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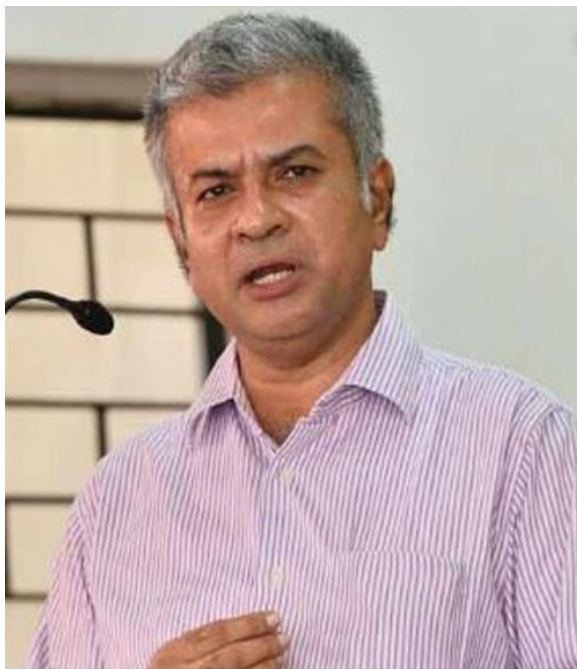
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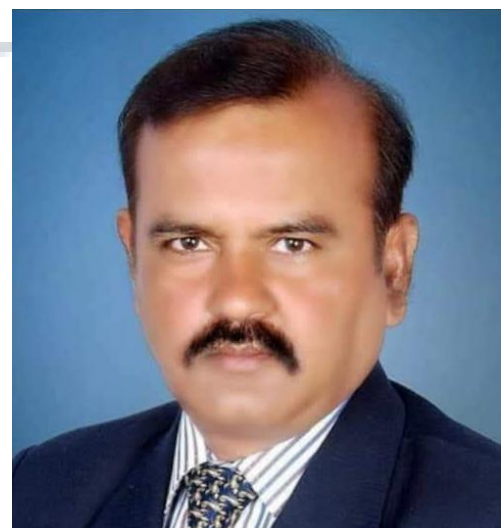


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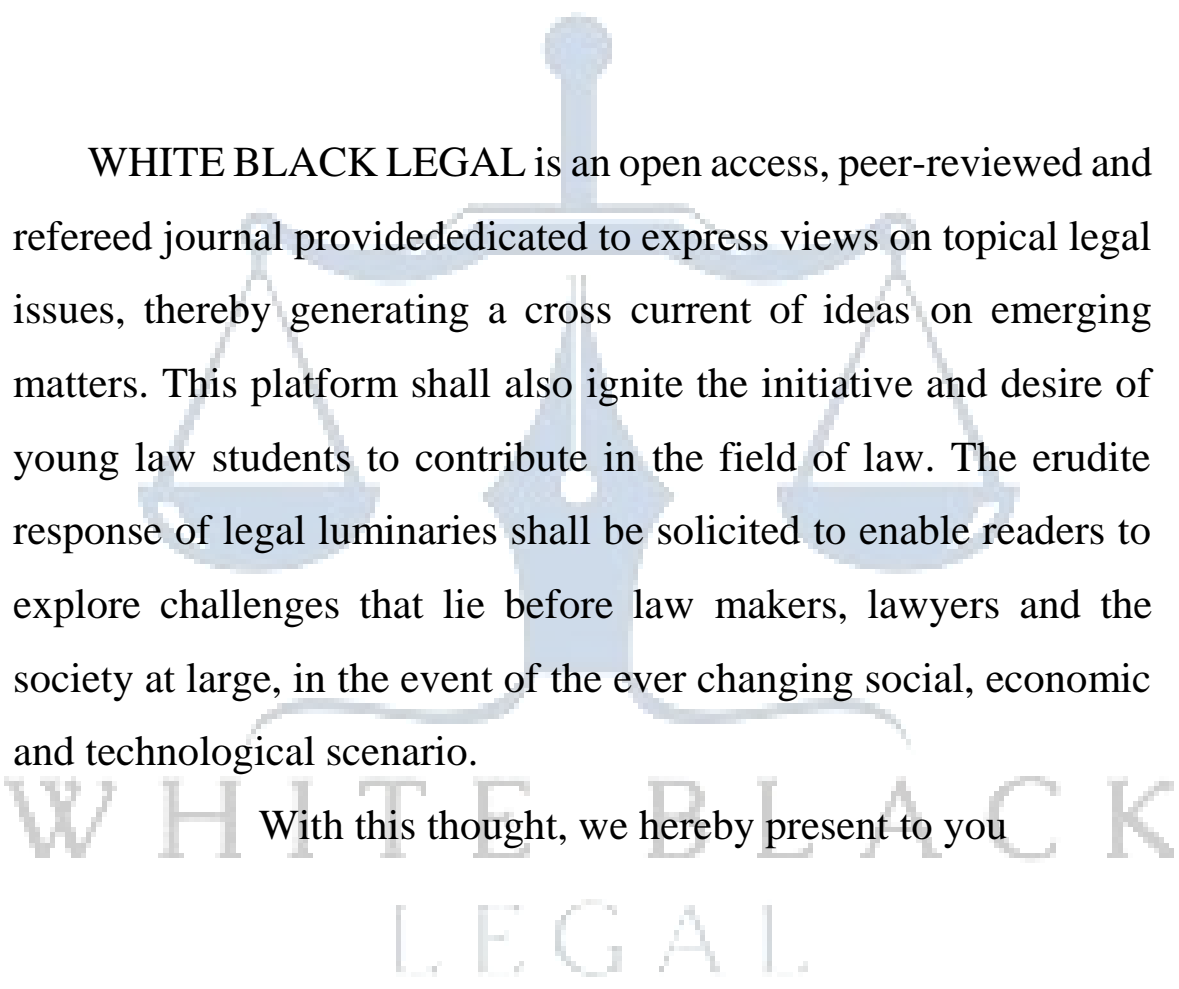


