Right to Language

What is the issue?

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

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What is the problem with the language data?

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

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

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