Activating Citizenship – the nation's use of education to create notions of identity and citizenship in south Asia

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Abstract
Identity in south Asia was anchored by, on the one end, community, and on the other, an appreciation of sub-continental (geographical and cultural) space. People, historically, drew their identity as part of communities, which in turn existed in continuity to each-other in the seamless regional expanse of south Asia. Imagination as nationals - a post-colonial construct - faced contestations, both, from community affiliations and spatial imagination contrary to the territorial - modular form of nation-state. As a response, the state fabricated the idea of 'patriotic-citizen' and used nationalist historiography to create citizens who are taught to believe the nation as prime-marker of self-definition and act like soldiers, guarding national identity against alternative imaginations. Education has become the most potent devise through which this is achieved. The article, on the basis of textbook narratives in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, would demonstrate (i) how educational practices build a militarist idea of citizenship and, (ii) in doing so co-opts the demands of community by showing the nation as vindication of community-aspirations and on the other hand erasing conceptualisation of a south Asian space from cognitive maps of its subjects. The idea of 'active' citizenship understands 'active' as responsible citizenship, emphasising a right based discourse. On the contrary education in south Asia is used to 'activate' citizenship which is relational in content - based on ideas of 'us' versus 'them' – instead of allowing critical understanding of rights and identities.

Keywords: Active citizenship, identity, South Asia

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The article is a modest attempt to understand and disentangle the complex relationship between identity, citizenship, nationalism and education in south Asia. This comes as a response to put in perspective - if not be able to answer - the central problematic towards which this particular issue of the journal is devoted - which is - the idea of active citizenship and the role education can play to promote the same; this essay tries to contextualise the idea of citizenship and education in case of the south Asian sub-continent.

This makes it imperative to begin with some insight into what it means to say 'active citizenship'. From the literature that has been produced on the issue it is difficult to extract a single definite definition of the term 'active citizenship' or enlist its exact criterions; but for the present article I understand it as an idea which looks at citizenship not just as entitlement to constitutional rights and duties, but as an idea which assumes citizens to be something more than being mere recipients of norms entrusted upon by state functionaries; it understands citizenship as predisposition and empowerment to participate in rule/norm making and reforming processes and something involving a more action based discourse of enacting change and enforcing rights; moving beyond mere governmental or statist scriptures. Active citizenship would therefore be about overcoming passivity and not confining citizenship as an institution/ function of receiving state conferred norms and remaining bound by the same. The concept of active citizenship is definitely therefore about transcendence; it involves critically reflecting upon present discourses on citizenship and making necessary interventions to produce (desired) future transformations. In Europe, with its trans-national visions and politics, the transformation might already be in progress, though its actual content may still need further reflection. Away from the European context this essay seeks to talk about the south Asian geo-political space. Notions about citizenship are intrinsically woven with notions about inter-subjective identity, therefore any attempt towards transforming meaning and parameters of citizenship would necessarily entail transforming primary notions and contents involving collective identity. With this problematic in mind the essay seeks to understand the identity construction process in south Asian countries and reflect upon how citizenship is perceived in the south Asian context.

The article traces the shifting posts of identity in south Asia through making a historical analysis of how bonds of affiliation and identities were perceived in pre-colonial south Asia and how the axis of identity and belongingness were altered by the imperatives of the post-colonial nation-states. It looks at how in the post-colonial times nation-states in south Asia created identities and notions about being citizens through a vigorous process of *otherisation* and demonization of other identities to anchor citizenship into a discourse of confrontational nationalism. The means and method to achieve this was to create belligerent historiographies of the shared south Asian past and for doing so, as the article intends to demonstrate, nation-states made use of public education to disseminate versions of nationalist history where the central agenda was to create citizens who would perceive their national identity as defiance of or opposition to significant others. The article shows how school education and curriculum were used, and especially school textbooks were written, to produce and re-enforce identities within the framework of 'us' against 'them' which not just confines the target audience to perceive a citizen as necessarily being a model of a patriot-martyr but also, and as a consequence, limits their vision of any trans-national or emancipatory understanding of citizenship and collective identity. Having demonstrated that, in its concluding observations, the article tries to make few preliminary comments on the challenges and possibilities of a trans-national understanding of citizenship in south Asia and on a possible post-national transcendence.

