

Understanding Public Discourse on History Textbooks in India

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Abstract

The textbook is a major educational tool for the students in India occupying most of the educational space in schools. With a wide reach and potential to shape the minds of the younger generation, textbooks profoundly influence children on what they learn and how they see the world. Textbooks, are not just pedagogic tools but also a crucial disseminator of what people want to pass on to the next generation all over the world. As a result, textbook content is a hotly debated topic around the world. Among all disciplines, history textbooks invite most contestations and controversies. Some of the most virulent debates on textbooks throughout the world revolve around history textbooks. This is because, unlike mathematics, science, or geography, history deals with issues of nationality, culture, and ultimately, identity. It is history that, to a large extent, defines who we are, where we come from and where we might be going. This is possibly why, in a diverse country like ours, the issue of history textbooks becomes a hotbed of contestations and divergent interpretations. Various debates and controversies erupting regularly over historical distortions, writing and rewriting of history textbooks, attest to this. Therefore, textbook content is critical and has a direct effect on students' educational progress. This paper looks at various such issues and concerns raised in letters by various stakeholders on history textbooks of NCERT from 2005 till 2020 and attempts to highlight public discourse on history textbooks in India and their implications for future history textbook writing.

Keywords: history textbook, India, historical distortions, controversies, primary sources, multiple perspectives, thematic approach.

Introduction

As an apex institute, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) was established by the Government of India, to advise and assist the Ministry of Education in the formulation, and implementation of policies in school education. It was entrusted with designing the national curriculum frameworks and syllabuses for all the school stages and preparing model textbooks. These textbooks are adopted and adapted by different states of the country. However, education comes under the 'concurrent list'

of the Indian constitution, which provides states freedom of adoption or adaption as per their requirement. But several state boards consider the NCERT syllabuses as guidelines for developing their own syllabuses, and textbooks. The NCERTs pioneering efforts in preparing model textbooks are well known. Over the years, these textbooks have been widely used, emulated, adopted and praised for their content and quality. The unique participatory process of design and development of textbooks at NCERT has also made a name for itself. And that is the reason, people have high expectations from

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NCERT, and they keep on writing to NCERT through ministry or directly over the content and quality of its textbooks.

The present paper is an attempt to look at various such issues and concerns, raised by various stakeholders, on the history textbooks published by NCERT, in numerous comments, suggestions, queries, petitions, and grievances that the NCERT received since 2005 till 2020.

Curriculum Frameworks and Textbooks in History So Far

The NCERT so far has developed four curriculum frameworks in 1975, 1988, 2000 and 2005 respectively. The first textbooks in history, published by NCERT, appeared in the late 1960s and 1970s, which remained in regular use until 2002-2003. When there was a change in the government in 1999, a process of curriculum revision was initiated. At the end of 2000, a new National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) was published; new syllabuses were released in 2001 and new textbooks appeared between 2002 to 2004. After a further change of government, National Curriculum Framework (NCF) appeared in 2005, followed by syllabuses, and the first books were published in 2006.

In India, reports of the Committees, and Commissions set up by the governments or by national leaders are used to select and organise social science syllabus topics and present or publish textbooks. So, the curriculum development agencies here were suggested different approaches to implement change in social science teaching—disciplinary and integrated. Until 2000, the disciplinary approach was followed. History was a separate subject with its own textbooks, alongside other subjects of the social sciences. With the curriculum reform of 2000, an attempt was made to adopt an integrated approach in social sciences from upper primary (Classes VI-VIII) to secondary stages (Classes IX-X), with one textbook for

each Class from VI to X. However, these books contained different units for individual component subjects. As in the past, in the higher secondary stage (Classes XI and XII), history remained an elective subject, like other social sciences, and followed a disciplinary approach with separate textbooks.

Following the curricular reform of 2005, social science subjects have been presented as ‘interrelated,’ subject, though there are separate textbooks for history, geography, social and political life at the upper primary stage and history, geography, political science and economics at the secondary stages. At the higher secondary stage, the disciplinary approach has been followed in all subjects and history remains an optional subject.

