# Trinity Monday Discourse, 14 May 2001

## George Abraham Grierson (1851–1941)

Provost, Fellows and Scholars, especially the new Fellows and Scholars, Ladies and Gentlemen

The great Buddhist sage Nagasena was once asked by King Milanda to discuss a variety of topics with him. The sage asked if the rules for the discussion would be those followed in discussions between scholars or those followed in discussions between a king and his subject. The king wanted to know the difference. Nagasena explained: when two scholars discuss they can dissagree violently but still remain friends and retain their respect for each other while if there is a violent disagreement with a king it could end in imprisonment or even execution. The king laughed and said he would be happy to follow the rules of discussion between scholars.

On this occasion I feel I should, like Nagasena, clarify the nature of my talk on the life and times of Sir George Abraham Grierson: Trinity mathematics graduate, Indian civil servant and language scholar extraordinaire. Grierson wrote extensively on folklore, he wrote on the Indian epic Ramayana, he wrote reviews, he annotated and translated manuscripts, he wrote grammars, he collected and recorded sayings, he produced dictionaries. Grierson's magnum opus, however, was supervising and editing a linguistic survey of India[1]. The work took thirty years to complete and resulted in nineteen volumes with over 8,000 pages of text. The sheer quantity of Grierson's work is amazing. His list of writings between 1877 and 1933 occupied twenty-one octavo pages in the volume of the "Indian and Iranian Studies" presented to him on his eighty-fifth birthday in 1936. It is recorded that "even on this occasion he offered to the deputation waiting on him his own latest volume PURUSA PARIKSA published a few weeks earlier"[2]!

As a theoretical physicist with no background in linguistics I certainly cannot give a scholarly balanced account of the technical merit of Grierson's work.[3] What I can try to do is give a discourse unravelling four strands present in Grierson's life:

[1]Linguistic Survey of India, Edited by Sir George Abraham Grierson, Reprint of First Edition (1903–1928), Delhi (1967).

[2]Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford (1941–1950).

[3]My grandfather, Dinesh Chandra Sen, a well known scholar of Bengali, knew Grierson. In his book "Bengali Language and Literature" Grierson is mentioned many times. There is, for instance, a direct quotation from a letter of Grierson dated 26 July 1898 which reads, "I think that in my former letter I have omitted to thank you for the editing of 'Manik Chandra Rajar Gan' which appeared in 1887. I now quite agree with you that its origin must be referred to Buddhist influence." The reference was to shifting the date of Manik Chandra from the 14th to the 10th century. My grandfather had the highest regard for Grierson and referred to him as "The Emperor of Learning". I knew about Grierson as a great scholar when growing up in Calcutta.

1. the structure of the British Empire when Grierson went to India in 1873,

2. the nature of the prestigious Indian Civil Service (ICS) he joined,

3. Trinity's link with India through the ICS and finally

4. a description of some of Grierson's work,

to give a flavour of the variety and depth of his achievements. I would like to unravel these strands in the manner of a dilettante, which I believe originally meant—someone who takes delight in a topic.

We start with some facts. Sir George Abraham Grierson was born on the 7th of January 1851 in the parish of Monkstown near Dublin. He was the eldest son of George Abraham Grierson, a Trinity graduate, who was a barrister (with an office in Essex Street) and was part of a family who were printers to the Crown. His mother Isabella was the daughter of Henry Ruxon of the Royal Navy. There was a younger brother who attended Trinity and went on to become a bishop. There was a relative, Constantina Grierson, who was a distinguished scholar.[4] We are told that she knew Hebrew, Greek, Latin and French and understood mathematics well, wrote elegantly in verse and prose and was on intimate terms with Swift and Sheridan. Mrs. Grierson also edited Latin classics published by her husband. One of her works "Tacitus" was described to be "one of the best edited books delivered to the world."[5]

After attending St. Bees and Shrewsbury Grierson joined TCD as a student of mathematics in 1868. His intention was to join the Indian Civil Service (ICS). The Trinity link with the ICS is fascinating. It started when the appointments to the ICS were opened to public competition in 1855. This presented a new career opportunity for a number of the ablest students of Trinity. It also gave them a chance to compete with students of similar calibre from Oxford and Cambridge. The ICS, at the time of Grierson, had evolved into an elite group of slightly over a thousand senior civil servants who formed the backbone of the British administration of India.