With that in mind the essay has been divided into three parts – in the first part we look at the nature of pre-colonial community in south Asian societies and understand how identity and the south Asian region itself was imagined in pre-modern and pre-colonial times. The second part of the essay, involving the central discussion of this article, looks at how school textbooks have been used by post-colonial nation-states in south Asia to build and disseminate a nationalist history in order to create particular content for national identities and construct future citizens. The third part of the essay attempts to be prescriptive, suggesting the need for overcoming nationalist teleology and re-defining identities.

Part-I: Identity in pre-colonial south Asia.

Nation as a form of political unity and nationality as a marker of self and collective identity are colonial advents in south Asia. In pre modern, pre-colonial south Asian societies the 'community' was the source of identity but at the same time identity was not situated to a singular, uni-dimensional definition rather it was in a flux and this sense of community can best be described as being, to borrow social scientist Sudipta Kaviraj's term, 'fuzzy'. Kaviraj seems to have given a remarkable understanding to the identity complex of pre-colonial south Asian societies. In explaining pre-modern, pre-colonial basis of identity Kaviraj says -

> The traditional sense of community... was fuzzy in two senses. It was fuzzy first in the sense that the construction of individual or collective identity depended very heavily on a sense of context. Belonging to varying layers of community was not seen as disputable or unreasonable. Given different situations, a pre-modern person could have said that his community was either his religious or caste or occupational group, or his village or his region. He might find it difficult to render these varying communities, to all of which he belonged, into some unimpeachable hierarchy, either moral or political. (Kaviraj, 2010: 13-14).

At a different place Kaviraj further explains, "The arrangement of identities is fuzzy in the sense of being indeterminate in rank order; though, paradoxically, this allows for greater precision and flexibility in the social identification of persons, and is more complex than the modern unidimensional assertion of a national tag." (Kaviraj, 2010: 95) The second sense in which Kaviraj understands these communities to be fuzzy is equally important and insightful. He suggests that they were fuzzy because they did "not have clear territorial boundaries, or a map in the way modern societies must have. It is a world of a much finer, graded, and more complex organization of difference, much like the way one tone of colour would shade off into another in a spectrum." (Kaviraj, 2010: 95-96).

Thus the understanding that we get about pre-colonial south Asian society is that, traditionally, social, economic and political life in south Asia was composed around the community but these communities existed in seamless continuity to each-other within the south Asian regional space, where the geo-spatial imagination was de-territorialised. This further means that there was neither any concept of borders cutting across the region nor an imagination of a territorialised identity. Thus identity was, while on the one hand, purely communitarian, on the other hand, it was also not bound by limits of territories. Hence though there might not have been an explicit realisation of the exact regional expanse but it was a de-territorialised regional imagination, that is, an imagination of a continuous geographical space where movement was unrestricted and identity was in a flux. The possibility of free flowing, virtually unrestricted, movement of people and goods is testimony of such an understanding of the physical/ geographical space. This is also not to suggest that instead of a territorialised (or nationalised) identity there existed any notion of a south Asian identity, but simply to propose that identity was sourced in the community and the communities themselves were not strictly demarcated and territorially differentiated from each-other. What is important to underline here is that in the pre - colonial times one did not derive or lay claim to any form of (social, political, economic/ individual or collective) right only by virtue of being part of a territorialised entity and hence, and what is more significant for the present discussion, did

not fear any possible loss of the same with loss of territorial identity. Thus, on the one hand, communitarian identity was one end of the spectrum, while imagination of a de-territorialised space was the other end, together characterising the identity spectrum of pre-colonial south Asian society.

