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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Eighth Schedule and Language Recognition: Why Khasi and Garo Deserve Constitutional Inclusion

THE HINDU

18 April 2026

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Eighth Schedule and Language Recognition: Why Khasi and Garo Deserve Constitutional Inclusion

 The Hindu

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"The Meghalaya state cabinet's April 16, 2026 decision to grant official administrative recognition to Khasi and Garo languages reopens the long-pending question of Eighth Schedule expansion. The Hindu argues that with 22 languages currently in the Eighth Schedule (last expansion via 92nd Amendment 2003 — Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, Santali), the constitutional framework has been frozen for over two decades while linguistic demands from Northeast, Bhojpuri-speaking regions, Tulu, Bhili have accumulated. Should India codify objective criteria for Eighth Schedule inclusion?"

 Source: [Original editorial](#)


EDITORIAL SUMMARY

The Hindu argues Meghalaya's official recognition of Khasi and Garo (April 16, 2026) reopens the question of Eighth Schedule expansion — frozen at 22 languages since 92nd Amendment 2003. Calls for Pahwa Committee revision to codify objective criteria, expedited Khasi-Garo inclusion, possible Tier-2 "Associate Scheduled" category, Article 345 state recognition supplementation, UNESCO-linked endangered language programme, and Article 350B Linguistic Minorities Commissioner statutory empowerment.

EIGHTH SCHEDULE EXPANSION TIMELINE

YEAR	AMENDMENT	LANGUAGES ADDED	TOTAL
1950	Original	14 (Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu)	14
1967	21st	Sindhi	15
1992	71st	Konkani, Manipuri, Nepali	18
2003	92nd	Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, Santali	22
2003-2026	None	None	22

LANGUAGES DEMANDING EIGHTH SCHEDULE INCLUSION

LANGUAGE	SPEAKERS (APPROX)	STATE
Bhojpuri	5+ crore	UP, Bihar, Jharkhand
Rajasthani	4-5 crore	Rajasthan
Khasi	14 lakh	Meghalaya
Garo	10 lakh	Meghalaya
Tulu	18 lakh	Karnataka, Kerala
Mizo (Lushai)	8 lakh	Mizoram
Bhili/Bhilodi	1+ crore	Multi-state
Garhwali	25+ lakh	Uttarakhand
Kumaoni	20+ lakh	Uttarakhand
Kokborok	9 lakh	Tripura

WHAT EIGHTH SCHEDULE RECOGNITION CONFERS

BENEFIT	CONSTITUTIONAL/ BASIS
Hindi enrichment directive	Article 351
UPSC Mains medium	Civil Services Examination Rules
Translation rights	Official Languages Act 1963
Sahitya Akademi recognition	Sahitya Akademi
Judicial use possibility	Article 348 (HC requires Presidential approval)
Linguistic Minorities Commissioner representation	Article 350B
Cultural funding	Various central schemes

INDIA'S LINGUISTIC ARCHITECTURE (CONSTITUTIONAL ARTICLES)

ARTICLE	PROVISION
Article 343	Hindi (Devanagari) as Official Language of Union
Article 344	Official Language Commission
Article 345	State-level official language adoption
Article 346	Inter-state communication language
Article 347	Special provision for languages with substantial state population
Article 348	SC/HC language (English default; state language with Presidential approval)
Article 350	Submission of representations in any language
Article 350A	Mother tongue primary education directive
Article 350B	Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities
Article 351	Hindi enrichment from Eighth Schedule

UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS2 — Polity	Eighth Schedule, Article 343-351, Article 368 procedure for amendments
GS2 — Polity	21st Amendment 1967, 71st Amendment 1992, 92nd Amendment 2003
GS1 — Society	Linguistic diversity, Northeast cultural identity, matrilineal Khasi society
GS1 — History & Culture	Linguistic families (Austroasiatic Khasi vs Tibeto-Burman Garo); missionary linguistic standardisation
GS2 — Governance	Pahwa Committee 1996, Sitakant Mahapatra Committee 2003, Centre-state language coordination
GS3 — Economy	Costs of language recognition (UPSC, translation, Sahitya Akademi, broadcasting)
Mains Keywords	Eighth Schedule, 22 scheduled languages, Khasi, Garo, Article 343, Article 345, Article 348, Article 350A, Article 350B, 21st Amendment 1967, 71st Amendment 1992, 92nd Amendment 2003, Pahwa Committee, Sitakant Mahapatra Committee, Austroasiatic, Tibeto-Burman, Census 2011 linguistic data, UNESCO endangered languages atlas

