

## Chapter 04

# School Children, Teaching History and Ethnic Conflict: A Normative Examination of Textbooks in Sri Lanka

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### Introduction

This paper is about teaching history to school children from year 06 to year 11 in Sri Lanka. It is the secondary level of schooling which is critical in molding citizens. The subject matter was approached from a normative perspective, a key focus of political inquiry. It examined the content of textbooks with a focus on their relevance to nurturing critical perspectives on history enabling students to value difference and diversity not following positivist epistemology. We have adopted a normative stance rather than a scientific focus or policy focus. A scientific focus is confined to explaining what is there while policy focus is concerned with what is possible. We do believe that for a society struggling with ethnic conflicts, the above two approaches are not sufficient. It requires transgressing and providing some thoughts on what ought to be. However, this does not imply that we are totally distancing the study from the scientific focus or policy focus of political studies. Yet, what is implied by a normative approach is that we are holding to the view that teaching history shall be based on objective facts and allow people to find shared history of all the people of Sri Lanka rather than teaching the past as exclusionist history of a particular ethnic group of a multicultural society from the very initiation of Sri Lankan society.

We have selected teaching history texts for school children because they are given free and decided by the state authorities by way of designing the content of the curriculum. The rationale was based on the recognition that teaching history gives substance for ethnic identification, tensions and anxiety in plural societies (Guichard, 2010). The normative approach was chosen on account of education scientists' expectations that teaching history must be oriented towards finding shared history for different groups rather than a particular identity group in a plural society. We hold that 'if any plural society is to enjoy a shared sense of political community across ethnic divides, it shall overcome the colonial logic of public policies and the continuing ethnic categorization after political independence through writing history. Anthropologists in Sri Lanka have pointed out that the recent ethnic conflict in the country of recent manufacture (Tambiah, 1993). The colonial project of writing history led to eulogizing particular ethnic group's culture which is numerically stronger and favoured under the territorial based principles of political representation since the 1930s (Rambukwella, 2012; Nissan and Stirrat, 1990). The ethnic problem had been aggravated by the patron-client networks influencing the sharing of the 'political spoils' in the country.

The role of education and curriculum, though not particularly textbook contents, make minority groups feel threatened by ill-thought-out curriculum policies on language, history, religious instruction and the preparation for a pluralist society, has been long recognized (De Silva, 1986). However, abundant literature on Sri Lankan ethnic conflict has paid little attention to teaching history to school children. This is not to deny both the general concern for revisioning syllabus and contents of text books under the worsening ethnic relations situation and using education for social harmony under the newly established office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) in 2017 (Rutnam, 2017). Our training in Politics has led us to note a lack of studies on teaching history from a critical normative point of view. It has led us to explore the contents of the textbook lessons in history from year 06 to year 11 of Sri Lanka's school system. This study is comprised of the following sections. The first section of the article elaborates teaching history and its relationship with ethnic groups and conflict/peace. The next section explains the theoretical positionality of authors. It is followed by a

discussion of data and information collection and analysis of the study. After deliberation of the methodological aspects of the study, it ventures into a discussion of the findings of the study while the final section of the study is a normative conclusion and observations on the content of the lesson in the history textbooks.

### **Teaching History: Peace or Conflict?**

Employing education for political purposes is nothing new in the history of political thought (Cunningham & Ladd, 2018). Politicization of curriculum, text book contents for extreme political purposes has been well documented (Paulson, 2015). Further, it is revealed that education could play a divisive role in instigating and perpetuating conflicts through unequal access and quality and a divisive curriculum has demonized the ethnic other in plural societies (Meertens, 2013). The recent scholarship on education has shown a shift among researchers and policy-makers in examining the iterative relationship between conflict and education and how factors such as content, structure, process and delivery of schooling may contribute to further conflict (Davies 2006; Novelli & Cardozo 2008).

In the case of Sri Lanka, the role played by successive governments since the political independence of the country needs to be understood. The political rivalry between the two major political parties needs special attention. Both the United National Party (UNP) (Presently Samagi Janabalavegaya (SJB) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) (presently, Podujana Peramuna) have had firm roots in the numerical majority Sinhalese while the ethnic minority political parties having their roots in their respective ethnic communities (Wilson 1988). This is important because the government controls much of the publication of educational materials (Cunningham, 2014). In many ways, these textbooks are a means of cultural reproduction and consolidation of a national identity. Though there have been many changes in the curriculum since the 1960s, they all have been introduced without needs assessment but with an eye on furthering political agendas of chauvinist political regimes (Cunningham, 2014). It is also revealed that through numerous, reforms emphasize student-centered and activity-based approaches to pedagogy in

