on multiple dimensions of the institution of caste. As early as 1916, Ambedkar published a seminal paper, *Castes in India: their mechanism, genesis and development*, was presented for the anthropological seminar of Alexander Goldenweiser at Columbia University. From here on, Ambedkar started a lifelong academic quest to understand the reality of India in its multiple dimensions, political, social, psychological, economic, philosophical, and historical. Ambedkar has written history textbooks in view to trace the origin of the Sudras (1946), the origins of the untouchables (1948), a critical history of Indian National Congress in relation to the issues of Depressed Classes (1945).

Caste in 'Secular Nationalist' discourse

Thapar, in relation to the existing nationalist historiography then, says "there was a hesitancy to analyse the inequities of caste, or the degree to which the social articulation of religions formulated societies or failed to do so"¹⁸¹

The nationalist historiography not only fails to capture the lives and aspirations of caste-subaltern but it further complicates the terrain as it was trying to establish an 'Indian' identity, it "inevitably meant a historical discourse about the upper castes and the aristocracy, since these were the groups that made history". Thapar claims that her textbooks sought to

¹⁸¹ Thapar, "The History Debate and School Textbooks in India: A Personal Memoir."

direct the attention to ‘other groups of supposedly lesser status that also contributed to history’, but nevertheless she agrees about the limited scope of her exercise by saying, ‘possibly the idea was not emphasized with sufficient examples.’¹⁸²

The discourse of legitimizing and idealizing caste hierarchy: NDA textbooks

Lot of eyebrows were raised when the BJP textbooks included a section of different civilization of the world in its new ‘integrated’ social science textbooks. This ‘integrated’ scheme led to reduction of the weightage that was offered to history in the syllabus. While previously the class VI Ancient history textbooks was about 150 pages, the BJP textbooks history section is comprised of only 90 pages. Even in that more than twenty pages were dedicated for the history of numerous ‘non-Indian civilizations’. Commentators were surprised at the fact that BJP which is arguing for ‘Indianization’ of education is eager to expose students to the alien cultures. The chapters in question while dealing with the civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamian, Greek, Roman, Chinese and Iran, each chapter is primarily divided into two parts, one, ‘Pattern of Living’ explaining the social system prevalent then and ‘Contributions’ of the said civilization to the world. This was seen as strange move from BJP, the ‘secular national’ critics has accused BJP of reducing the history to bullet points as only looking at ‘contributions’. While this point is valid, there were another elements which was overlooked in the debate. One can solve the puzzle of BJP’s suddenly found enthusiasm for world culture by positing it as an camouflaged move to legitimize and normalize the hierarchy of caste which is the undeniable blot on the, for the right wing, otherwise ‘glorious’ ancient India. Here I’m proposing to push this argument that this move to include various civilizations of the world is to legitimize the presence of caste in Rig Vedic society and mitigate the assault on that period’s ‘gloriousness’.

The location of ‘Non-Indian Civilization’ precedes the ‘Indian civilization’ in the textbook. The Egyptian civilization,

“The Pharaoh was assisted by a large number of officials of the work of the kingdom. After Pharaoh came priests, officials, artists, craftsmen and farmers. Slaves occupied the lowest position.”¹⁸³

¹⁸² Thapar.

“The people of Mesopotamia were divided into three social classes. The first were priests, officials and warriors. This class looked after the administrative as well as military aspect of the state and welfare and protection of state and society. The next were businessmen, professionals, and labourers to look after the economic welfare of the society. The third social class consisted of the slaves. These people were engaged in agriculture, craft and trade and commerce.”¹⁸⁴

“Hammurabi, a king of Babylon, united Mesopotamia and enacted a code of laws. Laws were required to control people and regulate their activities...The code recognized the division of society into three classes of rich, common men and slaves. Different punishments were prescribed for each class for the same crime”¹⁸⁵

Regarding the Greek civilization it was said,

“Society was divided into three classes: Citizens, free non-citizens and slaves. The Greeks were the first to use slave labour on a large scale. They were employed in agriculture, mining, handicraft production, domestic and menial work. Slaves were treated very inhumanly.”¹⁸⁶

