



Notes

## DEAF COMMUNITIES AND SIGN LANGUAGES IN OTHER COUNTRIES, IN COMPARISON TO ISL

India has a sizeable deaf population. However, the lives and concerns of deaf people living in Cities are much different than the lives of deaf people living in rural India. Access to education through the use of sign language, especially in the early years, is important but negligible. In this lesson, you will learn how various initiatives by the government and NGOs have played a crucial role in educating, training and establishing deaf identity through the use of sign language and deaf teachers. You will also learn about the status of sign languages, deaf people's lives and their education, and employment and status of interpreting services in advanced countries like the USA, Norway and Denmark in comparison to India.



### OUTCOMES

After studying this lesson, learner:

- discusses features of the deaf community in India compared to other deaf communities in the world;
- compares some features of ISL to those of other sign languages;
- demonstrates an awareness of diversity in sign languages and deaf communities around the world

### 3.1 FEATURES OF THE INDIAN DEAF COMMUNITY

- **Deaf community in India – Cities and villages:**

The population of the deaf community in India is quite huge, compared to deaf communities in other parts of the world. The deaf communities in cities are more

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likely to be involved in activities such as:

- ❖ Deaf schools
- ❖ Deaf associations
- ❖ Festivals
- ❖ Religious gatherings
- ❖ Training events

Deaf people in cities are more connected to one another, with more gatherings and opportunities for ISL communication.

Deaf people in villages are less connected because there are fewer opportunities to interact with other deaf people. Their access to ISL is also limited.

### ● Access to Indian Sign Language

- ❖ Only 5% of deaf learners have access to education in India. Most teachers use the oral method to teach deaf learners.
- ❖ Even at home, most deaf children do not have access to sign language.
- ❖ It is important to give early sign language input to deaf children at 0-5 years of age. But there are only a few early intervention services in India. These are in Haryana, Punjab, and Kerala (at NISH, the National Institute of Speech and Hearing).
- ❖ Parents mostly spend a deaf child's early years hoping that they will speak. But speech is not developed in many deaf children.
- ❖ The majority of parents are hearing and do not know sign language .
- ❖ As a result, most deaf children are not exposed to sign language until they attend deaf schools. This might be at a late age.

### ● Role of NGOs, deaf clubs and deaf associations

- ❖ Deaf learners tend to join short-term training events at various NGOs, which are in ISL.
- ❖ They may also join deaf clubs and associations where there is full access to communication and discussion in ISL.

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- ❖ Some deaf people meet regularly when they travel, for example on local trains in Mumbai.
- ❖ When deaf learners participate in ISL-based programmes, activities and festivals, they get deeper exposure to ISL and improve their ISL skills.
- ❖ There are also many deaf-led NGOs and institutes that offer personal development and work placement programmes. Examples include the Deaf Enabled Foundation (DEF), and the Noida Deaf Society (NDS).
- ❖ Hence these NGOs play an important role in deaf communities by providing ISL communication and learning.
- ❖ Many deaf people feel that they have a deaf identity (often signed as DEAF DEAF SAME) and a sense of community.

● **Deaf events, programmes and festivals**

Deaf people from various places get to interact at events, programmes and festivals. This has resulted in a well connected deaf community in India.

Examples are Deaf Expo and sports events organised by the All India Sports Council of Deaf (AISCD). At Deaf Expo, there are dramatic performances, modelling, deaf lectures, art events, and stand-up comedy.

The deaf participants at sports and cultural events come from different parts of the country but they all communicate in ISL, share their experiences and have a good time together.

● **International Week of the Deaf and International Day of Sign Languages**

Every year, the last week in the month of September is celebrated as the International Week of the Deaf (IWD), and the International Day of Sign Languages (IDSL) is held on 23<sup>rd</sup> September. Deaf people of all ages participate in the festivities. The festivities include art and culture programmes, lectures on sign language and deaf history, and awareness sessions. This is an important day in the lives of deaf people.

