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The beef debate: Religion, history, and harmony in India

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THE BEEF DEBATE: RELIGION, HISTORY, AND HARMONY IN INDIA

An Abstract of a Thesis

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Shreya Singh

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I analyze the rhetoric circulating during the 1977-78 textbook controversy debates and further probe into the politics of religion and identity in post-Independence India. I discuss the subsequent issues that have emerged due to a deeply divided and disputed historical narrative about who Indians are (and who they should be) as well as how Hindus and Muslims have internalized their identities. Further, I analyze Rajya Sabha debates from 1977-78 to trace the ideograph <harmony> as it moves through Indian political discourse and discuss its implications for Indian multiculturalism and communal coexistence.

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Entitled: The Beef Debate: Religion, History, and Harmony in India

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1977, a dispute that had been brewing over two sentences in a middle-school textbook erupted into a national-level controversy in India. The sentences appeared in a 1966 textbook written by historian Romila Thapar and simply indicated that given ancient Indians were cattle herders, like most herder civilizations, they ate cattle meat. The textbook also stated that cattle meat was held in high regard and was served mostly on special or celebratory occasions.

These seemingly innocuous sentences sparked criticism from politicians, nationalistic right-wing groups, as well as the public. The criticisms were based on contemporary interpretations of Hindu practices that revere cows and prohibit beef consumption. Right-wing groups accused Thapar of perpetuating anti-Hindu, and hence anti-national sentiments in school-age children by misrepresenting India's history and teaching them to doubt orthodox Hindu religious beliefs. Disapproval intensified over the years, finally culminating in a nation-wide, public and political controversy in 1977, after a new right-leaning government was elected to the parliament. The controversy swirled in the parliament as well as the media. Thapar (2009) wrote in her memoir that "for three years the Sunday papers carried articles for and against the authors of the textbook[s]" and the textbook became a subject of both parliamentary and public debates.

In order to grasp how two sentences in a history textbook could set in motion an intense public controversy that spanned ten years, a discussion of the role of cattle in Hindu religious narrative as well as the dominance of Hinduism in Indian society,

culture, and politics, is warranted. Selective meat avoidance in India, which is tied to religious and social factors, is influenced by interpretations of Hinduism, has always been highly nuanced, and requires some unpacking.

Historically, scholars have posited that ancient Indians were known to consume the meat of a wide variety of animals, some that they domesticated, and some that they hunted (Zysk, 1998). Although some regional rulers, citing religious reasons, prohibited the killing of cattle in their respective kingdoms, beef consumption was common (Kosambi, 1972). As civilization progressed, around the 4th century BCE new schools of thought like Jainism and Buddhism. These new sects promoted vegetarianism on humanitarian grounds, which was adopted by several high-caste Hindus and came to be recognized as a mark of purity (Doniger, 2017). However, other Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Zoroastrians, etc. continued to consume meat, including cattle meat, for centuries thereafter.

The avoidance of meat, especially cattle meat, began to take on a political hue when nationalistic right-wing groups gained traction in the 1920s (Venkatesh, 2019). Right-wing activists, spearheaded by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, a Hindu nationalist paramilitary organization), began advocating for a ban of cattle meat consumption and branded it anti-Hindu and hence, un-Indian (Bhagwat, 2017). While these sentiments kept brewing under the surface and caused sparks of cow vigilante-related violence, they were largely kept from gaining a prominent national voice due to the influence of the colonial rule pre-independence and the dominance of the Indian

National Congress (hereafter Congress), a religious-liberal political party[1], after 1947 (Malji, 2018).

Since the 1950s, right-wing groups made their presence felt as an oppositional political force by publicly condemning acts that they branded anti-Hindu and anti-national, one of which was Romila Thapar's account of the dietary practices of Ancient Indians. Since the 1970s, nationalistic forces have taken on an increasingly militant direction and sought to enforce their beef avoidance practices on Muslims, Christians, and lower Hindu castes (Subramanium, 2020).

In 1977, when the Janata Party won the national elections, the prominence of right-wing politicians within the party, emboldened nationalistic groups and gave them a louder voice on a national stage (Sarkar & Sarkar, 2016). These groups, RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha being among the notable ones, promoted a constructed identity of India and Hinduism that engaged in the exclusion of certain non-Hindu religions as well as lower castes (Venkatesh, 2019). Dietary practices played a central role in this exclusionary rhetoric (Akins, 2018).

In this thesis, I explore the 1977 textbook controversy and in doing so, explore how the right-wing Hindu nationalistic identity was created and why a couple of sentences in a history textbook challenged that identity. This puts me in conversation with literature about public argument, controversy, and constitutive rhetoric to see how

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[1]The Indian National Congress was formed in 1885 and dominated the Indian freedom struggle until 1947, after which it formed the first elected government of independent India. Since then, Congress has won several central government elections and has a strong presence in most Indian states.

theories developed in US Communication Studies might be reconfigured, used, and/or challenged to account for the postcolonial Indian rhetorical landscape.

Before moving on to discussing the artifacts I analyze and the literature I review to aid my analysis, it is crucial to understand the relationship between the intertwining of religion, Hinduism, and national identity in India. This provides a relevant backdrop to grasp the key tenets of the 1977 textbook controversy and offers a framework within which the controversy over history can be better understood.

<div align="center">Hinduism and Indian Identity</div>

In talking of an Indian national identity, it is difficult to ignore the centrality of Hinduism and Hindu nationalism. Not only does Hinduism dominate due to the sheer numerical edge given around 80% of the Indian population has identified as Hindu (since the 1947 partition), but the Hindu religious narrative has seeped into India's social and political domains due to the rise of right-wing rhetoric. In this section, I trace the emergence of Hindu-based nationalism in India triggered under colonial subjugation and summarize factors that led to its reinforcement in the post-independence political climate.

However, before we go any further, it is important to be cognizant of the ethno-geographical origins of the term "Hindu", which is different from its solely religious character that has emerged more recently (Lorenzen, 1999). Although often described as the oldest known religion in the world, some scholars argue Hinduism is not a religion at all. Instead, it is an ethnic identity which, in the recent past, was connected to religious views. Even though Hindu religious practices have been archaeologically traced back to before late centuries B.C.E., the emergence of Hinduism as a religious identity is fairly

recent (Lorenzen, 1999; Lahiri & Bacus, 2004). Before the arrival of British colonizers when the religious transformation of Hinduism began in earnest, the term "Hindu" was first used by Persian invaders in the 6th century BCE to refer to people from the east of the river Indus. According to this usage of the term, it literally meant indigenous to the Indian subcontinent (Viswanathan, 1993). This acknowledgement serves a two-fold purpose, which is expanded upon in the following discussion: Firstly, it heralds the discussion of how Hinduism became embedded into the core of India's national identity and secondly, it recognizes the various connotations of the term and establishes that "Hinduism" refers to the religion.

The Hindu-centered Indian identity first started taking shape under British rule. A combination of factors contributed to its emergence (Lorenzen, 1999; Oommen, 1994). In the late 1800s, the collective Indian identity was being threatened in the face of increasing criticism from British Christian missionaries regarding certain social practices as well as the disunity between Hindus and Muslims fostered by the divide-and-rule policy of British colonizers. Through this policy, the British intentionally stoked tensions between different castes and religions, especially between Hindus and Muslims. The objective was "to divide and so neutralize" the unifying potential of castes and nationalities making it easier to thwart native uprisings against the British (Stewart, 1951, p. 54).

Additionally, subjugation under foreign colonizers triggered anti-colonial nationalism which further fostered "a range of other more specific nationalisms" one of them being religious nationalism that branched out to form Hindu and Muslim

nationalisms (Thapar, 2009). In the next few decades, a Hindu-centered identity grew rapidly and is reflected in several events of the early 1900s. For instance, the year 1917 marks the first use of the term "Hindooism" while 1925 saw the founding of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Hindu right-wing paramilitary organization mentioned earlier (Lorenzen, 1999; Venkatesh, 2019).

As the subcontinent approached independence from colonial rule, dissent between Hindus and Muslims rose due to growing divergence in religion-based nationalisms and was exacerbated during the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan. In 1947, as the British left abruptly, Indian political leaders were left struggling to manage the rising animosity between Hindus and Muslims. After much discussion and debate among the then British Viceroy Louis Mountbatten and Indian representatives including Jawaharlal Nehru, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and Baldev Singh, a verdict was reached: the Indian subcontinent was to be divided into two separate countries: a Muslim-majority, Pakistan and what was meant to be an all-inclusive India (Sreenivas, 2017). This split further emboldened the right-wing rhetoric that a non-Muslim, non-Pakistani Hindu identity was synonymous with being Indian.

Post independence, as India struggled to constitute a unifying national identity, Hindu nationalist groups began to generate a rhetoric of negative identification, of a constitutive outside(concepts on which I will elaborate more in the next chapter). Being Hindu meant *not* being Pakistani. Being Hindu meant *not* being Muslim. This also triggered a rejection of customs and traditions followed by Muslim communities.

One Muslim custom which attracted disproportionate criticism and received nation-wide attention was the dietary practice of consuming cattle meat. Nationalistic groups declared that consuming cattle meat was anti-Hindu and by extension, un-Indian. Subsequently, cow-vigilante violence began to rise in certain parts of the country, first appearing in the late 1800s (Akins, 2018). Cow-vigilante groups, that often had affiliations with right-wing Hindu organizations, organized lynching attacks and used other intimidation tactics on people who raised and traded cattle. By the end of the 19th century, the cow protection movement had gained momentum. In 1889, riots occurred in the state of Uttar Pradesh, where 100 people were reported to have died in an attack connected to cow vigilantism. By the 1920s and 1930s, the cow protection agenda became an important talking point in Hindu nationalistic discourse (Siyech & Narain, 2018).

Despite this growing exclusionary narrative, right-wing Hindu groups did not gain nation-wide domination after independence due to the Congress government's religious-liberal stance. In 1977, for the first time in the history of independent India, "organizational decay" of the INC led to right-wing political parties gaining the upper hand in Indian politics (Varshney, 1993). The Hindu right wing finally found a national platform and the Hindu nationalistic identity gained traction. It was against this backdrop that the textbook controversy emerged and became a subject of discussion in the Indian parliament.

<u>The Controversy and the Artifacts</u>

In this thesis, I analyze a 1966 history textbook written by historian Romila Thapar for class VI and the controversy that emerged in 1977 as a reaction to its content. Although the textbook and a specific excerpt within it are of importance to this analysis, the controversy that swirled within Indian parliamentary debates in 1977-78 are also of interest in exploring the importance of history in the constitution of a unified national identity. In this section, I introduce the controversy, the key actors involved, and the artifacts I analyze.

Established by the Government of India in 1961, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) oversees school education and commissions model textbooks for centre and state schools. Although several textbooks were involved in the 1977 controversy, the one written by Thapar (1966) likely received the most targeted criticism because its most controversial excerpt could be reduced to two succinct sentences: "The cow held a place of pride among animals because the Aryans[2] were dependent on the produce of the cow. In fact, for special guests beef was served as a mark of honour" (p. 45).

After the textbook was published and distributed in 1966, the initial reactions of disapproval came from Hindu and Sikh religious organizations. The then Congress

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[2] The Aryan Theory of Race was developed in the 1850s by German philologists, including Max Müller, who introduced the notion that people who spoke Indo-European languages in India, Persia, and Europe were descendants of a primitive tribe from the north of the Hindu Kush mountains in Asia. Around 2000 BCE, the tribe migrated southward, into Europe and the Indian subcontinent, respectively. Most proponents of this theory dichotomized the two migrant groups and subsequently ascribed greater prominence to the western branch of Aryan migration (Leopold, 1970). In the *Ancient India* textbook, Thapar refers to the group of Aryan migrants that settled in India. See also Thomas Trautmann, *The Aryan Debate: Oxford in India Readings: Debates in Indian History and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

education minister Mohammadali Carim Chagla defended the textbook, saying Thapar abided by the principle "that textbooks in history should not recite myths but provide secular and rational explanations of the past" (as cited in Thapar, 2009). This led Hindu, Sikh, and certain other regional organizations to complain that their religions and religious teachers were not adequately glorified in Thapar's textbook. However, due to the support of the government-funded NCERT, the textbook, with the two sentences about beef consumption intact, continued to be taught with only minor revisions until the summer of 1977 (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1983; Thapar, 2009). It is noteworthy that although the textbook faced criticism when it was first published in 1966, the controversy around the beef passage became prominent a decade later.

The disapproval of the textbook turned into a national-level controversy in May 1977 just after the new Janata government was elected to power and "history became an object of open controversy" (Gottlob, 2007). The newly elected Prime Minister Moraji Desai sent a private note to the then education minister P.C. Chunder, directing him to look into the "controversial and biased material" appearing in four NCERT textbooks, one of which was Thapar's *Ancient India* (Rosser, 2003; Rudolph & Rudolph, 1983; Thapar, 2009). Desai's note also advised the education minister to ensure that "readers do not get wrong ideas about various elements of our history and culture" (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1983). To be clear, by "our history and culture," Desai meant Hindu history and culture. Shortly afterwards, the note was leaked to Thapar as well as the press and, thus, the controversy became a public and political one.

The intentions behind the writing of Indian history, how it should be taught, and how it affects national identity began to be overtly debated. Diverse argumentative stances emerged from secular-liberal academicians, conservative historians, left-liberal Marxist groups, right-wing religious organizations, and politicians. Essentially, all these arguments were centered around the question of what made Indians Indian.

Although the debates in the parliament did not address the line in Thapar's textbook about the consumption of cattle meat directly, NCERT history textbooks were mentioned frequently and criticized for distorting India's history. The Janata Party ministers alleged that NCERT, influenced by the previous Congres government's political rhetoric, had published haphazardly-written history textbooks to fit an agenda. The Janata Party derided "leftist" historians for misrepresenting Indian history and also set up an expert panel to review the textbooks. However, while the identity of the historians who formed the panel and the details of their deliberations about the textbooks were never disclosed, right-wing religious groups argued that it was inconceivable that ancient Indian culture, which was essentially Hindu, would have allowed beef consumption. Because modern-day Hindus believe that consuming beef goes against the very core of Hinduism and is synonymous with being anti-Hindu, then it was impossible that beef consumption had happened historically.

Every few days, popular daily newspapers carried articles arguing for or against the factual accuracy of Thapar's statement on beef consumption. These articles argued about who should get to tell history, if the books should be banned, and what implications bans would have on scholarly freedom. The upper house of the parliament, the Rajya

Sabha, held repeated debates about what should be taught in schools and some speculated that some textbooks would be banned (Rosser, 2003).

In this thesis, I focus on the 1977 textbook controversy to explore questions regarding right-wing Hinduism and the rewriting of history: Why did two sentences in a history textbook challenge the religion-based national identity? Why do dietary practices play a substantial role in India's nationalistic, political rhetoric? To study this controversy in depth, I collect and analyze the artifacts described below.

The Textbook

Published in 1966, *Ancient India* is a class VI history textbook which contains the two sentences in which I anchor my analysis. The textbook was commissioned by the NCERT as part of its responsibilities to commission model textbooks (Nair, 2009; Rudolph & Rudolph, 1983). *Ancient India* was one among several new social science textbooks to be written in the late 1960s. The 151-page long book contains nine chapters. The first few chapters provide a brief overview of the life of the "Early Men" [*sic*] and the transition to civilization, focusing on the Vedic Age, from c. 1500 BCE to c. 500 BCE, when the Vedas are believed to have been written (Ghosh, 2020). From the fourth chapter onwards, the book is chronologically divided into the various kingdoms and dynasties of Ancient India right up until the decline of the Gupta Empire around 550 CE. The excerpt which became the cause of contention appears in the chapter titled "Life in the Vedic Age" (pp. 42-52).

It is noteworthy that having been taken out of circulation around two decades ago, it was difficult to locate an electronic copy of the book. Hence, I approached the author,

Romila Thapar and received a scanned version of the chapter from her personal copy.

Although the book itself is of fundamental importance, I additionally analyze two sets of

key artifacts to explore the full extent of the controversy.

<u>Parliamentary Debates</u>

As the controversy gained a national stage, it was discussed extensively within

India's political sphere. Therefore, I collect data from the parliamentary debates digital

archives which are maintained by the Government of India and freely accessible. Thapar

mentioned in her memoir regarding the controversy that several right-wing leaders voiced

their criticism by calling the textbook anti-Hindu and branding Thapar a traitor to the

nation. Some of these comments were made during parliamentary debates. Hence, I

procured digital copies of the debates from the government archives, focusing on

parliament sessions conducted from 1977-78 in the Rajya Sabha, the deliberative upper

house of the Indian parliament. Further, I locate comments made on broad subjects like

NCERT textbooks, cattle meat consumption, education, history, and national identity

while being on the lookout for specific comments about religion and identity.

Although the controversy that began in the summer of 1977 spanned years, re-

emerged almost two decades later in 1999, and continues to be a point of contention

among various religious and academic circles, my focus is on artifacts relating to the

origins of the dispute. Therefore, most of the data is collected from the parliamentary

debates that unfolded during the brief rule of the Janata Party from 1977 to 1978.

Through this, my goal is to explore the role of history textbooks and by extension,

education in identity construction. Selecting artifacts from these two years also ensures

that my subsequent discussion and analysis stays focused on the beginnings of the controversy and does not get sidetracked by successive disputes related to the former.

Before beginning my analysis of the parliamentary debates, I provide contextual and historical frameworks that will help situate the textbook controversy. Hence, in Chapter 2, I discuss the various rhetorical theories and concepts that will guide the following chapters. In doing so, I pay particular attention to postcoloniality, constitutive rhetoric, and public memory. I am interested in teasing out the connections between collective remembering and how memories and identities are constituted through this process.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the historic development of the Indian education system and the role it played in identity construction. I also explore the colonial education system and its legacy on the present-day systems of knowledge production and consumption in the country.

