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Topics Covered

- The issue with criminalising all adolescent relationships
- More than symbolic
- How is global shipping trying to decarbonise?
- The need to protect India's linguistic secularism

The issue with criminalising all adolescent relationships

Syllabus

- GS Paper 2: Polity and Governance (Judiciary, Rights of Children, Legislative Reforms)
- GS Paper 1: Society (Issues related to Adolescents, Women and Child Rights)
- GS Paper 4: Ethics (Justice, Rights vs Law, Institutional Responsibility)

The issue with criminalising all adolescent relationships

The Supreme Court of India's sentencing judgment in *Re: Right to Privacy of Adolescents* (May 2025) is a remarkable example of the Court revisiting its stance by prioritising the voice of the young person most impacted by the criminal case initiated for her protection.

The Court exercised its extraordinary jurisdiction, under Article 142 of the Constitution, and did not impose any sentence on a young man convicted of aggravated penetrative sexual assault under Section 6, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. The case involved a 14-year-old girl from rural West Bengal who left her home to be with a 25-year-old man. The criminal justice system was set in motion by her mother. Although she stayed in a shelter and was restored to her mother, she left again to be with the man due to stigma, humiliation, and surveillance from her family. They got married and had a child in 2021 – when the girl was 17. He was arrested subsequently and tried for kidnapping, rape, aggravated penetrative sexual assault, and child marriage.

Despite noting the helplessness of the girl in court, with the child on her lap, the POCSO Special Court was constrained by stringent legal provisions and sentenced the accused to 20 years imprisonment.

In 2022, during the appeal, the Calcutta High Court recognised her distress – cut-off by her family and left to care for the baby and a mother-in-law with cancer, while fighting for the release of her partner. It noted the socio-economic background of the couple who did not understand that their relationship constituted an offence. Taking a “humane view of the matter to do complete justice” the High Court reversed the lower court's conviction. While noting that “the approach adopted under the POCSO Act renders adolescents vulnerable to criminal prosecutions for normative sexual behaviour,” the High Court also made several problematic comments, including one that female adolescents should “control sexual urge/urges as in the eyes of society she is the looser [sic] when she gives in to enjoy the sexual pleasure of hardly two minutes”.

Top court's intervention

Following media outrage over these remarks, the Supreme Court, in December 2023 took up the matter *suo motu* in *Re: The Right to Privacy of Adolescents*. It restored the accused's conviction and rejected the concepts of “non-exploitative” sexual acts with a minor aged 14 years, and the category of “older adolescents”. Incidentally, both these concepts are recognised in international human rights law and medical parlance, respectively. General Comment No. 20 by the Committee on the Rights of the Child under the UNCRC, exhorts States to “avoid criminalizing adolescents of similar ages for factually consensual and non-exploitative sexual activity”.



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Before finalising the sentence, in August 2024, the Court took a step, befitting the case's complexity, by directing the state to appoint an expert committee comprising a clinical psychologist, a social scientist, and a child welfare officer to ascertain whether the “victim” – now an adult – wanted to continue living with the accused or preferred to accept benefits offered by the State Government. The committee's report and the Court's interaction with the woman revealed the heavy emotional and financial toll that the legal battle had had on the family and the “collective failure of the systems” in protecting her.

The Court recognised the profound irony at the heart of this case. The young woman had spent her sparse resources fighting for the perpetrator's release, falling into debt and moving from court to court in desperate attempts to reunite with her family. It concluded that “sadly, true justice lies in not sentencing the accused to undergo imprisonment”, adding that “if we send the accused to jail, the worst sufferer will be the victim herself.”

