

## **FOREIGNERS AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN INDIA**

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Chaudhary, Shreesh, *Foreigners and Foreign Languages in India: A Sociolinguistic History* (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2009) / ISBN 978-81-7596-628-4; Price Rs. 950/-

The book under review runs a little less than 600 (586) pages containing seven chapters including “Introduction” as the first one and “Conclusion” as the last. There are 13 tables, 16 annexes and an index (pp. 581-86). Each chapter has extensive bibliographical references. A Foreword (p. viii) by Prof. M. S. Ananth, Director, IIT, Madras and a Preface (pp. ix-x) by Prof. Rajendra Singh of Universite de Montreal, Canada along with Acknowledgements of the author (pp. xi-xiii) make this volume a unique venture in reconstructing a certain aspect of the linguistic history of this country.

“India is a multilingual, multiethnic and pluricultural country”. It offers a smorgasbord of numerous languages which makes this land the most vibrant language laboratory of the world. The 1961 census of India estimated a total of 1652 mother tongues leaving aside many hitherto undiscovered languages. How come such a huge number of languages found their places here? The answer to this question calls for a close retrospection into the historical background of this subcontinent. From time immemorial India has been the place where various ethnic groups came along with their languages and cultures and settled down permanently imbibing the spirit of this land. These invasions and immigrations contributed towards the linguistic as well as cultural richness of this country. The language dynamics of this country is shaped by the presence of all these variegated linguistic elements. The comingling of so many cultures, fusion of many races, contacts of numerous languages not only enriched this country to become a single linguistic, socio-linguistic and cultural area but also increased its challenges, woes and paradoxes manifolds.

The issues of linguistic infiltration in India have been dealt with great care and deep penetration in the book under review. Shreesh Chaudhary, a professor of English and Linguistics at the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras has taken all the pains of treading the path of linguistic history of the foreigners and foreign languages in India. This book, perhaps, is the first of its kind that explores a full length “socio-linguistic” survey of all the foreign languages that found their places in this peninsula. The subtitle of the book is very much suggestive—language does not migrate on its own, it is the speakers that migrate with their languages. Hence, the linguistic history of a language wedded with the social history of its users can make it more comprehensive. Chaudhary could rightly put into rhyme these two aspects. This makes the book equally useful for sociolinguists, historical linguists, historians and common readers.

The author extensively made use of materials like biographies, travelogues, official correspondences, government reports, literary resources, personal diaries, newspapers from personal collections, royal libraries, government libraries etc. in India and abroad whichever bear relevance to the scope of the book. This helped the author to reconcile the linguistic history with the social history with great authority and authenticity.

The scope of the book is very wide. It starts its journey with the advent of Aryan speech in India in the second millennium BC and traverses a time period of almost four millennia up to the year 2008.

The author holds that each language that entered this country underwent a common process of pidginisation – creolisation - nativisation (PCN) (pp.9-23). But this statement seems to be oversimplified. Can the “evolution” of Prakrit languages from Sanskrit be termed as pidginisation? Did Prakrit languages evolve only due to the admixture of “mutually unintelligible” languages? Theories contradict each other on this issue. The phonological simplification alone cannot be taken as a proof of pidginisation. The emergence of Hindi/Urdu (p. 20, 179-224) due to the contact of Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Pushto with Sanskrit, Prakrit and other local languages lacks a proper pidginisation process and can better be termed as creoloid.

Chaudhary started his journey (chapter 2: 56-129) after a brief but minute study of the linguistic situation prevalent in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. The dispute regarding the origin of Aryan speech gets a proper mention here but the author fails to provide any satisfactory solution to the issue. The origin of Aryan speech is still shrouded under mystery. Hence, ascribing the “foreign” status to Aryan speech is not justified. So is the question of indigenous language of India. Following Suniti Kumar Chatterji, author tries to throw some light on this issue, but offers no view of his own.

The discussion on Greek (pp. 66-71), Chinese (pp. 71-76) and Hebrew (pp. 76-79) languages mainly concentrates on the lexical items.

The chapter on Arabic, Persian and Turkish languages (chapter 3: 130-235) is a major chapter that delves deeply into the minute details of their impacts on various Indian languages. The entry

and expansion of these languages left an indelible mark on the linguistic composition of this country. Issues like emergence of Urdu as an administrative language, introduction of a new script for Urdu, profuse lexical borrowings into various modern Indian languages are dealt with in great detail.

“Armenians were the first Christian nation to come to India.” (p. 237) After the Greeks, they were the second European nation to come to India. Instead of spreading their language, which they used “among themselves” (p. 240), they became “the first teachers of English in India” (p. 242). Portuguese population by virtue of their naval power concentrated in the coastal areas of India. Franciscan missionaries tried to impose Portuguese on local population, but Jesuits tried to promote local languages. By the patronage of Portuguese missionaries the first book (*Doutrina Crista*) in the entire East got printed in AD 1557. Thus the fourth chapter (236-303) makes an elaborate discussion on Armenian, Portuguese, Dutch and French languages.

The printing press came to India during East India Company’s (ELC) tenure. This opened up “new opportunities for the growth of the MILs” (Modern Indian Languages) (p.237). Chapters 5 (304-391) and 6 (392-516) evaluates ELC’s role in promoting Indian vernaculars and expanding English education in this country.

The concluding chapter (517-580) of the book delineates the issue of language dynamics of present-day India with “mathetic” precision. The rise of English as a language of power, social prestige and a medium of diplomatic and foreign communication, its inclusion as an official language of India, its importance as the preferred medium of higher education bear testimony to the concern expressed by Raja Rammohun Roy in a letter, reproduced here as an annex (489-492), to the Governor General Amherst almost two centuries back (11.12.1823). The adstratal features of Indian languages (as attested in literature, media, etc.), resurgence of Sanskrit language, increasing popularity of Hindi, superstratum-substratum relationships between languages due to political and economic power-play surface cogently in this chapter.

The book shows certain weaknesses as far as editing is concerned. Absence of a list of abbreviations (no elaboration for MIL, p. 2), wrong alphabetical ordering the bibliographical references (where Singh, Sridhar come before Scherer, p. 55), confusing bibliographical references (p. 42, footnote 72 refers to Jha 2005: 22-3, but there are two references of Jha 2005, pp. 53-4), the use of wrong phonetic symbol for the velar nasal (p. vii), erroneous transliterations throughout the book make its readers frown at the book. The arrangement of the chapters is chronologically haphazard. Suniti Kumar Chatterji’s 1926 edition of *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language* was published by Calcutta University Press (p. 51), George, Allen & Unwin Ltd. edition was published in 1970. Index should have been more exhaustive—names like Amir Khusro (p. 193), *Padumawat* (p. 199), *Ramacharitmanas* (p. 209), etc. could not find their place in the Index.

A glaring mistake! Prof. M. S. Ananth, Director, IIT, Madras in his foreword quotes a portion of the “infamous” Lord “Macaulay’s Minute on Education for India” (02.02.1835). Unfortunately, the quotation does not find its place in the minute which is reproduced verbatim in the book (pp. 492-505). Is it a mistake? Or a common misconception about the Minute that Ananth has fallen prey to?

Anyway, this is a *mega biblion* with minor errors.

Overall, the book provides its readers, as Prof. Rajendra Singh rightly claims in his Preface, “a full, minimally technical” delineation of the origin and development of numerous foreign tongues that inundated this country for the last four millennia. This book, replete with quotations from various sources, seems to be equally handy for both commoners and specialists.