

**Schoolbooks Archive Initiative**  
**Azim Premji University**  
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**Rationale<sup>1</sup> and Sections of the Archive**

Why is an archive of schoolbooks and educational required?

**1. As a source of social, cultural and educational history**

Textbooks are an important source of social and educational history. Textbooks from different spatial and temporal contexts can be approached from a variety of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. An archive of textbooks will be important not only for education but for all the disciplines of education.

We can analyse how the ideal of citizen, good learner and knowledge presented in textbooks excluded or included certain social groups. Social history of textbooks can provide us a lens to look at and reflect on how, and with what effects contestations over the formation of citizenship/nationhood and struggles over identity have been waged at different historical intervals. It may reveal how the struggles that erupted in public and private realms over citizenship were being waged and enacted in the domain of education in both colonial period and later. A significant number of school textbooks were translated and/or produced in different languages. These ‘translations’ and the metaphors they use signify the cultural embeddedness of education. Textbooks may be a source to recover and trace how our understanding of meanings and formation of ‘curriculum’ are bound to remain limited in the absence of an understanding of culture, social power relations and history.

**2. Giving the school textbook its due**

School textbooks are a significant mean of socialization of the young. If globalization has led to increasing migration within and between countries, then cross-cultural understandings of each other is a legitimate concern. And it would also need paying attention to how curriculum and textbooks engage students with the diversities and inequalities among people and the histories of these. School textbooks have been an important source of both social and educational history of a nation, its different regions, social groups and communities and have also engaged the young in ideas of self and other. But they have not received necessary attention to be archived as a source of history of knowledge, schooling, education, disciplines, identities, social relations and society. Given the

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1 Draft of a proposal by WATIS, prepared by Manish Jain, Ambedkar University, Delhi.

centrality of textbooks as a pedagogic device in the colonial education system, it is quite disconcerting that very little research exists on the content, debates and controversies over textbooks in colonial and independent India. Both our historians and scholars of education have not undertaken sufficient number of studies that use school textbooks as a historical source for research studies.

#### **4. Saving and preserving a mine of historical data**

Prominent state archives and universities in western countries have significant collections of textbooks and curriculum. In contrast, our prominent archives like National Archives of India, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library and National Library have not made any concerted effort to procure and archive school textbooks. In fact, the number of school textbooks is quite miniscule in their total archival collection.

A larger number of colonial textbooks are lying wasted in older libraries and schools. They neither realize their value, nor do they have any use value in the daily routine and struggles of running the school. Challenges of human and financial resources, professional capacities and infrastructure mean that these significant collections rot, are eaten up by moth, rats and moisture and are lost forever. If urgent steps are not taken up to retrieve, store and preserve these collections, they may be lost forever.

#### **5. Creating a national database**

There are huge regional diversities within India due to linguistic differences, distinct histories of state formation, economic development, provision of education and institutional capacities. It is not easy for researchers working in one part of India to access textbooks of other regions. As there are no regional centres/archives of textbooks, it is difficult for students and researchers to locate and access them. An archive of textbooks can also serve as a national data base of textbooks for diverse subjects and classes in various regions across different time-periods. This in itself may be a source of information and impetus for studies on shifts and continuities.

**6. Easy accessibility** of contemporary/out-of-print/historical/hard-to-find textbooks at one location  
Creation of an institution and facility that has large collections of textbooks can be a huge support to educationists, researchers, teachers, and students of different disciplines including education and general public to access such resources. It can serve as a resource centre to design workshops, study

material and training on development and study of textbooks. Collecting contemporary textbooks is also important as over a period with change of syllabus and curriculum, they may become old. Further, it is not easy for researchers of other states to locate textbooks of another region. Given the copyright issues of the textbooks of recent origin, the collection will collect and preserve hard copies of these textbooks. Initially these textbooks may be housed at one place and if the project does gather wings, then certain regional centers with institutional collaborations may be developed.

## **7. Preserving and promoting alternative efforts**

There are at least three sets of alternative textbooks initiatives that are distinct from state produced textbooks.

- a) We have instances of efforts outside state agencies (e. g., Eklavya, Digantar, Adharshila, SIDH, Jeevan Shalas of Narmada Bachao Andolan) to produce textbooks that besides being sensitive and responsive to local contexts also draw upon them, were/are based on progressive pedagogy and have laid new grounds for preparing textbooks. For learning from such initiatives, it is important that such textbooks may also be collected and archived to be used for a variety of purposes.
- b) Several religious organizations publish their own textbooks for use in their educational institutions. It is important to examine their ideological contours, disciplinary understanding and pedagogic articulation.
- c) In colonial India, a large number of textbooks were published by private players and state selected, sanctioned and approved their use. This practice continued in independent India and with establishment of NCERT and other state textbooks bureaus, state began to publish textbooks. Still a large number of textbooks are published by private publishers and they are used in not only private schools but also in government schools. Being an important part of the educational landscape, these textbooks too need to be preserved like other textbooks.

**8. Enabling knowledge, research and training:** These textbooks can lead to a series of research inquiries, some of which are indicated below. Domains such as history of education, sociology of education and bibliography/bibliology are obvious areas but other knowledge disciplines and research communities may also draw on textbooks for research. This repository and researches can also pave way for creation of courses, workshops and trainings in a wide variety of areas.

