

MAITHILI IN MEDIEVAL NEPAL : A HISTORICAL APPRAISAL

Basudevlal Das

Department of History, TU, Thakur Ram Multiple Campus, Birganj, Nepal
email: basudevlaldas@gmail.com

Abstract

Nepal is a multi-linguistic nation. Maithili is one of the major languages of Nepal. This is spoken as a mother-tongue in eastern Tarai of Nepal. Historically speaking, the development of Maithili language took place in medieval period, where the two dynasties i.e. the Karnatas of Mithila and the Senas of Makawanpur had played major roles. Maithili expanded towards Kathmandu valley also. There are many manuscripts written in Maithili preserved in National Archive, Kathmandu. Even now, in the devotional songs sang by the aged persons in Kathmandu valley, there are many Maithili words found. Describing the importance of Maithili language in medieval period, this article may be a historical background for the people engaged in policy making and the language movement.

Keywords

The Karnata Dynasty; The Sena Dynasty; The Mallas; Maithili language; Medieval Nepal

Introduction

Maithili language is spoken as mother-tongue in eastern Tarai of Nepal and northern Bihar of India. The area above mentioned is the land of ancient and medieval Mithila or Tirhut. The Karnata period in the history of Mithila is remarkable for the development of Maithili language and literature. Simaraungarh, the ruins of the capital of Karnatas of Mithila is situated in Bara district, Narayani Zone of Nepal, about 30 kilometre eastward from

Birganj town. The modern Maithili language took its shape in that period. The Karnata period in the history of Mithila is considered from 1097 AD to 1324 AD (Sinha, 1979). In this period the political and cultural relations between the Karnatas of Mithila and the Mallas of Kathmandu valley was established. The founder of Karnata dynasty in Mithila was Nanyadeva and he expanded his influences towards Kathmandu valley (Shreshtha, 2004, p.198). Likewise, his descendants also made

attempts to extend their political and military powers towards this end. The last ruler of Karnata dynasty of Mithila was Harisinghdeva, who was married with the princess of Bhaktapur. She was Devalakshmidēvi (also known as Devaldevi), the daughter of Jayatungamalla (Das,2003,p.2).

Likewise the Sena dynasty of Makawanpur from 1518 AD to 1762 AD was also very important in this aspect. The fort of Makawanpur is situated in Makawanpur district, Narayani Zone of Nepal, about 16 kilometre eastward from Hetaunda town. The rulers of Sena dynasty and the Mallas of Kathmandu valley had political and cultural relations among themselves. Maithili was the language of the state of Makawanpur (Regmi,1975. p.70). So, these two dynasties i.e. the Karnatas of Mithila and the Senas of Makawanpur cover the period of medieval Nepal. Though, in the pre-medieval period, i.e. the Karnata period, Maithili language was in developing stage, but in the latter-medieval period, i.e. the Sena period, it was developed. This language was so influential that even the rulers of Kathmandu valley created poems, dramas etc. in Maithili language.

Discussion

Maithili language and literature developed in medieval period. This language developed from Indo-European family of languages (Jha,1983). Nepal was an important neighbouring area of Mithila and so many works in Maithili occurred in Nepal. There are many manuscripts written in Tirhuta script preserved in National Archive in Kathmandu. The script of Mithila is called Tirhuta. Tirhut is one of the names of Mithila and by this its script became popular as Tirhuta. It is also called Mithilakshara.

The book Varnaratnakara is the famous work of Jyotirishvara Kavishekharacharya. He was a scholar of Karnata period. This period was formative in character so far as the development of Maithili language and

literature is concerned (Sinha,1979. p.66). Besides, there were many scholars whose works influenced culturally the lives of the people of medieval period of Nepal. In the Sena period, Maithili language was spoken throughout the Sena kingdom and was the state-language. This was called Rajabhasha (Jha, 1982,p.13). There are many inscriptions issued by the Sena kings written in Maithili language. One of the inscriptions of king Manikasena of Makawanpur issued in 1727 AD describing about the Birta landgrant to Gosain Ramdas reads as “.....*Shree Gosain Ramdaske Praganna Korarimadhye Janakpurpatti Belahitola.....Jotathu Jotabathu.....Bhogya Karathu.....*”(Rajbanshi,2018 BS,p.8).

