

# WEEKLY FOCUS

## #94



### *Constitutional Ethos III*

# Unity in Diversity – Multilingualism



DELHI



JAIPUR



HYDERABAD



PUNE



AHMEDABAD



LUCKNOW



CHANDIGARH



GUWAHATI



RANCHI



ALLAHABAD



BHOPAL

“Learning another language is not only learning different words for the same things but learning another way to think about things”.

- Flora Lewis



## INTRODUCTION

India is a nation of **sub-continental proportions**, not only geographically but also metaphorically. Being the most populous country in the world, the diversity of faith, language, and culture showcased here is unparalleled. The finest expressions of this are seen portrayed in fairs and festivals, arts, music, dance and drama, architectural and sculptural styles and in literature and languages. Language in India is not just a **means for communicating or sharing information / knowledge** by a community, language, in many cases, **signifies a collective way of life**.

In this article, we will discuss the Constitutional Ethos of **Multilingualism** – starting with the **basic theoretical idea on Multilingualism** and its presence in India. It is followed by the related provisions in the **Indian Constitution** and the **objectives** behind it. Next, we will discuss the initiatives in this direction along with the benefits and ongoing critical debates. Based on the above, certain challenges are identified with a possible way forward to **preserve and promote** multilingualism.



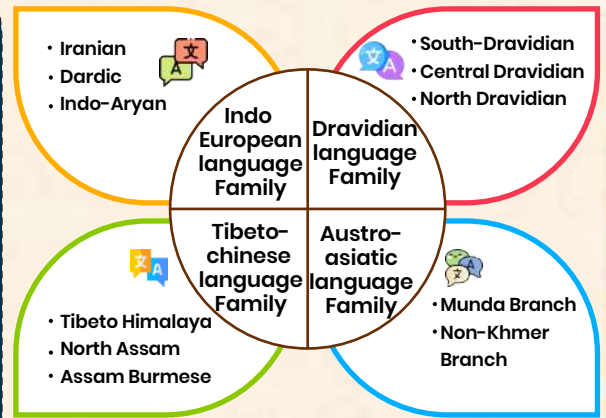
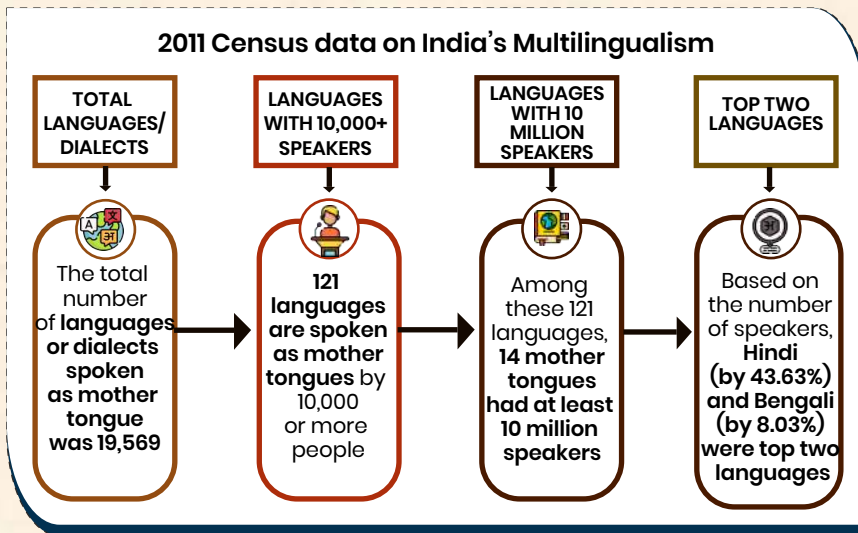
## PRINCIPLE OF MULTILINGUALISM: MEANING AND PRESENCE IN INDIA

India is one of the most **linguistically diverse countries**, leading to interest of linguists. E.g., the **first linguistic survey of India**, done by **GA Grierson** during the British regime identified the presence of **179 distinct languages** with nearly **544 dialects** across India.