The idea of a nation-state as a form of political community entered south Asian political imagination with the coming of the European colonisers and consequently with the introduction of western modernism and philosophy of enlightenment. The imagination of the nation-state was a derivative of modernism and enlightenment philosophy. By the middle of the 19th century there grew a sizeable constituency of English educated elite class in the south Asian sub-continent who were read in European philosophy and had internalised the language and logic of modern rationalism and also its dominance and superiority over traditional systems of social and political organisation. Nationalism grew as a reaction and response to colonial rule which, for the new nationalist elite, seemed to be the primary obstacle towards fulfilment of the promise of modernity and enlightenment.

Thereafter, with the end of colonialism in south Asia, the anti-colonialism inspired nationalism was left with the task of creating the nation and a sense of national identity where there existed none before the advent of colonial rule. Further the south Asian sub-continent, at the wake of its independence from European colonial rule, was dissected into separate territorialised entities by the logic of geopolitics and partition. This new post-colonial reality meant that the otherwise geographically continuous south Asian space was now composed of numerous territorial nation-states, each with the task of building definite national identities within the confines of their newly acquired territorial boundaries. To achieve this was the foremost critical and daunting task for the south Asian nation-states in the immediate post colonial times. Community affiliation and the seamless geographical space, the two axis of pre-colonial identity, seemed the two major impediments, which the nation-states had to override. Nation-building was an unfinished project at the time when European colonisers departed from the south Asian scene; consolidating a national identity and re-enforcing it in the manner of creating a sense of sacredness and perpetuity about the nation and national identity were the most urgent and essential tasks for the architects of the nation-state. This consolidation of national identity had to be accomplished by the states - within themselves and at same time against each-other.

The challenge was duly met by the nation-states through the adventure of writing their own pasts, crafting their own historiographies, where a nation recounts the story of its own making to its own (alleged) people. And in this mission of educating its people about its own past, school textbooks seemed to become the most potent weapon to forge the (nationalist) identity. The pre-modern community affiliation and de-territorialised imagination of the sub-continental space were two primary ideas and imaginations which the nation had to confront and, more importantly, override. To this end it used a double sided weapon – in its rendition of history it justified the community as being the nation itself, narrating how community was a sort of immanent nation waiting to rise to its consciousness and freedom with the formation of the nation-state, and by the help of the same discourse erased from the cognitive maps of its audience the imagination of a south Asian region as a possible geographically continuous space. The latter impression was achieved by the nationalist ideology through immortalising the existence and antiquity of borders, where, historically speaking, there existed none. Hence to community and to de-territorialised identity, the nationalist ideology had devised its unique responses. In its historiography, the nation manages to erase a regional imagination of space; one seldom finds references to any concept of regionalism and globalism in school textbooks, while the nation is juxtaposed over the communitarian imagery but minus the flux and the fuzzy, the non-hierarchical, multi-dimensional character.

Thus the past that the school textbooks are made to narrate have no reference to possible historical organic connectedness of south Asian people and communities. As the following section would show history is recounted as a play of communities struggling against each-other, existing in oppositions and binaries and the present day (modern and invented) conception of borders seeming immutable and eternal.

Part-II: Identity in post colonial south Asia

Public education is an extremely potent devise and, historically, has always been put in excellent use by ruling powers to manufacture opinion and interest in its favour. In light of contested identities and deep roots of the community in shaping collective identities, the newly formed south Asian states found historiography to be their best bet to counter oddities. Histories were written and re-written to rationalise the nation and school textbooks were found to be the best means to disseminate them.

