CHAPTER 2
BRITISH RULE AND CLASSIFICATIONS
OF INDIAN LANGUAGES

British conquest of India was a conquest of knowledge; with the territorial conquest they also conquered an epistemological space through which they legitimised their rule by producing knowledge for and about India. It was the victory at the epistemological level that provided the durable sustenance to the British rule in India. The knowledge produced by the British colonial administrators and other Orientalist writers were considered superior in the hierarchy of knowledge. ‘European technologies of literacy enabled missionary and non-missionary linguistic work that resulted in representations of languages as powerful icons of spiritual, territorial, and historical hierarchies that emerged in the colonial societies’. Modern print ‘Hindi’ that we know today is very much a product of late nineteenth and early twentieth century’s standardization and modernization process through colonial language practices, missionary societies, text book societies and ‘print capitalism’. According to Francesca Orsini print, colonial rule

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2 Epistemological Space refers to a methodological standpoint from and through which knowledge about something is produced. There can be different methodologies for the production of knowledge; but Britishers by claiming their methodology as scientific and neutral considered their knowledge of Indian history, languages, culture more accurate. Knowledge produced in this way alone was considered as authoritative knowledge; for details see, Said, E., Orientalism, Vintage Books, 1978; Errington, J., 'Colonial Linguistics' in Annual Review of Anthropology, vol. 30, 2001, pp. 19 - 39.
and missionary efforts together brought about crucial changes in the linguistic economy of north India in the nineteenth century. Khari ‘boli’ Hindi emerged as the main print language of prose over its regional variants, as a means of mass education and gradually of literature. With the demise of Mughal paramountcy and with inconsistencies in colonial language policy there began a long drawn controversy between defenders of Persian – Urdu and supporter of ‘Hindi’ and Devnagari script. These two phenomena brought about sweeping changes both in the nature and the use of Hindi. Hindi became a culturally loaded language, and several institutions were formed for its advancement and propaganda. She further maintains that “language was one of the essential concerns of Indian reformers in the nineteenth century, a basic constituent of their discourse of progress and reform. Establishing Hindi as a public language and constructing a group identity around it were themselves products of this concern. The idea that a nation ‘has’ one language – Bhartendu’s nij bhasha – which belongs simultaneously to the individual and to the community, covers all spoken and written practices and, finally, acquires the seal of recognition by becoming the language of the state (raj bhasha) and of the nation (rastra bhasha) was itself new”. Many scholars have agreed that the impact of print, the influence of the English language, of colonial linguists and policy makers and missionary efforts in education were all factors, helping to crystallize a new standard form of vernaculars and a new consciousness of language as a community marker. These standard languages, in turn, inspired the growth of journals and of a new kind of useful literature aimed at the progress of the self and the community.

In this chapter I shall explore the various methods that British had applied to learn and classify the languages of India. How they classified and standardised the various languages through the introduction of grammars and dictionaries; which were largely unknown to the native speakers of a particular language? How they classified and categorised the various knowledge systems of native India into one single hegemonic narrative, using ‘western scientific rational method’? Through the introduction of comparative philology by Sir William Jones, a new kind of discourse was created about the languages with a new zeal for learning the languages of India and the World; and to make a comparative study of them. On the basis of such study a world

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6 Orsini, Francesca. The Hindi Public Sphere: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 18 - 19.
family of languages was created, namely Indo-European language and all the other languages of the world were subsumed within this category. In this chapter I have explored the following questions: How these classifications and the categories produced and affected various social and political groups under colonialism, and continue to do so in the post-colonial times? Have these groups overcome this colonial legacy or has the grip of the latter strengthened? Is there any escape from this colonial legacy?

### 2.1 Britisher’s Encounter with the Indian Languages

For Britishers at least in initial years, to establish their trade in India was a prime concern. In order to ensure that and to get extra privilege over other competitive European Countries, ‘almost from the inception of their trading efforts in India, the British had sought legitimacy and protection from Indian rulers, primarily the Mughal emperors’. But to negotiate with them they required a working knowledge of Persian – the court language of Mughal India. Sir Thomas Roe, when asked to visit Mughal court in 1615 by the company and James I, was ‘plagued by a lack of knowledge of Persian’ he somehow managed to negotiate with Jahangir with the help of an interpreter, but not without explaining, ‘another terrible inconvenience that I suffer: want of interpreter. For the Broker’s here will not speak but what shall please; yea they would alter the kings letter because his name was before the Mughals, which I would not allow’.

According to Bernard S. Cohn ‘the British realised in seventeenth Century India that Persian was the crucial language for them to learn. They approached Persian as a kind of functional language, a pragmatic vehicle of communication with Indian officials and rulers through which in, a denotative fashion, they could express their requests, queries and thoughts, and through which they could get things done’. But to acquire the knowledge of Persian was a very difficult task for the Britishers, because ‘Persian as a language was part of a much larger system of meanings which was in turn based on

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7 Cohn, Bernard S., 1985, p. 277.
cultural premises which led to Indians constructing action in ways far different from those on which the British based their own.\textsuperscript{10} Secondly, there were ‘cultural blocks’ in a sense ‘Europeans in the seventeenth century lived in a world of signs and correspondences, while Indians lived in a world of substance ... relation between persons, groups, nations (quam) and ruler and ruled were constituted differently in Europe and India. The British in seventeenth century India operated on the idea that everything and everyone had a ‘price’... they never seemed to realize that certain kinds of cloth and clothes, jewels, arms and animals had values that were not established in terms of market-determined price, but were objects in a culturally constructed system by which authority and social relations were literally constituted and transmitted’. Thirdly, ‘most of the company servants lived in the port cities generally within the confines of their factories; most of their social contacts were with other Europeans.’\textsuperscript{11}

Cohn mentions that ‘in the 1713 when the company wished to obtain a farman (royal order) from the Mughal empire to reduce taxes on their internal trade in India to make permanent a whole series of grants they had received at various times from the Mughal, they had no one in their Bengal establishment who knew sufficient Persian to carry out the negotiations and had to depend upon an American for this vital function.’\textsuperscript{12} It appears that before the battle of Plassey there were very few among the employees of the company having sufficient knowledge of Persian or any other language of India. Even Robert Clive who is supposed to have established the foundation of British Empire in India ‘appears not to have Known any Indian language with the exception of the Portuguese trade language, and he was dependent on his Banian, Nubkissen, for translating and interpreting in his dealing with Indian rulers’.\textsuperscript{13} It was only after the ‘success at Plassey and subsequent appropriation of the revenue of Bengal’ that ‘British civilians and military officers’ started learning of one or more Indian languages. According to Cohn ‘the year 1770 – 85 may be looked upon as the formative period during which the British successfully began the program of appropriating Indian languages to serve as a crucial component in their construction of the system of rule. More and more British officials were learning the