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ABOUT US



WHITE BLACK LEGAL is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal providededicated to express views on topical legal issues, thereby generating a cross current of ideas on emerging matters. This platform shall also ignite the initiative and desire of young law students to contribute in the field of law. The erudite response of legal luminaries shall be solicited to enable readers to explore challenges that lie before law makers, lawyers and the society at large, in the event of the ever changing social, economic and technological scenario.

With this thought, we hereby present to you

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

India is a vast and diverse country, marked by significant cultural and geographical differences. It is home to a multitude of languages, some of which are recognized at the national level, while others are classified as regional dialects. Over centuries, foreign influences have also shaped India's linguistic landscape. The British, in particular, not only introduced their customs and traditions but also left behind English, which has since become one of India's widely used official languages. With approximately 1,600 dialects, 800 distinct languages, and 22 officially recognized languages, India's linguistic diversity is unparalleled. The Indian subcontinent is largely divided based on linguistic communities. The origins of Indian languages can be broadly classified into two primary linguistic families: Indo-Aryan and Dravidian.¹ The Indo-Aryan languages are spoken by nearly 74% of the population, while Dravidian languages account for about 24%. The remaining 2% speak languages that do not fall into either of these categories. Additionally, the Andamanese languages, spoken by indigenous communities in the Andaman Islands, are believed to be unrelated to any known language family.²

According to the Census of India 2001, 29 languages are spoken by more than a million native speakers, while 122 languages have more than 10,000 speakers. India's linguistic landscape has evolved over three millennia of language contact, leading to significant mutual influence among the four major language families: Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austroasiatic, and Tibeto-Burman.

Throughout history, two contact languages have played a crucial role in shaping India's linguistic and cultural identity: Persian and English. Persian was historically the language of administration and culture during various dynastic rules, particularly under the Delhi Sultanate

¹ There are two minor families as well Austro – Asiatic and Tibeto-chinese , spoken respectively by 1.5 per cent and 0.75 per cent people in the country

² <http://indiaonline.in/Profile/Culture/Language.asp>

and the Mughal Empire. English, introduced during British colonial rule, continues to serve as an important official and link language in India today.

The Indian Constitution (Article 343) designates Hindi as the official language of the Union. It is also recognized as the national language of India. Hindi is the mother tongue of approximately 20% of the population, primarily in the northern Hindi belt, which includes Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. Additionally, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh also recognize Hindi as their official language. Like other northern languages, Hindi belongs to the Indo-Aryan language family.

However, the linguistic landscape of South India is markedly different. The Dravidian languages, spoken in the southern states, share little resemblance with Indo-Aryan languages.

English serves as an additional official language of India and is the primary language of legislation and judiciary. In practice, English remains widely used in government, education, business, and administration, making it an essential link language. For many educated Indians, English is akin to a first language, though multilingualism is common across the country.

