

LANGUAGE OF UNITY: ON REJECTION OF THE THREE-LANGUAGE FORMULA

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

By rejecting the [three-language formula](#) advocated in the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), [Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami has only reiterated the State's unwavering position](#) on an emotive and political issue. Its two-language policy, implemented decades ago after a historic agitation against the imposition of Hindi, remains non-negotiable for almost the entire political class. Opposition from the State had last year forced the Centre to amend the draft NEP and withdraw a proposal to teach Hindi as a third language in schools in non-Hindi speaking States. Yet in the NEP, approved by the Union Cabinet last week, it chose to push for the [three-language formula](#), packaging it as a means to promote multilingualism and “national unity”. Though the policy said that no language will be imposed on any State, it has expectedly cut no ice with parties in Tamil Nadu, which have risen in near unison to oppose the proposal. In fact, Mr. Palaniswami, citing “collective sentiments” of the people, noted that the proposal was “saddening and painful” and appealed to the Prime Minister to allow States to follow their own language policy. In a State that resisted multiple attempts to impose Hindi since 1937, political parties are understandably wary of any mandate to impart an additional language in schools. They fear this would eventually pave the way for Hindi to enter the State through the back door. Since 1985, the State has even refused to allow Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas to be set up as they teach Hindi.

The two-language policy of Tamil and English, piloted by [former Chief Minister C.N. Annadurai in 1968](#), has thus far worked well in the State. In a liberalised world, more windows to the world are being opened up for those proficient in English, a global link language. The State's significant human resources contribution to the ever-expanding IT sector is also attributed to the English fluency of its recruits as much as to their technical knowledge. There is this counter-argument that Tamil Nadu is depriving students of an opportunity to learn Hindi, touted as a national link language. However, its voluntary learning has never been restricted and the growth over the past decade in the number of CBSE schools, where the language is taught, would bear testimony to this. The patronage for the 102-year-old Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha, based in Chennai, also proves this. In the Sabha's centenary year, Tamil Nadu accounted for 73% of active Hindi *pracharaks* (teachers) in South India. Out of necessity, many in the State have picked up conversational Hindi to engage with the migrant population that feeds the labour needs from factories to hair salons. Only compulsion is met with resistance. India's federal nature and diversity demand that no regional language is given supremacy over another.

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