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., pp. 279 – 80.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 281.
‘classical languages of India’ (Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic), as well as many of the ‘vulgar’ languages. More importantly, this was the period in which the British were beginning to produce an apparatus: grammar, dictionaries, treatises, class books and translations about and from the language of India. This craze for learning Indian languages was part of larger project that Britishers initiated, that was consolidating their position in India. And the way they started learning languages of India was itself a new kind of domination which ‘transformed Indian forms of Knowledge into European objects’. The introduction of grammars and dictionaries to learn the languages was not just for European but even the native speakers had to follow these grammars and dictionaries to learn their own language. By learning the language they also tried to understand the ‘culture’, ‘manners’ and ‘traditions’ of the Indians, Halhed’s *Gentoo Laws* and Wilkins *Geeta* were translations that were thought to be ‘Keys’ in which to unlock, and hence make available, knowledge of Indian law and religion held tightly by the mysterious Brahmins”.14 Cohn goes on to write that ‘seen as a corpus, these texts signal the invasion of an epistemological space occupied by a great number of a diverse variety of Indian scholars, intellectuals, teachers, scribes, priests, lawyers, officials, merchants and bankers whose knowledge, as well as they themselves were to be converted into instrument of colonial rule. They were now to become part of the army of babus, clerks, interpreters, sub-inspectors, munshis, pundits, kajis, vakils, schoolmasters, amins, sharistidars, tahlisdars, desmukh, darogahs and mamlatdars who, under the scrutiny and supervision of the white sahibs, ran the everyday affairs of the Raj’.15 With the help of these newly emerging classes of Indian society Britishers tried to collect and codify as much information as possible and to base their rule on the information gathered and ‘generated’. According to Cohn, for the Britishers India was a ‘vast social world’ that ‘has to be classified, categorised and bounded before it could be hierarchised’.16

To master the language of India a chair in Arabic was established at Oxford in late seventeenth century. Sir William Jones wrote *A Grammar of the Persian Language* (London 1771) this book was very successful and went on through six editions by

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14 Cohn, Bernard S., 1985, p. 283.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., p. 284.
1804. Hastings who unsuccessfully lobbied for the establishment of a Persian Chair at Oxford in 1765, ‘vigorously argued that Persian and Arabic should be the keystone of the curriculum at the newly established company’s college at Fort William’. ‘To the Persian Language as being the medium of all political intercourse the first place ought to be assigned in the studies of the pupils; and as much of the Arabic as necessary to show the principle of its construction and the variations which the sense of the radical word derives from its inflections, to complete their Knowledge of the Persian, which in its modern dialect consists in a great measure of the Arabic...the Persian ought to be studied to perfection, and is requisite to all civil servants of the company as it may also prove of equal use to the military officers of all the presidencies’. During the initial years at the college, according to Cohn, at least first fifteen years it was the Persian department which was the ‘most prestigious and best supported’.

During the seventeenth century it was the missionaries who were curious to know and learn about the languages and cultures in India, especially that of ‘Gentoos’. I shall discuss the efforts of missionaries in classification and standardisation of Indian languages later in this chapter. Here I want to make the point that Britishers especially the company officials were not learning the languages of India out of curiosity but due to their compulsions. For them the knowledge of Persian became necessary precisely because they had to carry out trade negotiations with Mughals and other Indian princely states in this language. They had considered it as the language of politics. Now when after the battle of Plassey the Britishers were trying to consolidate their rule in India; they realised it was necessary to know the other languages, religion and culture especially of “Gentoos”, who were in majority. However James Fraser, J.Z. Howell and Alexander Dow had made unsuccessful attempt to learn Sanskrit – classical language of the Hindoos. There may be some scholarly curiosity among a few Britishers to learn the mysterious languages of India to unlock it's mysterious past, but largely they were motivated to learn Sanskrit out of an immediate practical

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17 Ibid., p. 286.
18 Ibid., p 287.
necessity of running a smooth administration in Bengal. Sir William Jones’ initial reluctance and later enthusiasm to learn Sankrit make this point even more clear. He started learning the language to better administer the justice in India. For the Warren Hastings plan of 1792, ‘India should be governed by Indian Principles, Particularly in relation to law. Following current practice in Bengal, which was a Muslim ruled state, the British accepted Muslim Criminal law as law of the land, but civil law was to be Hindu for Hindus and Muslim for the Muslims’.

He appointed H. B. Halhed to supervise the Pundits in compilation of Hindu laws as per Dharmaśastra tradition as interpreted by these Pundits and then to translate it into English. Subsequently A Code of Gentoo Laws or ordination of the pundits were published in London in 1776. This compilation was known as *vivadarnavasetu* in Sanskrit which was first translated into Persian and from Persian Halhed translated it into English. But according to Cohn within fifteen years, William Jones questioned the authenticity of translation not from Persian to English but from Sanskrit to Persian itself.

With Sir William Jones’ study of Sanskrit there developed a new curiosity about learning languages of the world in the form of comparative philology, and through it to establish the relationship between and among the languages and the races of the world. There also developed a new category in the study of the languages – the Indo-European language family and a family tree of the world language was also created in which all the languages of the world were classified and hierarchised. Jones in 1786 clearly articulated the concept of Indo-European language family ‘as a group of related language consisting of Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, Gothic, Celtic, and Old Persian, condescended from a lost ancestral language, although he did not give this language family a name. The ‘original stock’ that spoke the ancestral language he simply called Indian or Hindu’.

There were also contestations regarding the name of this language family, according to Trautman in the early nineteenth century there were at least four different names for this language family and the people who spoke this language – ‘from the Bible narrative of the Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japhet, came the name Japhetic for this family; unlike the coordinate names Semitic and Hamitic, which are still in use for language

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21 Ibid., p. 290.
22 Ibid., p. 293.
families, the name Japhetic did not last long. German Philologists preferred “Indo-Germanic” devised by Heinrich Klaproth in 1823, but non-Germans resisted. The English linguist Arthur Young proposed “Indo-European” as early as in 1813, and it eventually displaced the other terms. This kind of development had a lot to do with the legitimisation of the colonial rule, the study of Indo-European languages family went hand in hand with the establishment of affinity among the different languages and races, and ‘colonial linguists’ became a mediator between the colonizer and colonized people. Though there also developed a new kind of study among Europeans, especially among the ‘German Romantics’ (wissenschaft) to bridge the gap between the ‘occident’ and the ‘orient’, considering them as the lost brothers who had to reunite again, and to establish Aryan as the common ancestor of both the civilisations. This also led to a new kind of political formation in Europe especially in Germany, in which the concept of the “superiority of the Aryan race” provided an impetus for the ‘politics of exclusion’ and reaffirmation of this superiority through conquering the other nation within Europe and bringing them under one ‘superior empire’.

