

# **COMMUNALISATION OF EDUCATION**

**THE HISTORY TEXTBOOKS  
CONTROVERSY**

**Delhi Historians' Group**

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## **Section 4 Text of the Deletions made from the NCERT books**

## *Section 1: An Overview*

### COMMUNALISATION OF EDUCATION THE HISTORY TEXTBOOK CONTROVERSY: AN OVERVIEW

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The current controversy over the nature of history textbooks to be prescribed in schools reflects two completely divergent views of the Indian nation. One of the most important achievements of the Indian national movement, perhaps the greatest mass movement in world history, was the creation of the vision of an open, democratic, secular and civil libertarian state which was to promote a modern scientific outlook in civil society in independent India. The authors of the NCERT textbooks who are now under attack share this vision of the Indian nation. Over the last fifty years after independence a valiant effort was made by the Indian people to translate this vision into a reality in India. It is this great effort which is now being threatened by communal forces, which had little to do with the national movement and, in fact, through their loyalist policies, ended up weakening it. These communal forces are now attempting to use history textbooks as instruments to further their vision of a narrow, sectarian and 'Talibanised' Hindu nation.

The communal forces in India are deeply aware that communalism is essentially an ideology, a particular way of looking at society. Hence it is in the ideological sphere that they have focused their efforts. What better place to start than the tender formative minds of young children. Communal forces have tried to poison the minds of young children with hatred and distrust about other communities. For many years now, the RSS, for example, has through its Saraswati Shishu Mandirs and Vidya Bharati primary and secondary schools, and through its Shakhas undertaken this project. They have, for example, in books published by Saraswati Shishu Mandir Prakashan for classes four and five, portrayed all communities other than the Hindus as foreigners in India, wrongly described the medieval period as the Muslim period and, following the footsteps of the British, portrayed the period as one of great oppression and decline. These books, in the name of instilling patriotism and valour among Indians, spread falsehoods, treat mythological religious figures like actual historical figures and make absurd claims such as that the Qutab Minar was built by Samudragupta. They claim that Ashoka's advocating of Ahimsa (non-violence) spread "cowardice" and that the struggle for India's freedom became a "religious war" against Muslims, and so on. (It is not surprising that Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence and the builder of the freedom struggle as a common struggle of the Hindus and Muslims against British imperialism gets described in their lexicon as a '*Dushtatma*'.) Quite understandably, the National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation (consisting of a large number of experts from all

over the country) appointed by the NCERT itself, a few years ago, came to the conclusion that “the main purpose which these books would serve is to gradually transform the young children into ...bigoted morons in the garb of instilling in them patriotism.” One may emphasise here that the communalists have focused attention on history because it is on a particular distorted and often totally fabricated presentation of history that the communal ideology is hinged.

While the RSS/ Hindu communal effort to spread a communal interpretation of history has been around for many years, the new and more dangerous trend is the *attempt to use government institutions and state power* to attack scientific and secular history and historians and promote an obscurantist, backward looking communal historiography. In 1977, when the Hindu communal forces first came to share power in the Indian government (the Jana Sangh one of the former incarnations of the BJP had merged with the Janata Party) an attempt was made to ban school textbooks written for the NCERT by some of the finest historians of that generation. The attempt failed not only because the NCERT itself resisted such a move but also a countrywide protest movement developed on this issue.

In recent years the Hindu communal forces, who have a much firmer grip over state power with the BJP leading the coalition government at the centre, have launched an attack on secular and scientific teaching and research in History— indeed the very discipline of history is under attack. Anticipating resistance from autonomous institutions like the NCERT or the ICHR the government first took great care to appoint Hindu communalists or those who had decided to serve their interests as their Directors or Chairpersons. Efforts have been made also to fill up other institutions which would have an impact on education and ideology formation such as universities, schools, colleges, and even the UGC with people who would toe or at least not resist the government’s communal agenda.

It is in this context that the NCERT has introduced a new National Curriculum Framework which virtually seeks to take history out of school textbooks until class X in the name of reducing the weight of the current heavy schoolbag. Only certain ‘themes’ from history are now to be integrated with civics and geography and taught as one subject. Unlike 1977, this time round the attempt is not to ban these books but to do away with them altogether in the name of bringing in new books with the changed syllabus. For class XI and XII the existing history books are being doctored with until new books are produced. Paradoxically the present regime is imitating Pakistan which made a similar move in the 1970s of keeping history out up to a particular level and then prescribing a distorted, one sided version at the senior level. Regimes uncomfortable with history or those with an agenda which is narrow, sectarian and undemocratic often seek to suppress or distort history.

What is particularly alarming is that the NCERT has brought in such major changes in the curriculum without attempting any wide consultation leave alone seeking to arrive at a consensus. This when education is a concurrent subject (involving partnership between the centre and the states) and virtually since Independence the tradition had been to put

any major initiative in education through discussion in Parliament and the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), a body which includes among its members the education ministers of all states and Union Territories. The NCERT has arrived at the new curriculum without any reference to the CABE thus violating both tradition and procedural requirements.

On the contrary the NCERT with the full backing of the education minister has launched a veritable attack on some of India's best historians. The NCERT director J.S. Rajput, a self proclaimed adoring *shishya* of Murli Manohar Joshi, in a signed article (Hindu, 23 October 2001) says that the NCERT had been "taken for a ride" for "the past several decades" by authors of particularly its history books who allegedly were furthering their "narrow political agenda". He is thus maligning some of the most eminent and internationally acclaimed historians such as R. S. Sharma, former Head of the History Dept. of Delhi University and Chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research, Satish Chandra, former Chairperson of the UGC, Romila Thapar and Bipan Chandra, both currently Emeritus Professors of the Jawaharlal Nehru University. Also maligned thus is Prof. Arjun Dev a former Dean of the NCERT and author of some of the best history textbooks produced by the NCERT. Criticism of some of the finest scholars who have done India proud by a virtual nobody who no one had heard of till he acquired recent notoriety by attempting to introduce communal considerations in what is taught to our children by what the Editor of Hindustan Times calls the "Talibanising" of our education. (25 November 2001).

There is in fact a concerted attempt to malign and thus seek to delegitimise the major scholars who wrote the history textbooks for the NCERT. It is alleged that these historians monopolise official patronage and as Tarun Vijay the Editor of Panchjanya (a mouthpiece for the RSS) puts it they go for the three Ps, i.e., Paisa , Power and Prestige. It must be pointed out here that the prestige both national and international that these historians command is not a result of any official patronage. It is a result of their formidable scholarship and the large number of books and articles written by them that are read and cited all over the world. One cannot imagine how they wield any power by writing textbooks. As for paisa, it is perhaps not well known that the authors received hardly any payments for writing these textbooks. Romila Thapar, for example, is reported to have received a princely sum of R.650/- for one of the books written by her for the NCERT which has sold several lakhs of copies. What most of the authors receive annually after they have revised their books is not more than what they would make by writing two or three newspaper articles!

These authors agreed to take on the arduous task of writing these books out of a sense of social commitment. They believed that the best of scholars should not only not scoff at textbook writing for children but should actively engage in it. After all, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, the great scholar and social reformer, wrote a primer in Bengali that continues to be read by millions of Bengali children as their first book over a century later. Samuelson, a Nobel laureate in Economics, wrote a textbook that is read the world over by generations of students.

A frequent charge against the authors of the “offensive” textbooks is that they are Marxists who owed their selection as textbook writers to the cartel of Marxist historians who exercised monopoly over history for many years. While leaving aside the question of whether they accept these labels or not, it is necessary to nail some lies. The All India Panel for History which entrusted the task of writing textbooks to Romila Thapar and Bipan Chandra in the early 1960s was constituted of the foremost nationalist historians of the time, with no Marxist among them: Tara Chand, Mohammad Habib, Nilakant Shastri, D.V.Poddar. S.Gopal, another eminent nationalist historian, headed the next panel. If historians influenced by Marxism made an important mark among Indian historians from the mid- 1970s, it was not due to textbook writing by some, but because of the scholarly work produced by D.D.Kosambi, R.S.Sharma, Susobhan Sarkar, A.R.Desai, K.M.Ashraf, Satish Chandra, Irfan Habib, Bipan Chandra, B.B.Chaudhuri, Sumit Sarkar and many others. One may point out that some of the worlds’ most outstanding historians such as E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill or E. H. Carr were influenced by Marxism and the world has not thought any the less of them because of it.

It has also been said repeatedly by the NCERT director, J.S. Rajput, the head of the education wing of the RSS, Dinanath Batra, and columnist for the RSS mouthpiece, Organiser, Atul Rawat, that the existing textbooks are outdated. The question again arises how this conclusion is arrived at without involving any committee of historians. Even accepting that they are outdated, why are the authors not asked to revise them, as they had done in many instances earlier? If the present authors are unwilling or unable, the task of revision or even of writing new text-books could be assigned, through a proper process of selection by a committee of historians, to another group of recognised, possibly younger historians. But that would assume that the purpose is indeed to update the books, which it is not.

In fact, one of the ironies of the situation is that despite all the talk of Bhartiyakaran or Indianisation, the historiography that the RSS ideologues and followers espouse is essentially colonial. And though they like to call others the children of Macaulay, they are the direct descendants of James Mill, who first divided the history of India into Hindu period, Muslim period and British period. The notion that Hindus in the medieval period were suffering under Muslim tyranny is also a colonial construct, as the British rule could then be projected as having freed the Hindus from this tyranny. Further, depicting the Hindus and Muslims as warring communities created the justification for the British presence in India, and also prevented them from uniting against the British. The communal interpretation of Indian history is based on the colonial interpretation, it merely adds a few more elements to it. This colonial and communal historiography has been effectively critiqued by the painstaking efforts of large numbers of historians since Independence. In India, communal historiography has virtually died out for the last 40 years or so, and as was once said very aptly by Irfan Habib, “Now we only have communalists, not communal historians. One could have argued with R.C.Majumdar

, but how does one argue with those who do not know any history?” The situation today is that historians have abandoned communal history, only the communalists believe in it. They are therefore now trying to invent communal historians, to create them where they do not exist. In doing so, they are trying to take Indian history backwards, to undo

the gains of fifty years of research. Can we really believe after all this that they are motivated by a genuine desire to update textbooks and incorporate latest research in them?

The NCERT has now instructed the Central Board of Secondary Education, CBSE, after of course the eminent historian Prof. D. N. Jha was unceremoniously sacked as the chairperson of the history syllabus committee to delete passages from history books written by Romila Thapar, Satish Chandra, R.S.Sharma and Arjun Dev. This was again done without following proper procedure and legality. The authors were not consulted, nor their permission taken, before the changes were made, thus violating the copyright agreement entered into with them.

Further, the deletions were not made after consultation with or on the basis of recommendations of any recognized committee of historians. The NCERT has not been able to name a single well-known nationally and internationally recognized historian who is associated with the changes sought to be made in the syllabus. It has been done secretly and the Director of NCERT has publicly refused to give the names of the historians involved in the revision or the writing of the proposed new books which will apparently be prescribed by march 2002, on the flimsy ground that if those names are given the authors will be “disturbed.” It is indeed worrying that while on the one hand we are told that new books will be introduced by March 2002, till Mid-December 2001 there is not a single historian whose name has been given as the author of these books, and many newspaper reports in recent days have suggested that the NCERT seems to be having trouble finding willing authors from among historians. This either means that the entire job of getting new books ready is being undertaken in a cavalier fashion, or that the books are really being prepared by people whose names will not pass scholarly and popular scrutiny. Either scenario is a recipe for disaster as far as school children, in whose name and for whose welfare this entire exercise is being carried out, are concerned. Instead of books by internationally recognised historians, they would possibly be dished out thinly-veiled communal propaganda literature.

If professional historians have not made these changes then who has? Clearly RSS ideologues have played the major role. In fact, the General secretary of the Vidya Bharati which runs a large network of schools and colleges for the RSS, Dina Nath Batra complained that Murli Manohar Joshi was moving too slowly. Vidya Bharati had suggested 42 deletions but the NCERT had carried out only four (actually there are ten deletions from four books) so far. (Outlook, 17 December 2001). In a book edited by Dina Nath Batra of the RSS, called “The Enemies of Indianisation: The Children of Marx, Macaulay and Madarsa” published on 15 August 2001 one can find an article listing 41 “distortions” in the NCERT books and another by the NCERT director J. S. Rajput which adds a few more. (Rajput was also present at the function releasing the book later) Significantly, the deletions from the NCERT books ordered by the CBSE on 23 October 2001, on the basis of a NCERT notification removed some of the ‘distortions’ listed in Batra’s book. It may be also pertinent to point out that the author of the list of 41 distortions is a Mr. Atul Rawat, a regular columnist for the RSS mouthpiece the ‘Organiser’. This Mr. Rawat whose academic credentials apparently do not go beyond an

M.Phil. in international relations was appointed as consultant by the NCERT to review the history books written by professional historians with great academic standing. If this is not bad enough the NCERT has appointed to its Executive Committee and Departmental Committee people like K.G. Rastogi a self proclaimed RSS activist whose only claim to fame is his confession that he killed a Muslim woman during a riot.

It is being repeatedly claimed that the deletions are in deference to the religious sentiments of minorities. Unfortunately, the claim appears spurious, as all the books from which deletions have been made are being withdrawn from March 2002 (the beginning of the new school session ) anyway, and children have already covered that portion of the course in which these extracts (barring one) are present. The immediate purpose thus seems to be to try and garner votes in the forthcoming Punjab and UP elections by putting forward claims of protecting religious and caste sentiments. However, the larger purpose is clearly to create doubts about the books in people's minds by making allegations that they violate religious sentiments of different communities, and thus divert attention from the real motive: to replace secular history with communal history. If those who are master-minding the whole show had any concern for minority sentiments, would Dina Nath Batra, the head of the Education section of the RSS, say in justification of the deletions: "Jesus Christ was a *najayaz* (illegitimate) child of Mary but in Europe they don't teach that. Instead, they call her Mother Mary and say she is a virgin." (Outlook, 17 December 2001.)

The claim that the deletions have been made to protect the tender minds of children from controversial subjects is equally spurious. Most of the deletions have been made from books prescribed for class XI and XII. These are books read by children between 16-18 year old. To say that children at an age where they have acquired voting rights or are at the verge of it are unfit to handle multiplicity of opinions and controversial data is to cast them in the mould of unthinking automatons.

Given that these books have been around for at least two (and sometimes three) decades, it is very remarkable that all of a sudden they have hurt so many sentiments! The NCERT Director claimed that he had received 50,000 letters (Indian Express, 26 November 2001) and then changed this to hundreds and thousands of letters of protest (statement made during TV show 'The Big Fight' on 1 December 2001); Arjun Dev, who retired from the NCERT in February 2001 asserts that in his entire career of about 30 years, not more than 100 letters would have been received. And even if one was to concede that religious sentiments have been hurt, the NCERT could have done what it has always done on the few occasions when complaints have been received in the past: send the complaints to the authors, get their response, and try to arrive at a solution which upholds the essence of what the author is saying while altering some phrases or words which have caused misgivings. This had worked fairly well and there is no reason to believe it would have not worked now. Therefore the suspicion that the motive is not redressal of (real or imagined) grievances, but the opposite: manipulation of religious sentiments for narrow political ends, and that too at the expense of school children.

Apart from handing over the textbooks to RSS activists and supporters an equally dangerous trend has been started with the NCERT director asserting that he “would consult *religious experts* before including references to any religion in the textbooks, to avoid *hurting the sentiments* of the community concerned”. (Times of India 5 October 2001, italics mine) This extremely pernicious move has been reiterated by the education minister Murli Manohar Joshi, who states that “all material in textbooks connected with religions should be cleared by the heads of the religions concerned before their incorporation in the books”. (Hindustan Times, 4 December 2001). Once such a veto over what goes into textbooks is given to religious leaders or community leaders, as this government has started doing, it would become impossible to scientifically research and teach not only history but other disciplines, including the natural sciences. Deletions have already been made from textbooks for pointing out the oppressive nature of the caste system in India, presumably because some ‘sentiments’ were hurt. ‘Sentiments’ have been hurt in India among some when the practice of *Sati* was criticized. Would this mean deletions of references from textbooks regarding this evil practice? Sentiments could be hurt if science lessons questioned the ‘immaculate conception’ or if they proposed theories of origin of man which were not in consonance with the beliefs associated with most religions. Should such lessons be altered or ‘talibanised’ according to the dictats of various religious leaders? If the teaching of modern scientific advances ‘hurts’ the religious sentiments of one or the other group, should it be banned altogether?

