

GENERAL CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

The evaluation of history textbooks may be undertaken with two broad considerations :

- (a) To see that the content does not foster communal, caste, racial and regional prejudices.
- (b) To see that the presentation of the past is authentic and *is* also free from myths and factual inaccuracies.

Some of the prejudices and attitudes and how they are sometimes reflected in the history textbooks are briefly described below. Suitable historical approaches that help in countering these prejudices are also indicated.

Communalism

The term 'communalism' has acquired a special meaning in our country where communities are mainly identified on the basis of religion. Hence, *it* may be treated as synonymous with religious intolerance. Communalism is a strong force that prevents the process of national integration. It is often reflected in the descriptions and interpretations of the events of the past. Communalist historians try to present the past of their own community in a bright colour and exaggerate the weak points of the others. As our democracy is wedded to the ideal of religious freedom and secularism, there is no room for discrimination and rivalry on the basis of religion. Religious books, personalities and tenets should not therefore be derided.

All the descriptions which project contemporary communal prejudices to the study of the past, are unhistorical and should be rejected. This may often occur in the presentation of medieval Indian history and certain aspects of modern Indian history, it may also manifest itself in overglorifying the civilization as it developed during ancient times and condemning the Medieval period as the Dark Age. Certain descriptions tend to suggest that the entire history of medieval India is nothing but the history of conflicts between Hindus and Muslims; the two communities are presented as being in a state of permanent hostility, living in complete isolation; conflicts between rulers are presented as primarily religious conflicts. Similarly, the past attitudes are projected to the present. For example, intolerance practised by a ruler is presented as the essence of the practice and beliefs of a particular religion. The periodization of history in religious terms and describing kingdoms primarily in terms of the religion of the rulers are also done. All such descriptions and characterization are unhistorical and tend to foster communal attitudes. Certain descriptions also tend to attribute certain undesirable features to specific communities and religions. Descriptions of the tenets and practices of various religions in textbooks are not always accurate. Similarly, any description which implies that any religion that did not originate in India or any community which follows a religion that originated outside the country or whose ancestors came from an area outside India is un-Indian, is not suitable as a teaching material.

While dealing with historical developments in which people following different religions are involved, emphasizing only the conflicts and ignoring the process of intermingling is unhistorical. Conflicts have to be presented in proper perspective. The role played by reform movements in narrowing down differences, *in* attacking dogmatism and bigotry and in furthering the process of synthesis should be prominently brought out. The acts of rulers belonging to any particular religion should not be presented as the acts of that religion or of that religious community as a whole. While describing conflicts between rulers, the political nature of the conflicts should be brought out. While dealing with communal politics in the modern period the use *of* religion for political purposes and attempts to provoke hatred against other religious communities to serve narrow political ends, should be decried and the damage caused by communal politics brought out.

Casteism and Untouchability

It pertains primarily to the feelings and practices related to the observance of social class exclusiveness based on birth (heredity) among Hindus where, in addition to the four Varnas, there exists a shatter-zone of caste variety accommodated into the Varna system. The institution of caste manifests itself in some form in other communities as well, e.g. among Indian Muslims- Since social class exclusiveness *or* social privilege *or* social hierarchy on the basis of birth is undesirable, the reading materials should not *in* any way lend support to it.

The description of the caste system is an important component of the description of the social conditions in various periods of Indian history. The descriptions which present the caste system as an ideal form of social organization or which present mythological versions of the caste system (e.g. divine origin) as true, perpetuate casteist feelings and should not find any place in history textbooks. The descriptions which present the caste system as something that was not subject to any change throughout the ages, are also historically fallacious.

A correct historical approach to deal with the caste system in any period would be to present it as a part *of* the social and economic system of that period, its place and importance in that system, the changes which it had undergone or was undergoing, and the influence that it exercised on the entire history of that period. For example, the fragmentation and lack of unity in society, which were the conse-

quences of the caste system and its rigidity, hampered social progress and had serious repercussions on the political history of India. A good historical description should also give adequate emphasis to the ideas and movements which in various times questioned the validity and desirability of the caste system.

In a way, the practice of untouchability flows from the caste system in which a section of the community is treated as unclean. Consequently, they may be forbidden entry into temples, use of wells, etc. Observance of such a discrimination has now become a penal offence.