Before 2000, history followed a chronological order, presenting Indian and world history separately. With the reform of 2000, a thematically integrated approach in social sciences was introduced, which focused on India and the World at the upper primary stage and Contemporary India at the secondary stage. However, the chronological approach remained in the history units. Topics related to India’s ancient, medieval, and modern past and contemporary world history, were focused on in the history syllabus at the higher secondary stage.

The curriculum revision of 2005 brought a new approach to history teaching. The history syllabus at the upper primary stage focuses on Indian history from the earliest times to the present and covers one chronological time span in each class, though the periods are not labeled conventionally as “ancient”, “medieval” or “modern.” The history syllabus at the secondary stage has made an attempt to study some diverse forces and developments that have shaped the history of the contemporary world locating India within that larger history through selected themes. The syllabus in history at the higher secondary stage has been organised on important ‘themes’ of World History and Indian History.

Grievances, Suggestions and Queries Received from Stakeholders

As an apex institution, NCERT regularly receives comments, suggestions, queries, petitions, grievances, Parliament Questions, RTIs on the content and quality of its textbooks. It is interesting to note here that one such person, who sent a number of RTIs on history textbooks, prepared following NCF 2005, was dissatisfied and filed a case in the Haryana (a state in India) court later. The same person has also come out with an independent book, the Brainwashed Republic alleging NCERT of the ‘insidious distortions’ in the present history textbooks. For convenience’ sake, while talking in general, the word ‘letter’ has been used for different types of public grievances and suggestions. If remarks are made for a specific type of letter in the paper, then that has been mentioned clearly.

Types of Letters

The NCERT receives comments, suggestions, queries, petitions, grievances, Parliament Questions and RTIs from different stakeholders, expressing their concern over various aspects of syllabus and textbooks in all subject areas, but maximum is received for History. NCERT receives a lot of grievances through a portal on Grievance Redressal System. The web-based Centralized Public Grievance Redressal and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) was introduced in all the Government of India’s Ministries/ Departments in 2007, but it wasn’t, until 2014 that the Department began receiving many grievances. A Parliament Question, is a question put formally to a government minister about a matter they are responsible for by a Member of a Parliament. The Right to Information (RTI) Act was enacted in October 2005, following which any citizen of India may request information from a “public authority” (a body of Government or “instrumentality of State”) which is required to reply expeditiously or within thirty days.

So, from 2006 onwards, NCERT has started receiving a lot of RTIs. Cases have been filed in courts of law on the content of history textbooks, while sometimes First Information Reports (FIR) have also been filed against authors of some textbooks. In the past few years, social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, have also been active in posting/ raising various issues and concerns related to history textbooks.

Who Sends These Letters and Where Do These Come From?

The NCERT receives letters from students, teachers, parents, scholars, researchers, students preparing for various competitive exams, members of parliament, ministers, journalists, common people, societies, and organizations established in names of various personalities and religions, and various school boards, etc. Sometimes people from outside India also express concern over the portrayal of specific personalities in Indian school textbooks. For example, the Minister of Environment, and Green Development of Mongolia in 2014, wrote to the then Ministry of Human Resource and Development, MHRD (now Ministry of Education) over mention of Changzhis Khan as ‘man eater’ in an Indian History textbook for Class IX.

These comments, suggestions, queries, petitions, grievances, Parliament Questions and RTIs, are received from different parts of the country. Sometimes, NCERT receives letters from people of Indian origin or Indian people living abroad also.

The Subject of the Letters

The subject of these comments, suggestions, queries, petitions, grievances, Parliament Questions and RTIs, varies. The subject of the letters has been identified here based on the frequency of letters received on a particular subject. Depending upon the subject of such letters, the letters may be put under the following four categories:

