Mains iMPACT – 07/10/2024

CLASSICAL LANGUAGE

SYLLABUS:
GS 1 > Art and Culture >> Indian Languages

REFERENCE NEWS:
The Union Cabinet extended the "classical language" tag to Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese, and Bengali. Tamil, Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Odia already enjoy this status. The Union Cabinet's decision to accord classical language status to five new languages, including Marathi and Bengali, came after a key provision, which mandated that a language must have original literary tradition, was dropped.

CLASSICAL LANGUAGES IN INDIA:
Classical Languages serve as a custodian of Bharat's profound and ancient cultural heritage, embodying the essence of each community's historical and cultural milestones. The concept of "Classical Languages" in India was formalized in 2004 to preserve and promote languages with ancient origins, rich traditions, and a substantial body of classical literature.

Criteria for Declaring a Classical Language: The Government of India, through the Ministry of Culture, has set specific criteria for a language to be granted classical status:
   o **Antiquity**: The language must have an early history spanning over **1500-2000 years**.
   o **Rich Literary Tradition**: The language should have a vast and rich body of ancient literature that has a significant influence on subsequent cultures and traditions.
   o **Distinctiveness**: The classical language should be distinct from modern languages and must show that the literary tradition is independent of contemporary spoken forms and is original.
   o **Heritage Value**: The language should have significant cultural, historical, and literary value, contributing to the civilizational growth of the region.

BENEFITS OF CLASSICAL LANGUAGE STATUS:
   o **Establishment of Centres for Excellence**: The government provides financial support for establishing **Classical Language Research Centres**. These centres focus on the **preservation, promotion, and development** of the language through academic and literary activities.
      • The **Central Institute of Classical Tamil** was established in Chennai following Tamil's recognition as a Classical Language.
   o **Grants for Research and Development**: Classical languages receive special grants from the government to promote **research and documentation** of ancient texts. These grants are aimed at conducting **philological studies, manuscript preservation, and language research**.

- The Ministry of Education takes steps to promote classical languages. Such as, three central universities were established in 2020 through an Act of Parliament for the promotion of the Sanskrit language.
  o **Cultural Promotion and Preservation**: **Cultural festivals, conferences, and seminars** are organized at national and international levels to highlight the importance of the classical language and its literature. These events help in **raising awareness** and encouraging **cultural preservation**.
    - The **Sanskrit Commission** was set up to promote Sanskrit studies, and various state governments organize **Tamil classical language festivals** to celebrate its cultural significance.
  o **Translation and Publication of Classical Works**: The government supports projects to **translate classical texts into modern languages** to make the literature accessible to a wider audience. This initiative is important for promoting knowledge of ancient philosophical, religious, and scientific works.
    - **Thirukkural**, an ancient Tamil text, has been translated into multiple languages to make its moral teachings accessible globally.
  o **Awards and Recognition**: Prestigious awards and honours are instituted to recognize individuals and scholars who have contributed to the **study, preservation, and promotion** of classical languages. These awards encourage research and highlight the significance of the language.
    - The **President's Certificate of Honour** is awarded to scholars who have made outstanding contributions to the promotion of Classical Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and other classical languages.
  o **Inclusion in Educational Curricula**: Classical languages gain prominence in **school and university curricula**, ensuring that younger generations learn and appreciate the language's historical and cultural value.
    - Universities offer **degree programs, diplomas, and courses** in classical languages, promoting in-depth study and academic engagement.

