Educational Equity in Schools in India: Perils & Possibilities

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India is one of the most diverse nation-states in the world. After gaining independence from Britain in 1947, it adopted a constitution that was based on pluralism, secularism, and egalitarianism. This constitutional vision guided the national education policies until very recently. The current moment in all areas of public policy is being defined by the ruling party's agenda of Hindutva, or Hindu nationalism. In education, the hallmarks of this move have been a rewriting of history to glorify a mythohistoric version of the Hindu past and a call to engage with ancient Indian knowledge systems and traditions. Unfortunately, Hindu nationalism is creating growing rifts between the majority Hindu population and other groups, including Muslims, Christians, and Dalits (formerly known as "untouchables" or "outcastes"). The aim of this essay is to understand what is happening in Indian education and to consider ways to return to an engagement with the constitutional principles of pluralism, secularism, and egalitarianism.

With its twenty-two official languages, over two hundred unofficial languages, significant refugee populations, and social divisions based on caste, class, indigenous status, gender, ability, and religion, India is arguably the most diverse country in the world. The national constitution and successive national education policies from the 1960s through the 1990s reaffirmed the importance of nurturing diversity and creating equity. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the sitting government, led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), attempted to change course, promoting a vision of India that was based only on its Hindu roots. This so-called saffronization was reflected, for example, in a vision of Indian citizenship based on belonging to the "Hindu family" (Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists), while those who were not of the Hindu family (Muslims, Christians, and Jews), regardless of ancestry, would not be seen as citizens. This vision was reflected in the National Curriculum Framework 2000 (NCF 2000).[1] When the BJP-led government was defeated in 2004, its successor, the Congress Party–led government, immediately established a working group to reconfigure the NCF, leading to the creation of a diversity- and equity-affirming educational approach reminiscent of the original ideals in the constitution. Since

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the return of the BJP to power in 2014, the saffronization agenda has once again been at the forefront. In April 2023, a new draft of the NCF was released, proclaiming both a strong rootedness in Hindu ideals and a commitment to equity, diversity, and pluralism. But is it possible for the ideals of Hinduism and equity to coexist? If so, how? And if not, what counter discourses can be marshaled to promote equity, diversity, and pluralism in India?

In April 2023, India was acknowledged as the most populous nation in the world, with a population of 1.428 billion people. According to the 2011 census, there are over 4,000 distinct ethnic groups, 655 religions or persuasions, and over 6,000 mother tongues spoken, of which 22 are official languages.[2] Most of the population (about 80 percent, or 960 million people) identify as Hindu, while approximately 14 percent (172 million people) identify as Muslim, 2.3 percent (27 million) as Christian, 1.7 percent (20 million) as Sikh, 0.7 percent (8 million) as Buddhist, and 0.37 percent (4.5 million) as Jain. India is one of only two countries in the world with a majority Hindu population, the other being Nepal, and it has the third-largest Muslim population of any country in the world, with Indonesia and Pakistan, respectively, ranking one and two. In 1990, it also became the first country to declare the birthday of the prophet Muhammed a holiday.

India has one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Oxfam data indicate that economic inequality has been rising sharply for the last three decades.[3] As a result, the top 10 percent of the population holds 77 percent of the wealth. Economic inequality is tied to other demographic issues, such as caste and gender. The term *caste* is still not well defined but refers to a social hierarchy that has existed in India for thousands of years.[4] There is still a great deal of residential and occupational segregation based on caste, and highly educated Indians tend to belong to the higher castes while those with little or no education belong to lower castes.[5] About 30 percent of all Indians identify as belonging to higher-caste groups, and about 68 percent identify as belonging to lower-caste groups. After independence, India established affirmative action programs based on a system of "reservations," meaning that a certain number of positions in government and seats in higher education institutions are reserved for members of the most disadvantaged lower castes, who were designated as "Scheduled Castes" (including Dalits) and "Scheduled Tribes" (Adivasis) in the Indian constitution in 1950. There is widespread debate over the need for and utility of the reservation system in India, and it is beyond the scope of this essay to comprehensively discuss this issue. However, a study in 2012 showed that increased political representation for lower castes was correlated with increased poverty.[6]

UNICEF India notes that only 25 percent of women in India are in the workforce, 77 percent of whom make their primary income from agriculture, and that only 12.7 percent of landholdings are in the names of women.[7] UNICEF India also reports that girls are more likely to die in childhood than boys and are more like-

ly to drop out of school. While the government has introduced numerous initiatives ostensibly to address gender equity in and out of education, the literacy rates among women continue to be low, and girls, especially girls from poor families, are less likely to be in school than their male counterparts.

