

India writes in many languages and speaks in many more voices. And yet, communication has never broken down in this sub-continent. With about 2.4% of the world's land surface and a total of 16% of the world's population (*India: A Country Study* by James Heitzman and Robert L. Worden eds. Federal Research Division; 1995), India houses according to one estimate, 1,652 "mother-tongues" – including 103 foreign mother tongues (Census 1961 & Nigam 1972: p. xv).

Writing came to India much earlier than many other civilizations – from the days of the Indus Valley Civilization, by over four thousand years ago, and the space has also witnessed emergence of some of the great writing systems like the *Brāhmī* and the *Kharosthī* – dating back to roughly 500 B.C. Today, India is a space with perhaps the largest base of books, authors and publication houses with about at least 70,000 new titles published every year, enjoyed by over 600 million readers of books in India.

*Read on to know more about Indian languages*

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## **1. The Indian Linguistic Space**

The earliest form of speech in India were reflected in the texts such as *Rig-Veda*, the *Brahmanas*, and the *Upanishads* - the oldest preserved treatises from which the Indian "literary" traditions of verse have sprung. The earliest works were composed to be sung or recited, and were orally transmitted for many generations before being written down. The oldest among them are the thousand-odd hymns of the *Rig-vedas* dating back to two millenium B.C. , composed in what is called the Vedic Sanskrit. The *Vedas*, which derived from the root *vid* - "to know", tried capturing knowledge that came from the quest for the unknown.

The Indian literary tradition demonstrated that early Indian creative writers interacted very closely with critical thinkers, and a very rich interpretive tradition developed just as they excelled in literary creativity in a number of genres – beginning from poetry and in

its epic form to story-telling as well as to the dramas. While a lot of these early texts dabbled with the idea of the 'sacred', even the most revered texts like the Vedas demonstrated that there were streaks of both in its body.

The early literary theoreticians could identify different sentiments being reflected in these writings, which have been trend-setters in world literature in many ways.

The Indian linguistic space, as it exists today in truncated form in the South Asian sub-continent – after its independence in 1947, has been a new geo-political identity. But India has, in all ages, been a concept – more true on the mental map than being a physical reality. At the same time, she has also contributed to numerous ideas that form the basis of modern-day knowledge-based society.

## **2. Mother-Tongues and Languages**

There are different theories about how many of these mother-tongues qualify to be described as independent languages. Even Sir George Grierson's twelve-volume *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903-1923) – material for which was collected in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, had identified 179 languages and 544 dialects. One of the early Census reports also showed 188 languages and 49 dialects (1921 census).

Out of these mother-tongues, 184 (Census 1991) or at least, 112 (Census 1981 figure) had more than 10,000 speakers. There are other estimates that would put the number higher or lower; For instance, the encyclopaedic *People of India* series of the Anthropological Survey of India, identified 75 "major languages" out of a total of 325 languages used in Indian households. *Ethnologue*, too reports India as a home for 398 languages, including 387 living and 11 extinct languages. Most importantly, as early as in the 1990s, India was reported to have 32 languages with one million or more speakers.

The *People of India* also reports that there are 25 writing systems in India that are in active use as in 1990s. The results of a 1989-survey titled '*The Written Languages of The World : A Survey of the Degree and Modes of Use (2. INDIA, Book 1, Constitutional Languages, Book 2, Non-Constitutional Languages)*' conducted by P.Padmanabha , B.P.Mahapatra , V.S.Verma , G.D.McConnell (Office of the Registrar General, India, Laval University Press) showed that there are at least 50 Indian languages in which writing and publishing are done in substantial quantity.

## **3. The Writing Systems**

### **3.1. The Indus Valley Script**

*The Indus Valley Script* was a product of the now well-known Indus Valley Civilization. The greater Indus region was home to the largest of the four ancient urban civilizations, others being the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Chinese civilizations. Most of its ruins remain to be fully excavated and studied, as nothing was known about this civilization until 1920s. What is more, the ancient Indus script has not yet been deciphered – although there have been many claims and counter-claims.

