

## Special Issue on Social Science in Schools

### In this Issue

- ❖ Contested Terrain of School Social Science
- ❖ Facing History and Ourselves: Studying History as a Moral Enterprise
- ❖ Role of Projects, Field Work and Discovery in Assessment
- ❖ Education for Democracy: the Relevance of Social Science Education in Schools

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## From the Editor

**I**t is a pleasure to bring to you the XV issue of Learning Curve. From the word go, this issue saw more debate and discussion amongst the editorial team as compared to our previous issues. I guess that was to be expected given the very nature of the subject and the high level of polemics that engulfs it.

One of the challenges was to bring 'on board' a diverse set of authors to represent all points of view on the spectrum. The effort has been to give our readers an honest and comprehensive view of the nature of social science as a subject. Beginning with the purpose of social science in society, and what the National Curriculum Framework says about the subject to the many moral conflicts while teaching it, pedagogic dilemmas, and a look at social science education across the world – we have tried to put together a range of views, perspectives, suggestions and critique on an assemblage of topics.

Each issue of Learning Curve has one special moment that I try and share in this page. For the lead essay of this issue we approached Prof Andre Beteille - not sure whether he would write for the Learning Curve. But even as we were humming and hawing through our request, Prof Beteille put us at ease with a simple assurance that we will have his essay. Within a few weeks there was occasion for Prof Beteille to visit Bangalore and an opportunity for me to meet him. Having greeted me, Prof Beteille turned to a side table, pulled out a neatly typed and stapled set of papers and handed them to me - with a twinkle in his eye. I let out a whoop of delight and hugged the article all the way home. Once again, a distinguished panel of contributors has helped us to discuss a spectrum of topics under the chosen theme. And, as always, they were very gracious in meeting the deadline, despite their busy schedules.

Some of our contributors have done much more. They have helped the editorial team in their editorial discussions; they suggested topics

and reached out to other authors, egging them to write for this issue. Such friends are precious indeed.

My own memories of social science (called social studies in those days) are pleasant; it is not one of having to memorize dates without meaning. On the contrary, it is of Mr. T V Chari, our social science teacher at Kendriya Vidyalaya, talking to us impromptu about Tutankhamen in our class on the day that there was a mention of him in the newspaper. It is about Chari, again, talking to us about great writers like Homer for two days on the trot or about World War I and II - when all these were not in the "syllabus". There was always enquiry, evidence and a cogent putting-together of it all, when Chari discussed these events.

As I said in the beginning, the editorial team's passion and love for the subject permeates the issue. But more important is whether or not we have met your expectations in our treatment of social science education in schools. Your candid feedback will help us to continuously improve subsequent editions.





**S. Giridhar**  
Head – Programs & Advocacy


# CONTENTS

Issue XV : August 2010  
Social Science in Schools


## Section A: The Broad Picture


	Social Science in Schools	-Andre Beteille	7
--	---------------------------	-----------------	---

	Contested Terrain of School Social Science	-Poonam Batra	10
--	--	---------------	----


	The 'Deficient' Status of Social Science in India - Reasons and Corrective Measures	-Rishikesh BS	18
--	---	---------------	----



	Education for Democracy – The Relevance of Social Science Education in Schools	-Anjali Noronha	23
---	--	-----------------	----

	Vexing Questions in Social Studies	-Hriday Kant Dewan	28
--	------------------------------------	--------------------	----



	Social Sciences and the National Curriculum Framework	-Indu Prasad	36
--	---	--------------	----

## Section B: Some Perspectives

	Learning Social Science - What is Right and Wrong?	-Vimala Ramachandran	40
--	--	----------------------	----


	Texts in School	-Rashmi Paliwal & C N Subramaniam	43
			


	Building Tomorrow's Citizens: A Brief Survey of Social Science Education Across the Globe	-Ann Horwitz	48
--	---	--------------	----


	Facing History and Ourselves: Studying History as a Moral Enterprise	-Adam Strom & Martin Sleeper	52
			


	Maps and Politics	-M H Qureshi	56
---	-------------------	--------------	----

	Geography in Daily Life	-Tapasya Saha	60
---	-------------------------	---------------	----


	Oh! Panchayat: Loose Lessons while Doing Social Science Text Books	-Alex M George	64
---	--	----------------	----


	Geography Education for the 21st Century	-Chandrashekhar Balachandran	68
--	--	------------------------------	----


	Issues in History Education: Perspectives from England and the USA	-Liz Dawes Duraisingh	72
---	--	-----------------------	----

	The Dilemma and Challenge of School Economics	-Arvind Sardana	75
---	---	-----------------	----

## Section C: In the Classroom

	Review of New NCERT Social Science Textbooks	-Sampurna Biswas	80
---	--	------------------	----

	Taking Geography to Heart	-Maria Athaide	83
---	---------------------------	----------------	----

	Vignettes - The Journey of a Class through Civilizations	-Sita Natarajan	86
---	--	-----------------	----



Does Neutral = Controversial? **90**  
-Mangala Nanda



How History Shaped Our World **134**  
-Gurmeet Kaur & Mariam Sahib

## Section D: The Role of Assessment



Assesment of Social Science in Schools - Our **95**  
Experiences, Experiments and Learnings  
-Rashmi Paliwal



The Social Sciences - How Scientific are **136**  
they?

-Manas Sarma



Beyond Retention: Meaningful Assessment **106**  
in Social Science  
-Jayashree Nambiar

## Section F: Film Review and Resource Kit



Quality vs. Quantity **111**  
-Tapasya Saha



Beyond Dates and Fights! **138**  
-Umashanker Periodi



Exams: The Need to Restore Credibility **114**  
and Sanctity  
-R S Krishna

Resource Kit **141**



Role of Projects, Field Work and Discovery **118**  
in Assessment  
-Sriparna

## Section E: Personal Reflections



The Importance of Being Useless **122**  
-Dhanwanti Nayak



Social Science - A Springboard for Life **125**  
-Richa Bhavanam



Why the Social Sciences Never Pulled Me **128**  
-Neeraja Raghavan



The Lens that Social Science Conferred **131**  
upon Me  
-Nidhi Tiwari



# **SECTION-A**

**The Broad Picture**

The social sciences are now taught, in one form or another, in schools throughout the country. This was not generally the case in the past. Before independence, the teaching of subjects such as sociology, political science and even economics was confined mainly to the universities and colleges. After independence there was a steady expansion in the teaching of the social sciences in universities and colleges, and the demand soon grew for their introduction in schools.

The social sciences are sometimes described as the policy sciences, although the contribution of disciplines such as sociology and political science to the making of policy is indirect and limited. In any case, it would be unrealistic to aim to make school students into policy makers or even policy advisers. At the same time, a general awareness of how economy, polity and society work can help them in later life to understand the role of policy in public life. It can provide them with a basis for taking an informed view as to why some policies and not others are adopted, and, among those that are adopted, why some succeed and others fail.

My view is that the more significant contribution of the social sciences is not in the training for policy making but in the education for citizenship. An educated citizenry is indispensable for the proper working of a democracy. One does not pluck the qualities that make a good citizen out of the air; one needs a certain kind of education to acquire and promote them. To be a good citizen it is not enough to be well informed about physical and biological phenomena; the good citizen must also have an informed understanding of the social world of which he is a part.

*But in sociology there are differences of opinion not only at the frontiers of the discipline but also at its very foundations. It is this that makes the teaching of the subject particularly difficult for school teachers.*

Having pointed to the importance of an education in the social sciences, I must dwell a little on the difficulty of teaching

the social sciences at the school level. At that level it is far more difficult to teach sociology or political science than to teach mathematics or physics. I would like to make this point as emphatically as I

can, and then try to explain briefly why I believe it to be true. In what follows I will focus mainly on sociology and political science but what I say applies in a broad way to most of the other social sciences as well.

There is an absence of settled opinion on many if not most significant topics in sociology and political science. This makes the pedagogic problem for teachers who have to deal with pupils aged fourteen, fifteen or sixteen rather different in those subjects from the problems to which their counterparts who teach physics or chemistry have to attend. This fact is not sufficiently appreciated by those at the apex of policy making for schools.

Let me explain the nature of the problem a little more fully. My colleagues in the sciences, particularly the physicists, tell me that I greatly exaggerate the extent to which opinion is settled in their fields of study and research. They point out that at the frontiers of physics there is little settled opinion. This is indeed so, and bound to be so at the frontiers of any field of knowledge. But in sociology there are differences of opinion not only at the frontiers of the discipline but also at its very foundations. It is this that makes the teaching of the subject particularly difficult for school teachers.

I had the good fortune to be a teacher of sociology at a premier center of post-graduate study and research. After the students had settled in, I was able to indulge in the luxury of telling them that in our subject the question was more important than the answer. For advanced students I had developed the practice of administering tests at which I would ask each student to formulate his or her own question and write an answer to it, saying that the student would be evaluated on the question as well as the answer. But the students soon got wind of what I was up to, and then came prepared with questions from previous university examination papers as well as answers to those questions. Indian students are past masters at getting around the



snare and pitfalls of any examination system.

In teaching post-graduate students I felt it my obligation to tell the class that more often than not there was no one correct answer to a particular question. I am not sure that even at that level I convinced all my students. At the age of fifteen or sixteen the pupil wants to know what the correct answer to a question is so that she can do well in the examinations and get on with her life. The physics teacher or the chemistry teacher can satisfy the pupil much more easily without compromising his integrity than the teacher of sociology or political science.

The constraints of the examination system on both students and teachers cannot be wished out of existence. Those constraints can lead to serious distortions in the teaching of a subject like sociology. Both students and teachers see themselves as victims of the examination system. As a matter of fact, they have very little control over the system which tends to be overhauled periodically in ways that appear arbitrary, capricious and incomprehensible to the vast majority of them.

The compulsions of organizing examinations on the scale that we seem unable to escape creates relentless pressures for the standardization not only of examination questions and their expected answers, but also on teaching and writing of textbooks on which the teaching is based. Some subjects fare much better with standardization than others. Teachers and examiners in the social sciences do not wish to fall behind in the inflation of grades that has become a common feature of the examination system. Inevitably, examination and teaching in the social sciences tend to follow the pattern that was first established in the natural sciences and seem to work reasonably well there. This smoothens out the paradoxes and uncertainties that lie at the heart of social, political and economic life.

The teaching of the social sciences to school children is complicated by what may be called the 'value problem' in these disciplines. The separation of value judgments from judgments of reality - or 'ought' questions from 'is' questions - does not pose the same kind of challenges in the natural sciences that it does in the social sciences.

The social sciences deal with facts that are complex, amorphous and fluid. Any science has to treat with respect the facts as they are, whether those facts relate to nature or to society. In the natural sciences it is relatively easy to

insulate the observation, description and analysis of facts from the pressures of common sense and popular sentiment. This is not the case to the same extent when we deal with society, polity and economy. Our personal preferences creep into our perceptions and our representations of the facts with which we have to deal. The social sciences have developed their own methods for dealing with facts in an objective and systematic way. Those methods are not identical with the methods used in the natural sciences. But that does not mean that the social scientist is any more free than the natural scientist to use his common sense or his personal preference in place of the observation, description and analysis of the relevant facts whether in teaching or in research.



*Inevitably, examination and teaching in the social sciences tend to follow the pattern that was first established in the natural sciences and seem to work reasonably well there. This smoothens out the paradoxes and uncertainties that lie at the heart of social, political and economic life.*



Educated Indians have an irresistible urge to moralize and, in my experience, this urge is particularly strong among teachers. But moralizing cannot be a substitute for description and analysis according to the methods of science, whether natural or social science. Here, there is a difference between the two kinds of science. The teacher of physics can scarcely indulge his urge for moralizing while dealing with electrons and protons or the teacher of chemistry while dealing with acids and alkalis. Teachers in the social sciences, on the other hand, often feel that they have the freedom to do so while dealing with the family, the bureaucracy or the free market. As a consequence, they tend to present their preferences and prejudices as simply the values of a just society. This leaves some students confused while it makes others opinionated.

Some believe that teachers of social science have a special

responsibility to instill and foster the right values among their pupils. It is not clear, though, as to how exactly they are to do this, whether they should do it separately from the description and analysis of social facts or as an integral part of that process. To build a particular set of moral values into the description and analysis of society, polity and economy is a very difficult undertaking whose pitfalls should not be taken lightly. I referred earlier to disagreement in the social sciences about fundamental matters relating to concepts, methods and theories. It is over what should be regarded as the best values that this disagreement is likely to be most acute.

There are, of course, certain basic values embodied in the Constitution of India. The nature and significance of those values should be explained to all students and they should be encouraged by their teachers to adopt them. But the Constitution sets down its basic values in very broad and general terms. It is when we come to details and specifics that the real disagreements come to the surface. As they say, the devil is in the detail.

Should we strive to elaborate one single set of values within the framework of the Constitution for the education of all school students throughout the country? I am not at all sure as to how far we can or should go in that direction without violating the basic principle of liberal democracy which is the tolerance of a diversity of values, including a diversity of conceptions of the good society. If there is one thing that we ought to be proud of and cherish in the Indian tradition is its tolerance of the diversity of ways of life among the people of the country. Our zeal for the promotion of 'value-based

education' through the social sciences should not undermine that spirit.

The point about diversity of social practices and social values ought to be emphasized - when we speak of Indian society as a whole. India is a vast society with a multitude of languages, religions, tribes, castes, sects, associations and parties. To promote a single set of values or to advocate a single conception of the good society without offending the sentiments of one or another section of this vast and complex society is a difficult undertaking which few can accomplish effectively and tactfully.

I come back in the end to the observation with which I began: the contribution of social science teaching to the education for citizenship. Educating school students for citizenship requires first of all encouraging them to think clearly, systematically and objectively about the social as well as the natural world. Beyond that, in the social sciences, it is important to give them some knowledge and understanding about the varieties of economic, political and social arrangements in such a way that the description and analysis of facts is not subordinated to the preferences and prejudices of zealous teachers and writers of text-books.

Finally, if we believe that diversity is our greatest treasure, we must encourage our students to take a serious interest in this diversity and to value it. Here the most significant contribution of the social sciences to the education for citizenship will be to encourage our students to cultivate an enquiring attitude towards their own ways of life and a tolerant one towards other ways of life.

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### Social Sciences or Social Studies?

The relatively recent formulation of social science as a discipline, since the late 19th century, is well known. Even more recent is the evolution of social science as a school subject in terms of content, methods and theoretical foundations. The inability of social sciences to occupy a central place in the primary and secondary school systems has in fact been a matter of grave concern. Social sciences are systematically taught at the university level. What is taught at the primary and secondary levels is usually referred to as 'social studies'. Typically, history, geography and civics are taught in middle schools. High school students study political science, economics, sociology or psychology, as part of the humanities or arts streams. This is perhaps why the social sciences are not part of the school curricula as a coherent body of knowledge. Scholars have argued that global forces and communal forces along with parochial attacks on the universal nature of social sciences have led 'to reduce the nature of social sciences to that of mere social studies' (Chalam, 2002: 922). However, the nuanced emphasis on the term social studies as a school subject needs to be understood within a socio-historical perspective.

One of the earliest formulations of what should be taught in the name of social sciences in schools is based on the definition given by Edger Wesley (1937), in whose view 'the social studies are the social sciences simplified for pedagogical purposes.' While engaging with the question of the foundations of social studies, Lawton (1981: 36) defined a social studies curriculum as "...one which helps young individuals to develop into fully human adults by relating them to their society by means of appropriate knowledge and experience selected from the social sciences and other disciplines". He reiterates that even though the social studies curriculum is likely to vary with time as well as context, depending on the assumptions about the needs of the individual and society, an integration between the three aims of 'individual needs', 'academic subject-matter' and 'citizen education' needs to be achieved. Other scholars have pointed out the need to study social studies because society requires adults who know their rights and responsibilities as citizens and social studies can better achieve these goals. However, as asserted by Wronski (1981: 23), "...education for citizenship is not the exclusive property of social studies. Other subjects

such as literature, art, music, science and even sports contribute towards citizenship education."

With the increasing influence of humanistic psychology in education during the last two decades of the 20th century, social studies came to be regarded as an appropriate space for integrating ideas of citizenship education with the existing paradigm of child-centered approaches to school education. Within this frame, 'the most compelling feature of social studies (came to be) the almost insistent way it invites one to connect with one's (and other's) humanity' (Wishon et al., 1998).



*In most Indian classrooms, social sciences (referred to as social studies) are defined by what the textbook contains and how the subject-matter is presented and organised.*

More recently, reflecting on what he refers to as 'the social science wars', Evans (2004: 47) identifies five distinct camps in social studies, each with its own philosophy, beliefs and pedagogic practices. These include the traditional historians who support history as the core of social science; the advocates of social studies as social sciences; social efficiency educators who hope to create a smoothly controlled, efficient society; Deweyan experimentalists who focus on developing reflective thinking and social constructivists who cast social studies in social sciences in a leading role for transformation. In his view, whatever began as a struggle among interest groups 'gradually evolved into a war against progressive social studies that has strongly influenced the current and future direction of the curriculum.' A reconciliation between different viewpoints led to the emergence of an eclectic camp, echoing Wesley, who advocated a general approach in which the term social studies refers to history and the social sciences simplified, integrated and adapted for pedagogic purposes. Gradually an 'integrative' view of social studies,

with history subsumed under its rubric, embedded within the discourse of 'progressive education' became the official curriculum in many countries (Leming, 2003).

There is, and perhaps will continue to be debates about what social science is and ought to be in schools. However, in most Indian classrooms, social sciences (referred to as social studies) are defined by what the textbook contains and how the subject-matter is presented and organised.

### Evolution of Social Science Teaching in Indian Schools

The teaching of social sciences in post-colonial India, as in other newly emerging nation-states was largely influenced by the perceived needs of nation-building and modernization. The genesis and purpose of formal social science in India can be traced to the purposive engagement on 'the place of teaching social science in the general education of the citizen' (UNESCO, 1954: 60). A continued emphasis on this encoded aim of social science education reverberate the views that emerged in the first few decades of independent India which in turn were informed by the discourse emerging in the new nation-states on the value of social science education. Thus education for citizenship was said to acquire a new meaning and the school was seen as the nucleus of such an educative force. Several perspectives on this question emerged later including the unequivocal emphasis on nation-building as articulated in the first post-independence Indian National Education Commission (GoI, 1966) Report<sup>1</sup>.

In the early years of post-Independence India, the Nehruvian framework prevailed dominantly through the agency of the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and its regional versions. The NCERT in its early years conducted a study on the 'Position of Social Sciences in India'<sup>2</sup>. The study provided insight into various aspects and shortcomings in the existing social science courses in Indian schools. This led the organization of four all-India workshops with the help of classroom teachers, subject experts and teacher educators between June 1963 and June 1964. A syllabus was developed for Classes I to XI. Based on this, textbooks in social sciences covering 'state', 'country' and 'world' were prepared for Classes III to V. For Classes VI to VIII, separate textbooks were prepared for history, civics and geography (Goel and Sharma, 1987: 176).

The theme of citizenship education characteristic of the early inclusion of social sciences in schools runs across

the national curriculum documents since 1975. However, a close scrutiny of the documents reveals finer nuances and some radical interpretations of this curricular aim. While the first Curriculum Framework (1975) aspired to '... enable the growing citizen of tomorrow to participate in the affairs of the community, the state, the country and the world at large', through the teaching of social sciences, the National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education (NCERT, 1988: 5) stressed the critical importance of teaching social sciences for creating 'a citizenry conscious of their rights and duties and committed to the principles embodied in our Constitution...' More than a decade later, the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCERT, 2000), formulated under a new political regime, redefined citizenship education in terms of an explicit emphasis on '... content essential to nurture national identity' with the aim to develop a sense of 'fundamental duties (and)... a sense of pride in being an Indian'.

*A continued emphasis on this encoded aim of social science education reverberate the views that emerged in the first few decades of independent India which in turn were informed by the discourse emerging in the new nation-states on the value of social science education. Thus education for citizenship was said to acquire a new meaning and the school was seen as the nucleus of such an educative force.*

This later view was in sharp contrast to the Curriculum Framework, 1975, which had explicitly stated that: "... narrow parochial, chauvinistic and obscurantist tendencies are not allowed to grow... [and that]...instruction in the social sciences promote the values and ideals of humanism, secularism, socialism and democracy ... inculcate attitudes and impart the knowledge necessary for the achievement of the principal values of a just world order, maximization of economic and social welfare, minimization of violence and maximization of ecological stability" (NCERT, 1975: 19).

The views stated in NCFSE, 2000 were also in sharp contrast to the curriculum document of 1988 in which the development of social skills and civic competencies were to equip citizens to ‘...participate in the task of social and economic reconstruction’ through social science teaching. It attempted to locate social sciences in the overall aim of ‘...education as a powerful instrument of human resource development [that] should help in the process of desired social transformation...’ (NCERT, 1988: 3).

The most recent NCF Review (NCERT, 2005), while reiterating the need to adhere to a commitment towards the values enshrined in the Constitution, articulates a more radical aim for the teaching of social sciences. First, it explicates the critical significance of social science perspective and knowledge towards developing a ‘just and peaceful society’, thus acknowledging its overarching essentiality in education and in this sense ‘(re)locating the social sciences in the overall aim of education’, as indicated in the 1988 curriculum framework. Second, and more importantly, it establishes social enquiry as a scientific endeavour that must challenge patriarchal frames and strive to generate in students ‘... a critical moral and mental energy, making them alert to the social forces that threaten these (constitutional) values... (and) develop amongst them ... sensitive, interrogative and transformative citizens...’ (NCERT, 2005: 48).

*“The hegemony of the physical and natural sciences (corresponding with management studies in a neo-liberal frame) has led to the popular belief that the subject of social science is redundant. It is therefore a major challenge to re-establish the importance of the social sciences in school education at a time when instrumentalist aims of education threaten to disengage the individual from the social.”*

The popular belief that social science merely transmits information; is too centered on the written text, and requires

to be rote memorized for examinations however, continues to prevail in classrooms. Even though this view emanates from and is sustained by the manner in which social science subjects are taught in schools, it dominates the thinking of many curriculum developers as well. For instance, the NCFSE, 2000 position, that the quantum of history needs to be ‘substantially reduced’ favours the argument that social science provides ‘unnecessary details about the past’ and should therefore be integrated thematically in texts of civics and geography. The suppression of history has been referred to by scholars as a form of ‘social amnesia’ (Jacoby, 1975) and ‘the call to ignore history’ in curriculum debates taking place in the US in the third quarter of the 20th century, as ‘an assault on thinking itself’ (Giroux, 1981). Interrogating claims of ‘truth’ in the writing of history, Menon (2010) argues for the need to recognize ‘society as historically constituted’ and to enquire into ‘history as political intervention’.

The other argument against the social sciences is that they are bereft of the ‘skills’ required to function in the real world. This, along with the hegemony of the physical and natural sciences (corresponding with management studies in a neo-liberal frame) has led to the popular belief that the subject of social science is redundant. It is therefore a major challenge to re-establish the importance of the social sciences in school education at a time when instrumentalist aims of education threaten to disengage the individual from the social.

As argued by Giroux (1981) a significant rationale for the inclusion of social sciences in school curriculum lies in the need to interrogate the socially constructed assumptions that underlie the concerns of curriculum and classroom social relationships. The position paper on the teaching of social sciences (NCERT, 2006) builds a strong case for an epistemological shift in the role of social science in school education. It argues for the critical role that social sciences can provide to develop social, cultural and analytical skills required to adjust to an increasingly interdependent world, and to deal with the political and economic realities that govern its functioning.

### Major Debates in the Teaching of Social Sciences in Schools

#### *Integrated Social Sciences vs Disciplinary Emphasis*

Several scholars have argued that history, geography, economics and other social sciences should be taught for their inherent worth. In this perspective it is the nature of

the discipline and its methodology that takes primacy and is believed to facilitate students' understanding of society they live in.

Arguments in favour of an integrated approach to social science teaching derive from the need to create a consonance with the cognitive processes of children who do not necessarily see the world through the divisions of academic disciplines<sup>3</sup>. Academic disciplines are perceived to be historico-cultural constructs, each with its discourse and perspective. This, it is argued, can be an imposition on the child's 'natural' way of viewing the world as a whole. Another argument in favour of an integrated approach is that, a strict focus on traditional academic disciplines stands the risk of ignoring interdisciplinary knowledge domains engendered by the 'relatively newer' social science disciplines such as social anthropology, environmental education and population studies that draw upon the natural and social sciences.

An integrated social science curriculum is perceived to help students see the inter-connections between and the inter-relatedness of various facets of society. Integration is achieved through concepts and generalisations from the social sciences by following specific questions and problems and drawing upon various disciplines as needed. This view of social studies was first proposed in the US through the Report of the Committee on Social Studies (Dunn, 1916). Thereafter, it received impetus in the 1930s with the textbook series: *Man and His Changing Society* by Harold Rugg. It was argued that, "Rugg's goal was to rid social studies of disciplinary compartments. From his perspective, the curriculum should instead focus pupil attention on contemporary problems... themes in the Rugg textbook series included the excesses of laissez faire capitalism, unfair distribution of income and wealth, unemployment, class conflict, immigration, rapid cultural change, and imperialism ... [with the aim] to criticize selected aspects of contemporary society and tradition. (Leming, 2003: 126).

Associated with progressive educational ideas of the time that focused on creating a 'more collective social order', this approach received further support from textbooks on the methods of teaching social studies (Hunt and Metcalfe, 1955/1968). The integrated approach sought to align content along specific questions and problems. The approach with 'public issues' as a nucleus emerged from the Harvard Social Studies Project in the US in the 1960s (Oliver and Shaver, 1966 cited in Leming, 2003: 128). These could include various

social issues that face the contemporary world today, such as increasing poverty, environmental pollution and religious violence. While focusing on a specific problem or theme, students draw upon concepts, perspectives and ideas from various disciplines. The problem-pursuing approach, it is argued, is useful in giving students a perspective on society as a whole, as each issue would involve a nuanced understanding of the various facets of life.

A simultaneous, but different orientation to integration was the curriculum development project carried out in 1967 by the Monash University in Australia. In this project a 'social studies' curriculum was developed along select themes which incorporated the 'newer' social science disciplines into school education. The curriculum was designed around the theme of 'Man in Society'. This approach tried to ensure that the specific methodology of each discipline got incorporated into the integrated curriculum. While examining the various themes students would work as 'novice social scientists'. This rested on the assumptions that social science techniques serve as aids in the development of abilities to analyze and interpret data and that learning by doing is a significant pedagogic principle (Hunt, 1971). The attempts of the Monash University become particularly significant in the light of a major criticism of an integrated curriculum, that it does not introduce students to the methodology of the social science disciplines.

*Arguments in favour of an integrated approach to social science teaching derive from the need to create a consonance with the cognitive processes of children who do not necessarily see the world through the divisions of academic disciplines.*

The idea of an integrated social science curriculum, however, has not been a significant part of the curriculum discourse in India. A proactive co-operation between social sciences was suggested by Vakil (1954) in the early post-colonial period. It was argued that this need for co-operation should not be looked at from the viewpoint of the extension of a

“given stock of knowledge available for any particular social science.... In many cases a greater intensive cultivation of those aspects of study which are exclusive to any particular social science itself depends on a change in perspective or methodology ...”; arguing that “there may be hidden areas of knowledge which are not accessible if one pursues only one’s own sphere of study” (Vakil, 1954: 75).

One of the few discussions on an ‘integrated’ approach is found in the ‘Ten-Year School’ curriculum document (1975), which posited it as one of the possible means of teaching social sciences at the primary, middle and lower secondary school level<sup>4</sup>. The document displays a keen understanding of the nature of debates around this theme as it further goes on to state that while the selection of topics should be done ‘...care may be taken to preserve the general structure of the discipline and include those facts which are useful to a growing adolescent’ (NCERT, 1975: 21). This approach was however, never adopted and textbooks continued to approach history, civics and geography as independent disciplines with no inter-linkages. Moreover, the paradigms presented in the three subjects also remained mutually exclusive. This holds true especially for geography whose content (unlike history and civics) is not characterized by the official discourse on nationalism.

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*Interdisciplinary thinking in the view of NCF, 2005 needs to be reflected in the treatment of subject-matter and is also sought to be addressed through thematic approaches in ‘social and political life’, a new subject that draws upon the disciplines of economics, sociology and political science and replaces what has traditionally been called civics.*

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The NCF, 2005 reiterates the need to preserve disciplinary boundaries in engaging students with social sciences at the middle and high school levels. Interdisciplinary thinking in the view of NCF, 2005 needs to be reflected in the treatment of subject-matter and is also sought to be addressed through

thematic approaches in ‘social and political life’, a new subject that draws upon the disciplines of economics, sociology and political science and replaces what has traditionally been called civics. Environmental studies, a subject at the primary level attempts to put together meaningful themes that draw upon sciences as well as social sciences.

### ***Aims of Education and Nationalism***

Questions of the social context of education and aims of education have been circumscribed to the development of a national citizenry. Philosophical engagements have also tended to confine themselves to seeking objective universal truths about education. Hobsbawm (1992: 9) argued how national bureaucracies controlled education all across Europe with the emergence of modern nation-states, communicating the image and heritage of the “nation”. In post-colonial India, the construction of a national identity via education, in particular, the social science curriculum was also of great importance. The Kothari Commission report saw modernity and nationalism as synonymous. Educational objectives were defined within the paradigm of national development and reflected in the ritualized practices of everyday schooling. This was a marked departure from the Secondary Education Commission (GoI, 1953), which in the early 1950s had laid emphasis on the psychological requirements of the child and the need to relate school subjects to the immediate environment of the child. In his analysis of the Kothari Commission, Krishna Kumar (2001: 51) writes, ‘... a young nation-state which had fought two wars in a span of four years and was undergoing a period of political uncertainty was less patient than before with the ideal of a child’s freedom to reconstruct knowledge in the context of a local ethos.’<sup>16</sup>

The ‘pan-Indian’ historical narrative of ‘unity in diversity’, constructed during the nation-building years acclaimed the country’s pluralistic heritage, thus capturing the imagination of the Indian people. The State had taken upon itself the task of constructing a history of harmonious coexistence and cultural synthesis of religious communities. While the narrative of ‘secular nationalism’ often stood the test of various political forces within the Congress, it came under serious challenge from the Hindu Right especially with the rewriting of history school textbooks under the NDA regime. The history curriculum to be taught in schools, became a fiercely contested terrain. Introduced in October 2002 (post-

NCFSE, 2000), the history textbooks presented a narrative of 'Hindu nationalism'; one that glorified India's 'Hindu' past, sought to incorporate Buddhism and Jainism into the fold of Hinduism and brutalize the Islamic rule of the medieval period (Marlena, 2003). The controversy around history texts brought into direct public scrutiny issues of curriculum content selection and presentation as well as the need to examine linkages between ideology and the state in the design of school curricula<sup>5</sup>.

Finer nuances of the tenuous relationship between aims of education and nationalism emerged when the UPA government led the exercise of the NCF review in 2005. For the first time we saw a national curriculum document (NCF, 2005) move beyond the critique of de-saffronisation and establish school curriculum as a legitimate concern of the pedagogue within a frame that links society and education intimately.

### **Values and Curriculum**

The discourse on 'values' has been an important one in the curriculum documents in India. From the time of the Secondary Education Commission in the early '50s and in continuation of the pre-independence focus of civics teaching, the role of civics was one of training citizens to improve their 'quality of character' and to inculcate the 'right ideals, habits and attitude' in them (Jain, 2004: 178). An unusual position was however taken by the Ten-Year School Curriculum Framework (1975) which asserted its commitment to 'character building and human values'.

*The criticality of social science teaching in schools assumes greater significance in the current context of a globalized world where matters of individual and national identities are highly politicized. This view stands at odds amidst a policy discourse that threatens the very existence of social sciences via an imposed regime of standardized curricula and evaluation.*

Social science was seen as a subject that shall, '... help children to develop an insight into human relationships, social values and attitudes' (NCERT, 1975: 21). Civics, more specifically was seen as having two objectives: to create 'an active and intelligent citizenship', as also to develop 'an intelligent understanding of the structure and working of social and political institutions' (NCERT, 1975: 23) These objectives stand in sharp contrast to the explicit statements made by later curriculum documents regarding the need to instill specific values in students. The National Curriculum Framework, 2000 states the role of social science teaching in clear terms: 'many values have to be inculcated through the teaching of social science.' The feeling of 'Indianness' that had been talked about by the 1988 document is interpreted rather narrowly and distorted to project the Hindutva agenda in NCFSE, 2000.

The discourse of nationalism and value education has been closely intertwined in the making of social science curricula. It is not the nature of the disciplines or the understanding of society that are regarded as the central objectives of social science teaching, but the values required to create a loyal citizenry with a strong sense of national identity. Recent researches have attempted to unfold the linkages between nationalism, identity and gender in school textbooks (Nirantar, 2009). The exercise of curriculum renewal brings a fresh focus on the critical significance of social sciences in establishing 'social enquiry as a scientific endeavour' and in developing a 'just and peaceful society' (NCF, 2005), within the larger frame of Constitutional values.

### **Conclusion**

This short essay has attempted to provide a glimpse of some of the key concerns and debates that confront the social science teacher and curriculum developer. It does not attempt to resolve any of these debates but to flag them with a plea to deepen the discourse. The criticality of social science teaching in schools assumes greater significance in the current context of a globalized world where matters of individual and national identities are highly politicized. This view stands at odds amidst a policy discourse that threatens the very existence of social sciences via an imposed regime of standardized curricula and evaluation. It is at this time that one finds some of the finest exemplars of social science texts of the NCERT written for the middle, secondary and higher secondary levels. It would not be iniquitous to say

that the framework used to create in particular, the middle school texts, including the texts on 'social and political life' that replaces civics, derives ideas and inspiration from the 30 years of experience of Eklavya in curriculum design and textbook writing.

Conventional social science teaching emphasizes learning about societies and times without reference to the child's actual lived experiences. The Eklavya and NCERT textbooks are unique in making the social world of the learner both an object of study and a process by constantly getting the learners to reflect upon their own social experiences. The texts in many ways resolve the dichotomy often posed between the child and the curriculum. They address the

multiple dynamic issues of - organizing subject-matter in developmentally appropriate ways and engaging the reader in a dialogical process of constructing meaning - all at once. Converting sets of 'social science facts' into processes of social inquiry has been a major strength of the new texts. This has been done by presenting different viewpoints about a phenomenon, comparing the normative with actual experiences and by demonstrating the use of methods of constructing knowledge. Without impinging upon the autonomy of the teacher, the texts provide useful pedagogical spaces and ideas. They open up possibilities for learners to engage with issues and ideas that may be remotely connected with their lives but which gradually acquire meaning within the larger social reality.

## Footnotes

1. Also known as the Kothari Commission Report
2. Cited in Goel and Sharma (1987)
3. The Plowden report noted that 'children's learning does not fit into subject categories' (DES, 1967: 203) cited in Penelope Harnett (2004)
4. The Curriculum for the Ten-Year School: A Framework (NCERT, 1975) recommended that the social sciences be 'taught as a part of the study of the environment in classes I and II and as the independent subject of social studies in subsequent classes'. While Environmental studies 'will include both natural and social environment in classes I and II, it would be more appropriate to use the term "social studies" rather than social sciences at the primary stage since it represents a broad and composite instructional area' (p. 20)
5. See SAHMAT Publications: Against Communalisation of Education (2002), Saffron Agenda in Education: An Expose (2001) and The Assault on History (2000) for a critique of the NCSE, 2000, on the issue of communalizing; Digantar (2007), for a critical review of Rajasthan textbooks

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Will there be any contention if it is stated that travelling to see places, armchair politics and stories concerning people, famous and ordinary, are among the top topics of non-work discussion for ordinary people in India (and elsewhere as well)? I do not think so. Ask any tour operator and he/she would confirm that our local tourism industry is thriving, check any discussion forum, be it an informal gathering or a formal, one will find that politics is the most discussed topic and a glance at the daily supplements of our newspapers and general magazines confirm the marketability of stories concerning people.

If we strip the subject of social science down to the bare minimum one can see that it is all about stories of people, places and institutions and we see all around us people tuning into stories, be it on the television, movie screens or newspapers. However survey of ordinary people on how interested they were in any of the social science subjects during their school days will indicate that either they were bored and hence completely switched off or disinterested because they saw no value add from these subjects to the practicalities of living life. And this when the subjects are all about living life! The subjects that make up social science in school connect us to the past to understand, appreciate and learn how we have reached to where we are now; they also connect us to the present through the study of institutions that govern us; and contextualize the past and present by providing us with an understanding of the larger eco-system that we are a part of. Social science helps us to dream of building a better world. Practical questions related to human development such as 'How to make our cities better, improve standards of living, reduce crime rates, overcome discrimination, provide better governance, improve productivity' are what social science is made of.

If this is so, why is it that when these topics are packaged as subjects they tend to become uninteresting and useless? Is it something to do with the material created to study these topics or is it to do with the manner in which social science teachers use them in a classroom setting? The answer lies in both of the above; however, the latter is critical because the task of making a subject drab can be done only with active support of a teacher! Even a very well crafted book can be used by a teacher to put a class of enthusiastic students to sleep. The advantage of good material is that students can

benefit from it even without the teacher. But the teacher can surely play the spoil sport and that is what one sees in our classrooms.

There are several methods of facilitating the understanding of social science subjects in schools. However, at present, in most of the schools in India the emphasis is on rote memorization. The teaching is through a method where in the teacher talks/lectures and the students passively take notes and memorizes to regurgitate in order to pass the exams; the more similar the answer to what the teacher has said, the higher is the passing grade. 'Passed in flying colors' will be the description as long as the colors are the same as painted by the teacher! Though the lever to change appears to be with the teacher, the fault lies with society itself; society which has accorded a secondary status to social science.



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As a student if one opts for any discipline associated with social science, especially the humanities (subjects such as history, literature, and philosophy that are based on the study of human culture and ideas) one is branded as a student who is not as bright / smart as those who opt for the natural sciences. This branding begins at the immediate family level and the key reason for this is the status that modern Indian society has accorded to engineers and doctors. One may also add here that even those who have taken up a natural science based subject but are not interested in pursuing a career in engineering or medicine are most likely to be viewed through the same lens as those studying social sciences which indicates how skewed society's perception

towards these two disciplines is. Hence the postulation of society is that those who are incapable of taking up natural sciences for their higher studies are the ones who take up social sciences. NCF 2005 also corroborates this when it says, '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' and it goes on to add that as a result of this, 'low self-esteem governs the classroom-transaction process, with both teachers and students feeling uninterested in comprehending its contents'.

In India, studying social science is also associated more with girls than boys and this is the 'patriarchal and gender biased' society's means of according an inequitable status to a field that is considered un-important. This is not only evidence of how society views social science, but also how societies that demean social science view the female members. Social science subjects are considered as non-premium fields, in terms of importance, demand and hence the fee, and patriarchal societies such as ours carry the belief that girls need not study anything worthwhile – this belief system leads a society to combine the 'oppressed' with the 'worthless'.

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Given the status, the question is where the correction mechanism lies. And a correction is necessary because further human development can take place only when we understand our societies. Social science is a study of the society at all levels, it is an inter-disciplinary subject that draws from probably all other subjects and from human experience and one whose scope and importance is not only continuously growing, but is becoming invaluable in furthering human progression. With regard to the correction mechanism, one line of argument is that unless the way

social science is taught in schools (allowing a student to appreciate it's usefulness in the practicalities of life) changes, one can never manage to turn around a society's point of view. Therefore the task of changing the perception of the society lies with social science itself – Is there hope? A bit of history could inform us better.

It was only in the 19th century that social science began to take shape, and it is only in the 20th century that a number of disciplines such as economics, sociology, political science, history geography, psychology and anthropology made their mark. It is interesting to note that social (studies) science became part of the official curriculum in modern India only with the Basic Education Program of Gandhiji, which makes it's history less than a century old. Hence, the fact that it is a very young discipline compared to the others may have contributed to the image society has created. After Gandhiji's Basic Education Program brought social (studies) science into the realm of formal education in modern India, the Secondary Education Commission provided the official recognition to the subject at an all India level. The Mudaliar Commission Report dated 1953 spoke of attention that is required towards the currently relevant concept of world citizenship, but even 50 years hence, the study of social (studies) science is still associated with remembering dates, facts and names of famous people, places and institutions. NCERT soon after it was set up, also came out with objectives of teaching social (studies) science and other than the usual and now staid things such as to 'make a better citizen' also mentioned that a key thing is to 'train minds to think' and 'to develop skills to express freely'. There are evidences all around us to show that leave alone our larger society, even our schools have not come close to achieving these objectives. In 1964, the Kothari commission said that one of the aims of teaching social (studies) science is to help students acquire certain values and attitudes which are critical for participation in the affairs of the world other than the acquisition of knowledge of the environment and understanding the human relationships. And in 2005 in it's position paper on social science, the NCF said that it is important to 'reinstate the significance of the social sciences by not only highlighting its increasing relevance for a job in the rapidly expanding service sector, but by pointing to its indispensability in laying the foundations for an analytical and creative mindset'.

Given that since the time social science has been brought

into the mainstream in the context of education in modern India all the committees have said the 'right' things, the discipline is yet to get the status it deserves in the opinion of the larger society. For the larger society social science is a non-utility subject. Therefore, there is need to drive home the point that the social sciences are essential to provide number of skills required to adjust to the globalized world, and to 'deal with political and economic realities'.

The correction mechanism therefore lies within the discipline and the onus is on social science itself. The correction needs to take place at the elementary school level; the popular perception that 'social science merely conveys information which is required to be rote learnt for examinations with the content of the material used in schools only remotely connected to realities of life' needs to be altered. For this correction to take place, the social science curriculum, the material available such as the prescribed textbooks and the teachers of social science subjects are the three vital change levers. Of these three, the NCF 05 has taken a big step towards identifying an appropriate framework for the curriculum and the new CBSE material (textbooks included) is surely a vast improvement and much can be achieved using them effectively, which leaves the third vital lever, that of the teacher, to be attended to.

Getting the third lever activated in a desirable manner is the key to the correction required to elevate the status of social science. The challenge of getting the teachers to facilitate the exploration of the social science subjects by the students themselves and to focus on conceptual understanding rather on superfluous 'facts' is also closely entwined to the current examination system. However, the examination system need not be the alibi for teachers refusing to adopt a model in which they join hands with the students in generating knowledge, because those who have adopted such a non-coercive approach realize that once the concept clarity is achieved, the exam pattern will not matter.

This understanding is critical for revitalizing social science by helping its students to acquire knowledge and skills in an interactive setting. Subjects such as Math and Physics have the potential to survive didactic approach in it's teaching due to certain inherent characteristics which will not be discussed here for lack of space, however students' interest in social science is surely exterminated using an approach that does not promote critical perspectives through a

participative approach. An important aspect of social science is the possibility of having different shades or at times even diametrically opposite answers. Hence, more than the teacher of natural sciences, it is critical for a social science teacher to move away from the age old habit of preaching from the pulpit; a shift in the pedagogy from merely providing information, towards debate and discussion, will enable both the students as well as the teacher, to be alive to real life situations. As is rightly said in NCF 05, 'it is important that the process of learning should promote the spirit of inquiry and creativity among both children and teachers'. This idea of 'exploring' is fundamental in infusing life into the subject of social science and only when this happens the usefulness of the discipline emerges. Therefore an open-ended approach to teaching is critical and the teachers should allow for the differences to emerge among the students thereby encouraging them to see different points of view and appreciate divergent opinions which are invariably based on the local contexts the students come from.