DIFFERENCE IN 8ᵗʰ SCHEDULE LANGUAGE AND CLASSICAL LANGUAGE:

CRITERIA	8ᵀᴴ SCHEDULE LANGUAGES	CLASSICAL LANGUAGES
Purpose and Focus	The languages included in the **Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution** are primarily recognized for **administrative and official purposes**. These languages are given **constitutional protection** and are used in **official communication, government functions, education**, and **public services**. The primary aim is to ensure that linguistic groups are represented and have their **language rights protected** in governance and public life.	**Classical language status** is an **honorary recognition** granted by the Government of India to languages that have **ancient origins** and **rich literary traditions**. The focus is on **cultural, historical, and literary significance**, and it aims to promote the **preservation of ancient texts, traditions**, and **linguistic research**. The emphasis is on **academic promotion**, research, and cultural heritage, rather than contemporary use in administration or governance.
Constitutional Basis	The **Eighth Schedule** is part of the **Indian Constitution** (Articles 343-351), which lists the official	Classical languages are recognized by the **Government of India** based on specific criteria but are **not part of the Constitution.** The Ministry

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	languages recognized for **government use**. Initially, there were 14 languages in the Eighth Schedule when the Constitution was adopted in 1950, The inclusion of languages in the Eighth Schedule can be modified through **constitutional amendments**.	of Culture is responsible for granting this status. There is **no explicit mention of Classical languages in the Constitution**, and their recognition does not involve constitutional amendments.
Criteria for Inclusion	There is no formal, publicly stated criterion for the inclusion of languages in the Eighth Schedule. The decision to include a language is **political** and is often based on **demands from linguistic communities** for **recognition, linguistic rights**, and **representation**. Factors like **geographical prevalence**, **number of speakers**, and **historical/cultural significance** often influence the inclusion process.	To qualify as a Classical language, the language must meet specific criteria, such as: **Antiquity** of over **1500-2000 years,** presence of **ancient literary texts** with high historical and cultural values, the existence of an **independent literary tradition**, distinct from other modern languages and the language is not a **spoken vernacular** in its classical form.
Benefits and Implications	**Official Status**: Languages in the Eighth Schedule are given official status and can be used for **government communication, parliamentary debates, education, court proceedings**, and **official documents**. **Use in Competitive Exams**: Candidates appearing for national-level exams like the **UPSC Civil Services** can opt for **any of the 22 languages** in the Eighth Schedule as a medium of examination or to write their optional papers. **Representation in Government**: The Eighth Schedule ensures that linguistic communities get **official recognition** and have **access to governance** in their language. **Development through Government Programs**: Special programs and schemes are created to promote and develop these languages, ensuring their growth in modern contexts.	**Cultural Promotion and Research Special Grants**: Classical languages receive **special financial grants** to promote **linguistic studies, cultural events**, and **scholarly work**. **Heritage Preservation**: The status ensures the preservation of the **cultural and literary heritage** of ancient languages. **Public Awareness and Celebrations**: Cultural festivals and academic conferences are organized to increase public awareness of the significance of Classical languages.
Languages present	There are **22 languages** listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution:	Currently 6 classical languages Tamil, Sanskrit, Kannada, Telegu, Malayalam and Odia. The new

	Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu.	addition includes Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese and Bengali.

ISSUES SURROUNDING CLASSICAL LANGUAGE STATUS:

o **Political and Regional Demands for Recognition:** The recognition of Classical Language status has become highly **politicized**. This has led to regional competitions between linguistic groups and the perception that **linguistic favoritism** plays a role in the decision-making process.

- The demand for **Maithali by Bihar** to be granted classical status has also been raised recently. Marathi language got the status in the wake of upcoming Maharashtra state assembly elections
- One nation One script initiatives by Government will instil fear of loss of language heritage among public.

o **Non-consideration of a Criteria for Recognition: The** criteria of original literary tradition was dropped this time while adding five new classical languages. The Linguistic Expert Committee discussed and understood that it was 'very difficult to prove or disprove (original literary tradition) as all ancient languages borrowed from each other' said the Linguistics Expert committee member.

o **Overlapping Status with Scheduled Languages:** Some languages, like **Tamil**, **Sanskrit**, **Kannada**, **Telugu**, **Malayalam**, and **Odia**, enjoy both **Classical Language status** and **Scheduled Language status** (under the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution). This overlap can lead to **ambiguity in terms of focus and resource allocation**.

