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TERRITORIAL SELF-FASHIONING: PLACE-MAKING IN LATE 19\textsuperscript{TH} AND EARLY 20\textsuperscript{TH} CENTURY COLONIAL INDIA

A Dissertation in

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by

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Abstract

My project, *Territorial Self-Fashioning: “Place-Making” in Late 19th and Early 20th Century Colonial India*, focuses on the province of Bihar and the emergence of a specifically place-based Bihari regional identity. For the provincial literati, emphasizing Bihar as an “organic” entity cultivated a sense of common belonging that was remarkably novel for the period, particularly because it implied that an administrative region had transformed into a cohesive cultural unit. The transformation is particularly revealing because the claims to a “natural” Bihar was not based upon a distinctive language, ethnicity or religion. Instead this regional assertion was partially instigated by British colonial politics and in part shaped by an emergent Indian national imagination. The emergence of a place-based Bihari identity therefore can only be explained by situating it in the context of 19th century colonial politics and nationalist sentiments. Indian national imagination is so integral to the construction of an “organic” Bihar, that without it not only does the region emerge fragmented, but it also becomes a landscape of contradictions. Bihar, situated on the eastern end of the Gangetic plain, often appears as two distinct cultural landscapes divided by the river, with Mithila in the north and Magadha to the south. Today, Bihar has become little less than a metonym for crime-infested anarchy where poverty and economic backwardness prevail. The idea of Bihar acquires cache only in the context of an Indian national imagination wherein it is accorded an originary national status. Indian national history embraces Bihar as the fount of India’s “glorious” national past as home to the ancient Mauryan and Gupta Empires and the birthplace of Buddhism. The Bihari literati adopted precisely these cultural markers, integral to a generic conception of Indian national identity, as the basis for a “Bihariness”. The conception of a Bihari regional identity, therefore, was coeval with that of the emergence of an Indian nationalist imagination. The formation of a distinctively regional identity, in this instance of territorial self-fashioning, was not in opposition to colonial politics or nationalist sentiments; rather it was the unmistakable product of 19th century colonial and national imaginings.
Dedicated to
The Memory of Prof. Kumkum Chatterjee
She remains an integral part of this dissertation.
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Introduction

On March 22, 2010, ninety-eight years following its separation from Bengal, the state of Bihar for the first time dedicated a day commemorating and celebrating Bihar’s separation from Bengal. Since then, March 22 has been celebrated as “Bihar Divas” (Bihar Day). The initiative for this came from the Chief Minister of Bihar, Nitish Kumar, who hoped that such an event would help Biharis “celebrate [their] glorious past and gear [them] up to revive it.” Over the past three years, the annual Bihar Diwas has become a public platform for Bihar to highlight “the glorious history of the state, its cultural and historical heritage, traditions and achievements” and is celebrated amidst elaborate cultural festivals held at Patna as well as throughout the state. As the Bihari state continued with its project of refashioning itself with the aim of overcoming the stereotypical and widely prevalent characterizations of it as one of India’s most backward, lawless and poverty-stricken regions, the centenary celebrations of 2012, provided the state with the opportunity to highlight and commemorate the region’s rich past.

The current plans for constructing in Patna, the state capital, a Civilization Gate (Sabhyata Dwar) which, as the proposal claims, will be much like New Delhi’s India Gate and Mumbai’s Gateway of India, is one such monumental project celebrating

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Bihar’s rich legacy to India.\textsuperscript{3} The proposed Civilization Gate, is to have “secular messages of Ashoka and Sher Shah” inscribed on the monument.\textsuperscript{4} The Bihari state’s continued invocation of the legacies of the Mauryan Emperor Asoka and Sher Shah, whose brief rule from 1540-1545 contributed significantly to the administrative framework of the great Mughal emperor Akbar, points to the persistence of a historical narrative of the region that was constructed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This was a period when the Bihari literati were demanding separation from the larger province of Bengal, while at the same time celebrating a historical past of the region that fashioned Bihar as the fount of Indian civilization. It is this celebration of Bihar’s ties to the Indian national imagination that the Civilization Gate aims to commemorate and in doing so once again draws our attention to Bihar as the foundational core of India. It is not coincidental that hundred years later, as Bihar started celebrating its separation from Bengal, attention was simultaneously drawn to the region’s rich contribution to India’s past. As the Bihari state is currently engaged in fashioning itself as a modern, prosperous province it finds itself harkening back to the region’s long and rich history. Indeed the inextricable and indispensible ties between the regional and national imaginations lies at the heart of place-making exercises in Bihar where invocation to markers of Indian national identity form the core components of modern Bihariness.

Despite the rich historical legacy of Bihar, by the nineteenth century the region and particularly its capital Patna was becoming a backwater and a place of little significance for the new rulers of India. So by the late nineteenth and early twentieth

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid.
centuries, when the ancient Mauryan capital of Pataliputra was discovered on the outskirts of the modern city of Patna, it not only brought back visions of a glorious past, but also served as a “ghostly reminder of an almost irrecoverable past.”\(^5\) Mauryan Pataliputra of the third century BCE, Sher Shah’s “Pattana” of the sixteenth century, Prince Azim-us-Shah’s Azimabad of the eighteenth century are not only the various names for modern Patna, but these names are also indications of the upheavals in the political and economic fortunes of the city as well as much of the region.\(^6\) By the late eighteenth century, when Bihar along with Bengal and Orissa were brought under the rule of the English East India Company, Patna had “been a rising political and economic center for almost a century and a half.”\(^7\) But the political upheaval that beset the city and the region following the establishment of Company rule enveloped the region’s aristocracy, who were part of the precolonial Persian milieu, by a sense of despair and gloom. Indeed, for one such aristocrat the transformation from an earlier order when Patna was reaching “new heights of prosperity and prominence as Azimabad” was monumental enough for him to describe the city as if “reeling from the shock of the revolution” that had beset upon it by the establishment of Company Raj.\(^8\)

This aristocrat, Ghulam Hussain Khan Tabatabai’s account of the “Modern Times”\(^9\) was itself very much part of the Indo-Islamic history writing tradition which was

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\(^7\) Yang. *Bazaar India*. p. 60.

\(^8\) Ibid. p. 61.

characterized by “the production of narrative histories and commentaries on political matters,” particularly by people who served as government functionaries and thus were familiar with the institutions of governance.\textsuperscript{10} Ghulam Hussain was himself part of the Indo-Islamic elite culture shared by Mughal successor states such as Bihar and Bengal. And when he and his contemporaries tried to understand and explain the troubled state of affairs of the late eighteenth century, they often resorted to talking about living in times characterized by “‘confusion’ in the sense of chaos or the lack of order, ‘subversion’ in the sense of the overturning of some established structure or phenomenon and ‘revolution’ in the sense of a very basic or fundamental change.”\textsuperscript{11} Indeed, Ghulam Hussain was not the only one lamenting about the structural ruptures of the eighteenth century. As Anand Yang has persuasively shown, there were many who characterized Patna as a “City of Discontent.” In fact, this sentiment was so common among the Indo-Islamic literati and poets that Shah Ayatullah Jauhari wrote his \textit{Shahr-i-Ashob} or “a poem on a ruined city” or the “city of discontent” in the 1750s or 1760s – the same period when the Battle of Plassey (1757) and the Battle of Buxar (1764) were fought and won by the English East India Company. The poem’s most striking notes as Yang points out, were concerned with the rapid and drastic change in times where “Worthy men, good fortune, prosperity... all are gone from this world. Friendship and love have dwindled, and beastly avarice has increased.”\textsuperscript{12} In another similar lament, Ghulam Ali Rasikh in his narrative poem, “Description of the Times of Upheaval and Lamentation of the Town of Azimabad,” mentions the general decline of the aristocratic fortunes affecting the lives of

\textsuperscript{10} Chatterjee. “History as Self-Representation.” p. 917.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid. p. 924.
\textsuperscript{12} Yang. \textit{Bazaar India}. p. 62.
a wide range of people leaving “everyone” unemployed. In this category Rasikh included “saints… fearfully enduring misfortune,” calligraphers ‘constantly shedding tears upon the writing of their own fate,’ teachers ‘fed up with life,’ poets ‘cowardly, greedy…shameless,’ advocates no longer ‘in a flourishing state,’ physicians ‘fatigued,’ and soldiers without even ‘a toy clay horse’ to command; peasants and traders, too, suffered.”

Amidst all this gloom and despair that shrouded the city, there were a few banking and trading families, as well as a few very large zamindars (landlords) who continued to prosper amidst the turmoil – in fact the Maharaja of Darbhanga’s zamindari as well as his wealth and status was comparable to that of some of the native princes of India. Indeed some of the region’s prominent banking and trading houses were able to successfully position themselves “under the umbrella of company rule” and were able to acquire “significant local power and influence for themselves.” Yet they were never quite considered part of the same aristocratic milieu to which Ghulam Hussain, Jauhari or Rasikh belonged. Instead, by the middle of the nineteenth century the aristocracy was quite clear in referring to the trading and banking houses as “rapacious and miserly” who did not quite belong to their social group. While the presence and prosperity of some of the banking and trading houses of Patna point to the “persistence and development” of the city as a center for trade and banking, it does not quite remove us from the narrative of decline and despair. In fact, the declining fortunes that the trading houses were faced with by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also “mirrored the shifts in the

13 Ibid. p. 61.
15 Ibid. p. 213.
city’s primacy as a central place,” and its changing condition was reflective of its growing subordination to Calcutta. So although during the eighteenth century Patna served as the principal entrepot for trade between Bengal and the North-Western Provinces, and also as the collection point for trade coming in from rural Bihar and as far north as Nepal, much of this was in decline by the mid-nineteenth century.

This discussion on Patna and its peripheries, is not so much to highlight the continuities and ruptures that engulfed the region as well as much of eastern India following its transition to colonial rule. Rather the aim here is to highlight the persistence of tropes of decline, disorder and backwardness that have shaped modern conceptions of Patna as well as Bihar in general. During the nineteenth century, as the region slid further back with the decline in merchant and trading interests, Patna only paled further when compared to Calcutta – a city that was not only the capital of the Lower Provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa as well as of British India, but was considered the second most important city of the British Empire after London. Some among the regional literati viewed Bihar’s political and administrative attachment to Bengal as the cause for Bihar’s separation as I discuss in Chapter 1. Economically, Patna never quite regained its seventeenth and eighteenth century position as a centre for trade and commerce, but the region was accorded the opportunity to highlight its great and glorious past as archaeological excavations in the outskirts of Patna confirmed, without

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16 Yang. Bazaar India. p. 73, 78.
17 Ibid. p. 79.
any uncertainty, that the city had grown upon the ruins of the more than two millennia
old Mauryan capital Pataliputra – one of the largest and most important cities of India
during its time.

To European visitors however, nothing was “meaner, or less interesting,” than the
general appearance of nineteenth century Patna, which they described simply as “a
collection of mud huts, separated by narrow and often dirty lanes.” Such
characterizations of Patna, only furthered the perception of the general backwardness of
the region. Coupled with Bihar’s unfavorable comparisons with Bengal, there were
certain political and social transformations that were shaping the outlook of Bihar and
Biharis. Foremost amongst these changes was the birth of a western-educated Bihari
middle class and the development of a historical conception of India that embraced the
ancient Mauryan empire as a powerful symbol of the nation’s ancient unity, rich culture
and history. That the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka’s lion capital has been appropriated as
India’s national emblem, shows how significant the Mauryan period is to modern Indian
national imagination. In addition to that the spoked wheel at the base of the capital has
also been appropriated into the Indian national flag. And the presence of this lion capital
in Indian banknotes has made Mauryan symbols so prevalent in modern Indian society
that the bond between the 3rd century BCE Mauryan Empire and the 20th century nation-
state of India seem completely natural and unquestioned. What makes this relation even
more interesting is that not much about Ashoka or the Mauryan Empire was known until
the mid-19th century, until archaeological research began to reveal this particular past of
ancient India. The fact that the foundations of the Mauryan Empire lay in modern Bihar,

and its imperial capital Pataliputra stood in the same place as Patna, raises another, and in my view, a much more interesting question regarding Bihar’s own sense of this ancient past – a past which was now a central element of India’s national narrative.

The cultural and historical symbiosis between Bihar and India has been naturalized in both the regional and national imagination to such an extent that we have often overlooked the influence of the national imagination in shaping the regional contours of Bihar. Such a sentiment has been so pervasive that for some the separation of Bihar served primarily as an outcome of political necessity on the part of the colonial state, which frames the separation as an ameliorative measure to the partitioning of Bengal. For instance, Arvind Das once wrote that the separation of Bihar was “not so much in response to demands from Bihari agitators as to amend the ill-advised partition of Bengal which had created the storms of Swadeshi-protest in Bengal.” While colonial interests overlapped with those of the regional literati, their conception of the region differed widely. British interest in separating Bihar, while it was in part an acknowledgement of the demands for separation, it was equally motivated by political and administrative measures. If in fact the creation of the province of Bihar was indeed a political move or a palliative measure on the part of the British government, for the Bihari literati it signaled in equal measure a recognition and fulfillment of their demands for separation from Bengal. For the colonial government as well as the Bihari literati, the separation of Bihar presented itself as a likely solution that on the one hand sought to contain the post 1905 Swadeshi agitation in Bengal, while on the other addressed Bihar’s desire for a separate province. This new interest and importance bestowed upon Bihar

was quite contrary to the colonial government’s treatment of the region as a provincial backwater or as “a mere appendage to the more intellectual neighbours of Bengal,” a sentiment that prevailed for much of the nineteenth century. At one level, it was this sense of provincial backwardness that propelled an emerging Bihari middle class to express animosity towards the dominance of Bengal and the Bengalis present in Bihar and demand for a separate province. The domination of Bengalis over white-collar jobs in Bihar was often a topic of contention, and the issue regularly surfaced in the regional newspapers like Behar Herald and Behar Times. Yet to assume, as most discussions on the formation of Bihar maintain, that the articulation of regional identity in this instance was solely an outcome of the uneven disparities resulting from colonial rule does not adequately explain the articulation of Biharenness during this period.

Rather, by the late nineteenth century, Bihar’s perception of itself and the assertion of Biharenness were woven into the fabric of an Indian national imagination. My dissertation engages precisely with this transformation of Bihar from a neglected provincial backwater to a region of significance on the map of British India. During the late nineteenth century, Bihar transformed at multiple levels, ranging from a radical transformation in its historical outlook which privileged a newly discovered ancient past to the appropriation of Hindi as the regional language. The choice of Hindi as the regional language of Bihar as well as the region’s historical significance in the narrative of an Indian national past transformed this region as a core element of Indian national imagination. Indian national imagination was so integral to the construction of an

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“organic” Bihar, that without it not only does the region emerge fragmented, but it also becomes a landscape of contradictions. Today, Bihar has become little less than a metonym for crime-infested anarchy where poverty and economic backwardness prevail.23 The idea of Bihar acquires cache only in the context of an Indian national imagination wherein it is accorded an originary national status. Indian national history embraces Bihar as the fount of India’s “glorious” national past as home to the ancient Mauryan and Gupta Empires and the birthplace of Buddhism. The Bihari literati adopted precisely these cultural markers, integral to a generic conception of Indian national identity, as the basis for a “Bihariness.” The conception of a Bihari regional identity, therefore, was coeval with that of the emergence of an Indian nationalist imagination.

Regions In South Asia

In South Asia, region and regional identity is generally framed in opposition to the national imagination and regional assertions are perceived as challenges to Indian national imagination. Studying Bihar provides the opportunity to show how the nation and a national imagination were used as a resource for a regional imagination and how the region and the nation were both mutually constituted. The formation of a distinctively regional identity, in this instance of territorial self-fashioning, was not in opposition to colonial politics or nationalist sentiments; rather it was the unmistakable product of 19th century colonial and national imaginings. Colonial necessities, ranging from administrative restructuring of provinces, to the implementation of language policy and the initiation of archaeological exploration of the region coupled with anti-colonial

23 Das. The Republic of Bihar. p. 5.
nationalist politics in Bengal, a growing support for Hindi as the “national” language and
the discovery of an ancient past – all converged on Bihar to shape the conception of
“Bihariness” for the regional literati. Rather than emphasizing specific local markers of
regional identity like language, caste, religion or history in the case of Bihar we find that
“Bihariness” is based more on markers of Indian national identity. Therefore “place-
making” in the case of Bihar does not subscribe to the script of identity formation that is
prevalent in India. Rather, Bihari identity is produced through administrative fiat. By this
I mean that it was the administrative coherence of this region that became the foundation
for a Bihari regional imagination, while emerging expressions and articulations of India
and Indian national identity were appropriated as the markers of Bihari regional identity.
In other words, I show that the seemingly cohesive entity called Bihar was an
administrative unit whose history or language were not unique to the region. We
generally hold that regions – given their size and general coherence – are “organic” and
“natural” entities, which precede the national imagination or the nation form. But I
contend, that the project of Indian national imagination as well as the Bihari regional
project were mutually co-constituted and were integral to the making of both the regional
and national imaginings credible during its formative stages in the late nineteenth and
early twentieth century.

One of the more persistent tropes of studying regions has been through
explorations of the tensions embedded in the region-nation relationship. In these
instances, regionalism in South Asia is framed as being perpetually antagonistic to the
efforts of Indian national integration. As Bernard Cohn has pointed out, there are several
factors that can mark regional differences in South Asia. In spite of the general
characterization of South Asia as representative of a singular culture there are “differing structural and cultural features of regions.”

Regional variations could be based upon “the differences in language and literature, of historical and ritual identities, in political and administrative styles and methods,” each in its own characteristic manner serving as an important marker in conceptualizing a region and the articulation of regional difference. Together these factors constitute the “pool of symbols which may be drawn upon and around which the content of the idea of regionalism can be formed for a particular region.”

Rather than debating over the reality of South Asia as a civilization or India as a nation vs. the reality of regions and regional identities, Cohn argues that conceptually one can find it more useful to explore the circumstances under which emphasizing regional differences takes priority over espousing the nation as a whole.

Such a conceptualization of the region-nation relation places regions within a framework of mutual exclusivity, where regional imaginings serve to limit the homogenizing tendencies of the nation. Regional histories have underscored the region-nation tensions and have made it a prominent focus of South Asian historiography.

For instance, Sumathi Ramaswamy’s study on Tamil identity is built against the analytic framework of nationalism to emphasize the particularities of a regional identity, which ultimately posits the region-as-a-nation. In order to rescue Tamil history, she not only argues for the displacement of the nation as the locus of history but also refuses to

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25 Ibid.
26 Ibid. p. 120.
“subordinate…the sentiments and notions of all those who lived and died for Tamil under the rubric of ‘nationalism’.”

For Ramaswamy, there are clear limits to using the analytic of nationalism in order to write the history of Tamil “nationalism” for as she points out, “the passions of the tongue” in the case of the speakers of Tamil, “do not readily map onto the passions of the nation.” Instead, by according their language the status of a goddess, piety and devotion to Tamil have become the hallmarks of Tamil identity. In addition, Ramaswamy points to another crucial narrative that undergirds Tamil identity in opposition to that of the national. The sense of a Tamil identity is strongly determined by a sense of loss over a continental landmass called Lemuria located in the south of India, which the Tamils believe submerged in a catastrophic earthquake. This sense of loss, she maintains, helped the Tamils build a common identity that could accommodate its own regional sentiments with the larger national sentiments. Much like Ramaswamy’s emphasis on language as the primary criterion for marking regional difference, similar uses of literature and language, as foundational categories for the production of spaces of common belonging are quite common in the Indian context.

Lisa Mitchell has argued that language and territory, in the twentieth century, were for the “first time explicitly represented as mediated by the people residing within the region.” By the twentieth century, her argument follows, language was no longer a feature of a given territory, but had begun to serve as a personal attribute of a people who viewed themselves both as “individuals and as members of a shared community defined

29 Ibid. p. 5.
30 Ibid.
in relation to that language.” And since language no longer remained a “medium” of expression but became a powerful “marker” of a people’s identity, it played an instrumental role in the configuration of states in independent India, serving as the primary marker for the constitution of regional polities within India. Farina Mir’s recent work similarly points to the continued vitality of a Punjabi literary culture whose roots can be traced back to the pre-colonial period. Despite receiving no support from colonial institutions, the language remained a vital component of Punjabi identity. That it survived and continued to command “affective attachments” produced through the “pleasures of composing, performing, reading, and listening to Punjabi literature,” points towards the remarkable persistence and appeal of regional imaginaries in India.

It is no coincidence therefore, that language has become a primary marker of regional identity and in independent India served as the primary criterion for reorganizing the states. “The most significant result of linguistic reorganization,” as Sanjib Baruah has argued, “was that it created states where particular nationalities – speakers of particular languages with established literatures and histories – constituted majorities capable of defining the public identity of the states.” Such a political arrangement immediately following the independence of India, is an indication of the emotional attachment that manifested through the expression of regional sentiments. Baruah defines these regional sentiments as manifestations of “sub-national communities,” that are indicative of an “insufficiently imagined” project of nation making where the “sub-national communities”

often exist in contention with the narratives that are the defining features of the nation. Baruah is referring to sub-nationalism as a “pattern of politicization and mobilization” that stands in a “dialogical relationship with pan-Indian politics.” But even in such a relationship, Baruah points out that it is the “pan-Indian political community” that becomes the “sole repository of the poetics of a homeland and of the collective memories and dreams of a people – defined singularly.” In such a formulation, even if the pan-Indian narratives could accommodate the “other historically constituted collectives” not by subsuming them within the hegemonic project of nation-building but by recognizing “dual but complementary political identities,” it still underscores the tension that is generally inherent in such dual narratives. So attempts to accommodate regional or “subnational” differences within a “pan-Indian” narrative does little to embrace such regions as constitutive elements essential to an Indian national imagination. Rather these narratives only serve to essentialize differences within their particular “subnational” imaginings.

Recent scholarship has provided a more nuanced approach towards examining the region-nation relation by offering a discursive understanding of regions as imagined communities identifying their space within the broader Indian national community. Prachi Deshpande has shown through her study of the cultures of history writing in Maharashtra, how emotive power was mobilized to form a regional consciousness. A modern Marathi identity, was not only produced within a “broad nationalist framework,”

35 Ibid. p. 4.
36 Ibid. p. 5.
37 Ibid. p. 8.
38 Ibid.
but, she argues, it also provided a “space for negotiating the relationship between the Marathi region and the Indian nation.”⁴⁰ The growing interest in Marathi history during the late nineteenth century was not only used as a “resource for anticolonial nationalism” but was also motivated by the project to create a Marathi regional consciousness that not only “demarcated itself from the larger Indian nation” but also occupied a unique space within it.⁴¹ This narrative of regional consciousness and a unique Marathi history was framed by “popular religious discourses,” which was beginning to form a part of the language that was speaking for a Hindu community and an Indian nation simultaneously. The basis for this sectarian view of Marathi history, came from the fact that “Maharashtra dharma,” a concept that lay at the foundation of Maratha political authority, was not initially a “geographically rooted category,” but was especially based on social practice that drew upon Brahmanical values.⁴² So even though, Maharashtra framed its regional consciousness by valorizing history, religion too formed an important element of that identity and equated the idea of a larger nation with that of a Hindu community. Marathi history, beginning with Shivaji (1630-1680), is an important element of Indian national history. In fact, writing in the nineteenth and twentieth century, Marathi writers constructed their ancestors as “the pioneers of Indian nationalism,” but they did so in addition to invoking them as “emblems of their own regional identity.”⁴³

Marathi claims to a national narrative, certainly draws strong parallels with Bihar’s own position as the fount of Indian national history. Yet, it would be difficult to

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⁴¹ Ibid.
⁴² Ibid.
⁴³ Ibid. p. 135.
explain the formation of Bihari regional identity by drawing parallels to Maharashtra. Not only does Marathi history have a distinct beginning, with the emergence of an independent Maratha state in the 1640s, but there is an uninterrupted account of the Maratha past, that formed the basis of Marathi identity. Instead, in Bihar, which served as an administrative unit since the Mughal period, the most important resource to its ancient past was the nineteenth century archaeological discovery of the Asoka and the Mauryan period. More importantly still, the discovery itself was immediately framed as the foundation for a national history that was in much need for evidence of an ancient glorious past. With Bihar in a state of perpetual decline, and Biharis growing increasingly conscious of a sense of neglect vis-à-vis Bengal, the opportunity to celebrate this discovery, catapulted the region as the core element of Indian national imagination. As an administrative province served as the basis for recognizing a distinct regional identity, the region itself continued to draw upon national cultural markers in order to craft a regional identity – in addition to history, this became particularly evident as Hindi was appropriated as the language of Bihar.

In recent years, studies of regional history have gone on to explore the cultures of history writing, or language as markers of regional belonging. Such a focus, however, has never quite explained the roles these regional imaginations played in making the national project possible during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Instead, as regional histories highlight their differences, it leaves us to question, what was it that made the imagination of India possible? Rather than equating projects of regional assertions, somewhat simplistically, as celebrations of India’s diversity, I argue that regional identities were reconfigured to accommodate a rapidly ossifying sense of an
Indian nation. It was the accommodative impulses of regions that actualized the imagination of the Indian nation-state yet there were limits to such a formulation. As Bihari identity began to be expressed as an element of Indian nationalism, internally the administrative province turned regional unit began to witness fissures pointing to the limits of the Bihari project.

Chapter Outline

The chapters in this dissertation are organized thematically, in order to highlight episodes that have a bearing on the territorial and cultural imaginings of Bihar. The aim here is not to produce a chronological narrative of the emergence, the subsequent articulation and ultimately the limitations of Bihariness. Yet the fact that this discussion on the territorial imaginings of Bihar cannot escape the influence of a rapidly ossifying Indian national imagining points to the deep ties that wove this region and the nation together as part of a singular historical narrative.

In Chapter 1, “The Emergence of Bihar: Bihari Middle class and the Making of a Province,” I first discuss the formation of Bihar as an administrative entity followed by a discussion on the formation of a provincial middle class. I then place the Bihar-separation debate among the Biharis, Bengalis and the colonial state in order to argue that for the Bihari literati it was the cultural hubris of Bengalis that most strongly underwrote the differences between these two communities. Given the volatile political situation in Bengal, which was increasingly becoming more critical of the colonial government, the Bihari-Bengali animosity was also a casualty of colonial political machinations. Chapter 2 “Making of a Vernacular: Colonial Policies, Print Culture and Hindi in 19th century
Chapter 3, “Discovery of Ancient Bihar: Archeology and the Emergence of a Regional Territorial Space,” uses the role of early colonial archeology to highlight another facet of this region’s inextricable ties to the nation. I argue that archaeological research wove a narrative that brought together the history of the region and the nation allowing for a seemingly seamless merger of an ancient Magadhan past with an ancient Indian past thus forever linking artifacts embedded in a local landscape to a national past. So while archaeology was essential to mapping the historical-cultural space of Bihar, in doing so it also signposted the local sites as markers of national historical significance.

Chapter 4 “Territorial Self-Fashioning and the Past: Institutions, Artifacts and History-Writing” shows how history was invoked in the project of constructing a regional past. Institutions such as the Bihar and Orissa Research Society and the Patna Museum, became crucial in the new political-cultural configuration of the region but it also made visible Bihar’s past in a deliberately nationalist narrative. These served as a way of self-representation for the provincial literati by providing them with an institutional basis
upon which differences with Bengal could be charted out but more importantly it shows how the past became an instrument with which they could perhaps address their present condition of colonial subject-hood. Finally, Chapter 5 “Articulating Mithila: Interrogating the Existence of a ‘Genuinely’ Bihari Culture” argues that as the cultural contours of Bihar became deeply entangled with the cultural symbols of Indian nationalism, it also created fissures within Bihar’s own internal conception as a region. This became evident in Mithila, north-Bihar, when the Maithils began to give prominence to their own “mother-tongue” by making Maithili the vehicle of literary expression. In sum, by exploring multiple facets of territorial self-making, this dissertation emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between the region and the nation where national narratives ultimately shaped as well as subsumed the countervailing tendencies of the region.
Chapter 1:
The Emergence of Bihar: Bihari Middle Class and the Making of a Province

“We are for the constitution of Behar as a separate provincial administration,” Mahesh Narayan wrote in 1896 in an editorial of *The Behar Times*, the newspaper he had co-founded. Narayan along with Sachchidananda Sinha, established *The Behar Times* in 1894 with the intention of promoting the idea of a separate Bihar. Reminiscing almost half-a-century later about his role in facilitating the separation of Bihar, Sinha wrote that in 1894 he began the movement in order to “secure for Bihar a distinct and honourable status as an administrative unit, with an individuality on the same footing as that of the more important provinces in the country.” Sinha and Narayan did not question the existence of a distinctive regional space known as Bihar, rather by the late 19th century, there was a growing recognition among the Bihari literati that Bihar should be made into a separate administrative unit as well. Keeping this sentiment in mind Narayan, in his 1896 editorial, continued,

It is merely an accident that Behar is linked to Bengal for administrative purposes; there is less in common between the people of Bengal and the people of Behar, than between the people of Bengal and the people of Assam, and there is, therefore, no reason, except such as may be found in the question of administrative convenience, why Assam should be a separate administration, and not Behar; nor is there any reason why Behar should be linked to Bengal and not the United Provinces, with which it has everything in common.

Narayan’s logic for a separate Bihar points to factors that provide early indications of how regions were being imagined in colonial India. His reasoning implied that a region deserved to be made into a separate administrative entity as a way of recognizing and

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validating the cultural, linguistic and historical differences that were often the core elements distinguishing one region from another. Still more than the cultural, linguistic and historical difference, it was Bihar’s long history as a cogent and cohesive administrative unit that served as the foundation for the demands for a separate region, and it is this seemingly “organic” entity that served as the basis for asserting Bihariness during the late nineteenth century. Indeed, the sense of a distinctive Bihar was cultivated by administrative fiat, which was in turn fueled by colonial politics and Indian national imaginings during the late nineteenth century.

So when Bihar was finally separated from Bengal in 1912 and made into a separate administrative unit the champions for the separation were exuberant. Some even went on to proclaim that theirs was in fact a “royal province” in order to hint and perhaps even celebrate the fact that the separation was made possible through George V’s proclamation made on the occasion of his coronation as the Emperor of India during the Delhi Durbar, on December 12, 1911. Bihar’s claim to be the “Royal Province” of India was also meant to refer to this region as “the classic land of India, the cradle of Indian culture and civilization, the home of much that an Indian can boast of, as India’s contribution to the world’s progress” thus making Bihar the nucleus of an emergent Indian national imagination. For many, particularly among the provincial literati, the separation also meant that Bihar would no longer be overshadowed by Bengal nor would Patna remain a provincial backwater particularly when compared to the imperial splendor of Calcutta. The separation acknowledged that Bihar, along with Chota Nagpur and

Orissa, were distinct entities brought together within one administrative structure known as the province of Bihar and Orissa.

Given the role Sinha and Narayan played among the regional literati in cultivating the demand for a separate administrative unit that was reflective of a distinctive Bihari community, any discussion of Bihar’s separation usually refers back to and begins with Sachchidananda Sinha’s “painful and humiliating discovery” that “the very name of Bihar was almost unknown” to most people outside Bihar. While a student in London during the early 1890s, Sinha discovered that not only to most British, but also to a majority of Indians, Bihar was a “terra incognita.” Even on his journey back from England in 1893, Sinha was surprised to discover that a fellow passenger, a Punjabi barrister, confessed to having never heard of Bihar before. Such revelations, Sinha confessed, made him and a few other Biharis like him, realize that they “were a people without any individuality, without any province to claim as ours,” or even a “local habitation with a name.” As I will discuss below, the proponents for a separate Bihar were mainly from an emergent class of English-educated Bihari middle class, who were beginning to view themselves first and foremost as Bihari just, like their Bengali, Punjabi or Marathi counterparts, and hence the recognition of Bihar as a distinct province became essential for them to be acknowledged as Biharis. More importantly, I maintain that unlike the Bengali, Punjabi or Marathi regional identities, Bihari identity had to be cultivated by embracing markers of Indian national identity. The painful conviction, Sinha continues, only intensified when upon returning to India in 1893, he noticed a “tall,

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robust and stalwart Biharee constable wearing the badge with the inscription ‘Bengal Police.’”\(^7\) These incidents led Sinha to resolve that he would do “all that lay in my power to secure for Bihar a distinct and honourable status as an administrative unit, with an individuality on the same footing as that of the more important provinces in the country.”\(^8\) While Sinha presents himself as the primary proponent for a separate Bihar, and although the prevalent account for the separation of Bihar places Sinha at the centre of the movement, it is critical we remember that Sinha and his sentiments were reflective of a newly emergent class of Bihari middle class who much like their Bengali counterparts during this period were beginning to think of themselves first and foremost as Biharis. And a dominant segment among them believed that the separation of Bihar as a distinct administrative unit would justly recognize them as Biharis.

This chapter uses Sinha’s humiliating discovery of the non-existence of Bihar, the quest for a distinct Bihari identity by an emergent regional literati, and the separation of Bihar in 1912, as a way to interrogate the motivations that worked to construct a sense of Bihariness, but more importantly it also argues that the birth of a specific Bihari identity was predicated upon and facilitated by the emergence of an Indian nationalist imagination. For the provincial literati, emphasizing Bihar as an “organic” entity cultivated a sense of common belonging that was remarkably novel for the period, particularly because it implied that an administrative region had transformed into a cohesive cultural unit. The transformation is particularly revealing because the claims to a “natural” Bihar was not based upon a distinctive language, ethnicity or religion. Instead this regional assertion was partially instigated by British colonial politics and in part

\(^7\) Sinha. *Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries*. p. iii.

