

# Schoolbooks Archive

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The emergence of the modern school system in India and its spread began in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, several decades before this system began to take shape, colonial officers and educators had sought to introduce new books for use in indigenous institutions of education, in their attempt to reform what was taught to children. Once they began to establish schools, and they came in different types, the production of such books increased by several folds. These were produced by

missionary organizations, societies for the promotion of education, private publishers, and some of these were published by the authors themselves. On the one hand, these books covered a wide-range of subjects (many of which we identify today as school subjects) and, on the other, they were written in a number of Indian languages, apart from a significant number in English alone. Some of these were bilingual and some were translations from one or another European language, or translations from one Indian language to another.

practice. Textbooks from this period were also subject to several debates and controversies, presented a range of viewpoints on what should be taught and how, and their writing were also occasions for reform in language and script.

In the period since India gained independence, notwithstanding various debates among educationists about the perils that stem from depending solely on textbooks for both teaching and learning, the focus on textbook production has only become more complex; that is, with the state agencies themselves becoming the single most important publisher of textbooks. While today, as before, discussions range over several aspects of textbooks, including whether schools should use them at all, given the centrality they have had and continue to have even today, it is undeniable that textbooks, along with supplementary materials such as workbooks, have become important records of educational history of this country. In so far as education itself takes place within specific socio-historical contexts, the significance that textbooks hold in helping us understand the broader historical contexts is equally undeniable. Thus, while these books help understand several educational issues such as those of curriculum design, pedagogy of subjects, curricular progression, issues of gender in education, and assessment, they also open a window to look at the political and economic currents, ideologies that are pervasively present and inform educational decision-making, politics of knowledge, and appropriation of bodies of knowledge in different contexts and how they are introduced into the school curriculum. A large

From the 1870s, these books began to occupy the attention of the colonial administrations, with several committees appointed to examine their quality and contents. Further, in the absence of elaborate curricula being produced by colonial administration, such books, which now began to be called textbooks, became the mainstay (some would even claim the only pillar) of educational

## HISTORICAL ATLAS OF INDIA

FOR THE USE OF HIGH SCHOOLS, COLLEGES  
AND PRIVATE STUDENTS

BY  
CHARLES JOPPEN, S.J.

NEW EDITION

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.  
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON  
FOURTH AVENUE & 30TH STREET, NEW YORK  
BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, AND MADRAS

1914  
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number of research studies have shown us how attention to textbooks can throw enormous light not just on educational aspects, which they verily do, but also beyond.

If schoolbooks offer such important insights on a large number of aspects of our social existence, our record in preserving and maintaining repositories for them has been dreadful. In schools and institutes of teacher education, these books are often discarded from holdings in their libraries as soon as a new set is introduced. The situation is not very different in the case of government institutions that one expects would have such repositories. It is also important to consider books that have been published, over several decades, by private publishers, non-governmental organizations and those that were produced in the contexts of several localized experiments in education. These are also quite difficult to access. The numbers are quite high and the need to recover, preserve and make them available is urgent. Then, of course, there is a need to carry out a similar exercise for documents produced for teachers, reports on textbooks and so on. All of these suggest that a repository for hosting and offering these important productions to a wider public is an important task that cannot be delayed any further.

An initiative of Azim Premji University, the Schoolbooks Archive (SBA) is an open-access online repository that offers in digital form a wide-ranging collection of printed teaching and learning materials developed and used in India and in the subcontinent, along with a large number of related documents. This portal is wide-ranging in the following ways:

1. The term 'schoolbooks' is used to refer to a spectrum of materials, such as textbooks, work books, works of references (such as dictionaries, conversion tables and atlases), materials on textbooks produced for use by teachers and materials used in teacher education programmes.
2. The contents of the portal cover schoolbooks produced in the course of the last 200 years, in several languages, and on several school subjects. In terms of publishers, these include government agencies, private companies, self-published works, and those that were published by societies and non-state organizations.

3. Apart from schoolbooks as defined above, the portal offers related documents as well, such as reports of committees appointed to examine different aspects of textbooks, documents on textbook development and writing processes instituted by various organizations, curriculum documents with discussions on teaching-learning materials, advertisements and reviews of textbooks published in magazines, draft versions of textbooks and documents on textbooks-related litigations.

