

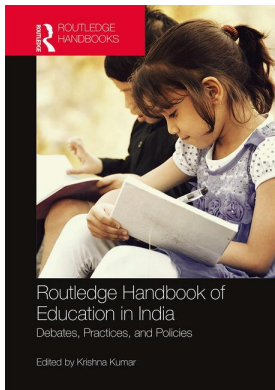
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### **The teaching of social sciences in schools and colleges in India**

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# The teaching of social sciences in schools and colleges in India

*Hari Vasudevan*

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This brief chapter examines the teaching in India of a range of subjects associated with the social sciences – history, geography, political science, sociology, and economics. It focuses on their teaching in schools and at the first degree level, in universities (Jamia Millia, Jadavpur, etc.), or colleges affiliated to universities (Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, Delhi, etc.), locating developments against an international background beginning with India's late colonial experiences. The chapter traces the limited sense of the social sciences as an integrated domain of study at the time of India's Independence and its slow evolution towards the 1960s. In school and college/early university, though, the child/young person did not find reference to the composite space in any meaningful manner. The domain was often used as a descriptive category well into the mid-1990s, with substantial value inflection loading its treatment at the school level. Initiatives took shape in the mid-2000s in India's National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) moving in new directions. These did not find any serious uptake in universities, where training in the categories and information necessary for research orientation were standard until recently. The chapter ends with a short evaluation of later developments associated with the Right to Education Act (RTE) and the onset of privatisation in school and university education.

The chapter reviews the standard literature on Indian education, including government committee and commission reports.<sup>1</sup> An important part of the argument will be that the position of 'social science' in the Indian educationist's imagination has often differed from the way the domain has been represented abroad, where stress falls on the significance of the domain for a 'modern' society and the practical value of the subjects for such a society. In India, orientation towards values at school, and research at university, has been standardised, without flexibility in aims and processes. Social science education receives a more 'holistic' and practical inflection in special institutes that are concerned with specific goals, giving these a special role in the Indian educational system; but in these institutions, the larger aspects of the subjects are not considered worthy of attention.

## India's encounters with social sciences: the global background of the early/mid-twentieth century

### *Global 'social sciences' education and significance for India: the British example*

India's engagement with social science teaching came through educational initiatives taken during the late colonial period (i.e. from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century) in Indian schools and colleges.<sup>2</sup> The initiatives were given a different direction and shape after Independence in 1947.

In the disciplines making up the social sciences, Indian inputs and networks took shape in the inter-war period. In history, these centred on the Asiatic societies, the Archaeological Survey of India, and independent scholarship among groups in growing universities and their constituent colleges. An inter-war generation of lead scholars included figures such as Nilakanta Shastri and Jadunath Sarkar in history. In geography, the Survey of India exercised a prominent hold. In economics, the Indian Economic Association stimulated diverse research, while in sociology, the works of G.S. Ghurye, Nirmal Bose, and others had established a trend. In political science, constitutions and administration attracted scholars. The subjects were associated with a self-conscious 'nationalist' scholarship that touched the study of language and literature as well, and developed the agenda for education in science and technology.

This was a domain of discipline-specific research. In the education system, the work suggested itself for attention at universities, for higher degrees (a two-year MA or PhD), or at colleges for lower degrees (a three-year BA Honours and two-year Pass course). In preparation for this, research-based literature was included in intermediate or pre-university courses that followed nine or ten years of school. In practice, degree education came down to teaching of individual subjects at various depths, where focus fell on a cardinal subject or subjects and the teaching was based on research literature.

At school, history and geography were taught through the equivalent of upper primary and secondary stages, with some attention to civics, where administration, constitutions, and good public habits were the stock in trade. Education rose to its higher levels with a firm disciplinary orientation (focused on language, mathematics, general science, history, geography, and forms of civics). In so far as social sciences were recognised here, they meant history, geography, and civics. Competence was graded according to depth in terms of information as well as a general awareness of the terms and categories of analysis.

This approach to teaching the subjects of the social sciences had its reference point in the British system of education. Here, education at school and university level in two subjects of the social sciences – history and geography<sup>3</sup> – was well established, although economics came to attract attention by the 1920s. A composite space of social science education was seldom involved, though interactions across disciplines did occur, while the academic acknowledgement of this as a domain of study was evident (Seligman and Johnson 1938). History and geography were primarily taught as subjects that contributed to identity and as guides to appropriate social behaviour and basic practical wisdom.

After 1945, social sciences as subjects for study and research developed vigorously in universities. Acknowledgement of this domain for school instruction gained visibility. Economics and sociology were seen as subjects that aided policy – a status that political economy had acquired in the nineteenth century, assisted by inputs from history and geography. The subjects associated with the social sciences were registered as crucial to the development of 'modern man' (Institut de l'UNESCO de l'éducation 1962). The legacy, however, of different disciplines, exercised its own influence.

