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**Curriculum as Destiny:
Forging National Identity in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh**

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**Curriculum as Destiny:
Forging National Identity in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh**

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Dedication

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nurture me with love and wisdom:

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Curriculum as Destiny: Forging National Identity in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh

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This dissertation investigates the political, social, and religious influences on curriculum policy and social studies textbooks. It highlights the importance of historiography in the creation and transmission of national ideologies. This study focuses on three nations of the Indian Subcontinent, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, which share thousands of years of history, but who after 1947 have entertained distinct, often opposing visions of the past. In this context, historical interpretations, often characterized by omission, elision, and embellishment, may become standardized narratives used as justification for ethnic violence and military brinkmanship. The civic imperative to create patriotic citizens finds a malleable, teleological tool in the social studies. This study seeks to understand the sources of contentiousness which characterize the relationships between these

often hostile nations where textbooks may be used as a site for negatively “othering” their neighbors.

The first section deals with the history of education in the Subcontinent and background information about the research. The second section looks at the three countries in the Subcontinent, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India. A brief conclusion attempts to tie them all together.

History textbooks are narrated with the intent of developing students into patriotic, productive citizens. Examples from state-sponsored textbooks can illustrate the appropriation of history to reinforce national ideologies. When history is seen as a tool to mold a nation's youth, interpretations of historical events are often manipulated in response to current events, as heroes become villains across the borders of neighboring countries, and opposing political parties within nations vie to control the grand narrative of the nation state.

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Introduction

One of the swiftest entrees to understanding any modern society is through listening to political discourse about education. Power struggles and ideological controversies about how to socialize and enculturate youth are at the heart of the processes by which a society is continually recreated.¹

Changes in the narration of history within a nation-state occur in much the same way as changes appear in languages. Both language and historiography are reified and given an aura of permanence by codification in the written word. However, both mutate and evolve through changes resulting from multiple processes acting and interacting.²

Alterations in languages and in historical narratives happen over time, through cultural influences such as influxes of foreign occupants, or the international media, as well as the internal introduction of innovations and alternative modalities. Assertive changes in societies often express popular opposition to stale conventions and are heralded as manifestations of latent liberation-psychology--whether it is creating new patterns in language to discard

1 Bryon K. Marshall, *Learning to be Modern: Japanese Political Discourse on Education*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994, p. 1.

2 Keith Jenkins wrote, "The fact that history per se is an ideological construct means that it is constantly being re-worked and re-ordered by all those who are variously affected by power relationships; because the dominated as well as the dominant also have their versions of the past to legitimate their practices, versions which have to be excluded as improper from any place on the agenda of the dominant discourse. In the at sense re-orderings of the messages to be delivered (often many such re-orderings are referred to academically as 'controversies') just have to be constructed continuously because the needs of the dominant/subordinate are constantly being re-worked on the real world as they seek to mobilize people(s) support of their interests. History is forged in such conflict and clearly these these conflicting needs for history impinge upon the debates (struggle for ownership) as to what history is." Jenkins, Keith, *Re-Thinking History*, Routledge, New York: 1991.

outdated usages or the rewriting of history to “jettison cultural deadwood” as advocated by John Dewey.³

Textbooks narratives and historical interpretations are by definition constantly redefined and rewritten based on variables such as changing social mores and new archeological discoveries as well as on-going research from different disciplines and by scholars outside formal academia. Historiography, languages, just like viable species, must be pliable and respond to pressures and continue evolving. Historical perspectives, like language use and popular cultural expressions, may change dramatically from one generation to another. Even when textbooks are radically altered, education providers and their pupils, in most cases, casually accept the new interpretations, believing that the revised historical *facts* represent the *real* truth. However, this *truth*, found in the contents of the textbooks, is always changing as it attempts to influence the direction of society and as it is in turn impacted by societal changes.

History in textbooks, from nation to nation, is responsive to diverse pressures. Because of this, textbook writers regularly reconstitute stories of the past, sometimes obscuring, distorting or decontextualizing certain sensitive details. Such contractions and expansions, flips, flops and hops in historical interpretations, express the cultural dynamics and socio-political demands that motivate nations to write and unwrite and rewrite the past to suit the present.⁴ Textbooks, as a pliable and public product, can provide a lens on the ever-

3 In Annihilation of Caste, Ambedkar wrote, "Professor John Dewey, who was my teacher and to whom I owe so much has said, 'Every society gets encumbered with what is trivial, with dead-wood from the past, and what is positively perverse. . . . As a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is irresponsible not to conserve and transmit the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as make for a better future society', from: Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. I, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1979, pp. 79.

4 In 1984, George Orwell stated that 'The past not only changed, but changed continuously' (pg. 64); he also wrote 'If all others accepted the lie . . . if all records told the same lie--then the lie passed into history and became truth' (pg. 32), Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, NY: 1983.

changing self-image of a society. “The ways in which what happened and that which is said to have happened are and are not the same may itself be historical.”⁵ The study of textbooks is in itself historical.

Nationalism: Something to Die For

Nations come into being based on certain shared perspectives that undergo a continual process of reevaluation as the societal and the political situations change. Allegiances and expectations erected through the process of nationalism and national consensus create a passionate commitment to an abstract, constantly transforming, transpersonal entity: the nation-state. National symbols such as anthems and flags as well as historical narratives elicit powerfully felt emotive responses. However, carefully hidden from the patriots’ purview is the reality that the cultural signification implied by these symbols are transitional and perpetually liminal in absolute terms, and the construction of the “nation” is at best ambivalent.

Homi Bhabha, in *Nation and Narration* eloquently states,

Nations, like narrative, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation--or narration--might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west. An idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force. This is not to deny the attempt by nationalist discourses persistently to produce the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of nation progress, the narcissism of self-generation, the primeval present of the Volk.⁶

5 Trouillot, pg. 4.

6 From "Introduction: narrating the nation" by Homi K. Bhabha, in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1990).

David Lowenthal in, *The Past is a Foreign Country*,⁷ explains that these primordial myths and images, cultural metaphors used by successive generations, move in and out of the predominating historical record,

Perspectives on historical understanding are as diverse as its components. They include what is sometimes derogated as mythological. 'In history of history a myth is a once valid but now discarded version of the human story', notes Becker, 'as our now valid versions will in due course be relegated to the category of discarded myths'.

Lowenthal adds, "Soothsayers, priests, storytellers and minstrels are historians too...written history may acquire the poetic, universalizing character of myth as time outdates its specific factual content".⁸ Extending the metaphor of history as a form of myth, Lowenthal quotes a scholar from India,

In perceptions of India's past, there are 'no criteria for differentiating between myth and history. . . What the Westerner considers as history in the West, he would regard as myth in India; . . . what he called history in his own world is experienced by Indians as myth'.⁹

In a footnote, Lowenthal quotes what he terms the "more mordant view" of V.S. Naipaul, the 2001 Nobel laureate who commented in a 1976 article¹⁰ that,

[T]he golden Indian past is not to be possessed by inquiry; it is only to be ecstatically contemplated. The past is a religious idea, clouding intellect and painful perceptions, numbing the stress in bad times.¹¹

If history provides a nation or a people with spiritual meanings, the essence of which is seen as essential for maintaining the core values of the society, then

7 Lowenthal, David. *The Past is a Foreign Country*, (Cambridge University Press: 1985).

8 Ibid, p. 212.

9 Panikkar, Raimundo. 'Time and history in the tradition of India: Kāla and Karma', in *Cultures and Time*, Paris: UNESCO, (1976), pp. 63-88, (as per Lowenthal, p. 212).

10 Naipaul, V.S. 'India: Paradise lost', N.Y. *Review of Books*, 28 Oct. 1976, pp. 10-16 (as per Lowenthal, p 212).

11 In the decades since this writing, Naipaul has reevaluated his analyses of Indian civilization. Reference to his more contemporary perspectives will be included later particularly regarding the impact of Islam on Hindu society.

textbooks are, in the modern world, one of the primary methods through which this lore, this core of the civilization is disseminated.

This voluminous study is based on my doctoral dissertation project research that sought to understand how the nations of the Indian Subcontinent view themselves, how they view each other, and how and why these images vary over time. It looks at how nations and communities in the South Asia use a common historical legacy to forge what are often diametrically opposite nationalized identities. Though history textbooks and interviews from field research form the core of the data, this study places the discourse about historiography in the public realm and takes media analyses, academic disputes, and Internet discussions into account.

Narratives of the past, as they appear in “official” textbooks, are often quite different than those popularized among citizens of different ethnic groups. In some textbooks, stories of aggression, oppression, or enslavement are downplayed in an effort to create a feeling of national integration.¹² However, these historical memories usually remain alive in popular discourse. This study is also an attempt to give agency to those voices. The purpose of this dissertation is to discuss the political controversies that implicate the narratives in social studies textbooks in three nations of the Indian Subcontinent.

Introduction: The Sub-Continental Divide

In India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, as in all countries, revisions in historical narratives must be considered within the social, religious, and political

¹² For example in Pakistani textbooks, the violence perpetrated against Sindhis by Md. Bin-Qasim is not discussed. In Pakistani textbooks, Qasim is seen as a savior. This same narrative is used in textbooks written by Indian “Marxist historians”. These convoluted, contrasting, and overlapping issues will be discussed in detail below.

milieu in which they were proposed and implemented. Different pressures operating in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have resulted in quite oppositional historical interpretations, as would be expected from nation-states that have been on opposite sides of variously drawn battle lines for over fifty years.

Textbook narratives by their very definition can never be irrevocably standardized. Social and political forces inevitably challenge historical interpretations found in textbooks. The then changed textual codification resulting from the reformulated or reevaluated interpretation of history leads to new confrontations by other political or subaltern groups critical of the now revised standard rhetoric.

In each of the three countries of the Indian Subcontinent these forces have worked to create not only the obvious variations that naturally occur between nations, but tectonic fractures in civilizational moorings. Sharp divides about the meaning of specific historical events are not unique to Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India, but characterize such debates in most countries. Understandably, as nations experience changes in perspective through the years these changes are eventually incorporated into the standard historical narrative as reflected in the social studies curriculum. This is a process that can take decades to percolate up from popular culture, or can happen within a few weeks due to a radical change in government.

In the case of Pakistan, curricular changes have been, more often than not, top down mandates, issued by martial law administrators. Bureaucrats at the textbook boards usually unquestioningly incorporated these mandated changes into the textbooks. As will be seen in chapter three on the Islamization of Pakistani Social Studies, since 1947 the historical record has become more and more codified to express a conservative, orthodox Islamic perspective. An Islamized approach to the writing of history began as soon as the nation came into being and can actually be traced to earlier historical narratives from the colonial

and even the medieval period. How the textbook boards will respond to General Musharraf's call to tone down the *jihadi* rhetoric, and how they will situate Pakistan beyond or outside of fundamentalist discourse that has dominated for that past two and a half decades, is something that remains to be seen.

Since 1947, most Pakistani politicians and leaders have sought to appease the fundamentalist factions by allowing them voice in cultural matters, offering them a certain level of empowerment or control over the educational discourse. In the early fifties the writers of the constitution bent over backwards to accommodate the orthodoxy and since then all the rulers, including both Bhuttos and Nawaz Sharif have placated the fundamentalists with promises to pass stricter blasphemy laws, do away with interest (*riba*), label certain sects as non-Muslim, and bring in the *Shari'at* as the law of the land.

As will be seen, during General Zia's period, the Mullahs ruled by proxy. In the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, tensions have arose between some sections of the military and the more fundamentalist clergy. Though General Musharraf made verbal promises to reign in the powers of the religious parties and the militant mullahs, instead as a result of the contrived election held in October 2002, the fundamentalist parties won a unprecedented number of votes. It will be very difficult for the Pakistani Intelligence agencies (ISI) to disentangle themselves from the decades long drive towards the promotion of an extreme expression of Islam.

Textbooks in Pakistan reflect this move towards fundamentalism, wherein the history of Pakistan during Mughal and colonial days, and the events that led to its meteoric emergence as an independent nation, were gradually replaced with exhortations to Islamize the nation. The impact of decades of Islamization and the resulting anti-Western, xenophobic discourse in the historical narrative in

Pakistani textbooks has come under international scrutiny since September 11, 2001.

Many liberal Pakistani scholars, with whom I discussed textbook history, have privately and publicly argued that advocating militant fundamentalism in textbooks will produce negative consequences. Given the new found political clout of the fundamentalists it will be difficult for the Pakistani establishment to act on the post 9/11 shift in policy and implement changes in the discourse of *Jihadi Wahabbism* propagated in textbooks since the time of General Zia ul-Haq. This Islamized narrative has produced results that are detrimental to international cooperation and internal security. As will be seen in chapter three, Pakistani textbooks often encourage students to discriminate against non-Muslims and exhort them to lead an international jihad towards the creation of a purely Islamic world.

In Bangladesh, in comparison with Pakistan, what is interesting is the obtuseness of changes that were actually implemented in textbooks during the two decades of military rule. As will be seen in chapter four, in the analysis of Bangladeshi textbooks, due in part to the indomitable Bengali spirit¹³, when military regimes mandated changes in the historical record, the professionals at the NCTB (National Curriculum and Textbook Board) in Dhaka, were slow to respond and in fact in some cases, refused to fully implement ordered changes.¹⁴

Since the restoration of democracy, Bangladesh has experienced a see-saw between the two competing political parties. Both have serious reasons to control

13 It used to be said that whatever happens in Bengal, happens twenty years later in the rest of India. For a more than a century Bengalis led the Indian Subcontinent in many areas, including social reform movements, educational institutions, literary achievements, and especially, the political activities associated with the freedom movement.

14 A friend of mine in Dhaka pointed out that this inaction may not only reflect a certain anti-establishment stubbornness for which Bengalis are famous, but a penchant for procrastination as well.

the historical narrative. Historiography is in a state of flux. The textbooks were altered in 1996 when the Awami League won, and then again in 2001 when the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) returned to power. Because of this instability brought on by democracy itself, chapter four on Bangladesh will bring out the ironies that often result when the textbooks are considered to be the personal property of political parties.

The battle over historiography in India continues to generate tremendous intellectual interest and intriguing scholarly debates, both domestically and internationally. Since the political rise of the Hindu Revivalist/Hindu Nationalist movements in India, there has been an enormous amount of journalistic and academic attention to the rewriting of history advocated by those wishing to convey more Indo-centric perspectives. Regardless of which side you support, the issue continues to consume a tremendous amount of column space in newspapers and spam-level bandwidth on the Internet. There were even law suits filed concerning the writing of new textbooks and the recall of official publications.

In India there has been an avalanche of newspaper articles and public debates because each policy decision, proposal, or appointment made by the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) government is met with immediate condemnation during well-orchestrated media events. News conferences and protests are regularly staged by groups who oppose the BJP government's educational and social policies. Opponents from the Leftist or Marxist factions¹⁵ are particularly vocal.

During the last few years in India, all officially initiated discussions regarding textbooks or curriculum have been hotly discussed in the popular media. Chapter five on India, will look at these on-going controversies. Because

¹⁵ Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, and the liberalization of the Indian economy, in 1990, those who identified with Marxist or Leftist socio-political agendas, now prefer to be called secularists or progressives. (This shift in nomenclature was explained to me by both 'former' Leftists and their critics from the Hindu nationalist camp.)

India is by far the largest country in the Subcontinent, and the debate is particularly public and heated, the chapter on India is somewhat longer than the chapters dealing with Pakistan and Bangladesh. It must be added that my take on the situation in India will be considered highly controversial by some parties and path-breaking by others. Suffice it to say, I do not see the process of Indianization of historical narratives in NCERT textbooks to be a threat to world peace.

The changes being discussed regarding historiography in India are mild in comparison to the results that the active promotion of Jihadi Islam had on the school children of Pakistan. In India, the perceived threat of Hindu Fundamentalism, vis-à-vis the “rewriting of history” is more rhetoric than substance, and mostly promoted by well established scholars who object to the new interpretations. The focus of the Indigenous or Indo-centric school is primarily on delving more deeply into certain issues such as the origin of the Aryans, or the contribution of India to world civilization, quite benign in comparison to exhortations to international jihad found in Pakistani Studies textbooks.

Many nations in the world today are in the process of reevaluating their standard historical narratives. In a number of countries, this very public discourse about historiography has occupied the attention of the scholarly community and the general population as well. All countries, not only post-colonial nation-states, are constantly reevaluating historical interpretations and recreating stories and narratives about their pasts.

Chapter two, *Research Assumptions and Caveats*, discusses textbook theory and the pressure on historiography that are the result of competing political groups. Drawing from the work of scholars such as Michael Apple and Sam Wineburg it looks at the uses of historiography in the creation of national identity.

It also includes a section about nineteenth century historical precedents in conflicts over textbooks in the Subcontinent, based on a study by Avril Powell.

International media attention often highlights the battles that various factions within a nation are willing to wage in order to control the meanings and change the tellings of the tales of the nation's past. Chapter one, *Historical Revisionism in Global Perspective*, highlights examples from journalistic sources that underscore the importance of the rewriting of history textbooks from an international perspective. It puts the "history wars" being fought in South Asia in global perspective. When leaders and/or groups of citizens raise a cry about a particular slant or bias in the historical record, it inevitably generates a flood of journalistic and academic articles, a few of which will be cited in the first chapter. Chapter one seeks to contextualize the rewriting of history in the Indian Subcontinent as a phenomenon common to all parts of the planet.

Chapter One: Historical Revisionism in Global Perspective

[P]articular social formations want their historians to deliver particular things [...] the predominantly delivered positions will be in the interests of those stronger ruling blocs within social formations, not that such positions are automatically achieved, unchallenged or secured once and for all and 'that is it'. ---Keith Jenkins¹⁶

In history textbooks written for school students, significant stories about the ancestors of the nation, be they cultural or political, are appropriated, packaged and presented to promote particular ideological perspectives. Writers of curriculum, employed by state agencies or serving on advisory commissions, are often more concerned about nurturing specific political ideals and social values in the minds of the youth than they are with the many troublesome details of objective historiography. In social studies textbooks the story of the nation, whichever nation, is projected through the lens of a prescribed paradigm. Historiographies found in schoolbooks, often elide or ignore inconvenient facts, twisting the logic of cause and effect this way and that to support a particular perspective of nationalism or an ideological trajectory. Textbooks often deny even simple chronology in order to conform to the heroics of nationalist identity formulations.

This teleology of indoctrination is not an unfortunate shortcoming or accidental outcome--a side effect of social studies textbooks. Ideology is integral to the ultimate purpose of a social studies curriculum. Historical narratives usually reflect the views of the dominant culture and report events through a lens with a narrow focus. These popularized stories of the past are not considered to be ideological, they are considered to be fact by the vast majority of teachers and

¹⁶ Jenkins, Keith, *Re-Thinking History*, Routledge, New York: 1991, pg. 17.

students. However, they illuminate a past narrated and complicated by motives that quite often come from concerns external to the subject of history.

Nation-states self-inscribe idealized narratives, drawing selectively from historical records to reconstitute “The Story of the Nation”, constructed and reconstructed to validate particular nationalist or ideological perspectives. In this discourse, heroes are pedestaled--their “warts airbrushed away”¹⁷. Through the decades, some of the documented words or deeds of a country’s national heroes and forefathers may seem to grow somehow out of sync with changing definitions of nationalism; some statements and actions are simply erased from the historical record, omitted and later perhaps even vehemently denied. Entire eras can be overlooked, if they prove to be inconvenient to the ever-changing logic of the unfolding of the nation, a logic that is never static.

By the same processes of omission and inclusion, other sets of historical actors are demonized--textbook prose blackens the faces of our countries’ enemies—the “Evil Empire” syndrome. Social studies paradigms and summations in history textbooks are designed to justify the nation. They may intentionally work to denigrate or uplift certain groups. They rarely examine multiple interpretations of events and usually demonstrate a very narrow range of explanations. Selective histories disconnect content from context and biography becomes hagiography when historiography is based on exclusivist interpretations and educational mandates implicated by trajectories inherent in the project of nation-building.

History textbooks rarely actually "teach" students how to "do history"¹⁸. The standard pedagogical approach to the social studies curriculum is often

¹⁷ This phrase was borrowed from Jim Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (1995).

¹⁸ Mira Lutgendorf suggested that this comment should be footnoted “to discuss a few exceptions.” Mira wrote, “Britain has pioneered the way on methods based history which uses inquiry and deduction as the foundation of studying history. It started out as a textbook consortium

anathema to the process of inquiry and deduction. In textbooks of most nations, an optimistic, patriotic march through disconnected facts leaves students with little room to interpret or discover. Most textbooks minimize controversy, eschewing uncomfortable details. They often stress disconnected details while disregarding whole social movements that crossed international boundaries and spanned decades. Through a combination of histrionics and mythmaking, causality is denied most tertiary historical narratives. Often the only thread that ties together disparate events is a loosely punctuated chronology dribbled along a sanitized, nationalized historical refrain.

History Textbooks 'R US

Social studies curricula are politically pliant tools that are seen to play a critical role in the creation of civic identity. This is true not only in developing, post-colonial countries working to forge distinct cultural and nationalist expressions outside a Eurocentric model. Nationalistic, political, or ideological indoctrination is the underlying goal of social studies curricula internationally. Bluntly stated or subtly buried, this imperative can be discerned in almost any history textbook. Sometimes the indoctrination is almost imperceptible-- a well-hidden agenda, and other times it is painfully obvious--unabashed blatant propaganda.

in the 1970s called the Schools History Project, but the skills idea has gradually found its way directly into the National Curriculum, where great emphasis is placed on students' understanding of causation, chronology, continuity and change, using and questioning sources and other historical methods. It still is quite stilted at times, as it often expects a too high intellectual level of eleven year olds, but students are often taught contrasting perspectives on an event and asked to draw their own conclusions. This has not had a great impact, however, on bringing a less Eurocentric history curriculum to most British schools. For more information, see <http://www.nc.uk.net/servlets/NCFrame?subject=Hi&KeyStage=3> (look at the attainment targets).”

In the USA, for example, school level textbooks presuppose such self-confident nationalist assumptions as Manifest Destiny, narrating historical events in North America from within that glorious *Westward Ho!*¹⁹ narrative. This curriculum model whitewashes the impact of European culture on the indigenous peoples who had lived in those westward lands for thousands of years. Since the mid-twentieth century when women and minority groups in the USA asserted their civil rights, most textbooks now include a sidebar about Sojourner Truth, Fredrick Douglas, Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, Susan B. Anthony, or some other well-known person of color or woman.

There were very few heroines or heroes from minority communities in the school textbooks in use when I was a student in the 1950s and 60s. Twenty years later, when I was a social studies teacher, most textbooks included stories about women actors in history and had incorporated into the tale of the nation, heroes from minority groups. In just two decades the books had dramatically changed, and only a few social conservatives questioned the validity of the new more pluralistic paradigm. Such changes were seen as necessary correctives to eliminate bias and incorporate the ancestors of citizens who had previously been denied entry into the historical record. Changing the orientation of textbooks was seen as a method of promoting national integration of the minority groups who were demanding their piece of the American Pie and their place in history.

History can change from decade to decade. In 1992, after it became apparent that not all inhabitants of the western hemisphere perceive Christopher Columbus in a positive light, some U.S. textbooks now include alternative historical perspectives of the European interface with the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas--perhaps an enrichment activity designed to show students that

¹⁹ This is a common refrain found in narratives about the American pioneers who traveled in wagon trains to the western territories during the mid-nineteenth century.

historical interpretations vary over time and among peoples. But, what are we to make of the dismissive treatment doled out to labor unions in textbooks designed for U.S. high school students? Labor's contribution to the growth of the American middle class is often ignored or even represented with a subtly negative slant in U.S. history textbooks, developed by large corporations, designed and written to establish the political moorings of future citizens. Tensions negotiated between societal pressures and institutional powers dictate which information and what interpretations get into textbooks and become the standard historical fare; and, just as importantly, what is left out, represented as inconsequential, or even villainized. This process of rewriting history occurs in all countries and is often very controversial and hotly contested.

The manner in which this process is currently working out in India is sensational and very bitter. Several law cases have been filed to either demand changes in the old textbooks or to prevent the new textbooks from being published. The new textbooks published by National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) were held up by the courts for eight months until the Supreme Court made their ruling in September 2002, and the new textbooks were released shortly afterwards. The last section of Chapter five will compare the new "Saffron" textbooks with the previous "Marxist" ones. It will also discuss these types of pejorative and exclusivist labels.

Some of the changes in the NCERT textbooks were implemented in response to litigation or legislative actions from members of the Sikh and Jain communities. As well, the new textbooks published by NCERT were temporarily withheld from publication by a lawsuit. In early 2002, prior to the beginning of the new school year, which begins in April, groups known to be ardent opponents of the BJP filed a case with the Supreme Court, seeking to prevent the publication of the new history textbooks. When the case had been filed a few months earlier

in January, the court dismissed it as frivolous and then interestingly, when it was filed again just before the school year, the judge acted swiftly to stop NCERT from publishing the new social studies textbooks.

One remarkable fact is that the Supreme Court froze the publication of these textbooks without ever having read them. The Chief Justice refused to read even a manuscript of the yet unpublished textbooks, stopping their publication sight unseen. Later in September of 2002, the court, with a new set of Justices, ruled that the textbooks could be published. This interesting topic will be taken up in detail in chapter five.

Litigious responses to changes in textbooks are not uncommon. In Bangladesh in 1997, a fundamentalist group, the Jaamat-i-Islami party filed a lawsuit. The suit objected to changes in historical interpretations incorporated into textbooks after the Awami League returned to power following a twenty-year hiatus. In 1996, immediately upon assuming power, the Awami League quickly formed committees to insert into the history textbooks ‘corrective retellings’ of events surrounding the liberation war, particularly regarding the role of Islamic fundamentalists who had sided with the Pakistani Army rather than the Bengali freedom fighters. The lawsuit was eventually dismissed as frivolous, though the differences in historical perspective remain.

In the October 2001 elections in Bangladesh, the Awami League was defeated and the BNP (Bangladesh National Party) came back to power. Now the passages that were added to the social studies books by the Awami League in 1996 and 1997, have been removed by the BNP. The Awami League era textbooks (1996 - 2001) not only added material that was critical of the role played by the fundamentalist groups during the war of independence but they extolled the contributions towards the creation of the nation of Sheikh Mujib-ur

Rahman aka Bangobandhu. Those Awami League revisions also diminished the role of General Zia-ul Rehman, the founder of the BNP.

In the 2001 elections, the BNP government returned to power through a coalition with the Islamic fundamentalist parties--the same groups that had filed the lawsuit to have the passages critical of fundamentalists removed from the Awami League era textbooks. It was an ideological imperative and their political prerogative to edit out the paragraphs describing how the fundamentalists murdered Bengali intellectuals in 1971 and how they supported Pakistan. Those passages the lawsuit had cited as offensive remained in the textbook, the suit thrown out of court, until by electoral luck the Jamaat-i-Islami were handed the reigns of power and unfettered access to the computer files at the NCTB (National Curriculum and Textbook Board).

Since the leader of the BNP is the widow of General Zia-ul Rehman, she has a duty to reinsert into the curriculum glowing narratives about her husband's contributions to the creation of Bangladesh. As will be seen in chapter four on Bangladesh, students I met in Dhaka expressed resentment that they are subjected to politically motivated radical revisions in their textbooks wherein General Zia was extracted and Sheikh Mujib was reinserted. The differences between the Awami League and the BNP will undoubtedly continue to create a seesaw effect in the social studies curriculum. Such reversals and reversions reveal the fragile nature of historiography.

In Pakistan, the textbooks that have been in use for over two decades are highly anti-American, anti-Hindu, and promote a narrow form of Wahabbi nationalism. Several years before the September 11, 2001 wake-up call in Islamabad, there were liberal-minded Pakistani scholars working within the system to tone down the Islamization that had been instituted during General Zia-ul Haq's eleven years of martial law administration. There are numerous Pakistani

scholars outside the system who have been publishing and collaborating with their colleagues to bring the long overdue and vital sea change in the Pakistani social studies curriculum that has for decades been straight-jacketed by the narrow constructs of the Ideology of Pakistan. Unfortunately, since the electoral victory of the fundamentalist parties in October 2002, the voices of more moderate Pakistani historians may be muted. A recent study by A.H. Nayyar is a good sign that this issue is receiving due attention.²⁰ In all three countries the popular media gives ample space to the on-going changes in textbook narratives. The next section of this chapter reviews how this topic is equally newsworthy in other parts of the world.

History Wars and the Paparazzi

The rewriting of history is a hotly contested topic in many nations. These debates are often fought out not only in the halls of government but also in the popular press. The following brief review of newspaper articles highlights the fact that controversies surrounding the rewriting of history are widespread and are often reported with great interest in the media.

In 2001, Italian right-wing politicians called for a regional review panel of high school history textbooks, claiming as they did, that Italian textbooks were overly influenced by communist ideology. A centrist politician who agreed that the “books were biased”, lamented, “that the call for revision had given the left free ammunition”, with which they can accuse the revisionists of “a return to fascism” and “state censorship”.²¹ There was a debate in the Italian parliament and Mr. Storace, a member of the right-wing National Alliance, defended the

²⁰ A. H. Nayyar and Ahmed Salim. "The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan," Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad: 2003.

²¹ November 15, 2000 article, “Storace Is Left Alone in Textbook Wars,” in Italy Daily, published with Corriere della Sera, (distributed with the International Herald Tribune) Milan.

right of regions to selectively choose history textbooks, challenging the central government's prerogative over the control of the historical narrative. He stated, "I don't want to replace Marxist books with non-Marxist books. I would just like authors to have more respect for the truth". He complained that the textbooks ignored events in WWII "such as the massacre of Italians by Yugoslav troops in northeastern Italy at the end of the war".²² This debate in Italy has rekindled the rhetorical antagonisms between centrists and leftists who dominated post-war Italian cultural and intellectual institutions and a latent Italian nationalism and resurgent post-fascism that would like to reclaim the intellectual narrative.²³ These critiques and reactions employ similar images and language as those playing out in India, the USA, and numerous other nations.

In Bosnia where telling history from an ethnic or religious perspective can be dangerous, the complexities of multiple ethnicities defy a codified historical narrative. The same question can be asked regarding a hypothetical, if utopian reunified South Asia: How would the history books be written within such a wide spectrum of perspectives? In an article, "History's a Tough Test for Bosnian Teachers", that appeared in the October 14, 1997 edition of the *International Herald Tribune*, Peter S. Green explained the difficulties that Bosnian teachers faced when trying to reconstruct and teach about the history of a region where diversity can prove deadly.

The article quotes several teachers who were working to create a history for all of their students. The teachers contrasted the history that they were

22 November 16, 2000 article, "Textbook Censorship Issue Embroils Parliament Debate," in Italy Daily, published with Corriere della Sera, Milan. These newspaper articles from Italy were mailed to me by Mira Lutgendorf.

23 A core issue in this debate concerns the textbook representation "of the Salo Republic set up by Mussolini, and the desire of people like Storace to make a much more sympathetic picture of it as a government (rather than a pure Nazi puppet regime as is presented by the current Leftist textbooks.)" (as per Mira Lutgendorf)

teaching with the Communist era textbooks where "Bosnia's own millennium of generally peaceful co-existence among different faiths was all but ignored". In those old books "kids were mainly taught . . . Serbian history, and Bosnia--its history [was] just half a page". The teachers explained that they were "trying to interpret history in the most accurate light [with] no place for national hatred, from any side".

However, in 1997 the Bosnian government introduced a new curriculum that seemed to be dividing the "country again along ethnic lines". The new curriculum was designed to teach "Bosnian Croat youngsters a Croat nationalist version of history and introducing an Islamist view in other schools that historians say does not reflect Bosnia's true multi-ethnic nature nor its true history". Critics fear that the new curriculum, in an attempt to include the perspectives of all the citizens, will teach the students narrow nationalistic interpretations that will cause more divisions in an already divided society. The continuing stress laid on the rewriting of history textbooks in Bosnia was highlighted by a UNESCO sponsored conference, History Curricula and Textbooks in Bosnia and Herzegovina, held in April 2001, in which "university professors, history teachers, textbook authors, and curriculum experts" participated in order to "discuss new approaches for the development of history curricula and for the presentation of controversial and shared elements in the history textbooks in Bosnia and Herzegovina".²⁴

Curricular changes implemented in Israeli history textbooks were the subject of a July 1999 article in the *New York Times*, reporting that for the first time since the creation of the Israeli state in 1948, the "word 'Palestinian' [was

²⁴ The conference was cosponsored by the Georg-Eckert-Institute for International Textbook Research, information is available at: <<http://www.gei.de/seenet/seenews23.htm>>.

included in the textbooks] to refer to a people and a nationalist movement”.²⁵ Official history as narrated in Israeli textbooks was radically revised in 1999 and many common beliefs about the early years of the Jewish state were “exposed as myth” and images of the “Arab enemy” were significantly softened. Importantly, these new Israeli textbooks “ask the pupils to put themselves in the Arabs’ shoes and consider how they would have felt about Zionism”.

The author of one of the new ninth-grade textbooks, Eyal Naveh, a history professor at Tel Aviv University, explains,

Only ten years ago much of this was taboo [...] we were not mature enough to look at these controversial problems. Now we can deal with this the way Americans deal with the Indians and black enslavement. We are getting rid of certain myths.

Many scholars such as Howard Zinn and Jim Loewen would argue that standard U.S. history textbooks still inadequately deal with the question of African slavery and the genocide of indigenous Americans.

The 1999 Israeli textbooks, described in *The New York Times* article, attempted to give a less Zionist interpretation of the events of 1948. The new Israeli curriculum generated a level of controversy that “mirrors the wider dispute in Israel”, quite similar to the passionate responses that greeted the publication of the NEH sponsored History Standards in the U.S. in 1995. However, only Israeli students in the secular mainstream system, which “serves about 60 percent of the population” are using the new, less nationalistic textbooks. The remaining 40 percent of students who attend religious schools do “not use the new books, meaning that the division between the various sectors may be aggravated further”. The impetus to change the history textbooks in Israel came after the Oslo Accord and was intended as a symbol that Israelis had responded to the call “to fight racism and provocation and instruct their populations to coexist.”

²⁵ Bronner, Ethan. “Israeli History Textbooks Replace Myth With Facts,” *New York Times*, August 13, 1999, page A-1, A-5.

This article about social studies curriculum reform was seen to be of such popular interest and international importance that it appeared on the front page of the *New York Times*. The article mentioned that in 1999, Palestinian students were using Jordanian and Egyptian textbooks, which were peppered with anti-Semitism and “never mention Israel and often portray Jews as evil and blood-thirsty”. The article goes on to quote Khalil Mahshi, the director of international relations at the Palestinian Education Ministry. When asked if the coming Palestinian textbooks would include “Israeli perspectives”, he responded,

We are attempting to be as objective as possible. . .to do that means overcoming pain. To see the Zionist movement as having an equal right to our land as we do is to embark on a personal journey to history which is more complicated than most people realize. [. . .] Israelis are changing because they can afford it. They are so rich now and powerful that they can afford to be magnanimous and say, ‘O.K., there are people here we haven’t treated well.’ But when you are still dealing with daily difficulties and view them as the fault of the people next door, can you afford to be so magnanimous?

A year later, on September 15, 2000, an article in the *International Herald Tribune* “Forging a Homegrown School Curriculum for a Palestinian State” discussed the first social studies textbooks published by the Palestinian Authority.²⁶ New textbooks for first and sixth graders were the initial attempt at creating a “genuine Palestinian curriculum”. Instead of using foreign books, these new texts are “part of the process of building institutions for an emerging Palestinian state” they are “saturated with local images”. But as the *Herald* article points out, “since the Palestinian nation has not yet emerged, the curriculum is a delicate work in progress”.

According to the principal at an elementary school in Ramallah, on the West Bank, it is “almost impossible to teach geography. [...] As far as every

²⁶ Sontag, Deborah. “Forging a Homegrown School Curriculum for a Palestinian State” *International Herald Tribune*, September 15, 2000, pg. 2-- Bologna edition, (article mailed to me from Italy thanks to Mira Lutgendorf).

Palestinian is concerned, the map cannot be drawn before the borders are determined”. The principal wondered if the students should illustrate Palestine by drawing “snowflakes, to portray the unconnected parcels of land that now constitute the Palestinian-ruled territories”. Ironically, the map of the region that is used in the new textbooks is what the writers call “the historic map of Palestine”. It is a pre-1948 map, “Israel is not pictured. Tel Aviv does not exist”.

Many Israelis feel this quintessential denial of even the geographical existence of the Jewish state “betrays the whole spirit of the peace effort”. What is the use, they ask, for the “Palestinians to generate a new educational curriculum that, for starters, ignores Israel on the map?” These fledgling textbooks are the object of scrutiny not only from critics in Israel, but by Palestinians who

have been scouring them for signs of how the government is managing the delicate question of forging a national identity from so many strands: the West Bank and Gaza, Muslims and Christians, religious and secular.

With the ongoing violence and instability in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank, the choice of textbook tales and the tone of the telling will continue to change with the times. The complexities and contradictions of modern definitions of nationhood give rise to history by committee, and the makeup of committees changes, whether they are administered by UNESCO or by a group as radical as the now defunct Taliban religious police at the Ministry for Fostering Virtue and Suppressing Vice.

Another example of curriculum wars and the battles people are willing to wage to defend their right to write or rewrite history can be seen in the case of Japanese textbooks. Ienaga Saburo spent decades challenging official government censorship of Japanese textbooks in which it was forbidden until the mid-1980s to mention negative aspects of Japan’s role in World War II. Controversial topics such as the Nanjing Massacre, the Korean comfort women, the biological warfare

unit 731, and other wartime atrocities were taboo subjects in the Japanese curriculum until litigation by Professor Ienaga changed the censorship policies of the Ministry of Education. In 1982, the textbook screening panel added what was called a neighboring countries clause, which stated that consideration should be given to other Asian countries when writing historical descriptions.

In the early sixties, Ienaga authored a textbook that discussed wartime atrocities. When it was censored, he filed the first of numerous lawsuits, fighting the strong lobby of historical revisionists in Japan who for decades dominated official circles with their negationist claims that war crimes did not occur. The result of over thirty years of litigation, Ienaga was gradually allowed to write textbooks that included less vague descriptions of Japanese aggression in World War II. In 2001, a petition was circulated to nominate Professor Ienaga for the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of his lifelong efforts against the government censors. The petition to the Nobel committee concluded by stating that Ienaga's life exemplifies the famous aphorism of George Santayana, 'Whoever forgets the past is doomed to relive it.' Irregardless of which camp appropriates which slogans, the overarching determinant of whose history will be remembered and who's forgotten, depends on whose narrative is in a position of power after the battle lines of historical interpretation have been drawn. The battles are never final and today's history can become tomorrow's myth and yesterday's myth can become today's facts.²⁷

In the fall of 2001, the Japanese curriculum was again in the news regarding changes or "regressions" in the draft manuscripts of the 2002 editions of

²⁷ A good example of myth becoming fact due to new findings is the discovery of the ancient channel of the Saraswati River which is often mentioned in the Rig Veda but was thought to be a mythical, underground river until land stat photography found the river bed that had dried up approximately 1800 BCE. This discovery is now working to challenge earlier theories about the date of the Vedas.

Japanese junior high social studies textbooks produced by "Atarashii rekishi kyokasho wo tsukuru kai" (Group to Produce a New History). This group claims current textbooks present an overly negative view of modern Japanese history.²⁸ In the previous 1997 editions of approved textbooks, references had been included about the treatment of Korean comfort women and Japanese imperialist aggression against China and Korea. The latest edition of at least one junior high school textbook recently approved by the Ministry of Education has taken a more right-wing stance--mention of Korean comfort women was erased and a more apologist tone was used.

Though it looks as if this new re-nationalized textbook discarded Ienaga's decades of "internationalizing" work, what seems to have happened is that now some aspects of Ienaga's approach to history have become the model. Japan's Education Ministry, which had traditionally promoted a more nationalistic historiography, endorsed the neo-nationalistic textbook only after the publishers agreed to revise 137 accounts of sensitive issues. Revisions designed to move the narrative towards a left/liberal stance are also more acceptable to the Koreans and Chinese. Ironically, the ministry that had for years blocked the more liberal or transnational perspective has now put at least mild pressure on the rightwing or nationalist historians to "internationalize" their narratives.

Earl M. Kinmonth, a scholar of modern Japanese social history, offered this review of the situation,

28 Tawara Yoshifumi, a Japanese expert on text books, examined the situation in a recent article: "Kenpo Ihan/Shinryaku Senso Kotei no 'Abunai Kyokasho' no Jittai" (The facts of a 'dangerous textbook' that violates the constitution and that affirms the aggressive war), published in *_Kikan Senso Sekinin Kenkyu_*, no.30 (2000). On recent developments, see "Special Report: Japanese History Textbook Raises Concerns," *Asia Source*, April 09, 2001 <http://www.asiasource.org/news/at_mp_02.cfm?newsid=48253> and Tawara Yoshifumi, "Junior High School History Textbooks: Whither 'Comfort Women' and the 'Nanking Massacre'?", *SEKAI* vol. 681 (November 2000), <<http://www.iwanami.co.jp/jpworld/text/textbook01.html>>.

[After] years of criticism (and law suits) from Japanese liberals and the left, the state apparatus that has heretofore been excoriated as presenting a right-wing, sanitized version of modern Japanese history is now being used to apparently push an overtly right-wing version of history into a centrist, if not left-wing, view of history. [...] It would be extremely ironic if the system that Ienaga Saburo and other Japanese liberal/left-wing intellectuals have been fighting for years now turns out to be the bulwark against an even more right-wing interpretation of Japanese history than government bureaucrats would wish. [...] As far as I know, no Japanese textbook to date has even touched the subject of Chinese or Korean collaborators or "atrocities" by Chinese or Koreans against their own people. It would be "interesting" to see how the Chinese or Koreans would react if a Japanese textbook took up these issues in a factual manner.²⁹

Much to the irritation of Japan's disgruntled neighbors, even with the required changes the newly approved textbook still glosses over the imperialistic role that Japan played in WW II. The battle over how to represent Japan's wartime military "advances" versus military "aggression" has a high level of very vocal involvement from East Asian countries that were invaded by Japan. South Korea and China have long been critical of the dismissive manner in which Japanese textbooks obfuscate wartime atrocities. The recent approval of the controversial "revisionist" history textbook prompted a wave of criticism from South Korea and China about the need for a balanced portrayal of Japan's role in the Asia-Pacific region during World War II. Seoul went to the extent of temporarily recalling the Korean ambassador to Japan. Needless to say, nationalist Japanese greatly resent the "neighboring countries" provision, as it allows what they consider to be excessive foreign influence in Japan's internal policy issues.

In many countries the international political climate can determine whether a particular event is openly condemned or whether it is given a low priority and hidden between the pages. Groups of citizens with crosscutting

²⁹ From an email communication posted on H-Asia, on March 6, 2001, <<http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~asia/>>. Used with permission from Professor Kinmonth.

agendas, both victors and victims of previous international confrontations--at least those with adequate access to power--exert pressure on the social studies curriculum at home and abroad. Offending nations are expected to include narratives that confess guilt, exude remorse, exclude nationalism, and instruct their populace about the evils of the previous regime. Often Hollywood and the popular media play a role in the international awareness gained by certain historical events such as the attention that *The Killing Fields* brought to the genocide of over a million Cambodians at the hands of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge.

In contrast to Japanese textbooks, the official historical narrative in Germany is very critical of Germany's aggression during WWII. A denigration of Nazism is central to the construct of the social studies curricula in Germany--the Holocaust is condemned and denounced in school textbooks. After the war, Germans found themselves in a situation wherein they had to take the historical sensitivities of their neighbors into consideration as they rewrote their history. Anti-Nazism was essential to Germany's reintegration into Europe. Immediately after the war, Japan was less tied to its East Asian neighbors and did not rewrite their history to appease them. Germany on the other hand was forced by circumstances, if not by contrition, to distance itself from a past that had been defeated.

The historical narratives of some nations, such as Japan, are scrutinized by foreigners, whereas, other nations are allowed to eliminate unpleasant facts and elide nasty historical events. For instance, there is little high level and persistent international pressure exerted on the internal affairs of the education ministry in Turkey to express remorse in their school textbooks regarding the massacre of Armenians. Tibetans, and Tibetophiles in the international community, obviously have no leverage and indeed not any possibility of pressuring the education

ministry of the People's Republic of China to include an apologetic appraisal of the negative impact the Chinese occupation has had on Tibetan culture.

Some genocidal tales or subaltern revolutions become proper topics for academic discourse and find voice in popular histories. Other cultural cataclysms and demographic decimations are simply swallowed by time as too impossible to believe or irrelevant. Or importantly, as we will see in the case of what has been termed the "Hindu Holocaust," sometimes topics are so charged with contemporary antagonisms leading to potential for inter-group violence, that they are shunned as an improper subject for academic discourse. History is written to suit real politicks and the sensibilities of the modern age, as Trouillot observes,

When reality does not coincide with deeply held beliefs, human beings tend to phrase interpretations that force reality within the scope of these beliefs. They devise formulas to repress the unthinkable and to bring it back within the realm of accepted discourse.³⁰

Postwar German textbooks are more forthcoming about atrocities committed during the war than are the Japanese about their wartime "crimes against humanity". This may be due in part to the manner in which the organizational strategies of the occupation forces of the Allied armies played out differently in the two nations during the postwar period. In Japan, Mac Arthur, kept the war-time Japanese bureaucracy in place along with the emperor Hirohito, whereas in Germany most Nazi bureaucrats and officials were, if not tried and convicted, at least disgraced and removed from their posts.³¹ In *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States*, the editors have assembled an impressive collection of essays that seek to explain the

30 Trouillot. Pg. 72.

31 Many German corporations that had supported the Nazi efforts, such as Krups, were after initially being implicated, quickly resuscitated and involved in the rehabilitation of Germany's infrastructure.

political and social roots of these different approaches to the past.³² By comparing the postwar conditions in each country, the authors illuminate how the historical narratives have been controlled, specific to each nation's evolving self-image, enlightened self-interest, and international interrelationships.

The controversy regarding whose paradigms and whose historical narratives become standardized and whose are discarded is a topic that became a passionate political issue during the very hot and public debate in the U.S. regarding the National History Standards.³³ This battle in the 1990's over the curriculum was another in a long process of defining and redefining the role of education in society. The new History Standards advocated a more multi-cultural presentation, which evoked reactionary critiques from right-wing citizens and educators claiming that such eclectic approaches negated American values. Similar conflicting orientations typify the on-going debates in many nations as they struggle to confront the changing face of history.

32 Selden, Mark and Laura Hein, eds. *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States*. (Asia and the Pacific Series, Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2000).

33 By way of comparison, the debate over the U.S. History Standards will also be discussed in Chapter Five on Indian historiography controversies.

Chapter Two: Research Assumptions and Caveats

Textbook research would be conducted blindly if it left out of consideration the complex conditioning elements of the relationship of political interest of legitimation, need of identification as well as historical, geographical and political consciousness. It thus develops into an interdisciplinary research activity in which historians, geographers, social scientists, and educationalists have an equal share.

--from the homepage of the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research³⁴

Assuming teleological imperatives of national identity formation inherent in social studies curricula--that history textbooks are narrated with the intent of developing students into patriotic, productive citizens--this study highlights oppositional interpretations of history found in the Indian Subcontinent. Examples from social studies textbooks used in classrooms in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh can serve to highlight the changing nature of social and political imperatives that impact educational reforms. In this way textbooks are indicators or products of larger, long term trends in society.

Changes in textbooks are generally embroiled in tremendous controversy, which is brought out in chapter one that discusses historical revision in a global context. The contentiousness of the controversies is central to the focus in chapter five on India. This chapter uses the sharply political and often quite personal differences and disagreements in the telling of Indian history as the structure upon which the analysis about rewriting of history is hung. The India chapter is significantly longer than the chapters dealing with Pakistan and Bangladesh for several reasons. First because the dialogue in India is much more open, textured and colorful-- the disagreements over historiography are very public, democratic,

34 <http://www.gei.de/about.htm>

and emphatically stated. This process is dealt with in chapter five, and I attempt to show that many of the negative stereotypes about the Hindu Revivalist Movement are in all fairness, overblown.³⁵

Chapter four on Pakistani textbooks, discusses the impact of decades of military rule and the Islamization policies that reframed Pakistani history. Chapter four also compares Pakistani perspectives of specific historical events with Indian versions. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 brought international attention to the curriculum of Madrassa educational institutions and the problematic aspects of Wahabbism. The chapter on Pakistan is of immediate international interest.

Chapter three on Bangladesh comes between the two other chapters because the process there hangs between the extremes of an Islamized-military model based on the Pakistani ideal, exemplified by the BNP, the current ruling party and the processes needed to sustain a civil society, and build democratic institutions. This is a delicate balance that may eventually be obtained in Bangladesh, where hope spring eternal with each new long, lush growing season or, as the case may be, hartal season. But for now, the pendulum of historical interpretations is swinging back and forth with each new election since democracy was restored in 1991. The Bangladesh chapter is a case study in political imperatives that dictate predetermined perspectives. Since the political situation in Bangladesh is quite unstable, it presents succinct examples of the pressures that influence the telling of history.

In Pakistan, each of the provinces has a textbook board, such as the Sindh Textbook Board and the Balouchistan Textbook Board. However, regardless of linguistic and cultural differences between the provinces, all of the books must be

³⁵ There are many unseemly characters who are associated with the Hindu Nationalist Movement such as Bal Thakery. Though much of the discourse against the Hindu movement is, in my well researched and humble opinion, overblown in the case of creeps like Bal Thakhary, it is warranted.

approved by the Curriculum Wing of the Ministry of Education in Islamabad, where the historical narrative is strictly edited to adhere to the nationalist discourse based on the “Ideology of Pakistan”. This will be discussed at length in Chapter four, which covers the negative impact of General Zia’s Islamization campaign on textbooks and compares Pakistani textbooks to those published in India by the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT).

Though this research deals with textbooks and curriculum documents, it is with a caveat that I present the rhetoric in educational materials as central to the process of identity formation in nations such as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Tension often arises when narratives in history textbooks manufactured by the central government are compared with the historical perspectives of regional ethnic, religious, or linguistic groups.³⁶ Additionally, in countries where large numbers of people are illiterate or semi-literate, textbooks and educational institutions may still represent an elite enterprise.

Classrooms and textbooks are not the only mediums through which citizens develop nationalist sentiments and historical groundings or the lack thereof. Though informal methods of knowledge transmission are not included in the present analysis, the views of selected sub-national groups who question the dominant historical narrative and nurture their own interpretations of the past are discussed. This study of social studies curricula and history textbooks in South Asia draws examples from materials published since independence in 1947.

School textbooks usually privilege the paradigm of the centralizing authority, which is itself not a fixed perspective. This predominating narrative often excludes the points-of-view and sentiments of large segments of the

³⁶ One example of this controversy between the center and the periphery is the case of Sindhis in Pakistan, many of whom feel that the story of their state is not included in the standard textbook narrative, many Balouchis in Pakistan share this perspective. This will be further discussed in chapter four on Pakistani textbooks.

citizenry. Such power arrangements can change. Formally de-emphasized groups or traditions can be added to the historical consensus of the nation or even gain supremacy in the historical record through a process that exists in all nations wherein histories are constantly being rewritten and subjected to revisions and reappraisals. To give voice to alternative historical interpretations, this study draws heavily on comments from interviews with historians and educators in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Additionally, the findings of this study were delimited by research opportunities in each country and the availability of materials.

The social studies curriculum plays a critical role in the creation of civic identity. This observation is especially fascinating in the South Asian region, considering the fluid intersections of religion-cultural and linguistic divisions and the continuing problems of militarization, now compounded by nuclear capabilities. Hopefully, the results of this study will be of value to researchers investigating curriculum development and the politics of educational reform, as well as to scholars of history, political science, anthropology, and sociology vis-à-vis interest in ethno-nationalism, meta-historical analysis, identity formation, and post-colonial nation-building. I hope that it will also be of use to those seeking peace and stability in South Asia.

Background Discussion and Transferability of Concepts

Pakistan and Bangladesh emerged as separate nations from the rupture of the Indian Nationalist Movement that fractured the Freedom Struggle on the basis of politicized religion with the demand for a homeland for South Asian Muslims. Both Pakistan and Bangladesh must deal with a past which created it but of which they are not now a political part. Memories being what they are, all nations have a strong impetus to embrace and embellish events from the recent or mythic past to

validate and enhance their present geo-political situations. Writing one's own history is seen as an enterprise that can help guide the citizens towards a bright future, thereby ensuring the continuation of the nation-state and/or promoting the present government's perspective of nationalism, or at least furthering a particular cause, theory, philosophy, or some equally abstractly metaphysical imperative such as values education.

Rewriting one's own history is more than a mere political act; it is rather a spiritual, civilizational imperative. The modern agent's obligation to seize the national narrative finds ample justifications, whether it be to create a strong nation-state or to promote the final working out of a theory or a belief, such as the fulfillment of a Marxist utopia or the institution of an Islamic World Order (Ulama), or the establishment of *Ramarajya*, the fabled era of peace and harmony in ancient India. Many contemporary historians from former colonies are rewriting their countries' histories to emancipate the narrative from the imprint of colonial paradigms that play into neo-colonial power structures.

Others seek to liberate history from the hands of "anti-national" ideologically motivated historians, or even from pressures exerted by the international community. Such re-appropriated history is re-owned, reinterpreted and indigenized. History is seen as an asset, a prize, a mission from God. Educators and bureaucrats are charged with creating, updating, and promoting paradigms to accomplish a transfer of various incarnations of patriotic, ideological, nationalist, or civilizational identity to the next generation. Often times scholars from outside the official corridors of curricula power exert pressure and provide research that overturns accepted litanies. Debates about historiography can be divisive and mean spirited.

Several important questions form the backdrop to this study of social studies textbooks, though all the answers are beyond the scope of the present

analysis. Whose history is valued and reproduced in service to the social order or state? How and why are historical events appropriated and imbued with diametrical interpretations? Nationalized historical trajectories claim ownership of particular views of the past, but is the official version of the historical record believed as *fact* by sub-national groups? Is there a displacement between history as official narrative and history as folklore? As Sam Wineburg wrote, “[I]t is clear that high school students bring to their lessons deeply entrenched narratives from the home [...] the ‘cultural history curriculum’ of the larger society.”³⁷ Often textbook narratives, even after a generation of retelling, are ineffective in altering deeply held ethnic or religious memories.

“History is always written wrong, and so always needs to be rewritten.”

--George Santayana

In *Ideology and Curriculum*, Michael Apple suggests that in the historical narratives typical of U.S. social studies textbooks, whole eras are deemed irrelevant, such the Middle Ages, which are often called "the Dark Ages" rather than "the historically more accurate and much less racist phrase 'the Age of African and Asian Ascendancy'."³⁸ As in most nations, students in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are also subject to changing political agendas, which find articulation through the social studies curricula.

Since independence in 1947, although the processes in each country have been very different, historical interpretations gradually became more and more codified and concretized, the narration predetermined by the nationalizing intentions of the state apparatus as well as pressure from political and/or religious ideologues. In this highly charged atmosphere, historical knowledge is imbued

³⁷ Wineburg, Sam. *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press: 2001, p. xiii.

³⁸ Apple, (1993), p. vii-ix.

with civilizational import--the social studies curriculum is integral to the destiny of the state. Historiography is a powerful tool in the urgent project of educating the nation's youth. In history textbooks, pre-selected events from the distant and not so distant past are isolated and manipulated and heroes and villains exchange places across borders and as will be seen in several examples in this study, even between ethnic groups in a single country.³⁹

A comparison of textbooks approved by the Curriculum Wing of the Ministry of Education in Islamabad with the textbooks published by the National Center for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in New Delhi will reveal two dramatically oppositional and theoretically adversarial interpretations. Textbooks in Pakistan are characterized by a communal, anti-Indian/anti-Hindu bias, especially since the Islamization campaign promoted by the Military ruler, General Zia-ul Haq in the late seventies and eighties. In contrast, the stated goal of the NCERT is based on the Nehruvian philosophy that education should promote national integration of minority communities. Arjun Dev, who was for many years, department head of social studies at NCERT explained to me, "We are very careful not to write anything that could be construed as defamatory

39 Closer to home, there is an on-going dispute between Texans of Hispanic and Anglo descent concerning what many residents of San Antonio consider to be racist or simply erroneous details that are part of the standard narrative retelling of the battle of the Alamo (for a brief discussion of the controversy regarding the Alamo see the first chapter of Trouillot's *Silencing the Past*.) The same ethnic Hispanic/Anglo divide characterizes an equally acrimonious debate concerning the use of the word "massacre" versus "execution" to describe the killing of Colonel Fannin and his troops at Goliad. For an excellent example of historical battles hot enough for popular media consumption, see "The Second Battle of Goliad" page 140, in the May 2001 edition of the *Texas Monthly*.

against Islam or any minority religion."⁴⁰ This policy is still the stated goal of the NCERT even after the BJP came to power.⁴¹

In contrast, the guiding directive of curriculum writers in Islamabad is the "Pakistan Ideology"⁴² which thrives on denigration of the "Hindu Other" and the promotion of a South Asian version of Islamic nationalism. As Najum Mushtaq wrote in a June 2001 article in a Pakistani newspaper,

The 'ideology of Pakistan' as defined to students at every school and college in the country is nothing except anti-Indianism. In every walk of life in Pakistan—from academia to journalism, from sports to bureaucracy—a vast majority of people have been inculcated with fantastic anti-India notions"⁴³

This rhetoric can be contrasted with India's post-independence "resolutions to eradicate communalism"—two opposing philosophies that "have shaped the preoccupations, and sometimes the logic, of textbooks writers in both countries."⁴⁴

Colonial Precedent: The Communalization of Textbook Narratives

In the Subcontinent, textbook centered conflicts between Hindu and Muslim historical perspectives did not commence because of Partition. Avril Powell, in an article "History Textbooks and the Transmission of the Pre-colonial

40 Changes in the direction of NCERT and their New National Curriculum Framework and the current debate between the Nehruvian school of secular socialists and the Hindu Nationalists, will be discussed in chapter five.

41 Chapter Five will look at the controversies over the rewriting of history and make a comparison between the old NCERT textbook for Medieval India, and the new one.

42 The "Ideology of Pakistan" will be described at length in chapter three.

43 Mushtaq, Najum. "Ideological Crossroads", *The New Internationalist*: June 10, 2001, <<http://www.jang-group.com/thenews/jun2001-daily/10-06-2001/oped/o3.htm>>

44 Avril Powell, *The Transmission of Knowledge in South Asia, Essays on Education, Religion, History, and Politics*, Crook, Nigel (ed.) (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996), p. 217.

Past in North-western India in the 1860's and 1870's",⁴⁵ chronicles debates that arose concerning the treatments of Hindu and Muslim history in two colonial era textbooks. One textbook examined by Professor Powell was authored by Shiva Prasad, an official in the education service in NWFP. The other was published in Panjab, by Karim al-Din, an Islamic scholar. This textbook came under criticism by an official of the British administration concerned about the perceived treatment of the God Ram and His wife Sita.⁴⁶ It was deemed necessary to find "the opinion of a Hindu of intelligence who was free from antiquated bigotry" who is "Hindoo only in name".⁴⁷

This textbook, based on British models, presented a dismissive treatment of history in pre-Islamic India covering "Hindu history" in only eleven pages, with the caveat that ancient history in India was unrecoverable and too intertwined with myth to be considered valid. The next section on Islamic history in India, a full 173 pages, offered a detailed account of Mahmud Ghaznavi and the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughals, and other Islamic dynasties during the medieval period, but never mentioned the history of communities who were not subordinate to Delhi. After the dispute, the textbook continued to be published in Panjab with only slight modifications. The objections were actually raised by a British officer and the colonial government was involved to adjudicate the textbook controversy at various levels.

45 Powell, Avril. "History Textbooks and the Transmission of the Pre-colonial Past in North-western Indian in the 1860's and 1870's", in Alli, Daud, (ed) *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 91-133.

46 According to the Avril Powell's analysis of the objecting British officer's critique the textbook, "the offending passages in Karim al-Din's book conveyed a denial of the divinity of Rama, which was compounded in the rest of the book [...] by the absence of sufficiently respectful titles for Rama and Sita (essentially the absence of the suffix 'ji'), and on occasion by the use of terms particularly for Sita, which he considered positively disrespectful." (pp. 102)

47 (This passage was quoted ironically by Powell, p. 107) from: Sec. To Govt Punjab to DPI, 15 Feb., 1865; DPI to Sec. To Govt, 17 March 1865. Govt Punjab: Educ. (A), Aug. 1865.

In the textbook written by Karim al-Din, a British officer suggested that the narrative regarding the Hindu God Ram was insulting to Hindus. On the other hand, another British officer went so far to state that

It can never be argued that because the Hindoos consider Ram Chundra an Incarnation of the Deity, that we are to corroborate their belief. The Government cannot undertake to teach false History, false Geography, and false Science and Philosophy, in order to please their prejudices, or suit the ignorance of its native subjects. At the same time, it can and should of course abstain from needlessly wounding their religious feelings. Now Ram Chundra is an ancient Raja of too great celebrity to be omitted altogether in a History of India, but at the same time the fact must be clearly and calmly stated that he was but a Raja, and there is no need of using words in the plural number to express extraordinary respect towards him [...]. Such extra mark of respect would in my opinion be tantamount to a recognition of his Divine character and mission, which is quite uncalled for on the part of the Government.⁴⁸

The offending passages, questioning the divinity of Rama, were omitted from some of the subsequent editions. Powel rightly compares this controversy to contemporary disputes about historical representations of the Hindu Muslim interface used in textbooks in modern India. These narratives have come under fire by the BJP government as being ‘anti-national’ and misrepresenting the indigenous traditions while “white-washing atrocities” of the Turkish, Afghan, and Mughal invaders. These historiography issues were not resolved by the British in the late nineteenth century, and due to the wide disparity in interpretation, they can, in truth, never be resolved because they express two opposing perspectives of a common history.

The school history textbook published by the North-West Frontier Province government, authored by Siva Prasad, a Hindu scholar, became controversial about the same time as the textbook authored in Panjab. However,

48 (quoted from Powell, p. 103) from: Fuller to Pollock, 7 May 1864. Govt of Punjab: Educ. (A). Feb. 1865.

the controversy over the Prasad textbook continued, particularly since the main critic was the well known educationist Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who contended that there was a Hindu bias in the book. An anonymous article published in the Aligarh Institute Gazetteer, complained that the textbook was,

avowedly the work of a Hindoo, it not only exhibits the most decided Hindoo predilections, and contains numerous isolated passages hurtful to Musulman feelings, but [...] its general tone is antagonistic to Mahomedanism. No opportunity seems to be lost of throwing ridicule on former Musulman glory or of exciting hatred against former Musulman cruelties--To a Mahomedan the book has the air of a covert endeavour to foster a jealousy between races.⁴⁹

Siva Prasad's textbook reflected the "perceptions of the 'Indian past'...which tallied.... with the reconstruction of the 'Muhammadan period'...expressed in the preface to *The Biographical Index to the Historians of Muhammedan India*, published in 1849 by Henry Elliot". Powell tells us that

It would seem that Siva Prasad was probably the first, at school textbook level at least, to transmit so transparently, the view, later chorused by nationalist writers, that the British perceived the propagation of negative and hostile view of the Turks and Mughals as a means to raise public consciousness of the comparative benefits of their own rule.⁵⁰

One of the main objections that Sayyid Ahmad Khan brought forth was "Siva Prasad's allegedly biased treatment of relations between later Mughals and the Sikhs, his treatment of Aurangzeb's army with 'ridicule and contempt', and his representations of the rebellion of 1857, in which 'his Hindoos are always mild, his Mahomedans always aggressive'." Sayyid was particularly angered by "the representation of Mughal treatment of the Sikhs, [which were, according to him], 'calculated to create or foster prejudices'."⁵¹ This stance certainly reflects, as Powel suggests, a "manifestation of embryonic communal hostility". The

49 Aligarh Institute Gazette (AIG), vol. 3, no. 3, 17 Jan. 1867, p, 34 (quoted from Powell. p. 119).

50 Powell, p. 113.

51 Ibid, p. 117.

historical treatment of Mughal Sikh relations, as will be seen in Chapter Five on Indian textbook controversies, remains contentious and continues to act as the catalyst for revision and deletion of contested interpretations that can be seen to “offend religious sensibilities”.

In his defense against Sayyad’s critique of the textbook, the British officer who supported Siva Prasad’s perspective wrote, reflecting the views of Elliot, “the chronicles of the Mahomedan tenure of empire at Delhi are remarkable for little else than cruelty and misrule”. He went on to state that “To call historical facts as ‘matter inimical to the religion of Islam’ is an unfair representation... A writer of history is justified by his facts in calling this or that emperor good or bad, just or unjust, whatever his creed may be”. He concluded that the Siva Prasad textbook should be seen as a “legitimate ‘Hindoo view’ of history, not as ‘an attack on the Mahomedans’.”⁵²

Sayyid Ahmed Khan continued his attack on Siva Prasad’s book particularly a footnote reference that called a Sikh “devastation of a royal mosque” in Delhi “providential”. This footnote was omitted from later editions. Sayyid also objected to the depiction of several Islamic rulers as debauched and claimed that the decadence of certain rulers, was based on the “presumption that Islam was inherently conducive to some of the habits attributed to Muslim rulers in India [which were] embedded in the ‘Mahomedan period’ and to the Muslims’.”⁵³ By the time this controversy reached the Viceroy, Powell tells us that “one of the members of his Council [argued] that nothing Siva Prasad had written concerning the depravity of the Delhi court matched the excesses depicted by the contemporary fourteenth-century Muslim historian, Barani.” Powell observes, that

52 Ibid. p. 120.

53 Ibid, p. 123.

This being the dominant view from above, Siva Prasad's depiction of royal orgies were allowed to stand. Consequently school pupils in the mid-1870s would still be edified, even after the required revision, by details of transvestism at a court where, they learned, Mubarak Shah 'would sometime go abroad stark naked'.⁵⁴

Ultimately, the Viceroy's Council considered the issue as trivial, though initially they were primarily concerned with a "perceived need to keep the [famous and influential] Syed⁵⁵ Ahmed placated, rather than by the actual content of the textbook".⁵⁶ Ironically, Siva Prasad's treatment of Hindu history was also criticized by orthodox Brahmans in Benares who claimed that his chapter on Hinduism was dismissive and sketchy. They also criticized his treatment of the Muslim Period. This group of influential Benarasi writers and intellectuals, condemned and ostracized Prasad for writing "a textbook so transparently eulogistic of British rule".

Avril Powell shows that the development of historical narratives is "a gradual and sometimes inconsistent process". One area of agreement among Hindu, Muslim and Christian scholars was that the history of the "so-called 'pre-Ghaznavid' years [were] unrecoverable. Lacking a basis in historical 'fact', it was assumed by British and Indian authors alike ... that any seeming evidence should be dismissed as the product of poetical exaggeration, even fabrication".⁵⁷ Siva Prasad, the author of the NW Province textbook, used the very same "mid-Mughal chronicles of Ferishta, who was [also] the main Persian source also for Karim al-Din", the author of the Punjab textbook, though they "did not draw the same conclusion...from the self-same Persian text".⁵⁸

54 Ibid, p. 124.

55 Here Powell spells the name Syed instead of Sayyid, as was used earlier in this same essay.

56 Powell, p. 125.

57 Ibid, p. 131.

58 Ibid, p. 133.

Powell's research into the colonial precedent of controversies about history textbooks documents early manifestations of the chasms that continue to divide historians and writers of textbooks, based on their perspectives of Islam's interface with the indigenous religions of the Indian Subcontinent--Hinduism and Sikhism and Buddhism. It reveals, as well, disputes regarding the ancientness of India and the assumption that Hindu history was a collection of fabulous fables that cannot be authenticated by scientific historical research. These precursors to today's historical debates indicate the depth of the divides.

The 1947 Partition of India served to strengthen and harden opposing historical interpretations in post-colonial South Asia. In this scenario, with their economic viability, educational systems, and social fabric in tatters, the new countries of the Indian Subcontinent joined the comity of nations amid tremendous social turmoil. The following section is devoted to the history of educational institutions and traditions in the Subcontinent.

Uprooting the "Beautiful Tree"

Our English schools are flourishing wonderfully; we find it difficult to provide instruction to all. The effect of this education on Hindus is prodigious. No Hindu who has received an English education ever remains sincerely attached to his religion. It is my firm belief that if our plans of education are followed up, there will not be a single idolater among the respected classes 30 years hence. And this will be effected without our efforts to proselytize; I heartily rejoice in the prospect. -T.B. Macaulay in a letter to his father (October 12, 1836)

Drawing from the educational theories and practices contemporary in eighteenth and nineteenth century England, education in colonial India was premised on the post-Enlightenment belief in reason, humanism, and liberalism. Educational objectives stressed the creation of an ordered civil society that could guard the rights of property and capital. During the colonial period education was

designed to impart moral values to the population, specifically the elites, who, it was assumed, would serve as role models for the lower classes. These pedagogical projects were supported by a centralized curriculum that depended on predetermined textbooks for its dissemination.

This chapter will discuss paradigms that have shaped educational conventions in the countries of the present-day Subcontinent. The origins of and contradictions in colonial models of education must be historicized to understand their continuing application in the South Asian milieu. Occi-centric paradigms and perspectives form the bedrock of most theoretical orientations in the fields of Indology and South Asian Studies--though there are many contemporary scholars arguing against the privilege of established meta-theories. These disciplines have in turn influenced how students are taught and how history is interpreted in post-colonial South Asia.

In colonial India similar contradictions that accompanied the growth of the Common School Movement at the turn of the nineteenth century in the USA are prevalent in the models of education imposed on Britain's Indian subjects during the same period. The Common School Movement was developed in the U.S. only a few decades after independence. Joel Spring explains, "No other period in American educational history has stimulated as extensive a debate about its meaning and goals".⁵⁹ Though there were educational institutions and state run schools prior to the movement spearheaded by Horace Mann during the first part of the 19th century, "What was different about the Common School Movement was the establishment and standardization of state systems of education designed to achieve specific public policies".

⁵⁹Spring, Joel. *The American School, 1642-1990, Varieties of Historical Interpretation of the Foundations and Development of American Education*, White Plains, NY: Longman, 1990, p. 73.

What made the Common School different was that it was under state control and designed to teach a "common body of knowledge to students from different social backgrounds". The Common School was designed so that children of all social classes would go to school together and study "a common social and political ideology" thereby decreasing "political conflict and social problems".⁶⁰ The Common School was seen as a panacea to solve society's problems. Certainly, schools of earlier years were expected to fulfill specific societal functions. Colonial American education was intended to teach people how to read the Bible. During the early years of the American Republic, schools were seen as a place to create an elite class of men who could provide leadership for the new nation. Schools during this period were intended to serve a particular social purpose, as they are now. Sometimes that purpose was to change society and sometimes to mirror and perpetuate it, depending on whose goals are implemented. Often, both orientations exist simultaneously.

The Common School Movement was based on the assumption that "human nature can be formed, shaped, and given direction by training within formally organized institutions".⁶¹ Liberals who supported the movement saw it as a way to integrate immigrants into the society and provide a forum for inculcating democratic ideals. Schools were seen as a method to reform the social order. Both conservatives and liberals had ideas about what the goals of the Common School should be--depending on whose interests were being served. Horace Mann and his followers set the stage for this dichotomous mission that was simultaneously "interested in disarming the poor and in preventing poverty".⁶²

⁶⁰ibid, p. 74.

⁶¹ibid, p. 75.

⁶²Bowles and Gintis, *Schooling in a Capitalist Society*, , (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 28.

The implementation of the British system of school reform in early colonial India dislodged the students of the lower classes who ceased attending the traditional *pathshalas* or guru-led schools. These lower or working class students found the new modernized colonially constructed curriculum irrelevant to their needs, and they preferred not to attend. This response to the establishment of schools in the 19th century, wherein the working poor eschewed education is also reflected in a study of attitudes toward education in early America.

A similar situation, where poor children rejected education was investigated by Michael Katz in 1968 in a study of American education, *The Irony of Early School Reform*.⁶³ In this landmark study, Katz argued that the working class resisted public schooling.⁶⁴ This observation was based on research of voting records from 1860 in Massachusetts, which showed that elites were inclined to support the Common School whereas less privileged classes opposed it. This discovery seemed to fly in the face of the standard view of the history of education in the U.S. which told a story of poor working class people who wanted and fought for a better life for their children through education. It was thought that elites were less concerned about the public schools because their children were already receiving good educations in private institutions. It was generally accepted that idealistic and socially conscious elites who advocated the Common School did so because they saw the need to help the disadvantaged and create a more egalitarian society.

Katz observed that the public schools during the late 19th century were rigid and bureaucratic with an emphasis on discipline and rote learning which led

⁶³Katz, Michael. *The Irony of Early School Reform*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).

⁶⁴In Bangladesh, a organization that has seemingly mediated education for disadvantage children is the Underprivileged Children's Education Project that has been successfully education working children for twenty five years and has a very low drop out rate. This has been accomplished through a program of teacher intervention and community involvement.

him to argue "Could a truly humanitarian urge to help realize widely diffused aspirations have turned so quickly into the dispassionate ethos of red tape and drill?" We are left, with the other side of the story, telling a tale of hegemonic intent in which workers are trained just enough to provide cheap labor for factories, but not enough to develop philosophical systems of inquiry to question a power structure based on unequal distribution of resources. According to Paulo Freire, in the introduction to *Culture Wars* by Ira Shor, "school reform corresponds to a specific political intention in the interest of safeguarding the establishment".⁶⁵

In seventeenth and eighteenth century Britain, when print technology merged with new imperatives for centralized education, the textbook became a "basic instrument for the organization of curricula and teaching in national school systems".⁶⁶ By the middle of the nineteenth century, the content of curricular materials was by and large centralized. Debate had begun in earnest among the ruling elites regarding the need for mass elementary education as a method to create good citizens among the general population.⁶⁷

As education came to be seen as a tool for social engineering, theories for teacher training replaced the personalized, scholarship-based patterns of earlier centuries. The move to teach large numbers of students simultaneously, and the imperative to impart cultural norms, created the need for standardized textbooks. The production of knowledge had become a powerful tool in the hegemonic intent

⁶⁵ The generalizability of this rationale can be pointed by the perceived responsibility of the East India Company to preserve British interests in India.

⁶⁶ David L Elliott and Arthur Woodward, eds. *Textbooks and Schooling in the United States: Eighty-ninth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. 4.

⁶⁷ It wasn't until the mass education experiments of the twentieth century that non-elites had access to education. Prior to the modern era, education was the exclusive domain of the upper classes, in England, Greece, Rome, India, the USA, etc.

of the civilizing project, what modern critics of education have called the 'hidden curriculum'.

Prior to the nineteenth century, "teachers worked with individuals or small groups. . . . schools [had] collections of texts. . . . [T]eachers would use these books adventitiously to organize programs of instruction for individual students".⁶⁸ A parallel can be drawn between this classical European system of pedagogy and the educational practices in ancient India. Gandhi's statement at Chatham House, London, in October 1931, criticizes the effect of the English educational system on traditional learning,

India is more illiterate than it was fifty or a hundred years ago . . . because the British administrators, when they came to India, instead of taking hold of things as they were, began to root them out.⁶⁹

Gandhi accused his colonizers of destroying the "Beautiful Tree"⁷⁰ of the indigenous system of village schools by digging up the roots and leaving them exposed. He claimed that the British had made education too expensive for the common man by disempowering the traditional village schoolmaster.

The centralized system of education undermined the teacher's authority over curriculum.⁷¹ This model obliged teachers to keep large groups of children orderly and to maintain daily records of attendance, expenditures, and test results. As their status declined dramatically, teachers faced financial loss, particularly when student performance during inspection became a criterion for financial grants. Teachers, as a rule, made a salary ten times less than the often intimidating

⁶⁸ Elliott and Woodward, p. 4.

⁶⁹M. K. Gandhi as cited by Dharampal in *The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century*, New Delhi: Sita Ram Goel for Biblia Impex Private Limited, (1983), p. vi.

⁷⁰This statement by Gandhi is the title of a book on Indian education by Dharmapal, which has become a classic, *The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century*, *Collected Writings, Volume III*, Other India Press, Mapusa Goa, India: 2000, (First edition Biblia Impex: 1983).

⁷¹Krishna Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education: a Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas*. New Delhi: Sage Publication, (1991), p. 73.

inspecting officers. By 1918, it was apparent that, "Authority, while ceasing to examine the pupil, [was] increasingly bent on examining the teacher".⁷² Teaching had become the "maintaining of accurate registers and records [and] sticking to the given order of lessons [from] whichever textbook had been prescribed".⁷³

As early as 1776, when England was facing a rebellion in the American colonies, Adam Smith criticized the East India Company, arguing that the preservation of British interests in India had given rise to additional responsibilities.⁷⁴ Krishna Kumar, a professor of education at Delhi University, notes ironically,

A commercial institution was thus made to become a colonial state and to change its rhetoric from profit for itself into service for the empire. [...] It implied the creation of a new order in the colony, a civil society among the natives. The ethos, the rules and the symbols of the new order had to be constructed, in a manner that would not disturb the ongoing commercial enterprise. [...] Within it, coercion had to be replaced by socialization.⁷⁵

The primary tool employed to achieve these goals was, of course, education. Aristocrats viewed the uneducated lower classes as illiterate, irrational, dangerous, a threat to their economic dominance. Education was considered necessary only in as far as it would ensure civil order and guarantee the rights of property. The same pedagogical imperatives were applied to the population of England as well as to Indian subjects. In India, as in England, only the elites were deemed worthy of imbibing gifts that a western education could bestow. Education of the working class was not considered cost-effective until much later. The poor were seen as a potential threat to the social order, needing moral training

⁷²The India Review 11 (November 1918), p. 290.

⁷³Krishna Kumar, *Origins, of India's Textbook Culture*, Occasional Papers on History and Society No. 47 (New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1987), p. 13.

⁷⁴See P.J. Marshall, *Problems of Empire*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968).

⁷⁵Krishna Kumar, *Political Agenda in Education: A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991), p. 26.

more than intellectual development. As Adam Smith wrote in *Wealth of Nations*, also published in 1776,

Civil government, so far as it is instituted for the security of property, is in reality instituted for the defense of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against those who have none at all.⁷⁶

Education was viewed as a method to secure the social order and ensure the continuance of civil society.

This civilizing hypothesis in the colonial context did not go unchallenged. Edmund Burke, among others of the British bourgeoisie, argued that the fierce American desire for independence would never have succeeded had it not "been led by a determined educated class".⁷⁷

We had just lost America from our own folly in having allowed the establishment of schools and colleges and that it would not do for us to repeat the same act of folly in regard to India.⁷⁸

Steeped in John Locke and post-Reformation Humanism, the Americans could not but rebel against their colonial masters. Many British feared the same from their Indian subjects if provided with the tools of rationalism. Such was their faith in the power of a British education. General Cornwallis, after tasting defeat during the America revolution, took up his next assignment as India's Governor-General, determined to consolidate the empire.

Cornwallis's most famous predecessor, Warren Hastings who "was fully conversant with Bengali and Persian languages, contributed his share to the progress of education".⁷⁹ Hastings, representative of the Orientalist tradition, was concerned with discovering the missing links of civilization. In comparison with other colonialists, he expressed respect for Indian customs and traditions, and

⁷⁶ Smith, Adam. *Wealth of Nations*, 1776, book V, chapter.I, part II.

⁷⁷Kalyan K. Chatterjee, *English Education in India: Issues and Opinions*, (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1976) p. 1.

⁷⁸ Attributed to a director of the East India Company, 1790, quoted from *Parliamentary Papers*, 1852-53, p. 113, (as per Kalyan Chatterjee).

⁷⁹P. L. Rawat, *History of Indian Education*, (Agra: Ram Prasad).

discouraged missionary activities. He did not share the Evangelical and Utilitarian viewpoint that promoted a "glorious vision of English education as the grand medium of transmitting the civilization and culture of Europe to a decadent Asiatic Society like India".⁸⁰ Instead, Hastings worked to help establish the Calcutta Madrassah in 1781, "based on the age-old Mohammedan system of teaching Arabic and Persian".⁸¹

In 1792, an Orientalist scholar, Jonathan Duncan, founded the Sanskrit College of Benares. In a letter to Cornwallis, Duncan defended the school, stating that the purpose of the institution was the "preservation and cultivation of the [indigenous] Laws, Literature, and Religion [in order to] endear our Government to the native Hindoos".⁸² The mandate for Orientalist education was to use the languages of the elite to educate Hindus and Moslems in their own laws and traditions. Early colonialists such as Hastings were

deeply interested in the civilizations of the sub-continent. Wishing to govern in harmony with the traditions of the peoples, he recruited [Sir William Jones] the first of a long series of British scholars to study the ancient laws of India.⁸³

The efforts of these scholars were more focused on bringing Indian learning to Europe than on bringing European learning to the subcontinent.

Though the first English school had been established in Madras as early as 1673, it was meant to serve the Anglo-Indian population and the educational needs of the Company's employees.⁸⁴ However, by the end of the eighteenth century, several institutes of higher learning had been established for local

⁸⁰ Chatterjee, p. 2.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 4.

⁸² Henry Sharp, Selection from Educational Records, Part I, (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, Calcutta, 1920), p. 137.

⁸³ Josselyn Hennessy, "British Education for an Elite in India," in *Governing Elites*, ed. Rupert Williams, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 136.

⁸⁴ P.L. Rawat, *History of Indian Education*, p. 128.

populations in Bengal, Bombay and Benares and other locales. With the beginning of the nineteenth century, colonial networks were entrenched and imperialists' concerns centered around methods of expanding and maintaining British dominance. In this colonization project, the role of education was pivotal.

In 1811, the Governor General, Lord Minto (Gilbert Elliot), wrote that the depraved and corrupt condition of the people of India was related to their lack of education,

Little doubt can be entertained that the prevalence of the crimes of perjury and forgery [...] is in a great measure ascribable, both in the Mohomedans and Hindoos, to the want of due instruction in the moral and religious tenets of their respective faiths.⁸⁵

When the Charter for the East India Company was renewed in 1813, "a modest provision was made for the expenditure on institutions of learning".⁸⁶ The agenda was to construct a subservient class of elites who would then provide the bureaucratic infrastructure and help to maintain order by inculcating British culture to their underlings, while, if should be added, their colonial masters plundered the wealth of the Indian Subcontinent. This exploitation was justified by the rhetoric inherent in the "white man's burden"--the British claim that they were carrying civilization to the "natives". Education was essential in accomplishing both these goals--the extraction of wealth and the injection of post-Enlightenment rationalism.

Utilitarians such as James Mill "were interested in teaching the sciences, history, and philosophy, not literature and poetry".⁸⁷ They were impatient with the Orientalists' indigenized approach to education, which had been designed during the early years of England's consolidation of power in order to avoid alienating the "natives". Missionary work had earlier been discouraged because it caused

⁸⁵A.N. Basu, ed., *Indian Education in Parliamentary Papers, Part I*, (Bombay: 1952), p. 145.

⁸⁶Krishna Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education*, p. 5.

⁸⁷Kalyan K. Chatterjee, pg. 10.

distrust among the locals. Nor did Mill give much credence to "the wishy-washy theories of acculturation by an English literary cult, a view that was much favored by the Evangelists and Macaulayists". Evangelism, which equated social progress with Christianity, espoused a form of

European education in alliance with the doctrine of Christianity, [which would communicate] to the colonies the superior morals and knowledge of Europe, would destroy the basis of their old beliefs and pave the way for conversion to Christianity.⁸⁸

All of these theories of education for India stressed schooling the propertied members of society. The laboring classes were not seen as individuals; they were simply the mass of undifferentiated laborers, in India as in England.

Orientalist scholarship gradually lost its sway over colonial policy-making, and ideas of conserving indigenous traditions in India were replaced by the "imperial urge to govern them and 'civilize' them according to British ideas".⁸⁹ The push to educate elite Indians in English gradually gained momentum. The idea was to educate a select group of the landed class who would then translate English law, poetry and literature into the native tongues, creating a trickle-down educational effect. European learning could thereby be appreciated by the masses and assist in their acquiescence and submission to the rule of what they would undoubtedly recognize as a technologically and morally superior civilization.

This Euro-centric influence reflected the ideas of Utilitarians such as James Mill, whose *History of British India*, first published in 1818, was immensely influential, and was required reading for aspiring colonial officers. Though Mill himself never visited India, his depiction and analysis of Indian culture and history were considered authoritative. He divided Indian history into

⁸⁸Ibid, p. 5- 8.

⁸⁹Ibid, p. 15.

three periods: Hindu, Muslim, and British⁹⁰. This tripartite periodization advanced the colonial enterprise.

The shortest section in the book, the Hindu period, based primarily on missionary reports, represented a superstitious and backward society whose history was characterized, if you could call it history, by repeated conquests and invasions, leading to the violence of the Muslim period that had, according to Mill, more history and therefore more pages. The British Period caps the history of India with the final and longest section, where English values and skills were rapidly bringing fiduciary progress and enlightened governance to depraved subjects hopelessly divided along caste and communal lines. This book helped to guide educational paradigms during the formative years of organizing and implementing educational reforms in colonial India.

"Learn English and lose your humanity."

-S.N. Chaturvedi, *History of Rural Education*

The Charter Act of 1833 opened the way for Indians to join the civil service. "From then on, every student was assumed to be aspiring for civil services as the Indian Civil servant was perceived as the heart of the small civil society".⁹¹ State spending on education was justified on these grounds. Education for the sake of learning was less important than as a source of ethical uplift and the creation of a cheap labor pool for the colonial administration. Regardless, many Indians who were educated in the British system, felt a "new and positive self-image". The tiny fraction of educated elites, from whom loyalty and morality was supposed to trickle down to the masses, soon became nationalists with quite another vision for India.

⁹⁰ Identifying the first two periods of Indian history with Hinduism and Islam but delinking the British Period from Christianity.

⁹¹ Krishna Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education*, p. 30

By 1857, the Orientalist orientation had given ground to the Anglicized Utilitarian position that promoted the study of English literature and eschewed the use of indigenous texts and knowledge.⁹² In this way, "the cosmopolitan and intellectual curiosity of the eighteenth century Enlightenment [gave way to the] messianism of the nineteenth century".⁹³ Ironically, it was the "vast body of knowledge, [from the Orientalists] and the stereotypes emanating from it, that were used by the Anglicist to attack the native culture". Ultimately, both orientations contributed to the colonial enterprise, which, by rejecting indigenous models, "created a deep conflict between education and knowledge"⁹⁴ and a widening gulf between the tiny educated class and the expanding laboring classes who were even more impoverished by colonial taxation policies.

The ironies inherent in the English educational program brought its validity into question. Aspiring parents who wanted to gain socially and financially under the prevailing conditions sent their sons to English schools in hopes that they would secure employment with the burgeoning bureaucracy. Yet they feared the very system that offered promises of prestige, precisely because English education was seen as divorced from Indian mores. Walsh notes in her study of children in British India that "the greatest fear of parents, particularly in the early years of the nineteenth century, was that their children would convert to Christianity".⁹⁵

Conversely, the worst fears of the imperialists, namely that English education would create a class of dissident intellectuals who would question the authority of their masters, gradually emerged and subverted the Anglicizing

⁹²Some Utilitarians, such as Mills, advocated translating English literature into the indigenous languages. Macaulay's notorious statement is often quoted, "A single shelf of a good European library is worth all the native literature of Bharat and Arabia."

⁹³Kalyan K. Chatterjee, p. 53.

⁹⁴Kumar, Political Agenda, p. 68.

⁹⁵Judith Walsh, *Growing Up in British India*, (London: Holmes and Meier, 1983), p. 44.

project. Though the British continued to look down on the intellectual abilities of the "brown babus" as imitative and superficial, and though most of those educated in the English system were in many ways disassociated from their indigenous milieu, the grand scheme of totalizing acculturation could not stem the nationalist tide. Modernist leaders such as Ram Mohan Roy whole-heartedly embraced the ideals of the Enlightenment, and, influenced by Unitarian thought, sought to implement social reform.

Traditionalists like Dayananda Saraswati promoted social reform in the garb of orthodox Vedic concepts, in response to those imposed by the colonizers. While utilizing Western pedagogical paradigms in promoting mass education, Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj in order to counteract evangelical missionary rhetoric and the perceived threat of continuing Islamic conversions. He utilized print technology and established educational institutions with a centrally mandated curriculum. Though the Hindu reformers utilized Western pedagogical paradigms, it should be pointed out that they were not simply mimicking the colonial model, but engaged and redeployed the methods to fit indigenous content and context.

The same holds for educators among the Islamic elite such as the two main figures in the founding of the Deoband school, Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi.⁹⁶ In the academic institution they established in Deoband in 1867, they did away with the personalized "teaching style that had been used for centuries. . . . Students enrolled in the school studied a defined curriculum with annual examinations". Though the hadith was central to the educational content, the organizational form was "adopted from the English

⁹⁶Kenneth Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India, Socio-religious reform movements in British India*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 58.

model of education".⁹⁷ Ultimately the educational enterprise was propagated and sustained through the introduction of textbooks and standardized curriculum--whether the content was based on the Vedas or the Qu'ran depended on the community. Colonial institutions implicated the indigenous models as less rational, and superimposed a system that privileged Western concepts and constructs.

Even though colonial education--characterized by the teleology of modernity and so essential to the civilizing project--disrupted, or uprooted, the indigenous systems, it fell, paradoxically, on fertile soil. In both Hindu and Muslim grammar schools, the preferred method of learning was rote memorization. Since both religions believe their respective holy books to be the revealed word of God, the exact syllabic reproduction of the words is essential. Traditionally, students at Madrassahs, Islamic-centered educational institutions, were made to memorize long passages from the Qu'ran and from Persian literature, little of which they could actually understand. Similarly, students in Brahmanical schools memorized Sanskrit texts verbatim as an integral component of the learning experience. Undoubtedly this method of instruction is important for the preservation of the culture and religious texts. This observation is not a critique of the recitation of religious texts, but a backdrop for understanding the easy implementation of rote methods of learning which continue to characterize schools in South Asia.

This call-and-response technique was ubiquitous and firmly established in the pedagogical practices of the subcontinent prior to the arrival of the Raj. W.D. Arnold, Director of Public Instruction in Panjab during 1857-58, found that the local people agreed upon "what constituted education," and that was

⁹⁷Ibid, p. 61.

to read fluently and if possible to say by heart a series of Persian works of which the meaning was not understood by the vast majority, and of which the meaning, when understood, was for the most part little calculated to edify the [general population].⁹⁸

Reverential recitation of hieratic literature provided a context in which rote learning experiences, using English literature, could flourish. However, the content of the colonial educational system was dramatically divorced from the realities of the Indian milieu. It was based on the perception that indigenous knowledge had become deficient through the centuries, which led to the current "depraved condition" of the Indian people. Orientalists and Indologists saw Indic civilization as the cradle of Europe, but they surmised that the rise of "superstitious and irrational" practices within Hinduism had caused India to stagnate socially and regress religiously. English-style education was promoted by Utilitarians who wanted to create a class of Indians, well educated in western ideas and sentiment, who would spread their influence to the rest of India.⁹⁹

As Bayly argues this constituted an "information revolution" in the subcontinent.

The knowledgeable man of the Indo-Islamic order was remade in the course of a generation to become the 'native servant of government' educated in Milton and Shakespeare, friend to Copernicus, and reader of *The Times*. This dramatic change is heightened by the apparent sparseness and inflexibility of indigenous knowledge systems and the pathetically low level of popular literacy.¹⁰⁰

This "pathetically low level of popular literacy" is contested in the article, *The Purpose and Impact of Government Policy on Pathshala Gurumohashoys in*

⁹⁸Richey, J.A., (ed.), *Selections from Educational Records, Part II 1840-1859*, (New Delhi: Published for the National Archives of India by the Manager of Publications, 1965), p. 301.

⁹⁹Sir Thomas Raleigh, *Lord Curzon of India*, (London: Macmillan, 1906), p. 316.

¹⁰⁰C.A. Bayly, *Colonial Rule and the 'Information Order' in South Asia*, Crook, Nigel (ed.) *The Transmission of Knowledge in South Asia, Essays on Education, Religion, History, and Politics*, (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996), p. 308.

Nineteenth-century Bengal.¹⁰¹ Based on his larger research of indigenous education in pre-colonial Bengal, Kazi Shahidullah of Dhaka University investigates the negative impact of British pedagogical interventions. Seemingly well meaning and articulated in the cloaked language of reform, these "measures [which were] aimed at controlling and improving the education given in the pathshalas [...] had severe ramifications for the pathshala gurus who were often unable or unwilling to adjust to the changes imposed".¹⁰²

Similar to Arnold's later study of village schools in Panjab, William Adam, a Scottish missionary, conducted a survey, between 1835 and 1838, on the state of education in Bengal.¹⁰³ He "found that almost every village in Bengal had a pathshala and estimated that there were about 100,000 such schools in existence at the time in Bengal and Bihar".¹⁰⁴ He reported that printed books were not used, "and even manuscripts were unknown to most of these institutes. Pupils were taught mainly through the oral tradition where exercises were dictated by the teacher and learnt by dint of rote memory". Pathshalas were popular with all classes of people, "irrespective of their religion, caste, or social status", as the "curriculum was designed towards meeting the practical demands of rural society", with emphasis put on accounting and letter writing.

In this way pathshalas had functioned for centuries, providing practical instruction to all classes of children and meeting local needs by "teaching traditional subjects in the traditional way". However, after the Education Dispatch

¹⁰¹Kazi Shahidullah. *The Purpose and Impact of Government Policy on Pathshala Gurumohashoys in Nineteenth-century Bengal*, Crook, Nigel (ed.) *The Transmission of Knowledge in South Asia, Essays on Education, Religion, History, and Politics*, (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996).

¹⁰²*ibid*, p. 119.

¹⁰³W. Adam, *Reports on the State of Education in Bengal (1835 and 1838)*, (ed. Anatanath Basu) Calcutta, 1941.

¹⁰⁴ Shahidullah, p. 120.

of 1854 the government initiated a series of programs designed at developing a more modern system of education. The pre-existing pathshalas were targeted, because they were operating in almost every village and because they were well attended and economical.

The reforming measures taken were directed mainly at . . . improving the guru, [and] providing him with training, and on directing him as to how best he could run a pathshala properly and efficiently.¹⁰⁵

By 1855, the Inspector of Schools for East Bengal, Henry Woodrow had designed a system to assert government control over the pathshalas. In October 1860, Lieutenant-Governor, Sir J.P. Grant initiated a program which identified "existing pathshalas in every district" and provided books and created a system of examination which would "evaluate" the guru as well as the pupils.

Grant's scheme thus was aimed at improving the education in the pathshalas through improving the gurus. However, a flaw in the scheme was that it made no provision for training, the mere offer of monetary rewards was unlikely to lead to the adoption of the desired improvements. The introduction of printed books and the study of geography and history marked an important change in the course of studies at old pathshalas. Clearly, it would be difficult for the traditional guru to teach subjects which he himself never studied.¹⁰⁶

Predictably, these improvements "had a negative impact on the enrollment of the pathshalas. Pupils belonging to the lower classes could not comprehend the utility of the changes introduced and began to drop out from the improved pathshalas".¹⁰⁷ This negative impact was noted in Government of Bengal, *Education Proceedings*, General Department, no. 64, October 1860,

When one passes from a patshala in its original condition, to one under a Normal school pupil, it is striking to observe the marked difference in the appearance of the pupils in each; in the former I found the naked children of the cultivators, and boys of the lowest

¹⁰⁵ Shahidullah, pp. 121- 123.

¹⁰⁶ibid, 124.

¹⁰⁷ibid, 125.

class that has ever been reached by instruction of any kind with a rare specimen of better class of villagers; in the latter I found (as a rule) only the Brahmin and writer-cast boys. To my enquires, made from everyone I met, there was but one answer, namely that the lower-class boys had retired altogether from the patshalas.¹⁰⁸

Drawing from colonial documents such as the Education Commission Report of the Bengal Provincial Committee (Calcutta, 1884), and the Report of Public Instruction in Bengal (Calcutta, 1863-64), Kazi Shahidullah describes the standardization of the curriculum and the introduction of print media. The new subjects included history and geography. "Students now learnt to draw maps of different districts showing railways and rivers passing through them; they had to study the administration of Warren Hastings, Lord Cornwallis and Lord William Bentinck".¹⁰⁹ The new system was designed to improve education by modernizing pedagogic practices. The results of this standardization was that schools moved away from indigenous knowledge which was intimately embedded in the local culture and began to emphasize the needs and the deeds of a conquering elite.

This was accomplished by coercion and the introduction of "the art of teaching" which taught gurus, how

to maintain registers of attendance and the different kinds of punishment to be invoked for purposes of discipline and control. . . . The independence [of the traditional teachers] was clearly being undermined, and they were gradually being transformed into officials of the government.¹¹⁰

Centralized control of the schools had a negative impact on teachers, who then had to teach what was deemed worthy by the colonial state, based on prescribed methods. Education became a totalizing hegemonic tool. At a speech delivered at

¹⁰⁸ibid.

¹⁰⁹quoted in Kazi Shahidullah from: Government of Bengal, Report of Public Instruction in Bengal (Calcutta, 1863-64) appendix A, pp. 342-3.

¹¹⁰ Shahidullah, p. 127.

Benares Hindu University, on Nov. 26, 1920, Mahatma Gandhi strongly contested the guiding values and negative results of the English model of education,

It is my firm conviction that the main reason why the present regime goes on and continues to perpetuate the atrocities it does, is that we have come under the spell of its education. Before its intrusion we were self reliant and not dependent as we are today.

In his now classic volume, *The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century*, Dharmapal validates Mahatma Gandhi's claims by examining numerous surveys and studies of educational institutions and village schools conducted in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

Dharmapal contextualizes British educational concerns and activities in India. He points out that the British in no way intended their policies to extend education to the colonial subject or the Indian masses. In fact, the opposite could be said to be true. The British distrusted the impact that a liberal education might have on the common people. In England, in 1542 a law was enacted that restricted the reading of the Bible to nobles and gentry, "No women... prentices, journeymen... yeoman or... husbandmen, nor labourers, shall read the New Testament in English". The law remained in effect until 1611 when the official King James version of the Bible was published. This anti-educational trend continued for over a hundred years, until the end of the seventeenth century when Charity Schools and Sunday Schools were established so that common people could have religious instruction and learn to read the Bible. Education was seen primarily as a missionary activity. Even as late as the end of the eighteenth century, many of the British ruling class blamed the comparably high literacy in the American colonies for the fierce desire for independence and democracy. In addition to this distrust of universal literacy, colonial mercantile concerns about education in India were

Not centered on the people, their knowledge, or education, or the lack of it. Rather, their interest in ancient texts served their purpose,

that of making the people conform to what was chosen for them from such texts and their new interpretations.¹¹¹

When in 1813 the House of Commons debated the “promotion of ‘religious and moral improvement’ in India” they commissioned surveys of schools and educational institutions in various districts in India. However, as Dharmapal points out,

It is important to emphasize that indigenous education was carried out through *pathshalas*, *madrassahs* and *gurukulas*. Education in these traditional institutions--which were actually kept alive by revenue contributions by the community including illiterate peasants-- was called *shiksha* (and included the ideals of *prajna*, *shil* and *samadhi*). These institutions were in fact, the watering holes of the culture of traditional communities. Therefore, the term ‘school’ is a weak translation of the roles these institutions really played in Indian society.

Nonetheless, the men who made these surveys in the early nineteenth century noted that “every village had a school” and larger villages had two schools.¹¹² Dharmapal compares this with the situation in England during the same period of time where there were “few schools for the ordinary people”. He boldly suggests that the data can provide an “insight into the nature of Indian society at the time”. He states,

According to this hard data, in terms of the content, and the proportion of those attending institutional school education and the situation in India in 1800 is certainly not inferior to what obtained in England then, and in many respects Indian schooling seems to have been much more extensive (and, it should be remembered, that it is a greatly damaged and disorganized India that one is referring to). The context of studies was better than what was then studied in England. The duration of study was more prolonged. The method of school teaching was superior and it is this very method which is said to have

¹¹¹ Dharmapal, *The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century*, Collected Writings, Volume III, Other India Press, Mapusa Goa, India: 2000, (First edition Biblia Impex: 1983), pg.16.

¹¹² *ibid*, pg. 18, (Quoted from: House of Commons Papers, 1812-13, volume 7, evidence of Thomas Munro, -.127.)

greatly helped the introduction of popular education in England but which had prevailed in India for centuries.

One amazing statistic that arises from the collected data on education in India is that, contrary to popular perceptions, education in India was not limited to the higher castes, or “twice-born”, but in the schools still existing at the time of the survey, it was the shudras, or low caste “who predominated in the thousands of the then still-existing schools in practically each of these areas”.

Needless to say, the arrival of the Europeans and the onset of modernity did not positively impact the literacy level or the spread of educational institutions. The educational objectives in the countries of the contemporary Subcontinent are not all based on the same objective of what is best for school children to learn. In Pakistan the model in place for the past two decades promotes xenophobia and medievalism.

The following chapter concerns the teaching of history in contemporary Pakistan and political and socio-religious pressures on the social studies curriculum. In the following analysis, Pakistani textbooks are compared with textbooks published in India by the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT). A survey of textbooks in use in Pakistan recently completed by a team of scholars, "The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan," compiled by A.H. Nayyar and Ahmed Salim, corroborates my research of Pakistani textbooks discussed in the next chapter of this dissertation.¹¹³

When I was in Pakistan in 1999, I met with both Professor A.H. Nayyar, a top physicist at Quaid-I-Azam University and also at MIT, who has written extensively about education related issues for two decades and Professor Ahmed Salim, known for being one of the first Pakistani scholars to write a book about

¹¹³ http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/society_resources_frameset.htm

Bangladesh, taking into account the betrayal and suffering. For years both of these scholars have been concerned about the xenophobic and medievalist points of view found in Pakistani textbooks and the negative impact of this kind of rhetoric on identity formation among Pakistani school children. In the introduction to this substantial report, hot off the press, they wrote,

Pakistan's public education system has an important role in determining how successful we shall be in achieving the goal of a progressive, moderate and democratic Pakistan. A key requirement is that children must learn to understand and value this goal and cherish the values of truthfulness, honesty, responsibility, equality, justice, and peace that go with it. [...] However, a close analysis by a group of independent scholars shows that for over two decades the curricula and the officially mandated textbooks in these subjects have contained material that is directly contrary to the goals and values of a progressive, moderate and democratic Pakistan.

The research project, funded in part by the Eqbal Ahmed Foundation, identified "some of the most significant problems in the current curriculum and textbooks:"

- Inaccuracies of fact and omissions that serve to substantially distort the nature and significance of actual events in our history.
- Insensitivity to the actually existing religious diversity of the nation
- Incitement to militancy and violence, including encouragement of *Jehad* and *Shahadat*.
- Perspectives that encourage prejudice, bigotry and discrimination towards fellow citizens, especially women and religious minorities, and other nations.
- A glorification of war and the use of force
- Omission of concepts, events and material that could encourage critical self-awareness among students.
- Outdated and incoherent pedagogical practices that hinder the development of interest and insight among students.

The authors go on to say that according to their research,

The books on Social Studies systematically misrepresent events that have happened over the past several decades of Pakistan's history, including those which are within living memory of many people. This history is narrated with distortions and omissions. The causes, effects, and responsibility for key events are presented so

as to leave a false understanding of our national experience. A large part of the history of this region is also simply omitted, making it difficult to properly interpret events, and narrowing the perspective that should be open to students. Worse, the material is presented in a way that encourages the student to marginalise and be hostile towards other social groups and people in the region.

These extensive quotes from this important research published in the Spring of 2003, forms an extended introduction to the following chapter of my dissertation, *The Islamization of Pakistani Social Studies*. This chapter was completed more than a year before the SDPI report by A.H. Nayyar and Ahmed Salim. Their extensive work validates my own research. I would like to offer another quote from that important project, that underscores my own evaluation of the curriculum and textbooks.

There is an undercurrent of exclusivist and divisive tendencies at work in the subject matter recommended for studies in the curriculum documents as well as in textbooks. Pakistani nationalism is repeatedly defined in a manner that is bound to exclude non-Muslim Pakistanis from either being Pakistani nationals or from even being good human beings. Much of this material would run counter to any efforts at national integration.

Chapter Three: The Islamization of Pakistani Social Studies

If it is not anti-Indianism, then in what other terms could we possibly render Pakistani-Muslim nationalism? [...] The 'ideology of Pakistan' as defined to students at every school and college in the country is nothing except anti-Indianism. In every walk of life in Pakistan--from academia to journalism, from sports to bureaucracy--a vast majority of people have been inculcated with fantastic anti-India notions. [...] Phrases like the "Hindu mentality" and "devious Indian psyche" are part of the daily military talk. [...] Anti-Indianism, in short, runs deep in Pakistani state and society. It is a state of mind that cannot be switched off [...]. People have no other alternative frame of reference in which to define Pakistani nationalism. --Najum Mushtaq¹¹⁴

Pak Studies: Propaganda of a 'Failed State'

All students in Pakistan are required to take courses called Pakistan Studies and must pass standardized tests based on that curriculum. Pakistan Studies is a compulsory subject in all secondary schools and colleges. There are numerous textbooks published under this title for the 9th class to the BA level. In general, the curriculum is a composite of patriotic discourses, justification of the Two-Nation Theory, hagiographies of Muslim heroes, and endemic in the discourse, polemics about the superiority of Islamic principals over Hinduism. The rubric in these textbooks must be learned by rote in order for students to pass the required exam.

Many of the students in Pakistan with whom I have spoken not only disliked this required course, but openly mocked it. A student at a women's college in Lahore told me that "Pak Studies classes are usually scheduled at five or six in the afternoon" and "hardly any students attend", choosing instead to spend their time studying for "important classes such as Math or Urdu or English"

114 Mushtaq, Najum. "Ideological Crossroads", The New International: June 10, 2001, <<http://www.jang-group.com/thenews/jun2001-daily/10-06-2001/oped/o3.htm>>.

which are held in the morning. “Besides”, the student continued, “we’ve covered the Pak Studies material year after year, it’s just the same Lucknow Pact, Two-Nation Theory. . . We don’t have to study for the test, the Ideology of Pakistan has been drilled into us”.

Textbooks in Pakistan must first be approved by the Curriculum Wing of the Ministry of Education in Islamabad after which they are published by the provincial textbook boards located at Jamshoro in Sindh, Quetta in Balouchistan, Lahore in Panjab,¹¹⁵ and Peshawar in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). The social studies curriculum in Pakistan, as both product and propagator of the “Ideology of Pakistan,” derive s its legitimacy from a narrow set of directives. The textbooks authored and altered during the eleven years of General Zia-ul-Haq’s military rule between 1977 and 1988, are still in use in most schools. They are decidedly anti-democratic and inclined to dogmatic tirades and characterized by internal contradictions.

When discussing General Zia’a lasting influence on the teaching of social studies in Pakistan, a principal at a woman’s college in Lahore¹¹⁶ told me a joke which she said was well known among intellectuals in the country, "General Zia-- May He Rest in Pieces." Indeed, after his airplane exploded in the sky, the pieces of his body were never found, along with the American ambassador and several other top brass generals on board the fatal flight. The casket in Zia’s mausoleum near the beautiful Faizl Mosque built with Saudi money in Islamabad, purportedly contains only his false teeth, jawbone, and eyeglasses. The remaining weight of his coffin is compensated with sandbags. There are, however, bits and pieces of

115 The phonetic spelling of the name of this large linguistic and cultural area that straddles the border between India and Pakistan is “Panjab” meaning “five waters”. The British spelled it as “Punjab” which has been retained in most English language transliterations in Pakistan. Here I have used Panjab, unless “Punjab” appeared in the original.

116 This is my dear Dr. Arifa Sayyida... many thanks!

Zia-ul Haq's body-politic littered across the Pakistani psychological, educational, political, and military landscape.

Since the deadly terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001, the popular media in the West has finally paid attention to the vitriolic anti-American narratives that are pervasive in textbooks in several Islamic countries, including our allies such as Saudi Arabia. For years, objective scholars have warned that the textbooks in Pakistan were fomenting hatred and encouraging fundamentalism. For several decades now, textbooks in not only Pakistan, but many Islamic nations have promoted a radically restrictive brand of Islamic exclusivism, and exported that perspective to other nations as in the case of Pakistani born Taliban and their negative impact on Afghani society.

In March 2001, an article I wrote appeared in *The Friday Times*, a weekly newspaper published in Lahore, Pakistan. In that article I warned of the imminent blowback of America's foreign policies in the 1980's in South Asia.¹¹⁷ Ironically, after the publication of that article, I was contacted by the American Institute of Pakistani Studies who had been mentioned in the bio as the organization who funded my research. AIPS requested that if I write such hard

117 Rosser, Yvette Claire, "Things That Go Bump in the Night: Is the Taliban Coming to Town?"--published in *The Friday Times*, March 13, 2001, Lahore, Pakistan: "[M]ost young men in Pakistan would rather marry an educated woman and work in the Info-Tech industry than fight the infidels. They would rather play cricket on the weekend in an empty lot than plot suicide missions into Kashmir. The average Pakistani is not a fundamentalist. Far more Pakistanis fear the militant Mullahs and their debilitating impact on society. Mullah jokes abound, but bitter laughter offers small reprieve. The vast majority of educated Pakistanis dream of a prosperous economy, democratic institutions, a safe future for their children—boys and girls. They want peace with India, peace with the world. They are secular and sophisticated. And they are sick of giving up everything—economic development, education, civic society--sacrificing everything for Kashmir. "Fifty years is long enough. Let's get on with the business of nation-building." Frustrated as they may be by the lack of infrastructure, the growing political clout of the militant fundamentalists is far more frightening. The gender-biased dogmatic rhetoric that revels in a culture of fatwas, hudood and blasphemy laws, the self-appointed sectarian clerics that depreciate diplomacy, the unemployed, well armed young men pouring out of the Deeni Madaris, hunting heretics in the neighborhood. . . scary indeed."

hitting articles in the future, critical of the negative impact of fundamentalists and Islamization policies, please do not mention my association with AIPS. Unfortunately, those dire predictions became front-page news on September 11, 2001, since when journalists and scholars from around the world have been writing about this issue. Now the Pakistani government will finally hopefully take some action to tone down the jihadi rhetoric that characterized not only traditional Islamic educational institutions, but the government sponsored social studies curriculum as well. According to the report recently compiled by A.H. Nayyar and Ahmed Salim,¹¹⁸ there was a “revision of curricula undertaken by the Curriculum Wing of the Ministry of Education’ in March of 2002. But, unfortunately, it “did not address the problems that existed in earlier curriculum documents”. Nayyar and Salim add, ominously “In some cases, these problems are now even worse.”

In the minds of a generation of Pakistanis, indoctrinated by the "Ideology of Pakistan" are lodged fragments of hatred and suspicion. The story manufactured to further Zia's "Be Pakistani/Buy Pakistani" worldview is presented through a myopic lens of hyper-nationalism and the politicized use of Islam. According to Dr. Inayat Magsi, a Sindhi psychiatrist at the Civil Hospital in Karachi, “[When Civics classes teach negative values] the result is a xenophobic and paranoid acceptance of authoritarianism and the denial of cultural differences and regional ethnic identities.” In the past few decades, social studies textbooks in Pakistan have been used as locations to articulate the hatred that Pakistani policy makers have attempted to inculcate towards their Hindu neighbors. Vituperative animosities legitimize military and autocratic rule,

¹¹⁸ A. H. Nayyar and Ahmed Salim. "The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan," Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad: 2003.

nurturing a siege mentality. Pakistan Studies textbooks are an active site for negatively representing India and othering the Subcontinent's Hindu past.

The teleological nature of the civic responsibility to create patriotic citizens finds a malleable tool in the social studies curriculum where myth and fact often merge. The many textbooks published in Pakistan under the title *Pakistan Studies* are particularly prone to the omissions, embellishments, and elisions that often characterize historical narratives designed for secondary level social studies classes. During the time of General Zia-ul Haq, social studies, comprised of history and geography, were replaced by Pakistan Studies, which was made a compulsory subject for all students from the ninth grade¹¹⁹ through the first year of college including engineering and medical schools. Curriculum changes, institutionalized during Zia's Islamization campaign, required that all students also take a series of courses under the title Islamiyat, the study of Islamic tenants and memorization of Quranic verses. Committees formed under Zia's guidance began to systematically edit the textbooks. The University Grants Commission (UGC) issued a directive in 1983 that textbook writers were

To demonstrate that the basis of Pakistan is not to be founded in racial, linguistic, or geographical factors, but, rather, in the shared experience of a common religion. To get students to know and appreciate the Ideology of Pakistan, and to popularize it with slogans. To guide students towards the ultimate goal of Pakistan—the creation of a completely Islamized State.¹²⁰

In 1985 when Zia's policies were in full swing, Pervez Hoodbhoy and A.H. Nayyar published an article, "Rewriting the History of Pakistan". They commence with a near prophetic comment regarding the inevitable and eventual blowback from General Zia's efforts to Islamize the educational system, "the full impact of which will probably be felt by the turn of the century, when the present

119 Known as ninth "standard" in Pakistan.

120 University Grants Commission directive, Islamabad: Mutalliyah-i-Pakistan, Alama Iqbal Open University, 1983, p. xi.

generation of school children attains maturity.”¹²¹ Nayyar and Hoodbhoy explain that the UGC’s directives centered on four themes:

1. The ‘Ideology of Pakistan,’ both as a historical force which motivated the movement for Pakistan as well as its *raison d’être*
2. The depiction of Jinnah as a man of orthodox religious views who sought the creation of a theocratic state
3. A move to establish the ‘ulama¹²² as genuine heroes of the Pakistan Movement
4. An emphasis on ritualistic Islam, together with the rejection of interpretations of the religion and generation of communal antagonism¹²³

The broad expanse of South Asian history is a *tabula rasa* upon which Pakistani historians and policy makers have created the story of a new nation replete with cultural roots and ancient socio-religious trajectories. This manufactured view of the past narrates Pakistan’s emergence as an independent country. In just seven short years, under the enlightened guidance of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Quaid-e-Azam, the father of the country, Pakistan rose from the strife and oppression of religious communalism in Hindu dominated India to join the comity of modern nations. Nayyar and Hoodbhoy explain, "The 'recasting' of Pakistani history [has been] used to 'endow the nation with a historic destiny'."¹²⁴ The story of Pakistan’s past is intentionally written to be distinct from and often in direct contrast with interpretations of history found in India.

For most Indians, Pakistan is still seen as invalid, created without any real legacy of participation in the freedom struggle, without any sacrifice for the nation. Partition continues to be considered a terrible mistake, albeit, one that Indians must deal with diplomatically and sometimes militarily. Rather than a

121 Hoodbhoy, Pervez and Nayyar, A.H. “Rewriting the History of Pakistan,” in Khan, Asghar, (ed.), *Islam, Politics, and the State*, (Zed Press, 1985), pp. 164.

122 Ulama—sometimes spelled as ulema: worldwide community of Muslims.

123 *ibid*, pp.165.

