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West Bengal History Textbooks and the Indian Textbook Controversy

Abstract

Textbook controversies in 1977 and 2000 arose in India concerning politically motivated changes of history curricula and school textbooks, brought forward by former opposition parties after they came to power in the centre. The controversies consisted of arguments that conformed to a right/nationalist – left/Marxist divide. Although the debates focused on textbooks prepared under the auspices of the central government, states also became involved, for both federal states and the centre are responsible for educational matters.

This article tries to demonstrate this involvement in the case of West Bengal. It also looks into whether and how the political orientation of the (left) West Bengal government is reflected in the latest editions of social science, and especially history, textbooks as an aspect that is part of the debate, although this is frequently obscured by other arguments.

Introduction

According to the Indian Constitution, education is a subject in the *Concurrent List*.¹ Until 1986, in the absence of any uniform national policy of education for the country, the Federal States had the freedom to plan their curricula, syllabuses and to prepare textbooks. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) was created by the Government of India as an apex Institute in the area of School Education, which was entrusted with the task of designing the national curriculum and syllabuses for all the school stages, and of preparing model textbooks. The Federal States could adopt, adapt or partially follow the National Curriculum that the NCERT had proposed, though they were not obliged to do so. West Bengal was one of the states which designed its own curricula and syllabuses and neither followed the NCERT curriculum nor prescribed the textbooks prepared by the NCERT to its schools.

In 1986, during the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi, the *National Policy on Education* (NPE-1986) was announced. This was the first policy to be enacted which

1 For administrative purposes, under the Constitution of India, various subjects were brought under the Union List, the State List and the Concurrent List (Joint List). The Concurrent List has subjects like education, newspapers, economic planning, etc which could be of common concern to both the central and the state governments. Therefore, both the central and state governments mostly cooperate and take decisions (at times by means of debates and discussions).

introduced uniform education all over the country. Apart from its aim to raise the standards of education and accessibility, this policy aimed to safeguard the values of secularism, socialism and equality. The central government was given wider responsibility to maintain the quality, standard as well as national integrity in collaboration with the states. After the introduction of the National Policy on Education (NPE-1986), all the Federal States were obliged to remain within the basic framework of the National Curriculum. The NCERT designed the National Curriculum, syllabuses and prepared model textbooks as a follow-up of the revised curriculum, keeping a provision for states to include the regional and local history, geography, and issues of regional concern.

In 1999, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power forming a coalition government, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). In 2000/1, the NCERT prepared under the instructions of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE-2000). The focus was to inculcate Indianness and national identity among pupils as well as students in higher education. As a follow-up of the new National Curriculum, syllabuses for the entire school stage were revised by NCERT and new textbooks were prepared. This revision of the syllabuses and the new textbooks created a huge controversy all over the country. The West Bengal Government did not revise the school syllabuses and continued with the old ones as the new National Curriculum was accused of containing *Hindutva* input.²

In the year 2004, the NDA Government led by the BJP fell. The immediate task of the new United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government, led by the Congress Party, was to change the National Curriculum and “detoxify” the “saffronised”³ education.⁴ The West Bengal government also revised the syllabus between 2003 and 2004.

Although it became obligatory for the Federal States to remain within the broad framework of the National Curriculum after the formulation of NPE in 1986, West Bengal (like some other states), formulated its own school curriculum and textbooks which deviated from the National Curriculum. This deviation between federal state and centre became part of, and an instrument in, the nation-wide ideological struggle between “Left” and “Right” over the BJP curriculum and textbook revision. The purpose of this article is to investigate these links and to follow or understand the centre-state deviations as the ideological imprint after the curriculum revisions in 2000 and 2005.

1. Textbook conflicts at the national level

School Education in India remained in the public discussion, in the press and other media, for about five years – as long as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was

2 E.g. Vedic Mathematics, Vedic Astrology, interpretations of history.

3 Sages and monks in Hindu religion wear saffron-coloured robes as a mark of sacrifice. The Left opposition used the expression ‘saffronisation’ in their ideological / political confrontation with the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government to accuse them of *Hindutva* (Hindu Nationalism) input in education.

4 “UPA will ‘kill’ saffron texts”, *The Times of India*, July 22, 2004, Times News Network [<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>].

in the government. Soon after the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government was in office, they scrapped portions in some of the history textbooks, wanted to withdraw some textbooks from schools and began revising the National School Curriculum. Though the entire school curriculum was revised by the NCERT, followed by new textbooks in all the school subjects for all the stages of school education, the revision of the school history curriculum and rewriting of history textbooks provoked severe criticism and protests all over India. Authors of the previous history textbooks were up in arms in protest and wanted to reinstate their books. A mass opinion was created through media or by holding seminars in all possible platforms all over the country against this “attempt to *saffronise*” education by the BJP-led government. This controversy received substantial coverage in the international press as well.

Despite its gravity, the 2000 controversy was not the first one to be triggered by school textbooks in India. A similar debate began in 1977, though on a smaller scale. This year, an opposition party, the Janata Party, came to power at the centre for the first time since independence, which marked the beginning of Bi-Party or Multi-Party democracy in India. Between 1977 and 1979 the Janata Party ruled at the centre led by the old Gandhian Morarji Desai. During this Janata Government, a controversy aroused over the proscription/deletion/rewriting/reinstating of history school textbooks at the national level, when the government started revising the curriculum and was accused of pushing *nationalist/communist* ideology in the curriculum and proscribing certain textbooks.

Communalism and history education were in discussion even before this⁵ and Bipan Chandra, a historian and one of the authors of the controversial history textbooks (the book at the centre of controversies in both 1977 and 2000), argued that “the vicissitudes of Indian Nationalism catered to the growth of communal perspective of national history”. Chandra further added in his argument,

“The teaching of Indian History has a great deal to do with the spread of communalism in the last 100 years. [...] [C]ommunal historical approach has been, and is, the main ideology of communalism in India. Communalism among the historians spread mainly because of its ability to serve as ‘vicarious’ or ‘Backdoor’ nationalism. Communalism enabled them to feel nationalists without opposing Imperialism.”⁶

The controversy of 1977 has to be understood within the context of the internal politics of the then ruling party as well as the state-levels political developments in different parts of India. After gaining power, “the first hint of ‘Hindu revivalism’ of Morarji Desai became apparent [...] when he sanctioned inquiries about

5 “Pupils attention is thus drawn to Gandhi’s warning that, ‘Communal harmony could not be permanently established in our country so long as highly distorted versions of history were taught in her schools and colleges, through the history textbooks” (Bipan Chandra, *Modern India*, New Delhi: NCERT, 1996, 207).

