CHAPTER I

CLASSIFICATION OF INDIAN LANGUAGES

India has been described by foreign scholars as a land of multiplicity of tongues and their dialects. Since ancient times this country has been hospitable to the foreign peoples of different racial origins. Thousands of such groups immigrated and settled in various parts of our country. They naturally had different languages and dialects and thus contributed to the present unique language complex. More than 2,000 dialects (LSI,II)¹ have been enumerated by Late Grierson G.A. who made enquiries into these forms of speech and produced the most scholarly work in the field of linguistics. The following account of classification of Indian languages has been based upon his introductory remarks in the work 'Linguistic Survey of India'. ²

A number of attempts have been made to classify Indian languages. The earliest and the
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most crude classification dates back to 1030 A.D. and was made by Albiruni. He spoke only of Sanskrit, divided into two forms of speech:

a. **Classical**: only in use among the upper and educated classes

b. **Vernacular**: only in use among the common people.

A fairly elaborate list of seven Indo-Aryan languages and three principal Dravidian forms of speech has been given by Amir Khusrau (1317 A.D.). The modern major languages that find place in his classification are:

1. Lahori (Punjabi)
2. Kashmiri
3. Sindi (Sindhi)
4. Dhur Samundar (Kannada)
5. Tilang (Telugu)
6. Gujarati
7. Ma'bar (Tamil)
8. Gaur (Northern Bengali)
9. Bengal Audh (Eastern Hindi)
10. Delhi and its environs (Western Hindi)
Abu'l Fazl's classification is similar to that of Amir Khusrau. He has mentioned following nine major languages of India.

The dialects of:
1. Delhi (Western Hindi)
2. Bengal (Bengali)
3. Marwar (Western Rajasthani)
4. Gujarat (Gujarati)
5. Marhatta (Marathi)
6. Sind (Sindhi)
7. Kashmir (Kashmiri)
8. Telingana (Telugu)
9. Karnatik (Kannada).

The European linguists have classified Indian languages more or less in the same manner. Remarkable contributions have been made to Indian linguistics by Fritz (1748), Bayer, Amadutius, Hodgson B.H., Sir Erskine Perry and W. Carey.¹

Among the Europeans, a special mention should be made of Grierson's work in this field during 1891-1901. A large scale information was collected under his supervision about the Indian languages. These speeches were then classified on the basis of total number of
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speakers. Their various aspects were studied systematically. The Census report of 1901 contains a chapter on languages by Grierson which by itself is a scholarly work. The detailed report of this survey published under the title 'Linguistic Survey of India' divided in eleven volumes (1905. Reprint: 1973) is the most noteworthy contribution to Indian linguistics. The outline of classification adopted in Linguistic survey of India enabled hundreds of mother-tongues, dialects and languages for the first time to be listed in a logical and closely constructed but a complex form. Grierson has classified Indian languages into Families, Sub-families, Branches, Sub-branches, Languages and Dialects thus forming a six tier hierarchical arrangement. A language belongs to a branch of a particular family and is itself formed of number of dialects e.g. Hindi belongs to the Central group of Indo-Aryan branch of Indo-European family of languages and has about ninety-seven dialects (Mitra, 1961, pp. 37-45).

On the basis of Grierson's classification, Indian languages can be grouped broadly into three categories:

1. Indo-Aryan languages
2. Dravidian languages
3. Dardic languages
The fourteen languages which form the subject matter of the present study may be classified on this basis as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indo-Aryan languages</th>
<th>Dravidian languages</th>
<th>Dardic languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inner branch</td>
<td>Mediate branch</td>
<td>Outer branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Hindi</td>
<td>E. Hindi</td>
<td>Southern group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These languages have been represented on Map 1 which also shows their respective home states.

On the basis of Grierson's meaningful, coherent and logical arrangement of Indian languages, the work was continued further during 1911-1931. The Census Report for 1931 was able to present Census data in a scientific form largely on account of the competent use it made of the Linguistic Survey. No
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survey was undertaken in 1941 on account of World War II. It was again carried out in 1951. During 1951-61, Linguistic Survey of India still held firm and unassailed in its essential details, despite the researches of the post-Grierson period i.e. 1901-1951. The research work during this period was mainly contributed by G.P. Sharma who classified the lists of mother-tongues and dialects in which were included languages traceable as well as not traceable in Grierson's classification. The name of Sri R.C. Nigam must be mentioned in connection with the presentation of language data. The final report of language tables, Census of India, 1961 has been prepared by A. Mitra.

In the present classification i.e. the classification used for 1961 Census, mother-tongues have been identified with LSI lists. Those which were not classified in LSI, have also been detected. The final data have been distributed under the fourteen

* It is true that the then Government of India had to curtail the scope of the Census of 1941 on account of the economy necessitated by the World war II. As a consequence, the linguistic survey was neglected. However, care was taken to emphasize the religious differences in the country by giving full details regarding communities having various religions in accordance with the policy of 'Divide and rule' when the political unrest was mounting towards the 'Quit India' movement.
languages of Schedule VIII of the Indian constitution. Under each constituent language, have been included all mother-tongues that legitimately belong to it. The classification has been made on the basis of total number of speakers of various languages. This sort of tabulation has been expected to bring about a great deal of order in the presentation of language statistics. A more extended long term survey in the manner of Grierson's LSI has been started in 1971 and would be completed in 1981.

The above classification has been used to form the states of India. The obvious purpose has been to make administration easy but it has unfortunately given rise to linguistic disputes among some states. The disputing states have been claiming each other's territory on the basis of linguistic majority. Such a dispute between the states of Kerala and Karnataka was settled in 1966, but that between Karnataka and Maharashtra is yet to be settled. This matter has been dealt with in some more details in the fourth chapter of this work. Among the other language problems may be included the opposition of the speakers of the Dravidian family, viz. Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam towards Hindi as a national language.
claims of minor language groups such as that of Konkani and Sindhi to be recognised as independent forms of speech. It is necessary under such circumstances to explain the mutual relationship between various languages of our country and to emphasize the fact that there is, in fact, no well marked line of separation between any two language areas but rather a zone of transition in which there is considerable intermixture of the languages which serve as linguistic bridges. No language group can have hard and fast limits on account of its contact with the neighbouring languages. It either gradually merges into the other language group or at least borrows vocabulary and structures of sentences from the other. In this sense, it is mutually related with the other language. However, by the formation of linguistic states, this sense of mutual relationship is being eroded very rapidly in our country. This reality has to be faced by stressing again and again the mutual relationship so as to counteract fissiparous tendencies. If various language groups realise that their languages are related to those of others, there won't be any issue to fight upon. Such a recognition would lead to more and more give and take and the sense of amicability would be developed which would be helpful in national integration.
The next chapter deals with the
general distribution of the fourteen major language
groups in the country as a whole and inside and outside
their home states.

References:

1. Grierson, G.A. (1927): Linguistic Survey of India,
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MAJOR LANGUAGE GROUPS AND THEIR HOME REGIONS

- **DARDIC**
  - 2A - MAJOR SUB-BRANCH
  - 2B - MINOR SUB-BRANCH
- **INDO-ARYAN**
  - 2A - MAJOR INNER SUB-BRANCH
  - 2B - MAJOR OUTER SUB-BRANCH
  - 2Bb - MINOR GROUP
- **DRAVIDIAN**

MAP NO. 1