

# Three-Language Policy: What the World Teaches Us

The debate over the **three-language policy** has resurfaced in India. The central government has withheld **₹2,152 crores** meant for Tamil Nadu's schools because the state has refused to implement the **New Education Policy (NEP)**. Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has clearly stated that **funds will be released only if the NEP is implemented**. However, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister **M.K. Stalin** has firmly responded, saying, "**Even if they offer ₹10,000 crores, we will not accept it.**"

At the core of this **controversial education policy** is the **three-language formula**. The initial proposal mandated learning **the mother tongue, English, and Hindi (for non-Hindi-speaking states)**, which sparked **strong opposition**. Later, the policy was revised to allow students to learn **their mother tongue, English, and any other Indian language of their choice**.

Since **1968**, Tamil Nadu has followed a **two-language policy (Tamil and English)**, rejecting the three-language formula. This remains the primary reason for its opposition to the NEP.

## A Long History of the Three-Language Policy

During India's independence movement, **national leaders debated the need for a common national language**. In 1925, at the **Kanpur Congress session**, Mahatma Gandhi proposed adopting **Hindustani (a blend of Hindi and Urdu)** as the national language to promote Hindu-Muslim unity. However, many leaders disagreed.

After independence, the **University Commission of 1948** was the first to recommend the **three-language formula**:

- **Mother tongue**
- **English**
- **A third language (Hindi for non-Hindi states)**

In 1950, the Constituent Assembly debated making **Hindustani the national language**. However, leaders like **Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad** rejected it due to the **Partition of India**, opting instead for **Hindi (in Devanagari script) as the official language**. The Constitution's **Article 343** declared Hindi as the official language, with a **15-year transition period** for its implementation.

During the **1960s**, several **anti-Hindi agitations** erupted in Tamil Nadu. These protests, which included **self-immolation and mass demonstrations**, ultimately forced the Indian government to **reconsider the mandatory imposition of Hindi**. Later **education policies introduced by Indira Gandhi (1968) and Rajiv Gandhi (1986)** continued to emphasize the **three-language formula**, but they never made it **mandatory**.

However, the **current government has taken a different approach—denying education funds to states that refuse to implement the NEP**, making it clear that Hindi promotion remains a priority.

## The Hidden Agenda Behind the Three-Language Policy

Many people argue that learning **an additional language like French, German, or Japanese** would create **better career opportunities**. However, the NEP mandates that the **third language must be an Indian language**—which often **translates to Hindi**.

The central government's actions suggest a broader agenda:

- Replacing English with Hindi in government administration
- Pushing for Hindi dominance across India
- Heavily funding Hindi and Sanskrit education while ignoring other Indian languages

For example:

- ₹50 crores have been allocated to recruit Hindi teachers in non-Hindi states.
- ₹622 crores have been allocated for Sanskrit education.
- No such funding exists for Tamil, Kannada, Bengali, or other Indian languages.

In Kendriya Vidyalayas (Central Government Schools) across Tamil Nadu, permanent Hindi and English teachers are employed, but no permanent Tamil teachers are appointed. If school principals choose, they can hire temporary Tamil teachers at lower salaries. This raises doubts about the true intention of the policy.

## Is Learning a Third Language Necessary?

Dr. E. Annamalai, a Tamil linguist and professor in the U.S., argues:

"Learning multiple languages should be a personal choice, not a government mandate. In India, over 10% of people are naturally bilingual—not because of school, but due to work and migration. People learn languages based on necessity. Enforcing a third language in schools does not guarantee its use in daily life."

Similarly, Dr. Porco, a former university vice-chancellor, states:

"No other country in the world uses language as a political tool the way India does. In Europe and America, multiple languages are encouraged, but no language is forced. For example, many workers from Bihar, Nepal, and Manipur move to Tamil Nadu. They learn Tamil naturally through necessity, without being forced in school."

## Lessons from the World

Many countries have adapted to linguistic diversity rather than forcing a single language:

- The United States supports Spanish, French, and Mandarin alongside English.
- Germany offers French, Spanish, Latin, and Russian as optional languages in schools.
- The UK allows students to choose between French, Spanish, and German.

India, however, is moving toward an extreme approach—pushing Hindi as the dominant language while restricting other Indian languages.

## The Bigger Picture

Since **1963**, the Indian **Official Languages Act** has required a **committee to review Hindi usage every five years**. In **2022**, Home Minister Amit Shah submitted a report recommending that **Hindi should become India's common language**. The **three-language policy is a step toward this ultimate goal**.

India is a **multilingual nation** with a rich linguistic heritage. However, **forcing Hindi upon non-Hindi states** is being perceived as an attempt to **establish political and cultural dominance**.

The question remains:

**Is India moving forward with linguistic inclusivity, or is it repeating the mistakes of the past?**