Both the High Court and Supreme Court barred their cases from being treated as precedent, with the top court describing this as an “extraordinary” case. However, empirical studies suggest that adolescent relationships, especially above 16 years, is not extraordinary but a common reality. An Enfold study of 1,715 “romantic cases” showed that out of 7,064 POCSO judgments in Assam, Maharashtra and West Bengal between 2016 to 2020, 24.3% involved romantic relationships, with 82% of victims in such cases refusing to testify against the accused. Another study by Enfold and P39A on judicial trends in 264 cases under Section 6, POCSO Act from these States found that 25.4% involved consensual relationships.

Various High Courts have emphasised that criminalising consensual sex was never the objective of the POCSO Act, while scientific studies confirm that sexual exploration is normal for older adolescents. However, recently the Bombay High Court in *Aakash Waghmare vs State of Maharashtra* (2025) refused to quash a case involving a consensual relationship, by stating that such petitions should wait until the government considers the suggestion of decriminalisation of adolescent sexual relationships under POCSO Act. This judicial reluctance reveals the limitations of case-by-case exceptions and the urgent need for structural reform.

The system that continues to fail

With remarkable candour, the Supreme Court acknowledged, “This case is an illustration of the complete failure of our society and our legal system.” Community humiliation, family abandonment, paternalistic judicial language, absent child protection systems, corrupt legal practices and sensationalist media coverage contributed to her seven-year ordeal. However,

the Court's assumption that implementation of the rehabilitative provisions under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 by the Child Welfare Committee would ensure that “no victim will face the situation which the victim in the case had to face”, belies the experience of many adolescent girls, who routinely endure institutionalisation, humiliation and the deprivation of liberty in such cases.

A victim, but of what?

As the law sets the age of consent at 18 – a development from 2012 before which it was 16 – the Supreme Court, in its initial judgment, did not envisage any non-exploitative consensual relationship involving an adolescent. The Supreme Court dismissed the observation of the Calcutta High Court that “the law undermines the identity of adolescent girls by casting them as victims, thereby rendering them voiceless”, as “shocking”, indicating a paternalistic approach unable to imagine such adolescents as anything but victims.

However, the expert Committee report emphatically stated that “the law saw it as a crime, the victim did not... the legal crime did not cause any trauma on this particular victim. It was the consequences thereafter”. Her trauma stemmed not from the relationship itself but from police involvement, court proceedings, and her struggle to secure her partner's release while raising a child alone.

This case exposes the fundamental tensions within the POCSO Act and ground realities of adolescent sexuality. The girl's consent was undeniably flawed, given her age, poverty, lack of a supportive environment and the cultural acceptability of child marriage, a lack of opportunities, and exposure and life choices beyond marriage. Nevertheless, it exemplifies the need to re-examine the blanket approach under the POCSO Act and its assumption that all sexual acts involving adolescents are inherently exploitative.

Young people who choose to marry early are often asserting their agency through the very limited options available within patriarchal structures. While consent may be flawed in such cases, it is crucial to interrogate state responses and whether they are support-oriented, shape the ability to exercise choice, and expand options. True justice requires moving beyond criminalising all adolescent relationships. Instead it must recognise consent of those above 16 years with conditions in which consent will be invalid such as coercion, and sexual relationships with persons in positions of trust and authority. It also necessitates addressing the root causes of underage elopements and power imbalances in intimate relationships. The Court's direction to the central government to consider measures for comprehensive sexuality education, life-skills training, emergency assistance, counselling services and comprehensive data collection on these interventions, is a step in this direction.





Key Takeaways from the Article

Context:

The **Supreme Court's May 2025 judgment** in Re: Right to Privacy of Adolescents reopened debate on how the **POCSO Act** criminalises **all adolescent sexual relationships**, even consensual ones

