

“Sisters and brothers,

I am delighted to be here with all of you to celebrate the International Mother Language Day.

International Mother Language Day was initially mooted by Bangladesh and UNESCO General Conference approved the proposal in 1999. This has since been observed throughout the world since 2000.

India, like UNESCO, believes in the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity for sustainable societies. We strongly believe that we must collectively preserve our linguistic heritage.

It is worth noting that globally 40 percent of the population does not have access to an education in a language they speak or understand. India shares UNESCO's perspective on linguistic diversity and believes that mother tongue-based multilingual education is very important.

Sisters and brothers,

I have always emphasized the importance of protecting and conserving our unique and rich linguistic heritage.

The great Indian poet Acharya Dandi, had said that if the light of language does not exist, we will be groping in a dark world.

Language illuminates our world, makes it easier for us to understand the world and fellow human beings.

Language is a tool for intellectual and emotional expression.

అనుభూతులు కట్టలు తెంచుకుని పొంగుకొస్తున్నప్పుడు మనసునీ మనసునీ కలబోసి.. మనిషినీ మనిషినీ కలిపి.. ఒక జట్టుగా.. బృందంగా.. సమూహంగా , చివరికి ఒక సమాజంగా పట్టి ఉంచే ఒకే ఒక మహత్తర సాధనం భాష. మదిలో ఆలోచనలు ముసురుకున్నప్పుడు మన నోటి నుంచి అప్రయత్నంగా బయటికొచ్చే అత్యంత సహజమైన పలుకు అది.

మానవ సంబంధాల అభివృద్ధి క్రమంలో ఏర్పడిన భావ వ్యక్తీకరణే భాష. వివిధ చారిత్రక , సామాజిక, ఆర్థిక, భౌగోళిక కారణాల వల్ల వ్యక్తీకరణ అనేక రకాలుగా జరుగుతుంది. భాషలో కేవలం వ్యక్తీకరణే గాక , మన సంస్కృతి కూడా దాగి ఉంటుందని నేను చెబుతూ ఉండే మాటల్లోని ఆంతర్యం ఇదే.

जब अनुभवों को अभिव्यक्ति की अपेक्षा होती है और व्यक्तियों को अपने विचारों और भावनाओं को साझा करना होता है, तो भाषा एक संयोजक शक्ति बन जाती है। यह एक ऐसा साधन है जो लोगों को एक साथ लाता है, और एक समाज का निर्माण करता है। यह एक सांस्कृतिक संबंध का निर्माण करता है।

Language is a vehicle of intergenerational transmission of culture, scientific knowledge and a worldview.

Language shapes the cultural life of a nation and lays the foundation for its progress.

Language is the vital, unseen thread that links the past with the present.

We, in India, are fortunate to be heirs to a great linguistic tradition. Our country is a linguistic treasure house. Ours is a nation that is widely acknowledged for its extraordinary linguistic and cultural diversity. The plurality and co-existence of multiple languages add color and vitality to our country and makes it unique.

Indian languages have always been celebrated for their scientific structure and phonetic, uncomplicated spellings and clear grammatical rules. Our languages also been vehicles of our vast and highly sophisticated ancient, medieval, and modern literature.

More than 19,500 languages or dialects are spoken in India as mother tongues, according to the Language Census.

There are 121 languages which are spoken by 10,000 or more people in India.

Our languages are a repository of our collective knowledge and wisdom which we have amassed over the course of the long journey of our vibrant civilization.

Our tribal languages, many of which are headed towards extinction, contain invaluable knowledge about a region's flora, fauna and medicinal plants.

Sisters and brothers,

Language evolves with human evolution and gets nourished by constant use. If you donot use a language, you lose it.

When a language declines, it takes with it an entire knowledge system.

भाषा मानव विकास के साथ विकसित होती है और निरंतर प्रयोग से पोषित होती है। यदि आप किसी भाषा का प्रयोग नहीं करते हैं, तो आप इसे खो देते हैं ।

जब कोई भाषा प्रयोग में घटती जाती है , तो वह अपने साथ संपूर्ण ज्ञान प्रणाली को भी ले जाती है ।

The traditional livelihood patterns disappear along with their special skills, arts, crafts, cuisine and trade.

We must not allow this to happen.

Language preservation and development needs a conscious, concerted action. It has to be a multi-pronged approach.

भाषा के संरक्षण और विकास के लिए एक सजग और ठोस कार्रवाई की आवश्यकता है। इस हेतु एक बहुआयामी दृष्टिकोण होना चाहिए।

We must start by offering in our schools a curriculum in which the mother tongue of the learners is the medium of instruction at least at the primary level if not high school.

A number of studies conducted all over the world by different expert groups have established the fact that teaching of mother tongue at the initial stages of education gives impetus to the growth of mind and thought and makes children more creative and logical.

At the same time, we must encourage our children to learn multiple languages in order to widen their horizons.

Let me recall, in this context, the wise words of Mahatma Gandhi. He had said, "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."

He had reminded us that mother tongue should not be neglected but this did not mean that one need not learn other languages like English. As he said, "I would have our young men and young women with literary taste to learn as much of English and other world languages as they like, and then expect them to give the benefits of their learning to India and to the world, like a Bose, a Roy or the poet himself. But I would not have a single Indian to forget, neglect or be ashamed of

his mother-tongue, or to feel that he or she cannot think or express the best thoughts in his or her own vernacular.”