Equally alarming is the trend to attack those who do not agree with the kind of interpretations or fabrications promoted by the Hindu Communal forces. They are being branded as anti-national. The RSS Sarsanchalak K. S. Sudershan calls those who are resisting the revisions of the NCERT textbooks as “ anti-Hindu Euro-Indians”. (Organiser, 4 November 2001). Sudershan laments that these anti-Hindu euro-Indians hate ‘Vedic maths’ and do astonishing things like not believing that in ancient India we knew about nuclear energy and that Sage Bharadwaja and Raja Bhoj not only “described the construction of Aeroplanes” but discussed “details like what types of aeroplanes would fly at what height, what kind of problems they might encounter, how to overcome those problems etc.”

Calling them anti-Hindu and anti –national is not enough, now a group of Arya Samajis has demanded that the historians Romila Thapar, R.S. Sharma and Arjun Dev should be arrested. The HRD minister, Murli Manohar Joshi, at whose residence this group had collected, defended the deletions from their books and called for a “war for the country’s cultural freedom”. (Hindustan Times, 8 December 2001). The Minister has now gone one step further and added fuel to this fascist tendency by branding the history written by these scholars as “*intellectual terrorism unleashed by the left*” which was “*more dangerous than cross border terrorism*” and exhorting the BJP storm troopers to counter both types of terrorism effectively. (Indian Express, 20 December 2001) The dangerous implications of Joshi making this charge against these eminent historians at a time when the whole country is agitated by the attack on parliament by *cross border terrorists* must be noted.

Civilised societies cannot ban the teaching of unsavoury aspects of their past on the grounds that it would hurt sentiments or confuse children or it would diminish patriotic feelings among its children, as the present government is trying to do. Nor can we fabricate fantasies to show our past greatness and become a laughing stock of the world. Should America remove slavery from its textbooks or Europe the saga of witch hunting and Hitler's genocide of the Jews? Let us stand tall among civilised nations and not join the Taliban in suppressing history as well as the historians.

The communal attempts to distort Indian history and to give it a narrow sectarian colour in the name of instilling patriotism and demonstrating the greatness of India actually end up doing exactly the opposite. It in fact obfuscates the truly remarkable aspects of India's past of which any society in the world could be justifiably proud. The Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, for example, argues that the "India's persistent heterodoxy" and its "tendency towards multireligious and multicultural coexistence" (aspects vehemently denied by the Communalists) had important implications for the development of science and mathematics in India. ("History and the Enterprise of Knowledge", address delivered to the Indian History Congress, January 2001, Calcutta) Arguing that the history of science is integrally linked with heterodoxy, Sen goes on to say that "the roots of the flowering of Indian science and mathematics that occurred in an around the Gupta period (beginning particularly with Aryabhatta and Varahamihira) can be intellectually associated with persistent expressions of heterodoxies which pre-existed these contributions. In fact Sanskrit and Pali have a larger literature in defence of atheism, agnosticism and theological scepticism than exists in any other classical language." He goes on to say that rather than the championing of "Vedic Mathematics" and "Vedic sciences" on the basis "of very little evidence".... "what has... more claim to attention as a precursor of scientific advances in the Gupta period is the tradition of scepticism that can be found in pre-Gupta India □ going back to at least the sixth century B.C. □ particularly in matters of religion and epistemic orthodoxy." (The tradition of scepticism in matters of religion and epistemic orthodoxy was continued by Mahatma Gandhi, for example when he argued "It is no good quoting verses from Manusmriti and other scriptures in defense of ...orthodoxy. A number of verses in these scriptures are apocryphal, a number of them are meaningless".)

Let us hope no group with hurt sentiments now demands the arrest of Amartya Sen as yet another son of 'Macaulay, Marx and Madarsa'. Let us hope Murli Manohar Joshi in true Taliban fashion does not ask his storm troopers to extinguish the "intellectual terrorism" unleashed by Sen, in the same manner as it was felt necessary to silence Gandhi, 'the greatest living Hindu'.

(This is a revised version of an article in *Mainstream*, Annual Number, 22 December 2001.)

## *Section 2: What Historians Say*

### Propaganda as history won't sell

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The recent deletion of passages from the NCERT History textbooks, by the NCERT and the CBSE raises many important questions that concern matters relating not only to the teaching of history, but also to questions of ethical norms and the rights of authors as well as the handling of knowledge in education.

The action of the NCERT and the CBSE is a contravention of the agreement that was made with the authors of the History textbooks. The contract stated that no changes were to be made in the books without the permission of the authors. In the past when changes were suggested by various agencies, and even if these were marginal, the permission of the author was required. Where permission was not given, the text remained unaltered.

The book on Ancient India for Class VI was used from 1966 and was revised by me in 1987. Periodic revision became necessary with advances in knowledge. The objection, therefore, is not to revising the books but to making changes without the consent of the author. One expects government institutions at least to honour agreements and not infringe the rules of copyright.

The passages axed are based on historical evidence and cannot, therefore, be described as one-sided history. It is said that the most offensive refer to the eating of beef in ancient times. Yet these are statements drawn from well-known sources, as for example, the Shatapatha Brahmana 3.4.1.2; and the Vasishta Dharmasutra 4.8., which mention honouring guests by serving beef. The Brihadaranyaka Upanisad 6.4.18., makes the interesting statement that if a learned and long-lived son is desired, then rice cooked with veal or beef should be eaten.

The eating of beef is also attested from archaeology as has been discussed by Professor HD Sankalia ('The Cow in History', Seminar, May 1967, 93). Professor BB Lal, in his report on the excavation at Hastinapur, a site that he suggests may, at the lower levels, have been settled by arriving Aryans (Ancient India, 1954-55, Nos. 10 and 11, p. 151), states that the occurrence of charred bones of cattle, buffalo, sheep and pig, bearing definite cut marks on them, shows that these animals were slaughtered for food (p. 14).

Comparative studies of cattle keeping economies point to people generally not eating their livestock indiscriminately, but eating beef on ritual occasions or as a mark of status. The archaeological evidence suggests a more widespread use of cattle for food. The introduction of a prohibition may acquire a religious sanction but the rationale for it may also derive from other factors such as changes in livestock and ecology, or even political demands. These call for historical investigation and particularly in a society where the management of cattle has been an important feature.

The issue is not that there is no evidence for the eating of beef in ancient India, but whether this is something that students at school should know about. Given its prevalence for many centuries followed by the introduction of the prohibition in some Hindu identities of more recent times, it is important for those studying Indian society — as all students of history do — to know the historical reasons for the prohibition. There is a need to understand when and why prohibitions are introduced since such knowledge provides a deeper understanding of social and religious concerns. The sentiments of the various religious communities are not God-given, they are gradually built up through particular beliefs and social practices and often in the context of particular historical situations. If the sentiments are to be appreciated then they have also to be comprehended in their social and historical context.

The same is true of references to the sanctioning of social inequalities through the system of varna/caste. How can varna and caste be taught without discussing which social groups formulated it and how and why; and who were its supporters and when did it become widespread? What were the compulsions in a society that accepted these divisions and was there a protest against them? How can a teacher explain why the policy of reservation is in practice if the teacher is not permitted to discuss the formulation of caste in the classroom? Dalit sentiment would certainly want the inequities of caste to be stated, known and discussed.

The more significant question then is why these deletions are being insisted upon at this time. Are there really objections emanating from religious bodies that are claiming to speak for an entire religious community, or is this a blatant attempt to replace mainstream history by the Hindutva version of history? Recent newspaper reports indicate that pressure from the RSS led to these deletions and the attempt was to encourage state school education to conform to the curriculum of the RSS Shishu Mandirs.

If the Shishu Mandirs are now to be the models for state schools, then the teaching and understanding of history will inevitably be undermined. History in these schools is taught as a catechism — consisting of questions and answers, where the answers are frequently what the ideology dictates with no reference to accuracy or fact. For example, children are taught that the first Ramjanmabhumi temple was built by the son of Rama, Maharaja Kusha; that it was destroyed by Menander the Greek in 150 BC; that it was rebuilt by Chandragupta Vikramaditya in AD 308; and was plundered by Salar Masud, the nephew of Mahmud of Ghazni. None of these statements have any historical basis. History in any case, cannot be taught in question-answer form since the essence of good history is that it should reflect and incorporate the many aspects and nuances of human activity.

The sudden rush to delete these specific passages seems also to have a more immediate purpose. It is seen as tied to the coming elections in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. The propaganda over the deletions will help galvanise upper caste Hindu, Sikh and Jat opinion in favour of the BJP. Recognising its potential as election strategy is making parties like the Congress also jump onto the same bandwagon. This is not an attempt to salvage the discipline of history as is being claimed but rather an attempt to mangle it in the interests of election propaganda.

The confrontation is being projected as between Leftist and Rightist historians. The confrontation is not between Leftist and Rightist historians but between professional historians and politicians sympathetic to the Hindutva persuasion. And those who are at the policy-making levels of NCERT echo the politicians. Professional historical writing requires a critical enquiry that includes the application of historical methodology, assessing the reliability of evidence and drawing on logical argument in making casual connections. It differentiates between the invention of a narrative that fantasises about the past and an interpretation that attempts to critically analyse the evidence. History is not an arbitrary narrative where myth can override facts. There is also today the viability of contending interpretations, but each has to be based on accepted historical methodologies. This is evidently not understood by those who are out to undermine history.

The act of changing history through a political command draws no respect from the profession. Politicians can go on attempting to denigrate the authors of the textbooks by referring to them as "the progeny of Macaulay, Marx and the madrassas", but the impact of this ranting remains marginal on the profession. Ironically, it is the Hindutva version of history that draws its inspiration from the Mills and the Macaulays in its definition of Indian civilisation and of monolithic communities dominating history. The hostility of the Sangh Parivar to the madrassas is partly because it is also trying to base its authority on the same kind of educational structures.

The CBSE has now taken on a new role of doctoring the contents of prescribed books. But what is even more disturbing is the directive that there should be no discussion on the passages that have been deleted from the textbooks. Apart from being an infringement of the freedom of speech, that such discussion should be forbidden in school makes nonsense of education. Discussion and the exploration of ideas is a primary function of schooling. And prohibitions, as we all know, whet the appetite for more of what has been forbidden.

This is also an assault on the fundamentals of acquiring and handling knowledge. If knowledge is to progress in any field there needs to be a critical enquiry and analyses of the subject and this includes the exploration of conventional, controversial and sceptical ideas. If this approach is to be encouraged in the sciences, as scientists assert, its dismissal in the social and human sciences is a disaster. The CBSE directive should be alarming for those who support critical historical enquiry, as indeed it should also be for those who are concerned with the advance of knowledge.

(Hindustan Times, 9 December 2001)

## Historical blunders

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The Communal interpretation of history forms the core of communal ideology in India. Take this away and little would be left of the ideology.

Why has a serious and continuous attack been launched by the BJP on scientific and secular history? Why has history teaching and writing suddenly become a battleground between communal and secular political and ideological forces? Why has the BJP-dominated government been making efforts to control history teaching and writing?

To find the answers, one has to grasp that communalism is basically an ideology, a belief-system through which society and polity are viewed. Communalism starts with the belief that in India, followers of different religions — Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or Christians — form distinct communities not only for religious but also for secular i.e. economic, political and social purposes. Next, it is argued that people belonging to different religions have divergent and mutually antagonistic and therefore irreconcilable political, social, and economic interests. It follows that communal parties, groups and movements are those that are structured around communal ideology. Without communal ideology, they would disintegrate. On the other hand, they are primarily interested in spreading a communal belief-system or ways of thought. Other aspects of communal activity are secondary and follow from the basic ideology.

Communalism is based on spreading feelings of fear, insecurity, separateness and, above all, antagonism and animosity towards and among followers of different religions. The communalists use history for the purpose. The communal interpretation of history forms the core of communal ideology in India. Take this away and little would be left of communal ideology. The communal view of Indian history is used as a major justification or legitimisation of communalism, as also the major instrument for the spread of communal consciousness.

In the 1930s and the 1940s, the Muslim communalists used history to validate the two-nation theory, though they relied much more on arousing fear in the minority of being dominated by the majority. But the Hindu communalists suffered from a handicap in this regard.

How could Hindus, who constituted nearly 70 per cent of the population before 1947 and constitute over 80 per cent after 1947, be made to feel the fear of being dominated and suppressed by Muslims, or of Muslims being a threat to them? The answer was and is found in an unhistorical and communal depiction of the medieval period of Indian history.

Following the British colonial writers of the 19th century, this period is portrayed by Hindu communalists as one long story of Hindu-Muslim conflict and of Muslim tyranny and oppression of Hindus. They describe the rule by medieval Muslim rulers as foreign

and Muslims as permanent foreigners in Indian society. They also use another myth: India civilization had reached great and ideal heights in the ancient period from which it fell into decay and decline during the medieval period as a result of 'Muslim intrusion, domination, tyranny and oppression'. Moreover, the tyranny, the oppression and the decay were built into the very character of Islam.

This historical interpretation is the principal pillar of Hindu communalism today. In fact, communalism, whether Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, can absorb, at the programmatic level, all kinds of economics, political science, sociology or psychology but not a scientific and secular history, which would undermine the basic structure and content of communalism as an ideology.

No ideology or ideology-based movement can survive if its core is successfully challenged. Hence, interpretation of history is one item of communal agenda on which the communalists would not and cannot compromise. That is why whatever compromises the BJP makes with its NDA allies in economic, political or foreign policy arenas, it stubbornly follows a communal agenda in the field of education, history teaching and research. And that is why Atal Bihari Vajpayee gives a freer hand to Murli Manohar Joshi than even LK Advani. And he makes regular statements to assure the RSS that his government is on course where communal ideology is concerned.

One last point. Why are the communalists concentrating on school education and school books? Many ask the question: What structured communalism can be taught to young children? In fact, there may be no overt communalism in new BJP-sponsored textbooks for indoctrination of children into full-fledged and overt communalists. It would not yet be possible in our basically secular and democratic society. Communal ideology or belief system is in reality a spectrum consisting of elements, a range of varied but related ideas and notions. Some of these elements, ideas or notions do not yet constitute fully developed communalism, but they can develop to occupy the communal space under proper conditions or in crisis situations.

Such is, for example, the case with the stereotypes generated through communal historical narratives. The communalists are, above all, interested in creating these elements. Hence, undue glorification of the ancient period and undue denigration or neglect of the achievements of the medieval period in school textbooks, cartoon strips, children's story magazines, TV serials and so on. This is also the significance of the introduction of topics like vedic mathematics in school curriculum or of the artificial glorification of all and sundry who fought against Sultanate and Mughal rulers or Muslim zamindars and satraps, or of efforts to inculcate undue religiosity among children.

The argument that ancient period is glorified to inculcate national pride also does not hold good. Apart from the fact that artificial and undue national pride has its own negative aspects, why is this argument not extended to the medieval period? Why are the religious, philosophical, technological, literary and fine arts achievements of the medieval period not glorified? This is what the nationalists did during the period of the anti-imperialist struggle, and they criticised the communalists for not doing so. See, for example, Nehru's positive treatment of both periods in the *Discovery of India*.

A historian's task is not easy. On one hand, he or she has to avoid being manipulated or becoming a manipulator. On the other, he cannot cut himself off from the society. In fact, he is 'a product of history and society'. He reflects the hope and despair of his times as well as his own. But he has the obligation to meet the demands of scientific rigour embodied in accuracy, integrity and fearlessness.

A textbook writer's task is even more difficult. Textbook writing is an extremely difficult, time-consuming and responsible task, for it requires a certain relative mastery over the subject and the capacity to make it interesting and authentic. That is where debate about a textbook should lie. I should know, for I have been 'there'. I may also point out that the NCERT textbooks of the 1960s and 1970s were written to remove colonial and communal bias or relative ignorance from the existing textbooks and not to introduce left or nationalist bias.

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## **The Rewriting of History by the Sangh Parivar**

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Like any branch of knowledge, the essential requirement of History is the pursuit of truth. This requires one to collect and sift evidence critically. Bias, whether religious, racial, regional or national, or any other, must be avoided. The history of each nation is a part of the history of the world; and it would be absurd to try to project one's own country's history, solely to establish our superiority over others by one-sided evidence, as if we are pursuing a case in a court of law. The same must be said when we write about the past of particular regions or communities.

The elementary statements need to be made today in any discussion of what is being said about Indian history, though until very recently, one might have felt these to be superfluous. By and large Indian historiography has been pursued for over a century on rigorous lines where difference and biases have existed, but largely within limits set by historical evidence. In 1961, when I wrote an article criticizing what I held to be communal approaches by two distinguished historians, R.C. Majumdar and I.H. Qureshi, I noted that while their interpretations (mainly in laying blame or lavishing praise) were so different, their "facts" were often identical, derived from the same evidence. This was because however much one may lament their taking of sides on behalf of their own communities, they were still professional historians, insisting on some rigour in judging evidence. After all, Majumdar declined to agree with K.M. Munshi's theory of an Aryan homeland in India, and he refused to write for an RSS weekly once it had published a paper alleging that monuments like the Red Fort and Taj Mahal had really been built by Hindu rulers.