Chapter 4, I shift my attention to Indian political discourse that will further frame my discussion of the parliamentary debates. In this chapter, I explore how <harmony> has been an omnipresent concept in Indian politics going back centuries. This will lead to a better understanding of why <harmony> comes up several times in the Rajya Sabha debates and is portrayed as both a characteristic and goal of Indian society.

In Chapter 5, I delve into a detailed analysis of debates that occurred in the Rajya Sabha between 1977-78, during the short Janata Party rule. These debates reveal assumptions and expectations regarding Indian religions and cultural relationships. I explore how the debates are aimed towards defining who Indians are and thus creating a

sense of unity and oneness within the Indian citizenry. I critique the construction of true Indian identity in the debates.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I summarize my findings and conclude by discussing how the construction of national identity in the debates is problematic as it preaches assimilation or tolerance, but largely ignores a third way of reaching national harmony: true acceptance. Lastly, drawing on my analysis, I also highlight connections between the debates of 1977-78 to contemporary developments in Indian political discourse.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS & LITERATURE REVIEW

In this thesis, I analyze the rhetoric circulating during the 1977-78 textbook controversy debates and further probe into the politics of religion and identity in post-Independence India. Although *rhetorical criticism* is the name given to the method of academic inquiry I utilize, it is better understood as a framework through which unique texts can be understood, rather than a rigid procedural method with set steps.

Rhetorical scholars have rejected immutable formulaic procedures in rhetorical analysis. Instead, rhetorical research is guided by "the language of criticism" and can be successfully conducted by mastering the "theoretical dialects" associated with the text being studied (Nothstine, Blair, & Copeland; 1994; p. 6). In this vein, Palczewski (2003) noted:

> Instead of viewing rhetorical scholarship as method (modelled after scientific method) that produces a product,. . . think of it as developing heuristic vocabularies that enable the conversation to veer off into interesting directions. (p. 388)

Thus, rhetorical analysis requires critics to develop vocabularies that enable them to study texts with full awareness of the artifact's distinctive significance.

In talking of its fluidity and the lack of methodological rigidity in rhetorical approaches to research, Nothstine, Blair, & Copeland (1994), stated:

> Most of these approaches do not really qualify as "methods", in any meaningful sense, to begin with. They are more properly conceptual heuristics or vocabularies; they may invite a critic to interesting ways of reading a text, but they do not have the procedural rigor or systematicity that typically characterizes a method. In fact, it is arguable that they are at their best, critically, when they are least rigorous "methodologically." (p. 39-40).

Hence, in order to conduct a rhetorical analysis, I develop a heuristic vocabulary by reviewing relevant literature. In social scientific research, description of the methodological process used and the findings of the literature review are distinctly different sections. However, as rhetorical methods essentially involves drawing on literature to advance the analysis, this section combines the two sections to offer a comprehensive account of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that guide my analysis.

An analysis of the textbook controversy of 1977-78 calls for a discussion about what constitutes Indian identity, how it is created, and what challenges it. The major frameworks and theories I use include postcolonial theory, constitutive rhetoric, and literature on public memory and its connection to history and identity. These concepts inform my analysis of the public arguments circulating during the textbook controversy.

<div align="center">Key Concepts to Guide the Analysis</div>

An analysis of the textbook controversy of 1977 sets the stage for an interesting discussion of what constitutes Indian identity, how it is created, and what challenges it. However, before diving into the analysis, a brief discussion of the critical and rhetorical frameworks that I utilize is warranted. I engage in a detailed analysis of the literature on the Indian Education system I reviewed in Chapter 3. For now, I offer a short preview of the major theoretical frameworks and concepts I use: postcolonialism theory, constitutive rhetoric, public memory, and controversy.

First, my analysis gains contextual efficacy by acknowledging India's postcolonial status and being cognizant of colonialism's effect on post-independence

Indian society, politics, and identity. The postcolonial framework also safeguards against academic neocolonialism as I am conscious of the risks of applying western-origin theoretical concepts (like constitutive rhetoric and public memory practices) to India. The key tenets of postcolonialism relevant to this thesis are intersectionality and othering, neocolonialism, and the colonization of identities.

Second, literature on constitutive rhetoric shapes my discussions regarding the constitution of India's national identity through narratives and how it came to be synonymous with Hindu nationalistic identity. These narratives conflate the nationalistic and Hindu identities and become a rhetorical tool through which the Indian Hindu population comes to understand itself and reacts to matters of national importance such as the textbook controversy.

Third, public memory literature provides the theoretical base to analyze the rhetoricity of memory and history and the role they have played in the rise of Hindu nationalism leading to the textbook controversy of 1977. Additionally, this thesis seeks to explore not only debates over history, but also how history functions rhetorically. Given that the textbook controversy arose over historical facts, the concept of collectively remembering the past explored in memory studies proves worthwhile. I analyze the beef controversy and by extension, the formation of modern Indian and Hindu identity through a discussion of how current political debates make us reimagine our past.

Postcolonial Theory

Gaining prominence in the later half of the 20th century, postcolonial theory is a critical framework primarily based on the writings of Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, and

Homi J. Bhabha (Dissanayake, 2009). Postcolonial theory criticizes the dominant eurocentric attitudes within scholarship as well as society. This framework urges scholars to look at the world through multiple perspectives offered by various non-dominant cultures and identify the previously absent voice of colonized populations (Alhassan, 2007; Dissanayake, 2009; Spivak, 1988).

Postcolonial theory identifies neocolonialism which recognizes how even though people seem to exist in a post-colonial world, the effects of the colonial past still exert influence on national consciousnesses and the daily realities of previously colonized societies (Shome, 1996). Hence, postcolonial theory is prominent in scholarship emerging from previously-colonized countries and cultures. In recent years, postcolonial theory has also merged with the concept of intersectionality to recognize power as a non-linear force that morphs and shifts as situations and contexts change (Mohanty, 2004b). The key tenets of postcolonialism relevant to this thesis are intersectionality and othering, neocolonialism, and the colonization of identities.

Intersectionality. Intersectionality is an integral concept in modern-day postcolonial scholarship. Although the term was first used in a paper about how race and sex come into play together in the lived experience of Africans Americans (Crenshaw, 1989), it has since been used extensively to reevaluate how lived realities are affected by an intersection of various identities and experiences, especially in postcolonial literature (Mohanty, 2004a; Shome & Hegde, 2006). Essentially, intersectionality is a theory of power and how it interacts with identity.

Identity is a complex concept and decoding the identity construction in India is closely related to colonization and the freedom struggle. However, before venturing into an exploration of intersectional Indian identity, I begin by providing a brief overview of identity, its function, and construction. First of all, I emphasize that identity is an ongoing process of identification, and not an unwavering, unchanging entity (Hall, 1996). Identities are created through a process of interaction between personal characteristics as well as gender, class, religion, sexuality, race, and culture (Gauntlett, 2002; Nayak, 2021). For the purpose of this thesis, Nayak's (2021) summation of identity is particularly relevant:

> Identities are based on a combination of acts (Sedgwick, 1990) that often takes the form of hierarchical social categories (Butler, 1990), culture (Kellner, 1995, 2003), history, difference, representation, social institutions, and stories that define and shape the self through recursive and self-reflexive processes. In short, identity is the product of a 'relational ethic [and] a discursive effect of the social . . . constituted through identifications' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000: 83). (Nayak, 2021, p. 514)

In my analysis, identities that are created through identification with some and by extension, disidentification with others plays an important role.

In Burkean rhetoric too, identification is a key component of persuasion as in order for persuasion to occur, one must identify with the other (Burke, 1969). This identification serves a critical purpose in assisting modern citizens imagine themselves as a part of the whole. In speaking of the function of identity creation in contemporary nation-states, "whether we like it or not, the dominant paradigm of identity has been 'the imagined community' of nationalism" (Radhakrishnan, 1993, p. 752). On the other hand, Ratcliffe (2005), draws on Burke (1969) and Fuss (1995) to argue that disidentification is

a critical component of rhetorical dialectics. As such, disidentification with certain

groups makes key contributions to identity construction. Becker & Tausch (2014) note

that "we try to downplay our membership in [some] groups and even actively distance

ourselves from [certain] unwanted identities" (p. 194). Disidentifying with certain groups

is therefore a part of identity building practices, through which people construct their

self-image by defining what they are not.

   To sum it up, identification and disidentification are central to identities that

groups carve out for themselves. These identities are constructed through social, cultural,

and for India, postcolonial intersections and serve the ideological purpose of nation-

building and for citizens to imagine themselves as part of a whole.

   In the context of this thesis, intersectionality as a framework allows a more

nuanced understanding of how Indian lived experiences and national identity are

inflected by the intersection of one's religion, caste, and sex/gender. In studying the

1977-78 textbook controversy, religious identities are especially relevant as the

controversy emerged from the Hindu national identity being challenged by two sentences

about an ancient civilization in a history textbook. Additionally, focusing on

intersectional identity offers a better understanding of how identification, and its

corollary of disidentification, operate in Indian political rhetoric.

   Neocolonialism. Around the mid-19th century, in the wake of anti-imperial

movements primarily in Asia and Africa, colonial empires began to withdraw from the

territories they occupied. However, this did not mark an end to colonialism itself but

rather, indicated that the imperial mechanism had evolved to a stage where territorial

occupation was no longer a requirement for regional exploitation (Prasad, 1996).

Neocolonial scholarship proposes that the effects of past colonialism continues to be

ingrained into the present daily lived experience of previously-colonized populations

even today (Bhabha, 1994; Mohanty, 2004a; Sartre, 2001; Spivak, 1988). Examples of

this can be identified in economic dependency on previous colonial powers, intra-

religious struggles in postcolonial countries, and border disputes created by past imperial

rulers, among others. These issues that persist in the modern world resulting from

centuries of economic and cultural exploitation.

Additionally, postcolonial nations have been burdened with the objective of what

Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) called "decolonization of the mind." Thiong'o, specifically

writing about Africa, argued that because most of history and scholarship is written from

the perspective of the colonizer, it is through these writings that post-colonial subjects

understand themselves and further, colonization of the mind persists.

In the context of the textbook controversies in India, the residual effects of

colonization are apparent in the way the Indian educational system is set up to encourage

compliance and discourage deviance or innovation, the inaccurate historical narratives

based on western scholarship, and the othering of certain castes and religions. In this

thesis, I discuss the subsequent issues that have emerged due to a deeply divided and

disputed historical narrative about who Indians are (and who they should be) as well as

how Hindus and Muslims have internalized their identities.

Neocolonialism also is present in scholarship. For instance, in a fundamental

article on the global applications of the public sphere theory, Brouwer & Paulesc (2017)

have noted that the concept is largely based on western democracies and presents

incongruencies when applied to non-western nations (p. 75). To offer some background,

the public sphere theory emerged in 18th century Europe at a time when the boundaries

of civic society were extremely restrictive and public opinion was, in truth, the opinion

held by feudal authorities who formed the dominant public sphere (Fraser, 1990; Negt &

Kluge, 1993). In these societies, the ideal was that the dominant public opinion would

guide state policies. In analyzing its origins in western democracies, it becomes clear that

public sphere theory in its original form would prove ineffective in studying non-western

states and publics. This is especially true for postcolonial countries where the formation

of public and counterpublic spheres has been heavily influenced by their colonial past.

Similar arguments have been advanced by scholars like Shome (1996) and Shome &

Hedge (2006), specifically regarding postcolonialism in communication studies. Shome

& Hegde (2006) assert the centrality of colonization in contemporary issues unfolding in

the world, from the "migrant crisis" in the west to the indigenous nationalism in newly-

formed nation-states. Legacies of colonization have extensively factored into modern

developments and situating them within the broader concept of neocolonialism is crucial

for a more accurate understanding.

An analysis of the postcolonial democratic development in India reveals how

colonial legacies influence the manner in which publics think, behave, and the opinions

they hold. India's modern democratic development began in 1947 with the signing of the

Indian Independence Act in the British Parliament, after almost 200 years of European

colonial domination. However, the independence of India was muddled with an abrupt

transfer of power, arbitrary territorial reorganization, and violent religious strife.

Undeniably, India's colonial experience has affected the formation of its democratic

public. Hence, the public sphere theory's reliance on western democracies must be

checked to factor in traumatic postcolonial legacies, religious diversity, and nationalism

born out of oppression, in order to effectively study the Indian public sphere.

Hence, I am conscious of the ways in which neocolonialism can creep into

scholarship and I work to avoid it in my analysis. Although western theories of identity,

rhetoric, and public controversies inform my research, I deconstruct what these concepts

mean in the Indian context. For instance, in Chapter 4, although my exploration of

ideographs is inspired by foundational literature on the subject from Western music and

philosophy, while discussing ideographs in Indian political discourse, I tease out suitable

examples and applications. Additionally, when talking of broader concepts like identity

and nationalism, I make sure that I situate them within postcolonial frameworks and

avoid drawing parallels with western-specific analyses.

Constitutive Rhetoric

The concept of constitutive rhetoric, first introduced by James Boyd White

(1985), and later added to by Maurice Charland (1987), explores how identities are

manifested through narratives and how it is through these narratives that subjects or

agents are "called into being" (Charland, 1987, p. 133). Charland describes constitutive

rhetoric as a discursive process through which identities are produced and reproduced.

This process of constituting identities is securely anchored in the past and influenced by

historical narratives and how people view themselves within those narratives. For

instance, citizens of a country are called into viewing themselves not as individuals but as a group with strong identification within it through discourse present in the constitution, political speeches, campaign calls, etc.

A relevant example is Jawaharlal Nehru's speech titled "Tryst with Destiny," which was delivered on the eve of independence on August 15, 1947. The speech addresses the people of a soon to be independent India and contributed to the constitution of their identity as citizens of a sovereign country. Through the words spoken by Nehru, for the first time in history, Indians began to understand themselves as part of an integrated citizenry and hence, the speech is a building block in the construction of India's identity.

Although the concept of constituting identity through rhetoric was first introduced to explain Western political identity, Indian-origin scholars like Mohanty (2004b), Shome and Hegde (2006), and Kinnvall (2002) have written about the concept of identity as something that is discursively constructed instead of something that naturally exists. For the most part, Charland's concept of constitutive identities holds true in Indian contexts and provides the space to weave in postcolonial sensibilities in discussions of identity. However, a subtle difference exists: for Indian scholars like Mohanty (2004a), Shome (1996), and Shome and Hegde (2006) the constitution of identities cannot be discussed without factoring in intersectional experiences of the previously colonized subject. For instance, Mohanty's (2004b) article on the construction of the "third world woman" identity specifically targets how indigenous patriarchal societies as well as western colonizers' perceptions contributed to its constitution. Hence, while Charland's

framework is vital for my analysis, I work through the concept by multiplying it with postcolonial contexts when applying it to India.

It is interesting to note that even after colonial pressures to assimilate to the colonizers' culture had passed, postcolonial nations continue to exert assimilation pressures, but this time to assimilate to a unified, shared national identity. Scholars have explored the rhetorical formation of this national identity in post-independence India, especially focusing on the aggrandizing of assimilation and a shared common past in identity development (Das, 2013; Guichard, 2010). Das (2013) argued that this has led to the idealized depiction of a "castless, raceless Indian people" within political and cultural discourse (p. 221). Promoted under the ideal of "unity in diversity" this idealized assimilated identity ignores communal tensions and further neglects the needs of disenfranchised groups. However, instead of attaining the Nehruvian ideal of an India without distinctions, this idealized depiction further aggravates notions of identification and disidentification within the country. The identification/disidentification discourse has become an important tool in the arsenal of politicians and cannot be ignored in political discourse.

As I probe deeper into postcolonial identity formation in India, it is apparent that under the guise of a unified, inclusive national consciousness lies a rhetoric that seeks to normalize just the opposite. The rise of extreme nationalistic identity is underlined by the goal of normalizing exclusions and carving out Indian identity through negative identification against the "constitutive outside" (Kristeva, 1989; Palczewski, 2016).

Hence, while constitutive rhetoric is about creating a stable internal identity, its outlines are contoured by a series of exclusions.

The concept of a constitutive outside was introduced by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Richter, 2016). Laclau and Mouffe argued that in the event of an existential dilemma (much like what India experienced post-partition from Pakistan), identity construction occurs by carving out a "radical outside, without a common measure with the inside" (Laclau, 1990, p. 18; Richter, 2016). This constitutive outside then unites everything that the dominant hegemonic powers disidentify with and label as "the other." This radical other personifies everything that the dominant identity is *not* and a subsequent villainization of the "other" creeps into political discourse. Derrida (1981) also wrote about how exclusions are always a part of identity construction and the establishment of a hierarchy between the two identities. Drawing on Derrida, Hall (1996) illustrates this social exclusion by using the examples of man/woman and white/black in societies where hegemonic assumptions treated the identities of man or white as default, whereas woman or black were "marked terms" that represented the other (p. 5). Although this example uses archaic and blatantly binary identities, it illustrates the hierarchical difference between identities that are the default normal and those that border exclusionary frontiers. In summation, disidentification with a constitutive outside is as important to identity construction as identification: "The Other constitutes US because we can never positively express what we really are; we can only express what we are not" (Hansen, 1996, p. 150).

In a more India-specific example about identification/disidentification, Hansen (1999) explored the saffronization[3] of Indian nationalism in modern times, discussing political, religious, and cultural factors that constitute India's modern nationalistic identity. Hansen takes a postcolonial approach to India identity formation and claims that the democratic development of India was undercut by the legacies of colonization that had, for centuries, propounded incongruencies between Hindu and Islamic cultures, systematically contributing to the formation of the "constitutive outside" of Indian identity.

