



Social Sciences as a critical pedagogic tool for transacting value based education

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Abstract

In contemporary times, socialisation of children is not entirely limited to family and community. Social institutions such as education system, media, economy and religion share the responsibility of transacting social values to the young ones and ensure that there aren't many deviations from the acceptable social norms. Schools, in particular share this role immediately with family. Social Sciences, as a discipline, provides a socio-cultural, political, economic and environmental lens to understand various dimensions of society, situated in its past and present. Social Sciences hold the potential to make students critically reflect and assess the relationship between various social structures and engage within the processes of the society they inhabit. This article aims at exploring the usefulness of teaching social sciences as critical pedagogic tool for transaction of desired values in Indian classrooms, more so in the pandemic times. It conceptualises its main argument through thorough analysis of NCERT's social sciences textbooks for standard six to tenth. The article presents a brief background of social sciences pedagogy and highlight its linkages with value-based education in critical manner. Direct teaching of value-based education is often criticized for preaching prescribed and rigid norms. This article presents social sciences education as a pedagogic tool to recontextualise and redraft the foundations of value education transaction in Indian classrooms. The questions that this study aimed to explore are: Are we really investing in children the required critical and mental capacities that make them evaluate social practices? Should inculcation of values be limited to value-based education classes or can other disciplines like social sciences contribute in making learners alert to the social forces that threaten these values? Is there a contrast in our aims and our current practices of Social Sciences pedagogy or is it successfully inculcating 'desired values'?

Keywords: Social Sciences, value based education, desired values and critical pedagogy.

Introduction

“It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education. The whole life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning”.

– Jiddu Krishnamurti

Social Sciences studies the voluminous nature of society and the complexities of human beings, hence an ever evolving and growing discipline. Social Sciences as the body of knowledge about societies and individuals came into existence as a separate identity during the 17th century, in Europe. The establishment and growth of this discipline in India can be traced back to colonial intervention in Indian education. It was evolved and unfurled by the Britishers, to spread the values which were beneficial for their empire. It was during 1945-70 that Social Sciences were developed in the non-western world with support from the western universities¹. The broadening of the sub disciplines of Social Sciences to school education is a recent phenomenon. Advancement of social values are encompassed in the very conception of Social Sciences education and is a perfect, multifaceted blend of content drawn from the disciplines of history, geography, political sciences,

economics, and sociology. Madan quiet precisely highlights how Social Sciences in Indian schools is in gruelling position. On one hand, it is expected to shoulder the bulk of the normative expectation from schooling. Thus, this discipline is supposed to cover everything – from commitment to civic duties to internalization of a pluralist vision of the nation. Yet, on the other hand, it is treated as the stepsister to sciences. “Science is seen as solid grounding for a lucrative career, while Social Sciences are considered soft, trivial and for the weak.” It puts the Social Sciences at the centre of the debate around purpose and means of schooling: Is schooling only about being employable or is it about becoming a critically, morally and scientifically aware person²?

With change in time and social systems, social norms and values also demand for change, furthering the need to understand this constant change through education in general and social sciences in specific. Indian vision of education from the very ancient time, till today was never limited to it being means to employment or social mobility, but has always been seen as an end in itself, which includes, strengthening the relationship of the learner with their own sense of self, with other members of society and nature at large and thus can be

said to have a wider connotation which was never just limited to transaction of information. As stated in document titled *Education for Values in Schools by NCERT*, “Philosophers, spiritual leaders and educationists of our country, all in various ways, have emphasized the role of education for ‘character development’, ‘bringing out the latent potentialities and inherent qualities’ and developing an ‘integrated personality’ for the wellbeing of the individual and the society at large. Whatever term may be used, the importance of developing values has long been embedded in the age-old traditions of India’s civilizational and cultural heritage, spanning over the centuries³”. Hence, Value Education forms one of the most discussed aspects of education and its importance is acknowledged by all the major policies and commissions of independent India, starting from National Commission of Secondary Education (1952-53) to the contemporary National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 lays particular emphasis on incorporating value-based education throughout schooling and higher education attainment. NEP 2020 envisions value-based education to “include the development of humanistic, ethical, constitutional, and universal human values of truth (satya), righteous conduct (dharma), peace (shanti), love (prem), nonviolence (ahimsa), scientific temper, citizenship values, and also life skills; lessons in seva/service and participation in community service programmes will be considered an integral part of a holistic education. As the world is becoming increasingly interconnected, Global Citizenship Education (GCED), a response to contemporary global challenges, will be provided to empower learners to become aware of and understand global issues and to become active promoters of more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure, and sustainable societies⁴”.

