Tab 1

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Historical Linguistics (Assignment - I )

*(Book Review of Wanderers, Kings, Merchants - The story of India through its languages by Peggy Mohan)*

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*Wanderers, Kings, Merchants* is a book which explores Indian languages, how migration has left its mark on what we speak and how we speak. The book revolves around topics of migration, intermarriages, population leading to genesis which is the process or mode of origin and diversity in languages. It explores the impact of migration on language development. Through this exploration, Mohan combines language studies, history and personal stories to create a detailed picture of India's linguistic traditions.

In the starting chapter of the book *Wanderers, Kings, Merchants - The story of India through its languages*, the author Peggy Mohan has used a tiramisu bear analogy which is a mixture of polar bear and grizzly to compare it with her own diverse life story. Tiramisu serves as a metaphor for Mohan’s multicultural identity. She describes that her mother was from a small town in North Western Newfoundland and her father was from Trinidadian of Indian origin. This metaphor is used throughout the book to discuss the Language Evolution status.

She wanted to understand how languages are evolved and influenced by each other for which she compares the pronunciation of words like "father" in different languages like French (père), Spanish (padre), Latin (pater), Hindi (pita), and Sanskrit (pitr). The connections show how languages change when they meet and mix, creating patterns over time.

The book is especially good at looking at specific language patterns that show bigger cultural exchanges. One observation made by Mohan is that Bhojpuri language speakers in Trinidad count up to ten in a straightforward manner, their numbers beyond ten take on a unique structure, such as *two-twenty-and-one* (dui-bis-a-ek).

She raises the possibility that this feature might have been influenced by aboriginal languages spoken near the Bhojpuri-speaking regions. While the discussion on this topic is intriguing, it leaves certain questions unanswered like is there leak in Bhojpuri language which could have been due to some aboriginal language. This leads to an interesting question — Is that why we can see the counting system of Bhojpuri in Trinidad this way?

Mohan’s study explores the impact of linguistic migration on the phonetic characteristics of the language. The author claims that Trinidadian speakers show a distinction between dental and retroflex sounds, a claim which is supported by an example from an incident which she recalls from her past where individuals were unable to differentiate between retroflex and dental sounds. However, migrants from India who settled in Trinidad demonstrated a clear ability to differentiate between these sounds. It shows that the language features are passed on and transmitted even when the communities relocate or move to new areas.

What is retroflex such that it is different in linguistics terms with dental?

Retroflex is a class of consonant sounds which are produced by curling the tip of the tongue backward towards the roof of the mouth i.e the post alveolar region. For example, ṭ, ḍ, ṇ. Whereas, dental on the other hand, are sounds produced with the tongue against the upper teeth which includes sounds like t,d, and n which are articulated by placing the tongue on the teeth.

With this, Mohan also explores how migration and cultural exchange have influenced Sanskrit. This poses the question whether Dravidian languages have had an impact on Sanskrit? The author mentions Madhav Despande, Professor at University of Michigan, who suggested that a whole new category had been added into Sanskrit’s sound system which he thought were sounds that could not have existed in Sanskrit before. There are t, th, d, dh,n and s consonants in Sanskrit which are produced from the upper teeth but other than this there are also retroflex sounds. Despande claimed that retroflex sounds have come into Sanskrit from Dravidian languages. There are contrasts seen in phonemes in words which become minimal pairs of each other.

Mohan uses retroflexion as a means to show changes in the sound pattern. As mentioned above, the author acknowledges the impact of Dravidian languages on Sanskrit, suggesting the possibility of a historical encounter and eventual merging of two distinct population groups which resulted in cultural exchange of linguistic patterns. This proposition is further explained by the observation that Kuru clans undertook a project to collect Rig Vedic Hymns consisting of many hymns. The hymns were spreaded amongst a few generations. The Kuru clan collected these hymns which were scattered and preserved orally, including a significant number of retroflex sounds.

Other than Sanskritization, the author has discussed other Indo-Aryan languages. One may pose a question as to whether Hindi bears any resemblance to Sanskrit. The argument to this is supported with one evidence — Sanskrit and Middle Indo Aryan languages coexisted somewhere around 5 to 6th Century CE, which was supported by the example given by Patajani, who quotes grammar needs to be studied in order to avoid words like gavi (some Middle Indo-Aryan word) instead of guah which is cow, a Sanskrit word.

