

## Diversity in India

### Language

India is one of the unique countries in the world that has the legacy of diversity of languages. The Constitution of India has recognised 22 official languages. Multilingualism is the way of life in India as people in different parts of the country speak more than one language from their birth and learn additional languages during their life time. Though officially there are 122 languages, Peoples Linguistic Survey of India has identified 780 languages, of which 50 are extinct in past five decades.

The twenty two languages that are recognised by the Constitution are: Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Kannada, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santhali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu are included in the Eighth Schedule of the constitution. Among these 22 languages, Sanskrit, Tamil and Kannada have been recognised as classical languages with special status and recognition by Government of India. The classical languages have written and oral history of more than 1000 years. In comparison to these, English is very young as it has the history of only 300 years.

In 1991 the Census of India listed 1576 mother tongues' with separate grammatical structures and 1796 speech varieties that is classified as other mother tongues'. In 1956 reorganisation of states in India was carried out with linguistic boundaries that had its own script. Sardar Vallab Bhai Patel, the then home minister played key role in formation and amalgamation of states based on linguistic attributes. The language policy of India has been pluralistic, giving priority to the use of mother tongue in administration, education and other fields of mass communication. The Language Bureau of Ministry of Human Resource Development is set up to implement and monitor the language policy.

Despite these efforts by the central government minority languages are under threat of extinction due to multiple causes. In Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the death of Boa, the last speaker of Bo language is one of those instances that have led to extinction of Bo language with the history of 70000 years. In recent years the language diversity is under threat as speakers of diverse languages are becoming rare and major languages are adopted after abandoning the mother tongues. The problem needs to be addressed at societal level, in which the communities have to take part in conservation of language diversity that is part of cultural wealth.

