

## Research Note

# The Educational Relevance of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Mahatma Gandhi in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

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## Contextualisation

These research notes are based on my PhD study, which I am partway through. The study looks at the educational ideas of the Japanese educator Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944) and those of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) of India. In particular the study deals with the views of the above educators on 'values' in education and their role in opposing both the totalitarian values of National Shinto in Japan during World War II and the communal values that were being invoked during the same period by Hindu and Muslim political parties in India. The study then questions the relevance of the two dissident philosophers in the present-day context of the ongoing controversies that exist in history textbooks in both Japan and India, with respect to the representation of World War II in Japanese textbooks and the influence of Hindutva values in Indian textbooks.

## Introduction

### ***Makiguchi, Gandhi and the ultranationalistic trends of the 20<sup>th</sup> century***

Whereas the ultranationalists in Japan and India in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century made use of values to design or re-invent 'communities' based on maintaining their separate sense of identity from the 'other', Makiguchi<sup>1</sup> and Gandhi<sup>2</sup> formulated a new way of looking at 'community' and 'values' that would incorporate the 'self' and the 'other'.

In Japan, the term 'ultranationalists' has been used to denote the military, imperial and religious leadership during the two World Wars. In India, the term 'ultranationalists' largely indicates the Hindu and Muslim communal leaders and their British counterparts who were the drivers of the internal conflicts between these two religious groups, which ultimately led to the partition of India in 1947.

The ultranationalists in both countries promoted values whose main function was to control and manipulate mass populations for their own ends (Basu, 1982; Kaigo, 1969; Keenleyside, 1937; Tokiomo, 1969; Whitehead, 1924). This was done through instilling in the members of the community a sense of being separate from the 'other'. Thus, in the case of Japan, the Emperor and subjects were constructed as a single community bound together by the values of loyalty and filial piety, the 'other' being the allied forces during the World War. In India, for the Muslims the Hindus were the 'other' and, likewise, for Hindus the Muslims were the 'other'.

The first part of my PhD - already completed - explores the ultranationalistic activities of the aforesaid groups within their historical contexts. It goes on to evaluate Makiguchi's and Gandhi's thinking within the Japanese and Indian contexts respectively. An attempt is made

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<sup>1</sup> For a fuller account see Bethel, 1989; Kazunori, 1994; Makiguchi, 1980; Sharma, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Fischer, 1998; Gandhi, 1982; Nanda, 1958; Sharma, 1999.

here to look not only at the ideas of Makiguchi and Gandhi (which have, over time, been glorified), but also to evaluate the viability of the propositions made by these educators for the times in which they lived. This means attesting to the feasibility of the application of Makiguchi's and Gandhi's thinking in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Japanese and Indian communities given the ultranationalistic trends in both countries. In effect, this requires an open-ended argument that does not seek to justify the evident disregard for Makiguchi and Gandhi in a period of fascism, colonialism and nationalism. It is an argument that seeks instead to understand the given socio-historical conditions as a seed-bed in which the two thinkers' notions of community, value, self and other took root, developed and grew.

The concluding part of my PhD thesis will attempt to explore the significance of the two educators in the 21<sup>st</sup> century society and education of Japan and India. It is to this work in progress that I now turn.

### ***Makiguchi, Gandhi and the ultranationalistic trends of the 21<sup>st</sup> century***

The representation of World War II in Japanese textbooks and the influence of Hindutva values in Indian textbooks is a good starting point, as analysis of these books indicates some of the ways in which controversies around ultranationalism are played out in 21<sup>st</sup> century education.

#### **Controversy in Japanese History Textbooks**

In present day Japan, under international pressure, history textbooks have been radically altered for the first time to portray, in depth, the atrocities committed by Japan in its colonies, namely Korea and China. There is controversy over certain textbooks for junior and middle public schools that are published by private companies who have received authorization from the Ministry of Education (*Mombusho*). Chief among these books in use are *Atarashii shakai - Rekishi* (New Social Studies: History) published by Tokyo Shoseki (1993) and *Chugaku shakai - Rekishiteki Bunya* (Junior High School Studies - Field of History) published by Osaka Shoseki (1993).

