



The social sciences are fields of academic scholarship which explore aspects of human society and complex human relationships. Social science perspectives and knowledge are indispensable to building the knowledge base for a just and peaceful society. The social sciences encompass diverse concerns of society, and include a wide range of content drawn from the disciplines of history, geography, political science, economics, sociology and anthropology.

The National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF) says that studying the social sciences provides learners the social, cultural, and analytical skills required to adjust to an increasingly interdependent world.

The social sciences carry a normative responsibility of creating a strong sense of human values - namely, freedom, trust, mutual respect, and respect for diversity. Social science teaching should aim at generating in students a critical moral and mental energy, making them alert to social forces that threaten these values. The disciplines that make up the social sciences have distinct methodologies that often justify the retaining of boundaries. At the same time, cross-disciplinary approaches that are possible should also be indicated. For an enabling curriculum, certain themes that facilitate interdisciplinary thinking need to be incorporated.

According to the NCF, social science content should aim at raising students' awareness through critically exploring and questioning familiar social reality. The possibilities of including new dimensions and concerns, especially in view of students' own life experiences, are considerable. Selecting and organising material into a meaningful curriculum, one that will enable students to develop a critical understanding of society, is therefore a challenging task.

Emphasis has to be laid on developing concepts and the ability to analyse sociopolitical realities rather than on the mere retention of information without comprehension.

The NCF recognizes the **popular perception** of social science as a 'non-utility' subject. Low self-esteem governs the classroom-transaction process with both teachers and students feeling uninterested in comprehending its contents. From the initial stages of schooling, it is often suggested to students that the natural sciences are 'superior' to the social sciences, and are the domain of 'bright' students. It is believed that the social sciences merely transmit information and are text centered.

Content, therefore, needs to focus on a conceptual understanding rather than lining up facts to be memorized for examinations. Emphasis has to be laid on developing concepts and the ability to analyse sociopolitical realities rather than on the mere retention of information without comprehension. It is also necessary to recognise that the social sciences lend themselves to scientific inquiry just as much as the natural and physical sciences do, as well as to indicate ways in which the methods employed by the social sciences are distinct but in no way inferior to those of the natural and physical sciences.

The NCF proposes a fundamental **epistemic shift**

- From the textbook as the only source of information to the textbook as suggestive of a particular way of understanding issues.
- From the 'mainstream' account of the past and its past to one where more groups and more regions are taken into account.
- From utilitarianism to egalitarianism.
- From the textbook being perceived as a closed box to the textbook as a dynamic document

This shift has been suggested to accommodate multiple ways of imagining the Indian nation where the national perspective needs to be balanced with reference to the local. At the same time, Indian history should not be taught in isolation and there should be reference to developments in other parts of the world. It is suggested that instead of

civics, the term political science be used. civics appeared in the Indian school curriculum in the colonial period against the background of increasing 'disloyalty' among Indians towards the Raj. Emphasis on obedience and loyalty were the key features of civics. Political science treats civil society as the sphere that produces sensitive, interrogative, deliberative, and transformative citizens.

Gender concerns need to be addressed in terms of making the perspectives of women integral to the discussion of any historical event and contemporary concerns. This requires an epistemic shift from the patriarchal preconceptions that inform much of the social studies at present. Concerns related to the health of children and social aspects of changes during adolescence (like changing relationships with parents, peer group, the opposite sex and the adult world in general) need to be addressed appropriately. The concept of human rights has a universal frame of reference and the NCF recommends that children are introduced to universal values in a manner appropriate for their age.

The NCF envisions the study of social sciences to **enable** children to

- Understand the society in which they live
- Learn how society is structured, managed, and governed
- Understand forces seeking to transform and redirect society in various ways
- Appreciate values enshrined in the Indian Constitution
- Grow up as active, responsible, and reflective members of society
- Learn to respect differences of opinion, lifestyle, and cultural practices
- Question and examine received ideas, institutions, and practices
- Acquire pleasure in reading, by providing them with enjoyable reading material
- Undertake activities that will help them develop social and life skills

The **objectives** of teaching social sciences at various stages as detailed in the NCF are:

1. Primary Stage

- Develop skills of observation, identification, and

classification

- Develop in the child a holistic understanding of the environment with emphasis on the interrelationship of the natural and the social environments
- Sensitise the child to social issues and develop in him/her a respect for difference and diversity

2. Upper Primary Stage

- Develop an understanding about the earth as the habitat of humankind and other forms of life
- Initiate the learner into a study of her/his own region, state, and country in the global context
- Initiate the learner into a study of India's past, with references to contemporary developments in other parts of the world
- Introduce the learner to the functioning and dynamics of social and political institutions and processes of the country

At this stage, the subject areas of the social sciences—drawing their content from history, geography, political science, and economics—will be introduced.

3. Secondary Stage

- Develop analytical and conceptual skills to
- Understand the processes of economic and social change and development
- Critically examine social and economic issues and challenges like poverty, child labour, destitution, illiteracy
- Understand the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democratic and secular society
- Understand the roles and responsibilities of the state in the fulfillment of constitutional obligations
- Understand the processes of change and development in India in relation to the world economy and polity
- Appreciate the rights of local communities in relation to their environment, the judicious utilisation of resources, as well as the need for the conservation of the natural environment

At the secondary stage, the social sciences comprise elements of history, geography, political science, and economics. The

main focus should be on contemporary India.

4. Higher Secondary Stage

- Assist students to explore their interests and aptitudes in order to choose appropriate university courses and/or careers
- Encourage them to explore higher levels of knowledge in different disciplines
- Promote problem-solving abilities and creative thinking in the citizens of tomorrow
- Introduce students to different ways of collecting and processing data and information in specific disciplines, and help them arrive at conclusions
- Generate new insights and knowledge in the process

According to the NCF, The teaching of the social sciences must adopt **methods** that promote creativity, aesthetics and critical perspectives; and enable children to draw relationships between past and present to understand changes taking place in society. Problem solving, dramatisation and role play are some strategies that could be employed. Teaching

should utilise audio-visual materials including photographs, charts and maps, and replicas of archaeological and material cultures.

In order to make the process of learning participative, there is a need to shift from mere imparting of information to debate and discussion. This approach to learning will keep both the learner and the teacher alive to social realities. Concepts should be clarified to students through lived experiences of individuals and communities. It has often been observed that cultural, social and class differences generate their own biases, prejudices and attitudes in classroom contexts. The approach to teaching therefore needs to be open-ended. Teachers should discuss different dimensions of social reality in the class, and work towards creating increasing self-awareness amongst themselves and the learners.

In **textbooks** and in the classroom, content, language, and images should be comprehensible, gender-sensitive, and critical of social inequalities of all kinds. Textbooks themselves should be seen as opening up avenues for further enquiry, and students should be encouraged to go beyond the textbook to further reading and observation.

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