



Original Article

The Constitutional Mandate of Humanism and Scientific Temper in India

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Abstract

The Indian Constitution enshrines the principles of humanism and scientific temper as essential pillars for nurturing a rational and inclusive democracy. These values are deeply rooted in India's philosophical traditions and social reform movements. The Constitution establishes a legal and moral framework that promotes human dignity, equality, critical thinking, and civic responsibility through its preamble, fundamental rights, directive principles of state policy, and fundamental duties. The judiciary has played a crucial role in interpreting and upholding these constitutional mandates, as evidenced by landmark cases, such as Mohd. Hanif Quareshi v. State of Bihar, Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala, and Aruna Roy v. Union of India. However, the implementation of these principles faces significant challenges, including religious superstitions, educational shortcomings that prioritize rote learning over critical thinking, the political exploitation of faith, and the spread of misinformation in the digital age. To strengthen humanism and scientific temper, India must undertake measures such as educational reform to foster critical thinking, public awareness campaigns, legal enforcement against exploitative practices, and promote responsible media reporting. By collectively working towards these goals, India can progress towards realizing its constitutional vision of a society guided by reason, empathy, and the spirit of inquiry.

Keywords: Fundamental Duty, Humanism, Rationality, Scientific Temper, Secularism, Superstition

Introduction

Humanism and scientific temper are essential pillars of rational and inclusive democracies. In India, these principles are deeply rooted in philosophical traditions, such as Lokayat, Buddhism, and the social reform movement, as well as in the nation's constitutional framework. Humanism is a value system that underscores the importance of human dignity, rights, and worth, and emphasizes ethics, compassion, and secularism. The idea of Scientific Temper, which was made well-known by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, encompasses logical thinking, questioning, doubt, and an empirical comprehension that is devoid of dogma. Together, these ideals form a progressive vision of citizenship, promoting critical thinking and civic responsibility. Humanism and scientific temper are core principles of the Indian Constitution, which mandates these ideals to counter superstitions, promote social reform, and ensure democratic governance.

Constitutional Provisions Promoting Humanism and Scientific Temper

The Indian Constitution, enacted in 1950, served as a visionary blueprint for fostering an equitable and progressive society. It encapsulates the highest ideals of humanism, highlighting human dignity, rational thought, and empathy while also advocating for a scientific temper that encourages inquiry, critical analysis, and reform. The principles are deeply embedded within the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy, and Fundamental Duties, establishing the democratic and moral bedrock of India.

- The Preamble: Foundation of Humanist Principles:** The Preamble to the Constitution embodies the fundamental values of the nation, including justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. These ideas transcend mere theory and serve as the foundation of humanism. By proclaiming India as a "Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic," the Preamble envisions a society that honors the dignity of every person, irrespective of religion, caste, or gender.

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The addition of "Secular" through the 42nd Amendment in 1976 underscores the commitment to religious neutrality and rational governance, which are central to humanism. The focus on fraternity ensures that citizens live together harmoniously, fostering mutual respect and compassion, which are vital to a humanist society.

