CHAPTER 3
LANGUAGE, HISTORY AND THE IMAGINARY OF MAITHILI IDENTITY

Nation and nationalities are too complex to be condensed to language and literature alone. Yet it is primarily through language and literature that one can map out the contours of nationalist imaginations of various kinds. In this chapter I have explored this interrelationship between language and the nation in the context of India, particularly on the imaginings of Maithili identity in the Hindi heartland. In the beginning of the chapter I will try to explore the inter-relationships between language and the nation through the insights of Benedict Anderson. Why did all kind of imaginings of modern identities like nation and nationalities necessarily require a language in a new form – written, standard, secular and universally applicable to all the speakers, quite distinct from the traditional use of the same language? I have also tried to explain a new sense of urgency and attempts by many scholars, colonial as well as local, with regard to writing the history of Mithila. What role did these historical narratives play in the formation of Maithili identity? What kind of Mithila had been imagined? What was the social constituency of the movement? What kind of ideological forces were at work? What role, if any, did Print – Capitalism have played in this context – and was it a hindrance for the Maithili movement?

The relationship between nation and language is relatively less explored in India. Although there have been fascinating studies on the subject, these are mostly limited to the issue of Hindi-Urdu controversy and the nationalization of Hindi or at best language based politics (in different languages in India especially Tamil, Marathi, Telugu etc) in association with other markers of identity as region, culture, caste, religion even with secessionist nationalist and civilizational underpinnings.¹

Nation, according to Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, 1983(1991), understood as an *imagined community* requires a group of people who associate with each other, struggle, and aspire together to form a community in a profoundly new ways which is inconceivable in earlier times. *Print capitalism* made it possible for rapidly growing members of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways. It also opens up a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together.

Anderson goes on to point out two features of ‘newer nationalisms’ that ‘changed the face of the old world’. First, in almost all of them ‘national print language’ was of central ideological or political importance. Second, all were able to work from visible models provided by their distant and not so distant predecessors. Further, he writes, in the context of Europe, print languages laid the basis for national consciousness in three distinct ways: - First, ‘they created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars. Speakers of the varieties of Frenches, Englishes, or Spanishes, who might find it difficult or even impossible to understand one another in conversation, became capable of comprehending one another via – print and paper’. In the process, they gradually became aware of the hundreds of the thousands or millions who spoke and read the same language. ‘These fellow readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed in their secular, particular – visible invisibility, the embryo of a nationally imagined community…Second, print capitalism gave a new fixity of language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation…Third, print capitalism created languages – of – power of a kind different from older administrative vernaculars. Certain dialects inevitably were ‘closer’ to each print language and dominated their final forms. Their disadvantaged cousins, still assimilable to the emerging print language, lost caste, above all because they were unsuccessful in insisting on their own print form.’

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3 Ibid., p. 44.
4 Ibid., pp. 44 – 45.
machinery that marked the nineteenth century created powerful new impulses for vernacular linguistic unification within each dynastic realm.\(^5\)

The contributions of language in nation building exercise is explained by Seton Watson in his study of Finnish nationalism – ‘the leaders of the burgeoning Finnish nationalist movement were persons whose profession largely consisted of the handling of language- writers, teachers, pastors and lawyers. The study of folklore and the rediscovery and piecing together of popular epic poetry went together with the publication of grammars and dictionaries, and led to the appearance of periodicals which served to standardize Finnish literary (print) language, on behalf of which stronger political demand could be advanced’.\(^6\)

We can apply these theories to some extent to the study of the formation of modern secular identities like nation and nationalities. But its limitation also becomes quite obvious when we apply it in a social context like India where the creation of this kind of identity is challenged at the two levels. First, from existing identities like caste and religion that could also reconsolidate itself in the new form with the emergence of nation and nationality. A second process concerns with the co-option or marginalization of regional identities within a larger process of pan Indian identity formation. Within Hindi heartland, we do not find any serious challenges to this Pan Indian Identity formation at least in beginning. But a weak, even suppressed but obvious and often visible discomfort against such formation was not totally absent. I will discuss in the later part of this chapter how such formation of Pan Indian identity formation was challenged by the Maithili speakers within Hindi heartland.

### 3.1 Historical Narratives, Imaginings of Mithila and Maithili Language

History writing has been recognized as a part of a ‘struggle for political power’, ‘an agenda for self representation’\(^7\) among the communities. History writing gave communities a sense of urgency to organize the members of their community. In the

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\(^5\) Ibid., pp. 75 – 76.

\(^6\) Ibid., pp. 74 – 75.

\(^7\) Chatterjee, Partha, *The Nation and Its Fragments Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 76.
context of Mithila, Maithili became a kind of *symbolic identity*. It had been used to mobilize all the inhabitants of Mithila – cutting across caste, class and gender lines – under the singular identity of language. And the history of the unfolding of the Maithili movement can be understood not merely as a struggle for its recognition as an independent language but also perhaps as a deeper struggle within – to organize a society divided on the basis of caste, sects and gender into a modern secular community. This allows a closer look at the evolution of Maithili community with all its constraints – both internal and external.

The starting point of Maithili consciousness was a new approach to its past. How and under what circumstances did they deem it fit to have a history of their region? What were the different kinds of history that were produced? Why was a particular kind of history constructed, promoted and how did it gain legitimacy over many other histories, which were marginalized and even suppressed? What were the shifts and changes in these kinds of historical narratives? How did these approaches to history help in the formulation of identities? Why did one form of identity become national and others regional? How did mainstream i.e. ‘national’ history negotiate with ‘regional’ histories or vice-versa? What could be the consequences of a renegotiation by ‘regional’ histories for their legitimate space against the hegemonic claims of national history? Here I will discuss these questions in the context of history writing in Mithila during the second half of nineteenth century to 1920s, when the first major work on the history of region was produced in English by Shyam Narayan Singh and will also try to understand how these texts facilitated the formation of Maithili identity.

Like many societies Mithila had very rich oral traditions of remembering. Its history was based mostly on *Pauranic* literature – *Smritis, Upanishadas*, and *Puranas*. History in the region revolved primarily around the myths and legends of these *Pauranic* literatures. This mode of history was beginning to be challenged and criticized from the middle of the nineteenth century. And for the first time efforts were made to document the history of the region using western methods. This kind of text was first written in Urdu – *Riyaz-i-Tirhut* by Ayodhya Prasad ‘Bahar’ in 1868 and *Aina-i-Tirhut* by Bihari Lal ‘Fitrat’ in 1883. In Maithili language such books were written after the publication of *Mithila Darpan* in Hindi by Ras Bihari Lal Das in 1915. It was Chanda Jha who for
the first time made an effort to produce such work in Maithili for this purpose he visited various parts of Mithila. He gathered information about the historical sites around. But it was Mahamahopadhyaya Parmeshwar Jha who wrote *Mithila Tatva Vimarsha*, the first book in Maithili on the history of Mithila. He completed the writing of this book by 1919 but it was published much later in 1949 after twenty five years of his death (in 1924) from Vidyapati Press, Laheriya Sarai. In English Shyam Narayan Singh wrote *History of Tirhut* published from Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1922. Mukund Jha ‘Bakshi’ wrote *Mithila Bhashamaya Itihas* in Maithili which was published from Vidya Vilas Press, Benares.

A proper and comprehensive account of the history of Mithila was and to a great extent, still remains a daunting task. All these texts vary on different counts from each other. The main reason for such variances is that in their attempt to free the history of Mithila from the clutches of *Puranic* and oral traditions, these historians themselves have used many *Puranic* texts and scriptures as their source and relied heavily on oral traditions that existed in Mithila. Hence these efforts of writing a proper and accurate history of Mithila are still considered inadequate. However, these texts developed a new sense of history and identity among the Maithils and its intelligentsias.

The first systematic approach toward the historical account of Mithila was *Riaz-i-Tirhut* by Ayodhya Prasad ‘Bahar’. He relied heavily on Oral and Puranic traditions. In the beginning, like many other religious texts, the author pays tribute to “Allah, the almighty”. This work provides a vivid account of King, his Palaces, peoples, their region, lands, lives and culture in the second half of nineteenth century’s Mithila. He chose Urdu for writing this book and not Maithili or Hindi. This clearly explains the prevalence of Urdu as the literary language in Mithila at that time particularly among the literary elites of its towns like Darbhanga.

The author Ayodhya Prasad was ‘son of Babu Gopal Lal, a Khatri by caste, who resided at Maner Sharif of Pargana Maner in the district of Patna. For about twenty or twenty-two years from 1846, Babu Gopal Lal worked as *thane-in-charge* of different *thanas*

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(police stations) in the district of Tirhut. As an officer he was quite influential’.  
Later on he settled in Muzaffarpur. Ayodhya Prasad also served the British administration in various capacities from 1853. When, in 1860, the Maharaja of Darbhanga Maheshwar Singh died and the Raj came under the administration of Court of Wards, he was appointed as a subordinate officer in-charge of records. ‘There were thirty three offices, all haphazardly containing records in Maithili, Deonagari and other scripts right from the beginning of the Raj. There were firman, deeds of purchase, decisions regarding boundaries, papers of borrowing loan, horoscopes of Maharajas, and other papers regarding festivals, etc. All of them were collected and compiled and brought to the notice of authorities. They were impressed and gave Ayodhya promotion’. He worked in the administration of Raj for six years then was removed from the service, according to his own understanding, due to the jealousy of others, through conspiracy. And this he also mentioned in his book and expressed his willingness to rejoin the administration once Maharaja Lakshmishwar Singh attained the age of maturity.

It is important to note that the author and his family were working under the colonial administration. They had access to English language and literatures and might have felt the need to write an account of history of Mithila. Ayodhya Prasad got this opportunity when he was removed from the service. Thus, the need to have a historical account of one’s own region was first felt by those who came into the close contacts with the colonial administration. Second, the fact that Maithili as a language and script was also used in the Raj administration is quite evident from his compilation - although to what extent the language was used is not very clear. It leads naturally to the question as to why Maithili was not promoted and encouraged in Raj administration during the court of ward’s administration. Why it was that Hindi and not Maithili was used as a medium of instruction in vernacular schools? Was it because of the Court of wards administration of Darbhanga Raj? Or, was it because of their ignorance of the existence of Maithili as a vernacular language in the region? In this context Ayodhya Prasad gives the details of a meeting called by ‘Maulvi Imdad Ali Khan (who) had organised a

10 Ibid., p. 6.
11 Ibid., p. 7.
meeting of all the Zamindars, money lenders and other gentlemen in the premises of the
government school at Muzaffarpur on 27 February, 1868, to discuss a proposal of
Indian public welfare. Dr. William Stuart Fallon, the inspector of schools, Suba Bihar,
presided. In the meeting, it was resolved that a supplication should be made to the
Governor-General in Council through Scientific Society (whose secretary Maulvi Saheb
was urged to be) for making vernacular as the medium of higher education and
examinations thereof and granting permission to the Scientific Society to issue
certificates, titles, etc. Accordingly, on 10 April, that supplication carrying the
signatures of one hundred and twenty five persons was forwarded to the Viceroy,
Governor-General in Council, in the hope that higher education would be imparted
through the medium of Indian languages, examinations which are conducted through
the medium of English in the colleges of Calcutta, would now be held at local centres in
local languages; certificates would be issued in these languages, and a college would be
established for imparting higher education through the medium of an Indian language.
This supplication issued on 13 April, was placed before the Governor-General in
Council on 27 April, and, then, along with a reply of the secretary, British Governor, a
letter was issued to the secretary, British India Association, Bihar Province. Since then,
there has been much progress. A printing press has been established. A newspaper is
being brought out. Books are being translated. The scholars whose condition was worse
than an illiterate simply because they do not know English, would now be accorded
recognition. The author is the editor of the newspaper published by the society’ (sick). 12
This indicates the efforts on the parts of the locals and approval of the government also
to promote the local vernacular language of the region. But which vernacular language
to be used was not clearly specified. Whether the vernacular language mentioned above
was Hindi, or Urdu, or Maithili was yet to be ascertained? But the language that
gradually took root and promoted in the Maithili speaking region was Hindi.

Another important work on the history of Mithila was Aina-i-Tirhut of Bihari Lal
‘Fitrat’. It was first published in 1883 in Urdu from the Bahar Kashmir Press, Lucknow.
And the author acknowledges the role of Maharaja Lakshmishwar Singh in publication
of this book. It again shows the spread of Urdu as a medium of literary expression and

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education. He was quite assertive about the distinct history and culture of Mithila. He writes – सुबा बिहार में तिहािर जिसे मिथिला देश कहते हैं । (In the Province of Bihar there is Tirhut which is called Mithila nation). So we find that idea of distinct identity of Mithila began to be conceptualised. In many journals like Mithila Moda Mithila is always referred as desha (country) or appan desha (our country). Though, it was used more in social and cultural senses and in a political sense they considered themselves as part of Bharatvarsha. So, the word desha did not refer to the same entity in social-cultural and political domain as late as until the second decade of twentieth century.

It is strange that writing his own book in Urdu Bihari Lal classified the vernacular of the region as Ganvari Hindi among the illiterates and Sanskritized Hindi among the literates. The example he gave for Ganvari Hindi is actually Maithili –

“अहाँक नाम की छी? (What is your name?)
कों गाम घर अधि? (In which village do you live?)
कों काजक हेतु आएल छी? (For what work you have come?)
के दिन रहव? । (How many days will you live?)

