

# Curricular Discourses of Inclusion in India: A Content Analysis of a Middle-School Social Science Textbook

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## Abstract

Using a **social-model lens of inclusion**, this study analyzes how a contemporary Indian middle-school social science textbook (Grade 8) constructs discourses on disability and socio-economic, social, and political inclusion. This research investigates a qualitative content analysis of class 8 seven chapters, focusing on narrative, sensitivity, and visual elements to uncover underlying inclusion messages. Findings reveal that while **constitutional principles of equality and political participation are prominent**, representations of disability remain minimal or tokenistic, suggesting a "**pedagogy of silence**" where difference is erased in favor of an assumed normalcy. The critical analysis conceptualized inclusion as the primary goal of **civic equality** rather than living diversity. This selective engagement with equality narratives illuminates the broader ideological constructions of inclusion in India's national curriculum. These findings suggest that the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) should mandate explicit inclusion criteria within textbook review frameworks to ensure comprehensive and critical representation.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Textbook Analysis, Disability Inclusion, Disability, Curriculum Theory.

## 1. Introduction

The textbook is the most important foundational element of the educational system, helping not only as a foundation of knowledge, but also as a powerful agent of socialization and cultural transmission. India has a large population, complicated history, and many different types of social, linguistic, and cultural societies. Therefore, we constantly check school textbooks to see how they shape national identity, bring people together, and deal with current and past conflicts, especially important for inclusive education, which is an effort to ensure students, regardless of their background, identity, or ability, feel valued, and get a fair chance to learn [1]. Inclusive education helps students to understand their rights and the importance of equality and justice in society.

Recent policy changes in India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and the subsequent National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023 have placed strong emphasis on equity and inclusion

in all aspects of education, from content to pedagogy [2]. These policies articulate a vision for a curriculum that actively works against fixed notions and stereotypical views, thereby promoting a critical understanding of social reality. This study aimed to evaluate how equity, social diversity, justice, and inclusion are reflected in practice within a contemporary social science textbook designed for the middle school level (Grade-8), a critical stage in which civics and social diversity themes intensify.

### 1.1. Research Gap and Rationale

While previous studies have examined textbook bias and representation in the Indian context, few have systematically coded middle-school texts through a multidimensional inclusion lens that at the same time researches considers disability, socio-economic, cultural, and political dimensions [2,3]. The middle-school stage is important for growing learners, as it is where they develop a complex understanding of their roles in society. The

National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) plays a critical role in shaping national curriculum narratives; analyzing this text illuminates the wider ideological constructions of inclusion in India [4].

The problem statement guiding this research is that the curriculum, as a form of "knowledge", may selectively engage with the ideals of inclusion, prioritizing constitutional and political equality while at the same time marginalizing or silencing the realities of certain groups, particularly those with disabilities. This type of selective engagement risks perpetuating a "pedagogy of silence", where differences are erased in favor of an assumed normalcy, thereby undermining the transformative goals of inclusive education [5]. This study addresses this gap by providing a systematic and theoretically grounded content analysis of contemporary social science textbooks.

## 1.2. Theoretical Framework

This study uses a combined approach and a **three-part framework** to analyze textbooks. It combines **Cultural Representation Theory (CRT)**, **Social Model of Disability (SMD)**, and **Critical Curriculum Theory (CCT)**. This powerful combination is necessary to look past the surface of the textbook and uncover hidden messages, power structures, and systemic exclusions built into the "official knowledge" taught in schools.

### 1.2.1. Critical Curriculum Theory

CCT interprets the school curriculum as a site of political power, it argues that the "**official knowledge**" what is chosen to be taught reflects the interests and values of the most powerful groups in society, and it helps keep those groups in charge. The central tenet of CCT in this study is the concept of a hidden curriculum of unstated norms and values transmitted through the selection and organization of content [6]. CCT provides a lens to deconstruct the ideology embedded in the textbook, examine whose knowledge is deemed "official", and understand the curriculum as a site of broader societal struggles over inclusion and national identity.

