



## CONSTITUTIONAL MORALITY VS. CULTURAL NATIONALISM: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF EDUCATION POLICIES

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores the evolution of the Indian education systems as a tool for nation building. It examines how the education policies of 1968, 1986, and 2020 align with Dr. Ambedkar's concept of constitutional morality. The article also explains the shift from the 1968 and 1986 focuses on secularism and composite culture toward the 2020 National Education Policy's emphasis on the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and decolonising education system. The article argues that while IKS aims to decolonize education, its vague definition risks promoting ethnic and cultural nationalism over abstract, secular citizenship.

The article also argues that political parties in government frame policies on the guidelines of political ideologies and try to impose their ideology on citizens.

The Congress government has promoted the values of secularism, while the BJP promotes the idea of cultural nationalism. The core theme of the article is to check what values this education policy wants to cultivate and what the implications of it will be. The focus will be on the New Education Policy and Indian Knowledge Systems as the most recent developments in the education system.

### INTRODUCTION

The history of nation-building in India can be traced back to ancient times. In ancient India, there were many janapadas and regional kinships whereby the notion of nation was not fully developed. Religion and regional culture were the only parameters to decide the fate of national unity. In medieval times, when Islamic dynasties were established in India, the regional diversity and ethnicity were somewhat incorporated under Islamic rule, mainly by force. The concept of modern nationalism started developing when European powers colonized Asian and African nations. This process was totally modern, whereby the people united against alien rule. India was also one episode of such nation-building processes.

As India is a highly diverse nation, it was difficult to build a consensus on the definition of the nation. However, the Constituent Assembly of India succeeded in developing this consensus, and over time, the Indian education system played a decisive role in sustaining it. Before independence, many leaders, including Tilak, demanded a national education system by which Indian nationalism could be fostered. The definition of Indian nationalism is more inclusive and incorporating as the frame of constitutional morality is attached to it. The article aims to check how the concept of constitutional morality is being implemented through the education system.

Constitutional morality is important for every nation which has a large number of diversities, as ethnicity and culture can be an easy foundation for nationalism. However, to build a secular and inclusive nationalism, constitutional morality becomes unavoidable. Constitutional morality provides consensus on the definition of nationalism and helps to maintain legitimacy. Therefore, constitutional morality is reflected and enacted through the education system, national celebrations, and political institutions. In short, constitutional morality promotes the idea of abstract citizenship, which is secular.

“Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated. We must realize that our people have yet to learn it,” Dr. Ambedkar, 4 November 1948, Constituent Assembly.

Dr. Ambedkar has rightly pointed out that constitutional morality becomes important for building a new nation. Ethnic nationalism is a natural instinct, while secular ideas of nationalism, like Indian nationalism, require the binding force of constitutional morality and constitutionalism.



This article examines how the Indian Knowledge System is also reflected in the policies of 1968 and 1986, and how the education policies of 1968, 1986, and 2020 had congruence with the concept of constitutional morality which was defined by Dr. Ambedkar. The article will be helpful to understand the importance of education in nation-building. It will build a clear understanding of how education is being used to set political agendas and to cultivate values in society. The article analyzes the vision of the constitution and education policies.

#### METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used is qualitative and descriptive in nature, relying primarily on documentary analysis and comparative policy analysis of 1968, 1986 and 2020 education policies. The study examines key National Education Policy documents of 1968, 1986, and 2020 as primary sources to trace the evolution of educational objectives, nation building goals in India and evolution of ideas of IKS. These policy texts are analyzed to understand how education has been used as a medium of political communication. Secondary sources such as academic writings, critical essays, and scholarly commentaries by thinkers like K. Krishna and Pratap Bhanu Mehta are used to contextualize and analyze the shift in the approach of the education system.

The theoretical framework of the study is grounded in the concepts of constitutional morality, abstract citizenship, and secularism. Constitutional morality, as articulated by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, refers to adherence to constitutional values and promotes constitutionalism. Abstract citizenship emphasizes Secular and abstract identity as Indian citizens irrespective of caste, religion or linguistic identity. Thus secularism as a constitutional principle, ensures state neutrality towards religion while safeguarding pluralism. Together, these concepts provide an analytical lens to assess whether new education policy reinforces constitutional values or advances a particular ideological orientation and imposition, especially through the emphasis on Indian Knowledge Systems.

