



INTEGRATING LOCAL TRADITIONS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCE CURRICULUM: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON WEST BENGAL, BIHAR, AND ODISHA

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

Local cultural traditions are vital for meaningful Social Science learning, but school curricula often do not reflect the realities students experience. This study examines how local traditions, heritage resources, and indigenous knowledge systems from West Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha can be included in the Social Science curriculum to improve contextual understanding. It uses a qualitative approach based entirely on secondary data, which includes literature reviews, government cultural reports, ethnographic documentation, and educational policy papers. The research identifies cultural resources specific to different zones and connects them with key curricular themes. The findings show significant chances for place-based teaching through examples from regional festivals, craft clusters, oral stories, ecological practices, and community livelihoods. The study suggests that effectively integrating these traditions into the curriculum can boost student engagement, cultural identity, critical thinking, and hands-on learning. It also highlights gaps in current curricula that often overlook regional heritage. The paper ends with suggestions for culturally relevant teaching in Social Science education.

Keywords: *Tradition, Heritage, Social Science, Curriculum, India*

Introduction

Social Science as a subject wants the knowledge of society, culture, politics, the economy, and the environment to become common sense of students' day-to-day living. The problem lies in the connection of concepts in the classroom to the learner's cultural world is (Dasgupta, 1994; Young, 2014; Lorea, 2023). The country of India is a very popular place to teach with the help of local customs and community-based knowledge systems (Sen, 2023; Chaturvedi, 2025; O'Connell & O'Connell, 2008). On the other hand, Social Science teaching often bi-passes the specific local issues, and hence, a uniform and generalized curriculum is prescribed (Thakur, 2003; Agarwal, 2015; Tiwari, 2018). West Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha, which are eastern states of India, having a large cultural base, are some of the more vivid examples where Social Science through different traditions, crafts, rituals, ecologically friendly methods, and community histories (Thakur, 2022; Bhattacharya, 2013; Chakroborty, Chatterjee, & Choudhury, 2021; Banerjee & Malakar, 2020). These areas have the stronghold of different cultural zones like the Dooars, Mithila, Sambalpur, and coastal Puri, where each presents its unique heritage resources (Ray, 2017; Chakrabarti, 2023; Roy & Ali, 2024; Pattnaik & Bhuyan, n.d.; Mohanty, 2005).

Objectives

1. To categorize these traditions for each state using secondary literature.
2. To suggest a framework for culturally responsive Social Science teaching.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative, literature-based research design supported by systematic document analysis. It relies entirely on secondary sources without any primary field survey. The Government websites studied on regional culture, ethnographic accounts of tribal and folk communities. Additionally, UNESCO's intangible heritage documentation was also taken for the study. All collected literature and documents were arranged thematically. State wise categorization followed cultural frameworks often used in regional studies. Through interpretive analysis, these mapped traditions were further connected with social science themes geography, civics, economy, and culture to understand their educational importance and broader value.

Results

Eastern India’s cultural landscape, mainly that of West Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha, presents a wide range of indigenous, folk, and classical traditions that are all very good for Social Science teaching. The Baul tradition in West Bengal is one of the most important and profound expressions of the spiritual side of the folk and is based on oral transmission, philosophical mixing, and minstrels traveling (Dasgupta, 1994; Young, 2014; Lorea, 2023). Next to it is the cultural world of Rabindranath Tagore, which is called Rabindrik Sanskriti and consists of music, dance, literature, and universal humanist values. Research indicates that Rabindra Sangeet and Rabindra Nritya develop the political thought, aesthetic sensibilities, and global cultural heritage (Sen, 2023; Chaturvedi, 2025; O’Connell & O’Connell, 2008). Durga Puja, the festival of the goddess Durga, is one of the most striking cultural events in Bengal, which with its different aspects: religious, urban, crafting, and community (Ray, 2017; Chakrabarti, 2023; Roy & Ali, 2024).

