CHAPTER IV

ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF MAITHILI MOVEMENT
Regional movements in a plural and diverse society are products of socio-cultural and economic factors. At the socio-cultural level, it is a movement for the political assertion and statutory recognition of exclusive regional identity defined and explained in terms of distinctive linguistic cum cultural or religious traditions. Regional identity is legitimized either by carving out a separate state or sub-state (such as, autonomous council for particular ethnic group) with sufficient amount of autonomy of decision-making, specially in the realms of cultural activities, or by extension of certain special privileges to socio-cultural groups by the state. However, in order to achieve this objective, socio-cultural regional movement defines its objective, sets-up its agenda (this includes relative ordering of different demands on the short term and long term basis) and formulates its strategy. Thus any analysis of regional movement should take into account the objective and subjective bases of demands, organizational network of movement, leadership pattern, support structure and finally state’s attitude towards the movement and its specific cultural and linguistic demands.

So far as Maithili Movement is concerned, it is also basically a socio-cultural regional movement for the promotion of Maithili linguistic cum cultural identity within the framework of a separate territorial state formed
on the basis of linguistic homogeneity and cultural uniformity. Theoretically significant is the fact that though the necessary objective factors, essential for the formation of a separate territorial state, are available, the movement has yet to achieve any success in terms of its main demand of a separate Maithili state. In the analysis of Paul R. Brass,¹ the main reason for this is that the objective factors have not been transformed successfully into subjective consciousness by the leadership of the movement. For him, the regional movement, in order to achieve its objective, must transform and translate the objective factors such as geography, history, language and culture into the subjective consciousness of separate identity. This has, however, limited perspective. This can help in explaining only the gains and failures of the movement. This cannot explain the rationality of movement and its objective from the federal perspective of territorial grouping of socio-cultural varieties and the sub-state formation within a broad framework of a nation-state.

Origin and Growth of Maithili Movement

The origin of Maithili movement can be traced back to 1910 when the first Maithili organization the Maithili Mahasabha came into being. It was a social and cultural organization dedicated to the cause of moral and cultural
regeneration of Maithils. Initially it was a caste based organization to keep intact the cultural heritage and purity of Maithil Brahmins and Karno Kayasthas. However, later on its base was broadened to include all those social and religious groups living within the Mithila region. From the perspective of the movement, another significant organization was the Maithili Sahitya Parishad which was established on the occasion of Darbhanga Maithil Sabha's meeting in 1931. Initially its major objective was to promote and develop separate Maithili script (Tirhuta) and the language. Here it may be pointed out that during the formative years of Maithili movement, emphasis was placed on maintaining an unpolluted Maithili cultural identity, and establishing the fact that Maithili is a separate language and not a dialect of Hindi. Maithili movement therefore grew and developed as a language movement during the formative years of 1910-1954. During this period and later on most of the demands of the Maithili movement was language specific. These included:

(1) Maithili should be accepted as an optional (or obligatory for the students in north Bihar) subject as well as medium of instruction at the primary level;

(2) Maithili should be accepted as a subject in the universities;

(3) there should be a Mithila university or a university in the Mithila region that will
project the language, literature, and culture of Mithila;

(4) there should be a Maithili Bhasha Parishad or a Maithili Academy in Patna along the lines of Bihar Hind Grantha Academy and Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad;

(5) there should be a radio-station in Darbhanga to cater to the special needs of the Maithili speaking population;

(6) Maithili should be accepted by the Sahitya Akademi and such other official and cultural bodies;

(7) there should be a separate state of Mithila; and

(8) Maithili should be made the associate official language of the state of Bihar.³

In addition to these, other minor demands included, "the publication of official notices and advertisement in Maithili, use of Maithili, use of Maithili script in the name of railway stations in Bihar, introduction of a Mithila express, etc."⁴

Here it may be pointed out that during the initial period of the Maithili movement no organized protest movement was as such launched. Rather Maithili organization and intellectual took up such activities as publication of books, journals in Maithili and writing drawing the attention of the government to the various demands of Maithili movement. The basic concern of Maithili intellectual, as mentioned above, was to prove the fact that Maithili was an independent language and that the Mithila
had a distinct linguistic and cultural identity. Based on this fact, Mithila has every claim of being made a separate state. Therefore, one of the eminent Maithili intellectuals and important leader of the Maithili movement, Lakshman Jha in his book *Mithila: A Union Republic, 1952* writes:

> Taken as a linguistic, geographical and cultural unit, or considered on the extent of its territory or the strength of its population, Mithila has a claim to statehood. In consideration of the neglect, exploitation and suffering of its people at the hands of the Congress rulers from Magadh and Bhojpur, this claim to statehood is an urgent necessity.

