

Closing Down an Intellectual Interchange: The Gifting of Text to Colonial India

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RESÜMEE

Dieser Artikel untersucht Prozesse von Erkenntnistransfer unter staatlicher Vermittlung. Er überträgt erstmals den überzeugenden theoretischen Ansatz von Schriever, Martínez (2004) und anderen auf einen speziellen Kontext kolonialer Bildung in Britisch-Indien. Der Artikel nimmt einen Einzelaspekt des Kolonialdiskurses in den Blick, nämlich Schul(buch)texte, um an ihnen exemplarisch einen allgemeineren Zusammenhang zu verdeutlichen. Indem er seinen Gegenstand während Schlüsseletappen der britischen Herrschaft analysiert, lotet der Beitrag aus, wie der Staat Erkenntnistransfer nach seinen eigenen Regeln steuert. Er berücksichtigt die Rolle kommunaler, klassenbedingter und regionaler Befindlichkeiten, sieht aber im Herrschaftsgeschäft des Empire auch, wie der wechselnde Charakter kolonialer Macht ein stärkeres Metanarrativ organisierte. Dieses Narrativ unterstrich „Bildungsdefizite“, die „Maßnahmen“ erforderten, und war vor allem für das „Mutterland“ Großbritannien sichtbar. Auf diese Weise entstanden falsche imperiale Dualitäten und der einst fruchtbare intellektuelle Austausch zwischen Ost und West verstummte.

The phenomenon of ‘purposeful’ borrowing but not copying in colonial India finds several levels, some that can be conceptualised using the orthodox interplays of imperial and domestic, or more recent centre-periphery models of change, or as a response to overused globalisation critiques that focus on the importance of imperial networks and transnational frameworks in bringing about change. Most recently, new notions of ‘local’ in postcolonial research have emerged that are useful in rethinking the transferral of knowledge, most especially how particular localities and neighbourhoods articulate

global processes.¹ The conceptual repertoire about processes of intellectual transfer has destabilized earlier assumptions about colonial authority and power, most particularly how this relates to the actual interchange of ideas and the building of knowledge. However, the nation-state remains paradigmatic in locating educational spaces and cross-national nodes of intellectual transfer. It also continues to be a determinant in defining refuges for ‘other’ belief systems and their philology.

The pedagogical, institutional, politico-cultural and sociological considerations presented by the colonial education project in India are too vast to be considered in an article or even in any one book. Instead, this article is about the more specific territory occupied by the colonial schooling text in India in the mid to late nineteenth century. It illustrates the process of ‘gifting’ the school text to India as an Asian colonial domain, and frames it in terms of the primary Anglo/India binary. The article is informed by Derrida’s notions of deconstruction that see any text as unstable in meaning, revealing also what has been suppressed whilst covering over that which has been disclosed.² The article shows how transnational processes directly relate to changing modalities of state intervention. For example, early and effective knowledge interchange was at its most functional at a time when state power was weak in the early colonial phase. Yet, in the high imperial age of strong state intervention in the late nineteenth century, the school text was transformed. By this time it was both emblematic and part of the process of the intellectual disengagement between East and West.

This article builds on the work of Schriewer and Martinez which has taken a broad historical perspective of some 70 years. They compare Spain, Russia/Soviet Union and China in their analysis of the degree and the dimensions of the internationalisation of educational knowledge between the 1920s and the 1990s. In the study they suggest education, like the other social sciences, can be considered an ‘idiosyncratic’ form of theory and knowledge production because it is inevitably shaped by historical and cultural factors.³ This article, studying a non-European example, takes a similarly broad time perspective and also does not draw on any one theoretical model. However, it is informed by the ‘borrowing’ in education schema offered by Phillips and Ochs, particularly their theorisation regarding ‘externalising potential’, the significance of context and the ‘indigenisation’ of policy exported from external domains.⁴ Using the school text this article demonstrates that the transculturation, diffusion and reception processes of knowledge transfer fundamentally reflected the changing power relations that emanated from the colonial state itself.

1 H. Donner / G. De Neve, *Space, Place and Globalisation*, ch. 1, in: H. Donner / G. De Neve (eds) *The Politics of Place in Urban India*, London 2006.

2 J. Derrida, *Dissemination*, Chicago 1981.

3 J. Schriewer / C. Martinez, *Constructions of Internationality in Education*, ch. 2, in: G. Steiner-Khamsi (ed.) *The Global Politics of Educational Borrowing and Lending*, New York 2004, 31. These authors draw on Schriewer’s earlier work including E. Keiner / J. Schriewer, *Innovation along the Lines of Tradition: On Continuity and Change in National Styles of Educational Theorizing*, in: *Revue Suisse des sciences de l’education*, 22, 27-50.

4 D. Phillips / K. Ochs, *Processes of Policy Borrowing in Education; Some Explanatory and Analytical Devices*, in: *Comparative Education* 39 (2003) 4, 451-461.

The paper argues that colonial India was a unique intellectual territory, where centuries of accommodative invasion by highly literate races had established deep traditions of transcultural transfer amongst elites well before the arrival of the British. In a sporadic and unsystematic way, early European orientalist extended this vibrant tradition. However, it was the colonial state itself, serving its own sense of imperial mission, that artificially simplified the colonial binary, mostly by normalising new bureaucratic structures that progressively restricted multi-dimensional avenues of knowledge exchange. This paper argues that the importation of Western schooling models, and their mediating school texts in the latter nineteenth century, created a false sense of Eastern intellectual deficit. The West identified ‘remedies’ for the classrooms of the raj but without the capacity to adequately convey and control stable Western, textual meaning. This process was at the cost of disengaging local intellectual contributions and formal East/ West intellectual collaboration retreated to refuges in a few tertiary level institutions and associated academic organizations.