6 Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra and Harbans Mukhia, “Historians of Modern India and Communalism”, in: *Communalism and writing of Indian History*, Delhi: PPP, 1969, p. 36.

certain textbooks enjoying government patronage”.⁷ Those books, according to an anonymous memorandum to the Prime Minister, “were prejudicial to the study of Indian history”.⁸ The school textbooks in discussion and of concern were: (i) *Medieval India* by Romila Thapar, (ii) *Modern India* by Bipan Chandra and (iii) *Ancient India* by R.S. Sharma.

“The most disputed feature in the textbook controversy of 1977 was the interpretation of the ‘medieval’ Indian history, which corresponds to the period in which Muslim rule prevailed in much of India. [...] Prime Minister Morarji Desai was urged in a confidential memorandum not only to proscribe certain books but also to appoint a committee to look into the infiltration by persons of ‘Communist’ persuasion of academic positions, research grants, publication subsidies, and teaching positions. His suggestion to the Education Minister [...] was accompanied by a more general campaign against so-called Communist historians and social scientists. They were said to be entrenched in the I.C.H.R.; J.N.U.’s Centre for Historical Studies, [...] and the N.C.E.R.T.”⁹

Similar allegations about ‘leftist view’ in history textbooks could be traced in many write-ups during the 2000 conflict as well. In one of his articles, Atul Rawat, a regular writer in the RSS mouthpiece ‘Organiser’ and NCERT Consultant, wrote,

“During the later part of the post independence era the history scholars were highly influenced by a Soviet centric scholarship which emerged in the form of leftist historians who came to occupy positions of prominence due to the Soviet and socialistic leanings of the post independence leadership. These scholars who had a strong leaning towards the erstwhile Soviet Union have prepared the NCERT textbooks.”¹⁰

Accusing authors of being “Communists” was used as a ‘killing argument’ by the communal parties in their political struggle.¹¹ However, some kind of ‘left slant’ was also noted by more neutral observers. For example, Professor Krishna Kumar (the then Professor of the Central Institute of Education, Delhi University, and a staunch critic of the then NCERT), remarked, “The circumstances shaping the publication of NCERT’s history textbooks were somewhat fortuitous, though they

7 Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, “Cultural Policy, The Textbook Controversy and Indian Identity”, in A. J. Wilson and D. Dalton (eds), *The States of South Asia: Problems of National Integration*, London: C. Hurst & Co., [1982] pb. ed. 1989, p. 139.

8 *ibid.*

9 *ibid.*, pp. 142, 147.

10 Atul Rawat, “Images of Germany in Indian Textbooks: A Case study of History Textbooks”, *Indo-German Experts Meeting on Reviewing India’s Image in Germany and Germany’s Image in India in High School Education*, A Report, New Delhi: NCERT 2001, 55–77, here p. 60. The Meeting was a part of the German Festival in India 2000–2001.

11 “‘Marxist historians and intellectuals distorted country’s history for gaining political benefits by misinterpreting ancient scriptures’ Joshi said [...] while speaking at orientology conference [...] dismissing the charge of saffronising education in the country” (“Leftist distorted History, says Joshi”, *Times of India*, 21.01.2002).

appear consistent with the leftward tilt of Indira Gandhi's early years as prime minister."¹²

As the mainstream of Indian historians including the 'eminent' ones followed 'left' if not 'Marxist' outlooks and approaches, the slant in the textbooks was, however, in line with academic historiography.

Both the school textbook debates in India started with accused attempts to include ideologies of the ruling political parties, leading to a leftist or communalist bias respectively, especially in the national history curriculum and textbooks prepared by the NCERT. This bias was particularly seen in the interpretation of specific historical topics of medieval and ancient Indian history as well as while treating the freedom movement.

Although the Janata Government had begun by making promises and bringing about a transfer of power, it could not survive for long because of its internal conflicts and diverse priorities. In 1979 the government fell and the proscribed textbooks were reinstated in schools without delay. However, the BJP government remained in power and could revise curricula and textbooks, which were used in schools for a number of years. These books were replaced in 2005 after further revision, while the older ones were not reinstated. The new books follow modern pedagogical concepts and approaches and have tried to avoid the vicious political circle.¹³

2. The West Bengal controversy

In the same year, 1977, when the Janata Government came to power in New Delhi, Left-front parties (multi party) formed the government in West Bengal led by the CPI(M)¹⁴ and the veteran Marxist communist leader Jyoti Basu became the Chief minister of West Bengal. And whereas at the centre the government was criticised for its *communist* attitudes, at the state level, in West Bengal, the state government stood accused of trying to promote communist/leftist ideology in education.

"The CPM had appointed party supervisors to oversee the work progress in all the ministries. [...] The mandate was clear. At all levels of educational administration, the CPM put in place its own people to ensure full control. The party started interfering in the day to day affairs of the academia."¹⁵

Even *Sahaj path*, a Bengali reader for schools written by Tagore, was taken out from schools for not complying with the leftist perspective. This action created severe public debate and the book was later reinstated.

12 Krishna Kumar, *Prejudice And Pride*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2001, p. 51. At present, Prof. Kumar is the Director of the NCERT.

13 See also the contribution by Michael Gottlob in this issue.

14 CPI(M), the Communist Party of India, Marxist, which has formed the Left Front government in 1977, is still the ruling Party in West Bengal.

15 Rajat Ray, "Two decades of left rule", *Seminar*, no. 497 (2001) [<http://www.india-seminar.com/2001/497/497%20rajat%20ray.htm>].

After the enactment of the NPE in 1986, the Federal states were to formulate their new syllabuses. The school syllabuses were revised in 1989 in West Bengal. But the WBBSE¹⁶ syllabuses of history and other social science subjects did not really follow the central government-recognised syllabuses of the NCERT.

There were other states, too, in which the syllabuses were not in tune with some of the core curricular concerns. Additionally, there were reports on biased textbooks in RSS-managed schools and right-wing states. Therefore, in January 1993, a National Steering Committee (NSC), formed by the central government, asked the NCERT to look into the issue and to prepare a report on history, mathematics and Hindi textbooks of Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, textbooks of Saraswati Shishu Mandir Prakashan and Vidya Bharati, Markazi Maktaba Islami and the history syllabuses and textbooks of West Bengal.

