Right to Language

What is the issue?

The language data of the census are not made public by the government since 1961 census.

What is the problem with the language data?

- During the colonial times, language was treated as a 'sensitive' subject and was seen as a cause for breakdown of law and order.
- The information related to language data is handled by the Home Ministry.
- In 1961, a complete list of languages claimed during the Census as 'mother tongues' was disclosed as 1652.
- From 1971 onwards, the Census decided to disclose names only of those languages which had more than 10,000 speakers.
- The rationale behind this move was not specified.
- As a result, the list of 1971 had only 108 language names.
- 2001 language data put together several languages under a single category, undermining their diversity.
- The 2011 language data has not been released yet.

How significant is the 'right to its language'?

- UNESCO has been promoting the idea of language as an inalienable cultural right.
- It has already built it into the charter of sustainable development goals.
- India is a formal signatory to the charter.
- The community's right to its language becomes a non-negotiable right to cultural possession.
- Similarly, the state's obligation to secure and protect this right too becomes a non-negotiable duty.

Why knowing the language data is important?

- It is important for those who belong to the linguistically minority communities.
- It helps them to take necessary action to preserve their language.
- Longevity of multiple language is essential for maintaining the cultural diversity of the country.
- Imparting education to children through their mother tongue is scientifically considered to aid full development of their cognitive and emotive faculties.
- So the data will help the government to identify the needs of various regions so that it can provide supportive materials in their mother tongue.
- The neglect of a community's language and its language loss are among the most important reasons for induced migration.
- So the data will help in understanding the demographic transitions like language induced migration to avoid urban sprawl.

- Hence, the disclosure of data related to languages should be made as a primary obligation of the state.

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Source: The Hindu

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