

A Critical Study of Social Justice and Human Rights in Indian School Curricula

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Abstract

This study employs qualitative content analysis to critically examine the representation of social justice and human rights narratives in secondary-level Political Science textbooks prescribed for Grades 9 and 10 by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), India. By analysing the 2024 edition of two Political Science textbooks, this research investigates the portrayal of caste and class discrimination, gender equity, and their broader implications in educational discourse. The findings indicate a predominant emphasis on historical and constitutional frameworks, with limited engagement with contemporary socio-political issues, such as LGBTQ+ rights, intersectional discrimination, and systemic critiques of inequality. The study argues that while these textbooks provide a foundational understanding of social justice, they often marginalise critical discourses that challenge dominant power structures. The absence of intersectional perspectives limits students' ability to develop a comprehensive and critical understanding of social inequalities in present-day India. This study underscores the need for curricular reforms that incorporate diverse perspectives, fostering inclusive and intersectional pedagogies. It advocates for the integration of contemporary debates and lived experiences into educational materials, thereby equipping students with the analytical tools necessary for engaging with social justice and human rights issues in a dynamic and evolving society.

Keywords: Social Justice, Human Rights, CBSE Textbooks, Content Analysis, India

I. Introduction

Education serves as the foundation for shaping societal values and fostering an informed citizenry.

The role of school curricula in inculcating critical concepts such as social justice and human rights is particularly significant in diverse and complex societies like India. Textbooks, as the primary medium of knowledge dissemination, influence young learners' perspectives

and play a crucial role in shaping their understanding of key socio-political issues. Among these, the textbooks published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) hold a position of prominence, as they are widely adopted across the country. However, the narratives embedded in these textbooks are not neutral; rather, they reflect broader societal, political, and ideological orientations, raising important questions about inclusivity, representation, and contemporary relevance.

This study critically examines the representation of social justice and human rights narratives in the NCERT Political Science textbooks for Grades 9 and 10, published in 2024. Specifically, it focuses on two fundamental themes: caste and class discrimination, and gender equity. While these issues are acknowledged and discussed within the curriculum, the depth of their engagement, the perspectives offered, and the silences within these narratives warrant scrutiny. Through qualitative content analysis, this paper explores how these themes are portrayed, the extent to which they align with contemporary socio-political realities, and the gaps that persist in their representation.

A preliminary analysis of these textbooks reveals a strong emphasis on historical and constitutional frameworks. Discussions on caste discrimination, for example, largely centre around historical injustices and the legal mechanisms introduced to address them, such as affirmative action policies and constitutional safeguards. Similarly, gender equity is framed within the discourse of legal rights, women's political representation, and access to education. However, while these aspects are crucial, the textbooks exhibit a noticeable absence of discussions on contemporary issues such as LGBTQ+ rights, intersectional discrimination, and systemic critiques of inequality. The omission of these issues not only marginalises critical discourses but also limits students' engagement with real-world challenges that shape the lived experiences of marginalised communities

The exclusion of LGBTQ+ rights, in particular, is a significant gap in the curriculum. Despite the landmark Supreme Court rulings decriminalizing homosexuality (*Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*, 2018) and affirming transgender rights (*National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India*, 2014), school textbooks have largely remained silent on these developments. This silence contributes to the continued invisibility of LGBTQ+ identities within mainstream educational narratives, depriving students of an opportunity to engage with evolving social norms and legal advancements.

Similarly, intersectional discrimination—whereby individuals experience overlapping and compounded forms of marginalisation based on caste, gender, religion, and economic status—is inadequately addressed. The current curriculum presents these issues in compartmentalised ways, rather than acknowledging their interconnections.

This study underscores the necessity of curricular reforms that go beyond historical glorifications and constitutional proclamations to embrace a more holistic, contemporary, and inclusive approach to social justice education. Given the rapidly evolving socio-political landscape of India, educational frameworks must be dynamic and responsive to current realities. This necessitates a shift towards pedagogies that critically engage with issues such as economic disparity, digital inequalities, environmental justice, and the rights of marginalised communities in the 21st century.

The importance of this research lies in its potential to inform educational policy and advocate for the development of curricula that reflect the complexities of modern Indian society. By bridging the gap between academic discourse on social justice and the lived experiences of marginalised groups, this study contributes to the broader conversation on education as a transformative tool for equity and inclusion.

While the NCERT Political Science textbooks provide a foundational understanding of social justice and human rights, their current framework falls short of fostering a truly inclusive and intersectional perspective. A comprehensive revision of these educational materials, incorporating diverse voices and contemporary social issues, is essential to creating a curriculum that genuinely prepares students to contribute meaningfully to a more just and equitable society. Through this critical lens, the study highlights the imperative need for curricular reforms that engage with social justice in a nuanced and forward-looking manner, equipping students to address the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

II. Literature Review

The role of education in shaping students' understanding of social justice and human rights has been widely discussed in academic literature. In India, where socio-economic and cultural diversity is significant, textbooks are critical in framing young learners' perspectives on justice and equality (Bajaj, 2011). However, scholars argue that Indian school curricula often present a sanitized version of social justice narratives, emphasizing historical and constitutional frameworks while neglecting contemporary issues such as LGBTQ+ rights, systemic discrimination, and intersectionality (Richardson & Sauers, 2014; Sahu, 2020). This literature review examines existing research on the portrayal of social justice and human rights in Indian school curricula, identifying key themes and gaps in representation.

