

A CASE FOR INCLUDING TULU IN THE EIGHTH SCHEDULE

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Indian Constitution - Amendments, Schedules, and Important Articles

According to the 2001 Census, India has 30 languages that are spoken by more than a million people each. Additionally, it has 122 languages that are spoken by at least 10,000 people each. It also has 1,599 languages, most of which are dialects. These are restricted to specific regions and many of them are on the verge of extinction. India must accommodate this plethora of languages in its cultural discourse and administrative apparatus.

Article 29 of the Constitution provides that a section of citizens having a distinct language, script or culture have the right to conserve the same. Whose burden is it to conserve the distinct language, script or culture of such a section of citizens? Does it fall on the state or the citizens concerned? Actually, both the state and the citizens have an equal responsibility to conserve the distinct language, script and culture of a people.

Among the legion of languages in India, the Constitution has 22 blue-eyed languages. They are protected in Schedule VIII of the Constitution. But many languages that are kept out of this favoured position are in some ways more deserving to be included in the Eighth Schedule. For example, Sanskrit, an Eighth Schedule language, has only 24,821 speakers (2011 Census). Manipuri, another scheduled language, has only 17,61,079 speakers. However, many unscheduled languages have a sizeable number of speakers: Bhili/Bhilodi has 1,04,13,637 speakers; Gondi has 29,84,453 speakers; Garo has 11,45,323; Ho has 14,21,418; Khandeshi, 18,60,236; Khasi, 14,31,344; and Oraon, 19,88,350.

Tulu is a textbook example of linguistic discrimination. Tulu is a Dravidian language whose speakers are concentrated in two coastal districts of Karnataka and in Kasaragod district of Kerala. Kasaragod district is called '*Sapta bhasha Samgama Bhumi* (the confluence of seven languages)', and Tulu is among the seven. The Census reports 18,46,427 native speakers of Tulu in India. The Tulu-speaking people are larger in number than speakers of Manipuri and Sanskrit, which have the Eighth Schedule status. Robert Caldwell (1814-1891), in his book, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of Languages*, called Tulu as "one of the most highly developed languages of the Dravidian family".

The present-day Tulu linguistic majority area is confined to the region of Tulu Nadu, which comprises the districts of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi in Karnataka and the northern part of Kasaragod district of Kerala up to the river Payaswani, or Chandragiri. The cities of Mangaluru, Udupi and Kasaragod are the epicentres of Tulu culture.

At present, Tulu is not an official language in India or any other country. Efforts are being made to include Tulu in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. If included in the Eighth Schedule, Tulu would get recognition from the Sahitya Akademi. Tulu books would be translated into other recognised Indian languages. Members of Parliament and MLAs could speak in Tulu in Parliament and State Assemblies, respectively. Candidates could write all-India competitive examinations like the Civil Services exam in Tulu.

The Yuelu Proclamation, made by the UNESCO at Changsha, The People's Republic of China, in 2018, says: "The protection and promotion of linguistic diversity helps to improve social inclusion and partnerships, helps to reduce the gender and social inequality between different native speakers, guarantee the rights for native speakers of endangered, minority, indigenous

languages, as well as non-official languages and dialects to receive education, enhance the social inclusion level and social decision-making ability by encouraging them to participate in a series of actions to promote cultural diversity, endangered language protection, and the protection of intangible cultural heritage...”

India has a lot to learn from the Yuelu Proclamation. Placing of all the deserving languages on equal footing will promote social inclusion and national solidarity. It will reduce the inequalities within the country to a great extent. So, Tulu, along with other deserving languages, should be included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution in order to substantially materialise the promise of equality of status and opportunity mentioned in the Preamble.

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