

THE CIVIL LENS

Zooming in on what matters

An Initiative by the students of MA Public Policy (2025-27), IILM University, Greater Noida

This Month's Exclusive Read

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Unity, not uniformity,
must be our aim. We
attain unity only through
variety. Differences must
be integrated, not
annihilated, not
absorbed.

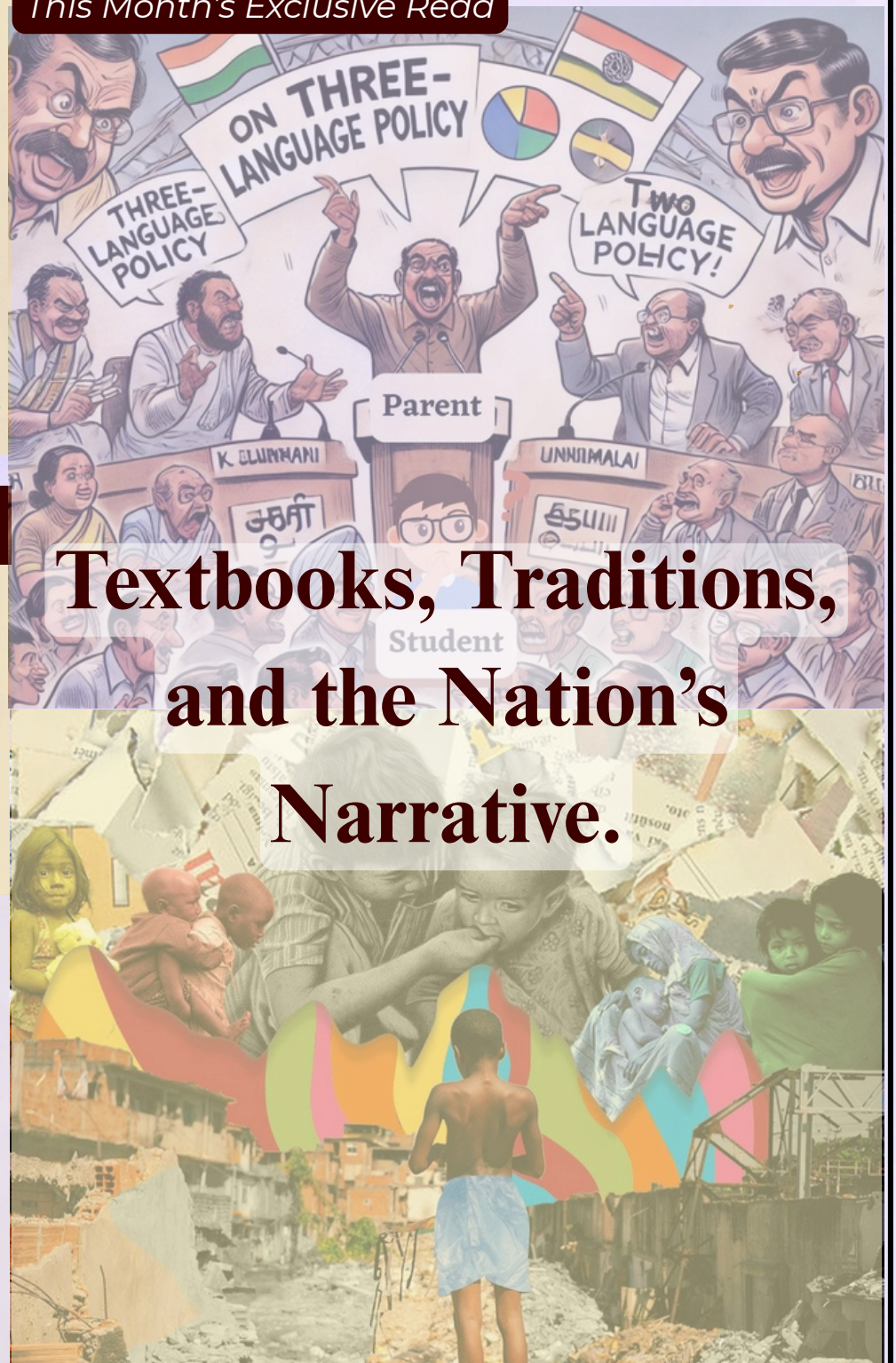
Mary Parker Follett

Secularism vs. Religion

The religion of rules
must give way to the
religion of principles.

Dr. B R Ambedkar

In a world
full of noise,
how are our
youth really
feeling?



The cultural curriculum: building citizens, shaping narratives

MEHAK BANSAL, *Managing Editor*

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"The classroom is not just where we learn facts; it's where nations narrate their identities. India's recent curricular changes reveal a subtle but powerful shift in how we tell the story of who we are."

Education is never just about lessons and syllabi. It is about the stories a nation tells itself. Through its curriculum, a nation chooses what to remember, celebrate, or erase. In India, the recent shifts under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, from promoting regional languages and ancient knowledge systems to reworking historical narratives, while quietly letting go of Mughal history, a new form of cultural policy unfolds - one that decides not just how students learn, but what kind of India they learn about. The syllabus, it seems, has become the new frontier of nationalism.

