CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.0. Introduction

If textbooks are treated as a vehicle for education, the living word of the teacher has very little value. A teacher who teaches from textbooks does not impart originality to his pupils. He himself becomes a slave of textbooks and thus has no opportunity or occasion to be original. It therefore seems that the less textbooks there are the better it is for the teacher and his pupils. (Gandhi qtd. in Kumar par.28)

Textbook publishing in India is a multi-crore-rupee monolithic industry today and its guardians will not take lightly such a blatant yet edifying pronouncement. The author and the publisher are the chief players in textbook production and the propagation of the printed word is basic to their survival, let alone sustenance. Seen in the light of today’s academic environment, with its dependence on the printed page as an important and indispensable tool for instruction, the Mahatma’s words would shock, unsettle and horrify the lobbyists in the textbook publishing industry. It would also mean the diminishing and eventual obliteration of a sizeable source of income for the persons actually engaged in the creation of a textbook, namely, the authors.
Pedagogic practice without the textbook is inconceivable, even improbable, as the process of teaching and learning rests to a great extent on its fragile edifice.

Book publishing in India has had a hoary tradition. "The earliest books were long, narrow strips of palm-leaf and cotton fabric. Actual printing of books on paper was introduced by the Portuguese around 1556 A.D. However it was the East India Company that had to give in to the persistent efforts by Christian missionaries to print propagation materials in spite of its preliminary reluctance to develop printing facilities in India" (Israel 1-4). Thereafter, "the major contribution of two hundred years of British colonial rule to Indian publishing is an internal market for books in the English language — a market that persists and even grows despite the end of direct colonial domination [...] This has had a profound effect on Indian publishing since independence" (Israel 56).

"With strong moorings in the colonial education system the textbook as it is used in Indian schools today, aims at acculturating Indian children and youth" (Kumar, Worth Teaching 26), a policy propagated by the colonisers. The chief motive behind educating the natives was to ensure a steady supply of educated Indians who would act as middle-men between the English colonisers and the Indian population. That motive (of creating middle-men) is irrelevant today. However textbooks, even on random examination, continue to adhere to and thrive on alien, imported pedagogy — i.e. content and methodology are still not wholly customised to suit the Indian context. Nevertheless, the
evolution of the textbook from a colonial legacy to an English Language Teaching tool provides a fascinating study. The textbook remains a potent, powerful, sometimes under-used commodity, which has "practical and symbolic functions" (Worth Teaching 24) within the community in which it operates. Whether it curtails teacher creativity and/or learner originality is a debatable point. That it still reflects the ethos of a bygone era is obvious and in today's circumstances where textbook writing is mired in religious and socio-political controversy, the question foremost in our minds is: should education be politicised? Also, given the textbook's dominant status in the curriculum, its potential has been and continues to be exploited by generations of publishers and authors.

The author and the publisher are the two pillars of the publishing trade. One is redundant without the other. Moreover, there are certain unique features in textbook publishing: firstly, the interdependent nature of the activity and secondly, a "surprising lack of awareness of one another's true constraints and priorities" (Sheldon 3). This ignorance (sometimes indifference) and the negative fallout of such an attitude is the preoccupation of this study; but before launching into the debate it is imperative to define the terms textbook, author and publisher to avoid terminological confusion.
1.1. **ELT Textbooks, ELT Materials**

How do ELT textbooks differ from ELT materials? *It is a fine line that* separates textbooks from materials, and the definitions of Brian Tomlinson (1998) and Jack C. Richards (2001) clarify this distinction.

A coursebook is a textbook which provides the core materials for a course. It aims to provide as much as possible in one book and is designed so that it could serve as the only book which the learners necessarily use during a course. Such a book usually includes work on grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, functions and the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. (Tomlinson ix)

Tomlinson (op. cit.) goes on to say that the term ‘language-teaching materials’ is commonly associated with text or coursebooks. However, the broader and more pragmatic meaning would be anything which is deliberately used to increase the learners’ knowledge and/or experience of the language.

For Jack C. Richards

textbooks are a key component in most language programmes. In some situations they serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom. They may provide the basis for the content of the lessons, the balance of skills taught and the kinds of language
practice the students take part in. In other situations, the textbook may serve primarily to supplement the teacher's instruction. For learners, the textbook may provide the major source of contact they have with the language apart from input provided by the teacher. In the case of inexperienced teachers textbooks may also serve as a form of teacher training — they provide ideas on how to plan and teach lessons as well as formats that teachers can use. Much of the language teaching that occurs throughout the world today could not take place without the extensive use of commercial textbooks. Learning how to use and adapt textbooks is hence an important part of a teacher's professional knowledge. (Richards, 2001 par.1)

The difference between the two, textbooks and materials, can be described as: “textbooks differ from language teaching materials in that materials can be anything that is used to help teach language learners. It can be in the form of a textbook, a workbook, a cassette, a CD-ROM, a video, a photocopied handout, a newspaper, a paragraph written on a whiteboard: anything which presents or informs about the language being learned” (Tomlinson xi). In other words, textbooks are just one of the types of materials produced for language learning. This research is concerned with commercially produced English Language Teaching textbooks. The writing and publishing of
these and the relationship between the two parties engaged in its production is the focus of the study.

