

Book Reviews

Mithilesh Kumar Jha, *Language Politics and Public Sphere in North India: Making of the Maithili Movement*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. xix + 34, Rs. 1195/- (hardbound), ISBN: 9780199479344.

Language Politics and Public Sphere in North India: Making of the Maithili Movement by Mithilesh Kumar Jha is a timely work on Maithili language movement, given the meagre number of books on language movements in India, especially since the last one decade. Most works on language conflicts in India focus solely on the Hindi-Urdu controversy which in turn gets translated as 'communal', given the identification of Urdu as the language of the Muslim community. Jha's work brings a fresh air to the somewhat stale arguments of Hindi-Urdu conflicts focusing on Maithili, which was considered a dialect of Hindi, thereby establishing the heterogeneous languages clubbed as dialects and enumerated under the category of Hindi in the Census of India (2001 Census of Indiagroups 49 languages under Hindi). The work problematizes this overarching image of Hindi as a single language by throwing light on the dialect-language distinctions used largely by scholars debating language movements. For example, Catalanian and Castilian, Bengali and Assamese and further Assamese and Bodo in the Spanish and Indian cases, respectively.

The book is divided into four chapters along with a detailed introduction but somewhat short conclusion. While the first chapter focuses on language enumeration during the British rule and its fallout on construction of communities in India. The second chapter again is a theoretical one titled *Language, History, Nation and the Imaginary of Maithili Identity*, argues that the relationship of nation and language in India have been less explored in India (p. 66), a proposition which is correct if compared to caste, culture and religion but works on language and nation such as Sumathi Ramaswamy's *Passions of the Tongue* (1997) linking Tamil language to the notion of nation, Lisa Mitchell's *Language, Emotion and Politics in South India* (2009) elaborating Telugu and its impact on politics in South India, Chitrlekha Zutshi's *Language of Belonging*

(2003) focuses on Kashmir's language connects language's role in the conceptualization of 'nation'. Some of these are works, which Jha reports as an endnote in chapter two but does not discuss these relevant works in a comparative perspective with his work on Maithili, which could have contributed to understanding the nuances of various language movements in India.

The next two chapters are specifically on the Maithili movement and its different phases. Jha unravels the intricate relationship between cultural associations, print-media and journalistic writings in constructing and developing a 'Maithili-reading public' (p.113) which leads to the rise of a class of 'intellectual elites' responsible for initiating the movement for recognition of Maithili as a language and its inclusion in the Eighth Schedule (also known as the language schedule) of the Indian Constitution. This is not new, considering that in most language movements, it is the middle-class elites who become the forerunners for such movements demanding recognition and at times representation but where Jha's work really contributes is in his analysis of the 'internal contradictions' of the Maithili movement. This scrutiny of contradictions-within, is beautifully and comprehensively pronounced in these chapters. He further illustrates how the politicization of the movement led to the declaration of Maithili as a subject in the examination of the State Service Commission, through judicial intervention and the support of Bhartiya Janata Party to the ongoing Maithili movement. Such arguments may not seem original i.e. language and its role in employability has been debated again and again, but nonetheless integral in any discussion of language movements as the underlying factor of political economy is critical to understanding such movements, and Jha presents this lucidly. In his conclusion, Jha takes up language as a 'conceptual category', he puts forth the two major internal issues of the Maithili movement first, "where one speaks of the Maithili movement and the other for statehood" (p. 257).

Even though, Jha's book is timely it suffers from some shortcomings which deserves mention. First, in

the introduction, Jha claims that the Maithili movement should be studied through the utilization of a theoretical framework of James Scott “weapons of the weak”, criticizing Paul Brass who compares the movement with the Tamil and Telugu language movement necessarily culminating into a territorial recognition of a language. This intrinsic relation between language, identity and territoriality is pivotal in discussions on language movements and the reader expects Jha to elucidate this criticism of Brass’s approach in the conclusion but Jha does not refer to it at all in the end.

