



# **CURRENT AFFAIRS**

**Takshashila School of Civil Services**



# Why is three-language policy controversial?

Why has the Centre withheld funds to Tamil Nadu under the Samagra Shiksha programme? When did the State adopt a two-language policy? What is its stand on mandatory imposition of Hindi? What is the central government's view? How can the issue be resolved?

**D. Suresh Kumar**

## The story so far:

**T**he Union Government has withheld ₹2,152 crore in funds due to Tamil Nadu under the Samagra Shiksha scheme for refusing to join the Prime Minister Schools for Rising India (PMSRI) initiative. While T.N. is eager to participate in the PM SHRI scheme, it staunchly opposes the accompanying mandate to implement the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. One of the State's core objections to the NEP is its insistence on adopting a three-language formula in schools. Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has rejected any concessions, insisting that T.N. must align "with the Constitution". Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, questioning which provision of the Constitution justifies such mandates, has declared that the State will not submit to "blackmail" or abandon its historically adopted two-language policy.

## What does the NEP 2020 state?

The NEP 2020 has retained the three-language formula, a concept first introduced in the NEP of 1968. The key difference, however, is that back then the NEP advocated for Hindi to be a compulsory language across the nation.

Tamil Nadu, with its long-standing two-language policy, has consistently outperformed many other States in key education metrics



Hindi-speaking States were required to teach Hindi, English, and a modern Indian language – preferably a south Indian language – while non-Hindi speaking States were expected to teach the local regional language, Hindi, and English. In contrast, NEP 2020 offers greater flexibility, technically not imposing any specific language on any State. It states that "the three languages learned by children will be the choices of States, regions, and, of course, the students themselves, so long as at least two of the three languages are native to India." This means, in addition to the State's language, children would be required to learn at least one other Indian language – not necessarily Hindi. The policy also emphasises bilingual teaching, particularly in the home language/mother tongue and English. Conspicuously, it places significant emphasis on Sanskrit as an optional choice within the three-language formula.

## Why is there opposition to this policy in T.N.?

Tamil Nadu has long resisted the 'imposition of Hindi'. In 1937, when the C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) government in Madras proposed making Hindi a compulsory subject in secondary schools, the Justice Party fiercely opposed it. Two young men, Thalamuthu and Natarajan, who participated in the agitation, died and became icons in the anti-Hindi imposition movement. Rajaji eventually resigned, and the British government withdrew the order. In 1965, as the deadline for adopting Hindi as the sole official language across India approached, the State witnessed violent protests that led to the deaths of at least 70 people in police shootings or self-immolations. The agitation resurfaced when Parliament adopted the Official Languages (Amendment) Act, 1967, and the Official Language Resolution, 1968, which mandated the teaching of Hindi as part of the three-language formula. In January 1968, the Madras Assembly, led by the C.N. Annadurai-led first Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) government, adopted a resolution calling for the scrapping of the three-language formula and the elimination of Hindi from the curriculum in T.N. schools. Since then, the State has steadfastly followed its two-language policy teaching Tamil and English.

Major political parties, including the ruling DMK and the principal opposition All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), have consistently opposed any efforts to alter this policy. In 2019, backlash led the Kasturirangan Committee to remove the mandatory Hindi learning clause from the draft NEP.

## Why is the three-language policy seen as an attempt to impose Hindi?

Political parties and activists in T.N. view the three-language policy as a "smokescreen" and a "backdoor" attempt to impose Hindi. They argue that, in practice, the implementation of a three-language scheme would inevitably lead to the teaching of Hindi, given the limited resources for providing additional language teachers and learning materials. Moreover, the Union Government and prominent BJP leaders have periodically advocated for the promotion of Hindi. In 2019, the Union Budget allocated ₹50 crore to support the appointment of Hindi teachers in non-Hindi speaking States. Critics contend the Centre's actions do not match its rhetoric on promoting regional languages, as evidenced by the lack of efforts to hire adequate regional language teachers in Kendriya Vidyalayas or to ensure south Indian languages are taught in schools above the Vindhyas.

Mr. Pradhan has defended the withholding of funds to T.N., making it clear that adherence to the three-language policy is non-negotiable. He urged Mr. Stalin to "rise above political differences" and criticised the State for viewing the NEP 2020 with a "myopic vision". In response, Mr. Stalin has accused Mr. Pradhan of attempting to "impose Hindi" under the guise of the NEP's policy. Mr. Stalin has vowed that, as long as the DMK and he are around, Tamil and T.N.'s interests will not be compromised.

## What is the way forward?

The only viable solution lies in constructive dialogue and a practical compromise between the Centre and the State on an issue like education, which was transferred from the State to the concurrent list during the Emergency. Notably, T.N., with its long-standing two-language policy, has consistently outperformed many other States in key metrics such as Gross Enrolment Ratio and reduced school dropout rates. Disagreements over teaching a third language should not be allowed to derail funding for Samagra Shiksha, a comprehensive programme for education.



