

LEARNING HISTORY WITHOUT BURDEN

A NOTE TO SCHOOL TEACHERS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Textbooks are once again in the news, especially those dealing with history. The Government recently constituted a panel of Historians to look into the current NCERT textbooks. The panel submitted its report and stated that “we are convinced that the current NCERT textbooks brought out after 2000 are so full of errors and substandard that we find it impossible to recommend their continuation. However, we have made an effort to point out some salient errors and also the common strand of bias that runs through the entire series.” (Report of the panel of Historians, MHRD, June 2004). A brief summary of the report is given in the following section.

The Executive Committee (EC) of NCERT accepted the report of the panel, but in the light of its utmost concern for the problems and dislocation faced by students and teachers, *decided not to withdraw the flawed books in the middle of the ongoing session*. However, for the current session 2004-05, to help teachers cope with the substandard and flawed history books, NCERT is immediately reprinting its pre-2000 history books (for Classes VI-VIII and XI-XII) to provide a few copies free of cost to each school, to serve as a ready reference. This is not being done for Classes IX and X, because the present integrated social studies syllabus is different from that of the pre-2000 books.

The EC also decided to initiate a participatory process of textbook writing, in line with a comprehensive curriculum review, which is meant to be undertaken every five years. In his letter (dated July 21, 2004) to the Director NCERT, the Education Secretary, who is also a member of the EC, had stated that:

“The textbooks of the NCERT have drawn serious academic criticism during the last few years. You are already in the process of handling the controversy regarding the History books. While undertaking the review, you may like to address the question of how books emanating from a new curriculum framework could be insulated from such distortions. While undertaking the review, we are sure you would take into account the Yashpal Committee Report on ‘Learning Without Burden’ and Chapter 8 of the Programme of Action (1992), prepared under the National Policy on Education 1986. The National Curriculum Framework should always be in harmony with the idea of India, as enshrined in its Constitution”.

This short advisory note is meant to directly communicate with school teachers the academic and pedagogical bases of these decisions and to help them cope with the problematic situation for this year.

2.0 REPORT OF THE PANEL OF HISTORIANS (JUNE, 2004)

In view of the issues of inadequacies and bias of the textbooks the MHRD appointed three eminent historians to review these books. This panel was asked to recommend the removal of ‘distorted and communally biased portions and inclusion of short passages to fill certain gaps’. The panel came to the conclusion that the textbooks prepared since 2000 are full of errors and a common strand of bias runs through the entire series (for the complete text see the NCERT website www.ncert.nic.in).

“A running bias of more weight to Hindu religious practices and revival movements distinguished from other religious or modernising traditions that have been in the last 1000 years as much a part of India’s composite culture as the one’s of earlier origin was seen.”

The panel acknowledged that debate is the substance of all historical interpretation and that there can be many ways of corroborating, verifying and contesting facts. However, for the school level, the interpretation should be generally acceptable, not from one or even from a dominant and majoritarian point of view, but from as harmonious a consensus as is possible. According to them the textbooks show printing errors, inaccuracies and a strong bias in favour of one interpretation of the Hindu religion that challenges the coexistence over time of varied currents in India’s historical unity in diversity.

The panel also felt that it may not be possible to surmount all the shortcomings and drawbacks in the books by altering a word, a few words, a sentence or a series of sentences, as some thoughts and ideologies run through the chapters or hide between the lines.

The panel concluded that: “The present slant on political and administrative history of the ruling class should be forsaken in order to accommodate the large masses of people and distinct social groups as well as neglected sections of society, in a reframing of the syllabus. It is necessary to highlight interrelations and diffusion of ideas and customs among different ethnic, religious and social groups in every period of history. The past has a value of its own and distinctive fact of its own, not to be twisted for present purposes, either of the state or regional predilections of that element of the past *as it was*, distinct from the past *as we would like it to be today*. If this can be reasserted, then the professional practice of Indian history can genuinely redeem itself and in the process become more interesting for children of the future.”

3.0 THE DECISION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE NCERT

The Minister of Human Resource Development made the following statement in Parliament on July 20, 2004, regarding the decision of the Executive Committee (EC) of the NCERT:

“I had ...hoped that the EC will no doubt keep the interest of students as their foremost concern. The report of the panel was accordingly considered by the EC for two days and they have taken the following decisions: The Executive Committee accepted the report of the Committee of Historians in so far as their finding that the history books were biased, badly written and full of inaccuracies rendering them unsuitable for continuation.

In view of the above it was decided that for the academic session 2005-06, the earlier books of history will be restored with appropriate modifications in line with the existing curriculum and minor corrections wherever required.

Because of the already advanced stage of the current academic session, it was, unfortunately, not practical to change the books at this stage. It was, however, decided that the (pre-2000) NCERT textbooks which were replaced by the present textbooks will be printed in sufficient numbers to enable at least 5 copies to be sent free to each school taking the CBSE syllabus. These textbooks would also be available in the market for purchase. These could be used by teachers and students for reference.

A short advisory should be expeditiously issued by the NCERT in close consultation with school teachers and historians to help them develop an appropriate perspective in teaching. In accordance with these decisions the HRD Ministry will issue appropriate direction to the CBSE to suitably guide the question paper setters and evaluators. The NCERT and CBSE could constitute joint teams for this purpose.

The Committee was also deeply concerned about the quality and content of textbooks other than in history. While it expected that the proposed curriculum framework review will take care of the concerns in the medium term, it was important that all the text books are subjected through a quick review to take corrective steps wherever required before the next academic session.”