I want to briefly describe three aspects of India's diversity that tend not to get much attention in international conversations on equity in education: children with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and refugees. A recent report of the government of India states that there are about twenty-seven million people with disabilities in India. Across all categories of disability, about 61 percent of children are in an educational institution, 12 percent have been in one but are not currently, and 27 percent have never been enrolled in school. But if we look specifically at the category of children with cognitive or developmental disabilities, about 50 percent of children with developmental disabilities have never been in school.[8] Adivasis, or the original peoples of India, make up about 8.2 percent of the population in 2011. There are over two hundred distinct groups of Adivasis, who live in forest or hill areas, often in smaller communities. Their existence in India predates both the Dravidian and Aryan peoples.[9] Most live below the poverty line and in communities that have little or no access to education or health care.[10] Survival International notes that the current government has particularly targeted Adivasis: for example, a 2019 Supreme Court ruling evicted eight million people from lands destined for either conservation or industrialization projects. At the same time, the government tried to pass legislation that would make it legal for forest rangers to shoot Adivasis.[11] Finally, as of January 2022, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that there are more than two hundred fifty thousand refugees and asylum seekers in India, of which about forty-six thousand were registered with UNHCR.[12] These numbers, however, do not consider the refugee communities that have been in India for many years, like Tibetans. Most of the refugee communities, except for Tibetans, have little access to education or health care.

A key challenge for India around equity has been incorporating the vast diversity of cultures, languages, and religions while trying to dismantle traditional hierarchies and animosities. India's policies to address these issues began before it gained independence from Britain. By the 1920s, policies for what we might now call affirmative action were in place to ensure that minority religious groups were included in the administration of government. While these policies were ostensibly meant to ensure harmony among all groups in the colony, it is widely accepted today that they were part of the larger British policy of "divide and rule" that created new divisions or exploited existing ones within Indigenous communities.[13] This legacy continues to taint some of the current policies, especially those for the Dalits, Adivasis, and Socially Excluded and Discriminated Groups (SEDGs).

Today, and throughout much of the postindependence era, Indian policies addressing diversity and equity quite clearly encompass objectives related to national unity, equality, and the development of a national identity that includes support for diversity. The meaning of these terms has changed over time, but when it was drafted, the constitution was cast in the mold of the classical liberal democracy with what has been called an Indian inflection.[14] It contains a strong commitment to equality, and it seeks to develop an overarching national identity while protecting minority identities. Three important principles from the Indian constitution that have shaped postindependence approaches to education are social justice, secularism, and the need to create a unified national identity.

Social justice was initially seen in terms of creating conditions to achieve economic and social equality for all minoritized groups. Secularism in India, unlike the Western versions of this ideal, meant both that there is no official state religion and that all religions are, at least in theory, equally recognized and valued. In practice, this had been translated into several policies and practices including recognition of a variety of religious holidays as official holidays for everyone, flexible dress codes in schools and other public institutions, and parallel systems of family law based on religious principles. Finally, the focus on national identity came out of the acknowledgment that, at the time of independence, there was no single unified sense of what it meant to be Indian. Instead, people were more attached to ethnic, linguistic, religious, or caste-based identities. The constitution gave due recognition to these identities and, rather than trying to eradicate them, sought to use them as building blocks for a unified national identity. In part, this was accomplished by dividing states along linguistic lines and by recognizing several regional languages as official languages. In this vision, national identity would be built though contact among and between members of the variously constituted social and cultural groups across the country.

The term *saffronization* has been coined to refer to the agenda of recreating India in the image of a Hindu nationalist state. This has been the stated aim of the national volunteer paramilitary organization the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) since its formation in 1925. The RSS wants India to be founded on the principles of Hindutva, an ideology based in a conservative and revivalist version of Hinduism that equates India with Hindu.[15] To understand the origins and significance of Hindutva, we must take a short detour into the colonial history of India.

