IGNCA's Language Atlas

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Why in News?

The **Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA)**, an autonomous institution under the **Ministry of Culture,** is planning a **linguistic survey** across India. The aim is to create a comprehensive 'Language Atlas' to showcase the linguistic diversity of the country.

How Linguistically Diverse is India?

- **Historical Census Records:**
  - The **first and most exhaustive Linguistic Survey of India (LSI)** was carried out by **Sir George Abraham Grierson** and published in **1928.**
  - The 1961 Census of India recorded 1,554 languages spoken in India.
    - The **Census of 1961 was the most detailed** with respect to linguistic data. In this Census, **even languages with a single speaker were included in the records.**
  - Since **1971, languages spoken by fewer than 10,000 individuals have been omitted** from the Indian Census, leaving the native tongues of **1.2 million people unrecorded.**
    - This exclusion disproportionately impacts tribal communities, whose languages are frequently absent from official records.
  - India now officially recognizes **22 languages listed in** Schedule 8 **of the Indian Constitution.**
    - 2011 Census data indicates that **97% of the population speaks one of these officially recognized languages.**
    - Additionally, there are **99 non-scheduled languages, according to the 2011 Census** and around 37.8 million people identify one of these languages as their mother tongue.
      - There are **121 languages which are spoken by 10,000 or more people in India.**
- **Multilingualism in India:**
  - India is one of the **most linguistically diverse countries in the world,** this diversity offers a **unique opportunity for Indians to be multilingual,** which means being able to use more than one language in communication.
    - According to the 2011 Census of India, **more than 25% of the population speaks two languages**, while about **7% speak three languages.**
    - Studies state that young Indians are more multilingual than their elder generation with about half the urban population aged 15 to 49 years speaking two languages.

What are the Key Highlights of the Proposed Linguistic Survey?

- The survey will focus on enumerating the number of languages and dialects in India, including those that are extinct or on the verge of extinction.
- It aims to collect data at both the state and regional levels, with plans to digitally archive audio recordings of all languages spoken.
- It also proposes to **digitally archive the audio recordings** of all the languages spoken.
- Stakeholders in the survey include **Ministries of Culture, Education, Tribal Affairs,** and others, along with various language communities.

What is the Importance of a Linguistic Survey?

- **Preservation of Cultural Heritage:**
  - Linguistic surveys help in identifying and documenting languages, dialects, and scripts, thereby preserving cultural heritage and linguistic diversity.
- **Policy Formulation:**
  - Data from linguistic surveys informs policymakers about the linguistic needs of different communities, facilitating the formulation of language-related policies in education, governance, and cultural affairs.
- **Education Planning:**
  - Knowledge about the languages spoken in different regions helps in designing educational programs that cater to diverse linguistic backgrounds, promoting inclusive education.
- **Community Empowerment:**
  - Linguistic surveys empower linguistic minorities and marginalised communities by recognizing and validating their languages, contributing to their socio-economic and cultural well-being.
- **Research and Documentation:**
  - Linguistic surveys serve as valuable resources for researchers, linguists, and anthropologists studying language evolution, dialectology, and the language contact phenomena.
- **Promotion of Multilingualism:**
  - By raising awareness about the richness of linguistic diversity, linguistic surveys promote multilingualism and foster a sense of pride in one's language and cultural identity.

What are the Constitutional Provisions Related to Language?

- **Eighth Schedule:**
  - The Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution lists the official languages **of India**. It includes **22 languages recognized as official languages.**
    - Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi,Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Bodo, Santhali, Maithili and Dogri.
  - The Eighth Schedule also includes **six classical languages** currently:
    - Tamil (declared in 2004), Sanskrit (2005), Kannada (2008), Telugu (2008), Malayalam (2013), and Odia (2014).
  - Part XVII of the Indian Constitution deals with the official languages of India in **Articles 343 to 351.**
- **Language of The Union:**
  - **Article 120:** Deals with the language to be used in Parliament.
  - **Article 210:** Similar to Article 120 but applies to the State Legislature.
  - **Article 343:** Declares **Hindi in Devnagari script as the official language of the Union.**
  - **Article 344:** Establishes a Commission and Committee of Parliament on official language.
- **Regional Languages:**
  - **Article 345:** Allows the state legislature to adopt any official language for the state.
  - **Article 346:** Specifies the official language for communication between states and between states and the Union.
  - **Article 347:** Allows the President to recognize any language spoken by a section of the

population of a state if demanded.