The descriptions of the practice of untouchability which tend to rationalize or justify it in any period, should not find a place in any textbook. On the contrary, it should be referred to as an inhuman practice and one which reflects adversely on the character of the society in which it was practised.

Regionalism and Linguism

India is a vast country with a good deal of cultural and linguistic variety. Various regions of the country, besides having many common features, have throughout history developed their distinctive identities, in terms of language, culture, traditions and customs. It is important to promote an appreciation of, and respect for, this variety in Indian culture, which is best described as 'composite culture' or one of 'unity in diversity'. However, there are certain approaches in dealing with the history and culture of regions which are unhistorical and tend to foster regional and linguistic chauvinism. The descriptions which depict the history of a particular region in complete isolation from the developments in the rest of the country, hamper a proper appreciation of the historical development of that region. The descriptions which tend to glorify a particular region at the cost of, or by denigrating, other regions, are objectionable. For example, the presentation of a particular ruler of one region as a hero and the denigration of the rulers of other regions, who may have been in conflict with that ruler, as villains, fosters prejudices. Similarly, the descriptions of cultural developments in a particular region, which ignore the influence of other regions, are unhistorical. The descriptions which glorify the cultural developments in a particular region at the cost of the cultural developments in other regions, are objectionable. While promoting an appreciation of, and respect for, the cultural developments and language and literature of a particular region is desirable, presenting it as being superior to the others and denigrating the others is objectionable.

Similarly, the presentation of heroic figures of a region on the basis of myths and exaggerating their role is unhistorical. The neglect of the process of give and take between different regions is also unhistorical. Total neglect of developments *in* certain regions of the country in textbooks in the history of India as a whole is also undesirable.

Racialism

Historical descriptions sometimes reflect racial prejudices and tend to promote such prejudices. Such descriptions occur in relation to certain periods and areas of world history. Any description which divides humanity into superior races, must be discarded. In the same category are such descriptions as associate beauty or ugliness and repulsiveness with any particular race(s), present racial purity as a virtue, and tend to relate the backwardness or the advances made by a particular community or people in a particular historical period to its race. Similarly, the use of the term 'race' as a substitute for 'nation' should not be allowed. It should also be stressed that throughout history the various races have intermixed and that references to some races being pure are unscientific.

The Indian population is made up of different racial groups who have so intermixed throughout history that it is difficult to call a particular group as racially 'pure'. The term 'Aryan', it must be remembered, is not a racial category but denotes groups of people speaking a particular family of languages.

Obscurantism and Superstitions

Sometimes such incidents and events are found in history textbooks as are based on legends and are not based on historical facts. Such materials in textbooks promote obscurantism and superstitions and are not conducive to the development of critical inquiry. Such materials are often used to support outmoded and unscientific ideas. Superstition of any kind is bad. Sometimes myths, legends and folklore are presented as historical truths; this is objectionable. Such literature in itself may be enjoyable but to present it as historical is not desirable.

Glaring Inaccuracies

Apart from the prejudices described above, a textbook should not include glaring historical inaccuracies or sweeping generalizations. Such materials, even though they may not have any direct bearing on national integration, lead to the development of wrong understanding of history. Accuracy and authenticity of facts is of utmost importance in a textbook.

13. CRITERIA FOR IDENTIFYING MATERIAL PREJUDICIAL TO NATIONAL INTEGRATION RELATED TO SPECIFIC PERIODS OF INDIAN HISTORY

Ancient Period

Characterization as 'Hindu Period'—The use of the term 'Aryan' as racial category—Overglorification of the ancient past—Overemphasis on the spiritualistic character of the ancient Indian culture—Overreliance on and use of myths as history—Presentation of Indian culture as monolithic and its identification with Aryan culture or the culture of a particular region or period—Lack of emphasis on material culture—Lack of emphasis on interaction between Aryan and non-Aryan cultures—Neglect of the contribution of other cultures to Indian culture—Lack of emphasis on describing the process of change—Neglect of the impact of foreign contacts, etc.

