

## From Native Words to National Strength: Pathways to Inclusive Nation Building

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**Abstract:** *Language plays a fundamental role in shaping cultural identity, social cohesion, and national development. The idea of “From Native Words to National Strength” emphasizes the importance of linguistic diversity in promoting inclusive nation building. In multilingual societies, native languages serve as powerful tools for preserving cultural heritage, facilitating communication, and ensuring broader participation in education and governance. Recognizing and promoting indigenous and regional languages can strengthen social inclusion by enabling people from diverse linguistic backgrounds to actively engage in national life. When citizens are able to learn, communicate, and express themselves in their mother tongues, it enhances access to education, knowledge, and democratic participation. Furthermore, linguistic inclusion contributes to cultural pride, mutual respect, and unity among different communities. This study explores how the promotion of native languages can support inclusive nation building by fostering cultural preservation, educational accessibility, and social integration. It also highlights the role of language policies and educational initiatives in strengthening national identity while respecting linguistic diversity. By emphasizing the value of native languages, the study underscores their contribution to building a more equitable, inclusive, and culturally enriched nation.*

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**Introduction:** Nation building is not merely the creation of political institutions or economic frameworks; it is fundamentally a cultural and social process rooted in shared values, identities, and communication systems. Among the many factors that contribute to this process, language occupies a central and indispensable position. It is through language that individuals articulate their identities, transmit cultural knowledge, and participate in collective life. In multilingual societies such as India, the relationship between language and nation building becomes even more complex and significant.

The phrase “From Native Words to National Strength” encapsulates a transformative vision in which linguistic diversity is not seen as a barrier but as a resource for national development. Historically, many nation-states have attempted to impose linguistic uniformity to foster unity. However, such approaches often marginalize minority communities and undermine social cohesion. In contrast, inclusive nation building recognizes the value of linguistic plurality and seeks to integrate diverse linguistic identities into a unified national framework.

**Objectives:** This research article examines the role of native languages in fostering inclusive nation building. It argues that the promotion of mother tongues and regional languages can enhance educational access, strengthen democratic participation, preserve cultural heritage, and promote social integration. At the same time, the article critically engages with the challenges posed by linguistic hierarchies, globalization, and policy implementation gaps.

**Conceptual Framework: Language, Identity and Nationhood:** Language is one of the most powerful markers of individual and collective identity. It carries within it the history, traditions, and worldview of a community. Through language, people develop a sense of belonging and continuity with their cultural heritage. Native languages, in particular, are deeply embedded in the everyday lives of individuals and communities, shaping their cognitive and emotional experiences.

The loss or marginalization of a native language often leads to a sense of cultural dislocation. Communities that are forced to abandon their linguistic heritage may experience alienation and loss of identity. Therefore, the preservation and promotion of native languages are essential for maintaining cultural diversity and ensuring the dignity of all communities.

Language is not a neutral medium; it is deeply intertwined with power structures. Dominant languages often enjoy greater prestige and institutional support, while minority languages are marginalized. This creates linguistic hierarchies that reflect and reinforce social inequalities.

In many postcolonial societies, colonial languages such as English continue to dominate education, administration, and economic opportunities. While these languages may offer certain advantages, their dominance can exclude large sections of the population who are not proficient in them. Inclusive nation building requires a critical examination of these power dynamics and the development of policies that promote linguistic equity.

Contrary to the belief that linguistic diversity leads to fragmentation, it can actually strengthen national unity when managed inclusively. A nation that respects and celebrates its linguistic diversity fosters a sense of belonging among its citizens. This inclusive approach enhances social cohesion and reduces conflicts arising from cultural and linguistic marginalization.

### **Historical Evolution of Language Policies in India:**

**Pre-Colonial Linguistic Landscape:** India has historically been characterized by profound linguistic plurality, with a wide range of languages functioning across domains such as literature, governance, education, and everyday communication. Classical languages like Sanskrit played a significant role in religious and philosophical discourse, while regional languages such as Tamil, Bengali, and others flourished as vibrant mediums of literary and cultural expression. Persian, particularly during the medieval period, served as an important administrative language under various Islamic dynasties (Pollock, 2006; Chatterjee, 1993). These languages were deeply embedded within regional socio-cultural contexts, contributing to the formation of localized identities and knowledge traditions. The coexistence of multiple languages did not necessarily create fragmentation; rather, it reflected a pluralistic and layered cultural framework that enabled diverse communities to maintain their linguistic heritage while participating in broader civilizational exchanges (Mohanty, 2019).