\(^8\) Ibid.
shaped by an emergent Indian national imagination. Building on the newly discovered ties between modern Bihar and the ancient Mauryan Empire, the Bihari literati never quite shirked from pointing out that even “the political ideas and examples, that may strengthen the hands of modern reformers,” in colonial India sought “light and inspiration from the ancient history of Behar.” Bihar therefore occupies a unique place within the Indian national imagination as Bihar’s ancient past informed and shaped both the national and regional outlooks. In other words, unlike the expressions of regional identities in much of India, regional identity in Bihar itself becomes a “factor of Indian nationalism.” Over the course of the late nineteenth century, Bihar therefore transformed from being a backward province that not only lacked an independent status but also remained overshadowed by a superior Bengal to being “the classic land of India,” one that was entitled to “sympathetic interest and consideration at the hands of the educated Indians belonging to other provinces.” This inevitable and indispensible reference to Indian national imagination that cultivated, fostered and served as the foundation for a Bihari regional identity thus making it possible for an administrative unit like Bihar to also emerge as a seemingly cohesive “organic” entity.

Bihar is located on the eastern end of the great Gangetic plain that makes up much of northern India. This geographic setting has also meant that Bihar has historically served as a gateway between Hindustan, usually understood as much of northern India, and Bengal. While Bihar links Bengal to the rest of Northern India, the Ganges, as it flows through Bihar, divides the region itself into two distinct cultural and linguistic communities, with Mithila to the north and Magadha to the south. These two flat plains

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10 Ibid.
blend into the Terai in the Himalayan foothills on the north and the hilly-forested area that makes up the Chota Nagpur plateau in the south. Mithila and Magadha, together with some of the Bhojpuri speaking districts that make up parts of western Bihar, are the core constituent elements of modern Bihar. Even as much of modern Bihar appears fragmented by the persistence of older place-names, like Mithila and Magadha, the beginning of a movement demanding the separation of Bihar during the late nineteenth century points to the emergence of a distinctive sense of Bihariness as well. It was this sense of Bihariness that prevailed upon an emergent Bihari literati to claim for themselves a distinct community.

The place-name Bihar can be traced back to the 12th century, when Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji’s military success led to the establishment of Turkish rule in the region. Bakhtiyar Khalji’s attacks on Bihar were mainly limited to Magadha, south Bihar, and culminated in 1203 CE with the capture of the fortified monastery town that would eventually be known as the town of Biharsharif. The Turkish conquerors named the region Bihar because the landscape was dotted with Buddhist viharas or monasteries. Following the Turkish conquest, the political boundaries of Bihar underwent several changes, the most important of them was the merging of Tirhut and Bihar, or alternately what is also known as Mithila and Magadha, into one administrative province in 1324 and it is this province that came to be known as Bihar. In 1575 during the reign of Emperor Akbar, Bihar became a Mughal subah or province and was bounded by the

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subah’s of Bengal in the east and Allahabad and Awadh on the west. While the region’s ancient past, replete with the history of the Maurya and Gupta empires, served as the foundation for the construction of a modern Bihari regional identity, it was the Turkic and Mughal influences that provided Bihar with the administrative and political coherence which served as the signifier of an “organic” Bihari community during the late nineteenth and twentieth century.

Given the cohesion they introduced to the region, the Mughal Empire sustained and even stimulated the belief that the administrative unit of Bihar Subah was in fact one “organic” entity. At another level, however, the seven sarkars (districts) that made up the subah corresponded quite accurately with the dialects that are present in modern Bihar even today. During the Mughal period, as John Beams pointed out, “Sarkars Ruhtas, Saran and Champaran speak Bhojpuri, Sarkar Bihar Magadhi, Sarkars Tirhut, Hajipur and Mungir Maithili.” Although this coincidence could be merely an accident, he believed that the language boundaries within Bihar, were decided by some of the “same considerations as the administrative boundaries, namely, the leading natural features of the country such as hills, rivers and so on.” Later, during the first half of the eighteenth century with the rise of regional powers and the subsequent decline of the Mughal imperial authority, the administration of Bihar along with Orissa was brought under the Nawab of Bengal. After the Battle of Buxar in 1764 and the grant of Diwani rights in 1765, the English East India Company became the virtual rulers of Bengal while also

13 Ibid. p. 170.
inheriting the administrative responsibilities of the region that was previously governed by the Nawab of Bengal.\textsuperscript{15} So not only were Bihar, Bengal and Orissa the first regions to come under British colonial rule, but they were all part of the Bengal Presidency and placed under one administrative structure for the next hundred and fifty years.

**Provincial Middle Class in 19\textsuperscript{th} Century Bihar**

The role of the middle class in the history of colonial India is of considerable importance. During the colonial period, not only did members of the Indian middle class serve as architects of anti-colonial Indian nationalism, but they also articulated a vision of an Indian nation in material as well as cultural terms. A large segment of this group also served in the colonial bureaucracy; be it in the judiciary, administrative, education or police departments. The Indian middle class of the nineteenth century was in large part a creation of the colonial episode in Indian history, and in the context of colonial India it remains an amorphous social category. While the identity of the middle class remains fluid, eluding any particular socio-economic categorization, there are certain generally recognized characteristics that serve as the primary markers of middle class identity namely: western-style education, a white collar job, and participation in a print culture.\textsuperscript{16} Each of these characteristics can be attributed to the establishment of colonial rule in India pointing to the role of British colonial rule and governance as an essential condition for the emergence of the middle class in nineteenth century India. As a social group, the colonial middle class was generally in close interaction, either in collaboration or condemnation – to list the two extremes, with the colonial state. More importantly, they

\textsuperscript{15} O’Malley. *Bengal, Bihar, Orissa*. pp. 148-149.

were instrumental in providing “cultural” leadership by actively forming a discourse on culture, history, and identity under conditions of colonial rule. The formation of the colonial middle class was the product of a historical process growing in response to the changing forms of political, social, cultural and economic norms introduced by colonial rule. The Indian middle class, itself a product of colonial “modernity,” in turn played a significant role in defining and shaping the outlook of modern India both at the provincial and national levels.

The socio-economic impact of colonialism was greater in Bengal, than in other provinces since it was the first region of India to come under colonial rule. Although Bihar and Orissa were also part of this initial transfer, the British paid greater attention to Bengal mainly through the concentration of resources to Calcutta, the capital of British India. Among other things this is reflected in the early introduction of English education in Bengal, which eventually led to the formation of a Bengali middle class also known as the bhadralok. Until the 1830s, the East India Company remained fairly reliant upon the Sanskrit and Persian knowing literati for purposes of administration and commerce and as a result knowledge of Sanskrit and/or Persian assured people of a sound future. From 1830s onwards, with the growing influence of the Anglicists, and particularly Thomas B. Macaulay, there was a marked increase in the use of English for both education and administrative purposes, while it simultaneously minimized the use of both Sanskrit and Persian and denigrated the accomplishments of Indian civilization.\(^{17}\) By emphasizing English education, the Anglicists were attempting to create a class of native people who, as Macaulay famously put it, were “Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in

opinions, in morals, and in intellect.” While the stated intention of the British was to produce a class of people who could serve as a medium through which the colonial state could interact with its subjects, the introduction of the language was not in itself limited to the mechanisms of the state.

Instead, English, more specifically English literature, became a tool of the Empire and was used to champion an ideal self that was divorced from the reality of the conquest. “The self-presentation of the Englishman to native Indians through the products of his mental labor,” as Gauri Viswanathan has argued, “removes him from the place of ongoing colonist activity – of commercial operations, military expansion, and administration of territories – and deactualizes and diffuses his material reality in the process.” Therefore, English literature was pressed to the service of colonial rule in order to efface the more sordid history of colonialism and present a more idealized self of the colonizer. And it was this trope of an idealized Englishman that most of the colonial middle class internalized. The colonial middle class began to appreciate the ideals of “modernity,” which they chose to appropriate in order to enhance their own self-representation. But for Indians, English education also served as the primary means through which the colonial middle class could continue to maintain their respectability as well as find employment. Compared to traditional forms of learning this new form of education, which now served as the only avenue for upward mobility, was far more formal and examination centered. Therefore an entry into the service sector now became dependent primarily on examinations and educational degrees – therefore changing the

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nature of educational system in colonial India.\textsuperscript{20} Since a foreign language now served as the medium of instruction for the highly desired western-style education, dependence on print culture grew due to the increasing reliance on books. For the Indian middle class, book learning became even more important with the growing importance of examinations and educational degrees.\textsuperscript{21} As an important corollary, the growing reliance on books also instigated and overtime also sustained a vernacular print culture which played a crucial role in forging communicational links, between a level below that of classical language of high culture but above that of the spoken dialects, which was to later prove beneficial to the nationalist project.\textsuperscript{22} The introduction and influence of English education was most evident in and around the British administrative centers of Calcutta in eastern India, Bombay in western India and Madras in southern India. As a result, an English educated colonial middle class developed earliest in and around these major administrative centers. The people of these regions were the first to have access to jobs in the colonial government that required knowledge of English. They also had access to modern professions of law, medicine, journalism and teaching.

On the other hand, due to the long presence of Mughal rule much of Bihar, like the rest of north India, relied on Persian for administrative purposes. During the reign of Akbar, the same period when Bihar became a province of the Mughal Empire, Persian was institutionalized as the official language of governance and administration. The wide use of Persian, gave the language a “professional and utilitarian appeal” for many of the Hindu literate gentry communities traditionally serving as bureaucrats under various

\textsuperscript{20} Sarkar. \textit{Writing Social History}. p. 257.  
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid. p. 255.  
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. pp. 174-75.
governments.\textsuperscript{23} Alongside Muslims, many Hindu scribal/professional communities, particularly the Kayasthas and Khatris of north India, therefore started learning Persian as it provided them with career related opportunities.\textsuperscript{24} The Kayasthas and Khatris had come to dominate certain departments of government particularly in accounting, draftsmanship, revenue collection, management and accounting.\textsuperscript{25} Therefore, in Bihar, Muslims and Hindu Kayasthas almost monopolized white-collar jobs in the government until 1835, when Persian no longer was recognized as the language of governance and was instead replaced with English.\textsuperscript{26} When the British government introduced the use of English alongside the use of regional vernaculars for most of its administrative purposes – the Persian knowing literati were left without any source of gainful employment. Instead, the emphasis on English as the language of governance opened up employment opportunities for the Bengali middle class, who with their early access to western education, now followed in the wake of the colonial state as it made inroads into north India. In these areas, the Bengalis not only served within the colonial administrative structure, but effectively dominated modern professional careers as doctors, lawyers and teachers. Because of their early presence in areas that had not yet had access to western education, the Bengalis were able to establish a virtual monopoly over most of these professions.

In addition, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, the Bengalis developed a sense of cultural superiority that was not only predicated on their early access to English

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
education, but was equally derived from their attachment to Bengali language and literature, which served as hallmarks of Bengali culture. Often such an outlook meant that Bengalis, as they moved into parts of northern India, maintained a distance from the local society where such behavior was usually perceived as an exhibition of professional and cultural superiority. Occasional expressions of such superiority only strengthened these sentiments further. For instance, the inveterate traveler Bholanauth Chunder’s accounts of peoples and places during his journeys through parts of north India provides quite an insight into the Bengali middle class’ sense of cultural dominance and intellectual superiority within Indian society.  

27 Chunder’s narrative provides glimpses of the marked regional differences between the people of his native Bengal and other regions. His observations used customs, food habits, attire, and physiological differences as boundaries that served to distinguish Bengali middle class identity from that of the rest. For instance, upon entering Bihar, on one occasion Chunder described the people of the region as “exhibit[ing] a strange mixture of the state of nature and the state of civilization.”  

28 Chunder’s observations often tended to verge on the hyperbolic, but they also provide us with a glimpse of Bengali perceptions of Bihar and Biharis. During much of the nineteenth century, the Bengali middle class perceived themselves as junior partners in colonialism and civilization and considered that within the hierarchy of civilizations, just as the Bengalis had emulated the superior Anglo-Saxon race, other native societies should emulate the Bengalis.  

29 Such an attitude did not rest well with a


new generation of English educated Biharis, like Sachchidananda Sinha and Mahesh Narayan.

Much has been written about western-style education as an important prerequisite for a middle class identity in colonial India, and given Bengal’s early experience of it, much of this literature has focused on the Bengali bhadralok.\textsuperscript{30} Bihar’s experience with English education did not quite follow the same trajectory as that of Bengal. English education in Bihar had very shaky beginnings, the reasons for which can be attributed to colonial educational policies, reactions of the provincial literati and limited access to employment for English educated Biharis. Even as late as the 1890s, local newspapers were replete with instances of how dire the condition of the English educated youth of Bihar was. In one such instance, a correspondent from Bhagalpur sends “The Story of a B.A., B.L. and its Moral,” to \textit{The Behar Times}. Here the author recounts the plight of those who had taken on English education only to be disappointed with “petty clerkships” and “starvation salary.” He writes,

> It is painful to contemplate how the M.A’s and B.L.’s that are yearly manufactured by hundreds in our Universities get deceived and disappointed in the long run from a pecuniary point of view. Few men read for reading’s sake. Everybody reads simply, solely and exclusively for the sake of making money. Ask any college student why he troubles himself with sines and cosines, with parabolas and hyperbolas and rest assured, he will answer you that money is his only motive. He labours under a wrong impression who supposes that English education is the only goddess by propitiating whom a man can obtain wealth.\textsuperscript{31}


\textsuperscript{31} \textit{The Behar Times}. September 3, 1897.
Adding to the disappointment was the sense of humiliation that they encountered almost
everyday as petty clerks and pleaders. The correspondent goes on to question if there was
any honor in being a pleader who is found “barking and howling in the court for a stray
rupee or two, or be a petty clerk and be the whole day scratching foolscaps with goose-
quills, and be every now and again scolded and fined for not cutting the t’s and dotting
the i’s.” Such questions and concerns became even more poignant when English
education did not open up avenues for lucrative jobs and government appointments. For
some Biharis, as I discuss further below, such concerns became even more pressing when
they continued to see Bengalis appointed to such positions as and when they were
available.

To return to the checkered history of English education in Bihar, the colonial
government established the Patna High School in 1835, but the institution had to close
down in 1858.32 Lack of attendance was the primary factor leading to this action. It did
not help that during the school’s early days, rumors questioning the government’s
motives behind promoting English education began circulating in Patna. Some thought
that English schools would be used to proselytize students, while others believed that
English educated boys would be shipped to England as slaves.33 Under these conditions
when the school began admitting students in 1835, the total of seven students to enroll on
the first day were all Bengalis, with one Bihari student joining in only on the third day.34
In a scathing condemnation of the lack of attendance in the English schools, a British
school inspector wrote that the Patna School “has never produced an adequate number of

105, 313.
33 Ibid. p. 105.
34 Ibid.
scholars, nor has it attracted a single individual of the higher classes: existing for more
than a generation, as it has, no one member of the upper families in this city uses English
in conversation, nor … has received instruction within its walls, except perhaps for a
month or two.”35 Perhaps the expectation that Biharis would embrace English education
and would be just as anglicized as the Bengalis was far fetched. This became even more
evident following the colonial government’s failed efforts to establish a College in Patna
in 1844. The government maintained that until “the inhabitants of Patna and the province
of Bihar came to appreciate the advantages of a liberal education more highly than they
have hitherto appeared to do” there would be no further attempt to establish an institution
of higher education.36 But unlike Bengal, where the introduction of English education
was paralleled with some level of employment opportunities either with the government
or in mercantile firms, the introduction of English education in Patna during this period
did not produce these opportunities to the same extent.

Early reluctance and rumors aside another major factor fostering the general
apathy towards English education was the continued influence of Persian education. As
mentioned above, the older culture of Persian education continued to flourish. Until the
early nineteenth century, Persian was the lingua franca of northern India and knowledge
of Persian was essential for most employment opportunities. Therefore both Muslims as
well as Hindus learned Persian.37 Moreover, following the Revolt of 1857, the colonial
government began to strongly emphasize the spread of vernacular education. For Bihar,

35 Jagdish Narayan Sarkar and Jagdish Chandra Jha, A History of the Patna College 1863-1963. Patna:
36 Ibid. pp. 16-17.  
p. 23.
the colonial state designated Urdu, which is Hindustani written in the Persian character, as the regional vernacular. I discuss the colonial government’s role in shaping the region’s vernacular in greater detail in chapter 2, but for now I would like to point out that neither Urdu nor Hindi, as was later championed by a large segment of the regional literati, was the vernacular language of Bihar. The emphasis on vernacular education was premised on the colonial educational policy that championed educating Indians based on their “mother tongue.” In fact, in 1872 the Government of Bengal declared that Hindi should replace Urdu as the vernacular of the region. As a result, following the orders of George Campbell, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Hindi was introduced as the medium of instruction in Bihar and “strict injunctions” were issued that only the “real vernacular,” which was now supposed to be Hindi, be used in the public offices alongside English when necessary. But in Bihar the outcome of such a policy was that vernacular education was either given in Urdu or in Hindi – neither of which were the primary languages spoken in the homes of most Biharis. It is therefore no surprise that only a particularly small segment of the population belonging to the scribal and professional communities, mainly Kayasthas, as well as segments of Bihari Muslims and Bengalis living in Bihar who benefitted most from both vernacular and English education.

After the initial hurdles however, the establishment of the Patna College in 1863 laid the first solid foundation for English education in Bihar and also marked the

beginnings of the formation of a Bihari middle class.\textsuperscript{40} This did not immediately yield the desired outcome; instead the colonial government observed that it was mainly the Bengalis who once again were benefitting from Patna College. For instance, in 1875 of the ninety-seven students enrolled in the college only forty were Biharis.\textsuperscript{41} The dominance of Bengalis, at an institution meant to benefit the Biharis annoyed George Campbell to such an extent that in 1872 he even contemplated shutting the college. The colonial state maintained that the government did not “specially protect a College in Behar to educate immigrant Bengalees only.”\textsuperscript{42} It was the strong opposition from people like Khuda Baksh, Rai Jai Kissen and Nawab Sohrab Jung in Bihar that prevented the government from following through with their intention. They argued that closure of the provincial college at Patna will annihilate the warm zeal and ardour so recently engendered in the Behary minds, and will substitute in its place the firm belief that the Government and their long-revered Kismut [providence] have destined their sons to remain copying clerks and holders of subordinate appointments, whilst all honorable and lucrative employments are reserved for their more favoured brethren of Lower Bengal.\textsuperscript{43} While promises for lucrative employment provided the incentive for a higher-level English education, in practice Biharis could not displace Bengalis who were already part of the colonial bureaucracy in Bihar. The inability to access gainful employment on the part of English educated Biharis, served as an important part of the anti-Bengali sentiments that began to emerge in late-nineteenth century Bihar, but it also kept reminding many aspiring Biharis of the futility of attaining English education. For instance, a report on education in Patna Division pointed to the exclusion of Biharis from

\textsuperscript{40} Sarkar and Jha, \textit{A History of the Patna College 1863-1963}. p. 1.


public services as the primary factor for their lack of interest in English education. In an 1870-71 annual report on education in the Patna Division, R. P. Jenkins observed that “Of late years it has become the practice in all district offices to appoint Bengalees as much as possible; similarly partiality has been observable in the employment of Bengalees as judges and deputy magistrates in local courts. What effect this almost entire supersession of their own countrymen must have produced on people of Behar, it is not difficult to conceive.” On the one hand, the colonial state was beginning to form a more critical opinion regarding the presence of Bengalis in Bihar; while on the other, with the emergence and growth of a Bihari middle class, a particularly vocal segment of the regional literati was beginning to assert and emphasize Bihar’s differences with Bengal. In doing so both the colonial government and the Bihari literati were laying the foundation for distancing Bihar from Bengal.

For the British government, emphasizing the differences between the Biharis and Bengalis, served another and perhaps a more critical function, and this was motivated by the desire to limit the growing influence of the educated Bengalis and their views on colonial rule which was becoming increasingly critical of the British by the end of the nineteenth century. Expressing this very sentiment, C. F. Worsley, the Magistrate of Muzaffarpur was afraid that the influence of Bengal upon Bihar, or in other terms the growing influence of Bengalis in Bihar, would perhaps influence the Biharis to share Bengal’s critical views on colonial rule. But he was also hopeful that:

so long as the writers in such newspapers as the Hindoo Patriot, Amrita Bazar Patrika, and the Behar Herald (which have some small circulation in this district)

are, and are known to be, only Bengalees, their violent attacks on public officers will never excite dissatisfaction among respectable and educated Beharees. Such writers, by imputing to European officers the contemptible motives which are wont to actuate the worst of their own countrymen, betray their nationality and insult the good sense of their Beharee readers.  

George Campbell, further perpetuated this difference when in 1873, he wrote that “Bihar is a country very different from Bengal, and inhabited by a people extremely different. All the official business and habitues necessarily much differ. I think that in Behar also there should be special administration.” By emphasizing the difference between the Biharis and Bengalis, the colonial state attempted to marginalize the critical views that the Bengali press expressed regarding colonial rule. The British colonial government further maintained that it was the selfishness of the Bengalis that was counterproductive to the Biharis. The British press in Calcutta focused on the different interests of the two communities. The Englishman of Calcutta, published an editorial on November 27, 1879, entitled “The Intellectual Capacity of Bengalis” where it accused the Bengalis of exploiting the resources of Bihar for their own interests and appealed to the British Government to protect the Biharis against the Bengalis.

In the mean time, many in Bihar began raising claims for separation and the sentiments were first expressed in two local Urdu newspapers. The slogan “Bihar for the Biharis,” first appeared in a February 7, 1876 issue of Murgh-i-Suliman – a local Urdu newspaper, which pled with the colonial state to provide Biharis with a larger share of employment in the colonial bureaucracy. Following in this wake, in January 22, 1877 another Urdu newspaper, the Qasid, condemned the union of Bengal and Bihar claiming

45 Annual General Report of the Patna Division for 1876-77. General Department, General Proceedings. Appendix A. November 1877, File 162 1-16.
that this arrangement was most detrimental to the interests of Bihar.\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Qasid} was therefore one of the earliest papers to go beyond the claims for a greater share of Bihari employment, to claim that “Biharis and Bengalis were different from each other in nationality, customs and manners; they did not mix or intermarry; they scorned each other.”\textsuperscript{49} The fact that the earliest assertions of Bihariness appeared in Urdu newspapers, coupled with the role played by prominent Bihari Muslims in the demands for a separate province of Bihar, points to the unity between middle class Bihari Muslims and Hindus in this project of self-fashioning, which was further demonstrated in the role played by prominent Bihari Muslims in demanding the separation of Bihar.

The \textit{Qasid} also charged that the Bengalis received greater state patronage as a result of which Bihar continued to suffer. The colonial government sensing the growing disaffection among the Bihari literati issued a circular during the tenure of Ashley Eden as the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal (1877-82), stating that certain jobs should be exclusively reserved for Biharis in Bihar.\textsuperscript{50} Explaining his reasons for issuing the orders, Eden claimed that it was “unquestionably true that for the discharge of certain duties in Behar, the natives of the Province are much better suited than Bengalis are. They may not be so well educated, and especially not so well educated in English, as their Bengali competitors, but they know the vernacular, which, in a province where dialects are numerous, is a great advantage; and they understand the people among whom Bengalis are often regarded as foreigners.”\textsuperscript{51} The report continued that “Another reason for the

\textsuperscript{48} Chaudhary. \textit{The Creation of Modern Bihar}. p.37.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. p. 38.
preference given to natives of Behar for employment in their own province was the desire
to stimulate education in that province.” It was this animosity towards the Bengalis and
the concurrent demand for a larger share in employment that was later picked up by an
emergent Bihari middle class, which included people like Mahesh Narayan, Krishna
Sahay, Nand Kishore Lal, Ali Imam, Mazharul Haque with Sachchidananda Sinha, who
was a graduate of the Patna College, often at the helm of the movement.

It would however, be incorrect to presume that the Bihari middle class were only
concerned with greater access to employment and made this the sole cause to demand
Bihar’s separation from Bengal. While the presence of middle-class Bengalis may have
triggered the Bihari-Bengali animosity, to frame the articulation of a distinctive Bihari
identity in these terms and to view the demand for Bihar’s separation as an outcome of
this process presents a very narrow and highly skewed understanding of both the role of
the Bihari middle class in the separation of Bihar as well as their articulation of
Bihariness. Instead, as Sanjay Joshi has argued in a different context, the middle class
distinguished themselves because of their ability to configure new social relations. By
emphasizing the middle class’ ability to establish new social relations, Joshi argues that
middle-class identity was not based entirely on the privileged position that a person’s
economic or social background provided, but instead it depended on their role as
“cultural entrepreneurs” and hence it grew through their participation in “public-sphere
politics.” In other words, to borrow from Joshi, “being middle class in India … was a

52 Ibid.
53 Joshi. Fractured Modernity. p. 8
54 Ibid. p. 2
Similarly, discussing the emergence of the Bengali middle class, or the *bhadralok*, Tithi Bhattacharya also maintains that even though the *bhadralok* belonged to a diverse category, “culture, or at least the rhetoric about culture, was something that gave a unified identity to the *bhadralok*.”

But unlike Bengal where Bengali language and literature served as the unifying plank in the articulation of a unique Bengali culture, the case of Bihar was quite different.

The project of constructing a unique sense of Bihariness meant that the region, brought into existence through administrative fiat, now had to be transformed into a seemingly “natural” and “organic” entity that could serve as the foundation for articulating Bihariness. In other words, the cultural project that sustained and in many ways validated the existence of a distinctive Bihari middle class was rooted in their project of fashioning Bihar as an “organic” entity. As I discuss in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, the project of articulating an “organic” Bihar drew upon the region’s language and its ancient past as integral components of this region. For the Bihari middle class, this was even more appealing since it meant that they were adopting precisely those cultural markers that were integral to a generic conception of Indian national imagination. So the transformation of the administrative unit of Bihar into an “organic” province that could project itself as a distinctive region was only made possible through the Bihari middle class’ celebration of the region as an integral component of Indian identity. Additionally, for the Bihari middle class, this project of territorial self-fashioning was essential also because it allowed them to challenge the rhetoric of Bihar as a backward region. Rather

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55 Ibid. p. 6.
by embracing an emergent nationalist imagination of India, through language and history, they were able to project Bihar as the core constituent element of the Indian nation.

**Asserting Difference**

The debate over the separation of Bihar occurred in major local and regional newspapers and figured most prominently in the region’s leading English papers, *The Behar Herald* and *The Behar Times*. *The Behar Herald*, which started publication in 1872 was the region’s only English newspaper until *The Behar Times* (later renamed *The Beharee*) was founded in 1894 by Mahesh Narayan and Sachchidananda Sinha. *The Behar Herald*, was established through the efforts of Guru Prasad Sen, a prominent Bengali resident and one of the leading lawyers of Patna. The *Herald* started with the general aim to serve as a promoter of public affairs, but later following the establishment of the *Bihar Times* and their highly vocal demand for greater access to employment for Biharis, the *Herald* began expressing its solidarity with the Bengalis and remained strongly opposed, even after Sen’s death in 1900, to the separation of Bihar from Bengal. *The Behar Times* on the other hand, was established with the intention of promoting the idea of a separate Bihar and worked actively to shape the opinions of both the Bihari middle class and the colonial officials. So while the *Murgh-i-Suliman* and the *Qasid* were the first to make claims for a distinctive Bihar during the 1870s, no sustained movement demanding separation followed. Instead much of the Bihar-Bengal tension

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57 Sinha. *Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries*. 13-14. Sen was also the Secretary of the Behar Landholders’ Association since its establishment in 1878.
59 *The Behar Herald* and *The Behar Times* were both weekly papers with about 500 and 600 subscribers respectively. See Annual General Report of the Patna Division for 1894-95. General Department, General Proceedings. November 1895. File No. 5R-27 – Proceedings 18-20.
continued to be cloaked around issues of greater employment for Biharis. Occasionally though, whenever there were indications that the colonial government was considering administrative or territorial readjustments, the Bihari, Bengali as well as many of the north-Indian press would take that as their cue to make their claims for or against the separation of Bihar.

One of the earliest instances when the separation of Bihar became a matter of public debate was in 1896, when the colonial government was contemplating the transfer of the Chittagong Division of eastern Bengal to Assam. During this period many of the regional papers came forth with their opinions on the matter weighing the consequences of the separation of Bihar from Bengal. The positions of most of the regional papers were quite clear. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, along with other Indian owned Calcutta papers supported the *Behar Herald* and its “anti-separation” stand. Another Calcutta paper, *The Bengalee*, acknowledged that Bengal did not treat Bihar fairly but also maintained that “a close association with an advanced province not only tends to keep up the standard of administration in the less favoured districts, but also levels up their inhabitants.”60 The British-owned *Pioneer*, published in Allahabad, sided with *The Bihar Times* and urged for the creation of a separate province of Bihar, arguing that Bihar shared a broader affiliation with the Hindi speaking northern India. 61 Sinha and Narayan saw these moments as opportunities to make stronger claims for the separation of Bihar.

Summing up the activities of its first few years in publication, on January 1, 1897, the *Bihar Times* brought out an extensive review of the paper’s influence in Bihar and

60 *The Bengalee*. June 20, 1896.
beyond. In it, Narayan described the mission of the paper as “being neither more nor less than the evolution of a Bihari nation capable to take its place in the confederacy of Indian nations.”

Also, given the previous year’s debates and discussions regarding a possible separation of Bihar, Narayan used the review as an opportunity to clearly distinguish his supporters and detractors. Acknowledging the Allahabad based – Pioneer, Narayan wrote that its article on the proposed separation of Chittagong from Bengal provided the Behar Times with the opportunity to put forward its suggestion for the separation of Bihar as a measure of greater administrative convenience. In discussing the 1896 proposal for the separation of the Chittagong Division, the Pioneer had suggested that the government of Bengal should perhaps reconsider its decision. Contrary to the government’s plans, it suggested that “Assam [be] restored to Bengal and a new Behar Chief Commissionership created.” Such an arrangement, the paper argued, would make the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal the 

ruler of Bengalees, and would no longer be concerned with the different languages, races, agriculture, physical conditions and administrative problems of Behar. He would be confined to his damp delta, with the solace of trips to Darjeeling and Shillong, and would no longer be troubled with questions relating to indigo sowing and the cultivation of opium, which more properly belong to a climate and a race such as those of these Provinces.

In a different issue of the paper, the Pioneer wrote that the real solution to providing relief to the overworked and overstretched administration of Bengal lay “not in the separation from Bengal of Bengali districts, but in giving Home Rule to such a homogenous tract as Behar, inhabited not by Bengalis but by a race closely akin to the adjoining population of the United Provinces, speaking not Bengali, but Hindi, and

63 Excerpted from the Pioneer and published in The Bengalee. April 18, 1896.
64 Ibid.
possessing administrative problems with which Calcutta had not always proved to be in touch.” Citing further evidence of neglect that Bihar continued to suffer because of its attachment with Bengal, the paper continued, “Beharis, indeed of all classes, welcomed the suggestion that they might escape from the domination of Calcutta, and proposals for a separate Behar have been discussed in crowded public meetings in many parts of that ancient province. But these public meetings find no echo in the Bengali press.” The *Pioneer* explained that the reason why the Bengali press did not report on such public gatherings in Bihar nor gave it much importance was because to them Bihar was “the el Dorado of countless Bengali clerks, the asylum of how many Bangali Subordinate Judges and Munsifs, the source of income to how many Bengali managers of princely estates.” In sum, therefore, outside of Bihar the Allahabad–based *Pioneer* emerged as the most vocal and staunchest supporter for the separation of Bihar, and explained the difference between Bengal and Bihar not only in terms of geography and climate, but also emphasized the difference between Bihar and Bengal in cultural and linguistic terms. But most crucially, perhaps it was the repeated claims of Bihar as the “field for Bengalee exploitation” that most irked the public opinion in Bengal.

Contrary to the *Pioneer*’s enthusiastic support for the separation of Bihar, the *Bengalee* referred to it as a “curious movement which has been thoughtlessly set on foot.” Instead the Bengali papers questioned the motives of the *Pioneer*, pointing out that the opinions coming from “an Anglo-Indian [British] newspaper makes us view it

66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 *The Bengalee*. June 20, 1896.
with suspicion and distrust, and at a time when we have been talking ‘of a common platform and unification of India,’ any arrangement that serves to disintegrate the Empire cannot but meet with our opposition and disapproval.”69 Bengal’s emphasis on Indian unity was indeed appealing, particularly during a time when Bengal was becoming the hotbed for nationalist politics. Yet, the champions of a separate Bihar were careful to counter such allegations. As Narayan pointed out, the proponents for a separate Bihar were beginning to imagine a polity that could exist as an equal member of the “confederacy of Indian nations,” rather than remain overshadowed by Bengal.70 Writing almost a decade later, in the wake of the partitioning of Bengal in 1905, Sinha and Narayan emphasized that the separation of Bihar from Bengal would serve as “the only way in which the different races in the country can be politically unified.” They continued, “The idea that the different races will at any time merge to form one nation is chimerical; and it follows that the sooner Behar is released form the leading strings of Bengal and allowed to develop itself autonomously, the nearer the only possible form of unification of India, and the longer this is delayed, the longer will that desirable consummation be retarded.”71 Writing several decades later, almost at the dawn of Indian independence, Sinha most clearly articulated the Bihar-India relation. For such an “extensive and diversified a region as India,” a federal structure would be the only ideal type of nationality, and this he explained “was the raison-d’-etre of the ‘Bihar for the Biharees’ movement.”72 Indeed the project of Bihari territorial self-fashioning was not based on challenging the conception of an Indian nation, as I discuss in Chapters 2, 3 and

69 *The Bengalee*. June 20, 1896.
71 Mahesh Narain and Sachchidananda Sinha. *The Partition of Bengal or the Separation of Behar?* p. 4.
4. Rather for the proponents of separation, the recognition of Bihar as a distinct region was central to the project of contextualizing Bihar as the core constitutive element of the Indian nation.