In case of West Bengal history syllabuses and textbooks, the Committee made the following comments and requested for appropriate steps to be taken by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and the state government and its educational authorities:

“The Committee considered the report (Appendix IV) on the history syllabus and textbooks of West Bengal. It expressed its concern at the generally poor quality of the history textbooks used in West Bengal. It noted that some of the textbooks were *full of inaccuracies, biased presentations and communal distortions*. It recommended that such books should not be allowed to be used in schools. It also recommended that the educational authorities of West Bengal should consider taking appropriate steps for the revision of the history syllabus and improvement in the quality of history textbooks used in West Bengal” [my italics].¹⁷

Regarding the West Bengal syllabuses, the arguments in the NSC Report can be summarised in the following points:

- The history syllabus of West Bengal from VI–X is “not in conformity with the syllabus prescribed by the NCERT at national level”. In West Bengal the syllabus prescribes world history with special reference to India in classes VI–VIII, while Indian history in detail is taught in classes IX–X. NCERT prescribed teaching of Indian history in classes VI–VIII and world history in the Secondary classes,
- The syllabuses are faulty in terms of their “organisation, accuracy, comprehensiveness and uptodateness”,
- The number of pages of the text have been specified for each unit which makes the syllabus “look extremely rigid. The number of pages for maps and illustrations have also been even prescribed”,
- “In terms of treatment and concepts, there is little consistency”,
- “The entire syllabus for classes VI–X when seen as a whole is somewhat inad-

16 West Bengal Board of Secondary Education.

17 National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation, *Recommendations & Report, Part 1*, n.p., n.d. [Government of India], p. 8.

- equate insofar as the history of ancient and medieval Indian developments in South India are concerned”,
- “Some of the *usages* [?] in the syllabus are not appropriate” (pp. 90–92).

The evaluation of textbooks of the report was based on the study of 12 (actually 11 were found registered in the detailed report) books from West Bengal by the NCERT. Of these books only one textbook is in Bengali, 5 are in Urdu and 6 in English (see Table 1). But it is important to note here that in West Bengal Bengali is the mother tongue of the majority and is the official state language. The WBBSE recommended/approved books are in Bengali. There are some approved books in English too. But the Urdu books are not the translated versions of Bengali or English approved ones. Therefore, without going into the merits of the NSC report, the selection of the samples seem to be very arbitrary for any serious kind of textbook evaluation.

Table 1: Books considered for the evaluation of the National Steering Committee Report 1993

Serial No.	Title	Author	Publisher	Board/Year of Publication	Remarks
1	A Short History of India (1857–1947)	Nishith R. Ray	Orient Longman	WBBSE/1989	in English, X
2	Tarikh-i-Ahd-i-Quadeem	Ahmad Sadi	Nishat Book Depot	N.A.	in Urdu, VI
3	Tarikh-i-Alam-ki-ek-Jhalak	Dr. Raz Aazam	Kitab Mahal	N.A.	in Urdu, VII
4	Tarikh-i-Alam-ki-ek-Jhalak	Dr. Raz Aazam	Kitab Mahal	N.A.	in Urdu, VIII
5	[?]	[?]	[?]	[?]	[?]
6	The History of Man- Ancient Age	Bibhas C. Mitra	Calcutta Book House	N.A.	in English, VI
7	The History of Man- Medieval Age	S. Bhat-tacharya & B. C. Mitra	Calcutta Book House	N.A.	in English, VII
8	Ancient World & Its People	Nishith R. Ray	Orient Longman	WBBSE/1990	in English, VI
9	Modern World & Its People	Nishith R. Ray	Orient Longman	WBBSE/1991	in English, VIII
10	Bharater Itihash (History of India)	Prof. S. R. Chakraborty	Rajkrishna Pustakalaya	WBBSE/–	in Bengali, IX
11	Hindustan ki Tareekh	Md Yaqub	Javed Book Depot	N.A./1988	in Urdu, IX
12	Hindustan ki Tareekh	Md Yaqub	Javed Book Depot	N.A./1989	in Urdu, X

The report did not mention anything about ‘Marxist input’ in the books. It even remarked on some drawbacks the syllabus and textbooks of class VIII covering ‘World History’ were suffering from.

“The detailing out of the sections on Renaissance, Reformation, the Industrial Revolution, etc. is without any reference to the rise of a new type of social system. There is reference to ‘The working class — Marx and Engels’ in the context of ‘Industrialisation of Europe’ and what the syllabus refers to as ‘Machine Civilisation’, but even the term ‘Socialist Movement’ is not mentioned” (p. 95).

It seems that whoever might have been the author of these lines, s/he found that a sound socialist perspective was lacking in these textbooks.

The accusations of communalist attitudes in West Bengal textbooks explicitly do not refer to the only book in Bengali (no. 10, Tab. 1), which is characterised as “free from bias” and “suitable for promoting national integration”. Especially books written in Urdu, however, are described as “following a communal [Muslim] framework”.¹⁸

As early as 1989, the WBBSE had taken measures against communalist outlooks and tried to promote integration.

“A group of school teachers from West Bengal sent Arun Shourie [editor of a national level newspaper and later a Minister] a circular relating to textbooks. Dated April 28, 1989, it was issued by the West Bengal Secondary Board and carried the reference number ‘Syl/89/1’. It said, ‘All the West Bengal Government recognised Secondary school Headmasters are being informed that in History textbooks recommended by this Board for class IX, the following amendments to the chapter *on the medieval period* have been decided after due discussions and review by experts. The authors and publishers of Class IX History textbooks are being requested to incorporate the amendments if books published by them have these aushuddho (errors) in all subsequent editions...’

Mr. Shourie, in his serialised exposé on what can aptly be called ‘pinko history’, listed some 40 such amendments.”¹⁹

The amendments in question refer to the medieval period and the interpretation of history from that time. As a substantial percentage of West Bengal’s population is Muslim, the government tried not to create disharmony between the communities, and took care to amend any parts which perhaps could lead to disintegration.²⁰ From the point of view of many, however, this act was regarded as whitewashing

18 National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation, *Recommendations & Report, Part I*, n.p., n.d. [Government of India], p. 120, 121–126.

19 Varsha Bhosle, “Towards Balkanisation, Part II”, *Rediff on the net, August 19, 2002* [<http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/aug/19varsha.htm>].

20 “References to loot and plunder, rape and murder, destruction of Hindu temples and forceful conversions by Muslim invaders and rulers have been deleted from the history books” (M. Chhaya, “Distorting History 2”, *The Rediff Special*, November 9, 2002 [<http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/nov/09spec.htm>]).

history.²¹ It seems that this approach did not affect the books used in *madrasas*, which continued their communalistic interpretations.