The vast purview of Social Sciences holds much more potential than any of the other disciplines taught at school level. It can enable learners to experience dignity, sensorial growth, and confidence in their learning, development of self-esteem and ethics, cultivation of their creativity, foster free enquiry and critical analysis. If delivered through integrated and interactional approach subject area of social sciences can make children sensitive to the pressing environmental issues and the need for fostering constitutional values as the way of life that forms the foundation of Indian Education system.

Current State of Social Sciences in Indian Schools

Typically, Social Sciences are considered a subject to be rote memorized and reproduced, in exactly the same manner in examination⁸. If we look at Social Sciences in the context of Indian classrooms, it is generally conceptualized and hence transacted as information, facts and theoretical facets, that students cannot make a connection with. Any provision for reflection and critical analysis can hardly be seen. Social Sciences as a discipline is considered to be a softer option at school level but one must be cautious to this deception. The

probable reasons behind this deception can be attributed to the following facts: Firstly, teaching and learning of different sub disciplines, under Social Sciences, has mostly been transaction of dead and dull information. Secondly, the area of study being humans and our own society, which surrounds us all the time and hence we do not find much complexity in studying it. But the fact is being metacognitive about the social system, one was born in and that starts seeming *natural*, is not that simple. Thirdly, poor quality of textbooks, that lacks the ability to arouse the curiosity in students to apply or reflect upon the concepts on their own social environment, relations. Finally, the examination system, which plays safe and act as the biggest motivation in Indian schools, can be successfully cleared by rote learning and hardly has any space for application and reflection.

From the very initial stages of schooling, desirability of sciences over social sciences is communicated to the learners. Hence there is pressing need to highlight the role of Social Sciences as a discipline fostering social and cultural values and providing the abilities to broadening the vision and analytical capabilities of its learners. A common prevalent image of Social Sciences as not directly leading to or increasing earning capability and hence not a demanded discipline in employment market somehow, discourages the interest of students and teachers in the discipline.

This monotonous and archetypal pedagogy of social sciences education makes both teachers and students very likely to give in to the values that the discipline has the power to foster and not letting them become conscious of the fact that no education is value-free. The macro forces including Socio-Political and Economic processes operating and casting their powerful influence on education at the same time, the internal educational functioning reproducing the existing social structures, inculcating values that are socially desired, must be brought into the realm of learners’ consciousness. Nationalist version of history was one and still is the tools in the hand of political powers of the newly born country, which saw two wars in its formative years. Another example demonstrating the fact that what is taught and the way it is transacted in social sciences classroom is not neutral or value free fact. A set of History textbooks that were introduced in early parts of last decade tried to eulogise ‘Hindu’ past of India and went to the extent of incorporating Buddhism and Jainism in folds of Hinduism. More than often, it tried to brutalise the Islamic rule of the medieval Indian history. Marlena, through various such examples establishes a clear linkage between the ruling political power, its ideology and effect on school curricula⁵. In Social Sciences and its sub disciplines the appreciation and value assignment to contextual knowledge was missing for a long time. Although, these disciplines were connected to the real-life contexts of the learners, but the reflection of their immediate environment was missing in the content they read. Hence, the learners could not keep their local knowledge at the pedestrian of the valid knowledge that was accepted, demanded and

celebrated all over. It gets further aggravated when teachers and scholars look at the sub disciplines of social sciences as separate subjects and no inter linkages are established between them. However the point to be focused here is that students might not be comfortable in envisaging this fragmented view. Thus, the emergence of a holistic picture of natural and social environment must be scaffold for the learner, which will help them develop nuanced understanding of the various facets of life.

The actuality remains that there is hardly any space for learners to get conscious and reflect upon such realities. The need to understand Social Sciences as a discipline whose content, pedagogy and reach cannot be restricted to school walls can be successfully executed keeping in mind the recommendations mentioned in the next section.

‘Desired Values’ and Pedagogic Tools to bring in change

The content and the manner in which it is transacted in classrooms are significant tools for value transmission in learners. Predetermined ‘desired values’ in accordance with the macro forces like socio-economic and political milieu of a society are imbibed by the future generation of that nation through the process of socialization that a learner goes through in this microcosm of society called School. Values that are transacted to the learners, if brought under scrutiny of their mental faculties and their analytical reflection opens up the potential for development of subjective realities of more aware and conscious learners. While engaging with the question of the foundations of social studies, Lawton defined 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”⁶. The space for such association and exploration under different sub-disciplines of social sciences can be made through the following means:

