

A Historical Perspective of 'Mithila' & 'Maithili's: Language, Culture, Geography, Economic, Education and Social Approach

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मेथिनी

"Maithili language made the social and economic exchange between people of
Maithili communities and cultures.

Abstract: Maithili has a status of associate language, but in fact it has become the most important language of India and gets the national status in eighth schedule. The most commonly spoken language in Mithila region of Bihar state as well as in Nepal and probably the most read and written language in Mithila. Man has rightly been called "a talking animal". Man is gifted with the quality of speech, which differentiates him from other living beings, language consists of words, idioms and syntax. Scholars in Mithila used Sanskrit for their literary work and Maithili was the language of the common folk (Abahatta). The beginning of Maithili language and literature can be traced back to the 'Charyapadas', a form of Buddhist mystical verses, composed during the period of 700-1300 AD. Mithila (IAST: Mithilā), also known as Tirhut and Tirabhukti, is a geographical and cultural region of the Indian subcontinent bounded by the Mahananda River in the east, the Ganges in the south, the Gandaki River in the west and by the foothills of the Himalayas in the north. It comprises certain parts of Bihar and Jharkhand of India and adjoining districts of the eastern Terai of Nepal, is an Indo-Aryan language native to the Indian subcontinent, Tirhuta or Mithilakshar was formerly the primary script for written Maithili, less commonly, it was also written in the local variant of Kaithi, but today it is written in the Devanagari script. The native language in Mithila is Maithili, and its speakers are referred to as Maithils. The name Mithila is commonly used to refer to the Videha Kingdom, as well as to the modern-day territories that fall within the ancient boundaries of Videha. In the 18th century, when Mithila was still ruled in part by the Raj Darbhanga, the British Raj annexed the region without recognizing it as a princely state. In 2003, Maithili was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution as a recognised Indian language, which allows it to be used in education, government,

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and other official contexts in India. Maithili received the second official language status in the Indian state of Jharkhand.

Keywords: *Mithila, Maithili, Mithilakshar, Maithili language, Maithili literature, culture of Mithila, geography of Mithila, people of Mithila*

“जननी जन्मभूमिश्च स्वर्गादपि गरीयसी”
 कौशिकीन्तु समारभ्य गण्डकीमधिगम्यवै।
 योजनानि चतुर्विंश व्यायामः परिकीर्तितः॥
 गङ्गा प्रवाहमारभ्य यावद्धैमवतम्बनम्।
 विस्तारः षोडशप्रोक्तो देशस्य कुलनन्दन॥
 अर्थात्:

पूर्व में कोसी से आरंभ होकर पश्चिम में गंडकी तक 24 योजन तथा दक्षिण में गंगा नदी से आरंभ होकर उत्तर में हिमालय वन (तराई प्रदेश) तक 16 योजन मिथिला का विस्तार है।

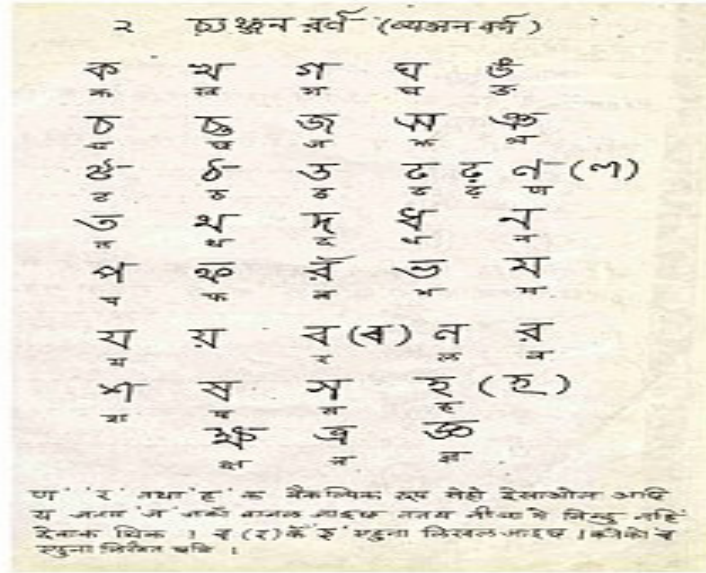
It means “Starting from Kosi in the east, to 24 *Yojana* (One *Yojana* = 13 km) till Gandaki in the west and 16 *Yojana* starting from the Ganga River in the south to Himalayan Forest (Terai region) in the north.

