

Introspection about their own location in society has not been too common among Indian historians. [...] Outside the world of metropolitan centres of learning and research there are provincial universities and colleges, schoolteachers, an immensely varied student population, and, beyond these, vast numbers more or less untouched by formal courses, yet with notions about history and remembrances of things past, the nature and origins of which it could be interesting to explore. What is neglected is the whole question of the conditions of production and reception of academic knowledge, its relationships with different kinds of common sense. We lack, in other words, a social history of historiography.

Certain features demarcate the late-colonial situation quite sharply from the many historical worlds of today. The Asiatic Society and the Anthropological Survey apart, official funding for pure research, detached from pedagogy, hardly existed, and there was very little of today's accelerating globalization which has made trips abroad for degrees, research or seminars an important part of the more prestigious kinds of academic life. Opportunities for any kind of higher education were more restricted and therefore even more class-cum-caste defined than today, given the far fewer universities and colleges. Within this smaller educated community, however, the hierarchical divisions between research/teaching, university departments/undergraduate colleges/schools, metropolitan/provincial universities seem to have been somewhat less sharp. Repositories of books, manuscripts, art objects and cultural artifacts were often built up by autodidacts, gentlemen with access to local resources and antiquarian interests but little formal academic training: a zamindar, lawyer or schoolteacher could sometimes contribute as much or more as a university professor. For Bengal, one thinks immediately of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, many local libraries, and the Varendra Research Society, the latter located in a small North Bengal district town (Rajshahi) yet enjoying at one time an academic prestige which it would be difficult for any non-metropolitan centre to emulate today. Another example of this relative absence of internal

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The Many Worlds of Indian History

Sumit Sarkar

hierarchization within a smaller educated elite is provided by the career of Sir Jadunath Sarkar (1870-1958). A Rajshahi zamindar's son, Jadunath's formal degrees were in English, and till retirement he combined research with the teaching of History, together sometimes with English and Bengali, mainly to undergraduate students (at Ripon, Metropolitan and Presidency Colleges in Calcutta, followed by Patna and Cuttack, and then briefly at the Benaras Hindu University). Jadunath became internationally renowned but never went abroad.

Late-colonial histories, then, were generally written by teachers for students or general readers. Very many of the topmost professional scholars also produced textbooks,

of college and school students as well as diffused through other means among the general public. Advanced historical research has come to have as its intended audience one's academic peer-group, research students of the best universities, and increasingly, international conferences. Meanwhile the now very seriously dated historiography of a past generation has kept on getting reproduced and disseminated, in diluted and crude forms, at other, inferiorized and neglected levels. Thus has come to be constituted a 'common-sense' - using that term in the most negative of Gramsci's several different formulations - open to appropriation and orchestration by organizations such as the Sangh

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and most of them published original works both in English and in indigenous languages. There was therefore much less of a gap than is evident now between the best and the worst or even average histories. But it would be dangerous to romanticize: inadequate funding for full-time research, confinement within national or regional parameters in the absence of opportunities for wider contacts, the restrictive aspects of a nationalist paradigm shot through with unstated class and high-caste assumptions (quite often sliding into communalist attitudes), all exerted a price. The 'best' scholarship of those times, with rare exceptions, appears unacceptably limited, parochial and unselfquestioning today.

Post-independence historiographical developments, in contrast, have been marked by a dialectic which simultaneously enhanced standards vastly at elite levels, while paying far too little attention to histories being taught to the majority

Parivar.

An exploration of the social conditions of production of history cannot afford to remain a merely intellectual project. It needs to become part of wider and far more difficult efforts to change these conditions. The paradox of postcolonial front-ranking historiography has been that the affirmation of socially radical values and approaches (unimaginable for old masters like Jadunath Sarkar or R. C. Majumdar, for instance) has been accompanied by more, rather than less, elitism in structures of historical production and dissemination.