In Indian nationalistic discourse, dominated by right-wing Hindu organizations like the RSS, Muslims are depicted as the constitutive outside (Hansen, 1996). Through decades of exclusionary rhetoric, the right-wing nationalistic branches of the Indian polity have constructed the idea of an "abstract Muslim", who no one knows personally but who posses a latent threat to the existence of an ordinary Hindu. Hansen's (1996), detailed analysis of how this Muslim Other is portrayed in natonalistic rhetoric as the antithesis to a prosperous, pure Hindutva state is illuminating. Further, Hansen (1996) elaborates:

> The myths of the lustful, wily and over-enjoying Muslim with many wives and secret links to rich Arabs are widespread in India. Not that anybody in fact knows such persons - it is an entirely "abstract Muslim" - but he is surely there in the popular imagination among Hindus. This "abstract Muslim" is the object of intense communal hatred. (p. 151)

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[3] The color saffron has been an age-old symbol of right-wing nationalism in India, having been used by groups and political parties that subscribe to an ideology of Hindu superiority. "Today, the saffron. . . color - though used widely in religious rituals and processions - has in the political field been appropriated by the Hindu nationalist movement" (Hansen, 1999, p. 108)

This identity of the Muslim Other has been constituted through decades on discourse on how their presence challenged the very idea of a culturally cohesive India that privileges Hinduness.

Therefore, through the framework of constituted identities and the subsequent demonization of the constitutive other, I argue that present-day Hindus who feel threatened by Thapar's description of beef-eating ancient Hindus are "called into being" by a series of political, historical, and cultural narratives that help them constitute their Hindu consciousness through divisive, exclusionary rhetoric. These narratives conflate the nationalistic, Hindu identities and become a rhetorical tool through which the Indian Hindu population comes to understand itself and reacts to matters of national importance such as the textbook controversy. Additionally, the Rajya Sabha debates I analyze also operate as narratives that contribute to this identity construction. These narratives strongly influence the public's memory of the past and hence, influences present identity. In order to tease out the connections between narratives, history, identity, I further discuss the role of public memory in building national identity.

Public Memory and History

Public memory or a shared remembering of the past is one of the ways in which publics constitute themselves through a sense of common identity. In fact, Houdek and Phillips (2017) claimed that groups of individuals that become an identifiable public do so through a set of shared memories. It must be noted that the growth in popularity of public memory discourse countered the dominant idea of an objective, fact-based history written by unbiased historians. The 1980s witnessed a rise in critical analyses of how

ideas of the past were "crafted, circulated, and contested" (Houdek & Phillips, 2017).

Explaining the difference between memory and history, Diane F. Britton (1997), a

historian and public history expert, scrutinized:

> How do we continue to confront the issue of "who owns the past"? Who determines which stories or interpretations are legitimate, what should be remembered and saved? How do the ways that individuals identify with the past influence what we do as professional interpreters of history? These are all questions that we must continue to address as we move toward the millennium. At the same time, we must consider that at the center of all of these issues lies the delicate balance between history and memory. (p. 14)

Scholars from several disciplines have displayed interest in the idea that what we accept

to be the true story of our past was actually a constructed narrative full of subjective

perspectives and knowingly or unknowingly engaging in marginalizing underrepresented

identities.

In the last few decades, public memory as a rhetorical function has been studied

extensively in Western scholarship, especially in the United States (Scott, 2004; Vivian,

2004). Memory scholars (Dickinson, Blair, & Ott, 2010; Schwartz, 1991) postulate that

instead of considering memory as something fixed and objective, scholars should

consider memory as constantly in the process of being constructed through human

symbolic action. Schwartz (1991) explained: "Recollection of the past is an active,

constructive process, not a simple matter of retrieving information. To remember is to

place a part of the past in the service of conceptions and needs of the present" (p. 107).

Hasian and Frank (1999), writing on the intermingling of history and memory in a

rhetorical context, explained that "official history" and "collective memory" share a

dialectical relationship, "especially when it comes to identity formation" (p. 107). This

relationship is especially instrumental in understanding how certain ideologies emerge and circulate because often, history and memory contest each other. Therefore, history is defined as the official records of the past, often written as a singular and accurate account, that privileges those who hold power. On the other hand, memory studies take a critical look at how diverse historical narratives are recorded, who benefits from them, and address that historical narratives are mutable and contest each other (Phillips, 2004). Similarly, Vivian (2004) also argued that the terms "past" and "history" have different meanings. The past is told through historical narratives that offer diverse versions of events; the absolute truth is elusive and differs immensely depending on whom we ask. Outside of history and memory studies, these different narratives, which contribute to creating a sense of identification/disidentification have been used by political leaders in order to garner public support and obtain power.

Exploring the connection between publics and memory, Phillips (2004) drew on Halbwachs (1992) to contend that memory is inherently social and to engage in acts of remembering is to be a part of a collective. Therefore, memory is more than just individual acts of remembrance or even different people remembering the same thing. It is a collective act through which publics constitute themselves and develop ways of understanding their own existence.

It is important to note that like identity, public memory constantly exists in a process of "permanent evolution" (Nora, 1989). Its fluidity and dynamism, which represents a "sense of 'living memory' is in stark contrast to a sense of a fixed, singular history" (Phillips, 2004, p. 2). Narrating history is an active process of constructing the

past and selectively forgetting certain details (Dickinson, Ott, & Aoki, 2006; Hasian & Frank, 1999; Vivian; 1999). Additionally, memories constitute society through collective acts of remembering. And in turn, memories are also constituted by exchanges, interactions, and rituals observed in society. Hence, both memory and society constitute each other simultaneously.

Phillips (2004) argues that because memory is constituting and being constituted at the same time, it is constantly being subjected to rejections and revisions. Hence, the process of creation and contestation of memory is essentially a rhetorical process and the study of memory is a study of rhetorical memory (pp. 2-3). As memories attain meaning, they also engage in acts of persuasion, cooperation, dissent, and disagreements. Therefore, public memory scholarship questions dissent within contrasting narratives of the past and explore whose memories get etched into the scrolls of public memory. In doing so, they reveal labyrinths of power, privilege, and the hegemonic dominance over knowledge production.

In order to answer the question "Who gets to tell history and what alternative narratives exist?" scholars have investigated sites of that form and maintain public memory: monuments, memorials, movies, literature, and of particular relevance to this thesis, history textbooks. Rhetorical scholars like Zagacki and Gallagher (2009), Ott, Aoki, and Dickinson (2011), Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci Jr. (1991), and Palczewski have contributed to a dynamic body of knowledge on how these sites of public memory offer rich material for exploring public identity and memory construction. For instance, McGeough, Palczewski, & Lake's (2015) work on contested public memorial spaces

interrogates how these sites construct narratives of armed clashes, decide who must be remembered, and how. Using the examples of Fetterman Battlefield, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, and Haymarket Square, McGeough, Palczewski, and Lake, reveal how these memorials are actively engaged in narrating a particular version of history and in the process, constituting public memory. The authors engage in discussing alternative memory practices and unearth alternative narratives, thus creating a dialogue within stories of the past. Quite simply, memorials argue. Rhetorical dialogue like these are constantly forming and reforming public memory, thus contributing to evolving public remembrance.

Similarly, history textbooks also contribute to the formation of a nation's collective memory and aid in the process of nation-building. In countries where the government has a significant role in prescribing what can and cannot be included in history textbooks, the past becomes a tool of manipulation in order to reimagine the present and the future (Podeh, 2000, p. 66). In the hands of groups whose intention is to attain and maintain political power, history is a narrative that can be sculpted, edited, and reproduced in textbooks to suit contemporary requirements. Through these textbooks, the appointed guardians of history can directly reach young minds and instill a sense of collective identity in them, planting the seeds of collective remembering. Howard Mehlinger, a pioneer of global education scholarship, believes "none of the socialization instruments can be compared to textbooks in their capacity to convey a uniform, approved, even official version of what youth should believe" (as cited in Podeh, 2000, p. 66). Additionally, textbooks are portrayed as major sources of legitimate information as

they appear in state-sanctioned curricula and impart information in print. History textbooks, in particular, play the role of establishing and maintaining social and political order that reinforce hegemonic assumptions. History textbooks play an important role in constituting memory as they are usually one of the first sources of historical information that a person encounters. If, as Phillips (2004) argues, publics constitute themselves through acts of collective remembering, history textbooks are possibly the most significant sites of constituting collective identities.

Conclusion

A heuristic vocabulary informed by postcolonial theory, intersectionality, constitutive rhetoric, and public memory guides my exploration of Indian parliamentary debates over history, identity, and how public memory of the past is influenced by present political needs. Hence, I analyze the textbook controversy that originated in 1977 and by extension, comment on the formation of modern Indian and Hindu identity. The 1977-78 parliament debates offer a rich collection of artifacts that involve contrasting historical narratives and reimagining history to serve present needs. These works guide me in exploring how the past is made fluid by its construction and reconstruction in the present. Additionally, this thesis explores not only debates over history, but also how history functions rhetorically. The textbook debates began due to dissent over what version of history must be taught to middle school students and although my analysis is anchored in the textbook debate, I further explore what the debates reveal about cultural and national identity development in India.

However, while using public sphere theory as well as the concepts like memory and history to guide my analysis, I am cognizant of Brouwer and Paulesc's (2017) critique that theories emerging from European democratic systems must be used with discretion when approaching countries that may not fit into the same mold, for instance, postcolonial nations like India. As I have discussed in this chapter, some theories like postcoloniality and intersectionality can be applied to India as they specifically address colonialism and its continuing impact on various aspects of life and society, while other theories like constitutive rhetoric and public sphere will be tweaked to factor in India's historical development and and social context in my analysis.

Several scholars have studied the beef controversy in India, the history textbook debate of 1977, the post-independence rise of Hindu nationalism, and the rhetorical construction of the past. However, these topics have not been studied in unison. In this thesis, I explore the rhetorical function of history and memory by focusing on the 1977 textbook controversy which primarily revolved around religious identities. I do this by using literature on religious nationalism, history and memory, the textbook debate, as well as debates regarding cattle meat consumption. This allows me to study the rise of Hindu nationalism through parliamentary discourse and analyze why a seemingly innocuous detail about the diet of ancient Indians in a history textbook has been perceived to pose a threat to a unifying national identity. I plan to expand on this further by arguing that cow vigilante violence offers insights into the nationalistic dimensions of India's right-wing groups if we go beyond its face-value of protecting cattle and instead consider it as an endeavour towards establishing Hindu religious practices as the norm in

India. However, normalizing a set of practices involves years of acculturation and reproducing rhetoric across diverse discourses. One way this can be achieved is by influencing educational content.

Hence, in the next chapter, I focus on how identity is constructed through education. In this vein, I trace the history of India's education system through the ancient era, during British colonization, and post-independence to set the scene for discussing factors that contributed to the textbook controversy of 1977-78. The development of the education system across time also illustrates how social and political factors influenced the concepts of knowledge construction and learning.

CHAPTER 3

INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

History, Colonial Legacies, and Modern Implications

An understanding of the history of education in India will be critical to grasping

the 1977 textbook controversy for two reasons. First, it enriches the understanding of

why information in a history textbook which went against the commonly accepted history

of ancient Indians caused nation-wide controversy. Second, it provides insight into why

new historical information gathered through archaeological evidence is equated with

distortion of the past. A brief history of India's education system, its origin, colonial

development, and post-independence advancements, provide insight into how its key

characteristics evolved over time. Further, I trace the history of education in India and

briefly discuss how colonial legacies continue to be a part of contemporary education

policies.

Education in Pre-Colonial India

Although written sources of information regarding educational systems in ancient

and medieval India are sparse, historians and archaeologists have found evidence to

suggest that there was a rich culture of knowledge transmission from one generation to

the next (Biswas & Agrawal, 1994; Keller, 2014). For centuries before British

colonization of India, education was imparted through an indigenous schooling system.

Access to education was fairly universal, in that there were meager socially-imposed

restrictions on who could seek higher learning (Dharampal, 1983). Historians, tracing the

development of education in India, have outlined three prominent time periods to study

the ancient and medieval traditions of learning: the Vedic period (ca. 2500 BCE-500 BCE), the Classical and Medieval period (500 BCE-1300 AD), and the Pre-modern period (1300 AD-1600 AD) (Keller, 2014).

The Vedic period derives its name from the Vedas, a set of four books named the Rigveda, the Yajurveda, the Samaveda, and the Atharvaveda (Sharma & Sharma, 2004). Although the Vedas are believed to have been first documented during this period, Vedic knowledge had been passed down for centuries through an oral tradition of chanting and recitation (Biswas & Agrawal, 1994). The term "Veda" is derived from the Sanskrit word *Vid*, literally meaning "to know." The Vedas are reservoirs of knowledge spanning a wide range of subjects like spirituality and personal character development, societal duties, astral science, mathematics, cosmology, grammar, metallurgy, medicine, philosophy, and political thought, etc. (Altekar, 1934, Keller, 2014, Sharma & Sharma, 2004). Additionally, education was free from state or political interference and the content and mode of learning were decided at the discretion of individual teachers (Sharma & Sharma, 2004).

The knowledge contained in the Vedas not only throws light on the subjects and concepts taught during the Vedic period but also on educational principles, the perceived importance of learning, and methods of instruction. For instance, it is clear that Vedic learning put significant emphasis on "an individual's capacity to memorize, recite and explain religious hymns, on creative intellect, on debating power and on developing a spirit of enquiry" (Biswas & Agrawal, 1994, p. 821). Learning occurred in several designated spaces like the Gurukuls, which were residential schools of varying sizes

where the students lived during the course of their education, the Parishad or bigger educational institutions, and the Sammelans where scholars convened occasionally to discuss and debate particular topics (Sharma & Sharma, 2004). The aim of education in the Vedic period was to initiate young students into a culture of spiritual and intellectual consciousness through literary and religious education. This was expected to guide them in seeking liberation from ignorance, attaining salvation from solely materialistic aspirations, and living well-rounded lives in their respective families, societies, and professional fields.

With the passage of time, the beginning of the post-Vedic, medieval period brought about two major developments in learning: Practical specialized education and the emphasis on rituals grew in significance (Sharma & Sharma, 2004). During this time, teachers and scholars came to appreciate the importance of specialized learning and education began to be tailored to individual students, their professions, and interests. It is noteworthy that in the Vedic period, the caste system was based on an individual's occupation, whereas in the post-Vedic period caste began to be assigned to individuals on the basis of ancestry. Naturally, this led to the development of various hierarchical social categories. As a result, education began to be imparted based on one's caste that determined the individual's social standing and prospective occupation (Keller, 2014; Sharma & Sharma, 2004). These social developments affected the ideal of universal access to education, and gradually castes that occupied the upper echelons of society like Brahmans and Kshatriyas were the only ones with access to formal learning. Intellectual and spiritual education, in particular, was established as the domain of Brahmans and

Kshatriyas while lower castes like Vaishyas and Shudras were allocated work in agriculture, trade, and commerce sectors (Sharma & Sharma, 2004).

Although the independence of institutions from political and state influence remained intact and a primary goal of learning was still the rejection of ignorance and attainment of salvation, learning began to be increasingly conflated with ritualistic traditions. This inflated the role of Brahmans as they had dominance over the Vedic knowledge regarding the performance of rituals. Gradually, Brahmans became the wardens of education in the post-Vedic society and easy access to education for lower castes and women deteriorated (Biswas & Agrawal, 1994; Sharma & Sharma, 2004). The goal of education, in part, echoed some Vedic sentiments like the attainment of salvation and well-rounded personal lives, attention on spirituality declined and increased emphasis began to be put on the "realisation of true knowledge" and "the absolute" (Sharma & Sharma, 2004, p. 13).

Near the latter half of the medieval period, education in India also witnessed a rise in larger "corporate institutions for higher studies" (Biswas & Agrawal, 1994, p. 824). Several Buddhist monasteries and Hindu temples developed into centers of learning and attracted the attention of foreign scholars and travelers. Some institutions that gained international repute, like Nalanda and Vikramshila, grew in size and ushered a new attitude towards learning and education. Some Buddhist monasteries-turned-centers of learning were against the caste system as a determinant of who should have access to spiritual and intellectual education; they pushed the importance of merit instead of ancestral history (Sharma & Sharma, 2004).

As educational institutions grew in size and had greater access to resources, they became more autonomous and divergent in their modes of teaching and instruction. Several institutions became popular for specific areas of study like medicine, philosophy, mathematics. However, several of these institutions eventually fell to ruin due to repeated foreign invasions by Persians, Greeks, Sakas, and Huns between 600 BCE and early centuries AD. For instance, near the end of the 12th century AD, Bakhtiyaar Khilji, a Turkish ruler, "invaded Nalanda, destroyed the university, and put the library to fire" (Sharma & Sharma, 2004, p. 59). With time, most ancient centres of education disintegrated and new systems of learning took their place.

With the onset of Islamic rule in pre-modern India, education became more oriented towards religious learning. During this time, the importance of Vedic education and its primary goals of intellectual and spiritual development disappeared. Scholarly discussions and debates were restricted to the princely courts and access to education for ordinary people was severely hampered. However, some notable Mughal rulers like Akbar and Jahangir were patrons of learning and initiated the establishment of local elementary schools and elite religious schools during their reigns in 1556 AD and 1605 AD, respectively (Sharma & Sharma, 2004, pp. 62-63). A significant goal of education during this period, with some exceptions, was geared towards the propagation of Islamic laws, social conventions, and religious principles. Therefore, when the East India Company first arrived in the Indian subcontinent in 1608 AD, the education system had gone through the stages of Vedic-centric education to education that concentrated on rituals and specialized education to indigenous centers of learning.