### *Global 'social sciences' education and significance for India*

Much of what took place in Britain followed from ideas concerning education and the skills essential for policy. These ideas have taken on new forms, and the last half-century has seen the assertion in the UK, Australasia, Western Europe, and the USA of a programme for social sciences teaching at the school level in preparation for an integrated approach to the disciplines in higher education. This coincides with a quest for a 'holistic' approach to education at both levels. It also recognises the coincidence of many questions that attract economics, political science, sociology, history, and geography. How social sciences as a unified branch of knowledge may address such common ground is still in doubt, though, since the dimensions of such a 'grouping' have not attracted consensus.

Persistent imbalances have remained.<sup>4</sup> Questions concerning pedagogy, and the way in which school education may blend into higher education, have been posed in dealing with the treatment of subjects pertaining to the social sciences in education (Institut de l'UNESCO de l'éducation 1962). In Europe, there is no uniformity of approach to school curricula as a consequence of such questions and diverse legacies. But the Bologna Process has attempted to create a degree of conformity. These perspectives have been communicated to India and other sections of the developing world directly, through bilateral interaction, or through UNESCO.

### **Indian institutions of school and university education and the social sciences I: from Independence to 2004**

#### *General*

After 1947, roughly three phases are discernible in Indian programmes that have evolved for teaching subjects pertaining to the social sciences in schools and, at the graduate level, at university or affiliated colleges. The first phase ran into the 1960s, and involved the emergence of social sciences beyond basic history and geography as a necessary focus of attention; the second phase involved important changes of the late 1960s and 1970s, initially understating the value of social science teaching in the quest to promote education, acknowledging that value with time, but uniformly involving a top-down approach to pedagogy. This approach was consolidated in the 1980s and faced challenges in the 1990s. The most recent phase involves the initiatives of the 2000s and after.

A variety of notions shaped these trends. At the time of Independence, existing school and university education in its prevailing form was associated with the colonial establishment: but subjects taught were considered fit to serve the goals of a new nation once content was altered in the direction of a 'nationalist' bent, and the process of education was reoriented. In the language that framed what was to be done, the conceptual focus was on how 'Eastern' or 'Western' this policy was or how 'colonial' the past had been. Such issues made up a nationalist discourse on education before Independence and came to influence later policy (see Basu 1974; Nurullah and Naik 1943; also Ministry of Education 1963: 29). Nationalist perspectives in general were varied. They ranged from 'official', 'Gandhian', and socialist positions concerning the best path for a goal of 'development' (Zachariah 2006) to a celebration of the practices and ideas of ancient India and piecemeal perspectives that centred on the practices of different communities.

Throughout, the importance of promotion of values was highlighted in social debate, and attracted attention in overall policy documents, but remained understated within the scope of the discipline-centred education system. Hence affirmative action, equality, and the meaning of 'secularism' were called into question at the school level through watch words, but with no

clarity as to where the social sciences stood in the promotion of such values. With time, coping with social programmes was associated with adjustment of numbers in schools, in universities, etc., and the professionalisation of teachers in a material sense. This habit of the mind was reflected in the text of the Kothari Commission's report (1965).

Beyond this, subjects pertaining to the social sciences were called on to deal with challenges that were specific to each subject. History, which had been shot through with implications concerning the superior nature of British rule as a path to a just and 'modern' society, was met with questions from nationalist historiography that had developed a strong professional ethos by 1947. Geography was oriented towards physical geography in line with the needs of the Survey of India and the colonial government; the subject was required to change focus. Economics evolved strong nationalist and developmental dimensions by 1947, though the subject had been shaped overall by debates prevalent in the UK. Hence, the 1950s were marked by tinkering with instruction in subjects pertaining to the social sciences – projecting nationalist preference and thinking in history, economics and sociology, and the new approach to geography symbolised by the National Atlas over the Survey of India.

To crown this edifice of a national orientation and inspire modern research, the Delhi School of Economics was established by V.K.R.V. Rao as a special social science research institution in 1949. This would set goals oriented differently from those of mere nationalist enterprise, associated with the Calcutta University project to encourage research, following the institution of the postgraduate departments in 1912.

### *From Independence until the formation of the NCERT and the UGC*

In 1947, substantial variety marked the framework within which schools and universities existed. They differed in institutional make-up and teaching in the various directly ruled provinces of British India (Bengal, Bombay, Madras, etc.) and the princely states. Nationalist enterprise in education also varied regionally. These variations continued after 1947, during the period of integration of the princely states and the first moves towards the formation of linguistic states (completed in 1956). Institutions sought to introduce a degree of uniformity through the Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE) and the Inter-University Board. But their range was limited. According to the Constitution, education was on a state list – i.e. the state governments had the major responsibilities and rights in this area. Religious and private education added to the list. The result was a large variation in the education system over the years following Independence, even if the Union government attempted to set the tenor of what was to be done via commissions and committees and the Ministry of Education.