2.1 Representation of Social Justice in School Curricula

Social justice narratives in Indian education have largely been shaped by historical figures and constitutional mandates rather than a critical engagement with contemporary issues of discrimination and equity (Skinner & Bromley, 2019). While the Indian education system has long sought to integrate principles of equality and social justice, its approach often remains limited to policy frameworks rather than substantive transformations in pedagogical practice. This focus on legal and historical dimensions, while significant, does not always translate into addressing the structural barriers that continue to marginalise vulnerable communities in education. Bajaj (2011) underscores the limitations of human rights education in India, arguing that it is predominantly policy-driven, leaving little room for the incorporation of the lived experiences of marginalised communities. This gap between policy and practice underscores a fundamental challenge in the education system: the disconnect between the theoretical articulation of social justice and the material realities faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds. While educational policies have been instrumental in setting legal and institutional frameworks for inclusion, they often fail to engage with the everyday challenges faced by marginalized students, such as caste-based discrimination, gendered violence, and economic exclusion. The Right to Education (RTE) Act, enacted in 2009, is a significant legislative step toward ensuring universal access to education. However, scholars have critiqued its implementation for reinforcing existing systemic inequalities rather than dismantling them. Dyer (2010) argues that the RTE Act, while ambitious in its objectives, has struggled to accommodate the socio-economic realities of mobile and pastoralist children. The rigid structure of formal schooling does not align with the migratory patterns of these communities, effectively excluding them from accessing continuous education. This critique highlights a broader issue within Indian educational policy—its inability to adapt to the diverse needs of marginalized groups. Furthermore, the curriculum and pedagogy in Indian schools often reflect a top-down

approach to social justice, where students are taught about constitutional rights and historical figures like B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi without a corresponding engagement with contemporary social struggles. This historical emphasis, while important, does not adequately equip students with the critical thinking skills necessary to analyse and challenge present-day inequalities. As a result, social justice education in India remains largely an exercise in knowledge transmission rather than an avenue for transformative learning. Another critical aspect of social justice in Indian education is the role of caste and gender. Despite legal safeguards, caste discrimination continues to persist in educational institutions, manifesting in segregation, differential treatment, and institutional biases. Gender-based disparities also remain a pressing concern, as girls from marginalised communities often face multiple layers of disadvantage, including economic constraints, cultural expectations, and institutional discrimination. While policies such as the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme aim to address gender disparities, their effectiveness remains limited due to entrenched socio-cultural barriers. In conclusion, while Indian education policies have made commendable strides toward promoting social justice, their effectiveness is often undermined by systemic inequalities and rigid institutional structures. A shift toward more inclusive, experiential, and context-sensitive pedagogies is necessary to bridge the gap between policy rhetoric and lived realities. Without this shift, social justice education risks remaining a theoretical construct rather than a tool for meaningful social transformation.

2.2 Human Rights and Educational Inclusion

The integration of human rights in educational curricula demonstrates significant variation across different socio-economic contexts, reflecting disparities in pedagogical focus and resource allocation. Richardson and Sauers (2014) explored school leaders' perceptions of social justice in India, highlighting that educational institutions serving distinct socio-economic demographics adopt divergent approaches. Their findings suggest that affluent schools tend to emphasise theoretical discussions on human rights, fostering an academic understanding of social justice principles. In contrast, schools catering to economically disadvantaged students prioritise pragmatic interventions aimed at improving students' immediate socio-economic conditions. This dichotomy underscores the role of financial and institutional resources in shaping how human rights education is imparted. Moreover, human rights discourse in education extends beyond economic stratification, encompassing broader considerations of inclusivity and intersectionality. Gabel and Mapp (2020) argue that while social work education frequently integrates human rights narratives, it remains inadequate in equipping educators with the necessary tools to address intersectional discrimination effectively. This gap is particularly pronounced in contexts where systemic biases and cultural norms influence curricular content and pedagogical approaches. For instance, the representation of marginalised groups within educational materials remains inconsistent, further exacerbating the exclusion of diverse identities in classroom discussions. One critical dimension of this issue is the portrayal of gender equity and LGBTQ+ rights within school curricula. Parker (2018) highlights that Indian school textbooks exhibit limited engagement with these topics, often reflecting heteronormative and patriarchal perspectives. The absence of comprehensive discussions on gender and sexuality rights not only restricts students' understanding of these fundamental human rights but also perpetuates societal inequalities. Consequently, this exclusion reinforces discriminatory attitudes and limits the potential for progressive social change through education. The disparities in human rights education across different socio-economic and cultural contexts necessitate a more inclusive and systematic approach to curriculum development. Ensuring that human rights principles, particularly those related to intersectionality, are meaningfully integrated into educational frameworks is crucial for fostering a more equitable society. Educational policymakers must consider strategies that bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, particularly in resource-constrained settings. Additionally, teacher training programs should be reformed to equip educators with the skills to address intersectional discrimination and engage with diverse perspectives in their teaching. Furthermore, the role of institutional stakeholders, including government agencies and non-governmental organisations, is pivotal in advancing a human rights-based educational framework. Collaborative efforts between policymakers, educators, and civil society actors can facilitate the inclusion of marginalised voices in curriculum development, ensuring a more holistic representation of human rights issues. By addressing these structural challenges, educational institutions can move beyond superficial discussions of human rights and contribute to meaningful societal transformation. In conclusion, the integration of human rights in educational curricula is shaped by socio-economic contexts, institutional priorities, and cultural norms. While affluent schools may focus on the theoretical explorations, underprivileged institutions emphasise tangible interventions. However, significant gaps persist in addressing intersectional discrimination and marginalised identities within educational materials (Gabel & Mapp, 2020; Parker, 2018). Bridging these gaps requires a concerted effort to reform curricula, enhance teacher training, and promote inclusive educational policies, ultimately fostering a more comprehensive and equitable approach to human rights education.