Beyond Hindi and English, India is home to numerous regional languages, each of which serves as the official language of its respective state. The Indian Constitution originally recognized 18 regional languages, but this number has since been expanded to 22 in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

At the time the constitution entered into force, English was used for most official purposes both at the federal level and in the various states. The constitution envisaged the gradual phasing in of local languages, principally Hindi, to replace English over a fifteen-year period, but gave Parliament the power to, by law, provide for the continued use of English even thereafter. Accordingly, *English continues to be used today, in combination with Hindi (at the central level and in some states) and other languages (at the state level).*

The legal framework governing the use of languages for official purpose currently includes the Constitution, the Official Languages Act, 1963, Official Languages (Use for Official Purpose of the Union) Rules, 1976, and various state laws, as well as rules and regulations made by the central government and the states.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF INDIA

The Constitution of India has stipulated the usage of Hindi and English to be the two languages of communication for the federal Central Government. However, the state governments use their own language along with English for communication with the Central Government. For example, the central government sends its information in Hindi and English to the state of Karnataka and this state communicates back in Kannada and English. Similarly, information from the centre to Tamil Nadu is in English and Hindi and this state communicates back in Tamil and English.

India has a list of 22 official languages (including Hindi and English). These languages are entitled to representation on the Official Language Commission, and a candidate in an examination conducted for national government service may opt to take the exam in any of these languages. But in most of the states Hindi is popular for uneducated labor as this still is a source or means of communication in all of India.

Neither the constitution nor the laws of India accord the status of "National Language" to any language in India. Indian law states that no language will be made the National Language unless and until all the constituent states of the Union of India accept it. *Out of the 28 states and 7 union territories, only 10 states and 3 Union Territories have Hindi as the principal official language.*

Article 343 of the India Constitution states that the official language of the Union (India) shall be Hindi in Devanagari script. As drafted in the constitution in 1950, English ceased to exist as an official language (on par with Hindi) in 1965, after which it was intended to continue as an "associate additional official language" until such time that a duly appointed committee can decide on a full-scale transition to Hindi, based on a periodic review. However, due to protests from South Indian states where there is low Hindi penetration, the "twin language" system is still in vogue. Due to rapid industrialization, and a bustling multinational influence in the economy, English continues to be a popular and influential means of communication in the government and day-to-day business, and moves to replace it have effectively been shelved.

EMERGENCE OF THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES IN INDIA

English was the only language used for official purpose in the British India. However, when, the Constitution of India was made, it was declared in Article 343 (1) that Hindi will be the official Union language. It was also mentioned that over a period of fifteen years since the commencement of the Indian Constitution, Hindi will replace English, which was used as the official language of the country.

However, there was provision made that Parliament can decide whether to use English as an official language or not. The non-Hindi speaking communities across the country protested on the aspect of the change in official language from English to Hindi. This protest resulted in the enactment of the Official Language Act, 1963.

Acc. to the Official Language Act, 1963, since 26th January, 1965, Hindi in Devanagari script has been declared the official language of the Union. International form of Indian numerals was chosen as the preferred form of numerals used for official purpose. However, Section 3 of the Official Language Act mentioned that English may also be used for official purposes even after 1965. English has been given the status of the 'subsidiary official language' of India. It was decided that either Hindi or English can be used for procedures of Parliament. The limitation of the usage of Hindi and English languages for official purpose has also been determined in the Official Language Act, 1963. The Official Language Rules, 1976 also specifies various usages of these official languages. The Department of Official Language was formed under the Ministry of Home Affairs, which is authorized to monitor the developments and usages of the official languages of the country.

CONCLUSION

India's linguistic diversity is a defining feature of its cultural and historical identity. With 22 constitutionally recognized official languages, over 800 spoken languages, and approximately 1,600 dialects, the country presents a unique model of multilingual coexistence. While Hindi remains the official language of the Union, and English serves as an associate official language, regional languages continue to thrive, ensuring cultural preservation and effective governance across states.

The linguistic landscape of India has been shaped by centuries of historical influences, political

policies, and societal evolution. The bilingual and multilingual policies adopted by the Indian government have facilitated national integration while respecting regional identities. Despite early attempts to phase out English, it remains an integral part of education, administration, business, and law, reflecting India's global connectivity.

Looking ahead, India's commitment to linguistic inclusivity remains crucial for fostering unity in diversity. The advancement of technology and artificial intelligence in language processing, as seen in recent AI-driven initiatives, will further support linguistic representation and accessibility. As India continues its economic and cultural growth, the preservation and promotion of its linguistic heritage will remain vital in shaping its national and global identity.