Geography: Mithila is a distinct geographical region with natural boundaries like rivers and hills. It is largely a flat and fertile alluvial plain criss-crossed by numerous rivers, which originate from the Himalayas. Due to the flat plains and fertile land Mithila has a rich variety of biotic resources; however, because of frequent floods people could not take full advantage of these resources. Seven major rivers flow through Mithila: Mahananda, Gandak, Kosi, Bagmati, Kamala, Balan, and the Budhi Gandak. They flow from the Himalayas in the north to the Ganges River in the south. These rivers regularly flood, depositing silt onto the farmlands and sometimes causing death or hardship. In India, Maithili is spoken mainly in Bihar and Jharkhand in the districts of Darbhanga, Saharsa, Samastipur, Madhubani, Muzaffarpur, Sitamarhi, Begusarai, Munger, Khagaria, Purnia, Katihar, Kishanganj, Sheohar, Bhagalpur, Madhepura, Araria, Supaul, Vaishali, Ranchi, Bokaro, Jamshedpur, Dhanbad and Deoghar as well as other districts of Santhal Pargana division. Darbhanga and Madhubani constitute cultural and linguistic centers. In Nepal, Maithili is spoken mainly in the Outer Terai districts including Sarlahi, Mahottari, Dhanusa, Sunsari, Siraha, Morang and Saptari Districts. Janakpur is an important linguistic centre of Maithili.

Culture of Mithila: The Mithila culture or Maithil culture originated in the Mithila region of the Indian subcontinent. Interestingly, the name ‘Maithili’ was also derived from the word Mithila: the ancient kingdom ruled by King Janaka (refer to Ramayana). This kingdom’s northern frontier was marked by the Himalayas and the southern by the river Ganga, whose land and fertile soil were marvelled by the Aryans after having waded through the parched lands of Central Asia. As for other facts, Maithili is also one of the names of Sita, the wife of King Rama and daughter of King Janaka. Furthermore, scholars in Mithila used Sanskrit for their literary work and Maithili used to be the language of the common folk (Abahatta). Mithila Painting, Madhubani art or Mithila painting is practiced in the Mithila region of India and Nepal. It was traditionally created by the women of different communities of the Mithila region. It is named after Madhubani district of Bihar, India which is where it originated. This painting as a form of wall art was practiced widely throughout the region;

the more recent development of painting on paper and canvas originated among the villages around Madhubani, and it is these latter developments that may correctly be referred to as Madhubani art. Mithila Paag, the Paag is a headdress in the Mithila region of India and Nepal worn by Maithil people. It is a symbol of honour and respect and a significant part of Maithil culture. The Paag is a popular headdress worn by the Maithil people, and is native to the Mithila region, where it is a symbol of honour and respect. On the other hand, women are known to put lanterns made of clay on their head and balance them when dancing, especially when performing Jhijhiya, the cultural dance from the Mithila region of India and Nepal. As regards creative arts, Madhubani art (or Mithila painting) was traditionally created by the women of different communities of the Mithila region as a form of wall art, and is often practiced here. It is not news that many of the not-so-popular languages around the world are melting away in the heat of globalization, paving way for new ones. Most of us have forgotten to look into our baggage of cultural treasures when it comes to food, travel or discovering another culture, and flock to everything that is seemingly foreign or shiny. With this, let's make an effort to know more about the beautiful cultures around us, in our very own country. The Paag dates back to pre-historic times when it was made of plant leaves. It exists today in a modified form. The Paag is worn by the whole Maithil community. The colour of the Paag also carries a lot of significance. The red Paag is worn by the bridegroom and by those who are undergoing the sacred thread rituals. Paag of mustard colour is donned by those attending wedding ceremonies and the elders wear a white Paag. This Paag now features place in the popular Macmillan Dictionary. For now, Macmillan Dictionary explains Paag as "a kind of headgear worn by people in the Mithila belt of India." On 10 February 2017, India Posts released a set of sixteen commemorative postage stamps on "Headgears of India". The Mithila Paag was featured on one of those postage stamps.