But by and large this study of comparative philology, and ‘Sanskrit studies’, enhanced the ‘European power in Asia’. In India we have to understand that Jones whole project to study its classical language Sanskrit was for the purpose of providing ‘authentic’ and ‘pure’ laws through which Indians can be better governed. In this formulation there emerged an ‘Ideology of Antiquity’ in which the ancient period was considered the golden period in Indian History and successive periods were regarded as degeneration from that golden past. This was also applied to the mythical texts, the more antique the text the more pure it was considered. Later texts were considered ‘impure’ or ‘perverted’.

Besides the study of classical language, Britishers also felt the need to study the ‘local vernaculars’ of India, which they called ‘vulgar’ languages of India. In this respect Nathaniel Halhed, A Grammar of Bengali Language first published in 1778 was a major development. According to Cohn, ‘his grammar was part of a larger project

24 Ibid.
which would stabilize and perpetuate British rule in India...  

26 Halhed himself wrote about the need of a language which would be the ‘medium of intercourse between the Government and its subjects, between the natives of Europe who are to rule, and the inhabitants of India who are to obey’. 27 Then H. P. Foster produced an English/Bengali and a Bengali/English dictionary between 1799 -1802. 28 Again in 1805 William Carey produced Grammar of the Bengali Language published form Serampore, in which he ‘warned his countrymen that dependence on poor interpreters and the continued use of the ‘jargons of Moors’ limited their ability to deal directly with ‘men of great respectability’ as well as the common folk of Bengal, who could ‘provide information on local affairs’. 29 There was also a search for the language which is spoken by the majority of Hindoos, that language was named as hindavi/hindustanic/hindoostani and ultimately it was Hindustani which became British ‘language of command’ in India. This is also a language favoured by many nationalists in India including Gandhi and Nehru. According to Cohn, Halhed talks about two varieties of ‘Hindustanic’, in his introduction to the Bengali language Grammar. One was spoken over most of Hindustan proper and ‘indubitably derived from Sanskrit’, with which it has exactly the same connection as the modern dialects of France and Italy have with pure Latin. The other variety of ‘Hindustanic’ was developed by the Muslim invaders of India, who could not learn the language spoken by the Hindus, who in order to maintain the purity of their own tongue introduced more and more abstruse terms from Sanskrit . 30 It is also interesting to note that for Halhed ‘the language currently spoken in Bengal and the upper India were ‘fallen’, ‘Broken’, or corrupt version of some ‘pure’, ‘authentic’ ‘coherent’, logically formed prior language, was one of course shared by his Hindu and Muslim instructors, who frequently had contempt for the spoken languages and favoured the sacred and literary languages of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian’. 31 

According to Cohn ‘until the late part of nineteenth century the British in India had done little to systematically study the wide variety of languages spoken in India.

26 Cohn, Bernard S., 1985, p. 296.
28 Cohn, Bernard S., 1985, p. 296.
29 Ibid., p. 297.
30 Ibid., p. 298.
31 Ibid., p. 299.
Portuguese, German, and Danish missionaries, as well as the Company’s Dutch and French trade rivals, had produced grammars and dictionaries of one or another of the Indian languages. The British appear to have been ignorant of these efforts'. The colonial classification of Indian languages was based on both ‘geography and function’, that is to say, the language spoken by fisherman and the boatmen on both the Coromandel and Malabar coasts were referred as ‘Malabar’. Language spoken by the people of Gujarat was referred to as a ‘banian’ language and so on.

Since their first negotiation with the Mughals, Britishers had realised the importance of the language spoken there and in the other parts of India. Terry, who accompanied Roe in Mughal court describe the language thus, ‘the language of this Empire I mean the vulgar, bears the name of it, and is called Indostan; it hath much affinitie with the Persian and Arabian tongue... a language which is very significant, and speaks much in a few words. It is expressed by letters which are different than those alphabets by which the Persian and Arabic tongues are formed’. ‘For the next two hundred years this language, or variants thereof carried a bewildering variety of labels: ‘Moors’, ‘Indostan’, Hindoostan’, Hindowee’, ‘Nagree’, and ‘Koota’. Most generally the British labelled it ‘Moors’ and pejoratively referred to it as a jargon’. The first grammar of Moors Published in England was that of Edward Hadley, Grammatical Remarks on the Practical and Vulgar Dialect of the Indostan language commonly called Moors... (London, 1772). By 1809 it went through seven editions, revised by a number of authors. At this time it was superseded by a series of works of John Borthwick Gilchrist... ‘The Hindustani language has three levels or ‘styles’ which Gilchrist identified as the ‘High Court or the Persian style’, ‘the middle or genuine Hindustanee’, and the ‘vulgar or the Hinduwee’. It is interesting that for Gilchrist, Hindustani was a language spoken by the Hindu and Muslim alike who inhabited the Hindustan. Then the division of Hindustani between ‘Hindi and ‘Urdu’ was a later development most explicitly during the ‘nationalist
phase' or anti colonial struggle. For Gilchrist even the classic language of India Sanskrit was derived from ‘Hindustani’, which was spoken over much of India before the invasion of the Muslim. ‘The other language which he distinguished in north India was Bengalee, Rajpooti and Poorbee (bhoj puri). He thought these languages were very different in both spoken and literary forms than the language that he was classifying as Hindustani. Other languages found in India included: Dukhunee, the language spoken by Muslim in south India, Ooreea (Oriya), Mulwarree (Marwari), Goojratee (Gujrati), Tilugee (Taliuga, Telugu), and Kashmeere (Kashmiri). These languages Gilchrist thought had been derived from Hinduwee, Braj Bhasha or Bhakha’. So in his theorisation there were three grand languages of India – Hinduwee, Sanskrit and Hindustani. In which the first and the last were ‘orally current’.