Mother Tongue	Language Family
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>It is the <b>first language a person learns and uses</b>.</li><li>Usually, mother tongue is the <b>language spoken in childhood</b> by the <b>person's mother</b> to the person.</li><li>If the mother died in infancy, the language mainly <b>spoken in the person's home</b> in childhood will be the mother tongue.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>It is a <b>group of languages</b> related to each other through <b>descent from a common ancestral language or parental language</b>, called the <b>proto-language</b> of that family.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Family reflects the <b>tree model of language origination</b> in historical linguistics.</li></ul></li></ul>

With centuries of **linguistic convergence** in India, these languages display some common features. Based on it, the linguists prominently divide Indian languages into **four language families** (refer image). This convergence also makes it common for people as well to use multiple languages, giving rise to **Multilingualism of Indian Society**.

## 2011 Census data on India's Multilingualism



## MULTILINGUALISM AS CONSTITUTIONAL ETHOS IN INDIA: ITS PROVISIONS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall constitutional provisions associated with multilingualism can be broadly categorized into four categories as:

### Fundamental Rights



Under Part III, i.e. Fundamental rights:

- ❖ Article 29 gives the right of conservation to each section of India in India with distinct language, script or culture of its own with no discrimination in admission to any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.
- ❖ Article 30 allows all minorities, whether based on religion or language, the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice with no discrimination from state while granting aid to educational institutions.

### Language used in Parliament and between the Union and State



The Constitution doesn't provide any one National language. It also has provisions such as:

- ❖ Article 120 allows the Chairman of the Council of States or Speaker of the House of the People, or person acting as such, to permit any member who cannot adequately express himself in Hindi or in English to address the House in his mother tongue.
- ❖ Article 343 specifies Hindi in Devanagari script as official language of the Union but allows use of English language as well due to the reservations on use of Hindi from some states.
- ❖ Article 345 allows the Legislature of a State to adopt, by law, any one or more of the languages used in the State or Hindi for official purposes.
- ❖ Article 346 allows States to communicate with other States or with Union in their official language or use Hindi, if two or more states agree to it.
- ❖ Article 347 allows the President to recognize the use of any language spoken by a section of the population of a State, on demand, if the section of the population of a State desires it.

## Language used in Supreme Court and High Courts



Though English Language is used in the Supreme Court and in the High Courts and for Acts, Bills, etc. under Article 348 (1),

- ❖ Article 348 (2) allows the Governor of a State, with the previous consent of the President, authorize the use of Hindi language or any other language for official purposes.

## Special Directives



Directly linked to all the Citizens of India, these special directives include:

- ❖ Article 350 to allow every individual person to submit representations for grievance redressal to any officer or authority of the Union or a State in any of the languages used in the Union and the States.
- ❖ Article 350A asks every State and local authority within the State to facilitate for instruction in their mother tongue at primary stage.
- ❖ Article 350B requires that there shall be a Special Officer for linguistic minorities to be appointed by the President.
  - ❖ It shall be the duty of the Special Officer to investigate all matters relating to the safeguards provided for linguistic minorities under this Constitution and report to the President upon those matters at such intervals as the President may direct.

## OBJECTIVES OF INDIAN MULTILINGUALISM



Preserve India's pluralism (unity in Diversity) to keep India's democracy vibrant.



Teach children in mother tongues to preserve languages.