124 *ibid*, pp. 176.

heroic leader of the oppressed South Asian Muslims, Jinnah is seen as almost Hitleresque, a ghostly TB infected, messianic figure whipping up a “false nationalism” and leading a “paper organization that had no clearly defined concept for the actual form of Pakistan”¹²⁵. According to this rendition, Jinnah “supported by opportunistic elites and capitalizing on the fear and ignorance of uneducated Indian-Muslims”, in “collaboration with the British colonialists”, was able to play his political cards, trump the Indian National Congress, and in “seven short years destroy the pan-Indian nationalist movement” and usher in a history filled with communal strife, espionage, and warfare. Obviously, the interpretation of historical events leading to the British leaving India and the Partition of the Subcontinent are narrated from absolutely contrasting approaches and completely contrary angles.

Light of God/Love of Plunder Schism: Dichotomies of Discourse

A comparison of several key historical events as represented in textbooks in Pakistan with parallel narrations in Indian textbooks reveals a dichotomy of discourse where guiding principals of interpretation are quite oppositional. Chronologically speaking, the first event that can be utilized to illuminate these poles of interpretation is the treatment of the conquest of Sindh in 712 CE by an Arab army under the leadership of Muhammad bin-Qasim.

Pakistan Studies textbooks appropriate bin-Qasim as fuel for nationalist inspired discourses, portraying him as the initial Islamizing agent, who less than a century after the death of the Prophet Mohammed¹²⁶ started a movement that

125 Quotes taken from comments made by numerous Indians whom I interviewed.

126 In Pakistani texts, when the name of the Prophet Mohammad is used, it is followed by the letter PBUH, which stands for Peace Be Upon Him. I will forego this reverential convention for the purpose of this academic treatment.

transformed the Subcontinent and opened the way for the creation of Pakistan.¹²⁷ On the other hand, Indian textbooks, though "appreciative of the cultural and scientific consequences of contact at this time with what is generally perceived as the 'highly civilized' [Arab] world", consider that Arabs had a minimal impact on the history of the Subcontinent. In *Medieval India: A History Textbook for Class XI*, Satish Chandra treats the "Arab invasion of Sind (sic)¹²⁸ as a localized affair".¹²⁹

In *Social Studies For Class VI*,¹³⁰ published by the Sindh Textbook Board, the story of the Arabs' march up the Indus is narrated with a flourish as the first moment of Pakistan ushering in a new era in South Asia and the ascendancy of Islam on Pakistani soil. This textbook explains to the young sixth class children of Sindh, "The Muslims knew that the people of South Asia were infidels and they kept thousands of idols in their temples". The Sindhi king, Raja Dahir, is described as cruel and despotic. "The non-Brahmans who were tired of the

127 "Officially sanctioned histories of Sindh in Pakistan routinely describe the invasion and subsequent conquest of Sindh by Mohammad Bin Qasim in 711-13 as an event that liberated the masses of Sindh from Brahminical tyranny and oppressive caste rule, ushering in an era of unprecedented social equality that was facilitated by the introduction of Islam - a faith unparalleled in its egalitarian outlook and commitment to fairness and justice. It is also asserted that the Arab rulers of Sindh promoted education and learning on a large-scale, and that Sindh experienced a cultural renaissance that outperformed the achievements of any previous era in the land of the Indus river." Shishir Thadani, Islamization and the Arab Conquest of Sindh, from SOUTH ASIAN HISTORY, at: http://members.tripod.com/~INDIA_RESOURCE/sindh.html.

128 Though many scholars continue to spell the name of this ancient land that is now the southern province of Pakistan, as Sind, which was the spelling used by the British, most Sindhis prefer to spell it as Sindh, since that represents a more accurate transliteration. Though it was by law changed from Sind to Sindh over twenty years ago, even many Pakistanis continue to use the older colonial spelling. Sindhis have complained to me that this continual misspelling of Sindh, even at the official level is a subtle slap in the face to Sindhi history and culture. Except when quoting the older spelling directly from other sources, I use Sindh.

129 Chandra, Satish. *Medieval India, A History Textbook for Class XI*, (New Delhi: NCERT, 1990).

130 *Social Studies For Class VI*, (Jamshoro: Sindh Textbooks Board, April 1997).

cruelties of Raja Dahir, joined hands with Muhammad-bin-Qasim because of his good treatment". According to this historical orientation,

The conquest of Sindh opened a new chapter in the history of South Asia. Muslims had ever lasting effects on their existence in the region. [. . .] For the first time the people of Sindh were introduced to Islam, its political system and way of the government. The people here had seen only the atrocities of the Hindu Rajas. [. . .] The people of Sindh were so much impressed by the benevolence of Muslims that they regarded Muhammad bin-Qasim as their savior. [. . .] Muhammad bin-Qasim stayed in Sindh for over three years. On his departure from Sindh, the local people were overwhelmed with grief.¹³¹

What is not mentioned in the textbooks is the fact that Arab armies attacked Sindh sixteen times prior to 712, but failed to overcome the "Hindu Rajas". When I was in Hyderabad, Sindh, I discussed the contents of this textbook with several Sindhis, who assured me that they told their children an alternative version of this story, where Raja Dahir is in fact referred to as a local ethnic hero. I was told by several informants that any "good Sindhi knows the real history. In several cities in ancient Sindh, Muhammad bin-Qasim beheaded every male over the age of eighteen and he sent tens of thousands of Sindhi women to the harems of the Abbasid Dynasty". They also explained that the impact of these textbooks was minimal because, though the back cover indicated 20,000 copies were printed annually, "due to corruption, fewer than 5,000 were ever printed and distributed".¹³²

Though I cannot surmise what percentage of Sindhis may have reason to disassociate their identity from Arabization brought by Muhammad bin-Qasim, it is true that they are often sensitive about their position vis-à-vis Pakistani society. Sindhis see a rupture between the expectations of a free homeland promised by the Muslim League and the repercussions of centralized politicized policies

¹³¹ibid, from Chapter 7.

¹³² from personal interviews in Sindh, July 1997.

emanating from Islamabad, which have left them disempowered and impoverished in their own land. Three decades after calling for the creation of Pakistan in 1939, G.M Syed, the grandfather of Sindh nationalism, called on Indira Gandhi during the Bangladesh war of independence, to send troops to Sindh and free it from Pakistani exploitation, creating "Sindhudesh". He spent the rest of his life under house arrest.¹³³ Sindhi and other sub-national perspectives of Pakistan's history will be mentioned again later in this chapter.

As my friend and mentor, Dr. Inayatullah in Islamabad wrote to me in a personal email communication,

For last fifty years the history in Pakistan has come to be written from a purely "national perspective" and mainly by scholars belonging to two dominant ethnic groups, Punjabi and Mohajir¹³⁴. As a result their perspective considerably shapes historical consciousness of Pakistanis. What the historians of smaller provinces think of critical issues in writing history such as the role of religion and provincial struggles for independence in the creation of Pakistan is not sufficiently known to Pakistan's academic community. Absence of this perspective has also implications for policy making. The demand of smaller provinces for regional peace in South Asia and equitable local development is not sufficiently appreciated and incorporated in national policies.

¹³³ Panjabi domination of Sindh continued at an accelerated rate during the eleven years of General Zia's rule and the two tenures of his protégé Nawaz Sharif who dismissed the Sindh legislature in October 1998 to prevent the two opposition parties, the PPP and MQM, from forming an alliance. For a year the state was controlled from the center by appointees known for their corruption. Since October, 1999, under General Pervez Musharraf nothing has changed. The future of Sindh after over five decades of problems caused by authoritarian governance and economic exploitation, is quite bleak, but as Sindhis told me repeatedly, they "have strong cultural identities and deep civilizational moorings". During the Spring of 2001, a water crisis, caused by a draught and the dramatically decreased flow of the Indus River, triggered a movement in Sindh when hundreds of protesters, including women and children were injured and arrested during a walk from Bhit Shah to Karachi. There were hartals that shut down towns and cities across the province. Musharraf's military government reacted harshly against the protesters, fearing perhaps a reincarnation of the MRD (Movement to Restore Democracy) that helped to topple the last military regime. Given the current situation, politics in Sindh will undoubtedly remain volatile.

¹³⁴ Mohajir, literally "refugee" refers to Pakistani's "fifth" ethnic group, immigrants who came from India in 1947.

Eliding and Ellipsing: Victim or Villain

Historiography and hagiography are frequently interchangeable in the Pakistani social studies curriculum that juxtaposes the contributions of two heroes--the young Arab general, Muhammad bin-Qasim and Sultan Mahmud, the Turkish speaking military leader from the Ghaznavi dynasty in eastern Afghanistan. Mahmud Ghaznavi's multiple iconoclastic incursions into the Subcontinent began in Peshawer in 1001 culminating with the infamous sacking of the Somnath Temple in 1025.¹³⁵

These two prominent figures are placed on pedestals used as stepping-stones toward the inevitable unfolding of the "Ideology of Pakistan" coming to closure with the near deification of the father of the nation, Mohammed Ali Jinnah. The standard *Pakistan Studies* textbook contracts the three centuries between Muhammad bin-Qasim and Mahmud Ghaznavi, the great-grandfathers of the Pakistan Movement. Muhammad Ghori's exploits, especially his defeat of Prithvi Raj Chauhan in 1192 are included, where after the tale is taken up again when Babar defeats Ibrahim Lodi at the Battle of Panipat in 1526.

The central narrative of the nation glides and elides through the descendants of Babur and is approached with renewed enthusiasm beginning with the reign of Aurangzeb in the late seventeenth century. This guided version of Pakistani history moves quickly to the rebellion of 1857, known as the "First War of Liberation" or the "Sepoy Mutiny" depending on the perspective of the authors. The textbooks mention Hindu-Muslim conflicts during Aurangzeb's era,

¹³⁵ The reconstruction of the Somnath temple not long after independence was highly criticized by the Pakistani government as an affront to India's Islamic heritage, even though no mosque had actually been built at the location of the temple. Nehru was also opposed to the rebuilding of the Somnath temple as he considered it communal. He did not want other Congress members involved in the project, though they were.

1658 - 1707, including his push towards orthodoxy, then briefly cover the military victories against the British of Tipu Sultan who ruled Mysore from 1782 – 1799. These two Islamic heroes, along with the 1857 violent uprising of the conscripted Indian troops are implicated as the underlying inspirations for the growth of the Pakistan Movement that came to fruition in 1939. Besides references to the establishment of Aligarh Muslim University in 1875 and quotes from the poet Muhammad Iqbal, the rest of Indian history is apparently superfluous as far as Muslim identity constructs are concerned. The narration of the Freedom Movement focuses mostly on betrayals by the Hindus and double-dealings by various British delegations

In most Pakistani textbooks the Delhi Sultanate is almost disregarded and the nearly five hundred years between Mahmud Ghaznavi's multiple invasions and the establishment of Babur's Mughal dynasty in 1526 are collapsed. Muhammad bin-Qasim is lauded as a kind-hearted young prince and beneficent warrior, welcomed and beloved by the Brahmin-weary Sindhis while Mahmud Ghaznavi is defended and promoted in Pakistani textbooks as a crusader for the one true religion.¹³⁶

Pakistani historians are often critical of Euro-American and Indian social scientists who generally discuss Mahmud Ghaznavi in terms of plunder, which explain that his numerous expeditions into India were motivated by economics considerations rather than religion. In contrast, most *Pakistan Studies* textbooks describe Mahmud as a warrior with a religious mission whose main objective was to bring the "light of Islam" to the pagans of the Subcontinent by waging a "holy jihad".¹³⁷ *Our World, for Class IV*, describes Mahmud's invasions into India,

136 This style of narrative is the norm in Pakistani textbooks dealing with bin-Qasim and Md. Ghaznavi.

137 This rhetoric is such a pervasive narrative tool in Pakistan Studies texts, that there is no need for multiple citations. An economic or nonreligious explanation is the exception in Pakistan.

There was a temple in India during those times, Somnath. The biggest idol/statue in that temple was also called Somnath. This temple had so much treasure in it that no royal treasure could even come near it. All the Hindu rajas used to get together in this temple and think about ways to fight the Muslims. After covering the desert of Rajputana, Mahmud came right in front of Somnath temple. Hindus got panicky. All of them tried to do their best but couldn't succeed. The fort was conquered. The priests begged him not to destroy the Somnath idol but he said that he wanted to be remembered as Mahmud who destroyed the idol and not the one who sold it. He blew the idol into pieces. This success was a source of happiness for the whole Muslim world.¹³⁸

J. Husain, in her Oxford University Press textbook, *The Illustrated History of Pakistan*, used in elite schools, deals with the Ghaznavi incursions from a less ideological perspective than is usually found in government textbooks. She discusses economic imperatives for Mahmud's plunderings of temples, but concludes that he "left the greatest monument of all: the gift of Islam".¹³⁹ Several of the government textbooks I have reviewed complained about the presumed negative treatment that Mahmud receives in British/Westernized and Indian versions of the events.¹⁴⁰

138 Our World, for Class IV, (Directorate of Education Punjab, New Curriculum, Malik Din Mohammad and Sons publishers, no date. From the appearance of the cover and type, this book may be from the late fifties or early sixties; translated from Urdu by Zahra Jafri),

139J. Husain, *The Illustrated History of Pakistan*, (Karachi: OUP, 1981-83), pp. 26.

140 In July 1997, I delivered a lecture in Islamabad titled 'Hegemony and Historiography: The Politics of Pedagogy'. After the talk, a member of the audience, in an effort to justify the contemptuous tone used against Hinduism in Pakistani textbooks, claimed that Indian textbooks slander Islam. Coincidentally, Dr. Arjun Dev, the head of the Social Studies division at NCERT in New Delhi had donated a set of secondary level social studies textbooks in Urdu translation for me to take to Pakistan and give away as a sign of friendship. I had brought the Indian textbooks along to the lecture. Several scholars eagerly scanned through the Indian textbooks quickly realizing that discussions about Islam in the NCERT publications were not as negative as they had presumed. Dr. Arjun Dev had explained to me a few weeks earlier that it is forbidden to write negatively about Islam in NCERT textbooks because it can foment communalism. He went so far as to say that "anyone who writes bad things about Islam could be arrested". The scholars in Islamabad who looked through the Indian textbooks were genuinely surprised at the generally positive treatment, even in the narratives about Md. Ghaznavi and Md. Ghori. Where as Pakistani textbooks take

As such defensive postures in Pakistan suggest the tendency in Indian textbooks is to treat Mahmud Ghaznavi as a plunderer, dismissing his religious motivations. Shatish Chandra states that Mahmud's "love of plunder went side by side with the defense of Islam".¹⁴¹ In the following passage from Romila Thapar, Mahmud's religious motivations are considered, though only by coincidence,

[Mahmud] had heard that there was much gold and jewelry kept in the big temples in India, so he destroyed the temples and took away the gold and jewelry. [...] Destroying temples had another advantage. He could claim, as he did, that he had obtained religious merit by destroying images.¹⁴²

These oppositional viewpoints regarding Mahmud Ghaznavi are characterized by ironic motivations. In India, textbooks published between the mid-sixties and the late nineties by the National Centre for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) were intended to be culturally neutral, guided by the Nehruvian school of secular socialism. As such, they were reticent to give too much weight to "jihad" and the religiously inspired perspective since many Indians are quite sensitive concerning the legacy of forced conversions. In 1989, the West Bengal Secondary Board under a Marxist-led government, issued a circular dated 28 April 1989, (number Syl/89/1) which recommended the deletion of most discussions about the medieval period because it was too controversial. They included in the circular a column of politically correct perspectives that promoted the maxim that "Muslim rule should never attract any criticism. Destruction of temples by Muslim rulers and invaders should not be

extra pains to condemn Hinduism and mock Hindu practices, it amazed them that government sponsored Indian textbooks made an extra effort to deal dispassionately with Islam. I did explain that not all schools in India use government sponsored textbooks. There are certainly history textbooks in India that present a more negative interpretation of the Islamic invasions, just as some textbooks used in private schools in Pakistan do not exclusively use pejorative language when discussing Hinduism.

¹⁴¹Chandra, pp. 205.

¹⁴²Thapar, Romila. *Medieval India: History Textbook for Class VII*, (New Delhi: NCERT, 1988), pp. 25-6.

mentioned".¹⁴³ In contrast, Pakistani textbooks proudly proclaim that Mahmud rode into the Subcontinent under the "flag of Islam" to convert the "pagans of India".

The communal writing of history in Pakistan, where the mandate is to produce patriotic Pakistanis who are also practicing orthodox Islam, is in sharp opposition with the textbooks published by the NCERT in New Delhi, where the stated goal of social studies education is national integration promoted through pluralism, socialism, and democracy. Textbooks in India, published by NCERT, in a effort to follow their mandate to include Muslim sentiments in their historical analyses, preferred for that past few decades to talk about economic motivations so as not to cast Mahmud as an iconoclast bent on conversions. Dr. Arjun Dev, for many years Department Head of Social Studies at NCERT, explained to me, "We are very careful not to write anything that could be construed as defamatory against Islam or any religion."¹⁴⁴ It is obvious that "the 'Pakistan Ideology', on the one hand, and post-Independence resolutions to eradicate communalism from India, on the other, have shaped the preoccupations, and sometimes the logic, of textbook writers in both countries".¹⁴⁵

In India, the secular-leftists who authored NCERT textbooks for nearly forty years reasoned that iconoclastic motivations for conquest would seem far more negative and insulting to the Hindus of India than an economic analysis, which was considered more palatable to their sensitivities. They believe that religious interpretations of historical events breed communal hatreds. Yet this very orientation--masking the religious motivations--is offensive to many

143 From Manoj Raghuvanshi the host of Zee Television's program, *Aap ki Adalat*, quoted by Arun Shourie in *Eminent Historians*, HarperCollins, New Delhi, 1998, page 63.

144 From a personal interview with Arjun Dev, June, 1997.

145 Powell, Avril. "Perceptions of the South Asian Past: Ideology, Nationalism and School History Textbooks," in Crook, Nigel (ed.) *The Transmission of Knowledge in South Asia, Essays in Education, Religion, History, and Politics*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 217.

Pakistanis, who hail Mahmud's iconoclasm as the duty of a good Muslim and an integral aspect of the establishment of Islam in India, and thus the eventual birth of Pakistan.

An economic interpretation that discounts the jihad perspective is also repugnant to the more Hindu-centric historians, such as those promoted by the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) government associated with the Sangh Parivar--social and political groups that emphasize the essential *Hinduness* or Hindutva of Indian culture and civilization. These "Hindu nationalist" scholars assert that the "Marxist inspired" NCERT textbooks "whitewash the violence of the Medieval Period" and thereby cause resentment on the part of the majority Hindu population and denial on the part of the Muslim minority because the facts have been decontextualized.¹⁴⁶

These nationalist historians, whether they be Indian nationalists or Hindu nationalists, argue that "Muslims in India should be encouraged to be patriotic citizens"; that Indian-Muslims should disown the "temple desecrations perpetrated by Islamic invaders and distance themselves philosophically and politically from historical atrocities committed by their ancestors."¹⁴⁷ These "Indo-centric" intellectuals think that Indians of Muslim heritage should not take pride in a legacy that defaced and destroyed the symbols and institutions of Indic culture. Hindu nationalists hold that it is better to provide opportunities for the citizens of the country to understand the history of the nation in which they live than to let them be lulled into false pride of iconoclasm and religiously driven violence based on a legacy of conquest. These polarized perspectives, a continuation of the contested discourses found in the two colonial era textbooks

¹⁴⁶ This topic is covered at length in chapter five.

¹⁴⁷ From an interview with a member of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), Chennai, July 2000.

studied by Avril Powell discussed earlier, reveal the complexities inherent in the narration and interpretation of controversial historical events.

As nation-states evolve and adapt to changing circumstances they often struggle to explain dynamic cultural influences by identifying and embracing new social variables as well as changing international realities, then narrating these within the expanding perimeters of their official histories. History by committee or consensus is not easy to write, history by decree is another matter.

Historical narratives are never etched in stone, they can change dramatically from year to year. Demands to change historical interpretations can be and often are violence prone. Nationalism is a hot topic--to die for. The need to give voice to all groups of citizens brings us back to the question of who determines whose voices are given agency?

As mentioned earlier, this dilemma was highlighted in the 1990 British National Curriculum reforms, which were criticized as too multi-cultural. The British curriculum, tried to deal with this problem by attempting to “impart knowledge of the diversity of cultures within Britain,” and teach South Asia Studies “from their own perspective”.¹⁴⁸ However, it is impossible to identify a collective South Asian “perspective”. A history curriculum that is, reflective of multiple strands of historiography in the Subcontinent, is a highly unlikely product, and at best, would be a compilation polarized and multi-perspectival analyses, highly personalized anecdotes.

The Akbar Aurangzeb Axis

Contestatory points of view are evident in the polarity between the treatments of the Mughal emperor Akbar, who is considered to be ecumenical and

¹⁴⁸National Curriculum History Working Group, 'Relationship of History to the Rest of the School Curriculum', Final Report, (London, 1990), pp. 183.

culturally syncretistic and his more conservative and orthodox grandson Aurangzeb. It seems logical that Pakistani textbooks would delve at length on the "Medieval Period" of Islamic ascendancy in South Asia as part of their historical legacy. What is "surprising, given the opportunity it would present for capitalizing on a 'golden age' of Mughal glory," is the discursive treatment of information provided about this period in the standard *Pakistan Studies* textbook. Avril Powell explains this as the "pre-occupation of the syllabus [...] with the final 'fulfillment' stage of the 'Two Nations' premise through the creation of Pakistan in the mid-twentieth century".¹⁴⁹

In NCERT textbooks authored by Romila Thapar and Satish Chandra, in use in India since the late sixties, the Mughal Emperor Akbar is portrayed as a just and truly Indian ruler, the "father of national integration".¹⁵⁰ This is in direct contrast to the perception of Pakistani historians and curriculum writers who see Akbar as harmful to the ultimate interests of Muslims in the Subcontinent. Most Indian and Western treatments represent Akbar's reign as "a high peak of cultural assimilation and religious harmony".¹⁵¹ While Pakistani historians see Akbar's religious theories as apostasy, Indian textbooks represent him as the first truly "Indian" ruler, who along with the Emperor Ashoka Maurya before him in the second century BCE, personified the liberal, pan-Indian leader. In her textbook, *Medieval India*, Romila Thapar states, "Akbar's great dream was that India should be united as one country. People should forget their differences of region and religion and think of themselves only as the people of India."¹⁵² That this eminent

¹⁴⁹ Powell, pp. 222.

¹⁵⁰ The textbooks that were in use for the past three decades in India, have recently been replaced. The new textbooks, published in 2002, will be compared to the old ones and to Pakistani textbooks in chapter five of this dissertation.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, pp. 205.

¹⁵² Romila Thapar, *Medieval India: History Textbook for Class VII* (New Delhi: NCERT, 1988), pp. 94.

historian falls in to the trap of presentism to analyze the past can perhaps be forgiven since she is using a voice aimed at children.

Professor Mubarak Ali, a respected historian living in Lahore, asserts that Akbar has been systematically eliminated from most textbooks in Pakistan in order to "divert attention away from his 'misplaced' policies".¹⁵³ Where they exist, discussions of Akbar are short and superficial, such as in *Social Studies for Class VI*,¹⁵⁴ in which his name is simply listed, but events of his life not elaborated. In *Pakistan Studies Class IX-X*,¹⁵⁵ Akbar's name is not even included among the Muslim rulers of India; and in *Pakistan Studies for Secondary Classes*,¹⁵⁶ he is not mentioned in the text along with other famous Islamic figures, a list that includes Mahmud Ghaznavi, Babur, Humayun, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb. Akbar, the son of Humayun and the father of Shah Jahan, ruled India for over five decades, longer than any of his predecessors or descendants, who nonetheless find mention in the textbooks. Akbar's father, Humayun, whose solitary year of rather dubious rulership was terminated when "he tripped, light headed from a pipe or two of opium, cracking his head on the stone stairs of his private astronomical observatory, and as one chronicler put it, 'stumbled out of life as he had stumbled in',"¹⁵⁷ finds at least cursory mention in Pakistani textbooks that ironically often

153Mubarak Ali (Khan) "Akbar in Pakistani Textbooks", a paper presented at a seminar on 'Akbar and his Age' held at the ICHR, New Delhi, 15-17 Oct. 1992, the full text of which was published in Pioneer on 13 Nov. 1992, under the title, 'Akbar in Pakistan: Historians malign him as anti-Islam, says Mubarak Ali'. Mubarak Ali was very helpful to me during my visits to Pakistan. He is a controversial historian and has been accused by conservative scholars of being too "pro-Indian" and writing history that is against the "Ideology of Pakistan", an accusation that could have dangerous repercussions in a country where criticizing the national ideology can be deemed a capital offence.

154Social Studies for Class VI, (Lahore: Punjab Textbook Board, 1996), pp. 114.

155In Pakistani Studies Class IX-X, (Lahore: Punjab Textbook Board, 1997), pp. 18.

156Pakistani Studies for Secondary Classes, (Lahore: Punjab Textbook Board, 1997).

157 Wolpert, Stanley A. A New History of India, 3rd ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 125.

fail to include even the name of his more famous, accomplished, and sober son, Akbar.

The first Mughal king, often redundantly called “Akbar the Great”¹⁵⁸ expanded his domain across a larger area of India than the Mauryan dynasty. However, in discussions of this seminal regime that firmly established the Mughal Empire on India soil, Pakistani textbooks, though necessarily brief in their presentation due to space limitations inherent in a chronological march through the millennia, are almost unanimously silent about Akbar. This omission is an amazing hick-up of historiography in which fifty-five very essential years are simply eliminated.

Typical of most textbook treatments where he does appear, in *Pakistan Studies*¹⁵⁹ written by Rabbani and Sayyid, Akbar is mentioned only while discussing Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, who according to Mubarak Ali, "is projected as a hero challenging Akbar's religious policy and restoring Islamic values in India".¹⁶⁰ This perspective of Akbar's “misguided policies” are derived in part from I. H. Qureshi's interpretation of Mughal history as articulated in his magna opus, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*¹⁶¹ and also in his book about Akbar in which he states,

It can be seriously contented if he possessed wisdom of the highest order. If he had, he would not have sought to weaken Islam and the Muslim community of the Subcontinent. At least he would have refrained from interfering with the established principals of Islam. Even Vincent Smith, who narrates Akbar's aberrations from Islam

158 “Akbar” means “great” in Arabic, therefore “Akbar the Great” actually translates as “Great the Great”.

159 Rabbani, M. Ikram and Monawwar Ali Sayyid. An Introduction to Pakistani Studies, for Intermediate/Senior Cambridge Classes, Lahore: The Caravan Book House, 1992.

160 Mubarak Ali pp. 2-3.

161 I. H. Qureshi. *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent (610-1947)*, (Karachi, Pakistan: The Bureau of Composition, Compilation and Translation, University of Karachi. Second edition, 1977).

with relish, concludes that ‘the whole scheme was the outcome of ridiculous vanity, a monstrous growth of unrestrained autocracy...’ How can it then be asserted that Akbar possessed wisdom in the highest degree?¹⁶²

By the time Akbar’s orthodox grandson Aurangzeb had killed his brothers and imprisoned his father, just one generation later, Akbar was already perceived by ”Muslim chroniclers” as a quasi-heretic.¹⁶³ The well-published historian, of Medieval Indian history, K.S. Lal in Delhi told me, “The Muslim chronicler, Khafi Khan, a contemporary of Aurangzeb, does not mention Akbar, though he names Babur, Shah Jahan, and the rest, but not Akbar”.¹⁶⁴

I. H. Qureshi, as well as K. K. Aziz and A. H. Dani are Pakistan’s preeminent historians who, in footnoted articulate style, grounded their arguments in the Two-Nation Theory, thus creating a post-Partition intellectual milieu within which educators and bureaucrats could inscribe the face of a new nation. References to historical precedence are essential to justify and develop new definitions of nationalism. In this politically dynamic scenario, heroes were created and recreated, villains exchanged or expunged, and entire eras deemed meaningless. I. H. Qureshi taught at St. Stephen's College and at the University of Delhi before Partition. A.H. Dani received a Ph.D. in Sanskrit from Benares Hindu University in the late thirties. Both scholars, who had spent years contemplating the vast historical legacy of their forefathers and the land of their birth, suddenly found themselves in need of a new narrative, a compulsion to create a past for a nation in which they had just been reborn.

162 Qureshi, I. H. Akbar, The Architect of the Mughul Empire, (Karachi: Ma’aaref Limited, 1978), pp. 155.

163 Khafi Khan, Muhammad Hashim, ca. 1663-ca. 1731, Khafi Khan’s History of 'Alamgir: being an English translation of the relevant portions of Muntakhab al-lubab, with notes and an introduction, (Karachi: 1975).

164 From a personal interview in New Delhi with K.S. Lal, a scholar of medieval Indian history.

According to a well-known Indian historian living in Delhi, Mushirul Hasan, “on reaching Pakistan [these India trained scholars had to] rewrite their own histories”. They constructed “a different past altogether, one that was at variance with their earlier explorations [and began] to search for heroes and martyrs, involve new symbols and traditions, and discover milestones [. . .] for the historical antecedents of Pakistan”. Much of A.H. Dani’s work focuses on the Central Asian roots of Pakistan, though as a scholar he does not dismiss the bedrock of Indic influences in Pakistani culture. Both military rulers, General Ayub Khan and General Zia-ul Haq, patronized Qureshi and Dani. They were instrumental in constructing a past for their new nation that would set it apart from Indic Civilization.

Hasan continues,

The issue was not just the defense of Partition, or Independence from Pakistan's vantage point, but a different reading of the past involving, among other things, the rejection of a diverse but vibrant composite-cultural and intellectual legacy.

In order to legitimize Pakistan as a Muslim homeland, historians had to nurture the “image of the Muslims as a monolithic entity, acting in unison and committed to specifically Islamic values and norms”.¹⁶⁵

In this capacity, tendencies which led to cultural accommodation or spiritual syncretism between Hindus and Muslims, that could have preempted and perhaps prevented the call for Pakistan, came to be criticized as agents working against the interests of the Two-Nation Theory. Deen-i-Ilahi, the religion created by Akbar and Bhakti movements, which opened a spiritual space where Sufis (Islamic mystics) and Hindus and could find common metaphors and experiences of God, were seen as dangerous forces that almost subsumed Indian Islam. I. H. Qureshi roundly rejects these syntegegrationist energies as threats to true Islam.

165 Mushirul Hasan. “The Historic Divide” The Indian Express, Saturday, February 20, 1999.

Akbar is therefore interpreted as dubiously Islamic, whereas his grandson, Aurangzeb, inspired by the orthodoxy of scholars such as Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, is credited with saving Indian Islam from being swallowed up as yet another monist sub-sect of Hinduism.

Using the past selectively, passages from the writings of Indian Muslim scholars and chroniclers were appropriated where they seemed to support the eventual establishment of a Muslim nation. In the search for ideological validation, Pakistani historians reached into the past to own leading Muslim intellectuals of 18th and 19th century North India, such as Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Shah Waliullah, and Syed Ahmad Barelwi, highlighting their ideas wherever they could be construed to support the Two-Nation Theory.

Aurangzeb, like Mahmud Ghaznavi, has earned a similarly controversial place in the hotly contested historical record of the Subcontinent. In the popular Indian imagination, Aurangzeb's name is associated with destruction and intolerance, but in Pakistan, he is a savior and a scholar. According to Zafar, "[Aurangzeb] reversed the policies of Akbar and made a genuine effort to give the State an Islamic orientation. Under Aurangzeb the Pakistan spirit gathered in strength".¹⁶⁶

Though J. Husain in part blames Aurangzeb for the decline of the Mughal Empire, she ultimately acts as his apologist, explaining that he was caught in "a 'vicious circle' set in motion by Akbar's misplaced 'religious adventurism'," which then precipitated "an 'opposite reaction' characterized in Aurangzeb's reign by 'anti-Hindu policies,'" which in their turn created a Hindu back-lash. She defends Aurangzeb against his critics while pointing to the sharply divergent historical interpretations of this controversial figure,

¹⁶⁶Zafar, M.A. Pakistani Studies for Secondary Education for F.A., etc., (Lahore, 1986), pp. 7.

Because of Aurangzeb's religious fervor, historians tend to judge him according to their own religious leanings. Hindu and Christian historians often present Aurangzeb's religious policies as the main cause of the disintegration of the Mughul Empire, while some Muslim historians try to completely ignore the negative effects of these policies.¹⁶⁷

Elisions of time found in the historical narrative in Pakistan are not isolated to the Sultante or Mughal periods. Such leaps began to appear in textbooks in the early years of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan that traced the nation's history from the life of the Prophet Mohammed the Prophet of Islam to the life of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the Father of Pakistan. It is said that school children in Pakistan sometimes inadvertently say PBUM after Quaid-I-Azam, because he is seen with such reverence, in line with the Prophet, the great leader.

In a 1975 *Social Studies* textbook for class eight¹⁶⁸, the Unit One covers the history of the Subcontinent, highlighting selected events leading directly to the creation of Pakistan. After several chapters on various invaders who introduced Islam into the Indian Subcontinent, followed by several chapters on British colonialism, there are chapters focusing on the Muslim League and events central to the emergence of Pakistan such as the Lucknow Pact and the Lahore Declaration. Two historical characters are invariably included in the story of Pakistan, the educator, Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan and Mohammad Iqbal, the poet.

Unit Two in this 1975 eighth grade textbook is titled "Islamic History", the various chapters narrate the story of the birth of Islam and the life of the Prophet. The final chapter, superimposed at the end of this unit on Islamic History, is titled, "The Pak-India War." This chapter, concerning the 65 War, was not included in the original 1968 version of this textbook but simply tacked onto

167Husain, pp. 105

168 This 1975 version was the third edition of this textbook originally published in 1968: *Social Studies, History & Civics, Class VII*, (Lahore: Punjab Textbook Board, February 1975, Third Edition; Circular # C-D/Education/65-54-1 Dated March 9, 1968).

the 1975 edition, during Bhutto's regime to counter Pakistan's failure to prevent the break up of the country in 1971. This chapter provided an opportunity to humiliate India whom Bhutto and most Pakistanis blamed for bifurcating the nation.

Historical events had caught up with the Pakistani social studies curriculum, where contemporary warfare and political polemics were pasted at the end of a unit on the "History of Islam", an ideologically significant but illogical chronological placement. Including the 65 War at the end of this unit created a connection between the life of the Prophet and the heroic acts of the brave Pakistani soldiers who were martyred defending the fatherland from India's "unprovoked attack on September 6, 1965".

Interestingly, there are historians in Pakistan who claim they have never heard of Operation Gibraltar, the 1965 failed attempt to invade Kashmir. According Lawrence Ziring, in *Pakistan in the Twentieth Century- A Political History*,¹⁶⁹ Operation Gibraltar, planned and implemented at the insistence of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the Foreign Minister under General Ayub Khan, and launched by the Pakistani Army on July 28, 1965, was an ill planned

clandestine action against Indian forces in the Kashmir Valley [designed to instigate an insurgency among the local Kashmiris who were to] rally local resistance to support Pakistan. [Operation Gibraltar] fizzled out when four Pakistani soldiers were captured and, upon interrogation, revealed the purpose and plan of the attack. The failure of the operation exposed the activities of the Inter-Services [Intelligence] Directorate (ISI).

Gibraltar's failure led the Pakistanis to escalate the fighting and implement "Operation of Gram Slam" on August 30, which

met with stiff Indian resistance, and three days later virtually collapsed. [. . .] Ayub tried to salvage what he could from the situation and called for a termination of hostilities [. . .] but on 6

169 Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997, page 291–293:

September, before the orders to stand down could be given, Indian troops opened an attack all along the West Pakistan frontier, the main force focused on Lahore, hardly a dozen miles from the Indian border.

Textbooks in Pakistan do not mention Operation Gibraltar and refer to Operation Gram Slam as a response to India's sudden and inexplicable aggressive maneuvers against Lahore. Relevant to the discussion of censorship prevalent in textbooks and the media in Pakistan are these comments from Ziring,

The vast majority of Pakistanis knew virtually nothing about the course of the hostilities. All they knew came from Radio Pakistan, and in the name of national morale, the public was informed over and over again of the successes on the battlefield, or at the very least, the heroism of units and individual members of the armed forces who had fallen in combat. The fact that Pakistan itself had been targeted by Indian forces. . . did not shake the Pakistani public's belief that the war was going well and that India was paying a heavy price for its audacious assault on Pakistani territory. Only when the war was suddenly halted by Ayub Khan did the general population begin to understand that their forces had not done as well as they had been led to believe. But even then, public opinion had been so influenced by the official media that it refused to accept the termination of hostilities as anything less than a sell-out by Ayub Khan. Long after the war, Bhutto and others more responsible for the debacle would point the finger at Ayub. [. . .] A risky but minor operation in Kashmir, had in fact, escalated out of Pakistani control.

This description of the 1965 clandestine incursion into Kashmir and the response of the media and general public was replayed almost verbatim during the spring and summer of 1999 when Pakistani backed forces took over the mountaintops above Kargil in Indian held Kashmir. As in the case of Ayub, Nawaz Sharif was relatively uninformed about the operation, and certainly not its architect. When it spun out of control he flew first to Beijing and then to Washington on the fourth of July to find support for Pakistan's stand on Kashmir and more immediately, a face-saving diplomatic excuse for calling off the assault

in Kargil, which was rapidly turning into a full scale war, one that Pakistan had little hope in winning.

Shariff's lack of clout and control over the military and the militants was obvious when he tried to order a retreat from the heights above Kargil. I was in Pakistan during this time, and the press and the popular perception convinced that the martial supremacy of the muhajideen over the Indian forces would ultimately succeed because of their religious zeal and the moral superiority of Pakistan's claims to Kashmir. These were sufficient rationale to justify backing the "freedom-fighters" in Kargil, so when Nawaz Sharif called on the mujahideen to withdraw, he was accused of collaborating with the imperialist Clinton and betraying God and country. However, as in the case of Ayub, he was simply trying to back Pakistan out of another foolhardy attempt of failed military brinkmanship before it escalated into a wider, possibly nuclearized conflict. Eventually, as in the case of the 1965 war, the story of the brave soldiers cum freedom fighters who defended Pakistan from "Indian aggression" during the summer of 1999 in Kargil, may make it into the textbooks. Unless the formula for writing social studies textbooks in Pakistan experiences an ideological upheaval, it is unlikely that the details of the ISI backed clandestine incursion across the Line of Control will be included with any factual objectivity.

Selected events and charismatic characters in the long history of the Indian Subcontinent are interpreted differently and imbued with diametrically opposed meanings and motivations in school textbooks designed to teach nationalist allegiance. In Pakistan, the inevitability of a separate Muslim nation in the Subcontinent is supported by the belief that Hindus and Muslims in South Asia had always constituted distinct and irreconcilably separate communities. The official Indian curriculum, in sharp contrast to the Pakistani position, argues that the divide and rule policies of the British created communalism, which was not

inherent in the interaction of Hindus and Muslims, and that communalism "has its roots in the modern colonial socio-economic political structure".¹⁷⁰ If the nature of a nation's social studies curriculum is, in varying degrees, determined by "the creation, preservation, or merely the 'understanding' of the twentieth-century 'nation' and its culture, then . . . what each syllabus will then encompass over time and space is. . . pre-determined by such objectives".¹⁷¹ In Pakistan, according to Avril Powell "ideology has . . . made a myth of history in the portrayal of . . . national heroes".¹⁷² Where "nation-building agendas. . . take a priority over disinterested academic study, history becomes a medium for transmitting goals for the future".¹⁷³ In this uncritical milieu, commonly acknowledged "facts" of the past, such as the reign of Akbar or Operation Gibraltar, are either eliminated or twisted to fit into a predetermined mold.

Whose History? Whose Nation?

An analysis of social studies education in Pakistan must be situated in several theoretically grounded questions: How do power relations between an increasingly politicized clergy and unstable, militarized governmental institutions impact the telling of history and the transmission nationalism? Whose stories are valorized and reproduced in service to the social order or state and whose are discounted and demonized? How is Islam incorporated into the social studies curriculum, designed to impart both piety and patriotism? How do Islamic historiographical methodologies and perspectives interface with the impetus towards nationalism and modernity?

¹⁷⁰Chandra, pp. 151-2.

¹⁷¹Powell, pp. 96.

¹⁷²ibid, pp. 219.

¹⁷³ibid, pp. 221.

The heritage of the geographical area of modern-day Pakistan is epitomized by the confluence of cultures. Graves excavated at prehistoric Indus Valley sites dating from the second millennia BCE produced skulls of peoples from diverse racial origins including Mediterranean, Proto-Australoid, Dravidian, and Mongoloid. Regional languages also reflect this amalgam of cultural influences: Urdu, created by the superimposition of Persian/Arabic vocabulary on Sanskritic/Prakritic forms, Balouch an Indo-Iranian language, including Brahui, a Dravidian linguistic island in Balouchistan, as well as Sindhi, with Sanskrit roots, also shows the merging of linguistic forms, as do Farsi, Pashtu and Panjabi. Influences left by the Maurya Dynasty, the Guptas, the Huns, Arabs, Turks, Mughals, Rajputs, the British, all impacted vast areas of South and Southwest Asia with elements of their traditions and languages.

The regions now comprising the provinces of Pakistan have long been a cultural crossroads. These areas were enriched and often exploited by millennia of ethnic interminglings. Many linguistic and cultural areas were at times powerful kingdoms and independent political entities in their own right. Contemporary relationships among the sub-national ethnic groups in Pakistan are based on ancient competitions and historical interconnections. Standard *Pakistan Studies* textbooks rarely include chapters that discuss the cultures and histories of Balouchis or Pathans or Sindhis.

An observation made by the head of the History Department at The University of Balouchistan offers an alternative perspective of Pakistani history, without negating the critique that historical discourse systematically distorts and deletes vast eras of South Asian history nor that the social studies curriculum intentionally divorced Pakistani culture from its Subcontinental roots. The Balouchi history professor pointed out that the official “history of Pakistan does not include the lives of personalities nor a narration of events which occurred *in*

Pakistan, but is restricted to the leaders and activities of the Muslim League in pre-Partition India”. He stated that the history of Pakistan in textbooks not only “ends just as Pakistan comes into being”, but the contributions towards anti-colonialism and the creation of Pakistan is “restricted to what happened in Lucknow and Delhi and Aligarh”. There is scant mention of Balouchis or Pathans who battled the British for over a century, nor any discussion of the activities of ethnic or regional leaders who had lived in regions that were now the provinces of the newly formed nation.

From the point of view of a Balouch or Pathan, the “history of Pakistan focuses entirely on events in the Indian Subcontinent,” of which culturally and historically they do not attribute a deep connection. Balouchis draw their historical identities from Iran and Central Asia, not from South Asia.¹⁷⁴ Ironically, they are therefore doubly denied a history, both of their ancestors who arrived in this area in the ancient pre-Islamic period and the contributions of their ethnic group to the modern nation-state.

174 In April, 2000 I interviewed a Balouchi historian, Prof. Agha Mir (Noori) Naseer Khan, in Quetta, who told me that "Balouchis are less fundamentalist than are Pathans and Afghans". He explained how Balouchis were converted to Islam during one of the first waves of Arab invasions in the ninth century. He said at that time, Balouchis had agreed to observe Islamic customs in exchange for keeping sovereignty of their land. "Prior to converting to Islam, Balouchis had been fire worshippers, Zoroastrian, and even up to the present day, when Balouchis take a vow, they swear their oaths on fire." They still, a thousand years later, he informed me, "have myths and stories about the sun and about fire." Professor Noori Khan made the claim that "Pathans and Afghans are more fundamentalist than are Balouchis because Pathans were converted to Islam multiple times. As successive waves of Islamic invaders moved across Central Asia, the Pathans and Afghans were their victims, time and again." The octogenarian Balouchi gentleman, who had been the emissary of the Khan of Kalat in the forties when Jinnah came for negotiations, explained that the people living in Afghanistan and NWFP had been Buddhist for centuries. "After each invader would pass through their territory, forcibly converting the inhabitants, the local residents would again revert to Buddhism. Then the next invaders would come and convert them by the sword again and again." This, he explained, was why the "Pathans and Afghans practiced such a conservative and rigid Islam. They felt they had to prove their Islam-ness to save their lives, so they became strictly orthodox and conservative." Balouchis, though often outwardly conservative, particularly regarding the role of women outside the home, don't support the type of fundamentalist Islam promoted by the Pathan dominated Taliban.

When Pakhtun leaders such as Abdul Ghaffar Khan, known as the “Frontier Gandhi”, or historical Balouchis, such as the Khan of Kalat are mentioned, their convictions are downplayed or distorted and their activities eclipsed. An irrational paradigm implemented since the days of One Unit¹⁷⁵ makes the assumption that denying cultural differences in the provinces will nullify ethnic affiliations and bring the Sindhis, Pathans, and Balouchis together under the flag of Pakistani nationalism. Islam has been the tool and Panjabi hegemony the rule, in response to which people who live in the provinces have steadily soured to what they perceive as pseudo-nationalism and Islamabad’s economic exploitation and misuse of religion.

Pakistan is a country encompassing several distinct ethnic communities and has faced many challenges on the road to achieving unity within diversity. Pakistan was founded on the principle that Islam, as the great leveler of class and caste, was a sufficient force to tie the Sindhis, the Pathans, and the Balouchi tribes, and also the Bengalis together with the dominant Panjabis to form a cohesive and stable national identity that would supersede regional loyalties and ethnicities.¹⁷⁶ Through the years, this mission to create a strong centrally

175 From Ziring, 1997: One Unit was a scheme that “dissolved the existing provinces in western Pakistan. . . and merged them into a single province. . . a maneuver aimed at giving the Punjab relative balance vis -à-vis East Bengal” (pp. 163). Higher Bureaucrats argued that One Unit “would eliminate all provincial designations and that thereafter there would be ‘no Bengalis, no Panjabis, no Sindhis, no Pathans, no Baluchis, no Bahawalpuris, no Khairpuris’, and that their ‘disappearance’ would ‘strengthen the integrity of Pakistan’ (West Pakistan As One Unit, Government of Pakistan, Karachi: 1984).” Ziring questions whether they really believed that “a change in official terminology, or the creation of a single administrative province, could cancel out centuries of locational, cultural, and tribal identity” (pp.177).

176 Imtiaz Alam, makes these comments about Punjabi hegemony and identity in modern Pakistan in an article, “Of Punjabi and Punjabiyat’ which appeared in *The News International* (Pakistan), 20 April 2001: “with the break-up of Punjabi-Mohajir axis and increasing self-awareness of the ethno-lingual communities in Pakistan, counter-posed to the dominant ethnic group, the Panjabis also started to partially look inward, despite zealously maintaining their hegemonic position. Unlike the Sikhs or the Punjabis, who are a minority in India, the majority-Punjabi group in Pakistan abandoned their native language, in favour of Urdu, as a tool to

controlled government has been pursued by various methods including realignment of political associations between its minority groups, usually based more on gains for provincial party bosses than national cohesion and by the use of military coercion, which in the case of the Bengali majority, resulted in the split up of the original country.

In the early seventies in Balouchistan this autocratic response from the central government resulted in a civil war that lasted four years, yet is almost unknown, and never mentioned in the textbooks. “The Balouch . . . have become conscious of their particularist identity in the face of perceived threats to national and cultural characteristics”.¹⁷⁷ Though the policy of One Unit was abandoned just prior to the elections of 1970,¹⁷⁸ even today, the central government still operates under the rhetorical assumption that Pakistan is a unitary cultural entity. Within this dialogue there is little room for linguistic, much less political diversity.

The Pakistani bureaucracy and military are still grappling with the problems that the contradictions inherent in the Ideology of Pakistan continue to create within the varied ethno-cultural landscapes of the nation. The powers at the center, usually more intent at retaining the profitable reins on the government, are inevitably unable to make equitable policies that can reverse decentralized loyalties nor reconcile those tendencies with the imperatives of a highly centralized state apparatus. As Feroz Ahmed in his book *Ethnicity and Politics in Pakistan*, wrote,

subordinate other linguistic entities and grab greater opportunities. That is why, unlike East Punjab, the Punjabi language had to suffer from the self-convenient neglect of the Punjabis and no Punjabi press worth the name could develop. Similarly, unlike Sindhis, the Punjabi could not be adopted as the mother tongue of learning or official discourse. . .”

177 Ali, Mahmud S., *The Fearful State*, Zed Books, Inc., London, 1993, pp. 120.

178 The dismissal of the results of that long awaited election led to the outbreak of the secessionist war in East Pakistan.

The state and its ideologues have steadfastly refused to recognize the fact that these regions are not merely chunks of territory with different names but areas which were historically inhabited by peoples who had different languages and cultures, and even states of their own. This official and intellectual denial has, no doubt, contributed to the progressive deterioration of inter-group relations, weakened societies cohesiveness, and undermined the state's capacity to forge security and sustain development.¹⁷⁹

Dr. Anwar Halepota, a psychiatrist at the Civil Hospital in Karachi, discussed the negative impact that narrow interpretations of nationalism and intellectual censorship can have on citizens. He explained,

Paradoxical double bind denial of the self--cultural denial-- leads to identity crises resulting in subsequent intellectual confusion. Students are not only exposed to this, it is hammered into them. Their response is a struggle to make sense.

Though, according to Dr. Halepota, many may seek help from other sources such as the media or teachers, in order “to bring some sense of clarity, and work out an intellectual point of reference within the available framework”, there are however, “few resources to help them”. Dr. Halepota, who has a strong grounding in his native Sindhi literature believes that “It is the strength of the culture and traditions which saves students from the deep psychotic schism to which they are exposed by the educational system. Culture and family will save them”. When asked to explain this cultural tradition that can save citizens from alienation, he responded that

Culture is the traditional interactions of communities. Social harmony can be found at the level of micro-social interactions which are strong enough to help sustain the nation at a macro-level. This culture of community can be the basis of a healthy cultural synthesis of old social systems and new challenges.

¹⁷⁹Ahmed, Feroz. *Ethnicity and Politics in Pakistan*, Oxford University Press: Karachi, 1998.

The most alarming challenge, according to Dr. Halepota, is conservative religious fundamentalism. He called it “religious colonization” and said that it “is in disharmony with the culture and traditions” of the ethnic groups who reside in Pakistan. He explained,

This orthodoxy is being imposed but Pakistani people resist, they always reject fundamentalism—one proof is that they have never voted the religious parties into office. Islamic parties always suffer humiliating defeats at the poles. People go for practical slogans, not for religion.

Dr. Halepota blamed the rise of fundamentalism in part on the “poor quality of formal education and lack of knowledge about the true nature of Islam, which is tolerance, equality, and justice”. He mentioned Shah Latif Bitai, the famous Sindhi poet, as a “good example of someone who studied the Qu’ran and found profound awareness”. Dr. Halepota, added, “If only today’s Mullahs were able to understand!”

Of particular interest in this regard is a conversation I had with a Sindhi family at their home outside a village in Larkana District, in February 2000. I was told by a middle-aged farmer that these days they are “afraid to go to the mosque” they may be killed, “shot in the back while praying”. They are afraid “NOT to go to the mosque” they may be killed for not being outwardly orthodox. He told me "ten years ago people went to the mosque when they wanted to, Eid, Ramzan, Jamaah, but no one forced you to go". He added, "Now Mullahs from Panjab, trained by the Taliban, have come to our village and built a madrassa next to the mosque. Three boys from the village have gone to fight in Kashmir and Chechnya". He added that when the boys leave the madrassah, "Some of them have become quite intolerant. Sindhis have never been intolerant". He lamented, "We never had this situation before, we have always been Sindhi Muslims, now we have to fake our religiosity just to protect our lives. At home, we sing Shah Latif couplets, we are Sufis". Indeed his children

chanted some poems for me written by the famous Sindhi mystic, Shah Latif of Bhit.

This gentleman-farmer in Larkana district, who lives with his four brothers and their wives and children in a long serai type rustic mud home with a thatched roof confided, "our names are Muslim but our chromosomes are Buddhist". He laughed and said that he wouldn't have said that "in the presence of a Pakistani", whom he equates with Panjabis. He didn't consider himself to be "Pakistani", he thinks of himself as a Sindhi. Nor did he think of himself as strictly Muslim, he was a Sufi. However he did say that he had to "hide his real identity" or he would endanger his life, family, and property. There is an intense fear among many people in Pakistan, not just the Westernized middle class, that the Taliban is coming to town. In some places, their arrival is past tense.¹⁸⁰

Dr. Halepota articulately explained that Sufism, a philosophy familiar to Pakistanis, could help them deal with the constant turmoil that seems to typify the socio-political predicament of their nation-state,

Sufi tradition has been outside the power of kings,¹⁸¹ Sufism is extremely powerful and traditional wisdom springs from it. It has saved this nation from extreme ideological confusion. Yet, we don't find different Islams in our textbooks. However, the Sufi tradition is deeply embedded in the culture—it is what designs the psyche of the people, the true intellectual and spiritual foundations of the people. Transplants from outside and above do find some place in the intellectual and environmental framework and they do disturb and confuse. But deep down still it is the Sufi tradition, philosophy, and belief system which dictates their lives. Sufis don't really actively convert, people are attracted to them—there is no fixed set way of Sufism. The historical reality of the land is now

180 I have not returned to Pakistan since the post-September 11th "War on Terrorism", but emails I received from my friends in Sindh indicated a collective feeling of hopeful anticipation that the assault on the Taliban might help to disempower some of the fundamentalists operating in their community.

181 I disagree with this, but Sufi Saints' associations with ruling elites is the topic of another paper.

at loggerheads with the structural political reality created by the establishment and dictated from above. I have no doubt who will win. History cannot be stopped—the inexorable source of history is relentless, it can't be stopped.

Though the religious parties have never been supported by the electorate, they exercise a coercive psychological influence on society. For years the narratives and symbols of the nation have been pushed along this ever-narrowing path. Non-Muslim cultural influences are often blamed for regional allegiances, such as in this discussion in Dr. Mohammed Sarwar's *Pakistan Studies* book,

At present a particular segment, in the guise of modernization and progressive activity, has taken the unholy task of damaging our cultural heritage. Certain elements aim at the promotion of cultures with the intention to enhance regionalism and provincialism and thereby damage national integration.

Progressive forces and regional cultural affinities are deemed anti-Pakistani and thereby inherently anti-Islamic. The same stance is consistently used when describing the emergence of Bengali irredentism. The Sarwar textbook states "It is in the interest of national solidarity that such aspects of culture should be promoted as reflect affinity among the people of the provinces". This type of discourse denies the cultural expressions of Sindhis, Pathans and Balouchis, instead of valuing them as part of the multi-cultural whole. Regional cultural tendencies are seen as a threat to the nation, and Islam is employed to ameliorate these dangerously fissiparous ethnic differences.

India has fared somewhat better on the question of sub-nationalisms and through a stable democratic system has achieved a wider degree of integration among diverse cultural groups. However, the topic of religion has consistently caused dilemmas not only for secular or Marxist scholars but for Hindu-centric intellectuals as well. Not all textbooks in India are based on the Nehruvian model of secular socialism. The textbooks sponsored by NCERT can be contrasted to those published by historians associated with the Indian History and Culture

Society (IHCS) who are critical of the NCERT series. IHCS textbooks often include statements such as "the Muslim rule was a period of unmitigated suffering and misery".¹⁸²

Well-known Indian historians such as Romila Thapar, Bipin Chandra, or R. S. Sharma authors of several NCERT textbooks, write from a decidedly non-communal perceptive, preferring to disentangle their historical analyses from religious elements in order to soften the narrations describing the Islamic/Hindu interface. These progressive or Leftist historians have set the tone of historiography in India for the past few decades.¹⁸³ Though there have been other voices in the field of history, they were often harshly criticized by the Leftists who dominated the intellectual landscape.¹⁸⁴

Indian historians of considerable reputation are not always free from certain assertions which may appear to be communal, wherein religion is not trivialized but is seen as one of the dominate motivating forces in Subcontinental power relations. The well-known historian, R.C. Majumdar, who began his illustrious career at Dhaka University prior to the partition of the Subcontinent, teaches that religion was an essential element in the composition of India's past

182 Quoted in Powell, pp. 223.

183 Since 1998 and the election of the BJP, these established historians have been very vocally critical of the BJP's efforts to indigenize the curriculum and use non-Marxist/non-colonialist analyses to narrate Indian history. This is called "saffronization of education" by secular Marxists and historians whose books have been criticized by the BJP for "whitewashing" Indian history. The ultimate impact of BJP policies cannot be determined until and if their mandates are implemented. Since the BJP is a coalition government, and there is significant opposition to many of their Hindu-centric orientations, any suggested changes are subjected to intense scrutiny. It remains to be seen how much of an impact they will ultimately have on the social studies curriculum and the writing of NCERT textbooks.

184 One informant told me that, "Indian Marxist historiography was not a reaction to an overbearing nationalistic historiography. It simply took up the thread of colonial historiography, thus enjoying a position of dominance from the beginning. The thrust of their endeavour has been hostile to Indian nationhood from the beginning and without limitation."

and that Hindus and Muslims had always constituted separate communities.¹⁸⁵ In his book, *Glimpses of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century*, Majumdar emphasizes the sharp divide that characterized inter-religious relationships.

A fundamental and basic difference between the two communities was apparent even to the casual observer. Religious and social ideas and institutions counted for more in men's lives in those days than anything else; and in these two respects the two differed as poles asunder¹⁸⁶ [. . .] It is a strange phenomenon that although the Muslims and Hindus had lived together in Bengal for nearly six hundred years, the average people of each community knew so little of the other's traditions.¹⁸⁷

These obvious disparities in historical interpretation bring into question the rationale for organizing Area Studies departments in the USA that focus on “South Asia”. They also make the writing of World History textbooks challenging. Was communalism a colonial construct or did Hindus and Muslims always constitute separate communities? This is not a question that can be answered by a closer examination of primary documents. It is a matter of definitions and interpretation.¹⁸⁸

185Ironically, this echoes the Pakistani version of historical interpretation and the inevitability of the Two Nation Theory.

186It has also been conversely argued that for centuries in Bengal, Hindus and Muslims had lived together quite seamlessly and continued to operate within the same social system. When the census of 1881 revealed a Muslim majority in Bengal, it came as a surprise to the colonial census takers and to the local inhabitants—Hindu and Muslim—because there had been a continuity of culture among the social groups, until forced by colonial classifications to declare their religious differentness.

187R.C. Majumdar, *Glimpses of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century*, (Calcutta: 1960), pp. 5-6.

188 Within this valid line of reasoning, the following question posed by a member of the RSS may be politically incorrect but nonetheless theoretically embedded in curriculum models that assert the study of history leads to enlightened perspectives of nationalism and patriotism. Hindu-centric historians ask, “Should Muslim citizens of modern India be taught to take pride in past temple desecrations perpetrated by their distant ancestors or should they be encouraged to understand the issue from a more ‘Indian’ point of view?” (from an interview in Chennai, July 2000).

Stitching Caps and Staging Coups

Of immediate interest in Pakistani textbooks are justifications that condone and even welcome the military's involvement in politics. General Zia-ul Haq, who overthrew Z.A. Bhutto's unpopular but democratically elected regime in 1977, is eulogized because he "took concrete steps in the direction of Islamization" even though he usurped the political process and suspended civilian rule for eleven years. Pakistani textbooks tend to describe martial law as inevitable, stimulated by the rise of "unIslamic forces" and "corrupt bureaucrats".

This same nonchalance towards military coups was evident in the lukewarm reception that greeted General Parvez Musharraf in October 1999 when he overthrew Nawaz Shariff's corrupt if elected government. In textbooks, the period of General Ayub Khan, the first military ruler is described as a necessary alternative to the failure of democracy as well as the threat of secular Western values,

The political leadership did not come up to the expectations and lacked commitment to Islamic objectives. [. . .] Bureaucratic elite had Western orientation with secular approach to all national issues. [. . .] the result was political instability and chaos paving the way for the intervention of military and the imposition of Martial Law.¹⁸⁹

The next statement reveals the power of the clergy behind the curriculum committee when the textbook accuses General Ayub Khan of imposing "unIslamic family laws"--laws meant to guarantee equal legal protection for women. The textbook asserts that Ayub's "secular" outlook ultimately brought about his decline. General Zia-ul Haq on the other hand, described as simple and sincere, "patronized religious institutions" and is praised for his efforts towards the Islamization of Pakistani society.

189 Sarwar, Muhammad. *Pakistani Studies*, (Lahore: Ilim Kitab Khana, 1997).

In social studies textbooks there is no mention of important court cases, such as Tamizuddin's legal challenge to the first coup or the mass Movement to Restore Democracy (MRD) at the end of Zia's reign. With little discussion of civil society and less about the destruction of the constitution by the military, Pakistani textbooks often substitute historical analyses for polemics about an idealized Islamic nation.¹⁹⁰ Since there is no consensus on the actual form of an Islamic state, contradictions inherent in the textbooks can cause confusion leading to hostile expressions of nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and/or political disenchantment.

During the past two decades, the Pakistani military and intelligence agencies have helped to empower a vast cadre of politically motivated, religiously conservative mujahideen, evidenced by the accelerating crisis in Kashmir, the war like situation in Kargil, airplane hijackings, and the Talibanization of madrassah¹⁹¹ education. This continuing move towards Islamization is accentuated against the ominous backdrop of nuclear testing, missile development, failed diplomacy, and sporadic tit-for-tat acrimonious exchanges between India and Pakistan. The social studies curriculum in Pakistan mirrors this trend, employing a very narrow definition of Islam in the construction of Pakistani nationalism.¹⁹²

Islamization is a controversial term with a variety of interpretations. There are subtle distinctions among usages of words such as Islamization, Islamic nationalism, Islamic Republic, Islamizing, that represent the manipulation and implementation of religious terminology and symbols as political tools. Both

190 Hoodbhoy and Nayyar, pp. 166.

191 Religious schools attached to a masjid or mosque.

192 Only time will tell if Pakistan's newly forged ties with the USA and Musharraf's statements that he wants to undo the negative impact of fundamentalism will have an impact on the history textbooks.

Maududi the founder of the Jaamat-I-Islami and Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran saw Islamization as a model for the world-wide community of Islamic Ummah, distinct from Islamic nationalism, which is "essentially a Western, non-Islamic, secular, and territorial concept that emphasizes patriotism and love of one's nation-state, its sacred territory, political institutions and symbols".¹⁹³

A more thoroughly Islamized Pakistan, which would finally fulfill the true Shariat-ruled mandate inherent in the creation of an Islamic Republic was how General Zia constructed the meaning of his Islamization campaign, which he propagated and popularized as the inevitable evolution of Pakistani nationalism. Zia institutionalized a kind of paranoia about parading Islamic symbols, which were seen as essential for the survival of the nation-state. Unfortunately some of the strategies that Zia and his fundamentalist mullah supporters appropriated and propagated were based on narrow, medieval interpretations of Islam, which resulted in gender-biased attitudes and policies, and militarized exhortations to take up arms for the sake of a worldwide jihad.

The "Ideology of Pakistan" is based on Islamic nationalism. Islamization is what Zia called it, but not coincidentally. He was consciously pushing for stricter adherence to external expressions of religion--placating the conservative forces, exerting social control, influencing social norms. Pakistan's ideology of "Islamic nationalism," though an oxymoron according to Maududi, still has a dynamic and powerful hold over the overwhelming majority of Pakistanis. Professor Mir Zohair Husain wrote in a personal email communication,

Just because Zia used the word 'Islamization' time and again, doesn't mean that he was successful in his so-called 'Islamization' of Pakistani political and economic institutions. While Pakistan's governing elite may have been relatively liberal, pragmatic and secular, the majority of Pakistanis were always devout Muslims,

¹⁹³ Thanks to Mir Zohair Husain, Department of Political Science, University of South Alabama, Mobile, for constructive comments regarding Zia's use of the term "Islamization".

and Pakistani culture was always 'Islamic' [and] thus didn't need any further 'Islamizing.' If Zia's so-called 'Islamization' of Pakistani society had actually occurred, Pakistanis would never have elected two relatively liberal, pragmatic, and secular Muslims to run Pakistan four times in 11 years in free and fair elections based on adult franchise--Benazir Bhutto (1988-1990, 1993-1996) and Nawaz Sharif (1990-1993, 1996-1999). General Pervaz Musharraf, who usurped power on October 12th, 1999, is also a liberal and pragmatic Muslim, who has said that he admired Mustafa Kemal Ataturk of Turkey [who] is denounced by devout Muslims all over the world for being a secular dictator who tried to Westernize Turkey. Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was not 'actually working to establish an Islamic-dominated state.' A 'Muslim-led government' is by no means the same thing as an 'Islamic-dominated state!' Most governments in the Muslim world are led by Muslims, but they are not Islamic regimes based on the Islamic Shariah (like Iran or Afghanistan).

Professor Husain's observation, contrasting the elites with the more "Islamized common" people highlights the irony of Zia's efforts that were in a sense redundant. Though this impetus to Islamize the outward manifestations of social and political institutions was itself a reflection of a worldwide movement towards religious conservatism and fundamentalism within the Islamic community, in real terms, the results of twenty years of Zia's Islamization indoctrination program have given rise to more women in burqas, a generation of Pakistani girls prevented by social conventions from riding bicycles to the market, and militant mullahs preaching political jihad from their Friday pulpits. Though certainly, these expressions are part of the international trend among Muslims toward religious conservatism, Zia latched on to that and used it.

With hyperbole and political and social coercion, the Islamization of Pakistan initiated during the eighties brought an end to the liberal secular ambience of the sixties and seventies, inherited from the sophisticated and educated father of the nation, Quaid-i-Azam, when some ladies still wore saris to weddings and elbow-length sleeves were the norm in a hot climate, and girls still

rode bicycles to the market. Middle-aged Pakistani women remember when hijab and traditional head gear was an anomaly, especially flapping dangerously on the back of a motor scooter.

Men in Pakistan have also adopted more Islamic expressions in their outward attire. Prior to the pressures exerted by Zia to Islamize all facets of society, Pakistani men who sported long beards and short pants could be seen on their way to pray at the Mosque, they were respected as either sincere Tabliqi practitioners or elderly gentlemen who had performed Haj. Now, as a friend in Sindh told me, “Most of the men who dress up as mullahs are quacks and crackpots. Every dacoit¹⁹⁴, shopkeeper, middle class businessman, and rickshaw wala wants to look like a mullah”. He added, “Twenty or thirty years ago Pakistani men were not judged by the length of their pants or their beards”.

Once social and political conventions become codified by conservative religious dictates, it is extremely difficult to break or oppose those newly imposed norms that quickly become sacrosanct and in fact, required of “true believers”. External expressions of Islamization, such as traditional Muslim fashion--beards and caps for males, burqas, purdah, or at least long-sleeved clothing for females--are also potent symbols of patriotism, proving one’s personal commitment to the Ideology of Pakistan—Islamic nationalism.

Hegemonic Hindustan: Pakistan’s Significant Other

For the past few decades in Pakistan, most educational reforms and curriculum policies have been politically and religiously driven, pedagogy being secondary. Denial and erasure are the primary tools of historiography as it is officially practiced in Pakistan. There is little room in the official historical narrative for questions or alternative points of view. *Nazariya Pakistan*, or the

194 Dacoit means thief or robber.

Ideology of Pakistan, is devoted to a mono-perspectival religious orientation. There is no other correct way to read the historical record. It is, after all, a capital crime¹⁹⁵ to talk against the "Ideology of Pakistan."¹⁹⁶

"What is important in the exercise is the faithful transmission, without any criticism or reevaluation, of the particular view of the past which is implicit in the coming to fruition of the 'Pakistan Ideology.'"¹⁹⁷ Rahat Saeed of the Irtiqa Institute of Social Sciences in Karachi explained that school level history teachers are often aware that what they are teaching in their Pakistan Studies classes is at best contradictory and often quite incorrect. They usually do not attempt to explain "the 'real' history regarding such events as the civil war in 1971, because to do so might jeopardize their jobs", and, as Rahat explains, the teachers are afraid to "corrupt their students with the truth".¹⁹⁸

As mentioned, in Pakistani textbooks the historical narrative is based on the Two Nation Theory beginning with the advent of Islam in South Asia, when Mohammed bin-Qasim arrived in Sindh followed by Mahmud Ghaznavi riding through the Khyber Pass, 16 times, bringing the *Light of Islam* to the *infidels* who "converted en mass" to escape the "evil domination" of the "cruel Brahmins." Reviewing a selection of textbooks published since 1972 in Pakistan will verify the assumption that there are little or no discussions of the ancient cultures that flowered in the land that is now Pakistan, such as Taxila and Mohenjo-Daro. Any mention of Hinduism is inevitably accompanied by derogatory critiques and none

195 Though General Zia mandated the law that made it illegal to criticize the Ideology of Pakistan in the late eighties, it was made a capital offense through legislation enacted in the late nineties by the democratically elected Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif.

196 During Martial Law, one well known case was lodged by the state against Jam Saqi, a Sindh nationalist who was accused of criticizing the Ideology of Pakistan. During the trial, the prosecution witnesses could not agree on a definition of the term. Benizir Bhutto was a witness for the defense. Jam Saqi was acquitted.

197 Hoodbhoy and Nayyar, pp. 165.

198 From an interview, August 1999, Karachi.

of the greatness of Indic civilization is considered--not even the success of Chandragupta Maurya, who defeated, or at least frightened the invading army of Alexander the Great at the banks of the Beas River where it flows through the land that is now called Pakistan. These events are deemed meaningless since they are not about Muslim heroes. There is an amazing elision in time between the moment Islam first arrived in Sindh in 712 and the birth of Pakistan on August 14, 1947.

Exclusivist ideologically driven historiography in contemporary Pakistan gives free reign to communal tirades replete with phrases such as “diabolical Hindus” and “Hindu conspiracies.” India, as a Hindu dominated political entity, is a hegemonic threat to Pakistani national sovereignty, whereas Hinduism, as a pseudo-religion, is an effeminate farce, incapable of surviving any interaction with Islam. The contradiction of such a convoluted stance is lost to the propagandist.

This blinkered approach to history was not always the case. Up until 1972, textbooks in Pakistan included much more elaborate sections on the history of the Subcontinent, while adopting the colonial frame of periodization--the books described the Hindu Period, the Muslim Period, and the British Period. History textbooks, such as *Indo Pak History, Part I* published in 1951, included chapters such as “Ramayana and Mahabharata Era,” “Aryans' Religion and Educational Literature,” the “Caste System,” “Jainism and Buddhism,” “Invasions of Iranians and Greeks,” “Chandra Gupta Maurya,” “Maharaja Ashok,” “Maharaja Kaniska,” “The Gupta Family,” “Maharaja Harish,” “New Era of Hinduism,” “The Era of Rajputs”.¹⁹⁹ Regardless of the tone employed to narrate South Asian history, whether negative or positive, importantly, it was included in the textbooks as relevant to Pakistan’s past.

¹⁹⁹See Appendix for complete tables of contents.

This South Asian orientation, reflected in the chronologically organized tables of contents of Pakistani history textbooks from the fifties, was prevalent until after the breakup of the country in 1971. These early textbooks quite naturally also included numerous chapters on the history of Islam beginning with the life of the Prophet (PBUH) and the rise of the Muslim Ummah, tracing Pakistani history from Mecca to Lahore. The many references to Indian kingdoms and traditions found in older Pakistani textbooks indicate that the social studies curriculum was not always estranged from South Asian history and culture.

A textbook published in 1970, for use at a military academy in Kakul, had a chapter titled, “Mahatma Gandhi, Man of Peace”, which tells the students that “Gandhi died for Pakistan”, since he had been killed by a Hindu radical who thought he had betrayed India by permitting the creation of Pakistan. The textbook states that after Partition, Gandhi insisted that Pakistan be given its fair share of the exchequer. Since Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu, bitter about the communally adjudicated bifurcation of the country, Pakistani textbooks could claim that “Gandhi died for Pakistan”.²⁰⁰

Beginning with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and accelerating under the Islamized tutelage of General Zia-ul Haq, not only has all nonIslamic history of the Subcontinent been discarded, but it has been vilified and mocked and transformed into the evil other, a measure of what Pakistan is not. Z. A. Bhutto's influence on the textbooks was profound—he blamed India for the break-up of the country. Though his mother was a Hindu, he vehemently launched an anti-Indian campaign with vituperative anti-Hindu rhetoric, swearing that his countrymen would “eat grass” in order to compete with India’s nuclear program and vowing to fight a “thousand years war” for Kashmir.

200 Haye, Kh. A. (Ph.D. and Department Head, Pakistan Military Academy, Kakul). *First Steps in Our History*, (Lahore: Ferozsons Ltd., 1971; first edition 1959, fifth edition 1962, revised 1964--reprinted yearly through 1971).

Politically weak, he needed to play the hate-the-Hindus-card to shore up his popularity. The legacy of this orchestrated hatred is still the basis of Pakistani historical narratives where Gandhi, regardless of his contribution to the decolonization of the Subcontinent, is now only referred to as a “conniving bania”²⁰¹ and certainly never called “Mahatma”. In fact, in Pakistani social studies narratives, the colonial enemy was not the British, but the Hindus.

Z.A. Bhutto, in a precarious political position, governing a drastically diminished territory, strove to win the support of the religious sectors of the population and had the textbooks altered to placate those factions. An integrated Pakistan, one strong Islamic nation that could overcome separatist movements and prevent another splitting, such as the creation of Bangladesh, was the mandate.

To appease the orthodox clerics, such policies as the declaration that Ahmadi²⁰² were "non-Muslims" were enacted under Bhutto. Textbooks laid

201 Refers to a Gujarati of the merchant class.

202 From Ziring, 1997: “As deep as . . . differences are in Pakistan [between Muslim Sunnis and Shias], they pale into relative insignificance in the juxtaposition of Sunni Muslim and the Ahmedis, who also consider themselves Muslims. The Ahmedis are the contemporary followers of the nineteenth-century personality, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad [. . .] they accept Ghulam Ahmad as a prophet. [. . .] A Punjabi phenomenon, the Ahmedis, also known as Qadianis [. . .] assail the fundamental Islamic belief that the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) is the last or seal of the prophets and that after him there can be no other prophets” (pp. 137). In Pakistan the Sunni Ulema demanded that the “Ahmedis be declared a non-Muslim minority [. . .] Viewed as a rebellious and divisive element within the body of Islam, both clerical and lay figures raised their voices against it, none more vehemently than the poet Iqbal, who wrote ‘it is in the interest of the (Islamic) solidarity that Islam cannot tolerate any rebellious group within its fold.’” A “vituperative campaign against the Ahmedis” was launched just five years after the bloodletting birth of the nation. Riots tore apart Panjab in 1953 as the Ahmedi community was targeted and murdered, their property destroyed. New Ahmedi riots erupted in 1974 “after the National Assembly at Bhutto’s urging, declared Ahmedis to be non-Muslims” (pp. 394). When General Zia came to power he “issued an order depriving the Ahmedi community, which during the Bhutto administration had been formally decertified as Muslims, from using any Islamic symbols or in any way leading people to believe that the community was connected with the Islamic faith. The more conservative members of the orthodox community had argued for even harsher penalties,

even greater stress on the Islamic perspective of historical events. Islamiyat was made a required subject up until class eight. The use of the phrase, "The Ideology of Pakistan" had already been inserted into social studies textbooks during Bhutto's first term, and as mentioned, pre-Islamic South Asian history was systematically obliterated. Despite all this, Bhutto gets very little credit for "Islamization", one textbook calling his efforts "too little, too late."

The military coup that ended Bhutto's second term and eventually his life, brought his protégé General Zia-ul Haq to power. Islamization began in full measure. Non-Muslims, such as Hindus in rural Sindh, were stripped of many of their rights and made to vote in separate electorates. Blasphemy laws were often used selectively against non-Muslims. The phrase "Ideology of Pakistan" was installed with vigor. The textbooks were rewritten by committee to assert the Islamic orientations of Pakistani nationalism--according to General Zia's socio-political decrees.

A decade and a half after Zia was assassinated, the textbooks he caused to be authorized have survived four democratically elected governments, and the propagandistic tone of the historical narrative is still taught, as of the summer of 2003, as absolute truth to the youth of Pakistan. Zia is depicted as benevolent and religious minded, a discourse that remains in the textbooks published through the 1990's during the two tenures of his protégé, Nawaz Sharif. Benazir Bhutto was too preoccupied with remaining in power to concern herself about the revision of curriculum, even concerning the dismal representation of her father in textbooks. After a historical character or event is divinely sanctioned and anointed with religious significance, altering that discourse is difficult, almost apostasy.

insisting that the Ahmedis were heretics and hence, subject to the death penalty. Zia did not accept that extreme view, but the government was immediately challenged by sectarian strife" (pp. 477).

From their government issued textbooks, students are taught that Hindus are backwards, superstitious, they burn their widows and wives, and that Brahmins are inherently cruel, and if given a chance, would assert their power over the weak, especially Muslims and Shudras, depriving them of education by pouring molten lead in their ears.²⁰³ In their social studies classes, students are taught that Islam brought peace, equality, and justice to the Subcontinent and only through Islam could the sinister ways of Hindus be held in check. In Pakistani textbooks "Hindu" rarely appears in a sentence without adjectives such as "politically astute", "sly", or "manipulative".

The Goal: Complete Islamization

Discourses about Islam and its relationship to the Ideology of Pakistan comprise the majority of the content of *Pakistan Studies* textbooks that delve at length on how Islam can create a fair and just nation,

In the eyes of a Muslim all human beings are equal and there is no distinction based on race or colour [. . .] The rich or poor [are] all equal before law. A virtuous and pious man has precedence over others before Allah.²⁰⁴

This *Pakistan Studies* textbook goes on to say, "Namaz²⁰⁵ prevents a Muslim from indulging in immoral and indecent acts." And regarding issues of justice, the 1999 edition of this *Pakistan Studies* textbook, which is in wide usage in Pakistan states,

On official level (sic) all the officers and officials must perform their duties justly, i.e., they should be honest, impartial and devoted. They should keep in view betterment of common people and should not act in a manner which may infringe the rights of others or may cause inconvenience to others.

203 Social Studies Grade VII, (Jamshoro: Sindh Textbook Board, 1997).

204 Rabbani, and Sayyid, pp. 3.

205 prayer

How does this discourse tally with the tales that the students have heard about corruption and the hassles their parents have endured simply to pay a bill or collect a refund? Several students in Pakistan complained that they felt cheated and pessimistic when they read these things. They were angry because they could not rectify their cognitive dissonance of what they hear about elected officials and wealthy landholders and industrialists buying off court cases lodged against them or simply not charged for known crimes, with statements from their textbooks such as,

Every one should be equal before law and the law should be applied without any distinction or discrimination. [. . .] Islam does not approve that certain individuals may be considered above law.

A textbook published by the Punjab Textbook Board states, "The Holy Prophet (PBUH) says that a nation which deviates from justice *invites its doom and destruction*" (emphasis added).²⁰⁶ With such a huge disparity between the ideal and the real, there is a great deal of fatalism apparent among the educated citizens and the school going youths concerning the state of the nation in Pakistan. Further compounding the students' distress and distancing them from either their religion or their nation-state or both, are contradictory statements made in this *Pakistan Studies* book that "the enforcement of Islamic principles . . . does not approve [of] dictatorship or the rule of man over man". Compared with the reality unfolding a few paragraphs later when the student is told uncritically that,

General Muhammad Ayub Khan captured power and abrogated the constitution of 1956 [...] dissolved the assemblies and ran the affairs of the country under Martial Law without any constitution.²⁰⁷

In Md. Sarwar's *Pakistan Studies* a whole chapter is dedicated to "Islamization of Pakistan" with subtitles such as, "Islamization Under Zia,"

²⁰⁶Rizvi, Hassan Askri, Javed Iqbal, Ghulam Abid Khan. *Pakistan Studies for Secondary Classes*, (Qamer, Lahore: Punjab Textbook Board, 1999), pp. 9-13.

²⁰⁷ibid, pp. 65.

“Hindrances to Islamization,” and “Complete Islamization is Our Goal”. Other themes and events in the history and culture of Pakistan are judged vis-à-vis their relationship and support of “complete Islamization”. Within this rhetoric are found dire warnings that Islam should be applied severely so that it can guard against degenerate Western influences. However, a few pages later the text encourages the students to embrace Western technological innovations in order to modernize the country. One part of the book complains that Muslims in British India lost out on economic opportunities because conservative religious forces rejected Western education. A few chapters later the authors are telling the students to use Islam to fend off the influences of Western education, eulogizing the efforts of conservative clerics who are the last hope of preventing the degeneration of the country through their desire to implement the Shari-a Law. This seems to be schizophrenic reasoning, but may reflect the inherent contradiction of British pedagogical constructs underlying and undermining post-colonial Islamized interpretations.

The Sarwar textbook claims that Islam sees no differences and promotes unity among peoples while it also discriminates between Muslims and nonbelievers. On page 120 the author states,

The Islamic state, of course, discriminates between Muslim citizens and religious minorities and preserves their separate entity. Islam does not conceal the realities in the guise of artificialities or hypocrisy.²⁰⁸ By recognizing their distinct entity, Islamic state affords better protection to its religious minorities. Despite the fact that the role of certain religious minorities, especially the Hindus in East Pakistan, had not been praiseworthy, Pakistan ensured full protection to their rights under the Constitution. Rather the Hindu Community enjoyed privileged position in East Pakistan by virtue of its effective control over the economy and the media. It is to be noted that the Hindu representatives in the 1st Constituent

208 What the USA would call multiculturalism, and India would call pluralism or national integration, Pakistani textbooks refer to a “guise of artificialities”.

Assembly of Pakistan employed delaying tactics in Constitution-making.

That this claim is exaggerated can be seen in the recent book by Allen McGrath, *The Destruction of Democracy in Pakistan*, in which the author, a lawyer, analyzes the efforts at constitution making in the first decade after independence before Iskandar Mizra dissolved the National Assembly. In the McGrath book the productive role D.N. Dutt, a Hindu from East Pakistan played in constitution making is mentioned. Yet, in *Pakistan Studies* textbooks, anti-Hindu rhetoric and the vilification of the Hindu community of East Pakistan are the standard fare.

In this particular version of Pakistani history, which is the official version, General Zia ul-Haq is portrayed as someone who "took concrete steps in the direction of Islamization." He is often portrayed as very pious and perhaps stitching caps alongside Aurangzeb. Though Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is generally criticized in the textbooks, General Zia escapes most criticism though he was the most autocratic of the four military rulers who have usurped the political process in Pakistan. Each time that martial law was declared in Pakistan, and the constitution aborted, placed in abeyance, or otherwise dismantled, textbooks describe it as a necessary repercussion responding to the rise of decadent secular values. Dr. Sarwar describes martial law as an inevitable solution stimulated by unIslamic forces,

During the period under Zia's regime, social life developed a leaning towards simplicity. Due respect and reverence to religious people was accorded. The government patronized the religious institutions and liberally donated funds.²⁰⁹

This textbook and many like it, claim that there is a "network of conspiracies and intrigues", which are threatening the "Muslim world in the guise of elimination of militancy and fundamentalism". In this treatment Pakistan, under the guidance of

209 Sarwar, pp. 136.

General Zia, takes credit for the fall of the Soviet Union and lays claim to have created a situation in the modern world where Islamic revolutions can flourish and the vacuum left by the fall of the USSR will "be filled by the world of Islam". The Sarwar textbook continues, "The Western world has full perception of this phenomena, [which] accounts for the development of reactionary trends in that civilization".

Concluding this section under the subheading "Global Changes," the author seems to be preparing for Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* when he writes,

The Muslim world has full capabilities to face the Western challenges provided Muslims are equipped with self-awareness and channelize their collective efforts for the well being of the Muslim Ummah. All evidences substantiate Muslim optimism indicating that the next century will glorify Islamic revolution with Pakistan performing a pivotal role.²¹⁰

Pakistan Studies textbooks are full of inherent contradictions. On one page the text brags about the modern banking system and on another page complains that interest, *riba*, is unIslamic. There is also a certain amount of self-loathing written into the *Pakistan Studies* textbooks, the politicians are depicted as inept and corrupt and the industrialists are described as pursuing "personal benefit even at the cost of national interest".

Bouncing between the poles of conspiracy theory and threats from within, the textbooks portray Pakistan as a victim of Western ideological hegemony, threatened by the perpetual Machiavellian intentions of India's military and espionage machine, together with the internal failure of its politicians to effectively govern the country. All this coupled with the fact that the economy is in the hands of a totally corrupt class of elite business interests who have only enriched themselves at the cost of the development of the nation. Ironically, in

210 Ibid, page 146.

textbooks intended to create patriotism and pride in the nation, the country is ridiculed and despised.

All of these failures of the state and internal and international conspiracies could, according to the rhetoric in the textbooks, be countered by the application of more strictly applied Islamic practices. In July of 1999, I spoke to several well-placed individuals who told me that they would welcome a Taliban type government in Pakistan so that the country could “finally achieve its birth right as a truly Islamic, corruption-free nation”. This is certainly not a majority opinion among the middle classes, however there is a large segment of society who thinks along these lines. I am not able to ascertain how the post-September 11th scenario will impact the allegiances of middle class Pakistanis who leaned towards Talibanization. Given the opportunistic nature of their personal, outward manifestation of Islamization

Most of the people I have met in Pakistan are alarmed about the "Talibanization of the nation". I was told time and again “the CIA created the Taliban Frankenstein in Pakistan’s backyard, then walked away, leaving the monster behind”. Some Pakistanis, inspired by the politicized sermons of Mullah elites, vociferously call for a “Taliban type system” and are willing to die to Islamize the nation. This may be especially true among the poor, whose only access to education is in a crowded Madrassah where they learn that Sunni Islam is poised to take over the world of kafirs (non-believers) and apostates. These economically and emotionally deprived young men have been taught that a Taliban type system could overcome their poverty, their powerlessness and despair. Caught between conspiracies, corruption and the Holy Qu’ran, they see no alternatives.

When textbooks and clerics cry conspiracy and the majority of newspapers, particularly the Urdu press, misinform the people and sensationalize

the issues, the tendency for Pakistanis to feel betrayed and persecuted is not surprising. During the 1971 war, newspapers in Pakistan told very little about the violent military crackdown in Dhaka nor did they keep the people informed of the deteriorating strategic situation. The role of the Mukti Bahini²¹¹ was practically unknown in the western wing of the country, and when defeat came, it was a devastating and unexpected shock that could only be explained by the treachery of Indira Gandhi, who is often quoted as saying, “We have sunk the Two-Nation Theory in the Bay of Bengal”. India remains a hyperbolic threat to Pakistan’s existence.

In the thirty years since the ‘fall of Dhaka’ the government controlled curriculum still does not include a historically circumspect version of the causes of the civil war that dismembered the nation. It is no wonder that during and in the aftermath of the Kargil crisis in the summer of 1999, newspapers often ran stories referring to the occupation of the heights above Kargil as “revenge for 1971.” There is a chronic shortage of objective information available to the majority of Pakistani citizens that can adequately explain the actual events which led to the three wars with India. Kashmir in 1948, the 1965 war, and the Bangladesh War of Independence have become national metaphors²¹² for betrayal within and a reminder of the constant threat looming from Hindu India. The split-up of the nation and the creation of Bangladesh remains a potent symbol of Pakistan’s disempowerment and a constant reminder of what will happen if the Muslim Ummah does not remain vigilant.

211 The Mukti Bahini (Liberation Army) were anti-Pakistani guerilla soldiers from East Bengal, supported and supplied by India. They spearheaded a nine-month civil war which began when Pakistani troops staged a military crack down on March 26, 1971 and massacred thousands of Bengalis/East Pakistanis, including hundreds of students at Dhaka University. On December 16, 1971, Indian troops liberated Dhaka and the independent country of Bangladesh was created.

212 For example, a headline that ran in the Islamabad edition of the newspaper, The News, in June 1999, said, "Nawaz Sharif’s Policies are Turning Sindh into Another Bangladesh." After thirty years, the secession of the eastern province is still fresh in the Pakistani imagination.

During the war-like situation in the summer of 1999 at the Line of Control near Kargil, the Pakistani government claimed that the Mujahideen were not physically supported by Pakistan, that they were indigenous Kashmiri freedom fighters. However, the presence of satellite television, the Internet, and newspapers which are now more connected to international media sources, offered the possibility of broader exposure than during the two previous wars fought over Kashmir.

Perhaps there is at least one positive outcome of the tragic Kargil crisis where hundreds of young men lost their lives; in the aftermath there was an outpouring of newspaper and magazine articles in Pakistan that attempted to analyze the brinkmanship from various angles. Such critical reflexivity is essential in a civil society. Although some of the essays in Pakistani newspapers prophetically called for the military to take over the government in the wake of Nawaz Shariff's sell out to the imperialist Clinton, most of the discussions were more circumspect and many authors looked at the Kargil debacle through a lens of history, trying to understand the cause of Pakistan's repeated failures arising from military brinkmanship. Many of the observations made after Kargil, such as the inadequacy of Pakistan's international diplomatic missions, are interestingly, also cited in *Pakistan Studies* textbooks regarding India's perceived manipulation of world opinion during the 1971 war, and Pakistan's inability to counter it.

Pakistani textbooks are particularly prone to historical narratives manipulated by omission, according to Avril Powell, professor of history at the University of London. History by erasure can have its long-term negative repercussions. An example of this is the manner in which the Indo-Pak War of 1965 is discussed in Pakistani textbooks. In standard narrations of the 65 War manufactured for students and the general public, there is no mention of Operation Gibraltar, even after four decades. In fact, several university level

history professors whom I interviewed claimed never to have heard of Operation Gibraltar and the repercussions of that ill-planned military adventurism which resulted in India's attack on Lahore.

In Pakistani textbooks the story is told that “the Indian army, unprovoked, inexplicably attacked Lahore” and that “one Pakistani jawan (soldier) equals ten Indian soldiers”, who, upon seeing the fierce Pakistanis, “drop their banduks (rifles) and run away”. Many people in Pakistan still think like this, and several mentioned this assumed cowardice of the Indian army in discussions with me while the fighting was raging in Kargil. The nation is elated by the valiant victories on the battlefield, as reported in the newspapers, then shocked and dismayed when their country is humiliated at the negotiating table. Because they were not fully informed about the adventurism of their military leaders, they can only feel betrayed that somehow Pakistani politicians once again “grabbed diplomatic defeat from the jaws of military victory”.

Operation Gibraltar, the 1999 debacle in Kargil, and especially the tragic lessons that could have been learned from the Bangladesh War are products of the same myopic processes. The Kargil crisis was a legacy of the lack of information that citizens have had about the real history of their country. The Kashmiri conflict has left a trail of denied incursions and undeclared wars. In 1948 the Pakistani army took an active role in the military action in Kashmir, and numerous historical accounts, such as Hodson's *The Great Divide*, offer evidence that Jinnah was ready “to 'call the whole thing off' if 'India would withdraw' its forces”.²¹³ In a letter to Mountbatten in late December 1948, Nehru wrote that

the resources of Pakistan are being employed. . .[and] the invasion of Kashmir is not an accidental affair resulting from the fanaticism

213 Hodson, H.V. *The Great Divide, Britain-India-Pakistan*, (1969, 1985, 1997 Jubilee Series-- edition with a new introduction), (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 459.

or exuberance of the tribesmen, but a well-organized business with the backing of the state. Nehru added ominously, "The present objective is Kashmir. The next declared objective is Patiala, East Punjab and Delhi. 'On to Delhi' is the cry all over West Punjab".²¹⁴

It is relevant to note in this context, an episode from a book by the well known Pakistani scholar, Akbar S. Ahmed in which he tells of a personal conversation in Dhaka with General Niazi, head of the Pakistani forces in East Bengal. Niazi claimed that he was planning to "cross into India and march up the Ganges and capture Delhi and thus link up with Pakistan". General Niazi told Ahmed that "This will be the corridor that will link East with West Pakistan. It was a corridor that the Quaid-e-Azam demanded and I will obtain it by force of arms".

This way of thinking can still be seen among those who were battling the Indian army in Kargil. In an interview published in *The News* in June 1999, a commander of one group of mujahideen told the reporter that their plan was first to take "Kargil, then Srinagar, then march victorious into Delhi". In January 2001, an article in the Pakistani newspaper, the DAWN, in reference to the BJP's ceasefire in Kashmir and the bomb attack on the Red Fort in Delhi a few weeks earlier stated, "Mujahideen groups [. . .] have stepped up their armed campaign—stretching from the heart of the Indian capital to the heart of the matter, in Kashmir".

As Pathani tribesmen swarm over Delhi and Hindus lay siege to Lahore, rumors and wild imaginings have far more power than what in reality is half a century of hostile stalemates. The social studies curriculum is just one vehicle through which Pakistan must manufacture adequate paranoia to sustain a passionate insecurity portraying South Asian Muslims as a beleaguered

214 *ibid*, pp. 467.

community in need of constant vigilance to retain its special identity. In this particularistic world-view, Muslims were denied their divine right to rule over the Indian Subcontinent and in the final analysis, the trusting Muslims were betrayed in the bargain, robbed of Kashmir and handed a “Moth-eaten Pakistan”.

Pakistani textbooks have a particular problem when defining geographical space. The terms "South Asia" and "Subcontinent" have partially helped to solve this problem of the geo-historical identity of the area formally known as British India. However, it is quite difficult for Pakistani textbook writers to ignore the land now known as India when they discuss Islamic heroes and Muslim monuments in the Subcontinent. This reticence to recognize anything of importance in India, which is almost always referred to as "Bharat" in both English and Urdu versions of the textbooks, creates a difficult dilemma for historians writing about the Mughal Dynasties. It is interesting to note that M.A. Jinnah strongly protested the Congress' appropriation of the appellation “India”, but Mountbatten dismissed his arguments. Because Pakistani textbook writers are constrained by the imperative to represent all facts and events in the historical record of South Asia so as to prove the inevitability of the Two Nation Theory, there is by necessity of this agenda, numerous misrepresentations. Geography also falls prey to this ideological orientation, as can be seen in this quote from one of the many textbooks titled, *Pakistani Studies*,

During the 12th century the shape of Pakistan was more or less the same as it is today . . . Under the Khiljis, Pakistan moved further southward to include a greater part of Central India and the Deccan. In retrospect it may be said that during the 16th century 'Hindustan' disappeared and was completely absorbed in 'Pakistan'.²¹⁵

That social studies textbooks in Pakistan have long been victimized by distorted politics can be seen by the following example. In 1953, prior to Ayub Khan's period, the second half of the seventh grade *Geography and Civics*

²¹⁵Zafar, M.A. *Pakistani Studies for Secondary Education for F.A., etc.*, (Lahore: 1986), pp. 4-7.

textbook,²¹⁶ published by the West Pakistan Textbook Board, was devoted to a discussion of various political systems, and featured chapters titled “Democracy,” “Theocracy,” “Military Dictatorship,” and “Federalism”. In a subsequent edition of this seventh grade *Geography and Civics* textbook²¹⁷ published in 1962, four years after Ayub Khan's military government had taken control of the country, the discussions of comparative political systems had been eliminated, and instead, chapters such as "What It Means to Be a Good Pakistani," and "Standing in Queue" are included. Perceived political imperatives shaped by a pervasive distrust of the Pakistani people motivated previous manipulations of the textbooks.

Another recent example of alterations made in textbooks to conform the narrative to the current political jargon can be seen by comparing two editions of the textbook *Pakistan Studies for Secondary Classes*, published by the Punjab Textbook Board. First, the 1997 edition states on page 206 – 207,

India is very advanced in its nuclear energy programme and has performed an atomic test in 1974. To divert world attention from its nuclear plans, Bharat launched a propaganda campaign against Pakistan to the effect that Pakistan was manufacturing nuclear weapons. Pakistan categorically contradicted these baseless allegations and proposed that both the countries should adopt such limitations with mutual consent as may be acceptable at international level, putting an end to the possibility of proliferation of nuclear arms in South Asia. *Bharat is not prepared to accept any restriction in this respect and desires that Pakistan should give up its peaceful nuclear energy programme. Obviously this is an unrealistic demand* (emphasis added).

After the nuclear tests in May of 1998, pages 206 – 207 of this textbook were changed in the 1999 imprint and the substituted comments added in a different font:

216 *Geography and Civics*, Class VII, (Lahore: West Pakistan Textbook Board, 1953).

217 *Geography and Civics*, Class VII, (Lahore: West Pakistan Textbook Board, 1962).

India is very advanced in its nuclear energy programme and has performed an atomic test in 1974. To divert world attention from its nuclear plans, Bharat launched a propaganda campaign against Pakistan to the effect that Pakistan was manufacturing nuclear weapons. Pakistan categorically contradicted these baseless allegations and proposed non-proliferation of nuclear arms in South Asia. *On 11th, 13th May, 1998 India detonated five nuclear explosions and threatened the strategic and security balance in the region. Pakistan was compelled to respond in the same language and it conducted its six nuclear explosions on 28th and 30th May of 1998 at Chagi* (emphasis added).

The day following the nuclear tests, public servants in Pakistan, without their consent, were docked a day's pay to help offset the cost of exploding nuclear devices. Subsequently, Yome Takhbeer Day is celebrated in Pakistan on May 28 and miniature models of rugged dome shaped Chagi Mountain adorn traffic circles in cities across the country. The revised curriculum guide suggests that school children draw posters and march in parades to mark the date of Pakistan's nuclearization.

If war begins in people's minds, as the UN Charter suggests, then our minds are prepared for war while we are students. By the time young people become policy makers, the templates of hostility may be deeply embedded in their worldviews. Textbooks can teach students about international cooperation and respect for other cultures, or they can serve as a source of contentiousness--poisoning the diplomatic climate and heightening the chances of war. Notions of militarized nationalism inculcated through the curriculum subvert efforts at international cooperation thereby diminishing the inherent conflict management capacity in South Asia.

Kashmir: A Vehicle for the Creation and Transmission of Nationalism

India and Pakistan have fought three wars over Kashmir, embroiling them in a vicious cycle of armed hostilities persisting for over fifty years--the heated

rhetoric increasing dramatically during the last decade. Kashmir's strategic location and each nation's self-image of its own meaning and worth endow the Kashmir issue with tremendous political and religious symbolism. Kashmir is integral to the self-perceived notions of statehood for both nations.

Kashmir is tied to the ideals of India's founding fathers--that a modern nation should not be established on the basis of religion but on political and economic considerations. India knows very well the value of their Kashmiri real estate in both philosophical and monetary terms. Kashmir symbolizes India's Himalayan heaven--Shangra-la, idyllic house boats surrounded by lotus blossoms on Dal Lake, yellow fields of flowering mustard seeds, purple fields of valuable saffron, towering snow peaks, the abode of Amarnath, the famous ice lingam. Kashmir is a scenic treasure, the crown of India.

Kashmiriyat was a philosophy wherein Hindus and Muslims had live together peacefully for centuries. Kashmir is symbolic of *Bharatvarsha*, the primordial land of the Hindus—a limb of the body of Mother India saved from Pakistani occupation during her dismemberment. Though tied to India through metaphor and memory, Kashmir is anchored in modern India's identity and territorial integrity in the twentieth century context of the nation-state. It's also a matter of maps. Losing Kashmir, lopping off the top of India, would be the geographical equivalent of shaving off Mother India's beautiful hair, a custom sometimes practiced by widows, symbolizing loss and death.

For Pakistan, Kashmir is perhaps even more essential to its nationhood--the "K" in Pakistan *stands for Kashmir*. Without Kashmir, Pakistan's mandate remains unfulfilled, much less the pronunciation of its name, invented by Chaudhry Rehmat Ali, a student living in London during the 1930s.²¹⁸ Kashmir as

218 The name, Pakistan has two meanings: Pak = pure in Arabic + stan = land --"Land of the Pure." It is also an acronym: P = Pakhtun, A = Afghan, K = Kashmir, S = Sindh, and the "tan"

a symbol is integral to the very meaning and existence of Pakistan. Even in the days of united Pakistan, before textbooks became virulently anti-Indian, they mourned the loss of the Valley of Kashmir and blamed a Mountbatten/Nehru conspiracy and a “toothless resolution from the United Nations Security Council” for the illegal occupation of territory that, according to the guidelines drawn up to partition British India, should “rightfully have acceded to Pakistan”. The betrayals of Kashmir fit neatly into the historical narratives in which Pakistanis are portrayed as a beleaguered community, struggling against injustice.

In a newspaper article, Mushirul Hasan mocks the self-pitying tone with which many Pakistani historians write,

With the debris of the constructive effort of centuries around them, the Muslims of the subcontinent stood alone. They were weak, disorganized and backward, hardly equipped for a great struggle, standing on the cross-roads of destiny without knowing in which direction safety lay and yet determined to fight for their right of existence and freedom.²¹⁹

About many issues, Pakistanis may feel insecure, but they feel historically vindicated and politically justified vis-à-vis their position on Kashmir. As one young historian in Lahore told me, “Our position on Kashmir is perfect, flawless. Kashmir is a contiguous territory with a majority Muslim population, India is clearly the aggressor in Kashmir. India’s position is not supported by international opinion or protocol”. Many Pakistanis feel quite attached to the issue and very emotional about Kashmir.

Many others think that Pakistan has squandered vast opportunities for economic, political, and educational development in the desire to liberate

stands for “Balouchistan”. . . Bengal was not included. According to most non-Pakistani scholars, Chaudhry Rehmat Ali contributed nothing to the establishment of Pakistan except the coining of the acronym. In later editions of Pakistani textbooks, his biography embellished and his role in the creation of the country is greatly enhanced through a process of historical revisionism.

219 Hasan:1999.

Srinagar. They feel cheated. There is a shared ominous realization that the Kashmir issue has brought militarized Islamic zealots into the society, even into areas of rural Sindh where Shah Latif's Sufi ballads shape the philosophies of the people. One Sindhi journalist told me, concerning the weaponization of religious groups in Pakistan, "the ISI²²⁰ thought they could buy guns that only faced north".

In the 1953 *History of Indo-Pakistan Part II for Class VII* published in Urdu, Kashmir is only mentioned once in the textbook, without any reference to contemporary problems,

Till the 14th century, Rajput Rajas ruled Kashmir. At the end of the century one of the ministers, Sikandar Mirza occupied it. The area had always been free. Sikandar and Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin were the famous kings of that area. In 1586, Akbar included Kashmir into his Empire.

Since most textbooks during the fifties were based on British models which approached historical materials from a chronological perspective designed to include the long expanse of South Asian history beginning with Mohenjo-Daro and Aryan Civilization, there were few passages in this early textbook dedicated to the justification of Pakistan's existence. The textbooks however gradually became more Islamized and nationalized, though not localized. The first manifestations of this were the commentaries about unequal distribution of resources and the violence of partition, typified by this excerpt from a 1962 *Social Studies* textbook for class seven,

Pakistan had to start every thing from the base, which caused many difficulties. Sectarian violence²²¹ was continuing. There was a flood of caravans of immigrants from India. India had taken over Kashmir by force. The economy of the nation was unstable.²²²

220 Pakistan's intelligence agency: "Inter-Services Intelligence".

221 Sectarian in this context referring to Hindu/Muslim violence.

222 Social Studies (History Portion), 7th grade, (Lahore, Pakistan: Education Department, First edition Feb. 1962).

This is the early version of a rhetorical style that remains central to the narration of the nation found in the Pakistani social studies curriculum. During the last few decades, the themes of victimization and justification have been amplified in both textbooks and the popular media. Abandoning the struggle for Kashmir, for many Pakistanis, means forsaking the very meaning of their beloved nation. For a half century, propaganda about Kashmir has been produced by both the government controlled sources of information and the independent press, images of the Indian army oppressing Kashmiris dominate the television news.

Omission of Transmission: The Emergence of Bangladesh

One of the more remarkable aspects of textbooks in Pakistan is their ability to completely eliminate cause and effect regarding the creation of Bangladesh.²²³ There is usually only a passing mention of the general elections called by Yahya Khan who is uniformly seen as a bad leader, a heavy drinking womanizer. There is nothing about the cancellation of the National Assembly, little about the military crackdown in Dhaka, less about the misfortunes of the Pakistani Army. The traumatic birth of Bangladesh is blamed on Indian cunning and incipient Bengali irridentalism.

“Eras and events deemed either irrelevant, hostile or inconvenient to the fulfillment of the Pakistan Movement are omitted”. In contemporary Pakistan it is not surprising that the Vedic Age and the Gupta Age would not be emphasized, what is startling is "the complete omission from some textbooks of any reference

²²³ It is even more remarkable, that in Bangladesh, they have not been able to write any textbook history at all about their country after it gained its independence. The social studies textbooks published by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) in Dhaka, end the narrative in January 1972, when the “father of the nation” Sheikh Mujib returned from nine months of captivity to a liberated Bangladesh. These issues will be discussed in the following chapter on the evolution of Bangladeshi historiography.

to East Bengal [or East Pakistan] and the creation of Bangladesh".²²⁴ When the civil war is mentioned, it is simply explained as a Hindu conspiracy, as in this extract from *An Introduction to Pakistan Studies*, published in 1999,

Since independence, the leadership of East Pakistan has been in the hands of [separatists, who] in collaboration with the Hindu teachers, polluted the political air and spread poisonous propaganda among the young students of East Pakistan. Bangladesh, in fact, was the sequel of that poisonous propaganda which the separatist elements and pro-Hindu teachers had been spreading in the educational institutions of East Pakistan.²²⁵

In most *Pakistan Studies* textbooks there is usually no mention of the Six-Point Plan of the Awami League in East Pakistan, or the cancellation of the national elections in 1971. This one short and ill informed paragraph about the emergence of Bangladesh, is all that Pakistani students learn from their textbooks about the break up of East and West Pakistan. Students are told that India, the evil enemy, manipulated the East Pakistanis, enlisting their Hindu minority, and split the motherland by unprovoked military action. Ironically, though textbooks in Pakistan blame the break-up of the country on Hindus living in the eastern wing, Bangladeshi textbooks, and official narratives about the liberation war, do not even mention the contribution made by Hindus to the independence movement. Hindus are blamed in the Pakistani textbooks and ignored in the Bangladeshi version of events.

Many textbooks published under the title, *Pakistan Studies*, argue that ideology had been insufficiently infused into the citizens--this being the root cause of the "debacle of 1971". For example, the textbook, *Pakistan Studies* by Sarwar, published for students preparing for the B.A. and B. Com. exams, explains on page 14 that

²²⁴Powell, pp. 222.

²²⁵Rabbani, and Sayyid, pp. 319.

Invariably, charismatic leadership swept the polls through their clever moves and techniques employed as election strategy. The political scene was characterized with the diffusion of alien ideologies, especially during the 1970's. As a result, Pakistan had to face the tragedy of the separation of its East wing. Secessionist tendencies could be overcome by tightening the grip of the ideological bond but it was not paid due heed.

Even in books purporting to be more objective and scholarly, such as, *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity: the Search for Saladin*, the author though appearing to be sympathetic to the Bengalis and regretting the racism dealt out to them during their twenty-four years under West Pakistani domination, still does not mask his inherent bias, as can be seen in the following quote in which he relates a conversation he had with General Yaqub Khan, who

summed up the situation he faced before the military crackdown. Pakistan is like a Ming vase, priceless and delicate, he said. Mujibur-Rehman, leading the Bengali nationalist party the Awami League and later President of Bangladesh, is like a fly sitting on it. We have to smack the fly but make sure the vase does not break [said Yaqub]. Only a few months later his colleagues would use a hammer to swat the fly; they would smash the vase and the fly would be unharmed.

Bangladesh's most famous hero of the liberation struggle, "Bangabandhu"²²⁶ Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation, is unapologetically reduced to an insect in this sympathetic 1997 Pakistani account.

In the entire narrative as presented in *Search for Saladin*, there is only one passing mention of the general elections called by Yahya Khan, but nothing about the cancellation of the election results, nothing about Bhutto's political machinations. Akbar S. Ahmed ends his discussion of Bangladesh with numerous excerpts from newspapers about crime and violence in Dhaka and statements

²²⁶ Bangabandhu, or sometimes spelled Bongobandhu is an honorific nickname bestowed on Sheikh Mujib, it means friend of Bengal.

from Bengalis who complain about RAW's²²⁷ influence and the failure of the state. . . as if to say that the problems of East Pakistan were not solved by the creation of Bangladesh. Ironically, Bangladesh in some ways seems to fair even worse in Pakistani textbooks and historical discourses than does India, where at least there is a discussion, albeit, negative.

To offer a background, some information from the next chapter is included here by way of comparison. Bangladeshi textbooks not only fail to mentioned the contributions of "pro-Hindu teachers" in the creation of their country, but acknowledgement of India's military support was omitted from Bangladeshi textbooks after the 1975 assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. During the seventeen years of military rule, the role of the freedom fighters and their slogan, "Joy Bangla" (Long-live Bangladesh) were banned from the textbooks and in the popular media, replaced by "Bangladesh Zindabad", the Urduized translation. Unlike textbooks published immediately after the 1971 war which discussed political and economic exploitation and genocide in erstwhile East Pakistan, in textbooks published under the military regimes of Bangladesh, who were seeking to normalize relations with their Islamic neighbors, Pakistan is not mentioned explicitly as the enemy-- references are simply to an anonymous "enemy army". Many Bangladeshis still harbor resentments against the Pakistani military, but there may be a generation of young adults who are partially "unaware that Pakistan was actually 'the enemy'," and may mistakenly believe that "the Bangladesh *army* fought the *Indian* army".²²⁸ When Sheikh Hasina became Prime Minister in 1996, textbooks were again remodified to include the "Muktijudha" (Freedom Fighters) and the contributions of her father, Sheikh

227 R.A.W.- Research and Analysis Wing is the Indian intelligence agency.

228 based on interviews with Bangladeshi students.

Mujib. This brings to light the assertion that the rewriting of social studies textbooks is not particular to Pakistan, but rather a very common practice.

Investigating the Politics of Curriculum Reform

In the countries of the Subcontinent, as in most nations, education is viewed as the penultimate social panacea. Claims are ubiquitously made that if properly designed and regulated, education will solve the problems of society and save the nation from an accelerating descent down the road to ruin upon which the citizens, and especially the youth seem to be sliding. Such ideas drive the pervasive machine of educational reform. Education is far more than personal enrichment and skill development, it is the cure-all for a nation's economic and moral woes.

Politicians use education as a rallying cry. Curriculum committees are appointed to transform schools and the contents of textbooks, usually to modernize them and prepare students for the future, and sometimes to return to traditional values, saving the children from "degenerate cultural influences". Education policy may encourage social change or may conversely take the syllabus "back to the basics" to recapture the past glories of bygone eras or guarantee the status quo. These agendas may exist simultaneously, since social paradigms are constantly changing, driven by class conflict and social, religious, and economic cross-purposes. Unfortunately, if educational reform is based on narrow interpretations of religious dogma or the perpetuation of unequal power relations, the society can atrophy. Assuming that education can change a nation's ethos, if curriculum is designed towards basic human values, which support individual human rights and international goodwill, it is more likely that the generations will prosper intellectually.

In today's Pakistan, many educators themselves raised on biased, myopic textbooks, now see the need to recast the underlying ideologically bound and moribund rhetoric. Hopefully, these forward looking education specialists will be supported in their efforts to develop textbooks which place value on peace and international cooperation, transforming the inherently belligerent orientation of Pakistani social sciences and contributing to the goal of constructively managing antagonisms in South Asia. A reevaluation and modification of curriculum policies and educational documents that perpetuate hostile paradigms may help to contribute to the conversation of reconciliation essential for conflict resolution and lasting peace, leading to increased prosperity in South Asia. On the other hand, representatives of the fundamentalist faction, that gained positions of power during Zia's time when Deeni-Madrassah schools were made equivalent with national universities, still occupy their positions, such as Vice-Chancellors and professors, explicitly involved in pedagogy and curriculum design--and in shaping the minds of the Pakistani youth. This is not a standoff that will be easily resolved though General Musharraf's much heralded efforts to reign in the fundamentalists and their institutions have received international attention since the events of September 11, 2001.

Investigations into the rhetoric of educational reform can offer constructive insights into curriculum policies through which nations transmit their aspirations for the future. Those seeking peace and justice need relevant information to deal with sources of conflict. Historical perspectives of educational policy can help to shine light on contemporary issues.

Nuclear testing and missile development in the Subcontinent have brought five decades of intermittent animosity and militarization into sharp focus. Instability and cost associated with hostilities in South Asia contribute to the economic deprivation of hundreds of millions of citizens. The need for mutual

understanding calls for a broader investigation into the sources of antagonism and the impact of educational policy in patriotic discourse and political culture.

In Pakistan, democracy has never lasted longer than a few years at a time. Governments were recalled before they could focus on the more “spiritual” aspects of nation-building, such as rewriting textbooks with political or ideological intentions. As mentioned in this study of Pakistani textbooks, there have been bouts of democracy in Pakistan since the assassination of General Zia-ul Haq, but none of the parties attempted to revamp the social studies curriculum that had been Islamized by the “steel cage”²²⁹ of the Ideology of Pakistan.

Based on work such as "The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan," produced in 2003 at the Sustainable Development Policy Institute in Islamabad, compiled by A. H. Nayyar and Ahmed Salim, Pakistani social studies can move forward to a more positive orientation instead of the jihadi-centric, xenophobic model installed by Gen. Zia on the domestic front in the early eighties, as he fought the CIA financed war to oust the Soviets from Afghanistan.

Many scholars in Pakistan hope that the more secular tendencies of General Musharraf will have long term positive results and work to tone down the fundamentalist hyperbole that has characterized Pakistani textbooks since the late seventies. The fact is, that he is just as likely to be assassinated by fundamentalists as he is to live a long life guiding the nation as the perpetual President. If he is taken out, his successors may not find it expedient to modernize the curriculum. Even if Musharaff survives for several more years, inshaAllah,²³⁰ he may never

²²⁹ The Steel Cage is a term used for the Indian Bureaucracy that could hold together such a huge and diverse nation. After the end of colonial rule, this Steel Cage has served to support the existence of the nation, while at the same time working at odds with governmental policies. The same could be said about the Ideology of Pakistan.

²³⁰ Arabic for “God willing”, a common expression used in Pakistan.

have the clout to change the tone of the textbooks or the direction of the curriculum.

Chapter Four: Mukti Bahini to Jihad: Evolution of Historiography in Bangladesh

If the clock was turned back, it would not be Mujib alone who was guilty. Later Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, who was a put in power after Mujib's assassination, and General Ziaur Rahman who followed him, put the seal on it all. All this—resulting in corrupt, unresponsive and effete administration... had the most disastrous consequences for Bangladesh.

--Anthony Mascarenhas

This chapter discusses the evolution of historiography in Bangladesh. The situation in Bangladesh is quite different than in Pakistan, though there are some striking similarities. In Bangladesh the textbooks were subjected to similar pressures as in Pakistan, with two military dictators during twenty-one years, both attempting to guide the historical narrative and hence, they believed, the political and psychological direction of the people.

Bengalis have a long tradition of intellectualism. Because of this, the overt pressures of the military regimes were resisted in a manner that did not occur in Pakistan when textbooks were radically altered after the breakup of the country in 1971. Following the civil war, the four provinces in what was “West” Pakistan were given some leeway to write regional history, particularly to include a few Sindh and/or Balouchi heroes. Regardless of this façade of decentralization, since 1971 all textbooks in Pakistan must be approved by the centralized authority in Islamabad.

The system in Bangladesh is even more centralized than in Pakistan since all the textbooks and curriculum directives originate in Dhaka; there are no regional authorities, even tutelary. Perhaps because of this, in Bangladesh there

was a greater sense of us-against-them—as the military years dragged on, 1975-1991. In Pakistan, during the years of General Zia-ul Haq’s dictatorship, the books were drastically altered to promote fundamentalist Islamic perspectives that glorified jihad. There was no scope for the textbook boards in the provinces to impact the narrative as it emanated exclusively from the Curriculum Wing in Islamabad.

