Children's Understanding of 'Nation' Theoretical Perspectives

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Abstract

In this paper, "nation" has been identified as one of the core and overarching themes which underlie the different academic boundaries of social sciences in school curriculum. The theme of nation takes the form of nation-states, historical or cultural communities, and counties or smaller geographical territories in the academic subjects of political science, history and geography respectively. Nation can be considered as an important theme to be investigated with children as they tend to learn about their own nation quite early in life through various direct and indirect sources. Moreover, the theme of nation may manifest in the form of nationality, nationalism, national attitudes, national identity and even citizenship, depending upon the socio-cultural context of a particular study with children. The paper attempts to critically review and analyse the theoretical frameworks and research studies on children's understanding on the theme of nation. It aims to present different perspectives under which the researches on children's conceptualisation of nation have been undertaken by scholars across the world. The theoretical orientations accompanying research studies include developmental psychology perspective, political socialisation perspective and "new" social studies of childhood perspective. It will highlight how children's understanding of nation develops and changes through the course of childhood, keeping their diverse socio-cultural contexts into consideration.

Introduction

Children's understanding of concepts in the discipline of social science has remained a relatively neglected area of research as compared to the disciplines of science and mathematics

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over the past decades across the world. The few researches undertaken in children's representation of concepts in social sciences have largely been conducted in western contexts. In India, social science as an academic discipline has traditionally been divided into strict academic subjects of history, geography, civics (or political science), economics and sociology for school-going children. It is argued that children's understanding of concepts in the social science discipline could be an interesting, yet less explored area particularly in the Indian socio-cultural context. Considering the fact that a wide range of concepts is present in different academic subjects within the social science discipline, it is a challenging task to identify specific and significant concepts for inquiring into children's developmental understanding. In this paper, 'nation' has been identified as one of the core and encompassing themes which covers the different academic branches of social sciences in school curriculum.

The term 'nation' refers to a named human community occupying a territory with common history and culture along with shared values, traditions, customs, practices and symbols (Smith, 2001). The emergence of nations and nationalism is a historically recent phenomenon in world history, as a consequence of modernisation and industrialisation, which disrupted the traditional agrarian societies (Gellner, 1983). At school level, the theme of nation may take the form of nation-states, historical or cultural communities, and counties or smaller geographical territories in the academic subjects of political science, history and geography respectively. Moreover, the theme of nation may manifest in the form of nationality, nationalism, national attitudes, national identity and even citizenship depending upon the socio-cultural context of a particular study.

In developmental psychology, childhood is traditionally considered as a time of 'structured becoming', a phase defined as preparatory time to acquire the behaviours, attitudes and values of the adult world. However, this traditional developmental psychology view on children has been accused of seeing children as 'human becomings, not beings' by researchers working in the 'new' social studies of childhood paradigm – a recent inter-disciplinary perspective which considers children as active and competent participants (James & Prout, 1997). Nation can be considered as an important theme to be investigated with children as they tend to learn about their own nation quite early in life through various direct and indirect sources. Children's identification with a

particular nation is often regarded as an unconscious feeling that seeps into a child's core being as s/he grows up. Children's beliefs about their own nation are often associated with strong emotions which appear to be present prior to the child's acquisition of any factual knowledge or understanding on nations (Barrett, 2007). However, some scholars, including political scientists (Berti, 2005) believe that the idea of nation is neither instinctive nor natural in children but it is consciously developed in them by various socialisation agencies such as family, school, media and the like. Scourfield et al (2006) argued that the schools within national systems of education hold one of the most dominant and significant status as they equip young children with the idea of their 'nation' through school curriculum, textbooks, pedagogy, discourses and school ethos. It can be asserted that the role of schools, particularly social science curriculum, is inevitable in children's representation of nation.

In this paper, a review of the theoretical frameworks and research studies on children's understanding on the theme of nation has been undertaken. The paper aims to present different perspectives under which the research studies on the children's conceptualisation of nation have been conducted by scholars across the world. The theoretical orientations/approaches accompanying research studies include developmental psychology perspective, political socialisation perspective and "new" social studies of childhood perspective. The paper intends to analyse significant research studies which have been carried out by scholars in these frameworks over the past few decades. The paper highlights how the children's understanding of nation develops and changes through the course of childhood keeping their diverse socio-cultural contexts into consideration.