Second, Jha does not elaborate how the Maithili movement which he himself claims to have failed to have a mass-base can be seen through the conceptual gaze of ‘weapon of the weak’. Because if we take his initial objective of following Scott’s framework, he should have presented why one should consider the movement as ‘weapon of the weak’ wherein, weak is synonymous to the middle-class intellectuals, suffering from caste hierarchy, failing to arouse mass support for the movement (p. 256). Another aspect which, if had Jha discussed, could have added more value, is on the uniqueness of Maithili movement which succeeded in the inclusion in the Eighth Schedule in 2003 without having been recognised as an official language in any state of India. A trait which is rare as only three languages have been included in the Eighth Schedule without having a separate state are Sanskrit, Sindhi and Maithili, rest all have official language status in one or the other state. Bodo and Manipuri, both of which were also included in the Eighth schedule in 2003 have territorial recognition in Bodoland and Manipur.

But apart from these shortcomings, this book is an essential reading for anyone interested in understanding the Maithili language movement and how language, even in the time of globalization, has the capacity to unite people for a collective cause i.e. recognition of one’s identity by the State and the ‘others’.

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Vivek Sachdeva, *Fiction to Film: Ruth Praver Jhabvala’s The Householder and Heat and Dust*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, pp. li + 244, ISBN: 9789386689030

“They slaughtered the novel in that film.”- A Reader

An apple isn’t an orange – it is, ipso facto, an apple. Similarly, no matter how vehemently public opinion – or even critical perspectives – (seek to) blur the boundaries between fiction

and film, a novel simply cannot *be* a film, and a film cannot *be* a novel. From what they (inherently) are and how they are perceived/received, these two art forms cannot be regarded as same; they may, however, be viewed as co-planar, and speaking mathematically, even similar (though certainly not congruent). After all, both these kinds of storytelling have their distinct individual styles, modes and epistemologies of narrative(s) that are inbuilt in their structural schematics. Thus, despite the oft-quoted complaint that “the directors ruined the novel”, fundamental differences ensure a direct comparison of fiction and film is a false analogy, and creates more problems than it solves (since it is akin to comparing apples and oranges).

How a text is read/seen/decoded, and how the processes of meaning generation operate within fiction and film, have been fecund grounds for contemporary critical enquiries and scholarly exploration. Vivek Sachdeva’s *Fiction to Film* is predicated on the idea that both fiction and film are different mediums of creative expression – though both tell stories in accordance with their specific governing conventions – and operate in the realm of the literary. Sachdeva reiterates that while fiction banks upon verbal/linguistic signs to communicate an idea to its readers, the film relies on a Gestalten interplay of linguistic, pictorial and other sign-systems to get its meaning(s) across to the audience. What words ‘describe’ in a novel, a movie ‘shows’ (using *mise en scène*, *typage*, etc).

Fiction to Film, a comprehensive, encompassing, and well-researched gaze on the changes that a narrative undergoes when a novel is adapted into a film, is one of the first of its kind, especially vis-à-vis the primary texts and research methodology adopted. This cogent and informative book brings to bear a spotlight on Ruth Praver Jhabvala’s *The Householder* and *Heat and Dust* – and their film adaptations by Merchant Ivory Productions. Divided into four chapters and a treasure-trove of an introduction, the study analyses the narrative techniques in Ruth Praver Jhabvala’s novels, and engages in a rigorous comparative study of her fiction and films. The writer delves into the epistemology of the transformations that a novel has to go through (when becoming a film) and locates, identifies and interrogates – rather deftly – the disruptions, deflections and dislocations of texts in the space-time continuum.

Sachdeva’s in-depth study – which theorizes the interface between literature and films – emanates from the vantage point of post-structuralist narrative theory, and is conscious of how each medium depends on a complex lattice of sign-systems to generate, constitute and shape meaning. To represent the thrust areas of this book using Venn diagrams: it focuses on the intersection of adaptation, narratology and film studies.

By operating at the cusp of these three paradigms, *Fiction*