

Chapter 1
Understanding Social Science

0908CH01

In Grades 6 to 8, we have explored Social Science through stories of people, places, and events. As you enter Grade 9, it is time to pause and understand what 'Social Science' truly means and why it matters.

Human beings live in societies and depend on each other in many ways. Our lives are shaped by the environment, the institutions that govern us, the economic activities that meet our needs, and the traditions and ideas passed down through generations. Understanding these connections is the foundation of Social Science, which seeks to understand their intricate patterns and influences.

In simple words, Social Science is the systematic study of human society. It not only tells us what happened or where things are located, but also explains why events occur, how people live together, how environments influence life, how governments function, how economies operate, and how the past and the present together shape the world.

While subjects like Physics, Chemistry, and Biology study the natural world, Social Science focuses on society, institutions, cultures, and human interactions. It helps us understand not only what happens in our social world, but also why it happens and how different aspects of life are interconnected.

Social Science in Everyday Life

Think about a day in your life.

You wake up in a house built with materials sourced from different places. The food you eat may come from various regions of the country. Before it reaches your plate, it has been harvested, processed, transported, bought, and sold through the efforts of many people. You travel on roads planned and maintained by public authorities. You study in a school shaped by educational policies and programmes. The electricity that you use is generated at distant power stations and delivered through a vast and complex network.

© NCERT not to be republished

Even the simplest daily activities rely on systems of governance, economic production, social cooperation, and the natural environment.

Now, look beyond your immediate surroundings.

- Why do some people live in crowded cities while others live in scattered villages?
- Why do different communities speak different languages and follow different traditions?
- Why do some regions depend on farming, while others focus on industry or trade?
- How do governments make decisions that affect millions of people?
- Why are certain regions more prone to floods?
- Why does agriculture flourish in some regions but not in others?
- How does climate change influence our lives?

Questions like these show that society does not function by chance. It is shaped by history, geography, institutions, resources, and human choices. Social Science helps us explore such questions and seek answers through careful observation, evidence, and logical reasoning.

LET'S ANALYSE

Observe your surroundings and identify a change that has taken place in your locality over the past five years. It could be related to transport, housing, education, technology, or the environment.

Discuss in groups:

→ What was the situation earlier?

→ What has changed?

→ What might have caused this change?

→ How has it affected people's lives?

Prepare a short report and present it in class.



Your daily experiences and the changes you observe around you reveal how Social Science builds connections among people, places, and systems. Simple observations like these help you see society as one connected story rather than a collection of separate pieces.

© NCERT not to be republished

Understanding Society through Time and Traditions

Society has not always been as it is today, and over thousands of years, it has changed greatly. Early human communities depended directly on nature for survival, and with time, people learnt to grow crops, domesticate animals, build settlements, develop tools, exchange goods, and organise systems of governance. Villages developed into towns, and towns grew into cities. New ideas, inventions, and cultural exchanges gradually transformed ways of life.

This spirit of inquiry has deep roots in India's knowledge traditions. Early thinkers valued discussion, questioning, and logical reasoning to understand the world. Knowledge was explored through observation, reflection, and dialogue. For example, the concept of the ***Pañchamahābhūtas*** describes the natural world as an interconnected system in which human life is embedded. It helps explain how the environment influences settlement patterns, occupations, architecture, food habits, and health practices—an idea that remains relevant as societies respond to environmental challenges. Similarly, the idea of *vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam*, meaning 'the world is one family', expresses the interconnectedness of human societies across regions and cultures. This sense of interdependence lies at the core of what Social Science seeks to understand when it studies global interactions and relationships.

Early reflections on governance in India also linked political authority with public welfare and ethical responsibility. The *Arthaśhāstra,* attributed to Kauṭilya, composed about 2,300 years ago, examined administration, economic management, taxation, and the duties of rulers toward their people. Such works show that systematic thinking about governance and the economy existed long before modern academic disciplines developed.