#### CONSTITUTIONAL MORALITY VS. CULTURAL NATIONALISM: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF EDUCATION POLICIES

The policy of government has always been designed on the ideological line of the party and the will of the leader. Therefore, the policies always have some political agendas to assert on the people through state mechanisms. Education policies play a very sole part of such political communication. The best examples of such political communication are Mao's China, where Mao has been portrayed as the only hero of China. Indians are not untouched by such practices. During the Congress government, they fostered the values of socialism and secularism, while the BJP promotes the idea of cultural nationalism. But the constitutional framers wanted to build the Indian education system on the line of constitutional values which will help to promote constitutional morality. So it becomes important to analyze all education policies to find how the education system has been used to promote one's own ideology. As K. Krishna had rightly pointed out, "Power-knowledge relations have served as a form of social control through education in the colonial period and have continued to do so even today."

The Government of India had introduced three main education policies in 1968, 1986, and 2020. The aims of these policies were totally different, as the issues and concerns of these policies were different. But all three of these policies are important to understand the process of nation-building and the role of education in India.

After independence, inadequate infrastructure was the main concern and problem before the government. Major parts of India were deprived of basic schooling facilities. Therefore, the 1968 education policy was mainly focused on accessibility of education to all. As a newly emerged nation, the foundation of nationalism in India was weak. That's why the 1968 policy had the aim of nation-building and increasing the literacy rate among Indians.

The goals of literacy and basic schooling infrastructure have been achieved. The focus of education policy turned towards the incorporation of backward sections in society. The 1986 education policy,



which was proposed by Rajiv Gandhi, was child-centric, where elementary education was focused and social justice became a goal for the policy. The introduction of the policy document, point number 8, mentions that the curriculum must be designed as it promotes the national values of secularism, scientific temper, and moral values which inculcate the understanding of India's rich composite culture.

While 2020 NEP focuses on the inclusivity of Indian culture and fosters a holistic approach to education. The focus area of NEP is the Indian Knowledge System. Local, tribal, and regional culture has been included in the curriculum. But the biggest problem of the IKS is that it has not been defined. Education centers and institutions have been provided autonomy to introduce courses related to IKS. As the concern of the policy is to deal with the problem of unemployment and cope with other nations at a global level, the aim of the policy is to develop human potential at its fullest.

The policies not only aim at promoting their own ideological preferences but also sometimes contradict constitutional morality. Therefore, policies must be formulated by considering constitutional directions and constitutional values.

### INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM AND THE PAST

The term "Indian Knowledge System" was first introduced in the policy of 2020, but the Indian Knowledge System can be found in the 1968 and 1986 policies also. Even before India got freedom, national leaders demanded the conducting of competitive exams in vernacular languages. Therefore, from the Indian freedom struggle to independent India, the government had always clearly distinguished Western knowledge systems from Indian knowledge systems, whereby Mr. Gandhi proposed a vocational and experience-based education system called Naya Taleem and Tilak argued for a national education system.

The fight between English and vernacular languages had started from the beginning of British rule. The nationalists demanded that the medium of education must be vernacular language, while the British believed that English must be promoted as it was considered a superior language. The British believed vernacular languages were of second grade and were not capable of knowledge-making. They framed Indian-origin languages as deficient for modern scientific and bureaucratic purposes. The British wanted to promote English as they wanted to safeguard their own rule by creating loyalists and clerks.

The aim of promoting vernacular languages was to counter British supremacy and the strategy of building the Indian nation on the identity of British colonial ideas. English education was under criticism because it produced loyalists to the British. K. Krishna rightly pointed out that the same English education produced Gandhi, Tilak, Ambedkar, and other nationalist leaders. Initially, English was being promoted to create a feeling of loyalty among Indians for British rule and bureaucratic purposes, but later it also helped to produce the counter-movement against colonial rule.

Specifically, even after independence, India had focused on building a unified education system which would create some kind of homogeneity among Indians. The 1968 policy was designed to promote nation's integrity and unity. Therefore, the three-language formula was introduced, whereby English, Hindi, and one South Indian language in Hindi-speaking states, and Hindi in South Indian states, were made compulsory. During the whole of schooling, Hindi was promoted for the cause of nation-building. On the basis of one unified language, the aim was to safeguard the unity of India. Even the aim reflects through Article 343 of the Indian Constitution. The article promoted Hindi as the official language of the Union and English as an associate official language for 15 years. The vision of the constitution-makers was clear: they wanted to build a homogeneous identity through some means.

The 1968 policy also talks about the promotion of Sanskrit. The policy did not make Sanskrit a compulsory language, but the policy clearly mentioned that Sanskrit had a great contribution to the development of Indian-origin languages and therefore Sanskrit must be provided at all levels of education. Hindi was made compulsory, but on the other hand, Sanskrit was encouraged in a

voluntary way. In other words, no strong steps were taken by the previous government regarding the spread of the Sanskrit language. Sanskrit is considered the language of Brahmins and upper castes, and that's why the lower and subaltern castes had no affection toward the Sanskrit language. India is divided along the lines of languages. The emphasis on Sanskrit can create a divide between Prakrit and Sanskrit, which can further harm national unity and the social fabric.