Developmental Psychology Perspective

In this section, a review of the theories on children's identification with nation, as proposed by researchers working under the perspective of developmental and social psychology has been undertaken. Developmental psychologists have been drawn to the field of children's identification with nations and national groups, as a way of theorising and testing specific theories that have been proposed within the domains of developmental and social psychology. Some social psychological theories have been suggested to explain how preferences for social groups, including national groups, develop through childhood which can be

extrapolated to the study of children's understanding of nation. These theories are Piaget and Weil's stage theory, social identity theory, cognitive developmental theory and societal social cognitive motivational theory. These theories focus on different aspects of the theme of nation as idea of country or homeland, national affiliation and attitudes towards nations, with children as discussed in the following section.

Piaget and Weil's Stage Theory

In a classic study on children's development of the idea of homeland, Piaget and Weil (1951) theorised a stage-wise development of the concept of nation among children. They applied the method of survey to collect data on a large number of children between 4-15 years in Geneva. Piaget and Weil postulated that children presuppose a parallel process of cognitive and affective development through gradual realisation that they belong to a particular country. In the first stage, prior to 7-8 years, children lacked an understanding of both spatial-geographical inclusion relationships and conceptual inclusion relationships. During the second stage, between 7-8 and 10-11 years of age, the children mastered spatial-geographical inclusion relationships, but still could not understand conceptual inclusion relationships. In the third stage,

from 10-11 years of age onwards, the children finally mastered conceptual inclusion relationships as well. Piaget and Weil hypothesised that before children attain a cognitive and affective awareness of their own country, they made a considerable effort towards decentration (i.e., broadening of their centres of interest) and integration with their surroundings.

The three stages described by Piaget and Weil correspond to affective evaluations in a clearly marked process of decentration, starting motives essentially with subjective or personal impressions and progressing towards acceptance of the values common to the larger social group. This theory proposes that children's cognitive functioning is domain-general rather than domain-specific which implies that at any given point in development, the child's cognitive performance is not task-specific but is relatively homogeneous, being structurally equivalent across a range of different knowledge domains. Thus, the child's thinking in any particular domain is rooted in deeper, domain-general, cognitive structures, and it is the changes that occur to these underlying structures that derive the development of the child's thinking in different domains. These deeper structures change themselves as the child learns from his or her personal experiences in the world, with the

driving force behind these changes being the child's need to achieve cognitive equilibrium (Piaget and Weil, 1951).

Social Identity Theory

Tajfel (1967) conducted a series of cross-national studies on the development of national affiliations by children between 6 to 11 years using large-scale surveys in seven European nations — England, Scotland, Belgium, Holland, Austria, Italy and Israel. In one such cross-national study, it was found that children displayed highly significant preference for their own national groups as compared to other national groups. However, this finding did not apply when a national or ethnic sub-group is traditionally less clearly identified with the nation-state by children. Moreover, there was a direct relation between the children's system of preference of other nations based on their perceptions of its similarity with their own national group. Another similar study by Tajfel involved children in taking concrete decisions on specific situations for nationals of their own and other countries. Two general bases for their justifications were discovered — a patriotic preference for their own country and a general norm of fairness. The study found that children's preferences and their capacity to perceive relations among national groups may involve a reasonable norm of fairness, other than preference of their own national group (Tajfel, 1967).

