



## CREATIONS Nanditha Krishna

culture are equated with just two hundred years of British rule! A bunch of useless Governor Generals — most of whom 'did nothing more than amass great wealth — are given more importance than a law giver like Manu. As a woman I dislike what he wrote, but I cannot deny the role and importance of his codes, which have held sway over centuries.

Speculation is taught as fact. The Harappan civilization, it is admitted, has yet to be fully understood or deciphered; yet there is a strong case made for its Dravidian character, without admitting that there is evidence of both Aryan and Dravidian. Then, of course, there is the suggestion that the Vedic Aryans were invaders from Central Asia, the Steppes, or wherever else,

tious beliefs', and that there were no 'orders for the general destruction of temples'. Aurangzeb's official, authorized historian Mustaid Khan asserts to the contrary. There are many more examples that need not be listed here. Please pick up your child's history textbook and read it — and learn the leftist version of Indian history.

What should



that was speculation. The popular belief is that he crossed the ocean at Rameshwaram and, unless the contrary can be proven conclusively, that is what the students need to know. Simultaneously, we had World History and even British History. The former consisted of a series of adventures of young people in various periods and places - Neanderthal,

messages. Those Indian freedom fighters who idolized Hitler were wrong, while Mahatma Gandhi's message of non-violence was right. Maybe history is not so black and white, but we learned to judge people and events by their actions, not by their race or religion.

If the leftists sanitize some aspects of our history, the rightists want to sanitize some others. In school, we learned that eating beef was not unknown to the Vedic Aryans. That did not affect our faith, nor did it inspire us to go out and eat beef. These were events of 5000 years ago, and we must be happy that we have evolved considerably since then.

Then there is the matter of date. In India we have a peculiar situa-

mere existence would inspire some young Indian somewhere to excavate further, or find an Indian Rosetta stone that will unravel the mystery of the Harappan seals. It is sad that when the whole world is excited about the Gulf of Cambay finds, which have been dated scientifically, we have a cynical school of history that casts doubts and has a media arm to back it up. What do they want to prove — that our history and culture are not ancient?

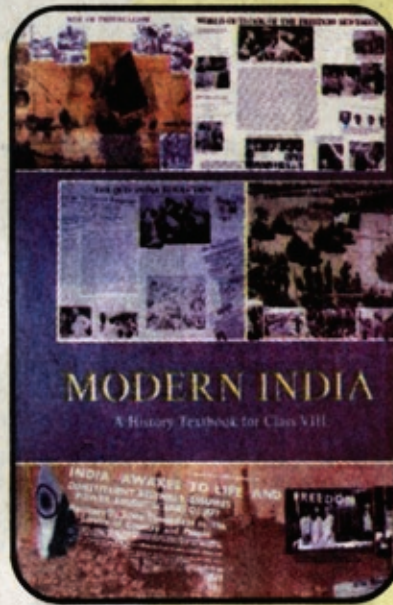
There is the other problem of students not opting for history because it is not job-oriented. This mistaken belief is the reason why less and less South Indians get into the IAS, whereas North Indians, aware of the importance of the subject, take it and enter the administrative services, the source of power in India. A private institution like Loyola College, Chennai, offers degrees in Applied History, such as archaeology, museology and tourism, which are all career-oriented subjects. Why can there not be more such opportunities?

Ancient societies did not bother about history, as they were more interested in preserving and developing their cultures. It is only with the growth of the nation-state that history was recorded and studied as a motivating factor, one that would rally people to the cause of nation making and preserving. It is the pivot around which the nation-state functions, its *raison d'être*. Unfortunately, the Indian nation-state being a late starter, we started recording our history very late, long after others had made their own records and judgements. This has, naturally, created problems, for our history was written by those who wanted to use it to rule and control. History can be exciting and romantic. Winston Churchill's History of the English speaking Peoples is an excellent example. There are brilliant histories of other nations. Why are we so churlish with ours?

I believe that India, as a nation-state, has come to exist and stay, notwithstanding events in Kashmir and the Northeast. Our history books must tell young people what is known of the past, teach them to be aware of it and to be proud of the best. History books must become more interesting and attract the best brains. Writers of textbooks must stick to what is known, whether it is supported by archaeological or literary evidence. We must stop doctoring history to suit political ideologies. Too much damage has been done over the last fifty years. Let us have more honesty in the future.

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# Teaching history A political agenda

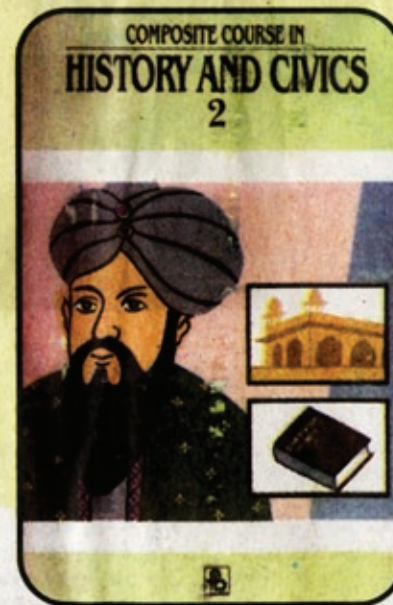


who conquered North West India (now Pakistan), even though the Vedas themselves do not make even a remote suggestion to that effect. In fact the chapter itself is titled 'The Coming of the Aryans', and says, 'Their homelands were in the vast plains of Central Asia'. Maybe, but this is still speculation. How can we teach them to young people as fact? Most important, they do not teach the fact that the terms Aryan and Dravidian refer to culture groups, not race. Thanks to Hitler, many Indians actually believe they belong to the 'Aryan race', without knowing that such a thing does not exist.