*Hence, more than the teacher of natural sciences, it is critical for a social science teacher to move away from the age old habit of preaching from the pulpit; a shift in the pedagogy from merely providing information, towards debate and discussion, will enable both the students as well as the teacher, to be alive to real life situations.*



It is therefore in the hands of the social science teacher to elevate the status of the discipline to one that is seen contributing to the development of the students in their journey as learners. For achieving this objective the social science teacher is required to study and analyze the diverse philosophies of instruction and come up with a necessary synthesis. Of the many things expected from a teacher, a social science teacher should play the role of a philosopher who knows different philosophical schools of thought. For this to happen, fundamental changes are required in the training of teachers through teacher education courses.

For instance, educational philosophy should be utilitarian in its purposes in which case it is important to focus on the application of the tenets of the philosophy.

A combination of procedures is required to be used by the social science teacher such as a project method that highlights an activity-centered approach to learning, problem solving procedure wherein subject matter from diverse academic disciplines are used to find solutions and so on; this in turn will lead to the development of skills among the students that are in tune with daily realities. Allan Janik in a paper titled 'Future for the Humanities?' presents how in the case of a gifted 40-year-old architect or engineer who is promoted to a management position, the promotion could be a source of deeply disturbing problems if there is no preparation for being a manager, which is largely a matter of coping with conflicts - and conflict resolution is a skill imbibed through social science. The author rightly argues that in this case more technical knowledge would be superfluous because it was the architect's/engineer's technical acumen that led to the 'disastrous' promotion in the first place and it is only skill sets from social science that will contribute positively. He espouses the case for studying social science by saying humanities (which is only one part of social science) are vital to understanding the context in which knowledge is applied in society and thus to any serious approach to life-long learning. He describes life-long learning as making serious re-adjustments to our very selves that mere technical knowledge cannot facilitate. The paper further elaborates how the financial crisis of 2008 has shown that it is necessary to 're-adjust to drastic changes in our unquestioned assumptions about ourselves and the world.....and a part of making a successful transition under such arduous circumstances is understanding how our minds, our lives and our enterprises are always embedded in conditions not of our making that may unexpectedly shift in dramatically unforeseen ways'. Thereby he argues that humanities are crucial to obtaining perspectives on human life and activity which comes in handy during critical junctures and that society (especially politicians and policy makers) cannot afford to ignore it, the way we have seen in recent times, especially in the Indian context.

It is also important for social science to position itself as a discipline that contributes to successful careers. Though the perception is changing in some urban centers of the country, the popular perception however is that not many desirable

job options are open to students of social science. Hence, it is important to establish to the larger society the relevance of social science for the present.

*A project method that highlights an activity-centered approach to learning, 'humanism' as a Philosophy of Education as advocated by Carl Rogers (1902-1985) whereby students identify questions to be answered, so that what is desired in learning comes from themselves and adopting a problem solving procedure wherein subject matter from diverse academic disciplines are used to find solutions.*

In conclusion, one can state with authority that it is becoming increasingly clear that the relevance of social science is only rising as it is intrinsically linked to the formation of the Knowledge Economy and Society and the recent emerging trend of evidence-based politics. Governments are beginning to realize how social sciences can help in the management of societies and are increasingly depending on the social sciences to deal with particular problems they are now facing. For instance, modern governments run research projects and the findings of these studies influence the design of government programs for combating various issues such as social discrimination, unemployment, urban violence and so on.

In a decade old paper titled 'Into the future with social sciences' Jean-Eric Aubert, Directorate for Science, Technology and Industry of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development predicted that 'perhaps in the information age and in the dematerialized economy of the knowledge world, society will discover a pressing need to know itself much better, if only to survive. Social sciences will then be very much in demand'. Today, even in the Indian context we can say that the trend is clearly towards elevating social science to a much higher level than what has been accorded till date. These changes are already visible in the urban centers and popular perceptions on the relevance of

social science are also changing. This has clearly led to a demand for the discipline from aspiring students. However, at this moment very few places in India offer social science

in the way it is sought. But the hope is that even this will change soon. Caveat being we do not lose sight of the corrections required.

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Anjali Noronha

We have a subject called social science taught in some form or the other in schools across the world. Sometimes it goes by the name of Environment Studies (like in the present primary schools in India), sometimes as separate subjects – history, geography, civics (or the more Contemporary Citizenship Education in many countries today or social and political Life as in India) until middle school and then as history, geography, economics, political science and sociology in high school. In some countries and at some times there has been a subject called social studies and some kinds of thinking excludes history and geography from the social sciences and treats them as separate subjects while including economics, political science and sociology in the social sciences. For the purpose of this article I will not enter into that discourse, however relevant. By social science I mean all subjects dealing with the analysis of some or all aspects of society and social life seen through some lens or the other. Thus history is part of social science as it analyses continuity and change in different aspects of society and their interrelationships over time, geography as it does the same across regions, economics as it develops and applies the concepts and method to analyze economic aspects, sociology as it does the same for the social aspects and political science for political aspects. Till the elementary level of schooling, the latter three are not taught as separate subjects but are in some way integrated through the subject of civics, citizenship education or social and political life as the case may be.

*It is only through conscious effort of a certain kind (education being one of them) that the attitudes, values and competence required for converting democracy from principle to practice can be developed and inculcated.*

Irrespective of how we understand the social sciences, there is often a question in the minds of parents and society in general as to whether the social sciences are relevant at all to the lives of people in today's technocratic world. The first

question people ask is what will a child do if s/he takes up the study of any of the social sciences at the plus two or the college level? What kind of 'job prospects' does s/he have? Become a teacher in a school or college, a researcher or academic; join one of the services through the entrance exams? Take up a management field particularly Human Resource Management. All these options are open to a graduate of engineering or a medical student as well so why take up social sciences if the option of the so called technical fields is open?

This attitude percolates to the lower school level as well where students (and parents) have the attitude of children wanting to just pass in the social sciences. Seldom is it asked as to how the social sciences can contribute to make a student a better person or make them capable of contributing to the betterment of society or in fact, how can the teaching and learning of social sciences at school sustain and develop a democracy. Specializing in a social science at the college level needs to be looked at differently from the essential education in the social sciences at the school level.

Having said this, I will focus in this paper on the relevance of the content and method of social science education in school in today's life with particular reference to civics/citizenship education/ social and political life. My main focus will be on the relevance of social science education for building, sustaining and developing a democracy. In doing so, I will outline the challenges faced by social science education from the present power structure of society and its ethics of hierarchical, feudal and exclusive modes of behavior legitimized by the teachers and parents themselves.

## Social Science Education as Education for Democracy

Democratic societies are fairly 'evolved' societies in the sense that they demand of the individual, in practice, a certain set of attitudes, morality, abilities and competence that require a high degree of sublimation of innate tendencies in human beings that are contradictory to the above; so that the principle of democracy actually becomes a practice of democracy. It is only through conscious effort of a certain



kind (education being one of them) that the attitudes, values and competence required for converting democracy from principle to practice can be developed and inculcated.

Historically, modern democracy emerged as a struggle against unequal power systems and centralization of power in the hands of individuals, challenging the contemporaneous hierarchical feudal and authoritarian structures. It often has to face the challenge of imbibed hierarchical values, ethics and attitudes prevalent among the very members who participated in the demand for democratization in the first place. This happens because our own socialization is part of a larger historical process, which legitimizes inequalities and hierarchies as differences in competence or 'god given' fates. It also is perhaps rooted in each individual's innate need for appreciation of self and control over others' lives. Therefore, to establish democracy in practice is as much a struggle within individuals as it is in social spheres and processes. This struggle is what needs to be given space within classrooms and the educational experience. Before we discuss how, let us come back from this little detour to what are the concepts on which democracy is based.

**Equality:** This is the core and most important idea in a democracy. Democracy treats all individuals as equal – the principle of one person one vote is based on this principle of equality. However, we all know that in practice this political equality is not supported by economic and social equality in most modern democracies. In fact economic and social inequality is seen to adversely influence the so called 'political equality' granted in principle through the constitution. A social science education that strives for equality in all spheres, and that develops attitudes that challenge policies that segregate or discriminate – (e.g. differential health and education facilities dependent on the ability to pay or exclusion of certain means of transport like autos from public places like airports and hotels, or demanding action on those that prevent by violence intermingling of castes and classes etc.) is what needs to be developed for a critical citizenry. The idea of treating all with equal respect is integral to the idea of democracy.

**Justice:** From the principle of equality is drawn the principle of equal justice for all, irrespective of their 'status' in society. It is not to be considered OK that certain people will be allowed to get away with a lot that may be 'officially' considered wrong.

**Freedom:** Another basic principle of democracy is the principle of freedom of all individuals. That is why any democratic constitution like the Indian Constitution, guarantees such freedoms – of expression, of movement, of practicing different faiths etc. An underlying assumption is that each individual is a product of her or his own 'free will'. However, we all know that in order to live peacefully in society, one needs to curtail one individual's freedom so that it does not impinge on another's. Yet it is not between one individual and another as to what extent a certain freedom is curtailed – but a collective notion of different freedoms that are to be subscribed by all.

*Therefore to establish democracy in practice is as much a struggle within individuals as it is in social spheres and processes. This struggle is what needs to be given space within classrooms and the educational experience.*

**Participation:** The most oft quoted quote on democracy is taken from Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address as being 'Government of the people, by the people, for the people'. In a democracy, therefore, policies and laws are to be reviewed, revised and made by the participation of citizens. If citizens have an attitude of not 'taking on the headache' involving themselves and participating in what could be better and more relevant policies, then the efficacy of the policies and programs are in danger of benefiting only the few who get involved.

**Representation and responsibility to the people:** Modern democracies are representative rather than direct democracies, as nations are too large for direct democracies. Thus the meaning of representative leadership needs to be understood by people, not as rule by the person representing through the vote but as accountability and answerability to people who have elected the leadership. This means that leadership is not unconstrained and cannot do anything that it pleases. It is circumscribed by the constitution, by policies and by the active and critical participation of citizens.

If these are the bases for a healthy and robust democracy, then it requires citizens to:

- Look at all persons as equal,
- Be able to raise issues where people are treated unequally,
- Have an attitude of trying to find ways of correcting wrongs and not be indifferent or cynical about them,
- Be able to critically analyze policies, rules and laws as they affect them,
- Be able to look for ways to collaborate and solve issues, develop skills of collaboration, working together and
- Develop abilities for dialogue—listening and understanding other people’s views, developing a consensus etc.

### **What does this imply for the Social Science Curriculum and Classroom?**

This has implications for both curriculum and classroom pedagogy. In order to develop the above attributes through social science education, children must experience both critical analysis of controversial issues through collegial methods in which they learn to respect diversity, others’ freedoms and also be given opportunities for collaborative action. It is through such experience that they would develop values of equality, respect for all, democratic justice and a conviction that things can be changed for the better through democratic action.

Such processes can be developed through a rigorous engagement with aspects of contemporary social, political and economic life as well as an understanding of history and geography through such a critical lens. Rigorous engagement can be through reading, reflection, discussion as well as experience.

Traditional social science education in schools in India is based on transmitting a lot of information which is supposed to be produced at the time of evaluation. Indian education systems also fight shy of controversy. And here we have a situation where, in order to ensure that social science fulfills the objectives of a democracy, controversy must be brought into the classroom and critically analyzed with different perspectives attempting to be understood and better resolutions sought. This has been elaborated upon by Professor Krishna Kumar in his book ‘Learning from Conflict’. Examples of how elections actually happen, how citizens

do and can take up issues through due process – like the issue of the environmental and social impact of large dams, increase in vehicular traffic, even of something like hosting the Commonwealth games, expose children to diverse, often contradictory perspectives and encourages them to explore deeper and collectively.

Education for democracy also demands participation in decision making with decisions and resolutions leading to a feeling of success to the participants i.e. the students. In the absence of such a feeling of success on the part of the students, they, the citizens of the future, would develop cynicism towards, rather than commitment to democracy - thus subverting the very objective of social science education for democracy.

Good social science education for developing democracy requires a deep conviction in the democratic processes and underlying concepts on the part of the system, the teacher and the parents. Conviction that democratic processes are the only way in which conflicts and difficult situations can be resolved in a humane and non-violent way – is critical to the success of democracy. In addition, a truly democratic system holds within itself an inherent ability to continuously evolve to higher levels. Hence the social science curriculum needs to develop materials and methods that successfully develop democratic values and attitudes to engage in a democratic manner. It needs to foster abilities for cooperative, collaborative and collegial collective action on public issues amongst students.

*“ Good social science education for developing democracy requires a deep conviction in the democratic processes and underlying concepts on the part of the system, the teacher and the parents. ”*

There are examples not only of particular schools but also of larger curricula that do so. The recent social science curriculum and textbooks at the middle and high school level of the NCERT is a case in point. The history and social & political life textbooks of the middle school and the history,

political science and sociology textbooks at the high school level attempt to use case studies that raise controversies, have different points of view and show collective action that has been successful in some measure. Many schools across the country, some whose experiences have been shared in this volume, (Shishu Van (Bombay), Namma Shaale (Bangalore), Poornodaya (Bangalore), Vikramshila (Kolkata), Shiksha Mitra (Kolkata), Center for Learning (Hyderabad and Bangalore), Aadharshila (Sendhwa) and many more, who take the initiative to develop their own curriculum and materials, discuss such issues in the classroom as part of the curriculum and also take their classes to participate in forums that raise issues like Bt Brinjal, climate change or the effect of the Commonwealth games on the common man. Eklavya's social science Textbooks can also be looked at as resource materials for developing a social science curriculum for critical and reflective democracy.

*The teacher, the parent, the community leader would prefer a social science education that pays obeisance to authority rather than being robustly critical of it, and would leave controversy outside children's minds.*

Neither the new NCERT books' approach nor the approach of the schools or educational groups mentioned above is partisan in any way. They are political inasmuch as democracy is a political ideal which is the basis of our nation's constitution. As citizens of the country, are we not charged with the responsibility to implement the constitution and to that extent democracy? Why then are the abovementioned initiatives looked at as partisan while those that are actually unethical to democratic principles, as legitimate and mainstream?

### **Challenges to Social Science Education for Critical Citizenship**

The contradiction in perceptions lies in the fact that societies do not change in as formal and straightforward ways as politics do on paper. The fact is that socially and culturally India is in large part deeply hierarchical, feudal (not economically but culturally) and caste based. Each human

being has multiple identities – those of the family, religion, social group, nation, profession. Hence, though formally India became a democracy more than 60 years ago, it still remains functionally and culturally - a fairly caste based, feudal society. Institutional processes that could strengthen democracy, particularly the education system, have in fact buckled under this cultural weight. The teacher, the parent, the community leader would prefer a social science education that pays obeisance to authority rather than being robustly critical of it, and would leave controversy outside children's minds. Hence these figures who are required to be democratic in their behavior and inculcate and encourage such values and attributes in children, actually actively undermine attempts to develop and encourage democratic behaviour. On the contrary, if a minority of teachers brings in critical and reflective thinking into the classroom, other teachers, parents and community members instead of encouraging and supporting her become critical of her and marginalize her. Hence, a social science teacher is often afraid to have a representative system of children for school decision making in a caste based, village classroom lest a girl or boy from the deprived classes be 'elected' and the whole thing becomes controversial.

Classrooms in elite schools that do have progressive methodologies become homogenized elite classrooms rather than socially diverse, mixed ones. Because of the class/caste homogeneity of such classrooms the same kind of activity tends to be less controversial as it does not challenge the status quo in the same way.

This leads to the possibility of different kinds of social science education in different kinds of schools, this differentiation itself becomes unethical to the principle of equality – a basis of democratic society.

### **Conclusion**

The point I am trying to make is that it is only through the widespread implementation of a democratized social science curriculum and pedagogy in schools on a large scale that a democratic society can be sustained and qualitatively developed. No other subject can fulfill this role. This is the primary relevance of critical and reflective social science learning and teaching. The kind of social science I have tried to elaborate upon in the article above, requires building support systems for its practice through resources, peer groups alongside academic, intellectual and social support

to its practitioners. The readers of this journal will I'm sure take a step in that direction.

Such social science education will not only develop the attributes of critical and reflective democratic citizens, but also inculcate the ability to work in a team in any career and the ability to make critically informed (and therefore to my

mind better) choices in a continuously changing world.

Other kinds of social science teaching (giving information, knowing about etc. etc.) do not, to my mind, have much relevance for school education and therefore children can be spared that burden.

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## A. INTRODUCTION

**S**ocial studies relates to our lives and our beings in an intense manner. It is expected to affect our behaviour and shape our world view. It expects the learner to integrate in society even while influencing it.

A common response to the question, why should we have children learn in schools, is 'so that she/he becomes a good citizen'. Social studies finds itself entwined in conflicting strands as it attempts to unravel and analyze heterogeneous notions of societies and citizens even while being rooted in the child's life.

Embedded in the ethical foundations of a social studies program are axioms. For instance, 'all human beings are equal' could be considered an axiom according to the Constitution of India. The axioms we adopt have a direct bearing on how we analyze the world around, from the Bhopal tragedy to gender prejudice we might encounter within our homes.

In a social studies program, the choices of what should be taught and in what manner draws from how we view society and the human being. The Constitutional preamble gives a notion of what we mean by these terms, but there is a wide variety in the manner they are interpreted and the extent of faith and seriousness in them. In many ways, social studies, being inextricably linked to notions of identity, is an arena of battle as it offers routes for the promotion of ideologies and indoctrination. In looking at the purpose of education, these are, however, not the only concerns. There is also the concern to balance stable social principles and their transformation.

Social studies embroils itself in issues that every person grapples with every day; in this lies its richness and its complexity.

The main questions that we have to address when considering the teaching and learning of social studies are:

1. **Purpose:** What are the main purposes of social studies?
2. **Components:** What are the building blocks of a social studies programs?
3. **Perspective:** What is the perspective of the proposed discourse?

4. **Nature:** What is the nature of the discipline, and how does it grow and accumulate knowledge?

5. **Process:** What processes of teaching would be appropriate?

In the following sections, we shall see why the above questions are difficult to answer in any straightforward manner. We will focus on the primary classes.

## B. PURPOSE

The overarching goal of social studies is to help the child understand society and her place in it, to use this understanding to make informed personal and social choices, and to enable her to realize that her choices are influential in shaping the society she lives in.

Such choices have to be informed not just by personal interests, but also by collective social good. Since a good society and a good human being are moral conceptions, a fourth social studies goal is the development of an ethical sense.

A social studies program needs to have some implications for what the child understands of her society and how she deals with it. The program has to gradually help her make better judgements and feel more confident in choosing and deciding. It also has to enable her to take sides, which is critical in a liberal, democratic, plural society. Having said that, it is also crucial for any social studies program to develop in the child a sensitivity towards others' choices and perspectives, to embrace the diversity of beliefs and experience, which adds to the richness of one's worldview.

It is thus clear that social studies contains some part of ethical development in itself. The ethical development suggested here is in terms of helping the child build her own logical and value framework. She needs to be able to make appropriate choices involving benefit to the majority. Often social studies is confused with learning a particular variety of community living and moral science, and is often confined to a list of do's and don'ts that the children have to follow. Such programs tend to reduce the child's space for observing,

experiencing, analysing, formulating ideas, and to develop her own way of working and deciding. In addition, it must make her sensitive to the needs of the collective and to ecology as well.

### C. COMPONENTS

The above three purposes indicate four broad components of a social studies program: Choice, Concept, Information and Skills.

#### 1. Choice

Rather than a set of moralized do's and don'ts, a good social studies program would seek to develop the ability of the child to make the appropriate choices for herself after weighing pros and cons. In this, it is important that she follow principles of rational thinking, enquiry, equity, diversity and plurality – values that are enshrined in our Constitution.

#### 2. Concept

To be able to ask and understand questions, to look for answers and to make choices, it is necessary that we understand underlying concepts. If we do not understand them reasonably clearly, we cannot form informed judgements. In social studies, concepts are the building blocks of understanding. By concept, we refer to the theoretical understanding of a real-world thing or event. Nation, festival, market, citizen, community, human being, home, family, etc. – each of these is a concept.

The social studies program needs to include engagement with the ideas of inter-dependence among people, communication, idea of a human society, evolution of societies, of location and mapping, climate, habitat, market, of governance, of cooperation, diversity, plurality, and so on. These concepts will gradually get more complex and would have more and more inter-linkages. The early specific concepts of a child – a chair; festivals like Id, Diwali, Christmas; home, family – gradually evolve and grow deeper and wider. There is no common conceptual development among all children. Concepts develop in each child with different nuances, and can only be scaffolded using their own, different experiences.

Another example of this can be that as the child grows, from the 'male' superset, the idea of 'father' begins to stand out more distinctly. Then comes a point when the distinction between one father and another become apparent. In this way, the very difference in experience can lend to nuances

in the building of concepts.

#### 3. Information

Concepts are generic patterns and abstractions of the real world. This implies that real world information is the basis for concept formation.

Take the concept of a map. In order to make a map, you need to know where north is and where south is. Similarly, without knowing the variety of relationships and their names, you cannot analyse the manifestation of gender and other kinship relations in our conversations and social processes. To understand the history of a market or a town, we need information of dates and events.



*The social studies program needs to include engagement with the ideas of inter-dependence among people, communication, idea of a human society, evolution of societies, of location and mapping, climate, habitat, market, of governance, of cooperation, diversity, plurality, and so on.*



social studies has a greater need for information than other disciplines such as Mathematics or Science. In Mathematics, once you have a few axioms, you could logically construct all knowledge using them. In Science, we can repeat an experience or even conduct new ones. There is also certainty that given certain conditions, the results of the observations will be consistent.

In social studies, however, it is not possible to engage with a concept in the abstract without having any information or facts to build up the analysis. It is the task of gleaning patterns in information. Hence, what information is provided, and to what level of detail, is an important consideration in the teaching of the discipline. Of course, we need to always be cognizant that information is rarely neutral, and is colored by perspective.

Information is sometimes confused with concept. This confusion arises because information and concept are intertwined, both in their relationship to each other, and in

the common language used to reference each other. In some aspects, information is prior to development of the concept. But once the concept has been developed, it can be used to organise and retain more information. For a child, 'teacher' might refer to her specific teacher – this is information. Whereas the child's mother might use the word 'teacher' to denote both the specific teacher (information) or to the concept of a teacher.

#### 4. Skills

How does information lead to concept; concept to understanding; and understanding to choices? This is the role of skills. Just as logic is a mathematical skill, and hypothesizing and experimentation are scientific skills, there are skills specific to social studies.

Some examples of social studies skills include: recognizing what to observe, observation, analysis of observation, formulating patterns, reflecting on situations, etc. These might seem complex and high order skills, but even young children demonstrate these when they are, for instance, asked to draw a map of their classroom or school, or are asked to conduct a survey.

Skills and concepts often develop simultaneously and contextually.

Let us consider an example to examine the components suggested above.

#### How did Human Civilisation Develop?

Let's assume the task at hand is to understand the development of the human society from hunter-gatherer days to the present. This requires information that humans did not know agriculture, that they hunted animals in groups and slowly started using tools. We need to know that use of metal in tools and weapons came later, primarily as a improved substitute for stone. There is information that can be gathered from cave paintings. To build a conceptual construct, we need an enormous amount of information that cannot merely be gathered from observation and experience.

The skills and capabilities revolve around finding, comprehending and using sources that have information about these elements. This could include simple reading materials that have analysed the observational data, or even interpreting the original descriptions. So while there is no direct observation required, the other aspects of skills are

still necessary. These require many skills and abilities, but are different from the concrete observational possibilities that tasks dealing with Science require.

The concepts included in this analysis of evolution of human society are the changing use of technology, the nature of production, governance, distribution of resources and surplus, nature of trade and commerce, and so on.

The principles of ethics include understanding of development in terms of sustainability, dealing with inequity in distribution, principles of governance that is just and equal, pros and cons of using technology and elaborate trade, etc.

In some of these categories, there are overlapping areas and a hierarchy of components as we move towards a more general and abstract form of knowledge. The abstraction and the distance from the experience of the child – the movement away from learning with concrete pictures and descriptions – increase as we move to the upper primary classes. The generalisations and connections that the child is expected to make also become more complex.

The need for retaining the concreteness of the picture remains.

#### D. PERSPECTIVES

The perspective with which one approaches social issues within the classroom is an extremely vexing question. Does learning to respect equity and justice demand action in situations where there is injustice and inequity – even if it means confronting something immediate in the child's home or in the community? If children explore the situations of injustice and inequity, do they discuss ways and means of changing it? Or should they limit themselves to the Constitution, its promises and structures without analysing how they function in reality? This is a difficult choice.

*Does learning to respect equity and justice demand action in situations where there is injustice and inequity – even if it means confronting something immediate in the child's home or in the community?*

It is not easy to discuss questions arising from real situations in the classroom. Children coming from various backgrounds and socio-economic strata cannot discuss such issues academically. The inequity, social domination and infringement of democracy have names of people and families associated with it. These are loaded with personal relationships and involvements. The natural instinct of the school system would be to avoid conflict and unpleasantness, to hide inequities, and plead for peace and harmony. A good citizen is one who accepts her lot with equanimity and hopes that better laws would be formed and more effective implementation would take place. It may be argued that this is the best choice for a society; but this is in fact just one perspective. There are counter views.

The Constitution of India promises a just and equitable society. However, it does not elaborate what kind of citizens and governance can lead to this. The goal of the elementary school program therefore has to help the child develop this understanding. The question therefore is, do we prepare children to succeed the best in the present situation? Or do we prepare them to question the dynamics and struggle for the goals that were promised?

There is therefore a struggle between a program that focuses on building a spirit of justice and equity in children; and a program that is focused on peace and harmony, leaving the tranquillity of the ancient pond undisturbed.

The child comes to the school with many experiences and interactions with her environment. She has memories of being respected and valued, of being considered part of a group. She also has memories of exclusion, memories of dominating or being dominated, etc. These experiences have structured her behaviour and beliefs. Based on these, and her own silent analysis, she has formed her identity. It is not easy to develop a program which can use these experiences and the identity in a meaningful manner and develop through them a common view. Also, it is arguable whether a common view or a widespread belief system is even desirable. We need to keep in mind that there are many conflicting world views, and it is not obvious which world view should be advocated. We cannot also ignore the fact that the State is controlled by many dominant forces that would also like to shape the child's perspective. The struggle for determining content and its transaction is therefore intense here.

It is thus obvious that there can be many perspectives

with which to develop social identity and to interpret environment, culture and history. The perspective chosen is governed by the presumed relationship of a human being to society, relationships among humans, and an understanding of how children learn. Any list of do's and don'ts, bereft of choice, discretion and rational analysis, is not acceptable. One of the things, therefore, to be kept in mind while thinking about social studies in primary schools is to avoid failing into trap of developing a didactic program.

## E. NATURE OF THE DISCIPLINE

### Is it Social Studies or is it Social Science?

The prevalent impression that the scientific process offered a superior way to knowledge and life; that along with mathematical logic, it formed a complete package to make the human being rational. These led to a rechristening even the social disciplines with a scientific suffix .

The power of science and technology globally, and the belief in the infallibility of evidence-based arguments and rational logic was considered to be the basis of all knowledge creation. This idea embedded itself in all areas of studies, and has led to a value in being scientific. The members of different disciplines in social studies took pains to describe how their discipline was close to Science, and as cognitively logical.

*Also, it is arguable whether a common view or a widespread belief system is even desirable. We need to keep in mind that there are many conflicting world views, and it is not obvious which world view should be advocated.*

However, while there is nothing wrong in the need for arguments and formulations to be logical, it is important to recognise that many aspects of human behaviour do not conform to straightforward, rational analysis and logic because there are too many inconsistencies. The question of how belief systems, for example, arise is extremely critical and has to be investigated in a manner that cannot be called

scientific.

Natural science has a method; it has a way of accepting knowledge as valid and within its ambit. The scientific process can have a variety of steps, but there are underlying common principles, and knowledge is eventually accepted when it makes verifiable predictions. But, keeping in mind the sheer variability of human behaviour and reviewing various aspects of society and its changed requires a system of processes that cannot be comfortably contained within a social science nomenclature. Unlike Science, human beings and society are not rational, objective and empirically consistent. It would be good to consider for oneself if the social studies disciplines can have the same criteria as the Sciences to judge knowledge or accept that an idea worth considering has been formulated.

*Unlike Science, human beings and society are not rational, objective and empirically consistent. It would be good to consider for oneself if the social studies disciplines can have the same criteria as the Sciences to judge knowledge or accept that an idea worth considering has been formulated.*

## F. CLASSROOM PROCESSES

It is difficult for the school to discuss the legal age for marriage, and the freedom to marry, in a society dominated by khap panchayats. Similarly, how do we talk meaningfully about equity, restraint and contentment in an economy pulled by the market forces? The tensions and the implications of the content of the discussions make it difficult to be held in school. There is besides this the question of the ideology of the school as a structure and the extent to which it can allow open ended discussions and explorations of ideas particularly in areas that may have immediate implications for the life of children and adults around them.

While an exhaustive response to classroom processes is outside the scope of this article, we will consider the following four questions:

1. Can there be a common approach to Science and social science in the primary classroom, especially since they are dealt with jointly under 'Environmental Studies'?
2. Can the program be largely built around the student's knowledge?
3. How do you build on the student's experiences, especially in history?
4. Where does a teacher draw a line when it comes to issues of immediate conflict for the child?
5. Can there be an integrated cross-discipline approach to the curriculum, or is a discipline-specific program required?

### **Can there be a Common Approach to Science and Social Science in the Primary Classroom, especially since they are dealt with Jointly under 'Environmental Studies'?**

At one level, a common approach that includes hypothesising, observing social aspects and discovering patterns as one does in the Science, is possible. However, this 'scientific' process cannot be extended to exploration of how societies develop and change, how human civilisations have learnt to use artefacts, and what has been its impact on their lives. It is also not possible to explore the forms of governance and the kind of implications they have for individuals in a society. The complexity of the social dynamics and situations makes it difficult for clear cause-effect relationships to be seen. Instead what we can see is a description of how things are, and absorb the nuances that differentiates things.

*The notion that scientific knowledge is preeminent, combined with the inherent difficulty in social studies teaching has discouraged the profuse inclusion of social disciplines in the school.*

It is clear that even at the primary level, Science and social studies would have distinct approaches. The notion that scientific knowledge is preeminent, combined with the inherent difficulty in social studies teaching has discouraged

the profuse inclusion of social disciplines in the school. Which is why even as a part of EVS, attention is focused on conducting surveys and locating places on a map; and not on analysing the lived experiences of children.

### Can the Program be Largely built Around the Student's Knowledge?

Students have local and personal information at the beginning of the program. Recognising this, we then use it to build wider conceptual structure that builds on and relates to the experiences of the student.

*If the program gives the child the opportunity to find reasons, organise her ideas and make choices, then it will have implications for behaviour of the child. The program would also convey to the child a sense of what society is and how to relate to it.*

The information available to the child is in a variety of forms. It includes family and kin, names of the village of the neighbouring villages, the river that flows nearby, the names of trees around, different types of crops that are grown, where the market is and what is sold there, etc.

The amount of information a child has and its scope increases as she grows older. While some of this happens on its own, a formal social studies effort should lead the child to information and knowledge that would otherwise be beyond her reach. This will require her to observe closely, collect data, to organise these observations, make generalizations from observations, draw inferences, and so on. The child has to be given opportunities to take up such tasks with a gradually increasing level of difficulty.

If the program gives the child the opportunity to find reasons, organise her ideas and make choices, then it will have implications for behaviour of the child. The program would also convey to the child a sense of what society is and how to relate to it. It would suggest ways to understand the happenings in the world around. There are certain principles and social norms that the child needs to be aware of, as well

as be capable of questioning them.

### How do you build on the Student's Experiences, especially in History?

The choice of themes and entry points for concepts has many folk views. The dominant argument is to move from the known to the unknown, and that means moving from what is around the child to the more distant. However, the diversity of backgrounds that children come from make it difficult for this to be meaningfully done. The use of the child's experience can only to be bring in what she knows and to help her analyse it.

There are however, some elements of the experience that may be clearly useable in the classroom. These include conversations about what artisans do, what tools and materials they use, the goods that come into village, the goods that go out, where people get firewood from, where they get water from, what people do during different festivals, and so on. These are all descriptions of observations, but critical analysis around these can make things difficult. It is not easy to analyse why some people have a water source in their house and others have to travel a long distance, or even why some people are even disallowed access to nearby water sources.

There is also the issue of how do you initiate the child into thinking about what happened before. The choice of whether we want to talk about kings, dynasties and their battles, or do something else, needs to be settled first. If agree that at the very least we need a historical perspective that values descriptions of society and of lives of people, then we need to begin this engagement with children. Of course, we can begin with the family tree, and what parents and other elders remember about earlier times. This, however, does not consolidate into the recognition of causes and implications. It does not also give a set of questions that can be examined.

The building of historical understanding using concrete experiences therefore becomes difficult. The framework for analysis requires a wider information base that is not immediately accessible for the child. This can partly be resolved through narrated tales – for instance, descriptions of the lives of ordinary people at different historical times, as told by accessible figure.

By now, it would be obvious that the classroom cannot

revolve around what the child already knows. There is a need for new data to be added to widen exposure. It is also crucial for the child to appreciate plurality and diversity. She needs to keep all this in mind while developing her conceptual structures. Such an analysis can only come by providing detailed descriptions so that the learner is able to establish a specific relationship with the information given. For this, the context has to be rich and well connected.

*Which means that while the asking of uncomfortable questions is inherent in the nature of social studies, an appropriate judgement of how far to push the envelope can only be taken by the teacher in real time.*

It would be important to also ensure that information is provided in a format that is by itself interesting. For example, it could be in the form of a story or a collection of detailed pictures. The examples that one constructs in these stories should relate to aspects of the child's experiences. There can be many ways of making the child engage with these descriptions, including comparing them with her own experience and getting her think and reflect on it. We need to take her back in time, we need to find anchors around which we can peg descriptions of earlier times and make it interesting for the child.

### **Where does a Teacher Draw a Line when it Comes to Issues of Immediate Conflict for the Child?**

It may be comparatively easy to decide what you want to do with physical geography, even though the extent of abstraction needed and the sizes of terrains for which these are significant are themselves frightening. It is also possible to know what to do with the village market or how we analyse for the idea of currency. But when we relate surplus to social dynamics of inequity, and analyse the accumulation of wealth or the justification of private property or inheritance, we are constructing social study concepts that behave differently for different people. We are both constructors of social ideas

and simultaneously are their analysers.

Free class room discourse thus could become critical and even disparaging of the system. Similarly, if we relate geography to the politics of nations, and to the domination and distribution of resources, then the challenge of the middle path between raising questions of inequity and promoting acceptance becomes thinner.

There are many instances of teachers who are convinced that children need to think about 'the other' and be sensitive to issues of equity and plurality, but feel unable to move the discussion forward. Cultural attitudes being deeply ingrained, it is difficult for the school to intervene in a situation of crisis. Any attempt to open a dialogue must recognise that the emotions are raw at the time the differences between communities are the most intense. Also, the prejudice of caste and the relative positions that have been reached cannot only be a matter of rational discussion. In any case, it is not easy to talk about deprivation and segregation among children present in the classroom.

Which means that while the asking of uncomfortable questions is inherent in the nature of social studies, an appropriate judgement of how far to push the envelope can only be taken by the teacher in real time.

### **Can there be an Integrated Cross-Discipline Approach to the Curriculum, or is a Discipline-Specific Program Pequired?**

Transacting social sciences also requires us to examine integrated versus discipline-based programs. The argument for an integrated program is that the child perceives reality as whole and therefore the treatment should be holistic; not based on disciplines. This at the extreme interpretation tends to suggest that the entire program be evolved as an undifferentiated theme, and not as specific development of discipline based concepts.

The radical proponents of theme-based presentation often miss out on ensuring that the key elements that link the primary school to further development. The elementary school programs have a certain serious disciplinary flavour and that increases as we move to the secondary classes. For example, there seems to be a clear expectation that by the time child reaches the upper primary, she has to be able to read maps, that therefore, there must be a program of helping child develop that ability. But this cannot be left to

happen under one overall theme or another.

Similarly to appreciate history, the primary school child has to have a sense of time and of relating it to their activity. The conclusion that you need a historical timeline has to be the basis of any content developed. This requires dealing with a level of discipline-specific abstraction that will not get developed under integrated theme-based approaches.

Having integrated materials might make it more engaging to the child. However, it cannot become an end in itself. It is important to recognize that formal education exists to help the child understand and analyze the whole from multiple

perspectives, and that this requires discipline-specific programs.

### G. FINAL COMMENTS

The questions that have been posed in this article are not such for which we have all answers; they are part of the struggle of developing social studies programs. There is need to develop a wider understanding of the issues in social studies among the entire education community, and especially among primary school teachers and textbook writers, so that it can appropriately inform what happens in the classroom.

### Authors' Note

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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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# SECTION-B

Some Perspectives



When I was asked to write about social science teaching and reflect on why our school system is so focused on giving children one right answer, one right approach and one way of looking at the world – I started looking back at my own school days. Yes, teaching has become uni-dimensional, children are expected to learn facts and reproduce them. Many young people find civics and history terribly boring and admit that they forget what they learn as soon as they come out of the examination hall. Why is this so? Can it be different?

This left me wondering how and why some of us grew up asking questions, demanding logical explanations and challenging superstitions and prejudices. While family and peer group play a huge role in determining values and practices, it has long been accepted that the school can indeed play an important role in moulding our world view. In the pre-independence period, schools set up by social reformers made a big difference. Equally, right up to this day, the kind of school we go to moulds us to a large extent. What and how we learn, the kind of teachers we have, the way curriculum is transacted is known to impact not only what we learn, but also how we learn and how we relate to our environment.

I was studying in class 8 in Kendriya Vidyalaya Pattom in Trivandrum, Kerala. The year was 1968. We had just moved from Shimla and being children of a central government officer, we barely stayed two years in a city. A teacher in school, I do not recall his name, was passionate about the civil rights movement in the US. He was a great admirer of Martin Luther King and the assassination of such a great leader in March 1968 had disturbed him greatly. He introduced us to the historical speech – I have a dream – and many of us learnt to recite the speech. One day he talked about Sri Narayana Guru (1855-1928), a revered spiritual leader and social reformer who revolted against casteism and propagated the new value of freedom and social equality. He asked if we would be willing to do a comparative study of the two great reformers.

Some of us volunteered, not knowing much about civil rights or the social reform movement in Kerala.

We started reading about the civil rights movement, assassination of Martin Luther King, struggle for equality and

justice in the US. Classmates who could read Malayalam read up about the Kerala social reformer and shared it with the rest of the group. We gathered press clippings, went to the British Council library, the public library and talked to people. We then went to the ashram, heard lectures, walked around and talked to people. We stayed together and ate together – students of different castes, religion and speaking different languages (Kendriya Vidyalaya was an amazing melting pot, there were students from all over the country). Small groups of students worked together to write about the two great leaders. We then put up an exhibition of sorts in our class. It was the most wonderful two-weeks of my student life.

Coming from a traditional Brahmin family, I was not adequately exposed to ideas about caste inequality. The first time I heard about it was during the anti-Hindi agitation in Tamil Nadu (when I was studying in class 5 in Kendriya Vidyalaya, IIT Madras) and I recall elders arguing that Brahmins had no future in the state and we should therefore learn English and Hindi well. There were others who disagreed and talked about historical injustice. The discussions used to be heated and children were often asked to go out and play and not eavesdrop on conversation of adults.

*“The biggest change that came over my friends and me was that we started questioning and started reflecting on everyday experiences. We discussed the food shortages of 1968-69, the unrest in society and stark inequality.”*

The short two-week project opened my eyes to caste and race, social discrimination and the spectre of inequality and injustice. On completion of the project I started questioning traditional practices, subtle and overt forms

of discrimination, consciously befriended children from different communities and backgrounds. I used to make it a point to eat in the homes of my friends. The biggest change that came over my friends and me was that we started questioning and started reflecting on everyday experiences. We discussed the food shortages of 1968-69, the unrest in society and stark inequality. Our world was turned up side down in a short span of a few weeks. It did not seem such a momentous experience at that time, it was only many years later as an adult that I realised how the kind of education I received made such an impact on me. I also realised that our teacher did not tell us what to look for and what not to look for, what to believe and most importantly he did not lecture us on caste or religion. Our teacher just let us explore and reach our own conclusion.

Many decades later I had the privilege of documenting the work of Bhima Sangha, an association of working children in Karnataka. During my trip to Kundapur in Dakshina Kannada, I came across Makkala Panchayat (Children's Panchayat). Children up to the age of 18 elect their own representatives at the Panchayat level and form the Children's Panchayat. The adults' Panchayat conducts the elections, following the formal procedures – filing nominations with a returning officer, campaigning and elections. The program was designed to provide experiential education in democratic values and practices. After the elections of the children's Panchayat, a Task Force is constituted. This is a representative forum comprising all the local government functionaries, elected representatives and Makkala Panchayat. The forum is key to continuous dialogue and collaboration with the government. Since its inception, a wide range of children's problems have been discussed and solved: for example, building a footbridge across a seasonal stream to reach school, persuading the community not to employ children as domestic labour, stemming the out-migration of children to work in hotels and creating alternative schools in locations that do not have a school within reach etc. Interfacing with the local government has created an opportunity for the program to work with primary schoolteachers to improve the quality of education and also make the school an enjoyable place for children. (Vimala Ramachandran, *Getting Children Back to School*, Sage Publications, New Delhi 2003)

I have seen similar work through Bal Panchayats in other parts of the country. What was significant about Makkala Panchayat was that it was an integral part of education,

learning about democratic processes and internalising the values of equality and fair play. Experiencing elections, taking decisions through dialogue, convincing each other and learning to work with and live with different world views was a powerful way to nurture democratic values and respect for others.

Over the years I have also seen similar processes adopted in some Mahila Shikshan Kendra (managed by Mahila Samakhya) – where gender relations, social injustice, empowerment through collective forums etc. – are woven into the curriculum of the intensive learning program. The Nirantar (a center for gender and education based in New Delhi) publication titled *Window to the World* (An analytic documentation of the experience of bringing out a curriculum for rural women, New Delhi, undated) outlines step by step how the MSK curriculum was evolved in Banda, Uttar Pradesh.

*The problem with our curriculum is that it places too much emphasis on topics and too little on the learning process itself. Regardless of what the topic is, if the learning process encourages us to explore our world, talk to each other and to people around us, discover history in our own environment and most importantly, work together in groups to debate, challenge and question – then we all (teachers and students) will emerge richer from such an experience.*

Almost four decades later I had a chance to go over the civics textbook prepared by Delhi SCERT. Friends and colleagues from Nirantar who were involved shared the draft. The textbook was not like conventional textbooks, it encouraged the teacher to work with children through projects, encouraged them to look around and learn about their own neighbourhood and their city. I remember sharing my own experience with some of them.

During this period I had the privilege of visiting Rishi Valley School (Madanapalle, AP) two times a year and saw how project based study of history, civics and almost all the subjects gave the students an opportunity to read, discuss and think. It opened their minds and encouraged them to question. And most importantly, the teaching learning process was entirely devoid of fear and punishment – the children enjoyed learning.

The National Curriculum Framework recommended that experiential teaching and learning draw upon local history and culture. I was immediately reminded of my two-week project, how the process of searching, reading and discovering lives and ideas of two great people started a process of critical thinking, something that has stayed with me through my years as a student, later as a teacher and now as a researcher and writer.

The problem with our curriculum is that it places too much emphasis on topics and too little on the learning process itself. Regardless of what the topic is, if the learning process encourages us to explore our world, talk to each other and to people around us, discover history in our own environment and most importantly, work together in groups to debate, challenge and question – then we all (teachers and students) will emerge richer from such an experience.

An experiential learning process involves both the mind and the heart. When the heart is convinced, the information is internalised immediately. For the heart to be convinced, the information must not only be authentic in the eyes of the teacher but must be like a mirror that reflects the “truth” as perceived by the students. Engaging children in such a process demands a lot more of the teacher. She is not the fountainhead of all knowledge, the know all – but a facilitator

who enables her students to explore, compile and analyse. Once we get the hang of searching and finding information, critically reflecting on them, discussing them and then forming an opinion –we can use this in any situation.