In the following pages I intend to make a documentary analysis of school textbooks and curriculum frameworks to demonstrate how textual representations are fabricated about issues relating to community relations and national security revealing how the audience for nationalist discourse is created and secured through symbolic and representational means. In the following demonstration one can see how the nation-state creates its citizens by narrating to the targeted audience stories about how the nation itself is vindication of community aspirations and hence safeguarding the nation-state is tantamount, and the only means, to protect the community. The stories about the nationalist past are juxtaposed on tales about community relations creating citizens who internalise a nationalist identity which is anchored on a sense of communal identity but necessarily involving a negation and detestation of yet other community identities. Thus is created a citizen whose point of self-reference is the nation and who finds in the nation his/her source of collective security, sense of survival and identity. Hence the citizen is always the soldier who is taught through textual images and representation who his/her fellow mates and outsiders are, who are to be considered friends and who are the foes; clearly drawing the line between 'us' and the 'others'. As mentioned before such a making of citizenship discourse, mandating imaginations to develop in terms of oppositions and binaries, does not allow readers to appreciate the inherent nature of south Asian societies and geography.

In this regard the most interesting areas of investigation and de-constructing nationalist narratives are where the south Asian nation-states re-create stories about nationalist history belonging to the shared past. It is revealing to see how such stories about similar incidents, belonging to the same past, are craftily constructed to produce antagonistic reactions.

In our analysis of textbook narratives the first case we look at are two instances from Bangladesh school textbooks. The excerpts are instrumental in understanding how Bangladesh creates a Bengali Muslim ascription for itself as the defining aspect about its national identity through narratives which are necessarily exclusionary in nature and build on negation of other community identities. In the first instance, and also later in other passages, we would see how a Bengali Muslim identity is consolidated and securitised by a tale of betrayal by a Hindu community (belonging to the territorial limits of present day India). Further, in the second instance, we would look at portrayal of the Punjabi community - the dominant group in present day Pakistan - visa vie Bengali Muslims belonging to the territory of present day Bangladesh (east Bengal during the colonial rule in south Asia).

Any standard secondary level school textbook in Bangladesh would initiate its narrative on modern history with a description on adverse effects faced by Muslims due to introduction of western education and reform policies by the British colonial rulers. The narrative would be explicit in its verdict that introduction of education in English language and modern sciences benefitted only the Hindus of the region while the Muslims suffered at

the hands of British as well as the Hindus. It would explain how Hindus were allowed to obtain all high salaried jobs while Muslims were denied of their traditional livelihoods. Texts would, in their introductory passages, narrate instances of Hindu exploitation over Muslims with the help of British policies. For instance a passage in a secondary level textbook in Bangladesh describing an agrarian taxation policy (known as the permanent settlement policy) introduced by the British would read as follows –

> During the period of British rule in Bangladesh most of the zamindars (landowners) were Hindus. British through the Permanent settlement policy destroyed the traditional Muslim landownership. Muslim landowners used to collect tax through Hindu workers. British ended up recognising the tax collectors as owners of the land. This is how the Muslim class of zamindars were eliminated and a class of British enthusiast and devoted Hindu zamindars was created...This brought about impoverishment of the Muslims. The Muslims were exploited by their Hindu zamindars. They had to pay several illegal taxes to the zamindars... (Bangladesh School Textbook Board, 1977: 261-262).

This is illustrative of how a Hindu community is projected to be an adversary to that of Muslims and a sub-text being implicit in the narrative that Muslim identity would prosper only through opposition to Hindus. This further show how school textbooks are made to initiate their history of colonialism with a tale of community dispossession and suffering at the hands of the significant *other* community so that the national identity created defines itself as involving the negation of this chosen 'other'. Thus from the very beginning a story conducive to the making of a patriotic citizen who perceives national identity as necessarily relational in terms of having friends and foes is forcefully entrenched.

Having created a certain imagery of the Hindus, textbooks in Bangladesh move on to their portrayal of the Punjabi community, another significant 'other' in the construction of the nationalist identity of a Bengali Muslim. In the following passage we can see how Punjabis are described as virtually being traitors in the 1857 revolt – the first major anti-colonial uprising in south Asia - while the narrative upholds a sense of Bengali Muslim martyrdom and victimhood.

