

## **Reimagining Classical Languages: From Cultural Heritage to Digital Hypertext**

**Dr. Sunanda M. Shinde**

Assistant Professor,

D. Y. Patil College of Engineering and Technology, (Autonomous)

Kasaba Bawada, Kolhapur,416006

[sunandagpatil@gmail.com](mailto:sunandagpatil@gmail.com)

=====

### **Abstract**

It is conventional that formal teaching and institution has played a critical role in the preservation of classical languages like Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Pali and Bengali. In today's digitalized and globalized world, but, a new perspective is needed. This paper presents classical languages as continuous and dynamic knowledge systems, rather than temporary and cultural heritages. By understanding these languages as active institutions of logic and philosophy, we can move from passive arousal to active use. In sum, it is critical that the linguistic heritage of India survive through a process of enmeshing tradition with innovation. Digital tools and Artificial Intelligence can be used to maintain the authenticity and robustness of the classical languages in order to create future knowledge out of these languages This makes the old languages to be alive, usable and pertinent to the next generations. Through such changes, these languages can not only perform well in the classroom, but they also can operate in the context of the modern information ecology.

**Keywords:** Classical Languages, Digital Humanities, Artificial Intelligence, Language Preservation, Multilingual Education, Cultural Heritage

### **1. Introduction**

In the case of the term of classical language being referred to; the reference of classical language was done to the old manner of speaking and the focus was made on the hard drives of human history. These languages possess the ability to preserve profound anecdotes of the wisdom of our fore fathers, their social reminiscence and even their identity. In India, the status of languages as classical language is not only good honour but also pledge to maintain a good line of connection to our origins. However, nowadays these languages have a lot of problems in a digital world of instant communication and trading across the globe. A lot of youths particularly the gen z youths pose the question Does this still matter to me? Although we continue to admire these languages in rituals or history books, it tends to be detached with life.

The way forward is not to treat these languages like antique pieces in museums meant only to be seen. Instead the global academic community is realizing we need to bring them into the 21st century. The need is to move them from the museum and bringing back in the active use. Those languages should be treated as living systems of knowledge that can interact with science, ethics, and technology. With this it can be ensured that classical languages are not just remembered they are used.

The study advances the existing preservation initiatives through a refocusing on a global and forward-thinking structure. It goes beyond policy support to examine the ways in which classical languages can get a new life through digital technologies, artificial intelligence (AI) and contemporary multilingual education. We can make this heritage more accessible and researchable than ever before by turning ancient scripts into the digital data that is easily searchable and by using AI to unravel the mysteries of the complex texts.

## **2. Classical Languages: Concept and Global Significance**

It is not only that a language is old that it is called classical; rather it is the wealth of knowledge contained in it. These languages normally evolve at a golden age, a period when a civilization is greatly advanced in science, art, literature, and philosophy. They reproduce the most significant ideas and findings of the human race in an easily comprehensible and permanent form. In contrast to the contemporary spoken languages that are utilized in their day-to-day communication, the classical languages are closely structured and accurate. They are powerful and sound documents that maintain the cultural, intellectual and historical memory of a civilization.

In every corner of the globe, languages like Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, Classical Chinese and Arabic are the languages that have influenced the way individuals think and learn. They were the primary knowledge languages of their time. In some cases, contemporary Western conceptions of law, medicine, and politics are based on Latin and Greek. The languages do not consist merely of words, but are structures of thought that help us perceive the world. They also make a close connection between the present and thousands of years of human knowledge and experience.

On the international level, the classical languages are not simply the symbols of national pride but also assist us in interpreting the concept of human civilization on the whole. They provide important evidence in the study of the way human language has evolved in time, in linguistics and philology. Studying their grammar and meanings, scholars are able to trace their connections to other language groups and observe how contemporary languages have expanded out of ancient ones thousands of years ago.

This was a big step initiated in 2004 when the Indian government established a special category to show appreciation to the oldest language treasures of the country by establishing a category called Classical Language. Initially, the bar was established on three key pillars including that the language must be more than a millennium old, it must have a fair amount of ancient literature that generations have kept close to their heart, and most importantly, the literary tradition of the language must be original, as opposed to borrowed off some other culture.

This was a big step initiated in 2004 when the Indian government established a special category to show appreciation to the oldest language treasures of the country by establishing a category called Classical Language. Initially, the bar was established on three key pillars including that the language must be more than a millennium old, it must have a fair amount of ancient literature that generations have kept close to their heart, and most importantly, the literary tradition of the language must be original, as opposed to borrowed off some other culture.