Such learning processes also reaffirm the value of common sense and relate daily experience as citizens to concepts and history. This process can also help students critically reflect on social relationships, dominant prejudices, injustice, inequality, gender relations and a range of social issues like corruption, violence etc. Building bridges between common sense and the world of knowledge (as sanctified in textbooks) yields valuable insights to educators and students.

All this is easier said than done. Is our teaching force prepared for such a drastic overhaul of teaching-learning processes? Exposure to new ideas, a different vision of the learning and teaching need to go hand-in-hand with a conscious effort to unlearn. Civics and social science teaching lends itself to experiential learning. It is possible to initiate it at a very early stage in environmental sciences from class 1 and gradually build on it right up to secondary education. The canvas would no doubt expand, but once teachers and children get a hang of the process, then it is possible to take the process forward.

One of the huge challenges that we face today is that politics and politicians want to determine what right history is and what right civics is. History and civics have unfortunately become a political battleground. The only way we can put an end to this is by introducing experiential learning and teaching, so that we make space for local experiences, local culture, history and most importantly, meaningful education that teaches our children how to learn and not what to learn.

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One of the many forms of illiteracy that we encounter around us is the lack of perception about processes of social change. Matching this is a 'block' against acknowledging the validity of the life of people who are 'different' -who are the 'other'. Whether as social activists, as bureaucrats, as experts, or as consultants engaged in monitoring and reviewing programs, we expect the ultimate transformations as a result of the effort we are engaged in. We do not recognize that these efforts are merely elements in a larger process.

It is in this context that the social role of the historian becomes important. The historian's function, or responsibility, lies in describing social processes closely and faithfully, but with a view to answer questions. The need, then, is to move away from both 'empiricism' and the fetish of abstractions; to a description informed by theory. Close assessment of the processes of social change has a staying power; it trains the mind to perceive life the way it is being lived around us.

Executing this responsibility was the most exciting part of the venture that we, at Eklavya, undertook in development of new textbooks for school children. The social science group at Eklavya, comprising of people from the disciplines of history, economics and geography, began by reviewing the existing text books, observing the standard social science classes being conducted, and discussing with teachers their experiences and the problems of teaching the subject. After a ground work of about three years, we obtained permission from the Madhya Pradesh government to formally implement our texts in nine schools from classes VI to VIII, and to conduct separate public exams for these schools in class VIII. That was in 1986. These texts have undergone several rounds of revision after feedback was received from these schools. The teachers have undergone training-programs devoted to the content of the books, teaching methods, and evaluation of students, etc. A system of open book evaluation has been developed, and question papers are set keeping in mind the objectives of the program; we are currently trying to evolve methods to evaluate the impact of a program of this kind on the teaching and learning of social sciences.

### Forming Concepts

In order to ascertain the difference in understanding gained



by children using different texts, we conducted a small study in two of the schools using our books and in two others using the normal texts.

We gave a set of identical questions on the hunter-gatherers (the shikari manav or adimanav) to both sets of children. Many children in the schools following the traditional system had made some or the other kind of value judgment on the life of the hunter-gatherers: 'behut bekar' (very useless), 'bahut kathin' (very difficult), 'asambhav' (impossible). The questions were worded in such a way that the students were not called upon to make such comments. On the other hand, not a single child from schools following our program made a value judgment. In addition, they were able to give many more details about the life of those people.



*The historian's function, or responsibility, lies in describing social processes closely and faithfully, but with a view to answer questions. The need, then, is to move away from both 'empiricism' and the fetish of abstractions; to a description informed by theory. Close assessment of the processes of social change has a staying power: it trains the mind to perceive life the way it is being lived around us.*



Responses to other questions such as 'why did the hunter-gatherers not live in houses' or 'not use pots and jars' also illustrate this difference. The most common answer given by children belonging to the normal stream was that the

hunter-gatherers did not know how to make or use houses or pots and jars. Probably such answers are not uncommon even among undergraduate history students. However, only a small number of children undertaking our program gave such simplistic answers. About two thirds of them attributed the lack of archaeological findings of pots and jars to the exhaustion of food and water resources. Others said that possibly these people collected their food from the forest and consumed it directly, not having much left to store, or that they were nomadic people and could not keep large pots, etc., These answers displayed, to our mind, a deeper understanding of the problem.

Such, then, are the results we seem to be getting: a richer and more vivid image of things being talked about, the ability to go beyond banal explanations into more substantial ones, a beginning as far as seeing the interconnectedness of social phenomena, and, finally, perceiving 'other' people in a less judgemental manner. Other dimensions of the effect of the new history texts have emerged in the course of our interaction with children over the years, as part of the Eklavya effort. We would like to share some of these interactions here.

*Some of the impacts on children: a richer and more vivid image of things being talked about, the ability to go beyond banal explanations into more substantial ones, a beginning as far as seeing the interconnectedness of social phenomena, and, finally, perceiving 'other' people in a less judgemental manner.*

### Breaking into Language

We recall our interaction while discussing the Mughal emperor Akbar with the class VIII students in a village school. Their involvement was astounding; they were enthused to construct a plot, take it apart into threads, and think and react to every query coming from us on Akbar's relationship with the Rajputs, Turanis, and Iranis.

Why did Akbar conquer the Rajputana kingdoms only to

return them to their respective ruling elite? '... so that the Rajputs could help him in times of need,' and again, 'taaki rajpooton ke raajya Akbar ke raajya ke naam mein aa jaayein (so that the Rajput kingdoms would be counted amongst his territories). Why were the Turanis unhappy? Here the complexity of the situation was tougher to comprehend: '... because they were deprived of their posts.' No', we said, and they replied, 'because they were deprived of important posts which were given to the Rajputs.' We informed them that this was also not true, and enacted a mock play with the students to concretize and bring the situation closer home to them. Watching us with avid interest and rapt attention, they nodded in understanding, almost hinting at us to stop clarifying further so that they could get back to the answering mode, and said 'hann, matlab Turani ameroon ko lagaa ki unkee pooch nahin rahee (the Turanis felt that they no more had any say in important matters). We see here an attempt at coining phrases and using idioms to express the concepts being formed in the minds of children.

Another incident comes to our mind. This happened at the Class VII level. We talked to a very quiet boy about the pictures in a chapter. The pictures were on the emergence of dynasties in early medieval India. The three pictures showed two men of a powerful family sitting astride horses talking to a Brahmin, a coronation ceremony with a Brahmin helping with the rites, and a king presenting a copper plate to a Brahmin respectively.

'The two men on the horses look angry... because ... it may be that the other poor people are not accepting them as kings ...because may be unko pata nahin ye do log kaun si jaat ke hain...' (maybe they do not know which caste these two people belong to). 'In this picture vo pandit se kaha raha hai ki mere ko bhari sabha mein mukut pahana do... mein raja ban jaaoon, ...vo khud mukut pehen lega to jo koi uski sabha hogi vo maanegi nahin ki yah raja hai, sab koi pandit ki baat mante hain ....' (he is telling the priest to perform his coronation ceremony in the presence of a large audience, and thus, he can become king; if he were to crown himself on his own then his people/subjects will not accept him as the ruler, but everyone accepts the word of the priest). ' ... Ab raja dan de raha hai ...kyonki brahman se kaha tha, so usne uska kam kar diya' (now the king is giving a gift, for he told the priest and the latter did the king's work).

What the boy narrated in response to the pictures in the

lesson was another text, not the one we had written with the help of our researchers and historians. As we talked to him, we wondered whether this village boy, thirteen years of age, was actually closer to the context of lineage, power and religious legitimization of authority than people like us. This can perhaps be said even in the case of the nature of responses elicited by the questions regarding factional politics and clout in the times of Akbar.

How were we to understand the responses of children to the new texts developed by us? It seems that when historical processes are concretized and reconstructed before children, a resonance is created, a chord is struck, and empathy begins to emerge with other people, and other times. Children start drawing upon their own experiences and language to assimilate and express the history they are studying.

When we cut away the denseness, the abstraction, the pointless empiricism enveloping history texts, when students are able to see in texts issues they are familiar with, they can relate them to dimensions of their own lives, their experiences. The shift to their indigenous vocabulary and phraseology in the act of narration is an indication of the empathy these children feel with the subject. In contrast, traditional texts only allow repetition of textbook language, requiring a mere memorizing of dates and events.

Children, especially in rural areas, are deeply connected with the labor processes and keenly aware of the social and political reality around them. Any superficial or abstract treatment of social issues, whether historical or contemporary, dampens their interest. Not all children, however, relate to different contexts in the same way. We have observed, for instance, that children who have been exposed to forms of labor and modes of payment show a sharper grasp of such matters than more privileged children.

This need of children requires us to go deeper into socio-historical situations and explore the changing conflicts and predicaments there. It was with this need in mind that we tried to explore in our texts the relationship between: an ordinary Aryan tribesman and the rajanyas, the Paraiya laborer, the Vellala tenants and Brahmin landlords in a medieval brahmadeya; the maharajadhiraja and the saamanta; or the adivasi, the forest guard and the moneylender in British India.

The incorporation of the experiences of various categories of people into the textbook constitutes a radical departure

from the conventional modes of knowing. It emphasizes the heterogeneities and conflicts in our social existence, whereas the dominant interest thrives on presenting a conflict-free image.

### Pedagogy in Traditional Texts

In the traditional history school text, the compulsion of saying everything in a hundred odd pages makes the textbook a mere compilation of points to remember. There is an implicit assumption that children cannot or need not understand things in any depth, and that they only need to know something -- the chosen 'important' points -- about everything that happened.



*The incorporation of the experiences of various categories of people into the textbook constitutes a radical departure from the conventional modes of knowing. It emphasizes the heterogeneities and conflicts in our social existence, whereas the dominant interest thrives on presenting a conflict-free image.*



The NCERT books of the 1980's had remained faithful to this basic assumption, even though they were a great improvement as compared to the earlier texts in some respects. They took care to weed out regional and communal biases, and made some effort to discuss key notions and concepts of history. There was also a greater emphasis on explanation and causation. However, the attempt remained halfhearted and was heavily restricted by the overwhelming compulsion to provide a 'balanced' package of information.

A number of pedagogical concerns need to be worked out (which calls for going beyond the perceived duty of the academic historian) if history teaching is to be made relevant for children. Here, the responsibility lies in focusing not so much on the politics of history writing - though this is not without importance - but on what the discipline itself stands for, that is, the principal approaches and ways of thinking historically. It consists mainly in learning to

see everything as transitional, as changing over time and place, as specific to a particular period and region, and to explain that specificity and change in the first place. Next, it would involve recognizing the interconnected nature of all phenomena within defined spatial and temporal limits.

The uniqueness of a particular historical situation has to be established through a comparison with other situations. But the comparative method is seldom used in our textbooks. There is no systematic attempt at pointing out the differences between different historical periods. NCERT books of that time occasionally mentioned such differences, but they were seldom of a fundamental, qualitative nature. The manner in which they were discussed registered difference in degree only. For example, it was said that under the Mauryas, the king had greater control/power than in the time of the Rajputs. But that the king's relationship with his subordinates was fundamentally different in these two contexts was never brought out through a multifaceted examination of the methods of recruitment and payment, the system of accountability, and the effect all this had on other aspects of society.

*It is time such lifeless, schematic formats were abandoned and a living picture of social formations were developed, where productive activity, social relations, political institutions, ideology and culture are seen as actively determining and influencing each other.*

Even fundamental transformations, such as the urban revolution, the emergence of state societies, or the transition from pastoralism to agriculture were at best only mentioned. Even here, the changes were left unexplained. As a result, the child is not imparted any training to enable him to constantly look for differences and similarities between periods or regions, and to explain and understand these.

In order to bring out the differences between various historical periods it is essential to structure the chapters in

such a way that they are comparable. Not only was this not attempted, the textbooks, in their quest for giving a balanced body of information, did not seek to correlate one aspect of society with another. The sections on polity, economy, society, religion, art and culture stood on their own, without connection with the other sections.

It is time such lifeless, schematic formats were abandoned and living pictures of social formations were developed, where productive activity, social relations, political institutions, ideology and culture are seen as actively determining and influencing each other.

### Charting An Alternative

In this context, it is necessary to recall Ashin Das Gupta's method of describing the merchants of Surat where one gets a vivid picture of not just the life and work of the merchants but of the entire Mughal political system, its working and its collapse. The graphic descriptions are neither purposeless nor empiricist. His main focus remains on explaining the reasons for the decline of this prime port town, through an exposition of the everyday churning of life.

This method can be used in school texts as well, to avoid abstract and dense narrations and also to eliminate the use of too many 'terms' to be learnt by rote. Writing texts with a problem/ theme as its focus makes it possible to have criteria for including or excluding a piece of information. Such criteria will be more meaningful than indiscriminately putting in everything that is generally known or is selectively considered very important by someone.

Being exposed to the concept of total history and to D. D. Kosambi's methods helped us a great deal. The latter wrote history by successfully integrating the methodologies of other disciplines, and made us realize that it is possible to combine special perspectives of different disciplines without fragmenting our understanding of society. We were able to handle the difficult question of writing an integrated textbook in the light of such examples.

Interaction with children helped us chart the rest of the course. We learnt that observing and recording facts about one's own environment could become inane and contribute little to children's understanding unless one went beyond the environment and explained things. Children have a very intimate knowledge of their environment. But they need to know about diverse situations in order to understand their

own better. They find the exercise of using knowledge about their own locale to explore other, similar and dissimilar, ones more fascinating than merely recounting the familiar.

At the same time, we discovered that middle school children were not equipped to handle abstract categories. They were more comfortable with situational thinking. They were also not ready to cope with a great deal of critical, interpretative delving into sources and opinions.

They seemed to need an exposure to a very rich range of real life experiences of people. The greater the variety of people from far and near, in the past as well as in the contemporary context - the rich and the poor, the ruling and the ruled, etc. – the greater the complexity, the better their understanding. Getting to know different human situations and predicaments, to discuss them and compare them with each other, seemed to form the base on which children could depend to eventually look at issues critically and, in this way, build up an open minded and mature outlook on society.

Today, as we evaluate the effectiveness of our books for the majority of students, we realize all that remains to be done. A great deal of non-textual activity is necessary, we have learnt from our experiences with children -- oral narrations, drawing pictures, making clay representations. They need greater feedback on their writing, greater orientation regarding the structure of the texts, more time to read and prepare, more attentive discussions and explanations from teachers, and, what is very important - a far greater space to talk about their experiences in the course of the lessons.

When we reflect on the responsiveness of children to the problem oriented and concretized texts, and on the emergence of their own idiom and expression, we are left with little doubt that people who are closer to real life situations could actually decode the processes discussed in the history texts with greater ease than we did or do. And that their perceptions would facilitate the historian's, and social scientist's, search for truth.

## Footnote

1. Much water has flown under the bridge since the writing of this article. The textbooks of NCERT have been rewritten afresh twice- once after the NCF 2000 and again after NCF 2005. While many pedagogic concerns Eklavya struggled with are increasingly taken on board and addressed in varying degrees, new issues about the academics and pedagogy are being debated and worked out. Meanwhile, Eklavya's experimental program in the 9 government schools of Madhya Pradesh came to an end in 2002

## Authors' Note

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Ann Horwitz



Understanding and promoting social science education is not a simple matter. By their definition these subjects—history, sociology, geography, civics, economics, psychology—are not “hard” sciences. For a student to master them, she must be able to interpret information and think critically in a way that is not demanded of those acquiring basic numeracy and literacy. After all,  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$  whether you're in Jakarta, Nairobi, or Paris. An apple is an apple, no matter what continent you are on. Making conclusions about the legacy of colonialism, the benefits and drawbacks of capitalism, or the appropriate role of women in society, however, can be a very different process across—and even within—national boundaries.

It is perhaps because of this “softness” that the international education community has, over the past few decades, tended to emphasize reading, writing, and arithmetic over the social sciences when shaping policy and assessing progress. The major international education assessments, “Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)” and “Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)”, do not measure students’ attainment of social science material. The “Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)”, another well-regarded assessment, focuses on reading, math, and science, though it does include a small, cross-curricular component for measuring “problem solving.” PISA is only administered in 65 countries, and the most recent round of participants did not include a single sub-Saharan African country.

One global assessment, the “International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Civic Education Study”, does measure students’ historical and geographic understanding and civic competencies, but only 39 countries participated in the latest round, in 2009. Again, the list of participating countries lacked diversity; 64% were European, 15% were Latin American, 13% were Asian, and not a single African country was represented in the remaining percentage. In a move that could be seen as reflective of the primacy of math, science, and reading over social science in the minds of policymakers, George W. Bush’s Department of Education chose to remove the U.S. from participation in the IEA Civic Education Study, beginning with the 2009 round. This decision could have been prompted, conceivably, by the findings of the larger, more inclusive, and more influential

TIMSS and PIRLS, which saw the U.S. outpaced by a number of Asian and European countries in reading, math, and science attainment.

The overall picture around the world, in short, is one where social sciences usually take a backseat to the “harder” disciplines. The prevailing wisdom seems to be that for a country to be competitive in the global economy, its education system must focus on preparing workers to understand numbers and words. Preparing active citizens with a nuanced understanding of history, culture, and human behavior has become, in many ways, an afterthought as countries compete for their slice of what all see to be an increasingly small pie.

*“The overall picture around the world, in short, is one where social sciences usually take a backseat to the “harder” disciplines. The prevailing wisdom seems to be that for a country to be competitive in the global economy, its education system must focus on preparing workers to understand numbers and words.”*

A country that goes too far in abandoning instruction in history, sociology, or the other social science fields, however, does so at its own peril. Few dispute the importance of education for preparing a competent, able workforce, and it is for this reason that literacy and numeracy are and must remain in curricula. The human capital-building function is not the only reason why states invest in education, though. Schools are a place where young people learn the ways of citizenship and public affairs, where their social and political affinities are formed, where the divisions within a society may be replicated or transformed. For these reasons, the social sciences, too, do and must continue to have a place—some might say the most important place—in curricula.

This inherent tension between economic imperatives, which demand an able workforce, and social imperatives, which demand an engaged citizenry, is not endemic to any one part of the globe. It can be witnessed in rich countries and poor countries, long-established democracies and fledgling ones alike. Though one could write volumes on the topic of social science education around the world, in the interest of space I here limit our exploration to a handful of countries. There is such great diversity of curriculum and pedagogy in the social sciences internationally, it is a shame to have to leave most of it untouched here. My hope is that readers will have their interest piqued by this article, and take the initiative to learn more.

### For 'Good' or for 'Ill'

Before delving into the global picture of social science education, it is worth reminding ourselves, as educators, that education is not an unqualified good. Far too often and in far too many places, the social science curriculum is contorted into a tool for indoctrination and consolidation of state power. Rather than providing a safe haven where students learn to think critically about the problems facing their society, schools themselves become the arena where inter-communal battles are pitched. Regimes manipulate, distort, and even fabricate history to favor their preferred ethnic, religious, or linguistic group. While this abuse of schools is most common in areas suffering violent conflict, it finds a home in more stable countries, as well. The recent controversy over the social studies curriculum in the American state of Texas, where a group of right-wing members of the State Board of Education succeeded in amending the U.S. history standards to emphasize the role of Christianity and conservative political movements and figures, provides evidence of this.

Given that it is the right of all people to receive an education that, in the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Promote[s] understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and...further[s]... the maintenance of peace," it behoves those of us in the education field to fight for the rightful place of the social sciences in schools, both in our own countries and abroad. If we share the ideals of peace, security, and the common dignity of all people, it is our responsibility to ensure that all learners, no matter the context in which they live, are given the tools to think, act, and participate as equals.

### The Global Picture

The recently published *World Social Science Report 2010*, a joint effort of UNESCO and the International Social Sciences Council, notes that international dialogue on the social sciences has been driven largely by North America and Western Europe. This is perhaps unsurprising, as these regions are home to the world's oldest democracies and are the birthplace of the institution of the public school as it is understood in modern times. In the United States, public schools are seen as a vital means of preserving and strengthening the democratic system.

The U.S., unlike the vast majority of countries, has a decentralized education system. There is a Federal Department of Education, but for the most part, schools are planned, managed, and funded at the state and local level. Approximately 83% of education spending comes from state and local governments, and the responsibility for crafting standards and assessing student progress lies at those levels. Despite this decentralization, there are curricular commonalities across states, and one is that all students are required to learn about the history and government of the country. This is an outgrowth of the view of America's founders, who believed that no democracy could survive if its citizens were not educated. John Adams, the 2<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States, wrote, "Liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people."

*Social science advocates are, therefore, dismayed by the government's decision to no longer participate in the IEA Civic Education Study, as it sends a disheartening message that knowledge of history, geography, and civics is not worth measuring.*

Public schooling in the U.S. truly took off beginning in the 1830s, under the leadership of Horace Mann. He shared the founders' ideals of molding democratic citizens through schools. In line with that view, social science education in the U.S. was and is geared towards equipping youth with basic knowledge of the workings of their government, an

understanding of rights that emphasizes the individual, and a fundamental trust in institutions that is essential to the continuation of the system. As Eleanor Roosevelt put it, "Our children should learn the general framework of their government and then they should know where they come in contact with the government, where it touches their daily lives and where their influence is exerted on the government. It must not be a distant thing, someone else's business, but they must see how every cog in the wheel of a democracy is important and bears its share of responsibility for the smooth running of the entire machine."

*In the world's newer democracies, such as those in Africa and the former Soviet bloc, this same tension between tradition and progress is evident in the social science curriculum. These countries tend to be more socially conservative than the U.S. and Western Europe and are not as likely to emphasize critical thinking and individual agency.*

While social science education is and always has been a central part of American schools, however most Americans, exhibit poor levels of political knowledge. Social science advocates are, therefore, dismayed by the government's decision to no longer participate in the IEA Civic Education Study, as it sends a disheartening message that knowledge of history, geography, and civics is not worth measuring. Beyond the struggle to secure the place of these fields in curricula, though, the social science community in the U.S. is frequently bogged down by internecine squabbles as to what exactly should be taught. At the risk of oversimplifying what is a quite complex debate, the issue may be painted as one of "multiculturalists"—who wish to see a curriculum that is more international in flavor and highlights the social and historical contributions of minorities—versus "traditionalists," who favor a focus on heroic figures (e.g. George Washington) and patriotic narrative. Because of the decentralized nature of the education system, American students in more liberal

districts tend to receive social science instruction that is more multicultural in nature, while those in conservative districts learn through a more traditional lens.

Australia, too, has a decentralized system, where states and territories are principally responsible for the schools. Also like the United States, Australian students' attainment of the civic competencies imparted through social science instruction is lackluster. The Australian government's report on the IEA Civic Education Study states that "only half of Australian students have a grasp of the essential pre-conditions for a properly working democracy. They are not strong in their understandings of what constitutes their civil rights...[they] do not have a strong grasp of the impact of economic issues in the functioning of a democratic system." In addition to the need to remedy this, Australia faces intractable issues of poverty and unequal opportunity among its indigenous population, and the government frequently faces accusations that it doesn't do enough to fix the problem by ridding the social science curriculum of its Eurocentric bias. A new draft of the Australian national curriculum is currently in the consultation process, and if it succeeds in addressing the flaws in the social science standards it may offer a model to other countries for empowering disadvantaged groups.

On the other side of the globe, in Western Europe, education is generally a centralized affair. An old joke suggests that the French education minister could, on any given day, check his watch and be able to tell you precisely what lesson is being taught all across France. Indeed, a defining characteristic of social science education in France has been its uniformity in promoting deference to the central state and a monolithic French identity. France and its neighbors, including the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries have found the role of social science education challenged, however, by two major changes on the continent. The first is the wave of immigration from Africa and the Middle East, which is forcing these democracies to pause and take stock of how tolerant and egalitarian they truly are, and to conceive of possible broader notions of what it means to be French, Danish, German, etc.

The second change is the establishment and growth of the European Union, which demands that curricula strike a balance between inculcating a particular national narrative on the one hand, and promoting an appreciation of the EU members' political and economic interdependence on the

other. National governments in Europe must deal with this challenge delicately, as the benefits of union are countered by a strong skepticism towards the EU on the part of many voters. In some ways, it is not unlike the tug-of-war between the multiculturalists and the traditionalists in the U.S. Because they play a key role in forming citizens' political and national identities in ways that other subjects do not, the social sciences seem always to be stuck between two (or more) competing visions of how society ought to look and function.

In the world's newer democracies, such as those in Africa and the former Soviet bloc, this same tension between tradition and progress is evident in the social science curriculum. These countries tend to be more socially conservative than the U.S. and Western Europe and are not as likely to emphasize critical thinking and individual agency. Even so, they recognize that they "need the social sciences more than ever, in order to confront the major challenges facing humanity, such as poverty, epidemics and climate change" in the words of the *World social science Report 2010*. Ironically, much of sub-Saharan Africa's inability to address civic competencies through education is exacerbated by the structural adjustment programs imposed by the global North, which force poor countries to cut education spending. The expressed desire of rich countries to aid new democracies is unlikely to bear fruit if those democracies are unable to prepare their students for the responsibilities of citizenship.

Furthermore, research findings as to the effectiveness of social science education indicate that a participatory, learner-centered pedagogy is the best means of teaching civic concepts. That pedagogy is far more prevalent in the global North than in the global South, where the more traditional method of teacher-centered rote learning is the norm. Despite these challenges, some African countries are making strides in social science education, a feat made particularly impressive by the history of conflict in many of these places. In Rwanda, for example, the Ministry of Education has not shied away from requiring that students learn about the 1994 genocide, including the role of the

media in the violence between Hutus and Tutsis. In South Africa, which is still toiling to heal the wounds of apartheid, the national curriculum strives across subject areas "to be sensitive to issues of poverty, inequality, race, gender, age, disability, and such challenges as HIV/AIDS." It is certainly no easy task to face the demons of the past, but only by telling its students the truth about their history can a country hope to build a peaceful future.

Iraq is a country coming to grips with its recent past and figuring out how to address it in schools. A recent *New York Times* article, "In Rewriting its history, Iraq Treads Cautiously," illuminates the difficulty of overhauling the social science curriculum in the midst of conflict. Noting that history education in Iraq was, up until the ouster of Saddam Hussein, "a tool for indoctrination into the ways of the Baath Party and a mechanism to promote the cult of Mr. Hussein," the piece shows that since his death there has been no agreement among the various sects in the country over whose version of history should be taught in schools.

Again, the tension here over who gets to define social science standards echoes the struggle elsewhere in the world, between multiculturalists and traditionalists and Eurocentrists, between EU supporters and EU skeptics, and between participatory pedagogy and rote learning. While it is easy to become discouraged in the face of these seemingly unbridgeable different points of view, it is also possible to create out of the discord a teachable moment, and as educators, that is what we must do. As the *World social science Report 2010* reminds us, social science education helps us to "understand how the world works from the ways humans interact." The debate over how best to deliver social science education is itself a lesson for the next generation of citizens; if we can address our disagreements with civility and a sense of shared purpose, we will be showing them what it means to be responsible and engaged members of the global community. Indeed, finding solutions to our gravest shared challenges—from poverty to war to climate change—depends upon how effectively we teach social science today.

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Reflecting on the purposes of history education Raquel F., a high school student from Brazil who took a Facing History and Ourselves course at International High School in Queens, New York, explained:

"Sometimes school in Brazil was like sitting in a classroom with steamed up windows. Light came in but you cannot see out. History, when taught well, can make that glass transparent. You can see and make clear the relationship between what we learn in school and our own lives."

"I know that we don't learn history to place blame. The members of my stepmother's family are all German. Am I to blame her for what happened during the Holocaust? How many generations of people can we hold responsible for the past? I'm responsible for what I do, not for what my ancestors have done."

"Now let's think about what history we learn. It is important that we learn the uncomfortable parts. It is from the uncomfortable parts that we really learn. It's there that we can find the conflicts that help us to understand ourselves."

Raquel's voice reminds us of a fundamental truth about young people: they have both the capacity and the tendency to connect historical issues to their own lives. That is how they make sense of the past. In addition to the cognitive components noted below, history education must help students to develop their burgeoning moral philosophy – their unique voices - in complex, academically rigorous and personal ways. By connecting history to themselves, students can build an intellectual and ethical vocabulary to apply to their study history and to think about its meaning for the decisions encompassed in their own civic environments.

History comes to life when students make connections with their own worlds that help them to relate to its protagonists and make sense of their motivations, decisions, and actions. At the same time, students gain new perspective on what is happening today – in their personal lives and in the larger world. This dynamic of moving back and forth between a study of history and a study of today holds special urgency for adolescents, who are beginning to see and define themselves as part of a larger history and often are seeking ways to "make a difference." It has been an integral part of the Facing History and Ourselves pedagogy since the organization's founding<sup>1</sup>.



That said, studying history in relation to present-day social and civic issues presents continuing intellectual challenges: understanding events within their own historical context, avoiding simple parallels between events that share a superficial similarity, and coming to understand how events in the past have (or have not) influenced the present. It involves bringing historical concepts and methods of inquiry to bear on understanding a particular history and assessing its universal implications. It also means seeing oneself as shaped by history and as a player in its ongoing creation.

In order to help students "face history," it is essential to consider how they are likely to understand the material, given their personal and educational backgrounds and levels of cognitive development; it is important to craft lessons and assignments that address their articulated questions and unarticulated concerns, thus helping them build a deeper understanding of history and of themselves. At the same time, as teachers, we need to be careful not to assume that we know how students will respond to a particular piece of content or the questions they will raise. That means, creating a space for students reflect on the content in writing, and in class discussion.

*In fact, any meaningful study of history requires an intellectually honest look at past events and at their implications for how we understand ourselves as human beings and how, individually and collectively, we choose to live our lives.*

In fact, any meaningful study of history requires an intellectually honest look at past events and at their implications for how we understand ourselves as human beings and how, individually and collectively, we choose to live our lives. For students and teachers alike, the process involves rigorous analysis combined with emotional engagement – what, at Facing History and Ourselves, is called head and heart. It frequently evokes cognitive dissonance, emotional discomfort, and probing ethical questioning. New information, new perspectives, and new connections challenge students and their teachers to repeatedly rethink their understandings of history, present-day issue, and themselves.



*...a history that is vital-alive, accessible, pertinent, and important-highlights a range of human responses along a moral continuum from bystander to 'upstander'. Learning such histories with engagement and reflection stirs youthful idealism, as young people see they have a role to play in making history.*



To help teachers and students make essential, civic and ethical connections, secondary school history courses are best built around a common core. This structure, which Facing History and Ourselves calls its “scope and sequence,” organizes the inquiry and shapes the journey that students and teachers will take together. It is often depicted as a circle or spiral; each phase of the journey not only builds upon previous elements but leads to their expanded and deepened understanding. In one sense, a Facing History and Ourselves journey moves from consideration of identity and group membership through historical study to a fuller understanding of the individual’s role in society. In another sense, the journey is more like a double helix, with a constant active interplay between “facing history” and “facing ourselves” – where each informs the other<sup>2</sup>.

Scholar and human rights activist Samantha Power has applauded history courses in which the traditional focus on the actions of nation-states and empires and of their leaders

and official representatives has given way in these courses to a more nuanced, disaggregated view that focuses on the stories of people whose individual and collective decisions shaped the course of events. Seen in this way, history is not static, not fixed and inevitable but active, always in flux. People – both famous and not – are its drivers. What happened could have happened differently had different choices been made. Similarly, the history of episodes of collective violence, such as those taught by Facing History and Ourselves, are not merely or even primarily stories of perpetrators and victims. Few people play these roles on a world stage. Rather, a history that is vital – alive, accessible, pertinent, and important – highlights a range of human responses along a moral continuum from bystander to “upstander.” Learning such histories with engagement and reflection stirs youthful idealism, as young people see that they have a role to play in making history.

One effective instructional approach involves helping students understand how ideas, processes, and institutions from the past are affected by the passage of time – a concept historians refer to as “continuity and change.” This concept suggests that while certain tendencies in the human condition are linked to the past as well as the present, the nature of these linkages change over time. Take the process of dehumanization, for example, which Facing History examines in several of its case studies. Dehumanization is a recognized “signifier” of the steps that, little by little, can lead to genocide. In this context, the dehumanization of the Jews by the Nazis can be seen to share certain dynamic features with the dehumanization of the Tutsis during the Rwandan genocide. That said, the particular methods and strategies of dehumanization manifested themselves differently in each of these time periods and social contexts.

The challenge for teachers is to help students explore how such ideas and institutions “continue” as well as “change” across time. More ambitiously, it is to help students see this paradox as an integral part of any deep exploration of the past and the present.

Young people often see history as “the way things were” rather than as a process involving influenced by multiple factors, including the actions of individuals, groups, and societies. They often take historical accounts at face value, without placing them into any sort of context. They may employ one-dimensional models of agency and causality,

asserting, for example, that the Holocaust was “caused” by a madman named Hitler, and seeking to understand “why he killed all the Jews.” Shocked by actions that they see as clearly senseless and immoral by present-day standards, they tend to empathize with victims, blame identifiable perpetrators and bystanders, and resist distinctions and explanations that could cloud their moral vision.

At a more complex level, students create composite pictures. They bring together multiple sources of evidence. They understand that events can have multiple causes and that a force for change may meet resistance which may or may not be strong enough to overcome. They see individuals’ beliefs and actions as influenced but not determined by what is happening around them. They may wonder why people made the choices they did and what they would have done in their place. As they link past and present, they may work hard to put themselves in others’ shoes. Recognizing that they do not always live up to their own ideals, they can be generous in their judgments of others. At the same time, they, as budding moral philosophers, expect people – past and present – to acknowledge their common humanity, recognize each other’s needs and take them into account, and to care about those beyond their immediate circle.

With a still more sophisticated perspective, adolescents and adults can see history through multiple lenses. They understand that individual choices and actions are influenced and constrained by interacting factors and look for patterns that are common across diverse settings, circumstances, and historical periods. They recognize that reported “facts” are often filtered through perceptions that are influenced by culture, ideology, and experience. Thus there can be many view points on a story, but they do not necessarily carry equal weight. Scholars can honestly disagree about why something happened and about what might have happened had other courses been taken, yet it is possible for students to critically evaluate their accounts and explanatory theories. An authentic understanding of history requires an honest attempt to piece together historical evidence and assess its significance.

Mining the historical record, students can draw conclusions about human nature. Yet they need not be trapped in moral relativism, cynicism, or despair; as they make informed and thoughtful judgments and consider the difficulties they will inevitably encounter in living up to their ideals, they can

commit instead to proactive awareness, reflection, and carefully considered actions.

Making informed comparisons between the past and the present in Facing History classrooms need not be – and indeed, must not be – a dry, academic exercise. The empathy, concern, anger, and moral outrage that historic and contemporary accounts evoke play a vital role in engaged analysis and understanding. As we encourage students to read, watch, and listen with care (in all senses of that word), we can ask them to temporarily suspend judgment, listen to other voices, bring more contextual information to bear on their analysis, and reflect upon their own thinking without undermining their moral passion. Indeed, by helping students to develop disciplined habits of mind that seek authentic understanding while we also support emotional engagement and ethical reflection, we enhance their ability to craft thoughtful moral arguments and make informed judgments and commitments.

*“Young people are moral philosophers. They bring already formed notions of prejudice, tolerance and justice to their studies. As they move through adolescence, their issues take deep hold: overarching interest in individual and group identity; and concern with acceptance or rejection, conformity or non-conformity, labeling, ostracism, loyalty, fairness and peer group pressure.”*

Young people are moral philosophers. They bring already formed notions of prejudice, tolerance and justice to their studies. As they move through adolescence, their issues take deep hold: overarching interest in individual and group identity; and concern with acceptance or rejection, conformity or non-conformity, labeling, ostracism, loyalty, fairness and peer group pressure. Our pedagogy must speak to newly discovered ideas of subjectivity, competing truths and differing perspectives, along with a growing capacity to think hypothetically and inclination to find personal meaning

in newly introduced phenomena. In order to make sense of the present and future, students need an opportunity to find meaning in the past and to examine history in all of its complexities, including its legacies of prejudice and discrimination, resilience and courage. Our task, as history

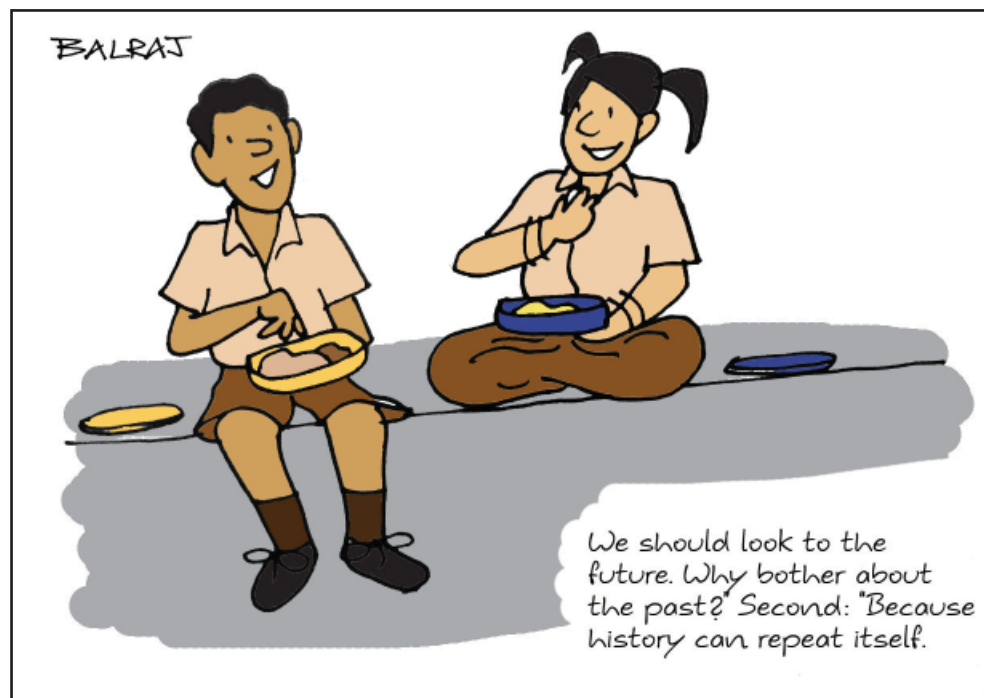
educators is to facilitate that study and to do so in a way that taps their moral potential and inspires their moral imaginations about their civic role in the communities, societies and world in which they inhabit.

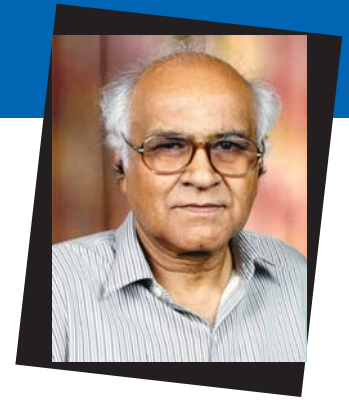
### Footnotes

1. Alan Stoskopf, "Core Concepts in Historical Understanding" unpublished briefing paper, Facing history and Ourselves, 2005
2. For a complete description of Facing history and Ourselves see Martin E. Sleeper and Margot Stern Strom, "Facing history and Ourselves" in Maurice Elias and Harriett Arnold, eds, *The Educator's Guide to Emotional Intelligence and Academic Achievement* (Corwin Press, 2006) pp. 240-246

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Human beings have always attempted to orient themselves with the help of coordinates which are actually their mental constructs. When a disoriented stranger seeks the help of another person perceived to be knowledgeable to orient her/him, the help is rendered sometimes by drawing lines on the paper, and otherwise on the ground itself with the help of the cardinal points/directions. One is not supposed to be a cartographer by training to do such an exercise. Thus, it can safely be assumed that maps are there in our minds whether we are conscious about them or not. The early human beings were also curious about knowing places and people beyond their horizons. What lies beyond the horizons always whipped up curiosity. The knowledge about the distant places travelled through stories, accounts of travelers or mere imagination of individuals. The stories which usually began with the expression that - "Once upon a time, there was a king" usually were detailed descriptions of that imaginary kingdom unfolded; the readers always constructed a mental map which became the part of their psyche.

*If we look at the historical evolution of map making, the cartographers tried to depict their perception of the reality. The reality is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional; hence it is difficult to capture it in two dimensions.*

Even the earliest descriptions of the earth were more based on philosophical logic rather than on hard scientific facts. The philosophers used their imagination to develop philosophical constructs and the scientists attempted to prove or disprove such constructs. Once the scientist proves, it becomes a scientific fact. If the scientists rejected a construct, the philosophers tried re-adjusting their facts to reconstruct their theory. The early Greek philosophers believed that earth is round but not as sphere but as a tablet surrounded by water of a circular sea. This view was held, perhaps, till the time of Plato who was the first to come out with the idea that earth is 'sphere'. He never provided any evidence for

his views and never tried to prove it. His logic was not rooted in cartography but in theology. He believed that human beings are the best creation of God and human body is symmetrical, God should have made the earth as the abode for His best creation which should, logically, have a symmetrical shape. Since the sphere is a perfect symmetrical geometric shape, the earth should be a spheroid. He propounded a geocentric view of the universe in which he put the earth in the center and thought that all other celestial bodies revolved around the earth. The geocentric view of the earth survived for a long period of time and religious institutions propagated it through their edicts. Plato never tried to provide proof of his contention but his disciple, Aristotle, did try to provide evidence for the earth being a sphere. The problem of converting the sphere into a two dimensional map, thus, became a constant concern for the cartographers.

The geographers and cartographers attempted to conceptualize and define a map. In textbooks, usually a map is defined as "a two dimensional, conventional representation of the earth or the part thereof, drawn to a scale, as seen from above." The expression of two dimensional representation of the earth indicates that there is territoriality attached to the meaning of a map. Territory has always attracted not only the human beings but also the animals. While human beings colonized the territory initially for their survival and exploited the resources at the later stages of their socio economic development, the animals carved out territories to sustain and to dominate the weaker creatures. The lion's territory is no less important than the kingdoms of individual kings and that is how lion is remembered as the king of the forest. Human beings delimit their territories by making maps while the animals have very subtle method of marking their territories. Not only the lions but even dogs have their territorial entities and any transgression is violently resisted. Literatures, all around the world, are full of emotional outbursts when the territorial integrity of the country was violated.

If we look at the historical evolution of map making, the

cartographers tried to depict their perception of the reality. The reality is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional; hence it is difficult to capture it in two dimensions. In one of the early maps, prepared by the Christian cartographers, the earth was depicted round as a tablet, surrounded by water of a circular sea, with Mediterranean Sea separating Europe and Africa and Tethys separating Asia from Europe and Africa. Jerusalem being the birth place of Lord Christ and Lord Christ being the light of the world was located in the Center of the map so that the light reached each corner equally. Orient (east) was shown at the top of the map with heaven shown in the extreme corner of the orient. The occident was marked at the bottom of the map. This “T” in “O” map (as it was known) was the product, more of imagination rather than based on the reality. The conjectural understanding of the territories of the world was slowly replaced by satisfying the curiosity by seeing. The explorations, thus, were ushered in different parts of the world.

Explorers set out to unknown areas of distant lands, either out of their own curiosity to unravel the reality or they were sponsored by the kings and rulers of different countries to go to distant places and know the reality of the territory and learn about the people and their cultures. The Asians were, perhaps, the pioneers. The Indians reached out to the remote corners of East and South East Asia with the message of Lord Buddha under the patronage of King Asoka. The Arab travelers were first to cross the equator in Africa and enter the Southern hemisphere which was never a part of the habitable world imagined by Greeks. The habitable world in Africa, according to Greek scholars, was confined only up to 12.5 degrees north latitude in Africa. The Arab traveler, Ibne- Haukal disproved this idea and travelled up to 20 degrees south of the Equator and found people living along the Eastern coast of Africa. Chinese travelers started exploring the territories around through the land and sea routes. One of the notable Chinese travelers was Huen Tsang, who could reach India in the seventh century A.D. through land route crossing the desolate plateau of Tibet. Another Chinese traveler I-Ching was able to reach India through the sea route in 671 crossing the islands of Southeast Asia. By the fifteenth century A.D., the Asian travelers ceased their voyages. Ibne- Batuta was, perhaps, the last Arab traveler. Cheng Ho, a Chinese admiral was the last to return after his expedition in 1433 and the story of Chinese explorations also ceased.