The passage says –

> Because of the fact that the movement (of 1857) first got ignited from the soil of Bengal, the British government began to treat the people of Bengal with suspicion... as a result, after 1857, the British started recruiting soldiers for the national army only from Punjab. The Punjabis, due to their persistent support to the British, began to acquire place in the army in huge numbers. On the other hand the people of Bengal were abused. (Bangladesh School Textbook Board, 1973b: 145).

Another textbook for a different age group of students had the following to say about the same event.

> The supporters of Britain helped them in various ways. The Bengali Hindus, Punjabis, Nepalese, Gorkhas, Nizam of Hyderabad...unequivocally helped the British... By supporting the British rulers, Punjabis became their closest. (As a result) in the army the presence of Punjabis kept increasing and thanks to the British government, irrigation and other developmental activities began in Punjab. (Bangladesh School Textbook Board, 1973a: 333 – 335).

Arguably reading such passages would invariably create an adversarial imagery of Punjabis of Pakistan and Hindus of present day India in the impressionable minds of the young readers of Bangladesh.

In the following passages we can further see how Hindus have been demonised in the textbooks of Bangladesh, describing in great details the extent of exploitation of Bengali Muslims at the hands of (Indian) Hindus. These are passages about the incident of Bengal Partition of 1905. Thereafter we would look at passages from Indian textbooks about the same incident but examine how they produce almost contradictory impression of the same past.

The Bangladesh textbooks have the following to say to its readers about the 1905 partition –

> Lord Curzon for the sake of administrative convenience and for economic and overall advancement of the Muslims of the east Bengal in 1905 divided Bengal into two parts... the Hindu community and the Congress launched a massive agitation against Lord Curzon's decision. Muslim support for Bengal Partition and strong protests by Hindus against the same brought to surface Hindu – Muslim differences in the most glaring manner... (Bangladesh School Textbook Board, 1973a: 340; 1977: 278-279)

Similarly, a later re-edited version of the textbook says –

> Lord Curzon could understand that since the very beginning of the British rule until then the administration of Bengal was entirely Kolkata centric. As a result east Bengal was always neglected and in every sphere – from trade and commerce, industry, transportation to education – it remained under-developed and backward. The inhabitants of east Bengal were exploited by Kolkata based businessmen, industrialists, zamindars, bureaucrats and lawyers. Lord Curzon thought that creating a new province in east Bengal would help reduce the administrative disparity and other inequalities between east and west of Bengal... But severe protest to the Bengal Partition was registered from the Hindus. The upper caste Hindu community of Bengal build a massive agitation against the Bengal Partition. Their moneyed, businessmen, zamindars and intellectual community took active part in this agitation. They had exploited the poor and the neglected lot of Muslims of east Bengal in various ways. Now (with Bengal Partition) they realised that with the institution of the new province their opportunity to exploit would cease. Kolkata's affluent, businessmen and lawyer community felt insecure anticipating the future of their businessmen. All India National Congress dived into agitations to impede and repeal Bengal Partition... Even a generous leader like the then chairperson of Congress, Gokhale, supported a movement which was against the interest of the Muslims of east Bengal. In this way the Hindu community increasingly made this anti-Bengal Partition movement, antithetical to Muslim interests, strong and dynamic. Muslims of east Bengal under their leader, Dhaka's Nawab Saimmullah's leadership, continued their agitation to defend the new province. But the Hindus, in order to attain their objective and vested interest, at the end turned the anti-Bengal Partition agitation into a terrorist movement. Ultimately the British government succumbed to the Hindu nationalists and terror driven agitation. (Nation Curriculum and Textbook Board, 1984: 164-165; 1987: 171-172)