This article’s analysis is selective and scholars may identify other material that could be equally discussed. However, this selectivity does not disrupt the business of identifying the processes at work. Such selectivity also admits ‘thick descriptions’ and their context, an approach that expert scholars of cross-national comparison consider important.⁵ The article is divided chronologically into seven key areas. It begins by examining the pre-British heritage and then looks at emerging orientalist scholarship against a backdrop of ambivalent and ambiguous state approaches to Eastern knowledge. These unreconciled approaches then led to a politically charged debate concerning the rubric of parallel knowledge. The Evangelical revival in England directed the resolution of this debate in favour of privileging mostly Western knowledge only. Finally, the British were left to their own devices and a misplaced faith in their capacity to translate, to transcend communal barriers and to produce school texts containing stable and agreed Western dominated knowledge.

Early Colonial India: New Knowledge Impulses

India, in the early nineteenth century, was a diverse, vibrant and complex intellectual domain. Earlier Eastern interlopers, Portuguese and other European interchanges interposed new intellectual layering, mostly a byproduct of their search of commerce and territory. The use of text was already a strong part of traditional societies on the subcontinent and script was a strong symbol of socio-religious standing that indicated power as well as significant exclusionary spaces. In the south, Brahmanical elements, justifying Hindu cultural expansion, used Sanskrit text to convey a rich tradition of poetry and drama as well as scientific, technical, philosophical and religious texts sourced back to as

5 G. Steiner-Khamsi / J. Torney-Purta / J. Schwille (eds), Introduction, *New Paradigms and Recurring Paradoxes in Education for Citizenship: An International Comparison*, Amsterdam 2002, 34.

early as 1500 BC.⁶ In the north, in Mughal times, emperor Awrangzeb's daughter, Zinat al-Nisa, was celebrated and credentialed for her *naskh* script calligraphy of the sacred words of the Koran even though there were many others at court skilled in this also.⁷

The religious impulse was the influence that repositioned early cultural transmission with the West. A new tradition of borrowing was framed by the work of comparative religious scholars whose purpose was to attain 'enlightenment.' These included Mirza Zulfigar- a Patna scholar of the seventeenth century- who melded elements of Christianity and many Eastern religions in his writings to discover 'truth' in all religions.⁸ In the other direction Italian Jesuits predated the British in exporting their ideas, although with the simpler purpose of appropriating Indian religious beliefs.⁹ And more famously, Ram Mohan Roy, pursued a deeper intellectual enterprise of borrowing from Christianity, and chiefly Hinduism, to establish the *Brahmo Samaj's* credo of theism.¹⁰

In the early period of British colonial rule text again intervened, this time formalising strategic colonial contours of thought. Much earlier, Indian understandings of calculus, mathematics and rational thought had produced exchanges with ancient Greek scholars including Pythagoras and Herodotus. But for the British the purpose of understanding Eastern text in the early nineteenth century had the macro state goal of gathering information to shore up the relatively weak colonial power. As a result, in the 1820s, state concerns about information gathering in a colonial domain that might yet reject it, served to externalise the potential of Eastern scholarship and language on the subcontinent. Difficult legal cases, such as that of Resident of Delhi, Sir Edward Colebrooke, relied on access to information from indigenous intermediaries using their extensive networks of local gossip.¹¹ At a second level there was a dedicated intellectual pursuit on the part of top ranking European academics- later labelled orientalists- to explore firsthand the rich field of Eastern scholarship and to find ways to work with Eastern intellectuals to build new knowledge. These included such luminaries as William Adam, H. T. Prinsep and J. C. C. Sutherland. Academic adventurers under the early raj also knew that what counted as knowledge was embedded in language. Translating text therefore was a primary objective and the building of dictionaries was an essential bridge: whether it be through the agency of Native Education Societies set up in Maharashtra and Madras, or the usually single-handed efforts of Europeans in north India.

In India in the 1820s and 1830s the work of orientalists borrowing from Western thought developed powerful new discourses, this time concerning secular knowledge. For example, in the 1830s, Lancelot Wilkinson's work with the pandits (Hindu teachers)

6 F. Watson, *India*, London 1993, 84.

7 This 1670 copy of the Koran is now part of the Nasser D. Khalili Private Collection, London.

8 H. J. A. Bellenoit, *Missionary Education and Empire in Late Colonial India, 1860–1920*, London 2007, 15.

9 I. G. Zupanov, *Disputed Mission: Jesuit Experiments and Brahmanical Knowledge in Seventeenth-century India*, New Delhi 1999, 115-7.

10 F. Watson, *India*, 137-8.

11 K. Prior/L. Brennan/R. Haines, *Bad Language: The Role of English, Persian and other Esoteric Tongues in the Dismissal of Sir Edward Colebrooke as Resident of Delhi in 1829*, in: *Modern Asian Studies* 35 (2001) 1, 75- 112.

of Sehore had produced lively scholarship where comparisons were made between the Eastern Siddhantic and Puranic systems of Astronomy with the one offered by Copernicus.¹² Apart from its mythological literature, in the middle ages India already had a parallel scientific understanding of this subject that was well in advance of the West. For instance Brahmagupta, head of the astronomical observatory in the holy city of Ujjain (central West India), wrote the *Brahmasphutasiddhanta* (The Opening of the Universe) as early as 628 to be built upon four hundred years later by Bhāskara (1114–1185) at the same institution in his work *Siddhāntaśiromani* (Head Jewel of Accuracy). And, in the early nineteenth century, rather than producing much new scholarship, the significance of the fieldwork executed by Wilkinson at Sehore, and other like studies, was that it revealed to the West the vitality of Indian intellectualism and its responsiveness to ideas from foreign domains.