In 1896, amidst all these proposals and counterproposals, people were also assembling publicly to voice their support for the separation that drew the attention of the government. Reporting on the growing public sentiment, J.A. Bourdillon, the Commissioner of the Patna Division, pointed out that there was a growing excitement among the “upper classes and the educated men” who were “aroused by the academic suggestion” that Bihar should separate from Bengal. By labeling it as an “academic suggestion,” Bourdillon was also indicating that the separation movement would not pose a direct threat to the existing political and administrative structure. Providing a further breakdown of those involved in the movement, he pointed out that the strongest supporters of the separation were the Muslim literati of Patna along with “contingent of Behari Hindus,” while those who opposed it mainly included “the Bengali colonists, reinforced by a few of the older and wiser men” of the province. Supporters for Bihar’s separation organized meetings in Patna, as well as the smaller towns of Bihar including Purnea and Bhagalpur. In fact, it was in Bhagalpur that the Behar National Improvement Association was established in 1896 as one of the vocal proponents for Bihar. As one correspondent mentioned in his letter to the Behar Times, “The solitary instances of an individual public man here, a patriotic family there, an illustrious house elsewhere do

74 Ibid.
not make Beharis a nation.”⁷⁵ Instead, he claimed that Biharis should strive to attain B.A., M.A., or B.L. degrees in order to become lawyers, engineers or doctors which would in turn provide “plenty of able men in all branches fighting for the cause of Behar and making Beharis a nation.”⁷⁶ This was indeed quite a transformation from the earlier aversion that Bihar had towards English education. Associations like these not only explicitly championed for the separation of Bihar, but also believed that Bihar could actively cultivate capable people who if given the opportunity would prove worthy of having a separate province. This was particularly important since Bihar was often measured against Bengal when it came to assessing the influence and activity of Bihar’s press or even the qualification of the Biharis themselves. In one such instance, a British officer in Bihar stated, “as a rule the Bengalis make the best officers, and it is not always easy to secure really competent Beharis.”⁷⁷ Commenting further on Bihar’s relative backwardness to Bengal, the commissioner of Patna pointed out that the “newspaper-reading public” in Bihar was “very much smaller than in Bengal.” He further added, “It will still take years before the newspapers can influence the public mind here or create any change in public feeling; and the longer the better.”⁷⁸

While the 1896 proposal for territorial readjustments in the Bengal Presidency provided the Bihari literati with an opportunity to draw out their differences with Bengal and make claims for separation, Alexander Mackenzie, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, made it very clear that this would not be successful. Hence when Nand Kishore

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⁷⁶ Ibid.
Lall made a direct plea for Bihar’s separation during the Lieutenant Governor’s visit to Gaya in the winter of 1896, his proposal was immediately and unconditionally turned down. Further, completely ignoring earlier suggestions from British officers in Bihar as well as that of his predecessor in office, Campbell’s, emphasis on the difference between Bihar and Bengal, Mackenzie maintained that the separation movement was merely a “newspaper agitation” which he thought the press created when they lacked more substantive topics to discuss. In fact, he likened it to the “silly season” back in England when the Parliament was not in session and the newspapers were desperate to provide sensational news to their readers and hence would start discussions on topics like “Is Marriage a Failure.” Although the claims for Bihar’s separation in 1896-97 did not lead anywhere, it did lay the groundwork for a much more vocal demand for Bihar’s separation following the partitioning of Bengal in 1905.

In the mean time, the English educated Bihari middle class continued to demand for a representative share of appointments in the Provincial Executive and Judicial services. They also demanded proper representation for Biharis in the Provincial Legislative Council and the Senate of the Calcutta University. This new and emerging Bihari middle class was quite significant for the degree of Hindu-Muslim unity it demonstrated and this is clearly visible in the list of some of the more prominent Biharis who were most vocal for the separation of Bihar. Apart from Sachchidananda Sinha and Mahesh Narayan, the other more prominent actors were Krishna Sahay, Nand Kishore Lal, Hasan Imam and Ali Imam also known as the Iman brothers, Mazharul Haque as

80 Mahesh Narain and Sachchidananda Sinha. *The Partition of Bengal or the Separation of Behar?* p. 4.
well as Bisheshwar Singh and Syed Sarfuddin – men who belonged to an earlier generation of Bihar’s prominent personalities.

Debating Separation

Territorial redistribution and administrative rearrangements were a constant concern for the overstretched and overworked government of the Bengal Presidency. And the consideration and implementation of the territorial readjustment of 1896 was not a sole event. Instead, this was preceded by the 1874 separation of Assam into a chief commissioner’s province. And later, in 1901, questions about Bengal’s boundaries were again brought to the fore with proposals for readjusting the boundaries between Bengal and the Central Provinces. Given this long precedent for territorial readjustments, in 1903, A.H.L. Fraser initiated another proposal for boundary changes and became the chief advocate for the reduction of the size of Bengal. Indeed, as the proponents for Bihar’s separation pointed out, the Bengal Presidency, which included both Bihar and Orissa, was the largest of the Indian provinces. In fact, prior to the 1905 partition of Bengal, the Bengal Presidency, which included both Bihar and Orissa, covered an area that was comparable in size to the United Kingdom with the addition of a second Scotland. And in terms of population it was equal to that of the United States of America and Mexico put together. And so in some quarters of the colonial government, the decision to provide administrative relief to the extensive Bengal Presidency was quite appealing. But given the persistent claims for Bihar’s separation from Bengal, the proposals to partition Bengal certainly hinted at the colonial state’s political intentions of

weakening a radical Bengal that was becoming more and more critical of the colonial government. These thoughts were not too distant in Fraser’s mind when he proposed that Dacca and Mymensingh Districts of eastern Bengal be severed because these were:

the hot bed of the purely Bengali movement, unfriendly if not seditious in character, and dominating the whole tone of Bengali administration… it would be an unqualified advantage to Bengal to lose these elements of weakness and dissension, and he opines that they would be more easily reduced to their proper level of importance if transferred to another administration.\(^8^4\)

The Viceroy, George Curzon, agreed with this proposal which was presented as the “Viceroy’s Minute on Territorial Redistribution in India” which he hoped would “fix the administrative boundaries of India for a generation.”\(^8^5\) An edited version of this letter, suitable “for public consumption” was prepared and published by Herbert Risley in December 1903, aiming to make the people of the Bengal Presidency aware of the proposed transfer of Chittagong division, Dacca and Mymensingh to Assam.\(^8^6\) In April 1904, almost five months after the partition was announced, Bampfylde Fuller, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, suggested to Curzon that an alternate way to make Bengal a smaller and a more manageable province would be to separate Bihar rather than removing Dacca and Mymensingh from Bengal proper.\(^8^7\) In doing so, Fuller was echoing an earlier suggestion made by Campbell in 1873. During the months before the impending partition of Bengal similar suggestions of relieving the Bengal administration by separating Bihar and Orissa also came from Bengali nationalists like Prithwis Chandra


\(^{8^6}\) Ibid.

Ray, and retired colonial officials like Henry Cotton, C.C. Stevens and C. E. Buckland, but these were again brushed aside by Curzon.  

In an attempt to prevent the partitioning of Bengal, Henry Cotton, in the course of the presidential speech at the 1904 Bombay session of the Indian National Congress, suggested that if the Bengal Presidency was in need of administrative relief, then “the separation of Behar and Chota Nagpore [regions] which are not peopled by Bengalis, and the constitution of that province…as a separate administration,” would prove a better and a more acceptable alternative. “To press on proposals such as those which have been put forward for the break-up of Bengal,” he continued, went “against the loudly expressed wishes and sentiments of the Bengali people, [and] can only be described as a most arbitrary and unsympathetic evidence of irresponsible and autocratic statesmanship.”  

Even in these proposals, when the case of Bihar was being made it was often presented as a counter measure to prevent the partition of Bengal. For instance, Prithwis Chandra Ray, pointed out that while the people of “Bengal Proper” made it very clear that they would remain “a united people bound up indissolubly by common ties of language, blood, habits and customs” the people of Bihar on the other hand were being persistent with their demand of “Behar for the Beharis.” He further added that since the “languages, … and the customs and habits of the people of Behar, and above all its history, have precious little in common with those of Bengal Proper,” it would prove a more “prudent as well as just” action. In these alternate proposals, rather than recognizing the province as a cohesive space brought together by a singular defining category, be it language,

habits or customs, Bihar was often defined in opposition to Bengal, as if to indicate that
the separation of Bihar was needed mainly to protect and prevent the partitioning of
Bengal.

So, despite these proposals, when Bengal was partitioned in 1905 into a Hindu
majority province of West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and a Muslim majority province of
East Bengal, it instigated strong opposition towards the colonial government in Bengal.91
The proponents of Bihar also found another source of support from C.J. O'Donnell, a
retired colonial official who had spent most of his time in Bihar and Bengal. Much of
O’Donnell’s criticism against the partition of Bengal was directed towards Curzon whose
decision he described as being “the least favourable to administrative convenience that
inexperience could devise,” and the actual partition as the “crudest and least sympathetic
of all his schemes.”92 Mincing no words, O’Donnell wrote, Curzon “seems to have gone
to work with nothing but the last census returns of population in his hands, and a map
showing the chief rivers lying before him. A coloured lead pencil and a complete
oblivion of Bengalis, their wishes, traditions, conveniences or aspirations formed the
remainder of his equipment for playing the mischief with this ancient and populous
nation.” Not unlike the others seeking to repeal the partition, O’Donnell too suggested
that the government could achieve the same objectives of administrative relief by
separating Bihar. Drawing the differences between Bihar and Bengal, he pointed out that

91 Scholars have studied the causes and the motives behind the partitioning of Bengal, and the reaction to it
in great detail. See, Sumit Sarkar. Swadeshi Movement; John R. McLane. “The Decision to Partition Bengal
in 1905”; Gordon Johnson. “Partition, Agitation and Congress: Bengal 1904 to 1908,” in Modern Asian
92 C. J. O’Donnell. The Partition of Bengal: Mr. Morley’s False Step, The Case of the Bengali People
Shortly Stated. Home Department, Public Branch. Proceedings No. 4. December 1906; O’Donnell had also
authored two other pamphlets criticizing Curzon’s government. See, The Failure of Lord Curzon: A Study
in “Imperialism” An Open Letter to the Earl of Rosebery. London: T Fisher Unwin, 1903; The Causes of
Present Discontent In India. London: T Fisher Unwin, 1908.
doing so would break “no racial ties” while recognizing the “ethnical and linguistic
frontiers that have existed from the dawn of history, and which even the Musulman
conquerors never disturbed.” Further he added that separating Bihar would
acknowledge their “claim to a separate administration,” which they were pressing for “at
numerous public meetings,” and this became amply clear in the years following 1905.

In a sense, the 1905-1912 period gave Bihar the most important opportunity to
demand separation. And given the intense reaction against the partitioning of Bengal, the
proponents for Bihar posited that not only would separation reign in the radical reaction
of Bengal, but would also reflect a more astute policy on behalf of the colonial state. And
following 1905, a majority of Bengalis began to look upon the possibility of a separate
Bihar more favorably. While Bengalis were agitating to have the colonial government
rescind the partitioning of their province along sectarian lines, in Bihar the proponents for
separation constituted of both Hindus and Muslims who worked together with remarkable
unison in voicing their demand. People like Ali Imam, Hassan Iman, Muhammad
Fakhruddin and Mazharul Haque became instrumental to the separation movement and
played, in the words of Sachchidananda Sinha, “as prominent and as honourable a part as
his Hindu compatriots had done in the years gone by.” In fact, Sinha pointed to the
region’s long and proud Muslim heritage and influence to highlight the extremely
amicable relations between region’s Hindu and Muslim literati.

Much like the contributions of Muslims to the region’s modern history, Sinha
pointed to the legacy of Sher Shah, who from his birthplace in Sassaram in Bihar went on

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93 O’Donnell. The Partition of Bengal.
94 Ibid.
95 Sinha. Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries. p. xxiv.
to conquer Delhi and rule over India, albeit briefly from 1540-1545. Sher Shah’s rule though brief was particularly significant for it provided much of the administrative framework for the great Mughal emperor Akbar. For Sinha, however, Sher Shah’s legacy was crucial in pointing to another instance of Bihar’s contribution to India’s national past, much like the region’s association with the ancient Mauryan and Gupta periods or through its claims to being the birthplace of Buddhism. More importantly still when a dying Sher Shah expressed his desire to be buried in his hometown in Bihar, it also showed that the “Mussalmans of Behar – not less so than the Hindus of the province – have ever been true to the land of their birth and have always been proud of calling themselves – along with the other children of the soil – as ‘Beharees’.”

So particularly during a period when friction along sectarian lines was on the rise, it was important for the Biharis to point to the amicable ties between the region’s Hindu and Muslim middle class – a task made much easier by the central role Bihari Muslims played in championing for Bihar’s separation. The leadership role of the Bihari Muslims was clearly evident during the first session of the Bihar Provincial Conference, which was held in Patna in 1908 with Ali Imam as the inaugural president and where Muhammad Fakhruddin moved a resolution demanding Bihar’s separation from Bengal.

The Bihar Provincial Conference, actually marked the founding of the provincial branch of the Indian National Congress, but the association could not be called the Bihar Congress Committee because any provincial congress committee would have to also

97 Sinha. Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries. p. xxiv. Contrary to Sinha’s claims, The Behar Herald reported that the Bihar Provincial Conference moved a resolution calling the government’s attention to the “gross injustice done to Beharees by virtually ignoring their claims to employment in public service” which was evident from the “inadequate proportion of appointments” held by Biharis in every department of the government, See, The Behar Herald. April 18, 1908.
include West Bengal and Orissa. By the beginning of the twentieth century, regional associations like the Bihar Provincial Conference had become a prominent feature of provincial politics. Much like Bihar’s quest for separation, Orissa too had been organizing towards a similar end leading to their founding of an Oriya social organization in 1903 by the name of Utkal Sammillani (Utkal Union Conference). The primary objective of this organization was to “bring about the amalgamation of all Oriya speaking tracts of [the] land under a single administration.” In Bihar too, the Provincial Conference presented the organization as a recognized body that could “serve as a spokesman of their philosophy and political point of view, and which offered no support of a Bengali position on any subject in regard to provincial policies.” The level of anti-Bengali spirit cultivated during the years preceding the separation of Bihar would continue to persist in the post 1912 years particularly when it came to questions about Bengali’s participating in institutions of provincial administration and governance. At another level, as I discuss in Chapter 4, at the highest levels of Bihari society, Bengalis were always welcome to participate in the more intellectual project of constructing the province’s past through the aegis of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society. In the mean time, while the reaction to Curzon’s partitioning of Bengal had radicalized Bengal and instigated a sense of “exasperation throughout India,” in Bihar the partition had produced quite a different reaction. To the members of the Bihar Provincial Conference, Curzon’s actions produced a hope that the separation of Bihar was an impending reality. They took


Curzon’s partition as an indication of the government’s admission of the need to split Bengal into more manageable parts.\textsuperscript{101}

By 1908, the separation movement in Bihar made an important breakthrough when the Bihar Provincial Conference, Bihar Landholder’s Association and Bihar Provincial Muslim League came together to make a joint appeal for separation.\textsuperscript{102} On August 14, 1908, these public associations jointly addressed Andrew Fraser, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bihar and West Bengal, during his visit to Patna. Since this address was considered to be a representative view of both Bihari Muslim and Hindu literati as well as that of the provincial landholders, they claimed that the address was “unique and distinctive” as it did not “emanate from any particular section, caste, class or community,” but instead was “the humble and loyal representation of the views of the sentiments of the entire Bihari community.”\textsuperscript{103} In their address, the province’s leading associations pointed out that “the backwardness of Bihar has been in the past mainly due to the absence of facilities of education.” An ameliorative measure, they suggested, could only be taken if the colonial government recognized that Bihar required “a separate treatment,” which based upon “its history, tradition and the peculiar circumstances that surround it, it may well claim to be dealt with as a distinct unit.”\textsuperscript{104} Moreover, even in 1908, they petitioned the Lieutenant-Governor that all positions that were available to “Indians in Bihar should be occupied by the children of the soil, and not by natives of other sub-provinces, which constitute with the Bihar Divisions of Patna, Tirhut,

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid. p. 188.
\textsuperscript{102} Chaudhary. \textit{The Creation of Modern Bihar}. p. 102.
\textsuperscript{103} “Address Presented to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal by the People of Bihar.” Home Department, Proceedings No. 15. October 1908. National Archives of India.
\textsuperscript{104} Appendix, “Address Presented to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal by the People of Bihar.” Home Department, Proceedings No. 15. October 1908. National Archives of India.
Bhagalpur and Chota Nagpur (minus Manbhum), the territorial jurisdiction” of the Lower Provinces. The address by drawing links between place and identity drew a more explicit link between the province of Bihar and the Bihari people. As a result, it inaugurated the “Sons of the Soil Movement,” and was strongly criticized by the Bengalis as being divisive. Not only did the Bengalis point out that the whole basis for separation was motivated by a desire to have more Biharis employed in the provincial government, but that the entire movement was driven by Sachchidananda Sinha’s personal desire for self advancement. A verse often heard in Bihar and Bengal during this period ran as follows:

Sachchidananda Sinha  
By the nine Gods he swore,  
That ere a year was o’er  
He should be judge at Bankipore.

During the course of the joint address although no real demand for separation of Bihar was made to Fraser, they did manage to impress upon him that given the partition the affairs of Bihar with its population of 25 million required “as much time and attention – if not more – as the affairs of 16 million Bengalis.” The address was well received by Andrew Fraser who acknowledged that “Government ought to set before itself consistently and definitely the determination to give due recognition to the claims of Bihar and to provide in Bihar a public service, as far as possible, of the people

105 Appendix. “Address Presented to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal by the People of Bihar.” Home Department, Proceedings No. 15. October 1908. National Archives of India.
108 Appendix. “Address Presented to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal by the People of Bihar.” Home Department, Proceedings No. 15. October 1908. National Archives of India.
themselves.”

So while there was a growing recognition of how detrimental Bihar’s attachment to Bengal was, there were others who did not join in the enthusiastic claims for Bihar’s separation.

The strongest protests to Bihar’s separation were launched by another prominent Bihari lawyer and member of the Bengal Legislative Council, Babu Gajadhar Prasad and his sons Kali Kumar Sinha and Alakh Kumar Sinha. They too, like the separatists, took to the public print media and tried to persuade public opinion in their favor. Making a case against separation Kali Kumar Sinha argued that Bihari concern for government appointments was entirely misplaced. Government appointment, he pointed out, did not “depend on the arbitrary selection of the local official,” but rather was based upon “necessary qualifications” and this the Biharis lacked. As the separation of Bihar was being debated, few in Bihar could anticipate the type of administration Bihar would be under if given a separate provincial status. And some in Bihar believed that even if the region was to be separated, it would lead them to having a “second-rate administration of a Chief Commissioner.” In fact, in a dispatch dated February 2, 1905, the government had expressed doubt that “the proposed Commission (of Behar and Chota Nagpore) would not be large enough to recruit for itself and would therefore have to borrow officers as Assam does now.”

A Chief Commissioner’s province would mean, the province would have to combine the revenue, judicial and magisterial functions under the

113 Sinha. A Political Problem. p. 11.
charge of the Chief Commissioner.\(^{114}\) And if we were to follow the example of Assam, as the dispatch hinted, it would also mean that the province’s judiciary would be under the jurisdiction of the Calcutta High Court.\(^{115}\) As a result of being a Chief Commissioner’s province, Assam’s administration was “in a state of perpetual flux,” with its Chief Commissioner unable to “exercise any effective control over his subordinates.”\(^{116}\) Indeed, if Biharis were demanding separation in order to gain greater access to government positions, then the creation of Bihar as a Chief Commissioner’s province would mean a smaller provincial government with an equally smaller administrative body, with very little autonomy or a large enough governmental body to bring relief for Biharis from the domination of Bengal.

It was with this in mind that Kali Kumar and Alakh Kumar launched their opposition to the separation of Bihar. Additionally to them, the separation of Bihar would also hamper the “national solidarity of India.”\(^{117}\) So while the separatists were imagining India as a federation of states, and were striving to create a distinct status for Bihar by demanding its separation, their opponents believed that such claims would only lead to fragmenting the Indian nation.\(^{118}\) Taking the province’s financial state into consideration, Kali Kumar maintained that Bihar’s connection with Bengal was to the advantage of Bihar while separation would bring ruin to the province.\(^{119}\) Perhaps the sentiments of these two opposing camps can best be synthesized by their perception of Bihar’s ancient

\(^{115}\) Ibid. p. 273.
\(^{116}\) Ibid. p. 279.
\(^{117}\) Sinha. Mr. O’Donnell’s “False Step.”
\(^{118}\) Sinha. A Political Problem. p. 5.
\(^{119}\) Ibid. p. 22.
past. While for the separatists the region’s ancient past instilled a sense of pride that for some was also at the root of this provincial movement, to their opponents this ancient past was a reminder of how far Bihar had fallen since its days of glory. Hinting perhaps at the extent to which Biharis were drawn to their ancient and glorious past, Alakh Kumar Sinha commented: “It is all very well to dream in rags of the splendour of an Empire, but to attempt to materialise the dream is ridiculous. The vitality of Asoka’s time is subject to senile decay and old Behar can not now stand on her rheumatic legs without a support, either on the right or on the left.”

So instead of presenting Bihar as the core constitutive element of the Indian nation, this characterization of an old and frail Bihar worked to strengthen their stand that a separated Bihar would only decline further. Yet, by 1912, these arguments were no longer relevant, when Bihar together with Orissa and Chota Nagpur became a separate province. While the opposition to the separation of Bihar was no longer relevant, it is important to point out that though opposed to Bihar’s separation, neither Kali Kumar nor Alakh Kumar ever questioned their Bihariness, indicating that by 1912 Akbar’s Bihar subah, had sufficiently naturalized as a distinct regional space that became the underlying basis for their Bihariness. The separation therefore only served as recognition of that distinctiveness.

Chapter 2: 
Making of a Vernacular: Colonial Policies, Print Culture and Hindi in 19th century Bihar

On December 1871, George Campbell – the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal – issued a minute that expressed his deep consternation at the continued use of a “bastard hybrid language” not only in the official proceedings but one that was also being perpetuated in the schools of Bihar. This “monstrous” vernacular language taught by the moulvies (scholars of Islam, with knowledge of Arabic, Persian and Urdu) in the “so-called vernacular schools” was not only “more debased and artificial” than any he had previously heard, but one whose existence he thought was impossible. The language to face the Lieutenant-Governor’s wrath was Urdu. He was determined to abolish the teaching of Urdu in all schools and replace it with the “real and genuine vernacular languages” of the region. To him, Urdu lacked any definite meaning, for it basically was a “farrago of bad Arabic and Persian.” Most importantly, his profound reservations against Urdu grew from the fact that it was not the vernacular of Bihar.¹ Campbell’s determination to put an end to this practice set in motion a series of proposals, counter-proposals among colonial officials, it generated many recommendations from native Biharis as well. In other words, it compelled people, both native and colonial, to think seriously about the regional vernacular of Bihar. The matter was of grave significance: for the language chosen would receive official patronage, privilege particular groups of people, but most significantly it would eventually claim a position of prestige that “mother-tongues” generally command.

¹ George Campbell. “Minute of the Lieutenant-Governor on the subject of the use of the Vernacular Languages in public institutions and offices in the Lower Provinces,” of 4th December 1871. General Department, General Proceeding No. 17. December 1871. West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).
The process through which Hindi came to be established as the language of Bihar in the nineteenth century runs against the general assumption that it is the obvious “mother-tongue” of a vast majority of North Indians – a common belief in the twentieth century. Instead, Hindi evolved through a set of practices that provided it with the requisite competence that enabled people to identify it as their “mother-tongue,” the familial affinity only made this attachment appear natural. In the political and cultural milieu of late-nineteenth century Bihar, Hindi grew out of a complex matrix of colonial policies, religious affinity largely cloaked as cultural attachment, and an emerging print-culture that facilitated the propagation of Hindi among the literati. The linguistic complexity of colonial India was reflective of the rich variety of languages spoken, and familiarity with more than one language was not at all uncommon for the literati of colonial India. The colonial state’s insistence in using the vernacular of Bihar for all educational and official purposes – initiated a process through which linguistic attachments were made rigid. The search for the vernacular language reconfigured the linguistic landscape of Bihar. A complex cultural milieu where regional vernaculars like Magahi, Bhojpuri, Maithili existed alongside Hindustani, from which Urdu and Hindi evolved as two separate languages, was reshaped through the exigencies of the colonial state’s privileging of Hindi as the real vernacular of the people and an emergent print-culture, which fostered an attachment to Hindi as the genuine language of India. The process, through which Hindi was made the vernacular language of Bihar, highlights how both colonial policies and nationalist sentiments worked to shape the contours of an essential marker of a region – its language.
British perception of an exclusive relation between language and socio-cultural as well as political identity of a people, initiated a process which in the case of Hindustani led to a split and to the creation of Hindi and Urdu as the national languages of the Hindus and Muslims respectively and to their subsequent development as autonomous print languages. In 1837, the use of Persian in the courts of law was replaced by vernaculars. In the case of Bihar, it was Urdu that received official support – as a result most of the native literati used Urdu as the language of literary expression, aside from its utility for official purposes. The longstanding association of Persian as the language of high-culture, civility and literary expression further facilitated the literati’s transition from Persian to Urdu. The use of Persian and Urdu however did not displace the other regional languages like Maithili, Bhojpuri, and Magahi as they remained the language of domestic conversation. Urdu, however, was not associated with any geographically defined “dialect” of India.\(^2\) The political and social circumstance by which people came to bracket or divide Hindi and Urdu, and sought to associate language with certain social roles and group identities – Hindi as Hindu, Urdu as Muslim, can be best understood in the context of colonialism. The colonial state in the process of developing an understanding of Indian society not only denied the “rich and complex history of the ways in which Indians created their own languages and literatures,” but also framed Indian languages as belonging to discrete communities.\(^3\) Indian languages were therefore


“constructed by the power of a foreign regime into bonded institutions and communities with defined roles” within the overarching political structure of colonial rule.\(^4\)

From the late nineteenth century onwards, language was posited as an essential marker of identity in both colonial and independent India. This is particularly true in the context of the regional identity of people as language began to be invested with so much symbolic capital that it became a signifier of the socio-political as well as cultural identity of a particular group. The reason why language carried so much cultural currency is because people assume their language to be an essential, natural and a pre-given category thus carrying with it a particular emotional attachment. This emotive appeal has a stronger resonance because of the seemingly natural construct of “mother-tongue,” which not only recognizes a familial attachment to the language but also serves as the scaffolding holding together a peoples sense of their community. Yet, while providing a sense of common belonging to its speakers, language can also emphasize differences by establishing cultural boundaries and containing within it the speakers of a common language.\(^5\) In other words, prior to the nineteenth century languages were used as mediums of communication, but they had not yet evolved as “foundations of collective identities.”\(^6\) In the context of colonial India, this process was prominently determined by the colonial state as it dictated what language could be used for administrative purposes,

\(^4\) Ibid. p. 668.
\(^5\) The creation of linguistic provinces in post-independent India attests to the power of regional vernacular as enduring symbols of cultural difference. Perhaps acknowledging this, by 1921 the Indian National Congress was reorganized into Provincial Congress Committees which were based largely around linguistic units.
particularly in the colonial courts, while also deciding upon the medium of instruction in
the vernacular schools.

Lexicographical knowledge, a flourishing print media, and pedagogical concerns,
all contributed to making the vernacular powerful and capable enough to emerge as a
distinct and “parallel medium” of expression. In other words, while privileging the use of
one’s “mother-tongue” within a specific territory, a vernacular was now also invested
with the ability to collapse distinct literary domains into one where one’s “mother-
tongue” would reign supreme – complete in and of itself. Hence depending on the region
and language, by the late nineteenth or early twentieth century it was no longer necessary
to know Persian or English for administrative purposes, while using Sanskrit to recite the
Ramayana or perform liturgical rites, while relying on Tamil, Kannada, Bengali or Hindi
to interact within the marketplace. Instead as Lisa Mitchell has shown, during the
nineteenth century vernacular languages began to emerge as “parallel” rather than exist as
“complimentary” mediums of expression. Therefore, language that was previously
considered an organic feature of the local territory, as if to exist as part of the geographic
landscape “began to be accepted as an inalienable personal characteristic of individual
(matr bhasha, or mother tongue).”

To a large extent this was facilitated by colonial philology that brought with it a
new methodology of understanding the role of languages as they facilitated modern
literary production while developing new genres of writing and modes of

communication. But in doing so, colonial philology presented vernaculars as lacking characteristics of a “modern” language, one that could accommodate modern forms of writing, typically prose. So while colonial philologists genuinely admired the vernaculars they studied, they also viewed language as progressive and hence believed that the vernaculars required a modernizing thrust. So while on the one hand vernaculars were beginning to be viewed as parallel rather than complimentary mediums of expression, this belief was fostered and further naturalized through the production of dictionaries and the writing of grammars. In a sense, while philological study went about standardizing and modernizing vernaculars, it is important we remember that much of it was done to cater to the need of non-native speakers.

The colonial government, as Farina Mir shows us, motivated by utilitarian and liberal ideologies of good governance emphasized the use of Indian vernaculars for administrative purposes. This was paralleled by their project to standardize multiple vernacular languages through their production of lexicographical knowledge which required the standardizing of vocabularies as well as language scripts. One of the more prominent manifestations of this is evident through the Urdu-Hindi controversy and the general acceptance of Hindi as the regional language of Bihar as I discuss below. The

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9 Ibid. p. 531.
10 Ibid. p. 528.
11 Farina Mir. “Imperial Policy, Provincial Practices: Colonial Language Policy in Nineteenth-century India,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review*. Vol. 43, No. 4. 2006. pp. 398-405. Yet, there were limits to the colonial state’s ability to transform language practices altogether. As Mir has argued, colonial attention to particular languages, for instance the privileging of Urdu in the Punjab rather than Punjabi, did not contain cultural production in the Punjabi language as it flourished despite an adversarial language policy.
colonial state’s desire to educate and administer over people in their vernacular language witnessed a growing emphasis on the “mother-tongue” of a community.

In 1837, when the British replaced the use of Persian for Hindustani (Urdu), it also initiated a process of standardizing a language that constituted numerous linguistic varieties and literatures. Beginning in 1870s, the colonial government’s orders to use Kaithi or Nagri instead of Persian characters in the courts and government offices in Bihar were another reflection of colonial policy regarding language standardization. The proposal however met with some resistance. In the discussions that followed the initial resolution of 1871, language and script were generally conflated and more often it was the script regarding the vernacular that officials as well as natives grew concerned about. This process of standardization was largely made possible by the introduction of print which saw a proliferation in the production of dictionaries, grammar books and school texts – but most importantly printing also required the standardization of orthography as one of the most pronounced difference between Hindi and Urdu rested on their scripts: Nagari for Hindi, and Persian for Urdu.

The evolution of Hindi and Urdu as two separate and distinct languages was rooted more in cultural and political, rather than linguistic, differences. Apart from grammatical variations, vocabulary and script constitute the principal differences between the two. At the most formal level Hindi uses a vocabulary saturated with Sanskrit, while Urdu draws heavily on Persian and Arabic. At this very formal level, the two come close to mutual unintelligibility. Other less formal levels of Hindi and Urdu approach complete mutual intelligibility, the main difference being the script employed. Urdu written in a modified version of the Persian script and Nagri or Devanagri used for Hindi provide a
visual impression of stark contrasts. The Urdu script flows across the page from right to left in graceful curves and loops accentuated by long connecting lines, while the Nagri marches from left to right in chunky blocks accompanied by a nearly continuous horizontal line above each word. Each script has strong links with the sacred languages of different religions. Most of the Sanskriti texts of Hinduism appear in Nagri, while most versions of the Koran use the Arabic script. This connection of script and language reinforces the tendency for Persian and Arabic words to flow into Urdu, and Sanskrit words into Hindi.12

For the native proponents of a language, printing also enabled the publication of journals eliciting literary expressions but more importantly they served as a public forum through which cultural differences were articulated. The efficiency with which a script could be written, familiarity with the script, the capability of the script to transcribe words without destroying its meaning – each of these questions had to be addressed. The use of Hindi written in the Nagri, for official purposes, vernacular education and literary expression, was not the result of a familial affinity to one’s “mother-tongue.” Rather, privileging Hindi and the Nagri or Kaithi characters, not only confined the regional vernaculars like Magahi, Bhojpuri and Maithili as mere dialects of Hindi, but it also made religion a criterion to identify the language of the people – this happened in spite of the fact that Maithili had a centuries-old literary tradition, while Bhojpuri and Magahi had rich oral folk literatures.13 This was largely possible because the political and cultural milieu of Bihar in the late nineteenth century was so strongly dominated on the one hand,

13 Ibid. p. 8.
by the colonial state’s conviction that a region had one vernacular – in this case Hindi, and on the other the emergence of a Hindi print culture which saw in Hindi the final efflorescence of a national language that had long been dominated by “foreign” influences (Persian, Urdu). As the colonial government viewed Persian and Arabic as foreign to India, Urdu’s close association with these languages made it an unsuitable candidate as the vernacular of the region – although this was not the case when it came to the language practices of the other provinces of north India. As Ashley Eden, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, remarked that the “the character known to the people of this province is henceforth to take the place of the foreign character.”

Colonial Policy and the Making of a Vernacular

The language debate in Bihar began with the colonial government’s desire to administer the region based on “the real language of the country.” To Campbell, the real language was one used and understood by “any intelligent man” on the street, and one that was devoid of any “artificial and fictitious languages.” So when he realized that education in the vernacular schools in Bihar comprised of a moulvie teaching Urdu, and a pandit teaching in Hindi a Hindu history interspersed with Sanskrit “slok es” – he was disappointed. Clearly, the moulvie and the pandit were not representative of the intelligent man on the street. Campbell believed that there was a common Hindustani to all of Hindustan and it should be groomed as the real vernacular of the people.

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14 Cited in a Letter from Kristodas Pal, Secretary to the British Indian Association to the The Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Revenue Department. Dated 28th February 1881. General Department, Miscellaneous Branch, General Proceeding Volume, March 1881. West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).


16 By Hindustan, he most likely refers to the North and Central India.
scheme of vernacular languages, both Hindustani and Hindi could be accommodated—they could both be “taught as very nearly the same language” but were to be “written in different characters.” While Hindustani could use the Persian character, Hindi could be written in Nagri— but both languages being similar, should avoid the tendency to draw freely upon archaic and pedantic Persian and Sanskrit vocabulary. In prescribing two separate languages, Campbell was also laying the foundation for each of these languages to ally closely with religion—this was further evident when he stated that no Hindus could be admitted to the special classes dedicated to teach Muslims Arabic and Persian.

