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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# Dancing Girl, Meet Modest Imagination

 **INDIAN EXPRESS**16 June 2026 · **HISTORY & CULTURE** · **GS1**

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

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# Dancing Girl, Meet Modest Imagination

 **The Indian Express**    16 June 2026    **GS1**

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## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"Should the state edit how an ancient artefact is depicted to suit contemporary sensibilities, or present heritage as it actually was?"*

Source: [Original editorial](#)  [The Indian Express](#)

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## WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

A new **NCERT Class 9 textbook** briefly shaded out the famous **Dancing Girl bronze** of Mohenjo-daro, drawing public criticism before the image was restored. For an aspirant, the episode is a vivid **GS1** entry point into **Harappan art and the Indus Valley Civilisation**, and a debate on how heritage should be taught.

## THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

Shading out the **Mohenjo-daro Dancing Girl** imposed a **false standard of modesty** on a 4,500-year-old icon of Harappan bronze art. Editing the past to fit present sensibility distorts the record and patronises students. After **public outcry the image was restored**, showing scrutiny works. Heritage education should present artefacts **in their own context**, trusting students with the past in full.

## THE ISSUE, DECODED

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ELEMENT	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT MATTERS
<b>Dancing Girl</b>	A bronze figurine from Mohenjo-daro	A masterpiece of Harappan lost-wax casting
<b>Lost-wax casting</b>	An ancient bronze-making technique	Shows Harappan metallurgical sophistication
<b>Shading-out</b>	Obscuring the artefact in a textbook	Imposes anachronistic modesty on the past
<b>Restoration</b>	Reinstating the image after outcry	Proof that public scrutiny corrects choices

## THE ANALYSIS: WHY EDITING THE PAST MISLEADS

- 1 **A touchstone artefact.** The Dancing Girl is among the finest products of Indus Valley bronze art, central to any account of Indian art history.
- 2 **Anachronism** (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/anachronism/>). Applying present-day modesty to a 4,500-year-old object distorts how the past is understood.
- 3 **Patronising students.** Erasure assumes young people cannot handle their own heritage honestly.
- 4 **Scrutiny works.** The swift restoration shows public debate can correct well-meaning but misguided editing.

## DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

*the **Dancing Girl**, a bronze figurine from **Mohenjo-daro**, made by the **lost-wax (cire perdue)** technique, around **4,500 years old**. **Civilisation:** the **Indus Valley / Harappan Civilisation** (mature phase roughly 2600 to 1900 BCE); major sites include Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, Dholavira, Rakhigarhi, Lothal. **Other Harappan art:** the **Priest-King** steatite bust, terracotta figurines, painted pottery, seals (the Pashupati seal). **Body:** **NCERT** designs school curricula and textbooks.*

## THE DEBATE

**Argument for editorial caution:** Textbook designers must weigh age-appropriateness and local sensibilities when presenting visual material to school students.

**Argument against erasure:** Editing an ancient artefact to fit modern propriety distorts the historical record and signals a lack of confidence in owning the past.

**The balanced verdict:** Age-appropriate design is legitimate, but the answer is richer context, not erasure. Heritage should be shown as it was, with students trusted to understand it.

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

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*When the past is presented through a present-day filter, ask what is lost in translation. The test of heritage education is whether it teaches an artefact in its own context, not whether it makes the past comfortable for the present. Confidence in a culture shows in its willingness to display the past honestly.*

## DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

4,500-year-old artefact -> shown through modern modesty filter -> shaded out in textbook  
-> public outcry -> restoration -> heritage shown in full

## THE WAY FORWARD

- ① **Show heritage accurately.** Present artefacts as they are, with context on technique, society and meaning.
- ② **Build art-historical literacy.** Train curriculum designers to understand the material they edit.
- ③ **Resist moral filters.** Do not impose contemporary propriety on ancient objects.
- ④ **Welcome scrutiny.** Treat public debate as a corrective, as the restoration showed.

## THE TAKEAWAY BOX

*Heritage education and the danger of filtering the past through present-day sensibility. **Lift line:** “A confident culture shows its past as it was.” **Prelims hooks:** Dancing Girl; Mohenjo-daro; lost-wax casting; Harappan sites; Priest-King; Pashupati seal. **Ethics/Interview angle:** The state’s responsibility to present heritage truthfully versus the urge to sanitise it. **PYQ linkage:** UPSC has asked on features of the Indus Valley Civilisation and on Harappan art and town planning. **Connects to:** Indian art history, museum curation, curriculum policy, cultural confidence.*

**Sources:** *Indian Express* (<https://indianexpress.com/section/opinion/>), *PIB* (<https://pib.gov.in/>)

Source: Dancing Girl, Meet Modest Imagination — Ujjyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

**KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE**

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Shading out the Mohenjo-daro Dancing Girl bronze in a new Class 9 textbook imposed an anachronistic standard of modesty on a 4,500-year-old icon of Harappan art, and the right response, restoration after public outcry, shows that students should be trusted with their heritage in full.

 **SUPPORTING**

- The Dancing Girl is among the finest examples of lost-wax bronze casting from the Indus Valley Civilisation and a touchstone of Indian art history.
- Editing how an ancient artefact is shown to suit present-day notions of propriety distorts the historical record and patronises students.
- The swift restoration of the image after criticism demonstrates that public scrutiny can correct well-meaning but misguided editorial choices.

 **COUNTER**

Some argue that textbook designers must consider age-appropriateness and local sensibilities when presenting visual material to young students.

 **WAY FORWARD**

Present heritage accurately and in context, train curriculum designers in art-historical literacy, and resist imposing contemporary moral filters on ancient artefacts.


**MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK**

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**QUESTION**

*"Heritage education must present the past on its own terms, not through the filter of present-day sensibility." Discuss with reference to the depiction of Harappan art. (150 words)*

**INTRODUCTION**

How a society teaches its ancient past reveals how confidently it owns it. The brief shading-out of the Dancing Girl was a small editorial act with a large message.

**BODY**

The Dancing Girl of Mohenjo-daro is one of the most celebrated objects of the Indus Valley Civilisation, a small bronze figurine cast by the lost-wax method some 4,500 years ago, prized for its naturalism and poise. When a new Class 9 textbook shaded out the figure, it applied a contemporary standard of modesty to an artefact that predates such notions by millennia.

The problem is not merely aesthetic. Editing how the past is shown to fit present sensibility distorts the historical record, deprives students of an honest encounter with their heritage, and quietly suggests that the past must be corrected before it can be taught.

Heritage education should do the opposite: it should equip young people to understand an artefact in its own context, the technology that made it, the society that produced it, and the meaning it carried then, rather than to recoil from it through a modern filter. The restoration of the image after public criticism is the encouraging part of the episode.

It shows that scrutiny works and that the instinct to trust students with their heritage in full ultimately prevailed. There is a reasonable concern about age-appropriateness in textbook design, but the answer to that is better context, not erasure.

**CONCLUSION**

A confident culture shows its past as it was. The Dancing Girl needed no editing; what needed correcting was the impulse to edit her, and public outcry did exactly that.


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