

# **The Politics of Minority Languages: Some Reflections on the Maithili Language Movement \***

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## **Abstract**

Post-Independence India has witnessed varied mass mobilisations over the issue of language. Such mobilisations have taken place at three levels: (1) the national where the question of Hindi versus English has exercised great many minds and led to intense conflicts; (2) the regional where the 'vernacular' languages were projected and then made the basis of politico-administrative organisation of Indian states and, (3) the intra-state, which happens to be the provenance of minority languages and where attempts are being made by the speech communities concerned to get legal-constitutional recognition for their languages. Against this backdrop, the present paper examines the chequered career of the Maithili Language Movement as an instance of the politics of minority languages, and attempts to explain its waxing and waning. Overall, it offers a critical assessment of the movement in order to underline its future potentialities and constraints.

## **Introduction**

In popular parlance the language categories of India are variously designated as mother tongues, minority languages, regional languages, scheduled languages, official languages, and national languages. These categories are, however, not fixed for ever. Historically, there have been quite frequent crossing of boundaries owing to language-based mobilisations and State intervention. Quite often, a variety of mother tongues go through processes of status reduction. These processes of marginalisation are the function of the dynamic interplay between the contending interests of varying social groups. Unsurprisingly enough, in India such mother tongues have, over a period of time, ceased to be autonomous languages and have become a variety of another language. At times, the state groups a range of mother tongues into different sets of languages through the instrument of census. For example, in the 1971 census forty-six mother tongues had been grouped with Hindi

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in the reports of the Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities (Brass 1994: 159). True, not all mother tongues are linguistically autonomous entities, but the grouping is not governed by the linguistic criterion alone. Otherwise, Maithili, with 5 million speakers (1961 census, according to the claims of the elites of the community it is over 15 million), a literary past and script, and genetic relation with eastern Indo-Aryan, would not have been treated as a variety of Hindi, a western Indo-Aryan language. This is further corroborated by the fact that the number of mother tongues, as enumerated in the census, has gone down from 1,652 in 1961, to 221 in 1971 to 106 in 1981 (Krishnamurti 1998: 256–57). What is to be noted is that census is only a visible instrument of the absorption of powerless minority languages. In reality, it articulates the mobility struggles of conflicting power groups. Dominant pressure groups/castes have historically used census to further their sectional interests (see Cohn 1990). In quite a few cases, the people speaking different mother tongues themselves prefer not to report them and instead report the regional/state language as their mother tongue. This strategy not only brings political mileage to the groups concerned by making them part of the regional/national linguistic mainstream but also saves them from many socio-political complications such as the fear of discrimination on account of their constituting minority language groups. In any case, no monocausal explanation can do justice to the complex processes of status reduction of languages as they vary according to the contexts and situations.

The language scene in post-Independence India seems to be characterised by a definitive hierarchy, at least in terms of official status (see Brass 1994: 175). For obvious reasons, Hindi and English occupy top positions in the official hierarchy. Regional languages come next, having been recognised as official languages in the linguistically reorganised states, nay, the very basis of their organisation, and also for having found a place in the coveted Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. At the third level are languages listed in the Eighth Schedule but having been deprived of the luxury of territorial anchorage in particular provinces such as Sanskrit, Sindhi and Nepali (Gorakhali). At the lowest level are those mother tongues which are not recognised either as official languages of India or of any state and are not listed in the Eighth Schedule which, in fact, constitute the bulk of minority languages. Such mother tongues, along with the officially recognised languages, were recorded fully for the first time in the 1961 census, where some 1,652 were listed. Among these mother tongues in 1971, were thirty-three with recorded speakers of more than a million. Maithili, our present concern, occupies sixteenth position with 6,121,922 speakers (*ibid.*; 159).