What followed the NSC recommendations after they were sent to the Government of West Bengal is not known. Between 1986 and 1999 several elections were held in India. As a result, several times the governments changed at the Centre as well as in many Federal States. But in West Bengal the Left Front government continued to rule and is still the ruling party.

When the textbook controversy was fuming up at the national level in 2002, West Bengal joined the opposition against the curriculum and textbook policy of the centre by boycotting the new textbooks and using NCERT annual general meetings for demonstrative action.²² At the same time, within the state, there were accusations of political interference in education for trying to push communist/leftist ideology including secular positions.²³ Old cases were revived, e.g. in the media article cited above.²⁴ Of course, those who were politically responsible declined all allegations:

“Nevertheless, School Education Minister Kanti Biswas insists there are no ‘calculated distortions’. ‘We don’t politicise education. [...] Our history books are not distorted unlike the ones being pushed by the BJP and the other custodians of Hinduism’.”²⁵

21 The old NCERT books were also accused of this before BJP came to power (cf. Avril Powell, “Perceptions of the South Asian Past: Ideology, Nationalism and School History Textbooks”, in Nigel Crook (ed.), *The Transmission of Knowledge in South Asia*, Oxford: OUP, 1996, p. 223).

22 “While the West Bengal Education Minister, Kanti Biswas, led the offensive against the NCERT and the Ministry the directive from the Congress central leadership to its State Education Ministers to take a clear stand against the efforts of the powers that be to ‘fabricate’ a consensus on the NCFSE added strength to the effort” (“16 Ministers walk out of NCERT meet”, *The Hindu*, 28 May 2002). And again: “[T]he education ministers staged a vociferous walk-out from the 39th annual general meeting of the Nationals Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), charging the Centre with indulging in the ‘saffronisation’ of education and giving a go-by to the concept of cooperative federalism” (“Gujarat shadow over education ministers’ meet”, *Times of India*, 16 Dec. 2002). In October 2002, “a united opposition has said the 16 states under their rule would reject the ‘doctored’ history textbooks [...] leaders representing almost the entire spectrum of Opposition politics agreed that the NCERT textbooks would not be adopted by the 14 Congress-run states and the two under the left rule. [...] They demanded that education being on the concurrent list a meeting of the state education ministers be held to discuss the issue” (“Reject NCERT books, says Oppn”, *Times of India*, 17 Oct. 2002).

23 “The communists, ideological opponents of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party, also stand accused of distorting textbooks, especially in West Bengal, where the Left Front, led by the Communist Party of India-Marxist, have ruled continuously since 1977”. “Years ago, the Communists started rewriting history – both Indian and world – with what appears to the clear intention of furthering its political ideology through the school textbooks. And some five million students in the state funded schools are today learning history from textbooks that have been heavily scrutinised, censored, and, claim critics, ‘calculatedly distorted’ by the leftists”. The article further added, “Immediately after the BJP-led central government started moving on changing the school syllabuses as prescribed by the NCERT in 2000, the West Bengal government too prepared to do its bit to consolidate a ‘Marxist view’ in the history course taught in the state’s schools” (M. Chhaya, “Distorting History 2”, *The Rediff Special*, November 9, 2002 [<http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/nov/09spec.htm>]).

24 Varsha Bhosle, “Towards Balkanisation, Part II”, *Rediff on the net*, August 19, 2002 [<http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/aug/19varsha.htm>].

25 M. Chhaya, “Distorting History 2”, *The Rediff Special*, November 9, 2002 [<http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/nov/09spec.htm>]).

During these stormy disputes over school history textbooks in 2002, one of the BJP-favoured controversial authors of the new social science (history was a part in it) and history textbooks, Prof. Makkhan Lal, brought out an analysis of a history textbook taught in West Bengal schools,²⁶ presumably as a counterattack against the left opposition.

According to Prof. Makkhan Lal, as he laments in the preface of his publication,

“I was shocked at the low level of the authors selected by the government of a state (that too, the one state which has given some of the most famous historians of this country) to play the role of a disseminator of knowledge.”

On this publication of Prof. Lal, a newspaper reported,

“The slanging match between the Left-wing and Right-wing historians over ancient Indian history reached another high today with the NCERT’s much maligned *Ancient History* (Class XI textbook) author Makhhan Lal coming out with a booklet on the Left coalition-led West Bengal government’s history textbook. [...] Launching full-swing a tit-for-tat game Lal claims, ‘The intention is not to stimulate a controversy, but to hold a beacon of light for the innocent souls of Bengal’.”

“Reacting to the exhaustive counter attack on the West Bengal’s history text book, CPI(M) MP²⁷ Nilotpal Basu said, ‘I have not seen the pamphlet. But how does the question of West Bengal’s textbook come into the debate of NCERT textbooks?’”²⁸

This, of course, can only be a rhetorical question.

The book in question is on the ancient history of India – *Itihash-Prachin*, prepared and published by WBBSE. The report prepared by Prof. Makkhan Lal can be summarised as:

- The history book is full of factual errors,
- The language is not at all simple,
- The topics have not been dealt with rationally,
- Exercises in some chapters are too numerous,
- The illustrations are poor in quality and lack authenticity.

According to Prof. Lal,

“The book [report?] was sent to most of the scholars, archaeologists, historians, educationists and government functionaries. [...] However, they completely ignored

26 Makhhan Lal, *A Review of the ClassVI Textbook of History (Ancient) Published by the Govt. of West Bengal*, New Delhi: Aravalli Printers & Publishers, 2002.

27 Member of Parliament of India.

28 Santwana Bhattacharya, “Textbook row: Author takes left swing”, *The Indian Express*, 26 November, 2002.

the fact that what the West Bengal children are being taught is not really history but a caricature of history”.²⁹

The book in question was reviewed by the present author in the light of Prof. Lal’s analysis. The difficulty perhaps Lal (hailing from the Hindi-belt) had, was his incompetence in Bengali language. What he pointed out as errors were mostly his own and it is understandable why the leaflet was ‘completely ignored’.³⁰

One example can illustrate this claim. According to his publication (p. 15) and an interview with the Indian Express,

“Lal points out that Page 26 of the West Bengal textbook says, ‘Flowing from the North to the South down the middle of Egypt the Nile falls into the Mediterranean Sea’. Whereas the ‘fact’ is, he writes, the Nile has to flow from South to North and not north to south in order to fall in Mediterranean Sea, which it does”.³¹

In *Itihash Prachin*, Egyptian civilisation is described on page 29 and not on page 26. The excerpt is a translation from Bengali that was wrongly translated. If translated properly, it reads,

“Egypt is located in the north-east part of Africa. The Mediterranean Sea lies to the north and the Red Sea lies to the east. [...] The river Nile flows through the middle of Egypt to the Mediterranean Sea.”

