All about Languages of India

What is the issue?

Home Minister’s suggestion that states should communicate with each other in Hindi rather than English has again stirred the debates over imposition of Hindi.

What does the Constitution say on official language?

> *Article 29-Protection of interests of minorities- Any section of the citizens having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.*

- **Article 343- Official language of the Union-** The official language of the Union shall be Hindi in Devanagari script and the form of numerals shall be the international form of Indian numerals.
- It also stipulated that English would be used for the Union's official business for a period of 15 years and after the completion of 15 years Parliament by law may provide for its continual.
- **Article 344- Commission-** The President shall constitute a Commission at the expiration of 5 years from the commencement of the Constitution and 10 years from such commencement.
- The Commission shall make recommendations to the President for the progressive use of Hindi and to restrict the use of English for any of the official purposes of the Union.
- **Committee -** There shall be constituted a Committee consisting of 30 members to examine the recommendations of the Commission and to report to the President their opinion.
- **Article 345- Official language or languages of a State-** The State legislature may adopt any one or more of the languages i or Hindi as the official language of that State.
- Until the State Legislature otherwise provides by law, English language shall continue to be used as official language of the State.
- **Article 346- Official language for communication between States and between a State and the Union-** It shall be communicated in the official language.
- If two or more States agree that the Hindi language should be the official language for communication between such States, that language may be used for such communication.
- **Article 347- Special provision-** If the President is satisfied that a substantial proportion of the population of a State desire the use of any language spoken by them to be recognised by that state, he may direct that such language to be officially recognised throughout that State or any part thereof.

> *The Official Languages Act, 1963 provided for the continuation of English language for official purposes of the Union and for use in Parliament*

What is the language to be used in Parliament and judiciary?

- **Article 120**- Business in Parliament shall be transacted in Hindi or in English
- However, the presiding officer may permit any member who cannot adequately express himself in Hindi or in English to address the House in his mother-tongue.
- **Article 348-** It talks about the language to be used in the Supreme Court and in the High Courts and for Acts, Bills.
- Until Parliament by law otherwise provides, all proceedings in the Supreme Court and High Court, authoritative texts, Bills, acts, amendments, ordinances, orders, rules, regulations and by-laws issued under this Constitution shall be in English.
- However, the Governor may, with the previous consent of the President, authorise the use of the Hindi or any other language used for any official purposes of the State, in proceedings in the High Court having its principal seat in that State.
- For States that has prescribed any language other than English for use in Bills, Acts, Ordinances, order, rule, regulation or by-law, a translation of the same in English has to be accompanied.

What are the special directives provided in the constitution regarding languages?

- **Article 350**- It talks about the language to be used in representations for redress of grievances.
- Grievance to any officer/ authority of the Union or a State can be redressed in any of the languages used in the Union or in the State.
- **Article 350A**- It facilities for instruction in mother-tongue at primary stage.
- It shall be the endeavour of every State and local authority to provide adequate facilities for instruction in mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups.
- The President may issue such directions to any State as he considers necessary or proper for securing the provision of such facilities.
- **Article 350B**- It talks about Special Officer for linguistic minorities.
- A Special Officer for linguistic minorities has to be appointed by the President to investigate all matters relating to the safeguards provided for linguistic minorities and report to the President.
- **Article 351**- It provides for the directive for development of the Hindi language.
- It shall be the duty of the Union to promote the spread of Hindi as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India.

What are the Eighth schedule languages?

- The Eighth Schedule to the Constitution consists of the following 22 languages.
- Of these languages, 14 were initially included in the Constitution.
- Sindhi language was added in 1967 while Konkani, Manipuri and Nepali were included in 1992.
- Subsequently Bodo, Dogri, Maithili and Santhali were added in 2004.
- English is not among the 22 languages in the 8th Schedule; it is one of the 99 non-scheduled languages.

What are Classical languages in India?

- Currently, six languages enjoy the Classical status
    - Tamil (declared in 2004)
    - Sanskrit (2005)
    - Kannada (2008)
    - Telugu (2008)
    - Malayalam (2013)
    - Odia (2014)
- Guidelines for declaring a language as 'Classical' are
    - High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years
    - A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers
    - The literary tradition be original and not borrowed from another speech community
    - The classical language and literature being distinct from modern, there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots
- Benefits of being notified as a Classical language are
    - Two major annual international awards for scholars of eminence in classical Indian languages
    - A Centre of Excellence for studies in Classical Languages is set up
    - The University Grants Commission is requested to create, to start with at least in the Central Universities, a certain number of Professional Chairs for the Classical Languages so declared

What languages are spoken widely in India?

- The 2011 linguistic census accounts for 121 mother tongues, including 22 languages listed in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution.
- Hindi is the most widely spoken, with 43.6% of the population declaring it as their mother tongue.
- The next highest is Bengali, mother tongue for 8% of the population.
- The share of Hindi in the population is rising in every succeeding census.
- **Reasons**
    - Hindi is the predominant language in some of India's most populous states, including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar.
    - A number of languages are bracketed under Hindi by census enumerators (the census has decided that Bhojpuri is Hindi)
- In terms of mother tongue, India had just 2.6 lakh English speakers in 2011.
- However, English was the second language of 8.3 crore respondents in 2011, next to Hindi's 13.9 crore.
- As second language, English is preferred over Hindi in parts of the Northeast.

References

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