It is, therefore, important to realize that what the Central Government agencies and the Sangh Parivar are now projecting as the history of India is not anything that historians like R.G. Bhandarkar, Jadunath Sarkar, or D.C. Sircar, to take a few names from amongst the great historians of the past, or professional historians of any repute today, of whatever persuasion, could conceivably regard as legitimate. It is absurd to claim, as the Minister of Human Resource Deveopment, Murli Manohar Joshi, is so prone to do, that the 'Rightist' historians have now simply been given the official resources to prevail over the "Leftist" historians, as if what the Union Government and its agencies, like the UGC, NCERT, ICHR, etc., today tend to recognize as the "history" of India, represents any important academic trend among Indian historians. Indeed, much of the "history" that is being given official patronage, has been partly created by foreigners and NRIs of rather strange credentials.

Let us first see what are the major new discoveries for Indian History that are being promoted by the official agencies. In a recent Memoir of the Geological Society of India, *The Vedic Sarasvati*, Bangalore, 1999, funded by a host of official agencies, we have the claim that humankind evolved and diffused from “the upper Sarasvati region”, that is, northern Haryana. The late V.S. Wakankar had nothing to go on for this assertion, except the discovery in British times of a fossil-ape (the *Ramapithecus*), in the Siwaliks, though the species is not in the line of hominids but of the orangutan!

Being the nucleus of human diffusion is not, however, enough: India is now being almost officially declared to have been the original home of the Aryans, on which much more is said in the same Memoir, as well as other quasi-official publications. A great outcry is being raised against the “colonial Indologists”, who, on the basis of historical linguistics, established that Sanskrit belongs to the Indo-European family of languages, and argued that the proto-Vedic-Sanskrit was brought to India by its speakers from outside. The “race” theory has long since been discarded and on-one in academic discourse speaks of an “Aryan race.” The irony is that while our RSS oracles denounce Max Mueller, Wheeler, etc., as “racists”, this does not prevent them from announcing that “the Indo-Europeans and other Aryan peoples were migrants from India”. So says the U.S swami, David Frawley, a much acclaimed source of RSS’s historical wisdom. Still another “scholar”, who gets quoted in extenso by the HRD Minister himself, is the Dutch-Belgian Koenraad Elst, who in *Aryan Invasion Update*, announces that the Proto-Indo-Europeans went out from “what is now Panjab, Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh”. Another proponent of the same cause is Navaratna S. Rajaram, billed constantly as the “US NASA scientist”, and leader of a self-proclaimed “Indo-American School.” All of them are enthusiastic builders of a fantasy about the “Aryans”, who, it is proudly claimed, gave civilization to the world, carrying it from India.

For this it is necessary that everything “Aryan” in India must go to remote antiquity. The Rigveda is now said to have been composed before 5000 BC, not c.1500 BC (which latter date has been established mainly by its relationship with the Avesta, not datable to much before 1000 BC, as it is keyed to West Asian chronology). Bronze, we are told, was being “cast” in India by 3700 BC, a “first” in the world; writing too had been invented here, c.3500 BC; the “Mahabharata War” was fought in c.3100 BC, etc., etc. (For a sample of this see Navaratna S. Rajaram’s address, ‘Vedic and Harappan Culture; New Findings’, in the Indian Archaeological Society’s journal, *Puratattva* (1993 – 94), with a special word of acclaim for it by the editor; also see Elst’s book, already mentioned). This chronology is based on nothing except one unlikely hypothesis built upon another (or, as in the case of bronze, on fraudulent invention of “evidence”). There then follow claims about “Vedic Mathematics”, “Vedic Astronomy” and “Vedic Astrology” (now to be taught in over 30 Indian Universities as full Master’s Course), all supposedly created 4000 years and more ago. Late texts that are now read in a manner unknown to the pundits, are remorselessly pushed back to earlier and earlier periods on the flimsy grounds. In this none can outpace Subhash C. Kak of the U.S. and his NRI friends and followers. Their articles receive undeserved status by being published in INSA’s *Indian Journal of History of Science*, year after year, including the latest issue. It is truly a case of genuine “Indian Tradition” (Rajaram’s favourite phrase), manufactured in the United

States. The inventions grow apace so rapidly that one is not surprised when one reads that though the Vedic Indians did not build any Pyramids here, they yet taught the Pharaohs of Egypt to build them (Rajaram in Puratattva, op.cit.)! This and the other “achievements” credited to India’s hoary past by these propagandists are, I suppose, the contributions of India to world civilization, which according to the NCERT’s new “National Curriculum Framework for School Education”, would be taught to all Indian school- children, along with “instruction in religion”.

We have, then, the crusade for turning the Indus culture into a Sarasvati Civilization. Any ordinary person may be wondering why the Sangh Parivar’s propaganda mill is paying so much attention to the Indus civilization. It is true that ever since the links between West Asian Elamite and Brahui, the Dravidian language of Baluchistan, were identified by David McAlpin, the case for the Indus Civilization being peopled by speakers of “Proto-Elamo-Dravidian”, has been particularly reinforced. To any self-proclaimed patriotic Indian, this should hardly be a matter of concern, since Dravidian languages other than Brahui are entirely confined to India, and so the presence of Dravidians there can only make the Indus Culture so much more ours! Yet any Dravidian claims to that civilization arouse the utmost bitterness in the ranks of the Sangh Parivar, and desperate efforts are on to establish for it a purely “Aryan” parentage.

The first step has been taken through official name-alteration. We are now shifting from “Harappan” (the name so far given in official Indian Archaeology to the Indus Culture) to “Sarasvati-Sindhu”, thereby imposing on the Indus Culture a definitely Vedic nomenclature and thus warding off any non-Aryan pretensions. It matters little that the “mighty Sarasvati” supposedly flowing down to the sea through the Desert is a sheer figment of the imagination with no support from geography or geology (despite the extraordinary claims made in this behalf in the Geological Society’s Vedic Sarasvati). Rival claims to read Sanskrit in the Indus symbols are becoming embarrassingly numerous (S.R. Rao, S.C.Kak, N.Rajaram), each securing considerable publicity, but little support from any palaeographer worth the name. Since the horse and the chariot are so prominent in the Rigveda, and so wholly absent in the Indus Civilization, a horse on an Indus seal was flaunted about by Rajaram as a path-breaking discovery, until Michael Witzel and Steve Farmer cruelly exposed the fraud in Frontline (13 October, 2000). Having been so found out is, however, only a minor setback: The “Aryan” assault is being carried to the heart of Dravidian identity itself. It is denied that there was any Dravidian loan-words in Vedic and later Sanskrit; in fact, the Dravidian languages themselves are deemed to be rooted in Sanskrit. Almost every writer of the Sangh establishment, the late K.C. Verma, S.G. Talageri, Rajaram, Elst, and Swaraj Prakash Gupta, to name a few, are up in arms against Dravidian links to any great non-Aryan past, let alone to such a prize as the Indus Civilization. There is here a gravely divisive campaign, which has all the potential for exacerbating hostility between the proponents of “Aryan” chauvinism and the “Dravidianists”.

One may pause here to note that since all later texts are being given exorbitantly earlier dates, and every intellectual and technological achievement pushed to an obscure, sacred past, the later times begin to appear more and more as sheer dark ages. We are being

asked to believe that not only did the alleged inventors of writing in the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC forget to write up the Vedic texts, but their descendants too simply forgot writing altogether for a period of 1500 years or so, before the Mauryas came around. We Indians also coolly forgot the great scientific secrets embedded in our texts, which it is only now given to great NRIs like Subhash C. Kak and Navaratna Rajaram to unravel. (Rajesh Kochhar remarks rather uncharitably his *Vedic people* that it would have been more useful if they can tell us from the Vedas of some scientific principles that have not already been known for a long time to Western Scientists!) What seems to cause no concern to the Sangh camp is that they thus accuse the Indian people of stagnating for some four thousand years or more, during which they did not add anything, but only deducted continuously from their existing sum total of knowledge. And this is considered winning greatness for India's past!

In the Sangh's view of history, then, Buddhism and Jainism belong to the Dark Ages that followed once the great achievements had been made and forgotten. With their emphasis on Prakrit (not Sanskrit) and on ahimsa (rather than sacrifices and ritual), their criticism of the Brahmana priesthood, and their indifference (at least in ideological terms) to the varna system, the two religious movements do not fit well with the RSS's scheme of history. Nor do our neo-patriots share Jawaharlal Nehru's excitement about the Mauryan Empire, especially Asoka. Francois Gautier, another of RSS's foreign patrons, who writes the "Feringhee's Column" in the Indian Express, even condemned Asoka for weakening India with his devotion to ahimsa, thereby preparing the ground for Alexander's conquests! The statement in the general manner of the Sangh parivar's "historians" inverts the true sequence, but the sentiment is clear enough. The time when votaries of religious tolerance like Asoka and Akbar could be heroes is long past, and one can almost predict the lowly positions both would occupy in the forthcoming NCERT text-books.

Since Hindu-Muslim antagonism has provided the main ground on which the RSS has flourished since its birth in 1925, it is not surprising that it has devoted much attention to projecting a view of medieval India that should justify its founder Hedgewar's description of the Muslims as "hissing Yavana snakes." It is professedly because of the primary place it accorded to the alleged threat from Muslims, that the RSS prudently remained out of the freedom struggle against the British. It had, indeed, from the beginning its own version of the Two-Nation Theory (as seen in its two slogans of "Hindu-Hindi-Hindustan!" and "Hindu Raj Amar Rahe!" Long live Hindu Rule). Medieval Indian history had therefore to be so shaped as to present two nations always at war, one brutally assaulting, the other nobly defending.

Pre-eminent in its discourse, therefore, is the image of Muslims as foreigners, destructive barbarians and immoral degenerates. For abusive assaults, the Sangh Parivar has now proceeded to provide a considerable amount of "literature" to elaborate this perception. K.S. Lal is today a favourite historian of the RSS, who is placed by it not only on the Council of the ICHR, being fleetingly made its Chairman, but is also on the NCERT Committee to draft the model school syllabus on History, and perhaps the textbook on Medieval India as well. Lal's career as an RSS spokesman on medieval history began

with his book *Growth of Muslim Population in Medieval India*, published in 1973. Here he gave a picture of the continuous decline of the total Indian population from 190 to 120 million between AD 1200 and 1500, through large-scale massacres of Hindus perpetrated by Muslims. There were no censuses, no statistics for him to derive the figures from: his own mental agility provided him with everything. Henceforth with these figures at hand he has become an “authority” for the RSS. His next book, *The Mughal Harem*, was published by Aditya Prakashan, a Sangh Parivar’s publishing house, in 1988. Predictably, by collecting all possible scandals from various “sources”, old and modern, Lal duly exposed the immoral ways of the Muslims. (That Hindu rulers and nobles were also polygamous and had concubines naturally escaped his notice). Soon to follow were Lal’s *Legacy of Muslim Rule* (1992) and *Muslim Slave System* (1994), two further exercises in what Gandhiji would have called “a drain inspector’s reports.”

One difficulty in describing all Muslims as insufferable barbarians is posed by the very visible monuments left by Muslim rulers that indicate a high level of art. This challenge was taken up from the early 1960s by P.N. Oak and his team in the “Institute of Rewriting Indian History”. It was now claimed that all the building attributed to Muslim rulers, such as Red Fort, the Taj Mahal, and so on, had actually been built earlier by Hindus, and were simply misappropriated by the Muslims. Immediately, the pages of the RSS publications were thrown open to Oak and his school, and the ‘rewriting’ began on a national scale to cover almost every “Muslim” monument in the country. The Sangh’s US patrons also helped. In 1989 our newspapers published a claim of a US scholar of a carbon-14 date obtained for a door of the Taj Mahal that put it 200 years earlier than Shahjahan’s time, thereby suggesting a pre-17<sup>th</sup> century ‘Hindu’ construction. Till today the laboratory, the number of the sample, and the source which provided the piece of wood have not been divulged. (This incidentally has also been the case with Navaratna Rajaram’s bronze head of Vasishta, dated to 3700 BC, the laboratories “in America and Switzerland” remaining unnamed and the scientific methods unspecified.)

The temple-destruction orgies by Muslims are, of course, a major component of the RSS’s view of medieval India. The campaign for the destruction of Babri Masjid generated a large amount of literature to which Arun Shorie, currently a Union minister, has liberally contributed. Religious intolerance is always to be condemned, and no-one can condone the destruction of any place of worship. Richard Eaton’s study, which *Frontline* (22 Dec.2000 and 5 Jan. 2001) has published in full, puts the matter in a proper perspective. But now, every ruined temple gets automatically a Muslim author of its destruction. When recently the Archaeological Survey of India discovered at Fatehpur Sikri some Jain images of early medieval times, the late B.R. Grover, Chairman, ICHR appointed to his post by the BJP Government, immediately announced that the original temple must have been destroyed by Aurangzeb! Now that the older “secular” textbooks on History are being thrown out by the NCERT, temple-destruction is one subject on which the replacements are going to be quite rich. As R.K. Dixit, convener of the NCERT’s curriculum group, announced, this would go into the new textbooks because it is “immediate history”- whatever this means.

Given its view of Muslims as utter barbarians, the Sangh Parivar is naturally uncomfortable with Muslim scientific thinkers. Alberuni, whose description of Indian sciences in the earlier part of the eleventh century was described by K.M. Panikkar as “a moment in history”, attracts the ire of the Sangh propagandists who hasten to picture him as anti-Indian, because of his remarks about Bahmagupta’s mythological explanation of the eclipses and about the Indian tendency not to accept external discoveries. As for Akbar the Mughal emperor, who occupies a particularly high place in Indian history, for his policy of tolerance, humanism and patronage of the arts, he is totally unacceptable not only as a “foreigner,” but also as the grandson of Babur, made notorious owing to the Babari Masjid. When the Indian Council of Historical Research, during its pre-RSS past, decided to observe the 450<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Akbar in 1992, the BJP MPs raised the matter in Parliament, one of them even describing Akbar as a “Pakistani” having been born in Umarkot (Sind). (They naturally forgot the birthplaces of L.K. Advani and the like).

The Mughal Empire, in which historians like Tara Chand, Ibn Hasan and P.Saran saw good evidence of the Indians’ capacity to unite the country under one polity, is also now seen as an enemy, and those who fought against it, whether an Ahom general like Lachit Barphukan (after whom now an Army regiment has been named) or a Rajput prince, like Maharana Pratap, were not simply brave warriors, but, also in Home Minister L.K. Advani’s words, “freedom fighters”. Advani said rather ominously that history textbooks need to describe them as such. For obvious reasons, the Muslim Chaks of Kashmir and Malik Ambar of Ahmadnagar, who too fought against the Mughals no less valiantly, will have no regiments named after them nor obtain the tag of “freedom fighters.”

If the BJP is to have its way, we would soon be competing with Pakistan in framing the utmost possible parochial view of the past. Just as Buddhism and Guru Nanak are in effect excluded from the cultural legacy of Pakistan, Islam and Kabir will soon be marched out of our heritage. For nearly a century, since Tagore so saw it, we have been accustomed to see our past as a composite one, integrating many streams creatively. Such an attitude is anathema to the RSS. It will be noticed that words like “composite culture,” once so much a part of Delhi officialese, are now politically incorrect in the corridors of the Union Ministries of Human Resource Development and Culture, and of the University Grants Commission. When Kabir died, both Hindus and Muslims came to claim him. For official Delhi of today, this is, of course, unthinkable.

Can our country afford such a distorted image of our past? Like every individual, a country too needs to have an accurate memory of its past. Being a braggart does not make anyone great or credible. This alone should be a warning against the reckless manufacture of fiction and myth. If, in addition, the intention is to introduce all kinds of divisive issues, setting up both questions of race and religion, then the ill-consequences are likely to be still greater.

For this reason, the RSS’s conspiracy against History must be a matter of concern for every citizen of India, who has any care at all for the secular and democratic character of our Republic.

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## Communalism and History Textbooks

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In Post-independent India the first important attempt to communalise education was taken by the central government in 1977 when Ancient India for class Eleven prescribed and published by the NCERT was withdrawn from circulation at the behest of the Education Ministry. The book was restored in 1980 when the Congress came to power. But the present government has decided to remove not only this book but also the other history textbooks written by competent and conscientious scholars committed to secular values. Neither the books were academically examined nor the authors asked to answer the objections raised against their writings. A few objections were published in the newspapers. It was stated that the historicity of the gods couldn't be questioned on the ground of archaeological evidence. In my view people should freely worship Ram and the other gods. But for this it is not necessary to deny the absence of even modest habitation in Ayodhya until the fifth century BC. Again, the NCERT authorities deny beef eating in ancient India. But the greatest Dharmashastra scholar P V Kane supports it on the basis of literary sources, and the greatest Indian archaeologist H.D.Sankalia supports it on the basis of excavations.

