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## A Survey Of 20th Century Maithili Literature

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## SURVEY

# A SURVEY OF 20TH CENTURY MAITHILI LITERATURE

Sushant Kumar Mishra

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**T**HOUGH, during the recent times Maithili language has been subjected to much oppression, its age-old vigour has refused to give up to linguistic and political onslaughts. Despite all odds, its literary tradition, which dates back at least to the 14th century, has produced many great writers and poets even in the 20th century. Some of the Maithili writers have written in Hindi also and have left their permanent mark in the domain of the Hindi literature. One may feel happy about the bilingual dexterity and literary talent of these writers, but it also raises certain questions like—why does a writer (or a poet) like Nagarjuna or Rajkamal starts writing in Maithili and then switches over to Hindi? Nagarjuna (who writes in Maithili with the name of Yatri) himself is an ardent defender of the forcefulness, compactness and idiomatic modernity of the Maithili language. He has given conclusive arguments to prove that Maithili is not a dialect but a language on its own.

Due to situations created by history, Maithili today has been reduced to the status of a minor language of India. The strong apathy of the government and the economic poverty of the Maithili speaking community have resulted in the discontinuation of several Maithili journals. In fact one can today hardly find a magazine or a journal being published regularly in Maithili. As a consequence, the publication of any literary piece written in Maithili becomes difficult. It may be a reason for writers to start writing in Hindi. However, here, the creative urge of writers and their benevolent desire to communicate with a greater number of readers play a more important role.

Despite all adversities, the centuries old literary tradition of Maithili has experimented during the course of 20th century almost all the old and new forms of literary activity. In poetry, Chanda Jha's works declare the dawn

of the 20th century. He wrote the *Ramayana* in Maithili. Numerous other poems by him also show that he continued the traditional literary forms. But the content has substantially changed. Chanda Jha is conscious as well as sensitive to the problems of the people and depict them in a realistic manner. His language is so simple and idiomatic that he became popular not only in the literary circles but also among the people. Chanda Jha's literary personality inspired a series of poets who were charged with the idea of social upliftment and enhancement of the status of their mother-tongue. Important among them are Yadunath Jha 'Yaduvar', Sitaram Jha and others. By 1930s poets like Yatri, Hemadevi, Kusheshwar Kumar and many others, have started attacking the bad traditions of the society. In the absence of a social reform movement, literature took up the task of gradually reforming the society.

From 1925, some of the poets, for example Bhuvanjee, evolved a new form of poetry in Maithili on the basis of the lyric is English. This lyric form of poetry did not follow the constraints of music and was marked by brilliant uses of various literary strategies. This kind of poetry, by the 50s, gradually evolved a poetic language in the style of prose. Many great poets like Tantra Nath Jha, Yatri, Arasi Prasad Singh, Brajkishore Verma 'Manipadma', Vyas and others contributed substantially to Maithili. The language of these poets are marked by a flow that catches the reader. The poets during this period were drawing from the western and modern Indian influences as well as from the old Sanskrit poetic tradition of India. Some of these poets are still contributing a lot to the poetry. This generation of poets have produced the greatest Maithili poetry of this century. Yatri's 'Patrahina Nagna Gachha', many poems of Bhuvanjee, Rajkamal Chaudhary, Manipadma, Vyas, Pt. Govinda Jha and other's are landmarks of 20th century Maithili poetry. The subject of the poetry varied from social problems to patriotism during the wars of '62, '65 and '71. After the 70s other batches of young poets arrived on the literary scene who have furthered the revolutionary spirit of the earlier poets.

Modern fiction writing in Maithili can be traced since the second decade of the 20th century. The first novels were written in 1914-15 by writers like Janardan Jha 'Janasidana', Bhola, and others. Even novel writing in Maithili began with a zeal to bring about reforms in the society. To protect the Maithili language and to safeguard the interests of its speech-community, were also the guiding principles of these novelists. Many novels which were written at this time, got published much later. However, 1914 onwards, after the publication of *Nirdayi Sasu* by Janardana Jha 'Janasidana', novels have been pub-