The policy of 1986 had taken a special initiative for inclusive growth of the education system by focusing on socially backward sections, including women. The policy was a landmark for the issue of gender sensitization and the low status of women. The policy also prioritizes the inclusion of SC/ST and other backward sections in education. Special initiatives like scholarships were introduced and teachers from these sections were recruited to ensure inclusivity. The educational interest of minorities was also promoted for the cause of national unity. "Operation Blackboard" was the famous initiative of this policy. The aim of Operation Blackboard was to provide minimum essential facilities to all primary schools in India.

The Indian Knowledge System can also be traced in this policy. Navodaya Vidyalayas were established to promote national integration and Indian culture. Navodaya Vidyalayas provide quality education to students on the basis of their talent irrespective of their socio-economic conditions. These schools were residential and promoted a culture of national integration by migrating students between Hindi and non-Hindi speaking states.

The policy carries forward the three-language formula and emphasizes the protection of indigenous linguistic knowledge. By making the "Mother Tongue" or "Regional Language" the primary medium of instruction at the elementary level, it ensured that local and regional languages remained part of the child's learning process.

One whole chapter was dedicated to culture named "THE CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE: BROAD PARAMETERS OF THE STRATEGY." The chapter focuses on linking culture with education. Here, the term IKS is not used, but the protection of regional and tribal culture is at the center of the theme. The policy provided a guideline for the establishment of new institutions dedicated to the protection, recording, and documentation of tribal and rural folklore and art.

It also had provisions to rewrite texts at the primary level of education and make them more culturally oriented and culturally aware. Zonal cultural centers were to be established to connect and interlink between states and different regions, as it would promote cultural exchange. The whole cultural aspect was framed to promote nation's integration and unity. By teaching regional culture and interlinking it with Indian heritage and a sense of nationalism, the policy aimed at promoting secular values. Thus, in the policy of 1986, the Indian Knowledge System was defined as a composite culture, meaning Indian culture is a reflection of diversity.

The new education policy of 2020 has introduced the Indian Knowledge System. The policy advocates that the Indian Knowledge System is an integral part of Indian culture and so it must be taught at every level of education. A minimum of 5% of the Indian Knowledge System must be included in the syllabus at all levels of education, from schooling to university.

By analyzing the three documents, it is clear that Indian culture and art have been an integral part of the Indian education system. It was promoted from time to time by the Government of India. Now the question arises: how is the Indian Knowledge System different from the steps taken by the previous government regarding the protection of Indian culture and heritage?

## INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM AND ITS AIM TO DECOLONIZE INDIAN KNOWLEDGE

The policy had not clearly defined what the Indian Knowledge System means. So, there is no universal definition for the Indian Knowledge System as such. India is a diverse nation where people from different caste, religion, and linguistic groups reside. There is no singular knowledge system which can unify the whole Indian nation. And that's why the new education policy uses "Indian Knowledge Systems" not in the singular but as a plural meaning.



There is no consensus on the definition of Indian Knowledge Systems. But the aim of the new education policy projected by the Government of India is to decolonize Indian knowledge. The aim of the policy helps to build some kind of understanding about the Indian Knowledge System. The words "Indian Knowledge Systems" are used in an antagonistic way against Western knowledge systems or British knowledge systems. Firstly, the Indian Knowledge System is something which is different from the British knowledge system which was introduced by Britishers in India. Secondly, the Indian Knowledge System means one which has Indian origin. These are only two standpoints which can be used to define Indian Knowledge Systems.

K. Krishna had argued that the Indian education system is the mix of colonial and nationalist conceptions of education. English has been accommodated as a language of modernity, and Indian history and culture is included in a way which represents unity in diversity. If the new education policy aimed at decolonizing the Indian knowledge and education system, but without clearly defining the goal, how is it possible to achieve?

The education system inculcates the values which favor the interest of elites. The education system has always been shaped and under the control of the elite section. Therefore, it becomes important to question the hidden aims of the government. The policy regarding Indian Knowledge Systems is either a tool of providing representation to Indian culture or it is only a political agenda to promote one's own self as a savior of Indian culture. On the other hand, portraying the previous government as a supporter of the Western knowledge system.

#### CONSTITUTIONAL MORALITY: GUIDING PRINCIPLE FOR FORMULATIONS OF POLICIES

Constitutional morality is created and can be enforced by inculcating the values of secularism and fraternity. Therefore, constitutional morality must be a guiding force for education policies rather than promoting political ideologies. Constitutional morality is not natural but a cultivated habit of obeying the constitution and having faith in the idea of constitutionalism. Constitutional morality becomes very important in a diverse nation like India, where diversity can lead to fragmentation. Thus, to sustain modern democracy and the idea of the Indian nation, constitutional morality can be used as a binding force.