Grievance/Comments

- Overall structure and framework of history syllabus and textbooks. Questions are raised frequently over the omission of history of important periods of Indian history like the entire Vedic and Post Vedic period (2000-1500 BCE), then 600-1000 CE and the period of the growth of nationalist consciousness, political parties, the Partition of Bengal, Swadeshi movement, etc. during 1858-1915.
- On factual errors in textbooks, particularly related to dates.
- On interpretations of historical artefacts or events, alleging NCERT textbooks of presenting one-sided or biased view. For example, labelling the 1857 revolt as 'mutiny' or 'popular rebellion'; describing 'lingas' found from sites of Harappan civilization as a 'toy' and not providing other alternative explanations.
- Disrespect to great men and religious leaders. For example, describing Rama and Krishna as mythical characters, distorted history of Jaina Tirthankaras (in textbooks prior to 2002), mentioning Sikh Gurus without honorifics, mentioning Aadi Guru Shankaracharya as Shankara only, Meerabai as a 'wanderer', to name a few.
- Objections are raised over the appropriateness of words like, 'terrorist' for revolutionaries (pre 2002 textbooks) or 'refugee' or 'sharnarathi' for people who came to India from Pakistan, during partition, use of the word 'invaded' for coming of Indian National Army to free India from British control, etc.
- Objections over stereotyping specific communities. For example, mentioning Nathuram Godse as *Brahman* or use of words like, *Mahar* or 'untouchable' for people coming from specific communities with an intention of stigmatizing a community.
- Objections over alleged 'insidious' distortions like the narrative on Aryan

Invasion Theory (AIT). Authors have been alleged that though they are not talking about AIT directly but are peddling the same view through selectively quoting individuals or presenting a narrative, which presupposes the AIT.

- Questions are raised over the dominance of a particular ideology in the textbooks. For example, communist ideas in the textbooks.
- Objections over 'regional imbalance' in textbooks and not portraying the history of various regions, and people like north-east, south, Maratha's, etc.
- Portrayal of Indian history in foreign school textbooks. For example, questions were raised, and comments sought in letters to NCERT over 'distorted' presentation of Indian history in middle school history textbooks of California.
- Questions are raised on the distorted content in history textbooks published by private publishers with a request to rectify it.

Suggestions/requests

- On the importance of history and how history should be taught to students.
- Inclusion of life history and works of various personalities. For example, Sukhdev, Rajguru, Shankaradeva, Lachit Borphukan, Martand Verma, Abdul Hameed, Surajmal, Satguru Ramsingh, Maharana Pratap, Shivaji, Shaheed Balak Baji Rout, Banda Bahadur, Sahibzade, Ambedkar, Sikh Gurus, Rani Gaidenliu, Kanaklata Barua, Rao Tularam, Mahatma and Savitribai Phule to name a few. Sometimes specific communities also write to get their important personalities reflected in textbooks like Jhalkari Bai, Uda Devi Pasi, Tilka Manjhi, Suheldev, etc.
- Inclusion of hitherto unrepresented important historical events like the Saragari war, about Indian National Army, naval mutiny, Kuka movement, etc.

- Deletion of some topics or details, particularly on Mughal history.
- Recent advances such as genetic evidence are suggested to be taken into account instead of repeating the age-old Aryan Invasion Theory, not accepted anymore.
- Writing a saint or personality's name correctly like writing Jnaneshwar as Dnyaneshwar, a saint-poet from the Maharashtra region.
- Sometimes researches are shared by people writing letters to get it authenticated by NCERT and accordingly giving space to their researches in the textbooks. For example, success in reading Indus script.
- Sometimes outcomes or proceedings of seminars related to debatable issues like Aryan invasion/migration in history is shared to modify the textbook content accordingly.
- Addition of more content on personalities already covered and presented in some forms in NCERT textbooks. For example, more coverage is demanded to revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad, etc. and people like Vivekananda, Subhash Chandra Bose, Jain Tirthankaras, Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, etc.
- Inclusion of content on post-independence Indian history and 'emergency.'
- Frequent requests to have more content on Indian history, particularly India's rich cultural heritage, the contribution of India in different spheres of life such as science, art, architecture, heritage, philosophy, etc., and freedom struggle.
- Frequent suggestions to give space to the messages of all major religions in the textbooks. The majority of letters in this regard want Gita to be taught compulsorily to school students, while others want epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata too to be taught as a part of the school curriculum.
- Having moral education to be a part of history.
- Requests to declare specific days or name roads, hospitals, streets, airports, schools on some personalities. For example, declaring places related to Bhimrao Ambedkar as 'teerth.'