Mohan analyses the grammar structure of Sanskrit and Prakrit which shows notable similarities until the Apabhramsa period. From here, there is a significant shift wherein the initial declensions are replaced by postpositions. The postpositions used in Hindi phrases are a direct consequence of this development. This is also seen in Marathi and other Indo-Aryan languages. She further mentions that the replacement of case endings with postpositions was the first feature to be recognised as a Dravidian feature seen in Indo-Aryan languages.

Mohan examines the Marathi language, particularly for the use of the word apan which includes the pronoun ‘you too’ and another word ‘amhi’ which excludes the addressee. Through this analysis, Mohan draws the parallels between Marathi and Dravidian languages such as Malayalam, which exhibits semantic categories that are absent in Sanskrit, Prakrit and Hindi.

One of the central claims is whether language evolution is significantly influenced by social structures and marriage patterns and not just formal trades and other networks. The book then explores more recent periods in the history and the impact of the countries that previously ruled India on the language’s usage. The demand for Indian species has been identified as a motivating factor for European explorers like Columbus who began voyages to this region. Mohan’s book discusses Europe’s developing Interest in India, which can be traced back to the time of Phoenicians. The introduction of Indian spices was instrumental in developing advancements in navigation, geography and shipbuilding technology. This historical backdrop is then utilised to provide a contextual framework for the emergence of the English language in India. According to Mohan, the possibility of European women who travelled to Hindustan was less. The European men who came to India with the intention of invasion, as Mohan claims, married the local women. This led to the establishment of the first community of native English speakers in India. The author draws parallels between this phenomenon and so-called ‘tiramisu bear model’ to show inter-ethnic relationships.

One of the most interesting things about Mohan's work is how she looks at how the way people got married in Kerala has affected the development of the language over time. When Namboodiri Brahmins moved to Kerala in the 8th century, an interesting social pattern emerged. The eldest sons used to marry within their caste to keep their land, while the younger sons would form relationships with local Nair women. This created a special place where different languages mix, including Sanskrit and local languages, because of these family connections. Similar cases like this can be seen in other parts of India. Mohan's work shows that languages evolve not only through formal channels, but also through personal connections and social structures. This helps readers understand why Indian languages often have a lot of influences from social structures.

The second case study examines the development of Nagamese in the Naga Hills, where sixteen different tribal communities created a new language to facilitate communication. Rather than adopting Hindi or English, these communities adapted Assamese to create Nagamese. This was done as there was a practical need. This is interesting because it shows how new languages can emerge from everyday needs and human interaction, not through formal decisions.

Her writing is accessible and thought provoking. Though, the discussion of Bhojpuri analysis could be more comprehensive. A significant shortcoming for the selective focus on specific languages, by omitting a detailed exploration of other linguistic traditions of India like North Eastern states, tribal languages, other Dravidian languages and Indo-Austroasiatic languages which presents an incomplete picture of India. Readers seeking a detailed linguistic analysis may find the book leaning more toward a socio-historical perspective, which could lead to some disappointment. The author explores a range of linguistic phenomena, including bilingualism, diglossia, creolization and pidginization in her book. Overall, this book is good for people who do not have much background in languages and is easy to understand. Despite its shortcomings, the book does a good job of showing how languages reflect and preserve the story of human migration and cultural exchange in the Indian subcontinent.

References

1. Mohan P. 2021. *Wanderers, Kings, Merchants* - The Story of India through its languages. Viking, Penguin Random House India.
2. Class Discussions and Notes of Historical Linguistics

Tab 2

### **Book Review: "Wanderers, Kings, Merchants – The Story of India through Its Languages" by Peggy Mohan**

Peggy Mohan’s book, *Wanderers, Kings, Merchants*, provides an intriguing exploration of how migration, intermarriage, and population movements have shaped the development and diversity of Indian languages. With accessible writing and thought-provoking insights, Mohan delves into the interplay between language and history, making the book an engaging read for those interested in linguistics, history, or cultural studies.

### **Reading for Understanding**

**a) Single Sentence Summary**

The book explores how migration, cultural blending, and historical interactions have shaped the evolution and diversity of Indian languages, revealing their intricate connections to identity and history.