● **Indian Sign Language interpreters**

Unfortunately, though the deaf community in India is large, the number of sign language interpreters is quite small. There has not been many efforts towards encouraging sign language interpreter's training.

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The limited number of interpreters poses accessibility challenges for many deaf people, especially at workplace meetings and in education and training courses.

However, compared to the past, due to some Government initiatives, the situation of access to information and communication is better now. In recent years, with the establishment of ISLRTC and also due to RPwD 2016, many centres have started two year Diploma in Indian Sign Language interpreting (DISLI) course to meet the demand for interpreters. Many higher education institutes too provide interpreters to their deaf learners. Many public functions and events also to have ISL access.

- **The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 (RPWD)**

Mentions the right to equal access, which is important for good education and the development of the deaf community. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPWD Act, 2016) was passed by both houses of Parliament of India after a series of consultation meetings and drafting processes. After receiving presidential assent, it was notified on December 28, 2016. According to the RPWD Act of 2016, “the appropriate Government shall ensure that the PWD enjoys the right to equality, life with dignity, and respect for his or her own integrity on an equal footing with others.” The RPWD Act of 2016 increased the number of disabilities from seven to twenty-one.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 3.1

1. How do deaf people in cities get connected with each other?
2. Why deaf from villages have limited access to ISL?
3. Write the full form of - AIFD, ISLRTC, RPwD, DISLI.

### 3.2 DEAF COMMUNITY IN INDIA COMPARED TO OTHERS AROUND THE WORLD

- There is much progress in the USA in terms of bilingual-bicultural deaf education. In this type of education, deaf learners have full access to American Sign Language (ASL) to support their learning of written English. The parents, who are mostly hearing, receive information about both ASL and speech development options. Then the parents are able to decide what is best for their child. These best practices for deaf education are missing in India. Here, parents are not

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informed about sign language as a viable option along with speech. Also, access to bilingual education through ISL is mostly not available.

In many parts of the world, deaf learners are mainstreamed with hearing learners. This means that the deaf learners have to:

- ❖ Depend on writing back and forth
- ❖ Read lips in order to communicate
- ❖ Use sign language interpreters and/or live captions (these are only available in developed settings)

When there is more mainstreaming in deaf education, there is less interaction among the deaf people. The deaf communities in such places are smaller and more scattered. In European countries such as Norway and the Netherlands, the deaf communities are quite small because of mainstreaming.

In Denmark and Australia, there is more cochlear implantation and a focus on speech. As a result, deaf communities are contracting. The deaf communities in these areas are worried about the future of their existence. In India, in comparison, deaf communities are very large and active, with a lot of interaction with each other.

#### ● **International deaf events**

- ❖ There are international gatherings and festivals where deaf people from across the world come together.
- ❖ For example, the Clin d’Oeil Festival in France is an international deaf festival. Many deaf people come from various countries to enjoy several events such as: Lectures, Art, Jokes, Modelling, Dance, Drama and so on. Through deaf culture, the interactions among deaf people from different part of the world build a sense of connection and community.
- ❖ Similar to this, India also has international deaf programmes. For example, the India International Deaf Film Festival (IIDFF).
- ❖ Such events build and reinforce the connections in the deaf community through shared language and culture.
- ❖ However, the international programmes can be expensive, so the deaf people also tend to choose events based on their interest and aptitude.