4.0 CLARIFICATIONS SOUGHT BY TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Different aspects of the announcement may need clarification in the minds of different sections of the school community. The suggestion about making available the pre-2000 textbooks for reference only for this year (2004-5) has caused some confusion in the minds of teachers and students. A number of questions are being raised:

- Should the students also buy the ‘old’ book? If they are available in the school library should they consult them regularly? If so, how?
- Can a student use only the current book? Will this matter in the Class XII Board examination?
- Can a student use only the ‘old’ one for certain portions?
- If the ‘old’ books are meant only for teachers’ reference, how should a teacher use the two books, which in some sections have contradictory facts and opposing views?
- How should the teacher help correct the biases and help the child to learn correctly?

- How will evaluation be done - will a student, especially of Class XII, be penalised for writing answers from the existing books?

4.1 Some General Suggestions on How to Tackle these Issues

For Classes VI-VIII

- Schools that prescribe the NCERT books in Class VI, VII and VIII may ask students to continue with the current books and there should be no pressure on them to buy the 'old' book in addition.
- Most teachers are familiar with the 'old' books so they should not find it difficult to *refer to these in order to correct factual errors and obvious bias*.
- It may need some convincing to make children accept a view not given in 'their' textbook. The teacher could talk and let children discuss about alternative views. *This could be a good opportunity for a discussion about interpretations*. The teacher could do an activity to show how a simple event that happened in class or school could be viewed differently by different children. Or they can read out reports of the same event from different newspapers to see how it is reported differently. The teacher may also do a few activities with artifacts (say, for instance to look at coins used today), and textual materials like an inscription, and get children to form opinions from these.
- In a chapter like that on Vedic culture where the panel has reported many distortions, the teacher may need to tell children how a historian is supposed to examine sources and arrive at conclusions.
- Children often ask 'what is the truth?' One could talk about how it may be difficult to know this, particularly about an event that happened so long ago. Archaeologists and historians study different sources to arrive at valid conclusions supported by the evidence.

Classes XI and XII

Students will continue to use the current books and should not be forced to buy the 'old' book. Teachers will be sent some copies of the pre-2000 'old' books (free of cost) to be used for reference to avoid blatant inaccuracies or bias.

Examples of how the 'old' book may be used for reference.

Class XII: *Modern India*

Example 1: The concept of Rule of Law is discussed on p. 75 of the current book. Reference could be made to p. 84 of the 'old' book for more clarification.

Example 2: Achievements of the Moderates are given on p. 165 of the current book. Reference could be made to p.168 of the 'old' book for a more organised presentation.

Class XII: *Contemporary World*

Example 1: For Chapter 1 (p. 1 to 11) of the current book, reference could be made to the old book (p. 1 to 10) for a clearer presentation.

Example 2: Developments leading to the First World War are discussed on p. 49 to 63 of the current book. For a better understanding reference could be made to p. 11 to 16 and p. 39 of the 'old' book.

In Classes XI and XII, the teacher needs to correct the inaccuracies and biases using his or her judgement. This will give the teacher an opportunity to talk about sources and historiography. The teacher may be able to get the students to interpret any source she or he could lay hands on. An interesting example of two historians who looked at the same set of events from completely different points of view is the following: Badauni and Abul Fazl were both employed at Akbar's court. Badauni wrote a strong critique of Akbar's religious policy, while Abul Fazl praised it as the strategy of a good statesman.

4.2 The Board Examinations

The CBSE will conduct the Board Examinations for Class X and XII in such a manner that the student will not be penalised for using the current book. Nor would he or she be penalised for using the 'old' book as reference.

Sample questions from Class XII *Modern India* that show how either of the books may be used.

Example 1: How did Lord Dalhousie extend direct British rule over Indian states?

The student may find the answer in the current book on P. 60 or refer to the 'old' book on P. 61.

Example 2: How did the Pitt's India Act of 1784 give control to the British Government over the East India Company?

See p.66 of the current book and refer to p. 65 of the 'old' book

A student may not find any controversy or discrepancy in this.

Example 3: Why did Indian handicrafts begin to decline by the middle of the 18th century?

See p. 92 of the current book or refer to p. 139 of the 'old' book.

Example 4: Explain the causes of the Revolt of 1857. See p. 99-103 of the current book or refer to p. 103-106 of the 'old' book.

5.0 ILLUSTRATIONS OF PROBLEMS WITH THE TEXTBOOKS

We give below a brief summary of the problems with each of the textbooks and suggestions of how teachers could take care while teaching from these. In addition, some examples have also been indicated to show how teachers could refer to the 'old' NCERT textbooks (now reprinted in August 2004), for more clarification or to avoid serious factual errors.

5.1 Class VI: *India and the World* by Makkhan Lal, Sima Yadav, B.K. Banerjee and M. Akhtar Hussain

One of the problems teachers face while teaching ancient India is that there are several topics on which scholars have completely different points of view. In some cases, this is because the evidence has not been analysed properly or in an impartial way. There are several examples of such inaccuracies and imbalances in the Class VI book. On the other hand, there are certain historical issues where the evidence can be interpreted in different ways and does not at present allow any definite conclusions. In such cases, there is no 'right' or 'wrong' view. The teacher will have to try to present these issues in a balanced way, explaining that these are matters of debate, without necessarily taking sides or requiring the students to do so.