In Bangladesh, since the return of democracy in 1991, the polity is almost evenly split between the two contesting political parties, the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). For the past thirteen years, 1991–2003 during uninterrupted democratic processes, the pressures from on-high to change the historical narrative have been dealt with differently and less defiantly than when the staff at the National Curriculum and Textbooks Board (NCTB) in Dhaka resisted, or at least resented, the educational mandates issued by military dictators in the late seventies and the eighties.

When the Awami League returned to power in 1996, they found a willing group of intellectuals at the NCTB who eagerly organized a rewrite of the history textbooks. When the BNP returned again to power in 2001, they also found employees at the NCTB who were more than happy to immediately comply with the directives of the BNP/Jamaat-i-Islami coalition government. The textbooks were altered within a few weeks of the election, with no discernable objections.

During the years that the military was in control of the sources of power, from 1975-1991 the bureaucrats at the NCTB may have resisted the autocracy, at least, as described in this chapter, they hold fond memories of resistance to intellectual hegemony. It has been said, that during military rule, Bangladeshi scholars at the NCTB carefully deliberated over mandated changes--they didn’t leap to comply. There is a long tradition of resistance to authority in Bangladesh, for instance, when marshal law was declared by the Pakistani General Yahya

Khan in 1969, the Bengali judges wouldn't swear him in, and all the civil servants in Dhaka went on strike.

Now, due to the vacillating nature of the political dispensation, half the employees at most institutions and half the bureaucrats are divided along a BNP versus Awami League line. Because of this, the contents of textbooks depend on which party is in power. Hopefully, it will just be a matter of time until the pendulum swings again and the famous "Bengali resistance mentality" will be resuscitated and dispassionate scholars, such as those I met when I was in Bangladesh, will rise to resist and contest the overt and unchecked politicization of historiography that now dominates the National Curriculum and Textbooks Board in Dhaka.

Ironically, as will be seen in this study, though each party eagerly appropriates the story of the nation as their own creation, neither side has been able to write the on-going story of Bangladesh, because, due to controversies, the post-1971 history of their country is so highly contested that it is frozen in time.

Attempting to abbreviate that unspeakable, or at least unwritable post-1971 history from a nonpartisan, straightforward stance, I will very briefly tell what happened to East Pakistanis after they gained their independence following decades of cultural and political turbulence. A civil war began on March 25 when the Pakistani army arrested Sheikh Mujib Rahman, the political head of the Awami League, who had won the nation-wide election. On that night there was a violent crack down by the Pakistani army that initiated nine months of violence.

Through the efforts of the Mukhtjuddho (freedom fighters/guerilla forces), along with the Bangladeshi government in exile, and of course the logistical and financial support of India's Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, Bangladesh was born on December 16, 1971 when the Pakistani Army surrendered to the "combined forces". This freedom was won with much bloodshed—especially traumatic was

the systematic murder of intellectuals on the night of December 14 as the Indian army approached Dhaka, carried out by the razakars, Islamic terrorist squads associated with the Jamaat-i-Islami party. On January 9, 1972 the man who had led the East Pakistani drive towards autonomy, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman returned to a free country from nine months confinement in Pakistan.

Mujib had inspired an independence movement, but the realities of ruling a nation devastated by genocide and natural disasters, a land of rivers with no bridges, no barges, was daunting--not to mention the innumerable sycophants. Mujib and most of his family were murdered in a military coup on August 15, 1975. Mujib was a hero who created a nation, but seems to have become somewhat obsessed with power. His assassination shocked the world, because for a while, he was the whole world's hero, largely due to the publicity generated by the first ever rock concert for charity, George Harrison's Concert for Bangladesh at Madison Square Garden.

After the murder of Mujib and most of his family members in August 1975, there was a series of short lived military coups. Then, on November 7, a few days after the brutal "jail-house killings" of four top Awami League leaders, General Zia came to power in a "Sepoy uprising", a mutiny among the rank and file of the army. Zia ruled as the Martial Law Administrator until he founded the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and was elected President. He was assassinated in 1981 and General Ershad took over and ruled for another ten years, until street demonstrations and pro-democracy protests forced him to step down in 1991.

In the first really free and almost fair elections since the murder of the Awami League leaders, the BNP, headed by General Zia's widow, Khaleda Zia, won by a slim margin in 1991. Six years later, at the end of Khalida's term, the Awami League, headed by Sheikh Hassina, the daughter of Sheikh Mujib, won by

a similarly slim margin in 1996. When this term expired, the BNP again won the election in 2001, this time in a coalition with several Islamist parties. Meant as a guide to the following study, the previous few paragraphs told the post-independence political history of Bangladesh a tiny nutshell.

The lushness and tranquil rivers of East Bengal were the inspiration for the lyrical poems of Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel Prize Laureate. The tale of its tragic birth with red blood running deep on the dark green of Bangladesh, inspired a protest poem by Alan Ginsburg. The place that Richard Nixon almost bombed in 1971 and Henry Kissinger called the world's "basket case",²³¹ Bangladesh is a country of incredible contrasts, three growing seasons, deep rivers, verdant plains, ancient hills, expansive beaches, a vibrant culture, beautiful tidy villages—with homes and fences woven from wicker and bamboo, filled with 120 million very patriotic and politicized citizens.

'As the Pendulum Swings'

Social Studies textbooks in Bangladesh can provide a dramatic case study of contestations over historiography in the Subcontinent. The battles over textbook narratives in Bangladesh epitomize the appropriation and containment of the social studies curriculum by political factions with specific allegiances. This study about the evolution of historiography in Bangladesh serves as an uneasy, inconclusive example of a multi-dimensional process. Uneasy, because the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 presented political problems and cultural

²³¹ Even with the trauma of its birth, and the murder of the founding father, and the years of military rule, since 1971 the demographic statistics of Bangladesh have radically improved. Due in large part to the incredible number of NGOs that operate in Bangladesh, that country has one of the lowest birth rates and highest literacy rates among the post-colonial or "developing" countries of the "South".

nationalism very different than events leading to 1947.²³² Inconclusive, because since the restoration of democracy in 1991, the historical narrative in Bangladesh is unstable and caught in a recurring politicized flux. In Dhaka, the pendulum of historiography is not swinging wildly, but flipping rhythmically back and forth every six years. These variables make any discussion of the politicization of textbooks in Bangladesh an on-going story of a contemporary history that is so disputed that it dare not be told to school children.

Historiography in Bangladesh is straight forward, if bi-polar. Changes in the historical narrative occurred in two manifestations. First, after independence in the early seventies was the rewrite by a team of scholars sympathetic to the ruling party, the Awami League. This version of history personified “Bengalee Nationalism”²³³ and described the rest of the world through that lens. The Awami League undertook another overhaul of the story of the nation when they returned to power in 1996, after a twenty-one year hiatus. Noted historians, scholars and journalists were enlisted in very public committees in order to discuss the textbooks and to bring the narrative back in line with the 1973-75 version.

²³² During the Partition of the Subcontinent in 1947 up to a million people were killed as they fled across the newly created borders of India and Pakistan, the murders were committed by both religious communities. In comparison, in 1971, in an onslaught that lasted nine months, up to three million Bengalis lost their lives. In this case, it was the Pakistani Army that systematically sought to eliminate Bengalee nationalists and in particular Hindus. For the first decade after independence, both India and Pakistan followed the colonial model of history, and the main divergence was in the telling of the “Freedom Movement” versus “The Two Nation Theory” in the discussion of the creation of the two nations. In Pakistan, as exemplified by the work of I.H. Qureshi, there was an effort beginning in the late fifties to look to Central Asia as the source of Pakistani culture, which additionally alienated the eastern wing. By the early seventies, after the breakup of the nation, textbooks in Pakistan took on a highly communal, anti-Hindu tone. In India, nationalist historians such as R.C. Majumdar and Jadunath Sarkar were influential in the early years of historiography, but by the mid sixties the field was dominated by Marxist scholars. In the late nineties historiography has become a hot topic in India since the BJP has commissioned new textbooks.

²³³ Bengali is the usual phonetic spelling for this adjective, but in East Pakistan the spelling Bengalee was popularized in the context of “Bengalee Nationalism” and has special meaning with this spelling in this particular usage.

The 1996 Awami League rewrite was to counteract the second manifestation of changes in historiography in Bangladesh implemented between 1976–1991. During this period, history was subject to the influences of the military dictatorships. The era is characterized by several controversial omissions and additions that occurred in textbooks during two decades of cantonment directed mandates. A word here or there, a few paragraphs, a change of focus, each alteration made by the military rulers had deeply social and political implications. Since the restoration of democracy in 1991, these two manifestations of historiography-- the Awami League version versus the rendition that represents the Military/BNP/Jamaat-i-Islami combine are in a contest for validity, using the malleable medium of the nation's textbooks as trophies.

The chronology of the evolution of textbooks in Bangladesh can be classified in four stages. The first textbooks were of course East Pakistani, representative of Pakistani historical narratives in the fifties and sixties--Islam-centric but not overly anti-Hindu.²³⁴ In this telling, the story of the creation of East and West Pakistan is based in central India and Lahore. The eastern wing is given little credit in the grand narrative of the creation of the nation. Several Bengalis such as A. K. Fazlul Haque who had first raised the Pakistan issue in Lahore, and of course that the Muslim League was founded in Dhaka, were perfunctorily included.

In their presentation, textbooks of the Pakistani period did not adequately credit East Bengal with its cultural longevity or its contributions to nation building. Modern history focused more on the Western wing and central India. Since the East Pakistani period was pre-Bangladeshi, it is not included in this analysis.

²³⁴ Textbooks in Pakistan after 1971, blamed the loss of the eastern wing on India and the historical narrative took on a virulent anti-Indian tone, eliminating almost all non-Muslim history.

The second period of the chronology of historiography in Bangladesh is represented by the Mujib era textbooks written in 1972-73, shortly after the War of Liberation. In that retelling, the birth of the nation was not August 14, 1947, this was the day “Bengalees” changed colonial masters from the British to the “West Pakistani imperialists”. The greatest story ever told, as far as these newly emergent Bangladeshi historians were concerned, was the heroic birth of the nation, amid great suffering and sacrifice. These early textbooks viewed the history of the Subcontinent and rest of the world, from the orientation of East Bengal—through the lens of Bengalee Nationalism. Bangabandhu²³⁵ Sheikh Mujibur Rahman figured prominently in the recounting of the modern period.

The third period of the evolution of textbooks in Bangladesh occurred during the years of military rule, 1975-1991. The military’s influence on textbooks represents the second manifestation of historiography, when political power was based in the cantonment. It represents, among other perspectives, a distinctly anti-Indian orientation. Though the goal was similar to the anti-Indianism that characterizes contemporary Pakistani textbooks, the process of historical revisionism in Bangladesh played out very differently than in (West) Pakistan during the same period. In Pakistan the power exerted by political and social pressures on textbooks were far more destructive and profound.

Immediately after the split up of the Pakistan, from 1971-76, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the Prime Minister of a now truncated nation, sought to have India written out of the ancient and medieval history of the Subcontinent in retaliation for India’s role in furthering the independence of Bangladesh.²³⁶ During the

²³⁵ Friend of Bengal, Sheikh Mujib was the political figure in Bangladesh who was elected Prime Minister of united Pakistan in December 1970 and was instead arrested by the Pakistani army on March 25, 1971. Mujib’s demands were for more autonomy, not for complete independence, but after his arrest, the violent crackdown against by the Pakistani army against the Bangladeshi population, brought on the civil war.

²³⁶ This issue was taken up in the previous chapter on Pakistan.

following decade in Pakistan, General Zia-ul Haq's subsequent Islamization campaign had a draconian influence on the textbooks that began to glorify jihad, promote discrimination against non-Muslims, and other xenophobic theories.²³⁷ In Bangladesh, after the murder of Sheikh Mujib along with his family, and numerous colleagues late at night on August 15, 1975 and the take over of the country by the military, the historical narrative in textbooks was altered with similar intentions as in Pakistan, to Islamize and de-Indianize.

The results of the overhauls of historiography were not as thorough²³⁸ in Bangladesh as compared to Pakistan. In Bangladesh, just the recent events, as narrated in textbooks, were altered to suit the military leaders. The stories of the ancient and medieval periods, as formulated by "Bengalee Nationalist" historians in 1973-75, were not changed. Alterations in textbooks in Bangladesh were implemented in a more haphazard process than in Pakistan. But eventually, during revisions orchestrated by Gen. Ziaur Rahman in 1977 and Gen. H. M. Ershad in 1984 and 1987, the retelling of the creation of the *Bengalee* nation had shifted its stance. The manipulations of the historical record undertaken by the military rulers of Bangladesh are a manifestation that will keep recurring as long as the government changes hands between the BNP and the Awami League, or perhaps until the nation comes of age. The BNP, having their roots in the cantonment, have a sense of history very different than the Awami League's.

The fourth period of the politics of historiography in Bangladesh is currently playing out. Since the restoration of electoral democracy in 1991, the textbooks available for Bangladeshi school children have been significantly altered twice, at six year intervals. The BNP won the first election in 1991, and didn't bother to alter the existing textbooks. When the Awami League was

²³⁷ ditto

²³⁸ Textbooks in Pakistan after 1971, blamed the loss of the eastern wing on India and the historical narrative took on a virulent anti-Indian tone, eliminating almost all non-Muslim history.

elected in 1996, after twenty-one years out of power, they energetically rewrote the textbooks to correct what they perceived as two and a half decades of history distorted by military imperatives.

The cycle continued when in 2001, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) returned again to power and they meteorically revoked the historical narratives interjected into the textbooks by the Awami League, which the students had be studying for the past six years. In 2001, the BNP government went to work immediately to reinstate their version that had been in vogue from 1977, and the first edition of General Zia's textbooks. This is the recurring aspect of the military manifestation. When the BNP is in power, they promote the version that was in use during the years of military rule.

When Awami League came to power in 1996, Sheikh Hassina worked tirelessly to put her father *Bangabandhu* Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahman²³⁹ back into the historical record. At times it seemed to be her single-minded passion. In the late nineties, there was much fanfare and media coverage about historiography. The Awami League conducted a very public rewrite of the history textbooks to "correct the excesses of military dictators".

A seasoned employee of the NCTB, who retired not long after the Awami League came to power, described this process. He was critical of the narrative used in the 1980's because it de-politicized the liberation movement. In this way Sheikh Mujib's efforts and the contributions of other statesmen were made tangential to the creation of Bangladesh and the focus centered on the military's prowess and courage. In an interview in 1999, this informed former employee of the NCTB told me that

²³⁹ The full name of Sheikh Hassina's father is "Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahman". He is variously called Mujib, or Sheikh Mujib, or Mujib Rahman, or Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib, or for diehard Awami League loyalists, simply Bangabandhu.

This situation ... changed ... when the ...[AL] government was voted to power. The new government formed an eight-member committee with senior university teachers and journalists to rewrite the history of Bangladesh, especially the liberation movement, *truly* (emphasis added). Accordingly, the committee reviewed and modified the relevant portions of about 20 textbooks on Bangla, History, Social Science and Civics, at Primary, Junior Secondary, and Secondary Levels. NCTB extended all out cooperation in this respect.²⁴⁰ And these books are now being used in the schools.

As mentioned, six years after the Awami League recaptured Bangladeshi history in 1996, the political situation flipped once again when the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) returned to power in October 2001. Within weeks of taking office, new editions of the NCTB textbooks had been readied. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) published the renewed BNP genre textbooks posthaste, only a month after the elections—no time to form highbrow editorial advisory committees.

This indicates that for the BNP and their Jamaat allies, textbooks were a high priority. The mandated changes were very specific. Relevant portions modified six years earlier by the Awami League were immediately altered. Primary in the BNP's agenda was to take "Bangabandhu" back out and put "General Zia" back in. Of course, there is the re-inclusion of Zia in the narrative regarding the almost comical tit for tat about who declared independence on March 26, 1971. More ominously, for Bangladeshis whose relatives were murdered, is the exclusion in the new BNP sponsored textbooks of the role played by the Jamaat-i-Islami and other fundamentalist organizations that supported

²⁴⁰ Among the people I met at the NCTB in Dhaka in 1998, most supported the recent Awami League revisions but were critical of the changes that had been "forced on them" during the decades of military rule. This may have been because the Awami League was in power and employees who supported them were empowered and not inhibited to speak their minds. NCTB employees who were supportive of the BNP's view of the history of the Liberation War may have been less vocal in 1998, sulking in their offices, hesitant to speak up against the changes. After 2001, the BNP made several alterations in the textbooks that reversed the Awami League revisions. This was accomplished within a month of the BNP's return to power.

razarkars, Islamic terrorist squads implicated in the murders of intellectuals in Dhaka in December 1971. The sentences that blamed the Jamaat-i-Islami in the AL era textbooks were immediately expunged when the Jamaat-i-Islami came to power in a coalition government with the BNP.

When the BNP returned to power in 2001, they immediately and systematically de-Bangabandhuized the textbooks. In *Social Science for Class Nine and Ten*²⁴¹, the prefix “Bangabandhu”, the title of endearment given to Sheikh Mujib, was extracted from the entire book. In 1996, “Bangabandhu” had been inserted before almost all references to Mujib, and in many instances had been substituted for the name Mujib, when his story was resurrected by pro-Awami League textbook revision committees.

By convention, Awami Leaguers refer to Mujib simply as Bangabandhu, no Sheikh or Mujib really necessary. Eliminating Bangabandhus, combing the textbooks, would have been time-consuming work were it not for computer programs that can find and replace in an instant. Between October and November 2001, the NCTB textbooks were quickly and quietly revised in turbo-speed. In the BNP issued textbooks, Sheikh Mujib is never called “Bangabandhu”. According to a graduate student doing research in Bangladesh, who carefully looked over the new textbooks, “His name ‘Sheikh Mujib’ or ‘Sheikh Mujibur’ appears often in the chapter on the war of liberation, but the prefix ‘Bangabandhu’ is altogether absent”.²⁴² According to sources, some staff member at NCTB went through the saved-files of the textbooks, extracting each occurrence of the word “Bangabandhu” ...search ...replace, search... delete. And Bangabandhu is once again posthumously eliminated, though this time around, because of the more open nature of today’s democratic society, Sheikh Mujib remains in the story, if

²⁴¹ First published: 1996. Revised: March 2001. Revised: November 2001.

²⁴² Courtesy, K.I. “Shefa” Iqbal.

in a somewhat less exalted level of importance—at least for the next few years. The class nine and ten textbook revised in 2001 by the BNP, uses the word “Bangabandhu” just once, and only then when explaining how the nickname was conferred.

On the occasion of mass reception given to the convicts of the Agratola conspiracy case on 23 February 1969 when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was given the title ‘Bangabandhu’ by Tofael Ahmed on behalf of the people.²⁴³

Besides the extractions of the honorific prefix Bangabandhu, there were two other significant deletions made by the BNP in October 2001. A descriptive and controversial paragraph added by the Awami League in 1996, blaming the razakars and specifically naming the Jamaat-i-Islami for the deaths of the intellectuals on December 14, 1971 was duly removed in October 2001. These sentences are no longer in the textbook. Neither is a reference to the indemnity ordinance that had pardoned the murderers of Mujib and family.²⁴⁴ The indemnity ordinance was termed “unfortunate” in an Awami era civics textbook in use between 1996-2001. When the BNP again gained access to the public tools of historical revision, this comment was immediately deleted—since mentioning the indemnity ordinance painted the military in a less than favorable light. Notably, textbooks recently revised by the BNP, make the narrative about General Zia’s radio broadcast of the declaration of independence purposefully vague.

The new editions have re-embraced the view of Bangladeshi nationalism that was promoted by the military regimes. However, the BNP’s efforts to vindicate the perpetrators of genocide have gone considerably further than even

²⁴³ Social Science for class IX-X. First published: 1996. Revised: March 2001. Revised: November 2001, translated by K.I. “Shefa” Iqbal.

²⁴⁴ These two topics will be discussed below. Razakars were groups of pro-Pakistani, Bengali Islamic fundamentalists who were responsible for the murder of thousands of Bangladeshis.

the former textbooks of Zia and Ershad's periods where the word "razakar" still appeared in reference to the murderers of the intellectuals. The Awami League added "al-badars" and "al-shams" to the list of collaborators, specifically naming the Jamaat-i-Islami as culpable in the murder of the intellectuals. The new textbook leaves all of these names out of the narrative and simply blames the deaths of the intellectuals on the Pakistani army. After October 2001, eliminating references to razakars and the Jamaat-i-Islami was an imperative since former razakars and members of the Jamaat are now part of the ruling coalition.

The new textbooks were modified so fast that only a word here and there and a few paragraphs could be removed, but the result creates a story more in tune with the BNP's and the Jamaat's view of the events and heroes. An important impact of the omissions and extractions is that the genocidal excesses of the infamous collaborators, the razakars are ignored and thereby excused. This deflection of guilt by the Jamaat-i-Islami was one of the first orders of business for the new BNP/Islamists political dispensation.

Differences in the representation of the role of the "invading" or "occupying" Pakistani army is another of the hotly contested issues. In the quote below, the Pakistani army is referred to ironically as the "Hanadar Bahini"²⁴⁵, a euphemistic tactic to obscure who the real enemy was in 1971,

After the election of October 1, 2002, Bangladesh is being ruled by a coalition government composed of mainly by BNP and ... Islamic parties. This coalition government had made no bones about declaring their pet agendas. They will soon re-write school textbooks to favor their views. Therefore in the next five years

²⁴⁵ In Bengali or Bangla, "Bahini" is used to mean army or band, as in MuktiBahini, or liberation army or forces. The word "hanadar" means attacker or aggressor. In this ironic usage by the author of this piece, "Hanadar Bahini" is a euphemism for the Pakistani Army. When I asked a Bangladeshi friend to explain the meaning of this word, and its usage in this article, he wrote, "This term is now mainly used by the f@#\$\$%^ pro-Pakistani/Jamaati Rajakar/al-Badrs, who are doing their best to erase all memory of Pakistan's involvement. It was probably first coined by pro-muktijodho in 1971 when the meaning was clear".

Bangladesh will ‘nourish’ the mind of young ones. And they will learn that a Hanadar Bahini (an Intruding Force) committed all sorts of crime in 1971. This Hanadar Bahini will be vilified to the maximum. However, if school students are asked who this Hanadar Bahini is composed of, then we will see some blank stares, undoubtedly.²⁴⁶

In textbooks published by the Awami League right after independence, the Pakistani Army is referred to as the “aggressor Pakistani invaders” or the “occupation forces”. They are several times called “murderous Khans”²⁴⁷. There was no doubt who the bad guy was. These textbooks did not acknowledge any violence against non-Bengalis during the war, but they stressed the terrible devastation Bengalis suffered at the hands of the “Paki hoards” and the “collaborator razakars”. No textbooks have admitted the attacks against non-Bengalis, but the description of the culpability of the collaborators is an issue that swings wildly with each change in government.

Textbooks and Popular Memory

Finding copies of old textbooks in Bangladesh was challenging. I was able to locate a few textbooks from the period between January 1972, when Bangladesh emerged as a nation-state, and August 1975, when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, et al were assassinated.²⁴⁸ I discovered an even greater scarcity of textbooks published during Zia’s period, between 1977²⁴⁹ and 1981. After a fairly

²⁴⁶ A.H. Jaffor Ullah. A divided nation after 31 years of independence, <http://bangladesh-web.com/news/mar/28/f28032002.htm>

²⁴⁷ Khan is a common last name in Afghanistan and the northern provinces of Pakistan. The title, Khan was used by descendants of Genghis Khan who, after invading Afghanistan, converted to Islam. Khans are known as fierce warriors

²⁴⁸ I always felt that there was a retired teacher somewhere in Dhaka who had saved her old textbooks, but I was never able to locate that personal library.

²⁴⁹ Though Zia came to power in a coup in November 1975, he could not consolidate his hold on governance and it wasn’t until 1977 that new textbooks were published. His assassination in 1981 left the job of revisions to his successor, General Ershad.

exhaustive search in old bookstores, libraries, and scrap paper bazaars, two textbooks from the Mujib period were found. One was a edition from 1973, reprinted in 1975 and the other, based on the 1973 version, had been reprinted up until 1977.²⁵⁰ There were a two pages missing in the 1977 reprint concerning the modern period, they may have been torn out, but they had been removed with a sharp instrument. The pages missing concerned the period immediately before the crackdown on March 25.

It is not unheard of that when one political party replaces another, pages will be torn out of the old social studies textbooks if there is not enough time to replace the textbooks published under the previous political party's influence. This happened to an English language reader in the Indian state of Rajasthan written in 1998 when there was a BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) government in charge of the state. The *Course Reader for Class Twelve*, with English essays included the writings of Mahatma Gandhi, R.S. Sharma, Jawaharlal Nehru, and controversially one by Deendayal Upadhyaya, chapter four, *Democracy and Political Parties*, beginning on page twenty-nine. Deendayal is held in high esteem by the BJP because he was instrumental in founding the party that led to the growth of the BJP. He was murdered mysteriously, but is considered an intellectual of the Sangh Parivar.

²⁵⁰ (1) Social Science for class Seven, Geography section: Mr. Shamsuddin Ahmed MABT, retired Headmaster of West End High School, Dhaka; History section: Mr. Abdus Sattar, retired principal, Chittangong Government College, Chittagong; Civics section: Mr. A. A. Khalilur Rahman, headmaster Collegiate School, Dhaka. EDITORS, Mr. M. I. Choudhury, assistant director of public education department, Education Directorate Dhaka, Bangladesh, Mr. Mohammed Nurul Karim, retired principal of Rajshahi Teachers' Training College, Mr. Khurshid Alam, Poet Nazrul Islam college, Dhaka. The inside states that "This book is selected for the year 1973 by Bangladesh School Textbook Board, first edition May 1973 price 1.50 taka, printed by Pioneer Press, Ramakanta Nandi Lane, Dhaka". (2) History of Bangladesh and India For Class Nine and Ten, published by Bangladesh School Textbook Board for the year of 1976, first published June 1973, reprint: January 1974, May 1974, January 1976. Author and editor: Muhammad Ishaq, M.A.B.S.E.S., former principal of Azizul Huq College, Bogra.

When the Congress won back control of the Rajasthani state government, they continued to use the same English reader the following year, but the essay by Deendayal was torn out and the title crossed out of the table of contents. Since the next essay *My Life and Mission* by Swami Vivekananda began at the bottom of the last page of the grammar and writing exercises following the Deendayal essay, the remaining questions were marked through several times with a blue pen.

The Deendayal essay discussed the democratic process and was not about any particular political party. Though his essay was truly nonpartisan, his name was not wanted in a curriculum under the Congress Party. When they returned to power in that state they simply sliced out that chapter thereby using up the remaining textbooks before republishing them—a practical if political solution. This may have been the case regarding the missing pages in the 1977 era textbook, and was discussed by several Bangladeshis who examined the text.

I found no books published between 1977 and 1981 when Zia was murdered. But there are many references to a textbook published in 1977, after Zia had consolidated his power. This is the textbook that gained notoriety, beginning what would become an anti-Awami League remodification process, representative of the second manifestation of historiography in Bangladesh. In this edition, Zia was described as declaring independence, proclaiming himself, even back then when he was a Major, as the “President of Bangladesh”. Though I never located an old copy of that book I made inquiries about it from the staff at the NCTB in Dhaka. There was a lot of fear and coercion in the early days of military rule, no one talks much about them. But the rumors have become the stuff of popular memory.

I found two textbooks from Ershad's period, 1984 and revised in 1987. A few years after Ershad took control following Zia's assassination in 1981²⁵¹, the 1977 textbooks were revised, and some of the excesses of the Zia historical narrative were somewhat corrected. In 1977 no one dared to oppose the military, Zia was popular if ruthless. But by 1984, the employees at NCTB felt more able to write history, though they were still constrained by the military authorities—not many “corrections” could be made without taking a risk.

To ascertain what those hard to locate, out-of-print textbooks may have said, I interviewed numerous graduate students and other Bangladeshis in their mid-thirties who had used these textbooks when they were in school. They all told similar stories, based on their memories of their school days. According to them, immediately after 1972, the first textbooks published in the newly formed country, told of economic exploitation—“West Pakistan was the beneficiary of income produced in the East, and foreign aid money was used for development in the West.”

Textbooks published immediately after independence described “the violent clashes on Language Day in 1952, after which Bangladeshi nationalism gradually developed”. The influence of “pro-Hindu teachers” was not mentioned. The story goes that the “War of Independence began after Sheikh Mujib's Awami League won the majority in the parliamentary elections” but “West Pakistan denied the elections, which was followed by the March 25-26 massacres”.

The early textbooks glorified the freedom fighters whose “guerrilla warfare wore down the Pakistani army.” Mention was made of “wide spread human rights abuses by the Pakistani occupation forces.” India's role, during the war, and especially the last two weeks was mentioned in early Bangladeshi textbooks, “but it was not considered to be decisive in liberation on December

²⁵¹ Ershad as Zia's chief of staff. He was not involved in the assassination.

16.”²⁵² India’s role in funding and training the Mukhti Bahini (liberation army) was “somewhat minimized”.

According to my interviewees, in the textbooks published during the years of General Zia's and General Ershad’s military rule, the “help of the Indian army was barely mentioned.” The role of the Muktijuddha, the guerrilla freedom fighters was altered, and they were referred to as the “Bangladeshi army” which, didn’t technically exist in 1971. Particularly, all my interviewees mentioned that the slogan, “Joy Bangla was systematically eliminated from the media and textbooks during the eighties”. Textbooks published immediately after the war of liberation discussed political and economic exploitation in erstwhile East Pakistan. However, according to an analysis common with many people,

In textbooks that were published under the regimes in the late seventies and eighties, while the military rulers of Bangladesh sought to normalize relations with their Islamic neighbor, Pakistan was not criticized explicitly as ‘the enemy’, and the magnitude of the genocide was not stressed.

The military-influenced editions of the textbooks referred to the Pakistani forces as simply “an anonymous enemy army” or “hanadar” army. Many middle aged Bangladeshis harbor resentments for “rape and pillage” perpetrated by the Pakistani army. However, according to my informants, some among the younger generation may be “unaware that Pakistan was actually ‘the enemy’”. These Bangladeshis claimed that there may be a generation who mistakenly thought, because their textbooks had become so vague by the late seventies and throughout the eighties, that “the ‘Bangladeshi Army’ fought the ‘India Army’ to achieve independence”.²⁵³

The textbooks I collected that were published right after independence compared with those published during the military period partially correspond to

²⁵² From interviews with several Bangladeshi graduate students.

²⁵³ These statements were selected from several interviews with Bangladeshis.

the critiques of the informants cited here. It is significant that this is a very common belief among many Bangladeshis. Many related their memories to me, that through the years of military rule, “Bangabandhu’s role was diminished,” as was “India’s contribution to independence”, and “the violence and exploitation of the Pakistanis” was also minimized. The two textbooks that I collected from the mid-eighties confirmed much of this assessment.

Cultural Nationalism versus Pan-Islamism

Bangladesh is a majority Muslim country, with a significant, if shrinking Hindu minority—about 25-30% at the time of Partition in 1947, and less than 9% in 2003. The textbooks in Bangladesh are not based on an anti-Indian bias as are state sponsored textbooks in Pakistan. The social studies curriculum in Pakistan is premised on creating a national identity that is distinct from India, whereas Bangladeshi textbooks reflect a more pan-South Asian perspective, though Bengal-centric.

Among textbooks writers in Dhaka, Gandhi is sometimes given more respect than Jinnah, who is criticized because of his anti-Bengali stance. In NCTB textbooks, Shivaji, a controversial “nationalistic” Hindu warrior of western India who almost defeated the Moghul empire before he was defeated by the British, is represented in Bangladeshi schoolbooks as a brave soldier. In this way, Hindu heroes are not systematically sidelined and maligned, as they are in current Pakistani textbooks.²⁵⁴ Much of the style of the narrative in Bangladeshi textbooks is based on the model of pre-1965 East Pakistani textbooks, which

²⁵⁴ I have not seen the new textbooks recently published since the BNP returned to power, so I can not be certain without actually reading through the new textbooks, how India and Hindus are treated in the re-revised editions, but since they are not a party that is friendly to India it may be less favorable. More than likely, the treatment of Hindus is not the issue, but the contentious debate regarding who contributed more to the birth of the nation and what was the role of the military and razakars.

were not anti-Indian. Pakistani textbooks began to drift towards anti-Indianism after the September 1965 war with India, and took a strong anti-Hindu turn in 1971, when India was instrumental in helping East Pakistan secede.

In Bangladesh, textbooks created after 1971 narrated events through a lens of Bengali cultural nationalism. Bengali nationalism includes Hindus, such as Rabindranath Tagore and Ram Mohan Roy, who contributed to Bengali literature and society prior to the partition of the Subcontinent. Rabindranath Tagore is particularly dear to Bangladeshis. His poetry and songs, “Rabindra Sangit”, are sung by Bengali speaking school children, additionally he authored the words and music of the national anthem, *Sonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal). It must be pointed out that prior to 1947, the center of Bengali culture was Calcutta, now spelled as Kollkotta. In his review of this study, Rod Moag suggested that I remind the reader that

The province of Bengal in pre-independence included all the Bengalis, and there are millions of Bengalis in the Indian state of West Bengal with whom many Bangladeshis feel more cultural affinity than with their coreligionists in West Pakistan. The seat of traditional Bengali culture is, of course, Calcutta from which Bangladeshis are now pretty much cut off.

Another reason Tagore is popular is because he was banned in Bangladesh in the late 1960’s, when West Pakistan was attempting to put down Bengali cultural nationalism that was gaining ground. Many Bangladeshis would agree with what this acquaintance of mine in Dhaka said,

This one repressive policy enacted by the Pakistani military ruler, Ayub Khan, forbidding the singing of Rabindra Sangit on the radio or in public performances, was the primary motivator that fueled the people of East Pakistan’s demand for autonomy. Depriving the Bengalis of Rabindranath Tagore was one of the most significant events that lead to the War of Liberation.²⁵⁵

255 From a 1999 interview with a professor at Dhaka University, who prefers to remain unnamed as did most interviewees in Bangladesh.

Urban Legends and The Rewriting of History

The very first textbooks published after the independence of Bangladesh were pieced together from the earlier East Pakistan editions. The time was short and the resources scant—the books had to come out between January 1972 and the beginning of classes for that year, just a few months later. To accomplish this in early 1972, the history textbooks added a few pages at the end of East Pakistani textbooks, about the growth of Bengali nationalism: the problems with Pakistani governance in an unequal power arrangement, the language movement, the demands of the Awami league, the independence war, and the return of Mujib after his incarceration.

The very first Bangladeshi textbooks had to be ready in early 1972, just a few months after independence. To accomplish this, they added text that dwelt at length on the events leading to the civil war and the ultimate creation of the nation. However, due to time limitations, the textbook authorities did not alter the earlier chapters about ancient, medieval, or colonial India, written during the East Pakistan period. That total rewrite was accomplished before the next school year.

Several Bangladeshi scholars told me a joke that was current right after independence. According to this urban legend, since the new government didn't have time to produce completely textbooks for the coming school year, they simply appended a short narrative about the birth of the nation, and tacked it on to the end of the story of the creation of Pakistan. To have Bangladeshi-centric books available for the 1972 school year, the textbook publishers simply extracted various pages of the books that glorified Pakistan and “whited-out” Jinnah's name and inserted the name of “Bangabandhu Mujibur Rahman” into the text.

The punch line of this joke told to me by several people was that, though Mujib's name replaced Jinnah's, because of an oversight the editors neglected to change the date and place of Jinnah's birth. So it goes, in the first revised edition of Bangladeshi textbooks, Mujib was born in 1875 in Thatta, Sindh in West Pakistan, which would have made him almost a hundred years old in 1972. This supposed and oft repeated humorous "typo" in the first textbooks may have just been a joke, though it was told to me by several scholars. I could not find a textbook of this nature. The only textbooks that I found from this period were dated 1973, and they represented a total rewrite of the tale of East Bengal, not a patched together version described in this humorous aside.

The Bengalees vs. the Bangladeshis

Revisions in the social studies curriculum in contemporary Bangladesh reflect the political divisions in that society, an electorate that is almost evenly split between the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The on-going battle over the highly prized historical narrative provides a fascinating example of how textbooks are manipulated to serve political prerogatives.

After the genocidal upheaval that culminated with the birth of the nation in 1971, there was virtually a complete rewriting of the textbooks based on the needs and views of the newly created country. The story of the emergence of the nation changed from a pro-Jinnah Pakistani perspective to one featuring the bravery of the Bangladeshi freedom fighters. The new version emphasized the role of Bangabandhu²⁵⁶ Sheikh Mujib as the Father of the Country rather than

²⁵⁶Bengali for "Friend of Bengal".

Quaid-e-Azam²⁵⁷ M.A. Jinnah, who, instead of being a hero to the Muslims of the Subcontinent, was seen as prejudiced against the welfare of the Bengalis.

“In this first rewrite of Bangladeshi history, the tale of the origin of the country was entwined with the life of Sheikh Mujib. He was the father of the nation²⁵⁸, the national hero who along with other brave East Pakistanis, stood up to West Pakistani exploitation while students in the fifties, opposing the Urdu language policy that discriminated against Bangla. Mujib and others were arrested several times, went on hunger strikes, and founded political parties. The decades of activism that led to the growth of Bengali nationalism and the liberation movement were narrated primarily through the experiences of Mujib, as well as several other famous freedom fighters. Though other heroes were acknowledged, it was Mujib’s life which served as the hook upon which the “Bengalee nationalist” narrative was hung in the textbooks published between 1973 and 1977.²⁵⁹

The retelling of the all important Language Movement mentioned Mujib’s activities during his student activism days. Then in the sixties as he, along with other noteworthy Bengali nationalists, pushed forward the “Six Point Plan” demanding more autonomy for East Pakistan, Mujib’s efforts and struggles were highlighted. Thus, as in most countries, the story of the nation was told through the contributions and adventures, steps and missteps of the founding fathers and mothers.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ Arabic for “Leader of the Country”.

²⁵⁸ In the textbooks that were revised by Awami League scholars in 1996 the word “uncontested” was placed in front of the words “father of the nation”. In 2001 when the BNP reissued revised editions of this textbook, they hadn’t removed Mujib completely but they did extract the word “uncontested”.

²⁵⁹ When Gen. Zia came to power in November 1975, there was too much political instability to worry about rewriting textbooks, but the new editions of the 1973 textbooks, published in 1977 seem to have had controversial additions and deletions

²⁶⁰ This is the gist of the narrative found in 1973-75 era textbooks.

In these narratives, the Agartala conspiracy case is highlighted as Pakistani treachery against Sheikh Mujib and other key civil servants and army personnel. The Pakistani government charged them with conspiring with India to help East Pakistan secede. As the political situation became less and less stable, the Pakistani government was forced to drop the case. Bangladeshi textbooks and all Bangladeshis swear that Sheikh Mujib was innocent and had not conspired to bifurcate the nation. In this instance his loyalty to Pakistan is praised—a strange insistence of presumed innocence when that particular crime, if true in a clandestine way, would in the final telling be something to point to with pride as it led to the creation of the nation. But it was, his diehard supporters say, his innocence and faithfulness that gave Sheikh Mujib and other East Pakistani politicians the power to force the West Pakistani military junta to allow free and fair elections.²⁶¹

Mujib's Bengali coalition won the majority of the votes. But instead of becoming Prime Minister, after many delays and much intrigue orchestrated by General Yahya Khan in cahoots with Z.A. Bhutto, Mujib was arrested on March 25, 1971. That night, the Pakistani army unleashed a siege of bloody terror on Dhaka. They encircled police stations, set fire to whole neighborhoods and gunned down the inhabitants when they fled from the flames. They sent tanks on

261 There had been years of political efforts by the people of both wings of Pakistan to remove the military government and hold elections. Pro-democracy protests in both East and West Pakistan forced General Ayub Khan to step down and pass the reigns of government on to General Yahya Khan who was forced to hold elections. Z.A. Bhutto won the majority of the votes in the western wing, while Mujib won a landslide in East Pakistan, which qualified him to serve as Prime Minister. The military and Bhutto were opposed to letting Mujib become Prime Minister so they denied the elections, and instead began a violent military action in the eastern wing. The war lasted for nine months and took over one million Bengali lives, though that number is disputed with some claiming, as did Sheikh Mujib, that at least three million died; others, such as pro-Pakistani Islamists estimate no more than a few hundred thousand were killed. The real numbers will never be known, but at the height of the war there were ten million refugees in West Bengal, Hindus in particular were being targeted by the Pakistani army.

the Dhaka University campus—the first building fired upon was Jagannath Hall the Hindu Student Hostel. Fifty thousand people were murdered in that night alone. Dhaka burned for days. Gen. Tikka Khan, along with his colleagues in the Pakistani Army such as Gen. Rao Farman Ali organized the March 25th crackdown called “Operation Searchlight”.

Across erstwhile East Pakistan, a blood bath reached even the remotest villages. Pakistani soldiers carried out rape, looting, extortion, beatings, and mass murder for the next nine months. When independence came on December 16, 1971, Bangladesh entered the comity of nations a ravaged, devastated land of seventy-five million displaced, traumatized people. In the first officially rewritten Bangladeshi textbooks published after the birth of the nation, this was the story—the wreckage of their country and the heroism of Sheikh Mujib.

The first few textbooks written after Bangladesh was created incorporated a more regional focus in the discourse about the ancient period, the medieval period, and especially the colonial period. There were many similarities, especially in chronology, to East Pakistani textbooks, but, embedded in the narratives of all the eras was a foreshadowing, an on-going commentary leading to the final working out, according to Sirajul Islam of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, of the “inevitability of the Bengali nation”.²⁶²

Within a year after independence, Bangladeshi textbooks had been completely rewritten from the ancient period, through the medieval era, to modern times. The point of view was distinctly Bengali--world events unfolded as they impacted the geographical area of the world now known as Bangladesh. Thus, the Aryans are discussed as noble invaders, whose Rishis brought Sanskritic culture to the Subcontinent. However, the discourse stressed that Bengalis had historically resisted “Aryanization” and had retained a distinct

²⁶² From an interview in March 1999.

identity. This historical autonomy facilitated the eventual emergence of Bangladesh as a modern nation state. Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms that had contributed to Bengali cultural consciousness were highlighted in the narrative.

Individual Islamic invaders and Sufis were seen as either relevant or irrelevant in relation to their positive or negative impact on Bengali identity. Events such as the occupation of Sindh by Muhammad bin Qasim, or the destruction of Somnath by Mahmud Ghaznavi, central to the Pakistani narrative, were not considered relevant as they had little impact on East Bengal. Though the story of the new nation moved along the same chronological path as the textbooks of East Pakistan, some heroes and events were tarnished or abbreviated, and new ones were added. The sum total of the narrative was through the lens of the Bengali historians of the newly created nation.

In the rewritten 1973 era textbooks, though Jinnah is credited for rousing Muslims' political identity, his role in the creation of Pakistan is tempered by the fact that he never really considered East Bengal as part of his "Home for Muslims in the Subcontinent".²⁶³ He complained at the time of Partition that he was handed a "moth eaten" nation. He enacted policies that were detrimental to the interests of the eastern wing. The "Bengalee" narrative demonized rather than eulogized him.

In 1948, Jinnah announced that Urdu would be the official language of the state and the script in which Bengali is written would be changed to the Nasta'liq, the Perso-Arabized alphabet used for Urdu and other languages spoken in the western wing of the country. The first textbooks in Bangladesh interpreted the creation of Pakistan through the lens of Jinnah's discriminatory policies rather

²⁶³ The name "Pakistan" is an acronym for Punjab + Afghanis tan (meaning the Pathans of the NWFP) + Sindh + stan for Balouchistan. East Bengal did not figure in the original vision.

than the wonderful tale of freedom for the Muslims of South Asia, as the textbooks used in erstwhile East Pakistan had once narrated the events.

Controversies about the deeds of various actors characterize not only the differences in historical narratives between nations, but also within countries. This is exemplified by the dispute over who declared independence in Bangladesh. The next section discusses this on-going debate that is at once almost comical and deadly serious.

Who Declared Independence?

The myth of Zia's being the declarer of independence was spiced up his so-called patriotism and transformed into legend what was nothing but a opportunistic gesture on his part. For last 20 years Zia and BNP, through government controlled media, made people to believe that Zia was the key person for our political independence and the independence of Bangladesh is nothing more than an event caused by an unknown major's declaration from the corner of the country. Nothing existed before his declaration and what ensued was but a miracle of God. --Tito Scohel

The first thing I was told, by the first scholar whom I interviewed in Bangladesh, was that no matter what I read or hear while in Dhaka, “Bangabandhu declared independence, not General Zia”. Anisuzzaman, a respected professor from Dhaka University explained the details of the events of those two days in late March 1971. He alerted me to the controversy. The burning question, who declared independence, Mujib or Zia is a hot political potato that is tossed around Dhaka, with different versions of the story popping in and out of Bangladeshi textbooks.

Disputed as it has now become, in the first editions of Bangladeshi textbooks, there was no mention of then Major Zia’s now famous and historically

controversial declaration of independence. In fact, in the first Bangladeshi textbook published in 1973 and revised thereafter until replaced in 1977, Mujib's declaration of independence on March 25 was not even mentioned. The first textbooks in Bangladesh were silent on this topic. Not only do they fail to give the text of the declaration, but the wireless broadcast is simply not mentioned. However, his famous "Race course" speech on March 7 was quoted in full, which ended with an unveiled call for freedom,

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Get ready with whatever
you have. When we have shed blood we will shed more blood.
We will get this country free, inshaAllah²⁶⁴. This struggle for our
freedom, this struggle is the struggle for our independence.

Immediately after this quotation, the 1973 book includes the following sentences,
no mention of Zia's now disputed declaration,²⁶⁵

The foundation of the military regime was shaken by the non-cooperation movement led by Bangabandhu. Yahya Khan continued discussions with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for ten days till 24 March 1971. As soon as Yahya Khan go ready, on 25th March, he left Dhaka after ordering the Army to stop forever the struggle for self-fure of the Bengali nation. On the night of 25th of March the army of Yahya Khan betrayed and arrested Bangabandhu. He was taken to West Pakistan and was imprisoned for a long time and a conspiracy was being crafted to kill him in the name of a trial. On 25th March 1971, the military government of Pakistan started a massacre in Dhaka.

²⁶⁴ Arabic for God willing.

²⁶⁵ History of Bangladesh and India for Class Nine and Ten, published by the Bangladesh School Textbook Board for the year 1976, first published June 1973, reprints: January 1974, May 1974, January 1976. Author and editor Muhammad Ishaq, M.A.B.S.E.S, former professor of history at Dhaka University and other government colleges, former principal of Azizul Haq College, Bogra, p. 403 (Translation by Iftekhar "Shefa" Iqbal, M.A. Dhaka).

The story of Mujib was central to the narrative, but his declaration of independence late at night on March 25, sent out on wireless just before he was arrested, was not included in that first textbook. Though this later became a big issue, in 1973 most people most people seem to have believed that Mujib's speech on March 7 had already declared independence. The textbook writers obviously did not feel that this announcement of independence, read several times on the radio by Major Zia and others the day after Mujib was arrested, was important enough to include in that first textbook. Certainly, for those who heard the broadcast there was no doubt that they were Mujib's words. There was no controversy about this in 1973—Zia was a complete nobody, Mujib was the “uncontested father of the nation”. Now, of course, Zia supporters see it differently and retroactively read levels of meaning into the event which it did not have at the time.

During the War of Liberation, Zia was made a section commander. In some quarters he is remembered best for his daring raid on the Dhaka cantonment while it was under the control of the Pakistani army. In the dark of night he made his way, it is said, to his former home to rescue his wife, Khalida, who had been left there when he joined the revolutionary forces.

Mrs. Zia declined to accompany her husband, feeling safe in her home guarded by the enemy officers, rather than “on the run with the Freedom Fighters”. After the war, Zia rejected Khalida for this “betrayal”, but was urged by Sheikh Mujib to reconcile with his wife. This is one of the favorite bits of gossip that was told to me many times.²⁶⁶ This tidbit obviously never made it into

²⁶⁶ When the war was over and Zia returned to Dhaka, he refused to cohabit with Khalida because she had spent the past nine months in the cantonment with Pakistani officers. During those weeks that Mujib was urging Zia to reconcile with his wife, I was told that Khalida moved in with Mujib's daughter, Sheikh Hasina, who comforted her. It is ironic that today, 30 years later, these two ladies are locked in a violent political confrontation. It is also well known that even after accepting his wife back, in spite of her tainted reputation, they were seen as estranged and Khalida

the official narrative. However, the notation that Zia is the one who first declared independence was added to the textbooks in 1977, during his stint as military dictator, a process during which Mujib's contributions were sidelined.

Though the BNP would like to own this moment in Bangladeshi history, and though it wasn't even included in the first textbooks that told the tale of the liberation movement, the fact remains that Mujib declared independence first, not Zia. The chronology of the event bespeaks the facts in this simple case. Major Zia had been requested by members of the Awami League to make the broadcast "in Mujib's name". There is no way getting around it-- Zia simply read Mujib's statement no matter how hard BNP stalwarts try to ignore this detail. In an environment of partial denial, the legend has grown that Zia is the fearless leader who dared to declare independence. BNP-centric historians still swear by this "fact".

One innuendo about this moment in Bangladeshi history foreshadows the ambitious personality of this military man, the then Major Zia, who had spent most of his adult life at army bases in West Pakistan. On March 27, the first time he read the declaration, "he did so in the name of Mujib",²⁶⁷

Zia re-read this declaration from the same station again on 28th and 29th March. But in both announcements, Zia presented himself as the head of independent Bangladesh. Everybody in the radio station strongly objected to Zia's presumptuous statements. Mr. AK Khan

rarely appeared in public with her husband, even after he made himself president following the murder of Sheikh Mujib. If this bit of gossip were just a rumor, I doubt that it would have been repeated to me so many times. I even asked BNP supporters about this information, and they did not deny it, though they excused Khalida and swore that she had remained chaste while living under the protection of the Pakistani officers. Her husband was not so sure, but thanks to Mujib he took her back anyway, though he did not consider her an equal partner. Khalida was a very attractive housewife with a tenth grade education. These facts add an surreal touch to her elevation as head of her husband's party the BNP.

²⁶⁷ From the web page written by Tito Scohel & Scyma Hesser, May 2000, Muktadhara, <http://members.tripod.com/scohel/page34.html>. Tito Scohel is a native of Bangladesh who now lives in Australia.

also resented Zia's naked ambition and warned him against the dangerous consequences his rashness may precipitate. Here is the original “Declaration of War by Major Zia on 27 March, 1971” as reproduced on a web site,

....The government of the Sovereign State of Bangladesh *On behalf of our Great Leader, the Supreme Commander of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*, we hereby proclaim the independence of Bangladesh and that the Government headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has already been formed (emphasis added).

It is further proclaimed that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the sole leader of the elected representatives of seventy five million people of Bangladesh and that the government headed by him is the only legitimate government of the people of Independent Sovereign State of Bangladesh, which is legally and constitutionally formed and is worthy of being recognized by all the governments of the world.

I, therefore, appeal on behalf of our Great Leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to the governments of all the democratic countries of the world, specially the big powers and the neighboring countries to recognize the legal Government of Bangladesh and take effective steps to stop immediately the awful genocide that has been carried on by the army of occupation from Pakistan.

To dub out the legally elected representatives of the majority of the people as secessionist is a crude joke and contradiction to truth which should befool none.

The guiding principle of a new state will be first neutrality, second peace and third friendship to all and enmity to none.

May Allah help us.

Joy Bangla.²⁶⁸

By the time the Awami League returned to power in 1996, after a twenty-one year hiatus, the issue regarding who declared independence had become so controversial that a subsection was devoted to it in the new textbook, a issue not even worthy of mention in the 1973 textbook. On page 81, of the 1996 *Social Science* textbook for class eight, Zia is credited with having made that broadcast, but not first or even second. Under the bolded subtitle “Declaration of

²⁶⁸ *ibid.*

Independence”, the textbook explains the controversy from the point of view of the Awami League,

At midnight, before arrest and just before dawn on 26th March, Bangabandhu declared the independence of Bangladesh. He sent instructions to the party leader through wireless to the leaders of Dhaka and to the closest colleagues in Chittagong for broadcast of the declaration of independence. With this began our struggle for liberation. Bangabandhu directed in transmitting the message regarding the independence of Bangladesh to the Awami League leader Abdul Hannan in Chittagong on 26th March which he had broadcast to the Nation over Chittagong Radio station. On 27th March, Major Ziaur-Rahman, on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman communicated another message of independence to the people from Kalurghat temporary Betar Kendra.²⁶⁹ By this time there was resistance all over the country against the Pakistani Junta.

This textbook does not deny that Zia was one of the actors who declared independence, but it puts the events into a perspective that makes his role not simply secondary, but tertiary. This is the Awami League perspective.

Bangladeshis who are supportive of the BNP, emphasize Zia’s decision to join the liberation forces --they tell a somewhat different, but highly contested version of the declaration of independence. They even proudly allude that Zia intuited he would be president one day, and that is why he made the added statement that he was the “head of independent Bangladesh”.

M. Rashiduzzaman, in *Bangladesh: In Search of a New Historical Envisioning*²⁷⁰, discusses this contentious issue about the declaration of independence,

One common but divisive question: Who declared Bangladesh independence? Sheikh Mujibur Rahman or Ziaur Rahman? Actually but sadly, Bangladesh is polarized over the independence declaration, which is not an academic disagreement pondering over

269 Bengali for radio centre.

270 Published in Holiday's Special Anniversary Edition October 1999

a past event-- it's a politically explosive question that determines the winners and losers of Bangladesh politics even today. Rashiduzzaman concludes,

The Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist party (BNP), the two largest parties are locked in a jockeying for power over who declared the independence in March 1971-- Awami League chief Sheikh Mujibur Rahman or Ziaur Rahman, a military officer at that time.²⁷¹

Zia, who was a junior officer in a Bengali regiment of the Pakistani Army, mutinied when he heard that the Pakistani Army was disarming and killing Bengali soldiers. At the request of Awami League leaders, Zia made the announcement from a radio station near Chittagong, a port city in the eastern part of the country. In the version of this event revised during Zia's time, the school children of Bangladesh were told that he made the declaration on his own initiative, "as President of Bangladesh" not at the urging of the AL and not, as it was broadcast in March 27, 1971, in the "name of Sheikh Mujib". This fairly significant alteration, that Zia actually declared independence *first*, not Mujib, caused considerable consternation among some quarters, but came to be believed among others. It is a highly contested, though completely contrived moment in Bangladeshi history—worth fighting and dying for.

In an article published in the fall of 2002, a year after the BNP had returned to power, A.H. Jaffor Ullah wrote,

As the nation of Bangladesh prepares to celebrate its 31st year of birth, we find the nation divided along a fault line. On one side of the fault line is the Bangalees who believe that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave the needed leadership for the cause of Bangalees since 1947. However, on the other side of this fault line are people who do not have much regards for Sheikh Mujib. To them, a

²⁷¹ Rashiduzzaman is a very controversial Bangladeshi historian, who it is claimed by many, supported the Pakistani side of the war. There was a very informative and one could say, juicy debate between Dr. Rashiduzzaman and numerous Bangladeshi scholars and activists. That dialogue can be found at: http://cyber_bangla0.tripod.com/Debate/NFB.html and at http://cyber_bangla0.tripod.com/Debate/Jinnah_Debate.html.

military major who just deserted his battalion under questionable circumstances is the real hero because this junior army officer had read an announcement prepared by the local Awami League.²⁷²

Jaffor Ullah points out the irony in this bit of revisionist history,

The incident could have been a blip in the history of Bangladesh. But that is not necessarily the case. The junior officer happens to mastermind a coup in November 1975, which landed him the position of the Martial law administrator. He later ‘regularized’ his position to become the strongman in the guise of a civilian dress.

The BNP would vigorously point out that Zia did not mastermind the coup, he was under house arrest when the sepoys mutinied. There was mayhem in the military ranks, and several officers had been murdered. The troops liberated Zia and carried him across the cantonment on their shoulders. The perspective promoted by the BNP credits Zia with saving Bangladesh.

In Dhaka in 1999, I interviewed a group of ninth class high school students, who expressed irritation that in grade five, while the BNP was in power, they were told “General Zia declared independence, but now in grade ten, [with Awami League in power] it’s Sheikh Mujib!” The students asked indignantly, “Why should we be subjected to such manipulations?” They resented having to learn alternating poles of historical interpretation each time the regime changed.

The students with whom I spoke felt adamant that their “rights were being violated” when such liberties were taken with the telling of history in their textbooks. While I was in their class, they wrote out a letter on the blackboard that they planned to send to the Minister of Education and the NCTB asking them to “get the facts straight and stop changing the story”. Those young ladies have since graduated, but now, with Mrs. Zia back at the helm, her deceased husband is again the one who declared independence. So yet another batch of Bangladeshi students can unlearn a few facts in order to pass the test.

²⁷² A.H. Jaffor Ullah. A divided nation after 31 years of independence, <http://bangladesh-web.com/news/mar/28/f28032002.htm>

Subtleties of Distortion

In the late seventies, the scars of the civil war and the memories of death and destruction were too near to be tampered with. Even though Sheikh Mujib became somewhat taboo after his murder²⁷³, the suffering of the people during the Liberation War was ingrained in the collective psyche. This ravaging is central to Bangladeshi identity. A clearly defined mission guided by memories of lost family members, instilled pride and patriotism in the Bangladeshi employees at the NCTB. These memories did not allow the government appointed committees to make too many radical changes to the textbooks regarding the pain and suffering of the Bengalis at the hands of the Pakistani army. The Zia era textbooks were only a degree less descriptive about the pain and suffering of the war, but that toning down was resented by some Bangladeshis. The political events leading up to the liberation movement got lost in the BNP type narrative.

Historiography as constructed during the military period minimized the repeated use of the honorific “Bangabandhu”. They subtracted a few phrases and added a line or two here and there. They put a greater focus on the military’s role instead of the political activities leading to independence. But the story had to adequately retell the tale of suffering and sacrifice. The death and destruction of 1971 were recent and painful and could not be deemphasized so easily. The additions that were made to the textbooks during the years of military rule became highly controversial, particularly the newly minted fact that General Zia was now given credit for declaring independence.

²⁷³ due to some of his autocratic initiatives that were implemented during 1974-75 that will be discussed below.

The long time employee of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board who answered many questions about changes made in the textbooks during the military period, explained the situation at the NCTB,

The history of Bangladesh, particularly the events leading to the liberation movement and emergence of Bangladesh, was not treated objectively and factually in the textbooks during 21 years covering post Mujib and pre-Hasina period when the country was ruled by either Martial Law or Cantonment-based democratic governments. Hence the young generation of today, born or grown up during this period, were kept unaware and misinformed of the opposition of Pakistan rulers, struggle for autonomy to independence, armed resistance or the people, contribution of the architect of the nation, calculated carnage of the collaborators and the role played by the neighboring countries, Arab world, and big powers during our liberation movement.

This gentleman, who had just retired from two decades of service at the NCTB continued his description of the situation, how the controversy regarding who declared independence got into the textbooks. He explained,

Just one example may suffice to prove how history was distorted and wrongly presented. The revised edition (1977) of textbooks on Secondary History (for grades 9 & 10) published by the BSTB [Bangladesh School Textbook Board, that was later changed to NCTB] describes the Declaration of Independence in this way: ‘on 27th of March Major Ziaur Rahman of 8th East Bengal Regiment (later President of Bangladesh) declared the independence of Bangladesh from Chittagong Radio.’ (page 377). The fact is presented in so distorted and motivated way that the author didn't or wasn't allowed to mention that Major Zia made his announcement, even in his own recorded words, ‘on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, our great national leader.’ Bangladesh observes her independence day on 26th March and victory day on 16th December every year. But how funny and sarcastic it is to say that declaration of independence was made on 27th March? And that declaration by an obscure and hitherto unknown Major and not by the guiding figure and undisputed political personality of that time. Students were made to study this sort of inaccurate history which in reality forms the most glorious part of their national history.

He added, that a new textbook, from 1984, somewhat corrected the above story,

As a matter of fact, prior to his arrest by the Pakistani horde in the early hour of 26th March, Bangabandhu sent the formal message of independence to the Awami League leader M.A. Hannan of Chittagong over wireless which was broadcast from Chittagong Radio on the day of 26th March. Major Zia made the announcement the following day and that exclusively on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. After the formulation of Mujibnagar government, Zia was made one of the eleven Sector Commanders who fought the liberation war during 9 months of occupation. The above information remained until a new textbook on the subject was introduced in 1984. This book contained more details on the background and other events relating to the liberation movement.²⁷⁴ The declaration of independence remained almost the same, but with the new insertion of ‘on behalf of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’.

Another gentleman I met spoke about how textbooks were altered during military rule, and how the National Curriculum and Textbook Board resisted these alterations. He told me this story with a great deal of pleasure,

In the mid eighties General Ershad looked at some of the history textbooks and wondered why he was not included in them as the leader of Bangladesh. He issued a directive that the NCTB should insert him into the history textbooks. At the meeting of the curriculum planners there was a lot of discussion. People wanted to know how we could include him and what good could be said about him? Finally we decided to add a sentence in a Civics textbook about how Ershad instituted the Upazillas²⁷⁵, thereby inserting his name but with no other mention. A small photo was included to placate his ego.

He added with a touch of pride that “There is a certain resistance mentality here in Bangladesh which precludes the overhaul of textbooks by official decree”.

He remembered fondly that at a time when “Ershad thought of himself as supreme leader of the country, the NCTB awarded him only a small photograph

²⁷⁴ It was said that government employees and intellectuals were not as intimidated by Ershad as by Zia and were able to make some corrections in the manner in which the story of the creation of the nation was told when the 1977 Zia era textbooks were revised in 1984.

²⁷⁵ Administrative and electoral districts.

and a short sentence”. This entry about Ershad was placed in the civics section of the book for class five-- it could not be included in history textbooks, because as will be seen, the official version of Bangladeshi history ended on January 10, 1972. No post-independence history can be written without mentioning the assassination of Sheikh Mujib, much less the series of highly controversial military coups, precluding any additions to the telling of the story of post-independence Bangladesh.

The NCTB, to comply, but with guarded resistance, included Ershad in the civics textbook only in reference to his creation of the Upazilla, or rural electoral districts. By the mid-eighties, additions were argued at length but they gradually made their way into the textbooks. This scholar told me that the staff at NCTB rather ridiculed Ershad, “We couldn’t find anything good he had done for the country besides creating the Upazillas.” But they still were compelled to include his photo—to placate him.

Another informed former NCTB employee described the situation in which Ershad’s photo was inserted into the Civics textbook,

Social Studies book of class 5 was modified and rewritten incorporating the then administrative developmental works including decentralization of judiciary and establishment of Sub-District administration and inserting a picture of Ershad.

Several people at the NCTB told me that this executive decree was laboriously discussed before Ershad’s singular contribution was included. Regardless of this hesitation, as relations with Pakistan improved, due to the friendship of the military dictators and their parallel efforts to Islamize the two nations, there was a distinct dilution of the dramatic discourse that had fired up the first history textbooks. The early Bangladeshi textbooks had graphically implicated Pakistan for not only exploitation and oppression, but genocide on a

scale comparable only to the Nazi holocaust—the later books took the fire out of the narrative.

Bangladeshi intellectuals who had been part of the scene since the birth of the country, and who were also involved with committees to write and edit textbooks, assured me there was indeed something of a resistance mentality. Coercive governmental decrees were not blindly followed by all bureaucrats, scholars and government employees. I asked my friend and informant, who had worked in the textbook office for decades, how he dealt with changes that were mandated with which he did not agree. When the political climate changed, how did members of the textbook board modify the textbooks to reflect what autocratic regimes wished, if the writers and reviewers disagreed? What was the process of political mandates verses scholarship, and the interplay between these two forces, which at times may have been adversarial? He answered, overturning the claim of a “resistance mentality” that I had heard from several others,

Whenever major works of development, revision, and editing of curriculum, syllabus, and textbooks take place, different subject committees are formed with university, college, and classroom teachers, subject experts, renowned educationists, teacher trainers, curriculum specialists and pedagogists. Conventionally, sets of people are chosen from those who are, though experienced, moderate in nature and easily subscribe to views of the authorities. A negligible number of experts of opposite views or resistance mentality are included in the committee. Sometimes they reacted to coercive governmental decrees and declined to work in the committee. Even though they worked they are out numbered and their views are generally set aside. The clash between political mandates and scholastic pursuits is really unfortunate and undesirable. Nevertheless, it happens. Curriculum researchers and specialists at NCTB may not personally agree with some of the mandates of the government. But they have hardly any freedom to act independently without yielding to or differing from government views and standpoint.

There may be a certain resistance mentality in Bangladesh which perhaps dissuades the forces of official coercion and the overhaul of textbooks by government decree. However, the textbooks written under Zia, that effectively excluded Mujib and made an effort to obscure the genocide, served as the model for the next twenty-one years. The textbooks published under Ershad, in 1984, followed this model, adding more about the liberation war and the prowess of the Bangladesh army, but still continued to ignore Mujib.

Some of the most glaring alterations made by Zia, by fiat, were eventually corrected defacto by accretion and small additions made in each revision. In 1986, a professor at Dhaka University was asked to serve on a committee to edit and review the history textbooks. On one page he “added the word ‘Bangabandhu’ in front of the name of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman”. His colleagues challenged him, wondering if that “was a good idea given the political climate”. The professor said, “Leave it. It should be there to adequately represent history.” The word was inserted. The 1984 edition did not have Bangabandhu in front of Mujib’s name anywhere in the book. Because of this daring professor, the 1987 version had “Bangabandhu” written once. But, as the professor told me, its inclusion was controversial, if not dangerous.²⁷⁶

The manner in which the textbooks were gradually rewritten in Bangladesh is very different than the method of the BJP (Bharatiya Janatan Party) in India, where changes in the orientation of historiography have been implemented with media fanfare and broad consultation--a very public debate. In the very different political atmosphere of BNP/Islamist government controlled Bangladesh, changes were clandestinely implemented, with little public review.

²⁷⁶ The academic environment at Dhaka University is dangerously politicized. There is often violence between opposing student groups, classes are often interrupted and vandalism of student hostels is common. Because of the numerous student agitations and protests examinations and graduation were often delayed.

'A much more open approach was adopted after a change in the political guard in 1996. Awami League's efforts to "correct the history textbooks" were publicly announced and the process was accomplished within six months by an advisory board of scholars. Their goal to re-Bangabandhuize the books was no secret. On the other hand, in 2001 immediately after the BNP won the elections, the books were quickly put through a clandestine editing process without public discussion. The new textbooks simply appeared a few weeks after the election, almost completely de-Bangabandhuized.

When Sheikh Mujib was assassinated by a military coup, a feeling of fear and sorrow pervaded much of the nation. I also was told there were "people dancing in the streets" to celebrate his death. Many pro-BNP Bangladeshis told me that Mujib may have been a great leader during the drive toward independence, but as the head of the independent country, he was "inept, corrupt and disorganized". I asked several people if he and his family had to die for his inability to successfully govern a nation that had been raped and ravished and where the enemies and collaborators, whom he had pardoned had free reign? There were people I spoke to in Dhaka who seemed to think that disorganization was a capital offense.

Though some Bangladeshis may have danced in the streets, most people told me that they drew their curtains and prayed that they would not be subsumed back into Pakistan. There was a lot of fear and foreboding. From what I could gather, far more people wept than danced. A teacher at a teacher training college near to Sheikh Mujib's house in Dhanmondi, told me that she was in a bicycle rickshaw going to work a few days after his murder. A truck of army men passed by and yelled at her "cover your head because the military has taken over and we are going to establish an Islamic republic". In both Pakistan and Bangladesh, the

Shari'at and the military are constant bedfellows as strange brew of whisky drinking soldiers and visions of jihad.

In the textbook revised in 1977 under the regime of General Zia-ur Rehman, most references to Sheikh Mujib and Bangalee nationalism were downplayed as he ushered in the Islamization of Bangladesh. A long-term employee at the NCTB concurred with this observation, when I asked him if this was the case.

Yes, there is truth in the information you gathered from different quarters regarding the exclusion of some terms and words such as 'Bangabandhu', 'Joy Bangla', 'Pakistan occupation Army', 'Razakar', etc., from the textbooks and government controlled media. These terms were deliberately expunged so as to deprive the new generation knowing about the true story about our heroic liberation struggle.

After the assassination of Zia, and during the Ershad era, more changes were forced on the textbooks published by the NCTB. The story of the creation of the nation was gradually altered to focus more on the contributions to the war efforts of the East Bengali military men and less on the political role of Sheikh Mujib and the government in exile in West Bengal. The Bangladesh military was shown to be organized and in control, whereas they were actually fighting a guerrilla war, financed²⁷⁷ and armed by India. In the 1984 era textbook, the focus is almost entirely on the actions of the military with most of the story devoted to the efforts of the Bengali regiment leaders, and particularly the air force, which was only virtually operational and that for only the last few days of the fighting—but it is glamorous. The political aspects were de-emphasized. Sheikh Mujib was barely mentioned.

²⁷⁷ The USSR also contributed significantly.

The narrative focused on the military instead of diplomacy, for example, from chapter twenty 1987 revision of the afore-mentioned 1984 text, the events are described in military terms,

As early as April, General Osmany planned for expansion and reconstruction of the regular force which included the formation of the guerrilla force and naval command. He formed them in the month of May and arranged for their training and supply for their arms.²⁷⁸ At the same time he reconstructed the air force and land force. In late June he started sending the guerrilla forces inside the country to attack the aggressor army. The regular army and the ganobahini (guerrilla) participated in the war in various sectors as per planning. From the start of the War of Liberation till the start of the Indo-Pak war on 3rd December, 1971 this Mukti Bahini showed endless courage and unprecedented patriotism in conducting the war.²⁷⁹ [...] The commander-in-Chief of the armed forces divided the battlefield into eleven sectors. The responsibility of each sector was rested with one sector commander.

No textbook in Bangladesh has ever left out General Osmany, the famous “Papa Tiger” of the Bengal regiment, who led the liberation war. He is however, not popular with either the Awami League or the BNP. In 1971, he was a seasoned officer and a gentleman and made part of Mujib’s government. During each of the many coups and counter coups that followed Mujib’s assassination, General Osmany called for order, sometimes according to Mascarenhas, hitchhiking across Dhaka to prevent a civil war between rival factions within the military.

Osmany’s commitment to Bangladesh, his fame and bravery during the liberation war is universally acknowledged. But it was his balanced personality while dealing with renegade military men who grabbed power, one after another that led General Osmany to be included in each new administrative set up, no

²⁷⁸ Training from whom? Arms arranged at whose cost?

²⁷⁹ Translation by Iftekhar “Shefa” Iqbal, M.A. (Dhaka)

matter how temporary. He was the chief of staff or advisor to each military junta that took control after Mujib's murder.

He was not involved with any of these coups or coup attempts, according to research by Anthony Mascarenhas.²⁸⁰ But his inclusion in each new regime is indicative of his respect and popularity. He was never seen as power hungry, and he did not support the coup leaders for personal glory. His advice was aimed at preserving Bangladesh and preventing bloodshed. At times he may have compromised himself in dealing with certain individuals, but he was sincere in his efforts to keep things under control.

Somehow, due to his neutrality, he has not been adopted as the poster child of any of the political parties. The Awami League was accused of trying to diminish the role of General Osmany. But the BNP hasn't included him in the many readers they have produced about their chosen heroes, either. He is not an unsung hero, he is remembered and buildings are named after him. Posthumously, his representation in history textbooks has become an issue as the BNP government justifies their recent rewriting of history.

At a celebration held on Osmany's nineteenth death anniversary in February 2003, an article about that event quoted a participant. He stated that the "present [BNP] government has taken a project to write the 'true history of the Liberation War'". The speaker averred that once that occurred, "Gen Osmany's contribution would obviously get its rightful place in the history of Bangladesh". Osmany is in fact one of the few heroes of the liberation war who has received his due respect--not for his battle to save the country during the numerous military

²⁸⁰ Anthony Mascarenhas was a reporter for DAWN, a West Pakistani newspaper. He was in Dhaka at the time of the crackdown. He witnessed things other journalists were not allowed to see as they were all evacuated. Mascarenhas was the first one to report on the violent excesses of the Pakistani army. He broke the story to the world. He has written numerous frank and very factual books on Bangladesh.

coups after August 1975, but only for his efforts to create it in 1971²⁸¹. As leader of the Mukhijuddho army, General Osmany figures prominently in the military era books.

Alluding to accusations that the Awami League had written Osmany out of the story, which a quick look at the AL textbooks disproves, the speaker at the February 2003 seminar concluded that with the BNP in control, “there was no scope of distorting history”. Since their reelection in October 2001, the BNP has poured over the textbooks to de-Bangabandhuize them. The BNP holds that in 1996 the Awami League distorted history by emphasizing Sheikh Mujib over all others. The BNP’s first goal was to tone down the Awami League textbooks, in which eulogistic essays and paragraphs about “Bangabandhu” dominated.

For example, a Bengali literature reader for class eight, *Shahitya Konika*, first published in November 1996 included “a six-page essay on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman”. In that Awami League era text, “There were no other entries on other important political figures of the time”. Though this book is “pure literature”, there were changes made “bearing important political implications”. In order to correct what the BNP saw as Awami League distortions, the essay on Mujib was shortened and three new entries were added to the 2001 edition of this reader.²⁸² By retaining an abbreviated version of the Mujib essay, while at the same time including essays on two very famous historical figures associated with the creation of East Pakistan, the BNP could, without much controversy, also add an essay about General Zia. In so doing, they can claim, which they do, that they are correcting the [alleged] distortions implemented by the Awami League in

²⁸¹ Naturally the NCTB textbooks can’t talk about events in 1975 since the post–1971 history of Bangladesh is yet to be written.

²⁸² *Shahitya Konika*, First print: November 1996, Revised edition: November 2000, Revised edition: November 2001, Reprinted: December 2002

1996, without erasing “Bangabandhu” completely as had been done during the military years.

The BNP textbook does not scrap the essay. Rather, while retaining the essay, though a little shorter, it incorporated four more entries on A.K. Fazlul Huq, Suhrawardhi, Bhasani and Ziaur Rahman.²⁸³

In textbooks during the Zia’s and Ershad’s periods, Sheikh Mujib hardly figures in the story of the creation of the nation. In the textbook written in 1984 and revised in 1987, *The History of Bangladesh for Class Nine and Ten*, in chapter twenty, the “War of Liberation”,²⁸⁴ Mujib is only mentioned twice.

Besides a short paragraph about the government in exile, the focus is on the heroic exploits of the Bangladeshi military regiments. One place in this 1987 textbook, the word Bangabandhu appears before the name Sheikh Mujib. As mentioned, a professor at Dhaka University had daringly inserted the word Bangabandhu, where it had not appeared in the 1984 edition.

In 1998, my informant at the NCTB told me that

Only a few months before the taking over power by the present [AL] government, some NCTB officers took the risk of partially correcting the declaration of independence in the Social Studies books of class V. Possibly the change of government saved them from authorities' wrath and service hazards.

During the time I was in Bangladesh, newspapers and magazines often carried articles about historiography and the meaning of the War of Liberation. It was a passionate obsession.²⁸⁵ *Star Magazine* had a cover story on December 18, 1998, “The Missing History of the Muktiyuddho”. Almost on a daily basis there was an article or an editorial that discussed the loss of or distortion of history.

²⁸³ In an email letter from Shefa in Dhaka.

²⁸⁴ *The History of Bangladesh For Class Nine and Ten*, written and edited by Muhammad Nurul Islam, Muhammad Ramzan, R.M. Zakir Hossain, Dr. Mofizullah Kabir, Dr. S. M. Hasan, January 1984, Revised edition: December 1987, Reprint: December, 1994, National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) Dhaka.

²⁸⁵ The worst insult in Bangladesh is to be called “anti-liberation war”.

In the *Daily Star*, on December 16, 1998, among the multiple pages devoted to the “Victory Day Special” edition, was an article on page six by Mir A. Zaman, “Future! Whose Future?”. Zaman wrote that the “victory day” he remembers best is “December 4, 1990”, when Ershad’s government fell. The whole of Dhaka was celebrating in the streets. The author quotes a shop keeper who had been in Dhaka in December 1971 and compared the jubilation of both events. Zaman was too young to remember December 1971, but the relief and joy he felt in 1990 was comparable, another era of autocracy was over.

Zaman discusses the politicization of the Liberation War rhetoric,

When the Pakistani occupation forces surrendered, some people became freedom-fighters overnight and unscrupulously took advantage of the prevailing disorder in the war-torn country. Later on, the politicians resorted to somewhat a similar strategy. In their frenzied attempt to politicize the War of Liberation, they rewrote history. With each government came addition or omission. History was distorted for the convenience of the people in power. Even now, politicians engage in intense debate on who led the country to independence, who declared the War, so on and so forth.

Echoing what the high school girls had told me, Zaman wrote,

[P]olitical maneuverings have left [the] country’s youth robbed of their rights to know the past in its entirety, no addition, no omission, no distortion, no fabrication: their right to the truth, the whole truth. Those who have been born in and after 1971, have been kept in the dark. They have seen politicians accusing each other of distorting history. They know not whether what they have read in the books is the truth or just a distorted version of truth. They are not sure who is telling the truth or who is lying. Confusion leads to frustration and eventually to impregnable indifference.

He quotes a “21-year-old [who] questioned... in a dismissive tone, ‘What spirit [of the Victory Day] do they talk about? Where do we get it from? History books? Who wrote them? Politicians or historians?’” Zaman concluded,

These questions unfortunately, go unanswered and the young generation, expected to lead the nation towards a better tomorrow,

looks back and finds that there was no past to take a foot into for a foot into the future. Bangladesh is a vibrant colorful country with brilliant intellectuals. It has a rich culture and a past that is full of inspirations, heroes, and lessons, but its contemporary history is so highly contested that its narration is frozen in time.²⁸⁶

From a Vision of Humanism to the Agenda of Islamism

After General Ziaur Rahman's assassination in 1981, Bangladesh was subjected to a decade of military rule under General Ershad. Though during this time, more changes were made to the textbooks.²⁸⁷ the most dramatic changes made by the two military rulers were the changes in the Constitution of Bangladesh. These religiously oriented alterations in the constitution are there to stay. Once Islam has been declared the law of the land, even undemocratically, by military fiat, it can never be repealed, on threat of apostasy.

Under the leadership of the Awami League, the 1972 constitution declared that the People's Republic of Bangladesh was a secular socialist democratic nation. The constitution stated that "The Republic shall be a democracy in which fundamental human rights and freedoms and respect for the dignity and worth of the human person shall be guaranteed."²⁸⁸ Less than a decade later, the military rulers had this line inserted, the "Absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah shall be the basis of all actions." Bangladeshi Human Rights advocate, Shahriar

²⁸⁶ This inability to write post-independence textbook history, is discussed below.

²⁸⁷ Many of the alterations in the textbooks were subtle, and thus Awami League supporters would later claim, more insidious.

²⁸⁸ From a paper by the writer, film maker, poet, and human rights advocate, Shahriar Kabir, "Human Rights in Bangladesh: Focus on Communal Persecution" written for the conference on Human Rights in Bangladesh, held on 17 August 2002, at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. Shahriar Kabir was arrested for subversion, charging that he had criticized the government of Bangladesh. Many other liberal intellectuals and human rights activists have been incarcerated on such charges since October 2001, when the BNP and the coalition of Islamic parties regained control of the government. I interviewed Shahriar Kabir in Dhaka in 1999.

Kabir, a noted writer and film maker explained that, “These two parts [of the constitution] are contradictory.”

The military rulers added to the Preamble, a pledge to uphold “the high ideals of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah” that is in contradiction to the secular nature of the original constitution. This inserted statement in the Bangladeshi constitution, mimics the Preamble to the Pakistani Constitution or the Objectives Resolution, that was added at the insistence of religious elements in Pakistan, especially the Jamaat-i-Islami who, during the first years of nationhood wanted to influence the set up of the government and give it a distinctly Islamic flavor, as they still do today. The Objectives Resolution was highly controversial at that time, because it effectively discriminated against the Hindus in united Pakistan, who were barely a few percent in the western wing, but comprised about 25% of the population of East Pakistan.

It was therefore ominous for minorities, and in opposition to the original intentions of Sheikh Mujib, and the brave freedom fighters who won independence, not to mention the scholars and lawyers who wrote the original constitution, when the military dictators of Bangladesh declared the “state religion of the Republic is Islam”. This effectively nullified articles in the Constitution such as, the “state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.” Shahriar Kabir explained,

Bangladesh had emerged as a secular state on the grave of Pakistani religious ideals [but] pro-Pakistanis captured power after the 1975 assassination of Bangladesh's founding father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman [and inserted] discriminatory clause(s) between Muslim and non-Muslim [that were not included] in the original constitution of Bangladesh.

Kabir described the assault by military rulers on the secular constitution of Bangladesh,

After the assassination of Bangabandhu, two military rulers, General

Ziaur Rahman and General H.M. Ershad removed the roots of the country's secular, non-communal and humane ideals. They changed the constitution to serve a vested quarter and thus eliminated the clause of equal rights for the Hindus, Christians and Buddhists along with indigenous ethnic communities like Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Maug, Hajong, etc. In the original constitution, which was written in 1972, Article 12 in Part II enshrined 'secularism and freedom of Religion' in the section called Fundamental Principle of State Policy. General Ziaur Rahman's military government totally erased this part of the constitution and that was how the religious and ethnic minority groups became second-class citizens to suffer state discrimination.²⁸⁹ According to Dr. Amena Mohsin, in *The Journal of Social Studies*²⁹⁰,

though General Ershad was looked [upon] as usurper, and his regime was termed as undemocratic and autocratic by both Khaleda Zia led Bangladesh Nationalists Party (BNP) and Shiekh Hasina led Awami League, yet none of these parties even after assuming power [...] would be able to retrench the Islamisation measures taken by Ershad”.²⁹¹

Saleem Samad explains, quoting Dr. Amena Mohsin, “The Constitution of Bangladesh, despite Awami League [...] remains an Islamic one”. Samad surmises, “It is then logical ... to assume that democracy is a prerogative of the dominant majority only”.

In his informative article, *State of Minorities in Bangladesh*, Saleem Samad presents a side of Bangladeshi history that has received very little attention. The Awami League, who early on impressed the world with their secular credentials, ignores this bit of history. The BNP ignores it because their founder began the Islamization process in 1975, and especially now that they are aligned with the Jamaat-i-Islami since 2001, they want to take credit for Islamizing the nation.

289 Kabir, Shahriar. “Human Rights in Bangladesh : Focus on Communal Persecution”, Conference on Human Rights in Bangladesh, held on 17 August 2002, at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada

290 October 1997, pp. 98,

291 quoted from: Saleem Samad, *State of Minorities in Bangladesh*, op cit.

Samad explains, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, “revived [the] Islamic Academy” that he had “banned in 1972”, and “upgraded [it to a] Foundation ...in March 1975”. During the last years of his tenure, Mujib “increasingly attended Islamic gatherings”. Samad writes that Mujib sought and received “recognition of OIC membership [Organization of Islamic Countries] ... [in] February 1974”. Samad cites Mujib’s “sudden decision to participate at [the] OIC conference in Lahore, Pakistan [in] 1974, [and establish] diplomatic ties with Pakistan”. Mujib’s “unconditional pardon of the occupational forces of Pakistan involved in war crimes on innocent people, especially women and their subsequent safe repatriation”, were according to Samad, “interpreted by political critics that Mujib stood at a confused crossroads.”

“Two social scientists and political analysts” cited in Samad’s article, “Dr. Talukder Maniruzzaman and Dr. Syed Anwar Husain” have expressed similar views that explain how “Mujib had significantly shifted from [a] secular attitude towards [the] sentiment of the majority”. Samad quotes, Dr. Maniruzzaman,

Towards the end of his rule, Mujib made frequent references to Islam in his speeches and public utterances by using terms and idioms which were peculiar mainly to the Islam-oriented Bangladeshi - like Allah (the Almighty God), Insha Allah (God willing), Bismillah (in the name of God), Tawaba (Penitence) and Imam (religious leader). As days passed on Shiekh Mujib even dropped his symbolic valedictory expression Joy Bangla (Glory to Bengal) and ended his speeches with Khuda Hafez (May God protect you), the traditional Indo-Islamic phrase for bidding farewell. In his later day speeches, he also highlighted his efforts to establish cordial relations with the Muslim countries in the Middle East.²⁹²

The situation in Bangladesh reflected the same strange dichotomy between secular socialism and Islamization that was happening simultaneously in West Pakistan. In the east, Mujib “was turning towards a pseudo-religious

²⁹² Dr. Maniruzzaman. 1990. Bangladesh Politics: Secular and Islamic Trends. New Delhi: pp.'s 73-74

stewardship”, but as Samad points out, his “religious ebullience” was mostly “rhetoric”. Historically, and in popular memory, Mujib is credited with establishing the first truly secular nation that had a Muslim majority. The Islamists’ factions deride Mujib for not making Islam the supreme law of the land that was demographically one of the largest Muslim majority nations in the world. The Pakistanis and their Bengali collaborators before and during the liberation struggle, placed Mujib in the category of apostate--he was driving the Bengali Muslims away from Allah and towards an effete Hinduized Bengalee cultural nationalism.

After the break up of the nation, the same phenomenon was happening in the western wing. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was projected as a socialist, but in reality, though he “nationalized” numerous banks, schools, factories, sugar mills, and other industries and institutions, he turned them over to his sycophants or “chamchas” who drove them into bankruptcy due to corruption. Many of his critics have claimed that he had no inclination towards socialism, but during the election campaign before the civil war, he found that the followers of his party, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), were advocating a socialist view to challenge the power of the zamindars and waderas²⁹³. A joke in Pakistan has it that when Bhutto realized the direction of the electorate, he adopted socialism as one of his mandates. It is said that when he saw he was being left behind ideologically, he “put on a red shirt and ran to the front of the crowd”.

Bhutto is highly criticized by the Islamists who accuse him of being overly secular. Yet it was during Z.A. Bhutto’s tenure that n were declared “non-Muslims”. Hindus and Christians were made to vote in separate electorates which significantly diminished their electoral choices and influence. It is Bhutto who

²⁹³ Powerful Sindhi landholders infamous for exploiting their tenant farmers. The Bhuttos were a Wadera family.

first institutionalized the concept of the “Ideology of Pakistan”, though his successor and the man who had him hung on the gallows, General Zia-ul Haq is credited with propagating this ideology “Nazariya Pakistan”, a narrow, Islamized perspective of nationalism.²⁹⁴ Textbooks in Pakistan, that eulogize General Zia-ul Haq for his successful agenda to Islamize the country, call Z.A. Bhutto’s efforts, “too little, too late”.²⁹⁵

Even if they tried to placate the fundamentalist factions, both Mujib and Bhutto are remembered as secular quasi-socialists. Depending on how it is interpreted, they either tried to bring their nations into the mainstream of world civilization, or, from the point of view of a Mullah, they were dangerously anti-Islamic. Either way, both versions of both stories are incomplete and lopsided.

Meanwhile, in Bangladesh,

The process of using Islam for leadership legitimation purposes gathered momentum during the military regimes of General Ziaur Rahman (1975-1981) and General H.M. Ershad (1982-1990). Zia doctored the Constitution, “scraped secularism from the four state principles [and inserted] Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim (in the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful)”. The principle of secularism was overturned and “replaced by the words, ‘Absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah shall be the basis of all action’”.²⁹⁶

Ziaur Rahman tried to Islamize education. He had Islamiyat “introduced as compulsory from classes one to eight with option for minority students to take

²⁹⁴ This was discussed in detail in the previous chapter about Pakistani textbooks.

²⁹⁵ Another comparison can be made between the two countries during the late seventies and eighties, when they were both ruled by military rulers who were advancing an Islamization program in politics, education, in all aspects of civil society. For a few years, between 1977 when General Zia-ul Haq staged his coup in Pakistan and before the murder of General Zia-ur Rahman’s in 1981, both wings were ruled by a general named Zia who tried to institutionalize Islam as the supreme political power of the land. How that worked out in the two countries is very different, but the efforts of both Zias were successful in the long run.

²⁹⁶ Saleem Samad, op cit.

similar religious courses of their own”.²⁹⁷ My friend from the NCTB described Ershad’s efforts to Islamize the curriculum, in the early eighties,

[Ershad’s] attempts for introduction of Arabic along with Bangla and English at the primary level ... failed in the vehement opposition of the students, educationists, and intellectuals.

He then explained that Ershad continued to put pressure on the NCTB to Islamize the curriculum, as he reached towards the religious community to support his failing regime.²⁹⁸

During General Ershad's regime two notable changes took place in curriculum and textbooks. Religious education was made compulsory at the secondary level through a government notification dated 12.12.1989. Before this notification, Religious Education was compulsory up to Grade 8 and elective subject in grades 9 & 10.

He pointed out that, “These changes minimized the scope for studying science subjects.”

Saleem Samad sums up the impact of Ershad’s Islamization efforts,

Between 1982 and 1990, Ershad made systematic efforts to continue the policy of Zia, rehabilitating anti-liberation elements and the parallel Islamisation culminating in the disputable Eighth amendment to the Constitution declaring ‘Islam’ as a state religion. Earlier short-lived government of Mustaque Ahmed (August 1975 - November 1975) brought to power at a behest of young military officers, declared Peoples Republic of Bangladesh as ‘Islamic Republic of Bangladesh’ over the state radio, which however fetched recognition of Saudi Arabia, Libya and China.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ The irony of Ershad is that he is known as a prolific womanizer. It is said that all the pretty single forty year old women in Dhaka led the processions in support of Ershad. He was an avid golfer and drinker...yet, he institutionalized by decree a process of Islamization of Bangladeshi government and society that ended the non-sectarian nature of the original constitution and the essence of the message of the Liberation War. For a country that had just liberated itself from a certain medievalism inherent in the tone of the Preamble of the Pakistani constitution, it is indeed ironic that a philanderer implemented such a narrow religiously based interpretation of Bangladeshi nationalism.

Now all school children in Bangladesh must take a course on religion. During this class period Hindu children go to one classroom and Christian children to another room, while the majority of the students, who are Muslims, remain in their classroom for their lessons on Islamiyat. Several Hindu students with whom I spoke at a small school in Mymensingh complained that this process set them apart even more from their peers. They said that they get religious instruction at home, from parents or priests, and didn't like being segregated at school on the basis of their religion. Some of them opted to sit in on the Islamiyat classes in an effort to fit in.

After several years of social unrest and street protests, General Ershad "stepped down". When democracy was finally restored in 1991, the BNP was elected by a slim margin in a highly contested election that was not free from fraud and violence—an unfortunate phenomenon that often accompanies a nation's return to democracy after decades of dictatorship. During the subsequent six years of BNP rule, there was no need for them to change the tone or the content of the existing textbooks. They contained the version of the independence war representing Zia as the one who declared the independence of Bangladesh. The six years of BNP governance were marked by months of hartals²⁹⁹ and violent street demonstrations orchestrated by Sheikh Hasina's Awami League.

The following six years, 1996-2001, during the Awami League tenure, were also marked by endless violent and destructive hartals, enforced by the BNP. Since October 2001, when the BNP again took control of the government, the violence has not abated. With the return of democracy and the political battle between the Awami League and the BNP, historiography in Bangladesh has been pulled one way then the other. Civil society as well has been stretched to its limits by violence and corruption. Social Studies textbooks, seen as a malleable tool for

²⁹⁹ Hartals, literally "all locks" is a strike or a bandh or a boycott.

indoctrination, are particularly subject to political pressures. This is particularly true in a country such as Bangladesh where democratic institutions are fragile and bureaucrats and scholars easily intimidated or bought.

The Unstable Story of the Nation

During the first six years of the return of democracy in Bangladesh, between 1991 –1996, while the BNP ruled by semi-popular mandate, Mrs. Zia seems to have had little concern about the textbooks, and no new versions of history were written. The textbooks that had been in use during the previous military period reflected the legacy of the imperatives of her late husband's political persuasion. When the Awami League returned to power in 1996, after a hiatus of twenty-one years, as mentioned, changing the textbooks was one of Sheikh Hassina's top priorities.

Winning only slightly more votes than the BNP in the second post-military-rule election, which was also highly contested and not free from fraud and violence, the political balance shifted by just a few percentage points, but it pushed the historiographical pendulum into full swing. Omissions and additions, changes that had encroached upon the narrative were overturned. Words such as "Bangabandhu" were reinserted with vigor. The Awami Leaguers were proudly proclaiming their perspectives of history that had been deemphasized. They enthusiastically resituated slogans such as "Joy Bangla" that had been gradually eaten away, by a decade and a half of top down military governance. The grand sweep of millennial history was not of great concern, but the politically motivated changes in the retelling of modern history and the story of the birth of the nation had to be corrected, and in the view of the AL, returned to the facts. Between 1996-2001, during the six years of Awami League governance, many buildings

and bridges were named or renamed Bangabandhu, a veritable Bangabandhuization of Bangladesh.

The ancient and medieval periods, though these eras had been central to the historiographic record created by Bangladeshi historians just after independence, were not of political interest to Zia and Ershad. The manner in which the Aryans, the Buddhists, the Mughals were represented remained relatively unchanged during the years of military rule. Zia and Ershad only tampered with a details about the civil war, its heroes and allies. But most significantly, they altered the secular nature of the nation, and set it on a course in the opposite direction than its original orientation—a course toward jihadi Islam that would ultimately unravel the fabric of tolerance and pluralism upon which Bangladesh was originally founded.

Hamood-ur-Rehman, War Crimes, and Long Delayed Justice

In 1996 several things were added to the textbooks, particularly a descriptive paragraph about the negative role played by the Jaamat-i-Islami during the liberation war, on page 82 of *Social Science for class Eight*,

During the Liberation War Jamate Islam³⁰⁰, a group of people allied with Muslim League vehemently opposed the liberation war and helped the Pakistani forces in different ways. The collaborators of Pakistani Army formed many battalions of killers in the style of Rajakar, Al-Badar, Al-Shams with the object of killing the intellectuals in a pre-planned way. They sorted out and kidnapped the reputed teachers, doctors, artists and journalists including the intelligencia and murdered them brutally.

In contrast, in the textbooks written for class nine and ten during Ershad's military rule, published in 1984 and revised in 1987, the collaborative role of the Jamaat-i-Islami is not specified and the language is less dramatic,

300 The name of this Islamic organization has several spelling that are used.

During this time the *local agents of the Pak military forces Al Shams and Al Badar forces*, in the dark of curfew, mercilessly killed teachers, doctors, journalists and many other intellectuals of Bangladesh.³⁰¹ (emphasis added)

The murder of the intellectuals on December 14 was a last desperate, and horribly violent action by the razakars and al-badars, groups of armed Bengali Islamic fundamentalists who supported the Pakistani crackdown on Dhaka. They worked to obstruct the secession of East Pakistan, but when it was clear that the Indian army was quickly cutting a swath through East Pakistan towards Dhaka in mid December, the razakars opted to murder all the leading intellectuals—a cruel bid to cut off the head of the country that they could not prevent, but that they had opposed. Golam Azam, the leader of the Jaamat-i-Islami in erstwhile East Pakistan, was vocal and public about his opposition to the independence movement. He was a close confidant of General Tikka Khan, known as the “Butcher of Bengal³⁰²”.

Azam is known to have provided lists of names and addresses of pro-Bengalee intellectuals to the infamous Pakistani general, Rao Farman Ali. Both Golam Azam and Rao Farman Ali are blamed for orchestrating the gruesome murders on December 14, when professors and other professionals were kidnapped from their homes in the dark of night and hacked to death, their bodies thrown in a ravine. In the Muktijuddha Jadughar (The Liberation War Museum), established in Dhaka during the mid nineties, as an institute dedicated to preserving the memory of the War of Liberation, there are 1971 era photographs of Golam Azam having tea with Tikka Khan.

301 HISTORY OF BANGLADESH FOR CLASS NINE AND TEN, Written and edited by Muhammad Nurul Karim et al. First Published: January 1984, Revised edition: December 1987, Reprint 1994, NCTB, Dhaka.

302 Also known as the “Butcher of Balouchistan” for his mass executions in that province.

Golam Azam, along with many of his razakar cronies, fled to Pakistan after Bangladesh gained independence. He later returned in the mid-nineties, after obtaining special, very controversial permission from the Khalida Zia government--traveling to Bangladesh on a Pakistani passport to look after his ailing mother. A mock trial was held for Azam by many intellectuals, who brought out his war crimes and urged the BNP government to arrest Golam and try him for treason. Instead the professors were arrested by the BNP for holding the mock trial. They even tried to charge Professor Anisuzzaman, one of Bangladesh's most respected senior intellectuals. The issue of putting the "war criminals" on trial has torn apart Bangladeshi society since 1972 when Sheikh Mujib pardoned all the collaborators in an attempt to unite factions in the new country.

In the fall of 1998, I spoke to a group of high school boys at the Lab School in Dhaka. I asked them what one thing would be the best for their country? "Besides economic and educational development", I queried them, "what single national issue is the most important from your point of view?" Several boys answered, almost in unison, "There should be a war crimes trial."

I was surprised that my question elicited such an immediate almost choral response. I asked, "Why a trial?" Their answers were well thought-out and based on precedent. One teenager told me "There should be an official international inquiry, like they did in Rwanda and Bosnia." Another added, "We should have a Nuremberg style trial." Several boys mentioned that Nazis were still being hunted and that "one old Nazi had recently been arrested in the USA". "Why", they asked, "shouldn't the Bangladeshis also have justice for crimes against humanity?"

Indeed during 1998, after the repeal of the Indemnity Ordinance that had protected the assassins, there was a sensational trial for the murderers of Sheikh

Mujib and his family and others who had been slain on that tragic night in 1975, as well as the four leaders who were brutally murdered in a Dhaka jail cell a few months later. The newspapers were full of the proceedings of the trial. One suspect had been picked up in Thailand. Others were absconding in foreign countries, including the USA, and extradition proceedings were underway. All fifteen accused were found guilty, and sentenced to death. During the days of the trial, the BNP held numerous hartals in protest.

In August 2000, a copy of the long concealed Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission report was published. This was a famous study, commissioned by Z.A. Bhutto, to investigate the causes of the loss of the eastern wing of the country. Since the report implicated both the Pakistani military and the politicians for corruption and incompetence, it was shelved as quickly as it was released and all known copies said to have been destroyed. In August 2000, a copy of the long lost Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission report was leaked to the *Times of India* that published lengthy sections implicating the Pakistanis for genocide, much less strategic ineptitude. The release of this report fueled the drive to bring justice to Bangladeshis for war atrocities.

General Musharraf commented on the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission report while at the UN Millennium Conference in New York, in September 2000. He said, "Let's forget the bitterness of the past and move forward. [...]" Something happened 30 years ago. Why do we want to live in history? As a Pakistani, I would like to forget 1971." Many Bangladeshis, whose fathers, brothers, and uncles, whose doctors, scientists, professors, and other noncombatants, were murdered during the Pakistani occupation, feel differently about the memory of 1971. At least half the population of Bangladesh never wants to forget 1971. Another half wants to forget just the parts that include Bangabandhu.

Since October 2001, scholars, such as the respected Professor Muntassir Mamoon, who advocated trials for the murders and collaborators, were themselves arrested shortly after the BNP returned to power. One columnist commented on this situation,

Prof. Muntassir Mamun, a columnist and historian, [was] among several prominent government critics arrested on December 8 [2001] in the capital, Dhaka. He had been outspoken of war crimes committed by pro-Islamist elements presently with the coalition government led by Begum Khaleda Zia. He was held under sedition laws of trying to destabilise the government.³⁰³

Three weeks after September 11, 2001, with a similarly slim margin as in 1991, the BNP again won the election, this time in a coalition with the Jamaat-i-Islam and several other Islamist parties.³⁰⁴ They immediately began to de-Bangabandhuize the textbooks, removing a whole paragraph about the Mujib Bahini, which had been controversial when it was inserted, and other Awami League rewrites added during Sheikh Hassina's six years at the helm.

As mentioned earlier, one reference added by the Awami League to the eighth grade Civics textbook, that was immediately removed by the BNP, was the discussion of the Indemnity Ordinance. That notorious Indemnity Ordinance was enacted by the military government to preempt possible charges against Mujib's assassins. Those assassins were, during the following decades, sent as diplomats to prized destinations in the West. Now many of their supporters have been made ministers.

In 1996, overturning the Indemnity Ordinance was one of the first objectives in the order of priorities when the Awami League returned to power.

³⁰³ Samad, Saleem. Threats and intimidation for secular and independent press in Bangladesh, was "presented on the auspices of World Press Freedom Day, 3 May 2003" Dhaka.

³⁰⁴ Informed individuals who prefer to remain nameless, have told me that they have uncontestable information that the Pakistani Intelligence agency, the ISI, contributed large sums of money to the BNP's campaign.

At that time, the BNP tried to prevent the removal of this ordinance from the constitution, claiming that since it was part of the constitution, it could only be removed by a two-thirds majority, which Awami League did not have in the parliament. However, when the question was taken to the courts it was ruled that since the ordinance had been inserted in the constitution “ultra-vires” by decree, it could be removed with a simple majority.

The trials of the assassins, their extraditions and convictions played out in a sensational manner in the Dhaka newspapers during the fall of 1998 and spring of 1999. During that time several “killing fields” were uncovered by the public works department. Skulls of children and babies and arm bones still tied together at the wrist were recovered.

Families of the intellectuals murdered on December 14, and other victims of razakar violence, filed cases against individuals known to have been involved in torture and murder, most of whom had become prominent citizens. Relatives of the deceased who were filing the cases were often threatened by the fundamentalists. Six years later, with the BNP-Islamicist coalition in power, these same retired razakars, who escaped justice through Mujib’s benevolence and their own wealth and political clout, are now part of the government.

According to information supplied by a scholar from Bangladesh, “The cases [against Mujib’s assassins] are [still] in the Supreme Court, naturally-- since most got the death sentence and appealed”. He added, “But the current bench is doing everything ... to delay final verdicts --not enough justices appointed; those who are there, recusing themselves on various accounts”.

The BNP/Jamaat coalition has not reinstated the Indemnity Ordinance that pardoned Mujib’s murders, but they did institute a ‘New Indemnity Clause’ that was passed and signed into law in December 2002, in order to “protect the Armed Forces Personnel from any legal proceeding as a result of their actions in response

to the Prime Minister's order to restore law and order and round up the usual suspects”³⁰⁵.

In BNP controlled Bangladesh, the “usual suspects” are journalists and professors who have worked for justice and dedicated themselves to bringing the criminals of 1971 and 1975 to trial. During the time that Awami League was in power, there were also politically motivated arrests, though not to the degree as the current BNP regime.

Regardless of the changes made to the textbooks by the military governments or the Awami League, neither of them has been able to write the history of Bangladesh after January 10, 1972. There is far too much contentiousness about events such as November 7, 1975, when the military “came out of the cantonment” following the murder of Sheikh Mujib and his family. For the BNP this represents the finest moment, when the brave soldiers rose to the occasion to take control of the lawlessness that followed in the wake of the assassination of Mujib. For the Awami League this date sealed the fate of democracy and ushered in an era of dictatorships and the erosion of freedom and human rights.

November 7, A Tale of Two Tales

In Bangladesh, there are some issues in the recent history, such as the assassination of Sheikh Mujib in August 1975, and the military takeover on November 7 of that year, that are simply too controversial to include in officially published textbooks--in a nation divided by political partisanship. When Bangladeshi scholars told me in 1999 that the historical narrative would soon be updated to include events in post-liberation (post-1971) Bangladesh, I asked them,

³⁰⁵ From an email communication with a Bangladeshi friend.

whose version would be included? They inevitably responded, “We will stick to the facts... just the facts.”

However it is the interpretation of the facts that creates the problems: Were the events of November 7, 1975 a ruthless army coup that ended democracy? Or does this date represent the valiant efforts by the military to bring order and peace to a nation beset with chaos and violence, saving Bangladesh from being subsumed by India, or returned to Pakistan in a CIA inspired conspiracy, as the BNP and Bangladeshi scholars such as M. Rashiduzaman have argued?

A special supplement of the Dhaka newspaper, the *Daily Star* published on November 7, 1998 devoted a whole page to this dispute. At the top of the page was a reproduction of a political poster showing Zia wearing shades, waving to the crowds of cheering Bangladeshis. A tank was superimposed at the bottom of this circa 1993 political poster. Behind Zia on the right are rows of military personnel with their rifles raised. A large caption, pasted across the bottom of this poster, with the edges of the scotch tape visible, “Today is The National Revolution and Solidarity Day, 1993”.

This poster of General Zia waving while wearing his trademark sunglasses, reprinted in the special supplement for November 7, 1998, was created during the first BNP stint at the center. The feature in the *Daily Star* was titled, “Significance of a National Day should not be Mixed up with Politics”. The three articles were all sympathetic to the BNP’s view of November 7, 1975. One of the articles, *Alive in the Hearts of the People*, written by Sadeq Khan, explained,

For two decades since 1975, the citizens of Bangladesh have been enjoying a holiday on November 7 to commemorate the day of Sepoy-People uprising. That day in 1975 changed their lives, put an end to chaotic bids for power after the fall of Sheikh Mujib’s Baksal raj, defeated a foreign interventionist bid, and firmly asserted the spirit of independence.

Another article in the November 7, 1998 supplement of the *Daily Star*, was written by Professor M. Maniruzzaman Miah. It was a first person account of the events of the day, describing the heroics of Zia, and his humility. When the Awami League came back to power in 1996, they abolished November 7 as a national holiday. An article by Mahbub Anam, explained, that the

7th of November is the mutiny day. Some people observe it and some do not because of their political differences. [...] Putting a notable significance on it, the previous governments [first Ershad, then the BNP] used to glorify the day on behalf of the nation. They termed it the day of revolution and consolidation. It was also declared [a] holiday. But after coming to power the present government [Awami League] had cancelled the holiday.

On the reverse side of this page devoted to justifying the events of November 7, was an article, titled, “Hold trial of 42,000 political killings” that described a seminar held in Dhaka on November 6, 1998, “Today’s Bangladesh and Importance of November 7”.³⁰⁶ The list of participants took up two columns. Their joint statement said, “Before holding trial of the killing of Sheikh Mujib, it is necessary to hold the trial of 42,000 political killings staged in early 70s.”

In the Fall of 1998, the trial of Mujib’s murderers had been in full swing for months. The verdicts, to have been pronounced on November 7, were delayed to avoid possible violent repercussions on National Revolution and Solidarity Day--though the holiday had been cancelled by the Awami League. The headlines on November 9, 1998 were sensational. Fifteen assassins had been condemned to death. But the demand for a trial of the murderers of 40,000 Bengalis and non-Bengalis that were killed after the country was made independent is still a burning issue with scholars associated with the BNP perspective.³⁰⁷ The violence and

³⁰⁶ The Daily Star, November 7, 1998, page 12.

³⁰⁷ Such as Professor M. Rashiduzaman, discussed below.

corruption in the first few years of Bangladeshi nationhood is often cited by BNP supporters as the reason Sheikh Mujib had to die.

At the November 7, 1998 seminar, Aftab Ahmed a professor from Dhaka University lectured that “the Awami League government during 1972-75 killed nearly 42,000 political activists and imprisoned about 86,000 leaders and workers”. Ahmed stated that after 1971 “the fascist government created a chaos in Bangladesh unleashing repressive measure on the opposition”. He said the “Rakkhi Bahini under the supervision of the Indian army committed those political killings”. He “warned” that “The government’s attempt to take political revenge in the name of trial of Sheikh Mujib killing will not bring any good result”. This short article quotes from the participants at the seminar and offers an excellent example of the radical divergence of historical orientation in Bangladesh. In his lecture, Dr. Aftab also made this harsh and partisan statement, “The nation got rid of suffocating situation with the killing of Sheikh Mujib”.

Another participant, Prof. Muniruzzaman “questioned why Awami League got feared (sic) of late president Ziaur Rahman and is spreading falsehood to undermine him and (sic) erase from history”. He concluded that “Lakhs of people had listened to the proclamation of liberation war in 1971 by Ziaur Rahman”. The bone of contention continues. Owning history is integral.

Professor Emajuddin said at the seminar that the, “Awami League wants to cast off Ziaur Rahman from history where Sheikh Mujib failed”. The article ended with a veiled threat for another military takeover. One professor, Reazuddin Ahmad advocated street violence to bring down the AL government, another scholar, Amanullah Kabir called for a military coup, “a situation has been created for another November 7”.

This perspective of Bangladeshi history is shared by Professor M. Rashiduzaman, who in 1998-99 participated in a heated discussion on a

Bangladeshi news service, Amitech. He had been accused of being a collaborator in 1971. In his defense he wrote several long letters. He discussed the differences of opinion regarding Mujib,

Over the years, about a dozen or so books/memoirs have been published in Bangladesh on what happened in 1971 and immediately after independence. Two key conceptualizations about Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's (also called Mujib and acclaimed as the Bangabandhu by millions)³⁰⁸ role in the liberation struggle emerged: In the first assumption, Mujib, driven by the Pakistani refusal to transfer power to his majority party, was categorically in favor of a complete secession from Pakistan, which he hinted on March 7, and he gave further directives for declaration of independence subsequently carried out from the Chittagong Radio station.

Rashiduzaman stated that in the second assumption, Mujib is seen as incompetent, and “Unable to decide which way to go, either for united Pakistan with the six-point autonomy, or for a complete secession”. Rashiduzaman then describes the events of the night of March 25, 1971 very differently than usually narrated,

Mujib decided to surrender to the Pakistan military leaving behind his followers to flee the country, to get killed by the marauding Pakistani soldiers, and to carry out the independence movement on their own.

In his defense of himself, against those who called him a collaborator

Rashiduzaman implies that Mujib was also a collaborator. He cites, “Zulfi Bhutto's biographer Stanley Wolpert”, who wrote about

Mujib's secretly taped conversation (with Bhutto) where the Bangladeshi hero hinted at some form of connection with Pakistan shortly before he was freed from the detention in January 1972.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁸ Rashiduzaman's disdain for Mujib can be detected in this reference.

³⁰⁹ Mascarenhas also mentions that Mujib told him, in London, right after his release from nine months in prison in Pakistan, that he and Bhutto had spoken about the possibility of some kind of joint governing. Mascarenhas was appalled and thought that Mujib was out of touch with the sentiments of his countrymen who had just won their new country amid vast devastation. Mujib soon realized this as he emerged from his isolation and returned a hero to Bangladesh.

Rashiduzaman points out that “The dispassionate historians have umpired none of those views; and, meanwhile, people argue both ways”. Back in 1998 when this on-line controversy was happening, the media in Bangladesh was obsessed with historiography. Rashiduzaman noted this as well, “Dhaka newspapers are filled with claims and counter-claims about Mujib's role in the 1971 liberation struggle”. He added, “We know that the acrimony between Prime Minister Hasina and the Opposition Leader Khaleda is also a battle over who did what in 1971”. He mentions the same controversy that was cited above from the November 7, 1998 edition of the *Daily Star*, “Just this week, I read that Opposition Leader Khaleda wanted trial for nearly 40,000 people killed from 1972 to 75.” He states emphatically, continuing to defend himself, “The ‘collaborators’ did not commit those killings!”

Rashiduzaman goes so far as to defend the razakars, “Even those who actually collaborated, many were forced to join the Al-Badars etc. under duress.” He explains that “After December 1971, most of such people were on the run” and that “the killing, torture, abduction, extortion and rape continued! Political killings were institutionalized”.

Rashiduzaman greatly angered several of the contributors to the discussion on the *Amitech News From Bangladesh* internet site when he wrote that he was now being accused of collaboration when he himself had been victimized by the “ultra-nationalist fervor” during “the dark days of early Bangladesh when Bangalee nationalism took a xenophobic and fascistic turn”.

One contributor wrote that it was an insult that Rashiduzaman “characterized our struggle to free the country --when an estimated three-million people gave their life - as merely a ultra-nationalist fervor”. Another said that Dr. M. Rashiduzaman took “a snipe... at the whole nation” by calling Bengali nationalism “xenophobic and fascistic”. This writer, critical of Rashiduzaman

continued, “I was numbed and felt insulted to his characterisation of early days of Bangladesh, which just suffered the second highest casualties next to holocaust.”

The discussion about the political position Rashiduzaman took while he was living in New York during the War of Liberation and that he continues to take in his scholarly articles, is an excellent example of the deep divisions concerning the writing of Bangladeshi history. In one of his several letters written to defend himself, Rashiduzaman made a statement that was as true in 1998 when he wrote it, and as it is now, “A definitive history of Bangladesh in 1971, minus the political hyperbole, is yet to be written”. He cites, “Doubts, fear, oscillation, vacillation, confusion and uncertainty” as the cause.³¹⁰ Rashiduzaman inferred that if events in Bangladesh were reevaluated, Mujib might even be considered to have been a collaborator.

When this internet debate was raging among cyber-centric Bangladeshi intellectuals in 1997-98, the holiday commemorating November 7th as National Revolution and Solidarity Day had been abolished by the Awami League. As soon as the BNP returned to power in October 2001, the National Revolution and Solidarity Day holiday was reinstated and celebrated. However, after two and a half decades, the events of that day still can not be written up in textbooks.

Though it is discussed extensively on newsgroups dedicated to issues about Bangladesh, and numerous books taking different sides of the story have been published, Bangladeshi school children don't read about this day in their textbooks. They also don't read about the murder of Mujib. A.H. Jaffor Ullah, in his incisive, acerbic style evaluates the current situation,

The existence of these two opposing views in Bangladesh is creating many problems for this nascent democracy. The nation is not quite sure who their founding fathers were. Unfortunately, most

³¹⁰ This fascinating and very revealing debate can be found at:
http://cyber_bangla0.tripod.com/Debate/NFB.html

of the founding fathers were assassinated by a gang of junior army officers under the leadership of a senior officer who consolidated his power base in subsequent period after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib. Even though 25 years have gone by, our people in Bangladesh are confused as ever. They don't know whether they want to erect the portrait of Sheikh Mujib, the acknowledged leader of the Bangalee nationalism, or the picture of four-star General who was merely a sector commander during our fight against the 'Hanadar Bahini.'³¹¹ The present government of Bangladesh with their heightened anti-Bangalee sentiment wanted to take down the picture of Sheikh Mujib, which this scribe thinks is a wrong idea. Bangladesh should march to modernity with or without Sheikh Mujib's or Rayban spectacled army General.

Sheikh Mujib's death in August 1975 was a tragedy that ended democracy in Bangladesh for seventeen years, though some claim that the one party rule he had established before he was killed had already destroyed democracy.³¹² A few months later General Zia-ur Rahman came to power through a coup³¹³. During his tenure, General Zia reestablished closer ties with Islamabad, meeting with Z.A. Bhutto who had become the Prime Minister of the now truncated Pakistan. Zia legitimized his undemocratic rule through founding the BNP, and having himself installed as president. He followed the tactics of the military rulers in undivided Pakistan, such as General Ayub Khan, and now, in that on-going tradition, General Musharraf who has also justified his coup through this pseudo-political strategy.

During the first years of the country's existence, 1972-75 there had been violence and murder against those considered collaborators. However, most of the

³¹¹ refers to the Pakistani army

³¹² It must be also pointed out that during his time as Prime Minister he became more and more autocratic, and less democratic. Some people say this was because the nation was in such disarray after such a violent war, and difficult to govern, but most critics condemn Mujib's creation of Baksal, a one-party system.