Apart from the larger story of describing one community exploiting the other, which is apparent and clearly reveals itself to be the core agenda of the write-up, one also needs to note the recurrent territorial references made. The passage is set about a time when the present national territories and borders did not emerge, but nonetheless there is continuous hammering about imaginations of the same, referring to territorial confines of east Bengal (present day Bangladesh) visa vie the west (present day India). Notions about territoriality, which might not have been that obvious and strong in the imaginations of the time that the narrative speaks of, are yet made explicit and repeatedly uttered for the sake of feeding the imaginations pertaining to present day nation-states. This validates what educationist Krishna Kumar said about history narratives in school books; claiming that what we see in our

textbooks "is not about the past but about the present". It is about "a vocal sense of continuity of the present with the past". (Kumar, 2001: 81)

An Indian textbook account of the 1905 Bengal Partition would have a completely different picture to draw. In Indian texts the 1905 Bengal Partition is understood as a manifestation of the 'divide and rule' policy of the colonisers and there would be no reference to the possible legitimacy of the fact that Bengali Muslims living in the eastern part of Bengal were far removed from the site of the capital which was located in Kolkata and hence share administrative motive might have prompted the said policy. Without refereeing to any possibility of distress among people of eastern Bengal, the Indian texts simply account for an assumed colonial intention of weakening the Indian nationalist movement as part of its description on 1905 Bengal Partition.

A standard Indian textbook narrative on 1905 Bengal Partition would read as follows –

> His (Lord Curzon's) most unpopular act was the partition of Bengal. The object of the measure was given out as administrative convenience. The leaders could clearly see that it was actually a measure to divide the people. East Bengal was to be a Muslim majority province and the West a Hindu majority province. The partition was designed to... thus weaken the nationalist movement. However, the effect of the measure belied the hopes of the British government. It provoked an (united) agitation and such angry reaction against British rule that the partition measure had to be annulled. (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 1989: 62-63)

'History' in school textbooks of Bangladesh come to close with almost graphical descriptions of Punjab dominated West Pakistan's exploitation on Bengalis of East Pakistan, later to become Bangladesh after independence in 1971. Any history text in Bangladesh would provide detailed account of how Punjabis exploited and carried brutal repression on Bengalis and consequently how Bengalis realised that their security and freedom could be maintained solely through opposing the Punjabis and forming a separate Bengali nation-state, the only way to vindicate Bengali identity. Students are made to read pages after pages of such descriptions in a fashion that protecting a threatened 'Bengali' identity is still the primary task and mandate for those belonging to Bangladesh.

Some of the passages from old and recent school textbooks in Bangladesh read as follows –

> In an independent state the mother tongue of majority of its citizens is the national language. In Pakistan 56% of the population's mother tongue was Bengali... Yet through completely undemocratic means Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Liquat Ali Khan and many non-Bengali bureaucrats tried imposing Urdu as the sole language on Pakistan... In protest the great agitation that was initiated in Bangladesh is known as the language movement... Hundreds and hundreds of students were arrested and the beating of protesting students with the help of Muslim League supporters aroused deep suspicion in the minds of Bengalis... one has to understand the conspiracy that revealed in front of the people of East Bengal... a story of exploitation and false claims and Bengalis started feeling alien... (Bangladesh School Textbook Board, 1973a: 421-430)

> They (the leadership of West Pakistan) demonstrated extreme disregard towards East Bengal. ... 65% of Pakistan's population resided in East Bengal. Yet among the positions of Governor-general and Prime Minister none were given to a Bengali... (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 1984: 178)

> To deteriorate the state of law and order a severe riot was purposely instigated between Bengalis and non - Bengali workers. To the extent that East Bengal's sole armed military unit was removed... and was put under the control of Punjab... people

of East Pakistan demanded self-rule and independence and (in response) rulers of West Pakistan tried crushing such demands of justice. They did not hesitate in labelling Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (nationalist leader of Bangladesh) and the patriotic population of this region as anti-nation. (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2009: 110-113)

It is easy to see the parallels. One has to substitute the story about Hindu exploitation of East Bengal with that of West Pakistani and Punjabi suppression of East Pakistan, and the overall narrative intent of '*otherising*' one or the other community to lay the foundations of a Bengali identity remains the same and evident.