When Lord Northbrook visited Darbhanga in 1874 to monitor the relief work for the victims of famine a letter of gratitude was given to him in Sanskrit and Urdu by Babu Guneshwar Singh and Murshid Hasan Kamil respectively. There was no official representation at all in Maithili. Surendra Gopal believes that from ‘the second half of the eighteenth century...Urdu began to occupy the space vacated by Persian in people’s day-to-day life, in their literary outpourings, in their educations and in their administrative practices’. It means prior to Urdu, it was Persian and not Maithili, which was the language of administration and ‘people’s day-to-day life’. Sanskrit was the language of high learning – Shastras, Puranas, Vedas and different branches of Indian Philosophy. Prose writing in Urdu acquired unprecedented intellectual prestige particularly after the establishment of Fort William College at Calcutta. Many texts on

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14 Ibid., p. 112.
15 Ibid., p. 164.
history and culture were published in that language. Hindu and Muslims both contributed in this kind of literary enterprise in India.

Bihari Lal ‘Fitrat’ was well aware of the fact that Persian, Arabic and Urdu were very much part of Mithila’s cultural and intellectual life. He devoted as much attention in his book to Persian and Arabic scholarship as he devoted to traditional Sanskrit learning and scholars in Mithila.\(^{17}\) There were many Hindu scholars of Persian and Arabic. He mentioned the name of Munshi Sambhu Datta, Lala Bodh Sen Singh, Lala Gopal Lal. All of them were Ambastha Kayastha.\(^{18}\) However, according to Hetukar Jha the education of Arabic, Persian and Urdu was virtually confined to Muslim community alone, with the exception of these three above mentioned names. But he agrees that Muslim culture was deeply rooted in Darbhanga town and the south western part of Tirhut.\(^{19}\)

Muzaffarpur, the most important town and the centre of modernity and western education in north Bihar, was established by Muzaffar Khan of Pargana Bisra. He developed his seven bighas of land for residential purposes and later developed it as a modern city that very soon overshadowed Darbhanga as an administrative centre of the colonial administration.\(^{20}\) Among the professions, vakils and mukhtars (lawyers and advocates) were most sought after. English had become by now the language of social prestige and many of the English educated lawyers were Bengali. But this was not the only language required as many established lawyers used to discuss their cases in Urdu, an acceptable language of the court.\(^{21}\) There were seventy six lawyers in those days in Tirhut. Out of these eleven conducted their practice in English. Of these seven were Bengalis, there were two Srivastavas and two Muslims.\(^{22}\) None of them were Brahmins. It suggests that Persian and Urdu were the court languages which were being replaced by English. Hindi was a late entrant and Maithili was nowhere in the scene and there were no participation by the Brahmins and upper castes in new profession like lawyers.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 28.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 29.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., pp. 77 – 78.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 38.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 40.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 94.
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The book also describes the socio-economic condition of Mithila in the second of nineteenth century. It is mentioned in the book that by ‘the second half of nineteenth century European indigo planters had become a powerful force in the economy of Tirhut. The largest indigo factory in India, the Pandaul indigo factory was based in the estate of Darbhanga. In 1860s a powerful anti – Indigo – planter movement – the first against the European indigo – planters in Bihar – had emerged in the vicinity of Pandaul and had been cursed by the government after much effort’. Resentment was growing among the peasants all over Mithila. Bihari Lal says that indigo planting on fertile land was one of the chief reasons for the famine of 1866 and 1873 in Mithila. The government failed to help the distressed masses in the first famine but their role in second famine of 1873 was widely admired. This was also a time when modern English and vernacular education were promoted in the Raj Zamindari but the spread of English education remained very limited. The Court of Wards (1860 - 1879) and then Maharaja Lakshmishwar Singh promoted English in the administration of the Raj. The administration of Raj was organized on modern bureaucratic lines. It was non Maithils, mostly Bengalis and Europeans who were recruited for the higher posts in administration. This was resented by many Maithils.

Bihari Lal also describes the rich class of Maithil society which included many Brahmin, Rajput and Bhumihar Zamindars; but it was Khatris, Agarwals and Shahu who were financially more powerful. He mentions one Rai Nandipat Mahatha of Muzaffarpur who had an annual income of eighty to ninety lakhs rupees; this was much more than the income of Maharaja Lakshmishwar Singh, the biggest Zamindar of the region who had an annual income of around twenty five lakhs rupees. Rai Banwari Lal Sahu Agrawal and Rai Govardhan Lal Bahadur of Darbhanga had annual incomes of seventy five to eighty and forty to forty five lakhs rupees respectively. So to say that it was Maithili Brahmins and Karna Kayasthas alone who were the leaders of Mithila is to miss the point that at least in trade and financial matter other caste groups were in some cases stronger than even the Maharaja of Darbhanga, the biggest Zamindar of the region. But whether these castes also had any influence on social and cultural life of Mithila and in what way they

23 Ibid., p. 44.
24 Ibid., pp. 149 – 160.
25 Ibid., p. 69.
26 Ibid., p. 194.
27 Ibid., p. 195.
contributed in the growth of Maithili culture and language is not discussed in the book. However, it can be argued that in the cultural sphere of life in Mithila, the leaderships of Brahmins and Kayashtas were more or less unchallenged.

The lack of historical accounts was felt by Ras Bihari Lal Das\textsuperscript{28} as well. In the beginning of \textit{Mithila Darpan} he writes ‘there was no historical account available to the people of Mithila which could make them aware of their past glories and conditions of existence. Therefore, Mithila had fallen to a precarious situation’.\textsuperscript{29} Supporting this argument Hetukar Jha writes, ‘there was no historical account of this region available in Hindi or Maithili in the beginning of the twentieth century. Books written before in this context were in Urdu. For all those who could read and write at that time, it must have become very difficult to find out and read \textit{Aina-i-Tirhut} or \textit{Riaz-i-Tirhut}. Under the circumstances, Ras Bihari Lal Das was prompted to write \textit{Mithila Darpan}'.\textsuperscript{30} He wrote \textit{Mithila Darpan} in Hindi, which he calls \textit{rashtra-bhasa} (national language), to make non Maithils aware about the history and culture of Mithila. He calls \textit{Mithila bhasa} (referring to Maithili) \textit{gharaubhasha} (household language). So we can infer that, in comparison to Maithili, it was initially Urdu and then Hindi that was used for serious scholarships in the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. It was only with Parmeshwar Jha’s \textit{Mithila Tatva Vimarsha} that Maithili was being used for history writings. And even this book was published in 1949 which he completed writing in 1919.\textsuperscript{31} Ras Bihari Lal Das also wrote a novel \textit{Sumati}, perhaps first in Maithili, on the request of \textit{Maithil Mahasabha}. The book was published in 1918.\textsuperscript{32}

3.2 Mithila: History and Territory

Through the publication of the history of Mithila there were also many attempts to demarcate the geographical territory of Mithila. But this demarcation of Maithili speaking region remained contentious. In the popular imagination Mithila and Maithili is of relatively recent development. Although the name of Mithila is mentioned in

\begin{itemize}
\item Ibid., p. iv.
\item Ibid.
\item Jha, Govind, ed., \textit{Mithila Tatva Vimarsha by Mahamahopadhyaya Parmeshwara Jha}, Patna, Maithili Akademi, 1977, p. 3.
\item Jha, Hetukar, 2005, p. viii.
\end{itemize}
Puranas, particularly Brihad Vishnu Purana’s chapter two is on Mithila Mahatmya. But its access remained confined to the tiny elite of literate Maithil Brahmins alone. In the history books about the region, administrative letters and papers, inter-cultural interaction Tirhut was more popular a term than Mithila till late nineteenth century.

In Mithila Darpan Ras Bihari Lal Das first gives a Puranic and political account of Mithila and then explains the social and cultural life of twentieth century Mithila. According to him, by the beginning of twentieth century, it was Darbhanga alone which had come to be known as Mithila. Even in Darbhanga, the areas under Madhubani, Khajauli and Benipatti thanas were especially considered to be Mithila. It was Madhubani which was considered the centre of Mithila. However he did mention the six districts – Purnea, Bhagalpur, Munger, Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur and Champaran as constitutive of old Mithila which was under the jurisdiction of government of India.

It was possible that the shrinking space of Mithila was the result of Brahminical orthodoxy and partly the consequence of continuous administrative redistribution of the region. Sarkar Tirhut was ruled by the Maharajas of Khandawala dynasty, but when Britishers got the rights to collect the revenue of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, they appointed Franko Grand as the first collector of Tirhut District in 1782. Because of his corrupt practices he was soon replaced by Robert Bath. Lord Cornwallis first surveyed the district between 1790-1793 and set the revenue to be collected from the region to be Rs. 1661029. Till 1877 district Tirhut comprised of Darbhanga and Muzaffarpur. In 1878 it was divided into the separate districts of Darbhanga and Muzaffarpur. Now even Darbhanga’s old three subdivisions – Darbhanga, Madhubani and Samastipur were constituted as independent districts (1972). These administrative divisions and re-divisions of the region prior to the growth of a common language or any other collective identity obstructed the development of a regional or political consciousness of linguistic unity among the masses.

However, the development and organization of the region on the basis of modern technology began to take place. During the reign of Maharaja Chhatra Singh, the

33 Discussed in the later part of this chapter.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., p. 94.
37 Ibid., p. 106.
system of postal Stump, money order and book post was introduced in 1840 - 1842. There had been four municipalities established in Darbhanga – Darbhanga 1864, Madhubani 1869, Samastipur 1897 and Rosra 1869. Darbhanga during the author’s time has four major hospitals – Darbhanga Raj Hospital, Rai Banwarilal Hospital, Railway’s Hospital, and one animal’s Hospital, besides many clinics. Railways were introduced in the region between Patna to Darbhanga in 1874. From November 1875 rail journey was made regular in the region. Then from February 1877 another railway line was laid between Samasuddinpur (Samastipur?) and Muzaffarpur.

Figure 1: Maithili Speaking Region and Districts of Bihar

[Source: Paul R. Brass, 1974:50]

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38 Ibid., p. 98.
39 Ibid., p. 110.
40 Ibid., p. 109.
41 Jha, Hetukar, 2001, p. 159; although according to Ras Bihari Lal Das the year was 1873; see Jha, Hetukar, 2005, p. 100; but as Bihari Lal ‘Fitrat’’s Aina-i-Tirhut was published much earlier in the year 1883, his account appears to be more correct.
42 Ibid., p. 160.
Together with railways was the introduction of printing technology which helped in connecting different regions of Mithila. There were six presses – *Union Press kathalwari, Darbhanga Raj Press Kaidarabad, Mithila Mihir Press Nai Bajar, Rameshwar Press Kanhaiyalal Barabajar, Chitragupta Press Mirjapur,* and *Mithila Press Madhubani.* However, Ras Bihari Lal Das regretted that despite there were so many presses existing in Mithila only one weekly news paper was published.

George A. Grierson had described the speech area of Maithili to be the entire districts of Darbhanga and Bhagalpur of Bihar in the early twentieth century. In addition, he had enlisted Maithili as a language spoken by the majority of people living in the districts of Muzaffarpur, Monghyr, Purnea and Santhal Parganas. According to the census of India 1901, at the turn of twentieth century Maithili was spoken in the following regions:-

a. All of Darbhanga and Bhagalpur,

b. 6/7th of Muzaffarpur,

c. 1/2 of Monghyr (presently Munger),

d. 2/3rd of Purnea, and

e. 4/5th of the so called ‘Hindi’ speakers (enumerated in census) under the Santhal Parganas.

Paul Brass in his *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* considered Bhagalpur, Purnea, Saharsa, Darbhanga and Muzaffarpur as broadly defining the geographical space of Mithila. In a project report *The Maithili Language Movement in North Bihar: A Sociolinguistic Investigation* conducted in 1985 by Uday Narayan Singh, N. Rajaram and Pradip Kumar Bose, 10 out of 31 districts (of then Bihar) were recommended to be considered as Maithili speech area – Bhagalpur, Katihar, Purnea, Saharsa, Madhubani, Darbhanga, Samastipur, Sitamarhi, Muzaffarpur and Vaishali.

There were different scripts that were in use in Mithila but with the coming of print, gradually it was Devanagari, which was widely adopted by the people. During the time

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43 Jha, Hetukar, 2005, p. 128.
44 Ibid.
45 Now it is divided into three separate district of Darbhanga, Madhubani and Samastipur. Darbhanga and Madhubani are considered to be the main speech area of Maithili. However, its varieties are spoken in different parts of Mithila.
of Ras Bihari Lal Das there were three kinds of scripts that were in use in Mithila – Devanagari, Kaithi and Tirhuta which was quite famous but after coming of the Mughals and the Britishers in the region Persian and English were also used.

There were many attempts to write the history of Mithila in local Maithili language as well. Two important works were produced during this period – Mahamahopadhyaya Parmeshwar Jha’s Mithila Tatva Vimarsha and Mahamahopadhyaya Mukund Jha Bakshi’s Mithila Bhashamaya Itihas. In Mithila Tatva Vimarsha Parmeshwar Jha gave an account of not just Bharat (India) but also of the British Emperor from the viewpoint of a loyalist. He considered Hindi the main language of India which is understood by all more or less. There were many provincial languages too – Bangla, Maithili (Tirhutiya), Nepali, Panjabli, Brajbhasha, Maarbari, Marhatti, Gujarati, Dravir, Telangi, Madrasi, Oriya etc.  