The samples of Indus Valley Script are huge - about 1000 settlements spreading all of modern Pakistan, and parts of India and Afghanistan. But the main corpus of writing include 2,000 inscribed brief seals and tablets of 6 to 26 symbols each which are still undeciphered. There are several competing theories about the language which the Indus script represents. But it appears that there was an equally strong multi-racial and multi-lingual existence then which has further contributed to the difficulties in decipherment.

### 3.2. The *Brāhmī* Script

There were many other systems of writing but none had as far reaching effect as the ***Brāhmī* script**. George Bühler in his 1895-98 work, entitled *Sitzungsberichte der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien*, (Philologisch-historische Classe 132, no.5, 1895. 2nd revised ed.: Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1898; Rept Varanasi, 1963) had conjectured that one of the earliest writing systems in India, the *Brāhmī* script had perhaps originated as far back as in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.

Some trace *Brāhmī* to Indus Script. But the Harappan ended by 1900 BC & the first Brahmi and Kharoshthi inscriptions date to roughly 500 BC. It is difficult to explain the gap.

Brahmi is a "syllabic alphabet", meaning that each character carries a consonant plus a neutral vowel "a", like Old Persian, but unlike it, *Brāhmī* uses the same consonant with extra strokes to combine with different vowels.

Bühler argued for a Phoenician script, although some other specialists like Dinger thought of an Aramaic origin of *Brāhmī*. There are controversies as to whether one should accept what the studies of Fussman, von Hinüber, and Falk concluded, namely that this script was only datable from the time of Ashoka, or whether – as many Indian epigraphists argued, its dates could be pushed back much further.

### 3.3. The *Kharosthī* Script

The *Kharosthi* Script was almost contemporarily with the *Brāhmī*, and it appeared by 3rd c. BC in northern Pakistan and east Afghanistan. Some examples of Kharosthi are also found in India.

Kharosthi was used primarily for the Prakrit dialect of Gandhari. In structure & sequence, Kharosthi and *Brāhmī* are similar, except that *Brāhmī* had different signs for different initial vowels, but it used the same marks that change vowels in Consonant-Vowel combinations, and while *Brāhmī* had long and short vowel signs, Kharosthi had only one. Kharosthi Script fell out of use by the 3rd or 4th century A.D.

### 3.4. Modern-day Writing Systems

Although Indian writing systems number at least 25 in a recent survey, the major scripts are 14, out of which 12 originated from the *Brāhmī*. Like the Greek alphabet, it had many local variants and gave rise to many Asian scripts - Burmese, Thai, Tibetan, etc. Emperor Asoka inscribed his laws as well as Lord Buddha's teachings onto columns in Brahmi.

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#### 4. Indian States and Multilingualism

India houses about 1.1 billion people with a population growth rate of 1.6% a year. As per Census 2001 statistics, India is administratively organized into 35 entities, each as big as many independent nations. There are 28 States and seven Union Territories, broadly set up on the linguistic principle.

Currently, India has 51 Cities, 384 Urban Agglomerates and 5,161 Towns (2,843 in 1951) in India, with about 26.1% of its total population. However, most Indians still live in rural areas and in small towns with different linguistic practices, and with scanty knowledge of English.

Each Indian state also happens to be pluri-cultural, besides showing a great degree of multilingualism as the following table would show:

<b>Se t</b>	<b>STATES</b>	<b>MAJOR LANGUAGE</b>	<b>OTHER LANGUAGES WITH SIGNIFICANT POPULATION</b>
A.	Kerala	Malayalam (96.6%)	Tamil, Kannada
	Punjab	Punjabi (92.2%)	Hindi, Urdu
	Gujarat	Gujarati (91.5%)	Hindi, Sindhi
	Haryana	Hindi (91.0%)	Punjabi, Urdu
	U.P.	Hindi (90.1%)	Urdu, Punjabi
	Rajasthan	Hindi (89.6%)	Bhili, Urdu
	H.P.	Hindi (88.9%)	Punjabi, Kinnauri
	Tamil Nadu	Tamil (86.7%)	Telugu, Kannada
	West Bengal	Bangla (86.0%)	Hindi, Urdu
B.	A.P.	Telugu (84.8%)	Urdu, Hindi
	M.P.	Hindi (85.6%)	Bhili, Gondi
	Bihar	Hindi (80.9%)	Urdu, Santali
	Orissa	Oriya (82.8%)	Hindi, Telugu
	Mizoram	Lushai (75.1%)	Bangla, Lakher
C.	Maharashtra	Marathi (73.3%)	Hindi, Urdu
	Goa	Konkani (51.5%)	Marathi, Kannada
	Meghalaya	Khasi (49.5%)	Garo, Bangla
	Tripura	Bangla (68.9%)	Tripuri, Hindi
D.	Karnataka	Kannada (66.2%)	Urdu, Telugu
	Sikkim	Nepali (63.1%)	Bhotia, Lepcha
	Manipur	Manipuri (60.4%)	Thadou, Tangkhul
E.	Assam	Assamese (57.8%)	Bangla, Boro
	Arunachal	Nissi (19.9%)	Nepali, Bangla
	Nagaland	Ao (14.0%)	Sema, Konyak

#### 5. The Linguistic Recognition

As of today, the Indian constitution recognizes 22 major languages of India in what is known as "the 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule" of the Constitution. They also happen to be the major literary languages in India, with a considerable volume of writing in them. They include, besides Sanskrit, the following 21 modern Indian languages: Assamese, Bangla, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Kannada, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Santali, Sindhi, and Urdu.

Originally, only 14 languages were included in the 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Indian constitution. Bodo, Dogri, Konkani, Maithili, Manipuri, Nepali, Santali and Sindhi were recognized later. The first Prime Minister of India, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru had made this comment about the recognition of languages: 'The makers of our Constitution were wise in laying down that all the 13 or 14 languages' were to be national languages. There is no question of anyone language being more a national language than the others...' (Kumaramangalam 1965).

The languages listed in this Schedule had acquired different names at different stages. They are better known as the *Scheduled languages* now.

The Minorities Commission Report, and The Official Language Resolution (3) of 1968 considered languages listed in the Schedule as *major languages* of the country. The 'Programme of Action' document 1992 on National Policy on Education, 1986, considered them as *Modern Indian Languages*.

Besides the Scheduled languages, the Indian Census did record 1,576 rationalized languages as well as 1,796 other mother-tongues.

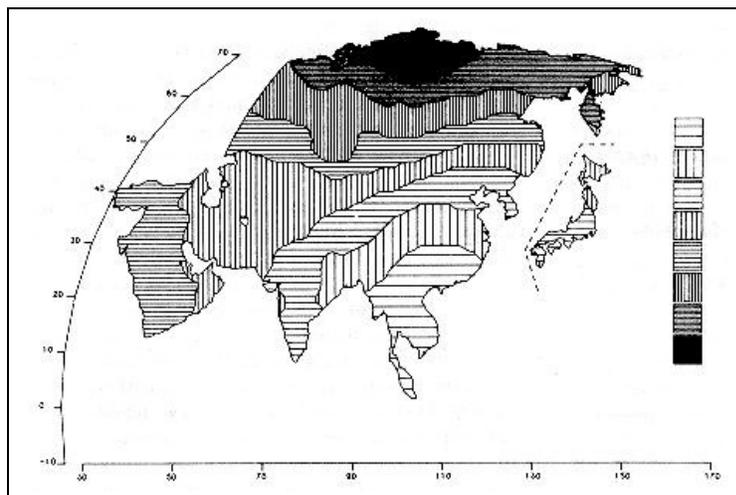
The highest literary awards in the country are given in 24 literary languages in India by the National Academy of Letters, called the '*Sahitya Akademi*', but newspapers and periodicals – 3,592 in number, are published in 35 Indian languages every year. There are only 69 to 72 languages that are taught in schools in India in some capacity, but again the radio network beams programmes in 146 languages and dialects.