- SC invoked **Article 142** to withhold sentencing a man convicted under Section 6, POCSO.
- Case involved a **14-year-old girl** who eloped, married the man, and had a child.
- The **High Court** acquitted him earlier citing **socio-economic context** and lack of awareness.
- SC reversed the acquittal but refrained from sentencing, citing justice in context.
- Over **24% of POCSO cases** involve **consensual adolescent relationships**.
- The judgment is **barred from being treated as precedent** due to its extraordinary nature.
- SC recommended **structural reforms and comprehensive sexuality education**.
- **POCSO (2012)** sets age of consent at 18, criminalising all sexual activity with minors, even if consensual.
- The girl's distress was caused not by the relationship, but by **police action, legal process, and stigma**.
- SC initially dismissed HC's view that the law undermines adolescent identity, reflecting a **paternalistic lens**.
- Expert panel found the **system's response** was more traumatic than the act itself.
- Socio-cultural realities like **poverty, early marriage, and patriarchy** influence adolescent choices.
- **Judicial inconsistency** remains—some HCs call for reform, others await legislation.
- SC acknowledged **systemic failure** and leaned towards a **rights-based approach**.

Way Forward:

- Allow **judicial discretion** in consensual adolescent cases.
- Focus on **counselling and rehabilitation**, not punishment.
- Introduce **comprehensive sexuality education** across schools.
- Regularly review data and cases to inform **policy improvements**.
- Amend POCSO to distinguish **consensual vs exploitative** acts among adolescents.





More than symbolic

Syllabus

▪ GS 2: Governance

More than symbolic Legislative measures to curb unhealthy food intake are a must

It is a welcome move, the Health Ministry has directed all government departments to display oil, sugar and trans fat content in everyday Indian snacks such as samosas, jalebis, ladoos and laddoos in a bid to highlight the health risks of their consumption on a regular basis. The campaign will be piloted in AIIMS Nagpur and then rolled out to other cities. The move comes two months after the CBSE directed all affiliated schools to establish 'sugar boards' to monitor and reduce the sugar intake of children. These will be information on the recommended daily sugar intake, the sugar content in commonly consumed foods, health risks associated with high sugar consumption, and healthier dietary alternatives. The initiatives have been driven by studies that provide evidence of increasing obesity trends in India. As in the NFHS data, obesity had increased from nearly 15% to 24% in men and from 12% to nearly 23% in women between 2005-06 and 2019-21. Since the amount of oil and sugar in Indian snacks is not apparent – and, hence, of less oversight – these initiatives will serve to fill the gap and act as “visual behavioural nudges”, much like the pictorial warnings on tobacco products. However, building awareness alone cannot bring about behavioural changes, especially in the absence of essential legislative measures. Surprisingly, while the Health Ministry has targeted Indian snacks, nothing has been done over the years to introduce clear front-of-package labels to caution people about unhealthy packaged food items, and regulate the advertising, marketing and promotion of unhealthy food to children. Also, levying additional tax on food products with high levels of fat, sugar, and salt (HFSS) can further reduce consumption, as seen in some countries. As in the national multisectoral action plan for prevention and control of common non-communicable disease (2017-25), the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) Regulation was required to be amended for inclusion of front-of-pack labelling and detailed measures to be taken. The FSSAI (Packaging and Labelling) Regulation was amended in 2020, on July 15, the Supreme Court of India again directed the agency to execute this label on packaged food. For front-of-pack labels on HFSS food and beverage products to become a reality, the FSSAI has to first define the upper limits for sugar, salt and total fat, which have not been finalised and approved so far. A 2022 study found that warning labels, supplemented by other forms of front-of-pack labelling in identifying unhealthy products. A study by the ICMR-NIN found that warning labels and nutrient ratings helped deter the consumption of even moderately unhealthy foods. Measures to build awareness without essential legislative measures to curb unhealthy food intake will not be much more than symbolic.