By the fifteenth century A.D. large parts of the old world were known; hence this century witnessed the efforts of European travelers particularly in Portugal and Spain under the sponsorship and protection of the kings of these countries. The Portuguese were able to take initiative for explorations beyond the Mediterranean Sea. The victory of Prince Henry on the southern side of Gibraltar in Africa 1415 was the first victory of a European power outside Europe. The process of European's colonization of Africa, Asia and later of the new world was, perhaps, initiated at that particular juncture. Prince Henry established the first Geographic Research Institute at Sagre in 1418. The institute was assigned the task of training navigators, preparing instruments and maps which could help in further explorations. Maps became essential tools to mark the safe and the shortest routes to reach the destinations rich in resources. Human beings have always been motivated by the principle of the least effort and always sought the shortest routes which became possible on the maps constructed on Mercator's projection. While cartographic work was in progress at Sagre, new ships were being prepared at Lagos under the instructions of Prince Henry. The seeds of the colonial era were sown and started sprouting. The rivalry first started amongst Spaniards and Portuguese and later other European powers also joined the race for discovering new colonies. The records of the treaty of Tordissellas tell the story of the intervention by the Pope to settle the disputes between Portuguese and Spaniards. The three powers; the British, French and Portuguese fought with each other to have dominance over Indian subcontinent. The French, Dutch and the British were face to face in Southeast Asia i.e. Malaysia, Indonesia and the Peninsula of Indo China. New maps started emerging with the expansion of the colonial process.

*“Political decisions are responsible for carving out and creating new maps. The contemporary politics of British in India led to the partitioning of the Indian sub continent; it was responsible for creating new maps of India, Pakistan, at the first instance, and Bangladesh later.”*

## Maps as Creations of Politics

Political decisions are responsible for carving out and creating new maps. The contemporary politics of British in India led to the partitioning of the Indian sub continent; it was responsible for creating new maps of India, Pakistan, at the first instance, and Bangladesh later. The British protected a number of small states on the borders of India as buffer states to keep erstwhile USSR and China away from the British India. They never wanted to enter into conflict with these neighbors. Buffer states are usually created to act as goats standing between two lions and remain safe. The continuity of these countries was ensured by their status of being buffer states. The politics of the Second World War got Germany divided, with two maps of the same nation. The Czech and Slovaks were joined to one country with one map and Soviets obliterated the whole of Central Asia by annexing and amalgamating separate nations into one entity. The British, by taking a political decision through Belfour declaration, created Israel as homeland for Jews. The Jews had left Israel in the hoary past and the area was settled by the Arabs. After the map of Israel became a reality in the region, the Arabs described it as a dagger in the Arab heart. The hearts of all the countries in the whole region have been bleeding for too long.

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*The boundaries of the country as demarcated in the maps are sacrosanct to the citizens of the country because these are symbols of the integrity and sovereignty of the nation and citizens lay their lives to defend their sovereignty.*

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Colonization created a new world map. The sun never used to set on the map of the British Empire. The competition between the European powers, in the new world, was intense from the very beginning. One can find the areas of French influence and the areas of British influence on the map of Canada. The British transplanted all their place names on the map of North Eastern states of USA, may be, due to emotional reasons. England was present in the form

of New England, Hampshire as New Hampshire and York as New York. It provided mental satisfaction to the immigrants and reduced the pangs caused by rootlessness.

The reversal of the political process created new type of maps. The end of colonialism witnessed the emergence of a new world with new maps of independent countries. Maps of Asia and Africa got modified. The British Empire lost its hold on the old and the new world alike. The newly independent countries started searching and re-establishing their old historical roots and values. The new symbols emerged in the form of national flags, national anthems and newly carved out maps. The process of remodeling and reshaping of the world map which started with the collapse of colonialism has not yet stopped. The world of 1990s witnessed another type of political upheaval with the collapse of erstwhile Soviet Union and new maps started emerging. The republics' of Soviet Union in Europe and Central Asia became independent countries, having separate maps. The European countries also responded to this political process. The two Germanys got united. There was velvet separation between Czechs and Slovaks. Tito's Yugoslavia witnessed bloody fragmentation. Everywhere new maps emerged due to the political decisions at various levels.

The boundaries of the country as demarcated in the maps are sacrosanct to the citizens of the country because these are symbols of the integrity and sovereignty of the nation and citizens lay their lives to defend their sovereignty. Many a conflict in the world have flared up as boundary disputes. Political geographers define the border as a zone and boundary as a line. The boundaries are well defined, delimited and demarcated entities and are protected with great effort. Even if some territory is annexed by a more powerful neighbor, the defeated country shows the original boundary on her maps and the ceded territory is taken as unredeemed territory. These maps are confined to the archives and remind and instigate the new generations to recapture the unredeemed territories.

## Maps as Parts of Human Psyche

Maps are also treated as national symbols. Symbols provide identity. This identity expressed through the national symbols becomes the part of human psyche. This leads to manipulation in map making so that the sentiments attached to the symbols (maps) get satisfied. Since the two dimensional maps can be hanged on the wall, people have

erroneously developed the idea that there is the top of the map and the bottom of the map. Though on the surface of the earth, there is no top and there is no bottom but it is the part of human feeling and cannot be corrected unless the person knows the implications of the map. Mention of the early map known as T in O map has already been made. Orient was shown on the top of that map. The European cartographers reoriented the maps and north was shown on the top which placed Europe on the top of the world. Europe's map on Mercator's Projection made the Europeans feel very big in size in spite of the fact that neither the shape nor the area is correct on Mercator's projection. It is only the direction which is correct in the maps prepared on Mercator's projection. But for a long time, it bloated the personality of Europe's map. The Arab cartographers also had the idea that south should be shown on the top of the world map and that placed the Arab world at the position of sitting over all other countries. However that idea could not prevail.

The countries are fatherlands and motherlands for their citizens. Closest relationship exists between the children and the mother/father. In the Indian ethos mother occupies the first place in the relationship which is expressed in one word i.e. "Ma". It is said that, "*Mata poorva roopam, Pita uttar roopam, premo sandhah, Prajanam sandhnam*". (Mother is the first form, father is the second form, their love joins them and the children become the cementing material and do not allow them to separate.) The image of the map of India as Bharat Mata is deeply embedded in the minds of our people. Artists have depicted this image in their paintings and other art forms. *Saare Jahan se Achha Hindostaan hamara* (Urdu Poet Iqbal) and *Sujalam, suflam, malayaj sheetlam, Mataram, Bande Mataram*, ( in *Anand Math* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee) the same emotion of dedication to

the motherland. The feeling of patriotism and nationalism becomes a cohesive force and strengthens the coefficient of belongingness. The mind of Indian citizen does not accept the partition and talks about Akhand Bharat with strong emotions inspite of the fact that all of us know that reality cannot be changed. Such emotions caused by the symbols of identity can be seen at micro level also. Each village in India has a *raison d'être* due to the identity provided by its *gram devata* (village deity) which generally belongs to the little tradition rather than the larger tradition. People identify themselves with these place names because their roots lie there. In south India the first names, in large number of cases, are the names of their villages. In India, we have these micro, meso and macro level prides operating in our psyche. We often talk about the Tamil pride, Maratha pride, Bangali pride, Gujarat's gaurav etc. converging in the Indian pride. Sometimes the local and regional prides become so intense that they become so parochial and destructive that they have to be reined in. The concept of nation state which flourished in Europe was responsible for the balkanization of the continent resulting in some very small countries. Some of these countries are smaller than a few districts of India but the intense nationalism has sustained them. The German concept of racial superiority and pride produced personalities who snuffed the whole world into strife and damaged themselves simultaneously.

In all the countries of the world since the time immemorial maps have constituted an important part of our existence. Whether we conceptualize it as a two dimensional representation of the earth, a mental construct, a political tool manipulated to meet vested interest, or the symbolization of a nation state; maps will continue being a vital tool for representing the multi faceted reality of human society.

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### Sometimes I think Olympics, FIFA or even IPL is God's way of Teaching us Geography

The other day as I was walking back home I overheard a conversation between a young mother and her seven/eight year old daughter. Ahead of them two African young men were walking, the little girl asked her mother, 'Why do these men have such coil like curly hair, we don't have such frizzy hair?' Mom replied, "All Africans have such hair"; very much ignoring the reason. The mother's answer was like a stab at all such queries made by children, at all things they see around them and learn in their own space, in their own ways. I was so inclined to give the reason. The question was very much a geographical query.

### Where is Geography?

To me, geography is a way of life; a day's journey for all of us starts with sun rising in the east, which a child already knows; she knows it sets in the west every day; likewise she knows about seasons, onam, pongal, vegetation, landforms, tsunami, temperature, food habits, culture, types of clothes, some diseases locally found and some are not, but she is not aware of the geographical connections to these.

Besides the mother tongue, I believe geography is the other subject for which the child has an innate capacity to learn. She learns it continuously all her life. Let us examine some questions a four to fourteen year old might ask.

- If the globe is like a round ball Mama, then why don't we fall off?
- Can Santa be as comfortable in Brazil as he is in Mongol?
- Why do the Arabs wear 'Thoub', Mama, and papa does not?
- If April- May is so hot, then why December is not?
- Why do I wear a cotton dress in Kerala and not a woolen frock?
- Why in Delhi I see the shadow a little longer at noon, while in Pune its not?
- Why do people say monsoon comes and goes, where does it live?
- Can we save some mangoes for my birthday in December, please?
- How can the moon wax and wane, appear full or disappear?

- Will the sun walk from dawn till dusk and yet remain the same forever?
- Why does Chennai have a single season, while Agartala has all the four?
- Why are we off to mountains in summer and in winter to the sea-shore?
- 'Why some prefer chole- bhature, and some idli-sambar?'
- Why chicken pox or yellow fever are not heard of in U.S.?
- Can a rainbow be a circle ever, like the bangle, I wear?
- Why can't I see snowfall in Hyderabad, but run to Himalayas?
- After sunset, how fast does the sun run to rise up in the east?
- Doesn't the cloud come down in winter to make the fog and mist?
- Why are Deodars bell-shaped and not the Neem tree?
- Here, we see deer and tiger and not the Krill and Kiwi!
- How does the pilot fly in the sky and never lose his way?
- Where do I get the answers of these problems and many more, so to say?

Grand-parents, parents, and teachers can answer many of these from their own experiences, I am sure. Answers from them are very believable and convincing to a child. Certain questions may need explanation and knowledge and concepts of other things. Let's ask some leading questions and help the child find her own answers. Let's take the first question, 'If the globe is like a ball mama, then why don't we fall off?'; we can really take a football and put an ant on it, let the ant move around, show this to the child and ask her if the ant would fall off or can be comfortable; make the child move the ball and see it herself.

Let's take another example 'Why do the Arabs wear 'Thoub', Mama, and papa do not?

To help her find an answer for herself, we can ask her why she is wearing clothes, sweater, shoes etc, or she requires an umbrella on a hot summer afternoon? Her answer may be to look good / to feel warm, protection from the sun etc.



To this we can bring in the idea of keeping away dust/ sand, I am sure she would agree. To this we can add that Arabia is a place which is dusty, sandy and hot; then ask her if it is a good idea to cover the body from head to foot, when out in the sun in such a place.

We can stop at that point and let the child continue forming her own knowledge which is age appropriate, meaningful and above all no rote learning is required at all.

Like the mother tongue, the child builds up the geography of the locality unbiased, and without much effort; the only conscious effort needed here, is guidance; the facilitator can provide leading questions and give viable answers to lead the child's thought process logically from her elementary classes, so that as she also develops thinking, observation, verification, validation, understanding, relating etc.

As a geography teacher, almost always I have connected the lessons with the materials found in the class room, the sari I was wearing, height, skin color of students, things in their bags, the lunch that they have brought, including the chalk and the board. I used to bring in topics like the sky, wind, temperature, clouds, rain in correlation with what the students were experiencing then and there outside the classroom - especially while teaching 'climate'. geography is always connected to everyday life; the teacher's job is to bring in the skill or help in developing the mental faculty of the child to see or identify the connection or link present between the experiences of life and the geographical concept behind these.

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Krishna Kumar strongly believes in conversation amongst children to be a very effective tool for learning. Children, when they observe a new thing, be it a caterpillar, a moth,

a new place, a movie or read a book, they would run to share with others, here both the parties are learning. Conversation amongst friends help children learn, especially if the conversation is after a vacation; children may have travelled to places in different directions and come back with many new experiences and observations. These, when shared amongst themselves, would help the listeners to build up their imagination of these places and would motivate them to learn on their own. Here teachers can reinforce the learning with the photographs brought by the child, maps, pictures etc.

Bigger children have a wider spectrum to navigate; they are exposed to newspaper, TV channels, movies, songs, storybooks, travelling, trekking etc. When each experience is pitched in, a huge resource is generated.

Do concepts of geography really need to be learned to live life better? Do these concepts help us in our daily life? Are these a kind of life-skill so to say? Do our children need to hone this skill?

Can these experiences, which are based on, rooted to, or tied to happenings in real life or directly influencing one's life, also be called as geographical experiences? Isn't our learning of geographical concepts, as a life skill, very much needed to survive, enjoy life, solve problem in everyday life, to make decisions, to understand other subjects, to understand happenings around us, to make a profession out of it? Most of the questions can be answered with a monosyllable, 'Yes'.

While writing this article, I asked my sister-in-law about the subject 'geography', her opinion about its importance in day to day in life. By the way, she is a bank employee and she studied mathematics, tricks for making bank balance grow is her cup of tea and not 'geography' in any way. Interestingly, the moment, I asked her the question, she without any hesitation responded as if she has been harping on this question long enough and has already come to a conclusion. She said, "If only I had known that the understanding of geographical concepts would be so necessary for understanding today's life-style, problems, world situation, then I would have taken more interest during my school days, sure I would have been better equipped today. Now to know the problem well enough is an uphill task for me".

### **What do we Conclude from this Conversation?**

My friend's son, found geography interesting, and many

a times we discussed and debated on various concepts of geography; once it was on latitude and longitude and its necessity; years later I met him as a handsome young pilot; as we were mulching over our times spent, he told me, how the concept of latitude and longitude has helped him in his understanding of the location of a place while flying. I learnt my lesson- it's so important to make a child curious.

### **Does the Present (geography) Syllabus Help the Child to Learn?**

Here I think we need to make some changes, in two areas in particular:

- Content
- The way we facilitate the content

Let's believe that children already know many things and are in a position to develop, add, alter, refine, speculate, understand, and imagine. Then we as facilitators need to add to their already existing schemata. Let's begin from what they know and give inputs in a way that helps them to learn through experiences. For example in I, II, III/ IV grade it's difficult to understand the abstraction of the globe, and theories of rotation, revolution, the relationship of these movements with the occurrence of 'day and night' or 'seasons'. Instead, if we can make them take note of their already existing knowledge of east and the rising sun, west and the setting sun, different positions of the sun during the day and the various lengths of the child's shadow, the difference in temperature with the changing position of the sun, etc. and then in higher grades the same information can be added to facts about the globe, rotation, revolution etc.

Let's help the child to find the house with the help of an address:

House #5B, 1st Main, Pai Layout.

Let's ask her which two pieces of information has been given to the postman to find the house. Her answer may be house number (5B) and the road (1st Main, Pai layout). Now let's ask her if she were the postman then what would she do? Help her by a simple drawing to show the road and the house number. Highlight those two references that are needed to find a place. (Here the references are the house number and the name of the road). Then may be in the next session we can bring in the two reference lines on the globe to be latitude and longitude and then connect the position of

a city with the help of latitude and longitude.

Netra and Preetam love to eat 'Aliva', biscuits that are triangular in shape; now whenever Netra sees anything with a triangular shape she calls it as 'Aliva', when Preetam sees the biscuit 'Aliva', he calls it as 'triangle'. Actually both have identified the shape with or without the name to describe it. Both of them had the notion of triangle based on their real experiences. Thus when the child says 'Aliva' is 'triangle', the teacher may explain, 'yes Aliva is a triangular biscuit, but so is a mountain peak or a Christmas tree, thus they all belong to the category called 'Triangle'.

### **How does a Child Learn About her Surroundings or the World Around her?**

A child learns by touching, eating, experimenting, observing, imitating, asking and so on. The theory of 'constructivism' says these are schemata; the individual learner keeps on building her knowledge on these experiences, lifelong. A teacher needs to take care of the situations she wants her students to experience for building up their own knowledge. The National Curriculum Framework – 2005, has identified these objectives. Now the question is how does the teacher go about it?

### **What Should the Teacher do to Make Children Construct their Knowledge?**

'Asking' is one very strong tool which can be used by the teacher. 'Why' questions from the learners may be a request for 'reason' or for 'explanation'. Giving reason is not the same thing as explaining. Reasons are given for holding beliefs or believing something to be true. Explanation is of events and processes in the course of nature like, "Why are some mountain peaks, and not all, covered with snow?" or "Why do we experience sunrise (local time 5am) at Namdhapa, Arunachal when it is still very dark (local time 3 am) at Dwarka, Gujarat?"

Here both theories and laws are involved in explaining. Sometimes teacher needs to telescope the process i.e. explaining events and then explaining laws.

Many a time the teacher/parent offer "explanations" which do not really explain. For example

1. Why Savanna is called a "Park land"?  
Because this natural grassland is dotted with a few trees, just as in a park.
2. What makes artesian well special?

Because you need not draw water from the well, water comes out of its own accord.

### 3. Why is Sahara a desert?

Because this region receives very little rainfall.

These are apparent explanations. In none of the answers have we gone to the root of the actual query like: why would few trees grow in savanna to give a park land view, (in the first question); why would water come out of its own accord instead of being drawn out, (in the second question) and why won't it rain much in Sahara (in the third question) have never been addressed.



*Geography is an anchor to live today's life; most of which we learn by our own experiences, hence takes a long time; if only the school/the teacher could instill in us the skill then amongst other things, taking decisions, for where to live, where to build a house, which flat to choose, whether to buy a diesel or a petrol car, would have been easier.*



The teacher must make use of the explanatory principle in such a way that it should have the predictive power to enable children make accurate predictions on the basis of it. Knowing that water cools and heats at a slower rate than the

land, children can predict that seaside would have moderate climate.

Similarly knowing that artesian well is limited to a region whose underlying rock structure is saucer-shaped, is easily subjected to hydraulic pressure(water) the students can comprehend that a well dug on such a structure will have the water gushing out on its own.

Can we not think of an outdoor geography classroom? The teacher and the school have to plan in advance, clubbing certain topics together (soil, soil erosion, natural vegetation, agricultural, occupation of the people etc) and sometimes clubbing science and geography class together (solar system, minerals). Some topics like weather and climate may be taken throughout the year season by season, what's the hurry? Or two seasons can be taught in grade VI and the other two in the grade VII. Beside there can be group-work, watching movie, reading travelogue, concept mapping; Students can make their own curriculum, based on the topics they would like to learn, some of the topics they themselves or students from higher classes can teach; selective readings from the latest books on relevant topics can be introduced in the class, or library class, making a scrap book using newspaper cutting on relative topics, can be a good learning source.

Geography is an anchor to live today's life; most of which we learn by our own experiences, hence takes a long time; if only the school/the teacher could instill in us the skill then amongst other things, taking decisions, for where to live, where to build a house, which flat to choose, whether to buy a diesel or a petrol car, would have been easier.

Geography is needed for all these, and more, to keep 'life' throbbing on this planet.

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Alex M George



Within the subject domain of sociology of education, which seems to have been my core area of practice, what critical pedagogues remind me about textbook is always at the back of the mind. They would say textbooks are:

- A means for the state to regulate classroom interactions of the teacher with her students and perpetuate itself
- A tool in the hands of the state to generate a set of official knowledge, and reassure survival of middle class
- An object capable of alienating children from schooling and so on.

Yet, my engagement over the last many years has been in creating learning material, despite repeated attempts to run away!

This write up is my learning(s) from doing (often seeing others do) one of the lessons in school textbooks – Panchayat. There are two reasons why I thought of this recently, 1. the infamous khaps of Haryana and 2. the elections in Karnataka. But lets start the story from the beginning.....

I assume that none of my current readers would need an extensive description of what Panchayat is. But to give a crisp textbook description - a Panchayat chapter will contain the following: description of its formation, power, and functions. This is usually done in a nearly sanitised rule book vocabulary. Over the last few decades in the name of 'child friendliness' text narratives have been often abused by introducing characters into the descriptions who rattle out the same set of information often in a condescending manner.<sup>2</sup>

## Lesson 1

### Days Before Buddha Smiled (Actually Wept!)

That was four football world cup seasons ago. It began while waiting for spiced up tea to be served at a dhaba near a guest house in the then outskirts of Jaipur at Jhalana Doongri. I was still struggling to be convinced that I understood the right "meanings" from Eklavya's social science textbooks in Hindi for class 6. I listened to Arvind's reading of Panchayat chapter. It was probably 5th time that we read the chapter together. And I remained unconvinced as in spite an extensive critical examination of the various functions of a Panchayat, the chapter ended with the feeling "and then they lived

happily ever after".

The key storyline that's used in this chapter is the struggle of a woman to get a hand-pump dug near her colony. A radical departure of the Eklavya textbook was the fact that while normal textbooks described all the functions and powers of institutions, as is expected 'text-bookishly', this chapter showed dysfunctionality of the institutions; the manner in which real politics of villages play an important role in making decisions, how corruption is prevalent etc. These real life portrayals were then used to build critical thinking. This element was sorely missing in our Indian social science textbooks.

Further I sat in for discussions with Mehamood and Sudheer; the context was that Rajasthan considered itself 'progressive' as compared to Madhya Pradesh; the political scenario was very different, rules and regulations varied from one state to the other. Despite this context, they would repeatedly insist, in correcting my newly learned Hindi vocabulary - that I did not live at the foot of Dewas "tekari" as MP-walas call it, and its actually a "doongri" as Rajasthanis call. And I had to wonder how much of the local flavour will keep the child hooked to it? While critical thinking in textbooks is generally highly emphasised, just as in my last assignment for the Kerala State's textbooks, none would have the courage to end the story of political institutions in a negative manner. Is it not clear that textbooks have the ability to "bring in" the real events in political world into the classroom? Is it not possible to have some faith that the child can unravel the mystery of unexpected positive twist which makes the story of Panchayat ending in very positive manner? How do we critically evaluate the impact of space given to critical thinking into school textbooks?

But then one day the Indian Government decided to conduct Pokharan II, and slowly Lok Jumbish<sup>3</sup> wound up. The current textbooks of Rajasthan do not even vaguely reflect there were any efforts of reform.

## Lesson 2

### Is this Colonialism from *Neeche ke Log*?

Namgyal offered cups of gur-gur chai. Then he first asked "aap

neeche se kab aaye?" Familiar with many Ladakhi's asking us question, we fumbled some answer. Then Namgyal began explaining the travel plan to Sujatha, Vineetha, Sumathi and me. "On the day after you walk for about 3 hours you will reach the first village, just beside a small stream. It has 4 houses. You can eat your packed lunch there. Then you walk another 4 hours. You will reach the second village, it has 7 houses. Those people will allow you to stay in their house. Next day after you walk for some 4 or 5 hours you will reach the first village, it has one house....."The description went on like this as how to enter the snow leopard reserve in Ladakh. It does not matter if we managed to do the trekking, but I had my Panchayat chapter in the mind. How can you have wards if there are only few houses? How big an area the Panchayats will cover? My images of Panchayat's were strongly built around the idea that villages have populations in 1000s or at least hundreds! And so it demanded I unlearn some of my wisdom.

You notice that the new sets of 4 & 5 textbooks that were brought out by SECMOL in 2003 which were supposed to be used in Ladakh region had certain unique ways of organising their social relationship. The textbooks brought to children the story of the Panchayat through traditional roles of goba, lorpa, churpon etc. Lorpa made sure that animals which entered into the fields of other people were confiscated; Churpon decided which field would get water on which day, how many times; Goba used to be a village head etc. Well in the language that the modern state structure uses the Ladakhi words do not find a place in labelling of representatives and heads of Panchayat. They have imported words like 'sarpanch' 'panchayat' from the "neeche". In the margins one cannot stop noting down 'aren't these the long hands of cultural colonialism, happening through textbooks?

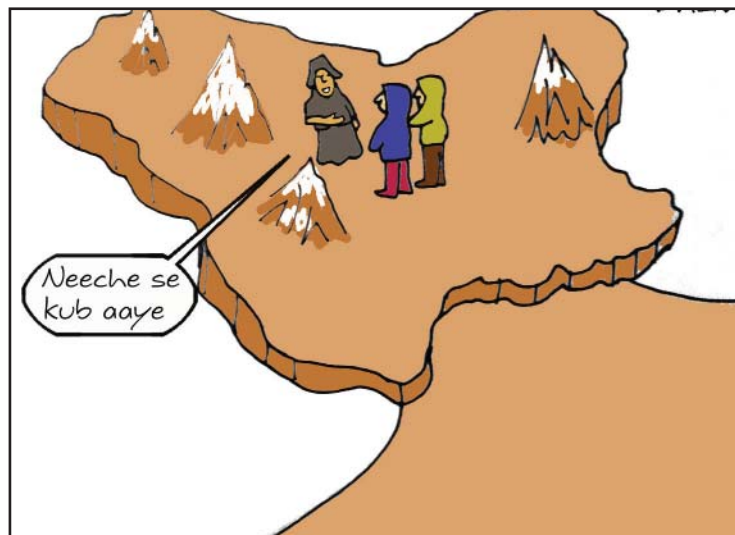
However there are two questions that remain unresolved. Why should panchayat be an institution that is shown as having an important role to play in local governance

for children of Ladakh? Ladakh is governed under an Autonomous Council, so are many different districts in the state of North East. Hence it stands out that the syllabus and curriculum are largely defined by "neeche ke log" who are unfamiliar with institutions like Autonomous Council that govern predominantly tribal dominated districts in the country. In the textbooks that belong to 'neeche ke log' one does not even hear the existence of Autonomous Councils. Are Autonomous Councils a mere anomaly when one thinks of 3 tiers of government? Or does it reflect an attitude of the state system that only visualises tribal communities to be in the margins? Hence does it become obvious that there is a skewed priority in choosing what is worth teaching? Or by negating the presence of other administrative structures, certain institutions and people, does the Indian state choose

to keep them in the margins? Ironically why does even a state that wants to perpetuate itself through textbook knowledge sidestep and ignore the existences of such institutions?

Another prominent dilemma emerges from this nostalgia. It is very prevalent in the textbooks of the 'neeche ke log' when they start the description of a panchayat as follows - 'Panch means five, in the ancient times our villages

were ruled by five wise people...'. In order to claim the validity for a modern institution we harp upon from the past. Textbook would casually remark that but those days women did not have much role, and see "we" have now resolved it. But often an occasional, puncturing of this nostalgia 'You mean like the khaps in Haryana?' Immediately things are put back in perspective: the un-representativeness and undemocratic nature of feudalism. Yet the question to think about is – what exactly does it mean for a 9 or 10 year old to relate either to the supposedly ancient institution or a modern one? Is it really possible to assume that, a 10 year old would differentiate between the different roles such as - your father is the village khap head and your neighbour is village panchayat member as having different implications?



### Lesson 3

#### Accidental Crossing of Brahmaputra...

Once, Arvind took me to Guwahati; it was a 3-day workshop of a class 5 book that was already in progress. In a way I had hoped that Panchayats would never again come back to me. But even more curiously, I never thought the theme water could be a point of discussion near the banks of Brahmaputra, and my textbook knowledge about this State was limited to the fact it rains the most here! To me water could be problems of MP or Rajasthan. Yet it was decided that the chapter can discuss common property resources. And it turned out that the most important of them were the ponds (water!) While textbooks of Rajasthan and MP discussed how/ which colony could be chosen to implement a program, it was some theme relating to maintenance and protection of ponds that was important to Assam. Hence, it was decided that the image/ role of Panchayat could be built around a need that children who come to school may otherwise experience. But aside from this commonality I would like to point out another learning.



*Similarly, social science is a subject which is burdened with making citizens and readers (children in this case) become future voters - mind you 'voters' and not 'strugglers' or 'fighter woman representatives'. Isn't this where the middle class values conflict and therefore allow the state to perpetuate?*



You may have noticed that in the three episodes, Panchayat chapter is being discussed at class 4, class 5 and class 6. Have you ever wondered what the logic is for this? This partly emerges from the complicated hierarchies of schooling that we practice in different parts of the country. The so called national (say in CBSE and ISC) and many Hindi speaking regions practice - define class 6 to 8 as middle school. Most States in the peripheries have middle school as class 5 to 7. Often there is the unstated desire to 'match' up with national

level, (while those elite in the national level have already moved to think of IB's where Panchayat's are probably non-existent). Is it possible that education remains a concurrent subject, but curriculum, syllabus, textbooks seem to get anchored on to a national model?

And by some interesting pedagogical rules "spiralling" and "local to remote" are slogans of textbook writers. Therefore, at the national level Panchayat appeared (past tense, we seem to have come over this obsession) in class 3, state government in class 4 and central government to UN in class 5. The so called "spiralling" brought them back in classes 6,7,8 and then again clubbed the local governments and state governments to class 9 and to class 10. But then since the schooling system in various States has had different definition of where the primary ends and upper/middle begins, the textbook content often gets manipulated. I realised that the psychological determinism - that a concept or theme could be taught only at a particular level - as fake jingoistic belief - truly we do not know how to practice I guess? In the name of spiralling aren't we merely asking children to recall information on how the Panchayats are formed 3 times during their school lives?

### Lesson 4

#### Unfinished Chapters

In spite of the fact that by now half my life has been lived outside the so called home state, people still consider me to know a whole lot of things about "back there" Kerala. It becomes an even more difficult situation because textbook writers often want to talk about the so called participatory democracy that is supposed to have been practiced in the State of Kerala. And I trace my roots to one of those villages - Chapparapadavu Panchayat - that had become an icon of the event. Apparently the year I began to work with textbooks & panchayat was also the time when the so called participatory planning began back there, as a red Latin American import. By then many states had reinvented the Panchayati raj institutions under the "new" amendment and therefore inevitably harped on the idea that "power to the people" needs to get reflected in textbooks. Moreover the World Bank funded DPEP had selectively insisted on experimenting with Kothari Commission report that the Panchayati Raj institution was a solution to the problems of education system. Within the whole discussion occasional recall to the memory of Gandhiji would make Panchayati raj

something that people of all political colours seemingly want to promote. Amongst these voices how does one choose relevant text? Why is it that adults often feel that every new idea they find fascinating is useful and should be 'given' to the child?

Thus, it is hard task to figure out how chapters need to be saved from becoming NGO manuals for Panchayat training. Similarly, social science is a subject which is burdened with making citizens and readers (children in this case) become future voters - mind you 'voters' and not 'strugglers' or 'fighter woman representatives'. Isn't this where the middle class values conflict and therefore allow the state to perpetuate? A stronger faith in democracy was considered to be an important, inevitable part of school education. Apparently, now looking back, the trust in local self government – participatory planning - itself was a bubble. World Bank funded SSA seems to be in the process of disowning them<sup>1</sup>. The left in Kerala keeps the idea of fourth world out of its mind. Yet, most people would agree that class 6 is "too early" to have a meaningful discussion on participatory democracy. Discussions would thus end with a promise this could be done in higher classes. And thus there remain

many unfinished chapters on Panchayat, since institutions and processes continue to dominate what is considered worth teaching. Will I ever do it?

### Epilogue. Never be Sure about Anything

Having participated in some tweaking in many corners of the country I sat cosily on my newspaper chair, with a cup of coffee asking Ranjan about his vote during the previous month's election in a village in Dakshina Kannada. He said he had elected 5 members for his ward. There are some 14 panchayat members and 5 wards in his panchayat. This was unacceptable to me, I realise that the "new" NCERT class 6 textbook is all wrong. To me democracy as described in textbooks is that of one man/woman - one vote – one representative! Textbook descriptions of election to Panchayat says that I as a voter elect one representative to my Panchayat ward. But here is a state that has multiple member constituencies – more than one representative being responsible for an entire ward. I can't even argue he reminded me "but you have only seen textbooks and rule books of some States and I am the one who has voted". Ooh how much I hate looking at the inedible ink on his middle finger!

### Footnotes

1. This article refers to many real people, but this is not an unbiased reflexive practice. It is a smoked bio-ethnography that depended on fantasised memories. It is not written for truth seekers, even though it does replace the name of drinks "educational correctness". There is an attempt to leave the lessons with questions to ponder; unlike the traditional Indian pedagogic faith that everything ends with a moral of the story
2. This article does not touch upon those issues or forms of marginalisation could be read in "If Eve could be Steve" <http://expressbuzz.com/magazine/if-eve-could-be-steve/84204.html>
3. Lok Jumbish was a movement that started in 1989 to mobilize "education for all" in the state of Rajasthan. It was involved in community mobilization, improving the quality of teaching learning process, in service training for teachers, emphasis on gender equity, etc. In the year 1992 it became a large scale project. In 1997 textbook revival for middle school classes was taken up
4. Refer to the EPW article on "Public Participation, Teacher Accountability and School Outcomes in Three States" Priyanka Pandey, Sangeeta Goyal, Venkatesh Sundararaman June 12, 2010 Vol XIV no 24 75

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**Alex** has thankfully survived the NGO sector doing academics, without ever doing a managerial task. He now has a vague intention to move into "akkademiks" because metaphorically "he wants to teach everybody a lesson"! Anyways he is entering another phase of footloose years from September. He may be reached at [alexmggeorge@gmail.com](mailto:alexmggeorge@gmail.com)



On Friday, 3 December 1971, Pakistani air force incursion into Indian air space triggered a full-scale war between India and Pakistan. On Saturday, 4 December, Mr. Narasanna, social studies teacher for 8th 'B', National High School, Bangalore, walked into the class, 1st period, early morning.

He announced, "Today, we will spend five minutes on world news." We were mildly thrilled... so long as it was not that dreary textbook, we were quite open to anything. He looked around for a wall map. None to be found. Eighty-two gawping kids just watching with no particular interest or emotion.

Then he electrified us. He just cleaned the chalkboard and proceeded to draw the continental outline map of the world! A collective gasp went up and the excitement in the room was palpable. He had achieved the first of many, what I now call, "teacher moments" – when the 'light bulb' goes on. Mine was two watts, at most. But it went on!

He proceeded to give us a detailed description of the history of the war. The events from 1947 and fast-forward to 1971. Everything from the injustices heaped on the East Pakistanis, their reaction, the military repression, China's involvement, Indira Gandhi's trip to several western capitals explaining that India would not go to war (while actually preparing for it).

All this dramatized in Kannada that we kids spoke. He was also a brilliant caricaturist. Indira and Richard (Nixon) faced each other on the blackboard with their protruding noses, Tikka Khan screamed at a taciturn Zhou En-Lai about Indian injustice ... The five minutes turned into all the social studies classes for the duration of the war (it ended Thursday, 16 December). He had introduced me to geopolitics, political history, and political and historical geography.

In 1993, 22 years later, I received my PhD in geography, dedicating my dissertation to Mr. Narasanna's memory. In 2010, 39 years later, I vividly recall every sensation of that Saturday morning class.

This is the power of the teacher. This incident holds many

lessons for us today. I will delineate a few here.

### The Power of the Teacher

Mr. Narasanna represented a very noble breed of teacher – deeply passionate about the subject and imbued with its explanatory power. What no government-produced geography textbook could excite, he did: the geographic imagination!

I could imagine the military moves and countermoves. No television, internet, newsreels (they were always late), nothing. Mr. Narasanna's narrative, his maps, caricatures, play-acting, and the newspapers. I first started reading newspapers as of 4 December 1971. Ever since, I have always connected geography and current events and come to understand that geography is fundamental to make sense of our world.

The importance of the shape of peninsular India, location of the Himalaya, resource re-distribution due to partition, variations in climate, cultural geographies, and a myriad other factors about the emergence of Bangladesh came alive to me.

### The Relevance of Relevance

The geography of South Asia was introduced to me via an ongoing process in which I was a participant – rations, raising funds for our jawans, putting brown paper on the window panes at home for the nightly brown-out, etc. What he taught in that class had an immediate relevance. I understood the geographic reason for the brownouts in Bangalore. I was part of the posse of scrawny little kids going up and down our street reminding people to turn the lights out until the all-clear was blown!

Coming to now - I recently visited a 7th grade social studies class in a Kannada medium government school recently. The students told me they were studying the physical features of Europe. Impressive!

I drew a circle, the principal latitudes, got them to



identify these, and asked for a volunteer to come to the board and show me where Europe is located on that Earth. No one could. They didn't know what Europe was. Same result when I asked for someone to show me where India is.

I asked them what use they saw for such study in their lives. No answer. Of course there is plenty of use, but let us put such usefulness in context. I asked them if they use geography in daily life in any identifiable way. No answer. I asked them how they come to school daily and how they know the route to the school and back. "There you are using geographical knowledge." Much sage nodding of heads.

Next, I asked them how many were from agricultural families. Almost all. We did a quick survey of the crops grown on their family lands. Then I asked them to look at why those particular crops were grown and not something else. Discussion quickly yielded the importance of soil, climate, water, market, dietary preferences, and generations of practice. I told them that their parents are practical geographers and that is where, every day, geography is being used. Right at home.

We need to question the utility of studying about distant lands without engaging with the geography right under our own feet! If it is relevant to the students' lives, they will find any subject fascinating.

### Subject, Discipline, Integration

Subjects are taught as if they are water-tight compartments. Most students are not taught how geography can bring together physics, chemistry, biology, geometry, economics, anthropology, sociology, language, and arts to make sense of our world. The power of geography is two-fold: (a) it gives a unique framework to make sense of our world – the geographic or spatial framework, and (b) it opens the mind up to integrating all subjects into this framework so that the interconnectedness of phenomena becomes clear. When we take this approach, we will be teaching geography as a discipline, not just a subject.

This is no mere intellectual exercise. An integrated ('holistic') understanding of our world makes us better equipped at analyzing and solving problems, planning, and working towards social justice. Geography is eminently empowering in this 'horizontal integration' (interlinking different subjects within one standard). I use the topic of the southwest

monsoons to help teachers and students understand how geography helps integrate other subjects with it. You can't appreciate the grandeur of the southwest monsoons without applying physics, chemistry, geography, culture, biology, mathematics, fine and performing arts, language, etc. I have even geography teachers coming up to me after this workshop and saying, "I had never thought of geography this way!" It is elegant, fun, and powerful. A collaborative process of scheduling topics in their own classes and tying them back to the southwest monsoons is all that it takes; often, it is just the use of monsoon examples instead of some other example. This approach helps students understand the power of geography and how it fosters interdisciplinary thinking.

*The power of geography is two-fold: (a) it gives a unique framework to make sense of our world – the geographic or spatial framework, and (b) it opens the mind up to integrating all subjects into this framework so that the interconnectedness of phenomena becomes clear.*

As students progress from class to class, their geography learning must build into discernible and useable frameworks and skills-sets ('vertical integration'). The southwest monsoon example can apply here too. The initial treatment may be to observe simple patterns associated with the monsoons – torrential rain, playing in the rain, the fears that people have about playing in the rain, what kind of foods we like to take during the rainy season, etc. With each subsequent year, it can be built to look at the complexity of the monsoon system, how we try to understand it, the factors that determine its behavior, etc. Thus, a geography student going through successive years will build a variety of skills beginning with pattern-matching and moving on to analyses of causal factors and patterns, and to impacts and eventually to application.

## Re-imagining geography Education in the 21st Century

There is a dire need to enhance the theory and praxis of geography education in and for the 21st century to empower both teachers and students. We need to begin with the fundamental recognition that social science education is as vital to human development as the 'natural' sciences. This is not possible without educating the educators!

### We Need to Adopt a Three-track Approach, Simultaneously

#### 1. Curricular Development

Curriculum, syllabus, exams, and pass percentages are facts of life. However, an empowered teacher can make the geography class fascinating with just a little extra effort to clarify conceptual understanding and application.

One effective method is to use current events and other familiar activities to illustrate geography concepts. For example, teaching latitudes and longitudes is among the toughest things for a middle-school geography teacher. Using two calendar observances – Christmas and New Year – both can be taught effectively. Kids love to play hopscotch. This is a great way to teach them the fundamental idea of spatial organization. (You can also break gender-stereotypes in this activity!)

Use of current events requires some amount of research by the teacher. It also requires students to read newspapers. The otherwise under-utilized newspapers-in-education (NIE) programs of several newspapers can be useful in this.

In most cases, the teacher-pupil ratio is inimical to much activities-based learning. Telling a story, recalling a poem, a film song ... all these can make the topics relevant and fun. Association with fun will enhance clarity of understanding and, if good communication skills are built, will lead to better exam performance also.

#### 2. Co-curricular Development

Co-curricular learning is collaborative and relates to the textbook topics but may not be directly aimed at enhancing exam results. Students understand a topic better, are able to apply it, and therefore better able to answer some questions in an exam (this last is only one of the benefits). The activities do not necessarily translate to marks/credit. Example:

understanding the fluctuation of daily temperatures in a place using a newspaper, as part of the chapter on climate/weather. This may not be directly a question in the exam, but it helps students see how geography is working in the lived environment.

#### 3. Extra-curricular Development

This is the most important mode of geographical learning. It helps build more interest in geography in the learners' minds and helps improve curricular development. This is the ultimate value-added geography education. This is where civil society structures have a precious role to play by empowering both teachers and students. This includes at least the following components:

a. **Field-work** – understanding geography through field work such as landscape analysis walk-about, interviews, surveying, etc.

An easy way of understanding how we construct human geography in the environment easily shows us, for example, how we privilege vehicular traffic over pedestrian traffic (a serious urban problem in India); how we address safety concerns of the very young and the very old people in our geographic space; how we provide/deny geographic access to people with disabilities.

A very fun and instructive exercise would get kids to give directions and follow directions in different modes (spoken, verbal, written, maps, etc.). This hones their mental geographical acumen and its communication very well, because they first become conscious of it and can, over time, become 'naturals' at it.

“*One effective method is to use current events and other familiar activities to illustrate geography concepts. For example, teaching latitudes and longitudes is among the toughest things for a middle-school geography teacher. Using two calendar observances – Christmas and New Year – both can be taught effectively.*”

Field-work techniques can also teach students many skills in communication. If they have to find out what public trees in their own neighborhoods mean to people, what are the questions the students should ask, how are these to be asked, how will they know that the questions get clear answers they seek, etc.

I once set my students to a small in-school survey. They immediately said, "Some people may not talk to us, Sir." Through a lot of fun questioning and mocking each other, I got them to understand the importance of body language in communication to elicit geographic information from people. "You are kids. No one will be able to say no to you if you put on a 'puppy-dog' face and ask." Only a few kids needed to use it, but they reported success!

b. **Case-studies** – taking up real-world case-studies, using real data, and understanding the untidiness of life and research to think of solutions to real problems such as social justice, environmental conservation, disaster management, safety, service delivery, commerce, etc. I have used data from NGO work on social issues (e.g.: case study of girl children in sex work in Bangalore) to teach about urban geography issues and found students responding very intelligently and sensitively to social justice issues.

c. **IT-enabled geography Education** – learning to use modern electronic tools of geographic data processing such as GPS, GIS, the Internet, etc. provides vital analytical and problem-solving skills-sets that can help students compete in the market place of ideas and jobs in the 21st century.