So far we mostly examined identity construction in textbooks of Bangladesh. A similar process of identity creation can be traced in textbooks of Pakistan and India.

A class V textbook in Pakistan has the following to say about Hindus -

The British had the objective to take over India and to achieve this, they made Hindus join them and Hindus were very glad to side with the British. After capturing the subcontinent, the British began on the one hand the loot of all things produced in this area, and on the other, in conjunction with Hindus, to greatly suppress the Muslims. (Cited in Khan, 2008).

On the other hand an Indian textbook shares with its readers the following expression about Muslims and Muslim League, the founding political party of Pakistan –

However, in spite of the fact that many Muslims had joined the united (Indian) nationalist movement, the influence of the communal elements among Muslims became strong. Many (Muslims) leaders still looked for concessions from the government to promote the interest of the newly emerging middle class and upper class economic interests... The encouragement given by the government to upper class Muslims and thus to communal politics is evident from the events which led to the formation of the Muslim League. On 1 October 1906, a Muslim delegation led by the Agha Khan met Governor-General Minto at Shimla. Agha Khan, religious head of a Muslim sect, was an extremely wealthy person. He led a life of luxury, mostly in Europe. Another important leader was Nawab Sallimullah of Decca (now Dhaka). The Governor-General encouraged the deputationists and within three months, on 30 December 1906, the Muslim League was formed. (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 1989: 67-68)

At another instance an Indian textbook narrative says -

An unfortunate development after the calling off the Non-Cooperation movement was the growth of communal riots... The communal parties were not concerned with the freedom of the country but wanted to get concessions for the upper classes of their communities. You have already read about the Muslim League which cut itself from the Congress in the 1920s and started pursuing communal demands... These tendencies hampered the nationalist movement. They diverted the attention of people from the need for independence from foreign rule... Many communal riots occurred in various parts of the country as a result of the activities of communal organisations and the encouragement they received from the British government. (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 1989: 74-75).

Again, a few pages later, the textbook has the following to say about the Muslim League –

You have read earlier about the rise of communal parties... The Muslim League fared badly in the elections of 1937... However, soon communalism raised its head again,

this time in a more sinister form and led to tragic consequences for the people of India... the Muslim League led by Jinnah claimed that India consisted of two separate nations - Hindus and Muslims. Politics based on this theory led to tragic incidents and ultimately the partition of the country... The 'two-nation theory' was a total falsification of the entire history of the Indian people. In 1940, at the Lahore session of the Muslim League, the demand for a separate state of Pakistan was made... The Muslim League was encouraged by the British government to press its demands for a separate state and played the game of British imperialism which had the effect of disrupting and weakening the movement for independence. When the Congress withdrew from the provincial governments in protest against British attitude to the demand for independence, the Muslim League celebrated the event by observing what is called the 'Deliverance Day' and tried to form ministries in the provinces although they did not have a majority in any provincial legislature. (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 1989: 87-89)

The story of creating conflicting nationalist identities and communal images that we are talking about is best reflected in a title of a class V textbook of Pakistan. Political scientist Navnita Chadha Behera (1996) in one of her studies reveals how a class V textbook in Pakistan had a chapter titled "India's Evil Designs Against Pakistan".