³¹³ Calling the coup of November 7, 1977, a coup, is itself controversial—half the population, namely the Awami League, sees this event as a coup, the other half, the BNP, would never call it a coup, but rather a kind of rescue operation by the founder of the BNP.

worst offenders survived the witch hunts to haunt the nation for thirty-one years. Political murders and instability also marked the years General Ziaur Rahman was in quasi-control of the Bangladeshi government, 1975-81. He personally ordered the execution by firing squad and hanging of over 2000 soldiers, many of whom had distinguished themselves as freedom fighters, but who opposed his takeover of the government, in one way or another. Zia was very partisan in whom he pardoned for attempted coups and whom he executed.

The two infamous majors, Rashid and Farooq, who masterminded the murder of Sheikh Mujib, his family and colleagues, were given safe passage out of the country twice. Once after the murder of Mujib and again after they staged a failed countercoup against General Zia. Other comrades in arms were not so fortunate or favored, such as Colonel Taher, who was not murderous and power hungry, as were the two favored majors. Taher was a patriot with leftist socialist ideas. He organized the mutiny among the troops, demanding rights which led to the elevation of Zia to Chief Marshal Law Administrator and then to President. Zia had Taher executed, while raskars and other scoundrels responsible for murder and extortion were not only pardoned but given lucrative positions abroad.

The colorful and courageous Colonel Taher was hung by Zia, though it was his inspiration and vision of an egalitarian “People’s Army” that led to the Sepoy³¹⁴ mutiny. Major Taher is one of the unsung, in fact completely obliterated heroes. If an objective history of Bangladesh can one day be written, Taher will be known as one of the truly unique and committed characters of the early years of the country.

During Zia’s term as head of state, there were numerous counter-coups and over twenty assassination attempts on his life before he was finally gunned

³¹⁴ Uprising of the troops

down in 1981. The facts of his murder are particularly gruesome. The contrasts between his assassination and burial and that of Sheikh Mujib paint a lucid picture of the vivid ironies in Bangladesh's painful, convoluted recent past.

What remained of Zia's remains, once it was unburied from a shallow grave after a few days of decay, was interred with pomp and pageantry in a stylishly modernistic mausoleum in Dhaka near the Parliament building in a park named after him.³¹⁵ On the other hand, Mujib's body lay head down on the stairwell of his home for several hours and then was hastily buried in an unmarked grave in his hometown far away from Dhaka. His bullet riddled body, unceremoniously removed from his home in Dhanmudi, was quietly flown in a helicopter to Tungipara and buried within twenty-four hours.³¹⁶ The rest of the family, the women and children, daughters-in-law and sons, were dumped in a mass grave on the other side of Dhaka. Mascarenhas wrote in 1986,

Ten years after Mujib's death his daughter, Hasina, told me that she could not get the agreement of relatives and neighbors in their home village of Tungipara to erect a suitable monument over Mujib's grave.

Tito Scohel a Bangladeshi activist and scholar, wrote at length about this ironic situation,

Zia always loved to glorify himself as he did during the liberation war. His cronies, always powerful behind the screen, fed Zia's urges for mythopoesis. After his death Zia was spiritualized in Bangladeshi politics. Sheikh Mujib's dead body was taken to Tungipara and buried in the same day. But Zia's dead body wasn't taken to [his hometown] Bogra. Instead a big monument was erected overnight on Zia's grave next to the parliament house at the heart of Dhaka city.

³¹⁵ The park was renamed during the Awami period in 1997 and then re-renamed again after the fall of 2001. Craftsmen who carve marble plaques may truly be the only Bangladeshis who look forward to these continual flip flops in the nomenclature of national memorials.

³¹⁶ The rest of the victims were buried in a mass grave on the outskirts of Dhaka.

Why so much honor was accorded to an ordinary major or a sector commander of 1971 while the architect of the liberation war was literally buried out of sight of the whole nation? The answer is simple: to spiritualize Zia into fine political ideology. To let his apparition haunt the nation in the perpetual medievalism. In Bangladeshi culture tombs are more powerful than the living men. The present being an irrecoverable squalor, the past appears to wield a more glittering prospect. Due to these cultural factors it was important for Zia's mentors to perpetuate his tomb in our political culture and drive Mujib out of the national phantasmagoria.

Zia stands for an ideology and is represented by an oligarchy (pro Pakistan) determined to perpetuate Islamic culture in Bangladesh. For last 15 years this group deified Zia cult, as part of their process, to obliterate Mujib and liberation war from our history. In order to secure their political hegemony, this group created a myth with Zia's corpse. For the fact is Zia's dead body was never brought to Dhaka. His dead body, due to the impact of heavy brush fire, was so much enmeshed with flesh, blood and other dead bodies (his body guards) that it was unidentifiable.³¹⁷

Ultimately, during his tumultuous tenure, Zia changed Mujib's concept of "Bengalee Nationalism" to "Bangladeshi Nationalism". In 1977 when there was a revision of textbooks, the story about the War of Liberation was still fresh and bloody in the minds of the people, so not many changes could be made to the story. He added a few significant sentences—changing names to obscure the perpetrators and omitting details, particularly concerning the role of Sheikh Mujib. These changes were significant in the sensitive issue of Bangladeshi identity formation.

³¹⁷ The same is true of the tomb for Ziaul Haq in Pakistan whose body was never found after his airplane exploded in flight and his coffin is said to contain only his eye glasses and one part of his jawbone that was identified. But his mausoleum in Islamabad is impressive, whether or not it contains his corpse. And his myth lives on in the Jihadi spirit of the ISI which he nurtured.

A.H. Jaffor Ullah a Bangladeshi scholar who lives in New Orleans, described this process in an article written in the fall of 2002, *A divided nation after 31 years of independence*³¹⁸.

Bangladesh was ruled by two successive army juntas who did away with the spirit of 1971. The country was ruled by anti-secular forces for the period 1975 through 1991. During that period, the school textbooks were re-written to thwart the spirit of 1971. An entire generation of kids grew up in Bangladesh without really knowing what their father's generation had to undergo and what sacrifices were needed to liberate this nation of Bangladesh from the evil clutch of Pak army and their yes men—Rajakars, Jamaatis, Al-Badars, Al-Shams, and an entire slue of Fifth Columnists who aided the army of gen. Tikka and Niazi. The country was also pushed towards a path of rapid Islamization. Thanks to easy petro-dollars from the Saudis and UAR Sheikdoms.

One sad aspect of this battle for the soul of Bangladesh, is that this nation, that will soon have its thirty-second birthday has been a land without a father figure. When I was in Bangladesh in 1998-99, Mujib's photos were everywhere. Now, since October 2001, photos of General Zia adorn all the office walls. In Pakistan, Jinnah is in every airport and post office, his photos everywhere for all posterity—Quaid-e-Azam, forever. In India, Gandhi is on all the rupee notes, his statue at intersections and in parks, his photo is ubiquitous. He is Mahatma, Bapu to ten crores³¹⁹ of Indians. But in Bangladesh, there is a sense of illegitimacy... the citizens can't remember or can't agree who is the father of their country.

This was brought dramatically to my attention in August 1999, when I was on an airplane from Dhaka to Calcutta. I struck up a conversation with several Bangladeshi passengers. Quite an intelligent and interesting discussion ensued between myself and two college students about my research into competing histories. As we were landing, a Bangladeshi lady in the seat in front of us, turned

³¹⁸ <http://bangladesh-web.com/news/mar/28/f28032002.htm>

³¹⁹ crore equals 10 million

around and said in a loud, almost angry voice that “Mujib is not the father of the country and calling him the father of the country is a lie”. She gave me her card, she was a member of the BNP, she told me to contact her for the “real story of the freedom movement”.

She was adamant in her denouncement of Sheikh Mujib. I told her that all countries had a father, like George Washington in the USA and Mahatma Gandhi in India. She responded that “most Bangladeshis don’t consider Mujib to be the father of the country, it is all Awami League propaganda”. By the time she finished speaking in a rather pompous voice, the seat belt sign was turned off, and literally dozens of Bangladeshi passengers approached and said, “don’t listen to her”. They yelled at her that she was a fool and didn’t know the “real” history of her country. Luckily there were no altercations, while the stewardesses watched on nervously. I waited and let the BNP lady off the plane in front of me.

In the airport more Bangladeshi passengers came up to me while we were waiting for our luggage and apologized for the lady’s comments. They assured me that Sheikh Mujib could be considered the “father of the country”. But the division was plain to see, an acrimonious uncertainty about a very sensitive and personal issue. One of the students I had been conversing with on the airplane, said to me, his eyes full of sorrow, “Bangladeshis have a collective memory loss. We’ve forgotten our past. We don’t know who our father is. We’re like a bastard child longing for a source of identity”.

A.H. Jaffor Ullah wrote about this problem, explaining that other “countries have no qualms about who their father figure is.”,

No one in Pakistan frets about Muhammad Ali Jinnah not being their national hero. They adore Jinnah so much in Pakistan that many in Pakistan think that his real name is Quaid-e-Azam. Similarly, M.K. Gandhi is revered so much that his portrait is seen in every office. Throughout Turkey one will see monuments to honor Kemal Atatürk. If this is the way a grateful nation shows

respect to their founding fathers, then what is the problem with Bangalees from Bangladesh? Are we such an ungrateful bunch that we do not show our gratitude to the founding fathers of our motherland?

Jaffor Ullah continued, concerned that such a serious disagreement about such an essential issue, as who is the father of the country, will keep his native land in turmoil. If they can't agree on something which should be a simple fact of history, how will they find balance in other spheres?

[A]n evil design well executed in the late 1970s had taken its toll. Because of this horrendous campaign our motherland is now divided by a fault line. I don't see much hope for this ingratitude nation in the coming decades. Think about if in America a debate is still raging about who is their founding father. A country that is divided as is the case in Bangladesh will have a slim chance to succeed. While other nations will march towards prosperity, Bangladesh folks will debate ad infinitum who is their real leader even though the historians are unanimous about it.

Professor Jaffor Ullah may be overly optimistic that historians are “unanimous” on the paternal parentage of Bangladesh. The BNP lady on the airplane certainly had the opposite opinion, and her party is now again in power. The college student who was so saddened by the confusion, that it brought tears to his eyes, like a fatherless child, is lost in the competitions. That question with all its shrill public contestations and sorrowful internalizations will be raging for the foreseeable future.

Political Overdose

An article appeared in the *Daily Star*, on May 07, 2003, titled, “Political overdose for primary students”.³²⁰ It told about the tit-for-tat publishing of politically motivated quasi-historical books that are pushed on the school children of Bangladesh. This article described the ups and downs of publishing based on the rise and fall of political fortunes. It also highlighted the mega-egos

³²⁰ Daily Star, Front Page, Wed. May 07, 2003, Volume 3 Number 1298
<http://dailystarnews.com/200305/07/n3050701.htm#BODY6>

of governmental leaders, who while in power, commission books about themselves and/or their deceased family members.

In his article subtitled, *18 books on the Zias, many authored by selection committee members, wives and friends*, Mustak Hossain reveals the bias in the selection of books. These are not history textbooks, but Bangla language readers published at government expense.

A committee has selected 18 books on late president Ziaur Rahman and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia as rapid readers for primary students. Political bias rather than contents was pivotal in selecting 14 books on Ziaur Rahman and four on Khaleda, alleged sources in the publishing industry.

The journalist explains the cronyism and nepotism that had guided the process. He quotes his sources in the publishing industry who “alleged” that “The motive behind the selection was *not only to please the ruling BNP* but to promote unfamiliar books” (emphasis added). His sources informed him that, “Many of the enlisted books were authored by committee members, their wives and friends”. It is no surprise that this governmentally appointed committee was partisan, it was established with that expectation, as are all such politically motivated bodies. The committee “also recommended five books written by Professor Jahanara Begum” a supporter of the BNP and “advisor of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED) with a state minister status”. Committee members promoted their own books in lieu of those of more respected scholars,

The committee ... ignored the books of noted authors like Begum Sufia Kamal,³²¹ Shawkat Osman, Hassan Azizul Huq, Dr Anisuzzaman³²² and Humayun Azad.

³²¹ Sufia Kamal is one of the most respected and beloved Bengali writers famous not only for her beautiful prose but inspiring writing. She has been awarded numerous literary prizes.

³²² Anisuzzaman is one of the most prominent and respected scholars in Bangladesh and is emeritus in the Department of Bangla at Dhaka University.

The author of this article, Mustak Hossain gives the names of numerous other authors whose Bangla language books were chosen, all associated with the current regime, or serving as members of the book selection committee.³²³

Hossain points out that due to the fact that the BNP came to power in a coalition with the Islamic parties, “The list of 250 books selected for different areas of Bangladesh also includes many on Islamic ideology”. These politically motivated “rapid readers” which are actually more like pamphlets designed for younger students rather than full fledged textbooks, will be published by “The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB)” that “has floated a tender on procurement of about 2.22 lakh³²⁴ copies of the books on primary and mass education.” Hossain reports that “The government will spend several crore³²⁵ taka on the yearly project”. Yearly, that is, while the BNP remains in office. If they are voted out then these politically motivated readers will be recalled and new readers about Awami League heroes will be republished.

“Professor Wakil Ahmed of Dhaka University” who headed the committee, though he “declined to comment on the selection of 14 books on Ziaur Rahman and four on Khaleda”, explained that the committee “tried to accommodate good books. But we could not always ensure quality”. As an alibi for the asymmetrical selection process that chose books of inferior quality because they were politically popular with the BNP, Professor Wakil Ahmed excused himself saying, “We live in a sickening society...”.

The author of the *Daily Star* article, commented that “Writers like Satyajit Ray and Mohammad Zafar Iqbal and national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam were not

³²³ “The list includes five books written by Abu Saleh, a leader of the Jatiyatabadi Samajik Sangskritik Sangstha, three by Iftekhar Rasul George, owner of Nowroj Sahitya Sangsad, two by MA Motalib Akhond, four by Al Mujahidi and two each by Mahmud Shafiq and Ahmed Musa, members of the selection committee.”

³²⁴ A Lakh equals one hundred thousand, so 2.2 lakhs is 220,000.

³²⁵ A crore equals ten million. Taka is Bangladeshi money.

included”. Though these authors are renowned for their beautiful use of the Bangla language, and as such would naturally be chosen for language readers, they were ignored in favor of political pamphlets about BNP leaders. The “sources say the committee selected ...only one book each of Rabindranath Tagore,³²⁶ Shamsur Rahman and Jasimuddin [and] of a few others like the three, *only to cover up its political bias*” (emphasis added).

Hossain’s sources who repeatedly requested anonymity, said “The books are not available... [in] the city's bookshops... as they are project-oriented” This anonymous publisher explained, “Those books are not meant for all”. “Another publisher alleged” that though “Eight hundred books were submitted to the NCTB when it invited samples and proposals.... *not all were selected on merit*” (emphasis added). Hossain writes that “The committee enlisted at least a dozen biographical books on Ziaur Rahman”. He lists their titles. He also gives the titles of the four biographical “books on Khaleda”. Hossain adds that “Earlier, a committee selected as many as 52 books on Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia for public and college libraries”. At the end of the article the journalist explains that this lop-sided selection criteria had also occurred during the previous government,

In the past, the Awami League also enlisted books for libraries on political considerations. During its rule, the AL selected as many as 34 books on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, seven on AL President Sheikh Hasina and 13 written by pro-AL intellectuals.

A second article on this topic by the same author appeared ten days latter in the *Daily Star*,³²⁷ titled *History in tunnel vision: College books depict Liberation*

³²⁶ Sidelining Tagore is to be expected by the BNP/Jamaat alliance, since many members of the governing coalition were pro-Pakistani and supported the banning of Tagore during the Pakistani crack down on Bengalee cultural identity.

³²⁷ These days in Bangladesh it is dangerous to do investigative journalism and several prominent journalists and scholars whose work is seen a threat to the ideology of the BNP ruling coalition

War the BNP way.³²⁸ Mustak Hossain, who has obviously taken a great interest in this issue wrote,

College students will now learn one-sided history of the Liberation War as a government project has selected all the books under the category relating to the war, influenced by the ruling BNP, sources in the education sector alleged.

He lists the names of numerous books, “selected ... under the Liberation War category” which include books about the “late president Ziaur Rahman and ... Prime Minister Khaleda Zia”. One of the books was called, *President Zia Kemal Ataturk of Bangladesh*.³²⁹ “Another book selected” about the Liberation War was written by the current BNP Minister of “Health and Family Welfare”.³³⁰ One “educationist, who asked not to be named”, said

There are a large number of books on the liberation struggle and it is not understandable why only three books by persons belonging to a certain political quarter have been selected.

The educationist lamented, “students would not be able to get a total picture of the liberation struggle from those books, rather they will get a one-sided view”. In addition to the “18 books on late president Ziaur Rahman and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia”, there are “17 books on the life and works of Ziaur Rahman and three on Khaleda Zia ...in two categories ... liberation war and reference books”.

“Worse still”, writes Hossain, editorializing his negative reaction that was undoubtedly shared by tens of millions of “Banglaees” who had lived through 1971, “*Worse still*,”³³¹ a book written by a former Pakistani general Rao

were arrested on flimsy charges and subjected to torturous treatment, simply for writing and researching. This is discussed again below.

³²⁸ Daily Star, May 18, 2003.

³²⁹ Written by “Prof. Niser Uddin”.

³³⁰ Dr. Khandoker Mosharraf Hossain

³³¹ I repeat this quote here for literary effect and to express my own surprise that this notorious book by a very biased participant in the war would unobjectively be suggested as appropriate reading for Bangladeshi students.

Forman Ali Khan --The Birth of Bangladesh--has been enlisted as a reference book”.

This bit of information must have sent shivers down the spines of historians like Muntassir Mamoon. Dr. Mamoon did extensive research into the Pakistan generals responsible for implementing Operation Searchlight on March 26 in Dhaka, and directing the ensuing nine months of atrocities against Bengalee civilians in 1971. Rao Farman is renowned in Bangladesh as the Pakistani general responsible for the murder of the intellectuals on December 14, 1971.

The journalist mentions the BNP government’s cancellation of several orders of secondary level books “due to various irregularities and political consideration in selecting the books”. He again informs his readers that, “Last year, a committee selected as many as 52 books on Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia for public and college libraries”. But to be fair, as in his previous article, Hossain explains, “Political consideration started getting priority in the selection of books when Awami League (AL) came to power in 1996”. He puts the BNP side of the drama into perspective,

During the AL rule, books for public libraries were selected on political consideration. Besides, 34 books on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, seven on AL President Sheikh Hasina and 13 written by pro-AL intellectuals were selected at that time.

But the words, “Worse still” were still ringing in the readers’ ears... “Rao Farman Ali³³² ... the person responsible for the murder of the intellectuals in 1971”.³³³

The Return of Rao Farman Ali

Muntassir Mamoon wrote in his authentically researched book, *The*

³³² see: Major Gen. Rao Farman Ali. 1992. How Pakistan Got Divided. Lahore.

³³³ Muntassir Mamoon. 2002. The Vanquished Generals and the Liberation of Bangladesh. Translated from Bengali by Kushal Ibrahim, Somoy Prokashon: Dhaka.

Vanquished Generals, that of all the generals he interviewed in Pakistan, Rao Farman Ali was the coldest and most calculated. Rao Farman left behind his diary when he fled Dhaka in December 1971. A page of “Rao Farman Ali's diary ...found in Banga Bhaban” is reproduced in Muntissar Mamoon’s book. On this page is a “List of intellectuals to be murdered” written in Farman’s own hand. His complicity in genocide and in particular in the murder of the intellectuals is undeniable.

He is guilty, except as he represents himself in his vision of the creation of Bangladesh, as narrated in his own book, which has now become suggested reading for Bangladeshi students. Though Farman denies his part in the genocide, many other Pakistanis blame him for planning and executing the level of violence that was used against the Bengalis. Farman had written in his now famous diary, "Green land of East Pakistan will be painted red".

Mamoon cites, “Hasan Zahir, a Pakistani civil servant at that time”, who in his book, *The Separation of East Pakistan* wrote, “Major General Farman Ali was the executor of Dhaka part of ‘Searchlight’. He succeeded in ‘shock action’ by concentrated and indiscriminate firing on the target areas”. According to Muntassir Mamoon, General Niazi, in his book about the creation of Bangladesh, “reserved his fiercest wrath for Rao Farman Ali.” Niazi told Mamoon that as they were evacuating East Pakistan, Rao Farman begged Niazi to take him to India to surrender, he was afraid that

Mukti Bahini would kill him for his alleged massacre of the Bangalis and intellectuals on the night of 15/16th December. It was a pathetic sight to see him pale and almost on the verge of breakdown.

Mamoon, states, about General Niazi’s book, which was “dedicated to the *Razakars*” that it “is a must” read, to “understand the mind of the Pakistani Generals”. Rao Farman Ali Khan’s book is less palatable.

Nonetheless, beginning in 2002, the school children of Bangladesh have been advised to read Rao Farman Ali's book as a reference source. They have not been told to consider it critically, as recommended by Dr. Mamoon, to read against the text, to understand the methods of denial used by the Pakistani generals. Mamoon describes "how Farman Ali narrates his tale". He "perfectly understood" reality, but avoided it skillfully

So ultimately the book becomes a mish-mash of exaggerations, half-truths and truths. But he has concocted the whole story so cleverly that it may seem believable to some readers. This is a good strategy for him, but disastrous for history or for the future.³³⁴

A quote from Farman Ali included in Mamoon's *The Vanquished Generals*, shows that he "advocated ...genocide" and excused the Pakistani Army's ruthlessness,

Some ... members exceeded their authority and killed a number of civil and police officials without proper trial. The Army was not able to control Biharis in taking revenge when badly affected areas were liberated by [Pakistani] Army.³³⁵

Professor Mamoon commented sarcastically, "neither he nor the Pakistan Army was responsible for the killing of the intellectuals; it was actually the freedom fighters or the Indian Army who did it!" Mamoon adds,

The Generals ... all seemed to agree that India had been conspiring to break apart Pakistan since 1947, and even our Liberation War was also the result of Indian conspiracies. Pakistani Generals have never managed [to] see past this illusion.³³⁶

Thirty years after the Liberation War, the children of Bangladesh have been advised to read Farman Ali's "lies" as a "reference source". Farman Ali was particularly friendly with Golam Azam and other leaders of the pro-Pakistani Bengali organizations such as the razakars. In 1971, Farman Ali was instrumental

³³⁴ Muntassir Mamoon. 2002. *The Vanquished Generals and the Liberation of Bangladesh*. Translated from Bengali by Kushal Ibrahim, Somoy Prokashon: Dhaka , pg 77.

³³⁵ Farman Ali, as quoted by Mamoon.

³³⁶ Mamoon. 2002, pg. 89.

in forming the ironically named “Peace Committees” that sponsored the blood-thirsty razakars and al-badars. Those retired razakars, former members of Farman Ali’s terrorist squads, are now part of the BNP coalition government. They have brought forth the memoirs of their former mentor, the man responsible for not only the murders of intellectuals on December 14, 1971, but the architect of Operation Searchlight. For those Bangladeshis who still admire the heroics of the freedom struggle, it came as a shock that Rao Farman Ali’s view of the liberation war is now promoted by the Government of Bangladesh.

During the past decade, since the return of democracy, the pendulum of historiography in Bangladesh has been swinging back and forth. As long as the divisions in society are as deep as they are, history will never find its balance. Until then, the continuing story of the nation can not be told in history textbooks in Bangladesh, and only Farman Ali’s propaganda, and hagiographies of General Zia are added to the recommended reading list.

Bangladesh: The Ghosts of the Generals

The historical narrative in Bangladesh has once again experienced a catharsis. This pendulum swing is more of a backslide, lapsing into the opposite direction of the rewriting that occurred in 1996 when the Awami League held the reigns of government. Since October 2001, when the BNP again won the elections by a slim margin, they have used this opportunity to re-seize the historical narrative, overturning the facts students were required to memorize for the past six years.

The school children in Bangladesh, will for the next six years, while the BNP has control of the Parliament and the NCTB, read in their textbooks that General Zia declared independence. They will read nothing about the razakars. Since those same razakars are now part of the ruling coalition, their bloodied role

in opposing the liberation of the nation, can not be included in the narrative. This dynamic example of shifting conversations in historical narrations from Bangladesh typifies the transitional nature of the historical narrative, but it is an extreme case.

The new post-October 2001 textbooks were not published in English, just Bengali. The Awami League books, published in 1997 and 1998, were the first English translations of NCTB textbooks after 1971 since the years of East Pakistan. Because so much of Bengali identity revolved around their love of their language, no English language subject specific textbooks were published by NCTB until 1997. Though there were English medium schools in Dhaka and elsewhere, Bengali medium was strongly encouraged.

In the 2001 BNP era textbooks, both Zia and Mujib are said to have declared independence—a compromise on the part of the BNP. However, in that newly scripted paragraph, Mujib's name comes once, Zia's twice. The event is not described in the very academic style found in the Awami League textbooks, who took the rewrite of this paragraph dead seriously. In the new BNP version, the paragraph is shorter. Zia's role is described with more ambivalence, rather than the factually detailed manner that it had been delineated in the 1998 version. In that telling, Zia was represented as just one of the many who declared independence “in Mujib's name” between March 25-27, 1971.

Several things were added into the textbooks in 1998 when they were radically revised after the Awami League came to power. One of the most important additions was a strong condemnation of the razakars, specifically naming the Islamic fundamentalist group, the Jamaat-i-Islami, who collaborated with the Pakistan Army throughout the war, and murdered the intellectuals on December 16, 1971. The Jamaat-i-Islami, who is now sharing the reigns of power with Mrs. Zia's BNP, made sure those lines were immediately removed from the

textbooks.

In 1997, the Jamaat had lodged a case against the NCTB for putting those sentences in the textbooks, which accused them of collaboration and murder—stating that the Jamaat, et al, had been razakars and anti-liberation forces during the liberation war in support of Pakistan. The law suit was eventually thrown out of court. My informant at the NCTB spoke about several of these issues in the spring of 1999, when the Awami League was still in power,

Thank God; thank the Honorable court justice that the petition is reported to have been declared void prima-facie. Now think of the audacity of those enemies of humanity, who were directly or indirectly reared and nourished and utilized for two decades. It is the irony of our national history that none of these butchers is known to have been punished; on the contrary the freedom fighters, patriot, intellectual and persons of liberal and progressive ideas often fall prey to their fanaticism and ferocity.

Since its inception as a nation, the Islamicist mandate in the realm of electoral politics was never validated in Bangladesh. Until the election of October 2001, the Jamaat-i-Islami candidates or other fundamentalist parties won few seats in the parliament. In Pakistan as well, they had never received more than eight percent of the votes, up until the contrived elections held by Musharraf in October 2002. In both nations, regardless of their lack of electoral clout through the years, nevertheless the Islamic fundamentalists wielded a tremendous amount of influence in society. Now in both nations they are in control of the reigns of power and their mandates may proceed unchecked, which often include curtailing the social and educational rights of women and encouraging violent jihadi elements.

In Bangladesh the Jamaat-i-Islami were not politically influential, winning only 3 seats in the previous election. But in October 2001, they came to power riding on a wave of anti-Americanism, raising alarms that Islam is in danger due to the “war on terror”. Prior to the last election, their unpopularity was due in part

because they were seen as collaborators, and are especially reviled for the brutal slaying of hundreds of intellectuals in Dhaka on December 14, 1971. Because of this tarnished history in the creation of the nation, the Islamicists have received minimal electoral support. Things have changed. A friend of mine from Dhaka, whose uncle was murdered on December 16, is very unhappy that Golam Azam's party is now part of the government of his country. He told me, that

It wasn't Golam Azam's buddies --- it was he himself who helped the Pakistani junta to prepare the list which contained my uncle's name! An extended list contained my dad's name; had the war lasted for only another week or so... my life could've been quite different.

During the past few decades, in villages and towns in Bangladesh, Jamaat-i-Islami activists have had an almost free reign to terrorize women and influence young male students who actively work to keep women from empowering themselves politically and socially. Now that they are part of the ruling coalition there are many people in Bangladesh who fear for their lives, and rightly so. Many of the people whom I interviewed when I was in Dhaka in 1998 and 99 have been arrested—charged with insulting the nation. Their crimes? They reported on the human rights abuses being carried out against the Hindu minority since the October 2001 elections.³³⁷

Back in January 2001, there seemed to be a reprieve from the fatwas and coercion in a sensational High Court judgment that made the international media. In an editorial from *The Friday Times*, Najam Sethi commented

Bangladesh High Court in Dhaka[that] handed down a judgment of great significance to all Muslim-majority countries that claim democratic statehood. They said that religious fatwas or edicts purporting to be Islamic law issued by maulvis, maulanas, muftis or

³³⁷ The unfavorable situation for journalists in Bangladesh since October 2001 is discussed again below.

other religio-political leaders are illegal and should be liable to punishment as any other illegality.³³⁸

The court decision included a critique of madrassa education, pointing out that “a particular group of men, upon getting education from madrassas or forming a religious group, are becoming fanatics with wrong views”. According to an Amnesty International press statement released on January 5, 2001,

dozens of fatwas are issued each year in Bangladesh by the rural clergy at village gatherings after receipt of complaints, usually against women who assert themselves in village family life. They impose flogging and stoning and other humiliating punishments such as shaving of heads, insults and beatings. They are also often involved in their execution.³³⁹

The Amnesty International report stated that in “many cases, there appears to be a financial motive involved. Fatwas can be a source of income for the local clergy, known as Fatwabaz (in fatwa business), who justify their deeds in the name of religion.” The press release mentioned that “In October 2000, the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance reported that 26 fatwas issued in the previous year were an attempt ‘to stifle any efforts to emancipate women’.” The two justices of the “High Court, Mohammad Gholam Rabbani and Nazmun Ara Sultana -- the first woman judge in the country” were threatened by Islamist groups who refused to accept the judgment. Dr. Kamal Hossain, who was a close associate of Sheikh Mujib and noted for authoring the original constitution, was “instrumental in persuading the judges to rule against the clerics”. He stated, “Fatwas are unconstitutional and against the fundamental rights.”³⁴⁰

³³⁸ Najam Sethi. “Leaf from Bangladesh”, The Friday Times, January 12-18, 2001, Lahore Pakistan.

³³⁹ Amnesty International Press Release, 5 January 2001, AI Index ASA 13/001/2001 - News Service Nr. 3, “Bangladesh: Landmark High Court ruling against fatwas”.

³⁴⁰ Arshad Mahmud (in Dhaka) BANGLADESH: The Final Edict: Religious zealots are stung to the quick as a court bans fatwas, “Outlook”, January 22, 2001 (article circulated electronically).

News reports from Bangladesh provided details about the response of the people to the daring ruling,

There was a perceptible sense of optimism and joy on the streets of Dhaka this New Year's day when the Bangladesh High Court, in a path-breaking judgement, declared all fatwas illegal. Human rights activists were jubilant because the judgement, they say, was a decisive blow to the menace of religious fundamentalism in the country. Within hours, the celebrations had spilled on to the streets.

But there are many pessimists too. Many say the verdict is unlikely to end repression against women in a country where they still play a subservient role and where semi-literate religious leaders, especially in rural areas, rule the roost. The response of fundamentalists too has added to their fear.³⁴¹

The verdict, however, has emboldened several victims to demand punishment against fatwa-happy local clerics. In the last one week alone, there have been at least a dozen newspaper reports of religious leaders fleeing their villages to escape the rising tide of public anger against them.³⁴²

Within ten months of this outpouring of relief, as women in rural areas were offered long denied protection from fatwas that were used to single females out for condemnation, the Mullahs have returned, bolstered by electoral victory. They now have a free reign to continue terrorizing common citizens, particularly the “uppity” women in rural Bangladesh. Given the current climate, the experience of my friend in a rickshaw after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib, when soldiers yelled at her to cover her head with a scarf, because the military was making Bangladesh an Islamic Republic, is becoming a reality.

A BNP Ban on Intellectuals

The human rights situation in Bangladesh has degenerated since the

³⁴¹ Fundamentalist groups put a death warrant on the lives of the judges, these are the same groups now in charge of Bangladesh in a coalition government.

³⁴² Ibid.

October 2001 election. Given this situation, while reading this chapter, Professor Rodney Moag commented that it is not surprising that “the political climate influencing the choice of, and content in, textbooks has, if anything, intensified since 2001, and at the present there is little prospect for any amelioration in the highly politicized and one-sided approach to educational materials”.

Negative treatment of the minority groups may become the norm. Reports translated from Bengali sources, can be found on the web page of the Human Rights Commission Bangladesh (HRCB)

The Daily Star ran articles about violence against the minority community in some districts, and intimidation at the ballot box. Here is a brief excerpt from a much longer, and very gruesome report from the HRCB website,

15 thousands minority families dislodged in two districts: thousands of houses ablaze, hundreds of women raped (Translated from Bengali) Report from Janakantha, Oct 10, 2001.

Shahriar Kabir wrote about this tragedy that has not abated since October 2001,

Annual reports on Bangladesh's state of human rights are regularly published by a number of national and international organizations, including the 'United States State Department', 'Amnesty International', 'Transparency International, etc.. The reports on the situation in 2001 show that human rights situation has dangerously deteriorated in Bangladesh.

Shahriar Kabir and many others Bangladeshi intellectuals, have been arrested for trying to bring out the facts of the post-October pogrom, he wrote,

The fierce persecution against the religious minorities that started soon after the October, 2001, general elections still continues even after the lapse of one year. The main opposition Awami League and a large section of Bangladesh's civil society have opined that the election was 'unacceptable' to them as the voting was influenced in many ways, including intimidation of opposition supporters and religious minorities.

Kabir further explains the problem,

The issue of communal torture has many dimensions in Bangladesh. If we take the recent incidents of communal atrocities in Bangladesh and link them only to elections or politics then it will not be fair or accurate. We need to know the historical, political, geographical, economical, cultural and psychological aspects of communal problems of Bangladesh to understand it in its entirety.

Another journalist, Saleem Samad, told the story of his arrest,

"I should kill you," the high-ranking Dhaka policeman said. He drew his pistol from his holster, shoved me to the floor and pressed the muzzle to my temple. "You are a traitor. You have betrayed your country. How dare you describe the nation as a haven for al-Qaeda and the Taliban?"

Samad's February 10, 2003 article in Time Asia, describes the BBC crew he worked for and then discusses the current political situation,

The government holds power with the help of fundamentalist Islamic groups that are changing Bangladesh's secular character; local Hindus and Christians are fleeing to neighboring India in the thousands, and the authorities are furious at media reports that Bangladesh is playing host to jihadis from Afghanistan and beyond. Rather than address these concerns, the government has systematically muzzled journalists and opposition leaders who try to get the story out. Since October, more than 4,000 people have been arrested and 44 have died in custody during a government crackdown supposedly directed at organized crime and euphemistically called Operation Clean Heart.

In December 2002, I received an urgent message from the daughter of Muntassir Mamoon, a well known intellectual in Dhaka who had been instrumental in bringing attention to the issue of war crimes. I had interviewed him and corresponded with him via email, so his daughter sent the desperate email to his mailing list. At the same time that this respected intellectual was arrested, so was Sheikh Hasina's secretary and dozens of others who were not sympathetic to the BNP government. Another letter arrived via email that explained the spate of arrests of intellectuals in Dhaka,

It is a long over due matter considering the present regime's planned and organized move to eliminate intellectuals from Bangladesh, a mirror image of 1971 blue print of the Pakistani junta and the Jamaat led Rajakar/Al Badar force.

In a lecture, "Threats and intimidation for secular and independent press in Bangladesh", that was presented on the auspices of World Press Freedom Day, 3

May 2003¹ Saleem Samad, wrote about the serious curtailment of civil rights under the BNP,

The newspapers, journalists and columnists [who] ascertained traditional secular beliefs were targeted by the government since the coalition of pro-right and pro-Islamic came to power in October 2001. The worst experience where those who exposed the identity of the war criminals during the bloody war of independence of Bangladesh in 1971 and covered civil society's demand for trial of war criminals.

Samad explains that "The government's acute paranoia contributed to the already existing level of violence against journalists". He quotes the Reporters Sans Frontiers Report on 2002, that called Bangladesh "by far the world's most violent country for journalists". He cites that since the BNP came to power with the coalition of Islamists, "at least 250 journalists were assaulted or threatened with deaths, three journalists murdered, 30 newspaper offices or press clubs attacked and 25 journalists detained".

There is tremendous interest in historiography in Bangladesh, as if it were a national pastime. Articles about history and the debates that emerge, are regular topics of newspaper and magazine articles. However, there is a difference with the manner that the same topic plays out in India, where the media airs the dirty linen, with no holds barred. In India, the editors and journalists take strongly one sided positions, they have no demands for objectivity since there is no retaliation from the government when the newspapers print highly partisan editorial lampooning the current government. Many editors, such as N. Ram at The Hindu have taken a special interest in historiography, with a decidedly anti-BJP editorial stance. The Hindu often presents alternating viewpoints on this topic.

This can be contrasted to the state of the debate in Bangladesh, where articles do regularly appear in the press decrying the manipulation and distortion of history. In contrast to India, there is a more hesitant approach very carefully tries not to step on the government's toes, while at the same time attempting to

actually report on excesses and corruption. Unfortunately, as has been discussed in this chapter, freedom of the press is still in question in Bangladesh. There are many independent newspapers and some that are aligned with one political party or another. *The Daily Star*, one of Dhaka's more successful and progressive newspapers is a model by any media standards. However, the pressures on journalists and editors in Bangladesh is not unsimilar to those in Pakistan. For example, in Peshawar and other cities, newspapers offices are often trashed by Madrassa trained youth in retaliation for some perceived transgression. Also when Navaz Sharif was Prime Minister, he ordered the arrest of Najam Sethi, the editor of Lahore newsweekly, *The Friday Times*, simply for being critical of the ruling party, the Muslim League. Sethi's arrest and detention caused an international uproar.

In the public debate over textbooks in Bangladesh issues are usually approached theoretically, as if the critiques will have little influence on the process itself. Perhaps intellectuals and journalists in Bangladesh were calloused by too many years of authoritarian governance, and have taken a fatalistic position, rather than a position on one side of the debate or the other. Taking a strong position in Bangladesh can be dangerous. Many journalists have been detained for reporting about the post-October 2001 persecution of the Hindu and Christian minority groups by gangs associated with the ruling parties. Just attempting to report about this issue got Shahriar Kabir arrested.

Ironically, the situation in today's Bangladesh can be contrasted to the days immediately following the crack down on March 26, 1971. The Pakistani authorities sent all the journalists out of the country and those who managed to stow away, hide out, and continue reporting about the carnage, such as Anthony Mascarenhas, were on the run and wanted men. Nonetheless, that indomitable Bengali resistance mentality and streak of intellectualism will prevail. Objective

Bangladeshi scholars and reporters stake their lives on that objectivity.

Unfortunately, today in Bangladesh that commitment is proving dangerous. Even so, reports about the Talibanization of Bangladesh continue to appear.

An ominous article appeared in Time Magazine Asia edition on October 21, 2002, a year after the BNP/Islamic coalition took control of the government. This article was criticized as promoting a sensationalized, westernized view of Bangladesh, but it was confirmed by several Bangladeshi friends. One friend predicted, in October 2001 when the USA attacked Afghanistan that, “when the bombing started, the dregs of al-Qaeda would find their way to Bangladesh, and be met with open arms by the fundamentalists” who had just won the election. Alex Perry’s Time article, written from Chittagong, confirms the fears expressed by my Bangladeshi friend a year earlier,

The arrival of a large al-Qaeda group in the capital Dhaka raises pressing concerns that Bangladesh may have become a dangerous new front in America's war on terror. Indeed, one Bangladeshi newspaper last month even quoted an unnamed foreign embassy in Dhaka as saying Osama bin Laden's No. 2, Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahiri, had been hiding out in the country for months after arriving in Chittagong. Today, southern Bangladesh has become a haven for hundreds of jihadis on the lam. They find natural allies in Muslim guerrillas from India hiding out across the border.

In 1999, a retired Bangladeshi ambassador told me that since the days of the military rulers, the Pakistani intelligence agency, the ISI, has been operating unobstructed in Bangladesh. He said they poured funds into the BNP election campaign in 1992 and one would assume in 2001 as well. Many commentators have explained that the election results, in which the fundamentalist parties won an unprecedented percentage of the votes, was successful because of the propaganda generated by the war on terror; “Islam is in danger”. An article in *Time*, published just after the election, explained,

At gatherings during the campaign, Jamaat leaders spoke of

breathing the 'Islamic spirit of jihad' into the armed forces while supporters rallied around posters of bin Laden and the HUJI slogan: 'AMRA SOBAI HOBO TALIBAN, BANGLA HOBE AFGHANISTAN. We will all be Taliban and Bangladesh will be Afghanistan.'

With these reports, it is not too difficult to guess how the contents of the textbooks may be altered during the BNP rule, and perhaps even the constitution. This study of textbooks in Bangladesh has not only shown the fragility and volatility of the historical narrative, but the frightening and destructive process of nation building in that tortured country. Several BNP governmental advisors, with full minister's status, "are renowned al-badar's, or were known to have a torture camp operating at their residences in 1971, or have been arrested for political murder as recently as within the past year"³⁴³. Quite disturbing, in a world where the air waves are full of calls for international Jihad from Osama bin Laden and colleagues.

Hindus and the 'Pollution of the Political Air'

The treatment of the Bangladesh War of Independence is a succinct example of the production of knowledge based on diverging points of view. Bangladesh came in to being with the help of Indira Gandhi's international diplomatic efforts, the important contribution of the government in exile in West Bengal, the indisputable aid of the Indian army. Bangladeshi textbooks have downplayed India's support. Bengalis, both the guerrilla forces, and the civilians were indeed very heroic, but the civil war was cut dramatically short with the help of India.

Without the funds, training and diplomatic efforts of India, the Muktijuddha, or guerrilla forces could never have ousted 93,000 Pakistani troops

³⁴³ From an email from a friend from Dhaka.

in nine short months. India's contribution is an incontestable fact. The war had gone on with hit and run tactics for nine months. Bangladeshi regiments were armed and trained in India. It is indisputable.

When Pakistan bombed Indian airbases in an attempt to preempt India's involvement, Indira Gandhi declared war on Pakistan and immediately recognized Bangladesh, whose government in exile welcome the liberators. From that moment on, it took only eleven days for the Indian Army to march across East Pakistan into Dhaka. The Muktiyuddha accompanied them, victoriously, it was a joint effort, not an invasion. But without the advance of the Indian forces that cut across the country in those now famous eleven days³⁴⁴, the war would have gone on much longer with far more death and suffering. The generals of the Pakistani Army surrendered to the Indian Army, along with "the joint forces", but in Bangladeshi history, India's role is seen as insignificant.

Pakistani textbooks blame Hindu-India for the breakup of the country, ignoring the rise of Bengali nationalism, the manipulation of the elections, and the military crackdown, which led to the civil war. Pakistani textbooks describe India's involvement as calculated aggression.³⁴⁵ They particularly blame the Hindu population in the eastern wing of the country for "polluting the political air". According to this way of reasoning, the larger number of Hindus in the eastern wing of the country had negatively influenced the religious beliefs of Bengali Muslims—driving them away from Allah, and hence towards secession. In Indian textbooks the war is explained as a humanitarian response to millions of

³⁴⁴ I've been told that at cricket matches between the India and Pakistan, Indian fans sometimes chant, "Eleven days! Eleven days! Gyaarah din! Gyaarah din!"... rubbing in the complete rout of December 1971.

³⁴⁵ Pakistani Studies for Secondary Classes, Lahore: Punjab Textbook Board, 1997, page 205.

refugees who had crossed into West Bengal, and of course the fact that Pakistan bombed their airbases.³⁴⁶

In Pakistani textbooks published during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's time, 1971-1976, there was no mention of Bangladesh, though Bhutto officially recognized Bangladesh in 1974. Explaining Bengali nationalism in the context of the “Two-nation Theory,” was challenging because it inherently negated the theory. Indira Gandhi claimed that the creation of Bangladesh had “thrown the Two-Nation Theory in the Bay of Bengal”. When a discussion of the split-up Pakistan is finally described in Pakistani textbooks, twenty years after the birth of Bangladesh, it is explained by saying,

[T]he leadership of East Pakistan has been in the hands of [separatists, who] in collaboration with the Hindu teachers, polluted the political air and spread poisonous propaganda among the young students of East Pakistan.³⁴⁷

No Bangladeshi textbook has ever mentioned the influence of “pro-Hindu teachers” Ironically, even though Hindus were singled out by the Pakistani army and razakars, their contributions to the war effort and sacrifice to the nation are not mentioned in Bangladeshi textbooks. I asked several scholars why the textbooks didn’t mention the fact that in the Pakistani Military’s White Paper, the army had orders to “kill Hindus”. I was told each time that “Bangladesh is a secular country and we don’t identify people by religion”. Nonetheless, the word Hindu is used numerous times in the textbooks, sometimes in a disparaging context, such as their negative influence on certain social customs, but never in relation to their contribution to the war of liberation. It is reasoned that this deliberate oversight, delinking Hindu citizens from the War of

346 Contemporary World History, A History Textbook for Class XII, Part I, Arjun Dev, Indira Arjun Dev, New Delhi: National Council of Educational Research and Training, 1995.

347 An Introduction to Pakistani Studies, for Intermediate/Senior Cambridge Classes, Rabbani, M. Ikram and Sayyid, Monawwar Ali. Lahore: The Caravan Book House, 1992, page 319. Please note, in another chapter I have written a lengthy discussion of Pakistani textbooks.

Liberation, makes it easier to consider them India spies and deny them their rights in an Islamic republic.

West Pakistanis were told that the large population of Hindus in East Pakistan had corrupted the minds of Bengali Muslims. The soldiers' orders were to "kill Hindus". The Hindu Student Hostel at Dhaka University was the first building to be attacked by Pakistani tanks on the night of March 25, 1971. But the land that took their lives in the making, has consciously decided to erase that ultimate contribution. In a statement dated November 1, 1971 US Senator Edward Kennedy wrote:

Field reports to the US Government, countless eye-witnesses, journalistic accounts, reports of International agencies such as the World Bank and additional information available to the subcommittee document the reign of terror which grips East Bengal (East Pakistan). Hardest hit have been members of the Hindu community who have been robbed of their lands and shops, systematically slaughtered, and in some cases, painted with yellow patches marked 'H'. All of this has been officially sanctioned, ordered and implemented under martial law from Islamabad.³⁴⁸

The mandate of the Pakistani Army was to "kill Hindus". The collaborators within East Pakistan, such as the razakars and al-badars, helped to locate Hindu homes and businesses, marking them with a yellow H,³⁴⁹ because of this the genocide was highly communal and horribly bloody. Within a few months, ten million refugees, mostly Hindus, were in camps in India. The anti-Hindu mission of the Pakistani Army can be verified by numerous sources and

³⁴⁸ Crisis in South Asia: A Report by Senator Edward Kennedy to the Subcommittee Investigating the Problem of Refugees and Their Settlement, Submitted to U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, November 1, 1971, US Govt. Press, p. 66. (quoted from Bertil Lintner, THE PLIGHTS OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES AND THE RISE OF ISLAMIC EXTREMISM IN BANGLADESH, February 2, 2003, at: http://www.asiapacificms.com/papers/ethnic_and_religious_minorities_bangladesh.pdf)

³⁴⁹ This is reminiscent of an order implemented by the now notorious Taliban that required the few Hindus left in Kabul to wear yellow triangles to mark them as non-Muslims—just Jew were required to do under the Nazis..

easily obtainable data. It is so widely documented that it does not need to be argued here. Though this fact is obscured in Bangladeshi textbooks, there were stories that I was told while in Bangladesh that corroborate this information, and deserve to be repeated.

A professor in the History Department at Dhaka University told me about his experiences during the months after the Pakistani Army took control of the country. When the bloodbath began in March, he and his family, along with many other Dhaka professionals fled to their ancestral villages hoping to escape the violence. For a few months, during the monsoon, the Pakistani junta declared an amnesty of sorts and made announcements asking scholars and professionals to return to Dhaka--to their posts in classrooms and hospitals. Promises were made that they would not be arrested. There had been a definite lull in the violence during the summer and many people decided to return to their jobs.

This professor, with whom I spoke with a length, told me that in April he and his family had gone to the home of his wife's relatives in a village in the northern part of the country. Since many professors had been targeted during the early weeks of the crackdown, there had been a mass exodus from the university campuses, which were seen as hotbeds of secessionists. In July of 1971, with promises of security, many returned to their homes on the campus of Dhaka University.

While on a barge, crossing a river on their way back to Dhaka my friend and his family encountered several Pakistani soldiers. Since the professor spoke Urdu they struck up a conversation. The professor was initially worried that he might be arrested or killed, but soon the soldiers waylaid their fears because, as they explained to the professor and his family, they had been "sent to kill Hindus". The professor and his family were Muslim.

The soldiers complained that “for the past few months they had not been able to find many Hindus”. He confided to the professor that he felt frustrated that “the Pakistani government had sent them to East Pakistan to kill Hindus” but he found mostly Muslims. He added that he “didn’t mind killing Hindus but killing Muslims was against [his] religious beliefs”. Needless to say, the professor was relieved, if horrified by the implications.

Unfortunately, a low-grade persecution of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh has seldom abated since 1971. Their properties have been confiscated and not returned, regardless of endless law cases. They are discriminated against in government service, denied military service because they are seen as “Hindu traitors”, and their temples and shrines are regularly vandalized.

I interviewed numerous Hindus in Dhaka and Mymensingh who told me stories of how their lives were continually in danger. Controversial as it may be, they also told me that their daughters are often kidnapped, “forcibly converted and married to Muslim boys”. They explained that, “once converted, even by force”, there is nothing they can do, because “if the girls want to come home” and return to their ancestral religion they are then “accused of apostasy” and run the risk of being murdered by the decree of a fatwa. Because of these pressures, the Hindu population of Bangladesh continues to shrink annually. “Afsan Chowdhury, a historian and social activist, describes low intensity violence against religious and ethnic minorities as [a] silent disaster.”³⁵⁰

A.H. Jaffor Ullah explained this process,

For the last few years we have read the news of street agitation in which Islamists marched with the banner to propound a Sharia-

³⁵⁰ Chowdhury, Afsan. 1998. “Disasters: Issues and Responses”, in Philip Gain (ed.) Bangladesh Environment: Facing the 21st Century. Dhaka: Society for Environment and Human Development., quoted in: Samad, Saleem. State of Minorities in Bangladesh: From Secular to Islamic Hegemony, at: http://www.mnet.fr/aiindex/ssamad_Bangaldesh.html.

based constitution. In the last quarter century, Bangladesh indeed had almost given up the secular spirit that was associated with our freedom struggle of 1971. In its place the powerful politicians have resurrected a defunct concept of nationalism that is solidly anchored to a virulent form of anti-India feelings. This new nationalism that is referred to as Bangladeshi-ism is at best an insular view that tries to play on the cheap sentiment of people often citing pan-Islamism as the main inspiration of this movement.³⁵¹

This observation mirrors critiques of Pakistani textbooks where anti-Indianness forms the basis of the narratives. “Bangladeshi-ism” and the “Ideology of Pakistan” have the same source and intention. Najum Mushtaq, a Pakistani journalist wrote that there are no “other terms” for “Pakistani-Muslim nationalism” except “anti-Indianism”. He added, in a June 2001 article, “The ‘ideology of Pakistan’ as defined to students at every school and college in the country is nothing except anti-Indianism”. In Pakistan, the propaganda against Hindu India is pervasive. As Mushtaq wrote, “In every walk of life in Pakistan--from academia to journalism, from sports to bureaucracy--a vast majority of people have been inculcated with fantastic anti-India notions”. Bangladeshi textbooks are more circumspect when discussing Hindus and Hinduism, though one NCTB textbook blamed problems of dowry on “degenerate Hindu influences”. However, in Pakistani textbooks, “Phrases like the ‘Hindu mentality’ and ‘devious Indian psyche’ are part of the daily military talk”.³⁵²

The textbooks in Bangladesh are not as manically anti-Hindu as in Pakistan. But there is a sense of anti-India sentiment that pervades the country. Bangladeshis perceive that they have to constantly be on guard to resist Indian hegemony--financially, culturally, and militarily. Bangladeshis often asked me if I thought India had any “designs” on their country. Many people in Dhaka told me

³⁵¹ A.H. Jaffor Ullah. A divided nation after 31 years of independence, <http://bangladesh-web.com/news/mar/28/f28032002.htm>

³⁵² Mushtaq, Najum. “Ideological Crossroads”, *The New Internationalist*: June 10, 2001, <<http://www.jang-group.com/thenews/jun2001-daily/10-06-2001/oped/o3.htm>>.

that in December 1971, after the Pakistani troops surrendered, the Indians were planning to stay in Bangladesh but the Bengalis ran them off. I was asked the same question many times, “Do you think India will try to take over Bangladesh?”³⁵³

It is that perceived threat of an Indian invasion that is used as the standard justification for the military coup that brought Zia to power. The politics of Zia’s party, the BNP, are buoyed by a pervasive anti-Indian rhetoric. When the BNP is in power, fear and loathing towards their neighbor increases. During the last election, the BNP campaigned that the Awami League was too pro-India – Sheikh Hasina would surrender Bangladesh’s hard won freedom. Hasina, during the 2001 elections made numerous anti-India comments to prove her loyalties. That she was compelled to do so to attract votes is an indication of the level of anti-Indian feelings among the people. Notably, the majority of Bangladeshi intellectuals are not anti-Hindu and they don’t hate India-- most of them go there occasionally for conferences. But, among the common people the feelings of anti-Indianness are increasing.

If this trend continues, soon all Hindus, such as Ram Mohan Roy, Satyajit Ray, and Rabindranath Tagore, may be erased from the story of Bengali culture. If this is allowed to happen, Bangladeshi cultural nationalism will exist no more and the BNP will have succeed in making anti-Indianism the basis of the nation, as it is in Pakistan. Najum Mushtaq wrote, “Anti-Indianism, in short, runs deep in Pakistani state and society. It is a state of mind that cannot be switched off”. He adds, “People have no other alternative frame of reference in which to define Pakistani nationalism”. Bangladeshi nationalism still has its historical reference points, but they are quickly disappearing.

³⁵³ I always replied that Bangladesh had more to fear from global warming than an attack from India.

The population of Hindus in Bangladesh has continued a steady decline since 1947. According to the *Bangladesh Population Census of 1991, Vol. I, Analytical Report*, the percentage of Hindus in Bangladesh in 1951 was 22%, by 1961 their demographic composition had declined to 19%. Since the traumas inflicted on Bangladesh in 1971 precluded the taking of a census, when it was taken again in 1974, the percentage of Hindus had decreased significantly to 14%. The decline has continued through the decades, with the total percentage decreasing to 12.75% in 1981 and 11% in 1991 and about 9% in 2001. This decline is not due to radically reduced birth rates, but rather to the continuing exodus of Hindus from Bangladesh due to sporadic persecution.

In Bangladesh, several times when I was introduced to a Hindu Bangladeshi, he or she would be called, “my Indian friend”. I asked these people if they were from India. I was told each time that they had never been to India and they were born in Bangladesh as had been their fathers and their fathers’ fathers. I asked why they were introduced as “Indian”. They explained that “Bangladeshis think all Hindus are Indian”. I was told by many non-Hindu Bangladeshis, “that professors and other professionals who are Hindus, work in Bangladesh but send their children to study in India and send their savings to relatives in Calcutta”. Several people in Bangladesh complained that, “all the Bangladeshi Hindus plan to retire in West Bengal”. “Their children all go to school at Shanti Niketan” the school of Rabindranath Tagore in West Bengal.

The Hindus I spoke with were not secure in their place in Bangladesh, and were often intimidated. This was told to me during the time of Awami League rule, which my Hindu informants explained was far more friendly to the Hindu minority. The BNP is known to be very anti-Hindu, partially because the Hindus tend to vote for the Awami League, since AL represents a more pan-Bengali

nationalism, whereas the BNP represents an Islamic Bengali nationalist orientation.

Bangladesh: A Tale That Can't Be Told

In social studies textbooks in Bangladesh, the official story of the country ends a few weeks after liberation on December 16, with the return of Sheikh Mujib from confinement in Pakistan on January 10, 1972. Naturally, this would be the ending for textbooks written immediately after the creation of the nation. But, there have been no new additions made to the official textbook history of contemporary Bangladesh for over thirty years. Though Zia and Ershad changed some of the details around, their administrations have not been included as part of the continuing story of Bangladeshi history. For the school children of Bangladesh, history stopped in January 1972.

Even in the Civics books, changes made to the constitution are barely discussed. It is as if the death of Mujib was so horrific that it could not be told in the textbooks, so nothing about Zia's and Ershad's rise to power at the center could be added, without at least mentioning the brutal fact that Bangabandhu et al had been murdered. Therefore no continuing political events beyond this point can be considered in NCTB historiography.

Even in the textbooks published during the Awami League's tenure in the late nineties, the murder of Sheikh Mujib is not included. The story of the nation as written in the textbooks, ends as soon as the country comes into existence. This has not changed in thirty-one years of independence. Neither the BNP or the Awami League has been able to write textbooks about the history of Bangladesh after January 10, 1972.

The retelling of certain events leading to the liberation of the nation are highly contested, they can and have been told and retold in the media, on internet

discussion groups, in numerous books written since 1971. There are a wide selection of books about the events post-1971, written from one perspective or another. But for the children of Bangladesh, the events after independence have not been written into their textbooks.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's murder in August 1975 was gruesome. The leader of the country was gunned down in his home in Dhaka, along with most of his family, including his wife, three sons, one of whom was only a child, and two daughters-in-law, one who was pregnant, as well as his secretary and a servant and another group of Awami Leaguers, twenty-one people in all. Two of his daughters were in Europe at the time including Sheikh Hassina.

Writing about this tragic mass murder, not to mention the four Awami leaders who were murdered in a jail cell on November 3, continues to be too controversial for school level textbook writers. Importantly, it was politically dangerous for the military rulers to include that bit of history—in which they were implicated. Zia and Ershad were willing to forego their own place in the history textbooks in order to avoid discussing the assassination of Mujib. So, the telling of history had to end as the history of the independent nation came into being.

Each and every Bangladeshi scholars with whom I spoke expressed a pride in the long and colorful history of their nation. But there was also a fear of history that pervaded the conversations. The political climate was so charged that the story of the nation could not be written. It could not be agreed upon. Mujib may have been the inspirational figure behind the Bangladesh independence war, but he became degenerate, and needed to be killed—or so it is claimed. How would the BNP write that into a school textbook? In Bangladesh, the historical narrative had been twisted just enough by military dictators to emulate the

Pakistani model that denigrates and attacks cultural nationalism in favor of pan-Islamism.

Bangladeshis love their history—pushing ancient Bengali identity on past the pre-Aryan period-- tracing the development of Bengali history through numerous great dynasties, Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic. Bangladeshi textbooks are very Bengali-centric, from proto-history to the present. History textbooks in most countries use this ethnocentric approach.

Textbooks published in the early years of Bangladesh, included the richness of the ancient past. They did not eschewed the history of Hindu India or the civilization of the Subcontinent. History about other areas besides East Bengal are usually brief and tangential to the narrative about Bangladesh, but, importantly, it is not ignored, as non-Muslim history is usually ignored in Pakistani textbooks. As mentioned, in Pakistan's textbooks the creation of Bangladesh barely gets mentioned, except in the context of a "Hindu conspiracy".

In Pakistani textbooks Bangladesh was eventually included--history did not come to an end the moment Pakistan came in to being. Pakistani textbooks continue the tale of the nation, warped and white-washed as it may be, the narrative proceeds from 1947 to the present. Ayub is mentioned, as are both Bhuttos, though the lens through which they are evaluated is not necessarily positive. General Zia-ul Haq is in the textbooks, praised for his efforts to Islamize the nation. Nawaz Shariff is even mentioned, and after May 1998, two paragraphs were added justifying the tests of the nuclear bombs. In the most recent editions, General Musharraf has found a place in the narrative, even the Agra Summit is discussed, where the General is described as a diplomat, whose efforts were scuttled by the Indian government's trickery.

As each leader in Pakistan replaces the next, the story of his or her predecessor is altered slightly, especially if he or she had been arrested, executed,

or exiled. With each regime change, the tale of the new leader is inserted, only to be redistorted when the next election or coup replaces the previous government. In Pakistan, regardless of its interpretation, the history of the nation marches on. Not so in Bangladesh.

Bangladeshis have found it difficult to write the history of their country after the creation of the nation. The fact that history is frozen is doubly strange considering the pride Bangladeshis take in not only the liberation war, but the vast scope of Bengali history through the millennia. However, controversies about certain historical events make reconstructing them almost impossible. An article by the scholar, M. Rashiduzzaman, *Bangladesh: In Search of a New Historical Envisioning*³⁵⁴, helps to explain this problem,

The post-independent Bangladesh history has been largely anecdotal and memory-based, which is a popular, yet a faulty, mode of historical writing. There is always a void between memory-driven popular construction of the past and historiographical evaluation of the yore, and it is risky to make a compelling historical judgment primarily based on memories and personal anecdotes that could be tainted and manipulated.

The fact that many of the freedom fighters are still living makes the collection of data about the independence war a rich experience. Afsan Chowdhury a well know writer and historian from Dhaka, collected stories from Bangladeshis who had contributed to the war effort or who were victimized by it. But the television station he worked for Ekushy was shut down when the BNP came back to power. In the first few years of the nation, there was an effort to preserve the memory of the war effort. But, according to many scholars, after the generals came to power there was a concerted effort to destroy all the records of

354 Published in Holiday's Special Anniversary Edition October 1999 -- M. Rashiduzzaman has been called a collaborator and his work is considered to be apologist for Pakistani atrocities and in support of the Islamization of Bangladesh.

the people's struggle during the War of Liberation.³⁵⁵ This seems like a far fetched accusation, since both parties are fixated on the liberation war, and extract their validation for the images associated. However, the generals sought to take the cultural aspect out of the nationalism, and replace with religious conservatism.

Whither Contemporary History in Bangladeshi Textbooks?

The Social Studies textbooks published by the National Curriculum and Textbooks Board in Bangladesh in 1998, which were the first editions that also had English translations, were in general non-communal in tone, except for a few references to “degenerate Hindu influences.” The NCTB textbooks, though fairly uninformative, as are most textbooks, are up to date regarding the rest of the world, including such details as the Gulf War in 1990 and the situation in Bosnia in 1995.

Though there are textbooks which include ancient histories of Rome, Egypt, and other general historical information, the majority of the pages in the social studies textbooks are dedicated to the development of Bengali nationalism and the emergence of Bangladesh. In textbooks published in 1997-98, descriptions of the struggle for autonomy from Pakistani dominance explain the exploitation, the political treachery, the valiant and bloody war of liberation, the creation of the nation. At which point the narrative ends.

Nationalism was achieved. The Bengali nation came into being with the blood of millions of martyrs, and the rape of three hundred thousand innocent women and girls. These heroes and heroines gave their lives and were subjected to terror and torture so that they and their fellow Bengalis could have among other rights, the freedom to tell the history of their nation in their own terms. Yet, once

³⁵⁵ Tito Scohel claims that “In 1977, all the recorded (celluloid) documents on liberation war (1952-1971) were destroyed from the FDC archive under the express order by the then president, General Ziaur Rahman”. I could not confirm this claim.

independence was achieved, the contemporary history of their nation ceased to be written.

Textbooks designed for Bangladeshi students delve into the distant past and speak of the lasting influences of Buddhism on the Bengali psyche, discuss the dynamic and relevant contributions of such Hindu greats as Ram Mohan Roy and Rabindranath Tagore. By winning the War of Liberation they not only saved their country from a narrow view of history based on the Two Nation Theory-- which erased five thousand years of the Subcontinent's past--but they recaptured it from the communal forces, so that they could describe a proud past that stretches back into distant millennia and includes heroes of various religions.

Ironically, after the success of such a heroic effort, the curriculum committees were unable to continue writing the modern history of their country. They eagerly rewrote the story of the ancient period, rescuing it from the short sighted perspective of Pakistani textbooks editors. They detailed the events that characterized the past, glorifying the growth of Bengali nationalism. They reveled in the stories of resistance to Pakistani autocracy and the drive for freedom and democracy. . . the "inevitability of Bangladesh". . . but, at that point, the story ends, at least in the textbooks. Even the military rulers, though they tried to manipulate the narrative, had to let the story of bravery and exploitation tell itself, but only up until January 1972.

In Bangladesh, the rest of the world continues to have a history--the Soviet Union collapses, Blacks gain the right to vote in South Africa--all these are mentioned in contemporary Bangladeshi textbooks. Yet, there is no discussion of the assassinations of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman or General Zia. In the textbooks there is nothing about the popular movement to end the military rule and the restoration of democracy in 1991. The Gulf War and the Balkans are discussed. .

. but in Bangladeshi textbooks, contemporary history of the nation ended as soon as the state came into being.

The Secondary *Civics* textbook published in 1998 mentioned the fifth amendment which created a presidential form of government and had one sentence about the Indemnity Ordinance, that pardoned the assassins of Sheikh Mujib, which was described as a “disgrace”. At any rate, that particular update to the Civics textbook was extracted in 2001. History textbooks only describe the events leading up to the creation of Bangladesh—and that is narrated differently every six years. Though the history of the rest of the world continues, Bangladeshi NCTB historiography-by-committee ignores the events in independent Bangladesh. A crystallized example of this fear of history is the difficulty faced when narrating the story of November 7, 1975.³⁵⁶

How would an objective historian recount the events leading from August 15 to November 7, and its consequences? Perhaps two columns, where the opposing points of view could juxtapose the divergent perspectives and empower the students to analyze, instead of simply memorize. Must history be a sanitized consensus, that changes when the political party at the center changes, or is it in fact, a “furious debate informed by evidence and reason.”³⁵⁷

In Bangladeshi textbooks, it is ironic that Saddam Hussain's name appears, but not Colonel Taher, a great hero of the War of Independence. Taher fell out with Mujib and was later hung by Zia, so neither of the polarized groups claim him. Nelson Mandela's name appears once, as does the name of Tajuddin Ahmed.

³⁵⁶ Half the society sees this as a great day for Bangladeshi nationalism when the military saved the fledgling country from foreign domination, the other half views it as a tragic day when the army came out of the cantonment, betraying the populist inception of the revolution, and ushering in seventeen long years of military rule. There is no objective middle road in evaluating this event.

³⁵⁷ Lowen, James. *The Lies My Teacher Told Me*.

Tajuddin Ahmed's place in history has been excluded from most Bangladeshi treatments. He was the Awami Leaguer who led the government in exile from Mujibagar, established near Calcutta. Tajuddin Ahmed and Mujib disagreed over the creation of Baksal, a one-party state. He was forced to resign his post as minister in the government in 1974.

Tajuddin Ahmed was one of the most important actors leading to the creation of Bangladesh. He was the ‘acting’ Prime Minister in the government in exile, while the war was raging in his country and Sheikh Mujib was in prison in the western wing. Tajuddin’s strained relationship with Mujib was brought about in part, by intrigues orchestrated by General Khandaker Mushtaq Ahmed, whose name, as Mascarenhas wrote, has become synonymous “with treachery”.

Of all the actors in the Bangladeshi drama, Tajuddin’s determination to be true to the vision of the liberation movement is unparalleled. Yet he is ignored in history. Tajuddin’s ideas for a pluralistic democratic Bangladesh were betrayed by his friend and mentor Sheikh Mujib. He was politically sidelined in the early years, as his country crashed headfirst in to constitutional chaos.

Tajuddin was murdered by the order of a scheming colleague Khandaker Mushtaq Ahmed, who had made himself president after Mujib’s assassination. The murder of Tajuddin was preplanned. Khandaker Mushtaq then promulgated the original Indemnity Ordinance to exonerate those who had killed Mujib. Indemnity was also given to the military men who had stormed the jail that night in November 1975, and murdered Tajuddin along with three other prominent Awami League leaders. The Indemnity Ordinance was institutionalized into the constitution by General Zia. All these things have not made it into the textbooks.

Tajuddin Ahmed was one of the main players in the war of liberation. He was also the most honest of many of those players. In 1998, he was posthumously awarded the long overdue respect denied to him. This “rehabilitation” that was

accorded to him when AL was in power, has certainly been withdrawn by the BNP. Army personnel brutally murdered him to ensure that no civilians capable of leading the nation remained alive. The military wanted to keep the power. It was therefore essential to murder all democratic statesmen.

March 25 is Independence Day, a holiday in Bangladesh that marks the day that the war of liberation began. On that date in 1999, on the front page of the *Daily Star*, was an article, “Tajuddin is being honored but...”. It described the fallout between Mujib and Tajuddin over the creation of the one-party system and his resignation.

On at least two occasions in October 1974, the Bangabandhu tried, unsuccessfully to convince Tajuddin whose argument lay in his belief that the one-party system and the centralization of powers in one hand were going to do more harm than good to the nation. The front page article reproduces his “forced” letter of resignation and states, “History is full of ironies”. The author explains,

A quarter of a century [after falling out of favor with Sheikh Mujib] he is being eulogized and rehabilitated as one of the national heroes alongside the person who had shown him the door. The staff reporter at the *Daily Star* asked an important question,

Now that the man, who carried forward the tasks of the founding father in his absence during those nine months in 1971, is being remembered with respect, we see reasons to raise at least one question. The nation had long neglected the founding father but came back to recover from the nonchalance. Why not the other person, who in the absence of the Bangabandhu held everything together? Tajuddin, who led the Liberation War as the head of the helpless government in exile to victory, should now be given his due.

How long will it be before Tajuddin finds his permanent place in Bangladeshi history? There are numerous non-communal, academically rigorous, and objective scholars and historians in Bangladesh who could write about the events of 1972-2003. Among most intellectuals I interviewed there was a fear to

face the past and others who unfortunately feel straight-jacketed by contemporary political pressures. If new chapters had been added by the Awami League in 1997, which they weren't, they would have been expunged or radically revised by the BNP in 2001. But neither camp can write about the post-independence past.

My informant at the NCTB responded to this criticism,

The observation made in this point is absolutely pertinent. As time and tide wait for none, so the history of Bangladesh cannot come to a halt with achievement of independence. Scantily reverses to or treatment in brevity of the historical event of post independence Bangladesh do not give a clear and vivid picture, rather tend to create confusion and misconception. There may be controversy and differences of opinion on issues like assassination of Mujib, Zia, and advent and exit of Ershad. But historical analysis and evaluation will elicit the truth and determine their respective place in the annals. This issue was raised on different occasions and hopefully will be settled in the next cycle ... the murder of Bangabandhu, Zia, and [other] leaders is a potent factor in this matter.

In 1999 when I made this observation at a lecture in Dhaka, about the lack of post-1971 history in the textbooks, it did seem that the time had arrived to add a few more chapters. Members of the audience commented that the nation had come into being against all odds--it's continuing story "should be told to the school children". The discussion revolved around the purpose of education. Several people insisted that the youth must be told about the past so they could form their own informed ideas. They argued that students must be given adequate information to help them make choices and decisions that would hopefully provide Bangladesh with intelligent citizens for the future.

The history of Bangladesh certainly did not stop in January 1972, only the narrative came to an end. Now, with the reelection of the BNP, as also with the rewriting of Bangladeshi history during the recent Awami League period, the story continues to be stunted, unable to coalesce and progress past the death of Mujib, the disputed father of the nation.

Bangladeshi Identity and Textbooks

In Bangladesh as in all nations, an attitude of certainty regarding the efficacy of education is easily observable. In Dhaka in 1999, there were often articles in the newspapers, such as the May 3 edition of *The Bangladesh Observer*, Sheikh Hassina is quoted, "Our aim is to rear children as worthy citizens so that they can love the country and culture and get equipped with modern education." From *The Daily Star*, March 19, of that year, under the heading " Govt taking all steps to groom children as worthy citizens," the article begins, "Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the government is working to groom the country's children as golden sons to build a . . . Golden Bengal..." She told the young students at Tungipara, the native town of her father, "We want to groom you as golden sons of the soil. With you, we'll build a 'Sonar Bangla'.³⁵⁸"

The first effort at educational reform in Bangladesh, the National Education Commission, popularly known as the Qudrat-e-Khuda Committee, was initiated a mere six months after the independence of the country, such was the confidence in the fruits of educational mandates. Its report, published in May, 1974, stated that the

aim was to remove the various defects and deficiencies of our present education system, to indicate a way as to how a wholesome nationhood can be achieved through the medium of education and to strengthen the country in modern knowledge.

In the first chapter of the Qudrat-e-Khuda report, education is called "a weapon for social transformation [and a] medium for the reconstruction of our individual and social lives, [a means to] destroy prejudices, malpractices, and corruption."

³⁵⁸ Golden Bengal

The report asserts that “educational institutions must assume a meaningful role in building the character of their pupils and in generating a sense of values”.

Regardless of these good intentions, there are plenty of colonial paradigms lingering in textbooks in Bangladesh. In the ninth/tenth class *Social Studies* textbook published in 1997 by the NCTB, the first chapter, devoted to the study of Sociology, "Society, Culture and Civilization," was simultaneously oversimplistic, uninformative, and over-loaded with disconnected facts. The textbook repeatedly quotes various sociologists and other scholars without any reference to the period or pros or cons of the theories of the scholars cited.

Invariably, the social scientists appropriated to lend academic validity to the textbook's arguments are European or American. Strings of official quotes from western scholars are liberally peppered throughout the textbook. For example, in only two short paragraphs on the initial page of the Sociology section, seven sociologists are quoted with bare mention of their ideas or orientations. Beginning with, “According to the opinion of L.F. Ward and Graham Samner, ‘Sociology is the science of social phenomenon’.” Followed immediately by the sentence, “French sociologist Emile Durkheim says that sociology is the science of social institutions”. And yet another quote in this string, “In the opinion of German sociologist Max Weber, sociology is the study of social actions”.

The paragraph ends with the sentence, “According to MacIver and Page, sociology is the only science which studies about social relationship of man and society”. MacIver is quoted in four more places on the next three pages, but the text never mentions who he was and why students should remember what he had to say. Ultimately where is the justification that a fourteen year old Bangladeshi child needs to know this splattering of names of sociologists without adequate context of their social positioning? A detailed explanation of basic sociological

concepts would be far more valuable than the staccatoed out-spewing of names of famous and not so famous Euro-American sociologists.

This name dropping continues throughout. For example, on page three under the heading “What is Culture?” after a few sentences explaining “aspects of human life,” the textbook informs that, “E.B. Taylor says, ‘culture is man's learned knowledge’,” immediately followed by, “According to North. . .”. A few pages later, “sociologist Kingley Davis” is quoted and we are told what “Ogburn and Nimkoff” had to say. The question remains, who are Taylor and North, Ogburn and Nimkoff? And why should these young students care? How does this string of Western names improve their understanding of the workings of society?

Students at a high school in Dhaka complained that they had to memorize these names without any context, which they promptly forgot after the test. They still weren't sure just what sociology was... “it was too confusing... who are all those people?” One student lamented that she had points taken off because she “accidentally spelled Nimkoff as Nibkoff”, but she had no understanding about the core theories of sociology.

Two of the most blatant misuses of long-floated theories of social scientists of the colonial era can be found on page fourteen of this Sociology textbook, under the heading “Geographical Factors”. Here, the “French criminologist Lambroso” (sic) is quoted as saying “that crime occurs due to geographical factor.” (sic) The quote continues, “injury and murder occur more in hilly areas than the plain lands.” No other explanation is given.

Since in Bangladesh there is a sharp cultural and linguistic distinction between the hill tracts and the rest of the country, this type of simplistic analysis, brought forth with quotes from a “French criminologist” might cause the children of this nation to develop ideas which could be less than constructive to their

society. Besides encouraging a prejudicial rupture in the nation, the reference is incorrect. Cesare Lombroso, not Lambroso, was an Italian criminologist, not French, who argued that criminals had certain recognizable hereditary physical traits. Lombroso's theory was disproved in the early twentieth century. It was, rather, Montesquieu who attempted to relate criminal behavior to natural, or physical, environment. It is interesting to note, that in Bangladesh there is more crime per capita in the plains than the hills. But the masses of Bangladeshi school children are indoctrinated with outdated, destructive, and racist theories.

The textbook cites another of Montesquieu's now discredited theories. This pseudo-fact is by far the most potentially damaging misuse of displaced Western theories found in this textbook. "According to Montesque (sic) cold climate is favourable to independence and tropical climate is favourable for slavery and despotism." There is absolutely no reason that the school children of Bangladesh, without a critical discussion in the text, should be taught this now highly discredited theory formulated in the mid-eighteenth century. How will such statements serve their needs in a democratic nation?

Added to this preposterous use of questionable theories of environmental determinism propagated in the eighteenth century, is the next statement in the textbook which teaches the youth of Bangladesh that they are inherently lazy and indolent.

According to Huntington, mental skill and intelligence are the highest at temperature under 40° F. (sic) The people of the cold countries are hard-working while the people of tropical areas are of idle nature.

Ironically, probably because of a typographical error, the textbook incorrectly states the supposed temperature for maximum intelligence to be 40° F instead of 40° C, making it seem that only those living near the polar regions can lay claim to superior intelligence. However, Ellsworth Huntington's work, though popular

at the turn of the century, especially among colonialists and racists advocating European racial and social dominance, made claims for the superiority of peoples living in temperate, cooler zones in comparison to those living in the warmer tropics. His work is now seen as ethnocentric and of doubtful scientific validity.

Nonetheless, how would a Bangladeshi adolescent answer the essay question at the end of this chapter, “Discuss the influence of geographical factors on social life”? If he or she were to argue against the text, would points be lost for disagreeing with what was printed in the textbook? Students are simply required to internalize these self-negating perspectives in order to parrot the text and pass the test. Page nineteen of this thus far dubious textbook states, “Every society through its education system teaches its members to play their specific roles so that the members can learn their social values, norms, and habits.” But if these lessons serve to reify class inequities and negate democratic ideals, then the purpose and result of the educational system must be questioned.

The Battle of the Begums³⁵⁹

The current Prime Minister, Khalida Zia, and the former Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina are both certified patriotic Bangladeshi Begums. These two ladies are in a locked battle, contesting the nation from opposite sides. Their agendas and their styles are very different.

During her time as Prime Minister, Hasina was able to sign a treaty with the Chakma Hill tribes to end the twenty year old insurgency³⁶⁰. She signed the Ganges Water Treaty with India, that had languished unresolved for decades. She passed a law that partially gave Hindus the right to reclaim properties, which had been illegally confiscated from them in 1947, 1965, and 1971, during periods of

³⁵⁹ Begum is a word signifying respect for an older female.

³⁶⁰ Unfortunately, the agreements made by the government have not been carried out and the situation continues to simmer.

pogroms against that community. Discriminatory laws had been codified in the Hindu Vested and Non-resident Property Act. The Awami League made somewhat of an effort to do away with this controversial law just at the end of their term in office. This discriminatory law was finally repealed after generations of Bangladeshi Hindus had unsuccessfully advocated for their right to claim their own property.³⁶¹ Unfortunately, soon after the repeal of the Vested Properties Act, the BNP returned to power and the ordinance is now in the courts. Because of these various treaties and ordinances, the Awami League is seen as pro-Hindu.³⁶²

When I was in Dhaka while AL was in power, one of the cabinet ministers was a Hindu. Every time Mr. Sen stood to speak in parliament, the members of the BNP walked out in protest—not because they disagreed with what he was saying, which they probably did, but they walked out simply because he is a Hindu. Not to defend the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), but in India, it is inconceivable that all the members of the BJP would stand in unison and leave the Lok Sabha when a Muslim MP stood up to speak. Perhaps, if M.M. Joshi stood to speak, the members of the CPI-M (Communist Party of India-Marxist) might walk out in protest over some issue. But in Bangladesh there is a lot of walking out in unison, and resigning in mass that keeps the government in disarray and at a perpetual standstill.

For the term that the Awami League was in power 1996-2001, the country was victimized by another six years of hartals and street violence staged by Madame Zia and BNP goons who burned rickshaw walas and threatened

³⁶¹ This ordinance is now in the courts.

³⁶² This is why Hindu communities were attacked on election day, in October 2001. The Bangladesh Human Rights Commission has documented the violence in the villages that began a few days before the election and intimidation at the polling station against the Hindu community. This violence has not gained much international attention, though it is reported that up to half a million Hindus have been driven from their homes since the fall of 2001.

citizens with bamboo poles and other more lethal weapons. Hartals³⁶³ are the bane of Bangladesh, where they have appropriated Mahatma Gandhi's model but forsaken his methodology and philosophy.

Hartals are based on ahimsa, nonviolence—passive resistance. But in Bangladesh, all activity ceases during a hartal—because they are enforced by extreme violence. Students can't go to school because buses and cars can't run, if they do they are set on fire.... passengers and all. Professors and state workers still draw a salary sitting at home watching TV or catching up on their reading. However, the vast majority of Bangladeshis who make their living with a trade or in commerce lose thousands of dollars, millions of takas every year. If they open their stores, they are burned down or looted by hartal enforcers roaming the streets. If a taxi driver is caught, his car will be torched and he will be lucky if he is not killed. Hartals cost Bangladesh *tens of billions* of dollars each year. There are statistics available on this tragic loss of prosperity and life that has been caused by these two warring women during the past twelve years.³⁶⁴

Just as many social events are becoming more conservative, and fatwas often issued against people singing Rabindra Sangit, so Islamic customs and fashions now seem to dominate in political elections and public posturing.

Sheikh Hasina wears a kind of hijab head gear, and is often photographed offering prayers. She has taken up the outward symbols of Islam to appeal to the masses. I was told by one of her old associates, she is personally religious and

³⁶³ Literally “all locks”.... Signifying that all shops will stay locked in protest.

³⁶⁴ I particularly dislike hartals because once while in Cox's Bazaar, I was threatened by a crowd of BNP activists with long bamboo poles who surrounded my rickshaw and barred my path. I reacted with such indignant rage, leaping from the rickshaw and cursing at them with crude expletives in my rudimentary Bengali, that they were momentarily astounded, shocked by my aggressive language, as I wildly waved my arms and screamed at them to get out of my path. Their eyes widened in shock and they were immobilized long enough that my rickshaw wala and I had time to make our escape, but barely. Had I not been a foreign female, it might have ended more violently. Had I abandoned my rickshaw wala, he might have been murdered.

keeps the fast during Ramzan and says her prayers, but it was a private thing not showy. Never until the recent years did she outwardly display her religious identity in such an obviously conservative fashion. Yet, though she looks and dresses more Islamic than Mrs. Zia, she is considered more secular than Khalida, who certainly does not wear Islamic headgear.

To offer a personal observation, I would like to point out the irony of photos of Khalida Zia, sitting at a conference table with Golam Azam or some other Mullahas-- looking very much out of place, fashion wise. She wears her hair in a bouffant style that was popular in the sixties and wears lots of make up, especially a certain iridescent lipstick that hasn't been in vogue since the seventies. She usually wears a rather diaphanous chiffon sari, with a very skimpy choli blouse, cut to reveal her cleavage under the nearly transparent silk.

Silk saris are the most beautiful fashion of the Subcontinent. Who doesn't admire shimmering saris and a sexy choli? But somehow, in photos of Mrs. Zia dressed in this attire, she seems strangely misplaced among the Jamaat. I told several BNP supporters whom I met to advise her to dispense with the super-gloss lipstick and get to a hair dresser who could give her a more contemporary look. They didn't seem amused, they call her pupal, which means doll, because she is known to have been a good looking women in her youth. When I mentioned my critique to my Awami League friends, they were highly amused by my complaint about the fashion preferences of the main opposition candidate. They said she was stuck in the seventies in more ways than one. They also complained that her level of education, with a high school degree, was not on par with the needs of international diplomacy.

If politics in Bangladesh weren't such a life and death situation, with the future of freedom and human rights threatened, it would seem like a soap opera or

sitcom. But the issues are dead serious and the stakes are high indeed, regardless of the inconsistency or the appearance of the two female protagonists. The nation hangs in the balance between a quasi-secularist who wears the garb of a conservative Muslim Begum and a pseudo-fundamentalist who dresses like an aging Mumbai movie star.³⁶⁵

Student Politics

Bangladesh would not exist today if it were not for its students. Students of the colleges and universities in Bangladesh led the language movement. They were the first ones to die. They led the agitations that demanded more autonomy culminating with the independence war. As part of the Muktiyuddho, they marched and fought alongside adults, never missing a step, in fact, leading and inspiring the troops. They were visionaries, opposing oppression. Student movements are a great tradition in Bangladesh. Muntissir Mamoon wrote that, “The students... had immense influence on the common people”. In the sixties,

Their influence had risen to such a level that during hartals if the students had said that birds would not fly, then the birds would listen to that.³⁶⁶

The universities in Bangladesh have always been highly politicized, at least since 1948 when Jinnah announced the Urdu only policy. Today, however, it is now a visionless form of politics. For the past few decades in Bangladesh, universities are often closed and classes cancelled —graduation can be delayed for several semesters, even years. The climate on campuses is overly politicized

³⁶⁵ Pardon my digression into the world of Dhaka fashion, but this was something that amused me to no end... when the ladies’ photos would appear in the newspapers—Hasina with her hair carefully covered, wrapped in a simple cotton sari, Khalida with her beehive hair and her bosom barely covered by a sexy silky fabric It was just so ironic.

³⁶⁶ Mamoon, *Vanquished Generals*, pg.80.

and because of the involvement of adults from the opposing political parties, the many demonstrations and marches often turn violent.

When I was in Bangladesh in 1998-99 the President of the country, Justice Shahbuddin Ahmed often made speeches about the negative impact of politics on campuses. I saw several demonstrations when I was visiting the campus of Dhaka University, often it was closed down when I had anticipated going there to meet a professor. There were murderous encounters between rival political groups. These altercations had no meaning, did not teach about struggle against tyranny, they only caused death and delay.

In an article in the *Daily Star* on August 26, 2002, titled, *Frustration over campus violence*, the journalist wrote about “Speakers at a discussion [who] expressed their grave concern over the atmosphere at the education institutions of the country, which they felt have reached its rock bottom.” The article continued,

The speakers condemned the recent police attack on the students of Shamsunnahar Hall and the assault of teachers. They expressed their frustration over the unbridled campus violence that continues to claim the lives of general students.

The correspondent lamented that,

Ironically, a certain quarter of policy makers and politicians seem indifferent about the frequent closure of universities or other campus problems, since their children or wards do not attend any of the public universities.

The article continues,

The speakers said that in most cases the teachers, who are supposed to have the sovereign power of an education institution, are sidelined by politicians or by the people they patronise. ‘As long as politics continues to control the institutions, there would not be any real autonomy or any improvement in the educational atmosphere,’ said Abdullah Abu Sayeed.

Most of the speakers, however, rejected the idea of banning student politics mentioning the glorious past of student politics in the country. ‘A student must have political awareness,’ said

Mosharraf Hossain. 'He can be a good student but never a good citizen unless he is politically conscious,' he clarified.

However the participants

grumbled that some people are using student politics or the education institution as a source of earning. These individuals use campus as a platform for future gain and they should not be called students. [...] Teachers should also cut off its link from political parties, some of the speakers noted.

Alochona Magazine³⁶⁷ ran a story by a student Haroon Rashid, titled *Politics Watch: Banning Student Politic*. Rashid wrote, that in the past "many talented politicians emerged from the student politics". However, he continued "the situation is very different now. If we expect that environment at this time, we are living in fool's paradise". He gave a good example, comparing Kashmir with the violence on campuses,

Once Kashmir was a dream place for the tourists, can anybody think of traveling there now? Yes, adventurous person may dare to travel there. But our parents do not send their kids to the college or universities for an adventure.

The article ends with this query,

Who is dominating in the student wings of all the universities now? Please ask any student of any major universities. How many of them are students? How many non-students stay in the university halls? Who supplies arms to them? Why they have to capture university halls? Anybody has an answer of this entire question where there is a link with education?

When I was in Dhaka there was plenty of violence on campus and BNP students often attacked the dormitories of Awami League students and vice-versa. Sometimes all their possessions were looted and there were even deaths. Most of these attacks were orchestrated by persons off campus.

There is no longer the fervent love of freedom that brought activism on the campuses during the fifties and sixties and during the move to remove Ershad in

³⁶⁷ May 14, 2203 June 2002 issue

the late eighties. Now there are only politicized tussles and the threats of violence that disrupt the education of Bangladeshi students. The burning issues of culture and democracy that once fired up the imagination of the Bengali students has degenerated in a meaningless cycle of violence and cancelled classes. The confusing history they were taught in their revolving textbooks has given them no basis on which to form their understanding of their nation... so they continue to fight it out, as do the politicians.

The preceding chapter on the politics of history in Bangladesh shows the volatile nature of the historical narrative. The subtleties of the changes that brought about the battles over history in Bangladesh are dwarfed in comparison to the rancor those changes cause. The on-going alterations in the textbooks at this point in time in Bangladesh seem to be made without any accountability—by decree, democratic as it may be. The following chapter on “the Rewriting of History in India” reveals a very public process that has, due to the nature of Indian intellectuals, been internationalized. The new textbooks and other controversial issues will be discussed, particularly the deep divisions between Indian scholars.

As in Bangladesh, much of the outcry about additions or extractions of details from the historical narrative in India are really dealing with minutiae, and the reactionary responses are in excess. But, one thing is constant among the three nations considered in this study, asking a group to alter their perceptions of the past is like asking them to give up their bonds to their families. Historiography as a process of historical inquiry is not so much in question as is the strident attachment to historiography as an ideology.

Chapter Five: India: Rewriting History in the Headlines

So far as I am able to judge, nothing has been left undone, either by man or nature, to make India the most extraordinary country that the sun visits on his rounds. Nothing seems to have been forgotten, nothing overlooked. --Mark Twain

Conflicts and Controversies: No Middle Ground in Indian Historiography

At the core of the conflicts and controversies determining the meaning of the past, lie systemic differences in orientations towards historiography between competing paradigms. In the “Western model”, from which Marxism and other Weberian-type “development” and “modernizing”³⁶⁸ theories have arisen, the ancient past is something alien to be studied as “isolated projects”.³⁶⁹ Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment scholars saw the past as primitive and irrational, “as something from which to escape, in Collingwood's words, [as] ‘sheer terror [and] devoid of all positive value whatever’. [W]hen gauged against the standards of the present, it failed to measure up”.³⁷⁰

The ancient Mediterranean and European cultures are represented as the remote yet germinal roots of Western artistic and political traditions. At the same time they are trivialized as superstitious and primitive, particularly because of their polytheism in a modern world where monotheism is represented as the

368 According to categories enumerated by Gerald Larson, in *India's Agony Over Religion*, (Albany: State University of New York, 1995), the “Modernizing-Secularization Theory” is represented by the work of liberal social scientists such as Durkheim and Weber and a long list of scholars including Habermas, neo-Hegelian historians and the Frankfurt School--a diverse group, who all share the perspective that modernization leads to the secular “disenchantment of the world”. These development idealists envisioned a process of progress, culminating in a rational, just society. Modernization is predicated by a certain liberal, scientific orientation centered on capitalism and/or democratic socialism that can lead less developed, more traditional societies, on a “trajectory of future-oriented development”.

369 Kumar, Krishna. “Children and History,” *Learning from Conflict, Tracts for Our Times Series # 10*: Hyderabad: Orient Longman Limited, 1996, p. 25.

370 Gilderhus, Mark T. *History and the Historians*, New Jersey: Printice Hall, 1992, p.34.

pinnacle, or the final unfolding of religious thought. The ancient Greek, Roman, Celtic and Egyptian societies are considered the seminal sources of western civilization and to have possessed philosophies and produced artifacts indicating remarkable levels of cultural and scientific sophistication. Simultaneously, these ancestors of occidental civilization are often represented as socially cruel and barbaric. Accordingly, early societies are attributed with having little value for “human rights”, “universal franchise” and other attributes of enlightened post Renaissance Euro-American societies.

In the West, “when the past is presented in chronological order, it is prioritized [and] only the post-Renaissance past appears relevant to the present; the earlier past is presented . . . as an object of curiosity”. The Indian perception towards history is diametrically different.

The ancient and medieval periods are presented in a manner which ensures that they carry the same aura of relevance to the present as the modern period does.³⁷¹ [...] The message of an underlying continuity is explicit . . . and imparts to the nation-state a civilizational heritage which is historically continuous.³⁷²

This inherent difference in orientations and assumptions is illuminated when we take into consideration that in the West, the compass assumes the viewer is

371 Hindu-centric historians would argue that in many treatments, the “Medieval” or “Muslim Period” is stressed at the expense of the “Ancient” or “Hindu Period”. They point out that the majority of India remained Hindu, even during the “Medieval Period” and thus calling it the “Muslim Period” privileges an elitist view that discounts the majority population. Others, such as Prof. Krishna Kumar, tend to use a more “progressive” analysis, and equate the ancient and medieval periods, stressing the composite culture created by a thousand years of Islamic military and political supremacy. Hindu oriented scholars would emphasize the “Ancient Period”, describing the Indus/Sarasvati Civilization and the Aryan/Vedic Period as early expressions of a continuous civilization--temporarily stymied by the imposition of Islamic rule. They would add that Islam had little impact on Hindus in India other than in fashion and food and that the faiths remained distinctly defined and at their core little syncretism occurred except superficially, such as Hindus worshiping at Sufi shrines and Muslims celebrating seasonal festivals such as kite flying at Vasant the spring festival and during Holi, the festival of colors.

372 Kumar, Krishna (1999) p.25-26.

oriented towards the North Pole.³⁷³ In Sanskrit, the terms for the points of the compass assume that the viewer is facing the East. *Puurva* means not only East but, forward, preceding, initial, and can even mean ancient and is used to refer to that which is at the front or ahead. Obviously, when facing east, the South is on the right, so *Dakshina* means both south and right and can also mean honest and sincere, righteous. Similarly the word used for the direction north, *Uttara*, assumes that the North is on the left. *Uttara* is used to mean both left and north and can also mean the other, the answer, the final conclusion.

In the Indian context, if facing the East, the Himalayas are of course on the left, so *Uttara* can also mean high and lofty, such as the mountainous state in northern India, *Uttara Anchal*, literally the high region or zone. *Pashchima* is the word for the West and is related to the Sanskrit word *Pashchaat* which means afterwards, behind, subsequent. The directional orientation on the points of this reoriented compass suggests that we must see things differently, adopt a different world-view, face the East so to speak, if we wish to enter sympathetically into an understanding of indigenous historical perspectives of ancient, medieval, or modern Indian history.

Agency, Hegemony, and Risky Stances on the Road Less Taken

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Indian nationalist leaders expressed a pan-Indian ethos that stressed the plurality of India's many ethnic and linguistic groups. "Unity in Diversity" has long been a popular motto. Indian Nationalist leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, and Aurobindo Ghose, Rabindranath Tagore, and earlier Ram Mohan Roy were situated within their Hindu cultural traditions. Each of these highly respected individuals argued that it

373 Symbolically, like the trajectory of the sun's travels, the West implies the direction of the future and by extension the direction of death and the unknown.

is the core elements of the Hindu tradition that allowed for the diversity of religious expressions in India.

Multiculturalism is India's hallmark, the pluralistic threads in a great, inclusive civilization--with saints and narratives strung like gems along the centuries, creating a *mala*³⁷⁴ of interrelated and overlapping cultural expressions. Gandhi and Tagore proposed pedagogical models that were situated within the Indian milieu, however, they were not implemented on a national scale and after 1947 schooling in India remained based primarily on colonial curriculum paradigms.³⁷⁵

For most of the first fifty years in post independence India, the state sponsored academic discourse was guided by a secular socialist "Nehruvian" doctrine that sought to delink progress and nationalism from culture and religion.³⁷⁶ In India, in an effort to be sensitive to the feelings of religious minority groups and to help integrate them into the nation, the official historical narrative sometimes obscured certain less palatable facts, such as the "gory" details of the Islamic conquests in northern India, or the "cruel" Inquisition by Portuguese Christians in Goa.³⁷⁷

During the past decade, many of India's most eminent historians have come under considerable criticism for supposedly using theoretically driven, politically correct analytical trajectories. Critics situated in what they would call the Indigenous schools of thought, contend that Marxism with its basic anti-

374 Mala is the Sanskrit word for rosary or garland.

375 A discussion of education in pre-colonial India is found in "The Beautiful Tree" a subsection of Chapter One of this dissertation.

376 Colonial historiography also implicated Hindu culture as an impediment to progress.

377 Richard Crasta, an Indian author of Goan ancestry who currently lives in New York City, described conversion strategies of the Portuguese in Goa during the sixteenth century, "[The Portuguese were on a] Divine Mission of spreading Christianity and syphilis. [They sought to win] souls for the mother country [by tactics such as] throwing beef or pork into the vegetarian Brahmins' sacred family wells, [thus] polluting them forever." Crasta, Richard. *The Revised Kama Sutra: A Novel of Colonialism and Desire*, Viking Penguin India, 1993.

religious approach, presents a subtle undercurrent of anti-Hinduism. This they claim has been the prevailing paradigm promoted in official scholarly institutions and in particular, in textbooks published by the National Center for Educational Research and Training (NCERT)³⁷⁸. History departments at India's flagship universities, such as Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Delhi University, and Aligarh Muslim University, have also been accused of using a "leftist bias" in the representation of Indian history.

These accusations, though controversial, are not baseless. However, it must be stressed that the assumptions guiding NCERT, JNU, et al were constructed on noble objectives. They hoped to minimize prejudice towards Moslems and Christians that certain "horrific" historical details might have inadvertently encouraged in the majority Hindu community. To accomplish this goal, India's most noteworthy scholars of the late twentieth century may have projected a subtly anti-majoritarian orientation.

Are these accusations valid? Has there been a dominance of Marxism in Indian intellectual institutions? Does that theory inherently negate the history and culture of indigenous Indian traditions? Are people who make critiques against Marxist historiography also looking at India through a particular paradigm, that may be perceived as unsavory? Who gets the right to write the history of India and how do they get that power? The battle over historiography in India has become furiously polarized. Excerpts from textbooks, as well as interviews and articles, will help to illuminate both sides of this debate.

Partha S. Ghosh, a scholar in no way associated with "Hindutva Historiography", was the director of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) in New Delhi in 1998. Ghosh wrote an article in *The Hindu* that discussed the leftist hegemony of historiography,

³⁷⁸ Examples from NCERT textbooks are discussed later in this chapter.

In the late Sixties and early Seventies, historical research got entangled in the larger politics of the state in which the Congress under Indira Gandhi and the Communist Party of India found themselves on the same wave length. The establishment of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) in 1969 under the chairmanship of Prof. R. S. Sharma was largely the result of this politics. Besides being an eminent scholar, Prof. Sharma's sympathy for the Left ideology in general and for the CPI in particular was well-known. His close association with the then Education Minister and CPI sympathiser, Nurul Hasan, was common knowledge. During his chairmanship, there were allegations from many historians that ICHR was being used for propagating history from a Marxist standpoint. The nexus between ICHR and NCERT was also mentioned in the same vein. [...] During the Emergency, people watched with dismay the camaraderie between the Congress and the CPI and in that context the role played by the Left historians was not overlooked. [...] At the micro-level, it was the Left-oriented historians versus the rest. [...] The battle apparently looked like one between 'secular' and 'communal' historians but behind the facade was the realpolitik of the Congress and the CPI, on the one hand, and the Janata bandwagon, on the other.³⁷⁹

Since its inception in the early sixties, JNU has provided the intellectual bedrock for the production of history in modern India. JNU has traditionally been dominated by scholars professing leftist inclinations, characterized by a liberal interpretation of socialism and an intellectual affirmation of India's particular, and some would say peculiar, application of secularism. Through the years, JNU nurtured many excellent historians of international renown. India's most prolific and respected scholars, R.S. Sharma, Romila Thapar, K.N. Panikkar, Satish Chandra, Harbans Mukhia, and other scholars such as Irfan Habib of Aligarh, ideologically and professionally connected with his colleagues at JNU. The works of these scholars have recently been criticized as overly Eurocentric and/or promoting a Marxist agenda. For many, who consider the work of these

379 Ghosh, Partha S. "The Rewriting of History", *The Hindu*, July 15, 1998.

individuals to be the seminal expression of contemporary historiography, these critiques are libelous and amount to infringement of freedom of academic expression.³⁸⁰

During the past few years, the eminent scholars from JNU and their associates have been in the forefront condemning the “Saffronization of Education”. Several of these prominent scholars, such as K. N. Panikkar, seem to have devoted themselves fulltime to the endeavor. As a group they often sign petitions objecting to policies of the BJP government. They are very vocal about their opposition and hold frequent news conferences and write op-ed pieces against the “Saffron Brigade”. This group of closely associated scholars who established several activist organizations, such as the Delhi Historians Group (DHG), have put themselves into the public domain as the last hope against Hindutva’s cultural chauvinism.

Because of this aggressive stance, they have generated considerable ill will among other respected scholars, such as M.G.S. Narayanan, the current chair of the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR), who do not appreciate what he considers to be bullying tactics. Scholars associated with the Delhi Historians Group are also often labeled with insulting names such as the “Marxist Brigade” or “Macaulay’s children”. There is a chasm-like polarization between these schools of thought in India that will not abate any time soon. These stubborn and starkly defined battle lines in historiography are not unique to India and are happening all over the world, in countries such as Italy, France, Japan, and the USA, with similar rancor, if not as extensive and bombastic media coverage.

The debate in India is not as simplistic as it plays out in the media and in many academic circles. Among a very broad assortment of nuances of thought, a

³⁸⁰ Professor Gail Minault commented that “Others may see these disagreements as natural to a profession that encourages contending interpretations.”

very deep intellectual battle line has been drawn. Scholars have trouble articulating their own positions, “I’m not a Marxist, but I use Marxist analysis”³⁸¹ “I’m certainly not Saffron, but I see the need for employing indigenous categories for interpreting India’s traditions”³⁸². Very uneasy while labeling themselves, they are quick to categorized the “opposition”. Commie vs. Fascist/ Pinko vs. Saffron, the *othering* among social scientists in today’s India has reached a crescendo. Both groups see the “other” as being against the basic fabric of the nation.

There are many variations of orientations among scholars in India. They are primarily pitched on opposing sides and use simplistic pejorative terms to define each other. Though they won’t quite define their own positions, they certainly know who their enemies are. In numerous interviews with scholars from both camps, these simplistic dualistic perspectives were the norm. During the past two decades, the battles between competing historiographies have stimulated an archive of publications. History is a very hot topic in India.

There have been heated debates in the Parliament with MPs walking out over historiography. Law suits were filed to prevent the publication of new textbooks. There were political rallies opposing “saffron history”, notifications about numerous seminars, anthologies, and editorials on the topic, including on-line petitions protesting the “rewriting of history in India”. The debate is highly polarized, very dramatic, and hotly contested.

Vijai Kumar Malhotra, a BJP member of the parliament, wrote in an article in *The Hindustan Times* that the rewriting of history by the “National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) needs to be understood in the context of the desperate struggle for self-preservation by a group of scholars.” Malhotra, explains,

³⁸¹ From an interview with Romila Thapar, a well respected if controversial professor from JNU.

³⁸² From an interview with M.G.S. Narayanan, head of ICHR (Indian Council for Historical Research).

For more than 30 years, historians Romila Thapar, Satish Chandra, R.S. Sharma, Bipan Chandra and others enjoyed such great political backing from the Congress establishment that they convinced themselves that they, and they alone, possessed god's gift of the ability to interpret India's past. They operated as a cartel and prevented others from articulating alternative points of view.³⁸³

Obviously, the professors named above, who are the most vocal critics of the BJP, disagree with the concept of a leftist hegemony in Indian historiography.

Woe to be Saffron

In most academic treatments about the socio-political situation in modern India, the viewpoints of Sangh Parivar oriented scholars are rarely engaged. Their perspectives are dealt with in a hands-off or tertiary manner. To bring a greater fullness to the debate, I have included quotations from both sides of the chasm. This multi-nuanced approach is not usually found in studies about the Hindu Revivalist Movement.

Scholarly articles about the Sangh Parivar usually objectify the movement in a predetermined negative light. Their views and books are not included in syllabi, notably even when they are the topic of research or the subject under consideration. Their spokesmen are often quoted out of context and only their most sensational statements included in the discussion. The Sangh Parivar is a classic case of "othering" in academia.

When I interviewed Dr. Ashis Nandy, the well respected and prolific psychologist,³⁸⁴ in his office in Delhi during the summer of 2000, he laughed when I told him that one famous scholar, a history professor at JNU, had told me that "Ashis Nandy has become 'Saffronized' since he had written that the Indian

383 "Cardinal Principles" by Vijai Kumar Malhotra, December 14, 2001, The Hindustan Times; <http://www.hvk.org/articles/1201/118.html>

384 Ashis Nandy was born a Christian in West Bengal.

form of secularism should be reevaluated”. Ashis just smiled and said he thought “it was wonderful...that the Marxists are throwing insults at anyone who dares to contradict their view of Indian society”. He really seemed to enjoy the humor. Giggling behind an unwieldy pile of papers on his desk, he stated that the “Leftists think that theirs is the only correct view and all others are fascists”. It tickled Ashis that, after decades of dominance of the intellectual sphere, now the “politically correct views of the ‘Marxists’ were being challenged and all they can do in response is cry ‘Fascism’ or ‘Saffronization’!”

It amused Ashis that he, a Christian was being placed in the Hindu Nationalist camp!³⁸⁵ He is of course, not "saffron", whatever that is, but he is enough of an iconoclast and freethinker to find amusement in the demise of an

385 In June 2002, when the BJP nominated the famous missile scientist, and very patriotic and secular Indian, Abdul Kalam to be the new President of India, the leftist parties opposed his candidacy, claiming that he would become saffronized and could turn into “another Hitler”. They argued “making the missile scientist President at a time of tension on the borders would send a wrong message to the international community”. (From an article by Shahid K Abbas, “Left fears Kalam may lack political savvy”, cited from <http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/jun/13prez.htm>). Obviously, it is because Abdul Kalam is involved in India’s defense and is well-known for his patriotism, that the BJP nominated him. In another article, E. Jayakrishnan quotes “CPM Politburo member Sitaram Yechury” who said that “Kalam represents the shrill militant nationalism of the BJP [...] when asked about the Left’s refusal to back the man half the nation considers ‘an Indian hero’ [Yechury responded] ‘As far as we are concerned he is the candidate of the ruling coalition’.” From this debate it becomes clear that politicians on the left are against all BJP policies and appointments based not on merit but on a simple political criteria that anyone who will accept a nomination from the BJP must be in collusion with Fascists. Yechury continued, “Politically, whatever may be Dr Kalam’s credentials, we have the right to oppose him. After all, he does represent the militant nationalism of the BJP” <<http://headlines.sify.com/945news1.html?headline=Kalam~symbolises~BJP's~militant~nationalism:~Left>>. In fact, Dr. Kalam represents Indian nationalism, which has been his trademark in his commencement speeches and other writings, praising India’s contributions to world culture and prodding his fellow citizens to live up to that great heritage. However, in an article sent via email by South Asia Citizens Web, an organization that forwards leftist and secular/socialist news articles and petitions, Praful Bidwai wrote that Abdul Kalam was the “RSS’ ‘poster-boy Muslim’,” (SACW #1, 16 June 2002, see: <http://www.mnet.fr/aiindex>). There is obviously a double standard here. Akbar, the left’s favorite historical Indian Muslim, is lauded for being ecumenical and secular because he embraced elements of the indigenous traditions. However, these same folks who have built up Akbar as the father of Indian cultural integration, are criticizing Abdul Kalam for his expressed appreciation of India’s Hindu culture and heritage.

intellectual dynasty, and he appreciates Indian culture--that is the key. Academicians who chastise him and call him saffron are what those "dreaded Hindu Nationalists" call "Self-hating Macaulayites"--an insult that may reverberate among the Oxford Cambridge educated school of elite Indian historians. Not all scholars who oppose the "indigenous school" are foreign educated. Many went to school at JNU, Delhi University, Aligarh. The idea of foreign and Indian educated are false dichotomous categories in this ideological debate. For example, Arun Shourie got his PhD in the USA.

Not all scholars take the negative labeling as lightly as does Dr. Nandy. In an article, "A Faith Besieged"³⁸⁶, the sociologist,

T.N. Madan, emeritus professor at the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi, says he feels the 'burden of Hindu identity'. How? 'I feel burdened by the calls to glory of the Hindu right and equally oppressed when secularists become suspicious of you if you are interested in Hindu culture,' he says.

The same article quotes anthropologist Shail Mayaram,

The media's politics of labeling ... have a bad effect. The papers keep talking about the saffron brigade. Historically, saffron is the colour of renunciation. Now you have taken away the colour from the believing Hindu and given it a pejorative ring.

Nonetheless, anti-Sangh critical analyses are not just hyperbole, they are for a good cause, as per the editorial comments--helping to crack open something bad brewing in India. Numerous scholars, such as David Ludden in his collection of essays, *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community, and Politics of Democracy in India*, favor one point of view, printing essays by critics of the Hindu revivalists movement, with no representation from the members of the school of thought under investigation. Many scholars such as R.S. Sharma and Romila Thapar have written in the preface to their works on topics such as ancient or

386 "A Faith Besieged", by SOUTIK BISWAS, SANJAY SURI, S. ANAND, Outlook India, July 8, 2002, <http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fodname=20020708&fname=Cover+Story&sid=1>

early India that the purpose of the book was to illuminate the “dangers of Hindu fundamentalism”. At least they are honest about their motivations for writing about the history of India: to preempt the possibility that the “glories of ancient” India could be used to support the views of Hindu revivalists. Many Indians, and not just the Hindutva-vadis, would see this “fear of triumphalism” as a latter day white man’s burden.

Because I have chosen to include both sides of the argument in this study, it may seem to be slanted towards the Indo-centric. Since most academic treatments exclusively employ an “anti-Saffron” position, this study takes an alternative approach to the standard treatment of the topic. It includes quotes from a broader selection of scholars in a effort to juxtapose the two dominant points of views. Through this technique differences in opinion can be compared. Often the contest plays out in a right vs. wrong/ black vs. white manner, but the actual positioning of scholars on the ideological spectrum is far more complex than represented in the media and even in academic circles. Some of the simplistic dichotomies are difficult to nuance because the actors themselves have created the categories from which they approach their historiographical others.

I have tried to reproduce this debate without automatically singling out the saffron side for ridicule. This may be a dangerous orientation, because it is a road less taken—therefore, curiously suspect. Scholars who have studied the Hindu Revivalist movement and write alarmist articles about the Sangh Parivar’s influence on historiography may be correct in their fears. This comparative approach will help to sort out the issues in this dispute over India’s past. The methodology will bring out contrasting points of view by allowing more voice to the subject—a process which will either underscore or deconstruct those fears of triumphalism.

The Hinduization of JNU

The teaching of Sanskrit at JNU is a good example of how differences in opinion about identity construction are often ironically implemented. Although JNU offers advanced degrees in Indian history it did not until 2002 officially offer classes in Sanskrit. Since its inception in the sixties, degrees were available in both classical and modern Arabic and classical and modern Persian. Long before the BJP's ascent to power in 1998, it was suggested several times that Sanskrit be added to the available classical languages students can take at JNU, thereby facilitating the analysis of ancient texts in the study of Indian history.

Proposals to include Sanskrit in the course offerings were rejected numerous times by scholars who wanted to protect JNU from what they considered to be a majoritarian or Hindu Nationalist agenda. When I questioned Romila Thapar³⁸⁷, a well known historian from JNU, about this issue in July 2000, she explained that if students want to learn Sanskrit, "there are so many Maths and Piths³⁸⁸ around where they can go".³⁸⁹ She added that "most of the regional colleges have some kind of Sanskrit program".

This is the approach of India's most famous JNU historian. Consequently, the primary tool to study ancient India was not made available to students

387 Romila Thapar, who for decades has been an outspoken critic of the Hindu Nationalist Movement, is the bête-noir of the Sangh Parivar. They toss her name around when offering critiques of Indian Leftist historiography in much the same way that the name Thomas B. Macauley's name is invoked with derision. She has attained the status of an anti-Hindu cult figure among Indo-centric scholars. Her crusade against the Ram Janma Bhumi movement and her very public and vocal criticism of the rewriting of history have given Prof. Thapar a high profile both at home and abroad.

388 Sanskrit words indicating places of learning.

389 However, many Sanskrit scholars in western universities hold critical views of the work produced at Sanskrit institutions in India. In Volume 7 of the Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies (EJVS), March, 2000, Michael Witzel, from Harvard University wrote a critique in which he questioned the quality of work done at schools such as the Rasthriya Sanskrit Sansthan in Delhi. Professor Witzel stated ironically, "One would like to know what other cutting edge, innovative, thought provoking, seminal and trend setting research is carried out [at such] Government financed institutions?" <http://www.asiatica.org/publications/ejvs/>

attending JNU. At India's premier academic institution--famous for its cutting edge social science excellence--students were not offered courses in Sanskrit, the root language of Indian culture. Implementing the study of this quintessential part of Hindu tradition was time and again vehemently opposed by the faculty. They preferred that Sanskrit education remain in the domain of religious institutions, so as "not to sully JNU's leftist/secular reputation"³⁹⁰ with anything too closely associated with Hindu traditions. Not all Indian universities share this aversion.³⁹¹

An article that appeared in *The Indian Express* in June 2001 expressed concern that Indian students who wanted to study Sanskrit were better served by going to American graduate programs such as at the University of Chicago,

While we battle each other on the streets on whether Sanskrit should be revived in the school curricula or not, top notch western universities have been busy churning [out] one esoteric dissertation after another on Panini's Ashtadhyay and comparing Bhartihari's and Patanjali's grammatical logic.³⁹²

The author states that at American universities the children of Indians who immigrated to the U.S. in the sixties and seventies are "alienated kids, desperate to discover their historical roots and cultural heritage, who are studying Sanskrit with a passion".³⁹³

Meanwhile in India, the obstacles and ironies regarding the teaching of Sanskrit at Indian academic institutions impeded that process. But, with the BJP's new imperatives to "Indianize" the curriculum, Sanskrit programs are now being developed at several prominent universities. In the near future, university students

³⁹⁰ A comment made to me in private by a scholar in favor of teaching Sanskrit at JNU.

³⁹¹ Gail Minault commented about this: "One can argue that relegating the study of Sanskrit to 'maths and piths' aids scholarly obscurantism. Witzel, Olivelle, et al would doubtless agreee."

³⁹² Ajit Kumar Jha, "Why Is The West Crazy About A 'Dead' Language?" *The Indian Express*, June 10, 2001.

³⁹³ Some scholars, including myself, object to this depiction of Hindu-American students as culturally alienated. I have interviewed many students who are attending American universities and taking courses to learn about their heritage. There is very little desperation, except the same pressures that all students may feel during finals' week.

in India will also “have the option of studying Sanskrit texts and the precise science of Sanskrit grammar”.³⁹⁴

Beginning in 2002, new Sanskrit studies programs were created in response to a proposal circulated by the Ministry for Human Resources and Development (HRD) that encouraged the establishment of Sanskrit at the university level. Responding to the call from the highly controversial HRD minister, Dr. M.M. Joshi, the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, one of India’s top universities has developed an “inter-disciplinary programme in Sanskrit”. News has it that students at IIT Delhi are signing up for the elective program.³⁹⁵

This purposeful, if in the opinion of some scholars, misapplied strategy was pursued at JNU—a methodological approach shared by historical and educational bodies such as the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICRH), National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) and the University Grants Commission (UGC). The goal was to hopefully prevent what Nehru warned democracy could become in India, “the tyranny of the majority”. It was also the result of Indira Gandhi’s efforts to consolidate her power by awarding key positions to leftist scholars in academic institutions such as JNU and the ICHR. In this way, she sought to placate the left and keep their support within the Congress fold, thereby co-opting the Communist Party supporters with employment perks and grants.³⁹⁶ Now, with the BJP in power, there has been a very controversial changing of the academic guard.