- There are two blog entries on these that could be useful. They are being re-located at the time of writing this article. Please contact me for the address to those.

Unfortunately, most curriculums do not engage with this seriously. This gap must be filled by civil society structures. At the time of writing this article, The Indian Institute of Geographical Studies is setting up GeoVidya Geography Center of Excellence at the campus of a school in Bangalore to start focused modules in this direction in the near future.

Students with basic understanding of computers combined with a strong understanding of basic geography concepts will be able to understand these tools and learn to use them reasonably quickly. All students from 8th standard should be exposed to these technologies and techniques. Google Earth and such platforms are a reasonable beginning but do not provide the intense skills that geographic knowledge production and application require. However, the beginnings must be made.

In summary, geography education is vital for developing the spatial sensibilities of our learners. Geography should be recognized as the bridge between the social and natural sciences. For over 60 years, in India, we have been emphasizing the need for 'the basics' in education. Rightly so.

However, we should urgently and assiduously start emphasizing 'value addition' if we are to help bring more and more people to participate in the emergence of a braver new world.

Nothing less will do.

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In this article I offer a selective overview of some of the ongoing and emerging issues concerning history education in England and the USA. I also try to explain why the history teaching practices in these two countries are very different.

### Some Background

In America, where education is decentralized, individual states set their own standards and guidelines for teaching history; however, teachers across the country tend to use the same textbooks which are produced by big publishing companies. Students are typically required to take both American history and World history courses during high school (age 14-18), although studying history is optional during their final year. In elementary and middle schools history is generally subsumed within a broader social studies curriculum.

In England, a National Curriculum has been in place since 1988. Here I refer solely to England because there are curriculum differences for history across England, Wales and Northern Ireland; meanwhile, the Scottish education system is quite different. Until the age of 14, English students follow a program of study that prescribes history content, concepts and skills, as well as expected attainment levels. After age 14, history is no longer mandatory; students who choose to continue with their studies take GCSE and Advanced Level history courses which are managed by various examination boards in accordance with government guidelines.

### Whose History? Controversies over Content

*Political wrangling aside, however, American history education is used unabashedly to promote a sense of national pride and belonging among students; whatever their personal family history, American students will say “We wanted to be free from the British”, for example, when they talk about the American War of Independence.*

The world over, history is one of the most contested subjects on the school curriculum. Because history is so intimately tied to questions of national, ethnic, religious and political identity and power, different groups often compete to see their ‘version’ of the past represented in school history textbooks and curricula. Of course, India itself has not been immune to such struggles in recent years.

In America, the recent controversy surrounding the social studies curriculum review in Texas was a reminder of how history education continues to be a battleground for different political agendas in this country. The stakes were high because Texas has one of the largest education budgets in America; textbook publishers tend to cater to Texan curriculum specifications which are reviewed every ten years. This time, conservative advocates successfully pushed for revisions that downplayed the Founding Fathers’ intent to create a secular government for America; they also secured a more prominent place for their hero Ronald Reagan. In contrast, attempts by other groups to include more positive Hispanic role models were thwarted.

Political wrangling aside, however, American history education is used unabashedly to promote a sense of national pride and belonging among students; whatever their personal family history, American students will say “We wanted to be free from the British”, for example, when they talk about the American War of Independence. The overarching story told by American textbooks is one of American exceptionalism and of ever-expanding rights and freedoms for all her citizens, as evidenced, for instance, by the abolition of slavery and the civil rights movement. Today’s history textbooks do include the perspectives of at least some of the groups who were once sidelined from official accounts of America’s past; nevertheless, the traditional national narrative remains intact.

The type of content studied in England is quite different, although during the 1980s in particular many on the right—including Margaret Thatcher—argued forcefully that students should learn a straightforward narrative of

events and accomplishments in British history. At present, a debate has been re-ignited about whether more British history should be taught in schools with the express aim of encouraging a greater sense of “Britishness” (which is seen as more inclusive than, for example, “Englishness” or “Welshness”). Several prominent historians have criticized the relative weight given to topics such as Nazi Germany and America’s Great Depression in comparison to topics of direct national significance. They have also criticized the piecemeal nature of the curriculum which does not allow students to develop a coherent overarching story about the past.

### History as a ‘Discipline’ vs. History as ‘Content’: Debates about How History should be Taught

One reason why students in England study relatively little British history is that the principle purpose of studying the past is not seen to be about promoting patriotism. From the 1960s onwards ‘new’ history gained traction with English education experts and teachers. In a nutshell, ‘new’ history was a response to ‘traditional’ history which critics said taught students to memorize rather than to think. Advocates of ‘new’ history pushed for a greater emphasis on ‘history from below’ rather than on national politics and military campaigns; they also wanted to see more non-British history in the curriculum and increased attention paid to the perspectives of different participants in events. They favored in-depth studies of particular themes or moments from history rather than extensive chronological sweeps of the past. The Schools history Project (SHP), founded in 1972, was a key proponent of the ‘new’ history approach and its syllabi were popular with teachers (who were free to choose their own curricula pre-National Curriculum); today SHP is still influential, particularly as the National Curriculum, despite furious protests from the right, ended up incorporating many aspects of ‘new’ history.

Although debates about ‘new’ and ‘traditional’ approaches to teaching history have generally fallen out along political lines in England, ‘new’ history is not necessarily about promoting a left-wing or populist agenda. Instead, it is about focusing on history as a dynamic discipline or way of knowing about the world rather than a collection of hard and dry facts. To understand the past, students are encouraged to think like historians: analyzing historical evidence, considering different historical interpretations, constructing arguments about why something happened or stayed the same, and/or considering

the significance of particular events or developments. It is important to note that substantive knowledge about the past—or ‘content’—is vitally important for developing a disciplinary understanding of history; it is just not the be-all and end-all. While some critics have lambasted the idea of trying to create mini-historians when the vast majority of students will not become professional historians, others have argued that it benefits all students to learn to think critically about the past and how we know about it. Indeed, the aspiration to teach history as a discipline is in line with the appeal made by many prominent educators in the West to teach for deep understanding across all aspects of the school curriculum.

“*Although debates about ‘new’ and ‘traditional’ approaches to teaching history have generally fallen out along political lines in England, ‘new’ history is not necessarily about promoting a left-wing or populist agenda. Instead, it is about focusing on history as a dynamic discipline or way of knowing about the world rather than a collection of hard and dry facts.*”

Although the idea of teaching history as a discipline is starting to make some inroads in America (and has long been present in some classrooms), the majority of teachers and administrators continue to take a ‘traditional’ approach toward history education, closely following textbook content. Prominent history education experts in North America—such as Sam Wineburg (USA) and Peter Seixas (Canada)—advocate an ‘inquiry-based’ or disciplinary approach to history education, arguing that such an approach enables students to develop sophisticated historical understanding as well as a keen interest in history. Their research, alongside that of English researchers (e.g. Peter Lee, Denis Shemilt and Ros Ashby), has also highlighted that students’ thinking about history is often counterintuitive and that students need to be supported and challenged to develop powerful and productive ideas about history. For example, many students

initially believe that history is just “there” and doesn’t have to be constructed from historical sources or that events happen because historical actors want them to: teaching history as a discipline is not easy.

### Looking ahead: Emerging Ideas for History Education

The media regularly reports that both American and English students know very little about the past, despite years of history education. While such concerns are decades-old and framed simplistically, something is arguably amiss. In England, the worry is that students can’t build up a coherent picture of the past because they are too busy practicing their historical thinking ‘skills’ on random topics. In America, where greater emphasis is placed on learning facts in chronological order, students seem unable—or unmotivated—to retain what they are supposed to have learnt.

Recently there has been growing interest in the concept of “historical consciousness” as a means of re-imagining teaching history as a discipline. Historical consciousness broadly refers to how as humans we situate ourselves in time and relate our lives to the past and future; it is about using the past to understand who we are and the lives we are living and can expect to live. For example, experts like Peter Lee are currently interested in developing ‘usable historical frameworks’ that would help to structure students’ understanding of the past; these frameworks would help students assimilate and organize new knowledge but not in a rigid or dogmatic way as in ‘traditional’ teaching. Such

frameworks, which would encompass the history of humanity as a whole, would initially be taught quickly but would be continually revisited, adapted and critiqued as students’ disciplinary knowledge became more sophisticated. Students would also be encouraged to make connections between the present-day and the past.

Many developments in history education have been driven by research. However, many decisions about what to teach and how to teach it boil down to the bigger question of why teach history? Those who believe that the most important reason for teaching history is to make young people feel proud of their nation’s past, for instance, will obviously have different ideas about what to teach and how to teach it than those who are more concerned with developing students’ disciplinary understanding of history, including how we even know about the past and why there might be different interpretations of the same event. Somewhat different again will be the practices of educators whose primary goal is to help students understand how they fit into a bigger picture of human history and can use the past to orient their own lives. Of course, there are other potential purposes of history education that I haven’t touched on here, such as teaching students moral or religious lessons and/or inspiring them to become politically or socially engaged; again, holding these as priorities will affect practice. Given that the purpose of history education is a matter of opinion, debates about history education are likely to continue for a very long time—and not just in America and England.

### Some Suggested Resources

1. Benchmarks of historical thinking website, Center for the Study of Historical Consciousness, Canada: <http://www.histori.ca/benchmarks/>
2. English National Curriculum: <http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/key-stage-3/history/index.aspx>
3. History Thinking Matters, resources for history teachers: <http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/>

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It is still contested whether economics should be taught at the school level. Many people feel that economics as a special subject similar to math, history or geography does not merit a place in the curriculum. The school curriculum ought to retain its focus on the development of basic abilities and skills. They feel that the time diverted to teaching economics could be better utilized in acquiring skills like math and language and to attain a mastery over them. Others feel that economics has much to contribute to understanding the modern world and this should be a part of a citizen's training. Besides, it also contributes to the training in logical reasoning. The critiques however add that the abstraction of the economic models and their slippery ground of assumptions are not appropriate for school level introduction. There's a grain of truth on either side. Therefore, what should be debated is the nature of economics for schools.

### Upper Primary Stage

When Eklavya developed social science textbooks for the Upper Primary Stage (UPS) economics figured as a component of the civics syllabus. This inclusion was based on the understanding that all students should have the opportunity to acquire basic principles necessary for elementary economic and social understanding. There were many themes that could draw upon the economic discipline to illumine aspects of social and economic life. The mandate, however, was not to teach economics as such.



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This understanding emerged out of trials & discussions with resource people and coming to grips with the approach to social sciences at the upper primary level. The book edited by Dr Poonam Batra, 'Social Science Learning in Schools, Perspective and Challenges' documents many chapters that

didn't work and reflects on this experience. The learning from this program was enriched over the years through actual teaching and follow-up in a sample of government schools & regular teacher trainings.

The NCF 2005 debated the purpose of the civics course, which according to the earlier Yashpal Committee report (1992-93) had been reduced to teaching meaningless rituals and still exhibited the colonial framework of converting people into "loyal citizens". The new conceptualization emerging from these deliberations attempts to break away from this tradition. Civics has been renamed as social and political Life at the UPS (and political science in higher grades). Civics in the new avatar of social and political life has within it many topics from sociology, gender, media and subaltern studies as also economics. The economics component of "Social and Political Life" textbooks, though small, is significant.

In the new NCERT textbook for class 6, students are introduced to a variety of livelihoods in the rural and urban areas. The diversity of contexts are then meaningfully used to draw distinction between farm and non-farm activities, farmers and laborers, self-employed and wage-employed, formal and informal workers and also discuss issues such as dearth of work, differing terms and conditions of work, etc.

The next two years of UPS are devoted to understanding the two major organizing principles of our economy, markets and the government, in a contemporary setting. Beginning with the physical notion of market as a place of exchange (example of 'haat', 'mandi', local shops, mall), the unit on markets goes on to discuss how markets function both in terms of connecting distant producers and buyers on the one hand and also creating vastly different opportunities for them.

The discussion on government in grade VIII takes cognizance of government failure in some of the important roles that it is supposed to take on such as universal provision of public facilities and regulation of economic activities, while emphasizing that these are roles it is constitutionally bound to honor – in order to achieve a decent quality of life for all.

In tune with the overall emphasis of these texts, a political economy approach was adopted for the economics sections. Admittedly, the analytical categories used are not always simple, but the use of a variety of cases before generalizing and the near complete absence of formal jargon is supposed to make the topics interesting and comprehensible for the students.

The treatment is focused on real examples and real life situations, starting from the familiar ones to more complex situations. These are then juxtaposed against questions on social ethics such as “would you consider this a fair price?”, “who are the people benefiting?”, “did people get justice in this case?” Seen from another angle, rather than discuss the ideas of democracy, equality, secularism and social justice as mere constitutional ideals (the usual trend for civics syllabus in India), their meanings are explored through the life experiences of ordinary people in an everyday setting.

### What Should be the Approach at the Secondary Level?

In the United States, the National Council on economics Education provides a set of concepts for teaching economics in schools below the college level. This lists the important economic concepts for early development of critical thinking and decision-making skills such as opportunity cost, marginal analysis, interdependence, exchange, productivity, money, markets and prices. Macroeconomic topics are introduced later. This framework places economic freedom and economic efficiency as the two most important social goals for an economy.

In contrast, from its inception in 1977, the economics textbook at the secondary level brought out by the NCERT has taken an original approach, quite different from the utilitarian framework laid above. Taking a broad view of development that would mean not only growth but also social justice, institutional and structural features of the economy were laid out with care and related to the constraints on development. The issue of employment (or the lack of it) received adequate emphasis and public policy intervention had an important place in the discussions, besides the role played by the market. ‘Our Economy: an introduction’ did set the tone for high school economics in India and all the subsequent attempts at textbook writing have followed the overall framework proposed in this book

With all its merits, however, this book would not qualify as

a beginner’s text judged even by the most conservative pedagogical standards. Learning for all age groups requires plenty of experience and thinking through concrete situations in order to come to grips with the facts and events of life upon which concepts and theories are based. The need for a concrete sense of economic life is even greater for younger age groups. ‘Our Economy’ had far too many concepts introduced all at once with few examples and applications. The language was terse and technical. The implication was that teachers teaching the book, most of them were not economics teachers, would teach by bracketing the text and students would memorize for examinations. If the author’s emphasis was on conceptual understanding, it achieved exactly the opposite result.

*“Instead the aim now is to introduce students to the ways of thinking adopted in economics.”*

The pedagogical shifts as required by the NCF (2005) – the leading document for the new set of NCERT textbooks – were therefore long awaited and most welcome. This had been explored by many groups, including Eklavya. It required that the nature of textbooks change fundamentally towards conceptual development and critical thinking in students and away from rote learning. The process of textbook writing was also made more democratic by having teams rather than an individual to draw up the curriculum, write and review the textbooks.

If we see the high school economics course with the themes covered at the UPS stage we would find that the conceptual areas are broadened and some of the formal economics usages are introduced so that the learner can relate this knowledge to what they hear in the media/adult conversations. But abstractions are still few, there is no formal theory and all themes retain practical relevance. It is geared towards general education. We must keep in mind that economics is a part of the social science course and shares this space along with history, geography & political science.

One reason why the earlier NCERT textbook was not appropriate for learners at that stage lies in the book trying to provide students with a core knowledge of economics (though this objective remains largely unstated). In a significant departure, the new NCERT curriculum for high school economics has dropped this agenda. Instead the aim now is to introduce students to the ways of thinking adopted in economics.



*Often textbooks to the detriment of the learner have failed to emphasize the logical structure inside the conceptual framework, but have focused more on introducing new categories and new information. This has been particularly the bane of Indian economics course (at various levels), and one needs to escape this trap.*



In what educationists call the thematic approach, the curriculum is organized around themes that connect conceptual categories to authentic learning contexts. The advantages of thematic approach are twofold. First, the learner starts from a real context/situation, which may reflect many of his own experiences and therefore provides a convenient (and far more interesting) entry point into a topic. Second, the conceptual areas can be determined by what aspects of economic reality one is considering, rather than the conceptual areas leading the horse, as has been the case most often. This approach has led to smaller conceptual load and greater use of real contexts and situations in the new economics textbooks.

Students (and teachers) have some initial hesitation and difficulty in engaging with the generalized picture, they do ultimately work through the numbers and graphs and the economic logic. A balance between specific illustrations and the generalized picture therefore is what is necessary and would enable the students to relate everyday economic activity to the workings of the economy. How to achieve this is the big challenge. Without the macro view, an understanding of the Indian economy would be incomplete,

but one needs to keep in mind that a macro perspective does not come easily. For instance, many students and teachers have personal experiences of labor shortages. They have difficulty coming to terms with the characterization of the Indian economy as labor surplus and unemployment as “the” major problem facing the economy. To take another example, while students easily understand the function of banks as financial intermediaries, they fail to appreciate that demand deposits are a form of money. There are many such examples where the macro perspective might be at variance with intuitive knowledge. This is the other challenge for curriculum designers.

For long, educationists have held that it is important to give students an understanding of the fundamental structure of whatever we teach. What is the logic behind it and how does this apply in different situations? To cite an example from economics, an understanding of terms such as credit and how it varies across classes of borrowers depending on their socio-economic status will mean learning a structure. It can be extended in many other situations such as analyzing the problem of farmer’s suicide, and rural indebtedness to a study of interlinked markets and agrarian relations in later training.

Often textbooks to the detriment of the learner have failed to emphasize the logical structure inside the conceptual framework but have focused more on introducing new categories and new information. This has been particularly the bane of Indian economics course (at various levels), and one needs to escape this trap. Their challenge is to creatively combine analytical description, framework and conceptualization with empirical evidence and thereby provide a general method of approaching the Indian economic problems.

The major thrust of social science curriculum has remained utilitarian in nature. It puts more emphasis on developmental issues that are important but not sufficient to understand the normative dimension – issues of equality, justice and dignity. This has been a major source of criticism. Concerns have been voiced on the nature of economics discourse both from outside and within the discipline for quite some time now. How does one bring in issues of social ethics? This also requires an inter-disciplinary approach so that the overall social science course in history, political science, geography and economics hold together. More can be done

at this end.

### Linking Textbooks, Teacher Training and Examination

Given that the classroom teaching learning processes are dependent upon among other things the level of training imparted to teachers and the assessment pattern followed; unfortunately we have created a culture where genuine involvement of teachers is missing. At an academic level, teachers have little opportunity to understand the approach to social sciences informed by the current contributions of research. Therefore, an engagement with the perspective that has informed the current changes cannot be imagined. Coupled with this, since the assessment pattern continues to depend largely on recall and assigned marks for chapters, conceptual understanding has virtually taken a back seat.

### Controversy at the Higher Secondary Stage

At the middle and secondary stages economics is taught as part of the social science course. At the higher secondary stage there's an opportunity to specialize and therefore students need to be introduced to a more formal course. But how should this be thought about?

In a recent controversy economics teachers teaching grade XII have objected to the new mathematical versions of micro and macro and have forced the CBSE to allow books other than those published by the NCERT to be officially taught in schools (within the prescribed syllabus). This amounts to de facto scrapping of the new textbooks. A committee looking into the matter has desired to reinstate these books. The academics reacted saying that teachers do not wish to be rigorous in their approach. Some college teachers commented that we are installing a fear for economics similar to that of math.

Having said that, higher secondary course cannot be a watered down version of the undergraduate course as it currently is, with four different papers (statistics, Indian economy, micro and macro) with little or few linkages between these subjects. There is an urgent need to think afresh. What is the motivation for studying economics? This might be a question relevant to ask - more so for the beginner or a young student. We must use the controversy as an opportunity to creatively engage with this issue. Indeed a lot more needs to be done to reassure young students that economics is worth studying early on.

### Author's Note

This article is adapted & modified version of the article "Teaching economics in Schools", Sukanya Bose & Arvind Sardana, EPW, Aug 9, 2008.

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# SECTION-C

**In the Classroom**



The new social studies books have been a definite improvement over the earlier ones. I am currently in X and got to use the new updated ones in this class and in IX. The greatest difference lies in the quality of the book and the lay-out. More colors have been used, there are more pictures and cartoons and, illustrations are of a better quality. All this has been done without sacrificing the content.

This change in the look is not superficial at all. It is a known fact that more graphics and colors help in better learning because they stimulate more areas in the brain. Apart from that, it also makes the book more attractive and people are much more willing to use books that they like the look of.

### History

The class VIII history book was a really drab one. There were only two colors – black and white. And various shades of in-between-gray. The IX and X history books are vastly different. The first thing you notice is the fact that the history book no longer looks like a piece of history itself. Interesting exercises that require the reader to write and think in terms of the period depicted (For example, on page 144 (NCERT Class X) is this question: "Imagine that you are a young person living in a *chawl*. Describe one day in your life.") or alternately interpret facts (for example, on page 24 (NCERT Class X) is a question: "Describe what you see in Fig. 17. What historical events could Hubner be referring to in this allegorical version of the nation?") and extra information such as paintings of that time and what they depict or letters and other sources as you go along help create interest in the subject.

Even though the sources and the boxes are not tested upon, they help in giving us a better picture of the times being talked about. In fact, just because they are not tested upon, I tend to go through them for the sake of it, not to learn it. Another basic difference I noticed between class VIII and the later books was the language. The new books use a more lucid style, almost as if narrating a story. Take, for example this passage from the second chapter (NCERT Class X) 'The Nationalist Movement In Indo-China', page 36: "In 1926 a major protest erupted in the Saigon Native Girls School. A Vietnamese girl sitting in one of the front seats was asked to move to the back of the class and allow a local French student

to occupy the front bench. She refused. The principal, also a colon (French people in the colonies), expelled her. When angry students protested, they too were expelled, leading to a further spread of open protests. Seeing the situation getting out of control, the government forced the school to take the students back. The principal reluctantly agreed but warned the students, "I will crush all Vietnamese under my feet. Ah! You wish my deportation. Know well that I will leave only after I am assured Vietnamese no longer inhabit Cochin China." It is, at best, a story. Nothing that one will learn for the exam. But it helps to explain the situation in Vietnam very well.

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*Another basic difference I noticed between class VIII and the later books was the language. The new books use a more lucid style, almost as if narrating a story.*

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On the other hand, the class VIII book was more of a collection of facts. It was good certainly if you want a book that gives to you in detail everything about the British Rule, but was not an ideal tool if what you preferred was something interesting and made you want to research more on it. On the whole, the new books facilitate learning because they create an interest in the subject while the previous one was good only if you had an exam to cram for.

### Political Science

The best feature in the books are the cartoons! Unni and Munni, and the political ones. They make a nice break from the text. I like Unni and Munni, the two cartoon characters who appear alongside the chapter, especially because they encourage us to think differently and ask questions. Some of them, when you read them, sound a little absurd but actually get you thinking when you think about it. Take, for example

the question, "If casteism and communalism are bad, what makes feminism a good thing? Why don't we oppose all those who divide the society on any lines – caste, religion or gender?" and "Are you suggesting that strike, dharna, bandh and demonstration are a good thing? I thought it happened only in our country because, we are not a mature democracy yet" or "Does it mean that whichever side manages to mobilize a bigger crowd gets away with whatever it wants? Are we saying that 'Might is Right' in a democracy?" (NCERT Class X) The Let Us Read Newspaper/Listen To Radio/Watch Television features are good. Even though teachers in the school (especially in tenth) are too busy finishing the syllabus to actually bother to go through them, they are good because what use is learning democracy theoretically if we aren't relating it to what is actually happening?



*The first thing that strikes you is, again, the look of the book. The pie-charts and maps have had a face-lift. Inclusions like "Did You Know?" are very interesting. Graphics and the quality of pictures too have improved. Attempts made to make the book much better are visible in the revamped exercises and inclusions like the crosswords.*



There is one error I would like to point out in the Class X NCERT. In the first chapter, the book discusses the problems in the states of Sri Lanka and Belgium arising out of a population consisting of different cultural groups. While it states that Sri Lanka's method of tackling the problem – running a majoritarian government (of the Sinhalese) and repressing the will of the minority (the Tamils) – has not solved the problem, Belgium's accommodation – accommodating the cultural freedoms of the Dutch and the French – has "helped avoid civic strife between the two major communities and a possible division of the country on linguistic lines". However, that is not very true because civic strife exists in the country till date and the country is on the verge of a political division along these very linguistic lines.

Of course, in defence of NCERT, you can say that these problems might not have been there when the book was published. But then, NCERT ought to refrain from making such statements. Perhaps this was a solution that should have been worked out but did not. But the fact is, it has not really helped the situation in Belgium and NCERT gives this arrangement as an example to show that power-sharing is good so in the end, it does not actually prove anything.

Class VIII did not have political science as a separate subject and neither was there another book for it. But commenting from the section on civics in it, the new books have a much better lay-out. More colors have been used, especially in maps. There are definitely more pictures and posters too. In a way, due to the various real-life examples used to illustrate the points, our learning of democracy has become more "real". What we are told are not just facts to memorize. They are based on systems that have worked and systems that have not. They are based on reality. The lessons are taught giving us direct examples that we can relate to. Since so much of it is 'now and happening' and based on the outside world, it initiates debates in the class. I think that is really important because debating about a topic especially in subjects like political science helps us grasp core objects much better.

### Geography

Just like political science, geography too didn't have a separate book in class VIII. Therefore, all comparisons are made relative to the portion on geography in the Part II book of social studies of class VIII.

The first thing that strikes you is, again, the look of the book. The pie-charts and maps have had a face-lift. Inclusions like "Did You Know?" are very interesting. Graphics and the quality of pictures too have improved. Attempts made to make the book much better are visible in the revamped exercises and inclusions like the crosswords (some of them need a little editing and I'd like it if we had more of them).

A doubt came up in the class one day and I think you should know. Someone said that information given in various chapters sometimes do not support each other. The teacher said that probably the editing was done rather hastily.

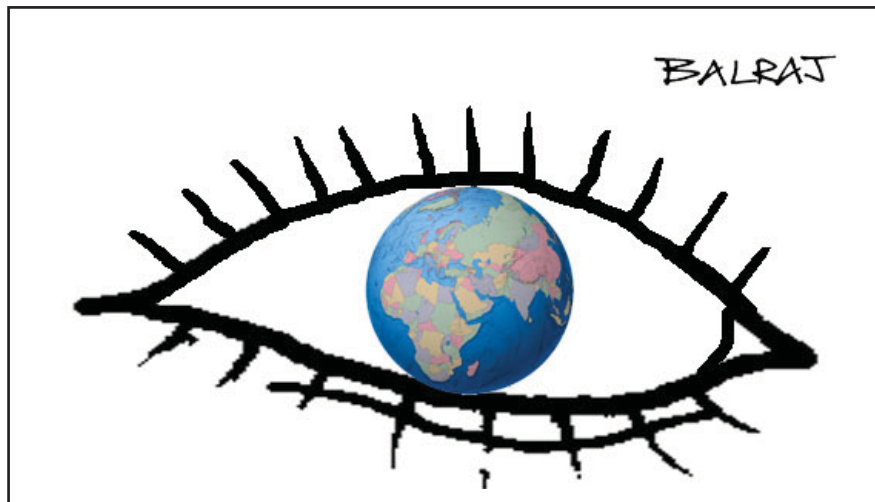
There does exist scope for improvement in the geography books. Some crosswords (given at the end of the chapters) need to be edited. Possibly, so much of text can be reduced

in places and the monotony broken by more charts and graphs. It would also be really great if the syllabus included

hands-on geography of the likes of field trips.

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As a young student I would love to bury my nose in a story book that transported me to strange and exotic locations like 'Never, Never Land' where Peter Pan refused to grow up. My imaginary world was filled with castaways and shipwrecks created by Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe. I was equally enchanted by Enid Blyton's *Magic Faraway Tree*. Yes, they were all about places that never existed in my school atlas that I faithfully carried around. Was that the reason why I never enjoyed geography? No.

In retrospect, the teacher and the textbook were to blame for a subject that could and should have fascinated me more than molecules and microbes. But back in those days, we thought well of our teacher and guarded the textbook because it made our life easy. It also kept our memory nimble and quick. It proved to be the best technique for reaching the winning post at quiz competitions and exams. It mattered little that we couldn't tell the climate from weather. Nor did we see the connection between plotting graphs and locating places along those crisscross lines that bound the globe in a grid. At least we knew the earth was round and flat no more! And we did split our sides with laughter when the class comedian described the equator as 'a menagerie lion running around the earth and through Africa.'

*If the aim of geography is to nurture global citizens then: can we walk students through the labyrinths of knowledge and give them an understanding of the myriad challenges that confront our world today?*

Years later when I found myself with the onerous responsibility of training teachers, my lacunae in geography came home to roost. I had to do something and the best way to begin at the beginning was to ask questions. The first: 'what is geography?' I ran into several definitions. The Wikipedia described it: as an all-encompassing discipline that seeks to understand the world - its human and physical features - through an understanding of place and location. Another

went like this: geography is the study of the earth's landscapes, peoples, places and environments. To put it simply – geography is about the world in which we live.



The next question: what do we expect our students to gain from learning geography that they cannot gather from other areas of the curriculum? The answer is given by GA (1999) which says, "The aim of geography is to develop an informed concern for the world around us, and an ability and willingness to take positive action both locally and globally." Yet another source like Oxfam believes that geography should build on young people's concerns, enabling them to become 'global citizens'. And to elaborate further - 'a global citizen is someone who cares about the wider world, knows how the world works, is outraged by poverty and injustice, and takes action to change things for the better.' (Garlake, 2000).

If the aim of geography is to nurture global citizens then: can we walk students through the labyrinths of knowledge and give them an understanding of the myriad challenges that confront our world today? The effects of global warming and the need to reduce harmful emissions of green house gases, the use of finite resources and energy in more sustainable ways, the need to reduce pollution, the maintenance of social justice and removal of prejudice and inequality. In short, the function of geography in schools is to train future citizens to imagine accurately the conditions of the great world stage and so help them to think sanely about political and social problems in the world around them. Therefore the links between geography and citizenship are natural and obvious. Is it possible to nurture this connection in our schools?

An environmental disaster comes to mind. It was July 26, 2005 when a 24-hour rainfall of 994 mm lashed Mumbai and the economic power of India "died" for two days. There was untold loss of life and property. 'Terrible Tuesday' would go down in history but not before an enthusiastic teacher used the experience in her geography class. Rani was keen to test the waters with her students of class IX. They

were an attentive lot, eager to share their experiences of the downpour. Rani gently nudged them into a discussion with the question: was the flood an act of God? The class was divided on the answer and they failed to come to a consensus. So she asked them to look at causes of flooding and its effects in different places around the world. The class diligently scanned the globe and meandered their way through similar events that took them up the Mississippi and down the Nile. And closer home they learnt of the Mithi river for the very first time. They were surprised to find no mention of it in their textbooks. They pored over journals and waded through archives till they finally decided to absolve God from all catastrophes. But who was to blame for the Mumbai tragedy? Their fingers quickly pointed to the politicians, municipality, slum dwellers, builders, and the migrant population. Almost everybody was guilty. At this stage, Rani coaxed the students to take on the roles of each of the culprits they had listed. The response was dramatic and soon a blame game was in progress. It was easy to see how this environmental issue had aroused strong passions. In the midst of this entire din Rani patiently kept observing the behavior of her students. What was she trying to achieve in this pandemonium?

Rani was making an attempt to teach citizenship alongside geography. The aims of her lesson were: (i) to develop an informed concern for the world around us, and (ii) to inculcate skills of participation in the experience of others. The key elements:

1. Knowledge of floods
2. Understanding the causes of floods
3. Critical thinking
4. Social competencies

Rani had encouraged her class to investigate places, people and issues. They were encouraged to think logically and critically before drawing conclusions. Lastly, she helped them explore their feelings in relation to place, space and the environment. Rani strongly believed that it's not enough to simply fill students' brains with facts. She wanted to help her students develop the skills to manage their emotions, resolve conflicts nonviolently, and make responsible decisions. The role play showcased the social competencies that were important learning outcomes for this geography

teacher. Rani was using an approach called SEL – Social and Emotional Learning.

### **What is SEL and why do we Need such Competencies in Today's World?**

There are several theories but the best explanation comes from psychologist Daniel Goleman who makes a case for emotional intelligence in his book that became a bestseller in 1995: "Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ". His research proved that people with high emotional intelligence tend to be more successful in life than those with high IQs. Other research studies show that promoting social and emotional skills leads to reduced violence and aggression among children, higher academic achievement, and an improved ability to function in schools and in the workplace. Students who demonstrate respect for others and practice positive interactions, and whose respectful attitudes and productive communication skills are acknowledged and rewarded, are more likely to continue to demonstrate such behavior. Students who feel secure and respected can better apply themselves to learning and find it easier to thrive in educational environments and in the wider world.

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### **Can Emotional Intelligence be Taught?**

Emotions are a part of our being and geography has a particular place in this endeavor because the study of real

places, real people and real-life issues is at its core. A number of key geographical concepts provide a distinctive edge on how contemporary issues can be confronted. These are place, space, interdependence, environmental interaction, distance, relational perspectives, geographical imaginations, cultural understanding and diversity. According to Karen Stone McCown (1998) "Emotions are our responses to the world around us, and they are created by the combination of our thoughts, feelings and actions." Slater (2001), for example, says that, 'Citizens need geography and

geographical understanding'. She claims that geography is all about our perception of our environment and how we seek to live in it as geographically and politically literate citizens.

The world is shrinking while carbon emissions are growing. Google maps have long replaced my wearied atlas. And I have taken geography to heart. To me it's a subject that cradles the future in the wondrous beauty of its mountains, plains, rivers and seasons.

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**W**hat is social studies? How can one make this subject contribute to the personal growth of children through experiential learning, skill building and broadening their outlook toward different aspects of life? Finally, how does one as a teacher of social studies ensure that the dynamism and buoyant quality of this subject is strengthened by the pedagogy adopted in class and take it beyond the four walls of the classroom?

There is enormous scope for students in such a subject to ask and pursue questions which seem very real to them, research on concepts they feel deeply connected to, form their own subtle judgements and take away these questions and opinions to delve further as they grow.

As a teacher of social studies it has been a very adventurous and meaningful journey for me personally through a gamut of experiences and experiments with children.

Social studies is incorporated in the curriculum in Rishi Valley for only one year ie in class VI bridging the links and differences between Environmental Studies studied in earlier years and the more focussed disciplines of geography and history in later years. It is by and large a study of ancient civilizations and contemporary cities across the world - Loyang from Ancient China, Athens and Sparta from Greece, London from Great Britain and Benares from India. The children take a journey through each of these cities looking at different cultures and the impact of some of these societies on world culture today.

One realisation I had during the first two years of my teaching this subject was that children tend to forget the facts and most of the theory part of the content. However, what stays in their memory are the rich experiences of co-operative working, field trips, hands on activities, joy of participating in dramas and dances, ideas they take away from the debates and interviews with people, projects they do, putting up exhibitions, countless number of stories they listen to, etc.. In a nutshell what remains with them is the subtle understanding of the depth of the study of man and the workings of any society which then strengthens and nurtures their relationship with subjects like history and geography in higher classes. Therefore, these are the different threads I have always played with to weave and design the colourful and rich tapestry of this fabric called social studies.

Here's a bird' eye view of what's and how's of my exploration of China and Greece in class 6 and Egypt in class 5. I would like to mention here that we have created our own course materials and booklets for all the civilizations and cities that we cover.



### China



Chin Shi Huangdi in the play

We began exploring China with an exhibition of photographs - of people, places, paintings of different landscapes, architecture etc. We also displayed a few materials and devices which were first invented and used in China and are still being used all around the world (silk, compass, umbrella, paper, etc..)

China was then introduced in a very dramatic manner through Chin Shi Huangdi, the first emperor of China who unified all the six warring states of the country through military conquests. Photographs of a vast buried army of terracotta soldiers with life size horses near the emperor's tomb and a lot of other information about his life, cruelties, and achievements proved to be a very gripping starter. At this juncture the children themselves initiated a very interesting discussion on the belief of life after death. This led to a spontaneous comparative study of how different cultures including different religions in India deal with death and the rituals that follow it. Children spoke about the rituals

that their families practise and why they do it. This also made them think about the validity of some rituals and some which didn't make any sense at all.

The study of the Han Dynasty brought them face to face with the concepts of dynasty, division into provinces, a hierarchical bureaucracy or civil service, and merit based public examinations. This then extended itself into a very rich discussion about the administrative system of our own country.

The lesson on 'the life and teachings of Confucius' and what he said about the duties and responsibilities of all the members in a family and society lent itself beautifully to the exploration of philosophy at the level of their understanding. This provided a platform to delve for a while on what J.Krishnamurthi, the founder of the school and a great philosopher, had to say about 'freedom and responsibility.'



Dragon Dance

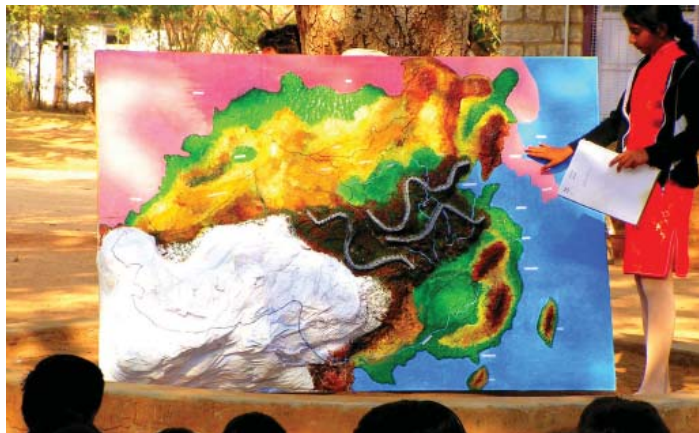
A comparative study of the life of children in those days in China, their upbringing and the life of today's children i.e, the students themselves, the advantages and disadvantages of living in both the worlds proved to be a very debatable and worthwhile venture in class.

Around that time, an ex-student of Rishi Valley who was then a resident of China came visiting. She regaled the students with her knowledge of present day China, Mao - his policies and how they affected the country, important landmarks and places worth visiting, etc. in an eloquent manner. The children had very inspiring and rich sessions with her.

The grand finale of this exploration was a month and a half long project that the entire class embarked upon in preparation for a school assembly to share their learning

with others.

We made a huge colourful 3-D relief map of China to scale, highlighting all the major natural and geographical features, the silk route and the Great Wall of China. With the help of the village potter we made beautiful replicas of the terracotta army. A very ambitious part of the project was the making of two thirty feet long dragons for the traditional Chinese dragon dance.



China Map

Plays depicting a market scene, of how philosophers and teachers met people in public places and talked to them about the truth of life, a court scene of Chin Shi Huangdi followed by an assassination attempt on him were the themes chosen for the final day presentation. Another group of students practised the dragon dance depicting the fight between good and evil over the 'pearl of wisdom'.

The assembly proved to be a huge success with beautiful Chinese music in the background and the much awaited Dragon dance. Thus ended our exploration of one ancient civilization.

Those students are now in class X and it's heartening to see how they still remember this experience with thrill.

### Ancient Greece



Greek Mosaic

I followed more or less the same methodology while working on this civilization with the students. The basic tools used were the booklet on Ancient Greece, reference work from a rich resource of library books, maps, pictures, charts, etc. One new skill that I felt would be worth imparting was the making of mind maps. Social studies as a subject calls for remembering many details, facts & figures and other information. I feel that mind maps are one of the easiest ways of putting together details as a cluster. Therefore, I used Tony Buzan's techniques on mind maps and over a few sessions the students seemed quite adept at making beautiful, colour-coded mind maps on different themes related to Greece.

Some of these topics included looking at the geographical features of the land, the structure of a Greek town, daily life and occupations of its people, the two main cities - Sparta and Athens with their very contrasting outlook toward life and their conflicts.



Parthenon

The lesson on the emergence of democracy in Greece under the able leadership of Pericles was an experience worth remembering. This topic extended itself into many activities – a comparative study mainly through sharing of knowledge about the different forms of government, skits to show the difference between Monarchy, Aristocracy, Oligarchy and Democracy. To give the children an experience of what democracy is and how it works, I organised debates between teams on different aspects of their life in school. The idea was to convey how decisions on important issues of the state were taken up through discussions and debates.

The concept of 'street theatre' was introduced when we began our exploration of Greek myths and legends. After reading around six to seven stories we decided to write scripts in small groups of four to five students for each story. Then after a few rehearsals we invited other classes and teachers to watch the plays. For each play we chose a natural setting in different parts of the campus and stories were enacted with minimum number of props and costumes. The exciting part of the whole experience was the audience who moved with the actors from one place to another to watch the plays.

We also watched a documentary called Greek – Crucible of Civilization. One very thought-provoking activity for me as a teacher happened when I made the children take charge of a few simple themes related to Greece and prepare themselves in small groups to teach the others in class. The children enjoyed being teachers for some time, but what's worth sharing is the depth with which each group had prepared itself. Not only did they divide the responsibilities among themselves and teach their friends taking cues from the methods followed by their own teachers, but also brought in their own ways of imparting a lesson. In fact in those few sessions I learnt many more creative ways of teaching from my 'student teachers.'

We again took up a month long project in preparation for a school assembly on Greece. This time the students made a model of the Parthenon, mosaics depicting scenes and people (based on their study of Greek Mosaics), lovely cardboard models of Greek pots with exquisite paintings on them and a big 2-D model of Greek map. Themes chosen for plays included how meetings on important issues of the state were discussed in a very democratic manner by the citizens of Greece and three famous Greek myths. A beautiful



Greek Vases

traditional Greek dance was performed by the girls.

### Ancient Egypt

Children learn about this civilization towards the fag end of the session in class V – this topic prepares them well to understand what a civilization means, what is archaeology, how cities come into existence, what is a society, what is hierarchy, etc.

I decided to take ahead this entire topic with the children in a two-pronged manner – through classroom learning and a research based project method going hand in hand. Each group was given the task of researching one major topic related to the civilization and and make models, charts and other things based on their research. The topics covered were as follows – The Nile, Pharaohs (their throne, different types of crowns, the traditional beard, etc.), Egyptian gods and goddesses, sarcophagus and mummification, Pyramids, Egyptian houses and kinds of food they ate (we also made the traditional crude Egyptian cookies), occupations of people and societal hierarchy (in the form of a diorama) and Hieroglyphs. We spent around three weeks studying and doing reference work from the library and internet, theory classes with the teacher and making charts. All the children had designed their own Egyptian attire.



A week before the exhibition, each group had to present their work to the whole class. This helped the children learn presentation skills and ways to handle different types of questions based on their work. Once the exhibition was set up inside the classroom, the night before the big day another colleague and I went around posing as visitors asking each group of questions related to their work and giving them feedback and suggestions. Thus the learning was thorough, co-operative and holistic though each group had worked intensely on their own topics.

Three years into the exploration, the journey is on – the journey of finding new approaches to teaching the subject, of finding answers to the questions posed through the most meaningful processes possible, of helping children shape their attitude toward society and culture from their study of the past and present through introspection and observation.



Egyptian attire

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### An exploration of the dilemmas teachers face when teaching contentious issues in Social-Sciences

During the practicum component of my teacher-training to be a history teacher, I observed a wildly enthusiastic teacher. In one of his lessons, he modeled a memorable way to get young students to structure their thoughts and writing so that they explored different sides of an argument. He wore these massive colorful mittens on each hand, and then waved his right hand at them, bellowing out: "On the ONE hand!" and then his left, shouting: "one the OTHER hand!" He repeated this exercise a few times much to my bemusement, although his students were obviously attuned to his eccentricities! He went on to say that you needed an 'on the one hand', and an 'on the other hand' when building up a full picture of the past. In fact, the more hands (or perspectives) you had, the fuller your story would be. He proceeded to verbally build up an argument why, on the one hand, Mary Tudor deserved her reputation as a Bloody Queen. He then provided a counterargument, suggesting why some people argue this reputation could be unfounded – all the while shaking his mittened hands. I'm sure those useful sentence-starters stuck in his students' minds.