Pratap Bhanu Mehta stated that, "This account of constitutional morality may seem to emphasize the formal elements: self-restraint, respect for plurality, deference to processes, scepticism about authoritative claims to popular sovereignty, and the concern for an open culture of criticism that remains at the core of constitutional forms."

The five elements suggested by Pratap Bhanu Mehta promote the idea of secularism, fraternity, unity in diversity, and a liberal framework of criticism. Constitutional morality is nothing but a secular culture or practice by which civic behavior can be shaped. Thus, the policies must be in congruence with constitutional values.

#### SECULARISM, SCIENTIFIC TEMPER, UNITY IN DIVERSITY AND IKS: A HEGEMONIC AGENDA

Pratap Bhanu Mehta defines the Indian model of secularism as a contextual and principled distance approach, whereby the state keeps equal distance and even intervenes when there is need. This model allows the state to engage with or disengage from religion based on the context. It intervenes to protect basic values of secularism like liberty, equality, and fraternity. The people will only believe in the idea of secularism when they have faith in constitutional morality. Because secularism as an idea does not have the power to build a homogeneous society. In other words, constitutional morality is the practice of secularism or secularism in action.



Constitutional morality creates a sense of abstract citizenship which is important to bind the people irrespective of their caste, class, religion, and linguistic identities. Abstract citizenship provides legitimacy to the modern idea of nationalism in a highly heterogeneous society. But the idea of IKS seems to be contradicting the principle of abstract citizenship. IKS promotes the ethnic identity by including regional and local practices, history, and culture in the curriculum. As there is no unified policy on IKS and no clear guidelines regarding the designing of the curriculum, the vague idea of IKS can create cultural and regional divides.

If mythological stories are not critically taught, the myths can be presented as scientific facts. Sometimes, people claim that ancient Indians had modern technology like airplanes (Vimanas) or the internet just because it is mentioned in an ancient text. The pseudoscience vs. science debate between Indian Knowledge Systems will harm the value of secularism and promote conformity to mythology, stereotypes, and even superstition.

The NEP 2020 contains clauses related to the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), which is the actual execution of NEP. What approach it will follow is questionable. The government is expected to be neutral, but as ideologies of the ruling party decide the guiding force of every policy, the possibility cannot be denied that opposite value systems will not be considered. Kusha Anand and Marie Lall argue that textbooks are the political tools to promote ruling party ideology. They claim that textbooks are not neutral; they are primary vehicles for transmitting national narratives and ideologies of the ruling party to younger generations.

The Indian Knowledge System can promote a hegemonic agenda of cultural nationalism by linking subaltern and tribal culture to the Hindu religion. The process of assimilation will accelerate, but it will promote cultural nationalism rather than abstract citizenship. The exclusion of minority religions is the biggest concern, whereby textbooks will be rewritten under the censorship of the ideology of cultural nationalism.

The concern about the exclusion of marginalized voices is that Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) often focus too much on ancient books written in Sanskrit by a small, elite group. This "Sanskrit-centric" approach risks leaving out the rest of India's history. Specifically, it ignores the great culture of Dalits and Adivasis. On the other hand, IKS can present Dalit and Adivasi culture as part of a greater Hindu culture. One major concern is that school textbooks and teaching methods could be used to push a specific political or religious viewpoint rather than teaching objective facts. This ideological imposition is the risk of the erosion of distinct values and the culture of subalterns and Adivasis.

The recent rewriting of NCERT reflects the BJP vision of cultural nationalism. Kusha Anand and Marie Lall further argue that the discourse of nationalism is being shifted from secular and plural to a majoritarian, Hindu-centric identity. The recent steps taken by the BJP government regarding the rewriting of the NCERT textbooks are examples of this shift. The inclusion of Indian Knowledge Systems, history, and culture must be appreciated, but the intention must be checked. As education is a tool of nation-building, it can also end in hegemony.

## CONCLUSION

The Congress government has always promoted the value of secularism and ideal abstract citizenship through the education policies of 1968 and 1986. Initiatives like the three-language formula and the setting up of Navodaya Vidyalayas are the reflection of nothing but the Indian Knowledge System, where diversity is protected and even unity is secured.

On the other hand, the new National Education Policy of 2020 has changed the approach of the education system by focusing on the Indian Knowledge System and having the aim of decolonization of the Indian education system. As there is no clear definition of the Indian Knowledge System, the intention of the government is under doubt. If Indian Knowledge Systems become the tool of promoting cultural nationalism, the principle of abstract citizenship and unity in diversity can be



harmed. Thus, the guiding force of policy must be constitutional morality and not cultural nationalism.

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