Key Takeaways from the Article

Context:

In response to India's **rising obesity levels**, the **Health Ministry** has launched a campaign to display **oil, sugar, and trans-fat content** in traditional snacks and to curb sugar consumption in schools

- Ministries instructed to display nutritional content (oil, sugar, trans-fat) in items like samosas, jalebis, laddoos.
- Campaign starts at AIIMS Nagpur, to be scaled nationwide.
- CBSE directed schools to establish 'sugar boards' for student awareness.
- Obesity rates (NFHS data) rose from 15% to 24% in men, and 12% to 23% in women between 2005–06 and 2019–21.
- Despite initiatives, Front-of-Pack (FoP) labelling for packaged foods remains unenforced.
- SC (July 2025) ordered FSSAI to implement FoP labelling immediately.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

➤ Ministry of health and family welfare has ordered all central institutions, including AIIMS Nagpur, to install 'Oil and Sugar Boards'

➤ These are brightly coloured posters revealing how much hidden fat and sugar lurk in everyday snacks

➤ According to the govt letter, India could become world's second-largest hub of obesity by 2050



➤ The initiative, officials say, is part of the fight against non-communicable diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease





- **Visual nudges**, like those on tobacco products, can shape public choices but need **legal backing**.
- **FSSAI Labelling Regulations (2020)** still lack finalised upper limits for **salt, sugar, fat**.
- **Global best practices** show that **HFSS food taxation** and mandatory warnings reduce unhealthy food consumption.
- The **National Multisectoral Action Plan (2017–22)** proposed FoP and ad regulations, but implementation is poor.
- Research (e.g., by **ICMR**) confirms that **warning labels** are the most effective in helping consumers identify unhealthy foods.
- **Scientific & Policy Concepts:**
- **HFSS Foods:** High in Fat, Sugar, Salt — linked to obesity, diabetes, heart diseases.
- **FoP Labelling:** Simplified, visible nutrition labels on packaged foods for informed decision-making.
- **Behavioural Nudges:** Subtle cues (e.g., visuals, labels) to influence healthier consumer choices.

Way Forward:

- **Enforce FoP labelling** urgently through FSSAI.
- Extend labelling norms to **local eateries**, not just packaged products.
- Integrate **nutrition education** into school curricula.
- **Taxation and advertising controls** on HFSS foods to discourage consumption.
- Strengthen coordination under a revised **Multisectoral Action Plan**.

How is global shipping trying to decarbonise?

Syllabus

GS Paper 3: Environment, Energy, Infrastructure, Industrial Policy

GS Paper 2: International cooperation, Government initiatives

How is global shipping trying to decarbonise?

What is the goal? What are the green fuels that may be used? Why is it difficult to implement changes in shipping? What does India need to do? Why is the government encouraging green ammonia production in India? What are the challenges?

EXPLAINER

M. Kalyanaram
Kaban Mangalagalli

The story so far: Global shipping is on course towards decarbonisation by 2040-50. This represents a huge opportunity for India. Merchant ships largely use Very Low Sulphur Fuel Oil (VLSFO), diesel, and methane gas stored in liquid form as fuel. LNG-powered engines with their higher efficiency of some five percentage points are likely to be a transition fuel before shipping moves to green fuels such as green ammonia, green or e-methanol and biofuels by 2040 and net zero thereafter.

How are green fuels produced? Green hydrogen is made from the electrolysis of water using renewable power. Shipping will not use hydrogen directly because of issues with storage and transportation of hydrogen, a highly volatile fuel. Green ammonia, made from green hydrogen and nitrogen, is more stable. The government is also encouraging green ammonia production in India since it can substitute LNG imports in making fertilisers. Green methanol is made from green hydrogen and carbon dioxide obtained from industrial sources.