- **Sanskrit** is both a classical and scheduled language, but it is no longer widely spoken. Some argue that more attention should be given to languages in active use, while others believe Sanskrit's literary and cultural legacy justifies special treatment.

o **Lack of Adequate Implementation:** Although the Classical Language status comes with promises of grants, research centres, and scholarships, in many cases, the **implementation of these benefits has been slow** or inadequate. Despite the status, the infrastructure and financial resources required to promote these languages effectively are often lacking.

- Even after Tamil was declared a Classical Language in 2004, it took several years to establish the **Central Institute of Classical Tamil** in Chennai, and the funds for research have often been criticized as insufficient.

o **Perception of Inequality Among Different Language Groups:** The process of granting Classical Language status has, in some cases, created a **sense of inequality** among different linguistic communities.

- Communities speaking **Tulu**, a language with a rich history and literature, have been advocating for Classical Language and scheduled language status but have not yet succeeded.
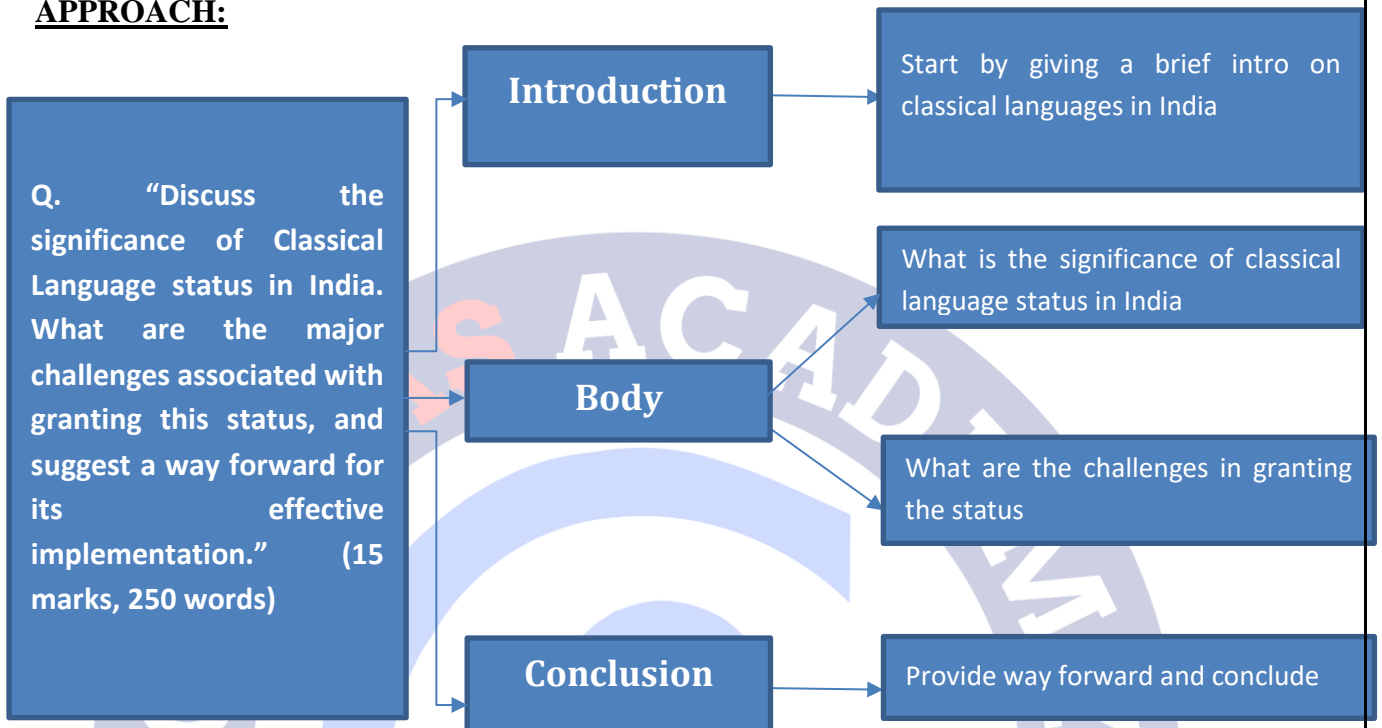
WAY FORWARD:

- **Establishing an Independent Expert Body:** Create an independent commission or linguistic authority composed of scholars, linguists, historians, and cultural experts. This body should be free from political influence and tasked with evaluating languages

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for Classical Language status based on transparent, objective criteria. Currently, the process is administered by the Ministry of Culture, which may be influenced by political considerations.

o **Clear and Consistent Criteria for Recognition:** The government should refine and publicize the criteria for granting Classical Language status, ensuring that it is consistent and standardized. This would eliminate the ambiguity and subjective interpretation of the current criteria, reducing the scope for political manipulation.

o **Objective, Data-Driven Evaluation of Languages:** Employ data-driven evaluations of languages, using historical, philological, and literary evidence to determine their classical status. Use a combination of archaeological findings, inscriptions, ancient manuscripts, and linguistic studies to provide a scientific basis for the recognition of languages.

o **Decentralized Language Preservation Initiatives**: Empower state governments, universities, and cultural institutions to take a leading role in preserving and promoting endangered or classical languages. The central government can provide funding and frameworks, but language preservation efforts should be decentralized to better reflect the needs of individual linguistic communities.

o **Increased Funding for Language Conservation:** Allocate dedicated, increased funding to both classical and endangered language preservation projects, with a focus on modern technology for conservation. The government should create a Language Preservation Fund to support the digitization of manuscripts, development of educational tools, and research on ancient languages

o **Promote Languages Beyond Classical Status:** Establish a National Language Promotion Policy that offers support for regional languages, not just classical ones. This could include grants for modern literature, cultural festivals, and the preservation of endangered languages through education and media.

o **National Language Day and Cultural Events:** Celebrate a National Language Day where all languages—classical, scheduled, and regional—are promoted through cultural festivals, exhibitions, and conferences. The government can organize festivals, seminars, and competitions on this day, involving scholars, artists, writers, and students to showcase the cultural and literary richness of India's languages.

o **Language Technology Development:** Invest in the development of language technology that supports both Classical and endangered languages. Tools like machine translation, digital dictionaries, and language learning apps can help make ancient languages accessible to modern audiences. These were done to tribal languages like Ho using radio telecasts.

PRACTICE QUESTION:
Q. "Discuss the significance of Classical Language status in India. What are the major challenges associated with granting this status, and suggest a way forward for its effective implementation." (15 marks, 250 words)
APPROACH:

Q. "Discuss the significance of Classical Language status in India. What are the major challenges associated with granting this status, and suggest a way forward for its effective implementation." (15 marks, 250 words)	**Introduction**	Start by giving a brief intro on classical languages in India
	Body	What is the significance of classical language status in India
		What are the challenges in granting the status
	Conclusion	Provide way forward and conclude

MODEL ANSWER:
India's rich linguistic heritage is preserved and promoted through the recognition of **Classical Languages**. This status is granted to languages with **ancient origins, rich literary traditions**, and **historical significance**. It aims to conserve and promote these languages for their cultural, historical, and literary value.