“As Sanskrit verses reappear and Mughal chapters fade, one wonders: what version of India are we teaching our children to inherit?”

The NEP 2020 introduced a new emphasis on India's ancient and philosophical roots. By promoting regional languages or mother tongues as the medium of instruction until at least grade 5, the policy envisions education as something that should emerge from local contexts rather than borrowed colonial frameworks. This linguistic shift is accompanied by a deliberate effort to integrate Bharatiya knowledge systems, including ancient philosophy, Vedic mathematics, traditional art forms, and Sanskrit texts, into the curriculum.

This effort, on paper, serves the dual purpose of promoting inclusivity and reviving cultural pride. It allows a Tamil child to learn in Tamil, a Manipuri student to access knowledge in their mother tongue, and a Gujarati student to find philosophical resonance in texts from their own heritage. It is an attempt to make learning more relatable and culturally grounded. The intent, therefore, is noble, i.e., to reconnect education with India's civilizational depth. However, when cultural revival selectively celebrates some histories while silencing others, the balance between pride and pluralism begins to tilt.

The NCERT textbook revisions that reduced or removed content on the Mughal era sparked nationwide discourse. References to the Delhi Sultanate, Mughal courts, policies of tolerance, art, architecture, and administration have been pruned, allegedly to make textbooks “more concise”. Yet, in a nation as historically layered as India, such omissions are not simply academic choices. They are acts of selective remembrance.

The Mughal period, despite its complexities, shaped India's identity in profound ways: from language and literature to cuisine, music, architecture, and governance. To exclude it from the narrative is to deny an entire chapter of how cultural synthesis forged the India we know today. The Red Fort, the Urdu language, Hindustani music, and even the composite court culture that blended Persian and Indian traditions, all speak of coexistence, negotiation, and exchange.

Erasing these contributions in the name of cultural purity risks presenting a monolithic version of the past, one that aligns with a singular cultural nationalism rather than the pluralistic nationalism envisioned in the Indian Constitution. History, in this way, becomes less about inquiry and more about ideology.

Education policy, when viewed beyond its administrative frame, becomes a powerful cultural project. Through curriculum, the state defines the boundaries of belonging, deciding whose stories matter, which legacies deserve pride, and which histories are peripheral. In this light, NEP 2020's emphasis on “Indian values” and “ancient wisdom” may appear as an effort at decolonization, but without a parallel inclusion of diverse and even uncomfortable histories, it risks creating what scholars call “selective authenticity”.

Other nations have grappled with similar questions. Japan's debates over wartime textbooks, or the US controversies around the teaching of slavery and race. The way a country teaches its past often determines how its citizens engage with its present. India, a civilization defined by multiplicity, cannot afford a curriculum that simplifies its stories into binaries of glory and guilt.



The project of nationalism, at its core, is also a project of memory. To forget certain parts of our history is to fragment our collective identity. A truly inclusive nationalism must draw strength from every layer of India's cultural evolution; from the Vedas to the Sufis, from Nalanda to Fatehpur Sikri, from regional languages to cosmopolitan art forms.

Education, therefore, must not only transmit knowledge but also cultivate cultural citizenship—a sense of belonging rooted in awareness, empathy, and multiplicity. The curriculum should invite questioning, not conformity; inclusion, not erasure.

Can Indian education authentically integrate its rich civilizational heritage with the demands of the globalized world? Can we create citizens who are rooted in their culture yet open to universal human knowledge? The answer will shape not just individual lives, but the very character of the nation itself.



To build the India of tomorrow, we must teach the India that truly was - complex, composite, and alive in its diversity. Because what we choose to teach our children is not merely our history. It is, in fact, our future.

From the desk of the Managing Editor

Culture is not just what we inherit; it's what we continue to create. Diversity is not a challenge; it is India's essence. And nationalism, in its truest form, should celebrate that very plurality. This month, The Civil Lens explores the intersections of these three ideas - how culture shapes belonging, how diversity strengthens democracy, and how nationalism must evolve to remain inclusive. Through stories that span education, culture, through the lens of informal labour, the evolution of faith, digital nationalism, marital rape, and comparative federalism.

This issue reflects on how the idea of India is lived and learned in classrooms, communities, and conversations. As students of public policy, our attempt is not to define nationalism, but to question and understand how it is constructed through policy, culture, and everyday life.

As Managing Editor, I've witnessed how every draft, discussion, and debate shaped this edition into more than a publication — it became a dialogue between us and the world around us.

At The Civil Lens, we believe reflection is as vital as reform. Each piece in this issue is a small act of questioning of what it means to belong, to remember, and to imagine.

~Mehak Bansal

The faces behind the festive glow

EKTA GROVER,

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The festive season in India is marked by Navratri, Dussehra, Durga Puja, Diwali, and Chhath Puja, which bring immense joy, spiritual renewal and togetherness. In India, the festive season is a joyous occasion we all love to celebrate. It is the time when most of the houses are meticulously cleaned and decorated with lights and flowers, and even renovated during festive times. Every corner of the country sparkles with celebration and enthusiasm.

Every year, our informal and unorganized workers gear up for this festive season as this is their most demanding era, from making marigold garlands to painting Diyas, from putting up a fairy light stall to an electrician stringing lights to our home, from making handmade decorative items to selling them at sustainable prices, from cleaning the streets to cleaning our rooms these unseen faces be the reason of this cities festive glow. They transform our streets into radiant hubs of festivity.