Globally, the classical languages are significant in the fields of learning, culture and tradition. They provide such rich material that they are used in fields such as comparative linguistics and philology to understand how languages vary, construct grammatical forms, demystify meaning, and trace interrelations between language groups in antiquity. Speaking of the philosophical thought and ethical principles in the world, the ancient authors still can provide the practical opinion on what is of interest to people and what is still significant today. Old words have an ancient origin and are still used to influence the way people speak in cross-cultural settings. Due to these languages, researchers use these languages to associate old writings with the living languages based on the common meaning. They are not confined to grammar or inscription, but they lead to the research of healing practices that have been long forgotten. They are even excessively in numbers, too star-shaped, harmonious with nature, even traditionally-inspired math. That they are not mere dead objects on shelves, but lead thought in laboratories, in wood and street and town. What is notable is the fact that they serve as global entities of knowledge which contribute to what is known by the people in the world. Learning more about them enhances cross-cultural understanding, fosters more effective collaboration among scholars, and helps retain old wisdom to their use in the modern world and generations to come.

In 2004, the Indian government made a significant move and introduced a special category in awarding exceptional linguistic treasures in the country by introducing a special category of Classical Language. Initially, the bar was established on the criteria of three key pillars; the language must be more than a thousand years old, must have an extensive legacy of ancient literature that generations have been proud of, and above all the literary tradition must be original, not an importation of another culture.

In fact, we see the need for greater precision which is what prompted the revision of these standards in 2005 at the behest of the Sahitya Akademi expert committees' advice. This update in turn made for the recognition of Sanskrit as an official language. What we did was to raise the bar we went back in time to 1500 2000 years and at the same time put forward a continuous rich literary history as a must. Also of note is that we required a break between the "classical" version of the language and its modern form which we found to have evolved so as to consider the ancient versions of these languages as almost independent systems of knowledge.

Based on work of Linguistic Experts Committees (LEC) which reported to the Sahitya Akademi these criteria were restructured in 2005. After this change Sanskrit was given the status of a classical language. What the revised criteria did was to put more stress on the language's age (1500 2000 years' back), to present a very rich and continuous body of literature, originality of that

literature and to put out the classical language as a clear entity from its modern forms which may or may not have that classicity.

In 2024, the government continued to develop these rules in the spirit of being more inclusive and incorporating more research. While the requirement of ancient roots remained the same, the focus began to shift toward "hard evidence." For a language to be recognized as classical, the language could not be based solely on legends, poetry, and other literary expressions. It had to provide proof in the form of ancient writings and, more importantly, knowledge texts. These texts were prose writings that pertained to philosophy, science, or law.

A classical language does not have to mirror its modern descendant. We see that over the course of thousands of years languages change so greatly as to become almost unrecognizable from the modern version. By this we note that which there is a break in the continuity, the government put in place measures to protect and study the separate great intellectual achievements of the past which may be very different from what is present in the modern language which has gone a different way.

In 2024 at a historic turn of events in October 3rd India put in place a which saw the expansion of its classical languages by the addition of Bengali, Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, and Assamese to the select group. Also joining the initial six Tamil, Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Odia this brings the total to eleven. This is not simply a reorganization of which languages are included; it is a great step forward in the recognition of what makes up the linguistic tapestry of India. Out of over 1,600 languages which are spoken in the sub-continent these eleven represent the base which a language tree has grown from over thousands of years and which has been shaped by migration, faith and local tradition.

This governmental recognition does not only pay tribute to the past, it is a stage to the future. By encouraging these languages India is releasing as much of the ancient knowledge as it can to us as we, in turn, diminish the distance between ancient and modern researchers and students. We are opening new areas to world academic inquiry and it is through that too which we are proposing to the world Indian rich literary traditions both the philosophical profundities of Pali and the very breath of life that is Marathi. This is a strong point that the civilizational identity of India is not something to be put away in a museum, but instead it is a history that is alive and breathing and is constantly changing.

### 3. Literature Review

The language and literature of India is one of the rich and varied languages globally. The country is a tremendous living mosaic with over 1,600 language varieties spoken around the sub-continent due to the thousands of years of migration, religion, social change and historical experience. The scholars hold that the evolution of the Indian languages is not only a linguistic issue; it is also a symbol of the civilizational pulse of the country that has remained extremely consistent over the course of both antiquity and contemporary periods.

India is also a leading example of multilingualism which is mainly supported by the Indo-Aryan and Dravidian language groups. Nevertheless, the image is further enriched by the presence of the Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Burman languages, which are the main pillars of the identity of the central and northeastern India. Although the 2011 Census reports that 22 languages are officially in use by the Constitution as an Eighth Schedule, hundreds of regional languages and dialects bring more nuances to such a rich scenery.