By 1960s, 87.13% of Indians spoke languages already included (by 1960s) in the 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

Having recognized the importance of English as an instrument of knowledge-dissemination as well as commerce as well as maintenance of international relations, a provision was left to extend the use of English language in the Article 343 on 'Official language of the Union' - "for all the official purposes of the Union" even after "a period of fifteen years," with a proviso that "the President may, during the said period, by order authorize the use of the Hindi language in addition to the English language and of the Devanagari form of numerals for any of the official purposes of the Union".

## 6. Language Families in India

It is estimated that there have been great movements of people and races that made it possible for India to be the home for so many ethnic groups. The expansions of Europeoid peoples (probably Tocharians) possibly started around 3800 years ago. And, perhaps 1000 years (or more) earlier, Indo-European speakers from the oases south of the Urals, north of the Black Sea and in western Kazakstan moved in western and in eastern directions, and finally moved to the south, mixing with (presumably) Dravidian or the other original inhabitants of the South Asian region.



Languages spoken in the South Asian region belong to at least four major language families: Indo-European (most of which belong to its sub-branch Indo-Aryan), Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, and Sino-Tibetan. Almost one third of our mother-tongues (574 languages) belonged to the Indo-Aryan family of languages - spoken by 73.30% of Indians.

The Dravidian languages, 153 in number, form the second major linguistic group of the country (24.47 per cent).

Less than one per cent, 0.73 per cent, of the total population of the country speaks the languages belonging to the Tibeto-Burman subfamily, including the lone language Khampti, which belongs to the Siamese-Chinese subfamily of the Sino-Tibetan/Tibeto-Chinese family. The number of Sino-Tibetan languages stood at 226.

The languages belonging to the Austro-Asiatic family of languages, 65 in number, accounted for a total number of 6.19 million speakers, and on top of it all, 530 were still recorded as unclassified languages.

In fact, South Asia has been recognized in the serious literature on historical linguistics as one entity, not only because of the movement and admixture of ethnic groups that we talked about, but also in terms of genetic gradation of Asian people, along-side the linguistic classifications, which will make the north-south division evident (ref: *History and Geography of Human Genes, Chapt 4* by Menozzi, Piazza and Cavalli-Sforza).

It was the discovery of surprising similarities of structure and function that the South Asian languages have developed because of shared cultural space that has been vibrant and interactive over several millennia that prompted scholars like Murrey B. Emeneau to come up with the concepts like '*India as a linguistic area*' (1958). This essential unity of divergent languages of India has made it possible to make Indian languages a very fertile ground for creative and critical minds.

### **6.1. The Indo-Aryan Languages**

The largest chunk of languages and mother tongues belong to the Indo-Aryan sub-family of Indo-European languages. The immediate predecessor of Indo-Aryan happens to be Indo-Iranian, the oldest specimens of which are available in the Zend-Avesta.

Among the modern Indo-Aryan languages, Hindi and Bangla happen to be the most well-known languages internationally. Hindi of course has about 49 varieties, and is spread over a vast tract in North India.

The Western Hindi is a Midland Indo-Aryan language, spoken in the Gangetic plain and in the region immediately to its north and south. Around it, on three sides, are Panjabi, Gujarati, Rajasthani.

The Eastern Hindi is spoken in Oudh and to its south. In the outer layer, we get languages such as Kashmiri, Lahnda, Sindhi, Gujarati, Marathi, in the northern and the western region, and Oriya, Maithili, Bengali and Assamese in the east.

### **6.2. The Dravidian Languages**

The actual word '*Dravidian*' was first used by Robert A. Caldwell, who introduced the Sanskrit word *Dravida*. Among Dravidian languages, besides the four internationally known languages spread in many parts of the world, there are 26 Dravidian languages

by the current count, of which 25 are spoken in India and one (Brahui) is spoken in Baluchistan on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Spoken by more than 300 million people in south Asia, the antiquity of Dravidian languages is largely due to the rich grammatical and linguistico-literary tradition of Classical Tamil<sup>1</sup>.