The section on the society of roman civilization reads,

“The Roman society was divided into two classes – Patricians and Plebians. Patricians consisted of the aristocrats and big landlords. They enjoyed a number of powers and privileges. The Plebians consisted of small farmers, craftsmen, traders and soldiers. They had a few legal rights and were forced to pay taxes”¹⁸⁷

“The society in China was divided into many classes. The highest position was occupied by the king followed by bureaucracy. Below them came the scholars, writers, merchants, artisans and slaves respectively”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Makkhan, Lal, Class VI, NCERT, 2002, 59

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 63

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 64

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 67

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 70

¹⁸⁸ Makkhan, Lal, Class VI, NCERT, 2002, 73

The Iranian society was

“...divided into four social classes – priests, warriors, scribes and peasants. The kings, priests, warriors enjoyed very high position while artisans , traders, and peasants were placed in lower position”¹⁸⁹

One gets a juxta-positioned view of RigVedic society with that of other civilization with hierarchy as a norm. Great emphasis was placed on the so-called original ideal of varna i.e. the four fold division of society with its attendant unequal distribution of social labour and its fruits, was based merely on ‘occupation’. The argument was typical in the defence of varna system, that it is merely ‘a division of labour’. Though it is thoroughly repudiated by Ambedkar as early as 1936 in his undelivered speech, later published as, *The Annihilation of Caste*. Ambedkar incisively argued that caste is not merely division of labour but ‘division of labourers’. But submerging the import of this reality is one of the thrust in framing history betrays the upper caste ideological allegiance of the BJP. The first reference to Varna/Caste comes in when discussing the ‘society’ of Vedic times,

“The RigVedic society comprised of four varnas, namely Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. This classification of society was based on the occupation of individuals. The teacher and priests were called Brahmanas, ruler and administrators Kshatriyas; farmers, merchants and bankers vaisyas; and artisan and labourers as sudras. **These vocations were followed by persons according to their ability and liking**, and the occupations had not become hereditary as they become later on.”¹⁹⁰

A picture was presented as if they had freedom to choose their occupation as in the modern sense. The varna society was presented as one abound with free choices and fair play. To illustrate this, one example was seen as adequate. It presents a hymn from the RigVeda which talks about the members of the same family having different occupations. What was not taken into account is the varna works as the ascending scale of privilege and descending scale of disabilities. So, the top varnas are historically free to engage in occupations that were the preserve of lower varnas, while its looked down upon, there was no strict restrictions on that.

“Members of the same family took to different professions and belonged to different varnas is well illustrated by a hymn of the RigVeda (ix. 112). In this hymn a person

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 78

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 86

says, I am singer; My father is a physician, My mother is a grinder of corn; Having various occupations, Desiring riches we remain (in the world), Like cattle (in the stalls). It is therefore, clear that there was freedom and mobility for the adoption of a profession and the idea of hereditary trades and occupations was not envisaged in the society.”¹⁹¹

As a corollary to the fairness of varna in its original form, regarding women it was said,

“The unit of society was family, primarily monogamous and patriarchal. Child marriage was not in vogue. There are few references to the freedom of choice in marriage. A widow could marry the younger brother of her deceased brother. The wife was husband’s partner in all religious and social ceremonies”¹⁹²

Of the ‘Later Vedic Age’, the ideal varna system got twisted from ‘profession’ based to ‘birth-based. Actually Ambedkar, while challenging the retrograde argument of arya-samajists to revive the four-fold chaturvarna, asks the following which is also an appropriate challenge for the rose-tinted picture of the original varna system where the label is based on ‘profession’ and not caste. The question then raised by Babasaheb is still relevant in this context. What is its original function and purpose is left unexplained in BJP textbooks.

