
THE PROBLEM OF MAITHILI

Author(s): Ramanath Jha

Source: *Indian Literature*, DECEMBER 1969, Vol. 12, No. 4 (DECEMBER 1969), pp. 5-10

Published by: Sahitya Akademi

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24157120>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Indian Literature*

JSTOR

Languages without State or Region

A Seminar on Languages without State or Region was organised by the Sahitya Akademi in New Delhi on August 3 and 4, 1969. Among the papers contributed to the Seminar, two are reproduced below—Ed.

THE PROBLEM OF MAITHILI

Ramanath Jha

AMONG THE LANGUAGES represented on Sahitya Akademi, Maithili stands in a peculiar predicament. It is spoken by nearly one third of the people of the State of Bihar, almost all over North Bihar, and parts of the South also. It is the only one of the three indigenous languages of the State that has a literary tradition dating back to the 8th century, and all the Universities of the State have recognised it as a subject of teaching and examination. But most unfortunately, Maithili has not yet been recognised as a regional language by the Government of Bihar and does not receive any aid, grant or encouragement for its development, as a result of which it is literally being starved. It is systematically and deliberately being ignored, if not suppressed, at home. The recognition by Sahitya Akademi has given Maithili only the status; it still lacks the political recognition which seems now essential for the removal of all those disabilities from which it suffers and which stand in its growth and development.

It may sound surprising to my learned friends of Sahitya Akademi, but it is a fact, that among those who count in the political life of Bihar there are people, no matter to which political party they belong, who still labour under the delusion, or allow themselves to be deluded, that Maithili is not a language but only a dialect of Hindi. The recognition by Sahitya Akademi

accorded after a thorough consideration of the matter does not seem to have any effect on these diehard protagonists of Hindi who would sacrifice Maithili at the altar of the national language. Speakers of Maithili are not antagonistic to Hindi. Their contribution to Hindi has not been less either in quality or in quantity than that of any other non-Hindi speaking people of India. Yatriji who has won the last award in Maithili is renowned as Nagarjun in the field of Hindi literature also. We do not believe that there is any antagonism between the national language and our own native language, but the planned and deliberate antagonism of non-Maithili speaking politicians and lovers of Hindi still continues to oppose the cause of Maithili in the name of the national language.

Whenever there is any talk about the amelioration of Maithili language and literature, the Government of Bihar brings forth the cases of Magahi and Bhojpuri, the other two indigenous languages of Bihar. We sincerely wish that they, too, should prosper and flourish, but their cases are different from ours. We are represented on the Sahitya Akademi and the Universities of Bihar have recognised Maithili for teaching and examination. Bhojpuri and Magahi have still to achieve that. But because they have not yet that status, Maithili is being denied the privileges which it deserves from the State Government.

In the field of education, it has been the settled policy of the Government of India that primary education should be imparted through the mother tongue. The Government of Bihar conceded this privilege to Maithili more than ten years ago but primary education to our children is not yet imparted in Maithili because there are no books available. The Government of Bihar publishes books for the primary classes and does not permit the use of books printed privately. No books are published in Maithili and therefore no teaching in Maithili is possible.

At the secondary stage, Maithili is recognised as a Modern Indian Language and our boys who read Maithili have to appear in Rashtrabhasha paper of a lower standard. This privilege is

PROBLEM OF MAITHILI

allowed to our boys along with students of Bengali, Urdu, Nepali, Oriya, Santali and all the minority languages of Bihar. But students of other minority languages have the privilege of writing their answers in other papers also in their own language while students of Maithili have to write in Hindi, like students who read Hindi of a higher standard. Maithili is not given the status of even a minority language there.

This is the case with the University Examination also, though in all the Universities of Bihar there is provision of examination and teaching of Maithili up to the M.A. standard. In course of the last six years more than a dozen theses in Maithili have been approved for the Ph. D. and D. Lit. degrees. Still there is no provision of Maithili in the examinations held by the Public Service Commission of Bihar. More than twelve years ago when Maithili was recognised for the M.A. Examination, the then Chairman of the Bihar Public Service Commission wrote to the Government recommending the inclusion of Maithili in the curricula of the State public examinations but nothing has been done to implement it, with the result that post-graduate teaching of Maithili is losing its popularity and our young men are getting desperate.

The Government of Bihar has established the Rashtrabhasha Parishad at Patna at a great cost and it is doing very valuable work indeed, of which all of us of Bihar are really proud. But the same Government has not spent a single pie up till now for the cause of Maithili.