He further writes that Hindi was introduced in the courts of Bihar by Sir Ashley Eden from January 1, 1881. This, he considered, provided a great relief to the people as now they did not need to travel a long distance in search of people with knowledge of Urdu. There was some opposition to this decision as well. These were published in Bihar Bandhu and Masir Bihar weekly journals in Hindi and Urdu respectively in 1880. This showed that Urdu as a court language of Bihar was a burden on the people. So when Hindi was introduced people welcomed that decision. However, Parmeshwar Jha is silent about the claims of Maithili for such a position at least in north Bihar. It indicates that Maithili as a language of courts and administrations was not sufficiently thought about by then. There is no evidence of a demand from below with regards to Maithili. It was still being considered as the language of poetry and of the household. It might be possible that Hindi was welcomed because of the incomprehensibility of Urdu by the majority of population. Secondly, the cultural elite in the region were drawn mainly from Sanskrit scholars. They had knowledge of Devanagari, which was used as the script of Hindi as well. So they might have found it easier to comprehend Hindi than Urdu. Again, when on April 18, 1900 Hindi was introduced along with Urdu in the courts of Samyukt Prant (United Province) by Sir Anthony Macdonald, it was also opposed but the decision prevailed. Parmeshwar Jha commended Nagari Pracharani Sabha, Kashi for the efforts by which Hindi got this elevated position.  

47 Ibid., p. 32. 
48 Ibid., 33.
However, the process of identity formation on the basis of region or language i.e. Mithila or Maithili had not reached a decisive stage. Even when Shyam Narayan Singh published his book\(^49\) in 1922, he used Tirhut to denote the region and did not use Mithila in the title of his book. Singh was born in a village called Ahiyapur in Aurangabad district of Bihar. After obtaining a B. A. degree from Patna College he joined the Bengal Civil Service in 1906. He was appointed to several distinguished positions in the administration of Bihar. He was decorated with many prestigious awards and honours for his service like MBE (Member of British Empire), OBE (Officer British Empire). In the course of his service he came in close contact with Motilal Nehru, Sachidananda Sinha, Rajendra Prasad. It was his connection with the colonial administration and also with many other nationalist leaders and the lack of any adequate work on the history of Tirhut that might have encouraged him to write this history. Although he was familiar about the works like \textit{Riaz-i-Tirhut}, \textit{Aina-i-Tirhut}, and \textit{Mithila Darpan}, he must also have been aware of Mahamahopadhyaya Parmewar Jha’s \textit{Mithila Tatvavimarsha}. Then it is possible that he might have felt it necessary to produce a history of the region in English as well. The book was successful in catching the attention of Indologist like Sylvain Levi and others. The book is extremely rich in terms of subjects it dealt with. Along with the historical narrative of the region it provides accounts of Sanskrit scholars of Mithila, a classification of Maithili literary activities – ancient and modern, Mithila Dialect, Brahman Marriage in Mithila, of the Darbhanga Raja and Bettiah Estate, an account of European factories for indigo and sugar manufacturing together with a map of Tirbhukti (Mithila region was also referred to as Tirbhukti).

Though he mentioned that Mithila was much older in use besides Tirhut and Tirbhukti,\(^50\) he used mostly Tirhut for Mithila. It may be because of the fact that during the Mughal

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{History of Tirhut}, Kolkata, Baptist Mission Press, 1922.
  \item Ibid., p. 3, it is believed that Mithila is named after King Mithi son of Maharaja Nimi and this term is mentioned in many puranic literature like Mithilakhanda of \textit{Brihad Vishnu Purana} and Balmiki’s \textit{Ramayana}. Chanda Jha, attributed as the father of modern Maithili literature, describes the region as: -
  \begin{quote}
    गंगा वहल जनिक दक्षिणदिशिष पूर्व कौतिकिर्मारा।
    पश्चिम वहल भंडरी, उत्तर हिमाल दक्षिण विरुद्धार।
    कलाक दिबुंगु आकृति एवं पूर्व वापसी समाय तत्त्व।
    मध्य वहल स्वयम्भु मि हिमाल कैंप्रति।
  \end{quote}
  [To the south of which flows the river Ganga, to west flows Gandaki, and in the north exist gigantic Himalaya. Where Kamla, Triyuga, Ambrita, Ghemura, Bagwati flow from the length and breadth, and in the middle of which flows the river like Lakshmana, that habitat of learning is Mithila.]
\end{itemize}
period the area was known as Sircar Tirhut and during British period for a long time there was a separate Tirhut collectorate and then a Commissionary. So Tirhut was still fresh in the popular imagination. Further giving Puranic and other oral descriptions about the boundary of the region, he considered the then districts of Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Champaran and parts of the districts of Monghyr, Bhagalpur and Purnea as part of Tirhut. He also included the history of Vaishali in his history of Tirhut.

Despite being till then the most comprehensive book on the history of Mithila there are many surprising discrepancies in the book. First, instead of Mithila, the author preferred to use Tirhut even when at least two prior works Mithila Darpan and Mithila Tatvavimarsa had been already written. Further, journals like Maithil Hitsadhana, Mithila Moda and Mithila Mihir were also published and circulated. In this context the fact that he preferred Tirhut to Mithila is surprising. Secondly, though he described the antiquity of Maithili and demonstrated its richness and closeness with Bengali and even he considered classical Bengali and Maithili to have been originated from some common language, he nevertheless classified Mithila as a dialect instead of seeing it as the language of Mithila. Why did he use dialect for Maithili? Was it to subscribe to the official position on language? Third, the book does give a brief account of Maithili Brahmin marriage ceremony but hardly says anything about other caste groups. This shows the hold of caste consciousness not just among the masses but also among the intellectual elite of the region. Surely the book is comprehensive in many aspects and helped in developing a geographic unity among the inhabitants. But it fell somewhat short of developing a political identity on the basis of Maithili and Mithila which was already in ferment. This was a period when the identity of the region, language and the populace was shifting from Tirhut, Tirhutiya (for the language and population both), to Mithila, Maithili and Maithils respectively.

There is also an interesting story about the classification of the vernacular language as Maithili. Hetukar Jha, in the introduction of Maithili Chrestomathy of George A. Grierson writes that it is to the credit of Sir George A. Grierson that for the first time

51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., pp. 202 – 205.
Maithili was recognized as the language spoken in the region. Grierson is also attributed as the author of the first book of grammar of the Maithili language which was published in 1880 – 81. The language was earlier known as ‘Tirhutia’. Grierson writes in this context that “the earliest reference which I can find to Maithili or Tirhutia is in the preface to the Alphabetum Brammhanicum, published in 1771, ... in the list of languages mentioned on p. viii is ‘Tourutiana’. Colebrook in his famous Essay on the Sanskrit and the Prakrit languages written in the year 1801, is first to describe Maithili as distinct dialect. He points out its affinity with Bengali, discusses the written character used by the Brahmans and adds, ‘As the dialect of Mithila has no extensive use, and does not appear to have been at any time cultivated by elegant poets, it is unnecessary to notice it any further in this place’. Since then, like the other dialects of the Bihar, Maithili remained unnoticed and forgotten, till Mr. Fallon gave a few specimens of it in the Indian Antiquary in the year 1875. In the preceding year, it is true, some examples of the dialect were given in Sir George Campbell’s Specimens, but they are there classed as some of many dialects of Hindi spoken in Bihar. Indeed it was the general belief that, all over Bihar, the language spoken was corrupt form of Hindi, ... matters remained in this state, till the present writer published his Maithili grammar in 1880 – 81” (sick). William Adam, while he was conducting the survey of vernacular schools of Tirhut in the third decade of the nineteenth century, also considered the dialect of Mithila as having a distinct character. He called it Tirhutia, which according to him, was used as a medium of instruction in the village schools of the north eastern part of the district of Tirhut. Buchanan, in his Purnea and Bhagalpur reports of 1809 –10 and 1810 –11 respectively, mentioned the “Des Bhasha of the Maithilas” as a dialect of Hindi. These clearly explain the unfavorable estimation of Maithili by the colonial administrators and scholars. None of them considered it as a language and Maithili was not used by any of them to denote the ‘dialect’ of the region. Though William Adam

54 Ibid., p. ii.
55 Ibid.
reported in his survey that Tirhutia was used as a medium in the village schools, but when the modern education system was introduced in Mithila, it was Hindi which was favored over the regional vernacular. Text books were not locally produced but imported from Allahabad much to the difficulty of pupils and the teacher alike.\(^{59}\) How lightly they took the vernacular of the region is evident from the fact that none of them were aware, as it appears, about the existence of *Mithilakshar*, the Maithili script, also known as *Tirhuta*. Even many Sanskrit manuscripts were written in this script. In matters of languages in north India, colonial administrators too were preoccupied with the Hindi and Urdu debate and they took very little interest in the promotion of other languages of the region including Maithili. The imposition of Hindi through modern school education left very little prospect for the development of local vernaculars. It is to the credit of Grierson that he informed the intellectuals of that time about the rich literary tradition of Maithili. He was quite optimistic about the capacity of Maithili for literary expression.

However, it was not just the colonials who are to be blamed about the misrepresentation of Maithili. Many local scholars also took different stands on the issue of regional vernaculars. Like Bihari Lal ‘Fitrat’ classified it as ‘*Ganwari Hindi*’ and ‘Sanskrit mixed Hindi’,\(^{60}\) Chanda Jha called it ‘*Mithila Bhasha’*,\(^{61}\) Ras Bihari Lal Das also called it ‘*Mithila Bhasha*’ or ‘*Gharao Boli*’,\(^{62}\) Parmeshwar Jha in his *Mithila Tatva Vimarsha* and Mukund Jha Bakshi in his *Mithila Bhashamaya Itihas* did not refer to Maithili as the vernacular of the region,\(^{63}\) Gangapati Singh in an article published in *Mithila Mihir* in 1916 used Mithila Bhasha for the language of the region.\(^{64}\) Shyam Narayan Singh in his celebrated book *History of Tirhut*\(^{65}\) used the word Maithili for the language of Mithila. According to Hetukar Jha it is only after 1922 that Maithili was widely used as the language of Mithila.

\(^{60}\) Jha, Hetukar, 2001, p. 112.
\(^{62}\) Jha, Hetukar, 2005, p. xxv.
\(^{63}\) Jha, Hetukar, 2009, p. iv.
\(^{64}\) ‘Raman’, Ramanand Jha, Personal communication with Hetukar Jha; cited in Jha, Hetkar, 2009, p. iv.
\(^{65}\) Singh, Shyam Narayan, 1922, p. 81&185.
3.3 Darbhanga Raj and the Growth of Maithili

Being the strong hold of Hindu orthodoxy, the Maithili elite found it easier to associate with all India politics. This is reflected in the statements of Secretary of Maithil Mahasabha about Maharaja Lakshmishwar Singh of Darbhanga – “[he] was a great nationalist, one of the founders of the Indian National Congress. Now he worked for national integration. So he removed the claims of Maithili itself and fought for Hindi. We have a script of our own, but when he established a printing press here [in Darbhanga], he established a Hindi printing press. A great contribution to national integration, but a loss for Mithila.”

In 1860 the management of Raj Darbhanga was brought under the supervision of Court of Wards. They introduced Persian as the court language and persuaded Maharaja Lakshmishwar Singh to use Hindi as the language of administration. The officers of the ward assumed that the region was without a linguistic and literary tradition. Hence they used both Hindi and Urdu as the medium of instruction in modern vernacular schools. The problem was compounded by the compliance of the learned elite of the region. It was even worse when Hindi and Urdu medium books were not locally produced but were imported from Allahabad. It was believed that these books were published in Allahabad and written by the same authors. The most important among them were those prepared jointly by Munshi Suraj Mull and Pandit Radha Lal. The teaching of Hindi was a complete failure in this region. As many inspecting officers have pointed out the fact that for most student Hindi would be more convenient to learn than Urdu. So steps should be taken to improve Hindi and not the local vernacular Maithili, they argued. When the attempt to bring Hindi teachers from western U. P. failed, Hindi teaching was left to the local teacher with their little or no knowledge of Hindi.

G. Campbell, the Lieutenant Governor in 1871 favored the vernacular language in the school education. Regarding the use of Hindi language in Bihar schools he stated, “I was astonished on lately visiting Bihar to find this bastard language not only flourishing

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67 There had been many changes introduced in the functioning of Raj administration. From 1860 – 1871 they managed the Darbhanga house with Thededari system, then from 1871 – 1876 through Tahsildari system, and finally through bureaucratic system from 1876 which remained at work even after the court of wards administration was over; see Henningham, Stephen, *A Great Estate and Its Landlords in Colonial India, Darbhanga 1860 – 1942*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 34 – 40.

in its fullest course in our official proceedings but that we are perpetuating it by teaching it? in our schools... I found that in all our so called vernacular schools this monstrous language, if it can be called a language, is being taught by Maulvis instead of vernacular... I am determined to put a stop to the teaching of this language in our schools.”