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- ❖ In India, however most deaf events are affordably priced, so most deaf people are easily able to participate. Hence deaf community ties tend to be stronger.
- ❖ These events provide exposure to the services and success in other parts of the world. Many deaf people, who go for such events, come back with greater motivation and ideas for better work.
- **Deaf community connections**
  - ❖ In the USA, there are deaf business owners who are part of the deaf ecosystem. They are well connected, and they support each other. They serve as inspiring role models for other deaf people.
  - ❖ Similar to India, there is a large deaf community in China that is strongly connected. But there are certain differences between the two such as the accessibility options, quality of education and number of deaf colleges
- **Interpreting services across the world**
  - ❖ In Europe, there are various national sign languages, so interpreters are required to get trained in many sign languages. There are interpreting agencies who provide these services when required by their deaf and hearing clients.
  - ❖ Similarly, many countries in Asia and Africa have good interpreting services available for communication access.
- **Sign language recognition**
  - ❖ **Uganda** was the first country to have the sign language recognised by its government. Later, many other countries in Europe also recognised their sign languages.
  - ❖ **Brazil** has excellent government policies related to sign language. Many deaf professionals there get good job opportunities. There are many deaf teachers and academics.
  - ❖ In **India**, sign language is not officially recognised yet, although it is mentioned in some laws related to disability.
- **Sign languages across the world**
  - ❖ ISL is completely different from other sign languages.

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- ❖ Some sign languages, such as those from Mexico and Japan, have unusual and complex signs that are not easy to understand for a non-native.
  - ❖ ISL has developed through the interactions of the Indian deaf community. The fingerspelling is influenced by British Sign Language (BSL), but most of the signs are not influenced by other sign languages. The vocabulary is unique to ISL.
  - ❖ Some ISL expressions resemble hearing gestures, such as the signs WHAT and NO, are similar to hearing gestures.
  - ❖ The sign for ‘hearing (person)’ in ISL signifies hearing near the ear and has mouthing influence of ‘normal’ as most hearing people use this to identify themselves when meeting a deaf person. The sign for ‘hearing (person)’ in ASL is related to talking.
  - ❖ Some signs are similar between sign languages. For example, the sign for ‘good’ in BSL is the same as that in ISL.
  - ❖ There are some similarities in signs from Japan and South Korea, e.g. ‘man’ and ‘woman’.
  - ❖ Signs for questions and negatives have different head movements in India and Turkey. In India, raised eyebrows and head back/chin up means WHAT. In Turkey, raised eyebrows and head back/chin up means NO.
- **What does the Indian deaf community need?**
    - ❖ Quality bilingual education
    - ❖ Better access to communication and information – the RPWD Act mandates equal access for all persons with disabilities.
    - ❖ A deaf university, to create a pool of deaf professionals and more job opportunities for deaf people in sign language work.



**INTEXT QUESTIONS 3.2**

1. Why are deaf children not exposed to Sign language?
2. How people can improve their ISL skills.
3. When is IWD celebrated?

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4. When is IDSL celebrated every year?
5. In which two countries is there more focus on cochlear implant and speech?
6. Which two European countries have small deaf communities?
7. What is one similar point in chinese and Indian deaf communities?
8. Which country has more deaf business owners?
9. Name some International Deaf Events.
10. Name two European countries with good interpreting services available for communication access.
11. Which country got first SL recognized by its Government?
12. Which country has the best government policies in relation to about SL?



**WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT**

- India has a very large deaf population as compared to other countries in the world.
- Deaf people in the cities are better connected because of Deaf schools, Deaf clubs, Deaf associations, Festival, Religious gatherings and Training events. However, deaf people in villages do not get such opportunities, hence they are less connected.
- Most deaf children are born to hearing parents and deaf kids face isolation in homes and at schools where teachers are hearing and do not use sign language.
- Early intervention in bilingual mode with deaf adults as language role model is important but is available only at very few places like the Haryana Welfare Society, NISH (Kerala). At all other places the Oral approach dominates.
- Deaf kids get exposure to ISL only when they join a special school for the deaf which usually is quite late.
- Many deaf people join NGOs for short training courses or deaf clubs and deaf associations where they have full access to information, discussions and entertainment through ISL. These clubs help them to establish their Deaf identity too. Deaf programmes, events, festivals, art events and sports etc. further deepen their bonding, sense of shared experiences and belongingness to the deaf community.