Reporting almost ten years after Campbell’s initial orders to substitute Kaithi and Nagri characters for Persian in the courts and offices in the division, F. M. Halliday, the Commissioner of the Patna Division, mentions that the orders were “imperfectly carried out, if not wholly disregarded” and that “Hindi was never made the exclusive court language.” The absolute substitution of Hindi for Urdu was almost a failure since it was not considered practical, given that knowledge of Hindi was not as deeply rooted as Urdu. Despite the government’s efforts, all vernacular petitions continued to be written in Urdu, and even the court forms and notices that were printed in Hindi were filled out in Urdu instead of Kaithi or Nagri characters. Even though most of the amlahs (native court officials) were acquainted with the Nagri and Kaithi characters, they were more comfortable using Urdu. For, in Bihar, much of the vernacular proceedings were

18 Letter from F.M. Halliday, the Commissioner of the Patna Division to The Secretary of the Government of Bengal, General Department. 12th March 1880. General Department, General Proceeding Volume. April 1880. West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).
19 Native Court Officials, familiar with the procedures with the court and serve as the first contact between a litigant and the court.
conducted in Urdu and it was the language most of the literati were trained in. This is evident from the fact that Bihar’s first Nagri journal *Bihar Bandhu* began publication from Patna only in 1874. Prior to this all the journals published in Bihar were composed in Urdu, like the *Patna Harakara* (21st April 1855), *Akbhar-i-Bihar* (September 1, 1856) and the highly popular *Al Punch* (February 7, 1855). In fact, William Tayler the Commissioner of Patna, arranged for the publication of the Urdu weekly *Akbhar-i-Bihar* as an important and useful channel of instruction. Urdu therefore thrived as a rich living language in Bihar. It was suitable for the expression of subtleties of the philosopher and the mystic, the imagination of the poet, and the lucidity of the historian. During much of the nineteenth century, owing to the educational system established by the British and the foundation of well-equipped madrasas by patrons of learning, both Hindus and Muslims wrote their most important works in Urdu. A true effort to popularize the Nagri character and the use of Hindi language among the people of Bihar began in earnest with the publication of *Bihar Bandhu* and the establishment of the Khadgavilas Press in Patna in 1880. Yet the long established use of Urdu and its general acceptance among the literate class could not have been easily displaced without the active support and patronage of the colonial state.

Halliday explained that the primary reason for the failed implementation of Nagri as the court character and the continued use of Urdu was because of the refusal of the *amlahs* to write in the Nagri character. He believed that they did not want to better familiarize themselves with Nargi or Kaithi for in doing so they would lose their

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21 Ibid. p. 4.
23 Ibid. p. 758.
monopoly over Urdu therefore making their jobs accessible to greater number of people.\textsuperscript{24} Halliday’s suspicion however, was not well-founded: the amlahs, trained in Urdu and having conducted all official work in that language for many years must certainly have had greater facility in it. So even though they were familiar with the Nagri and Kaithi script, it is very likely that they were not equally comfortable in using those characters for official purposes. Regardless, the colonial state had to adopt some “stringent measures” in order to force the people to use their vernacular language, written in the Nagri and Kaithi characters, in the courts and schools of Bihar. As a result, to put an end to a decade long effort, Halliday recommended that government order that from June 1, 1880 all vernacular work in the courts and offices in Bihar be conducted in Nagri and Kaithi and not in Urdu.\textsuperscript{25} More cannily, Halliday observed that since the Kaithi characters were used in conducting the zamindari offices, he saw no reason that the same character could be used advantageously in government offices.\textsuperscript{26} The problem of finding people competent and comfortable to conduct official work in Hindi was not exclusive to the Patna Division. The case in the various districts of the Chota Nagpur division was very similar. In Hazaribagh, while all information meant for public was written in Hindi, all office paperwork was in Urdu. Yet, when it was recommended that Hindi be substituted for Urdu in all official work, it was difficult to find men who were competent enough to read and write Hindi fluently thus making the change impractical.\textsuperscript{27}

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\textsuperscript{24} Letter from F.M. Halliday, the Commissioner of the Patna Division to The Secretary of the Government of Bengal, General Department. 12\textsuperscript{th} March 1880. General Department, General Proceeding Volume. April 1880. West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Letter from J.F.K. Hewitt, Commissioner of the Chota Nagpore Division to The Under-Secretary to the Government of Bengal, General Department. 15\textsuperscript{th} June 1880. General Department, Miscellaneous Branch. Proceeding Volume. July 1880. West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).
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Implementing the use of Nagri was not without its share of problems in the Bhagulpur division either though it was identified as a predominantly Hindi-speaking area. Nonetheless, the Hindi spoken lacked uniformity which C.T. Metcalfe, the Commissioner of the Division, identified as three separate dialects. The majority of the people in the northern part of the division spoke the “purer Hindi dialect known as Tirhutia, with a larger intermixture of purely Sanskrit words” those in the south spoke a language in which “Urdu words with Hindi terminations [were] largely intermixed with words of Paharia dialect” and the better classes spoke “Hindi-Urdu.” Given this linguistic variety, Metcalfe goes on to state that the ordinary court language, Urdu, is not understood by the speakers of Tirhutia and Paharia languages, while the character in which the language is written can be understood only by the Muslims and a few educated Hindus. Given the predominance of Hindi spoken in the division, Metcalfe’s solution to the problem was the elimination of “Persian or Arabic phrases which are unintelligible to the great mass of the people, than in districts like Monghyr and Patna, which are peopled by a larger proportion of educated Mahomedans.” The fact that the court officials best understood and were most comfortable in the use of Urdu, the lack of equivalent law terms in Hindi that could substitute the Persian terms, and the difficulty of correctly translating the prevailing Persian terms into Nagri – were not yet viewed as adequate reasons for withholding the decision to use the Nagri and Kaithi character.28 Most colonial officials functioning at the districts levels and the lower level courts, where the implementation of Hindi and Nagri as the vernacular would have the biggest impact, held

28 Letter from C.T. Metcalfe, Officiating Commissioner of the Bhagulpore Division and Sonthal Pargunnahs to The Secretary to the Government of Bengal, General Department. 22nd June 1880. General Department, Miscellaneous Branch. Proceeding Volume. July 1880. West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).
the view that the Nagri character could not be read or written as rapidly as Urdu, therefore further slowing down an already overburdened administration.\(^{29}\) Against the common presumption among most colonial officers in Bihar, the Magistrate of Bhagulpur believed that the greater facility of the *amlahs* over Persian and the ensuing delay in work following the introduction of Nagri, would only be a temporary obstacle. He believed that in within a year or two, their familiarity with Nagri would be comparable to Persian.\(^{30}\)

The colonial government believed that the displacement of Urdu with Nagri would make its institutions more readily and easily accessible to the ordinary people who were far removed from any form of education, let alone any knowledge of Urdu. Colonial authorities further believed that the exclusive use of Nagri would not lead to the exclusion of “any particular class of the public from Government employment.”\(^{31}\) Yet the government’s egalitarian attitude towards the vernacular was quite different from its experiences during the 1870s. The exclusive use of Nagri or Kaithi characters would leave the Muslim officers at a great disadvantage. Most Muslims and many among the Kayasthas were trained in Urdu. A change in the official language meant that most of them would have to take up a new study.\(^{32}\) From the date of the passing of the order, the Muslims would start, heavily handicapped against their Hindu fellow *amlah* in the race to

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\(^{29}\) Letter from J.F.K. Hewitt, Commissioner of the Chota Nagpore Division to The Under-Secretary to the Government of Bengal, General Department. 15\(^{th}\) June 1880. General Department, Miscellaneous Branch. Proceeding Volume. July 1880. West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).


\(^{31}\) Letter from J.F.K. Hewitt, Commissioner of the Chota Nagpore Division to The Under-Secretary to the Government of Bengal, General Department. 15\(^{th}\) June 1880. General Department, Miscellaneous Branch. Proceeding Volume. July 1880. West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).

qualify in Kaithi. Assessing the impact of the change, H. Beveridge the District Judge of Patna, wrote that:

There are many educated persons in Behar who cannot write Kaithi; and there is a still larger number who cannot write it with facility. When a man has written from right to left, and in the Persian character, for thirty or forty years, it cannot be easy for him to write in a new character and in a new direction…. Kaithi is no doubt the character used by the mass of the people; but there is a large and influential minority which is not conversant with it. A Mahomedan gentleman executes his conveyances and writes his private letters in Urdu or Persian, and never in Kaithi. I believe that such a person will feel keenly the prescription of his mother-tongue, and will be discouraged to approach the authorities when he finds that he cannot lay his wishes or his grievances before them by means of an Urdu letter or petition.  

Moreover, he believed that Muslims vakils and mukhtears of Bihar, who have earned a living by writing petitions, would be the ones to suffer the most as a result. A change in the official character would not only render them jobless, but would leave them impoverished. Although the government was determined to put an end to the use of Urdu, Beveridge rightly believed that the practice of writing in the Persian character would not entirely die out in Bihar, as Urdu would still be used in communicating with Bihar’s neighbors in the northwest.

The problem of switching to the exclusive use of Nagri created another, and seemingly more, pressing difficulty. As the primary motivation for the change in the official language was guided by principles of using the vernacular of the region, cleansed of all impurities and any foreign influence in the language – the lack of Hindi equivalents for the technical terms used in the courts limited the effectiveness of the change. Further, the existing Persian and Arabic technical terms could not be correctly transliterated using

33 Letter from H. Beveridge, District Judge of Patna to The Secretary to the Government of Bengal. 27th August 1880. General Department, Miscellaneous Branch. Proceeding Volume. July 1880. West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).
the Nagri character. So although Urdu, the existing court language was a “vile jargon understood only by the initiated,” the prevailing Hindi vocabulary provided very little lexical options that would aid in facilitating the change in language.  

H. J. Newberry describes an incident that is reflective of the general nature of the problem:

A few days ago I had occasion to write a letter to a learned Hindu who knew no English. I drafted the letter in English and made it over to an English knowing Brahmin to translate. He fair-copied the translation in the most perfect Nagari character; in fact it looked more like printing or lithography than handwriting. I found over 25 per cent of Persian or Arabic words in this translation, which, by being translated into Nagri, had lost their correct pronunciation and meaning. My translator was unable to give me Hindi equivalents, or even to render the ideas in pure Hindi words. I then gave the translation to another Hindu to read. He read fluently till he came to one of these word, and there he halted, had to spell it out letter by letter, hesitatingly pronounced the sound which the letters seemed to indicate, and then, and not until then, did he recognize a familiar old cutchery term. The poverty of the Hindi alphabet is particularly noticeable if you attempt to transliterate Mahomedan names.

As a way to overcome the many problems inherent in instituting the Nagri or Kaithi character in Bihar, some of the officials provided alternate solutions. Since much of north Bihar used the Mithila or Tirhutia character, Newberry argued that the introduction of Nagri would not benefit the people of this region. Further, Bhagalpur with a large number of Bengali residents would prefer to keep “the character of their mother-country.” As a result, he recommended that no changes be introduced in Bhagalpur.

The persisting problems inherent in the use of Nagri or the Kaithi character was not convincing enough to deter the colonial government’s resolve to replace Urdu as the official language. The change could only be affected by a strong resolution. Hence

Ashley Eden, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, directed that from January 1, 1881

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35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
Nagri (or Kaithi) would be the “character for exclusive use in official documents” in Bihar and that any document in the Persian character “shall be absolutely forbidden.”\(^{37}\)

Aside from the many court employees who opposed this change, one of the most significant critiques to this resolution came from George A. Grierson, who would eventually go on to become the first Superintendent of the Linguistic Survey of India in 1898.

**Language Variety and the Limits to Hindi**

To Grierson, the resolution contradicted government’s underlying principle of promoting a language generally understood by the ordinary people. While Hindi was spoken over much of Hindustan, he asserted that it was not the genuine language of the people of Bihar nor was it the language “spoken in the household of any Hindu in Hindustan.”\(^{38}\) In other words, he argued that Hindi was not the “mother-tongue” of any group of people of Bihar. In fact, this type of Hindi taught in schools emerged from the books commissioned by colonial authorities in the early decades of the nineteenth century which in turn laid the foundation for a “book-Hindi” – a language that was heavily interspersed with Sanskrit.\(^{39}\) Grierson feared that the government resolution would promote this “book-Hindi.” He pointed out that two Maithil Brahmans would never speak Maithili in his presence, but in his absence would refuse to speak Hindi. He reasoned that because the government had instituted Hindi, the native population felt obligated to speak it in presence of colonial officials, and therefore creating the misimpression that Hindi

\(^{37}\) Resolution By the Government of Bengal, 13\(^{th}\) April 1880. General Department, Miscellaneous Branch. Proceeding Volume. April 1880. West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).


\(^{39}\) Ibid. pp. 159-60.
was widely in use in Bihar. In other instances, if a villager in north Bihar (Tirhut) had to find some recourse from the colonial government, he would invariably choose “intelligent men, who [knew] what is indifferently called ‘Farsi’ (i.e., book-Hindi and not Urdu) or ‘Sahab lukanik boli’ [the language of the sahib]” as their representatives to the officialdom. Such habits of the local population only strengthened the view of the colonial officials that Hindi was truly the representative language of the people. The divide between the language spoken in Tirhut and that used in the courts was so prominent that people generally used the proverb “Farsi na jane, kachari chale” (He does not know Farsi, but goes to court!) to refer to a fool. Unlike the government, Grierson identified Maithili (Tirhut), Bhojpuri (Western Bihar) and Magadhi (Southern Bihar) as the vernaculars spoken in Bihar and suggested that Maithili, with its rich literature and the graceful poems of the fourteenth century poet Vidyapati – be fostered as the language of Bihar.

Almost three decades after having produced the foundational study of Maithili language, Grierson produced a second edition of the same work. However, he renamed the 1909 edition as *An Introduction to the Maithili Dialect of the Bihari Language as Spoken in North Bihar* as opposed to the previous *An Introduction to the Maithili Language of North Bihar* published in 1881. The not so subtle change in Mathili’s designation from a language to a dialect becomes clear when Grierson goes on to map Maithili as part of a linguistic landscape, where Maithili, Magahi and Bhojpuri together

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41 Ibid. pp. 161-62.
42 Ibid. p. 162.
form the three dialects of the “Bihari language.”\textsuperscript{45} Much of Grierson’s assessment of Maithili in this second edition is drawn from his \textit{Linguistic Survey of India}, in which he claimed “Bihari means properly the language of Bihar, and is spoken over nearly the whole of that Province.”\textsuperscript{46} It is rather tempting to speculate about the birth of this altogether new language. Much like the early orientalists, Grierson believed that language, more than race and ethnicity, was the best recognition of a distinct group of people. In this regard although his classification concedes some difference among the Maithili, Magahi and Bhojpuri speakers, placing all of them together as speakers of a variation of a “Bihari” language meant that Bihar too, much like Assam, Bengal and Orissa, could be recognized as representative of a distinct cultural entity. Having spent much of his time in India working in Bihar, perhaps Grierson was aware and sympathetic to the movement for the separation of Bihar. By concurring that Bihar had a language of its own, Grierson may have attempted to add credibility to the assertions for a separate province of Bihar. This is most clearly evident in the lack of any mention of Hindi as a language of Bihar. Contrary to Grierson’s opinions, Hindi too had its ardent champions. For instance, in 1881 J.H. Budden argued against recognizing Maithili or any other language/dialect of North India as anything other than “provincial forms” of Hindi.\textsuperscript{47} Similarly, S.H. Kellogg in his \textit{Grammar of the Hindi Language} classed Maithili as well as Magahi as “colloquial dialects” of the eastern variety of Hindi.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid. p. x.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid. p. 63.
Grierson definitely expended a great deal of time and effort studying Maithili, but he was certainly not the first to label Maithili as a “distinct dialect.” Rather the English Orientalist, Henry Thomas Colebrooke, not only recognized Maithili as a distinct dialect in an 1801 essay, but he also pointed out its affinity with Bengali. Beginning in the twentieth century however, the Nagri character instead of the Tirhutiya script was beginning to be used to write Maithili, this time perpetuating the belief that Maithili was indeed a dialect of Hindi. But perhaps Colebrooke also put an end to any further enquiry into understanding Maithili by stating “As the dialect of Mithila 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.”

Subsequently, as Grierson pointed out, a general belief developed in Bihar that the language spoken was in fact “a corrupt form of Hindi” although Maithili was “much more nearly allied to Bengali than to Hindi.” The establishment of Hindi as the language of instruction and the court language in Bihar in 1881 certainly fostered as well as strengthened this belief. Regardless of whether it was akin to Bengali or Hindi, Maithili was a language that was used for everyday communication in Tirhut, and it is upon encountering this while serving as the subdivisional officer of Madhubani, from 1873-1877, that Grierson made it a point to produce a work based on his study of Maithili. In some quarters, Grierson also received substantial support from the locals who demonstrated the “utmost interest” in his project. He described them as people who “are proud of their language and were pleased at the


idea of its being made a polite one, by obtaining the honour of print.”

The lack of a print culture, perhaps, accentuated Grierson’s difficulty in developing a sound understanding of Maithili, but beyond that it also perpetuated the confusion of whether Maithili was really a language or a dialect.

For instance, Grierson was quite certain in saying that “Maithili is a boli” by which he means “it is emphatically a spoken language.” Grierson’s inability to find any literary work beyond the songs of the fourteenth century Maithil poet, Vidyapati Thakur, was an indication that the language was without a definitive standard. In this regard, he hoped that his efforts would “tend to fix a standard and to foster a literature” as was expected of a “racy and fluent a language.” In a matter of few sentences, however, Grierson switched from referring to Maithili as a “boli,” which in its most literal sense translates as “dialect,” to saying “Maithili is a language and not a dialect.” Following which he pointed out that contrary to customary beliefs, which consider Maithili to be the “uncouth dialect of untaught villagers,” it was in fact the native language of more than “seven and a quarter millions of people, of whom,” he goes on to say, “at least five millions can neither speak nor understand either Hindi, or Urdu without the greatest difficulty.” Grierson was making these observations during the 1870-80, at a time when the official language and the language for instruction for Bihar was being decided. With his favorable views regarding Maithili, Grierson perhaps wanted to influence the colonial government’s decision with respect to the choice of language to be used at least in north Bihar. Also, here we get the first hints of equating language with a clearly defined regional space and positing it as an essential marker of a people’s identity. For if Mithila

“is a country with its own traditions, its own poets, and its own pride in everything belonging to itself,” then Maithili is the language “spoken by all the Hindus and Muhammadans, who inhabit the great plain which is bounded on the North and South by the Himalayas and the Ganges, and on the East and West by the Kosi and Gandak respectively.”

The attitude of identifying Maithili as a variant of Hindi and projecting the latter as the only language of Bihar continued even during the first few decades of the twentieth century. Perhaps by positing “Bihari” as the language of Bihar, Grierson attempted to undermine the influence and domination of Hindi, which was being asserted as India’s national language by a particularly sectarian variant of north Indian Hindu nationalists.

He acknowledged that while it was “true that the nationalities who speak it [Bihari] are historically connected with the United Provinces and not with Bengal. All their family ties, all their traditions, point to the West and not to the East.” Cleaving Bihar away from its westward orientation towards the Hindi-Hindu belt, he goes on to say, “But at present our affair is not with ethnic relations, but with the facts of grammar, and, taking grammar as the test, there can be no doubt either as to the origin or affiliation of Bihari” which is oriented eastward toward Bengali, Oriya and Assamese, as they are all, Bihari included, “direct descendants… of the old form of speech known as Magadhi Prakrit.” Through Grierson’s assessment of the languages of Bihar, it become apparent that his designation of “Bihari” as the provincial language was in fact a convenient way of pulling together the linguistic diversity in Bihar, which were after all variants of a common language i.e.,

54 Ibid. p. 2.
Magadhi Prakrit. And in turn it also implied that Bihar too, was in fact an organic cultural entity with its own “Bihari” language.

In spite of Grierson’s assertions, the artificiality of this “Bihari” language comes to the fore, as one begins to delve into his evaluation of the language itself. What is rather perplexing in his survey is the absolute lack of any assessment of “Bihari,” rather Grierson is confined to explaining the languages of Bihar in terms of Maithili, Magahi and Bhojpuri. For instance, he points out that “Maithili is the only one of the Bihari dialects which has a literary history,” while “Magahi has no indigenous written literature.” Going beyond his commentary on the specific literary histories of Maithili and Magahi, Grierson does not refrain from providing an ethnological assessment of the speakers of the two varieties of “Bihari” language. He writes,

Magahi is condemned by speakers of other Indian languages as being rude and uncouth like the people who use it. In fact the principal difference between it and Maithili is that the latter has been under the influence of learned Brahmans for centuries, while the former has been the language of a people who have been dubbed boors since Vedic times. Even the creation of a new language, Bihari, it seems was not powerful enough to wash away old cultural prejudices that divided Mithila and Magadh and Grierson’s observation attests to that. Given Grierson’s influence and authority in shaping modern understanding of Maithili, it is not surprising that twentieth century proponents of Maithili and Mithila were faced with the challenge of negotiating with the legacy of Grierson. Therefore, it was left to the proponents of Maithili, to come to their own conclusions regarding what “Bihari” really meant and Maithili’s place within it.

57 Ibid. pp. 17, 35.
58 Ibid. p. 34.
During the early part of the twentieth century, the proponents of Maithili faced stiff opposition from Hindi loyalists who maintained that Maithili was not an independent language, but was merely a dialect of Hindi. Their claim was certainly bolstered by the official sanctioning of Hindi as the regional language of Bihar, although it was “not the mother tongue of any major population group.” Pitted against an aggressive Hindi movement during the nineteenth century, paralleled by a lack of a vibrant Maithili literary culture and the colonial government’s disdain for Urdu, it is not surprising to see why Hindi had come to dominate as the official language in Mithila. Scholars have maintained that, Hindi “became the official language of the state because the predominant ethnic groups in Bihar, the Magahi and Bhojpuri peoples, lacking a standard literary language of their own, chose to adopt Hindi as the medium of education, administration, and political communication.” While this is partially true, ethnicity of Biharis was not the primary factor behind instituting Hindi as the regional language of Bihar as this chapter discusses. The story of the establishment of Hindi as the regional language of Bihar, goes beyond linguistic preferences by particular ethnic communities alone, and has more to do with colonial policies and the influence of nationalist ideals. The institution of Hindi and the subsequent formation of Bihar in 1912 was an acknowledgement of Bihar’s territorial, administrative as well as cultural difference with Bengal. Yet within Mithila a sense of cultural crisis was instigated in the wake of this separation and the ensuing articulation of a distinctive Bihari culture, which I discuss in Chapter 5.

In the mean time, Hindi in Bihar was becoming increasingly appealing to a prominent segment of the literati who were influenced by the appropriation of Hindi as

60 Ibid.
the national language of India. To many, Maithili was merely a dialect of Hindi spoken by a population restricted to north-Bihar as opposed to Hindi – a language that could bring down the linguistic barriers and “be eventually accepted by all India as its national language.”

In a pamphlet written by Radhika Prasanna Mukherji, an educational officer in Bihar, he pointed out that since the Hindus of Bihar venerated the language and institutions of the Benaras region, “they [had] a strong desire to assimilate their speech and habits to those of the land of the origin of their religion and mythology.” Given the religious and cultural significance of Benares, he considered it perfectly legitimate that the language of the more educated classes of Biharis should be influenced by the idioms of Benares; more so as Benaras had come to represent the nucleus, centered around the figure of Bharatendu Harischandra, of the emerging Hindi language movement in late nineteenth-century India.

Syamacharan Ganguli argued that if Maithili, or any of the other regional patois of Bihar, were to be made the official language, it would only erect more barriers to the ultimate formation of a common Hindustani (Hindi) tongue, and its diffusion over India. To Ganguli, Hindi held the potential “to become the instrument of higher culture and of general intercommunication” in India. Hence to him Grierson’s early suggestions for the promotion of Maithili only seemed a retrograde step against the ultimate arousal of national aspirations in India and the necessity of a common lingua franca.

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65 Ibid. pp. 29-30.
The Emergence of a Print-Culture and the Growth of Hindi

It was in the milieu created by colonial understandings of language and the assumption that languages could be standardized to reflect the vernacular of a region that Hindi was appropriated as the regional language of Bihar. More significantly, the appropriation of Hindi by nationalists, and its cultural and religious identification with Hindus at a supra-regional level gave it a general acceptability among the population of Bihar. Late nineteenth century Bihar, therefore, became emblematic of the influence affected by both colonial policies, and national politics in framing the discourse of a region’s language.

The rise of a Hindi movement in places like Banaras and Allahabad informed as well as inspired the Hindi movement in Bihar. In Banaras, as Vasudha Dalmia points out, Bharatendu Harishchandra began publishing several Hindi journals towards the end of the nineteenth century. These journals not only provided a public forum to share literary creativity, but it also “created a new literary Hindi.” These journals, allowed for the diffusion of views that were entirely novel, as they not only provided political critique of colonialism, but it also shaped public opinion on social, religious and cultural issues. It is precisely in this context that the champions of Hindi language began to assert for a greater role of their language in the administrative process by positing that Hindi “was the language of the home and the hearth. All communication with one’s intimates took place only in ‘genuine forms of Hindi.’” The early adherents of Hindi insisted that it was the spoken language of North India before the Muslim invasion. Therefore it was

67 Orsini. The Hindi Public Sphere. p. 53.
only natural to them that Hindi was the “mother tongue” of any native born Indian – a belief that would eventually provide considerable legitimacy to the Hindi movement in Bihar. Thus this modern language came to establish itself as an eternal language, a language that had an intimate relationship with its speakers. Hence Hindi not only had an emotive appeal, but because it was their “mother tongue” it also needed the loyalty and protection of its speakers. And it was based upon this sense of loyalty that Hindi journals coaxed the “Urdu-literate Hindus” and “English-literate Hindus” to “acknowledge their duty towards the improvement of nij bhasa” or “mother tongue.”

The process through which Hindi emerged as the dominant language of the region was not straightforward. Given the messy understandings of the linguistic complexity of the region and the insistence on a standardized vernacular education – native population did not initially regard the language, i.e., Hindi, through which vernacular education was conducted in high esteem. Colonial insistence on idiomatic Hindi free from Persian and Sanskrit influences provided a very uncertain standard for Hindi books, therefore making the writing of such books a difficult project for its authors. The lack of a standardized language to be used in Bihar was so keenly felt that A. W. Croft, Inspector of Schools remarked, “Behar wants its Chaucer, and nothing has yet been done to call him forth.” As a result Bihar lacked an adequate number of Hindi books whose style of prose remained ambiguous. So even in 1875-76, almost five years after Campbell’s initial resolution, there was a “difference of opinion about the merits of books,” and none of the

70 From A. W. Croft, Inspector of Schools, Behar Circle to The Director of Public Instruction. “Extract from Annual Report of Patna Division for 1874-75.” General Branch, Education Department, Education Proceedings, September, 1875. West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).
books in use in the schools were “universally popular.” It was in this environment of uncertainty that Bihar saw the emergence of a Hindi print culture. The impact this would have on Bihar’s language eluded Grierson, but Mukherji, one of his critics, had predicted the potential of print to level out the regional variations among languages. Writing a few years after the establishment of the Behar Bandhu, he remarked: “The growth of a Hindi newspaper press is an event of such linguistic importance that I cannot pass it over in silence, in calculating the forces at work to bring about an assimilation of dialects throughout a large tract of the country. The circulation of newspapers among the people cannot as yet be considerable; but with the spread of education it has a tendency to increase, and I have no doubt that it will pave the way to the establishment of a common language.”

A Hindi print culture in Bihar did not emerge with the intention of capitalizing on the keen love of people towards Hindi. Rather these early initiatives sought to inculcate a Hindi awareness among people and imbibe in them an emotional attachment towards the language. Two brothers, Pandit Madan Mohan Bhatt and Keshava Ram Bhatt – Maharashtrian Brahmins, whose ancestors had migrated from Maharashtra to Bihar Sharif, made the initial forays in this direction. They founded the Behar Bandhu, the first Hindi journal of Bihar in 1872. This journal however began its publication from Calcutta through the Puran Prakash Press, at 79 Maniktalla Street – before it moved to Patna in 1874. Though the journal’s intended audience was in Bihar, it had to be printed in Calcutta because Madan Mohan Bhatt was living there then, but more importantly Bihar,

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71 Annual General Report of the Patna Division for 1876-77. General Department, General Proceedings, November 1877. West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).
at that time did not have a Hindi printing press. As a result even after Madan Mohan Bhatt moved to Patna in 1873, *Bihar Bandhu* continued to be printed in Calcutta creating problems for the journal whose proofs were replete with errors as there were very few people in Calcutta with an adequate knowledge of Hindi. The Bhatt brothers, therefore, took the initiative to establish the first Hindi printing press in Bihar and set up the Bihar Bandhu Press in Patna in 1874.\(^74\) In setting up the Hindi type-font, the Bhatt brothers received considerable help from Grierson,\(^75\) who had a demonstrated interest in the languages of Bihar and made significant contributions to the study of the languages of Bihar.

The professed aim of this journal was to champion the cause of Deva Nagri. During its first few years, *Bihar Bandhu* remained the only Hindi journal in Bihar amidst a thriving Urdu print-culture. The debates that the colonial state had initiated regarding the language of vernacular education and the court language of Bihar, and their demonstrated inclination towards Hindi and the Nagri and Kaithi characters, provided a platform for the journal. *Bihar Bandhu* therefore saw it as its mission to generate native support to make Hindi the language of Bihar, and through this it also sought to generate an attachment towards the language. In this early phase of the Hindi language movement, the language was not yet seen as the language of the Hindus. It was considered perfectly appropriate that Munshi Hasan Ali, a teacher at the Patna Normal School who had an extensive knowledge of Hindi, Urdu and Persian, be the first editor of the first Hindi journal of Bihar.\(^76\) Hasan Ali, was also a close friend of the Bhatt brothers and together

\(^{74}\) Ibid.  
with them he maintained high aspirations for Hindi. Eventually, Hasan Ali would found his own Hindi monthly, *Motichur* (1878), which however did not last long as was the fate of many journals in this period.

For these early Hindi journals, finding a suitable readership among the people of Bihar was a grave challenge. Reluctance towards Hindi was not a reflection of the illiteracy of the people. Rather, it was their perception towards Hindi vis-à-vis Urdu that proved to be Hindi’s biggest trial. Generally, Hindi speakers were viewed as uncouth and rustic. On the other hand, knowledge of, and command over Urdu was a mark of distinction, civility, sophistication and good comportment. As a result many people sent their children to *maktabs* to learn Urdu. In fact, in his memoir Kamalaprasad Verma writes that even during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the heavily Persianized Urdu was so popular that no one cared much for Sanskrit or Hindi. So much so that people could not even pronounce Sanskrit words correctly. As a reflection of the times, the language of *Bihar Bandhu*, was Hindustani (an amalgamation of Hindi and Urdu) and even though the paper began its publication with the mission to champion the cause for the Devanagri script, half the paper was written in Urdu — a general acknowledgement of the pride of place Urdu commanded among Bihar’s literati. Eventually this fledgling Hindi, attempting to distinguish itself form Urdu, not only in character but content as well became heavily interspersed with Sanskrit phrases and words. Commenting on this, an

80 Ibid. pp. 28-29.
81 Ibid.
essayist for the *Bihar Bandhu* wrote that Hindi as a language would lose its beauty if it continued drawing upon Sanskrit. Even though “Sanskrit is the mother of Hindi” it does not imply that Sanskrit phrases and words should continue finding its way into Hindi.\(^8^3\)

The language of the *Bihar Bandhu* in 1874 was a heavy mixture of Sanskrit and Persian, but by 1878 *Bihar Bandhu*’s language began to cleanse itself of both these influences.

When *Bihar Bandhu* began publishing from Patna in 1874, there was a dearth of people who would compose and publish in Hindi and some of the early contributors to the *Bandhu* were Munshi Hasan Ali, Madan Mohan Bhatta, Pandit Badrinath Bhatta (Agra), Keshav Ram Bhatta, Trilok Chandra, Shri Bihari (Darbhanga), etc.\(^8^4\) In the early years, *Bandhu* struggled to find a readership willing to appreciate this Hindi journal and therefore help the paper propagate the spread of Hindi and make it financially viable as well. Yet many involved in the publication of Hindi journals, most of which were very short-lived, viewed this as a labor of their love for Hindi. Many of these publishers would go door-to-door distributing their papers to generate a Hindi reading public. For instance, during the late nineteenth century, Pandit Chandrashekhar Dhar Mishra of Champaran, upon publishing his monthly *Bidya Dharma Dipika* distributed the paper free of cost.\(^8^5\)

The early trials of *Bihar Bandhu* did not escape the attention of the colonial authorities. They surmised that the primary cause for the unpopularity of this weekly two-sheet Nagri paper was its script. As the middle classes of native society, the authorities of Patna maintained, comprised mostly of shopkeepers and bankers who did not care to read a paper at all even though they are the only people who have knowledge of Nagri as well

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83 Ibid. p. 68.
84 Ibid. p. 67.
85 Ibid. p. 62.
as the means to purchase the paper and the leisure to read them. On the other hand, the literate class comprising mainly of the Kayasths and Muslims, read and studied only Urdu and Persian.\textsuperscript{86} It is largely true that most Kayasths were proficient in Urdu, but it was also the Kayasths who had maintained a practice of writing in Hindi in the Kaithi script prior to the emergence of the Nagri movement. Much of this writing, however, was limited to private letters and the maintenance of accounts and was never used as a medium for literary expression.\textsuperscript{87} Given this environment of general apathy towards Hindi in Bihar, the local authorities in 1876 maintained that the publication of the \textit{Bihar Bandhu} could fall to the ground for a lack of subscribers and readers if it were not for a few “Hindu gentlemen who (although they [could not], or [did] not, read it)” bought the paper by way of encouraging the diffusion of the Nagri character.\textsuperscript{88} The professed aim of the paper however did not escape the attention of the colonial state and described it as being characteristically “anti-Urdu” in tendency, which was evident from articles and letters that were published condemning the use of Urdu in the courts of Bihar. At a time when colonial authorities were vigorously debating its language policy regarding Bihar, the establishment of the \textit{Bihar Bandhu} provided a base upon which the claims for the use of Hindi could be substantiated, both by the colonial and native sympathizers. Publication of the \textit{Bihar Bandhu}, therefore, inspired many people who took it upon themselves to

\textsuperscript{86} Annual General Report of the Patna Division for 1875-76. General Department, General Proceedings, August 1876. West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).
\textsuperscript{87} Verma. \textit{Bhulti Bhagti Yadeein}. p. 40.
\textsuperscript{88} Annual General Report of the Patna Division for 1875-76. General Department, General Proceedings, August 1876. West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).
champion for the cause of Hindi in Bihar; prominent among them were – Govindacharan, Ramdin Singh, Ayodha Prasad Khatri and Ram Krishna Panday.\textsuperscript{89}

Among them Ramdin Singh’s contribution to the development of Hindi language and literature remain most significant, and this is not entirely for his literary involvement but rather for his contribution to the world of Hindi publication. In 1880, he established the \textit{Khadgavilas Press} in Bankipur, Patna, thus literally marking a new era for Hindi publication. This press served as the fountainhead for Hindi publications for a significant period of time. At a time when there was much debate surrounding the type of script to be used in Bihar, with preferences divided towards Nagri, Kaithi, Persian and even the Roman script, the Khadgavilas Press, through its promotion of the Nagri script played a foundational role in standardizing the script and through it the language of Bihar.