(While writing this note Campbell according to Jayadev Mishra, had in mind perhaps the use of Urdu in the schools in dearth of Hindi books and Hindi teachers, however what is important here is that he supported the use of vernacular in school education.) Unfortunately this view of Campbell was completely ignored and combined with the indifferent attitude of the regional intelligentsia it left hardly any space for Maithili. Though, they used maithili in their literary productions, they did not act or fight in public, political space for Maithili. However, when Hindi was promoted in the region, ordinary people were not comfortable with it. This was acknowledged by the colonial administrators as well. In 1869, the Inspector of Schools, Tirhut Division, said that ‘most of the teachers, called Hindi teachers, know not even the Barnamala, the first Hindi Book. Most of the Urdu teachers are astonished to hear the words, history, geography, Euclid, algebra, mensuration, roots, idioms, primary and secondary meanings, parsing as they have never heard of them in their life. Some of them have learnt up to 2nd and 3rd class of our old vernacular schools before the time of the present Inspector of Schools when the efficiency of a school consisted in the number of the boys attending it’. It clearly shows how for the colonial administration number mattered even to ascertain the quality of any work and this remains a criterion even today? Again in 1873 A. Keally, the Deputy Collector and Magistrate of Sitamarhi noted in his diary ‘the Brahmins of the village said they had their boys taught Sanskrit at home, but if they had a Pandit who would teach them Sanskrit and Hindee they would send the boys to the schools. Some Brahmins I met at the school said Hindee was of no use to them. One who repeated a ‘shloka’ in Sanskrit admitted he could not write a chitti or his signature in Hindee’. Thus the belief and confidence in the Sanskrit learning, suspicion towards English and feeling of uselessness of Hindi changed very little among the Maithils when many vernacular schools were established in the region. However, when Maharaja Lakshmishwar Singh and his younger brother Maharajadhiraja Rameshwar Singh received modern English education at Benares

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69 Ibid., p. 21.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid., p. 18.
72 Ibid., p. 20.
under the supervision of Court of Wards they promoted English education in Mithila. It was only after the persuasion of Maharaja Lakshmishwar Singh that the parents of Sir Ganganath Jha, a renowned scholar of Sanskrit, allowed him to take up the study of English language. But in the beginning he was taught Sanskrit towards which he remained committed to all his life. He was also put under some Maulvi to learn Persian which he left very soon for want of interest. He translated and interpreted many classical and rare Sanskrit texts into English. He supported the demand for the progress and development of Maithili language and himself wrote in Maithili as well. So while English education and Hindi were making a slow but gradual start in the Maithili speaking region, Sanskrit was still revered and promoted.

A circular of Maharaja Lakshimshwar Singh dated 14\textsuperscript{th} July 1880, did everything required for the promotion of Hindi in the Maithili speaking region. In the circular he ordered –

\begin{quote}
\textit{I have given orders for introduction of Hindi character and language in my office a very long time ago. This, however, cannot take place till our vernacular amlas get thoroughly to understand the character to read and write fluently. This, however, I am sorry to say that none of our amlas know how to do.

I have, therefore, been obliged to pass these orders. That all amla should at once set to work to master the Hindi character and language.

That I give them another three months to learn it. That is, in November they will have to master it thoroughly and to save me from the painful necessity of pensioning or dismissing old hands.}

\textit{Sd/- Lakshmishwar Singh}

14.7.80
\end{quote}

Within three weeks from the publication of this circular, he also announced three prizes of the values of Rs. 200, Rs. 150 and Rs. 150 for works in Hindi language on science, poetry and novel respectively. Also a fourth prize of Rs. 100 was announced for an essay in Hindi’.\textsuperscript{73} Though, he also worked for the promotion of Maithili, this circular worked decisively for the promotion of Hindi in the region. According to Jayadeva Misra, ‘A few persons, however enthusiastic, could not do much in the face of heavy

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., p. 22.
odds in the shape of the recognised elite siding with the officials with the result that Maithili could not occupy its rightful place in curriculum. Maharaja Lakshmishwar Singh who could have raised the status of his mother tongue by promoting its all-round cultivation and by enabling it to find a place in the school curriculum threw away a golden chance. He even drove away Maithili from his office. This did not only render the knowledge of Maithili Language and script unnecessary for those seeking employment in Raj office but what was more important, it made lakhs of Raj tenants regard Maithili as of no consequence”.74

Why Maharaja Lakshmishwar Singh did this? Firstly, it may be said that he did so because he studied at Benares under the guidance of Europeans who knew very little other than Hindi – Urdu debate. Secondly, he knew of Maithili merely as a household language or as a language used in informal conversation among courtiers. Finally, it may be because of his personal involvement in all India politics where Hindi came next to English only. All these factors might have influenced the Maharaja to undertake the task of promoting Hindi. His preference for Hindi over Maithili had a crippling effect on the growth of Maithili as a modern vernacular language.

However, Maharaja Lakshmishwar Singh also promoted Maithili to some extent. He gave patronage to Chanda Jha, Parmeshwar Jha, Harshnath Jha whose contributions to modern Maithili are absolutely critical. He even asked Chanda Jha to translate Vidyapati’s Purush Pariksha (originally in Sanskrit) into Maithili and also to write a Mithila Bhasha Ramayana. He established the Darbhanga Raj Press which published many Maithili books. According to Hetukar Jha, Urdu and Kaithi scripts were in use in the administration of Darbhanga Raj during those days. Maharaja Lakshmishwar Singh preferred Devanagari over Kaithi because Kaithi’s knowledge was limited to one particular community in Mithila – Kayastha. He did not select Mithilakshar over Devanagari as by his time the use of Mithilakshar was limited to a very small circle of Maithil Pandits alone.75

Maithili found patronage of Maharaja Rameshwar Singh, successor of Maharaja Lakshmishwar Singh of Darbhanga Raj. However, the Maharaja also played an active role

74 Ibid., p. 21.
in the promotion of Hindu Dharma at all India level. He was made the life time Chairman of *Sanatan Dharma Mahamandal* and toured extensively all over India for its propagation. He was also trying to revive Sanskrit learning in Mithila. In this connection he established many Sanskrit colleges and Pathshalas – Rameshwar Lata College, Darbhanga, Kapileshwar Sthan Sanskrit School, Lohana Vidyaapeeth, Lakshimpur Sanskrit School, Rajangar Sanskrit School etc. He was more inclined towards the revival of Sanskrit and Vedic learning than in the promotion of Maithili. Nevertheless, he ordered the publication of *Mithila Mihir* and played a critical role in the formation of *Maithil Mahasabha*. So what we find in the efforts of the Darbanga Raj is that when it could have promoted Maithili and had brought it on par with any other modern Indian vernaculars it sided with Hindi and Devnagari. And even when it undertook the task of promoting Maithili it was still trying to revive Sanskrit learning. This effort of the Raj was against the spirit of the time and resulted in the promotion of Hindi at the cost of Maithili even among the Maithili speaking region of the Darbhanga Raj.

During the same period there were many scholars and administrators who championed the cause of Maithili. Important among them were – Harsha Nath Jha, Chanda Jha, Bhanunath Jha, Jivan Jha, Raghunandan Das, Parmeshwar Jha and others. However, it was to the credit of Sir George Grierson, the Sub-divisional Magistrate of Madhubani at that time, that he not only awakened the Maithils about the recognition of their mother tongue as Maithili but also brought it firmly in the philological discourse of his time. Between 1880 and 1884 he published *Maithili Chrestomathy and Vocabulary, Twenty-One Vaishnava hymns* and *Umapati’s Parijata-harana.* Although, there were many poets of Maithili who were also Sanskrit scholars, possessing a long lineage starting from the Jyotirishwar’s *Varn-ratnakar*, it was only during this period that serious attempts were made to study the literature, grammar and vocabulary of Maithili language. Hali Jha while assisting Grierson himself wrote a grammar of Maithili, which is considered as the first Maithili grammar. Grierson also published a grammar of the Maithili language. From this point on many more texts on the grammar and language of Maithili has been published, the latest being *Kalyani Kosha* – a Maithili English dictionary published from the Kalyani foundation at Darbhanga in 2004.

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The works of Grierson provided a kind of impetus for the Maithils who used to consider Maithili as only a language of poetry and drama, while serious literary studies could be conducted in Sanskrit alone. They began to develop a sense that same could be done in their mother tongue Maithili as well. This led to the establishment of Mithila Printing works at Madhubani for the sole purpose of publishing Maithili books.78

3.4 Maithili Journalism, Hindi – Maithili Debate and the Imaginings of Mithila Desha

Journalism in Maithili started with the publication of Mithila Hita Sadhana (1905) from Jaipur and Mithila Moda (1905) from Benares. From 1909 Mithila Mihir was published from Darbhanga. Mithila Mihir (published until 1980s) proved to be the longest circulating magazine in Maithili. All these magazines were bilingual in the beginning. There was space left for both the language - Hindi and Maithili. In the case of Mithila Moda it was trilingual, since it also included Sanskrit. All these papers were committed to social reform and to the eradication of social evils in Mithila, though there were very strong and harsh internal confrontations among them, all of them had orthodox approach.80 For all the social evils of Mithila in their opinion was the result of dharmabrhrstha acharana (irreligious conduct) of the people. In these journals we find Mithila being referred as Desha, Swadesh, Apan Desha, and Mithila Desha. Their use of the term Desha did not refer to India; or produce same imagination as it does today in almost all modern Indian vernaculars. In these Maithili journals the word refers to the more specific geographical location of Mithila with its peculiar and distinct cultural and

79 For details on these confrontations between Mithila Moda and Maithili Hita Sadhana see Mithila Moda, Udgar – 3, Benares, Prabhakari Yantralaya, p. 56; Mithila Moda, Udgar – 5, p. 81 – 84; Mithila Moda, Udgar – 6, pp. 105 – 106; Mithila Moda, Udgar – 11 – 12, pp. 224 – 225; later this confrontation started between Mithila Moda and Mithila Mihir as well. And it was believed that Mithila Mihir in its then format could not serve the interest of Maithil society. There was a proposal for publishing a separate and independent paper for Maithil Mahasabha as well; see Mithila Moda, Udgar – 59, Bhadra, pp. 1 – 5.
80 Here by orthodox approach I mean orthodox Hinduism, particularly Brahminism. It is interesting to note that even the Brahmns of the area was divided and Hierarchised into – Shrotriya, Yogya, Panjibadha and Jaibar or Grihashas. Shrotriyas were the highest in the rank even among the Brahmns. They themselves were again internally divided into Pubaipar and Pachhvairpar (east and west part of the region) where Pachhvairpar were considered inferior to Pubaipar on the basis of their rituals, practices and followings; see Ray, Rabindra, The Indianization of The Maithils, Allahabad, Govind Ballabh Pant Social Science Institute, 1987; Mithila Moda, Udgar – 2 to 59.
social life, its traditions and habits. Thus we find that an imaginary of a Mithila desh nationality was germinating. But before it could take its proper shape the region was brought within the fold of pan Indian nationalism and this process was subsequently marginalized. However, this idea could not be completely erased. It resurfaced repeatedly in different contexts and in different forms during the 1930s, the 1950s, and throughout the post-independence periods in India.

Religion and religiosity were defining features in the imaginary of Mithila in the beginning of the twentieth century. It was thought that Mithila could only progress through the preservation and restoration of the “eternal religion”, that is, Sanatan Dharma. The Bharat Dharma Mahamandal and its branch in Darbhanga Janak Dharma Mandal were supposed to uphold pure Sanatan Dharma. All the prevalent social evils were considered to be the results of irreligiosity or because of the decline of Sanatan Dharma. Their orthodoxy can be understood from the fact that when Dayanand Saraswati led Arya Samaj propagated the widow remarriage in Benares, Maithil Pandits were against that campaign; it even cautioned the Nagari Pracharin Sabha for their support of this programme. Other new revivalist reform movements within Hinduism like Dayananda Aryasamaj, Radhaswami Sect, Kaviraha Sect, Shivanaraiya Sect, and Theosophists as well, were considered as an attack on Sanatana Dharma. Although, there were some followers of the Arya Samaj in Mithila as well but they were negligible in numbers and influence. For instance, Shivashankar Chaudhary of village Chahutawas condemned for being an Arya Samaji and was informed that his Guru Dayananad had been defeated in argument by Hali Jha of village Harinagar.

The Panji system of Mithila created a unique hierarchy in Maithil society. This system divided even the Brahmins in Mithila into high and low supposedly on the basis of purity, although it was believed that this hierarchy was based on the cultivation of knowledge, on Kula (family); purity of conduct and finall on the basis of wealth. Following the religious mode of thinking it was considered that in this age of Kaliyuga wealth had become more important than the first three. So they thought it would be

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81 Mithila Moda, Udgar – 5, Magh Purnima, p. 93.
82 Mithila Moda, Udgar – 6, Paush Purnima, p. 114.
84 Ibid., pp. 66 – 67.
appropriate to abandon the whole system and treat everybody equally. Its maintenance
in their own time was considered even more difficult since English rulers gave equal
consideration to all people. Though, the system in itself was considered valuable, its
observance in the modern context was thought to be difficult.\textsuperscript{85} This argument indicates
a move towards social reform that concerned a single caste and the problems of other
caste groups were hardly mentioned. Besides, the literate sections of Maithils were
divided into two groups. They were divided between those knowledgeable in Sanskrit;
were larger in numbers although unaware of modern social norms and emphasized the
importance of \textit{Sadachar} (rightful conduct) and the English educated, limited in their
numbers. The latter were aware of modern laws and regulations. They were well placed
in administration and economically better off. But they used to take \textit{Sadachar} very
lightly.\textsuperscript{86} Those who were educated in Sanskrit looked at everything modern with
suspicion – while modern English educated were not only in few numbers but were
forced to follow \textit{Sadachar} even if they did not fully subscribe to it.

