



Topic: Diversity of India.

Safeguarding Tribal Languages

Introduction

- India epitomizes unity in diversity, and languages are a big part of our collective identity.
- According to UNESCO, any language that is spoken by less than 10,000 people is potentially endangered.

Endangered tribal languages

- In India, after the 1971 census, Government decided to not include any language spoken by less than 10,000 in the official list of languages.
- Such languages are treated by UNESCO as potentially endangered.
- According to the People's Linguistic Survey of India 2013, around 220 languages has been lost in the last 50 years and 197 has been categorised as Endangered.
- Examples of such languages would be Wadari, Kolhati, Golla, Gisari.

Importance of tribal languages

- The primary need to conserve any language is to conserve the cultures associated with them which include literature, food habits and lifestyle.
- A language is not just words. It's a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community.
- Tribal languages are fundamental to understand the world we live in, our origin and the roots that we all came from.
- An experience of generations is preserved in indigenous languages.
- Languages serve as the medium of transmitting cultures from one generation to the other.
- It is language that distinguishes one ethnic community from another.

Concerns / Challenges

- With a dying language die thousands of stories, millions of lessons, and a lifetime of experience.
- **A language's death is akin to erasing a part of our history.**
- With loss of their mother tongue, people find themselves unable to speak their first language.

Initiatives to Preserve Tribal Languages

- A local community radio channel called 'Asur Mobile Radio' in Jharkhand launched cultural programmes in the Asur language, which has only 7,000-8,000 speakers.
- The Government of India launched **Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages (SPPEL)** to document and archive the country's languages that have become endangered.

Way Forward

- Tribal languages should be endorsed through innovative, cultural and entertainment programmes.
- There is a need to promote tribal languages as a medium of communication and education in tribal-dominated districts.
- It is important to integrate indigenous knowledge systems alongside modern sciences in the curriculum of schools.
- There is a need to create livelihood support for the speakers of these language.
- Recording audio or video of folk songs/folk tales in different languages can help preserve not just the language/dialect but also the folk culture.
- The traditional knowledge about sustainable living, medicines, farming and architecture can also be documented for preservation.
- There is a need to set up departments in central universities to study the dying languages and work towards their promotion.
- Language departments in central universities can set up libraries or museums with audio and video material showing the oral traditions of these languages.
- Institutions like **Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL)** should take lead in studying and preparing materials in tribal languages.
- A healthy nexus and coordination between voluntary organisations, linguists, and the government is a must.