There has been relatively little sustained or effective attempt to spread the methods, findings, and values of even more India-rooted, post-1950s Left-nationalist historiography beyond 'higher' academic circles. The spread-effects of History Congress sessions, the possibly more

effective state-level conferences conducted through regional languages, sporadic translation efforts, and occasional refresher courses, remain fairly limited, and the possibilities of democratic dialogue often get further restricted, even within these limits, by the prevalence of hierarchized structures and attitudes. [...] In India [...] with the important and honourable exception of gender studies, which has offered considerable opportunities at times for fruitful interaction between activists and academics, research and teaching tend to remain highly hierarchized even among Left intellectuals.

The contrasting experiences of two efforts at preparing school textbooks can serve in conclusion as indicators of problems - and possibilities. In the schools where they have been in use, the National Council of Education, Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks commissioned in the mid-1970s from front-ranking (and mostly Delhi-based) historians have certainly helped to eliminate the blatant communal bias at the level of prescribed texts (through not necessarily from actual teaching), and outdated histories have been displaced to some extent by the findings and approaches of post-independence research. But their impact has been reduced by overburdened syllabi, bureaucratic management, and a concentration on providing 'correct' factual information and interpretation rather than imaginative pedagogical presentations. The texts were written by university scholars with little possibility of contact with secondary education: inputs through discussions with schoolteachers, difficult to organize for such a centralized, Delhi-based project, seem to have been minimal.

A decade or so later, the Eklavya volunteer group was able to work out much more interesting and innovative history texts and teaching methods through sustained grassroots work in the not particularly propitious atmosphere of Hoshangabad's small town and village schools in Madhya Pradesh. There were consultations with metropolitan historians (the initiators of the history textbooks project were themselves JNU graduates), but also repeated rounds of discussions with local schoolteachers. Eklavya history texts contain less factual detail than the

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Mutinies Now. Nirad Chaudhuri's piece, 'My Hundredth Year' is yet another exercise in self-indulgence, and an apology - the *raison d'être* for his writings. His *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* had raised hackles on account of its dedication to the 'memory of the British Empire in India.' Chaudhuri thinks that the criticism was unwarranted and born of a basic misconception about his book.

Philip Knightley, who was associated with the Bombay magazine *Imprint* in its early years, writes in 'An Accidental Spy' how in the early sixties he became, unwittingly, a part of the covert operations of the CIA (*Imprint* was a front for them) and was wooed by KGB agents for all the wrong reasons. Jan Morris, in 'Clive's Castle', links Clive's fortunes, his ambitions and his unscrupulous ways, to the then British Mission in India: 'It was an Empire, by and large, without ideology.... For the most part their loftiest motive was Clive's loftiest too - the patriotic motive - and their basest was his too - to get rich quick' (p. 253).

An objective and dispassionate assessment of Arundhati Roy's first novel *The God of Small Things* can be possible only after all the media-generated hype around it subsides, when one will be able to see the work for what it is. The extracts published in the anthology do not reveal much, except for her deft use of language and its spontaneity. The anthology has two poems, one, 'What we lost' by Michael Ondaatje who recreates a charming old world giving way to the inexorable demands of change, and the other is 'Sampati' by Vikram Seth. It is a short, haiku-like poem, but is not as evocative, and the imagery is constrained. The selection, on the whole, makes good reading, though the colonial bias shows. It is a pity no translation from any of the Indian languages is included, though there is a significant *oeuvre* in these, both in literary and non-literary fields. Perhaps the omission is deliberate. And why not, if Macaulay's mission finds a promoter in Salman Rushdie (see his article in *The New Yorker* of 23 and 30 June 1997, which also shows a truncated map of India), who valorizes the English language, implicitly privileging the structures it embodies. The Empire rules the roost.

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An Essay on Time

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Thompson's statement virtually empties the word human of all actual or possible substance.

Consider in this context the great perplexity of the modern situation. While seeking time as the marker of progress upon which all significance is predicated, in certain modern contexts, time that negates linear progression is meticulously nurtured.