According to Bernard S. Cohn ‘the British Studies of the Indian Languages, literature, science and thought produced three major projects. The first involve the objectification and use of Indian languages as instruments of rule to better understand the ‘peculiar’ manners, customs, and prejudices of Indians, and to carry out enquiries to gather information necessary to conciliate and control the peoples of India. The second project entailed what the European defined as ‘discoveries’ of the wisdom of the ancients, the analogy being to the restoration of Greek and Roman thought and knowledge in the fifteenth and the sixteenth century. This was a European project, the end being to construct a history of the relationship between India and the west, to classify and order and locate their civilization on an evaluative scale of progress of decay. The third project involved the patronage of institutions and religious and literary specialists who maintained and transmitted – through texts, writing, recitations, performances, paintings and sculptures, rituals and performances – that which the British conquerors defined as the traditions of the conquered. To appear legitimate in the eyes of the Indians, the British thought they had to demonstrate respect and interest in those Indians and institutions that were the carriers of the traditions’.

These projects well served the British colonial rule in India, and also helped in the development of a hostile process of classification and standardisation among the different linguistic groups to construct the identity on the basis of language.

38 Ibid., p. 304.
39 Ibid., p. 316.
2.2 Fort William College: Classical Versus Vernacular & Written Versus Oral Debate

The more rigorous and systematic study of Indian languages was inaugurated with the establishment of Fort William College at Kolkata in 1800. The college was supposed to train the young staffs of the company in history, customs, languages, laws and religion of India. There were four departments: Sanskrit – Bengali, Arabic, Persian, and Hindustani. John Gilchrist was appointed as the Professor of Hindustani, besides there were many Indian scholars, notable among them were Inshallah Khan, Sadal Mishra, and Lalooji Lal. ‘Here he supervised a staff of Indian scholars who were engaged in an extraordinary burst of scholarly, literary, and pedagogical activities directed toward making available to students at the college a corpus of works from which they could learn to read, write, and speak Hindustani’.

‘The British .... Set out to ‘discover’ something which science told them to be there; not surprisingly, they “succeeded”, and soon generated a vast and consequential literature of grammars, dictionaries and lexicographies’. There were also division among them about the study of classical language or the spoken vernacular and Gilchrist and William Carey favoured the spoken vernacular languages. This appears to be the first systematic effort to understand and classify the linguistically complex landscape of India. The ‘battle between classicists and vernacularists’ according to Cohn, ‘in relation to Hindustani was to continue throughout the nineteenth century. Each new dictionary or grammar that would appear caused argumentation. The missionary soon joined the officials of the company, and questions of scripts and source of borrowings or lexical items and for grammatical refinements became politically charged issue’.

According to S. W. Fallon language in written form with grammar was artificial and hence it corrupts the natural growth of a language. He considered language in its written form as the privilege of the lettered class. They admire the structural and constructed language over the rustic vernacular, for them that were more real and expressive. But contrary to this Fallon was of the view that words uttered by rustics embody his thought, feelings and sentiments, which he acquired through experience, hence it was more real and expressive.

40 Cohn, B. S., Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge The British in India, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 38
42 Cohn, Bernard S., 1986, p. 45.
Regarding the Hindustani as used in written and spoken form in nineteenth century India, he writes, ‘the wealth of the language is in the spoken tongue; and how rich and expressive that is, those best know who are familiar with the diversified phases of every-day speech of the impressionable and imaginative Oriental. The best part of the language cannot be left out, if the language is to be represented in its integrity. The living utterances of the people are almost absent from the Dictionaries. Their place is filled instead by a great many Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit words which are seldom or never used in written or spoken Hindustani. To cull these so deemed choice exotics out of Dictionaries of those languages and foist them in the vocabulary of the indigenous language of which they are not a part, is peculiar delight of book – learned Moultis and Pandits. These are the autocrats who have banished the people’s mother tongue, and forged in its place the artificial language which divides the people and the ruling class. With might and main they have laboured to keep out the spoken vernacular from the written language of books and legal procedures and official correspondence; ... They refuse to admit these earliest friends of their youth into the new found courts and palaces in which they have been installed by the royal favour. They speak one language in their houses, and another when they appear in the Public’. 43 ‘While the pedantry of scholars, growing with the artificial wordiness it feeds on and the wide distinctions which it continually strives to make between themselves and the mass of the people, had caused the written language to diverge more and more from the spoken tongue – destined, however, with the return of a sounder taste, to converge again towards its prototype – the perennial stream of living speech of the unlettered mass has followed on ever in its own bed, self sustained, self moving, and apart’. 44 Regarding the meaning of the words for the native speakers of the language and the strangers, he goes on to say that ‘while the native orders his words and frames his periods in the logical order of his thoughts and the emotions which he feels or desire to produce in others – thus giving to his language a certain positional and idiomatic character – the stranger has to approach the same language by means of preliminary observations of certain distinctive forms and agreements, and to spell out the syntax before he can make out the meaning’. 45

44 Ibid., p. xiii.
Here it is very important to mention Vidyapati, Sanskrit scholar, poet, musician, writer, diplomat but he is popular even today not because of his standard Sanskrit texts or literature but because of his innumerable songs that he composed in the vernacular language of the region – Maithili. For many scholars it is his songs which keep him alive even today. He is also called Kavikantahar. Fallon criticised Maulvis and Pandits because they bring strange words, known to them in the language they use, which keep them isolated from the masses. He also gave the example of Kabir – a sufi poet. How his poems have become very popular? It was due to his use of the words – Persian, Hindi, and Sanskrit which were more commonly in use. So it is evident from these explanations that the living language in forms of oral speech was considered more real than written or dead language. And yet all the struggles over the issue of language in nineteenth and twentieth century was the struggle over the written or published work in a language and that become the criteria for a language’s worth and not its rich oral traditions.

One major tradition which was prevalent widely in the country before the penetration of the printing technology, during the colonial times, was the strong oral tradition. It continues to exist in some part of country including Mithila region. In this tradition there are special relations between the vakta (speaker, scholar or lettered person) and the srota (listener or unlettered person). There were less or no use of grammar and dictionaries to learn their ‘own’ language and there was also less segmentation between lettered and unlettered class. And transmission of knowledge was more direct and comprehensible in the ‘concrete and localized’ community in comparison to impersonal and imaginary community produced by the rapid publications of books, journals, magazines, and newspapers supported by print capitalism. Written texts were available but not in the form of books but in the form of manuscripts which used to command a very different kind of value and possession than the publication of any finest book in the era of print capitalism. The relevance of this knowledge system was judged on the basis of its applicability to the social, moral and politico-economic betterment of the local community. ‘Pathshala education was predominantly vocational, consisting of simple arithmetic, commercial and agricultural accounts...'\(^46\) Now with the introduction of modern education (English education; not only the language but also its patterns of