Until the nineteenth century, no one in India described their religious affiliation as Hindu. Historically, there were several different communities who "shared a cultural matrix but no single Hindu religion."[16] Today, great diversity continues to exist within Hinduism based on these older sets of traditions, but there have been some attempts to create more structured and hierarchical versions of the re-

ligion. It was British historians who used the umbrella term "Hindu" to refer to disparate groups who called themselves many different names based on their interpretations of myths, history, and identity. British historians also codified a particular version of Hinduism based largely on their engagement with Brahmins, who were only one group among many. These same historians also divided Indian history into periods based on religion: the ancient Hindu period, the medieval Muslim period, and the modern British (Christian) period. The first two were characterized as being static in nature and as ruled by despots. The third was then necessary to "civilize" India and bring it to the modern world through British and Christian traditions.[17]

This enunciation of Indian history in many ways shaped both the Freedom Movement and the rise of Hindutva. Leaders of the Freedom Movement fought against the characterization of India as uncivilized by pointing to the glorious ancient Hindu civilization. They encouraged Indians to reject British customs in favor of those rooted in Hindu and Indian traditions. Eliding myth and history, and drawing selectively on the many traditions that had been subsumed under the Hindu umbrella, leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi championed nonviolence, pluralism, and inner strength created through devotional practice to bring people to the struggle for independence.[18] While Gandhi and his contemporaries used this logic to also make the case for a multifaith version of India that would include Muslims and Christians, other leaders such as V. D. Savarkar built on this colonial historicization to argue for a vision of India that favored Hinduism. Today, many Hindus in India and elsewhere continue to believe in and fight for an inclusive and peaceful version of the faith. Others, however, follow the path of Savarkar and his successors.

Savarkar was the first to develop the notion of Hindutva, arguing that only those for whom India was both the birthplace of their ancestors and the birthplace of their religion could truly be Indian. Thus, while Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs could be Indian by definition, Muslims and Christians could not. Savarkar went on to write about how this vision could be translated to education, gaining inspiration from the paramilitary structure of the Boy Scouts and from work done with youth in Italy and Germany through their respective fascist parties. The RSS began developing its own system of schools in 1952, and as of 2015, had over nineteen thousand schools operating in most regions of India. These schools are based on three principles: 1) militarism and bodily training; 2) inculcating hatred for the enemy (that is, Muslims and Christians); and 3) the glorification of India's ancient Hindu past.[19] In addition, the RSS education system prescribes differentiated roles for men and women in society, delegating women primarily to the realm of the private domicile, where they should be wives, mothers, and daughters who are subservient to the men in their families.[20] While the policies of the BJP government do not replicate this vision of education, they are certainly informed by it.

In 1998, the BJP was the major party in the National Democratic Alliance government. Almost immediately it began to change Indian educational policy, moving away from the constitutional principles of secularism, diversity, and social justice to a vision commensurate with Hindutva. Shortly after the 1998 election, the government appointed a new director for the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT), J. S. Rajput, who was part of the RSS family. Rajput immediately "asserted that the Post-Independence period has witnessed gradual erosion of essential moral, social, and cultural values," and that the way forward lay in a strong reconnection with traditional Indian values and thought.[21] Rajput and other BJP politicians and functionaries proclaimed that the existing education system was nothing but a continuation of the British system and needed to be replaced with education rooted in Indian tradition.

In 1998, the minister of Human Resources Development convened a meeting of ministers of education. At this meeting, he presented a curriculum in use in schools run by the Sangh Parivar (the family of Hindu organizations linked to the RSS) and announced his intention to use this curriculum as a model to "Indianise, nationalize, and spiritualise" the national curriculum of the country.[22] Several of the state ministers walked out in protest, yet the national government went forward with its plan. It undertook a review of the National Curriculum ostensibly because it was time; the framework had not been changed since 1988. In 1993, the Yash Pal Commission made various recommendations related to curriculum overload, and the Ministry of Human Resources Development appointed a committee to report on values-based education.

The review was done in relative secrecy with little known about the individuals involved in the process, and in 2000, the new Curriculum Framework (NCFSE 2000) was released. Not surprisingly, the framework took aim at the existing civics and history curricula. Claiming that the existing curriculum placed too much of a burden on students and implying that it was uninteresting and irrelevant, a Ministry of Education press release announced that for the first time in Indian education, the new curriculum would feature a subject called citizenship education. It would help students to "develop a proper understanding of their roles and responsibilities as citizens in a modern democracy."[23] It also noted that the new history curriculum would "help promote a deeper understanding of the core values that has kept Indian civilisation ticking through the ages. A route to instill pride in India's background as a great contributor to human progress. It will be a history free of rhetoric, stereotypes and objectionable attributes to any one stream of Indian culture."[24]