These traditions demonstrate that the effort to understand society through observation, reasoning, and reflection has a long history. Modern Social Science continues this legacy using new tools and methods to study how societies function and change over time. To understand the present, we must trace this long journey of continuity and change and explore how societies evolved, how

Pañchamahābhūtas: The idea of the *Pañchamahābhūtas* (five great elements) comes from Indian philosophical traditions and explains the world as composed of five fundamental elements—earth (*Pṛithvī*), water (*Āpaḥ*), fire (*Agni*), air (*Vāyu*), and space (*Ākāśha*). Scholars use this idea to explain natural processes, the human body, and the relationship between living beings and the environment. While expressed in philosophical terms, it represents an early attempt to understand nature as an interconnected system.

© NCERT not to be republished

institutions developed, and how relationships between people and the environment transformed. Hence, social scientists observe people's lives, conduct interviews and surveys, examine documents, and compare different times and places. By gathering information from multiple sources, they develop explanations that are supported by evidence. This way, Social Science explains both what endures and what changes, showing how the past shapes the present and how today's actions will influence the future.

Social Science as a Study of Disciplines

Human society is complex, and no single field of study can fully explain it. For example, a drought affects crops (environment), farmers' incomes (economy), government relief measures (politics), migration to cities (society), and traditional ways of coping with scarcity (culture). To understand such situations, we must examine society from different perspectives. Social Science, therefore, is not a single subject but a group of related disciplines, each focusing on a different aspect of human life. Together, they help us understand society in a comprehensive and connected way.

In Grades 9–10, Social Science primarily draws from four core disciplines—Geography, History, Political Science, and Economics—that together provide a comprehensive understanding of society. Other disciplines such as Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology, and Psychology also form part of the broader Social Science family. These fields explore social relationships, ethical reasoning, and human behaviour in greater depth and will be further developed in higher grades.

- Geography studies the Earth, its environments, and the relationships between people and their surroundings.
- History examines the human past and helps us understand how societies change over time.
- Political Science analyses systems of governance, power, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens.
- Economics explores how societies produce, distribute, and utilise resources to meet their needs.

Each discipline asks different questions, yet all are interconnected and together provide a holistic understanding of society. Let us now explore these disciplines in detail.

© NCERT not to be republished

Geography

Geography studies the location and distribution of places, objects, materials, and people, as well as the relationships between human societies and their surroundings. It examines both, the physical features of the Earth's surface and the human communities that inhabit it, focusing on how people interact with the natural environment and how places influence human life. Geography seeks to understand where things are located, why they are found there, and how places—near or distant—affect one another over time. It views the world as a system of interdependencies and adopts a holistic approach by integrating spatial perspectives (location and its significance) with temporal perspectives (change over time). Drawing on both natural sciences (such as Physics, Chemistry, Biology, etc.) and social sciences (including Political Science, Economics, and History), Geography helps answer questions like why India has historically been a hub of global interaction and how the Indian peninsula's long coastline facilitated contact with Africa, Europe, and Southeast Asia. Geography as a discipline takes help of various tools to understand concepts and investigate questions. It uses maps, globes, atlases, Geographical Information System (GIS), infographics, and various other instruments. In the course of next two years, you will realise how these tools enhance your understanding of the discipline.

LET'S EXPLORE

With the help of NCERT's School Bhuvan portal, you can also map your own village/ city. You can access and explore the NCERT's School Bhuvan portal by visiting the website: https://bhuvan-app1.nrsc.gov.in/mhrd_ncert/