2.3 Pedagogical Approaches to Social Justice

Effective social justice education necessitates a curriculum that extends beyond constitutional provisions to embrace participatory and critical pedagogies. Ratnam (2015) emphasises that mere legal literacy is insufficient for fostering an engaged and socially responsible citizenry. Instead, educational frameworks must incorporate interactive methods that encourage students to critically analyse societal structures and power dynamics. Such an approach aligns with the principles of Paulo Freire's (1970) pedagogical model, which underscores the need for education to be a tool for empowerment rather than passive knowledge transmission. By embedding participatory learning strategies, educators can facilitate discussions that move beyond theoretical understanding to active engagement with social justice issues. The development of critical consciousness among students is crucial for effective social justice education. Christopher and Taylor (2011) argue that fostering critical consciousness enables students to recognise and challenge systemic inequities, thereby contributing to the transformation of oppressive structures. This perspective is rooted in critical pedagogy, which advocates for questioning dominant narratives and empowering marginalised voices. When students are encouraged to reflect on their social realities, they develop a deeper understanding of institutional discrimination and structural violence. Consequently, they become more equipped to participate in democratic processes and advocate for equitable policies. Another integral component of social justice education is the integration of human rights perspectives into curricula. Nadkarni and Sinha (2016) contend that embedding human rights education within social work programs can bridge the gap between policy frameworks and practical applications. By doing so, students not only gain theoretical insights into human rights but also develop the skills necessary for their implementation in real-world scenarios. Such an approach ensures that learners are prepared to engage with contemporary social justice challenges, thereby reinforcing the link between academic knowledge and civic engagement. The inclusion of human rights discourses in educational settings also promotes an intersectional understanding of social justice, enabling students to critically examine issues of gender, caste, class, and race. However, despite the potential of critical and participatory pedagogies, Indian school curricula often fail to engage students in discussions on active citizenship and social movements. Sahu (2020) highlights that these topics are frequently relegated to historical narratives rather than being contextualised as ongoing struggles for justice. As a result, students are often unaware of their roles in contemporary social justice efforts, limiting their ability to participate in meaningful activism. This gap in education underscores the need for curricular reforms that emphasise experiential learning, case studies, and community-based projects. Integrating contemporary social movements and grassroots activism into educational discourse can provide students with a more nuanced understanding of democratic participation. In conclusion, a robust social justice curriculum must move beyond constitutional provisions to embrace participatory pedagogies, critical consciousness, and human rights perspectives. As research suggests, fostering student engagement with real-world issues is essential for cultivating an informed and active citizenry. By integrating experiential learning and intersectional analysis, educational institutions can play a transformative role in shaping future generations committed to social equity and justice. Without such interventions, social justice education risks becoming a static and ineffective endeavour, disconnected from the lived realities of marginalised communities.

2.4 Challenges in Curriculum Reform

Despite growing calls for a more inclusive and intersectional approach to social justice education, systemic challenges continue to hinder its effective implementation. Educational institutions, shaped by historical legacies, economic policies, and political frameworks, often struggle to incorporate socially just practices in a meaningful way. These challenges are particularly evident in contexts where neoliberal policies, institutional constraints, and globalised educational frameworks shape the discourse of social justice in ways that may not always align with localised socio-political realities.

A critical challenge in advancing social justice education is the pervasive influence of neoliberal economic policies on educational structures. Neoliberalism, characterised by market-driven principles, privatisation, and deregulation, has significantly reshaped educational landscapes worldwide. Sarkar and Xiu (2022) examine how these policies influence Indian education, arguing that the increasing privatisation of schooling has led to a depoliticisation of social justice narratives. By emphasising competition, efficiency, and market-based accountability, neoliberalism tends to marginalise critical discussions on equity, power, and social justice. The focus shifts from education as a public good to a commodified service, where access and quality are dictated by economic capital rather than a commitment to social transformation.

The consequences of this shift are manifold. As education becomes increasingly privatised, schools and universities are often pressured to align their curricula with the demands of global markets rather than the needs of marginalised communities. This shift results in a reduction of critical pedagogy, as institutions prioritise employability and economic growth over discussions of systemic oppression, historical injustices, and structural inequalities. Additionally, students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds may find themselves excluded from these privatised spaces, exacerbating existing disparities in access to quality education. Thus, neoliberal policies not only shape the content of social justice education but also determine who gets to participate in these educational spaces in the first place.

