

2. International Mother Language Day- Art & Culture

International Mother Language Day is observed on February 21, under the theme “Youth voices on multilingual education”.

International Mother Language Day

International Mother Language Day is observed annually on 21 February. It was proclaimed by the General Conference of UNESCO in 1999, on the initiative of Bangladesh, in recognition of the 1952 Bengali Language Movement martyrs. The UN General Assembly (2002 Resolution) welcomed the observance and called for the promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity.

The day underscores three interrelated objectives

1. Promotion of linguistic diversity and multilingualism
2. Protection of endangered languages
3. Integration of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in formal schooling systems

UNESCO views language not merely as a communication tool, but as a carrier of identity, knowledge systems, and cultural continuity.

India as a Multilingual Civilisational State

India represents one of the most linguistically diverse societies in the world.

1. According to the Census 2011 –
 1. More than 1,300 mother tongues were reported.
 2. 121 languages are spoken by 10,000 or more people.
2. The Eighth Schedule of the Constitution currently recognises 22 languages.
3. Hundreds of tribal and minority languages remain outside formal recognition frameworks.

Educational Reality

1. As per NCERT (2022), nearly 44% of children in India enter school with a home language different from the medium of instruction.
2. This creates a “double learning burden” –
 1. First, decoding an unfamiliar language.
 2. Then, grasping academic content through that unfamiliar language.

UNESCO State of the Education Report (2025 Edition)

The 2025 edition focused on Mother Tongue and Multilingual Education in India, synthesising –

1. Global research evidence
2. National-level empirical data
3. Policy implementation experiences

It emphasised that language mismatch remains a structural barrier to equitable foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN).

Significance of Mother Tongue-Based Education

Pedagogical and Cognitive Dimensions

Improved Comprehension

1. Children grasp abstract concepts faster in a familiar linguistic framework.
2. Early literacy acquisition is smoother.

Enhanced Cognitive Development

1. Strengthens analytical reasoning and problem-solving abilities.
2. Facilitates metalinguistic awareness (ability to understand how language works).

Higher Retention and Reduced Dropout Rates

1. Language familiarity reduces alienation.
2. Particularly relevant in tribal and rural contexts.

Socio-Cultural Dimensions

Preservation of Cultural Capital

1. Indigenous knowledge systems are transmitted effectively.
2. Oral traditions gain academic legitimacy.

Strengthening Identity and Self-Esteem– Children experience dignity and validation of their linguistic identity.

Promotion of Social Inclusion

1. Reduces structural discrimination against linguistic minorities.
2. Aligns with the principle of substantive equality under Article 14.

Emotional and Psychological Benefits

1. Greater classroom participation
2. Reduced anxiety
3. Better teacher–student communication

Constitutional and Legal Framework in India

India's constitutional design explicitly protects linguistic diversity.

Article 29(1) – Protection of Interests of Minorities

1. Grants any section of citizens the right to conserve their language, script, and culture.
2. Applies beyond religious minorities to include linguistic minorities.

Article 30(1) – Educational Rights of Minorities

1. Provides minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
2. Protects linguistic autonomy in education.

Article 350A – Instruction in Mother Tongue

1. Directs states to provide facilities for instruction in mother tongue at the primary stage.
2. It is a constitutional directive principle-like obligation, though not directly enforceable.

Article 350B – Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities–Establishes a constitutional authority to monitor safeguards for linguistic minorities.

Right to Education Act, 2009 – Section 29(f)

1. Mandates that medium of instruction, “as far as practicable”, shall be in the child's mother tongue.
2. Reflects a statutory commitment to mother tongue education.

Policy Framework and Government Initiatives

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

1. Recommends medium of instruction in home language/mother tongue/local language at least till Class 5, preferably till Class 8.
2. Promotes bilingual pedagogy.
3. Calls for development of high-quality textbooks in Indian languages.
4. Aligns with foundational literacy goals under NIPUN Bharat.

Bharatiya Bhasha Pustak Pariyojana (BBPP)

1. Announced in Union Budget 2025–26.
2. Aims to produce textbooks (digital and print) in 22 Indian languages.

3. Extends beyond school level to higher education.

Grants for Promotion of Indian Languages (GPIL)

1. Supports development of Hindi, Veda studies, Classical Tamil, Sindhi, Urdu.
2. Institutional support through dedicated bodies for Hindi, Urdu, Sindhi, Sanskrit.

AICTE Language Reform

1. Technical education institutions permitted to offer engineering and diploma courses in regional languages.
2. 19 institutions across 10 states have operationalised this initiative.
3. Addresses the language barrier in STEM education.

Digital and AI-Based Interventions

1. **PM eVIDYA** – Multilingual digital learning resources.
2. **DIKSHA Portal** – Textbooks and materials in 33 Indian languages and Indian Sign Language.
3. **BHASHINI** – AI-driven language translation ecosystem for digital inclusion.
4. **AI4Bharat initiatives** – Community developed language technologies.
5. **Adi Vaani** – Supports documentation of endangered languages.

These initiatives reflect convergence between language preservation and digital public infrastructure.

Structural Challenges

Despite policy commitment, implementation constraints remain –

1. Shortage of trained teachers proficient in local languages.
2. Lack of standardised orthography for several tribal languages.
3. Administrative difficulty in multilingual classrooms.
4. Political debates over language hierarchy.
5. Limited research-based assessment mechanisms for MTB-MLE outcomes.

Comparative Global Perspective

1. **Soviet Union (Early 20th Century)** – “Korenizatsiya” (nativisation) promoted mother tongue education among ethnic groups.
2. **China (1950s onwards)** – Ethnic minority language schooling alongside Mandarin acquisition.
3. Many African nations have increasingly adopted MTB-MLE frameworks to address post-colonial language inequities.

International evidence consistently demonstrates that strong foundational literacy in mother tongue facilitates subsequent acquisition of second and third languages.

Strategic Importance for India

Mother tongue education intersects with –

1. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) targets
2. Social justice and inclusive development
3. Tribal empowerment
4. Digital inclusion
5. Knowledge economy transformation

It supports the transition from rote-based instruction to conceptual learning.

Conclusion

Mother tongue education in India is not merely a pedagogical preference but a constitutional commitment and developmental necessity.

In a linguistically plural society, multilingual education serves three simultaneous purposes –

1. Enhancing academic outcomes
2. Preserving civilisational diversity
3. Promoting inclusive growth

By institutionalising multilingualism through NEP 2020, AI-enabled platforms, and constitutional safeguards, India can create an education system that is both globally competitive and culturally rooted.

Source – [https://epaper.thehindu.com/ccidist-
ws/th/th_international/issues/172056/OPS/GAUFJ4AAS.1+GUOFK8A87.1.html](https://epaper.thehindu.com/ccidist-
ws/th/th_international/issues/172056/OPS/GAUFJ4AAS.1+GUOFK8A87.1.html)