primary education (Little, 2011), teaching remains exam-oriented and teacher-centered and relies heavily on textbooks (Sørensen 2008; Wickrema & Colenso 2003). Educationalists have pointed out that those official interpretations of conflict as presented in history textbooks function to transmit collective values, beliefs, and convictions. Cronon (1992) examines how the valence, source, and nation of historical accounts of the Korean War affected Chinese and American students' beliefs about their shared past, emotions, national self-esteem, and threat perception in the present. Teaching history to produce historical practices and social epistemological changes and instrumentality in producing governing principles moulding children who are to be future generation, tracing ideas backwards and forwards to understand the previous and current historical conjunctures have also been studied (Popkewitz, 2008). The link between construction of identity and the role of teaching history while identifying the role of historical narratives has been studied in relation to different socio-historical settings. Teaching history becomes the glue that binds members of different groups enabling group consciousness and promotion of nationalist agendas (Korostelina 2008; Volkan 1998; Tajfel & Turner 2004).

The scholarship of teaching history has generally acknowledged positive and negative impacts that could be made on citizens of multicultural and multi-ethnic societies. If history teaching is designed to stereo type cultural and ethnic others, it would result in distrust and conflict among different groups in any multicultural society. It also has been recognized that if it is designed to make students informed and critical and reflexive, it would enable to produce citizens that respect others (Seitz, 2004).

From a normative point of view, teaching history may lead to understanding and honoring the multi-perspectival nature of the past and realizing that different groups experiencing the same events differently. It highlights the importance of looking for shared past and shared future destiny than searching for exclusionist narratives of history. The scholars that adopt a normative stance point out that teaching history if dominance oriented would cement divisions and tensions within educational systems paving the way for polar positions among groups about the past contentious

interpretations of history. If that line of approach is adopted by the governing elite of multicultural societies, it would feed a divisive sense of belonging in particular identities which are constructed in opposition to the identity of the relevant 'Others'. The 'us versus them' dichotomy is a key ingredient in different stories told by different parties about the conflict which shapes their versions of reality and produces separate sociocultural entities. This is the kind of history favored by ethnonationalist political entrepreneurs. Catherine Vanner, Spogmai Akseer & Thursica Kovinthan (2016) maintain that the main challenge for sustainable positive peace is that different groups seek to legitimize their own views of the past and the present, through which they affirm their identities and position themselves on a higher moral ground in relation to the 'Other'. As a result of this, people start to diminish the other, while glorifying themselves, which in turn leads to the creation of new tensions between the groups. It no doubt will get complicated and aggravated if a government in a multi-ethnic or multi-culture society favours a particular group through education policies of the state.

### **Theoretical Position**

There are different theoretical positions followed by scholars explaining and advocating solutions to ethnonationalist conflicts throughout the world. To understand the discussion and analysis which is normatively informed in this study, an elaboration of theoretical positionalities of writers of the study is required. This study is a critical reflection of the contents of textbooks used to teach history for school children in Sri Lanka and with a specific focus on whether these text books have been useful in providing a sense of shared history, a common present and destiny as a whole and not as discrete and disaggregated groups in society.

Those explaining ethnic conflict and prescribing solutions have been pre-occupied with accounting for managing ethnic tensions through forms of consociationalism, ethnic accommodation, power sharing and devolution framework (Rampton, 2011: 1). Yet, what is lacking in these accounts is deconstruction of discursive practices in the construction of ethnonationalism by pointing out contradictions contained in the discursive practices themselves.

Rampton (2011) recognizes that one of the key issues with discourses championed by the elite is the inability to account for how agents play an active role in constituting landscapes and political and socio-cultural communities that they inhabit. In this context, we share the Notion of Nira Wickramasinghe (2006) when she states that origins of ideas and events are sometimes less interesting than how they reverberate throughout history; she adopts a different approach to the study of conflicts (Wickramasinghe, 2006: 107). We also share the notion of the New left perspective on the constructivists nature of identities and conflict championed by Benedict Anderson (1998) and Tom Nairn (1981). Nairn has maintained that nationalism could not be reduced to a singular archetype which displays the hidden truth of nationalism in any final sense. It is indeed a protean phenomenon and an autonomous mode of socio-political organization. It cannot be explained through recourse to mechanistic underlying social and politics dynamics (Nairn, 1981: 347). It is maintained that the elite in the peripheral states of the world system articulate a national register that is accessible to the lower orders seeking to propel themselves forward certain goals. Tom Nairn's proposition is helpful in recognizing that native elites do this through a certain kind of regression- by looking inwards, drawing more deeply upon indigenous resources, resurrecting past heroes and folk myths (Nairn, 1981: 348). He recognizes the instrumentality of nationalism for subaltern nations to navigate in the unevenness in global developmental inequalities (Rampton, 2011:5). Nairn recognizes that the elite engage in an instrumental populism out of necessity in both their relation to subaltern classes and in reaction to uneven development of the world system. (Nairn, 1981: 341). A somewhat similar but different approach has been adopted by Anderson in his explanation of the discursive construction of nationalism, by extension ethno-nationalism. The two authors also share and agree to the proposition that print capitalism prompted nationalism as a cultural artefact and as movement of imagining and creation, coupled with top-down dynamics emergent from colonial and postcolonial governmental logic in which society is mapped, enumerated and administered, producing a transformation of the significance of borders, identity categories and social structures and narratives which increasingly take on a nationalist hue (Anderson, 1991:163-185). What is lacking in those explanations