The processes of the constitution and consolidation of linguistic identity necessarily entail shifting configurations between language, identity and politics. Language becomes a contested site to access resources, including political power, where larger politics of identity unfolds itself. Naturally enough, linguistic and

other identities, such as religious, ethnic, and regional, merge, cross cut and diverge. This intermeshing of identities tends to complicate the politics of language leading to warring linguistic groups and factions with opposing identities and interests, real or otherwise. Language no longer remains a means of collective communication and imagination but gets embedded in a given socio-political power structure. The socially mobile and politically ambitious social groups (of all places and at all time) see to it that the plural cultural resources of a given language are made amenable to a distinctively new group identity, which would serve their political ends better. As a rule, languages come to mark asymmetrical power relations: the relationship of domination and subordination. Proponents of any dominant language regard the minor languages (read 'dialects') as part of them or subordinate to them. This framework helps us situate the plight of minority languages such as Maithili in the northern region which was used as cannon fodder to consolidate the emerging dominance of ever-paternalistic Hindi as the *rashtrabhasha*. In fact, the very usage of the term *dialects/ minority languages* smacks of the relationship of domination and subordination.

Basing itself on a review of secondary literature, and on the insights and observations gathered by the writer as an insider to the speech community and the movement, the present paper intends to examine the chequered career of the Maithili Language Movement as an instance of the politics of minority languages. It attempts to look into the causes and consequences of the movement with a view to explaining the waxing and waning that it has gone through. Overall, it aims to present a critical assessment of the movement in historical and contemporary outline in order to underline its future potentialities and constraints.

### **Linguistic Reorganisation of States and the Minority Languages**

Between 1956 and 1966 the linguistic states were formed on the basis of twelve dominant regional languages—eight in 1956 (Assam, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Karnataka, Kashmir, Kerala, Orissa and Tamil Nadu), two in 1960 (Gujarat and Maharashtra) and two in 1966 (Punjab and Haryana) in addition to states having Hindi as their official languages (Krishnamurti 1998: 252). This does not mean that all the states could be formed on linguistic basis (there are exceptions such as Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, and the recent ones, Jharkhand, Uttaranchal and Chhatisgarh). Regardless of these exceptions and the contention that the organising principle was not that each language (whether listed in the Constitution or not) will have a state but that each state would have a majority language (Annamalai 2001: 153), a distinctive language has turned out to be the very *raison d'être* for a privileged claim to statehood. By implication, it has also meant that the linguistic states need not remain multilingual. As the report of the Linguistic

Reorganisation Commission puts it,

An autonomous linguistic province...means an autonomous linguistic state and an autonomous state means...that its territories are inviolate. And if in a linguistic province the majority language group comes to regard the territory of the entire province as exclusively its own, the time cannot be far distant when it will come to regard the minority living in that province and people living outside it as not their own (cited in Karna 1999: 85).

The state, through various means, tries to make the official language symbolise the state. One particular language is projected to be the shared symbol of statehood. Annamalai (2001: 153) rightly avers that the distinction between the instrumental and symbolic function of language is obliterated. This is made possible by the sheer will of those commanding power at the state level as they also have the numerical majority on their side. At times, regional pride or religion or tribal-ethnic identity can be made amenable to linguistic assertion. Thus, numerical superiority (derived from the logic of popular democracy) and the political power that it generates make a language-based state marginalise other languages in the state. With population and power in its favour, the official language is treated as *de facto* 'national language of the state' making all people in the state identify themselves with it and pay allegiance to it (ibid.).

In a way, the growing assertion of regional languages has been deeply wedded to the character of Indian nationalism (Karna 1999: 86). What is relevant for the present purpose is the rather unexpected assertion of the unrecognised local contact languages (mostly minority languages) for recognition of their rights. Karna links this assertion to the release of certain social forces by the formation of linguistic states (ibid.). The imposition of linguistic uniformity in the name of language-based states is sufficient cause for the linguistic movements to fight against the domination of one language. Be that as it may, no state or union territory in the country is entirely homogeneous. The minority languages in the state range from 5 per cent (Kerala) to nearly 85 per cent (Nagaland) of their respective populations. One could therefore call India 'a country of linguistic minorities' (Krishna 1991: 26). There is another aspect of the minority language scene. The dominant language in one state may be a minority language elsewhere, as in the case of the Malayalis constituting minority language speakers in many other states such as Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland (ibid.; 28). In essence, patterns of verbal usage in the subcontinent have hardly ever been coterminous with political and administrative boundaries. The present linguistic states are based on the language identity of dominant pressure groups. *Language-identity* regions are not necessarily homogeneous *communication regions*, as is being accepted like an article of faith by administrative and educational agencies in various states (Khubchandani 1991:

30).