Street sellers set up their stalls from early morning to late at night, and as a result, they have to sleep on the footpaths so that they can earn more during this festive season to support their families.

The irony of our celebration is the diya we light up at home is made by the potter who couldn't go to his village to celebrate his festival with his family, the women making garlands for our doors couldn't afford to even light up her house with lights and colours, the domestic helper who deep cleaned our home could not buy new dresses or gifts for her children.

While we celebrate with our families, these individuals ensure our comfort and happiness, often making time for themselves to do the same.

They and even we often forget that between adorning our homes, caring for the cleanliness of our streets, and bringing color and brightness to our lives and society. Their own celebrations are often overshadowed by struggle.

While the festive season brings prosperity, it also brings inequality to our unorganized society. While we celebrate, do shopping and eat good food for them, it's time for more hard work for the very people who illuminate our festivals. It's the time when all these pillars of our society continue their struggle to gain economic and social security before their demand fades.

Most of them earn on daily wages with no job security, no health insurance, no fixed earnings, and they don't have proper housing; some live in tin houses, some sleep without a roof over their head. Even without these, they keep on working for society. The most disheartening part is that their efforts go to vain, they are not appreciated, and more than that, they are not properly paid. Also, whatever they demand, they either get less or not appropriate for the work they did. These are our informal laborers whose voices are unheard, whose faces are unseen, and whose rights are often neglected.

From this festive season onwards, let's make a few changes in our society to extend our gratitude towards these pillars and redefine the meaning of celebration for those who stand by us, help us throughout, and enhance our festive joys.

1. Residential welfare societies can organize small parties for them, in which they can be appreciated, and everyone can enjoy together.
2. Donation drives can be conducted after the festive season to show gratitude towards them.
3. Promote these small and medium sellers rather than buying from large brands.

This year, as we light our diyas and adorn our homes, let us pause to consider the people whose hands created this beauty. Their work is deeply human, creative, and emotional, and also economically driven. We are reminded by the "faces behind the festive glow" that light is meaningless unless it is shared.

Government initiatives for the informal labor

India's informal labor accounts for 85% of the country's workforce, which contributes more than half of India's GDP. On August 26, 2021, the Ministry of Labor and Employment launched the e-Shram portal for unorganized sector workers, a e-Shram card containing a 12-digit unique number, so that they can avail welfare benefits under various schemes.

Creation of a centralized database of all unorganized workers, including Construction Workers, Migrant Workers, Gig and Platform workers, Street Vendors, Domestic Workers, Agriculture Workers, etc., to be seeded with Aadhaar. To improve the implementation efficiency of the social security services for the unorganized workers. Integration of Social Security Schemes meant for unorganized workers being administered by MoLE, and subsequently those run by other ministries as well.

Digital Nationalism: the Nation is trending

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Social media has fundamentally changed how we perceive different things; nationalism is no different from that phenomenon. It has transformed the way in which nationalism is constructed, performed, and weaponized in modern India. The digital sphere, particularly platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, and Facebook, has become the primary place of all debates related to anything nationalist or political in nature. It is good in a way that normal people can now debate and give off their opinions, anonymously as well if they want. However, just as with everything, this isn't perfect; people start arguing about religious topics, which has previously led to real-life upheaval. This leads us to political parties weaponizing social media, especially in India, in a way that's almost like a pyramid scheme. For example, let's talk about the BJP.

Trending patriotism: the machinery behind nationalist social media campaigns

Any of the campaigns or hashtags that we see online on Twitter for example are not organic in nature, they are specifically engineered. In India, BJP's IT cell represents one of the most organized political social media operations globally, comprising approximately 150,000 people that work across different platforms, for example a lot of the workers disseminate content across a vast network of WhatsApp groups. This infrastructure operates at multiple levels: 25-member state teams, 20-member regional centres, 15-member district teams, and 7-member block level units, creating a pyramid structure of approximately 5,000 workers at regional, district, and assembly levels.

This has real-world impact; during both BJP victories, social media is said to have been one of the most crucial parts. Distribution matters more than narrative. WhatsApp provides India's largest distribution platform for political messaging, and the BJP's amazing coordination gives it a significant electoral advantage over others.

The research on these hashtag movements shows the dual nature of the phenomena; while they can work as a powerful political message like #BlackLivesMatter, they are more than just indexing tools at this point. The mere presence of a hashtag can dramatically increase perceptions of content as offensive or racist among opposing political partisans. In India's context, not only are these hashtags most of the time engineered by the IT cells, but also if anything critical was said on social media, especially by journalists, the volunteers were instructed to troll them.

Construction of the anti-national:

The concept of anti-nationalism has become a very prominent weapon for digital exclusion in this BJP-led India. This term, now taken out of context, is widely used in media discourse, serves to frame minorities, activists, and dissenters as threats to national integrity.

In contemporary India, WhatsApp and social media have become catalysts, where Hindu nationalism is propagated through memes, videos, forwarded messages, and political talk. This leads us to what researchers call "digital denizenship", a regression of citizenship rights where religious and political minorities experience socio-digital exclusion within mainstream communities. The concept captures how bodies or values that threaten Hindu nationalism are pushed to the margins of digital civic space, even as they remain technically within it.