The origin of the ICS could be traced to the senior employees of the East India Company, who, in the 18th and first half of the 19th century, were known as "The Honourable East India Company's Servants" and, by custom, wrote HEICS after their name. The East India Company had its origin in a company of prominent knights and merchants of the City of London who received a Royal Charter from Queen Elizabeth I on the 31st December 1600 to have exclusive right to trade in the region east of the Cape of Good Hope extending to the Straits of Magellan.

The founding of a trading post at Calcutta in 1690 by Job Charnock and the events that then unfolded in Bengal led to the Company essentially ruling the major part of India by 1818. Notable events on the way were Robert Clive's victories at Plassey in 1757 over the Nawab of Bengal and at Buxar in 1764 over the Mogul Emperor. These victories put Clive completely in control of the riches of Bengal. Optimistically Clive overestimated the revenue the East India Company could expect to receive from Bengal. On the basis of Clive's estimate, dividends to shareholders were announced by the Company. When

[4]Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 8.

[5]Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 8, Comments of Dr. Harwood.

the enormous shortfall of revenue from India became evident the Company was on the brink of becoming bankrupt. It asked for Government help. A government loan of £1,400,000 was given to the Company subject to the Company having its affairs controlled by an Act passed by Parliament in 1773. The Act introduced a Governor General for Fort William in Calcutta who would be in charge of all Company affairs. The trading posts of the Company established earlier in Bombay and Madras now came under the control of Calcutta. A few years later, in 1784, Pitt, the younger, introduced an Act in Parliament which stipulated that the Company affairs were to be monitored regularly at intervals of twenty years, taking 1773 as the initial date, before the Company's charter could be renewed. ("The Charter Acts").

These reviews of the Company led to major changes. The 1813 scrutiny resulted in the Company's monopoly for trade with India being withdrawn, the 1833 scrutiny led to the Company ceasing to be a trading company[6] while the 1853 scrutiny led to the introduction of an open competition for entry to the higher administration posts of the Company. A committee with Benjamin Jowett, afterwards Master of Balliol College, Oxford as a a member, was formed to draft the nature of the open examinations on the basis of which entry to the administrative service was to be determined. It was decided to model these examinations on the Oxford Greats: a course of study with an emphasis on classical languages. The 1853 Act was urged on the Government by pressure from the majority of the Company directors who were keen to ensure that the young men selected for the Company service were reasonably educated and trained and in particular had a knowledge of Indian languages.

The first attempt to provide a structured training program for Company employees had been made by Lord Wellesley while he was Governor General of India (1798–1805). (His father, Lord Mornington, was a Professor of Music in TCD). Lord Wellesley proposed that the Company should establish a College in Calcutta where newly appointed civil servants should be given a general education in ethics, law and general history as well as specialized training in the languages and history of India, the customs and manners of its people and a familiarity with the Hindu and Muhammadan codes of law and religion. A college, known as Fort William College, was set up in Calcutta in 1800 with John Gilchrist as its first principal.[7] The College had an excellent staff and played an important role in fostering oriental learning, publishing books and articles in Hindi and Urdu. The directors of the East India Company, however, thought that any such training institute should be in England. In place of Wellesley's proposal the directors, in 1806, founded the "East India College" in Haileybury[8] in England through which all new entrants to the service had to pass. Haileybury had an innovative curriculum and a distinguished faculty, for instance, Malthus was the Professor of Economics.

[6]The three main sources of revenue for the Company were from Land revenue, from salt tax and from the illegal sales of opium to China.

[7]Gilchrist is said to have coined the word "Hindustani".

[8]Besides the college at Haileybury the Company had a Military Seminary and Pembroke House and Ealing Lunatic Asylum which took care of Company servants who were certified insane while serving in India. Later the Royal Engineering College which trained entrants to the Public Works department of the Government of India was set up (1869–1925). A.J. Fairington "The Records of the East India College, Haileybury and Other Institutions" (London, 1976).