What are the preferred fuels? Shipping, however, is generally a conservative industry. New technology adoption is relatively slow. Ammonia engines are a novelty, so shipping is going first for green methanol, which emits some 10% of carbon dioxide, and later green ammonia, which emits no greenhouse gas. However, ammonia use requires extensive processes onboard. Besides a storage tank and tweaks to the engine and fuel handling system, green methanol is almost a drop-in replacement for VLSFO and is stored as liquid in ambient temperature unlike green



For cleaner seas: Cargo shipping containers in Chennai on June 30. JITHU RAMANIGAM, B

ammonia or even LNG. Already, more than 300 ships capable of operating on methanol are either in service or in order. Major container shipping companies such as Maersk, CMA, CGM and Evergreen are backing methanol. A 100% sustainable e-methanol as bunker fuel costs \$3,950 per tonne (of VLSFO equivalent) in February in Singapore, while VLSFO averaged at \$560 per tonne. This pricing discrepancy is primarily caused by the present price of renewable electricity, with every tonne of green e-methanol using 10-11 MWh of power, and the heavy upfront capital cost for electrolyser facilities. Estimates suggest that demand for green methanol would surpass 14 million tonnes by 2025, whereas the projected supply is merely in the order of 11 million tonnes, creating additional price pressures.

What is Indian shipping's decarbonisation plans? India has committed to decarbonising its domestic shipping. Plans have been made

for supporting domestic container ships using green fuels as well as creating green fuel bunkering points such as at the Tuticorin V.O. Chidambaram port and Kandla. The government is looking at producing and supplying green fuels to Singapore, which is a fuelling station accounting for nearly one-fourth of all global ship fuelling. Singapore has committed to being a green fuels supplier and would require therefore tens of millions of tonnes of green fuels. Given that India has the land and expertise for solar power, it can aspire to be a major supplier of green fuels to global shipping.

How can India do it? Making a marine green fuels production hub has some challenges. Solar panels and electrolysers to make green hydrogen need to be imported. India's solar energy revolution, however, is a model of how sovereign guarantees and policy strategic frameworks can drive the adoption of green fuels. From 2014 to 2025, India's solar capacity grew from 2.82 GW to 105

GW. This achievement was made through the convergence of sovereign guarantees, off-take assurance, and strengthened supply chain support. Sovereign guarantees have emerged as a powerful de-risking mechanism for green methanol investments that can considerably reduce prices. These government-backed assurances can fundamentally transform project economics by enabling access to international capital markets at significantly lower interest rates. Innovative financial instruments are needed for an at-scale green methanol rollout. Production-linked Incentive (PLI) schemes for electrolysers can relieve supply chain bottlenecks by territorialising value chains and lessening transportation costs of raw materials. Carbon capture, utilisation, and storage (CCUS) incentives are also essential, as they increase the feasibility of the production of green methanol from sequestered CO₂. Further, the government's aggressive push in creating 1.5 GW of local electrolyser manufacturing capacity and growing industrial CO₂ sources positions India strategically to develop integrated green fuel hubs. Multilateral development banks offer financing at rates low as 4%, as opposed to 10-12% by domestic lenders, and they can be leveraged.

THE GIST

Shipping, however, is generally a conservative industry. New technology adoption is relatively slow.

Making a marine green fuels production hub has some challenges. India's solar energy revolution, however, is a model of how sovereign guarantees and policy strategic frameworks can drive the adoption of green fuels.

The government's move to inject demand-side support for shipbuilders, along with incentives for foreign cooperation, should spur economies of scale and attract global shipbuilders to the country.

How can green fuels help restart Indian shipbuilding and shipbuilding? The government's move to inject demand-side support for shipbuilders, along with incentives for foreign cooperation, should spur economies of scale and attract global shipbuilders to the country. Partnerships with overseas shipbuilders from South Korea and Japan are being pursued to support India's shipbuilding strength. The strategy is to support new builds and retrofit current ships for green fuel compatibility. India has pledged \$10 billion to support the purchase of over 100 ships. Government can provide incentives so 10-20% of these are green fuel-capable, built in Indian shipyards, and are Indian flagged.





Key Takeaways from the Article

Context:

With global shipping aiming for **net-zero emissions by 2040–2050**, India is positioning itself as a **green fuel hub** by capitalising on its **solar energy potential and industrial base**.