This can also get very severe, as after the Pahalgam attack, anybody sympathetic towards Pakistan, various mechanisms at different levels were set up to crack down on this. Many people were arrested in Kashmir. Many Kashmir-based news outlets were also blocked in the name of national security. This is hard to argue against because the topic of Pahalgam is very sensitive. Let's switch focus to the biggest internet shutdown ever in history, which occurred in 2019, and a similar thing; news outlets shut down, people were arrested, pen-drive journalism became prominent, and J&K journalism still hasn't recovered from this. Moreover, one of the biggest reasons why this happened was to cut down on terrorism (Article 370 being abrogated), and it didn't even work. The Pahalgam attack still happened, all of it was useless, and led to the same thing (twice).

Thus, digital nationalism is a contemporary phenomenon in India that underlines the complex intersections between technological affordances, political power, and social identity. Though social media has the potential to democratize public discourses, its deployment in current nationalist projects often exacerbates polarization and undermines inclusive citizenship. Digital nationalism, therefore, needs to be understood as part of how effectively digital infrastructures are embedded in existing power relations within societies and shape who belongs and who doesn't in both online and offline worlds. This calls for critical engagement with the digital space, emphasizing the protection of minority rights and democratic deliberation in our increasingly interconnected world.

Secularism vs. Religion: Why must India always choose?

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When Jai Sai Deepak said, *“It doesn’t make a difference if India is a secular country or not. You know why? Because a place of worship is not secular by definition. So please do not apply secular logic to religious places because you will not tolerate the application of religious logic to secular places.”*

I took a long pause and disagreed.

The problem with this statement is that it assumes religion and secularism occupy two separate, watertight compartments as if the divine and the democratic never touch. But in India, they always have. As Dr. B. R. Ambedkar once said, “The religion of rules must give way to the religion of principles.” He warned that when religion dictates social and political conduct, it risks becoming a tool of control rather than a guide for conscience. Ambedkar never asked India to abandon faith; he asked it to ensure that faith never eclipses freedom.

This is the crucial pivot point where Indian secularism distinguishes itself. The state cannot be genuinely neutral, because strict neutrality often favors the powerful or the status quo. Instead, the framers mandated what is often termed a system of ‘principled distance.’ This means the State maintains a distance from all religions but reserves the constitutional right to intervene when religious practices violate fundamental rights, such as equality or dignity. This is why the state can legislate matters like temple entry or challenge discriminatory customs; it acts not to destroy faith, but to reform and uphold the values that underpin the Republic itself.

The argument that religious spaces must be free from secular scrutiny fundamentally ignores the clear text of Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution, which state that the right to practice religion is explicitly subject to ‘public order, morality and health.’ This constitutional caveat is the mechanism by which democracy ensures that no divine decree can supersede human rights. Without this necessary tension, minority rights and social justice would be perpetually vulnerable to the dictates of majority religious customs. Therefore, the application of secular logic is not an intrusion; it is the constitutional price of religious freedom in a diverse democracy. It is the guarantee that my right to believe does not negate my neighbor’s right to be treated equally under the law. Moreover, the reciprocal argument—that we wouldn’t tolerate the application of

religious logic to secular places—is precisely why the secular framework is essential. It shields our courts, parliaments, and schools from being governed by the tenets of any single faith.

That distinction is the soul of Indian secularism. It doesn’t deny belief; it disciplines its power.

Secularism in India was never meant to erase religion from public life. It was meant to prevent any one religion from governing public life. It was not an act of removal; it was a promise of restraint.

Unlike the Western model, which separates Church and State, Indian secularism was imagined as a system of equal respect. The Constitution didn’t demand that Indians stop being religious. It simply ensured that their faith could not decide someone else’s freedom. This all isn’t just today’s tale. It has been going on for centuries now. People do not understand how religion might not always be democratic and how secularism isn’t always atheistic.

To say, then, that “a place of worship is not secular” is to ignore that even religious spaces exist within a constitutional order, one that upholds liberty, equality, and dignity. A temple, a mosque, a church, all of them operate under the same democratic canopy that allows them to exist freely. That is not the failure of secularism. That is secularism.

When religion becomes a reason to dominate, exclude, or silence, it stops being faith and starts becoming politics. And when politics begins to wear the robes of faith, the balance between belief and belonging starts to break.

Take, for instance, our temples, spaces meant for devotion, yet historically sites of exclusion. Even today, reports surface from villages across India where Dalits are barred from entering temples or forced to worship from a distance.

How can a nation that calls itself secular reconcile with such selective holiness? If the divine demands discrimination, then perhaps it’s not the believer who has failed; it’s the belief that has.

And this isn’t confined to one faith. In 2022, women in Kerala fought to enter the Sabarimala temple, challenging centuries-old customs that restricted them by age and gender. The debate wasn’t about devotion; it was about

access. Similarly, women's entry to mosques, or the right of non-Muslims to visit certain shrines, continues to spark questions about ownership over faith and space.