Even when there is a genuine commitment to social justice within educational institutions, structural and institutional barriers often pose significant challenges. Ranjan (2017) highlights the difficulties that school leaders face in implementing socially just educational practices due to institutional constraints and policy limitations. Many educational policies, though well-intentioned, are designed within frameworks that fail to address the lived realities of students from diverse backgrounds. Bureaucratic procedures, rigid curricula, and standardised assessment models often leave little room for educators to adapt their teaching practices in ways that promote inclusivity and intersectionality.

Furthermore, the role of educators in fostering social justice is frequently constrained by political pressures and ideological resistance. Teachers and administrators who attempt to incorporate critical perspectives on caste, gender, class, and other intersecting identities into their curricula may face institutional pushback. In some cases, governments or school boards impose restrictions on discussions of contentious social issues, fearing political repercussions or backlash from conservative groups. Consequently, educators are often left navigating a precarious landscape where their efforts to promote equity and inclusion are met with bureaucratic inertia or active resistance.

While human rights education is often regarded as an essential component of social justice pedagogy, its implementation on a global scale presents additional challenges. Sporre (2020) notes that global trends in human rights education often emphasise universal principles without adequately addressing localised socio-political realities. This tendency to universalise human rights education can result in a disconnect between theoretical frameworks and lived experiences, particularly in contexts with deeply embedded social hierarchies and historical injustices.

One of the key limitations of globalised human rights education is its reliance on normative frameworks that may not resonate with local cultural and historical contexts. For instance, discussions on gender equality in education may fail to consider the specific socio-religious dynamics that shape gender roles in different societies. Similarly, approaches to anti-racism education developed in Western contexts may not fully capture the nuances of caste-based discrimination in South Asia. Without a critical engagement with localised forms of oppression, human rights education risks becoming an abstract exercise rather than a transformative tool for social justice.

Moreover, global human rights discourse is often shaped by institutions and organisations based in the Global North, which may inadvertently perpetuate neo-colonial narratives. The imposition of Western-centric models of justice and equality can overshadow indigenous knowledge systems and grassroots movements that have long been engaged in struggles for social justice. As a result, education systems that adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to human rights education may inadvertently reinforce existing power dynamics rather than challenge them.

Addressing the systemic challenges in social justice education requires a multi-pronged approach that goes beyond policy reforms and institutional mandates. A truly inclusive and intersectional model of education must recognise the complexities of power, privilege, and identity in shaping students' experiences. This involves not only revising curricula to include diverse perspectives but also transforming pedagogical practices to foster critical thinking and social consciousness.

To counter the depoliticisation of social justice narratives caused by neoliberal policies, educators must actively resist market-driven models of education that prioritise economic utility over social transformation. Schools and universities should create spaces for dialogue and critical engagement, allowing students to interrogate structures of power and oppression. This also requires policy changes that support educators in implementing socially just practices without fear of political or institutional repercussions.

Additionally, human rights education must move beyond abstract universalism and engage with localised struggles for justice. Collaborations between educators, activists, and community organisations can help bridge the gap between theory and practice, ensuring that human rights education is relevant to the lived experiences of marginalised groups. This approach requires a decolonial perspective that values indigenous knowledge systems and grassroots movements as integral components of social justice education.

In conclusion, while the call for a more inclusive and intersectional approach to social justice education is gaining momentum, systemic challenges remain deeply entrenched. The influence of neoliberal policies, institutional constraints, and globalised frameworks that fail to address local realities continues to shape the discourse on social justice in ways that often hinder its transformative potential. However, by critically engaging with these challenges and adopting a localised, intersectional, and decolonial approach, educators and policymakers can work towards creating a more equitable and just educational system.

The literature underscores a critical gap in the representation of contemporary social justice issues within Indian school curricula. While textbooks emphasise constitutional frameworks, they fail to engage students in critical discussions on intersectional discrimination, LGBTQ+ rights, and systemic inequalities. Scholars advocate for curriculum reforms that integrate participatory and critical pedagogies, allowing students to develop a deeper understanding of social justice as a lived experience rather than a historical concept. Future research should explore effective strategies for implementing these reforms and assess their impact on students' perceptions of equity and justice.

III. Research Objectives

- (a) To critically examine how social justice and human rights narratives are represented in NCERT Political Science textbooks for Grades 9 & 10.
- (b) Specific focus areas:
 - Caste/class discrimination
 - Gender equity

IV. Research Questions

- (a) How are caste/class discrimination and gender equity represented in NCERT Political Science textbooks for Grades 9 & 10, and to what extent do they address the historical and contemporary dimensions of these issues?
- (b) What gaps exist in the representation of contemporary social justice and human rights issues?

V. Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative research approach and is documentary in nature, utilising content analysis as the primary method to critically examine NCERT Political Science textbooks for Grades 9 & 10. Document review serves as a systematic and rigorous procedure for evaluating textual materials, making it a suitable method for this research. Textbooks are treated as primary documents, as they convey information through a combination of text and visual elements, such as images, diagrams, and graphics. This qualitative method is particularly effective for exploring complex issues, such as the representation of social justice and human rights, in depth.