In addition to authorizing these textbooks, the Japanese government has, since the 1990s, begun a process of discussing the Second World War more frankly than ever before (Selden, 2000). The Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, established in 1996, can be said to be a rear-guard reaction to this spirit of frankness. Its members, all volunteers, claim to be united by their concern about the current state of history education in Japan, which they feel is coloured by a self-hating perception of history. The membership represents all segments of society, and includes corporate executives, business owners, scholars, novelists, critics, artists, business people, engineers, educators, homemakers, and students. They have even published their own history and moral textbooks as 'model textbooks' for the government, and these are sold (unlike other textbooks) in public bookshops (Nobukatsu, 2001).

The controversy in history textbooks must be looked at from multiple viewpoints. Until now, Japanese and international writers have either taken a left- or right-wing position. But a full analysis requires a more nuanced approach. On the one hand, it cannot be ignored that the 'concerns' of The Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform suggest a refusal to learn from history, which, if strengthened and taken to its ultimate conclusions, could result in a possible resurgence of fascism and nationalism as witnessed by the country less than a century ago. But on the other hand, it is also the case that many illustrations in the textbooks are extreme: the picture of the painting of a Japanese soldier cutting off the breasts of his Chinese captive, for example, (Chugaku shakai - Rekishiteki Bunya, 1993, p 254) is, as the

Textbook Reform Society argues, based on lack of historical evidence (The Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, 1998, p 5).

### **Controversy in Indian History Textbooks**

By contrast, in India, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has taken an ultranationalistic stance, reinforcing Hindutva values and intervening in the educational curriculum to alter the history syllabus (Delhi Historians Group, 2001; 2002). For instance, the new textbooks portray Muslims as invaders of a Hindu country.

History textbooks in India are published by the National Council of Education and Research Training (NCERT). These textbooks are used by public and private schools under the Central Board of Education. NCERT Director, J.S. Rajput has sought to delete from the textbooks for Class XI and Class XII<sup>3</sup>, historical facts that run counter to popular Hindu beliefs, such as the eating of beef by Hindus (Chandra, 2001; Dev, 2001; Sharma, 1980; Thapar, 1987). Rajput claims to have received 50,000 letters (Indian Express, 26 November 2001) - a claim he later changed to hundreds of thousands - of letters of protest regarding the (mis)representation of facts related to Hinduism (Rajput, 2001). Arjun Dev, who retired from the NCERT in February 2001, asserts however that in his career of about 30 years, no more than 100 letters were received.

Communalisation in education is a reflection of the increasing communalisation in Indian society. Since Indian independence, communal parties, Hindu, Muslim and secularists such as the Congress have found in religion a tool to increase their vote banks.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions, which relate to the relevance of Makiguchi and Gandhi in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, are the ones I am currently addressing at this stage of my PhD research.

#### **Main Question**

What was Makiguchi and Gandhi's contribution in over-riding the 'self-other' bifurcation as promoted in Japan and India by ultranationalists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century? Why and how, if at all, did Makiguchi and Gandhi formulate a new way of looking at 'community' and 'values' that would incorporate the 'self' and 'other'?

#### **Subsidiary Questions**

1. What were Makiguchi's and Gandhi's notions of community and values, self and other?
2. What were the germinating grounds for their thoughts?
3. How is what they were saying different from that of the ultranationalists of their respective countries?
4. What was the viability of the propositions of these two educators, *with* and *without* the given ultranationalistic trends that existed in their respective countries?

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<sup>3</sup> These texts are authored by the eminent historians of India – R.S. Sharma, Romila Thapar, Satish Chandra, Arjun Dev and Indira Dev.

5. What is the relevance of the two educators in the 21<sup>st</sup> century education, given the re-emergence of ultranationalistic trends in Japan and India?

## Research Methods

- An open-ended interview was conducted in spring 2002 with ultra-nationalist Professor Nobukatsu Fujioka of Tokyo University, author of the 'New History Textbook', a textbook that is not authorised by the Mombusho but seeks to be a model textbook which will instill in the Japanese a confidence in their nation's history.
- An open-ended interview was conducted in spring 2002 with Professor Bipan Chandra, eminent historian of India.
- Quantitative and qualitative analysis of history textbooks for Class IX and X in India and Junior and Middle School textbooks in Japan, related to the above controversies. These books have been obtained from Tokyo, New Delhi and the Georg-Eckert Institute in Braunschweig, and analysis is ongoing.
- Primary and secondary literature review of the educational works on and by Makiguchi and Gandhi.

## Comments/Suggestions

I would welcome any feedback on my research as set out. Any useful comments or suggestions on the following topics will be particularly appreciated:

1. The educational works of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and/or Mahatma Gandhi.
2. Nationalism and ultranationalism in Japan and India.

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