2. **Fundamental Rights (Part III): Legal Safeguards for Humanism and Rational Thought:** The Fundamental Rights outlined in Part III are designed to protect personal freedom and dignity, thereby establishing a legal framework that supports humanist and scientific principles. Article 14 guarantees equality before law and ensures equal legal protection for all individuals. This prohibits discrimination and upholds human equality, a core tenet of the humanist perspective. Article 19(1)(a) secures freedom of speech and expression, empowering citizens to disseminate ideas, challenge established beliefs, and engage in rational discourse, all of which are essential to scientific inquiry and democratic participation. Article 21 grants a right to life and personal liberty. The judiciary interpreted this as including the right to live with dignity, access education, and enjoy a clean environment. These interpretations align with humanism and promote the holistic development of the human personality.
3. **Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV): Ethical Objectives for Governance:** Although not legally binding, Directive Principles serve as a foundational guide for the state in crafting laws and policies that aim to cultivate a compassionate and equitable society. Article 39A underscores the importance of equitable justice and the availability of free legal assistance, mandating the state to make justice accessible to everyone, regardless of their financial or social standing. This embodies a humanist perspective on the intrinsic values and rights of each individual. Article 48A requires the state to safeguard and improve the environment, recognizing the significance of ensuring a sustainable future. This article instructs the state to tackle environmental challenges through scientific understanding and rational planning, thereby fostering a scientific mindset.
4. **Fundamental Duties (Article 51A): Responsibilities Towards Humanism and Science:** Part IVA of the Constitution delineates the fundamental duties of citizens, underscoring their significance in the nation's development and progress. Article 51A(h) mandates citizens to foster a scientific temperament, humanism, and spirit of inquiry and reform, thereby constitutionally endorsing rational thought. This encourages citizens to challenge superstitions, advocate for reason, and contribute to a forward-thinking society. According to Article 51A(e), citizens are required to refrain from actions that undermine the dignity of women, as humanism is inherently rooted in gender equality and mutual respect. The constitution

reinforces its dedication to egalitarian values by advocating for the elimination of discriminatory practices.

The Indian Constitution stands as a symbol of progressive thought, reflecting humanist principles and a scientific perspective. The Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles, and Fundamental Duties collectively establish a foundation for nurturing a society that values reason and empathy. When dogma and irrationality threaten social harmony and scientific advancement, these constitutional provisions act as legal guidelines and moral obligations. Adhering to them ensures that India continues to progress into an enlightened democracy.

Judicial Interpretations in India Relating to the Constitutional Mandate of Humanism and Scientific Temper

The Indian Constitution reflects the ideals of humanism and scientific reasoning through its preamble, fundamental rights, directive principles, and duties. These values are upheld and interpreted by the judiciary to ensure their effective implementation. The Supreme Court of India has interpreted constitutional provisions to promote rationality, equality, compassion, and critical inquiry, which are the cornerstones of society oriented towards humanism and science. The judiciary plays a substantial role in advancing rationality and humanism. India's courts have acted as guardians of constitutional morality, intervening when dogmas, discrimination, and unscientific practices threaten constitutional principles. Through landmark rulings, courts have emphasized that reason should prevail over irrational customs, and human dignity should be prioritized over regressive traditions.

In *Mohd. Hanif Quareshi v. State of Bihar* (AIR 1958 SC 731), the Supreme Court evaluated the reasonableness of legislative actions. This early constitutional case examined the legality of state-imposed bans on cow slaughter, which were contested as an infringement on religious freedom. The Court concluded that while Article 25 protects religious freedom, it is subject to considerations of public order, morality, and health and must be interpreted with reason. The Court stressed that legislation should be reasonable and secular, discouraging the influence of religious sentiments in the legislative process. This decision highlighted rational lawmaking, marking one of the initial instances in which the judiciary prioritized constitutional rationality over emotional or religious appeals, an essential aspect of humanism and scientific temper. In the *Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala* (AIR ONLINE 2018 SC 243) case, known as the Sabarimala Judgment, the Supreme Court reaffirmed the principle of rationality. The Court made a significant statement on constitutional morality by overturning a practice that barred women of menstruating age from entering Sabarimala Temple. The Court found the practice discriminatory, irrational, and contrary to women's dignity, violating Articles 14, 15, and 25 of the constitution. This judgment particularly emphasized that "the Constitution cannot be reduced to a document of blind faith; it must reflect reason and progress." It was a landmark in humanist

jurisprudence, affirming that traditions must conform to the constitutional principles of equality and rationality. This case stands as a judicial endorsement of a scientific temper, where faith and tradition are evaluated against the standards of logic, equality, and justice. In the case *Aruna Roy v. Union of India* (AIR 2002 SC 3176), the Supreme Court emphasized the importance of a scientific temper in education. This case challenged the inclusion of religious instruction in school curricula through the "National Curriculum Framework for School Education." The petitioners were concerned that such inclusion would promote dogma and impede scientific thinking among the students. The Supreme Court dismissed the petition but made significant observations. It upheld the importance of fostering scientific tempers and humanist values in education. The Court asserted that cultivating a scientific temper is crucial for democracy, as it empowers citizens to question, reason, and make informed decisions. Even though the petition was turned down, the ruling reinforced the constitutional duty outlined in Article 51A(h), which urges citizens to cultivate a scientific mindset, humanism, and a spirit of inquiry and reform.