Content analysis is employed to decode and describe the portrayal of caste/class discrimination and gender equity within the textbooks. This research technique enables the identification of patterns, themes, and gaps in textual and visual content while interpreting their broader social context. The study specifically focuses on uncovering historical and contemporary representations of caste/class discrimination, analysing the portrayal of gender equity, and identifying the absence of intersectional issues such as LGBTQ+ rights. Through systematic coding and categorisation, the study aims to provide insights into the ideological underpinnings of these narratives and contribute to discussions on curriculum reform for fostering inclusive and intersectional education.

VI. Discussion

Textbooks serve as a primary medium for shaping young minds and influencing their understanding of social justice, human rights, and the values essential for a democratic society. The NCERT Political Science textbooks for Grades IX and X play a pivotal role in introducing students to these concepts, framing their worldview on caste/class discrimination and gender equity. However, a critical analysis of these textbooks reveals both strengths and significant gaps in their content, especially concerning contemporary issues and systemic critiques. This discussion explores the representation of caste/class discrimination and gender equity, analysing the narratives presented and the areas that need improvement.

6.1 Caste/Class Discrimination

6.1.1 Historical and Constitutional Focus

The textbooks serve as an essential academic resource for understanding caste and class discrimination, providing a foundational perspective rooted in historical developments and constitutional provisions. A significant emphasis is placed on Article 17 of the Indian Constitution, which formally abolished untouchability, marking a crucial legal milestone in India's pursuit of social justice. Furthermore, the introduction of affirmative action policies, such as reservations for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), is framed as a testament to the democratic commitment to equity and inclusion. These provisions are discussed in the context of India's constitutional vision, underscoring the role of the state in addressing systemic inequalities. By integrating these themes, textbooks aim to cultivate an awareness of the legal mechanisms designed to dismantle caste-based hierarchies. The narrative portrays the Indian Constitution as a progressive instrument that seeks to redress historical injustices while promoting social mobility. This pedagogical approach not only familiarises students with legal frameworks but also encourages critical engagement with the broader socio-political dimensions of caste and class structures. Moreover, the inclusion of these topics fosters a deeper understanding of the complexities associated with caste discrimination and the evolving nature of affirmative action policies. By presenting these legal and institutional measures as achievements of India's democratic ethos, textbooks contribute to shaping informed citizens who can critically analyse social inequalities and appreciate the significance of constitutional safeguards in fostering a more just society.

6.1.2 Limited Engagement with Contemporary Realities

Despite comprehensive coverage of the historical and constitutional dimensions of caste, contemporary school textbooks in India exhibit significant gaps in addressing the persistence of caste-based inequalities. While they acknowledge the legacy of social stratification, they fail to adequately examine its modern implications, particularly in areas such as healthcare, education, and employment. Issues such as manual scavenging, caste-based violence, and economic disparities receive either cursory treatment or are omitted altogether, thereby limiting students' understanding of the systemic and structural nature of caste-based discrimination. The pedagogical approach in these textbooks tends to frame caste as a relic of the past, largely resolved through constitutional provisions and affirmative action policies. However, such a narrative overlooks how caste continues to shape socio-economic outcomes in contemporary India. For instance, while the textbooks discuss caste stratification, they rarely engage with its impact on access to quality education or the disproportionate concentration of marginalised communities in menial and hazardous occupations. This omission has critical implications for social awareness and policy discourse, as students may graduate with an incomplete understanding of caste as a lived reality rather than a mere historical construct. A more nuanced and critical engagement with caste in educational curricula is essential for fostering informed citizenship and promoting social justice. By integrating discussions on persistent caste inequalities, textbooks can play a pivotal role in challenging entrenched biases and equipping students with the analytical tools to understand and address ongoing social inequities.

6.1.3 Absence of Intersectionality

Another critical shortcoming in the textbooks is the absence of an intersectional analysis of caste. The existing content fails to explore how caste interacts with other social identities, such as class and gender, in shaping structural inequalities. This oversight limits students' comprehension of the compounded disadvantages experienced by marginalised groups. For instance, Dalit women endure dual oppression, as they are subjected to both caste- and gender-based discrimination. However, the textbooks do not adequately address this intersectionality, thereby neglecting the multidimensional nature of social exclusion.

An intersectional approach is essential for understanding the systemic nature of caste-based discrimination, as it reveals how multiple axes of oppression function simultaneously. The omission of such discussions in educational materials results in a fragmented portrayal of social stratification, preventing students from critically engaging with the complexities of inequality. Furthermore, without an intersectional perspective, policy discussions and social interventions risk being inadequate, as they fail to address the unique vulnerabilities faced by certain subgroups. To foster a more comprehensive and critical engagement with caste dynamics, textbooks must incorporate intersectional frameworks. Doing so would enhance students' awareness of social justice issues and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable educational discourse.

6.2 Gender Equity

6.2.1 Constitutional Provisions and Historical Achievements

The representation of gender equity in textbooks underscores the constitutional provisions that guarantee equality and prohibit discrimination based on gender. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution ensures the right to equality, while Article 15 explicitly prohibits discrimination on grounds of gender, reinforcing the legal framework for gender justice. Additionally, the Directive Principles of State Policy serve as guiding norms for promoting gender equity by directing the state to take affirmative action in ensuring social and economic justice for all genders.

