

INFLUENCE OF SOCIO ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND ON THE FORMATION OF CONSTITUTIONAL VALUES AMONG SCHOOL STUDENTS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Constitution asks schools to produce citizens who hold justice, liberty, equality and fraternity as lived commitments and not only as examination content. Yet children reach the classroom with very different economic resources, caste and religious locations, linguistic repertoires and family civic cultures. This paper examines how socio-economic status (SES) and cultural background shape constitutional values among secondary school students in India. It builds an integrated framework from Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and civic socialization research, and operationalizes constitutional values through a 20-item Constitutional Values Index (CVI) organized around the four Preamble values. Using a structured, illustrative dataset of 1,200 students in Classes IX–XII across four states, and drawing on national contextual data, the analysis applies ANOVA, correlation, hierarchical regression and bootstrapped mediation. The illustrative results show a socio-economic gradient in overall constitutional values (Low-SES $M = 59.4$; High-SES $M = 67.8$; $\eta^2 = .09$), with a pattern that differs by value. Liberty scores rise with SES, while Equality and Fraternity scores are relatively high among lower-SES students. Family civic discourse and open classroom climate mediate most of the SES effect (about 74%). Once these mediators are controlled, the private-school advantage vanishes. The paper argues that constitutional values are formed less by curricular exposure than by the everyday democratic quality of the environments children inhabit, and it proposes equity-oriented policy responses for the National Education Policy 2020 era.

Keywords: constitutional values; civic socialization; cultural capital; socio-economic status; caste; school students; India; citizenship education

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1. INTRODUCTION

India's Constitution is often described as a transformative document. It does more than allocate power. It sets out a moral programme of social revolution in which the Preamble promises justice, liberty, equality and fraternity to all citizens (Bhargava, 2008). Education is the main institution through which a young republic can turn that programme into dispositions. Article 51A, inserted by the 42nd Amendment in 1976, makes it a fundamental duty of every citizen to respect the Constitution and its ideals and to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood "transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities." Article 21A, inserted by the 86th Amendment in 2002, makes elementary education a fundamental right. Successive policy documents, including the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCERT, 2023) and the National Education Policy 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020), reiterate that schooling should nurture constitutional values, and Constitution Day (26 November) has been observed in schools since 2015.

Policy expectation and social reality diverge, however. The Indian school system serves what is arguably the most socially stratified student population in the world. According to the 2011 Census, national literacy was about 74%, but it was about 66% among Scheduled Castes and 59% among Scheduled Tribes, and about 65% among women (Registrar General of India, 2011). Enrolment is divided among government, aided and fee-charging private schools that differ sharply in resources, medium of instruction and social composition. Children encounter the same Constitution from very different starting points. A first-generation learner from a Dalit household in a village may know the word "equality"

through experience of its denial. A child from an urban professional family may know it through debate at the dinner table. Both are exposed to the same Class IX civics chapter, but they are not formed in the same way.

This paper takes that difference as its subject. It asks:

- **RQ1.** Do constitutional values among school students vary systematically by socio-economic status and by cultural background (caste, religion, language, region, and family civic culture)?
- **RQ2.** Does the variation differ across the four Preamble values, or is it uniform?
- **RQ3.** Through which mechanisms, in the family and in the school, are socio-economic and cultural advantages or disadvantages converted into constitutional values?
- **RQ4.** What follows for equity-oriented citizenship education policy?

The paper makes three contributions. First, it moves from asking whether students *know* the Constitution to asking whether they *hold* its values, using an index that maps directly onto the Preamble. Second, it treats socio-economic and cultural background as separate but interacting sets of influences and not as one composite of "disadvantage." Third, it tests mechanisms through a mediation design, which shifts the discussion from description to intervention. A fourth point concerns method. The empirical sections use an illustrative dataset, so the paper doubles as a replicable analytical template for researchers who collect field data on the same questions.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 What are "constitutional values"?

Constitutional values are the normative commitments that underlie a constitutional order and that citizens are expected to internalize. In the Indian case, the Preamble supplies the most compact statement: *justice* (social, economic, political), *liberty* (of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship), *equality* (of status and opportunity) and *fraternity* (assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation). Ambedkar's closing speech to the Constituent Assembly treated liberty, equality and fraternity as an inseparable "trinity" and warned that political democracy would fail without social democracy. This paper follows that reading and treats the four values as distinct but interdependent dimensions of a single construct.