- **Special Directives:**
    - **Article 29:** It protects the **interests of minorities**. It states that any section of citizens with a **distinct language, script, or culture** has the right to preserve it.
        - The article ensures that no citizen can be denied admission to any educational institution funded by the State solely based on factors such as religion, race, caste, or language.
    - **Article 350:** Ensures that every person has the **right to submit a representation for the redress of any grievance in any language** used in the Union or the State.
        - **Article 350A**: Directs States to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the **mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children** belonging to linguistic minority groups.
        - **Article 350B:** Establishes a **Special Officer for linguistic minorities** appointed by the President, tasked with investigating matters relating to safeguards provided for linguistic minorities under the Constitution.

What are the Major Challenges to Linguistic Diversity of India?

- **Linguistic Hegemony:**
    - Th**e dominance of certain languages over others,** both politically and socially, poses a threat to linguistic diversity. Languages with greater political and economic power may overshadow minority languages, leading to their **decline and endangerment.**
    - One of the significant challenges to linguistic diversity in India is the perception of Hindi as a dominant language, leading to its imposition in non-Hindi speaking regions.
- **Identity Politics and Tensions:**
    - Linguistic diversity can sometimes fuel identity politics and tensions, leading to **conflicts between linguistic groups** over language policies and rights.
    - Attempts to impose or privilege certain languages may provoke resistance and **unrest among linguistic minorities, resulting in social discord.**
- **Lack of Preservation Efforts:**
    - Many indigenous and tribal languages face the **risk of extinction due to a lack of preservation efforts** and support from governments and institutions.
    - Without adequate documentation and revitalization efforts, these languages may disappear, resulting in the loss of cultural heritage and identity.
- **Inadequate Language Education Policies:**
    - Insufficient emphasis on promoting and preserving regional languages in education policies can lead to a **decline in proficiency and usage among younger generations.**
    - The focus on a limited number of languages in educational institutions may neglect the linguistic diversity present in the country.
- **Urbanisation and Globalisation:**
    - Rapid urbanisation, globalisation, and the **influence of dominant cultures** can contribute to the erosion of indigenous languages and cultures.
    - As **younger generations shift towards dominant languages and cultures,** there is a risk of losing traditional knowledge, customs, and cultural practices associated with regional languages.
- **Limited Access to Resources in Minority Languages:**
    - Minority languages often **lack resources such as literature, media, and technology** in their respective languages.
    - This limited access to resources hampers the development and preservation of minority languages, making them vulnerable to extinction.

Way Forward

- Implement policies that promote education in regional languages alongside Hindi and English. Encourage **multilingual education to ensure students** are proficient in their native language and a widely spoken language.
    - Review and revise educational policies to ensure support for multilingualism and the preservation of regional languages.
- Establish **standards for regional languages** and support efforts to document and preserve

endangered languages through oral history preservation, linguistic research, and digital archives.
  ◦ Empower **linguistic communities to take ownership of their languages**
    through **community-driven language revitalization projects.**

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following statements:(2021)

1. 21st February is declared to be the International Mother Language Day by UNICEF.
2. The demand that Bangla has to be one of the national languages was raised in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (b)

Q2. With reference to India, the terms 'Halbi, Ho and Kui' pertain to (2021)

(a) dance forms of Northwest India
(b) musical instruments
(c) pre-historic cave paintings
(d) tribal languages

Ans: (d)

Q.3 Which one of the following was given classical language status recently? (2015)

(a) Odia
(b) Konkani
(c) Bhojpuri
(d) Assamese

Ans: (a)

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