A few examples of the inaccuracies and imbalances in the book are given below:

- The book suggests (pp. 59-63) that the Egyptian civilisation is older than the Mesopotamian civilisation, while it is actually the other way around.
- The relationship between the Harappan and Vedic cultures is a matter of unresolved debate. Although it admits that there is no consensus on the issue (p. 91), the book clearly tilts towards the theory that the two cultures can be identified with each other. This is problematic.
- While the Harappans may have worshipped *linga*-type objects, it is incorrect to say that they "worshipped Siva in the form of *linga*." (p. 84). Similarly, the statement on p. 90 that the Harappans worshipped the '*Saptamatrikas*' and '*Siva lingas*' is incorrect.
- Some of the statements about the Rig Vedic culture are questionable, e.g. that the four *varnas* existed in the Early Vedic age (p. 90). There is an exaggeration of the scientific knowledge contained in the Vedas (p. 91). The statement about the status of the cow in the Vedic age (p. 89) is also questionable.
- Examples of inaccurate over-glorification include a description of the *Upanishads* as "the works of most profound philosophy in any religion" (p. 91) and as "the greatest works of philosophy in the history of humankind" (p. 134). Similarly, on p. 58: "... Indian and Chinese civilisations are

the only ones which have survived right from the time they came into existence till date....All other early civilisations have disappeared and the present people/civilisations have no connection with the past ones.”

- On p. 107, confusion is created by mixing up the early Cholas with the later Cholas.
- The book’s emphasis is on the Indo-Gangetic valley, and developments in other parts of the subcontinent have not been given adequate attention.

5.2 Class VII: *India and the World* by Sima Yadav, Basabi Khan Banerjee, Sanjay Dubey and Themmichon Woleng

Unit II – People and Society in the Medieval World (pp.55-170)

This unit discusses medieval world civilisations with detailed emphasis on the medieval period in Indian history. However, there are problems in the way in which the medieval period has been conceptualised. The textbook reduces the socio-religious diversities in medieval India into two homogeneous categories: the ‘Hindus’ and the ‘Muslims’. This is a serious misrepresentation of this period of Indian history. Here are a few examples of the problems in the textbook:

- The idea of the ‘medieval’ is not explained properly. A rough time-span also needs to be provided for its beginning and end, for example, roughly from the eighth to the eighteenth century. This is discussed clearly in the ‘old’ book (pp.1-3).
- The title of the section, ‘Arabian Empire’ (p.73) is inappropriate. This is because it covers a large geographical area from Arabia to North Africa and includes parts of Spain and France. Themes on science, technology, culture etc., which are discussed in the case of other civilisations, are ignored in this section. Instead, the book concentrates on the political expansion of Islam and battles fought for the faith.
- While discussing South East Asia, Hindu influences are over emphasised (p.88). Buddhist and Islamic influences are thereby marginalised. This presents an incorrect view of the cultural interaction between India and South East Asia.
- The issue of the origin of the Rajputs as a historical process is not discussed properly (refer to the ‘old’ book, pp.21-25).
- The invasions of Mahmud of Ghazni (p.97-98) have been presented only in terms of religious motives leaving out the political dimension (see the ‘old’ book, p.25).
- Chapters on the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire emphasise an image of warfare and destruction. Phrases like ‘Muslim invaders’ and ‘Muslim rule’ are problematic. These phrases club together different groups like the Arabs, Turks, and Afghans, who had their own political and cultural identities. Further, not all who belonged to the ruling group were Muslims.
- The book paints a rosy picture of women in ancient India. The oppression of women (in the context of *sati*, *pardah*, etc. on p. 99 and 122) is presented solely as the result of Muslim invasion and oppression. All this results in an incorrect and simplistic perspective on the relationship between gender and society.
- The Alvars and Nayanars in Chapter 10 (p.102) have no relevance here, as they are a part of the south Indian *bhakti* and not the North Indian religious systems. Similarly, the illustrations of Akbar’s bridge at Jaunpur (p.128), Gol Gumbaz at Bijapur and Charminar of Hyderabad (p.131) have no relevance to Chapter 13 as they are of a later period.
- The unit is burdened with political details (for example, see, Chapter 10, 13 and 15). Difficult and unnecessary terms are included, for instance, *pustakasrama*, *arogyasala*, *viprasala* (all on p.88) and so on.
- The interaction and influence of *bhakti* and the Sufis has not been discussed at all. The most glaring omission is that of Kabir and Dadu Dayal.

5.3 Class VIII: *India and the World* by Savita Sinha, Sanjay Dube, P.K. Mandal, M.V. Srinivasan

This book contains a long section on People and Society in the Modern World, of which the first 25 pages is a rushed survey of World History, followed by an equally breathless account of India from the 18th century to 1947. The chronology is confusing, and the connection between developments in the world and in India are not brought out.

The book is full of details, accounts of wars and diplomatic and constitutional developments, and makes very little allowance for the intellectual development and curiosity of an average 13-year child. Unclear and sloppy writing is combined with the use of difficult words, like 'intercession' (p. 107) or 'enumerated' (p. 99). Economic concepts such as 'comparative advantage' in the production of goods for international trade are thrown in without any explanation, in badly-formed sentences.