Social science teaching varied in accordance with this set-up. In schools it was strictly non-constructivist. No allowance was made in the textbook material or the method of teaching for received ideas and means to engage with them. Education was seen as an interactive process only in so far as it tested whether the student had absorbed the lesson or lecture and wished to raise questions concerning this. The approach was evident in the didactic textbooks. Illustrations were used as back-up rather than as starting points for a discussion; questions set out to examine absorption of the material provided. The classroom test, or the terminal or annual examination, were the means of evaluation.

Evaluation in higher education came in the annual examination. Instruction in universities and affiliated colleges centred teaching through lectures, with a short reading list for follow-up. Syllabi reflected research in nationalist circles – often projected at discipline-centred congresses.

Immediately after 1947, the first Committee on Secondary Education (1948) focused on the language of school teaching – seeking to delimit the use of English and enhance the use of a

'federal language' to mark a departure from a colonial status; but teaching of specific subjects arose for comment almost immediately. Social science subjects were given importance and serious attention in the Radhakrishnan Committee on University Education of 1948–49:

Everyone should know something of the society in which he lives, the great forces that mould contemporary civilisation. History, economics, politics, social psychology, anthropology belong to the group of social sciences. Whatever may be our specialised field, a general understanding of our social environment is essential.

*(Ministry of Education 1962)*

A broad approach to nationalism in education and research at the university level was also stressed:

We must give up the fatal obsession of the perfection of the past... When we are hypnotised by our past achievements ... we become fetish worshippers.... All that man has done is very little compared with what he is destined to achieve.

The Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar Commission on Secondary Education (1952–53) also showed a major interest in the area (Ministry of Education 1953). It stressed that an awareness of 'social studies' was important for citizenship. This coincided with contemporary debates on social studies in international circles. The upshot of these suggestions, during the late 1950s, was that while subjects pertaining to the social sciences continued to be pursued separately at school, they came to be seen as part of the domain of social studies, and were projected together as a source of social values. The Commission's ideas were unexceptionable:

Social Studies is meant to cover the ground traditionally associated with History, Geography, Economics, Civics, etc. If the teaching of these separate subjects only imparts miscellaneous and unrelated information and does not throw any light on or provide insight into social conditions and problems or create the desire to improve the existing state of things, their educative significance will be negligible.

In its section on methods of education, its final report emphasised the significance of habits of cultivation of thought and the complex relationship between teacher and student:

Any method, good or bad, links up the teacher and his pupils into an organic relationship with constant mutual interaction: it reacts not only on the mind of the students but on their entire personality, their standards of work and judgment, their intellectual and emotional equipment, their attitudes and values.

*(Ibid.: 88ff)*

From this, the Commission worked towards recommendations for education based on activities, and projects as much as on lectures and examination. Taking up the problem of poor textbooks in circulation, the Commission also set the foundation for the production of national textbooks (*ibid.*: 79ff).

Much of this concurred with the general notions that were the focus of the UNESCO members in Delhi in 1954. But it differed from these notions in that the 'social studies' mentioned here did not wholly overlap with the idea of 'social sciences' that was projected for the UNESCO focus – political science, economics, sociology, and social anthropology. These

disciplines were judged to be those that ‘made a scientific analysis of social systems’, with history and human geography important outsiders (Marshal 1954). The Mudaliar Commission involved these subjects in a wider association with values education.

As a consequence of the Commission’s injunctions, when it came to schools, training of teachers noted social studies as the category to which history, geography, economics, and sociology belonged, and devoted a degree of importance to them accordingly. States were to teach the subjects individually, but grouped them together and found a place for them in the curriculum. Official sources were clear that these commitments were intended to ‘(i) develop a broad human interest in the progress of mankind and of India in particular (ii) to develop a proper understanding of the social and geographical environment and awaken an urge to improve it and (iii) to develop a sense of citizenship’.<sup>5</sup>

Initially, a challenge to these ideas came from an important source. The scope and aims of social studies were mainly defined by universities. The research orientation of the universities determined the fate of social science teaching in schools. The secondary school stage involved preparation for the university course and mirrored the concerns of the universities, which set up the requirements for the school-leaving or matriculation examinations. They were also responsible for the pre-university or intermediate courses that preceded the degree courses. Unusual projects existed: the Shantiniketan Project, the Jamia project, the Krishnamurthi Foundation Schools, etc. But the regular approach to the social sciences was that set by the dominant university school course systems of Madras, Bombay, Calcutta, Punjab, and 20 or so other universities that came after them.

Responding to nationalist awareness, both before and after Independence, a ‘national’ orientation in the syllabi was evident in the large involvement of Bengali, Assamese, Hindi, and Urdu textbooks among those recommended, for instance, for the Calcutta University matriculation examination. This was in addition to the standard books oriented towards physical geography and ‘school’ history in English (University of Calcutta 1960). The random, often contradictory, mixture demonstrated the scant attention to what was being taught and how.