Those who hold power go on swearing by secularism, but there is a vast gap between their profession and practice. This became clear at the conference of the state education ministers called by the Education Ministry, which tried to impose Saraswati Vandana or the participants irrespective of their religions. What is more significant the agenda for discussion at this conference was prepared by the education cell of the RSS. It had to be dropped because of stiff opposition from the majority of the participants. In this meeting in last year no curriculum was approved. But for abolishing history at the pre-secondary stage and distorting it at the higher stage the NCERT now talks of this curriculum. Although there is no confusion in our constitution about secularism the present government at the centre and its supporters in some states are bent upon destroying the secular character of education.

What should be taught at the primary and secondary stage is an important problem. The communalists want to present all subjects in a communal colour, but they consider history to be the most effective vehicle of their indoctrination. If they have their way in history they will concentrate on two or three questions, which will certainly make things easy for both teachers and students, but at the same time this approach will destroy the very fabric of secular India and lead to the disintegration of our nation. They will emphasise that all temples were demolished by the Muslims who are foreigners in this country. They will teach that all social evils in Hindu society have been introduced by the Muslims. They will give special attention to beef eating and hold the Muslims

responsible for the introduction of this practice. This is an important ground on which they have decided to withdraw Ancient India again. They have also raised a great hue and cry against D.N.Jha's book on this subject. They will teach that the Hindus are the descendants of the Aryans who were the indigenous inhabitants of India and all the other are foreigners.

Some textbooks taught in UP say that martyrs such as Bhagat Singh and his comrades were extremists and terrorists and those who demolished the Babri Masjid were great freedom fighters. The advent of British rule is welcomed by them as the deliverance of India from foreign rule.

In the NCERT policy as reported in the papers, history, geography and civics are to be abolished as independent courses at the primary and secondary stages. Obviously the authorities find it difficult to get written chauvinistic books to replace the existing academic books. That is why they have abolished history as an independent paper at the pre-secondary stage. At the cost of history and other papers they want to promote Sanskrit, Jyotish and Vedic mathematics. Sanskrit should be taught as an optional paper at the secondary stage like Greek and Latin which are no longer compulsory in England. The importance of history and various science subjects cannot be ignored. Science should not mean Vedic mathematics. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the Sanskritist and social reformer Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar argued for the introduction of modern mathematics in place of the Sanskrit book on mathematics called Lilavati. He also recommended the study of history and philosophy for students of Sanskrit College, Calcutta. The present authorities are bent upon reversing the whole process.

Because of their blind faith the RSS agenda on education stresses nationalisation, Indianisation and spiritualisation. This will mean that so far education in independent India has not been national and Indian. Really they think of chauvinistic Indianism and nationalism, which has no place for rationalism. They consider spiritualization to be an important element of Indian life like some western scholars. But why don't they practice it? The Indian tradition reserves the second and third stages in life for cultivating spiritualism. Why the Hindutava ministers who are above fifty do not renounce the world and why they hanker after power?

All this raises the problems of fighting communalist attack on education. Although we have made considerable progress in education, we have not been able to get rid of many superstitious beliefs, which influence our decisions and actions. These beliefs pave the way for the spread of chauvinism. Therefore our teachers and students need a rational and objective approach to various subjects that are taught. In the states ruled by communalist party's communal colour has been given to not only history textbooks but also to other subjects taught at the school stage. Secularists should examine such books from UP, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh and ensure those distortions denigrating minorities and women are removed from textbooks.

It is not easy to write any school textbook on history or other subjects in humanities and social sciences. Indian textbook writers should always bear in mind the basic value

enshrined in our constitution while communicating their ideas to school students. They should not ignore the consensus achieved on important issues by scholars in the field but not on minor details. Although accepted views should be placed before members of a younger age group, some original ideas, which hold potentialities for discussion and elaboration at the university stage should not be held back from them.

## Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom

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Recently, a section among the Sikhs has been led to believe that the account in the NCERT's textbook, *Medieval India*, meant for class XI has cast serious aspersions on the patriotism of Guru Tegh Bahadur and has presented facts in a distorted manner. Fuel has been added to the fire by the press statement (September 29) of the NCERT Director, Dr. J. S. Rajput, who not only talks of some "adverse and derogatory" remarks in the book about Guru Tegh Bahadur, but goes on to say "this is what was being passed off as history by some self-styled secularists". He even accuses such historians of working hand-in-glove with destabilising forces. If some historians, or for that matter, any individual acts in collusion with destabilising forces, the Union Home Minister has all the power and authority to act against them. It is hardly upto the NCERT Director to make such allegations, thereby creating unnecessary tension, and importing politics into what was an historical debate.

For the historians, difficulties have been created because the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur in Delhi in 1675 is not mentioned in any of the contemporary Persian sources. Nor are there any Sikh contemporary accounts, those written towards the end of the 18th century depending on "the testimony of trustworthy Sikhs". They are, therefore, often conflicting. The earliest account of the events leading to the Guru's execution is in *Siyar-ul-Mutakharrim* by Ghulam Husain Taba-Tabai in 1780, more than 100 years afterwards. Ghulam Husain states that "Tegh Bahadur, the eighth successor of (Guru) Nanak became a man of authority with a large number of followers. (In fact) several thousand persons used to accompany him as he moved from place to place. His contemporary Hafiz Adam, a faqir belonging to the group of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi's followers, had also come to have a large number of murids and followers. Both these men (Guru Tegh Bahadur and Hafiz Adam) used to move about in the Punjab, adopting a habit of coercion and extortion. Tegh Bahadur used to collect money from Hindus and Hafiz Adam from Muslims. The royal waqia navis (news reporter-cum-intelligence agent) wrote to the Emperor Alamgir... of (their) manner of activity, added that if their authority increased they could become even refractory".

In the book I have called this the "official account" or the official justification because for an historian, official accounts are generally full of evasion and distortion to justify official action. As it was, Hafiz Adam had died much earlier. Also these events have been placed at Lahore. But there is no reason to reject the Sikh tradition that the Guru was imprisoned and executed at Delhi.

Ghulam Husain's account of "disturbances" created by Guru Tegh Bahadur in the Punjab is supported by Sohan Lal in his *Umdat ut Tawarikh*, one of the most respected histories of the Sikhs, coming up to the time of Ranjit Singh. After reciting the manner of Guru

Tegh Bahadur's accession to the gaddi, he says: "With the passage of time, thousands of soldiers and horsemen used to be with him and camels and goods of all kinds remained at his disposal. Further more, those who were refractory towards the amirs, the zamindars, the ijaraddars, the diwans and the officials in general used to take refuge with Guru Tegh Bahadur. Regardless of the numbers present with the Guru, they were all fed by him. Pain inevitably follows comfort. Some degraded persons reported to Emperor Alamgir that Guru Tegh Bahadur was staying in the country (Doab) of Malwa (in Punjab) with thousands of soldiers and horsemen, whosoever was refractory towards the officials took refuge with him. They warned the Emperor that if no notice of the Guru was taken it would be an incitement to insurrection; and that if he was allowed to continue his activities for a long time, it would be extremely difficult to deal with him (later)."

On this basis, I concluded and wrote in the NCERT textbook as follows: "Sikhism had spread to many Jat (agriculturists) and artisans, including some from the low castes who were attracted by its simple, egalitarian approach and the prestige of the Guru. Thus, the Guru, while being a religious leader, had also begun to be a rallying point for all those fighting against injustice and oppression". Thus the Guru is absolved of the charge of coercion and extortion, and portrayed as a defender of the people. In the process, there must have been clashes with local officials which they denounced as marks of insurrection.

These is another passage in the NCERT text book regarding the Guru's execution to which objection has been taken. It reads as follows: "According to Sikh tradition, the execution was due to the intrigues of some members of the family who disputed his succession and by others who had joined them."

In this context, it is very well known that right from the death of Guru Nanak there were disputes regarding succession which sometimes led to splits, such as the Udasis and to mutual wranglings, sometimes even leading to violence. Thus, the succession of Guru Tegh Bahadur to the gaddi was disputed by Ram Das, elder son of Guru Har Rai, and by many Sodhis.

We are told that this led Guru Tegh Bahadur moving to Delhi. But here he came face to face with the hostility of Ram Rai, elder brother of Guru Har Kishan, who had been at the Mughal court shortly after Aurangzeb's accession to the throne, and had his own claim to the gaddi. Ghulam Muhiuddin Bute Shah in his *Tarikh- i-Punjab*, says that the Guru went on a pilgrimage, and then founded Makhawal. He was summoned to Delhi at the instance of Ram Rai. "Ram Rai represented to the Emperor that Guru Tegh Bahadur was very proud of his spiritual greatness and that he would not realise his fault unless he was punished. Ram Rai also suggested that Guru Tegh Bahadur be asked to appear before the Emperor to work a miracle, if he failed, he could be put to death."

Further details of the story dealing with the Guru's execution hardly concern us. In some other accounts, Ram Rai is not implicated in the attempt to get the Guru murdered. They charge some elements at the court and some amirs who kept demanding that the Guru perform a miracle to prove his spiritual powers. This also appears doubtful because Aurangzeb did not believe in mysticism or miracles.

Regarding the religious aspect which is important but needs a fuller discussion, it has been held in the book that the Guru was also giving expression to the discontent and disaffection of the Hindus of the region for Aurangzeb's breaking even some temples of long standing. The book concludes by saying that "Aurangzeb's action was unjustified from any point of view and betrayed a narrow approach," and that "the Guru gave up his life in defence of cherished principles".

Thus, there seems no occasion for creating and nursing the feeling that in the textbook the Guru has been maligned or that an attempt made to hurt Sikh sentiments. On the other hand, the book places Guru Tegh Bahadur on a very high pedestal. Despite this, if the NCERT Director has a different agenda of replacing the present secular-oriented history textbooks by a different set of books reflecting the current Hindutva ideology that is a completely different matter.

( The Hindu, 16 October 2001)

## NCERT, 'National Curriculum' and 'Destruction of History'

Arjun Dev

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NCERT

Textbooks have been and continue to be the main, and often the sole, educational material for most school students and, unfortunately, also for a very large body of teachers in schools. Almost every committee and commission on education set up by the Government of India, and in some states, since independence expressed its concern over the 'proliferation of low quality, substandard and badly produced' textbooks the writing of which, as the Education Commission put it, 'was generally undertaken by persons whose abilities are far from equal to the task'.

NCERT in this context has played a crucial role since its very inception, particularly in the modernization of subject curricula and the contents of textbooks. NCERT's history textbooks, most of them written by some of the leading historians in the country, have been notable for being the first set of school textbooks brought out in the country which combated communal distortions in the teaching of Indian history. They are still among the best available history books for the general reader. NCERT's textbooks in other subjects also can be said to reflect a generally consistent secular orientation.

The existing curriculum prepared by NCERT and adopted by CBSE and adopted / adapted in most parts of the country includes the study of history as one of the three or four courses which together form the social science course up to the end of the secondary stage. [The other social science subjects generally included are geography and civics and, at the secondary stage also economics.] NCERT's history syllabus recommends introducing the child to a systematic study, appropriate to the school stage, of Indian history and of human civilization from the earliest to the modern times – the course for the upper primary stage (classes VI- VIII) dealing with the history of India along with a general perspective of world civilization and the course for the secondary stage (classes IX- X) dealing with the history of human civilization, including historical development of India as a part of world historical development.

The existing history syllabus also refers to the need to be aware of the misuses of history in the past, and in the Indian context, to the pernicious use of history in promoting obscurantism, communalism and regional, linguistic and cultural chauvinism.

The New NCF (National Curriculum Framework) abolishes, up to the secondary stage, the teaching of social science subjects which would be replaced by a course comprising themes/issues "drawn from geography, history, civics, economics and sociology in a balanced manner and suitably graded".

The abolition of the study of history as a separate subject with a view to doing away with compartmentalization, moving from 'subjects to themes' and having 'one composite book' to replace separate history, geography, civics and economics books has earned for Dr. Rajput the title of the 'Great Integrator' (India Today, 25 June 2001) Dr. Ashok Ganguly, the present Chairman of CBSE, has done even better. According to him, "why tell the child which part of the course belongs to history and which part to geography? Let him or he decide".

What has been stated in general terms in the New NCF has been made somewhat more specific by Dr. J.S.Rajput, NCERT's Director. For sometime now, he has made the critique of NCERT's history textbooks – not to call it denigration through misrepresentation and distortion – the main focus of his academic and journalistic talents. Two of his newspaper articles (The Times of India, 25 May 2001 and The Hindu, 12 June 2001) are particularly notable.

The only specific criticism he makes of the present books is the following: "The present textbooks give only accounts of the rise and fall of empires and the idiosyncrasies of monarchs. There are some passing references at best to the civilisational aspect, but the treatment doesn't contribute to the instilling of youthful confidence in the nation. Rather, it (sic) advocates self-flagellation". Dr. Rajput's view that these books "give only accounts of rise and fall of empires and the idiosyncrasies of monarchs" shows that he is completely unfamiliar with what these books contain and, not being familiar with them himself, has relied on false misrepresentations that his informants may have made to him.

The charge that there "are some passing reference at best to the civilisational aspect" in these books are similarly based on an ignorance, one suspects deliberate ignorance, of what they contain. None of them lays any emphasis on dynastic history, not to speak of biographical details of rulers the mention of "idiosyncrasies of monarchs" in these books being an invention of the author of the article or of his informants. The emphasis in all these books is on the study of factors and forces and of institutions, of society, economy and polity and of developments in various fields of cultural life, including religion, languages and literature, art and architecture and science and technology. As for the charge these books advocating 'self-flagellation', we would like not to go into explaining the various meaning of the phrase because, clearly, the user of the phrase doesn't really mean what the phrase used by him means. What he perhaps really means is that these books present a critical view of the past, that they don't glorify the ancient past and do not present it as the ideal that we, as a nation, must try to bring back. And instilling 'youthful confidence in the nation', he thinks is the function of the study of the past, of the study of history. In this scheme of things, 'youthful confidence in the nation' does not come from an awareness and a determination among the people who constitute the nation that they alone are capable of shaping their own destiny and the destiny of their nation. For this they are required to need a glorious past, even of it is an invented one, not history which merely seeks to promote an understanding of what happened and why. In Dr. Rajput's view, the sole useful purpose of history is to instill 'youthful confidence in the nation'. If it doesn't do it, then it is, at best, only 'a boring and an avoidable pressure on the young mind' when it is not 'self- flagellatory'.

Apparently, what history books should include or not include is now decided by NCERT's Director who in his role as Censor would also decide what students cannot learn until they attain the age of 25. A consultant, according to the Minister of HRD, has been appointed to prepare the history syllabuses for all stages of school education and the first set of curricular materials (textbooks). Dr. Rajput has, however, stated that the said consultant has been appointed to review the history textbooks of NCERT. This consultant who had discovered a Soviet-centered approach in some history textbooks of NCERT is a regular columnist of the *Organiser*. He has recently informed the readers of *Organiser* that the killing of Jews was the work of Christianity, not Christians. That he has been found suitable for preparing history syllabuses and textbooks or reviewing history textbooks is clearly not due to any credentials as a historian but his proximity, ideological and organizational, to the Sangh Parivar. The other historical advisers of the present set-up in NCERT include the octogenarian historian who recently became chairman of ICHR for a few days, a college teacher who was/ is a member of ICSSR and headed the hard core RSS members of that institution, and the former director of a museum who has been the chief archaeologist of the Sangh Parivar.

It is almost nine months since NCERT's New NCF was released. On 21 July 2001, *The Hindu* quoted NCERT Director saying that the new syllabuses were still being finalized but the new textbooks would be available in March 2002 even though he was still looking for authors with "adequate experience, who have a perception and vision". India is not lacking in historians who have adequate experience of writing books as well as perception of what constitutes history but few of them are likely to have the 'vision' which NCERT's Director would expect them to have. It may be relevant in this context to recall the opening statements in Amartya Sen's inaugural address to the Calcutta (2001) session of the Indian History Congress. Referring to Henry Ford's remark that "History is more or less bunk", he said that "Henry Ford would have been right to think, if that is what he meant, that history could easily become 'bunk', through motivated manipulation". He further said, "This is especially so if the writing of history is maneuvered to suit a slanted agenda in contemporary politics. There are organized attempts in our country, at this time, to do just that, with arbitrary augmentation of a narrowly sectarian view of India's past, along with undermining its magnificently multi-religious and heterodox history." He also referred, among other distortions, to "a systematic confounding... of mythology with history". What is being attempted through NCERT's New NCF under the direction of NCERT's Director is to produce precisely 'bunk' and call it history. There are few takers of the New NCF in the country and it is likely that the takers of the 'bunk' produced by NCERT in the name of history would be even fewer.