1.2. The Author

Writing is fun, because it is creative. Writing can be frustrating, when ideas don't come. Writing brings joy, when inspiration comes, when your hand cannot keep up with the speed of your thoughts. Writing is absorbing — the best materials are written in ‘trances’. Writing improves with practice. Writing is addictive. (Prowse 136)

Creator, originator, maker, inventor, producer — these are some of the words synonymous with the word author and the common thread of meaning that binds all the words is: fountainhead. The author thus has an almost sacred status and the reasons are twofold: firstly, as a creative genius and secondly, as a person who wields the power to mould minds, the author as a social animal has an exalted position and to repeat the oft-quoted adage, the pen is indeed mightier than the sword. The germ of an idea, that spark of originality is what triggers the whole process of writing and in that the writer of textbooks is no different from the writer of fiction. Both need the benevolence of the muse to carry out the task of germinating that first burst of inspiration, to nurture and nourish it, to attain fruition.
"But being a writer is hard and lonely at times" (Maley, 2003 screen1) and one of the main constraints imposed on the textbook author is the syllabus. The creative potential has to be tailored to fit the framework preordained by the straitjacketed syllabus, and it hinders and curtails the natural creativity of the writer. Top this up with the limitations of time and the constant threat posed by deadlines, and textbook writing is quite literally a race against time. Intertwined with these difficulties are the ever present, often overbearing, editorial interventions. The author, especially a well-established one, is never comfortable when told to revamp the text. As the author he is a recognisable authority on his subject and will not take kindly to interference on issues that fall within the purview of his experience and expertise. How then does the publisher handle this "neglected and thorny issue" (Sheldon 2) without jeopardising his relationship with the author? This is indeed one of the primary obstacles in the path of author-publisher relations and needs to be tackled with kid gloves. Considering that both are working towards the common goal of selling the book, it would do neither any harm to be fully aware of the constraints under which the other operates. In fact it would ease the rites of passage for both and the responsibility to see it work lies equally with the author and the publisher.
1.3. **The Publisher**

Publishers are not necessarily either philanthropists or rogues. As a working hypothesis think of them as ordinary human beings trying to earn their living at an unusually difficult occupation. It is easy to become a publisher but difficult to remain one, or to remain independent; the mortality in infancy is higher than in any other trade or profession. (Unwin 15)

The publisher is a businessman and is faced with the unenviable task of striking a balance between a sound pedagogic framework and a healthy balance sheet. In most cases author-publisher confrontations stems from what the publisher sees as insensitivity on the part of the author for market-ruled or market-governed circumstances. The market place for books is as demanding and unstable as for any other commodity and the publisher is constrained to oblige and accommodate vagaries in market conditions apart from author compulsions. Commercially viable is the most important phrase in the publisher's dictionary. Self-interest is the predominant sentiment but no publisher is a “free agent” (Sriraman 2002): i.e. he doesn’t have the freedom to publish whatever he wants. Starting with author interference, the publisher has other hurdles in his path like cantankerous members of Boards of Studies, who have the final say in textbook prescription and the ever present market determiners.
The argument is plain enough. Personal experience and hearsay coupled with theoretical evidence have found a grey area in the author-publisher interface. What this thesis aims to do is analyse the playing field, monitor the factors that create friction in this two-way relationship, explore the fuzzy areas that need to be redefined with respect to more interaction between the two, and finally to put down in black and white, the ways and means of ensuring the smooth transition of one man's or woman's brain child into the highly competitive world of commercially produced textbooks. The aim is to investigate whether the constraints and compromises both the creator and the nurturer of teaching materials confront are for real, or whether they are just some of the obstacles — financial, egocentric, bureaucratic — that are part and parcel of any partnership between equals. For ultimately, even when their viewpoints differ, both author and publisher are conscious of the fact that they are united and bound by this commonness of purpose: the success of the book. "Traded commodity" (Kitto 76) "commercial ephemera," "physical artefact" (Sheldon 2, 8) a textbook is all these and more. But as a classroom tool its role is that of disseminator of information, information that is accurate, realistic, interesting, down-to-earth, but which at the same time nudges, cajoles and jogs the imagination of the person who peruses its contents. Given the high stakes, both in its influence in the classroom and as a saleable product, the textbook has to be looked at closely and with it the people involved in its production.
The terrain is relatively un-trodden and the area largely uncharted, but there is the promise of arriving at or unearthing something of significance.