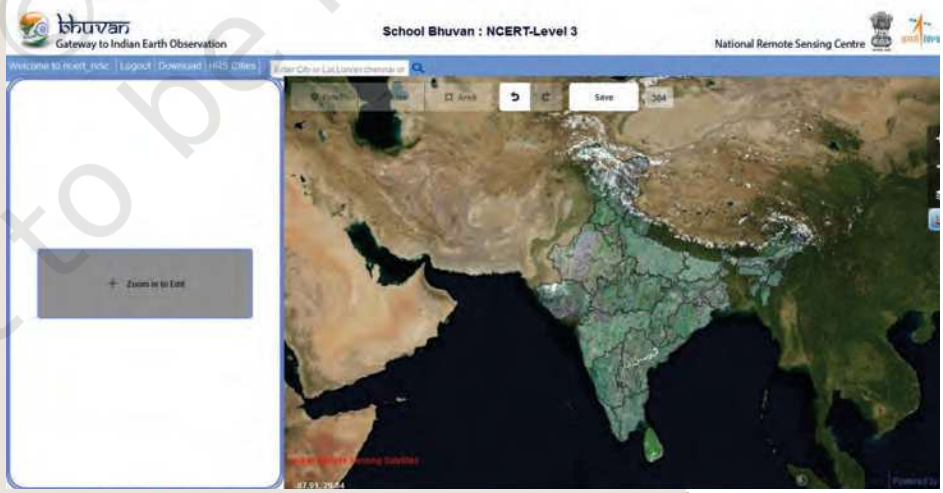


Fig. 1.1

© NCERT not to be republished

Over the next two years, you will study the processes that shape the Earth's surface and the formation of different landforms. You will learn about the atmosphere and climate, oceans, major biomes and India's biosphere reserves. You will also be introduced to geospatial technologies, life in different regions of India and the world, geographical and socio-economic perspectives on selected issues, and the historical development of geographical knowledge.

History

History is the study of human past, through which societies seek to understand people's experiences, values, and changes over time. There are multiple ways to interpret the past and transmit cultural values from one generation to the next. One of the oldest and most influential traditions of preserving cultural memory in Bharat is the *itihāsa-purāṇa* tradition. Through stories, this tradition not only shares historical information but also gives cultural meaning to events and people. In doing so, it reinforces enduring ideals and values, offering a sense of identity and purpose. Across cultures, different historical traditions have utilised different methods. Some traditions emphasise moral and philosophical insight, while others offer documentary verification. Modern historiography, by contrast, increasingly relies on **empirical evidence** and uses tools, such as human genetics, carbon-14 dating, archaeology, and other scientific methods to establish timelines and understand the past.

Empirical evidence: Information collected by actual observation or experimentation.

History writing draws on a wide range of sources to understand the social realities of the past. These include archaeological and literary traditions such as travelogues, memoirs, correspondence, **genealogical records**, folklore and oral traditions, and revenue documents. Material remains used to study the past are known as archaeological sources. These include monuments, architectural structures, excavated sites, artefacts, objects, and art, such as sculptures and paintings. Their analysis often involves scientific instruments and laboratory testing.

Genealogical records: Documents or sources that trace family lineage and ancestry by recording relationships between generations and documenting events, such as births, marriages, and deaths.

Over the next two years, you will learn about early human history and trace major developments in India from the beginnings of civilisation to the present day. You will also explore key landmarks in world history, including the Greco-Roman world, the Reformation, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution. In addition, you will examine colonialism, its global impact, and various anti-colonial struggles across the world. Overall, you will develop an understanding of the histories of diverse peoples, cultures, and the events that have shaped the present.

© NCERT not to be republished

Literary Sources

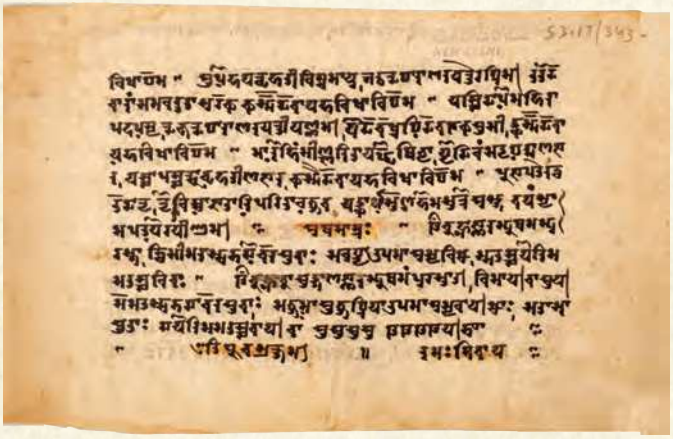


Fig. 1.2. The Sāmaveda manuscript, National Museum, New Delhi



Fig. 1.3. A traditional palm-leaf manuscript of the Tirukkuṛaḷ, an ancient Tamil text of ethical wisdom

Archaeological Sources



Fig. 1.4. A terracotta figurine from the Sindhu-Sarasvatī Civilisation



Fig. 1.5. A sculpture of Viṣhṇu from the 12th century CE

© NCERT not to be republished

Epigraphic Sources

Epigraphic Source: A historical source consisting of texts, decrees, or records inscribed on durable materials such as stone, metal plates, or rock surfaces. These inscriptions provide direct evidence about past events, rulers, administration, and society.