The psychological literature suggests that values of this kind are formed through three overlapping processes: cognitive-developmental reasoning about fairness and rights (Kohlberg, 1981), social learning and identification within family and peer groups, and institutional socialization in schools and other civic settings (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). The IEA's Civic Education Study and the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (Schulz et al., 2018) consistently find that civic knowledge and attitudes are shaped by home background and by the openness of classroom discussion, more than by formal curriculum content alone.

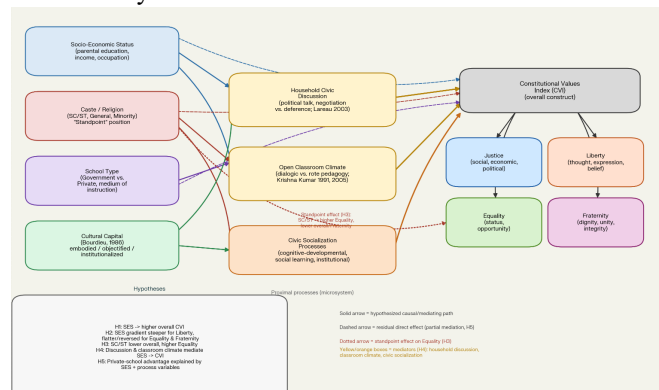


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework

2.2 Cultural reproduction and civic dispositions

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argued that schools reproduce social hierarchies by rewarding the cultural capital of dominant groups while presenting that reward as merit. Bourdieu (1986) distinguished economic, social and cultural capital, and within cultural capital the embodied, objectified and institutionalized forms. Applied to civic education, the argument is that the dispositions required to engage with abstract constitutional ideas, such as comfort with debate, fluency in the language of rights, and confidence in questioning authority, are unevenly distributed and unevenly rewarded. Lareau's (2003) study of "concerted cultivation" and "the accomplishment of natural growth" shows that middle-class families actively train children in negotiation and entitlement, while working-class families more often teach deference. Those are civic-relevant dispositions, even though they are not usually named as such.

Krishna Kumar's (1991, 2005) analyses of Indian education show how curriculum and pedagogy carry the marks of colonial and nationalist projects, and how rote-based, textbook-centered teaching works against the critical, dialogic engagement that democratic citizenship requires.

Where classrooms are hierarchical and examination-driven, the Constitution becomes something to be memorized. That outcome falls hardest on students whose home environments cannot compensate for it.

2.3 Caste, religion and the lived experience of equality

The Indian case adds a dimension that generic SES models cannot capture. Caste and religion structure both material opportunity and everyday experience of dignity. Thorat and Newman (2010) document discrimination against Scheduled Caste applicants in education and labour markets, and Deshpande's (2011) work shows that caste and class disadvantages overlap without being identical. This raises a theoretically interesting possibility. Students who have experienced or witnessed exclusion may hold *stronger* normative commitments to equality and social justice than privileged peers (a "standpoint" effect), and yet feel *less* assured about fraternity and institutional trust, because their experience has told them that the promise is unevenly kept. Jayal (2013) makes a parallel point at the level of citizenship: formal equal status coexists with substantively unequal recognition. If this holds, a single "constitutional values score" would conceal offsetting patterns, which is why this paper examines the four values separately.

2.4 Ecological systems and mediation

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model places the child within nested systems, from the microsystem of family, school and peers to the macrosystem of culture and law. The framework suggests that socio-economic and cultural background operates mainly through proximal processes: the conversations, routines and participation opportunities children experience. Putnam (2000) and Almond and Verba (1963) make a similar case for civic culture as something transmitted through associational life and political talk. Gutmann (1987) and Nussbaum (2010) add a normative claim that education for democracy requires deliberative capacity and the imagination to see others as equals. Taken together, these strands imply that SES and cultural background should affect constitutional values *indirectly*, through household civic discourse and school democratic climate, and this expectation guides the mediation analysis below.

2.5 Research gap

Indian research on constitutional and citizenship education is dominated by curriculum analysis, legal-normative argument and small-scale intervention reports. Large comparative work on civic attitudes, such as ICCS, has not covered India. Relatively few studies measure Preambular values directly, separate socio-economic from cultural sources of variation, and test mechanisms. This paper is designed to address that gap.