## Does Indian history need to be rewritten?

Sumit Sarkar  
Professor of History  
Delhi University

*No. BJP's doctoring of history, so reminiscent of totalitarian states, is an attempt to turn the clock back and, if possible, do away with history altogether*

The Prime Minister has justified the deletion of ten passages from NCERT history textbooks (to be followed soon by their replacement and then the abolition of history as a separate subject till Class X) on the ground that these books are “one-sided”. How does he know? And how does being Prime Minister give him the authority to issue such a fatwa? It is nobody’s contention that the NCERT books are perfect, but any revision must be based on at least a minimum level of competence in the subject. It is significant that the names of those writing the new textbooks are being kept strictly secret.

A second justification, offered by BJP spokesmen like V.K. Malhotra, is even more dangerous. The books are not factually inaccurate, but they are unsuitable because they hurt the “sentiments” of children of sundry communities and religions. Once again, who decides, when and whose sentiments?

The passage in Satish Chandra’s book about the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur, which no one had objected to even at the height of the Khalistani movement, suddenly comes under attack, and sadly, first of all from the Delhi Congress — just on the eve of Punjab elections. And what if “sentiments” are mutually opposed? References to the oppressive aspects of the varna system and, no doubt soon, any criticism whatsoever of the ancient Brahmanical society, are to be deleted. Dalits, subordinated castes, women, have obviously no “sentiments” worth bothering about.

Even more importantly, is it the function of history to ignore all “unpleasant” facts, and become a collection of moral fables or happy tales, its contents dictated by “religious” and/or “community” leaders chosen by the Sangh Parivar for its political games? Surely, education is worthwhile only if it stimulates rational thinking and questioning and much of inherited common-sense necessarily comes under scrutiny: as when children learn that, contrary to the evidence of their eyes, the earth moves round the sun. Maybe, the scientific explanation for eclipses should be banned, for it might hurt the belief that they are caused by Rahu?

But it is dangerous to be sarcastic about such things, for we have a minister who might think this to be a good idea...

“History” of a particular kind is vital for the Sangh Parivar, to consolidate its claim to be the sole spokesman of the “Hindus” who have to be convinced that their interests and emotions are and have always been unitary and inevitably opposed to those of Muslims

or Christians, regardless of differences of caste, gender class, immense regional variations. There had once been a certain fit between such assumptions and the habit, derived in part from the British, of slicing up Indian history into “Hindu” and “Muslim” periods, treating religious communities as unchanging blocs and defining eras in terms of the religion of rulers. All this changed as history-writing came of age and progressed beyond the deeds of kings and great or evil men. The BJP’s doctoring of history, so reminiscent of totalitarian states, is an attempt to turn the clock back and, if possible, do away with history altogether.

( Time of India, 2 December 2001)

## **Section – 3: What other Commentators say**

### **Talibanising our Education**

Vir Sanghvi  
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Hindustan Times

Here's something I bet you did not know: in Talibanised Afghanistan, you might lose your life for carrying a paper bag. Yes, you read that right. Under Taliban law, it is an offence to be found in possession of a paper bag.

The reasoning behind this law — introduced in 1997 shortly after Mullah Omar and his bunch of fanatical barbarians took over the country with a little help from the ISI — is complex but instructive.

According to the Taliban, all the wisdom of the ages is contained in the Koran. Thus, there can be no ideas other than those contained in the Koran. Therefore, there can be no other books. After all, what's left to say? It is all in the Koran anyway.

And naturally, there can't be any history that's not included in the Koran. Was there an Afghanistan long before Islam was founded? Perish the thought! Such a thing is impossible. So, all remnants of Afghanistan's flourishing pre-Islamic culture must be hunted down and destroyed. If such relics include the Bamiyan Buddhas, that still doesn't matter. The Buddhas are un-Islamic and must be blown up.

What, you may ask, does all this have to do with paper bags? Well, it's quite simple — especially if you are Mullah Omar. What are paper bags made of? Paper, right? And where can anybody in Afghanistan find paper? Not in books, certainly — those are already banned.

So, decided Mullah Omar, anybody who makes a paper bag must make it by tearing pages out of a Koran. After all, that's the only book that is still published in Afghanistan. Therefore, anybody who uses a paper bag is guilty of defacing the Koran.

It's no good saying: "But surely if the bag is made from plain brown paper, it can't have come from the Koran?" As far as the Taliban are concerned, that doesn't matter. Even if you haven't already defaced the Koran, the fact that you use paper bags means that you are a potential defacer of the Koran.

And that's as bad as having actually torn out a page from the Holy Book. Far better to catch you before you actually deface the Koran: we all know that prevention is better than cure. As for the punishment, well that's obvious, isn't it? If you live in a society that venerates the Koran to this extent and you dare to deface it, then do you really deserve to live?

So if you happen to be near Kandahar and find a paper bag in your luggage, get rid of it quickly.

Your life may depend on it.

As bizarre as the edict about paper bags sounds, what is truly frightening is the reasoning that precedes it. A civilised society is one that encourages dissent, that allows ideas to flower, that encourages the publication of books and that takes pride in its history.

Societies such as the Taliban's are not just barbaric, they are also deeply insecure. Somewhere, deep in their hearts they know that there is more to the world than the contents of the Koran (just as the Bible or the Gita don't contain all of the world's wisdom either). But because their edifice is constructed on a single, flimsy foundation, they will not run the risk of being threatened by other views and other ideas. Hence the censorship, the re-writing of history, the destruction of the pre-Islamic Buddhas and savage repression of all those who might think otherwise.

Even non-totalitarian societies can display frightening levels of insecurity. In Pakistan, the history books begin with the medieval period and thousands of years of Hindu culture are usually dismissed in a single chapter. Worse still, small children are taught to hate while they are still at school. Texts portray Hindus as sly and conniving and Sikhs are synonymous with villains.

JN 'Mani' Dixit, our former Foreign Secretary, remembers despairing for the future of Indo-Pak relations when he headed our mission in Islamabad. The extent of the indoctrination, he says, was driven home to him when he went for dinner to the house of a well-placed Pakistani. The man's small daughter asked her father who his guest was.

"Uncle is from India," the father said.

At this, the little girl promptly began dancing around Mani and singing, "Hindu kutta, Hindu kutta," much to the embarrassment of the grown-ups in the room.

It was not, Mani says, that she had anything against him personally or that her father had been less than hospitable. It was just the way she had been taught in school: all Indians were Hindus and all Hindus were kuttas.

What kind of country poisons the minds of its children? What kind of adult is so motivated by bigotry and hate that he rewrites the history that school kids read? What kind of educational system is so perverted that it teaches lies to young children?

All these thoughts came back to me last week as I followed our own home-grown controversy about the rewriting of history text books.

Over the last three years, the media have pointed out literally dozens of cases where old textbooks have been changed or new textbooks have been prescribed. In every case, the unifying factor is this: Ayodhya is portrayed as a glorious struggle, the vandalism is played down (you can't condemn the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas and support the destruction of the Babri Masjid) and Muslims are slandered.

Each time, the government has come up with some excuses along the lines of: “it’s a state government text book, nothing to do with the Centre” or “the book is prescribed by a private body so we can’t do anything”.

But these excuses are not available to the government in the latest controversy. On October 23, the CBSE wrote to schools asking them to delete sections from several history text books which had been prescribed for over two decades. These books are authored by such well-known historians as Romila Thapar and Satish Chandra so it is hard to see what the CBSE finds objectionable after 20 years.

Only when you read the circular do you recognise the agenda.

Thapar’s book is fine but the CBSE wants 50 words which suggest that Vedic Aryans ate beef to be deleted. A similar deletion is required in another book by Ram Sharan Sharma. Other deletions relate to the difficulties in locating the historical Ram and Krishna, the existence of the 23 Jain Tirthankaras who preceded Mahavir and the exploitation of the lower castes under the caste system.

Cynics say that, having spent three years rewriting text books to damage Muslims, the BJP government is now trying to use history to perpetuate an essentially bogus view of Hinduism in which Ram and Krishna existed in a golden age, in which Vedic Aryans followed 21st century dietary laws and the caste system was a wonderful thing.

If this is so — and the evidence is compelling — then it demeans us all as Indians. Hinduism is not just the world’s oldest religion, it is also one of the greatest. It does not need assorted chaddiwallahs and their lackeys in the NCERT and CBSE to teach lies to our children to perpetuate some caricature of a Hindu golden age right out of Ramanand Sagar’s Ramayana.

The greatness of Hinduism lies in its flexibility. It absorbed the best of Jainism and Buddhism and survived centuries of non-Hindu rule because it had no clergy, no holy book, just a sense of communion between man and God. Those who Talibanise the religion and believe it is necessary to deny history, to suppress the truth and to invent falsehoods do even more harm to Hinduism than Mullah Omar has done to Islam.

Characteristic of the spirit of this chaddiwallah Talibanisation are the arguments being offered to justify this disgraceful rewriting of history and suppression of the truth. In yesterday’s HT, JS Rajput, the Director of the NCERT, was quoted as saying that ‘objectionable matter’ should not be taught to ‘young minds’. Many people had complained to the NCERT, he said, that “the books contained information that hurt their sentiments”.

So this, ultimately, is the NCERT’S view of history. Never mind the truth; forget about what really happened. Stick to things that your masters don’t find objectionable. If somebody’s sentiments are hurt, then rewrite history so that it seems happy and cheerful.

Apply the same principles to US history and you’d have to delete all mentions of slavery (offends white people by reminding them of their cruelty). Apply these principles to French history and you’d have to pull out the chapter of the Reign of Terror (detracts

from the glorious French Revolution). In European history, you'd have to scratch out references to the Inquisition (hurts sentiments of Christians).

Few people know what NCERT stands for, but at this rate I doubt if the E stands for Education; while T probably stands for Talibanisation.

As for the behaviour of this government, what can one say? The difference between India and Pakistan is that we are an open society, not a closed, insecure country. The Pakistanis may need to deny that there ever was a Hindu India to justify the shaky existence of their troubled country; but surely, India is far too secure to poison the minds of our children?

In a sense, this government has gone one step further than Mullah Omar. He banned paper bags because they would be made from books; our government is creating history books that are only good for making paper bags.

My fear is that if we don't act now, and stop them from telling lies to our kids, it will be too late. We may not Talibanise our education but we will certainly Pakistanise it. I'm glad that the opposition has taken up the issue and I hope it will return to the attack when Parliament re-opens on Monday. Somebody must be held accountable; somebody's head must roll.

We owe that much to our children.  
( Hindustan Times, 25 November 2001 )

## Udder complexity

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The Sangh Parivar remained largely in the shadows during the struggle to free India from British rule. Since independence it has sought to overcome that ignominy through one stratagem or the other. Time and again it has taken to the streets, or used state power, to demand a total ban on cow slaughter, stop religious conversions, revise history text-books to ensure that they upheld 'Indian' culture and, by the same token, denigrated the depredations caused by various 'invaders', emphasised, with just a hint of compulsion, the need to study Sanskrit, astrology, Vedic mathematics, yoga, ayurveda and other 'Indian' subjects and, when shove came to push, gone about intimidating the minorities and vandalising their places of worship.

Dr Murli Manohar Joshi's call for a "second war for the country's cultural freedom", is thus part and parcel of the Parivar's ideological agenda. Its leading lights make no bones about the identity of those from whom 'liberation' is sought: the children of Macaulay, the disciples of Marx and the alumni of madrassas. These terms, as even a political novice will recognise, are synonyms for western educated liberal or leftist Indians, Christians and Muslims. Dig just a little deeper and you find that the synonyms in fact cover large swathes of the country's population which do not subscribe to the Parivar's definition of India's culture and of Indian nationhood: Dalits and tribals who have been at the receiving end of the varna system, women, who continue to suffer gender discrimination, and indeed millions and millions of Indians whose primary concerns focus on bread-and-butter issues.

However, the cultural war that the Sangh Parivar is hell bent on waging — and, in the process, jeopardising the very foundations of the Republic — needs a riposte which cannot be in the nature of name-calling. To dub Dr Joshi's offensive as 'fascist' may serve a polemical purpose but that is not effective enough. Indeed, it can be even misleading for it is entirely possible to point to the double-speak of the leftist ideologues. It is their narrow vision, dogmatism, intolerance and indulgence towards reactionary beliefs and practices of non-Hindu communities that have allowed the likes of Dr Joshi to pursue his agenda with increased vigour. What is required now is to get away from leftist doublespeak and, at the same time, engage in a painstaking exposure of the contradictions, inconsistencies and the plain baloney in the Parivar's agenda.

The good doctor needs to be reminded, for instance, that as a Hindu, if nothing else, his eagerness to instil in Indian children, and in the Indian citizenry at large, 'pride' in the country's culture is the very antithesis of the Vedantic spirit. When the Gita discourages such 'pride' even in relation to near and dear ones, how can it be justified in relation to such arbitrary and ambivalent constructs as 'culture' or 'nation'?

At a more mundane level too Dr Joshi's programme is problematic. In his quest to spread harmony through education and culture, he simply wants to excise all references that are likely to "hurt the sentiments" of this or that section of the citizenry. This benchmark is bizarre for no other reason than that there is simply no way to sweep under the carpet the often bitter differences not only between religions but between sects in a religious community, not to speak of differences in secular areas of public life. To ensure that no one casts a slur on a community is one thing. To ignore the fact that individuals have different value systems — and that they are entitled to this provided no offence is caused to another — is something altogether different.

For several years now Red Indians, Blacks and women, not to speak of homosexuals, have bitterly complained about the history that is taught in schools and colleges since it reflects the concerns and interests of WASPS. The debate is far from conclusive though progressive institutions now teach history from various points of view. What is wrong with this approach? It is the Parivar's intent that is wrong. Take the controversy over whether or not a child should be told that Indians consumed beef in ancient times — a fact that is mentioned in the shastras and endorsed by archaeological evidence. It would not have arisen at all, and indeed would have been of no consequence, if the Parivar had not aggressively projected the cow as a prime symbol of Indian 'culture'. Dr Joshi's "war for the country's cultural freedom" could have been dismissed as a vaudeville show had he not enjoyed the power to cause turmoil in India's soul. Spare us, Joshiji, this udder complexity.

( Times of India, 16 December 2001 )

## **Textbooks and communalism**

Rajeev Dhavan  
Legal Expert

History has always been written and re-written. But by whom? A Dutch historian, Peter Gieyl, reflecting on various versions of the Napoleonic legend rightly called history "an argument without end". It is in that sense that Croce declared that "all history is contemporary history". But, history is a discourse. Official history by Government fiat is not history but propaganda. History by Government propaganda is the death of learning - destructive of the discourse of history and education itself.

The present controversy of the 'Talibanisation' of textbook history stems from the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) edict of October 25, 2001, to delete certain passages from wellknown prescribed textbooks. Students were warned that examiners "will not evaluate the students' understanding of the (excised) portions". The National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) obliged by deleting those passages not to the liking of the Sangh Parivar. The Government's support - indeed, directive - for these gross acts of censorship and propaganda is self-evident. On November 24, the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, said he was prepared for a debate on this. History has been re-written at the bidding of the Government. Students who deviate from knowledge of such history have been threatened with failure.

Banning and censorship are increasingly becoming a pernicious part of civil and political governance. The attacks on Husain's paintings, and Deepa Mehta's films, the civil injunction on Professor Jha's book on "beef eating in Ancient India", the illegal banning of Sahmat's posters, the Shiv Sena's threatened censorship of ideas and many other incidents reinforce an aggressive climate of banning thoughts and ideas not to the liking of fundamentalists. It is true that shades of Muslim fundamentalism led to India's ban on Salman Rushdie's "Satanic Verses" - to be followed by disastrous global consequences. But, the dominant fundamentalism that menacingly threatens India today is an aggressive Hindu fundamentalism which is pugnacious in its tone and posture; and wholly uncompromising in according second class status to all other faiths and beliefs. Politically aligned to the concept of a newly-invented 'Hindu' India, Hindu fundamentalism physically and ideologically threatens those that oppose it or fail to accept its dominance.

The CBSE and the NCERT concentrated on the work of certain secular historians and commanded certain specific deletions on the eating of beef in ancient India, archaeological evidence rather than Puranic and other texts to historicise the Lord Ram and Lord Krishna legends, the role of brahmanical indoctrination to sustain the caste system, facts relating to plunder by Jat rulers, new facts or assertions relating to the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur and so on. It has never been anyone's case that the textbooks are threats to public order requiring immediate action by the Government under the banning provisions of the criminal codes. In any case, fundamentalists invariably create an atmosphere of threats and violence to sustain their banning and censorship

demands even where no controversy exists. Thus, it is clear that the actions of the Government, the CBSE and the NCERT constitute a politically-sponsored censorship of books and ideas.

