

MAITHILĪ OR TIR'HUTIYĀ.

*Grihē sūrā ranē bhītāḥ, paraspara-virōdhināḥ,
Kulā-'bhimāninō gūyam Mithilāyāḥ bhaviṣyatha.*

Heroes at home, cowards in the battle-field, ever quarrelling amongst yourselves, and inordinately full of family-pride, shall ye be in Mithilā.

Rāma-chandra's curse on the Mithilā Brāhmanas.

Maithilī or Tir'hutiya is, properly speaking, the language of Mithilā, or Taira-
bhukti (the ancient name of Tirhut). According to the
Where spoken.

Mithilā-māhātmya, a Sanskrit work of considerable repute in the territory which it describes, Mithilā is the country bounded on the north by the Himālaya Mountains, on the south by the Ganges, on the west by the River Gandak and on the east by the River Kōsī.¹ It thus includes the British Districts of Champaran, Muzaffarpur, and Darbhanga, as well as the strip of the Nepal Tarai which runs between these Districts and the lower ranges of the Himalayas. The Districts of Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga originally formed one District called Tirhut, and that name is still used as a convenient appellation for the country included in these two Districts. At the present day, the language of the greater portion of Champaran is a form of Bhojpuri and not Maithilī, but, with that exception, Maithilī is spoken over the whole of this tract. It has also extended east of the river Kōsī, and occupies the greater part of the District of Purnea, and has moreover crossed the Ganges, and is now spoken over the whole of the south-Gangetic portion of the Bhagalpur District, over the eastern portion of the south-Gangetic portion of the Monghyr District, and in the north and west of the Sonthal Parganas.

Maithilī is spoken in its greatest purity by the Brāhmanas of the north of the Dar-
bhanga and Bhagalpur Districts and by those of western
Sub-dialects.

Purnea. These men have a literature and traditions which have retarded the corruption of the dialect. It is also spoken with some purity, but with more signs of the wearing away of inflexions in the south of the Darbhanga District, and in those portions of the Monghyr and Bhagalpur Districts which lie on the northern bank of the Ganges. This may be called Southern Standard Maithilī. To the east, in Purnea, it becomes more and more infected with Bengali, till, in the east of that District it is superseded by the Siripuriā dialect of that language which is a border form of speech, Bengali in the main, but containing expressions borrowed from Maithilī, and written, not in the Bengali character, but in the Kaithī of Bihar. Siripuriā will be found described on pp. 139 and ff. of Vol. v, Pt. I, under the head of Bengali. The Maithilī spoken in Purnea may be called Eastern Maithilī.

South of the Ganges, Maithilī is influenced more or less by the Magahī spoken to its west, and partly also by Bengali. The result is a well-marked dialect, locally known as *Chhikā-chhiki bōlī*, from its frequent use of the syllable 'chhik,' which is the base on which the conjugation of the Verb Substantive is conjugated.

¹ *Gaṅgā-himavattir madhyē nadi-pañcadaśāntarē |
Tairabhūktir iti khyātō dēśaḥ parama-pāvanaḥ ||*

• • • • •
*Kautilikim tu samārabhya Gaṅḍakim ad higāmya vai |
Yōjanāni caturvīṅśa vyāyāmaḥ parikīrtitāḥ ||*

The Maithili spoken in the Muzaffarpur District, and in a strip of country on the eastern side of Darbhanga is strongly infected by the neighbouring Bhojpuri spoken in various forms in the adjacent district of Saran and in the greater part of Champaran. So much is this the case, that, as spoken by some people, it is difficult to say where the dialect is Maithili or Bhojpuri. It may be called Western Maithili.

The Musalmāns of Mithilā do not all speak Maithili. In Muzaffarpur and Champaran, they speak an altogether different dialect, closely allied to the language of Oudh. It is locally known as Shēkhaī or as Musalmānī, and is sometimes called Jolahā Bōlī, after the caste which forms one of the most numerous Musalmān tribes, according to popular opinion, of the locality. The true Jolahā Boli, however, is the language spoken by the Musalmāns of Darbhanga, which is a form of Maithili, though somewhat corrupted by the admission of Persian and Arabic words to its vocabulary.

The details of the number of people who speak each form of Maithili will be given subsequently, in dealing with each of the sub-dialects. The following are the totals :—

Number of speakers.