education) seems to create a divide in the complementary role between education and its societal relevance, between lettered and unlettered masses that existed in oral tradition. Now the certificate given by the (colonial/postcolonial) government, rather than the societal test of knowledge through public debate, had/have become the sole criterion of judging merit. It leads to a new kind of educational system, quite cut off from day to day social life where the relevance of the any kind of knowledge is really tested, through the new educational institutions schools and universities, textbooks, literary sphere quite distinct from the traditional modes of learning and dissemination of knowledge. According to Alok Rai, ‘The important thing that emerged from the Fort William is the idea of two-ness, of linguistic duality. Fort William College gave institutional recognition to the notion that there were in-fact two ways of doing Hindustani – One which used the available and mixed language, and another from which the Arabic – Persian words had been removed in order to produce a language more suitable to Hindus’. Fort William according to Rai, soon acquired a mythical status, being seen either as the visible symbol of the imperial policy of divide and rule, the origin and fount of linguistic division; or alternatively, as the influential official recognition of the neglected linguistic tradition which came into its own as modern “Hindi”. The role of the missionaries was equally important in the standardisation and classifications of Indian languages. They were among the first to learn the local language. They also standardised these languages for print and also for the publication of Bible and other religious texts. Most prominent among these missionaries was the Serampore establishment, near Calcutta (now Kolkata) founded in late 18th Century. ‘As part of their moral activities’ writes Alok Rai borrowing this idea from Tej Bhatia’s, A History of the Hindi Grammatical Tradition, ‘they were soon to set up school book societies all over north India – Calcutta, Agra, Allahabad – and embark on an ambitious publishing programme. There is no need to allege or imply conspiracy here. There were obvious technical and even existential imperatives which determined their attitude with respect to the linguistic diversity and even anarchy of north India. Thus the sheer technical necessity of setting up texts in type – for the rapidly growing School Book Societies – dictated a certain “normalcy” perspective after all. Standardising grammar, orthography etc. were ‘natural’ imperative built into the new

printing technologies’. Here it is interesting to mention that for Ram Chandra Shukla, ‘one of the creators of modern Hindi’s self consciousness’ missionaries had to go beyond the official language of ‘Hindustani’ which they found inadequate to communicate with the masses, then they had to ‘approximate to the Sanskrit – near language in which the common people told and listened to their religious stories’, 49. ‘The pre-modern community ... was crucially an oral community. Unaffected by the imperatives of print-standardisation, it was a community which worked through local ‘borrowings’ and “neighbourly intelligibility”, recognised and affirmed in flexible acts of oral communication that necessarily implicate both parties, communicator and communicate, in the labour of finding common ground. Printed communication, on the other hand, is intrinsically fixed – and unilateral’. 50 ‘The actual process, magnanimously decreed by the Board of Directors of the East India Company, of replacing Persian – the language of Mughal administration – with the local vernaculars, shows considerable local variation. Thus the history of modern Bengali, or modern Marathi, or modern Tamil, must all recall the replacement of Persian (in 1832 in the Bombay and Madras Presidencies, in 1837 in Bengal Presidency, with the exception of Bihar, which was then a part of Bengal Presidency) as a crucial moment. But their subsequent histories were subject to the specific cultural and demographic topographies of those regions’. 51 ‘In Bihar and in the central Provinces (now Madhya Pradesh), Hindustani in the Persian script began to be replaced by Hindi in Nagri script in the 1870’s and 1880’s, while in the Punjab, Urdu (or Hindustani) and the Persian script retained their dominance until well into the 20th Century’. 52 For Alok Rai and many other scholars the most crucial region for the linguistic division and identification of religion and culture with the language was North Western Province and Oudh (i.e. roughly modern Uttar Pradesh). ‘It is here that the resistance was strongest, the struggle more intense, the cultural consequences most profound’ 53

48 Ibid., p. 24.
51 Ibid., p. 27.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
In the administration Europeans were encouraged to learn the languages of the natives, especially in education department. It should henceforth be made upon all European appointed to the educational department to pass within a given period an examination which shall prove that they possess a significant colloquial knowledge of the vernacular language of the district in which they are employed, failing which their service should be dispensed with. All persons now employed in the department should be required to satisfy the director of Public Institution within a given period that they possess such knowledge.

There were establishment of modern institution of learning. There was an establishment of madrassa in Calcutta under the supervision of a well known teacher and scholar Muiz-ud-din, which Hastings ‘hoped, would preserve and further knowledge, provide training for future law officers of the Company, contribute to the “credit” of the company’s name, and “help soften the prejudices excited by the growth of the British dominions’.

Similar was the motive for the establishment of Sanskrit College in Banaras. John Duncan was at the fore front for the establishment of “a Hindoo College . . . for the Preservation and cultivation of Laws, Literature and Religion of that nation, at this centre of their faith.” It “would endear our government to the Native Hindoos.” He also observed that there were “many private seminaries” for the study of various forms of Hindu learning, but as the Company’s college would be the only “public” institution dedicated to the purpose, reputation of the company would be enhanced.

It was in 1861, the year in which the Darbhanga Raj came under the Court of Wards, that English became official language of the state, prior to that year the records were maintained in Persian.

All efforts on the part of government to spread English education in the district of Tirhoot had failed till the beginning of Court of Wards rule i.e. 1860. The region being stronghold of orthodox Brahmins it resisted the introduction of a foreign language in the domain of learning. To study English was considered as an act of irreligion. The Muhammadans and Kyasthas who generally went

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54 Home, education department, dated Mar 12, (Accessed at National Archives of India, New Delhi) 1856.
55 Home, educational department, dated 22 Dec, (Accessed at National Archives of India, New Delhi), 1859.
in for Persian and Arabic education, were equally averse to English education. Maharaja Rudra Pratap Singh and other Zamindars no doubt made liberal donations to the Anglo Vernacular Schools when it was established in 1844 at Muzaffarpur, but no upper class people sent their children to the institution. Again when a similar school was established at Darbhanga in 1855 on the initiative of some local government officers it had to be closed down within a period of two years for want of students. The credit for the establishment of an Anglo Vernacular School at Darbhanga on a sound footing goes to the first General Manager, James Forlong. The school was opened in September 1861 and proved to be quite popular by 1867 the number of student rose to 100, and the Raj began to bear the entire cost of its establishments. By 1871 another Anglo Vernacular School was founded at Madhubani which received aid both from the Raj and government. The prejudices against English education had begun to disappear’. In the annual report of 1875 it was noted that “Tirhootias both Kayasth and Brahmins who are as a rule averse to English education have begun appreciating the same.” This point was further emphasised in the annual report of the following year. “The fact of the Tirhoot Brahmins attending the school is an encouraging sign because the tenets of their religion have hitherto led them to regard any attempt to educate the people in English, with distrust and suspicion, in the ignorant belief that the teaching of English is indirectly intended to discourage the teaching of Sanskrit............” Does this mean that it is all because of the Court of Ward’s rule that the English education was introduced in the Mithila? What were the conditions that made them appreciate English education, about which they were once so suspicious? However, there was again a shift to Sanskrit studies with the accession of Maharaja Rameshwar Singh to the throne. ‘Within a year he created twenty scholarships for the revival and encouragement of Vedic education’. He also established Maharani Rameshwar Lata Vidyalaya, July 1907 ‘To encourage conversation in Sanskrit he passed an order to the effect that the teachers and students of the vidyalaya should talk among themselves in Sanskrit only’. ‘But all the efforts proved to be a movement against the spirit of the time. Sanskrit education failed to secure even bare livelihood for scholars’. Though there were as many as 26 schools opened for the vernacular education under the jurisdiction of the Raj, these