Queries

- At times articles/news items related to history debates/controversies are sent for clarification.
- RTIs, especially raise the following type of queries:
- Answers to specific questions related to some facts or dates in the textbooks.
- Authentic answer to a particular question or set of questions asked in some competitive exam.
- Most of the times questions seek primary source/sources on specific information/statements made in the textbooks.
- Minutes/notigs related to textbook development work meetings are also sought.

While browsing through the letters received between 2005-2020, the author comes across a few sporadic but interesting letters. For example, in recent years, after the coming of the new government National Democratic Alliance in power in 2014, some letters enquired/sought content on Nath cult, Kashmiri Pandits, V.D. Savarkar, Kashi Vishwanath temple, etc., in the history textbooks. A similar thing is noticed during the previous United Progressive Alliance government when Muslim organizations and Member of Parliament sought inclusion of Muslim heroes in curriculum who contributed to the freedom struggle.

How Do We Respond? Issues and Challenges

Many letters and representations raising issues and concerns over NCERT's history textbooks are addressed to the Ministry of Education, Prime Minister's office, and President of India's office. However,

other letters are addressed to the Director, NCERT and sometimes to the Head of the Department (HoD) of Education in Social Sciences, which deals with the subject history along with the other subjects of Social Sciences. Letters, thus coming from different quarters, are first received at the C & P Section of NCERT and then marked to the concerned department's head. The HoD, then marks the letter to the concerned faculty member in the subject to respond. Once received by a faculty member, the letter is thoroughly reviewed and an appropriate reply is prepared and submitted to the HoD for onward transmission. Different kinds of letters require different amount of time. For example, some letters which seek clarification or correction in some factual inaccuracy or printing mistake, require less time to respond than letters seeking primary sources for statements in the textbook. Sometimes, a discussion is required among faculty members in the subject to prepare an appropriate reply. Lots of challenges are faced while replying to these letters. Some such issues and challenges are:

- There are some letters, especially RTI applications, which seek information on primary source/s based on which some statements have been made in the textbook/s. This becomes a challenge. The present history textbooks of NCERT were developed during 2005-07. The textbooks for Classes VI-VII were developed by the Textbook Development Committees (TDC), consisting of subject experts and practicing teachers. In the TDC meetings, rough drafts were brought by subject experts, which were discussed, improved upon by the members and activities, and questions were added. For Classes IX-XII, chapters were written by individual authors, and then shared and discussed among the TDC members. The textbooks, thus, prepared, though carry excerpts from many primary sources, don't provide a reference for specific source excerpt/s used in the textbook. In such a situation, it becomes difficult for the department to

share the exact reference or source used by an author.

- Letters received on same personalities or event, at times are in conflict with each other. For example, we often get letters to acknowledge and mention the contribution of Suheldev, an Indian king from Sravasti (a place in the present state of Uttar Pradesh) and mention him as a Pasi leader, while other letters do want a space for Suheldev but want to mention him as a Rajbhar king. Both communities (Pasi and Rajbhar) claim that Suheldev belonged to their community. To answer satisfactorily on this matter becomes a challenge, as we don't have sufficient research-based content on these regional personalities.
- Questions raised on the content of history textbooks, published by the states, pose a challenge. In India, education comes under the 'concurrent list' of the Indian constitution, which means both the centre and the states can legislate on any aspects of education from the primary to the university level. So, in case of any misrepresentation of facts or choice of themes or deletion of a topic, NCERT cannot put pressure on states and can only provide suggestions.
- Many times, letters are received raising objections over content in school history textbooks, published by private publishers. In India, thousands of private publishers, publish school textbooks. In the initial pages of most of these textbooks, publishers claim to bring the content as per the curriculum framework and syllabus of NCERT. Some provide quality content, while many others have lots of problems regarding content, presentation of historical facts and interpretation, printing, etc. In India, we don't have a mechanism to regulate the content of textbooks published by private publishers.
- Letters also seek inclusion of a number of topics focusing on regional history, events and personalities. These issues are

difficult to address immediately. These issues are responded to by explaining in detail the rationale and objectives behind the present textbooks, so that, the person writing is able to understand it clearly and see his/her suggestion in the light of the overall curriculum framework, principles, and the bases on which these textbooks were written. Sometimes, a para or some lines is added on a particular event or personality, given their historical importance but the inclusion of many such suggestions pose a challenge as textbooks also have to keep in mind both the physical and mental burden on students.

