

New Classical Languages

Why in news?

Recently, the Union Cabinet has approved to confer the status of Classical Language to five Indian languages.

What is a classical language?

- **Need for classical status** - To *recognize the historical significance* and role of the language as a guardian of Bharat's rich cultural and intellectual heritage.
- **Classical languages** - They are ancient languages with independent traditions and a rich literary history that continue to influence various literary styles and philosophical texts.
- **Introduction** - It was first introduced **in 2004** in India.

Tamil was the first language to get the Classical language status in 2004.

- **Responsible authority** - *Earlier, it was the Ministry of Home Affairs* but then the **Ministry of Culture** took over the responsibility since 2005 for further implementations and future recognitions.
- **Linguistic Experts Committee (LEC)** - It is established by the Ministry of Culture to assess future proposals for the recognition of classical languages.
 - **Composition** - Representatives of the Union Ministries of Home, Culture and four to five linguistic experts.
 - **Chaired by** - The *president of the [Sahitya Akademi](#)*.
- It was established the in 2004 and in 2024.
- **Importance** - By recognizing a language as classical, the government acknowledges their deep-rooted antiquity, vast literary traditions, and their invaluable contribution to the cultural fabric of the nation.

What are the criteria for declaring a language as classical?

- **Criteria in 2004** - High antiquity of its early texts/ recorded history *over a thousand years*.
- A body of ancient literature/ texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generation of speakers.
- The literary tradition must be original and not borrowed from another speech community.
- **Revision of criteria** - It was ***revised two times, in 2005 and 2024***, based on the recommendations of Linguistic Experts Committees (LEC).

2005 Criteria for Classical Language Status

- **Existing** - A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers.
- The literary tradition must be original and not borrowed from another speech community.
- **Modified** - High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years.
- **Added** - The classical language and literature being distinct from modern, there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.

2024 Criteria for Classical Language Status

- **Existing** - High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500- 2000 years.
- A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers.
- The Classical Languages and literature could be distinct from its current form or could be discontinuous with later forms of its offshoots.
- **Added** - Knowledge texts, especially prose texts in addition to poetry, epigraphical and inscriptional evidence.
- **Deleted** - The literary tradition must be original and not borrowed from another speech community.

How many languages have been declared so far?

- As of October 2024, there are **totally 11** classical language in India.
- 5 languages were added in 2024.

Language	Year of Notification	Notification by
Tamil	2004	Ministry of Home Affairs
Sanskrit	2005	
Kannada	2008	Ministry of Culture
Telugu	2008	
Malayalam	2013	
Odia	2014	
Marathi	2024	
Pali	2024	
Prakrit	2024	
Assamese	2024	
Bengali	2024	

What are the features of new classical languages?

- **Prakrit** - It was the vernacular of the common folk in ancient India, and the language of heterodox religions like Buddhism and Jainism.
- The term 'Prakrit' derived from Sanskrit word 'prakriti' meaning 'source' or 'origin'.
 - **Linguistic group** - Middle Indo-Aryan languages

Different dialects of Prakrit

Magadhi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is the official language of the Mauryan court and used in the Ashokan edicts. • It evolved into modern-day languages such as Bengali, Assamese, Odia, Bhojpuri, Magahi, and Maithili.
Ardhamagadhi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literally “half-Magadhi” which is prominently used by Jain scholars.
Shauraseni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was used by the women from lower class women and people in plays. • It later evolved into Hindustani, Punjabi, and other languages of the Hindi group.

- **Pali** - It is the *variant of Ardhamagadhi Prakrit*.
- It was the language of Theravada Buddhist canon.
 - **Linguistic group** - Middle Indo-Aryan languages
- After Theravada Buddhism declined in India, Pali survived as a *religious language in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia*, where this Buddhist school continued to prosper.
- **Marathi** - It belongs to the *Indo-Aryan family* are *derived from early forms of Prakrit*.
 - Official language- In Maharashtra and UT of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu.

While Konkani is the official language of Goa, it allows Marathi to be used for official purpose sometimes.

- **Assamese** - It belongs to *Indo-Aryan family*.
 - **Official language** - Assam
- **Bengali** - It belongs to *India - European language family*
 - **Official language** - West Bengal, Tripura, Assam (Barak Valley), Jharkhand (additional official language) and Bangladesh.

What steps have been taken to promote classical languages?

- *Ministry of Education* has taken various steps for advancing Classical Languages.
- **Establishing universities** - In 2020, *three Central Universities* were established through an Act of Parliament *to promote Sanskrit*.
- The *Central Institute of Classical Tamil* was created to facilitate translating ancient Tamil texts, promoting research, and offering courses for university students and language scholars.
- **Establishing Centres for Excellence** - It was established for studies in Classical *Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, and Odia* under the auspices of the *Central Institute of Indian Languages in Mysuru*.
- It also takes steps in establishing Centers for promoting Classical Languages.
- **Recognition through awards** - Several *national and international* awards have been introduced to recognize and encourage achievements in the field of Classical Languages.
- **Chairs in Universities** - As UGC recommended, *professional chairs in central universities* were established.

What is the impact of classical language status?

- **Revives intellectual and cultural identity** - It encourage scholarly research, preservation, and the revitalization of ancient texts and knowledge systems.
- **Promotes national integration** - It instills a sense of pride and ownership among the speakers of these languages.
- **Self-reliance** - It aligns with the broader vision of a self-reliant and culturally rooted India.
- It will elevate their stature and will ensure their continued relevance in the modern world.
- **Employment generation** - It will create significant employment opportunities, particularly in academic and research fields.
- Additionally, the preservation, documentation, and *digitization of ancient texts of these languages* will generate jobs in archiving, translation, publishing, and digital media.

What lies ahead?

- Government shall continue providing technical and financial support for the development and preservation of language.
- Promote academic and cultural initiatives to increase public awareness and motivate more scholars to contribute language development.
- Research and document literary provision and transform to next generation.

References

1. [The Indian Express| Classical Language Status to 5 New Languages](#)
2. [PIB| Status of Classical Language](#)