### 1.2.2. Cultural Representation Theory

CRT, associated with the work of Stuart Hall, provides methodological and conceptual tools to analyze how meaning is constructed and communicated through language, visuals, and discourse [7]. **CRT** teaches us that how things are shown is not just a mirror of reality, but an active way of creating meaning, and this process is always related to power. In textbooks, CRT helps with analysis: 1) **Signification**: *How* marginalized groups are shown; 2) **Stereotyping/Tokenism**: Whether they are shown in flat, limited ways; and 3) **Politics of Difference**: Whether the book celebrates differences as "**lived diversity**" or tries to hide or erase them to promote an idea of "**normalcy**". The intersection of CCT and CRT is potent, as CCT explains why certain representations are chosen (ideology), and CRT explains how those representations function to produce meaning and reinforce power structures.

### 1.2.3. The Social Model of Disability (SMD)

SMD is a major change in the Medical Model, which explains that disability is caused by society and not by a person's medical condition [8]. For this study, the SMD is the ethical and analytical foundation for examining disability representation in content. It shifts the analytical focus from the individual to the social environment, defining true inclusion as the active removal of societal barriers and demanding that the curriculum represent individuals with disabilities as rights-holder citizens and valued participants in society [9]. SMD provides an analytical approach to evaluating the textbook's portrayal of disability moves beyond tokenistic, compliance-driven examples to genuinely integrate disability as a dimension of human diversity and social justice.

### 1.2.4. Synthesis of the Integrated Framework

By combining CCT, CRT, and SMD, we obtained a strong, multi layered framework that allows for a deep, critical analysis of the textbook's content. This framework allows for the analysis of textbooks at three distinct yet interconnected levels.

Theoretical Framework	Primary Focus	Contribution to Textbook Analysis	Intersectional Linkages
<b>Critical Curriculum Theory (CCT)</b>	<b>Ideology and Power</b>	Uncovers the political nature of "official knowledge" and the mechanisms of the hidden curriculum that silence marginalized voices.	Links the selection of content (CCT) to the meaning produced by that content (CRT).
<b>Cultural Representation Theory (CRT)</b>	<b>Meaning and Discourse</b>	Analyzes the how of representation—identifying stereotypes, tokenism, and the construction of difference through narrative and visual elements.	Provides the tools to analyze the specific form of exclusion identified by CCT and the impact of non-SMD representations.
<b>Social Model of Disability (SMD)</b>	<b>Systemic Barriers and Rights</b>	Provides the normative standard for evaluating disability content, shifting the critique from individual deficit to systemic exclusion and the demand for full social participation.	Acts as a specific, rights-based critique that CCT and CRT can generalize to other forms of social exclusion (e.g., socio-economic, cultural).

This integrated framework allows the study to argue that the textbook's selective engagement with inclusion, which prioritizes civic equality while minimizing disability and cultural diversity, is

not an accidental omission, but a reflection of a deeper ideological project (CCT) that actively shapes meaning (CRT) to maintain a status quo that privileges assumed normativity (critiqued by

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SMD). By using this framework, the study can effectively argue that the "pedagogy of silence" surrounding disability is a function of the curriculum's ideological construction.

### 1.3. Literature Review

The literature related to curriculum studies and content analysis consistently underscores the role of educational materials as powerful agents of socialization, reproducing, or challenging existing social inequalities [10,11]. This review synthesizes existing knowledge across three thematic areas of inclusion and establishes an integrated theoretical framework that guides this critical content analysis.

#### 1.3.1. Disability Representation and the Pedagogy of Silence

The representation of disability in textbooks is a critical area of study, with research consistently highlighting problematic and exclusionary representations [3]. In the Indian context, research has identified that disability is often presented through the lens of the Medical Model, focusing on individual deficit, tragedy, or isolated "heroic" narratives of overcoming [12,13]. This approach fails to recognize the systemic barriers that create disabilities. Researchers advocate for a shift towards strengths-based imagery and the integration of disability within everyday social and political contexts, portraying individuals with disabilities as active, rights-holder citizens [13].