I've always seen history as a braided narrative – a collection of multiple narratives and perspectives. This is why I liked the idea of offering young history students a framework that acknowledged the existence of multiple viewpoints, and prompted them to write about different sides of an argument. When I first began teaching, I wanted my classroom to be an open space where there was "fair competition in the market place of ideas" (Kelly, 1986). I wanted my students to raise different arguments in response to controversies in history, and come to their own conclusions. I felt it was important to conceal my own position so as not to influence them, and that the most appropriate role for me was the neutral facilitator. However, I soon started to believe that teacher neutrality wasn't really possible, and nor was it desirable.

Teaching is inevitably political, and hence, implicitly or explicitly I (or any educator) could not be 'neutral' in the classroom. Every action that we take is shaped in some way by our socio-political stance. Schools are not distinct from wider society, but are themselves the site of struggle

and social change. In this sense, teachers' minds are far from a tabula rasa when they enter the classroom; the signs of a teacher's (and a system's) social and political lens will always be visible in the classroom when one takes a closer look. The choice of textbook or resources is one obvious indication. This certainly applied to me. I chose textbooks that focused on subaltern and peoples' histories, rather than high politics – because these textbooks aligned to the school of history that I identify with. However, there are also less apparent details which give an indication of a teacher's particular stance. For example, the way that a teacher facilitates a class discussion – the points she lingers on, the ones she chooses to ignore – all these will be a reflection of her social, political values and beliefs.



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Cotton (2006) underscores the difficulty of ever achieving teacher neutrality when teaching controversial environmental issues. She states that while teachers may want to adopt a 'balanced' approach to teaching contentious subject matter, such an approach is unsustainable within the classroom. Her research findings, based on detailed analysis of classroom interactions, demonstrate that "the influence of [teachers'] own attitudes was greater than they intended or, in all probability, realized" (p 223). The interchange below

about land rights for indigenous people demonstrates the struggle the teacher faced in being neutral when there was a disconnect between her values and those being put forward by a student.

18. T: Mmmm... Well, they call it the Maring's forest because it belongs to the Marings, yeah.
19. Sarah: It doesn't belong to them, they just live there.
20. T: Ah, well that could open up all sorts of debates, Sarah, couldn't it? If it doesn't belong to them, to whom does it belong? And does that mean indigenous people...?
21. Sarah: It doesn't belong to anybody, they just use it.
22. T: And does that mean... does that mean that indigenous people have no land rights?
23. Sarah: No [I guess not] (Cotton 2006 p 236).

On reading the full transcript we see that the teacher eventually accepts Sarah's point of view but not before expressing her own attitude in the lesson through the way she steers the argument. She does this in a variety of ways. For example, while she used open questioning at the start of the discussion, this rapidly changes into rhetorical questioning (such as the question seen in Line 23) which restricts open dialogue, and indirectly expresses disagreement with the student. She also goes on to pick students to contribute to the discussion who she knows (through their previous comments) will argue against Sarah. It is interesting that the teachers in this study were striving to be neutral, and despite this intention, their own values and persuasion continued to influence classroom transaction. This is in keeping with much of the literature which discounts the possibility of balance and neutrality in teaching. For example, Outon et al (2004) argue that the requirement to maintain balance is unhelpful as it is probably impossible to achieve.

I know that my own values and persuasions had a bearing on my classroom transactions. Just a week after I first started teaching, I had to teach a Class 9 history unit about Victorian poverty. I know I made it clear to students that I personally felt 'laissez faire' politics were irresponsible and that the state had a responsibility to provide public services such as education and healthcare for the poor. At the same time, in Class 8, we were studying a unit about slavery and bonded labour (the cocoa trade with countries in western Africa). I facilitated discussions where we explored the reasons why workers, including children, continue to work

in these conditions today. Before teaching these units I thought about how I should approach them. I did not want my own social concerns for marginalized populations to suffocate student enquiry or prevent them from thoughtfully considering opposing viewpoints. But at the same time, I wanted my students to know that I believed in equity and social justice. So I decided that I had no desire to feign neutrality. This approach was shared by Bigelow, a high school social-studies teacher interviewed by Kelly and Brandes (2001) in their study of teacher neutrality. Bigelow spoke of a unit he had taught on Nike and global capitalism, and highlighted his concern with teacher impartiality when discussing issues of social justice: "to pretend that I was a mere dispenser of education would be dishonest, but worse, it would imply that being a spectator is an ethical response to injustice. It would model a stance of moral apathy."

*Bigelow spoke of a unit he had taught on Nike and global capitalism, and highlighted his concern with teacher impartiality when discussing issues of social justice: "to pretend that I was a mere dispenser of education would be dishonest, but worse, it would imply that being a spectator is an ethical response to injustice."*

There is a body of research to support the view that the teacher expressing her own stance in the classroom can be preferable to her trying to conceal it. Cotton (2006) states that since teachers end up implicitly or explicitly expressing their attitudes in the classroom, it is better to be explicit about one's position as, "indirect expression of attitudes may [be] harder for the student to challenge than a direct argument presented by the teacher" (p 237). Her case studies outline examples of teachers who find themselves (though often unaware of this, until it is discussed in a de-brief with the observer) steering the conversation in a particular direction. Rather than this, Cotton argues, it is better to be open about one's stance, thus giving a fair chance for students to raise their opposing views. Ashton and Watson (1998)

also argue against the teacher presenting themselves as neutral, stating that this can be interpreted by students as teacher indifference. They state that it is preferable that the teacher expresses herself and enters into dialogue with students because this demonstrates to students that their views are being taken seriously. Of course the success of classroom interactions in which a teacher shares her views is heavily dependent on the classroom culture. A teacher interviewed by Kelly and Brandes (2001) encapsulated this when he said, “you can as a teacher express your opinions and still have a fair and respectful environment, just as long as it’s understood that your opinion isn’t overbearing, that if anyone goes against you, you would never knock them down” (p 448).

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*Neutrality and balance sound like the ideal values for a social science teacher to embody. However, there is much evidence, explored above, which supports the argument that these values are not really possible to attain.*

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In terms of my own teaching practice, I decided not to shy away from putting forward my views in the classroom, and inviting students to dissect my, and each other’s arguments. I wanted to give my students the opportunity to see that history was a subject that lent itself to dialogue, opinions and debate. We had some healthy debates about plenty of subjects, ranging from the extent to which the Indian National Congress was responsible for the Partition of India to whether King George really was mad. These lessons got more successful with time, as I got to know and develop positive relationships with my students. Once we had that rapport, and students felt ‘safe’ to express themselves and argue with each other in my class, we had many fruitful discussions where students supported their points with evidence and explanations. There were certainly times when my students had differing views to myself, but I found myself feeling proud of them for finding ways to challenge me and

drive their arguments forward.

However, there were times in discussion that I simply did not see eye to eye with certain students. I remember one particularly difficult discussion I had with a group of students. It was a very snowy day which had dissuaded the majority of students from coming to school. As there were so few students in class that day, I abandoned the lesson I had planned and decided to just have a chat with them about their families, the news, or anything at all. We started talking about relationships and found ourselves having a fairly charged discussion. A vocal minority of two students stated that they thought it was perfectly acceptable for a woman to be stoned to death if she committed adultery. There was an equally vocal group of students, about six of them, who found the idea abhorrent. The groups were somewhat divided along religious lines – the minority group who were arguing in favour of stoning were Muslim girls, and the majority group against stoning included both Muslim and non-Muslim students. It was a difficult situation – and I wasn’t sure how to move it forward, especially since both groups were using (different facets of) religious decree as their armament. I felt I needed to express my own view in this argument – if I had stayed silent, that in itself would have said something. This was important to me because I didn’t want to give off the impression, even implicitly, that I supported the idea of violence. I chose to state my opinions and I explained why I held these opinions. I tried to facilitate the discussion in such a way that different students presented their opinions without personally attacking their opposing peers. I was keen that while we may not come to a consensus, we should establish some procedures to help us learn how to deal with conflicting opinions in a respectful manner. I still don’t know if and how I could have dealt with that situation better. I felt it was important to intervene, but it upset me to know that the two students whose views I had countered felt that I had disrespected their beliefs.

Neutrality and balance sound like the ideal values for a social science teacher to embody. However, there is much evidence, explored above, which supports the argument that these values are not really possible to attain. Teachers, like all of us, view the world through a particular social and political paradigm; it is unreasonable to expect that this will not, in some small way at least, be reflected in their practice. Furthermore, one could argue that attempting neutrality is in itself undesirable. By attempting to be neutral, the teacher

limits the ability of students to challenge her, to engage in a meaningful dialogue and to see the world through different lenses. The social sciences lend themselves to argument, debate and opinion – and by choosing to simply referee students’ ideas, the teacher does not model the passion and enthusiasm that these subjects have the ability to invoke. Finally, it is arguable that it is necessary at times for a teacher to intervene, in order to “counter massive prejudice” (Ashton, E. & Watson, B. 1998. p88), ‘Values Education: a fresh look at procedural neutrality’, *Educational Studies*, 24 (2), 83-193). Arguments that promote violence or social injustice may well emerge within the classroom. It is important to explore these arguments rather than shut students down. However, it is irresponsible, on the pretext of teacher neutrality, to leave these views hanging in the classroom either.

None of these arguments preclude the fact that by stating her own perspectives, the teacher may well influence students’ independent thought processes – students may imbibe the teacher’s views unintentionally or they may choose to align their views with her simply because they have a positive relationship with her. Conversely, it may be that students take on an opposing viewpoint to their teacher simply because they have a negative relationship with her. The stance that teachers should take in the classroom is therefore one that still instigates controversy. In my classroom I chose to be honest with students and lay out my assumptions and perspectives, hoping that we had a classroom culture that allowed students to freely express themselves too. I still think about this issue – and I wonder to what extent my approach truly promoted independent thought and enquiry.

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# SECTION-D

## The Role of Assessment



**E**klavya conducted an educational experiment to improve social science teaching in middle schools from 1986 to 2002. Keeping in mind the requirements of the state curriculum, new textbooks were written and field tested in eight middle schools across Madhya Pradesh with the help of government teachers, who were specially trained to teach the revised content to students.

The experimental project set in motion a continuing dialogue with the teachers on the form and content of the social science curriculum. It also raised questions about what one should expect in terms of understanding and achievement from the children who had studied the new texts. Quite naturally, this led to a discussion on how to evaluate these students and gauge whether they had achieved the required level of conceptual clarity and skill development demanded of the new content and teaching methodology.

In this article we discuss some of our experiences in evaluating and changing social science education in schools.

### Objectives of Teaching Social Science in Schools

Many years ago we were brave enough to launch an experiment to improve the teaching of a subject which suffered an image of being boring and useless. The first step we took was to review the existing social science textbooks, which we expectedly found overloaded with information put together in a rather perfunctory and cursory manner. Perhaps, the textbook writers thought it was best to give students only tidbits of knowledge and therefore left a more in-depth study of the subject to the higher classes.

At this juncture I am reminded of the American philosopher John Dewey who had some insightful observations to offer on social science teaching in schools; this will help put things in perspective: *"Just as mind was supposed to get its filling by direct contact with the world, so all the needs of instruction were thought to be met by bringing the child's mind into direct relation with various bodies of external fact labelled geography, arithmetic, grammar, etc. That these classified sets of facts were simply selections from the social life of the past was overlooked; equally so that they had been generated out of social situations and represented the answers found for social needs.....It was forgotten that the maximum appeal, and the full meaning in the life of the child,*

*could be secured only when the studies were presented, not as bare external studies, but from the standpoint of the relation they bear to the life of society."* (Dewey, 2008, p. 80-81)

How is this possible? Dewey quotes an example from the teaching of American history in this context: *"The method involves presentation of a large amount of detail, of minute of surroundings, tools, clothing, household utensils, foods, modes of living day by day, so that the child can reproduce the material as life, not as mere historic information. In this way social processes and results become realities. Moreover, to the personal and dramatic identification of the child with the social life studied, characteristic of the earlier period, there now supervenes an intellectual identification - the child puts himself at the standpoint of the problems that have to be met and rediscovers, so far as may be, ways of meeting them."* (Ibid, page 87.)

We also believe that 'external facts' conveyed to students in the educational process do not easily translate into knowledge. Their concise presentation ensures that children do not understand or learn, but merely memorize. If we expect teachers to encourage and help children understand the underlying concepts then the textbooks should only actively assist them in their endeavor. But when the textbooks themselves are written in a summarized manner they offer little scope for students to internalize abstract and difficult concepts. The learners are then left with no alternative but to memorize the content or fall back on shoddy guidebooks.

The key objectives of our conception of social science teaching can be summarized in the following manner:

### History

1. Discover continuity and change in social processes. Identify/recognize changes that occur with the passage of time and what remains unchanged.
2. Investigate the inter-linkages between different social processes and identify the reasons for these linkages.
3. Recognize/understand the impact/imprint of past processes on present-day society and living.

4. Understand the role individuals play in society/social processes within the context of the circumstances prevailing during the times they lived.
5. Understand the nature of sources from which information about the past can be gleaned and the methods by which this information can be extracted.
6. Form a balanced, unbiased and rational viewpoint about events that occurred in the past.

### Civics

1. Understand basic concepts related to governance-administration and economic structures/systems.
2. Evoke concrete and living images of their functioning.
3. Compare the rules/regulations governing these structures with present-day situations and, in the process, identify their strengths and shortcomings.
4. Understand the background/foundations of the government's economic policies, their impact on society and possible alternative approaches to economic development.
5. Create awareness of the crucial/influential role that citizens can play.

### Geography

1. Evoke concrete images of the lives of people in different regions of the world.
2. Understand the symbiotic relationship between man and nature and the reasons behind lifestyle differences between people living in different regions.
3. Understand the basic elements of physical geography on the basis of concrete examples/references from regional geography.
4. Investigate different aspects of local geography.
5. Understand the man-nature inter-relationship in the context of changes taking place over time.
6. Develop basic skills for observing and studying geography, such as drawing and using maps, graphs, diagrams, photographs and tables.

### The Structure of the Textbook

Keeping in mind the above objectives, what kind of textbooks need to be written and what would their focal points be?

This was the next question. We strongly felt that we should not be bogged down by the requirement to teach 'so much' history-civics-geography. Rather the guiding principle should be to choose topics for the syllabus that would help children develop a concrete understanding of social processes and change. We also tried to ensure that the writing was as close to the language of the learners as possible.

Children of this age are generally not disposed to abstract thinking or definitional terminology. Their thought processes are guided more by the context or situation. If they are to understand abstract concepts, the first requirement was to create a concrete situation and let the concepts emerge through the detailed descriptions and discussions about the situation.

For example, in one chapter we discussed the topic of industrial activity and how it is organized. The traditional approach would have been to give the technical definition of different types of industrial organization. Like: A cottage industry is .....! Instead, we chose to give concrete examples of terms like cottage industry, contract or putting-out system, small manufacturing unit and so on. Each example was dealt with in depth, with detailed descriptions of the various processes involved. This was followed by a comparative analysis of the different forms of industrial organization, thus enabling children to draw some general conclusions from which the concepts further emerged.

We also used the story telling technique quite extensively in all the three sections of social science – history, geography and civics. Children like hearing stories. They make the textbooks more attractive and easier to read. But the stories we included served an educational purpose as well. They were meant to build concrete images of situations or things, making it easier for children to draw some general observations.

To prevent children from getting lost in the flow of the story and missing out on important generalizations, we usually broke up the flow by periodically drawing their attention to the conceptual or general aspects by posing a series of questions; this encouraged them to think. We found this to be a fairly successful strategy that evoked an enthusiastic response from both the teachers and students.

We also used pictures and diagrams extensively, woven integrally into the text. Here, too, we interspersed questions in the text to draw the children's attention to these illustrations

and help them understand why and what was depicted.

### Is Activity Based Learning Possible in Social Sciences?

The principle of using activities to help children internalize concepts is fairly well established in educational theory. After much experimentation, we identified three major kinds of activities that could be conducted in simple but effective ways in the social science classroom.

- 1. Interspersing questions in the text:** The common practice in classrooms is to read the text from beginning to end. We broke up the text by introducing questions of many kinds; some were to aid children comprehend and understand difficult narrations, some helped extract information from maps, diagrams and illustrations, others were concept related, requiring the children to discuss among themselves to search for answers and there were comparative questions too – comparing two different periods to identify changes that had occurred, or pinpointing the differences between two situations. These questions encouraged discussions between the teacher and the students and, in looking for the answers, the children had no option but to study and comprehend the text as well.
- 2. Using children's experiences and knowledge:** Children in the 10-15 year age-group are a storehouse of knowledge when it comes to their daily experiences and observations of the community they live in. Normally, this storehouse is overlooked in social science teaching but it has the potential of becoming a very practical and useful toolbox for learning. Many of the questions we posed in the text sought to delve into this storehouse of students' experiences and relate to them in the context of learning.
- 3. Exercises in using the textbook meaningfully:** The ability to understand and express oneself through the medium of the written word is crucial. This is perhaps because it is not possible to directly experience other times, places, societies, organizations and cultures. One needs to read and learn about them, or listen to someone talk about them.

We tried to develop writing skills in children by introducing different types of exercises in each chapter. We also sought to assess whether children had acquired such skills in the

examinations we conducted.

In this context, we opted for the open-book examinations because we were clear in our minds that we were not judging the ability of a child to memorize the content of the textbook but instead wanted to test whether the child was able to think, understand and use the textbook intelligently. It is these abilities that we focused upon in the evaluation system we developed.

### Evaluation of Students: Open-book Examinations

The open-book method of evaluation is important for the social sciences because it is meaningless to evaluate how much information on a particular topic a student has 'swallowed'. There is no limit to the quantum of such information. No curriculum can be expected to provide all the available information on a subject nor is it possible for children to remember it all. Whatever little they do remember or memorize for examinations is eventually forgotten.

Does this mean that the information leaves no imprint on their minds and personality once it is forgotten? Isn't education supposed to leave an imprint? Shouldn't we retain the thinking, understanding and skills that education is supposed to develop? These are abilities that help us throughout our lives to face up to new situations, learn new things from books and other materials and solve new problems that constantly arise.

Kamala Mukunda, a teacher and psychologist, cites an interesting study done in the USA in her book *What Did You Ask At School Today?* (2009, page 68). Harry Bahrick and colleagues sought to assess what high school students remembered 50 years after leaving school. They found the students tended to remember whatever they had studied over a long period of time and those things which they repeatedly used. They forgot what was taught for a short time or which they found little use for in later life.

Mukunda draws our attention to the fact that we learn to read, write, understand, calculate, solve problems, analyze things, and reach conclusions in school. These are abilities we never lose throughout our lives, provided school education focuses on developing them in students.

These were the aspects we emphasized on in our evaluation of student performance. Our examinations sought to assess whether children had acquired the ability to think, analyze,

compare different periods and places, understand the reason for observed differences, express themselves clearly and give detailed descriptions or present a summary of situations and processes, etc.

In addition, we felt the ability to use a textbook constructively also qualified for evaluation because it is important from the point of view of learning the social sciences. So we permitted students to use their textbooks freely during examinations.

One practical benefit in adopting the open-book approach was that we no longer needed to print maps, pictures, graphs etc for the question papers - children were often asked questions related to diagrams in the textbook. So all they needed to do was locate the relevant map, picture or graph in their textbook during the examination to give the answer.

By shifting the focus of evaluation to these aspects we sought to rid children of the fear of examinations and the burden of memorizing/forgetting the subject content.

To summarize, the questions we set sought to evaluate in students the ability to:

1. Locate relevant information in the textbook.
2. Understand the aim of the question and give the appropriate, to-the-point answer.
3. Present a summary of discussions conducted on any topic.
4. Analyze new information or new situations on the basis of discussions conducted on any topic.
5. Extract information from maps, pictures, tables and graphs.
6. Compare different situations.
7. Understand the reasons or causes for any situation.

### What were the Different Kinds of Questions?

1. Objective questions – giving the answer in one word or sentence, filling in the blanks - such questions accounted for 16 marks out of 100.
2. Questions whose answers could be found in a specific location in the textbook - such questions that required locating the correct answer accounted for 30 marks out of 100.
3. Questions whose answers required referring to more

than one portion of the textbook, or questions whose answers were not contained in the text but could be extracted from pictures, maps, etc or by reasoning, extrapolation, imagination, knowledge and experience - such questions based on abilities like comparison, analysis, reasoning, extrapolation and reading maps, pictures and tables accounted for 54 marks out of 100.

### Evaluation Policy: Some Considerations

1. Not more than one question from the textbook could be included in the examination, the attempt being to formulate new questions for every question paper.
2. Those who answered in their own words, regardless of whether the language was perfect or not, were given additional marks.
3. Marks were cut for answers taken from the textbook that included unnecessary text.

### Some Sample Questions

#### 1. Objective questions

Correct only the incorrect sentences given below:

1. Banks do not pay interest on money deposited in a savings account.
2. Money can be withdrawn daily from a savings account.
3. Only owners of large factories can get loans from banks.
4. Fixed term deposits attract more interest.

Fill in the blanks:

1. Akbar abolished the pilgrimage tax in ----- and the ----- tax in 1564 in order to win the support of -----
2. At the start of Akbar's reign, there were only ----- and ----- amirs in his administration.
3. Akbar adopted the policy of ----- after 1580.
4. The appointment of the Mughal mansabdars was done by -----.
5. During Aurangzeb's reign there was a shortage of ----- to distribute among the amirs.

#### 2. Questions that required to-the-point answers

1. When the first parliament was convened in England,

who were eligible to vote and who were not?

2. During British rule what prohibitions did the Forest Department impose on the people to protect the forests?

**3. Questions based on summarization, reasoning, extrapolation and interpreting maps, diagrams, etc.**

1. What are the differences in the rules to cast one's vote in India today, compared to the rules in England's first parliament?
2. Who is responsible for passing legislation in India? How are laws formulated? Explain.
3. Describe the picture on page 101. What are the different things you can see? Where are these things being brought from? Who are the people you see in the picture? What are they saying? Are they agreeing with one another?
4. The American adivasis and the Europeans both hunted the bison. But they made use of the bison they killed in different ways. What were these differences? Explain.
5. Look at the map on page 220 and answer the following questions:
  - a. In which direction does the Colombia river flow and into which sea does it flow?
  - b. In which direction does the McKenzie river flow and which sea does it join?
  - c. Which river is further away from the Equator – the Mckenzie or the Red river?
  - d. Which river freezes in winter – the Mckenzie or the Red river?
  - e. Which of the following places are located on the sea coast: Denver, Winnipeg, Norfolk, San Francisco?
6. The winter and summer temperatures in three places are given in the table below. Explain, giving reasons, whether the climate in these places is moderate or extreme.

Place	January temperature	May temperature
A	15	30
B	25	30
C	26	28

7. Farm owners in the USA cultivate a single crop in their

farms that stretch over hundreds of acres.

- a. How is this fact illustrated in the picture on page 247?
- b. What is the advantage of growing a single crop in such large farms?

**Teacher Training**

Every year during the tenure of the program question papers were prepared with the participation of the 16 teachers from the eight government schools. After the examination, we would hold a meeting with the teachers in which a sample of the children's answers would be read out and analyzed. The purpose of this sampling was to see how effective our question paper was in evaluating student performance. Standards for evaluating the answer sheets would then be formulated on the basis of our review of the sample. This exercise, which was carried out twice every year, helped us understand better the purpose and methods of evaluation.

**Skill in Using the Textbook and its Content**

We observed that children tried to use the textbook in different ways. There were some who attempted to answer the questions in their own words, based on their own understanding, without recourse to the textbook. Most others would search for the appropriate answer in the textbook. But it was often disappointing to see that even with the textbook open in front of them many children seemed at a loss, unable to think and use the book; they sat aimlessly for several minutes randomly flipping the pages.

There were also marked differences in children's skills in searching for the answers. A few would note down exactly what was required from the book while many others copied incomplete portions of the appropriate answer. There were also those who wrote more than was required, most commonly copying a few additional sentences before or after the appropriate section. And, of course, there were those who failed to zero in on the needed answer, copying portions that had no relation to what was required.

We regularly analyzed the students' answers with the teachers in an attempt to understand how children thought and how we could provide direction to their thinking. For us, it was as important to develop our understanding of the students' psyche while evaluating their answers as it was to award marks for their knowledge and understanding.

Our experiences with open-book examinations emboldened the teachers to modify their focus in teaching. They began to make special efforts to draw the attention of students to the main points of each chapter. They helped them identify the required sections and sub-titles that served as markers to these portions. They also emphasized the importance of reading with understanding, encouraging students to write answers in their own words. But they would caution students against coming unprepared for the examination in the hope that an open-book examination would give them sufficient leeway to look for answers in the examination hall itself, urging them to revise the chapters well beforehand.

We took up a few initiatives to strengthen this process. For example, we prepared question banks and workbooks, the latter containing sample answers for different questions written by children. In order to develop their understanding of how to answer questions, we outlined ways to review the answers, even including an exercise in which children made their own assessments and awarded marks for answers on a scale of 10. These were at a trial stage when the program came to an end in the schools in 2002.

In this manner, both we and the teachers grew committed to teaching children how to use their textbook as a source of information instead of memorizing its content solely for the purpose of examinations. The outcome of our combined efforts was that instead of making learning redundant and providing students an easy way to answer questions, the open-book approach opened up new avenues, giving them the opportunity to develop new skills in the social sciences.

We shall now discuss this aspect in more detail.

### Emerging Knowledge in the Social Science Perspective

As we had pointed out earlier, one expectation from the new teaching methodology was that it would help children develop knowledge giving them the perspective that social science offers. This was something we were keen to assess. We looked for possible indicators of a growing knowledge against the perspective social science offered. For example, we felt that one such indicator could be the ability of children to assess and identify differences between two periods or situations and cogently explain the reasons for these differences.

To illustrate how this knowledge is expressed, we cite

answers given by students to two questions posed in the examinations:

Question 1 How did people exploit forest resources in the era before British rule? How did they exploit forest resources during British rule? Make a comparative assessment and answer in your own words.

Answer 1 The British used the services of people to exploit the forests and also for farming. The British used to kill the people and keep the traders happy. They used to send people to distant villages to collect taxes.

**(The student's own words, images and conclusions).**

Answer 2 Before the British, the people utilized forests in a proper way. They never cut the whole tree. They never removed all its leaves. Nor did they blindly cut leaves. The forests were protected. During British rule many trees were cut to provide sleepers for railway lines. In this way, the adivasis used to plant medicinal herbs and flowering plants instead of exploiting the forests for wood, while the British wiped out the forests.

**(The student's own words, images and conclusions).**

Answer 3 Before the British:

- i. Used only by villages and people living near the forests.
- ii. For tubers, fruits and medicinal plants as well as for grazing cattle.
- iii. Wood cut for personal use, trade and development.

During British rule:

- i. Building houses in towns.
- ii. Laying railway lines.
- iii. Earning profit by manufacturing medicines.

**(The student's own words and point-wise presentation).**

Answer 4 Before the British, the people were the owners in a way. They used to hunt, collect tubers, fruits and medicinal plants and graze their cattle. They would also burn the forest in places to cultivate the land. They cut wood to make things for their homes. During the time of the British, trade in timber began. At that time many large cities like Bombay and Calcutta were coming up; railway lines were being laid, huge ships were being built, and mines were being opened. All these needed timber. So the British destroyed the forests.

**(Choosing sentences from the textbook and combining them after some thought to write the answer).**

Answer 5 Before the British, people used the forests with ease and during British rule they could use the forests with difficulty. The British used to oppress the farmers, who could not utilize the forests fully during their rule. I have written this comparison of people before the British and during British rule in my own words.

**(The student's own words, images and conclusions).**

Answer 6 Before the British, people used forests freely. They got fruits and wood and did farming as they wished. During British rule they were not able to use the forests openly. If they went to collect wood the officials of the British stopped them and refused to let them cut wood. And farming, which they used to do anywhere, now the British began to distribute land for farming and register the land in their names. If they farmed any other land they were arrested and imprisoned.

**(The student's own words, images and conclusions. General conclusions drawn from the story narrated in the chapter).**

Now let us take up another question whose answer is not directly discussed in the textbook.

Question 2 What are the differences between jhum cultivation in the eastern Himalayas and farming in the Great Plains of America?

Answer 1 Jhum cultivation in the eastern Himalayas and farming in the Great Plains have the following differences. In jhum farming the people first cut all the trees growing on the land. In this region no one does agricultural labor. As soon as light showers fall the men and women together take handfuls of seed, dig a small hole in the ground with a hoe, plant the seed and cover it with soil. In jhum cultivation all the crops needed by the family is grown in one field .. No trees are cut in the farms of the Great Plains, which are like maidans. All the work is done by machines in the Great Plains and for miles only a single crop is grown.

**(The student's own words, images and conclusions).**

Answer 2 The differences between jhum cultivation in the eastern Himalayas and farming in the Great Plains are that during the months of jhum farming there is very little rain. There is a water problem here during these months. Water has to be brought from the rivers in the deep valleys into which the rain waters flow. In the Great Plains, the animals encroach into the fields to graze and destroy the crop. Fences are constructed to save the fields. But what can be used to construct fences? Great Plains has big farmers. Nowadays, it is common for each farmer to own 500-600 acres of land here. These are the differences.

**(The student has lifted unrelated sentences from the textbook to give the answer).**

Answer 3 Jhum cultivation in the eastern Himalayas – there are not enough forests left for jhum farming. Many people say the forests have been destroyed because of jhum cultivation. People residing here are now doing contour bunding of the slopes for farming. The main crop cultivated in the Great Plains is wheat. It grows as winter sets in. The wheat is sown in autumn. In jhum farming fields are prepared here and there. In Great Plains, farming is done on a non-permanent basis. This does not

destroy too many forests.

**(The student has lifted unrelated sentences from the textbook to give the answer).**

Answer 4 There are not enough forests for jhum farming. Every year a field was left to fallow, but now it cannot be left for more than four or five years. For this reason trees cannot grow on that land and the forests are beginning to be destroyed. In three or four years the same field is cultivated for jhum cultivation. Rice, radish, jowar, til, beans, vegetables, tobacco, cotton, tubers etc are grown together in the same field and harvested. In Great Plains the main crop is wheat. Wheat fields can be seen stretching for miles. Two types of wheat are grown in the Great Plains – a winter crop and a spring crop. Apart from wheat, soyabean and some cotton is also cultivated in the Great Plains.

**(The sentences in the beginning are unrelated but the later sentences have been chosen from the textbook with some thought and understanding in order to illustrate the differences in crops).**

Answer 5 In jhum farming in the eastern Himalayas trees are cut and left to lie until they dry, after which they are burnt. After they burn, the field is coated with a layer of ash beneath which some stumps of unburnt trees still remain. After a shower or two, the ash mixes into the soil. In this way the jhum field is ready for cultivation. On the other hand, in the Great Plains of America, farming is not done in this way. There, fences are constructed with barbed wire. Then the fields are ploughed and the seeds are sown, after which they are periodically irrigated and the crop is harvested with the aid of machines. This is not the case in jhum farming where the crop is harvested by hand. Here water is provided only when it rains, unlike in the Great Plains where water is provided from time to time.

**(The student's own words, images and conclusions).**

The answers to these questions cannot be found in any single location in the textbook. Children have to form and explain in their own words two contrasting concepts related to the use of land and forests. They may find and copy information related to one aspect but they have to themselves link and present other aspects. Making this comparison provides children the scope to distinguish differences in time and place.

But should one define knowledge only in terms of the ability to perform this task? Its definition cannot be limited in such a fashion. Knowledge is not just the understanding required to complete a task. It is much more. It is about knowing things which claim to be the truth in a culture, linking this information to one's previous experience and knowledge and then assimilating this revised understanding in one's mind. It is a creative process, a process of construction that children can embark upon themselves.

In the examples given above, we see children setting forth on this journey in their own different ways, reflecting the diverse nature of their personal struggles to construct knowledge. The facility of referring freely to the textbook did help in this process but did not appear to fully consolidate it. The crucial input was to allow children the leeway to think, search for the right answer and then explain in writing, instead of merely expecting them to memorize and regurgitate the correct answer.

But the issue kept troubling some teachers who still felt knowledge was something one should remember and spontaneously recall whenever required. Why should a person be expected to roam around the pages of a book whenever the need for an answer arises? Such concerns were often voiced and they would set us thinking about the problem of what exactly people remember and when. And what they tend to forget. Expectedly, we began to see the curriculum and syllabus not as a rigid and absolute framework but as something open to critical appraisal.

Another lingering concern was whether children were actually constructing knowledge in their minds or just polishing their skill in searching for the right answer in the textbook. We got some further insights through a small study we conducted in a school with children studying in Class VI, VII and VIII.

We set a question paper for these children and asked them to write the answers without referring to their textbooks. They could write what they remembered and understood.

A week later we gave the same question paper to the same set of children but this time we told them they could make use of their textbook.

When we assessed and compared the two sets of answers, we found that more children were able to successfully navigate the answers in the open-book examination. Another pertinent fact that emerged was that in both situations children failed to give satisfactory answers to questions related to chapters that were not dealt with in detail and that lacked stories, examples, etc – basically, topics dealt with in a brief or abstruse fashion.

The message was clear. Children did not remember what was brief, perfunctory and abstruse and they also found it difficult to search for and understand information dealt with in such a manner in the textbook. In direct contrast to this was their performance in chapters that were treated in a more effective manner. More children were able to answer questions related to these chapters in their own words on the basis of their understanding, and they did not try to extract the answer from the textbook even when it was available.

The study clearly told us that if a chapter is effectual, children begin to construct knowledge and find remembering things less of a burden. The possibility of teachers adopting effective strategies to teach it also increases. It then does not make much of a difference whether the textbook is available or not.

So the question is: how should a textbook meant to promote knowledge view knowledge? This shifts the focus to how knowledge is seen and dealt with within the classroom. This has become an area for critical assessment today. In the evolving field of educational theory it is increasingly being pointed out that schools view facts as important bits of information but tend to teach them in an unrelated manner.

This does not really help the learners. They come to school with already well-formed mental concepts of the world they live in, but they cannot seem to set in motion a meaningful process of linking and assimilating the unrelated facts they encounter in the classroom to their mental images. So there is no basic change occurring in these images, no conceptual evolution.

At the same time, to whatever extent changes do begin to occur, they inevitably lead to differences between one child and the next. That's because children adopt their own

individual strategies to modify their mental concepts.

But the school fails to take cognisance of this reality. It fails to present knowledge from the standpoint of its living links with the external world and the mental concepts of the child. It also fails to acknowledge children's learning strategies in its teaching and evaluation. In sum, it fails to create a context for constructing and remembering knowledge.

### Knowledge, Children and the Teaching Profession

We were able to give children the freedom to think, understand and explain for themselves in our social science program because we and the teachers were prepared to engage with the individual ways in which each child thinks and learns. We saw little merit in labelling them on the basis of predetermined standards, like goods manufactured in a factory.



*The existence of a teachers' professional group is also a non-negotiable condition for improving the evaluation system. Equally important is the need to make classroom teaching more meaningful and effective. An open-book examination piggy backing on a badly conceived textbook or an ineffective teaching methodology would be of no service to anybody.*



We have seen how this group of teachers worked relentlessly year after year, interacting with one another, answering each others' queries, arriving at a mutual consensus of what is good or bad evaluation, all the while upholding the dignity of their profession. This is also what the teachers involved in the Prathmik Shiksha Karyakrama (Prashika) of Eklavya and the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Program had been doing for years, forging new traditions, rules and systems for their profession.

The existence of a teachers' professional group is also a non-negotiable condition for improving the evaluation system.

Equally important is the need to make classroom teaching more meaningful and effective. An open-book examination piggy backing on a badly conceived textbook or an ineffective teaching methodology would be of no service to anybody. Of course, if the methodology and textbook are innovative, an open-book examination could provide avenues for learning many important and priceless skills. In conjunction with the construction of knowledge that seeks the truth, these skills form an integral part of the overall objectives of the program.

Based on their experiences, the teachers suggested two reforms in the examination system we had evolved. First was to reduce the number of questions so that children had adequate time to look for the correct answers in the textbook. Otherwise, time pressures often forced them to leave out questions. Second, they felt the range of questions needed to be re-examined because most children were not fully capable of giving written answers to questions that required them to reason, compare, extrapolate, give an opinion, draw a conclusion, etc.

Once when we conducted an analysis of answers given by 300 children to the whole spectrum of questions generated in the program, we found that:

- 92% succeeded in locating the answer if it was present in a single location in the textbook
- 43% got average or high marks in answering questions that required reasoning, comparison, causative factors, and summarisation
- 38% got average or high marks in answering questions that involved extrapolation or required them to express their own opinions.

We also brainstormed with teachers to find the different kinds of experiences which could equip students better to give written responses to tasks that required reasoning, estimation, comparison and similar skills. For us, the limited writing abilities of children were more evident than any limitations in their mental abilities - 20% to 50% of middle school children were not at a level where they could read a textbook, understand what they read or express their thoughts in writing.

On the other hand, most students almost always participated enthusiastically in the group discussions and oral exercises conducted in smaller groups, even though we do concede

that not all them contributed equally to the discussions.

The children's answer sheets provided a clear picture of their individual capabilities. By analyzing them we were able to clarify the challenges teachers faced in giving all the children equal opportunities to learn. The analysis also helped us find ways to proceed.

As far as the results of the children were concerned, we believed in evaluating only what we had been able to teach them effectively. That's why we always lowered the weightage of questions few children answered correctly and redistributed these marks among the questions more children answered. After all, it was we, the initiators of the program, and the teachers who were answerable for fulfilling its objectives, not the students.

### **Educational Experiments, Policies and Beyond**

In 2005-06, National Focus Group set up to look into fundamental issues connected to student evaluation came up with a set of major recommendations. It wrote that the objective of evaluation should not be limited to assessing how much of what was taught had been assimilated by students; instead evaluation should also focus on the responsiveness of students to what was taught.

Among its many proposals outlined in detail one important suggestion was to eventually move towards open-book examinations. It stressed the need to undertake a pilot project for the purpose.

In this context, there are several possible alternatives that can be taken up. Some teachers once put forward one such alternative – that the open-book system could be adopted for unit tests while keeping the annual examination a closed-book affair. They felt it was an alternative that would be more easily acceptable to the public. Another suggested alternative was to divide the annual examination into two parts – one open-book, after which the textbooks could be collected to hold the closed-book portion.

Our experience has been that teachers generally appreciate the usefulness and importance of open-book evaluation in the social sciences and become committed to it. They say it helps control and overcome several shortcomings in the educational system. It improves the morale and confidence level of students, lessening the fear and tension that examinations generate in them. It also leads to a sharp fall in copying during examinations, with the tendency to resort

to guide books and keys also fading away.

In the final analysis, all our hopes of changing the education system rest, to a large extent, on the hope that teachers will become committed to new ideas and reforms. Eklavya's long association with teachers in trying to foster educational

change has emboldened our belief that there is no reason to lose hope – provided our policy making and administrative processes have the courage to be patient and cherish the independence and flexibility that teachers and children require.

### Author's Note

This article is based on the social science program of Eklavya. I have drawn extensively from my team-mate Sanjay Tiwari's work in writing this piece.

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The weakness in the teaching of social science in school lies in assessment. The assessments today often are an evaluation of the student's ability to retain and recall information - names and dates, given characteristics of a period, causes of an event, incidents in the event itself and the results of an event all of which have been listed in the textbook. In this article I will explore what we need to assess in social science and how we need to do it using the teaching-learning of history. I choose history because I am familiar with it. I choose it also because the teaching and learning of history seems to have little to do with the practical and the everyday. It is easier for the teacher and student to see practical possibilities in civics and geography. Most are able to conceive of civics as practice and geography as practical with its links to science. I do hope that it will be evident indirectly in the course of the article that the understanding of one invariably includes aspects of the other two.

### What Needs to be Assessed and How

Teaching must inextricably be linked with learning and assessment. If my concern is that students should learn the information in the textbook so that they are able to recall and write responses to questions the details they have studied from the book, then my teaching will and must necessarily suit this purpose. I will explain the chapter in detail to the class and give the students skills to master this content so that they are able to recall details when asked. However, if I were to assess the student's ability to learn and understand, I would teach my students very different skills and abilities. I would teach them how to observe carefully, how to read thoroughly and how to think through what is observed or read. I would teach them to question and I would talk about the necessity to be open.

### Observation

Observation is a key skill in learning history. It is significant because when you observe a map or a picture you are learning about what it depicts directly or first hand, and not through another's interpretation be it that of a historian or a textbook writer.

On a study visit to Hampi, students were asked to examine the relief sculptures on the sides of the platform

of the Mahanavami Dibba commemorating court life during the times of Krishnadevaraya. One relief shows elephants uprooting trees. Another shows deer scattering as huntsmen shoot their arrows. A question that was put to thirteen year olds observing and writing about what they saw is: What indication do you have of the landscape before Hampi became the capital of Vijayanagara? This question invites the students to examine the sculpted pictures carefully and through observation, which is their own, come upon what could be a likely fact - that the region was deeply forested.

What else in the area among the ruins of Hampi would indicate that they were right? Much of the structures are bases with no super structures but with indentations which could mean that there were pillars at regular intervals. Might these pillars have been made of wood? Are the pillars not there because they were made of wood and must have been burnt or looted? For it has been learnt that that after the Battle of Talikota, the capital of Vijayanagara burned for six days and was later looted and plundered. The initial observation is thus applied to another situation and the details connected and confirmed through a third source. The student thus has learnt to learn and this learning she will be able to apply in other contexts and situations both in her study and in life.

These same skills of observation and making connections can be applied to learning about Mesopotamia. The map of the area reveals two rivers flowing through the land from the hills to the gulf. The areas along the rivers are low lying and much further away are hills. A close examination and a number of questions would help students understand the main occupations, local economy, material used for construction, and the frequency of battles. What the student is encouraged to do here is to observe and place his observations in the framework of her experience and knowledge of human life. From here he makes inferences which he could then corroborate or dismiss.

Take a remarkable book that I came across, simplifying Human Rights for young students called 'We are Born Free.'

An illustrator represents Article 11 which states that nobody ought to be accused of doing anything wrong without being asked about it first. This he does through a picture showing a child with a stem of flowers in her hand and a fallen vase on the floor. There is water spilt from the vase and more stems of flowers fallen next to it. Next to the child are two pairs of adult legs. An observation of this picture and a discussion can help students recall similar experiences, tell us how we conclude so easily, and inform us of our prejudices. Questions such as - 'Has this happened to you?', "Recall a time when you misjudged someone" 'Try and suggest how this might have happened.' 'How do advertisements, serials and popular films portray wrong or evil?' Thus, Human Right is learnt and understood in a meaningful way.

What is taught, learnt and assessed in the three examples are the skills of observation, of making connections, of application and the responsibility to confirm one's findings. In this teaching of the skills, the content is learnt through direct, personal experience, as it were. Therefore, teaching and learning happen together and assessment happens through the very act of learning. The assessment is then not a conclusive statement but a pointer to what more needs to be taught and learnt. This essentially should be the role of assessment.

### How to Think

Thinking rightly is the most complex aspect in the teaching-learning of history. Facts are wrapped in myth, legend and opinions. It is important to see stories with supernatural beings that explain natural or social phenomena as different from an unauthenticated traditional story of a specific historical place or person; and both as different from stories of past events that can be corroborated with evidence.

An opinion is much harder to separate from the statement of the historical 'fact' backed by evidence. When a textbook states about the ruler of the Delhi Sultanate, 'Razia's weakness was that she was born a woman', or 'Ashoka weakened the country by preaching ahimsa,' it is important for the teacher to deconstruct the statement, place it in context and point to the students a way to think through these statements.

