

Study Notes: The Nature and Curriculum of Social Sciences

1.0 Understanding Social Science as a Discipline: An Introduction

1.1 Core Definition of Social Sciences

Social sciences constitute a field of knowledge which studies the relationship between individuals and their socio-cultural environment. It originated as a formal academic discipline at the university level in the eighteenth century and was introduced into school curricula globally during the twentieth century.

1.2 The Evolution and Conception of Social Sciences

1.2.1 Evolution of the Discipline

The emergence of social sciences as a formal discipline was driven by significant societal transformations and historical events. These rapid changes, while bringing progress, also created immense social disruption, intellectual crises, and new forms of conflict, establishing the urgent need for a new field of study dedicated to understanding and guiding modern society. Key factors include:

- **Modernization, industrialization, renaissance, and urbanization:** These processes created new, complex social orders and challenges that required systematic study.
- **Major historical events:** Pivotal moments such as the Renaissance in Italy, the French Revolution (1789), the industrial revolutions (beginning in 1767), and the American War of Independence (1776) radically altered societies, prompting a need to understand these new dynamics.
- **Societal Challenges:** Social sciences arose as an effort to understand and counter the problems of the modern world. These included social disorganization, intellectual crises, unhealthy competition, the misuse of science (as seen in World Wars I & II), and the severe economic depression of 1930-1940.

Exemplary founding texts that shaped the discipline include:

- Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws* (1748)
- Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (1776)
- Condorcet, *Outline of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Kind* (1795)
- J.G. Herder, *Idea towards a Philosophy of History* (1784-91)

1.2.2 Key Concepts: Social Sciences vs. Social Studies

Definition of Social Sciences

Social sciences are a body of knowledge concerned with human affairs within the broader socio-cultural system.

Charles Beard: "Social sciences are the body of knowledge and thought pertaining to human affairs as distinguished from sticks, stones, stars and physical objects." (S. K. Kochhar, The Teaching of Social Studies, 1984-First Edition)

James High: "Social sciences are those bodies of learning and study which recognize the simultaneous and mutual action of physical and non-physical stimuli which produce social reaction." (Dr. Y.K. Singh, Teaching of Social Studies, 2008)

The core characteristics of social sciences can be summarized as follows:

1. They have a direct bearing on human activity in various socio-cultural fields.
2. They represent advanced studies of human society, typically taught at higher education levels.
3. They aim to discover truths about human relationships to advance knowledge and social utility.

Definition of Social Studies

The concept of 'social studies' is relatively recent, with widespread use beginning in America in **1916** and in India with **Gandhiji's Basic Education in 1937**. It is a single, composite instructional area designed for schools, drawing its content from various social sciences to help learners understand their relationship with their environment.

James High: "Most simply stated, the social studies are the school mirror of the scholarly findings of the social sciences. Such data, as social scientists may gather, is integrated and simplified to appropriate levels of expression for children in all the grades." (S. K. Kochhar, The Teaching of Social Studies, 1984-First Edition)

John V. Michael's: "The social studies are concerned with man and his interaction with his social and physical environment; they deal with human relationships. The central function of the social studies is identical with the central purpose of education – development of democratic citizenship." (S. K. Kochhar, The Teaching of Social Studies, 1984-First Edition)

Key characteristics of social studies include:

- It is concerned with human study in relation to the socio-cultural environment.
- It has been evolved from social sciences as an instructional area for schools to promote healthy social and democratic living.
- It establishes the relationship among the present, past, and future.
- It stresses contemporary human life and its problems more than the past history of humankind.
- It aims to enable students to adjust to their socio-cultural environment, from family to the whole of humanity.
- It is a realistic course that deals with the practical aspects of society.
- It is in a growing stage, with an ever-broadening scope.
- It is considered a core subject at the school level for developing necessary competencies for healthy social living.