Language: India is a country of rich cultural diversity where 22 officially recognised languages and over 1650 dialects are spoken across 29 states and 7 union territories, as in 2019. The 2011 Census of India last listed 1369 'mother tongues', however, our country has been a witness to a great number of tongues over the centuries. One such distinctive and culturally rich language is Maithili. People of Mithila region speak Maithili primarily and are well versed in other languages like Hindi, Nepali, English, Bhojpur for other different purposes. While Maithilis living in Nepal also use Nepali language. And some also use Bengali language in significant part of Bihar-Bengal region. This language is an Indo-Aryan language native to the Indian subcontinent, mainly spoken in India and Nepal and is one of the 22 recognised Indian languages. In Nepal, it is spoken in the eastern Terai and is the second most prevalent language of Nepal. Tirhuta was formerly the primary script for written Maithili. Less commonly, it was also written in the local variant of Kaithi. Today it is written in the Devanagari script. It ranks 40th among the most spoken languages of the world, while it occupies the 16th position in the list of the most spoken languages in India. Maithilakshar or Tirhuta is its own script, which originated from Brahmi (a script of the 3rd B.C., also found in the Ahokan Inscriptions). At present, the Devanagari script has been adopted because of its widespread use. Mithila is a richly green and lush land, without hills or mountains and irrigated by a network of rivers and rivulets. Its peculiar geographical position has made it impregnable since prehistoric times. Thousands of years ago Mathava Videgha and a group of enlightened seers reached the banks of the river Sadanira. They crossed the river to settle in the land of Mithila. This was the Mithila of the Vedas, a land that excelled in the field of scholarship. Even in these early Vedic times there were two distinct lines of development - Vedic religion and speculations of the Upanishads, which in later years came to be known as the 'Path of Rituals' (religion or karma kanda) and the 'Path of Knowledge' (philosophy or jnana kanda) respectively.



Contrary to the popular notion that Maithili is essentially confined to the dominant Hindu castes of Brahmins and Kayasthas, the author, Mithilesh Kumar Jha, essentially speaking, does not consider the Maithili movement to be caste exclusive. However, he seems to be missing a lived reality here. Bhojpuri is spoken by all, regardless of caste and religious identities, whereas not many Muslims of Mithila would speak Maithili. Rather, a considerable proportion of Mithila Muslims speak a dialect that is essentially identified with Urdu. Writing Style and Grammar, in the very inception, Maithili used to be written in the Maithili script, which has some resemblance to the Bengali script and is also known by names like Tirhuta and Mithilakshar. Apart from this, the Maithili language was also written in the Kaithi script. However, it is the Devanagri script that is most commonly used for writing Maithili in the present times. A proposal has been drafted to preserve as well as develop the Maithili script by using it in the digital media by encoding the script in the Unicode standard. Maithili Grammar is considered to be a very standard Grammar. It is based on the sutras of Sanskrit grammar of Panini. Education in Mithila generally meant proficiency in the study of the traditional branches of Sanskrit learning of which the Vedas (scriptures), Dharmashastra (ethics), Mimamsa (rites and rituals), Niyaya (logic), Vyakarana (grammar), and Jyotish (astrology and astronomy) were the subjects usually pursued. Any other subject that was outside of, or new to Sanskritic lore was considered irrelevant or even forbidden. The pandits were the leaders and also the educators of society. It was the duty of the pandit to teach free of charge to all who wished to study. Many pandits taught from home and these 'schools' were called Chaupadi (or Chatuspadi, a school where the four vedas were read). Pandits had no regular income, their expenses were met by the society. Some rich landlords or Rajas would, however, employ pandits under their personal patronage to perform religious rites and to educate their children. Vidyapati's clout was not just contained or limited to Maithili and Sanskrit literature but also reached far and wide to other Eastern literary traditions. In Vidyapati time, language such as the prakrit-derived late abahatta, had started too metamorphosed into early versions of the Eastern languages such as Maithili, Bhojpuri etc. Thus, Vidyapati's clout on making these languages has been seen as "analogous to that of Dante in Italy and Chaucer in England".

