

## Language Revitalisation through Digital Economy

By

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Digitalization is no longer a matter of prestige issue but is a practical reality in contemporary society, and it has become an integral part of life in a natural way, especially after the pandemic. COVID-19 effects have deepened its root in the larger society; therefore, information technologies-based facilities have been shifted into the essentials. The role of the internet in administration, banking, education, tourism, entertainment, public relations, etc., has increased at an unprecedented level. As per the Report (2021) of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), the total number of internet users is 825.30 million, which is 60.73 percent of the country's population by March 2021. Out of all internet users, 96.77 percent used it through the mobile platform. Now online shopping is a fast emerging hobby in middle-class society. This trend is only likely to be expanded; hence e-commerce is a new form of business, facilitating the people on global to local and vice versa grounds. As per a Report (2019) by India Brand Equity Foundation, India's e-commerce market has the potential to grow more than four folds to US\$ 150 billion by 2022, supported by rising incomes and a surge in internet users. Through the 'Digital India' campaign, the Indian Government (2019) aims to create a trillion-dollar online economy by 2025. The number of active internet users in the country is the second highest globally and one of the largest data consumers at the world level and also has the highest data usage per smartphone at an average of 10.40 GB per month. Out of these developments, now 5G is at the door of its users, which will change the entire dynamics of the internet world.

But the basic issue is that the mother tongue of the information revolution has always been English, and its entire appearance stands against the Indian linguistic ecology. It increases the risk of limiting Indian socio-cultural diversity in Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs), consequently shrinking space for Indian democracy, especially for grassroots societies. India is a deep multilingual country, and the expression of common Indian sentiments is not possible in English. On the other hand, the market, which has been the major regulator of this democracy neither has an interest in the local languages or cultures nor any concern for their survival. The basic object of the market is its own capital,

whether through English or any other suitable language. Since English is closely related to information technology and has the reach of a large global population, the digital market blindly stands with English or other potential languages. Although there is no doubt that English is the top priority of the global market, with time, other languages are also being included in this priority. However, because of favorable conditions in information technology-related fields, the competence of English is enhanced naturally, so the quality of its digital resource will remain the best among the available linguistic resources. But as the market is expanding its base, the smaller languages will also be benefited from it. The digitalization-orientated industry will see the future in these languages gradually, and they will invest in them. For example, Google has recently placed Bhojpuri on its machine translation platform, which means that now French people can also access Bhojpuri, and Bhojpuri people can also access French through their own language. Obviously, Google has shown the market in Bhojpuri and it has adopted it. Keep in mind that Bhojpuri does not come under any official category in the Country. It is neither in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian constitution nor is it an official language anywhere in the Country. But it is useful for the market because it has a comparatively larger population in its lap. Bhojpuri has already created a good market in films, songs, etc. But here, the concern is about those languages, which do not even have enough population to attract the market or governments towards it. Hence, neither the market nor the government cares about democratically weak languages. Although the Government of India has made a very encouraging move in this direction through the New Education Policy (2020), it will depend on its implementation. Because implementing the provisions of NEP-2020, like education in the mother tongue at least at the primary level in a deep, complex multilingual country like India, is highly challenging. The most important thing in the area of language revitalization is the attitude of communities toward their language. If they are aware of their language, then they can force their children's schools to mother tongue education by referring to this upcoming education policy. On the other hand, if these small languages accept such extensive digitization, then it will be very reassuring for the future of those languages. Digitalization may be one of the best practical ways of language maintenance. The speech and text corpus, mobile app-based dictionaries, language learning modules, language games, ethnic knowledge in the form of text, audio and video, culture-based videos, and other resources should be easily available on the internet. So that not only the younger generations of the same community remain connected to their linguistic legacy, but other people can also go through it. These ethnic

languages have very rich content in the form of folklore, medicinal practices, and food habits, but these are not available in the open domain; therefore internet may work for their expansion to the larger society and an ethnic market system may evolve with the deep involvement of these communities. Once marginal people are assured of their livelihood in their surroundings, migration will be stopped, and a regional economy may occur. Thus the dream of rural industrialization of Mahatma Gandhi will also be fulfilled.

Opposing the internet and digitization today would be like going back in the past, but imposing it in a single language cannot be justified anywhere. Now the time has come to take up this digitalization process on the positive note and always think about how our languages and cultures will benefit from this venture. Thus we have to deal with these market players for not underestimating our low-resourced languages and to move forward for the betterment of our suppressed languages and cultures.

#### **About the Author**

Mr. Arimardan Kumar Tripathi is a Computational Linguist by training and has a Ph.D. in Machine Translation. He is actively engaged in writing and research in languages and linguistics, currently associated with the Centre for Endangered Languages, Visva-Bharati as a faculty member and maintaining the web-portal [www.cfelvb.in](http://www.cfelvb.in) and its Android App.

