Curriculum as destiny: forging national identity in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh

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Author
Rosser, Y. C.

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Abstract
This dissertation investigates the political, social, and religious influences on curriculum policy and social studies textbooks. It highlights the importance of historiography in the creation and transmission of national ideologies. This study focuses on three nations of the Indian Subcontinent, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, which share thousands of years of history, but who after 1947 have entertained distinct, often opposing visions of the past. In this context, historical interpretations, often characterized by omission, elision, and embellishment, may become standardized narratives used as justification for ethnic violence and military brinkmanship. The civic imperative to create patriotic citizens finds a malleable, teleological tool in the social studies. This study seeks to understand the sources of contentiousness which characterize the relationships between these often hostile nations where textbooks may be used as a site for negatively “othering” their neighbors. The first section deals with the history of education in the Subcontinent and background information about the research. The second section looks at the three countries in the Subcontinent, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India. A brief conclusion attempts to tie them all together. History textbooks are narrated with the intent of developing students into patriotic, productive citizens. Examples from state-sponsored textbooks can illustrate the appropriation of history to reinforce national ideologies. When history is seen as a tool to mold a nation's youth, interpretations of historical events are often manipulated in response to current events, as heroes become villains across the borders of neighboring countries, and opposing political parties within nations vie to control the grand narrative of the nation state.

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