*All my inhibition left me in a flash,
 When he robbed me off my clothes,
 But his body became my new dress.*

*Like a bee hovering on a lotus leaf
He was there in my night, on me!*

Maithili has a long literary tradition and close to half of all Maithili speakers are literate in their native language as well as a second or third language, such as Hindi or Bengali, and English. It was the literary language of all of eastern India in medieval times and was an official language of the court. It was traditionally written in the Mithilakshar script which is most closely related to the Bengali script. The close relationship of Maithili to Bengali, and more distantly to the Oriya, and Assamese scripts, is due to their common origin from the Proto-Bengali script which, in turn, developed from the Brahmi script around 1,000 AD. An effort is underway to preserve the Maithili script and to develop it for use in digital media by encoding the script in the Unicode standard. Maithili was also written in the Kaithi script, but the Devanagari script is the script most commonly used for writing Maithili today.

People: Maithili language speakers are referred to as Maithils and they are an Indo-Aryan ethno-linguistic group. There are an estimated 45 million Maithils in India alone. The vast majority of them are Hindu. The people of Mithila can be split into various caste/clan affiliations such as Brahmins, Kayasthas, Bhumihars, Rajputs, Koeris, Baniyas, Kamatas, Ahirs, Kurmis, Dushads, Koeris and many more. Maithili is most friendly & sweetest language in comparison to all language of the world. It is also said by many persons that if People are quarrelling in Maithili, it seems as they are talking very friendly to each other, you can think from it this language is how much friendly. The 'Hindi heartland' is a culturally and linguistically diverse region. Complex socio-political processes resulted in the dominance of Hindi in the region, and speakers of languages classified as its 'dialects', representing distinctive cultural/historical imaginaries of their own, have often contested Hindi's linguistic dominance. Migration may be defined as geographical mobility involving a change of usual residence from one type of area to another. It implies movement on a somewhat permanent basis and over a significant distance. In other words, migration is a process undertaken to break from a familiar social universe in favour of a new one. In this sense it is a saga of adventure whereby individuals seek a different climate in which to explore the potentialities of their own personalities and capacities. It may be pointed out here that urbanization and industrialization are two processes that lead to large scale movement of people from one area to another, which in turn involves inter alia a great deal of decision-making, adaptation, consequences etc. in case of both the 1 societies of origin as well as of destination.

Maithili Literature: In the 19th century, linguistic scholars considered Maithili as a dialect of Bihari languages and grouped it with other languages spoken in Bihar. Hoernlé compared it with Gaudian languages and recognized that it shows more similarities with Bengali languages than with Hindi. Grierson recognized it as a distinct language and published the first grammar in 1881. Maithili has a very rich literary tradition since the 14th century. It is still very vibrant. In fact, this is what has kept it going. The oldest prose-text in all Indo-Aryan languages has been written in Maithili: 'Varna-ratnaakara' by Jyotirishwara. Vidyapati as a poet and Umapati and Nandipati as play-rights in 15th-16th century and the Malla kings from Nepal were popular in entire eastern India. The name Maithili is derived from the word Mithila, an ancient kingdom of which King Janaka was the ruler. Maithili is also one of the names of Sita, the wife of King Rama and daughter of King Janaka. Scholars in Mithila used Sanskrit for their literary work and Maithili was the language of the common folk (Abahatta). The beginning of Maithili language and literature can be traced back to the 'Charyapadas', a form of Buddhist mystical verses, composed during the period of 700-1300 AD. These padas were written in Sandhya bhasa by several Siddhas who belonged to Vajrayana Buddhism and were scattered throughout the territory of Assam, Bengal, Bihar and Odisha. Several of Siddhas were from Mithila