- Sometimes, letters seek an immediate modification in the textbook citing some recent research finding or alternative interpretation. The academic nature of some such suggestions also poses a challenge for immediate redressal. All such issues require wider deliberation among subject experts and are thus kept for consideration of subject experts for future deliberation.

Evaluation of Textbooks: A Regular Activity

As a part of the regular activity at NCERT, before textbooks are reprinted every year, necessary changes and corrections are made keeping in view the comments, suggestions, and grievances received from all stakeholders. In view of some public controversies, a quick review of all history textbooks was carried out in the year 2013 and 2015 involving subject experts, and accordingly, some modifications were made in the textbooks. In 2018-19, again some materials were added in history textbooks regarding knowledge traditions and practices of India. For example, the addition of material on Vikram Samvat, metallurgy, Shivaji, paika revolt, Subhash Chandra Bose, Swami Vivekananda, Ranjeet Singh, Rani Avantibai Lodhi, Sri Aurobindo Ghose, etc. Similarly, some visuals were also added. Recently,

in the month of February 2021, again a quick review was carried out to look into the grievances, comments, and suggestions received from all stakeholders since the last review in 2015.

What These Letters Tell Us: Reflection

The letters received, tell a lot about the overall framework, syllabus and content of the NCERT textbooks, importance and expectations from history as a subject in public, influence of contemporary political developments, use, and misuse of history, etc.

- History is an important component of our identity formation, who we are or are not, where we come from and where we might be headed — all these are influenced by our understanding of history. This is precisely the reason that people from different regions of the country want events and personalities important to them, at the regional level, to find a place in the textbooks brought out at the national level. However, requests for inclusion of some such events and personalities, are made from different parts of the country, and not from the region where those events occurred or personalities belonged to. This shows that people are conscious of their local history, but at the same time, their concerns cut across the history of different regions of the country.
- Majority of the representations and letters reflect a wish to have content in history textbooks in such a way that students feel proud of the history and culture of their country, freedom fighters and revolutionaries, who sacrificed their lives. For the medieval part of Indian history, multiple grievances raise the issue of omission of description of important personalities of the period like Shivaji, Maharana Pratap, Prithviraj Chauhan and others. At the same time, many letters and representations want to cut down the content on Mughal history/

rulers. This calls for a re-look at the organisation and distribution of content in the history textbooks.

- It seems, people closely relate history with biographies. Majority of letters want more focus on personalities, sometimes personalities from contemporary times like late President of India Abdul Kalam.
- Unlike public perception, history is very much a lively subject. Serious scholars and the public, in general, are concerned about the content and way of presentation and that's why a lot of requests seeking information over the basis of facts presented in textbooks or interpretation of a particular event or aspect, frequently come to NCERT. This is a welcome development.
- The influence of current political developments on the content and preferences in history textbooks is a reality. And this is in no way peculiar to India. This is attested by various issues raised in letters in recent years. For example, in 2019, when Article 370 was revoked, people took note of this situation and sought information on the portrayal of this issue and plight of Kashmiri Pandits in the NCERT textbooks. Similarly, after Yogi Adityanath became the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), the largest state in India in terms of population, letters sought to have some content on Nath community, to which Yogi Adityanath belongs and quite recently when a district court passed an order allowing the Archaeological Survey of India to do a survey of Kashi Vishwanath temple-Gyanvapi mosque complex at Varanasi, NCERT received letters, enquiring about content on Vishwanath temple in the history textbooks.
- Sometimes opposition parties at the centre or in states or some individuals seek NCERT's intervention over the portrayal or removal of historical personalities and events in the textbooks, prepared under the ruling government at the centre or in states and take action against those

who have done it. History textbooks in the state of Rajasthan are an important example of this, where opposing parties have regularly accused the reigning party of distorting/misrepresenting facts in the history textbooks.