Conserve India's rich cultural wealth of language as language influences/get influenced by the social-cultural conditions

## IMPLEMENTATION IN INDIA: GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

- **Official Languages of India:** Under Eighth Schedule of the Constitution [Articles 344(1) and 351], 22 languages are recognized as scheduled official languages of India.
- **Multilingual Education:** India's Education Policy follows the three-language formula since 1968, allowing students education in mother-tongue and to learn two other languages.
  - Under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, two of them must be Indian languages and states are free to choose them.
- **Classical Languages:** Six languages (Tamil, Sanskrit, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, and Odia) are declared classical languages. It helps these languages by allowing various benefits such as:
  - Two major annual international awards for scholars of eminence in classical Indian languages.
  - A Centre of excellence has been setup for studies in Classical Languages.
  - Creation of a certain number of Professional Chairs for the Classical Languages in the Central Universities and awarding of research projects for promoting these languages from University Grant Commission (UGC).
  - Also, under the NEP 2020, Classical Languages will be made available in schools as an option under the three-language formula.

### CRITERIA FOR DECLARING A LANGUAGE AS CLASSICAL



#### ANTIQUITY

High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years



#### VALUABLE HERITAGE

A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generation of speakers.



#### LITERARY TRADITION

The literary tradition be original & not borrowed from another speech community.



#### DISTINCTNESS

The classical languages & literature being distinct from modern, there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language & its later forms or its offshoots.

- **National Language Translation Mission (NLTM):** Also known as Bhashini, is a three-year mission (started in March 2022) to enable all Indians easy access to the Internet and digital services in their own languages and increase the content in Indian Languages.
  - It will build an Indian Language Technologies ecosystem for development of Indic Language Technologies and evolve as a Unified Language Interface (ULI) for Indian Languages.
- **Judicial initiatives:** In order to make justice administration more accessible for common man, the Supreme Court has taken initiatives such as translation of Judgments in regional languages such as Hindi, Odia, Tamil, Marathi etc.



## One Nation One Language Debate

- ❖ The debate took root in India's struggle for independence. A number of Indian freedom fighters felt the need of a national language as a unifying factor. With Hindi as the most spoken language of India, it became the first choice. At the same time, voices/ movements started to preserve the distinct linguistic identities of different regions. E.g.
  - ❖ In 1927, "the redistribution of provinces on a linguistic basis" became a major commitment of the Indian National Congress (INC).
  - ❖ Similarly, the introduction of three-language formula in Tamil Nadu - making Hindi compulsory in state government schools- faced Anti-Hindi Agitations (1937-40) from Periyar's Self Respect Movement and the Justice Party.
  - ❖ Post-independence, the constituent assembly also discussed this issue. Based on the Munshi-Ayyangar. Formula, Part XVII of the Constitution found a way to pacify both sides, i.e. Hindi in Devanagari script will be the official language of union with no national language.
  - ❖ A number of languages to be recognized as Scheduled Languages (presently 22 languages under 8th Schedule).
  - ❖ States have the freedom to choose their own official languages.
  - ❖ English to cease as the official language after the end of 15 years.
    - ❖ The Official Language Amendment Act, 1967 extended it by providing for continuing the use of English in official work.
  - ❖ Union Government to develop and promote Hindi Language. E.g., Under Article 351, it is the duty of the Union to spread the Hindi language so that people can serve Hindi language in the medium of communication.

In the present times, the debate continues with pros and cons on either side-

Positives with Hindi as National Language	Problems of One Nation One Language in a society like India
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop Hindi as a Lingua Franca across India, helping tourists and migrants alike.</li> <li>• National Language will provide a global linguistic representation/identity to India.</li> <li>• Decrease domination of English as the connecting language.</li> <li>• Can help in overcoming regionalism based on linguistic differences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goes against India's civilizational ethos of multilingualism.</li> <li>• Hindi is the most-spoken language, but it is spoken by less than 50% of the population.</li> <li>• Forceful imposition of Hindi can lead to igniting of the North-South Divide.</li> <li>• It is against the right to freedom of speech and expression guaranteed to every citizen under Article 19 (a).</li> </ul>



# BENEFITS OF MULTILINGUALISM

With Globalization, Multilingualism has emerged as a universal phenomenon. Today, it is believed that we have **more multilingual speakers as compared to monolingual speakers in the world**. Under such circumstances, benefits of Multilingualism are not just limited to constitutional objectives.