Colonial Education Policy: Textbooks and Curricula

The attitude of the British towards education in India went through several phases. Writing in 1872, Howell, a member of the elite Indian Civil Service[4], noted that under the British rule, education was "first ignored, then violently and successfully opposed, then conducted on a system now universally admitted to be erroneous" (p. 1). In the 19th century, a new system of education backed by the colonial state replaced the indigenous schooling systems of India (Chaudhary, 2009). This indigenous schooling system primarily operated on a dual level: local elementary schools at the grassroots level (where pupils were exposed to the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic), and elite religious schools that were designed to propel students towards higher learning (Chaudhary, 2009; Nurullah & Naik, 1951). However, this system started crumbling over the course of the 19th century due to a lack of funds from the British East India Company. Universal education was not deemed important by the colonial powers and thus the indigenous schooling system across the country collapsed over time (Chaudhary, 2009; Dharampal, 1983).

However, the British powers did need a small English-educated group of elite Indians who would fill low-level administrative positions in the colonial machinery and also act as a liaison between the British powers and the "natives" (Basu, 1989; Mookerjee, 1944). Thus, the emphasis was put on secondary school education as well as colleges for economic reasons. Education was not for the benefit of individual self-

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[4] The Indian Civil Service (operating from 1858 to 1947) was an elite administrative body of British government officials to whom the task of ruling the Indian subcontinent was delegated.

realization or for training citizens, but merely to create a small educated workforce. Thus, education in colonial India, at least until the mid-nineteenth century was purely for the benefit of British colonizers (Mookerjee, 1944).

The British institutionalized their education policies in India when Charles Woods's Educational Despatch was introduced in 1854. This Despatch was the "first official document akin to a national education policy," loosely modelled on the British education system (Chaudhary, 2009). The Despatch provided guidelines on establishing primary and secondary schools as well as college-level institutions in India. To oversee the execution of the suggestions made in the Despatch, an intricate system of provincial departments was established (Chaudhary, 2009; Moore, 1965). The Despatch also introduced "grant-in-aids" as a way to subsidize schools that were privately-managed. Even though these schools were partially funded by the state, the monetary aid received by private individuals and organizations encouraged private enterprise which led to private monies significantly funding the subsequent development of a country-wide school system (Chaudhary, 2009). By 1860, primary and secondary education was mostly imparted by schools controlled by provincial governments and education boards, private government-aided schools, and unaided schools.

However, even with these efforts to increase access to primary education, there were significant caste and gender-based hurdles. Most schools charged fees, even though some charged only a nominal amount. Due to social and economic factors, the

demographic that was positioned to have the best access to education was high-caste

Brahmin males [5] (Chaudhary, 2009).

In summary, education in British India was not universally accessible, the

allocation of funds was based on colonial economic interests, and educational content

was designed to reinforce colonial hegemony by cultivating subservience. Because the

system was built to produce a small pool of low-level civil servants for administrative

jobs, there was no incentive to universalize access to education or promote innovative

thinking among the educated (Basu, 1989; Mookerjee, 1944). Instead, the system

emphasized memorization of facts, rote learning, and standardized examinations as

metrics of academic success. A prime tool for the propagation of a homogenous

education policy in British India were textbooks. As the British wanted to ensure that a

predetermined curriculum was strictly adhered to, teachers were tied to prescribed

textbooks and had limited autonomy in the classroom. Textbooks authorized and

published by the colonial government held central importance in the system and over

time, gave rise to India's "textbook culture" (Kumar, 1988).

Textbooks in British India: The origin of India's "textbook problem". The

textbook-centred methods of teaching in Indian schools can be traced back to the

historical circumstances of their origin. Kumar (1988), a celebrated sociologist and

Indian education expert, joins scholars of British India, to observe that the colonial

government attempted to turn India into a society of passive consumers through several

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[5] Although the definition of "Brahmins" has varied across centuries, the term is generally used to describe a revered social category that has historically consisted of teachers, intellectuals, and priests. See Ramanujan (2020).

administrative policies, of which education was one. Just as the colonial economic policy was directed towards creating an Indian consumer base for goods produced in the English mainland, the colonial education system ensured that its beneficiaries would begin to see themselves as "consumers of the knowledge supplied by the colonizer," instead of a people capable of producing new knowledge (Kumar, 1988, p. 454; Seal, 1968). Thus, with the introduction of Wood's Educational Despatch in 1854, the colonial government attempted to "force culturally what colonial policies were aimed at achieving economically" (Kumar, 1988, p. 454).

The colonial administrators made some important decisions regarding this new system of education that would influence India's education policy for decades to come. Some of these decisions directly addressed the determination of curricula, the role of textbooks, and the general goal of the new system:

> (i) the new system would be governed by a bureaucracy at every stage from primary schooling onward and in all aspects, including the structure of syllabi, the content of textbooks, and teachers' training; (ii) the new system would aim at acculturating Indian children and youths in European attitudes and perceptions and at imparting to them the skills required for working in colonial administration, particularly at its middle and lower rungs. . . (iv) indigenous schools would have to conform to the syllabus and textbooks prescribed by the colonial government if they wanted to seek the government's aid. (Kumar, 1988, p. 454)

Hence, starting from the syllabi to the content of the textbooks, all major decisions were to be taken at the top levels of the British bureaucracy, whereas the on-ground educators were to be mere message-bearers for the colonial government, without any say in what they were teaching. It must be noted that the British administrators were very clear on what they wanted this education system to accomplish. It was the medium through which

Indian children and youths were to be acculturated to "European attitudes and perceptions" and where they would be taught skills that would make them better colonial subjects. The decision-making structure of the system was also reflective of how authority was distributed throughout the system, with the teachers at the bottom rungs and the colonial administration at the top.

Additionally, as the textbooks were published majorly in English, a non-native language, written by non-native authors, they did not do justice to cultural subjectivities and religious sensibilities. The textbooks spoke of a world which Indian students could not relate to, metaphors and symbolism that seemed foreign, and contexts that they could not grasp. Kumar observes that these textbooks "could *not* be read for meaning: they could only be memorized."

Muriel Lester (1962) explained how English language textbooks were far removed from the reality of Indian students:

> Stories in one-syllabled words that English children enjoy, tales of domestic life, of cars, of faithful dogs, of snow and skating, only muddled the minds of those who had never seen ice nor felt cold, who were trained never to let a dog, which ate filth, come near them. As for the pictures which accompany two syllable-worded stories about kettles and tea pots, puddings and turkeys and cosy fireplaces in the cottage kitchens where a table is spread for Sunday dinner, and chairs are drawn up while everyone bows the head to listen to the father asking the blessing, it seemed a mad, if not immoral, world that was being presented. The only thing to do was to learn it all by heart and repeat it rapidly when called upon. (p. 37, as cited in Kumar, 1988, p. 460)

Thus, the combination of English as the medium of instruction as well as the use of contexts and circumstances alien to a typical Indian child propagated a classroom culture in which memorization was the only way to do well in exams. Additionally, assessments were designed to be merely summative, which tested how much a child can memorize

and repeat. This aligned with the colonial government's requirement of training employees who could do well in government-conducted examinations for the British administrative services.

As a result, the colonial education system was used as the machinery to effectuate colonial socialization, in order to create ideal colonial subjects. Textbooks became the vehicle through which pre-determined knowledge prescribed by the higher-ups could be efficiently disseminated. This reliance on textbooks in the classroom and examinations that test memorization power have remained a legacy of the colonial system that plagues India's education to this day. Further, I discuss how the education system adapted to independence, the role of textbooks post-1947, and how educational content has evolved over time.

Post-independence Development of Education: Nehruvian Secularism and the Janata Party's Nationalistic Approach

As India approached independence from British rule, the new leaders paid extensive attention to the formation of policies that would set India on a path of recovery and prosperity (Biswas & Agrawal, 1994; Panikkar, 2011). Scholarly leaders like Abul Kalam Azad, the first education minister of independent India advocated for a "liberal and humanitarian" education policy, which would reflect the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru's, liberal and secular outlook (Panikkar, 2011, p. 38). One of the primary goals of the education sector was to expand access to education across the country, with special attention to primary education (Sharma & Sharma, 2004). The Central Advisory Board, which consisted of several distinguished scholars and educators,

played a critical role in overseeing the development of the education policy and guiding the centre and state governments in its execution (Biswas & Agrawal, 1994). The crucial thing to note is that the early education policies reflect a paradigm shift in the official educational discourse in India due to the Congress government in power.

Textbooks in Post-Independence India. The Congress leadership under Nehru was determined to unite public sentiments after the Partition by vigorously promoting secularism and this was reflected in the government-commissioned textbooks of newly liberated India (Mohammad-Arif, 2007). In the years following independence, the Indian government was concerned about the communal[6] content of textbooks written by British authors, especially history textbooks and how they were affecting public sentiments in the country. Thereafter, the central government began to take a closer interest in the textbooks being published. Eventually, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) was established in 1961 to assist the Ministry of Education in matters related to curriculum development and textbook publishing (Kumar, 1988).

However, the Congress government was unable to ensure that the textbook recommendations of the NCERT would be adopted by the states. As a result, while the NCERT's recommendations usually aligned with the agenda of the central government, the states were free to alter their textbook contents as they saw fit (Mohammad-Arif, 2007). This divergence between the textbooks published by the centre and the states has continued into the present. The NCERT-commissioned history textbooks, in particular,

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[6] In the South Asian context, the word "communal" specifically refers to conflicts among opposing religious communities, especially Hindus and Muslims. See Mohammad-Arif (2007).

are taught in all government-run schools in New Delhi and all the Union Territories. Additionally, NCERT textbooks are also used in English-medium public schools and elite state-run schools (Mohammad-Arif, 2007). In other regional schools run by individual states, textbooks are commissioned and published by local bodies. Sometimes, these textbooks differ significantly in content from NCERT textbooks as well as textbooks published by other states. Vernoff (1992, p. 13, as cited in Mohammad-Arif, 2007, p. 153) observed that in theory, "the Indian system allows for a maximum amount of conflict about the historical legacy of India, each state and the central government being permitted to present its own view of history to Indian students."

<u>Postcolonial Legacies in Education</u>

As most systemically ingrained practices, colonial structures of education and pedagogy continued long after colonial rule ended (Kumar, 1988). The centrality of textbooks, the practice of training students to be passive consumers of information, and the relative powerlessness of teachers within the education machinery continued into independent India. In 1977, the central or state government-produced textbooks were the most important resources available to teachers in the classroom. Because of the absence of supplementary teaching resources and high-quality training combined with the requirement to follow a predetermined curriculum, most school teachers have to rely on the textbooks as their sole resource in the classroom. Therefore, what began as a way for India's colonial government to control the information being disseminated in Indian classrooms in the 19th century, continues to affect the dominance of textbook knowledge in Indian classrooms. Teachers have little to no room for innovation or experimentation.

This attitude further affects students' reliance on theoretical information that is best memorized to be repeated during examinations. Evidently, this system, designed to create uncritical, colonially socialized subjects, eventually became a tool that central and state governments used to politically socialize[7] young citizens.

For instance, the Congress-led governments of newly-independent India had a secular and liberal attitude towards education. They wanted to revamp the archaic system to modernize it and make it more accessible across the country. These policies were carried on by the subsequent elected governments until the 1970s, when some ill-intentioned political strategies used by then-Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi led to her exit from office and a new government was elected to power. In 1977, for the first time in the history of independent India, "organizational decay" of the Congress led to right-wing political parties gaining the upper hand in Indian politics (Varshney, 1993). Although the reign of the newly elected Janata Party coalition was short-lived, their time in power was punctuated by several undeniable displays of a nationalistic approach to education, especially with regard to history books. In May 1977, just after the new Janata government was elected to power, "history became an object of open controversy" (Gottlob, 2007). One of the most prominent incidents that highlighted the Janata Party's attitudes towards education was the textbook controversy of 1977 and it began with a note secretly leaked to the media.

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[7] Political socialization is a concept emerging from United States public discourse, which refers to how society molds children and encourages them to a previously-determined model. Scholars have noted that besides the family, public schools, where the curriculum is influenced by the politicians in power, are a key site of political socialization in the United States. See Dawson & Prewitt (1969) and Hess & Torney (1967).

The newly elected Prime Minister Moraji Desai sent a private note to Education Minister P.C. Chunder, directing him to look into the "controversial and biased material" appearing in four NCERT textbooks, one of which was historian Romila Thapar's Ancient India (Rosser, 2003; Rudolph & Rudolph, 1983; Thapar, 2009). Desai's note also advised the Education Minister to ensure that "readers do not get wrong ideas about various elements of our history and culture" (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1983). To be clear, by "our history and culture," Desai meant Hindu history and culture. Shortly afterwards, the note was leaked to Thapar as well as the press and, thus, the controversy became a public one.

Under the Janata Party government, the intentions behind the writing of Indian history, how it should be taught, and how it will affect national identity began to be overtly debated. Diverse argumentative stances emerged from secular-liberal academicians, conservative historians, left-liberal Marxist groups, right-wing religious organizations, and politicians. The stance of the right-wing Janata Party can be seen as a reaction to the divisive history education by the colonial government followed by a complete turn towards liberal secularism by the Congress-led government. Following the British government's policy of dividing the country on religious lines in order to maintain a stronghold within the subcontinent, the liberal policies of the Congress government essentially tried to rewrite the history of India. This was aimed towards promoting unity in the country and discouraging religion-based clashes after the ghastly India-Pakistan partition. However, this created a dissonance within the country as for almost a century,

the British's divide-and-rule policies had instilled a sense of estrangement between Hindus, Muslims, and other religious communities.

This also came at a time when India was trying to carve out a national identity separate from that of Pakistan, which had quite literally been carved out from the Indian mainland. Hence, it is comprehensible why Thapar's textbook, which claimed that ancient Indians were beef eaters, struck a nerve among right-wing forces in the country. These groups had been invested in the notion that Pakistan represented a cultural and religious "other" that Hindus in India must divorce themselves from. Practices like beef-consumption, were one of the few tangible elements that helped them distance themselves from Muslims in Pakistan. Hence, the textbook controversy of 1977, and the subsequent debate on Indian and Hindu identity, must be explored with the knowledge of how India's education system developed pre and post independence.

CHAPTER 4

<HARMONY> AS AN IDEOGRAPH IN INDIAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

Drawing on Kenneth Burke's concept of god terms, Michael C. McGee (1980)

developed the idea of ideographs which are pervasively present in political discourse.

These ideographs are seemingly common words or phrases that, despite being ill-defined

and abstract, represent a collectively recognized concept or ideology and possess

rhetorical value. McGee (1980) defined the ideograph as:

> . . .an ordinary-language term found in political discourse. It is a high-order
> abstraction representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and
> ill-defined normative goal. It warrants the use of power, excuses behavior and
> belief which might otherwise be perceived as eccentric or antisocial, and guides
> behavior and belief into channels easily recognized by a community as acceptable
> and laudable. (p. 15)

Synthesizing how McGee described ideographs, Edwards and Winkler (1997) proposed

that ideographs have four defining characteristics. Ideographs (1) are "ordinary terms in

political discourse," (2) display a "high order of abstraction" and elasticity to be applied

to a "wide range of modern usages," (3) "warrant the use of power" and guide behavior

which can be recognized by the public and even lauded, (4) are "cultural-bound," and

often define or exclude groupings of the public (pp. 297-302).

Their malleability and fluid definitions ensure that ideographs are always

understood in their social context; their meanings are not attributed ethically or rationally.

Some examples of ideographs found in U.S. political discourse are <equality> (Condit &

Lucaites, 1993), <family values> (Cloud, 1998), <the people> (Enck-Wanzer, 2012), and

<life> and <choice> (Hayden, 2002).

In this chapter, I explore how scholars define ideographs, how they function in social and political discourse, and trace <harmony> in Indian political, philosophical, and religious discourse going back centuries. In the end, I highlight how <harmony> has been given equivocal definitions by scholars and tease out how <harmony> plays a role in Indian identity construction.

<div align="center">What are Ideographs?</div>

Different discourse communities can attribute different meanings to identical vocabulary, which then shapes unique ideological perceptions and collective beliefs. Because ideographs are ill-defined, vague words or phrases, their meanings are fluid and keep changing as they are used in different contexts.

Ideographs play an important role in political socialization as they can persuade the public to justify any use of power if they are aimed towards fulfilling a commonly accepted ideological goal. Articulating the dissonance between ideographs appearing to be morally and logically rigorous concepts but evading concrete definitions, McGee (1980) offered an example:

> [No one is] permitted to question the fundamental logic of ideographs: Everyone is conditioned to think of "rule of law" as a logical commitment just as one is taught to think that "186,000 miles per second" is an accurate empirical description of the speed of light even though few can work the experiments or do the mathematics to prove it. (p. 7)

This often means it takes effort to hear an ideograph. They are so ubiquitous and quotidian, they become unremarkable. For example, in my first few passes through the texts analyzed, I did not notice the central role <harmony> played, perhaps because growing up Indian I was conditioned to see <harmony> as just a logical commitment, the

way things were. Ideographs are commonly visible and audible in political discourse and it is because of their malleable nature that they are used as rhetorical tools that appeal to publics.

Analyzing ideographs enables teasing out how a discourse community *feels* about certain ideas or events. McGee notes that explaining proposed government policies in the form of popular ideographs has been shown to increase positive public opinion about it. For example, when a government claims that a certain policy will enhance <freedom> or <equality>, it appeals to people's subjective ideas of freedom and equality and hence generates an emotional response. Here, the words <freedom> and <equality> are ideographs that are not necessarily defined by specific meaning but are powerful appeals. As McGee (1980) mused, "No one has ever seen an 'equality' strutting up the driveway." (p. 10). Even so, the term makes numerous appearances in public discourse and constructs its meaning through specific applications. For instance, Lucaites and Condit (1990) explored how <equality> has shifted meaning in the U.S. political discourse across decades. Through a diachronic analysis of <equality>, Lucaites and Condit argue that the Black rhetorical sphere in the U. S. has had a strong influence on demarcating the role of homogeneity and heterogeneity within discourse on <equality>.