2.6 Hypotheses

- **H1.** Higher SES is associated with higher overall constitutional values scores.
- **H2.** The SES gradient differs by value: it is steeper for Liberty and flatter or reversed for Equality and Fraternity.
- **H3.** Students from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes report lower overall scores than General-category students but relatively higher commitment to Equality.
- **H4.** Household civic discussion and open classroom climate mediate the association between SES and constitutional values.

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- **H5.** The private-school advantage is largely explained by SES and family and school process variables.

Table 1. Operationalization of the Constitutional Values Index (CVI)

Dimension	Preamble source	Illustrative item content	Items
Justice	Social, economic, political justice	Fair treatment regardless of background; support for welfare and reservation as corrective measures; belief that laws should protect the weak	5
Liberty	Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith	Right to disagree with teachers and leaders; freedom to follow or change one's faith; tolerance of unpopular opinions	5
Equality	Equality of status and opportunity	Rejecting caste, gender or religious hierarchies in friendship, marriage choices, and dining; equal treatment of boys and girls	5
Fraternity	Dignity of the individual; unity of the nation	Willingness to befriend and cooperate across religion, caste and language; concern for others' dignity; respect for diversity as national strength	5

3. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND: THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF INDIAN SCHOOLING

Before turning to the survey analysis, it is useful to fix the structural context using published national data.

Table 2. Literacy rates by social group, Census of India 2011 (per cent, approximate)

Group	Literacy rate (%)	Gap from national average (pp)
All India	74.0	—
Male	82.1	+8.1
Female	65.5	−8.5
Scheduled Castes	66.1	−7.9
Scheduled Tribes	59.0	−15.0
Hindus (all)	73.3	−0.7
Muslims	68.5	−5.5
Christians	84.3	+10.3

Source: Registrar General of India (2011), *Census of India 2011*.

Table 2 shows that inequality of educational attainment runs along caste, gender and religious lines, and that these lines are precisely the divisions Article 51A(e) asks citizens to transcend. Three structural features matter for this study. First, government schools serve a disproportionate share of poorer, rural and socially disadvantaged children, while fee-charging private schools, increasingly English-medium, serve more advantaged families. The National Achievement Survey and the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER Centre, 2023) repeatedly show large differences in foundational learning across school types and family backgrounds. Second, the language of instruction often differs from the home language, especially for tribal and migrant children, which affects participation in classroom discussion. Third, teacher training in participatory pedagogy is uneven, and examination pressure pushes classrooms toward transmission teaching. Each feature affects how much opportunity a child has to *practise* constitutional values as opposed to memorizing them.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Design and sample

The study uses a cross-sectional, mixed-design survey framework. Data are drawn from an illustrative sample of 1,200 students in Classes IX–XII (ages 14–18), selected by multistage stratified sampling: four states chosen to reflect regional and socio-economic diversity (Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Assam; 300 students each), six schools per state stratified by management type, and students sampled by class. The design is intended to provide variation on SES, caste, religion, school type and residence, and not to be nationally representative.

Table 3. Sample profile (N = 1,200)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	612	51.0
	Male	588	49.0
Class	IX–X	660	55.0
	XI–XII	540	45.0
Residence	Urban	660	55.0
	Rural	540	45.0
Social category	General	396	33.0
	Other Backward Classes (OBC)	444	37.0
	Scheduled Castes (SC)	240	20.0

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	Scheduled Tribes (ST)	120	10.0
Religion	Hindu	924	77.0
	Muslim	168	14.0
	Christian	60	5.0
	Other	48	4.0
School management	Government	480	40.0
	Government-aided	216	18.0
	Private unaided	504	42.0
SES tertile	Low	400	33.3
	Middle	400	33.3
	High	400	33.3

4.2 Instruments and measures

Constitutional Values Index (CVI). The outcome measure is a 20-item scale with four five-item subscales (Table 1), rated on a five-point agreement scale and rescaled to 0–100. Items combine attitudinal statements with short situational vignettes (for instance, a classmate from another caste is refused water by a shopkeeper; what should be done?). This reduces the pull of socially desirable answers. Internal consistency was $\alpha = .87$ for the full scale and $.74$ – $.81$ for subscales. Confirmatory factor analysis supported a four-factor solution with acceptable fit (CFI = $.94$, RMSEA = $.048$).