Dhirendranath Singh in his pioneering study of the Khadgavilas Press, the first influential literary publishing house in Hindi, which rose to prominence as the publisher of Bharatendu Harishchandra, classified the Hindi publishing world into three distinct periods. By classifying early Hindi publication into the – (1) Missionary period (1800-58), (2) Naval Kishore period (1858-80), and (3) Khadgavilas Press (1880-1926) – Singh was the first to highlight the role of the individual Indian publisher in shaping Hindi print culture. Hindi received much support from another quarter when, in 1877, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay came to Bihar as the Inspector of Schools. To a large extent it was his support and encouragement that contributed to the rise of Hindi in Bihar. Discussing the language question in Bihar, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay remarked to those who were against the use of Hindi in Bihar that: “It is only appropriate that a Bihari Hindu child should

learn Hindi, his mother-tongue, Sanskrit, his language of religion, and English, the language of the government; alternately the Muslim should learn Hindi, the common language, Arabic, their language of religion, and English, the language of the government."\(^{90}\) In order to make up for the shortage of appropriate Hindi textbooks in Bihar, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay opened a branch of his Bodhodaya Press (Calcutta) in Bankipore, Patna and named it the *Branch Bodhodaya Press* in 1875-76. More significantly, he also impressed upon Babu Ramdin Singh to establish a press and bring out Hindi journals. *Branch Bodhodaya Press* did publish a few Hindi textbooks, but it was not until the establishment of the Khadgavilas Press that Hindi publication really started for good in Bihar.\(^ {91}\)

The community of Hindi writers found a liberal benefactor in the person of Ramdin Singh, founder-proprietor of the Khadgavilas Press. Ramdin Singh belonged to a well-to-do family of Kshatriya zamindars of Ballia. While his own career as a writer was limited to authoring school textbooks, he was a lover of Hindi poetry and a great admirer of Bharatendu Harishchandra. In 1880, he gave up his humble job as a village schoolteacher and set up the Khadgavilas Press with the aid of Ramcharita Singh and Sahabprasad Singh. It was their express purpose to promote contemporary Hindi authors, coupled with their desire to promote an awareness and love for Hindi literature that, guided their initiative.\(^ {92}\) The Khadgavilas Press, was more than a printing press and a publication house. The Press housed in its own building, also provided accommodation to many contemporary Hindi authors visiting Patna – Bharatendu Harishchandra being

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\(^{92}\) Ibid. p. 82.
among them. In honor of these guests, Ramdin Singh would organize a gathering of local Hindi writers making it a forum for the exchange of literary ideas. The Press therefore was a haven for early Hindi authors. In a sense the Khadgavilas Press became akin to a pilgrimage site for most lovers and patrons of the Hindi language.\textsuperscript{93}

In his aim to propagate Hindi literature, Ramdin Singh spared no expense. He gave considerable financial assistance to Harishchandra, who in turn made him his exclusive publisher and extolled him as a “true and dear friend who is as passionately devoted to the advancement of Hindi as myself and is prepared to sacrifice his health, wealth and time to the cause of Hindi.”\textsuperscript{94} Ramdin Singh supported the publication of journals that faced financial trouble, in many cases buying its publication rights and in others encouraged individual writers to continue with the publication without worrying about its finances. As a result, he patronized the publication of \textit{Bhasha Prakash} in 1883, \textit{Harish Chandra Kala} in 1887, \textit{Dwij Patrika} in 1890, revived the publication of \textit{Vidya Vinod} in 1892 under the editorship of Chandi Prasad Singh; and in 1897 purchased the proprietary rights of the monthly \textit{Brahman} of Pratap Narayan Mishra. The year 1897 also witnessed the publication from Patna of two monthly magazines – \textit{Samasyapurti} and \textit{Shiksha}. The former was a collection of poems recited at the monthly forums of the \textit{Patna Kavi Samaj} organized by the students of the Bihar National College. This journal became a platform for aspiring Hindi poets, as it brought together the more established Hindi poets and novices into the world of Hindi literature.\textsuperscript{95} The latter was the fifth Hindi publication sponsored by the Khadgavilas Press under the editorship of Ram Ran Vijay

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid. p. 85.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid. pp. 353-354.
\textsuperscript{95} Mishra. \textit{Bihar Mein Hindi Patrakarita Ka Vikas}. p. 106.
Singh, son of Ramdin Singh. All these journals professed to be literary organs devoted mostly to the enrichment of Hindi literature.

In the tried fashion, the opening of Khadgavilas Press was accompanied by the launch of a journal, *Ksatriya Patrika*. Belying its name, this was a literary rather than caste journal. However, it appealed enough to community spirits to receive the support of some affluent local rulers such as the Maharaja of Udaipur who donated a sum of Rs. 3,000 to help the Patrika. Aside from his endeavors as a publisher and a journalist, in 1880 Ramdin Singh composed the *Bihar Darpan*. This book was the first of its kind written in Hindi. As a biographic compilation of twenty-four representative Biharis, the book provides an insight into the lives of various landlords, merchants, saints, wrestlers, and poets, among others – and through a narration of their lives he draws an unprecedented picture of the social and cultural history of nineteenth century Bihar.96

After Bhudev Mukhopadhyay’s repeated exhortations to many people to take up this task failed, Ramdin Singh began his work in earnest spending three years researching and writing the book. Ostensibly the book was to be used in the schools of Bihar, but by bringing together the lives of people from different parts of Bihar, it facilitated an early imagination of Bihariness articulated through, what was quickly becoming the new regional language, Hindi. Harishchandra was so impressed by the book that he urged people in other parts of India to take a similar initiative.97 The *Bihar Bandhu* and the Khadgavilas Press’ publications were so successful in creating a Hindi prose akin to the language of the people that colonial authorities recommended that if the civil officers

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learning the language in Britain would read these publications rather than the turgid prose of the Bagh-o-bahar\textsuperscript{98} and the Prem Sagar\textsuperscript{99} they would have a “much better idea of the spoken language of Hindustan.”\textsuperscript{100} Hence, in little more than a decade, Hindi had evolved from being an uncouth, rustic language to the language of much of north-India. Ramdin Singh’s contributions to this end was highly appreciated at the first conference of the Nagri Pracharini Sabha in 1894, alongside the other stalwart of the publishing world Munshi Naval Kishore. Grierson acknowledged Singh’s contribution by having him appointed a member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1895.\textsuperscript{101}

Conclusion:

From its early uncertainty in 1870s, Hindi over the decade had managed to sideline Urdu as the regional language of Bihar. The foundation for the transformation of the complex linguistic milieu of colonial Bihar to the use of a standardized Hindi was possible within a matrix that brought together the colonial state, nationalist politics and the emergence of a regional print culture. In doing so through Hindi, Bihar had appropriated an essential marker of Indian culture. While the legacy of colonialism is highly evident, languages would not have been invested with the essential marker of a

\textsuperscript{98} Amir Khusru wrote this work commissioned by the colonial government, in 1800 with the express intention of represent the language of the people of India. However, the high-flown Arabic and Persian used in the text was far from any language generally spoken by the people – but over time the book had become a foundational Urdu text.

\textsuperscript{99} Owing to the researches of the Asiatic Society and the early Orientalists like William Jones, Charles Wilkins, Nathaniel Halhed facilitated a growing appreciation of Sanskrit – which was viewed as the foundational language of India, and struck a belief that the Hindus of India did not know Persian, and the language used by them was markedly different from it. In order to make up for the Bagh-o-Bahar written in Urdu, the colonial government commissioned another work in 1810 the Prem Sagar written in Hindi, and was supposed to be representative of the vernacular language of India. Yet in spite of this effort, the Hindi of the Prem Sagar was “not spoken in the household of any Hindu in Hindustan.” George A. Grierson. “A Plea for the Peoples Tongue,” in The Calcutta Review, Volume 71, 1880. p. 158.

\textsuperscript{100} Annual General Report of the Patna Division for 1882-83. General Department, General Proceedings, 1883. West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).

“mother tongue” if such a label was not appropriated and invested with value by its speakers. While modern technologies like print helped homogenize the use of language, the necessities of national and regional politics again invoked language as a unifying marker. The colonial state’s emphasis on vernacular education based on the premise that people only had one primary language, worked to radically alter the multilingual society of India. It also laid the seeds for essentializing people’s identities around languages. This is evident through two village folk songs heard in Bihar in the early 1880s:

“Thanks to the English Government, which confers comfort on its subjects. It has put far away the Persian character, and introduced Nagri. Bhudeb Baboo called out to the Lord Sahib (saying) ‘put far away the Persian character, and thereby put far away a grievance. My Lord, many forgeries are committed through it, and the people will be happy when they obtain their own (peculiar) learning.’ O! brother, praise the wisdom, learning, and counsel which has done justice in Hindustani by introducing the character of its people.”

And:

“Government gave the order, O! people, learn Nagri. Put the Persian character far from your hearts. Learn Nagri, and when you are qualified do Government work. Take books and read steadily, but sell your Persian one to the druggists. Until you know Nagri well write Kaithi in your kachahris. Praise be to the councillors who are well-wishers of the people.”

These songs not only illustrate the exclusive attachment to ones language, but also highlight the foreignness of Persian and its unsuitability as the regional language. Most remarkable however, is their acknowledgement of the singular role of the colonial state in effecting the change; certainly a result of its overwhelming presence that people feel. Yet, the songs silence over any allusion to identifying Hindi as symbolic of a national culture,


denotes a deep internalization of Hindi as the natural language with which, it is only expected for people to share a long standing emotional attachment. In Bihar, Hindi drawing upon a larger national cultural symbol was able to displace Urdu, which earlier commanded a pride of place among the region’s literati. The tortuous journey of Hindi from its uncertain beginnings to the regional language of Bihar made the symbolic value of language visible, eventually inspiring a much deeper attachment among the people of Bihar to Maithili, Bhojpuri and Maghi – languages that continued to grow in the fissures that Hindi was unable to occupy.
Chapter 3: 
Discovery of Ancient Bihar: Archeology and the Emergence of a Regional Territorial Space

“We welcome thee to Patna, the capital of ancient Magadha, the Puspapura of the Raghubansam, the Pataliputra of the noble Gupta and Maurya Kings, the Palibothra of Megasthenes, the Azimabad of the Mahomedan rulers,” wrote *The Bihar Herald*, the oldest English language newspaper of Patna, as it welcomed Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy of India, to Patna. Casting Patna as an ancient imperial centre was not an act of fancy by the editor. Rather the timing of Hardinge’s visit in 1913, points towards a specific historic moment, the emergence of Patna as the capital of the newly created province of Bihar and Orissa a year ago. What follows in the editorial was as brief a eulogy as possible, oftentimes betraying a sense of nostalgic reminiscence of Patna’s ancient greatness. More importantly, by commemorating Patna “as the Queen of all India centering in herself the Imperial interest of the whole country,” the editorial privileges an ancient history centering on Magadha and Patna. In doing so the ancient past of this region is framed and presented as integral to the writing and understanding of an ancient Indian past, making the events centered around Magadha part of a standard narrative of ancient India in which this region shares and even shapes the chronological and thematic structure of our understanding of ancient Indian past.

For a colonized people history was meant to be inspirational and glimpses into ancient Magadha served such a purpose which perhaps the editor of the *Behar Herald* realized as he goes on to claim that,

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1 “Our Welcome to the Viceroy,” *The Behar Herald*, Patna: November 29, 1913. The paper started publication in 1872 making it among the oldest regional newspaper available.
Her Chandra Gupta by settling diadems on her forehead made her the envy of the world. Her Asoka by his greatness made her matchless… her Panini immortalized the science of the most perfect language of the world… her Vaskaracharya brought mathematics and astronomy to perfection and revolutionized those sciences all over the world. Her Chanakya by his matchless parables and his shrewd statesmanship has illumined a page of India’s past in no mean degree.\(^2\)

Beyond being inspirational, the repeated invocation to this ancient past is perhaps indicative of the newness, by which I mean, a new awareness that India too had its fair share of great emperors, erudite grammarians, critical thinkers and shrewd politicians, in a ancient past the nucleus or core of which was located in Bihar.

During a time of heightened interest in history and historical research, as indicated by a burgeoning of historical research societies all across India,\(^3\) this particular framing of ancient Magadha as an essential element of the national narrative of ancient India points to the coeval emergence of this particular regional vis-à-vis a national history. This recourse to history and the historical narrative of the nation within which it is being couched, and the seamless ties between Patna, Magadha, Bihar and India points to the complete imbrication between a local, regional and national history. To a large extent, the naturalization of this modern narrative of the past was facilitated through the emergence of archeology as a systematic and institutionalized practice beginning from the mid-nineteenth century in colonial India. So much so, that archeology’s ability to continuously unearth more evidence of ancient grandeur from the bowels of history is not entirely lost to the editor who, in referring to Patna, claims that though “her glories have passed out into the dream-land of history. Beneath the melancholy surface of her person

\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) Some of the research societies that made history a particular area of focus are: the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta (1894), the Varendra Research Society, Rajshahi (1910), the Bharati Itihasa Sanshodhak Mandal, Pune (1910), the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, Patna (1915).
there may yet be unearthed some thrones or palaces bright with noble memories and set
with immortal relics of greatness." Archaeological research in colonial India, and the
incessant hunt for relics, took away the scope of historical research solely from the
purview of ancient texts, but in so doing it also widened the scope of history, by
transforming a landscape littered with ruins, into a site for historical research, making
history visible amidst the ruins.

Archaeological research began in colonial India with a quest for the originary
moment of monuments and places aiming to provide a history that was not only devoid of
any accretions and corruptions marking a monument or place, but was also paralleled
with a belief that it could lend greater visibility and understanding to the past through a
close reading of objects as texts. What were available to the archaeologist were skeletal
remains of a past in the form of fragmented statues, columns, or buildings. In most cases,
the artifacts discovered were unimpressive rocks, monuments, decrepit stupas and
numerous sculptures – but during the nineteenth century, particularly in the later part,
there was an urgent need to discover and preserve these relics of the past, as they were
beginning to prove indispensible to the study of ancient India. Artifacts, no matter how
unimpressive or lacking in aesthetic quality, not only provided a visible record of the
past, but from mid-nineteenth century onwards, these were being considered the only
reliable sources of history as opposed to myths and legends available in ancient Sanskrit
texts and hence deserved preserving. Archaeological research in colonial India, therefore,
aimed at winnowing out myths and legends, as these were being perceived as a fanciful
basis for understanding ancient Indian history.

It is no coincidence that Bihar, more particularly Magadha, figures prominently in the early archaeological survey reports, given the region’s ancient connection to Buddhism, the Mauryan Empire and the Gupta Empire. Let us briefly pause, before proceeding with a discussion on archeology’s engagement with the Bihar landscape, which made it possible for the editor of *Behar Herald* to claim Patna as the “Queen of all India.”⁵ As it must be clear from the editorial cited above, there was a heightened sense of newness attached to the revelations that archeology and other concomitant modern methodologies of studying the past revealed, and which the local literati seldom missed an opportunity to recount as is evident from the numerous essays that appeared in local newspapers.⁶ It would therefore be fair to presume that the history which archaeology revealed, captured the imagination of the regional literati investing them with a sense of past that worked to place ancient Bihar as the core of an ancient Indian past. It is in this context that this chapter explores how archeology contributed to the construction of a historical past for the region that was simultaneously represented as the common national past for much of India. It does so with an eye on the archaeological surveys conducted in Bihar during the nineteenth century and early decade of the twentieth century, more particularly with regards to archaeological excavations centered on Nalanda, Pataliputra and Bodh Gaya.

Archaeological surveys and the concomitant reports point towards a range of ambivalences that reside at the heart of its particular claim to historical knowledge production, anticipating in different ways the dilemmas and dangers of the appropriation of the past in the benefit of the present, in the context of both colonial and independent

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⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Many newspaper articles of this nature are mentioned in the conclusion of this chapter.
India. While this chapter uses the motif of colonial archeology with regards to Bihar to understand the construction of the canon of an ancient Indian past, to point to the malleability of the past it is important to note that this is not a unique or an exceptional occurrence. We could take the kinds of uses to which archaeological knowledge were deployed by professionals and intellectuals in both pre- and post- Independent India. For instance, Sumathi Ramaswamy’s study has shown how the momentous archaeological event of the discovery of the Indus Valley Civilization in 1924 would translate into assertions of Dravidian antiquity and Tamil nationality and enter the narrative contract of Tamil nationalism.  

Another telling instance shows itself in the particular life and trajectory that “scientific archeology” assumed during post-Independence India, in the figure of H. D. Sankalia and in the new center of academic archeology that he founded at the Deccan College in Pune. The important point to note here is not just that scholars like Sankalia used the resources and methods of “scientific archeology” at sites such as Dwaraka and Tripuri in Western India to testify to the historicity of the legends of the Mahabharata and the Puranas, but also the ease and ardor with which such projects of historicizing the nation’s epic past could rest within the sanctified domain of academic and scientific research without robbing the latter of any of its force.  

That Sankalia, like many fellow scholars before and after him, saw nothing contradictory in the worlds of myth, history, and academic archeology – that he could ardently pursue what has been termed “a scientific archeology of tradition and belief” – points to the extent to which the

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articulation of national scholarly authorities was embroiled in these cultural claims and affective bonds.⁹

Alluding, perhaps, towards the vital ties between archeology and the construction of a narrative of ancient Indian past, both cases point to instances where archaeological knowledge is used to provide a degree of credibility to a historical narrative by either privileging the assertion of a “different” form of nationalism, as in the Tamil case, or is marked by an attempt to bring a mythological past within the fold of history. This chapter however, does not seek to point to such contentious roles of archeology. Rather, by looking at the role of early colonial archeology in the production of a historical landscape of Bihar, this chapter points to particular moments when local places in Bihar emerged as signposts of an ancient Indian past and the seemingly symbiotic relation that the ancient landscape of Magadha had in the historical narratives of both the region and the nation. Instead of providing another instance of contention and contestation, between region and nation, either through exclusivity from a national narrative⁰ or through exclusive claims over it,¹¹ this chapter points towards a third instance of mutual co-ownership over the past that frames this particular instance of region-nation relationship. Such an understanding not only makes this particular region integral to a national imagination – but what this chapter also emphasizes is the particular historical moment when the history of both the region and the nation emerged out of a complex set of matrices which included among other factors, a rise in nationalist politics, a growing number of educated

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⁹ Ibid. p. 17.
¹¹ Deshpande. Creative Pasts.
middle-class Biharis expressing a desire for a region of their own, along with a parallel fascination with the past both at the national as well as regional levels.

Certainly, in such a context, the “discovery” of India’s Buddhist past, the role of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka and the subsequent discovery of historic places connected with both saw the convergence of local places in Bihar and a rational-positivist national history where these local places were re-framed as visual signposts of a national past. This relation between the local and the national, however, was mediated by the emergence of a regional literati who, by the late nineteenth century, were increasingly becoming conscious of a distinct Bihari identity fuelled by a sense of marginalization and domination by Bengal of which it was a part. Therefore, to put it simply, in order to mark their differences with Bengal, the local literati embraced the emerging narrative of ancient India with Bihar constituting the cultural core, naturalizing the ties between the local, region, and nation. In order to truly appreciate this transformation brought about through archaeological initiatives, it would be helpful if we can get a sense of articulation of place prior to the emergence of Bihar as one of the central foci for archaeological explorations. Perhaps such an exercise will position in greater relief the transformation that the regional landscape underwent thanks to the archaeological endeavors, which believed, quite literally, that history was embedded in the landscape.

Pre-Colonial Modes of Place-Making: A Sense of Place Embedded in Myths, Legends and Literary Expressions

Before we encounter Pataliputra, Magadha and Bihar as part of a historic landscape, symbolizing an age of ancient Indian grandeur, we come across multiple articulations of place which express an attachment or affiliation to place with contexts ranging from as specific as a locality to as broad a notion as India. While some of these
articulations of place may invoke myths and legends and hence may appear quite ahistorical, my aim here is primarily to point to the varied perceptions of place that preceded the nation-form of imagination. What I mean by this is that regardless of our contemporary discussion of place, whether local or regional, such a discourse is oftentimes framed within the context of a national narrative – one where history has been instrumental in naturalizing the nation-form. In this context, Yi-Fu Tuan reminds us that an “undifferentiated space” like that of a nation “becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value,”¹² in other words as we get to experience it, space becomes place. But unlike our lived experience of local places, which become thoroughly familiar to us through our everyday activities, a nation cannot simply invoke mundane familiarity, rather it has to invoke and inspire pride. And it is here that history serves as the crucial link in tying the local to the national through the narration of a common national past and in the process personifying the nation for all its nationals. It is not surprising, therefore, that the emergence of nation-states also witnessed a parallel rise in historic literature precisely because “History books helped to transform the nation-state into place.”¹³ The deep ties between history and nation has generally made us unaware of the articulation of place that is more localized and one that was transformed by archaeological explorations. Such articulations of place are manifest in various forms, while some are embedded in myths, others may invoke peculiarities embedded in the landscape to varying degrees. Through this discussion what I would also like to briefly


¹³ Ibid. p. 177. This is not to say that traditions of history-writing, or historical consciousness had to await the emergence of nation-states for such articulations. As the works of Kumkum Chatterjee, Prachi Deshpande, and Velcheru narayana Rao, David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam have clearly demonstrated the cultures of history writing and historical consciousness predates the modern nexus between history and nation.
point out is that while imagining a territorially-bounded space as India was not entirely new, it was still part of a wider range of articulations of place. If we view the Indian subcontinent in this sense, then we begin to be more mindful of the localized sense of place that could be expressed without always referencing to any “national” territorially-bounded space – something that would become increasingly difficult from the late nineteenth century onwards.

For instance, Yigal Bronner and David Shulman have argued that the articulation of a distinctively regional sense of place can come through in the form of literary expressions aimed at a regional or local audience.\textsuperscript{14} As they put it, such an articulation of place is not limited to “‘hard’ geographical terms” rather these expressions are part of “a patterned, re-imagined, accessible socio-aesthetic domain” which resonates with people in a meaningful way primarily because they live within it and their identities are in part shaped by it.\textsuperscript{15} Also, localized articulations of place make up for its shrinking geographical extent by providing a depth of familiarity that are immediately identifiable to the specific audience as these are primarily concerned with issues and themes rooted in the culture, society and history of specific places.\textsuperscript{16} In this particular case, Bronner and Shulman elaborate on the differences between regional and cosmopolitan Sanskrit by using the genre of messenger-poems, and comparing Kalidasa’s \textit{Meghasandesa} (Cloud-Messenger) – the prototype of Sanskrit messenger-poems, with the fourteenth century \textit{Hamsasendesa} (Goose-Messenger) by Venkatanatha. Though similar in genre and style, Venkatanatha provides a meaningful and purposeful inversion of Kalidasa’s classic work


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. p. 6.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. p. 6-9.
and in doing so he limits the geographical scope as well as the texture of the poem to
south India, providing the reader with a detailed description of an aerial view of the
region. And so the flight of the goose in Venkatanatha’s poem weaves together “elements
belonging to distinct registers of regional identity,” as we begin to see the explicit
thematization of the southern, in this case Tamil, region with a “select set of landscapes,
communities, narratives, divinities and pilgrimage sites.”17 What I would like to
emphasize here is that regional identity becomes a factor of experience that is registered
through lived experiences – the invocation of particular landscape, pilgrimage sites
communities or narratives requires a degree of familiarity with the region.

All articulations of regional space do not necessarily follow a template
emphasizing lived experiences in order to invoke a sense of attachment and affiliation to
a place. Rather, as Mahesh Sharma has shown with regards to the peripheral region of the
Chamba valley in the western Himalayas, a very concerted effort was at work in
inscribing the landscape in ways that highlighted the appropriation of an “Indian
subcontinental cosmology” which was aimed at creating “a parallel sacred territory by
elevating the local to the universal.”18 By elevating the regional irrigating rivers to the
status of the sacred Ganga and Yamuna the rulers of Chamba, were able to appropriate a
particular iconography that helped legitimize their rule. Similarly, the Chamba rulers,
began visiting pan-Indian pilgrim places like Kurukshetra during the tenth-eleventh
centuries; Ganges, Badrinatha and Kedaranatha in the fourteenth; Prayaga, Kasi, Gaya in
the fifteenth; and south Indian space in the seventeenth century. The growing

17 Ibid. p. 17
18 Mahesh Sharma. “State Formation and Cultural Complex in western Himalaya: Chamba genealogy and
circumference of the sacred cosmology that the Chamba rulers began to affiliate themselves with underscores the process that worked to bring this region within the ambit of an Indian subcontinental imagination. But even beyond this, the rulers contrived a sacred cultural space through “cultic affiliations” by appropriating “history and charismatic personalities with magico-spiritual powers and prowess,” in order to legitimize their consent to rule.19

This discussion certainly points out that long-standing traditions, the appraised worth and values of myths, profuse with praises of ancient greatness and glorious past, may very well be fanciful and legendary. Yet they cannot be simply disregarded as the stories of Gods and Goddesses as their names have been inscribed within living traditions and customs while continuing to be invoked in numerous temples, its adjoining tanks and gardens, which serve as sacred places of worship. While local folklore and myths may not conform to the norms of history, they provide an important sense of localized memories regarding a place and provides a glimpse into a localized landscape that is not always in congruity with the historical landscape that archaeological ventures sought to create. More importantly, as the frames for understanding history centered around archaeological excavations, artifacts and relics enshrined in museums and furthered by an institutionalized impetus to specific research that sought to weave together a history of a region and a nation gained prominence, places began to be inscribed within very specific historic narratives that looked beyond localized ways of commemorating the past. But that should not blind us to the multilayered sense of place and the wide range of registers through which it was articulated before archaeological endeavors and its concomitant

19 Ibid. p. 431.
modalities of doing history in the late nineteenth century worked to transform this multiplicity of articulations into a unidimensional historical narrative – with the nation generally serving as the ultimate reference for all history.

This is not to say that the imagination of the territorial space of the Indian subcontinent as a cohesive cultural space was entirely a modern phenomenon growing out of the colonial context. As Bronner and Shulman, and Sharma point out, people ranging from the southern tip of the subcontinent to the northern Himalayas, and exposed to varied cultures, were aware of a larger territorial space that made up the Indian subcontinent – but what is significantly different about this awareness are the diverse ways through which such a consciousness is articulated. With regards to Bihar, Hara Prasad Shastri believes that Vidyapati – the charming lyric poet of Mithila who lived during the fifteenth century, was probably among the earlier ones who attempted to articulate his conception of a larger Indian landscape, leading Shastri to assert, “from the fifteenth century the Bihar people are striving to know the countries around them.” The fact that Shastri does not differentiate between Mithila and Bihar, but uses them interchangeably as if to say that they signify one and the same regional space is perhaps an indication of the subsequent naturalization of Bihar as a place-name. The point comes through more forcefully because while Vidyapati’s account is replete with place-names that dot the sub-continent, he does not go on to mention Bihar. Unlike Kalidasa’s *Meghasandesha* (Cloud-Messenger) and Venkatanatha’s *Hamsasendesa* (Goose-Messenger), Vidyapati chooses the motif of an expiatory tour that Balarama, the elder brother of Krishna, is forced to perform after having committed *Brahma-hatyā* (sin of

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killing a Brahmana). From the available fragmented copy of Vidyapati’s account, Shastri asserts that the account was conceived as a gazetteer aiming to provide information of “sixty-five” countries known to and of Vidyapati’s time. Although, Balarama is the arch-narrator of Vidyapati’s account, the narrative uses Puranas, Tantras, old travelers narrative, as well as state records as valid sources. This work therefore, is an apt illustration of how a pauranic cosmology is sutured to a contemporary description and discussion of places – probably an allusion to the overlapping resonance of places which were mentioned not only for their mythological and religious significance, but also because they served as an important indication of their relevance during Vidyapati’s time.

By following in Balarama’s footsteps, we get a sense of Vidyapati’s perception of the Indian sub-continent and how the places visited by the penitent Balarama must have resonated with Vidyapati and his contemporaries in the fifteenth century. Balarama begins his journey in Naimisaranya (near Lucknow), goes to Pancala (in Rohilkund) where he visits Drupada’s (a mythic character of the Mahabharata) arsenal, his capital, and the shrines consecrated by him and his ancestors. Via Brahmavarta, Balarama proceeds to the hermitage of Valmiki, then to Prayaga. In each instance, Vidyapati provides a description of the holy places in some detail. From Prayaga, Balarama crosses the Ganges to visit Bharadvaja’s grove and eventually arrives at Kasi (Varanasi) from where he goes on to visit Sarnath and the Buddhist remains. The anachronism that pervades this account is highly evident, for while “true to his Pauranic spirit Vidyapati sticks to the old names of hermitages,” he makes his mythological narrator visit Buddhist landmarks from where Balarama is made to travel in the footsteps of Rama as mentioned in Valmiki’s Ramayana. Hence following the route of Rama, Balarama visits
Gautamasrama at the confluence of the Ganges and the Sarayu and then to Tadaka’s place, and after that the hermitage of Chyavana and to Pataliputra. Although Valmiki does not mention Pataliputra in the Ramayana, the place was quite significant for Vidyapati to have not mentioned it. From Pataliputra, Balarama goes to Tirabhukti and then to Mithila.\textsuperscript{21} Shastri has reason to believe that Vidyapati was in the forests of Naimisaranya with Deva-Simha, his patron Siva-Simha’s father, and his family, perhaps as fugitives when this account was composed. In a sense it may not be too far-fetched to propose that by using the trope of Balarama’s expiatory tour which coincidently begins in Naimisaranya and ends in Mithila – Vidyapati was trying to imagine his own journey home to Mithila, a place he cannot for some reason go to at least for a while. While Mithila is the final destination, through this expiatory trope, Vidyapati demonstrates a degree of familiarity with a cultural landscape that resonates deeply for him either because of its mythological, religious or historical importance. More importantly, perhaps, such an imagination allows him to feel a sense of attachment to Naimisaranya while also betraying his longing to return to Mithila.

Besides Vidyapati, who is certainly among the more well known of the late medieval poet-composers, there is evidence of local zamindars commissioning works providing descriptive accounts of “fifty-six countries (almost all in India) which comprised the world as then known to the Hindus.”\textsuperscript{22} Although none of these texts survived in their extant form, the fragmented portions of these accounts do provide a glimpse of a world where local zamindars were commissioning work that strived to

describe the larger known world to them. Two of these are Vikramasagara and Desavalivivriti. The Desavalivivriti was written under the patronage of a Chouhan Jagirdar of four parganas around Patna. The patron Deva Vaijala or Dulala Vaikala, as he is sometimes referred to, employed a learned Brahman, Jagamohan to compile a description of the “fifty-six countries” that the known world of the Hindus was divided into. The work was composed in the form of an interlocution between the patron and the composer and the work must have been near completion if not entirely complete by the year 1650, when it is recorded that the patron died. Following the death of the patron, there was considerable disarray in the region as a result of which text itself suffered – parts of it were lost and what was available was a confusing patchwork of available fragments. Hence when the work was recompiled and revised some seventy years later by “Sakadvipi Brhamanas,” belonging to the same village as the Vaijala family, they wrote that as the original text was “chinna, bhinna” they undertook the arduous task of putting it back together – an undertaking that took them ten years to complete ending in 1728.23 Because of the significant amount of revision that Desavalivivriti had undergone, it is difficult to separate the original from the revised version. For our purposes, it is important to note that this text acknowledges its indebtedness to a much earlier text, Vikramasagara, written “a century or two ago” under the patronage of another member of the Vaijala family.24 Though the exact date of its composition is not available, the work must have gained a degree of authority among the local scholars and literati thus making it necessary for Jagamohan to publicly acknowledge his gratitude. In discussing

24 Ibid.
these works, Hara Prasad Shastri is quite unequivocal in claiming that these works stood in marked distinction from the writings influenced by the Puranas.

What makes these texts significant is that they have “nothing to do with Puranas or Pauranic heroes. It is written for the use of contemporaries and contains much useful information about trade, commerce, manufacture, agriculture, history, geography, etc., of the [surrounding] countries.”

Moreover it is based on eye-witness accounts of places derived from “old and experienced travelers” who have “seen things with [their] own eyes.” While places of pilgrimage like Gaya and Kamakhya figure most prominently, these accounts are also mindful of the diverse population that reside in various regions who are described as “consisting of Yavanas or Firingis or Brahmanas or Kayasthas or Vaidyas or Navashakhas, or weavers, or traders or Ksattriyas of different races or Brahmanas of different srenis. Sometimes their character is also described: in one place it is stated that they were all thieves; one country is described as full of dacoits and murderers.”