Like the case of descriptions about Bengal Partition of 1905, the mutually contesting representations about the 1947 Partition of the sub-continent in textbooks of India and Pakistan are revealing about the nationalist project. A Pakistan textbook described the violence during partition riots in the following words – "Hindus and Sikh, enemies of mankind, killed and dishonoured thousands nay thousands of women, children, the old and the young, with extreme cruelty and heartlessness." (Mutala´a-i-Pakistan, published by NWFP Textbook Board, cited in Behera, 1996). On the other hand an Indian text finds Muslim League and its 'communal' demand for Pakistan as the reason for all violence. It says-

...the Muslim League declared that it would bid goodbye to constitutional methods and observe 16 August 1946 as 'Direct Action Day'. As a result, some places in East Bengal, Calcutta, Bihar and Punjab witnessed riots, murder, pillage and arson. Nearly 500 Indians lost their lives. About one lakh Indians became homeless. This is one part of the story. The other was the refusal of the Muslim League to take part in the elections to be held in July 1946 for the purpose of setting up of a Constitutional Assembly. In short, the Muslim League communalised the country's political situation which, in its turn, produced disastrous results. (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2002: 56-57)

Thus the discussion so far reveals the process of demonizing other communities, vilifying them, situating one's own community identity as a struggle with the other. And all this is done through the medium of public education.

The above discussion brings to light some important aspects about citizenship. Beginning with the obvious – it anchors one's self-references in singular/ unidimensional identities – a Hindu, a Punjabi-Muslim, a Bengali- Muslim – and weds them with national identities and territories. Hence any sense of threat to one's identity is perceived as threat to one's nation and is further considered an existential crisis and, as a result, what are produced are 'militant-citizens', ready to kill, plunge and be martyrs in name of the nation. The second, and more important, aspect about such discourses on identity and nation is that such discourse result in deep sense of exclusion among many of those who inhabit the territorial boundaries of these nation-states - they might be legal citizens or at times vying for such status but denied - but do not share the community identity associated with the nation and the nationalist discourse. It is important therefore to ask how a Muslim reader living in India would perceive his/her citizenship on reading Indian texts about Muslims and the kind of historicization

Muslim League receives in the above cited texts. Similarly a non-Bengali living in Bangladesh is quite at a loss to make sense of his membership of Bangladesh, a state claiming in its historical autobiography to be created for the interests of Bengalis only. Notion of citizenship for a Hindu or a Bengali- Muslim living in Pakistan is equally troubled. The counter-narratives of these communities, living almost as if in exile, is never made part of the nationalist historiography, opening avenues for the making of, if not, 'patriotic-militant-citizens' but potential 'unpatriotic-militants'.

Part-III : Last thoughts

This article, as hinted in the beginning, was a response to try and answer what it would mean to introduce discourse on 'active' citizenship to education modules of classrooms in south Asia. A module which would instil in students' psyche an appreciation of one's rights and duties - politically and socially - as part of a larger trans-national milieu; characterised by a sense of citizenship as meaning to be predisposed towards participating in change and being active as members of one's socio-political contexts, perceived quite apart from the passivity of being mere non-active recipients. How is one to contextualise this positive, responsible transcending sense of (active) citizenship in south Asia where education modules are stuffed with perceptions of struggling community identities and national loyalties?

In place of a responsible and civil sense of (active) citizenship, we found how educational discourses in south Asia, in a way, 'activate' citizenship, understanding membership of a polity as necessarily entailing a constant state of preparedness to guard frontiers and homogenise notions of national identity, irrespective of the fact that they always can be plural in nature. Even if not for an actual war, citizens are expected to be constantly prepared to defend national identities and its emblems – the anthem, the flag, the borders as markings on paper. Test for citizenship is readiness to sacrifice and achieve martyrdom. And this discourse on citizenship is propelled through what is taught and learnt as part of education.

Thus the article intends to end with the submission that the crippling teleologies of nationalism need to be surpassed in what is read and taught in south Asian schools and educational premises. A fresh lease of life needs to be pumped into historical narratives that are tutored in schools. More fundamentally the region – the south Asian space – needs to be re-looked for more organic imaginations to be built in place of an imagination which looks at south Asia simply as a physical – political map bifurcated by territorial lines and imaginary borders.

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