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- Every year, the last week in the month of September is celebrated as the International Week of the Deaf (IWD), and the International Day of Sign Languages (IDSL) is held on 23 September. In India too many awareness programmes and events are held both at Govt. and NGO levels.
- As compared to the large number of deaf people, number of qualified and skilled Interpreters in India is very less and thus, it is very challenging to meet interpreting services though RPWD act (2016) mentions equal and full access.
- In many advanced countries like Norway and Netherland, deaf communities are shrinking because more and more deaf are getting cochlear implant and studying in mainstream schools and get to interact less with the other deaf.
- Though, in India, some learners, study in mainstream schools and face lot of communication barrier and also social isolation; however, India has huge deaf population and there is lot of interaction among the deaf people.
- Deaf people have their own identity and culture and to celebrate deaf talent and deafhood. They hold national and international festivals. Clind'Oeil Festival in France and India International Deaf Film Festival (IIDFF) are two such examples.
- Like India, China too has large deaf population and lot of interaction but here is less freedom in China. However, quality of education of the deaf is better there. There is a deaf college too. In the USA, deaf business owners have a collective and they support each other.
- Talking of sign language across the world, we find that ISL is unique and different from other sign languages of the world. Though it has some influence of BSL in finger spelling but vocabulary is totally different. Some signs of ISL like 'what' and 'no' resemble gestures of hearing people. Within India too, there are regional variations in signs.
- Some sign languages like Mexican sign language and Japanese sign language are quite complex and unusual.
- There may be some similarities between different sign languages, however, every sign language is unique in terms of vocabulary and grammar.
- For further development of ISL and the deaf community, India needs better bilingual education for the deaf, better interpreting services and better educational and employment opportunities for the deaf to become teachers and professionals.

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**TERMINAL EXERCISE**

1. In India, who has more opportunities to use ISL: deaf people living in cities or deaf people living in villages? Explain your answer.
2. Why do deaf children have less access to education compared to hearing children? Give three reasons.
3. Two examples of international deaf events are the Clin d’Oeil Festival in France and the International Deaf Film Festival in India. What other examples can you find? Do some research online and describe two more international deaf events, including their aim, location, who organises them, how often they happen, and how many deaf people attend.
4. What is Deaf Identity?
5. How can India's deaf community become more connected?
6. For what reason RPWD is important for deaf community?
7. What is bilingual education?
8. In India, what challenges do deaf people face when they try to access communication?

(Tick mark the correct answers)

- a) There aren't enough interpreters available
- b) The government does not always fund interpreter costs
- c) Many interpreters are not trained
- d) All of the above



**ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS**

3.1

1. Through various activities & events for deaf, they get opportunities for communities in ISL.
2. Villages have few or less opportunity to interact with deaf peers.

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3. AIFD - All India Federation of the Deaf, ISLRTC - Indian Sign Language Research and Training Center, RPwD - Rights for Persons with Disabilities, DISLI - Diploma in Indian Sign Language Interpreting

3.2

1. Hearing parents themselves not know SL.
2. When deaf learners, participate in ISL based programmes, activities & festivals. They get deeper exposure to ISL & improve their ISL skill.
3. Every year, the last week in September is celebrated as International Week of the Deaf (IWD).
4. 23<sup>rd</sup> September
5. Denmark and Australia
6. Norway and Netherlands
7. Similar to India, China has a large deaf community.
8. USA
9. a. Clin d' Oeil Festival in France  
b. India International Deaf Film Festival
10. Asia and Africa
11. Uganda
12. Brazil



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## MODULE -2

### **Sign Language in Society**

As you learnt in the previous module, India has a large deaf population. This module provides a basic overview of the status of ISL in deaf education and its importance and awareness among society and helps to identify the different sub-group and structure of deaf.

This module will cover the following lessons:

4. The community of Indian Sign Language users, their commonalities and diversity
5. Aspects of deaf culture and linguistic identity
6. Legislative provisions for ISL in India
7. Status of use of ISL in deaf education