The Indian judiciary has played a crucial role in maintaining the constitutional values of humanism and a scientific approach. As illustrated in the above cases, the Supreme Court underscored that governance and societal norms should be guided by rationality, equality, and respect for individual dignity. These interpretations have profoundly influenced Indian legal thought and contributed to the moral advancement of society, ensuring that tradition is not a pretext for regression. In India's diverse and pluralistic society, the judiciary's commitment to these values is crucial for nurturing a rational and compassionate democracy.

Obstacles in Enforcing the Constitutional Directive of Humanism and Scientific Temper in India

The Indian Constitution enshrines humanism and a scientific mindset as core national principles; however, the nation encounters significant obstacles to realizing these ideals. These challenges arise from cultural, educational, political, and technological factors that hinder a country's progress towards a rational, humanist society.

1. **Religious and Superstitious Practices: An Obstacle to Rationality:** India's diverse religious and cultural landscape often intertwines with deeply rooted superstitions and unscientific customs. Although the Constitution guarantees religious freedom, blind faith and ritualism frequently overshadow logic and evidence-based reasoning. Practices such as witch-hunting, astrology-driven decisions, and miracle-based healing are widespread nationwide. Efforts to challenge these practices often encounter social resistance or violence, as demonstrated by backlash against rationalist activists. A conflict arises when religious sentiment takes precedence over constitutional values, hindering a culture of inquiry and reform.
2. **Educational Shortcomings: Rote Learning Over Critical Thinking:** The Indian education system prioritizes memorization over the comprehension of

concepts and questioning. Critical thinking, creativity, and scientific inquiry were not systematically integrated into the curriculum. Students are often discouraged from questioning or challenging existing knowledge, undermining the spirit of scientific temper, as outlined in Article 51A(h). Teacher training and evaluation methods emphasize academic performance by fostering intellectual curiosity and rational thinking. This impedes the development of rational, empathetic, and responsible citizens.

3. **Political Exploitation: Faith Used for Electoral Gains:** Political figures manipulate faith and identity to secure votes and polarize communities. Election campaigns frequently feature divisive rhetoric, communal appeals, and pseudo-historical narratives that counteract reason and fraternity. When faith becomes a political tool, secularism, rational governance and inclusive humanism suffer. This exploitation normalizes irrationality and disregards constitutional mandates for short-term gains.
4. **Misinformation and Pseudoscience: The Digital Age Challenge** In the era of social media, misinformation, conspiracy theories, and pseudoscientific claims have become significant obstacles. Claims ranging from miracle cures to astrology-based governance are unchallenged because of low digital literacy and cognitive biases. During the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation about vaccines, alternative medicines, and religious remedies has threatened public health and rational policymaking. Poor regulation and critical media literacy erode scientific reasoning among the public. Without proper education and governance, this digital landscape impedes constitutional goals.

While the Constitution provides a framework to promote humanism and scientific tempers, its implementation faces profound challenges. Cultural inertia, educational limitations, political opportunism, and digital misinformation hinder the progress towards a rational society. Addressing these challenges requires reforming education for critical thinking, protecting rationalist voices, depoliticizing religious identities, and promoting scientific literacy. A truly democratic India can emerge only when constitutional ideals are reflected in people's consciousness and actions.

Measures to Strengthen Humanism and Scientific Temper in India

The Indian Constitution upholds humanism and a scientific mindset as national ideals that are essential for fostering a rational, compassionate, and inclusive society. Achieving this vision necessitates action through education, awareness, legal measures, and media reforms. To tackle issues such as superstitions, misinformation, and rote learning, India must implement strategies that promote critical thinking and empathy.

