

“My object in compiling this book has been to place before the students preparing for Matriculation examination of the Calcutta University, a work, which should strictly follow the syllabus...” (1908)

“An attempt has been made to include in this book new facts and to interpret them correctly and sympathetically... the reader, who is acquainted with the subject will at once find out what a great improvement has been made on the existing books on Indian history.” (1940)

## **A Comparison between Colonial and Post-Colonial “Textbook Culture” – Shaan Kashyap, JNU, Delhi**

“I would think over thousand times before releasing a book to our people.. The idea is that *the teacher should teach orally*. Education should not be imparted through books and textbooks. In a heap of textbooks for education, what would be injected in the minds of children? Perhaps a ghost?... I do not want to give any textbook in the hand of children. The teachers may read the textbooks if they like.”

-Mahatma Gandhi, lecture at National Education Council, August 1, 1924

# But what happened to the textbooks?



Gandhi himself wrote a primer for children in 1924-25  
*Balpothi*, 32 pages, 50 paise

Using textbooks was associated with marring the freedom!  
After 1947, and especially after the establishment of NCERT,  
“Textbook Culture” in Indian pedagogy was situated as a  
“colonial” intervention and invention, which took away the  
autonomy of “what to teach” from  
the teachers. Matter of the fact is, post-colonial India  
never moved away for this “colonial legacy”, if at all,  
it was that problematic!

There are doubts whether the post-colonial Indian state  
characterised and legitimised its pedagogical moves  
regarding the textbooks in the temporal penumbra  
of colonialism *without* caring for existing *diversities*

# Contestations? History Textbooks for Schools

1. Textbooks written by Colonial Officials, Missionaries, and Indians, both Hindus and Muslims, and textbooks in different vernaculars such as Hindi, Odiya, Bangla, and Urdu show a great diversity in the historical narratives.
2. All of them wrote very *different* kind of History textbooks for schools, even though, they shared some binding norms regarding chronology, periodisation, and approaches. However, these norms kept changing with professionalisation of history writing and History as a modern discipline, in the late nineteenth century and later.
3. For example, out of *Bharat ka Saral Itihasa* (Rajgovind Pandeya, Calcutta: 1937); *Longman's School History of India* (Rev GU Pope, London: 1892); *A Junior School History of India* (EW Thompson & AC Clayton, Madras: 1911), and *Matriculation History of India* (Kailash Chandra Manna, Calcutta: 1908) one *cannot* find any kind of 'standardisation' of curriculum which 'prescribed textbooks' usually have or even any similarity regarding periodisation and approaches!

# What happened in post-colonial India?

## History Rewriting? Why?

***Nationalisation***-- Government of India, Ministry of Education, established a National Board of School Textbooks on December 31, 1968. The resolution stated the following reason for the establishment:

“The problem of school textbooks was discussed at a meeting of the National Integration Council held at Srinagar in June 1968. The Council attached great significance to the proper use of textbooks for purposes of national integration...” (*The National Board of School Textbooks- Report of the First Meeting*, New Delhi, NCERT, 1969)

A subsequent study on the position of nationalised textbooks in the country conducted by the NCERT in 1971 revealed that the number of nationalised textbooks had risen to about 2000 books.

*Screening Record Booklet* was prepared for giving precise meanings of the words casteism, communalism, regionalism, etc. along with other instructions and proforma for observations.

# **After 1947- Uniformity and Standardisation!**

## **Before 1947- Contestation and Freedom!**

### **Before 1947-**

Textbook writing, especially in the contestable terrain of history writing, and history being the space to reclaim the imagination of a 'glorious past' had pre-occupied a lot of actors. While few saw it fruitful to mention and accentuate the fact that their textbooks adhered to some 'Textbook Committee' or some 'syllabus requirements', many others didn't care much.

### **After 1947-**

Textbooks saw a great quest of standardisation and uniformity especially to espouse to the cause of a 'common past'. They became the site to construct and promulgate the 'Official Knowledge', and other contests and contradictions of the past were pushed to the margins and erased from the narrative. Thus, while the contestations over History school textbooks prior to 1947 was largely related to 'religious identities', after 1947, it became about 'political', 'social', and 'regional' identities as well.