Name of Sub-dialect.	Number of Speakers.
Standard	1,946,800
Southern Standard	2,300,000
Eastern	1,302,300 ¹
Chhikā-chhiki	1,719,781
Western	1,783,495
Jolahā	337,000
Total number of speakers of Maithili in Maithili-speaking districts	9,389,376

These figures do not include the speakers of Maithili in the Nepal Tarai, concerning whom no figures are available. Under any circumstances, therefore, we shall be justified in assuming that at least ten million people speak Maithili in the country of which it is the vernacular.

It is impossible to state how many speakers of Maithili live outside the Maithili tract proper, as no figures are available. In the census of 1891, Maithili and the other Bihār dialects were grouped together with the various languages of Central and Western Hindōstān under the one head of 'Hindī.' We cannot now separate the figures. It is possible, in the case of the Provinces of Lower Bengal and Assam, to ascertain from the Census records, the number of people hailing from each District in Bihār, and also the total number of persons who come from all parts of India in which, according to the Census, 'Hindī' is spoken. With the aid of these figures we can, in the case of these two provinces, divide the number of people recorded in the Census as speaking 'Hindī,' proportionately to these two sets of figures, and the results may be expected to represent approximately the number of people in each District of these two Provinces speaking, respectively, the language of each District of Bihār. By totalling up the figures thus gained for the Maithili-speaking Districts, we may expect to obtain the number of people speaking that dialect outside the Maithili-speaking area. Unfortunately, the theory is not borne out by local experience. For instance, a calculation of this kind shows that there should be 6,900 speakers of Maithili in Burdwan,

¹ Include 2,300 Thārūs of North Purnea, who, apparently, speak a corrupt form of Eastern Maithili.

but the local authorities report, in answer to enquiries subsequently made, that as a matter of fact there are no speakers of the language in the District. In such a matter, even the experience of District Officers may be at fault, and though I do not offer the following figures relating to Bengal and Assam as certainly correct, I believe that they have a better foundation than any other assertion which can be made on the point, and give them for what they are worth.

Table showing the estimated number of speakers of Maithili within the Lower Provinces of Bengal, but outside the area in which Maithili is the Vernacular Language.

NAME OF DISTRICT.	Number of Speakers.	REMARKS.
Burdwan	6,900	The local authorities report that there are no speakers of Maithili in the District.
Bankura	300	
Birbhum	3,900	
Midnapore	7,900	
Hooghly	2,400	
Howrah	4,000	
24-Parganas	8,800	
Calcutta	34,000	
Nadia	3,300	
Jessore	700	
Murshidabad	33,100	
Khulna	400	
Dinajpur	26,700	
Rajshahi	9,100	
Rangpur	5,000	
Bogra	4,000	
Pabna	3,500	
Darjeeling	13,900	
Kuch-Bihar (State)	3,200	
Dacca	10,800	
Faridpur	1,500	
Backergunge	1,000	
Mymensingh	5,000	
Chittagong	1,200	
Noakhali	32	
Tippera	800	
Malda	5,000	
Cuttack	100	
Puri	110	
Balasore	140	
TOTAL	196,782	

Table showing the estimated number of speakers of Maithili within the Province of Assam.

NAME OF DISTRICT.	Number of Speakers.	REMARKS.
Cachar Plains	20,400	
Sylhet	9,200	
Goalpara	3,700	
Kamrup	800	
Darrang	4,100	
Nowgong	2,250	
Sibsagar	15,600	
Lakhimpur	10,050	
Naga Hills	150	
Khasi and Jaintia Hills	300	
Lushai Hills	25	
TOTAL	66,575	

We cannot give similar figures for other Provinces of India, as in their Census Reports, the population figures for people whose home is Bihar are not given district by district. In most of them the number of people coming from the Province of Bihar as a whole is given, and it might be thought that it would be possible to ascertain from this the approximate number of people coming from the Maithili-speaking tract by dividing that number in the proportion that the whole population of the Maithili-speaking tract bears to the total population of Bihar; but any such attempt would be misleading. Of the three nationalities which occupy Bihar, the Maithili, the Magahi, and the Bhojpuri, the first are a timid, home-staying people, who rarely leave their abodes for distant provinces of India, while, on the other hand, the Bhojpuris are an enterprising tribe found in numbers all over the land, and even in distant countries, like Mauritius and Natal. Any proportional division would not take this important factor into consideration, and, as a result, would show a far greater number of inhabitants of Mithilā in foreign provinces than is really the case.