The most thoughtful form of exclusion is not misrepresentation, but invisibility in the textbooks, termed the "pedagogy of silence" by Slee [5], occurs when the curriculum assumes a normativity that erases difference [24], effectively rendering a significant portion of the population invisible [5,14]. Hodgkinson [8] further argues that this avoidance of disability in school textbooks is a variant of critical avoidance that characterizes a regime that covertly reinforces ableist ideologies. Curriculum silence on disability is a powerful ideological tool that supports the idea that disability is not a relevant dimension of social life or civic identity [9,15].

#### 1.3.2. Cultural and Socio-economic Inclusion

The discussion of socioeconomic and cultural inclusion in textbooks is enclosed by the pressure between celebrating superficial diversity and addressing operational inequality. On one hand, textbooks are expected to reflect varied cultural practices and heritage [16]. On the other hand, a critical perspective demands that they move beyond mere tokenism, where minimal, isolated examples are used to mask a broader absence and content recognizes the interconnecting nature of identities [17,18].

The literature critically analyzes the need for educational content to address the structural barriers and inequality that perpetuate disadvantages such as wealth disparity, privilege, and unequal access to resources [4,19].

In the South Asian and Indian context, this includes confronting the historical and contemporary impacts of caste and regional disparities [20]. Effective cultural representation must promote criticality by addressing historical and systemic forms of inequality,

exclusion, and marginalization rather than presenting an idealized, harmonious view of society [21,22]. For instance, studies on cultural representation in Indian English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks have shown a persistent bias towards certain cultural groups and a lack of local representation, underscoring the ideological nature of content selection [23,24].

#### 1.3.3. Political Inclusion and Civic Discourse

Textbooks are the foundation of the dissemination of civic identity and political knowledge [25]. Research on political inclusion focuses on whether the curriculum represents diverse groups of participants in political processes [1,5]. A key finding in critical curriculum analysis is the conflicts between the "knowledge" of constitutional ideals and the reality of lived inequality and social justice [10]. Textbooks often privilege a constitutional, idealistic view of democracy, emphasizing formal rights such as the Universal Adult Franchise, while content neglects the historical struggles and ongoing realities of political marginalization [9,26].

This discriminatory focus can lead to a curriculum that is high in civic idealism but low in critical realism, thereby failing to prepare students with the tools to understand and challenge systemic inequality and injustices [20]. Therefore, the analysis of political discourse in textbooks must assess whether the content details agency, depicting marginalized groups as active agents of change, or merely as passive recipients of state benevolence [19].

### 1.4. Research Objectives

- **Research** will carefully check how much and how well marginalized groups are shown in the textbook across five key areas of inclusion: Disability, Social issues, economic issues, cultural issues, and political issues.
- To analyse how the textbook's narrative and visual elements, through the lens of Critical Curriculum Theory and Cultural Representation Theory, construct discourses of inclusion and exclusion, revealing the underlying ideological messages.
- **This research** will look closely at the kind of inclusion that the curriculum favours. Does it focus only on **formal civic equality** or does it embrace **substantive lived diversity**? This is important when analysing using an SMD lens.
- To empirically identify and describe the presence of a "pedagogy of silence" surrounding disability and other forms of difference, and analyse its implications for the transformative goals of inclusive education.

### 1.5. Research Questions

- How do the narrative and visual elements in middle-school social science textbooks construct discourses of inclusion and exclusion across five dimensions: **Disability, Social, Economic, Cultural, and Political**?
- To what extent does the textbook engage in a critical historical analysis of exclusion and marginalization and how does this engagement vary across different dimensions of inclusion?
- How does the textbook conceptualize and prioritize different dimensions of inclusion (e.g., formal **civic equality** versus substantive **lived diversity**), and what are the ideological

implications of this prioritization?