Whether it's caste in Hinduism, patriarchy in Islam, or hierarchy in any other religion, the question remains: When faith becomes a fortress of the fortunate, who gets left outside its walls?

Secularism, then, isn't a threat to religion but a mirror. It asks every faith to look within and ask: *Does your God allow everyone to stand in His presence equally?*

In recent years, we've watched this balance tilt. Laws, festivals, and even everyday conversations have begun to carry undertones of identity. The language of "us" and "them" has replaced the quiet pluralism that once defined our streets. But here's what we forget: secularism was never supposed to be neutral; it was supposed to be *fair*. It doesn't tell us to stop believing. It tells us to start *believing responsibly*. To understand and be open to people who might not believe what we do, but respect it anyway.

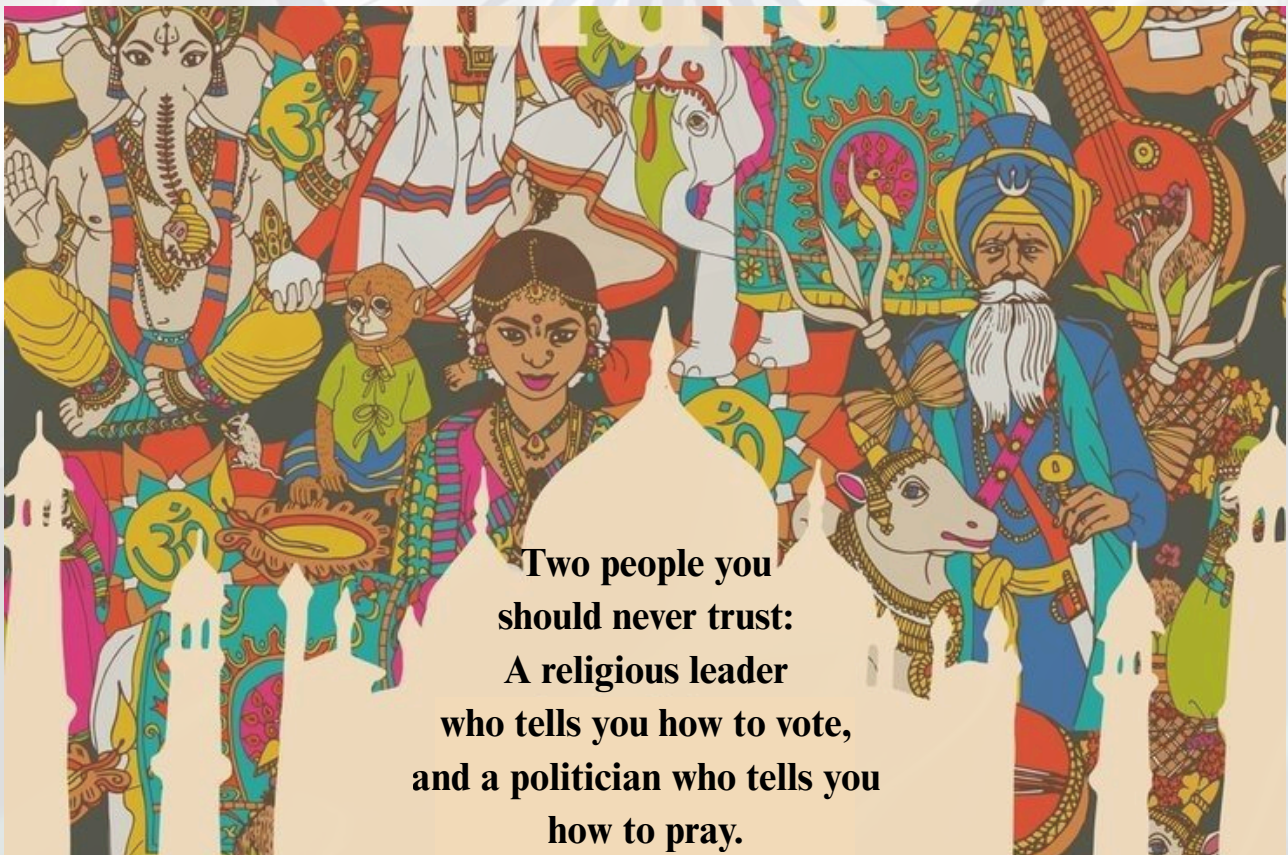
Religion shapes our values, but so does reason. Faith teaches us devotion, but democracy teaches us discernment.

Both must coexist. Because the moment one consumes the other, neither survives.

To say "don't apply secular logic to religious spaces" is dangerous because it implies that faith cannot be questioned, and that reason must stay outside its doors. But democracy, at its best, thrives on questioning even sacred ideas. And that is exactly what makes democracy true in its essence.

And yet, I understand the fatigue. In a country as complex as ours, where every festival carries both color and controversy, it's easier to retreat into the comfort of certainty. But the idea of India was never built on certainty. When the Constitution was drafted, our founding leaders didn't see secularism as a threat to religion, but as its protector.

So, secularism is not an irrelevant label. It's the invisible thread that lets multiple faiths breathe under the same flag. And perhaps that's where India's real strength lies. Because the true spirit of this nation was never about the victory of one faith over another, it was about the harmony of all. The true building block of our country!



