



Research Unit
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Government of India

Classical Language Status Granted to Prakrit

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Prakrit, representing a spectrum of Middle Indo-Aryan languages, is integral to understanding India's rich linguistic and cultural heritage. This ancient language not only serves as a foundation for many modern Indian languages but also encapsulates the diverse traditions and philosophies that have shaped the subcontinent's historical narrative. According to Adi Shankaracharya, "*Vachah Prakrit Sanskritau Shrutigiro*"- Prakrit and Sanskrit languages are the true vehicles of Indian wisdom. The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved conferring the Classical Language status to Prakrit along with Marathi, Pali, Assamese and Bengali languages on October 03, 2024.

Historical Significance of Prakrit

The antiquity of the Prakrit language is widely acknowledged among linguists and scholars. Renowned Acharya, including Panini, Chand, Vararuchi, and Samantbhadra, have shaped its grammatical structure. Prakrit served as the medium for sermons by eminent figures like Mahatma Buddha and Mahaveer, enabling them to effectively communicate their teachings to the masses. The impressions of Prakrit in regional literature are evident, with its dramatic, poetic, and philosophical works contributing to various fields, including astrology, mathematics, geology, chemistry, and botany.

The Prakrit language is not only foundational to the understanding of Indian linguistics and dialects but also exhibits a rich legacy. The tradition of Rastrabhasha Hindi finds its development in the tradition of Prakrit-Apabhramsa. Additionally, the Vedic language shows substantial elements of Prakrit, underscoring the necessity of studying this ancient language to comprehend the chronological evolution of Indian linguistic heritage.

Inscriptions and Literature

Prakrit inscriptions serve as vital historical records, providing insights into India's past. The inscriptions from the pre-Mauryan period, as well as those from King Ashoka and Kharvel, are primarily written in Prakrit. This rich literary tradition encompasses various genres, making Prakrit a repository of Indian history, culture, art, philosophy, and knowledge systems. Influential figures such as Lord Mahavira and Mahatma Buddha imparted their teachings in the Prakrit language to

share their insights and accomplishments with the general populace. Prakrit served as the vernacular of ancient Indian society. The foundational texts of both Jain and Buddhist traditions were written in Prakrit languages, which embody a valuable reservoir of knowledge and science. Furthermore, various forms of folk literature also showcase a wide array of uses of Prakrit languages throughout different regions.

Acharya Bharatmuni, in his seminal work 'Natyashastra,' recognized Prakrit as the language of the majority of Indians, rich in artistic expression and cultural diversity. This acknowledgement emphasizes Prakrit's accessibility and importance as a mode of communication among the common people. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, acknowledged the significance of Prakrit in the renowned text "*Vaishali Abhinandan Granth*" (Homage to Vaishali), which discusses the birthplace of Lord Mahavira, Vaishali.

Languages like Hindi, Bengali, and Marathi trace their development back to Prakrit, highlighting the importance of understanding Prakrit literature for a comprehensive grasp of the origins and evolution of modern languages. The research and publication of Prakrit literature are crucial for understanding the broader scope of Indian literature.

Significance of Classical Language Status for Prakrit

The conferment of Classical Language status on the Prakrit language holds significant cultural and historical importance. Prakrit languages, which flourished during ancient Indian civilization, serve as a vital link to India's rich literary heritage, particularly in the realms of Jain and Buddhist texts. This recognition not only acknowledges Prakrit's historical significance but also elevates its stature as a medium through which ancient philosophies, culture, and artistic expressions were conveyed. By promoting Prakrit, the government aims to preserve and revitalize ancient literary traditions, enriching contemporary understanding of India's diverse linguistic landscape. Furthermore, this status can inspire scholarly research, encourage educational initiatives, and foster cultural pride among communities that have historically used Prakrit, thus enhancing national identity and cultural heritage in a modern context.

Conclusion

The Prakrit language is a cornerstone of India's linguistic heritage, reflecting the rich tapestry of cultural and intellectual contributions of ancient thinkers and scholars. As a language of the masses, it has played a pivotal role in shaping India's religious, philosophical, and literary landscapes. Recognizing Prakrit's significance is crucial not only for studying historical texts but also for understanding the evolution of contemporary Indian languages. In preserving and promoting Prakrit literature, we ensure that the wisdom and knowledge of our ancestors continue to enlighten future generations, fostering a deeper connection to our cultural roots and linguistic diversity.

References

<https://www.slbsrsv.ac.in/faculties-and-departments/faculty-sahitya-and-sanskriti/department-prakrit>

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