There are invidious remarks that put down one group and boost another. For example, Satish Chandra praises Kabir and Nanak as great mystics who 'strongly denounced idol worship'. As an ardent idol worshipper myself, I object strongly to that statement. There is a determined effort to whitewash Aurangzeb and prove that his religious decrees were actually 'economic and social' and 'against supersti-

we teach in our history books? The truth, or a sanitized version? I can only go back to my own school (Cathedral and John Connon in Mumbai, recently adjudged India's best school in a nation-wide survey) and tell you what I was taught, which developed my passion for history.

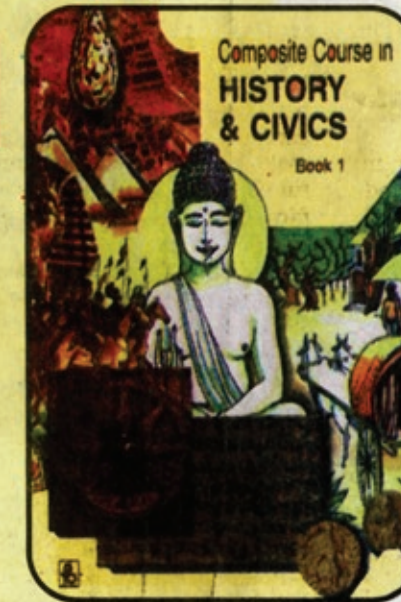
At the junior level, our history text books included Great People of India in one year, the Ramayana another year, and so on. I learned about the great Vedic sages, Buddha and Mahavira, scientists and freedom fighters. We followed Rama's journey from Ayodhya to Lanka and learned both the history and geography of India. Years later, I came across Dr H D Sankharia's suggestion that the sea crossed by Rama was the river Godavari. Maybe, but



Neolithic, etc. The story element made all the difference.

Later, at a more senior level, we followed textbooks where good and bad were judged in very black and white terms. Ashoka and Akbar were 'good' kings, Aurangzeb was 'bad'. There was no effort to sanitize one community or another. Good and bad were judged according to their actions, with set parameters. Thus

'good' kings dug wells and tanks, built roads and rest houses, planted trees and improved the lives of their people and the economy, creating the 'feel good' factor. Bad kings were cruel, went to war, killed and taxed their people and oppressed them. This has been a standing joke about history books, but it does teach values and sends out strong



tion of a material culture (Harappan) with no recognizable literature, and a cornucopia of Sanskrit literature with little evidence of material culture. That they are both ancient is a fact. Recent debate will have us believe that the existence or otherwise of the horse and its family is the defining factor. But to presume that there was no overlap is ridiculous. Instead of trying to prove whether they are same or distinct, the better option would be to present what we know of both and leave archaeologists and scholars to debate the rest. It is shocking to read the views of a school of historians who choose to disregard the literary heritage of ancient India. After all, all ancient civilizations were sustained by oral or literary traditions.

More disturbing is the fact that we do not teach our students about archaeological discoveries — the cave paintings of Central India or the underwater finds off the coast of Gujarat and in Tamilnadu, to name a few. We need not even try to label them. Maybe the knowledge of their

RECENTLY, I sent one of my staff members to the Arts Colleges at Kanchipuram in search of graduates in history or archaeology. Two colleges said they did not offer history, since students were not forthcoming. The third sent one M A. in history who, according to his own explanation, was doing his A M I E and had acquired an M A. degree because history was the 'easiest' subject which would enable him to call himself a post-graduate! This is the cursory treatment the subject receives in the South. People in the North are smarter than us, for they have learned the importance of history in acquiring an IAS or other public services degree. Yet, seeing the national debate on the subject, one would imagine that the country was swarming with historians.

There has been much debate in the press from historians of the left, right and center as to what should be taught. So, I bought a few NCERT textbooks — presumably the best in the country — to see, for myself, what was being taught. My first reaction was "How boring." The books were verbose, badly written, confused and unreadable. There was no natural development of ideas — one jumped back and forth. I pity the student who studies these books. He will only learn to hate history.

The division of periods is so lopsided. Ancient India, running into several thousand years with a cornucopia of literary sources, is one section; medieval India, comprising a thousand years, from the eight to the eighteenth centuries, is the second section; and modern India, spanning a period of two hundred years from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, is the third. This corresponds roughly to ancient, medieval and modern, a uniquely Indian division! It takes one year to teach each section. Thus thousands of years of history and