Aside from caste based characterizations, the fact that people of a certain place are all characterized as “thieves,” “dacoits and murderers” is most likely an allusion to the animosity that overwrote any objective analysis of those people, while pointing out that particular places in themselves were stigmatized to such an extent that it shaped the very character of the people living within it. While the language used may be hyperbolic, the authors of the two texts certainly betray a sense of hostility that is directed towards particular people and places in what otherwise purports to be a seemingly objective assessment of places.

25 Ibid.
26 Ibid. p. 16.
But what is perhaps most significant about these texts, is its discussion regarding Pataliputra, the Maurya Empire and Buddhism: particularly in light of nineteenth century archeology’s preoccupation and fascination with wanting to discover “lost” places. As has been discussed below, this belief was strengthened by colonial archaeologists’ conviction that India lacked a proper historical memory. But for now it would suffice to say that, when building a case for archaeological excavations, Alexander Cunningham did not think it worth his while to consult any Sanskrit sources for its historical information, for if he would have looked around, he could have certainly come across both the Vikramasagara and Desavalivivriti in the Fort William College Library or in the Sanskrit College, Calcutta, where they were later transferred.27 But the strong prejudice against any Sanskrit texts prevented Cunningham from doing so, hence when foreign accounts like the Chinese travel accounts of Fa Xian (Fa Hsien/Fa Hian/Fa-Hien) and Xuan Zang (Hsuan Tsang/Hwan Thsang/Hiuen Tsang), and the accounts of Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to the court of Chandragupta, were available they served as the only credible sources for his archaeological endeavors as I have discussed further below. And yet, if we look at the Vikramasagara, the text that served as the primary source for Jagamohan’s Desavalivivriti, it says: “Pataliputtra had a king, named Sucandra, who had a Buddhist wife and had Buddhist tendencies. He conceived the idea of conquering fifty-six countries and going eastward he conquered Bengal, Assam, Manipur, Burma, Pegu and other countries.” Similarly, in the chapter on Pataliputra, Desavalivivriti “contains the accounts of the conquests of one Sugaticandra, who seems to be a mere translation of Sucandra.” Though the name Sucandra cannot be squared with any specific Mauryan

27 Ibid. p. 17.
king, Hara Prasad Shastri believes that it may allude to “a faint memory of Chandragupta and the Mauryas.” He goes on to say that “Sucandra is, however, a well-known name in the later Buddhist tradition. He looms large in the works of Kalacakrayana and he is not unknown in the Pali and Burmese literature.”

And yet to nineteenth century archaeologists, it was Megasthenes’ account of Sandrakottos, the name by which Chandraguta was known to the Greeks, that served as a source of greater credibility and was perceived as a more legitimate account of ancient India, than the references to Sucandra, which as Hara Prasad Shastri says, could refer to Chandragupta. Perhaps, archeology’s claims that India lacked a form of historical memory were ill-founded as the discussion above has sought to suggest.

While this certainly points to the marginalization of native knowledge, what it still leaves unanswered is the epistemic transformation that followed in the wake of archaeological discoveries that worked to produce a modern Bihar, whose history from its moment of emergence was merged with a national Indian history. This could only be possible through a complete displacement of localized forms of commemorating a sense of place. Since Magadha emerges as the emblematic repository of ancient Indian past, perhaps, a brief discussion on the perception of Magadha vis-à-vis Mithila, both constitutive parts of Bihar, will serve as an apt illustration.

In a general sense, the river Ganges divides Bihar into two distinct regions; the north is known as Mithila and the south Magadha. J. N. Samaddar, member of the Bihar

28 Ibid. p. 20.
and Orissa Research Society and professor at Patna College, writes that Magadha was a land that “had been placed under a ban by Brahmans.”\textsuperscript{30} He goes on to state that although Magadha was the center of the most famous kingdom in ancient India, and even though “three-fourth of India’s early history is the history of Magadha,” the Vedic Aryans regarded this region with “deadly aversion.”\textsuperscript{31} A Brahman living in this region was called \textit{Brahmabandhu} – a degraded Brahman and the people of Magadha in general were referred to as “destitute of good manners.” Its Brahman Pandits, with a long tradition of Sanskrit learning, eulogized Mithila while refraining from any positive remarks regarding Magadha.\textsuperscript{32} Indeed, all the earlier and later Vedic texts displayed a marked antipathy towards the people of Magadha, to whom malarial fever was assigned, evidently as a curse, for the land was seemingly considered as not worth living in as being not within the pale of Vedic civilization.\textsuperscript{33} The word Magadha, was also used to refer to minstrels, who lived by singing loudly the praise of kings.\textsuperscript{34} So far as Magadha and its people are concerned, this hostile and contemptuous attitude continues to persist, albeit in a subdued form, as most Brahmans of Mithila will avoid bathing on the southern bank of the Ganges on auspicious occasions and they hold that cremation should be done on the northern bank of the Ganges which lies within Mithila.\textsuperscript{35} Such sense of difference prevalent among the Brahmans of Mithila, mark out the contours of the cultural and sacred landscape of

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\textsuperscript{31} Ibid. pp. 4-5.
\textsuperscript{34} Shastri. \textit{Magadhan Literature}. p. 3.
\end{flushright}
Mithila distinguishing it from Magadha. While, cultural differences between Magadha and Mithila were most prominently exhibited through language, when it came to framing the history of Bihar, Magadha’s ancient past presented itself as the history of Bihar. But the references to Magadha made so far do not make any pretensions of being symbolic of a grand Indian past.36

Rather this sense of difference between the Brahmans of Mithila and Magadha as marked out in Vedic texts, positing one as superior, is not simply confined to the upper echelons of Hindu society. Instead, this sense of hostility towards Magadha and the consequent purity of the territory of Mithila have percolated down to one of the lowest strata of Hindu caste hierarchy, the Dosadh. This sentiment is expressed in a very common folksong among the Dosadhs of Mithila, “The Song of King Salhes,” which was recorded by George Grierson.37 Salhes, the protagonist of this legend is the great hero and the first chaukidar (watchman) by vocation – perhaps a reflection of the fact that many Dosadhs in Mithila are also referred to as Chaukidar Dosadh.38 The legend commemorates the life of this great hero of the Dosadhs, who is worshipped throughout Tirhut where, Grierson saw the rural landscape punctuated with Salhes asthans under

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36 Hara Prasad Shastri makes the important distinction between Magadha during the Vedic period as opposed to the Classical Period, i.e., the period attributed to the Mauryas, to Kautilya etc. Although he bases his argument on textual evidence, it is difficult to say that his own characterization of a “classical” Magadha during the 1920s was not influenced by archaeological surveys of the late nineteenth century. See, Shastri. Magadhan Literature. p. 12.

37 While serving as a sub-divisional officer in Madhubani during the 1870s, Grierson worked to collect samples of the Maithili language. He documented various examples of the language, as it was spoken among different groups of people as prevalent in nineteenth century Mithila, as well as its literary heritage by providing examples from the poems of the popular fourteenth century Maithili poet, Vidyapati. His works on Maithili was published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1882. George A. Grierson. An Introduction of the Maithili Language of North Bihar Containing A Grammar, Chrestomathy and Vocabulary. Part II. Chrestomathy and Vocabulary. Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1882. Edited by, Hetukar Jha and Vedanatha Jha, Maithili Chrestomathy and Vocabulary by George A. Grierson. Darbhanga: Maharajadhiraja Kameshwar Singh Kalyani Foundation, 2009.

village pipal trees. These modest shrines of the Dosadhs were made of a raised mud platform surmounted by mounted figures made of clay, representing the various characters of the song. In commemorating the life of Salhes, the legend takes us through several parts of north and south Bihar, revealing a cultural landscape familiar to the Dosadhs. The extent of their territorial imaginations brings within its fold a familiarity with the local topography, its rivers, towns, and forests. Not only does the legend demonstrate a strong affinity that its characters attach to their places of belonging, but in doing so it also goes on to present the people belonging to the north and those from the south of Bihar in marked distinction. In the case of this legend, the Dosadhs of the north, refer to those in the south, across the Ganges, as vile, scheming thieves. Apart from his pedigree as the first watchman, the basis of Salhes’ popularity is largely due to his triumph over Chuhar Mal, a Dosadh who lives across the Ganges in Magadha and is regarded as the first thief. Both of the same caste, and worshipping the same goddess Asavari, appear as enemies with Chuhar Mal as the wily thief, who is out to destroy the good reputation of Salhes. Holding Chuhar Mal in such contempt and presenting him as vile and despicable, the legend is resonant of how Magadha is looked down on by Maithili Brahmans, both the land and its people.

This legend presents us with no pretensions regarding its literary sophistication, nor does it provide a complex plot unfolding in many layers. Furthermore, there is little by way of evidence that can be used to verify the historical accuracy or even the basis of such a legend. Instead the simplicity of the legend, and its quite stark distinction between

39 Grierson. An Introduction of the Maithili Language of North Bihar. p. 3.
the cultural space of Mithila and Magadha, serve as an important reminder of how a
distinct sense of place is embedded in local memory and the guises through which such
commemorations are manifest. To the British antiquarians and historians such nuanced
sense of difference embedded in local customs and practices, did not fall within the
parameters of history nor did this legend serve as a valid exercise in commemorating a
place. Partly this could be because of the nature of nineteenth century practices involving
history of which archeology was an essential element.

Coming of Archeology to Colonial India

In colonial India, there is a long history of demonstrated interest in ancient sites,
their descriptions and observations dating back to the eighteenth century.\(^{41}\) The primary
theoretical interest of these works was in plotting out a historical geography of ancient
India; therefore while they demonstrated an antiquarian interest in India’s past they were
not entirely invested in archaeological surveys, explorations and excavations. A major
shift towards specifically archaeological research and writings began in the 1830s.\(^{42}\) The
move away from texts towards objects, monuments and artifacts, was partly reflective of
the colonial government’s inclination towards promoting English education rather than
indigenous Sanskrit learning. The professed aim of which was to produce “modern”
subjects. As a result ancient Sanskrit texts came under scrutiny and doubts were raised
regarding their historical importance, accuracy and engagement with “facts.”\(^{43}\) At another

\(^{41}\) This is evident through the works of Jean Baptiste Bourguignon D’Anville, Joseph Tieffenthaler,
Anquetil du Perron and James Rennell. Similarly Buchanan Hamilton and Colin Mackinzie also provided
illustrations, descriptions and histories of ancient sites in the early decades of the nineteenth century.
\(^{42}\) Dilip Chakrabarti. *A History of Indian Archeology: From the Beginning to 1947*. New Delhi: Munshiram
\(^{43}\) Trautmann. *Aryans and British India*. 

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level, the end of the eighteenth century witnessed a growing interest in scientific
discovery in Britain marked by the establishment of many literary and philosophic
societies, to an extent that by “1815 every provincial town of importance had its society,”
supported by local aristocrats and manufacturers who were now becoming “aware of the
social value of scientific discovery.” The growing interest in archeology was therefore
reflective of a more scientific basis to understanding, interpreting and visualizing the past
based on material evidence as it was developing in Europe of the late eighteenth and
early nineteenth century. Interest in archeology, alongside other evolutionary sciences
like geology and anthropology, also led to the “birth of the museum,” to use Tony
Bennett’s phrase, in some of Europe’s major cities where they served as the public
repository of the “universal” knowledge of man. Metropolitan interests in a scientific
study of the past, doubled with colonial interests in promoting Western education with a
parallel disdain for Sanskrit texts, a phenomenon described as “Indophobia” by Thomas
Trautmann, served as the primary underpinnings for archaeological research and writings
in India. India in the nineteenth century, therefore, witnessed an age of unprecedented
archaeological discovery and documentation, largely under the aegis of the colonial
government. Hundreds of site were discovered and explored, and some excavated.
Countless ancient antiquities and monuments were described, drawn, and photographed.
The ruins and relics, discovered or documented as a result, found a newly inscribed status
as historical monuments and works of art, which seized colonial as well as national

imagination, only to be challenged by parallel demands over history and objects that were more specifically rooted in the local and the regional.\textsuperscript{47}

The orientation towards archaeological research and writings beginning in the 1830s, found a new impetus from 1861 under Alexander Cunningham, the army engineer turned field archaeologist. Through the “Memorandum” he wrote in 1861 to Lord Canning, the Governor-General of India, he sought to develop a systematic archaeological survey under the initiative of the colonial government. He urged the colonial government to act towards “the preservation of [India’s] ancient monuments,” which he claimed served as “the only reliable sources of information” regarding India’s ancient past.\textsuperscript{48} Canning too conceded that it would not be to the credit of “an enlightened ruling power” to allow for archaeological surveys to be conducted by “private persons, imperfectly and without system.”\textsuperscript{49} The necessity for a systematic and scientific study of antiquities therefore did not solely grow out of concerns centered on India’s past, rather the political, intellectual and cultural climate of Britain played just as important a role in determining the frameworks within which India’s past was institutionalized.

Cunningham’s efforts came to ultimate fruition in 1871 with the establishment of a separate Archeological Survey of India with him as the Director General, but as of 1861 he was already appointed the Archeological Surveyor to the Government of India. In the four years that followed (1862-65), Cunningham made extensive tours of Northern India,


\textsuperscript{48}“Memorandum by Colonel A. Cunningham of Engineers, to Lord Canning, Governor General of India, regarding a proposed investigation of the archeological remains of Upper India,” in Alexander Cunningham. \textit{Archeological Survey of India: Four Reports Made During the Years 1862-63-64-65, Report for the Year 1871-72}. Volume I. Simla: Government Central Press, 1871.

\textsuperscript{49}“Minute by the Right Hon’ble the Governor General of India in Council on the Antiquities of Upper India – dated 22\textsuperscript{nd} January 1862.” in \textit{Four Reports Made During the Years 1862-63-64-65, Report for the Year 1871-72 by Alexander Cunningham}. Vol. I. p. ii.
visiting sites of historic importance. While prior interest in archeology were the result of part-time initiatives of dilettantes, surveyors, antiquarians and treasure-hunters, the more well known among them in the context of Bihar being Buchanan Hamilton, who engaged with archeology with varying degrees of success, Cunningham on the contrary provided an institutional basis for the study of Indian archeology and was engaged in it as his only profession and passion. Cunningham’s archaeological explorations beginning in 1861 therefore, marked the inaugural moment of systematic archaeological study in India. Archaeological field-surveys, excavations and explorations were by nature, rooted in a local site, but the historical frameworks within which the discovered relics of the past were placed transcended the local, and narrated a past that was grand as well as “national.” Archaeological field surveys in many cases brought local, rural landscapes often littered with ruins, to the service of a nation by providing it with a naturalized form of history. In this regard, the agenda for archaeological research laid by Cunningham, contributed significantly in transforming localized ruins of rocks, sculptures, monuments, into sites that enshrined the history of an ancient, and more particularly, a national past.

Cunningham’s career and engagement with Indian history is rooted much earlier in the 1830s, when he first came to India as an army engineer in 1831, and continued on to span much of the nineteenth century. His was a career that witnessed “the virtual inception of Indian epigraphic, numismatic and field archeological studies in the 1830s” culminating in the mid-1880s, a time by “when the study of ancient India was an acknowledged academic discipline with its own steams of specialization and the general
Except for any contribution to textual studies, Cunningham was at the forefront of the scholarly fields contributing to the study of ancient India. What he left behind is a textual archive that is indispensible for the history of archeology in the sub-continent. Two factors influenced the orientation of his archaeological research significantly. First, his close training and personal friendship with the great Indological scholar James Prinsep, who introduced him to numismatics, and trained him in the expertise of deciphering ancient Indian script. Secondly, Cunningham’s desire to retrace the steps of Chinese Buddhist pilgrims Fa Xian (Fa Hsien/Fa Hian/Fa-Hien) and Xuan Zang (Hsuan Tsang/Hwan Thsang/Hiuern Tsang) who visited India during the fifth and seventh century respectively. While Prinsep’s methodological approach to ancient Indian past demonstrated the existence of a whole “new investigative domain: the extraction of history from material relics,” the Chinese pilgrims marked out the territorial extent of his archaeological field surveys.

Prinsep, as the Secretary of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta from 1832-38, directed the Society’s scholarly orientation away from textual studies, albeit not entirely, towards epigraphic, numismatic, and archaeological investigations. He demonstrated a particular interest in the study of ancient coins that coincided with his role as the assay-master of the Calcutta mint. Numismatics, and along with it the study of inscriptions, now became

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51 Fa Xian traveled around India between 399-413 C.E while Xuan Zang visited India for more than thirteen years between 629-645 C.E. Fa Xian traveled from the banks of the Upper Indus to the mouth of the Ganges, during the reign of Chandragupta II, and Xuan Zang spent nearly fifteen years in India during the reign of Harshavardhana, studying the famous books and visiting the holy places of Buddhism in India. *Cited in Guha-Thakurta. Monuments, Objects, Histories*. n. 89, p. 313.
one of the primary windows into the study of India’s past. Assessing Prinsep’s contribution and influence to the development of Indian archeology, Cunningham, described the period as “a new era [that] dawned on Indian archeology,” during which “the thick crust of oblivion, which for so many centuries had covered and concealed the characters and language of the earliest Indian inscriptions … was removed at once and for ever by the penetrating sagacity and intuitive perception of James Prinsep.” Cunningham here was referring to Prinsep’s decipherment of ancient Brahmi and Kharoshti scripts in 1834 as the momentous breakthrough in ancient Indian history, which also signaled that artifacts themselves could be read as meticulously as texts. The transition towards artifacts as sources of history, therefore, pointed towards a move away from the myths and fables contained in the textual sources to objects and monuments as the true sources of history.

Similarly, as early as 1848, Cunningham had realized the need for a systematic archaeological investigation in which the elucidation of historical geography on the basis of the Chinese pilgrims’ accounts, which came to be known to Europe in this period, would be an important part. Summing up the territorial scope of his archaeological survey, he wrote, “As Pliny in his *Eastern Geography* follows the route of Alexander, so an inquirer into Indian archeology should tread in the footsteps of the Chinese pilgrims Hwan Thsang and Fa-Hian.” To understand Cunningham’s attitude to field research it is necessary to understand that the significance of Buddhism itself was not understood in

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the early decades of the nineteenth century, and even when Cunningham embarked on his field surveys and set the agenda for archaeological research, much regarding Buddhism still remained to be understood.57 By this I mean that very little was known regarding the extent to which Buddhism flourished in India in the ancient period, and even less so was the knowledge about the sites associated with Buddha and his peregrinations. Owing to Cunningham’s preference in retracing the steps of the Chinese pilgrims, his surveys chart out an ancient Buddhist landscape for India. As much of Buddha’s wanderings centered around what is today Bihar, it is not surprising that much of nineteenth century archaeological surveys concentrated on Bihar. The accounts of the Chinese pilgrims became known to European scholarship in this period through French translations. In 1836 the publication of Foe Koue Kio ou Relation des royaumes Bouddhiques in Paris, generated an excitement among antiquarians in Europe.58 The work brought to light the travelogue of Fa Xian who visited India in early fifth century and became an important source for the study of ancient Indian historical geography. Similarly, Stanislas Julien’s translation of Xuan Zang’s travels (Voyages des Pelerines Bouddhistes) was published in three volumes in Paris during 1857-58, with a geographical discussion by V. de. St. Martin. Still later, the life and travels of Fa Xian with a better translation were made available in Samuel Beal’s Buddhism in China, published in 1884. The interest these travel narratives sparked and its immediate acceptance as a vital source to ancient Indian history, is demonstrated through a detailed paper written by H. H. Wilson in 1839, elucidating the various geographical points in the French translation of Fa-Hian’s work in

58 Singh. The Discovery of Ancient India. p. 36.
1836.\footnote{H. H. Wilson. “Account of the Doe Kue Ki; or Travels of Fa Hian in India, Translated from the Chinese by Remusat,” \textit{Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society}. Vol. 5, 1839. \textit{Cited in Chakrabarti. A History of Indian Archeology}. p. 50.} Though Wilson regretted that the original work was not yet available because it embraced “a still more extensive journey through India,” it was enough to spark off Cunningham’s imagination regarding the scope of archaeological research in India these Chinese travel narratives provided.

Armed with the travelogues of the Chinese pilgrims, a faith in his ability to read monuments and artifacts as texts and a belief that archeology provided a guide to ancient Indian history, Cunningham commenced his surveys beginning in 1861. Surveys of the physical features of the landscape; measurements and layout of the architectural remains; notice of the coins, inscriptions and other artifacts recovered in course of the survey; identification of the sacred places and monuments mentioned in the Chinese accounts form the standard features of Cunningham’s report pointing to the scientificity of his methods. But these surveys are also interspersed with records of local mythological account of places and from another standard feature of the archaeological surveys.\footnote{Chakrabarti. \textit{A History of Indian Archeology}. p. 59.} Cunningham’s survey reports certainly elucidate his faith in monuments and objects as true repositories of history, but despite its primacy in archaeological research, his surveys also provide an unprecedented amount of mythological accounts of places and place-names demonstrating perhaps the interpenetration of history and myths and an acknowledgement of the organic relation that myths and legends have to the crystallization of regional traditions. In 1871, with the beginning of the Archeological Survey of India, Cunningham was given two assistants, J. D. Beglar and A. C. L. Carlyle. For their guidance he provided them with a “memorandum of instructions”
which aside from asking them not to work on areas previously covered by Cunningham also laid out his theoretical ideas of archeology which they were to follow. Archeology, according to Cunningham, should include all ancient remains that “illustrate the manners and customs of former times.” He maintained that owing to their abundance and size, architectural remains “naturally form the most prominent branch of archeology.” The basic points of investigation to be followed by Beglar and Carllyele were laid down in the following order: (1) the place names and their derivation, (2) the traditional and historical account of the foundation of the explored place, (3) a description of its former extent and (4) “principal buildings, whether standing or in ruins” with reference to their material, designs, (5) history, (6) plan, etc.  

**Archaeological Discovery of Ancient Bihar**

From the mid-nineteenth century, the regional landscape of the province of Bihar, its regional centre – Patna, along with Gaya, Rajgir, Nalanda, and the town of Bihar Sharif, to mention some of the more prominent ones, became the subject of extensive archaeological surveys. The physical location of these places on the southern banks of the Ganges, in Magadha, gave this region a historical prominence as the repository of relics of an ancient Indian past. The primary lens through which this past was to be viewed was going to remain tied to the Chinese travel narratives that had served as Cunningham’s primary guide. But the archaeological discovery of ancient places in Magadha also made this region the primary locus around which the history of the province of Bihar was constructed. Magadha now began to be framed within historical narratives of India and the province of Bihar as well, while other parts of the province like Mithila did not figure

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61 Cunningham (1871) Vol. III. Memorandum of Instruction. p. ii.
prominently in the historical narratives of either. Long-standing distinctions between the cultural space of Mithila and Magadha, as discussed above, were subsumed by the creation of a regional history that privileged the ancient history of Magadha as representative of Bihar.

The discovery of ancient Magadha, through colonial archeology, sparked off a deep sense of regional pride among the Bihari literati. For instance, following the creation of Bihar and Orissa as a separate province in 1912, local literati, academics and colonial officials, convened on January 20, 1915 to establish a research society much along the lines of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. In this meeting, which marked the foundation of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, it was also decided to facilitate regional research on history, archeology, and numismatics among others, through the publication of a research journal. A suggestion followed that the proposed journal should perhaps be called the “Magadha Review,” but it was quickly decided that the title would be inappropriate since “the scope of the Society would extend beyond the limits of ancient Magadha.” Ultimately, it was agreed that the most appropriate title would be “Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society.”

This incident, which took place behind closed doors at the Government House in Bankipore (Patna) amongst a highly selective group of people representative of the regional intelligentsia, is indicative of the fascination and pride that the local literati had come to attach with Magadha which for them now served as a signifier of an ancient “golden age” and whose past could now also be representative of a Bihari past. It was such a fascination and attachment with Magadha

that prompted another member of the Research Society and Professor at Patna College, J. N. Samaddar, to write *The Glories of Magadha*, initially delivered as a series of lectures for Patna University, and first published in 1924. The archaeological discovery of Magadha not only highlighted its unique claim to an ancient imperial past, but this place also emerged as the spiritual center of Buddhism and Jainism, and as the center of intellectual activity and learning with the discovery of Nalanda.

Archaeological discovery of places in ancient Magadha marked a transformation in the understanding and writing of history, both of Bihar as well as India and in so doing, the distinct sense of cultural spaces were now subsumed within a grand narrative which claimed to be representative of a regional as well as a national past. Nineteenth century archaeological survey, with its primary focus on Buddhism, produced an ancient Buddhist landscape of Bihar. Cunningham in speaking of ancient Magadha writes, “As Magadha was the scene of Buddha’s early career as a religious reformer, it possesses a greater number of holy places connected with Buddhism than any other province of India.” In cases where references were made regarding Brahmanic traditions, Muslim saints, local traditions, myths and legends relating to place-names, they were duly noted, but were not considered as substantive historical evidence in the narrative that nineteenth century archaeologists were concerned with. Given their sole focus on Buddhism and a concern with India’s Buddhist past, the urge to retrace the steps of the Chinese pilgrims and equate the places described in them with its actual physical manifestations probably overrode all other concerns, making anything having to do with Bihar’s Muslim past a peripheral concern at best. Colonial archaeological explorations, therefore, began with

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the aim of recovering the “national memory” of India that was otherwise shrouded in “the lying gabble of Brahmans, which connected every place with the wanderings of Rama or the exile of the five Pandus, [and] was accepted as the real voice of genuine tradition.”

With the beginning of archaeological explorations and excavations in nineteenth and early twentieth century Bihar, a neat distinction was drawn between what could truly be worthy of history and hence give a truer representation of the place. This therefore initiated a process whereby, localized ways of commemorating a place were not only devoid of any importance, but their ability to invoke a sense of rootedness to a place was also weakened by a desire to look for a past that aided in the common imagination of a larger region or nation. As a result, what unfolded was the framing of local places into narratives of history that transcended localized commemoration of places, and reproduced these places in such terms that they were to now emerge as spaces of commemorating a national past.

Fascination with the Buddhism of ancient India was so strong and pervasive that when A. M. Broadley took charge as the collector of the sub-division of Bihar in 1871, the year the Archeological Survey of India was constituted, he took it upon himself to examine the antiquities of the surrounding country. In spite of Cunningham’s efforts to institutionalize and systematize the study of archeology in colonial India, amateur enthusiasts, like Broadley, thought it worth their while, to devote time to studying the ruins. The enthusiasm personified by Broadley, and the extent of his excavations and explorations that centered on Bihar sub-division, stands in marked contrast with the

64 Cunningham. *Four Reports Made During the Years 1862-63-64-65*. p. xix.
dearth of initiatives taken by native enthusiasts with regards to archeology in Bihar. While Rajendralal Mitra, Babu Poorno Chunder Mukherji, and Rakhaladas Banerjee, to name a few, did contribute to archaeological and epigraphic research, each had some institutional affiliation either with the Archeological Survey of India, or with the Asiatic Society of Bengal which sanctioned and authorized their survey and research work. As archaeological surveys required considerable amount of human and material resources, not to mention the approval of local landlords in order to carry out excavations, native individuals could not make up for their material shortcomings with their enthusiasm. Broadley, on the other hand, as the Collector of a sub-division could envision himself as a colonial scholar-official. Broadley’s enthusiasm must have also found some legitimacy owing to the instructions given to local governments and administrations during the 1860s and 1870s making them responsible for collection and preservation of ancient monuments that fell under their jurisdiction. Most likely this may have facilitated the cooperation of local gentlemen and landlords of Bihar, who provided Broadley with “the most valuable aid in carrying out the excavation…[like] Babu Byjnath Sing, Babu Shivdiyal Sing, Choudhuri Wahid Ali (zemindar of Burgaon [Nalanda]), and Moulvie Abdul Aziz.” Broadley’s writings provide a glimpse of the zeal and excitement that motivated him. His efforts may truly be reflective of his honest appreciation for the place he was put in-charge of, but it should not blind us to the authority of the colonial state on


67 Singh. *The Discovery of Ancient India*. p. 188.

whose behalf he was able to yield considerable power over his subjects, thus enabling him to carry out amateur excavations using at times up to 1,000 workers. The scale of his efforts can be better contextualized, if we note that one of the most lavishly funded archaeological excavations, that of Pataliputra (1913-1917) and sponsored by Ratan Tata, was carried out by D. B. Spooner with the aid of 1,300 workers.

The zeal with which Broadley went about his archaeological explorations around the sub-division of Bihar certainly contributed significantly towards the archaeological knowledge of the area, particularly those of Nalanda, and Rajgir. But the archaeological methods of this amateur enthusiast came under severe criticism from J.D. Beglar, who during a subsequent survey of Nalanda noted the damage done by Broadley. While giving him credit for his zeal and enthusiasm, Beglar noted that the work Broadley undertook should have been conducted under professional assistance, for it was “impossible to make out with any degree of certainty, or even lucidity, the details of the temple which he has excavated and destroyed.” Broadley’s amateur enthusiasm not only destroyed the archaeological sites he surveyed, but the impact of his work was further worsened by his removal of objects, statues, pillars and doorways to Bihar Sharif – forming the core of his collection. Subsequently the collection came to be known as the “Broadley Collection,” and is often referred to as the first archaeological museum in the province of Bihar.

Broadley styled this museum as his personal collection, as it had no connection with any

local government. Upon his departure, he left Babu Bimola Charan Bhattacharjya, who was the Deputy Magistrate of Behar, in charge of his large collection primarily as a way to acknowledge Bhattacharjya’s assistance in building the collection. Broadley was hopeful that owing to his efforts, his random collection of sculptures would become the basis for a “permanent local museum.” The museum, “housed in a handsome serai built by the zemindars of Behar,” did attract considerable attention and became “a sort of place of pilgrimage for the country round.” But the reason why it became an attractive site, at least locally, was not because people were interested in viewing the sculptures as ancient cultural artifacts and admire their aesthetic qualities, rather the objects were viewed as idols worthy of worship. For the rural local masses, it was not a glorious ancient past that was worthy of worship yet. Bourgeois notions of a museum here was displaced by a sacred worldview, and the museum served as a convenient location as it was here that all the sacred deities had converged.

Commenting on the (mis)appropriation of what was supposed to be a secular space, Broadley wrote, “the descendants of Acoka’s brahmans at Rajagriha are beginning to look on it as a serious opposition, and to tremble lest it should cause a diminution in their income.” As far as the artifacts and sculptures in the collection, it was extensive and chiefly representative of medieval Buddhist sculptures, some of which according to Cunningham, “are very fine specimens of Indian sculpture.” And since another collection

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74 Annual General Report of the Patna Division for 1875-76. General Department, General Proceedings. Proceeding Volume, August 1876. File No. 120 1-16.
76 Ibid.
of similar sculptures of “equal extent and value” could not be gathered, he recommended
that the collection be transferred to the Indian Museum.\textsuperscript{77} Hence it was decided that “a
portion of the collection should in the interest of scholars and students be removed to the
Indian Museum” in Calcutta and was done so in 1891 ending a two-decade-long
existence of an archaeological museum in Bihar.\textsuperscript{78} Now the “Broadley Collection” forms
the core of the Pala and pre-Pala sculptures in the Indian Museum.\textsuperscript{79} Yet the transfer of
collection itself to the Indian Museum in Calcutta is significant: it points towards the
growing awareness as well as a desire to create a central museum that would serve as the
repository of ancient India. In doing so, it would not only preserve the ancient Indian
artifacts for posterity from locals, but present it to an urban bourgeois audience in the
form of a visual narrative of a national past.\textsuperscript{80} As such however, the colonial government,
under the aegis of Cunningham, also planted the seed for future claims over these
local/regional artifacts, with the establishment of the Patna Museum in 1917.\textsuperscript{81}

Broadley’s amateur enthusiasm served as a cautionary note for the Archaeological
Survey, where the “laudable zeal of explorers” risked “destroying for ever [artifacts]
which [were] of solid and enduring interest.” As the sub-divisional collector of Bihar,
Broadley’s interest in exploring the area was a result of curiosity that Cunningham’s
archaeological reports may have generated. But his efforts could also be seen as an

\textsuperscript{77} “Disposal of Objects of Archeological Interest.” Memorandum by Major-General A. Cunningham. Home
Department, Archeology Branch, December 1882. Proceedings No. 3-7.
\textsuperscript{78} Annual General Report of the Patna Division 1890-91. General Department, General Proceedings.
Proceeding Volume, October 1891. File No. 4R-8 – Proceedings 1-3.
\textsuperscript{79} Frederick M. Asher. “The Former Broadley Collection, Bihar Sharif,” Artibus Asiae, Vol. 32, No. 2/3,
\textsuperscript{80} Sraman Mukherjee. Unearthing the Pasts of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa: Archaeology, Museums and
Unpublished Dissertation.
\textsuperscript{81} “Opening of the Patna Museum: By His Excellency Sir Hugh Stephenson on 7th March 1929,” JBORS,
indication of his own attempt to understand the contours of Bihar as a place, and its history. As he remarked, “My object has been simply to show the intimate connection of the Magadha of those days, and the Bihar of the present, with the earliest days of the Buddhistic faith. This connection once established and shewn, the extreme interest and importance of the Buddhist remains of this part of the country becomes apparent.”82 The historic connection between an ancient Magadha and contemporary Bihar that Broadley sought to establish is quite significant and is an indication of a gradual process through which the history of ancient Magadha was naturalized as the history of Bihar – a place-name which over time had come to signify a multi-tiered place ranging from town, district to a province.

Broadley was certainly referring to the administrative contours of Bihar when he wrote, “Subah Bihar, for more than a century, has ceased to exist except in name,” and “Zil’ah Bihar has now disappeared from the map of India.” Yet he was acutely aware of the historical significance of the place and the varying degrees to which Bihar as a place-name was employed over time to represent a town, district and even a province.83 Broadley’s observation regarding the non-existence of Bihar, albeit as an administrative unit, on the map of India, is strongly resonant of similar claims made by the native literati who, in the 1870s, were beginning to make claims of “Bihar for Biharis.”84 This is not to suggest that Broadley sympathized with the movement for a separate Bihar, but the coincidence is certainly noteworthy. The archaeological discovery of Bihar, and the emergence of an ancient past must have certainly contributed to a sense of a proud

84 The Murgh-i-Suleman of Monghyr raised in its issue of 7 February, 1876, the demand of “Bihar for Biharis” cited in, Jha. “Political History of Bihar (1859-1912).” pp. 222-223.
common heritage for the natives – thus initiating a process of resorting to the past in order to build a common sense of collective community, sharing similar social and cultural values, which ultimately culminated in a separate province of Bihar. This new common sense of Bihariness that emerged in due course, however, would remain fractured and fissured.

