

Hindi, National Language Debate, and the Linguistic Reality of Assam



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Mowsam Hazarika 9 July 2026 1211 views

GUWAHATI, July 9, 2026 — The question of whether Hindi is the national language of India continues to generate confusion, debate and, at times, controversy. A widespread belief persists that Hindi enjoys the status of a "national language," yet a closer examination of the Constitution of India reveals a different reality. India does not have a national language. Instead, it recognizes linguistic diversity as a foundational strength of its federal structure. This distinction becomes particularly significant when viewed through the lens of states like Assam, where language is deeply intertwined with identity, culture and political consciousness.

The Constitution of India, under Article 343, designates Hindi in the Devanagari script as the official language of the Union, while also permitting the continued use of English for official purposes. Nowhere, however, does the Constitution declare Hindi—or any other language—to be the national language. In addition, the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution recognizes 22 languages, including Assamese, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu and others, reflecting the country's rich multilingual heritage.

Despite this constitutional clarity, the misconception that Hindi is the national language persists. This arises partly because Hindi is one of the most widely spoken languages in India and is extensively used in central government communication, the media and popular culture. However, equating prevalence with constitutional status leads to misunderstandings that can have serious implications, particularly in linguistically sensitive regions like Assam.

Assam presents a unique case in India's linguistic landscape. The Assamese language is not merely a medium of communication; it is a symbol of cultural identity and historical continuity. Over the decades, Assam has witnessed several movements centred on the protection and promotion of the Assamese language. The Assam Official Language Act of 1960, for instance, marked a significant milestone in establishing Assamese as the official language of the state, although provisions were made to accommodate linguistic minorities in specific regions.

The imposition—or perceived imposition—of any language often evokes strong reactions in Assam. Historical experiences have made the people of the state particularly sensitive to issues of linguistic dominance. Therefore, when Hindi is projected, even inadvertently, as a "national language," it can create apprehension among those who fear the marginalization of regional languages and cultures.

It is important to recognize that India's strength lies in its pluralism. The framers of the Constitution were acutely aware of the country's linguistic diversity and deliberately chose not to impose a single national language. Instead, they adopted a flexible approach that allows states to function in their own languages while enabling the Union to operate in Hindi and English. This arrangement was designed to promote unity without undermining diversity.

In Assam, multilingualism is a lived reality. Alongside Assamese, languages such as Bengali, Bodo, Karbi, Mishing and various tribal dialects coexist, each contributing to the state's cultural mosaic. The recognition of Bodo as an official language in certain areas and its inclusion in the Eighth Schedule underscores the evolving nature of India's linguistic policy. Such developments highlight the need for sensitivity and inclusiveness in language-related discourse.

The role of Hindi in Assam cannot be dismissed. It serves as a link language, facilitating communication between people from different linguistic backgrounds, especially in urban areas and among migrant communities. Hindi cinema, television and digital media have also contributed to its growing familiarity among younger generations. However, this functional utility should not be conflated with cultural or constitutional supremacy.

Promoting Hindi as a link language is different from projecting it as a national language. The former acknowledges practical needs, while the latter risks undermining the linguistic equality enshrined in the Constitution. For Assam, maintaining this distinction is crucial to preserving its linguistic heritage while engaging with the broader national framework.

Education plays a vital role in shaping perceptions about language. In Assam, efforts must continue to strengthen Assamese as the primary medium of instruction while also providing opportunities to learn other languages, including Hindi and English. A balanced multilingual approach can empower students without compromising their cultural roots.

Furthermore, public discourse needs to be more informed and nuanced. Political rhetoric or administrative practices that suggest Hindi's superiority can inadvertently fuel linguistic tensions. Instead, there should be a conscious effort to communicate the constitutional position clearly: India has no national language, and all recognized languages are equal in dignity.

Assam's experience offers valuable lessons for the rest of the country. It demonstrates how language can be both a unifying force and a source of conflict, depending on how it is handled. Respecting linguistic diversity is not merely a constitutional obligation; it is essential for social harmony and national integration.

In conclusion, the belief that Hindi is the national language of India is a misconception that needs to be addressed through awareness and education. For Assam, this issue is not merely academic but is deeply connected to identity and cultural preservation. Recognizing Hindi as an official and link language while affirming the equal status of Assamese and other regional languages is the way forward. Only by embracing its linguistic diversity can India truly uphold the spirit of "unity in diversity" that defines the nation.

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BY MOWSAM HAZARIKA

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