- In Chapter 1, the impact of the Industrial Revolution in India and of stunted industrial growth in the country is discussed well before the child comes to learn about the 'European Conquests in Asia'. This has the effect of children coming to know about Jamshedji Tata, the pioneer of the steel industry in India (1911), well ahead of Vasco da Gama.
- The discussion of fundamental technical changes in cotton-thread production in England in the early phase of the Industrial Revolution in that country comes after the author's survey of the spread of industrial production to other countries in Europe which was much later. (p.10,14). The Second Carnatic Wars (1749-54) appear before the First Carnatic Wars (p. 44)
- The emergence and development of the idea of Nationalism, which is a central issue, is handled in an unimaginative manner. In Chapter 5 the young child is thrown into a detailed political and diplomatic account of the emergence of Italy and Germany as nation-states in the late-19th century. (p. 73). The child is even told how Bismarck altered the language of a telegram (it is not clear from whom to whom!) and that 'this led to the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War I in 1870' (pp.66-67). All this has no bearing on the issues discussed in the second half of this chapter.
- The second half of Chapter 5 then moves on to the factors 'responsible for the Rise of Indian Nationalism in the 19th Century'. Here we get a description of the Revolt of 1857, the Santhal Uprising of 1855-56 and the Kuka movement in Punjab. All these, important as they are, are not connected in any meaningful way (for the child) with the developments in Italy and Germany described immediately before.
- This kind of jumping with events and the piling up of unnecessary detail is a constant feature of the book. There is also a lack of balance and perspective. Some further examples are given below.
- Chapters 6-7 on the Indian National Movement are again presented in a very dry manner. Issues are thrown in without any explanation (e.g. the Ilbert Bill controversy, pp. 92-94). There is relatively much more on revolutionaries outside India, and hardly anything on Bhagat Singh and his associates (pp. 98-100, and p. 114). In the 'old' book, pp. 218-19.
- While the Congress mass movements are referred to, especially those of 1920-22, there is no explanation of what mass participation amounted to. There is also no discussion of the ways in which Mahatma Gandhi functioned as a mass leader, and the high regard in which he was held by millions of Indians. There is no mention that the Khilafat movement was also a mass movement.
- The period 1930-1947 in the Freedom Struggle is rushed through, without any explanation. There is an overemphasis on constitutional developments to the exclusion of popular participation in the 1930s and 1940s.
- The treatment of 1942 is practically non-existent (compare with the 'old' book, pp. 254-56). The significance of the 1937 Provincial Assembly elections, and the first experiments in running a popular government are completely ignored (see the 'old' book, pp. 247-48).

5.4 Class IX: *Contemporary India* by Hari Om

The history component of the book covers world events from the 15th century to the end of the 20th century and India from 1857 to 1947. There are many problems in this book. It does not adequately cover important events such as the Russian Revolution and the two world wars. The book is full of

names and facts. Many of the facts are reeled off without indicating the context and without connecting them with statements made before or after. The language of the book is unrefined and awkward. The illustrations are poorly selected and shoddily produced, and only the first chapter has maps. There is a lack of balance in the treatment of almost all events and in the assessment of the role and contribution of various social groups.

- There are a number of factual errors. For example, the section on pre-1857 popular revolts mentions Curzon as an administrator. Curzon actually came to India in 1899. Subramania Bharati (spelt as Bharti) is mentioned as a revolutionary who spread his activities in England. This is incorrect as he was a revolutionary poet who lived, wrote, and died in Tamil Nadu.
- There are several glaring omissions. For instance, there is no reference to the historic Karachi session of the Indian National Congress (1931), the role of Hindu communal groups, or the contribution of Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan as a reformer and educationist. Most of the social reformers are treated casually or omitted
- There is a lack of conceptual clarity. For instance, there is confusion (p. 14) between import duty and excise duty. The concepts of 'swaraj', 'poorna swaraj', 'dominion status' or even nationalism are not clearly explained.
- The whole tenor of the book betrays an ideological slant. There is no explanation of the concept of socialism. The non-participation of the Communist Party during the 1942 Movement is highlighted, ignoring the non-participation of the Hindu Mahasabha.
- The teacher could refer to the 'old' Class VIII textbook or the 'old' Class XII book for clarification, more information and for a more balanced approach on these themes.

5.5 Class X: *Contemporary India* by B.M. Pandey, J.P.Singh, Sanjay Dubey, Neerja Rashmi and M.V. Srinivasan

Unit I covers the "heritage" of India in four chapters. This is the only History the students have to learn in Class X. The chapters are crammed with information and names. There are lists of rivers, hill ranges, musical modes, typical trees, names of monuments, birds, musical instruments, dance forms, festivals etc.

- There is no historical background to give a context to any of these things. The child is, therefore, forced to learn a number of names by rote.
- Even the discussion of the archaeological heritage is not developed chronologically. Prehistoric sites come at the end of the chapter.
- A classification of temples is given without mentioning the features of different styles.
- There is an over-emphasis on religious structures.
- A large number of books and writers are given under "living heritage" without saying anything about their works. There is not a single excerpt from any text.
- On p. 28 the dance forms of different regions are simply listed without discussing how they originated, and how they differ from each other.

Since this is a Board Examination year, it is left to the teachers to use their skills and resources to teach these topics as interestingly as they can. The 'old' Class X book, though very long, does give some perspective on heritage. A teacher may find it useful.

