"Linguistic diversity enriches life..."

M J Warsi

M J WARSII, Indian-American linguist named as the recipient of the prestigious James E. Mcleod Faculty Recognition Award for the year 2012. The award is viewed as a very prestigious honor in academics and given to those who have positively and profoundly influenced the educational experiences to the students at Washington University. Mr Warsi is presently teaching at Washington University, the best institution in the world for linguistic magnificence. In the United States, M J Warsi, is making the study of South Asian linguistics and Hindi-Urdu more popular and viable. Warsi, author of many books on South Asian Languages and linguistics have spoken extensively on his award and about his work on South Asian Languages and linguistics with senior journalist and the grandson of Maulana Abu al Kalam Azad, Firoz Bakht Ahmed. Here is an excerpt from his conversation:

thing to study. It is very interesting about the style being used by the editors of the news media and also very fascinating to study the processes underlying the formation of new expressions which are intended to bring modern and traditional expressions into the speech community. The freshness of style and coined expressions with which the news are conveyed are the reasons of their popularity, many of these expressions have been stabilized and standardized in formal use. Nowadays, print and electronic media provide a rich and interesting data on how a language develops new registers in the normal course of its use in areas and roles in which the speech community have not employed it before. In order to efficiently serve their role as mass media, they have no alternative but to adopt a new innovative, simpler and effective style of expression.

As you have many years teaching experience in US Academic Institutions. Could you please tell us future of South Asian Studies in US varsities?

South Asia is becoming an increasingly important region to study in the modern, global world because of its importance in the world’s economy. South Asia, and specifically India, has become a front-runner in the world economically. Domestic businesses have been partnering with call centers, manufacturers and industries in South Asia to bring in profits. Great companies such as Target, Microsoft, and so on and so forth often travel to India for business. Knowledge of the regions cultural practices as well as practical language skills are incredibly useful in today’s world, especially for students. It not only makes students more culturally aware in today’s global world, but allows for career advancement as well. Every school that does not have a great South Asian Studies department should highly consider creating one out of their existing structures.

Please tell us about your recent discovery of a new dialect "Mithilanchal Urdu" spoken in Bihar? Is it published now?

Yes, the book 'Mithilanchal Urdu: The Newly Discovered Dialect of Bihar' has already been published by Germany based LINCOM GmbH (2014). This is the first linguistic study of Mithilanchal Urdu, a dialect of Urdu language of Indo-Aryan family, spoken by around four million speakers in Darbhanga, Samastipur, Begusarai, Madhubani, and Muzaffarpur districts of the state of Bihar in India. It has SOV word order and it lacks script and literature. Needless to say, this work is an attempt to document this dialect so that it should contribute in the field of descriptive linguistics. The book describes the structure of expressions about
Mithilanchal Urdu that include the structure of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences.

As a linguist, how do you describe “South Asia as a Linguistic Area”? South Asia is a geographically well defined area and is of great importance in the present day world order, forming a vital block under the banner of “South Asia Association of Regional Cooperation” (SAARC). The people of the region share a great deal in terms of culture, civilization and linguistic features. It has been the home to various civilizations, religions, cultures, and languages. This heterogeneity on the scales of culture, religion, and language has frequently attracted the scholars of the world to focus on various aspects of this part of the globe. The multilingualism of South Asia has provided a hunting ground for the linguists from early times to study the phenomenon of convergence among different languages.

It has been said that due to globalization and rapid urbanization, some of the minority or commonly lesser known languages are disappearing from its existence. What is your opinion about a multilingual country like India? Good question! The rich linguistic and cultural heritage of India is preserved in the indigenous aboriginal languages of this country. Unfortunately, some of these languages are disappearing from use among the younger generation. Language is one of the salient markers of the identity of the group. If the language is lost everything will be lost. This amounts to saying that many of the languages spoken by small numbers are endangered. There is an urgent need to identify, record, analyse, describe and prepare grammars, primers, dictionaries and textbooks in these languages. It is necessary both for the native speaker and other human beings including linguists, scientists and researchers who are interested in knowledge and its growth. It is good to know that after a long gap Government of India through Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore has initiated a fresh linguistic survey of India. Information is essential for knowledge, and only a working linguist can serve the cause of minor and endangered languages of the country.

You often write about Urdu education. What do you think about Multilingualism and mother tongue education? Is it a barrier or a symbol of success? India is a multilingual, multietnic, multi-religious and pluricultural society with variety and diversity as the very fabric of its ethos. Underlying the superficial differences among cultures and languages is a common Indian reality that sustains the unity and integrity of this great nation. The development of Indian languages will be partial if some facilities are not extended to the development of minor and tribal languages. Multilingualism is often cited as a hindrance to progress to educational or economic spheres. But in the Indian situation, the use of many languages by the same group of persons is complementary in that each is used in a specified domain. Secondly, the network of linguistic communication spread all over the country reveals the use of various languages at different levels. Our national progress will pick up by recognizing small languages for the purposes of education and communication and not by undermining them. People's languages have a right to develop in a democracy created and sustained by the people. Education through the mother tongue of the people and the learning of languages with wider communication possibilities will be a practical step towards national development.

Dr. Warsi, since you also have a language technology background. Can you tell us about the future of SAARC countries in terms of language technology? Yes, SAARC countries have a very good future with regard to language technology. We are seeing a wave of innovative computing technologies spurred by the popularity and spreading of personal computers and internet not only in offices but homes too. I believe, unless our technologies maintain the lead and remain globally competitive, it would make SAARC nations vulnerable in the area of new technologies for our languages. The study and develop a prototype for implementing a multilingual electronic program guide would allow integration of this technology into set top boxes as soon as it gets deployed with digital broadcasting. The situation has to be increased where large amount of books, magazines, audio-visual training materials, and educational centers has to spread the multilingual IT education in SAARC nations also through content in regional languages. The multilingual IT has the immense potential of increasing the computer penetration and usage in SAARC nations. It is therefore, important to provide training and resources to empower the individuals and make this happen.

Mithilanchal Urdu
The Newly Discovred Dialect of Bihar

Mohammad J. Warsi

Mohammad J. Warsi is well known for his social asthetic and educational endeavours. This book is his latest effort in that direction. This book is a research based compilation which gives full account of historical urdu and its ancient root. Language is something which always changes its nature and find its deep root down the historical lane, this happened to most of ancient languages like Sanskrit, Greek and Arabic etc. this is an effort to find the missing link and establishing the same which ultimately paves the way for faded glory of the language and literature. Since very long Bihar is considered to be the best place for the amalgamation of culture as well as language and rituals. Ever since the inception democracy this land of laws and governance and ancient economy saw many change in due course of time. When muslims invaded India, no sooner they found Bihar to be the place which was conducive to their growth and progress. Everyone know about the presence and development of Urdu in this fertile crescent but very few can notice the change in the language and its dialects and emergence of its regional entity. This book is unique for this very nature of urdu and its regional dialects. Overall it will be an interest generating exercise for the scholars and social engineers.

Languages of the world/Materials