Editorial Desk

Preserving Indian Languages and Ancient Scripts through Language Documentation and Digital Archiving

Unity in diversity is one of the most distinctive features of Indian civilisation. From Jammu & Kashmir to Kanyakumari, every region portrays different customs, cultural traditions, and mother tongues. India is a country of multiple languages and ancient scripts. According to the 2011 census report, 1950 mother tongues were spoken/in use in India. Under Article 344 of the Indian Constitution, only 15 languages were initially recognised as the official language. The 21st Constitution Amendment gave Sindhi the official language status. Based on the 71st constitution amendment, the Nepali, Konkani, and Manipuri languages were also included in the above list. Later, by the 92nd Constitution Amendment Act, 2003, four new languages Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, and Santhali, were included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Thus, now 22 languages have been given the status of official language in the Indian Constitution. The total number of people speaking these 22 languages in India is 90 per cent. Apart from these 22 languages, English is also the official language and is also the official language of Mizoram, Nagaland, and Meghalaya. In all, 60 languages are being taught in schools in India.

As per the census of 2001, there are 1635 rationalised mother tongues, 234 identifiable mother tongues, and 22 major languages. Of these, 29 languages have more than a million native speakers, 60 have more than 100,000, and 122 have more than **10,000** native speakers.

The Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India stated that since a household can have people related to or unrelated to or related to a blood relationship, it is necessary to ask every person about their mother tongue. Every household member needs not to have the same mother tongue. As per Census 2011, the total number of identifiable mother tongues arrived at is 121, the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, said. These 121 languages may be divided into two parts. Part I, 22 official languages account for the mother tongue of 96.72 per cent Indians, and Part II consists of all other 99 mother tongues with less than 10,000 speakers at the all-India level or was not identifiable based on the linguistic information available (PRUTHI).

As per Table 1, it is clear that we had lost about half the mother tongues in 10 years, i.e., 2001- 2011. So there is an urgent need to preserve and protect the rich linguistic diversity of India.

MANUSCRIPTOLOGY AND PALEOGRAPHY

Vedic and classical Sanskrit literature has inspired the entire world with its wisdom and science from primeval periods

Table 1. Scheduled language in descending order of speakers' strength - 2011

Language	Persons who returned the language as their mother tongue	Percentage to total population
2	3	4
Hindi	52,83,47,193	43.63
Bengali	9,72,37,669	8.03
Marathi	8,30,26,680	6.86
Telugu	8,11,27,740	6.70
Tamil	6,90,26,881	5.70
Gujarati	5,54,92,554	4.58
Urdu	5,07,72,631	4.19
Kannada	4,37,06,512	3.61
Odia	3,75,21,324	3.10
Malayalam	3,48,38,819	2.88
Punjabi	3,31,24,726	2.74
Assamese	1,53,11,351	1.26
Maithili	1,35,83,464	1.12
Santali	73,68,192	0.61
Kashmiri	67,97,587	0.56
Nepali	29,26,168	0.24
Sindhi	27,72,264	0.23
Dogri	25,96,767	0.21
Konkani	22,56,502	0.19
Manipuri	17,61,079	0.15
Bodo	14,82,929	0.12
Sanskrit	24,821	N

to the present era. Prominent Research Institutes and scholars have also endorsed that it is essential to research the extensive knowledge elaborated in ancient Sanskrit Texts. Furthermore, several Indian and foreign research institutes are doing pervasive research in Indian traditional Knowledge Systems and sciences. Those who intend to know the efficacy of these texts are giving special prominence to Sanskrit Teachings. The accumulated knowledge of traditional science and wisdom embedded in these manuscripts can be utilised to prosper humanity. This also precisely substantiates the significance of Sanskrit Manuscripts . These Sanskrit manuscripts are vast repositories of empirical knowledge of our ancestors. Many thousands of years ago, Indian culture, civilisation, and all its learnings existed in the Sanskrit language. Such as - four Vedas (Rig, Yajus, Sāma, Atharva), Upanishads, Six Vedāṅgas (Śikṣā, Vyākaraṇa, Kalpa, Nirukta, Chanda, Jyautiṣa), Six Darśanas

(Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Vedānta, Mīmāṃsā), Dharmaśāstra, Āgama, Tantra, Mantra, Yantra, Vijñāna, Jyotiṣa, Gaṇita, Vāstu, Śilpa, Bhūgola, Kalā, Saṃgīta, Nāṭya, Kṛṣi, Āyurveda, Dhanurveda, Gāndharvaveda, Kauṭilya, Arthaśāstra, Mānavaśāstra, Nītiśāstra, Ādhyātmavidyā, etc. These disciplines are still accessible in the Sanskrit language. The root of Indian culture is inherent in these texts. These texts decipher the significance of our oriental Sanskrit learning and inheritance. To preserve this national pride, promoting Sanskrit and Indian culture is inevitable.

'Sanskṛtiryasya Sa Jīvati' According to this, the nation whose culture survives is also always alive and persistently growing. 'Bhāratasya Pratiṣṭhe Dve Sanskṛtaṃ Sanskṛtistathā' Indian culture and Sanskrit both are differentiae of India's pride. The traditional culture of India is still alive in these manuscripts. These manuscripts are the primordial chronological sources of our heritage, social, and religious studies, essential for research. Millions of manuscripts preserved in the ancient universities like Taxila, Nalanda, etc. were destroyed during the medieval period. Even though our ancestors made every endeavor to keep them protected, as a result of which millions of these manuscripts are still safe in our country and abroad.

