MAITHILI IN MEDIEVAL NEPAL: A HISTORICAL APPRAISAL

Basudev Lal Das
Department of History, TU, Thakur Ram Multiple Campus, Birganj, Nepal
email: basudev.lal.das@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 sung 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 1244 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 (Shrestha, 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 Devalakshmidevi (also known as Devaldevi), the daughter of
Jayatungamalla (Das, 2003, p.2).

Likewise the Sena dynasty of Makawanpur from 1528 AD to 1762 AD was also very
important in this aspect. The fort of Makawanpur is situated in Makawanpur district,
Narayanid 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. Tirhuta is one of the names of Mithila and by this its
script became popular as Tirhuta. It is also called Mithilakshara.

The book Varanatnakara is the famous work of Jyotirishvara Kavishhekharacharya.
He was a scholar of Karnataka 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
Pragnava Kororimadhre Janakpurpati Belaitotala......Jotathu Jotabathu......Bhojya
Karathu......”(Rajbansi, 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 Bhogyi Kai Sevme Raju
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 Rayashrihara (Jha & Jha, 1977, p.8-19). These
names are considered as king Raghavasena and king Hariharasena respectively. Besides,
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, Umapatii 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 Chaturbhuja and the inhabitant of the village 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, 2049 BS).

The name of the Malla kings of Kathmandu valley who wrote the literature in Maithili language are Ranajitmalla, Jitamitramalla, Jagatprakashamalla, Pratapamalla, Jagajjyotimalla 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


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