and description of emergence of nationalism and hegemonic formation of nationalist discourses is that they have all been unable to take into account the international dictate of the necessity for a nation with a history to claim statehood for the colonized world and people to claim political independence and become members of the international system under a capitalist world order (Arneil, 1994). This international norm is needed to be situated within the colonial ethnographic exercise if one wants to understand the hegemonic formation of nationalism; by extension majoritarian ethnonationalism in diverse societies such as Sri Lanka. The colonial ethnographers, largely the colonial public servants themselves, found culture, attitudes and norms of the colonized people totally different from that of their own. Largely driven on the necessity of the expedient rule of the colonized and their commitment to the idea of progress, the colonial administration embarked on an exercise of categorization and providing information for the colonial state or colonial statistics. Colonial statistics has dictated that each and every one of the colonized societies needed to be included into a definite category of social groups wherein mixed origin, different cultures, ethnicity and religion etc. was not allowed. However, the historical evidence substantiates that societies in South Asia including Sri Lanka had been accommodative of differences of culture and religions (Obeysekera, 1970). Further, Gananth Obesekera has noticed and observed that the portrayal of the Tamils as the enemy through disgraceful terminologies and distortion has been deliberately initiated with the colonial requirement of doing away with the Kandyan Kingdom by artificially embedding ethnic hatred among the different but fluid identity groups (Obeysekera, 2021). Thus, Colonial statistics and categorization has prevented fluidity of social identities and has contributed to fossilization of ethnic, religious and linguistic identities.

The fossilization of identities has further been strengthened by the norms of the international political system (Arneil, 1994). The International system since the Westphalia Treaty, has been characterized by the precondition to claim statehood in the international system, a homogeneous people was required. Making a people implied a people with a history for the people. Thus, the political elite and the intelligentsia in colonized societies had been tasked with making a nation to claim political independence out of the diverse

communities in the colonial state. The bipolar world order after World War II and the developmental approach prescribed for the new states in the context of balkanization of empires has equated development with nation building and changing the society towards a European type of society and state. In this process, the state and education has gained a critical role in making the national community for the state. The Colonial interpretation of Mahavansa, the chronicle of the Buddhist Order in the country with colonial discovery of archeological sites as proven evidence of existence of history for the Sinhalese Buddhist and resulting ethnic rivalry through community based political representation and power rivalry among the multi-lingual colonial political elite, paved the way for territorial based identity formation through discursive practices among competing elite, based on colonially constructed groups (Ismail, 2000 & Jaganathan, 1995) . Though this study does not follow the positivist tradition of research, it is hypothesized that competing ethno nationalisms has been constructed in the course of the evolution of rivalry among ethnic elites' competition for political spoils.

The literature review found that in the case Sri Lanka, there is no critical assessment of the role of the state and education in shaping attitudes of students who are at the molding stage of citizens of a multi-ethnic and cultural milieu of Sri Lanka. Yet, there are studies on the role played by education in forming identities. For instance, Fine, Weis, Powell and Mun Wong (1997, p. viii) note that education, 'the site for democratic inquiry, heterogeneity, and exposure to and celebration of 'difference', has become a foundational space within which children of differing races, ethnicities, social class, language backgrounds and genders 'learn their place' in the broader culture'. The scholarship on ethnic conflicts and conflict resolution seems to pay little attention to teaching history and their impacts on molding citizens for a multiethnic polity. The two authors of the present study also hold that if properly instrumentalized, teaching history can play a positive role in situations where humanity has been wounded, destroyed, and almost lost, as often happens during rival ethnic competitions. In this context, we hold that the political elite has not been able to explore shared history; imagining an alternative future. The task of teaching history Sri Lanka is ever eyeing for peace and harmony shall be the deconstruction of history and providing

a critical space for children to reflect upon and cultivate values of diversity and difference. In other words, learning to unlearn history which has been fashioned after the colonial implant of people.

