

Book Reviews

Bob van der Linden, *Moral languages from Colonial Punjab: The Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyahs* New Delhi: Manohar: New Delhi, 2008, Pp. 268, Rs 670.00, ISBN 81-7304-759-6

The monograph under review is undoubtedly one of the best few to appear so far on the social and intellectual history of Punjab covering a crucial period of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It is the time when interface between the western and 'Indian' ideas, what Bob van der Linden calls 'the interaction between two dynamic civilizations: the regional one and the British imported version of European civilization' (p. 19), reaches a critical point when the three religious traditions (the author prefers to use the term 'traditional morality' for 'religion', p. 9), viz., 'Hindu', 'Islam' and 'Sikh', try to come terms with each other in Punjab through what is known as a 'polemical war' between their respective elitist organisations of the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyahs as they also confront aggressive Protestant Christianity to resituate their traditions in the fast changing world under the aegis of 'Pax Britannica' and western hegemony. Despite the book's preoccupation with 'secularism, religion, tradition, the colonial state, public sphere, secularization, religious nationalism' this is 'largely an exercise in historiography' (p. 11). It follows the idea that in 'the newly emerging liberal public sphere, dominant state institutions and practices continuously interacted and competed and often overlapped with' voluntary organizations like Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj, and Ahmadiyahs to evolve a 'modern hierarchical colonial culture' (20-21). To van der Linden 'the important feature of the liberal public sphere in South Asia remains the passionate moral commitment to community and tradition in the context of a powerful centralized representative governmental state' which was an outcome of reform movements' response to the 'British civilizing mission' (22). The author takes the confrontation between indigenous traditions and western

science and Christianity as most crucial to modern South Asian history as 'the relationship between social and intellectual history' remains fundamental to this book (27). He argues that the Protestant missionary activity heavily influenced the Punjabi mind and identities as these reformers belonging to three movements came to define themselves through 'moral languages' by creating 'bodies of moral knowledge' (17). The meticulous and careful historian is conscious of Eurocentric pitfall (11) and tries his best to maintain a balance but does not fail to slip, as we should see, as if location and cultural moorings cannot be so easily transcended.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part in two chapters describes the 'social process' of the making of a public sphere in the last quarter of the nineteenth century Punjab under the Pax Britannica. The importance of the contextual background of the British Empire is emphasised as the penetration of the Anglo-Indian colonial state into the rural society left deep impact on the structure of Punjabi society as well as on the minds of its inhabitants. The second part entitled 'the Intellectual Texture' in 4 chapters including 'Conclusion' is focussed on the redefinition of Punjabi traditions through the examples of the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj, and Ahmadiyah moral languages. The use of western science and rationality by reformers for contesting and competing with the Christian morality did not necessarily meant the complete rejection of the traditional world. Indeed it remained highly patriarchal strengthening the identities of communities in which women had a subordinate position and the traditional authoritative sacred symbols came to be used by the reformers for their political goals.

Van der Linden goes along Harjot Oberoi's argument (in *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, 1994) that the religious boundaries in the rural Punjab were extremely fluid as 'standards of behaviour, categories of thought, conceptions of time, notions of purity and impurity and of the sacred and profane were not marked by great differences' (50). But it was the colonial state and

reformers who attacked the popular culture. While the state in Punjab persecuted the freely moving nomads, pedlars and herdsmen in order to control and discipline them the reformers launched their attacks on popular religiosity. Both were engaged in imposing some moral order. Van der Linden makes an interesting observation that in line with the evangelical revivalist movement that sought to advance a notion of muscular Christianity, the British had reached the Punjab as conquerors and rulers in the mid-nineteenth century, not as traders as was the case with the coastal subcontinent (69-70). The church and state together violated the traditional world in Punjab invoking militant response from Punjabi traditions that left behind a 'disturbing legacy for Punjabi society' (75). Since the author does not look closely enough into such earlier linkages, he fails to see the pre-colonial history of such militancy in the very development of the Sikh tradition in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Van der Linden goes into details in chapter 3 how the three reform movements came to enmesh tradition, rationality and reform and argues that the rational organization of knowledge lay at the basis of their moral languages. He is careful not to deny 'rational criticism' in the pre-colonial India but highlights the sharing of values between the rulers and the ruled in making the Anglo-Indian state and liberal public sphere. These values were 'the rational organization of knowledge; the authority of science; criticism of traditional society; education as most significant feature underlying both the British civilizing mission and Indian moral languages; the importance of the human will; and a moral duty towards community and society; modern voluntary institutions and practices; and literal interpretation of scriptures' (133). He situates 'the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj, and Ahmadiyah moral languages within the complex world of opportunities, constraints and motivations they shared in different degrees with other groups within non-western secularizing traditions' (170). The choice of different vernacular languages in specific scripts, Punjabi in Gurmukhi, Hindi in Devnagari and Urdu in Nastaliq for the writing of the history of one's own community by three movements strengthened the sectarian identities (171). In the chapter entitled 'Community, Government and Social Consciousness', van der Linden discusses how reformers propagated their moral languages that incorporated traditional sacred symbols and patriotisms in a rhetorical fashion to mobilize followers through identity politics. Interesting is his discussion on 'conversion and social mobilization' as conversion by the Christian missionaries became 'pivotal to the stirring of Punjabi minds' (204). The close linkage between conversion and caste was very

