

Social Science

Social and Political Life – III

Textbook for Class VIII



0860



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Foreword

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005, recommends that children's life at school must be linked to their life outside the school. This principle marks a departure from the legacy of bookish learning which continues to shape our system and causes a gap between the school, home and community. The syllabi and textbooks developed on the basis of NCF signify an attempt to implement this basic idea. They also attempt to discourage rote learning and the maintenance of sharp boundaries between different subject areas. We hope these measures will take us significantly further in the direction of a child-centred system of education outlined in the National Policy on Education (1986).

The success of this effort depends on the steps that school principals and teachers will take to encourage children to reflect on their own learning and to pursue imaginative activities and questions. We must recognise that given space, time and freedom, children generate new knowledge by engaging with the information passed on to them by adults. Treating the prescribed textbook as the sole basis of examination is one of the key reasons why other resources and sites of learning are ignored. Inculcating creativity and initiative is possible if we perceive and treat children as participants in learning, not as receivers of a fixed body of knowledge.

These aims imply considerable change in school routines and mode of functioning. Flexibility in the daily timetable is as necessary as rigour in implementing the annual calendar so that the required number of teaching days is actually devoted to teaching. The methods used for teaching and evaluation will also determine how effective this textbook proves for making children's life at school a happy experience, rather than a source of stress or boredom. Syllabus designers have tried to address the problem of curricular burden by restructuring and reorienting knowledge at different stages with greater consideration for child psychology and the time available for teaching. The textbook attempts to enhance this endeavour by giving higher priority and space to opportunities for contemplation and wondering, discussion in small groups, and activities requiring hands-on experience.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) appreciates the hard work done by the textbook development committee responsible for this book. We wish to thank the Chairperson of the advisory group in Social Sciences, Professor Hari Vasudevan, the Chief Advisor, Sarada Balagopalan and the Advisor, Dipta Bhog for guiding the work of this committee. Several teachers contributed to the development of this textbook; we are grateful to their principals for making this possible. We are indebted to the institutions and organisations which have generously permitted us to draw upon their resources, material and personnel. We are especially grateful to the members of the National Monitoring Committee, appointed by the Department of Secondary and Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resources Development under the Chairpersonship of Professor Mrinal Miri and Professor G.P. Deshpande, for their valuable time and contribution. As an organisation committed to systemic reform and continuous improvement in the quality of its products, NCERT welcomes comments and suggestions which will enable us to undertake further revision and refinement.

New Delhi
30 November 2007

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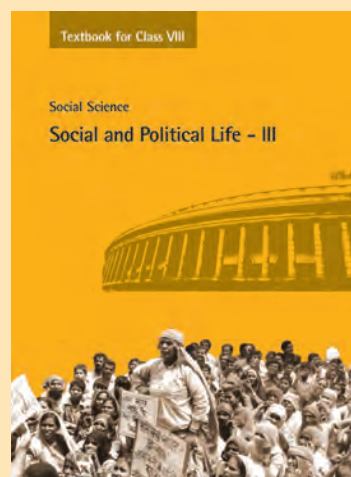
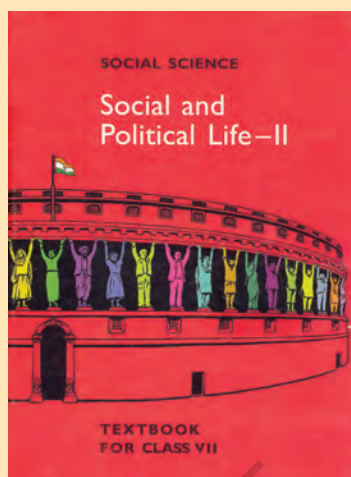
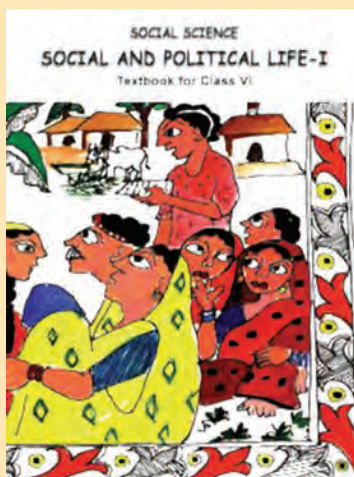
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Introductory Note for Teachers



This is the third and final textbook on Social and Political Life. In the higher classes, the students will continue to learn some of what we have discussed within the subject areas of political science and economics. In our 'Introductory Note' over the past two years, we had emphasised what this new subject area was about. This year's note is more personal as we write about what motivated us to create these textbooks in this manner and the central role that teachers play in transacting them.