- a) **History of education** in colonial and independent India by looking at what was actually taught. This can be
- b) **Colonial perceptions, ideological frames** and agendas that guided colonial educational policies; **Indian response** to the above and their own agency; use of textbooks to **establish and legitimise social dominance** of the native elite through use of colonial categories of civilisational hierarchy or counter and accommodate the challenges posed to existing social relations; **continuities and changes in the textbooks in pre-colonial and colonial period**; continuities and shifts in the **understanding of a discipline** in colonial and postcolonial period; **decolonization** and education; use of textbooks to establish ‘**standardised**’ versions of **vernacular scripts** and legitimize certain scripts; their role in shaping the ‘public language and the public sphere’ (Orsini, 2002: 91-92); comparative studies of textbooks in different colonies of same colonizer or among different colonial powers; how far did colonial textbooks draw upon the textbooks used in the colonizing society and what were the points of departure and distinction
- c) **Complexity of the processes of textbook production and use**, space for pre-colonial Indian books in the curriculum, what perspective guided a textbook, how far did a colonial textbook follow or depart from the ‘approved British texts’, how were authors chosen, how did their anticipation of readers influence the text and the provincial setting of a textbook and the quarters from which its criticism was made are issues that have received scant attention (Powell 2002, 2011). We still need more studies that locate a colonial textbook with reference to other cultural texts where politics and discourse of colonial dominance was being played out, or that examine the reasons to select or reject a textbook and government orders to promote a textbook to illuminate the ideological and pedagogical objectives (Jain 2009).
- d) What philosophical assumptions framed the **ideas of education and its purpose, knowledge, learner, learning and pedagogy** that informed textbooks? How the ‘authority’ (whether of state or other sanctioning agencies and institutions) **constructed knowledge** in colonial and postcolonial contexts, different social and geographic spaces/federal entities/socio-historical moments? What shifts and continuities can we discern in this knowledge-power construction and coupling?

- e) How were textbooks used to construct (or reflected) a particular **pedagogic regime** and were an instrument to create (as well as challenge and resist) certain **subjectivities** (consciousness) and subjects of state? This can also illuminate socialization of the young.
- f) Studies of **nationalism and education, state formation** and education; portrayal of state and its expectations from citizens; perceptions of self and other
- g) If textbooks can be a powerful mean to socialize the young to hate other communities and to contest other's historical narrations about self and the past, they can also be used to **create textbooks** that aim **to overcome prejudices, conflicts and hatred and promote peace.**
- h) Analysis of a series of **anxieties along gender, caste and class, moral order and regulation; biases, prejudice and representation** with regard to class, caste, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, language, disability; inclusion and exclusion of the perspectives and voices of the marginalized.
- i) **History of curriculum and school subjects:** Scope of curriculum; Entry and removal of a school subject from the school curriculum; changing understanding and approaches to discipline and objectives to teach it at school level; continuity and change in the content; what **concepts** were considered significant and how were they **treated and explained; intellectual roots of the ideas** discussed in textbooks; change in the status of the school subject.
- j) Production and market of textbooks
- k) Changes in the teaching aids like visuals (**images/pictures/cartoons/maps**), suggestions for activities, experiments and visits, questions and its placing, use of tables etc. will tell histories of organization of textbooks. These can also be used and examined from the areas of design, media and communication. They can also be used to organize **workshops and trainings** around what kinds of images are appropriate to age, designs, and the political embeddedness of visual texts.
- l) Studies of evaluation exercises
- m) Such a store house of textbooks can serve as a **resource centre** for textbook and **material development and training, workshops** around a range of themes that use textbook as a resource, to develop face to face and online **courses**, for **trainings**, and to promote research and **research groups** who **collaborate** across regions.

## Sections of the Archive

The archive is envisioned to have seven sections:

1. **Schoolbooks Collection:** Comprising printed books meant for use by students, teachers and head-teachers; such as textbooks, reference books, prize-books, readers, guides for teachers and students, manuals, solved-paper books, home-schooling and children's literature – published by government institutions, private publishers and NGOs. This could in turn have various sub-sections such as
  - India Collection
  - South Asia Collection
  - Other Countries
2. **Manuscript Section:** Private papers of textbook writers, process related papers – internal manuscripts/drafts of books, internal reviews, etc. to show how textbooks are produced. Letters/correspondence relating to this, diaries. Agreements between publishers and authors/illustrators, etc. This will be sourced from government agencies, NGOs, individual textbook writers, etc.
3. **Educational Artefacts:** This section will host:
  - Maps, Atlases, Science-kits, Question/exam papers, Students' answer-scripts and notebooks, Lesson-plans, etc. used by students and teachers
  - Educational materials for children with special needs
4. **Documents Section:**
  - Politico-legal: Laws and High Court and Supreme Court decisions pertaining to schoolbooks, government orders, legislative debates, parliament questions and their responses from MHRD, litigation papers, educational policy documents, inspection and committee reports, etc.
  - Curriculum and syllabus documents
  - Newspaper articles, reviews of textbooks, journals and journal debates/articles, etc.
5. **Digital Section:** This section will comprise two subsections:
  - Digitization: including efficient scanning, OCR, etc. of all the above materials that do not compromise copyright and privacy
  - APF/APU Website: to make as much archival material as possible freely and widely accessible; as well as to actively facilitate the use of such materials

6. **Textbooks Library:** will comprise of books/writings on and about textbooks (textbooks' history, analysis and comparative research), journals on textbooks and educational artefacts, memoirs which accounts of school-time, etc. It will also contain contemporary textbooks from India and other countries.
7. **Audio-Visual Section:** Will consist of videos, interviews, documentaries, images, etc.
  - About how schoolbooks and other educational artefacts are transacted in the classroom; used by students independently, etc.
  - On the process and experiences of making textbooks (such as NCERT, various state-boards, civil society organizations, private publishers, etc.) with the idea of capturing oral histories (of schoolbook writers, illustrators, editors, designers, printers, publishers, etc.) and providing a window into how the schoolbooks came into being.
  - Interviews of people who have worked on archival materials (to facilitate the archive's usage and as a way of training young people).

## References

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