5.6 Class XI: *Ancient India* by Makkhan Lal

There are certain topics in ancient Indian history on which scholars have completely different points of view. In some cases, this is because the evidence has not been analysed properly or in an impartial way. In other cases, the difference of opinion is because the evidence can be interpreted in different ways and does not at present allow any definite conclusions. The teacher can explain to students that these are matters of debate, without necessarily taking sides or requiring the students to do so. A few

examples of the factual inaccuracies, imbalances, and the use of inaccurate, mystifying, and misleading language in the Class XI book are given below:

- Use of incorrect and therefore confusing language: e.g., on p. 7, it is stated that “Al-Beruni also possess a well defined religious and hermeneutics awareness.” On the same page: “...Indian history became the victim of political and religious problems of Europe.” On p. 10: “Thus, the fate of Indian history now got intertwined with the safety and pleasure of Christianity.” On p. 97: “Emergence of *jati* was very unusual but perhaps not impossible in that age.”
- The book is marked by an over-glorification of certain aspects of the Indian past, especially those connected with the Vedic tradition and Hinduism. The Vedic people are given credit for various scientific discoveries actually made in much later times (p. 100).
- Issues of debate/controversy/interpretation are presented as statements of fact. For example the statement on p. 32 that rainfall levels were higher in Harappan times. The same problem arises in the discussion of Harappan religion (p. 76) and the issue of the relationship between the Harappan and the Vedic cultures (pp. 89-90, 92).
- There are many inaccuracies, for example, the statement (p. 21) that civilisation in India goes back to about 5000 B.C. On p. 229, there is a statement that the Bhakti movement led by the Nayanars and the Alvars “renewed emphasis on the Vedas and Vedic worship...”
- The brahmanical Sanskrit sources of history are discussed in detail, while others are given very brief treatment.
- The discussion of Indian philosophical schools (Chapter 11) is much too detailed. For a shorter, but adequate discussion, see Chapter 25 of the old book.
- The discussion of the period from the 6th century B.C. to the rise of the Nandas only consists of dynastic history and leaves out the important social and economic processes that were going on.
- There is inadequate coverage of South India.
- The discussion of the Sangam age in Chapter 16 focuses on dynastic history and little else.
- Many technical terms are not explained. For example, p. 66 refers to the different phases of the Harappan civilisation, but does not explain what these were.
- There are a number of completely unnecessary quotations (e.g. p. 10, 14, 92, etc.)
- In Chapter 22 (on society and culture in the post-Harsha period), there is no discussion of the kinds of social and economic changes that were going on in these centuries.

5.7 Class XI: *Medieval India* by Meenakshi Jain

There is an over-emphasis on dynastic history to the relative exclusion of socio-cultural and economic factors. Several terms and concepts are not explained properly. As a result the conclusions drawn are partial and often erroneous.

- Chapter 3: “The world of Islam” is followed by “the Indian Kingdoms”- both, practically dealing with the same period i.e. around 1200. This separation shows a desire to highlight religious distinction to the exclusion of political conflict and interaction.
- On p. 115 the definition of “three distinct stages of evolution of Islamic architecture in India” is totally incorrect and misleading. (Chapter 11 of the ‘old’ book may be consulted).
- It is said on p. 127 that, “In the Indian context, Sufis meticulously resolved their differences with the *ulema* and emphasised the need to follow the *Sharia*”. This is erroneous for several reasons. It views *ulema* and Sufis as two opposing groups. This is not necessarily true as many Sufis were fine scholars (*ulema*). And in several well documented instances there were clear disagreements between the *ulema* and the Sufis.
- In very many places historical issues have been inadequately treated. For example, the emergence of new political groups like the Rajputs have been explained with reference to their mythology only (p. 14). For a better-informed view see ‘old’ book pp. 28-29.

- On p. 199 three categories of zamindars have been enumerated without any explanation about their relevance. Several other terms like ‘al-Hind’ (p.25), ‘Afghan egalitarian traditions’ (p. 136), the invoking of ‘Sanskritic’ monarchical traditions by Hemu (p. 139) have also not been explained.
- The evolution of *sulh-i-kul* as the Mughal state ideology is inadequate. See ‘old’ book, pp.168-171.
- The political and economic significance of the ‘tripartite struggle for Kanauj’ is not explained. See ‘old’ book p.8.
- The Mongol problems faced by the various Delhi Sultans is not highlighted. This makes it difficult to understand Alauddin’s measures and the projects taken up by Mohammed bin Tughlaq.
- Page 77 of the book (on Market Regulations) states: “Since the Sultan wanted to maintain a large army on relatively modest pay, he had to ensure that essential commodities were available at low prices”. How do we explain why the Sultan wanted a large army? Page 63 of the ‘old’ book clarifies this.
- The demarcation between two distinct phases - the ‘early medieval’ and the ‘medieval’ - is portrayed largely as a rigid distinction between the less harsh “Hindu rulers” of the earlier period (beginning A.D. 647) and the oppressive “Muslim rulers” of the Delhi Sultanate (beginning A.D. 1206). On p. 75 we are told that the rate of taxation in the earlier period was usually one-sixth of the produce and appears to be far less than the exactions under the Delhi Sultans. This is incorrect. Some of the rulers before the coming of the Turks claimed a higher share of the produce. On p. 54 the book itself refers to the Cholas and says that “The state share appears to have been pegged at one third of the produce”.
- There is practically no positive religious and cultural interaction shown between the categories defined as “Muslims” and “Hindus”. Consequently, the assimilative aspects of medieval Indian culture - art forms, literature, Sufi-Bhakti interaction - are totally missing. The cultural aspects of the Mughal Empire are also not treated adequately. See chapters 8, 11 and 17 of the ‘old’ book.

5.8 Class XII: *Modern India* by Satish Chandra Mittal

The book is a mere collection of biographies of different people. It is full of spelling mistakes, factual errors and ambiguous sentences. Sweeping statements are made without substantiating them, and by merely quoting a few writers now and then. The Chapter on the Revolt of 1857 alone has about 150 names!