- **Current Fuels:** Shipping still relies on Very Low Sulphur Fuel Oil (VLSFO), diesel, and LNG.
- **Emerging Alternatives:** Shift underway toward green methanol, green ammonia, and biofuels.
- **Methanol-powered ships:** Over 360 vessels are operational or under construction globally.
- **Fuel Comparison:**
 - ♦ **Green e-methanol:** ~\$1,950/tonne
 - ♦ **VLSFO:** ~\$560/tonne (Cost gap a key barrier to adoption)

India's Strategy:

- **Bunkering Hubs:** Development of green fuel refuelling stations at Tuticorin and Kandla ports.
- **Export Focus:** Plans to supply green fuels to Singapore, which handles 25% of global bunkering.
- **Shipbuilding Push:**
 - ♦ \$10 billion plan to build **10 green-capable ships**.
 - ♦ Boost to domestic shipyards with international ties (e.g., Japan, South Korea).
- **Solar Energy Base:**
 - ♦ **105 GW solar capacity** (as of 2025) to support green hydrogen production.
- **Incentives & Finance:**
 - ♦ **PLI schemes, CCUS, sovereign guarantees** to lower costs.
 - ♦ Push for **multilateral financing** at ~4% interest (vs 11–12% domestically).



Challenges:

- **High Costs** of green fuels vs conventional options.
- **Safety and infrastructure** issues, especially for green ammonia.
- **Conservatism** in the shipping industry slows adoption.
- **Need for global capital**, policy certainty, and technology transfer

Way Forward:

Scale up **green hydrogen infrastructure**.

Offer **subsidies** and long-term **purchase guarantees** to reduce fuel price volatility.

Promote **multilateral cooperation** for technology sharing and lowcost capital.

Fast-track **port infrastructure** for bunkering and fuel handling.

Align maritime strategy with **India's National Green Hydrogen Mission**.

- **Green Hydrogen:** Produced via electrolysis using renewable energy.
- **Green Methanol:** Synthesised from green hydrogen + industrial CO₂; safer and requires minimal engine changes.
- **Green Ammonia:** Made using green hydrogen + atmospheric nitrogen; zero emissions but requires strict handling protocols.





- **Drop-in Fuels:** Can be used in existing engines with minimal modification.
- **Bunkering:** Supplying fuel to ships at ports.

The need to protect India's linguistic secularism

Syllabus

GS Paper 1: Indian Society – Diversity, Regionalism

GS Paper 2: Constitution – Federalism, Minority Rights

The need to protect India's linguistic secularism

According to the 2011 Census, India has 121 languages and 270 mother tongues

LETTER & SPIRIT

C.B.P. Srivastava

India's diversity in religion and language is one of the primary factors which protects the secular character of the nation, ensuring its unity and integrity. But while religion and language are the two most crucial aspects of any culture, these are also the predominant cross-cultural barriers. This is clearly visible in recent communal tensions and the violence in Maharashtra. Secularism in India is different from what the West practises. When the concept originated in England in the mid-19th century, it was explained that there should be complete separation between the state and religion without criticising any of the prevalent religious beliefs. India too accepted this notion and incorporated the concept in the

Constitution in the form of rights to religious freedom. These rights are based on the principles of religious tolerance and equality. Every person has the equal right to freedom of conscience and to profess, practise and propagate his religion. This makes India truly secular as the state does not have its own religion. However, the unique aspect of Indian secularism is not only related to religion but it is also concerned with language. Indian secularism is neither pro-religion or language, nor against. Yet it is not neutral either. It is incorporated in the Constitution as a state policy and it empowers the state to take steps against communalism, be it religious or linguistic.

