



Is one language enough?

Context:

- New Education Policy and how it deals with the issues of language.

Development of National Language in Indonesia:

- Here, hundreds of languages were spoken across thousands of islands that now comprise the modern nations of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.
- **During Colonial rule**, Malay became an accepted language of communication as it was grammatically simple, non-hierarchical, and easier to learn than other regional languages.
- Over centuries of Colonial rule, **Malay had evolved** due to the need in maritime Southeast Asia for a lingua franca for trade and other exchanges.
- While negotiating independence from Dutch colonial rule, Indonesian nationalists decided that a **reformed version of Malay** (renamed **Bahasa Indonesia**) would become the official language.
- Bahasa Indonesia aimed to bring more than **300 ethnic groups together** with no one ethnic group, including the Javanese, overshadowing the rest.
- From the outset of its independence, Indonesia recognised the importance of avoiding the inequality that was likely to occur by imposing the language of one dominant ethnic group over others.

What was the debates in the Indian Constituent Assembly about Language?

- In contrast, the issue of adopting a national language could not be resolved when the Constituent Assembly began drafting India's Constitution.
- The adoption of a national language, the language in which the Constitution was to be written, and the language in which the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly were to be conducted were the main questions debated.
- On the one side were members from the Hindi-speaking provinces who argued for adopting Hindi as the sole national language
- One of the member (R.V. Dhulekar), declared "People who do not know Hindustani have no right to stay in India.... and those who do not know Hindi are not worthy to be members of this Assembly."
- To counter such an argument, a member of the Assembly from the south said "This kind of intolerance makes us fear that the strong Centre which we



need... will also mean the enslavement of people who do not speak the language of the Centre.”

How was the issue of National Language resolved then?

- Widespread resistance to the imposition of Hindi on non-native speakers, especially in Tamil Nadu, led to the passage of the **Official Languages Act of 1963**, which provided for the continued use of English for all official purposes.
- Hindi became the sole working language of the Union government by 1965 with the State governments free to function in the language of their choice.
- Meanwhile, the constitutional directive for the Union government to encourage the spread of Hindi was retained.
- Later, Hindi speakers from the IT, construction and other sectors began moving for jobs to the south which led to Hindi as the fastest growing language.

Loss of Languages:

- According to the 2001 Census, India has 30 languages that are spoken by more than a million people each.
- The Constitution lists 22 languages and protects them in the eighth schedule. Many languages are kept out of this schedule even if they deserve to be included.
- This includes Tulu which is spoken by over 1.8 million people and has inscriptions dating back to the 14th and 15th centuries.
- Hindi language came to replace prestige dialects such as Awadhi, Maithili and Braj. The literary value of these dialects diminished in due course.

Consequences:

- When a refined language loses its status in literary and daily interactions, the way of life associated with it also vanishes.
- If we don't protect and promote other well-evolved or endangered and indigenous languages, our future generations may end up never understanding their 'real' roots and culture.

Conclusion:

- Instead of focusing on one national language, one can try to learn a language beyond one's mother tongue and get to know a different way of life too.