“The former [Chaturvarnya] is based on worth. How are you going to compel people who have acquired a higher status based on birth, without reference to their worth, to vacate that status? How are you going to compel people to recognize the status due to a man, in accordance with his worth, who is occupying a lower status based on his birth?”¹⁹³

“In later Vedic period varnas came to be birth based rather than profession based. The proliferation of profession gave rise to jatis. But the jati system was not yet as rigid as it became during the period of the Sutras. It was somewhere in the middle of flexible RigVedic society and rigid society of the Sutra period. **Emergence of jati was very unusual but perhaps not impossible in that age.** The RigVeda describes

¹⁹¹ Makkhan, Lal, *Ancient India*, Textbook for Class XI, NCERT, 2002, 86

¹⁹² Lal, 86

¹⁹³ B. R, Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste* (New Delhi, Critical Quest, 2010)

Vishvamitra as a rishi but Aitareya Brahmana mentions him as kshatirya. In the same Brahmana we find that rigidity in terms of jati is coming up.¹⁹⁴ (emphasis mine)

So, in the evolution of Varna, in the BJP textbooks, we never arrive at a stage where the varna or jati is fully matured. The discrimination and restriction part were mentioned in a negative way. This is the only place where it was hinted that varna/jati system ever had any harmful effect. This is nothing less than accepting and legitimizing the scheme and function of the caste system.

“The position of fourth varna, i.e. sudra was made miserable by depriving them of the rights of performing sacrifices, learning the sacred texts and of even holding landed property. The most glaring evil of the jati system, namely the concept of untouchability had not yet reared its ugly head.”¹⁹⁵

Immediately it was felt necessary to give counter-example to show the supposed porousness of the varna/jati system.

“There are instances of individuals such as Kavasha, Vatsa and Satyakama Jabala who were born in non-brahman jatis but came to be known as the great brahmans. On the whole jati had not yet become a rigid system, and none of the three factors which characterised it later viz. prohibition of inter-dining, inter-marriage and determination of varna by descent, were yet established on a rigid basis.”¹⁹⁶

The Education was fairly wide spread. Teaching continued to be the main job of the brahmans. But Buddhist monasteries also acted as educational institutions. Taxila, Ujjayini and Varanasi were famous educational centres. The technical education was generally provided through guilds where pupils learnt the crafts from yearly age.¹⁹⁷

In the Sunga and Satvahana period, it was said

“During this period varna and ashrama systems continued to govern the society. Society continued to govern the society. Society comprised four varnas i.e. Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. The duties, status, and occupations of these varnas are enumerated in the Dharma sastras. The most significant development in the varna

¹⁹⁴ Lal, *Ancient India*, 97

¹⁹⁵ Lal, 97

¹⁹⁶ Lal, 97

¹⁹⁷ Lal, 134-135

system is in the marriage between different varnas. These were called anuloma i.e., marriage between the male of higher varna and female of lower varna, or pratiloma – marriage between male of lower varna and female of higher varna. The social status of a person is born of anuloma was higher than partiloma and they followed their father's occupation. Buddhist texts and other evidence also leave no doubt the so-called mixed castes really resulted from organisations like guilds of people following different arts and crafts. The general theory of intermarriages leading to the birth of different mixed jatis appears superficial and handy. The Buddhist texts also show that jatis was not rigidly tied to craft in those days. They tell of a kshatriya working successively as a potter, basket-maker., reed-worker, garland-maker, and cook, also of a Setthi (Vaisya) working as a tailor and a potter, without loss of prestige in both cases. We find Kshatriyas of the Sakya and Koliya clans cultivating their fields. The Vasettha Sutta refers to brahmans working as cultivators, craftsmen, messengers, sacrificers and landlords. The fragment on Silas mentions brahmnas following many diverse occupations as physicians, sorcerers, architects, story-tellers, cattle-breeders, farers and the like. The Jatakas refer to brahmans pursuing tillage, tending cattle, trade, hunting, carpentry, weaving, policing of caravans, archery, driving of carriages, and even snake-charming. The Jatakas hold up a brahman peasant as a supremely pious man and even a Bodhisattava...”¹⁹⁸

“From the seventh century A.D. onwards, two trends were continuing in society. One was the continuity of the assimilation of foreign elements and second was the segregation of jati system. The four varnas still constituted an umbrella beneath with jatis kept emerging and finding their own inter-jati relationship which, though broadly in keeping with the theoretical structure, were nevertheless modified by local requirements and expediency. The law of the period accepted birth, profession, and residence as the deciding factor in the determination of jati. As a result there were four original varnas with several jatis and these were further subdivided into numerous sub-sections. For instance, the brahmans came to be identified by their gotra, ancestor, the branch of Vedic learning, original home and village. Inscriptions of the period also mention this fact. The Kshatriyas also multiplied as a result of the assimilation of

¹⁹⁸ Lal, 158-159

foreigners and other local people. The transformation of a specific profession into jati and the increasing phenomenon of hypergamous unions between different jato led to the rise of mixed jati.....”¹⁹⁹

The flexibility of the Varnas were emphasized time and again giving the impression that the Varna/Caste system all along benign.