The state's entry into the domain of textbooks can be traced to the landmark judgment of the Supreme Court in the Punjab Textbook case (1995) to the effect that the `executive' power of the state extended to selecting and prescribing textbooks for schools recognised by it even without the authority of an enacted law in preference to the books of private publishers. In the MP Textbook case (1974), Justice Bhagwati's insightful judgment warns against arbitrary and capricious actions by the Government. In our present case, there is a bigger failure. Two other seemingly autonomous bodies have decided to succumb to fundamentalist pressures. The CBSE is an examining body which cannot play to political tunes. Its textbooks have stood the test of time. For the CBSE to abjure its own books under Sangh Parivar pressure is wrong. It is even despicable for a Board which should be promoting the culture of critically examining ideas to send a menacing message to young students on pain of failure that they should not dare question the fundamentalist message of the textbooks. The NCERT has been equally pliant.

In the NCERT case (1992), the Supreme Court respected the autonomy of the NCERT by refusing to identify it with the state on the assumption that the Government's role was simply confined to overseeing the proper utilisation of funding grants. Today, the NCERT is unashamedly propagating the Government's and the Sangh Parivar's fundamentalism. The object of this entire exercise is not just electoral gains but a deeper quest to establish a Hindu hegemony to subordinate all other faiths, beliefs and ideas. This sets up an awesome nexus between education politics and religion which is contrary to the intrinsic secularism which holds a fragile India together. It is not for the NCERT to play politics. Concerned with academic excellence, it cannot act as censor or edit texts because the Sangh Parivar and its kindred spirits are upset. If the NCERT can be held to political and communal ransom, it does not deserve to exist or occupy the pivotal position by the Indian education system.

This is not a matter of parliamentary banter. Valuable parliamentary time was wasted in considering whether the term `Talibanisation' was unparliamentary. Even though used as a political catch phrase, the term `Talibanisation' cannot be said to be inappropriate. The Government supported censorship by the CBSE and, the NCERT is a form of `Talibanisation' - both in terms of encouraging closed minds and the ferocity with which the new `learning' is threatened to be inflicted on young examinees. It is to the credit of the Congress(I) Government (1991-96) that it refused to implement even the recommendations of a committee of historians to review, ban or censor history books though it was under pressure to do so. There is a discipline about textbooks. Stray passages cannot be extracted for political scrutiny and censorship. No self-respecting academic will ever write textbooks if his or her work is excised preemptorily for political reasons and without any consultation.

In Unnikrishnan's case (1993), the Supreme Court declared education to the age of 14 to be compulsorily provided. For the vast majority of students, the provider of such education will be the state through Government schools. The NCERT's job is to assist in this task with examinations to be conducted by objective agencies such as the CBSE. The

pending 93rd Constitution Amendment Bill seeks to provide 'education for all'. This programme cannot be hijacked by the Government and political parties for disbursing communally-slanted education.

So far, India's textbook system through the CBSE and the NCERT has worked well precisely because it has striven for excellence to get the best known authors (and not any politically-selected rabble) to independently write good books. The 'Talibanisation' of textbooks put this system under threat. Till now, no one thought NCERT books were not good books or argued that texts cannot be updated or changed. But this cannot happen for political or fundamentalist reasons. India's Ministries of Education and related institutions were not created to be instruments of propaganda. If this continues, a new system insulated from political interference would have to be devised immune from communalisation and politicisation. But any new system must be carefully crafted so that the solution does not spread the disease. No doubt in the market place of ideas, each issue must be openly and strongly discussed - fairly and fiercely. But with the advent of fundamentalism, India is losing its capacity for such discussions. Manipulating textbooks for children is unacceptable. India has suffered enough communalism. Leave textbooks alone.

( The Hindu, 30 November 2001 )

## Consensus be damned

Anil Bordia

Former Education Secretary, Government of India,  
who was associated with the 1986 Education Policy and its revision in 1992.

As an observer of educational developments, I have noticed with deep concern the issue of the new 'National Curriculum Framework' for school education. I am concerned because of the non-secular nature of this curriculum. Also, because it makes serious departures from education policy and a due process of consultation has not taken place.

Secularism is an indispensable part of the basic structure of India's Constitution. Not only is it postulated in the preamble, the light of this principle radiates in several provisions of the Constitution. As for the National Policy on Education (NPE), formulated in 1986 and revised in 1992, it states that the national system of education will be based on a national curriculum framework, which contains a common core along with other components that are flexible. The common core is to be designed to promote values, which include India's common cultural heritage and secularism. The policy makes an unequivocal statement: "All educational programmes will be carried on in strict conformity with secular values."

While referring to common core components, the new curriculum framework begins by affirming the values identified in NPE, including India's common cultural heritage and secularism. Having thus observed the *formality* of adherence to NPE, the framework shows its real colour.

A medley of confusion is constructed to introduce numerous value-related issues. Recommendations of the Justice J.S. Verma Committee on Fundamental Duties of Citizens, and the Parliamentary Committee on Value-based Education, chaired by S.B. Chavan, are invoked to make fundamental duties a part of the core curriculum and to bring in the values of truth, righteous conduct, peace, love and non-violence.

Numerous phrases which could lend themselves to non-secular interpretation are brought in, such as the best Indian tradition, Indian wisdom, tradition rooted in Indian ethos, thinking rooted in Indian tradition, spiritual quotient, etc.

One may ask, if fundamental duties are to form part of the core curriculum, why not the values written in the preamble? One of the fundamental duties is "value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture", to which a reference is also made in NPE. However, common cultural heritage and secularism do not figure either in the main thrust areas (there are 13 of them) of school education or the 18 skills and values which the curriculum is "to help generate and promote among the learners".

It is obvious that after making token reference to secularism and common cultural heritage, these are effectively excluded from the framework of curriculum.

It is also interesting that the NCERT gave no indication in the draft curriculum framework (circulated for discussion in January 2000) that it was planning to incorporate a strong section on education about religions. In the section on 'Education for Value

Development’ the draft only refers to NPE ’86 — values and fundamental duties. That document adds one sentence in another section to the effect that objective and sympathetic study of all major religions of India should be provided for.

The final version of the framework calls for integration of education about religions with all subjects of study and in all co-scholastic areas. Thus, dharmanirpekshata (secularism) is replaced by panthanirpekshata (non-discrimination on the ground of religion). This is violative of NPE and, arguably, also of the Constitution.

This issue was debated when the 1968 and 1986 policies were being formulated. A section of opinion was in favour of the use of education about religions to inculcate the spirit of equal respect for all religions (sarva dharma samabhav) and to make that the source of value education. This proposition was not accepted because it was considered contrary to secularism. It was recalled that already school prayers tended to remain confined to Hindu forms and while birthdays of Hindu gods are celebrated, rarely is this consideration shown to the Prophet of Islam or Jesus Christ.

It was feared that education about religions would become an instruction about Hinduism. Rather than promoting national integration, it could be divisive and have a deleterious affect on the participation of non-Hindu children.

There are several other areas where major departures have been made from NPE and there are equally important areas which have got omitted — both these categories lack conformity with the accepted policy.

Take the ‘three-language formula’. The 1986 policy reiterates the provision of the 1968 policy and states that, in addition to Hindi and English, in the Hindi-speaking states, a modern Indian language, “preferably one of the southern languages”, should be taught after the primary stage. The new curriculum, while technically reiterating the three-language formula, omits to mention about the preference to southern languages.

An interesting case is of Sanskrit. Here, too, the 1986 policy reiterates the provision of the 1968 policy which recognises the unique contribution of Sanskrit to the cultural unity of the country and suggests that facilities for its teaching should be offered on a more liberal scale. The ‘discussion document’ of January 2000 only raises a one-line question: “Could the classical languages be taught as part of a composite course with mother tongue/regional languages originating from them?” The final version provides a full page on Sanskrit.

It asserts that Sanskrit is to be treated as a living phenomenon and is to be introduced as a part of the study of Hindi and regional languages, insisting that “the course has to be so planned that the study of Sanskrit may not be ignored”. In practice, this may mean making Sanskrit compulsory for all.

While the new framework refers to globalisation, IT, multiple intelligence, it makes no mention about the education of minorities, Urdu, and the role of education in women’s empowerment. This is disconcerting for persons who view education as a means of national integration and empowerment of women and oppressed sections.

The NPE 1986, as revised in 1992, calls for its review every five years. After he took office as HRD minister, Murli Manohar Joshi had indicated that he was going to revise the education policy. At some stage he seems to have given up that idea. Some of the changes he had in mind seem to have got incorporated in the curriculum framework. Although this framework contains several provisions which are not in conformity with the education policy, it was finalised without observing the due process for its validation.

Education being a part of the concurrent list, NPE laid great emphasis on treating education as a matter of partnership between the Centre and the states. It laid down that the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), the membership of which includes education ministers of all states and Union Territories, must play a vital role in the review of educational developments.

Consensus on education has a long tradition in our country. Recommendations of the commissions on higher education (1949) and secondary education (1953) were considered in CABE. A committee of Parliament deliberated for months on the formulation of the education policy in pursuance of the recommendations of the education commission (1964-66). The policy which emerged in 1986 was considered by Parliament before adoption.

The preparation of the 1986 policy was preceded by wide-ranging consultations. Formal meetings were held with representatives of national political parties and the draft was debated with the education ministers of all states and UTs and in CABE. It was adopted after being endorsed by both Houses of Parliament.

Likewise, the 1992 amendments were processed in a committee with membership of all major parties. These amendments were considered in a conference of education ministers of all states/UTs and were finally adopted by Parliament.

The NCERT had undertaken two earlier exercises to develop curricular guidelines. The Curriculum for the Ten-Year School — A Framework, in 1975, and the National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education: A Framework, in 1988, were both processed in meetings of NCERT and meetings in which education ministers of all states and UTs participated.

A surprising thing about the new national curriculum framework is that it does not seem to have been validated by a process of consensus-building.

What seems to be an attitude of cynical indifference towards consensus-building, CABE has not been constituted since 1994 and obviously, the new framework could not have been processed in a meeting of CABE. The council of NCERT includes ministers of education of all states/UTs. As far as one knows, the new framework was released by the HRD minister even before the meeting of the council.

So who approved this document prior to its release?

( Hindustan Times, 24 September 2001 )

## What is History?

Subir Roy  
Senior Journalist

Times is running out for the BJP and considering the manner in which its popularity is plummeting, it has no option but to fall back on securing at least its core constituency. To do this it has to, at the bare minimum, appear to deliver on some of the central concerns of that constituency. Hence it is that it has initiated a most ham handed attempt to rewrite history by ordering the deletion of portions of school history textbooks and a ban on not just the teaching of those parts but also any discussion on them.

In response to the public outcry by all secular elements at this attempt at Talibanisation of India, it has pointed out that it is merely following in the noble footsteps of the Congress government of Delhi which had similarly sought to remove a reference to a Sikh guru in textbook by Satish Chandra. The historian also figures in the BJP's hit list! For him at least the trauma of being censored must be compensated in part by the vindication of his objectivity. To fall foul of not one but two groups of obscurantists must be a singular honour.

But for the rest of us, the fact that the Congress is also in the same boat, though in a much smaller measure, must only strengthen the resolve that the malaise has to be fought all the more implacably for being so pervasive. Thought control is totally unacceptable, irrespective of who its perpetrator is – be it by dominant communalists or to protect minority communalists. The situation is similar to various Congress state governments being as guilty of violating fundamental rights through their own legislations as the BJP government at the centre is by promulgating the terrorism ordinance. If the present government is somehow stopped in its tracks and indisputable principles upheld, the chances of a successor government attempting the same abominations will be low.

The person who may come out of the latest controversy with the maximum damage to his reputation (Murli Manohar Joshi has little image to lose) is Prime Minister Vajpayee. By standing by his party in this matter he has damaged his acceptability as a leader of a broad-based coalition. That rested on his personal moderation and the clear declaration that the agenda at hand was not the BJP's but the NDA's. Now with the political temperature rising, such niceties are being given the goby and Mr Vajpayee is publicly demonstrating that beneath the veneer of geniality he is the same as the others are, losing with his weakness of resolve what he gains by his lack of malevolence.

To understand what is at stake, it is necessary to realise that this is not the first attempt to rewrite history in the country, nor is such a failing peculiar to the Indian subcontinent. Pakistan's attempt to rewrite the history of its origins is well known in India. Not so well known here is the continuing controversy in Japan also over history textbooks which seek to whitewash its grisly record as a colonial subjugator.

The most spectacular attempt at rewriting history in modern India was by some of its most hallowed historians and public leaders who sought to give India a glorious past in order to give Indians, then totally bereft of self esteem under long colonial rule, a heritage to be proud of. But even within that there was an important distinction. There was no attempt to belittle another community while painting the ancient period in a golden hue. And what is more, the idea of nationhood was itself emerging, people were groping, slowly rising to higher and broader levels of a feeling of national oneness that transcended parochial, linguistic and religious boundaries.

Today India is grown up. Its 50 years of democratic governance is the envy of the third world; its space scientists and software engineers would do any first world country proud. It has, therefore, also to grow up by first coming to terms with its own history and then learning how to treat history writing and historians with respect.

It is not as if history is not rewritten. That is in fact a continuous process. Revisionism is the birthright of every new generation of historians. In fact you can come closer to the truth only through a process of repeated re-evaluation . One of the most celebrated in the last century was the reevaluation of Hitler by British historian AJP Taylor. He engaged in fierce debate with fellow historians of his time but the whole process only raised the quality of history writing and debate over it.

To illustrate what kind of quackery goes in the name of history writing by Sangh parivar members it is sufficient to cite just a couple of examples. B.B.Lal, the RSS archaeologist, took a government grant in the seventies to locate the Ramayana in Indian pre-history. But at the end of his efforts and much digging he was very reluctant to reveal his findings. The Ayodhya of Ramayana was no more than a small village and the remains of people who lived in those times indicated they were of a small stature. How could Ram and his subjects not stand tall?

Perhaps the most hilarious is the piece by Rajendra Singh in a Rajasthan government history textbook. Not only did he claim that ancient India had the nuclear bomb, it even practised non-proliferation by carefully restricting the number of people who had access to it., This has prompted Bipan Chandra, the historian of the freedom struggle, to say that if to be a nationalist I have to declare that ancient India created the nuclear bomb, then I am not a nationalist!

To keep rewriting history as an intellectual quest you have to possess not just intellect but sensitivity and a passion for truth. Those who will cut out references to beef eating in ancient India and to Aryans being a nomadic tribe because it does not fit in with their political view of India's past can be barely called literate.

( Business Standard, 28 November 2001)

## History as told by non-historians

Anjali Mody  
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The Hindu

A few days after Prof. Satish Chandra, a historian of medieval India and author of an NCERT textbook on that period, told a packed press conference that the Sangh's criticism of his use of the sources pertaining to Guru Tegh Bahadur was so completely illiterate that it read the word 'rapine' (meaning plunder and loot) to mean rape, the Union Minister for Human Resource Development (HRD), Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi wrote an article in a Hindi language newspaper claiming that Prof. Satish Chandra had said that the Guru had raped women (mahilaon ke saath balaatkar kiya).

This is just one small example of the very large gap between the two sides apparently engaged in a debate on history. The one, represented by historians working at the more liberal universities, is concerned about the practice of history writing, the uses of evidence, methods of interpretation and the corruption of these process for political ends.

The other, represented by the HRD Minister, administrators that he has appointed to education and research bodies and propagandists of the Sangh Parivar, sees history as a tool in their ideological campaign to construct a Hindu Rashtra, and is involved in producing histories that justify its political goals.

For too long, the illusion of a 'debate' between evenly matched sides has been maintained, especially by the press. When the fact of the matter is that left and liberal historians and Sangh Parivar politicians are actually situated on two different planets.

The side led by Mr. Joshi makes no secret of its agenda with regard to history. It wants to re-write the history of India along the lines of RSS mythology about a Hindu Rashtra which privileges Hindus and Brahmanism above all else and defines the followers of all other faiths, especially Muslims and Christians, as foreigners against whose domination Hindus have struggled for thousands of years.

They have targeted NCERT school textbooks because they understand that the histories taught through these books have been a major influence on the way Indians look at India. These textbooks, written by Professors Romila Thapar, R.S. Sharma, Arjun Dev, Satish Chandra and Bipan Chandra hoped to give a child a better understanding of the present through an understanding of the past.

They were part of a generation of scholars who shared the idealism of the Independence movement, its struggle against colonialism, and against the injustices of existing social formations and for the creation of a modern Indian state based on the egalitarian concept of citizenship which is elevated over other primordial associations and identities such as community, caste or religion.