This teaching would lead to a firmer academic orientation at the next level, where the intermediate or pre-university course was set by the university with a stress on groups. The syllabi and curricula at this level were oriented to university syllabi and were deeply discipline-centred, with little cross-referencing, except in so far as a subject combination required it. Hence, in Calcutta University in 1960, the pre-university syllabus included a paper on ‘Elements of Economics and Civics’. This had two distinct domains, even if they referred to each other. One section of the syllabus included an outline of economics as a discipline and routine disciplinary discussions of the nature of money, the character of demand, the determination of wages, and so on; a second section dealt with constitutional government, law and liberty, party systems, and so on – a common area in discussions of the economic functions of government and the character of the planned economy.

At the level of the first degree, these subjects were firmly bifurcated and there was little or no discussion of government and its significance in the economics course. It was noticeable that the pre-university course in history was general; the subjects were general history, Indo-Islamic and world history, Islamic history and culture, and ancient history. Even though economic history was acknowledged as a subject, it was only taught in the economics syllabus (Ministry of Education 1953: 1ff, 25ff).

There were variations in other universities. But the bottom line here was that academic orientation at the school/early college level was directed, in the case of what may be termed social science (primarily history and geography), towards a university orientation. A determination to move away from this had been expressed in government commissions; but little had occurred that was of substance.

In higher education, meanwhile, the value of the subjects that made up the social sciences had been recognised. How they were to be taught was linked to the research agenda of a small but increasing number of universities. The Delhi School of Economics set a model, but given the variety on the nationalist agenda, this was not invoked, even in the central universities outside Delhi – Visva Bharati, Benaras Hindu University, and Aligarh Muslim University. The existence of private colleges added to the variety of what was being taught.

### *After the formation of the UGC and NCERT*

Many of these approaches continued to thrive under the planned economy after the Second Plan (1956–61), but the profile altered structurally and conceptually. Structurally, the universities ceased to determine the way school education would be shaped. State Boards of Secondary Education (BSEs) were established as new states came into existence or shortly afterwards. These provided the space for public evaluation of the work of the host of public and private schools that the planned economy sponsored directly and indirectly.

Attempts were made to regulate and assist institutions through professional means. School instruction as a domain of its own came to be projected nationally with the formation of the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1956, NCERT (1961) and its spin-off in 1973, the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), as well as NCERT affiliates in the states (SCERTs).

### *Approaches to social sciences in schools during the 1960s and 1970s*

In the course of the 1960s, two contradictory trends were discernible as far as social science school education was concerned. An overwhelming focus on industrial development focused on technology and science and pushed for an increase in their reach numerically and socially within the education system, even as the social sciences came to be regarded by policy-makers as ‘also rans’. Science and technology subjects were promoted with vigour at the cost of the social sciences. The spirit of the time was expressed in the Kothari Commission Report (1964–66), which said little concerning non-technical education, except in a rhetorical manner (Ministry of Education 1970). The Report also reflected a greater concern with teachers’ salaries and professional requirements than education – partly the result of the Union government’s direct responsibility for schools in the new Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan or Central Schools Network established in 1963, and a concern with increasing enrolment in central universities.

NCERT, however, took a keen interest in social sciences teaching, publishing model textbooks from the end of the 1960s and generating debates in the newly founded *Journal of Indian Education*. Programmes for school education set out here were substantially followed by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), giving NCERT and its output a national reach that no other institution had. NCERT books were preferred when they finally appeared. Programmes were run by a number of State BSEs, but a number used the CBSE as a reference point. The main Board that had authority equal to that of the CBSE was the Indian School Certificate Board (ISCB) that worked with textbooks produced privately, but its range was narrower than the CBSE and State Boards.

Wariness concerning books produced by private presses and approved by the mass of public and private schools was partly the reason for this turn of events. The K.G. Sodayin Committee on textbooks pointed out major problems with a host of standard books – and their handling of history and religious and minority issues (Ministry of Education 1969). Officials became concerned about this situation and found in the NCERT books a means of dealing with the problem.



In these circumstances, despite the marginal role played by social science education in projections of education policy at the time, a spate of textbook writing was generated within NCERT and important books for history and geography were produced, as well as for economics and sociology (the latter being taught from the 1970s at the higher secondary level). Social sciences here, though, came down to a descriptive grouping. The term had no analytical or pedagogic force. The subjects were variously described as ‘environmental studies’ or ‘social studies’ in different states.

Textbook production, especially in history, involved major figures of the universities: Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra, R.S. Sharma, and Satish Chandra, the chairman of the UGC. The output gave significance and weight to subjects that had acquired weight at the university level, and where academics felt they had achieved merit stripped of colonial dependency – a status that made their work worthy of dissemination (UNESCO 1974). The textbooks began to appear from 1968, most coming in the late 1970s.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, the new books claimed to be scientifically accurate: arguing for a place on par with the hard sciences and technology. They built firmly on the nationalist narrative, but with a degree of social content.<sup>7</sup> Each discipline – history, geography, political science, economics, and sociology – followed its university paradigm. There was no attempt to address questions that were of mutual importance in any manner that suggested interaction, although each subject was considered to be part of a larger family of social science, whose importance was stressed by S. Nurul Hasan as Education Minister in 1973, and was mirrored in the country’s commitment to the Asia-wide phenomenon of founding Councils for Social Science Research (Hasan 1977).