Even other major Dravidian languages, namely, Malayalam, Kannada, and Telugu – possess independent scripts and literary histories dating from the pre-Christian era.

The smaller Dravidian languages include Kolami-Naiki, Parji-Gadaba, Gondi, Konda, Manda-Kui, Kodagu, Toda-Kota, and Tulu, etc.<sup>2</sup>

The Northern Group is the smallest: Brahui, Malto and Kudukh. The Central Group of Dravidian languages seem to be most widespread: Gondi, Konda, Kui, Manda, Parji, Gadaba, Kolami, Pengo, Naiki, Kuvi and Telugu.

The 'Southern Group' includes Tulu, Kannada, Kodagu, Toda, Kota, Malayalam and Tamil.

### **6.3. The Austric Family**

The Austric family of languages is divided into two branches, Austroasiatic and Austronesian, the latter formerly called Malayo-Polynesian. They are spoken in India, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands.

The Austroasiatic branch has three sub-branches: Munda, Mon-Khmer, and Vietnamese-Muong, out of which the first one is located in India.

The Munda languages in India are spoken in the eastern and southern parts of India. The well-known Munda languages include the following: Santali, Mundri, Bhumij, Birhar, Ho, Tri, Korku, Khari, Juang, and Savara, etc. The Munda speakers are found mostly in the hills and jungles, while the plains and valleys have some pockets inhabited by people speaking these languages. There are accordingly some Aryanized tribes in northern India (like Cheros in Bihar and Chota Nagpur, and the Kherwars in the Mirzapur area) who have formerly belonged to the Munda stock.

### **6.4. The Tibeto-Burman Languages**

The Tibeto-Burman family is a part of Sino-Tibetan languages, spread over a large area - from Tibet in the north to Burma in the south, and from the Ladakh wathrat of the state of Jammu & Kashmir in the west to the Chinese provinces of Sze-chuen and Yunnan in the east.

Lepcha, Sikkimese, Garo, Bodo, Manipuri, and Naga are some of the better-known Tibeto-Burman languages. Besides a few that are close to Tibetan, the South Himalayan languages spoken from Lahul in the west (Himachal Pradesh) to Bhutan in the east are quite distinct.

Bodo and Tipra sub-groups are now well-known, and so are the Naga languages.

The Kuki-Chin languages as well as Lushai and Manipuri fall somewhere in between these extreme sub-families.

### **6.5. Other Languages**

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<sup>1</sup> Annamalai, E. Review of Bh.Krishnamurti's 'The Dravidian Languages'; In *Frontline*, Volume 20 - Issue 22, October 25 - November, 07, 2003

<sup>2</sup> *The Dravidian Languages* by Bhadriraju Krishnamurti; Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (South Asian edition), 2003

Several smaller languages that cannot easily be fit into any of the above large families such as Burushaski in the North-West are language isolates. Then there are separate families<sup>3</sup> like Andamanese which would include quite a few diverse languages in the Andamans, and one could possibly also add six odd languages spoken in 22 odd Nicobar islands.

## **7. Indian Languages and Knowledge-bases**

India has always been a knowledge super-power, producing both knowledge that has universal relevance as well as knowledge that needs to be differentiated by cultural specificity that makes it useful for the Indian society. This vast expanse in the domain of knowledge production did not come from the introduction of western education in the country, as cultural contacts with other civilizations have happened here for many many centuries. However, it surely got a new dimension when the modern western education as well as printing and publishing came to India during the last few centuries.

This further exploded with the advent of mass media and literacy. A recent report on Indian Print media would make us wonder how one could gather so much of news and views to churn up 5,638 daily newspapers and 348 weeklies in 101 Indian languages (including in 82 non-scheduled tongues). India has also had the largest readership of printed materials. It is not surprising to us that 275 of our daily newspapers are 'big', 954 'medium' and 3551 being only 'small' newspapers. There are 2,507 newspapers and periodicals in Hindi alone – a language which is understood by more than half its population.