On both sides of the chasm, scholars are primarily concerned with identity formation of the nation’s youth. However, through it all, the young students of India are lost in a political muddle, where there is no room for the middle path.

³⁹⁴ Ajit Kumar Jha, *ibid.*

³⁹⁵ From an article circulated by India Abroad News Service, “At IIT Delhi, S in Sanskrit stands for Science,” by Nirmala Gganapathy.

<<http://www.expressindia.com/ie/daily/20010111/ina11029.html>>

³⁹⁶ Shankar, Ravi. *More Equal than Others*, Vision Books, New Delhi: 1999.

Which history we will teach children becomes more important than why or how history is taught. Gail Minault brought out that this applies to “Why or how Sanskrit is taught, too”. She commented that “Teaching Sanskrit itself is laudable, but what ideological context will be pursued (if any)?”

Aryans and Ancestral Angst: The Obligation of Identity Construction

The volatile nature of national identity formation implicates the politics of historiography and impacts the writing and rewriting of historical narratives. The rewriting of history is not unique to India, history battles are being waged from Israel and Palestine to the Balkans and the countries of the former Soviet Block.³⁹⁷ In the USA, during the “History Wars” in the late 1980s and 90s, educators and intellectuals from the liberal left and conservative right fought tit for tat battles in the op-ed pages of major newspapers. As Sam Wineburg, colorfully describes in his recent book, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*,

The choice between the two seemed absurd but this was exactly what the debate about national history standards had become, ‘George Washington or Bart Simpson,’ asked Senator Slade Gorton (R-Wash.) during the 1995 Congressional debates on this subject: Which figure represents a ‘more important part of our Nation’s history for our children to study?’³⁹⁸ To Gorton, the proposed national standards represented a frontal attack on American civilization, an ‘ideologically driven anti-Western monument to politically correct caricature.’ The Senate, in apparent agreement, rejected the standards 99-1.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁷ Chapter one of this dissertation highlighted many of these international controversies.

³⁹⁸ Cited in Wineberg from: Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Knopf, 1997), p. 232.

³⁹⁹ Wineberg, (2001) p. 3.

The rancor that was exchanged during this debate over the U.S. National History Standards⁴⁰⁰ is indicative of the seriousness with which proponents of each school of thought view their mandates, as if their very survival was at stake. As Sam Wineburg describes, “In the barroom terms befitting such a brawl, those who wrote the standards were traitors, those who opposed them, racists”. Senator Bob Dole, the 1996 Republican presidential candidate stated that the “national standards were the ‘handiwork of people worse than external enemies’.”⁴⁰¹

In Indian historiography a similarly contemptuous *mêlée* has erupted around what would otherwise seem like a rather dry intellectual debate among antiquarians discussing the distant past-- regarding questions about the origin, or geographical homeland of the Vedic Aryans. Were they, as colonial era and Delhi Historians Group (DHG)⁴⁰² historians have stridently claimed, nomadic tribes originating in the Russian Steppes who came into the Subcontinent over the Khyber Pass in successive waves, beginning around 1700 BCE, where they encountered and possibly displaced a sedentary Indus Valley, perhaps Dravidian culture? Or were the Aryan family groups indigenous to India, as several top archeologists and other scholars of Vedic literature have proposed?⁴⁰³

400 It is important to keep in mind that these standards were only recommendations, not required. Professor Gail Minault, added, “Reflectively, the traditional American mistrust of any centralization of the education system and thought control of any kind, however laudable the thinking behind it.”

k401 Ibid, p. 4.

402 DHG or the Delhi Historians Group is a loose organization of scholars, most of whom are closely associated with SAHMAT a Marxist activist and publishing center. The single-minded agenda of scholars associated with the DHG is the denigration of the Hindu revivalist movement. For deeply felt reasons, these scholars have based their life’s work on proving, among other issues, that Indic civilization can be dated according to a Biblical timeframe, and the ancientness of Hinduism is a myth of a colonially manufactured “Golden Age” that never existed. The name “Delhi Historians Group” is self applied and the twenty plus scholars who are regular signatories on petitions use this term to describe themselves.

403 Or as Gail Minault pointed out, was there a “long-term intermingling of both?”

European philologists discovered the rich literary Sanskrit tradition at the end of the eighteenth century; and during the nineteenth constructed the theory of the “Aryan Invasion” based on their study of the etymology of common roots of words, originating from a Proto-Indo-European parent language. Indologists mined Vedic literature looking for clues to prove the Aryans originally came from outside of the Subcontinent. The colonialist scholars reasoned that such a sophisticated language, related to but more refined than Latin, must have come into India from a common source somewhere in Central Eurasia.

According to this line of thinking, from its pristine Vedic form, Sanskritic culture gradually degenerated into Hindu idolatry and ritual. Conveniently, the Aryan Invasion provided a pattern of conquests by outsiders, which helped to justify colonial rule over a land that had always been invaded by foreigners--first the Central Asian Aryans, followed by the Kushans, the Huns, the Turks and Afghans, and finally, by sea, came the Europeans. In this way, India was seen as a derivative civilization, always in need of stimulation from outsiders to progress.

Professor M.G.S. Narayanan, BJP appointed Chairman of the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR), in a lecture which I attended in New Delhi in November 2001, said, regarding this underlying premises of colonial and Marxist historians,

The most important assumption was that Indian history was just a collection of unrelated events, like a series of migrations and conquests, owing their origin to external stimuli. It did not reveal the organic growth of a nation or a civilization, marking the stages of development or decline. The people are not an active force bringing about changes like the renaissance and reformation, or producing a revolution at some stage. It was a procession of exotic and colourful characters, autocratic kings and emperors just having their way without encountering resistance from the people.⁴⁰⁴

404 Narayanan, M.G.S., Chairman, Indian Council for Historical Research, *The Eurocentric Approach to Indian History in Colonial and Communist Writing: the Case for Reinterpretation*,

When India is understood as a derivative civilization, Professor Narayanan elaborated, “there is no development, and no meaning, in history”. In this scenario,

a long series of invasions...[acted] upon the unresponsive masses [and] political and historical upheavals [were] not products of conditions within society, representing certain trends or movements among the people. [...] It was as though India was simply a geographical entity, providing an empty stage for odd characters to appear and move about for some time before their mysterious disappearance.

The Aryan Invasion Theory (AIT) and its variant the Aryan Migration Theory, have been widely disseminated for over two centuries. The AIT figures in all chapters on ancient India in high school and college textbooks in the USA, and in India. It also features prominently in Pakistan where the textbooks describe the Aryans as fair skinned invaders who brought the evil caste system to the area that is now Pakistan and enslaved the indigenous dark-skinned Dravidians, who were the original residents of the Indus Valley sites. Pakistani textbooks add a warning that the descendants of the Aryans [Hindu dominated India] would, if given a chance, also enslave the Muslims of Pakistan.

Quite honestly, most contemporary mainstream scholars, both in the West and in India, also embrace the invasion/migration narrative, though in a more politically correct, and less overtly antagonistic tone than in Pakistani versions. Although scholars such as Romila Thapar and various archaeologists have reworked their interpretations allowing for multiple invasions over centuries or a gradual migration and integration into the culture of the Subcontinent, they do so without considering the past twenty years of research documented along the bed of the dried up river that is being called the “Sarasvati” by the many scholars who have taken notice of this data. Ironically, the medieval historian, Irfan Habib

November 2001, New Delhi, text of speech available at:
<http://ifihhome.tripod.com/articles/mgs001.html>

recently came out with a short textbook on the Indus Valley Civilization in which his goal was to act as a count-balance to negate the current research which he dismissed categorically, without proper scholarly consideration.

The contentiousness over this issue provides a clear example of the chasm that divides scholars. There isn't anything inherently good or bad with either side. Since the Aryan Invasion Theory is wide spread but the Inside India Theory is less known, I will summarize the reasoning of that school.

Scholars who refute the Aryan Invasion Theory have called into question the methodologies of Western philologists and Indologists, and their modern and post-modern counterparts. The "inside India" proponents claim that Indologists constructed theories with a political agenda from an unequal relationship of power, from a position of cultural and economic hegemony. They argue that Indologists who are strongly opposed to considering an indigenous origin for the Sanskrit language are using outdated, Eurocentric colonial era paradigms in their analyses, which overlook not only the archeological record, but misread and ignore important references from Vedic literature. Many Indologists and professors in departments of South Asian Studies are virulently opposed to even discussing this topic. On Internet scholarly discussion groups this topic elicits insults rather than discourse.

Employing alternative research methodologies and reevaluating passages from the Vedas, scholars who are questioning the Aryan Invasion/Migration⁴⁰⁵ Theory have pointed out what they perceive as flaws in the early Indological interpretations. Several scholars have computed ancient astronomical correlations based on the procession of the equinoxes with seasonal astrological references from the Rg Veda and the Mahabharata. Often these scholars are outside the field

405 Over the past twenty years many scholars, such as the well-known Indian historian Romila Thapar, have revised the invasion theory and now advocate the Aryan Migration Theory--that the Aryan tribes came as nomadic pastoralists in waves over the course of several centuries.

of history, such as Anand Sharan, who used computers to chart eclipses and other celestial events referenced in the Mahabharata. Sharan is not alone with his claims that “he was able, using mathematical calculations, to track the positioning of the moon, Jupiter and Mars in relation to the sun to the exact events described in the Mahabharata”.

Though interesting and cloaked in the garb of the scientific methods, such research is usually dismissed by mainstream scholars.⁴⁰⁶ Others, especially archaeologists have taken into consideration the vast data that have emerged in the past few decades from discoveries at sites along the bed of the dried up Saraswati/Ghaggar River and across large areas of Northern India and the Gujarati coastal area. Scholars in several disciplines have begun to seriously challenged the Aryan Invasion/Migration Theory.

Many of these proponents of an inside India origin for the Aryans have suggested that the civilization that created the cities, trading routes, and seaports of the Indus/Sarasvati Civilization were in fact, the same cultural group whose predecessors produced the Vedas. They are thus the same historical group as the “Harappans” and by extension, ancestors of the contemporary inhabitants of the Indian Subcontinent. This of course could only have occurred if the writing of the Vedas was associated with the urban areas of the Indus Valley/Sarasvati Civilization⁴⁰⁷. Such a theory pushes the date of the Vedas back several thousand

⁴⁰⁶ From an article by Will Hilliard, that appeared in The Telegram on May 13, titled, “Professor unlocks secrets of ancient Indian fable”, “Memorial University engineering professor Anand Sharan claims to have established the timeline of the ancient religious epic of India known as the Mahabharata”.

⁴⁰⁷ The use of this phrase Indus/Sarasvati is in itself controversial.

years from what was assumed by traditional Indologists, who dated them from around 1200 B.C.E.⁴⁰⁸

Reinterpreting data, and applying new theories and technologies to old historical problems is the usual and accepted methodology of the history profession and serves to further research. The same rethinking of chronology is going on among Egyptologists as they apply new laboratory tests to mortar samples from pyramids and other techniques that can help date the structures more exactly. Even in the field of Egyptology there are wide discrepancies among competing theories. The great difference between Indology and Egyptology is that the vast majority of Egyptians do not have spiritual connections and extant ritual practices that tie them to the ancient religions of the Pharaohs, whereas contemporary Hindu-Indians trace their religious traditions directly to the Vedas, and many of their symbols to the Indus Valley Civilization.

When it comes to the Aryan Invasion Theory, well established tenured Indologists have little patience for challenges to their claim of an outside of India origin for Sanskrit. Quite often, in this debate, rather than calling methodologies and textual references into question, a common response against arguments supporting an inside India origin of the Aryans, is to politically discredit the research by accusing the scholars of hyper Hindu-centric nationalism. If contemporary Hindus themselves were not concerned about this issue perhaps the opposing debate would be more dispassionate without the personal attacks based on the perceived need to deconstruct identity politics.

It is widely assumed by many Indologists that the vast majority of scholars who question the invasion paradigm are Hindu nationalists, whom they often derisively refer to as “Hindu Chauvinists” or “Hindu Fundamentalists”. Scholars

408 It is well known that the scholars of the colonial era assumed that the earth was created in 4000 BCE, based on Biblical dating. They extrapolated backwards to date the Vedas. Obviously the earth is billions of years older.

are often labeled as fundamentalist for posing questions and alternative solutions to this old historical problem. Pejorative labeling is a common tack within the hotly contested political debate over the content and meaning of a India's ancient history.

There are numerous Western, non-Hindu scholars who are also rethinking the plausibility of the invasion theory. Even they are accused of supporting the political agenda of Hindu super nationalist politically motivated scholars. What makes this particular debate so remarkable, besides the vivid and hot hyperbole, is the sheer remoteness of the historical narrative in question.

A simplistic polarized understanding--racist/humanist, patriot/traitor--emerges from dogmatic attachment to a particular historical perspective. This attitude of "you're either with us or against us" that has been popularized by President George W. Bush after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, was also expressed by Senator Bob Dole on the floor of the U.S. Senate in 1995 during his very vocal and hyper patriotic condemnation of the overly multicultural stance he perceived in the U.S. History Standards. This either/or compartmentalization highlights the dynamic process of contesting historiographies, but it leaves little room for debate.

The dispute over the Aryan Invasion Theory plays out in India in an almost identical pattern, where many scholars, including Euro-Americans and Indian leftists, have labeled those who question the Aryan Invasion Theory as Hindu Fundamentalists, even terrorists. They are also referred to by the pejorative term Saffron, in reference to the ochre color of a saint's robes and the flag used by the RSS.⁴⁰⁹ Scholars who are personally committed or professionally attached to the Aryan Invasion/Migration Theory are quick to accuse proponents of the

⁴⁰⁹ Rastriya Swayamaevak Sangh (literally National Volunteer Group)-- a Hindu centric socio-political organization founded in 1924. This is a very controversial group and is the parent organization of the current government, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Indigenous Aryan Theory of promoting racism, rabid nationalism, xenophobia, and other social ills. They claim that if the Saffronites succeed in proving that the Aryans were not outsiders, it will make it easier to vilify Indian Muslims as foreigners.⁴¹⁰

An article that appeared in an Indian magazine *Frontline*⁴¹¹ reporting about the 61st session of the Indian History Congress (IHC), held in Kolkata⁴¹² from January 2 to 4, 2001, expressed “concern over attempts to distort history in school textbooks and thus subvert secular education”. The well-known Marxist historian, and eminent scholar from Aligarh University, Professor Irfan Habib is quoted in the article where, in mocking tones, he evaluates the historical debate,

According to the Sangh Parivar⁴¹³, the Aryans did not come to India, they were from North India, in fact, more specifically, from Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh. This is ridiculous, and it has reached such a point that whoever says that the Aryans came to India are labeled racists and those who say that they were from India are hailed as patriots.

As Habib mentioned, those who support the Aryan Invasion Theory are labeled neo-colonial and anti-Indian, and “racists” by scholars “hailed as patriots” who support the indigenous Aryan model. According to those so-called patriots, historians like Professor Habib are clinging to old theories, refusing to take note

410 Ironically, many caste conscious (read: color conscious) Hindu elites in India also support the Aryan Invasion theory because they prefer to see themselves as racially distinct from indigenous groups, therefore an Indo-European homeland makes them feel more Caucasian, which they consider to be racially superior to a darker hue of skin tone which they associate with South Indians and tribal peoples. This type of skin tone based racism can be found in all societies and even within families.

411 “Concern over distortions”, by Suhrid Sankar Chattopadhyay, Volume 18 - Issue 02, Jan. 20 - Feb. 02, 2001. *Frontline* is well known for its staunch opposition to the Sangh Parivar. The editor, N. Ram is quite left leaning, as can easily be seen from his editorials.

412 Calcutta

413 The group of organizations that promote a Hindu-centric perspective of Indian history and culture.

of new discoveries, blinded by a legacy of “pseudo-secular vote bank politics”⁴¹⁴. Scholars who share Professor Habib’s view that an inside origin of the Aryans is ridiculous term advocates of that theory as racists, anti-national and against the basic secular, socialist, pluralistic ethos of India. In this discourse there is often very little discussion of evidence based on research. The rhetoric is diverted to personal attacks and slander. Both camps inevitably label the other anti-national or anti-India.

Racists and patriots are fighting a contemporary academic battle over an interesting, but remote historical question. Professor Irfan Habib finds the idea of indigenous Aryans to be ridiculous and could have continued his list of dyads to include other pairs of ideologically opposing positions--obscurantist/scientific, traditional/modern, revivalist/progressive. The politically charged nature of this debate has provoked normally sophisticated and erudite Sanskrit scholars, even at institutions such as Harvard, to insinuate that supporters of the “Autochthonous Aryan” theory are fascists or at best New Age adherents to neo-Hindu obscurantism.⁴¹⁵ There should be more room for doubt and the historical hedges necessary for scholarly discourse.

Not all scholars who question the Aryan Invasion theory are Hindu nationalists. A scholar of Sanskrit from Athens, Greece points out,

The situation whereby the Aryans are indigenous and compose the bulk of the [Rg Veda] in the 4th millennium in Saptasindhu is a very simple one and in harmony with the archaeological data in the region. Scholars who think that this simple situation is at odds with their linguistic theories need do no more than reexamine these theories, which necessitate the further theory of the Aryan immigration, which theory generates complexities and problems and is in conflict with the data of archaeology. After all it is not as though these linguistic theories are without problems of their own

⁴¹⁴ This is one of the Sangh Parivar’s most popular insults.

⁴¹⁵ See Frontline, Dec. 2000.

or that in their present form they harmonize with archaeological data anywhere else in the Eurasian belt involved.⁴¹⁶

The philologists are defending the Indo-European forts and ready to fight it out with the Archeological Survey of India (ASI), whom they have dubbed Hindu nationalists. These are not just “secular or pseudo-secular” Hindus who are passionately opposed to reopening the verdict on this antiquarian question, many Euro-American scholars are equally threatened and have drawn their ideological battle lines. Kazanas continues,

Instead of emitting such strident emotional cries and witch-hunt slogans, Prof Witzel and his followers had better re-examine their unfounded linguistic assumptions and recall the words of Edmund Leach [published in 1990],⁴¹⁷ who was neither an Indian nationalist technocrat, nor a New-Age writer, but a solid, mainstream pillar of the academic establishment. He wrote: “Because of their commitment to a unilineal segmentary history of language development that needed to be mapped onto the ground, the philologists took it for granted that proto-Indo-Iranian was a language that had originated outside either India or Iran. From this we derived the myth of the Aryan invasions.” Then that provost of King’s College, Cambridge, added that to shift the Aryan invasion theory, which he dismissed contemptuously, “is like trying to cut down a 300-year-old oak tree with a pen-knife. But the job will have to be done one day”.

This problem is a vignette from the ancient past that has aroused anger and passion among what are often stereotyped as a rather dull lot: social scientists and humanities scholars. Though a historical study of evidence about a people who lived five or seven thousand years ago would not seem a likely source of such heated polemics, when it comes to identity formation and laying claims to a

416 From internet correspondence of Nicholas Kazanas, a Sanskritist from Athens, Greece, “The RV Date = a Postscript” an answer to Michael Witzel’s comments about the Aryan Invasion and the Indus Valley Civilization. (Used with permission--“Nicholas Kazanas” <aroik@comvos.net>)

417 Leach, Edmund ‘Aryan Invasions over four millennia’ in Culture through Time, (ed) E. Ohnuki-Tierney, Stanford Univ Press, Stanford 1990, pg 227-45.

biological biography tied to a sacred geography, no other discipline seems to elicit such acrimonious and passionate debates as does the historiography of the Aryans.

It is this dynamic nature of the discipline that is at the heart of true historical research. Regardless of the controversies, the battle over history is ultimately a very democratic process that is constantly pushing the envelope of knowledge by illuminating little known facts and presenting alternative interpretations. Often scholars outside the field make breakthrough discoveries that create a framework or timetable upon which historical hypotheses can be re-explored and re-articulated. Except in the case of top-down force-fed historical distortions, such as those imposed on the German people by the Nazis and the Russian people by the Soviets, most alternative historiographies arising from the scholarly population are an expression of changing identities or revolving perceptions of the past.

Changing historical orientations are not unique to India. For years French history textbooks ignored ‘France’s collaboration with its Nazi occupiers’ but since ‘the mid-1970’s, spurred by scholarly histories, the spread of new historical methods and the rise of a less tainted and more curious generation’ French textbooks ‘began to deal more honestly with World War II’.⁴¹⁸ Sometimes some historical interpretations may swing too far to the left and seek to validate a vulgar unfolding of society according to Karl Marx. Certainly, throughout the recent decades numerous scholars, such as ‘Prof. Karashima, [did not] agree with the view that ancient and medieval South Indian society followed Asiatic mode of production’.

[Karashima] cautions against the ‘mechanical application of the concept of feudalism in the South Indian context as has been done by scholars like D.N. Jha.’ He points out the many fallacies in their

418 “Teaching Myths and History”, The New York Times Editorial, February 17, 1998, pg. A22.

argument and observes that the number of villages granted by rulers to Brahmins and temples was decisively in minority and also says 'it seems too hasty to take royal grants of villages as an evidence for a prevalence of feudalism or serfdom, unless we study the conditions of the non-grant villages'.⁴¹⁹

Other times history may be skewed as it is adjusted to accommodate more sub-national interpretations. History can be used to validate almost anything depending on how you use it. The following long quote from Ananda Wood, an independent Indian scholar living in Pune,⁴²⁰ articulately expresses the dynamic uncertainty of competing analyses of Indian historiography,

One thing that occurs to me about the teaching of history is that teachers should not be afraid to say to their students: 'We don't know.' This applies in particular, in a rather big way, to the Vedas and the Indus civilization. In the present situation, I think it's best to say to students:

'Some scholars suggest that the Vedas were composed by immigrants who came into India at the end or soon after the Indus civilization, around 1,500 to 1,000 BCE. And others suggest that they were composed by the inhabitants of the Indus civilization as it developed, starting perhaps as early as 6,500 or 6,000 BCE. But the truth is that there isn't conclusive evidence for either picture. So there is a huge uncertainty, of 5,000 years, in the age of the Hindu tradition. That uncertainty affects our entire dating of ancient and classical Indic traditions. Modern scholars have tended to dismiss traditional datings as absurdly mythical exaggerations, but it may be that the traditional dating are not quite so wrong at all.'

Of course, such an admission of gross ignorance comes very hard to many teachers: especially in India, where attitudes tend to be polarized between old-fashioned authoritarianism among the traditionalists and brattish assertiveness among the 'liberals'.

⁴¹⁹ From a book review by K.V. Raman, *History and Society in South India— The Cholas to Vijayanagar*: Noboru Karashima; Oxford University Press, New Delhi, published Tuesday, Apr 09, 2002 in *The Hindu* <<http://www.hinduonnet.com/br/stories/2002040900090200.htm>>

⁴²⁰ Ananda Wood, whose father was English, of Irish stock, and whose mother was a Parsee, has a bachelor's degree in mathematics and theoretical physics from Cambridge University, and a doctorate in anthropology from University of Chicago (with field research in Kerala, India). This quote is taken with permission from a personal email communication.

Moreover, for those teachers who do bite the bullet and admit the gross uncertainties of Indian history, the admission will of course raise some very tough questions to be answered about the nature and course of Indian history.

Whether or not you think that William Bennett's and Bob Dole's observations about Values Education in the USA are based on a neutral reading of the past or politicized polemical hyperbole is determined by your perspective of American history and culture. The same impulses guide members of political groups or communities in India. In recent years several religious communities raised objections about NCERT textbook treatments of particular historical events. Members of the Hindu, Jain, and Sikh communities complained to the education ministry that their traditions had been insulted in government sponsored textbooks.

A complaint from the Sikh community alleged that the NCERT textbook treatment of Sikh Guru Tegh Bahadur Singh, who had been executed by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, was a distortion of history. Hindu critics pointed out that sporadic violence and negative attributes of their faith were highlighted as the norm, and the positive aspects of Hinduism were not stressed. The Jain community complained about the tone of the narrative about Mahavira, the founder of their religion.

One of the more controversial critiques of the old NCERT textbooks that had been written by scholars such as Romila Thapar, Satish Chandra, R.S. Sharma, and Arjun Dev, concerns the representation of Islam. There is a common perception that the tone of the narrative as found in the textbooks authored by the above scholars, often protects Islam from scrutiny, while putting negative characteristics of Sikhism, Jainism, and especially Hinduism under the microscope. In contrast, it is claimed that the violent deeds of Islamic invaders are "white-washed". These community based complaints are central to the debate.

The next section discusses an earlier incarnation of the current controversy over textbook history, a precursor to identity politics in India that continues to play itself out in the social studies curriculum.

Prelude to Controversy: Romila Thapar and 1977 Textbook Recall

All history is contemporary history; you can't get away from the politics around you. –Romila Thapar

In 1977, after authoritarian moves by Indira Gandhi created disaffection within the democratic polity, she was decisively voted out of office. At the beginning of the Janata coalition government's brief tenure, a controversy arose over the representation of the historical record in prescribed history textbooks. The Janata government included in the cabinet, A.B. Vajpayee, who is the current prime minister. Indo-centric ideologues associated with the Jan Sangh⁴²¹ felt that historians commissioned by NCERT, had since the sixties, written textbooks which were leftist-centered and often portrayed India's culture and history in a negative light, thereby discouraging *desh prem*, patriotism. The short-lived Janata coalition government, in the process of contesting the policies of the Congress Party, questioned the content of the government-sponsored history curriculum.

Professors Susanne and Lloyd Rudolph offered an in-depth analysis of the ensuing public debate in their article, *The Textbook Controversy in India, 1977-79*.⁴²² They questioned the ad hoc process by which public policy is determined in India, claiming, "It is more of a loose aggregate of spontaneous decisions than a body of coherent doctrine expressing intent and subject to policy choice and

⁴²¹ The BJP evolved out of the Jan Sangh.

⁴²² See Susanne and Lloyd Rudolph, "The Textbook Controversy in India, 1977-79," *Public Affairs* 56, no. 1 (Spring 1983).

guidance.”⁴²³ The Rudolphs questioned the reasoning through which “both Congress and the Janata governments assumed they could and should intervene in a tutelary and patrimonial manner on behalf of their very different world-views and priorities.”⁴²⁴

In this article, the Rudolphs exposed an earlier manifestation of the divide that exists in modern India--an ideologically driven intellectual competition between historians. The Marxists, who for decades enjoyed the support of the ruling Congress party, considered their work as the legacy of Nehru's secular cultural policy, which, as the Rudolphs explained, “denied the relevance of religion to a national political identity”. A strong mandate prevailed within the Congress party to promote an “aggressive left secularism in institutional arrangement, ideological formulations, and scholarship.”⁴²⁵ The establishment at Jawaharlal Nehru University reflected these perspectives. Historical texts produced during this period emphasized the socio-economic variables as central to their historical narrations. They downplayed religious motivations, considering them to be communalistic⁴²⁶ and divisive.

The first non-Congress government since independence, the Janata coalition led by Morarji Desai, objected to this prevailing interpretation of Indian history. The short-lived political dispensation felt that the “socialist-secular” representation of history denigrated Indic civilization and “whitewashed” the

423 I question the implication that India is in isolation concerning the arbitrary implementation of public policy in view of the politically directed nature inherent in the creation of most textbooks, and particularly in light of the political climate in the U.S. in which the National History Standards, the work of hundreds of historians and educators, was called into question by politicians who forced a revision that more closely suited their interpretation of the past. Both systems of historical revision have their problems whether government sponsored or market driven.

424 Rudolph and Rudolph, (1983), p. 17.

425 Ibid, 19.

426 “Communal” in the Indian context means something quite opposite than the common interpretation of the term.

Muslim record of a “thousand years of conquest”. Among the critics of the NCERT textbooks was the famous historian R.C. Majumdar, who held that religion was an essential element in the composition of India's past. Majumdar has argued that Hindus and Muslims had always constituted separate communities.⁴²⁷

Majumdar, among others, was critical both of the widely distributed textbooks, written with what he considered to be an overly-Marxist slant, and of the appropriation of the historical narrative to promote a particular agenda. He felt that these historical accounts of the Islamic interface with the indigenous Hindu population downplayed the religious motivations. The textbooks created the impression that “idol breakers” such as Mahmud of Ghazni and Aurangzeb were driven primarily by plunder and not religious fervor which he claimed was also a significant factor in temple desecration. Scholars of this school theorized that by glossing over the motivations of these historical figures, a method adopted by Romila Thapar, Satish Chandra, et al, students were denied access to facts central to the medieval period. The Jan Sangh government also found fault with R.S, Sharma’s textbooks on ancient Indian history. Five history textbooks were called into question, and recalled, as a lively public debate ensued.⁴²⁸

The memorandum critical of the textbooks sent from the Prime Minister's Office to the Education Ministry was leaked to Romila Thapar, who went public with the information by immediately sending a rebuttal to the press. In her published statement, Thapar accused the Jan Sangh government of meddling with the methods of historical scholarship.⁴²⁹ In an interview written by Maneesha Lal

427This echoes the Pakistani version of history and the inevitability of the Two Nation Theory.

428The books were: 1. Medieval India (1967), by Romila Thapar; 2. Modern India (1970), by Bipan Chandra; 3. Freedom Struggle (1972) by Amal Tripathi, Barun De and Bipan Chandra; 4. Communalism and the Writing of Indian History (1969), by Romila Thapar, Harbans Mukhia and Bipan Chandra; and 5. Ancient India (1977), by R.S. Sharma.

429 Ironically, a decade later, Thapar also falls into the same trap, by calling the scholarship and reputation of the well respected archeologist B.B. Lal into question, regarding his excavation and analysis at the Ram Janmabhumi/Babri Masjid site.

and published in the Spring 1995 edition of the South Asian Newsletter at the University of Pennsylvania, Thapar stated, "My position at the time was who is the Prime Minister to ban these books; he's not a historian, they would never do that with a book on chemistry or physics but they think history is their birthright". Thapar told Maneesha Lal, "All history is contemporary history; you can't get away from the politics around you."⁴³⁰ Thapar's critics would argue that she is also subject to the political orientation enshrined by the heritage of the Nehruvian social agenda.⁴³¹

The socialist/secular project and its application to the representation of the historical record was and is, a hotly debated topic. Secularism, as an expression of freedom of religion, was not so much in question. However, the twists and turns of political reinterpretations to which secularism had been subjected in the multicultural Indian milieu has led to uneven applications. Scholars such as Ashis Nandy and T.N. Madan have confronted the issue with open-mindedness, attempting to analyze and redefine the concept of secularism within the Indian context.⁴³²

In 1977 textbook debate raged for months and was discussed in the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the parliament. Well-respected intellectuals, such as V.P. Dutt, testified that medieval Indian history could be used by "communal forces to divide the country, and...pleaded for history that promoted integration."⁴³³ Nurul Hasan⁴³⁴ agreed, arguing that "medieval Indian societies,

430 A statement reminiscent of George Orwell in 1984: "Who controls the present controls the past."

431 Because of her outspoken nature and penchant to hold press conferences, Romila Thapar has become the *bête-noir* of the Hindu Nationalists. My comment here is not to criticize Professor Thapar but to highlight the perspectives of numerous Indo-centric scholars in India.

432 Nandy and Madan, both highly respected scholars, have been labeled "saffron" by their critics for daring to critique the nature of secularism as it has been implemented in India.

433 Rudolphs, p. 30.

like all medieval societies, were exploitative. *The religious beliefs of rulers and ruled were irrelevant*”(emphasis added).⁴³⁵ Hasan, the former Education Minister, concluded that textbooks should “provide school children with a wholesome history”. Hasan’s method to achieve this idealistic goal was the very source of the controversy. It centered around expunging the historical record of conflict and denying the religiosity of the medieval period in order to create a more harmonious retelling of the past. One man’s wholesome history is another man’s negationism.⁴³⁶

Ultimately, the Jan Sangh and the Janta coalition government fell after a year and a half, and Indira Gandhi returned to office. The textbooks brought under fire remained in circulation for another twenty-five years, as did the furor among political factions concerning the representation of history. More than two decades later, these are the same textbooks, relatively unrevised after thirty years of use, which were called into question by the BJP led government in 1999. The debate this time around is far more hostile and contentious and the stakes are high with profuse international attention.

There are many contemporary Indian and non-Indian scholars who question the shortcomings of using a foreign, Euro-centric paradigm based on dialectical materialism that has, among other trajectories inherent in its central justification, a need to disentangle what is political, economic, and sociological from what is religious and spiritual therefore, labeled accordingly, irrational. It has been claimed that this deculturized approach to the understanding of the history of socio-religious and spiritual movements in India is incapable of capturing the essence of these expressions.

⁴³⁴ Leftist scholar/politician who became education minister during Indira Gandhi’s administration.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ A term used to indicate the denial of violence, as in holocaust negationists.

In an article published in *The Times of India* on May 25, 2001 “Why Revising History Textbooks is a Write Move for NCERT”, J.S. Rajput, the BJP appointed director of NCERT, responds to the criticism that textbooks are being “Saffronized”. He pointed out the following passage from the NCERT textbook written by the well-known JNU historian R.S. Sharma.⁴³⁷

From the seventh century A.D. onwards the Bhakti cult spread throughout the country, and especially in the south. Bhakti meant that people made all kinds of offerings to the god in return for which they received the prasada or the favour of the god. It meant that the devotees completely surrendered to their God. This practice can be compared to the complete dependence of the tenants on the land-owners.⁴³⁸

The narrative in R.S. Sharma’s textbook illuminates the universalism that the slant through which approved history is transmitted to students is not always the message that is ultimately received. Though Indian education has been guided by a secular socialist mandate for two generations, not all ethnic or religious communities necessarily embrace the textbooks’ descriptions. Many people in India are practitioners of Bhakti. They bring to the classroom what Sam Wineburg aptly described as “deeply entrenched narratives from the home”.

This comparison of Bhakti with feudalism is unrecognizable to those who consider their relationship with their *Ishta Deva* (personal God) as reciprocal and intimate. Hindus speak to their “Lord and God” in the most familiar grammatical form *tu*, not the formal *aap*, as would be used to speak to a feudal lord. This narrative that portrays Bhakti as a feudal arrangement does not attempt to understand the essence of the tradition. These controversies are very deep and are not going to be resolved any time soon.

A debate over Sharma’s *Ancient India* was stimulated by the Janta government’s recall of the NCERT history textbooks in 1977. The following

⁴³⁷ This same textbook had been recalled in 1977.

⁴³⁸ R.S. Sharma, *Ancient India*, NCERT: New Delhi, p.194.

section highlights criticisms against Sharma's book, made by the archaeologist S.P. Gupta. It includes Sharma's rebuttal and Gupta's rejoinder to that defense.

Duel of the Dons: A Central Debate on the Fringe⁴³⁹

By the time Sharma's textbook was revised in 1990, it had been subjected to merciless scrutiny by S.P. Gupta, the noted archaeologist. In 1977, at the time of the Janata textbook controversy, Gupta wrote a critique, "Comments on Prof. R.S. Sharma's 'Ancient India,'" in which he pointed out what he perceived as serious problems. Gupta's objections to Sharma's book intellectualized the politically motivated reasons that the textbook was recalled by the Jan Sangh. Gupta approaches "two major aspects of the controversy". First, that Sharma had "tried to place Indian history [...] in an alien framework", and secondly, that the textbook writer had "given ... wrong data and also suppressed some vital information."⁴⁴⁰

Gupta's 1977 critique of R.S. Sharma's *Ancient India* is less scathing than the 2002 critiques of Makkhan Lal's new version of that same NCERT textbook. Lal's book was mercilessly ridiculed by scholars of the DHG who published their reviews in a volume *Substandard and Saffronized*, published by SAHMAT, an activist organization associated with the CPI (Communist Party-India).⁴⁴¹ S.P. Gupta's analysis is more centered on academic disputes rather than dismissal through political labeling, as in the case of the SAHMAT condemnation of the new NCERT textbook, *Ancient India*. In that aggressive stance often taken by

⁴³⁹ "Saffronites" think the historian R.S. Sharma is on the far left of the chasm and "JNU-types" consider the archaeologist S.P. Gupta to be on the far right.

⁴⁴⁰ Gupta, S.P. Comments on Prof. R.S. Sharma's 'Ancient India', "Panel Discussion held on 12th December, 1977, at India International Center Lodi Estate, New Delhi", National Museum, Delhi: 1978.

⁴⁴¹ The SAHMAT booklet and its critiques of Makkhan Lal's book are covered in detail below.

leftist scholars, Sharma's subsequent rebuttal to Gupta's critique, as will be seen, was not academically neutral.

Gupta wrote that in Sharma's NCERT textbook, *Ancient India*,

Page after page and paragraph after paragraph [showed] something extremely shocking. Data which do not exist. Informations which are wholly or are partially wrong. Facts which are disputed. Theories which are outdated. Chronology which no serious scholar would accept. Terms which are not in vogue. Sociological and cultural interpretations of archaeological data without giving due regard to the inherent limitations of the data themselves. Maps which are not organically related to the text. Absence of several vital facts and epoch-making discoveries.⁴⁴²

In his textbook meant for school students in class eleven, Sharma had numerous references to regressive elements in society. He explains that these communal forces want to twist history to serve their nefarious ends, such as proving that ancient India was much older than Max Mueller, et al had hypothesized. Between 1977 when this textbook was called into question and hauled over the coals, there was over a decade during which many of the problems that were meticulously pointed out by S.P. Gupta, could have been reconsidered and included. However, the 1990 version continues to assert the same disputed theories as fact, continues to gloss over new discoveries as it did in 1977.

S.P. Gupta uses the same urgent language in his critique of *Ancient India* as did Arjun Dev, Kum Kum Roy, and others associated with the Delhi Historians Group in their analyses of the new version of *Ancient India* by Makkhan Lal, who also used this voice in his rebuttal—they are all going to save the children of India. Gupta wrote that he was compelled to critique the errors in the Sharma textbook, because “it is meant for school students, who will naturally take every

⁴⁴² In his revised 1990 edition of *Ancient India*, Sharma alludes to these discoveries but laments that they as yet have not been included in the historical record. P.S. Gupta could have guided him to up-to-date research.

word as gospel truth [...] and will carry the contexts of this book in their minds for the rest of their lives”. Gupta then presents a laundry list of numerous errors, numbered under categories which discuss “Data Given Which Do Not Exist”. There are six categories, such as “Wrong Information”, with sixteen enumerated objections, “Disputed Facts” that cites four examples, and four other categories, including “Out-Dated Theories”, “Distorted Sociological and Cultural Interpretations”, and “Important Discoveries Completely Omitted”. The monograph is nine pages long.

This document began a tit for tat between Sharma and Gupta that was not purely academic but ranged in to the personal. In all fairness, it must be said that S.P Gupta had kept his original comments to the historical data. He called the contents of Sharma’s textbook, and the methodology in question, but he did not call him names.

However, a month later, in January 1978, in his rebuttal, *In Defence of ‘Ancient India’*, Sharma moved away from the purely academic, issue-by-issue approach found in Gupta’s *Critique*. Sharma raised the pitch asserting that Gupta’s analysis of his NCERT textbook was “based on a highly politicalised *fanatical* approach”. Beginning his rebuttal with a section “How to Write a Textbook,” he considers “the criticisms [of] S.P Gupta... and his *fanatical friends*”(emphasis added). To refute Gupta’s specific criticism, Sharma has sixteen different subheadings in thirty pages. These primarily deal with detailed archaeological arguments about topics such as copper-hoards, ochre-colored pottery; but the tone is anything but even tempered scholarship.

Throughout the article, Sharma calls S.P. Gupta names like “clever, “obscurantist”, “communal”. Though he deals with the issues as well, he is compelled to label Gupta pejoratively, and contends that the errors and the corrections Gupta pointed out were an effort “to boost the fighting spirit of the

Hindu communalists [...] and the Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh” (RSS). This is an early version of the critiques and rebuttals based on labeling that have become the standard methodology of the DHG and leftist historians, of whom R.S. Sharma is emeritus.

When DHG scholars engage the criticism of scholars from other schools of thought, they classify any objections or deviations from their work as communalism, and the favorite term, obscurantism. Sharma’s *Defence of ‘Ancient India’*, and especially the last section, “Communal Criticisms Under Academic Garb”, used this approach. He ends with a challenge to “scholars and lovers of history to decide whether they will lend their support to superstition or to reason, to scientific history or to blind, bigoted, religious propaganda”. Strong words in a debate centered on “Painted Greyware” and the percentage of tin in bronze utensils. In his conclusion, R. S. Sharma articulates one of the great oxymorons of this debate. He wrote that,

Both Dr S. P. Gupta *and his Samajists*⁴⁴³ question the prevalence of social conflicts and inequalities, because they want to willfully ignore inequalities in modern Indian society. They are interested in presenting a false image of harmony in ancient times, so that it could be used for the perpetuation of vested interests in modern times. (emphasis added)

There is a difference in the manner in which S. P. Gupta and R.S. Sharma view the ancient world in the Subcontinent and how that civilization evolved into modern Indian society. Sharma’s primary focus through which he views the Harappans, the Aryans, the Vedic people, is the lens of class. He intentionally, as he stated in the first chapter of *Ancient India*, mines the past for references to

⁴⁴³ This refers to the Arya Samaj that had also critiqued Sharma’s book and sent their complaints to the Education Ministry. In the late seventies, Sharma referred derisively to “Samajists”, an association that would not be considered politically correct in today’s intellectual climate. References to the Arya Samaj do not form part of the anti-saffron narrative. Perceived communalism in the historical organization, the Arya Samaj has been buffered by what Sharma would consider a far more dangerous incarnation of Hindu cultural assertion, the BJP.

class inequality, to learn where social injustice originated and work to eradicate it. In this paradigm, it is the inherently twisted nature of Hinduism that led to social depravity in the modern period.

S.P. Gupta's school of historiography has the same motivation, to eradicate social injustice thereby uniting all modern Indians. However, he approaches the past with a more open mind and does not shun the possibility of finding evidence of social equality. Much data has shown that the caste system, as it was written up by anthropologists in the early twentieth century, did not exist in ancient India. Codified caste divisions were not the hallmark Vedic and Upanishadic times, but rather a corruption that crept into Hinduism through the millennia. Such a search for the positive instead of the negative, may prove more productive in eliminating caste. If it can be proved that caste was not the defining characteristic of ancient India, any validations of it in later times can be shown to have been politically or economically motivated. There are two different approaches with the same goal in mind, to eliminate casteism.

It is perceived that *Ancient India* by R.S. Sharma, sets Hinduism up "as the source of social inequalities in India that must be rooted out"⁴⁴⁴. Since most Hindus, even those who are not overtly devout, are respectful of the symbols and philosophy of Indic traditions, Sharma's approach might very well be counterproductive. Gupta, and as Sharma wrote, "his Samajists" may have a better method to root out the caste system, while leaving the basic beliefs of the majority population in tact. Sharma's accusations against Gupta, lobbed in defense of his textbook are often illogical, quite hysterical and certainly inappropriate in an academic debate.

⁴⁴⁴ A comment made by an audience member at an education conference in Hyderabad, December 2002.

Sharma's thirty page rebuttal, which had been published by the People's Publishing House, stimulated a counter response from S.P. Gupta "A Critique of R.S. Sharma's *In Defence of "Ancient India"*", printed by the National Museum, New Delhi. In this twenty-seven page response, much of which answers Sharma's political charges with tongue-in-cheek irony, Gupta refers to R.S. Sharma as Professor R.S.S., because, "besides history, Prof. R.S.S. loves politics, equally, if not more". This response engages each of Prof. Sharma's issues, point by point, including controversies in the dating of certain sites and artifact, and details about rock dwellings and pottery.

He answers Sharma's accusation of communal bias with a paragraph that succinctly states his views on communalism and the use of history in society. His comments sum up the Indic view of history and are far from the sanguinely saffronized depictions of Gupta's philosophy as conjured up by R.S. Sharma and the DHG. Gupta wrote,

With regard to the problem of communalism whether it be Hindu-Muslim, Vaishnava-Saiva or Shia-Sunni it may be assumed that the people of India have come of age. If that is so the historians of India should neither look for forces of communal synthesis nor for those of conflict; they should just look for facts as they unfold themselves in the historical process. If they only look for facts supporting synthesis they may be good nationalists but they would at the same time be inverted communalists. *Let history be our psychoanalyst.* Once we are able to accept ourselves for what we are we will be able to give the right direction to our present and future. ... A historian's commitment to history must remain untouched by his loyalties, political, religious or others. (original emphasis)

P.S. Gupta's reply is composed of numerous long paragraphs, each headed by a page number from Sharma's *Defence of 'Ancient India'*. He takes on each issue academically and answers the political charges as well. He ends many of these paragraphs that argue that there is "no coherence in [Sharma's] arguments",

with a question repeatedly directed at “Prof. R.S.S.”—“Am I wrong?” This heated exchange between these two eminent scholars is a prototype of the on-going controversies that have grown hotter through the decades and become internationalized academically during the past ten years.

The following section discusses the impact of textbooks on identity formation among Indian students. It will examine how historical narratives that present the past through a predetermined lens can distort the present. This section uses examples from the NCERT textbook, *Ancient India* by R.S. Sharma.

The Power of Silence: Rejecting History for Personal Salvation

The negative impact on identity formation that textbook narratives can have on students from India’s sub-national communities was clearly illustrated by Krishna Kumar in the *Social Character of Learning*. He described the interaction between a teacher and her eleventh grade pupils during a class on ancient Indian history in a government sponsored English medium school. Out of the 27 students enrolled, one boy belonged to a Scheduled Caste and one to a Scheduled Tribe.

The instructional method consisted of lecturing, interspersed with questioning, which was intended to elicit recitation and evaluate recall. The textbook, *Ancient India*, by R.S. Sharma, central to the day's lesson plan and the source of the broader curriculum, described the origin and spread of Tantra during the fifth through seventh centuries in absolutist terms, “Obviously tantricism arose as a result of the large-scale admission of the aboriginal peoples in brahmanical society.”⁴⁴⁵ In this style of pedagogical presentation, a history-as-facts approach informs the role of both the teacher and the textbook, and however inadvertently, ignores the individual backgrounds of the students.

445 Sharma, R.S. *Ancient India*, NCERT, (First edition 1990, reprint 1995), p. 194.

Kumar describes how the teacher, in line with the pedantic historical perspective found in the textbook, explained to the students that “tantricism” is a superstitious corruption which came into Hinduism through Brahmanical contact with tribal peoples. In keeping with her method of using questioning as a tool to assess the students' retention, the teacher asked, "What is tantricism?" (Answer: "A belief in magic and superstition.") "What else?" (Answer: "A sign of backwardness.") "What villages were most affected?" (Answer: "Tribal villages.")

Looking for answers to review the analysis presented in Sharma's text, the teacher called on the boy from a Scheduled Tribe to stand, and asked, “Who did the Brahmins learn tantricism from?”⁴⁴⁶ The boy did not reply. The teacher repeated the question slowly. The student stood by his desk, unable or unwilling to respond. She then repeated her question in Hindi, assuming it was a linguistic barrier that prevented him from answering the question. The student remained silent.

As a self-protection mechanism against the hegemonic discourse inherent in a reading of the historical record that implicates tribal villages as superstitious, this young man's silence can be seen as a subtle, if unintended, act of resistance. His mute response was perhaps complicated by the perception of his classmates and teacher that he was attending the English medium school only by virtue of the affirmative recruitment practices that reserved educational placement for Scheduled Tribes. He was therefore considered to be intellectually and culturally at a disadvantage. On the other hand, his silence can be interpreted not as a lack of understanding of the teacher's questions, as she inevitably viewed his non

446 Kumar, Krishna, *Social Character of Learning*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, (1989), p. 64-66.

response, but as a symbol of a cognitive break, a rupture with the “meaning and view point. . . reflected in the curriculum”.⁴⁴⁷

The discursive displacement of the multiple layers of his subject self, his relationship to codified facts presented through an undifferentiated delivery of knowledge, is an index of the extent to which the tribal student was objectified as the *other*. The teacher's approach, dependent on a literal reading of the material that analyzed his ancestral traditions in a negative light, catalyzed the tribal boy's displacement. His silence can be interpreted as a unconscious will to resist the pedagogical paradigm, expressing his fractured interface with the institutionalized instructional method, and the historiography of certainty. R.S. Sharma's narrative views the impact of tribal culture on Hinduism as a corrupting force that brought superstition and magical rituals into mainstream beliefs. The textbook states that “tribal rituals, charms, and symbols [...] were distorted by the brahmanas (sic) and priests to serve the interests of rich patrons.”⁴⁴⁸

In this reading, not only is the heritage of the tribal student criticized, but any Brahman students in the class may feel a similar resentment regarding a narrative that prejudices Brahmins as corrupt and greedy. This negative treatment of Brahmins is integral to much of the retelling of history in NCERT textbooks, and for that matter in World History textbooks in the USA. To underscore the ubiquitousness of the negative evaluation of Brahmins, note these examples from a World History text that enjoyed wide usage in the USA, *World History: People and Nations*, by Mazour and Peoples. In the chapter dealing with the Aryan religion, the authors state,

As time passed, the rituals of sacrifice became more complicated. The spoken language of the Indian people also changed, until it became quite different from the Sanskrit of the first Aryan invaders.

447 Ibid, pg. 64 -69.

448 Sharma (1995). p. 194.

Since they emphasized the importance of proper observance, priests who knew the proper forms and could read and write Sanskrit also became more important. These priests, called Brahmins, prepared the proper ceremony for almost every occasion in life and charged heavily for their services.⁴⁴⁹

There are two examples of historical decision-making in this short excerpt. First, the term “Aryan invaders” is used without question. Secondly, the moral character of the Brahmin priests is brought into question, as it is several times in this and many other textbooks. There are numerous references from Vedic and other sources that indicate many Brahmins were poor and often took only alms for their services. Over time many Brahmins became rich and powerful, but the fact that the authors state categorically that they “charged heavily for their services” omits the other side of the picture, which is essential for a well-rounded understanding of Brahmins in the Vedic period.

According to many Vedic scholars, in the ancient past, caste was not determined by birth but rather by ability. This is one important historical caveat about the caste system that is rarely explained to students in textbooks. Historically there was a high degree of caste mobility, and interrelationships between groups were in a constant flux, though as Professor Minault pointed out, “birth and kinship were part of it”.

Many famous characters in Indian history, such as Valmiki who wrote the epic *The Ramayana*, are referred to as Brahmins, though Valmiki was actually born in a low caste family. Numerous famous dynasties were founded by men who were born into the servant caste and due to their great deeds became kings--the strength of their personalities determined their caste not their parentage. Many scholars point out that through census data formulated to serve the colonial project and a quota system designed to divide and rule, the British helped to reify

⁴⁴⁹ World History: People and Nations, by Anatole G Mazour and John M Peoples, Harcourt, Brace, Javonovich, 1990.

the caste system. Caste identity was, in the distant past, and is even now, far more adaptable and far less codified than is understood in World History textbooks and also the interpretation found in Sharma's work.

In classical India, Brahmans were charged with the maintenance of religious and societal continuity. There were instances of corrupt Brahmans and Hindu history has condemned them, with tales about stupid or a-Dharmic Brahmins. However, in the ancient period countless Brahman priests undoubtedly took their duties to the community seriously as well as their own personal *sadhana* or religious practice. This is why we have the Vedas and Upanishads passed down to us. That is why we have beautiful Sanskrit poetry and literature, because there were some Brahmins who took their duties seriously. In most texts written in the West, as well as in R.S. Sharma's NCERT textbook, Brahmans are uniformly shown as irrelevant hangers-on to the royal court and exploiters of the people.⁴⁵⁰

Krishna Kumar states that, "The social backgrounds to which [students] belong, and the points of view these backgrounds shape, become irrelevant when history is presented as a body of facts". In R.S. Sharma's textbook for class eleven on *Ancient India*, both the Brahmans and the tribal students were subjected to narrowly interpreted retellings of their histories. The narrative carried an omniscient point of view in which the students' subjective identities are

⁴⁵⁰ Historically, in the eyes of the Hindu rulers and other members of the community, Brahmans were charged with the maintenance of spiritual and religious continuity. They preserved the religious scriptures through the millennium by spending their lives memorizing and recording texts. Without this inter-generational, trans-subcontinental commitment, most of India's literature and philosophical treatises would have been lost to time, pillage, or the elements. Regardless, in most school textbooks, Brahmans are uniformly shown as irrelevant hangers-on to the royal court and exploiters of the people. In post-Enlightenment theoretical constructs, the importance of political economy and various interpretations of national identity are primary in the historical narrative. The place of religion and its role in the everyday functioning of Vedic society is not adequately addressed. Brahmans are therefore always suspect and unnecessary. These same biases can be seen operating in both Indian and American textbooks and classrooms.

challenged and with which they found little resonance, no space in which to respond. Native American children often have the same response to Thanksgiving reenactments in the classroom. The writing of history textbooks that presents conjecture as fact, and fact as incontestable, precludes the academic opportunity to look at the known historical data from other perspectives. In contrast with this categorical totality of certainty approach, Kumar suggests a more “tentative tone”,⁴⁵¹ or as Sam Wineburg would say, use more “hedgies”.

The teaching of history, in most representations, has a political, nationalistic, ethnic, gender and/or class bias. W.A. Reid, a professor of education from Great Britain pointed out in a personal communication, "It's always going to be a story. The question is whose story and how defensible it is?" Jim Loewen in his book, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbooks Got Wrong*, stressed that,

Textbooks. . . keep students in the dark about the nature of history. History is a furious debate informed by evidence and reason. Textbooks encourage students to believe that history is facts to be learned [and] because textbooks employ such a godlike tone, it never occurs to most students [or teachers] to question them.⁴⁵²

In Krishna Kumar's vivid example from an Indian classroom, the teacher's insistence on the textbook's formulations, and her disregard for the background of the tribal student, barred the possibility of his response and codified his *otherness* within the context of the prescribed lesson.

Ironically, the term *tribal*, which is an “imprecise label, becomes a very precise indicator of identity in a contemporary Indian classroom [where there are only a few students of the] Scheduled Tribes category”.⁴⁵³ The ambiguity of the

451 Kumar cites the treatment of the topic by Wolpert: "The esoteric nature of Tantrism obscures its roots and rituals."

452 James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. New York Press, New York: 1995.

453 Kumar, Krishna, *Social Character of Learning*, page 66.

Indian student's cultural associations within the greater society,⁴⁵⁴ his inferior status in the classroom, and the orientation of the teacher vis-à-vis the textbook-driven curriculum--all these elements converge to compromise his identity in relation to this standardized interpretation of the historical record. The approach denied him a space in history--wherein he intuitively answered with silence. A correct answer on his part would have been a capitulation to the hegemonic discourse that denigrated his identity as a *tribal*. He chose silence, and the accompanying criticism that brought his intelligence into question, rather than a regurgitation of an interpretation that was, from his perspective, however intuitively fashioned, a distortion.

R.S. Sharma's narrative about Tantra skirts an occasion to point out the positive contributions that tribal culture had on Indian society.⁴⁵⁵ Though most of the discussion in Sharma's textbook is aimed at pointing out the negative attributes of Tantra, buried in one sentence he states, without elaborating, "Tantricism admitted both women and Shudras into its ranks [though they] laid great stress on the use of magical rituals".⁴⁵⁶

It is notable that in the sixth century women and low castes were initiated into the Tantric traditions. This would have been an ideal moment to point out that such democratic propensities were ahead of their time, a harbinger of what was to become the hallmark of India's political system. Such a discourse would

454 This analysis can refer to both the response of American-Indian students in US classrooms, and to particular cultural groups within India.

455 In Satish Chandra's NCERT textbook, *Medieval India*, he also missed an opportunity to credit the Tantric tradition with contributing to pluralism in India. This will be discussed below. This view is shared by the two historians wherein they mine history for morality tales to teach anti-communalism. In this methodology, for some strange reason, they highlight details that defile indigenous traditions, even if it discredits sub-national groups such as the tribals. Their positive contributions to society are not mentioned, just the perceived corruptions they introduced. But there is a contradiction here, since the system they are accused of corrupting is the same system, Hindu society, that Sharma and Chandra represent as corrupt in the first place.

456 Sharma (1995), p. 194.

have opened a space for the tribal student to speak with pride about his pre-modern ancestral contributions to modern India's cultural ethos.

The ubiquitousness of the prepackaged narrative used for the teaching of history in prescribed texts and among educators who view the curriculum as a received body of facts, produces similar effects of intellectual resistance across cultures. Topics that become available for pedagogy in secondary social studies, whether the classroom is in New York or New Delhi, are usually selected, organized, and presented, not through a methodology of inquiry, which stresses process, but by socially or politically predefined constructs. Kumar's

analysis of the tribal boy's experience indicates that the curriculum is not just a logical⁴⁵⁷ packaging of facts, but rather a reorganization of available knowledge from a certain perspective. The history lesson could have meant something rather different to the tribal student if the text, on which the lesson was based, had been written from the perspective of the tribal people.⁴⁵⁸

Prof. Gail Minault pointed out that it would be impossible to write history from the perspectives of all the hundreds of minority groups in India. She wrote, in comment to an earlier version of this analysis, "The point is to open up the interpretation to more than one perspective and have a debate with the text--which by its very retelling is a packaging of 'facts'." The construction of knowledge and its reproduction in textbooks, and the methods of pedagogy epitomized by the classroom interaction described above, reveal the impact of educational imperatives and pedagogical methods inherited from the colonial model that were transcribed into the form and substance of education in post-independence India.

The following section of this study looks at controversies over the narrative about Tegh Bahadur Singh in NCERT textbooks. Sikhs claimed that this historical account does not treat him with respect. It is not consistent with what

457It must be pointed out that a "logical packaging of facts" is also subject to editorial discretion.

458Kumar, Krishna, *Social Character of Learning*, page 69.

Sikhs have recorded about their history. These charges from the Sikh community gave fuel to M.M. Joshi's drive to rewrite the textbooks. It also influenced the judge who heard the case against the textbooks in March 2002. He temporarily withheld publication of the new NCERT textbooks, but because of complaints from Sikhs and Jain, did not order that the old textbooks should be reinstated.⁴⁵⁹ It was decided that the old textbooks would continue to be used but with the recommendation that the deleted phrases not be included in test questions.

As will be highlighted again during the following discussion of Tegh Bahadur, the old NCERT textbooks often ignored opportunities to cite contributions to pluralism and religious tolerance made by the Sikh community. The following analysis will examine the claims that these textbook treatments of Hinduism and Sikhism tend to lean towards the negative. It will also look to see if, as claimed, Islam and Muslim characters are treated with kid gloves.

Tegh Bahadur Singh versus NCERT

It may not really possible to internalize what someone of another religious persuasion or ethnicity may feel when they perceive prejudice. However, we can quote from the textbook and determine if there seems to be an inherent bias. The following example about the historiography of Tegh Bahadur Singh lends credence to the transferability of the concept of the underlying the political nature of historical narratives. It also positions on an international continuum the efforts of Indians to rewrite their history. An example of what was perceived to be a biased narrative in the government sponsored textbooks was pointed out by in an email correspondence with a Panjabi gentleman who felt that the NCERT representation was skewed and caused him, as a Sikh to distrust the rest of the textbook's interpretations.

⁴⁵⁹ The legal battle over the NCERT textbooks will be discussed below.

The first quote referred by the Panjabi gentleman is from a primary source document concerning the Islamic interface with India, translated from the words of the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak, as quoted in *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, edited by R C Majumdar,

Thou, O' Creator of all things
Takest to Thyself no blame:
Thou have sent Yama disguised as the great Moghul Babar.
Terrible was the slaughter,
Loud were the cries of lamenters.
Did this not awaken any pity in Thee, O Lord?⁴⁶⁰

Compare this with an excerpt from the Class Eleven NCERT textbook, *Medieval India*, written by Satish Chandra,

Thus there was no atmosphere of confrontation between the Sikhs and the Mughal rulers during this period. *Nor was there any systematic persecution of the Hindus, and hence no occasion for the Sikhs or any group or sect to stand forth as the champion of the Hindus against religious persecution* (emphasis added). The occasional conflict between the Gurus and the Mughal rulers was personal and political rather than religious. Despite some display of orthodoxy by Shah Jahan at the beginning of his reign and a few acts of intolerance, such as the demolition of 'new' temples, he was not narrow in his outlook, which was further tempered towards the end of his reign by the influence of his liberal⁴⁶¹ son, Dara.⁴⁶²

Satish Chandra's narrative works to obscure the details of Mughal intolerance. In contrast, Stanley Wolpert states that though Akbar's relationship with the Sikhs was amiable, his son, Jahangir, charged the fifth Sikh Guru, Arjun, "with treason...and had him tortured to death for supposedly aiding the emperor's rebel son Khusrau, then refusing to admit his 'guilt' or *abandon his faith*"

⁴⁶⁰ Majumdar, R.C.-ed., *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Vol, 7, 2nd edition, pp. 306-7.

⁴⁶¹ Professor Gail Minault pointed out that here, Chandra uses an "anachronistic term".

⁴⁶² Chandra, Satish. *Medieval India*, NCERT New Delhi: 1996, pg. 223.

(emphasis added). Wolpert goes on to say, rather dramatically, as is often his style of narrative,

Arjun's martyrdom inspired his own son, Hargobind, to arm his comrades, who stood ready to defend their religion with their lives, converting the pacifist faith of Guru Nanak into a militant new order pitted against Mughal tyranny.

This narrative stands in contrast to Satish Chandra's emphatic assertion that, "there was no atmosphere of confrontation between the Sikhs and the Mughal rulers during this period", which is also at odds with the Sikh version. As the excerpt illustrates, this NCERT textbook refers to rulers such as Shah Jahan as tolerant, despite his penchant to demolish temples. Gail Minault pointed out in a review of this manuscript that the

demolition of temples is a very complicated historical problem. Hindu kinds went after other's temples in times of war and rebellion. But When Muslims demolished Hindu and Sikh temples in retaliation for rebellion, was it religious intolerance or political? The religious difference adds to the damage, no doubt...

NCERT textbooks have inadvertently, or perhaps intentionally, as some critics allege, "injured the religious sentiments"⁴⁶³ of the Sikhs. The complaint lodged against NCERT by members of the Sikh community focused on the textbook narratives describing the death of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh guru, who was arrested, imprisoned, and beheaded on the orders of Aurangzeb.

In two different NCERT textbooks that narrated this event, the historical impact felt by the Sikhs as a result of the martyrdom of Tegh Bahadur is not considered. In the NCERT treatments, deceit within the Sikh community is implicated in Tegh Bahadur's death. However, it was the murder of Tegh Bahadur that served to rally Sikhs behind his son, Guru Govind Singh. Along with the

463 To "injure the religious sentiments," a legal phrasing from the colonial period, is taken very seriously in India and is enshrined in legislation. Many suits are brought forth that accuse one community of injuring the religious sentiments of another.

martyrdom of Arjun, the beheading of Tegh Bahadur was the impetus that transformed the Sikhs into a more militant organization.

The NCERT textbook for class seven, *Medieval India*, by Romila Thapar states,

After the death of the seventh guru [Har Rai], Aurangzeb tried to take advantage of the differences over the succession of the next guru. Meanwhile the power of Sikhs was increasing. In order to curb this power, the Mughal administration ordered the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1675.⁴⁶⁴

Thapar wrote that there were “differences over succession” while at the same time it is not unexplained *why* Sikh power “was increasing”. The source of their growing popularity goes unmentioned. Actions and motivations described in this textbook, are interpreted through the imperatives of the Mughal state. Decapitation of religious leaders is only about power, and as in the earlier Satish Chandra example, Tegh Bahadur’s execution was “personal and political rather than religious”.⁴⁶⁵ Chandra explained that Aurangzeb was able to take advantage of the “differences over succession” because “Har Rai [the seventh guru] was obliged to send his son, Ram Rai, as hostage to Delhi’s court”. Later his youngest son died of smallpox in Delhi.

In these NCERT textbooks that were criticized by members of the Sikh community, there was no discussion of why the Sikhs were gaining power--what were their issues, their rallying cry? Who were their allies? What were they uniting against? Instead of presenting the Sikhs’ struggle as a symbol of a movement against autocracy and religious intolerance, in this treatment, the execution of Tegh Bahadur is represented as simply politically expedient. There is

⁴⁶⁴ Romila Thapar, *Medieval India*, Class VII NCERT: New Delhi, first edition 1988, seventh reprint 1995, p. 107

⁴⁶⁵ Gail Minault pointed out that “no details are given to permit students to think for themselves.”.

no mention of the main reason he was beheaded--according to Sikh records--for resisting religious intolerance.

Sikhs believe that Guru Tegh Bahadur was killed because he refused to convert to Islam, a detail mentioned by Wolpert but omitted from NCERT textbooks.⁴⁶⁶ According to popular history, when the emperor Aurangzeb commanded Tegh Bahadur to “make peace with the Mughal Empire by taking the rest of the Sikhs with him into the Muslim fold”,⁴⁶⁷ he chose death over forced conversion. However in the standard NCERT narrative, his death is simply described as an execution, a faceless function of state-administration. Such terminology implies some guilt on the part of the Sikh Guru, since state executions are administered for high crimes and treason. According to Sikhs, this telling only alludes to one side of the story, and ignores their perspective.

Tegh Bahadur’s “execution” was described in Satish Chandra’s class eleven NCERT textbook,

There was no conflict between the Guru and Aurangzeb till 1675 when Guru Tegh Bahadur was arrested with five of his followers, brought to Delhi and executed⁴⁶⁸. The causes of this are not clear. According to some Persian accounts, the Guru had joined hands with a Pathan, Hafiz Adam, and created disturbances in the Punjab. *According to Sikh tradition, the execution was done, to the intrigues of some members of his family who disputed his succession, and who had been joined by others. But we are told*

466 The tale of Tegh Bahadur is not included in several other histories of India such as Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund’s *A History of India* (Barnes and Noble: 1986), or Sugara Bose and Ayesha Jala’s *Modern South Asia* (Sang-e-Meel, Lahore: 1998). He is also not listed in Surjit Mansingh’s *Historical Dictionary of India* (Vision Books, New Delhi: 1999). However, he is central to the story of the growth of Sikhism, because it was his martyrdom that pushed the Sikhs towards militancy, which soon came to define their tradition.

467 A quote from the Panjabi gentleman mentioned earlier, attributed to R.C. Majumdar.

468 This ignores the facts: Aurangzeb’s grandfather, Jahangir, had ordered the execution of Arjun, and that Arjun’s son, Hargobind, fought the Mughals from the Himalayan foothills for over thirty years. After Hargobin was forced to send one of his sons to the Mughal court as a hostage, and the other son died of smallpox, the leadership of the Sikhs was passed to Hargobin’s granduncle, Tegh Bahadur.

that Aurangzeb was annoyed because the Guru had converted a *few* Muslims to Sikhism⁴⁶⁹ and *raised a protest against religious persecution* in Kashmir by the local governor (emphasis added).⁴⁷⁰

There is no mention of the version generally accepted by Sikhs, in which Guru Tegh Bahadur refuses to convert to Islam and willingly offered his life to challenge Aurangzeb's intolerant orthodoxy. By ignoring this important detail so integral to the story, the author, whose methodologies reflect the NCERT paradigm to promote national unity, has squandered an opportunity to point out the importance of religious pluralism. Explaining Tegh Bahadur's sacrifice as a contribution of the Sikh community to the secular fabric of India is a point that should have been obvious to a historian such as Satish Chandra. It would also have been in line with the agenda of NCERT, to honor the feelings of all religious groups in India and to teach tolerance. In the same way that NCERT textbooks credit Akbar with contributing to the secular nature of the nation, Tegh Bahadur's "protest against religious persecution" could have been further highlighted as a proto-national expression of modern India's respect of religious tolerance.

This NCERT version of Indian history overlooked an opportunity to illuminate the Sikh community's contribution to national integration. Sikhs consider that Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom was not only for "Sikhs or Hindus". They claim that by the time of the Mughals, India had already become a "multinational and multiracial country"⁴⁷¹. Tegh Bahadur gave his life so that all the people of India, "irrespective of their varied beliefs" would have a noble role model against tyranny.

469 By using the phrase, "we are told" Chandra purposefully diminishes the historical validity of the claims made by the Sikhs, and trivializes with the word "few" the work that Tegh Bahadur had done to reconvert Muslims and barely mentions his mission to "protest against religious persecution".

470 Satish Chandra, *Medieval India*, Class XI, NCERT: New Delhi First edition 1990, third reprint 1994, p.237.

471 from Sikh website: <http://www.punjabilok.com/faith/sikh/gurutegbahadur.htm>

Instead, Satish Chandra's narration turns the event into an example from history through which we teach cautious lessons to children, rather than a sense of pride. Chandra warned the students that the Sikh rebellions against the empire "showed how an egalitarian religious movement could, under certain circumstances, turn into a political and militaristic movement and subtly move towards regional independence".⁴⁷² He doesn't allude to the circumstances that had exerted pressures on the Sikhs, but warns the students that such defiance of central authority can lead to secessionist movements. He chides the Sikhs for moving their egalitarian religion towards militancy. The lessons Chandra draws from this story are in direct opposition to the inspiration these same events provide to Sikhs.

The only citation that is referenced "according [to the] Sikh tradition" refers to "intrigues" and betrayals from within the community. Instead of working to bring Sikhs into the narrative, honoring them as contributors to the nation, Satish Chandra twice dismisses the validity of the Sikh historical tradition. In a footnote regarding the persecution of Hindus in Kashmir, he speculates, "the Sikh accounts which were written later may have confused the name [of the ruler of Kashmir]." Chandra continues in the same vein to justify Aurangzeb's motives for murdering the Guru who had, according to this telling, "annoyed" the Mughal ruler by giving moral support to Kashmiri Pandits who were being persecuted,

In Kashmir, the previous governor, Saif Khan [was] a humane and broadminded person who had appointed a Hindu to advise him in administrative matters.⁴⁷³ *Stories of mass persecution by the new governor appear to be exaggerated* because Kashmir had been predominantly Muslim since the fifteenth century (emphasis added).⁴⁷⁴

472 *ibid*, p.238

473 If having a Hindu adviser sets Saif Khan apart as "broadminded", what does that say about the number of Hindu administrators in other courts? I

474 Chandra, pg. 238, footnote.

How Kashmir became predominantly Muslim by the fifteenth century is not considered. The reference to exaggerated stories of mass persecution *appears to be* painfully politically correct. In this narrative the intent is to argue against the Sikh version of the story, negating reports of “mass persecution”. This retelling systematically downplays traumas narrated by Sikhs and Hindus regarding persecution claiming that their “stories *appear* to be exaggerated”.

Dr. Meenakshi Jain,⁴⁷⁵ a historian in New Delhi wrote that the historical narrative found in NCERT’s textbook *Medieval India* for class eight by Romila Thapar is “partial and partisan” and that “well-known historical facts are found deliberately obliterated or undervalued”. She opined that an analysis of NCERT textbooks makes “the Leftist claim to historical objectivity suddenly appear vulnerable”.⁴⁷⁶ Dr. Jain continues,

The problem of historical accuracy is compounded as we proceed into the medieval era. Key civilizational issues raised by the Islamic arrival are not even hinted at. [...]. In the entire discussion on the Delhi Sultanate, the words *dhimmi* and *jaziya* are deliberately omitted, though they are crucial to understanding the dynamics of that epoch. There is a complete glossing over of the closed nature of the governing class [...]. Instead, there are innumerable misleading references to Hindu participation in the governmental process. If Indian involvement at the lower levels of administration did not make the colonial state an Indo-British venture, surely the same logic applies here as well? Yet the text insists that Hindu princes, landholders and priests of the time became constituents of the ‘new aristocracy’ that arose. The fact, however, is that leaving aside the ruling houses of Rajputana, Rajput resistance even in the neighbouring Katiher region remained intense till the last days of the Mughal Empire. The participation of landholders in the ruling class was, likewise, extremely restricted even under the Mughals. Hence, to assert that involvement of these groups was the norm in the Sultanate period is taking liberties with truth. Overlooking all forms of Hindu

⁴⁷⁵ Dr. Jain is the author of the new NCERT textbook for class eleven, *Medieval India*.

⁴⁷⁶ Meenakshi Jain, “Selective Memory”, *The Hindustan Times*, May 2001.

persecution, the book states that Brahmins and *ulema* were equally permitted to propagate their respective faiths. References to the infamous ‘pilgrimage tax’ are conveniently dropped.

In contrast to Satish Chandra’s now contested narrative, most Sikhs would consider Tegh Bahadur to have been “humane and broadminded”--the textbook did not mention that he had any positive qualities. Rather, it implicates him for fomenting turmoil in the empire and raising the wrath of the emperor by reconverting Muslims. On the other hand, Sikh narratives focus on the issue of Tegh Bahadur’s challenge to Aurangzeb and resistance to conversion. The standard Sikh version of the story goes like this,

In Indian history the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji is exemplary because it shook the weakened soul of India out of stupor and instilled courage in people’s hearts. Bigotry can have no place in true religion. True religion is the manifestation of truth, justice and equality. His martyrdom enhanced the tradition of ‘sabhe sanjhiwal sadayin’ (everybody is an equal partner). It was his call to awaken the soul that led to the birth of valour seen during the times of Guru Gobind Singh Ji. His martyrdom was not merely to save Sikhs or Hindus. By then India had become a multinational and multiracial country. This martyrdom was for the cause of co-existence and equality of all people irrespective of their varied beliefs and against the tyranny of the rulers.⁴⁷⁷

Sikhs see Tegh Bahadur as a martyr whose sacrifice furthered pluralism and whose death symbolized brave resistance to intolerance. Chandra sees him as a renegade challenging authority and fomenting trouble in the kingdom by converting Muslims.

The Satish Chandra textbook has only one sentence critical of Aurangzeb’s treatment of Tegh Bahadur, which states simply that his actions were “unjustified from any point of view and betrayed a narrow approach”. The next two paragraphs deal with feuds between Guru Govind Singh and Hindu rajas who were forced to call on Aurangzeb to help them defeat the Sikhs. The emphasis

477 <http://www.punjabilok.com/faith/sikh/gurutegbahadur.htm>

projected in this NCERT textbook concerning this one specific historical narrative has been to bury the murder of the Sikh Guru in one sentence. Then, in two full paragraphs, exhume the rivalries between the Hindus and Sikhs, which are then used as justification for continuing Mughal rule in Panjab.

If Sikhs take offence at this treatment, is it a form of religious chauvinism when they insist that their understanding of the historical record be included with a measure of sensitivity? Why it is not included is a question that can only be answered by taking contemporary socio-political imperatives of the writers curriculum and syllabus into consideration. From another point of view, this story offers an ideal opportunity to promote religious cohabitation.⁴⁷⁸ By exalting the brave resistance of Tegh Bahadur, and by stressing the fact that Aurangzeb transgressed the overarching ethos of India, *sarva dharma samabhava*, all ‘religions’ (dharma) are equal (the same), the NCERT could still have accomplished its goal of promoting national integration and tolerance. These examples illustrate that complaints against the tilt of the narrative in the old NCERT textbooks were not unfounded.⁴⁷⁹

Within the context of NCERT’s directive to curtail communal tensions between Muslims and Hindus and/or Sikhs, not being overly explicit about some of the atrocities attributed to certain Islamic rulers can be understood. In contrast, this textbook challenged the validity of the Sikhs’ perspectives, undermining their connection to the nation and contribution to pluralism. Why there was no effort to make members of the Sikh minority feel more integrated and respected is a rhetorical question that must have a very convoluted answer.

⁴⁷⁸ Professor Gail Minault commented about the controversy discussed in this paragraph, “ It seems to me that here, the historian, whomever he is, is in a bind—He can offend ‘Sikhs’ or he can offend Muslims, or he can spend several pages (which he may not have in a prescribed textbook) explaining the context in which the 17th century rulers and theirs subjects were acting. How much of that can an 8th grade text accommodate?”

⁴⁷⁹ Dr. Minault added, “Agree, but you can’t please everybody.”

Instead of honoring the Sikh version, or at least mentioning it as an alternative, the narrative implicates the Sikh community in Tegh Bahadur's demise, they somehow conspired in his execution. In this section of the textbook dealing with the Sikh/Islamic interface, religion is downplayed in the case of Islam and discredited in the case of Sikhism. The decision to write the history from this period in this manner represents not just a subtle selection process in the flow of the historical narrative, but rather it is a deliberate twist manufactured in the name of national integration.⁴⁸⁰ This is a worthy cause, premised on tolerance for a specific minority community. Nonetheless, the decision to elevate the importance of Hindu/Sikh rivalries by dedicating two paragraphs to the topic, and elide the negative impact of Aurangzeb's policies in one short sentence, is an example of creative, theory-driven historiography.

In October 2001, the Central Board of Secondary Education issued a circular that certain sections of several NCERT textbooks should be deleted and would not be included in test questions during the next round of exams. They based their decision, in part, on a resolution passed by the Delhi Legislative Assembly⁴⁸¹ recommending that passages in textbooks containing "objectionable comments about various religions" should be "proscribed forthwith". The resolution was moved by Arvinder Singh Lovely, a Sikh member of the Delhi Legislative Assembly, who is a member of the Congress Party and not associated with the BJP. However, his criticism was in line with the thinking of M.M. Joshi, the HRD Minister and also with J.S. Rajput, the BJP appointed head of NCERT. The resolution said,

⁴⁸⁰ Gail Minault added that this methodology "does not account for the 17th century context of the events."

⁴⁸¹ Document issued by the Delhi Legislative Assembly Secretariat, No. 21(1)(10)2001/LAS-II/To/10412, addressed to the Secretary to the Minister of Education, dated October 4, 2001.

This House strongly condemns the attempt made to distort the history of the country and resolves to support the implementation of secular education policy based on the provisions of our Constitution. This House also recommends that at page 328 of 11th Class NCERT curriculum book 'Madhyakalin Bharat' [Medieval India] under the heading 'Sikh', appropriate amendment may be made and objectionable portion about Shri Guru Teg Bahadur Ji be removed.

The Delhi Legislative Assembly also suggested proscribing the NCERT textbook written by R.S. Sharma, *Ancient India*. This is not the first controversy concerning the book written by the well-known Marxist historian, now retired from his position at Jawaharlal Nehru University. Sharma's work has also been criticized by several western scholars such as Andre Wink and Cynthia Talbot. Most criticisms of his books center on his over riding concern to unfold Indian history within the Marxist paradigm.

The following section discusses the law suit against the NCERT to prevent the publication of the new history textbooks. This analysis cites criticisms from media reports about the rewriting of history in India. This discussion concludes with a comparison of particular topics in the new textbooks to the same topics in the previous NCERT textbooks.

The New NCERT Textbooks: "It's Our Turn Now"

On September 12, 2002, the Supreme Court of India vacated a six month stay on the NCERT social studies textbooks. Within weeks, four volumes in the new series were brought out, including *India and the World for Class Seven*, *Contemporary India for Class Ten*, and the two textbooks for class eleven, *Ancient India* and *Medieval India*. These textbooks were released amid considerable controversy and in spite of years of concerted effort to prevent their publication. Long before they were on the market, the hypothetical contents of the upcoming textbooks were the focus of numerous newspaper articles as well as

several seminars. These critiques of saffron historiography were compiled into books and pamphlets.⁴⁸²

The above mentioned four new NCERT textbooks will be considered in this discussion, including *India and the World Social Sciences Textbook for Class Six*, authored by Makkhan Lal.⁴⁸³ Previously, students in class six studied ancient India. Under the new syllabus the textbook includes a section on geography as well as a survey of non-Indian ancient civilizations.⁴⁸⁴ The majority of the textbook is about ancient India from prehistory to the Seventh Century C.E.. At the beginning of Unit II, in a thirty page chapter titled, “Early Non-Indian Civilizations” are sections on Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, China, and Iran. The chapter on ancient India is forty pages. Unit II ends with a controversial chapter titled, *Major Religions*.

In Unit II “People and Society in the Ancient Period”, there are seven chapters that cover the early history of India chronologically, beginning with the

⁴⁸² For example, SAHMAT in Delhi came out with three books between 1999 and 2001 including *Against Communalism in Education*, *The Saffron Agenda in Education*, and *The Assault on History*, as well as a collection of articles critiquing the new textbooks published in December 2002, *Saffronized and Substandard: A Critique of the New NCERT Textbook*. These books are generally composed of an anthology of papers by activist scholars and a selection of newspaper articles.

⁴⁸³ Coauthored by Sima Yadav, Basabi Khan Banerjee, and M. Akhtar Hussain, edited by B.S. Parakh. This textbook is dated October 2002, based on the “First Edition, September 2002. ISBN 81-7450-007-3, publication team Benoy Banerjee, D. Sai Prasad, Subodh Srivastava, cover and Layout Kalyan Banerjee, ISBN 81-7450-007-3, 30 rupees. Also on the copyright page are the dates in an indigenous dating system: October 2002 = Kartika 1924, September 2002 = Bhadrapada 1924. These dating conventions were also used on previous editions of NCERT textbooks

⁴⁸⁴ The book begins with a short unit on geography and earth sun relations, “The Earth Our Habitat”. The titles of the chapters in Unit I are: 1. Our Earth and the Solar System, 2. How the Globe and Maps Help us, 3. Locating Places on the Earth, 4. How Days and Seasons are Caused, 5. Major Domains of the Earth, 6. India-Our Country, and 7. Our Climate, Natural Vegetation and Wildlife, for a total of 48 pages. The middle unit on ancient Indian history is discussed below. The third and final unit in the sixth standard textbook is on “Community and its Development” this unit is just over twenty pages and includes four chapters, How Communities Meet Their Needs, How Village People Meet Their Needs, How People in Cities Meet Their Needs, and Caring for Things Belonging to Us All. The book concludes with a four page Glossary of Terms.

Harappans in chapter ten on through *India's Cultural Contact with the Outside World* in chapter sixteen.⁴⁸⁵ The last chapter in Unit II, *Major Religions*, includes two and a half pages on Hinduism, one and a half pages on Jainism, just over one page on Buddhism, and concludes with two pages on “Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity” The textbook informs in a highlighted box at the very end of this chapter on comparative religion, under the heading “Islam and Sikhism”,

The Prophet Mohammad is the founder of the religion called Islam, Its followers are known as Muslims. Sikhism is a religion founded by Guru Nanak Dev and its followers are known as Sikhs. You will learn about these two major religions in the next class.

Sikhism need not be included in this volume that covers history through the eighth century, but the exclusion of Islam was foolish. The intentional oversight provided ammunition to scholars working against the publication of the BJP sponsored social studies series. The author of the class six book, Makkhan Lal, explained to me in an interview that the syllabus only covered the period through Harsh. Therefore, “where was the scope to include Islam in this textbook? The syllabus calls for it in class seven”. However, this seems a bit flimsy since the chapter is titled, “Major Religions”, and in the previous chapter, “India’s Cultural Contacts with the Outside World”, Makkhan Lal had mentioned Islam.

The Arabs built their Islamic empire in the 7^h and 8^h century A.D. The sea and land routes came under their control. The Arabs became the link between India and Europe. Through the Arabs, the Europeans learnt the Indian system of science, mathematics, astronomy and medicine. Many of India’s philosophical and literary works were translated in Arabic and Persian. Europeans leant Indian numerals and the decimal system from the Arabs. Due to this they call it Arabic numerals.

⁴⁸⁵ 10. The Harappan Civilization, 11. The Vedic Civilization, 12. Indian History (600 to 100 B.C: Janapadas, Mahajanapadas, Mauryas, and Sungas, 13. Megalithic Culture of Deccan and South India, Early History of Deccan and South India, 14. North India after the Mauryas and Sungas (First Century B.C. to Third Century A.D.) the Gupta Empire [and] The Era of Harsh. Chapter 15 is again a focus on the Deccan and South India (Fourth to Seventh Century A.D.) and chapter 16 covers, India’s Cultural Contact with the Outside World.

The textbook had already discussed Arab traders in the “7th and 8th centuries”, so the inclusion of Islam in the chapter on comparative religions would have been logical. Omitting it on the excuse that it was not in the syllabus, does not sit well. In light of Islamic Arabic contacts with India in the eighth century, this choice of the curriculum writers is not well thought out. More than pointing at a faulty syllabus, such an oversight calls into question the reputation of the scholars selected to write the textbooks and by implication, the BJP government. Though this was an unforgivable oversight, the book has redeeming characteristics, particularly readability, when compared with the textbook that it replaced *Ancient India*, by Romila Thapar,⁴⁸⁶ whose prose is rather stiff.

Another textbook published by NCERT, *Contemporary India, Textbook in Social Sciences for Class Nine*, was written by Hari Om.⁴⁸⁷ A limited number of the first edition, August 2002, were published just a few weeks before the court case was settled. It had errors that were quickly corrected in the next edition, which came out in October, just a month after the supreme court ruling.⁴⁸⁸ That is the edition that I have consulted.

Changes made to the curriculum during 2000 and 2001 make it impracticable to compare the new class nine textbook with its predecessor, because the curriculum upon which the textbooks are based was changed. Previously class nine students studied from a book titled, *The Story of Civilization (Volume One)* by Arjun Dev, first edition May 1989. By virtue of its curricular orientation, it had very little information on India and focused almost entirely on non-Indian parts of the world as well as prehistoric hominoids, as per the previous

⁴⁸⁶ *Medieval India*, first published in 1987 and reprinted until 2002.

⁴⁸⁷ Coauthored by Supta Das, Savita Sinha, and Neerja Rashmi, edited by B.S. Parakh. ISBN: 81-7450-019-7, publication team, editorial, Shveta Uppal, Shashi Chadha, Arun Chitrkara, Sunil Kumar, cover by Amit Srivastava, 45 rupees.

⁴⁸⁸ A discussion of the errors in the earlier edition will be discussed below.

syllabus. In these earlier class nine books, the text about India was embedded in discussions of eras, and not given special prominence. *The Story of Civilization (Volume Two)* under the same title, by Arjun Dev and Indira Arjun Dev, was the textbook for class ten. Under the old syllabus, the textbook for class eight was *Modern India*, also written by Arjun Dev along with his wife, Indira Arjun Dev. This old NCERT textbook, *Modern India*, can be more easily compared to the new class nine textbook, *Contemporary India*. Bits and parts from each of these three older books will be compared to narratives from the new textbook along with reviews

The two new books for class eleven, *Ancient India* and *Medieval India* can most easily be compared to the previous NCERT textbooks because the syllabus remained relatively the same. The new textbook *Ancient India*, written by Makkhan Lal can be contrasted to the textbook for class eleven written by R.S. Sharma, first published in 1977 and revised in 1990. The textbook for the second semester of class eleven, *Medieval India*, written by Meenakshi Jain, can be compared to the textbook written by Satish Chandra, first published in 1978 and revised in 1990.

The differences between the new and the old textbooks are just as profound as are the similarities. The primary comparison undertaken in this study will look at the old NCERT textbook on *Medieval India* by Satish Chandra along side the new textbook by Meenakshi Jain. Before comparing the textbooks, the Supreme Court judgment that took up the case will be discussed.

Values Education: The Verdict

In January 2002, three well known activists, Aruna Roy who won the Magsaysay Award for her work promoting freedom of information, columnist George Verghese, also a Magsaysay winner from 1976, and sociologist Meena

Radhkrishna Tyabji along with representatives of the Human Rights Commission (HRC) approached the Indian High Court with a complaint seeking to block the publication of the new NCERT social science textbooks on the grounds that they were certain to be “saffronized”.

The petition, based on a notice sent from the HRC to the Human Resource Department (HRD) in January, claimed that the new, but as of yet unseen textbooks violated the Human Rights of Indian school children because they were against the secular nature of the constitution. Since broad assumptions were made, the judge initially rejected the petition and told the litigants to identify a substantive issue that the court could engage and resubmit it, which they did. In March, with the decision to entertain the resubmitted Public Interest Litigation (PIL), the court ordered NCERT to hold up the publication of five of the new textbooks until further notice, the four social studies books mentioned above as well as one Hindi textbook.⁴⁸⁹

Sandhya Jain, a columnist at Delhi based newspaper, *The Pioneer* wrote an article, *Irresistible Ideology, Dispensable Education*, which appeared on March 26, 2002. Ms. Jain, whose sister, Meenakshi Jain is the author of the new NCERT textbook for class eleven, *Medieval India*, wrote that the petition was “filed by activists [...] hence the apex court would have done well to question their locus standi on a matter of such academic sensitivity.” Jain continues her analysis of the court’s temporary stay on the textbooks,

The critical issue is that the controversy is ideological rather than academic, and that not one of the litigants has a background in

⁴⁸⁹ The litigants requested that the old NCERT textbooks be reprinted and used for the current year. Because of controversies over the old textbooks the court decided against this suggestion. Sandhya Jain, who attended the court hearing explained in an email letter that the judges had to consider both sides since, “The Jain and Sikh communities had filed petitions demanding that the old NCERT history textbooks should not be revived on any pretext because of ‘offensive and incorrect remarks about the communities’. As well, the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes also filed a petition because they had been described as slaves!”

History, though they are trying to scuttle its new syllabi and books. What is more, for over six months, newspaper columns and television channels have been inundated with one-sided polemics against the new curriculum and books. Many of the articles and statements were by the authors whose books were being replaced; yet no attempt was made to balance the diatribes with a different viewpoint.

News reports about the court's decision explained that the banned NCERT Hindi textbook contained examples of "Hinduization", as per the litigants' charges, because illustrations in the chapter on major festivals included artwork depicting Hindu festivals. The Hindi language textbook also contained an entire chapter on the Islamic festival of Id, a fact that was omitted the media reports about the "Saffronization of Education".

Sandhya Jain emphasized that, given the politically motivated aspect of the petition, "With such sustained bombardment on 'Saffronization' of education, it is hard to believe that the learned judges were unfamiliar with the ideological considerations that motivated the petition". In light of what she considers obvious political motivations, Jain wondered why the court didn't dismiss the case as a "nuisance petition". She pointed out that by "confining the ban to Social Science-History⁴⁹⁰, the Court has joined a prickly ideological dispute".

Her article stated that the judges withheld the publication of the textbooks, "without a shred of evidence that factually incorrect history has been written", but based simply on the claim made by the litigants that the history textbooks had been "saffronized" by the BJP led government. Jain explains, as most of her readers are already aware, that "Saffronization" is a politicized charge. She laments that the court "permitted a petition that does not make a

⁴⁹⁰ As mentioned. there was also one Hindi textbook that was banned.

single substantive point”. She asked, “what are the academic parameters within which the decision [of the court] will be taken?”

If the judges decide that knowledge in History is to be frozen and no critical review or rewriting can ever be done, shall we continue to teach impressionable minds about the Aryan Invasion long after archaeology has proved that it never took place? We will be the laughing stock of the international community if we continue with such inanities. More serious inaccuracies relate to the depiction of the Turkish invasions as causing the political unification of India! If this is the tainted History that the Court upholds, we are in danger of becoming a Marxist ideological theocracy.

Ultimately, Jain questions the process of a judicially adjudicated version of India history,

Will the learned judges go over the frozen textbooks themselves, line by line, and assess them on the basis of their own understanding of History? Or will they hear arguments from differing groups of historians and allow them to present their original sources and explain their interpretations in the manner in which lawyers present their briefs? How many original texts would be examined in this manner, and within what time-frame? Which historical sources will be declared acceptable, which unacceptable, and why? [...] The questions arising from this litigation amply demonstrate that the Courtroom is not the proper arena for academic grand-standing. It is sincerely hoped that the learned judges will spare themselves a walk in territory where angels fear to tread.

During the hearing, the lawyer for NCERT, Solicitor General Harish Salve, offered to supply manuscript copies of the new textbooks for the court so the judge could read them and determine for himself if they were as communal as the litigants, who also had not read the textbooks, had charged. The judge refused the offer. Replying that he didn't need to read the books to know that they were communal in nature. He told Salve to give the manuscripts to the prosecuting attorney.

On April 14, 2002, a few weeks after the March hearing, when the court confirmed its decision to temporarily forbid NCERT from publishing the textbooks, the newspaper, *The Hindu*⁴⁹¹, wrote,

The issues involved go far beyond mere procedural formalities. The changes [in the new NCERT textbooks] have the potential of undermining the task of inculcating a scientific and rational mindset among the school going children. What is of concern in the changes is an attempt to negate the foundations of pluralism, a principle so integral to the task of nation building.

The Judge presiding in this phase of the case was Chief Justice Bharucha. According to Sandhya Jain who was in attendance in the court that day, “the bench was divided”. She wrote in a personal email,

The Supreme Court met on the History/Social Science Textbooks controversy today. In this period, they found that the Jain and Sikh communities had filed petitions demanding that the old Marxist History textbooks should not be revived on any pretext because of offensive and incorrect remarks about the communities. The POL DYNAMITE is that the COMMISSION FOR SCHEDULED CASTES AND SCHEDULED TRIBES also filed a petition because they had been described as SLAVES!

This unnerved the judges and despite Nariman's [the lawyer for the plaintiffs] pleading, they refused to permit the old books to be revived and re-printed at any cost! So they are dead and gone.

The hearing about the new books - including Medieval India by my sister Meenakshi Jain - will resume in July. On the surface this looks bad. But my reading is that the bench was divided and this is a compromise to let the Chief Justice Bharucha retire on May 6. After all - if the case has become big like the judges said, why not have hearings immediately since the schools are on and the courts are still open?

But they were delayed. Between April and July, as the court case simmered, there were several seminars held to critique the saffronization of education. While the NCERT, the litigants, M.M. Joshi, and the authors of the new as yet unpublished textbooks awaited the verdict, op-ed pieces flew across the newspapers.

⁴⁹¹ The Hindu has a reputation for being adamantly anti-BJP.

In late July, during the scheduled hearing of the case, Solicitor General Harish Salve's comments were recorded in an article by R. Venkataraman in *The Telegraph*,⁴⁹² titled, "Centre turns education gun on Bengal"⁴⁹³. The article is worthy of reproducing in detail:

The Centre today took on the West Bengal government in the Supreme Court with an "anti-national" question paper set for the state's inter-school higher secondary test. Solicitor-general Harish Salve presented the entire set of question papers for the year 1992 before a three-judge bench presided over by Justice M.B. Shah, and pointed out its "anti-national" tone. During the hearing of a public interest litigation on "saffronisation" of education, Salve *dramatically brought out* a question paper and started reading it out aloud (emphasis added). Students appearing for the Hindi (Group-A) second paper examination were asked to write an essay on any one of the following topics:

'National unity and integrity are false political slogans'

'In Hindustan, there is no place for Hindu and Hindi'

'Five-year plans are a sham'

'Statistics on national development are a fraud'

'Democracy is a conspiracy'

'National revolution is the only way for progress'

'National means of broadcasting are useless'

The article continues, quoting Mr. Salve verbatim as he reads from the examination questions:

The students were also asked to write a précis of the following passage: 'The guardian of national politics... Delhi is a heartless administrative seat, on which sit not elected representatives of people, but anti-social poisonous snakes coming out of the caste jungle. Progress has been destroyed by tradition, education by the English medium, religion by political secularism, human beings by greed, idealism by dirty consumerism... Litterateurs have turned alcoholic, democratic representatives and administrators have become national villains, who only like secret accounts in foreign banks.' A choice was given between writing the précis or

⁴⁹² Dr. Minault pointed out that newspapers in India usually represent a "known political viewpoint" making objectivity beside the point.

⁴⁹³ August 2, 2002, *The Telegraph*, Calcutta edition.

expanding the following: 'Red Flag in Red Fort, is the demand of Hindustan.'

Obviously, these are quite anti-national perspectives and if truly representative of leftist historiography or rather indoctrination, are a travesty on education which renders leftists' objections to the rewriting of history by the BJP a hypocritical exercise. During the hearing, the attorney for NCERT, Harish Salve also read from a West Bengal

mathematics paper set in the 1999-2000 annual examination for Class VI students in a Burdwan higher secondary school. 'How much money did Clinton give Atal and Pervez?' Salve started, when Justice Shah *stopped the court room drama*, telling him 'not to read any more' (emphasis added)⁴⁹⁴.

The *Telegraph* article provides the details of the examination paper, continuing where Salve had been ordered by the judge to leave off,

The question that the solicitor-general was referring to, asked: 'All right children, tell us how much money did Bill give Atal and Pervez? Three friends, Pervez, Atal and Bill went on a picnic. Pervez bought 750 grams of meat at Rs 120 a kg, Atal bought other food for Rs 75 and Bill gave some money to Atal and Pervez, so that their expenditure was equal. How much money did Atal and Pervez receive from Bill?'

This article portrays the scene as if Mr. Salve caused a drama in the court room. The journalist missed the opportunity to ponder about the biases and in reality, quite anti-India questions on this West Bengal examination paper. Instead, he concluded that Salve's presentation had been propagandistic dramatics, even though he had quoted directly from official documents. Nonetheless, Salve's statements are seen as suspect, not suitable for a court of law, but rather, he presented "propaganda". Varsha Bhosle, a columnist on Rediff.com discussed the reportage found in the article from *The Telegraph*,

⁴⁹⁴ The Rediff columnist Varsha Bhosle called these "hilariously blatant examples of leftist indoctrination, variations of which are being hammered into Indian children". In her article about this court hearing, she wrote that Justice M B Shah got the gist of it and asked Mr Salve 'not to read any more'." <http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/aug/12varsha.htm>

When the scribe -- or the copy editor -- couldn't avoid reporting material damaging to his ideological masters, he ensured that readers at least got the impression that the Solicitor General of India is no more than a loud actor, one carrying a Hindutva party card. No matter that the 'propaganda' Mr. Salve 'attached' to his argument was: 'Marxists, who have reached ideological bankruptcy, are now targeting young students through education in West Bengal. They are making an attempt to sow poisonous seeds, reflective of their low thinking, into the consciousness of the children in Burdwan district of West Bengal'.⁴⁹⁵

The *Telegraph* article, as mentioned, called Salve's analysis of Marxist historiography, "BJP propaganda material." Gail Minault felt that according to this, it should be pointed out that "*The Telegraph* is clearly a CPI paper."

Most newspapers, such as *The Hindu*, reported the court hearing without supplying the dramatic details about West Bengali Marxist perspectives of history that *The Telegraph* described. In an article that appeared on July 31, 2002, titled, *Centre attempting to saffronise education, counsel tells SC*,⁴⁹⁶ the Legal Correspondent of *The Hindu* summarized the newspaper's perspective in the opening statement. This article, written before the verdict had come in, implies that the petitioners were in the right and their public interest litigation was in the best interest of the nation. The letter in *The Hindu* is a good example of the slant found in reporting of key controversial issues, and the journalistic assumption made.

By trying to implement the revised national curriculum framework, the Centre is attempting to 'saffronise' education, which has the effect of impinging on the country's secular character, argued senior counsel C.S. Vaidyanathan in the Supreme Court hearing a petition challenging the new curriculum.

Here the correspondent uses the term "saffronise" as a given. Beginning the article with a strong quote, that the new curriculum is going to impinge on the

⁴⁹⁵ Bhosle, Varsha. Towards Balkanisation, Part I, August 12, 2002, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/aug/12varsha.htm>

⁴⁹⁶ <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/2002/07/31/stories/2002073103971100.htm>

character of India, gives the assumption to the reader that this is the correct position from the outset. The article then explains the technicalities of the petition, that the “Government had changed the education policy without consulting the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), which comprised experts and State Education Ministers.” The counsel for the petitioners is quoted at length, that the new textbooks represented the ‘Brahminical approach’, followed by the bench’s reaction,

Mr. Vaidyanathan said certain portions of textbooks had been deliberately deleted on grounds of religion. Such distortions in the textbooks would amount to religious propaganda, which would result in stultifying growth, development and spirit of critical inquiry of children at the primary age. The new curriculum was driven by a ‘Brahminical approach’ and as there were repeated references to the Vedas and the Upanishads, *the Bench took strong exception to these and told the counsel ‘do not abuse any caste, do not abuse the word Brahmin as it has a wider meaning’* (emphasis added).

Varsha Bhosle explained that the judge had objected when the counsel for the litigants had “repeatedly made disparaging references to Hindu castes and scriptures”, the editor of *The Hindu* instead quotes the counsel for the petitioners defending himself by saying, that

he was not abusing any caste or castigating anybody but was only trying to emphasise that the repeated reference to the Upanishads gave this impression.

Both Bhosle and *The Hindu* wrote that the judge took exception to the counsel’s overly anti-Hindu allegations and as Bhosle’s penned, “shot him down”. *The Hindu* stated,

The Bench was quick to respond by saying, *‘How can India live without the Vedas and the Upanishads which are the essence of the spiritual heritage of the country. If you look at it with a coloured approach, it is coloured’* (emphasis added).

Another media outlet, *The Khaleej Times*⁴⁹⁷, carried a report covering this same court hearing. The article, “*Saffronisation' of school textbooks halted*” claimed that NCERT acceded “before the Supreme Court that ‘objectionable’ portions deemed unfit for school students would be deleted”⁴⁹⁸. The correspondent explained, even though the textbooks in question had not been yet printed much less analyzed, that “objectionable textbook portions give overemphasis on Hindu religion and disregard Islam”.

The Khaleej Times article quoted, C S Vaidyanathan, “There was an attempt by the government to saffronise education and to give a religious overtone to the syllabus. This was unacceptable as school children were finding it difficult to fathom such religious overtones”. Actually, the school children weren’t having any difficulties reading these books with religious overtones, because, as Vaidyanathan knew well, the books were not yet in print. *The Khaleej Times* continues, alarmist over the possibility that the school syllabi would not be acceptable to particular religious or political groups, and pedantically infers that the new textbooks will go against the spirit of democracy,

The litigation had alleged that the government had misrepresented the school syllabi with a view to promote a particular political and religious ideology, which was not acceptable to religious groups and also was not in the right spirit of primary education in a democratic nation like India.

The article concludes that the NCERT’s “attempt to saffronise the books invited criticism by one and all”. The reporting of this event took dramatically different turns, depending on who was writing.

⁴⁹⁷ <http://www.khaleejtimes.co.ae/ktarchive/020802/subcont.htm>, August 2, 2002. It is important to note that the Khaleej Times is a UAE publication. The fact that they took note of this controversy is in itself of interest.

⁴⁹⁸ The textbooks were published immediately after the verdict, so there was not scope for NCERT to delete objectionable portions. But this article is nonetheless reassuring, given the headlines, that saffronization had been halted.

High Court Judgment: Vedas Are Not Saffron

Aruna Roy, et al filed the petition charging the authorities, specifically the HRD and the NCERT of instigating religious hatred. Solicitor General Harish Salve submitted in late July before the three-judge bench that the government was ready to scratch out any part of the textbooks that the court found unacceptable. However, the judges, Justice M.B. Shah, Justice D.M. Dharmadhikari and Justice H.K. Sema, weren't actually ruling on the contents of the textbooks, but on the supposed saffronization of the syllabus document upon which the textbooks would be based.

The central claim, on which the PIL⁴⁹⁹ was framed, besides the accusations of saffronization made by the litigants, all prominent members of activist NGOs, along with the HRC,⁵⁰⁰ was that the HRD⁵⁰¹ had not reconstituted the CABE⁵⁰² concerning the NCFSE⁵⁰³ before finalizing the new NCERT syllabus. The case of the colliding acronyms hung precariously in the balance for six months. Immediately after the court ruled in favor of the respondents the government's elation was expressed in many ways, not the least that NCERT published the entire text of the court's judgment in pamphlet form.⁵⁰⁴

According to the verdict of September 12, 2002, there were two primary issues behind the case. Filed under Article 32 of the Constitution of India, this

⁴⁹⁹ Public Interest Litigation

⁵⁰⁰ Human Rights Commission

⁵⁰¹ Human Resource Department

⁵⁰² Central Advisory Board of Education

⁵⁰³ National Curriculum Framework for School Education

⁵⁰⁴ This points to a very important aspect that can not be adequately discussed in this study.

When intellectual and historical committees and councils and other semi-autonomous bodies are appointed by the government, they are inherently political. The publication of the Supreme Court verdict regarding the NCERT reflect the earlier pamphleteering of JNU professors during the Ram Janma Bhumi/ Babri Masjid controversy are a reflection of assertions of intellectual supremacy. Conversely, a textbook industry that is market driven is also subject to pressures.

public interest litigation “mainly contended that the National Curriculum Framework for School Education [(NCFSE) published by NCERT in 2002] is against the constitutional mandate, anti-secular”. Secondly, the suit claimed that “without consultation with Central Advisory Board of Education” (CABE) the curriculum must “be set aside”. The litigants claimed that it is illegal for NCERT to create a new syllabus without consultation with the CABE. The allegation that the curriculum had been saffronized was less easy to judge from a legalistic point of view, but the judges waded in to that morass.

The lead judgment written by M. B. Shah stated that

At the time of hearing of this matter, it was contended by Mr. C.S. Vaidyanathan, learned senior counsel for the petitioners that the issue involved is one of grave constitutional importance affecting the future of children.

Judge Shah states that the claimants alleged the new syllabus will negatively impact Indian’s school children, in so far as it is “violative of the rubric of secularism which is part of the basic structure of our constitution”. Additionally, the attorney for the petitioners claimed, in a sweeping motion that “The NCFSE and the Syllabus are also violative of the fundamental right to education, fundamental right to development, fundamental right to information (which have all been read into the right to life under Article 21) and also Articles 27 and 28 of the Constitution of India”. This strongly worded allegation against NCERT’s revised syllabus claimed it was capable of destroying the fabric of the nation. The judges felt otherwise.

The first section of the judgment dealt with the “Non-Consultation with CABE”. Judge Shah wrote that the “CABE was constituted in April 1982 and its term expired in September 1985”. He ruled, “that the functions of the CABE are limited. It nowhere mandates that before framing national curriculum framework for school education, the Government shall consult the CABE and act as per its

advice”. Shah added, “why it [was] not reconstituted by the Government...cannot be decided in this petition”.

The judge explained that the

respondent... pointed out that NCERT is an autonomous body established by the Union Government as a vehicle to promote inter alia the uniformity of standards in education. The Memorandum of Association of NCERT, states "the objects of the Council shall be to assist and advice the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare in the implementation of its policies and major programmes in the field of education particularly school education." The programmes and activities which the Council may undertake include inter alia the following (a) To develop and/or to disseminate improved educational techniques and practices in schools; (b) To cooperate with, collaborate and assist the State education departments, universities and other educational institutions for the furtherance of its objects; (c) To advise the State Governments and other educational organizations and institutions on matters relating to school education; (d) To undertake the preparation and/or the publication of such books, materials; periodicals and other literature as may be necessary for the furtherance of its objects.

In this capacity, the judges ruled that the main legalistic claim of the petitioners was baseless. It should be pointed out that they were not ruling on the contents of the textbooks, though the media painted it in that light. Judge Shah summed up the ruling on the actual issue under consideration,

(W)e hold that non-consultation with CAGE cannot be held to be a ground for setting aside the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) as a) CAGE is not a statutory body; b) There is nothing in the resolution passed by the Government constituting the CAGE in 1986 and 1990 that CAGE is required to be consulted before framing NCFSE. Functions of the CAGE are mainly to advise the Government and co-ordinate between the Centre and State in implementing the National Education Policy.⁵⁰⁵

In an interview immediately after the verdict, when asked by a reporter why he did not consult the Central Advisory Board of Education (CAGE), M.M.

⁵⁰⁵ Supreme Court of India Judgement (12 September, 2002) In the matter of The National Curriculum Framework for School Education, 2000. NCERT, New Delhi, October 2002, p. 48.

Joshi explained, “The CAGE wasn’t ever constituted after 1994. Narasimha Rao did not do it, Inder Kumar Gujral did not do it. Why blame me?” He then asked if the reporter knew “the structure of CAGE?” Joshi explained, “Apart from the state education ministers, it has posts for 50-60 experts which I would have had to fill up”. Given the loud opposition that Joshi faced with each nominations he made to boards such as the ICHR or UGC, he mused ironically, “Then they would have accused me of filling up CAGE with BJP people. Then, CAGE would have been under attack!” Joshi explained,

The CAGE was set up by the British in 1935 to control the education policy of each and every state. Mahatma Gandhi was against CAGE, the Congress was opposed to it. For the sake of opposition, they forget their own history.⁵⁰⁶

Judge Shah’s ruling next took up the issue of Values Education, against which the “Learned counsel for the petitioners [had] vehemently objected”⁵⁰⁷. The claimants contended that the new syllabus violated the secular nature of the constitution and the human rights of India’s school children because it advocated the teaching of “saffron” values. Judge Shah quoted at length from “the relevant part of NCFSE”⁵⁰⁸. Because of the controversial nature of Values Education, and the backlash the issue caused among various schools of historians and social commentators, Judge Shah, quoted this segment of the curriculum framework in full. In section “1.4.7. Education for Value Development” the judge quoted from the NCFSE, pages eighteen through twenty, from which a few highlights are reproduced below.

The past five decades after independence have witnessed constant erosion of the essential social, moral and spiritual values and an increase in cynicism at all levels. Although schools are not isolated islands untouched by the prevailing mood of indifference and even

⁵⁰⁶ The Indian Express, New Delhi: September 24, 2002.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid, page 20.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid, pps. 18 – 20.

disregard for the entire value system, their potential for and role in the task of guiding the national psyche cannot be underestimated. Schools can and must strive to restore and sustain the universal and eternal values oriented towards the unity and integration of the people, their moral and spiritual growth enabling them to realise the treasure within. People must realise who they are and what is the ultimate purpose of human life. Self-recognition would come to them through proper value education that would facilitate their spiritual march from the level of sub-consciousness to that of super consciousness through the different intermediary stages.

The NCFSE was roundly criticized for using Hindu-centric language in the above description of Values Education—that was the bases of the court case. Such references to “self-realization” were, according to the petitioners, indicative and synonymous with Hinduization. The National Curriculum Framework stated that the goal of “Value-based education” is to

help the nation fight against all kinds of fanaticism, ill will, violence, fatalism, dishonesty, avarice, corruption, exploitation and drug abuse.

Shah’s verdict continued quoting from the NCFSE document, which sought to justify itself on the basis of previous governmentally appointed educational commissions. The NCFSE quotes the J.S. Verma Committee, that formulated the ten “Fundamental Duties of Citizens” which are printed prominently in each of the new NCERT textbooks,

The National Policy on Education (1986) lays emphasis on equity and social justice in education to promote the country's unique socio-cultural identity and to contribute to national cohesion, promoting tolerance, scientific temper and the concerns enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The recommendations of the Justice J.S. Verma Committee on Fundamental Duties of Citizens pave the way for strong commitment to basic human values and social justice. The core components of school curriculum as mentioned in the National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education A Framework (1988) are all the more relevant in the present scenario. The Constitutional Amendment incorporating the ten Fundamental Duties of Citizens is a valuable pointer to what the

country expects of its citizens. All these must find a prominent place in the total education system of India including the school environs.

The NCERT document cited these studies on “Value-Based Education” to substantiate that its revised syllabus resulted from the work of earlier committees, and not just a project of BJP tampering,

The School Curriculum in 1988 was designed to enable the learner to acquire knowledge to develop concepts and inculcate values commensurate with the social, cultural, economic and environmental realities at the national and international levels. The social values aimed at were friendliness, cooperativeness, compassion, self-discipline, courage, love for social justice, etc. Truth, righteous conduct, peace, love and non-violence are the core universal values that can become the foundation for building the value-based education programme as per the recommendations of the S.B. Chavan Committee Report submitted to the Indian Parliament in February, 1999. These five universal values represent the five domains of the human personality intellectual, physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual are "correlated with the five major objectives of education, namely knowledge, skill, balance, vision and identity." (81st Report on Value-Based Education presented to Rajya Sabha on 26th February, 1999, Item No.8).

The judge cited the full passage about values education from the NCFSE, which explained that,

curriculum in schools has to develop the key qualities like regularity and *punctuality, cleanliness, self-control, industriousness, sense of duty, desire to serve, responsibility, enterprise, creativity, sensitivity to greater equality, fraternity democratic attitude and sense of obligation to environmental protection.* (original emphasis)⁵⁰⁹

Judge Shah includes in his judgment the section from the NCFSE on the teaching of religion, particularly since the lawsuit had sought to block this aspect of the new curriculum,

⁵⁰⁹ In the NCERT’s printed document of the verdict, these “Key qualities” are highlighted in bold font and italicized.

Another significant factor that merits urgent attention now is religion. Although it is not the only source of essential values, it certainly is a major source of value generation. What is required today is not religious education but education about religions, their basics, the values inherent therein and also a comparative study of the philosophy of all religions. These need to be inculcated at appropriate stages in education right from the primary years. Students have to be given the awareness that the essence of every religion is common, only the practices differ. The students should also be led to believe that differences of opinion in certain areas are also to be respected. The Chavan Committee (1999) strongly urges education about religions as an instrument of social cohesion and social and religious harmony.

NCFSE also quoted the UN as a source of its focus on the teaching of religion.

Judge Shah included this paragraph in his ruling,

The UNESCO Department for Intercultural Dialogue and Pluralism for a Culture of Peace pleads for 'Spiritual Convergence' and proposes to promote dialogue among the different religious and spiritual traditions in a world where intra and inter-religious conflicts have become the order of the day (January 2000). It observes 'that it is from early childhood that children should be introduced to the discovery of "otherness", and to the values of tolerance, respect, and confidence in the "other" that will bring about a change of behaviour and attitudes towards others. The introduction of specific teaching of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, through the adequate pedagogical tools, is conceived as a means to foster reciprocal knowledge of shared values contained in the message issued by religious and spiritual traditions, which can be considered as a common spiritual and cultural heritage'.

The NCERT document notes, that in this context, "a word of caution is required" because "education about religions must be handled with extreme care".

All steps must be taken in advance to ensure that no personal prejudice or narrow minded perceptions are allowed to distort the real purpose of this venture and no rituals, dogmas and superstitions are propagated in the name of education about religions. All religions therefore have to be treated with equal respect (Sarva Dharma Sambhav) and that there has to be no discrimination on the ground of any religion (Panthnirapekshata).

Judge Shah then summarized in five points, the gist of what he had quoted from the NCFSE,

From the aforesaid paragraph, it can be culled out: (i) that the object for value based education is to have national fight against all kinds of fanaticism, ill-will, violence, dishonesty, corruption, exploitation and drug abuses; (ii) National policy on Education (1986) also lays down emphasis on equity and social justice in education and to promote the country's unique, socio-cultural identity and to contribute to national cohesion, promoting tolerance; (iii) Enable the learner to acquire knowledge to develop concepts and inculcate values commensurate with social values aimed at friendliness, cooperativeness, compassion, self-discipline, courage, love for social justice, truth, righteous conduct and non-violence; (iv) For religion, it is stated that students have to be given the awareness that the essence of every religion is common, only practices differ; (v) As a matter of caution it provides that all steps should be taken in advance to ensure that no personal prejudices or narrow minded perceptions are allowed to distort the real purpose of imparting education on religions; no righteous dogmas and superstitions should be promoted to propagate in the name of education about religions.

Shah compared the contentions of the two sides in the argument, first stating that the

(L)earned counsel for the petitioners vehemently objected only to the following part 'what is required today is not religious education but education about religions, their basics, the values inherent therein and also comparative study of the philosophy of all religions.' It is contended that giving education about religions would be violative of Article 28 and also it would offend the basic structure of the Constitution, namely, secularism.