For the preservation of \textit{Sanatandharma}, the \textit{Shri Janak Mandal} was established in
Mithila. It was closely associated with the \textit{Bharat Dharma Mahamandal} and Maharaja
Rameshwar Singh was the chairman of both organizations. It was surprising that the
mouth-piece of these institutions ‘\textit{Nigamagamchandrika}’ was published in Bangla,
Gujarati and many other provincial language even in the atinindya Urdu but not in the
language of the Chairman i. e. in Maithili. In an issue of \textit{Mithila Moda} it was expressed
that though it was not desirable that Mithilakshar should be used in place of Devakshar.
But it was desirable that religious texts and socially relevant essays should be published
regularly in Maithili to make the ordinary Maithils aware about the condition of Mithila
and the relevance of contemporary education.\textsuperscript{87}

There were efforts to reform the society as well. The practice of \textit{Bikaua Vivah}\textsuperscript{88} and \textit{Jati}
and daughters selling among Maithils were criticised. And at times the progress of
one’s caste (\textit{Jatonnati}) was equated with the progress of society and of the \textit{Desha} as
well.\textsuperscript{89} Attempts were made to mobilise all the caste groups in Mithila as well, like,

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Mithila Moda}, Udgar – 6, Paush Purnima, pp. 98 – 99.
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Mithila Moda}, Udgar – 49, Kartika, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Mithila Moda}, Udgar – 17-19, Magh Purnima, pp. 380 – 381.
\textsuperscript{88} In this marriage Brahmins of the lower ranks used to pay money in the marriage of their daughters
to the Brahmins of higher ranks to improve their social status.
\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Mithila Moda}, Udgar – 9 & 10, Chaitra, Vaisakha Purnima, pp. 159 – 164.
there was an attempt to establish one residential *Janaknandini Mahavidyalaya* for the students of all castes. For the establishment of this institution twenty eight thousand signatures in its support were collected. All caste groups were invited to help in this cause – Ojha, Upadhyaya, Mishra, Thakur, Singh, Rai, Das, Mandal, Raut.⁹⁰ To launch this signature campaign a request was made that those who would send a thousand signatures with their consent letter would be given Rs. 5 as a reward together with a pair of Dhotis.⁹¹ Another instance of non Brahmins joining the cause of Maithili is provided by an essay of Shri Shrimant Narayan (Gopavanshiya, a non Brahmin) of Khirahari in Bhagalpur District. In this essay he expressed his gratitude for the publication of *Mithila Moda* and *Mithila Mihir*, while regretting that Maithili’s progress was fraught. He requested educated Maithils to take the cause of their mother tongue more seriously as Mithila’s progress was impossible without the progress of Maithili. ⁹² Modern professionals, particularly *Vakeels* and *Mukhtars* were looked at with contempt. It was said that instead of unity they amplified disagreements and lies.⁹³

*Mithila Bhasha* was considered an indispensable tool for the progress of Mithila. With the introduction and growth of printing in the region, the publication of journals and magazines in Maithili became very popular. *Maithil Hit Sadhana* was published from Jaipur in 1905. Vidyavachaspati Madhusudan Jha and the Chief Justice of the Albar State, Pandit Rambhadra Jha, were respectively the proprietor and the editor of the journal. The approach towards this publication is captured in a *pada* of Kavishwar Chanda Jha. When his opinion was sought for the publication of *Maithil Hit Sadhana*, he expressed it thus –

| लिखित जाय मिथिला इतिहास || नाहि हो तहिमे शिखिल प्रयास ||
| विषय विशेष हमूँ लिखि देव || सपनहूँ एक टका नाहि लेब ||
| गुण रत्नकर धिक जयपूर || आयह गि नाहि एको कूर ||
| पणिक तम्भ नियत निवास || बहुत पड़त नाहि अनकर आस ||
| पत्र बहुतजन हर्षित लेत || नियामित मूल्य पूँव देय देत ||
| मासिक मिथिला पत्र प्रचार || मैथिला माण्ड विहित विचार ||
| सभ तकिहत अहि पत्रक बाट || पीपक दिनस रहत अछे खीट ||
| नमस्कार लिखिइत छधि चन्द || सत्वर लिखि कुशल आन्द || ⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 7 – 8.
⁹³ *Mithila Moda*, Udgar – 59, Bhadra, p. 11.
[History of Mithila should be written, there should not be any indolence in that.
On particular subject even I will write, shall never take a penny for that even in
my dream.
Jayapur as a city is equal to jewel in virtue, people here are neither obstinate,
nor cruel nor unfortunate.
It is an eternal home of Pandits and gentlemen, there will be no need of others.
Many people will purchase the paper cheerfully; they will pay the price in
advance.
There should be Promotion of monthly Maithili paper, ideas weaved in
Maithili language.
Everyone is waiting for the paper; the days of Pausha are ideal for the
publication.
Greetings from Chandra; please write back about your wellbeing.]

Maithil Hit Sadhana had a serious approach towards Maithili journalism. It was declared
in the beginning –

जनिका सबहीक गल्ला–हाई–ही, लल्लो वच्चो, गीत–कवितक अतिरिक्त गम्भीर लेख सबहीक रसात्वादक
योग्यता नहीं छैनि लादुश व्यक्तक ग्राहक नहीं रहलारां हिंदा साधनक कीनोटा बुटि नहीं।

[Those who are not eligible to comprehend serious essays except cheap,
buttering songs, Hitsadhan would not face any difficulties in losing such
subscribers.]

It took the task of providing elementary books in Maithili for all branches of learning –
Grammar, Hygiene, Philosophy, Geography, Mathematics, History, Poetry and Music.
The other ambitious task that it undertook was the improvement of Mithila through
modern education. Hindi was not excluded in this journal and interestingly it was also
used as a medium to teach Maithili to those who went outside Mithila – Agra, Ajmer,
Jhansi, Aligadh, Ferojabad, Mathura – and settled there. 
Maithil Hit Sadhana was very
cautious about writing style. It followed a particular format and paved the way for the
standardization of Maithili. A new culture of discussion and debate through print was
established in Maithili language. Although, it was a short lived journal, often

95 Maithili Sahityak Ruprekha, Part – 2, Patna, Chetna Samiti, p. 81; cited in ‘Amar’, Chandranath
Mishra, Maithili Patrakaritak Itihas, Patna, Maithili Akademi, 1981, p. 27.
96 Ibid., p. 34.
contemptuously called *Maithil Pandit Hit Sadhana*, it nevertheless set a trend for the other magazines that followed it, such as *Mithila Moda* and *Mithila Mihir*.

Similarly *Mithila Moda* claimed that through its publication, there was a chance for *Desha Sudhar* (reform of the country). The respected members of Mithila (referred to as Shreeman and who were mostly wealthy landlords) were reminded of their duty to contribute generously for the publications in the Maithili. The writers and editors themselves were doing this job of promoting Maithili over and above their usual work of teaching and learning. But their effort would be insufficient unless wealthy Maithils contributed to the cause.

The language of the region was referred to as *Mithila Bhasha* in *Mithila Moda*. Its main objective was to refine and promote the mother tongue of all Maithils, by which they meant all the inhabitants of Mithila:

> हमाही नहीं, किन्तु समाही मैथिल्लन्द को धन्यवाद देव उठित धिक जै हेतु समाही मैथिल क अधिक समपृण मिथिला — निवासी क मूतःभाषा क संशोधन ओ प्रवाह करवा मध्य उक्त महानुभाव लोकान गत्नुभूत्सर प्रवृत्त भेत छायि।

[It is not my duty alone but the responsibility of whole Maithil fraternity to thank these gentlemen who are compassionately committed to amend and promote the mother tongue of all Maithils that is all the inhabitants of Mithila.]

But readership of these periodicals was very limited. Almost all the editors and publishers faced this crisis and most of them stopped publications due to the insufficient number of subscribers. It also appears that the uppermost section of the society i.e. *Zamindars* including the Maharaja of Darbhanga, was more concerned with Indian politics and only reluctantly responded to the demands of the Maithili litterateurs.

Parmeshwar Sharma, Head Librarian, *Rajakiya Sanskrit Library*, Darbhanga praised the efforts of *Mithila Moda* and made some suggestions to improve the writing style of Maithili. For this he felt the need of writing some novels in Maithili. He believed that Hindi had also faced this problem but within thirty years it had improved a lot. But in

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97 Ibid.
the case of Maithili it would be difficult as it faced too much antagonism. So, according to him, some knowledgeable people should initially write novels in Maithili in their own styles and this would gradually produce a standard format of writing in Maithili. He believed that the way Maithili was spoken and written in his times was different from the earlier times. And there was also a difference between the language of the gentle villagers and others which also needed to be taken into account.\textsuperscript{100}

Though, the circulation of magazines and newspapers was limited, three magazines were published – \textit{Mithila Hitsikhsa} from Muniyari, \textit{Tirhut Akhabar} from Muzaffarpur, and \textit{Mithila Mihir} from Darbhanga.\textsuperscript{101} Besides \textit{Mithila Moda} and \textit{Maithil Hitasadhana}, \textit{Mithila Hitsiksha} was published from Khadagvivas Press, Bankipur and distributed free of cost. Its language was Hindi. This effort was commended by \textit{Mithila Moda} as it sowed the seed for Hindi as a public language in Mithila.\textsuperscript{102} But it also criticised \textit{Hitsiksha} for using Hindi. It said:

\begin{quote}
[In the book since every described subject is related to Maithil society what was the need for using Nagari (Hindi) at the cost of Maithili? It is hard to comprehend. In all the provinces, for instance in Bengali high quality texts have been published and are still being published yet Maithils feel ashamed and incapable to use their own mother tongue Maithili (which is the mother of Bangbhasha and Nebar language of Nepal) even in discussing their own internal matters (for which provincial language is mostly required)? Tell me and think what could be more unfortunate than this? ]
\end{quote}

Thus we find that although there was no strong opposition against Hindi, people were aware about its implications and use. In \textit{Bihar Bandhu} (June 12, 1909), Babu

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\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Mithila Moda}, Udgar – 11 – 12, Jyestha, Ashadh, pp. 272 – 273.
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\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., p. 135.
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Jayanarayan Lal of Ara had criticised *Mithila Mihir* and wrote of Maithili as an oral language. It was challenged by *Mithila Moda*. To propagate Hindi in Mithila some space was left for Hindi as well in *Mithila Moda* which was mostly in *Mithila-Bhasha*. But such attempts by Hindi journal like *Bihar Bandhu* infuriated many Maithils. It was thus claimed: - हम लोग अभी ‘नागरी’ सागरी कुछ नहीं चुनेंगे और न देखेंगे।"104

[At present we will not hear at or look at ‘Nagari’ or Sagari (sick)]

Again, at a *Prantiya Sabha* (provincial conference) of the *Maithil Mahasabha* at Kashi, Pt. Trilochan Jha reasserted that though Hindi should be adopted, Maithili should be used to discuss social issues (*Samajik Bhasha*).105 It shows the aspirations of Maithili speakers, although they did not oppose Hindi completely but they were against the use of Hindi in discussing the social issues of Mithila. In this way they also contested the idea of Maithili as the household language of the womenfolk. The assertion of Maithili identity was becoming more and more vocal. However, Hindi was not completely excluded. There are some essays in *Mithila Moda* in which Maithili and Hindi are both used. Interestingly, the writers and his protagonists in these essays, who were the officials of Raj Darbhanga, used Hindi - although many other Sanskrit Pandits used Maithili.106 Babu Brajnandan Sahay of Ara wrote a biography of Vidyapati in Hindi which shed some light on the many kings of Mithila and their dynasties. This book was available with the manager of *Nagari Pracharani Sabha*, Ara.107 Though this shows the attempts by the Hindi supporters to replace Maithili with Hindi, such attempt was welcomed by the Maithils.108

In an essay in *Mithila Moda*109 Shri Baidyanath Msihra of Basaith who was living in Kanpur at that time, had downgraded the status of Maithili. He mentioned about the 175 spoken languages in India of which only 27 were considered as the major languages in which Maithili was ranked in the last. For him the reasons for this were lack of any grammar, the existence of only a few numbers of magazines with limited circulation.