Official vs national language

This is the reason why we do not and cannot have a national language. In order to protect linguistic diversity, the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution includes 22 languages. As India is a unitary

federation, that is, a Union of States, Article 343 enshrines that the official language of the Union shall be Hindi in Devanagari script. The States are free to choose their own official language. This arrangement is due to the fact that in India, States are culturally integrated and no State is permitted to go out of it in the name of distinct language or culture. Article 29 incorporates that any section of citizens of India including minority groups shall have the right to protect their language, script or culture, and that language cannot be the ground for discrimination. According to the 2011 Census, India has 121 languages and 270 mother tongues. About 96.71% population of the country have one of the 22 scheduled languages as their mother tongue. Finally, the Census says that the 121 languages are presented in two parts, languages included in the Eighth Schedule, and languages not included (99) in the Eighth Schedule.

Respecting diversity

Such diversity needs to be protected; each and every language irrespective of region or State must be shown respect. This is the only way to protect India's linguistic secularism. Many southern and northeastern States have resisted the imposition of Hindi, citing fears of cultural domination. Dravidian movements in Tamil Nadu historically opposed Hindi imposition, favouring Tamil and English. Maharashtra, however, has emerged as the most sensitive State so far as the language debate is concerned. The recent violence against the non-Marathi population is the manifestation of identity politics. Definitely, it is not to protect its cultural identity. Had it been related to the protection of culture, the "protectors" of Marathi language would have considered that 'tolerance' and 'liberality' are the two pillars of India's unity in diversity.

India has always accepted different religions, ideas, lifestyles, food habits etc., mainly because of its liberal and tolerant attitude. In a globalising world, a conservative leaning towards religion or language will lead to a fragmentation of society and tear apart the secular fabric.

Political parties have the onus to ensure the protection of India's diversity which has been well shielded by the Constitution.

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THE GIST

While religion and language are the two most crucial aspects of any culture, these are also the predominant cross-cultural barriers.

Article 29 incorporates that any section of citizens of India including minority groups shall have the right to protect their language, script or culture.

Such diversity needs to be protected; each and every language irrespective of region or State must be shown respect.

Context:

The article highlights the rising language-based tensions (e.g., in **Maharashtra**) and sustained **resistance to Hindi imposition in southern and northeastern states**, stressing the need to uphold **linguistic secularism** as a pillar of India's plural democracy.

- **Census 2011:** India has **121 languages** and **270 mother tongues**; **22 languages** are listed in the **Eighth Schedule**.
- **Article 343:** Hindi in Devanagari is the **official language of the Union**; states can adopt their own.
- **Article 29:** Guarantees **minority rights to conserve language, script, and culture**.
- **No national language** in India — ensures **language neutrality** and avoids majoritarian dominance.
- **96.71%** of Indians speak a **Scheduled Language** as mother tongue.
- **Linguistic violence** (e.g., Maharashtra) shows the dangers of **linguistic chauvinism**.
- **Indian secularism** includes **neutrality towards language**, not just religion.

INDIA'S MOST-SPOKEN LANGUAGES

BY NATIVE SPEAKERS



Fig. are rounded off.
Source: Census state-wise languages, 2011





- India follows an **inclusive secular model** that prevents **religious and linguistic dominance**.
- **Linguistic pluralism** sustains **federalism and national unity**, avoiding cultural homogenisation.
- **Dravidian movements**, and **Northeast protests** reflect long-standing fears of **linguistic centralisation**.
- Political use of **language identity** can deepen divides and fragment society.
- The **Constitutional framework** protects **multilingualism** as essential to **national integrity**.
- In the global era, **rigid linguistic policies** can harm **cohesion and inclusion**.

Key Concepts:

Eighth Schedule: Grants official status to select languages; used for recruitment, education, etc.

Linguistic Secularism: The State must be **neutral in language policy**, providing **equal respect and support** to all languages.

Way Forward:

- Avoid **language imposition**; promote **linguistic harmony and inclusivity**.
- Strengthen **mother tongue-based education** while supporting multilingual competencies.
- Encourage **policy neutrality** in official communication and public services.
- Political parties must refrain from **exploiting language identity for electoral gains**