## **Methodology**

This study employed the ‘notion of symbolic power’ drawing from Bourdieu. (Bourdieu, 1977: 74). He reveals that the education system reproduces structures of power relations and symbolic relationship between different groups in a society. Through the reproduction of the structure of distribution of cultural capital among these classes. He discusses the traditional way of conceiving the educational system as transmitting traditionally accumulated information from generation to generation while critically looking at the role played by educational institutions in cultural reproduction of power relations. We hold that education in history can be converted towards critical engagement of historical narratives pointing out the contradictions contained in the historical accounts of the past initiated during colonial times and their continuation after the political independence of the country, would help to ease ethnic tensions.

In the above context, we have selected only the text books for history from year 06 to year 11 leading to the General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level) examination. We have summarized the lessons in the history textbooks with critical reflections if the contents have covered competing and alternative explanations given by critical historians and are helpful in finding a shared history for all the communities of Sri Lanka by allowing students a space to critically reflect on their past, present and future. In the course of our analysis of the content, we have attempted to pinpoint contradictions and what is critically lacking in the content of the lessons.

## **Significance and Limitations of the Study**

There are only a few studies that touch upon the link between histories and school text books largely dominated by government sponsored schooling system in Sri Lanka. Of course, if this study had covered all the text books

from year 6 to year 11, it would have been more meaningful. The time span to complete this research did not enable us to cover all the text books and go for a comparative study. If it had been the case, we could have been able to bring out contradictions among different text books in different subject stream. However, we believe, covering the text books is still enlightening. However, future researchers are warned herewith of the categorically stated limitation of this study if they are making use of our findings and conclusions in their researches.

## **Findings and Discussion**

“The objectives of teaching history are spelled out at the end of the textbook for year 06 under Editors’ Notes. They are spelt out as follows: “the becoming of members of any society is consequent to its historical process. Hence what they enjoy as their culture and they are historical. The root causes of socio- political problems they encounter at present lay in their immediate history ..... history works to give experiences to resolve conflicts. It is one of the reasons that one should study history. It will enable us to understand our social identity, to live together as separate persons and act with others for collective goals”.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, the broader goal of the text books in history from year 06 year 11 in Sri Lanka is to mould good citizens. Textbooks have included many topics useful to shape attitudes of would-be citizens in the near future. The lessons have covered the evolution of human beings on the planet earth, different civilizations, revolutions, national movements, world wars and detailed discussions from time to time, the evolution of Sri Lankan history from early beginning to the present in a chronological order. Table 1.1 has summarized the contents of history text books from year 06 to year 11 with contents covered in each lesson together with observations made by the authors.

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1. *Translated from Sinhala to English by Authors of the present study.*

**Table 1.1. Content of Lessons with Observation by Authors**

Year	Lesson	Content	Observation
06	1. Introduction to History	Definitions of History, Methods of study, use and measuring time of historical incidences.	We have reflected sudden jumping of the ancient throne of the kings with the Symbol of lion without any link to the explanation of the means of knowing history. The lesson states although events in the past <i>ended, the messages emerged out of them is useful for making the present a better one</i> . In the discussion of knowledge of the past, it has been highlighted that such knowledge will be useful to shape the future and knowledge of history is useful to harmonious living in a multicultural society (p 3)
	2. Old Human	The lesson highlights that the earth is the place for all flora and fauna and hence discussion is centred on the origin of the earth and the origin of different beings.	The lesson is based on the evolutionary process of human settlements and the gradual emergence of civilizations. As explanation of human differences, environmental facts have been brought out but not the politics of forming differences drawing from modern history
	3. Lesson 03: Old Civilizations of the World	It covers different old civilizations of the world after a brief introduction to what civilization is about and their heritage, for the present generations	It is observed that the lesson writers have attempted to keep a distance from their ethnos biases and be value neutral