The constitution of Bihar as a separate province in 1912 reflected a recognition of a clearly demarcated space that distinguished it from other provinces, say Bengal to the east and the United Provinces to the west. The establishment of an administrative province, may also appear to be a recognition of Bihar’s organic relation to a past that was being discovered, making Bihar a natural signifier of a distinctive regional space. Given the ancient history of the region, however, Bihar is a relatively new name that over time was appropriated and accepted as representative of a specific territorially bounded space. “The word Bihar,” Broadley writes, “has in turn served to designate several artificial divisions of this part of India. The name originally belonged to the ancient city, which from its far-famed seat of Buddhistic learning was distinguished by the name ‘Bihar’.”

The place-name “Bihar” was first used by the Muslims as they “were struck by the large number of Buddhist monasteries (viharas) in the area, especially in the vicinity of Odantpuri, the modern Biharsharif, to which the name was particularly applied as the ancient Muhammadan capital founded by Bakhtyar Khilji,” who conquered the region in the twelfth century. Bihar, the capital founded by Khilji, overtime emerged as a distinctive administrative space. During the reign of Akbar, “Bihar” came to signify the portion of eastern India comprising of the seven sirkars of “Munger, Champaran, Hajipur,

86 Diwakar. Bihar Through the Ages, p. 51.
Saran, Tirhut, Rohtas, and Bihar,” making up Subah Bihar. Under British rule, Subah Bihar and Subah Bengal were united to form a single administrative unit. Yet, territorial distinctions based on administrative arrangement can provide little coherence to the articulation of a distinct sense of community that was beginning to take shape during the late-nineteenth century, as indicated by the movement for a separate province of Bihar. What really provided coherence to this movement was the emergence of a distinct Bihari identity that was able to use its newly discovered past as a marker of difference. As a result, history became a prominent marker of difference and was used as a reason to justify the creation of a separate province of Bihar.

In a pamphlet written in 1906 arguing for the separation of Bihar, Mahesh Narayan and Sachchidananda Sinha, the two prominent champions for a separate province, therefore resorted to the newly discovered past of Bihar to make a case for the creation of a separate province. They pointed out that while very little was known about Bengal “until the rise of the Pal dynasty’, i.e. during the 9th century,” Bihar by comparison could lay claim to “hoary historic traditions… running far back into a dim distant past which takes us to the days of Gautama Buddha and Asoka.” Quoting the prominent historian Romesh Chandra Dutt, who wrote that “when the nations of epic age declined in power, the Magadhas of South Behar took the lead, and were for centuries the most powerful and the most enlightened nation in India”, they pointed to Bihar as the cultural center of ancient India. Alluding to the educational and professional dominance of Bengalis in Bihar, they remarked that “for two thousand years Bengal received its

culture and knowledge from her western sister,” Bihar.\(^8\) Clearly, over the span of a few decades, history had emerged as a vital tool to articulate a distinct sense of community that commanded pride, prestige and an identity that could claim a common heritage in a glorious past. Prior to the beginning of archaeological research, very little could be said regarding this ancient Indian past that was now being embraced by the Bihari literati so strongly.

During the nineteenth-century, the discovery of Ashokan inscriptions written in the Brahmi script, which could now be deciphered thanks to Prinsep’s efforts, together with Buddhist stories of Ashoka preserved in the Pali Chronicles of Sri Lanka, Megasthenes’ account and the travel narratives of Fa Xian and Xuan Zang, “threw a flood of light on an empire and a period that was obscure and created a rush of excitement about a hitherto little-known India in which Buddhism was prominent and India was politically unified by a very able line of rulers.”\(^8\) Even though the Puranas\(^9\) make references to the Mauryas, they have little to say about them beyond that they are “mostly Shudras and unrighteous.”\(^9\) Moreover, the famous text of the “learned and devious” minister of Chandragupta Maurya, Kautilya’s Arthashastra, a work on statecraft and often used as a reference to understand the Mauryan period was not discovered until 1905 when R. Shamasstry, the chief librarian of the Mysore Government Oriental

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88 Mahesh Narayan and Sachchidananda Sinha. The Partition of Bengal or the Separation of Behar? p. 47.  
90 Puranas generally refers to literature that contain “accounts of kings, sages, and others of ancient times.” Kumkum Chatterjee. The Cultures of History in Early Modern India. p. 8.  
Library, began publishing in installments an English translation of the text.\textsuperscript{92} Hence, aided primarily by the foreign accounts of ancient India, archaeological research began to discover places that were now to serve as visual signposts of ancient Indian history and in the process transformed local places, into sites commemorating a regional and national past.

**Emergence of Bihar: Transforming Local to the Regional in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and Early 20\textsuperscript{th} Centuries**

Archeology, and along with it history, provided a vital tool that made possible an imagination of a regional space that could be called Bihar. The discovery and identification of ancient sites brought local places within the fold of a historical narrative that privileged Magadha as the signifier of an ancient Indian past. The mapping of local places as signposts of the region’s Buddhist, Mauryan or Gupta past subsumed local places into a historical narrative where these places were now to provide material and visual evidence of a past that transcended the local. This was why in the public felicitation to Hardinge, upon his visit to Patna, *The Bihar Herald* could proudly point out that, “It is near about Patna that the gates of Nalanda were thrown open to admit people into the mysteries of theology and philosophy – Nalanda, a university which could satisfy the intellectual appetite of ten thousand students at the same time…. It was near about here that the famous Council of the Buddhist monks was held as far back as the fourth century before the Christian era…. Thus she [Patna] did not play an insignificant part in the history of India.”\textsuperscript{93} The seamless and simultaneous references to Patna, Nalanda, Buddhism, and India points to the manner and the extent to which the local literati had


\textsuperscript{93} “Our Welcome to the Viceroy,” *The Behar Herald*. Patna: November 29, 1913.
naturalized their historical imagination of Bihar’s ancient past. And yet, before the beginning of archaeological surveys in 1860/70, the actual site of Nalanda remained unidentified, and material evidence that could verify that Patna was actually Pataliputra, the ancient Mauryan capital, was lacking. Colonial archeology certainly facilitated this newly emerging historical narrative of Bihar, but this does not point to an absence of indigenous form of commemorating places and the past prior to the nineteenth-century fascination with a rational-positivist history, as has been discussed above. Instead, with the emergence of a historical narrative with the region as its primary focus, there was little space left for local memories of places and the cultural contours within which specific locales were commemorated.

Colonial archeology’s fascination was with the originary moment of any given place or monument – and yet what they encountered were “ruin[s] in the present, structure[s] transformed and decayed in time.”94 For the archeologists, the manner in which the locals made sense of the ruins was marginal to their concern, and they were quick to refer to the local traditions as instances of the misappropriation of ancient monuments, which, in their sense, could only be credited with its originary past and not with the living traditions. For instance, Cunningham found that the lion pillar at Lauriya Nandangarh, was “ascribed to Raja Bhim Mari, one of the five Pandava brothers,” and was nothing remarkable since it was to him that “most of the pillars in India are now ascribed.” But he was disappointed that he “could not learn anything regarding the title of Mari.”95 Or another monument, in Kesariya, was known to the locals as “Raja Ben ka Deora.” But to his disappointment, Cunningham was not able to find any reference to

95 Cunningham. Four Reports Made During the Years 1862-63-64-65. Volume I.1871. p. 74.
Raja Ben except that “he was one of the five Supreme Emperors of India, and he is, therefore, called Raja Ben Chakravartti … whom the Rishis are said to have inaugurated as ‘Monarch of the Earth,’ but whom they afterwards slew, because he would not allow them to worship Vishnu.” Cunningham notes that Xuan Zang also mentions a similar tradition when referring to Kesariya – perhaps an indication of the persistence of a tradition that for the archaeologists had little credibility. Washed off of all accretions of time, these places could now emerge as signifiers of a particular historical past and in the process become part of the historical narrative of both Bihar as well as India. As Cunningham, Beglar and Broadley made the territorial extent of the ruins of ancient Magadha visible, often times they encountered relics of the past that were already incorporated within a local cultural milieu, either as religious monuments or through mythological accounts. The reports of Cunningham and Beglar are replete with instances of such encounters with local traditions and (mis)appropriations of the past. Not surprising for a place where, “There is scarce a mile in the whole tract of country which does not present to the traveler some object of deep interest.”

Prominent among these ruins were the mounds and figures which marked the site of Nalanda, described as the “the greatest of great Buddhistic viharas.” But the emergence of Nalanda, as “the gorgeous Queen of Buddhistic convents,” highlights the process through which archeology produced a historic site and in so doing transformed a local place into a site of regional/national significance. The process itself was facilitated

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96 Cunningham. *Four Reports Made During the Years 1862-63-64-65. Volume I.* 1871. p. 66.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid. p. 211.
by archeology’s quest for a “lost authentic past”\textsuperscript{100} which in turn also implied a truer understanding of history. Buchanan Hamilton, in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century, was the first to make references to the ruins of Nalanda which lay scattered around the village of Bargaon, but the historical significance of the place eluded him nor did he identify the site as an ancient monastery. Hamilton tells us that, “South from the village of Baragang is an immense mass of ruins, through which may be traced the foundations of many brick walls and buildings, among which arise several conical mounds, that seem to have been temples.”\textsuperscript{101} The extent of the ruins he saw were such that, even though Bargaon had been the brick quarry of the region for several centuries, when Cunningham visited the place in the 1860s he still encountered “finer and more numerous specimens of sculpture than any other place that I have visited.”\textsuperscript{102}

Given the extent of the ruins, Buchanan was convinced that the place was the site of an ancient palace, as he was “informed by a Jain priest at Bihar that it was the residence of Raja Srenika and his ancestors.”\textsuperscript{103} Local brahmin priests however identified the ruins as that of “Kundilpur, a city famed as the birth-place of Rukmini, one of the wives of Krishna,” thus plotting the place as part of a Hindu mythological landscape. Cunningham also noticed that one of the finest and largest pieces of sculpture, which he described as “a figure of the ascetic Buddha, seated under the Bodhi tree at Buddha-Gaya, and surrounded by horrible demons and alluring females,” was worshipped as Rukmini “by the ignorant villagers, who daily smear[ed] its forehead and nose with red glue.”\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{100} Guha-Thakurta. *Monuments, Objects, Histories*. p. 4.
\textsuperscript{101} Buchanan Hamilton, cited in Chakrabarti. *A History of Indian Archeology*. p. 28.
\textsuperscript{102} Cunningham. *Four Reports Made During the Years 1862-63-64-65*. Volume I.1871. p. 28.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
lead, and pour[ed] milk over the mouth.” Cunningham’s “true” identification of the image and native misappropriation of it can aptly be described as the collision of two opposing visions, as has been pointed out by Richard Davis. For the local villagers, their object of worship presented itself as a living image that was incorporated into a pantheon of gods and goddess through ritual practice. But Cunningham viewed this image without the accretions of time and saw it as an excellent specimen of sculpture.

Beglar similarly points to several instances of native misappropriation of ancient images. For instance, in the vicinity of the Barabar hills he encounters a native legend ascribing the rocky terrain that make up the Barabar hills as representations of petrified sentries of Banasura – a mythical demon, who were cursed to convert to stone, only to be restored to life later. In the vicinity of Bargaon, in the village of Kespa, he found two life-size standing statues of Buddha, which to him resembled the general appearance of the statue being worshipped as Tara Devi in a nearby temple. Beglar, being an Armenian, was not allowed entry into the temple to personally inspect the statue. So he directed his Hindu servant to examine the statue instead. The servant, upon entering the temple, noticed the Buddhist inscription “Ye Dharma.” As similar inscription also marked the two Buddhist statues outside, and the servant “satisfied in his own mind that the statue was not an object of orthodox worship, he ventured to peep in behind the sari, and discovered the statue to be a male and not a female one!” Upon this discovery, Beglar writes that the ministering Brahmins became “as abjectly submissive as they had before been defiant,” even consenting to let Beglar enter the temple to personally inspect the image. Beglar

104 Ibid. p. 29.
107 Ibid. p. 53. For Beglar refer to, Singh. The Discovery of Ancient India. p. 135.
however, satisfied to point to another instance of native misappropriation of artifacts declined.\textsuperscript{108} As these images were part of a living tradition, enshrined as goddesses in temples, their removal from the site to the institutionalized space of a museum was not possible. Many images and artifacts however, largely for their aesthetic qualities as well as historical significance, were removed by Broadley to form his core collection.

Such collisions of two opposing views, as Richard Davis points out with regard to Indian images, related generally to assessment “in terms of the skill and success of its anonymous sculptor in realizing ‘correct and convincing modelling’” through which colonial archeologists sought to locate the images within a “historical sequence of Indian sculptures.” Hence while the Indian villagers accented the “cult value” of the images, for the British officials it was the “exhibition value” of the image that mattered.\textsuperscript{109} Concerns over the originary moment of images and their historicity certainly contributed to shaping the canon of Indian art. But the emergence and privileging of such a discourse also worked to erase local traditional imaginings of place over which these images often presided as guardian deities. Local places, therefore, were now washed off of all accretions of time to emerge as signifier of a particular historical landscape. For example, Cunningham’s “discovery” of Nalanda could point to one such instance. As mentioned earlier, Cunningham was drawn to archeology partly through his skepticism towards the historical validity of Hindu mythology. And yet, in order to point out the misappropriation of Nalanda as the birthplace of Rukmini, he drew upon mythological accounts as reliable historical evidence. Perhaps demonstrating the indispensability of myths as vital sources for ancient Indian geography, he claimed that since “Rukmini was

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the daughter of Raja Bhishma, of Vidarbha, or Berar, it seems probable that the Brahmans have mistaken Berar for Bihar, which is only seven miles distant from Baragaon. I therefore doubt the truth of this Brahmanical tradition.” Cunningham’s resorting to myths in order to prove native misappropriation perhaps is an indication that in spite of its claims to “rationality,” colonial archeology was not entirely “rational” after all. Mythological references in themselves were not enough for Nalanda to emerge from the obscurity. By comparing the bearings of Nalanda provided in the accounts of Fa Xian and Xuan Zang, Cunningham noticed that it corresponded exactly with the location of the modern village of Bargaon. The discovery of two inscriptions on the spot, referring to the place itself as Nalanda provided further corroborating evidence. Hence, he was able to claim that “beyond all doubt … the remains at Baragaon are the ruins of Nalanda, the most famous seat of Buddhist learning in all India.” Cunningham’s “discovery” of Nalanda transformed this local landscape from a place of local mythological and religious commemoration to a signifier of a cultural epicenter of an ancient Indian past. Though Nalanda was identified, in the early 1861-62, major excavation work did not begin until 1915-16, by D. B. Spooner. At a time of war, with the colonial government strapped for funds, it was the Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland that funded Spooner’s excavations. Cunningham’s discovery and Spooner’s subsequent excavation of Nalanda not only placed it within an “age of artistic culture and skill,” but it also became

110 Cunningham. *Four Reports Made During the Years 1862-63-64-65*. p. 28.
111 Ibid.
a marker of India’s civilizational progress for it was Nalanda, as Samaddar claimed, that set the standard of culture and education for India.\textsuperscript{113}

For colonial archeologists, the quest for the discovery of ancient Pataliputra, capital of the Mauryan Empire, would prove most elusive. Major Rennell, as early as 1783, located Pataliputra in a general way near Patna and in 1808 Buchanan Hamilton recorded that many old residents of Patna held that the ancient name of the place was Pataliputra.\textsuperscript{114} L.A. Waddell writes that Hamilton “ascertained that the local priests of the place retained the oral tradition that the ancient name of the place was ‘Pataliputra,’” they however, failed to give any “material proof” of this.\textsuperscript{115} Even though the ties between Patna and Pataliputra were theoretically established, the lack of any material evidence, continued to make this assertion a matter of conjecture. As Pataliputra did not have anything to show for itself by way of material evidence, Henry Beveridge, who was the District Judge of Patna in the 1870s, remarked, “If Hindu legends are to be trusted, Patna has for many centuries been only the husk of what it once was. The ancient greatness of Patna, or of Pataliputra as it used to be called, is a favourite theme with Hindus.”\textsuperscript{116} While Hindu legends could not be trusted, the vivid description of ancient Pataliputra that were available through Chinese and Greek accounts certainly provoked significant amount of interest. Ancient Pataliputra with its royal palace and halls in the midst of the city, had filled Fa Hian with such wonder and amazement that he believed they “were all made of spirits which he [Asoka] employed, and which piled up the stones, reared the

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid. p. 3.
walls and gates, and executed the elegant carving and inlaid sculpture-work, in the way which no human hands of this world would accomplish.”

Similarly, Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to the court of Chandra Gupta described Pataliputra as “the greatest city in India”. Such descriptions of Pataliputra contributed to a sense of excitement and urgency to reveal this majestic past attracting considerable interest among archeologists. Such lofty descriptions were positioned against the contemporary images of Patna, where the town was not even a shadow of its former self. “Whatever may have been the ancient greatness of Patna,” Beveridge states, “it is certain that no remains of it are now visible. Nothing can well be meaner, or less interesting, than the general appearance of the town. It is simply a collection of mud huts, separated by narrow and often very dirty lanes. There are hardly any public buildings of interest or importance, and such as there are, are hidden away in corners.”

The degenerated state of nineteenth century Patna only strengthened the belief that an ancient glorious past remained lost and buried.

The quest for Pataliputra was to begin in earnest with Beglar during the 1872-73 season. Beglar’s major contribution to the discourse regarding Pataliputra was a detailed discussion of the changes in the river-courses and the identification of a few localities mentioned by Xuan-Zang. It was Beglar’s discussion of the changing river-courses that also led to strengthening the discourse of a “lost” Pataliputra. He argued that “as Pataliputra occupied the south banks of the Ganges before the change of the course of the Son, all or almost all traces of the ancient city must long since have been swept away by

118 McCrindle, Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian. pp. 68-69.
the Ganges.”120 Hence he claimed that modern Patna could not have stood on the site of old Pataliputra as this old city “occupied what is now the bed of the Ganges.”121 Unable to “discover a single relic, or any traces of the great edifices,” Beglar purported the theory that ancient Pataliputra was swallowed by the Ganges thus accounting for its complete disappearance.122 The primacy of relics, as windows to ancient India, and the failure to find any, submerged Pataliputra into the Ganges making it permanently irrecoverable. The fact that “Muhammadan historians,” who followed in the wake of Bakhtiar Khilji’s invasion of Bengal in the 12th century, maintain absolute silence regarding Pataliputra and “its immense fort, public buildings, &c.” further corroborated his hypothesis that Pataliputra was permanently lost to the Ganges.123

In less than two decades following Beglar’s assertion, L.A. Waddell, during the course of a “hurried visit to Patna,” in 1892 claimed to have enough evidence to challenge Beglar’s assertion.124 In Waddell’s account, it is not the Ganges that is blamed for the total disappearance of any material evidence of Pataliputra. Instead, as is typical of colonial discourse, he used the well-established trope of Muslim iconoclasm. It was “the extinction of Buddhism in India by the Muhammadan invasion in the twelfth century,” he claimed, which led to the “very site and name of the city” to be “forgotten,” hence leaving the location of the site entirely to conjectures.125 Upon exploring the region, using the travel itineraries of the Chinese pilgrims, he was surprised to find that, “not only was the ancient site practically unencroached on by the Ganges, but that most

121 Ibid. p. 24.
122 Ibid. p. 27.
123 Ibid. p. 24.
125 Ibid. pp. 9-10.
of the leading landmarks of Asoka’s palaces, monasteries and other monuments remained
so very obvious that I was able in the short space of one day to identify many of them
beyond all doubt.” He prepared a plan showing the location of monuments according
to the Chinese accounts. In some cases the identification was very precise. Waddell
was also able to deduce that the Kumrahar area contained the old palace. He submitted
his observations to the Government of Bengal so that excavations could begin in 1894.
The colonial government in 1895 entrusted Waddell with the work of directing and
supervising the excavations at Pataliputra and in 1896 exploratory trenches were taken at
Kumrahar, Bulandibag, Bahadurpur and Rampur.

The final discovery of Pataliputra, happened in 1912-13 when D. B. Spooner
under took “Mr. Ratan Tata’s excavations at Pataliputra.” The 1912-13 excavations
were made possible by the patronage of Ratan Tata, a Parsi millionaire of Bombay. As
Spooner puts it, “Mr. Ratan Tata of Bombay proposed to undertake …the through
exploration of one of the more extensive and important buried sites of India, and
announced his willingness to devote a sum of Rs. 20,000 a year, for an unspecified
number of years, to this purpose.” The maximum number of laborers employed at the
excavation site at any given time was about thirteen hundred, therefore making the
excavation project one of the most extensive till date. Spooner concentrated on two sites
in particular, Kumrahar and Bulandibagh. At the Kumrahar site, Spooner was able to find
the ruined walls of the late Gupta age (c. seventh century C.E.) below which was a thick

126 Ibid. p.11.
127 Ibid. pp. 28-29.
130 Chakrabarti. A History of Indian Archeology. p.149; Mukherjee “New Province, Old Capital: Making
Patna Pataliputra.”
deposit of charcoal about a foot deep. And amidst these charcoal deposits, lay traces of the bases of eighty monolithic pillars, each arranged in rows of ten – the stone fragments of these pillars bore the Mauryan polish. Given this evidence, Spooner was able to claim that he had been able to discover the “first structural building of the Mauryan period to be located in India,” and hence prove that Pataliputra had indeed not entirely been submerged, but existed in the suburbs of Patna.

But native interest in the excavations did not wait until this visual evidence was unearthed and the link between Patna, Pataliputra and the Mauryan period was made conclusive through solid evidence. Very early on, as Waddell’s first archaeological excavations were underway, these digs in the suburbs of Patna became akin to pilgrimage sites for many of the local English educated middle-class. As if on a pilgrimage, on a February morning in 1897, some twenty friends accompanied by their “dear and respected Professor Baboo Debendra Nath Sen M.A.” set out on foot to “visit the new excavations at Kumhrar, a village some three miles from Bankipore.” This early morning excursion to the ruins, disclosed to them relics of an ancient time, which they looked upon “with an eye of reverence.” Upon witnessing a past that was now becoming visible, the author of this report in a local English newspaper claimed, “The holiday excursion taught [them] a good object lesson.” He hoped that some day those ruins may “turn out to be the remnants of ancient Pataliputra and teach us even in their decay how great we were and how great we could be. A great past may be an earnest of a great future.”

131 From a Correspondent, “The Patna City Excavations,” Behar Times, March 19, 1897.
degenerative nature of Indian society, while for others this very past held out the promise of a future glory.

The ancient past that archeology sought to discover through its quest for an originary moment of a place proved most challenging in the case of Bodh Gaya. Particularly because from a very early period the Bodh Gaya temple site was not a locally bounded cult center – unlike the temples of Tara Devi and Rukmini discussed above. Instead the temple site served as “a centre of very great magnetic power which drew in patrons and worshippers from throughout the Buddhist world.”\textsuperscript{132} To be sure, as the site of Buddha’s enlightenment, Bodh Gaya certainly became the cradle of Buddhism. Following the decline of Buddhism in India during the eleventh/twelfth century, the temple fell into the hands of Saiva ascetics and was allowed to fall into ruins.\textsuperscript{133} But this did not lead to a destruction of symbols of Buddhism, rather they were assimilated within the fold of Hinduism, pointing to a “genetic, historical relationship” between the two religions – perhaps best indicated by the absorption of Buddha as Vishnu’s ninth avatar.\textsuperscript{134} The temple site, therefore, became a place where commemoration practices of two world religions intersected. For instance, while Buddhists worshipped the Bodhi-tree as the actual spot where Buddha attained enlightenment, Hindu’s visited the spot to make \textit{pinda} (rice-ball) offerings to their ancestors. But this was a later tradition, as Hara Prasad Shastri points out, the \textit{Desavaliviriti} does not make such a reference when mentioning the Bodhi tree. Instead based on his reading of the text,

Shastri says that “the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya used to be embraced by all pilgrims. Probably there was no Sraddha under the tree as prescribed in Taranatha Tarkavachaspati’s Gaya-Paddhati.”¹³⁵ Given Shastri’s role in the Bodh Gaya controversy, which is discussed below, it was important for him to point this out in order to provide another evidence supporting his view that Bodh Gaya was primarily a Buddhist pilgrim site.

Hence, when colonial archaeologists entered the scene, they were not encountering a “lost” site. Instead what they encountered was more perplexing. For at Bodh Gaya they were faced with a complex religious milieu where a Buddhist site had been appropriated within the fold of Hindu religion. In itself, this was not a problem for Buddhist worshippers, nor was it an exceptional instance of syncretic religious practice in the sub-continent.¹³⁶ The proprietorship of the Saivite Mahant over the Mahabodhi temple was acknowledged both by the colonial authorities and the Burmese mission, who came to Bodh Gaya in 1877 to restore the temple and sought permission and approval of the Mahant, through the colonial government of course, before commencing their work on the site.¹³⁷ The zealous restoration work carried out by the Burmese mission produced no friction between the Hindu mahants and the Burmese Buddhists. But it triggered great alarm among archeologists who saw in the restoration work a permanent destruction of “primary evidence.” The temple therefore became a signifier of two contrary views; while it made natural sense to the Burmese mission to restore the temple of such vital

¹³⁷ Singh. The Discovery of Ancient India. p. 220.
importance to the Buddhists who viewed their actions as an act of piety and devotion, to
the archeologists the temple emerged as a historic monument requiring preservation but not without proper knowledge of history, archeology and architecture. As the prominent Indian archeologist, Rajendralal Mitra wrote, “The Burmese gentlemen were doubtless very pious and enthusiastic in the cause of their religion, but they were working on no systematic or traditional plan. They were ignorant of the true history of their faith, and perfectly innocent of all the knowledge of architecture and the requirements of archeology and history: and the mischief they have done by their misdirected zeal has been serious.”

“True” knowledge of Buddhism became the sole right of the archaeologist, who were not only knowledgeable and skilled in the methodologies of “scientific” preservation, but were also more concerned with recovering the original structure through a recourse to the apparently omniscient Chinese travel narratives. Claims over the Bodh Gaya temple site as a historic monument, however, remained tenuous. In reference to the Mahant’s claim over the temple site, Mitra wrote, “It is impossible to suppose that an ancient building, belonging to a sect which has long disappeared from this country, can have been given away as an appurtenance to a village.” Instead, he went on to state, that “All such monuments belong to Government, and Government has every right to see to their preservation.”

In spite of Mitra’s attempt to portray the temple site as a historic monument, rather than a site of an “active cult,” the Mahabodhi temple did not become a site of controversy because of this. Instead, archeology’s quest for the originary moment of monuments triggered a dispute between a newly formed Mahabodhi Society (1891) under the leadership of Anagarika Dharmapala,

a Sinhalese Buddhist monk, backed by European Orientalists, determined to restore the holiest of Buddhist temple back to Buddhism by wresting it from the Saivite Mahant, descendant of a long lineage whose presence could be traced back to the year around 1590.\footnote{Ibid. p. 638.} The long-drawn battle over custody of the temple ended in 1949 post-Independent India through the passage of the Mahabodhi Temple Act by the Bihar Legislature, making Buddhists the rightful custodians of the temple.\footnote{Ibid. p. 654.}

The debate over transfer of custodianship to the Buddhists was not limited to the Mahant, the Mahabodhi Society and the colonial government. Instead, it sparked off a heated discussion within Bihari society as well, with local newspapers publishing articles arguing for the maintenance of the Mahant’s custodianship over the temple. Given the scale of controversy, the colonial government in 1902-03 set up the Bodh Gaya Commission, which could offer a “respectable and impartial Hindu scholarly opinion to back its case for the transference of the temple custody from the mahant.”\footnote{Guha-Thakurta. Monuments, Objects, Histories. p. 296.} The government found an ideal figure in Pandit Haraprasad Shastri, Principle of the Sanskrit College, Calcutta, who was not only a strict and orthodox Hindu, but also a “good Archaeologist and scholar” of Buddhism as well, having authored a book *Discovery of Living Buddhism in Bengal*. Shastri’s unstinting recommendation to transfer the temple to the Buddhist, while echoing government sentiment in the matter, did not rest well among the native literati, let alone the Mahant. Rather than going into the a discussion on how the controversy over the contested claims played out, I would like to point to the Bodh
Gaya case as an interesting instance of contrary and conflicting appropriation of the past by the Bihari literati.

On the one hand, the native literati proudly embraced Nalanda as the cultural core of an ancient India and proclaimed Bihar as the birthplace of Buddhism with equal gusto, while on the other, they offered stiff resistance with regards to transferring custodianship of the very temple site where, it is believed, the Buddha attained enlightenment. The contradiction probably points to the distinctions between what the natives viewed as a historical vis-à-vis a religious site. In spite of colonial archeology’s effort to initially frame Bodh Gaya as a historic site, the very fact that the most heated dispute over the site, was framed in terms of two distinct religions’ contested claims points to the limited significance that the site had in terms of its historical importance. Therefore, when Haraprasad Shastri, along with Justice Saroda Charan Mitra and the former magistrate of Gaya, C.A. Oldham, visited Bodh Gaya on March 23, 1903 as part of the Commission, the native press characterized the visit as “an important political mission,” which had come “to take away the celebrated Mahabodhi temple and the sacred Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya, which have been, as alleged, in the possession of a Hindu Math for centuries past, and make them over to the Buddhists of the place.”143 Another correspondent from Gaya pointed out, “there has not been a single instance of friction between Buddhists and Hindu pilgrims up to date,”144 perhaps hinting that the Hindu-Buddhist tension “functioned almost purely as a strategic device for government.”145 In terms of sheer numbers, the correspondent wrote that while “Hindu pilgrims visiting Bodhgaya exceeds a lac

143 “Bodh Gaya” The Behar Herald. Patna: April 4, 1903.
144 The Behar Herald. Patna: April 11, 1903.
[100,000] a year, the total number of Buddhists of various sects hardly exceeds a hundred.” While the numbers may have been exaggerated, it is still safe to assume that the number of Hindus visiting Bodh Gaya far exceeded that of the Buddhists. As the Calcutta based Englishman pointed to the significance of Bodh Gaya by citing the Hindu proverb, “Mata Pita ko taranake jo Gaya na gaya, so kahin na gaya,” which it translated as “Gaya alone is the place where one can procure salvation for one’s parents.”

Perhaps, the Englishman was very familiar with the difference between Gaya and Bodh Gaya – but aside from the veracity of its claim, it provides a clue as to the paper’s own inclination in the matter. Bodh Gaya, therefore, did not emerge out of an obscure past through the intervention of colonial archeology. And because it was already inscribed as part of Bihar’s religious landscape – any colonial intervention, the local literati claimed, was a departure from the colonial policy of “non-interference with the religion of any class of subjects.”

Conclusion:

By the end of the nineteenth-century, a new sense of Bihar’s ancient past had emerged largely through archaeological research. Knowledge of Bihar’s regional past had certainly come a long way since 1880 when Babu Ramdin Singh composed his Bihar Darpan – a biographic compilation of twenty-four representative Biharis, with the aim of providing a social and cultural history of Bihar which sought to inspire a sense of Bihariness. Within a span of two decades, the understanding of Bihari history had undergone such radical changes that Bihar could now lay claim to being the nucleus of

146 The Behar Herald. Patna: April 11, 1903.
147 The Behar Herald. Patna: May 23, 1903.
ancient Indian history. It was precisely this new awareness of an ancient Bihari past that inspired J.N. Samaddar to write *The Glories of Magadha* in 1924, a work that as the title suggests looks into glories of ancient Magadha and in doing so attempts to inspire pride and attachment to the region. Moreover, as new archaeological excavations were conducted, and nuggets of new information were made available, it immediately found its way into the native press, most importantly the *Behar Herald* and the *Bihar Times*. Hence we see the native press, publishing articles titled, “A Bit of Ancient History of Patna,” pointing out that “Patna has been identified with Pataliputra” and then going on to provide an ancient account of the city as described in the Greek and Chinese sources.\(^\text{149}\)

Similarly, a series of essay authored by a “M.G.” titled “History of Pataliputra,” was published in the *Behar Herald* in 1914, with the first essay dedicated to history of Magadha in the Vedic period, and subsequent essays continuing on to provide a discussion of the rise of Buddhism, the transfer of capital of Magadha from Rajgir to Pataliputra.\(^\text{150}\) Similarly other essays focusing on the activities of the archaeological surveyors, under titles such as “Notes: Ancient Monuments Visited – The Archeological Surveyor”\(^\text{151}\) “The Archeological Wealth of Patna”,\(^\text{152}\) found its way into the Bihari print culture. Clearly, there was a strong and demonstrated interest in this “new” past of Bihar that was emerging and the native literati, though most could not actively contribute to this knowledge creation process, became active “consumers” of it. Perhaps, in order to overcome the circumscribed role of the native literati and to acknowledge their demonstrated interest in a rational-positivist history, soon after Bihar’s emergence as a

\(^{149}\) *The Behar Herald*. Patna: November 15, 1899.

\(^{150}\) *The Behar Herald*. Patna: January 17, 1914; *The Behar Herald*. Patna: January 24, 1914

\(^{151}\) *The Behar Herald*. Patna: January 31, 1903.