- With regard to history, some people seem to be thoughtful, while others seem to be casual as many letters raise concerns over the content of textbooks, which are not published by NCERT anymore. Sometimes, such letters raise concern over some issues, which were resolved even in these textbooks, published by NCERT before 2002. So, it shows that many people who are sending such letters are not updated and it is a reflection on their casual approach.
- General awareness of the rationale behind the overall framework, syllabus and objectives of the syllabus at various stages, and the pedagogical principles of history curriculum are missing and that's why many times, questions are raised over deletion of some topics or lines on personalities like Vivekananda, Netaji in Classes VI-VII history textbooks, which are presently having content on ancient and medieval periods of Indian history. Sometimes people raise concerns over not having chapters on Ramayana, Mahabharata or Indian republics in the Class XI history textbook. The present Class XI history textbook presents selected themes from ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary periods.

Implications for Future Textbook Writing in History

Understanding of issues and concerns raised in the letters has implications for improving the quality of future textbooks and other curricular materials in history.

- Some consider 'history' a 'boring' subject that involves memorising dates, events, information about personalities and processes and wants it to be scrapped as it serves no purpose. Ironically, history is at

the same time a subject that arouses much public passion over the depiction of their communities and personalities. Every now and then our attention is brought to the historical distortions, 'controversial' topics, writing and rewriting of history textbooks in letters and in the media. During this period (2005-2020) also, some such controversies emerged. The history textbook for Class IX, *India and the Contemporary World- I*, published by the NCERT in 2006 had a chapter on clothing. In this chapter, women from the *Nadar* (also known as *Shanar*) caste in the erstwhile Travancore region, who struggled for the right to wear a blouse, was described. Various caste-based organisations, members of Parliament and political parties in the southern state of Tamil Nadu found the usage of words, 'toddy tappers' and 'migrants' for them as offensive and some of them accused the author of selectively reporting the incident by highlighting only one aspect of historical reality. This led to the modification of content by the NCERT in the later editions of its textbook. Similarly, recently, there has been a huge uproar over NCERT's history textbook for Class XII, *Themes in Indian History, Part II*, wherein it has been mentioned that Mughal emperor Aurangzeb gave grants to rebuild Hindu temples. Many RTIs, letters and social media feeds objected to this, sought primary source for this and termed it a 'historical distortion' or 'partial account of history'.

The important lesson that we get from these controversies is that whatever may be the case/issue, multiple viewpoints and perspectives, need to be discussed. Bharath and Bertram (2008), who conducted a study to analyse historical enquiry in school history textbooks, points out that, "A multi-perspective approach entails the provision of a number of sources relating to the same event from different points of view to provide a basis for comparison. The

historical sources enable the learner to make a judgement or adopt a position with regard to the historical event they are studying" (p.146). Michelle Danino (2015) says that, "our students should not be denied access to such facts of history? And the argument that such unpleasant facts would promote 'communal hatred' is a perverse one: dark chapters of humanity's chequered history may be 'controversial' or unpleasant, but are those we need to study the most if we wish them not to recur (p.21)."

- Many letters point out the lack of awareness among Indian students about the achievements of the country in various fields in the past and hold textbooks responsible for this, suggesting to make learners familiar with India's rich cultural heritage, the contribution of India to the world civilization in different spheres of life such as science, art, architecture, heritage, philosophy, etc. Following this, some information related to India's knowledge traditions and achievements were added in the history textbooks of different classes in 2018-19 in addition to a few things already available in the textbooks. However, a lot more needs to be done in this direction, as this has great potential and relevance for the future also.
- India has a vast, many-layered and complex history and it is not possible to cover the entire mosaic of such a vast history in any textbook of history. In such a situation, the need for making a selection from among enormous historical knowledge becomes inevitable. In an interaction with teachers, the Chief Advisor of history textbooks, developed following NCF 2005, justified selection and focus on certain themes by saying that the idea behind 'thematic approach' has been that if students are able to understand a particular issue from different angles, they will be able to apply the same critical scrutiny to other such issues as well. However, many letters and

grievances questioned the selection of themes in the present history textbooks and accused NCERT of omitting many important themes and periods of Indian history like the entire Vedic and Post Vedic period (2000-1500 BCE), then 600-1000 CE and the period of the growth of nationalist consciousness, political parties, the Partition of Bengal, Swadeshi movement, etc., during 1858-1915. Kaya Yilmaz (2008) says that the method of selecting historical topics or developing history curriculum should be made not only open to public review and scrutiny, but also open to public discussion and revision if necessary. The assumptions and parameters used to choose topics for history curricula must be specified explicitly.

