CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

Language can be used in three senses. First, as a means of communication its role is vital in the growth of civilisation. Second, as a marker of group identity it has infinite power to form a new identity and to contest other rival identities. And finally, it can be used as a conceptual category to understand the rise, growth and evolution of a particular linguistic community. Here, by using language in the third sense – as a conceptual category, I do not intend to take a philosophical stand point on the issue of language. Instead, I wish to use it as a conceptual tool to understand making, remaking or unmaking of a linguistic community on the basis of the politics of language. In the present study, I have used language mostly in the second sense that is - language as a marker of group identity and socio-political mobilisations in the context of Hindi heartland in India. However, I have also tried to use language in the third sense - as a conceptual category to understand the social and political evolution of Maithili linguistic community and the movement. Using language as a conceptual category allows us to explore the varied experiences of different linguistic communities with our ‘colonial modernity’. Besides, it also allows us to revisit some of the important concepts like nation, nationalism, tradition, modernity, and how these terms were used and understood by different linguistic communities particularly in the vernacular languages? The study of a language is not merely the study of a speech form, but it also involves a whole web of inter-connected themes, ideas and activities which together constitute the totality of human existence. Language as a conceptual category provides a valuable link to approach that reality in all its complexity. And this is what makes the studies of language so fascinating and the reason why it has caught the attention of scholars throughout the ages.

The study of the language movements in the Hindi heartland like the Maithili language movement would be incomplete unless it also takes into account the social-political and historical context in which such movement has emerged. Movements like these evolved without popular political support and patronage, with a kind of indifferent attitude even apathy from their own speakers. These movements for a long
time had been sustained by the tireless activities of the leaders involved; even at the cost of their personal loss. The Maithili language and the movement have not only evolved in such a context but have also been successful in competing against the all pervasive expansionist agenda of Hindi and its combined forces of nationalism and Hinduism. The Maithili language movement faced not only the political apathy of the provincial government in Bihar but even the speakers of the Maithili as well. And yet it had been successful in its fight against the imperialist agendas of Hindi supporters, though the relationship between the two is not that of total opposition, in fact, Maithili speakers actively supported Hindi’s claim as the national language of India. But when the Maithili speakers felt that there were systematic attempts made by the Hindi zealots to classify Maithili as a ‘dialect’ of Hindi, they started to mobilise public opinion and began to assert the independent status of Maithili. This misconception about Maithili being part of Hindi was the biggest challenge for the Maithili movement in twentieth century. Though, official and institutional recognition of Maithili as an independent language had been granted, but in public discourse the same misconception has been repeated time and again. Another factor that makes the Maithili movement a successful movement against the expansionist agenda of Hindi is that all its demands have been met with the exception of separate statehood demand. In support of such demand, public and political mobilisations, demonstrations and protests are still going on with greater zeal. There are various internal tensions within this movement too. This requires serious and careful investigations, but undermining the movement’s worth just because of these internal tensions would shut the possibility of exploring the other often obscure aspects of the language based politics in India particularly as it was played out in Hindi heartland.

With the beginning of philological studies in the 18th and 19th century a link was made between language and race. It took a different shape when the nation state emerged as the most desirable form of political community. One of the essential features for this politically Imagined communities was standardising a language – a national language for each imagined political communities – in a way that connect the heterogeneous masses in a meaningful ways. This formation of a national language is often contested by the speakers of heterogeneous languages within a nation. This contestation is far
more complex in a multilingual and heterogeneous country like India. In the present study, I have explored the discrepancies and inherent contestations of this kind of formation in the context of Hindi heartland while taking Maithili as a case study. In India with the classification of language and its standardisation through grammars and dictionaries, a new kind of identity – a form of linguistic communities, was being formed from the beginning of the nineteenth century. This process was even more consolidated with the beginning of modern education and particularly, of vernacular education. These practices developed a new sense of attachment among the people to their languages. Now language no longer belongs to the region, it belongs to the people.\footnote{Mitchell, Lisa, \textit{Language Emotions and Politics in South India}, Ranikhet, Permanent Black, 2010.} In the beginning such formulation was based on regional or provincial language – Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Punjabi, Assamese, Oriya, Maithili, etc. This process of linguistic identity formations simultaneously carries the process of linguistic appropriation, domination and marginalisation over the ‘minor’ and not so developed languages often categorised as ‘dialects’. And what makes this kind of classification more problematic is that it has been done not on linguistic criteria alone, but also on the basis of intense socio-political mobilisations. Such classifications entered into a troubled zone when a link language – other than Sanskrit and English, was being developed consciously with remarkable success but not without prolong and consistent opposition to that. The expectations and also impositions from such nationalist leadership that provincial languages should make the way for the national language has created an unresolved tension between national and regional/provincial languages in India.

In the present study I have tried to understand such process in the context of Hind and Maithili. I have also made an attempt to understand and analyse the evolution of Maithili as a linguistic community, its internal organisations, problems, successes and failures, its internal dynamics and external antagonisms. Throughout the history of the Maithili movement what one finds is not just an opposition to Hindi’s claim of Maithili being its ‘dialect’ or the ambivalent relationship between the two. More appropriately we can see a double movement. The authority and power of Hindi was strengthening with the adoption and promotion of Hindi in the Maithili speaking
region at the same time as the Maithili assertion was becoming more powerful with the making of a separate Maithili linguistic community.

The Maithili language movement can be categorised as a middle class movement. But in the beginning this class was socially and economically too weak to fight independently for too long. It was dependent upon the patronage of the rich landlords and the Maharajas. However, the Maharajas and landlords were not unambiguously supporting Maithili, while the masses were largely indifferent to the issue. Meanwhile Hindi was already introduced in school education and was being increasingly used in public places and in the administration of the court. Clearly the Maithili middle class professionals were working for the growth of Maithili in enormously unfavourable circumstances. It is to their credit that Maithili over many years was successfully recognised as an Independent language of India.