**Colonial Impact on Language:** The advent of colonial rule, particularly under the British, marked a significant transformation in India's linguistic landscape. The introduction of English as the primary language of administration, law, and higher education institutionalized a new linguistic hierarchy. The implementation of policies such as Macaulay's Minute on Education explicitly promoted English education

with the objective of creating a class of intermediaries who would serve colonial interests (Macaulay, 1835). As a result, English became associated with power, prestige, and upward mobility, while indigenous languages were relegated to the margins.

This shift produced a deep socio-linguistic divide between the English-educated elite and the broader population, who remained rooted in their native languages. The consequences of this divide were far-reaching, influencing access to education, employment opportunities, and administrative participation. Scholars argue that this linguistic stratification contributed significantly to the reproduction of social and economic inequalities in colonial and postcolonial India (Viswanathan, 1989; Phillipson, 1992). Furthermore, the privileging of English disrupted traditional knowledge systems that were previously transmitted through indigenous languages, thereby weakening local epistemologies.

**Post-Independence Language Policy:** Following independence, India adopted a consciously pluralistic approach to language policy, recognizing the need to balance linguistic diversity with national integration. The framers of the Constitution of India acknowledged multiple languages within the national framework, enshrining provisions for linguistic rights and cultural preservation. The inclusion of languages in the Eighth Schedule was a significant step toward formal recognition, while the adoption of the three-language formula aimed to promote multilingual competence and national unity (Government of India, 1950; Agnihotri, 2007).

Despite these progressive measures, the implementation of language policies has remained uneven. Certain languages, particularly those with political and demographic dominance, have received greater institutional support, while many minority and tribal languages continue to face marginalization. This disparity underscores the gap between policy intent and practical execution, highlighting the need for more inclusive, context-sensitive, and adequately resourced language planning initiatives (Mohanty, 2019; Annamalai, 2001).

### **Native Languages and Educational Inclusion**

**Mother Tongue-Based Education:** The role of native languages in education is widely recognized as fundamental to effective learning and cognitive development. A substantial body of research indicates that children acquire knowledge more efficiently when instructed in their mother tongue, particularly during the foundational years of education (Cummins, 2000; UNESCO, 2003). Mother tongue-based education facilitates better comprehension, enhances critical thinking skills, and fosters creativity by allowing learners to engage with concepts in a familiar linguistic framework.

Conversely, the use of an unfamiliar language as the medium of instruction often creates significant barriers to learning. Students may struggle to understand basic concepts, leading to frustration, disengagement, and poor academic performance. This challenge is especially pronounced among children from marginalized and linguistically diverse communities, who are disproportionately affected by language-related disadvantages (Heugh, 2011). Thus, the adoption of native languages in early education is not merely a pedagogical preference but a necessity for ensuring equitable learning outcomes.

**Reducing Educational Inequality:** The integration of native languages into the educational system plays a crucial role in addressing structural inequalities. By enabling learners to access education in a language they understand, it reduces disparities in academic achievement and enhances inclusivity. This approach aligns with broader goals of social justice by ensuring that linguistic background does not become a barrier to educational opportunity (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009).

Furthermore, native language instruction contributes to higher retention rates and improved participation, particularly among first-generation learners and students from rural or tribal backgrounds. It empowers

learners by validating their linguistic identities, thereby fostering confidence and a sense of belonging within the educational system (Mohanty, Panda, & Pal, 2010).

**National Education Policy and Linguistic Inclusion:** A significant policy development in recent years is the introduction of the National Education Policy, which strongly advocates for the use of mother tongue or regional languages as the medium of instruction at least until the primary level. This policy marks a paradigm shift in recognizing the pedagogical and socio-cultural importance of linguistic diversity in education (Government of India, 2020).

However, the effectiveness of this policy depends largely on its implementation. Key challenges include the availability of trained teachers proficient in local languages, the development of quality teaching-learning materials, and the need for institutional support. Without addressing these structural issues, the transformative potential of the policy may remain unrealized. Therefore, sustained investment, capacity building, and community involvement are essential to translate policy vision into educational practice (Heugh, 2011; Mohanty, 2019).

### **Language and Democratic Participation**

**Access to Governance:** Language plays a fundamental role in enabling meaningful democratic participation by facilitating communication between the state and its citizens. When government policies, legal frameworks, and administrative procedures are communicated in languages that people understand, it enhances transparency, strengthens accountability, and encourages active civic engagement (Habermas, 1989; Mohanty, 2019). In multilingual societies, the use of native and regional languages in governance ensures that citizens are not merely passive recipients of state directives but active participants in decision-making processes.