significant. Here the dalits as untouchables assumed such a significance that had never before been accorded to them. This had forced the Arya Samajis to invent the *shuddhi* movement which in turn became 'a causal factor in the increase of Hindu-Muslim antagonism' (214). In comparison to the West, he argues, 'in South Asia the main feature of the public sphere was not citizenship, rule by law or a distinction between a private and public domain' and that it is only 'electoral politics' that 'became the unchallenged legitimate source of a public sphere' (216).

The comparative perspective van der Linden uses obviously has the strength of illuminating some of the shaded and darker points which remain such if looked from within. And he is even aware of the problems involved while comparing nineteenth century social reform in Punjab with what happened in Europe during the Protestant Reformation and to him the comparison solely remains 'illuminating in contrast' because in the eyes of the stalwart Protestant British, both Catholicism and Hinduism encouraged effeminacy in men'. He picks up, as an instance, 'the British Orientalist myth of Sikhism in decay' in this regard. This is a problem area for him. Since he has not gone to the historical depths of the problematic of 'Sikhism in decay' he takes it as a 'myth' when actually it was 'real'. The reviewer has been able to see this 'reality' of the process of 'Brahmanisation of Sikhism' that set in with the establishment of Ranjit Singh's rule. Moreover, his analogy may not stand the test only if he could be aware that independent of the European Renaissance and Reformation, the Indian subcontinent had its own reformative agenda during the 15th-17th centuries when bhakti and sufi movements, which were anti-Brahmanical and egalitarian in nature, along with economic changes, brought about such social transformation that it resulted in the formation of a new religious tradition in Sikhism.

The second weak point of the book is a heavy reliance on western sources and very little use of a huge body of references available in vernacular languages. One wonders how one can discuss the creation of 'moral languages' without using any native language or linguistic discourse. To give one example, one can just think of the vast material left behind by Giani Ditt Singh, the pillar of the Singh Sabha movement, who was a poet, polemicist, journalist, orator, missionary and writer of about 50 books. One would surely get a different vocabulary, idiom and diction for those ideas. The author is conscious of his vast readership as he winds up his 'conclusion' with a section on the 'Moral Languages in Diaspora and World History' asserting that 'the continuing search for identity confirms the need for moral

languages among Indian migrants after all these years' (235).

Even though the topic under discussion is excitingly promising and Bob van der Linden does a scholarly job at addressing the crucial issues, and his contribution lies in raising the questions with the force of comparative perspective and opening the field for further investigation, one needs the facility for vernacular languages as much as with the European languages to deal with nuances of language and grammar of ideas of the colonized, especially those who rebelled against the mainstream traditions. One hopes the young scholars get motivated by the scholarly vigour of van der Linden. His work is a must read for anyone working on and interested in the social and intellectual history of the subcontinent.

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Mita Biswas, *Representations of a Culture in Indian English Poetry*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced study, 2009. Pp. 255, Rs. 470

It takes a certain kind of courage—and perhaps determination—to offer a book on Indian English poetry that leans towards “representations of a culture.” Add to that the playful audacity of the book jacket featuring a cup of richly brewed coffee, enticingly aromatic in the imagination of the beholder. You are “hooked” by this invitation to ponder over a history of poetry never attempted before in quite the same way—chronological but laced with contemporaneity, informative yet narratorial, liberal with quotations but not catalogue-like. In other words, a reader’s scepticism about the impossibility of the task at hand dissolves as one turns the pages of Mita Biswas’s confident compendium. And while sipping that “virtual” coffee, one muses over the analysis of favourite lines by favoured poets.