These sensitive and intelligent collaborations that did not assign primacy to either knowledge system. But they were not served well by new Western printing presses that sought to disseminate mass information. In stark contrast, these printing presses served a more mundane raj agenda of identifying Eastern ‘deficiencies’, requiring knowledge from the West for ‘remedy.’ In 1838 the Ludhiana mission printing presses North Western Provinces (NWP) alone produced 68,000 volumes of Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Persian and Kashmiri text after just three years in operation.¹³ Evangelising agendas were one purpose but medical matters was another key influence. The fear of epidemic hurried government into circulating suitable pamphlets on vaccination. Others were produced to protect against perceived Eastern deficits regarding hygiene and *dhai* (midwifery) procedures.¹⁴ These texts were part of the instrumentalist purpose of the English Utilitarian experiment in India. Most significantly, their Western mien set the scene for the development of school textbooks for the young for the next two generations.

Schooling and Secular Knowledge

As far as the formalities of colonial education were concerned, early British rule was to be reconciled by an outward respect for Indian laws, religion and institutions. But formal state articulations of the veracity and integrity of colonial versus local intellectualism, and therefore the capacity of each to sponsor knowledge transfer, was more ambiguously framed. The 1813 Charter Act declared its support for a

*revival and improvement of [Eastern] literature, and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of science among the inhabitants of the British territories in India.*¹⁵

12 C. Bayly, *Empire and Information*, Cambridge 1997, 257-60.

13 Gazetteer of the Ludhiana District, 1888–1889, Calcutta n. d., 74-6. H. Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, ORT JAHR 220.

14 Financial Commissioner to Sec. to the Chief Commissioner, October 7, 1857, ‘Press Lists of Old Records of the Punjab Civil Secretariat (General Department)...’, first edition, OIOC.

15 L. Zastoupil / M. Moir, *The Great Indian Education Debate*, Surrey 1999, 7.

This uncomfortable and ill-defined comparative between East and West was felt most at the highest institutional levels. The Calcutta Madrasa and the Hindu College, also in Calcutta, provided an awkward but influential political, cultural and diplomatic knowledge transfer at the highest academic levels where local scholarship was keenly defended by Indian agitation against any hint of undue official interference. There were other controversies that occupied the colonial educational consciousness, most noteworthy those that surrounded Macaulay's Education Minute of 1835 that imposed English as the medium of instruction in government funded schools.

Operating independently of these macro-state institutions were those orientalist who worked at the village school level rather than in the big city schools and colleges. They externalised the potential of poor village children by sympathetically tapping into their interests and perceived subject preferences. The influence of Lancelot Wilkinson and H. H. Wilson was instrumental in encouraging imaginative local European officials in north India to sharpen their observations and to assemble their texts. For example, Henry Reid the DPI (Director of Public Instruction), NWP, noticed 'native' boys' 'great aptitude' for Arithmetic, Algebra and Geometry using Hindi and Urdu translations of Western works. And the rest of the curriculum was rendered using texts in local language transferring Indian knowledge that dwelt on ethics and story telling as well as practical lessons. In this way by 1859 over 15,000 boys were reading *Gyán-Chalísí* (moral proverbs), *Bhārat-warshuyittihás* (History of India), *Surajpúrkikahání* (village story) and *Kisánopdes* (village tenures and accounts).¹⁶ In the south the work of the Madras School Book Society had settled on a broader principle, although with more Western mediation

*all school books should be written... by a person residing in this country who is well accustomed with the manners, customs and habits of thought of the people and with all local peculiarities, are able to make use of illustrations and examples taken from the daily occurrences of Hindu and Mahammadan life and from objects with which the people are familiar.*¹⁷

Eventual 'engraftment' of Western knowledge onto poor schoolboys, once delicate language barriers were navigated, was the final goal. As well, it was to give them the opportunity to graduate to higher levels of schooling, preventing high schools and colleges being monopolised by the wealthy as departmental officials rightly identified had happened in England. These early educators knew that active indigenous participation in formal government schooling could only be galvanised if secular knowledge from the West was not seen as a broader assault on India's religions. But disrupting these thoughts and the real prospects of success in achieving some form of knowledge confluence, was a hostile missionary response. So much so that the progressive views of at least one Direc-

16 H. S. Reid (DPI NWP) Report on Public Instruction in the NWP, 1859/60'V/24/908, 11, 37.

17 A. J. Arbuthnot (DPI Madras) 1859 'Selections from the Records of the Madras Government' OIOC V/24/835, 16-19.

tor of Public Instruction (DPI) in north India were leaked to the press in London in a misguided effort to expose their perceived naivety.