In effect, the minority languages are the first victims of the linguistic state's quest for homogeneity and standardisation. According to Khubchandani (*ibid.*; 30–31) such overenthusiasm of many state agencies to bring about coercive homogeneity in communications in favour of the language identity of the dominant groups is a typical instance of generating insular tendencies among plural societies. As a result, since the 1970s the number of educational languages (languages used as media of instruction and those studied as subjects) has been decreasing steadily. As a rule, the languages axed are minority and tribal languages. In undivided Bihar itself, Ho, Mundari, Kurukh (Oraon), Kharia, and Maithili have been discontinued. 'It appears that the most neglected languages as media of primary education are the various tribal languages of central India, and languages that have affinity with Hindi such as Maithili and Bhojpuri' (*ibid.*; 92). With educationists and administrators concentrating their attention on the three-language formula, the educational needs of the minority language students tend to be forgotten. Throughout India, the 40–10 (40 students in the school, 10 in a class) requirement for providing minority language teaching remains unimplemented (*ibid.*; 97). Even otherwise, access to resources and opportunities is linked to the medium of learning. The real-life experience of depleting or dwindling of opportunities forces the students of minority languages to opt for the dominant language. It is not a question of sentiment but of survival in the midst of scarcity. When education becomes commodified the non-marketable languages get eliminated from the medium of instruction. As Peggy Mohan (2001: 2609–11) points out, the vast number of speakers of various dialects and languages in India cannot access the 'open-ended world of modernity' as they 'are excluded from that world, by their poverty, the lack of educational opportunities available to them in their languages, by the sheer cussedness of the social system'. However, they too have ambitions of 'upward transit to a bigger world with more opportunities open to them, the world represented in India by English' [and other dominant languages]. This social impasse leaves them effectively with two options: to be in place and keep contributing to the vitality of these languages or to move ahead and sacrifice any languages that come in the way of their empowerment.

Generally, those who exercise the first option (which include linguistic minorities) are the ones who resist the homogenising juggernaut of dominant languages. Whenever and wherever they assert their distinctive linguistic identity, conflicts follow. The nature of the conflict and the extent of the success of the protesting groups depend on the nature of numerical and political equations between the minority and the majority (Annamalai 2001: 153). To the extent that language is a source to access resources, positions, and power, dominant social groups manoeuvre linguistic identity in order to consolidate and retain power. In some cases, certain language groups might join together to keep away some language

group(s) from positions of power. The general antagonism found among the speakers of Hindi, Bhojpuri and Magahi/Magadhi towards the demands of the Maithili language movement is a case in point. Also, the politics of numbers steamrolls the regional minority languages or groups. In a democracy of numbers the marginal groups are bound to become invisible unless disproportionate attention is showered on them.

### **Dialectalization and the Politics of Linguistic Identity**

There is nothing inherent in the nature of language that automatically makes it the basis of political contestations. When language acquires institutional importance in some major domains of nationality—law, polity and economy—it may assume political significance (Karna 1999: 82). Even otherwise, mobilisation of linguistic loyalty for political purposes is implicated in the very nature of modern democratic processes (Brass 1974, 1994) or the needs of the modern State (Hobsbawm 1992: 51–63). Such mobilisations are as recent as the arrival of modernity and associated transition from ‘fuzzy’ to ‘enumerated communities’ (Kaviraj 1992).