- There is discrepancy in the details given about the Chapekar Brothers on p. 168 and 184. The detail on p.168 is wrong.
- Page 247: The INA trial of three officers- the book says they were acquitted, which is wrong. They were released because of public protests.
- Page 66: The Charter Acts of 1813 and 1833 have not been dealt with clearly.
- The discussion on the economic impact of the British rule is very sketchy.
- Chapter 7 (p. 136-141) on social and cultural awakening in 19th century India focuses exclusively on Hindu revival movements, without even cursory references to Islamic modernism, Parsee reawakening or other social movements, such as, among the tribals.
- Page 171: The use of the term ‘nationalist’ for the Radicals/Extremists seems to underestimate the moderates as nationalists or their nationalist feelings.
- On p. 69-70 there is no clarity about the minimum and maximum age fixed for the ICS examination.
- Irrelevant details about a telegram on p. 180 about the Partition of Bengal are given while ignoring the significance of the Swadeshi and Boycott movement.
- On Chapters 6 and 7 many things are attributed to the Christian missionaries. For example, “The principal aim of the Brahmo Samaj was to eradicate the evils from the Hindu society to check the growing influence of Christianity...”

- Page 207: In the discussion of Gandhi's Hind Swaraj the statement that "the need for support of religion-based civilisation as prevailing in ancient times" gives the impression that it was the Vedic religion that he wanted to bring back. It does not talk about the evolution of his thoughts over time.
- On p. 228 the Nehru Report is discussed at length but there is no mention later of the Karachi session where the resolution on Fundamental Rights and Economic Policy was passed.
- The role of socialists and the socialist movements in relation to the national movement has been overlooked.
- Nationalist stirrings and political activities in the princely States have been overlooked.

5.9 Class XII: *Contemporary World History* by Mohammed Anwar ul Haq, Himanshu S. Patnaik and Pratyusa K. Mandal

The text abounds in inaccuracies, distortions and all manner of inconsistencies. For a clear understanding of what contemporary world history is about, it may be useful to study the introductory chapter in the 'old' text rather than the confused and confusing Chapter 1 in the 'new book. Chapter 2 is not there in the syllabus and may therefore be omitted.

Some problems in the book are highlighted below:

- According to the book, the Anti-Comintern Pact was signed 'to exploit the universal hatred for communism' (p.98) and it was 'clear to all' that communism was the biggest threat perception to the Western world. (p.99). These are political judgements that cannot be substantiated.
- The Soviet Union is held exclusively responsible for the failure to have an alliance with Britain and France (p.100). Further, the secret clauses of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact are stated to have provided for Ukraine and Byelorussia to be given to USSR (p.100-01). This is wrong because Ukraine and Byelorussia were founder member countries of the USSR.
- There is no reference to the Chinese Revolution of 1911.
- Chapter 7 on World War II is confusing. It first describes the course of the war and its end. It is only subsequently that the child is told about the reasons for the US entering the war. This is followed by a section on the causes of the War which is stated to have been made 'inevitable' by Stalin. This is incorrect. Chapter 4 of the 'old' text may be consulted.
- The book states (Chapter 8) that the Fourth Republic in France was established in 1944. This is incorrect – it was in 1946. In the same chapter Salazar's dictatorship is stated to have been overthrown in 1974, even though Salazar died in 1970.
- The national liberation struggles discussed in Chapter 9, especially in West Asia, have been dealt with from a pro-US perspective. There is no reference to the US support to Israel's policies. The book was published in May 2003 and, therefore, has devoted a lot of space to 'Operation Iraq Freedom'. According to the book 'The ordinary Iraqis welcomed the US troops as liberators...'. This is a biased view.
- Chapter 10 deals with 'The Cold War Years', again basically from the Cold War perspective of the West. Much of it is ill-informed. For example, according to the book, the Berlin Blockade of 1948 meant the sealing by the Soviets of 'all roads, rails and canal links between West and East Berlin' because of which 'western aid could not reach the trapped people in East Berlin' who were 'on the brink of starvation'. These statements are incorrect. The old book may be consulted.

6.0 FUTURE CHALLENGES: TOWARDS CHILD-FRIENDLY TEXTBOOKS

The discipline of History has a critical role to play in the school curriculum. It can equip children to understand diversities in terms of environments, cultures, languages, religions, gender and social practices. It can develop skills in understanding social relations, institutions and processes of social change. Moreover, it can stimulate children to understand how people have grappled with different ideas at different times, and how even the scientific theories that are accepted as valid knowledge

today have been questioned and examined over time. But unfortunately a subject that could help children analyse people, events and ideas, to discriminate and judge for themselves, does not attract the interest of most students. Being part of Social Studies which is a compulsory subject till Class X, children have to go through the motions of 'doing' history. There are many factors responsible for this. These include the overburdened and linear nature of the course, textbooks which are usually not child-friendly, and the little scope these leave for the subject to be taught in an interesting and engrossing manner in the classroom. Unfortunately, public debates on textbooks tend to overlook these factors while taking notice only of the ideological slants and tilts and factual inaccuracies.

It is true that history is politically contentious and there have been debates in several countries about how to represent historical events and individuals in school textbooks, whether it is about racism and the policy of Apartheid in South Africa, war crimes committed by the Japanese army or the role of Hitler and Nazism in Germany. However, in most countries history teaching is not assumed to be doling out mere 'facts' to children, taken as passive recipients, but is meant to actively engage them in critical analysis and knowledge construction. They are trained to understand the methodology of how historians construct history, and also to reflect on different perspectives offered by various sources. In our own context there is an urgent need for a pedagogy that helps raise questions and prevents indoctrination, and textbooks that stimulate and excite children.