1.2.3 Comparison: Social Sciences and Social Studies

Similarities

1. Both social sciences and social studies originate from the same genus, focusing on human affairs.
2. They share a common body of course content.
3. Their central focus is the relationship between individuals and their environment.
4. Human relationship is the common denominator for both.
5. Both examine human activities related to meeting basic needs, communication, production, and consumption.

Differences

Basis of Difference	Social Sciences	Social Studies
Derivation	The parent discipline from which social studies is derived.	The product or outcome of social sciences, adapted for schools.
Area of Affairs	Concerned with the theoretical aspects of human affairs.	Concerned with the practical aspects of human affairs.
Utility	Seeks social utility and the advancement of knowledge.	Seeks instructional utility for citizenship preparation.
Approach	Represents an adult approach.	Represents a child-centric approach.
Approach	Studied through an idealistic approach.	Studied through a pragmatic approach.
Aim	Aims to contribute to knowledge and expand intellectual horizons.	Aims to provide knowledge for solving practical societal problems.
Composition	A collection of distinct disciplines (e.g., history, economics, sociology).	An integrated field that draws content from social sciences.
Nature of Composition	A mixture of subjects where each has a special identity.	A compound where something new emerges; parts are not easily separated.
Reader	Readership is limited to competent and interested individuals.	Studied by everybody, as its main aim is citizenship preparation.
Stage of Study	Advanced study of human society, taught at the high school/university level.	Simplified aspect of social sciences, taught at the school or junior school stage.
Scope	Scope is limited within its own field (e.g., economics focuses on economic activities).	Touches upon all aspects of human social life in a compound manner.

Scope	Vast, covering numerous specialized subjects.	Narrower, as it is a part of the broader social sciences field.
Complexity	Involves the complex study of social phenomena.	Presents a simplified aspect of social sciences for younger students.

1.3 Social Sciences in the Indian School Curriculum

1.3.1 Structure Across School Levels

- **Lower Primary (Class I-V):** Taught as an integrated part of environmental studies.
- **Upper Primary & Secondary (Class VI-X):** Taught as a core composite area, often called 'social studies' or 'social sciences'.
- **Higher Secondary (Class XI-XII):** Offered as optional or specialized courses, such as political science, economics, and history.

Notably, the terms 'social studies' and 'social sciences' are often used interchangeably at the upper primary and secondary levels, as seen in documents like the NCF (2005) and the Position Paper of the National Focus Group on Teaching Social Sciences (2006).

1.3.2 Aims and Objectives at the Upper Primary Level

General Aims The general aims of learning social sciences at this level are:

1. To acquaint students with their geographical, social, and cultural environments.
2. To develop a sense of social competence and commitment.
3. To foster democratic citizenship qualities.
4. To cultivate patriotism, national feeling, and international understanding.
5. To help students to participate in socio-economic institutions.
6. To train students to solve present and future social issues.
7. To develop moral values, emotional qualities, and a sense of belongingness.

Objectives from the National Focus Group (2006) The National Focus Group on Teaching Social Sciences (2006) outlines the following specific objectives for the upper primary stage:

- To develop an understanding of the earth as the habitat of humankind and other life forms.
- To initiate the learner into a study of their own region, state, and country in a global context.
- To initiate the learner into a study of India's past, with reference to contemporary developments in other parts of the world.
- To introduce the learner to the functioning of social and political institutions and processes in the country.

The content at this stage is drawn from **history, geography, political science, and economics**. Emphasis is placed on contemporary issues such as poverty, illiteracy, child and bonded labour, class, caste, gender, and the environment.

1.4 The Historical Trajectory of Social Sciences

1.4.1 Social Sciences in the Pre-Modern World

In the pre-modern era, the study of social sciences was informal and unorganized, but the principles were embedded in philosophy and civic life.

- **Ancient Greek Intellectuals:** Key contributions came from figures like Socrates, Plato (whose *Republic* explored the ideal state), and Aristotle (whose *Politics* analyzed governance).
- **The Civic Oath of the Greeks:** This oath served as a practical application of social science principles. New citizens pledged to honor the city, obey its laws, fight for its ideals, and transmit the city to the next generation "greater, better, more beautiful than it was transmitted to us."

