

Classical Languages of India

Mains: *GS I - Indian Culture - Salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature*

Why in News?

Recently the classical language list of India has got a new addition.

What are the classical languages of India?

- **11 languages** - Tamil, Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Odia, Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese, and Bengali.



Pali 2024	Prakrit 2024	Bengali 2024	Marathi 2024	Assamese 2024
Odia 2014	Malayalam 2013	Kannada 2008	Telugu 2008	Sanskrit 2005
		Tamil 2004		

- **Criteria** - The Government of India has established the following criteria for a language to be classified as a Classical Language:
 - High antiquity of its early texts or recorded history, spanning a period of 1,500-2,000 years.
 - A body of ancient literature or texts that is considered heritage by generations of speakers.
 - Knowledge texts, especially prose texts, in addition to poetry, epigraphical and inscriptional evidence.
 - The Classical Language and its literature may be distinct from its current form or show discontinuity with later forms derived from the original.

Why classical language status matters?

- **Recognising the historical importance** - Recognising a language as Classical is a way of honouring and acknowledging its historical importance and profound impact on India's cultural and intellectual identity.
- **Preservation** - To protect and transmit ancient knowledge, philosophies, and values over thousands of years.
- **Ensuring the relevance** - This status not only enhances their prestige but also supports efforts to protect, promote, and further study these languages, helping to ensure they remain relevant in today's world.

What are the steps undertaken to promote classical languages?

- **CIIL** - The promotion of all Indian languages, including Classical Languages, is done through the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), part of the Language Bureau of Ministry of Education.
- **Special centres** - They have been set up for the study and promotion of the classical languages, either independently or under CIIL.
- **Central Sanskrit universities** - In 2020, three Central Universities were established through an Act of Parliament to promote the study of Sanskrit.
 - These are the Central Sanskrit University and Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri National Sanskrit University in New Delhi, and the National Sanskrit University in Tirupati.
 - Financial assistance is provided to Adarsh Sanskrit Mahavidyalayas and Shodha Sansthanas.
- **The Central Institute of Classical Tamil** - It has been established to promote and preserve classical Tamil literature.
- It facilitates the translation of ancient Tamil texts, supporting research, and providing courses for university students and scholars in Classical Tamil.
- The Central Institute of Classical Tamil at Chennai is doing extensive research relating to the classical phase of Tamil, from the early period to 600 A.D.
 - This includes texts like Tolkāppiyam - the most ancient extant Tamil grammar text, forty-one ancient Tamil Texts like Natrinai, Puranānūru, Kār Nārpatu and others.
- The Centre is engaging multidisciplinary scholars to study the antiquity of Tamil, carrying out researches on Dravidian comparative grammar and the study of Tamil dialects, creating Tamil Chairs in world-class Universities, providing Grant-in-Aid for short term research projects to Institutes and researchers, among its many activities.
- The Centre is also translating ancient Tamil texts into multiple Indian and foreign languages.
- Under this project Tirukkural has been translated into 28 Indian and over 30 world languages and also in Braille.

Braille is a tactile writing system used by people who are blind or have a visual impairment, created with a series of six raised dots that represent letters, numbers, and symbols.

- The Centre is publishing the classical Tamil texts into Braille and compiling a classical Tamil thesaurus.
- **Key Activities and Objectives of the Centres for Classical Languages**
 - Promote, propagate, and preserve India's Classical Languages and Literatures.
 - Research and Documentation.
 - Digitizing manuscripts in collaboration with State Museums and Archives.
 - Publishing books, research reports, and manuscript catalogues.
 - Translating classical texts into Indian and foreign languages.
 - Audio-Visual Documentation: Producing documentaries on eminent scholars and classical texts.
 - Promoting studies linking classical languages with epigraphy, archaeology, anthropology, numismatics, and ancient history.
 - Conducting epistemological studies linking classical heritage with indigenous knowledge systems.
- **The Centre of Excellence for Studies in Classical Telugu (CESCT)** - It has been set up under CIIL and operates from a campus at Venkatachalam, SPSR Nellore (Andhra Pradesh).
- It has compiled a database containing approximately 10,000 classical epics with detailed information.
 - This includes dramas, temples of Andhra and Telangana, village records etc.
- All Telugu inscriptions have been edited and compiled into a book titled "*Telugu Sasanaalu*" The first Telugu grammar, '*Andhra Sabda Chintamani*,' and the pioneering prosody work, '*Kavijanasramam*,' have been translated into English.
- **The Centre of Excellence for Studies in Classical Kannada (CESCK)** - It has been set up under CIIL and operates on the University of Mysuru campus, Mysuru.
- It has a dedicated library, cultural laboratory, and new conference facilities.
- The CESCK has initiated various programs like Roadmap Meetings and Dissemination of Classical Kannada through its Training Programmes.
- The Centre functions in *four foundational areas*
 - Research
 - Teaching
 - Documentation
 - Dissemination.
- It has published 7 books, and 22 more are ready for release.
- First musical notations '*Sankeerthana Lakshanam*' by poet-saint *Annamacharya*, which was originally written in Sanskrit, translated into Kannada.
- **The Centre of Excellence for Studies in Classical Odia (CESCO)** - It has been set up under CIIL and is located at the Eastern Regional Language Centre in Bhubaneswar.
- The Centre work to promote, propagate, and preserve the heritage of Classical Languages and Literatures, as well as to undertake and encourage research and documentation.
- It has undertaken projects based on sources of Classical languages like Odia, including analysis of inscriptions, linguistic study of mural paintings, archaeological remains, old palm leaf manuscripts, and compiling references from various ancient texts.
- **The Centre of Excellence for Studies in Classical Malayalam (CESCM)** - It has been set up under CIIL has been established at Thunchath Ezhuthachan Malayalam

University, Tirur, Malappuram, Kerala, provided by the state government.

What lies ahead?

- “Virasat Bhi, Vikas Bhi”—this inspiring mantra from Prime Minister of India captures the essence of balancing India’s rich heritage with progressive development.
- The country’s classical languages serve as living symbols of this vision, showcasing the intellectual and cultural treasures of our civilisation.
- Classical Languages status also reflects a profound recognition of the invaluable role these languages have played in shaping India’s intellectual heritage.
- The government’s efforts have enabled institutions, scholars, and young people to connect with our ancient traditions.
- By safeguarding these languages for future generations, the government is reinforcing a broader vision of cultural self-reliance and national integration, in line with the objectives of Atmanirbhar Bharat and a culturally rooted India.
- Through his dedication, India’s historic voices continue to echo in a modern, confident Bharat.

Reference

[PIB| Preserving the Languages](#)