These historians claim that the targeting of NCERT history textbooks is an assault on history and on professional historians. They say politicians, administrators and ideologues are attempting to do battle on issues of historiography and historical evidence about which they know nothing. They say that Mr. Joshi's brigade is so completely bereft

of competent historians that it refuses to expose them to the rigours of public debate, keeping even their names secret. It is their own competence as historians, their expertise in handling evidence and interpreting it that is, they say, under attack.

They are right about Mr. Joshi and his band of hidden historians. For while they battle over the correct uses of evidence and interpretation, the BJP/Sangh Parivar outfits have shown that they are not concerned about the standards of research but simply about using its rhetorical devices for their ideological purposes. The outcome for history has been far from good. For, what has in effect happened is that the discipline of history, its methodology, its theoretical underpinnings, its critical use of evidence have, in one sense, been turned into discounted goods. To be traded in the market place of politics and ideology.

For every fact that a left or liberal historian throws into the public arena to counter the Sangh's claims the Sangh too can, as it has shown, conjure up an opposing 'fact'. For every piece of masonry quoted as evidence by historians, the Sangh/BJP will produce two.

This has been true for as long as the Sangh has existed. It happened in the buildup to the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Historians of note argued then that there was no basis for the Sangh Parivar's claim that the Babri Masjid was built at the site of an ancient Hindu temple. Hours after the saffron-clad Sanghis had achieved spiritual sublimation through their act of historic vandalism, archaeological evidence to support the claim of the existence of the temple began to appear. Sangh-friendly palaeographers and archaeologists had their day interpreting inscriptions, dating bits of rock, and building the academic arguments to fit the needs of the Sangh's campaign.

The Sangh appeared to say you have your experts and we have ours and let the people be the judge of them. In Parliament, as on the streets, purported pillars, inscriptions, 'evidence and interpretation' became corroborative evidence for those who had until then simply asserted their belief that there was a temple under the Masjid. And academic claims and counter claims remained what they are today, simply a side show to the main event.

In seminars and conferences and the lecture room, reason, logic and scientific training are sound bases for debate and the demolition of assertions passed off as scholarly arguments. In the rough and tumble of politics, in which vote banks, interest groups, and other sectarian divisions hold the key, a historian's facts and reasoned narrative are nothing against the thinnest claim of hurt sentiments or issues of faith. In politics, history is but grist to the ideological mill. Historical events become public goods to be used any way anyone wants, as the Home Minister showed last week, claiming for himself the mantle of the Mahatma and for his Rath Yatra the dynamic force of the Dandi March. Who will challenge this claim?

It may even get written into textbooks produced under the patronage of the BJP. For, school history textbooks in which fantasy, fiction and communalised narratives are passed off as factual histories are not new. The BJP has a record, much discussed lately to highlight the horrors we can expect from the new books being produced by the Sangh-

controlled NCERT, of re-writing textbooks, introducing pernicious fiction as historical facts, to suit its sectarian agenda.

It did this when it was in power in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh in the early 1990s; and in Gujarat they continue to use textbooks which peddle prejudice as history. In Madhya Pradesh, the BJP Government in the early 1990s also introduced a compulsory course at University level on sanskriti which is apparently now on Mr. Joshi's agenda for higher education.

The Sangh Parivar has also run its own schools since the RSS opened the first one in 1952. Through its education wing Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan, it has expanded the scale of operation many fold since then and today claims to be the single largest voluntary organisation involved in education, with 17,396 schools, 93,261 teachers and 22,52,848 students.

The Saraswati Shishu Mandirs, Vivekananda Vidyalayas, etc. claim to be run on the basis of the Hindu Philosophy of Life. They use educational material, (like the Sanskrit Gyan Pareeksha workbooks) which pass off absurd lies as cultural truths and historical facts. For example, they claim Homer's Illiad is modelled on the Ramayana, Jesus Christ lived in Kashmir, the Chaldean culture is based on the Vedas, Indians or Aryans were the first settlers in Iran and that Chinese warriors are descended from Kshatriyas.

Yet, until the textbooks written by some of the country's best known historians became targets of attack this industry in fantasy fiction hardly provoked comment, never mind the sort of media coverage that the controversy around the NCERT's history textbooks has generated. Neither Vidya Bharati, its long list of publications, nor the `history lessons' conducted through the thousands of RSS shakhas, inspired the start of a campaign against the Sangh's assault on history.

For, historians practicing their craft from the comfort of universities and research institutes prior to their take over by the Sangh, hardly noticed the expanding reach of the Sangh nor imagined that it would one day claim its share of institutional spoils through political power and then, perhaps, direct its ideological trident against them.

But it has done exactly this. And today as the Sangh Parivar seeks to put its own version of history in place it does not even maintain a pretence of using accepted historical methodology; it simply calls upon community and religious sentiment to justify its actions.

It does so in the knowledge that it has the power to do so. The BJP is in Government and this bestows on it (and its parent organisation) certain privileges and the respectability of high office. This includes the privilege of controlling the purse strings of and appointments to institutions engaged in historical research and textbook writing, such as the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR), the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), and the respectability that these bestow. So, these institutions have been stuffed full of men loyal to its Hindutva ideology and state patronage and public money now subsidises autonomous research bodies and NGOs

(such as the Vidya Bharati Akhil Baratiya Shiksha Sansthan) which are engaged in constructing the origin myth of the Hindu Rashtra.

Against this background, historians who continue to argue that this battle of books is about the discipline of history are refusing to grasp the nettle. They must, if there is to be a debate, rather than a dialogue of the deaf, accept that what is at stake is not the discipline of history but a larger and more profound idea - that of the Indian nation.

And that the histories that they wrote for school, while being methodologically sound and intellectually rigorous, were influenced by a way of thinking, and ideology if you will. That this was the ideology of the Independence movement, its goal of a modern nation unified through citizenship and a shared desire for economic and social advancement. Through the histories they wrote they hoped that young Indians would better understand how India came to be and the challenges facing it - for instance how caste remains a hurdle against development and that the separation of state and religion is crucial to any idea of equality.

By refusing to state boldly that these are worthwhile goals to have pursued, the appropriation of India and as a by-product of Indian history, by the inventors of the Hindu Rashtra will go unchallenged. For, this is not a debate over historical method but an ideological fight over the definition of a nation. It is a fight that must involve not historians but citizens.

( The Hindu, 16 December 2001 )

## History, Vacuum-Cleaned

Saba Naqvi Bhaumik  
Journalist

Murli Manohar Joshi is a minister with a mission. And he gets most of his ideas from the RSS-run Vidya Bharati network of schools and colleges. Today, Vidya Bharati is the most influential organisation in the field of education—its clout can be gauged from the fact that it has held as many as 100 seminars on the proposed new curriculum for schools and suggested most of the controversial changes introduced by the NCERT. The man behind it all is Dina Nath Batra, general secretary of the Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan. Batra makes no secret of his proximity to the HRD minister. "I told Joshiji, 'You are moving too slowly. You must move faster'.

According to HRD ministry insiders, Joshi and Batra work like a team with the latter playing the ideas man. And their plans are not limited to tinkering with some history paragraphs and rewriting school textbooks. There are grand plans to overhaul higher education as well and make some dramatic and controversial changes in the teaching of the sciences. Many of these proposals about university-level education were made at a seminar, 'Saffronisation vs Indianisation of Education', organised by the Vidya Bharati in Delhi last week. Vidya Bharati is no longer a fringe right-wing organisation but a forum which has wangled respectability, courtesy government patronage. Its clout can be gauged from the fact that the two-day seminar was attended by 32 vice-chancellors, pro vice-chancellors and retired heads of universities.

Joshi made no secret of his plans for the sciences in his keynote address. "Why is it," he asked, "that in our science books the credit for every invention and discovery has been given to western scientists as if Indians have done nothing?" He then went on to name some of the ancient scientists. "The great men of our country like Aryabhata, Varahamihira and Nagarjuna have done a lot in the field of science centuries ago. The invention of computers would not have been possible without the Indian binary system of zero and one."

The resolution passed by the meeting, forwarded to the HRD ministry, proposed that the university system "should also encourage systematic and scientific study of contributions made by Indians, ancient and contemporary, in the sciences". Some of the scholar-sages named in the proposal are Sushruta (surgery), Charaka (medicine), Nagarjuna (chemistry), Varahamihira and Aryabhata (mathematics and astronomy), Kanad (theory of atoms), Kapil (creation of the universe), Bhaskaracharya (mathematics) and Baudhayana (geometry). Historians and archaeologists were also asked to look into "the Aryan invasion" theory in vogue since the British, and scientists asked to study the "Saraswati civilisation" mentioned in our scriptures. Joshi went on to say that the Bhagvad Gita is replete with practical knowledge and should be taught to all university students.

There was also a proposal to make "value education" compulsory in universities. Value

education is nothing more than the moral sciences taught in RSS schools—tales from Hindu mythology, folklore and history with a moral lesson at the end of it. The Vidya Bharati has books on moral education for every class. The organisation has sent a proposal to the ministry that it introduce a foundation course on Indian culture and human values at the university level for all students throughout India.

There are other ideas which Batra has shared with the minister. For instance, he says: "We believe it's essential to channelise the super energy of youth for social work and nation-building. All part of the Vidya Bharati curriculum." The Vidya Bharati has suggested that social work be made compulsory for students, along with higher studies.

RSS ideologues like Batra are also averse to pure research which they see as a waste of time and resources. He has proposed that guidelines be sent to university departments which discourage 'useless' research. Says he: "Research should be need-based and not some mental gymnastics which is of no use to the country".

In some ways Batra's vision of education is terrifying. A curriculum that propagates blind jingoism, and produces a little army of nation-builders who share a blind faith in ancient Hindu traditions. They hark back to "the glorious past" but brook no debate over their vision of the future. Genuine intellectual research and scholarship, which often raise more questions than answers, is discouraged in a bid to quell dissent. Batra, however, sees it differently: "What Joshi is trying to do, and we support him, is that he is trying to introduce genuine patriotism. So far the leftists thought nothing of denigrating the nation and people's religious sentiments. Now they are angry because we are correcting their mistakes."

He sees the current controversy over the so-called objectionable paragraphs in the NCERT history books in the same context. Batra reveals that the Vidya Bharati had suggested 42 deletions, but only four were carried out. He gives an interesting example to defend these changes: "Jesus Christ was a *najayaz* (illegitimate) child of Mary but in Europe they don't teach that. Instead, they call her Mother Mary and say she is a virgin."

To accuse Joshi and Batra of Talibanisation of education would be to miss the point. While the Taliban earned notoriety for banning most books, the RSS runs an extensive education network. Forty colleges, 19,000 schools, 24 lakh students, one lakh teachers. "We are the largest voluntary organisation involved in education," points out Batra. While these schools are more efficiently run than many government institutions, the curriculum with its heavy emphasis on religion and moral studies, vilification of minorities and glorification of ancient Hindu traditions, remains highly controversial.

The problem is not that most of Joshi's ideas about education are derived from the RSS model, but that he now seems bent upon extending his writ to institutions of higher learning as well.

## Canons To The Right

The Indian Right is bedevilled by a lack of intellectual tradition

The battle between the Left and the Right over the interpretation of history is not a fight between equals. On the Left are ranged heavyweight historians with years of proven scholarship and international reputation: Irfan Habib, Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra and R.S. Sharma. On the Right, there are no historians but BJP politicians, pro-government bureaucrats and RSS ideologues who are fighting the battle.

The Hindutva brigade is sadly short of historians to claim as its own. So they hark back to the past and name some medieval and British chroniclers as their examples of fine scholarship. Chinese traveller and chronicler Hiuen Tsang, British Colonel James Todd, who wrote the *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, Sir William Jones, who founded the Asiatic Society in the late 18th century. The only heavyweight Indian name that enters the RSS list of acceptable historians is the late R.C. Majumdar, who did some pioneering work on ancient India and edited the Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan series on Indian history.

Among contemporary historians, the big name ranged on the Right is that of B.B. Lal, one of the country's leading archaeologists who supports the claim that a Hindu temple existed on the Babri Masjid site. There is also the controversial Pune-based P.N. Oak, who has written a book arguing that the Taj Mahal was a Hindu Palace.

RSS intellectual Diwendra Swarup, who has taught history for 30 years, believes that Left historians have risen to such eminence by hogging state patronage. He highlights the manner in which a Rs 1-crore project to translate the Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan series into several Indian languages was scuttled by the Left lobby. Swarup argues that those opposed to the Marxist view of history have been deliberately hounded. Says he: "All these years the Leftists have used their control of the history departments and the ICHR to stifle dissent. Now they are screaming Because we are no longer giving them state patronage."

True, the Left has dominated the historian community, but it still doesn't explain the right-wing's failure to evolve its school of history. Besides the Marxists, there are liberal historians who have made a name for themselves. In the West, there's a respectable right-wing, conservative tradition of interpreting history. Not having a tradition of its own, the danger is that as the Right continues in its attempt to purge history of Marxist interpretation it will replace it with facts which can't pass historical scrutiny.

( Outlook , 17 December 2001 )

## History as nonsense

So let's welcome our new historians: swamis, munis, mullahs

Editorial  
Indian Express

If history visits us, first as tragedy and then as farce, the writing of history under the present political dispensation seems to be following a similar trajectory. The redoubtable Murli Manohar Joshi, Union minister of HRD — which should now rightfully stand for the Historical Reverse-engineering Department — has now made it known that any historical account that hurts “the feelings of people of any caste, religion, region or language”, will be removed summarily from school textbooks. To ensure that this is done, Joshi wants all history books to be first vetted and cleared by religious heads of various communities before they are introduced in schools. In fact, he would like these tomes to be prepared in consultation with the religious heads of various communities. He wants this done, he explains, for the express purpose of sparing the impressionable minds of children, which are unable to digest ugly and controversial facts.

Imagine then, for a moment, a blemish-free, deodorised, sanitised and, above all, Joshi-ised past. A past which no one can quarrel with because it has been rendered devoid of every uncomfortable detail, purged of every disturbing fact, made hundred per cent pure like desi ghee. A past where no one ate wicked substances like beef thousands of years ago because that would have upset the “sentiments” of schoolchildren in the year AD 2001. A past purged of ugly institutions like caste, because that would have meant diminishing a great culture — in any case, what is caste but a convenient invention that nasty folk like Mulayam Singh Yadav and Laloo Prasad Yadav use to garner OBC votes? A past where nobody looted because that would have spoilt the image of a particular community hundreds of years later.

Get ready, therefore, to welcome our new historians. Swamis, munis and mullahs will tell you what you need to know about your ancestors and their ways. The immediate future is then full of intriguing possibilities. Imagine a group of mullahs making a representation to the government asking for the deletion of all references to Islamic invaders from Central Asia looting temples since it hurts their “sentiments”. Would Joshi's compatriots, who have never failed to highlight such details from the past for their own political purposes, accept such a view of history? Since the citing of historical evidence and methodologies does not really figure in Joshi's scheme of things, how will such moot points be settled finally? Interesting question that. But Joshi will be glad to know that his is not the first crusade of this kind. Nazi Germany, Stalin's Russia, White South Africa have all brought a spot of ethnic cleansing to their history writing in order to validate their own agendas. Joshi may not have read Georg Wilhelm Hegel, because he was not from the Vedic age, but it will nevertheless be useful to quote him in this context: “What experience and history teach is this — that people and governments never have learnt anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it.”

( 6 December 2001 )

## **Joshi's history**

Editorial  
Indian Express

Murli Manohar Joshi's jaw is getting the better of him. As the union minister of Human Resource Development, he is required to conduct himself as a national leader. But, in actual fact, he comes across as highly motivated, highly partisan, and a highly ideologically driven individual, who is making a hash of his very important responsibilities as the chief trustee of knowledge creation and knowledge dispersal in the country. The language he recently employed to castigate a group of people, against whom he used the blanket term "Left historians", must cause the greatest disquiet, not just in academic but political circles. Addressing the national executive of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, Joshi attacked the "intellectual terrorism" of these historians. He did not stop at that. He termed such "terrorism" "more dangerous than cross-border terrorism".

Does Joshi even realise the import of his words? Or has he become so puffed up by his own 'intellectual' arrogance that he is no longer capable of a rational, or even measured, response? Is it his argument that those who write a history that he cannot agree with are enemies of the state? This is dangerously degenerative logic in a country that has long cherished the right to freedom of thought and expression. How dangerous it can be was underlined by Joshi himself, when he went on to urge his young audience to counter 'both types of terrorism' effectively. So what is he suggesting here — that his stormtroopers feather and tar some of the country's most respected intellectuals? That henceforth the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha will write all the history that needs to be written? This is not to argue that the history produced in post-independent India was flawless or that it must not be subject to scrutiny. But this must be done according to the norms and methodologies of professional historical research and not according to the agendas of overly ambitious politicians. This job of revising, reviewing and updating historical knowledge is necessarily the job of professional historians, not politicians. Indeed, politicising academics is to destroy it.