**Two people you
should never trust:
A religious leader
who tells you how to vote,
and a politician who tells you
how to pray.**

Who Belongs? Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and the Politics of Identity

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'What kind of American are you?' —This quote from Alex Garland's 2025 movie *Civil War* has become poignant in the current political climate. This quote is not just relevant for American political discourse but one that can be applied in a multitude of different situations. It essentially asks what kind of citizen you are with respect to your own country. Are you the right kind or the wrong one? This subject has pertinence beyond the big screen in today's connected yet fragmented society. Due to factors like migration, globalization, and growing political division, the question of belonging has become crucial to how countries define themselves and their people.

Discussions surrounding national identity, multiculturalism, and nationalism have opened Pandora's box. Throw in a bunch of pent-up resentment and grievances, and what you have is a national identity quagmire. As the world gets more globalized and people start emigrating to other countries in search of better employment and quality of life, the chances of cultural clashes have gone up tremendously. Previously sequestered native populations have been exposed to the cultures they knew very little about. Is diversity worth celebrating, or is it something that should be discouraged in favour of homogeneity?

Understanding Culture

"Culture" is a word that gets thrown around a lot, but what does it actually mean? Culture consists of the shared values, experiences, languages, cuisine, belief systems, and folklore that get passed down from one generation to another. You can, in theory, lose touch with your own culture as you move far away from it and start intermixing with other cultures. On the other hand, you can pick up on new cultures, as there are no hard and fast rules governing their dissemination. Culture never stays stagnant; it lives and breathes on as the adherents of it do. It integrates new components while leaving behind certain aspects that aren't in vogue.

It gets rather complicated when culture is tied to national identity. When one particular culture or way of life gets elevated as the national standard, it can lead to hostilities. What happens in a diverse and multicultural environment? Who gets to claim their culture is superior to others? Countries have their own laws that govern their citizens and encourage them to behave in a certain manner as it sees fit. But in reality, can you really police behavior and thought?

Sure, educating people on the culture and laws of a new country can be challenging but not impossible. The problem arises when cultural hangovers bleed into behaviors that are deemed undesirable or foreign. This gives way for people who co-opt concerns about national identity and integration to push xenophobic attacks and further spread ethnonationalism.

Clinging to worn-out discussions

"Nationalism" is a word that conjures up many strong emotions in people. Some consider it to be an acceptable notion to have. Taking pride in one's own nation and its achievements—what's so wrong with that? Detractors of that notion would say the appropriate word to describe that emotion would be patriotism. Nations resort to nationalism when times get tough. Leaders often co-opt nationalistic narratives to further their own political goals. This often comes at the price of excluding people who are deemed unworthy to be part of the body politic.

Is assimilation the answer?

Cultural assimilation entails adopting the cultural values of the country or society you are in. This can go as far as learning the language spoken by the people, picking up on the local cuisine, adopting mannerisms that the locals exhibit, dressing to emulate the likeness of the locals, and the list goes on. Cultures and the people who adhere to them aren't monoliths. Within each group, you would get people who are more open to assimilation and those who ardently oppose it. With the rise of nationalism in many countries across Europe, whether it be the UK, Germany, France, Italy, etc., cracks are beginning to appear.

The path forward

Progress depends not on enforcing cultural uniformity but on advancing education, dialogue, and mutual respect. Initiatives that emphasize cultural awareness and critical reasoning can effectively counter the pull of exclusionary ideologies. Nation-states are the culmination of the people who inhabit them. Each person carries with them their own lived experience and culture. Governments and communities must work in tandem to deepen understanding across cultural lines and highlight shared values. In doing so, diversity and multiculturalism can move beyond rhetoric to become integral, enduring strengths of society.

Legality of marital rape in India

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Marital rape is defined as non-consensual sexual intercourse with one's spouse. Sexual violence in marital relationships is one of the most privatised and least addressed forms of violence. In India, rape outside of marriage is a crime, but within marriage is not considered criminal and is socially tolerated.

Legal Framework

- Acts of forced sexual contact, including but not limited to vaginal penetration, are considered marital rape in India, with the condition that the wife is younger than 15 years of age.
- Exception 2 to Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code talks about the legalization of Marital Rape in India, as it is not considered a crime due to the presence of Exception 2.
- Under the earlier Section 375 of the IPC, rape was defined as non-consensual sexual intercourse. However, section 2 stated that sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under the age of 15 years of age is not rape.
- This effectively provided legal immunity to husbands from charges for acts committed within marriages. rape
- In the revised law, Section 63 of the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023-the exception has been retained in a similar term, continuing the presence of no laws against marital rape.
- The following are the Constitutional Rights that Exception-2 violates:
 - Article 14 (Right to Equality)
 - Article 15 (Prohibition of Discrimination)
 - Article 21 (Right to life and Personal Liberty)

Global Context

Most democratic nations have criminalised marital rape, recognising a woman's right to bodily autonomy irrespective of marital status.

Countries that criminalise marital rape, such as the United States, also report that. Marital rapes victim suffer from adverse mental health outcomes such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression, with women raped by their spouse exhibiting higher rates of anger, depression, and suicidal feelings compared to those assaulted by strangers.

In India, 24-26% of victims have been reported seeking help, but only 2-4% were provided help by Indian Authorities.