The upheaval in India in 1857–58 arising from the First War of Independence brought the two and half century existence of the East India Company to an abrupt end. In 1858, India came under the direct rule of the Crown through a Viceroy, with Lord Canning as the first Viceroy of India. The Honourable East India Company Service became the Indian Civil Service set up by the 1853 Act. The open competition for entry to the ICS as drafted by the committee was through a stiff examination in two parts followed by an oral examination. In the first part candidates were examined in English Literature, Composition, History, Law, Mathematics, Moral Sciences, Science, Classical and Indian languages (including Arabic and Sanskrit): candidates had to be between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one. Marks were deducted for a smattering knowledge (except in mathematics). For those successful at this examination there was a requirement to spend two further probationary years at either Oxford, Cambridge or TCD preparing for a second written examination and an oral examination. This time the subjects for the examination included Law, Economics, Sanskrit and an Indian language.

The response from Trinity to these events was amazingly swift. By 1856 a Professor of Arabic (Wright) and a Professor of Sanskrit (Siegfried) had been appointed. Writing about these events in the Book of TCD 1591–1891, Rev. Dr. Stubbs commented that "The course of study was at once widened. Classical studies received an impetus which roused the teachers from their old routine. The English Language and Literature and Modern History, as well as foreign languages, became an important part of collegiate education. The heads of the College at once saw the necessity of largely remodelling the instruction given to undergraduates. The Greek Professorship was very soon separated from the office which was restricted to the Senior Fellows; a Professor was elected from among the Tutors ... Similar arrangements were made for the Professorships of Geology and Experimental Physics ... the Professorship of Oratory was virtually changed into one of English Languages and Literature. The immediate effect of these changes was at once visible in the great and remarkable success of the Dublin candidates at the open competition for the ICS ... In the first seven years sixty-three succeeded from Dublin ..." In 1862, of the eighty vacancies for the ICS, TCD students filled twelve. By 1875 one hundred and nineteen TCD students had joined the ICS[9] In 1871, the year Grierson took the ICS examination, six TCD students qualified.

The staff of TCD in the period 1868–1873 when Grierson was a student, was distinguished. The Provost was Humphrey Lloyd, the Professor of Divinity was Salmon, Houghton was Professor of Geology, Tyrell in Latin, Ingram in Greek, Mahaffy in History, Dowden in English, Atkinson in Romance Languages and Celtic and Sanskrit. The oriental language instruction had been expanded, from a Professor of Arabic and Hindustani in 1866 to a Professor of Arabic, Hindustani and Persian by 1873. The Professor of Arabic, Persian and Hindustani was also given the right to charge three guineas for a course of twenty lectures and personally give Certificates of Competence to students. Prizes for Arabic, Sanskrit and Hindustani were also introduced.

This was the Trinity that Grierson joined in 1868. Some of his fellow un-

[9]The Dublin University Calendar of 1875 contains a list of the names of these 119 students.

dergraduates would later become well known. There was G. F. FitzGerald, later a famous physicist, Oscar Wilde, Bram Stoker (author of Dracula) and Percy French, song writer and painter. There were others who would later become well known in India such as Vincent Smith[10] and Francis Spring. Vincent Smith would later be a renowned historian of India and would receive an honorary degree from TCD. Francis Spring would later be knighted for his bridge building talents in India and will forever be remembered for the encouragement and support he gave to the great Indian mathematical genius Srinivasa Ramanujan[11]. Sir Francis Spring, as Chairman of the Port Trust of Madras, provided Ramanujan with a job and argued his case for a University research fellowship even though Ramanujan had no proper academic qualifications. In a remarkable and well known episode in the history of mathematics Ramanujan wrote to the Cambridge Professor of Mathematics, Hardy, enclosing a list of some of his mathematical discoveries. This letter eventually led to Ramanujan meeting and working with Hardy at Cambridge and being elected a Fellow of the Royal Society for his contributions to mathematics.