Table 1: Representing local tradition in various zone of selected states

State	Zone	Key Local Traditions / Heritage Elements	Relevance to Social Science Pedagogy	References
West Bengal	North Bengal (Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri)	Nepali, Lepcha, Bhutia traditions; tea garden labour culture; Teesta valley ecology	Diversity, livelihood, labour rights, environmental sustainability	(Bhattacharya, 1994; Chhetri et al, 2020)
	South Bengal (Bankura, Purulia)	Chhau dance; Dokra craft; Bishnupur terracotta temples	Medieval polity, craft economy, regional identity	(Kumar et al, 2024; Chakraborty, Chatterjee, & Choudhury, 2021; Banerjee & Malakar, 2020; Thakur, 2022; Bhattacharya, 2013; Gascogne, 2021)
	Deltaic Bengal (Sundarbans)	Bonbibi lore; mangrove ecology; fishing communities	Human–environment interactions, climate adaptation	ay, 2017; Chakrabarti, 2023; Roy & Ali, 2024
Bihar	North Bihar (Mithila)	Madhubani painting; Maithili folklore	Gender and art, rural society, symbolism	Thakur, 2003; Agarwal, 2015; Tiwari, 2018
	Magadh (Gaya, Nalanda)	Buddhist heritage; rock-cut caves;	Ancient history, religions, technological evolution	Prasad, 2021; Upadhya, Kumar, & Vij, 2020; Ghosh, Chakravarty, & Johari, 2024
	Bhojpur (Western Bihar)	Biraha music; Bhojpuri oral narratives; brick-kiln culture	Migration, labour systems, folk politics	Singh, Rajak, & Sharma, 2025; Roy, 1970
Odisha	Coastal Odisha (Puri, Cuttack)	Jagannath culture; Pattachitra; maritime history	Culture and governance, art-history, trade networks	Pattnaik & Bhuyan, n.d.; Mohanty, 2005; “Jagannath Temple, Puri,” n.d.; Rana, 2023; Pareek & Pant, 2015; Katiyar, 2019
	Western Odisha (Sambalpur)	Sambalpuri textile, songs and dances; agrarian folklore	Identity, folklore studies, indigenous practices	Panda, 2023; Mohanty, 2022; Acharya & Swain, 2017
	Southern Odisha (Koraput)	Adivasi festivals; terraced farming; indigenous traditions	Tribal studies, sustainable agriculture, cultural ecology	Banerji, 2010; Sikand, 2012; Banerji, 2010

Source: Compiled by the author

Bengal’s material culture is also significantly represented through its craft traditions. Terracotta art of Bishnupur and Bankura—showing up in temple architecture, ritual figurines, and decorative motifs still proving the existence of ancient artisan communities (Thakur, 2022; Bhattacharya, 2013; Gascogne, 2021). To the same extent, the Dokra metal craft of Jangalmahal is an example of the lost-wax casting tradition still alive among marginalized artist communities who are supported by their skills and cultural practices that are resilience and adaptation (Chakraborty et al., 2021; Sen, n.d.; Banerjee & Malakar, 2020). Besides, the region is recognized for Chhau, a martial mask-dance that combines ritual, performance, and spiritual symbolism and indicates tribal as well as non-tribal cultural syncretism (Kumar et al., 2024). Patachitra, the narrative scroll painting and singing tradition of the Patua community, is another art form of Bengal that apart from providing a visual story also functions as a means of social and moral instruction.

Bihar’s Madhubani painting, which the world has come to recognize as the state’s major folk art, is still mainly connected with the Maithil women and has been completely recognized for its symbolic motifs, cultural narratives, and women’s empowerment

(Thakur, 2003; Agarwal, 2015; Tiwari, 2018). Besides, the various crafts of Bihar also consist of Sikki and Sujani art, which are the mirrors of women’s entrepreneurship, natural-fibre craftsmanship, and the adoption of the rural creative economy (Paras & Varshneya, 2014; Malhotra & Saravanan, 2025). One more important event of Bihar is the Patna Qalam painting tradition, which came into being during the colonial period and gave birth to a new art by combining Mughal aesthetics with local themes, thus creating a new school of visual documentation (Rekha, 2011; Gauri & Gupta, n.d.). Bihar is also known for its ceramic applications, for which there is historical proof of its pottery and ceramic industries dating back to the Gupta period, thus depicting the evolution of technology and the culture (Roy, 1970; Singh et al., 2025). Chhath Puja is one of the most remarkable festivals in the realm of ritual culture, which has ecological concerns at its heart, as it strengthens river conservation practices and gives rise to gender roles, community building, and sustainable agriculture (Badikilaya, 2019; Singh et al., 2016). Moreover, Bihar’s location as the cradle of early Buddhism makes it a fertile ground for heritage-centered teaching. The Buddhist monastic complexes at Nalanda, Bodhgaya, and Rajgir are so engaged that they not only provide insights into religion, pilgrimage, global heritage networks, and state-led preservation but also contribute significantly to such areas (Prasad, 2021; Upadhyaya et al., 2020; Ghosh et al., 2024).