Textbooks were developed to respond to the edict that "all foreign elements had to be purged from the curriculum."[25] The greatest controversy surrounding the NCFSE 2000 came in relation to the content of history textbooks. All the existing history texts were removed because they were said to incorporate a West-

ern rather than Indian outlook. In their place came textbooks that many "secularist" historians claimed presented a particularly chauvinistic view of history complete with "facts" that had already been discredited or had no basis in historical evidence.[26] While there was some debate about the appropriateness of the chauvinist label, the new textbooks did contain inaccuracies.[27] For example, that the result of the arrival of Islam in India was the establishment of two nations – one Muslim, one Hindu – where there had previously only been one, the Hindu nation.[28] In addition, historical facts were presented as incontrovertible, leaving no room to challenge the misrepresentations of any groups nor to discuss anything in the Hindu tradition that might deserve to be questioned, such as the caste system.

Although the textbooks had a short shelf life nationally – the Congress-led coalition immediately created a new curriculum framework (NCF 2005) and accompanying textbooks after coming into power in 2004 – the BJP-inspired texts remained in use in some states that were governed by the BJP. The texts included content such as:

- In a discussion of democratic practices in a class 8 text, the idea that citizens must cooperate with security agencies and that "social harmony should be pursued even at the expense of individual rights."[29]
- In the same text, "we should refrain from negative acts like strikes."
- A passage in a class 12 text that criticizes the Treaty of Versailles, enumerates Mussolini's successes, and states, "Hitler made a strong German organization with the help of [the] Nazi Party and attained great honour for this. By favouring German civilians and by opposing Jews and by his new economic policies, he made Germany a prosperous country."[30]

Before moving to the current policies, it is important to note that I am not claiming that the educational approach of Congress-led governments has been without flaws. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to provide details, I note that it was largely under Congress-led governments that the state education system was weakened, and private educational organizations began to exploit the concerns of lower- and middle-income families regarding the education of their children.[31]

The current versions of the National Educational Policy (NEP 2020) and National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2023) have both similarities with and differences from the 2000 initiatives. Notably, a key element is still the promotion of the saffronized version of Indian history. However, where NCF 2000 rejected foreign influence and engagement outright, NEP 2020 notes that an education based in traditional Indian values and knowledge will prepare young people to participate in the global economy. Thus, "the BJP draws upon 'orientalist constructions of India' to define an authentic global citizen who would not challenge neoliberal globalization but adjusts to it."[32]

Unlike its previous term in office, the BJP did not immediately begin to change the formal education policies when it was elected in 2014. Instead, it embarked on three important initiatives. First, it focused on ensuring that people in senior positions in educational organizations such as universities, the Indian Council for Historical Research, and NCERT were RSS members, or at the very least sympathetic to RSS philosophy.[33] Second, it began to edit existing textbooks, claiming that students were overwhelmed by too much information and the textbooks needed to be pared down. Interestingly, the passages that were removed consistently reinforced the Hindutva worldview: for example, all discussions that mentioned that ancient Indians killed cows or ate beef, any portrayal of Muslim rulers as accepting of other religions or being fair-minded, discussions of Jainism having evolved parallel to Hinduism rather than being an offshoot of Hinduism, and any discussion of how the caste system codified inequality and injustice.[34]

At the beginning of its second term in office in 2019, the BJP began to work on their formal educational policies. Unlike the 2000 experience, the 2019 process had already been underway for some time, starting with a consultation process that began at the village level. The entire policy process was guided, if not directed, by the RSS educational wing.[35] Recall that the RSS educational curriculum is based on Hindutva, patriarchy, and militarism. Specific messages in their texts include:

- "The Varna [caste] system was a precious gift of Aryans to mankind [*sic*]."
- "Catholic priests accumulated wealth through unjust taxes and spent the money on worldly pleasures and immoral behaviour."
- "Islam teaches only atrocities."
- "Between 1528 and 1914 some three lakhs and 50,000 [350,000] devotees of Rama laid down their lives to liberate the Rama temple."[36]

In addition, in 2017, Dinanath Batra, an RSS ideologue, wrote a letter to NCERT objecting to more than seventy content items in textbooks. He wanted changes in four broad areas: "1) adding bravery and valour to Hindu rulers; 2) correcting the negative portrayals of Hindu culture and history; and 3) correcting the portrayal of Muslim rulers," as well as 4) removing Urdu and English from Hindi textbooks.[37] It is important to highlight these points as we examine the NEP 2020 and the NCF 2023 more closely, because this information provides context within which we can interpret the meaning of the policy texts.