Soon after entering TCD Grierson came under the spell of Robert Atkinson (1839–1908), the charismatic Professor of Romance Languages, who was also the Professor of Sanskrit and Comparative Philology and the Todd Professor of Celtic Languages at the Royal Irish Academy. Atkinson according to Bailey[12] "possessed an amazing power of learning languages and had some knowledge (and in most cases a good one) of several of the Romance languages, as well as Sanskrit, Tamil, Telegu, Hebrew, Coptic Persian, Arabic, Welsh and even Chinese. Atkinson, English by birth, entered Trinity in 1856 but his undergraduate career was interrupted. He spent two years on the continent, mainly at Liege, and was compelled by lack of means to become a teacher. It was only when he obtained a classical scholarship in 1862 that he was able to devote his full time to his studies." Years later Grierson wrote affectionately, "The immense range of Atkinson's linguistic facility enabled pupils to learn languages new to them with almost magical rapidity and thoroughness." Atkinson's influence on Grierson was extraordinary. In the concluding section of the "Linguistic Survey of India" Grierson warmly recalled,

> "It was to me a memorable day when in 1868 my honoured teacher Professor Robert Atkinson introduced me to the Sanskrit alphabet in what soon became to me his familiar rooms in Trinity. Five years later, as full of hope, I was bidding him farewell before starting to India he laid the task of conducting a linguistic survey of India upon me and with the enthusiasm of youth I gladly undertook it . . . ".

The study of oriental languages, especially Sanskrit, had become popular in Europe after the discovery, in Calcutta, of the riches of Sanskrit literature by Sir William Jones at the close the the eighteenth century. In a widely quoted article written in 1786, Sir William Jones, a judge of the Supreme Court of Bengal and founder of the Asiatic Society of Bengal wrote,

[10] Author of Oxford History of Indian (1917), Akbar the Great Moghul (1917), History of Art in India and Ceylon (1911).

[11] S.R. Ranganathan, Ramanujan, Bangalore (1967).

[12] K. Bailey, A History of TCD 1892–1945.

> "The Sanskrit language whatever be its antiquity is a wonderful structure more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin and more exquisitely refined than either yet bearing to the both of them a strong affinity both in the roots of the verbs and in the forms of grammar than could be produced by accident ...".

This article of Sir William Jones started the subject of comparative linguistics. By the mid nineteenth century Sir William Jones's conjecture regarding a possible connection between Sanskrit and Latin and Greek had been established and the study of works in Sanskrit and books on comparative grammar of other Indo-European languages were being written in many centres throughout Europe. However the study of modern oriental languages had not been undertaken in a systematic way, thus the suggestion of Atkinson was innovative and novel. Grierson qualified for the ICS in 1871. In the first part of the the ICS examinations he was ranked 28th and rose to the 12th rank in the second set of examinations. He also won prizes for Sanskrit and Hindustani in Trinity during his two probationary years spent in Dublin. Finally Grierson set sail for India in 1873.

The training of an ICS man in India[13] was based on the principle of "on the job training." The standard practice was for a new entrant to be placed under the tutelage of a Collector or District Magistrate. The "Collector", originally "The collector of the Emperor's revenue", was the apex of the British district administration in India. On average each district had three to five divisions, each division had two–three taluks and a taluk consisted of about forty villages. The Collector was responsible for overseeing the collection of land revenue. He was also the law officer for the majority of cases in his district. Major criminal cases, however, were tried by a Session Judge who was part of an independent branch of the administration.

A typical district could have a population of one to three million people. The Collector was essentially the king of his domain although his work was under the scrutiny of a Commissioner. Initially a new entrant to the ICS was designated as Assistant Collector and as a Third Class Magistrate. As a Third Class Magistrate he was allowed, almost immediately, to try trivial criminal offences such as minor assaults, with his clerk anxiously helping and interpreting. The maximum sentence a Third Class Magistrate could impose was one month's imprisonment and a fine of fifty rupees. The newly appointed Assistant Collector was expected to pass written examinations in law and languages, receive training in survey techniques and pass practical examinations in horsemanship within a period of about two years. At which time the district provincial government would place him as a Sub Collector and Joint Magistrate to a division of the district. Within ten years of entering the Service it was normally the case that someone in the ICS would have been promoted to become a Collector and District Magistrate of a district. One of the duties of the Collector was to go on tours of his district during the winter months. This

[13] I am indebted to Mr. James Walmsley, who was in the ICS from 1937–1947, for providing me with personal reflections and copies of the Indo-British Review which contained reminiscences of over forty former ICS men, written in 1997, on the occasion of fifty years of Indian Independence. The career path of the ICS described here was essentially set up by Lord Betnick, Governor-General of India, 1828–1835. See also "The Advanced History of Modern India" edited by S.R. Bakshi, New Dehli (1995) 5 volumes.

allowed him to meet local people, inspect premises and schools and check land revenue details. These tours also gave those, so inclined, an opportunity to gather information regarding the languages, customs and the way of life of the local people.