Translations and transfer of this huge pool of knowledge have not been taken up earnestly so far. So far, it has generally been a one-way traffic, with western knowledge being rendered into different Indian languages, because of which a wrong perception has gained ground in the recent times that India has only been a consumer of western world of creativity and knowledge. This is the perception that is being challenged by the organizers of the Book Fair by turning the attention of the world to Indian writing and scholarship.

Much before the concept of literary genre came to exist in the western literary theories, India had its own developed paradigms of literary classifications and established tradition of 'long narratives', 'short tales', 'drama', 'epics' and 'lyrical poetry' as well as treatises that bore evidence of serious essays or prose-writing. The contact with the west brought in and valorized the new forms such as 'novels' which by the 19<sup>th</sup> century had become an established tradition in Europe. The narratives that did not fit the European paradigm were marginalized by western educated literary analysts, although Indian authors kept on experimenting with both forms and content, and there had been no regimentation by our literary academies.

## **8. Plurality Index**

In fact, the linguistic plurality index is strengthened if we also consider the functionality of these vast speech groups. In order to appreciate language death and endangerment phenomena better, let me first present a dozen points to give an overall picture of India:

**1. Languages in School:** Although we get varying accounts, India's schools teach 58 to 69 different languages either as subjects or as media of instruction.

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<sup>3</sup> Mallikarjun, B. 2002. Mother tongues of India according to the 1961 census. *Languages of India*, Vol 5. August no.

**2. Languages of Mass Media:** The nation has newspapers and/or periodicals in 87 languages with varying degrees of regularity and readership. Radio programs are still mostly under the government domination (with the exception of a few recent FM stations) and they beam programs in 24 languages and 146 "dialects" (so called – not on the basis of any sound historical linguistic principles, but only because of the fact they are mostly oral modes of expression), whereas films are made in 15 languages.

**3. Written Languages:** In a recent survey conducted by Padmanabha, Mahapatra, Verma and McConnel (1989), we are told that out of the 96 languages surveyed of the 114 languages listed in Census 1981, 50 were found to have written modes of expression. Although by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century many major Indian languages were put to some kind of writing, the writing systems did not spread across the whole society. In the initial period, these included writings by both scholars and non-native missionaries, but without native participation, every such written language lapsed back to an unwritten state.

**4. Link Languages and Speech Variation:** Every language area consists of at least three inter-languages. Widely accepted and understood languages have variants. Hindi alone has 48, which has resulted in a functional hierarchy of Indian languages, with Hindi and English occupying the top spot, followed by the 16 other official languages of the states and territories plus four others (that include Dogri, Maithili, and Rajasthani), which are recognised as vehicles of significant literature.

**5. Numerous 'Other tongues':** There are 23 "other" languages with a million plus speakers (including Awadhi, Bagri, Bhili, Bhojpuri, Chattisgarhi, Deccani, Kangri, Garhwali, Haryanvi, Ho, Kanauji, Khandeshi, Kumaoni, Kurux, Lamani, Magahi, Malvi, Marwari, Meitei, Mundari, Nimadi, Sadari and Tulu), followed by hundreds of still other speech varieties at the bottom of the ladder.

**6. Speech Variation in early surveys:** The picture of changing space of Indian languages becomes clearer if one looks into older demographic records, like the census returns of Bombay (1864), Madras Presidency (1871) and Bengal (1872), and then systematically compares information on linguistic composition of the country as collected through the succeeding decennial censuses of the country from 1891 to 2001. Grierson's LSI (*The Linguistic Survey of India*), conducted between 1886 and 1927, was another source of information of the linguistic composition of the region. It had a total number of 179 languages and 544 dialects (Grierson, 1927), although these figures are of limited consequence today because he had to include many regions that are no longer part of the country, and there are many other parts of the country that did not receive adequate coverage at the time.