Often teachers feel overwhelmed by frequent revisions in the curriculum. These are revisions that they seldom have any role in drafting but have to implement in the classroom space. Often teachers do not understand the basis for the changes. This results in some amount of frustration and cynicism about the effectiveness of any change. This skepticism can in some cases result in teachers not taking the new subject area very seriously. It may also lead to teachers' unwillingness to adopt new teaching practices that the new subject area relies upon. We hope that through sharing with you what has compelled us to develop these textbooks differently, over the past three years, you will recognise the significant role that teachers have in realising the pedagogic goals of Social and Political Life.

In hindsight, it appears we took up quite an exciting, though daunting, task three years ago when we decided that we would help flesh out a new subject area in middle-school social science. The task was exciting because quite a few of us had been involved with the teaching of Civics in school and knew how tedious the subject was to students. Or, we had done an analysis of civics textbooks and were dismayed by their limited understanding of Indian democracy. We were particularly troubled by two factors: one, the textbook's lack of any concrete examples to highlight the functioning of democracy in people's lives in India and two, its tendency to portray institutions and processes as if they functioned exactly in the ways in which the Constitution intended.

In addition, some of us had been part of a research project that showed that students were often confused between processes, institutions and individuals in government. For example, they were often not able to distinguish between the legislature and the executive. As teachers, you probably

often reflect upon such limitations of civics textbooks. We were also motivated by the fact that contemporary social and political issues did not have any space in the middle-school curriculum. Though civics had tried to raise these through a focus on the government, a new subject area was an opportunity to enlarge this focus and make it more exciting to teach without losing sight of the government's role.

We were confronted by three different types of questions. The first of these was: how can we get students to understand contemporary social and political concerns? The first question brought forth the following tentative ideas: one, we would need content that was grounded in the lives of students; two, students needed to understand that 'democracy' is not limited to the functioning of government institutions but depends primarily on the role played by ordinary persons; and three, change in content would simultaneously require a different pedagogic style.

The second question that struck us concerned the choice of themes within the subject area. Here we have explored many new themes, trying to balance what is appropriate for the middle school with a certain depth of analysis. It is unfortunate that social science has increasingly come to be viewed by students a box full of general knowledge facts to be learnt by rote. This existing understanding is completely opposed to what social science is meant to do, i.e. to provide a lens through which to analyse the world around us. This ability to analyse social issues is increasingly being viewed as a necessary and desirable skill to possess even amongst those who teach 'Science' in Universities. As social science teachers, we should be proud of our subject area and the opportunity it provides to build in the student a critical and informed way of looking at their contemporary world.

The third question related to the role that we expected teachers to play in this new subject area. This was more within the realm of pedagogy and we had the following thoughts on this: one, that as often as possible we would not provide definitions for concepts that we discussed, two, that we would use stories and other forms of creative expression including storyboards to help the students empathise with the issues being raised, and three, that the in-text and end-text questions we asked would make students engage analytically with the material presented. The visuals that the book used, whether they be storyboards, photos or photo essays, were integral to the content and could be used for further analysis of issues. These should not be seen as decorative.

Quite naturally for all of these ideas to materialise within the space of the classroom, we had to rely on more than the textbook. A national textbook, we recognised, would always fall short of providing particular content that was grounded in the vast diversity of students' lives in this country. As far as possible, we have tried to spread the case studies across regions and social groups. Secondly, since contemporary concerns would necessarily highlight the inequalities that were woven into our social fabric, there was a need for mediation of information and opinion in the classroom space. And, this role is best played by teachers. So your role is not just to transact the content of the textbook but you have been expected from the start to bring in different, more local, examples and help students develop their own analysis of important issues. These textbooks also mark a departure from earlier ones precisely because they name and identify specific forms of inequality. These caste, religious and gender distinctions are also realities that are present in the classroom and therefore, our expectation is also that you will handle these situations with the necessary sensitivity.

Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator (who characterised rote learning as akin to depositing money in a bank) wrote that teachers should attempt to, "live part of their dreams within their educational space (i.e. in schools)". And, we hoped that the social and political life classroom would serve quite easily as this space for teachers because the topics discussed in the textbooks

were deeply connected to people's struggles for justice, equality and dignity. We hoped that the teachers' strong identification with the topics discussed would allow them to guide students to critically pose questions on contemporary issues.

We also realised that this critical lens we wanted students to develop would need to be linked to a larger vision. This was needed for them to make a more informed analysis as well as not develop a cynicism when confronted with stark realities of social and political life in India. We wanted them to be critical and positive at the same time. And, although this might sound contradictory to you, we were quite sure that we did not want one without the other. For students to be confronted by only unequal realities without having any idea about how matters could be better, would have been frustrating. And on the flip side, to have them to learn about India only as an ideal democracy, in order that they remain positive, would have been misleading, given that their everyday realities are constantly telling them a different story.

Luckily for us, the country has a visionary document as well as a history of people's struggles. It is these two tools that we deliberately decided to draw upon to help make a critical analysis simultaneously a hopeful and positive experience for students. The Indian Constitution is a visionary document and has been used as such by several individuals and social movements to address issues of injustice and oppression. We have used the Constitution to serve as the moral compass for this new subject area. In addition, the book also utilises social movements to meaningfully show students that the existence of the Constitution does not in and of itself guarantee equality and dignity but that people continuously struggle to realise these in their lives.

As we developed this last book, we were also aware that in the future changes will be made to the social and political life curriculum as well as these textbooks. We hope that sharing the above reasons – why we developed these texts as well as what we hope the teacher and student will bring to the analyses presented – will allow you to deepen your commitment to this subject area. We hope that it will allow you to recognise that as the only subject area that deals with contemporary social and political issues in middle-school classes, *Social and Political Life* series provides you with a great opportunity to explore the ways in which your students' lives are tied to broader societal issues. We would like for you to use this opportunity to begin to change the ways in which students are forced to learn information by rote in the classroom space. Since the information provided in these textbooks provides enough room to introduce connected local concerns and to develop an analysis based on this, you need to exercise an active role in making the classroom space exciting as well as safe for students of all backgrounds to air their opinions without feeling left out, ridiculed or silenced.

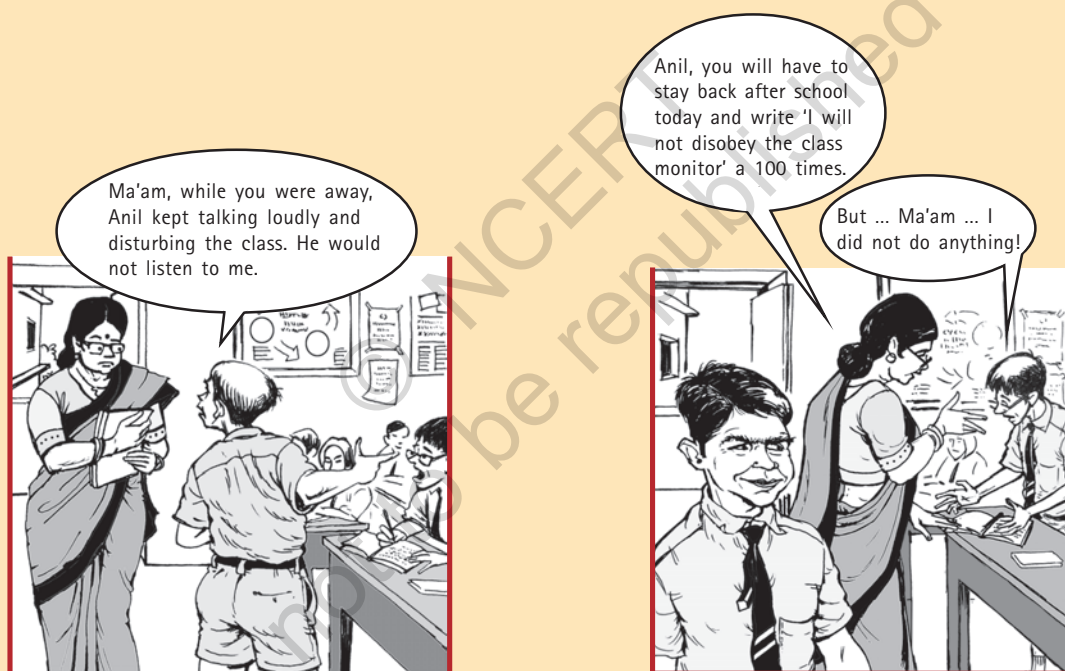
The task of establishing a new subject area through a textbook is not easy. *Social and Political Life* because of its focus on the contemporary will also be controversial at times. We can't run away from this. While you would allow a variety of opinions to be expressed, this would be based on a large amount of trust in your sense of justice and dignity for all. If you believe that schools can help build in the child a sense of a just society, then *Social and Political Life* provides you a great opportunity to do this. It is our keen hope that you take up our offer.