In a similar vein, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had also said that children taught in a foreign language are forced to memorize the words without understanding and “when cramming power increases, understanding power decreases.” In 1946 while addressing the convocation of Nagpur University he further elaborates on the theme of mother tongue education in the following words: “Your university has shown that where there is a will there is a way. I hope you will follow this well thought plan with determination and when Indian language is used as medium you will see that a lot of time of students saved, their intelligence blossoms and minds become sharp.”

Since education is one of the instruments for the growth of self, society and the nation, language or languages should enhance access to knowledge and improve the quality of life.

Language should become a catalyst for inclusive development.

Language of administration should be the language of the people. समावेशी विकास के लिए भाषा एक उत्प्रेरक बननी चाहिए। लोगों की भाषा ही प्रशासन की भाषा होनी चाहिए। जैसा कि प्रख्यात गांधीवादी काका साहेब काकेलकर ने कहा है , “यदि भारत में प्रजा का राज चलाना है , तो वह जनता की भाषा में ही चलाना होगा।” (If India has to be a people’s government, it has to run the government only in people’s language.)

Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, in her message on the occasion of International Mother Language Day (February 21) 2019 had said: “For UNESCO, every mother tongue deserves to be known, recognised and given greater prominence in all spheres of public life. This is not always the case. Mother tongues do not necessarily have national-language status, official-language status, or status as the language of instruction. The situation can lead to the devaluation of a mother tongue and to its ultimate disappearance in the long term.” In my view, this is a timely, important reminder. We cannot allow this devaluation of mother languages to take place.

Swami Vivekananda had once said that language is the chief means and index of a nation’s progress. We must ensure that Indian languages are used extensively and with a sense of pride.

Our languages must serve as means of empowerment of the masses.

I am very happy that the Parliament of India now allows its members to express themselves in any of the 22 scheduled languages. We must explore the possibility of permitting our Parliamentarians to speak in their mother tongues in the House. We must tap the power of technology to make this happen.

It is heartening that the Supreme Court of India has recently decided to make available its judgements in six vernacular languages, to start with. This is a positive step in the direction of removing language barriers and ensuring equal access to justice.

Indian languages can bring administration closer to people. It can make governance more people-centric.

Sisters and brothers,

India has the largest youth population in the world, 65% of its population is below 35 years of age. We must incentivize this energetic generation of young people to keep alive their mother tongues and dialects.

We must teach our children to love languages and equip them to protect and nourish the beautiful legacy of languages that we have received from our ancestors.

This is the underlying spirit of Government’s Ek Bharat, Shresth Bharat initiative.

Every language is important and we should make sincere effort to preserve and propagate it. Let us strive to communicate with each other and understand each other better through our Indian languages.

Our tongues might very well be different but we are all part of the same great civilization and we share common aspirations and goals. Let us deepen our bonds of friendship by learning as many language as possible without neglecting our mother tongue.

Let us learn languages out of love for them, out of love for the people who speak them and for the knowledge that is available in them. Also, let us ensure that every citizen is literate in at least one Indian language.

It is heartening to note that the new draft National Education Policy puts forth a number of suggestions for supporting education in home languages and mother tongues, tribal as well as sign languages.

I do hope the recommendations contained in the New Education Policy will be discussed with objectivity and foresight so that the children and youth build excellent language competence to navigate the multi-lingual globalized world of the 21st century.

I hope that more and more people will start using their native languages at home, in the community, in meetings and in administration.

More people should write poetry, stories, novels and dramas in Indian languages. We must accord a sense of dignity and pride to those who speak, write and communicate in these languages.

We must encourage Indian language publications, journals and children's books. Dialects and folk literature must be given adequate focus.

भाषा को संरक्षित करने में समाचार पत्रों , पत्रिकाओं, सिनेमा और टेलीविजन की एक एक महती भूमिका है। इसलिए मैं कहता हूँ कि मातृभाषा हमारी आंखों की तरह है। अन्य भाषाएं हमारे चश्मे की तरह हैं। हमारी बुनियादी दृष्टि होने पर ही चश्मे हमारी मदद करते हैं। ब्रिटिश काल के दौरान, अंग्रेजी सीखने और नौकरी पाने के बीच एक संबंध विद्यमान था। इसीलिए उस समय अंग्रेजी के प्रति आकर्षण था। हमें शिक्षा और रोजगार को भी जोड़ना होगा और राज्यों में रोजगार के लिए भारतीय भाषाओं के ज्ञान को अनिवार्य बनाना होगा ।

We must think of making the knowledge of Indian languages compulsory for recruitment to State government jobs. There has to be a link between language and employment.

In recent years a lot of dates in the calendar have been designated as some day or diwas to create awareness about a particular thing or object etc. However, more often than not the seriousness about that phenomenon ends with passage of the day. Therefore, it is important that our celebration of matribhashas does not end with the conclusion of Matribhasha Diwas. In fact everyday should be celebrated as matribhasha diwas and I wish that all citizens of the country get an opportunity to use their mother tongue on a daily basis. Only then will the celebration of this kind attain serious meaning. The celebration of matribhasha diwas provides an opportunity for strengthening the languages spoken by social groups and at the same it promotes the linguistic diversity of the country too. When we protect and promote mother tongues we protect and promote linguistic and cultural diversity also.

I am happy that the Ministry of Human Resource Development and Ministry of Culture are jointly organizing a number of events across the country to highlight the need to protect, preserve and further enrich Indian languages. I congratulate them and extend my greetings to innumerable scholars, writers, teachers and language enthusiasts who are contributing to this sacred cause.

I hope that this conference will come up with meaningful ideas for further development and use of Indian languages. I wish you the very best in your endeavours.

Thank you

Jai Hind!”