History as an important school discipline talks about ancient, medieval, pre-colonial and post-colonial past of our country. “At the same time the curriculum provides for the exploration of various aspects of history through which the child will become aware of the individuals, groups, events, cultures, beliefs and values which have affected the lives of people in the past and shaped contemporary society”⁷. Nevertheless how value-free is the past presented to the current generation must be explored. Students of this discipline are made to see Mughal rules as invaders to India, where as they are not enabled to visualize the fact that India, as a nation state was born on August 15, 1947. The politicization of this discipline is not considered a matter to be reflected upon in our classrooms. The nationalist history transacted to learners creates an imagery of colonization as a one-way process, in which colonizers are portrait as exploitative lot and Indians as monolithic wholes of meek receptors. Whereas the fact remains that colonization was

a reciprocal interaction and could not have survived for such a long period, if no Indian (mainly the upper class) would not have had any form of involvement with them. The process of interaction is generally kept out of learners’ consciousness to avoid any kind of conflict with nation development and preparation of *ideal citizens* in classrooms.

Some other issues to be brought under scrutiny are: why are contribution of some of the freedom fighters celebrated in our textbooks and no mention of certain others like Jhalkari Bai who is said to have fought the battle in place of Rani Lakshmi Bai against British troops, but whose contribution to the struggle for freedom was erased from official accounts as she was a Dalit woman⁸. Many more of such struggles are invisibilized by the historians and ruling political party in the post independence India. History, in our Indian schools ends with independence and there is no mention of post-independence history since then. The probable reason for all these and many more of such critical issues must be thread bared in the classrooms. Students must be encouraged to explore, develop and practice historical temperament concerned with temporal and chronological trajectory, cause and effect, change and continuity, the use of evidence, synthesis, communication and empathy. They must be motivated to critically reflect and analyse these factors and the agenda behind it. Learners must operationalise the theoretical knowledge and conceptualisations gained in history classrooms by recognising how they interact with forces outside the classrooms. This will encourage them to get involved with the discipline they found least interactive and engaging, in novel manner.

Geography is a way of life. “It is a field of knowledge dedicated to the study of the lands, the features, the inhabitants, and the phenomena of the Earth. It has the potential to bring forward the man-nature inter-relationship in the context of changes taking place over time, investigate different aspects of local geography and understand the symbiotic reasons behind lifestyle differences between people living in different regions”⁹. In Indian geography textbooks major themes include natural resources, land forms and their distributions and natural phenomenon. Geography textbooks are loaded with facts like: “India is the fourth largest producer of electricity and oil products and the fourth largest importer of coal and crude-oil in the world. India’s mining industry was the 4th largest producer of minerals in the world by volume, and 8th largest producer by value in 2009. Nearly 50% of India’s mining industry, by output value, is concentrated in eight states- Odisha, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka”¹⁰. Facts like these are mentioned, rote memorized and reproduced in examinations. There are hardly any classrooms where the socio-economic effects of industries, effect of concentration of natural resources in one area and absence in other on the lives of the inhabitants or loss of life and relations behind the painful process of industrialization is ever discussed.

A small and generally last chapter is designated to concepts like pollution, its effects on health, natural disasters and depletion of our environment. Geography played a major role in creating positive ethos around the process of development, and for a very long-time topics like changes and sustainable development found no space in school curriculum.

Despite the fact that current scenario provides little scope for reflective enquiry in lived issues there still exists the scope for discussion on environmental conservation, while discussing how we can contribute in smallest of ways by getting conscious of our usage of natural resources. Geography is always in sync with everyday life; the teacher's job is to help learners uncover or identify the connection between the experiences of life and the geographical concept behind these. Students should be encouraged to explore geography not just within but outside the classroom and teachers should not restrict their teaching-learning process to these four walls. A visit to a zoo or a national park can effectively be precursor to combination of topics including plant and animal life, soil, soil erosion and conservation of natural resources, to name a few. Another factor to be kept in mind here is utility of studying a subject. If learners are unable to engage with the geography of their own immediate surroundings, they lose interest and get alienated to the concepts being taught, whereas if applied efficiently with other sub-disciplines of social sciences geography has great potential to foster local as well as national values. Values of oneness, worth of biodiversity, interdependence of countries, unity in diversity, responsibility of environmental conservation, urgency of preserving natural habitats and being vary of irreversible alterations made in natural and ecological make up are all the more important today than ever before.