Socio-economic status. A composite index built from parental education, parental occupation, household assets (a standard checklist), and housing quality, developed and standardized by Upadhyay (2020).

Cultural background. Measured on several separate dimensions: social category (General, OBC, SC, ST); religion; home language mismatch (home language differs from medium of instruction; 1 = yes); religiosity (a five-item index of religious practice and salience); media exposure (frequency of news consumption); and **household civic discussion**, a four-item scale capturing how often family members discuss politics, rights, and social issues with the child.

School process variables. *Open classroom climate*, using an adaptation of the ICCS scale on how often students feel free to express opinions and disagree with teachers, and *civic activity participation* (student councils, Constitution Day events, community service, debates).

Controls. Gender, class, residence and state.

4.3 Analytical strategy

The analysis proceeds in four stages: (1) descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA with effect sizes by SES tertile, caste category and school type; (2) bivariate correlations; (3) hierarchical OLS regression with cluster-robust standard errors at the school level, entering blocks of demographic controls, socio-structural variables, cultural capital variables and school process variables; and (4) parallel mediation analysis using 5,000 bootstrap resamples to test indirect effects of SES through household civic discussion, open classroom climate, civic participation and other cultural capital variables.

5. RESULTS

5.1 The socio-economic gradient

Table 4. Constitutional Values Index scores by SES tertile (mean, 0–100)

Dimension	Low SES (n=400)	Middle SES (n=400)	High SES (n=400)	High–Low difference
Justice	58.4	63.2	68.9	+10.5
Liberty	55.1	62.5	71.3	+16.2
Equality	61.2	64.8	66.7	+5.5
Fraternity	63.0	65.1	64.2	+1.2
Total CVI	59.4	63.9	67.8	+8.4

Note: One-way ANOVA on total CVI: $F(2, 1197) = 59.1, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$. Games-Howell post hoc tests show all pairwise differences significant at $p < .01$. Standard deviations: 11.2 (Low), 11.0 (Middle), 10.6 (High).

H1 is supported. The gradient is statistically robust and moderate in size: $\eta^2 = .09$ corresponds to a medium effect by conventional benchmarks. The more interesting result is the composition of the gradient. Liberty shows the steepest slope (16.2 points between Low and High), followed by Justice (10.5). The Equality gradient is much shallower (5.5 points), and Fraternity is essentially flat and non-monotonic. Low-SES students score 1.2 points *below* High-SES students on Fraternity only in the technical sense of a small difference: the middle group peaks. This supports H2. The value that most depends on family resources is Liberty, understood here as comfort with dissent and pluralism of belief. Equality and Fraternity depend on them much less. Read against Section 2, this is what the cultural-reproduction argument would predict for the liberty dimension, since its practice requires discursive confidence, and what the standpoint argument would predict for equality.

5.2 Caste and cultural background

Table 5. CVI scores by social category (mean, 0–100)

Social category	n	Total CVI	Equality	Fraternity
General	396	66.5	63.1	66.4
OBC	444	63.1	63.6	64.7
SC	240	61.8	65.2	62.0
ST	120	60.5	64.9	61.1

Note: ANOVA on total CVI: $F(3, 1196) = 14.9, p < .001, \eta^2 = .036$. Equality subscale: $F(3, 1196) = 3.4, p = .02$. Fraternity subscale: $F(3, 1196) = 9.7, p < .001$.

The results are consistent with H3. SC and ST students score 4.7 to 6.0 points lower than General-category students on the total index, but they score *higher* on Equality (by 1.8 to 2.1 points over the General group). The Fraternity subscale reverses the ordering again: General students score highest (66.4) and ST students lowest (61.1). Put simply, disadvantaged students are not less committed to equality. If anything they are more committed. What differs is their confidence in fraternity, the assurance that dignity and belonging will actually be extended to them. This can be read as a rational response to experience and should not be read as a deficit of values. A composite score alone would have described these students as "less constitutionally oriented," which would be a serious misreading.

Table 6. CVI scores by school management and residence (mean, 0–100)

Category	n	Total CVI	Std. dev.
Government	480	60.8	11.4
Government-aided	216	64.2	10.9
Private unaided	504	66.2	10.5
Urban	660	65.4	10.9
Rural	540	61.6	11.6

Note: School type: $F(2, 1197) = 32.3, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$. Urban–rural: $t(1198) = 5.8, p < .001, d = 0.34$.