A nation-state feels compelled to enforce a single dominant language in all spheres of life. A single dominant language creates the myth of a homogeneous communication zone. It promotes mass media, large-scale printing and centralised control of information. It also leads to greater uniformity. Concomitantly, the minorities are exhorted to join the mainstream which, in effect, means giving up the loyalty of their own language and welcoming assimilation through the dominant language. In any case, the apparent linguistic homogeneity and uniformity achieved by the State hides differences and deviations beneath a false surface. For Pattanayak (1981: 40) the assertion of identity of Maithili, Bhojpuri and Pahadi in the Hindi Zone of India are instances of protest against the false uniformity in the name of Hindi. Several other factors go into the drawing and redrawing of linguistic boundaries. More often than not, this exercise is fraught with serious political consequences. On the other hand, certain languages prefer branching out from the existing language and establishing their claims for a separate identity. For instance, the christening of Angika and Bajjhika as separate languages indicates their desire to break with the existing Maithili identity (Pattanayak 1981: 43). In this process of identity-formation, ‘the linguistic distinction between language and dialect is immaterial in the sociolinguistic context of India’ (Annamalai 2001: 38). The emergence of standard dialects and the social and economic values attached to them make other dialects low and dispensable. What is considered to be a separate language like Maithili by linguists on historical and grammatical grounds may be perceived by some of its speakers as a dialect, and be reported as such in the census, and a separate language with a literary history of its own by other speakers (ibid.).

In fact, the *dialectalization* process is one of the means for the dominant language to consolidate its power. Through this process, more mother tongues are added under major languages and their population is thus enlarged, adding to their dominance. As a consequence, powerless languages lose their existence as languages. This may even include languages in a linguistic sense, which are grammatically distinct and have a literary tradition of their own. Hindi, for example, has absorbed languages like Maithili and Avadhi as its mother tongue varieties (ibid.; 79).

Obviously, what matters in categorising languages and in naming these categories is its politico-economic dimensions and the way it has been constructed socially not only by the community of its speakers but also by neighbouring speech communities and the State. This social construction may refer to 'the boundary of the language, that is, about which variants of speech are included in a language, it may be about the norm of the language, what is considered as the standard speech which is equated with language'. And, any 'social construct is basically ideological in nature in the sense of being the link "to the process of sustaining asymmetrical relations of power" (Annamalai 1998: 149). In the case of Maithili, this has been made clear more than once that "objective" language differences would not suffice for a reorganisation to succeed or inclusion in the Eighth Schedule, where a cultural and literary elite demanded the creation of a separate province for the speakers of Maithili, a language distinct from its neighbouring communities of Hindi and Bengali speakers' (Brass 1974, 1994: 173). The irony is that on the one hand, the claim to a distinctive linguistic identity is denied to Maithili by treating it as an adjunct or mother tongue variety of Hindi, while on the other, in terms of nativity of the speech, a Maithili mother tongue speaker of Hindi is not treated on a par with the Khari Boli speaking community, and quite frequently, is branded a dialect speaker of Hindi, i.e., 'not a native speaker in the centre of the construct' (Annamalai 1998: 154). This is so by the political decision of the State as well as the community's ambivalence between loyalty to the mother tongue and regional and national aspirations realised through identification with Hindi (Brass 1974).

### **Contested Space and Uneasy Adjustments**

Like many other movements of its genre, the Maithili language movement has put forth two principal demands: the enforcement of Constitutional provisions concerning the minority languages and inclusion in the Eighth Schedule. There are four Articles in the Constitution of India that protect the rights of linguistic minorities. Only one of them specifically refers to mother tongues. Article 350 A obliges every state and local authority to 'provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minorities groups'. Articles 20, 30 and 350, which refer to languages, confer broader rights upon linguistic minorities to preserve their 'distinct language, script or culture'

(Article 20), 'to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice' (Article 30), and to submit representations for redress of grievances to any central or state authority in any language (Article 350). Moreover, a listing on the Eighth Schedule carries symbolic and material advantages: a presumptive right to recognition as a minority language in states where other languages are dominant, including a presumptive right to recognition as medium of instruction in both primary and secondary school classes in such states, a right to the protection of the President of India (i.e., the central government) on the advice of the Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities against discrimination in use of the language, and representation on language development committees appointed by the central government (Brass 1994: 175–79).

It is equally true that in both respects such spokesmen have faced strong resistance from state governments that wish to avoid the administrative costs of implementing mother tongue instruction for a multiplicity of minority languages. So far as inclusion in the Eighth Schedule is concerned, the government has felt that 'such recognition to a geographically compact language group would provide a basis for making a further claim thereafter for the creation of a new linguistic state' as all the languages in the Eighth Schedule except Sanskrit and Sindhi have also been recognised as the official language of one or more states. Moreover, the listing of further languages in the Eighth Schedule would act as a catalyst and lead to an unending demand for addition of more and more languages therein (*ibid.*; 178).