In India, millions of unpublished valuable handwritten texts are available based on diverse subjects. The pattern of writing these manuscripts is also many such as Tadpatra, Bhojpatra, Sanchipatra, Tulapatra, Agurucharm, Pashuharm, Clothing, Wood, Gold-Silver-Copper metal, Ivory, Handmade and machine-made Paper, Stone and Clay, etc.

Due to the lack of proper protection of these manuscripts, the protected Indian cultural heritage is becoming endangered. Therefore, it is our utmost responsibility to realise this textual tradition's value and encourage and inspire researchers to research and edit these manuscripts. Thus, understanding various scripts such as Brahmi, Sharda, Modi, etc. is essential. There are very few scholars who can read and write these ancient scripts. So there is urgent need for language documentation as well education and training on these scripts. The one year PG Diploma in Manuscriptology & Paleography (PGDMP) has been started by Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts to train a new generation of scholars. In this course, scripts such as Brahmi, Granth, Sharda, Newari, Nandinagari, Maithili, Takri, Modi, Tiglari, and Tibetan, etc. are being taught.

HOW TO PRESERVE LANGUAGES?

Language documentation is one of the essential ways to preserve languages and scripts. As per (Austin), "Language documentation, also known as documentary linguistics, is the subfield of linguistics that deals with creating multipurpose records of languages through audio and video recording of speakers and signers and with annotation, translation, preservation, and distribution of the resulting materials. It shows by its nature multidisciplinarity and draws on theoretical concepts and methods from linguistics, ethnography, folklore studies, psychology, information, and library science, archiving and museum studies, digital humanities, media and recording arts, pedagogy, ethics, and other research areas. Its major goal is the creation of well-organised, long-lasting corpora that can be used for a variety of purposes, including theoretical research

and practical needs such as language and cultural revitalisation". In the current situation, it is challenging to keep all languages alive. However, it is essential to do language documentation and digitally Archive these languages. So in the future, using documented language resources, someone can learn these languages. In India, there is hardly any awareness of language documentation and archiving. Therefore, this is a special issue of DJLIT, a unique and first step in the right direction to create awareness of language documentation and archiving. Language documentation and archiving involve multiple stakeholders, i.e., linguists, Librarians, and IT Professionals.

There was an excellent response to the call for papers for Special Issue on Language Documentation and Archiving of DESIDOC Journal of Library and Information Technology (DJLIT). A total of about 13 Papers were received for the special issue. Based on the review and relevancy of the particular theme, the following six papers have been selected for publication in the special issue on Language Documentation and Archiving.

- The research paper entitled "Language Analysis in Library OPAC-Designing an Open Source Software based Framework for Bibliographic Records in Mainstream and Tribal Languages" discusses issues concerning language Documentation of some tribal languages, especially Santali. This paper has provided an overview of enhancing OPAC through language analysis with a special reference to tribal languages.

- The Paper entitled "Recognizing Devanagari Script by Deep Structure Learning of Image Quadrants" has presented various aspects related to the use of the neural network for recognizing Devnagari Script from images. It also discusses digitisation of Devnagari scripts using artificial intelligence.

- The review paper entitled "Digital Archiving of Manuscripts" presents a study of digital archiving of manuscripts in Kunda Kunda Gyan Peeth, Indore. The study has presented various advantages and disadvantages of digitisation and digital archiving of ancient manuscripts, based on a user survey.

- The paper entitled "Exploring ArchivesSpace: An Open Source Solution for Digital Archiving" discusses the application and usefulness of an open-source solution of digital archiving, namely ArchivesSpace. The study is an attempt to use ArchiveSpace for Language Documentation and Digital Archiving.

- The paper entitled "Documentation of Tai Ahom manuscripts: Digital Archiving of a dead language" talks about digital archiving of TAI AHOM Language manuscripts. It is an attempt to preserve the contents of a dead language. Along with the language documentation, digital preservation of concerned language contents are also necessary for language documentation and digital archiving.

- The Paper entitled "Made in India-SiDHELA India's first endangered language archive" presents details about Sikkim and Darjiling Himalaya Endangered languages (SiDHELA) created by the Centre for Endangered Languages Sikkim University. This is the first endangered

language archives created in India. The Paper primarily intends to create awareness about, particularly endangered languages. This may also be useful to the research scholars working with endangered languages in the above regions.

- The paper entitled "Sustainable Digital Preservation and Access of Heritage Knowledge in India: A Review" evaluates scholarly literature and analyses it to understand the application of standards for digitisation, access, and preservation in the digital process by Indian institutions.

This special issue also contains some general papers received for the Journal. This is essential to maintain the regular inclusion of various contributions received from LIS professionals in India and abroad.

- Another paper by Wulff discusses the implementation and development of Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC) standards for Spanish Oceanography, as they have become a domain of application in spatial data repositories and, marine data literacy.
- The paper by Divya & Haneefa dwells upon the factors influencing digital reading behavior of students from the teaching departments of the Universities in Kerala.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Alka Suri, Director, DESIDOC, for appointing me as the Guest Editor and having faith in me to bring out this special issue of DJLIT on Language Documentation. I am grateful to all contributors for their special contribution to the Journal. I am not an expert on Language Documentation as I am still learning from experiences about this very complex and challenging subject. I am sure the articles published in this issue would help libraries, archives, and various universities and institutions working towards the preservation and protection of Indian Languages in India in particular and other parts of the world in general. Once again, I thank you all. Special thanks to the editorial team of DJLIT.

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