1.4.2 Social Sciences in the Modern & Contemporary World

The study of social sciences became more formal and systematic in the modern era, particularly after the two World Wars highlighted the need for global cooperation and understanding.

- International bodies like **UNESCO, UNICEF, and the UNO** were established to promote healthy social living worldwide.
- **Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)** encapsulates this spirit:

"All human being are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience, and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

- **The Delores Commission (1996)** emphasized one of the key pillars of modern education as "learning to live together."

1.4.3 Indian Perspectives Through the Ages

Social science principles have long been a part of Indian culture and education.

- **Ancient India:** Guiding principles for social living are found in scriptures like the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata*. Specific texts like Kautilya's *Arthashastra* (on statecraft and economics) and Vishnu Sharma's *Panchatantra* (on political science and practical wisdom) are foundational works.
- **Medieval India:** Literary traditions from Buddhist, Jain, Islamic, and Bhakti movements contained significant social and cultural values.
- **Formalization:** Social sciences became a formal part of Indian higher education in the 18th/19th century and were incorporated into school education with Gandhiji's Basic Education scheme.

Views from Indian Education Policies and Commissions

The Secondary Education Commission (1952-53): “Social studies as a term, is comparatively new in Indian education. It is meant to cover the ground traditionally associated with history, geography, economics, civics etc...This whole group of studies has, therefore, to be viewed as compact whole whose object is to adjust the students to their social environment...”

The Education Commission (1964-66): “The aim of teaching social studies is to help the students acquire knowledge of their environment, an understanding of human relationship, and attitude and values which are vital for intelligent participation in the affairs of the community, the state, the nation and the world.”

'The Curriculum For Ten Year School: A Framework' of NCERT (1975): “Environmental studies will include both natural and social environment in class I and II. It will be more appropriate to use the term social studies rather than social sciences at primary stage, since it represents a broad and composite instructional area.”

National Curriculum For Elementary And Secondary Education (1988): This framework observed that Social Sciences could be the most effective tool for delivering the core components envisaged by the NPE (1986), which included the history of India's freedom movement, constitutional obligations, secularism, equality, and environmental protection.

National Curriculum Framework (2005): “The social sciences encompass diverse concerns of society... The content should aim at raising students' awareness through critically exploring and questioning of familiar social reality... Selecting and organizing material into a meaningful curriculum, one that will enable students to develop a critical understanding of society, is therefore a challenging task.”

1.5 The Current Status of Society and the Scope of Social Sciences

1.5.1 Current Social Phenomena and Challenges

1. Rapid development of science and technology.
2. High levels of complexity, heterogeneity, and diversity in all spheres of life.
3. New social orders like globalization, privatization, and planned development.
4. Emergence of new social values such as democracy, secularism, equality, and individual rights.
5. Wide-ranging social mobility, multiculturalism, and the decline of ill social traditions.
6. A host of new social problems, including poverty, unemployment, exploitation based on capitalism, rural-urban differences, development of slums, social alienation, population growth, family disorganization, social crimes, black marketing, social unrest, and environmental degradation.

1.5.2 Scope in a Differentiated Society

As societies become more complex and differentiated, new social problems emerge. In response, new social science disciplines arise to study and address these challenges. For example:

- **Demography** emerged to study issues related to population growth.

- **Criminology** developed to address the rise in criminal activities in modern industrial societies.

1.6 Components and Interdisciplinary Nature of Social Sciences

1.6.1 Subjects within the Social Sciences Family

A field of study is characterized by three conditions: it includes multiple individual subjects, there are functional relationships among these subjects, and there are relationships between the field and other fields of study. Social sciences meet these criteria and can be categorized as follows:

- **Pure Social Sciences:** Political science, economics, history, law, sociology, public administration, anthropology, human rights.
- **Semi Social Sciences:** Ethics, education, philosophy, psychology, art.
- **Sciences with Social Implication:** Geography, biology, medicine, linguistics, library science.