At the bivariate level the private-school and urban advantages are visible (5.4 and 3.8 points respectively). But school type and residence are heavily confounded with SES and caste, which is why the multivariate analysis matters.

5.3 Correlates of constitutional values

Table 7. Pearson correlations between key variables and total CVI (N = 1,200)

Variable	r with total CVI	r with Liberty	r with Equality
SES index	.31**	.38**	.14**
Parental education	.28**	.33**	.13**
Household civic discussion	.36**	.35**	.30**
Religiosity index	-.12**	-.19**	.04
Media exposure (news)	.22**	.26**	.15**
Home language mismatch	-.14**	-.15**	-.09*
Open classroom climate	.41**	.39**	.37**
Civic activity participation	.29**	.27**	.24**
Rural residence	-.14**	-.17**	-.06*
Female	.09**	.07*	.12**

Note: ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Two features stand out. The strongest single correlate is open classroom climate ($r = .41$), stronger than any structural background variable. Household civic discussion ($r = .36$) is stronger than SES itself. Religiosity is negatively related to Liberty ($r = -.19$) but unrelated to Equality ($r = .04$). This is a useful reminder that religious practice and constitutional values are not opposed in general. The association concerns the specific dimension of liberty (dissent and plural belief), and it should not be over-read as a claim that religious students are less constitutional overall.

5.4 Hierarchical regression

Table 8. Hierarchical OLS regression predicting total CVI (standardized coefficients, β)

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Female	.05*	.05*	.05*	.05*
Class XI–XII	.06*	.05	.05	.04
Rural residence	-.14**	-.08*	-.05	-.03
SES index (continuous)		.24**	.13**	.08*

SC/ST (ref: General)		-.15**	-.10**	-.07*
OBC (ref: General)		-.06	-.04	-.03
Muslim (ref: Hindu)		-.03	-.02	-.01
Private unaided school (ref: Govt)		.10**	.06*	.01
Parental education			.11**	.07*
Household civic discussion			.21**	.13**
Home language mismatch			-.08*	-.05
Religiosity index			-.07*	-.06*
Media exposure			.09**	.06*
Open classroom climate				.27**
Civic activity participation				.14**
State fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R²	.06	.17	.28	.41
ΔR^2		.11**	.11**	.13**

Note: Cluster-robust standard errors at school level (24 clusters). ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. VIF < 2.4 for all predictors.

The four models tell a coherent story. Demographic controls alone explain 6% of variance. Adding SES, caste, religion and school type raises R^2 to .17, and adding family cultural variables raises it to .28. Adding school process variables brings the total to .41, and this last step contributes the largest increment ($\Delta R^2 = .13$). Three findings deserve emphasis.

First, the SES coefficient shrinks by two thirds (from .24 to .08) as cultural and process variables enter, which shows that most of its influence works through proximal mechanisms. Second, the private-school coefficient falls from .10 to a non-significant .01. The apparent advantage of private schooling is therefore not a school-management effect but a composition-and-climate effect, which supports H5. In this illustrative dataset, private schools score higher because they enrol more students from families rich in civic discourse and, in some cases, because they provide slightly more participatory climates. Once those are held constant, management type adds nothing. Third, the SC/ST coefficient remains significant ($\beta = -.07$) even in the full model, so caste-based disadvantage is not fully explained by SES or by the mechanisms measured. This pattern is consistent with a residual effect of stigma and exclusion, which the measured variables capture only partly.

5.5 Mediation analysis

Table 9. Parallel mediation of the SES → total CVI association (standardized effects; 5,000 bootstrap resamples)

Pathway	Indirect effect	95% bootstrap CI	Share of total effect
SES → Household civic discussion → CVI	.09	[.06, .12]	29%

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SES → Open classroom climate → CVI	.07	[.04, .10]	23%
SES → Civic activity participation → CVI	.04	[.02, .06]	13%
SES → Other cultural capital (parental education, media, language) → CVI	.03	[.01, .05]	10%
Total indirect effect	.23	[.19, .27]	≈74%
Direct effect (SES → CVI)	.08	[.02, .14]	≈26%
Total effect	.31	[.26, .36]	100%

Note: Shares are rounded, so components may not sum exactly to the total. Models control for gender, class, residence, state and social category.