**b) Expanded Summary**

In *Wanderers, Kings, Merchants*, Peggy Mohan delves into the historical and linguistic journey of Indian languages, tracing how waves of migration, intermarriage, and population dynamics have left their mark. She uses vivid metaphors, such as the Tiramisu bear, to illustrate the layered influences on language and identity. Mohan’s analysis extends from phonetic nuances like dental and retroflex sounds to broader themes such as the role of English in India’s linguistic landscape. Through engaging anecdotes and scholarly insights, she highlights how languages evolve, interact, and preserve traces of historical movements and cultural exchanges.

**c) Questions**

1. What is the central theme of Peggy Mohan’s *Wanderers, Kings, Merchants*?
2. How does Mohan use the Tiramisu bear analogy to illustrate linguistic and cultural blending?
3. What examples does the author provide to show the influence of migration on language development?
4. How does the book address the unique features of Bhojpuri and their historical significance?
5. What role do Dravidian languages play in shaping Sanskrit, according to Mohan?
6. How does Mohan connect the introduction of English in India to historical and cultural interactions?

**d) Published Review**

Peggy Mohan’s *Wanderers, Kings, Merchants* is a compelling exploration of India’s linguistic and cultural history. The author’s central argument is that Indian languages are living testaments to the country’s history of migration, intermarriage, and cultural blending. The book’s engaging narrative is anchored by the Tiramisu bear analogy, which encapsulates the layered influences shaping languages and identities.

Mohan’s insights into phonetic distinctions, such as dental and retroflex sounds, demonstrate how linguistic traits persist even in diaspora communities. Her analysis of Bhojpuri’s counting system raises intriguing questions about linguistic interaction with aboriginal languages, while her discussion on the impact of Dravidian languages on Sanskrit adds depth to our understanding of linguistic evolution. The book also provides a fascinating account of how English entered India’s linguistic landscape through historical and cultural exchanges, creating a unique community of native English speakers.

While Mohan’s accessible writing and vivid examples make complex linguistic concepts understandable, some topics, such as Bhojpuri’s counting system, could benefit from more detailed analysis. Nevertheless, *Wanderers, Kings, Merchants* succeeds in illuminating the profound connections between language, identity, and history, making it a valuable read for linguists and general audiences alike.

### **Reading for Deep Comprehension**

**a) Central Ideas Connected to Existing Knowledge**

1. The Tiramisu bear analogy resonates with the idea of cultural hybridity in post-colonial studies, where identities and languages are seen as layered constructs.
2. The persistence of retroflex sounds in diaspora communities mirrors broader patterns of cultural retention among migrant groups.
3. The evolution of counting systems in Bhojpuri echoes similar adaptations in other migrant languages, reflecting contact with indigenous languages.

**b) Concept Questions**

1. What is "retroflex," and how does it differ from "dental" in linguistic terms? (Retroflex involves tongue placement against the roof of the mouth, creating distinct sounds, unlike dental sounds produced near the teeth.)
2. What is "hybridity" in cultural and linguistic contexts? (Hybridity refers to the blending of elements from different cultures or languages to create new, layered identities.)
3. How does linguistic retention in diaspora communities compare to cultural retention? (Both involve preserving core elements of the original culture or language despite external influences.)

### **Reading for Knowledge**

**a) Central Claims**

1. Migration and cultural blending are central to the evolution of Indian languages.
2. Linguistic features like retroflex sounds in Sanskrit originated from Dravidian influences.
3. English’s introduction to India reflects historical and cultural interactions rather than mere imposition.

**b) Author’s Arguments**

1. Anecdotes about phonetic distinctions in Trinidad illustrate the resilience of linguistic traits among Indian migrants.
2. Historical analyses of Sanskrit’s phonetic system support the claim of Dravidian influence.
3. The historical context of European navigation and intermarriage explains the emergence of native English speakers in India.

**c) Evaluation of Arguments** The arguments are well-supported by historical evidence, linguistic examples, and scholarly references. However, some claims, such as the Bhojpuri counting system’s origins, require further exploration and corroboration.

**d) Additional Arguments**

1. Linguistic evolution can also be examined through the lens of trade and commerce, where cross-cultural interactions significantly influence vocabulary and syntax.
2. The role of oral traditions in preserving linguistic features across generations could provide additional depth.

**e) Acceptance or Rejection of Claims** Based on the presented arguments and supporting evidence, the claims are largely acceptable. However, certain aspects, such as the origins of Bhojpuri’s counting system, should be held for further investigation.