The university provided the main writers of these textbooks. The books also became guided by a strong nationalist ideology that was seen to be ‘left-oriented’. History provided capsules of information on the nationalist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with discussions not only on the social but also political agenda. The power of religion as a motive force in policy was understated. The whole mix was framed within a single compelling chronology that could not be questioned. In political science and sociology, the importance of nationalist thinkers was stressed; in economics it was the planned economy, as well as aspects of theory and the use of statistics.

At the college level, these themes were filled out. Many colleges in fact used the Class XI and Class XII textbooks as an introduction to the course, as the pre-university course became rare in the 1970s. The importance of this approach became greater with the arrival of education on a concurrent list, where both central and state governments had responsibilities.

National Educational Policies, which were elaborated from 1968,<sup>8</sup> receiving new formulations in 1986 and 1992, had little impact on these issues. But the practice also began of formulation of curriculum, with the first National Curriculum Framework (NCF) announced in 1975 (Yadav 2011). This gave little place to social sciences in the school, and was followed up by debate and a revised NCF in 1988<sup>9</sup> that had a more elaborate discussion of social science teaching. During the 1980s, the Union government’s National Educational Mission attempted to use technology to extend the range of education, with television drafted in for the purpose, and programmes devised to supplement the range of the classroom. Other measures gave orientation to teachers to follow pedagogy specified by NCERT – through DIETs (District Institutes of Education and Training) and RIEs (Regional Institutes of Education). Teacher education outside these institutions was monitored by the NCTE, established as an independent institution in 1993.

### *Approaches to social sciences in universities and colleges during the 1960s and 1970s*

In the degree colleges and in the universities, meanwhile, a pattern was established that would continue. In social science teaching, in political science and sociology, basic categories associated with analysis, as well as classics of thought were the methodological inputs, followed by themes that affected Indian politics and society ('Indian society', 'The Indian Constitution', etc.). International relations and additional subjects relating to public administration were items that were also an important part of syllabi. In history, a focus on Indian history, with stray subjects from European history, was the norm. In geography, division into physical and social geography components and subdivisions according to 'region' was characteristic, with a 'scientific' component added by way of acquaintance with surveying methods. Anthropology remained almost wholly physical anthropology.

This thematic pattern was revised in terms of the books taught, with the main presses supplying summaries of international work or Indian research. The overall structure was not reworked. The training was intended to be the basis for competition for civil service examinations, and other public service positions. An expanding public sector recruited its managers from such backgrounds. Broader acquaintance with such a sector was limited, most instruction being concerned with legislation. More appropriate training would come after selection – in the Indian Institution of Public Administration, or training in Hyderabad and elsewhere. Encapsulated versions of the research agenda of the university and the scholarly community were seen to be important. Awareness of disciplines across boundaries came through instruction in multiple subjects at BA (Pass) or through additional Pass subjects at the more specialised BA Honours level.

### *The Jawaharlal Nehru University model and its relevance for undergraduate education*

It was partly to galvanise teaching at the undergraduate level, as well as to promote research, that the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) model took shape in 1966. Like the DSE, the JNU had an orientation towards social sciences in its School of Social Sciences, as well as in sister schools, the School of International Studies and the School of Languages. But it had a social agenda, drawing for its MA programme from the country as a whole, making allowances for the underprivileged. Interdisciplinary study was promoted, and many took their perspectives to the states from which they came. The model was replicated in the Central University of Hyderabad and the North Eastern Hill University. In the 1970s, the authority enjoyed by JNU faculty in the UGC helped promote the syllabi of the JNU in the states and in central universities.

The preparation of college and university teachers through new methods set an interdisciplinary approach to education as the norm of higher education. In doing so it set out to restructure the national paradigm of teaching in subjects pertaining to the social sciences. It also took its lead from the left-wing values that were to be seen in the restructuring of school teaching.

Through the stress on research, the aims of the experiment failed to address the problem of application of social science education – even if such application were to be restricted to a refined training in values and the way techniques may be used as a measure of important issues. The departure also failed to address the problem of numbers in higher education. The number of colleges was substantially larger than at Independence, as was the intake into colleges – in the early 1970s ten times what it had been in 1950. The bulk of enrolment was for the 'Arts' (Ministry of Human Resources Development 2005: 7–9) – which required some attention to methods of teaching and application of disciplines. The JNU experiment could not address this adequately.

The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), with its close links with those who directed the JNU experiment, was intended to deal with the problem of numbers. Its activities, though, failed to affect the large number of colleges and small universities that had set their own benchmarks.