These analyses of <equality> illustrate that as ideographs' meanings shift over time and space, they can also create ideological differences and thus, influence public opinion. Harking back to Marx, McGee suggested that ideologies heavily influence mass belief, and subscribing to ideologies impedes "the free emergence of public opinion" (p. 5). Through the exploration of how ideographs move through channels of public

discourse, McGee argues that even those who are seemingly free of ideological indoctrination are predisposed to preconceived, structured mass response (p. 15).

Additionally, ideographs are not uniform across cultures. Their meaning is culture-bound and popular ideographs that dominate culture-specific political rhetoric offer a window into what that culture holds sacrosanct and considers as a prerequisite to cultivating a sense of belonging.

Tracing <Harmony> Etymologically

In Indian political discourse, a common ideograph is <harmony>. It pops up in ancient Indian texts, makes an appearance in the Indian constitution, and has been used by prominent historical figures in India. Although its meaning appears pliable and frequently shifts depending on the context, its pervasiveness in Indian political discourse goes back centuries. Before unpacking <harmony> as it appears in the context of India, I provide a brief summary on the synchronic development of the term.

Etymologically, the term harmony comes from an Ancient Greek word that literally means "joint work" (Ilievski, 1993, p. 22). The Greek term was used to denote the coming together of two entities in order to complete a task more efficiently. For instance, when the mechanical wheel and human arms come together, they allow for better transportation of goods, both in terms of quantity and time. Today, a generally agreed-upon definition of harmony is "reconciliation of opposites, a fitting together of disparate elements, whether in music, universe, the body politic, or the body of man [*sic*]" (Finney, 1973, p. 388, cited in Ilievski, 1993, p. 19). Ancient eastern traditions like Hinduism have also discussed the concept of harmony in terms of sharing a harmonious

relationship with entities of the human and natural world in order to experience sustainable existence. These concepts of harmony are highly philosophical abstractions that idealize balance and symmetry in the world. They refer to harmony as an all-encompassing expression of togetherness.

Ilievski (1993), in their analyses of the semantic development of "harmony", reflected on these abstract definitions of harmony to state that they are reflective of "cultural and spiritual development of the ancient civilizations" (p. 28). Further, they conclude:

> Health, both physical and spiritual, is a result of a balance and proportion, i.e. harmony, of the opposite elements, a principle which underlies the existence of the cosmos. If one of the elements is going to dominate the others, then order and harmony disappear, and this causes illness in the human body, anarchy in society, disorder in the cosmos and a return to chaos. (Ilievski, 1993, p. 29)

However, subsequently, as harmony entered the musical vocabulary, its meaning shifted in the musical context.

Walter Piston's definition of musical harmony contradicts Ilievski's metaphysical understanding of the term. Piston (1959), a celebrated classical music crafter, theorist, and professor, writing about harmony created through overlapping voices, stated: "When two voices move upwards in similar motion, the lower voice is not usually allowed to move to a position higher than that just left by the upper voice" (p.26). Therefore, when considering overlapping entities, there is dissonance between the nature of co-mingling between the two. According to Ilievski's account, equality of different entities is a prerequisite for harmony whereas in musical harmony according to Piston, the upper voice dominantes the lower one.

I use these two conceptions of harmony as metaphors as well as a framework to discuss how <harmony> has functioned specifically in Indian history, how it changes meaning in different contexts, and explain why it played an important role in the textbook debates of 1977.

<center><u><Harmony> as a Core Ideograph in Indian Political Discourse</u></center>

In Indian political discourse, <harmony> as a central ideograph generally refers to religious or communal harmony. The concrete centrality of the ideograph in modern Indian political discourse is illustrated by the Indian Constitution, which was ratified and came into effect in January, 1950. Of the ten original fundamental duties of an Indian citizen listed in the Constitution, the fourth one states "It shall be the duty of every citizen of India. . . to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities. . ." (Section 51A, Part IVA). As this appears in the section on Fundamental Rights and Duties, one of the most unchanging, widely-read, and cited parts of any Constitution, it squarely positions <harmony> as a collective goal to which all Indian citizens must contribute.

The term appears four additional times in the Constitution with reference to executive powers of the Center and State governments, which can be exercised against anyone or anything "affecting the harmony amongst different sections of the people." Aligning with McGee's (1980) claim that ideographs justify the use of power in order to reach an collective ideological goal, the constitution gives the state extensive legislative powers in the event that the country's harmony is threatened. In fact, the constitution

refers to activities that could potentially disrupt harmony, as "terrorist acts" and groups them together with unlawful acts like attempting to overthrow a lawfully-elected government (Article 248).

These appearances of <harmony> in the constitution have clear ties to inter-religious relations in India and can be understood when situated within the contemporary political situation at the time of its drafting. The constitution was developed during the violent India-Pakistan partition[8] and inter-religious clashes within the country were a prime concern for the leaders of newly-liberated India. In a bid to quell communal riots and promote peace, the writers of the constitution were persistent in painting <harmony> as an ideal that Indian society must collectively work towards.

To understand how <harmony> came to have such a central role in the documents constituting India as a nation, it is important to analyze the diachronic meanings of <harmony>. Historically, the term has been alternatively used to represent: (1) amiability between different religions/cultures that exist parallely but largely keep to their own enclaves, only to come together infrequently through assimilation and (2) truly harmonious co-mingling where variance is celebrated and there is genuine syncretic development. This section explores how the use of the term has shifted several times from ancient Indian politics to post-independence India.

<Harmony> has made appearances throughout Indian history and can be traced back to the late centuries BCE. In several artifacts, <harmony> appears as an ideal to be reached for any sovereign state and often refers to inter-religious and inter-caste

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[8] See Chapter 1: Introduction

amiability. In this section, I briefly trace the mention of <harmony> in early Indian politics, followed by its appearances during colonization and post-colonial era political discourse.

<u>A Short History of <Harmony> in Indian Discourse</u>

The use of <harmony> can be traced back to early Indian philosophical traditions. While some textual sources from ancient India describe harmony as the goal of sovereign empires, others have specific instructions to rulers of these kingdoms to put effort into building harmony into their social and political systems. For instance, twin Buddhist treatise Aṅguttara Nikāya and Dīgha Nikāya[9], dated around 400 BCE, speaks of a golden age of happiness specifically characterized by harmonious living (Chaturvedi, 2009). The term "Nikāya" roughly translates to a collection of rules or guidelines written for sovereign rulers. These Buddhist collections of guidelines for ruling a political kingdom glorify the ideal of harmony in society and direct rulers to follow a strategic path which will evoke harmonious living. Another example is a chapter from the Mahabharata written around 200 BCE which lists "peace and harmony" as the top six essential elements for a successful sovereign ruler (Chaturvedi, 2009). In several of these texts, harmony refers to harmonious living between castes, classes, professions, philosophical beliefs, as well as spiritual harmony.

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[9] It is important to note that while these ancient scriptures have now been translated and studied extensively, there is no reliable evidence on who the authors of such texts were. Unlike Western traditions of learning and knowledge preservation, private ownership of knowledge was not a popular concept in most Eastern traditions. Additionally, most teachers of the time practiced orally transmitted learning and believed in collective ownership of knowledge. Scholars are of the opinion that as most sovereign rulers relied on the advice of erudite philosophers of the time, texts like these were most likely a compilation of their teachings.

However, whether this harmony represents distant amiability or dynamic syncretism is difficult to identify. Considering historical sources, this time in ancient Indian history was a period of conquests and regional battles but also economic growth and philosophical/spiritual advancement. During this time, new religious traditions emerged which conflated principles of Buddhism and Hinduism and prioritized devotional worship instead of material and ritualistic practices. This is a prime example of syncretic development of cultures that blend together to create fusions without losing their individual characteristics. However, the Indian subcontinent at this time was a cluster of either regional or loosely integrated kingdoms, and not a unified country. Hence, harmony most likely referred to amicable coexistence within individual kingdoms where people of different cultures, professions, and castes resided.

These traces of the idealization of <harmony> continue over the centuries in various ancient texts and new, albeit short-lived religious traditions like the Mughal ruler Akbar's, Dīn-i Ilāhī. Akbar, who is touted as one of the most secular Mughal rulers, introduced the philosophical concept of Dīn-i Ilāhī[10] in 1582-83 AD, which later historians have identified as Akbar's attempt to establish a new religion that synthesized the positive aspects of major Indian religions of the time (Roychoudhury, 1941). Consistent with early philosophical traditions, this new religion emphasized the ideals of peace and <harmony>, specifically religious harmony, in this context (Chaturvedi, 2009). Under Akbar, the Mughal kingdom was vast and diverse and Akbar's policies were aimed at inspiring harmonious living between different sects of Islamic communities as

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[10] See M. L. Roychoudhury's (1941) *The Din-i-Ilahi or the Religion of Akbar.*

well as between Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, etc. in general. Specifically, in terms of

religion, Akbar's views diverted from orthodox Islam and Hinduism (Ali, 1980, p. 327).

Instead, he was interested in bringing these different cultures together by taking, what

was to him, the most peace-loving and spiritual aspects of them. Thus, unlike other rulers

who had been commended for their religious tolerance, Akbar's Dīn-i Ilāhī sought to

bring harmonious syncretism to inter-religious relationships in the subcontinent, as an

attempt to unite an immensely diverse populace.

      Therefore, harmony as an ideal has been an omnipresent concept throughout early

Indian discourse. It is evident that <harmony> is rooted in religious harmony and has

been used to reflect both distant amiability and harmonious coexistence, over the

centuries. In other words, <harmony> alternatively represents a truly proportional

existence where religions share concepts and ideas without one dominating the other, as

well as harmony created through overlapping ideas where the more powerful enjoy

hegemonic domination. Next, I move on to unpack how <harmony> appeared in political

discourse during the colonial and most importantly, post-colonial era.

<div align="center"><u><Harmony> in Contemporary India</u></div>

      During the colonial period, <harmony> continued to be used in the contexts of

spirituality, society, caste, and religion, encompassing an idealistic view of unity in a

pluralistic society. Due to deepening divisions between the religious groups[11] (majorly

Hindus and Muslims but also including other smaller religious groups like Sikhs) during

the British period, <harmony> as it referred to religious harmony became more dominant.

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[11] See Chapter 1: Introduction

As the anti-colonial freedom struggle intensified, <harmony> was evoked by prominent Indian political leaders of the time in a bid to encourage peace among Indians during the inter-religious strife that plagued the later years of the freedom struggle, especially during the time of Partition. The term harmony appears everywhere in the political discourse of this time. In order to illustrate this point, I explore how the ideal of harmony played an important role in the rhetoric of two important, albeit rival political leaders in the 1900s.

In the early 20th century when the freedom movement was at its height, several prominent personalities on the political horizon had deep ideological differences. Perhaps the best examples in this regard are Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. While Gandhi was well-known for his peaceful civic disobedience resistance tactics and believed that India could only attain freedom through non-violent measures, Bose, on the other end of the spectrum, was known for his radical nationalistic zeal to fight for freedom even at the cost of human lives, including his own. However, despite evident ideological differences between the two, communal harmony as an ideal played an important role in both their political rhetorics. Further, by situating the concept of harmony within the discourse of Gandhi and Bose, I illustrate how harmony was an important ideal during the years of the freedom struggle, at least from the perspective of prominent political leaders[12].

In 1963, the writings and speeches of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, written mostly during the freedom struggle, were compiled and published in a book titled, *The*

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[12] Scholars like Condit and Lucaites (2009) have compared prominent figures' use of an ideograph to offer a synchronic understanding of an ideograph's complexity and fluidity. I draw inspiration from their model to further my analysis.

Way to Communal Harmony. In this book, a chapter about Gandhi's views on cow slaughter and cow protection quoted a May 11, 1921, article from Young India, a weekly newspaper published by Gandhi in the early 1900s. The quote read, "Save for the cow, the Hindus have no ground for quarrel with Musalmans" (p. 101). In the same chapter, Gandhi is also quoted remarking that "Fullest recognition of freedom to the Muslims to slaughter cows is indispensable for communal <harmony>, and is the only way of saving the cow" (emphasis added, p. 102). Although "harmony" has not always been used in the context of specific inter-religious issues like the cow-slaughter debate, this quote illustrates that by the beginning of the 1900s, <harmony> in India began to be gradually used in terms of religious or communal unity.

In 1925, when Gandhi was asked how he would advise people to vote in political elections, he remarked that one of the major criteria he would consider before registering his vote was if one of the candidates stood for interfaith harmony. Further, he continued that one of the questions he would ask the candidates was, "Do you believe in Hindu-Muslim-Parsi-Christian-Jewish unity?" Gandhi's version of harmony, at least its theoretical form, was characterized by openness and acceptance of different cultures with their uniqueness intact. He wanted "all cultures to be enriched by each other without losing their specific identities" (Heredia, 2009, p. 64). Gandhi touted the ideal of sarvadharma samabhava, which loosely translates to "equal respect for all religions" (Heredia, 2009, p. 64). Hence, in terms of religion and culture, evidence suggests that Gandhi had moved beyond assimilation to promote mutual respect and coexistence within Indian society.

Similarly, Bose's political rhetoric referenced <harmony> as a characteristic of his Azad Hind armed forces. Bose was known to have brought a sense of unity and harmony within his army among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs (Roy, 2004). S. A. Ayar, a close associate of Bose stated that "communal harmony of a high order prevailed among the ranks" (Roy, 2004, p. 2). However, unlike Gandhi for whom religion was central to his politics, Bose believed that the state and religion must be separate. Although he was known to be a religious Hindu privately, he discouraged the conflation of religion and public or political issues (Gordon, 2006, p. 105). For Bose, the common goal for all Indians regardless of religion or caste was the expulsion of colonial rulers from the country. As such, while Bose routinely reached out to Muslim as well as Hindu leaders during the freedom movement, he believed that a liberated India should also be secular (Gordon, 2006, p. 106). Hence, while his Azad Hind army was composed of soldiers from all communities, cultures, and religions, "Bose made every effort to downplay regional identifications. . ." (Gordon, 2006, p. 108). Additionally, he was a proponent of the argument that all of India should be united by one language and script.

Bose, being an outspoken public personality, routinely gave speeches and talks. Records of these speeches are proof that although Bose's politics differed extensively from that of Gandhi, he subscribed to the ideal of <harmony> as much as the latter. In fact, Sugata Bose (2020), a historian, politician, and Subhash Chandra Bose's grandson commented, "extolling Netaji's (Bose's) military heroism sounds hollow if divorced from his unequivocal commitment to religious harmony." However, it must be noted that as Bose made a conscious effort to divorce religion from his political undertakings, his idea

of <harmony> appears in contrast with that of Gandhi's. While Gandhi believed that all

religions must be allowed dynamic coexistence in Indian society, Bose envisioned a

society devoid of religious identification. For Bose, <harmony> did not require

identification of linguistic, cultural, and religious differences. Instead, <harmony> would

come from a common language, nationalism, and unification against foreign colonizers.

Therefore, during the most culturally significant years of the Indian freedom struggle,

prominent politicians actively promoted the <harmony> ideal, and specifically wove

religious harmony into their political rhetoric. However while their respective

understanding of <harmony> differed considerably, there is one commonality: for both

Bose and Gandhi, harmony meant people living and working together, not the creation of

separate enclaves that never interacted.

     Therefore, <harmony> has been historically omnipresent and has changed

meaning in different contexts. It has been used to refer to mutual coexistence, syncretic

development, and even complete removal of differences. These varying meanings of

<harmony> have been used to influence public opinion and justify the use of political

power. At its core, <harmony> is an abstract ideal that is often touted as a requirement in

a pluralistic Indian society. At times, the term is used in place of "unity," "peace," or

even "oneness."

     The use of this term as a "high order abstraction" (Edwards & Winkler, 1997, p.

299) will become even clearer in the next few sections as I explore its use in the 1977-78

debates. Its use in the constitution is in sections that specify that the State and Central

governments can make policies and execute them in retaliation to disruption of harmony.

This too will become clearer in the next few sections as I discuss how the controversial textbooks were charged with disturbing religious harmony. The term is used in culturally specific contexts and has value in this discussion when studied in the context of Indian political discourse.

Therefore, <harmony> clearly functions as an ideograph, which in turn played an important role in the textbook debates of 1977. These debates are a place where the struggle over the various meanings of the ideograph played out and can be further elaborated by analyzing Rajya Sabha debates from 1977-78. To fulfill McGee's final ask, as the term changes meaning and context across discourse, it has often contributed to divisive politics. In Indian political discourse, the division usually emerges from (1) a distinct understanding of what harmony means and (2) subtle rhetorical insinuations that one or one religious group wants harmony more than the other.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS: RAJYA SABHA DEBATES

The bicameral Parliament of India is the supreme legislative authority in the country, sitting at the apex of all law-making procedures, budgetary allocations, and discourses on matters of national importance. Members of its two branches, the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and the Rajya Sabha (House of Representatives) are responsible for introducing and passing legislative bills, conducting debates, and making decisions about various administrative sectors of India. While the Lok Sabha is comprised of members who are directly elected by eligible voters in the country, the members of the Rajya Sabha are elected by state-level legislative bodies. In addition to the elected members, the President of India appoints 12 pioneers to the Rajya Sabha who may belong to various professional fields such as art, media, film, academia etc. Although both the Houses theoretically hold similar legislative powers and any bill introduced in the Parliament has to be passed in both Houses to become law, the Rajya Sabha has a unique role in the legislative machinery of the country.

