

# Endangered Languages in India

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Language loss has been a reality throughout history. Language loss is a serious matter and it is a socio-cultural shock. After the 1971 census, Indian government decided that any language spoken by less than 10,000 people need not be included in the official list of languages. Therefore, in India, all the languages that are spoken by less than 10,000 people are treated by the state as not worthy of mention and treated by the UNESCO as potentially endangered.

**In news:** Annual International Mother Language Day (IMLD) observed on 21 February

**Placing it in syllabus:** Society

## Dimensions

- What is this Report?
- Details of the Report
- Reasons for languages getting endangered
- What has the government been doing?
- Suggestions

## Content:

### What is this Report?

***UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger is intended to:***

- raise awareness about language endangerment.
- highlights the need to safeguard the world's linguistic diversity among policy-makers, speaker communities and the general public, and
- be a tool to monitor the status of endangered languages and the trends in linguistic diversity at the global level.

The aim of UNESCO's Endangered Languages Programme is to support communities, experts and governments by producing, coordinating and disseminating:

- tools for monitoring, advocacy, and assessment of language status and trends; and
- services such as policy advice, technical expertise and training, good practices and
- a platform for the exchange and transfer of skills.

### **The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**

- It is a specialised agency of the United Nations (UN) Headquartered in Paris, France
- aimed at promoting world peace and security through international cooperation in education, the sciences, and culture.
- It has 193 member states and 11 associate members, as well as partners in the nongovernmental, intergovernmental, and private sector.
- UNESCO was founded in 1945 as the successor to the League of Nations' International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation.
- UNESCO's activities have broadened over the years to include assisting in the translating and disseminating of world literature, establishing international cooperation agreements to secure World Heritage Sites of cultural and natural importance, defending human rights, bridging the worldwide digital divide, and creating inclusive knowledge societies through information and communication






### **Details of the Report:**

- It is estimated that, if nothing is done, half of the over 6,000 plus languages spoken today will disappear by the end of this century

- India has the highest number of languages – 197 languages- which were endangered, vulnerable or extinct as of 2017
- Out of these 5 languages were extinct, 42 critically Endangered, 7 severely endangered and 62 were definitely endangered and 81 were vulnerable
- Neary 60% of these languages originated in the Northeast and Andaman & Nicobar Islands
- More than half of endangered languages have fewer than 10000 speakers and therefore have not been recorded in the Indian Census
- India's language Census records only those languages with more than 10,000 speakers.
- As per the 2011 Census, the number of speakers reduced for 22 languages out of the 99 non-scheduled languages recorded.
- Examples of such languages would be Wadari, Kolhati, Golla, Gisari. These are languages of nomadic people in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Telangana.
- Then there several tribal languages as well, such as Pauri, Korku, Haldi, Mavchi.
- In Assam, there is Moran, Tangsa, Aiton.
- The Bo language in Andaman disappeared in 2010 and the Majhi language in Sikkim disappeared in 2015.

## Degree of Endangerment

- According to UNESCO, any language that is spoken by less than 10,000 people is potentially endangered.

Degree of endangerment	Intergenerational Language Transmission
safe	language is spoken by all generations: intergenerational transmission is uninterrupted >> not included in the Atlas
 vulnerable	most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g., home)
 definitely endangered	children no longer learn the language as mother tongue in the home
 severely endangered	language is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves
 critically endangered	the youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently
 extinct	there are no speakers left >> included in the Atlas if presumably extinct since the 1950s

## Reasons for languages getting endangered:

- A language disappears when its speakers disappear or when they shift to speaking another language – most often, a larger language used by a more powerful group.
- **Threat from External Sources:** Languages are threatened by external forces such as military, economic, religious, cultural or educational subjugation, or by internal forces such as a community's negative attitude towards its own language.
- **increased migration and rapid urbanization** often bring along the loss of traditional ways of life and a strong pressure to speak a dominant language that is – or is perceived to be – necessary for full civic participation and economic advancement.
- **Politico-economic and cultural subordination:** the social dominance by any group leads to the language of that group becoming more popular in that society. For instance, Sanskrit became popular in ancient India because of social domination by speakers of Sanskrit. Or English has become popular because of colonial rule.
- **Economic Benefits:** When a language becomes useful in a marketplace, that language gains greater currency. This makes mother tongues to be restricted to very few domains. there will be a change in the attitudes towards their mother tongue.
  - For instance, we in India speak one language at home, maybe another in office, but when we go to the market we might use neither.
  - For example in Delhi, you might use Punjabi or Bengali at home, English in the office, but in the marketplace, one tends to use the Hindi language.
- **Language Domination:** English and other major languages have become the language of knowledge and employability, as well as the primary language of the internet. The major content of the digital sphere is now in English, and, therefore, other languages have been marginalised.

## What happens when a language dies?

- When a language dies, its speakers decide to migrate.
- they migrate to another language and then they physically start migrating to another region.
- Their traditional livelihood patterns go down. They may have some special skills and that disappears.
- A unique way of looking at the world disappears. Every language is a unique worldview.

## What has the government been doing?

### ***SCHEME FOR PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION OF ENDANGERED LANGUAGES***

- The Government of India has initiated a Scheme known as “Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages of India”.
- It was instituted by Ministry of Education (Government of India) in 2013.
- The sole objective of the Scheme is to document and archive the country’s languages that have become endangered or likely to be endangered in the near future.
- The scheme is **monitored by Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL)** located in Mysuru, Karnataka.
- The CIIL has collaborated with various universities and institutes across India for this mission.
- At the moment, the languages which are spoken by less than 10,000 speakers or languages which are not linguistically studied earlier are chiefly considered to be documented in this Government of India scheme.
- Presently, 117 languages have been listed for the documentation.
- Documentation in the form of grammar, dictionary and ethno-linguistic profiles of about 500 lesser known languages are estimated to be accomplished in the coming

years.

## **Suggestions:**

- The most important thing that can be done to keep a language from disappearing is to create favourable conditions for its speakers to speak the language and teach it to their children.
- This often requires national policies that recognize and protect minority languages, education systems that promote mother-tongue instruction, and creative collaboration between community members and linguists to develop a writing system and introduce formal instruction in the language.
- Since the most crucial factor is the attitude of the speaker community toward its own language, it is essential to create a social and political environment that encourages multilingualism and respect for minority languages so that speaking such a language is an asset rather than a liability.
- Some languages now have so few speakers that they cannot be maintained, but linguists can, if the community so wishes, record as much of the language as possible so that it does not disappear without a trace.
- We need to create livelihood support for the speakers of the language.
- If they have livelihood available within their language, nobody would want to switch from their language to any other language.

**Mould your thought:** Why do languages disappear in India? What can be done to stop this trend?

### ***Approach to the answer:***

- Introduction
- Discuss the status of endangered languages in India
- Write about the reasons for disappearing languages

- Mention GoI efforts and other suggestions
- Conclusion