Later, Social Identity Theory was proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1986) on the development of identity among individuals, including children, on the basis of their social groups. Social identity theory is based on the observation that children belong to many different social groups such as gender, national, state, ethnic and social class which may be internalised as part of a child's self concept. In order to do this, the in-group (i.e., the child's own nation) is compared against out-groups (i.e., other nations) using dimensions of comparison. While constructing representations of in-groups and out-groups, dimensions of comparison are selected that produce more favourable representations of in-groups than of out-groups. Therefore, it implies that children tend to selectively learn the positive characteristics of their own nation as compared to other nations (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Cognitive Developmental Theory

Cognitive Developmental Theory is a more recent adaptation of Piagetian theory on the development of children's national and ethnic attitudes. Aboud (2008) proposed an alternative cognitive-developmental

perspective that can be applied to the development of children's attitudes to national groups, using the technique of empirical and statistical testing based on standardised tools. Aboud suggested that children's egocentricity and affective processes dominate their responses to people from other national, ethnic and racial groups before the age of 6 years. Thus, children exhibit maximum in-group bias (i.e., favour own national groups) and negative prejudice against out-groups (i.e., dislike other national groups). Cognitive developmental theory postulated that there is a significant discontinuity in children's development of ethnic and racial prejudice at about six years of age. These biases for national groups are hypothesised to peak at 6-7 years, after which these biases decline. However, between 6-7 and 11-12 years, children increasingly attribute more negative traits to the in-group (i.e., child's own country) and more positive traits to out-groups (i.e., other national groups). These shifts are likely to be driven by the development of the child's underlying cognitive and socio-cognitive skills (Aboud, 2008).

Societal-Social-Cognitive-Motivational Theory

Societal Social Cognitive Motivational Theory (SSCMT) has been developed by Martyn Barrett (2007) based on the research evidence provided by large-scale surveys, quantitative and empirical studies with children. This theory attempts to integrate all the factors that affect children's intergroup attitudes within a single overarching framework. SSCMT begins from the observation that the child always develops within a particular societal niche characterised by specific historical, geographical, economic and political circumstances. These circumstances define the relationships between the child's in-groups (i.e., own nation) and salient out-groups (i.e., other nations) based on the history of peaceful coexistence or conflicts with other nations. From a developing child's view, the most relevant factors are parents, teachers, school curricula, textbooks and the mass media. Barrett (2007) proposed that parental discourse and actions can directly or indirectly influence their children's developing intergroup attitudes towards nations. The school influences the child's personal contact with people from other national, ethnic and racial groups. Hence, there are many sources of information about other groups available to the child, such as school curriculum, textbooks, teacher discourse, parental practices, peer group interaction and the mass media (Barrett, 2007).

To sum up developmental psychology perspective, some

theories and research studies have been conducted by focussing on different aspects of nation, such as idea of country, national affiliation and attitudes toward nations among children. During the early 1950s, Piaget and Weil theorised stage-wise progression of the idea of country and emphasised that children undergo simultaneous processes of cognitive and affective development, in gradual realisation of their belongingness to a particular country. Tajfel (1967) carried out cross-national studies on the development of national affiliations by children and highlighted that they displayed highly significant preference for their own national groups as compared to other national groups. Later, social identity theory was proposed by Tajfel to explain the development of identity among children on the basis of different social groups, including national groups. Cognitive developmental theory (Aboud, 2008) can be applied to the development of children's attitudes to nations which acknowledges the role of socialisation factors, but stresses that children's underlying cognitive abilities ultimately determine the influence of these social factors. Societal social cognitive motivational theory was proposed by Barrett (2007) that integrated all the possible cognitive, affective, social and motivational, factors that might impact on children's intergroup attitudes towards nations. These factors include parents, teachers, school curricula, textbooks and the mass media. Barrett postulated these factors are, in turn, influenced by the child's cognitive, affective and motivational processes while developing the concept of nation. The research methods applied under these developmental psychology theories were limited to large-scale collection of data, standardised testing, quantitative analysis and generalisation of results in a stage wise or theoretical manner for all children. Moreover, these developmental psychology theories do not foreground the role and significance of the socio-cultural context for children's understanding of different aspects of nation.

Political Socialisation Perspective

Political socialisation perspective refers to the processes through which a young child acquires political orientations including political knowledge, attitudes, norms, values and standards of evaluation transmitted by society - from one generation to another generation (Easton & Hess, 1962). In this section, three different waves of research will be outlined within which the development of political understanding among children will be discussed by

outlining the theoretical frameworks of the various research studies. Berti (2005) propounded research studies that addressed age-related changes among children in political attitudes and knowledge as having taken place in three distinct waves while conceptualising children's understanding of political concepts, including nation.