As the Second House of the Parliament, the Rajya Sabha is expected to serve several functions that would be absent from a unicameral legislature. First, members of the Rajya Sabha retire every six years, making the House a semi-permanent body that does not automatically dissolve and reform with a change in the government. Multiple political scientists have pointed out that this offers stability to the Indian legislature and ensures that matters of national importance will be taken care of even during power transitions at the centre or premature dissolution of the government. Second, due to the

indirect election of Rajya Sabha members, they are expected to take a more neutral position in national debates and look past populist demands. Unlike the Lok Sabha, which is controlled by the political party in power, the Rajya Sabha plays the role of a revising chamber that takes a second look at legislation that might have emerged from "purely political compulsions" in the Lower House (Rajya Sabha Secretariat, 2009). Third, the Rajya Sabha is meant to strengthen parliamentary democracy by holding extensive debates on public issues such as industrial developments, transportation, education, etc., which require a wide range of diverse opinions, including input from the states.

The Rajya Sabha was envisioned to be a deliberative gatekeeper of legislation that would hold "dignified debates on important issues and . . . delay legislation which might be the outcome of passions of the moment until the passions have subsided and calm consideration could be bestowed on the measures which will be before the Legislature" (Ayyangar, 1949). The Constituent Assembly[13] also introduced the provision for 12 nominated Rajya Sabha members, selected by the President, from the fields of art, science, social service, and literature, etc. to be nominated to the Rajya Sabha, which was expected to contribute to dignified intellectual debates in the Parliament, in stark contrast to the potential demagoguery of the Lok Sabha.

Debates in the Rajya Sabha possess rhetorical value and are worth analyzing in order to understand the 1977 history textbook controversy, discourses on Indian identity,

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[13] The Constituent Assembly of India was formed in 1946 to deliberate and document the constitution of free India. After attaining independence from the British in 1947, the members of the Constituent Assembly served as India's first members of Parliament. In the Constitutional Assembly Debate Vol. IV (p. 876), this is how Ayyangar envisioned the role of the Rajya Sabha.

and Hindu idealism in the Indian Parliament. Because the Rajya Sabha was conceived as the dignified, intellectual, and deliberative branch of the legislature, its debates regarding history education and controversial textbooks written by historians like Romila Thapar are useful in unpacking how political narratives about Indian culture and history constitute a Hindu-centric Indian consciousness. In time, these narratives become rhetorical tools that influence and promote the development of a Hindu nationalist Indian identity.

Before beginning to analyze the Rajya Sabha debates around the history controversy, I provide a summary of how debates are conducted in the Second Chamber with special attention to debates on education and textbooks. Next, I analyze three specific debates that informed the textbook controversy of 1977-78. These debates, which took place on July 29, 1977, November 16, 1977, and April 25, 1978, are relevant to my exploration of Thapar's Ancient India textbook, and more specifically the two lines that were objected to, as the controversy over Tharpur was part of a wider controversy over history, encompassing other school textbooks that dealt with other focus areas of Indian history.

<u>Rajya Sabha Debates: Norms and Procedures</u>

All proceedings in the Rajya Sabha are presided over by the Chairperson of the House while the Rajya Sabha secretariat is responsible to aid its smooth day-to-day functioning. At the beginning of each day when the Rajya Sabha is in session, the members receive a detailed packet containing information about the day's agenda. Usually, to participate in the Rajya Sabha by raising issues of public concern, asking

questions, and addressing debates requires that the members give a 15-days notice to the

Chairperson. There is some leniency given to matters of urgent importance and, in such

cases, the Chairperson uses their discretion to allow or deny any member to address the

House without prior notice (Shankar & Singh, 2015).

The proceedings of the House can be divided into four broad categories: Zero

Hour, Question Hour, Debates and Motions, and Legislation. During the Zero Hour and

Question Hour, the members are expected to participate as "individual legislators,

independent of the political ideology of their parties" while in the Debates and Motions

and Legislation categories, the members represent their respective political parties

(Shankar & Singh, 2015, p. 2). Besides these four categories, the Rajya Sabha also

presents the yearly Union Budget in February and scrutinizes financial and legislative

topics through Parliamentary Committees. However, among these, the Question Hour,

Debates and Motions, and Legislation are the three Rajya Sabha proceedings most

relevant to my analysis as discourses about education and controversial textbooks in

1977-78 primarily emerged from them.

Question Hour

The Question Hour is a time set apart from policy deliberations in the House for

legislators to pose questions to the government and inquire about the actions of various

Ministers. During this time, the government is held accountable for policy-related

decisions and Ministers are responsible for answering questions regarding decisions made

by their office. Three basic kinds of questions can be asked in the House: Starred,

Unstarred, and Short Notice questions. Starred questions and Unstarred questions must be

submitted 15 days prior to the session and receive oral and written answers respectively. Short Notice questions, on the other hand, relate to matters of urgent public importance and may be asked without a 15-days notice at the discretion of the Chairperson.

During 1977-78, several questions during this Hour related to the decisions made by the government about controversial history textbooks written by Romila Thapar and other historians. Although the questions themselves were often answered succinctly and are not immediately followed by debates about them, they inform the discourse during other proceedings.

Debates and Motions

During the time allotted for debates and motions, the members of the Rajya Sabha may raise various issues. After a discussion regarding the particular issue, the minister most closely associated with the topic addresses the House with their response. Usually, the Business Advisory Committee of the House determines times for various debates. The topics discussed under this category have ranged from pollution, defense, economic situation of the country, education, to industries, etc. In the months following the election of the Janata Party government in 1977, several of the debates and motions discussed in the Rajya Sabha were about education policy, content, and strategies that the country should ideally adopt.

Legislation

Under its primary legislative powers, the Rajya Sabha introduces, discusses, and votes on legislative proposals that are presented in the form of Bills. However, when it is in session, the last two and a half hours of every other Friday are reserved for Private

Member Resolutions. Any member of the Rajya Sabha "may move a resolution in the form of a recommendation, declaration of opinion, approval or disapproval of an Act or policy of the government, or to call attention of the government to an important matter" (Shankar & Singh, 2015, p. 17).

For instance, on July 29, 1977 a historian and Congress minister Bishimbhar Nath Pande moved a resolution in the Rajya Sabha about re-orientating the study of Indian history to promote cultural integration of the Indian people. This led to an extensive discussion about history, identity, and religion in Indian history and is one of the texts I analyze in this chapter. Further, I explore the themes that emerge from a close reading of these debates and discuss arguments put forward by the government and the opposition in the light of historical education, public memory, the communal divide, and India's postcolonial status.

<div align="center">Arguments in the Rajya Sabha Debates</div>

After attaining independence from the British colonial rule and undergoing a riotous Partition merely 30 years before, the tumultuous work of constituting a young nation continued in 1977 India. On one hand, Hindu right-wing factions in the country zealously pushed the narrative of an India that was everything that Muslim-majority Pakistan was not. This India was to be constituted of Hindu[14] values and customs and be non-Islamic at its core. On the other hand, the legacy of Nehruism continued to be a force to reckon with in Indian politics. Nehru's idealistic vision of an India devoid of religious

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[14] Note that this division between the two ideologies in Indian politics is heavily simplified here in order to provide a gist of the dominant political tensions in the textbook debates.

and communal divisions influenced several Congress political leaders who came after him. While it would be reductionist to claim that the Janata Party was solely a Hindu supremacist political group, it is undeniable that the party was dominated by right-wing influences and stood in contrast to the secular/liberal idealism dominant within the Congress party. These ideological tensions frame the continued constitution of Indian identity and play a crucial role in contextualizing debates around nationality, religion, and history in the post-independence decades.

In the following analysis, I study this much-debated Indian identity as a diffused text – whose constitution and description wove through a range of rhetorical texts like movies, songs, clothing, popular culture, law, institutions, and governmental debates. Here, I focus on the way identity is constituted through education, particularly in the debates about textbook content that ensued within the chambers of the Parliament and made its way into multiple discussions in the Rajya Sabha in 1977-78.

When the new Janata government came to power in 1977, India was a 30-years young nation where basic governmental functions, the allocation of funds of different sectors, as well as decisions regarding authoritative power within government ministries were still being developed and disputed. During this time, one of the most extensively debated issues in the deliberative chambers of Rajya Sabha was the national education policy, more specifically related to reorganizing the outdated British-established academic system and school-level educational content. The ministers in the Rajya Sabha debated several key points like the set-up of school systems, the number of years that must be allocated to earning a college degree, and the development of vocational learning

in academic institutions. While these discussions are extensive and highly consequential to the subsequent development of education in India, I am more interested in discussions about educational content that contain subtexts about identity and history.

These debates on controversial information in textbooks written by historians like Romila Thapar also coincide with discussions addressing communal violence in the country. An analysis of the debates reflect that for the Rajya Sabha ministers, controversial and inadequate history textbooks were connected to the communal violence in India, specifically in terms of Hindu-Muslim clashes. Keeping my focus on the use of history textbooks in building perceptions of Indian identity and Hindu nationalism, I have further divided the analysis of debates in two broad categories: (1) explicit mentions of Thapar and their history textbook, and (2) implicit mentions of history textbooks and the role they play in nation building and national identity formation.

Explicit mentions of Thapar and History Textbooks

An analysis of the three aforementioned debates from 1977-78 revealed that direct references to the controversial history books written by Thapar and other historians were rare. They are mentioned more frequently by the opposition parties but even then, the ministers are noticeably coy in directly addressing the textbooks or the authors in question. In this section, I tease out the meagre mentions of the textbooks and how they are discussed in the parliament. Interestingly, none of these debates began with the history textbooks as the explicit agenda. Instead, mentions of the textbooks emerge within other discussions primarily regarding rising communal violence in the country and social issues like illiteracy, education, and unemployment. As such, a brief overview of

the social and political backdrop against which these debates are set will provide a

framework to navigate the proceedings of the Rajya Sabha.

In 1977, violent clashes between various religious communities in the country,

several of which were between Hindu and Muslim groups, had become a major concern

for the Indian government. Although there had been a temporary lull in violence during

the decade following the 1947 Partition, the onset of the 1960s saw frequent episodes of

violence breaking out in eastern and central Indian states like Madhya Pradesh, West

Bengal, and Jharkhand (Engineer, 2002). Official figures reflect that in almost all

instances of communal violence in the early 1960s, more Muslim than Hindu lives were

lost (Engineer, 2002). These clashes also coincided with a rise in the presence of right-

wing Hindutva organizations like the RSS and Jan Sangh and continued into the 1970s

when the partition of East Pakistan[15] (present-day Bangladesh) further aggravated the

situation. By this time, instances of Hindu-Muslim violence were being reported across

the country and mass communal riots in places like Ahmedabad in Gujarat and Bhivandi

in Maharastra were making news (Graff & Galonnier, 2013).

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[15] The 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War or Mukhtojuddho was a violent conflict fought on the grounds of territory, religion, and language. The nation of Bangladesh was born out of territory which had been designated as a part of Pakistan during the 1947 Partition. This territory, then known as East Pakistan, was separate from the Pakistan mainland and the majority population was Bangla-speaking Muslims. From the beginning, the culture of East Pakistan and Pakistan mainland differed significantly in terms of food, culture, and most importantly, language. The most significant unifying factor was the majority religion, Islam. In 1971, a war for Bangladesh's liberation broke out following what is known as "intellectual genocide" conducted by Pakistan. As Bangladesh shares a border with India and due to the nature of the India-Pakistan rivalry, anti-Pakistan and anti-Muslim sentiments were high during the 1971 conflict. See *Bangladesh's Genocide Debate: A Conscientious Research (2018)*.

However, all of this came to a halting stop in 1975 when the Indira Gandhi-led Congress government declared a State of Emergency and enforced President's Rule[16] in all states. This put a temporary stop to the violence but when the Emergency was eventually lifted in 1977, following the fall of the Congress government, riots backed by the RSS began once again (Engineer, 2002). A study conducted in Delhi after the riots that took place in May 1974 revealed that most Hindus held Muslims responsible for the escalation of violence between the two communities. Survey respondents who self-identified as Hindu were quoted saying that Muslims were "fanatical," brought "religion into everything," "quarrel[ed] in the name of religion," "lack[ed] sentiment of nationalism," and "look[ed] up to Pakistan" (Krishna, 1985, p. 125). On the other hand, respondents who self-identified as Muslims echoed the statement that "the greatest deficiency in them [Hindus] is that they are not willing/able to accept Muslims" (Krishna, 1985, p. 126). This survey highlighted some crucial elements of inter-religious tensions in India and provided insight into how the public was making sense of riots and violent communal clashes. It must be noted that although official records show that in most instances of violence, more Muslim than Hindu lives were lost, the general public perception (consisting of a Hindu-majority population) was that violent and fanatical Muslim mobs were the prime cause of riot violence (Krishna, 1985; Graff & Galonnier, 2013).

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[16] In the event of failure of state government machinery or an emergency situation in the country, the President can impose temporary suspension of the state or union government. During this time, the states come under the direct control of the central government.

As this riot-induced hostile social environment festered in the 1970s, it became a chief concern of the government. This prompted frequent calls for "peace" and "harmony" within parliamentary discourse of the time. In the 1977-78 debates on education, specifically history education, politicians advocated that a common interpretation of history was an important way of ensuring peace in the country. In these debates on history, NCERT textbooks, which were published as models for schools and education boards were frequently mentioned. In 1977, NCERT was under siege for allegedly displaying leftist-bias in the educational resources it produced (Thapar, 2009). Textbooks like Thapar's Ancient India commissioned by the NCERT were being increasingly challenged by regional organizations who felt that their local histories were being inappropriately or insufficiently represented. This also prompted comments in the Rajya Sabha that urged the government to ensure that history books did not contain controversial information which could incite public anger, thus aggravating religious violence in the country. The subtext of the debates was that Hindu right-wing groups like the RSS were bound to be enraged by history books that challenged widely-accepted religious views and hence, historians must exercise caution regarding what information made its way into the textbooks. Further, I delve into a Rajya Sabha debate from 1978 to analyze in detail how history books came to be at the centre of disagreements in the parliament.

As discussed previously, conversation regarding history textbooks most frequently emerged from debates on education policy, unemployment, etc. For instance, this 1978 debate which started as a discussion on tackling illiteracy and strategies for

vocational training, eventually turned into discourse on academic freedom when a minister challenged the government on the grounds that educational institutions were being used as training grounds by the RSS (see Chapter 1). B. V. Abdullah Koya, a member of the Indian Union Muslim League[17], serving their second term in the Rajya Sabha, asked the question in response to a speech by Ramlal Parikh, a lawmaker representing the Janata Party. Parikh made his way through identifying problems in the country's education system and urged ministers to come to a mutual agreement that they "shall not use university campuses for political propaganda" (Parikh, April 25, 1978, p. 130). In response, Koya inquired "What about educational institutions being used as training ground by the RSS?" (Koya, April 25, 1978, p. 130).

Koya's interruption marked a turn in the debate towards the textbook controversy stirring in the media and invited bigger questions about the future of intellectual liberty in the country. Parikh initially ignored the insinuation by Koya and remarked that "the future of a *peaceful society* [emphasis added] depends on how we reconstruct our educational system." At the outset, it is unclear from this remark whether Parikh is referring to the education system established during the British colonial times or the one developed by the Congress since 1947. However, their next few statements offer some more insight. Parikh refers to the textbook dispute and commends state leaders for not accepting things that emerged from the NCERT back when the previous Congress-led government was in power. Parikh states:

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[17] The Indian Muslim League is a state party based in the state of Kerala. It emerged after the All-India Muslim League, a political party in British India which strongly advocated for a separate Muslim-majority state, was officially dissolved after the Partition in 1947.

> I was feeling rather sorry that this [rejection of education resources developed by NCERT] was not even theoretically accepted earlier...it was said that something had emerged from the NCERT and it had to be accepted, although it was not accepted by some bold State leaders.

To put this in context, Parikh is referring to the controversial passages in the NCERT history textbooks that were opposed by some State legislatures in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Punjab with much uproar in the media. Parikh follows up with a tirade against NCERT itself, criticizing its development into an "unwieldy organization" under the last government and calls for it to be diminished in size and authority, and for its activities to be limited (p. 132). This section of the debate comes across as an accusatory give-and-take between members affiliated with the Congress and the Janata Party, where both sides criticized the other for using the education system to further their respective political agenda.

These sentiments are further echoed by Pratap Chander Chunder, the Education Minister appointed by the Janata Party in the same session. Chunder tactfully broaches the subject of taking certain textbooks out of circulation and reasons that the decision was made in order to "reduce the [academic] load" on students taking their exams that year. Chunder's criticism also indirectly extended to the authors of NCERT textbooks and he claimed that the textbooks will be subjected to revisions and "proper" textbooks will be written "in a scientific manner, not in a haphazard manner." Chunder's remarks are quite transparent in insinuating that the said textbooks, written by Thapar and others, were haphazardly written and did not exercise scientific rigor. Chunder offers no further explanation to address why the textbooks were found to be scientifically inept and by whom. Rajya Sabha minister V. P. Dutt expressed frustration over the opaqueness of the

decision-making system of the Janata Government by demanding that the comments of

these historical experts be made public:

> . . . the hon'ble Education Minister said in the House that he had referred these
> text-books to certain eminent panelists. I should like to urge on him to let us know
> the comments he has received. Let them be published so that there may be a
> democratic national debate on the issues. There is nothing hush hush about it. The
> textbook concern matters of various intellectual views and there should be no
> difficulty in having a democratic debate on these questions. (Dutt, April 25, 1978,
> p. 148)

Given these remarks regarding the accuracy of historical data and the fact that there is no

transparent communication about which historical experts constituted the panel and

whose verdict Chunder is discussing, I argue that the dispute over historical accuracy was

essentially manufactured.