A large majority of our children are denied the luxury of formal studies after Class 8; it is *our* responsibility to make history a pleasant memory for them, not an inexplicable jumble of facts and dates painfully memorised. Children love stories of 'real' people and places, and narratives of emotion, action and change; they relish the suspense of investigation, the joy of exploration, and the drama of dilemmas. History offers us a rich canvas of possibilities, to creatively engage their inquisitive and imaginative minds. Why not present it in a way they can truly enjoy? Children love visuals and cartoons (and so do we!), but our textbooks are devoid of illustrations and humour that can tease or tickle their imagination. Why are our children not trained to 'see' monuments, appreciate architecture, analyse paintings, feel the textures of terracotta, wonder at how textiles are designed or how musical instruments are crafted?

7.0 HOW DO CHILDREN UNDERSTAND AND RELATE TO HISTORY?

One crucial aspect that has often been ignored in the ongoing debates on history textbooks is that of how children construct their understanding of historical ideas and facts. People often say that school history should offer 'nothing but facts', without realising that 'facts' acquire a meaning for children only when they can place them in a perspective. Isolated 'facts' cannot be 'understood' when the child cannot link them to her own mental map of concepts. Whether we say 'the earth is rotating on its axis' or 'cave paintings about hunting were made by pre-historic humans' the child has to make sense of these 'facts' by relating these to what she understands. Each of these 'statements of fact' involves a canvas of several concepts, some of them even too abstract for the mind to grasp before she may be, say, 14-15 years old.

For instance, it is now well researched across the world that most children younger than 15 years find it difficult to think of 'this earth', referring to the ground beneath their feet, as something like a sphere, rotating at an unimaginable speed on some imaginary axis! Even when they are old enough to imagine that we are standing on a huge rotating sphere, they continue to wonder why we do not *feel* anything - 'no dizziness, no gushing winds!' The human mind needs to develop a whole perspective to deal with such mind-boggling abstraction before it can understand that 'fact'. Early astronomers too struggled similarly to understand this. And yet, this fact is usually 'told' in school, to children as young as 8-9 years

old, sometimes with models of balls and rotating tops, without realising the conceptual problem they face in comprehending it.

For a sense of history a child must develop a concept about time and things in the past. For this she must know how we know what we know about the past. To convey this, several 'real' examples of sources such as archaeological artifacts, maps, original documents, newspapers, photographs, biographies, diaries and books can be used to very good effect.

Teachers need guidance from textbooks, to be able to consciously address how children think about certain concepts that are routinely used in the discipline. For instance, recently in a government aided school, a teacher asked the children (from relatively poor and disadvantaged families) what they understood by the term "*anusoochit jaati*" (scheduled caste) that often appeared in their social studies textbook. A few vocal ones spoke, and said it referred to persons 'with small teeth' or 'dirty clothes' whom their mothers did not allow in the kitchen because they would steal their utensils! These alarmingly incorrect ideas reflected how children internalised strong upper caste biases. There were children in the class who were from Scheduled Caste families, but who did not speak. Textbooks normally deal with issues such as caste discrimination, 'untouchability' or dowry very briefly and mechanically, calling them 'social evils'. The challenge both for textbook writers and teachers is how to sensitively and effectively address such issues.

How do children interpret historical processes mentioned in textbooks and relate them to their own experiences? How does formal school knowledge relate to the 'common sense' children imbibe from their peer group and family, or from popular narratives of the past and present? These are issues that must be addressed seriously and imaginatively.

Textbooks must help children to build concrete and living images of the concepts being discussed. This can be done through imaginative accounts with human characters, through case studies, role play and by drawing analogies from the lived experience of the child. The textbook and the teacher cannot hurriedly offer conclusions, but must allow children to think, to relate with their experiences and debate with each other to arrive at a reasoned opinion. This had been strongly emphasised by the Yashpal Committee Report.

8.0 THE YASHPAL COMMITTEE REPORT 'LEARNING WITHOUT BURDEN'

In section 1.0 we had mentioned that the NCERT has decided to review the National Curriculum Framework and has been advised to keep in mind the Yashpal Committee Report. Following the National Policy on Education 1986, the Government had set up an Advisory Committee (chaired by Professor Yashpal) in 1992 that gave a detailed report on the status of school curricula and textbooks. We quote below some salient observations from the Report, "Learning Without Burden" (MHRD, 1993), on how learning can be made more meaningful and textbooks more child-centred:

8.1 Preamble

"Our Committee was concerned with one major flaw of our system of education. This flaw can be identified briefly by saying that "a lot is taught, but little is understood"...Right from early childhood, many children, especially those belonging to the middle classes, are made to slog through home work, tuitions, and coaching classes of different kinds. The child's innate nature and capacities have no opportunity to find expression in a daily routine which permits no time to play, to enjoy simple pleasures, and to explore the world (p. 4).