Finally, future teachers trained in the JNU MA programmes in social science were trained to place a premium on independent research and writing. But given the stress at the NCERT on ‘correct’ scientific approaches, and a harum-scarum approach to teaching elsewhere, the students were hardly prepared for the departure. Products of the new university, meanwhile, had to face traditional discipline-oriented syllabi in the colleges; and their influence would be limited in the long-term. Where such influence would be considerable, it would reinforce the research orientation of undergraduate education rather than diversify its character.

### *‘Crisis’ in education and teaching of social sciences*

In this process, if the social sciences had acquired a premium owing to the ‘scientific’ edge they had received with new textbook development and the JNU model, the educational system had come to be identified with a numerical achievement on the one hand and an exclusivity on the other. J.P. Naik identified a ‘crisis’ as a consequence, where at the level of the underprivileged, education was seen to be exclusive by the end of the 1970s (Naik 1979a). Meanwhile, various groups concerned with educational and pedagogic reform – such as the Ekalavya<sup>10</sup> group, founded in Madhya Pradesh in 1982 – placed part of the reason for the ‘crisis’ not on the failure to draw a larger tier of groups into the education system, but the system of teaching itself, which failed to appeal to a large contingent of students, losing the underprivileged and their concerns on the way.

In university education, the consequences of increased numbers in colleges for the nature of research preparation were not ignored. Awareness led to the creation of a system to evaluate quality – the National Assessment and Accreditation Council – in 1994. The new body’s ratings were to be important for access to grants and other subventions. As was to be expected, though, a basis of evaluation that would apply effectively to various institutions was difficult to establish; and the rush for ratings meant, with time, a hastily assembled process whose value was suspect.

The government of 1999–2004 responded to the overall situation in two ways. In 2002, it made education a Fundamental Right and paved the way for a legislation that might solve the problem of numbers in the education system. To give this shape, it initiated the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to promote literacy and basic education. In the NCF of 2000, the government evaluated the onus for the limitations of the content of school education.<sup>11</sup> The NCF firmly placed the blame on the lead school subject of the social sciences – the one that shared space with geography throughout the upper primary and secondary stages, i.e. history. The failure of education to cultivate national pride and citizenship was associated with the prevailing teaching of this subject. NCERT books, in the period after 2000, attempted to create a composite social science syllabus and textbook that downplayed the role of history teaching and introduced a focus on ‘heritage’ (National Curriculum Framework 2000a,b). The latter mirrored a trend elsewhere, outside India, to view the past as a mere gloss on the present – a source of information on monuments and buildings.

### **Indian institutions of school and college education and the social sciences II: the NCERT initiative of the mid-2000s, the NCF 2005, and the broader context in the school–college system**

These departures in schools’ curricula and the reorientation of school textbooks in the process came in for immediate scrutiny (see CABE Committee 2005) following the advent of a new

government in May 2004. The NCF 2005 was developed and a new approach to social sciences evolved at the school level in the CBSE system that followed NCERT syllabi and textbooks.

### *Developing a social sciences initiative at NCERT*

The development of the NCF 2005<sup>12</sup> had, as part of its agenda, the task of dealing with the limitations of the attempt to take subjects pertaining to the social sciences in a direction where greater integration was achieved. Earlier syllabi and books (i.e. post-1968 and post-2000) had failed to articulate how they had understood the term 'social sciences' and how the approach to the disciplines that made up the social sciences varied from the approach that had been in vogue until the mid-twentieth century. Discussions regarding the task before schools also stressed that the previous books had dealt inadequately with the importance of marginal social groups and women in the development of social science perspectives.

### *The context of higher education*

No initiative was taken at this time to reorient the UGC perspectives on social sciences and to stimulate a fresh agenda for colleges and universities. Ideas were presented concerning the school-college link with the development of a National Coordinating Committee from 2007 to draw in perspectives from those who were not involved in the processes set in motion by the NCF 2005. Discussions paid no attention to pedagogy at the college level, the importance of different phases of college education, or its overall position in the education system as a whole.

### *Development of a new school-level approach to 'social science': the Focus Group on Social Sciences*

As NCF 2005 was taking its final shape, a Focus Group on the Social Sciences was constituted by NCERT. The group's main suggestions were to act as the point of reference for syllabus committees and textbook development committees that took shape thereafter. On the crucial issue of the integration of subjects that had been attempted under the previous framework, the group suggested a disciplinary focus. Hence, while a sense of the subjects as contributing to social science awareness was important, it was considered equally important that this was to be achieved through a heightened sensitivity to space, time, and institutions.