- The use of real evidence/primary sources is widely acknowledged as a significant criterion in the teaching and learning of history. In certain parts of the world, the emphasis in schools has now shifted to using both primary and secondary sources rather than just school textbooks, making history teaching and learning even more useful, enjoyable, and profitable. However, in India, it is only a recent phenomenon. The present history textbooks have excerpts from different primary sources, but without reference. Writing about the objective behind using sources in the new history textbooks, Neeladri Bhattacharya (2014), highlighted the importance of providing students “an idea of the nature of historical knowledge, allowing them to see how in fact historians construct history: the sources they use, the problems of reading these sources, the variety of possible interpretations, and the limitations of different kinds of sources (p.108)”. Ironically, it is the reference/source of various such excerpts, which attracted maximum RTIs, queries, grievances and uproar on various social media platforms. Many letters sought to know the source of various statements made in the textbook

and accused authors of presenting primary sources partially, many times of omitting certain words from the primary source to either stigmatise a community, for example *brahmans* or undermine the unity and achievements of the country.

All history textbooks need to clearly mention the sources or references used by the authors. According to Bharath and Bertram (2008), the learner needs to identify the source’s author, interpret the source’s motivation, and assess the fairness of the argument made there. They (Bharath & Bertram, 2008) say that the lack of provenance (the source’s origin, author, and purpose) limits high-level and historical questioning, so textbooks must include more detail about the source and allow for contestation.

- Textbooks are meant to be updated, revised, critiqued, challenged, and changed. Over the years many measures have been adopted by the government agencies while preparing textbooks but to date, we don’t have any regulatory mechanism or a statutory body in India to look into textbooks and other curricular materials published by private publishers. One of the CAGE Committees (GOI, 2005), set up in 2005 to suggest Regulatory Mechanisms for Textbooks and Parallel Textbooks also reported that “There is hardly any regulation or regulatory mechanism for the textbooks and textual materials used in schools outside the government system (p.17)”. This committee recommended setting up an independent institution National Textbook Council to keep an eye on textbooks published by both government organizations as well as by private publishers and also, respond to questions received from the public about the content and quality of school textbooks. Nothing could be done in this direction since then. The establishment of such an independent institution has the potential of increasing public awareness of the content and quality of school textbooks

and also addressing their grievances.

- There is a perception that social science in general and history in particular is a 'text centred' subject and merely transmits information. Besides, textbooks also have to deal with competing claims of different regions/sections of society for incorporation of information that is important in their own ways. Therefore, instead of being 'comprehensive', the present history textbooks have been 'illustrative' in their orientation. But a large number of grievances/comments, not only from common citizens but sometimes from Ministers also, belonging to different regions, have pointed to the absence/less coverage to the people and culture of different regions, especially North-Eastern states of India.

Every effort needs to be taken up to ensure regional balance, by preparing textbooks that represent the history of the country as a whole. At the same time, we also need to recognise the practical difficulty that is associated with the task of covering the rich and varied histories of this vast and culturally diverse country 'in its entirety'. Different strategies may be thought of to address the issue of 'regional imbalance' like having content/ exploratory activities on different regions,

its people and culture under QR Codes. All chapters of all textbooks of NCERT are now embedded with Quick Response Codes (QR), which help students to access e-resources such as audios, videos, multi-media, texts, etc. We can also prepare supplementary readers on some aspects of history, culture and people of different regions, etc.

- Today, many enthusiastic individuals, organisations and media (including various social media platforms) are vigilant with regard to the content and quality of textbooks. This has the potential to keep a check on what is being given in the textbooks, it also poses serious challenge for those involved in the preparation of curriculum, syllabus and textbooks in such a vast and diverse country of ours. In order to face this challenge, Michelle Danino (2015) proposes that all academic viewpoints be valued, and that national debates be held free of demonisation. Simultaneously, he recommends to lessen reliance on textbooks, by going beyond textbooks, openly discussing different views and perspectives, and encouraging creative pedagogies, such as, involving students in field trips or mini-research projects to bring history to life.

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