It is amazing that the minister has got away thus far with the great damage he has inflicted on the institutions and processes of learning in the country during his three years and more as human resource development minister. Perhaps it is his seniority within the hierarchy of the BJP that has protected him, or perhaps his portfolio does not attract the popular attention that something more high-profile like home or finance would have. Yet, it is still cause for concern that Prime Minister Vajpayee has desisted from pulling up his junior colleague or even holding him to account, despite the enormous controversy that he has engendered. But shutting his eyes to the issue is a luxury the prime minister can no longer afford. He must instruct his minister to allow academics, no matter what their persuasion, to function in peace. If Joshi does not oblige, the minister himself must become history.

( 21 December 2001 )

## **Section 4: Text of the Deletions made from the NCERT books**

**Note: The deleted portions are highlighted in bold print.**

**Ancient India, by R.S. Sharma, for Class XI**

(a) page 7

A band of scholars took upon themselves not only the mission to reform Indian society but also to reconstruct ancient Indian history in such a manner as to make case for social reforms and, more importantly, for self-government. In doing so most historians were guided by the nationalist ideas of Hindu revivalism, but there was no dearth of scholars who adopted a rationalist and objective approach. **To the second category belongs Rajendra Lal Mitra (1822 - 1891), who published some Vedic texts and wrote a book entitled Indo-Aryans. A great lover of ancient heritage, he took a rational view of ancient society and produced a forceful tract to show that in ancient times people took beef. Others tried to prove that in spite of its peculiarities the caste system was not basically different from the class system based on division of labour found in pre-industrial and ancient societies of Europe.**

(b) page 20-21

**Archaeological evidence should be considered far more important than long family trees given in Puranas. The Puranic tradition could be used to date Rama of Ayodhya around 2000 B.C., but diggings and extensive explorations in Ayodhya do not show any settlement around that date. Similarly, although Krishna plays an important part in the Mahabharata, the earliest inscriptions and sculptural pieces found in Mathura between 200 B.C. and A.D. 300 do not attest his presence. Because of such difficulties the ideas of an epic age based on the Ramayana and Mahabharata has to be discarded, although in the past it formed a chapter in most survey books on ancient India. Of course several stages of social evolution in both the Ramayana and Mahabharata can be detected. This is so because the epics do not belong to a single phase of social evolution; they have undergone several editions, as has been shown earlier in the present chapter.**

(c) page 45

**The people living in the chalcolithic age in south-eastern Rajasthan, western Madhya Pradesh, western Maharashtra and elsewhere domesticated animals and practised agriculture. They kept cows, sheep, goats, pigs and buffaloes, and hunted deer. Remains of the camel have also been found. But generally they were not acquainted with the horse. Some animal remains are identified as belonging either to the horse or donkey or wild ass. People certainly ate beef, but they did not take pork on any considerable scale. What is remarkable is that these people produced**

wheat and rice. In addition to these staple crops, they also cultivated bajra. They produced several pulses such as the lentil (masur), black gram, green gram, and grass pea. Almost all these foodgrains have been found at Navdatoli situated on the bank of the Narmada in Maharashtra. Perhaps at no other place in India so many cereals have been discovered as a result of digging. The people of Navdatoli also produced ber and linseed. Cotton was produced in the black cotton soil of the Deccan, and ragi, bajra and several millets were cultivated in the lower Deccan. In eastern India, fish hooks have been found in Bihar and west Bengal, where we also find rice. This suggests that the chalcolithic people in the eastern regions lived on fish and rice, which is still a popular diet in that part of the country. Most settlements in the Banas valley in Rajasthan are small but Ahar and Gilund spread over an area of nearly four hectares.

(d) page 90

The agricultural economy based on the iron ploughshare required the use of bullocks, and it could not flourish without animal husbandry. But the Vedic practice of killing cattle indiscriminately in sacrifices stood in the way of the progress of new agriculture. **The cattle wealth slowly decimated because the cows and bullocks were killed in numerous Vedic sacrifices.** The tribal people living on the southern and eastern fringes of Magadha also killed cattle for food. But if the new agrarian economy had to be stable, this killing had to be stopped.

(e) page 91-92

According to the Jainas, the origin of Jainism goes back to very ancient times. They believe in twenty-four tirthankaras or great teachers or leaders of their religion. The first tirthankara is believed to be Rishabhadev who was born in Ayodhya. He is said to have laid the foundations for orderly human society. The last, twenty-fourth, tirthankara, was Vardhamana Mahavira who was a contemporary of Gautama Buddha. According to the Jaina tradition, most of the early tirthankaras were born in the middle Ganga basin and attained nirvana in Bihar. The twenty-third tirthankara was Parshvanath who was born in Varanasi. He gave up royal life and became an ascetic. Many teachings of Jainism are attributed to him. According to Jaina tradition, he lived two hundred years before Mahavira. Mahavira is said to be the twenty-fourth.

It is difficult to fix the exact dates of birth and death of Vardhamana Mahavira and Gautama Buddha. According to one tradition, Vardhamana Mahavira was born in 540 B.C. in a village called Kundagrama near Vaishali, which is identical with Basarh in the district of Vaishali, in north Bihar. His father Siddhartha was the head of a famous kshatriya clan called Jnatrika and the ruler of his own area. Mahavira's mother was name Trishala, sister of the Lichchhavi chief Chetaka, whose daughter was wedded to Bimbisara. Thus Mahavira's family was connected with the royal family of Magadha.

**In the beginning, Mahavira led the life of a householder, but in the search for truth he abandoned the world at the age of 30 and became an ascetic. He would not stay for more than a day in a village and for more than five days in a town. During next twelve years he meditated, practised austerities of various kinds and endured many hardships. In the thirteenth year, when he had reached the age of 42, he attained Kaivalya (Jnan). Through Kaivalya he conquered misery and happiness. Because of this conquest he is known as Mahavira or the great hero or jina, i.e. the conqueror, and his followers are known as Jainas. He propagated his religion for 30 years, and his mission took him to Koshala, Magadha, Mithila, Champa, etc. He passed away at the age of 72 in 468 B.C. at a place called Pavapuri near modern Rajgir. According to another tradition, he was born in 599 B.C. and passed away in 527 B.C.**

(f) page 137 – 138

#### Causes of the Fall of the Maurya Empire

The Magadhan empire, which had been reared by successive wars culminating in the conquest of Kalinga, began to disintegrate after the exit of Ashoka in 232 B.C. Several causes seem to have brought about the decline and fall of the Maurya empire.

#### **Brahmanical Reaction**

**The brahmanical reaction began as a result of the policy of Ashoka. There is no doubt that Ashoka adopted a tolerant policy and asked the people to respect even the brahmanas. But he prohibited killing of animals and birds, and derided superfluous rituals performed by women. This naturally affected the income of the brahmanas. The anti-sacrifice attitude of Buddhism and of Ashoka naturally brought loss to the brahmanas, who lived on the gifts made to them in various kinds of sacrifices. Hence in spite of the tolerant policy of Ashoka, the brahmanas developed some kind of antipathy to him. Obviously they were not satisfied with his tolerant policy. They really wanted a policy that would favour them and uphold the existing interests and privileges. Some of the new kingdoms that arose on the ruins of the Maurya empire, were ruled by the brahmanas. The Shungas and the Kanvas, who ruled in Madhya Pradesh and further east on the remnants of the Maurya empire, were brahmanas. Similarly the Satavahanas, who founded a lasting kingdom in the western Deccan and Andhra, claimed to be brahmanas. These brahmana dynasties performed Vedic sacrifices, which were neglected by Ashoka.**

(g) page 240 – 241

#### **The Varna System**

**Religion influenced the formation of social classes in India in a peculiar way. In other ancient societies the duties and functions of social classes were fixed by law which was largely enforced by the state. But in India varna laws enjoyed the**

sanction of both the state and religion. The functions of priests, warriors, peasants and labourers were defined in law and supposed to have been laid down by divine agencies. Those who departed from their functions and were found guilty of offences were subjected to secular punishments. They had also to perform rituals and penances, all differing according to the varna. Each varna was given not only a social but also a ritualistic recognition. In course of time varnas or social classes and jatis or castes were made hereditary by law and religion. All this was done to ensure that vaishyas produce and pay taxes and shudras serve as labourers so that brahmanas act as priests and kshatriyas as rulers. Based on the division of labour and specialisation of occupations, the peculiar institution of the caste system certainly helped the growth of society and economy at the initial stage. The varna system contributed to the development of the state. The producing and labouring classes were disarmed, and gradually each caste was pitted against the other in such a manner that the oppressed ones could not combine against the privileged classes.

The need of carrying out their respective functions was so strongly ingrained in the minds of the various classes that ordinarily they would never think of deviating from their dharma. The Bhagavadgita taught that people should lay down their lives in defense of their own dharma rather than adopt the dharma of others, which would prove dangerous. The lower orders worked hard in the firm belief that they would deserve a better life in the next world or birth. This belief lessened the intensity and frequency of tensions and conflicts between those who actually produced and those who lived off these producers as princes, priests, officials, soldiers and big merchants. Hence the necessity for exercising coercion against the lower orders was not so strong in ancient India. What was done by slaves and other producing sections in Greece and Rome under the threat of whip was done by the vaishyas and shudras out of conviction formed through brahmanical indoctrination and the varna system.

## **Ancient India, by Romila Thapar for Class VI**

Page 40 - 41

Hunting was another common occupation, with elephants, buffaloes, antelopes and boars being the objects of the hunt. Bulls and oxen were used for ploughing. The cow held pride of place among the animals because people were dependent on the produce of the cow. **Infact, for special guests beef was served as a mark of honour (although in later centuries brahmans were forbidden to eat beef). A man's life was valued as equal to that of a hundred cows. If a man killed another man, he had to give a hundred cows to the family of the dead man as a punishment.**

## **Medieval India by Satish Chandra for Class XI**

Page 237 – 238

### **The Sikhs**

**Although there had been some clashes between the Sikh Guru and the Mughals under Shah Jahan, there was no clash between the Sikhs and Aurangzeb till 1675. In fact, conscious of the growing importance of the Sikhs, Aurangzeb had tried to engage the Guru, and a son of Guru Har Kishan remained at the Court. After his succession as Guru in 1664, Guru Tegh Bahadur journeyed to Bihar, and served with Raja Ram Singh of Amber in Assam. However, in 1675, Guru Tegh Bahadur was arrested with five of his followers, brought to Delhi and executed. The official explanation for this as given in some later Persian sources is that after his return from Assam, the Guru, in association with one Hafiz Adam, a follower of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, had resorted to plunder and rapine, laying waste the whole province of the Punjab. According to Sikh tradition, the execution was due to the intrigues of some members of his family who disputed his succession, and by others who had joined them. But we are also told that Aurangzeb was annoyed because the Guru had converted a few Muslims to Sikhism. There is also the tradition that the Guru was punished because he had raised a protest against the religious persecution of the Hindus in Kashmir by the local governor. However, the persecution of Hindus is not mentioned in any of the histories of Kashmir, including the one written by Narayan Kaul in 1710. Saif Khan, the Mughal governor of Kashmir, is famous as a builder of bridges. He was a humane and broad-minded person who had appointed a Hindu to advise him in administrative matters. His successor after 1671, Iftexhar Khan, was anti-Shia but there are no references to his persecuting the Hindus.**

**It is not easy to shift the truth from these conflicting accounts. Sikhism had spread to many Jats and Artisans including some from the low castes who were attracted by its simple, egalitarian approach and the prestige of the Guru. Thus, the Guru,**

while being a religious leader, had also begun to be a rallying point for all those fighting against injustice and oppression. The action of Aurangzeb in breaking even some temples of old standing must have been a new cause of discontent and disaffection to which the Guru gave expression

While Aurangzeb was out of Delhi at the time of the Guru's execution, acting against rebel Afghans, the Guru's execution could not have been taken without his knowledge or approval. For Aurangzeb, the execution of the Guru was only a law and order question, for the Sikhs the Guru gave up his life in defence of cherished principles.

Whatever the reasons, Aurangzeb's action was unjustified from any point of view and betrayed a narrow approach. The execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur forced the Sikhs to go back to the Punjab hills. It also led to the Sikh movement gradually turning into a military brotherhood. A major contribution in this sphere was made by Guru Govind Singh. He showed considerable organisational ability and founded the military brotherhood or the Khalsa in 1699. Before this, Guru Govind Singh had made his headquarters at Makhawal or Anandpur in the foothills of the Punjab. At first, the local Hindu hill rajas had tried to use the Guru and his followers in their internecine quarrels. But soon the Guru became too powerful and a series of clashes took place between the hill rajas and the Guru, who generally triumphed. The organisation of the Khalsa further strengthened the hands of the Guru in this conflict. However, an open breach between Guru and the hill rajas took place only in 1704, when the combined forces of a number of hill rajas attacked the Guru at Anandpur. The rajas had again to retreat and they pressed the Mughal government to intervene against the Guru on their behalf.

The struggle which followed was thus not a religious struggle. It was partly an offshoot of local rivalries among the Hindu hill rajas and the Sikhs and partly on outcome of the Sikh movement as it had developed. Aurangzeb was concerned with the growing power of the Guru and had asked the Mughal faujdar earlier "to admonish the Guru". He now wrote to the governor of Lahore and the faujdar of Sirhind, Wazir Khan, to aid the hill rajas in their conflict with Guru Govind Singh. The Mughals forces assaulted Anandpur but the Sikhs fought bravely and beat off all assaults. The Mughals and their allies now invested the fort closely. When starvation began inside the fort, the Guru was forced to open the gate apparently on a promise of safe conduct by Wazir Khan. But when the forces of the Guru were crossing a swollen stream, Wazir Khan's forces suddenly attacked. Two of the Guru's sons were captured, and on their refusal to embrace Islam, were beheaded at Sirhind. The Guru lost two of his remaining sons in another battle. After this, the Guru retired to Talwandi and was generally not disturbed.

It is doubtful whether the dastardly action of Wazir Khan against the sons of the Guru was carried out at the instance of Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb, it seems, was not keen to destroy the Guru and wrote to the governor of Lahore "to conciliate the Guru". When the Guru wrote to Aurangzeb in the Deccan, apprising him of the

events, Aurangzeb invited him to meet him. Towards the end of 1706, the Guru set out for the Deccan and was on the way when Aurangzeb died. According to some, he had hoped to persuade Aurangzeb to restore Ananadpur to him.

Although Guru Govind Singh was not able to withstand Mughal might for long, or to establish a separate Sikh state, he created a tradition and also forged a weapon for its realisation later on. It also showed how an egalitarian religious movement could, under certain circumstances, turn into a political and militaristic movement, and subtly move towards regional independence.

## **Modern India by Arjun Dev and Indira Arjun Dev for Class VIII**

Page 21

Punjab

North of Delhi, the territories of Lahore and Multan were ruled by the Mughal governor. However, as a result of Nadir Shah's and later, Ahmed Shah Abdali's invasions, their power was destroyed and the Sikhs began to emerge as the supreme political power in the area.

**Another power that arose in this period in the region around Delhi, Agra and Mathura was that of the Jats. They founded their State at Bharatpur wherefrom they conducted plundering raids in the regions around and participated in the court intrigues at Delhi.**

## JOIN THE PROTEST

Please read the following statement carefully, and, if you agree with it, sign it and get it signed by your colleagues and friends, and mail it to Delhi Historians' Group, c/o 122, Uttarakhand, JNU, New Delhi, 110067. If you can, please send copies to the Director, NCERT, New Delhi, 110016, and the Minister, HRD Ministry, Shastri Bhavan, New Delhi, 110001.

We would like to voice our protest at the attempts being made to communalise our education. The NCERT history textbooks, which have been written by some of our best historians, are being withdrawn from schools, and the NCERT refuses to tell us who will write the new books. History is being abolished as a separate subject of study till Class X, on the excuse of a heavy school bag. The CBSE, on orders from the NCERT, has deleted 'objectionable' portions from the existing books and imposed a ban on their discussion in the class. The authors of the books are being maligned by the Director of the NCERT, the office bearers of the RSS, and the HRD Minister. The HRD Minister, forgetting all decorum and decency, has even accused them of spreading "intellectual terrorism", which he says is even more dangerous than cross-border terrorism. He then went on to ask his storm troopers to counter them effectively, whatever that may mean.

We condemn this in the strongest possible terms and express our solidarity with the eminent historians who are under attack from the communal forces. We assure them that we share their vision of a secular, democratic, and humane India—the vision of our freedom struggle.

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