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59 For the nature and development of English education in Mithila see, Ibid, pp. xvi-xx.
60 Cited in Jha, J. S., 1972, p. xvii.
remained a failed exercise as Brahmans and Kayasthas who usually prosecuted their study beyond the middle school were unwilling to get themselves admitted as there was no provision for teaching of English.

2.3 George A. Grierson’s Linguistic Survey of India and the Classifications Of Indian Languages

Sir G. A. Grierson’s, *Linguistic survey of India* was a major development and culmination of the colonial project of classification and standardisations of the Indian languages. Many anti-colonial and post-colonial linguistic movements derive their strengths and weakness form this epoch making work, which in the words of the author himself is ‘what has been done in it for India has been done for no other country in the world’. The most striking example for this is Maithili language movement; in this work Grierson classified Maithili as the dialect of the no-one’s language, which he named Bihari consisted of Maithili, Bhojpuri and Magadhi. In the other works although Grierson in his other works considered Maithili as an independent language having its own history of literature and culture. However his classification in linguistic survey became the authoritative, ‘official’ stand on the status of the Maithili language for many years to come. I shall explore the consequences of this on the language and the movement, and how it has come out of this status and asserted its independence, in another chapter. Here it is very important to understand the rationale behind the project of linguistic survey, how it categorised the past work on the subject and how it compiled and classified the languages of India.

Regarding the previous work of the philologists, Grierson writes that ‘a consideration of this early stage of enquiry into the languages of India will show that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there had been laborious accumulation of materials, but hardly any scientific study. Such study could not, indeed have been expected in those days. The necessary materials, though increasing gradually from decade to decade, were throughout too scanty for it to have been possible. Nevertheless the period was marked by a steady advance in the knowledge beyond the older belief

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that all languages were derived from ‘Hebrew’. Here it is important to mention that he claims that the works of earlier philologists were not scientific. Hidden here is the claim that his will be more scientific, hence more acceptable. According to Grierson ‘In the early years of the 17th century the existence in India of Sanskrit, the sacred literary language, became known, from this, as a short corollary, there arose the belief that besides it there was in addition one general colloquial form of speech used by the vulgar over the whole continent. A further development of this belief was the curious error that that colloquial language was Malay, a kind of lingua franca, before which the indigenous speech was disappearing. It took many decades to wipe out this misapprehension and its consequences. The existence of more than one spoken language was the next discovery’. He then goes on to explain how collection of alphabets first merely out of curiosity, led to the ‘suspicion of the existence of diverse tongues’ and this in turn led to the compilation of Lord Prayers – a text which become the starting point for comparative philology in India. Here he cites the name of LaCroze and Bayer who ‘began to make rudimentary classifications of languages based on the comparisons of the numerals and similar words, and succeeded in tracing the connexion between the alphabets of Tibet and India, a fact that was destined in later days to have a far-reaching importance’. Reflecting on this period he writes ‘we find that Europe had a fairly clear idea of the names and general characters of the Indian languages, and that its scholars had begun to compare one with another. The old philology thus on its deathbed gave birth to the new. The materials for classification had been collected and set in order, but no general classification had yet been attempted’.

According to Grierson ‘Modern comparative philology dates from the introduction of Sanskrit as a serious study, and from consequent recognition of the existence of an Indo-European family of language by Sir William Jones in 1786. In his third Annual Discourse to the Asiatic Society (of Bengal) delivered in that year, he said: ‘... the Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin and more exquisitely refined than either;
yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in roots of verbs, and in forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong, indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists’.66 Franz Bopp and his successors Grimm, Pott, Scheicher, Whitney, Brugmann, Delbruck, Meillet, and Jesperson developed this field of study.

The next most prominent scholar who dominated the linguistic study in India was William Carey. He landed in India in November 1793, and his translation of the New Testament into Bengali appeared in 1801. In the following year versions into other languages were published; but in 1816 Carey found himself on the wrong track and reported to his home correspondent ‘in the prosecution of it, we have found that our ideas relative to the number of languages which spring from the Sungskrit were far from being accurate. The fact is that in this point of view, India is today almost an unexplored country. That eight or nine languages had sprung from that great philological root, the Sungskrit, we well knew. But we imagined that Tamul, the Kurnata, the Telinga, the Guzrattee, the Orissa, the Bengali, the Maharatta, the Punjabee, and the Hindoostanee, comprised nearly all the collateral branches springing from the Sungskrit language; and that all the rest were varieties of the Hinddee and some of them, indeed, little better than jargons capable of conveying ideas...in fact we have ascertained that there are more than twenty languages, composed, it is true, of nearly the same words and all equally related to the common parent, the Sungskrit, but each possessing a distinct set of terminations, and, therefore, having equal claim of distinct cognate languages ... that these languages, though differing from each other only in terminations and a few of words that they contain, can scarcely be called dialects, will appear, if we reflect, that there in India no general language current, of which they can be supposed to be dialects. The Sungskrit, the parent of them all is at present the current language of no country, though spoken by the learned nearly throughout India...The fact is, indeed, that the latest and most exact researches have shown that the Hinddee has no country which can exclusively claim it as its own. Being the language of the Musulman courts and camps, it is spoken in those cities and towns which have been formerly, or

are now, the seat of Musulman princes; and in general by those Musulmans who attend on the persons of Europeans gentlemen in almost every part of India. Hence it is the language which most Europeans get an idea of before any other, and which indeed, in many instances, terminates their philological researches. These circumstances have led to the supposition, that it is the language of the greater part of the Hindoostan; while the fact is, that it is not always understood by the common people at a distance of only twenty miles from the towns in which it is spoken. These speak their own vernacular language, in Bengal the Bengalee, and in the other countries that which is appropriately the language of the country, which may account for a circumstances well known to those gentlemen who fill the judicial department, namely, that the publishing of the Honourable Company’s Regulations in the Hindoostani has been often objected to, on the ground that in that language they would be unintelligible to the bulk of the people in the various provinces of Hindoostan. Had this idea been followed up, it might have led to the knowledge of the fact, that each of these various provinces has a language of its own, most of them nearly alike in the bulk of their words, but differing so widely in the grammatical terminations, as, when spoken, to be scarcely intelligible to their next neighbours’.