The NEP 2020 was introduced in draft form in 2019. The first page of the document proclaimed that the policy's purpose was to "create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education, including SDG-4 [ensure inclusive and equitable quality education], while building upon India's traditions and value systems."[38] After the draft document was released, more deletions were made to textbooks, including:

- A discussion on the evolution of print media, women's role in media, and censorship;
- A chapter on the Mongols under Genghis Khan that talked about the religious diversity within the group and highlighted that pluralism was not seen as a threat;
- A chapter on partition in 1947;
- A chapter on democratic rights;
- A chapter on gender, race, and caste;
- Discussions of modern social movements, challenges to democracy, citizenship, secularism, the rise of popular movements, and regional aspirations; and
- In Hindi literature courses, any text that talked about communal harmony, peace, or the Urdu language; and all works written by Kabir, a mystic saint who was critical of both Hinduism and Islam.[39]

More recently, all words with Farsi or Arabic roots have been replaced by words with Sanskrit roots, even though the former had been in common usage in Hindi for years. Although there are strong statements in NEP 2020 about supporting multilingualism and home languages, this support clearly does not extend to Urdu – one of the twenty-two official languages of India and one of the four official languages of Delhi – which is nonetheless associated with Muslims. Additionally, there have been significant changes to math and science textbooks, including the removal of the periodic table, the Pythagorean theorem, and Darwin's theory of evolution, in favor of knowledge that comes from Vedic traditions. While not all references to the Mughal or British period have been removed, and the textbooks still address democracy and rights to some degree, as one analyst notes, "The promulgation of the New Education Policy in 2020 has set the stage where modern ideas, including modern sciences, have to be filtered through 'traditional knowledge systems' so that only what comports without hoary traditions is retained."[40]

NCF 2023 was released at the end of August 2023. It expands on the vision of NEP 2020, particularly the Indianization of the curriculum. At the same time, it affirms the importance of diversity and inclusion at various points in the text, stating, for instance, that "India's diversity in all its forms must not only be addressed but should also become a resource for learning," and "inclusion and participation of all needs to be the core consideration across the elements of school culture."[41] Thus, while the primary move seems to be toward a Hindutva view of education, the door remains open for educators to teach from a perspective of diversity and inclusion. It is beyond the scope of this essay to do a thorough analysis of NCF 2023, but below, I highlight three key points in relation to diversity.

First, while there are five aims of school education enunciated in NCF 2023, one seems perhaps more equal than the others. The fifth aim is a category called

"cultural and social participation," which is explained in the following manner: "along with democracy and the economy, culture and society play an important role in the 'mode of associated living.' Cultures maintain continuity as well as change over time. The NEP 2020 expect [*sic*] students to have a 'rootedness and pride' in India, and its rich, diverse, ancient and modern culture and knowledge systems and traditions."[42] While some educators might read this emphasis on Indian traditions and culture as a continuation of the vision defined by the constitution and use this to inform their approach, I would argue that the government is working to ensure that the dominant interpretation would be narrowly defined as Hindu traditions and culture. NCF 2023 is replete with highlighted textboxes that explain aspects of ancient Indian/Hindu thought and culture. The boxes tacitly assert the superiority of Indian thought and traditions. There is nothing comparable for any of the other four proposed aims of education according to NCF 2023.

Second, it is important to examine the idea of inclusion as it appears in the curriculum framework. Inclusion is one of six cross-cutting themes presented in the document. The others are values, information and communication technology, guidance and counseling, environment, and rootedness in India. Sandwiched between a notion of values reflecting the ancient Hindu tradition and a sense of rootedness in India that essentially means accepting the Hindu traditions and knowledge system as inviolable, inclusion takes on a special meaning. In this context, inclusion means being assimilated into the Hindutva version of Indian. In other words, "minorities should subordinate their religious or ethnic identity to the overarching Hindu identity."[43] Further, the NEP 2020 was touted as being "the first education policy that rejects the welfare approach toward educationally excluded sections by empowering and providing equal opportunities for all to participate and succeed."[44] It is clear that the notion of participation that accompanies the idea of inclusion is procedural; in other words, if everyone is given an opportunity to participate, everyone is by definition included. This considers neither the quality of participation nor the conditions that might be required to create equality of outcomes. Thus, inclusion should be read as something more like inclusivism, a concept that has been developed by scholars of religious studies to designate "the practice of claiming for, and thus including in, one's own religion or worldview what belongs in reality to another."[45]