Conversely, the dominance of unfamiliar or elite languages in administration can create significant barriers to participation. Citizens who lack proficiency in such languages often find themselves excluded from accessing public services, understanding legal rights, or engaging in political discourse. This linguistic exclusion undermines the foundational principles of democracy, including equality and representation, and reinforces existing socio-economic disparities (Phillipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009). Therefore, linguistic accessibility in governance is essential for fostering inclusive and participatory democratic systems.

**Linguistic Rights and Citizenship:** Linguistic rights are increasingly recognized as an integral dimension of human rights, closely linked to the broader ideals of dignity, equality, and cultural freedom. The ability to use one's language in education, administration, judiciary, and public life is essential for exercising full citizenship and participating effectively in national life (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009). These rights are particularly crucial for linguistic minorities, who often face systemic marginalization.

The recognition and protection of linguistic rights contribute significantly to inclusive nation building by ensuring that all citizens, regardless of their linguistic background, have equitable access to opportunities and resources. International frameworks such as UNESCO's advocacy for multilingual education and linguistic diversity further reinforce the importance of safeguarding these rights (UNESCO, 2003). In this context, linguistic inclusion is not merely a cultural concern but a democratic imperative that strengthens the relationship between the state and its citizens.

### **Cultural Preservation and Social Integration**

**Language as Cultural Heritage:** Native languages serve as vital repositories of cultural heritage, encapsulating the collective memory, traditions, and knowledge systems of communities. They carry oral

traditions, folklore, literary expressions, and indigenous epistemologies that have evolved over generations (Fishman, 1999; Crystal, 2000). The loss or decline of a language often results in the erosion of these cultural assets, leading to an irreversible loss of human heritage.

Preserving native languages is therefore essential not only for maintaining cultural diversity but also for sustaining the intellectual and philosophical richness of societies. In multilingual nations, the protection of linguistic heritage becomes a crucial aspect of cultural policy and national identity formation (Mohanty, 2019).

**Promoting Intercultural Understanding:** Linguistic inclusion fosters intercultural understanding by promoting respect for diverse languages and cultural practices. When multiple languages are recognized and valued within a society, it encourages dialogue and interaction among different cultural groups. This process helps dismantle stereotypes and prejudices, creating a more inclusive social environment (Banks, 2008).

Moreover, exposure to linguistic diversity enhances cultural sensitivity and empathy, enabling individuals to appreciate perspectives beyond their own cultural frameworks. Such intercultural competence is essential in pluralistic societies, where social harmony depends on mutual respect and understanding.

**Language and Social Cohesion:** A society that embraces linguistic diversity is more likely to achieve social cohesion and inclusivity. When individuals feel that their language and cultural identity are acknowledged and respected, they develop a stronger sense of belonging and attachment to the nation (Anderson, 1983). This sense of inclusion fosters trust in institutions and encourages active participation in social and political life.

On the other hand, the marginalization of certain languages can lead to feelings of alienation and exclusion, potentially resulting in social tensions and conflict. Therefore, promoting linguistic equity is essential for building cohesive societies where diversity is seen as a strength rather than a source of division (Kymlicka, 1995).

### **Economic Dimensions of Linguistic Inclusion**

**Language and Employment:** Language proficiency is closely linked to access to employment opportunities and economic mobility. In many contexts, the dominance of certain languages—particularly global or colonial languages—creates structural barriers for individuals who are not proficient in them. This often results in unequal access to jobs, professional advancement, and economic resources (Grin, 2003).

Promoting multilingualism can help address these disparities by enabling individuals to participate more effectively in diverse economic sectors. It also enhances workforce diversity and adaptability, which are critical in an increasingly globalized economy. Recognizing the economic value of linguistic diversity can thus contribute to more inclusive and equitable development.

**Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainable Development:** Native languages play a crucial role in preserving and transmitting indigenous knowledge systems related to agriculture, medicine, environmental conservation, and community governance. These knowledge systems are often deeply rooted in local ecosystems and cultural practices, making them highly relevant for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2010).

By valuing and integrating indigenous knowledge into development strategies, societies can promote environmentally sustainable practices and support local economies. The loss of native languages, however, threatens the continuity of this knowledge, underscoring the need for linguistic preservation as part of sustainable development initiatives (Crystal, 2000).

**Digital Inclusion and Language:** The digital revolution has transformed access to information, communication, and economic opportunities. However, it has also highlighted significant linguistic disparities, as many digital platforms and resources are dominated by a limited number of global languages. This creates a digital divide that disproportionately affects speakers of minority and indigenous languages (Warschauer, 2004).