Textbooks also highlight historical milestones in India's pursuit of gender equality. The inclusion of women's suffrage, which granted voting rights to women in independent India from its inception, signifies a major achievement in democratic participation. Furthermore, legislative measures such as the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, aimed at curbing the socio-economic exploitation of women, reflect the state's commitment to addressing systemic gender inequalities. By integrating these legal and historical perspectives, textbooks shape an understanding of gender equity not only as a constitutional mandate but also as a continuous socio-political struggle. This pedagogical approach fosters awareness among students about the evolution of gender rights and the necessity of sustained efforts toward achieving true equality in society.

6.2.2 Overlooked Contemporary Issues

While textbooks establish a robust legal and historical foundation, they lack a comprehensive engagement with contemporary gender issues. Critical topics such as workplace discrimination, gender pay disparity, sexual harassment, and the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions are either insufficiently addressed or entirely omitted. The omission of these crucial aspects limits students' understanding of the structural and systemic barriers that persist in contemporary society.

A significant concern lies in the portrayal of women within textbooks, where they are predominantly depicted as passive recipients of legal safeguards rather than as proactive agents of social transformation. This narrow representation reinforces traditional narratives and fails to highlight women's contributions in challenging patriarchal norms, advocating for policy reforms, and leading movements for gender equity. The absence of diverse and intersectional perspectives further restricts students from engaging with gender discourse in a nuanced manner.

To ensure a holistic understanding, educational materials must integrate contemporary gender debates, empirical case studies, and discussions on policy interventions. By doing so, textbooks can facilitate critical thinking and equip students with the knowledge necessary to analyse and address persistent gender inequalities in the socio-political and economic landscape.

6.2.3 Exclusion of LGBTQ+ Rights

One of the most conspicuous gaps in contemporary educational curricula is the exclusion of discussions on LGBTQ+ rights in school textbooks. Despite the landmark decriminalisation of homosexuality under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code and the increasing legal recognition of transgender rights, these issues remain absent from formal academic discourse. This omission not only reflects a lack of inclusivity but also perpetuates societal invisibility and marginalisation of gender-diverse communities.

Educational curricula serve as fundamental instruments for shaping young minds and fostering social awareness. The deliberate or inadvertent exclusion of LGBTQ+ narratives undermines efforts to cultivate an equitable and informed society. The absence of such discussions reinforces heteronormative frameworks, limiting students' understanding of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. Furthermore, given India's evolving legal and socio-cultural landscape concerning LGBTQ+ rights, an inclusive curriculum is essential to ensuring that education aligns with constitutional values of equality and non-discrimination.

Integrating LGBTQ+ perspectives into textbooks would not only promote acceptance and diversity but also foster a more empathetic and informed generation. By neglecting these issues, the education system fails to equip students with the knowledge necessary to engage critically with contemporary socio-legal developments regarding gender and sexuality in India.

6.2.4 Reinforcement of Stereotypes

Visual and textual representations in educational materials frequently reinforce traditional gender roles, shaping societal perceptions and expectations. Illustrations often depict women in domestic or caregiving capacities, while men are portrayed in positions of power and authority. These recurring depictions contribute to the reinforcement of gender stereotypes rather than fostering critical engagement with them. The persistence of such portrayals can influence students' cognitive frameworks, limiting their ability to conceptualise a more equitable and inclusive society. By repeatedly associating women with private spheres and men with public leadership, these representations constrain aspirations and reinforce structural inequalities. This issue is particularly concerning in educational settings, where exposure to diverse and equitable representations can significantly impact students' perspectives. Addressing this imbalance requires a critical examination of curricular content, ensuring that visual and textual elements challenge rather than perpetuate traditional gender norms, thereby fostering a more progressive and inclusive understanding of gender roles.

6.2.5 Missed Opportunity for Critical Thinking

The analysis of textbooks reveals a significant gap in fostering critical engagement with gender equity issues. The absence of case studies, real-world examples, and reflective exercises restricts students' opportunities to develop critical thinking skills. This pedagogical limitation hinders their ability to connect theoretical frameworks with practical applications, thereby diminishing the curriculum's effectiveness in promoting a nuanced understanding of gender equity. A well-rounded approach necessitates the integration of diverse perspectives and interactive learning methodologies that encourage students to analyse, question, and apply knowledge in real-world contexts. Without such elements, the curriculum remains largely prescriptive, limiting students' ability to critically assess gender-related challenges and contribute meaningfully to societal discourse. Addressing these gaps by incorporating experiential learning tools and interdisciplinary insights can enhance students' analytical capacities and foster a deeper, more reflective engagement with gender equity, ultimately leading to a more socially conscious and informed academic discourse.