Shah summarized the "Contra" perspective presented by the "learned Solicitor General Shri Salve" who

submitted that for challenging the policy framed by NCERT, petitioners have picked up some sentences out of the context. This national curriculum is prepared on the basis of report submitted to the Parliament on 22nd January, 1999 by the S.B. Chavan Committee which was appointed by the Parliament in 1996. The report of the Committee is based on earlier reports submitted by various Committees, namely, the Radhakrishnan Commission

(1948-49), Kothari Commission (1964- 66), National Policy on Education (1986), Ramamurti Committee (1990), Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) Committee on Policy (1992), Planning Commission Core Group on Value Orientation of Education (1992), which have highlighted the urgent need for making the educational system value-based.

The judge makes reference to an affidavit filed by the secretary of the NCERT, which stated “that the NCERT followed what the Parliamentary Committee asked it to do”. The judge explains,

The S.B. Chavan Committee's report on value based education was tabled in Parliament; after its approval, since there was no opposition, NCERT was asked to implement this report. It is submitted that some of the recommendations in the curriculum proposed by NCERT are virtual and verbatim copy of the report of the S.B. Chavan Committee.

Shah, referring back to the charge that NCERT did not consult with the appropriate academic bodies, concludes that

NCERT in fact consulted other institutions and other individual experts and sent the draft curriculum document to the Education Ministers of all the States and its Governments who would have been members of the CABE, had it been reconstituted. Further, 13 Regional and National Seminars were arranged by NCERT in different parts of India to find out reaction to this new proposal. Majority of those who participated was for the new curriculum.

The judge stated, in rather harsh language that “to say that NCERT did not consult anyone is unfair and in ignorance of facts and if not deliberate suppression of facts”. At this point, the judge quotes from “the relevant part of the S.B. Chavan Committee's report” comprising six pages in the printed version of the judgment. He highlights sixteen points regarding the efficacy and need for Values Education included in the NCFSE document. The Chavan Committee was constituted in 1996, several years before the BJP came to power at the center. The committee submitted its report to the parliament in 1999, during his tenure, but independent of Dr. M. M. Joshi’s much criticized efforts to bring “Value-based

Education” into the curriculum and to “Indianize Indian education”.

The words of the Chavan committee must have fallen on welcome ears in the HRD. The advice therein was immediately used as a model, or justification for revamping the curriculum. By the summer of 2000, when I spent a few weeks in Delhi visiting the NCERT campus, there were several seminars going on with delegates attending from around India.

There were also meetings at the parliament on the topic, which the then head of the NCERT Social Studies Department, Arjun Dev, was required to attend.⁵¹⁰ Still more than a year away from retirement at the time, Professor Arjun Dev had to carry out his duties even though he was personally and politically predisposed against many of the changes proposed by the BJP controlled HRD.

⁵¹⁰ I was in Arjun Dev’s office one day in July 2000, when he had to leave for a meeting at the parliament about values education, which he begrudgingly attended, mentioning his chagrin at the process and his pedagogical questions about the value of values education. It is to his credit that as long as he was employed at NCERT he did not come out publicly against the Human Resource Department’s proposed modifications in the curriculum framework, though he had great reservations and endless conversations with like-minded colleagues, discussing how the saffron bogey’s impact on historiography could be arrested. After his retirement, Arjun Dev came out as one of the most vocal critics of changes in the social studies curriculum. Prior to that due to his position in Indian bureaucracy, while not an active participant in conferences, or signatory on petitions, he often consulted with many of his close friends and associates, professors at JNU, were often quoted in the press in opposition to the new curriculum. Ultimately, it was his and his colleagues’ textbooks that were being replaced. Arjun Dev retired in late 2001, just as the deletions in the social studies textbooks were ordered by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and just before Aruna Roy, et al, brought the anti-NCERT case before the supreme court. In the ensuing months of media frenzy Arjun Dev was interviewed and quoted in most news reports, a highly critical insider to the NCERT who was informed and adamantly against the BJP controlled education ministry. He has been a very vocal activist presence at conferences sponsored at SAHMAT and other venues, and his numerous public statements and articles written against the government have brought him into the limelight. In the fall of 2002 an “anonymously published” pamphlet appeared accusing him of all sorts of academic and professional sins, the least of which was plagiarism and fraudulent use of the Ph.D. moniker. Because of my friendship with Prof. Arjun Dev and his wife Mrs. Indira Arjun Dev, I prefer not to go there. He was a dedicated civil servant for entire adult life and his honor should not be retroactively sullied in his retirement just because of his political perspectives. The author of the anonymous booklet had reason to be upset, since Arjun Dev had written scathing critiques about the history textbook he had written for NCERT. There was even a very public media exchange between the two social scientists.

After his retirement, he has become one of the most vocal critics of the new social studies textbooks. One of the areas he criticized the most is the effort to inculcate “Values Education” in Indian school children.

The goal that education should teach social and cultural values is invariably a central premise in most curriculum documents. As Judge Shah indicates, quoting the Chavan report, there have been numerous committees set up through the decades since independence, but little was done to implement these decrees. M.M Joshi commented on the court case shortly after the verdict, in his usual tongue-in-cheek caustic style,

In the Supreme Court, not a single word could be shown that was at variance with Parliament’s statement on the National Policy of Education. It was a policy that had been passed by Parliament. I only implemented it. People started developing stomach aches because no one before me could implement the policy.⁵¹¹

The BJP relied on the resolutions of several eminent commissions on Values Education attempting to bring them to fruition. Dr. Joshi made the point regarding his educational agenda, quite blatantly declaring, “It’s our turn now”.⁵¹² The Sangh perspective contends that for the past fifty years, India’s indigenous value system has been sidelined and renewing these cherished spiritual traditions is a long overdue writ prescribed by numerous commissions. This is the same argument that divides liberals and conservatives in the USA, both sides claiming to represent the “real” American value system.

Joshi and the NCERT used the Chavan report to further their own mission to “indigenize Indian education”. The report defined values as “principles which are consistent and universal and which direct our action and activities”. This statement by itself does not seem controversial, and wouldn’t have been-

⁵¹¹ The Indian Express, ‘I’ve only taken education a step forward, many have told me it’s the finest syllabi ever’ – an interview with Muroli Manohar Joshi, September 24, 2002.

⁵¹² Swapan Dasgupta. “Jobs for the Boys”, India Today, August 20, 2000, <http://www.indiatoday.com/webexclusive/columns/swapan/20000820.html>

implemented under another government. However, when enshrined in the NCFSE, a document created under Murali Manohar Joshi's tutelage, it brought condemnation from outraged politicians and scholars who cited these as Hindu inspired universalisms that denied the differences in value systems found in a diverse nation such as India—and hence promoted Brahmanical supremacy.

On the other hand, the Chavan report stated that these universal values “are in-built in our society, common to not only all the communities but also to all religions at all times”. In the view of its critics this is indicative of the Sangh Parivar's hegemonic intentions, to level the playing field among India's minority groups, thereby favoring the Hindu majority. To the Chavan committee members it undoubtedly meant that there was a core of goodness in all groups and beliefs. But the critics of Dr. Joshi were able to twist these words to imply communalism, claiming as they do that the “universality of values” is a distinctly Hindu perspective. Joshi spoke of his critics,

The most vitriolic reaction came from the Leftists as they had to hide their own skeletons. They feared their own skewed curriculum would be exposed—their history and social science books which teach how Lenin inspired the Indian freedom struggle and which ignore Rabindranath Tagore, Subhash Chandra Bose or Gandhi's contributions.⁵¹³

The Chavan Committee report discussed cultural values in much the same way that Dr. Joshi advocated. In 1999, the timing of the publication of the document couldn't have been more propitious for the HRD minister, just as they were developing the initial “Discussion Document”, the *National Curriculum for School Education*. The Chavan report stressed that if values deteriorate it “will hasten or accelerate the break-down of family, society and nation as a whole”. This concept of the slow decline of society into amoral amorphousness is common to curriculum documents in many countries. However, exactly what

⁵¹³ Ibid.

values should be inculcated to arrest this decline are inevitably subject to debate and even radical reversals. The Chavan Committee goes on to say,

Although there has been great advancement in science and technology, there has been a gradual erosion of values [...]. Our young generation under the growing influence of negative aspects of Western culture, is stranded on the cross-roads, not able to decide which direction to take.

Mr. Joshi agreed, “Why should we not teach our own time-tested values when the world over everyone is talking about value-based education?”⁵¹⁴

Educational objectives employed in curriculum documents of traditional cultures in the process of rapid modernization and economic development are often designed to help students resist the homogenizing pressures of westernization or globalization. This is a common theme in “post-colonial” educational parlance. Critics of the BJP say, that in India, because this perspective is promoted by the majority community, it will lead to social discrimination, hence the vehement stance taken by the litigants in this case.

Ironically, in other contexts, alternative perspectives on society are accepted as positive steps towards deconstructing hegemony, and even encouraged by human rights advocates and liberal intellectuals. In comparison to other developing nations, as they attempt to promote their “indigenous” view of pre-colonial history and culture, the condemnation vetted against the BJP is an anomaly. But the criticism is scathing and insistent. In the next section, I digress from this discussion of historiographical battles in India to take a seriously negative look at the radical fringe of the Hindu Revivalist movement, and quote from one of their most vocal advocates, Praveen Togadia.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

*From the Drain Pipe Inspector's View*⁵¹⁵

Criticism of the Sangh Parivar is based on numerous factors. First and foremost, in India there are steep political differences between scholars and journalists of various schools of thought. Intellectuals who position themselves on the left, such as JNU scholars, activists in various NGOs, and the editors at several English language daily newspapers, are united against the Sangh Parivar, whose philosophy is seen as a form of nationalistic religious triumphalism. Opposition to the Sangh is based on the view that majoritarian cultural nationalism is chauvinistic and anti-minority and will impose hegemonic cultural norms on non-Hindus.⁵¹⁶ The Sangh Parivar is an example of a majority community that feels it has been discriminated against and seeks to revive its lost greatness or rekindle cultural pride in a civilization that was subjected to a millennium of discrimination and exploitation. This is their primary point of view.

Other important factors that have turned many people against the Sangh Parivar are the more radical segments of the movement such as the Bajrang Dal, a youth group that promotes a militant form of activism, and does military-like training, which many people condemn as a challenge to civil society. On their website, they call themselves, “Warriors of the Hindutva Revolution” and state, “We as members of the Bajrang Dal, swear in the name of Lord Hanuman to always remain prepared to protect our country, religion and culture”.

This youth group points to the service that they have done for their country.

⁵¹⁵ “Drain inspector's view” was how Gandhi described a book written by Katherine Mayo, *Mother India*, published in 1927. This book was used as anti-Hindu propaganda for missionaries and also as “evidence that India was 'not yet ready' for self-rule.” (Thanks to Professor Frank Conlon for that comment, via email.) Mayo’s book focused exclusively on social evils.

⁵¹⁶ Ironically, in other situations, cultural revivalism is often encouraged, when it is among minority groups, in order to help them maintain their identity and renew pride in their culture. (Gail Minault added, that this was true, at least regarding “music and dance”!)

But others point to the dangers they pose if they think of themselves as a paramilitary force. They have been implicated in attacks on Muslims. They have been responsible for assaults on greeting card stores on Valentine's Day, and on artists and movie directors, whose art they think is insulting to Hinduism.

Sometimes the Bajrang Dal is compared to the Taliban. I have met members of the Taliban, and I have met members of the Bajrang Dal. From my discussions with them, I can say unequivocally, that their goals and worldviews are very different. No real comparison. The Talibanis I met in 2000 in Quetta Balouchistan, and in Islamabad in 1999 were angry men. Long gone were the idealistic Talibs who emerged from their Madrassas to liberate Afghanistan from the war lords. They were middle aged, unfriendly men. They were gloomy. The world was closing in on them, coming to an end. Violent jihad against cultural imperialism was their primary imperative. The students in the Taliban schools learned nothing but the Qu'ran. They did not live with their parents... they were preparing to go to Chechnya to become martyrs.

The Bajrang Dal members I have met were more like over enthusiastic boy scouts who have become politicized. Most of them are college students, often fluent in English, educated and very international. They passionately felt that it is their duty to protect Hindu Dharma and the territorial integrity of India. But there was no mission of carrying that vision beyond the borders of Hindustan.

The Bajrang Dal has been accused of causing numerous altercations. The media held them responsible for the murder of Graham Stains and his two sons, but the official inquiry found that they were not involved. They are named as the first suspects in almost all communal altercations. Their reputation exceeds their actual prowess. Their bark is bigger than their bite, though they would be the last to admit it. But they do bark a lot and the media sensationalizes their militant

stance, hence their name comes up whenever there is a protest.⁵¹⁷

There is little likelihood of suicide bombers among the Bajrang Dal. They march around in saffron colored silk shirts waving flags. They practice hand to hand combat, which they claim is for self protection from “anti-Indian forces” a euphemism for Muslims. They have not been instrumental in rewriting history or in any of the debates that are discussed here. Except for meeting a few members informally, I have not researched their activities and these comments are based on media coverage and the minimal contact I have had with a few Bajrang Dal members.

I had a long and interesting discussion with an RSS man from Jaipur who had lived in Dimapur, Nagaland for several generations. His son was a member of Bajrang Dal. They told me that when the earthquake happened in Gujarat they immediately coordinated and dispatched a convoy of trucks filled with wood for cremations. I told him that the newspapers had cited this as an example of the communalism of the Sangh Parivar, that they “were only burning Hindus, not burying Muslims”. The man looked mortified for a moment. He said that if there is an other earthquake, he will also “dispatch a truck full of shovels”.

There are other “members” of the Parivar’s radical fringe who are more unsavory. The Shiv Sena⁵¹⁸ is a Mumbai based organization whose imperiously

⁵¹⁷ This article about environmentalists in Bhopal is a good example of how the Hindu Fundamentalists are often blamed for social unrest, to justify attacking them: “On Monday [November 25, 2002], under the banner of the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal, a large group of local people entered the factory to begin a citizen's clean-up. With them were 30 foreign decontamination experts, among them Greenpeace members from 16 countries and local people who had been specially trained in waste disposal [...] [When the] riot police turned up with their rifles and lathis.... [w]ith them came [the] Reserve Inspector [who] told the crowd... that the activists were ‘Hindu fundamentalists’, come to stir up trouble between the communities.” <http://www.bhopal.net/peoplevpoison.html>

⁵¹⁸ The Shiv Sena was first formed, not as a pro-Hindu organization but to keep immigrants from Tamilnadu from moving to erstwhile Bombay, now Mumbai. As the political tide changed, they changed their colors and turned that xenophobic urge against Muslims instead of their co-religionist Tamils.

pompous leader, Bal Thackeray often makes racist remarks and advocates a xenophobic perspective of Hindu society. The Shiv Sena is not at the center of the Hindu revivalist movement, though they were instrumental in the late eighties and early nineties of fomenting antagonism among the radical fringe.

Many Indians who are sympathetic to the basic ideas of Hindu Revivalism, or Indian Cultural Nationalism, are very critical of Thackeray who is seen as an embarrassment. His party lost control of the Mumbai metropolitan area in the last election held in the spring of 2003, after over a decade of dominance. Many dedicated stalwarts of the Sangh perspective, with insiders' views, have told me that Thackeray is a real "*saalaa*"⁵¹⁹.

Another group within the Sangh Parivar, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) or World Council of Hinduism, is often viewed in a negative light. Several VHP leaders are seen as overly bombastic. They often use religion to whip up political sentiments. These are important criticisms and must be considered in a broader study of the Hindu Revivalist Movement.

This study of textbooks and competing historical narratives acknowledges that there are quite negative implications in some of the statements and stances of leaders of the VHP and Shiv Sena. Many of their statements are blatantly anti-Muslim. They talk incessantly about the negative influence of Madrassa education on Muslim youth⁵²⁰ and the threat of terrorism from ISI⁵²¹ backed

⁵¹⁹ literally, brother-in-law, pejoratively used, it means sister f _ _ker. I was told by someone close to the Shiv Sena that Thackeray has had a long time affair with his daughter-in-law. Whether this is true or not I do not know, but such nasty gossip about him abounds as he is seen as a very questionable and mean-spirited, self-serving egotistical person. As far as personalities go, and the way that people are perceived within the Hindu Nationalist movement, Thackeray is often reviled while M.M. Joshi is widely respected as a social reformer and a scholar. There are of course many others who are critical of Dr. Joshi's vision of society.

⁵²⁰ This is something that has also been discussed by Pakistani scholars such as Professor Tariq Rahman.

militants. Many leaders of the Sangh Parivar make anti-Islamic remarks which can lead to prejudicial attitudes and even violence. Some of their activities, such as the distribution of *trishuls*,⁵²² are highly provocative. Their activities are often aimed at minority populations, warning them not to support terrorism, telling them to be patriotic, or else—an “India: love it or leave it” syndrome.⁵²³

The VHP and RSS are actively engaged in preventing wide scale missionary activity, which they claim targets uneducated Hindus with monetary allurements to convert. The governments of several states, including Gujarat and Tamilnadu, have recently passed anti-conversion bills that prevent citizens from changing their religion for reasons other than personal conviction. In particular, these laws attempt to put an end to “mass conversions”. Many Indian Christians claim that such laws discriminate against their right to practice their religion which includes the right to proselytize.

For six weeks during the spring of 2002, Gujarat burned with communal riots that took the lives of over a thousand Indian citizens, the vast majority of the victims were Muslims.⁵²⁴ These communal riots received wide media coverage and the carnage was blamed on Narendra Modi, the BJP chief minister of the state. The communal riots were the repercussion an attack on a train of Hindu pilgrims⁵²⁵.

⁵²¹ The ISI or Inter Services Intelligence, is the infamous CIA trained Pakistani agency that notoriously supports Jihadi elements in that society and funds mujahideen who are sent into India, especially Kashmir.

⁵²² Trishuls are a three pronged pitchfork-like weapon that is one of the symbols of the Hindu God, Shiva. The VHP has distributed hundreds of thousands of trishuls as a symbol of “Hindu strength”.

⁵²³ This phenomenon was highlighted in the film by Anand Patwardhan, “Father Son and Holy War”.

⁵²⁴ Approximately two hundred policemen in Gujarat also lost their lives trying to quell the violence.

⁵²⁵ Some people referred to these fifty-seven Hindu women and children as pilgrims, others called them Svayamsevaaks, or Hindutva activists. In either case, they were returning from a trip

Modi is said to have encouraged revenge after a train coach filled with Hindus was burned by a mob of Muslims in Godhra, a city in Gujarat. One compartment was burned in which fifty-seven women and children died. The next day, the state erupted in two months of violence that targeted the Muslim minority community.⁵²⁶

The Gujarat government and the BJP at the center were highly criticized for their inability to immediately curtail the violence. Many analyses have blamed the Gujarat state government for complicity and fanning the flames of revenge. The Sangh Parivar may have some unsavory characters, but not all Indians who are sympathetic to developing a more Indo-centric orientation in Indian education are anti-minority. It is to the credit of the people of India that the terrible riots in Gujarat during the spring of 2002 did not spread to other states. These are highly controversial issues and though not directly related to the process of the evolution of historiography in India, must be mentioned and condemned.

In this condemnation should be the acknowledgement that the vast majority of Indians who are inclined to think that Hinduism is the bedrock of Indian civilization, are not inherently anti-Muslim. They very much consider Muslims to be part of the Indian mosaic and genetically and culturally integral to the milieu of Indian-ness. The catch is that they want Muslims to share that perspective and not to set themselves apart within the nation. Many Indians feel that separate laws for Muslims keep them in a perpetual state of alienation. They say that living under a separate civil code encourages Muslim citizens of India to

to Ayodhya and a visit to the disputed site where the Babri Masjid once stood. The train was waylaid by a mob of Muslims and a compartment was torched.

⁵²⁶ This communal carnage is comparable in scope with the violent retribution against innocent members of the Sikh community after the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. This pogrom in Delhi, that killed thousands of Sikhs was led by Congress Party stalwarts. Until now, twenty years later, very few of the accused have been brought to justice.

view non-Muslim citizens as kafirs instead of countrymen.

Whether someone thinks that these perspectives have truth in them, depends on his or her experience and orientation. Nonetheless, it is widely believed among millions and millions of Indians that jihadi Islam and the rhetoric of fundamentalist Muslim clerics are detrimental to the interests of the nation. They criticize Mullahs who have encouraged Muslim men to attack Hindus, as happened in May 2003 in Maraad, Kozhikode, Kerala and, as mentioned, in February 2002 in Godhra, Gujarat. In the same breath, the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi must be blamed for the communal carnage in February and March of 2002. Either way, Hindutva feeds on jihadi Islam, and vice-versa.

The events of 9/11 brought to international attention the fervor of the jihadi mentality of the Mujahideen that in the 1980s was whipped up in training camps in Pakistan by the ISI backed by the CIA to fight the “Godless Soviets”. In the past fifteen years, since the Russians were driven from Afghanistan, the jihadi forces have turned their attention to India. Since 1989, there have been over seventy thousand Indians killed in terrorist related violence.

Every few months, Hindu pilgrims and wedding parties, whole villages of Sikhs and Pandits living in Jammu or Kashmir are murdered by terrorists, whom Pakistan dubs freedom fighters. They line up the villagers and shoot the women, grandmothers, old men, and little children. There have been armed attacks on Indian temples by Islamic suicide squads, much less the Parliament building. With the “War on Terror” now globalized, India’s efforts to curb Islamic terrorism are taken more seriously and members of the Sangh Parivar have become even more vocal about this perceived threat.

Despite the less savory characters in the Sangh Parivar, they have not sworn an oath to destroy all non-Hindu world culture. Even the most fanatical of

the VHP and Bajrang Dal do not aspire to destroy the symbols of “Western hegemony” by violent confrontation⁵²⁷. At least they do not strap suicide bombs on themselves and blow up buses. They are militantly Hindu, not militantly anti-American. In fact, the Sangh Parivar is seen as more sympathetic to the USA than are many of the most vocal Marxist intellectuals such as K.N. Panikkar who have for several decades been the loudest critics of “American imperialism”. The situation in India is very convoluted. The labels are often an uneasy fit. Hindu cultural nationalism is not a threat to world culture, unless you believe as they do that they are taking over the world gradually by the flourishing of yoga studios in most metropolitan areas.

Hindu nationalism is based on the idea that India should not be Balkanized. That all Indians, regardless of their language or religion should be patriotic. And at the very least citizens should not work with foreign elements to cause internal turmoil in the country. Their primary claim is that Vedic and Indic traditions are the cultural bedrock of India’s civilization. How this is interpreted is multifold, sometimes emphasizing the pluralistic—that all Indians are basically from the same origins, but due to circumstance of place have somewhat different orientations. Others take a harder line.

Among many supporters of the Sangh Parivar is a strong element of anti-Islamism. They blame the Muslim League for bifurcating India, *Bharat Mata*⁵²⁸. They are sworn to protect Hindu culture and retain the integrity of Indian territory. In that capacity, they often seem xenophobic or aggressive. But as

⁵²⁷ One exception is their stance on Valentine’s Day, which they say encourages licentious behavior and illicit sex. Sometimes on February 14th the radical fringe attacks greeting cards’ stores. Though no one has been killed in these raids on romance, there has been a loss of property. Importantly, I have met very few supporters of the Sangh Parivar who condone this anti-Valentine’s Day agenda and most people ridicule it and say that such meaningless agitation brings shame to India.

⁵²⁸ Mother India

every Hindu will point out, a Hindu nation has never invaded another country. Hindutva has no aims for world domination... but it vehemently demands the recognition that Hindu culture is the foundation of India's civilizational ethos. That can be framed as a serious threat.

“Vituperative, Venom-Spewing” ... VHP

An in depth interview with Praveen Togadia, a prominent spokesman for the VHP, is useful here to understand the reasoning and motives of the more radical elements in the Sangh Parivar. On October 15, 2002, an article appeared in the *Milli Gazette*, a newspaper oriented towards a Muslim audience.⁵²⁹ The interview was then posted on the VHP homepage.⁵³⁰ Since one of the methodologies of this study is to represent the motives of the Hindu Revivalist movement and the Sangh Parivar in their own words, what Dr. Togadia had to say when interviewed by Firoz Bakht Ahmed of the *Milli Gazette* is relevant.

The article was titled, “We (Hindus and Muslims) are Ethnically and Culturally the Same: Interview with Dr. Pravin Togadia”. The editor of the newspaper writes in an introduction that Dr. Togadia “comes from the noble profession of healing and professes to be a believer in the nobler ideas of Hinduism,” but adds, that nonetheless, Togadia “would not pause for a moment before making uncharitable remarks against Islam and Muslims”. The editor of the *Milli Gazette* pointed out that Togadia supports the “Distribution of a million trishuls at kumbh, followed by similar trishul-distribution campaigns at other places in India, fire arms training to Bajrang Dal cadres. etc.”. In his introduction to Firoz Bakht Ahmed’s interview the editor concludes that “there is still a silver lining in the darkness of hate”,

⁵²⁹ <http://www.milligazette.com/Archives/15102002/1510200234.htm>

⁵³⁰ <http://www.delhiinfo.com/vhpsamachar/vhp1/newsadmin/vhp/english>

Dr Togadia does recognise⁵³¹ the shared ancestry of Indian Muslims and Hindus. All of us know that blood is thicker than water, and a day might come when this burning rage fuelled by angry people like Dr Togadia would cool down and blood ties would reassert themselves.

“Till then,” the editor ominously warns his readers, “listen to what the militant doctor has to tell Firoz Bakht Ahmed, and mull over it.” Since this interview was originally published in a Muslim newspaper and then proudly reposted on the VHP website, it can be assumed that the VHP concurs with Togadia’s statements as recorded in this article. On the VHP web site the link was called, “Togadia Speaks”.

This document can therefore be said to express the views of the VHP. Following the methodology in other parts of this study--using quotes from the media to highlight scholarly and political controversies in India--this interview is an excellent source to understand the reasoning processes of the VHP. It must be noted that there are significant differences between groups within the Sangh Parivar, and prominent members of the BJP, such as Venkaiah Naidu have accused the VHP of acting like “Islamic fundamentalists”. The VHP has accused Vajpayee of “pandering to vote bank politics”.

Obviously, the interviewer, Firoz Bakht Ahmed is not sympathetic and asks his questions from a confrontational stance. He first inquired why “a highly qualified cancer surgeon” got “involved with a riotous and communalist organisation like the VHP?” Togadia replied that referring to the VHP in those terms “is an allegation put forward by Hindu secularists and Muslims who hate the Hindus more than Ghaznavi did”. This is the first among several times that Togadia uses medieval history as his reference point.

⁵³¹ When the British spelling of a word appears in a direct quote, the spelling has been retained. At other places in the text, American spelling conventions are used.

He then cites the VHP's most common complaint that these aforementioned "secularists and Muslim" groups "don't have the courage to intrude into the roles of the madrasas that are spreading Islamic fundamentalism during the riots". He defends the Sangh Parivar by saying "many commissions have been formed in the Congress-ruled states but not a single [one] has mentioned the involvement of the VHP or Bajrang Dal, while they have all accused the Muslims". He dramatically ends his answer to this question, "There are secular forces that want to convert India into a graveyard like Kashmir". And states unequivocally, "I am proud of VHP".

Firoz Bakht Ahmed turns around the Arabic terminology that has recently been used to turn against Islam and tells Togadia that these "secularists", whom he has criticized, take him to be a "Hindu Talib, a Hindu jihadi and a Hindu kafir". Togadia replied, using the Hinduism versus Islam comparative tack often taken by Hindutva-walas. First, in painfully simplistic platitudes, he glorifies Hinduism,

A Hindu cannot be a Talib, jihadi or kafir because a Hindu is one who is a hundred times more refined, cultured, more honest, more religious and more balanced in his outlook. Hinduism is the culmination of the cultural evolution of mankind. As a Hindu, I see God in every individual.

Then, continuing in this common strategy taken to defend the more militant aspects of Hindutva, he negatively, if somewhat humorously compares Islam to Hinduism,

A Talib is one who cannot tolerate the Bamiyan Buddha; a jihadi is one who kills and displaces the innocent Kashmiri Pandits; a kafir is one who is intolerant like Osama and his followers. Osama's religion misguided him to be a terrorist. Had Osama been a Hindu, as per this religion, he would have been running a Rama-Krishna matha somewhere in the Hindukush Mountains for the welfare of the needy rather than plotting the massacre of thousands of innocents in the 9/11 tragedy.

Togadia finished answering this question with another comment that is germane to this study of competing historiography. He singles out the “pseudo-intellectuals of the JNU *madrassa*” (emphasis added), whom he believes have accused him “of these unfounded allegations” of being a “Hindu kafir”. He adds, later on in the interview, that the VHP is “running more than 8,000 social service projects through out the length and breadth of India. Those who are trying to defame an organisation like this are only paving way for ruining India”.

Firoz Bakht Ahmed refers to a “VHP leaflet printed in the report of an independent fact-finding mission by intellectuals” who went to Gujarat after the communal riots. The intellectuals described the VHP leaflet which “mentions that Muslim teachers should not teach Hindus or have business transactions with them etc.” The editor parenthetically cites “the report prepared by Dr Kamal Mitra Chenoy, S P Shukla, Dr K S Subramanian and Achin Vinayak”.⁵³² The editor then added parenthetically that Togadia denied there was “an anti-Muslim campaign leaflet”. Firoz Bakht Ahmed asks Togadia, if this kind of leaflet doesn’t make him “a Hindu kafir?”

⁵³² Because I have looked at both sides of several contentious confrontations in Indian political culture, I have followed the activities and read the articles of activists such as Kamal Mitra Chenoy, S. P. Shukla, and Achin Vinayak. Professor Chenoy from JNU appeared before a Congressionally appointed committee in the summer of 2002 to encourage the American government to censure the Indian government for genocide. The gist of his writings, in publications such as *Communalism Combat*, subtly aver that the only solution to India’s problems is to root out Hinduism. Shukla is one of the more radical journalists who uses shrill language and sensationalism in his articles against the BJP. Achin Vinayak equates Hinduism with *Hindutva* and has often raised the ire of his audiences by his anti-Hindu stance—equating Hinduism with intolerance. Because I have seen that the articles and speeches by these three intellectuals are highly partisan and activist oriented, I would like to see that leaflet before critiquing it. Because of my familiarity with the charges and stances of these three intellectuals, I would have to say that just because this group of anti-Sangh scholars claimed to have seen it, doesn’t mean it exists... though it certainly could be true. But since, I have traced down other discoveries and broadly disseminated proclamations made by several of these scholars and have found the source to be quite different than the ensuing propaganda, I would want to see this leaflet for myself. This comment is added as a caveat for scholars seeking to learn more about the Sangh Parivar. Don’t rely on secondary and tertiary sources, but have the document in your hand, rather than reading “critical analyses” about such politicized and sensitive issues.

Togadia considers this to be “propaganda by the Hindu secularists who have a long history of defaming the VHP”. He explained that “Hinduism has no concept of kufr”.⁵³³ He alludes to the essence of Hinduism’s ancient tradition as “the science for the development of the mind and body of the individual, the family, the society, nation and ultimately the world in perfect harmony with each other-Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam”⁵³⁴. He states emphatically, “Hinduism is not a religion but a synonym for nationalism”⁵³⁵. To underscore his claim that Indian Muslims should consider themselves as much Indian as do India’s Hindu citizens, Togadia adds, “The Arabs, who still maintain [the] practice [of kafir], called *all* Indians Hindus” (emphasis added).

In this context the journalist asked Togadia why then does “the VHP always talks about Hindus and not Indians?” Togadia replied with a series of counter questions. First, embracing the “Golden Age of Hinduism” paradigm that is ridiculed by many serious scholars, he replies, “I ask you if it is a crime to be a member of such a big Hindu family extending to all corners of the world and a society that is the part of the most ancient civilisation?” He takes the common tack that Hinduism has been vandalized for centuries, pointing to cases of Muslim on Hindu violence, “Members of this ancient civilisation are being annihilated in Godhra, Kashmir, Pakistan and Bangladesh”. He asks a series of indignant, yet provocative questions,

⁵³³ In this article kafir is spelled two different ways.

⁵³⁴ All the world is one family

⁵³⁵ I have spoken to many people sympathetic to the Hindu Revivalist Movement who argue effectively against the phrase “Hinduism is not a religion, but a way-of-life”. They claim that this terminology lowers Hinduism from a belief system shared by hundreds of millions of people to a kind of cultural synthesis. They are even more against the phrasing chosen by Togadia that rather than a religion Hinduism is “a synonym for nationalism”. Many people who might be classified as “saffron” are very critical of some of these assumptions by the more radical wing of the Sangh Parivar, though they agree with other perspectives. The Sangh Parivar is not a monolith and the varieties of points of view are vast.

What is wrong if some organisations like the VHP, RSS and Shiv Sena believe that the Vedic culture of a society that believes in plurality and unity in diversity, has to be retained? If we are saving a civilisation that preserves 1100 religions and 1600 dialects, defending it against the totalitarian and violent religious belief system within democratic set-up, is it wrong?

Showing his true saffron colors, Togadia scolds Firoz Bakht Ahmed, accusing him in not so subtle language of being anti-national, “Only the violent and jihadi forces that want to destroy India, should ask a question like this.” All Ahmed asked was why the VHP always “talks about Hindus and not Indians”. But it must have hit a sore spot with Togadia. Again grounding himself in the Hindutva view of medieval Indian history, and using an antiquated Hindustani reference to Muslims, he added another question to his answer, “Do you know that more than 30,000 temples had been converted into mosques during the Mohammedan rule?”

He concluded with a claim that is clearly part of the discourse of Hindu identity formation. “Hinduism takes pride in not having invaded any country during its long glorious history. Hinduism is synonymous with harmony”. Togadia had earlier claimed that Hinduism was a “synonym for nationalism”, now he says it is “synonymous with harmony”. Hinduism is fluid enough to accommodate both ends of the spectrum that are almost mutually exclusive. In India as in the USA, God and nationalism are inextricably intertwined.⁵³⁶

Ahmed then asks a confrontational question, “What vested interest drives you to issue vituperative, venom-spewing and rabid statements against Muslims?” Togadia replies that the VHP’s “vested interest” is in “saving the nation from the divisive forces”. He throws the word Taliban around, like so many have done on both sides of the debate of historiography in India. He refers to activist scholars,

⁵³⁶ This internal contradiction reminds me of a sign out side a Walgreen’s store right after 9/11, “Prozac on Sale, God Bless America”. The nationalist Hindus would be well served if they tried to focus more on the harmony aspect of Hinduism.

such as those associated with the Delhi Historians Group, calling them “the anti-Hindu secularist Taliban”. Togadia claims that the biggest supporters of anti-national divisive forces are at “JNU (Jawaharlal Nehru University) madrasa, an atheists' seminary that hates God and those who want to preserve the rich Hindutva heritage”.

Harsh, partisan words, but not an uncommon observation. I've heard similar comments many times, though in less crude language. I have even been told this by Indians who had graduated from JNU. The deep-seated hatred that Togadia reserves for JNU-type scholars is tangible. Numerous intellectuals supportive of the Sangh share this perspective. JNU has been singled out as the enemy since the days of the Babri Masjid controversy. At that time JNU faculty played a high profile activist role in support of the All India Babri Masjid Action Committee. They were at the forefront in preventing any negotiations between the AIBMAC and the VHP.

Member of the DHG published numerous pamphlets critical of the Sangh Parivar's perspective. They invoked history to validate their points. This was the defining moment when the battle lines were drawn across the chasm of history. Pamphleteer historiography also became institutionalized. Togadia's disdain for the scholars in the Delhi Historians Group is obvious, the feelings are mutual.

Togadia then mentions the VHP's top priorities, fighting missionaries and mujahideen. He breaks it down into black and white. There is no middle ground as far as Togadia is concerned. Anyone who criticizes the VHP must be supportive of General Musharraf and the “grand design” to destabilize of India.

We are fighting against such people who are trying to destroy the Hindu society with their totalitarian attitude that only promotes the Church paradigm of the 17th and 18th century Europe. We are exposing the grand design of Pakistan and the ISI to destabilise India. If we are being criticised for that, it means that the

secularists are supporting the plans of Musharraf and Macaulay both against the unity of India.

He again absolves himself and the VHP, “The 14 Congress-ruled states haven't filed a single case against me, and this allegation against me [‘venom-spewing and rabid’] is all humbug and unfounded”. Ahmed asks Togadia’s “views regarding the Modi-sponsored genocide of Muslims in Gujarat in response to the Godhra carnage?” Ignoring the fact that the interviewer referred to Godhra as a carnage, Togadia responds with an answer that exemplifies the Hindutva position and uses common Hindu imagery,

Violence of any type by anyone and anywhere should be vehemently condemned. I feel that Muslims haven't condemned the violence in Godhra and Kashmir the way they did in Gujarat-an undemocratic act. When the secularists selectively condemn the Gujarat violence, it seems that without Sita haran (Sita's abduction) the Lanka dahan (Lanka's burning) is imagined.⁵³⁷ So if you have to criticise the Gujarat carnage, you must also condemn the Kashmir killings as well as the Godhra massacre. If you are only condemning Gujarat, you are inviting the jihadi terrorists and Musharraf to attack Akshardham⁵³⁸ with a red carpet welcome.

When Ahmed asks him if “Muslims of India have contributed a lot to the nation in all walks of life?” Togadia reveals his inherent bias. He accommodates the question with a pat reply, “Yes, Muslims have contributed to the civilisation as well as culture”. Then he immediately launches into a litany of examples of Islamic offenses, “But, they have also contributed Somnath, Mathura, Kashi, Kashmir valley, Pakistan, attacks on Indian parliament and Akshardham”. He then chides Indian Muslims for not speaking up against jihad.

⁵³⁷ This refers to the much loved Indian epic, The Ramayana, that tells the tale, according to a summation written by storyteller, Sara Ransom, of “Ram, a prince who was to have been crowned king, but due to palace intrigues and jealousy, was banished instead, to the forest--the forest where his lovely wife, Sita ...had been kidnapped by demons”. Held captive, she is rescued with the help of Hanuman who burns down Sri Lanka in the process. The metaphor is clear, if violence had not been done on the Hindu society, there would be no need of retaliation.

⁵³⁸ Akshardham was stormed by terrorists on September 24, 2002, it is a 23 acre cultural complex dedicated to world peace and harmony, founded by Swaminarayan.

Muslims have also contributed to the youth who are willing to be cannon fodder in the name of jihad. I believe that most of the Muslims want to live peacefully and have nothing to do with vandalism. It's very unfortunate that not even 10 Muslim leaders have marched to resettle the displaced Kashmiri Pandits while on the other hand Hindu leaders marched for rehabilitating Muslims who have suffered in Gujarat. After the Gujarat violence, there was an outcry by the Hindu leaders but not a fatwa has been issued till date by the Muslim ulama against the 70,000 people killed in Kashmir.

This question about Muslims got him fired up and he makes several references to medieval Indian history. Togadia states defiantly that the “Muslim community has contributed Ghaznavi, Aurangzeb, Jinnah and Imam Bukhari⁵³⁹ – all symbols of vandalism”. He adds, again in reference to medieval history, “At least the likes⁵⁴⁰ of Rahim, Khusro and Raskhan do not seem to lead the misled Muslims⁵⁴¹ today”. He continues, trying to bring a tolerant face to the VHP, “We don't oppose the mosques, but certainly oppose the jihadi madrasas and the Taliban”. Again invoking the names of these three famous medieval Indian Muslim poets who composed Bhakti songs about Krishna, Togadia emphatically states the VHP's position on Muslims in India, “We welcome Rahim, Raskhan and Khusro but oppose Bukhari and Imam Ali”.⁵⁴²

Asghar Ali Engineer, a well known scholar from Mumbai, in an article, *The RSS – An Evaluation from the Minority Perspective*, inadvertently expresses the same perspective as Togadia, regarding the contribution of tolerant, Hindu-

⁵³⁹ The Imam of the Jaama Masjid in Old Delhi who is an outspoken supporter of the Taliban and Pakistani Mujahideen in Kashmir.

⁵⁴⁰ In American English, when we use the phrase, “the likes of” it is a way of othering certain groups or individuals in a negative context.

⁵⁴¹ Certainly a negative summation of the mental condition of contemporary Indian Muslims.

⁵⁴² The BJP's choice for the President of India, Abdul Kamal, is a Muslim scientist who because he loved to read the Gita, was called, by members of the Delhi Historians Group, an “RSS poster boy”, though he embodies the very expression of the synthesis of Indian Islam that Asghar Ali Engineer promotes when he favorably discusses “Rahim, Raskhan and Khusro”.

loving Muslims to Indian culture. Though they would not agree on most issues, in this case they do.

The Indian Muslims have contributed very richly to music, painting and Indian architecture too. Some Muslim poets like Rahim and Raskhan have written poetry full of Krishna bhakti (devotion). The Padmavat was also written by a Muslim poet. Khusro, the noted disciple of Hazrat Nizamuddin Awliya, composed dohas in Hindi, which became part of North Indian folklore.⁵⁴³

Asghar Ali Engineer, a kind soft spoken scholar, views “the likes of” Togadia as narrow minded, anti-secular, and violence prone. He wrote about the parent organization, the RSS,

The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh was set up on the Vijay Dashmi day in 1925 by Dr. Hedgewar with a negative sentiment. The Sangh was floated to train the Hindu youth to face the ‘Muslim goondaism’ and to defend the Hindus from ‘Muslim bullies’. It was believed in those days, even by some educated people that Muslims are bullies and Hindus cowards. The Sangh was meant to make Hindus feel brave. The Sangh has grown for last seventy-five years with this negative feeling towards the minorities, especially the Muslims. An organisation which is bred on such negative feelings can hardly be expected to have healthy and balanced view towards minorities.⁵⁴⁴

Togadia’s next statement spells out in no uncertain terms, what it takes for Muslims to be accepted in a “healthy and balanced” manner in an RSS or VHP envisioned India.

It is for the Muslim society to decide whether to live peacefully rejecting the jihadis or to support them. The VHP is a truly patriotic organisation that has always welcomed any citizen who does not believe in violence and respects the country, its history, culture and ethos.

⁵⁴³ Asghar Ali Engineer. The RSS – An Evaluation from the Minority Perspective, Secular Perspective 16-30 April, 2001, <http://ecumene.org/IIS/csss48.htm>.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

When Ahmed asks, what is “the real root of Hindu-Muslim problem”

Togadia replies with an answer that encapsulates the VHP’s view of Islam,

Hindus are not totalitarian as they are inclusive, have accepted and respected the Syrian Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians and the other minorities, except Muslims who are closed. If you accuse VHP or Ram mandir movement to be responsible for the riots, what about the riots before 1984? If Hindus are riotous then riots should be confined only to India. Globally, it is Muslims who are fighting everywhere, whether it is against the Christians in Chechnya and Bosnia, against the Jews in Israel or against the Roman Catholics in Philippines. Islam has an exclusive totalitarian system believing in jihad, terming the non-Muslims as kafirs. This intolerance is basically responsible for the Hindu-Muslim problem.

Ahmed continues, “Why do you accuse Islam as a terrorist religion and all Muslims extremists, rather than castigating only those Muslims who are terrorists?” And Togadia explains, with a bit of a globalized ironic twist,

Look, LTTE⁵⁴⁵ is a violent organisation comprising mostly Hindus, but no one calls Hinduism a terrorist religion. The Irish Republican Army is of Christians but no one accuses Christianity to be a fundamentalist religion. But Muslim terrorists are termed as Islamic terrorists since they call themselves as ‘jihadis out to save Islam’.

When Ahmed asks “Why in Kashmir valley and Afghanistan, Muslim youth of different nationalities come to fight?” Togadia responds that “They have nothing to do with the aspirations of the Kashmiris or the Afghans”. He then begins a rant that isolates Islam as the only religion that advocates violence,

Tell me the name of any scripture from any religion that supports jihad, be it Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism or Judaism. *If Islam is not a terrorist religion* why not some muftis issue fatwas against the likes of Osama, Masood Azhar⁵⁴⁶, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Hizb-

⁵⁴⁵ The Tamil liberation front in Sri Lanka, who through the past decades have exploded more suicide bombs than all the Jihadis put together, including a bomb that killed the Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi.

⁵⁴⁶ The jihadi cleric who was released from an Indian jail as ransom after five hijackers seized an Indian Airlines flight from Kathmandu on December 24, 1999. They ultimately landed in Taliban controlled Kandahar, Afghanistan, and demanded the release of Maulana Masood Azhar, a

ul-Mujahedeen, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Al-Qaida⁵⁴⁷ to prove true to their faith as well as the nation (emphasis added).

After all this, Togadia makes the following innocuous demand sound like a warning, when it seems to be the same thing that Ali Asghar Engineer had celebrated in his view of Hindu Sufi synthesis. Togadia states, a little too emphatically, “Muslims must ... pay heed to what the saints like Rama, Buddha, Mahavira, Guru Nanak and Mahatma Gandhi have propagated”. At this point, Firoz Bakht Ahmed, in his caustic style of inquiry, asks what it would take for a Muslim to get the VHP’s “certificate of loyalty” He asked Togadia if he thought Muslims could “join the mainstream?” The cancer surgeon turned ideologue replied,

First, all Hindus and Muslims should accept one reality - that we are ethnically and culturally the same. No one from the Hindu-Muslim society must suffer German-Jew paradigm. Each and every Muslim of India emanates ancestrally from the gene, RBC, bone, blood and flesh of a Hindu. If there is something in Hindu dharma that hurts Muslims, I, as a Hindu leader, am ready to reform that.

Togadia emphasized that “Muslims must think about the closed concepts of Darul Islam, kufr, jihad etc”. He reminds Mr. Ahmed once again that these things “have resulted in Pakistan, the ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Pandits and other global acts of terrorism”. The interview concludes with Togadia’s final statement on how Indian Muslims could win the VHP’s certificate of loyalty. They “should also come forward and accept” pluralism rather than totalitarianism “for peaceful co-existence”. He added, “Each Indian Muslim should project a Mohammed (PBUH), a Ram, a Christ and a Guru Nanak in him”.

This extended, seemingly unedited interview that appeared in the *Milli Gazette* evoked reader responses. One contributor in Mumbai, Ghulam

Pakistani Islamic cleric arrested in Kashmir in 1994. After his release he went to to become internationally known for sending money to Florida, to fund the mission of the Saudi Arabian men who executed the events of 9/11.... Not a nice guy!

⁵⁴⁷ Four well-known terrorist organizations.

Muhammed⁵⁴⁸ summed up succinctly the collective reaction to Togadia comments. “Praveen Togadia's ‘Hinduism’ is not the same as it is believed and practiced by majority of ‘Hindu’ gurus.” This contributor accuses “Togadia as well as all Hindutvadis” of hijacking “a pristine philosophy that has been nurtured and imbibed over centuries with the noblest of human aspirations to search for the truth and spirituality”.

Ghulam Muhammed adds, in the shadow of Rahim, Khusro and Raskhan, “There are sages and gurus, who in the quest for the eternal truth can easily identify with Islam's definitive concepts of monotheism and spirituality”. He states that the “Hindutvadis... are opportunists [who] have taken undue advantage of the free form of spiritual quest in Hindu traditions to inject their own brand of ‘Islamic fundamentalism’”.⁵⁴⁹ He terms this a “distorted attempt to follow Swami Vivekananda's invitation for a new blending of ‘Brahmin brains and Islamic body’.”

Ghulam Muhammed concludes, “Though Sangh Parivar may cleverly try to overload itself with the coverings from great names like Ram, Buddha, Mahavira, Guru Nanak and Mahatma Gandhi, it cannot hide its nakedness”. He closes his letter by suggesting that “Dr. Tagodia should first take ‘maun vrat’⁵⁵⁰ for an extended time; strive to serve some guru that is willing to purge him of all hate, and then study Islam”. He warns Togadia to prepare himself, because there will be a day of “reckoning”.

Undoubtedly, Masood Azhar, the Islamic fundamentalist, and Praveen Togadia, the Hindu fundamentalist, are both making decisions and promoting social movements in light of their own understandings of that “reckoning”.

⁵⁴⁸ www.milligazette.com/Archives/01112002/0111200269.htm

⁵⁴⁹ Venkaiah Naidu of the BJP used the same words.

⁵⁵⁰ Vow of silence

Though the goals of these two brands of fundamentalism may seem similar, the results of their efforts are diametrically opposite. Islamic fundamentalism seeks to Islamize India, and the rest of the kafirs in the world, through violent confrontation. Whereas Hindu fundamentalists want to Hinduize India through cultural coercion, and asks that the rest of the world leave India alone, or at least respect her time honored traditions. The VHP doesn't have extraterritorial ambitions, per se, though they talk a lot about connecting with other "indigenous cultures" worldwide or the possibility that twenty million yoga practitioners in the USA are neo-Hindus. The VHP has a sullied reputation for promoting an exclusivist brand of Hinduism, which goes against the very fabric of that religious tradition. The previous discussion of Praveen Togadia's points of view have illustrated this critique.

The BJP, as the political wing of the Sangh Parivar, has had to take a more moderate and conciliatory approach to accommodate coalition partners in the government. The HRD minister, Dr. M. M. Joshi is an enthusiastic advocate of the Indo-centric point of view. He believes that the values upon which the nation of India is based are Hindu values.⁵⁵¹

Dr. Joshi's goals for India are parallel to the pronouncements of American politicians, both the Democrats and Republicans, who talk about Christian values as the basis of American culture. Joshi is heavily criticized because he enthusiastically and unabashedly promotes the idea of Hinduism as the cultural bedrock of India. As the minister who oversees education and culture, the signature of his philosophy is found in many of the new policies and projects of the UGC, NCERT, and ICHR.

⁵⁵¹ Because of lack of space, I have chosen not to discuss the RSS, the parent organization of the Sangh Parivar. Their views can be found at: http://www.rss.org/New_RSS/index.jsp, the newsmagazine published by the RSS, The Organiser, can be accessed at: <http://www.organiser.org/>

Back to the Books: The Scuffle Over Values Education

The influence of Dr. M.M. Joshi's ideas were visible in the *Discussion Document for the National Curriculum Framework*, published by NCERT in 1999. The section, "Integrating Indigenous Knowledge and India's Contribution to Mankind", expresses his perspective of the negative impact of colonial indoctrination,

Education in general, and the process of curriculum development in particular, in many ... developing countries which not long ago were part of the colonial rule, even now continue to be strongly influenced by the vestiges of the past.⁵⁵²

Joshi depended heavily on the 1999 Chavan report "that since independence, a number of higher-powered Commissions and Committees on Education [...] have highlighted the urgent need for making our educational system value based".⁵⁵³

In the historic court ruling that vindicated Joshi's efforts, Justice Shah lists the names and dates of these "higher-powered Commissions and Committees" to reiterate that Values Education was not the creation of the NCERT under the BJP's saffron-thrall. Since its publication in 1999, the new dispensation at the NCERT repeatedly pointed out that the Chavan Committee had found "it very disappointing ... that such well-concerted efforts during the last four decades have failed to achieve the desired results". Though each committee submitted "well-chalked out plans and strategies for making education value-oriented [they] still remain on paper".⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵² National Framework for School Education--a Discussion Document, NCERT, 1999, pg. 9–10.

⁵⁵³ Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49), Kothari Commission (1964-66), National Policy on Education (1986), Ramamurti Committee (1990), Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) Committee on Policy (1992), Planning Commission Core Group on Value Orientation of Education (1992)

⁵⁵⁴ Supreme Court of India Judgement, NCERT, 2002.

The Chavan report, quoted in the judicial judgment, tells the history of their efforts, that a

Sub-Committee on Value based Education was constituted on 16th January, 1997, which was subsequently re-constituted on 6th August, 1997 [and then] a new Sub-Committee came into being on 6th August, 1998 [that] invited suggestions from noted educationists on various aspects of value-based education [from] representatives of a number of State Governments... eminent experts/NGOs, doing pioneering work in this area [and] representatives of various Government Organisations.

The committee found an “encouraging response from individuals/organisations ... from all parts of the country [which] showed the public concern with this vital aspect, the building up of our national character”. This is the same process that the NCERT used when floating its *Discussion Document*, though later, the three litigants claimed that the NCERT had not conducted “wide consultations”. There were, as pointed out by the supreme court, sixteen regional conferences.

Justice Shah “shot down” the attorney for the petitioners for his numerous derisive comments about Brahmins, the Vedas, and the Upanishads. He then quotes sections from the Chavan report that could easily be construed as Hinduization. That report, which was not inspired or directed by the BJP stated,

This country has a long tradition. Here from ancient times, there have been great saints and thinkers from different religions and sects who have talked about some eternal values. These values are to be inculcated [sic] by our young generation.

The report used symbols from India’s Hindu traditions as representative of the whole, “In ancient times in Gurukuls⁵⁵⁵, emphasis used to be primarily on building the character of a student”. The petitioners and their colleagues would undoubtedly call this a clear indication that the judiciary was turning towards the Hindutva philosophy.

⁵⁵⁵ Vedic schools, with gurus as teachers, found in most villages in pre-colonial India, as documented by Dharampal.

The Chavan report laments that the modern education system discourages personal growth and encourages data acquisition,

Our educational system aims at only information based knowledge and the holistic views turning the student into a perfect human being and a useful member of society have been completely set aside.

The committee's report quotes Swami Vivekananda whose perspectives have in recent years fallen into disrepute among DGH scholars primarily because much of his teachings have been appropriated by Hindu-centric thinkers,

Education is not the amount of information that is put in your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. We must have life-building. Man-making, character-making, assimilation of ideas. If education is identical with information, libraries are the greatest sages of the world and encyclopedias are rishis

Judge Shah continues to extract from the Chavan report. Though not constituted by the BJP, it employs Hindu-centric terminology to describe the values that students should imbibe, listing

Truth (Satya), Righteous Conduct (Dharma), Peace (Shanti), Love (Prema) and Non-violence (Ahinsa) [as] the core universal values which can be identified as the foundation stone on which the value-based education programme can be built up.

These concepts are common among religions. However, designating them with Sanskrit terms is indicative of the ubiquitousness of this frame of reference. It is the frame of reference upon which the learned judge of the Supreme Court could hang his judgment. The Chavan Committee may have inadvertently offend the religious sentiments of minority communities, who would not necessarily use these particular words to describe their values. Additionally, Sanskrit words such as Dharma are loaded with meaning, far deeper than mere "righteous duty". The committee went on to assert that

These five are indeed universal values and respectively represent the five domains of human personality, intellectual, physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual. They also are

correspondingly co-related with the five major objectives of education, namely, knowledge, skill, balance, vision and identity. This wording of the Chavan Committee has been used by the HRD as the basis of their Values Education proposals and projects. Obviously, the learned Supreme Court judge concurred with this conceptualization of Values Education and he included several more paragraphs from the report not reproduced here.

The final excerpt from the Chavan committee's report concerns "Religious Education". Stating it is one "aspect that must be given some thought" the report laments that religion "is the most misused and misunderstood concept" and suggests that

The process of making the students acquainted with the basics of all religions, the values inherent therein and also a comparative study of the philosophy of all religions should begin at the middle stage in schools and continue up to the university level. Students have to be made aware that the basic concept behind every religion is common, only the practices differ. Even if there are differences of opinion in certain areas, people have to learn to co-exist and carry no hatred against any religion.

The report promotes the belief that there is a "divine spark in each one of us [which is] the *most important eternal value* to be inculcated by the small children even before starting their school life" (emphasis added). This kind of generalizing of the basic concepts underlying Indic traditions is often criticized by DGH-type scholars. They claim that such universalizing is indicative of Hindu-centric triumphalism that assumes all systems are ultimately based on one unifying truth.⁵⁵⁶

The Chavan Committee had reached the conclusion that "the basic concept behind every religion is" the same. This view was endorsed by the Indian high court. However, if this phrasing had been included in curriculum

⁵⁵⁶ All systems of thought and religions inherently believe that they are based on the greater truth, or the only true way. This is more so in many non-Hindu religions than in the Indic traditions that are generally more syncretistic than faiths based on a single book.

recommendations in the USA, it could easily have led to vociferous objections by conservative educators. Such a pluralistic orientation, reflective of multicultural education, is criticized by right-wing Christians for advocating New Age philosophy or Humanism. On the other hand, it is promoted by M.M. Joshi as the core of Hindu values.

In India, neither the parliamentary appointed Chavan commission nor the Supreme Court Judge felt constrained from using the Hindu Dharma as the civilizational bedrock upon which to frame the core educational objectives. This doesn't mean that there aren't people in India who don't object to this orientation. The main difference is that the objections are coming from the other end of the political spectrum.

On dollar bills, the phrase, "In God we trust" may cause problems for some Americans, among the radical secular fringe. Recently, a case was filed against the "Pledge of Allegiance" to the flag, demanding that the words "under God" be removed. This suit caused a backlash of affirmations of their "faith in Christ" among Senators and Congressmen on Capital Hill⁵⁵⁷. They passed resolutions to guarantee that the USA would remain "one nation *under God*". The God in question was most certainly in the Christian image. Though the religious diversity found in the United States might be grounds to have that phrase changed to "under Gods", this will never happen. It goes against the basic bedrock of American society that is Christo-centric, drawing from the Bible to validate laws and norms is common.

The Chavan committee's terminology, their frame of reference, is unconsciously but thoroughly Hindu. An assumed Hindu centric cultural bedrock is not accepted by all. As in the USA, there are some who object to this

⁵⁵⁷ Gail Minault also pointed out that from the fray, there came forward also "Vociferous advocates of a clear separation of church and state".

orientation. Though the country is eighty-five percent Hindu, these assumptions draw critiques of chauvinism and exclusivism.

References to Hindu thought are ubiquitous in the document. Instead of reaching into the Bible for sources of Values Education, the members on the Chavan committee reached into the Upanishads. They wrote, “people must realize [that] proper value education ... would facilitate their spiritual march from the level of *sub-consciousness to that of super consciousness*”. A spiritual march to super consciousness is not necessarily a universally shared idiom for personal salvation.

In the last paragraph quoted from the Chavan report and included in the Supreme Court verdict there are two sentences in the NCERT printing of the judgment that appear in bold italicized font,

Under the invasion of Western culture penetrating into India through the media, the young are being literally moved away from our age-old traditions and values. Any attempt to instill indigenous values in students in schools, colleges are over-shadowed by the over-whelming impact of Western culture.

The obvious intent of these sentiments was to help steer impressionable youth away from consumerism and other problems such as environmental exploitation that often accompany “modernization”. These two sentences referring to India’s “age-old traditions and values” inadvertently provided ammunition to critics searching for a hook to condemn the BJP’s Values Education project on the basis that it only promotes “indigenous” and therefore Indic or Hindu values, to the exclusion of minorities.

In this antagonistic rendering of the discourse, even the concept of “indigenous”, much less the references to self-realization, the Dharma, and notions such as Ahimsa, are considered to be offensive to certain communities and not representative of language used to express the ultimate values of Muslims and Christians. These subtleties of terminology have for years confounded policy

makers and have led to circuitous redefinitions to avoid what could be construed as a position teetering dangerously towards a Hindu-centric ethos in a hotly contested multicultural milieu. In today's intellectual environment with controversies over "saffronization", most references to values and culture are deemed majoritarian and therefore communal.

Justice Shah took up four more issues which the counsel for the petitioners contended saffronized the curriculum of India's school children. First, writing "Regarding Sanskrit language", the judge cut holes in the claim that Sanskrit was "imposed in an unjustified manner", explaining the "allegation is wholly wrong" because Sanskrit is only being offered as an "elective course... at the higher secondary stage".

He cites an unsuccessful court case that had tried to block the teaching of Sanskrit in public institutions on the grounds that it was "against secularism". He concurred with the previous ruling that "an elective subject can in no way be regarded as against secularism". He agreed with the point of view of the Government of India, that "not contending this status to Arabic and/or Persian, would not in any way militate against the basic tenet of secularism". The issue of whether Sanskrit can be taught in government sponsored schools has resurfaced through the decades—and until the last few years, Sanskrit consistently lost.

The next allegation taken up "Regarding Vedic Astrology" was dismissed because it was simply not mentioned in the curriculum, though the litigants inferred that it was. In this context, Judge Shah made the distinction between astronomy and astrology. The third claim "Regarding Vedic Mathematics" was dismissed by the judge as inapplicable because it "has not been made part of the curriculum but suggested as a computational aid". The judge commented that because the "epithet 'Vedic' is used, the petitioners ... attempted to attribute something of religion to it". He explains that "The word 'vedic' in this context

indicates only time factor”.

Concerning the next item which accused NCERT of saffronization, “Regarding Hindu Festivals being treated as National Festivals”, the Judge quotes from the NCFSE submitting that the allegation is a “clear distortion” of what is in the curriculum. The counsel, Mr. Vaidyanathan “contended that instead of emphasizing development of scientific temper” the curriculum distorted history because it used the words the “Mughals invaded the country as against Britishers conquered the country.” The judge found this claim to be preposterous and did “not deserve any consideration hence rejected”.

The other two judges offered appended judgments. D.M. Dharmadhikari also employed Hindu terminology to describe and define essential human values. He wrote extensively on the word religion compared to the concept of “Sanatana Dharma”, asserting that in the Indian system “different faiths, sects and schools of thought merely are different ways of knowing truth, which is one”. He then proceeds to give a little lesson on comparative religion while discussing exclusivism and inclusivism. He attempts to illuminate the meaning of secularism by quoting from the debate in the Constituent Assembly during 1948 when Article 28 was considered. Justice Dharmadhikari writes that

the real meaning of secularism in the language of Gandhi is Sarva-Dharma-Samabhav meaning equal treatment and respect for all religions, but we have misunderstood the meaning of secularism as Sarva-Dharma-Sam-Abhav, meaning negation of all religions. The result of this is that we do not allow our children to even touch our religious books.

He concludes by quoting from Gandhi, Nehru, Bertrand Russell, and J. Krishnamurti.

The third judge kept his comments to the issue of the reconstitution of the Central Advisory Board of Education, CABE. The verdict was welcomed by the NCERT but seen by the litigants as a symbol of the erosion of secularism and the

gradual saffronization of the judiciary. Once the court cleared the way for the NCERT to print the new textbooks, four books were published within weeks of the decision.

As in any democratic country, citizens in India often disagree with judicial verdicts. The criticism of the judiciary is almost always divided down the Delhi Historians Group versus “Hindutva-wala” line-- depending on the tilt of the judgment. For example, Sabrang Communications an activist publishing house in Mumbai, and leftist organizations such as SAHMAT in Delhi, prominently advertise their republished copies of the “Sri Krishna Commission Report” that investigated the communal violence in Mumbai in 1993. Selected excerpts from the report are often highlighted, particularly the part that blamed the Shiv Sena for the violence against Muslims following the 1993 bomb blasts. The report implicated several prominent Hindus as the instigators and perpetrators of numerous violent acts.

The segments of the Sri Krishna Commission Report that describe how the bomb blasts in March 1993 had been financed and planned by Indian Muslims in the service of the ISI (the Pakistani secret service) were less widely circulated by Sabrang, et al. The Report was presented to the Maharashtra Assembly in June 1998 and has since been partially implemented and endlessly discussed. As a document exposing the guilt or active participation of Shiv Sena leaders in the violence, it continues to be referred to and resurrected as proof of Hindutva complicity in communal violence.

On the other hand, the Wadhwa Commission Report, that investigated the murder of Reverend Graham Stains and his two young sons who were burned to death in their car by a mob in Orissa in 1998, exonerated the Sangh Parivar groups of complicity in the violent event. This report refers to social tensions that missionary activities and religious conversions have on tribal villages. However,

the Wadhwa Report was dismissed by leftists as a white-wash, or perhaps saffron wash, because it did not implicate the RSS, BJP, or Bajrang Dal in planning or carrying out the murderous attack.

On the contrary, the Wadhwa Commission blamed the violence on tribal rivalries antagonized by missionary activity that has divided villages along religious lines. This is a point of view that Indian Marxists would not like to propagate. Though the Sangh Parivar would like to broadcast the conclusions of the Wadhwa Commission Report, because their PR mechanisms are less well entrenched and situated, their efforts have been less than successful, particularly internationally.

The Supreme Court judgment about the NCFSE and the social studies curriculum is viewed through this dichotomy--leftists con/saffrons pro. The same can be said about numerous decisions, as highlighted here, such as verdicts that allowed Sanskrit to be taught as an elective in government schools. Obviously, social commentators leaning towards the Hindu-Nationalist or saffron perspective, heralded such verdicts as vindication of their socio-political perspectives. Conversely, those who call themselves leftist or secularists and have worked for decades to keep Hindu symbols and terminology out of the public realm for fear of the dominance of majoritarianism have decried the verdict as communal. Many activists see such judgments as representing the encroachment of saffron. The ubiquitous use of concepts and words such as Dharma and Ahimsa in writings from the high court bench is troubling to many leftists and secularists (whom L.K. Advani⁵⁵⁸ and others would call pseudo-secularists). To most Indians, it is simply the language of India's civilizational ethos and the easiest and clearest method to explain the perspectives upon which such a verdict is based.

⁵⁵⁸ L.K. Advani is the Deputy Prime Minister of India and second in command in the BJP. He is well known as one of the primary politicians who generated momentum for the BJP through his participation in the Rath Yatras held in the late eighties and early nineties.

The Questionable Textbooks in Question

Dr. M.M. Joshi's comment "It's our turn now" was met with considerable scorn and derision. However, compared with the processes of historiography in other parts of the world, the rewriting of history in India is more a reevaluation than a complete break with past narratives. It is also a far more public affair than in many countries. As M.M. Joshi, J.S. Rajput, Makkhan Lal⁵⁵⁹ and others associated with the new NCERT textbooks have said numerous times, "there are more than five or six historians in India". Joshi's critics are well connected and articulate.

In historiography the pendulum swings one way then the other, as current events drag it along, and push it back and forth until it finds its center. Changes in history textbooks in democratic countries are usually highly controversial while they are occurring. Many times, especially if the debate was very public, such changes are seen retroactively as corrective. This was the case regarding changes in textbooks in the USA after the 1960's that incorporated more people of color and women into the narrative, though issues of revisionism remain controversial. Activist scholars in the Delhi Historians Group negatively view changes in perspective suggested by M.M. Joshi et al. They have very publicly fought the process, lending a vibrantly intellectual color to the spectacle of rewriting India's history in the headlines.

The DHG school intellectuals for decades opposed any scholarship which they determined was communal. They formed various organizations to further those aims. When it was perceived that archaeology was uncovering data from the past with which they did not agree, they sought to suppress and discredit it.

⁵⁵⁹ Rajput the head of NCERT, and Makkhan Lal author of two of the new NCERT textbooks and director of an institute dedicated to preservation of historical monuments. Both are closely associated with M.M. Joshi, et al.

Members of the DHG formed another activist scholarly organization, Association for the Study of History and Archaeology (ASHA) which issued joint statements against the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). This public face of scholarly activism has been the strategy since the late sixties.

In that tradition, they systematically and vehemently opposed the HRD Minister's efforts to bring out the new series of *Indianized* social studies textbooks. The DHG saw this agenda as against secularism and anti-minority. Dr. Joshi and his supporters see the new curriculum as a long overdue shift from colonial categories and descriptions of India narrated through a foreign lens of dialectical materialism or an anthropologized approach, filtered through centuries of colonial and Euro-centric interpretations. Scholars who are associated with the DHG see Joshi's ideas as dangerous.

Battle of the Booklets: The DHG versus NCERT

During a parliamentary debate about the social studies curriculum, members of the Congress Party and the Communist parties (CPI and CPI-M), quoting from statements made by members of the Delhi Historians Group,⁵⁶⁰ which included the authors of the recently discarded NCERT history textbooks, accused the BJP of Talibanizing education. M.M. Joshi retorted in the official record that certain

⁵⁶⁰ I am uncertain as of what date this group of activist scholars began to use this title for themselves, but an electronic booklet sent via the internet from an organization that called itself "The Delhi Historians' Group". According to Dr. A.H. Jaffor Ullah scholars from JNU "compiled [the] booklet and e-mailed it through electronic means to freethinkers, academicians, and opinion makers of South Asian descent". Ullah wrote about the e-booklet in an article in the *The Bangladesh Observer*, July 8, 2002, *Saffronization Of Education In India* and provided the URL where he had posted the contents of the booklet at: http://cyber_bangla0.tripod.com/Delhi_Historian.html. The booklet was composed of a collection of scholarly critiques and newspaper articles, in the same format as booklets published by SAHMAT on this topic.

scholars acted more like terrorists than intellectuals.⁵⁶¹ He was referring to the DHG, the usual group of scholars who traditionally stage news conferences, coordinating orchestrated politicized responses to various academic issues.

The hostile reviews written by the Delhi Historians Group and their colleagues critiquing the new NCERT textbooks mirrored the manner in which the august members of this traditionally activist consortium have proffered opinions about socio-political issues for the past thirty years. As far as I know, there is no official membership to the Delhi Historians Group. I am not certain when they began using that name to describe themselves. Whatever organizational affiliation that they have claimed for themselves through the decades, these scholars can call news conferences at the drop of the hat—with their comments against saffronization quoted the next day as uncontested truth in newspaper articles. Their articles are routinely published in SAHMAT booklets, along with accompanying and compliant editorials.

This feat of prompt press releases was evident when the new NCERT textbooks came out on October 3, 2002, and “the very next day at 5.00 p.m. a press conference was addressed by some ‘Eminent Historians’ and professional pallbearers of ‘secularism’, not from an academic forum but from a political platform”.⁵⁶² In the booklet written to rebut the SAHMAT booklet, Professor Makkhan Lal explains that

The result of this press conference, as always, was indeed remarkable. The friendly and obliging reporters, editors, and newspapers came out the next day ... with such headlines as if the

⁵⁶¹ This is reminiscent of the comment made by Bob Dole on the floor of the US Senate in 1995 regarding the publication of the New History Standards which were, according to him, the “handiwork of people worse than external enemies”.

⁵⁶² From Professor Makkhan Lal’s booklet rebutting the many articles written against the two NCERT textbooks that he had authored, *The NCERT Social Science Books: False Propaganda, Political Agenda, and the “Eminent Historians”*, Self published by Makkhan Lal, November 2002, Navman Offset Printers, Madar Gate, Aligarh, p.1.

academic world, especially history had been made to stand it head (sic)". He lists some of the "screaming headlines": 'Bloomers galore in NCERT texts' (Hindustan Times); 'Historians point to errors in new NCERDT books' (Times of India); 'Errors galore in NCERT textbooks' (The Hindu) ... 'Rewrite, Delete, Error?' (Indian Express).

Makkhan Lal, in his bitterness to rebut the critiques, does not pull his punches. He makes an ironic observation. In reality, there are only a couple of dozen⁵⁶³ of scholars dominating the intellectual space in India. Most of these scholars have been writing editorials for decades, quite a few are the authors of the withdrawn NCERT textbooks, and most were previously board members on historical and educational councils. Lal writes that

It is remarkable that this entire campaign is being run by just a few historians and activists associated with a particular political party and the number of these historians does not cross the equal of 'two thumbs and eight fingers'.⁵⁶⁴

Though Lal told me he was personally insulted by statements made by members of the Delhi Historians Group and carried in the newspapers, he wrote that he felt "obliged" to respond because of the "impact such insidious and false reports would have on the society or individuals". The Delhi Historians use the same kind of language as do those whom they accuse of being saffron. When critiquing the work of their opponents, both camps claim that these alternative

⁵⁶³ Based on the signatures on their petitions, and by-lines in SAHMAT booklets, there are about twenty-five scholars who regularly associate themselves with the very public leaders of the Delhi Historians Group which include Romila Thapar, K.M. Shrimali, K.N. Panikkar, and other notables including Irfan Habib, from Aligarh University and R. S. Sharma retired in Patna. There are numerous journalists who have associated themselves with this the DHG and whose articles inevitably are published in an appendix in SAHMAT booklets.

⁵⁶⁴ In the The Rediff Interview/NCERT Director J. S. Rajput written by Ramesh Menon, published at: <http://www.rediff.com/news/2001/dec/03inter.htm> on December 3, 2001, Professor Rajput wrote, "This is a big country -- just four or five historians cannot keep writing forever." The interview was incredibly hostile, with Menon asking Rajput if he was controlled by the "Saffron Brigade". Rajput replied, referring to the politicized partisan questioning technique of the interviewer, "Do not get into this. My answer is very clear. I am not familiar with any saffron brigade or red brigade or left brigade. These are not professional questions and I am not going to answer them."

versions of India's history will destroy the gullible nation.

The criticisms from the DHG concerning the new NCERT textbooks used what Makkhan Lal claimed with a bit of resentment, the “choicest of abuses and invectives”. For examples, he cites that the newspapers accused the authors of the new textbooks of “suffering from slavish mentality” and being “academically bankrupt”, or “communally biased”, much less “ignorant of facts and research methodology”. This last “abuse” is a claim constantly made by DHG historians against whomever they decide are saffronized scholars.⁵⁶⁵

The new textbooks were called “shoddy”, “plagiarized” and “unbelievably ridiculous”. In the SAHMAT publication, *Substandard and Saffronized*, members of the DGH pointed out, according to Lal, “a few ‘glaring’ and ‘factual’ mistakes in the books”. Lal states in the introduction to his rebuttal pamphlet, that the aim of this group is “to abuse, denigrate, and terrorize all those who differ with them academically”. Concurring with comments about educational controversies made by M.M. Joshi and also Bob Dole, Makkhan Lal claims, “‘Intellectual terrorism’ is their goal”.

Makkhan Lal takes on Arjun Dev who, since his retirement from a life of service at NCERT, has been in the forefront condemning the new textbooks. Arjun Dev wrote in an article that appeared in *Mainstream*, November 9, 2002 “Pushing the Parivar View”,⁵⁶⁶ that Lal’s class six textbook was “highly patriotic from the beginning.” This is a serious criticism since the earlier NCERT series assiduously avoided patriotism. However, this critique would undoubtedly seem strange for an American whose social studies textbooks are always highly

⁵⁶⁵ It was even said about someone as brilliant and grounded as Ashis Nandy, that he didn’t understand Indian secularism when, several years ago he suggested a reappraisal would be healthy.

⁵⁶⁶ Reprinted in *Saffronized and Substandard: A Critique of the New NCERT Textbooks*, December 2002, SAHMAT, New Delhi, pp. 10 –24.

laudatory of America's historical record.

In contrast, the common Indian citizen was not allowed to fly the Indian flag until January 2002. Up until that time, when the law was finally changed, only diplomats and other government officials were authorized to fly the tri-colors—a situation completely juxtaposed to the flag waving tendencies of the majority of Americans, for whom patriotic historical narratives are the accepted norm. It is not surprising that books published during the BJP rule would attempt to instill a bit of patriotism in the populace, *desh prem* or love of country is one of their goals.

In his critique of Makkhan Lal's textbook, *India and the World for Class Six*, Arjun Dev complains that the portion of “the history book that focuses on ancient India... begins with the Harappan civilization which we are told is also known as ‘Indus-Saraswati civilization’.” Arjun Dev is of the school of scholars who hesitate to look at the archeological digs that have unearthed numerous sites along the banks of a long ago desiccated river bed, that according to this theory ran from the Himalayas through Gujarat into the Arabian Sea, until 1800 BCE⁵⁶⁷ when it was disturbed by tectonic activity.

In the past few decades of research, more Indus Valley type sites have been discovered in western India than have been found along the Indus. These professors fight pitched battles in the media and on the internet to oppose the idea and the nomenclature of the Indus-Saraswati. ⁵⁶⁸ Arjun Dev quotes from Lal's

⁵⁶⁷ One interesting observation about the new NCERT textbooks is that even though they claim to be advancing a less Euro-centric perspective, they have not gone very far, since they have retained the now outdated Christo-centric dating convention of BC and AD instead of the more politically correct BCE and CE.

⁵⁶⁸ Even to allude to this change in nomenclature is controversial, though undoubtedly warranted by virtue of the data. Professor Michael Witzel has been particularly virulent in his condemnation of this change in naming of that ancient civilization. It is seen as a form of triumphalism to be eschewed. Dr. Witzel has become notorious in India for his numerous op-ed pieces concerning saffron historiography that run regularly in *The Hindu*.

textbook, “It is also claimed that ‘many scholars think that Rig Vedic Culture and Harappan Culture are the same’ because of ‘various similarities like the same geographical areas, advanced nature of civilization and religious practices’.” Arjun Dev asserts,

While the identity of the Rig Vedic Saraswati remains uncertain, the claim of similarities in advanced nature civilization and religious practices is an invention of the ‘scholars’ of the *Sangh Parivar*. [...] [T]he identification of the Harappan with Vedic is an essential component of the mythological ‘history’ of the *Parivar* that has received official sanction since the present government came to power.

The new textbooks were criticized by several scholars for using a map that showed the Harappan Civilization coterminous with the early Vedic Cultural area. However, the map of page 81 in Makkhan Lal’s showing the “Extent of the Harappan Civilization” indicates the exact same geographical area as the map on page 25 in the book by Romila Thapar for class six, *Ancient India*, published in 1987.

Arjun Dev, along with Romila Thapar and other members of the Delhi Historians Group, take the tack that the on-going research into the sites found along the bed of that ancient dried up river in western India is inherently tainted. So they try to downplay it. This politicization of the evidence is a source of blinders for DHG critics.

A dismissive tone regarding the archaeological discoveries that have catalyzed our knowledge of the civilization known as the Indus Valley is consistently used by scholars aligned with the Delhi Historians Group, such as Irfan Habib, who wrote,

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.⁵⁶⁹ These are very strong words for a respected historian to use when data showing connections between the Indus Culture and Vedic Culture are not so easily dismissed. There is overwhelming documented scientific evidence that a huge river did flow in that part of western India 3800 some odd years ago. But besides the facts compiled by geologists, which Habib chooses to ignore and mock, he claims to be ignorant of the research and explorations of numerous archaeologists, from India and the West.

Many excavations have revealed germinal similarities and overlaps between the artifacts unearthed along the not imaginary dried up river bed of the Sarasvati and later attributes and religious practices of Hinduism. Perhaps Professor Habib can be excused for not being up to date in paleo-geology and satellite imaging, or even contemporary research on ancient Indian history, since his specialty is Medieval India. But it is surprising that, being thusly uninformed, he has taken such a strong stand.

Makkhan Lal mentions some of the cultural connections between the Indus Valley culture and Vedic/Hindu traditions in his rebuttal booklet addressed to Habib and rest of the “Eminent Historians”. He wrote under the subheading “Vermillion in the Harappan civilization”,

The occurrence of terracotta female figurines with vermilion in the hair parting from the archaeological sites of Mehargarh and Nausharo (both in Pakistan) in the context of 2800 B.C. is a well known fact. These have been published widely in archaeological books on Harappan civilization and have also been included in such books as ‘Ancient India’ (published in 1994) under the

⁵⁶⁹ From: The Rewriting of History by the Sangh Parivar, by Irfan Habib “(Founder-Head Centre for Advanced Studies in History Aligarh Muslim University & Former Chairperson, (ICHR)”, first published in One India One People, 8 June 2001, and included in the electronic pamphlet sent via the internet from "The Delhi Historians' Group" to Dr. A.H. Jaffor Ullah: http://cyber_bangla0.tripod.com/Delhi_Historian.html.

popular series of *Time-Life on 'Ancient Civilizations'*. It is only the 'eminent historians' and secularists, who are pretending that no such evidence exists.

Arjun Dev wrote in his exposé of Lal's textbook, in no uncertain terms, but in convoluted prose, that

None of the religious practices which have been stated to be Harappan, quite apart from the question of the historical validity of what are claimed to be Harappan religious practices, are Rig Vedic.

Makkhan Lal "brutally" refutes this perspective in his rebuttal, under the subheading "*Swastikas, Sivalingas, Folk-lores, (sic) etc.*",

The terracotta objects like *Swastikas, Sivalingas, Kamandalus*⁵⁷⁰, and the depiction of the pipal leaves are as brutal a fact as the rising of the sun in the east. These have been published in books and archaeological reports right from Sir John Marshall's time. It is only the 'eminent historians' who obstinately deny their existence, exactly the way an ostrich buries its head in the sand and thinks that the world does not exist.

R.S. Sharma, the famous Marxist historian who was the author of the now withdrawn NCERT textbook, *Ancient India*, mentioned many of these overlapping cultural expressions in his book, first published in 1977 and revised in 1990. He discussed such items of cultural continuity as the pipal tree, "which continues to be worshiped to this day". He sites the "humped bull" adding, with a bit of sarcasm, that "Even today, when such a bull passes in the market streets the pious Indian gives way to it". Sharma does mention goddess worship, but goes out of his way to make clear that goddess worship in later Hinduism was not connected to the Harappans. He wrote,

Some Vedic texts show reverence to the earth goddess, although she is not given any prominence. It took a long time for the

⁵⁷⁰ Distinctly shaped water pot with a handle.

worship of the supreme goddess to develop in Hinduism.⁵⁷¹ Only from the sixth century A.D. onwards various mother-goddesses such as Durga, Amba, Kali, Chandi, etc., came to be regarded as goddesses in the Puranas and in the Tantra literature. In course of time every village came to have its own separate goddess.⁵⁷²

Though Sharma discusses the many artifacts associated with Shiva that have been found at Harappan-type sites, he does so in a rather salacious fashion, referring to their “sex organs” in an almost Victorian tone, a bit embarrassed by the longevity of the tradition, and the

prevalence of the phallus worship, which became so intimately connected with Shiva in later times. Numerous symbols of the phallus and female sex organs made of stone have been found in Harappa. They were possibly meant for worship. The Rig Veda speaks of the non-Aryan people who were phallus worshippers. The phallus worship which was started in the days of Harappa came to be recognized as a respectable form of worship in Hindu society.

Sharma concludes his lengthy chapter on the Harappans,

Although the Rig Vedic Aryans settled down mostly in the land of the Seven Rivers, in which the Harappan culture once flourished, we have no archaeological evidence of any mass-scale confrontations between the mature Harappans and the Aryans. The Vedic people *may* have encountered the people belonging to the late Harappan phase between 1800 B.C. and 1200 B.C. (emphasis added).

Sharma isn't sure if Vedic and Harappan cultures collided. In Makkhan Lal's view of historiography, these cultures were related to one another chronologically and culturally. He describes those tangible connections more deferentially than did Professor Sharma, though to his credit, Lal does not carry on, triumphally. However, he does emphasize the cultural continuity characteristic,

⁵⁷¹ Here Sharma makes the assumption that Hinduism existed in the sixth century CE, when in other contexts he and other scholars such as Romila Thapar have argued that Hinduism did not actually exist until the medieval period, when it defined itself in .

⁵⁷² Sharma, R.S. Ancient India, NCERT, New Delhi, 1990, p. 51.

The pipal tree was worshipped and revered by the Harappans which continues to be worshiped even today. Many animals like humped bulls and elephants were also worshiped. These people also worshipped Siva in the form of a *linga* which is done today also (original emphasis).

The new NCERT textbook for class six on ancient India has many more illustrations displaying artifacts from the era than did the earlier textbooks. The quality of the paper and the reproductions are also better, which may reflect both technological improvements within the computer enhanced publishing industry and also the added importance the current Government of India placed on the new social studies textbooks.

Lal included among the illustrations, a painted jar with the story of the thirsty crow depicted on it, a tale that is still told in India and was incorporated in to Aesop's Fables. He has included a "terracotta female figurine with a vermillion in hair parting", to show the continuity of the tradition of married women painting the part of the hair with red. The figure that is called a priest in many books, Romila Thapar refers to as "a bearded figure", Lal titles, "Yogi figurine". Many art historians have alluded to the serenity on the face of the figurine as indicative of meditative composure, a virtue of Vedic times. That Lal calls this figure a Yogi, using Indo-familiar nomenclature, is therefore within normal bounds and not unnecessarily saffronizing the ancient past. Yet, calling of this "bearded figure" a "Yogi" did cause consternation in DHG circles. Finding a Yogi in Harappa presented another example of Hinduization of the past.

Makkhan Lal referred to the famous seal of a "deity sitting in a yogic posture and surrounded by animals [that] has been identified with the god Pasupati which is another name of Siva".⁵⁷³ In his textbook, R. S. Sharma also devotes a paragraph to the discussion of this seal. The deity is in the

⁵⁷³ Lal, Makkhan, India and the World, Social Science Textbook for class IV, NCERT, 2002, p. 86.

sitting posture of a yogi, placing one foot on the other. [...] The seal immediately recalls to our mind the traditional image of Pashupati Mahadeva.⁵⁷⁴ The four animals surrounding the god look toward the four directions of the earth.⁵⁷⁵

Unfortunately at that point Sharma's narrative seems to degenerate into a missionary-toned treatment of Shiva's phallic symbolism as quoted above. The main difference between the treatments in the older books and this new one, is that the Harappan civilization does not come to an end, when their cities declined because of changes in the courses of the major rivers. Rather, Makkhan Lal claims "a major population of the Harappan civilization moved to other areas like Gujarat, northern regions of Punjab and Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh". In his view, the Harappans were an earlier incarnation of the people who wrote the Vedas and later peopled the Gangetic Doab.

Both Thapar and Sharma agree that IVC⁵⁷⁶ cities were not destroyed by marauding Aryan invaders, but rather by changes in the climatic conditions. However, Thapar claims that

the decline of the Harappan cities was a negative step in the history of India. Although some aspect of the Harappan culture continued, those who succeeded the Harappans knew nothing of city life. So it was more than a thousand years before India could boast of cities again.⁵⁷⁷

Makkhan Lal would put a more positive spin on this assessment. Pastoralism and community farming are an integral part of India's ecological lifestyle. Social and

⁵⁷⁴ Here Sharma uses a respectful appellation for Siva, by appending Mahadev, an honorific, to the specific manifestation, Pashupati, or Lord of the Animals, that is found on the seal and also in temples in many places in India. A particularly famous Pashupati Mandir is near Kathmandu, Nepal. Perhaps Sharma used the name Mahadev to make it clear to Indian school children that this figure is associated with Siva; in this textbook it is rare that the author uses the honorific in this context.

⁵⁷⁵ Sharma, p. 51.

⁵⁷⁶ Indus Valley Civilization

⁵⁷⁷ Romila Thapar, *Ancient India: A Textbook of History for class VI*, NCERT: New Delhi, 1987, pg. 34.

economic arrangements which contributed to the decentralized nature of Hinduism facilitated its longevity. In this battle for India's soul through the tool of historiography, spin does seem to be more important than substance.

In the SAHMAT booklet, *Saffronized and Substandard*, Kumkum Roy, a professor at JNU contributed an article critiquing Lal's class six textbook. She wrote, under the subheading "Anachronisms",

When we fail to date historical developments correctly, we are guilty of committing anachronisms. [...] Consider the statement from page 57, in the context of early civilizations: 'This not only required participation of people on a large scale but also obeying the law and realizing one's own responsibilities as part of community, society, culture and nation.' Such a statement can confuse and mislead children. Nationalism and national identities developed in the modern period from the 18th century onwards, to refer to ancient nations is anachronistic.

In most history textbooks written for children, authors try to take lessons from the past that they can apply to the present. Makkhan Lal, in his above quoted comment did nothing more than what someone with the stature of Romila Thapar was guilty of in her NCERT textbook *Medieval India*, when she wrote,

Akbar's great dream was that India should be united as one country. People should forget their differences of region and religion and think of themselves only as the people of India.⁵⁷⁸

Every social studies textbook in some way tries to distill the past to make lessons for students in the present. This practice may be anachronistic, but it is common and expected, in fact accepted as the primary purpose in teaching social studies.⁵⁷⁹

One factor that comes out in the critiques of Makkhan Lal's textbook is that the members of the Delhi Historians Group themselves do not agree on the

⁵⁷⁸ Romila Thapar, *Medieval India: History Textbook for Class VII*, NCERT: New Delhi, 1988, pg. 94.

⁵⁷⁹ See: Wineburg, Sam. *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press: 2001; also James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*, New York Press, New York: 1995.

“facts” of history. For example, in an article in the *Hindustan Times* that appeared on October 18, 2002, *Twisted Tale: Indian Children Have Done Nothing to Deserve Such a Raw Deal*, and republished in the SAHMAT volume *Saffronized and Substandard*, Nayanjot Lahiri, an archaeologist, writes,

I am amused by the attack on the book’s statement about the use of vermilion in the hair parting of female terracottas in very early context in Balouchistan. This statement is correct and the fact that it has been attacked as an example of saffronization of education shows how little some Delhi-based historians know about Indian archaeology.

Based on the comments of Irfan Habib and many others, hotly denying the importance, or even existence of these cultural connections over time, this observation of Prof. Lahiri, included in this SAHMAT booklet, is a refreshingly candid anomaly.

In his self-published booklet, Makkhan Lal contests Lahiri’s critiques. Lahiri complained that Lal’s textbook “wrongly mentions that the Harappans were the earliest to grow cotton”. In rebuttal, Lal quotes from R.S. Sharma’s book *Ancient India*, which says, “The Indus people were the earliest people to produce cotton”⁵⁸⁰. Lal adds that the “same has been written by Prof. Romila Thapar in her book on Ancient India for class VI, published... by NCERT.” Makkhan Lal then wryly castigates his critics, “It is strange that when ‘they’ write some thing it is a fact and a synthesis by great scholars, and when ‘I’ write the same thing it becomes ‘plain wrong’”. Makkhan Lal has his hackles up.

Another issue that Makkhan Lal addresses from Ms. Lahiri’s piece in the *Hindustan Times* is the problematic use of the terms “Vedic culture” and “Vedic civilization”. This is a common critique that claims, as Lahiri does “there is

⁵⁸⁰ Lal states that this quote is on page 59, which it might be in the edition he is using, but in the 1990 edition, fifth reprint of Sharma’s textbook, this statement is on page 48.

nothing called a 'Vedic culture' or a 'Vedic civilization' in Indian history". Lal of course, disagrees.

Topic wise, the issue of the Aryan invasion presents one of the biggest differences between Lal's treatment of the "Vedic Age" and that of R.S. Sharma or Romila Thapar. Both Sharma and Thapar devote several pages to explaining various versions of the Aryan invasion/migration theory to which they subscribe. Whereas Lal advocates that, on

the basis of various similarities like the same geographical areas, advanced nature of civilization and religious practices many scholars think that the RigVedic Culture and Harappan Culture are the same.

Makkhan Lal gives agency to the Indo-centric school, some might say he lends a bombastic, overly confident voice. The DHG certainly matches his antagonism step for step. Lal wrote, "However, some scholars think that the Harappan civilization and RigVedic civilizations are not the same. This issue can be resolved only after the Harappan inscriptions have been deciphered".

Statements in Lal's *India and the World* that praised Hindu philosophy, religion, literature, or society were termed by DHG scholars, as regressive chauvinistic, Hindutva triumphalism. For example, Lal's book stated,

Upanishads are the works of most profound philosophy in any religion. In the Upanishads such questions have been dealt with as:
What is God? Who is God? What is life? ... and so on.

Though she doesn't cite his lack of fluidity in his English prose, Kumkum Roy chides Makkhan Lal for this reference to the greatness of the Upanishads. She opines that "this statement is addressed to students in class six, who may have neither the ability nor the inclination to grapple with abstruse notions of philosophy." It can well be imagined that the framers of the new syllabus, whose goal it was to Indianize education, intended that upon reading this brief textbook

description, Indian students would develop an interest or inclination to study the Upanishads seeking answers to that eternal question, “What is life?”.

This kind of explanatory comment about Upanishadic wisdom might also be found in sections of World History books for American students under a comparative religion subheading. The Upanishads certainly are the “works of most profound philosophy”. But Lal’s assertion that the Upanishads are the most profound philosophy “in any religion” does pose problems of triumphalism. Nonetheless, the Upanishads are known to be liberating, not restrictive or totalitarian. Lal is of the school that avers that reading from this source of ancient wisdom can only be beneficial for students. Dr. Kumkum Roy thinks Indian philosophy would only confuse adolescents.

There are many other critiques of Makkhan Lal’s book, some valid and some stretching the point, focusing on tiny details. Probably one of the more interesting scholarly debates concerns the eating of beef in ancient India. This issue has caused a tremendous amount of controversy. It was carefully included in both R.S. Sharma’s and Romila Thapar’s textbooks and was one of the main reasons their books were withdrawn by the Janta government in 1977. The lines in their books that promoted this theory were among those sentences that were marked as irrelevant in the fall of 2001, when the CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) sent out a memo instructing teachers not to include certain content from the textbooks in their examination questions.

The lines were not actually physically expunged from the old textbooks because at the time the books were still in circulation.⁵⁸¹ A few sentences and one or two whole paragraphs in several NCERT textbooks were highlighted in the

⁵⁸¹ This action caused a furor over the infringement of intellectual property rights of the historians whose books were being retroactively edited. R.S. Sharma, Romila Thapar and Satish Chandra, whose books were involved, were interviewed extensively in the press. This was a sensational issue in 2001.

CBSE memo. These parts of the text the students would not be held responsible for during examination time. The main result of this memo was that it brought everyone's attention to those controversial sentences—since it is human nature for people to rush off to read what they are told not to.

The paragraphs and sentences that were in question concerned issues that the BJP raked up as controversial, such as the representation of Tegh Bahadur Singh's execution and negative references to the Jat community. Both of these examples were first raised by the communities in question, and taken up by the BJP controlled HRD. Based on these complaints, these expunged parts of the old NCERT textbooks were projected as communal, or offensive to a particular group, and hence should not be read by India's school children. A discussion of beef eating in the ancient period was one of those deletions from the old textbooks.

Where's the Beef?

DGH scholars consider beef eating in ancient India to be a settled argument: Vedic Indians ate beef. Alternative research has shown other perspectives to be valid. At least this issue has been shown to have more than one side. In his textbook, Makkhan Lal expressed a perspective that promoted cow protection, which is a very a communalized issue,

Among the animals the cow was given the most prominent and sacred place. Injuring or killing of the cow was prohibited in the Vedic period. The cow was called Aghnya (is not to be killed or injured). The Vedas prescribe punishment for injuring or killing the cow by expulsion from the kingdom or by death penalty, as the case may be.

In the SAHMAT publication Arjun Dev deals harshly with this above statement where he writes with due sarcasm, “No Veda is cited for this because, according to the author, the ‘word Veda means knowledge or the sacred spiritual

knowledge'...". However, in Romila Thapar's NCERT textbook on Ancient India, she asserts that Vedic Hindus ate beef, but she does not provide the Vedic source of that claim, either. In his critique, Arjun Dev is livid that Lal made "no reference to beef" in his textbook. Makkhan Lal and many others are ready to back up their claims with scripture as is R.S. Sharma and his DHG associates.

This contentious topic has been debated for years, more than ever since the publication of a controversial book by D.N. Jha, *The Myth of the Holy Cow*. Since the book is now being used, relatively uncritically, in classes in Departments of South Asian Studies, the veracity of Jha's claim is cemented in the minds of many scholars. However, evidence may indeed point to the contrary and is less than conclusive. For every verse that Jha can interpret to mean that Aryans ate beef, other scholars can find two verses that proscribed beef eating. There are numerous slokas that speak of the sanctity of the cow—and the crime of cow killing. Just like the Bible the Vedas can be mined to justify just about anything the seeker is looking for.

What must be considered is the profound need that many scholars such as R.S. Sharma and Romila Thapar have to prove that beef was eaten in the Vedic period. In this urge to find beef, they do not include a discussion as to why such practices were altered. It is paradoxical that they first insist that Hindus in ancient India ate beef, then they claim that Hindus are hopelessly trapped by tradition, forgetting that meat eating was discarded as social mores changed.

D.N. Jha, R.S. Sharma, Romila Thapar, Arjun Dev and other scholars who adamantly claim that Hindus regularly ate beef in the Vedic period often have ulterior motives. In regards to some of the cases they take up with a enthusiasm, as in proving that Vedic Indians ate beef, the reason for their passionate embrace of a particular topic is not always easy to ascertain. The logic may be a bit convoluted. Gail Minault commented about this, "Perhaps because cow protection

is so implicated in Hindutva—they would like to demolish the particular cultural artifact.” However, that is one of the main points of this whole study: the secular/socialist critics of the Hindu revivalist movement are so eager to demolish their intellectual others that they are willing to throw the baby out with the bath water and thereby alienate much of mainstream Hindu India.

Sharma stated in his textbook *Ancient India* that his purpose in studying India’s ancient past was to dig out and expose problems and injustice, in order to rid contemporary society of those ills. Beef eating doesn’t seem to fit into that category. Does eating beef make Vedic Aryans progressive? Does ceasing to eat beef make the Vedic Indians regressive? Is the eating of cow’s meat something bad or unhealthy, to be shunned and therefore in line with Sharma’s historiographical mission, proof that the Vedic Indians were so thoroughly corrupt that they even ate *Gai Mata*, Mother India’s dearest symbol? Ultimately, the reasoning put forth is that if the Vedic Aryans can be shown to have eaten beef, then initiatives by Hindu Revivalists advocating a ban on cow slaughter can be deflated.

Jha wrote in an essay on the topic,

Although there is reason to believe that a brahmana's cow may not have been killed, that is no index of its inherent sanctity in the Vedic period or even later.⁵⁸²

There are actually many references to the sanctity of the cow, especially in later Vedic periods. Jha, who is a well known and self-avowed Marxist scholar, said in an interview that he is a vegetarian by choice, not religious compulsion. However, he goes to great pains to try to prove that historically Hindus were beef eaters, though he has been accused of selectively quoting Vedic scriptures.

⁵⁸² There are innumerable statements about the sanctity of the cow both in the Vedic and especially later periods. This is the sort of statement that is made throughout this textbook

There is certainly a political element to the argument, clearly explained by Professor Guy L. Beck of the Department of Classical Studies at Tulane University, New Orleans. Dr. Beck wrote,

The issue of beef-eating in Vedic culture has had a history that goes back to the Mutiny of 1857. After the revolt of the Indians for the British use of beef-tallow in gun cartridges, the Britishers were determined to root out the Hindu reverence for the cow, and thus began to reward Indian Sanskrit scholars for finding any references to meat or beef in Hindu sastras, so as to undermine the Hindu piety. The first Indian to publish information was Raja Rajendra Lala Mitra of Calcutta, who published his essay "Beef in Ancient India" in the JOURNAL OF THE ASIATIC SOCIETY in 1872. [...]

Others followed his example (P.V.Kane, etc.) such that this verse is invariably quoted by almost all who support beef-eating in the Vedas. The original essay by Mitra was circulated as a booklet in 1926 just after Gandhi had taken up cow protection (1925). After the Cow Protection Movement gained momentum in 1967, once again the pamphlet was distributed. As a result of the first booklet, Indian Macaulayites formed "Beef-eating Clubs" to propagate it among certain 'intellectuals', and many Hindus who eat beef use this single verse as a reference point today.

However, in the original Sanskrit ... it is not apparently cow or bull meat which is referred to, but the 'meat' of a certain medicinal plant. The book, A REVIEW OF BEEF IN ANCIENT INDIA (Gorakhpur, 1971, Mathura, 1983) presents all sides of the issue including all the references from other sources (Grhya Sutras, etc.) and lays to rest any notion of widespread or 'normal' beef-eating in ancient India. Of course, there were a few exceptions, but there is not enough solid evidence to say that it was condoned in the Vedas or the Vedic (Aryan) culture. The notion is more the product of a Macaulayite agenda.⁵⁸³

The insistence that beef eating was common in ancient India is central to the narrative of scholars associated with the Delhi Historians Group, even when it is a contested item. In older NCERT textbooks, this controversial issue is presented as

⁵⁸³ From an email communication with Professor Beck.

fact, with no context or comments about why most Hindus have not eaten beef for several millennia.

One Indian gentleman, Vinod Kumar, who commented about this controversy, wrote via email,

If the historians felt the compulsion to mention ancient Hindus ate beef, they should have credited them for stopping doing so, specially when in today's west --traditional beef eaters--there is a concentrated drive not to eat red meat.

Kumar then cites quotes from Alberuni who commented on why Indians shunned the eating of beef a thousand years ago. He added, complaining about the manner in which scholars have decontextualized the information so as to make it seem wide spread and pervasive, "What is the motive of these historians in not giving explanatory notes to the ancient practice of eating beef and then stopping or forbidding to do so?" Kumar wondered regarding the pedagogical implications, "How does the statement that ancient Hindus ate beef help the knowledge of ancient India to a young student and specially if it is not accompanied by a full explanation?" According to an email communication from, Sandhya Jain regarding this topic,

What Jha is doing is setting up a strawman -- that Hindus want to return to an original pristine religion, and then knocking it down, and thereby declaring all Hindu practice as illegitimate, so that the demand for cow protection becomes totally irrational, and dismissible.

This is just one of the hotly contested issues in ancient Indian historiography. In these disputes, that are essentially academic, not political, the new textbooks certainly have taken the alternative approach. Many of the issues are far from conclusive and are being subjected to on-going research. Much of that research is eschewed by the DHG. The divide is not going away any time soon, at least not until some breakthrough discovery can bring more light to the existing data about India's ancient past. Until then, when both sides are

positioning themselves, there will be no scope for collaborations and consultation. The Delhi Historians Group is in a protracted war, with the support of a large segments of the English print media, and no amount of research will dissuade their need for confrontation. They aver, as they have numerous times, that the very future of humanity is at stake.

Where's the RSS?

One of the most common charges that the DHG lobs against the new dispensation at the NCERT is that the “saffron” textbooks will bring respectability to the RSS. Besides enhancing the role of the RSS during India’s independence movement, the new textbooks will find the current Prime Minister, A. B. Vajpayee, a prominent place in the Quit India Movement. Upon examination, this claim is nowhere evident in the new textbooks. The RSS is never once mentioned in the new textbook, *Contemporary India*, and Vajpayee is only cited regarding the election victory of the BJP in the late 1990’s.

This accusation from DHG and SAHMAT scholars was repeated numerous times. It was claimed that the new textbooks would erroneously elevate Vajpayee to a freedom fighter and give the RSS respectability denied since 1948 when a former member was convicted and executed for the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. Afterwards, the organization was banned for several years, The courts cleared the RSS of complicity in Gandhi-ji’s murder. Nonetheless, the organization will continue to be cited and stigmatized as the murderer of Gandhi in articles in India and abroad.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸⁴ At this point, I would like to reemphasize that I am using a neutral stance regarding the rewriting of history in India, instead of the lop-sided stance usually found in western academia. I take this stance because there are hundreds of millions of Indians who agree with it and their voices are not heard. I do not intend to give voice to the radical fringe of the Sangh such as Bal Thackeray

The old textbooks and the historical narrative dominant in India for fifty years characterized the Hindu Mahasabha as a communal party. In that reading the Mahasabha is shown to be more responsible for Partition than the Muslim League.⁵⁸⁵ Members of the DHG anticipated that the new textbooks would describe the Hindu Mahasabha as a mainstream party that contributed to India's independence.⁵⁸⁶

The estimation was partially correct. The new textbooks are not necessarily more sympathetic to the Hindu Mahasabha, it hardly figures and is not elevated. The main difference is that the Hindu Mahasabha is mentioned at all. Earlier textbooks put the Mahasabha on the sidelines, as if those freedom fighters who were associated with it played no part at all in independence movement. When and if it is mentioned it is only in the context of communalism.

The pendulum is in full swing, and those writing the narratives now are far less critical of the Hindu Mahasabha than are scholars in the Delhi Historians Group. Nonetheless, even though the Hindu Mahasabha is not listed as a communal party in the new narrative, it has not been elevated as the driving force in the achievement of India's independence and is only mentioned in passing. The story of the creation of the nation remained essentially the same as in the earlier textbooks, but with a few extra names thrown in, and the eulogies to Marxism omitted.⁵⁸⁷ The history unit was also shortened significantly, as per the new syllabus so that units of geography and civics could be added.

⁵⁸⁵ Gail Minault commented that "the Muslim League advocated partition, the Mahasabha did not."

⁵⁸⁶ This was also the organizing principle in the P.S. Gupta's volume of *Toward Freedom*, that dedicated hundreds of pages to the Communist's activities and relegated the Hindu Mahasabha as a communal footnote.

⁵⁸⁷ This technique was also used by the BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) when they added or subtracted a name here and there to the Awami League books. The process in Bangladesh was very covert and took only three weeks to accomplish, whereas in India it has been very public and has taken several years to bring out the new textbooks, under the glare of tremendous publicity.

In the new NCERT textbook *Contemporary India*, the Hindu Mahasabha is cited only a couple of times. Once while discussing the Indian response to the Simon Commission the book states, “all the political parties and groups like the Congress, Muslim League led by Jinnah, the Hindu Mahasabha and others declared that the Indians would not cooperate with the Simon Commission”. In the earlier NCERT textbook, *Modern India*, written by Arjun Dev, he states on page 223 that along with the Congress “the Muslim League decided to boycott the [Simon] Commission”. He does not mention the Hindu Mahasabha in this connection. But, six pages later, under the subheading “Communal Parties and Their Role” Arjun Dev writes, “during the agitation against Simon Commission, some leaders of these [communal] parties welcomed the Simon Commission”. Which communal parties these were is not specified.

Arjun Dev is consistently vague about who the generic communal parties are. He describes how they were dividing the nation on communal lines and retarding the efforts of the true nationalists who were associated with the Congress Party. All in all, in the rendering in this old NCERT textbook, the Muslim League is often praised, but the Hindu Mahasabha is only alluded to with derision, as the source of India’s eventual partition.

While describing the independence movement, Arjun Dev’s textbook continues for several pages repeating numerous times the phrase “the communal parties” but never again directly names the Hindu Mahasabha . He focuses on the role played by the Muslim League in the partition of India and continually alludes to “Hindu communalism”, without any names or examples. He writes, on page 239 that “During periods when thousands were in jail for participating in the struggle for freedom, the communal parties kept themselves aloof. Sometimes they joined hands and cooperated with the British Government”. He mentions the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha in this regard. However, in his list of

conspirators he does not include the Communist Party, though they also stayed out of jail by cooperating with the British during the second world war. In fact, on page 248, Arjun Dev writes several sentences that indicate just the opposite,

The influence of the Communist party had also grown. Thus the influence of people who *did not want to compromise with the British government* had grown. They wanted complete independence and were in favour of launching a movement to achieve it. (emphasis added)

This represents the standard eliding of the collaborative role played by the Indian Communist Party during the freedom movement. A more objective assessment is described by Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr. and Stanley A Kochanek in *India Government and Politics in a Developing Nation* (Fifth Edition),⁵⁸⁸

Since its inception in 1928 the Communist Party of India (CPI) has been divided in its social character, its base of support, and its ideological stance. These divisions reflect its origins in the regional organizations of the Workers' and Peasants' party. In its early years the CPI, closely tied to the Communist Party of Great Britain, was largely under Comintern control and followed Moscow directives with dutiful twists and turns. During the 1930s the party adopted a tactic of 'the united front from above' in cooperation with the nationalist movement. Entering the Congress Socialist Party, (CSP), Communists soon secured leadership in the Socialist organization, particularly in the South, where they gained effective control. Expelled in 1939, they took much of the CSP membership in the South with them. The final break with the Congress came with the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union and the CPI's call for cooperation with the British in what was deemed an anti-imperialist war. The Congress chose noncooperation and as Congress leaders languished in jail, the CPI infiltrated student, peasant, and labor organizations, expanding its membership from 5,000 in 1942 to 53,000 by 1946. Although the CPI effectively gained control of a number of mass organizations, its participation in the war effort, its continued attack on Gandhi, and its support for the Muslim League demand for Pakistan tainted the party as antinational and minimized its influence.

⁵⁸⁸ Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, Fort Worth (1993), page 294.

Professor R.C. Majumdar is one of India's most famous historians though his work has been posthumously labeled "Saffron" and is often dismissed by Leftists as "communal history". However, none can deny that he was a first class scholar. Nonetheless, the Congress Party tried to suppress his monumental, three-volume *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, which is still considered a classic, at least by among certain scholars. Majumdar wrote,

During the great national upsurge of 1942, the Communists acted as stooges and spies of the British Government... Mr. Joshi (of the Communist Party) was placing at the disposal of India the services of his Party Members... Joshi had, as General Secretary of the Party, written a letter in which he offered 'unconditional help' to the then Government of India and the Army GHQ to fight the 1942 underground workers and the Azad Hind Fauz (INA) of Subhas Chandra Bose... Joshi's letter revealed that the CPI was receiving financial aid from the British Government, had a secret pact with the Muslim League...⁵⁸⁹

The new NCERT textbook *Contemporary India* by Hari Om, with the pendulum swinging, gives us another perspective, when he writes about the Quit India Movement, "Among those who got arrested and faced lathi blows and bullets were the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs, and other communities". Certainly the gist of the next paragraph is a prickly issue and must have infuriated the members of the Delhi Historians Group. This fact is never mentioned in Arjun Dev's textbook, *Modern India*. Hari Om wrote,

The Indian Communists and the followers of Jinnah were perhaps the only political elements who did not support such a strong and widespread movement. The Muslim League even went to the extent of offering cooperation to the government on the condition that the British authorities would divide India on communal lines and finally quit. As for the Indian Communists, they gave their full support to the League's views and British war efforts. They blindly

⁵⁸⁹ History of the Freedom Movement in India, 2d rev. ed., Calcutta: Firma (1971), Volume III, pp. 569.

supported Russia, ignoring the interests of the Indians and their fight against the British.⁵⁹⁰

Nowhere in the many biting and detailed critiques about this new textbook written by leftist scholars in anthologies published by SAHMAT, do they complain about this very negative depiction of the role of the Communist parties during the Quit India Movement. Though many of these scholars are closely associated with the CPI, as is SAHMAT, this particular corrective has not been highlighted as a distortion. Considering how they picked this book apart when it was published, it is surprising that they did not object to this condemnation of the CPI. Perhaps they are hesitant to bring attention to this dramatic swing in the historical pendulum, because it is actually true and to contest it would bring out the facts.

The textbook on *Modern India* by Arjun Dev fails to mention this detail about the communal role played by Communist parties in their support of the Muslim League's call for Pakistan and their support of the British war effort after Germany invaded Russia. This information was suppressed for fifty years, at least in NCERT textbooks where another version of the story was promoted. A version where in the 1940's the "Communist party [grew because it] did not want to compromise with the British government ... They wanted complete independence".

For activist scholars such as Arjun Dev, Irfan Habib, Kumkum Roy, K.M. Shrimali, and especially outspoken Marxist scholars such as K.N. Panikkar, and including the don of Indian historiography, Professor Romila Thapar, this recent shift or pendulum swing is not only the denigration of their life's work, but the worse kind of terrorism. They express the same horror that Bob Dole and his fellow republican spokesperson, Lynn Cheney, the wife of the current vice-

⁵⁹⁰ Gail Minault wrote about this: "The Indian Communists participated in the Quit India Movement—many student participants in the Quit India Movement were members of the CPI.

president, felt about the new US History Standards. They see it as the end of historiography, the pinnacle of communal interpretations, the demise of science and rationalism in the writing of history. The new textbooks may, in fact, represent none of the above, but rather a pendulum shift away from the narratives that they have nurtured for decades.

An analogy with a hypothetical situation in the USA may help to explain why the process of reevaluating history is not such a fascist enterprise as the scholars of the DHG would have the rest of the world and their fellow countrymen believe. Imagine a situation in the USA, one day in the future, the unlikely but possible election success of the Libertarian Party, who fifty years from now *could* win the presidency and control one or both houses of Congress. In present day textbooks in the USA, the Libertarian Party is usually not mentioned, and certainly their candidates and their political platform are not presented as relevant to American school children. However, the Libertarian Party has participated in elections since its formation in 1971. Libertarians have fielded candidates for local and national elections and they have developed party platforms, but these facts are omitted from contemporary textbooks.

If one day in the future the Libertarians managed to assume the role of the majority party, it would only be fair and logical, that their platforms and their heroes should be written into the historical record—retroactively. It would be their turn at the center and they would have every right to demand that their rise to power also be included in textbooks. Whether this situation will occur in the USA is a long shot. But it did happen in India, though in most ways, the BJP does not equal Libertarians. However, this context, the BJP has every right to demand that their heroes are included in the historical record, where previously they were consciously excluded and often condemned by historians associated with other political dispensations.

Vir Savarkar: Revered or Feared?

The case of V.D. Savarkar is an excellent example of a hero who lost his place in history posthumously, due to contemporary politics that negatively implicated his role retroactively. He was one of the most daring figures of the freedom struggle, but because of his association with Hindutva philosophy, he is not discussed by Arjun Dev, except to be listed once, in a string of names on page 192 that included “some of the most prominent Indian revolutionaries outside India” such as M.N. Roy--a well known Communist intellectual and activist. Never again does Arjun Dev mention the name of Vir Savarkar, though he highlights the contributions of Mohamed Ali and his brother Shaukaut Ali in numerous places.

A photograph of V.D. Savarkar is on page 190, in association with the subsection titled, “The Revolutionaries”. However, Savakar’s exploits are not included in Arjun Dev’s historical narrative at this juncture, though he describes in relative detail the adventures of quite a few other revolutionaries. There are many photographs of individuals included in the book but scarcely mentioned in the text, a criticism also extended to the new NCERT textbooks in the collections of essays compiled for several SAHMAT published pamphlets.

On the other hand, as the pendulum swings, the textbook *Contemporary India*, commissioned and published during M. M. Joshi’s tenure, mentions Savarkar under a subheading titled similarly as Arjun Dev’s, “Revolutionary Movement Abroad”. Here Savarkar is once again listed among numerous revolutionary freedom fighters, though the list is different with several new names added and some of the names on Arjun Dev’s list missing. In particular M.N. Roy, who was notable for his ‘internationalist’ Communist connections, was not on Hari Om’s revised list. Savakar’s name appears two or three more times in the

new textbook, and there is, besides the same photograph, though of better resolution than was used in Arjun Dev's textbook, a short paragraph devoted to him.

Hari Om writes that "V.D. Savarkar was ... arrested and sentenced to transportation for life in April 1910." The book tells the students that Savarkar "escaped from the ship" and swam "across the sea [to] the French coast, where he was again arrested". It mentions that Savarkar's history of the "1857 rebellion", that had been banned by the British, was "smuggled into India" and inspired the people. Other than that, though the opportunity is there, this new, more "Indianized" view of the independence movement does not dwell on Vir Savakar's life. He is not elevated in a grandiose style as the critics of the new curriculum predicted.

It would seem that though the pendulum is in full swing, the Hindu nationalists have only claimed a little extra space to give their favorite freedom fighter his due. In the earlier version of history, he was deprived space in state sponsored textbooks. If mentioned by DHG associated scholars, he is more likely to be associated with the death of Gandhi, though cleared by the courts, than his contributions to the freedom movement.

This description of Savakar's escape from the ship, was the brunt of much merriment and condemnation in several critiques of the new textbooks. Fact is, he did jump ship and swim to shore in France just to be rearrested. The objection wasn't regarding whether he did or did not jump off the ship while being transported away from England, but in the phrasing of the event, that he "swam across the sea" instead of the recommended more sedate description, "swam to shore".

Many of the arguments against the new textbook are stylistic rather than content, and when about content, they refer to subtle changes, such as adding an

alternative, yet controversial hero's name, such as M. M. Malaviya, to a list of characters. Or including a few more details about Savakar, or an adjective that could be construed to project Hinduism as superior to Islam and or Christianity. The big differences remain, including the origins of the Aryans, the impact of the Islamic invasions, and the role of the Communists versus the Hindu nationalists.