Biswas gives a sharp historical account of early Indian English poetry in the works of Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt and Rabindranath Tagore, departing somewhat from a usual criticism that the early poets were dissociated from “mass culture” in India by their belonging to a privileged class. Usefully, Mita Biswas draws attention to the manner in which they sought a “possible union between east and west.” (22). Biswas goes on to illustrate successfully that the contrapuntal pull of the English language and the Indian ethos did not, always, work to delink the English poet from his or her “roots”. In the

case of Derozio there were strong patriotic statements, and Tagore’s *Gitanjali* carried the core of his nationalism. It is helpful to be reminded of lines such as the following:

“O! Lovely is my native land
With all its skies of cloudless nights.” . . . (26)
-Henry Derozio

The emotions of an “Indian culture” are expressed in the language of the English educated poet, claims Mita Biswas and it is a point worth pondering over when one discusses form and content in the poetry of “The Pioneers” as she calls them.

However, in her reading of Toru Dutt’s *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, Mita Biswas repeats an error in interpretation that has become quite common. Biswas and others have upheld this volume of poetry as proof of Toru Dutt’s Indianization after her immersion into French, mostly on the basis of Edmund Gosse’s prefatorial remarks. Gosse knew too little Indian mythology to be taken seriously on the matter of authenticity in Toru’s rendering. In fact, Toru recreates the stories from the memory of her mother’s oral narratives; she does not “translate” from a single, known source. Moreover, Toru’s personal reflections freely intermingle with the tales. As an example, the opening stanza of the poem titled “Sita” is quoted below:

Three happy children in a darkened room!
What do they gaze on with wide open eyes?
A dense forest, where no sunbeam pries
And in its centre a cleared spot. . .

Even today readers wonder about these references. This is not Sita’s story but Toru’s, the three children being she, sister Aru and brother Abju. By the time the poem was written the siblings were dead, and Toru the poet is overwhelmed by memories of childhood when familiar myths were narrated at bedtime by their mother, Kshetramohini. Sita is seen through the prism of the Dutt family’s experience of ill health and lost lives. The mythology is personalized and the “culture” that Biswas is seeking lies in the seamless amalgam of the west and the east, the community and the individual. In a postmodern way, one could even call it the “technologies of the self.”

The notion of “Indian culture” that this book uses as a rubric should not be homogenized or even confined to the geographical boundaries of the nation state. If the early writers used their English education and elite upbringing as an “approach” to India, their viewpoint had a sustained validity: Tagore, Michael Madhusudan

Dutt, Manmohan Ghose, Sarojini Naidu would be easy examples to cite.

Interestingly, a similar trend is visible once again in diasporic and multilocal poets of the present generation whom Mita Biswas discusses in the later chapter titled "The New Voices"—Agha Shahid Ali, Imtiaz Dharker and Sudeep Sen being prominent examples. What has changed is the idealism of the pre-colonial nation, and the dependency on English poetic forms. Today's writers are deliciously experimental with form as well as language. The angst about "home" or "belonging" has turned into a celebration of willful displacements. The poets are eternal travellers, and interestingly, the "postcard" or the "postmark" are signs that appear in the major works by each of these internationally acclaimed writers. Mita Biswas painstakingly explains the inadequacy of the English word "culture" in comparison with the resonance of some Indian terms: "'Marg' referred to cultures pervading the entire subcontinent horizontally, with the 'desi' being the vertical, local, changing features of one's cultural identity" (178). If one were to add AK Ramanujan's terms "akam" and "puram" and U. R. Ananthamurthy's theories of "*Manyamathu* - House tongue, *Bidimathu* - Street tongue, and *Attarmathu*-Upstairs tongue", the picture of Indian multiculturalism stands firmly validated. Where do the Indian English writers contribute to this brave new world of mixed vocabulary? Sensibly, one should see English as one among the many languages of India and bury the old notion of its "foreign" and "western" identity. Mita Biswas's liberal quotations from poems carry home this conviction.