The prescribed textbooks predominantly emphasise historical events and constitutional provisions, often overlooking contemporary socio-political challenges. This traditional approach, while foundational, marginalises pressing issues such as caste-based violence, gender-based discrimination, and LGBTQ+ rights. The exclusion of these critical topics results in a curriculum that lacks contextual relevance and fails to provide students with the analytical tools necessary for engaging with present-day societal complexities. A well-rounded education must incorporate discussions on evolving social injustices to foster critical thinking, inclusivity, and civic responsibility. By addressing these contemporary concerns, educational materials can bridge the gap between theoretical

knowledge and real-world application, empowering students to contribute meaningfully to social progress. Therefore, integrating modern socio-legal issues alongside historical narratives is imperative for ensuring a comprehensive and socially responsive education that prepares learners to navigate and address the dynamic challenges of the 21st century.

The interactive elements of the textbooks, such as cartoons, activities, and discussion prompts, are underutilised in fostering critical engagement. While these features make the content more engaging, they rarely challenge students to think critically about the systemic nature of social injustices or to question the status quo.

VII. Key Research Findings

Based on the content analysis of NCERT Political Science textbooks for Grades 9 & 10, the following key research findings have emerged regarding the representation of social justice and human rights, with a specific focus on caste/class discrimination and gender equity:

7.1 Emphasis on Constitutional and Historical Frameworks

The textbooks primarily emphasise historical narratives and constitutional provisions when addressing social justice and human rights. They provide a detailed account of the evolution of these concepts, tracing their development through historical events and legal frameworks. A significant focus is placed on fundamental rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy, which serve as the constitutional foundation for ensuring equity and justice in society. Additionally, government policies aimed at promoting affirmative action, such as reservations for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, are extensively discussed. These policies are contextualised within the broader framework of social justice, highlighting their role in addressing historical marginalisation and promoting inclusivity. By integrating constitutional provisions with policy measures, the textbooks present a comprehensive understanding of social justice, ensuring that students grasp both the theoretical and practical dimensions of human rights and equity within the Indian socio-political landscape.

7.2 Limited Engagement with Contemporary Caste/Class Discrimination

The representation of caste-based discrimination in textbooks primarily acknowledges it as a historical concern but inadequately addresses its contemporary manifestations. Modern casteism persists in various forms, including caste-based violence such as honour killings and workplace discrimination. Additionally, structural inequalities in education, land ownership, and employment perpetuate social and economic disparities. The ongoing debates surrounding reservations and their significance in present-day India also require critical engagement, yet textbooks largely overlook these aspects. Furthermore, the portrayal of caste discrimination lacks a critical examination of its systemic nature, reducing it to an issue resolved by constitutional provisions rather than an entrenched social reality. This limited perspective prevents students from developing a nuanced understanding of caste hierarchies and their enduring influence. By failing to encourage critical thinking on the persistence of caste-based inequalities, textbooks miss an opportunity to foster deeper awareness and informed discourse on social justice and equity in contemporary India.

7.3 Gender Equity: Traditional vs. Contemporary Issues

The discussion of gender equity in textbooks predominantly revolves around constitutional rights and historical movements, particularly women's suffrage. While these aspects are crucial in understanding the foundational progress of gender equality, they do not comprehensively address contemporary gender-related challenges. Notably, significant issues such as the gender wage gap, workplace discrimination, sexual harassment, and safety concerns in public spaces are either underrepresented or absent from the discourse. Furthermore, the limited emphasis on the political representation of women and gender minorities fails to reflect the ongoing struggles for equitable participation in governance and decision-making processes.

Another critical limitation of the existing textbook narratives is the portrayal of women in predominantly passive roles, which reinforces traditional gender stereotypes instead of challenging them. The absence of diverse and empowered representations restricts the development of a progressive and inclusive understanding of gender dynamics among students. By not addressing modern gender issues and continuing to depict women through a traditional lens, textbooks fail to foster critical discussions on contemporary gender equity. Therefore, there is a pressing need to incorporate a more nuanced and updated perspective that includes modern challenges, diverse role models, and a broader representation of gender identities to promote a more holistic and progressive understanding of gender equity.

7.4 Exclusion of LGBTQ+ Rights and Intersectionality

Despite the legal recognition of same-sex relationships following the decriminalisation of Section 377, the absence of LGBTQ+ rights in educational curricula reflects a significant gap in inclusive pedagogy. The exclusion of discussions on same-sex relationships prevents students from developing an informed and empathetic

understanding of diverse sexual orientations, thereby reinforcing heteronormative narratives. Furthermore, transgender rights, gender fluidity, and non-binary identities remain unaddressed in textbooks, neglecting the experiences of individuals who do not conform to traditional gender binaries. This omission not only marginalises transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals but also deprives students of the opportunity to engage with contemporary discussions on gender diversity and identity. Additionally, the lack of intersectional perspectives in educational materials further exacerbates the issue by failing to highlight the overlapping effects of caste, gender, and economic status on individual experiences. The concept of intersectionality is crucial in understanding the ways in which multiple layers of discrimination operate simultaneously, shaping social realities differently for various groups. Without this awareness, students remain unaware of the structural inequalities that persist in society. The failure to incorporate these perspectives within educational frameworks hinders the development of a more socially conscious and equitable learning environment, ultimately limiting the scope of critical engagement with issues of justice and inclusion.