Without going further in that ‘tit-for-tat game’, interest was aroused by the fact that, though the accusations by the media regarding Marxist input in school history textbooks were rather strong, the report of Makkhan Lal pointed out only a limited number of errors in a textbook of the Communist ruled state, without mentioning any sort of ideological slant.³²

Nevertheless, Lal’s booklet provided arguments in the political conflict when,

“The West Bengal education ministers launched a scathing attack on Central educational agencies [...] school education minister Kanti Biswas pointed out ‘scores of mistakes’ in NCERT history textbooks [...] Biswas claimed that if the NCERT could not publish error-free textbooks, it had no right to formulate the National Curriculum for Schools, which has already been tabled without inviting the participation of state governments. [...] Asked if Joshi had also pointed out mistakes in school textbooks of West Bengal, Biswas said, ‘I admit that in one of our history

29 Makhhan Lal, *A Review of the ClassVI Textbook of History (Ancient) Published by the Govt. of West Bengal*, New Delhi: Aravalli Printers & Publishers, New Delhi 2002, p. vii.

30 *ibid.*

31 Santwana Bhattacharya, “Textbook row: Author takes left swing”, *The Indian Express*, 26 November, 2002.

32 In its form, it might be regarded as a mini-equivalent of and revenge for the “Report and Index of Errors” by the IHC regarding NCERT books, also authored by Prof. Lal (Irfan Habib, Suvira Jaiswal, Aditya Mukherjee, *History in the New NCERT Text Books. A Report and an Index of Errors*, Kolkata: Indian History Congress, 2003, whose content was discussed by the media before its formal publication.

text books written in Bengali there is one mistake [...] Several mistakes have crept into the English translation of this book. I apologise for it'. He added that a committee has been formed to find out such mistakes and rectify them."³³

Here, too, both sides use the 'mistake' argument instead of 'ideology'.

3. West Bengal textbooks after the curriculum reform of 2004

At the end of 2003, against the backdrop of the textbook controversy at the national level and of media reports on the political interference in school education at the state level, the West Bengal educational authorities started revising the school syllabuses. The influence of the political environment on this process is difficult to ascertain. However, the new syllabuses and textbooks can be checked in order to ascertain whether they still reflect the leaning and discrepancies that they were accused of.

For this purpose a field visit was made in 2005, during which social science syllabuses at the Secondary level as well as thirty-seven social science books were collected as samples based on their sale frequencies (according to sellers), of which twenty-two were history textbooks (see List of Textbooks).³⁴

To summarise the revised history syllabuses (Table 2):

- The syllabuses explicitly mention the learning objectives and have prescribed the number of pages to deal with the topics. This seems to be intended for the authors. Furthermore, the syllabuses mention the number of periods that are required to teach and train the pupils.
- It is true that the new syllabuses are also (ref. the NSC Report) to some extent rigid and prescriptive in nature. This kind of prescription might restrict the textbook author to deal with the topics. But in many cases it may be helpful for the authors to conceptualise the book for a particular stage and the concerned target groups. As for the teachers who have to work within a specific time-frame, it can be helpful to plan the lessons and activities accordingly.

In the *Upper Primary stage*, the prescribed syllabuses cover India and the world in ancient, medieval and modern periods. The syllabus tries to integrate Indian history within the bigger space of the world. It matches quite appropriately the geography syllabuses (geography books were studied in this light) at that level.³⁵ In class VIII local geography as well as history of West Bengal is dealt with in detail. It does not match with the old syllabuses of the NCERT.³⁶ But in these aspects of linking world

33 "Ministers lash out at Joshi", *The Times of India*, 19 December, 2002.

34 In West Bengal, the Board publishes history textbooks till class VIII, thereafter it approves a list of books, but does not prescribe any.

35 The geography syllabuses include solar system, different land forms, climatic regions of the earth and integrate the national and local geography along with the study about the continents.

36 The older NCERT syllabus of history was huge and there were always complaints from the teachers and pupils. In 1998, a workshop was organised by social science teachers in Delhi (author was present as a representative of the NCERT), where the organisation of the history syllabuses and textbooks

Table 2: History syllabuses of West Bengal at a glance (revised in 2004)

School stage	Class	Content	No. of periods	Remarks
Upper Primary	VI	Ancient History: World & India	weekly 3	104 pages
	VII	Medieval History: World & India	weekly 3	92 pages (smaller font)
	VIII	Modern History: World & India	total 45	110 pages
Secondary	IX Group-A Group-B	Indian History: From Vedic Age to Rebel of 1857 Renaissance, Industrial Revolution Organisation of the Freedom Movement, Formation of the National Congress Party, Mass Awareness against Colonialism India in reference to the World	total 60	129 pages, 15% can be increased for maps and illustrations
	X	Nationalism, Imperialism, World Wars, India's Struggle for Freedom – the Beginning	total 35	85 pages, 15% can be increased for maps and illustrations
Higher Secondary	XI Group-A Group-B	Indian History - Major Developments between 1707 & 1765, Brief History of the Decline of the Mughal Empire, Growth of Regional Powers, the Colonial Contexts. Growth of the British Empire, Revolts and Uprising in Various Phases, Communalism in Indian Politics, Growth of the Modern Economy and Education. Age of Revolutions: the World Scenario, Impact of Nationalism, From Empire to the World Wars, the World between the Two Wars		For classes XI & XII together, 225 pages, 50 pages additional for maps and illustrations
	XII Group-A Group-B	Impact of the First World War on India, Last Phase of the Indian Freedom Struggle, the Non-Cooperation Movement and Rise of M.K. Gandhi, Prelude to Independence, Aftermath of Independence. The Second World War, The Cold War, The Challenge of Communism, The Muddle of the Middle-East, The New World Order, The United Nations.		

Sources: Syllabuses published as part of textbooks (cf. List of textbooks)

history with Indian history and regarding integration with other social science subjects, it is largely similar to the revised syllabuses of 2000 and 2005.

In the *Secondary stage*, at the beginning of the syllabus, Indian history has been integrated with its geographical space and how the geography of India has influenced history over various periods of time. Moreover, efforts have been made to link the historical developments at the world level with that at the national level, which is found to be pedagogically quite sound. This kind of integration helps the pupils to co-relate the various events at local, national or at the global level and inculcate an understanding and perspective about a variety of events at large.

