
PRESERVATION OF ENDANGERED HIMALAYAN LANGUAGES: CONSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON GARHWALI, KUMAONI AND JAUNSARI

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ABSTRACT

Language is an essential component of cultural identity and constitutional pluralism in India. The Himalayan regional languages of Garhwali, Kumaoni, and Jaunsari represent rich linguistic traditions of Uttarakhand, yet they face gradual decline due to migration, urbanization, dominance of Hindi and English, and inadequate institutional support. Although the Constitution of India promotes linguistic diversity through Articles 29, 30, 350A, and 351, these languages remain outside the Eighth Schedule, limiting their recognition and protection. This paper critically examines the constitutional framework for preserving endangered Himalayan languages and analyses governmental, judicial, and policy responses concerning Garhwali, Kumaoni, and Jaunsari. The study also evaluates the role of education, digital preservation, regional literature, and community participation in safeguarding linguistic heritage. By exploring constitutional guarantees and international standards relating to language rights, the paper argues for stronger legislative and policy measures to ensure the survival and revitalization of these indigenous languages in the era of globalization.

Keywords: Endangered Languages, Garhwali, Kumaoni, Jaunsari, Constitutional Protection, Linguistic Rights, Cultural Heritage, Uttarakhand.

1. Introduction

India is one of the most linguistically diverse nations in the world, possessing hundreds of languages and dialects that reflect its multicultural and pluralistic society. Language is not merely a medium of communication but also a repository of history, identity, folklore, customs, and collective memory. Among the various regional languages spoken in India, the Himalayan languages of Garhwali, Kumaoni, and Jaunsari occupy a unique position due to their historical, cultural, and geographical significance in the state of Uttarakhand. These languages have traditionally served as instruments of social cohesion and cultural transmission among mountain communities. However, rapid modernization, migration, educational preferences, and increasing dependence on dominant languages such as Hindi and English have endangered their existence.

The Constitution of India recognizes linguistic diversity as a vital element of national unity and cultural democracy. Constitutional provisions such as Articles 29 and 30 safeguard cultural and linguistic rights of minorities, while Articles 350A and 350B promote linguistic education and representation. Nevertheless, Garhwali, Kumaoni, and Jaunsari remain excluded from the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, thereby depriving them of official recognition and institutional development. This constitutional gap raises important questions regarding the adequacy of legal protection available to endangered regional languages.

International legal instruments such as the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples also emphasize the preservation of indigenous languages as part of humanity's intangible cultural heritage. In this context, the preservation of Himalayan languages becomes both a constitutional obligation and a cultural necessity.

This paper critically analyses the constitutional framework governing linguistic rights in India and evaluates the challenges faced by Garhwali, Kumaoni, and Jaunsari languages. It further examines governmental policies, judicial approaches, educational reforms, and technological initiatives aimed at preserving these languages. The study seeks to propose constitutional and policy reforms necessary for ensuring their survival and revitalization in contemporary India.

2. Historical and Cultural Significance of Garhwali, Kumaoni and Jaunsari

Garhwali, Kumaoni, and Jaunsari are among the oldest regional languages spoken in the

Himalayan region of Uttarakhand. These languages evolved through centuries of interaction between indigenous traditions, Sanskritic influences, and local cultural practices. Garhwali is predominantly spoken in the Garhwal division, Kumaoni in the Kumaon region, and Jaunsari in the Jaunsar-Bawar tribal belt. Together, these languages represent the cultural identity and historical continuity of mountain communities.

The cultural significance of these languages is reflected in folk songs, oral traditions, rituals, festivals, and local literature. Traditional narratives, ballads, and legends preserved in these languages embody collective social memory and indigenous knowledge systems. Folk music and storytelling have historically functioned as tools of social education and preservation of local history.

Despite their importance, these languages face increasing marginalization. Urbanization and migration from hill regions to cities have reduced intergenerational language transmission. Parents increasingly encourage children to communicate in Hindi or English due to employment and educational opportunities. Consequently, younger generations are gradually losing fluency in their native languages.