	<p>4. Human Settlement in Sri Lanka</p>	<p>The lesson is comprised of two sections. The first part is on the early human settlement in Sri Lanka. The second part of the lesson is titled as Arrival of the Prince Vijaya and Human Settlement</p>	<p>It is highlighted that there were no such divisive identities such as Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim at the earlier and pre-historical ages of Sri Lankan history. It concludes such identities originated in Sri Lanka later. Part 11: This part of the lesson on the arrival of Prince Vijaya hides the destiny of those people who already inhabited the country. It also has attempted to link them blindly to the Aryans myth. It states the inhabitants by the time of his arrival, were in a lessor stage of development implying that the prince and his cohorts as more advanced. The writers of the lesson state that with the arrival of Vijaya, the traditions and the customs of the Indian Society spread in Sri Lanka without any concern for the colonial construction of modern India itself. The blind use of terminologies associated with nation state is constant throughout the historical account of people and political system of Sri Lanka</p>
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	<p>5. Fearless Kings of Sri Lanka</p>	<p>It covers five important kings over the territory of then Sri Lanka. The lesson has covered King Pandukabhaya, Devanapiyathissa, Dutugamunu, Valagamba, Vasabha and Dhatusena.</p>	<p>It details the meritorious measures of welfare by those kings. In the case of the narration on Pandukabhaya, the conspiracy of his uncles and public support from various indigenous relatives has not been mentioned though they are well known facts to students of Sri Lankan History. The lesson ends with some advice to the students to be emulated from the characters of those kings.</p> <p>We found the account on King Elara is very brief and we cannot find any reasons for not including him as an important king of the Anuradhapura Era. If the lesson in relation to King Dutugamunu and Elara had been included, information of some Sinhala speakers and Buddhist believers in the Elara Fold and some Tamil speakers and Buddhists in the Fold of Dutugamunu, would have provided a critical realm for the students to reflect upon the present conflict as this is one narration employed by ethnonationalists of both camp to justify their exclusionary state making projects.</p>
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Year 07	Lesson 01: Our Ancient Community Life	Discusses Economic Activities, Commerce and Culture	The section on culture has followed the colonial construction of identity categories. The lesson states that Sri Lanka is a place inhabited by different groups of people but it simplifies the demography of the country by recognizing Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims as the groups of people in the country. The part that discusses introduction of Buddhism into the country accounts for civilization and good qualities as positive outcomes.
	Lesson 02 Our Famous Kings		
	Lesson 03 Our Cultural Heritage	Tangible and Intangible heritage	Seems to be following a scientific approach to history
	Lesson 04, Late Governing Centres	The lesson covers the shifting of kingdoms from place to place since the collapse of Polonnaruwa in 1215.	The emergence of local bred dynasties has not been sufficiently highlighted.
	Lesson 05 European Civilizations: Greek and Roman	Details the evolution of these civilizations.	Seems to be an impartial discussion

Year 08	Technology and the Arts in Ancient Sri Lanka	The lesson discusses the evolution of various forms of Technology and the Arts	The lesson has discussed the heritage of ancient technology and arts
	Lesson 02 Kandyan Kingdom	It contains details on the last native kingdom of Sri Lanka which includes origin, important kings, economy, society and arts forms	Sait Jothiya was ruling the area under the Kotte kingdom. He has rebelled against his rule indicating the emergence of non- dynasties competing for power. It further substantiates the fact that a nobleman named Senasammatha Vikramabahu becoming the king of the area. The important point to note is the seeking of concubines from Indian Dynasties. The discussion on king Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe revealed that even a Hindu could be the king if he received the blessing of the Buddhist clergy.
	Lesson 03: Renaissance in Europe	The lesson details the intellectual and scientific progress made out of rational thinking during the period from 14 to 16 centuries.	

	Lesson 04: Finding new Territories and the Arrival of Europeans in Asia	The lesson Details the context, reasons for the arrival of Europeans in Asia.	
	Lesson 05: Subjugation of Coastal Territories of Sri Lanka to the Portuguese	The lesson has focussed on the division of the Kotte Kingdom into three the internal struggle between different kingdoms and the relations they had with the Portuguese	
Year 09	Lesson 01 Colonization of Coastal Areas of the Country	Colonization of Coastal areas by the Dutch (Arrival of the Dutch in Asia, Seeking of Dutch Support to expel the Portuguese, Diplomatic and Military Relations with the Kandyan Kingdom, Invasion by Dutch	In discussing, the crowning of Kirthisri Rajasinghe, the brother in laws of Sri Vijaya Rajasinghe, a Nayakkar, sufficient attention has not been paid to highlight, that even an alien could become the king, if he followed the tradition of upholding Buddhist Practices.