## 2. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative content analysis approach to systematically examine Class 8 social science textbook content for themes related to inclusion, justice, culture, and equitable representation from social, cultural, economic, and political perspectives. This methodology is particularly suited for analysing the latent and manifest content of educational texts to uncover underlying ideological messages and pedagogical intentions.

### 2.1. Data Sources and Sampling Rationale

The main material analysed was seven chapters from the current Indian social science textbook. The 7th-grade book was chosen on purpose because it is the point in the middle school curriculum where topics about citizenship and social diversity become more complex. The chapters covered a broad spectrum of the social science curriculum:

- **Geography/Economics:** Chapter 1 (Natural Resources and Their Use) and Chapter 7 (Factors of Production).
- **History:** Chapter 2 (Reshaping India's Political Map), Chapter 3 (The Rise of the Marathas), and Chapter 4 (The Colonial Era in India).
- **Civics/Political Science:** Chapter 5 (Universal Franchise and India's Electoral System) and Chapter 6 (The Parliamentary System: Legislature and Executive).

### 2.2. Analytical Framework and Unit of Analysis

A **thematic framework** was developed a priori, synthesized from established academic literature on inclusive textbook analysis (UNESCO, 2017; Slee, 2011). The codes were derived inductively from literature and guided by the coding process, focusing on the four critical dimensions of inclusion. The **analytic unit** used in this study was a **paragraph** for narrative content and a **full image/caption** for visual content.

Thematic Dimension	Key Analytical Questions	Supporting Literature
<b>Disability Representation</b>	How are individuals with disabilities portrayed? Does the textbook content highlight that person with disabilities can access things, have fair opportunities, and take part in society, instead of just focusing on what they can't do?	(Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023; Ulya et al., 2025)
<b>Social &amp; Economic Inclusion</b>	Does the textbook address issues of wealth disparity, privilege, and disadvantage? Does the book talk about access to resources and opportunities in a fair way that shows respect for all groups of students?	(Yadav, 2025; Mamasadikovna & Borataliyevna, 2025)
<b>Cultural Representation</b>	Does the content reflect varied cultural practices and heritage? Does the book recognize and show that people have multiple, overlapping identities (like being a woman and being from a certain class and having a disability)?	(Košir & Lakshminarayanan, 2024; Khanal et al., 2025)
<b>Political Inclusion</b>	Are all different groups (including women, minorities, and people with disabilities) shown as actively involved in politics? Does the textbook present legitimate avenues for political participation and change?	(Tonson et al., 2013; Jackson, 1968)

### 2.3. Reliability and Procedure

The research analysis was completed in several steps: familiarization with the text, grouping themes, and summarizing the findings. To ensure that the results were reliable, two people independently analyzed 20% of the text and agreed on most of the coding (Cohen's  $\kappa = .81$ ). Disagreements were resolved until a consensus was reached. The final interpretation links the findings to the theoretical framework and broader academic discourse on inclusive education and curriculum reforms in India.

## 3. Findings

The analysis revealed a selective and uneven approach to inclusion across the textbook series, demonstrating a strong commitment to constitutional ideals, but limited engagement with the lived realities of diversity.

### 3.1. Political Inclusion: The Prominence of Civic Equality

The strongest theme was Political Inclusion, especially in civic chapters. The textbook content focuses mainly on the Constitution's ideas of equality, the right to vote for all adults, and

how the legislature and executives work. This highlights that the textbook mostly defines inclusion as civic equality, rather than as a reflection of diverse life experiences within society.

For example, a unit discussing parliament highlights the provision of translation services in multiple Indian languages, which was coded as an instance of inclusion, demonstrating the state's commitment to linguistic equity. However, the analysis also revealed selective engagement (CCT lens), where inclusive elements peaked in chapters on the constitution and the electoral process, declining significantly in historical units that might discuss political struggles or marginalization. The exclusionary contents primarily presented an idealized, conflict-free lens of democracy, neglecting historical and contemporary struggles for rights by marginalized groups.

