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PANEL TITLE:

LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY, INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AND MULTILINGUALISM

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ABSTRACT

Within the global frame of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032), it is imperative to investigate the nature of linguistic diversities, cultural ecologies, indigenous languages, and multilingualism in India. This is an important mandate to understand how various ethnic, linguistic, and cultural issues and aspects are severely affected due to several uncontrolled factors that pose a threat to the multilingual and multicultural fabric of the Indian society. To achieve that objective, it is essential to draw an action plan to acknowledge identity and existence of indigenous languages and devise strategies for their survival. The preservation and revitalization of indigenous linguistic diversity along with multilingualism is possible if more and more and more languages are given legal recognition under the 8th schedule of the constitution.

In India, diversities in dialects, language families, and cultural ecology are quite wide, and this can be clearly observed at every hundred kilometres of distance. Recent studies record that more than five language families consisting of two hundred and twenty-two languages co-exist in India now. A major number of them are indigenous and ethnic languages, which, due to many linguistic and extra-linguistic reasons, have remained minor and endangered over the centuries. At the present age, when many of these indigenous languages are on the verge of extinction or identity loss, there arise challenges of different kinds and dimensions concerning their protection, preservation, and promotion. Although we argue that most of these challenges are caused due to linguistic, extra-linguistic, and cultural constraints but there are many other reasons, which are not yet defined and explained. One should, however, notice that those regions where indigenous communities are spread are endowed with bilingualism and/or multilingualism. This phenomenon gives birth to a new concept called 'illiterate bilingualism', which is a unique linguistic feature among the indigenous language communities and is hardly found in so-called advanced societies.

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Keeping these facts and issues in view, the present session of this panel desires to shed some light on the linguistic diversities, cultural ecologies, indigenous languages, and multilingualism with a special focus on Indian languages and cultures as well as desires to address those factors and elements that create hurdles in the study of linguistic diversities, indigenous Indian languages, and promotion of these languages. India is a multilingual country in a real sense. This panel discussion is also intended to shed light on Indian multilingualism/bilingualism to attest how this is a boon for the people of the country. How it helps them establish purposeful communication across different linguistic communities. The present panel also desires to analyse typical, uncalled-for, and unique challenges that we face when we study linguistic diversities, indigenous languages, and cultural differences in the context of bilingualism and multilingualism. The experts are invited to highlight theoretical, methodological, operational, and implicational issues, aspects, and challenges that are involved in the study of linguistic diversities, indigenous languages, cultural diversities, and multilingualism in India. The immediate beneficiaries of this discussion are students, social workers, policymakers, media people, and others who are engaged in studies and research in endangered languages, ethnic cultures, language documentation, Eco-linguistics, and ethnography of language communities.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Illiterate bilingualism, Language documentation, Language revitalization, Eco-linguistics

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