**Not backing down:** Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin and his allies protest against NEP's three-language policy in Chennai on February 18. R. RAGU



# Should a third language be compulsory?

Why is the Union government delaying funds under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan to Tamil Nadu? When was the three-language policy first introduced and what did it mandate? What are the challenges in having extra language courses in government schools?

## EXPLAINER

Rangarajan. R

### The story so far:

**T**here has been a tussle between the Centre and the Tamil Nadu government over the three-language formula in schools under the New Education Policy (NEP), 2020. The Union government has indicated that it needs to be complied with for release of funds tied to the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan. However, the Tamil Nadu government views it as a 'smokescreen' for Hindi imposition and insists that it would continue with its two-language policy.

### What are constitutional provisions?

The Constitution provides that Hindi is the official language of the Union. English was originally meant to continue as the official language for 15 years from the commencement of the Constitution (till 1965). However, the Official Languages Act, 1963 provides for the continued use of English, in addition to Hindi, for all official purposes of the Union without any time limit. The legislature of a State may adopt any one or more of the languages in use in the State or Hindi as the official language(s) for official purposes of that State.

Further, the Constitution provides that it shall be the duty of the Union to promote the spread of the Hindi language so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India.

### What is the three-language policy?

The three-language formula was first introduced in the NEP of 1968. This policy and the Official Language Resolution, 1968 mandated the teaching of Hindi as a language in non-Hindi speaking States. There were protests against the same in Tamil Nadu and it has steadfastly followed its two-language policy of teaching Tamil and English in its government schools.



**Firm stance:** A protest against the three-language policy, in Chennai, on February 18. PTI

The NEP, 2020 has retained the three-language formula albeit with a key difference that it doesn't impose any language on any State. It specifies that the languages to be learnt will be the choice of States, regions and the students, so long as at least two of the three languages are native to India.

### What are the issues?

The Annual Status of Education Research (ASER) conducted regularly by renowned NGO Pratham leaves much to be improved upon with respect to learning abilities. The report of 2022 indicates that close to 60% of students in Class V could

not read a Class II level text. The report of 2023 reveals that 25% of youth in the age group of 14-18 years could not read a Class II level text fluently in their regional language. More than 40% of this age group could not read sentences in English. The learning outcomes in foundational numeracy skills like subtraction and division is equally poor.

As per the report on 'Analysis of Budgeted expenditure on Education' prepared by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, in 2022, out of the total revenue expenditure on elementary education estimated at ₹3.03 lakh crore (2019-20), 15% is spent by the Centre

while 85% is spent by the States. The total expenditure on elementary, secondary, higher and technical education by the Centre and States combined hovers around 4-4.5% of the GDP as against the target of 6% set out in the NEP 2020. Thus, the expenditure on education is yet to reach the desired levels.

### What can be the way forward?

While English is not a native language, its proficiency has helped us in becoming globally competitive in various service industries. India is a multi-lingual country and the objective of learning more Indian languages in schools is desirable. However, the existing issues of learning outcomes coupled with constraints on resources require that the efforts of government run schools should be focused on improving the teaching of the mother tongue/local language and English, apart from foundational numeracy skills. Even in private schools where a third language is taught till Standard VIII, there is limited proficiency being attained by the students in such language.

The 2011 Census data reveals that approximately 26% of India is bilingual and 7% is trilingual. The corresponding figures for urban areas are 44% and 15%, as against 22% and 5% for rural areas. With rapid urbanisation and migration of labourers across the country, this number is bound to increase in the forthcoming Census, indicating that the young and adult population would learn additional languages according to their needs.

There must be a constructive dialogue between the Centre and the Tamil Nadu government to ensure that funding is not delayed.

Considering the share of expenditure borne by the States as well as regional diversities, there also needs to be a productive discussion on providing more autonomy to the States in policy matters relating to school education.

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## THE GIST

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## Steps Taken to Promote Multilingualism In Indian Education System



**ASMITA Initiative:** ASMITA (Augmenting Study Materials in Indian Languages through Translation and Academic Writing) aims to produce 22,000 books in 22 scheduled languages over five years.



**Bahubhasha Shabdkosh:** Aims to create a multilingual dictionary repository.



**Real-time Translation Architecture:** led by the National Education Technology Forum (NETF) in collaboration with Bharatiya Bhasha Samiti for developing technology for real-time translation in Indian languages.



**Bharatiya Bhasha Pustak Scheme:** Provides digital textbooks and study materials in multiple Indian languages.



**Bhashini:** It is an AI-led language translation system that enables people to speak in their own language while talking to speakers of other Indian languages.