Fig. 1.6. Brahmi inscription on part of a pillar belonging to the Gupta period



Fig. 1.7. Kannada inscription of Emperor Krishnadeva Raya at the underground Shiva temple, Prasanna Virupaksha Temple, Hampi

Numismatic Sources

Numismatic Source: A historical source comprising coins, currency, or medals. Numismatics helps historians study the economy, chronology, rulers, trade, political boundaries, and culture of a civilisation through the metal content, inscriptions, and symbols on coins.



Fig. 1.8. A coin issued by King Samudragupta, 4th century CE.



Fig. 1.9. A Mughal coin issued during the reign of Jahangir, showing the zodiac sign 'Sagittarius'.

© NCERT not to be republished

Political Science

Political Science is the study of governance, which informs us how and why power is distributed, decisions are made, and policies are implemented. It is the study of constitutions, governments, and institutions of the State. Political Science also studies social movements, nation building, foreign policy, and the ways power is exercised, shared, and regulated in society and everyday life. In India's villages, the Panchayati Raj system embodies grassroots democracy by giving citizens a voice in local development planning. This shows that political power exists not only within formal institutions but also in social relationships, customs, and ideas of legitimacy. To study politics, therefore, is to examine society itself—its hierarchies and its struggles for more effective and accountable governance.

The study of politics in India began very early, alongside reflections on how society should be organised and governed. Politics was not treated as a separate discipline but was closely linked to the ideas of *dharma* (moral duty), *artha* (economic well-being), and *rājadharma* (the duties of the ruler). Early texts, such as the Vedas, Upaniṣads, and Purāṇas discuss justice, authority, social order, and the responsibilities of kings and citizens. Indian political thought is further articulated in works such as the *Mahābhārata* and *Śhukranīti*, which address governance, law, and ethical leadership. Among these, the *Arthaśhāstra* stands out as a foundational text on politics and administration, detailing how a state should be governed, how taxes should be collected, how the army should function, and how rulers should ensure the welfare of the people.

Overall, Indian political thought adopted a holistic approach, linking politics with economics, social life, morality, and defence. Power was viewed as a responsibility rather than merely a privilege. This tradition helps us understand modern institutions, such as the Panchayati Raj system, which promotes local self-governance and public participation at the village level. In this way, ancient ideas continue to shape India's democratic practices today.

Over the next two years, you will study major contemporary concepts and practices in Political Science, including democracy, elections, authority, civil society, governance and public policy, and national security and its challenges. However, a meaningful understanding of Political Science also requires your own efforts to observe and analyse the political issues around you, along with their linkages with other social science disciplines.

© NCERT not to be republished

Economics

Economics helps us understand how individuals and societies decide how to use limited resources to meet their needs. It studies how goods and services are produced, exchanged, and distributed. It also examines how these processes shape everyday life—from the food we eat and the clothes we wear to the jobs people do and the services they use. Economics explores decision-making by consumers, producers, and governments. Consumers decide what to buy, producers determine what and how much to produce, and governments frame policies to balance goals, such as growth and stability, efficiency and fairness. In this way, economics is not only about numbers and markets but also about well-being, equity, and justice.

India has a rich and dynamic economic history. For centuries, it was one of the world's leading economies and an important centre of trade, industry, and maritime activity. Colonial rule disrupted this progress, resulting in widespread poverty, recurrent famines, and the decline of traditional industries. After independence, India began the task of rebuilding its economy. In recent decades, our country has made significant progress through improvements in infrastructure, expansion of education and technology, reduction in poverty, and rising life expectancy. Yet important challenges remain, particularly in increasing incomes and ensuring that the benefits of growth reach all sections of society.