	<p>Lesson 02 British Power in Sri Lanka</p>	<p>It has discussed the reasons for the British interest in Sri Lanka. The lesson also has discussed the reason for Kandyan kings to seek the support of the British.</p> <p>The lesson discusses the handing over of Dutch territories. The unbearable tax burden, resulting in rebellion in the coastal territories has been discussed. The consequent dyarchy and issues, of the subjugation of the Kandyan kingdom has also been discussed.</p>	<p>The counting of persons, property etc. for commercial purpose and schooling and introduction of print has been highlighted but without much emphasis on impact on relations among people.</p> <p>In the introduction, it is stated that British made a high impact on its history. The question is whether it is on society or history itself. Is history a living thing?</p> <p>The discussion on the invasion of the Kandyan kingdom and its subjugation has failed to account for shrewd colonial interventions and the chaos in the Kandyan Kingdom. The collaboration of the chieftains and clergy with the colonial powers has not been sufficiently discussed. The cruelty of the chieftains of the Kandyan Areas and the king's kind intervention has not been sufficiently discussed.</p>
	<p>Lesson 03 The Religious and National Revivalist Movement</p>	<p>The Lesson covers the activities of Missionaries, The threat on the cultures of the people of Sri Lanka,</p>	

	Lesson 04: Indian Independence Movement	It covers the European Encounter of India, the Revolt against British Rule, Indian National Congress,	
	Lesson 05: Constitutional Reforms and National Movement in Sri Lanka	The lesson covers various constitutional reforms introduced since 1833 to 1947	The lesson has not critically discussed the failure of Ceylon National Congress
	Lesson 06: Sri Lanka after Independence,	It covers 1947, 1952, 1956, March 1960, July 1960, 1965, First Republican Constitution, Second Republican Constitution and Various Public Policies	However, there is no word on the 1971 Youth Uprising, the 1987-88 youth insurgency or the Tamil Militant Movement.
Year 10	Lesson 01 Sources for studying History	Categorisation of sources, the importance of studying history and the conservation of Archaeological sources are covered	
	Lesson 02 Human Settlements in Ancient Sri Lanka	Proto historical, Pre-historical Settlement, Settlement during the early historical era has been discussed	Seems to be that the discussion is based on the evolutionary theory of human habitation

	Lesson 03 Evolution of Political Power in Sri Lanka	It discusses both Pre-polity and Polity formation with centralized state apparatus	The lesson seems to be written impartially with facts and figures on the formation of socio-economic and political structure
	Lesson 04 Ancient Society in Sri Lanka	It covers the nature of government, Economy, Professions and Culture	The lesson is fair in treating different religions and communities by drawing its attention to the location of the country and commerce and trade of the ancient period.
	Lesson 05 Ancient Science and Technology in Sri Lanka	It covers the primary Stages of scientific ideas, technology of House building, Water Management, measuring time based on the lunar month basis,	It discusses the king centred governance arrangement and attempts to portray the system as fair
	Lesson 06 Ancient Knowledge and Practical Application	It discusses adaptation of the knowledge system and its cultural heritage	Discussion on the status of women seems to be within the present popular notion of women's role in social space. Is it a portrayal of the past from the present perspective?
	Lesson 07: Cities in Dry Zoon and Emergence of New Kingdoms	The lesson covers the process of the shifting of the kingdom from place to place giving reasons	The emergence of Vanniyars, a local ruling elite has not been sufficiently emphasised. The emergence of a new political elite that replaces traditional Royal families has not been emphasized either.

	Lesson 08: Kandyan Kingdom	It covers its emergence and extension with details made by kings.	Neither the conflicts among the elite in the kingdom nor their power thirsty behaviour is sufficiently discussed. The lesson follows the popular path of explaining the Nayakkar Dynasty which was constructed by the English to subjugate in accordance with Obeysekera
	Lesson 09: Renaissance	It covers various aspects and its impact on the Sri Lankan Society	The lesson could have contributed to critical thinking if it had sufficiently discussed the intended and un-intended result of introducing such ideas to the Sri Lanka society
	Lesson 10: Sri Lanka and the Western World	The Lesson covers interactions between the Kandyan Kingdom with the Portuguese and the Dutch together with important figures of the time	
Year 11	Lesson 01; Industrial Revolution	It details the context of the industrial revolution, spread how it from Britain to the rest of Europe, the emergence of class-based politics, positive and negative impacts and its influence on Sri Lanka.	

	Lesson 02 Establishment of British Power in Sri Lanka	The lesson details the following topics The establishment of British power in the country, political locations, profitable spices such as cinnamon, the subjugation of the country and 1818 revolt. The 1948 rebellion and the resulting softening of British policies in Sri Lanka.	The major points that is lacking in the discussion are the impact of colonial policies in the formation of identity groups in the country.
	Lesson 03 The Revival of Nationalism in Sri Lanka	The lesson has divided its discussion into two parts as national and religious revival from 1848-1915 and agitation for political reform from 1915-1948. The discussion on religious revivalism is centred around Missionaries' attempts to spread their religion through propaganda and counter propaganda.	The major issue with the lesson is the eraser of the Eurasian community that contributed to the development of national consciousness.
	Lesson 04: Political Changes under the British Rule	The lesson details the evolution of the political system including milestones of its evolution up to the dominion status in 1948	However, the lesson is silent over why the National Congress was a unable to evolve into a genuine National Organization. Further, the discussion on the political left does not mention anything of the left politics that went beyond ethnic divides.

