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Abstract

Fetishizing (Linguistic) Diversity: Some reflections on the Indian Instance

In this talk, I examine how India's linguistic diversity in particular, and its multi-ethnic and multi-cultural composition, has been conceived of in both colonial and post-colonial academic and popular writings on the multitude of languages and their speakers. I shall argue that at its basic core, a Eurocentric imaginary of one language—one people has informed both the citizen's and the state's perception of the Indian 'nation', with the result that linguistic and cultural diversity can only be conceptualized as a conglomeration of diversely monolingual and monocultural populations. Drawing on resources from linguistics, genetics, history, gender and cultural studies, I shall speculate on an alternative imaginary based on linguistic and cultural pluralism within each community may lead us to and the implications that it would have for the study of Indian languages.