In 1707 AD, the kingdom of Makawanpur was divided and a new kingdom of Vijaypur came into existence (Das,2010.p.64). The king of Vijaypur, Bisantarasena issued a landgrant paper to the militarymen in 1752 AD which reads as “.....*Sukha Bhogya Kai Sevame Ruju Rahai Seva Badhai Jagir Badhai Seva Ghatai Jagir Ghatai.....*”(Naraharinath,2022 BS.p.186). The rulers of Sena dynasty themselves had written many poems. A manuscript written in Maithili language is preserved in National Archive in Kathmandu named Nanaragagitam. Its code number is 1/391 and it is a collection of songs. The name of its collector is not mentioned. These songs are written in Maithili and Vairagi languages. Name of the poets of Nanaragagitam includes Rayaraghava and Rayaharihara (Jha & Jha,1977.p.18-19). These names are considered as king Raghvasena and king Hariharasena respectively. Besides, a poet named Devanath is also mentioned to be in the court of Makawanpur. His works are researched and published (Jha,1980. p.35-38). The most celebrated poet and dramatist of Maithili, Umapati Upadhyaya was in the court of king Hariharasena of Makawanpur. He wrote the famous drama named Parijataharana (Upadhyaya,1971). He was a kinsman of the poet Chaturbhuj and the inhabitant of the villege Koilakha (Jha,1977.p.125). In this drama the dialogues are in Sanskrit and the songs are in Maithili

language. The songs are indicated with Ragas. It is written in the tradition of Kirtaniya-Natya to entertain the general people (Jha, 2040 BS).

The name of the Malla kings of Kathmandu valley who wrote the literature in Maithili language are Ranajitmalla, Jitamitramalla, Jagatprakashamalla, Pratapamalla, Jagajyotimalla etc. (Singh, 2068 BS). They were influenced by Maithili language and literature of medieval age. Now the age has passed, but the influence of Maithili language are seen in Kathmandu valley. The Bhajanas (hymns) and Kirtanas (devotional songs) sang by aged persons in different temples and homes in valley even now are full of Maithili words and Ragas.

Conclusion

The influences of Maithili language in the society of medieval period of Nepalese history are remarkable. This aspect of language expansion is most significant in the national history of Nepal. Nepal is a multi-linguistic nation. Maithili is one of the major languages of the country. To a large extent, Maithili language influenced not only in literary works, but in the political and administrative fields also. It has its own historical value to be evaluated by the scholars. Here people engaged in language-movement are of the opinion that Maithili language should be the language of official works. For these people, this article may be a historical background in forming their views and making the policy.

References

- Das, B.(2003). "Devalakshmidivi : a queen of Mithila in the politics of medieval Nepal". *Rolamba*. Vol. 22-23. Lalitpur Joshi Research Institute.
- Das, B.(2010). *The Senas of Makawanpur : a regional study in the political and cultural history of Nepal, 1518-1762 AD*. Birganj: Bharati Nilaya.
- Jha, D.N. "Shreesh" (1983). *Maithili Sahitya Itihas*. Darbhanga, Bharati Pustak Kendra.
- Jha, P.(1977). *Mithilatattavimarsha*. Patna, Maithili Academy.
- Jha, P.N.(2040 BS). *Nepalaka Maithili Natakakara Umapati Upadhyaya Parijataharana Natakaka Adhyayana* (a dissertation submitted to TU, Kathmandu, Nepal for the fulfilment of the eighth paper of postgraduate degree in Maithili), unpublished.
- Jha, R.(1980). *Umapati*. Patna, Maithili Academy.
- Jha, S. "Suman" & Jha, R. eds.(1977) : *Maithili Prachina Gitavali*. Patna: Maithili Academy.
- Jha, V.(1982). "Umapati Aa Parijataharana". *Mithila Mihira*. Patna: Indian Nation Press.
- Naraharinath, Y.ed. (2022 BS). *Itihasa Prakashama Sandhipatra Sangraha*. Vol. 1. Chaughara (Dang), Shree Goraksha Ratna Yoga Siksha Kendra.
- Rajbanshi, S.M. (ed.) (2018 BS). *Puratattva Patra Sangraha*. Vol.2. Kathmandu: HMG Deptt. Of Archaeology.
- Regmi, D.R. (1975). *Modern Nepal : rise and growth in the eighteenth century*. Vol. 1. Calcutta: Firma K L Mukhopadhyay.
- Singh, P.K. "Maun" (2068 BS). *Nepalaka Maithili Sahitya Itihasa*. Lalitpur: Sajha Prakashan.
- Sinha, C.P.N. (1979). *Mithila Under The Karnatas*. Patna: Janaki Prakashan.
- Shreshtha, S. "Malla"(2004). *Mithilaka Karnatavanshiharu Ra Nepal Mandalama Uniharuko Prabhava*. Lalitpur: Shaileshraj Shreshtha.
- Upadhyaya, U.(1971), *Parijataharana (Mangalantakam)*. edited by Surandra Jha "Suman". Darbhanga: Maithili Mandir.