Next, we see that in placing certain facts in the textbook and omitting others, a version of the past and of human life is created. Nationalism is based on a partial interpretation of the past and history is used to construct the identity of a region

or nation. This learning of selected movements, people and facts creates a particular world view. It is not unusual to find in textbooks of history, a chapter on what is referred to as the advent of Islam where the raids from Ghazni and Ghori and the battles and brutalities that took place in northern Gangetic plains are described. In the same books there is almost no mention of the years of peaceful living of groups of people along the Malabar Coast. An understanding of history as a study of conquest and conflict gets accepted and dangerously groups of people get characterized in particular ways. What view of the past and human life would this leave the student with?

The teaching of world history mostly revolves around war and conflict in Europe and the United States. In this emphasis, some parts of the world acquire dominance; war and conflict get internalized as worthy of historical memory. Quite powerfully and non-verbally it gets impressed upon growing student minds that war is an inevitable part of human life. The generalized statements in the textbooks about caste and how women were treated badly gloss over issues that affect every day living and must require critical engagement. These generalities couch important aspects of history that need to be understood. Views of human life and the world we live in are thus shaped. In the history classes questions about what we see and read and the difference between what is seen and read, experienced, heard of and thought must be raised. It is in examining these gaps that real learning takes place.

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*Teaching and learning happen together and assessment happens through the very act of learning. The assessment is then not a conclusive statement but a pointer to what more needs to be taught and learnt. This essentially should be the role of assessment.*

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Further, in the classroom the student needs to be helped to see a historical fact in context. At what period did the historian write? Is there evidence of an ideological position?

What was the contemporary political, economic and social situation at the period she wrote? What was her purpose in writing? Thus it is important to see that although history seems to represent an external reality, we are actually dealing with representations - narratives determined by the views of the dominant group, class, race or gender. Human consciousness is shaped by beliefs, values and ways of thinking and feeling through which human beings perceive and by which recourse they seek to explain what they take to be reality.

What the student needs is a taste of the rich complexity of history. What needs to be taught, learnt and assessed then, is the student's capacity to draw conclusions based on evidence, to understand that this conclusion needs to be held tentatively because it has been constructed not only from available evidence but also from one's own thoughts of how things are and must be. What the student needs to learn is to hold multiple and sometimes contradictory narratives and divergent views without conflict. More than what to think teachers need to teach how to think.

How is this to be done? One activity often given to students is the 'pot burial' activity. The class is divided into groups of students. Each group collects items, keeping in mind a particular section of a house or structure, and places them in a pot and buries the pot. Another group locates the pot through a given map or the creation of a mound and unearths the pot and examines the find as evidence and draws conclusions from this available 'evidence' about the period and lifestyle of the inhabitants. The evidence and the conclusion are then presented to the class. In this, some things become apparent. There is faulty thinking because the object has not been sufficiently examined or the thinking was incomplete. Thinking is biased when it is based on the present day realities of the student and there is insufficient imagination, perhaps. Finally, it could also be seen that the intention of the students who buried the pot and the conclusion drawn by another group of students may not be the same.

Examining multiple materials on one subject is an excellent teaching tool - a document of the period, a contemporary newspaper article, and varied views of two historians writing at different times. What are the differences? The reasons for the differences could teach one how to think. In a related manner, the newspaper reflecting events of the present

forms effective material for the study of history! Why do all newspapers choose to print the same stories on the front page? Why are these events considered significant? On what fact is each story based? In what ways do the stories differ from each other? What kinds of events are least reported?

It is important to use distortions, omissions and differences as steps to learning how to think. Sometimes, an entire history and a serious lesson to be learnt is held in the use of one word, for instance, the word 'discovered.' When we teach that Columbus 'discovered' America we need to ask who the speaker is and for whom he discovered it because there were people already living there. In this one word lies the whole history of power, the reasons for the disappearance of a rich and different history, extinction and forcible assimilation. The word 'primitive' for instance has connotations of inferior and ignorant and 'progress' has positive connotations. These world views held in single words will perpetuate and young students will not think any differently unless they learn to examine and question these words and concepts.

*What the student needs to learn is to hold multiple and sometimes contradictory narratives and divergent views without conflict. More than what to think teachers need to teach how to think.*

Through exposure to material and through questions, then, the students learn to think. There is a great confidence when a student knows that he can think for himself. Usually education in school teaches you what to think and not how to think. And it is through thinking that students grow into creative human beings and not repetitive machines. It is this ability to think that we need to nurture and assess.

### Questioning

Through observation and learning how to think the student gains an understanding of the past and insights into the processes of history. Learning history also means trying to understand how societies work and seeing that this understanding is equally applicable to grasp the happenings

of the present day. History is most significant in that it helps us with ways of understanding the present and its skills apply to situations and information encountered in everyday life. Such learning would enable a student to hone the tools of thinking and evaluation that he has and use them over an impulsive and uninformed rush to decision and judgment.

How is this to be taught, learnt and assessed? If history is a way of understanding the present, then a good place to begin is the present. A classroom discussion could begin with asking why English is the medium of instruction in schools in India? Why do students in Indian schools wear pinafores, ties and socks and shoes? What ideas about childhood and what adult concerns formed our present day educational classroom? This leads to history that is relevant.

Even the study of a syllabus of a history course allows the students to begin with the questions they have. 'The rise and growth of British Power, The Ascendency of British Power, The Consolidation of British Power' stated in the syllabus could provoke in students questions such as - Why did the British travel to India? If there were so many Indians how did a small group of British acquire power and grow to consolidate it as well? What was the response of the people in India to what was happening? These are essential questions and learning begins from where the students are. There are other kinds of questions born of the need to understand the present through the past that could surface in a discussion - How do we understand the emotional surge that led to the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya?

This interplay between the past and present is as natural as it is essential. Here are questions that were raised after a year of studying medieval and early modern India to help students think, connect and respond in an essay:

### The Struggle for Power

Introduction: How do you understand 'power'? Why does a king need power?

#### Further Questions

- Under what specific conditions does a king have to prove himself? (Rajput theories of origin, Qutb-ud-din Aibak, Babur and Humayun, Shivaji)
- How does a king keep his power? (Chola kings, Balban, Alauddin Khalji, Krisnadevaraya, Akbar, Aurangzeb)
- What is the impact of power on the kings themselves?

(Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad bin Tughluq, Jahangir and Shah Jahan) How does this struggle for power affect relationships with others and what happens within oneself?

- What is the sadness here? (Razia, the Bahmini kings, the wars of succession among the Mughals, Aurangzeb's ascension to the throne)

Conclusion:

Write your own thoughts on what you have studied.

### Assessment Tasks

What might some assessment tasks look like if the assessment task is not an activity, group work or a field visit but a written examination? Here are some tasks drawn from what has been stated so far but randomly chosen:

#### Question 1:

*Examine the following picture of a tomb painting in ancient Egypt carefully and answer the following questions:*

*What three activities do you see the people engaged in?*

*Describe the tools used.*

*Why do you think the people are shown in different sizes? Explain your reasons.*

#### Question 2:

*Below is a newspaper story. What human right is referred to? State the right and explain how it is violated here.*

#### Question 3:

*Here are two extracts from historians about the Black Hole incident in Calcutta. What are the similarities in the writer's reports? What might you ascertain as the facts?*

#### Question 4:

*Marked on the given map is an area. Study the map carefully and answer the following questions:*

- *What would the occupation of the people be? Why?*
- *What leisure activities might they pursue? What gives you an indication?*
- *Why might trade be an important activity in this region?*
- *With which areas might there have been contact?*

- *What crops do you predict might grow in this region?*

State your reasons.

Three things are clear in the tasks above. First, the student is required to read or study a given picture, map or text. She then has to place this information in the framework of knowledge that she already has and think clearly. She then has to articulate her observation and thinking in careful writing. Second, in the course of the task she becomes the creator of the answer and works on it with confidence. Third, and most significant, the student learns something new in skill or knowledge through the exercise, or acquires an insight. Any assessment task that the student does not learn from is at best incomplete and meaningless.

### **Beyond Assessment**

Having said all that I have about how assessment in the social sciences can be made meaningful, I now wish to state

that the most essential things that must be taught and learnt through the social sciences cannot be assessed.

The essential learning from social science must be to learn to live and relate rightly - to learn silent non-judgmental observation, to grow aware of the working of ideologies, of our nervous and emotional responses to words, ideas and events, to learn to hold diverse points of view in our minds without conflict. The learning must help us engage with the realities of everyday life with clarity and ask what our responsibilities are, it must free us from prejudice and create the ground for self questioning.

The goal of the learning of social science, in my view, is two-fold. It is to teach us through the human affairs of another place and time, to know ourselves in the here and now. It is to enable a caring relationship with the human, animal and natural environment around us. Knowledge and skill are valuable only when embedded in a relationship of care and responsibility. And this is beyond assessment.

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**A**nalysis of social studies papers across three Boards- what are we currently testing in social science? Is this responsible for the deplorable state of affairs?

To start the argument, let's look at the three Boards Question Papers on social studies of the academic session 2008- 2009, closely. The analysis of the CBSE, ICSE and State Board (Karnataka) papers is based on different cognitive levels like Knowledge, Understanding, Application, and Skill.

- Q2. Which are the two sources of fresh water in India?
- Q3. Name the two main ferrous minerals.
- Q4. Where is the largest solar plant located in India? (CBSE)

- Both State Board and CBSE papers indicate certain points quite clearly:
- The geography portion carries only 30 marks.
- More than 95%-96% of the paper (geography) is based on pure recall of information, and only 4 % of it is skill-based.

Q.No.45 Why are National Parks created?

- A. to protect forests B. to protect birds C. to protect wild life D. to protect tigers.  
(Karnataka Board)

- Even those questions which 'appear' to be beyond recall have been possibly taken from the practice questions at the end of each chapter in the textbook. Hence they demand nothing beyond reproducing learnt facts. This particular question is a wrong one as the distracters used in this multiple choice question are all correct.
- The paper gives no opportunity to students for answering 'thinking questions'. Almost everything in the paper can be answered through rote-learning.
- Both the Boards have textbooks.

**The ICSE Question Paper is different from other two Boards on various aspects**



Q 7. a) Which is the largest producer of mineral oil? Name any 2 oil-refineries of India. b) Name any 2 off-shore oil fields of India. c). i. Name the largest and oldest coal field of India. ii. Name any two raw materials derived from coal. d. Name the different types of iron ore found in India. Which is the best quality iron ore? (ICSE)

### Limitations of the Board Papers

All the three Board question papers have one thing in common - in no way can these assessment tools bring out the essence of the subject, its relationship with life, its necessity in life.

None of the questions address any geographical concepts; for example:

#### A. Karnataka State Board Paper

Q. No.33. Basket making is a product of cottage industry whereas making of electrical fan is a product of

- a) Small scale industry b). Medium scale industry  
c) Large scale industry d). Specialized industry

Q. 44. Why are cottage and small scale industries suitable to Indian condition?

- a) Provide employment b) Require less capital  
c) Depend on indigenous resources  
d) Require less power supply

Q. 46. Which organization is providing loans to cottage and small scale industries?

- a) State Finance Corporation  
b) Industrial Development Bank of India  
c) Nationalized Bank  
d) State Bank of India.

All the three questions ask only for some information. Students can get the answers right by guess work and luck

also. So what is the objective of asking this question? What is being tested? Definitely not the concept of 'industry'.

### B. CBSE Paper

Q. No.2. Which are the two resources of fresh water in India?

Q. No.4. Where is the largest solar plant located in India?

Both the questions never referred to the concepts like 'fresh water and salt water' or 'solar energy'.

Instead only names have been asked.

Q. No.16. Explain any three factors that affect the location of industries in a region.

Instead the question could have been as follows: Study the given map of India showing three industrial regions of India namely, Mumbai, Jamshedpur, and Vishakhapatnam. Each region has a host of industries; in Mumbai it is cotton textiles, Iron & Steel industry in Jamshedpur and Ship-building industry in Vishakhapatnam. Why do you think the various industries cannot be setup anywhere and everywhere? While answering this question the student would definitely have had the opportunity to link the industry with the location. The language of the question paper is dry, without any context, to some extent didactic and not student-friendly.

Let's examine some more examples – they validate my views.

### E.g. A. Karnataka State Board Paper

Q. No.69. What are subsistence farming, commercial farming and mixed farming?

Q. No.73. Why is India backward in agriculture?

This question is lifted from the "Textbook", Pg, 230, Q. No. IV, 2

### B. CBSE

Q. No. 21. Look at the picture carefully and answer the questions that follow: 21.1) Name the crop shown in the picture.

21.2) Write climatic conditions required for cultivation of this crop.

21.3) Name two major producing states of this crop.

The same question could have been asked differently.

Q. i. Name this plant which you may have seen in the market during festival or at the juice center.

ii. What kind of climate do you think this crop would require for its growth?

iii. It is found in plenty in Karnataka, can you suggest the names of any other two states of India where it is grown?

- Information like names is asked repeatedly, there is no variety. This highlights that geography is more like 'General Knowledge' rather than a branch of science that involves various skills like observation, classification, calculation, measurement, experimentation etc.
- Questions assessing skills of creativity, application, and analysis, critical thinking are conspicuously absent in the paper.
- The information asked is very direct, and has no scope for the student to be innovative in her answers.

### What is our learning from the above analysis?

The paper supports a style of pedagogy which is limited to direct transmitting of information - facts and figures mostly.

Such a paper can put a student off, as she has nothing to answer in case she is not aware of the names/information asked.

There is no scope for students, to think and come out with possible answers. The overall impression the assessment tools exhibit is that the papers are aimed at how best a child can score pass marks.

This prodding inquisition, 'is this (the assessment tool) responsible for the deplorable state of affairs?' suggests a number of issues that involve school and its stake holders, like:

1. There is a total absence of the knowledge and understanding of NCF amongst all stake holders – this includes the vision of the school, pedagogy used by teachers and parents
2. The attitude and interest of the school/community/parents/ students, towards the subject is discouraging.

The subject (geography), remains as a paper to be learned for the examination only, where students answer the paper only through memorization and regurgitation; it is therefore a process in which no skill is developed, no knowledge that makes a person wiser, no creativity of the brain aroused, no

horizon of the mind expanded, no joyful learning indeed.

Whether the question paper is the only reason for this state of affairs or is it the whole get-up of the textbook, including, print, picture and content, pedagogy, attitude projected by the school, teachers, Boards, the parents and community, to be blamed – this remains a pertinent question.

### What is the Vision of NCF?

“ ....recognizes the primacy of children’s experiences, their voices and their active involvement in the process of learning.

Learning experiences at school should pave the way for construction of knowledge and fostering creativity and become a source of joy, not stress.

Curricular transactions seek hands-on experiences and project based approaches. Concerns and issues pertaining to environment, peace oriented values, gender etc.

The approach proposed in the NCF recognizes disciplinary markers while emphasizing integration on significant themes, such as water.

In the social sciences, the syllabi center on activities and projects, which would help learners to understand society and its institutions, change and development.

Examination system seeks a shift from content based testing to problem solving and competency based assessment.”

### What is the Objective Outlined in the NCF?

- To train children locate and comprehend relationships between the natural, social and cultural environment.

- to develop an understanding based on observation and illustration, drawn from lived experiences and physical, biological, social and cultural aspects of life, rather than abstractions
- to nurture the curiosity and creativity of the child particularly in relation
- to natural environment(including artifacts and people)to develop awareness about environmental issues.

All stake holders have a big responsibility in instilling the vision. The syllabus should be in sync with this vision and pedagogy should pursue this.

The Board, the school, the teacher all play a very decisive role in implementing this. The board sets the syllabus as well as the textbook and finally the assessment tool, while the school along with the teacher does the most important job of bringing the whole vision and objectives into the classroom.

The ‘pedagogy’ is key to successful implementation of the NCF, but in reality the Board, school and teacher are all in dark about the NCF.

NCF has no place in school, classroom or the Board Paper. Teachers are never made aware of this document and its content in any of the trainings. Thus the pedagogy and the assessment tool aims only at getting marks and the subject is looked upon as dead and irrelevant to life; attitude of the parents and community, also add to this grave situation.

Let’s wake up and take the call, long overdue. It’s better late than never.

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Evaluation in Indian schools, across assortments of examination boards and subjects, I contend, are basically meant to be a formality where the concerns of ensuring better pass percentages appear paramount. Second, the overriding evaluation criteria appears to be governed more by psychological concerns of minimizing stress and fear of exams than the need of testing understanding and skills. And by evaluation I refer both to the process of setting a test/examination paper and its assessment where, either marks or grades are awarded.

While the above may be the picture across disciplines, the scenario becomes even more depressing when it comes to social sciences comprising subjects of history, geography, political science (or just politics) and economics. These subjects, in particular, history and politics, beleaguered by the constant harangue of “irrelevance”, “memorization intensive”, “uni-linearity” seem to seek redemption by making it “easy”, and “scorable” in exams. The 90 pluses and A’s which so many students seem to be scoring, tell one story. A truer indicator of student understanding of history or politics is gauged by the kind of social and political practices of our youth - indifferent to society, politics and bereft of any citizenship attributes. Nothing more need be said as to this paradox, indeed a tragedy<sup>1</sup>.

In this paper I seek to raise certain larger questions regarding the kind of evaluation practices used in public exams conducted by three educational boards viz, Tamil Nadu Matriculation Board (TNMB), Central Board of Secondary Examinations (CBSE) and Council for Indian School Certificate Examinations (CICSE or ICSE for short). Although many of the issues and questions that I raise may well be applicable to all the subjects of social sciences but given my experience in teaching of history and politics, my critique tends to be confined to the latter.

Evaluation, examinations, tests, assessments...etc in my view form part of what can be called the curriculum spectrum, where we need to look into aspects of textbooks and pedagogy, to review the kind of questions that are asked in tests and exams. With perhaps a marginal exception of CBSE, the exams conducted by TNMB and ICSE, reflect a rather pathetic and ludicrous state of social science practices in our schools. Both, the textbooks (with the sole exception of NCERT whose books are prescribed for CBSE affiliated schools

but which nevertheless does not exonerate CBSE as I point out later) and pedagogical practices in history and politics are, ironically caught in a time warp. This I contend is responsible for the banality and inanity of board exams (sic). For example, if we take the TNMB Class X exams in history and civics, there is hardly any question (objective, “caption questions”, short answers or essay type) that is not based on the three R model of exams – read, recall, write. Though the TNMB examination blue print claims that 41 questions that are asked are based on knowledge, application, skill and understanding only the naïve would take their word for it. Looking at the exam papers for the last 5 years, not a single question comes across as one where some thought, genuine analysis or originality from the students is sought.

Likewise, ICSE is no different. As one pours through its history and civics question papers for nearly a decade, one is amazed, if not shocked, that this board which claims to have a better brand equity and which therefore has some of the most elitist, exclusive, celebrated and well known schools across the country affiliated to it, a travesty similar to the TNMB is committed. For again the pattern of questions more or less remains the same, the questions too often remain the same and the thrust of the exam is basically to test the cramming capacity of the students<sup>2</sup>.

Now coming to CBSE, the scenario is one of some change. We do see some effort to test students application and understanding sans mere memorization and writing in rote. Though from last academic year CBSE has brought in certain changes spurred by Kapil Sibal’s munificence of making Class X final exams optional, but observing the papers over the previous 4 years, CBSE is unable to get rid of the recapitulation mode of important dates, names and events. Secondly (and this is more revealing), the marking scheme of CBSE makes it explicit that some 80% of the questions should hover between the “easy” and “average”; “difficult” questions should be limited to not more than 20%!<sup>3</sup> Thirdly, in the recent comprehensive and continuous evaluation (CCE) introduced by the CBSE, a maximum of 60% weightage is accorded to all social science subjects



put together in what they call as summative assessments. Summative assessments are akin to the final board exams (sic). The rest, called formative assessment comprises of tests, assortment of projects, assignments, homework, class work, etc to be carried out on a daily, weekly, fortnightly and monthly basis.<sup>4</sup> On the face of it, these appear as very progressive and credible act(s). But as I argue these appear to emerge not in the context of enriching learning but guided largely in the name of de-stressing students and to take away the pressure and fear of exams.<sup>5</sup> (Never mind in the process if teachers are stressed and much of their valuable time is taken by preparing, filling and compiling whole lot of data)<sup>6</sup>

Concerns of de-stressing students and removing fear of exams hardly do justice to learning. By compromising on the complexity and intensity of the discipline's epistemology, we not only make mockery of exams but mockery of the subject, learning and schooling itself. The shrill chorus raised by many in demonizing exams has damaged the inherent challenge, charms, beauty and reputation of history and politics if not other subjects.

At one level let me also say that CBSE examination pattern hardly does credit to the most imaginative, thoughtful of the textbooks we have on history and politics. The history and politics textbooks of NCERT are meant to help students to appreciate history as lot more than mere dates, events and names. The books are multilayered and more thematic in their approach. All topics are exploratory in nature and are deliberately open ended to ensure that both teachers and students debate on them<sup>7</sup>. In such a case the exams therefore demand more imagination and depth, goading students to give answers of insight, profundity, reflecting deeper understanding. Alas! When one contrasts the CBSE papers with NCERT texts, the CBSE pattern of exams appear so tame and insipid<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, if we see any of the textbooks prescribed by ICSE or the TNMB<sup>9</sup>, one will be forgiven if these texts are mistaken to be guidebooks!! All chapters are categorized in neatly divided causes, courses and consequences paradigm. There is little of the how's and why-forth's and even where they are presented, the arguments put across are neatly packed, self contained and sealed. These, like I stated earlier, are meant more to facilitate easy memorizing and consequently scoring.

Ultimately any examination/evaluation makeover is congruent

upon two things – one, changes in textbooks and second, and more importantly, pedagogy. NCERT has done its bit to expose children to a qualitatively richer understanding of history and politics. However, in the final analysis the onus to help a child rests with teachers and the kind of class interaction s/he initiates. Teachers with a sound and firmer grasp of history and politics who see society both in its past(s) and present not in absolutes but more as processes where they help students with appropriate activities, classroom discussions etc to explore the interface between economy, culture, politics and how it determines and shapes our identities and outlooks. Sadly this is where reforms and policy changes are not coming. Given the context in which teaching finds itself as the least sought after profession in urban India, being the worst paid, ridiculed and maligned, it is no surprise that the best teaching talents are not to be found here. Consequently, learning suffers. However, the situation in the rural parts is different. There the issue has more to do with lack of teacher preparation and motivation.

*Concerns of de-stressing students and removing fear of exams hardly do justice to learning. By compromising on the complexity and intensity of the discipline's epistemology, we not only make mockery of exams but mockery of the subject, learning and schooling itself.*

Meanwhile, we do have few teachers and schools, who try to make exams more challenging and meaningful. However, owing to the nature of the public exams that are highly centralized affairs and its grades or marks given so much of credence by all, such innovation and experiments get sidelined and focus is once again on 'examination' preparation and ensuring high pass percentages. One may view attempts by CBSE through their CCE as an effort not only to minimize the importance of final exams<sup>10</sup> and also as an attempt to decentralize. The many rubrics that fill the data sheet/report cards suggest that non logico-mathematical intelligence and emotive constituents in a child's growth have been factored

in. However in the process cognitive benchmarks have also been so tweaked, informed by 'clearing exams should be a breeze' mindset. Moreover, in stipulating every benchmark, including the weightage to be given for these benchmarks - instead of giving teachers the freedom to evolve their own benchmarks - the board has once again derided the concept of decentralization. The teachers' manual for CCE, so full of instructions, appears to be written in 'a- teachers-needs-to-be-spoon-fed' and 'teachers-know-nothing' tone. The anxiety in making evaluation very scientific and objective through check lists, hundreds of rubrics, anecdotal notes and what not, undermines the element of fuzziness, which in contemporary management discourse, is perhaps an abomination<sup>11</sup>. But I contend that learning at many levels is fuzzy and the apprehension to generate 'scientific' data removes the element of intuitiveness which to me plays a key role in teaching-learning. Though at some levels their intent has been to make classroom transactions richer and deeper, these measures appear to bludgeon a teacher with so much of data generating paper work leaving them gasping for time. Such a move on the one hand gives no room for teacher's discretion who may have otherwise evolved an

appropriate evaluating mechanism keeping in mind the nature of learning styles of each student with whom the teacher formally and informally interacts<sup>12</sup>. But on the other hand, the fear of reducing it into some caricature or travesty is genuine given the realities of teaching in classrooms in India with limitations of resources, teacher availability, teacher competence and compulsions of ensuring high pass percentages.

In the final analysis then, the variables involved in evaluation are many and complex, each having its pitfalls. I, however would bet on the teaching community to restore the credibility, not just of evaluation but the entire teaching-learning process. This of course is dependent on a contingent of teachers who love teaching and interacting with students, are passionate about the subjects they teach and importantly schools wherein these teachers trusted for what they do and how they go about their job. But if teachers are just not trusted, we are not going to get the best lot ever and learning with all its constituents will continue to suffer and continue (with apologies to Marx) as a farce and as a tragedy.

## Footnotes

1. See Kanti Bajpai, 'The middle and other classes,' in The Times of India, May 29, 2010 for further examples of 'failed citizenship'
2. Even one look at the syllabus and guidelines itself will be enough to indicate the kind of limitations both TNMB and ICSE impose on setting an examination paper. See <http://www.cisce.org/data/Syllabus%20for%20ICSE%202011/history.pdf> and [http://www.tn.gov.in/matricsyllabus/blueprint/matric\\_QandB.pdf](http://www.tn.gov.in/matricsyllabus/blueprint/matric_QandB.pdf) p 49
3. See the section on 'Sample question paper and marking scheme' for social sciences at <http://cbse.nic.in/> (the pattern has now changed to some extent for academic year 2010-2011)
4. In effect everything that a child does both inside and outside the classroom comes under scrutiny. From what one understands of the guideline given, even homework and class-work have to be graded. At one level I suspect it becomes inevitable for how else is one going to quantify continuously a student's homework and classwork performance as the new system demands? In that sense it does appear contradictory to the underlying intent of CBSE of pushing up pass percentages. In this context see news report: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/CBSE-sounds-warning-on-arbitrary-use-of-CCE/articleshow/5587256.cms> (The Times Of India, February 18/19, 2010, New Delhi edition)
5. In the circular sent by CBSE on September 20, 2009 by its chairman to all CBSE schools, the first two reasons given for introducing CCE stated were "to reduce stress and anxiety" and "to reduce drop out rates". See Circular 39 at <http://cbse.nic.in/circulars/cir39-2009.pdf>. Secondly as far as history and politics are concerned, the NCERT books calls upon a robust understanding of history and contemporary politics. Given the limitations of many teachers dealing with history, themselves schooled in simplistic, political narrative approach, one wonders how many can deal with these chapters in the rigorous, multi-layered fashion it so demands. . One is welcome to read more on this on my site: <http://www.historicalmind.com/2007/07/new-ncert-history-text-books-critique.html> for further critique and some problems of dealing with NCERT books in our classrooms
6. For further reference on our obsession with numbers and the high percentages where '90 percent has been reduced from the status of outstanding to a minimum qualification', see Robindra Saha's Merit in a time of extravagant marking, Education World, March 2008. Given the 'I top, I first' mindset, the grades, despite being indicative, are certainly going to take the place of marks and percentages. Nothing short of A+ may secure one a seat in senior secondary, making A+ a minimum
7. Sumit Sarkar, A new kind of history textbooks, The Hindu, April 17, 2006
8. If the sample papers are anything to go by under the new CCE parameters for the academic year 2010-11, with multiple choice questions being a first, the tone and tenor of the questions do not appear to be as demanding of a student's analytical, reasoning skills as claimed. The recapitulation mode of exams similar to TNMB and ICSE seems to be intact at most levels. See in <http://www.cbse.nic.in/cce/index.html>

9. Uma Maheswari & Sally Varghese, history and civics, Matriculation, Tamil nadu textbook corporation, Chennai, 2006; Xavier Pinto, E G Myall; New ICSE history and civics , part II, NOIDA, 2010
10. Some may contend that instead of one major exam now there are far too many of them albeit in different guises
11. I also contend that there is an effort to 'managerialize' education with all such data work on spreadsheets and make it market oriented. For a similar view see Stephen Alter, 'Classroom shopping –All the management mumbo-jumbo cannot make education a retail product' ,Outlook, November 27, 2006
12. It can be argued that teaching and learning cannot be seen merely as a craft to be measured and quantified through lesson plans, flow charts and check lists. Teaching and learning are more of an subjective experience. While one is not denying the need to measure and assess learning but the criteria involved and its best judge would be the teacher himself/herself. See <http://www.historicalmind.com/2009/06/indian-exams-patently-fraudulent-and.html> and [www.historicalmind.com/2010/05/cbses-continuous-and-comprehensive.html](http://www.historicalmind.com/2010/05/cbses-continuous-and-comprehensive.html)

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“Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.”

-Albert Einstein

### An Experience

A lesson in social studies begins with little 10 year - old children walking down the hill in rural Maharashtra, on which the school is situated. They are on their way to the village below, to study the river that is a part of their lives in more ways than one. The task had begun in the classroom itself, when they were asked to trace the exact course of the river from books in the library. They now try to have a more intimate relation with it: to find out about the creatures (various kinds of fish, birds, amphibians and reptiles) in the river and around it, and about the fishermen whose lives revolve around it. They stumble upon the interesting fact that apart from the local fishermen who live permanently in the village, there are those who regularly come once a year from Andhra Pradesh, to release lobsters and prawns in the water. They allow them to grow for a couple of months and then come back to catch them when they are fully grown to further transport them to other states and make huge profits in the process. The logistics of such a flourishing enterprise in the seemingly sleepy wilderness is a surprising revelation to all. The temporary blue tents put up by the families of these migrant fishermen, speak little about this interesting tale of entrepreneurship, hitherto unknown to the people living on the hill top. The children visit the homes of the fishermen; find out about their lives in transition, struggles and joys in a way no textbook could have explained. They also try to find out whether the seasonal migration of fishermen from another state affects the social and economic lives of the local folk. Some children raise questions about fishing as an activity from an ethical point of view, while realizing that the livelihood of many depends on it.

Next, they take a close look at the dam, built on the river, to see how it works. An interview with the local engineer informs them about the need of the dam in the region, the electricity generated by it, the history of a struggle with the villagers and a ten year long agitation against the building of it. One is convinced by the end of the day that the story of the dam is not so simple. People had been displaced by the dam after all, and a whole village had been submerged because of it. Though the engineer tries to tell them that the

displaced people had been adequately compensated and that the benefits of the dam far outweighed the loss caused to local people, even little children can sense, there is more

to the story. They decide to meet the local villagers, some of whom are workers in the school they study in. The interactions give a completely different side of the story, one of anger and frustration, about the loss of homes and land, of not getting compensation as promised by the government or being offered land of a far inferior quality than the ones they originally owned. Excited about the newly learnt lessons from the river flowing by, the students decide to share their discovery through reports, photographs, inspired sketches and interviews, which they share with the rest of the school.



*What's the value of doing any activity that cannot be precisely and sufficiently measured? In a country where the history of assessment has largely been the traditional paper-pencil test, it is natural to ask, is there scope for assessing projects, field work, and such other experiences?*

Hopefully having captured the essence of a field trip, and simultaneously reflecting on the question given to me as the topic to write on, I realize that I have to contextualize my writing as I live in a world driven by measurement. What's the value of doing any activity that cannot be precisely and sufficiently measured? In a country where the history of assessment has largely been the traditional paper-pencil test, it is natural to ask, is there scope for assessing projects, field work and such other experiences? Can the assessment happen through formal tests or do we need more authentic, integrative, holistic assessment techniques to evaluate the students' learning?

## The Value

With reference to the experience quoted above, how did it enrich the learning experience of the children? The field trip gave them an authentic experience that interested them, engaged them and raised their curiosity. Such exposures give students an opportunity to engage with the world outside their classroom, discovering things for themselves, analyzing facts (very often confused with interpretation), reflecting upon a situation, answering questions, and often coming up with original solutions. It also exposes them to multiple perspectives of people.

In a typical project, groups of students work together toward the common goal of exploring and understanding something. Student performance can be based on the quality of the outcome produced, the depth of content understanding demonstrated, and the contributions made to the ongoing process of learning. Students may or may not be assessed individually. Most importantly, they create a scope for students to reflect upon their own ideas and opinions, think critically, make their choices, voice their opinion and therefore make intelligent decisions. Such experiences also help in developing a deeper understanding of the content since it is learnt from an immediate context. They also motivate students who otherwise find the classrooms boring or meaningless.

## The Demonstration of Learning

The learning from the experience can be captured to the extent possible, in a variety of non-traditional ways: reports, power-point presentations, charts, sketches, collages, essays, poems, skits, models, scrap-books, to name a few.

## The Skills Developed

Several skills can be developed in the students through such experiences: research and inquiry skills, communication and presentation skills, organization and time management skills, self-assessment and reflection skills, group participation and leadership skills.

## The Assessment Strategy

As a teacher who had been a part of the experience mentioned above, I ask myself whether I had been able to assess the learning of the students authentically. The answer is yes, but only to the extent possible.

Like any other activity, the scope for effective assessment of projects and field trips depends on some amount of thought

and planning. One needs to be clear about the goals and objectives of the activity, the method to be adopted to realize them and the tools that one will use to gauge whether those objectives have been fulfilled. Before beginning a project, it is always necessary to ask: "Why am I doing this or what I am aiming to do? How will I know if the project is successful and how will I ensure that students learn? It is important to mention here, however, that my experience tells me the goals and objectives might also change during the course of the experience and that one needs some amount of flexibility to be open to this.

The assessment plan itself can include both formative assessment that will allow you to give feedback as the project progresses and summative assessment that provides students with a culminating appraisal of their performance. Since intelligence is diverse, evaluation should respect the diversity.



*The need therefore is to enable teachers to modify standardized rubrics or create their own, while assessing the exploration of contexts that are local and therefore, specific.*



The assessment can be recorded through a variety of rubrics, based on the correctness, depth and understanding of the content presented, the organization of the matter, thinking skills and communication, oral and written presentation, analysis and application and last but not the least, the skills required to work in a group.

Using similar rubrics and parameters for other aspects of learning, one can assess any activity quite effectively. The need therefore is to enable teachers to modify standardized rubrics or create their own, while assessing the exploration of contexts that are local and therefore, specific. It would be impossible and unfair otherwise, to assess a student authentically by broadly capturing the multifaceted experience through marks or grades.

This brings me, however, to some larger questions about the measurement, almost invariably related to assessment,

which may be worth raising:

### Questions to Ask

- Is measurement always so tangible? How does one measure attitudes, perspectives, qualities like sensitivity, objectivity, empathy? Do such intangible things manifest so immediately after an experience or is there scope for the manifestation to happen sometime later in life? Character development, after all, does not happen in a day.
- Is a thoroughly predictable outcome always possible or desirable? It goes with the assumption that a thoroughly organized plan is bound to yield predictable results. It neither takes into account various factors that go into learning, nor leaves scope for the goals and objectives to sometime go beyond what was initially planned for.
- Predictability and accurate organization leaves little space for creativity or spontaneity in the teaching or learning process. Looking at the most perfect rubric, one wonders finally, whether the teaching - learning process is so linear?
- One also wonders whether one has taken accountability so seriously that little is left to the ability of either the teacher or the learner to give enquiry the direction and the depth one chooses.
- Can the best of rubrics capture the complexity of the way information is processed in the minds of children? Who knows what goes on in the child's mind during the process of learning?
- Creativity is related to "out of the box" thinking and the rubric is yet another box created to capture predictable and desired results.
- Can the best form of assessment ever justify an activity? Does one see projects as a way of learning, valuable because

of its own intrinsic value or only because it can be sufficiently assessed, in order to capture the proof of learning? Alas! The more one tries to capture the learning in exact words the more the mystery and magic of the process seems to be lost!

- At a more philosophical level, can one finally ask about the sudden national obsession with accountability: do we see a direct link between the desire to create more and more structures, checks, measures and precise tools to capture the output of work, as fundamentally a sign of lack of faith in people? While some amount of accountability is necessary, one cannot overlook the harm done by the undue importance given to the micro-planning of assessment techniques.
- Last but not the least, one is bound to ask, what is the purpose of education today? Is the objective of education merely to produce "skilled" and "productive" workers or is the essence of education something infinitely larger? Can we leave the magic and wonder of the process of learning untouched by seeking the proof of learning, eternally?

To quote Gibran, "You may give them your love but not your thoughts. For they have their own thoughts. You may house their bodies but not their souls, for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams."

While trying to assess accurately, the experiences given to children from life around, there is a dire need to keep our minds open to the unpredictable, immeasurable, unimaginable potential in each child, to develop her own understanding of things at her own pace, to create her own world-view, with or without the influence of adults who seem to plan outcomes to perfection. The celebration of learning happens along the way, not merely through a visible, predictable proof as the end result!

### Readings

1. <http://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/whatisit.htm> - Authentic assessment toolbox
2. [www.bie.org](http://www.bie.org) - Project based learning for the 21st century
3. <http://pbl-online.org> - Project based Learning
4. <http://www.journal.kfionline.org/article.asp?issue=9&article=7> - Curriculum for an enquiring mind
5. <http://www.journal.kfionline.org/article.asp?issue=11&article=7> - Perspectives on testing

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# **SECTION-E**

**Personal Reflections**

**D**o you remember a time in your life when you wanted to do one thing, your family wanted you to do something else, and you fought bitterly, got sent to purgatory, rebelled again and thought balefully that the world was against you? Do you remember being told that what you wanted to do was of “no use”? Of course you do, for that practically defines teenage.

For many of my friends and me growing up in erstwhile Bombay in the 70s and 80s, the world we experienced was filled with all kinds of people and we learned to celebrate and sympathise with them. Vegetable vendors, maids, milkmen, dhobis came to our doorstep and brought with them worlds we could access through narratives, conversations and dialogue. We went by public transport to school and experienced other things en route, equally important to our negotiations with the world, especially as women. We thus had a different kind of education outside of school through such fiction, poetry, popular culture and the experience of diversity, long before they were conceptualised for us in institutions and disciplines under the various liberal art disciplines. It is through them that we established our first

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*In such a world then, which increasingly isolates us from each other and from experiencing diversity, the liberal arts are even more critical. They help us negotiate between our selves as individuals and the larger world. They reveal to us other world-views, different perspectives. They also reiterate to us that at every moment of our lives as engineers, doctors, accountants, teachers, and indeed in every activity and profession, not the least as academics, there are continuities between ourselves and the world which we can ignore only at our peril.*

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tenuous connections with our world as much as with our selves.

Unfortunately, separation of the ‘world of experience’ from the ‘world of knowledge’ increasingly

occurred as we went up the education ladder, until we were finally graduates and professionals with a knowledge base that had no connection with anything - so complete was the rupture between the world and the intellect. We were the possessors of knowledge that came from nowhere and therefore could go nowhere.

The past three decades have seen a meteoric rise in the numbers and ways the world has changed, not least because of the innovations and penetration of new technologies on the one hand, and the increased isolation of the middle class on the other. Even the mail comes to our desktops, not our doorsteps, and the postman nowhere delivers twice a day. The segregation of knowledge and experience has newer dimensions and manifold consequences. Compassion never approaches us; it certainly never crosses the threshold of our consciousness. Broken families, financial insecurity, poverty, migration, violence and strife are part of our daily vocabulary, yet we are indifferent to them qua experience; they are something to watch on TV. Even in moments of great solitude, we are busy on Facebook – aloneness seems so unbearable as we reach out in virtual time and space to a long list of people at a click but may have nothing to say to each other face to face. Thus, in as much as we keep “in touch,” virtually minute by minute through new technologies, we also lose touch - with our inner selves as well as the realities of the larger world. The poetry, literature, philosophy, art and yes, people, all of which kept us “whole” and in tune with something deep within ourselves even as they revealed to us different worlds to which we were inextricably linked, have all but disappeared. Our politics and solidarity have become sciences; our morality is nonexistent.

In such a world then, which increasingly isolates us from each other and from experiencing diversity, the liberal arts are even more critical. They help us negotiate between our selves as individuals and the larger world. They reveal to us other world-views, different perspectives. They also reiterate



to us that at every moment of our lives as engineers, doctors, accountants, teachers, and indeed in every activity and profession, not the least as academics, there are continuities between ourselves and the world which we can ignore only at our peril. Like every teenager who accessed ideas, understandings and experiences through fiction, poetry and art, it stands to reason that it is through the humanities that our sciences, as much as our lives, become genuinely social, deeply humanitarian.

The case for the larger liberal arts has been made, and made well, by others. Among these are that they cultivate well-rounded citizenry, encourage critical thinking and public discussion and make us understand motivations other than our own in the pursuit of living. Despite all these stellar qualities that an education in the liberal arts can cultivate, they are definitely being bullied out of our educational systems by the big brothers science and technology (and step brother management). Our youth are getting specialised education at an even younger age - the best example (or worst one, depending on your perspective) being that of an undergraduate degree being offered in Business Management, making a mockery of education itself. Yet it is the liberal arts which are being edged out in one way or the other from education when it is blatant that we need them more, not less.

While there are major benefits of including the social sciences in education, yet teaching of the social sciences is not a simple task. According to the National Curriculum Framework 2005, for instance, one of the major problems is that an utilitarian approach has been used in the teaching of the social sciences, whereby the individual is regarded as an instrument of development. It recommends a shift to a normative approach so that issues of equality, justice and dignity of society are emphasized in order to awaken a real concern for social justice among students. What the NCF does not address is how this is to be achieved. We need our sciences, including our social sciences, to more deeply embrace the humanities and regain the synergies lost between them. It is through the deeper engagement between the humanities and the social sciences that the liberal arts can become relevant again in education.

Surprisingly, this struggle between utilitarianism and egalitarianism seems to find echoes in the world of work, the “real world” if you will. Here though, the opposite is the case

and the liberal arts, which the curriculum considered too influenced by utilitarianism, are ironically deemed to be of largely no use. Thus, there are few jobs for even the best of such graduates, and almost no career paths in organisational life for them to grow in outside of academics and NGOs. The world of work still believes that the graduates they hire, (ironically even the S&T graduates, but somehow these are accommodated in organisations), are of little use to them.

Several arguments from other disciplinary backgrounds have also come to the defence of the liberal arts but listen to what one such well-intentioned but misguided commentator attempting to make a case for the humanities in no less than The New York Times tells us: “You will have enormous power if you are the person in the office who can write a clear and concise memo.” Leaving aside the fact that no one studies the humanities in order to possess a dubious skill like writing a memo well, by reducing the larger knowledge base on which the liberal arts rest to a set of “skills” (worse, “soft skills”) the world of work does us an enormous disservice. The world of work demands “skill sets” and the ability to “deliver” without realising that in order for these to be improved what we need is more, not less, liberal education for every one.

*“Unfortunately, in an attempt to cater to the needs of world of work, the world of education (the world of ideas if you will, where knowledge is constructed) strives to improve itself through the imposition of an even more socially isolated curriculum and an uncritical pedagogy in an attempt to be efficacious.”*

Unfortunately, in an attempt to cater to the needs of world of work, the world of education (the world of ideas if you will, where knowledge is constructed) strives to improve itself through the imposition of an even more socially isolated curriculum and an uncritical pedagogy in an attempt to be efficacious. Thus, knowledge divorced from the world is as rampant in medicine, engineering, management, sciences

which produce professionals who certainly are "effective" in one way but whose knowledge is isolated and irrelevant in many others - irrelevant because they ignore the personhood of people and the social in society; irrelevant because they have received uncritically what has been taught to them; irrelevant because they have not understood the larger framework within which this knowledge has been constructed. They need more, not less liberal education.