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

The Meghalaya state cabinet's April 16, 2026 grant of official administrative recognition to Khasi (~14 lakh speakers, Austroasiatic family) and Garo (~10 lakh speakers, Tibeto-Burman family) is a significant step toward eventual Eighth Schedule inclusion — but reopens the broader question of how India structures linguistic recognition: the Eighth Schedule has been frozen at 22 languages since the 92nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003 (which added Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, Santali); meanwhile demands from Bhojpuri (~5 crore speakers), Rajasthani (~4-5 crore), Tulu (~18 lakh), Mizo, Bhili, Garhwali-Kumaoni, Kokborok have accumulated; India needs to either codify objective criteria for inclusion or accept that Eighth Schedule recognition will remain politically discretionary.


SUPPORTING

- The Eighth Schedule has been expanded only four times since 1950: **21st Amendment (1967)** — Sindhi; **71st Amendment (1992)** — Konkani, Manipuri, Nepali; **92nd Amendment (2003)** — Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, Santali. Total: 14 (1950) → 22 (2003). No further additions in 23 years despite multiple linguistic demands.
- The **Pahwa Committee (1996)** and the **Sitakant Mahapatra Committee (2003)** examined criteria for Eighth Schedule inclusion. Neither produced a definitive framework. The lack of explicit criteria leaves inclusion to political-cultural judgement — creating both flexibility and unpredictability for language communities.
- Northeast representation in the Eighth Schedule is limited: **Assamese** (1950), **Manipuri** (1992), **Bodo** (2003), **Nepali** (1992 — also Sikkim). Many Northeastern languages — Khasi, Garo, Mizo, Naga languages, Kokborok, Mising — remain unrecognised despite cultural significance.
Northeast hosts hundreds of languages, many endangered.
- The Census 2011 documented **121 languages with 10,000+ speakers and 1,369 mother tongues**. Ethnologue (2024) lists 460+ Indian languages spoken; UNESCO Atlas lists ~200 Indian languages as endangered.
The Eighth Schedule's 22-language framework represents only a small fraction of India's linguistic reality — raising fundamental questions about constitutional language policy.


COUNTER

Eighth Schedule expansion creates significant administrative obligations: UPSC examination medium availability, official translation of central laws, Sahitya Akademi creation, judicial use possibility (Article 348). Each expansion has multiplied costs and complexity. An unbounded expansion risks rendering the framework administratively unworkable. The Centre's caution may reflect legitimate institutional capacity concerns rather than indifference to linguistic diversity.

State-level recognition (Article 345) provides an alternative pathway that has been underutilised.


WAY FORWARD

Six-pillar reform framework: (1) **Pahwa Committee revision** — establish a high-level committee (chaired by retired Supreme Court judge or Linguistic Minorities Commissioner) to codify objective criteria for Eighth Schedule inclusion (e.g., minimum speakers, distinct script, literary tradition, geographic distribution, historical recognition); (2) **Khasi-Garo expedited inclusion** — given their cultural significance, distinct linguistic families (Austroasiatic and Tibeto-Burman), Northeast underrepresentation, and now state-level

recognition by Meghalaya, an early constitutional amendment is appropriate; (3) **Tier-2 “Associate Scheduled” category** — a constitutional category for languages on the path to full Eighth Schedule inclusion, conferring partial benefits while building infrastructure; (4) **State language policy alignment** — Article 345 state-level adoption supplemented by central support for translation, broadcasting, education infrastructure; (5) **Endangered language preservation programme** — UNESCO collaboration, digital archiving, mother-tongue education at primary level under Article 350A; (6) **Linguistic Minorities Commissioner empowerment** — Article 350B body to be granted statutory backing and adequate budget for language minority protection.

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MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

The Eighth Schedule of the Constitution has remained at 22 languages since 2003. Critically examine the criteria, process, and political-cultural basis for Eighth Schedule inclusion, and suggest a reform framework for language recognition aligned with India's linguistic diversity. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

The Meghalaya state cabinet's April 16, 2026 decision to grant official administrative recognition to **Khasi** (~14 lakh speakers, Austroasiatic family) and **Garó** (~10 lakh speakers, Tibeto-Burman family) is a significant step toward eventual **Eighth Schedule** inclusion — but reopens the broader constitutional question of how India structures linguistic recognition. The Eighth Schedule has remained at 22 languages since the **92nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003**.