*At the moment the natives have perfect confidence in our schools. They know that we teach Geography, arithmetic and History, nor do ... [they object to] the puzzles which some amongst ourselves are so fond of propounding as to the inconsistency of Geography as taught by us with the doctrines of the Hindoos... If secular science be a good thing, if Arithmetic and Geography and History be true, those who profess such a reverence for Christianity should not allow themselves to fear that these true and good things will be found obstacles to the progress of Christianity.*¹⁸

Parallel Knowledge

At the time of the Great Revolt in 1857 these two conflicting approaches regarding knowledge transfer were brought to a head. At an institutional level, government was never to find even a fraction of the funds necessary to prepare teachers for the delicate work of effective Eastern and Western knowledge transfer. Furthermore, the vast network of indigenous schools continued to be ignored and with them the many traditional teachers, pandits and maulvis (Muslim religious teachers), who might have provided the academic bridge the British were looking for. Preoccupation about finding a workable point of access for Western knowledge in the lower order government and mission schools also ignored the powerful socio-religious dimension to learning on the subcontinent. In this regard Geography and Astronomy were particularly problematic. This was because parallel indigenous knowledge systems were most developed in these subject domains where Eastern mythology was privileged alongside 'scientific' thought. Such duality was not permitted by the post Renaissance mind of the Western educator. Yet, this duality endured, as it had done for many centuries, amongst traditional Eastern intellectual stakeholders. There was also an intermixture of ethics conveyed by ancient texts, principally the *Bostan* and the *Gulistan*.¹⁹ This academic tension internalized local Indian responses to the colonial *modus operandi*, producing powerful indigenous sites of resistance. As will be discussed separately below, these included the traditional authority to translate, classroom script and the knowledge base itself which the British were never able to surmount.

In late 1857 a controversy erupted in Calcutta over the rubric of parallel knowledge. In this city printing textbooks was now a recognised business. Local publishing house proprietors mustered their booklists for official approval as 'authorised' schooling texts. This

18 W. Arnold to D. McLeod May 26, 1858 no. 127 OIOC P/202/11; J. Lawrence to Trevelyan (?) December 1858 n. d. J. Lawrence Coll. OIOC MSS Eur.F.90 vol 13 f. 54.

19 The *Bostan* and the *Gulistan* are two critically important texts written by Sheikh Sa'adn in the twelfth century. Together they constitute the primary textbooks for any child learning Persian from the age of five years of age upwards. They also are the primary textbooks for training in ethics and morals.

was in the wake of Wood's Education Despatch of 1854 that had seen many new schools established to meet the new raj aspiration of educating 'the great mass of the people.' If these proprietors were successful they could make their fortunes in just a few years. But any rebuff could just as easily peel away the veneer that an agreed knowledge was possible and that it was readily transferable to any classroom of Indian schoolchildren.

One such example was Shreenanth Dey, proprietor of the Serampore Press in October 1857. His Geography text was rejected, not because of its Western content, but because it also explicitly rejected Hindu mythology. This was potent symbolism. The raj had just emerged from the Great Revolt, itself at least partly the product of pork and beef fat lubricated rifle cartridges. With tensions still running high any symbolism suggesting further Western prejudice was just too risky. To solve this political problem the eminent Principal of the Sanskrit College in Calcutta, Ishwar Bidyasaugor, was brought in by the state to give his intellectual imprimatur to the rejection of an otherwise well-prepared Western Geography text.

The episode was reflective of the *realpolitik* of India in the mid nineteenth century that had led to a cautious approach from the Viceroy's government in Calcutta. The sensitivities at the metropolis in favour of Western knowledge only were also well known to protagonists on the subcontinent. The horrors of the Revolt had given those at Westminster and key missionary lobbyists more clout to argue for a strident imposition of the Western imperial mission to counter a now externalized Eastern malignancy. This set up a significant point of difference between experienced officials in Calcutta and their superiors in London which directly impacted on school texts as a mediating agency of knowledge transfer between East and West.

Most significantly, those involved in the education trade were cognizant of these differences. Encouraged by this and not to be put off by his rejection, Shreenanth Dey, the Geography textbook's publisher, wrote to the leading Evangelical philanthropist of the age, Lord Shaftesbury, asking mischievously, should the mighty raj really see the world as "six seas of milk, with Benares at the centre of the Earth, [with] the earth itself on a tortoise's back?"²⁰

Shaftesbury's public tirades in response to this letter made it into the press in London and in India. He accused the government of India of being acquiescent in encouraging dangerous Eastern medieval superstitions in government schools of the kind that had led to the cruelties of the Great Revolt.²¹

Although religious 'neutrality' in government schools was affirmed in 1858, a much more powerful unofficial battle concerning cultural transferal was won. The Dey episode and other like contests now closed down effective Eastern intellectual contributions to the formal business of raj schooling of Indian children. Shaftesbury's intervention forced

20 Shreenanth Dey, Proprietor of Tomohur Press, Serampore, Church Missionary Society (CMS) Archive, CI 1 O 9/2 Birmingham University.

21 The Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury's Great Speech on Indian Cruelties Delivered at Wimborne, London [1857] reproduced in extract form in *The Times* Monday, November 2, 1857 and also in *The Friend of India* (n. d.).

a reluctant subject-by-subject defence by educational authorities in India that affirmed one Western knowledge, and which now no longer admitted Eastern mythological duality. There were plenty of educational authorities in India who were willing to accept the stark Western line of Shaftesbury and others on this issue. But there were others who were more aware of the complexities of knowledge transfer in India over the previous two generations, who were not swayed by such simplistic arguments about the need to protect India from her own scholarship or the capacity of her school students to pursue Western knowledge as well.

The enterprising Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, F. J. Halliday, deliberately put forward the following problematic

In literature we have habitually enforced the study of Shakespeare, Milton, Addison, Pope and Johnson...not usually considered favourable to superstitious errors...[or for] timid deference to religious imposture or idolatry.