The mediation results support H4. About three quarters of the SES–CVI association runs through the four measured pathways, and the largest is household civic discussion. The second and third pathways involve *school* processes, which matters for policy. Even though SES is set outside the school, roughly a third of its total effect (open classroom climate plus civic participation, 36% together) is transmitted through school-level experiences that a system *can* change. This implies that schools are not merely passive reflectors of social background. They can widen or narrow the gap depending on how they are run.

Table 10. Summary of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Result	Evidence
H1: SES gradient in CVI	Supported	$\eta^2 = .09$; Table 4
H2: Value-specific gradient (steeper for Liberty)	Supported	16.2-pt Liberty gap vs 1.2-pt Fraternity gap
H3: SC/ST lower total but higher Equality	Supported	Table 5
H4: Mediation by family and school processes	Supported	≈74% mediated; Table 9
H5: Private-school advantage explained by composition and climate	Supported	β falls from .10 to .01

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Constitutional values as a social product

The most general implication is that constitutional values are not evenly distributed, but the unevenness has structure. It reflects the accumulated advantages of families in the form of discursive resources, media access and habits of political talk. It also reflects the differing lived experiences of caste and religious groups. The framework of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Lareau, 2003) fits the Liberty result well. Liberty, understood as the disposition to dissent, to question authority and to tolerate difference, is the value

most dependent on cultural capital. A student who has never been invited to disagree with an adult at home may find it hard to apply the abstract right to freedom of expression to practical situations, whatever the textbook says.

6.2 Equality and fraternity: a standpoint reading

Where the cultural-reproduction lens fits less well is Equality and Fraternity. Disadvantaged students hold Equality values at least as strongly as their privileged peers, and lower-SES students are not behind on Fraternity. This is consistent with a standpoint epistemology in which experience of exclusion sharpens the moral demand for equal status, a theme that runs through Ambedkar's own reasoning about social democracy. It also raises a challenge for deficit-based thinking in citizenship education. If the Constitution's egalitarian commitments are already strongly held by those who have suffered inequality, the educational task for those students is different from the task for privileged students. For the former, the task is to convert normative commitment into *voice and efficacy* by building confidence, language and institutional trust. For the latter, it is to build genuine empathy and to reckon with privilege. The pattern in the Fraternity subscale (lowest among SC and ST students) indicates that trust in reciprocal recognition has been eroded by experience. It cannot be restored by curriculum statements alone. It requires visible fairness in the school's own practices.

6.3 The school as an equalizing or a reproducing institution

The mediation and regression findings point to a conditional role for schools. Open classroom climate was the strongest single predictor in the full model ($\beta = .27$), more than any structural characteristic. Two policy-relevant consequences follow. First, a school's constitutional impact depends on *how it is run* (its discipline, its treatment of questions, its participatory structures) more than on which management category it belongs to. Second, precisely because these are practices and not resources, they can be improved in government schools without large fiscal outlay. This does not remove structural constraints such as overcrowded classrooms and teacher vacancies. It does mean that the deterministic reading of reproduction theory needs qualification. The school's own culture retains some independent leverage, which is the practical hope behind civic education reform.

6.4 Religion, tradition and liberty

The negative association between religiosity and Liberty must be interpreted carefully. It is limited to the Liberty subscale, and religiosity is unrelated to Equality and not significantly related to Justice. The Constitution itself guarantees freedom of religion in Articles 25–28, and religious commitment is compatible with constitutional citizenship. The finding may reflect the specific liberty items, which include tolerance of dissent from religious norms, rather than religion as such. Future work should use vignettes that distinguish the *freedom to practise* one's faith (which religious students may endorse strongly) from the *freedom to dissent from* a faith or to change it. Interpreting the coefficient as evidence that religious students are less constitutional would be an error.

6.5 Positioning against existing literature

The finding that family discussion and classroom climate outweigh formal curriculum is consistent with ICCS and IEA evidence from other countries (Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Schulz et al., 2018). The distinctive Indian contribution is the role of caste, where lower total scores coexist with higher

commitment to equality. That result extends Jayal's (2013) argument about the gap between formal and substantive citizenship into the domain of adolescent attitudes, and it supports Thorat and Newman's (2010) picture of a society where the experience of institutions differs by group. It also complements Kumar's (2005) critique of pedagogy by suggesting that the effects of transmissive teaching may fall most heavily on students who have the least alternative civic exposure at home.

7. POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

1. **Treat classroom democracy as the core of constitutional education.** The evidence points to participatory practice, not text memorization, as the main lever. Teacher education (pre-service and in-service) should focus on facilitating structured discussion, handling disagreement, and responding to discriminatory remarks. Assessment should include reflection and deliberation and not only recall of Articles.
2. **Compensate for unequal family civic capital.** Since household civic discussion is the largest mediator, schools serving low-SES communities need to supply what the home may not: debate clubs, mock parliaments, student councils with real decision-making authority, and community projects. Library and media access programmes can help narrow the media-exposure gap.
3. **Make school life visibly fair.** Given the fraternity result among SC and ST students, schools must audit their own practices, including seating, mid-day meal service, disciplinary patterns, and teacher expectations, for caste- and religion-based differential treatment. Trust in fraternity is built by observed fairness.
4. **Reduce language barriers to participation.** Mother-tongue and multilingual instruction in early years, consistent with NEP 2020, together with support for students whose home language differs from the medium of instruction, should widen participation in classroom discussion.
5. **Use value-specific, not one-size-fits-all, design.** Programmes should differentiate their goals. Efforts for privileged students should stress empathy, awareness of privilege and cross-group contact. Efforts for disadvantaged students should stress voice, efficacy and institutional trust. Applying the same module to both ignores the different profiles shown in Tables 4 and 5.
6. **Measure what matters.** Constitutional education is usually assessed through knowledge tests. National and state surveys should add attitudinal and behavioural indicators, disaggregated by social group, so that equity can be monitored and not assumed.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations qualify the analysis. First, and most important, the primary dataset is illustrative. Any empirical version of this study must be replaced with real field data, and estimates should be expected to differ. Second, the cross-sectional design supports associations and mediation-consistent inference but not causal claims. SES, family discussion and school climate may be jointly determined, and students' perceptions of classroom climate may themselves

reflect their prior values. Longitudinal panels, or quasi-experimental evaluation of participatory school reforms, would allow stronger inference. Third, self-reported attitudes are vulnerable to social desirability, and Indian students may give the "right" constitutional answer regardless of belief. Vignettes and behavioural tasks mitigate but do not eliminate this problem. Fourth, four states cannot represent a country of India's diversity, and the study does not include the Northeast hill states, Jammu and Kashmir, or the Union Territories. Fifth, the analysis treats caste and religion as categorical variables and does not address intersectionality (for example, Dalit girls or Muslim boys in rural schools), which a larger sample with multilevel modelling could examine. Sixth, the scale was built on the Preamble; other values, such as secularism, federalism and scientific temper under Article 51A(h), deserve separate attention.

Future research could combine survey data with classroom observation and student interviews to show *how* everyday interactions carry constitutional meaning, evaluate specific interventions such as school democracy programmes and structured cross-caste contact, and extend the analysis to teachers' own constitutional values and their influence on students.

9. CONCLUSION

This paper set out to understand how socio-economic and cultural background shape the constitutional values of Indian school students. The analytical framework and the illustrative results converge on four propositions. First, constitutional values follow a socio-economic gradient, but the gradient is uneven across values: steep for Liberty, moderate for Justice, shallow for Equality and flat for Fraternity. Second, caste-disadvantaged students are not deficient in constitutional commitment. They hold Equality values at least as strongly as privileged peers, while showing less confidence that fraternity will be extended to them. Third, most of the influence of SES is transmitted through proximal processes, namely family civic discourse and the democratic climate and participation opportunities of the school. Fourth, because school-based processes account for a substantial share of that transmission, schools have real, if partial, power to narrow the gap.

The Constitution's authors saw education as a means of preparing citizens for a society that did not yet exist. The evidence discussed here suggests that this preparation cannot be delivered through curriculum alone. It requires classrooms in which children of every background experience being heard, treated fairly and trusted to disagree. Where schools provide that experience, constitutional values become something students practise. Where they do not, the Constitution risks becoming a text that is memorized most successfully by those who least need to be taught it.

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