In the case of Grierson he was posted to Bankipore in Bihar and in due course he became a Collector and Commissioner. Grierson spent his time in Bihar preparing himself for the task of eventually conducting a linguistic survey as he had promised Atkinson. He gathered linguistic data, recorded folklore, and wrote scholarly accounts of the grammar of the languages of the Bihar region. In 1885 he wrote

his famous book on "Bihar Peasant Life". In this book of 592 pages he made a catalogue of the words and objects used in day-to-day life by a Bihar peasant of the time. What made his work unusual was the way anecdotes, stories, and local proverbs were interwoven into the text. There was also a marvellous collection of photographs taken by Grierson himself.

A few examples from the book might be of interest. While describing the cooking pots used in a certain district Grierson pauses to explain that this-district contained many robbers and there was a story that travellers carrying cooking pots in the area were stopped and asked "Is this pot yours or mine?". If the traveller said the pot is "mine" then he was beaten up and the pot was taken from him. If he said "The pot is yours" then the robber took away the pot. This lead to a local understanding of the saying, "Is this pot yours or mine" similar to "Heads I win, tails you lose".

In another section he states that local weavers were the proverbial fools of stories, jokes and anecdotes of that area. He then proceeded to given examples: "Once a crow carried off to the roof some bread which a weaver had given to his child. Before giving the child any more bread the weaver took the precaution of removing the ladder next to the roof."

For each story, proverb, anecdote or saying Grierson first wrote it out in the local script then provided a Roman script transliteration followed by an English translation. Grierson was very careful and thorough. He comments:[14]

"Such a work as this is nothing if it is not accurate and no ordinary pains have been spared to compass the greatest accuracy possible. Every word in this book has been collected from the mouths of people and noted in the spot where it was spoken either by the writer himself or by one of his assistants. When the work began to take shape it was carefully compared with every available book of reference and where discrepancies occurred they were either reconciled or explained. Finally the proof sheets have been circulated to all the Bihar districts and have been again checked on the spot by competent observers different from the original person who collected the material on which the book was founded."

By 1885 Grierson was ready to make his move. In 1886 while attending the International Congress of Orientologists held in Vienna he was able to muster support for carrying out a "Linguistic Survey of India." Grierson attended the meeting as a delegate of the Government of Bengal, the Bengal Asiatic Society and Calcutta University . His link with Calcutta University became official when he was nominated Fellow of the University by the Viceroy in 1884. The

[14]Bihar Peasant Life, 2nd Revised Edition (Patna 1926), P.1

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor and Fellows were, at that time, responsible for the management of the University which was founde d in 1857. The first Chancellor was the Viceroy Lord Canning. At the Vienna Congress it was pointed out that even the number of Indian languages was not known. Estimates varied from twenty to sixty to 250. A resolution was passed urging the Indian Government to undertake a "deliberate systematic survey of the languages of India." Those who made the proposal were some of the most distinguished orientologists of the time including Bühler, Max Müller, Monier Williams and Grierson. The proposal was favourably received but the adoption of a detailed scheme was delayed at first on financial grounds. However, in 1894 it was agreed that an examination of practical matters regarding carrying out such a linguistic survey should be undertaken. It was a mammoth task: the survey was to include 224,000,000 from a population of 294,000,000. The parts of India excluded from the survey were Madras and the states of Hyderabad and Mysore.The country was to be divided into subdivisions and instructions regarding the way the survey was to be carried out together with all relevant material was to be sent to each political agent and district officer After discussions it was decided that there were to be three parts in the survey.

(i) A standard passage (for comparison) was to be translated into every known dialect and subdialect spoken in the area covered by the operation.

(ii) A representative narrative or prose passage was to be locally selected and translated.