Odisha’s artistic and cultural heritage has enriched the eastern Indian traditions. To illustrate, the Patachitra of Puri and Raghurajpur of the state are the paintings of the highest classical style that were made with temple culture, narrative epics, and the use of intricate natural dyes (Pareek & Pant, 2015; Katiyar, 2019). Odisha is also known for Odissi dance, an expressive classical form that represents devotional aesthetics, the female embodiment, and the rigorous practice of sadhana while dealing with the issues of gender, nationalism, and modernity (Banerji, 2010; Sikand, 2012a; Sikand, 2012b). The spiritual and civic heart of Odisha is the vast universe of Jagannath culture, which creates social unity, ritual life, community celebrations, and a peculiar temple administration system that profoundly affects every day cultural practices (Pattnaik & Bhuyan, n.d.; Mohanty, 2005; “Jagannath Temple, Puri,” n.d.; Rana, 2023). Among Odisha’s most unique textile traditions is the Sambalpuri Ikat, which is a combination of symbolic motifs, resist-dye methods, and artisan identity and it is a factor contributing to both the anthropological and economic aspects of community life (Panda, 2023; Mohanty, 2022; Acharya & Swain, 2017).

Table 2: Cultural Traditions with Social Science Curriculum Themes

Social Science Theme	Related Local Traditions Identified	Pedagogical Opportunities
History & Heritage	Terracotta temples, Buddhist sites, Patachitra	Understanding dynasties, religious traditions, craftsmanship
Geography & Environment	Sundarbans ecology, Koraput farming, North Bihar floodplain	Studying landforms, climate resilience, ecological adaptation
Society & Culture	Chhau dance, Sambalpuri traditions, Maithili festivals	Exploring identity, pluralism, social norms
Economy & Livelihood	Dokra craft, Madhubani art, tea gardens	Learning about local industries, artisanal economy
Civics & Governance	Jagannath temple administration, Panchayat rituals	Understanding governance models, community participation

Discussion

Literature’s results showcase the huge prospects of using local customs as part of the Social Science learning process in West Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha. Every locality is a cultural melting pot with the potential of the living laboratory for the students. The above-said regions, for example, are the Sundarbans, where the ecological troubles provide the students with the environmental geography teaching examples drawn and subjected to the real world (Ray, 2017; Chakrabarti, 2023; Roy & Ali, 2024). At the same time, the traditions of Mithila and Bankura, the crafts, like Madhubani painting, terracotta, and Dokra, demonstrate the interrelation of economy, culture, and identity (Thakur, 2003; Agarwal, 2015; Tiwari, 2018; Thakur, 2022; Bhattacharya, 2013; Chakroborty, Chatterjee, & Choudhury, 2021; Banerjee & Malakar, 2020). Educational theory underpins such contextualisation; for instance, constructivist methods encourage the use of familiar environments for learning, while the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) continuously posts for making school education comprehensible through children’s milieu. Besides, local customs are a source of career exposure, integrated learning, and virtues teaching (Dasgupta, 1994; Young, 2014; Lorea, 2023; Sen, 2023; Chaturvedi, 2025). Nevertheless, in spite of these advantages, numerous difficulties pop up. The local cultural allusions in the current state textbooks tend to be treated more or less like an outside-the-surface approach with no real interaction involved. The instructional staffs might be unqualified to incorporate the region’s source materials appropriately. Furthermore, the educationally applicable resources for the very many folk and indigenous traditions are also very limited (Pattnaik & Bhuyan, n.d.; Mohanty, 2005; “Jagannath Temple, Puri,” n.d.; Rana, 2023).

Conclusion

The present research is not only about the strengths of the Social Science pedagogy but also an indication of abundant cultural resources in West Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha that could be used for better Social Science pedagogy. The primary sources have provided clear evidence of the curricular relevance of various festivals such as Chhau, Madhubani, Jagannath culture, Sambalpuri

weaving, and Sundarbans folklore. The application of such traditions will not only increase cultural sensitivity but also help learners to understand the concepts better and create their own identity.

In order to get the best out of it, the curriculum designers have to first make it a point that local traditions are systematically linked with curricular themes, teacher training has to give priority to cultural pedagogy, and schools have to provide chances for field-based learning. Social Science education in this way can become a practice that is culturally responsive, rich in context, and socially relevant, besides being blessed with the heritage of the learners and opening up for them a deeper understanding of society.

The current study demonstrates not solely the weaknesses of Social Science pedagogy but also the rich cultural resources that can be found in West Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha, which can be utilized for teaching in a more effective way. The research unmistakably points to the correspondence between the curriculum and the different festivals and traditions such as Chhau dance, Madhubani painting, Jagannath culture, Sambalpuri weaving, and Sundarbans folklore. By incorporating such traditions, the students will be more aware of the different cultures, will have a better understanding of the concepts, and will be able to shape their own identities. To get the most out of these advantages, local traditions should be connected to the curriculum themes in a systematic way by the curriculum designers, and cultural pedagogy should be given priority in teacher training, and schools should provide field-based and experiential learning opportunities. The teaching of Social Science, thus, can become culturally responsive, contextually rich, and socially relevant, while at the same time preserving and celebrating the heritage of the learners and giving them deeper insights into society.

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