**7. Picture after Independence: 1961 and 1971 Attempts:** After Independence, an attempt was made in the 1961 census to present the mother tongue data in the same classification scheme as that of Grierson. A list of 193 classified languages (excluding foreign and unclassified tongues) was identified out of a total of 1,652 mother tongue labels enumerated. The 1971 census, which defined 'language' in terms of broad demo- and geolinguistic units, showed a list of 105 languages each with a speaker strength of 10,000 and above on the all India level.

**8. Rationalisation of Mother Tongue Figures:** Until the census of India 1881 came out, because innumerable mother tongue labels were floated during each census taken at ten year intervals, there was great difficulty in arriving at a rationalised figure. For example, the 1961 and 1971 census figures of raw labels numbered around 3,000, which jumped in 1981 to around 7,000 and touched an all-time high in 1991, when more than 10,000 were returned. The task of presenting a meaningful linguistic picture of the entire country required that the census produce a list of rationalised mother tongues. This was how the 1961 figure as 1,652 was announced, whereas in 1991 it was 1,576. Finally, in the Census of India, 1991, the total number of languages arrived at was 114.

**9. Defining the 'mother tongue':** The concept of 'mother tongue' is now defined by the census as "the language spoken in childhood by the person's mother to the person. If the mother died in infancy, the language mainly spoken in the person's home in childhood will be the mother tongue. In the case of infants and deaf mutes, the language usually spoken by the mother should be recorded. In case of doubt, the language mainly spoken in the household may be recorded". There were great variations in the figure across different decennial figures, because of different criteria used in different periods. In the 1881 and 1891 census operations, the emphasis was on the language 'ordinarily spoken in the household at each person's parents', whereas in 1901, the enumerators were instructed to record names of languages 'ordinarily used' by each subject, which was slightly extended as 'ordinarily used in his own home' during the census of 1911 and 1921. There was an altogether different instruction in three subsequent operations in 1931, 1941 and 1951, when it was stipulated as the language first spoken 'from the cradle'. The 1961 census figures have a lot of respectability, as here for the first time the enumeration used a more elaborate criterion, namely the language 'spoken in childhood by the person's mother to the person or mainly spoken in the household', whereas in 1971 it was the language spoken in childhood by the person's mother to the person. The census authorities, however, felt that the concept of 'language ordinarily used' was perhaps best understood by the subjects for the vernacular word *Matri-Bhasa* (of Sanskrit origin).

**10. Bilingualism Figures:** During the 1931 census, one more question was added, as each individual was asked to name any other language (other than one's mother tongue), commonly used. In 1991 there was a conscious decision to make the task a little more complicated by adding a question on two subsidiary languages rather than one, to get the trilingualism figures. India's national average of bilingualism according to Census 1991 (19.44%) is significantly higher compared to the national averages of 1961 (9.7%), 1971 (13.04%), and 1981 (13.44%), and to add to that, the 1991 figures of average rate of trilingualism is 7.26%.

**11. Speech Repertoire:** Part of the reason for such linguistic diversity lies in the complex social realities of South Asia. Indian languages reflect the intricate levels of social hierarchy and caste. Individuals have in their speech repertoire a variety of styles and dialects appropriate to various social situations. In general, the higher the speaker's status, the more speech forms there are at his or her disposal. Speech is adapted in countless ways to reflect the specific social context and the relative standing of the speakers.

**12. Language-Dialect Division:** Determining what should be called a language or a dialect is more a political than a linguistic question. Sometimes the word *language* is applied to a standardised and prestigious form, recognised as such over a large geographic area, whereas the word *dialect* is used for the various forms of speech that lack prestige or that are restricted to certain regions or castes but are still regarded as forms of the same language. Sometimes mutual intelligibility is the criterion: if the speakers can understand each other, even though with some difficulty, they are speaking the same language, although they may speak different dialects. However, speakers of Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi can often understand each other, yet they are regarded as speakers of different languages.