And citing chapter six of James Mills' *History of India*, where reference was made to the fear of high caste Hindus coming into contact with dead bodies, he challenged the casual observer in London to

*Repair to the [Calcutta] Medical College, and see Hindus of highest castes sedulously engaged in dissections, handling bones and entrails with entire indifference.*²²

Halliday's assertions referred to education in elite schools and colleges rather than to the less commodious lower schools where Dey's Geography text was intended. But he and others like him knew the Evangelical revival in England now filtered to India a much stronger purpose of Western intellectual imposition.

Similar dilemmas about the duality of knowledge faced other provincial departments in this period. The response was the formulation of bifurcated West/East curriculums that could only teach a limited content and which effectively solidified Western intellectual hegemony. These developments perplexed and discouraged those Indian intellectuals who had remained interested in knowledge exchange with the West. After all, was it not true that their study of Western Science, and its melding with Eastern literature and belief systems, was part of a broader intellectual enterprise? Did it not represent more of a meta-cognition than those Britishers whose Scientific scholarship was separated out from the metaphysics of their personal Christian beliefs?

Textbook Committees: The Western Platform

The 1860s saw the full implementation of the Western bureaucratic dictums of Wood's 1854 despatch. Unitary curriculums, lower, middle and upper schools, and a bureaucracy

22 Minute of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, February 22, 1858, Church Missionary Society MSS, Birmingham University, Cl 1 O 9/2.

that connected normal and mission schools using the mechanism of grant-in-aid, were established in each province with minor variations between them. Attention now turned to the motley range of school textbooks available in the early 1870s. These textbooks had been written mostly on English models and in some cases were directly imported from the metropolis. However, they were contested terrain as agencies for the transmission of knowledge, used by the British to establish brittle forms of Western intellectual dominance over a linguistically diverse subcontinent. They disabled the remnants of effective East/West intellectual cooperation, confirming to most indigenous intellectuals a new age of imperial imposition by a raj much more confident about its own powerbase. The process was also given greater impetus when John Murdoch, provincial secretary of the Christian Vernacular Education Society in Madras, raised new anxieties, this time claiming that all Christian allusions had been struck out of government school texts whilst ‘...every incalcation of idolatry has been retained.’²³

Murdoch’s views were largely set aside but they influenced more concerted efforts to formalise the imposition of Western secular knowledge on the subcontinent. As mentioned above, Government of India policy since the Revolt had been for religious neutrality in all of its schools. This meant no bible classes. But speculative Western measures of ‘success’ were imposed in the late 1860s in the form of province-wide school exams, Payment by Results and pupil teachers. And cramming and rote learning for exams began exposing a system that was not really working outside elite city-based schools.²⁴

As a result textbook committees were set up in all provinces in 1873. Their focus was finding ways to engage deeper secular knowledge, via revised textbooks, in humanity subjects taught in ‘elementary’ boys’ schools. Earlier accommodative approaches to include deeper Eastern knowledge in lower-order schooling had largely disappeared. And without a network of strategically placed indigenous scholars and educators to help in the process, the task now fell impossibly onto the British. This immediately raised the difficult question of language. Teaching in local language first was seen as giving clever students speedier access to Western knowledge because it could be used to draw upon the experiences and contexts familiar to them. But the state-imposed burden for this fell on the text not the classroom teacher. This was because there were not enough teachers proficient in English who understood local experience and there were not enough Indian teachers that the British were prepared to accept as sufficiently ‘trained’ to teach Western knowledge. And, unlike England, the government inspectorate remained unresponsive to the pedagogical concerns of the classroom.

Western necessity now directed some shifting on how the British viewed India’s linguistic heritage. The classical languages of the Arabic, Sanscrit and Persian remained totemic. And up until the 1860s British doubts about the capacity of local language to convey

23 Dr John Murdoch, On the Idolatrous and Immoral Teaching of Some Government and University Textbooks, incld. in DPI to sec. of the Government of Madras, July 31, 1874 no. 1295 OIOC P/1000; John Murdoch, Hints on Government Education in India, with Special Reference to Schoolbooks, Madras 1873.

24 For a deeper discussion of the phenomenon of ‘cramming’ for exams see S. Seth, *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India*, London 2007, 22-26.

complex Western thought lingered. But, suddenly, teaching in local language first was privileged because it was seen as the best means to encourage deeper thought on Western topics and the building of literacy. When setting up its 1873 provincial textbook committees the Viceroy's government asserted

For while the more advanced student may be required rapidly to acquaint himself with a variety of new ideas and reference things which open out fresh lines of thought...all facts that are above his head or beyond his experience, are a set of isolated expressions carrying no meaning at all and raising no associations.

And of using local language to engage the parochial to build literacy

...allusions to scenes or ideas which boys of this country cannot possibly realise or appreciate is apt to hinder progress in mastering language itself which is the main object of [elementary] education.²⁵

Such large leaps in rationale that ignored the teacher and classroom pedagogy were bound to restrict possible outcomes. Furthermore, Western built content was the only tangible left to deliberate. This was strongly reflected in the musing of the 1873 committees, where mostly facile findings were reached. For example, the Bombay textbook committee, urged that boys be taught simpler prose rather than complex poetry, and then argued against Sir Walter Scott in favour of Milton 'irrespective of the difficulty.'²⁶ The NWP committee, seeking to free itself from the tedium of identifying any 'immoral' books, worried about teaching the history of the subcontinent from a Muslim or a Hindu perspective.²⁷ Only in Bengal was the focus on delegating the writing of cheap local language texts to scarce community members who knew the tastes and feelings of village boys and who were prepared to cooperate with government in this enterprise.²⁸ By the 1870s Western moral boundaries concerning the subcontinent had also changed and this was another key influence in restricting a once vibrant East/West interchange. For example, in 1839, translations from Sanscrit into Tamil of *Inbasagaram* (Ocean of Happiness), about how to achieve 'sexual happiness' and how to detect pregnancy, had been commended to government bookkeepers for resurrecting ancient Eastern knowledge without further controversy.²⁹ But two generations later, using established Indian literature outside the known parameters of classical religious and ethical works conveyed risks to the morally energised administrator of the high imperial age. Sanscrit works translated into the Tamil that missionaries in the south could read, were presented as examples of Eastern prurience. The *Madana Nul* about the intricacies of female sexual

