
Jules Bloch's 'Application de la cartographie', the States Reorganisation Commission and the contested legacies of colonial language maps in post-independence India.

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Résumé

In 1952 the French orientalist, Jules Bloch, was invited to give a series of lectures in London on Indo-Aryan linguistic geography. Unable to do so due to declining health, his lecture notes and maps were eventually published posthumously in a short treatise titled *Application de la cartographie à l'Histoire de l'Indo-Aryen* (1963). This work explored how linguistic maps, compiled by colonial authorities in the late 19th and early 20th century, could be used to trace the grammatical development of the Indo-Aryan languages of Northern India. Twenty of Bloch's hand drawn linguistic maps were also edited and published in the volume.

Shortly after in 1953, the year Bloch passed away and left his work unpublished, the newly independent government of India established the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) to consider the structure of India's internal territory. The SRC consolidated the idea that India would be organised and demarcated by language, composed of linguistic states. Crucially, colonial language maps continued to govern the early postcolonial state. Like Bloch, the SRC was indebted to the linguistic surveys, language maps and statistical information gathered under British rule. But linguistic reorganisation was contested and resisted, sometimes violently, leaving a controversial legacy.

This paper traces the legacy of colonial language mapping – as produced in projects such as the *Linguistic Survey of India* and the Census - on the subcontinent by comparatively examining two diverging linguistic geographies which emerged soon after India gained independence. On the one hand, Bloch, a leading European linguist of Indian languages based in Paris, cartographically imagined India as a linguistic space which could be studied and differentiated, not simply in the present but also through time. Bloch was simply building upon on earlier colonial linguistic surveys and maps, while borrowing and applying new methods in linguistic science. On the other hand, the SRC was trying to reconcile an imaginary geography of India which could be neatly divided into linguistic units, or territories, with the reality that India's languages were not precisely contiguous nor easily demarcated. This paper, therefore, has broader implications for our understanding of how linguistic territories – real or imagined - were shaped by colonial cartographic practices and ideologies.

Mots-Clés: Linguistic cartography, colonial and postcolonial, Language maps, linguistic geography, language and territory in India

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