Interestingly, in the same book, Jha has formulated a draft Constitution for the state of Mithila which lays emphasis on the maximum autonomy to the people of Mithila including the right to secession from Bharat. The extent of regional autonomy in this draft Constitution includes:

(i) The territory of the state of Mithila may not be altered without its consent; (ii) the state of Mithila has the right to enter into direct relations with foreign state and to conclude agreements and exchange diplomatic and consular representatives with them; and (iii) the state of Mithila has its own people's military formation.

The proposed Mithila state, according to him, would be a democratic and socialist state.

In another pamphlet, Lakshman Jha has pleaded that on the basis of geography, language, culture, economy and administrative conveniences, the territorial boundaries of India should be readjusted to carve out many move states in India. Extending this hypothesis, he further pleads for the
trifurcation of Bihar into Mithila for Maithili speaking people of north Bihar with headquarters at Muzaffarpur; Magadh for Magahi people with headquarters at Patna, and Jharkhand state for the Tribal people of the South-Central Bihar with administrative capital at Ranchi.

On the basis of the spread of Maithili language and number of speakers, Lakshman Jha, included in the Maithili state the old districts of Champaran, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Saharsa, north Munger and Purnea from the state of Bihar and Morang, Saptari, Mahotari, Saralahi, Rautahat, Bara and Parasa districts of Nepal. The proposed Mithila state was to cover an area around 25,000 sq. miles which in a way is larger than many other states of India.

However, main concern of the Maithili intellectuals during the initial period of unorganized movement was to seek improvement in the status of Maithili language. For this, development and standardization of Maithili language were stressed. Thus Maithili intellectuals undertook activities like compilation of Maithili words, publication of dictionaries, books, magazines, journals, newspapers etc.

The more systematic demand for a separate state for Maithili speaking people of north Bihar began in 1954 when meetings and protest movements were organized. The pioneering leadership was provided by late Sri Jankinandan Singh who himself was a Congress legislator. He presented a
Memorandum to states Reorganization Commission, 1955.

In the memorandum, emphasis was placed on two aspects - one was the assertion of the fact that Mithila has a separate linguistic cum cultural identity, and the other was the political demand for a separate state. After a careful scrutiny of different objective factors, the memorandum concludes that the Mithila is a homogeneous state. It says:

Geographical features, soils, rivers, agricultural and industrial backwardness, lack of transport and communications, uniformity in roads and rails, history, language and culture bind the whole of this land in a common unit.9

Then what necessitates the formation of a separate state? The memorandum finds the reason and justification in the following words:

Mithila is being ruled against her will and in a manner harmful to her interests. It is a sad commentary on democracy of India. It is queer that a whole people professing Maithili as their mother tongue have to swallow the dictation that their mother tongue is Hindi. The reaction to Bihar's attitude towards Mithila leaves India's security on its long international frontiers in danger.... No fortification, no forces, no facilities of transport exist north and east of Mithila has to be properly strengthened, Mithila state is an inevitable necessity. It will thus be observed that formation of Mithila state forms an essential feature of the country's re-distribution of states with a view to strengthening the unity and defence of India.10

Interestingly despite its nationalist overtones, the SRC did not give any consideration to the memorandum. SRC in its
Protagonists of the Maithili movement putforth the following objective bases for the formation of a Maithili state:

1. Maithils, irrespective of any caste and religious consideration, constitute a separate territorial community who share common history, common culture and speak common language - Maithili. Such an identity is exclusive to Mithila. This fact is further buttressed by the geographic distinctiveness of Mithila.