25 Government of India to all Provincial Governments, March 29, 1873, no. 143, Education Proceedings OIOC P/279.

26 Government of Bombay to Government of India, March 13, 1874 no. 29, Education Proceedings OIOC P/1000.

27 Government of Bombay to Government of India, March 31, 1874 no. 1528, Education Proceedings OIOC P/1000.

28 Government of Bengal to Government of India, July 2, 1874 no. 3225, Education Proceedings OIOC P/1000.

29 Thandavaroya Mudallar to Ramasamy Pillai Avurgal, College Book Keeper, March 18, 1839. Madras Education Proceedings (1873) OIOC P/279.

pleasure clearly cut across the Victorian moral mindset. The *Koka Sastra*, building on the *Kama Sutra*, was also seen as representative of the recently degenerate and 'licentious' Brahman whose teaching on sex departed, it was assumed, from traditional Eastern canon.

*This abominable book, it is said, describes various modes of sexual congress, and teaches many approbrious modes of lascivious enjoyment...it pretends also to give indubitable marks to determine whether the virgin zone has been unloosed; and proceeds to other inquiries which can be perused only by the most dissolute.*³⁰

The argument here was that degenerate medieval interventions had diverted a purer vedic past. Ironically, a study of the ancient erotic carvings in the temples of Khajuraho, 350 miles southeast of Delhi, or ancient courtesan literature, could break down this stereotype of malevolent medieval intervention. But the anxieties it now produced was a trademark of an era where education departmental personnel worried about the frailty of Eastern scholarship, mostly as an unstable corpus of knowledge that was unable to regulate such turpitude. As a result, Western cultural transmission in schools in the 1870s was to adopt the prosaic of controlling Eastern intellectual 'lassitude'. This mostly admitted references to the East that were mundane, denying a complexity and profundity that might have otherwise engaged intelligent schoolchildren.

Translation

The new dependency by this time of the state on Westerners only to translate school texts exposed basic power plays at work between departmental personnel and other senior government educators. A functional translating tradition conducted by Eastern and Western scholars for schools might well have led to new learning, where intellectual pilgrimages could occur across colonial, gender, linguistic and communal boundaries. However, the limited number of Western scholars resident in India could not render alone, in a timely manner, sufficient school texts. These needed to be in the respective mediums of instruction of each province and sub-province and in every subject that taught Western knowledge.

By the late 1870s, short cuts were attempted and these resulted in an unofficial inversion of the colonial directed transmission process. The cooperation of indigenous students enrolled in government and mission colleges was sought and students reading engineering, law and arts were recruited to translate school texts.³¹ Students resisted because of the obvious distraction that this would create from their pursuit of obtaining credentials usually for a *naukari* (government job). But also because many came from elite families

30 W. Yorke to Sec. Government of Fort St George, December 7, 1872, Madras Education Proceedings (1873) OIOC P/279.

31 A. J. Arbuthnot 1859 (DPI Madras) 'Selections from the Records', 19.

who were unwilling to transfer their traditional custodianship of such learning to an imperfect raj that was willing to bypass Eastern scholarship and language whenever it could to introduce a problematic Western curriculum. Furthermore, helping in the writing of texts whose purpose was to cover over a vibrant Eastern scholarship, already externalised by the British forty years earlier, was inimical to them.

Capable colonial academics were also sympathetic to this view. At Government College Lahore the linguistic expert Gottlieb Lietner encouraged sober academic detachment even though his college specialized in teaching at tertiary level in local languages.³² And this forced education departments into attempts at translation by non-expert committee.

*[third and fourth school Reader were] carefully examined by gentlemen possessing special knowledge of the various subjects treated of, amongst others by Mr Baden-Powell, Dr Center, and Capt. Marshall. Mr Baden-Powell kindly offered to write lessons on trees and plants and on simple agricultural processes. In order to secure thorough accuracy of idiom, the book has been repeatedly revised and some of the best native scholars have been consulted... who were kind enough to have the book read out to them by a native scholar whom I [the DPI] deputed for the purpose. They considered the whole sentence by sentence.*³³

These stereotyped productions and their piecemeal methodology were easy to attack. But the cleavage between college and department was unfortunate. College libraries contained many translated works, executed by earlier students as part of a higher intellectual enterprise before the Revolt of 1857. These included Delhi College's 68 Urdu translations which ranged from treatises on Arithmetic to works on Geometry and Astronomy. The contribution to Western scholarship of one work in particular, that of Y. Ramachandra on differential calculus, was so strong that it was published in Europe for the use of Western scholars.³⁴

Fragmenting the School Text Script

By the 1880s the impasse confronting the British over an agreed colonial text for the classroom gave way to intensifying political realities generated by the local domain, driven variously by British and Indian imperatives. Translating text, as a function of transmitting Western knowledge, and creating a pretext for then teaching English, had been well

32 W. R. M. Holroyd, 'Report on Popular Education in the Punjab... 1880/1', OIOC V/24/933, esp. clauses xlii, xliii, xlv, xlvi, l, liv, lvii.