At the root of such demands is an aspiration among the spokesmen for languages such as Maithili to get recognition as a language, and not just as a mother tongue. It is a different matter altogether that many minority language movements have not been able to generate adequate political momentum by way of developing strong enough movements to gain inclusion in the Eighth Schedule let alone to achieve a separate linguistic state. They are equally determined to oppose all those 'who wish to secure the dominance of the major regional languages in their states and seek to assimilate the speakers of such mother tongues to the dominant language' (*ibid.*; 179).

While trying to evaluate the Maithili language movement, Brass (1974, see also Singh 1986: 194–95) locates its failure in the absence of the requisite transformation, on the part of the Maithili-speaking people, of their objective differences from the rest of the people of Bihar as well as from the rest of India into a significant subjective consciousness. This meant that the Maithili language elites have been ambiguous about their identity between Mithilia and India, and thus have failed to ensure popular participation in the movement. More importantly, he finds Maithili's lack of association with a distinctive religion a big stumbling block in the consolidation of the movement. This jibes well with his overall thesis where

religion has been posited as the pre-eminent locus of identity and political mobilisation in north India. In his explanatory framework, other co-ordinates of identity are made subsidiary to the overarching axis of religion to project what he calls 'multi-symbol congruence,' which makes a sustained political mobilisation possible. Thus, political elites have selected religion as the primary symbol and have exerted themselves to make language and other symbols congruent (see also King 1999: 4).

Singh (1986: 195), though differing from Brass's assessment, concedes low level of social mobilisation achieved by the movement. He finds a certain reluctance on the part of the political elites in north Bihar to emphasise regional symbols in the political arena and also the disproportionate participation and leadership by Maithils outside the region of Mithila. However, he does not go into the question as to why this has been the case. Moreover, his rendering of the achievements is highly loaded in favour of certain individuals and political personalities. It seems all the gains of the movements were the generous gifts bestowed on the people of Mithila by those loving *Maithil* brethren who had somehow risen to positions of power and authority. Nonetheless, he raises an important question as to how a language movement (Maithili) fails to register its presence in an area that has been in the forefront of almost all political movements of the twentieth century (see also Singer 1997).

On a different plane, the antecedents of the Maithili language movement can be traced back to the great struggle for dominance between Hindi and Urdu in the nineteenth century (see King 1999). In order to consolidate its claim as the future *rashttrabhasha*, as the first step, Hindi was to establish itself as the regional standard language for the entire region from Punjab to Bengal. Naturally, in this great historical drama the claims of the small mother tongues and vernaculars had no or negligible role to play except acquiescing to the demands of the main contenders as they were far removed from the nationalist aspirations and were not supposedly equipped to cater to the demands of a great nation-in-the-making. Even after independence, few mother tongues (Punjabi being the sole exception) have succeeded in achieving an officially recognised distinctive linguistic personality. Independence also meant the accretion of power to Hindi as it became the official language of the Union of India. Rai (2001: 105) puts it succinctly: 'It [Hindi] has become a kind of poor man's "English", the language of social access and upward mobility. "Dialect" users are under pressure to acquire this official, officials' "Hindi"'. Arguably, mother tongues became the cannon fodder in the game of facile democratic legitimacy that Hindi had to achieve to make good on its claim of having the largest percentage of speakers. Nonetheless, the ambitions of the promoters of Hindi as the regional standard language of north India have meant the absorption of numerous mother tongues under its umbrella and there being rendered its dialects.