108 Ibid.
He emphasized the point that the progress of language and *Desha* was same. When language acquires the capacity to describe many new and diverse things not comprehended so far, it reflects the progress of the country as well. According to him a well developed language could help in many ways to do things in a better and profitable ways; for instance, the cultivations of crops could be more profitable for the farmers if scientific knowledge about them was available in their own language. The growth of one’s own language and publications would open up knowledge about other societies, their culture, places, markets etc, which they could use for their own benefits.\(^{110}\) So standardization of their local language was considered to be extremely useful in the social, cultural and economic spheres of life of the speakers. There were attempts to develop a standard form of Maithili as well that would cut across the caste and region based varieties of Maithili. There were some queries regarding correct use of the words like आहन (ahan) and the editor had asked the contributors about the proper method of writing they should follow.\(^{111}\) It was believed that reason for the marginalization of Maithili was due to lack of a grammar. It is reported that Pandit Baidyanath Mishra of Basaith prepared a small *Mithila Bhasha* grammar.\(^{112}\)

There were many modern educated persons in Mithila who were found inept when it came to speaking and writing correct Maithili. It was said that *Maithil Samaj* could develop only when all the speeches given at *Maithil Mahasabha* were delivered in *Mithila Bhasha*. Hindi supporters were not expected to oppose this. The example of Bengali was given in which not only literature but even history and other texts had been prepared. Many Maithils were now putting in effort to do the same for Maithili. They also believed that without the progress of their mother tongue, social reforms would never be successful. Further, to develop the language, it was deemed necessary to write history texts in Maithili. They felt that Maithili literatures needed to be developed and this should not be considered as a boycott of Hindi. Even the Maharaja of Darbhanga was requested to change *Mithila Mihir* from a Hindi paper with very little space for Maithili, to a *Mithila Bhasha* paper, the reason being there were so many Hindi journals

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\(^{110}\) Ibid.


\(^{112}\) *Mithila Moda*, Udgar – 54, Chaitra, p. 3.
and magazines already in existence but very few in Maithili.\footnote{Mithila Moda, Udgar – 56, Jyestha, pp. 9 – 11.} The contestation between Hindi and Maithili were also reflected in some journals. The Bharati, a Hindi journal published from Ara wrote the following about Maithili –

[Maithils have followed a strange path to empower themselves...this time in the Maithil Conference a resolution has been passed with regards to publication of books in Maithil-Bhasha in order to promote education among the Maithils. More than half of the fourth issue of ‘Mithila Mihir’ is filled with Maithil-Bhasha. In this condition it is not inappropriate to say that Maithils are supporting other Maithils from the backdoor. Looking at the kind of Maithili written in Mithila Mihir any knowledgeable person may believe that it is not possible to promote education in this language. Because except verbs and syntax it is Hindi only. Promoting education in this language among the Maithils is merely day dreaming.]

This journal - Bharati - was criticised not only because of its opposition to Maithili but also for its poor Hindi. The Maithili protagonists believed that there were many languages in India and all of them should flourish. So, Hindi supporters were requested not to object publications in Maithili at least for five seven years, if they want the Maithils to support the expansion of Hindi. The Bihar Bandhu, regarded as an older brother (बुढ़ा भाई) was asked by the Maithili speakers and supporters to take these considerations seriously.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 11 – 12.}

Maithil writers, who were living in Mithila, were requested to write in Maithili instead of Hindi. The supporters of Maithili expressed that theirs’ should not be considered as an anti Hindi stand, but as the acceptance of Hindi with the preservation of the mother

\footnote{Ibid., pp. 11 – 13.}
tongue *Mithila Bhasha*. There were few Maithils who believed that the knowledge of Hindi was necessary for Maithils. It was believed that with the knowledge of Hindi among the Maithils; government officials could also understand the exact condition of Mithila.

Against all these beliefs Maithili supporters expressed this view that if this support for Hindi was at the cost of mother tongue *Mithila Bhasha*, then desired social progress might never be achieved. Second, if government officers were to make aware of Mithila’s condition than why was English not recommended for use? *Mithila Mihir* was rebuked for its reasoning that because of the subscriber’s preference for Hindi it would be difficult to publish it as a Maithili paper. It was mentioned that this argument was wrong, as at the most there were not more than 40 to 50 subscribers of Hindi; but because of them, Hindi was imposed on 200 – 250 subscribers who would actually prefer Maithili.\(^{116}\) The growing cleavage between supporters of Hindi and Maithili got wide coverage in *Mithila Moda*. In the beginning, space was given to Hindi, but this was gradually reduced and later only Maithili was preferred and contributors were asked to send their essays in *Mithila Bhasha* only.\(^{117}\)

Through *Mithila Moda* modern education was not only supported but it was expressed that without its growth, Mithila would not progress. Sanskrit education was equally promoted. They wanted the students not to waste time in *Shastrartha* (oral debates and discussion which had lost its intellectual fineness and had been reduced to using derogatory remarks against each other) but to learn correct writing, reading and speaking in Sanskrit. And it was expressed that pupils should learn to translate it into other languages.\(^{118}\) It was mentioned that the *desha* condition could not be improved without education which was also the main occupation of Maithils and the basis of their survival.\(^{119}\) The decline of the *pathshala* system of education in which all the *shastras* and *puranas* were taught (and for which some villages were renowned such as Ranti, Mangarauni, Koilakh), in Mithila was also pointed out.\(^{120}\) It led to the decline of Sanskrit education while the modern system of education was still not adequately

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\(^{118}\) *Mithila Moda*, Udgar – 8, Falgun Purnima, pp. 136 – 137.
\(^{119}\) Ibid.
\(^{120}\) *Mithila Moda*, Udgar – 9 – 10, Chaitra and Vaisakha Purnima, pp. 159 – 160.
accepted by the society. Examples of the failure to revive Sanskrit pathshalas were
given. Shri Kaushlendra Chaudhary of Koilakh established a pathsala in his village. Its
contributions were admired. Bihar Bandhu, a Hindi magazine published from Patna,
editor of Mithila Moda called it Sahayogi (a colleague) and prayed for its stability and
progress. But in the neighbourhood it was not taken seriously. Instead when he sought
the support of locals and went to Sabhagachhi\(^{121}\) in Saurath for this purpose, he was
criticized and ridiculed.\(^{122}\)

Although, there were growing discontent between the supporters of Hindi and Maithili
Bihar Bandhu was called Sahayogi (colleague) by Mithila Moda. It shows the attitude
of Maithili towards Hindi. But when it started to support Hindi and wanted to impose it
upon the Maithils, it was fiercely opposed –

\[\text{...एना झोकने ‘हिंदी’ तथा ‘नागरी’ चले त चला लिखा। अपने दशा के स्मरण करूँ, अस्तु जे हो, किन्तु हम येह कहब जे गावत मातृभाषा नहीं स्थिर होएत ओं ‘बालशिक्षा’ मातृभाषा में नहीं होएत तावत घोलघाल करैत कहब किन्तु नहीं सुनब...हम भिडितराविावितज्ञतामुदाय क मातृभाषा ‘हिंदी’ नहीं सिक ठी।}\(^{123}\)

[…if through imposition ‘Hindi’ and ‘Nagari’ could be expanded then by
all means follow it. Remember your condition, whatever may come, but
we can only say that as long as mother tongue is not stabilized and
‘children-education’ is not imparted in mother tongue till then we will not
hear anything no matter how much distractions you bring.....Hindi is not
the mother tongue of our people of Mithila desa.]

The status of Maithili and the approach towards education of the Maithils and its
overlap with caste consciousness can be understood from an article of Kaliprasad Singh
Cahudhary of Hasua which was written in Hindi.\(^{124}\) In this article he welcomed the
decision of establishing a university in Kashi – which was considered the centre of
education for the Maithils. He expressed his anguish over the lack of contemporary
education in Mithila. He argued that without it Mithila was decaying day by day.

\(^{121}\) There used to be an annual faire called Sabhagachhee in Mithila of the bridegrooms in which most
of the marriages were solemnized.


\(^{123}\) Mithila Moda, Udgar – 59, Bhadra, pp. 22 – 23.

\(^{124}\) ‘Vishwavidyalay aur Darbhanga Naresh Apekshit Kartabya’ in Mithila Moda, Udgar 11 – 12,
Sanskrit education in Mithila, if at all it had improved, was because of college education. But it had become almost impossible for the Maithils to pay the fees of the college over and above the expenses of boarding, which was substantially high. So he requested the Maharaja of Darbhanga to establish a Boarding house only for Maithil students. But he cautioned that Maithils would only like to stay in the Boarding house when a Pachak (cook) which should be Panjibadh (someone whose genealogy is maintained through the Panjis, i.e. upper castes Brahmins) were also recruited. It was not possible for Maithils to stay and eat in any ordinary Boarding house. To restrict the free movement of the students and look after their conduct, the recruitment of a noble and educated Maithil were also desired. Thus the caste consciousness remained the main criterion in their approach to education, particularly the attitude of that of the upper castes Brahmins (These demands were meant for one particular caste only – Maithil Brahmins).

The approach towards education was such that it was said that every year there were around ten students who used to take admissions in school, while there were eight to nine students who used to drop out of school without completing their education. It was the result of the pauperisation of the masses. Still, modern education was considered inevitable for the social and economic progress of Mithila. In this regard the efforts of the government were commended for opening up a high school (Watson) at Madhubani. The Darbhanga Raj too was urged to make provision for necessary and urgent compulsory and free education. And it was demanded that for technical knowledge a technical college should also be opened.

For proper education, children’s education was given the most importance. It was considered that pauranic education was now in decline and was fruitless. But modern education had not been properly adopted. There were very few – 15 to 20 Maithil students who had passed the B.A. course but they could not write letters in any other language besides English. The lack of facilities for children education in their mother tongue was considered main reason for this. In the market there was a plethora of Hindi books, but these were considered as copies of western children education books, which

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would not be suitable for the Maithil boys. Hence, it was important to impart primary education to them through *Mithila Bhasha*. Later they could learn other languages and disciplines without difficulty.¹²⁷

Women’s education was also considered necessary if Mithila had to progress. But in the beginning there were strong reactions and objections to it. Women’s education was considered inappropriate and unwanted and could lead to the degeneration of society. It was believed that women of high families got the required training and education within their family. So they did not need to go to school and their best place was household.¹²⁸ Against these remarks in the same issue of *Mithila Moda* there is a letter by one Hemvati Devi which describes the degrading status of women within the household. It not only justifies women education but reflects upon many social evils as well –

> ऐ बांधु! ई “गृह देवी” कै, देत “दरिद्रा” --सुप बनाय।।
> “नारी–नीति” शिक्षा–प्रचार विनु, हे अति ई अन्ध्य समुदाय।।
> एक विवाह कमल नहीं समरे, तब न करे छी बहुत विवाह।।
> ऐहि मैं सुख अवस्था! ऐतेहा, देखिँ जुड़ायब “सीतिनि–ढाह”।।
> पैर घरे छी विनती है कै, ल्यागू, ई सम शापव कृषित।।
> दया कनु दुखिया अवल दिशि, कनु सुधार समाज क नीति।।¹²⁹

*O Babu, this household goddess has been made penniless.*

Due to lack of promotion for female education policy, there is a great injustice to this community.

When there is difficulty in smoothly running a marriage, you go for multiple marriages.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 100, this led to attack and counter attack in subsequent issues of *Mithila Moda* among those who were in the support of women education and those who were against it. There were many Pandits who reacted very harshly against women education. But gradually it was considered that women education was desirable and necessary. If so early a debate on modern education and particularly women education started in Mithila then what was the reason for the people to not to take the matter of education particularly women education seriously. Was it in any way connected to suppression of mother tongue Maithili? What would have been the state of education especially of women education in the region if it was promoted in Maithili?: see, *Mithila Moda*, Udgar – 34, Shrawan, p. 200 – 204; *Mithila Moda*, Udgar – 35, Bhadrapad, pp. 236 – 238; *Mithila Moda*, Udgar – 36, Ashwin, pp. 251 – 258; *Mithila Moda*, Udgar – 37, Kartik, pp. 22 – 24; *Mithila Moda*, Udgar – 38, Magh, pp. 7 – 16; *Mithila Moda*, Udgar – 43, Vaisakh, pp. 13 – 16; *Mithila Moda*, Udgar – 45 – 46, Ashadh – Shrawan, pp. 17 – 18.
In this, only happiness lies in looking at the envy between wives. 

I bow to you and pray that abandon these ill practices,

Be kind to helpless poor women, and reform the norms of society.]

All these debates on women education clearly show the orthodox attitude of the Maithils. But, such questions were raised and debated in the first and second decades of the twentieth century, also reflects the orientation of Maithili society toward reform. The support for women education was growing and it is reported that a book for women was published by Shri Ramchandra Thakur of Aligadh from Venkateshwar Press, Bombay.\(^{130}\)

There were reactions against the publication of *Mithila Moda*. Its moral preaching (*neeti sambandhi upadesh*) was regarded as unnecessary. The readers of the journal asked - was there any want of it in Mithila? How could this publication bring progress? In response to these questions the editor of the journal said that it was possible through reading the paper to know the evils that had plagued Mithila. And what had divided the same Desha (country), same Praganna (province), same village, same caste, and even the same household.\(^{131}\) *Mithila Moda* would make the people aware of these evils and how to overcome them, to remove divisive practices and to bring progress of the self and community. The ideal of *Deshonnati* (progress of the country) was repeatedly invoked in the many issues of *Mithila Moda*. And it was distinguished from the progress of one’s village, self, caste: - देशोन्नतिक अर्थ ग्रामोन्नति तैं नहिं, व्यक्ति:नहिं, जाति:नहिं, केवल देश अथवा मिथिला—देश, तकर उन्नति = बाढ़े एतना....\(^{132}\)

[Development of the country does not mean development of village, nor of a person, nor of a caste, but only of Desha that means Mithila Desha and its development, that’s all...] 