2. The protagonists point out that the internal boundary of Bihar is artificial.

There are major geographical distinctions, partly reinforced by linguistic and cultural distinctions, between the Maithili speaking north Bihar plain, separated from the rest of Bihar by the river Ganges; the Magahi - and Bhojpuri - speaking plains districts south of Ganges; and the heavily tribal hill districts of Chotanagpur.

3. The cause of Mithila and Maithili suffers because the step-motherly treatment of state government.

Protagonists also tried to cultivate the symbolic unity by emphasizing certain literary figures and personality of Mithila. The most emphasized is Vidyapati. "The annual Vidyapati week celebrations are as important to the building of regional consciousness in Mithila as Tilak's Ganesh and Shivaji festivals were in Maharashtra at the turn
of the century." Vidyapati was selected because he represents, as mentioned in chapter 3 above, both the high cultural and folk cultural traditions of Mithila.

The second most emphasized figure was the Maharaja of Darbhanga. He was looked "as the living embodiment of the independent history and culture of the region". Though, he took keen interest in the development of Maithili language and culture, he was depicted as the representative of the select caste-cultural identity of two communities - Maithil Brahmins and Karna Kayasthas. But in a feudal social order, he was also depicted as symbolizing the culture of oppression. Many of the backward castes movements, especially Yadava movement, and agrarian protest movements were targeted against him.

Post-1954 Maithili Movement

The year 1954 was the peak period of Maithili movement in terms of the intensity of movement, mobilization of people, and overall, by partially transforming the objective factors of Maithili identity in the political movement for a separate state. But in the post-1954 period, Maithili movement, gradually became passive and the movement became issue specific i.e., getting different demands of the Maithili regionalism fulfilled separately and individually. So each issue of Mithili movement was taken up separately by
the Maithili intellectuals and Maithili organization. Leaders, like the previous phase of the Maithili movement, adopted constitutional and democratic methods to get the different demands fulfilled. Thus, for getting Maithili included in the list of languages recognized by the Sahitya Akademi, the national academy of letters, a memorandum was presented by Jayakanta Misra on March 31, 1963. To this cause, standardization of Maithili language was emphasized. Many important Maithili works such as Jayakanta Misra’s History of Maithili Literature in two volumes (1956) and Subhadra Jha’s The Formation of Maithili Language (1958) appeared. The efforts of Maithili intellectuals brought fruit when on September 25, 1964, Sahitya Akademi decided to accord recognition to Maithili.

Similarly for getting Maithili included in the eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution, the movement adopted the method of petitioning, i.e., submitting memorandum and sending letters to the Central Government. Another method adopted was to pressurize the elected representatives from the Mithila region to raise the issue of Maithili in the state legislature and in the Parliament.

Similar types of activities were also carried out for getting a University and Radio-station at Darbhanga, and the functional elevation of Maithili in the school and college education as medium of instruction and as a subject for
higher studies and State Civil Services.

Another important issues to which the Maithili movement itself addressed was the enumeration of Maithili in the census of India. Protagonist of the Maithili movement attributed the under-enumeration of Maithili language in the subsequent censuses (1951 onwards), when compared to census figure of 1911 which listed 1,07,37,000 persons as the Maithili speakers, to the conspiratorial designs of the government of Bihar and the Census officials, to promote Hindi at the cost of other dialects of Bihar. An interesting observation was made in the footnote appended to 1951 census which recorded the fact that:

The small number shown against Maithili, Maghi, Bhojpuri... should not be understood to mean that these dialects of languages have got out of vogue. In actual fact the vast majority of the population still use them but they preferred to return their mother tongue simply as Hindi.

The leaders of the movement, since 1951 census, claimed 25 million of people as Maithili speakers, on the other hand, Paul R. Brass, following Gait's criteria, computed 16 million people as Maithili speakers in 1961. But the 1961 census, figured out 4.9 million people as Maithili speakers. Many factors have been attributed for the low percentage of Maithili speakers in the censuses:

1. "There has never been a scientific census count, based on the philological distinctions." Although the changes
in the administrative boundaries have been taken into consideration, "no account has been taken of migration patterns, patterns of assimilation to Hindi via public school education, and the like."21

2. The problem of computation is complicated further in the dialect shift zone where the rate of convergence between two dialects is much faster than the difference. In such a situation, people generally fail to linguistically distinguish between two languages or dialects. Such a confusion may further cause inaccuracies in the language figures.