The third aspect of NCF 2023 that deserves special attention is what is not in the text. As mentioned earlier in this essay, previous educational policies were guided by the principles of the Indian constitution. Central among these were the ideas of secularism and egalitarianism. Secularism is a guiding principle of the previous framework (NCF 2005) and is characterized as a value to be developed, a concept to be taught, and an idea to be debated. The term *secularism* does not appear in either NEP 2020 or NCF 2023. Egalitarianism, which is also presented as a guiding principle of education in NCF 2005, is accompanied by references to plu-

ralism, equality, and social justice. Again, the term *egalitarianism* does not appear in either NEP 2020 or NCF 2023. *Social justice* appears twice, once in a quote from NEP 2020 at the beginning of the section on inclusion and once in reference to the nature of knowledge in reference to environmental education. Quite clearly, secularism, egalitarianism, and the related notion of social justice are not part of the education envisaged by NCF 2023.

Is there any way back to an idea of a secular and pluralist India? And if so, what is the path? I contend that although we cannot go backward, perhaps there is a way forward in the reappropriation of some of the founding myths of the modern Indian nation-state.

I have noted that secularism does not appear in the new education policy documents. Moreover, the BJP has had three major critiques of secularism as it has previously functioned in India: first, that it is a Western concept; second, that it ignores the fact that faith is interwoven with all aspects of the life of many if not most Indians; and third, that it favors Muslims.[46] This has not stopped the BJP from staking a claim for what it calls "positive secularism."[47] It purports to support the ideal of equal respect for all religions but with no safeguards for minority rights. Given that secularism as a concept has never been well-defined in India, perhaps part of the way forward is to engage in guided dialogues about the meaning and possibilities of secularism. By this, I mean facilitated conversations in which people would be encouraged to enter the process with respect and humility, not in the spirit of debate and conversion.

Related conversations could also be facilitated on the ideas of inclusion and inclusivism. Theologian Elaine M. Fisher has argued that the notion of inclusivism might be a way back to the idea of true pluralism within Hindu tradition, and I would add, to Indian pluralism.[48] Fisher argues that if someone truly believes in the idea that others are part of their traditions, it might open a door to expanding the notion, and I would add, rethinking our taken-for-granted notions of pluralism. Although I am not entirely convinced by Fisher's argument, I am open to the idea that this might lead to a fruitful dialogue if we enter it with respect and humility.

Finally, political scientist Rochana Bajpai advances a case for covenantal pluralism as a possibility for India's future.[49] She begins by noting that even in the current context, a Pew Research Center survey of about thirty thousand Indians across all religions revealed that 91 percent felt free to practice their religion and 84 percent thought "respecting all religions was very important to being truly Indian."[50] Bajpai advocates building on the good will that seems to exist to move from the various versions of secular pluralism that have existed in India toward covenantal pluralism, an idea she borrows from philosopher W. Christopher Stewart, theologian Chris Seiple, and political scientist Dennis R. Hoover, an approach to

religious diversity "that goes beyond tolerance and secularism, emphasizing both legal equality and neighbourly solidarity."[51] In other words, it asks not just for the engagement of the state in enacting laws and policies but also the engagement of citizens in truly working to develop relationships with their fellow citizens across lines of caste, class, gender, religion, disability, and other social categories. She believes that this would require two things: an acceptance by all parties that the right to religious freedom is subject to other constitutional constraints like equality and nondiscrimination, and a robust campaign to support multireligious literacy and the cultivation of humility and respectful engagement. While Bajpai's focus is mostly on religion, I believe this idea points toward a path to thinking across multiple aspects of diversity.

I am not so naive as to believe that one could present these ideas to the current Modi-BJP government and find any kind of success in moving forward. I am, however, encouraged by the example of some educators and people in social movements in India who continue to work for causes including economic and social justice, communal harmony, gender equity, and the rights of Dalits and Adivasis. I am also encouraged by educational institutions that have presented more egalitarian and inclusive approaches to education. In short, the way forward is to begin these conversations with progressive educators and activists and then to engage young people. If there is a way forward, it lies outside the structures of the state and in the hands of engaged, caring, and compassionate citizens.

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