To this one could add a related perplexity of another kind. Anthropology seems content to merely outline as to how survival of time that negates linear progression in the West is akin to the much more substantial survivals of that in say, India or Algeria. Further, the way that such survival continues to persist in non-Western societies may have something to teach the modern West. For some strange reason such survivals are often designated as 'indigenous'. One respects the implicit disposition of sympathy towards, to use that awkward and culturally inane expression, the 'Third World'. But that by itself cannot furnish firm philosophical or even anthropological basis for enlarging the ambit of such survivals in modern life.

The true significance of the persistence of a sense of time that negates linear progression is perhaps to be sought precisely in realms that modern theory and life dare not entirely negate. Painting and poetry are artifacts as different in appearance as any two human artifacts perhaps can be. But they both affirm the logic and sheer power of form. A poem signifies, in the words of Octavio Paz, 'human utterance frozen in time'. Poetry, like painting is a human happening but it is a happening that could never have a pre-history. Their power to speak and possess far beyond the bounded contexts of their origins stems from the unalterable freezing of a particular sequence of words and sounds in a poem, of lines and colours in a painting that invokes that ineffable sense of an eternal presence. It is that which imparts to the artistic form a resilience beyond the reach and might of institutions and structures of entrenched power.

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The Many Meanings of Freedom

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attitudes are incapable of fighting the new materialism called communalism where religion becomes not the guide to the lone soul in the dark but a ploy in the hands of day-to-day power politics, a way not to salvation but to sabotage of the most destructive and inhuman kind.

One can fight this evil only from the higher spiritual ground where all created beings are able to hear one another's call, one another's silence, and share a platform of equality. I am referring to the other discourse where the tree gets involved with the earth, the other tongue in which water speaks to the wind, the wind to air, the air to the sky, the flower to the bee, the beast to the woods and man to all of them. My more recent poems, not only the ones on saint poets like Namdev, Kabir, Meera, Tukaram, Basava, Akka Mahadevi and Andal, but even the ones on my language and region and my travels inside and outside, emerge from the borders of these two languages: the one that bargains with the visible and the one that converses with the invisible. Perhaps I still have a long way to go to realize that alter-language of the spirit where freedom breaks free of its bondage to itself.

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Mapping Postcolonialism

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attention and appropriation within its parameters.

However, despite so many disagreements, a definite sense of the postcolonial does emerge out of this collection, and will certainly set the discerning reader thinking about his/her individual relation to the postcolonial. In particular, this book is a scholars' delight: it is a timely publication, has no truncated essays and is equipped with a useful bibliography. However, after going through so many deliberations on subject positions and the sites and politics of scholarly production, one misses the usual brief note on contributors. Considering the price of the book, the quality of the print is somewhat disappointing.

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NCERT books: combined with constant attention to teaching methods, they do seem geared towards much more classroom discussion and creative assimilation.[...]

What is needed is not just more effective channels of communication through which high academic wisdom can be disseminated downwards, but efforts to democratize also the production of historical knowledge, to work towards a new kind of historical culture. There is a need to pioneer ways of developing interaction among researchers, teachers, and activists drawn from, or working among, diverse social strata. On a long-term scale, collaborative research works and textbooks could emerge, enriched by multiple social and pedagogical experiences, and based on a mutual reformulation of perspectives. [...] Surely we can agree that the many worlds of Indian history must not be allowed to fly totally apart, as the social base of producers and intended audiences of front-ranking South Asian scholarship narrows, even while reaching out towards global horizons.

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The Place of Tradition

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it is generally true that every Indian sociologist begins as if there has been no work done by Indians before, this is particularly true of those who set out to take the Indian tradition as their point of departure. [...]

There is a large and yawning gap in time and context between the tradition that is invoked and the purpose for which, it is invoked, rendering largely fictitious that sense of filiation which is an essential part of tradition as an active principle. It is obvious that the appeal to tradition serves a rhetorical purpose; but it is doubtful that it contributes anything of value to the method of sociological enquiry.

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