Political Sciences as a discipline concerns with the study of the state, nation, government and politics. Concepts related to governance, judiciary, administration and economic structures/systems for the theoretical foundations of this discipline. The change in nomenclature from civics to Political sciences was suggested by NCF 2005 and claims that 'political sciences' suggests the dynamism of a process that produces structures of dominance and their contestations by social forces. Political sciences treat civil society as the sphere that produces sensitive, interrogative, deliberative, and transformative citizen"⁹. This subject has great potential to enable comprehensive understanding of constitutional values like civil duties, essence of democracy, citizenship, human rights, child rights, social justice, patriotism and unity in diversity. The Constitution of India is an extremely important document that clearly explicates values essential for nation building. Integral part of citizenship education including fundamental right and duties, for instance right to equality is one right that students see being violated at every second of their lives, in discrimination faced by women of their families or differential treatment given to house hold help, but hardly question it. They are *trained* to accept all the violation to such an extent, that they stop asking

for any right at all and accept blindly, whatever comes there way.

Change in curriculum, syllabus, textbooks, educational policies with change in ruling political party is a crucial topic to be taken up in depth, separately, but the ability to raise critical citizens is surely not met as of now. But Political Sciences have the scope of fostering critical thinking learners and enriching their mental faculties by uncovering how social practices and structures operate, more so in times of global pandemic when social and economic disparities within our society came to fore in its dreadful form. Discussions on lived experiences and firsthand accounts of issues such as, digital-gender divide, plight of migrant labourers, pressure of gender segregated domestic labour, technology and violence, access to medical and educational facilities to name a few. Provision of open turf of this manner in classrooms would enable learners determine the strength and shortcomings of the social structures they inhabit. These learners will further be in the position to understand the foundations of the government's policies, their impact on society and possible alternative approaches to equitable development.

Economics can be attributed with the charge of producing values which are surely not neutral. Non-inclusion of economic tasks done by homemakers, for instance cooking, washing clothes, child rearing in calculation of national income, have been questioned for decades by feminist groups. Economic reimbursements of domestic labour where monetary value could be reached by calculating the amount for the work done at home, either in the form of savings or income earned by that individual (majority females) would lessen the scope for gender based economic disparity and cruel practices attached to values of modern capitalist patriarchy that got highlighted with pandemic led lockdowns and work from home culture. Similarly, critical analysis of landmark economic decisions such as economic reforms of 1991, will enable learners to scrutinize the hegemonic effects it had on local producers and Indian economy at global level.

Value ascribed to individual benefits, profit, greed, competition has led to heightened disparity between rich and poor in last few decades, which finally has aggravated the inequality in our society. One of the most 'scientific' social sciences sub-discipline tacitly and tactfully pushes various social values forward. Economics curriculum has majorly inculcated utilitarian values in learners. "It puts more emphasis on developmental issues that are important but not sufficient to understand the normative dimension – issues of equality, justice and dignity"¹¹.

All the above-mentioned sub-disciplines of Social Sciences have the potential of enabling learners to not just give into the latent values of education system and critically reflect upon them and be responsive before letting them enculture their very sense of self.

Conclusion

Social Sciences as a discipline must provide learners with complete freedom to learn *about* the social phenomenon, *through* the social context and *for* social development. This would encourage a personal interaction between the learner, their immediate environment, the social customs, cultural heritage, history of society, through observation, exploration and scientific study of the social events and phenomenon, thereby developing a genuine interest in preserving what is good in our culture and become agents of required radical changes. If backed by quality textbooks (an initiative was taken by NCERT, as they came up with completely new generation of Social Sciences textbooks in last decade) teachers who are not just passive transporters of information and reproducers of social hierarchies, but the one who are intrinsically motivated to act as reflective practitioners and facilitators for learners, one who believe in dialogical pedagogy, can successfully use the content of constructive textbooks by not just limiting the frontiers of the learning to the printed content, but use it as an initiation of the learners into the world of critical enquiry. Such a teacher and pedagogy will surely contribute in development of analytical and reflective future citizens of our country, who can think freely and critically, possess scientific temper and citizenship values, who can act responsibly and with courage and conviction. This undoubtedly will lead the kind of educated citizen NEP 2020 and other recent educational initiatives envision. The goal is not to promote passive conformity and blind obedience to prescribed values being passed on. Responding to value situation blindly out of habit, fear of authority or indifference to tradition, convention or custom is, of course, a stage in one's value development. But eventually it should give way to independent appraisal of a situation post critical deliberation and principled judgment. Social Sciences content and its transaction through critical pedagogic tools, will make their significant contribution of inculcating values, if they provide ample opportunities for learners to be aware, to associate, to think rationally and reflect, to question and

criticize, to care and feel concerned, to develop the disposition and will to act on one's conviction with reference to critical human concerns.

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