	Lesson 05: Social Transformation under the British	Has covered economic, social and cultural changes	The discussion on the positive and negative impacts on Sri Lankan society is contradictory. The lesson has dismally failed to bring into notice the good results that were brought with the introduction of the representative principle into the governance process of the country
	Lesson 06: Independence of Sri Lanka	The lesson has covered important incidents of political history up to the 1978 constitution and development policies	Ironically, there is no mention of aggravation of ethnic relations in the country due to short-sighted constitutional and other preventing students to imagine a better future instead of portrayal of Sri Lankan history as past conflict among the different peoples of the country.
	Lesson 07: Important Revolutions of the World	Details the American, French, and Russian Revolutions.	The lessons at the end have attempt to show the emergence of the bi-polar world order and Sri Lanka becoming a country of Non-aligned Movement without providing sufficient background of the evolution of the world order.
	Lesson 08: World Wars and Agreements	The lesson has discussed the world Wars the first, second and the resulting attempts at preventing such occurrence in the future.	Though it seems to be an objective discussion, it has failed to discuss the problems associated with nationalism in essentially multi-cultural societies that emerged out of the very nationalism of the world order framed.

Source: Compiled by authors

The research found that in writing history in relation to events and incidents that do not involve Sri Lanka, scientific approach has been followed. However, the lessons related to Sri Lankan politics, the jargon associated with modern nation state and nationalism juxtaposed has simplified the history of a nation with multiple identity groups. This is particularly interesting in the context of colonial statistical exercises of colonially constructed identity construction. We observed that there were many instances of having fluid identities in the pre-colonial days. Yet, the textbooks used in teaching history had not deviated from the colonial construction of identities while authors have been in pain to depict kings of mixed breeding to portray as purely Sinhalese.

It was found that lessons included many examples of intermixing of dynasties of different languages and faiths. The only lesson that did not follow that footpath has been the lesson on kingship and government formation during the Anuradhapura era in the year 10 textbook. However, it was noted that though there were different arrangements to accommodate differences and diversity before the superimposition of colonial state craft/graft has not been sufficiently highlighted. Thus, it was observed the students were not given a chance to reflect upon who are making use of the historical accounts in the lessons. The two researchers are of the point of view, if it had been done, it would have enabled students to critically reflect in problems of modern practice of nationalism and ethnic nationalism.

What we found in the history lessons is the rich sources of evidence of the existence of a shared past of different communities. Yet, the lessons have failed to touch those aspects enabling students to critically reflect on the present conflict from historically informed perspective. If lesson writers had been able to find some other perspective to look at history beyond the modern nationalist terminologies, it would have facilitated imagining an alternative Sri Lankan identity. If such an approach was adopted, the rich evidence scattered here and there in the lessons themselves could be used to nurture the shared pride of being Sri Lankan and an alternative future.

It is quite clear that the lessons in text books followed a narrative approach to explain history. This narrative approach aimed to produce a story connecting the past, present, and the future. It is revealed that the story telling tune of the lessons aimed at portraying unitary state from old times despite ample evidence to prove ancient political arrangement has been a decentralized and rule centric loyalty system. The lessons themselves contain information of decentralized forms of government before the colonial encounter of the country by chieftains who were known as kings particularly since the Dambadeniya kingdom. There is evidence revealing struggles between different dynasties, sometimes of alien marking starting with prince Vijaya and continued up to the last king of the Kandyan Kingdom and the local native elite.