The first wave of research comprising empirical investigations into children's political attitudes was carried out in the 1950s and 1960s under the label 'political socialisation' (Greenstein, 1969). These investigations referred mainly to the system theory from political science, and psychoanalysis and learning theories from psychology. Easton and Hess (1962) hypothesised that the truly formative years for the development of political knowledge among children are between the ages of 3 and 13 years. By the time children are seven years old, most of them have become firmly attached to their political community. Based on a study of elementary school students in the U.S., Hess and Torney (1967) argued that the child's relationship with his country develops from a vaguely understood, though highly positive attachment to his country to a more informed emotional tie by the end of elementary school.

Easton and Hess (1962) suggested that by the time the child has completed elementary school (i.e., at age 14), many basic political concepts, such as nation, have become firmly established. They indicated that children learn their political attitudes from their parents through observation and by modelling adult attitudes. The school appeared to have had a direct effect on children's early learning and political attitudes. Education made a difference in political learning and researchers claimed that there were linkages between school, classroom practices and political outcomes (Hess & Torney, 1967). Formal education bolstered by the mass media was likely to be the source of such political knowledge. By the time children reached second grade, around age seven, most of them have become firmly attached to their political community (Easton & Hess, 1962). Due to the large number of participants required to investigate these variables, the method frequently used was a large survey with written questionnaires, which hampered a thorough examination of children's understanding of nation.

The second wave of research in political socialisation, which took place from the 1970s to the 1980s, reflected the changes that occurred in those years both in the political climate and in the leading psychological frameworks. The different theoretical frameworks of research studies on children's

political understanding that found increased support among psychologists included Piagetian cognitive development theory, Erikson's theory on identity development and lifespan development. The methods of investigation applied were surveys and group or individual interviews with children for assessing their understanding on political concepts. Moore et al. (1985) found that before the age of 6-7 years, children do not possess the concept of nation, intended as the territory of a state, nor do they have what might be considered its rudimentary version, that is, a large territory inhabited by people who have something in common. In the American sample assessed by Moore et al. (1985), by fourth grade (around 9 years) most children were able to name correctly the city, state and country in which they lived. However, correctly naming countries or locating them on a map might not involve an understanding of what kind of entities they were. At 10-14 years, children were able to articulate their understanding on core political concepts, including nation-state (Moore et al., 1985). Such findings stimulated researchers to concentrate on the age range most represented in the ranks of political movements–late adolescence and early adulthood by regarding it as a period of major change in political

position and commitment.

The third wave of research on political socialisation during the 1990s onwards was also affected by an intertwining of current political problems, along with mainstream approaches to the study of development. Several studies (Berti, 1994, 1988) suggested that, before about 10-11 years of age, children do not know what countries, states or nations are, or that they conceive of them as physical or social categories, but not yet political entities. Italian children younger than 10-11 years were either unable to define the words state or nation, or defined them as large territories with villages, towns or cities (Berti, 1994). The full emergence of a native political theory, with the concept of the nation-state at its core, appeared to take place at about 10-11 years. They represented their respective territories as one included in the other. As a result, children could conceive of the nation-state as a territory with a central power that makes laws and whose decisions affect the whole country (Berti & Benesso, 1998). Between the ages of 12 to 16 years, there was further refinement of political understanding.

An intervention study, conducted using a domain-specific approach, highlighted the role of explicit teaching (Berti & Andriolo, 2001). A curriculum on political concepts, including nation-state, was

successfully implemented with children around eight years, in a third-grade class. After the intervention through curriculum and teaching, children knew that a state is a territory where particular laws, made by parliament, apply and that the government uses money obtained through taxes to pay the employees involved, such as teachers, police and judges. According to Berti (2005), this wave of studies has mainly been conducted in the framework of contextualist approaches such as those of Bronfenbrenner, Vygotsky, Erikson and in Europe, the theory of social representations, which all underline that children's experience of the social world is mediated by the interpretations circulating in their social communities. In these studies, to underline the difference in perspective from the first research wave, the term political 'development' is substituted for political 'socialisation'. The explicit aim of these studies has been the development of policies and educational interventions that might help foster political competence and engagement among children. Therefore, the focus of this third wave was mainly on adolescents and young adults.