- The Civics chapter points out that the Parliament system provides an overview of legislature and executive work, and provides translation services for several Indian languages.
- This is a strong example of the government's dedication to fairness in all languages, and respect for different cultures in

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the nation's top legislative body.

- **Contents** reveal that inclusive elements peak in chapters on the constitution and electoral process, declining significantly in historical units. This shows selective engagement with equality narratives, prioritizing the ideal over the historical struggle.

### 3.2. Socio-Economic and Critical Historical Analysis

The textbook engages in a critical, albeit sometimes descriptive, analysis of historical and socio-economic exclusion, fulfilling the requirement to "actively work against preconceived notions or stigmatizing views."

- The historical chapters closely examine power and marginalization. For example, chapters discuss the Delhi Sultanate's Jizya tax and iconoclasm, which encourage students to think critically about how power has historically led to religious and social exclusion. Likewise, critiques of the colonial period focused on economic exploitation and forcing foreign cultures onto India, pointing out specific examples of religious and cultural unfairness.
- The chapter on natural resources discusses how resources are not shared equally and the social price of development, such as people being forced to move from resource-rich areas. This directly addresses attention related to wealth inequality and ensures fair opportunities for everyone.

### 3.3. Disability Representation: A Pedagogy of Silence

Disability remains the most underrepresented category, suggesting systemic invisibility rather than incidental omission. The way disability is shown in digital content is very limited, or just a surface-level mention.

- Unlike a strong emphasis on political and socioeconomic inclusion, disability is largely absent from the core narrative. The book failed to show people with disabilities varied and meaningful roles.
- The only clear mention of disability is a short part of the Civics chapter about the Election Commission's efforts to make sure "no voter is left behind" (like home voting and special technology). While this is good, a single example is not sufficient to compensate for the overall lack of representation. This suggests that the focus is on the following rules (institutional compliance), rather than truly including disability as a normal part of life. This lack of content creates a condition of "pedagogy of silence," a silent way of environment that accepts everyone is "normal" and ignores differences.

### 3.4. Cultural Representation: Tokenism and Superficiality

Cultural Representation is categorized by a high degree of tokenism and superficiality (CRT view) [7]. While the textbook included numerous images and references to diverse cultural practices (e.g., festivals and traditional clothing), the narrative rarely moved beyond a celebratory, surface-level acknowledgment. The exclusionary content was examined in the following units:

1. Units that reduced complex cultural groups to a few simplistic, often exoticized, traits.

2. Units content that failed to acknowledge the intersecting nature of social identities or cultural and linguistic marginalization.

This finding suggests that the curriculum's approach to culture is a tokenistic celebration designed to mask the deeper ideological avoidance of confronting cultural power dynamics and historical injustices.

## 4. Discussion

The research findings of current social science textbooks explore a complex and contradictory approach to inclusion, which also confirms that the curriculum's engagement with inclusion is selective, prioritizing constitutional and political ideals over the comprehensive representation of lived diversity.

### 4.1. Disability Inclusion: Systemic Invisibility

Disability remains the most underrepresented category, reflecting **systemic invisibility** rather than incidental omission. The minimal and isolated example of ECI accessibility, while positive, functions as a token node for institutional efforts rather than a genuine integration of the SMD. This aligns with Patel and Singh's [20] findings on tokenistic portrayals and suggests that the curriculum has yet to fully internalize the social model [9], which demands the representation of individuals with disabilities as active-valued participants in all aspects of society. The **pedagogy of silence** [5] surrounding disability reinforces the notion of an assumed "normal" student body, effectively marginalizing those who do not fit this norm.