SIGNIFICANCE OF CLASSICAL LANGUAGE STATUS:

1. **Cultural and Heritage Preservation**: Classical Languages serve as custodians of India's **ancient cultural heritage**. They embody the essence of historical, philosophical, and religious milestones that shaped Indian civilization.
   - **Sanskrit** and **Tamil** hold immense significance for their literary contributions, influencing modern Indian philosophy, religion, and scientific thought.
2. **Promotion of Scholarly Research**: Classical Language status ensures the **establishment of research centers** and universities dedicated to the study and preservation of ancient texts, facilitating **academic inquiry** into India's literary and cultural history.
   - The **Central Institute of Classical Tamil** in Chennai promotes research on classical Tamil texts and history.
3. **Translation and Accessibility**: The status encourages the **translation and publication** of ancient texts into modern languages, making them accessible to a wider audience and preserving their knowledge for future generations.
   - Ancient texts like **Thirukkural** in Tamil have been translated into several languages, helping spread its moral teachings globally.
4. **Cultural Promotion through Festivals and Awards**: Classical Languages are promoted through **cultural festivals, awards**, and **seminars**, raising public awareness and engagement with these ancient traditions.

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o   The **Sanskrit Commission** promotes Sanskrit studies through state-sponsored programs and festivals.

CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH CLASSICAL LANGUAGE STATUS:

1. **Politicization of the Process**: The recognition of Classical Language status has become **highly politicized**, with demands from regional groups for inclusion. Political favoritism and **regional competition** often play a role in the decision-making process, undermining the **objectivity** of the criteria.
   o   The recent recognition of **Marathi** as a Classical Language was perceived as politically motivated, occurring in the context of upcoming elections in Maharashtra

2. **Ambiguity in Criteria for Recognition**: The criteria for granting Classical Language status, such as **original literary tradition**, were recently dropped, leading to questions about the **standardization and consistency** of the evaluation process.
   o   The Linguistic Expert Committee admitted that proving the "originality" of literary traditions was difficult, as ancient languages borrowed from each other

3. **Overlapping Status with Scheduled Languages**: Some languages, like **Tamil**, **Kannada**, and **Sanskrit**, enjoy both Classical and Scheduled Language status, leading to ambiguity in **resource allocation** and focus. While these languages receive special grants, their practical usage is limited, as they are no longer widely spoken in their classical forms

4. **Inadequate Implementation**: Despite the recognition, the **promised grants, research centers**, and **scholarships** for Classical Languages are often delayed or insufficient. The infrastructure needed to promote these languages effectively is often lacking.
   o   Even after Tamil received Classical status in 2004, the establishment of the **Central Institute of Classical Tamil** faced long delays

5. **Perceptions of Inequality**: The recognition process has created a sense of **inequality among linguistic communities**, with some languages receiving classical status, while others with rich literary traditions, such as **Tulu** and **Maithili**, remain excluded. This fuels dissatisfaction and demands for recognition

WAY FORWARD FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION:

1. **Establish an Independent Expert Body**: An independent commission, composed of **linguists, historians**, and **cultural scholars**, should be created to evaluate languages for Classical status. This body should operate **free from political influence** to ensure an **objective** and **transparent** process.

2. **Clear and Consistent Criteria**: The criteria for recognition should be **refined and standardized**, focusing on **antiquity, distinct literary tradition**, and **historical value**. This would remove ambiguity and prevent **subjective interpretation**.

3. **Decentralized Preservation Efforts**: Empower **state governments and universities** to take a leading role in preserving and promoting Classical and endangered languages, with **financial support from the central government**. This would allow local communities to be more engaged in the preservation of their linguistic heritage.

4. **National Language Promotion Day**: Celebrate a **National Language Promotion Day** to highlight the importance of all Indian languages, including Classical, Scheduled, and endangered languages. This would raise **public awareness** and foster a sense of pride in India's linguistic diversity.

5. **Leverage Technology for Preservation**: Invest in **language technology development**, including **machine translation, digital archives**, and **language learning apps**, to make Classical languages more accessible to modern audiences.

Classical Language status is vital for preserving India's rich linguistic and cultural heritage. However, the process of granting this status must be **objective, transparent**, and **free from political influence**. By adopting measures such as the creation of an **independent linguistic body**, **clear criteria**, and **adequate funding**, India can ensure the effective promotion and conservation of its Classical Languages, while also encouraging the preservation of its entire linguistic diversity.

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