Whatever the inroads made on classroom pedagogy by the advent of newer and more sophisticated technology, the solid foundation that a textbook offers cannot be replicated, let alone replaced by modern age gizmos. E-books might offer an alternative to the traditional printed text in more affluent societies, but in a country where the average classroom is equipped with nothing more than a blackboard, the textbook will hold sway for a very long time as the undisputed tool or disseminator of information. This study posits the view or proceeds on the assumption that given the all-pervasive nature of the textbook in the academic environment in the country, with nearly 75% of all publishing comprising textbook publishing, an awareness of the workings of this machinery would be an enlightening if not eye-opening experience. For apart from the fact that the onus of creating and sustaining a ‘good’ textbook rests on the author and publisher, such a study should be relevant on moralistic lines too, for the textbook is seen as something that is capable of, apart from a myriad other factors, moulding man into a social animal. Good textbook production should be the norm rather than the exception and a situation should evolve whereby professionalism and pedagogy do not take a backseat in the pursuit of achieving the now-utopian goal of sound, saleable teaching materials.
1.4. **Aims of the Study**

To state that there is little love lost between the author and the publisher would appear as an extreme pronouncement. But there is no denying the fact that this relationship is fraught with some amount of tension, strain and stress. This study aims to firstly, recognise and confirm the existence of certain mutual misgivings and the severity of the condition. Secondly, it tries to analyse the rationale behind the workings of both entities by studying the features of their individual operations and as associates. Thirdly, the study explores ways of reducing conflict by outlining strategies that would not result in an unhealthy compromise on either side and offers recommendations for “building a bridge of understanding between the two parties” (Ramanujam 1).

1.5. **Relevance of the Study**

The relevance of this study at the macrocosmic level of ESL studies and at the microcosmic level of ELT textbook publishing works on the assumption that textbooks are here to stay. Both from personal writing experiences and from the analyses of view points and opinions of professionals in the field, it is obvious that textbook writing is a very complex activity and involves the delicate balance of pedagogic and commercial variables. Many of these variables are often contradictory in nature and are the main reasons for disharmony and strife in the relationship. And further, to avoid the escalation of the conflict into confrontation, it is understood that both writers and publishers have equal responsibility in carrying out their part of the contract without
detriment to the other. The other assumption is that authors and publishers by having a common agenda will deal with the differences in their interaction in a cerebral rather than impulsive manner. Ignorance is often the root cause of a lot of misapprehension and it is inferred that a number of authors are quite oblivious to publisher constraints and vice versa. Awareness of both scenarios, the creative process with its capriciousness and the volatile nature of all business activity, the scope for fault-finding by either group is reduced, if not eliminated. This study’s relevance and value lies in its attempt to bring to light some of the issues listed above that are part of the author-publisher interface and that haven’t hitherto been discussed or analysed to this extent. And it identifies with Brumfit (1987) when he says that “written materials are central to almost all language teaching, yet they are discussed all too rarely. This study intends to fill that gap” (Preface n.pag.).

1.6. Scope and Limitations of the Study

1. Based on first and second hand experiences the study confines itself to the author-publisher interface as is evident in the production of ELT textbooks for school children, specifically middle school (Classes IV-VII).

2. The geographical region is limited to the three south Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. This is a limitation of sorts because it assumes that the analysis of a
limited demographic area would necessarily be a replication of all others. The study analyses only the experiences of a select band of private publishers and authors. The larger, state-run, government-sponsored and controlled textbook boards or bureaus that monopolised publishing have not been investigated. It is however used as a point of reference.

3. Authors with several years of writing experience are the focus of discussion and novice or amateur writers are not included because here again they work to a different set of variables.

4. The field work is confined to face-to-face interviews with a small group of stakeholders in textbook writing and publishing. Their collective knowledge is crystallised and interpreted in order to arrive at a via media that would pave the way for a more balanced author-publisher relationship.

1.7. Conclusion

Why is there a lack or dearth of communication between the two parties involved in the textbook question, namely, the author and the publisher? How does one negotiate within the schema of this love-hate relationship the mechanics of materials production? What are the expectations of one from the other and how do they go about the delicate task of not trampling on each other's toes while trying to tap dance? Is there evidence of a supercilious
attitude towards one another or is it just one of the myths perpetrated by less informed outsiders? Is the relationship symbiotic (Sasikumar 2000) or is it parasitical? Are there real, palpable constraints within the interface and do they entail the possibility of compromise or concession from either side? These and a host of other questions need to be answered in order to try to understand the complex relationship which exists between the author and the publisher. The author-publisher interface opens up the field of materials production to close scrutiny, placing the parties concerned under microscopic examination, by trying to grasp the inner workings of both as they interact at personal and professional levels. The exploration into the materials production jungle will try to unravel some of the mysteries and the tangles surrounding this partnership between equals. Chapter II will examine the ‘problem’ and its expression in ESL/EFL literature in order to get a holistic view of the interaction between author and publisher.