“The traditional professions related to four varnas were not scrupulously adhered to during this period. This tendency to deviate from the customary profession was not new, it was noticeable even in the earlier age.”²⁰⁰

“The brahmans for example did not invariably confine their activity to studying, teaching, worshipping and performance of priestly functions. Atri speaks of kshatriya brahman, who lives by fighting, the vaisya brahman, who lives by engaging himself in agriculture and trade, the sudra brahman who sells lac, salt, milk, ghee, honey etc. Like-wise, Kshatriyas, vaisyas and sudras deviated from their traditional professions and formed several mixed castes”²⁰¹

The above asserts portray a picture of ancient India where the Varna/Caste system and its social effect was trivialized and all of the concrete examples were mobilized in order to project Varna/Caste System as a seamless or inconsequential categorization. This along with the agenda of normalization of caste system forms the underpinning of Hindutva interpretation of History.

¹⁹⁹ Lal, 225

²⁰⁰ Lal, 225

²⁰¹ Lal, 225

Conclusion

The NCERT textbook historiography, due to the milieu of its time and its social context, at have championed the ‘national’ framework, which was in Congress regime dubbed as ‘secular’ and BJP version of national, in popular discourse, termed as Cultural/Communal nationalism. While the ‘secular’ nationalism tries to bring in all the religious diversities in a smooth synthesis as envisioned by the slogan of ‘Unity in diversity’, the ‘Cultural Nationalism’ of BJP has its imagination to form a Hindu supremacist polity, where other religions will be subordinate. Unambiguously, in this closed binary of these nationalisms, the ‘secular’ appears morally desirable and justifiable. Many serious scholars have committed to the ideology of Secularism in the hope that it will lead to a better future.

But the complicated reality, if one cares to recognize and acknowledge, reveals that we do not inhabit a world comprised of mere stark binaries. Consequentially, proposing to be the one end of the pole and claiming absolute moral worth is not also an available option. What became apparent is that there exists an economy of power thorough which this binary of Secular and Communal is maintained.

This moral ambiguity that plague the apparent oppositional binary of nationalism and communalism if one cares to scratch the historical surface needs to be acknowledged.

“The Hindutva version of Indian History, again , is obviously grounded on certain kinds of ‘nationalist’ readings that had once predominated, had been overcome at sophisticated levels through researched over the past generation, but are now being sought to be reimposed by state action”²⁰²

Sumit Sarkar, in his *Beyond Nationalist Frames* contends that

“...not everything in late-colonial subcontinental history can or should be reduced to a single colonial/anti-colonial frame. Evaluation in terms of contribution to anti-colonial politics or degree of cultural authenticity can be particularly constrictive for

²⁰² Sumit, Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames, Relocating Postmodernism, Hindutva, History*, (Raniet: Permanent Black, 2002) , Introduction

histories of gender and women's rights, as well as of subordinate-caste movements."²⁰³

Already, the NCF 2005 have shown some hope by moving away from the 'nationalist frames' though it did not abandon it. Even though it's a small step, it's a deliberate one in the right direction. The denationalizing thrust of the NCF 2005 made some space for articulating the reality of contradictions between the Nationalist elite and the caste subalterns. Though, the treatment is far from adequate in terms of addressing the academic and curricular imbalances, it serves as a sign of optimism.

This analysis of the Nationalist discourse of NCERT textbook historiography highlights the fact that how the homogenizing narrative of nationalism or perhaps the battle between the competitive version of it, will crowd out other crucial historical concerns. Instead of ironing out, the historical field should be conducive for the free play of various contradictions arising out of different social locations. A monolithic nationalistic frame, either secular or communal variant will deprive us of a closer approximation of truth. So, it is crucial that we do not trade the existing reality for the sake of a comforting narrative, even if it is nation.

²⁰³ Sumit, Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames, Relocating Postmodernism, Hindutva, History*, (Raniket: Permanent Black, 2002) , Introduction

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