Learning more than one language yields **multiple cognitive benefits**, which translates into good learning and thinking skills. This leads to various other benefits as highlighted in the **image**.

## BENEFITS OF MULTILINGUALISM

### POLITICAL

Create respect for diversity & Rights of People such as linguistic Rights, Human rights, etc.

### INDIVIDUAL

- Academic advantage due to better reading & writing skills.
- Better Employment prospects (More Jobs)
- Better understanding of own culture & of others.
- Increased reading & entertainment opportunities.

### ECONOMIC

- Efficient Resource Allocation
- Help to make Globalization Beneficial

## In Conversation Linguistic Diversity in India and benefits of multilingualism



**Vinay:** Hey Vini! This summer I am planning to learn a new language.

**Vini:** Great! Last summer, I also learnt a language.

**Vinay:** Which one?

**Vini:** I learnt Garhwali Pahari.

**Vinay:** Ok, you learnt Pahari language.

**Vini:** Yes, but do add Garhwali with it as we have other Pahari languages as well like Kumaoni Pahari.

**Vinay:** You mean within Pahari we have different dialects.

**Vini:** Yes. In fact, different dialects of Pahari are spoken in Himachal as well. That's why, for India, it is said that - 'Kos Kos pe Badle Paani, Char kos pe Vaani' i.e., Every two miles the water changes, and every four the dialect'.

**Vinay:** But doesn't this make the interaction difficult between groups?

**Vini:** Not really. As all of them evolved from one common language group, these languages share commonalities not just with different Pahari languages but with other languages of the group as well.

**Vinay:** Oh! Now I'm a bit confused. With so many languages, I don't think my learning of a new language will be of any good.

**Vini:** I disagree. On the contrary, I think it will benefit you a lot. For example, you will be able to learn about different cultures. It will also help when you will go to these states as a tourist or for work. Not only that, it gives you an opportunity to interact with a whole new set of people and see the world through their eyes.

**Vinay:** Hmm! Now, I think I must try to learn at least one language from each group.

**Vini:** That will be great. Through you, people in your circle will also be able to learn more about the benefits of Multilingualism.

**Vinay:** Thanks Vini.





## MULTILINGUALISM CHALLENGES: ITS LIMITATION AND CONCERNS

According to D P Pattanayak, founder-director of the Central Institute of Indian Languages, multilingualism can be successful only if there is respect for multiplicity or differences in a society. Also, in India, multilingualism has its own limitations and concerns such as:

### Limitations



- ❖ Language environment, i.e., monolingual surroundings (e.g., at home), leading to extra and continuous effort needed in using another language.
  - ❖ It can also shift focus from core subjects to languages.
- ❖ Limitation of resources as it requires qualified educators, study material to meet modern education and economic system requirements, etc.
  - ❖ It leads to non-uniform implementation of the three-language formula.
  - ❖ The high linguistic diversity of few states with limited population and resources (e.g. Nagaland) make it even more difficult to fully benefit from multilingualism.
- ❖ Lack of script and Limited speakers of some languages, especially tribal languages, which leads to extinction.
  - ❖ As per the UNESCO Atlas of World Languages in Danger-2010, 196 Indian languages were on the verge of extinction.
- ❖ Reduced linguistic sense as learning grammars of multiple languages can be confusing and may demand immersion into the language.
- ❖ Overall, these limitations lead to a vicious cycle of stagnation in language development and further poor intergenerational transfer.