4. Finally, this portal is not meant to be a repository of such documents and books alone. In addition, it is meant to serve as a venue for furthering studies on various aspects of schoolbooks. Towards this objective, the portal will host bibliographies, virtual exhibitions, lectures and interviews of individuals and collectives who have carried out extensive work on different facets of schoolbooks, and enable discussion forums for users of this portal.

The above discussion on schoolbooks and their significance as social records might generate the impression that they would be of use only to the historian and to anyone with a strong set of interests in educational and social developments in the past. We think the SBA could certainly offer much to enlighten us about our contemporary concerns, apart from enabling us to understand present practices as developments that have their sources in the past.

This online repository, overtime, could host a large number of schoolbooks and related documents. It is important to reiterate that the portal will comprise both historical and contemporary schoolbooks. This variety – spanning regions, boards, and languages and contexts in which these books were produced – could offer teachers and teacher educators resources to become familiar with and explore a range of possibilities in planning their classroom practices. This could be for developing lesson plans, assessment schemes and so on. For curriculum and textbook developers, especially during consultations and workshops for these activities, these works can function as points of reference for possibilities followed hitherto, either to emulate or to avoid. Such a collection could be of immense use for illustrators, too. Thus, we believe that SBA could serve as a rich repository for researchers and practitioners with different as well as overlapping

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**BRIEF ACCOUNT**  
 OF  
**THE SOLAR SYSTEM,**  
 IN ENGLISH;  
 WITH  
 THE TRANSLATION INTO HINDUSTANI,  
 EXPRESSED IN THE ROMAN CHARACTER.

◆◆◆

**ARRANGED AS READING LESSONS**  
 FOR  
**The Use of Schools.**

◆◆◆

"The heavens declare the glory of God,  
 "And the firmament showeth his handy work."  
 "Day unto day uttereth speech,  
 "And night unto night proclaimeth knowledge."  
 "The worlds were framed by the word of God,"  
 "He hangeth the earth upon nothing."  
 "By his Spirit he hath garnished the heavens."

**Calcutta:**

PRINTED AT THE BAPTIST MISSION PRESS, CIRCULAR ROAD,  
 TO BE HAD OF T. OSTELL, BRITISH LIBRARY, CALCUTTA; AND  
 AT ALL THE DEPOSITORIES OF THE CALCUTTA  
 SCHOOL-BOOK SOCIETY.  
 1836.

The SBA is an attempt to address an important lacuna among the kind of digital repositories in India. On the one hand, it seeks to complement the few repositories dedicated to school education that we currently have, for they host only documents related to policies and their implementation, commission reports, surveys, budgetary reports and such. On the other, SBA expands the scope of ephemera that are housed in any of the libraries in India. It is expected that libraries at academic institutions should

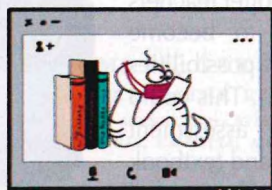
from such a resource. The SBA is a preliminary step in this direction.

A portal such as SBA cannot but be a collaborative effort. This has two aspects. The first pertains to the use of contents, participating in discussions, and sending us suggestions for improvement of the portal itself. The second pertains to contributing to the collection and thereby enriching the portal. This could be by means of pointing us to collections that could be digitized either at institutions that you are familiar with, and/or allowing us to digitize and share materials that you may have collected yourself.

We hope SBA would be of interest to all those who are working in the domain of school education in various capacities. We also hope that, through collaborative efforts (with both individuals and organizations), this portal can offer a comprehensive collection of schoolbooks and related documents.

interests in curriculum, teaching and learning materials, pedagogy and assessments in school education.

constantly redefine and expand their collections and thereby widen the pool of those who would benefit



- **What are the ways we can engage and share information with children in the library who are not able to read books?**
- **How do you engage children who hate reading with books? Do you run some sort of program or webinar?**
- **Most of the books in the library are in English. Why aren't there more books in our own local languages?**

*Student from MitiGhar, Muskaan, Bhopal*