Ceccarelli (2011) defined this kind of dispute as manufactured controversy, "in

which rhetors seek to promote or delay public policy by announcing that there is an

ongoing scientific debate about a matter for which there is actually an overwhelming

scientific consensus" (p. 195). In the 1960s and 70s, academicians and scholars involved

in ancient Indian historical research were exploring expansive new vistas of the region's

past. Sure enough, there were debates and disagreements among the scholars but this

discourse had nothing to do with the livelihood of the Aryans, much less their dietary

habits. In fact, prominent history scholars had served on the editorial board of NCERT

and had reviewed the textbooks commissioned by the organization, including Thapar's

Ancient India.

As Thapar (2009) wrote in their memoir, the historical research community at the

time was invested in doing the work of reversing colonial assumptions and orientations in

the study of history, exploring ways of incorporating new archaeological findings[18] in

recorded history, and rethinking colonial assumptions about ancient Indian society in

terms of caste, culture, and religions. However, these scientific deliberations, popular

within the scholarly community, were not the ones being discussed or even addressed in

the Indian parliament at the time. Instead, the Rajya Sabha was debating snippets of

information in history textbooks that had garnered opposition from religious groups, not

history scholars. Therefore, the debate in the Rajya Sabha on history textbooks published

by the NCERT was an attempt to manufacture scientific controversy over something that

had general consensus in the technical sphere[19] of history research.

Further, the subtext of the Rajya Sabha debates, shrouded behind a veneer of

telling history truthfully, was quite simply this: regardless of whether Thapar's book

contained accurate research-backed information, if it did not align with the narrative of

India's Hindu-centric identity, should it be included in government-funded history

textbooks? The textbook controversy was aimed at creating public dissent over a topic

which was essentially a technical debate. It had little to do with the scientific standards

that the NCERT textbooks are accused of failing. The controversy that emerged from

regional factions and weaved through political debates was not about some widely-

debated historical information, but about political ideology and keeping the story of

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[18] During this time, new archaeological sites of the ancient Harappa civilization had been discovered, the majority of which was across the borders in Pakistan. This promoted Indian archaeological organizations to double down on efforts to discover other sites on the Indian side of the border. See Thapar (2009).

[19] Goodnight (2012) defined the technical sphere as one of the realms of arguments which was characterized by scientific knowledge, expertise, and specialized language. For someone to propose an argument in the technical sphere, they must possess the technical knowledge and jargon relevant to the field.

India's nation building intact. This manufacturing of controversy for the sake of impacting policy is a prime example of public interference in a technical debate.

When studied in the context of manufactured controversy, the reason behind the coyness of the Rajya Sabha ministers, the omission of direct mentions of the controversial textbooks, and the indirect attacks on the authors by accusing them of leftist/Marxist propaganda, become a bit clearer. A 1977 debate quotes Chunder, the Janata Party education minister, referring to Thapar as both a "communist" and "communalist." As there was no real scientific debate on whether the textbooks published by the NCERT were backed by research and archaeological evidence, directly challenging the textbooks on scientific grounds would have been futile. Instead, questioning the impact of the textbooks on the youth of the country and how they affected their sense of Indian identity might be considered more significant and, hence, these were the concerns presented in the Rajya Sabha. For instance, Parikh (1978), outlined their critique of the NCERT's functioning by declaring that ". . . the future of a peaceful society depends on how we reconstruct our educational system" (p. 131). The insinuation here is that, in a time of religious and social unrest, the education system could be used to instill a sense of a singular national identity to ensure peace and harmony in the country.

However, in order to do that, advocates argued controversial material had to be removed from history books and the government needed to aim to publish books with the ideal of harmony in mind. These appeals to use education, especially history education, to solidify national identity are not limited to rare instances where the controversial authors

or textbooks are explicitly mentioned. Hence, in order to study identity as diffused text throughout the debates on education policy, it is crucial to look at the debates that are anchored by the concept of identity construction through textbooks but do not explicitly refer to them.

Implicit Mentions of History Textbooks

The Rajya Sabha debates conducted during the short rule of the Janata Party dealt with an extensive range of subjects and touched upon questions of Indian postcolonial identity as home to diverse religious and ethnic communities. Given the Rajya Sabha's concerns about recent religious clashes, particularly between Hindu and Muslim groups, ways of inspiring a sense of unity featured heavily in the parliamentary debates of the 1970s. Against this backdrop of religious and communal upheaval, the Rajya Sabha members sought a path forward, through education, that would inspire peace and harmony in the country.

This concern with inter-group violence prompted frequent calls for "integration" of the Indian people, the subtext being that it was the perceived differences between the histories of various communities and religious groups in India that caused violent discord. This is evident from the debates in the Rajya Sabha that obsessively concentrated on the need for integration in order to achieve harmony in the country. Depending on whether the speaker belonged to the Janata Party or one of the opposition parties, this idea of integration took two distinct forms: Muslims assimilating into Hindu culture to avoid conflict or Hindus being more tolerant of minority religions to avoid feuds. I

address these two different paths to integration – tolerance and assimilation – in the next section.

In this section, I explore how the burden of inspiring integration is put on history, as though history is merely a narrative which can be moulded and sculpted depending on what one wants to achieve through it. By closely reading the debate records, I analyze how harmonic integration of the Indian people is understood as a goal that can be achieved if the right historical notes are played. Further, I argue that for the Rajya Sabha in 1977, mutually-agreed upon history that endorsed a Hindu-centric Indian identity, was a prerequisite for harmonious national identity-building. For them, the purpose of historical research and education was primarily its contributions to nation-building and creating a sense of unified Indian identity. While this idea of uniting the Indian people through history appears across several parliamentary sessions, a particular debate occurring on July 29, 1977, is the most suitable place to anchor my analysis. There are three key factors that make this debate relevant in terms of the ideal of integration: the date, the agenda, and the argument it proposes.

First, the date on which the debate takes place indicates that this was a period immediately before the textbook controversy erupted in the media. In a way, the July 29 debate foreshadows the controversy regarding the past and the writing of history that is to come. Although no specific history books or historians are mentioned, the participants of the debate discuss the many ways in which Indian history has been distorted to serve colonial interests, how the distortion has led to social disintegration, and how the government must work with historians to address these concerns. Therefore, the debate

offers unique insight into the factors that directly informed the textbook controversy and helps situate the arguments pertaining to the history controversy that would be articulated in the parliament in the coming months.

Second, the July 29 debate was pivotal in addressing the need for integration as exigent for fostering peace and harmony in the country. The name of the resolution that started the debate is declarative of its cause and articulates its key points: "Resolution Re: Reorientation of the study of the Medieval Indian history with a view to promoting cultural and emotional integration of the Indian people" (July 29, 1977, p. 115). Additionally, the agenda of the resolution also gives insight into the ministers' perception of why the country was suffering from lack of integration and the multitudinal effects it had on the people. In the beginning of the discussion, the agenda outlines that Indian history must be studied in terms of how different communities have been historically compatible with each other in order to inspire a sense of unified "Indian-ness" among the citizens. Hence, this resolution was a clear appeal to promote integration within different religious communities by reorienting the education policy.

Third, the terms used in the resolution and in the following debate are vital in understanding the Rajya Sabha's stance on not just *why* the country must be culturally integrated but also the perception of *what* a properly integrated population looked like and, more importantly, the role history played in influencing this idealized integration. Hence, this debate serves a key purpose in my analysis, that is, to understand how the policy debates in the Rajya Sabha discussed the role of history education in nation building and national identity construction. It is crucial to note that the ideal of a well-

integrated Indian populace, and the urgent need to consolidate the country culturally and emotionally, was enthusiastically promoted by most political parties in the Rajya Sabha and sometimes more so by the opposition[20] in the parliament. Reaching across party lines, most members of the Rajya Sabha were supportive of achieving harmony in the country. However, as harmony operated as an ideograph, it meant different things to different members and many of them differed on how it could be achieved. Further, I categorize the different ways in which harmony was to be achieved through retelling of history, advocating for tolerance of differences within communities, or erasing differences and promoting assimilation.

Achieving harmony: A burden on history. On July 29, 1977, Dr. Bhishambhar Nath Pande, a minister of the Congress party, opened the discussion by laying out a resolution outlining two steps that the Government must take to reorient the study of medieval history. Pande, who was a former freedom fighter, had been strongly influenced by Nehru and Gandhi's political views. He was a close associate of Nehru and had served for almost two decades on the boards of various organizations that aimed to spread Gandhian philosophies and teachings on a global level.

Pande's calls to action in terms of the resolution to reorient historical study must be read in the context of his political influences, which further informed his stance on social issues. He stated that the communal interpretation of Medieval history was

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[20] After the 1977 general elections, the opposition in the Rajya Sabha comprised various national and regional parties. In 1977, Kamalapati Tripathi, a former freedom fighter and minister of the Indian National Congress, was the leader of the opposition. Besides Congress, some other political parties that formed the opposition body in the Rajya Sabha were All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), and Communist Party of India - Marxist (CPM).

negatively affecting cultural and emotional integration in India and the Government must take steps to:

> (i) bring out points of contacts and understanding between different Indian communities; and (ii) serve, in the words of Gandhiji, the purpose of creating a sense of Indian-ness and to help in promoting concord in place of discord, peace in place of strife, progress in place of retrogression and mutual faith in place of hatred.

This outlined agenda of Pande's resolution has some key takeaways in terms of the role history plays in nation building, creating a unified citizenry, and the importance of controlled historical narrative.

First, the term "reorientation" comes up frequently in this debate. Pande and several other ministers of the Rajya Sabha were concerned that the current orientation of history education had a strong colonial flavor which regurgitated a "communal interpretation" of the past. Pande (1977) lamented that "[Indian history's] distortion by the British historians. . . [portrayed] the Hindus and Muslims as being divided into warring camps with little in common between them" (p. 115). This distortion had made its way into history textbooks which were being consumed by students across the country and aggravating divisions within a citizenry still haunted by the violent 1947 Partition and the current riotous uprisings between religious groups.

Second, Pande delved deeper into the technicalities of history scholarship and presented numerous examples of how outdated information regarding Indian history was still being taught in schools. For instance, British historians had divided Indian history into three broad periods based on the religion of the rulers. This communal compartmentalization of the past was being criticized by academia and had found support

from politicians like Pande. These factors, Pande continued, were "responsible for continuously aggravating disunity, disharmony, and disintegration between communities" (p. 118). Clearly, this resolution assumes that a retelling of history from a more harmonious perspective, where different religions and ethnic communities (especially Hindus and Muslims) are portrayed as unified, integrated, and peacefully coexisting groups would instill a sense of strong national identity on both sides and help quell the violent uprisings of current times. Therefore, this resolution clarifies the stance of the Rajya Sabha that in post-independence India, history was to be used as a tool to integrate the public and prevent violent conflicts.

Third, Pande's comment that history must be reoriented to create a "sense of Indian-ness" in a time of communal upheaval is reminiscent of Blair, Dickenson, and Ott's (2010) argument that history serves the present and not the past. In this case, those responsible for formulating India's education policy are aware that historical narratives can be controlled to tell stories that evoke an emotional response from the public. This emotional response can then be directed towards the needs of the present which in 1977 India, was to inspire peace and unity in a country marred by communal violence. Interestingly, some Rajya Sabha members are quite candid about acknowledging that no version of history is completely true and exhaustive. S. Nurul Hasan, a historian and the former minister of Education and Social Welfare under Congress, observed: Any historian ha[s] to select his facts. What facts does he select? In selecting his facts, does [h]e present a total picture. . . which conforms to the overall reality or does he not[?]

Fourth, the resolution argues that a "harmonious" study of Indian history, which forgoes the communal classification of India's past (Hindu, Muslim, and British periods), is urgently needed. The use of the term "urgent" is of rhetorical importance as seldom do we view historical study as possessing immediate exigency. In fact, this opinion is voiced throughout the session by several ministers of the opposition who call for an immediate reorientation of historical study, indicating that the utility of historical narratives serve the present as much as they function as accounts of the past. I propose two potential reasons why a reorientation of history education seemed urgent at the time: the communal riots and the sweeping victory of the right-wing Janata Party in the 1977 elections.

I have previously discussed the volatile communal situation in the country in the 1970s. Due to this, some politicians may have realized that history education could be used to create a space where both Muslims and Hindus could be seen as equally Indian. By bringing out "points of contact," as Pande phrased it, a long historical relationship between Hindus and Muslims in India could be made visible to Indians and encourage them to look past individual violent clashes to appreciate an overall peaceful coexistence that has existed between the two communities for centuries.

Here, I want to emphasize that the actual nature of the relationship between Hindu and Muslim rulers of Medieval India has been a topic of contention for decades. While some claim that India's Muslim rulers were Hinduphobic and waged numerous wars in the name of religion, other historians have claimed that Muslim rulers did not specifically target Hindus and their military strategies were mostly political, not religious, in nature.

Hence, the history of India cannot and should not be reduced to centuries-old rivalry between Hindus and Muslims. As this conversation is ongoing within the scholars involved in the relevant field, I refrain from commenting on whether Pande and others were historically accurate in their claims.

In 1977 India, communal tensions were running high and cracks along religious lines were becoming increasingly more pronounced. In this situation, the parliamentarians responded by asking for history to be reoriented in order to culturally and emotionally integrate a fragmented public by finding points of connection and underlining their common histories.

Hence, the Rajya Sabha debates in 1977-78 revealed that: first, a common understanding of history was a prerequisite to consolidate national identity and second, that an important, if not the most important, purpose of historical study was to create a sense of Indian-ness. However, what is interesting is that while *both* the representatives of the Janata Party as well as the opposition appear to agree that national integration was required, what integration ideally looked like for them differed dramatically.

Achieving harmony: Tolerance and assimilation. Below the surface of these Rajya Sabha debates, currents of tolerance, assimilation, and sometimes acceptance, swirl together to create an interesting mosaic of what harmonious integration means in India. A common claim that comes up multiple times across the debates is that Indian culture and Hinduism, at their core, are pluralistic and this pluralism breeds tolerance towards "the other." In the April 25, 1978 debate, V. P. Dutt, a nominated Congress minister warned the current government of being overtaken by the dominant right-wing forces

within the party by citing a recent example of an RSS member nominated as the secretary

of the Indian Culture and History Congress[21]. Dutt, who had earlier chided the Janata

Party for being ambiguous about the decision to take certain NCERT books out of

circulation, cautioned that the government could be in danger of tainting India's, tolerant

and pluralistic image:

> So in the matter of text-books let not an impression be given that the Government
> is being swamped the m[o]st fanatical and the most obscurantist forces in this
> country because the unity and the integrity of this country have depended on
> tolerance and a progressive outlook born of a composite culture. If we are unable
> t[o] maintain that, then I am afraid we will be in deep trouble.

Dutt sounded the alarm for letting Hindu right-wing organizations infiltrate

administrative positions, especially those that could influence historical research and

development.

Dutt was concerned that letting the RSS, infamous for its non-tolerance towards

other religions, would tarnish the pluralistic image of India that the Congress had been

trying to paint since its inception before Independence. Dutt's comment that without this

"tolerance and progressive outlook," the Government and the country itself would be in

trouble speaks to its perceived importance to postcolonial Indian identity. Attributing

such importance to India's tolerant outlook is unsurprising as the Congress had tried to

build this sense of inclusivity into the core of Indian identity for decades. Nehru, who

went on to become the first Prime Minister of independent India had famously said in

1946 that Ashoka, the Buddhist Maurya emperor and Akbar, the Muslim Mughal

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[21] Indian Culture and History Congress is one of the largest professional organizations for historians in
South Asia. It was established in 1935. Its official website declares that the organization's "main objective
is to promote secular and scientific writing of history."

emperor were prime examples of the tolerant nature of Indian civilization, due to their

secular policies and advocacy for harmony between religious groups (van der Veer,

2005). Similarly, social reformers like Gandhi and Vivekananda had emphasized the

openness of Hinduism towards dissent and the tolerance and non-violence of Indian

civilization (van der Veer, 2005). In fact, tolerance and inclusivity were specific tags that

India had used since 1947 to separate itself from Pakistan, which was designed to be a

state created specifically for Muslims.

The debates also reveal that Congress politicians as well as those from other

opposition parties advocated for this sense of tolerance to be instilled in Indian minds

through education. In the same 1978 session, Khurshed Alam Khan, a Congress minister,

called for values of tolerance, truth, and humanity to be imbued through education:

> . . .education and seats of higher learning stand for humanism, for tolerance, for
> reasons and good will and for search of truth. If these functions are discharged
> honestly and adequately, then the nation and the people can be assured that all is
> well.

Clearly, tolerance was perceived to be an essential part of being Indian.

These examples reveal that tolerance was a virtue that many Indian politicians

prided themselves on. Several Rajya Sabha members advocated for the merit of tolerance

to be taught to Indians through formal methods of education. Although Khan and Dutt do

not refer to history textbooks in particular, mentions of these textbooks are sprinkled

throughout the debate. Hence, it would be logical to speculate that the ministers believed

a harmonious portrayal of Hindus and Muslims in history textbooks would instill

tolerance in young Indians and help maintain communal peace.

However, although tolerance is often used as a positive attribute of multicultural countries, I seek to problematize the term and its implications in pluralistic cultures like India. In scholarship studying multicultural societies, the ideal of tolerance has generated criticism from researchers who argue that in most pluralistic societies, both eastern and western tolerance does not support equality or acceptance (Brown, 2012; Hoon, 2006; van Krieken, 2012; Vani & John, 2009). The hegemonic powers within the respective societies dictate what can be tolerated and demarcate to what extent certain identities, beliefs, and values can be tolerated. Hence, tolerance is always accompanied by hidden power differentials between the tolerant and the tolerated (Brown, 2012). Tolerance discourse often erases the "historically and politically produced inequalities and exclusions" and

> [at] the same time, tolerance discourse confers supremacy, beneficence and normalcy upon the tolerant while consecrating the abject status of the tolerated— only what is difficult, foreign or unwanted is tolerated and tolerance itself anoints its objects with this status. (Brown, 2012, p. 21)

In the Indian context, tolerance is touted as one of the many positive attributes of Hindu culture. However, whether tolerance extends to encompass inclusivity is left unsaid.