In this section, a review of the researches undertaken by various scholars working under the perspective of political socialisation was undertaken in three distinct waves of research studies. The first wave of researches in the 1950s and 1960s investigated children's political understanding with children in the age range of 5-16 years. This wave suggested that children around 14 years display many basic political concepts, such as nation. The second wave of researches began from the 1970s to the 1980s which reflected the changes of those years both in political climate but very few researches were carried out. It was reiterated that children in the age group of 10-14 years could articulate their understanding on core political concepts, including nation-state. The third wave of researches on political socialisation during the 1990s onwards was more intense and rigorous in research studies. It was influenced by current political problems with the aim to develop educational programmes to encourage political competence and engagement among children. In all the three waves of research on political socialisation, the role of socialisation agencies, particularly school, curriculum and pedagogy, have been firmly established with gradual increase in their significance over the years.

'New' Social Studies of Childhood Perspective

The 'new' social studies of childhood perspective evolved during the 1990s

while accounting for children's development in various domains, including identification with nation. This perspective, sometimes also known as the 'new' sociology of childhood, stands strikingly apart from the conventional sociological tradition of understanding children pioneered by classical sociologists in the first half of the twentieth century. The 'new' social studies of childhood suggest that children are competent and active participants in all kinds of social scenarios. This perspective acknowledges children as developing beings, not human 'becomings'; but at the same time validates their agency in their everyday lives (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). It does not have to be approached from an assumed shortfall of competence, reason or significance. The change in terminology from the sociology of childhood (James & Prout, 1997) to the new social studies of childhood (James et al., 1998) reflects a growing cross-fertilisation of ideas between researchers in a variety of social science disciplines.

The major pitfall of developmental psychology based studies is that it is not much interested in the children's own worldview because of a strict focus on cognition. These subjective dimensions of childhood are seen as constitutive of children's identity as in the 'new' sociology of childhood. The dominance of socialisation theories, including political socialisation, in learning concepts implied that children were seen as incompetent and incomplete, it was the forces of socialisation–the family and school–which received greater attention with 'little or no time' being given to children themselves (James et al. 1998, p. 25). Brannen and O'Brien (1995) pointed out that the position was little different in British sociology, where children tended to be ignored, with children only being studied indirectly in sub-disciplinary areas such as the family or education (Scourfield et al, 2006).

In this section, a review of the research studies under the 'new' social studies of childhood conducted by several scholars since the 1990s has been undertaken primarily in a chronological manner. In a study of Irish children, Kevin Nugent (1994) examined the development of children's relationships with their country at different ages, and described the manner in which this relationship unfolded and the possible stages in its development. Content analysis of children's narratives, at different age levels–10, 12, 14 and 16 years, suggested that the relation of the child to her/his country is a developmental phenomenon which is mediated by cognitive processes. However, he observed that the affective quality of the child's attachment to her/his

country is influenced by the cultural-historical and political milieu in which it emerges and develops. The study indicated a strong relationship between Piaget's stage of formal operations and Erikson's stage of identity achievement and the development of the highest levels of national perspectivism in children (Nugent, 1994, p. 288).

In a classic study of children belonging to three different nations, Hengst (1997) focused on the development of national identity in children. He conducted guideline interviews with children in the age group 8-13 years across the three countries. Hengst found that there were differences between the groups studied in relation to the importance they assigned to national identity. There was also evidence that children, in many cases, saw themselves as more similar to other children across nationalities than to adults who shared their nationality. He suggested a phrase 'children's international' which pointed out the role played by globalised media, entertainment and consumer industries in establishing a 'basis of global solidarity' (Hengst, 1997, p. 58).