In the *Higher Secondary stage*, the revised syllabus includes the history of the American Revolution, the Unification of Germany, the Suez Crisis in the Middle East, the conflict in the South-East along with the history of Europe and the world in general. Even the textbook authors are unsure about the vast and diverse topics to be studied by the pupils. The author of the book no. 22 admits in the Preface, “the history of Europe being extremely complex, [...] I am hopeful that this book will help pupils overcome the complexity of the subject and gain an adequate grasp on the history of Europe” (p. vii).

The books considered for this study are prescribed/approved by the West Bengal Government and they follow the above-mentioned syllabuses for the different stages of school education in West Bengal. Aside from political leanings, the books were analysed in terms of didactics and their academic standards.

According to the information of the Board, the history books up until class VIII (VI, VII and VIII) are prepared by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education itself with the help of teachers and subject experts. These three books reflect supervision on the whole exercise of textbook writing. The books are written in comprehensible language and the number of textual errors is very small. The exercise of the textbook preparation of the WBBSE is, to some extent, similar to the NCERT, where manuscripts are evaluated in workshop-mode by a team of practising teachers and university experts. The books from class IX onwards are prepared by private publishers, but have to be approved by the Board.

The books were found to have tried to focus on local history and local geography, which were one of the main concerns of both NCFSE-2000 and the National Curriculum Framework 2005. For example, in all the books on Indian history there is information about local uprisings in various parts of India while dealing with the Freedom Movement. Some of the excerpts are:

“Kol Revolt (1831) – In the year 1831–32, the Kol tribes of the Chhotonagpur revolted against exploitation. [...] It is known from the documents of that time that no outsiders were spared from their attack. It was clear that they could not accept the new land reform system that was imposed by the British which gave more power to the wealthy land-owners” (Book no. 5, p. 149).³⁷

of NCERT in the Upper Primary and the Secondary stages (till 1999) were strongly criticised by the teachers as they found the syllabuses haphazard and too huge for the allotted marks and the given time-frame to handle properly.

37 The quotations from the textbooks in Indian languages, if not otherwise mentioned, have been translated by the author.

“The Indigo Rebellion, 1859: The Indigo Rebellion of 1859–60 is a unique example of the situation when tortures and injustice go beyond the tolerable limits, how the fire of revolt explodes in the mind of weak and simple people” (Book no. 1, p. 153).

Apart from the question of what might be tolerable with torture and injustice, this inclusion of local history was rather absent in NCERT books until 2000, which was criticised by the various communities and states who felt that they were either *underrepresented* or else *not at all* represented in the history textbooks of India. Now in NCERT books, too, there have been efforts to integrate the national history with the local or global history.

Moreover, history education tries to interrelate with other social science disciplines as mentioned above, e.g. with geography. This is also reflected in the textbooks.³⁸ Additionally, there are instances of binding some situations in India with the comparable ones in other countries.

But the books suffer from some drawbacks, too.

- Some of the books have some inaccuracies in terms of spellings of the foreign words.
- In a few cases it was observed that the books lack recent information or evidences. For example, the archaeological findings of Dhaula-Vira in Gujarat³⁹ (2002) in the context of the Indus Valley Civilisation was not mentioned in the revised editions of 2004 books prepared by the WBBSE.
- Illustrations like photos, maps or graphs are mostly of bad quality and sometimes even suffer from illegibility. They are even worse and presented very casually in the books published by the WBBSE.

Topics that were of major importance in the controversy are sometimes presented as debatable ones, giving multiple theories. Thus, the origin of the Aryans is discussed in this way.

“Who are the Aryans? Where is their original homeland? There is an endless debate about it. Many Western scholars believe that the Aryans had come from outside. They came from the Southern part of the Ural mountains of Europe. But some of the scholars from India believe that they were Indians” (Book no. 1, p. 80–81).

38 “The contribution of the Himalayas behind the Indian Civilisation is immense. The Himalayas, as a high wall, protects India from the cold polar winds, the attacks of enemies and cause rains from the Monsoons which feed India’s big rivers” (Book no. 4, p. 1). “The ancient civilisations all around the world were river-valley centred. In the ancient times Sumerian, Egyptian, Chinese or the Indian, all grew in the valley of rivers. The people of that period settled along the banks of rivers for the facilities in their farming practices. The silts along the river banks were very fertile and gave them good crops” (Book no. 19, p. 45). “Like the Himalayas, Vindhya mountain has also deeply influenced the course of the Indian history. For a long time this mountain had been like a divide between two cultural areas: the Aryavartya and the Dakshinatya or the Deccan. [...] Similar was the influence of the Seas and Oceans on the history of India. The Portuguese, the French, the Dutch or the English came through the oceanic route for trade. And the English had shaped the Indian history for the next 200 years” (Book no. 11, p. 6).

39 This specific topic may be of higher interest for those looking into the ancient Indian past as base for Indianness than it is from a left viewpoint. Thus, an attributed “lack of relevance” might explain not being up-to-date in this specific case.

The Aryan debate, however, is of more academic than practical significance. Another topic, Muslim rule in India, is not presented as a controversial one. The focus in West Bengal textbooks is mainly on the positive aspects of this contact. One excerpt from a WBBSE published book can illustrate this.

“Arab soldiers, led by Mohammed bin Kasem, invaded and conquered Sindh Province. The Arab rule lasted there for three hundred years. [...] During this period, Sindh Province came in social, economic and cultural contacts with Central and West Asia. [...] In 886, the Koran was translated into the Sindhi language. The Arabs had learnt Sanskrit and acquired knowledge about Indian astronomy, medicine, arithmetic and philosophy. [...] This way, Indian philosophy and science spread in the Arab countries and through the Arabs to Europe” (Book no. 2, p. 83–84).

But plundering, looting, conversions, etc., were either not mentioned or were rather played in a low key. For example, there was no mention of repeated loots (11 times) of the Somnatha Temple by Mahmud of Ghazni. A similar treatment holds true for the books by the private publishers.

As far as the allegations about the Leftist/Marxist bias in school history textbooks are concerned, a ‘left slant’ in the language and content of recent books cannot be overlooked. In most of the samples, including other social science books, one finds texts like those mentioned in Box 1. Apart from the language, in the textbooks of the Higher Secondary there are certain points of emphasis on specific topics such as the Trade Union Movement (4–5 pages), the Birth of the Communist Party of India, Labour unrest, the peasants’ uprising etc., where the narratives reflect left positions. However, the texts are not biased in such a way that they become academically unsound or mere indoctrination.