The absence of formal institutional support has further accelerated linguistic decline. Unlike constitutionally recognized languages, these languages lack standardized educational materials, government-sponsored literary academies, and official administrative usage. Their exclusion from mainstream educational curricula weakens their social legitimacy.

Language extinction not only affects communication but also destroys cultural diversity and indigenous heritage. UNESCO has repeatedly emphasized that endangered languages represent irreplaceable cultural resources. The decline of Himalayan languages therefore threatens traditional ecological knowledge, local customs, and cultural expressions associated with mountain life.

Preservation of these languages requires collective societal effort alongside constitutional and policy support. Community organizations, cultural groups, and regional literary associations have played a significant role in organizing festivals, publications, and awareness campaigns. However, without state recognition and constitutional support, such efforts remain insufficient.

Thus, Garhwali, Kumaoni, and Jaunsari are not merely linguistic mediums but symbols of

cultural identity whose preservation is essential for protecting India's pluralistic heritage.

3. Constitutional Framework for Linguistic Rights in India

The Constitution of India provides extensive safeguards for linguistic and cultural diversity. India's constitutional philosophy recognizes unity in diversity and seeks to preserve the multicultural fabric of society through various legal protections. Linguistic rights form an essential aspect of constitutional democracy and cultural autonomy.

Article 29 guarantees the right of citizens to conserve their distinct language, script, or culture. This provision protects minority linguistic communities against cultural assimilation and enables them to preserve their linguistic heritage. Article 30 further grants minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

Articles 350A and 350B specifically address linguistic education and representation. Article 350A directs states to provide facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education for linguistic minority children. Article 350B establishes the office of the Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities to investigate matters relating to constitutional safeguards.

The Eighth Schedule of the Constitution presently recognizes twenty-two languages. Inclusion in the Schedule provides institutional benefits such as representation in official examinations, literary promotion, educational development, and governmental recognition. However, Garhwali, Kumaoni, and Jaunsari have not yet received such recognition despite long-standing demands.

The constitutional exclusion of these languages raises concerns regarding equality and cultural justice. Several parliamentary committees and state-level resolutions have recommended inclusion of Garhwali and Kumaoni in the Eighth Schedule, yet implementation remains pending.

Judicial interpretation has also emphasized the importance of linguistic rights. The Supreme Court has repeatedly observed that language forms an integral part of cultural identity and constitutional freedoms. Courts have interpreted Articles 29 and 30 broadly to protect minority cultural interests.

At the same time, constitutional protection remains largely symbolic without effective policy

implementation. Linguistic preservation requires practical measures including educational inclusion, financial support, technological development, and administrative recognition.

The constitutional framework thus establishes a strong normative basis for preserving endangered languages, but implementation gaps continue to undermine the survival of regional Himalayan languages.

4. Challenges Faced by Endangered Himalayan Languages

The preservation of Garhwali, Kumaoni, and Jaunsari faces numerous socio-economic, educational, and political challenges. One of the most significant threats is migration from hill regions to urban centers. Economic difficulties and lack of employment opportunities have forced large-scale migration, leading to reduced usage of native languages within families.

Globalization has intensified the dominance of Hindi and English in education, media, and employment sectors. Parents increasingly prioritize dominant languages for social mobility, resulting in declining transmission of regional languages to younger generations. This linguistic shift has weakened the everyday use of Himalayan languages.

Another major challenge is the absence of institutional support. These languages are rarely used in official administration, courts, or formal education systems. Lack of standardized grammar, dictionaries, and teaching materials further hinders their academic development.

Educational policies also contribute to linguistic decline. Schools in Uttarakhand predominantly use Hindi or English as mediums of instruction. Children therefore associate regional languages with backwardness and limited opportunities. Without mother-tongue education, linguistic continuity becomes difficult.

Technological marginalization represents another serious concern. Digital platforms, software interfaces, and online educational resources are predominantly available in globally dominant languages. Limited digital content in Garhwali, Kumaoni, and Jaunsari restricts their accessibility among younger populations.