William Carey’s Linguistic Survey was for Grierson the first attempt at a systematic survey of the languages of India. In Carey’s survey ‘thirty four specimens were given of thirty three Indian languages’. ‘In this connexion it is well to remember that its date is 1816, and that its authors were Carey, Marshman, and Ward. The language considered are as follows:- Sungskrit, Bengallee, Hindee, Kashmeera, Dongura (i.e. Dogri), Wuch (i.e. Lahnda), Sindh, Southern Sindh, Kutch, Goojuratee, Kunkuna, Punjabi or Shikh, Bikaner, Marawar, Juya-poora, Ooduya-poora, Harutee, Maluwa, Bruj, Bundelkhund, Maharatta, Magudha or South Bahar, North Koshula (i.e. Awadhi), Mythilee, Nepal, Assam, Orissa or Ootkul, Telinga, Kurnata, Pushtoo or Affghan, Bulochee, Khassee, Burman’. Grierson then goes on to make two points about this list of Carey’s linguistic survey, first, ‘it shows that the Dravidian Languages – Tamil, Telugu, kanarese, and so forth – were not recognized as separate family. That had to await the acute discernment of Hadgson. Here they are looked as being just as much Sanskritic as

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68 Ibid., p. 12.
Bengali or Hindi’. Second, ‘No distinction has been made between language and dialect’. Reason for this he suggests is that ‘there is no word, at least in north India, exactly corresponding to our ‘language’ as distinct from language’. After Carey’s report the systematic study of the languages remained undetermined for a considerable period of time. The newly established *Asiatic Society of Bengal* according to Grierson was too busy with Sanskrit and Persian, though practical grammars of the important language were compiled in plenty, but no systematic inquiry was initiated into the subject as a whole. However there were efforts by individual scholars to study non-Aryan languages and Indo Chinese was the first to receive the attention. ‘Dr. Francis Buchanan published in the Asiatic Researches (Vol. V) a Comparative Vocabulary of some of the languages spoken in Burma, and three years later D. J. Leyden, in the tenth volume, wrote on the Languages and Literature of the Indo-Chinese Nations’.

The next most important name that we come across is that of Brian Houghton Hodgson, who wrote ‘on the Language, Literature, and Religion of the Boudhas of Nepal and Bhot (Tibet)’. He further compiled a comparative vocabulary of the ‘sub Himalayan dialects’. For Grierson ‘he was the first Englishman to use the term ‘Dravidian’ for the language of Central and Southern India, but he included under the term not only the Dravidian language proper, but also those of an altogether different family, - the Munda’. He also studied the languages of Central Asia in search of the common language in which he failed yet his contribution to the classification of Indian language was immense especially of south Indian languages. In 1868 appeared ‘Hunter’s “Comparative Dictionary of the Languages of India and High Asia”, which, with some additions, summarized the results of Hodgson’s collections, and presented them in a form convenient to the student’. Max Muller for the first time in 1854 established the Munda language as an independent form of speech different from Dravidian. ‘Two year later, in 1856, appeared what has ever since been the foundation of research into the tongues of the Southern India, Bishop Caldwell’s ‘Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages’. W. Schimdt in his work ‘Die Mon-Khmer-Volker’ not only established a link between the Munda language and the languages of Indonesia, but also ‘shown that the languages of Indonesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia also form a group which he terms the ‘Austronesic’. The Indonesian languages thus

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69 Ibid., p. 13.
70 Ibid., p. 14.
form a link between the Austroasiatic and the Austronesic languages, the whole forming one great linguistic family, - called the ‘Austric’ – extending from the hills of the Central India to Easter Island, off the coast of South America, and covering a wider area even than that of the Indo-European tongues’.  

Thirty seven year later after the publication of the Carey’s Report it was in the Bombay that the comparative study of the Indo-Aryan languages was resumed. Sir Thomas Erskine Perry, then Chief Justice of Bombay and President of the Bombay branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, published his paper ‘On the Geographical Distribution of the principal languages of India’. In this paper he divided the languages of India into two great classes, - the languages of the intruding Arians, or Sanskritoid, in the North, and the language of a Civilized race in the South of India, represented by the most cultivated branch, the Tamil. The former he reckoned as a seven in number, viz., Hindi, Kashmiri, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Kunkani, and Oriya, with ten dialects. Punjabi, Lahnda (called by him Multani), Sindhi, and Marwari he looked upon as all dialects of Hindi. It is interesting to note that he considered Maithili as the dialects of the Bengali. Grierson has rightly pointed out that many of the forms of speech that he considered as a dialect, have elevated to the status of the independent language. The Southern languages he called ‘Turanian or Tamiloid’. He did not seem to be aware of the ‘Dravidian’ which was first used simultaneously in 1856 both by Hodgson and by Caldwell. He was also ignorant of Indo Chinese languages altogether and did not mention about the Munda language. J. Stevenson’s Comparative Vocabulary of the Non-Sanscrit Vocables of the vernacular Languages of India was a major development in this regard where he studies the borrowing of the Dravidian words by the different Indo-Aryan languages. In 1867 John Beames, in his Outlines of Indian Philology summarized what was then known about the Indian languages. ‘Five year later appeared the first volume of his well-known ‘Comparative Grammar of the Aryan Languages of India. The same year witnessed the publication of Dr. Hoernle’s first essays in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal on the same subject, which were followed in 1880 by his ‘Grammar of Eastern Hindi compared with the other Gaudian languages’. These excellent works, each a masterpiece in its own way, have since been the twin

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71 Ibid., p. 15.
72 Ibid.
foundation of all researches into the origin and mutual relationship of the language of the Indo-Aryan family of speech’.