The Chairman of the Board of WBBSE claims in the preface to the class VII history textbook (Book no. 2), on the Medieval Period,

“the education and cultural progress faced strong confrontations by the rigid religious fundamentalism, blind beliefs & superstitions, and resulting political conflicts which slowed down the advancement of the civilisations. But the protests and rebels of the common people against extortion, torture and exploitation by the rich and powerful always continued, [...] ultimately reaching a new era of progress at the end of the medieval period”.

Conclusions

The influence of politics in the Indian educational sphere, as in many other countries, is beyond doubt. Over the past years, the teaching of history in schools has reflected political agendas of the ruling party in the country. Whether it is the construction of Indian identity or the transmission of ideological outlooks, school history curriculum and textbooks have reflected the power politics where the ruling party exerted influence through the Institutions like NCERT or ICHR over the whole exercise of teaching school history.

Box 1: Excerpts from social science textbooks

On the discussion of the Laws of Hamurabi,

"If somebody cannot payback the loan, his wife, sons and daughters had to work as slaves for three years to compensate it. If a common man slaps a rich man he was whipped 60 times while a rich man could pay some money for the same deed. [...] One can know about the social and economic lifestyle of that time from the laws of Hamurabi. These laws, generally, protected the interests of the rich and nobles while neglecting the interests of the poor masses" (Book no. 1, p. 36).

On the discussion of Russian history

"Educated and enlightened Catherine the Second, was a great patron for the development of health and education in Russia. She set up special schools for the education of the children of the rich and nobles. She also took interest to educate the Ladies from Aristocratic families. But she did not show much enterprise to spread the light of education among the common peoples" (Book no. 17, p. 10).

On the discussion of the French Revolution and after

"Jacobin group were against the acquisition of wealth. Naturally those who were very poor, low waged labourers or landless farmers (sankulant) were their strong supporters" (Book no. 17, p. 45).

On the discussion of the economy of India during the Delhi Sultanate

"The rural economy was almost self sufficient. There was not much scarcity of the necessities which were very low priced. But in the absence of any policy or control behind the distribution of wealth, stinking rich co-existed with quite poor people. Historian Amir Khasru has therefore lamented that each of the pearls of the Crown were the frozen sweat, blood and tears of the poor farmers" (Book no. 18, p. 155).

On the discussion of the achievement of Indian Independence

"It is true that the Independence was not of equal value to all sections of India. [...] Especially to the low class farmers and labourers political freedom did not mean their economic freedom. [...] Therefore a political group¹ said, 'Ye Azadi Jhutha hai, bhulna Mat, bhulna Mat' [This freedom is false; don't forget, don't you forget]" (Book no. 14, p. 212).

On the discussion of the Russian Revolution

"The main reason behind the 1917 Russian Revolution was the dissatisfaction of the Labour class. The plight of the labour class was as unbearable as that of the farmers. [...] According to the opinion of the Marxist economists, the awareness and the need to be organised as a group had started in the last decade of the 19th century among the labour class in Russia" (Book no. 17, p. 187).

Such excerpts are found in other social science textbooks, too. For example,

"Religion and its restrictions, sometimes, pose obstruction to the progress of the society and economic pursuits. Though grapes grow in plenty in the countries around the Mediterranean sea, the Muslim citizens refrain from venturing into wine production or in banking as taking interests against money or drinking alcohol are prohibited in Islam." (Geography, Book no. 26, p. 26)

"The Marxists do not believe in the 'Doctrine of Truth and Non-Violence' propounded by Gandhi Ji. They believe that if the society is made of various classes having diverse class interests, there truth and non-violence can not succeed" (Political Science, Book no. 31, p. 228).

"In the capitalist system, [...] the owners enjoy the profits by selling the products which are produced by the labourers. The labourers are deprived of their share. Labour class is exploited. This way two classes emerge in the society - capitalist owner class and the exploited labour class" (Economics, Book no. 37, p. 13).

1 This was a slogan of the Communist Party of India at the time of independence.

Since education is on the Concurrent List, centre-state competition is structurally grounded. Where this competition meets ideological differences between state and centre, it may serve as a stage in the political game. Thus, the controversies about NCERT textbooks and about those of ideologically different states are linked not only by the content of the debates but by argumentation and political action. Writing reports about the products of the other side is used as an instrument in these controversies.

In past decades, the West Bengal government has kept distance from the national curriculum and continued with its own system, even when the Congress was the ruling party, both at the Centre and in West Bengal. Yet after the formulation of the NPE-1986, now under Communist rule, it did not follow the national curriculum very closely. During the BJP era, the West Bengal government refused to follow the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE-2000), condemning it for having 'saffron agendas' and aimed to foster communalism. Nevertheless, two reports (NSC Report during the Congress rule and Prof. Lal's during the BJP's) which analysed the history textbooks of West Bengal in different time phase, kept silent about any political slant in their samples. However, the present study demonstrates that the current books are also influenced by the outlook of the ruling Left Front in terms of their language and content. On the other hand, these books do not prove most of the aspects mentioned as critical in the earlier reports.

In these controversies, which concerned political gains, pedagogical or didactical concerns figure in the debate mostly as instruments. The well-being of the pupils, these 'innocent souls' (Makkhan Lal), are put forward as arguments, but they are not in the focus of the debate. Despite all verbal benevolence, they were the victims, as they (and the teachers) suffer from several sudden changes of curricula and textbooks that result from rather non-academic interests.

Sample History and Social Science Textbooks of West Bengal, 2005

History Textbooks

1. West Bengal Board of Secondary Education, *Itihash (Prachin)*, Textbook for Class VI, Kolkata: WBBSE, 2004 (First ed. 1994)
2. West Bengal Board of Secondary Education, *Itihash (Madhyayug)*, Textbook for Class VII, Kolkata: WBBSE, 2004 (First ed. 1994)
3. J. Mukherjee and S. Roychaudhury, *Itihashe Madhyayug*, Textbook for Class VII, Kolkata: K B Publishing, 2005 (First ed. 1980)
4. B. Sen, *Adhunik Yuger Sabhyata*, Textbook for Class VIII, Kolkata: N Bhattacharya & Co, 2004 (First ed. 2003)
5. Ajay Gupta and A. Sengupta, *Adunik Prithibir Itihash*, Textbook for Class VIII, Kolkata: S. Publications, 2005 (First ed. 2003)
6. G. Basu, *Sabhyata O Swadesh*, Textbook for the Secondary Stage, Kolkata: BB Kundu & Grandsons, 2005 (First ed. 2004)
7. R. Das and S. Roy, *Sabhyatar Itibritta*, Textbook for the Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Troyee, 2005
8. K. Chaudhury, *Bharater Itibritta*, Textbook for the Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Oriental Book Company Pvt. Ltd., 2005 (First ed. 2004)