Political neglect has additionally impeded preservation efforts. Despite repeated public demands, the central government has not included these languages in the Eighth Schedule. The absence of political prioritization reduces funding and institutional commitment toward

linguistic preservation.

Social attitudes also play a role. Many speakers themselves perceive regional languages as less prestigious compared to Hindi and English. Such perceptions contribute to gradual abandonment of native linguistic identities.

Furthermore, linguistic documentation remains inadequate. Oral traditions, folklore, and indigenous knowledge systems are disappearing without systematic recording or archiving. Loss of elderly speakers accelerates the disappearance of traditional vocabulary and cultural expressions.

These challenges collectively threaten the long-term survival of Himalayan languages. Effective preservation therefore requires comprehensive legal, educational, technological, and social interventions.

5. Role of Judiciary and Judicial Interpretation in Linguistic Preservation

The Indian judiciary has played an important role in interpreting constitutional provisions related to language and cultural rights. Courts have recognized that language is deeply connected with identity, dignity, and freedom of expression. Judicial interpretation has therefore expanded the scope of constitutional protection available to linguistic minorities.

The Supreme Court has consistently emphasized the significance of Articles 29 and 30 in protecting cultural and linguistic diversity. In several cases, the Court observed that preservation of language is essential for safeguarding minority identity and democratic pluralism.

Judicial decisions concerning mother-tongue education have also highlighted the importance of linguistic preservation. Courts have acknowledged that education in one's native language promotes cultural continuity and effective learning. Such observations strengthen the constitutional basis for introducing Garhwali, Kumaoni, and Jaunsari in regional educational systems.

At the same time, judicial protection remains limited due to absence of direct litigation concerning these specific Himalayan languages. Most constitutional debates have focused on larger linguistic communities. Consequently, smaller regional languages continue to receive

inadequate judicial attention.

Public Interest Litigations relating to inclusion of regional languages in the Eighth Schedule have occasionally emerged, but courts generally treat such matters as policy decisions falling within legislative discretion. This judicial restraint limits enforceability of linguistic recognition demands.

Nevertheless, the judiciary can contribute significantly through progressive constitutional interpretation. Courts may direct governments to implement mother-tongue education policies, promote linguistic documentation, and preserve indigenous cultural heritage under Article 21's expanded interpretation of dignity and cultural life.

Judicial recognition of cultural rights under international human rights principles can further strengthen protection mechanisms. Indian courts increasingly rely upon international conventions while interpreting constitutional rights. UNESCO principles relating to endangered languages may therefore influence future judicial approaches.

The judiciary also possesses an important symbolic role in shaping public discourse. Judicial acknowledgment of endangered languages as part of India's constitutional heritage can encourage governmental and societal action.

Thus, while judicial intervention alone cannot guarantee preservation, constitutional jurisprudence provides an important foundation for protecting endangered Himalayan languages.

6. Educational and Technological Measures for Language Preservation

Education and technology are crucial instruments for preserving endangered languages. Sustainable preservation requires integrating regional languages into educational systems and digital platforms to ensure intergenerational transmission.

Mother-tongue education has been recognized internationally as essential for linguistic and cognitive development. Introducing Garhwali, Kumaoni, and Jaunsari at the primary education level can strengthen cultural identity and improve learning outcomes. Article 350A of the Constitution specifically supports mother-tongue instruction for linguistic minorities.

The National Education Policy 2020 also emphasizes multilingualism and regional language

education. This policy creates opportunities for incorporating Himalayan languages into school curricula in Uttarakhand. Development of textbooks, teacher training programs, and language-learning materials is necessary for effective implementation.

Universities and research institutions can contribute through linguistic documentation, translation projects, and publication of dictionaries and grammars. Academic recognition enhances the legitimacy and scholarly preservation of endangered languages.

Technology offers new possibilities for linguistic revitalization. Digital archives, mobile applications, online dictionaries, podcasts, and social media platforms can help preserve and popularize regional languages among younger generations. Recording oral traditions and folk literature in digital formats prevents permanent cultural loss.