For the progress of *Desha* (referred to Mithila) it was considered that there was a need for human effort. Without such effort, to think of *Deshonnati* alone was merely a dream. Financial and other contributions from the Maharaja of Darbhanga and other

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\(^{131}\) *Mithila Moda*, Udgar – 4, Kartika Purnima, pp. 63 – 64.

\(^{132}\) *Mithila Moda*, Udgar – 5, Magh Purnima, p. 76.
leaders and scholars of the society were solicited. But it appears that this met with very little success. In almost every issue editors made a request for contributions particularly from the Maharaja of Darbhanga, who used to pay Rs. 100 annually for the publication of *Mithila Moda*. Even after the completion of one year, the total number of subscribed readers of the magazine remained at less than fifty. It was believed that even if each village in Mithila subscribed to at least one copy of the magazine, the total number of the subscription could reach a thousand easily and this would have a positive impact on society. An appeal was also made to the Maharaja of Darbhanga to provide the requisite leadership in social reforms. He alone was considered suitable. There were such kinds of appeal in almost all the issues of *Mithila Moda*. Yadunath Jha ‘Yaduwar’ of Muraho once urged him through a song:

हेत्रू मिधिलादिशि मिधिलेा !
सब देश क नर पौलक उन्नति कय प्रबन्ध शुभदेश !
मिधिला दिन दिन अबनत होइछ मेधिल जन को क्लेश !
भाषा विग्रहि विग्रहि गेल आछि प्रभु! पतियार क सनिवेश !
जे नाहि कहिए छल एहि शल मे स होइछ नित वेश !
चाहि रामित-प्रबन्ध स्थापित तिरहुति विच सब गाम !
पुनि विद्यालय चाषा शास्त्र क दिन बनाय सब नाम !
मिधिला-मोद और हिताधिक भल प्रवरल दुहुँ पत्र !
दुहुँ पर कृष्णकोर प्रभु राखियि जानि अन्य सर्वत्र !
औरोशक्षकल्लहांदूर मिधिलादिशि गुणवान !
विनय सुनायि प्रभु जानि अन्य जन 'वदुवर' करधि बखान।।

[O Mithilesh! Look at Mithila,
The people of all other country have developed by managing their beloved country.
But Mithila is declining day by day and it makes Maithils suffer,
O lord! Language has perverted, so perverted is the culture of students,
Things are happening very often which never used to take place,
There is a need for the management of committees in all the villages of Tirhut, Reopen the schools of all the four shastras everywhere,
*Mithila Moda* and Hitsadhan are two well circulating paper,

133 *Mithila Moda*, Udgar – 8, Falgun Purnima, p. 139 – 141.
O Lord! Look after them by embracing them as your own,
Shri Rameshwar Singh Bahadur is a great king of Mithila,
O lord! Listen to the prayer of ‘Yaduwar’ considering him your own people.]

The Maharaja was requested to protect the interests of all Maithils and not just the Shrotriya.\textsuperscript{137} This explains that till then there was not a sufficiently strong middle class in Mithila to undertake the responsibility of social reforms. Although, there were debates on social reforms, education, religious reforms, women education, and moral education, this took place among the Sanskrit Pandits and their debates had very limited or no access to the day to day lives of all the Maithils.

In their discourse on social reform one can find a division between those who wanted to revive the old and thoroughly followed the traditional ‘orthodox’ conduct (Prachin Paripati) and others who were relatively few in numbers and who wanted to introduce changes in the modes of conduct and to learn modern ways (Naveen Paripati). The later were a tiny voice and were not totally opposed to traditional ‘orthodox’ conducts. On the contrary they wanted to preserve Maithil distinctiveness without missing the fruits of modern way of life.\textsuperscript{138}

With regards to language use, Hindi (referred to as Nagari in Mithila Moda) was considered appropriate for par-desha bhasha (foreign language), popular throughout the country. But within one’s own Desha Maithili must be used and promoted.\textsuperscript{139} There were resentments against the recruitment of English educated non Maithils in the service of Darbhanga Raj. The supporters of Maithili claimed that earlier almost all the staff were Maithils and certainly all the superior positions were held by them. But now, due to the lack of English education among the Maithils, and the bureaucratic system of the Raj, all the superior positions were held by the Europeans, Bengali and other non-Maithils. To overcome this situation they requested that proper arrangement should be put in place for the greater participation of Maithils in the administration of the Darbhanga Raj. Second, there were also demands of removing untouchability, though

\textsuperscript{137} Mithila Moda, Udgar – 13 – 14, Shrawan, Bhadra Purnima, pp. 242 – 251.
\textsuperscript{139} Mithila Moda, Udgar – 11 – 12, Jyestha, Ashadha, pp. 67 – 70
in defensive and cautious tone. So there was also a gradual move to extend the identity of Maithil to include other caste groups within its fold as well. But such attempts were so defensive and weak in the face of all pervasive orthodoxy that it met with very little success.

### 3.5 Maithili Organisations and Modern Associations in Mithila

The *Mithila-Anusandhan-Samiti* is considered the first modern organisation for the development of Mithila and Maithili. An advertisement tells us about the existence of the Mithila Research Society (*Mithila Tatva Vimarshini Sabha*). According to Chandranath Mishra ‘Amar’ it was established in 1905. The main objectives of this society were –

1. Promotion of teaching and learning of Sanskrit,
2. Research and printing of popular texts of Mithila written by Maithils or non-Maithils
3. Writing the exact (*यथार्थ*; *र्यथार्थ*) history of Mithila *Desha*, Maithil scholars and other personalities
4. Investigation and restoration of historically important places of Mithila
5. Advancement in other disciplines as well;

It might be possible that Parmeshwar Jha in writing his book *Mithila Tatva Vimarsha* might have taken the help of this *Sabha*. However this *Sabha* became inactive shortly and sarcastically it was called *Murda Club*. Even the Maithili works of Chanda Jha was made a mockery of by the Pandits (Sanskrit Scholars) in Mithila. However, this so-called *Murda Club* made a beginning in the process of the promotion of Maithili language, culture and history. This name was so fascinating that when Ramanath Jha started an organization in 1939 for the cause of Maithili he also called that *Murda Club*.

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142 ‘Amar’, Chandranath Mishra. 1981, p. 43 The custodians of this society were Maharaja Rameshwar Singh and Justice Babu Shardacharan Mitra of Kolkata High court and the members were – Babu Tulapati Singh, Vindhyanath Jha, Dr. Ganganath Jha, Vindheshwari Prasad Singh, Shri Kalibabu Doctor, Mahamahopadhyaya Pandit Chitrakar Mishra, Kavishwar Pandit Shri Chanda Jha, Vaiyakaran Keshari Pandit Shri Parmeshwar Jha etc.
Maithil students also embarked on this new spirit of Mithila. Around 1910, many Maithil students of Tejnarayan Jubilee College, Collegiate School, Zila School, Mission School, Marwari-Sanskrit Pathshala and many other schools formed The Matihil Student's Association (मथिल-छात्र-समिति)\(^{144}\) in Bhagalpur. The main objectives of the Association were –

a. develop fraternity among the Maithil Students

b. social, religious, and intellectual progress

c. promotion of Mithila and Hindi languages

d. promotion of the speaking capabilities of Maithil students in Associations

The rules of the Association were followings –

a. fortnightly meeting of the association in which member should speak and read their papers in English, Hindi and Mithila Bhasha

b. annual celebration in commemoration of those who promoted the interest of the country

c. provision for religious teachings among members

d. monthly and daily newspapers (especially social and religious) subscriptions for members

e. establishment of a library with social and religious books related to contemporary education

f. Encouragement of members to hold annual examinations for elocution, essay writings, and religious subjects with distribution of awards.

An advertisement with regard to these examinations was published in Mithila Moda.\(^{145}\)

To participate in the examination only Maithil students who had cleared matriculation were considered eligible. The following examinations were supposed to be held –

First section, Essay writing (a) English, (b) Hindi (C) Mithila

Second section, Elocution (a) Hindi, (b) Mithila


\(^{145}\) Ibid., pp. 21 – 22.
Third section, Religious Examination

Fourth section, Recitation

Interestingly, the subjects selected for the first and second levels of examinations reveals the approach of association - to make Maithil students aware about contemporary issues. The subjects were – (a) village life (वाला) and urban life, (b) Profit from newspapers, (c) Necessity is the mother of invention, (d) Past and Present condition of Maithil, (e) Bad effects of child marriage, (f) India’s profit from British government, (g) obedience of fathers, (h) the past and present condition of the Indian students, (i) the relativity of the flow of time and river, (समय तथा नदी चैन के निरपेक्षिता) (j) religious is self-fruitful (धर्म स्वतः फलदायक शिक्षक). The first annual function of this institution was held on 17 august 1911. In a report about the function it is mentioned that many delegates from different branches of Association including Maithil Chhatra Samiti, Darbhanga also participated.

These efforts created a small readership for Maithili. But without the patronage of state and the administration this readership was always usurped by Hindi. In 1912, to propagate Hindi, a branch of Hindi Sahitya Sammelan was established at Laheriasarai with the efforts of Jeevanand Tripathi. The second annual conference of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan was held at Bhagalpur in 1914. Girindra Mohan Mishra writes that the issue of Hindi and Maithili was fiercely debated in this conference. He wrote an essay for this conference in which he considered Maithili merely as a part Hindi. Prior to this conference there emerged a controversy in Bihar on the issue of the medium of instruction in primary schools. Maithili speakers wanted that in Mithila, Maithili should be the medium of instruction and to this effect they published their demands in the newspapers as well. But many people from other parts of Bihar opposed this demand. Despite having their own mother tongue such as Magahi and Bhojpuri, they were not opposed to Hindi as the medium of instruction in primary schools. Among the Maithils

146 Those who were interested to participate in this examination were supposed to send their application by July 03 to July 15 to Sidhinath Mishra, The Secretary, Maithil Student Association, Baruari Rajvama, Mansurganj, Bhagalpur, through their school address or through the headmaster of their school; see Ibid.
147 Mithila Moda, Udgar – 59, Bhadra, p. 18.
148 Mihra, Girindra Mohan, Kichhu Dekhal Kichhu Sunal, Laheriasarai, Nava-Bharat Press, n. d., p. 68
149 Ibid., pp. 77 – 80.
opinion was divided. The people of Bhagalpur and Munger in comparison to Maithili were convinced that Hindi was more appropriate for primary education and also profitable. For them, the different languages of Bihar were only forms of Hindi. Many members of the conference opposed the demands of Maithils. Prior to the day of the conference, during the session of the Election Committee a proposal was tabled in which it was recommended that Hindi be made the medium of instruction in the province of Bihar. The next day, when Rajendra Prasad geared himself up to present that recommendation, it was Girindra Mohan Mishra, himself a Maithili speaker, reluctantly introduced it in the conference for discussion. It was passed unanimously. However, many people registered their protest against the move through their absence like Raja Kirtyanand Singh Bahadur who was also the chairman of reception Committee. Later Girindra Mohan Mishra also publicly regretted this move by him when he met Babu Raghunandan Das. In this context it is also important to take into account another famous Maithili activist Babu Bhola Lal Das, who played a key role in the establishment of *Maithili Sahitya Parishad*, as well as the recognition of Maithili in Bihar Education Directorate and in Patna University. In the annual function of the *Bargam Saraswati Library*, he presented a paper in Hindi in which he said that to think of learning Hindi through developing Maithili would be as funny as catching the train by a turtle. Even in the later years of his life - which he devoted to the cause of Maithili- he did not consider Maithili or Hindi as imposing barriers to each other.

### 3.6 Maithil Mahasabha and its idea of Mithila

The organisation of *Maithil Mahasabha*150 by the Maharaja of Darbhanga, Rameshwar Singh in 1910, was foundational in many ways for the development of the Maithili and Mithila movement in later years. This was first of its kind in Mithila, an institution organised on modern lines with traditional authorities like caste and religion still dominating the minds of members of this institution. The Maharajas of Darbhanga were its patrons. The organization was staffed by usual *Sabhapatis*; there was a committee

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headed by a Mahasachiv for which elections were held regularly. There was a constitution of the Mahashabha which was amended many times. There were provincial and district level branches of Mahasabha as well. In the beginning it helped in developing a new consciousness and a sense of pride in Maithili culture among the Maithils divided on different lines. The Mahasabha, from the beginning, made it a point to be an ‘apolitical’ institution, but its policies and decisions were never free from the influence of the Darbhanga Raj family. Even its first objective was to foster loyalty towards the Raj. Its other objectives were expansion of education in Mithila (for which scholarship were provided to many students), improvement of the socio economic conditions of people, preservation of Maithili culture and protecting the interest of Mithila, Maithils and Maithili. This institution was quite successful in promoting education in Sanskrit as well as modern western education in Mithila. The use of the Maithili language in primary education was debated but did not met with success. In the first session of the Maithil Mahasabha held at Madhubani from March 26 – 28, 1910, Pandit Murlidhar Jha (editor of Mithila Moda) proposed that in primary education Mithila Bhasha should be used. But it was considered that as there was lack of grammar, history, geography textbooks in Maithili and as long as this situation continued, Hindi should be used.