Influence of Patriarchal culture in India and how it leads to marital rape

The concept of marriage in Indian families is always considered sacred as it is still believed that marriages are made in heaven, but there is the presence of certain elements in marriage which is not at all heavenly, such as inequality and patriarchy.

- Patriarchy is a social system in which men hold predominant power and authority, dominating the social, political, and economic situation.
- Presence of Patriarchy in Modern Times:-
 - In families and marriages, patriarchy is reflected in subtle ways, like the first person who is expected to help with household chores is the daughter-in-law.
 - Many families still practice another form of patriarchy in terms of food and dining. The food is first given to the male, and then the women eat the leftovers.
 - Control over family life is yet another issue. Even though birth control options like contraceptives are mainly expected to be used by women only, the number of unintended pregnancies is at the rate of 70% per 1000 women between 15-49 years in India.
 - Implied Consent through marriage. Indian traditions have exempted marital rape from prosecution, as it is based on the doctrine that claims that a wife gave her irrevocable consent to sex with her husband upon entering the marriage.
 - Reinforcement of male entitlement. Men are considered superior, and therefore, it is considered in Indian society that they have inherent rights over women, including their bodies.
 - According to the National Family Healthcare Survey (2015-2016) Prevalence of sexual IPV (sexual intimate partner violence) was significantly higher when the age of marriage was 19 years, among the uneducated, in the lowest wealth index quintile, belonging to the scheduled caste, having multiparity, and not having mass media exposure. About 12.1% of pregnancies were considered unintended by the respondents, and 22.9% of women who had ever had a history of sexual IPV considered the last pregnancy to be unintentional. Women who experienced sexual IPV were in younger age groups, having parity 21, and larger families had significantly higher odds of having an unintended pregnancy compared to their reference groups.

Youth fascination: Homophobia

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Where Do We Draw the Line?

If we have to talk about today's world, conversations about gender have become more difficult to comprehend than in the past. For centuries, societies had recognized only 2 basic genders: male and female. These two categories are grounded and have been found to be biologically proven in human experience.

However, in recent years, people in the name of trend have been identifying themselves with a huge range of new gender labels such as non-binary, gender-fluid, agender, demi-boy, and the count doesn't end here, it's so much more. While respecting people for who they are is important, the dilemma that everyone faces is: should we classify every feeling or self-perception as a gender?

If someone says, "I feel like a cat," we will not start identifying "cat" as a new gender. This is because gender, at its core, has its own values and fundamental roles. Expanding gender to include every personal feeling or experience is vague; its concept has started to lose its originality and credibility. People have started creating hundreds of gender labels to satisfy their own feelings, forcing people to accept them and validate them. It has generated confusion rather than concept clarity.

Supporters of these new identities argue that gender is a "spectrum", when it's not. It has blurred the line between identity and satisfactory feelings. For instance, a transgender person has medical and psychological recognition all over the world, which has been backed up by decades of research. But when someone claims to be "gender-fluid" or "pangender," there is no scientific or biological reasoning to be proven, because it is simply based on how they feel at a given moment.

This has created more problems than equality. Teenagers who are already in a sensitive phase of self-discovery are now bombarded with gender terminology on social media. Many of them have started adopting those labels not

because they identify with them, but also because they like to fit in with the trends. This has raised serious concerns in today's era, whether we are helping young people discover themselves or forcing them to fit in and confuse them even more.

It is very important to comprehend that questioning the legitimacy of certain gender labels does not mean disrespecting the community, because every individual out there deserves their own share of respect, dignity, and freedom of expression. However, respecting someone's choices is different when compared to creating new identities based on a sense of feeling!

Recognizing the two basic genders has always created a balance amongst society, maintaining its decorum of clarity and concept. And if we continue to expand the list of genders so negligently, then we are definitely risking a space where the term "gender" becomes meaningless, with no authenticity. Like trying to identify it with a mythical or a fictional character.

Nonetheless, while empathy and acceptance are legitimate, we must also remember the fundamentals when it comes to understanding gender. Respecting someone does not require us to agree that every feeling is valid and could be considered a gender label. Society should learn to accept the clear distinction between identity and fleeting self-expression.



"Today's 'religious freedom' policies should not be seen as a problem limited to LGBT people but as a co-optation of religion that affects us all."

— DaShanne Stokes

Faith and Power: Recurring patterns in Political Narratives

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The human curiosity of understanding the layers of our own conscious and subconscious brain has led to the behemoth knowledge base we have today, ranging from psychology to sociology, political science to economics, and our daily activities to the activities inside a star. We want to know it all, understand the mechanisms of it all, yet we are still far away as a population to recognise the similar patterns of history repeating itself.

The important aspect of studying history is the ability to recognise the patterns of the past recurring in the present world in a newer form. Failure of acquisition of this ability is failure of mankind to understand the lessons and ways of human beings as a species and its relationship in every ecosystem.