# Amid three-language debate, data shows only one out of four Indians is multilingual

As per 2011 Census, Hindi is mother tongue of 43% Indians, but it's spoken by less than 5% of population in 12 states, UTs

**ANJISHNU DAS**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

IN 1968, a national education policy (NEP) formulated by the Indira Gandhi-led Congress government had introduced the three-language formula. Centred on a Hindi-English fulcrum, the policy called for teaching a southern language in Hindi-speaking states and a regional language in non-Hindi-speaking states as the third language. Since then the three-language formula has been an issue of intense dispute. In 1968, Tamil Nadu had opposed the policy and has since persisted with a two-language formula of its own.

Currently, the DMK-led Tamil Nadu government is at loggerheads with the BJP-ruled Centre over its NEP 2020, which has retained the three-language formula with fewer restrictions on the choices of languages.

The row between Tamil Nadu and the Centre erupted after

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan indicated that the former would not be provided funds under the Samagra Shiksha programme for school education until it implements the NEP and adopts its three-language rule. In response, Tamil Nadu CM M K Stalin said Tamils would not accept such a "blackmail", asking "which constitutional provision made the three-language formula mandatory. The DMK has alleged that this formula was merely a guise for "Hindi imposition".

In the Congress-led Telangana government's push against the NEP, Telugu was on Tuesday made a compulsory language across all school boards. The Centre has maintained that no specific language would be imposed on any state.

In 1968 and 2020, the stated objective of the three-language formula was to promote multilingualism. However, data from the 2011 Census shows that despite India's language diversity, over

half a state's population speaks more than two languages in just eight states and UTs.

Nationally, 26.02% of the population is bilingual and 7.1% is trilingual, as per the 2011 Census. While the bilingual population has grown from 24.79% in the 2001 Census, the share of trilingual speakers fell from 8.51%.

Between 2001 and 2011, bilingualism fell in 12 states and UTs, while trilingualism fell in 23 states and UTs. Tamil Nadu, despite sticking to its two-language formula, ranked 15th in 2011 for its share of bilingual population at 28.3%. At 3.39%, its trilingual population put the state at eighth from the bottom.

However, five lowest-ranked states on bilingualism are Rajasthan (10.9%), Uttar Pradesh (11.45%), Bihar (12.82%), Chhattisgarh (13.25%), and Madhya Pradesh (13.51%). These states, which fall in the Hindi heartland, are also in the bottom five for trilingualism, with each



## TOP STATES

### FOR BILINGUALISM

State	Share of bilingual population
Goa	77.21 %
Andaman & Nicobar Island	67.64 %
Arunachal Pradesh	64.03 %
Sikkim	63.71 %
Nagaland	62.15 %

### FOR TRILINGUALISM

State	Share of trilingual population
Goa	50.82 %
Chandigarh	30.51 %
Arunachal Pradesh	30.25 %
Sikkim	29.71 %
Punjab	28.22 %

Source: 2011 Census

falling below 2%. The best performing state on multilingualism is Goa – 77.21% of its population is bilingual and 50.82% is trilingual. Goa is the only state where trilingualism exceeds 50%, followed by Chandigarh with 30.51% and Arunachal Pradesh with 30.25%.

The other states and UTs with high rates of bilingualism are Andaman & Nicobar Islands (67.64%), Arunachal Pradesh (64.03%), Sikkim (63.71%), Nagaland (62.15%), Chandigarh

(54.95%), Manipur (54.02%), and Maharashtra (51.1%).

With 3.47 crore speakers, Marathi-Hindi is the most common bilingual combination, followed by Hindi-English at 3.2 crore, Gujarati-Hindi at 2.17 crore, Urdu-Hindi at 1.86 crore, and Punjabi-Hindi at 1.55 crore.

In 2001 though, Hindi-English was the most common bilingual combination at 3.24 crore, followed by Marathi-Hindi at 2.59 crore, Gujarati-Hindi at 1.49 crore,

Urdu-Hindi at 1.31 crore, and Punjabi-Hindi at 1.22 crore.

In 2011, among trilinguals, Marathi-Hindi-English is the most common combination at 1.01 crore, followed by Punjabi-Hindi-English at 77.99 lakh, Gujarati-Hindi-English at 66.32 lakh, Telugu-English-Hindi at 25.04 lakh, and Malayalam-English-Hindi at 24.76 lakh. The most spoken trilingual combination that does not include Hindi is Kashmiri-Urdu-English at 64.79 lakh, while the most common combination excluding both Hindi and English is Telugu-Kannada-Tamil at 1.6 lakh.

While the 2011 Census reported that 43.63% of Indians say Hindi is their mother tongue, it is spoken by less than 1% of population in five states and UTs, including Tamil Nadu and Kerala, and by less than 5% of population in another seven states and UTs, including Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

Andhra, which included Telangana in the 2011 Census, had the highest proportion of Hindi speakers among the southern states at 3.69%.