The indifferent attitude of masses towards Maithili language movement can be explained through the idea of Ashis Nandi about the non participation of masses in the modernizing process. All the problems that these modernising elites were facing could not be categorised as the problem of the masses too. In the case of Maithili movement we find that masses were still using the language as they were using it before, without perceiving any threat to its existence from outside. It was the elite, particularly Sanskrit scholars, who first realized this threat and gradually mobilised opinion in support of Maithili. But for very long time such mobilisations remained confined to the literary elite.

However, there have been continuous social and political expansions of the Maithili language movement over the decades, more so since 1980s. Started as a movement for the recognition of Maithili as one of the independent languages of modern India, the Maithili movement remained for a very long time more or less a ‘non-political’, cultural and linguistic movement. Though, the politics and demand for separate statehood for Mithila was there, the struggle for the recognition of Maithili as an independent language was the focal point of the movement. And for many decades the Maithili movement was organised and led by the Maithili writers, journalists, and scholars. Their main form of

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activism was the publication of more and more journals, magazines and books in Maithili to check the growing misconception about Maithili as a ‘dialect’ of Hindi. But there was a gradual shift in the agenda and methods of the Maithili movement. During the 1950’s, the political demand of separate statehood for Mithila was the most emphasized agenda and there were considerable political agitations for it by Maithili speakers as well. The main ideologues of such demand were Lakshman Jha, Jankinandan Singh besides many others. Since then political leaders of the region also raised the issue of Mithila and Maithili time to time, and agitations, mass protests and demonstrations became the medium of the expression of their demands.

Although, the social base of the Maithili movement has increased considerably, it has yet to acquire the form of a mass movement. There are many reasons for this: the lack of employment opportunities in Maithili, and the non-implementation of Maithili as the medium of education at the primary level in the beginning of modern education in Mithila. It is surprising that Maithili was recognised as a subject of study at the university level since 1917, but at the primary and secondary level it is still not taught. At the secondary level students may opt for Maithili and that too as an optional. It is not compulsory, that makes the mockery of the government decision to make the mother tongue as the medium of instruction for the Maithili speaking child. In the beginning Maithili needed promotion and patronage by the state government which was not only denied but when sufficient pressure was put on the government the latter conceded this demand. But they did so in a way that progress of Maithili was always hindered. Besides, due to lack of employment opportunities in Maithili, parents who could not send their children for English medium education preferred Hindi over Maithili, as there were more employment opportunities available in Hindi. Their commitment to the study of Maithili can be understood from the fact that millions of students still opt for Maithili at secondary, intermediate and graduation levels. However, when the children do not have to study Maithili at the primary level, it is less likely that they would opt for Maithili at the University level. Hence, all the university department of Maithili in Bihar are not unaffected by this ironical situation of Maithili.

Since the 1990’s there has been a major shift in the Maithili movement. Maithili remains the dominant issue for mobilisation, but the issue of the economic
development of Mithila region with the demand for the separate statehood of Mithila has also become an important agenda for social and political mobilisations. Many organisations came together to launch a combined struggle. One such umbrella organisation is Antarashtriya Maithili Parishad. Their claim is that the proper growth of the language and also the proper development of the Maithili speaking region are not possible within the existing state of Bihar.

However, the greatest challenge of the Maithili movement is despite more than a century of struggle, it has failed to sufficiently connect to the masses and to mobilise them systematically in a sustained manner. There have been instances of popular support to the movement but these have not been properly harnessed. The larger part of the people remained to a certain extent, indifferent and even suspicious of the objectives of the Maithili movement. The suspicion of the Maithili movement among the non Brahmins and the non Kayasthas in Mithila remains very high. Caste consciousness is dominant in the thinking of even the leaders of the Maithili movement. They are internally divided on the basis of caste. In the beginning it was between the Brahmins and the Kayasthas, even among the Brahmins there were divisions on the basis of region i.e. Pubairpar and Pachhbairpar and Panji Vyavstha.

The Maithili movement in the contemporary phase is struggling with the two major internal issues – one is the two voices within the movement where one speaks of Maithili language movement whereas the other speaks about the Mithila state movement; the other issue is the challenge to the Brahminical domination of Maithili movement and its leaderships. Now, increasingly non Brahmins and non Kayasthas castes of Mithila are interrogating the domination of Maithili Brahmins. Another challenge is how to connect to the masses. In the contemporary phase of the movement it is increasingly perceived by the protagonists of the Maithili movement that in order to connect to the masses, language alone is not a sufficient ground. Unless the social and economic issues affecting the people of Mithila are included in the agendas, channelizing the mass support would be an arduous task for the Maithili movement. The future course of the Maithili movement will be determined by the outcome of these internal tensions and external support to the movement.
On the basis of my study I have drawn the following conclusions: -

1. The relationships between a language and ‘dialects’ are not static but contingent. And this relationship depends upon the social political and historical condition as well as the consciousness of the speakers about their own language.

2. Language as a tool for social and political mobilisation connected with nationalism and religion proved to be a powerful concept to explain the social, political and historical evolution of a linguistic community, precisely because of its emotional and cultural roots among speakers.

3. The challenges to Maithili movement has been its failure to diminish the social divisions based on caste, combined with emerging nationalism and expansion of Hindi as the national language, its assertion and development as an independent Indian language had not only been discouraged but also ‘suspected’.

4. The major contradictory element in the Maithili movement was its increasing politicisation - from Hindi-Maithili antagonism to territorial consciousness and political demand has gone hand in hand with the persistent indifferent attitude of the masses.