1.6.2 Instructional Components at School Level (CBSE/NCERT)

- **Upper Primary:** History, Geography, and Social and Political Life (SPL).
- **Secondary:** History, Geography, Political Science, and Economics.

1.6.3 Interdisciplinary and Integration Perspectives

Interdisciplinary Nature Social science subjects are inherently linked to other disciplines, both within and outside their field. For instance, the study of '**history**' is not isolated; it includes economic history, political history, the history of sociology, and even the history of physics or mathematics.

Integration Perspective To be effective, knowledge should be taught in a unitary, integrated fashion. The concept of '**food**', for example, connects to multiple subjects:

- **Economics:** Production, marketing, consumption.
- **Sociology:** Food styles, rituals, family dynamics.
- **Political Science:** Equality in distribution, price controls.
- **Mathematics:** Quantification, division, fractions.
- **Life Sciences:** Vitamins, nutrition.
- **Physics and Chemistry:** Heat for cooking, chemical preservation.

2.0 Social Sciences in the School Curriculum: Influences and Perspectives

2.1 Colonial Legacy and the Nationalist Response

2.1.1 The Colonial Influence on Curriculum

The colonial period laid the groundwork for the formal study of social sciences in India, though often with a specific administrative and ideological purpose.

- **Writing of Indian History:** The British were the first to write a comprehensive history of India, with James Mill's *The History of British India* (1818) being a key example.
- **Archaeological Discoveries:** Colonial-era efforts led to the discovery of the Indus Valley Civilization (by figures like Charles Masson, Alexander Cunningham, and John Marshall) and the deciphering of Asoka's edicts by James Prinsep in 1837.
- **Institutional Contributions:** The Asiatic Society of Bengal (founded 1784) and the Survey of India (established 1767) were created to systematically study and map the subcontinent.
- **Census:** The first census of India was conducted in 1872, providing unprecedented data about its population.

The underlying motive for many of these efforts was to justify British rule as a "civilizing" force, a concept encapsulated in Rudyard Kipling's phrase, the "white man's burden."

2.1.2 The Nationalist Alternative

Indian nationalists reacted against the British interpretation of Indian history and culture, which they viewed as biased and demeaning.

Macaulay's Minutes (1835) illustrates the colonial attitude: "I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia."

The nationalist goal, advocated by leaders like **Swami Vivekananda**, was to write Indian history from an Indian perspective to foster national identity and pride. This led to a direct reinterpretation of key historical events: what British historians dismissed as a mere 'sepoy mutiny,' Indian nationalists reclaimed and celebrated as the 'first war of independence.'

Nationalists also established alternative models for social and educational development, such as Mahatma Gandhi's **Basic Education** scheme and the **Dayanand Anglo Vedic (DAV) movement**.

2.2 Post-Independence Curriculum Evolution

After independence, the social sciences curriculum was reshaped by the values enshrined in the Constitution of India: **liberty, equality, justice, and fraternity**.

Key recommendations from education commissions include:

- **University Education Commission (1948-49):** Emphasized training for democracy and understanding cultural heritage.
- **Secondary Education Commission (1952-53):** Focused on developing democratic citizenship.
- **Indian Education Commission (1964-66):** Aimed to strengthen social and national integration.

The **National Policy on Education (1986)** defined a common core for the national curriculum, mandating the inclusion of the history of India's freedom movement, constitutional obligations, secularism, equality, and environmental protection.

2.3 Key Thematic Influences on the Curriculum

2.3.1 National Integration and International Understanding

In a pluralistic country like India, fostering a feeling of oneness is crucial. The curriculum addresses threats to national integration, such as communalism, casteism, separatism, regionalism, and economic disparity. In a globalized world, it also promotes international understanding to tackle shared challenges like environmental degradation, world peace, and human rights.