While researching on the engagement of children on the theme of nationalism in a conflicting area, such as a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan, Hart (2002) undertook ethnographic fieldwork with children. In their position of marginality to both the Jordanian nation-state and the emerging Palestinian national entity, the children of Hussein Camp became the objects of different visions for their own collective future. However, the principal focus was upon children as they engaged with the discourses presented to them within a particular spatial and historical context. The young children in Hussein Camp might be considered as 'deviant' according to the criteria argued by Stephens (1997). The national identity of these children became ambiguous and potentially multiple, far from fitting into any single mould. In this setting, they automatically acquired the status of both UN registered refugees and citizens of the Jordanian state. In conducting ethnographic enquiry into such subjects, Hart (2002) suggested attention should be provided to the experiences and activities of young children, who reshape the complex and frequently contradictory cultural politics that inform their daily lives (Hart, 2002).

To sum up 'new' social studies of childhood perspective, it is important to reiterate that it emerged as an alternative to the theoretical orientations of developmental psychology and socialisation theories, including political socialisation perspective. It considered children as active and competent participants by validating their agency in everyday lives. In this

section, a review of studies from the 1990s to the recent times which followed this perspective was being undertaken. From these studies, it becomes evident that national identity has become the focus of researches with children. The objectives, methods and findings on national identity have been centred on children themselves, rather than arriving at pre-determined criteria through cognitive stages of developmental psychology perspective or locating the role of socialisation agencies of political socialisation perspective. Among the significant findings of this perspective, children's relationship with their country is a developmental phenomenon, mediated by cognitive processes but influenced by the child's socio-cultural, historical and political milieu. Many researchers have concluded that children had begun to adopt new forms of national identity that involve a constant movement between the national and the international aspects of identity. In some researches, the exposure to a globalised world through mass media, migration and tourism has been identified as children's construction of national identity. It also emerged from some studies that children's responses in different social-cultural contexts rarely had cultural or racist overtones. Few studies demonstrated the willingness of children to engage in critical reflection on their constructions and negotiation of national identity.

Emerging Concerns in the Study of Nation in Indian Socio-Cultural Context

India is a nation with plural and diverse society varying in terms of religion, culture, language, regions, traditions, customs and rituals. There are some characteristics that make Indian society pluralistic, according to criteria developed by Ainslie Embree (1972). First, the different regions or states in India have relatively autonomous existences which imply that there is no single dominant common way of life. Second, the regional groups have different lifestyles which include differences in language, religion, culture, food and customs. Third, there is relativism in cultural and moral choices with no common vision of what is "ideal" for people. Such characteristics have been present in Indian society throughout history, and are no less present today, and their presence is the key to an understanding of India as a pluralistic nation. Sunil Khilnani (2012) argues that the 'idea of India' is not homogenous and univocal as no single idea can possibly capture the many energies, angers and hopes of all Indians. The Indian idea has itself become a proudly plural idea. It is the capacity of India's representational and constitutional

democracy to articulate India's diversity by giving voice to differing interests and ideas of self, rather than merely to aggregate common identities.

In India, immense diversities are reflected in various castes, religious and linguistic groups, each having its rituals, customs and practices. India is a socialist and secular nation, as mandated by the constitution, which guarantees that people belonging to diverse regions, religions, cultures, languages and socio-economic strata should be treated as equal. National integrity has been maintained even though many social, political and economic inequalities have obstructed the emergence of egalitarian social relations. The cohesiveness of India is inherent in its historical, social and political realities as well as in its cultural heritage. In India, there has been a continuous unity even in the greatest diversities. Therefore, India is a plural society characterised by 'unity in diversity' with synthesis of different cultures, religions and languages of people belonging to different castes, communities and minorities. Shalini Advani (2009) articulates the role of education system in construing nation for school children in two distinct ways — through the constitution with a national-cultural imagery which locates the nation in the realm of loyalty and through a description of the nation in social progress.