8.2 Textbook as the 'Truth'

The pervasive effects of the examination system can be seen in the style and content of the textbooks... Barring exceptions, our textbooks appear to have been written primarily to convey information or 'facts', rather than to make children think and explore (p. 7). Textbooks and guidebooks form a tight nexus. In some parts of the country children are compelled to buy the

guidebook (or 'key') along with the textbook. The economic and business aspects of this pairing apart, the academic function of the textbook has become dubious indeed. It is not perceived as one of the resources for learning about a subject but as the only authoritative resource. Teachers see it as a body of 'truths' which children must learn by heart. This perception and urge to 'cover' the chapters of the prescribed textbook turn all knowledge into a load to be borne by the child's memory. The distance between the child's everyday life and the content of the textbook further accentuates the transformation of knowledge into a load (p. 8).

8.3 Structure of Syllabus

The absence of the child's point of view is also reflected in the organisation of syllabi in different subjects. We received a large number of complaints from parents as well as teachers that the content of syllabi lacks an overall organisation or coherence (p.11).

History is the most clear case in point. Although it forms one part of the subject called social sciences, it offers a prime example of curriculum load. Despite many changes that have come about in the style of history texts the history syllabus continues to be a frustrating and meaningless experience for children. The aim of teaching history is defeated because children are not enabled to relate to their own heritage. Traditionally, it requires children to form an overall picture of the 'whole' of India's known history, from ancient to modern times during the three years from Classes VI to VIII. Since the texts for these classes are required to cover such a vast span, the density of these texts becomes extremely high which means that historical time is greatly compressed, i.e. a few sentences are deemed to 'cover' several decades. The synoptic style forces the child into 'accepting' whatever is narrated. There aren't enough details that a child could use to work out some kind of argument or interpretation, but the sheer volume of text (which is supposed to 'cover' 'all' of India's history in three years) forces the child and the teacher to 'take in' as much as text as possible without 'wasting' time in studying or constructing an argument... Apparently, the syllabus makers believe that compression of information in terms of page-space does not affect the readability, let alone comprehensibility, of a text (p. 12).

8.4 Knowledge versus Information

'Understanding' is often confused with 'acquisition of facts'. Such confusion leads to the neglect of 'understanding' as an aim of education. It would be correct to say that this neglect of understanding has gone so far and deep in our education system that a child can pass almost any examination without any understanding of phenomena he or she has been told about in books or in the classroom. To a great extent, this paradoxical situation can be attributed to the excessive emphasis placed in our syllabi and textbooks on information or 'names' of things...Despite all kinds of claims that examinations have been reformed, they continue to focus on testing the possession of 'correct' information (i.e. names of things, definitions, examples, etc.). Recall type questions outnumber the questions that test the child's capacity to speculate, evaluate or judge, and to apply an idea in an unfamiliar context. Board examinations, taken at the end of Class X and XII, have remained rigid, bureaucratic and essentially uneducative (as the child never sees why he or she was marked in a certain way)... (p. 17).

8.5 Isolation of Experts from Classroom Realities

The new topics and information put into the syllabus and textbooks at the time of each successive revision are usually added at the behest of experts of different subjects. These experts are university-level teachers, sometimes including individuals of high stature in the research world. Their involvement in the writing or revision of the textbook is indeed appreciable but they have little exposure to children in classroom situations. The limitation of the experts extends to their possible ignorance of children and of the processes that children use for learning new ideas. Textbooks simply do not reflect the versatile search of the ordinary child for clues to make sense of natural or social phenomena. Typically, school texts proceed in a linear fashion, adding bits of information in, and concepts as they go along. ..Very seldom is an effort made to construct knowledge-patterns in non-linear ways (p. 18).

8.6 Convention of ‘Teaching the Text’

Lack of adequate opportunities for teachers to participate in the processes of syllabus and textbook preparation is a major factor indirectly responsible for the problem of unrealistic syllabi and curriculum load...Boredom is the inevitable outcome when a tersely written textbook is taught in a rigid, mechanical manner. Poor grasp among teachers of their role as translators of the curriculum into classroom activity is a widely prevalent characteristic of our system. We feel that strategies to improve textbook writing and production must work parallel to strategies for improvement in teacher training and for creating an ethos in which teachers would feel motivated to take an academic interest in their work. The perception that a teacher can do little in the classroom that is different from what the textbook says is part of a historical legacy. This legacy must be transcended and the self perception rooted in it must be changed, Teacher training institutions and the mass media, both can assist in making this change possible (p. 20).

8.7 Recommendations

The public examinations taken at the end of Class X and XII be reviewed with a view to replacement of the prevailing text-based and ‘quiz-type’ questioning by concept based questioning. This single reform is sufficient to improve the quality of learning and save the children from the tyranny of rote memorisation.

The culture of writing textbooks be changed so as to involve a large number of (school) teachers. Scientists and experts in various disciplines may be associated as consultants and not as writers of the books. Initiative in this regard should rest with groups of enlightened and innovative teachers who should be provided training in textbook writing (p. 25).

Besides imparting knowledge of history and geography, the social sciences curriculum for Classes VI-VIII and IX-X should ... enable the students to analyse, understand and reflect on the problems and priorities of socio-economic development (p. 28)”.

9.0 CONCLUSION

This advisory is not exhaustive. It attempts to indicate some of the problems with the present textbooks with suggestions for dealing with them. The teacher may use his or her innovative skills, experience and available resources to tackle the immediate problems at the classroom level. Ultimately the teacher is the best judge. It is the teacher who can kindle interest and also create curiosity in children’s minds to critically seek new knowledge and examine what they already know. The teacher needs to be supported in this process, by the best educators and academics, and the NCERT will endeavour to provide such a participatory platform. The challenge of reviewing curricula and moving towards more child friendly textbooks will also be taken up this year and conducted in an academically sound and participatory manner.