lished continuously. By the 1930s the Maithili novelists started producing mature novels of good quality. *Kanyadan* (1933) of Harimohan Jha, *Chandragrahan* (1932) by Kanchi Nath 'Kiran', exhibit good literary craftsmanship in terms of novel-writing. This is further perfected in the 40s with the publication of *Paro* (1946) by Yatri, *Dwiragamana* (1945) by Harimohan Jha, *Kumar* (1946) by Vyas and many other novels. In terms of quality, these novels are at par with the novels in any other language. Especially Yatri, who published *Nauturiya* (1954) and *Balacanama* (1967) takes the Maithili novel to a great height. In his first novel *Paro*, Yatri shows the attraction between two cousins, thus striking a harsh blow on the existing conformist sexual morals of the society in Mithila. Through *Kanyadan* and *Dwiragamana* (which may be considered the second part of *Kanyadan*), Harimohan Jha has actually shown the schizophrenia resulting from the sudden anglicisation because of the western education. The style is humorous and can be compared to that of P.G. Wodehouse. After this, a long list of novels and good novelists can be given out of which some great names are those of Mayanand Mishra, Manipadma, Rajkamal Chaudhary and many others.

'Bhishan Anyaya' (1923) by Kali Kumar Das and 'Manusyak Mol' (1924) by Kumar Ganganand Singh are supposed to be the first short stories of Maithili. Since then, Maithili short stories have developed in three distinct, though continuous phases—(1) stories till 1950 (2) stories of the 50s and the 60s (3) stories after the 60s.

The story writing before the 50s is marked by a humorous writing style with the sole purpose of entertainment. This genre is best represented by Harimohan Jha though many others were also writing in the same humorous style. Amongst those who do not follow this style, Bhuvanjee, Manmohan Jha, Vyas, Yatri, Yoganand Jha and others are important. Bhuvanjee has written symbolic, reflective and psychoanalytical stories like 'Raud-Chhaya' and 'Shunya'. Imagination, pathos and romantic sensibility are important elements in the stories of Manmohan Jha. Yoganand Jha is more inclined towards *shringar* (the erotic sentiment) and the thrilling narratives. Vyas is a very good writer of Maithili. His 'Rusal Jamai' is considered to be one of the best stories of Maithili. In his stories, Vyas gives a lively, symbolic and realistic picture of the society of Mithila. Yatri is a realistic story-writer whose stories are marked by the simplicity of style and a natural flavour.

The story-writers of the 50s and the 60s emphasized more on the character sketching while keeping the craft of the story intact. They were progressive writers who wanted to create a balance between

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the individual and the social in their stories. Some of them gave more importance to the social and some others to individual even though there was a striking similarity between the art of their story-writing. Both of them depict reality and do a psychoanalytical character-sketching in a language which is simple and suitable to the choice of the character. Some representative writers of this period are Lalit, Govind Jha, Mayanand Mishra, Rajkamal, Brajkishore Verma 'Manipadma' and many others. Even after the 60s, which can be considered the third phase of Maithili writing, the same writers and the new writers following the same trend have been actively writing short-stories. Nothing new has been evolved in style after the 80s. Instead, in the 90s, due to the lack of journals in Maithili, there has been a sharp decline in the number of short stories being published.

A good number of plays have also been written in Maithili but for want of well-established theatrical groups, they have not been made popular. The social attitude towards theatre-related professions have also created problems for the development of written as well as enacted plays. However there are some important playwrights like Jeevan Jha, Laldas, Govind Jha, Manipadma, Mahendra 'Malangiya', Chhatranand Singh Jha and many others. Many radio plays have also been written. The constraint of space prohibits us from presenting a critical appreciation of all the plays written during the course of this century. However, it can be said here that even the tradition of written plays have been evolving all through the 20th century.

One important point to be noted in the 20th century evolution of Maithili literature is that there are no well-defined literary movements in the process of its development. In fact, writers with different tendencies have been writing simultaneously. Also, sometimes the same writers have been creative in poetry as well as in different genres of prose writing. The creative writers have been assuming the role of critics as well. There is hardly anyone writing in Maithili who has substantially worked only as a critic of contemporary literature. One important reason for this may be the dearth of journals in Maithili. However, despite several problems of existence, only the quantity of Maithili literature has suffered. The quality of literature produced in Maithili has been good enough to equal the literature of any major language of India. □