Biswas however separates two categories of "new poets": the women and the gay—a cardinal error of categorization in my view because such labels dilute the more significant matter of new poetry reflecting a global India. Lakshmi Kannan, Sunita Jain, Eunice de Souza are positioning the woman's perspective but the context is not just the woman's world. As a parallel, when Hoshang Merchant begins his frank note with the words "As everyone knows by now, I, homosexual." (212), he is reflecting on the social censure rather than his personal choice. The "new voices" in this chapter (and many cited here are mature writers and not "new") are bound by the common thread of breaking traditional taboos and cruising into new territories of language and theme. The point is adequately made and illustrated. Sadly, many "new voices" of the millennium have not found admittance in Biswas' repertoire: Temsula Ao, Jeet Thayil, Priya Surukkai Chabria, Mamang Dai, Desmond L. Kharmawphlang and Robin S. Ngangom to name just a few at the risk of leaving unnamed many other gifted poets one hears periodically.

The transition from Mita Biswas's account of "The Pioneers" to "The New Voices" is made through "The Moderns" as she calls them. In this chapter one will find many familiar names, the poets whose well-thumbed volumes we turned over while sipping coffee, meditating on life's puzzles, soothing a disappointment or simply savouring the play of the English language. Nissim Ezekiel, Jayanta Mahapatra, AK Ramanujan, Arun Koltkar, Keki N. Daruwalla, Kamala Das, Dom Moraes, Eunice de Souza, Saleem Peeradina—are so many witnesses to the troubled emotions of the 1960s-1980s when, in Biswas's terms, Indian culture was in a state of flux. The idealism of the pioneering poets had dissolved into the disenchanting reality of post independent India. Transitions, often painful and bewildering were bringing unexpected developments everywhere. The poets had captured the invisible tensions of the changing, evolving, self contradicting nation grappling with identity formation.

Among those wonderful poets who touched the chords of a troubled society, Keki N. Daruwalla has a long history of enduring poetic excellence. Biswas reminds us of his first volume *Under Orion* (1970) and the later award winning collection *The Keeper of the Dead* (1982). Poet, historian, anthologist, short story writer, and recently, a novelist (*For Pepper and Christ*, 2009), Daruwalla's consummate art lies in his rich imagery and his meticulous attention to the rhythms of the English language. Ezekiel and Koltkar and a few others will be remembered for crafting the language anew but several others will just remain the exponents of a culture but not innovators in poetry. On the whole, "the Moderns" traversed a "double journey", says Mita Biswas, one of exploring the self, the other of an ironic incursion into social change.

Let me conclude with a few general observations about the virtues of Biswas's book. As a critical study of Indian English poetry, it is a timely piece of research that sets out information in a systematic manner. While teachers and students would find it useful, critics of cultural studies may question its chronological order, categories and the assumption that Indian English poetry is guided by a determinable "culture". Nonetheless, my admiration for the book remains unstinted. Only after the foundational material is known can the nuances be teased apart. This thoughtful and sound assessment of Indian English poetry deserves a venerable place in English Studies in India.

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Asha Sarangi, ed., *Language and Politics in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009, Pp. xvi+431, hb. Rs.795.

Next only to religion, language has caused loss of more lives, property and man-hours than any other issue in India. Close to a hundred lives were lost in one day in Madras in mid-1960s when police fired upon rioting anti-Hindi protesters¹. Since and before then, similar incidents have recurred in Tamil Nadu and in other places.

Language & Politics in India (henceforth mentioned as *LPI*) is a must-read for scholars interested in the formation of India as a nation. It is a collection of already published eleven articles preceded by a 40-page introduction. There are articles on the language of and in the Constitution; languages in Kashmir, U P, Bihar; on the language of rural versus urban elite; on the demise of languages; on the reorganization of states; on language movements; on the big cities' confusion between local loyalties and global ambitions; and, on the emergence of a popular language for cinema, but its absence in radio and television.

One wishes that the book had articles on the fate of "Three-language formula", language in education, etc. In that sense, the book is not exhaustive. Yet it shows why and how language has been a stumbling block in the emergence of India as a strong and united nation.

Even after 62 years of independence, Hindi of the official radio news, the principal channel of broadcast by the government, is seen as a joke². Language of popular Hindi films, on the other hand, has acquired national level comprehensibility. Why this dichotomy? David Lelyveld³ says they differ because one is "the language of the state" and the other is the "language of the market" (p. 363). The latter made it possible for a film to be produced by a Gujarati producer in Bombay, starring a Bengali hero and a Tamilian heroine, both speaking Hindustani dialogue written by a Punjabi" (p. 364).