1. **Education Reform: Fostering Critical Thinking:** Education plays a pivotal role in embedding humanist values and scientific reasoning within society. At present, the education system in India focuses on

memorization and discourages inquiry. School curricula should integrate critical thinking, logical reasoning, ethics and philosophy as fundamental components. Teaching should evolve from mere information delivery to exploratory learning, encouraging students to question and test their ideas. Educators need training to promote open-mindedness and scientific inquiry, moving away from dogmatic instruction. By equipping students with critical thinking and empathy, the education system can cultivate citizenry informed by science and humanism.

- 2. Public Awareness Campaigns: Engaging the Public:** Promoting a scientific mindset extends beyond formal education. Mass-awareness campaigns can shift societal attitudes, particularly in rural areas. Initiatives such as the Vigyan Prasar aim to popularize science through radio, television, and digital media. Regular community events, such as science fairs and exhibitions, should be organized and science clubs established in every school and college to spark interest in rational thinking. Sensitizing community leaders to humanist values can bridge tradition and reason, thus making rational thought culturally acceptable. These efforts help normalize critical inquiry, reduce superstition, and promote inclusivity.
- 3. Legal Enforcement: Preventing Exploitation in the Name of Faith:** The legal system must protect citizens from exploitation through unscientific and harmful practices. States, such as Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Gujarat, have enacted laws against black magic and fraudulent rituals. The Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and Other Inhuman, Evil, and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act, 2013 lists 12 harmful practices. Meanwhile, the Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices and Black Magic Act, 2017, lists 16 harmful practices. Gujarat's Anti-Superstition Law aligns with Maharashtra's law. Additionally, laws against witch-hunting accusations and related violence were passed by six state governments: Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Odisha, and Assam. A nationwide unified anti-superstition act, modeled after the laws of Maharashtra and Karnataka, is necessary to curb superstitious practices. The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 should be revised to impose penalties on deceptive advertisements that endorse pseudo-scientific products. By criminalizing exploitative practices, the legal framework reinforces constitutional values and protects the vulnerable population.
- 4. Media Responsibility: Promoting Rational Discourse and Fact Verification:** Media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception, with its influence capable of either nurturing a scientific mindset or propagating misinformation, depending on its level of accountability. Media must implement a robust fact-checking system. News organizations and social media platforms should dedicate resources to fact-checking teams and technologies to combat fake news and pseudoscience. The media acts as a significant

tool for promoting scientific understanding. Broadcasting educational content and discussions that elucidate scientific concepts, dispel myths, and promote ethical reasoning can effectively engage the audience. It should be mandated through appropriate mechanisms for media to report responsibly. Government agencies can set standards that mandate media outlets, including digital, print, and social media platforms, to promote a scientific mindset and encourage the practice of critical thinking. Sensationalism should be avoided in matters related to religion, health, and science. Based on evidence, journalism must become the norm. Responsible media acts as both a guardian and educator, fostering rational discourse.

The aspiration for a rational, compassionate India, anchored in humanism and scientific reasoning, requires collective efforts through education, awareness, legal frameworks, and responsible media. By implementing these measures, India can advance towards realizing its constitutional vision of society guided by reason, empathy, and inquiry. Although this journey may be challenging, it is vital to construct a progressive future.

Conclusion

India's constitutional vision is deeply rooted in ethical considerations rather than being confined to legal principles alone. The principles of humanism and scientific mindset serve as the foundation for nurturing a progressive society. In an era marked by increasing dogmatism and misinformation, it is a civic and constitutional duty to uphold these values. True progress is measured not only by economic indicators but also by the moral and intellectual development of individuals. The Constitution provides a strong framework for promoting humanism and scientific thought. Although judicial decisions and policies have supported these ideals, societal challenges persist. Improving education, governance, and public discourse are essential for achieving this vision.

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