Many of the critiques are nit picking and not very different than the kinds of criticisms that educationists such as Krishna Kumar used to lob at the old NCERT textbooks. In the summer of 1996, when I first met both Krishna Kumar, a left-leaning scholar from the Education Department at Delhi University, and Arjun Dev, the left-leaning head of Social Studies at NCERT, they were not speaking to one another and were locked in an intellectual battle about pedagogy and historiography. Krishna Kumar had been critical of Arjun Dev's textbooks. Now perhaps the common saffron enemy may have brought them together.

Another very prominent hero of the freedom movement who was extracted from the earlier historical narrative was Madan Mohan Malaviya, the founder of Benares Hindu University and a prominent member of the Congress Party, serving as its president for four terms between 1909 and 1933. He was also the co-founder the All India Hindu Mahasabha. Though he is not mentioned anywhere that I could locate in Arjun Dev's book⁵⁹¹, he was an active participant in India's freedom struggle and, according to Surjit Mansingh, "a close friend of Motilal Nehru". Mansingh states that Malaviya was "known as a moderate".

Once again, though the opportunity is wide open, Hari Om simply inserts Malaviya into the historical record where appropriate and doesn't exalt him unduly. Under a subsection about the Swaraj Party, Arjun Dev writes, that "one

⁵⁹¹ As I was reading the pages of Modern India, searching for a reference for Malaviya, I was astounded that I could not find his name mentioned anywhere. I looked over the relevant chapters several times to confirm his exclusion from the historical record because it is a significant oversight. Perhaps he is in the textbook and I did not find him, but if he is, he is barely mentioned because I scoured the appropriate pages for his name and never found it.

group led by C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru, and Vithalbhai Patel wanted that the Congress should take part in the elections”. Hari Om’s version reads “a section of influential Congressmen like C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Vithalbhai Patel and Madan Mohan Malaviya [were] keen on contesting elections”. Malaviya’s inclusion in the new textbook is more a corrective measure rather than the rewriting of history. His exclusion was just as noticeable to Hindu nationalists as his inclusion is to the DHG. Whether a pendulum or a sea-saw, historiography balances precariously.

Another reference can show the differences in orientations. Arjun Dev had written on page 193, “Some ‘extremist’ leaders who were Hindus used religious beliefs and festivals to propagate nationalism”. He blamed these leaders for opening up the “opportunity to those Muslims who were pro-British, to say that the nationalist movement was a movement of Hindus only and therefore, they should have nothing to do with it”. Here he blames Tilak, though scrupulously unnamed. This anonymous inference implicates others like him, which in many ways must necessarily include Mahatma Gandhi and his call for *Ramarajya*. Gandhi used symbols associated with religion to promulgate nationalism, which, according to Arjun Dev’s way of interpreting events, inevitably led to the break up of the nation on religious grounds.

Hari Om does not blame these nationalist leaders for using religious symbols, but evaluates their contributions in a positive light. He wrote on page twenty-three,

Tilak gave a new orientation to the freedom struggle by introducing the Ganapati festival ... followed by the introduction of the Shivaji festival ... Tilak ... used these festivals as a vehicle of mass awakening and mobilization in favour of a struggle for *Swaraj*.

Arjun Dev sees these efforts during the early twentieth century as the communalization of the freedom movement. Hari Om interprets them quite

differently.

A conflict that revealed the ideological cleavages in contemporary India occurred when a bust of Vir Savarkar was installed in the parliament building in February 2003. The Communists and the Congress loudly objected, stating that Savarkar was the progenitor of Hindutva and blemished by his complicity in Mahatma Gandhi's murder. They staged a parliamentary walk out in protest. Savarkar, one of the most controversial characters in the freedom movement is revered by those leaning to the Hindu-centric side, and reviled by secular socialists.

The problem of defining Savarkar and his undeniable contribution to India's independence exposes the tangled politics of Indian historiography. Is it a white-wash? Is it saffronization? Is it a vision that the "red flag will fly over the red fort"? Whichever it is depends on the color of the lens.

Oops! Goes the Mahatma & Howlers

In his article published in the SAHMAT anthology, *Substandard and Saffronized*, Arjun Dev takes on the *Contemporary India* textbook in wry prose. First regarding the books' structure, he stated that it was "not clear" why the section, "Land and the People should come at the end". He added that "there is not much in the book which is clear except, of course, the intention". With these words of warning, he begins his critique of this textbook.

Errors in labeling and spelling and grammar that Arjun Dev and several others pointed out in their articles in the SAHMAT publication, only appeared in the first edition of the textbook, published in September, 2002. Many of the grammatical errors and other such mistakes were changed immediately, and did not appear in the second edition that was published a month later. Besides considerable corrections in the text, the revised edition contained a full page of

errata inserted at the back of the book.

Several phrases in the first edition cited as objectionable by the DHG, do not appear in the second edition, which is the edition I have to consult. It is definitely minus some of the “howlers” pointed out by Arjun Dev, Sumit Sakar and others whose critiques were published in the SAHMAT booklet. Given the tone of their criticism coupled with the level of resistance and animosity at NCERT, making any changes in that short a time was in itself remarkable. In an interview, Rajput, the director of NCERT, admitted there had been some mistakes in the first editions. He blamed it on the time constraints created by the litigation process, and promised to correct any errors, which they did, and hopefully they will continue to do.

One item on the errata page added the word Balouchistan to a sentence on page 57, where it had been omitted in the first edition when describing the constituent states of Pakistan. Several critiques of the new textbook mocked the author for omitting Balouchistan, claiming it proved not only the ignorance of the textbook writers, but their complete denial of the existence of Pakistan. Ironically, in his textbook, *Modern India*, on page 266, Arjun Dev wrote, “A separate State of Pakistan comprising West Punjab, East Bengal, Sind and North-West Frontier Province was created”. This textbook had been in use since 1989. For thirteen years Pakistan was not accorded its far western province—no one was howling about it. In the new textbook the omission was corrected within six weeks. The only point in bringing this disparity to attention is to show that many errors in the new textbooks that were brought forth as examples of communalism, for which the NCERT was castigated with stinging venom, are also found in the old textbooks.

The most startling error in the class nine textbook, *Contemporary India*, is the fact that in the first edition, the murder of Mahatma Gandhi was not

mentioned. This obviously created a huge uproar and embarrassment. It was not only an unfortunate “oversight” but absolutely ludicrous on the part of the editors. Needless to say, this omission made the author, and by inference the HRD minister, laughingstocks.

Though the first edition neglected to tell the hapless students in India’s schools about the assassination of the father of the nation, it does have numerous pages of very positive narratives about the Mahatma. Hari Om’s critics claimed that his textbook not only omitted Gandhi’s murder, but barely mentions him at all. This is not the case, and as per the number of words about the freedom struggle, Gandhi fares as the most prominent character, as well he should.

But the very public spectacle that ensued from this unconscionable oversight of the Mahatma’s death brings into focus the almost nonexistent public relations strategy of the BJP. The booklet, *Substandard and Saffronized*, has several essays lamenting the fact that Gandhi’s murder was not included in the new textbook. Naturally, since an ex-RSS member was guilty of his murder, the critics eagerly pointed out that the omission was intentional.

Four months after the second edition of the textbook had been released, that did indeed mention the Mahatma’s murder, an article was published in the February 4, 2003 edition of *The Hindu* written by Supriya RoyChowdhury. She decried the omission of Gandhi’s assassination in *Contemporary India* and quotes the textbook’s description of “the moment of Independence thus:”

The Muslim League communalised the country's political situation... The bitterness created by the Muslim League produced dangerous results. The common people were subjected to senseless brutalities. Gandhi and other leaders... did try to control the situation but with little success. It was under these sad and tragic circumstances that India got Independence on August 15, 1947 (pp

157) (sic)⁵⁹².

The above quote from the textbook leaves out more than three fourths of the text. This short excerpt is taken from three full paragraphs. The extractions are meant to present what she considers to be communalism. She continues with the observation that

The chapter on Independence ends without a single reference to Gandhi's assassination. Nor is there any reference in the subsequent chapter on the Indian Constitution to his killing, or to any other aspect of his life and ideas.

Besides the illogical expectation that the killing of Gandhi should be mentioned in the chapter about the writing of the constitution, there is in the book, as will be quoted below, considerable references to his contributions and philosophy. Why Ms. RoyChowdhury did not read those paragraphs is unknown, unless she did not have a copy of the offending textbook and based her critique on the reviews published in the SAHMAT booklet. Since this article in *The Hindu* was written four months after the revised edition of *Contemporary India* was published--into which Gandhi-ji's assassination had most definitely been added--the information is outdated. However, without a doubt, the fact that it was omitted is still highly sensational.

Though RoyChowdhury strongly implicates the agenda of the Sangh Parivar in the eclipsing of the Mahatma's message, she also laments that Nehruvian politics and policies had, within the first few years of independence, also negated Gandhi's goals,

The fact that some of Gandhi's ideas, such as trusteeship, prioritising the village economy, and his deep distrust of modern industrialisation could be dismissed with relative ease by Nehru and his team, also made it easier to pack away his concept of ethical politics along with these other concepts. Thus, ethical

⁵⁹² This quote is from page 57, not 157--this is more than likely a printing error, unless she didn't really read the book, which may be the case since she adamantly claims that Gandhi is not discussed in the textbook, which he is.

politics became as much a curious anachronism as trusteeship. Not only was this to ignore that the concept of ethical politics is what underlay his preoccupation with the micro village and his distrust of industrial consumerism, but in the process, what had given politics its inspiring character during the Gandhian phase of the nationalist movement, was now completely lost.⁵⁹³

On February 13, a rebuttal written by Hari Om to the above article appeared in *The Hindu*. He apologized copiously for omitting Gandhi's murder,

I have acknowledged in the past on more than one occasion that I committed a very serious mistake by not reflecting on the murder of a world leader such as Gandhi. I am admitting my mistake once again in public print and in an unambiguous language.

Never once in this piece, that begins with such angst, does Hari Om inform the readers that the second edition of the textbook, which did include Gandhi's death, was published several months previous to this article--immediately after the oversight was brought to the attention of the NCERT. Neglecting to inform the readers that the correction had been made, shows an unfortunate lack of media suavity and a total absence of PR on the part of the NCERT, ditto for the BJP.

Hari Om continues his apology, pointing "out that this omission was not deliberate". He then offers what is, in my opinion, and obviously in the opinion of the Delhi Historians Group, a very lame excuse, pure drivel. He gives a series of explanations that in no way forgive the supposed unintentional exclusion of Gandhi's murder from the textbook,

My major problem was the time and space constraint. I had to write the history portion in less than eight months and cover a period of no less than 400 years in the 64-odd pages, which also include nearly 40 illustrations and detailed exercises. It was impossible for me to include each and every development in the limited space available to me as one of the authors of 'Contemporary India.' Another problem was the font size. Since the textbook is meant for class IX, the font size has to be bigger. This is the policy of the

⁵⁹³ Chowdhury, Supriya Roy. "The killing of Gandhi:," *The Hindu*, Tuesday, Feb 04, 2003, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/2003/02/04/stories/2003020400561000.htm>

NCERT and I had to go by it. What does all this further mean? It only means yet another limitation. But to advance these arguments, under no situation should it be taken to mean that I am in any way questioning Supriya RoyChowdhury's well-founded concern and anxiety.

If Gandhi's murder was not included because of these space limitation, why did the revised edition find room for it? And why, in the writing of this entire article did Hari Om fail to mention that Gandhi's murder had been immediately added to the second edition? These questions are really meaningless because Hari Om's excuses were meaningless.

Hari Om then tells the readers of *The Hindu* that what "shocked" him was the "allegation that [his textbook] ignored Gandhiji's unique, spectacular and highly inspiring contribution to the national movement" and as RoyChowdhury claimed, failed to mention "any other aspect of his life and ideas". Hari Om counters that "Even a cursory glance at the textbook would be enough to rebut her charge. Gandhi has figured prominently in chapters 4, 5 and 6 and for obvious reasons". He then goes on to "quote a few portions from the textbook, which deal with the ideas and role of Gandhi [...] in order to put things in a perspective". He quotes from page 34, skipping one controversial sentence in this excerpt,

However, the most important and epoch-making development in the post-1909 period was the return of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi from South Africa in 1915. He had returned with a new technique of mass struggle, called Satyagraha. But between 1915 and 1918, he did not play any active role in the Indian political life under the advice of his political guru, Gopal Krishna Gokhale. During this period, he simply studied the prevailing condition in the country. He got so moved by the poverty of the masses that he adopted a life of simplicity earning the title of Mahatma... Soon he started applying his technique of non-violent Satyagraha to local mass struggles. These include his fight for the rights of the Champaran (Bihar) indigo cultivators, Kheda (Gujarat) peasants and Ahmedabad textile workers. Gandhi identified himself with the weaker sections of the society and emerged as a moral force in

the Indian public life. The success of these three localised experiments thrilled the whole nation and Gandhi emerged as a rallying point for patriotic elements in the country... "

In the middle of the above quote from his textbook, after the words "title of Mahatma", Hari Om omits the following sentence which is found in the text of both the first and second editions, "The title of Mahatma was given by Rabindranath Thakur". This spelling of Tagore's name, though perhaps phonetically justified, and the transliteration used by some members of that social group, it is not the conventional spelling of the famous Nobel Laureate's name. The use of Thakur instead of Tagore raised jeers from the Delhi Historians Group who were combing the books for errors. This misspelling was mentioned in several of the critiques. Why this spelling was not changed in the second edition neither in the text or on the errata page, is not known, but perhaps Hari Om deleted it from this newspaper article to avoid the chuckles.

RoyChowdhury claimed that no aspects of Gandhi's "life and ideas" were included in the book, which is not the case, as he features more prominently than any other leader of the freedom movement. She mentioned in her article that she looked carefully over the textbook, but even a quick glance would show that there were several chapters in which Gandhi played the primary role, including three photographs. In Arjun Dev's book there are nine photographs of Gandhi, most of them showing him participating in events, such as the Second Round Table Conference in London, or sitting talking with Nehru at a meeting of the Indian National Congress. There are also nine photographs of Jawaharlal Nehru in Arjun Dev's textbook compared to three in Hari Om's.

With the change in the syllabus, the new textbook must cover a course in social studies, not just history. Because of this, there is far less room for history. Instead of devoting 272 pages to modern Indian history, the new textbook only

has 102 pages. After that there is a chapter on the constitution and civics followed by a unit that focuses on geography, climate, land forms, etc.

Certainly space considerations, and the need to summarize the history of the nation to fit in to the significantly constricted page allotment, disallowed including many details about the freedom movement. This move towards social studies, combining what were previously separate books for Civics, Geography, and History, severely restricted the space available. Nonetheless, there are sufficient photographs in the new textbook to accompany the text, and in fact, many of the photos in the new book are the same as in Arjun Dev's, with a few new heroes and heroines added and subtracted.

Particularly, one heroine who found her way into the new textbook was Rani Gaidilieu, one of the favorite freedom fighters valorized by Hindu-centric scholars. Rani Gaidilieu was from Nagaland and, though it doesn't say so in the narrative about this "great heroine", she was not only active in opposing the British, but renowned for her efforts to preserve Naga culture against the influx of missionaries. She was never before mentioned in NCERT textbooks. Critics would say that Rani Gaidilieu was the Sangh Parivar's "poster child" from the Northeast, just as they said that Abdul Kalam, the new President of India."⁵⁹⁴

In his article in *The Hindu*, Hari Om provides several more quotes about Gandhi from his textbook, *Contemporary India*,

The Congress, under the unique leadership and guidance of Gandhi transformed itself from an elitist body into a mass organisation reaching to the village level. The apparent gulf between the urban elite and rural India was bridged and a new Congress came into being. Women and depressed classes joined the Congress, thus making it a mass movement. The Congress in its new avatar launched a massive non-cooperation movement all over the

⁵⁹⁴ I have often heard Indian scholars argue that it is the leftists who are communal and conservative, and against the inclusion of a woman from Nagaland into the historical record, and opposed when a patriotic Muslim scientist is appointed to the highest office in the land.

country. In a way, Gandhi snatched away the initiative from the British, who had been setting the political agenda for India after the failure of the 1857 rebellion. The British authorities found it difficult to match Gandhi's unconventional methodology and unpredictable moves. (page 35)⁵⁹⁵

In the next excerpt from his textbook included in his rebuttal, Hari Om again deletes a controversial sentence,

On 16 August, 1932, the British Prime Minister announced his Communal Award. It not only provided communal electorates for the Muslims and the Sikhs, but also for the members of the depressed communities. Gandhi and the Congress condemned this award as a sinister plan worked out to weaken the freedom struggle. He was of the view that the Communal Award was designed to destroy the Indian society and play the Hindus against the Hindus. Gandhi, who was the Yervada jail that time, started an indefinite fast on 20 September 1932 to force the British Prime Minister to withdraw that part of the award which was applicable to the depressed communities. The action of Gandhi created a commotion throughout the country. The people got extremely worried for their great leader. This led to the signing of the Poona Pact (between Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar) on 25 September 1932. It recommended joint electorates with reserved seats for the members of the depressed communities. The British accepted this Pact and Gandhi broke his fast (Page 44).

The parenthetical comment “(between Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar)” did not appear in the first or the second edition of the textbook. However, included in Hari Om’s *Contemporary India*, after the sentence “The people got extremely worried for their great leader” is a bit of history that was certainly not part of Arjun Dev’s treatment of this event,

Madan Mohan Malaviya and others approached B.R. Ambedkar, who happened to be a signatory to the ‘Minority Pact’ and asked

⁵⁹⁵ The newspaper article cites page 35 for this quote, but it appears on page 36 in the second edition.

him not to press his demand for separate electorates for the depressed communities. And, Ambedkar agreed.⁵⁹⁶

Though the previous NCERT textbook had more than twice the space to devote to history, Arjun Dev gives even less information about this event. He wrote on page 243, “an agreement was reached by which the decision to introduce separate electorates was withdrawn”. Arjun Dev does not mention the Poona Pact. Both narratives assert that the rights of the untouchables were protected so they would get, according to Arjun Dev, “adequate representation”. Hari Om explains that the Poona Pact “recommended joint electorates with reserved seats for the members of the depressed communities”.

Why Hari Om omitted the reference to Malaviya in his newspaper article is not difficult to understand. The inclusion of this name, anywhere in the textbook, would be interpreted as the saffronization of history. Even if Malaviya was an active player in the freedom movement, he is, according to the previous historical prescription, politically incorrect and unworthy of discussion, except in a negative light. Thus does the pendulum swing—except in this case it has only tilted slightly.

Hari Om provides several more quotes that discuss Gandhi from his textbook. He did not include the sentence about Gandhi’s murder, that was retroactively inserted into the text of the second edition. He didn’t even mention that it had been included. That sentence from the second edition reads,

Gandhi’s efforts to bring peace and harmony in society came to a sudden and tragic end due to his assassination by Nathuram Godse on January 30, 1948, in Delhi while Gandhiji was on his way to attend a prayer meeting.

In Arjun Dev’s textbook, the tragic event was written up quite differently, with an emphasis on Hindu communal groups.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁶ This sentence is in both editions of the textbook but was omitted by the author when he reproduced the paragraph for the newspaper article.

[Gandhi's] message of love and brotherhood was not to the liking of some people. Their minds had been poisoned by their hatred for other communities. On 30 January 1948, a Hindu fanatic shot him dead as he was going to a prayer meeting.

The narrative ends with a full paragraph mourning Gandhi's loss, and a quote from Nehru, "Light has gone out of our lives".⁵⁹⁸ Arjun Dev then writes about the trauma of partition and "rehabilitating the refugees" and the problem of the distribution of resources between India and Pakistan, before he commences discussing the "Framing of the Constitution". Hari Om jumps straight from the death of Gandhi into a paragraph about the "first government of free India".

Hari Om provided several more examples from his textbook that described Gandhi's activities, including quotes, such as "Leave India to the care of God and anarchy", and "his slogan 'Do or Die'....This slogan was aimed at inspiring the Indians to lay down their lives for the cause of the country and break the chains of Indian slavery⁵⁹⁹" and "Be humble, Beware of power. Power corrupts... Remember, you are in office to serve the poor in India's villages".⁶⁰⁰ Incidentally, Gandhi is quoted directly at least as often in the new textbook, which was roundly accused of excluding Gandhi, as he is in Arjun Dev's treatment, regardless of the constriction of space.

Though there are many historical events that are fraught with the possibility of communal overtones, only two more comparisons are discussed in reference to the class nine textbook. First, the description of "Direct Action Day", called by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, which unleashed a reign of terror beginning on

⁵⁹⁷ Note in comparison, as will be discussed below, when the Moplah Rebellion was discussed the religion of the murders as well as the victims remained anonymous.

⁵⁹⁸ Arjun Dev, *Modern India*, p. 271.

⁵⁹⁹ Hari Om, page 53

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid*, page 57

August 16, 1946, known in Calcutta as the “Great Killing”. The second event concerns the accession of the princely state of Hyderabad.

In Hari Om’s book, he writes about the events of August 16, 1946,

The Muslim League declared that it would bid goodbye to constitutional methods and observe 16 August as ‘Direct Action Day’. As a result, Calcutta⁶⁰¹ and other places in East Bengal, Bihar and Punjab witnessed riots, murder, pillage and arson. Nearly 500 (sic) Indians lost their lives. About one lakh Indians became homeless. This is one part of the story. The other was the refusal of the Muslim League to take part in the election to be held in July 1946 for the purpose of setting up a Constituent Assembly. In short, the Muslim League communalized the country’s political situation which, in its turn, produced disastrous results.

There is a typo in this paragraph, that is also in the second edition as well, stating that 500 Indians lost their lives” where it was actually 5000 Indians, from both religious communities, who died as a direct result of the repercussions of Jinnah’s Direct Action Day. According to most accounts, bodies were piled at the intersections of busy streets. On page fifty-six in Hari Om’s textbook is a reproduction of the front page of *The Hindustan Times*, from August 17, 1946-- the headlines read “Ninety Dead and 900 Injured in Calcutta”.

The new textbook did not dwell overly on the grim news about this event. Though M.A. Jinnah’s hands were bloodied, both Hindus and Muslims, died by the thousands. In contrast, Arjun Dev does not mention Direct Action Day by name, and refers to it ambiguously in the past tense, “In 1946, there had been riots in Bengal, Bihar, Bombay and other places in which thousands of Hindus and Muslims were killed.” He lumps this violence into the same paragraph as the violence of partition, which happened exactly a year later. He completely eliminated the Direct Action Day and its consequences.

⁶⁰¹ Though this city officially changed its name several years ago, for some reason the author has chosen to retain the old spelling.

Hari Om has been condemned for writing things such as, “The bitterness created by the Muslim League produced dangerous results”. At the same point in the narrative, when summarizing the events leading to partition, Arjun Dev’s description is similar, except he does not name the Muslim League, but continues to implicate them anonymously. “The hatred preached by the communal parties, encouraged by the British rulers, had borne fruit. Most shameless, inhuman acts were perpetrated.”⁶⁰² In this treatment, Arjun Dev goes from the arrival of Mountbatten in March 1947, backwards in time, alluding to Direct Action Day in 1946, without mentioning it directly, and forward to partition in August 1947, in one paragraph. Hari Om’s treatment of this period is actually more colorful and detailed, regardless of his lamentations about lack of space.

It seems that Arjun Dev was also was running out of room at the end of the book, so he felt the need to abbreviate the last year of the freedom movement. He summarized the first few years of free India, including the framing of the constitution in a few pages. The narrative in both textbooks about the birth of the nation ends with the annexation of the princely states, because that is where the syllabus ends—even though the new textbook slips in an interesting paragraph at the end of this chapter that discusses Indo-US relations post September 11.

In the last few pages of Arjun Dev’s textbook, after a long and quite pedantic paragraph on secularism, he tells the students optimistically, regarding “reconstructing the Indian Society”, that the “aim had become clearer with the spread of socialist ideas”. This is only one of a many sentences inserted in the textbook, praising the rise of socialism, or the activities of the Communist Parties. Yet, Arjun Dev only has room for one sentence about Sardar Patel and his dynamic role in the States Department, convincing the princes to join India. He

⁶⁰² Gail Minault observed about this that “Arjun Dev is very fond of the passive voice—no active agent.”

simply writes, in a rather circular sentence that “Patel brought about the accession to India of all states lying within India before India became Independent”. Patel was mentioned earlier in the book, but very briefly. Nowhere is he given credit for his very important role in gaining India’s independence and the essential part he played in consolidating the states is only given one sentence.

Hari Om gives a far more nuanced report about Sardar Patel who along with “V.P. Menon [was] well versed in political, administrative and diplomatic matters”. The new book praises Patel again in the following paragraph, and later on he is called the “Iron-man of India”. Patel, who was known as a devout Hindu, was sidelined in the old textbook, whereas is he given full credit for his contribution to the consolidation of India in the new narrative.

Hari Om also tells us about “pro-India movements that were already going on in the [princely] states”. He writes that the appointment of Patel “as the country’s Home Minister ... was a clear indication that the nation was for accession of the princely states to India”. Patel assured the princes that “the Congress stood for the prosperity and happiness ... of the people under their aegis”. Then he writes, “The integration of the princely states with the country could be achieved only through Sardar Patel’s skillful strategy and military action.” Including Patel in the tale of Indian history does not take a very strong push of the pendulum because he his one of the most important figures.⁶⁰³ His deep and personal connection with the Hindu Dharma may have contributed to his expulsion from the earlier textbooks that put a low value on Hindu expressions of nationalism.⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰³ He was also a serious contender for first Prime Minister and many have argued that his practicality would have been more advantageous to India than Nehru’s idealism.

⁶⁰⁴ The lack of information about Sadar Patel in the old NCERT textbook is astonishing since he is one of the most renowned actors in the India Nationalist movement. Surjit Mansingh, in Historical Dictionary of India, wrote “Patel was a key player in the Civil Disobedience Movement ... and served as President of the Indian National Congress in 1931. [...] [Patel] provided the

In his coverage of the accession of Hyderabad, Arjun Dev states that the Nizam of Hyderabad “encouraged the activities of an armed gang of religious fanatics to commit atrocities against the people”. Once again, the perpetrators and the victims remain unnamed in this rendition. Arjun Dev tells the students that in September 1948, the Nizam surrendered to Indian troops.

Considering the opportunity to use the terrorism unleashed by the Nizam on the Hindu residents of Hyderabad as a communally charged historical device, discerning critics would look to see how the NCERT under the influence of the Sangh Parivar discusses the razakar and al-badars, who were anti-Hindu death squads formed under the Nizam. Though there is a page and a half about the liberation of Pondicherry and Goa, the situation in Hyderabad is not mentioned at all, except in the following overview at the first of the section,

The Pakistani aggression on Jammu and Kashmir resulted in her accession to India on 26 October 1947, and the accession was unconditional. Hyderabad and Junagarh were the only states which posed some problems. These were the Hindu-majority states with Muslim rulers. The Muslim rulers did not want to maintain any kind of relationship with India.

The final sentence is either intended to be provocative or is so unintentionally due to awkward phrasing. It is true that the Muslim rulers of Hyderabad and Junagarh refused to accede to India, but repeating the word Muslim twice seems to implicate the entire community and not just the leaders.

Hari Om then attributes Sardar Patel for bringing together diplomacy with

main organizational drive of the Congress Parliamentary Board [...] along side Gandhi, he planned the Quite India Movement” and many other activities leading to independence. Mansingh described Patel as “An unemotional and practical man identified as a conservative Hindu. [...] Some suggest that Patel might have made a more decisive and realistic Prime Minister than the idealistic Nehru. Though Patel was “loyal” and made “an invaluable contribution as Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister”, they differed over “India’s choices in Kashmir [and] the consequences of China’s military action in Tibet”. Mansingh writes more about Patel’s significant contributions, which for some reason, were not alluded to in the old NCERT textbooks, but did find some mention in the new renditions of the freedom movement.

the military. The Nizam's death squads are not mentioned. On the other hand the "Freedom Struggle in Pondicherry" and the "Integration of Goa" were each given a subheading of their own and several long paragraphs describing the diplomatic efforts and Satyagraha that brought Pondicherry into the nation and the many years and finally the military moves that brought Goa into the Indian union in 1961. Hyderabad did not warrant its own subheading, nor was it mentioned again. Hari Om missed an opportunity to promote a Hindutva interpretation which could easily have been the approach if the liberation of Hyderabad had been discussed in any depth.

In this narrative, Hari Om made a statement about the liberation of Goa that rankled his critics, "The most notable achievements were the capture of Dadra on 22 July and Nagar Haveli shortly thereafter by the volunteers of 'Free Goa' movement backed by the Jana Sangh and the Goan People's Party". The use of Jana Sangh in this context is a code word for the role that the RSS played in Dadra in 1954. The Jana Sangh, founded in 1951 is the precursor of the BJP. This version of the liberation of Goa is part of history.

In RSS literature the story is told that "armed RSS men entered Dadra and overpowered the Portuguese and raised the Indian flag". Though the textbook did not name the RSS and stated that the volunteers were members of the Jan Sangh, the Delhi Historians Group went wild over this assertion. The RSS aka Jan Sangh actually were involved in this escapade, though earlier NCERT textbooks would never have mentioned this fact.

This is an example of how the insertion of one name in the telling of a familiar tale can cause an uproar. The dates, the place, the consequences were the same in the both tellings of this story. Only one controversial, if historically attenuated detail was added, but that detail belied the orientation of the author.

Arjun Dev's textbook has an interesting comment about Goa left out of the

later version. He wrote that for many years after Independence in 1947, “many Western countries, particularly Britain” backed Portugal’s right to hold on to its Indian colonies. He added, “The U.S.A. also supported the foolish claim of Portugal that Goa was one of its Provinces.”.

In a book that goes out of its way to praise the USSR and devotes many paragraphs to the worldwide rise of socialism, a little barb sent the way of the USA is to be expected. There is very little discussion about the USA in Arjun Dev’s book on *Modern India*, besides their foolish Goa policy. Since there is a tremendous focus on the USSR and the Russian revolution, some additional mention of the USA might have been warranted. Then again, the USA and India weren’t on the best of terms during the cold war. Arjun Dev textbook reflects those imperatives.

Another reference to the USA did occur when narrating the end of the Second World War, “The U.S.A. dropped atom bombs on two cities of Japan ... [that] were burnt to the ground and over 200,000 people were killed”. The section concludes, “The use of atom bombs ... led to new tensions in the world and to a new competition for making more and more deadly weapons which might destroy all mankind”.⁶⁰⁵ Hari Om’s description is not quite so graphic,

On 6 August, 1945 the Americans dropped an atom bomb.... Killing 84,000, and ... Nagasaki... about 40,000. [...] The dropping of these atomic bombs on Japan was one of the most devastating and controversial actions of the entire war.

Besides the huge discrepancy in the number killed by the atom bombs, there is a difference in tone easily noticeable. The BJP is more pro-American than the Congress ever was, as they leaned heavily toward the USSR, much less the historians like R.S. Sharma who wrote the earlier textbooks.

⁶⁰⁵ Arjun Dev, p. 260.

Obviously there are many contrasts between these two textbooks. They are written from completely different points-of-view. Some of the dissimilarities are overt and some subtle. For instance, in the first chapter, while discussing European nationalism, Hari Om makes a very controversial claim regarding Max Mueller's ideas, "This Aryan invasion theory was used as an intellectual instrument to further the well-known British policy of 'Divide and Rule'". Since the Aryan Invasion Theory remains controversial, this statement is seen as ideological and provocative.

The treatment of the rise and the role of Communism and socialist inspired movements in India is one of the most noticeable shifts. In the chapter about world developments, on page nine of *Contemporary India* by Hari Om, the Russian Revolution is referred to as "a coup led by Lenin"; followed by "This political change was presented to the world as an ideological revolution rooted in Marxism and Communism". A few paragraphs later he writes, "the Indian Communists out of their loyalty towards the Soviet Union declared their support to the British war efforts". The chapter ends with a discussion of the Cold War. There are no accolades to Lenin or Marx in this textbook.

In the critiques published by SAHMAT, whose office is located at the headquarters of the CPI (Communist Party India) in New Delhi, the treatment of the Russian Revolution in this textbook was highlighted as uninformed and the use of the phrase "a coup led by Lenin" was ridiculed. They surmised that Hari Om, coming from the University of Jammu, must be somewhat provincial, and doesn't grasp the significance of such a momentous event. However, it is obvious that Hari Om saw the events of 1917 through the telescope of October 1989, and the fall of the Berlin wall, much less the inherently anti-communist stance of the Jan Sangh et al, which increased after China invaded and occupied Indian territory in 1963.

Compare this treatment of communism to the section in Arjun Dev's book called "New Movements" that beginning on page eleven has almost two full pages about the origins and the philosophy of Marx and Engel, and states that "the impact of the ideas of Marx and Engel and the Russian Revolution has been felt in all countries of the world". On the following page there is a full page photo of the face of "Vladimir Ilyich Lenin". It appears to be right out of a Bolshevik propaganda poster. Lenin's enlarged face is dramatically superimposed over a background photo of soldiers "storming the winter palace". No other hero, not even Gandhi, is allotted such a large full page photograph in this textbook.

Though there are nine photos of the Mahatma, including one wood cut, these photos show him engaged in conversation, or sitting with other Indians such as Nehru or Azad Kalam, or walking down a road on the Salt March. None of the photos of Gandhi are over half a page large. And none are so dramatic as the one of Lenin on page twelve.

The photo of Lenin is not only propagandistic in appearance, but it is the only full page illustration anywhere in the textbook. The three illustrations that preceded Lenin in the first chapter were small quarter page reproductions of paintings, such as the storming of the Bastille. Arjun Dev's textbook, written in May 1989, of course has no mention of the events later that year that unraveled Lenin's legacy. Though by its sixth printing in 1995, six years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the textbook had not been revised.

There are other major differences. The new textbook neglected to mention the social work of Ram Mohan Roy who was very instrumental in awakening India to the modern world, whereas he was highlighted in earlier textbooks. It would be hoped that the NCERT will continue to improve these textbooks at the speed that they made the revisions in the second edition, published immediately after the Supreme Court ruled in their favor. If so, many of the grammatical

mistakes and content oversights will continue to be corrected. If not, its flaws will make it obsolete long before the twelve years it took Arjun Dev's to be replaced.

Are the New Textbooks Communal?

In the criticisms of the new NCERT textbooks, many of which are written by the authors of the old, now discontinued textbooks, the issues and items found to be offensive are often found in their own textbooks as well. A good example of this is Arjun Dev's SAHMAT published critique of the textbook for class nine, *Contemporary India*, where he writes that

There is much on Muslim communalism and the Muslim League but not even an indirect reference to Hindu communalism. [...] There is, sadly, no reference to the RSS, not even in the context of 'cultural nationalism' which was the real driving force of Indian nationalism. [This term has been in use for some years now as a euphemism for Hindu revivalism.] (original parenthetical comment.)

Arjun Dev quotes a line from Hari Om's new textbook, "The 'only political elements who did not support' the Quit India were the 'Indian Communists and followers of Jinnah'." Then he asks, "Why leave out the Hindu Mahasabha in this context?" Ironically, in the textbook authored by Arjun Dev titled *Modern India*, for class eight, he also never mentions the RSS by name, though numerous times he refers indirectly to Hindu communalism. He continually uses the phrase "communal parties" without naming them. Using this terminology he makes vague references to Hindu communalism. Only once or twice in the whole textbook, does he ever mention the Hindu Mahasabha by name and certainly never discusses their objectives. The book does have several in depth discussions of the Muslim League in which their point of view is amply covered—their fear of being dominated by Hindus in a democratic system. Arjun Dev wrote,

[I]n spite of the fact that an overwhelming majority of the people were not misled by the propaganda of the communal parties, they

succeeded in making headway, particularly from the end of the late 1930's. The communal riots instigated by the communal parties further worsened the situation. The two nation theory and the demand for a separate state led to disastrous consequences.⁶⁰⁶

This commentary primarily traces the activities of the Muslim League, but without mentioning them directly. The Muslim League was the party in the late 30's that put up the demand for a separate nation for South Asian Muslims. However, Arjun Dev prefers to let them remain unnamed in this context, mentioning details ambiguously such as "The communal riots [were] instigated by the communal parties". He also did not reveal the whole picture while trying to paint the Muslim community as patriotic, when he wrote "Most of the religious leaders of the Muslims were also opposed to the demand of the Muslim League".

The reason that Maududi, the founder of Jaamat-i-Islami did not agree with Jinnah regarding the creation of Pakistan was because he believed that all of India should be Islamized and creating a nation for Muslims would distract from that long term goal.⁶⁰⁷ "Syed Abu-Ala' Maududi ...whose commentaries on the Quran are widely respected" in a "speech delivered on April 13, 1939, at the Town Hall in Lahore" said,

Islam wishes to destroy all States and Governments anywhere on the face of the earth which are opposed to the ideology and programme of Islam regardless of the country or the Nation which rules it. The purpose of Islam is to set up a State on the basis of its own ideology and programme, regardless of which Nation assumes the role of the standard-bearer of Islam or the rule of which nation is undermined in the process... Islam requires the earth -- not just a portion, but the whole planet -- not because the sovereignty over the earth should be wrested from one Nation or

⁶⁰⁶ Arjun Dev and Indira Arjun Dev, *Modern India, A History Textbook for Class VIII*, NECRT, New Delhi, May 1989, sixth reprint March 1995.

⁶⁰⁷ Gail Minault commented on this: "Maududi and the Jama'at are extreme by any standard. Many of the 'ulema opposed Pakistan as well because they were suspicious of the Muslim League's secular leadership. SO the Muslims were divided on the issue for a variety of reasons."

several Nations and vested in one particular Nation, but because the entire mankind should benefit from the ideology...⁶⁰⁸

Shortly after Partition, many of the Muslim leaders who had opposed the creation of an Islamic state, left India to settle in Pakistan. Maududi helped to formulate the preamble to the first constitutional document in Pakistan, that gave the government a distinctly Islamic orientation. These details are not discussed by Arjun Dev because they are considered communal. But they are also not mentioned in detail by Hari Om, either.

Repeatedly, Arjun Dev makes reference to “communal groups among the Hindus” but contrary to his criticism of the new textbook, neither did he in his textbook ever name the RSS, even as he complained in his critique, in the context of “cultural nationalism”. Hari Om, the author of the history segment of the *Contemporary India* textbook, does mention the Hindu Mahasabha several times, but not in the derisive manner as does Arjun Dev in his historical treatment. When Arjun Dev tells the students about that organization he comments, after “the Hindu Mahasabha was formed” [in 1915] “the virus of communalism began to spread in the 1920’s [...] There were riots in the name of religion and many innocent people were killed”. This narrative makes it appear that Hindus orchestrated all the communal violence.⁶⁰⁹

The few references to the Hindu Mahasabha in the Arjun Dev textbook do not give any information at all about their perspectives or activities. In this

⁶⁰⁸ Quoted from: Varsha Bhosle, The perils of 'multiculturalism', June 2, 2003, Rediff on Net, URL: <http://www.rediff.com/news/2003/jun/02varsha.htm>

⁶⁰⁹ K.S. Lal, the renowned medieval historian described the change in the use of the "word communal". He explained that in 1947 he was already a lecturer and understood how words were used. He said before 1947, "the word communal was then used for Muslims [separatists], those who were not in the national main stream. They wanted a separate country, a separate state for themselves. And there were very few. Somehow, when independence came, things changed, terminologies changed overnight." He speculated, "Some people blame Nehru, some others blame his Marxist ideology. However, those non-Marxist, Hindu Indians became communal. Muslims became secular, and Muslims became progressive. Hindus became chauvinistic. They became fundamentalist. The nomenclature changed over night. How could it be?"

narrative of the freedom movement, the Hindu Mahasabha is barely accorded any mention, as if to ignore those social activists and freedom fighters will discredit them through disregard. There is continual use of the phrase “communal parties”, but only a few times is the offending Hindu-centric organization given a name. The Muslim League features prominently throughout—sometimes critically, sometimes analytically. The Hindu Mahasabha falls between the historical cracks.

On page 239, Arjun Dev wrote that in 1924 “the Hindu Mahasabha also became active” but he doesn’t give any details about their activities, though quite a few pages were devoted to the formation and formulations of the Communist Parties and the socialist movements. He does state, simplistically, on page 240 that “In March 1940, at Lahore session, the Muslim League demanded the creation of Pakistan. The Hindu Mahasabha, on the other hand, declared that only the Hindus in India constituted the nation”. In general he usually does not name this political organization but prefers to simply label it as a communal party and lump it in with the Muslim League as the cause of the partition of India. In fact, the Muslim League comes out looking a lot better and at least it is discussed in relative detail.

When Hindu Mahasabha is mentioned by Arjun Dev, it is in very general terms with derogatory references to communalism. Wolpert states that the Hindu Mahasabha was formed “as a counterfoil to Muslim separatist demands”⁶¹⁰, but Arjun Dev’s treatment makes it seem as if it was formed in order to partition the nation. Surjit Mansingh gives the history of the organization, that was formed in Punjab because of resentment “of the extra weightage given to Muslims in the

⁶¹⁰ Wolpert, Stanley. *A New History of India*, fifth edition, (first edition 1977), Oxford University Press, New York: 1997, p. 306.

province by the system of separate electorates introduced in 1909”⁶¹¹. Arjun Dev ignores this bit of history. But then again, Hari Om doesn’t dwell on it either.

Hari Om, going against the expectations of his critics, doesn’t discuss the founding of the Hindu Mahasabha. He refers to it by name several times, but from a neutral stance of a narrator. He includes a brief reference where appropriate but does not glorify the organization, it is hardly mentioned.

Arjun Dev, on the other hand, almost refuses to name the Hindu Mahasabha and repeatedly vilifies it by inference as the “Hindu communal party” responsible for the break up of the nation. He never alludes to the fact that the Communist Parties were far more supportive of partition than was the Hindu Mahasabha who ultimately saw partition as the vivisection of Mother India. The Communists saw partition as a means leading to the demise of the nation state giving rise of an international proletariat movement. During the freedom movement many Communists pushed the idea that India was many nations and should be divided not only according to religion but language and geography. This caused a lot of tension between the Hindu Mahasabha and the Communist Party, a tension and mutual disdain that still dictates their interaction.

How the old NCERT textbooks compare with the new ones when dealing with the communal riots and the historical events during the 1920’s is indicative of the dichotomous approaches to the history of that tumultuous decade. This chasm can be seen particularly when writing about the Khilafat Movement and the Moplah rebellion. Under the subheading “Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movement”, Arjun Dev wrote that “growing indignation [to British policies] led to the launching” of these two simultaneous movements.

He explains the historical context of the Khilafat Movement that was a reaction to the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire after World War I and the

⁶¹¹ Mansingh, Surjit. *Historical Dictionary of India*, Vision Books, New Delhi: 1999, p. 173.

deposing of the “Sultan of Turkey [who] was also considered the Caliph or Khalifa, the religious head of the Muslims”. Arjun Dev does not discuss the opposition to Gandhi’s embrace of the cause of the Khilafat Movement, but states that “the movement on the Khilafat question soon merged with the movement against repression in Punjab and for Swaraj” (independence). He fails to mention that the repression was the result of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. He then discusses the Non-Cooperation Movement but never tells the dubious outcome of the Khilafat initiative.

Arjun Dev states on page 208 of *Modern India* that the Non-Cooperation “movement was a great success and the firings and arrests could not stop it”. In the same paragraph he writes,

A rebellion had broken out in some parts of Kerala. The rebels were mostly Moplah peasants; hence it is called the Moplah rebellion. The rebellion was suppressed by terrible brutalities. More than 2000 Moplah were killed and about 45,000 arrested.

He gives the students an example of this brutality when “67 Moplah” prisoners suffocated to death “in a railway wagon “.

Later, on page 215, under the subheading “Movement of Peasants and Workers” he mentions the Moplah Rebellion as an example of the “struggle of the peasants” in the Non-Cooperation Movement. Defining the Moplah rebellion as a “peasant struggle” sits uncomfortably with many scholars who see it as a communal blood bath, with no redeeming results, in that members of both communities perished. If leftist scholars classify this violent episode as a significant milestone in the peasant struggle, it is a frightening future which they seek, not because peasants shouldn’t struggle for their rights, but because it justifies murder of landlords based on their ethnic identity.

In his treatment of the Moplah Rebellion, Arjun Dev does not comment on the deaths and forced conversions of hundreds of Hindus during what was in

actuality a highly communalized and very violent struggle among peasants—more a series of massacres. Undoubtedly, ignoring this major detail of the event in question is based on Arjun Dev’s heartfelt desire not to create feelings of communalism among India’s school children. However, eliminating the actual consequences of the Moplah rebellion from the historical record—a “jihad” against Hindus in Kerala, as Wolpert termed it-- is an inexcusable manipulation of the facts⁶¹²... and many would say, a form of denial that can lead to more communal riots.⁶¹³

The new NCERT textbook offers a different perspective on this decade, one that is perhaps more authentic and does not elide the results of the Khilafat Movement or discard the details of the Moplah Rebellion. Under the subheading “Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements” Hari Om wrote, “Gandhiji’s support to the Khilafat was not acceptable to a section of the old Congress leaders such as Tilak, Annie Besant, Srinivassa Shastri, Modan Mohan Malaviya and C.R. Das”. Arjun Dev had not mentioned this opposition. It is significant that Hari Om failed to include Jinnah in this list, who also opposed Gandhi’s support of the Khilafat agitation.

Hari Om’s textbook discusses *Swadeshi* and the rise of patriotism, and the “unique scene of the Hindu-Muslim unity”—which may express a subtle bias with the use of the word “unique” indicating that in the opinion of the author such cooperation was rare.⁶¹⁴ At least this treatment explains the outcome, that “abolition of the institution of the Khilafat by the Turkish revolutionaries under

⁶¹² Gail Minault added, “ignoring or obfuscating, certainly”.

⁶¹³ Professor Minault, one of the world’s top authorities on the Khalifat, commented that this motivation was based in part on “the fear that [the Moplah rebellion] resulted in communal hard feelings that spilled over elsewhere in India was very significant at the time and should not be white-washed”.

⁶¹⁴ Gail Minault commented, “Hindu-Muslim unity at that time was “unique” not only in the sense of “rare” but also in the “remarkable” sense-- heart-warming scenes of brotherhood— Swami Shradhananda of the Ayra Samaj preaching in the Jama Masjid, for example”.

the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Pasha weakened the whole Khilafat Movement”. And adds, “The Muslim fervour for agitation died and they withdrew from the Non-Cooperation Movement”. That some of the Muslim leaders who had been very active in the Khilafat Movement such as Kalam Azad did not withdraw from the Non-Cooperation Movement is not mentioned. But notably, the conclusion of the Khilafat is explained, whereas Arjun Dev’s treatment does not tell the students about the events that happened in Turkey which brought the movement in India to an end.

In the next paragraph on page thirty-six of the new textbook, Hari Om tells the students in rather communal terms that “the participation of the Muslims fired by a religious fervour gave the Movement a new vigor and aggressiveness”. He then mentions the Moplah Rebellion, “the outburst of this religious zeal in Malabar, in the form of Moplah riots on agrarian/tenancy problems resulted in large scale conversions and murder of the Hindus”. On the other hand, as quoted above, Arjun Dev does not tell the students the cause of the riots in Malabar, land ownership problems exacerbated by religious sentiments stirred up by the Khilafat Movement, nor does he suggest anywhere, that any Hindus were killed in those riots, just Muslims.⁶¹⁵ This is a rather astonishing omission since the primary characteristic of the Moplah rebellion was the murder of Hindus. This is a clear example of what many scholars have called “negationism”.

Stanley Wolpert describes these riots briefly in his book *A New History of India*, “In Malabar, Muslim Moplahs declared a *jihad* (holy war) in August 1921, ostensibly in order to establish a new khilafat of their own, killing Europeans and wealthy Hindus wherever they found them and forcibly converting Hindu peasants and laborers to Islam”.⁶¹⁶ The British intervened and killed thousands of

⁶¹⁵ Gail Minault commented here “Deaths on both sides surely should have been mentioned”.

⁶¹⁶ Wolpert, p. 306.

Moplah Muslims, but the murder of Hindus in Malabar is an essential aspect of those riots. A fact omitted by Arjun Dev who only mentioned the death of Muslim victims.⁶¹⁷

Surjit Mansingh in her compilation, *Historical Dictionary of India*, wrote, that “the rebellion in southern Malabar ... acquired a communal tone when about 600 Hindus were killed and rumors spread of forced conversions to Islam”. According to all accounts, the forced conversions were not just rumor, but even here where the topic is discussed in a more realistic manner than Arjun Dev accorded it, the controversial conversion issue is sidestepped by calling it a rumor. Mansingh writes that the “British authorities” killed over 2000 Moplahs and took over 45,000 prisoners. Since the rampage had included the murder of Christians this severe response is indicative of Britain’s usual harsh retaliation tactics.

Not surprisingly, Hari Om neglects to mention that Muslims were also killed during the Moplah riots. In his book, only Hindus died, in Arjun Dev’s only Muslims lost their lives. After writing that there were “large scale conversions and murder of Hindus” Hari Om writes that, after the Moplah rebellion

The behind the scene British diplomacy was also working to detach the Muslims from the Non-cooperation Movement. This phase also witnessed a spate of Hindu-Muslim riots all over the country... This trend induced Lala Lajput Rai to study deeply the question of Hindu-Muslim unity. ... [He] made a prophesy that India will surely witness a communal partition if the same trend of communal divide through communal electorates continued anymore.

The fact that he mentioned Lala Lajput Rai in such positive terms also sets this book apart from its predecessors where Rai is usually classified, as in Arjun Dev’s book, along with heroes such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipan Chandra Pal, as seminal leaders of the Swaraj movement who became extremists. Dev does

⁶¹⁷ Professor Minault wrote here, “Wolpert isn’t infallible here either. Calling the Moplah rebellion a ‘jihad’ is also inaccurate, since it arose out of a tenancy dispute”.

mention that their views were popular and describes the split in the Congress leadership between the moderates and extremists. But many of their views that could be considered communal, as in the discussion about Lala Lajput Rai in Hari Om's book, are not mentioned. The contributions of these three characters were often downplayed in earlier treatments, inspired by left-centric analyses, because they were seen as communal, especially Tilak who started the trend to use Hindu symbols to achieve independence. The next section discusses comparative historiography and can hopefully shed some light on the methodologies of historians.

Doing History

One of the promises that was made by M.M. Joshi, as he took flak for his policies, is that the new NCERT textbooks would discuss how to “do history”—that there would be a section in the textbooks that informs students about alternative methodologies of historiography. Many of the hotly worded critiques against the new NCERT social studies textbooks published in the fall of 2002, castigated the authors for not supplying more materials on streams of historical thought.⁶¹⁸ Among these angry critics are the authors of the old, discontinued volumes. However, comparatively, textbooks published in the late seventies and revised in the late eighties or early nineties, offered significantly less information about the problems of historiography than the ones that replaced them.

An exception is *Ancient India* by R.S. Sharma in which the first three chapters discuss historiography. He ends the first chapter on, “The Importance of Ancient India History”, with a long list of social problems, stating that his goal for studying ancient Indian history is to isolate the negative aspects in order to “help us to go deeply into the roots of ...prejudices.” He concludes, alluding to the

⁶¹⁸ Meenakshi Jain's textbook, *Medieval India* was not reviewed in the SAHMAT publication.

“Hindu revivalists” who had roundly criticized an earlier edition of this book when it was withdrawn from publication in 1977 by the Janta government,

The Study of ancient Indian history, therefore, is relevant not only to those who want to understand the true nature of the past *that some people want to relive* but also to those who want to appreciate the nature of obstacles that hamper the development of the country (emphasis added).

In his textbook for class six, *India and the World*, Makkhan Lal has one page at the beginning of the history section, “Source of History” where he mentions that we get information about the past from “tools, pots and pans, jewellery (sic), buildings, coins and writings”. He provides a list of sources, all examples of Indian religious texts: “Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishads, Smritis, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Sangam literature and Tripitakas”. He was condemned by the authors of *Substandard and Saffronized* for only mentioning religious sources. They cited that as an example of skewed methodology that “pushed the Parivar line” towards “Hinduization”.

In the booklet Makkhan Lal published in rebuttal to the SAHMAT publication, he defended himself, writing that the “Historian’s craft involves a lot of debate, sometimes of an extremely confusing nature [...] not simple enough for a small child to comprehend”.⁶¹⁹ I disagree and think that a child in class six is perfectly able to understand that there are multiple sources of information from which we piece together pieces of the past, and as we sift through that data, some of our new conclusions may contradict our old ones. Children can easily understand as we make new discoveries, our view of the past can change—like putting a puzzle together, we can’t see the whole picture until we’ve worked on it for awhile. Explaining this to school children will not confuse them, on the contrary, it will make history seem like an alive subject instead of foregone

⁶¹⁹ Lal, Makkhan. The NCERT Social Science Books, Aligarh: 2002, p.17.

conclusions about the distant past. This attitude of certitude is the tone that Satish Chandra uses in his *Medieval India* textbook, discussed below, with its unrelenting march through Islamic dynastic history, with no reference to sources.

Fortunately, Makkhan Lal and the framers of the new curriculum consider students in class eleven mature enough to understand the vageries and tensions involved when historians are writing the grand narrative of the nation. In the new textbook for class eleven, *Ancient India*, written by Makkhan Lal, there are, as in the case of the earlier text by R.S. Sharma, three chapters on the subject of historiography, sufficient attention, that would even satisfy Romila Thapar—though their approaches undoubtedly vary.

In her book for class eight, *Medieval India*, Romila Thapar wrote two paragraphs on sources of history, mentioning inscriptions and archaeology and literature. Here, Professor Thapar does not provide that peek into historiography revealing its dynamic nature, though she has, since 1988, when this textbook was written, made numerous presentations, and produced several pieces about the state of historiography in India. She began publishing on the topic of Indian historiography early in her career. According to Sanjay Subrahmanyam, a Professor of Indian History and Culture in the University of Oxford, her work argues for a ‘marriage of Marxism and structuralism.’⁶²⁰ It could be said that arguments about historiography have become Professor Thapar’s trademark.

⁶²⁰ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, a Professor of Indian History and Culture in the University of Oxford, wrote a book review of Thapar’s revised edition of *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*, published by Allen Lane, London, 2002. The review was published in *The Hindu* on April 6, 2003: “Monumental History”, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/lr/stories/2003040600110200.htm> “Romila Thapar's reputation does not rest on a single work, but on the capacity to have adapted herself decade after decade to changing trends and tendencies, and to have continued nevertheless to produce work of a consistent quality. Most Indian historians of her generation either were one-monograph wonders (effectively the case of the demi-god of medievalists, Professor Irfan Habib), incapable of mounting a fresh project once their doctoral thesis was done; or otherwise they were specialists of the "one-note samba", producing fresh books on Indian feudalism every two years which

Hari Om's textbook on *Contemporary India*, for class nine, except for a comment about Max Mueller and the Aryan Invasion "Conspiracy" Theory, that his critics jeered as somewhat off-the-wall, does not take up the topic of historiography. Though Hari Om was mocked by DHG for his mention of Mueller, as a source of racism, R.S. Sharma also sights, that "Mueller and other western scholars made certain generalizations about the nature of ancient Indian history and society".

In wording that would now seem highly communal, since the topic has become so politicized that it can no longer be discussed dispassionately, Sharma unintentionally makes the case for his arch enemies, Hindutva historians. He wrote that much of the history of India was written by "Christian missionaries [who] wanted to find out the vulnerable points of the Hindu religion to win converts and strengthen the British empire". If this had been written by Hari Om or Makkhan Lal, they would have been castigated for promoting anti-Christian perspectives.

In Sharma's discussion of historiography he mentions the names of numerous historians, such as R.C. Majumdar, whom he calls a Hindu revivalist, and Hemachandra Raychaudhuri, who has "a streak of militant Brahmanism". He writes that Nilakanta Sastri's work, though dependable in his "presentation of facts" has been "questioned by several scholars" because he "emphasised the cultural supremacy of the brahmanas and also highlighted the harmony that prevailed in early Indian society". Nilakanta Sastri's approach is questioned since it is the opposite of Sharma's, who, as mentioned, stated that his goal in studying

effectively said the same thing again, again and still again. Romila Thapar on the other hand has moved from her early work on the Mauryas, to a general consideration of early state-formation that is much influenced by the marriage of Marxism and structuralism, to reflections on the epics, historiography and a host of other subjects.

ancient India was to look at the negative characteristics of the era, a process that would, according to his intention, save modern India from various social ills.

About A.L. Basham, Sharma writes his work represented “a sympathetic survey of the various facets of ancient Indian culture and civilization free from the prejudices that plague the writings of V.A. Smith or other British writers”. However, Sharma’s own declared stance, stated in the introduction of the textbook was to highlight the negative facets of ancient Indian culture. Since this writing in the late seventies, the use of the phrase “Indian civilization” has been shunned by leftists because it has been appropriated by Indo-centric scholars. Now it is claimed that India was never a civilization, just a hodge-podge of interlinking communities. This illustrates how various nomenclature and concepts are subjected to interpretative reversals based on their usage by rival political groups.

In his textbook, Sharma describes the growth of Marxist historiography in relative detail. He ends this section with a warning about the dangers of certain chauvinist perspectives of the past that can promote obscurantism. He uses a convoluted logic when he accuses these historians, whom he doesn’t name, but infers are Hindu revivalists, of looking at India as a “society that has not changed and cannot be changed”.⁶²¹ In truth, it is the revivalist historians who have long averred that the caste system was not static, whereas the Marxist see it as an immutable force. Many staunch leftist scholars, such as Kamal Mitra Chenoy, and Professor Tulsiram, both from JNU, have argued that Hinduism itself is the cause of India’s sectarian problems and must be rooted out because as Tulsiram claims,

⁶²¹ Sharma, R.S. *Ancient India*, NCERT, New Delhi, 1990, p. 5.

these basic and inextricable problems with Hinduism “will destroy all of society”.⁶²²

Many Marxist historians, such as R.S. Sharma, write that “revivalist” scholars “are more concerned about the problem of stability and continuity” and that they “magnify the role of religion” which they seem to “want to preserve... forever”.⁶²³ Certainly, the eternally evolving nature of Hinduism is against the orientation of a scholar who considers religion to be the opiate of the people. Sharma’s comments are stereotypes and do not adequately explain the views of “Hindu Revivalist” scholars who, according to their stated motivations, study ancient India to understand the positive and lofty, to learn from the past. Sharma, though a historian of great repute, studies the past to search for social ills and evils, from which we can learn. At the end of chapter come the writing exercises where he asks the students to define “Militant brahmanism” and “Hindu revivalism”. They are required to emphasize the negative as in Sharma’s text.

The orientations and the goals of what Sharma has termed, “Hindu revivalist” history are usually analyzed pejoratively, and terms such as racist and communal are used. Hindu revivalist historians claim they are using non-Eurocentric indigenous paradigms, which is not racist and less communal. This debate makes the chapter on the history of Indian historiography in Meenakshi Jain’s *Medieval India* textbook all the more essential. Additionally, a discussion of historiography was promised by none other than the HRD minister himself.

In the first subsection of Meenakshi Jain’s chapter on historiography, “Transition from the Ancient to the Medieval Periods”, she discusses the controversy over the dating of the Medieval era. She explains that many scholars have questioned using the term “Medieval” for the period between the “death of

⁶²² Tulsiram. “Dalits: Still doing the savarna’s dirty job?” *Communalism Combat*, Mumbai: February 2003, N. 84, p. 15.

⁶²³ Sharma, p. 7.

Harsh in A.D. 647” and the “establishment of Turkish rule in Delhi in A.D. 1206”. She presents some of the pros and cons of the arguments and concludes, “While scholars debate the ramifications of the term, it remains the most widely used for period”. So, due to common usage, she retains the term, though she explained its shortcomings. No such analytical approach was forthcoming in the Chandra NCERT volume, *Medieval India*.

Similarly obliged by convention, Makkhan Lal, in his two textbooks retains the term “Harappan Civilization” even though he mentions that many scholars now think it should be called the Indus/Sarasvati civilization. The new NCERT textbooks are rocking the history boat, swinging the pendulum, but not too hard. They are pushing the old paradigms, but not discarding them completely—after all, it is still just a historical narrative, not the Bible, the Quran, or the Vedas. The changes that have been made are attitudinal, not factual. Facts are facts as they say, but the links that join them make all the difference.

In her history of historiography, Jain cites the sources available to study this period, and that the “reconstruction of the history of medieval India is a particularly rewarding exercise given the rich documentation available”. She mentions several “historical accounts” including the official chronicles of ruling families as well as “Jain writings of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries [that] provide glimpses of political and cultural events”. She cites the “Tibetan monk, Dharmasvamin [who] left a poignant testimony of the condition of Buddhist shrines after the Turkish invasion of Bihar”.

In his earlier versions of the textbook for class eleven, *Medieval India*, Satish Chandra studiously avoids mentioning temple destruction by Islamic invaders, except in a few unavoidable references, such as Nalanda Institute. He prefers to focus on the negative impact of Brahmanism on Hindu society, even though it is a bit of an oxymoron, since they were the ones who preserved Hindu

literature for posterity. Nonetheless, Chandra sees Brahmans as more destructive to Indian culture, and elides the negative repercussions of the Sultans and the Moghuls. Jain takes a different tack. She does not mention Brahmans as a negative influence, nor does she omit discussions on the destructive impact of iconoclastic Islamic invaders on the religious and educational institutions of early medieval India.

Jain discusses Islamic sources of history for the era, which include materials written during the Delhi Sultanate and by Mughul and other Islamic chroniclers that provide “meticulous details about various facets of the empire”. She also mentions “Sufi literature” which includes biographies of the Muslim saints. She then has a subsection that discusses the use of these materials and the “Growth of Historiography”. She refers to the Muslim chronicles as the “raconteur approach” and states that they are “court-centric, and generally took no note of the world beyond the royal darbar” though they “sometimes critiqued the actions of the rulers”. She describes how some of the Muslim chroniclers had “unprecedented access to state papers, on which they based their works, and did not depend solely on past accounts” which she says are more reliable than the raconteur method.

Jain then discusses “Colonial Trends” in historiography where authors often relied on translations of Muslim chronicles such as “Elliot and Dowson’s famous eight-volume *History of India as told by its own Historians*, published between 1867-1877”. She mentions that “this genre of writing came to be known as the ‘history of the historian,’ and formed the basis of early British reconstructions of the medieval era”.

She doesn’t tell the students that scholars such as Irfan Habib and Romila Thapar have long claimed the Muslim chronicles were a not a trustworthy source of historical information because the slaughter of Hindus was aggrandized to

please their royal Muslim patrons. These scholars also point out that, to further the imperialist project, the British translated these accounts of invasions and destruction by Muslims to highlight to the Hindu population that British rule was benign in comparison. In his textbook on *Medieval India*, Chandra doesn't give this interpretation. He hardly mentions the Muslim chronicles as an important source of history for the era—though he refers a few times to Alberuni.

Certainly there is truth to the observation that the chroniclers exaggerated. However, some of the scholars of the Delhi Historian Group who have taken this stance, carry it to the extreme as completely reject the Muslim chronicles as a valid source. It is rather like the probability that there are other life forms in the universe besides those on earth. If, of the billions of stars, only a fraction have planets, and of those hundreds of millions of planets, only one among millions might have atmospheres that could support some form of life, the equation makes it impossible to rule out the possibility that we are not alone in the universe. In the same way, if the Muslim chroniclers were exaggerating for the aggrandizement and pleasure of the Sultan, for whom they were recording his exploits, and if in reality only a fraction of the murder and mayhem and temple desecration described therein can actually be verified, that still leaves hundreds of demolished Hindu and Buddhist temples, schools, and shrines and tens of thousands of civilian victims of warfare, from Taxila to Bihar to Gujarat to Malabar, with millions of Hindu slaves sold in Sumarkand. It also indicates that the sultans held temple desecration in high regard, since poems and biographies written about them glorify this aspect.

To deny the fact that many temples were destroyed by various Sultans, is to ignore the probability factor and the cold hard facts. This avowed refusal to allow even a discussion of temple desecration is verified by the oft cited example of the portions of textbooks that the West Bengal state government ordered to be

deleted. The West Bengal government issued a circular citing that all passages from textbooks must be expunged that even vaguely inferred that Muslim invaders had a less than positive impact on temple architecture, or that there was any trauma inflicted on the local population by actors across the medieval Indian stage such as Sultan Ghaznavi, Balban, Bakhtiyar Khalji, Muhammad Tughlaq, etc.⁶²⁴

This zeal to conceal the severity of the repercussions of the Islamic invasions is a prominent characteristic of Marxist historiography. For example, in a newspaper article, Vinod Kumar, a commentator who often writes about issues regarding historiography, discussed the point of view of the well-known historian, Professor D. N. Jha, who is quoted as saying that,

[T]he Hindutva forces, in their bid to aggravate religious conflicts in the country, argue that Hindus were forcibly converted to Islam and Christianity in the past and therefore they have to be reconverted so as to take them back into the Hindu fold. But such an assertion has no basis in our history. The idea that the Muslims were destroyers of 'Hindu' temples and that they converted 'Hindus' to Islam by force is extremely tendentious and is largely unfounded.⁶²⁵

Kumar explains that, 'Dr. D.N. Jha [is] a Professor of History at the Delhi University [who] belongs to the 'secular' school of History'. Jha made the above statement in the "presidential address" given at the "Punjab History Conference held at Patiala" in 1999, which focused "on the theme: 'Against Communalising History'." Kumar informs his readers, who might not be aware of the tremendous efforts to internationalize the debates over historiography in India by the Delhi Historians Group, of which Professor Jha is a contributing participant, ,

Some of the 'secular historians' have, in fact, globalized this issue

⁶²⁴ The circulars from the West Bengal Education Ministry are famous and have been discussed in many places, particularly, in Arun Shourie's book, *Eminent Historians*.

⁶²⁵ Kumar, Vinod. "Communalising history?", *Kashmir Herald*, Volume 2, No. 11 - April 2003, <http://www.kashmirherald.com/featuredarticle/communalisinghistoryx.html>.

by talking about it constantly at International conferences and seminars across the globe, and particularly in North America and Europe.”

In his speech, D.N. Jha quoted Alberuni about the impact of Islam on medieval India where, "the use of force in ... conversion was neither necessary nor possible". Kumar responds by citing one of the more famous of Alberuni's quotes about his benefactor "Prince Mahmud [who had] 'utterly ruined the prosperity of the country' and calling these as 'wonderful exploits' by which Hindus became like atoms of dust scattered in all directions'. This, [Alberuni] goes on to observe, has created among Hindus, 'the most inveterate aversion towards all Muslims'." Kumar suggests that,

If Dr. Jha was looking for the full extent of the destruction of temples and conversion of Hindus, he should have rather looked into *Tarikh-e-Yamini* written by Prince Mahmud's secretary Utbi and other Islamic sources dealing with the exploits of Muslim invaders and rulers.

“Dr. Jha went on to say”,

The possibility of a forced mass conversion is, in fact, contradicted by Muhammad bin Qasim himself who, according to Baladhuri, is believed to have said: 'The temples shall be unto us like the churches of the Christians, the synagogues of the Jews, and the fire temples of the Magians'.

Kumar then adds some details about bin Qasim, that paint him in a less benevolent light,

Islamic warriors spared some temples. However, this was not done as an act of tolerance or compassion towards Hindus. Alberuni writes about one such incident. When Muhammad bin Kasim conquered Multan, he inquired 'why the town was so very flourishing?' When told the cause was the idol of Aditya, for there came pilgrims from all sides to visit it. He decided to 'leave the idol where it was but he hung a piece of cow's flesh on its neck by way of mockery.' When the Karmatians occupied Multan, Jalam ibn Shaiban broke the idol into pieces and built a mosque at the same place, Alberuni went on to add.

Kumar states that "For reasons best known to him, Dr. Jha does not tell all the

facts of the history. He gives only a sanitized account of Muslim invasion, and exploitation”. Kumar then adds more details about temple destruction, referring first to bin Qasim then to Mahmud Ghazanavi,

At Debal, the temples were demolished and a mosque founded; a general massacre endured for three whole days; prisoners were taken captive; plunder was amassed. At Nirun, the idols were broken, and mosques founded on the site of the temple of Budh, notwithstanding its voluntary surrender. The account of Mahmud's invasions is full of demolition of temples (at Thanesar, Mathura, Kannauj, Somnath - to mention a few), plunder, massacres, enslavement and forced conversions.

Vinod Kumar ends his article with comments that are reflective of the feelings of many Hindus who collectively express amazement that “Marxist, a.k.a. pseudo-secular” historians are so adamant about honey coating the impact of Islamic invaders. Arun Shourie suggested that this school of historiography portrays the arrival of Islamic armies as if they “came into India on a tour bus”. Kumar concludes, with four paragraphs that succinctly explain his objections to this kind of history. His observations are worthy of being reproduced in full because they express a point of view widely held by a body of Indian intellectuals, who collectively recoil at the level of negationism they encounter from other Indian intellectuals, such as Professor D.N. Jha.

If at times Hindus enjoyed some freedom in the practice of their religion; it was dictated less by any principle of justice or humanity, than the impossibility of suppressing the native religion by the small number of Muslim invaders. The Hindus were never treated equal to Muslims. They had to pay higher taxes in addition to humiliating Jiziya.

The truth is that Muslim invasions, almost without exception, were followed by a great massacre and demolition of Hindu temples. All means from the sword to political to economic pressure in the form of excessive taxation and humiliating Jiziya were used to convert Hindus to Islam.

When the Communist Government of West Bengal issued orders not to mention demolition of Hindu temples by the

Muslims in textbooks, at least indirectly, they accepted that, indeed, this had happened. However, historians such as Dr. Jha go to extraordinary lengths to deny, hide and twist true historical facts.

What is presented by Dr. Jha is far from objective history. It is communal history - history favoring one community at the expense of the other in contradiction to all available evidence. Ironically, Dr. Jha while protesting against 'communalising' history is very much doing the same. What India needs now is 'true' academic historians who won't be afraid to call a spade as spade.

Meenakshi Jain is not afraid to call a spade a spade. In the last section of Jain's chapter on "Reconstructing Medieval History", she explains how this negationist history came into vogue in India. First she refers to "Sayyid Ahmed Khan and Khuda Bakhsh [who] extended their canvass beyond political matters and emphasised Islamic achievements in the fields of art, literature, science and religion". She then discusses the work of Mohammad Habib, the father of Irfan, who "published a small but influential book, Mahmud of Ghaznin (1927), which stressed the economic motives underlying the Sultan's invasions of India".

As representative of this school, she mentions several more historians of the early twentieth century, including I.H. Qureshi, who has been called the father of Pakistani historiography. She then discusses "Another important group of modern historians on medieval India... represented by Sir Jadunath Sarkar, G.S. Sardesai, Ishwari Prasad... K.S. Lal, among others". She sites some of their works and contributions, mentioning that "K.S. Lal provided a painstakingly researched account of the Khalji period, which remains a standard reference".

Contrast that reference to what Irfan Habib has to say about K.S. Lal, whom he describes as "an RSS spokesman on medieval history". In an article by Habib that was distributed electronically to "concerned South Asian scholars" around the globe, he lists several of K.S. Lal's books, without mentioning that his father had written the forward for Lal's book on the Khiljis. Habib assumes that

Lal will also “perhaps [write] the [NCERT] textbook on Medieval India as well”, though a less controversial and relatively unknown historian, Meenakshi Jain was given that assignment.

Habib accuses K.S. Lal of faulty scholarship and sinister intentions, describing “Lal’s career as an RSS spokesman on medieval history”. Habib point the finger at K.S. Lal for looking at the history of Muslim India “in what Gandhiji would have called ‘a drain inspector’s reports’.”⁶²⁶ K.S. Lal was a well respected scholar who was black balled early in the sixties when he did not kowtow to the negationist paradigm. After that, his books were not recommended in university reading lists, though he continued to publish right up until his death in 2002. He was fluent in several languages, including Persian, Old Persian, and Urdu.

Meenakshi Jain concludes her discussion of historiography with another reference to the work of Irfan Habib’s father, “In 1952 Mohammad Habib wrote a long introduction to the revised edition of Elliot and Dowson’s History of India Vol. II, where in he applies Marxist methodology to the study of medieval Indian history”. She refers to Irfan in far more generous terms than he reserved for K. S. Lal, “This approach was continued by his son, Irfan Habib, whose Agrarian Systems of Mughul India [was] first published in 1963”. Jain, though she may not agree with all of Irfan Habib’s conclusions, does not denigrate his work. Rather, she wrote that it “opened new vistas in the study of medieval India history... with extensive use of sources, careful attention to detail and sheer range”. She has several more sentences calling his work “the most authoritative study of agrarian relations in Mughul India”. She also mentions several other scholars such as Athar Ali and S.A.A. Rizvi, “which considerably extended the realm of the

⁶²⁶ Habib, Irfan. “The Rewriting of History by the Sangh Parivar”, originally published in One India One People, June 8, 2001 and distributed by the “Delhi Historians’ groups from prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru University” as an electronic booklet, titled, “The Communalization of Education”. The article referred to Habib as the “Founder-Head Centre for Advanced Studies in History, Aligarh Muslim University & Former Chairperson, (ICHR)”.

discipline beyond the economic and political”. She ends this chapter with the provocative comment designed to tease students into further investigating various streams of historiography, “the historians (sic)⁶²⁷ tryst with the past continues”. With these complimentary comments about her leftist colleagues, it is small wonder that her textbook has not been rubbished by the DHG.

In *Ancient India*, the textbook that class eleven students use during the first half of the year, the author, Makkhan Lal is far less neutral about the “Marxist School of History”. He explains that Marx knew very little about India and based his ideas on the work of Hegel who thought that India had no “history of philosophy” and was “inferior to that of Greeks and Romans”. Marx, who “took his lead from Hegel”, “dismissed India as a backward and uncivilized nation with no history” . Lal quotes Marx,

India, then could not escape being conquered, and the whole of her past history, if it be anything, is the history of the successive conquests she has undergone. Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call history, is but the history of the successive intruders who founded their empires on passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society...

Lal continues, “After the independence of India, the Marxist school of historiography became one of the most influential and dominant schools”. He adds, “Following Marx’s scheme , the history of India also came to be rewritten”. Many scholars, Makkhan Lal included, have observed that in the mid-twentieth century, Indian history was rewritten using a Marxist paradigm. They also claim that Marxism had its place, and made lasting contributions to economic analyses; however, Marxism is not the last word, nor the most applicable model to explain India. Lal then describes in relative detail the reasons that scholars of the Indo School of historians are predisposed against Marxist historiography,

⁶²⁷ The printer left off the apostrophe after historians’. Hopefully this type of typo won’t remain in the textbook for twelve years, as in the old textbooks where such errors were reprinted over and over again.

...primitive communism, slavery, feudalism and capitalism, i.e. the various stages of history propounded by Marx and Engels came to be applied to Indian History... This school also, like the imperialist school, does not find anything good with Indian civilization. Like Marx, they feel that all that is good in Indian civilization is the contribution of conquerors and that is why, according to this school, the Kushana period is the golden period, and not the Satavahanas or Guptas. The period from the Gupta's to the conquest of Muslims in the twelfth century A.D. has been termed as the 'Period of Feudalism' i.e. 'Dark Age' during which every thing degenerated. This has been despite the fact that, irrespective of political upheaval, there was an all round development in the fields of literature, sciences, art, architecture, economy, etc. Also, when it came to literary evidence and its chronology, they largely followed Max Muller⁶²⁸ and other British historians.

He continues his uncomplimentary critique of this school of thought as it was developed in India,

Indian Marxist historians lay great emphasis on economic interpretation of all social and religious ideas, customs and institutions. Being allergic to religion and spirituality their irreverence for saints and sages is too obvious.

Lal does give the Indian Marxist historians some credit, saying that "their writing contributed immensely towards the understanding of various aspects of Indian history which had remained ignored earlier". He then lists several historians who were "pioneers of this school of thought" including D.D. Kosambi, R.S. Sharma, Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib, Bipan Chandra, and Satish Chandra. Lal calls these scholars "some of the leading Marxist historians of India", which according to his above quoted evaluation of Marxist historiography, is not necessarily a compliment. With such an exposition of Marxist historiography, it is small wonder the scholars whom he mentioned took umbrage with at textbooks. Makkhan Lal's third chapter that also deals with historiography explains what he

⁶²⁸ In Hari Om's and Makkhan Lal's books, Muller is consistently misspelled. It should be Mueller.

calls the “multidisciplinary approach” which includes “Literary Sources”, “Foreign Accounts”, and “Archaeological Sources”.

Makkhan Lal’s third chapter on historiography, “The Sources of Ancient Indian History” is similar to the third chapter in R.S. Sharma’s book, “Types of Sources and Historical Construction”. They mention the same sources, though prioritize them differently. Sharma opens with a subsection titled “Material Remains” that discusses archaeology, carbon fourteen dating, and numismatics. In the next subsection he deals with “Inscriptions” and epigraphy, and then presents the information on “Literary Sources”, followed by “Foreign Accounts”. He ends this chapter with two sections, “Historical Sense” and “Constructing History”, commenting that “numerous sites” that have been “excavated and explored ... but do not find a place in the main stream of Indian history”. Sharma explains that

Although more than 150 sites belonging to the ancient historical period have been excavated, yet their relevance to the study of social, economic and cultural trends in ancient times has not been discussed in the survey books.

Sharma then uses inscriptions and archaeology to disprove many of the conclusions that can be extracted from ancient literature, particularly the dating of historical events that are recounted in Epic and Puranic literature. Interestingly, he uses the exact time frames that were hypothesized by Max Mueller, whom earlier he had criticized for “Meeting the needs” of “Christian missionaries” who wanted to “win converts”. Though he laments that there are numerous archaeological discoveries that have not been included in the historical record, he does not mention these specifically.

He ends these chapters on historiography, once again using his platform of the textbook to counter what he considers, triumphalism among a certain class of Indian historians. He eschews “the ‘rare’ or ‘Unique’ in ancient India”, hoping that new research will “bring out those trends which ancient India shares with the

past societies of the other countries”. Which trends are emphasized is the essential question. The next section will compare the narratives used in NCERT textbooks about the medieval period.

Medieval India Revisited and Revised: Reviled or Rectified?

This section compares two NCERT textbooks for class eleven: *Medieval India*, by Satish Chandra, first published in 1978 and revised in 1990 and *Medieval India*, by Meenakshi Jain, first edition November 2002. In addition, the syllabi related to class eleven were used as a reference.⁶²⁹ Medieval India is also taught in class seven, so two NCERT textbooks on *Medieval India* written by Romila Thapar for class seven students were consulted.⁶³⁰ Another NCERT textbook used in this study was Arjun Dev’s *The Story of Civilization, Volume One, A History Textbook for Class Nine*.

According to the 2001 syllabus, Unit One of the new *Medieval India* textbook will discuss “Historiographical debates and sources of history for the period”. This is to be followed by a section on the

Rise of Islam and Arabia—Arabian Invasions of India and their impact, India’s contact with other parts of the world with special emphasis on relations with South East and East Asia.

In contrast, Unit One in the old syllabus, circa 1995, began with these topics, “Medieval Europe – Growth of feudalism, The Arab World, East and South-East

⁶²⁹ Syllabuses for Higher Secondary Stage, Classes Eleven and Twelve, NCERT February 1995, and Guidelines and Syllabi for Higher Secondary Stage, Eleven and Twelve, NCERT, November 2001

⁶³⁰ History and Civics: A Textbook for Class Seven, Medieval India”, by Romila Thapar, May 1979; and Medieval India, History Textbook for Class Seven, Romila Thapar, first edition 1988, seventh reprint 1995.

Asia, India and the world in medieval times” and ended with the “Construction of medieval Indian history”.⁶³¹

Satish Chandra’s *Medieval History* textbook, published by NCERT in 1990, begins the story of eighth century India with a discussion of medieval Europe, devoting several pages to the “Growth of Feudalism”, followed by two pages on “The Arab World”. The first section ends with a page and a half on “East and South-East Asia”. This textbook, specific to medieval India, begins with the fall of the Roman Empire and the rise of Christianity, and spends most of the first section explaining fiefdoms, lords, and manors in Europe.

Satish Chandra writes that “There are many similarities between this system and the system of government and society evolved by the Turks in Central Asia and by the Rajputs in India”. After explaining the financial arrangements between lord and vassal, he states,

Some historians think that the system of ‘serfdom’ and the manor system are vital parts of feudalism and that it is wrong to speak of feudalism for societies in which these two do not exist. In India, for instance, there was no serfdom and no manor system as such. But the local landed elements (samantas) exercised many of the powers of the feudal lords, and the peasantry was in a dependent position to them. In other words, what mattered was not whether the peasantry was formally free, but the manner and the extent in which it could exercise its freedom.⁶³²

Numerous scholars, such as Burton Stein and André Wink have argued the inapplicability of feudalism in the Indian context. Chandra here alludes to those objections, then proceeds with his analysis under the assumption that the paradigm is valid.⁶³³

⁶³¹ This revised syllabus came out five years after Satish Chandra’s revised edition was published in 1990. His book does not have a section on the “Construction of medieval Indian history”.

⁶³² Chandra, Satish. *Medieval India: A History Textbook for Class XI*, NCERT, New Delhi: 1990, p. 2.

⁶³³ Gail Minault commented about this, “some people never learn”.

In the new 2002 NCERT textbook *Medieval India* by Dr. Meenakshi Jain, she begins the narrative in the middle of India, not in medieval Europe. She dispenses with the dense description of feudalism found in the earlier book. Her introduction, “India after Harsha: An Overview” that incidentally was not mandated in the November 2001 syllabus⁶³⁴, provides an illuminating summary of the period. Jain introduces the “interregnum between the death of Harsha in the mid-seventh century A.D, and the rise of the Delhi Sultanate nearly six hundred years later”. She explains that “the proliferation of dynasties gives the era a chaotic appearance”,

Yet, the polity remains dynamic and is notable for the assimilation of new groups into the system. The realms of culture and religion are enriched by intense creativity, and overall, this is a time of considerable accomplishments in the fields of language, aesthetics, and spirituality.

This opening statement, that brings the focus immediately to India’s achievements, finds no parallel in the first few chapters of the Satish Chandra textbook. This positive approach to Indian culture highlights the basic difference between the two books. Jain’s introduction paints a vivid picture of life, religion, literature, onto the geography of India during the eighth century. Chandra finds decay.⁶³⁵

Earlier NCERT treatments of the medieval era chose not to highlight the response of Indian kingdoms to the military incursions by Arabs that had conquered Sindh in 712 C.E. Jain discusses these issues in greater detail. She traces the “ascendancy of Yashovarman... a reputed warrior [who] is said to have allied with China against the growing power of the Arabs”. She devotes a paragraph to the Gurjara Pratiharas who “stood as the bulwarks against the

⁶³⁴ In an email from Sandhya Jain, the sister of Meenakshi Jain, she explained that the NCERT modified the syllabus several times after November 2001 and before the books were published.

⁶³⁵ Gail Minault pointed out that “A parallel with re-evaluation of the 15th century, where some find decline and confusion, and others find regional creativity”.

marching Arabs”, and the victorious “Chalukyan king”, who was given the title of “repeller of the unrepellable”.⁶³⁶

In another treatment of this period found in a circa 1989 NCERT textbook written by Arjun Dev, *The Story of Civilization, Volume One, A History Textbook for Class Nine*⁶³⁷, in chapter five, “The Medieval World”, under the subheading, “India in Medieval Times”, he briefly mentions the three kingdoms, mostly highlighting that they fought amongst themselves. He does not mention that the Pratiharas also fought the Arabs. His focus is on decline and disintegration in India and the political unity brought by Islam.

Satish Chandra writes about the Pratiharas, “They gained prominence on account of their resistance to Arab incursions from Sindh into Rajasthan”.⁶³⁸ He mentions, “However, the Arabs were decisively defeated by the Chalukya rulers of Gujarat in 738 and ceased to be a real danger”. He then adds, “The Pratiharas were well-known for their hostility to the Arab rulers of Sindh.” He doesn’t glorify this military prowess of the native princes for holding back such a formidable foe, and in fact paints them in a negative light, “known for their hostility”. He doesn’t make it clear to the students why the Arabs “ceased to be a real danger”. His prose, in my humble opinion, is stiffer and less engaging than Meenakshi Jain’s that is rather elegant and very accessible.

In his treatment of the early medieval period, Chandra has very little positive to write about the accomplishments of India’s indigenous traditions. He focuses almost entirely on warfare and rulership. Occasionally, he does highlight India’s achievements, such as the comment that,

⁶³⁶ Jain, Meenakshi. *Medieval India, A Textbook for Class IX*, NCERT, New Delhi: 2002, p. 2.

⁶³⁷ Arjun Dev, *The Story of Civilization, Volume One, A History Textbook for Class IX*, NCERT, New Delhi:1989, p. 146.

⁶³⁸ Chandra, Satish. *Medieval India, A History Textbook for Class IX*, NCERT, New Delhi: 1990, p. 9.

During the eighth and ninth centuries, many Indian scholars went with embassies to the court of the Caliph in Baghdad. These scholars introduced Indian sciences to the Arab world.

This statement retroactively corrected his oversight in the previous chapter when he wrote, on page 5 that “Arab science was truly international [...] [the] result of work done by people outside Arabia, in Khorasan, Egypt, Spain, etc.”. In this list he neglected to mention India from where the Arabs got the decimal number system, astronomy and much of their learning. Later in this section Chandra does say that “Many Indian works dealing with astronomy and mathematics were ... translated into Arabic”. In his textbook, the relevance of Indian learning is highlighted only in relationship to its assimilation into the “Arab World”.

Chandra writes that Arab society had a “remarkable degree of intellectual and personal freedom enjoyed by scientists and scholars.”. He contrasts this to Indian science that had begun to “stagnate during this period” and therefore “hardly any of the Arab sciences could filter into India”. Here, India is seen as a dying society, too closed and moribund to imbibe the wisdom and science from Arabia. Islam is seen as dynamic and scientifically vibrant.

Chandra excuses himself for his lack of information, saying that “A detailed study on the impact of Indian sciences and philosophy on the Arab world and the Arab sciences on India during the subsequent period is now being made”. Actually, there were many such studies already in existence, far earlier than 1990. Where Satish Chandra found stagnation and contraction, Meenakshi Jain finds cultural dynamism and the growth of society.

In her five page introduction, Meenakshi Jain surveys the three dynasties of the age, which she discusses in more detail in the following chapters of the textbook. She also mentions, the “incorporation of new communities into the [pastoral] system” that occurred during this period. She devotes two pages in this

introduction to “Cultural and Religious Trends” commenting that the “growing participation of local and tribal groups was accompanied by the elevation of their gods in the regional and all India pantheon”.

She offers the Jagannath temple in Puri as an example and cites several other local deities, such as “Minakshi in Madhrai” who was “transformed into a leading goddess”. She ties these changes together by explaining that, “There was thus a rich exchange between the lowest and remotest strata of society and polity and those at its upper reaches”. In this statement, she scrupulously avoids the word caste. Throughout the book, she does not treat class divisions as a reified religious sanction. She sees social change and cultural exchange between evolving groups, where Satish Chandra, and many other historians see unequal power relations, frozen in time, perpetuated by a self-serving priesthood.

In his textbook, *Medieval India*, chapter four, “Economic and Social Life, Education, and Religious Beliefs”, Satish Chandra approached the assimilative tendency of Hinduism from a less positive perspective,

Hinduism was expanding rapidly during the period. It not only absorbed large numbers of Buddhists and Jains within its fold but many indigenous tribes and foreigners were also Hinduized.⁶³⁹ These new sections formed castes and sub-castes, and often continued their own customs, rituals of marriage ceremonies and even their own tribal gods and goddesses. Thus society and religion became more and more complex.⁶⁴⁰

Jain’s textbook paints a picture of communal harmony in early medieval India, which many scholars have argued against, preferring to point out conflicts between Hindus and Buddhists, or Hindus and Jains that occurred occasionally through the centuries. Other scholars point to the big picture of Indian history--the

⁶³⁹ It is important to note that this tendency towards Hinduization is considered a negative impact on society by many scholars, who see India’s diversity swallowed up in a “sea of Hinduism”. In the modern context the term “Hinduization” is used pejoratively.

⁶⁴⁰ Chandra, p. 29.

long view of inter-group communications—where violence between Buddhists and Hindus or Hindus and Jains was the exception, not the norm. The intermingling of symbols and ideas is the most striking feature of the early medieval period. Satish Chandra’s textbook emphasizes the conflicts that occasionally occurred during two thousand years of contact. Whereas Meenakshi Jain writes, “This was ... a time of active interaction between Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism.”, Satish Chandra explains this cultural interaction in very different terms,

A revival and expansion of Hinduism, and continued decline of Buddhism and Jainism mark the period. Not only were the the (sic)⁶⁴¹ tenets of Buddhism and Jainism challenged at the intellectual level, there was on occasions, outbreak of violence and forcible occupations of Buddhist and Jain temples.

Chandra contends, regarding the demise of Buddhism, that “even more serious” than the hegemonic impact of Hinduization “were the internal developments in Buddhism”. He negatively appraises Mahayana Buddhism as a deviance from the teachings of Buddha, having been corrupted by contact with Hindu pantheism. He refers in a rather sensational tone to the desire of tantric yogis to “attain supernatural powers, such as the power to fly, to become invisible, to see things at distance, etc.” He adds, “Many Hindu yogis also adopted these practices”. To put these mystical beliefs in their superstitious place, he writes, “It is only with the growth of modern science that many of these yearnings have been fulfilled”. Some Indian scholars would argue that this is a very materialistic view of tantric practices, taken straight from a page of colonial historiography where these rites and rituals are seen as magical and corrupt. Most

⁶⁴¹ Though this textbook was first published by NCERT in the last seventies, and reprinted until 1990 when it was revised and reprinted yearly after that, there continue to be small typographical and grammatical errors throughout. The first edition of Meenakshi Jain’s textbook also had a few typos.

scholars in India would argue that such “Siddhis”⁶⁴² were far more metaphysical than physical.

Chandra mentions the casteless nature of the tantric tradition. However, he approaches the topic in much the same way as R.S. Sharma, in his NCERT textbook *Ancient India*, neglected to credit the Tantric tradition, and its many female yoginis, with bringing more egalitarian social values into early medieval society. In their NCERT textbooks, these two DHG-School historians deemphasize the grassroots implications of the Tantric movement.

Perhaps it is because social revolution and “class emancipation” is suppose to occur in a certain trajectory that these eighth century Tantrics are seen as an anomaly instead of a herald. Liberal social movements among tribal peoples a thousand years ago is something unusual and to be admired. Instead, R.S. Sharma and Satish Chandra use this discourse as a vehicle to castigate the greedy Brahmins, once again condemn the caste system, and cast derision on the mysticism of the Tantric Tribals. In his *Medieval India* textbook, Chandra mentions the egalitarian nature of the Tantric tradition, but doesn’t go to the extent of crediting them, as he does Akbar, as a pre-modern expression of Indian integration.

Many of these yogis belonged to the lower castes. They denounced the caste system and the privileges claimed by the brahmanas. The path they preached was called Tantra which was open to all, irrespective of caste distinctions.

Chandra concludes his discussion about the demise of Buddhism in India, “Thus, Buddhism did not so much decline, as it assumed forms which made it indistinguishable from Hinduism,” which seems to primarily include, after reading his previous paragraphs, a mixture of magical superstitious practices and the oppressive caste system.

⁶⁴² Sanskrit for power or supernatural or spiritual “ability”.

Meenakshi Jain on the other hand, describes this phenomenon very differently. Instead of blaming the exotic aspects of Hinduism for corrupting Buddhism, and sucking it back into the polytheistic fold, she writes that it was the rise of the rational, intellectual schools of thought exemplified by the Upanishads that brought these two traditions closer and closer together. Seeking to show the similarities, instead of dwelling on the differences between these two religions, she writes,

Buddhism was for all practical purposes absorbed in to Hinduism and virtually ceased to lead an independent existence in the country. The similarity of ideas between the Upanishads undoubtedly facilitated this process, as Buddhism retained so much of Hinduism in the form of its legends, rites and deities.

She also mentions that “The great Sankaracharya renewed Vedanta philosophy and incorporated several doctrinal and organizational features of Buddhism and Jainism into Hinduism [...] especially ahimsa and vegetarianism”. Without the condemnation of Tantra with which Chandra had approached the Nathpanthis, Jain adds that “The Buddhist Siddha tradition also deeply influenced the new Saivite sect... initiated by Gorakhnath”. The differences in these narratives do not represent a distortion of facts, just alternative readings of the past.

A Pulsating Versus a ‘Metabolically Challenged’ Geography

Meenakshi Jain expresses the school of thought that India has for thousands of years had a civilizational awareness of its sacred geography, even though it was not a nation in the modern sense. She writes, regarding the “growth of temple cults and the development of the Puranas”, “The growing network of pilgrimage routes reinforced cultural unity amidst the proliferating states and kingdoms”. In a society that Satish Chandra depicted as stagnant, Meenakshi Jain wrote,

The arts, language and literature pulsated with similar dynamism. Indian artistic sensibilities reached their zenith with the rock-cut

temple at Ellora, the monumental Chola structures, the gigantic Jain statue at Sravana Belgola, and the remarkable temples of Khajuraho, Orissa, Mathura, and Banaras.⁶⁴³

Satish Chandra describes the period as a time when “The revival and expansion of Hinduism took many forms, Shiva and Vishnu became chief gods and magnificent temple (sic) were built to proclaim their supremacy”.⁶⁴⁴ Here Chandra uses the term “chief gods” which is anthropological type terminology and quite offensive to many Hindus. He seems to be using this opportunity to belittle the growth of Hinduism as a competition between tribal gods vying for power.

Both historians discuss the Bhakti movement. Chandra describes the efforts of Ramanuja, who “tried to assimilate Bhakti to the tradition of the Vedas”, arguing that “the path to Bhakti was open to all, irrespective of caste”. He explains “that [Ramanuja was] a bridge between the popular movement based on Bhakti and the upper caste movement based on the Vedas”--again highlighting caste divisions. Meenakshi Jain describes the “powerful bhakti movement [that] developed ... in the Tamil region ... and spread... to north India and Bengal”. She writes that Ramanuja gave “a new impetus to the movement by reconciling metaphysical speculation with popular bhakti”. She omits the many references to upper or lower castes that characterized Chandra’s treatment. This too reveals a selection process, the prerogative of the interpreter.

Though the differences in these two narratives about Bhakti are subtle, Chandra’s tends to touch on caste more than other aspects of the cultural/religious movement. He mentions caste numerous times in his discussion of Bhakti. Caste is part of Indian society and class is an essential component of Marxist historiography. Chandra confounds the two, and essentializes the former.

⁶⁴³ Jain, p. 4.

⁶⁴⁴ Chandra, p. 32.

Meenakshi Jain is of a school of thought that while opposing caste as an institution, tries not to stress caste divisions as the solitary, reified organizing principle of Indian society.

Chandra also neglected to mention that Ramanuja was Tamil and that his teachings influenced North India, thereby ignoring another opportunity to discuss North-South interaction. South Indians often complain that the South is slighted in history textbooks, so this lack of a regional reference to the most famous Tamil saint is significant. There is a tendency among scholars associated with the Delhi Historians Group to see India as a Balkanizing entity and deny the universalizing energies that have brought the North's influence to the South and vice versa. When the North's influence went to the South it was called Hinduization. When the South's influence went to the North, it was ignored. Chandra concludes his treatment of Bhakti, generically stating that it "became acceptable to all sections of Hindu society by the early sixteenth century".

Meenakshi Jain mentions Telegu, Kannada, Tamil, and Sanskrit poetry and then ends her introduction with a section titled, "Material Prosperity", where she writes that in addition to arts and culture, "India presented a picture of abundance on the material plane as well". In her treatment, Jain establishes that philosophy, literature, and religion were thriving during the eighth and ninth centuries. Satish Chandra wrote that "during this period society was becoming increasingly rigid and narrow... There had been a setback in urban life and communications, with growing religious orthodoxy". For Chandra religion is an impediment to the progress and harmony of society, for Jain it enriches. Many of the scholars associated with the DHG, and most of prominent leftist intellectuals in West Bengal, are from Brahmin backgrounds, perhaps they have some kind of

guilt trip about their ancestors that motivates them to constantly criticize Brahmins.⁶⁴⁵

With what seems to be a condemnation of his fellow Indians, Chandra quotes “al-Biruni [who] noted the insular attitude of the learned people of the country, viz. brahmanas, [who were] haughty, foolish, vain, self-conceited, stolid”. Denigrating Brahmins is central to the unfolding of a proletariat revolution. Since Brahmins could be seen as an archetype of the bourgeoisie, it is essential that they are criticized as often as possible. This anti-Brahmanism is also the approach that is taken about India in World History textbooks in the USA. Brahmins are highly criticized by Western scholars and Indian Marxist scholars. Brahmins are far from a monolithic community.⁶⁴⁶ Their long term influence on Indian society regarding education and cultural preservation is relatively unparalleled in any other civilization.

Quotes from Alberuni can be used to show a multiple of perspectives. He wrote glowing accounts of the scientific knowledge he gained from the “learned Brahmins”. At the beginning of this textbook, when Chandra discussed these issues, he did not say that it was learned Brahmins who were invited to Baghdad to teach about astronomy, it was simply Indians. In reality it was the learned Brahmins who shared their knowledge with the Arabs, et al. But naming them in that context didn’t fit in with Chandra’s social agenda.⁶⁴⁷ Brahmins must be

⁶⁴⁵ Gail Minault noted that “This is less relevant than the fact that they see economics as the basis and religion as superstructural.”

⁶⁴⁶ Gail Minault wrote about this that “Al-Beruni had a point, but he only got to the NW part of the country—The prosperity and vitality were further South”.

⁶⁴⁷ Gail Minault commented on this: “Criticizing Brahmins is also a way of criticizing the caste structure per se... which was abolished as unjust in the Indian Constitution in 1950—this doesn’t mean that it has ceased to exist. You have lots of good Brahmins, but that doesn’t excuse the evil and cruel part of caste distinctiveness”.

blamed for the ills of society and the hegemonic process of Hinduization, even as they were the mechanism through which traditions were preserved.⁶⁴⁸

At the end of Jain's introduction there are no review exercises because the students are not responsible for this overview. It was richly informative, offering a positive assessment of the period rather than describing it as a time of decline. The era, as represented by Satish Chandra was characterized by corrupt tantric practices and caste competitions, where rival tribal deities vied for supremacy.

In chapter one, titled "Reconstructing Medieval India", Meenakshi Jain discusses various schools of historiography. With the BJP's much touted changes in the historical narrative, it was expected that each of the new NCERT textbooks would have a section or a few lines on the topic of historiography—theoretically justifying the new orientation. It is essential that the authors deal with this issue since there were objections to the methodology used in the new textbooks—especially from the group of activist scholars who authored the old textbooks. It was therefore essential that the author state her sources and explain the debates regarding competing historical theories.

The 1995 syllabus for Higher Secondary Stage indicated that at the end of chapter one, of the class eleven textbook, there should be a section devoted to the "Construction of Medieval Indian History". For the framers of NCERT policy during the early nineties, the issue of historiography gained importance, particularly in context of their aversion to the rise in popularity of the BJP, and the Sangh Parivar's use of history to validate their more Indo-centric socio-political orientation. Because Satish Chandra's textbook was written in 1978, with revisions in 1990, this need to explain the sources of history and their interpretation was not seen as an imperative in his book on *Medieval India*.

⁶⁴⁸ I apologize for this comment which might be construed to defend the evil Brahmans. I know a lot of Brahmans who are not evil and hegemonic, but that is beside the point because most narratives place them in that light.

New textbooks based on the 1995 syllabus, were never written and by 1998, the political currents in the country had changed.

Nowhere in Satish Chandra's book does he discuss how medieval Indian history is reconstructed. There is no subheading and no hints of the methods of historiography which are obscurely embedded in the text. In the chapters on Mahmud Ghaznavi and the Delhi Sultanate there is no mention of the Muslim chronicles as a source of information from which the years between Harsha and the British are reconstructed. Perhaps in 1990, when this textbook was revised, the author did not think it necessary to justify his perspectives and cite his sources--since the paradigm employed had not changed or been challenged for decades.

Comparing Two Narratives: Whose India? Whose Stories?

A comparison of the medieval epoch, as written by Meenakshi Jain, juxtaposed with the narratives written by Satish Chandra, can highlight how these two very different schools of thought approach India's past-- a debate between what has been called Marxist versus what might be called Hindu Nationalist historiography⁶⁴⁹. From the beginning of his *Medieval India* textbook, Chandra situates India's history within the Marxist paradigm, devoting the first chapter to a discussion of feudalism in Europe and the applicability of that thesis in the Indian context. After a review of the rise of Islam in "The Arab World", he traces the trajectory of Islamic influence across north Africa into Spain and to the "Abbasid empire [that] was one of the most powerful and flourishing empire" (sic).

⁶⁴⁹ There are many names that have been used to refer to this Indo-centric, or Hindu Revivalist, or Indian Nationalist, or Indigenous Indian school of thought, that seeks to use Dharmic or Indic categories instead of Euro-centric concepts. Perhaps the difficulty in naming this amorphous group is that they actually claim that they are not using a pre-designed theory, such as structuralism or Marxism, but are going directly to the source. Inevitably, however, historians and scholars always have some kind of "orientation".

Chapter two in Satish Chandra's textbook is called "Northern India: Age of the Three Empires", where he discusses the Palas, the Pratiharas, and the Rastrakutas and their "Struggle for Dominion". Meenakshi Jain's chapter two, which covers the same material, is titled, "Struggle for Chakravartitva" a more culturally specific term than "dominion". Both authors describe the era as culturally rich. According to Chandra, "Each of these empires, though they fought among themselves, provided stable conditions of life over large areas, and gave patronage to arts and letters". Jain states that the three powers "steadfastly combated each other for mastery over the imperial city of Kanauj, even as they promoted cultural efflorescence within their realms".

In the narrative about the Pratiharas, both authors use the same sources, both mention Arab travelers who had noted the strength of the cavalry. Jain quotes an Arab description of "The king of Kanauj" who "has four armies in the four directions of the wind". Both authors give details about the number of villages, the dates and names are all the same. This part of the curriculum did not change between Chandra's writing and Jain's. Both narratives tell relatively the same story about the Palas, the Pratiharas, and the Rashtrakutas... their battles, their kings, their dates, their religions. Significantly, Jain includes more details about the public works that were constructed during this period.

The chapters in their books are arranged differently. Chapter three in Jain's book is titled, "the World of Islam", whereas Chandra's is about "The Chola Empire". Chandra's book doesn't have a chapter dedicated to Islam. And besides the Cholas it only has one other chapter dedicated to non Muslim dynasties. The fourth chapter in Chandra's textbook is titled, "Economic and Social Life, Education and Religious Beliefs (800-1200)", where there is some discussion of Hinduism, albeit minimal. In chapter five, "The Age of Conflict" Chandra writes about "the Ghaznavids, The Rajput States, The Turkish Conquest

of North India”, and other subtopics related to the early Islamic incursions. He then has three chapters on the Delhi Sultanate. After this, Chandra’s book has the other chapter that deals, at least in part, with non Islamic rulers, chapter nine, “The Age of Vijayanagara and the Bahmanids, and the Coming of the Portuguese”.

Other than that, until chapter seventeen, “Cultural and Religious Developments”, the focus in the Chandra book is almost exclusively on Islamic rulers and their policies, their likes, their dislikes, their fears, their motivations. Out of the fourteen pages in chapter seventeen on culture and religion, there are only a few paragraphs or sentences here and there that deal with non-Islamic topics, such as the rise of Bhakti, and the Sikh religion. Eight out of the nine photographs in the chapter are of Islamic architecture and art. There are a few sentences about Tulsidas and a reproduction of a painting of him that is so badly blurred, it can’t be discerned. The gist of the section on religion is to show the liberal nature of Islamic rule during this period. In one subsection titled, the “Problems of Integration”, Chandra asserts that “there was no atmosphere of confrontation between the Sikhs and the Mughal rulers” and “the occasional conflict between the [Sikh] Gurus and the Mughal rulers was personal and political rather than religious.”⁶⁵⁰

Chandra briefly discusses Tulsidas, who was “pleading for a modified caste system, based not on birth but on individual qualities”. Here, too when discussing North India’s most popular poet, Chandra sees only caste. He spends far more lines of the text discussing the various Hindu books that Shah Jahan and his son Dara had translated into Persian, far more than the few sentences devoted to Tulsidas, who wrote the *Ramacharitmanas*, one of Indian’s most treasured and enduring epic poems. The students are told simply that Tulsidas was an

⁶⁵⁰ Chandra, p. 223.

“influential Hindi poet [whose] hero was Ram”. They are not told the name of his most famous work. There are two sentences about Tulsidas, and one of those is devoted to a discussion of the stubborn evils of the caste system.

In a fairly brief sub-section of Chandra’s textbook, titled, “Language, Literature and Music” there are seventeen sentences that describe Persian literature. In the next section as well, about “Religious Ideas and Beliefs”, his focus is on the pluralistic nature of Muslim rule, which he highlights by again naming texts that the Mughals had translated into Persian. All in all, his few paragraphs about Hindus focus on their intolerance. Or, he cites the failed efforts of certain actors to counteract what he repeatedly describes as a systemic intolerance in the indigenous civilization. The focus of the section on art, religion, and literature is on the synthesis of the two cultures which, according to Chandra, was due to the beneficence of the Islamic rulers. Hindus hardly feature in the story.

In chapter eighteen of Chandra’s textbook, “Climax and Disintegration of the Mughal Empire (part I)”, Hindus are discussed briefly under the subheading “Jats and Satnamis”. These references, many of which are negative, describe how “Dharmashastras during the medieval period ... asserted the privileges of the brahmanas, [stating that] none other except the brahmanas had the right to read the scriptures or to preach”. Other than these kinds of comments about Hinduism, Chandra’s book focuses almost exclusively on the Muslim rulers. This makes it seem as if Hindus were no longer in India, and those who were, were orthodox, like “Ramananda of Maharastra... [who was] vehement in asserting the privileges of the brahmanas”. Chandra does however mention the intolerance of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, as a negative influence, undoing the essentially secular and pan-Indian nature of Akbar’s reign, who for DHG scholars, represents the pinnacle of Indian integration.

In comparison to the sections on Islamic heroes and their exploits in this textbook, the discussion about Hindus is significantly less, and it is liberally peppered with criticism about Brahmanic hegemony. The narrative about Muslim rulers completely dominates the discourse of the textbook, but in general, only their positive attributes are highlighted. In reference to Hinduism it focuses almost entirely on the integration of Hinduism with Islam rather than the resilience of Hinduism. This approach doesn't see the non-Islamic people and their cultural contributions, except where they are politically correct insofar as they integrated themselves into the Muslim controlled state.

The history of this era, written in this manner, is without a doubt depicted as the “Muslim Period”, with Hindus depopulated from the land in the telling. Was there really a depopulation during that period, a “holocaust”, as many scholars such as Sita Ram Goel and K.S. Lal have claimed? Or have they simply been lost from sight, elided in the historical narrative, as in the case of this textbook by Satish Chandra?

In chapter eighteen, “The Climax and Disintegration of the Mughal Empire– I” Chandra once again, for emphasis, repeats his earlier statement about the Sikhs. Their conflicts with the Moghuls, specifically, Aurangzeb, “were political and personal rather than religious”. He writes that the execution of Tegh Bahadur⁶⁵¹ “was due to intrigues against [him] by some members of his family”. He adds, in a tone that implies the information about the Guru is hearsay, “*We are told* that Aurangzeb was annoyed because the Guru had converted a few Muslims to Sikhism and raised a protest against religious persecution in Kashmir by the local governor” (emphasis added).

⁶⁵¹ The controversy regarding NCERT's narrative about Tegh Bahadur Sindh was discussed in more detail above.

Inferring this information may be erroneous, Chandra comments, “It is difficult to sift the truth of these allegations”. He sums up his treatment of the Sikhs, “Sikhism had gradually spread to many Jat peasants and low caste artisans who were attracted to its simple egalitarian approach”. He blames the Jats’ “economic discontent” for the problems they caused in the empire, rather than Aurangzeb’s intolerance. Ultimately, Chandra blames the practitioners of the Hindu religion for corrupting society, leading to political downfall, rather than the pressures exerted on them by the Mughals. He dismisses the Sikhs’ historical accounts as tangential.

Satish Chandra takes the opposite tack when recounting the Muslim side of the story about the governor of Kashmir, Saif Khan, whom he calls “famous as a builder of bridges [...] a humane, and broadminded person who had appointed a Hindu to advise him in administrative matters”. Chandra accepts this version of history as fact, and the Sikhs’ as questionable, “Stories of mass persecution ... appear to be exaggerated because Kashmir had been predominantly Muslim since the fifteenth century”. How they became Muslim is not mentioned, especially since claims of persecution had already been discounted.

Once again, the indigenous population, such as the Sikhs, are shown deficient, as “low caste” converts, who had manufactured stories of persecutions to justify their history. The Mughal ruler, whom Sikhs accused of intolerance is shown to be broadminded. When Sikhs and Hindus are discussed, Chandra highlights their “internecine quarrels”. He wraps up this discussion by reiterating his primary premise, “The struggle ... was thus not a religious struggle”

He denies that religion had anything to do with the problems between Aurangzeb and the Sikhs, which is a negation of the real issues that caused the Sikhs to rebel. In his description Chandra sees no paradox in the analysis that the struggle was nonreligious, yet later in this same paragraph writes that “Two of the

Guru's sons were captured, and on their refusal to embrace Islam, were beheaded". This must be quite confusing for the students, especially the Sikhs. Isn't this religious?

A common criticism of colonial historiography, from the "left", is that it divides society up into religiously defined segments. From the "saffron camp" colonial historiography is criticized for ignoring Hindu resistance, and their cultural contributions during the medieval period. Chandra's textbook falls headfirst into the periodization pitfalls that have defined India since John Stuart Mills wrote his famous history of India, dividing it into three categories, "Hindu History", "Muslim History" and "British History". Chandra's book most definitely tells the story of "Muslim India".

Chandra deals with a few more Hindus, whom he can't avoid, when he covers "The Rise of the Marathas", in several subsections in chapter nineteen, which is titled, as per the lens of Islamic rulership, "Climax and Disintegration of the Mughal Empire –2". His treatment of Shivaji is full of comments such as he "had resorted to treachery on a number of occasions". Chandra refers rather sarcastically to Shivaji's attack on Surat where he "looted to his heart's content returning home laden with treasure".

Compare this to how he had earlier described Mahmud Ghaznavi who "posed as a great *but shikan* or 'destroyer of the images' for the glory of Islam". Mahmud conducted "daring raids" that were "aimed at plundering the rich temples and cities of northern India in order to continue his struggle against his enemies in Central Asia"⁶⁵². The difference is there, Shivaji looted for his "heart's content"⁶⁵³ whereas, Ghaznavi plundered for political and religious reasons.

⁶⁵² Chandra, p. 37.

⁶⁵³ Ibid, p. 243.

As Chandra recounts the tale of Shivaji's alliances and escapades, he cuts it short because "The manner of Shivaji's escape is too well known to be repeated here". So with that flick of the wrist, Shivaji's heroics are deleted. However, there was ample room for the author to comment that, when "In 1674 Shivaji crowned himself formally", he had "traveled far from being a *petty* jagirdar at Poona" (emphasis added). Chandra, per volume of narrative, has a far greater percentage of negative comments about Shivaji than about Aurangzeb, or any of the other Muslim rulers and invaders whom he discusses. Additionally, he tries to discredit Shivaji in a way that he did not attempt in the case of Mahmud Ghaznavi.

When Mahmud attacked Muslim centers such as Multan on his return to Ghazni, it is simply recounted, without calling his religious convictions into question. He is not accused of forsaking Islam. However, for Shivaji, hoping to cast dispersions on his character, Chandra wrote "Although Shivaji had assumed the title of "*Haindava-Dharmoddharak*" (Protector of the Hindu faith), he plundered mercilessly the Hindu population of the area". In the case of the Muslim hero, looting is expected, taken in stride, not emphasized. But in the case of Shivaji, he is made to look like a depraved plunderer and not worthy of the love and respect with which he is revered by millions of Indians. Ghaznavi was allowed to attack his co-religionists, because of economic expediency, and still retain his Islamic gloss. The author does not grant the same forgiveness to Shivaji but attempts to tarnish his Hinduness in the narrative.

In chapter twenty, "Assessment and Review", Chandra summaries "the thousand years from the beginning of the eighth to the end of the seventeenth century". He first cites

the caste system [that] continued to dominate, despite the challenge posed to it by Islam and loss of political power by the Rajput rulers who were duty bound to dharma which implied, among other

things, the upholding of the four-fold division of society (*varnashrama-dharma*)⁶⁵⁴ (original emphasis) Here Islam is seen as a liberalizing force, challenging social inequality. The Hindus are shown to be trapped by tradition. The deeply spiritual concept of “Dharma” is dismissed simply as the source of caste divisions.

In this summary chapter, Chandra describes the rise of Bhakti in political terms--that there was a kind of trade off between the Bhakti saints, who “vehemently criticized the caste system” and Brahmans who “acquiesced in the advocacy of the path of devotion as the way for salvation for all castes, especially shudras”. He refers to this as, “a tacit agreement... arrived at in course of time”. Thus social adjustments are characterized in a negative light. This civilizational synthesis, of what has been called the “Great Tradition” or *Sanskriti Parampara*, with the “Lesser Traditions”, represented by the incorporation of regional stories and histories in to the Puranic tales, and the embrace of Bhakti saints by all strata of the social order, could be represented as a move towards multiculturalism. But not in Chandra’s analysis.

Chandra’s explanation makes this synthesis seem as if there was a preplanned, long range conspiracy by the manipulative Brahmans to placate the Bhakti saints’ anti-castism by grudgingly allowing the Shudras into the Dharma by way of devotionism. R.S. Sharma in his NCERT textbook on *Ancient India*, compared the Bhakti devotee’s relationship to his or her Ishta Dev (personal God) as an example of the serf’s relationship with the feudal lord. This kind of simplistic definition, de-spiritualized and out of context of the culture, comes nowhere near explaining the essence of the Bhakti movement. It is rather a bold attempt to push the feudalistic paradigm on to the early medieval Indian milieu. Just as easily, a scholar of a different school could represent this dynamic

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 257.

exchange as a pre-modern example of pluralism, cultural synthesis, national integration. But neither Satish Chandra or R.S. Sharma seized the opportunity.

In his summary chapter intended to highlight the main points in the textbook on *Medieval India*, only the negative aspects of Hinduism are deemed worthy to be recounted. After two paragraphs on caste, Chandra tells the students that when Indians finally understood that Islam and Hinduism “had a great deal of similarities” there was “mutual harmony and toleration” in the polity. He doesn’t cite the date when that understanding was achieved. But he does state that there was very little intolerance in the medieval period, “on the whole”. His summary makes a disparaging comparison between the “position of women”. “Hindu women were not able to claim the right of remarriage or a share in their father’s property which Muslim women had”.⁶⁵⁵

In this summary, the Turks and Mughals are credited with uniting the nation, developing roads and public works. Chandra neglects to mention the universities, roads, tanks, and public works that were the hallmark of the Palas and the Rashtrakutas. These empires were discussed earlier in the textbook, and are certainly very much a part of the millennium under discussion. But they do not figure in this summary, where only the Muslims are credited with looking after social welfare. In the text Chandra repeatedly dismissed the Hindus as too busy worrying about caste pollution to think about arts and science. For Chandra, in this summary chapter, there was no reason to mention Hindu accomplishments between 800 C.E. and the British.