3. Also at the popular level of perception, common people are not generally aware about the linguistic nomenclature of their mothertongues. This leaves the scope for unconscious and incorrect reporting by the ordinary population about their language (mother tongue).22

Thus for proper listing of Maithili speakers, the protagonists of the Maithili Movement launched several publicity campaign to impress upon the people of Maithili region to record themselves as Maithili speakers in the census enumeration.

However, between 1954 and 1985 no organized protest movement was ever launched. Also the priority of the movement shifted from the demand for a separate state to that of language issue only.
Maithili Movement Since 1985

Maithili movement gained certain momentum in the later half of the 1985 when, under the organizational leadership of Vidyapati Seva Sansthan (Darbhanga) rail roko agitation was organized in Darbhanga and some other parts of the Mithila region. In the same year, the Sansthan submitted a 14-points memorandum to the then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi. The memorandum, besides, other minor demands, demanded once again for (i) the Mithila state, (ii) inclusion of Maithili in the eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, (iii) according the status of state official language to Maithili, and (iv) all broadcast from the regional Radio centres at Darbhanga and Bhagalpur should be in Maithili.23 However, the protest movement did not move further due to the lack of popular participation.

Following a state government directive in February-March 1992 to exclude Maithili from the list of optional subjects in the language group for the Bihar Public Service Commission, which conducts competitive examination for the services under Bihar government, Maithili movement resurfaced again. An interesting feature was that perhaps for the first time, the youth and the students from backward castes of Mithila participated in the movement to pressurize the government to restore the old position of Maithili vis-
a-vis Bihar Public Service Commission, that is, Maithili should remain as one of the optional subjects.

In July 1992, a rally at Boat Club, New Delhi was organized. A memorandum signed by Akhil Bhartiya Maithili Sahitya Parishad, Darbhanga, Vidyapati Seva Sansthan, Darbhanga, Mithilanchal Vikas Parishad, Laheriasari, and the Akhil Bhartiya Mithila Sangh, Delhi was also submitted to the Prime Minister of India. The memorandum, besides mentioning several facts of Maithili language, writes that "Maithili was recognized by the Sahitya Akademi as the sixteenth language, the first non-scheduled language of the constitution. Thus, it deserves the first consideration to be included in the eighth Schedule of the Constitution." 24

Conclusion

Maithili movement has always been language specific. Other factors of Maithili nationality formation such as culture was weakly embedded in its fold. But, in other socio-cultural regional movements, language protection was emphasized to enhance the cause of respective cultural identity. Thus language development and linguistic protection was made a means for the promotion of exclusive ethnic identity of the socio-cultural groups. This is not the case with Maithili movement. Also, the socio-economic under-development of the region is least emphasized factor

169
in the Maithili movement. Except at certain point of time, the movement did not address itself sufficiently to the most important demand of a separate Maithili state. This is partly due to the difference of opinions among the Maithil elites. Thus one finds a diffused ordering of priority in the Maithili movement.

Least attempt has been made to build a regional feeling of 'we' among the people of Mithila. Another important fact is that Maithili movement has never been a mass-based movement. Also it has always centred around urban locality and never reached to the rural areas. This is partly because, the movement always lacked proper organization and leadership. In terms of selection of mode of protest, the movement has always stressed on constitutional and democratic means of protest. Emphasis was placed on submitting memorandum and petitions. Other mode of protests such as 'dharna', 'Bandha' etc. were rarely resorted to. Thus the movement has not been successful in projecting itself as ethnic movement for the political formation of Mithila state.
References


5. Lakshman Jha was also the Chairman of the Mithila Socialist Party and Mithila Nirman Sabha, Darbhanga.


8. Lakshman Jha, Mithila in India, Darbhanga, Mithila Mandal, 1953.


10. Ibid, pp.54-55.


13. Ibid, p.56.


171


19. Paul R. Brass, op.cit., p.66, Table 2.2


21. Ibid.

22. Ibid, p.74.

23. Memorandum (in Maithili) translated by the author.


25. This point is further elaborated in the next chapter.