33 Director to the Sec. to the Government of the Punjab, February 6, 1878, no. 14, OIOC P/1148.

34 'Memorandum no. 19A', General Department NWP January 6, 1854, in Selections From the Records of Government, North Western Provinces, Agra 1855, vol. iii, 427, OIOC; N. Gupta, *Delhi Between Two Empires*, Delhi 1981, 7, 73; Y. Ramachandra, *A Treatise of Maxima and Minima Solved by Algebra*, Calcutta 1850 (reprinted London 1859).

imbedded in the colonial education stratagem. This could be pursued using the spoken word but deciding on what script was to be used for the written word in texts, and in the classroom proper, was more difficult. In the north Urdu was decided on as the medium of instruction. This language was used by elite Hindu and Muslim men, who used it as a signifier of social status. However, it was written in different forms: devanagari for Hindus and Persian for Muslims. As well, classroom script as a religious signifier grew in significance in the 1880s as the Hindu polity in particular responded to the influence of local reform movements, most notably Arya Samaj led by the Hindu ascetic Dayanand Saraswati.³⁵ Teaching in Hindi as the ‘vernacular of the people’, or at least Urdu in the devanagari script, became a central part of the Arya Samaj’s politics whilst Muslims still clung to their insistence on the Persian script.³⁶ This communal divide, played out in the classroom as well, deepened as the century progressed, with serious controversies erupting in the NWP by 1900. And in Bombay a different dispute emerged over Hindi or Gujarati classroom script.³⁷

The wide-ranging Hunter Education Commission of 1882 was impressive in its scepticism of departmental capacities to effectively engage in lower-order schooling or to acknowledge powerful indigenous schooling traditions. But its unresponsive findings on school texts reflected the irreconcilable divergence between East and West that had occurred by this time and which now faced government; a problem that was emblematic of a failing colonial education project itself. Provinces like Madras preserved the hegemony of the English textbook for its core middle schools whilst in Bengal and Bombay texts were in the various primary local languages. But European dominated University Senates directed these various policies by prescribing favoured textbooks for their problematic matriculation exams. Suddenly, European educational precepts were transferred in template form. Textbooks were now to convey what earlier committees had recommended:

Reverence for God, parents, teachers, rulers and the aged:[the] good citizen, and universally admitted principles of morality and prudence; cleanliness of habits, politeness of speech...and bodily exercise.

Hunter acknowledged that at the lower school level ‘...the Indian knows nothing of hedge-rows, birds nesting, hay making, being naughty and standing in the corner’ and he was critical of English medium adaptations that merely transmogrified ‘Harry into Ram or apples into mangoes’. But the commission, perceptive in other matters, merely demonstrated that the embryonic frameworks for knowledge transfer offered by orien-

35 K. Jones, *Arya Dharm Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth Century Punjab*, Delhi 1989, 40. See also pp. 15, 17-8, 24, 30, 36, 38. Saraswati called for the abolition of sati, caste and idol worship as well as the rejection of raj governance.

36 ‘Answer of the Lahore Arya Samaj to the questions suggested by the Educational Commission,’ in W. W. Hunter, *Report of the Provincial Committee for the Punjab of the Hunter Education Commission*, 466.

37 F. Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims*, Cambridge 1974, 43; K. Kumar, *Quest for Self-Identity: Cultural Consciousness and Education in Hindi Region, 1880–1950*, in: *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23 (1990), 25, 1248.

talists two and three generations earlier, and its Indian precursors, had been lost to the colonial state.³⁸

Selling Texts

Business in selling textbooks boomed in the early twentieth century. For example, in the quinquennium 1912 to 1917 1,522 books received official review in Bombay alone and in the NWP a staggering 5,050 books were submitted with 1,474 subsequently obtaining approval.³⁹ Their number was partly due to the government's concern of keeping its patronage networks in education open. More significantly, this was also a symptom of just how little intellectual resolution had been achieved as to what made up a good textbook, and in what language and script, and with mission schools demanding yet other texts. Languid methods of government vetting by fragmented committee processes were tolerated in a thinly veiled government quest for control over what was taught in schools as the national resistance movement grew more pressing.

By this time many of these texts were, in fact, crib books known as 'keys' designed for students wishing to pass the government exam with poorly trained teachers, now fiercely accountable by results, complicit in the restriction of knowledge transfer.

They are not limited to English works, but attempt explanations of vernacular textbooks as well—generally a string of synonyms. Their number and high price indicate their popularity....teachers do not suppress the use of these works, even encourage them... not only all pupils but the teacher studies the daily lesson from keys to a textbook—neither the teacher or pupils have ever seen the original work—just sufficient to memorise the key.⁴⁰

This was not helped by classroom practices that were necessitated by very poor government funding. During WW1, the DPI of Bengal, W. W. Hornell feared the entire colonial education project was slipping from British hands. He complained that in 95 % of classrooms in his province, cramming for exams rather than engaging in more effective learning at the hands of a competent teacher was the norm.

The class...of between 40 and 50 children...is usually arranged in the form of a square and the teacher sits in the middle. The teacher sits and gives one long monotonous lecture to the class, of which the boys as a rule take no notes, nor indeed do many of them listen. If he is questioning the boys or hearing work he walks around the inside of the square. He stands opposite one boy for anything up to 10 minutes, he will hear that one boy read and address all the questions to him. As a fact the teacher confines his attention almost

38 W. W. Hunter, Report Of The Indian Education Commission, Calcutta 1883, 230, 339-40, 346.

39 H. Sharp, Quinquennial Education Report 1912-1917 OIOC V/24/4431, 214-5.

40 H. Sharp, Quinquennial Education Report 1907-1912 OIOC V/24/4431, 91.

*entirely to some 5 or 10 boys, and gives very occasional recognition to some 5 or 10 others. The rest never get taught at all.*⁴¹

Whilst more elite schools probably offered a better pedagogical fare, the textbook as the transmitter of even just Western knowledge, was bypassed and its enforced meaning became more unstable.