The theme of nation, therefore, cannot be understood as a homogenised entity due to the extreme diversities in Indian pluralistic society. However, nation can be a very significant and interesting area to be explored with children. Most children in the age-group of 6 to 14 years attend formal or informal schools. Children gradually learn the concepts, including nation, from the social science textbooks followed in their respective schools. Some researches and reviews have been undertaken to analyse the concepts in social science textbooks, designed by NCERT, SCERT, Eklavya and others, during the past two decades. However, most of the previous researches of social science concepts have been conducted by analysing text materials but children's understanding of those concepts has not been investigated by researches.

Alex George (2004, 2007) examined the perceptions of children on *sarkar*, a concept which involves political aspects of the theme "nation". George explored children's understanding on three basic themes – the formation of an elected government, its functions and major institutions. He highlighted the "gap between the real and the ideal" for children as the school texts were extremely terse and factual which discussed only the "ideal types"

within a 'Constitution-centric' framework (2004, p. 248). These texts tended to describe government-based institutions and functions as they "ought to be" rather than in real life; which could not provide the enough space for the images children learn from the actual events. The texts failed miserably to critically evaluate and blend the ideas which children gained from their real-life experiences (George, 2004). As a result, after reading such texts, children also failed to identify the relationships between various interrelated concepts due to the lack of examples in the textbooks from the real political world in order to present a concrete picture of these concepts. George (2007) argued the need of redefining the concept of *sarkar* in the state-prescribed school textbooks for children as the ideals presented in the textbooks and images from the actual political world often do not support and sometimes contradict each other. Alternately, he suggested that the textbooks should attempt to draw a picture of the political processes as they actually take place in the milieu that surrounds the children and should identify such contradictions and cautiously discusses them, showing the tension between the ideal and the real (George, 2007, p. 67-69).

In the past decade, some scholars (Madan, 2003; Jain, 2005) have critiqued the conceptual knowledge as provided in the social science textbooks for school children. Amman Madan (2003) criticised the prevalent social science textbooks, particularly civics, for avoiding any closer examination of the state-based functions and responsibilities. According to Madan, civics textbooks were marked by a 'distrust of local initiatives', sought to push only the 'validity of the state's actions' and ignored 'conflicts of interests' and struggle for powers among political parties. He emphasised the 'paradox of contemporary civics has been that it teaches democracy, freedom and rights in a fundamentally undemocratic way' (2003, p. 4657). In Madan's opinion, children are expected to learn the mechanism of elections, the formation of governments and sets of rules in the bureaucratic organisation of the state without any scope for discussion or debate. Moreover, children are taught that they are free, but not free to criticise or dispute what they are taught. Manish Jain (2005) criticised the use of legalistic language to present an abstract image of the state institutions in school textbooks as it becomes difficult for children to form a conceptual understanding of these structures. The "ideal" presentation of the state-based institutions could not encourage the children to find and discuss

strengths, weaknesses and contributions of these structures. He argued that NCERT's civics textbooks tend to 'distort reality, sanctify the state and strengthen the process of hegemonisation', by neglecting the growing crisis in society (2005, p. 1941).

On the basis of the critical review by many educationists on social science textbooks in the past, the recent National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) recommended that 'the content needs to focus on a conceptual understanding rather than facts to be memorised for examination' (NCERT, 2005, p. 50). The NCERT's position paper on the teaching of social sciences further built the argument for improvement in conceptual knowledge by reiterating that 'concepts should be explained to the students through the lived experiences of individuals and communities ... that make up the social and cultural milieu of the child' (NCERT, 2006, p. 9). Hence, with the introduction of new textbooks of social sciences by NCERT along the lines of NCF–2005 a new ray of hope has emerged for positioning and treating subject-matter and making it stimulating, interesting and worthwhile for children, thereby enabling better concept development and understanding.