### Concerns



- ❖ Monolingualism in Higher Education leading to loss of regional languages relevance in the field of education, science, business, tourism etc.
  - ❖ Though some states have taken initiatives to start technical and medical education in regional languages, they are too few and sparse.
  - ❖ E.g. Last year, Madhya Pradesh became the first state to release MBBS books in Hindi language for Medical Education under NEP 2020.
- ❖ Influence of Globalization: Motivating people to learn foreign languages due to better economic opportunities rather than preserving their own cultural heritage.
- ❖ Opposition to the three-language formula from some states as it is seen as a means to impose Hindi or other languages.
- ❖ Limited Cyberspace presence of Indian languages which widens the linguistic and digital divide.
  - ❖ E.g. India has the second largest internet user base but the large linguistic diversity makes it difficult to create digital content in all.
- ❖ Rising Social Inequalities and reduced social-cohesion due to stigmatization of and loss of languages.
  - ❖ It gives rise to an inferiority Complex in people based on language.
- ❖ Dearth of quality reading material or movies in all Indian languages.



## WAY FORWARD

NEP 2020 demonstrates multilingualism as a potent means to preserve India's composite culture. But it requires much more effort to be made as compared to earlier efforts due to increased reach of technology and internet. Some of the steps which should be taken in short to long term are:

- **Documentation of all Languages:** Government should start with documentation of all languages, their vocabulary and grammar through language departments of Universities.
  - Increasing the number of scheduled languages or classical languages, based on meeting the criteria, can help in it.
- **Overcome inefficiencies of Education System:** To stop the decline of regional languages, it is important to overcome education system inefficiencies by:

- Increasing budgetary allocation for education to overcome resource constraints.
- Training educators and engaging educated local youth to improve teaching.
- Overcome states apprehension on three-language formula through increased regional languages share in school and higher education.
- **Development of Regional Languages:** To reverse the decline or the stagnation, it is important that languages should continue to develop. So, it needs:
  - Development of local content, i.e. newspapers, books or movies in such languages.
  - Recognition of local content through increased presence of the content in classrooms and on cyberspace.
    - It will also help in integration of regional languages with economic activities, increasing people's interest in them with reduced social inequalities.
- **Awareness on Linguistic Rights:** For increased accountability of state, the awareness on linguistic rights should increase.



## CONCLUSION

Multilingualism broadens out thought patterns and influences our perspective. It can strengthen our democracy by creating a state of togetherness or oneness which is **assimilative** despite being **unique and different**, i.e., **Unity in diversity**.





# TOPIC AT A GLANCE

## CONSTITUTIONAL ETHOS III: UNITY IN DIVERSITY –MULTILINGUALISM



With centuries of linguistic convergence, Multilingualism becomes an important feature of the Indian Society.



The Constituent Assembly recognized its role in preserving India's unity in diversity; leading to Multilingualism becoming a part of India's Constitutional Ethos.



### Indian Multilingualism: Features/Objectives

- No National Language (only official language) of India and Freedom to State Legislature on its official language to preserve India's pluralism.
- Linguistic Minorities' Fundamental Right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice
- Special Directives to facilitate teaching in mother tongue in order to preserve languages.
- Right of language conservation for linguistic minorities etc. to preserve India's cultural wealth of language.



### Government Initiatives

- Recognition of 22 languages of India under Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.
- Three-language formula to promote multilingual education.
- Recognition of Classical Languages with provisions to protect and develop them.
- Mission mode efforts (Bhashini) to increase availability of content in Indian Languages.
- Efforts from other institutions to promote regional languages etc. for multiple benefits at economic, political and individual level.



### Challenges to Multilingualism

- Monolingual surroundings with reducing linguistic sense.
- Shortage of human and financial resources to preserve all languages.
- Problem of stagnation in language and poor intergenerational transfer.
- Apprehension towards Multilingualism policies from some states.
- Negative influence of globalization with limited digital presence.
- Stigmatization on the basis of language, leading to increased social inequalities and reduced social cohesion.



### Way Forward

- Documentation of all languages from State.
- Overcome apprehensions of states on three-language formula with increased funding and manpower development to overcome inefficiencies of Education System.
- Make efforts to remove existing linguistic inequalities.
- Focus on Development and Recognition of local content to promote regional languages.
- Create awareness on linguistic rights to make state accountable.



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