Expanding digital content and technological interfaces in native languages can play a transformative role in bridging this divide. Initiatives such as localized software, multilingual websites, and language technologies (e.g., translation tools and voice recognition systems) can enhance digital accessibility and participation. In doing so, they contribute to more inclusive knowledge economies and empower communities to engage in the digital age on their own linguistic terms (Mohanty, 2019).

### Pathways to Inclusive Nation Building

**Strengthening Language Policies:** A foundational pathway toward inclusive nation building lies in the formulation and effective implementation of robust language policies that recognize and promote linguistic diversity. Governments must move beyond symbolic recognition of languages to ensuring their functional presence in education, administration, judiciary, and public life. This includes granting official or semi-official status to minority and indigenous languages, investing in their standardization, and supporting the creation of linguistic resources such as dictionaries, grammars, and literature (May, 2012; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009).

Furthermore, language policies must be grounded in the principles of linguistic justice and human rights, ensuring that speakers of all languages have equitable access to opportunities and services. In multilingual countries like India, this also involves strengthening constitutional provisions and institutional mechanisms that safeguard linguistic rights while promoting national integration (Mohanty, 2019). However, the success of such policies depends not only on their design but also on their implementation, which requires political will, adequate funding, and continuous monitoring.

**Promoting Multilingual Education:** Multilingual education represents a critical strategy for integrating linguistic diversity into nation building. Educational systems must adopt inclusive pedagogical models that incorporate native or mother tongues alongside regional, national, and global languages. Such an approach ensures that learners benefit from cognitive advantages associated with mother tongue instruction while also acquiring the linguistic skills necessary for broader communication and global engagement (Cummins, 2000; García, 2009).

Research indicates that multilingual education enhances academic achievement, improves literacy outcomes, and fosters critical thinking skills. It also contributes to social inclusion by validating students' linguistic identities and reducing barriers to learning (UNESCO, 2003). In the Indian context, policy frameworks such as the National Education Policy (2020) advocate for mother tongue-based instruction in early education, reflecting a growing recognition of its importance. However, successful implementation requires teacher training, curriculum development, and the production of quality educational materials in diverse languages (Heugh, 2011; Mohanty, 2019).

**Leveraging Technology:** In the contemporary digital era, technology offers unprecedented opportunities to promote and revitalize native languages. The development of digital tools—such as machine translation systems, speech recognition software, and localized educational applications—can significantly enhance the accessibility and usability of indigenous and regional languages (Warschauer, 2004). By expanding digital content in local languages, governments and institutions can ensure that speakers of these languages are not excluded from the information economy.

Moreover, technology can facilitate the documentation and preservation of endangered languages through digital archives, online repositories, and multimedia platforms. Social media and mobile technologies have also emerged as powerful tools for linguistic expression and community engagement, enabling speakers to use and promote their languages in everyday digital interactions (Crystal, 2000). However, bridging the digital linguistic divide requires sustained investment, public-private partnerships, and inclusive technological design that accommodates linguistic diversity (Mohanty, 2019).

**Community Participation and Empowerment:** Inclusive nation building cannot be achieved solely through top-down policy interventions; it requires active participation and ownership by communities themselves. Grassroots initiatives play a vital role in preserving and promoting native languages, particularly in contexts where institutional support is limited. Community-led efforts such as language revitalization programs, cultural festivals, storytelling traditions, and local publications contribute significantly to sustaining linguistic heritage (Fishman, 1991).

Empowering communities also involves recognizing their role as custodians of linguistic and cultural knowledge. Participatory approaches to language planning and policy implementation can ensure that interventions are contextually relevant and culturally sensitive. Additionally, involving local communities in educational initiatives—such as the development of mother tongue-based curricula—can enhance the effectiveness and acceptance of such programs (Mohanty, Panda, & Pal, 2010).

Ultimately, the integration of community perspectives fosters a sense of ownership and pride, strengthening both linguistic identity and national belonging. By combining policy support with community engagement, nations can create a sustainable framework for linguistic inclusion that contributes to long-term social cohesion and development.

**Conclusion:** The journey from native words to national strength is a journey toward inclusivity, equity, and cultural richness. Native languages are not merely tools of communication; they are foundational to identity, participation, and development. Recognizing and promoting linguistic diversity is essential for building a nation that is not only strong but also inclusive and just. In a globalized world, the challenge is not to choose between local and global languages but to create a harmonious balance between them. By embracing linguistic diversity, nations can transform their cultural wealth into a powerful driver of social cohesion and sustainable development.

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