9. A. Gupta and A. Sengupta, *Itihashe Bharat O Biswa*, Textbook for the Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Dey Book Concern, 2005 (New ed. 2004)
10. M.S. Patra and S. Chakraborty, *Bharater Itihash*, Textbook for the Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Rajkrishna Pustakalaya, 2005 (First ed. 2004)
11. P. Chatterjee and S. Mukherjee, *Bharat O Adhunik Biswer Itihash*, Textbook for the Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Prantik, 2005 (First ed. 2004)
12. G. K. Pahari, *Bharat O Biswer Itihash*, Textbook for the Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Sri Tara Prakashani, 2005 (New ed. 2004)
13. Kiran Ch. Chaudhury, *Swadesh Katha*, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: New Central Book Agency Pvt. Ltd., 2005 (WBBSE approved ed. 1991)
14. G.K. Pahari, *Adhunik Bharat*, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Sri Tara Prakashani, 2005 (New ed. 2004)
15. Ajoy Gupta, *Adhunik Bharater Itihash*, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Dey Book Concern, 2004 (First ed. 2000)
16. Kalyan Chaudhury, *Adhunik Bishwer Itibritta*, Part II, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Oriental Book Company Pvt. Ltd., 2004 (Revised ed. 1994).
17. G. K. Pahari, *Europe O Biswa Itihash*, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Sri Tara Prakashani, 2001 (First ed. 1999)
18. G. K. Pahari, *Europe O Biswa Itihash*, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Sri Tara Prakashani, 2005
19. N. Banerjee, *Adhunik Bharat Itihashe Ruprekha*, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Prayash, 2005 (First ed. 2004)
20. G. Niyogy, *Uchha-madhyamik Itihash*, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Orkav, 2005 (First ed. 2004)
21. A. K. Mandal, *Modern India*, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Sreedhar Prakashani, 2005 (First ed. 2004)
22. Jiban Mukhopadhyay, *History of the World*, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Scholar Books, 2005

Geography Textbooks

23. P. Chakraborty and A. Das, *Prithivi O Prakriti*, Textbook for Class VI, Kolkata: KP Ghosh & Co, 2004
24. S. K. Kolay, *Bhugol Parichay*, Textbook for Class VII, Kolkata: Pratyay Prakashani, 2004
25. G.P. Chatterjee and M. Mazumder, *Bhugol Parichay*, Textbook for Class VIII, Kolkata: Pratyusha, 2005
26. S. Pal and P. D. Das, *Bhu-Parichiti O Desh Bidesh*, Textbook for Class VIII, Kolkata: Naba Bharati Prakashani, 2005 (First ed. 2003)
27. R. Basu, *Prakritik O Anchalik Bhugol*, Textbook for the Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Nabarun, 2005
28. Basab Bhattacharya, *Bhugol Parichay*, Textbook for the Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Avinaba Prakashan, 2005 (First ed. 2004)
29. A. Chatterjee and S. Bhattacharya, *Bhugol Parichay*, Part-II, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: ABS Publishing House, 2005
30. A. Mishra, *Arthanaitik Bhugol Samiksha*, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Grantha Bharati, 2005

Political Science Textbooks

31. A. K. Mahapatra, *Rashtra Bignaner Ruprekha*, Part I, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Suhrid Publications, 2005 (first ed. 1989)

32. A. K. Mahapatra, *Rashtra Bignaner Ruprekha*, Part II, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Suhrid Publications, 2005 (first ed. 1989)
33. Utpal Roy, *Rashtra Bignan*, Part I, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Calcutta Book House, 2005 (First ed. 1976)
34. Utpal Roy, *Rashtra Bignan*, Part II, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Calcutta Book House, 2005 (First ed. 1976)
35. N. Pramanik, *Rashtra Bignaner Ruprekha*, Part I, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Chhaya Prakashani, 2005
36. N. Pramanik, *Rashtra Bignaner Ruprekha*, Part II, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Chhaya Prakashani, 2005

Economics Textbook

37. H. Ghosh and S. K. Ghosh, *Arthaniti*, Textbook for the Higher Secondary Stage, Kolkata: Naba Bharati Prakashani, 2005 (First ed. 2004)

Zusammenfassung

In den Jahren 1977 und 2000 entbrannte in Indien Streit, der sich an politisch motivierten Änderungen von Geschichtscurricula und Schulbüchern entzündete, die von bisherigen Oppositionsparteien vorgenommen wurden, nachdem sie die Macht erlangt hatten. Die Kontroversen folgten einem Rechts/Nationalist-Links/Marxist-Schema in ihrer Argumentation. Obwohl die Debatten Bücher betrafen, die unter der Ägide der Zentralregierung erstellt wurden, waren auch die Bundesstaaten involviert, da beide – Bundesstaaten und Zentralregierung – Zuständigkeiten im Erziehungswesen besitzen.

Dieser Artikel beschreibt diese Beziehungen im Falle West-Bengalens. Zudem untersucht er, in welcher Weise sich die politische Orientierung der („Links“-)Regierung West-Bengalens in den jüngsten Ausgaben der Schulbücher für Sozialwissenschaften, vor allem Geschichte, niederschlägt, ein Aspekt der in der Debatte eine Rolle spielte, obwohl er z.T. durch andere Argumente maskiert wurde.

Résumé

L'Inde a connu en 1977 et 2000 de vifs débats sur les changements opérés dans les programmes d'enseignement et les manuels scolaires d'histoire par les anciens partis d'opposition après leur prise du pouvoir. Bien que ces controverses, axées autour d'une ligne d'argumentation de droite/nationaliste – de gauche/marxiste, aient porté sur des manuels conçus sous l'égide du gouvernement central, les différents États fédéraux ont également été impliqués, étant donné que ces derniers se partagent avec le pouvoir central les prérogatives en matière d'éducation.

Le présent article brosse un portrait de cette implication dans le cas du Bengale Occidental. En outre, l'auteure analyse dans quelle mesure l'orientation politique du gouvernement (de gauche) du Bengale Occidental se reflète dans les récentes éditions de manuels scolaires de sciences sociales, en particulier d'histoire, un aspect qui a joué un rôle dans ces débats, bien que parfois masqué par d'autres arguments.

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