Community radio and regional cinema also play significant roles in promoting linguistic awareness. Songs, storytelling, and cultural performances in native languages strengthen emotional attachment and cultural pride.

Artificial Intelligence and language-processing technologies may further assist preservation efforts. Speech recognition systems, translation software, and digital keyboards can improve usability of regional languages in modern communication.

However, technological preservation requires governmental funding and institutional support. Most endangered languages lack adequate digital infrastructure due to limited investment. Public-private partnerships may therefore help develop technological resources for Himalayan languages.

Educational and technological measures must also involve local communities. Language preservation cannot succeed solely through state intervention; active participation of native speakers is essential. Community-driven initiatives, literary festivals, and youth engagement programs can foster linguistic revival.

Hence, education and technology together provide powerful tools for safeguarding endangered Himalayan languages in the contemporary era.

7. Need for Constitutional and Policy Reforms

The survival of Garhwali, Kumaoni, and Jaunsari requires comprehensive constitutional and

policy reforms. Existing constitutional protections remain inadequate without effective implementation and official recognition.

One important reform is inclusion of Garhwali and Kumaoni in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Such recognition would provide institutional legitimacy, governmental funding, and educational promotion. Inclusion would also symbolize constitutional commitment toward preserving linguistic diversity.

State governments should formulate dedicated language preservation policies focusing on endangered regional languages. Establishment of language academies, cultural research institutes, and translation centers can strengthen preservation initiatives. Legislative measures should encourage use of regional languages in local administration, public communication, and cultural programs. Official usage enhances social prestige and practical relevance of endangered languages. Educational reforms are equally necessary. Schools in Uttarakhand should introduce optional courses in Garhwali, Kumaoni, and Jaunsari. Teacher recruitment and curriculum development must support regional language education. Universities may establish specialized departments for Himalayan linguistic studies. Financial assistance for writers, artists, translators, and researchers working in these languages is also essential. Literary production strengthens linguistic vitality and public engagement. Policy reforms should additionally focus on digital preservation. Government-sponsored digital archives, language-learning applications, and online cultural repositories can expand accessibility and awareness.

International cooperation with UNESCO and cultural preservation organizations may further strengthen preservation strategies. India can adopt successful global models used for revitalizing indigenous and minority languages.

Public awareness campaigns are equally important for changing social attitudes. Language preservation should be viewed not as regionalism but as protection of national cultural heritage. Media and cultural institutions can promote positive perceptions regarding regional linguistic identity.

Ultimately, constitutional morality requires active protection of linguistic diversity. Preservation of endangered Himalayan languages is not merely a cultural issue but also a question of constitutional justice, equality, and democratic pluralism.

8. Conclusion

The preservation of Garhwali, Kumaoni, and Jaunsari represents an urgent constitutional and cultural challenge in contemporary India. These Himalayan languages embody centuries of collective memory, folklore, indigenous knowledge, and regional identity. However, modernization, migration, educational preferences, and dominance of major languages have pushed them toward gradual extinction. The decline of these languages reflects not only linguistic loss but also erosion of cultural diversity and constitutional pluralism.

The Constitution of India provides an important framework for protecting linguistic rights through Articles 29, 30, 350A, and 351. Nevertheless, the exclusion of these languages from the Eighth Schedule demonstrates the gap between constitutional ideals and practical implementation. Judicial interpretation has recognized the importance of linguistic identity, yet stronger institutional and policy support remains necessary.

Educational reforms, mother-tongue instruction, digital preservation, and community participation are essential for ensuring linguistic survival. Technological innovation offers new opportunities for revitalization, particularly among younger generations. At the same time, governmental recognition and political commitment are indispensable for meaningful preservation.

India's constitutional vision of unity in diversity can only be fulfilled when smaller regional languages receive equal dignity and protection. Preserving endangered Himalayan languages is therefore not merely a regional concern but a national responsibility toward safeguarding India's multicultural heritage for future generations.

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