However, ambivalent relationship of Maithili with Hindi continued in this period and Hindi began to be considered as a threat for Maithili in Mithila Moda – हिंदी = अंकुरितमिथिला–भाषा–प्रचार–विकासिति\(^{152}\)

[Hindi = Destroyer of sapling-expanding-Mithila Bhasha (language)]

The above citation proves two things. First, Hindi was already in use even for primary education in Mithila, and second, there was a growing discomfort with this language and a desire for using Maithili, the mother tongue. The use of Hindi was permitted only as a temporary measure, because textbooks were not available in Maithili. The same argument was used in the context of Oriya and Assamese as well when Bengali alone

\(^{151}\) For the details on the functioning, and proposals in this Mahasabha; see Mithila Moda, Udgar – 42 Chaitra, pp. 1 – 20; Mithila Moda, Udgar – 43, Vaisakh, pp. 1 – 8.

\(^{152}\) Mithila Moda, Udgar – 42, Chaitra, p. 3.
was considered to be eligible for the medium of instruction in schools. Only when the imposition of Bengali was resisted from below, were textbooks prepared in these languages. This proved decisive for the development of Oriya and Assamese. But in the case of Maithili, it was not just the colonial administrators but also sections of the elites of Maithili society that permitted and even encouraged the use of Hindi. What if claims for Maithili were strongly put forward? The status of Maithili would have been different today had textbooks were written in Maithili and Maithili had been introduced as the medium of school education in Mithila during that period.

The second session of the Maithil Mahasabha was held in Supaul district in 1910. On the year after the King of England George V and queen had plans to visit India for coronation in Delhi, and they wished to visit Kolkata and part of Tirhut as well as a part of their tour. So to show the loyalty to government it was proposed that a felicitation letter should be sent to London on the occasion of King’s coronation. This shows that the Maharaja was not just interested in the social and economic progress of the Maithil through the Mahasabha, but he was also using it as a platform to showcase his strength to the British and strengthen his demand for the status of a princely chief.

However, it was to the credit of Maithil Mahasabha that new schools were opened and there was also a demand for the establishment of a Mithila college in Darbhanga. But according to Babu Bhola Das, Maharaja Rameshwar Singh was of the view that an Art College could not serve the purpose of ‘true’ education. In fact he believed that it could only produce ‘slaves’ and on this assumption he promoted Sanskrit education in

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154 Writing textbooks in Maithili was not very difficult also. It was claimed that within a month or two these texts could be prepared. For Mithila Bhasha grammar Pandit Chandrasekhar Jha of Harinagar, for history Pandit Parmeshwar Jha, for moral education Pandit Janardan Jha of Bajitpur, for translation of primer in Mithila Bhasha Babu Harinand Das Vakeel and for mathematics there were many, who were considered appropriate. And it was also claimed that they would not take much time in preparing them if the members of the Mahasabha so wished; see Ibid. The issue of Maithili as a medium of primary education and the need for the preparation of the history of Mithila were raised and debated again and again in other meetings of the Mahasabha. It was also proposed that all the papers of Mahasabha should be in Maithili and the speakers incapable of speaking in Maithili should use Hindi or any other language with the permission of Sabhapati (chairman). This proposal was accepted but it was still not included in the rule book of the Mahasabha; see Mithila Moda, Udgar – 49, Kartik, p. 7; many textbooks in Maithili were prepared and published by Maithil Hit Sadhana also.

155 Speech of Maharajadhiraja Rameshwar Singh of Darbhanga on the occasion of second session of Maithil Mahasabha at Supaul; see Mithila Moda, Udgar – 55, Vaisakh, pp. 9 – 16.
Mithila. It was due to generous donations by Babu Chandradhari Singh that Chandradhari Mithila College was later established in Darbhanga.

The membership of the Maithil Mahasabha as the name suggests, was not open to all the people inhabiting in Mithila. It was restricted to Maithili Brahmans and Karna Kayasthas. The other caste groups formed their own separate institutions like Rajput Sabha, Gopa Sabha, Vaishya Sabha to improve their own social and economic conditions. This decision of Mahasabha to not to include other caste groups as members, enormously damaged the development of Maithili language and the identity. It was from then on that it was considered that Maithili was the language of Maithil Brahmins and Karna Kayasthas alone; the other caste groups were reluctant to call themselves Maithili speakers. This was a grave historical error on the part of Mahasabha and the popular imaginary of Maithili identity signified these two castes alone, although the language was spoken by all the inhabitants of Mithila. The participation of other castes in the Maithili movement remained very little for a long time. Maithili has not adequately recovered from this predicament and the caste consciousness remains greater than language consciousness among the people of the region though they speak the same language.

The Mahasabha itself became less and less active in its later years (within five to six years of its establishment in 1910) with the purpose of merely holding its annual sessions and passing resolutions which were hardly ever implemented. However, on certain occasions it had played a critical role such as during the reorganisation of the linguistic states it sent a memorandum demanding separate statehood for Maithils on the basis of language. In 1965, during the Saurath Session of the Mahasabha, many people including Shri Rajeshwar Mishra were arrested for agitating for their demands before the then education minister to immediately establish Mithila University; again, in 1969, the Maithili Mahasabha published a booklet on Why Maithili in the Eighth Schedule of Indian Constitution? This was written by Jayadhari Singh. During 1966 – 67 it opened branches in almost all the districts of Koshi Pramandal. These branches were in: - Saharsa, Suparul, Mashepura, Bangaon, Mahishi, Parrari, Chainpur, Karnapur, Sukhapur, Veerpur, Govindapur, Forbisganj, Bhadreshwar, and Balua Bajar. During this period there was a unique movement called postcard Abhiyaan (also known as the postcard movement) launched for the inclusion of Maithili into the eighth
Members of the Mahasabha went from village to village – Koili, Nanpur, Pakari, Oini and others to make the villagers aware of Mahasabha’s programme, the glorious history of Maithili, and to ask them to participate in the Postcard Abhiyan. In April 1967 the Mahasabha put forward the demand for the recognition of Maithili as the second official language of the state before the government of Bihar. But it was not granted. On the eve of Census of 1981 all the theatres (Cinema Halls) in the district of Darbhanga and Madhubani displayed a quotation which said – Matibhashak kalam mei apan matribhashas Maithili likhau (Get Maithili our mother tongue written in the column of Mother tongue). Again, in 1994, it sent a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India for the inclusion of Maithili in the eighth schedule of the constitution. Five copies of that memorandum was presented to Pranab Mukherjee during his visit to Darbhanga along with one each to cabinet ministers Krishna Sahi and Rameshwar Thakur who were elected from the Mithila. Thus we find the positive role that the Mahasabha played in the raising the consciousness among the masses while putting forward such demands on behalf of all the Maithils to the authorities and the governments. But the greatest limitation of the Mahasabha was that it confined its activities to Maithili Brahmins and Karna Kayastha alone. Instead of Maithili elevated to the position of common marker of regional linguistic identity, it increased the power of caste associations and caste consciousness among other caste groups. They looked at the every activities of Mahasabha with contempt and mistrust.

For the success of any movement the subjective consciousness among the support base of that movement is essential. In the Maithili movement, according to Paul R. Brass, this vital factor was missing. Therefore even when the other objective elements necessary for the formation of distinct identity were available to the Maithili movement, it failed to achieve its objective. It is believed and also accepted by the some scholars like Hetukar Jha, Pankaj Kumar Jha that the main reason for the lack of this subjective consciousness among the Maithili speakers is the result of three factors –

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158 Jha, Hetukar, Nation-Building in North Indian Region: The case of Mithila, Patna, A. N. Sinha Research Institute, 1976.
first, the social and economic milieu of Mithila characterized by ‘a truncated form of feudalism or better termed as bastard feudalism’. In this kind of milieu the Zamindars of the area (also called Maharajas) emphasized the divine origin of the kingship and maintained the racial purity through Panji Prabandha and also used other kinds of coercive means familiar of a feudal context. The people of the region never associated themselves with the king though they never challenged his authority. The continuance of Panji Prabandha further compartmentalised even the Maithil Brahmins into – Shrotriyas, Yogyas, Panji-badhas and Jayabars/Grihasthas and Kayasthas into Kulins and Grihasthas. It led to a fractured intra-caste identity besides exclusionary inter-caste identity in Mithila. Here ‘the traditional vernacular system was highlighted, the gurukul system of education was provided more impetus, and Brahanical studies received greater patronage’. So any kind of mass mobilisation in this kind of predominantly agrarian feudal, deeply hierarchiesed and fragmented society was difficult to germinate. Second, there was also the effect of what Hetukar Jha calls the elite - mass contradiction in Mithila. Here the elite were not like legal bureaucrats and professionals in a capitalist economy, but the leisured class, aristocrats and Zamindars. There was a huge gulf between tiny elite at the top and the large masses at the bottom. They not only failed to generate the subjective regional consciousness among the masses but themselves were confused and divided. One group of elite

160 Ibid., p. 194.
161 Thakur, Upendra, Mithilak Itihas, Patna, 1992, p 229; cited in Jha, Pankaj Kumar, 2002, p. 124; The foundation of Panji is ascribed to the celebrated Karnata dynasty ruler Hari Singh Dev. Origin of this Panji Prabandha is believed to be 1310 A. D. There are various legends orally and now written also, regarding the origin of Panji but it is widely believed that it is to maintain the purity of blood among the Maithils and Karna Kayasthas, ruling elite of Mithila. Other Castes including Jaibar Brahmins were excluded from the Panjis. It has been maintained by the Panjikars for over seven hundred years now. It is believed to be a rich source to understand the social evolutions and transformations in Mithila in previous six to seven hundred years. It was mainly to maintain the purity of caste, as it was believed to be prescribed in scriptures, in marriages of Maithil Brahmins and Karna Kayastha. But later it leads to polygamy and other social evils as many Brahmins for monetary gains started to marry many girls of inferior in caste hierarchy. They were called Bikauas. It took extremely bad shape in eighteenth and nineteenth century when one Bikaua use to marry as many as fifty girls. This increased the number of widows in society as with the death of one Bikaua there become many widows some of them even minors. ‘Due to the death of only fifty four such Bikaua in 1876, six hundred and sixty five women (some still in the stage of childhood and the rest being quite young) became widows’. Condition of these widows became extremely inhuman when society imposed many restrictions and taboos on them. See Jha, Jata Shankar, Report of the Regional Records Survey Committee (1965 - 1976), Patna, Education Department, Government of Bihar, 1978, pp. 49 – 58; cited in Jha, Hetukar, 2001, p. 59.
supported the national cause while the other strived for regional identity but both were cut off from the Maithili speaking masses. Third, in Mithila region, Hindi versus Urdu was established as the dominant debate on language, while lesser importance was given to the Maithili-Hindi debate – although this situation changed over time.

The public domain of Maithili was threatened both by British administrative policy and the emergent Indian nationalist movement. In 1860 when Maharaja Lakshmishwar Singh succeeded to the throne, he was made subject to the authority of the court of wards being a minor. The Courts of Ward obstructed the growth of Maithili language, making Urdu and Persian the language of public life. Surmising that Urdu might violate the religious sensibilities of the royal family, the British advised the young ruler, upon coming of age, to make Hindi the courtly language with Urdu and Persian remaining the language of the lower courts. Maithil intellectuals who wished to participate in the public life of upper India adopted Nagari Hindi as their language and even the Benares based advocates of a Maithili cultural movement adopted Devanagari when it came to publishing their monthly journal *Mithila Mod*. Although, the consciousness about Maithili as a language was already there, it was not explicitly invoked. This was partly due to the domination of Sanskrit in all branches of learning and partly because they did not perceive any threat to the existence of Maithili. But when modern education was introduced in Mithila in Hindi medium, and many leaders, including the Maharajas of Darbhanga sided with nationalist politics and started to support Hindi, many Maithils felt the threat to their mother tongue that this move could cause. Yet they did not have any problem with Hindi per se. This is evident in the use of Hindi in almost all the magazines in Maithili published from the region – *Maithil Hit Sadhana, Mithila Moda* and *Mithila Mihir*. But gradually when *Hindiwallas*, to use the phrase of Granville Austin, started to appropriate Maithili language, its literary figures, and its literary space and tried to reduce it to the household language, Maithili elites became much more vocal and assertive to the extent they became anti Hindi as well. But these movements did not develop a strong leadership and organization. However, it is to their

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164 Mihsra, J., 1976, pp. 2 – 9; Cited in Ibid.
credit that they were gradually able to develop Maithili consciousness against extremely knotty situations – unavailability of print and publishing houses, a small reading public already affiliated to Hindi, apathy of the government, mass education even at primary level in Hindi.

In this period there was a search for Maithili identity. But before it could take its proper shape it had to compete with Hindi and the emergent nationalist identity. There was willing adaptation of Hindi as the national language in the region but not at the cost of the mother tongue Maithili. The struggle for the Maithili’s recognition as an independent language became more intense in the following decades when attempts were made to appropriate it as the ‘dialects’ of Hindi. Hence, from the beginning of the 19th century, Maithili did not develop independently by pulling its past, its spoken varieties together in a meaningfully new ways. It was always addressed to the importance of Hindi. In the following chapters I will be discussing these politics of subjugation by the Hindi supporters and growing assertion of Maithili identity by the Maithili protagonists.