The debate of classical languages is changing in academic circles. Other philosophers such as Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar believe that they should not be regarded as dusty relics. Rather, they are living connections, which connects us because of the same morals and the same intellectual past. According to Sarkar, the best example could be Sanskrit that is an ancient power that influenced not only the language in India, but also in South and Southeast Asia. Another splendid paradox also brought about by him is that although those southern languages as the Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam languages have maintained their own ancient forms, their lexicons have been shot through with Sanskrit, and this is a sight that just goes to show how much these traditions have conversed with each other over the ages.

The richness is reflected in the literary worlds that these languages have created. In the north, such languages as Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, and Marathi have generated enormous literature. The example of Hindi literature, which had moved out of the epic ambit of the Ramayana to the heartfelt Bhakti poems of the Middle Ages and thence into the contemporary social realism. Urdu has recognized the ghazal and nazm to discuss the issues of love and social justice, and the Bengali literature entered the world of literature through the genius of Rabindranath Tagore.

The south tells an equally powerful story. Tamil stands as one of the world's oldest classical languages, with a literary streak that hasn't broken for over 2,000 years, beginning with the Sangam era. Telugu literature reached its peak during the magnificent Vijayanagara period, Kannada is celebrated for its revolutionary Vachana poetry that pushed for social reform, and Malayalam literature beautifully captures the socio-political heart of Kerala.

Recently, the government has stepped up to turn this pride into policy. A major milestone occurred in October 2024, when Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese, and Bengali were added to the classical list. This move makes India the only country in the world to officially recognize eleven classical languages, a clear signal of its commitment to saving its ancient knowledge. The Ministry of Education has backed this up by setting up dedicated universities for Sanskrit, a specialized institute for Classical Tamil, and centers of excellence in Mysuru to ensure these languages are researched and taught at the highest levels.

It isn't just a government effort, though. Groups like the Sanskrit Promotion Foundation are working to make learning accessible to everyone, while the National Translation Mission is busy translating complex academic texts into regional languages. This ensures that a student doesn't have to give up their native tongue to succeed in higher education.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is seen as the real "game-changer" here. By emphasizing early education in a child's mother tongue and creating high-quality bilingual textbooks, the policy aims to build students who are both culturally rooted and intellectually confident. Researchers believe this is the key to keeping classical languages sustainable. The consensus is clear: we have a solid foundation, but to truly thrive in a digital, globalized world, we must keep finding new ways to weave these ancient languages into our technology, our classrooms, and our daily lives.

#### 4. Classical Languages in the Digital and AI Era

The greater rise of artificial intelligence and computer technology has completely changed the playing field of the traditional languages. Quite to the contrary, these tools are now potent allies that contribute to the fact that ancient traditions can be made alive so that they can be available to a student and researcher globally.

The digitization of physical treasures such as manuscripts, inscriptions and palm-leaf records has become one of the largest changes. Previously, these texts were not that easy to study; you needed to travel somewhere to a certain library and the documents also were often too delicate to read. Those barriers have been eliminated in the digital archives and online repositories today. The rare and delicate texts are currently being rescued off physical rot and made available on high resolution text, which can be studied by anyone with some internet connection.

Not only by capturing images of old pages, but also through digital humanities projects are rendering this information searchable and interactive with the use of AI. The patterns of thousands of years of history, philosophy, and medicine can now be analyzed using annotated databases and linguistic tools by scholars. This is not only safeguarding the past as it is keeping the vast amount of knowledge contained in these classical systems safe and alive to be used and applied by the next generation.

#### 4.2 Language Processing and Artificial Intelligence

A major problem of the classical languages today is the reduction in student interest which has frequently been caused by the perceived lack of career opportunities. Evidence has shown that often the traditional text-based nature of teaching does not appeal to the students of today that

often are bored with the heavy emphasis on memorization and complex grammar rules and the fact that they are not allowed to see the real beauty of the language. A possible solution to this issue is technology-enhanced pedagogy which allows the classroom to become more interactive and student-centered.

With the help of blended learning models, mobile applications, and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), the classical language teaching becomes much more flexible to the current lifestyles. The tools that might be used to simplify the otherwise intricate grammatical structure to be easier to digest and remember might be digital stories telling, gamification, and audiovisual. With such resources, students are free to learn the content as fast as they want and at the same time in a very academically rigorous way. At the end of the day, the inclusion of technology in the teaching process repositioned classical languages as something thought provoking and practical. Rather than being regarded as being dead or inert, they are lively systems that appeal to a larger and more diverse audience. These languages with greater accessibility and interactivity will be kept as an important element of our international intellectual community, and not merely a scholarly interest.

