

## **Review of new NCERT Social Science Textbooks**

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

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

### **History**

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

Even though the sources and the boxes are not tested upon, they help in giving us a better picture of the times being talked about. In fact, just because they are not tested upon, I tend to go through them for the sake of it, not to learn it.

Another basic difference I noticed between class VIII and the later books was the language. The new books use a more lucid style, almost as if narrating a story. Take, for example this passage from the second chapter (NCERT Class X)

'The Nationalist Movement In Indo-China', page 36 : "In 1926 a major protest erupted in the Saigon

Native Girls School. A Vietnamese girl sitting in one of the front seats was asked to move to the back of the class and allow a local French student to occupy the front bench. She refused. The principal, also a colon (French people in the colonies), expelled her. When angry students protested, they too were expelled, leading to a further spread of open protests. Seeing the situation getting out of control, the government forced the school to take the students back. The principal reluctantly agreed but warned the students, "I will crush all Vietnamese under my feet. Ah! You wish my deportation. Know well that I will leave only after I am assured Vietnamese no longer inhabit Cochinchina."

It is, at best, a story. Nothing that one will learn for the exam. But it helps to explain the situation in Vietnam very well.

On the other hand, the class VIII book was more of a collection of facts. It was good certainly if you want a book that gives to you in detail everything about the British Rule, but wasn't an ideal tool if what you preferred was something interesting and made you want to research more on it.

On the whole, the new books facilitate learning because they create an interest in the subject while the previous one is a good one if you were serious about the subject and had an exam to cram for.

### **Political Science**

The best feature in the books is the cartoons!! Unni and Munni, and the political ones. They make a nice break from the text.

I like Unni and Munni, the two cartoon characters who appear alongside the chapter especially because they encourage us to think differently and ask questions. Some of them, when you read them, sound a little absurd but actually get you thinking when you think about it. Take, for example the question, "If casteism and communalism is bad, what makes feminism a good thing? Why don't we oppose all those who divide the society on any lines – caste, religion or gender?" and "Are you suggesting that strike, dharna, bandh and demonstration are a good thing? I thought it happened only in our country because, we are not a mature democracy yet" or "Does it mean that whichever side manages to mobilize a bigger crowd gets away with whatever it wants? Are we saying that 'Might is Right' in a democracy?" (NCERT Class X)

The Let Us Read Newspaper/Listen To Radio/Watch Television features are good. Even though teachers in the school (especially in tenth) are too busy finishing the syllabus to actually bother to go through them, they are good because what use is learning democracy theoretically if we aren't relating it to what is actually happening?

There is one error I'd like to point out in the Class X NCERT. In the

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

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

Class VIII did not have Political Science as a separate subject and neither was there another book for it. But commenting from the section on Civics in it, the new books have a much better lay-out. More colours have been used, especially in maps.

There are definitely more pictures and posters too. In a way, due to the various real-life examples used to illustrate the points, our learning of democracy has become more "real". What we are told are not just facts to memorise. They are based on systems that have worked and systems that haven't. They are based on reality. The lessons are taught giving us direct examples that we can relate to. Since so much of it is 'now and happening' and based on the outside world, it initiates debates in the class. I think that is really important because debating about a topic especially in subjects like Political Science helps us to grasp the core object much better.

## **Geography**

Just like Political Science, Geography too didn't have a separate book in class VIII.

Therefore, all comparisons are made relative to the portion on Geography in the Part II book of Social Studies of class VIII. The first thing that strikes you is, again, the look of the book. The pie-charts and maps have had a face-lift. Inclusions like "Did You Know?" are very interesting. Graphics and the quality of pictures too have improved.

Attempts made to make the book much better are visible in the revamped exercises and inclusions like the crosswords (some of them need a little editing and I'd like it if we had more of them).

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

There does exist scope for improvement in the Geography books. Some crosswords (given at the end of the chapters) need to be edited. Possibly, so much of text can be reduced in places and the monotony broken by more charts and graphs. It would also be really great if the syllabus included hands-on geography of the likes of field trips.

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