The Rajya Sabha debates seem to advocate tolerance of all religions and cultures but it is evident that Hindus are understood to be the benevolent, tolerant majority, whereas "foreign elements" like Islam, as Chunder (1977, p. 168) phrased it, are the ones being tolerated. Because Hinduism, as an umbrella term for various subregions, is widely accepted as the indigenous religion of the subcontinental region (Chunder, 1977, p. 169), Islam becomes the cultural and religious *other* which must be tolerated by Hindus. This unsaid but mutually agreed upon power relationship between Hindus and Muslims also

weaves through the debates when Rajya Sabha members talk of "integration" of cultures within the country.

Moving on from tolerance, there is another path to harmony extensively discussed in the Rajya Sabha sessions: assimilation. There are several instances where the members discuss and glorify how Muslims have been integrated and "absorbed" into Indian culture over the centuries (Chunder, 1977, p. 168). I argue that when the Rajya Sabha advocates for integration, what is actually meant is assimilation of Muslims into Hindu culture. This assimilation is portrayed to be both a core tenet of Indian/Hindu identity as well as an urgent requirement to quell Hindu-Muslim violence in the country. Further, I explore the debates to tease out vestiges of assimilation as discussed and often lauded by the members.

In the July 29, 1977, session that discussed the urgent need to reorient history to promote integration, Rajya Sabha member Z. A. Ahmad, the Uttar Pradesh Communist Party secretary, made several comments developing his argument that most Indians, including Muslims, are part of the same Hindu culture. The divisions between them are minimal, and sometimes exist only in theory:

> I never think of myself as Muslim or Hindu. I am human and I consider all humans equal. . . there is no difference in our blood and culture. . .my grandfather was born Hindu and our household culture is Hindu. My sister is married to a Hindu. My sister-in-law also married into a Hindu family. Our values, culture, and food habits are all the same . . .ninety-nine point nine percent of [Indian] Muslims are actually Hindu. Their culture is Hindu. They are Muslim only in name. (translated, p. 160)

> Divisions are being created intentionally and some people not only want to maintain these divisions but aggravate them. . . [if these divisions] are ingrained into children's minds from the beginning, you can understand how it will affect their future. (translated, p. 160)

These comments by Ahmad reflect a preoccupation with portraying Muslims as ethnically and culturally Hindus for Muslims to be considered an equal part of the Indian culture because they are really just Hindu. These comments are meant to drive home the fact that a significant number of Muslims in India are ethnically indigenous to the region and became Muslims due to conversions during the period of Mughal rule. However, arguments like these promote the subtext that "Muslims as converts should realize that they are Hindus first" (van der Veer, 2005, p. 191). Inadvertently, even some of the most progressive Rajya Sabha members advocate for assimilation as the preferred path to integration and suggest that only assimilated Muslims can be seen as truly Indian.

Further during the July 29 session, Chunder, disagreeing with prior comments that the Janata Party was attempting to create communal divisions among Hindus and Muslims, argued that on the contrary, the Janata Party was trying to bring cohesion into the country. Evoking the unified leadership of the Janata Party, which used to be smaller, distinct political groups, Chunder commented that just like differences emerged within political parties, such differences also exist within India. However, Chunder took the stance that such differences were not desirable as they got in the way of national unification:

> If there are certain differences here and there, these differences should not be accentuated and under the leadership of this unified party, we will be able to unify the entire people of India, without any reference to any particular caste, creed or community (July 29, 1977, p. 171)

Although Chunder seems to advocate for a complete removal of cultural differences to create one national culture, the subtext here is that a unified culture can be created if minorities assimilate to the dominant Hindu culture. Previous comments made by

Chunder as well as other ministers like Ahmad in the Rajya Sabha are indicative of the assumption that the hegemony of Hindu culture was natural and irrefutable as the dominant Indian culture. Other minority communities could then become Indian if their values, customs, and practices could be assimilated into Hindu dominance.

Interestingly, even V. P. Dutt, who had earlier expressed outrage at communal historical narratives and the Janata Party's lack of transparency over the textbook ban controversy, seems to subscribe to the notion that harmony meant an absence of differences. In his closing remarks for the July 29 session, Dutt remarked, "I hope the Government. . . would use all its efforts to encourage what brings us together and discourage what separates." (p. 179).

Therefore, this idea of cultural harmony, achieved through tolerance and assimilation, reduces the diverse mosaic of Indian cultures into a homogenous blob. This sort of idealized homogeneity echoes the North American "melting pot" metaphor where cultural sensibilities and religious practices amalgamate and lose their distinct characteristics (Glazer & Moynihan, 1963). Similarly, Allen (2004) critiqued the idealization of "oneness" in multicultural societies which reinforces the hegemonic dominance of the powerful while subjugation and unequal treatment of minorities. A nation with oneness as the goal will inadvertently uphold inequalities by continuing to ignore the needs of the less privileged and failing to address the power imbalance.

This "melting pot" of harmonious "oneness" is neither a reflection of India's reality nor the dynamism of Indians' cultural lived experience. The dominant political leadership of India in 1977 imagined unity without nuances and indirectly advocated for

the erasure of cultural subjectivity. In the debates, there is no mention of cultures that

exist distinctly and propagate parallel to each other. The debates reduce "Indian culture"

to merely instances of assimilation into a dominant Hindu culture, ignoring distinctions

within sub-religions and minority communities. Hence, rejecting the perception that India

can only achieve harmony when minorities assimilate into the dominant culture, I argue

that Indian history needs to tease out the wholeness (Allen, 2004) of century-old

pluralistic commingling and truly celebrate the multicultural dynamism of Indian society.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: BEYOND THE MELTING POT

The 1977 debates around the NCERT history textbooks reveal some fundamental grounds of controversy within the Indian polity. The combined horrors of a 200-year long colonial rule and the 1947 partition that divided India along haphazardly drawn borders, were the two key events that exerted dominating influence on the subcontinent's identity and politics for decades to come. In this thesis, I explored this intricate labyrinth of questions that Indians have been trying to answer since they became citizens of a newly sovereign state: "Who are we and who do we want to be?" I focused my analysis on a specific series of debates that unfolded in the Indian parliament beginning in the summer of 1977, soon after India's first right-wing government came to power. This debate covered an extensive array of issues plaguing the Indian polity at the time, such as communal violence, slow economic growth, border disputes, and a national identity crisis. The 1975 Bangladesh Liberation War had further reignited the public's memory of the Partition and aggravated the Hindu-Muslim divide in the country.

At this time, when an NCERT history textbook written by Romila Thapar claimed that the ancient Indian Aryan civilization consumed beef on special occasions, a key pillar of the Hindu Indian identity was shaken. Over centuries, beef had become one of the key differences between Muslims and Hindus, a concrete characteristic that separated one from the other. So, as Thapar's book began to generate opposition in the public and media, the Central government of India took notice as well. The newly elected Janata Party government was becoming increasingly critical of the previous Congress-led

governments and NCERT featured heavily in their criticism. NCERT was accused of enabling "leftist" historians and privileging their opinions over others.

In this thesis, I analyzed debates in the Rajya Sabha that specifically dealt with history and its alleged retelling for political purposes. The analysis revealed that Thapar's book which mentioned beef consumption in ancient India was deemed detrimental to the country's national identity and unity because it contradicted a fundamental trademark of the high-caste Hindu Indian identity. When the Janata Party Rajya Sabha ministers decreed textbooks like Thapar's to be against national harmony, what they meant was that it disrupted the hegemonic superiority of the high-caste Hindu diet over those followed by Muslims, Christians, Dalits, and other groups.

I explored how <harmony> functioned as an ideograph in the Indian public sphere and toed the line between assimilation and acceptance between distinct communities. In the parliamentary debates, <harmony> is believed to be in jeopardy because of textbooks like Thapar's that contrasted common assumptions about Indian society and perturbed groups that consider their cultural practices to be the *only true* representations of India.

Further, my analysis reveals that most Rajya Sabha members follow two distinct tracks to achieve harmony: tolerance and assimilation. Some members of the parliament praise Hindus and Indians for being tolerant of other religions and cultures and believe that harmony can be achieved by *allowing* others to exist peacefully in the country. However, tolerance as a path to harmony is rife with undercurrents of inequality and hegemonic superiority of the dominant culture. It perpetuates the idea that the dominant

cultures are hierarchically superior and their benevolence towards the lesser cultures makes them tolerant towards the others.

As for assimilation, several Rajya Sabha members, even some of the most liberal ones, seem convinced that the country will be harmonious when the citizens accept that although people follow different religions and customs, they are ethnically and culturally Hindus. The assimilation-favoring members reject the dynamic distinctions between religions and cultural practices to say that everyone must live harmoniously by rejecting their differences and accepting that they are Hindus, essentially. This path to harmony is problematic too as it undermines the cultural distinctions that do exist within Indian society. These differences that manifest in the form of languages, food habits, religious practices, and cultural beliefs are an important part of the lived realities of Indians. Additionally, the negative effects of these distinctions, such as caste-based and religion-based systemic discrimination are also an undeniable part of reality that cannot be ignored or forgotten by those whose lives are directly impacted by them.

However, these two paths to harmony are not exhaustive. In fact, a third option emerges from the Rajya Sabha debates themselves: a syncretic celebration of distinctions. The term "syncretism" which was first identified in 17th century Christian theology, denotes "the union of different, supposedly equal, theological viewpoints, [and] can also come up when the idea of absolute Truth is abandoned." (van der Veer, 2005, p. 186). In the context of religions, several proponents of multiculturalism and pluralism in India believe that Indian culture in its true form is a mosaic of different cultural beliefs and practices, without one taking precedence over others. However, van der Veer's (2005)

analysis reveals that India's brand of pluralism has a "distinctively Hindu flavour", and while this is also supported by arguments proposed in the Rajya Sabha debates, I argue that a truly syncretic existence of India's differences can be envisioned (p. 197). In fact, the 1977-78 Rajya Sabha debates contain within themselves some scattered appeals to inspire an attitude of celebrating multicultural distinctions. Further, I explore these calls for synergistic coexistence that forgo the idealization of a homogeneously harmonious cultural melting pot.

<p align="center">Beyond the Melting Pot: Celebrating Multicultural Coexistence</p>

In the July 29, 1977 Rajya Sabha session, Congress minister Bishimbhar Nath Pande, providing a historical context of the coexistence between Hinduism and Islam, observed that although they seemed antithetical when they first encountered each other, they "at last intermingled, each one stirred the profoundest depth of the other and from their synthesis, grew" subreligions, art, architecture, music, and literature. Pande's comments give voice to counterpublic Indian Hindus who believe in the synergistic growth between different religious communities. This looks beyond the dominant rationale that non-Hindu communities in India are essentially Hindu, which makes them deserving of being treated as equal citizens and gives them an equal voice in the public sphere.

Hasan also appealed to a truly harmonious intra-cultural relationship. Hasan stated:

> Sir, it can not be denied that the overall reality of India is was that here the Hindus and the Muslims had learnt to live together and that here they had a common cultural tradition while retaining their own religious forms, beliefs and faith and

that even in cultural matters, a great deal has been taken by the one, from the other" (S. Nurul Hasan, July 29, 1977, p. 155)

Diversity and harmony in India has often been fostered, not in spite of intra-cultural differences, but through them. This is evident in India's history of food, architecture, language, dialects, and spiritual philosophies. For instance, the spiritual/religious tradition of Sufism is an exemplar of Hindu-Muslim syncretism in India (van der Veer, 2005, p. 193).

South Asian scholars of religion believe that Sufism, which arose in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was influenced by Hindu philosophies and the bhakti school of thought in Hinduism (Ikram, 1964). Sufism continues to be a recognized philosophical belief system in India which transcends religion, and instead asks its believers to look inward in their search for peace and truth. Today, the shrines of Sufi saints are visited by not just Hindus and Muslims but also people of various other religions (van der Veer, 2005). Sufism is an exceptional example of Islamic and Hindu syncretism that upholds philosophies from both religions but privileges neither. There is no talk of tolerating the other because diverse philosophies come together and intermingle harmoniously in Sufi philosophy.

In the 1977-78 Rajya Sabha debates, while assimilation and tolerance had many proponents, the ideal of true pluralism was lost within arguments put forward by right-wing and modern liberal leaders. In the end, the Janata coalition broke up, dissolving the government, before any significant changes could be made to the national education policy or curricula. In 1979, Indira Gandhi, the previous Prime Minister, was reelected

and the controversy quieted (Gottlob, 2007). However, the 1977 textbook controversy predicted some of the current identity-based politics on the rise in contemporary India.

After 1977, Thapar's book continued to be taught for the next two decades until the elections of 1998-99, when the first Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led government was voted to power and the textbook controversy reignited (Gottlob, 2007; Nair, 2009). Over time, depending on the ideology of the political party in power, history textbooks continued to be altered at national and regional levels, with some textbooks disseminating information that historians claim to be unfactual (eg. inaccurate glorification of regional personalities and teaching mythological stories as history). History continues to be a battleground for religious and nationalistic sentiments. Manufactured controversies created by non-historians over historical facts are still providing grounds for divisive rhetoric.

The debates of the 1977 textbook controversy also predicted the growth of right-wing Hindu nationalistic politics that eventually culminated in the 2014 victory of the BJP and the election of Narendra Modi, a former RSS operative, to arguably the most powerful office in the country. Although the BJP had won three consecutive central elections in the late 1990s, in the 2014 election, BJP was able to secure more the 50% of the seats in the Lok Sabha[22] for the first time in history.

In tune with what the 1977-78 textbook debates revealed, the ideal of oneness persists in contemporary Indian politics. The 2014 BJP campaign manifesto declares on the first page: "Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat", which literally translates to "One India,

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[22] See Chapter 5: Analysis

Greatest India." Clearly the ideal of oneness, which wove through the history debates, remains a glorified concept in Indian politics. Further, the manifesto states that one of the primary goals of the BJP government will be to reform the system by reinforcing the belief that "India [is] one country, one people and one nation" (BJP manifesto, 2014). However, in my previous analysis, I argue that when Indians refer to "oneness", there is systemic bias that reinforces the superiority of high-caste Hindu, and often Hindi-speaking cultures over others. Evidently, there is a lot more to unpack regarding intra-cultural hegemonic systems within India. As such, I propose some suggestions to advance this area of scholarship and identity gaps in my own analysis.

<div align="center">Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research</div>

In this thesis, I have discussed the variations within Indian identity and highlighted how the myth of one true Indian identity is problematic and detrimental to India's cultural wellbeing. Additionally, most of my analysis is based on Rajya Sabha debates between the years 1977-78 that specifically addressed education, textbooks, and history. As is expected, there are several potential avenues for expansion and diversification on the topics I have explored. Further, I acknowledge some limitations of this thesis and propose suggestions for future research.

First, due to pragmatic limitations, I restricted my analysis to parliamentary debates conducted in the years 1977-78. But the controversy also appeared outside the formal political sphere and circulated in the media. Beginning with the leaking of Prime Minister Desai's note to the press, the textbook controversy was widely discussed in news and magazine articles which featured contesting opinions and claims. An analysis

of these artifacts obtained from media sources will further enhance the understanding of the textbook controversy and throw light on how the manufactured controversy over beef consumption played out in the media. Because these articles were written for direct consumption by the public, they might reveal distinct rhetorical tools and arguments that are absent from the Rajya Sabha exchanges. The newspaper articles provide a unique perspective to the controversy as they reflected a range of diverse opinions and stances to the controversy, the role of history in nation-building, the question of cattle meat consumption in ancient India and its religious implications. Therefore, newspaper articles published by experts from different backgrounds will be a compelling next step in comprehensively studying how cultural identity and national harmony wove through textbook controversy.

Second, in my analysis, I argued that Indian politicians often conflated Hindu culture with Indian culture, thus defining a hierarchy within society. However, Hindu culture is a composite of several different cultures and religious practices. As discussed in Chapter 1, before British colonial rule, India was a loosely integrated cluster of different empires and not a unified country. British scholars began to heap all the diverse Indian subcultures into a singular religion termed Hindooism and with time, some subcultures took precedence over others. Today, some Indian subcultures have reached hegemonic dominance and are understood by Indians as well as non-citizens to be ostensibly truer representations of Indian culture. This can be seen in languages, foods, and traditions that are recognized as more Indian than others. For instance, Hindi is often mistaken to be something akin to India's national language. In reality, however, only about 44% of

Indians speak Hindi as their first language, which is further divided into multiple dialects, some of which are distinctly different from each other. Despite this, a recent survey conducted by Pew Research Center (2021) revealed that 59% Hindus believe that speaking Hindi is important to being truly Indian.

To sum up my arguments and suggestions for future research, the hegemonic religious and caste domination in Indian society has, for decades, propagated the myth of a "true Indian" who is Hindu (or assimilated into Hindu culture) and does not consume cattle meat. Nearly 64% of Hindus, nearly two-thirds, believe that being Hindu is very important to being truly Indian (Pew Research Center Survey, 2021). However, I have argued that the identity marker of "Hindu" is a complex one as it has meant different things to different people at different times in history. Just like the Indian identity is one teeming with contrasting beliefs and opposing cultural norms, there is no "true Hindu" identity or culture. Surely, some subcultures and sub-religions have built networks of identification over time, due to intersections of caste, economic, and educational privilege, and now constitute what is portrayed to be a true Hindu identity. However, this hegemonic dominance is problematic and has been reinforced through systems of social and political power that build identity on the backs of a constitutive outside with which Indians disidentify. An Indian culture, that does not exist yet but can be envisioned, is one where power and privilege is decentralized, where religion or dietary preferences do not determine nationality, and where multiculturalism is truly accepted, complete with its messy differences, chaotic divergences, and complex syncretism.

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