### Whither Maithili Language Movement?

Incidentally, the first great success for the spread of Hindi occurred in Bihar in 1881 when Hindi displaced Urdu as the sole official language of that province. Logically enough, the potential claims of three large mother tongues (Maithili, Magahi, and Bhojpuri), which Grierson had included in the Bihari group, were ignored in the long-drawn battle between two competing regional standards (Hindi and Urdu). Bihar Official Language Act, 1950 made Hindi the sole official language of the State but in the mother tongue census of 1961 only 44.3 per cent of the population of the State had declared Hindi to be their mother tongue (Brass 1994: 184). However, an interesting question arises here: why have political representatives of Maithili always insisted that Maithili is an entirely distinct language from Hindi while those of Bhojpuri and Magahi have treated the inclusion of their mother tongues as dialects of Hindi as a *fait accompli*? In fact, even among Maithili speakers this claim has been largely restricted to an upper caste elite, while, many, if not most, middle and lower caste groups in the Maithili-speaking districts of north Bihar have accepted Hindi as their language (ibid.). There also seems to be a variation along caste lines so far as identification with the Maithili language is concerned. Mainly, Maithil Brahmins and Karan Kayasthas provide the support systems to the Maithili movement (most of the leaders of the movement come from these two caste groups) whereas various other caste groups living in the region of Mithila are projecting Bajjhikka and Angika as their mother tongues and are consciously seeking to break away from all-inclusive regional identity based on the Maithili language (Pattanayak 1981: 43; for further details on the relationship between caste and language/dialect see Bean 1974 and Pattanayak 1975, 1976). This dependence of the movement on a handful of caste groups combined with the disproportionate representation of migrant leadership (by Maithils outside the region of Mithila and in places such as Kolkata, Delhi, and Allahabad) has narrowly circumscribed the social base of the movement. It also shows that the social character of the leadership itself has remained largely unchanged. The consistent failure of the leadership to reach wider social constituencies has had a telling effect on the movement. It comes as no surprise, then, that Maithili language elites seem to have given up even the pretensions of a mass-based language movement. Their attempts are more focused on literary production than mass mobilisation. In the light of Annamalai's (1986: 9–11) classification of language movements on the basis of their concern with *status* or *corpus* of a language, the present day Maithili language movement can be seen as marking a shift from the earlier status-orientation (implying attempts towards achieving a separate politico-ethnic identity by way of claiming certain statutory privileges and acceptance for use in certain domains) to the current corpus-orientation (meaning choice and reform of script and spelling, choice of variety for specific domains, and choice of source for lexical development).

One can cull out two interrelated hypotheses from the available literature in order to account for the claim of Maithili for a separate linguistic state in the 1950s and 1960s (though never pressed too far) and its quest for a distinctive linguistic status. First, among the three languages identified by Grierson under the rubric Bihari - Magahi, Bhojpuri and Maithili, only the last could claim a literary tradition of several centuries while the other two have had rich oral folk literature. In this respect, Maithili could rub shoulders with Avadhi, Brajbhasa, and Khari Boli (King 1999: 200). This literary heritage got the indirect official stamp when the Sahitya Akademi (the National Academy of Letters) included Maithili in the list of twenty-two languages chosen for the regular annual awards in the field of literature. Eighteen languages are already officially recognised languages by virtue of their inclusion in the Eighth Schedule, whereas Maithili shares its rank with Rajasthani, Dogri and English. Curiously enough, which brings us to our second point, in the case of Maithili, approvals of its being linguistically autonomous have come from the scientific community — experts ranging from Grierson to Suniti Kumar Chatterjee to the members of the committee of the Sahitya Akademi — which further seems to have fuelled up the processes of political mobilisation (see Singh 1986: 186). At least, for the participants and spokesperson of the movement, it seemed to be a case of objective differences working themselves out and making the linguistic fault-lines visible rather than out and out instrumental interests masquerading as primordial linguistic loyalties and associated communitarianism. These conjectures, nonetheless, continue to beg answers as all objective differences do not lead to attempts to transform them into subjective perceptions. After all, Avadhi had to yield to the onslaught of Hindi and similar other literary languages (now dialects of Hindi) have come to terms with their historically-destined status (see King 1994; Rai 2001). Interestingly, a close perusal of the demands of the Maithili movement shows that they too were geared towards the extension of use of languages into the public domains. The principal demands were as follows (Singh 1986: 179–80):

- Maithili should be accepted as an optional (or obligatory for the students in north Bihar) subject as well as the medium of instruction in primary education. Subsequently, a demand for inclusion of Maithili as a subject in the list of the Bihar Public Service Commission was also made. Further, they pressed for the acceptance of Maithili as a subject in the universities.
- To protect the language, literature and culture of Mithila a university should be established in the region. Also there should be a Maithili Academy on the lines of the Bihar Hindi Grantha Academy and the Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad.
- To cater to the special needs of the Maithili-speaking population an All India Radio station should be set up in Darbhanga.