### 4.2. Curriculum as Ideology: Civic Idealism vs. Lived Inequality

The curriculum's constitutional emphasis aligns with Apple's [10] notion of "**official knowledge**," which privileges civic idealism over lived inequality. The strong focus on the Universal Adult Franchise and formal mechanisms of government presents an idealized view of a functioning democracy. While the textbook engages in a critical historical analysis of exclusion (e.g., colonialism, *jizya* tax), this criticism often stops short of connecting historical injustices to contemporary, lived socioeconomic, and disability inequalities. The selective nature of inclusion—peaking in Civics chapters and declining elsewhere—demonstrates the textbook's role as a pedagogic device [11] that frames inclusion within the boundaries of state-sanctioned political discourse.

### 4.3. Comparative Insight and Implications

Connecting these results to international contexts, the textbook partially met the criteria of UNESCO's [14] inclusion framework by promoting political participation and cultural respect. However, content failure to effectively address disability contrasts with inclusive practices in curricula, which regularly mandate the integration of diverse life experiences across content. The implications of these findings are significant for curriculum and textbook reforms. The recent approach risks the development of a generation of students who understand equality as a constitutional right but fail to recognize the systemic barriers faced by marginalized groups, particularly those with disabilities.

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To operationalize inclusion in classroom practice, teacher guides should include reflection context like, “*Whose voices are missing from this narrative?*” to encourage critical engagement with the text.

#### 4.4. Addressing the Research Questions

The research results provide clear answers to the research questions:

- The textbook proposes an address of only selective inclusion, where the political dimension of the textbook is emphasized, while the content-related disability dimension is subject to the pedagogy of silence. Cultural and socioeconomic dimensions were addressed through tokenism and descriptive, rather than critical, analysis.
- Textbooks’ engagement with critical historical analysis was uneven. It engages critically with historical economic and colonial exclusion, but largely avoids a critical historical analysis of social and disability-related marginalization, particularly where such analysis would challenge the current ideological status quo.
- The textbook conceptualizes inclusion primarily as civic equality (formal rights) and prioritizes this dimension. The ideological implication is that the curriculum seeks to socialize students into accepting the formal structures of democracy while discouraging critical engagement with substantive inequalities that persist in society.

In summary, the analysis confirms that the curriculum, through its selective content and representational strategies, reinforces an ideological project that marginalizes the lived experiences of diversity, particularly for people with disabilities, thereby undermining the transformative potential of inclusive education.

#### 5. Conclusion

This study systematically analysed a contemporary Indian social science textbook using a multidimensional inclusion framework. The key finding was the significant disparity between the healthy representation of Political Inclusion and the systemic invisibility of Disability Representation in content and visuals. The content successfully promoted constitutional principles of equality, and engaged in a critical historical analysis of exclusion. However, the minimal and tokenistic portrayal of disability suggests that the curriculum conceptualizes inclusion primarily as **civic equality** rather than comprehensive lived diversity.

These findings suggest that NCERT’s textbook policy (2025 Edition) **mandates explicit inclusion criteria** within textbook review frameworks, particularly for disability representation, to move beyond tokenism and pedagogy of silence.

#### 5.1. Limitations and Future Research

The main limitation of this research is that it focuses only on the textual and visual content of social science textbooks, not on other subjects, and focuses only on grade 8 textbooks published by NCERT (2025 edition). Future research should include student focus groups to explore how learners internalize textbook discourses

on inclusion and whether they perceive the “pedagogy of silence” surrounding disabilities. Moreover, a comparison of different educational boards would provide a broader understanding of the ideological landscape of inclusion in Indian school textbooks.

#### Author Contributions

In the development of this paper, ‘Akhilesh Yadav’ collected and analysed the data, drafted the manuscript, and revised the first draft.

#### Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study no human involvement in the research.

#### Consent for Publication

Informed consent was obtained from all participants and dental information was included in the study protocol.

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#### Data Availability Statement

Data supporting the findings of this study were obtained from the corresponding author upon request.

#### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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