The group suggested the development of a phased pattern of social science awareness that would start in the period before upper primary (Classes VI, VII, and VIII), when 'environmental studies' was the standard subject taught outside basic language and mathematics; the 'environmental studies' here having science and non-science components. A point of major importance was that the nature of value discussion in the textbooks should be shaped within the disciplinary discussion. This was allied to the suggestion that the subject of 'civics' through which social values and political norms had hitherto been discussed in the upper primary level and early secondary level of school should be revised. Content traditionally involved discussions of the political structures of India as framed by the Constitution and a series of problems of public values (cleanliness, awareness, etc.). This could be handled through integration into disciplines.

The Focus Group also drew attention to the issue of principles of pedagogy that some of these suggestions led into. Constructivist perspectives were preferred. A full engagement was required, it was argued, with the environment where social science questions were raised if teaching was to be meaningful. Hence the 'lesson' should open the way to references to experience and drawing from experience, both in discussion as well as in project work. Pointing to

the lacunae that had frequently become the reference of NCF discussions, the Focus Group emphasised the importance of attention to marginal communities and women in the model syllabi and textbooks that NCERT would establish.

### *Syllabus committees and textbooks*

The Focus Group's suggestions were taken up in developing syllabi and textbooks after the publication of NCF 2005. The development of textbooks brought together a range of expertise as the work on syllabi had done. A draft conceived by one individual was subject to a rigorous process of editing and re-editing, with major inputs from illustrators who had their own opinions on what was most effective as pedagogy. Project work attempted to go beyond fixing the lesson in the reader's mind – the goal of the past. Pains were taken to address social issues that were neglected in the past, in all the subjects. Project-oriented work was recommended and attempts made to draw in the child's/young person's experiences. Legal cases were used to illustrate the points raised in the subject of social and political life that replaced civics in Classes VI to VIII. Archival material and visual material was used to raise questions in history rather than illustrate a point. The process of textbook development was completed by 2009. As they came out, textbooks were made available on the internet. A Curriculum Group of the NCERT was created to promote discussions with State Boards that did not automatically use NCERT as their main point of reference.

## **Beyond NCF 2005**

### *Schools*

Pedagogy in subjects pertaining to the social sciences faced a larger list of problems once the textbook work was complete. Initiatives under NCF 2005 were touching on larger problems. Attention to the teaching of social sciences did not solve the immediate issue of the comparatively limited numbers in school – which no policy could ignore. Problems concerning effective pedagogy itself could not be ignored – those regarding communication and evaluation. These problems attracted attention through the pursuit of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2010, and the follow-up. In order to ensure that the latter had some effect, the MHRD allowed the establishment of private schools with public fund assistance providing that a minimum intake was guaranteed to underprivileged groups. The Ministry also organised task forces to look into how policy associated with the Act was given effect.

Steps were taken to address problems of pedagogy arising from measures taken under NCF 2005. Some of these problems could be solved by using Regional Institutes of Education (RIEs) and District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) to convey ideas. Model methods of 'continuous and comprehensive evaluation', framed by NCERT and implemented in a framework of only one major public examination, were considered a viable solution. A rising demand for teachers that would follow from the RTE initiatives posed problems. Standards could not be maintained by existing government organisations such as RIEs; nor could the promotion of CCE (continuous and comprehensive evaluation) methods be ensured. Rather, the task required attention from the institutions concerned with teacher preparation itself. Action was required, in fact, from the National Council for Teacher Education, the Teachers Training Colleges (TTCs) they approved and University and College Education Departments. The government turned its attention to this issue. The measures undertaken to solve crucial problems generated a sphere of private enterprise in school education, where perspectives framed in NCF 2005 for the school would be maintained uneasily.

### *Colleges/universities*

The link between the university and the school was also weakening, owing to little or no reform in approach in universities as a whole until the late 2000s. Serious response was lacking all round to NCERT initiatives and ideas and their implications for higher education, albeit not for want of suggestions. The National Knowledge Commission made a series of suggestions in 2009 for overhaul of the education system without looking closely at education and its process in depth. These changes, though, it tied firmly to involvement of private investment and the creation of a new regulatory body for higher education to replace the UGC (National Knowledge Commission 2009). The UGC itself trod a conservative course and saw merit in greater autonomy to educational institutions, adherence to the yardsticks set by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), and extension of the number of central universities (CABE Committee 2005).

The 2009 recommendations of the Yash Pal Committee (Government of India 2009)<sup>13</sup> to establish a National Council for Higher Education and Research were more far-reaching and involved a deep examination of the system of higher education. Among its suggestions, a number addressed some of the problems that affected teaching of the social sciences – including academic and non-academic orientation and interdisciplinary access. The Committee argued for new approaches to undergraduate education, a ‘holistic’ approach to knowledge, and changes in undergraduate education that would involve close practical experience. Both the Knowledge Commission and the Yash Pal Committee, however, appear to have argued for initiatives that were too far-reaching and out of key with the prevailing system; their suggestions were hardly implemented before 2014. Equally, it has been clear that in the case of the preferred path of the UGC, the system of accreditation was deeply flawed and the grant of autonomy often ran against problems of how to evaluate institutional capability and competence.