Conclusion

In this paper, different theoretical perspectives and research studies on children's representations of nation have been critically reviewed and analysed. Developmental psychology perspective believes that children's identity with nation emerges quite early in life. This perspective includes some theories – Piaget and Weil's stage theory, social identity theory, cognitive developmental theory and societal-social-cognitive-motivational theory, which provides explanation for the development of the theme of nation. Political socialisation researchers believe that the concept of nation and nationalism emerges in children by various socialisation agencies such as family, school, media and so on. Political socialisation perspective has been discussed by elaborating three distinct waves of research studies across a wide time-frame. More recently, the perspective on "new" social studies of childhood emerged which reflects a growing cross-fertilisation of ideas in a variety of social science disciplines towards the last decade of the twentieth century. This perspective evolved in response to the growing dissatisfaction among researchers with previous perspectives on different aspects of development in children, including representation of concepts, such as nation.

Within these perspectives, the theme of nation has been conceptualised and studied through researches in varied ways. The theme of nation has been studied as idea of country or homeland, affiliation to nation and national attitudes in developmental psychology researches; as a core political concept which may take the form of nation-state in political socialisation researches; and as national identity or relationship with nation in "new" social studies of childhood researches. Consequently, the theme of nation is construed in a different manner with the help of these perspectives and subsequent researches. In developmental psychology perspective, nation has been viewed as a cognitive, social or geographical category which can be generalised in a stage-wise manner as universal phenomena. Under political socialisation perspective, nation has largely been understood as a political or civic concept. In "new" social studies of childhood perspective, nation is conceptualised as a social, political, historical, geographical, subjective and more holistic construct in the form of national identity for children.

Research methods applied under different perspectives for studying children's understanding of nation have immense differences. It is quite significant to evaluate the research methods as they can either limit or expand the horizon of researches undertaken within those perspectives. The researches under developmental psychology and political socialisation perspectives follow the method of collecting large scale data through surveys, standardised testing or group interviews with children. The data collected on a large scale is then subjected to quantitative analysis for generalisation through stage-wise development of different aspects of nation in children. Both these perspectives tend to reduce children as "objects" of research on whom the data should be collected; but they have been criticised for generalising findings of studies conducted in Western contexts as universally applicable. The "new" social studies of childhood apply various methods - individual interviews, narrative inquiry, discourse analysis and ethnography to collect and analyse data with children depending on the context of the research. It gives prominence to children as "subjects" of research by collecting in-depth data on limited participants through qualitative methods. Therefore, it integrates diversity of research approaches with children and considers children as social actors and active participants with their set of needs, rights, individual differences and subjective dimensions.

On the criterion of giving agency to children, "new" social studies of childhood emerged as an

interdisciplinary perspective of studying 'child' as a developing 'being' – which is conceived of as a social actor or participant, who can be understood in her/his own right. The dominant developmental psychology paradigm takes away children's agency while researching and tends to view children as 'adults in the making' or 'human becomings', rather than children in the 'state of being'. Political socialisation perspective overemphasised the role of socialisation agencies by giving too much attention to the forces of socialisation, such as family and schools; thereby neglecting the active and independent participation by children in learning the concept of nation. Although some developmental psychology theories acknowledge the role of socialisation factors for children's ideas on nation, but children's own cognition of those factors was the determining parameter. On the other hand, the 'new' social studies of childhood perspective provides due importance to socialisation factors and foregrounds the social context of children.

It is significant to critically review and analyse the theoretical perspectives that are prevalent in western contexts to evolve a well informed perspective on children's representation of nation in Indian socio-cultural context. It has been noted that some researches and reviews have been undertaken to analyse the content of social science textbooks in the past few decades. However, most of the previous researches of social science texts have analysed text materials which neglected children's understanding of specific concepts present in those texts. The study on children's perception of *sarkar* by Alex George (2007) is the sole worthwhile study which highlighted a huge gap between the "ideal" concepts present in school textbooks and the real life experiences of children. There is paucity of researches on children's representation of concepts in social sciences. Nation is one of the core and overarching themes which children learn from their social science textbooks in different academic subjects in schools. The theme of nation is studied in the form of nation-states in political science; as historical or cultural communities in history and as counties or smaller geographical territories in geography. However, the theme of nation cannot be studied as a homogenised entity in India because of its plural and diverse context. It is a very significant and interesting area to be explored in Indian socio-cultural context with children.

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