Not so for radio. Language controversy there is quite old. Several committees and individuals tried to find a nationally acceptable non-English language for official broadcasts. In 1938, Lionel Fielden, the British chief of AIR, invited Rajendra Prasad, Abul Kalam Azad, Zakir Husain, Tara Chand, Abdul Haq, and Narendra Dev, three Hindu and three Muslim leaders, to speak on the subject. The issue moved no closer to resolution. Another chief of AIR, Ahmadshah Bokhari Patras, got two literary figures from Lahore, Sachchidanand Hiranand Vatsyayan 'Agyeya' and C H Hasrat, to make an 8,000 word dictionary that would constitute the vocabulary of broadcast Hindustani. But Muslim League rubbished its work. After partition, AIR could not resist being named Akashvani in Hindi; neither could it shed a Sanskritised

Hindi comprehensible to few. A special Urdu service was ordered for the Muslims.

This pattern has repeated itself with unerring deviation. Granville Austin's article "Language and the Constitution: The Half-Hearted Compromise" shows how India lost a historic opportunity to forge a cohesive nation out of warring ethnic and regional groups. Members of the Constituent Assembly failed to see, Austin says, that "India was . . . a land of linguistic minorities, where no one language was spoken by a majority of the population. . ." (p.68). As a result of this insensitivity, no matter how many times and how many committees or sub-committees Constituent Assembly members met in, they could not lay aside their partisan agenda and could not think of the good of the nation. Finally, Hindi in Devanagari script was made the official language with a provision to replace English in the next fifteen years.

Such attitudes rendered many languages a death blow. Even those with centuries old literary traditions were given short shrift. Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Braj, Coorgi, Dogari, Konkani, Ladakhi, Maithili, Magahi, Rajasthani, Tulu, etc were reduced to the position of dialects of another language. Maithili, with a far older history of written literature than Hindi's, was declared a dialect of Hindi⁴. Similarly, Tulu, with an old literary tradition, became a dialect of Kannada.

Linguistic reorganization of states did not help either, though Schwartzberg claims that that is one issue that has been successfully resolved⁵. Some major regional languages, of course, consolidated and extended their territories, but most others were condemned to a second class status in their own home. No local language in Bihar and Eastern U P was a language any longer. In spite of a rich linguistic diversity in Jammu & Kashmir, Urdu, without a native speaker in the state, was made its official language⁶. People of Ladakh, speaking Ladakhi or Bodhi, could more easily have learnt Chinese. Urdu was made the second official language in U P and Bihar, causing communal riots⁷. Some languages lost the homogeneity of their speech communities. Sindhi came to be written in two scripts, Santhali in three, and Konkani in four. Many scripts, such as Kaithi, Modi, Sancheti, Tirhuta or Mithilakshara no longer had any users. Local languages in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, North-Eastern States and in the Himalayas, in particular in J & K and Himachal Pradesh, had few users and fewer learners. Anvita Abbi says all of these languages are endangered now⁸.

Language has always served as a force in creating group identities. Politicians have, therefore, exploited language issues to promote their agenda. Many North

Indian politicians have promoted the cause of Hindi/Urdu, against English, while doing all within their powers to kill the local language movements. Sonntag and Sheth show how imposition of Urdu/Hindi in Bihar, J & K, and U P has adversely affected the local languages⁹.

Though there is no specific article on this subject, the language riots of the mid-1960s began in Delhi and other cities of the North India, when mobs supporting Hindi began blackening signboards and number plates on motor vehicles, etc. It had more violent reactions in the South. It changed the temper of many of the otherwise liberal cities. Bombay was reminded of its Maratha roots and was changed into Mumbai, Calcutta to Kolkata, Madras to Chennai, Bangalore to Bengaluru, Trivandrum to Thiruvananthapuram, etc. Many other cities also took new spelling of their names. Many people, not so clever as their leaders, died supporting such superficial agenda. Tamil Nadu still pays monthly pension to its "language martyrs".

In the North, there is little opposition to English today. But in the South, the feeling of regional loyalty, woken up once, grew with time. Janaki Nayar's article presents an account of this confusion in Bangalore, considered today the BPO centre of the world, and yet mired in parochial politics¹⁰.