Medieval Period

Identifying the period as Muslim Period—Characterization of the period as a dark period or the period of conflicts between Hindus and Muslims—Identification of Muslims as the rulers, Hindus as the subjects—Identification of Muslims as foreigners (the early invaders only who *did* not settle down here could be termed 'foreigners')—Description of the State as theocracy without examining the actual influence of religion—Highly exaggerated role of religion in political conflicts—Describing the relationship between the rulers and the subjects on the basis of religion—Overglorification of Medieval rule—Neglect and omission of the trends and processes of assimilation and synthesis, growth of composite culture and socio-religious reform movements, development of language, art and architecture.

Modern Period

Emphasis on the process of modernization isolated from the problems created by the British rule—Neglect of the social conditions in the eighteenth century, stagnation of society, non-occurrence of the Industrial Revolution in India—Lack of technological break-through—Glorification of regional phenomena—Neglect of some weaknesses of the nineteenth century reform movements, e.g. the revivalist aspect of the movements (This may be more relevant at the higher classes)—Partial explanation of the nationalist movement in India e.g. neglect of peasants', workers' and socialist movements, neglect of the movements in Princely States—Emphasizing the role of any particular communal organization and neglecting that of the others in the freedom movement—Identifying communal organizations with communities—Underemphasizing the secular character of the freedom movement—Neglect

of socio-economic content of the freedom movement -Lack of emphasis on the role and contribution of all regions and communities and also of women in the freedom struggle—inadequate coverage of freedom struggle—Underemphasi/ing the sacrifices made by people during the freedom struggle.

PART II

SPECIFIC GUIDELINE FOR USING THE TOOL FOR EVALUATION FOR TEXT-BOOKS OF HISTORY FROM THE STANDPOINT OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION

1. This tool consists of the following sections :

Section A	Proforma for identification data of the book
Section B (i)	Proforma for identifying objectionable material from the standpoint of national integration
(JI)	Proforma for indicating omissions and inadequate emphases
Section C	Plain sheet for General Remarks
Section D	Proforma for supplying information about the evaluator
2. Please fill in the details of the book you are evaluating in the proforma for identification data of the book given in Section A of the tool.
3. Before analysing the textbook please study the criteria for evaluating textbooks carefully. You will note that the items against which the subject matter is to be evaluated are as under :

Item 1	Communalism
Item 2	Casteism and Untouchability
Item 3	Regionalism and Linguism
Item 4	Racialism
Item 5	Obscurantism and Superstition
Item 6	Glaring Inaccuracies
4. You are requested to evaluate critically the book assigned to you in terms of what has been discussed in the criteria for evaluating textbooks. While studying the book please underline the passages, words, lines, exercises, etc., which you consider to be objectionable in the light of the criteria. Also encircle the pictures, illustrations.

etc., which you feel are objectionable. In the margin of the book indicate the item number (as indicated in Para 3 above) to which the objectionable material relates. In some situations it may be difficult to classify the material in terms of a particular item. In such cases specify your observation in the margin. Put 'A' if the matter, in your opinion, is directly objectionable, and 'B' if it is indirectly construed to be objectionable. Please also indicate in the margin the omissions of aspects which, if incorporated, would have given a more objective and balanced idea. Please also indicate in the margin the instances of aspects which you feel have not been properly emphasized.

5. Go through the book again. It is usually desirable to go over your comments once again in order to arrive at a careful and comprehensive judgement.
6. After you have completed this work, you are requested to fill in carefully the Proforma for Identifying Objectionable Material given in Section B(i). If there is nothing objectionable, you should write across the whole proforma : 'Nothing Objectionable'. Also fill in Proforma B(ii) meant for indicating omissions and inadequate emphases.
7. Use the sheet for 'General Remarks' given in Section C for the following :
 - (i) Point out the general approach in selecting the facts and their presentation from the standpoint of national integration. While describing the approach of selection of facts in the textbook, please specifically indicate whether there is overemphasis of regional or communal aspects, omission and underemphasis of the aspects of social and cultural developments and of forces of cohesion and intermingling. Similarly, regarding the approach to presentation of material the evaluator should indicate whether proper perspective has been built, suitable language has been used and appropriate illustrations have been given. To support his/her contention the evaluator should give suitable examples from the textbook.
 - (ii) Give your general assessment of the textbook from the point of view of national integration. Please attach additional sheets, if necessary.
8. Fill in the proforma given in Section D and supply the necessary information asked for.