region such as Kanhapa, Sarhapa etc. Prominent scholars like Rahul Sankrityanan, Subhadra Jha and Jayakant Mishra provided evidences and proved that the language of Charyapada is ancient Maithili or proto-Maithili. Apart from Charyapadas, there has been rich tradition of folk culture, folk songs and which were popular among common folks of Mithila region. After the fall of Pala rule, disappearance of Buddhism, establishment of Karnāta kings and patronage of Maithili under Harasimhadeva (1226–1324) of Karnāta dynasty dates back to the 14th century (around 1327 AD). Jyotirishwar Thakur (1280–1340) wrote a unique work Varnaratnākara in Maithili prose. The Varna Ratnākara is the earliest known prose text, written by Jyotirishwar Thakur in Mithilaksar script, and is the first prose work not only in Maithili but in any modern Indian language. In 1324, Ghyasuddin Tughluq, the emperor of Delhi invaded Mithila, defeated Harisimhadeva, entrusted Mithila to his family priest Kameshvar Jha, a Maithil Brahmin of the Oinwar dynasty. But the disturbed era did not produce any literature in Maithili until Vidyapati Thakur (1360 to 1450), who was an epoch-making poet under the patronage of king Shiva Singh and his queen Lakhima Devi. He produced over 1,000 immortal songs in Maithili on the theme of love of Radha and Krishna and the domestic life of Shiva and Parvati as well as on the subject of suffering of migrant labourers of Morang and their families; besides, he wrote a number of treaties in Sanskrit. His love-songs spread far and wide in no time and enchanted saints, poets and youth. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu saw the divine light of love behind these songs, and soon these songs became themes of Vaisnava sect of Bengal. Rabindranath Tagore, out of curiosity, imitated these songs under the pseudonym Bhanusimha. Vidyapati influenced the religious literature of Asama, Bengal, Utkala and gave birth to a new Brajabuli language.

The earliest reference to Maithili or Tirhutiya is in Amaduzzi's preface to Beligatti's *Alphabetum Brammhanicum*, published in 1771. This contains a list of Indian languages amongst which is 'Tourutiana.' Colebrooke's essay on the Sanskrit and Prakrit languages, written in 1801, was the first to describe Maithili as a distinct dialect. Many devotional songs were written by Vaisnava saints, including in the mid-17th century, Vidyapati and Govindadas. Mapati Upadhyaya wrote a drama titled *Pārijātaharāṇa* in Maithili. Professional troupes, mostly from dalit classes known as Kirtanias, the singers of bhajan or devotional songs, started to perform this drama in public gatherings and the courts of the nobles. Lochana (c.1575–c.1660) wrote *Rāgatarangni*, a significant treatise on the science of music, describing the rāgas, tālas, and lyrics prevalent in Mithila. During the Malla dynasties rule Maithili spread far and wide throughout Nepal from the 16th to the 17th century. During this period, at least seventy Maithili dramas were produced. In the drama *Harishchandranrityam* by Siddhinarayanadeva (1620–57), some characters speak pure colloquial Maithili, while others speak Bengali, Sanskrit or Prakrit. After the demise of Maheshwar Singh, the ruler of Darbhanga Raj, in 1860, the Raj was taken over by the British Government as regent. The Darbhanga Raj returned to his successor, Maharaj Lakshmishvar Singh, in 1898. The Zamindari Raj had a lackadaisical approach toward Maithili. The use of Maithili language was revived through personal efforts of MM Parameshvar Mishra, Chanda Jha, Munshi Raghunandan Das and others. Publication of *Maithil Hita Sadhana* (1905), *Mithila Moda* (1906), and *Mithila Mihir* (1908) further encouraged writers. The first social organization, *Maithil Mahasabha*, was established in 1910 for the development of Mithila and Maithili. It blocked its membership for people outside from the Maithil Brahmin and Karna Kayastha castes. *Maithil Mahasabha* campaigned for the official recognition of Maithili as a regional language. Calcutta University recognized Maithili in 1917, and other universities followed suit. Babu Bhola Lal Das wrote *Maithili Grammar (Maithili Vyakaran)*. He edited a book *Gadyakusumanjali* and edited a journal *Maithili*. In 1965, Maithili was officially accepted by Sahitya Academy, an organization dedicated to the promotion of Indian literature. In 2002, Maithili was recognized on