A national language has been considered essential for a nation. This is how most nations emerged during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries in Europe. Sanskrit was seen as that language for India. But there were those that pressed for English, Persian or even Hindustani. Sumati Ramasamy's article tells the story of the restoration of Sanskrit to the status of national language¹¹. Sanskrit Commission, created in 1955-56, made several suggestions for the use of Sanskrit, as national language, or official language, or additional official language, etc. "Sanskrit was spoken by so few", the Official Language Commission remarked, "that any suggestion to make it the national medium for communication" would amount to "mere escapism".

Finally, Sanskrit was listed among languages in the Eighth Schedule. Its words appeared in the monograms of government organizations. News broadcasts began to be made in Sanskrit. It appeared on the curriculum of Central Board of Secondary Education and on those of many state boards. Besides, the government of India created Sanskrit Advisory Committee and Central Sanskrit Institute, etc. Sanskrit staged a come back at the national level even without an official status.

Interestingly, only one contributor to the volume is a linguist, others are either political scientists or historians of modern India. *LPI* has some factual inaccuracies. Richard Burghart, for instance, is cited as saying that

"calling oneself a Maithil is to denote being a Maithil Brahman"¹². I wonder if Lal Das, who wrote *Mithila Bhasha Ramayan*, and many other non-Brahmin poets and writers of Maithili today would agree with this observation, or if all the non-Brahmin parliamentarians from Mithilanchal who pressed for inclusion of Maithili in the Eighth Schedule would do so. It is true that more Brahmins than others have written in Maithili, but that is true of many other modern Indian languages.

Ramaswamy says Sanskrit had "essentially functioned as a prestigious language of high ritual, scholasticism, and elite culture. . ." (p.105). This may not be the whole truth. Sanskrit has functioned as the link language from the remote islands of the Philippines to the cities on the Nile. Buddhists still used it as the preferred language of discourse, though Buddha gave it no special status. Even Muhammad Ghori's first coins and some of the early mosques in India had inscriptions in Sanskrit. . . .

Similarly, the demand for the creation of new states has not ended yet, though the book claims otherwise (p. 180). Speakers of Maithili and Bodo, and those in Western U P are demanding creation of linguistic states. Since these articles were written, three new states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand, all of them using Hindi as their official language, have been created. People in Telengana of the Andhra Pradesh region are asking for another state for themselves. Yet, regardless of these minor lapses, the book is a good record of contemporary documents and debates on linguistic issues in India.

NOTES

1. Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr., "The Riots in Tamilnad: Problems and Prospects of India's Language Crisis" *Asian Survey*, Vol. 5, No. 8 (Aug., 1965), pp. 399-407.
2. The following became a standard joke in the 1970s against the kind of language used in the A.I.R. news bulletins in Hindi: "ab samaachaar mein Hindi suniye," "Now listen to Hindi in the news." Lachman M Khubchandani, "Language Demography and Language in Education" in C. J. Daswani, ed., *Language Education in Multilingual India* (2001), New Delhi: UNESCO, p.43
3. David Lelyveld, "Talking the National Language : Hindi/Urdu/Hindustani in Indian Broadcasting and Cinema", pp.351-67
4. See Shreesh Chaudhary, *Foreigners and Foreign Languages: A Sociolinguistic History* (2009), New Delhi: Cambridge University Press/Foundation Books, pp. 130-235.
5. Joseph E. Schwartzberg, "Factors in the Linguistic Reorganization of Indian States," in *LPI*, p.182.
6. K. Warikoo, "Language and Politics in Jammu & Kashmir : Issues & Perspectives" in *LPI*, pp. 243-266.

7. Selma K Sonntag, "The Political Saliency of Language in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh," in *LPI*, pp. 221-242.
8. Anvita Abbi, "Vanishing Diversities and Submerging Identities : An Indian Case" in *LPI*, pp. 299-311 Also see Rajaram Mehrotra, "Endangered Languages in India" in *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* (1999), p. 140.
9. D. L. Sheth, "The Great Language Debate" in *LPI*, pp. 267-297. Selma K. Sonntag, "The Political Saliency of Language in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh" in *LPI*, pp. 221-242.
10. Janaki Nayar, "Language and the Right to the City", in *LPI*, pp. 368-415.
11. "Sanskrit for the Nation" in *LPI*, pp. 93-138.
12. *LPI*, p.7.
13. See Shreesh Chaudhary, *Foreigners and Foreign Languages: A Sociolinguistic History*, p.166. See also , Syed Asad Ali (2000) *Influence of Islam on Hindi Literature*, (2000), Delhi : Idarah-e-Adabiyat – e – Delli, p.13.