2.3.2 Secularism and Communalism

Indian secularism is defined as treating all religions equally, rather than being irreligious. The curriculum is designed to address the causes of communal strife and encourage rational, dispassionate discussion of related issues to promote harmony.

2.3.3 The Subaltern Perspective

The term "subaltern" refers to marginalized, oppressed, and non-elite members of society. This perspective aims to correct the elitist bias in history by viewing events "from below." It highlights the role of peasants, workers, and other marginalized groups in shaping history. Examples of subaltern movements include:

- **Santhal uprising (1855)**
- **Champaran Satyagraha (1917-18)**
- **Bardoli Satyagraha (1928)**

2.3.4 Gender, Caste, and Tribal Perspectives

Gender The curriculum addresses significant gender disparities in Indian society. Data from the 2011 Census highlights these gaps:

Literacy Rates in India (2011) | Category | Rate | | :--- | :--- | | All Persons | 74.04% | | Male | 82.14% | | Female | 65.46% |

Sex Ratio (Females per 1000 Males) - 2011 | Region | Ratio | | :--- | :--- | | India | 940 | | Jharkhand | 947 | | Odisha | 978 |

The curriculum aims to promote gender equality, the education of the girl child, and women's rights to dignity and respect.

Caste Backward castes have historically suffered from poverty, humiliation, and exploitation. As per the **NPE (1986)**, the goal of education for Scheduled Castes (SCs) is "their equalization with the non-SC population at all Stages and levels of education." The following data from the 2001 Census illustrates the educational disparities faced by these communities.

Literacy among SC & ST Populations (2001) | States | Scheduled Caste (All) | Scheduled Caste (Female) | Scheduled Tribe (All) | Scheduled Tribe (Female) | | :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- | | Bihar | 28.5% | 15.6% | 28.2% | 15.5% | | Chhattisgarh | 64.0% | 49.2% | 52.1% | 39.3% | | Jharkhand | 37.6% | 22.5% | 40.7% | 27.2% | | Odisha | 55.5% | 40.3% | 37.4% | 23.4% | | UP | 46.3% | 30.5% | 35.1% | 20.7% | | **India** | **54.69%** | -- | **47.10%** | -- |

Tribal Scheduled Tribes possess distinct languages, cultures, and knowledge systems. They face educational challenges such as language barriers and a lack of cultural representation in curricula. The **NPE (1986)** states the curriculum's goal is "to create an awareness of the rich cultural identity of the tribal people as also of their enormous creative talent."

2.4 International and Current National Perspectives

2.4.1 An International Example: South Africa

The social sciences curriculum in post-apartheid South Africa serves as an illustrative case study. Its key features include:

- A focus on the relationship between people and the environment.
- An integration of human rights and environmental education.
- The goal of developing informed, critical, and responsible citizens.
- A direct confrontation with economic and social inequality, including racism and sexism.
- An examination of power relations and the distribution of resources.

2.4.2 Current Thinking in India: National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005

The NCF 2005 proposed significant shifts for the social sciences curriculum in India:

- **Aim:** To raise students' awareness by encouraging critical exploration and questioning of social reality.
- **Shift from 'Civics' to 'Political Science':** This change moves away from the subject of 'Civics,' which was introduced during the colonial period to foster obedience and loyalty to the Raj. The shift to 'Political Science' aims to treat civil society as a sphere that produces sensitive, interrogative, deliberative, and transformative citizens fit for a democracy.
- **Content Focus:** To balance national and local perspectives and address contemporary issues such as human rights, poverty, illiteracy, gender, caste, and environmental pollution.
- **Pedagogical Shift:** To move from mere instruction to more suggestive and interactive teaching methods.
- **New Methods:** To emphasize problem-solving, debates, discussions, and the use of audio-visual materials.
- **Teacher's Role:** To act as a facilitator of debate and help create self-awareness in learners.