Inception

We know modern Hinduism is a result of the gradual evolution of Sanatan Dharma. With the addition of various evolving beliefs, traditions, and concepts contained in later Upanishads to symbolize the foundation of the eternal truth of Sanatan Dharma. But how did we go from cavemen to Sanatan Dharma? How did the concept of God come into being? The prehistoric man was concerned with only one primal thing, which was survival. Later, with the gradual evolution of thought, skills, and capabilities, humans created a life and a world which was never been seen before. And to keep this increasingly complex inner and outer world working, came the concept of a superior power.

Instances from history

The concept of God started with fear, and the next stage was greed. The fear of forces bigger than us, like lightning and thunder, floods, and droughts, all these forces that were bigger than the control of human hands, instilled fear, and as a result, came the prayers to keep everything favorable. When the conditions were favorable, came the next stage of greed, to have more than what was already available. The focus of prayers shifted to the expansion of agricultural land and produce, family, and name. The introduction of the Varna System with Brahmins as the mediators between man and god rose as a means to capitalize on the fear and greed, and to satiate the needs of mankind. This turned into the dominant narrative of brahmins being the bridge between man and god.

This practice of narrative building, gradually turning into the dominant narrative, repeats again. There are numerous

examples present in history all over the map, where dynasties and empires like Egyptian Pharaohs, Mesopotamian kings, Chinese and Japanese imperialism, and so on, claim their descent from a deity like sun gods to legitimize political power. The Kushana dynasty used the title of “devaputra” to support their claim of divine lineage. In contemporary times, the loyalties of the population as subjects lay with their ruler, and accepting a new ruler was mentally conflicting for the subjects. This posed a threat of mass rebellion against the new dynasty; therefore, to counter these threats, dynasties cleverly developed the narrative of connection to gods or divine power, hence creating a divine lineage. This leveraged the fear of the superior powers of god and helped the rulers establish their empires smoothly.

Impacts of narrative building

The play of narrative building is a long haul. It takes strategic observation and recognition of the specific points to be leveraged and manipulated. It also requires careful planning and execution of all the steps to slowly mould the thought process of the general masses and reshape it into the politically desired narrative. This is the biggest evidence that politics is not just a game of political science and economics, but also a play of psychology and sociology. The major impacts of narrative building are that people lose their sense of critical evaluation and analysis of right and wrong, they become mere followers, and end up supporting the person instead of their deeds. This leads to overlooking the national circumstances and requirements, and blindly following the dominant narrative without verifying it.

When it comes to understanding potential solutions, we need to keep in mind that the subjects of the humanities teach us the importance of understanding the relationship of oneself with one's own mind and the ecosystem. Hard sciences teach us the mechanisms of the physical world, but soft sciences teach us the mechanisms of our own selves and the world. Therefore, it is essential to have at least one subject from the humanities in school and college degrees as well, to understand the hidden mechanisms of the world. Another aspect is the freedom of the media. Think tanks also play a big role in providing evidence-based information to the people and especially the youth, to help them see the reality without the lens of a specific narrative. And lastly, we as a population need to understand that the reason behind casting our vote should never be religion, caste, or a narrative, but the real work done on the ground and its impact on the population.

Policy, Politics, and the Public: Insights from Prof. G. Gopakumar

We had the privilege of attending a deeply insightful lecture by Professor G. Gopakumar, an eminent psephologist, political scientist, and public intellectual whose experience spans both India and the international stage.

Professor Gopakumar reminded us that public policy never exists in a vacuum, it is continually shaped by politics, bureaucracy, and the people it seeks to serve. He emphasized that political parties are not merely electoral machines; their manifestos should emerge from research, reflection, and a genuine vision for governance.

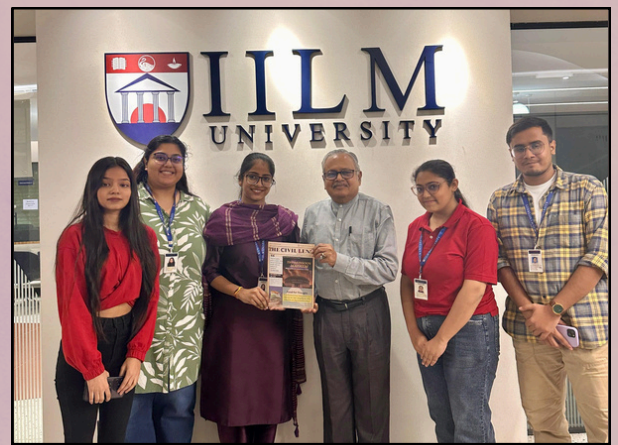
From environmental education, from public finance to disaster management, the domains of policy are vast—and India, with all its contrasts and contradictions, remains one of the world's richest laboratories to study them.

Reflecting on India's post-independence journey—from a “ship-to-mouth” existence to a self-reliant democracy—he reminded us that every stage of development brings new dilemmas: inequality, the rural–urban divide, and the slow, steady evolution of civil society.

A few lines that stayed with us:

1. “No law is perfect, and no law is permanent.” Policy must evolve through feedback, reflection, and improvisation.
2. “India may have missed the Industrial Revolution, but we cannot afford to miss the Policy Revolution.”
3. “Equality may be a myth, but equity is a mission.”
4. “Every state in India is a model; the challenge is to learn from one another.”

His lecture wasn't just about theories; it was about the lived pulse of governance, the intersection of power and purpose, and the responsibility of those who wish to serve the public good.



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