the VIII schedule of the Indian Constitution as a major Indian language; Maithili is now one of the twenty-two Scheduled languages of India. The publishing of Maithili books in Mithilakshar script was started by Acharya Ramlochan Saran. The relationship with Bhojpuri and Magahi communities – the immediate neighbours have been neither very pleasant nor hostile. These two groups have rather been watching the series of achievements of Maithili – both literary and socio-political. But Maithili has been the only one among these languages which has been trying to constantly deny superimposition of Hindi over her identity. The other two seem to have given up their claims and have resigned to accept the status of dialects of Hindi. There is no doubt that in the recent times, Bhojpuri and Magahi had had some very fine poets and short story writers, and they have begun reaching the reading public of other languages through translation. However, no much translation has happened into Maithili from these languages, probably because of mutual intelligibility.

It goes without saying that the relationship of Maithili and Hindi have been most complicated. While almost all Maithils have accepted Hindi as a language of formal occasions, the retention of Maithili for cultural, social, familial as well as literary purposes have also been more or less steady. The trend among the youngest generation to use Maithili in lesser and lesser occasions should be viewed in the context of the same thing happening among Hindi, Telugu or Marathi speakers who are tilting towards use of English rather than their mother tongue. However, with the inclusion of Maithili in the 8th Schedule, the situation has altered and the use of Maithili in public places and even on formal occasions have begun. The attitude of Bengali speakers has all along been very positive, partly because Tagore himself was influenced by medieval Maithili poetry, and partly because of striking cultural similarities and a shared system of scholarship in Sanskrit. There was a time when many Maithili writers would freely be able to read Bengali literature in original. In fact, the largest number of translations into Maithili has been from Sanskrit and Bengali.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to show the understanding Mithila-Maithili communication as well as keys for effective relationship of the people of Mithila region. Here, I have given the attitudes of language in India from old period to modern period and use of language. The present paper deals with the important idea of Maithili language & literature competence in every walk of the life in this region. Language is a means of communication through which we transfer out ideas, emotions, and thought; express our love, anger and get understood by other persons. It is language that distinguishes human being from other species. It has been the common experience of all human beings that language is acquired in proper surrounding or situation. Acquisition of language is not like learning other subjects such as mathematics, sociology, history, economics, etc. It is the language itself to be acquired and get the information about it. We know well that, for acquiring a language, just the realization of the grammatical competence is not sufficient; it requires the communicative competence as well. Language is a marker of identity and a tool for representing local values and culture. On the one hand, the right to study one's own language is now considered a basic human right. On the other hand, there is an urgent-felt need, particularly among the younger generation, to identify with the global world culture. "The idea of India as a secular nation enters a phase of crisis in contemporary times with the majoritarian turn in Indian politics," which the author says should prompt academics to probe a series of issues on the "formation of the Indian nation and nationalism and its various fault-lines based on language, religion, caste, peasants, tribe, gender, and regional or sub-national politics". The articulations were successful and how did Maithili language and history was used as powerful tools for the articulations of modern Maithili identity.

Language Family: Indo-European, Indo-Iranian, Regulated by: India (Sahitya Akademi), Bihar,
Writing System: Tirhuta (Mithilakshar) (Former); Dialects: Central (Sotipura); Thēthi; Bajjika

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