We must therefore content ourselves with recording the following figures for the Provinces of Bengal and Assam, and leave the question of the number of speakers of Maithili in other provinces of India as an insoluble problem :—

Total number of people speaking Maithili at home, say	10,000,000
Estimated number of people speaking Maithili elsewhere in the Lower Provinces	196,782
Estimated number of people speaking Maithili in Assam	66,575
TOTAL	10,263,357

Maithilī is the only one of the Bihārī dialects which has a literary history. For centuries the Paṇḍits of Mithilā have been famous for their learning, and more than one Sanskrit work of authority has been written by them. One of the few learned women of India whose name has come down to us, was Lakhimā Ṭhakkurāṇī, who, according to tradition, lived at the middle of the 15th century A.D. Nor was the field of vernacular literature neglected by them. The earliest vernacular writer of whom we have any record was the celebrated Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura, who graced the court of Mahārāja Śiva Simha of Sugāonā, and who flourished about the same time. As a writer of Sanskrit works he was an author of considerable repute, and one of his works, translated into Bengali; is familiar as a text-book, under the name of the *Purusha-parīkshā*, to every student of that language. But it is upon his dainty songs in the vernacular that his fame chiefly rests. He was the first of the old master-singers whose short religious poems, dealing principally with Rādhā and Kṛishṇa, exercised such an important influence on the religious history of Eastern India. His songs were adopted and enthusiastically recited by the celebrated Hindū reformer Chaitanya who flourished at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and, through him, became the house-poetry of the Lower Provinces. Numbers of imitators sprung up, many of whom wrote in Vidyāpati's name, so that it is now difficult to separate the genuine from the imitations, especially as in the great collection of these Vaishnava songs, the *Pada-kalpa-taru*, which is the accepted authority in Bengal, the former have been altered in the course of generations to suit the Bengali idiom and metre. Up to nearly twenty years ago, the *Pada-kalpa-taru* was the only record which we had of the poet's works, but, in the year 1882, the present writer was enabled to publish, in his *Maithilī Chrestomathy*, a collection of songs attributed to him, which he collected in Mithilā itself, partly from the mouths of itinerant singers and partly from manuscript collections in the possession of local Paṇḍits. That all the songs in this collection are genuine, is not a matter capable of proof, but, there can be little doubt that most of them are so, although the language has been greatly modernised in the course of transition from mouth to mouth during the past five centuries.

Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura or, as he is called in the vernacular, Bidyāpat' Ṭhākur, had many imitators in Mithilā itself, of whom we know nothing except the names of the most popular, and a few stray verses. Amongst them may be mentioned Umāpati, Nandipati, Mōda-narāyaṇa, Rāmāpati, Mahīpati, Jayānanda, Chaturbhujā, Sarasa-rāma, Jayadēva, Kēsava, Bhañjana, Chakrapāṇi, Bhānunātha, and Harshanātha or, in the vernacular, Harakh-nāth. The last two were alive when the present writer was in Darbhanga twenty years ago.

Amongst other writers in Maithilī may be mentioned Man-bōdh Jhā, who died about the year 1788 A.D. He composed a *Haribans*, or Poetical Life of Kṛishṇa, of which ten cantos are still extant, and enjoy great popularity.

The drama has had several authors in Mithilā. The local custom has been to write the body of a play in Sanskrit, but the songs in the vernacular. The best-known of these plays are as follows. None of them has been published.

The *Pārijāta-harāṇa*, and the *Rukmiṇi-pariṇaya*, both by Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura.

The *Gaurī-pariṇaya* by Kavi-lāla.

The *Ushā-harāṇa* by Harshanātha above mentioned.

The *Prabhāvatī-harṇa* by Bhānunātha above mentioned.

Under the enlightened guidance of the late Mahārāja of Darbhanga, there has been a remarkable revival of Maithili literature during the past few years. At least one author deserving of special note has come to the front, Chandra Jhā, who has shown remarkable literary powers. He has written a *Mithilā-bhāshā Rāmāyaṇa*, and a translation, with an edition of the original Sanskrit text, of the *Purusha-parīksha* of Vidyāpati Thakkura, both of which will well repay the student by their perusal.