The Hindu's editorial argues India needs either objective inclusion criteria or to accept that the framework will continue to evolve through political-cultural judgement.

BODY

The Eighth Schedule architecture: The Eighth Schedule originally listed 14 languages in 1950: Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu. Expansions: **21st Amendment (1967)** — Sindhi; **71st Amendment (1992)** — Konkani, Manipuri, Nepali; **92nd Amendment (2003)** — Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, Santali.

Total: 22 languages since 2003. **What Eighth Schedule recognition confers:** (a) **Article 351** directive — Hindi shall draw from Eighth Schedule languages for enrichment; (b) **UPSC Civil Services Mains**

medium choice (currently 22 + English); © **Translation rights** — official translations of central laws, judgments; (d) **Sahitya Akademi** awards and recognition; (e) **Article 348** — judicial use possibility (with Presidential approval for HC use); (f) **Linguistic Minorities Commissioner (Article 350B)** representation; (g) **Cultural promotion** — state-level cultural funding, broadcasting. **The constitutional language architecture (broader): Article 343** — Hindi (Devanagari) as Official Language of the Union (English as associate); **Article 345** — state-level official language adoption (independent of Eighth Schedule); **Article 348** — SC/HC language (English by default; HC state-language use requires Presidential approval); **Article 350A** — directive for primary mother-tongue education for linguistic minorities; **Article 350B** — Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities; **Article 351** — Hindi enrichment directive. The Official Languages Act, 1963 (amended 1967) provides English continuation as associate official language indefinitely. **The Northeast underrepresentation:** Northeast hosts hundreds of languages — many endangered.

Eighth Schedule has limited Northeast presence: Assamese (1950), Manipuri (1992), Bodo (2003), Nepali (1992 — also Sikkim). Major unrecognised Northeastern languages include Khasi, Garo, Mizo, Naga languages, Kokborok, Mising, Karbi, Dimasa.

The Khasi-Garo recognition by Meghalaya thus addresses a long-standing Northeastern representation gap. **The Khasi and Garo significance: Khasi** is one of the world's major living Austroasiatic languages (Mon-Khmer branch) — distinct from Tibeto-Burman languages that dominate Northeast. Khasi society is also one of the world's largest matrilineal societies. **Garo** is a major Tibeto-Burman language (Boro-Garo subgroup) with rich oral literature tradition.

Both languages use Roman script standardised through 19th-20th century missionary efforts. The languages carry distinct cultural-anthropological identities — predominantly Christian communities, matrilineal in Khasi case — that Eighth Schedule inclusion would constitutionally affirm. **The criteria question:** Other languages with strong Eighth Schedule claims include: **Bhojpuri** (5+ crore speakers), **Rajasthani** (4-5 crore), **Tulu** (18 lakh, distinct Dravidian language), **Mizo** (8 lakh), **Bhili/Bhilodi** (1+ crore), **Garhwali-Kumaoni** (45+ lakh), **Kokborok** (9 lakh, Tripura).

The **Pahwa Committee (1996)** and **Sitakant Mahapatra Committee (2003)** examined inclusion criteria but did not produce definitive framework. Without explicit criteria, decisions remain politically discretionary — benefiting some communities and frustrating others. **The constitutional process:** Eighth Schedule expansion requires Constitutional Amendment under Article 368 — special majority (more than 50% total membership AND two-thirds present and voting), but NOT state ratification (since it does not affect federal-structure provisions in Article 368(2)).

This makes Eighth Schedule expansion procedurally easier than territorial or representation-affecting amendments — yet 22 years have passed since the last expansion.

CONCLUSION

Eighth Schedule expansion is constitutionally appropriate, culturally necessary, and procedurally feasible. The way forward should combine: a high-level committee (Pahwa Committee revision) to codify objective inclusion criteria; expedited Khasi-Garo inclusion given Northeast underrepresentation and now state-level recognition; possibly a Tier-2 "Associate Scheduled" constitutional category for

languages on the inclusion path; Article 345 state-level recognition supplementation; UNESCO-collaborated endangered language preservation programme; and Article 350B Linguistic Minorities Commissioner statutory empowerment.

India's linguistic diversity — 121 Census 2011 languages with 10,000+ speakers, 1,369 mother tongues — demands a constitutional framework that matches its scale. The Khasi-Garo Meghalaya recognition is an opportunity to begin this long-overdue reform.

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