Yet it is the ones who struggle to understand and engage with the world who are made out to be "skill sets" at best, "irrelevant" and "useless" at worst. The larger world of work needs to value the engagements that the liberal arts have made in order to understand society and our place in that society - individually, socially, aesthetically, ethically. They have to understand that society is a complex creature and reducing it to one or other thing may be simple, efficacious and profitable in the short run but detrimental in the long. Now more than ever before, the ability to evaluate things in an information-inundated society must be cultivated in people as must the ability to examine and respond to different view points. In fact, in order to push for more government support to those who need it most, for better legislation and improved governance, it is imperative

to have more, not less, liberal education.

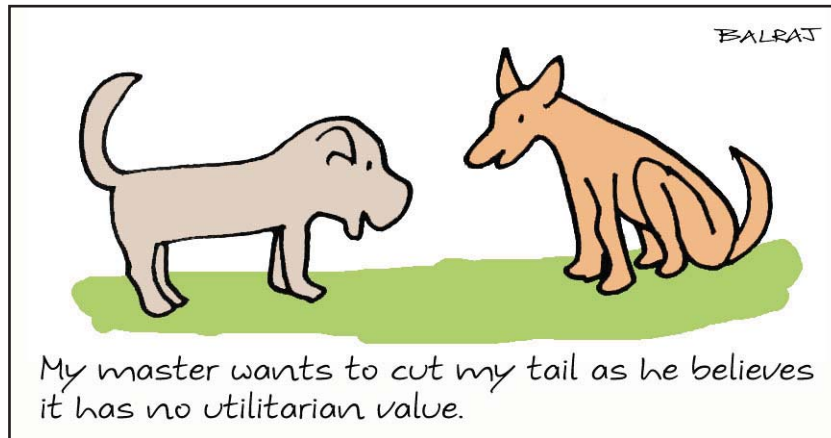
It is time for those of us in the larger liberal arts to permeate other disciplines and work spaces and make their knowledge relevant again. It is time for every writer, philosopher, historian, social scientist, poet and artist to stand up and be counted. It is time for us to emphatically tell this world of work, this so called "real world", that what

they do in the name of efficiency, precision, profitability, is irrelevant to the needs of education, certainly irrelevant to the world as a lot of us experience and understand it.

Not matter how irrelevant and indeed obfuscating and esoteric we are made out to be, it is in this world of liberal

arts education - this playful world - that ideas are born and nurtured, that ideals are upheld, where questions of relevance and irrelevance are discussed and debated within larger discourses, sometimes in the abstract, other times within contexts of the public good.

It is in this sense that what is most academic is also the most useful. It is in this spirit that it is time to reclaim the "irrelevant" and "useless" ideals of our teenage years again, for they may be just what are needed today.



My master wants to cut my tail as he believes it has no utilitarian value.

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'Sociology' and 'Psychology'- I have shared a relationship of fascination with these two words from the time that I vaguely knew what they meant. It is quite absurd actually, the idea of studying society, people, their brains, emotions, reactions, (all of it/the whole lot!). Having studied subjects like English and Math for the first 16 years of my life, these topics seemed to be scattered, disorganized, and all-in-all impossible to look at through one fixed framework. How can our actions and feelings be explained by a set of theories and rules? True, they cannot. As I later found out, the social sciences are not monolithic, in that, they do not use one, single theory that everyone in the field agrees with and follows. They each carry their own view point, ideas, questions, and answers. Perhaps this is the reason that both sociology and Psychology contain many, many facets, and, for me, this multi-faceted ness is one of the beauties of the social sciences.

Another very appealing feature was that, somehow, these subjects have a lot to do with 'us' as human beings, and just 'you' and 'me' as people. I have had an obsession with finding out more about the human race, and myself; and if I may be a little judgmental, I think we all share this obsession on some level, even if to varying extents. These two subjects seem to cater to that obsession. They seem to have a personal element in them, something that directly corresponds to who and what we are. Whether directly or indirectly, we were studying ourselves. Studying ourselves as subjects and looking back - this is what drew me to studying the social sciences.

*A certain issue or phenomenon cannot usually be understood and explained if looked at solely from one of these viewpoints. There will always be another point of view that holds its own positives and sounds as convincing as the other.*

Over the past two years or so, sociology and psychology have occupied a fairly large portion of my life. The journey began with me being an enthusiastic 16 year old who was excited about these two subjects, though. I did not have much of an idea of what studying these subjects involved. I felt each of us was conditioned into a certain way of thinking. Be it unconscious or conscious, in my experience, this conditioning has proved to be important- primarily to understand these subjects, and then to let my thoughts travel beyond this basic understanding, thus to form my own opinions and ideas about various topics. This process began on one of classes without being blatantly apparent to me. This kind of thinking that began in class was initially as though I had to peer through a peep hole to look at issues in different way; to think subtly, to look at matters through different lights, see things in different shades, and most importantly, to understand that there are always many perspectives and view points, and each of them have their strengths and weaknesses. A certain issue or phenomenon cannot usually be understood and explained if looked at solely from one of these viewpoints. There will always be another point of view that holds its own positives and sounds as convincing as the other.

Eventually, this framework leaked into other parts of my life. I began to see the world around me through this framework. The slums on the road side, the tall sky scrapers towering over us, the vegetable vendor pushing her cart with a baby on it, the fancy malls, even with all its contradictions, I was able to make some sense of it. Soon enough, I began to see things that are closer to my heart through this perspective- some aspects of home that I had always taken for granted, like patriarchal forces, jump out at you. The patriarchal structure is one such example. The traditional role of a 'housewife' (and in my opinion, demanding) has always been taken up by my mother, and, my father, as convention holds, has been the financial pillar of the family- the man in charge of money matters. Even relationships and other issues in my personal life came alive as I looked at them through my own framework. It helped me see that there were multiple

sides to any story. For example, the whirlwinds of teenage life, with all its conflicts and insecurities, are brought into perspective when you understand the story through the other person's point of view, and think to yourself that he/she is also like you, and you would probably behave in the same way when put in a similar situation.

My experience in and outside class have been responsible for fostering this kind of an outlook.

My time in class has been valuable because that is where my knowledge bank lies. That is where the seeds of several ideas, that could potentially flourish into so much more are sown. That has been the place where I have developed my roots in the soil of the social sciences. One might wonder what happens during class time that allows for such engagement. Of course, we do learn the basics of our subjects there. In the case of sociology, it would include Marxism, Feminism, Functionalism, Interactionism, Religion, Crime, Media, Family, the works! The field of psychology is a whole different universe, with its exceedingly interesting studies, the various disorders and treatments. But, our classes have gone beyond studying sociology and psychology out of a textbook. Our conversations, discussions and heated debates, all lend the class a different spirit. For instance, there was a sociology class in which we were discussing 'social constructs'. This term, in case you are unfamiliar with it, refers to aspects of society that have been constructed by us, as compared to being a product of biology or instinct. Some arguments in sociology suggest that these social constructs establish a structure in society, which influences the way each one of us thinks and lives life. Love is an example - can you think of love as constructed, made up? They say it is not real! Yet we all experience the feeling of love so strongly - the heart racing, the constant chattering inside your head about that one special person, attraction that seems so natural and real. This theory states that it is only because of a certain conditioning that we feel emotions such as love. When questions like 'why is it that most of us from the upper-middle class fall in love with others of the same background are asked, it is striking, even scary sometimes, when you try to answer them.

Another extremely interesting topic came about in our psychology classes - we were studying a paper about split-brain patients, whose corpus callosum (the band connecting the two hemispheres) is operated upon in such a way

that the connection no longer exists. Such a procedure is usually conducted on persons whose epilepsy is so severe that it makes them dysfunctional. The results of this study indicated that there were two level of consciousness in one person. The left and the right hemispheres each led a life of their own, with their own memories and ways of expression. Generalizing from this, we could ask ourselves if we also have two levels of consciousness. Who is the real me? Such questions sparked off a lively discussion in the classroom. It created an atmosphere of exploration. Such dynamics pushes you to think about yourself and the world around you, and points to the relevance that these subjects have to our everyday lives. Self- reflection and critical thinking become common activities, perhaps even the norm in these classes.

This kind of an environment acts as a springboard from which I can take off and stray into other areas of interest. An advantage of both sociology and psychology is that I can look out of my window, and my laboratory is right there - at least to the extent that it allows for information through observation, and sometimes interaction.

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*The social sciences have surely sculpted sensitivity in me. When I look around, there are people from all walks of life, and, on the surface of it, they seem to be worlds apart. And maybe they are. But social science has changed the way I now look at them and reinforced the fact that we are all human.*

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We went on a field trip from school to one of the slums in Bangalore, and had an interactive session with the domestic workers who lived there. It was very interesting for me to see that the walls between 'us' and 'them' were broken down just a few minutes into conversation over a cup of tea. Their lives, stories, problems were all of a sudden not out there, completely disconnected from our lives, but something that I could relate to and empathize with. Asking the flower vendor her name or how many children she has,

or complimenting the rickshaw driver on his radio set did not require a relationship – it was amazing how little it took to strike up a conversation.

The social sciences help people open up in this way, it has surely sculpted sensitivity in me. When I look around, there are people from all walks of life, and, on the surface of it, they seem to be worlds apart. And maybe they are. But social science has changed the way I now look at them and reinforced the fact that we are all human. At the end of the day, we are the same. When you adopt this kind of an outlook, distinctions like poor-rich, Hindu-Muslim, Indian-

Pakistani, fair-dark, fail to make much sense.

Closing in to the end of my A-level course in sociology and psychology, and reflecting on the past two odd years, it has been a delight to have studied these subjects. Their contribution to everyday life, their presence in the hustle and bustle of our cities, the life within each of these subjects, has made my experience truly colorful. My biggest take away from this subject is that it has made me innately sensitive, and helped me see subtleties of human nature. I look forward to studying the social sciences in college.

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“What is the use of learning history?” As a thirteen-year-old, I unobtrusively slipped this question into the question box, hoping to hear my teacher’s illuminating answer. (I hadn’t the temerity to ask such a question to her face.) I can still recall how I waited eagerly for her to pull my question out of the box.

There were a number of chits in the box that day.

She took her time: tantalisingly, and ran through a number of other questions before she arrived at it - at the very end of the period. To my disappointment, she laughed it off, saying: “And the last question here is: What is the use of learning history?” All joined in her laughter, but my teacher gave no answer as she rose to leave.

I was left to deal with my question on my own: something I did until the end of my school days, with no success. While I had demurely studied all the assigned subjects until the age of thirteen, I began to question their utility when a possible choice loomed ahead - in Class IX.

“When something is over and done with, why should we bother to memorise it in detail?” I wondered. The glamour of Science was so overpowering, that no one had to convince me of its utility. Indeed, I cannot recall a single one of my classmates asking this question of Science: “What is the use of studying Science?” Boring? Yes, many felt it was so. Tough? Sure, some agreed. But ‘useless’? No one would have said so.

Perhaps it was the very determined direction that the subject steered you to: a career as a doctor, or an engineer, or a scientist, or maybe it was just the ‘done thing’ to study it – whatever the case, no one had to convince my classmates (or me) about the need to study Science. Yes, some of us had our preferences, when we chose not to opt for Biology (in any case, I am not going to become a doctor, so why should I cut up frogs?), but Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics were part of our checked-in baggage. No doubt about that.

Geography was even less of a felt necessity: it didn’t even carry the names of powerful people to salvage it. Who cared, really, if the temperate zones had deciduous trees or there were gold mines elsewhere? From poring over maps and mastering the skill of drawing them, to memorising climatic zones and the crops that these yielded, here was yet

another subject that had few takers. I recall just one teacher advocating it as a ‘logical subject’: but she, too, could not convince me of its use.

In short, the periods devoted to the social sciences were the ones that drew the most yawns. We enlivened our classes by drawing moustaches and fierce eyebrows on the pictures of the Moghul queens, and bindis and mascaraed lashes for the imposing kings. Passing these reworked portraits to each other, under our desks, we elicited quiet giggles as our only means of entertainment in the boring history classes. The only historical persona to escape our mutilating pen was the devastatingly handsome Lord Mountbatten: for obvious reasons.



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*The patterns in Mathematics, the beautiful logic in Science, its unquestionable relevance to our immediate lives: I found all of these to be conspicuous by their absence in history and geography.*

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The patterns in Mathematics, the beautiful logic in Science, its unquestionable relevance to our immediate lives: I found all of these to be conspicuous by their absence in history and geography.

Which brings me to what I perceive as the source of magnetism in a subject: what pulls a learner to it? This is my surmise: anything that is taught should be at least one of these three things: relevant, useful or beautiful (or, at least, appealing) from the point of view of the learner. Why, for instance, did science seem necessary to most of us? For one, it was extremely relevant. No one could deny that. Of course we needed to know about the laws of the Universe, the changes that could be wrought, the flora and fauna around

us. Contrast this to the dates of the Battle of Panipat or the changes brought about by King Ashoka...yawn! Wouldn't we do better to know the changes being effected by our present government, the cheekier amongst us felt tempted to ask.

And yes, Science was useful. It helped us figure out why milk soured, how plants grew and how to dress a wound. It inspired us to think more systematically and deductively. It made us enquire into the truth behind assumptions. It helped make our lives more comfortable. We needed it: even if we were unlucky enough to be taught the subject by a drone of a teacher.

And oh! Sometimes, Science was even beautiful: from my early fascination of high school Chemistry to an experience of utter awe in my MSc days – at the intricacies of the DNA in our bodies – to me, beauty and Science seldom seemed incompatible. (Some lucky fellows had this experience in Math, but of them – another time.) Often, beauty was an overriding quality in determining my love for a subject. Poetry was neither useful nor relevant in my eyes: but yes, it was often beautiful. Literature, indeed, was rich with beauty: I couldn't deny that. But gray was the colour I would have used to describe history and geography. (And colour just splashed in waves of bright purples and pinks all over Science, Literature and occasionally, even Math.)

Even if social science hadn't met these three criteria, I now tend to think that it would have somehow made it to our plates had it been just easy. Who doesn't recall the satisfaction of solving a mathematical problem, and getting it right? The unique satisfaction in knowing that you had, somehow, managed to crack a problem - made Math just that much more tolerable. But here, you were right only if your memory happened not to fail you. You couldn't think the answer through: or so we were led to believe.

There fell the last prop that this subject may have had: it demanded too remarkable a memory from me. So I couldn't wait to drop it: which I did, at the earliest available opportunity.

Thus, history and geography constituted for me a bunch of facts that one could live life pretty well without remembering. Where were the patterns here? The trends? The connection to our own lives? These were either non-existent or buried beneath the huge number of facts that we had to remember. It wasn't until my college years that it dawned on me that a study of the past could perhaps make one live the present

better. However, I continued to feel that this seemed to be a lame excuse for thrusting that boring subject down our throats - for I couldn't see a single person, community or nation around me making fewer mistakes (or living better lives) because they had learnt from their own history. That 'knowledge' - if you could term it so - stayed safely ensconced between the dusty covers of their history textbooks: no one bothered to bring it into their everyday lives. A fascination that developed during my college years for reading biographies (of famous people) did lead me unconsciously down the alley of what I would now call 'history': but this was so very different! For people inhabited the pages of these wonderful books, in place of lifeless dates and boring events! My school history books seemed to be utterly devoid of the human element.

*Thus, history and geography constituted for me a bunch of facts that one could live life pretty well without remembering. Where were the patterns here? The trends? The connection to our own lives? These were either non-existent or buried beneath the huge number of facts that we had to remember.*

Decades later, when I was travelling in the Himalayas, and saw the numerous types of rock and stone, their varying textures and colours spoke eloquently to me of patterns in that terrain. Why had no one ever taught me this? I wondered. The terraced slopes in Uttarkashi, the unique cuisine of the mountainfolk and their preferred diets: these were as intriguing as they were relevant. By now, I was interested, you see, in knowing how these people lived. My excitement at walking down the cobbled streets of Pompeii – knowing that Roman emperors had trod these very stones – was palpable! Seeing the ruins of the Indus Valley Civilisation in Lothal was another time in my adult life when I saw the immense possibilities of learning history with excitement.

Alas! These were unrealised dreams: to date, the learning of history and geography has been amongst my most colourless experiences. The palette and brush that our teachers dipped

into - to teach us these subjects - were dry and without paint. Perhaps those dry deserts and pompous kings had drained out all the colour.

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The other day, while driving back from Shimoga I got into a bit of an argument with a close friend of mine. Traversing into philosophy, we were debating whether there is anything called 'gray' in life. It all began when I took serious objection to his words 'there is nothing called gray in my life, I always live in black and white!' He further went to the extent of saying: "I will never teach my children that there is something called gray."

I hope you are with me when I use the word 'gray'. Here, gray on P129 refers to the various situations/relationships/attitudes/actions which are outside our normally stated fence of values. For example, while in public nobody accepts that bribery is good, it still thrives! How do you resolve this paradox? The 'Swalpa adjust madi..' (please adjust a bit) attitude is yet another example. Call it situational or circumstantial - the gray in us does appear every now and then - whether we admit it or not. It is a difficult admission to make - I agree; it takes courage.

It took me by absolute surprise that there live individuals in this world who completely ignore or believe that their actions/thoughts/interactions with the world are totally bereft of any gray. Driving the next 200 kms in mental cacophony, the disbelief continued to haunt me. After many weeks, there finally came a 'eureka' moment! Could the actual discord between my friend and I have been the fact that he used a 'science lens' to view the world while mine was steeped in a background of social science? Don't you feel that the sciences are far more definite, precise, right-wrong, demanding a certain degree of absoluteness, proof and closure? While on the other hand, the social sciences to my mind are more flexible, accommodating, and willing to accept different points of view. I feel this stems from an innate belief that there are no absolute rights/wrongs. It has more to do with the lens you view them with.

### I Started Gathering Proof for My Latest Hypothesis

And believe me; the more I think about it, the more convinced I am that people from a background of social science view the world with a lens that's hopelessly inclusive and least exclusive.

It is this lens that I wish to write about and how the subject

impacted learning through my formative years of study.

Being a keen follower of politics in the country, my earliest recollection of a horrible debate was the Babri Masjid incident. Thanks to the local riots that followed, schools were closed and I had ample time to watch those painful visuals of people on top of the mosque trying to demolish the very ground that they were standing upon. Very impressionable - but a feisty little girl that I was - my instant reaction was to take sides. I kept asking my helpless parents very difficult questions. Why are some people saying they are right when they are actually bringing down buildings? Why aren't the police arresting them? Naïve, yet extremely curious and eager to make sense of the event, this chaos did not settle for a long time. It got carried on to school and my social science teacher. And she did such a tremendous job of putting things in perspective!

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She began by drawing a circle in the center of the black board. She told me the circle represented the world. She asked me to fill in all the things that I felt were part of the world. Just as a little kid would, I filled in water, land, mountains, people, my family, my dog, and other things. I distinctly remember writing India in it. And then she drew a stick figure to the left of the circle and called it 'Nidhi'. She drew another stick figure on the right and called it by some other name. She filled the world with a few other things that she felt the other person might want in them. She then showed me that I was seeing one part of the world and called it 'my world', while this other person was

seeing another part of the world and so we were seeing two different dimensions of the same world. This, she said, was the problem. People were seeing two different realities in the same building (mosque and temple) and that's why they wanted to bring it down. Another 'eureka' moment – for the first time, I realized that the same event/action can have two very different thought processes behind the supposed rationale.

It felt extremely unnerving to me at that time, that there could be two groups of people believing in their own set of truths! As an adult, this has become so much more apparent and important – to realize that people operate from different contexts.

I was recently on an outdoor leadership course in the US and one incident transported me back in time. There I was, with a bunch of American youngsters, roughing it out in the wilderness for 60 days! The social dynamics of the team was challenging, to say the least. At one point, folks were even upset about my mannerisms and vocabulary – I did not say 'please' and 'thank you' at the drop of a hat, my expression of respect was less outwardly. And, can you believe it: this was discussed for over 2 hours in our evening meeting! Aha...different contexts again! Was I under critique thanks to my different cultural upbringing? Do we, as Indians, express ourselves as much in words? Do we communicate differently? Is it right on my part to judge anybody for their observations when I realize that my whole team was operating from a different cultural context? Social science to my rescue – and there I was completely at peace with my team mates, having realized that there was actually a cultural gap, there was nothing personal or malicious in their observations. Yet another example of how my learning from the subject enabled me to be absolutely objective about what could well have been a delicate situation.

Talking about objectivity and different points of view, one vivid memory from school stands out; often the civics class used to be characterized by highly polemic positions by students – especially when it came to parliamentary democracy. Difficult questions about corruption, the elections, horse-trading, etc. were thrown in. But our teacher navigated through all of them beautifully. In hindsight, I realize that she gave us no answers but left the discussion open-ended. Often, we would chide her saying 'she ought to take a stand'. Isn't that what we were taught? Taking a stand almost seemed

central to survival in school - and life, I would say. As a child, often between friends one was asked 'tell me, whose friend are you, ours or theirs?' The answer would dictate one's social circle. My Math teacher's words about getting it 'right' or 'wrong' always hounded my limited imagination. I often wondered as a child, why can't there be two right answers? Why was the world always steeped in certainty? It was always either 'this' or 'that'.

Perhaps this is why I enjoyed my social studies class the most – here, I was allowed to make sense of two different and conflicting viewpoints without having to defend one or the other. There was no proof to completely negate my take on things. For example, in history, I always wondered what the common man was doing when these kings fought wars and expanded their territory. I spent much time wondering if every second citizen was a soldier in olden times. Were there ordinary people like us those days – or did you have to be a noble, craftsmen, soldier or Brahmin? Did people only fight wars or did they also get a chance to lead a peaceful life? Why is there so little heard about the 'dark' side of kings? Often, these were left to my imagination with very few pointers from my teacher. The beauty was that the teacher was open to my learning new things and changing course accordingly. I was not ridiculed for 'one right' or 'one wrong'. This diversity of rights and wrongs was extremely encouraging.

*I enjoyed my social studies class the most – here, I was allowed to make sense of two different and conflicting viewpoints without having to defend one or the other.*

Over time, the need to justify your stand/or your concept of 'right' and 'wrong' grew less. As years went by, and I started engaging with difficult questions like building dams, eradicating forests, shooting wildlife, relocating local people and tampering with conservation, my social science learning helped; it enabled me to appreciate different viewpoints and respect them. I was not compelled to stick to one

dogma and live by the same. The joy of navigating, making mistakes, seeing different aspects of life, assessing different viewpoints and learning the art of reconciliation, negotiation and problem-solving have been my biggest takeaways from the subject.

While I vouch that the subject has played a central role in

the way I relate to the world around me, it has informed my choices, interactions, relationships to keep alive within me a sense of self, humanity and choice. Often, it has demanded that I step out of my comfort zone; learn that people operate from different contexts and that my lens cannot be used to judge them since they have their own lens for the world. It has been an insightful journey indeed.

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As children, our world consisted of our immediate surroundings. It was only through our history lessons that we began to discover the complexities of the world we never saw. From an early age, we were able to learn about different cultures to our own from the Ancient Egyptians to the Vikings. It was through an array of learning tools ranging from songs and videos to textbooks and lessons that made history an inspiring and complete learning experience.

Perhaps our love for studying history would not have been so fundamental to our thinking if it weren't for the brilliant teachers that we encountered through our educational life. History lessons for many students are boring, lifeless and simply tedious; an hour filled with monotonous repetitive lecturing of the history teacher. However, our experience of history in school differed completely; our teachers were able to bring life to the subject with passion, invoking these feelings within us. Constantly hearing our teachers' praise encouraged us to participate in class more often.

Our classroom environment was not only a place where we learnt new subject matter, but also somewhere we questioned, challenged and re-assessed our views. The open atmosphere created by our teachers and peers alike gave us the confidence to engage freely with the topics. What we looked forward to the most was interacting in class debates and asserting exactly what we believed. Far from being off-putting, the manner in which our teachers challenged our views during debates led us to search for evidence to support our points further. We were lucky enough to have peers in our history classes who felt the same passion as us. We enjoyed interacting with one another, and the experience of arguing with each other helped us become assertive. We remember vividly how engrossed we became in arguing over whatever the issue was that day rather than fidgeting with our pencil cases - the usual pastime in other lessons. This desire and ability to express ourselves effectively is something that has stayed with us. We now feel confident to articulate our social and political views, and build up an argument which is grounded in evidence.

Many may find it hard to link how one's world view can be influenced by studying a social science such as history. Studying a social science such as history has made us question



the agenda of any institution and the selective information they distribute as a result of that. For example, when studying WW2, we came to see how the British government issued propaganda campaigns while censoring other sources in order to keep up the morale of the public. We often see instances of propaganda or censorship within our context today too – everything that we see is designed to influence us in some way. Thus, as a consumer of the media today, it becomes more important for us to question the agenda of every source, rather than mindlessly believe it. For example, reading newspaper articles from both left-wing and right-wing newspapers during the General election meant that we were able to note how political agenda affected the way in the way that the election was reported. Bearing this in mind, we could make informed decisions about who we chose to support and why.

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*Studying a social science such as history has made us question the agenda of any institution and the selective information they distribute as a result of that.*

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While in earlier years the focus on our history education was Britain, in later years we studied extra-European history too such as the Vietnam war, the Indian independence movement and modern America. Through this we explored the politics of power and the different ways it could be expressed – whether through colonisation, segregation or violence. Learning about the complexities of these world events helped us better understand the political situation and conflicts that we see in the world today. One of the topics that particularly struck us was the salt march led by Gandhi in the 1930s. While Gandhi led this march, it was a

success because of those who supported it. It occurred to us that change does not happen because of one important person, but because of millions of people. From the forces behind the salt marches, to the millions who supported Martin Luther King's Washington March, we began to see history as not just about leaders but more about people and how they choose to act.

It became clear to us that history is not just a subject within the classroom but evident within our lives. The advantages of studying this in a city where resources are so readily available sparked life into the forgotten past. Our experience of history was enhanced by current affairs and exploring primary artefacts in public libraries and museums. We went on numerous trips throughout school. We still remember seeing the very writing desk Henry VIII used hundreds of years ago. We almost felt him in the exhibition, and could picture him writing at this desk while us visitors tried to piece

together the strands of history and create his story.

A mixture of all the various learning tools has made history so fascinating to us. In the classroom, the role of our teachers was paramount in fuelling our enthusiasm of the subject, stimulating us to delve deeper and learn more whilst the vast amounts of resources outside the classroom led us to develop how our perception of current events. However, we are still aware even now that our knowledge of history is still vastly insufficient to give us an informed view of the world around us. This knowledge itself is important, because it means that we are always searching for ways to learn more and have a more holistic picture of the world around us. Whether it is living through historical moments or contemplating future changes that are to take place, our experience with the subject has left a clear mark upon our philosophy. Upon reflection, studying this complex social science has, and continues to affect, both our thoughts and actions.

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The social sciences are a very important and amazing field of study. A division of science, social sciences embrace a wide variety of topics from anthropology to sociology. The social sciences cover a wide range of topics that are crucial for understanding human experience/behavior in groups or as individuals.

By definition, social science is the branch of science that deals with the human facets of the natural world (the other two branches of science are natural science and formal science). Some social sciences are law, economics, and psychology, to name a few. The social sciences have existed since the time of the ancient Greeks, and have evolved ever since. Over time, social sciences have grown and gained a big following. Some colleges, like Yale University, have chosen to focus more on the social sciences than other subjects. The social sciences are more based on qualitative data and not as black-and-white as the other sciences, so even though they are more open to interpretation, the social sciences are still as scientific as the rest. Unfortunately, they have also not been as widely embraced as a science as natural science and formal science have, but are still as much a science as natural and formal science.

Law is a good example of social science. There is a lot more to law than most people may think. Lawyers have to know all of the federal laws, all of the laws of the state they may be living in, strong communication skills, and a multitude of critical thinking. The amount of critical thinking alone required for studying law is enough to qualify as a science. Lawyers are required to have a great deal of understanding of a great deal of things. Even though lawyers are not required to know physics or chemistry or anything of the like, they are still as scientifically knowledgeable as, say, Isaac Newton

or Madame Curie. That is, in their own way.

A better example of a social science than law may be economics. Economics is, in a word, finances.

Economics is the study of how money changes, the rate at which it changes, and how it potentially could change and the rate at which it would. Even though economics does not deal with science directly, it is definitely equally scientific. About 50-60% of colleges require calculus to study business or economics. Calculus is also required in some science fields, like physics or chemistry. Since economics and science both require calculus, economics is still a science.

Perhaps the most scientific of the social sciences is psychology. Psychology is the study of human behaviors, how they change, mental disorders, and basically covers everything from how people behave to the emotional side of people. The field of psychology deserves as much credit as a science because of all that is required to study it. To study psychology requires biology, chemistry, and statistics, and also an advanced psychology class. Biology, chemistry, and (sometimes) statistics are also required in many science fields like engineering. With the common ground of requirements that psychology and science share, psychology is every bit as much a science field as actual science fields are.

The social sciences are a very important and amazing part of life and the world around us. While they are not as scientific and may be more abstract, the social sciences should still be more embraced than they are, because only by knowing people can you know the world around you.



**Manas Sarma** was born in 1994 in Lowell, Massachusetts. Currently in 11th grade at Shrewsbury High school, he now resides in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts with his parents and younger brother. His favorite activities are playing outside with friends when weather-permitting and watching his favorite sitcoms "George Lopez" and "The Big Bang Theory." He can be reached at [mnsarma@hotmail.com](mailto:mnsarma@hotmail.com)





**SECTION-F**

**Film Review and Resource Kit**

**Review of Young Historians. -A video series on history for children by Deepa Dhanraj.**

**H**ow do you teach history to primary school children? What is the experience that children should get in a history class? What is the importance of teaching history to children? What preparation does a history teacher need to do before entering the classroom? What are some elements of a good history class? How can you make history class interesting and meaningful? If history is not dates and fights between Kings, then what is history? These are some of the questions our teachers usually have. There are many attempts by different people to answer these questions. People have responded to these questions through articles, books, lectures, workshops and discussions. Deepa Dhanraj has attempted answering the above questions very meaningfully in the medium that she is good at- video films. She has produced a series of 9 video films-- **Young Historians**. She travels with a group of primary school children capturing the process of their understanding of history in different places with the help of a creative teacher.

Deepa has produced a video series which is very unique. It is a series of 9 films each of half an hour duration. While each one can be viewed independently, it can be viewed as a whole for a better and larger understanding. I have watched these films many times with different audiences, with different purposes. As a film, it educates and entertains any layperson. For the children watching these films it is an exciting experience, teaching them some history in a very enjoyable way taking them virtually to these places of historical importance with lots of fun and challenge. For the teachers and teacher educators it gives both the subject knowledge and pedagogy of teaching history.

The script by Kotaganahalli Ramaih is deceptively simple. A group of 16 children are engaged in studying history through exploration and active engagement with a dynamic and creative teacher; the teacher successfully facilitates the entire process with the help of practitioners, experts, researchers and performers. The choice of the subject, the active participation of the children, the larger than life locations, and different artistic forms used to elicit the needed responses, all these make viewing this series a pleasant and rich experience.

### **Our Family History**

(30:59mts)

The series starts with the children finding the history of their own family. In the beginning the children meet the folk historian-



Yelavaru, who

has created and maintained history of different families. It gives us a glimpse of the process of creating oral history and singing it to the families concerned. The children meet their family members and from them construct their family history. They draw the family tree with the inputs from the elders. The selection of the children belonging to the dalit group makes a very strong statement. The family members recount how in olden days they had to carry in a pot the night soil and the sewage water of the upper caste on their head.

“

*For the children watching these films is an exciting experience, teaching them some history in a very enjoyable way taking them virtually to these places of historical importance with lots of fun and challenge. For the teachers and teacher educators it gives both the subject knowledge and pedagogy of teaching history.*

”

**Our Village History** (31:30mts) In this unit the children go to the village to speak to their elders and collect details about some of the important aspects of the village - an upper caste well, a old temple and the granary. The elders share their experience of the great famine and quit India movement of 1942. They also speak of the introduction of the ration after the World War 2. The process of collecting the data from the people and consolidating it in the group later by the children through discussion, arguments, refutation, and verification is very interesting.

**Archeology and Sculpture** (30:40mts) It starts with the facilitating teacher spreading a few household material in front of the children and asking them to explain the nature of the household, the number of people and their occupation, food habits etc. What follows is a very animated discussion by the children. Through discussion, challenge and guessing they come to some conclusion with the help of the evidences available. Later an expert helps the children understand the life of the people thousands of years back with the help of the stone tools evacuated from the site in N.W Karnataka. In the last part, the children visit Aihole and learn history through the sculptures.

**Learning History Through Inscription** (29:42mts) The children go to the site of Badami and Pattadakallu and unearth history through the inscriptions found in temples and ruined monuments. An expert explains and demonstrates the process of reading the inscription by copying it on the paper. In the end the teacher explains the multidimensional role of the temples. He explains how these temples were a center for worship, entertainment, trade, business, justice and education.

**Sea Routes** (29:59mts) In this unit the children go to coastal Karnataka to find out about the sea routes. A local teacher helps them to trace the route the traders would take with the help of a globe and mark it in a map. They travel in a boat and find out from the sailor the process of finding the route in the deep sea. Towards the end they come to a ship building yard and speak to the builder and gather information about the process of building a ship

**Trade and History** (31:16mts) A local expert in the field helps the children understand about trading that was vibrant in Basrur, an ancient port of India. He helps the children understand the rise and fall of that port due to the various forces- natural and manmade. They visit the local Jain Basadi and through the sculpture try to find out the connections and relationship they might have had with the countries like China, Africa and Middle East. A carving of Chinese Dragon and African Giraffe in a Jain Basadi of Moodabidri is very exciting for the children. A coin collector helps the children construct history through the coins.

**Jainism and Gomateshwara** (29:00mts) The unit starts with the narration of Bahubali's story by a story teller (Bhavani). The children visit the monolithic stone statue of Bahubali in Srawanabelagola and find out from a sculptor

of Karkala the detail and mechanics of sculpturing statues. They visit the thousand pillars Basadi in Moodabidri and get a glimpse of Jainism through the rendering of Pampa's Adipurana by a Gamaka singer. The discussion on how literature provides us some clues to construct history is very insightful.

**Jataka Tales and Buddhism** (29:40mts) The unit starts with a life story of Gautama Buddha. Two interesting stories from the Jataka tales (THE SWAN and the GAUTAMA AND DEVADATTA) are narrated to the children with the help of beautiful illustrations. The travelogue of Husen Tsang is used to understand the university that was there at Nalanda. This piece is animated with beautiful illustrations. In the end the children write their travelogue and discuss the use and elements of a good travelogue.

**History Vachanas Reveal** (27:59mts) In this last unit, the focus is on understanding history from the Vachanas created by the vachanakars of the Bhakti movement of 12th Century. A local team sings selected Vachanas of Basavanna and the children ask questions to understand the background and context of the Vachanas to construct the situation that led ordinary people to plunge in to the movement which fought against all forms of discrimination and worked towards a society which was **just, humane and equitable**.

*The choice of the topics is made with a lot of care and concern. Visiting the sites and of interacting with the experts and practitioners makes the film rich and rewarding.*

The content of the film is very well worked out. The essence of what has to be taught in history class comes across very powerfully. The choice of the topics is made with a lot of care and concern. Visiting the sites and of interacting with the experts and practitioners makes the film rich and rewarding. The team has exploited the medium aptly. The frames, color and the lights all together makes some of the pieces look like a good painting. The places they have chosen to visit are very rich and full of varieties hence viewing the entire series

is not boring and does not tire one.

Deepa has used a variety of forms very effectively. Visiting actual sites, meeting elders and family members, teachers transacting specific topics, discussion with practitioners, inputs by experts and researchers, some of the media she has used creatively to convey the messages are narration, storytelling, folk songs, colorful illustrations, animations, probing questions by children and the teachers which make us pause and think. In the film there are plenty of lighter moments like children watching the monkeys playing. There

are patches of silence here and there, which is refreshing and helps us to think and relook at the issue discussed. The transition from one topic to the other is very smooth and logical.

The film very strongly drives home the point that teaching history need not be miserably boring and confined to remembering the dates the kings fought with each other. Children deserve the best and thank you Deepa for giving them the best.

Produced and Directed by: Deepa Dhanraj

Cinematography: Navaroze Contractor

Script: Kotaganahalli Ramaih

Facilitating teacher: Chegga Reddy

Presented by: EDC and DSERT

Produced in 2005 and presented in 2007

The film is in Kannada with English subtitles

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**Umashanker Periodi** is Head, Child-Friendly School Initiative, Azim Premji Foundation. He has over twenty-five years experience in the development sector. He has contributed extensively to the National Literacy Mission as well as towards tribal education in BR Hills, Karnataka. He is also the President of Karnataka State Trainers' Collective. He can be contacted at [periodi@azimpremjifoundation.org](mailto:periodi@azimpremjifoundation.org)



*This resource kit is not by any means an exhaustive one. It has been put together with the help of several individuals who work in the field of education, all of whom we would like to sincerely thank for their time and effort.*

## A. Organisations that Work on Social Sciences at School Level - On Curriculum and Material Development Issues

SL. No	Name of Organisation	Location
1.	Eklavya	Bhopal, MP
2.	Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi	Almora, Uttarakhand
3.	Nirantar	New Delhi
4.	Khoj	Mumbai
5.	Avehi Abacus	Mumbai
6.	Swanirbhar, Organisation based in Noth 24 Pargana	West Bengal
7.	SAHMAT, Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust	New Delhi
8.	Vidya Bhawan Society	Udaipur, Rajasthan
9.	Digantar	Jaipur, Rajasthan
10.	Pravah	Delhi

## B. Schools that have used Innovative Methods to Teach Social Science

SL. No	Name of School	Location
1.	The School	Chennai
2.	Rishi Valley School, (Social Science and History curriculum for classes 4 to 7)	Madanapalle
3.	Shishu Van	Bombay
4.	Center for Learning	Bangalore, Hyderabad
5.	Aadharshila	Sendhwa, MP
(Most of these schools have their websites where contacts and materials can be accessed)		

## C. Publishers in Social Sciences

- **Granthshilpi** - New Delhi
- **Eklavya**, Bhopal
- **Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti**, Delhi
- **NCERT**, New Delhi
- **Publication Division**, New Delhi
- **National Book Trust**, New Delhi
- **Children's Book Trust**, New Delhi
- **Books on Social Science education by Sage Publications**, New Delhi
- **Books published for Children by Oxford University Press**, New Delhi
- **People's History Series**, Tulika Publications, Chennai
- **Katha**, New Delhi
- **Tara**, Chennai
- **Navayana**, New Delhi

#### D. Some Useful Books

- **Samajik Adhayayan** - 6, 7 and 8 - Textbooks developed and published by Eklavya, Bhopal (Hindi)
- **Textbook of Social Science** for class 6, 7 and 8 (English, 1994): Eklavya, Bhopal.
- **Textbooks of Social Science** for classes 6 & 7, developed by Eklavya for Lok Jumbish Parishad, Rajasthan, 1999/2000.
- **Samajik Adhayayan Sikshan** - Ek Prayog, published by Eklavya
- **Hamari Dharati, Hamara Jeewan**, textbooks for classes 6, 7 & 8, Uttarakhand Sewa Nidhi, Almora
- **Workbooks** for Rajasthan textbooks for Classes 6, 7 & 8.
- **Workbooks** of Haryana for Class 6, 7 & 8 (2008).
- **Text Book of Chattisgarh** for classes 3 to 8: EVS and Social Sciences, SCERT, Raipur.
- **Textbooks for Ladakh Hill Council** on Environmental Studies Part II for classes 4 & 5
- **Our Tribal Ancestors** - Prehistory for Indian Schools, part 1 & 2, Rishi Valley Education Series
- **Sangam Age and Age of the Pallavas** - TVS Education Society & Macmillan
- **The Young Geographer series**, Haydn Evans, Wheaton – Pergamon
- **Geography Direct** – Collins Educational
- **Khushi-Khushi** for class 3, 4, 5: Eklavya, Bhopal
- **Apne Aas pas**, textbook for classes 4 & 5, Digantar, Jaipur
- **Kuchh Karen**, Vidya Bhawan Society, Udaipur
- **Textbooks** of NCERT for class 3 to 8: NCERT, New Delhi
- **Textbooks** of EVS and Social Science for classes 3 to 8, SCERT, Delhi

#### E. Some Resource & Reference Books

- **Itihas ke Srote**, bhag – 1, A resource book for Teachers, published by Eklavya
- **People, Places and Change: An Introduction to World Cultures** by Berry and Ford
- **Puffin History of India series** by Puffin Books, Delhi
- **Report of the seminar on Environment Studies** (1995): Vidya Bhawan Society
- **Social Science Learning in Schools** - Documentation of the Eklavya's social science experiment, Edited by Prof Poonam Batra and published by SAGE
- **Teaching Social Science in Schools** - by Alex M George and Amman Madan, Published by SAGE
- **Walk With Me** – A guide for Inspiring Citizenship Action – Pravah, New Delhi
- **Writings of Teachers Ideas for the Classroom** – East West Books, Madras
- **Social Studies Instruction in the Elementary School** by Richard E Servey
- **Learning from Conflict** by Prof Krishna Kumar
- **Turning the Pot Tilling the Land** by Kancha ILAIAH – Navayana Books
- **Different Tales Series** – Anveshi and D.C. Books, Kerala

#### F. Localised Resource Books as Models for Creation

- **Our City Delhi** – Narayani Gupta - Oxford University Press
- **School and Society and Area Study of Mylapore** – Tara Publishing

## G. Journals

- **Sandarbh** (For Teachers)
- **Vimarsh** ( for Teachers)
- **Chakmak** (for children)
- **Contemporary Education Dialogue`**
- **Economic and Political Weekly**
- **Teacher Talk, A Journal of the TVS Educational Society**
- **Journal of the Krishnamurthy Schools**

## H. Films

- **The Young Historians** – Series of films by Ms Deepa Dhanraj
- **Bharat Ki Khoj**, Tele Serial produced & directed by Mr Shyam Benegal
- **Bharat Ki Chhap**, films on Indian History
- **Naata**(on Communalism) TISS Mumbai (Anjali Monteiro)
- **India Untouched** – Stalin (on Untouchability in India)
- **War and Peace** – Anand Patwardhan
- **Making of the Mahatma** – Shyam Benegal
- **Ambedkar**
- **Nanook of the North (on the life of Eskimos)**

## I. Websites

- <http://www.neok12.com/History-of-India.htm> - has many videos on topics in social science
- Eklavya publications, <http://www.eklavya.in>
- Sangati interactive teaching learning kits, <http://avehiabacus.org/about.html><http://schools.indiawaterportal.org/>
- Me and my City – sunitha Nadhamuni and Rama Errabelli  
Janagraha Center for Citizenship and Democracy, [www.janaagraha.org](http://www.janaagraha.org)
- Water related projects and resources, <http://schools.indiawaterportal.org/>
- Heritage related resources  
The Indian National Trust for National and Cultural Heritage, <http://www.intach.org/>
- Curriculum based story books: IETS publications  
<http://www.ilfsets.com/solutions.asp?secid=1&menuid=3&smenuid=1&childid=1&subchildid=2&pageid=345>
- <http://www.worldsocialscience.org/>, the site of the International Social Science Council.
- UNESCO's Social and Human Sciences page, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/> and Education page, <http://www.unesco.org/en/education>

- The IEA's Civic Education Study link is, <http://www.iea.nl/icces.html>.
- Bombay Natural History Society, <http://www.bnhs.org>
- Kalpavriksha Environment Action Group, <http://www.kalpavriksha.org>
- Center for Environment Education, India, <http://www.ceeindia.org/cee/index.html>
- Down to Earth Magazine, <http://www.downtoearth.org.in>
- Center for Science and Environment, India, <http://www.cseindia.org>

**Some other Important Websites**

<http://www.school.discovery.com>

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com>

<http://www.incredibleindia.org>

<http://www.animalplanet.co.uk>

<http://www.greenpeace.org>

<http://www.britanica.com>

<http://www.arvindguptatoys.com>





Azim Premji  
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A Newsletter from  
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