(iii) A standard list of 241 words and test sentences originally drawn up in 1866 for the Asiatic Society of Bengal by Sir George Campbell was to be translated.

Grierson was placed in charge of the Survey. By 1894 Grierson had excellent credentials for the job. His scholarly output of papers, articles, reviews, works on grammar, starting from 1877 was enormous: he had already written his Seven Grammars and Dialects and Subdialects of Bihar Language in eight parts (1883–87) and his book on Bihar Peasant Life (1885) had appeared. He had been made a Fellow of Calcutta University (1884), he was a CIE (1894) and he had received an honorary Ph.D. from Halle in 1894. He also had considerable administrative experience. He was the right man for the job! In order to proceed with the Survey in 1898 certain preliminary steps had to be taken. The list of 241 words and test sentences required for the Survey was ready. A decision regarding the standard passage for translation had to be made: it was decided that it was to be the parable of the Prodigal Son. In view of the fact that the majority of those being approached in the survey were not expected to be familiar with this parable it was essential to produce, as a preliminary step, specimen translations of the parable in various Indian languages. This was done for sixty-five languages by 1897. It was a difficult task. Collection of one specimen, for instance, was delayed for six months by the fall of snow in the Hindukush mountains which prevented access to the only getable bilingual speaker of one of the Pamir districts.

A record of the language total of each district according to the census of 1891 was also prepared, so that those conducting the Survey would have

an indication regarding what was already known. At this stage the Survey could be started. Each official had the sixty-five versions of the parable, the language total of his district from the census, the 241 test word and sentences and forms for the Survey with instructions regarding the requirements for the specimen prose/verse sample which was to be locally selected! As Grierson wrote,[15] "The great majority of specimens were prepared either by Indians whose native language it was that was being illustrated or else by missionaries who lived in daily and hourly contact with the illiterate people who spoke it. Others again were prepared by members of my own service including many personal friends in the ripeness of whose knowledge I had full confidence..."

At the end of his labours Grierson listed 179 languages with 544 dialects. He classified the languages under the following broad headings:

1. Indo-Aryan
2. Dravidian/Mundra
3. Austric/Tibetan-Chinese
4. Unclassified

Roughly 74% of the languages were Indo-Aryan, 24% Dravidian. Tables of languages spoken together with maps of the localities where the languages were chiefly spoken were provided. There was also a collection of 218 records of ninety-seven languages (one set of records was sent to TCD). It was stressed that the aim of the survey was confined to the ascertainment of facts: the elaboration of theories formed no part of its objective.

The work was carried out with Grierson's customary thoroughness: the printed version, for instance, was compared three times with the manuscript. The difficulty in analyzing the specimens and forms sent out when they returned was also considerable. In one Himalayan district the main language was Indo-Aryan but in the district there was a small colony, originally from Tibet which had retained its own language. Grierson wrote, "No official knew the language and the discusion with them was carried through the medium of a lingua franca. The district officers entered the name of this language in his return. This name was not one or two words. It was a solemn process of weird monosyllables wandering right across the page. I could make nothing of it nor could my Tibetan knowing friends. It should be remembered that it was a foreign expression written down in English letters as it sounded to the untrained ear of a person entirely unacquainted with the language. All my endeavours to identify the name failed. Eventually after correspondence with th district office it was realised that the monosyllabic procession was not the name of a language but was the local way of saying "I don't understand what you are driving at in broken Tibetan!" The difficulty of naming a dialect was also acute. Usually there was rude description of a dialect given by neighbours. For instance in Afghanistan a local dialect was initially called PASCHANDA by Grierson but it was subsequently changed to DARDIC as PASCHANDA is not a complimentary word in Sanskrit.

[15]Linguistic Survey, Vol. 1.

Grierson also produced a reasonably thorough history of what was previously known about each language and its grammar prior to his Survey. Occasionally he introduced humourous interjections in the middle of this scholarly work. For instance, while describing the PASHTO language of North-West India, Grierson noted that an earlier linguistic survey of that region had been carried out years ago according to local legend, by a Grand Wazir, who is said to have brought to his king specimens of the sound of all the languages spoken on earth. The specimen of PASHTO consisted of the rattling of a stone in a pot!

