

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE: POLITY

NEWS: Think, converse and glorify own languages, says Amit Shah

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Department of Official Language celebrated 50 years since its establishment, with renewed focus on promoting Indian languages as a cornerstone of cultural identity, inclusive development, and digital empowerment.

Context

- The Department of Official Language recently celebrated its golden jubilee, marking 50 years since its establishment in 1975.
- During the celebration, the Union Home Minister highlighted the central role of Indian languages in preserving cultural identity and strengthening national unity, describing language as the 'soul of a nation'.

About Indian Languages

Cultural and Civilizational Heritage:

- India's linguistic diversity forms a vital part of its civilizational legacy, representing thousands of years of cultural exchange and literary evolution.
- According to Census 2011, India recognizes 121 languages and over 1,600 mother tongues actively spoken across the country.
- The earliest writing systems in India, such as the Indus Valley script, Brāhmī, and Kharos-thī, highlight India's deep historical engagement with language and script development.
- India has eleven recognized classical languages, namely Tamil, Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, and recently added Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese, and Bengali, reflecting rich literary and scholarly traditions.

Constitutional and Legal Recognition:

- The Constitution of India recognizes 22 scheduled languages under the Eighth Schedule, granting them equal status and protection.
- Article 350A directs states to provide primary education in the mother tongue for children from linguistic minority communities.
- The right to conserve one's language and culture is guaranteed as a Fundamental Right under the Constitution.
- Article 343 declares Hindi in Devanagari script as the official language of the Union, while allowing English to continue for official purposes.
- Article 344 provides for the constitution of a Commission and Committee on Official Language to guide the progressive use of Hindi.

- Article 345 empowers State Legislatures to adopt any language used in the state or Hindi as the official language(s) of that state.

Importance of Language & Policy Support:

Multilingualism as a Way of Life:

- Most Indians naturally grow up bilingual or multilingual, which is seen as a cultural strength.
- Multilingualism enhances intercultural understanding, promotes social harmony, and improves cognitive development in children, aiding problem-solving and creativity.

Education and Empowerment:

- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 promotes mother tongue-based education until Grade 5, and preferably up to Grade 8, wherever possible.
- Competitive entrance exams such as JEE, NEET, and CUET are now offered in 13 Indian languages, improving accessibility to higher education for non-Hindi and non-English speaking students.
- Digital learning platforms like DIKSHA and SWAYAM deliver educational resources in Indian languages:
 - DIKSHA hosts textbooks and resources in 33 languages, including Indian Sign Language.
 - SWAYAM offers engineering course content translated into 11 Indian languages, expanding inclusivity in technical education.

Digital Inclusion and Innovation:

- Under the Digital India initiative, mobile phones sold in India since 2017 are mandated to support all Indian languages, promoting inclusivity in digital communication, e-governance, and e-commerce.
- The Bhashini project is building AI-powered tools for Indian languages to enable more accessible public service delivery, digital content creation, and information dissemination in local languages.

Safeguarding Endangered Languages:

- India has lost 50 languages over the past five decades.
- Many tribal and minority languages remain vulnerable due to declining intergenerational transmission and reduced number of speakers.

Dedicated Institutions for Language Promotion:

- **Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysuru:** Works on research, training, and development of Indian languages.

- **Central Hindi Directorate, Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, and CSTT:** Focus on promotion and development of Hindi language and terminologies.
- **National Councils for Promotion of Urdu and Sindhi Languages:** Dedicated bodies for fostering Urdu and Sindhi linguistic heritage.
- **Central Sanskrit Universities:** Promote Sanskrit research and education.
- **Central Institute of Classical Tamil (CICT), Chennai:** Works on preservation and promotion of classical Tamil.

Other Initiatives:

- **Bharatiya Bhasha Anubhag:** Focuses on promoting multilingualism and translation efforts.
- **Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat Campaign:** Encourages cultural and linguistic exchanges among states to build mutual understanding and national integration, especially among youth.

Conclusion:

- India's linguistic diversity is not just a cultural treasure but a foundation for national identity, democratic inclusivity, and social cohesion.
- Policies and programs promoting education in local languages, digital inclusion, and the preservation of endangered languages are crucial to maintaining and strengthening India's multilingual heritage.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/language-is-the-soul-of-a-nation-not-merely-a-medium-of-communication-says-union-minister-amit-shah/article69739609.ece>