It was found that the lessons never attempted at alternative interpretations given by historians. For instance, there existed an interpretation of the power struggle in Sri Lanka among competing dynasties rather than ethnic groups (See: Gunawardene, 1990). In fact, every ethnic group conflict were outcomes of colonial public policies. The narratives about past events do not have a closure, their structure is cyclical and they are always connected to a history writing pattern that has been shaped after colonial state craft with a present conditions and future orientations. The lessons on the evolution of the Sri Lankan society, clearly follow a format of telling stories to students with a clear beginning, middle and end connected linearly to the modern form of state, using terminologies associated with modern nation state. It was Sinhalese and Buddhist Centric despite facts of the mixing of dynasties of the Sinhalese and other stocks either on the maternal or the paternal side. It has been attempted to present them as solely unmixed (See. Year six and Seven Text Books). The rationale may be a result of following state sponsorship which carries out a discursive practice of the modern nation state largely dictated by the requirement of nationhood to claim statehood under international politics. It is held that stories create and give expression to personal and group identity by encoding a body of shared knowledge to which persons are intellectually and emotionally committed. There is in the stories a mixture of master structural discourses which include discourses of victimhood, aggression, domination, and unity on the one hand, and personal stories on the other. One can easily

find recurrence of these themes produced by the colonial state graft and the Sinhalese elite formed discourses within history text books. The lessons have closely adopted the colonial construction of communities and power pursuit by different ethnic political entrepreneurs continues even to date.

Stories and discourses can be distinguished. Stories can be recognized from the discourses because they describe an action that begins, continues over a well-defined period of time, and finally draws to a definite close. They become meaningful because of their placement within the narrative. Completed action gives a story its unity and allows us to evaluate and judge an act by its results. Such stories lead one to perceive an identity threat the presence of opposite meaning systems that have at their core the idea of a positive, morally pure and superior 'us' and evil, vicious and negative 'them' (Rothbart & Korostelina 2006). It can be observed that evolution of the Sri Lankan society is presented as a conflict between invaders, most from South India making the Dravidian Stock of People as evil "them" while presenting kings who had fought against them as pure Sinhalese rulers. Lesson writers seem to be at pains in representing those kings as purely Sinhalese. It may be connected with the requirement of the modern international system to become a nation to claim political independence cum inability to envision the alternative shared history and polity that could accommodate diversity and difference. It can be related to the idea of writing memories grafted into cultural memory by colonial public policy which is characterized by sharp distinctions like who we are and who we are not imposed by the political authorities that decide policies on education.

It was found that there were lessons contents aiming to educate students on contemporary history including development policies regimes, evolution of the constitutional system and the modern representative system. However, it is noticeable that they lack contemporary events like youth unrest in the South or the North of the country and the ethnic wars that cost enormously. It can be argued it is a result of a rupture between the school and the community. If the discourse had included such events, it could have resulted in enabling them to examine who they are in relation to the broader culture of Sri Lanka and imagine a better future for all instead of silencing and preventing them from growing such critical perspectives.

## **Conclusion**

Following Bourdieu, (1973) and Luke (1988), this situation of the textbooks can be related not to writers of the lessons but to the modern logic of nation building. In our analysis we found that the themes of the history text books have failed to present a true description of the history of Sri Lanka and have not been able to create space for the students to critically reflect upon the present and the future drawing upon accurate accounts of the past. We have theoretically situated ourselves as the political elite that control the eyes of the state apparatus to communicate politically correct versions of the past, carving values, national identity and acceptable norms that are aimed at creating followers or loyal citizens. The lessons have not been able to create space red recent important historical incidence such as the ethnic war and youth unrest. We are at pains to understand as to why these have been ignored and forgotten. This may be related to the nation building project under the international system based on the nation state system. The nation state project requires a homogeneous society to functions properly. Electoral competition among political elites of different ethnic groups may lead to constructions of histories according to their power objectives. The Sinhala Sri Lankan Political elite who are numerically superior in terms of strength may find it beneficial to construct exclusionist history of the Sinhalese community because it is Sinhalese political leadership that could control the entire state sponsored education system. They might have found textbooks to be a means to that end. Text books are main sources of the official historical narrative. Political elites often very adamantly control education as a tool for shaping public opinion and international status. Textbooks have become not only a question of national identity and pride, but also a source of controversy that plagues the international arena. In the above context, under the free education policy, history writing remains an enterprise of crafting collective memories that have emerged out of elite competition in a particular political demography which has got a numerically superior ethnic group which is essentially a colonial construction. The situation becomes difficult to handle when lessening proselytized identities constructed by colonial policies were ardently embraced by the political leadership which resorts to majoritarian representative democracy. We normatively conclude that if one approaches

the past from the perspective of collective memory as social and cultural practices, it would not enable students to reflect on their past, present and future from a critical perspective. The contents of the lessons, particularly lessons related to Sri Lankan political history seem to be framed in and around imagined unitary state notions though the reality is something else. Thus, we normatively propose that the lessons in the text books be reoriented; they have to be rewritten to portray the shared past of the different communities and show the possibility of having and imagining a shared future which will enable the community to have effective attachments to civic political institutions while allowing the differences to be the norms of social interactions as was the case in pre-colonial Sri Lanka.

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