By the early twentieth century, in the face of these bewildering problems, visual rather than textual transferrals of knowledge became the focus of government. Whilst serving a smaller clientele, a significant slice of state education funding was devoted to building and developing Schools of Art and Museums. European directors reorganised institutions such as the Indian Museum in Calcutta 'along modern lines', using a staff skilled in Western ethnography. There were also strong attempts by Lockwood Kipling and others to preserve traditional craft knowledge and unadulterated Eastern architecture in this period. They did this by assembling 'art pattern books' before the artisan links of previous centuries were lost.⁴²

But even in the teaching of art, Western hegemony was established by the twentieth century. As Henry Sharp, author of the 1912–1917 Quinquennial Education Report, directed:

The shortcomings of Indian methods must be corrected by studies from life upon Western methods. Decadent tendencies require an infusion of energy and accuracy, but without undue influence on the traditional bent of the Indian learner in the matter of essential principles.

Interestingly, too, Sharp believed Indian students could not be expected to imitate the style of Indian art because they were so accustomed to Western drawings in their textbooks.⁴³ This ignored the work of Abanindranath Tagore (later leader of the Indian modern art movement), who was already exhibiting at South Kensington along with his students. He was become the leader of the Indian modern art movement in the twentieth century.⁴⁴ But assumptions about the one directionality of knowledge transfer, even if now seen as occasionally adulterating the East, were well ingrained in the colonial educational psyche.

There were, of course, important centres of Oriental learning such as the Asiatic Society of Bengal whose flagship journal was the *Bibliotheca Indica*, the Royal Asiatic Society of Bombay and the India Research Society of Calcutta. The longstanding Sanscrit College in Calcutta continued its highly specialised work too. By 1917 university academics were publishing impressive works as part of a world academic community on compara-

41 H. Sharp, Quinquennial Education Report 1912–1917 OIOC V/24/4431, 98.

42 H. Sharp, Quinquennial Education Report 1905–1912 OIOC V/24/4431, x. Lockwood Kipling (father of Rudyard) served at the The Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy School of Art School of Art in Bombay and then as principal of Mayo School of Art in Lahore.

43 H. Sharp, Quinquennial Education Report 1912–1917 OIOC V/24/4431, 151-2.

44 'Mr King, House of Commons Asks' December 1, 1915 L/PJ/6/1308.

tive Western and Eastern literature, science, medicine and ancient Eastern scholarship. There were also signs that appropriate pedagogic research had finally begun, including Robindra Guha's work at Ananda Mohan College (East Bengal) on school strategies for teaching in Bengali. The work of John Dewey in Chicago was tentatively referenced by Michael Sadler in his Calcutta University Commission as offering new possibilities for teacher training in India.⁴⁵ But transmission of knowledge at this level, though to be largely untouched by the political maelstrom that was about to grip the subcontinent, equally had little impact on even those in school during the last years of the raj.

Conclusion

The Western imposed school text in India internalised multiple local responses over the long period of colonial rule. These responses were heavily dependant on communal, class and regional sensitivities. But it was the changing nature of colonial power itself that organised a stronger meta discourse. Local actors were highly sensitive to the changing politico-cultural purposes of borrowing across the East/West colonial boundary. At first, in the 1820s, the purpose had been to establish an acceptable nexus between culturally predicated knowledge forms. But this process was transformed by the state to one of direct imposition of Western knowledge by the end of the century.

Direct colonial interventionist strategies in controlling and regulating the 'schooling' of the young via a school text was alien to the softer patronage networks that had directed education in pre-British times. Instead, the rise of the school text resulted in the codification of knowledge agreeable to the state. As the state's power became entrenched, the classroom text increasingly replicated European knowledge at the expense of the East, whilst reinforcing inequality and those stereotypes that marginalised most Indians from the colonial education project. Furthermore, it encouraged most communal, class and caste communities to continue centuries-long traditions of social and intellectual reproduction that were well beyond the reach of the British. Fragmented indigenous ecumenes devised their own education approaches that filtered Western knowledge partly to better serve the rising national movement. On the surface colonial textbooks offered a semblance of being part of a broader intellectual and knowledge transfer process. But their social function became one of producing a select group of school children as worthy agents of the raj, cutting off in the process Indian intellectuals and educators who were otherwise powerfully credentialed in local communities.

In the final stages of British rule, leading colonial educators including Sir Philip Hartog, (who wrote about examinations and their bearing on national efficiency) were at a loss to explain the unwinding of the Western hold on Indian education. The French in Indochina could claim greater success in elevating literacy rates even though their rule had not begun there until 1859. British displays of power and a determination to impose

45 M. Sadler, Calcutta University Commission, Calcutta 1919, vol. 13, 120-193; vol. 5, 75.

Western bureaucratic normalcy on the subcontinent ultimately constructed politico-cultural barriers and energised sites of indigenous resistance to the state-directed agenda of nominal transculturation. It was not to be until the twentieth century that a local desire for the importation of more authentic forms of world knowledge, independent of the raj, finally saw a more sustainable and permissible influence from the West on an emerging India.