No translation of any part of the Bible into Maithili has been issued by the Bible Society, nor is that language included amongst those into which the Serampore Missionaries translated the Scriptures. At the same time, if an article in the *Calcutta Review* is to be believed, the first translation of any portion of the Bible made into any language of Northern India was that of the Gospels and Acts, made into the Chhikā-chhikī dialect of Maithili by Pather Antonio at the end of the eighteenth century. For further particulars reference may be made to the section on Chhikā-chhikī bōlī, on p. 96 *post*. The only other translations with which I am acquainted are versions of the Sermon on the Mount, and other short portions of Scripture, made about twenty years ago by Mr. John Christian, and lithographed and published at Monghyr.

AUTHORITIES—

I.—EARLY REFERENCES.—The earliest reference which I can find to Maithili or Tir^hutiyā is in the Preface to the *Alphabetum Brammhanicum*, published in 1771, from which an extract has been quoted in dealing with the Bengali language in Vol. v, Pt. I, p. 23. In the list of languages mentioned on p. viii is 'Tourutiana.'

Colebrooke in his famous Essay on the Sanskrit and Prakrit languages written in the year 1801, is the first to describe Maithili¹ as a distinct dialect. He points out its affinity with Bengali, discusses the written character used by the Brāhman, and adds, 'As the dialect of Mithilā has no extensive use, and does not appear to have been at any time cultivated by elegant poets, it is unnecessary to notice it any further in this place.' Since then,² like the other dialects of Bihar, Maithili remained unnoticed and forgotten, till Mr. Fallon gave a few specimens of it in the *Indian Antiquary* in the year 1875. In the preceding year, it is true, some examples of the dialect were given in Sir George Campbell's *Specimens*,³ but they are there classed as some of many dialects of Hindī spoken in Bihar. Indeed, at this time, it was the general belief that, all over Bihar, the language spoken was a corrupt form of Hindī, whereas, as Colebrooke had long previously pointed out, it was much more nearly allied to Bengali than to the Hindī of the North-Western Provinces. Matters remained in this state, till the present writer published his Maithili grammar in the year 1890-81.

¹ *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. VII, 1801, pp. 199 and ff. Reprinted in his *Essays*, Ed. 1873, p. 26.

² Note, however, Aimé-Martin's *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, Paris, 1840. I. Vol. II, p. 295, when describing the languages of India, he says 'the *Marthila* (sic) se retrouve dans Neypal.'

³ *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. IV 1875, p. 340.

⁴ *Specimens of Languages of India, including those of the Aboriginal Tribes of Bengal, the Central Provinces and the Eastern Frontier*. Calcutta, 1874. The specimens given are headed, 'Vernacular of West Tirhoot'; 'Vernacular of East Tirhoot'; and 'Vernacular of West Purneah (Hindee),' respectively. They will be found on pp. 60 and following.

II.—GRAMMARS—

- GRIERSON, G. A.,—*An Introduction to the Maithilī Language of North Bihār. Containing a Grammar, Chrestomathy and Vocabulary. Part I, Grammar.* Extra Number to *Journal, Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Part I, for 1880. Separate Reprint, Calcutta, 1881. Part II, *Chrestomathy and Vocabulary.* Extra Number to ditto for 1882. Separate Reprint, Calcutta, 1882.
- GRIERSON, G. A.,—*Seven Grammars of the Dialects and Sub-Dialects of the Bihāri Language.* Part I, *Introductory.* Calcutta, 1883. Part IV, *Maithil-Bhojpuri Dialect of Central and South Muzaffarpūr,* 1884. Part V, *South Maithilī Dialect of South Darbhanga, North Munger, and the Madhepūrā Subdivision of Bhagalpūr.* Part VI, *South Maithil-Māgadhi Dialect of South Munger and the Bārī Subdivision of Patna.* Part VII, *South Maithilī-Bengālī Dialect of South Bhagalpūr.* Part VIII, *Maithil-Bangālī Dialect of Central and Western Puraniyā.*
- HOERNLE, A. F. R.,—*A Grammar of the Eastern Hindī compared with the other Gaudian Languages.* London, 1880. In this Grammar, Dr. Hoernle was the first to recognise Maithilī as a dialect separate from Hindī. He was able to give some specimens of its grammatical forms, but no published materials were then available.
- KELLOGG, The Revd. S. H.,—*A Grammar of the Hindī Language, in which are treated the colloquial dialects of Maithilā, etc., with copious philological notes.* Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged. London, 1893. (The first edition does not deal with Maithilī.)