There was also a local saying: Arabic is science, Turki is accomplishment, Persian is sugar, Hindustani is salt, but PASHTO is the braying of an ass.

Grierson's comment: in spite of these unfavorable remarks, though harsh sounding, Pashto is a strong virile language which is capable of expressing any idea with neatness and accuracy.

A few comments of Grierson's based on the survey are worth recording:

1. It was noted that it was rare for one Indo-Aryan language to be replaced by another Indo-Aryan language.

2. It was very often the case that a local tribal language was replaced by an Indo-Aryan language

3. Similarities of vocabulary alone were not a trustworthy working guide to classifying a language.

4. The range of languages considered in the Survey was enormous. There were languages in which the deepest thoughts and most refined arguments could be presented with an extensive and rich literature, while there were languages with few words and no written script.

The Survey was started in 1898. By the time Grierson retired from the ICS in 1903 most of the data from the Survey had come in. What remained to be done was the mammoth task of editing the enormous amount of material gathered, producing skeletal grammars where possible, and making a preliminary classification of the languages in the Survey. This work was carried by Grierson[16] from Camberley in Surrey where he went to live after retirement. His house in Surrey was called "Rathfarnham" and became a place of pilgrimage for oriental scholars. Completion of the survey took Grierson thirty years! At the end Grierson wrote:

> "I lay these volumes as an offering before India that was long my home and that has itself had home in my heart for more than half a century. Throughout my active life among the people who I soon learned to love, Robert Atkinson's injunction to conduct a linguistic survey of India was ever present in my mind and urged me to devote such time as I could spare from official duties in preparation for accomplishment. Twenty years later the opportunity and the privilege of conducting the linguistic Survey became mine. For me personally these years of preparation were by no means without

[16]Five of the volumes on the non-Indo-European languages were edited by Stan Kontow.

> profit. I have been granted a vision of a magnificent literature enshrining the thoughts of great men from generation to generation through three thousand years. I have been able to stroll through enchanted gardens of poesy beginning with the happy carefree hymns of the Vedas, continuing through great epics, through the magic of Indian drama and the consummate world witchery of Kalidasa ... Truth have I gathered from many a tree of knowledge from the ripe Pandit, strong in his monism, acute in thought, crystal clear in his exposition and from the simple peasant chatting in his rude patois under the village tree, steeped in the deepest superstition, yet quick with the living faith in the fatherhood of God ... Hidden under religiosity have I found religion, hidden under legend history, wisdom have I found in the proverbs of the unlettered hand ..."

On the completion of the linguistic survey, its breadth and thoroughness were immediately recognised as being of an outstanding standard and Grierson received numerous honorary degrees including honorary degrees from Halle (1894), Dublin (1902), Cambridge (1920) and Oxford (1929). He was knighted in 1912 and presented with the OM in 1928. He was elected a British Academy Fellow, elected to numerous learned societies, was awarded the British Academy Gold Medal in 1928 and the Sir William Jones Gold Medal of Bengal in 1929.

At the end Grierson wrote, "It is with a feeling of gratitude for having been permitted to finish a work extending over thirty years that after writing this Preface the pen will be laid down. Without any pretended modesty I confess that no one is more than myself aware of the deficiencies of the Survey nor, on the other hand, need I plead guilty to a vain boast when I say that what has been done in it for India has been done for no other country in the world."

Grierson died on the 9th of March 1941 in Camberley in Surrey. His was a remarkable life. He had the vision of an enormous project placed before him as an undergraduate at Trinity. Against all the odds he worked tirelessly for over thirty years to complete the project he had promised to complete as a youth. His magnificent obsession enriched the world by revealing the riches of diverse Indian languages. His careful study of Tulsi-Das's Ramayana, for example, and the delight he took in praising the achievements of the great bard of Bihar makes even a casual reader excited about the work. His 1250 page 'Kashmiri Dictionary' was another example of the care and delight he took in studying Indian languages even those not from his beloved Bihar.

On this happy occasion it is a pleasure to recall the achievements of this remarkable Trinity graduate. It is also satisfying that this is being done on the occasion of Grierson's 150th birth year.

Siddhartha Sen
School of Mathematics, TCD