- There should be acceptance of the language by the Sahitya Akademi and such other official and cultural bodies.
- A separate state of Mithila should be carved out on the basis of the language. Additionally, it should be made the associate official language of the state of Bihar.

Then, there were minor demands like publication of official notices and advertisements in Maithili, use of Maithili script in the names of railway stations in Bihar, governmental support for the exhibition of Maithili books and periodicals, and introduction of a new train by the name Mithila Express. In course of time, all these demands were met except two, i.e., separate statehood and inclusion in the Eighth Schedule. Maithili Academy was established in Patna in 1976. In the same year the All India Radio station was made operational at Darbhanga. In the previous year, i.e., 1975, a university named after one of the popular leaders of the region, L.N.Mishra, was inaugurated. The Bihar Public Service Commission accorded Maithili a place in the list of recognised subjects in 1972. Sahitya Akademi had already granted recognition to the language in 1964. All these apparent achievements, however, fail to belie the assertion that the movement was accompanied by somewhat minimal political action. One tends to see these achievements more as the outcome of elite action and manipulations at the official level than that of mass action. This probably explains the feeling that the successes of the movement amounted to 'symbolic concessions without effective protection of the rights' (ibid.). This assumes added significance as it has been voiced by a sympathetic observer of the movement who seems to be less inclined 'to call the outcome of this movement a failure at this stage' (ibid.; 195).

In the meantime, Bihar Government's declaration of making Urdu the second official language of the State in 1980 adds another dimension to the Maithili language movement. This is so because Urdu, as the second official language, has to be made effective in precisely those districts which have been the stronghold of Maithili. Going by Brass' thesis (1974), this linguistic turn on the part of the Bihar Government would amount to the ultimate dying out of the movement. In that case, the leaders and spokesmen of the movement should have echoed sentiments articulated by the famous socialist theoretician Karl Kautsky in a different context: '...[small] languages will be increasingly confined to domestic use, and even there they will tend to be treated like an old piece of inherited family furniture, something that we treat with veneration even though it has not much practical use (cited in Hobsbawm 1992: 36). Does the contemporary low ebb of the Maithili movement mean that their proponents have reconciled themselves to the eventual disappearance of Maithili? Do we find such a resigned tone having sunk deep in them?

### By Way of Conclusion

However, an alternative reading of the movement seems possible. As some of the recent scholarship on social movements has argued:

When we examine the impact of movements, then we must gauge the extent to which their demands, discourses, and practices circulate in weblike, capillary fashion (e.g., are deployed, adopted, appropriated, co-opted or reconstructed as the case may be) in larger institutional and cultural arenas. [For such an assessment, one needs to go beyond] the prevalent notion that 'the measure of success of a social movement is its ability to achieve mass mobilizations and public protests'...[W]e must consider that there may not be any 'demonstrations to count'...[B]ut there will be new generations of students, leaders, teachers, development workers, and community elders who have been touched in one way or another by the movement and its cultural production (Alvarez et al. 1998: 16).

The very selection of the theme and substantive focus of this paper by the present writer tilts towards the second reading of the Maithili language movement, albeit, on different theoretical grounds, 'where social movements' political interventions extend into and beyond political society and the state'. It calls attention to 'the cultural practices and interpersonal networks of daily life that sustain social movements across mobilizational ebbs and flows and that infuse new cultural meanings into political practices and collective actions' (ibid: 14). The richness of the literary output in Maithili, the publication and circulation of literary journals like *Antika*, the new sense of linguistic solidarity and cultural activism being found in the migrants from the region and the use of the already existing institutional space to further and consolidate them, all point towards a new configuration of the movement.

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