III.—DICTIONARIES—

- GRIERSON, G. A.,—There are vocabularies attached to the Maithilī Chrestomathy, above mentioned, and to the edition of Manbōdh's *Haribans* mentioned below.
- HOERNLE, A. F. R., and GRIERSON, G. A.,—*A Comparative Dictionary of the Bihāri Language.* Part I, Calcutta, 1885. Part II, 1889. Only two parts issued.

IV.—GENERAL LITERATURE—

Regarding Vidyāpati, see Beames, *The Early Vaishnava Poets of Bengal, Indian Antiquary* ii, 1873, p. 37, and the same author's *On the Age and Country of Bidyāpati*, *ibid.* iv, 1875, p. 299. See also, the *Bengali Magazine*, the *Baṅga-darsana*, Vol. iv, for Jyaishṭha, 1282, Bg. san, pp. 75 and ff. Also the present writer's *Vidyāpati and his Contemporaries, Indian Antiquary*, Vol. xiv, 1885, p. 182; Eggelling, *Catalogue of Sanskrit MSS. in the India Office Library*, Part iv, No. 2864; and the present writer in the *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, for August, 1895. Also the present writer's *On some mediæval Kings of Mithilā, Indian Antiquary*, Vol. xxviii, 1899, p. 57. The following contain editions of the Bengali recension of the poet's works. *Vidyāpati-kṛita-pādāvalī*, edited by Akshaya-chandra Sarkār. Chinsurah, 1285, Bg. s. *Vidyāpatir Pādāvalī*, Edited with an Introduction by Śārādā-charaṇ Maitra. Second Edition, Calcutta, 1285, Bg. s. *Prāchīna Kāvya Saṅgraha*, Part I, Edited by Akshaya-chandra Sarkār. Calcutta, 1291, Bg. s. The Mithilā recension is published in the present writer's *Maithilī Chrestomathy*.

For the benefit of those who wish to study Maithilī, the following is a list of the principal works which have been published in the language.

The present writer's *Maithilī Chrestomathy* referred to above under the head of Grammars, contains several other texts besides the poems of Vidyāpati.

Twenty-one Vaishnava Hymns, Edited and translated by the present writer. *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. liii, 1884, Special Number, pp. 76 and ff.

Manbōdh's Haribans, Edited and translated by the same. *Ibid.* Vol. li, 1882, pp. 129 and ff., and Vol. liii, 1884, Special Number, pp. 1 and ff.

Selected Specimens of the Bihāri Language, Part I, The Maithilī Dialect. The Gū Dīnā Bhadrīk, and the Gū Nebārak. Edited and translated by the same. *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft.* Vol. xxxix, 1885, pp. 617 and ff.

Vidyāpati's *Purusha-parīkshā*, Edited and translated in prose and verse into Maithilī by Chandra Jhā, Darbhanga, Rāj Press, Śākē 1810.

Mithilā-Bhāshā Rāmāyana, by Chandra Jhā. A version of the story of the Rāmāyana in Maithilī verse. Darbhanga, Union Press, San 1299 Fasli.

LINGUISTIC SURVEY OF INDIA

COMPILED AND EDITED BY

G. A. GRIERSON, C.I.E., PH.D., D.LITT., I.C.S. (RETD.)

© MOTILAL BANARSIDASS
BUNGALOW ROAD, JAWAHAR NAGAR, DELHI-7
NEPALI KHAPRA, VARANASI, (U.P.)
ASHOK RAJ PATH, (OPP. PATNA COLLEGE) PATNA (BIHAR)

With kind permission of Govt. of India.

FIRST EDITION 1927

REPRINT 1967

Price Rs. 1250/- (\$ 200) for the complete set.

PRINTED IN INDIA BY SHANTILAL JAIN, AT SHRI JAINENDRA PRESS,
BUNGALOW ROAD, JAWAHARNAGAR, DELHI-7 AND PUBLISHED BY
SUNDARLAL JAIN, MOTILAL BANARSIDASS, BUNGALOW ROAD,
JAWAHARNAGAR, DELHI-7

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