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Contemporary issues mirrored into the past: creating dialogs with mathematical procedures from the Indian subcontinent

Abstract – There are many ways in which dialogs or bridges can be created between the past and the present. Two cases studies will be given here, with a focus on the Indian subcontinent and its mathematics. The first example will take the contemporary politics of re-hinduizing the mathematical curricula in India as a mirror to look at the different techniques to multiply numbers known from ancient Sanskrit texts. This reflexion on contemporary hands-on pedagogy will have us reinvest the history of numerical notations and the appropriation of history of science by all sorts of people including flying yogis. In the second example, we will see how the translation of Indian mathematical texts into English in the nineteenth century was taken up by mathematicians such as Chasles and Hankel to reflect for the first on the relations between indeterminate analysis and geometry, and for the second on modes of proof in mathematics. There reflexions raise questions that we can address to ancient texts as well as to contemporary mathematicians.