What are the issues included in the Class VIII book?

The Class VIII book has a focus on rule of law and social justice. The units are devoted to the following topics: the Indian Constitution, the Parliament, the Judiciary, Social Marginalisation and the Economic Presence of Government. Each unit consists of two chapters. In this book, students learn what law is and what is meant by rule of law. They also learn that often laws are not enough and people continue to struggle to have their fundamental rights realised long after laws have been passed to guarantee these. The book ends with a note on the 'Constitution as a Living Ideal'. This note serves the function of tying together the main ideas raised in the book.

What elements does the Class VIII book utilise to explain selected issues?

Storyboards: We have received feedback that the storyboards that we introduced last year worked well in the classroom with both students and teachers. This year, we have continued to use this visual medium to discuss narratives that are fictional but based on real events. We hope students will be drawn into the narrative and this will help them better understand the concepts and processes that the storyboard depicts.



Glossary: The glossary words are highlighted in the chapters. The glossary is not a dictionary. Instead, it explains the context or sense in which the words or phrases have been used in the chapter. The glossary is a tool to be used for understanding the text further and not something that needs to be memorised.

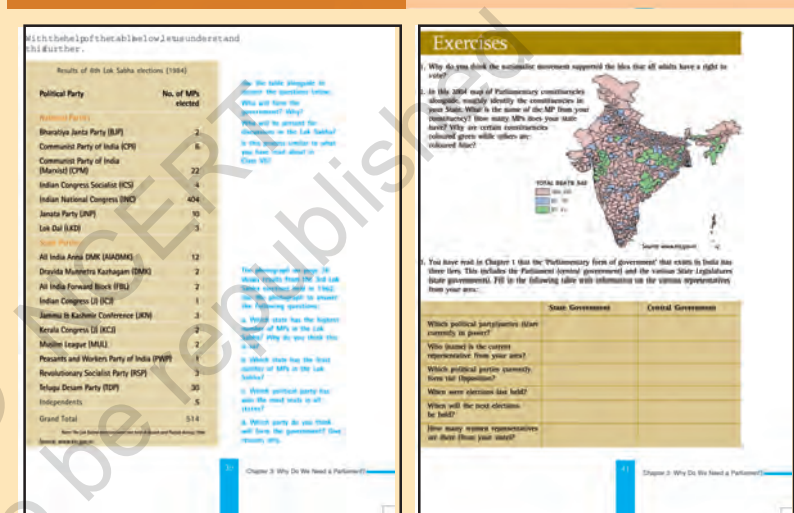


Teacher's Page: Again like we did last year, each of the units begins with a separate Teacher's Page. This highlights the main conceptual points that the chapter raises with the teacher in order to facilitate the teaching of these in the classroom space.

In-text and End-text Questions:

As with the books in the two previous years, this year's book also includes in-text and end-text questions. These combine different kinds of questions, testing the ability to reason, to contrast and compare, to infer and extrapolate, to analyse and to read and create visual material. The end-text questions usually revise the main conceptual points raised in the chapter in addition to asking students to often use their creative abilities. It is crucial that students answer these questions in their own words.

Photo Essay: Last year's book had a photo essay on the women's movement. This year, we have a photo essay on the Bhopal gas tragedy. A photo essay is to enable a student to learn about a particular situation through reading visuals. Each of the photos have been chosen with great care to mark particular moments in the history of the issue being highlighted. Students should be encouraged to read and discuss the photo essays and not gloss over them.



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