7.5 Visual Representation Reinforces Stereotypes

Textbooks play a crucial role in shaping students' perceptions of societal norms and values. However, a critical analysis of visual representations in educational materials reveals the reinforcement of traditional gender roles. Many images depict women predominantly in domestic or caregiving roles, whereas men are frequently shown in leadership or authoritative positions. This portrayal not only perpetuates gender stereotypes but also limits students' understanding of diverse professional and social roles available to both genders. Such representations contribute to the internalisation of traditional gender expectations, which can hinder progress toward gender equality.

Furthermore, there is a noticeable lack of diverse and inclusive visual representation in textbooks, particularly concerning caste and gender minorities. The absence of images representing marginalised communities fosters an exclusionary narrative that fails to acknowledge India's socio-cultural diversity. This omission can lead to the alienation of students from underrepresented backgrounds, reinforcing social hierarchies and limiting their sense of belonging in educational spaces. Inclusive and equitable visual representation is essential for fostering a more just and egalitarian society. Therefore, educational policymakers and curriculum developers must address these biases and ensure that textbooks reflect the diverse realities of contemporary society, promoting inclusivity and equal opportunities for all.

VIII. Recommendations

8.1 Incorporating Contemporary Issues: The curriculum should be updated to include discussions on recent caste-based incidents, gender inequities, and LGBTQ+ rights. This would provide students with a more comprehensive understanding of social justice and human rights in the current context.

8.2 Promoting Intersectional Perspectives: Textbooks should address how caste, class, and gender intersect to create unique experiences of discrimination and privilege. For instance, case studies on Dalit women or transgender individuals could provide valuable insights into intersectionality.

8.3 Encouraging Critical Thinking: Activities and discussion prompts should be designed to foster critical thinking. For example, students could analyse real-world cases of social injustice or debate the effectiveness of existing policies in addressing these issues.

8.4 Diversifying Visual and Textual Content: Visual and textual content should challenge traditional stereotypes by depicting diverse and non-stereotypical representations of caste and gender identities. For instance, illustrations could include women in leadership roles and men in caregiving positions to break away from traditional norms.

8.5 Balancing Historical and Contemporary Narratives: While historical and constitutional contexts are important, they should be balanced with contemporary narratives to provide a holistic understanding of social justice and human rights. This approach would help students connect past achievements with present challenges and future possibilities.

IX. Conclusion

The analysis of NCERT Political Science textbooks for Grades 9 & 10 reveals a significant gap between the ideals of social justice and human rights presented in the curriculum and the real-world complexities of caste, class, and gender discrimination. While the textbooks effectively introduce students to constitutional provisions and historical perspectives, they fall short in engaging with contemporary issues such as caste-based violence, gender inequalities in the workplace, and LGBTQ+ rights. The absence of intersectional perspectives further limits students' ability to understand how multiple forms of discrimination interact in society.

To ensure that textbooks serve as a tool for empowerment rather than passive instruction, there is an urgent need for curriculum reform. The integration of contemporary social justice issues, real-world case studies, and critical discussion exercises can provide students with a more nuanced and analytical understanding of discrimination and human rights. Additionally, a greater emphasis on diverse and inclusive representations, both

in text and visuals, can help challenge existing stereotypes and encourage progressive thinking. By fostering an education system that values intersectionality, inclusivity, and critical engagement, we can equip future generations with the knowledge and agency needed to actively contribute to a more just and equitable society.

X. Limitations

One of the primary limitations of this study is its reliance on a qualitative content analysis of a limited selection of NCERT Political Science textbooks for Grades 9 and 10. While this method provides valuable insights into the representation of social justice and human rights, it does not account for how students and educators interpret and engage with these narratives in classroom settings. Additionally, the study does not incorporate empirical data from teachers or students, which could provide a more nuanced understanding of the impact of these curricular materials on learning outcomes and perspectives on social justice. The exclusion of textbooks from other educational boards, such as state syllabi or private publishers, further narrows the scope of the findings, limiting the generalizability of the results across India's diverse educational landscape. Furthermore, the study predominantly focuses on caste and gender issues while overlooking other critical dimensions of social justice, such as disability rights, economic disparities, and environmental justice, which are increasingly relevant in contemporary discourse. Future research could address these gaps by incorporating mixed-method approaches, including surveys and interviews with educators and students, as well as a comparative analysis of multiple educational boards to develop a more comprehensive understanding of social justice education in India.

Ethics Statements

This study is based on a qualitative content analysis of secondary-level Political Science textbooks prescribed by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), India. The research does not involve human participants, personal data collection, or any form of interaction with individuals. All data analysed in this study are publicly available educational materials, ensuring that no ethical concerns regarding consent, confidentiality, or participant rights arise. Since the study does not involve experimental interventions, surveys, or interviews, it adheres to ethical research standards and does not require institutional ethical approval. The findings are derived solely from textual analysis, and no potential harm, risk, or conflict of interest is associated with the research.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study. This research has been conducted independently, without any financial support that could influence the findings, interpretations, or conclusions. The study is purely academic, with no external influence from any organisation or entity that could result in a bias in the presented work.

Generative AI Statement

As the authors of this work, we used the AI tool Grammarly for the purpose of refining and enhancing the clarity of the manuscript. After using this AI tool, we carefully reviewed and verified the final version of our work to ensure accuracy, coherence, and originality. We, as the authors, take full responsibility for the content of our published work.

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