In the circumstances, a combination of financial stringency, inflation, and limited but necessary expansion of infrastructure have led to stagnation of existing colleges and universities and the gradual development of a private sector in the area. Suggestions for a ‘liberal arts’ profile on the lines of the US model (involving subjects pertaining to the social sciences) has been suggested for some of these institutions, while others remain solidly technology- and medicine-oriented, where social sciences are support subjects attracting minimal attention. While the ‘liberal arts’ paradigm may involve international equivalence of a type for some institutions, it makes them far from fit to play any meaningful role in India’s future, since their planning only provides a broad ‘liberal education’ that only raises questions about what is ‘liberal’ and what the ‘education’ is for, but fails to offer any answers on how these can be made relevant or meaningful.

### **Postscript**

The current situation in education has been the result of these developments – a situation arousing concern and confusion. A somewhat ramshackle system of education where clear knowledge of purpose is at a premium. Wild variations in the way social sciences are taught and received has been part of this scenario. The inclination towards private education and accreditation is sometimes regarded as a trend towards democracy, pluralism, and a practical approach, since it decreases the burden of responsibility on the state, permitting it to focus on marginal groups and large initiatives in areas of professional training, scientific education, and the promotion of values’ awareness. Whether the line of policy has been effectively gauged and adequately evaluated, in order for this to happen, however, remains a moot point.

In the case of the social sciences, competing systems of approach in a situation where professional awareness in the teaching community is at a premium presents a serious problem: a problem that leads to depreciation in the value of the subjects as well as a decline in their status. This occurs, regrettably, at a time when, through the education system, these very subjects look to achieve a more pointed direction and substance.

## Notes

- 1 Kumar (1976–88) is the multivolume best source other than documents on the net.
- 2 Ideas that are associated with social science may be traced in various forms of knowledge developed in India's history outside the school or college classroom (in the madrasa or in the *toll*, for instance). But, pending research, it must be assumed, this area of awareness was the sketchy remnant of socially limited institutions of the past. See Naik (1979b). For an alternate view see Khasnavis (1983).
- 3 The Oxford and Cambridge Examinations Syndicate did not consider Economics worthy of attention until the 1950s. See [www.oua.ox.ac.uk/holdings/Oxford%20&%20Cambridge%20OC.pdf](http://www.oua.ox.ac.uk/holdings/Oxford%20&%20Cambridge%20OC.pdf) (last accessed 19 August 2015). But both economics and economic history were popular in schools, as noted by the *Economic History Review* during 1927–34.
- 4 See 'Re-inventing the social sciences' at [www.oecd.org/science/sci-tech/33695704.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/science/sci-tech/33695704.pdf).
- 5 Pires (1970) deals with the diversity of interpretation of 'social studies' in India as well as in other countries. Indian institutions picked up the debates in the West on the subject. They also generated a literature of their own, as indicated by Khasnavis (1983).
- 6 Romila Thapar's text book for Class VIII, *Medieval India* is a good example. For secondary school textbooks this included Arjun Dev's *The Story of Civilisation* (2 vols., Class IX and Class X), R.S. Sharma's *Ancient India*, Satish Chandra's *Medieval India* (2 vols), and Bipan Chandra's *Modern India*.
- 7 For interviews with textbook writers and interpretation of the books, see Guichard (2011).
- 8 [http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/NPE-1968.pdf](http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/NPE-1968.pdf) and (for 1986 and 1992) [www.ncert.nic.in/oth\\_anoun/npe86.pdf](http://www.ncert.nic.in/oth_anoun/npe86.pdf) (last accessed 19 August 2015).
- 9 [http://eledu.net/rrcusrn\\_data/National%20Curriculum%20Framework-1988.pdf](http://eledu.net/rrcusrn_data/National%20Curriculum%20Framework-1988.pdf) (last accessed 19 August 2015).
- 10 For information on Ekalavya and assessments of their work, see [www.srtt.org/institutional\\_grants/pdf/educational\\_titles.pdf](http://www.srtt.org/institutional_grants/pdf/educational_titles.pdf) and [www.eklavya.in](http://www.eklavya.in) (last accessed 19 August 2015).
- 11 [www.eledu.net/rrcusrn\\_data/NCF-2000.pdf](http://www.eledu.net/rrcusrn_data/NCF-2000.pdf) (last accessed 19 August 2015).
- 12 [www.ncert.nic.in/rightside/links/pdf/framework/english/nf2005.pdf](http://www.ncert.nic.in/rightside/links/pdf/framework/english/nf2005.pdf) (last accessed 19 August 2015).
- 13 The Committee suggested 'Universities to establish live relationship with the real world outside and develop capacities to challenges faced by rural and urban economies and culture' (p. 66). In its 'Agenda for action' it pointed to the necessity for a more broadness of interaction between disciplines at the undergraduate level and interaction between the domains of vocational education and university education (p. 64).

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