Only recently the Government of India constituted a Bharatiya Bhasha Samiti for the development of Indian languages. I felt, and still feel, that if there is any language in India which deserves the special attention of the Government of India, it is Maithili, and I submitted an appeal to the Government of India which was recommended even by the Sahitya Akademi but I was told by the Ministry of Education that 'As Maithili is not yet included in the 8th schedule, I am afraid, it will not be possible for the Government to accord it representation on the Samiti at this

stage.' I had written to the Minister of Education to help us in establishing an Institute or Pratisthana of Maithili at Darbhanga and I was told that 'the scheme of setting up of State Institutes of Languages is in the State Sector in the fourth Five Year Plan. You are accordingly advised to approach the State Government in the matter.' The State Government of Bihar does not even respond to our appeals, with the result that Maithili is the only language in India represented on Sahitya Akademi which is denied consideration from the Government of India, while at home it is being suppressed in the name of Rashtrabhasha.

Maithili has developed through the patronage of the Maharajas, Rajas and Zamindars of Mithila but now that there are no more Maharajas and Rajas there is no source of its sustenance left. Moreover, in the modern days of welfare state, it should be the duty of the State to work for the growth and development of the languages spoken within the state, but the apathetic, if not positively hostile, attitude of the State Government leaves Maithili languishing. Whatever little is published is for the consumption of students in schools and colleges. All credit goes to our writers who publish, now and then, their works at their own cost but that is too meagre for a language which has been neglected and undeveloped and strives to grow forth rapidly like the sister languages of India.

And all this has happened and is happening in a State where one third of the entire population speaks Maithili and almost one third of the members of the State legislature are Maithili speaking. If our members of the State legislature take it up in right earnest, they can do much to help their language. But Maithili-speaking people have always been backward politically, with the result that in Bihar people of Mithila have always been ruled over by non-Maithili speaking people, mostly of south Bihar. We who work in the field of Maithili literature never make of our language a political issue. We do not oppose any language, we love all literatures, and works in Brajabhasha

PROBLEM OF MAITHILI

and Hindi have always been popular in Mithila along with our own literature.

It may not be out of place to mention here that during the eighties of the last century when the modern Indian languages were being introduced in schools as well as in the law courts, the then leader of Maithil Society was the Maharaja of Darbhanga, Lakshmishwar Singh Bahadur, who was a staunch nationalist among the princes. For the sake of national intergration he adopted Hindi and though he did not ignore or neglect Maithili he gave Hindi a preference for national purposes and kept Maithili for use at home. But the most outstanding service that he rendered to the cause of national integration was the establishment of a Devanagari press at Darbhanga. Till then Mithila had her own script and that was the script used all over Mithila. The Maharaja did not establish a Maithili press but printed Maithili books in Devanagari script. In course of these eighty years Maithili script has gone out of use and not even one in a hundred Maithils knows the script. It was a sacrifice that Mithila has voluntarily made for the cause of Hindi, the national language, and it is because we have given up our script that people doubt if Maithili is an independent language like Bengali, Oriya or Assamese. We expect that protagonists of the national language should remember that since we have given up our script, we deserve help to foster our language; but it is a tragedy that we are being compelled to let our language, too, die out for want of the most elementary privileges which are our due.

We who are still inspired by our old tradition revere the national language and learn it voluntarily. We do not want to make of our language a political issue. But our days are past and already our young men are getting desperate. Only last month, they have begun organizing a Sena to work against Hindi. We of the older generation have no agitational approach to the problem and we are sure of the rightness of our own cause, but if there is an agitation in Mithila against Hindi, it will be for no fault of ours, but the responsibility for this would



INDIAN LITERATURE

lie with those who work deliberately against our fundamental right about our own language. Only recently the distinguished leader of young Mithila, Lalit Narayan Mishra, M.P. has voiced the feeling of our young men that Mithila should be a separate State to work for its progress. Our young men are inspired by what is being done in other parts of the country for the sake of regional languages. Let me hope that wiser counsels will prevail and the real protagonists and well-wishers of Hindi will raise their voice against the injustice being done to Maithili before Mithila is lost to them. And let me declare once again that we of Mithila are not antagonistic to Hindi, we admire Hindi and revere it, but we do want that Maithili should not be ignored, much less suppressed.

Let me appeal to this distinguished gathering of renowned scholars of all the languages of India to lend us their moral support so that with their good-will Maithili may find its rightful place at the Centre as well as at home.

SANSKRIT IN OUR NATIONAL LIFE

V. D. Ghatge

SANSKRIT IS ONE of our national languages. We are a big country and can afford the luxury of multiple national languages. Canada, Belgium and South Africa have two national languages each. Switzerland, a small country, has three or perhaps four. We can certainly cherish and nourish a dozen or more national languages without much difficulty, provided we do not let them quarrel among themselves, as old dames are apt to do. We can prevent such quarrels, if we assign separate and specific functions to each of them. The regional languages and English which are our national languages, will continue to serve as