However, till 1878 still there was lack of accurate understanding of the Indian languages, ‘no one had yet made even a catalogue of all the language spoken in India, and the estimates of their number varied between 50 or 60 and 250.\(^\text{73}\) Grierson’s own *Linguistic Survey of India* was the result of Vienna Congress of 1886 where scholars like – Dr. Cust, Dr. Buhler, Professor Weber, Messrs, Barth, Bendall, Grierson, Hoernle, Max Muller, Sir Monier-Williams, Messra, Rost, Sayce, and Senart\(^\text{74}\) - passed a resolution to urge the government of India to undertake ‘a deliberate systematic survey of the languages of India’. This proposal was initially favoured but delayed on the financial grounds. In 1894 it ‘came within the region of practical politics and the preliminary details came under discussion’. It was decided that Provinces of Madras and Burma and the states of Hyderabad and Mysore to be excluded from its operation, so his survey cover from the West to the East, Baluchistan, the North-West Frontier, Kashmir, the Punjab, the Bombay Presidency, Rajputana and Central India, the Central Provinces and Berar, the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Bihar and Orissa, Bengal, and Assam, then containing a population of about 224,000,000 out of the 294,000,000 of our Indian Empire’.\(^\text{75}\)

The main method applied for the survey was the collection of three specimens – the standard passage to be translated into every known dialect and sub-dialect of the area covered under operation, a piece of folklore or some other passage in narrative prose or verse, selected on the spot and taken down from the mouth of the speaker, and the list of words and sentences. The total number of the languages and dialects reported from the survey area was 231 and 774 respectively. However, after scrutiny Grierson reduced it to 179 for the language and 544 for the dialects, citing that same language reported more than once and also same form of speech reported many times under different names. It is interesting to note that he cited the Census of 1921 which listed 188 languages, the number of dialects being unknown. Now the major problem that he faced was the preparation of the list. He first collected the local lists of dialects and sub-dialects through the local officers and from this list provincial list were compiled and printed. These compilations he himself claimed were far from accurate as the officers who

\(^{73}\) Ibid, p. 17.

\(^{74}\) Ibid, footnotes no. 1.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., p. 17; based on the 1891 census.
collected these numbers ‘did not pretend to be philological experts’. Then ‘when the lists were printed, the dialects were divided into two main classes, distinguished by a difference of type, viz., (1) those which were vernaculars of the localities from which they were reported, and (2) those which were spoken by the foreigners in each locality. The latter were once for all excluded, and attention was thenceforth devoted only to the former’.\(^{76}\) He also confessed the difficulties in deciding ‘where a given form of speech is to be looked upon as an independent language, or as a dialect of some other definite form of speech. In practice it has been found that it is sometimes impossible to decide the question in a manner which will gain universal acceptance. ... in common use we may say that, as a general rule, different dialects of the same language are sufficiently alike to be reasonably well understood by all whose native tongue is that language, while different languages are so unlike that special study is needed to enable one to understand a language that is not his own’.\(^{77}\) However he is not convinced by this explanation which is there in the Century Dictionary, regarding the Aryan languages of north India, he writes, ‘there, mutual intelligibility cannot always be the deciding factor, for the consideration is obscured by the fact that between Bengal and the Punjab every individual who received the very slightest education is bilingual. In his own home, and in his own immediate surroundings he speaks a local idiom, but in his intercourse with strangers he employs or understands some form of that great lingua franca, - Hindi or Hindostani’.\(^{78}\) Given this complexity of the linguistic scenario, for the linguistic survey, Grierson has classified the languages on the basis of their grammatical systems into three groups, each of which is given the dignity of a language, - Bihari, Eastern Hindi, and Western Hindi. This kind of division is based on the grammatical structure and nationality factor, though he was in favour of separating the philology from the ethnology. He was also aware of the difficulties in fixing the boundaries of the language. ‘As a rule, unless they are separated by great ethnic differences, or by some natural obstacles, such as a range of mountains or a large river, Indian languages gradually merge into each other and are not separated by hard and fast boundary lines. When such boundaries are spoken of, or are shown on a map, they must always be understood as conventional methods of showing definitely a state of things which is in its essence indefinite.\(^{79}\)

\(^{76}\) Ibid., p. 19.

\(^{77}\) Ibid., p. 22.

\(^{78}\) Ibid., pp. 22 – 23.

\(^{79}\) Ibid., pp. 30 – 31.
2.4 Language Enumeration and ‘Our Modernity’

It is now clear enough to say that the languages, their relationships with their own ‘dialects’ and other languages and their ‘dialects’, and their boundaries is something which started to be drawn, sometimes correctly and sometimes arbitrarily (though it can be argued it was always done arbitrarily), with the arrival of Europeans and especially after the establishment and consolidation of the British rule in India. This is not to say that these languages and ‘dialects’ did not exist earlier, these certainly did exist but not in the same ways that it emerged during and after the colonial rule. Using Kaviraj idea of “fuzzy” and “enumerated” communities,\(^\text{80}\) it is now possible to argue that before the introduction of enumeration processes through census, mapping, and surveys, these communities did exist, for Kaviraj in its fuzziness, but certainly not with the idea of their ‘exact’ number of speakers, their boundaries, the differentiations with other linguistic groups, their grammatical, phonological, and morphological difference and so on. So after the processes of enumeration they develop different kinds of consciousness to create a new kind of ‘intra’ and ‘extra’ group relationships\(^\text{81}\) and above all to form an identity based on language, which provided a platform to untie and assert their rights beyond the parochial identities of caste, class, gender, region, and religion. Now it is very much clear that in the practice of these linguistic politics we come across a number of instances when all these ‘parochial identities’ were also used especially in the politics of Hindi’s and Urdu’s linguistic nationalism. In this kind of development there are also a great stress on the co-relationships of territory and (mono) language division to produce linguistic parochialisms and hierarchisation. It is important to mention that linguistic groups and rise of the language based politics of mobilisation is the result of colonial interactions. Now it is all the more important to not to live in the fallacy that newly emerging linguistic movements are the result of ‘parochial and backward looking mentalities’ or ‘uneven economic development’. I am not sure whether we can completely negate these charges, but we must understand that these movements are the result of the same process of enumeration which gave rise to nationalism and especially

\(^{80}\) Kaviraj, S., ‘The Imaginary Institution of India’ in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey eds., *Subaltern Studies VII Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 01 - 39.

Hindi’s and Urdu’s linguistic nationalism. These movements are resurfacing now and shall continue to do so in the future, depending upon many things – assertiveness of the speakers, their political and cultural leaderships, history of their cultural and literary selfhood and consciousness of these among the speakers there of, development of the regional and national politics – most important among these are, and shall be, their level of interaction and experience of this modern technicalities of ‘enumeration’ processes, in a way ‘our modernity’. All the communities did not have the same kind and level of experience of ‘our modernity’. Then the nature of movements and their scope and strategies are, and shall be, determined by these processes and the ability to interact with “our modernity” which is “colonial modernity” as well.

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