### **4.3 Technology-Enhanced Pedagogy**

The lack of interest in classic languages as well as the perceived lack of career opportunities is one of the biggest challenges of the classical languages nowadays. Studies based on surveys indicate that the old-fashioned text-based instructional techniques do not necessarily appeal to the modern learners. Technology based pedagogy provides the best remedies to these problems by changing the way the classical languages are taught and learnt.

Classical language education can be more interactive, flexible, and learner-centered with the help of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), mobile learning applications, multimedia resources, and blended learning models. Complex grammatical ideas and improved understanding can be simplified with the use of audio-visual content, gamified learning tasks, and digital storytelling. Blended learning which involves integration of classroom teaching with use of digital applications enable the learner to study the classics language at their pace without compromising on academic standards.

With the help of the use of technology in pedagogy, classical languages will be rebranded as thought-provoking and practical and, thus, appeal to more and more diverse learners.

### **4.4 Discussion: Preservation to Empowerment.**

As it is analyzed in the present study, the preservation is not enough to ensure that the classical languages do not disappear. Classical languages need to be vigorously enabled by incorporating modern educational, technological and cultural orientations although it is important to maintain the texts and traditions.

One, instead of being confined to the exclusive or elite academic environment, the classical languages should be included in the mainstream and multilingual education. Second, it is possible to relate the classical languages to the current areas such as sustainability, ethics, environmental

studies, and artificial intelligence to illustrate the relevances in addressing the modern global issues. Many of the classical works offer very valuable thoughts on sustainable living, social harmony and moral reason that are quite topical in modern problems.

Third, popular culture, digital platforms and creative media should be promoted to encourage people to use the classical languages especially the younger generations. In international academic and professional life, classical languages become significant again when brought as the tool of the critical thinking, the ethical reflection and the cultural understanding. This plan was effective in balancing the innovation, employability and global relevance as well as preserving the heritage.

## 5. Conclusion

The old languages are living systems of learning that affect our values, culture and the thought of man. They are living traditions of thought that can be adapted to the changing needs and possibilities of education and technology, not frozen relics of former ages.

Classical languages will only leave as long as they are involved in significant interaction with the educational technology and knowledge networks of global society that manifests in the policy and debate. In this paper the author emphasizes that digital developments and cross disciplinary use can save these languages. In a world of digital transformation and emergence of AI digital Humanities and Technology informed pedagogy are bound to prevail in the classical languages in the new millennium as a dynamic source of inspiration and information. This strategy will mean that even in the future the languages will be capable of educating empowering and linking generations of all backgrounds and subjects.

## References

Berti, M. (2019). *Digital humanities and ancient texts: Tools, methods, and challenges*. Springer.

Central Institute of Classical Tamil. (2023). *Research, translation, and preservation of classical Tamil literature*. Government of India.

Central Institute of Indian Languages. (2022). *Centres of excellence for classical languages*. Mysuru: CIIL.

Census of India. (2011). *Census of India 2011: Language data*. Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India.

Crane, G. (2016). What do you do with a million books? Digital humanities and classical studies. *D-Lib Magazine*, 22(7/8).

Crystal, D. (2010). *Language death*. Cambridge University Press.

---

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:3 March 2026

Dr. Sunanda M. Shinde

Reimagining Classical Languages: From Cultural Heritage to Digital Hypertext

- Jurafsky, D., & Martin, J. H. (2023). *Speech and language processing* (3rd ed.). Pearson.
- McCarty, W. (2014). *Humanities computing*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mete, J., & Dutta, S. (2024). *Beauty in Indian languages*. GSAR Publishers.
- Ministry of Education, Government of India. (2020). *Establishment of central universities for Sanskrit*. Government of India.
- Ministry of Education, Government of India. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. Government of India.
- National Translation Mission. (2023). *About the National Translation Mission*. Ministry of Education, Government of India.
- Press Information Bureau, Government of India. (2024). *Efforts of government for protection and preservation of classical languages*. Ministry of Culture, Government of India.
- Press Information Bureau, Government of India. (2024). *Status of classical language: An explainer*. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.
- Sanskrit Promotion Foundation. (2023). *Promoting Sanskrit through education and research*. Government of India-supported initiative.
- Sarkar, P. R. (1999). *The evolution of Indian languages*. Ananda Marga Publications.
- UNESCO. (2018). *Safeguarding endangered languages*. UNESCO Publishing.