Economic development, therefore, remains a central national goal. Understanding economics helps us recognise both achievements and challenges, and encourages us to think about how resources can be used more wisely and fairly, while ensuring sustainable growth that meets present needs without harming the ability of future generations to meet theirs.

Over the next two years, you will study the foundations of the Indian economy, markets and prices, financial management and entrepreneurship, economic growth and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), international trade, and the Union Budget. These topics will help you understand how economic decisions affect individuals, communities, and the nation as a whole.

Why Should We Study Social Science?

After exploring how Social Science helps us observe events, ask questions, and examine evidence, an important question arises: how does this knowledge help us in our lives?

© NCERT not to be republished

The house you live in, the water you use, the roads you travel on, the school you attend, the markets you visit, and even the digital spaces you use are part of systems created and managed by society. Social Science helps us understand how these systems developed, how they function, and how they affect different groups of people. You also live among people who may speak different languages, follow diverse customs, and practise varied occupations. Why do such differences exist within the same country? How do they continue over time? Social Science explains these variations as outcomes of geographical, historical, cultural, and economic factors. This understanding builds respect and cooperation among communities. At the same time, it helps us recognise how Indian culture binds this diversity together through an underlying unity, fostering a sense of belonging, and shared identity.

In a democratic society, citizens play an active role in public life. Laws, rights, and responsibilities guide how people live together. When you understand how governments function and how decisions are made, you are better prepared to participate responsibly in civic life. Social Science also strengthens your ability to think about shared challenges. When you hear about issues, such as environmental protection, public health, employment, or urban growth, you learn to ask informed questions about their causes, effects, and possible solutions. This habit of careful questioning and reasoning is essential for addressing problems that affect society as a whole.

Most importantly, Social Science connects the past, present, and future. By understanding how past decisions shaped the present, we become better equipped to make wiser choices for the future.

The Future of Social Science

As societies change rapidly, the importance of Social Science continues to grow. New technologies, expanding cities, environmental concerns, migration, and global connections are reshaping how people live and interact. Understanding these changes requires the same skills you have begun practising in this chapter—careful observation, asking questions, examining evidence, and recognising connections.

In the years ahead, Social Science will help societies address complex issues such as climate change, sustainable development, social harmony, and equitable use of resources. It will also guide the responsible use of new technologies and support communities as they adapt to changing conditions. Most importantly, Social Science

© NCERT not to be republished

prepares you not only to understand the world but also to take part in shaping it as informed and thoughtful citizens, while strengthening national unity and keeping us rooted in our rich cultural traditions.

The study of Social Science is, therefore, a journey—from understanding how societies evolved, to analysing how they function today, to imagining how they can become better in the future.

Secondary-Stage Social Science: Your Two-Year Learning Journey (Grades 9–10)

Social Science is not just a subject you study in school; it is a window into the world around you. By studying Social Science, you learn not only about the past and present but also about your role as a responsible citizen in shaping the future.

Over the next two years, you will explore society in greater depth through different branches of Social Science. You will examine how historical events shaped the modern world, how geographical features influence human life and economic activity, how political systems and democratic institutions function, and how economies organise production, distribution, and development. You will also study contemporary challenges, such as environmental sustainability, social diversity, citizens' rights and responsibilities, and the impact of technology and global connections. As you engage with these themes, you will learn to analyse evidence, compare perspectives, and understand how the past, present, and future are linked. This journey will help you grow into a thoughtful learner, an aware citizen, and a responsible member of the society.

The Grade 9 Social Science textbook has been designed to provide a broad and balanced introduction to the four disciplines—Geography, History, Political Science, and Economics—where each offers a distinct perspective on human life and society, together presenting a comprehensive understanding of the world.

Social Science is not about memorising dates, maps, or definitions—it is about understanding people, places, society, culture and power. It encourages you to learn from the past, analyse the present, and imagine a better future. As you turn these pages, you will not only gain knowledge but also develop the ability to think independently and act responsibly. We hope this book inspires you to reflect on the relationship between self and society, and to view the world with curiosity and empathy. Let this journey help you grow not just as a student, but as a responsible citizen of India and the world.

© NCERT not to be republished