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In Memoriam Meenakshi Mukherjee (1937 – 2009)

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The Day: 17 September 2009. Venue: India International Centre, New Delhi. The occasion was the launch and a panel discussion on Meenakshi Mukherjee's latest book *A Man for all Seasons: The Many Lives of R. C. Dutt*, an intellectual biography of historian Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909). In a tragic irony the event turned out to be a memorial service for Meenakshi Mukherjee. Romila Thapar, Sudhir Chandra, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Harish Trivedi did address the work but ended up paying warm tributes to her. A day earlier while on her way to Delhi for the book launch she succumbed to a massive heart attack at the Hyderabad airport. The tragic news that quickly spread shocked and benumbed her friends, admirers and former students the world over. She was 72. Howsoever one may resist using clichés there is perhaps no other word to describe the loss which has left a huge 'void' in the lives touched by her. She had been feeling distraught and lonely after the death of her equally distinguished husband Sujit Mukherjee, some years ago, but had pulled herself together and transmuted her grief into profound scholarly outpouring.

How does one describe, succinctly, the variegated life and concerns of Meenakshi Mukherjee? She was an academic, a teacher, cultural critic, translator, and a builder of institutions with lasting impact. Her first major work *The Twice-Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian English Fiction* (1971) was one of the earliest attempts to come to terms with Indian Writing in English as a literary phenomenon, which set the critical agenda for literary studies in India. Along with K. R. Srinivas Iyengar and C. D. Narasimhaiah she helped consolidate the discipline which would make room for literatures from Indian languages. It was an earnest appeal to open up the canon and expand the literary space. To begin with it was a lonely crusade amidst resistance from smug and stiff English departments. But the subsequent diversification of English studies over the years vindicated her prescience. She always felt that the rich literatures in various Indian languages needed the

attention of scholars and readers, and that the Indian Writing in English could not be separated from the contexts in which it had been created and canonized. Therefore she pleaded for translations of texts from Indian languages into English. She was the founder editor of a quarterly journal *Vagatha* (1973-1979), which published Indian literature in translation.

Her book *Realism and Reality: the Novel and Society in India* (1985) explores conceptual frameworks for reading texts in Indian languages. It is a comprehensive study of the currents of Indian literature emerging through complex patterns of culture and society in India. *Interrogating Post-Colonialism: Theory, Text and Context*, which she co-edited with Harish Trivedi, and was published by the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, in 1996 (rpt. 2000, 2006), looked at the field of postcolonial studies from diverse perspectives and locations. Her book *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English* won her the Sahitya Akademi award in 2003. *Elusive Terrain: Culture and Literary Memory* (2008) is lovingly dedicated to the memory of Sujit Mukherjee 'who always read the first draft.' She also wrote in Bangla and her book *Upanyase Ateet: Itihas o Kalpa-itihas* (2003) looks at the use of history and imagined history in fiction.

Prior to joining Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, where she had her longest teaching spell, Meenakshi Mukherjee taught in Patna, Pune and Hyderabad. She had been a visiting professor in several universities outside India, including University of Texas at Austin, University of Chicago, University of California at Berkeley, Macquarie University, University of Canberra and Flinders University. In 2007-08 she was a Fellow of the Institute of Advanced Study, Berlin. She was the International Chairperson of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS) in 2001-2004 and the Chairperson of its Indian chapter (IACLALS) in 1993-2005. It was at her initiative that the ACLALS triennial conference was organized in Hyderabad in 2004 attended by academic stalwarts such

as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Aijaz Ahmad and Ashish Nandy.

I had the good fortune of meeting Meenakshi Mukherjee at various seminars and at social occasions, and found her most accessible. When I was working on a Festschrift for the late Professor C. D. Narasimhaih she readily agreed to contribute to the volume. She was, indeed, a formidable scholar, but never forbidding, when one approached her for any counsel. Her humility, elegance in simplicity, and unpretentious behaviour are

a rarity to come by. Yet she was also quick to deflate overbearing egos. One recalls her brush with author Vikram Chandra who she charged with 'exoticising' the East for the consumption of a primarily western audience. But she harboured no rancour in her heart. She was a quintessential intellectual, except that she would not have liked using the word 'intellectual' for herself. She has bequeathed us a rich legacy through which we shall cherish her memories.