



The debate on the national language

1. Under Article 343 of the Constitution, the official language of the Union shall be Hindi in the Devanagari script. The international form of Indian numerals will be used for official purposes.
2. The Constituent Assembly was bitterly divided on the question, with members from States that did not speak Hindi initially opposing the declaration of Hindi as a national language.
3. Ultimately, it was decided that the Constitution will only speak of an 'official language'. And that English would continue to be used for a period of 15 years.
4. The Constitution said that after 15 years, Parliament may by law decide on the use of English and the use of the Devanagari form of numbers for specified purposes.

What is the Eighth Schedule?

1. The Eighth Schedule contains a list of languages in the country. Initially, there were 14 languages in the schedule, but now there are 22 languages. There is no description of the sort of languages that are included or will be included in the Eighth Schedule. There are only two references to these languages in the text of the Constitution.
2. One is in Article 344(1), which provides for the formation of a Commission by the President, which should have a Chairman and members representing these scheduled languages.
3. The purpose of the Commission is to make recommendations for the progressive use of Hindi for official purposes of the Union and for restricting the use of English.
4. The second reference, found in Article 351, says it is the Union government's duty to promote the spread of Hindi so that it becomes "a medium of expression for all elements of the composite culture of India" and also to assimilate elements of forms and expressions from Hindustani and languages listed in the Eighth Schedule.



The Official Languages Act, 1963 was passed in anticipation of the expiry of the 15-year period during which the Constitution originally allowed the use of English for official purposes notwithstanding the expiry of the 15-year period.

What is the three-language formula?

1. Since the 1960s, the Centre's education policy documents speak of teaching three languages — Hindi, English and one regional language in the Hindi-speaking States, and Hindi, English and the official regional language in other States. In practice, however, only some States teach both their predominant language and Hindi, besides English.
2. In States where Hindi is the official language, a third language is rarely taught as a compulsory subject. Tamil Nadu has been steadfastly opposing the three-language formula and sticks to teaching Tamil and English. It argues that those who need to know Hindi can learn on their own.

Quasi-federalism

Conscious effort on the part of the framers of the Constitution to ensure flexibility and accommodate diversity renders India's federalism an original form

Federal, quasi-federal or hybrid

1. India consciously adopted a version of federalism that made the Union government and State governments interdependent on each other (latter more vis-a-vis the former) thereby violating the primal characteristic of a federal constitution i.e., autonomous spheres of authority for Union and State governments.
2. Similar other constitutional features include the size and composition of the Rajya Sabha akin to that of the Lok Sabha thereby favouring larger States;
3. Article 3 of the Indian Constitution allows the Union to alter the boundaries of a State without the latter's consent, emergency powers, and concurrent list subjects of the Seventh Schedule wherein the Union possesses more authority than the State barring a few exceptions.
4. India's centralised federal structure was not marked by the process of 'coming together' but was an outcome of 'holding together' and 'putting together'.



Observations on Indian federalism:

1. Ambedkar called India's federation a Union as it was indestructible which is why the Constitution does not contain words related to federalism.
2. He also said that India's Constitution holds requisite flexibility to be federal and unitary on a need basis.
3. While the Supreme Court of India held that federalism was a part of the basic structure of the Indian Constitution in the S.R. Bommai vs Union of India case(1994), the Court also held that the Indian variant of federalism upholds a strong centre in the Kuldip Nayar vs Union of India case (2006).

A centralised federal structure

1. There are four main reasons why India adopted a centralised federal structure. First was the partition of India and its concomitant concerns.
2. The second reason was to forge a national civic identity.
3. The third reason concerns the objective of building a welfare state and the final reason was to alleviate inter-regional economic inequality.

While the aforementioned reasons make a case for a centralised federal setup, the structure's effectiveness is solely dependent on the intent and objectives a government aims to achieve.

- For instance, Professor Louise Tillin observed that linguistic reorganisation would not have been possible if India followed a rigid or conventional federal system.
- In other words, the current form of federalism in the Indian context is largely a function of the intent of the government of the day and the objectives it seeks to achieve.
- The majoritarian tendencies prevalent today are subverting the unique and indigenised set-up into an asymmetrical one.
- Inter alia, delayed disbursement of resources and tax proceeds, bias towards electorally unfavourable States, evasion of accountability, blurring spheres of authority, weakening institutions, a proliferation of fissiparous political ideologies all signal the diminishing of India's plurality or regionalisation of



the nation — a process that is highly antithetical to the forging of a supra-local and secular national identity that preserves and promotes pluralism.

While it would be safe to argue that our federal set-up is a conscious choice, its furthering or undoing, will depend on the collective will of the citizenry and the representatives they vote to power.