Chandra makes quite misleading statements, in this grand sweep of the era, “Under the Mughals, political integration was accompanied by a deliberate effort to create a unified ruling class consisting of Muslims and Hindus”. In

⁶⁵⁵ Women’s property rights in pre-British India were considered in a recent groundbreaking study by Veena Oldenburg.

actuality there were very few Hindus among the ruling class during Muslim rule, confined mostly to the Rajputs. The vast majority of Hindus were treated as second class citizens and made to pay jaziya, a tax on non-Muslims. Chandra does not mention jaziya in this summary and barely touches on it in the textbook, though it was one of the issues that continually brought the Hindu population into conflict with the Muslim rulers. He rounds this final paragraph off with an assertion that underscores his overall paradigm, “many historians argue that the state in medieval India [was] essentially feudal”.

Meenakshi Jain looks at the millennium known as medieval India through a very different lens. After using the term *Chakravartitva* to describe the contests between the three rival empires, she continues to employ culturally specific concepts in her analysis. Most importantly, she does not reduce all analyses to discussions of the evils of the caste system. She does not see Brahmans as a semi-imperialist hegemonic force subjugating the depressed and weary masses and acting in the long run as a source of decline and contraction. She sees a dynamic interaction between traditions, instead of a sort of gobbling up of regional deities by a voracious Brahmanical hierarchy.

It could be said that Meenakshi Jain looks at medieval India as a glass half full, and Satish Chandra sees it half empty. The amount of water in the glass is the same, just the perspective of its contents is different. For school children, the more positive approach would seem to be more constructive. This is especially important since the objective of a social studies curriculum, in India and all nations, is to instill a sense of pride and create unity in the nation.

Satish Chandra’s version of Hinduism in medieval India, makes the reader want to throw out the remaining water in that glass, which seems to be polluted with irredeemable and codified social injustice. Meenakshi Jain’s view of that same body of information gives the impression that there is something significant

that we can draw from the pluralistic social movements of the past, and the teachings of the indigenous saints can give inspiration to the modern nation. In comparing the textbooks of Satish Chandra and Meenakshi Jain, besides the obvious observation that Jain approaches early medieval India with a more sympathetic view of indigenous kingdoms, the main difference is that she considers these dynasties and kingdoms at all.

In the Chandra textbook, after chapter two about the Palas, Pratiharas, and Rastrakutas, the author only considers the Chola Empire, except for a later chapter on Vijayanagar, which focused almost exclusively on conflict and disintegration. Besides these three sections of the textbook--the territorial conflicts between the three competing dynasties, the Cholas, and Vijaynagar--Chandra explicitly ignores all Hindu kingdoms. Fewer than fifty pages of a 260 page book, only a fraction of the whole text, are devoted to Hindu and or Buddhist or Jain societal contributions.

Four-fifths of the textbook is a reconstruction of Islamic rulers, their policies, their exploits, the successes and disappointments. Hindus have almost been banished from Satish Chandra's *Medieval India*. When they do appear, they are represented as either heartless perpetrators of the caste system, or its hapless, powerless victims, besides a few Bhakti saints who unsuccessfully attempted to fight casteism. Chandra uses the evils of the caste system as his lens to look at Hinduism during the medieval period.

Meenakshi Jain uses a broader brush stroke as she paints the story of the cultural and historical geography of early medieval India. Her narrative includes numerous discussions of "Indian Kingdoms" that did not find mention in the old NCERT textbooks. Besides chapter three on the Palas, Pratiharas, and Rastrakutas and chapter nine on Vijayanagar, Jain has three chapters that discuss indigenous dynasties. The first, titled simply "Indian Kingdoms" discusses "The Chandellas

of Jejakabhukti or Bundelkhand, the Paramaras of Malwa, The Chahamanas or Chauhans of Sakambhari, the Kalachuris of Tripuri, the Chalukyas of Gujarat”. This chapter in Jain’s text ends with a brief description of Kashmir in the ninth through twelfth centuries, describing the founder of the Utpalas, “Avantivarman ... a man of sagacity who restored peace and order in the region and commissioned an engineering operation for the drainage and irrigation of the valley”.

Such historical figures and important technological accomplishments, are exempted from the Satish Chandra type view of medieval India that reads like a laundry list of Islamic dynasties. Whether Chandra is writing about north India or south, the actors are Muslims, and very few Hindus feature in the narrative, except when their villages are “depopulated” as was mentioned once or twice--without any elaboration, or they collaborate with the Islamic rulers--which is seen as positive. In this view of India, Hindus are represented as inert recipients if not willing participants of cycles of invasions, any resistance is downplayed. These examples highlight the reasons many patriotic Hindus are willing to look for another narrative of the nation, that doesn’t exclude the existence or essence of the dominant culture.

In chapter five of her textbook, titled, “North-Eastern and Eastern States”, Meenakshi Jain begins the discussion of Assam, Bengal, Orissa, and Kalinga with this introductory comment,

New and vibrant kingdoms thrived in the eastern regions as well. The rulers of Assam worsted the marching Khalji armies, as Orissa repulsed several invasions. Bengal witnessed a cultural renaissance under the Palas and Senas, before finally succumbing to the Turkish forces.⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵⁶ Jain, p. 43.

These historical events are also mentioned in the Satish Chandra book, but they are discretely embedded in a long chapter on “The Delhi Sultanate” that has many pages on the rulership of Balban and the exploits of the Khaljis. The mode in which this local resistance is mentioned, puts the subject of the action in the hands of the Muslims and the rulers of the Indian kingdoms are not mentioned by name, though the uncles, brothers, and cousins of an array of Islamic characters are discussed at length. Chandra writes about eastern India,

The [the Khiljis] also attempted to extend their rule over Radha (south Bengal), Orissa, and Kamrupa (Assam). In this conflict, the rulers of Orissa badly defeated the Muslim forces near Lakhauti. Subsequent efforts of the Muslims against Jajnagar, the capital of Orissa failed. This showed that the independent Muslim rulers of Lakhnauti were not strong enough to bring the neighboring Hindu areas under their control.

The kingdoms that resisted “the Muslim forces” are not listed in the table of contents and they do not merit a subheading in the text. The valor of these people are hidden in embedded sentences. They are treated as an aside to the actual unfolding of medieval Indian history in this narrative created by Satish Chandra, which is almost exclusively the story of Muslim rulers. The unfolding story gives voice and angst to Islamic characters, their victories and failures and the lessons learned to further their empires. Hindu characters rarely warrant that depth of discussion.

Chapter six of Meenakshi Jain’s textbook, covering “The Deccan and the South” includes information about seven additional indigenous dynasties, than were not covered in the Chandra textbook. Jain lists them in the table of contents as the “Chalukyas of Kalyani, The Eastern Chalukyas, The Yadavas of Devagiri, The Kakatiyas, Dynasties of South India, The Chola Empire, Hoysalas, The Later Pandyas”. Each of these groups is accorded several paragraphs under its own

subheading. In the Satish Chandra version of *Medieval India*, these groups are buried in the text, when and if they do appear. Finding them therein is not easy.

While searching Chandra's textbook for any mention of these indigenous dynasties, reading page after page filled with subheadings such as "Market Control and Agrarian Policy of Alauddin", or "Muhammad Tughlaq's Experiments", the occasional references to non-Islamic actors and influences, is meager. The sheer paucity of information about the majority population in India is a kind of disappearing act, where the local Hindu and Buddhist and Jain populations exist only in the long shadow of Islam. The near exclusive focus on the Muslim rulers and their kingdoms presents a picture of India that is controlled and shaped by a series of Central Asian Sultans. Meenakshi Jain shines light on forgotten actors in India's history, north and south.

The 'Arab World' in India

There are numerous narratives in these two textbooks that cover similar topics. The "Arab World" is described by Satish Chandra under a subheading in chapter one. Chapter three in Meenakshi Jain's book is titled, "The World of Islam". Under this chapter heading Jain covers the topic from Arabia through the "Rise of the Ghaznavids" and the Ghurids, and concludes with a subsection, titled, "The Causes of Turkish Success". Chandra covers the Turkish invasions in chapter five, "The Age of Conflict (Circa 1000-1200)".

The section in chapter one devoted to "The Arab World" in Satish Chandra's book is only two pages long, but that does not indicate that the Islamic world is not adequately covered in his textbook. Almost all of the subsequent chapters primarily tell the tale of the Islamized Arabian/ Persian world on the South Asia tapestry. Since this is a textbook on medieval India, in order to

understand historical interactions between Muslims and Hindus, some background about Islam should be provided for the students.

In Chandra's book, as part of the two pages that cover "The Arab World", there is no discussion of the birth of Islam, perhaps because it happened before the eighth century and has arbitrarily been excluded from the narrative. Instead of discussing the tenets of Islam, he focuses on Arabic achievements in science. In this discussion there is almost half a page about Indic contributions to Arab culture, "Many Indian works dealing with astronomy and mathematics were ... translated into Arabic [such as] *Surya-Siddhanta*, which had been revised and reformed by Aryabhata". He adds that works dealing with medicine were also translated.

One of the only times that Hindu scientific and mathematical accomplishments are highlighted in this textbook is embedded in the subsection on "The Arab World". Chandra writes that "we only have a limited knowledge of India's economic and cultural relationship with the Arab world ... and India's scientific contribution to it". The author excused himself several times for his lack of knowledge of India's technological accomplishments. Here he cites those civilizational accomplishments in a subsection specifically devoted to Islamic developments. In other places in the textbook, Hindu advances in math and science are not considered, but at this juncture they are represented as contributing to Arab society that was characterized by, as quoted earlier, a "remarkable degree of intellectual and personal freedom enjoyed by scientists and scholars". Dhimmis, or non-Muslims in their realms are not considered.

This textbook goes out of its way to make Hinduism seem primitive and regressive and Islam seem advanced and progressive. The author rarely discusses positive aspects of Hinduism, except as it was accepted or appreciated by Muslims. Literature is cited only when it is translated into Persian, medical

advances are mentioned only when they are transmitted to Arabs. Hinduism is respected only insofar as it can integrate itself with Islam, which is seen to have had an egalitarian influence on a moribund and tradition-bound society.

Chapter three of Meenakshi Jain's textbook deals with "The World of Islam", as specified in the revised syllabus—from the birth of Muhammad through the Turkish invasions of India. A chapter on Islam is justified on several grounds. Since the textbook deals with a time frame from the end of Harsha in 647 A.D., and because the era under examination was profoundly impacted by Islam, it is essential to explain its philosophy and its arrival in India.

In a coolly detached voice, Jain describes the birth of Islam, and traces its movement from Arabia to Spain to Central Asia and into Sindh. She relates the events in the life of Muhammad with a tone that is not usually applied to descriptions of the Prophet of Islam, but is inevitably applied when discussing Hinduism. For example, about the Prophet's visions, Jain wrote that "he believed that an Angel appeared to him in a dream" and "he was convinced he was the chosen Messenger of God".

In general, most treatments of Muhammad's experiences are related as fact, and not qualified with "he believed" or "he was convinced". In Arjun Dev's history textbook for class nine, *The Story of Civilization Volume One*, published in 1989 by NCERT, he used a factual tone, eschewing the said-to-be approach, "When [Muhammad] was 40, he had 'visions of truth' and became a prophet". There is not hedging in this sentence, Muhammad "became a prophet". Arjun Dev makes Muhammad's fight with the Meccans seem like a class struggle, as "he made many enemies, chiefly among the rich merchants". In his description of the tenets of Islam, he includes this sentence, "The emphasis on a life of virtue and

benevolence makes Islam one the great humanitarian religions”.⁶⁵⁷ Arjun Dev’s section on Islam can be used to compare with Meenakshi Jain’s, since a similar comparison is not possible between Jain’s book and Satish Chandra’s. Chandra only has a few paragraphs under the subheading, “The Arab World”, whereas Arjun Dev’s narrative for class nine covers the same materials as Meenakshi Jain’s, which facilitates a comparison between the two.

In her descriptions, Meenakshi Jain doesn’t comment as euphorically on the “humanitarian” aspects of Islam. However, in comparison with the negative narratives about Hinduism found in many of the now discarded NCERT textbooks, she treats Islam with a guarded respect. When she wrote that “Muhammad ... was ... convinced he was the chosen Messenger of God”, she uses the same tone that scholars often employ when writing about Hinduism. In this genre, Hindus “are convinced” of the sanctity of the Vedas, or they “claim that Hinduism is monistic”, with an aside added that studies of the Hindu religion indicate they are actually polytheistic.

The said-to-be phrasing draws attention to the possibility that the beliefs of a particular group are not verifiable, which is the common approach when scholars describe Hindu practices and beliefs.⁶⁵⁸ Though Arjun Dev is obliged to

⁶⁵⁷ Arjun Dev, 1989, p. 141.

⁶⁵⁸ Research by Sankrant Sanu, Are Hinduism studies prejudiced? A look at Microsoft Encarta, September 24, 2002, <http://www.sulekha.com/column.asp?cid=245733>, provides numerous examples of this phenomenon, and provides ironic examples if this standard approach were applied to descriptions of Hinduism to Christianity and Islam. In this article, Sanu exposes the inherent bias in the discourse. Here are three examples from his excellent study. The Encarta Encyclopedia, offers this description, authored by Wendy Doniger, written in the standard “said-to-be” approach, “Ra ma and Krishna are said to be avatars of Vishnu though they were originally human heroes.” Sanu shows how Christianity is not subjected to the same discourse, and we never find sentences such as “Jesus Christ is said to be the ‘Son of God’ though he was just a human”. He provides a galaxy of examples from Encarta wherein the author attempts to contradict the practices and beliefs of Hindus, for example, “The most important tenet of sanatana dharma for all Hindus is ahimsa, the absence of a desire to injure, which is used to justify vegetarianism (although it does not preclude physical violence toward animals or humans, or blood sacrifices in temples).” Sanu, again offers alternative treatments, which in the context of Christianity and Islam

use similar phrasing about Muhammad in his textbook, because to do otherwise would mean he was teaching religion, he tempers it with a totalizing modifier, “Muhammad’s visions *completely* convinced him that Allah was the only God and that he was the Prophet of God” (emphasis added). Meenakshi Jain isn’t completely convinced.

As a rule, in dealing with Islam, Arjun Dev, avoids the said-to-be approach. He writes, “Islam teaches faith in the one all-powerful God, Allah, and in the Prophethood⁶⁵⁹ of Muhammad. Man is powerless before Allah and must therefore, submit to His will” (original capitalization of “His”). If the above passage were written using the “said-to-be” approach, it would read more like this, “Islam teaches faith in Allah, originally a tribal deity of the Bedouins, now said to be all-powerful by believers. Muslims consider man as powerless before Allah and therefore they think they have to submit to his will”. In this hypothetical example, the pronoun replacing Allah’s name has not been capitalized in the same way that the word “God” is spelled without the capital when used in reference to Hindu “gods”. In Arjun Dev’s treatment even the word Prophethood is capitalized, which is something of a codified genuflection to Muhammad. This is not done in reverence to saints and prophets from other traditions. In her telling, Meenakshi Jain also uses this capitalization honorific for the Prophet.

In *The Story of Civilization*, Arjun Dev’s NCERT textbook for class nine, traces the history and trajectory of Islam, describing the “Hijira” and the five pillars, and the “astonishingly rapid conquest” which was “part missionary zeal”.

seem ludicrous, but which are the standard approach to Hinduism. Sanu’s ironic comparisons, first with Christianity, “The most important tenet of Christianity is love (although it does not preclude burning heretics and witches at the stake, the Crusades, Christian colonization and the Jewish Holocaust). And then with Islam, “Muslims claim that Islam is a religion of peace (although it does not preclude suicide bombing or other terrorist acts).”

⁶⁵⁹ Here the capitalization is retained in deference.

He adds, “economic and social causes favoured expansion.” Arjun Dev explains that Islam spread across vast areas, but he never once mentions the use of violence. He wrote, “The people of neighboring countries, tired of oppressive rule and fascinated by the simplicity of the teachings of Islam, welcomed the invaders.” Most scholars would question this paradigm of a peaceful transition to Islam in Central Asia, Afghanistan, or Sindh. There may be a few places where Islam became established nonviolently, such as in later centuries in Malaysia, or gradually, over several centuries, as in East Bengal. But to completely white-out the aggressive nature of Islamic armies and their impact on the populations of Buddhists and Hindus in Sindh, Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Northwest India, is an example of negationism.

In this version of the *Story of Civilization*, nowhere between the Prophet Muhammad and the “first three Khalifas”, does Arjun Dev mention the schism between Sunnis and Shi’ias, and the death of the prophet’s son-in-law. Comparatively, in the treatment of the Bhakti movement, several pages later, he focuses on divisions and schisms. He may have intended not to hurt the religious sentiments of the Sunnis, but in so doing he has ignored the existence of the Shi’as. The same deference was not shown the Hindus practicing Bhakti. Meenakshi Jain recounts the history of Islam quite differently. She does not eschew describing violence when violence occurred, but she doesn’t dwell on it exclusively.

In Satish Chandra’s and Arjun Dev’s treatments, Islam is portrayed primarily as an egalitarian, scientific, beneficent civilization. They scrupulously avoid mentioning jihad or the undeniably violent nature of the Arab expansion, which many objective scholars, even Pakistani intellectuals have characterized as “Arab nationalism” or “Arab imperialism”. This calculated denial of the essentially violent nature of the majority of the Islamic encounters in South Asia

that claims the local populations “welcomed the invaders” is a falsification of the facts. This negationism is a source of contention that has fueled considerable controversies.

In the new NCERT textbook, the chapter on “The World of Islam” pushes the pendulum that had been stuck for five decades. Though Meenakshi Jain certainly does not blaspheme Muhammad, she situates him differently historically than was the custom in earlier NCERT textbooks written under another paradigm. Including a few details about the very violent nature of the Arab expansion is no more detrimental to Muslim identity than a discussion of slavery in early America is harmful to Whites. Attempting to learn from the mistakes and accomplishments of our ancestors is the main reason history is taught to students.

Jain writes that, “The Battle of Badr, where Muhammad first wielded the sword to assert his Prophethood,⁶⁶⁰ is regarded as the most momentous in Islamic history”. Though this assertion is true according to many devote Muslims, and fits in with the history of the advent of Islam, DHG historians would never frame it in this manner. Jain mentions Muhammad’s “attacks on the Jews and later the Christians” and she does not hide his expulsion of “a Jewish tribe from Medina” and “subsequent assault on the Jewish oases of Khaibar”. She describes his “triumphal entry into Mecca” and that he “ordered the removal of 360 idols” from the Kaaba. In the tale, as told by Arjun Dev, no Jews were attacked, when they are mentioned, he writes that for Muslims, “the prophets of the Jews are revered”.

Islam is treated with kid gloves in the old NCERT textbooks, while Hinduism is picked apart for its faults. The new textbook on *Medieval India*, in many ways matches the manner in which the story of the rise of Islam is told in the Muslim world that takes pride and seeks to learn from the acts of the Prophet and therefore his execution of nonbelievers is essential to the story. Arjun Dev

⁶⁶⁰ Here again, the capitalization is retained.

may have felt that the real history was too harsh to tell and needed to be softened in order not to shock Hindus or insult Muslims.

Jain mentions the “*dhimmi* system”, which, in a quite euphemistic definition, “reflected the eternal frontier between believers and non-believers”.⁶⁶¹ The doctrine of Dhimmitude impacted the inhabitants of India more profoundly than in other areas because the majority of the population remained non-Muslim. However, the concept of *dhimmi*, so essential to the administrative organization of Muslim dominated states, is never mentioned by Satish Chandra or Arjun Dev.

Jain writes, that

Islam was the first attempt in Arab history at a social formation based on religious rather than blood ties. Scholars have therefore viewed the new religion as a manifestation of Arab nationalism. She then takes up the topic of “Arab Expansion” that was either ignored in the case of Satish Chandra, or glorified in the case of Arjun Dev who saw the locals welcoming the invaders with open arms. Jain states something that is hardly ever mentioned in school book narratives, “The conquest of India... proved to be no walkover for the invaders”. She adds details that, though they had been left out of NCERT textbooks, are a part of history,

While they had won relatively easy victories in Christian and Zoroastrian lands, they were checkmated in Sind, Kabul, Zabul, three tiny Hindu kingdoms on the north-western frontier of India, for almost four centuries.

Balouchi and Pakhtun nationalist historians have told me about the centuries of fierce resistance, but this does not find mention in either Pakistani history textbooks or the old NCERT series. Perhaps the authors of the old textbooks

⁶⁶¹ *Dhimmi* literally a “protected subject”, the term describes the status of non-Muslims in a Muslim ruled state. According to *The Venture of Islam, The Classical Age of Islam* (Volume 1), University of Chicago Press, 1974, p. 514, by Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *Dhimmi* is a “Follower of a religion tolerated by Islam, within Muslim ruled territory” In the glossary of her textbook, Jain defines *Dhimmi* as “non-Muslim people who were entitled to state protection in lieu of *jaziya*” (a tax on non-Muslims). The *dhimmi* status was considered second class citizen and had to pay a special tax. It was deeply resented by many Hindus during the Sultanate and Mughal periods.

thought that if students were taught that the Islamic invasions into the Subcontinent were held at bay for 400 years, instead of being “welcomed by the natives”, it might make the modern school child less than welcoming to his or her Muslim neighbors.⁶⁶²

Arjun Dev’s textbook does not mention the Arab invasion of Sindh, which warrants its own subsection in Jain’s textbook. In Pakistani textbooks it is one of the proudest moments in history. The narrative in Jain’s textbook reads differently than the way it is represented by the official Pakistani version, and more the way the tale is told by Sindhi nationalists. This telling includes aspects of the Arab invasion of the Indus corridor that are not mentioned in most textbooks, either in India, Pakistan, or the West. Jain writes,

After their unsuccessful attempt to conquer Thana near Bombay in A.D. 636... subsequent expeditions also ended in failure, though the Arabs continued their attacks by and land and sea. They focused on the hilly region of Kikana near the Bolan Pass⁶⁶³ inhabited by the sturdy Jats. It was only in A.D. 712, after over seven decades of dogged resistance, that the Arabs under Muhammad bin Qasim finally succeeded in establishing their rule in Sind.⁶⁶⁴

She concludes this section, stating that even after the defeat of the last Hindu king, Raja Dahir, “his widow and later also his son continued the resistance”. According to Arjun Dev, there was no resistance to the invaders and according to

⁶⁶² Others argue that to deny the violence is damaging to the society and citizens should distance themselves from bad practices of their ancestors. The example that comes to mind again is slavery, something no American should take pride in. So, too many Hindus think that Muslim Indians should distance themselves from the violence that accompanied the advance of Islam in India. At least, they think it should not be a source of pride, that their distant ancestors destroyed temples and educational institutions, anymore than white Americans should defend slavery.

⁶⁶³ The Bolan Pass is in Baluchistan, indicating the geographical extent of the Jat community.

⁶⁶⁴ Though this narrative may match the one popular among Sindhi nationalists, the author leaves off the “h: in Sindh. Sind is the colonial spelling and Sindhis, in the early seventies, got it officially changed, but the usage remains difficult to alter.

Satish Chandra, Islam brought a peaceful and egalitarian social system that unified India. Jain added a few ripples to the tale.

Regarding Islamic conquests of Afghanistan, Jain writes that the “Arabs waged an inconclusive struggle [against the indigenous people of] the region for 220 years, which was eventually continued by the Turks”. This militaristic and cultural resistance of the pre-Islamic peoples in the area that is now Afghanistan is attested in many accounts. In the eighth and ninth century most people in Afghanistan were Hindus and Buddhists. Unlike other parts of western and central Asia, they resisted Islamization for hundreds years. However, this anomaly in the historical narrative of the Indian nation is considered, by some quarters, to be communalization. If Hindus are shown bravely and successfully resisting Islamic invaders, it is seen as communal. To be “secular”, history has to show Hindus as welcoming Muslim rule. However, that was not necessarily the case.

Meenakshi Jain describes these centuries of successful resistance, “Thus from the first Arab foray into Sind⁶⁶⁵ to the Turkish conquest of Lahore [by Mahmud of Ghaznavi], it took the invaders nearly four hundred years to establish a foothold in the subcontinent”. Mentioning this valiant, centuries-long resistance to multiple invasion attempts is eschewed as communal by scholars who seek to represent the arrival of Islam in India as a welcome reprieve from caste domination.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶⁵ Here again Jain spells “Sind” without the final “h”, as in Sindh. Sindhis always spell it with the “h”. License plates from Sindh have the “h” at the end, but most scholars have retained the incorrect transliteration. This issue of the “h” at the end of Sindh, is something of an issue with Sindhis. One even complained that “Beijing was changed from Peking and Dacca was changed to Dhaka, such a well know name as Bombay was even changed to Mumbai”, but Sindhis can’t seem to get the world to give them their “h”.

⁶⁶⁶ Surjit Mansingh, in the Historical Dictionary of India, p. 242, wrote aboutthis: “ Five hundred years of Arab-Turk attacks over stubborn resistance pushed that frontier east and south in stages: the battle for Sindh 636-713; the battle for Afghanistan from 643-870; the struggle for Punjab from 870-1030.”.

In the retelling of the invasions of Mahmud Ghaznavi and Muhammad Ghori, Meenakshi Jain recounts the interaction from the point of view of the recipient – referring to the destruction of temples, as well as the wealth that was extracted. When she quotes Alberuni it is to show his sympathy and regret for the devastation wrought by Mahmud, and also the praise that he lavished on famous Indian architectural sites, before Mahmud razed them.

Satish Chandra recounted the events through the lens of the invaders, describing inter-Islamic conflicts and their mode of warfare, and adding editorial comments such as, “It was the resourcefulness of the ghazi and his willingness to undergo great privation for the sake of the cause which enabled these infant states to hold their own against the Turks”. Chandra waxes eloquent about the “Persian renaissance of the Iranian spirit” with which Mahmud of Ghaznavi was “closely associated”.

Regarding local resistance to Mahmud’s incursions into India, Chandra wrote about the indigenous resistance in the “said-to-be” mode, “It *seems* that many princes of north-western India, including the rulers of Kanauj and Rajasthan, took part in [...] the decisive battle between Mahmud and Anandapala ... in 1008-09 ... near Peshawar” (emphasis added). Besides a few sentences about how Anandapala’s father had been routed several times by Mahmud, there is no discussion of the motivations or methods of the indigenous defenders. Just the valor of Mahmud is discussed, not his valiant foes. Chandra writes that “Mahmud marched across Rajputana in order to raid the fabulously rich temple at Somnath without encountering any serious resistance on the way”. Chandra adds in this quasi-eulogy, defending him in much the same way as do Pakistani textbooks, “It is not correct to dismiss Mahmud as just a raider and plunderer”.

In contrast, Meenakshi Jain focuses her text on the alliances among the local rajas, such as the Pratiharas of Kanauj, the Chandellas, and the defensive

strategies of the “intrepid Hindushahis”, among others. She quotes from Alberuni who paid a “tribute” to the Hindushahi dynasty that had “expended four generations... in the struggle”. Alberuni had called them, “men of noble sentiment and noble bearing”. She describes several of Mahmud’s expeditions into India, quoting from his “court historian, Utbi, who left a vivid description of the extraordinary buildings that Mahmud saw [in Mathura] which, according to some accounts, included one thousand temples”.

In contrast to what Chandra depicted as a lack of “any serious resistance” against Mahmud when he attacked Somnath, Jain writes that “Mahmud captured the city after a grim struggle in which more than fifty thousand defenders⁶⁶⁷ lost their lives”. She again quotes Alberuni, who described the demolition of the temple. She concludes the episode saying that on his return home, Mahmud’s “soldiers suffered many hardships ... partly due to pressures from the Jats of Sindh”⁶⁶⁸.

In Satish Chandra’s version, the Jats are cited more often for pillage than are the invading Islamic armies. The representations of the Jats as found in Chandra’s narrative is the reason members of the Jat community filed a writ with the court citing their complaints against the old NCERT textbooks. Chandra’s treatment of Mahmud of Ghaznavi and his armies is more positive than his comments about the role of the Hindu communities in medieval India.

⁶⁶⁷ The use of the word defenders here has subtle but serious implications. It implies that the Muslim armies were not welcomed, as the earlier versions of NCERT history had described. It also implies that the Hindus were the defenders and the Muslims the attackers, which does not paint a picture of communal harmony during this period.

⁶⁶⁸ Here the Sindhis get their “h”.

How Many Qassims, Ghaznvis, and Ghoris Do We Need?

Mubarak Ali, a prolific and insightful Pakistani historian, wrote an article in September 2000, *How Many Qassims, Ghaznvis, and Ghoris Do We Need?* Mubarak Ali's analysis discussed the valorization of the Arabs and Turks who had ravished the land that is now Pakistan. Mubarak Ali marvels that it is the foreign invaders who looted the wealth of the land who are today's heroes and role models in Pakistani history.

Muhammad b. Qasim, Mahmud of Ghazna, and Shihabuddin Ghori emerged as powerful symbols in Muslim politics in the context of the 1930s' communal atmosphere in India. Interestingly they continue to be used as symbols of perfect Muslim heroes who have the ability to restore peace and order through their belligerence. [...] The consequences of hero worship have resulted in disaster for Pakistan. Following the footsteps of the conquerors, the rulers of Pakistan treated it as a conquered country and, therefore, legitimated plunder and loot of its wealth and resources. The only difference between them and the model conquerors is that in the past the wealth was taken away from India and deposited in the state treasuries of Damascus, Bhagdad, and Ghaznin. Now the Swiss banks or American and Western countries provide safe haven to the plundered wealth.⁶⁶⁹

Vis-à-vis the positive treatment of Islamic invaders, the old NCERT textbooks more closely follow those in Pakistan. The following brief comparison can help to show this. In an article, "Murdering history amounts to state-sponsored terrorism", that appeared on April 4, 2003 in *The Friday Times*, a newsweekly, in Lahore, Pakistan, Mohammad Shehzad wrote,

Social studies textbooks in the Urdu language, printed by the government and used in government-run schools and institutions, fudge facts and indoctrinate students with a jaundiced worldview. Shehzad explains that social studies in Pakistan "is compulsory for students" in all

⁶⁶⁹ This article was sent to me via email by Mubarak Ali.

schools, both state-sponsored and private. The textbooks they are required to use “have been written at the behest of the state and project a certain idea of Pakistan, its supposed friends and adversaries”. Shehzad describes the narrative style and contents of textbooks in Pakistan,

The books ... are [the] literary equivalent of hate speech. These books would not be out of place in any madrassah preparing the young for an early grave. ‘Hindu’ India and Britain are depicted as enemies while Saudi Arabia and the Muslim Ummah are extolled. The Pakistan Army and its ‘three decisive victories’ over India are mentioned liberally and are an example of how institutional attempt has been made to rewrite history. Words like ‘dark’, ‘ugly’ and ‘short’ are used to describe Hindus while Muslims are presented in glowing terms. Atrocities committed by Muslim invaders are glossed over while those by Hindu and Sikh invaders magnified. Invasions led by Muslims are justified as having been necessary for the expansion of Islam whereas Hindu-led invasions are depicted bleakly. Hindus are also reported as having colluded with the English to suppress the Muslims,⁶⁷⁰ according to these books.

The Friday Times article includes a few more quotes from Pakistani social studies textbooks “Gandhi was with the Muslims and against the English when the Caliphate Movement started but without giving any reason switched sides. *This is typical of Hindus*” (emphasis added). Shehzad writes that the Congress Party is “accused of masterminding acts of violence and aggression against Muslims and plotting to install ‘Hindu Raj’ upon the end of British rule”. He cites another quote from a Pakistani textbook,

The national anthem, ‘Banday Matram’, is un-Islamic and preached hatred against Muslims. Recitation of it was made compulsory in schools; children were made to worship Gandhi's portrait and salute the Congress flag... This was a bald attempt to undermine and forcibly replace Muslim traditions and culture. Muslims were embargoed from government services and disallowed from freely practicing Islam.

This insightful article continues, in Pakistani textbooks the ‘Muslim League

⁶⁷⁰ IN Hari Om’s book it was the Muslim who colluded with the British.

leaders are portrayed as possessing the patience of saints and the party is extolled for its role in the creation of Pakistan". The Ideology of Pakistan, designed to justify the Two-Nation Theory, was formulated by historians such as I.H. Qureshi and rulers such as Z.A. Bhutto and Zia-ul Haq. It is the foundation of this narrative, "The Hindus were biding their time and wanted, once the British left, to rule over Muslims to take revenge for the time they spent under benevolent Mughal rule".

Shehzad's study of social studies textbooks in Pakistan mirrors my own research, found in chapter three on Pakistan in this dissertation, "The Islamization of Pakistani Social Studies", where the numerous books I investigated glorified the more violent manifestations of "jihad". *The Friday Times* article concurred, "definitions of jihad in the books [describe] it as a religious duty to war against India". Shehzad again quotes directly from the textbooks,

'Muslims have always helped the Hindus who have only returned the favour by massacring innocent Muslims,' the textbook for Class IV makes plain on Page 85. 'India is an enemy. Its designs are nefarious. We should receive military training so that we could fight our enemy,' it suggests on Page 112. The propagation of the caste-system and of medieval practices such as satti (burning a widow on the husband's pyre) are used to illustrate the inferiority of Hindu culture.⁶⁷¹

These quotes from Pakistani textbooks bring us back to New Delhi, where left-leaning critics of the new NCERT textbooks have repeatedly accused the HRD Minister of aping Pakistani's theocratic approach to historiography. Ironically, as can be seen from the above comparison, the old NCERT textbooks mirror the Pakistani version of the historical narrative more closely. In Pakistani textbooks the heroes of medieval history are the Islamic invaders, the Arabs, the Central Asians, the Turks, including the most ruthless of the Persians and

⁶⁷¹ Shehzad, Mohammad. "Murdering history amounts to state-sponsored terrorism", *The Friday Times*, Lahore, Pakistan: April 4, 2003.

Afghanis who ravished the countryside for centuries. These raiders and military men, many of whom never stayed long enough in the Subcontinent to establish kingdoms, plundered Peshawar, Lahore, Multan, and Sindh mercilessly for hundreds of years. They laid waste to the urban centers and the countryside of the land that is now Pakistan. But they are considered heroes.

Stories about the of resistance that the Islamic armies encountered among the peoples that inhabited Afghanistan and what is now Northwest Frontier Province are not included in Pakistani narratives nor the older NCERT versions. It took hundreds of years of violent conflicts to convert the Pakhtuns to Islam, unlike the “heady” tempo of empire building in the first centuries after the death of Muhammad. Islam swept across North Africa, Assyria, Babylon. Persia, but the armies and the doctrine of Islam met a roadblock in what is now Afghanistan, Pakistan’s Northwest Frontier Province, and West Panjab. Fierce as they may have been, the local inhabitants of northwest India, during the eighth and ninth centuries--Hindus and Buddhists, whose descendants were eventually converted to Islam--do not figure into the story of the Pakistani nation, or in the old NCERT textbooks.

A few Hindu kings and kingdoms have found their way into Pakistani textbooks, such as Raja Dahir, who successfully resisted numerous Arab invasions before he was defeated by Muhammad bin Qasim in Sindh in 712 A.D. That he successfully repelled over a dozen Arab invasion attempts is not mentioned, only his defeat. Raja Dahir, and any other Hindu rulers that figure into the Pakistani story of the past, are depicted as disorganized cowards ruling hapless subjects who are hopelessly divided by caste. The locals are described, as in Arjun Dev’s treatment, as welcoming the Arab armies with open arms.

Pakistani narratives also portray the response of the local Sindhis in this way, as if there was a welcoming committee up and down the Indus corridor.

Pakistani textbooks also proudly tell students that bin Qasim's army razed several cities to the ground and massacred all the inhabitants. It is not clear if they were killed for waving at the Arab army or resisting the invasion. Pakistani textbooks never mention that for decades, Arab forays into Gujarat and Rajasthan were successfully repelled by martial groups such as the Pratiharas. For hundreds of years, the Arabs in Sindh failed to make any inroads east of the Indus. That this fierce and effective resistance is not mentioned in Pakistani textbooks, is not surprising, but that these historical events are excluded from the old NCERT textbooks written for Indian students is astonishing.

In Pakistani textbooks, nothing positive is said of the locals who lived in the land before the advent of Islam, particularly the evil Brahmans who "burned their wives" and "put lead in the ears of Shudras if they herd the Vedas". The politics, the art and literature, architecture is purely Islamic. There is nothing good about Hindus, nothing worthwhile to include in a textbook. This is the narrative as published by the Textbook Boards in Pakistan and amazingly, in a modified form, also in textbooks published previously by the NCERT. The new volume on *Medieval India* by Meenakshi Jain brings a different perspective to the story of the advent of Islam in South Asia. It situates the local inhabitants along with the invaders, instead of depopulating them from the land and excluding them from the historical narrative.

Hindu resistance to Islamic invaders is not included in the historical narrative, neither Colonial, Marxist, or Muslim. Therefore, the fact that Hindu India was eventually dominated by Islamic dynasties can be blamed on the internal weaknesses of the victims, whose stories were never told. Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains in the medieval era, exist only as a subtext in a tale told through the lens of "Muslim India". When indigenous peoples are discussed they are shown as chaotic, caste-ridden, effete, unable to defend themselves. This

approach of the “Cowering Hindu and the Towering Sultan” is ingrained in the vast majority of historical records, a legacy of schools of thought that have dominated India intellectually for centuries.

The Pendulum

Since independence, modern Indians have been nurtured by a stable democratic government, as well as educational and economic opportunities. Hindu society has had a reprieve from the centuries of violence and subjugation that seriously stunted the intellectual climate. This recovering sense of identity, among a large number of Hindus, has been called a renaissance. Many Hindus have made an assertive effort to challenge the legacies of the one-sided representation of the past described in this analysis. When historians as noteworthy as Will Durant, A.L. Basham, John Mills, Vincent Smith, as well as eminent Indian historians such as D. D. Kosambi, R.S. Sharma, Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib, Bipan Chandra, Satish Chandra, and their colleagues in Indian and western universities have told the same story of the cowering Hindus and the towering Sultans, who marched across the face of unchanging India... it is difficult to set the pendulum swinging, especially where there is no will to change the discourse and often fierce opposition.

The resistance to a reevaluation of history is tenacious. As Prof. M. S. G. Narayanan, chairman of the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR), wrote, “History is constantly rewritten by historians in every country in every age”. He adds that “it is only natural that the intellectual and cultural hegemony of the colonial masters must be terminated, at least after half a century of political independence”. He points out that in colonial historical paradigms,

There was a general tendency to condemn and denigrate everything Indian, calling it Hindu and communal, without realizing the fact that the label ‘Hindu’ did not represent a religion

in the Semitic or Western sense, but a whole civilization which possessed institutions and outlook entirely different from those of the Western civilization. [...] Western standards, capitalist or communist, were applied indiscriminately to Indian history for evaluating the developments in all walks of life. This was evident in the way terms like religion, state, class, empire, nation, law, justice, morality, etc. were used in the analysis and interpretation of the past in India.⁶⁷²

Referring to the standard “history of different political units” in India, Narayanan asserts that they have been “discussed as though they were kingdoms established arbitrarily by some powerful tyrants and functioning arbitrarily without reference to a framework of civilization”. He blames this on a Eurocentric paradigm, that used, “European and West Asian parallels of religious persecution, conversion, state religion, church-state conflicts etc [...] while approaching all Indian phenomena”. About the historiography of medieval India, Narayanan concurs that Hindus have been depopulated from the historical record, and Hinduism has been denuded of its vitality,

The history of India for the period after Harsha was often conceived as the history of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire. Society outside these was neglected as if it was of no consequence. The history of the regions of North East India and South India was often kept out of what came to be regarded as the mainstream history of India. The process of development of the Indian civilization, its formation and dissemination, and the stages of its growth were not subject matter to be considered in history courses taught in schools and colleges.

Both Arjun Dev and Satish Chandra devote considerable space to explaining why the Turkish invasions were so successful. Justifications and explanations of Islamic military supremacy tended to be the primary focus in

⁶⁷² Narayanan, M. G. S. Eurocentric History vs. the Indian Perspective, Chairman’s Column, ICHR Newsletter, Vol. 2, January-June 2002, <http://www.geocities.com/ifihhome/articles/mgs002.html>.

textbooks written by DHG historians such as Chandra and Dev. This approach reflects the reference point of Pakistani historians.

There is a certain irony in the way theoretical orientations of historians play out in India and Pakistan. In India, leftist historians valorized the Muslim invaders and elide or excuse their religious motivations. In Pakistan, leftist scholars focus on the misuse of religion and criticize Ghaznavi and Ghori for extreme violence and looting. Sangh historians would undoubtedly agree, though they would focus equally on the reaction of the local Hindu populations, not just the actions of the invaders.⁶⁷³

Meenakshi Jain's textbook is not written from the holier than thou syndrome that permeates most tertiary historical treatments that approach history as if it were uncontested. She eschews the totality of certainty approach so common in textbooks, and uses more "hedged" as Sam Wineburg suggests or what Krishna Kumar calls a more "tentative tone". She argued her point without being pedantic,

Some modern historians attribute the Turkish success to the internal weaknesses of Hindu society. They depict the caste system as having played a crucial role in this regard. It is said to have restricted participation in warfare to the Kshatriyas, and thereby militarily enfeebled the Hindus and inhibited unity among them. Islam's message of social equality, *they say*, won over large numbers of discontented Hindus who crossed over to the side of

⁶⁷³ In a conversation with K.S. Lal we discussed the anomaly that "Left-centric analyses in India are also similar to those propounded by colonial historians. Internal weaknesses are cited as the causes of Hindu domination and decline. The colonial narrative sees the indigenous cultures as perfunctorily degenerate and in need of reform by the fierce egalitarian sword of Islam followed by the liberal hand of the Raj". Colonial historians and Indian historians differ on the motivations behind the benevolent hand of the Raj, which nonetheless, they all agree, brought a certain level of modernization and mass transportation. The biggest difference between these two narratives is that the British claim they came to India to eradicate the caste system and other social ills, whereas Indian historians cite that their census methods helped to concretize caste divisions. This points to another irony in the Marx-centric view of India in so far as they blame both the British for reifying caste, while at the same time the blame the core values of Hinduism for creating and perpetuating this social injustice. When convenient, they have it both ways.

the conquerors (emphasis added). But this explanation fails to account for the swift collapse of the mighty Persian and Byzantine empires where caste was not a social reality. Nor is the caste factor corroborated by contemporary medieval sources.

She continues her critical rebuttal against the “Cowering Hindu/Towering Sultan” school of thought,

Furthermore, the argument fails to note that recruitment to Hindu armies was never the preserve of Kshatriyas. Peasants routinely served as soldiers, especially during non-harvest seasons, a practice which continued till the colonial period when the British for the first time disarmed the Hindu peasantry. The Kshatriya varna, moreover had always been an open-ended category; any enterprising leader who acquired political power could claim Kshatriya rank.

She gives several examples of the fluidity of the classification of Kshatriyas, and brings up “two other points” to shore up her theory,

First, there is no evidence of large-scale conversions to Islam in the twelfth century. Secondly, there is nothing to show that Islam mitigated social discrimination against the erstwhile low caste Hindu converts.⁶⁷⁴

She adds, “Certainly [the Turks] did not regard the converts as social equals”, and points out that “the Arab conquerors of early Islam were also not known for enforcing equality in the areas they subjugated in Asia and Africa”. She mentions “the highly refined system of racial discrimination, as evident in the slave trade” where “white slaves, designated Mamluks, were entrusted with high office” and they could “become governors, generals, and even sovereigns”. In contrast, “black slaves ... were used mostly for hard labor’.

There are social stratification and codified class systems among not only South Asian Muslims, but in many other Islamic dominated areas. Those who trace their ancestry to the invaders and even back to the Prophet himself often do not intermarry or socialize with converts who lack those class-conscious

⁶⁷⁴ Jain, 2002, p. 30-31.

extraterritorial ties. There has been considerable academic research into this phenomenon. In Satish Chandra's version, this less egalitarian side of Islam is not critiqued.

The argument of the cowering Hindu versus the towering Sultan is oddly paradoxical. The structure and the beliefs of India's indigenous society are blamed for a millennium of military and political subjugation by Islamic invaders, from the eighth to the eighteenth centuries, resulting in hundreds of years of Muslim dominated rulership. If considered in the big picture, between Morocco and Malaysia, India is the only society in which, even after scores of generations under Islamic martial and administrative control, eighty-five percent of the population never converted to Islam, notwithstanding the perks and pressures exerted through the religious ideology of the military political forces.

This represents a civilizational resilience and renewal that is unparalleled anywhere in the world, except maybe Spain, where the majority of the population did not convert, but, the situation was very different than in India and the occupation lasted for less time. The impact on Spanish society was quite different. Nonetheless, this Hindu anomaly of cultural tenacity and unparalleled religious resilience is not mentioned in most historical accounts. Sangh-centric historians would like to bring these questions out of the historical closet.

Why, in a broad view of the history of the medieval world, were Hindus the only group that successfully retained their religious identity? Why isn't this one of the unique paradigms of the historiography of that era? And why are weaknesses in the religion of the Hindus, who were the only group to emerge relatively intact from a millennium of Muslim rule, cited as the reasons for their domination when all the people in all the nations and cultural zones that were occupied by Islamic rulers lost their pre-Islamic religious traditions, except the Hindus? Has one of history's most important questions not been asked?

Meenakshi Jain writes about the cataclysmic results of Islam's encounters with other cultures,

When Islam stepped out of Arabia and extended its writ over the Middle East, it brought about a revolution in the regions it entered. The languages, scripts, cultures and history of the pre-Islamic states were all replaced in favour of Islamic forms. The new identity became so pervasive that all traces of pre-Islamic civilizations were erased from public memory.⁶⁷⁵

In Iran, the Islamic ideology quickly overran the Zoroastrians and within generations took root with the majority of Persians. In Turkey and Central Asia, the local populations, though fierce warriors, once conquered, were rapidly Islamized. In Sindh, indigenous tribal communities became Islamized in the Sufi tradition and then rose to power, ruling independently for hundreds of years. Even the invading Mongols, who decimated Islamic dominated cities, eventually became converts to the faith. The Byzantines, the Egyptians, the Persians, and the Turks may have won or lost some military battles against the invading Arab armies, carrying "the light of Islam", but for whatever reasons, these societies were quickly engulfed religiously.

Once conquered militarily, the religious and philosophical systems of the regions also collapsed and for all practical purposes, disappeared, subsumed or coopted by Islam. In all cases the original culture influenced the manifestation of Islam in a particular area. But, even when local leaders retained political control over their states, they converted and made Islam the state religion, in its various hues and manifestations.⁶⁷⁶

On the other hand, in India, where Hindu traditions flourished, such as Benares, Mathura, and the Hindi/Gujarati/Marathi heartland, and across the Deccan, and over most of South India, fewer people converted to Islam than on

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 121.

⁶⁷⁶ Gail Minault commented that "Islam is different in different places"

the periphery of the cultural zone, where Buddhism was more prevalent. Buddhism, a religion that historiography often represents as a caste-free protestant movement against Brahmin hegemony, was eventually subsumed under the pressures of centuries of destruction of their vihars and the murder of monks and nuns. Since Buddhism was in large part monastically based, when the monasteries were destroyed, the lay people eventually lost their center.

For Hindus, who have few formal monastic traditions, the destruction of a temple did not halt their practices, since every Hindu home has a shrine. Even among the population that lived nearest the centers of Islamic power and influence, such as Delhi and Lucknow, the majority of the indigenous people remained Hindu. This remarkable resilience of culture and religion is unheard of in any other areas over which Islamic dynasties ruled. Though an investigation of these oxymorons could overturn this theory--that the internal inequities in the Hindu system facilitated India's conquest by Islam--it is such a deeply entrenched component of colonial and Islamic historiography, that it may never be completely exposed.

Meenakshi Jain's textbook *Medieval India*, continues to overturn colonial theories, or at least it turns them over for inspection—a pedagogical strategy that was not offered to India's school children in the Chandra textbook. Jain discusses the interface between Hinduism and Islam, “In India, Islam faced an evolved native faith that resisted being supplanted in its ancestral land, thereby creating an impasse that evaded resolution through subsequent centuries”. As she does several times in this textbook, she informs the students about divergent perspectives of historical investigations, eschewing the “history by decree” approach.

Jain takes up another theory popular with “some modern historians” who have hypothesized “that the use of the terms ‘Hindus’ and ‘Muslims’ is

inappropriate for this period as identity formation had not crystallized sufficiently to warrant the use of such categories”. She disagrees with this popular hypothesis because, “It is undeniable that the invaders were deeply conscious of their distinctiveness from the local populace, as evidenced from the imposition of the *jaziya* tax”. This argument about a lack of religious identity among the Hindus of medieval India has been promoted by several western scholars, such as Cynthia Talbot.

This is also the tack taken by Romila Thapar, R.S. Sharma, and Satish Chandra, all authors of the old NCERT textbooks. They argue that the Muslim outsiders inscribed the identity of “Hindu” on the indigenous population, and that until the interaction between these two groups, Hindus did not consider themselves as belonging to a particular culture or civilization. These scholars claim that the people living in one part of India were unaware of their counterparts in other areas, and caste divisions kept the traditions fragmented.

However, architecture and literature can disprove this, and it can be shown that by the Gupta period, during the fifth and sixth centuries, *Santana Dharma*, the indigenous word for Hinduism, was ubiquitous from Kanya Kumari to Kashmir, not to mention the emergence of various sects and religious movements that swept across the hills and plains of the pre-Islamic Subcontinent. Jain also takes on “the claim of Islamic equality versus caste tyranny” which she cites as “essentially a nineteenth century argument”. Jain often uses the said-to-be approach, such as when she wrote, “Bengal is... said to have been won not by Muslim cavalymen, but by the *bara auliyas*, the twelve legendary Muslim militant saints” (original emphasis).

Jain deconstructs another well entrenched theory about the role of the Bhakti movement in the Islamic Hindu interface. She writes,

The Bhakti movement has often been presented as a Hindu response to the egalitarian message of Islam and its spread among the lower classes. But this seems to be an inadequate assessment, as in the Hindu scheme bhakti (devotion) is an essential constituent of *sadhana* (religious pursuit).

She points out that devotionism is an integral part of the Bhagavad Gita, a text that predates Islam by several millennia. Setting aside the historical possibility that Bhakti was a response to Islam, she highlights its origins as a tradition that had evolved in the pre-Islamic milieu. She wrote, the “bhakti movement started in the Tamil region around the sixth century A.D., spread through Karnataka and Maharashtra, and from around the fifteenth century, to north India and Bengal”. She commented that the “leaders of the bhakti movement came from all strata of society”. She doesn’t set the bhakti saints up as anti-caste social activists, as does Satish Chandra, but describes the tradition, without politicizing it as a feudal relationship, as does R.S. Sharma . Jain doesn’t depict Bhakti as a stepping stone to Islam, as did the earlier NCERT textbooks. Jain tells the students that Bhakti’s

chief feature was the emphasis on a loving relationship between the devotee and a personal god. Its popular poet-saints composed devotional hymns in the regional vernaculars and promised salvation to all classes.

She devotes three pages to Bhakti saints from different regions and briefly discusses their literature. This section on Bhakti is far more informative than was the section on Bhakti in the old NCERT textbook. Jain does not, as did Satish Chandra, repudiate some of the saints for selling out to the Brahmans.

Essentially, the only aspect of Bhakti that Chandra focused on was its relationship to the caste system. He wasn’t interested in the spiritual aspects of Bhakti that had popularized the movement across the Subcontinent. Chandra didn’t present Bhakti as an evolution of uniquely Indic speculation. There was no rich description, as in Jain’s textbook about the “*nirguna* ... school ... which worshipped the formless aspect of divinity [...] best represented by Kabir” who

was “considered the preceptor of all subsequent north Indian *panths*” (paths). Jain describes the “*saguna* school” mentioning some of the saints, such as Tulsidas and the impact of their literature on society. She devotes a paragraph to Chaitanya, whose devotional movement dedicated to Krishna gained millions of converts across north India, “and it is believed”, Jain informs the students in a controversial aside, “he converted a number of Muslims”.⁶⁷⁷

Chaitanya is not mentioned by Satish Chandra in the paragraphs where he discusses the Bhakti movement. Chaitanya is found later under the subheading, “Religious Ideas and Beliefs, and Problems of Integration”, which includes information about the founding of the Sikh religion as well. The descriptions of these important cultural and religious movements were not awarded their own subheading and they are presented only regarding their interaction with the ruling Islamic authority. In Chandra’s discussion of Bhakti, Chaitanya was written out of the story, but the benevolence of Shah Jahan and his spiritually inclined son Dara are discussed at length.⁶⁷⁸

Jain devotes a subheading to the “Birth of Sikhism” and a full page to Guru Nanak and the founding of the Sikh religion, and mentions that, “Like Kabir, he believed that devotion to one God could lead to salvation.”. Perhaps because of convention, or oversight, but in the earlier reference to the “personal god” of the Hindus, Jain writes the word with a little “g”, whereas when she refers to the “one God” she uses a capital “G”—so ingrained is the habit to show deference to the Abrahamic *God* but not the Hindu *gods*.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 124.

⁶⁷⁸ Gail Minault commented that “The judgment about what to include or to emphasize is within the province of the author in question. Jain chooses to devote more space to Chaitanya, Chandra chooses to emphasize Mughal tolerance. This is a matter of interpretive option—but both make the point that tolerance and syncretism were characteristic of that age.”

The Chandra book similarly has a page describing the founding of Sikhism, comparing Guru Nanak's teaching to Kabir's. Unfortunately, there are no subtitles to highlight the content of the text, so the reader has to look carefully to locate the narrative. However in that discourse about these indigenous religious movements, there are eight references to Kabir and Nanak's "rejection of caste", two references to their "denouncing idol worship" and several comments such as "people were no longer satisfied with the old religion". According to Chandra, their teachings "coincided with the Islamic ideas of equality and brotherhood".⁶⁷⁹

This discussion in Chandra's book is in the chapter titled, "Cultural Development in India" and several saints from that period are part of the narrative. The gist is that Bhakti was a synthesis between Hinduism and Islam, a contention that Meenakshi Jain brings into question. Chandra concludes his subsection on "the Bhakti Movement", indicating that it culminated with the "religious ideas and policies of Akbar" the Moghul ruler.⁶⁸⁰ Even in his next subsection, "The Vaishnavite Movement", on a page devoted to the topic, there are more sentences that focus on Akbar and Arab and Persian poets than on Hindu poets. The last line of the subsection on the Vaishnavite Movement, states, "This was the essential background to the ideas of Akbar and his concept of *tauhid* or unity of religions". It would seem that the Vaishnavite Movement was only significant in so far as it was similar to and in tune with Akbar's concepts. Its origins and vitality are inconsequential.

The Saffron Brigade Versus Akbar the Great

In December 2000, the Delhi Historians Group sent an electronic booklet, *Saffronization of Education in India* around the globe, with ominous warnings

⁶⁷⁹ Gail Minault commented on this, that "Reading their poetry and prayers, anti-caste and iconoclasm are points that stand out—nothing Marxist there. Kabir is also anti-Mullah".

⁶⁸⁰ Chandra, pp. 126-127.

about how the murderers of Gandhi have taken over the government of India and are planning to abolish democracy and make non-Hindus into second class citizens. According to this alarmist exposé, the Hindu fascists will accomplish their nefarious goals of establishing a Hindu state through their ruthless capture of the historical narrative. Contributors to the booklet, which was seventy pages long, included the high profile members of the DHG, Irfan Habib, Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra, Satish Chandra, Arjun Dev, Sumit Sarkar, a veritable list who's who among Indian leftists intellectuals. R.S. Sharma contributed an article, "Communalism and History Textbooks" and Irfan Habib wrote one titled, "The Rewriting of History by the Sangh Parivar". There were also numerous articles by editors and journalists, including one by Vir Sanghvi "Talibanizing Our Education".

In his article, Irfan Habib wrote,

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. [...] When Kabir died, both Hindus and Muslims came to claim him. For official Delhi of today, this is, of course, unthinkable.

Dr. Meenakshi Jain did include Kabir and Guru Nanak in the new textbook *Medieval India*, written as Irfan Habib characterized it, by the "Sangh Parivar". She devotes more pages to their philosophies and their impact on the society than did Satish Chandra in his narrative about the era. Importantly, the old NCERT textbooks, written using a colonial paradigm filtered through Marxist analysis, certainly read more like the Pakistani version of the historical record than does the new textbook by Meenakshi Jain.

Also contrary to the predictions of the Delhi Historians Group, the new textbook on *Medieval India* does not paint a completely horrid picture of the

Muslim invaders, though it certainly doesn't negate the violence. Jain wrote of Babur that "in addition to being a talented soldier and strategist, [he] had wide-ranging interests and varied skills". She states that Babur was a "Writer of great elegance, proficient in Persian, Arabic... as well as his native Turkish". She tells the students that Babur wasn't initially overtly religious, and only when his troops threatened to rebel, did he engage in the use of religious symbols such as jihad. Chandra also mentions the same instance when Babur faced his rebellious army and broke the wine vessels and urged them to fight the infidels. Jain tells the students about instances where Babur destroyed temples and that he built several mosques, one of which was in Ayodhya. For many staunch secularists in India, daring to mention the Babri Masjid is tantamount to treason., and at the very least provocative.

Satish Chandra discusses aspects of Babur's adventures in Hindustan. He also paints him as a man of character, who "was always prepared to share the hardships of his soldiers" and was "fond of wine and good company [...] a good and merry companion". In this telling, even his not so valiant attributes are readily contextualized and excused,

He did have a streak of cruelty, probably inherited from his ancestors, for he made towers of skulls from the heads of his opponents on a number of occasions. These and other instances of personal cruelty, have to be seen in the context of the harsh time in which Babur lived.

Chandra adds that "though his reign was a period of war, only a few instances can be found of destruction of temples". The phrasing indicates that the author is attempting to downplay the destructions so that he can claim, as he does, that the isolated cases of desecrations were the result of factors beyond the control of the individual Islamic invader.

This narrative is reminiscent of the justifications that Pakistani historians give to humanize and even glorify inhuman acts. In Chandra's section on Babur,

he concludes that the first Mughal emperor “introduced a new concept of the state” in which there was an “absence of religious and sectarian bigotry [...] He thus provided a precedent and a direction for his successors”. Hence, a man who found joy in making mountains of thousands of decapitated Hindu heads, is surmised to have contributed religious harmony to the nation.

It can be extrapolated that this inspiration guided his enlightened grandson, Akbar, to slaughter the inhabitants of Chitor. The last issue taken up in this comparison between these textbooks on *Medieval India*, is how they represent stories surrounding the life of Akbar. This is the litmus of secularism, as far as the Delhi Historians Group is concerned. Akbar is seen as the father of India secularism and the first proponent of cultural integration in India.

In comparing the treatment of the battles that Akbar fought against Hemu, both authors describe Hemu as hailing from a mercantile family and becoming a victorious military leader, as Chandra wrote, “He had not lost a single one of the twenty-two battles in which he had fought”. The main difference in the story of Hemu, is that after he defeated the Moguls near Delhi and occupied the city, Meenakshi Jain writes that he “declared himself independent, and invoking the *sanskritic* monarchical traditions, assumed the title of Raja Hemachandra Vikramaditya”.

Chandra does not mention this interesting fact. It represents a sort of reversed direction of his narrative in the context of cultural integration and the merging of religious categories. It would show how Islam occasionally lapsed back into the Indic instead of the other way around, with the Indic merging into the Islamic. Hemu’s declarations in Delhi represent a trajectory of apostasy that was not allowable in the old school of historiography.

Even when discussing the origins of Vijayanagar, when historical information verifies that the two brothers who founded the empire had been

converts to Islam who returned to Hinduism, Chandra uses the said-to-be approach, beginning the story of their conversion and apostasy with the phrase, “according to legend”. Meenakshi Jain, dismisses the argument that their apostasy was a myth, and cites contemporary accounts from “Isami and Barani [...] that the brothers apostatized from Islam”.

Another tale associated with the reign of Akbar is that of Durgavati, a famous Rajasthani queen who, according to Chandra, “ruled the country with great vigor and courage”. He goes on to describe her as “a good marksman, both with guns and bow and arrow”. Adding a literary depth to this historical character he usually reserved for Babur and Akbar, not for their opponents, Chandra describes Durgavati--perhaps to provide a gendered aside to the march of Islam across the Subcontinent.

She was fond of hunting and, according to a contemporary, ‘it was her custom to whenever she heard that a tiger had appeared she did not drink water till she had shot it.’ She fought many successful battles against her neighbours...

Chandra explains that “the cupidity of Asaf Khan, the Mughal governor of Allahabad, was roused by the stories of the fabulous wealth and the beauty of the Rani”. He describes the results, “Though wounded, she fought on gallantly. Finding that the battle was lost and that she was in danger of being captured, she stabbed herself to death”. In an earlier paragraph, Chandra had mentioned another queen, Rupmati, who when captured by the Mughals, “preferred to commit suicide to being dragged to [the] harem”.⁶⁸¹

Compare this with a seemingly less communal reading of these same events in Meenakshi Jain’s version, “Rupmati preferred to take her life than become a Mughal captive”. This is more neutral than being “dragged to the harem”. Jain describes “Rani Durgawati [who] fought valiantly but killed herself

⁶⁸¹ Ibid, p. 154.

to avoid capture when defeat seemed inevitable”. She adds that “a large number of royal women committed *jauhar*” (committing suicide by entering into a bonfire). Both authors speak of the tremendous amount of gold and jewels that the Mughals plundered.

Chandra does not mention *jauhar*, but he shares a detail omitted from the Jain book, telling the students that as part of the plunder, “Kamaladevi, the younger sister of the Rani, was sent to the [Moghal] court”. After her sister killed herself rather than being dragged off to the harem, the students can only wonder about the fate of poor Kamaladevi. If the Delhi Historians group were to compare the two above treatments of the tale of Durgavati, they would consider the Chandra rendition to be fraught with subtle communal overtones—Jain’s, in this instance, is more politically correct.

The manner in which Akbar’s “siege of Chittor” is covered brings us back to the basic dichotomy of discourse, where leftist historians are keen to portray Akbar as fair and honorable, who consolidated his empire through diplomacy rather than bloodshed. Chandra wrote, describing the massacre. This was “the first and last time that Akbar indulged in such a carnage”. He referred to Chittor as a “redoubtable fortress” which, besides its political and geographical importance “was a symbol of the Rajput spirit of resistance”. The fort finally fell “after a gallant siege of six months”.

In the telling of this famous tale, Chandra subtly but repeatedly orients his narrative from the direction of the Moghal ruler, who was keen to destroy the “Rajput’s spirit of resistance”. Jain narrates the events more from the other direction, as if reporting from the Rajput side of the conflict—from the point of view of the defenders and not the attackers. Chandra wrote, “Akbar realised that without conquering Chittor, he could not induce the other Rajput rulers to accept his suzerainty”. Jain writes that the “siege of Chittor must rank among the

bloodiest in Mughal history”. Chandra explains why Akbar needed to conquer Chittor, Jain describes the results.

Chandra assumes complicit guilt of the “peasants from the surrounding area [who] had ... taken shelter within the fort, and *actively aided the defenders*” and were massacred along with “many of the Rajput warriors” (emphasis added). In contrast to Chandra’s assertion that the peasants were guilty of aiding and abetting the warriors on the loosing side, Jain makes their massacre seem unjustified, “The Mughals butchered about thirty thousand peasants who had taken shelter in the fort *on the ground* that they had participated in its defence” (emphasis added)⁶⁸². The use of this phrase expressing doubt is a form of the said-to-be approach that questions the validity of certain historical assumptions. Jain has details that were not included in Chandra’s versions. She describes the carnage, with commentary, “The valiant Rajput defence so enraged the Emperor that he let loose three hundred war elephants on the besieged people. Altogether eight thousand soldiers perished in the battle”.

On the other hand, Chandra states that “The Rajput warriors died after extracting as much vengeance as possible”. This phrasing undeniably describes the events from the view of the victors—who saw the defiant warriors as vengeful. More subtly, they are said to have died, not to have perished. Chandra concludes this recounting of the events with an act of charity and honor on the part of Akbar, who was so impressed with the “honour of the gallant Jaimal and Patta”, two defenders of the Chittor fort, that he “ordered that two stone statues of these warriors, seated on elephants, be erected outside the chief gate of the fort at Agra”. When comparing these two versions, one wonders if the elephants upon which the “legendary warriors” were the same as the war elephants who trampled their comrades to death.

⁶⁸² Throughout, when in quotes, the original British spelling conventions have been retained.

After Chittor, Akbar attacked Ranthambhor, that warranted only one sentence in Satish Chandra's textbook, "The fall of Chittor was followed by the conquest of Ranthambhor reputed to be the most powerful fortress in Rajasthan". He then states, that "As a result of these victories, most of the Rajput rajas, including those of Bikaner and Jaisalmer, submitted to Akbar. Only Mewar continued to resist". There is in this approach a subtle glorification of the subjugation of the Rajput rulers to Akbar who is the victor-- a necessary step to the establishment of his "secular, pan-Indian" empire. The phrasing, that "only Mewar continued to resist" makes that kingdom seem as the last dogged hold out, as far as Akbar was concerned.

Jain projects the events more from the view of the trauma that Akbar's sieges and massacres inflicted on the people, rather than narrating them as necessary steps towards political consolidation. She devotes a paragraph to the siege of Ranthambhor and writes with a very different tone, "Mewar ... kept the beacon of resistance alive". The divergence in narrative style is not transparent.

The most significant variation in the story of the battles that Akbar fought to secure his empire, occurs at this point in the tale. Chandra's narrative omits Rana Pratap from the unfolding of these dramatic events, though he is discussed in the next chapter. Here in the appropriately chronological placement, he does not appear in the old NCERT narrative. On the other hand, Jain devotes almost a full page to the heroics of this character, "who kept up a guerilla resistance against the Mughals, harassing imperial troops and disrupting their supply lines whenever possible".

When Rana Pratap is discussed later in the Chandra book under the subheading, "Relations with the Rajputs" he is depicted as leading a futile if inspiring effort. Though referred to as "chivalrous and courteous" he is called

proud, with references to his “refusal to bow” and his “defiance of the mighty Mughal empire”. Again, Chandra narrates through the eyes of Akbar.

He concludes his discussion of Rana Pratap, stating that, though ineffective in uniting the Rajputs or resisting the Mughals, it was “a glorious saga of Rajput valour and the spirit of sacrifice for cherished principles”. Ultimately, according to Satish Chandra, after 1597 “no Mughal expedition was sent after Rana Pratap” who took advantage of Akbar’s twelve year stay in Lahore and “built a new capital city, Chavand”. Since he was not attacked by Akbar again, his hardships were not all in vain. Though Chandra writes that Rana Pratap was able to establish a new capitol city, his summation negates the effects of Pratap’s efforts.⁶⁸³

Chandra makes an emphatic point, which though justified in this context, is perhaps taken to pedantic extremes. Because Rana Pratap had aligned with “Hakim Khan Sur and his contingent of Afghans” to fight against Akbar, the author could state unequivocally that “this battle... was not a struggle between the Hindus and Muslims, or between the Indians and the foreigners”. While telling this tale of resistance, he wrote that “it is not necessary to discuss in detail the struggle between Akbar and Rana Pratap”.⁶⁸⁴ He meted out the same treatment to the other Hindu hero Sivaji, whose story was also “too well known”, according to Chandra to be repeated.

After a two paragraphs that did not discuss in “detail the struggle” of Rana Pratap, Chandra detailed a number of examples of Akbar’s concern for his subjects and his compassion and generosity. These qualities of Akbar worked to

⁶⁸³ In most treatments of Akbar’s interface with the Rajputs, the exploits of Rana Pratap are not included. He does not appear in standard books of Indian history, such as Stanley Wolpert’s *A New History of India*, OUP 1997, or the text of Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India*, Barnes and Noble, 1986.

⁶⁸⁴ As Gail Minault pointed out here, this is “a possible reading, again—though Rana Pratap has become a Rajput icon in modern times”.

bring all the Rajputs under his control, hence facilitating peace and safe passage in the empire. Since Rana Pratap never submitted to Akbar's suzerainty, and his kingdom remained outside of the Mughal empire, would this imply that his realm was unsafe and remained in a state of warfare, since it was opposed to the Mughal state, as inferred in Satish Chandra's textbook? Perhaps submission is the goal from Akbar's point of view, resistance from the perspective of Rana Pratap—both are important aspects of the tale. Chandra's narrative tells the tale using the former approach. Jain's see the story through the eyes of the latter.

These two books offer many more examples where the same topic is described from different points of view. Like two people looking at an automobile accident from opposite corners of an intersection may see the collision differently. Or when football fans discuss the results of a game, the same action will be seen in a different way in relationship to how it impacted the favored team.

Certainly social forces and cultural interactions are not a game. The simplistic top-down story of the "Great Game" forgets the victims, forgoes nuance for power relations. Such a view of the rise of the Mughal empire, as seen through the eyes of Akbar or Aurangzeb, would see obstacles to their rule as problems. The top down, empire-centric approach is not the only way to write history. Whether a historian sees the action through the eyes of Rana Pratap or through Akbar, does not change the outcome, just the tone of the narrative.

This is the end of the comparison of the two NCERT textbooks on *Medieval India*. The differences weren't staggering in the sense that they told different tales. They told the same story from opposite corners of yet another boxing match in the never-ending battle over history.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸⁵ Dr. Minault commented, "What is interesting is that the differences are not all that great".

Does India's Past Have a Future?

M.G.S. Narayanan, in a critique of Eurocentric history, wrote that many Indian scholars and politicians “who enjoyed power for long [...] were frustrated by the course of direction taken by democracy in India in which the voice of the newly empowered masses increasingly became assertive and decisive”. Narayanan sees this entrenched group of scholars as conservative. Since many of them are leftists, the conservative mantle may seem inappropriate. Their work sought to shine the light of truth at Indic traditions in order to expose Hinduism’s inherent superstitions and social inequalities.

Through the years the intellectuals loosely associated with the Delhi Historians Group have engaged with issues of social change and cultural continuity. Though they indulge in accolades about art and architecture, and cultural integration, their imperative is to root out the Vedic vestiges that they see as a barrier to economic and social development. This goal remains unmet. In spite of decades of academic and political effort on the part of Marxist scholars, Hinduism is alive and well. The Vedic perspective is evolving in the modern period, as it did through the last few millennia. Without addressing this phenomenon, I was told numerous times, that historians of the DHG school run the risk of “being left behind”. Or, and I was also reminded of this many times, as in the case of Romila Thapar, they are awarded prominent positions in Western institutions. The differences are interpretive, and though they both deny the validity of the others’ perspective, it is not a matter of right or wrong, only of differences in interpretation.

Narayanan explained that “conservative politicians and the conservative historians joined hands to resist any change in the writing and teaching of Indian history”. The battle for ownership of the historical narrative is not over, nor is it at a stalemate. Even though the Ivory Towers of western academia have pronounced

judgment on the upstart Indic historians, a dynamic intellectual renaissance is growing in India. Indian scholars, of the indigenous school, are undaunted even though they are not invited to deliver lectures at Harvard or Berkeley. There is a powerful dynamic, though painful⁶⁸⁶ at times, that has enveloped Indian intellectuals, who are reaching into their own civilizational ethos and symbols and are rewriting their story. Narayanan explains,

Fortunately for us, there is a growing number of historians in India, especially among the younger generation, who would refuse to hold any philosophy or ideology of history, be it Imperialist or Nationalist or Marxist, as the last word, the final truth. They are prepared to learn about all new refinements in historical method, in India or elsewhere, to judge everything independently, and to subject all preconceived notions to scrutiny with an open mind, ready to accept anything that is supported by reliable evidence. This new healthy trend has to be encouraged.

Narayanan, in this article in the ICHR newsletter, takes up an important issue regarding name calling discussed in the last section of this conclusion. Here he turns the terms around again, and calls the members of the DHG fascists. He wrote,

We are aware of the fact that certain historians professing to project the Marxist ideology have been in the habit of claiming infallibility and monopoly of wisdom, branding all other historians as reactionary and communal and treating them as untouchables. This intellectual fascism has to be discouraged. What they were enjoying for some time was not a monopoly of wisdom but a monopoly of power in several government bodies and universities. This has come to an end happily. Historical research must now gather new momentum in this country so that our people are eventually liberated from the hegemony of Eurocentric history and enabled to develop their own independent Indian perspective.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁶ Painful in the sense that catharsis can cause introspection and expansion that can give rise to angst or shame or reconceptualizing the world and the self.

⁶⁸⁷ Narayanan, M. G. S. Eurocentric History vs. the Indian Perspective, ICHR 2002

As can be seen by Professor Narayanan's comments, there are scholars who have come forward to argue that rational history does not have to be Marxist or anti-Indian. Unfortunately, as was revealed in this study, comments from the DHG side consist more of heated rhetoric than contextually based critiques. Prof. Narayanan's above quoted analysis was also not free from pejoratives, such as "intellectual fascism". From the data that I have collected about this debate, the DHG is a high profile group who use personal attacks to silence their opponents. These diatribes provide colorful examples of passionate professional positioning about the meaning and function of investigations into the past and their impact on society, but they cannot lead to dispassionate debate.

DHG, Me, and the 'Others'⁶⁸⁸

For me, as a researcher, the level of condemnation and the condescension among historians in India was impressive and easy to document. Uncomfortably, even engaging the Indo-centric perspective as something worth discussing caused a few historians at JNU and NCERT to ask me if I was a fascist sympathizer. Numerous times, I was told that in their estimation the blossoming Indic orientation in the interpretation of history was invalid, dangerous. I was warned that anyone who considered issues broached by the BJP, such as the unequal implementation of secularism in the Indian context⁶⁸⁹ or possible changes in the narration of history, was obviously politically tainted, ideologically contaminated, or just plain misguided.

⁶⁸⁸ In many cases, in my opinion, "saffron-balling" and much of the hysterical criticism of this process of reevaluating India during the past two decades, is akin to "black-balling" that tore apart the American intellectual community in the forties and fifties.

⁶⁸⁹ Article 30 of the Indian Constitution, is considered to be anti-majoritarian, by some groups. This article provides funding and institutional autonomy to non-Hindu schools, it also demands that temples are under government control, but not mosques and churches. A portion of funds given to temples are given to the government, but funds from mosques and churches are used exclusively for religious purposes.

Historiography battles have been raging in the newspapers for years-- editorials, front page headlines, investigative journalism, reports about archaeological discoveries and social studies education controversies. For decades there has been a steady stream of op-ed pieces written by Indian and Western scholars seeking to put a spin on India's vast past legacies. This high level of exposure in the English language news media not only indicates the interest the topic elicits among elite citizens, but reveals the passionate and public stances that scholars have taken.

There are differences, seemingly irreconcilable. And there is very real hatred between the well established, well respected DHG school and the "other" camp composed of retired scholars and lesser known but, stridently informed professors and lecturers in Delhi and regional universities and colleges. The DHG certainly has more influence in the popular media as well as more foreign junkets. The non-leftists, even if they are well-published octogenarians, were represented by the media and JNU professors whom I interviewed as either "pugnacious upstarts" or "opportunistic retirees from third rate colleges". Their sin may have been that they critiqued Marxist analysis, but even more likely they are stained saffron because they had wondered aloud, back in 1991 and 92, if there just might be the remains of a temple under the Babri Masjid.

The protagonists and antagonists, depending on your perspective, take themselves and their ideas very, very seriously. Several leftist historians told me that their intellectual world was falling apart and their life's work was being trashed. Many of the historians and scholars on the opposing side were jubilant, their sitting rooms were abuzz, because their ideas were finally getting some "official" notice after what they perceive as five decades of socialist dominance of the intellectual sphere. During several visits I made to Delhi between 1998 and 2002, the tumultuousness regarding the rewriting of history charged the

intellectual atmosphere and was discussed daily in not only the newspapers, but the Lok Sabha (India's legislative body) and the tea stalls and coffee shops of the capitol.⁶⁹⁰ The people in the villages were less concerned as were the vernacular newspapers.

During several visits to India I interviewed scholars of various persuasions. I spoke with historians from both ends of the ideological spectrum. I met with several scholars who are well-established "Leftist" or "Progressive" intellectuals, regular signatories on DHG generated documents. They detest the BJP and oppose the on-going efforts to "Indianize" the curriculum. They are easy to locate in Delhi, since many of them teach at Jawaharlal Nehru University. Members of the DHG call news conferences and write many editorials in the newspapers concerning India's history wars--they maintain a high profile.

Finding scholars who promoted a "Hindu-centric" perspective was more difficult since most of them teach at smaller, less prestigious colleges. To locate these "saffron historians" I sought out those scholars against whom the DHG positioned themselves. I noted whom they thought represented historians in the "other camp". Several JNU professors said that there were "no professional historians in the saffron camp-- they are all sham historians." Most of these notorious "saffron" historians whom I located told me that during the Babri Masjid/Ram Janma Bhumi controversy, they were "black-balled", as were any

690 This very public debate is not necessarily as popular a topic in all parts of India and may find more media attention with the English press in Delhi than in other areas of the country. According to a friend of mine in Chennai, a native of Tamilnadu, the Delhi intellectuals who are so very upset about the "saffronization of education" use words such as "saffronization" because, "They are that much out of touch with the common man [for whom saffron has positive connotations]. When you say 'English speaking elite', you are really just thinking of a bunch of intellectuals (professors and journalists) in Delhi. The entire population of this vocal group, even those in other parts of India, would be at most a few thousands...I don't think we are talking about more than that...which means that this entire debate is micro...that it does not really matter to the average Indian".

scholars who publicly considered that there might have been a temple underneath the site of the disputed mosque.⁶⁹¹

I was also told many times, by informants on both sides of the chasm, that during the sixties and seventies, as the Indian academic establishment moved more and more to the left, the work of some “nationalist” historians was not considered politically correct.⁶⁹² However, “prior to the Marxist domination of the intellectual space, their books had been valued”. The famous historian R.C. Majumdar was reclassified as saffron, particularly posthumously after the divide that emerged over the Babri Masjid, though none can deny that he was a first class scholar. Even before that, Majumdar’s monumental three-volume *History of the Freedom Movement in India* was suppressed by the Congress Party. Majumdar self published it and it is still considered a classic.

The Indian Council of Historical Research in New Delhi is a drab, darkly lit three storied structure. The ICHR offices are two flights up, in a warren of little rooms with stacks of papers and storage cabinets along the dusty halls. From the parking lot the ICHR building is anything but impressive, a scraggly Pipal tree growing out between the moldy bricks somewhere between the second and third floor. I visited the ICHR several times between 2000 and 2002. Each time there was a feeling of conspiracy. Gathering from what I heard while visiting, there had been history battles before. Fifteen years ago there was a disagreement between the Chairman Irfan Habib and M.G.S. Narayanan, who was associated with ICHR at that time and is now the chair. In an interview in December 2001, Professor Narayanan explained,

Earlier than RJB/BM when I was member secretary at ICHR, and Irfan Habib was the chairman, we had our differences. I found that

⁶⁹¹ This was mentioned to me by numerous intellectuals, for example B. B. Lal, the well-known archeologist, ironically also called “saffron-balling”.

⁶⁹² This was mentioned by K. S. Lal, a prolific medieval historian.

he was doing many things stealthily, unacademic unethical things, acting for this Babri Masjid committee supporting the Imam... Though he claims himself to be a Marxist he used to take instructions from the Imam. I was in the office. I said that he should not do this in his office... he stopped it there.... But he had other means. He was using the ICHR for organizing the All Indian Babri Masjid Committee.

Professor Narayanan also mentioned that leftist scholars such as K.N. Panikkar “used to be so critical of America... When they are here they rail against America, but they go [to the USA] on junkets to trash the Indian government.” “It’s about power,” he added, “to be in the lime light.” Together we lamented the “polarization of academia”. Narayanan pointed out that from his experience

They are the real fascists, you know they do not believe in discussion. With them there is no dialogue; with them, no debate. They simply use these political terms... for the last thirty years non leftists were not given any opportunity, their books were not being taught, their books not recommended.

In my interviews, I have found that the well-heeled and well-known historians associated with the DHG were far less interested in dialogue and negotiation than were the non-leftists, those “scoundrels” labeled “Saffron” who often begged for more engaged debate.

One person in Delhi named as notorious by DHG informants is a retired history professor, Devindra Svarup. I interviewed him in his home which is also an archive of newspaper articles about historiography. The study of the politics of history is his hobby. He is a well known commentator about “Sangh” historiography. He often writes op-ed pieces in Hindi newspapers and indeed, he did seem to know everything about the history wars in India. While I was interviewing him an employee from the ICHR came by to chat about current events at the office.

Professor Svarup gleans dozens of publications daily, he has an assistant who helps him to archive articles about history. After decades of watching the

historiography debates, he is now seeing his orientation gaining centrality. Though many people would undoubtedly find Devindra Svarup's comments problematic, he is very informed about the politics of history and he expresses the perspectives of the Indo-centric historians who are now asserting themselves in India. He said of Marxism,

The problem with Marxist historiography is that they are trying to interpret the whole past within the framework of dialectical materialism—a Marxist framework. Due the focus of science and the march of civilization during the last hundred years the Marxist framework has become out of date. Its philosophical foundations have been knocked out. Now modern science itself is knocking at the door of spiritualism, something that is beyond time and space. Similarly Marx's visualization of the future of civilization did not materialize. Marxism is a failed ideology and so its application to understand a civilization like India is not very tenable... Unfortunately our Marxist friends are captive prisoners of the ideological framework--they say no ideology, no history, this is what Prof. R.S. Sharma said. Everything should fit in the Marxist framework and so they even try to suppress facts, distort facts and misinterpret facts. They want to interpret everything in economic terms, of course it has some relevance, nobody can deny it. But now they are prisoners of their own perceptions and bias, unable to go beyond.

He continued, counting his concerns in strong language,

Secondly they have developed a sense of superiority complex about their intellectualism. And want to dub all others as anti-intellectual. Thirdly, although they profess themselves to be very open-minded, very large-hearted, very liberal, but they practice untouchability in the field of intellectualism and even in politics. So they are the most narrow-minded bigoted fanatics who are not prepared to think with an open mind into the past or the trends which are emerging out of the march of civilization and the march of science. That is the problem. And now they have developed invested interest in their hegemony in academic institutions and if that hegemony is dented anywhere they start howling saffronization, saffronization, saffronization. If any writing goes against their pet theories you are saffronized and you're not a historian. You cease to be an historian,

you are a historian as long as you are with them... They do not allow any difference of opinion even in their own camp. These historians are not prepared to understand the limitations of Marxist approach--they are just fighting a political battle.

When he added, "Marxist interpretation of Indian history is just an interlude it is not going to stay", I asked, "What is going to replace it?" Prof. Svarup replied,

In an actual interpretation the sources speak. It is not going to be something concocted, a framework already decided, not something like that. It is their thing they are practicing, they want to see their image in everybody, a man sees his own image in others. Because these people can not think of history writing without an ideological framework, they think that all others are doing the same thing.

I asked him to explain, "What is saffron history?"

There is no saffron history. It is in their minds. It is their imagination. I would call it traditionalist. I would call it history true to the sources. For example R.C. Majumdar was not convinced that the sepoy mutiny the 1857 revolt was a national revolt and he came out boldly--they call him saffron historian. They labeled him. R.C. Majumdar, in many places has his own approach....But these people think that they are the only intellectuals.⁶⁹³

The academic boxing rounds and name calling continue. Self-identified Hindu Nationalists, who see themselves as *Indian* Nationalists, are referred to as Nazis, fascists, and fundamentalists by members of the DHG camp who self-identify themselves as progressives but are called Stalinists and Maoists by their non-Marxist nemeses. The first camp, the Nationalists, feel that the other camp, the Leftists aka Progressives, have dominated the scholarly discourse in India for decades. DHG scholars are corralling, pulling up the moats of academia by calling their historical others incompetent, firing shots through the media. Like a post-modern Ramayana, the saffron brigade of monkeys and bears is storming the left-

⁶⁹³ I had to agree with him after having conducted numerous interviews. That is what they seem to think--all others are anti-intellectuals. There was definitely a syndrome of arrogant absolutism.

leaning Ivory Towers of Lanka. The pundits are defending their turf against the assault.

When I interviewed Romila Thapar at her home in New Delhi, she was no more or less dispassionate than Professors Narayanan or Devindra Svaroop. She said,

Professionally I am very worried about the fact that shoddy scholarship or the lack of scholarship is now beginning to encroach on the profession and you're beginning to get people talking about things in a way which it wouldn't have happened in the past because there would have been a certain barrier of scholarship which doesn't exist now.

I asked her what those barriers were, she replied, "There was a certain requirement of scholarship. You couldn't just get up and come up with wild statements, and be accepted and be treated seriously". I mentioned that the "Saffronites" would say that "Leftist" historians had exercised institutional hegemony that acted as a barrier to all other kinds of scholarship. They would also say that the leftists had gone overboard in their interpretations and were mining texts prove controversial ideas, such as beef eating in Vedic India and the beneficence of Muslim rule. Prof. Thapar warned me not to over-simplify the issue,

You must get one thing straight. This is not a battle between Saffronites and Marxists. You *must* get that straight. Because this is the kind of propaganda that the saffronites are putting out. The people who are opposed to the Hindutva interpretation of Indian History, half of them are not Marxists⁶⁹⁴. More than half are not Marxists and it's not going to hurt the Hindutva interpretation by

⁶⁹⁴ The historians most despised by the "saffron camp" are those associated with Marxist organizations such as SAHMAT or the CPI, for example, R.S. Sharma and K.N. Panikkar. Prof. Thapar certainly does not have as many tangible ties to Marxist organizations, but her association with historians with these links and her view of historiography, which is very similar to R.S. Sharma, Bipin Chandra, et al, and her very vocal and public advocacy stance, have cast her in with the so-called Marxist camp.

going on saying that the Marxists have gone overboard.⁶⁹⁵ Because there is a whole slew of Indian historians who are writing first rate history but unfortunately are only being read outside India and are not being circulated in schools and colleges in India because of the Saffronization.⁶⁹⁶

I asked her to name those first rate scholars, and she mentioned the Subaltern historians, explaining,

Now they're not Marxists⁶⁹⁷, they've given a completely new turn to Indian history. But they are not the kind of historians who are being supported or propagated by the Hindutva historians, partly because they don't understand them. They are very sophisticated historians. And this is part of the reasons why the Hindutva historians are constantly attacking all of us and saying 'Oh, they are Marxists,' it's because they don't understand sophisticated history. [...] If the whole Saffronization thing succeeds, you will have two types of history in India. You will have one absolutely inane practically, historical writing with all this that everything is indigenous, everything is in terms of the indigenous which is taught in India. And you'll have a much more sophisticated history of India being taught outside.

I inquired, who were these third rate scholars now positioning themselves to take over the historical narrative? The name of K. S. Lal came up, though it did seem a bit unlikely that a retired professor, well into his eighties--whether he was jockeying for position or simply continuing to publish--could be an imminent threat to the scholarly establishment.

⁶⁹⁵ When talking with Prof. Thapar and in reading her articles, it often seems that condemning the Saffronites is more important than dispassionate scholarship. This may be unfair to state, but that is the impression that I got from her. The same could certainly be said for the Hindutva camp as well.

⁶⁹⁶ At the time of this interview the BJP had only been in power for two years and had not exercised any censoring of reading materials for colleges. If Subaltern authors had not been read in Indian colleges for the past decade, as they became popular in courses on South Asia in the USA, it is not because of saffronization. During the fifteen years since the Subaltern series began, the saffron brigade had no influence on college reading lists. This seems to be an alarmist fear rather than a fact. Plus one wonders, when so many of India's scholars during that time were progressives or leftists, why didn't they include Subaltern titles.

⁶⁹⁷ I told Prof. Thapar that my professors at The University of Texas had classified the Subaltern Historians as Marxist. She replied that "Ranajit Guha may be something of a Leftist. But you look at the ones who have contributed to the last five volumes. They are anything but Marxists".

Since I had interviewed Professor K.S. Lal a few days earlier and had purchased several of his books, I pointed out that he was fluent in Persian, Old Persian, Urdu, and several other Indian languages. I asked Prof. Thapar to elaborate, she said, “What he wrote twenty-five, thirty years ago was worth reading” but “recently... he hasn’t written very much...he’s very old and he does the odd newspaper article”. I told her that he had come out recently with a couple of new books, but she wasn’t aware that he was still writing, and hadn’t heard of them.

I had gathered from talking with Thapar’s colleagues that Lal’s early work on the Moghul era and the Khaljis was excellent, but during the past few decades his books weren’t used in colleges, and weren’t recommended, especially at JNU. Most people I talked with about K.S. Lal respected his ability, his dedication to archival research and his command of numerous languages. It would seem nonetheless, that because his interpretations weren’t respected by the Leftists he had suffered from that barrier that Prof. Thapar had mentioned earlier.

The result was that he was shunned but not defiled, he continued to publish but his books weren’t recommended by official educational institutions. Few will deny that he was one of the more capable scholars of Medieval India. However, during the decades of Congress rule he was never asked to sit on the ICHR board, and his research was not funded by such bodies. Though he had not received coveted trips to foreign countries, he continued to research and write, and lived modestly, teaching at smaller colleges and serving as the head of the history department in regional universities. However, according to several informants, when he came out with a book about the population demographics in Mughal India he became the laughing stock of the leftist intelligentsia. Prof. Thapar agreed,

It was a disaster. It was so bad. It was so bad that it just became a joke. You know where he went around saying that such and such a chronicler says that such and such a sultan conducted a campaign in which he slaughtered 80,000 infidels...so, minus 80,000 Hindus from the Hindu population. You can't write history that way. It just does not make sense. It hasn't got the elements of historiography. That's what I mean by shoddy scholarship. No self-respecting historians today would write history like that. It's a much more complicated subject. You can't just do a silly bit of arithmetic and then say that you have done a book on Mughal demography.

I asked Prof. Thapar, "why do you think that people like K.S. Lal, from having been a first rate historian, suddenly turns "shoddy"?" She replied,

He was never a first level historian. He was always a competent historian. And let's keep it at that. And even when he did this book on population and various other things, people criticized it in a healthy sort of way. In the sense that you had a review that said how can you possibly write a book on demography using this type of evidence in this way. The evidence, all right, but you don't use it in this way. You have to be much more sophisticated about how you go about it. So that has been going on for a long, long time.

This political barrier dictating what was considered to be sophisticated as opposed to shoddy was not yet in place when Muhammad Habib⁶⁹⁸ wrote this praise that is included on the jacket of Lal's "History of the Khaljis",⁶⁹⁹

Dr. KS Lal has managed to fill a very important gap in our national history. I have read his work several times with pleasure and profit. He has utilized for his work all contemporary authorities which seem to be within the reach of the present generation in Persian, Hindi and Sanskrit. He has critical discrimination and complete freedom from all prejudices. No student of Indian history can afford to ignore Dr. Lal's excellent work.⁷⁰⁰

698 Muhammad Habib is the father of Prof. Thapar's colleague the well known and very vocal leftist historian Irfan Habib.

699 K.S. Lal, History of the Khaljis AD 1290-1320, Munshiram Manoharlal. New Delhi: 1967, 1980.

700 Comment written by Muhammad Habib on the jacket of K.S. Lal's book, History of the Khaljis AD 1290-1320.

Professor Thapar believes that if the Saffronites have their way, the only good history about India will be written by Western scholars.⁷⁰¹ There are scholars who would offer the rejoinder that much of the history that is taught outside of India, and inside, considers India to be a derivative civilization. There was hardly anything of importance in the Subcontinent until foreigners brought it. Arun Shourie, who is anything but dispassionate, but is a spokesman for the Saffron side, complains that “Marxist historians”

have made India out to have been an empty land--filled by successive invaders. They have made present-day India, and Hinduism even more so, out to be a zoo--an agglomeration of assorted, disparate, specimens. No such thing as ‘India’, just a geographical expression, just a construct of the British, no such thing as Hinduism, just a word used by Arabs to describe the assortment they encountered, just an invention of the communalists to impose a uniformity--that has been their stance. For this, they have blackened the Hindu period of our history, and [...] strained to whitewash the Islamic period. They have denounced ancient India’s social system as the epitome of oppression and made totalitarian ideologies out to be egalitarian and just.⁷⁰²

This observation is shared by an increasing number of scholars who, in recent years have been liberated from what Devindra Svarup called, “the yoke of a leftist dominated academia”. Professor Svarup commented that the “underlying

⁷⁰¹ One example that people often give as a Saffron historian is P.N. Oak, who since the sixties has been writing far fetched books about Indian monuments, such as the Taj Mahal, which he claims was a Hindu temple before it was taken over by Shah Jahan. He very carefully shows his theory about how the Taj was converted from a Shiva temple to a mausoleum. Most serious scholars do not take his work seriously. He has not been appointed to any historical boards or institutions by the BJP. His form of historiography can’t really be classified as saffron because it is more like a conspiracy theory than history. Nonetheless, P.N. Oak’s name is often mentioned derisively as an example of the ludicrous nature of Saffron historiography. But he is not a good example because he is on the radical fringe. Meenakshi Jain and M.G.S. Narayanan are more representative of the Indo-centric school. This term Indo-centric is problematic and some may consider it a bogus category. Just as defining the DHG as Marxist is over simplifying their orientations, so too are monikers for other groups of historians difficult to articulate. Certainly the dyad Marxist/Saffron is untenable. But there are few substitutions, and the battle lines in historiography are drawn, over simplistically, in these terms.

⁷⁰² Eminent Historians, HarperCollins, New Delhi , 1998,

premises of colonial and Marxist history view Indian people as a changeless mass never offering resistance to repeated invasions”. When they are represented, Indians are “made to seem like exotic communities all disconnected from one another with no history”. As Professor Narayanan said, “It was as though India was simply a geographical entity, providing an empty stage for odd characters to appear and move about for some time before their mysterious disappearance”. The earlier analysis of two Medieval India history textbooks, presented some examples of this view of India, where Satish Chandra failed to mention what the inhabitants of the land were doing. Though Svaroop and Narayanan are not necessarily dispassionate in their presentation of their analyses, neither of them are fascists, though the DHG would say otherwise. Both camps are strident.

The cries of alarm about the saffron assault on historiography in India and the infringement of intellectual freedom by the BJP, can often obscure the actual facts. Dharampal the famous historian trivialized the media outcry against the ICHR, “It may be no exaggeration to state that at least 75% of our population has no interest in this coming and going, in this ludicrous tamasha.” Dharampal lamented that the freedom Indian people worked to achieve turned out to be more of a transfer of power from English elites to Indian elites and vested interests are deaf to the mandate of the people—caught in a colonial mindset.

The ordinary people who proved the backbone of the freedom struggle, were shunted back to their ploughs and fields, to their tools and workshops, and we exhorted them to work harder, and assured them that we could take care of India.⁷⁰³

The tug-o-war over Indian historiography is voracious and vicious. The demons and devas are churning the seas of the past. The pendulum only finds a brief pause as it swings past the tamasha of today’s history wars in India. After this revision, and some would say collision, Dharampal’s people, the backbone of

⁷⁰³ The Statesman March 24, 2000, under the headline, “Project That Has Lost Its Purpose”, regarding the outcry over the recall of the Towards Freedom Project.

India, will discover that their ancestors have been rehabilitated, repopulating the historical record. This emphasis on the people, the common villagers and city dwellers, is a topic that has been embraced by the “Indo-centric” scholars as well as the Subaltern project, though there is still much that could be done in this area. The scholars who consider themselves more grounded in an indigenous methodology would do well to look to the Subaltern paradigm. Indian classical literature could lend itself to Subaltern type analysis.

Devindra Svarup claimed the “Indo-centric”⁷⁰⁴ scholars do not follow a theory or a paradigm, “just the source”. However, what they are arguing is a model of interpretation based on Indic categories, from a Dharmic based perspective, instead of the Hegelian worldview. Does this school of thought represent a valid orientation, with categories of relationships and redefinitions of terms? Theories of Karl Marx had to be mulled and expanded by a century of scholars, they are embedded in all discussions of economics or class in contemporary historiography whether “Indo-centric” or some other school. Marx is here to stay as are, without a doubt, the continually evolving indigenous models. As Foucault would say, the power structure is over turning.

This very public debate has been of interest to generations of educated Indians. No one will win the struggle over history because the pendulum will swing again, but the narratives and notions arising from this process will impact Indian school children for the foreseeable future. Even if the BJP loses power at the center, new questions have been asked, and doors have been opened. A reevaluation of India’s history cannot be recalled.

History is an emotional subject, and people are willing to give their lives to tell it the way their group sees it. Because of this seriousness, the statements of many scholars are often over dramatic and even apocalyptic. In India, the debate

⁷⁰⁴ The word needs to be problematized, but is retained for lack of another term.

over historiography is a very public and very democratic controversy over the politics of culture. Many people cited in this chapter, aver that it is a battle over the very soul of India.

This commitment to control the historical narrative in order to construct the story of the nation along particular lines is a phenomenon that can be found in all countries. Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India share this characteristic—where groups of dedicated and driven scholars and ideologues vie to control the sources of knowledge. Whether it be ideological or religious or nationalistic, or a combination, a fervor drives the process of historical reevaluation.

Conclusion: What Flavor of History Would You Like?

Why, beyond reasons of scientific curiosity, do we want to know about the past? And whose past is it anyway? ...the past is big business...the past is politically highly charged, ideologically powerful and significant.

Archaeology: Theories, Methods, Practice

--Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahns

Schooling the youth is viewed as indispensable for social and national development. The purposes and goals of education proclaimed by curriculum committees arouse heated debates and endless discourse in all countries. Multiple variables condition the rhetoric of educational reform, such as the socio-political, religious, and economic orientations of appointed educators or elected public officials, not to mention the reordering of national priorities inherent in a change of government. Investigations into changes in curriculum offer insights into the variable nature of identity constructs through which nations transmit their

aspirations for the future. “In every historiographical design, politics/political ideology is directly or indirectly involved”.⁷⁰⁵

The Subcontinent as Subject

This concluding section brings us back to the core of this dissertation, how historical events are constructed to create a trajectory of national identity formation. To again reiterate the selective nature of historical interpretation that has been highlighted in this research, one event in the modern history of the Subcontinent has been selected and compared across several textbooks. That event is the Simla conference in June 1945, held not long after the war in Europe ended. This was an attempt by the British to keep the Indians behind the war effort until the Japanese could be defeated. The Simla conference was a meeting of Indian leaders, many of whom, such as Gandhi, were recently released from jail in order to attend the conference. Jinnah was also invited.

This event is significant because of the inability of the parties to agree and the total breakdown of the process. It is particularly important from the Pakistani perspective, since it can be counted as the time when the Muslim League gained recognition as the “sole representative” of the Muslims of the Subcontinent. For the Congress Party, it was a time when communalism won the day. As Bipin Chandra wrote about this event,

There was an impression of hope and optimism when the Conference started, but very soon it was clear that Jinnah’s intransigence and rearguard action by the imperialists would make it impossible for it to succeed. The negotiations broke down because Jinnah insisted that all the Muslim members of the Executive Council should be nominated only by the League. Nor were the British willing to sign any agreement with the Congress

⁷⁰⁵ Gaur, I.D. *Essays in History and Historiography*, Amol Publication PCT. LTD. New Delhi: 1998, p. 9.

to which the Muslim League was not a party. The policy of 'Divide and Rule' was at its zenith.⁷⁰⁶

This was taken from a book, *Freedom Struggle*, published in 1972, and approved by a board of eminent historians, including S. Gopal, Satish Chandra, among others. The forward was written by Nurul Hasan. The book was released with fan fare, simultaneously in several regional languages. This sponsored volume, for its time, can be considered the official story of the birth of the nation. It is the story as it still stands. In this rendering, the Viceroy introduced a "divisive characteristic" in the decision that

there would be 'equal proportions of caste Hindus and Moslems' in the Council. This meant that the Muslim League's demand for parity on a communal basis had been endorsed for the first time in an official declaration of British policy.

In another textbook version of the story written by Bipan Chandra, the Simla conference does not figure at all in the well-known college level textbook he co-authored, *India's Struggle for Independence*,⁷⁰⁷ where the conference is named, but not discussed. In the NCERT textbook for *Modern India* by Arjun Dev, the Simla Conference is not mentioned. Also in the textbook for modern history published by the NCTB in Dhaka, for class nine the conference is not part of the narrative. In Pakistan it takes if not a page to tell, at least a paragraph.

In another Indian textbook, *New Approach to History of Modern India and Contemporary World*, by D. N. Kundra, for use in non-governmental "Public Schools", the Simla conference is not mentioned, but this comment appears under the bolded heading, "Undue Importance to Jinnah":

The Congress sought the co-operation of the League to achieve freedom for the country as they thought that their mutual co-operation would help in doing away with imperialism at an early

⁷⁰⁶ Bipan Chandra, Amal Tripathi, and Barun De. *Freedom Struggle*, A National Book Trust Publication, New Delhi, 1972, reprinted 1975, p. 224.

⁷⁰⁷ Bipin Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee, Aditya Mukherjee, K.N. Panikkar, Sucheta Mahajan, *Indian's Struggle for Independence*, Penguin Books, 1987.

date. But this policy of continuous appeasement gave undue importance to Mr. Jinnah who emerged as the greatest opponent of the Congress policies. Maulana Azad clearly stated that it was the natural consequences of Gandhiji's policy of irrational appeasement of Mr. Jinnah that even those among the Muslims who doubted Jinnah's policies came to regard him as a great leader of the Muslims.⁷⁰⁸

In several other Indian textbooks, such as the ones from Tamil Nadu or Maharashtra, the Wavell Plan or the Simla conference does not warrant even a mention.

In a textbook written "in accordance with the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education" syllabus, by S.N. Sen, *Modern India*, the topic is discussed,

Jinnah demanded that all Muslims members (sic) should belong to the League and that in an Executive Council so formed, the Muslim members should have a veto on all important decisions. Such a demand was totally unacceptable to the Congress which had claimed since 1885 to represent all Indians irrespective of their religions. Even to Wavell Jinnah's demand seemed unjust.⁷⁰⁹

In most of the Indian textbooks that I consulted, the Simla conference was either ignored, or mentioned only briefly as an example of Jinnah's intransigence.

In contrast, in Pakistan, the Simla conference found mention in all the textbooks I consulted, even in a textbook for class nine and ten, that had to include Geography, History, and Civics, in a small volume, six by five inches, with 266 pages. Based on a 1967 book, this volume was published by the Sindh Textbook Board in 1973. It explains that in order to "get the co-operation of the two main political parties, the Congress and the Muslim League [...] before the end of the war" Lord Wavell "convened a conference of a few selected leaders at

⁷⁰⁸ Kundra, D. N. *New Approach to History of Modern India and Contemporary World*, Neelam Publishers, Delhi, 2000.

⁷⁰⁹ Sen, S.N. *Modern India*, New Age International Publishers, New Delhi, 1991, second reprint, 1996.

Simla”. The textbook, though very short on space, continues its discussion of this event, central to the final steps that led to the creation of Pakistan,

Some of the Congress leaders were released from jail to participate in the conference. [...] The conference proved a failure. The main reason for the failure was that the Congress claimed to be the representative body of all the peoples in the sub-continent. But Quaid-i-Azam was not prepared to accept this. He demanded that if the Government is to be truly representative, the selection of Muslim members of the ministry should be left to the Muslim League. There was only one outcome of the Simla Conference; all parties decided unanimously that elections should be held at the earliest.

In another textbook, *Pakistan A Historical and Contemporary Look*, Pakistani Studies for ‘O’ Level published by Oxford University Press, there is a full page on “Wavell and the Simla Conference”. The author, Farooq Bajwa tells these top level students at elite Cambridge Schools in Pakistan that at the Simla conference

The Muslim League delegation included the Quaid, Liaquat Ali Khan and Khawaja Nazimuddin. The Congress Party was led by Gandhi, and Abdul Kalam Azad and Khizar Hyat Tiwana were deliberately included in the delegation to demonstrate that not all Muslims were members of the Muslim League.

The narrative continues describing the events day by day,

the Congress Party argued that they had a right to nominate Muslims and that these Muslims should be included in the total number of Muslims. The Quaid was adamant that only the Muslim League had the right to nominate names for the Muslim quota. When Wavell said that he could not accept this demand of the League, Jinnah pointed out that the Muslim League had won every single by election in the last two years and there was no real doubt that it represented the overwhelming majority of Muslims. Jinnah also claimed that if there was to be a simple parity only between the Hindus and Muslims, the Muslims would be constantly outvoted as the Sikhs and scheduled cases on the Council would side with the Congress.⁷¹⁰

⁷¹⁰ Farooq Bajwa. *Pakistan A Historical and Contemporary Look*, Pakistani Studies for ‘O’ Level, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1999, p. 111.

Another text, a reader for university students in Pakistan, *The Genesis of Pakistan Movement, Volume II*, discusses the Simla conference at length. After going through the events step by step, the textbook states,

At this juncture the case of the Muslim League had taken a definite shape. [...] The council should therefore be manned by persons chosen by and enjoying confidence of the various communities. The League represented the overwhelming majority of Muslims, and the League leaders alone should be called upon to represent their community in the Executive Council. While the Hindu Mahasabha has protested against its non-inclusion, no Muslim organization had uttered a single word, and as such had silently acknowledged the League's right to represent the Muslims. The presence of a few Muslims in the Congress in the Conference did not alter the position of the League. Further, the very participation of the Congress and the Conference along with other bodies nullified its claim as a national body. Therefore only the League had the right to nominate Muslims to the Council. Having agreed to the principal of parity, it was not for the Congress to suggest Muslim names, as 'parity would then cease to have any meaning'.⁷¹¹

The university level reader continues, elaborating about the Simla conference, and the flawed claims of the Congress,

The Congress insisted that it was a national and not a communal organization. Though Gandhi had conceded in a statement that it was 'overwhelmingly Hindu', there were many non-Hindus, including Muslims, who counted themselves as Congressmen.

One textbook, *Pakistani Studies*, published by the Punjab Textbook Board, told the nine-tenth class students that the purpose of the Quit India movement was "to force the English to leave India and establish its 'RAJ' after taking over the government". The book, naturally, in order to justify the nation, speaks to the broad support that the Muslims of the Subcontinent gave to the Pakistan Movement and the Muslim League.

⁷¹¹ *The Genesis of Pakistan Movement, Volume II*, edited by Sikandar Hayat and Shandana Sahid, Department of Pakistan Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Allama Iqbal University, pp. 215, from the article "The Simla Conference" by Safar Ul Islam in *History of the Freedom Movement, Part II*, 1970, pp. 208-247.

In the new NCERT textbook for class nine, *Contemporary India*, the author Hari Om, writes that the Muslim League was unreasonable in their request to represent all of the Muslims of India. The Pakistani versions praise “the Quaid” for being adamant and standing firm. The Simla conference was the turning point in the authority of the Muslim League to bargain for the future of Pakistan. This was the time when the British were able to introduce the fact of communal representation based on religion, and the Congress was forced to swallow it, a bitter bill indeed. The textbooks confirm these perspectives.

Even the textbooks in Pakistan that are very limited in space refer to the Wavell or Simla conference, whereas in India, most of the textbooks I surveyed omitted reference to the Simla conference altogether, even the famous and comprehensive volume by Bipin Chandra, et al. Those that did discuss it, see Jinnah’s stance as unreasonable and destructive, leading to the breakup of the nation. The Pakistanis see it as a stroke of genius, leading to the creation of a homeland. In Bangladesh, this event is also of little importance, since Jinnah is not lauded unduly, and the steps leading to Pakistan are just more ropes and chains of political and economic colonialism.

Irreconcilable Differences

The above comparison about a singular event highlights the conflicting nature of multiple historical interpretations. These irreconcilable differences are the foundation of the mutually exclusive narratives. This dichotomous approach is also unconsciously underscored by the internal contradictions in official documents such as the British National Curriculum, that was revised in 1990 to reflect the changing face of the Britain’s increasingly multicultural and diverse population--which includes many citizens from both India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. In England, the new curriculum reforms met the same negative

criticism from British nationalists that the U.S. History Standards received from the rightwing in America five years later.

In the 1990 British National Curriculum, an “integrative” role was stressed for history education “in imparting knowledge of the diversity of cultures within Britain”. In order to achieve this, it was determined that “the study of non-Western civilizations” which includes South Asia, should be taught “*from their own perspective*” (emphasis added).⁷¹² The internal contradictions and the problems in representing these multiple, often conflicting perspectives makes the new curriculum difficult to implement. What is ironic, and something about which the British curriculum writers seem oblivious, is that the identification of a “South Asian perspective” on “civilization” is itself vigorously contested.⁷¹³

Education is seriously embroiled in the realities of power relations that characterize societies. It is inherently implicated in the politics of culture. As expressed by Bourdieu, all pedagogy that aims to reproduce culture is a form of “symbolic violence”.⁷¹⁴ Is it a “violence” justified as a necessary corrective against false propaganda and subtle bias, or is it a form of violence that is seen as a cruel manipulation of facts or perhaps a farcical “ethnic” challenge to standardized, generally accepted narratives? Today, Euro-centric historiographies, generally accepted since colonial days, are being mined by nationalists and post-colonialists for their inherent biases.

In the past, British historians were prone to focus on the organizational contributions colonial rule had on Indian political culture and economics. Similarly, historians writing from an Islamic point-of-view have usually taken the

712National Curriculum History Working Group, 'Relationship of History to the Rest of the School Curriculum', Final Report (London, 1990) p. 183.

713 Not to mention an “Irish perspective”! (etc.)

714 Bourdieu, P. and J.C. Passeron. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, London: Sage Publications (1977).

same tack, focusing on the positive impact that Muslim administrations had on Indian society. On the other hand, a contemporary Indian nationalist or perhaps a Hindu-centric aka Saffron historian may choose to deconstruct both perspectives as expressions of two different forms of imperialism and in response create new interpretations from the available historical data.

Imperatives inherent in the project of nation-building and pressures rising from ongoing social, political, and religious transformations within the population and the outside world work to influence the writing and rewriting of history textbooks. Not only do these conventions and demands set the tone of history textbooks, they determine which tales are selected for retelling and which are not. Descriptions of specific historical events vary widely in textbooks from different countries as can be seen by the example of the Simla conference above.

Irreconcilable readings of cause and effect often leave only geographical features and perhaps a few dates as rare points of concurrence, and even these basic, seemingly non-controversial time/place “facts” are often disputed. Labels are not random and inferences are imbued with exclusivist meanings. In British textbooks, for example, the “American Revolution” of 1776 is often referred to as the “American Rebellion”, whereas the “Indian Rebellion” of 1857 is reduced to the “Sepoy Mutiny” though it is called the “First War of Liberation” in history textbooks published in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

Such interpretive clashes over names, meanings, and causation can exist within a single educational system as in the countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe that in almost a fell swoop moved away from the restricted ideology of the communist state, and quickly recreating themselves in a changing world system, radically rewrote their histories.

Rarely has history been such a subject of controversy. In the former communist world, aroused citizens have toppled statues of Lenin and other discredited national heroes and thrown out history

professors and textbooks as hopelessly contaminated by Marxist ideology. When repressive governments fall from power, whether on the left or on the right, the citizens rush to find historical evidence of the government's previous misdeeds in order to fortify the will to reconstitute their nation.⁷¹⁵

Sometimes history changes before textbooks have a chance to catch-up. As late as 1998, a tenth grade history textbook in South Africa explained that the “blacks were the workers and the whites the bosses because of the white’s man’s ‘high level of civilization and his Christian religion’.”⁷¹⁶ In Russia, the Open Society Institute, funded by George Soros subsidized the writing and publication of new history textbooks. The post-Soviet approach to the events of WWII are reminiscent of the Bangladeshi feeling about the War of Liberation, it is sacred.

Dozens of new publishing houses are churning out textbooks with more or less accurate accounts of Soviet Communism [however] Russia’s textbooks continue to distort the Soviet Union’s participation in World War II, a sacred touchstone in a country more than 20 million of whose people died in the war. New books continue to play down the Allied contributions, and for example, give the Soviet Union undeserved credit for winning the war in the Pacific.⁷¹⁷

Re-appropriating the historical record from the archives of ethnic memory is an essential step in asserting or reasserting evolving expressions of national identity. Historiography is a continual process of renegotiating the past to conform to the needs of the present. Historical narratives develop over a long period of time, as certain perspectives gain preeminence and others fall in to disrepute. In general, in most countries, there evolves over time, an agreed upon story of the nation. Little changes in that established narrative can cause big ripples in the collective personality. How history is rewritten and periodically manufactured is a complex process that is beyond the scope of this study, but

715 Appleby, et al., (1994), pp. 4.

716 “Teaching Myths and History, The New York Times Editorial, February 17, 1998.

717 Ibid.

suffice it to say that it is a continual expansion and retraction of facts and interpretations that are expressions of politically charged imperatives. Sometimes, as in the case of Bangladesh, regarding who declared independence, the perceived need to change the narrative is far more important than the actual desired changes.

Rewriting history becomes an urgent mission since the rapidly approaching future depends on instilling these newly created or recently resuscitated ideals of nationhood into the minds and hearts of the next generation. This urgency reflects the understanding that the stability of one particular ideological perspective is tenuous and fleeting and so must quickly be implemented so as not to squander the moment while the power to rewrite history is within grasp--to right old historical wrongs.

Of particular urgency for curriculum writers is inculcating ideals of national unity among minority populations to prevent fissiparous political movements. This drive towards national consolidation has the tendency to deny the validity of minorities identities. At various junctions, the movement will be in one direction then another, depending on the dispensation. Sometimes the stories of some groups are romanticized, and at other times demonized. The pendulum swings, often knocking down whatever school of thought may be in its path, as it cuts a swath across time and space and back again.

The goals of education, beyond the ubiquitous objectives of the three R's, are in a perpetual state of flux in all societies and dependent on variables outside the classroom in the broader social milieu. The content of social studies textbooks is the politicized academic workshop where nations construct their identity. The history curriculum is the theatre where nations fulfill the strident urge to inculcate their progeny with a sense of patriotism and love of country that will help to

guarantee the future survival of the state.⁷¹⁸ The teaching of nationalism, as a required component of the social studies curriculum, will also, as a most necessary side-effect, help to create a population that is patriotic to the point of giving up their lives for their country, or the lives of their sons and daughters. In the case of Pakistan, the religious foundations of the nation predetermine the narrative, and in that context, God and country are confounded, doubly appealing motivation for martyrdom.

Somewhere in official educational circles, there are decisions made as to whose knowledge is deemed worthwhile to transmit to future generations as a touchstone of the national ethos, while the culture and history of certain minorities or other sub-national groups are often ignored if not defiled. How these top-down mandates or mere shared assumptions become institutionalized varies from example to example. The why and the wherefore that guide historical orientations are very difficult to deconstruct and understand their origins, though various perspectives are specific and pervasive.

Sometimes certain points of view are not mere oversights or technicalities of interpretation but the result of hegemonic forces. They are seen, as imagined by those “Indo-centric” historians discussed in Chapter five, as civilizational conspiracies that disregard millennia of documentation. Given the scope of disputed facts and contested historiographies, this study only scratched the surface of this topic.

718 It was discussed in Chapter Five on Indian narratives, that sometimes the state sponsored textbooks can have an anti-nationalism bias, and work to diminish the importance of the “nation’s golden past”.

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