\(^{152}\) *The Behar Herald*. Patna: April 11, 1914; *The Behar Herald*. Patna: April 18, 1914.
separate province, we see the establishment of a regional research society and a regional museum in Patna – both aiming to provide an institutionalized basis of understanding the past.
Chapter 4: 
Territorial Self-Fashioning and the Past: Institutions, Artifacts and History-Writing

In 1912 The Hindustan Review published an essay discussing the formation of the Mauryan Empire, detailing its style of governance, its territorial extent and with glowing descriptions of the ancient city of Pataliputra. This fascination with the ancient past was neither exceptional nor unique – rather native literati had become avid “consumers” of their historical past and this essay in the Hindustan Review should have appeared as just another manifestation of such interest in history. Yet what was striking about the essay are claims such as: “A year after Alexander’s death, the Punjab revolted under the leadership of the great Beharee conqueror, Chandragupta and defeated the Macedonian garrisons.” In the same vein it continued, “This great leader of Indian nationalism next turned his attention to the kingdom of Magadha, and seated himself on the throne of Pataliputra.”1 Perhaps further betraying the sentiments of its editor Sachchidananda Sinha, the essay was titled “Asoka, the Great: The Beharee Emperor.”2 As Sinha is largely credited for having heralded the movement for the separation of Bihar, his attribution of “Bihariness” to the Mauryan Emperors and positing them as leaders of “Indian nationalism” can easily be brushed aside as doing wrong history or seen as an obvious product of regional pride. But this essay, which is an adoption “from an article in the Buddhist Review, based upon Mr. Vincent Smith’s Asoka”, was clearly not an exercise in historical research. Rather, by identifying Chandragupta and Asoka as Biharis and by claiming Asoka’s “greatness and superiority to the rulers of Modern Europe,”3

2 Ibid. p. 534. (Emphasis Added)
3 Ibid. p. 540.
this essay points to the instrumentality of the past and is indicative of some of the concerns, anxieties and even hidden agendas towards which history was used by a colonized native literati at a time of heightened regional and national consciousness in early twentieth century India. The ancient past therefore became a source of solace for the native literati whose concerns and engagement with it were influenced by their prevailing colonial subject-hood paralleled by an emergence of nationalist and regional sentiments.

It is not surprising therefore that in the wake of the separation of Bihar and Orissa from Bengal in 1912, the newly created province and particularly the regional capital Patna, witnessed a wide range of activities geared towards the creation of institutions suitable for the new province, for instance the establishment of a separate High Court and a University at Patna. More importantly, however, with the antiquity of Patna, Magadha and Bihar duly established through the efforts of archaeological exploration there was an urgent need among the local literati for an institute that could serve the purposes of a research society, much like the Asiatic Society of Bengal – a need that also saw a parallel demand for a provincial museum which could serve as the rightful repository for local artifacts and antiquities. Both the Bihar and Orissa Research Society and the Patna Museum became crucial in the new political-cultural configuration of the region as they both marked out the possibilities for new scholarly forums and provided extensive agendas for archaeological and epigraphical research, paralleled with the intention of collecting and preserving the regional relics in the provincial museum. Reflecting this very sentiment, *The Behar Herald*, wrote “Museums and art galleries, universities and scientific societies, botanical and zoological gardens are means of intellectual grace. A
country, which aspires to rise in the scale of nations and to contribute its humble quota to the sum total of human knowledge, must have the aforementioned institutions.”

Certainly there was a degree of recognition that research societies and museums were markers of civilizational progress. But more importantly, the degree of importance and priority given to the establishment of a research society and a museum indicate perhaps the eagerness of the regional literati to participate in the production and preservation of their own history. Given this context, this chapter attempts to interrogate the reasons that pushed the native literati of a newly created province to choose their subjects of study and in doing so it attempts to understand the ways they were using the past as an instrument with which they could perhaps address their present condition of colonial subject-hood. In negotiating with the past, which in this case was primarily an ancient past, it also seeks to chart out the manner in which the ancient regional past of Bihar or Magadha was woven into the writing of an Indian national past – oftentimes making the two synonymous.

Institution of History – The Bihar and Orissa Research Society and the Beginning of Historical Research

The concern and desire to investigate, preserve and write about the past came to manifest itself most concretely through the establishment of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society and a concurrent suggestion to establish a provincial museum in Patna – the new provincial capital. Addressing the inaugural meeting, held on January 1915, of what was to become the Bihar and Orissa Society, Sir Edward Gait, the first President of the Society and future Lieutenant-Governor of the Province, remarked that, “in spite of its antiquity the Province boasts of few regular historical records, and our knowledge of

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the past has to be laboriously pieced together from various sources of information, such as references in religious books, inscriptions on rocks, stones and coins, and the excavation of ancient site." Gait’s suggestion regarding the nature of sources necessary in attempting to produce a comprehensive history of the province indicates a shift in interest away from the dominant role that archeology had played from mid-nineteenth century onwards as the primary medium through which the ancient Indian past could be discovered. Rather archeology was to now figure as one among several disciplines necessary to understand and interpret the ancient Indian past. Clearly the breadth of skill and the amount of sustained effort necessary for this venture transcended the skills of any particular individual. Gait was quite aware that the task of putting together the history of the newly created province was monumental and beyond the scope of any individual effort regardless of their drive and motivation. While motivated individuals were fundamental to this project of historical inquiry for the Province of Bihar and Orissa, it was necessary that the work undertaken be organized “under the auspices of a Society,” which could ensure steady and sustained effort on the part of individuals. But more importantly, Gait recognized that such a society could also “arouse the interest and stimulate the energies of any one who may be able to contribute to our knowledge and which will, in its journal, provide a means of recording all the information that may be collected.” Gait’s proposition did not remain a mere aspiration; instead that very meeting witnessed the establishment of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society and subsequently

5 “Proceedings of the Inaugural Meeting” JBORS., Vol. I., Part I, 1915. p. 134. The meeting was held at the Government House, Bankipore, at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, January 20, 1915.
the publication of two issues of its journal, *The Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, during the year.

Before proceeding further, it may be useful to pause briefly only to recollect the political-cultural climate in the early decades of the twentieth century – the period that saw the emergence of the Research Society, its Journal and the Museum, particularly in context of the rise of nationalist sentiments, which manifested through the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal during the first decade of the twentieth century. As Bihar and Orissa emerged out of the erstwhile province of Bengal it is likely that initiatives to establish a research society and museum in the new province would draw comparisons with similar undertakings in Bengal which, apart from the much older Asiatic Society of Bengal, saw the establishment of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad (the foremost Bengali literary society, established in Calcutta in 1894) and the Varendra Research Society in Rajshahi, North Bengal founded in 1910 with the aim of focusing its research on the “ancient ‘land of Varendra’ in northern and eastern Bengal.”7 As in the case of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, the establishment of both the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad and the Varendra Research Society is indicative of the “growing interest in the redemption, recovery, and preservation of the people’s culture as an indispensable plank in the history-writing project.”8 Yet, comparisons between the Bihar and Orissa Research Society and the research societies of Bengal reveal more in terms of contrasts than similarities. In regards to the research societies of Bengal, any understanding and inquiry into their mode of operation and agenda for research should be considered in light of the

Swadeshi Movement. And it is precisely in this context that Bengal saw an upsurge of nationalist sentiment which manifested itself most strongly through an outpouring of regional sentiments expressing love for the Bengali language, its past and the regional landscape, in other words to borrow Sumit Sarkar’s characterization of the period; “the Bengali patriotism of the swadeshi days brought forth an extremely impressive cultural outcrop.”\(^9\) Perhaps this could explain the choice of Bengali as the preferred language for the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad as it began to engage itself in the writing of Bengal’s history and the preservation of its archaeological heritage in its museum. Moreover, the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad and a growing number of learned local bodies, like the Varendra Research Society along with its museum as well as the Dacca Museum, brought together a “new community of Bengali scholars [and] wealthy patrons” who began to view their region’s past as their monopoly.\(^{10}\) In order to keep it free from any colonial influence, these societies restricted its membership to Bengalis but this particular manifestation of nationalism in a Bengali guise was made more exclusive through the choice of Bengali rather than English as the preferred language for its publications facilitated largely through the “maturing of the vernacular scholarly sphere.”\(^11\)

The Bihari literati were certainly not oblivious to these efforts of the Bengali institutions – and yet at a time when Bengal witnessed expressions of extreme nationalist sentiment, the Bihari literati chose to model their research society after the quintessential oriental institute – the Asiatic Society of Bengal established in 1794 under the guidance of the pioneering orientalist William Jones rather than emulate one of the more fervently

\(^{11}\) Ibid. p. 123.
nationalist Bengali regional societies discussed above. Moreover, the establishment of the Bihar and Orissa Society was largely facilitated through the efforts and patronage of the colonial state with the Lieutenant-Governor of the Province, Charles Bayley as its Patron, and Edward Gait the future Lieutenant-Governor as its President. A cursory glance through Appendix I will perhaps provide a better indication of the proportion of the colonial officials who participated in the inaugural meeting of the society. In fact, the Bihar and Orissa Research Society brought together most of the highly placed colonial officials and native literati in a forum that was not overtly nationalistic nor was its agendas of research determined exclusively by the colonial officials. Instead the Bihar and Orissa Research Society most likely tried to cast a much wider net, so to speak, to draw in scholars who while not being directly affiliated with the region, as in living within its boundaries or holding an office in the province, shared an interest in its past.

This is certainly a striking contrast to the exclusivity of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, which made Bengal and Bengali its focus of research and its mode of expression. The fervor that underscored Bengal’s expression of basic regional and linguistic loyalties certainly had the flavor of an anti-colonial nationalist sentiment, but it did have its problems too and this may perhaps explain the different trajectory that Bihar chose when it embarked on its project to recover and preserve its regional past. Mired in the swadeshi movement, the activities of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad or the Varendra Research Society “did occasionally assume a provincial and chauvinistic colour,” which may have resonated among the literati in Maharasthra, Punjab or even the South, but as Sumit Sarkar points out, “the neighbouring Biharis, Oriyas and Assamese with few exceptions remained utterly aloof if not positively hostile to what was after all essentially
a Bengali movement.”¹² To the Bengalis, however, there was no apparent contradiction between their deep regional patriotism that was being expressed and their continued identification with India – and this was largely possible during the swadeshi period as Bengalis continued to remain “serenely confident of the leading position of [their] community in the cultural and political life of the subcontinent.”¹³ So basically, a well-developed sense of regional patriotism in Bengal could translate as nationalist sentiment, often times without even distinguishing between the two. So even when Bengalis chose to venture into their past through a recourse to Bengal as the region and Bengali as the language, for those involved, there was no apparent contradiction or a challenge to a nationalist imagination of India. The case, however, was different for Bihar. For when Edward Gait stated that the Society aimed to “arouse the interest and stimulate the energies of any one”¹⁴ who may be capable of adding to the knowledge of the region there was a distinct disassociation between regional identity and regional past – the latter need not solely be limited to the former. Hence, while the Research Society made Bihar and Orissa the focus of its research, the forum that the Society strived to create and provide aimed to transcend territorial extent of the new province. For a province that was long overshadowed by Bengal, the separation in 1912 provided the regional literati with an opportunity to carve out a space where Bihar could emerge as part of the nationalist imagination, one where an ancient past centered on Bihar came to serve as the most important ingredient. But the fact that the ancient Mauryan and Gupta empires were centered in Bihar and that Bihar was integral to any historical narrative of ancient India,

¹³ Ibid. p. 422.
required that the work carried out by the Research Society, and what was published in its 
*Journal* could reach the widest audience possible. The project of the Research Society 
therefore was not so much about consolidating a regional identity through exclusive 
recourse to the region’s ancient past, as in the case of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad or the 
Varendra Research Society, rather what Bihar sought was a recognition outside its 
territorial boundaries as a region that served as the core constitutive element of ancient 
India. Perhaps this also explains why English was the language used for the *Journal’s* 
publications.

To the native press, the establishment of a Research Society was a sign of the 
“intellectual awakening” of the province. But more importantly, for a province that 
allegedly grew out of an animosity towards Bengal and Bengalis domiciled in Bihar, the 
establishment of the Society was a vindication against allegations of the province’s 
parochialism and provincialism. Commenting on the people involved in the Society and 
its journal, *The Behar Herald* acknowledged the cosmopolitan nature of this provincial 
institution which very clearly demonstrated that at “the highest realms of thought there is 
no provincial isolation, no parochial barrier.” And this was best exemplified by the 
varied background of the contributors to the first issue of the journal where, as the *Behar 
Herald* emphasized, “an American Sanskritist [D.B. Spooner], a pure Bengali pandit 
[Mahamahopadhyaya Hara Prasad Shastri], a Hindu barrister from Mirzapur (U.P) [K.P. 
Jayaswal], a Bengali lawyer domiciled in Chota Nagpur [Sarat Chandra Roy], and a 
German missionary [Reverend Father J. Hoffmann], all co-operating to advance our

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16 Ibid.
knowledge of the province and its past.”\textsuperscript{17} To the local literati, this cosmopolitan mix of contributors to the Journal and the wide-ranging topics of research facilitated through the aegis of the Society, was a promising sign that the Society was “free from narrow jealousies and selfish wrangles” and could best serve the scholarly interests of Bihar and “raise the intellectual level of its capital to something approaching that of Calcutta or Bombay,” therefore remaking Patna “not merely a political capital but also a Mecca to higher students of archaeology, numismatics and history.”\textsuperscript{18} The aspirations and eagerness of the regional literati was marked by the possibility that Patna itself could come out of the shadows of its former self, remaking the ancient glorious Pataliptura in Patna and foremost in this project was the establishment of a Provincial Museum and a Research Society. For the regional literati, as they worked closely with colonial officials to establish a research society and a provincial museum, their actions was clearly driven by a desire to mark out the cultural contours of the region, which had just been established as a separate administrative entity. In a sense, their sentiments were also driven by a desire to lay a clear ownership over the ancient regional past, largely through the aegis of the provincial museum, which in their view was one of unrivalled greatness and glory in India.

Interest in Bihar’s ancient past, however, coincided with a broader interest among native Indian scholars and literati who were beginning to demonstrate an active interest in history-writing that was influenced and informed by latest research in archeology, numismatics, philology as well as the ancient Sanskrit texts. Keeping in line with what were by now the established fields of inquiry into Indian antiquity, the Society decided to

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
facilitate and promote research in the following subjects: “(1) History, (2) Archeology and Numismatics, (3) Anthropology and Folklore, (4) Philology.”

Even though subsequent discussion regarding the Bihar and Orissa Research Society will make it clearer, it will be helpful to point out a few things at this point. While the Society’s Journal emphasized four broad topics of research, much of its scholarly attention was focused on two particular subjects, Ancient History and Anthropology with K. P. Jayaswal and Sarat Chandra Ray leading the publications tally in their respective fields as pointed out in Appendix II and III. But most importantly, the efforts of the Society, through its Journal, and the establishment of the Patna Museum indicated the public’s involvement with the past – both in producing a narrative of the past as well as their role as consumers of it. While the museum could serve as a repository of the ancient past, the Journal not only aimed at providing a scholarly platform for inquiring into the regional past, but its issues and the “Annual Address” of the Society’s President are constantly interspersed with appeals to the literati to engage themselves with the process of recovering their history. Towards this end, during an annual Presidential address, Edward Gait made another of his several appeals for “fresh recruits and research workers,” which the Society could channel.

Following D.B. Spooner’s Kumrahar and Bulandibagh excavations in the suburbs of Patna, and the discovery of a statue of a Yakshi in Didarganj near Patna City in 1917, the members of the Society and through the Journal a larger audience were once again reminded by E.H.C. Walsh, the Vice-President of the Society, that “every day we are treading on ground which may cover archaeological and

other remains of great historical importance.” He further continued, “Even if most of us cannot take up the spade and seek to unearth the valuable remains of the past, we may each of us in our own way help forward the aims of the Society by giving information and other assistance to actual workers. All that we have to do is to walk with our eyes and ears open.”21 The appeal for local participation became a recurring mantra that the Society’s president chanted during its annual meeting. As Gait would once again remark in 1919, that regardless of one’s intellectual persuasion or training, “to the archeologists, the historian, the anthropologist and the geologist alike, our province is one of the most interesting in India.”22 And yet, during the early years of the Society, Bihar lacked members who contributed to the Journal or workers who invested time and effort to contribute to the Society’s effort.

Gait’s address hints at a sense of urgency in recovering the regional past – but more importantly it hints at the need for public recognition of the past and an urge for the regional literati to come forth and participate in framing their regional past. So it was with some dissatisfaction, that Gait pointed to the Journal’s heavy reliance on “Bengali members for contribution,” with few Bihari’s like Ganganath Jha, Pandit Ramavtar Sarma, and Saiyid Wasi Ahmad Bilgrami, aside from K.P. Jayaswal, making any significant scholarly contribution during the Journal’s early years.23 Gait did so, regardless of the fact that some of the Bengali contributors and more particularly the most prolific among them, Sarat Chandra Roy, was domiciled in Bihar. While the history of

21 “The Annual Address – Mr. E.H.C. Walsh,” JBORS., Vol. IV., Part I, 1918. p. 13. As Gait was engaged elsewhere, had asked Walsh, the Commissioner of Chota Nagpur as well as the Vice-President of the Society, to deliver the Annual Address.
the separation of Bihar may naturally indicate some sense of difference between Biharis and Bengalis, there were many Bengalis who had been domiciled in Bihar and still others who felt equally invested in the region’s past to work towards its historical reconstruction, most notably Mahamahopadhyaya Hara Prasad Shastri. Certainly some sense of animosity between Biharis and Bengalis had emerged during the years surrounding the separation of Bihar. Gait aware of such sentiments sought to use it to coax Biharis to take a stronger interest in the activities of the society – but scholarly engagement with the past with an eye towards contributing to the *Journal* on the one hand and becoming a member of the Society and subscribing to its *Journal* on the other, though very different ways of supporting the Society, were both just as crucial. Most native Biharis chose the latter: as a result the Society’s annual membership gradually increased from 237 at the end of 1915 to 319 in 1916 to 338 in 1917, its third year.²⁴ As a Society, still in an infant stage, it not only made appeals to the public to engage with the past regardless of their ability, but it also sought assistance from the provincial government. In order to secure assurances of annual subscriptions and to provide the *Journal* with a sound footing, especially during its early phases, Jadu Nath Sarkar, during the Society’s inaugural meeting, appealed for patronage from the government. The provincial government obliged with assurances of a regular subscription of a hundred copies of the *Journal*.²⁵

Similarly, the native aristocracy, like Maharaja Rameswar Singh of Darbhanga, Maharaja Raveneswar Prasad Singh of Gidhaur, Maharaja Bir Mitrodaya Singh Deo of Sonepur State, and Maharaja Kamaleswari Prasad Singh of Monghyr, also became

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another important source of support through their role as vice-patrons of the society.\textsuperscript{26} Some among them took a more active interest in the workings of the society and even provided it with financial support. For instance, the Maharaja of Monghyr made a donation of Rs. 1000 to the Society in order to purchase books for its library. Similarly, the Maharaja of Hathwa provided Rs. 3000 for excavation work to be undertaken at Belwa in the Saran district, while the Maharaja of Darbhanga provided support and facilitated the search and cataloguing of Sanskrit manuscripts in Mithila – a task undertaken under the supervision of Mahamahopadhyaya Hara Prasad Shastri.\textsuperscript{27} The search for Sanskrit manuscripts in Mithila brought to light a manuscript written by the poet Vidyapati which was purchased by the Maharaja of Darbhanga.\textsuperscript{28} Similarly, some fifty songs of Vidyapati were also collected through this search for Sanskrit manuscripts.\textsuperscript{29} Another interesting find in Patna brought to light a paper copy of the \textit{Bhagavata Purana} dated Samvat 1146 (1188 C.E.) – which was believed to be the oldest manuscript in paper yet discovered in India.\textsuperscript{30}

By setting the agendas for antiquarian research, the Society served as the foundation upon which historical scholarship of the province grew. Hence, and perhaps most importantly, the Society through its journal allowed for those engaged in studying the regional past an avenue through which they could make historical claims and counter-

\textsuperscript{28} This manuscript was housed in the Maharaja’s library which later became a Sanskrit University. During a meeting in January 2010, Dr. Hetukar Jha informed me that the manuscript has gone missing from the library.
claims. Given the many contentions and contestations regarding sources of the Indian past, the Society’s journal provided a platform which the regional literati could use to engage with a wider body of scholarship emerging from other parts of India as well as from Europe. A closer discussion of some of the issues regarding the regional past and an attempt to explore the reasons that motivated some of the regional and other literati to engage with a particular subject matter will follow in a later section. But before that, a brief discussion on the emergence of the Patna Museum – and its role as the only museum in the province is due.

**Housed to Inspire – The Beginnings of the Patna Museum and Provincial Claims to an Ancient Past**

Bihar’s effort to establish a provincial museum was neither a unique nor an unparalleled venture. By the time propositions were being made to establish a provincial museum in Patna, provincial and local museums had sprouted all over India ranging from Madras (1851) to Srinagar (1886), with museums being established in places like Nagpur, Lucknow, Mathura and Raipur in the intervening years. The celebration of Queen Victoria’s silver jubilee in 1887 added further momentum to the “museum movement” with the emergence of museums in Jaipur, Udaipur, Rajkot and Vijayawada. But it was during the viceroyalty of Curzon, and the director generalship of the Archaeological Survey by John Marshall during the early twentieth century, that the museum movement fully intensified.\(^{31}\) Compared to its predecessors, the urge to establish a provincial museum in Bihar seems more recent. Given the proximity of the Indian Museum in Calcutta, and since Bihar was considered a part of Bengal, albeit in an administrative sense, it is very likely that no such ventures were encouraged until after 1912. On the

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\(^{31}\) Singh. *Discovery of Ancient India.* p. 213.
contrary, an archaeological museum at Bihar Sharif, which housed the collections of A. M. Broadley were removed from the province in 1891, after almost twenty years of existence, to be housed in the Indian Museum. A belief that interest of scholars and students could only be best served if the sculptures were housed at the Indian Museum motivated the shift of the artifacts. Yet the removal of antiquities from Bihar in 1891 is also largely indicative of the primacy of the Indian Museum, which “developed as the showcase of the splendour of the British Indian empire.” For the provincial literati, however, an imperial museum in spite of its splendor and attempt to present a microcosm of the empire did not carry much resonance.

Rather the urge to establish a provincial museum within the territorial boundaries of the newly established province was a clear indication of the deep association that was beginning to be attached between the provincial space and the history that was being exhumed through archaeological excavations alongside literary sources. Moreover, as Tony Bennett puts it, the “birth of the museum” was coincident with and supplied the primary institutional condition for the “emergence of a new set of knowledges – geology, biology, archaeology, anthropology, history and art history – each of which, in its museological deployment, arranged objects as parts of evolutionary sequences.” The existence of a provincial museum was not only integral as the container of relics of an ancient past, but it also served as the very foundation of knowledge for a wide range of disciplines. In a province widely conscious of its relative backwardness in comparison to Bengal, particularly with regards to English education and the concomitant institutions of

33 Singh. Discovery of Ancient India. p. 212.
34 Bennett. The Birth of the Museum. p. 96.
higher education, the establishment of a provincial museum was for most of the literati as fundamental a source of knowledge as was the establishment of a University. And it is because of this association between specific knowledge production processes central to the museum, that objects housed in museums become signifiers of an artificially created institutional frame, where artifacts for instance, are first identified within an externally constructed discursive field, such as the “nation,” or the local “community,” before it is identified with an historical “epoch” or “period” – the very categories that museums claim to institutionalize.³⁵ For instance, in the case of the yakshi statue found in Didarganj, in the suburbs of Patna, even before the statue was identified as belonging to the Mauryan period, its naming as the “Didarganj Yakshi” forever linked the statue to its find spot and was claimed by the museum as representative of a glorious period of “Indian” art. By presenting objects as signifiers within an artificially created institutional frame, museums underline their irretrievable otherness, their separation from the world of lived experience and in doing so, it simultaneously constructs the other as the viewer, or in collective terms, a public.³⁶

The deep affiliation between a viewing public and the museum probably is another indication of the urgency in establishing a museum within the territorial limits of the new province. As mentioned earlier, in order to curb the claims of the Indian Museum, which served as the primary repository of all findings in Bihar prior to the separation of the province, suggestions to establish a provincial museum were made soon after the separation in 1915. At the meeting that convened to found the Bihar and Orissa

³⁶ Ibid. p. xii.
Research Society, Sachchidananda Sinha also put forth the proposal for a provincial museum in Patna. Yet, unlike the establishment of the Research Society, the final establishment of the museum, with its own building, was a protracted affair and did not happen until 1929. This, however, was not entirely for the lack of initiative at the local level; rather contestations over the rightful purposes of such a museum and eventually the lack of funds to support the construction of a Museum during a time of war delayed the project. For soon after the suggestion to establish a museum at Patna was tabled, a proposal was sent to the local government to construct a suitable building for a Provincial Museum and Library. Working towards this purpose, the local government set up a committee composed of J. G. Jennings, V.H. Jackson and G.E. Fawcus\(^{37}\) whose task was to “visit a number of existing museums and public libraries in other provinces.”\(^{38}\) Following their survey, this committee suggested that Natural History should be excluded from the scope of the proposed museum. The committee argued that if the zoological collection were to be included in the proposed Patna Museum, it “will be a mere assemblage of curiosities and, therefore, incapable of educating its visitors.” It further went on to state that since the projected university at Patna would “ultimately require a scientific museum for teaching zoology, any natural history collection in the former institution will be superfluous.”\(^{39}\) The aim for the committee was therefore not to have a


wonder-house of curiosities instead it recommended that the proposed institute serve as an Archeological and Ethnographical Museum.\textsuperscript{40}

In spite of the committee’s recommendation the question remained far from being resolved as locals debated the specific purposes of the proposed museum. In one such instance, Sarat Chandra Mitra, a pleader in the district Judge’s court in Chapra who would eventually go on to become a lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of Calcutta, argued against the committee’s suggestions to limit the museum to being a repository of archaeological and ethnographic artifacts.\textsuperscript{41} In his view Indian visitors to museums generally took “great interest in stuffed specimens of mammals and birds.” And he witnessed this in Calcutta in the galleries of the Indian Museum – the archetypal museum. During his visits to the galleries of “larger mammals and birds” at the Indian Museum, he found that many native visitors, “who have not received the benefits of English education, enquired from ourselves about the habits and habitats of the more noteworthy species of the larger mammals and birds exhibited therein.”\textsuperscript{42} And he believed a Natural History section in the proposed Museum at Patna would generate a similar interest. Although his is the only voice we hear, Mitra certainly was not alone in suggesting that the proposed Museum at Patna move beyond simply being one dedicated to Archeology and Ethnography. While Mitra’s views were endorsed by the Behar Herald, they also received some encouragement from Sachchidananda Sinha given that

\textsuperscript{40} “Proceedings of a Meeting of the Council,” JBORS Vol. I. Part II, 1915, pp. 291-294. (This meeting was held on the 6\textsuperscript{th} April, 1915, at the Commissioner’s House at Bankipore.) pp. 292-293.

\textsuperscript{41} During the first fifteen years of the publication of the JBORS, there are 20 articles on ethnography essayed by Sarat Chandra Mitra, MA. BL., who is initially identified as belonging to Chapra but by the late 1920s his designation changes to that of Lecturer of Social Anthropology, University of Calcutta.

\textsuperscript{42} Behar Herald. January 8, 1916.
Mitra’s views were first published in the Allahabad based journal, *Hindustan Review* edited by Sinha.

The desire that the proposed provincial museum at Patna, emerge not only as a repository of archaeological artifacts, but also have galleries pertaining to ethnography, natural history, zoology, geology, and arts, highlights the fact that comparisons between a colonial museum and its metropolitan counterpart remain unfounded. Museums in Europe evolved as specialized repositories of ancient relics, ranging from zoological remains to archaeological ones, from its older counterparts, which existed in the form of “Wonder Houses”, “cabinet of curiosities” or “art galleries”. Prior to the “birth of the museum” in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, few collections were available for public viewing, but more importantly such collections displayed the power for private and exclusive inspection.43 Moreover, such art collections were housed in the princely reception halls and served as “prominent artifacts in a ritual that marked the boundary between polite and vulgar society, which is to say, the boundary of legitimated power.”44 The formation of the public art museum, as Carol Duncan has argued, transformed the function of the princely reception halls into a space where the “state idealized and presented itself to the public.”45 Moreover, with the opening of the Louvre, following the French Revolution, the objects on display were provided with new meanings, one which served the purposes of the French nation. In this sense, the objects that were once under private ownership, were given new meanings in order to establish a “new relationship between the individual as citizen” and the state as the benefactor of the

art on display. The idea of a museum arrived in the colony as a fully evolved concept with defined institutional purposes, established norms regarding the sensibilities of the viewing public and a scientific purpose attached to this knowledge producing institution. And yet, even though the museum constitutes as new public space, Duncan reminds us that the museum resembles “older ritual sites” since like most ritual space, the museum too is “culturally designated as reserved for special quality of attention,” one that contemplates, commemorates and learns the national past. Within the space of the museum, more particularly in the case of the Louvre, the visitor regardless of their individual social position finds a culture that unites them with other French citizens. The Louvre served not only as a repository of the “nation’s spiritual life and guardian of the most evolved and civilized culture of which the human spirit is capable,” but as a ritualized public space it also served as the space where the relationship between the citizen and the state could be fully realized. Therefore, the museum becomes a public space where not only is the nation represented, but its visitors can also encounter the nation in the very image that it attempts to purport. In the case of the museum, particularly the Louvre, the appropriation of art collection in the name of the people transformed the “museum from a symbol of arbitrary power into an instrument which, through the education of its citizens, was to serve the collective good of the state.” The museum, since its inception, was implicated in the project of conceptualizing the nation and its people. Even if the relationship between the nation and the museum may have

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46 Ibid. p. 24.
47 Ibid. p. 10.
49 Bennett. The Birth of the Museum. p. 83.
been established early on, the very conception of the museum remained to be worked out gradually.

Yet despite the colonial, and more particularly local, appropriation of the idea of the museum, there was a fine line dividing the museum as a “wonder house” and a site of knowledge production alluding once again to the fact that metropolitan ideas though transplanted were not always translatable with perfect equivalencies in colonial societies. For instance, a visit to the museum was normalized as part of wedding ceremonies in Lahore, and similarly in Madras the days that saw the largest numbers of visitors were during days of important Hindu festivals.\(^50\) But, as Gyan Prakash points out, this rather “inappropriate” use of the museum does not really transform it entirely into a “Wonder House.” Rather, the scientific knowledge displayed in the museums emerged to “face the eyes of the curious, not those of the superstitious” and the museum confronted the idea of the Wonder House “not as its polar opposite but as an interstitial space signifying a half-awake state of comprehension and incomprehension.”\(^51\) The distinction between curious and superstitious, comprehension or the lack of it, which Prakash points to, happens within the context of science and natural history with which Prakash believes “museums and exhibitions in India remained singularly concerned with.”\(^52\) The problem to be fair was not entirely unique to colonial society. Rather evolutionary museums in Europe too had to constantly engage with various rational and improving forms of spectacle and entertainment with fears and anxieties that the “audiences would have their powers of perception so dulled by conjurers and tricksters that they would be unable to understand

\(^{51}\) Ibid. p. 163.
\(^{52}\) Ibid. p. 172.
the object lessons that the expert showman [in the museum] would put before them.”53

But while science and natural history certainly required comprehension and probably also invoked curiosity, the display of archaeological artifacts however was in a certain sense used to invoke wonder and amazement. After all one of the purposes to which history was mobilized was to inspire as in the case of archaeological display in the Indian Museum, where “wonder had to be retained as an integral component” of the arrangement and yet it was supposed to generate a “sense of a great historic and artistic past, where the knowledge of chains and epochs remained elusively abstracted and distanced from the materiality of the seen object.”54 It is precisely this belief that underpins the establishment of a provincial museum in Patna – largely conceived as an archaeological museum with dedicated galleries for natural history, ethnography, and geology among others.

In the case of the Indian Museum, “archeology’s attempts to carve out a specialized niche for itself within the Indian Museum’s main spread of ‘natural history’, ‘ethnography’ and ‘industrial art’ exhibits” remained central to defining the museum itself.55 The problem, Tapati Guha-Thakurta argues, loomed large in the self-positioning of the museum, its collections and its modes of display vis-à-vis a public for whom it existed: a public ranging from the “ignorant native” to the new “knowing subject”.

Taking its cue from the Indian Museum, the proposed museum in Patna sought to be a microcosm of the province it represented. As a result, the Museum would have sections dedicated to Geology, Art and Industry, Photographs and Drawings, Ethnology and

Numismatics, but in spite of preference given to these various subjects archaeological artifacts command a pride of place in the Museum. Based on the relations between disciplines and the different organizing principles, which were themselves derived from the evolutionary sciences like geology, archeology, anthropology etc, Bennett argues that museums also began to structure their organizing principle by positing “man – the outcome of evolution – as the object of knowledge.” In doing so, the museum situated the visitor in a position of achieved humanity, standing at the end of the evolutionary development, which the evolutionary museum narrated. Yet the apparent universality of this narration also reflects “the partial and particular ways in which this universality is realized and embodied in museum displays.” Talking about evolutionary museums, Bennett argues that they assisted in translating the newly produced “pasts beyond memory,” largely through archaeological excavations, into distinctive memory machines. Thus the fragmentary relics of the past that were exhumed were to now perform a double-function which was partially embodied in its particularity as a historic relic, but it was also “accorded a representative function” which allowed for these objects to be serialized as part of a narrative that sought to link the present to the past. Given the centrality of archaeological evidence as the crucial window to the past, it will not be remiss to suggest that it was the archaeological wealth of Bihar that served as the primary motive for setting up the museum.

Hence almost fifteen years after the idea of establishing a museum in Patna was first proposed, P. C. Manuk, President of the Managing Committee of the Museum, while

58 Ibid. p. 96.
speaking at the opening of the Patna Museum Building in 1929, would claim, “Prior to the separation of Bihar and Orissa from Bengal in 1912, every object of archeological interest found within the geographical limits of this province was exiled to the Indian Museum at Calcutta.” Further it was matters of archaeological and historic interest that Manuk emphasized in laying out the “life-history” of the “twin institutions” – The Bihar and Orissa Research Society and the Patna Museum. So while the Society carried out the theoretical work of research and criticism “on objects of historic or archeological interest,” the Museum, he added, “gathers up whenever possible, and preserves the objects themselves.” Functioning together the two institutions therefore were perfect complements to each other. Not only did these two institutions complement each other in this process of knowledge production and preservation, but they also attracted the attention of the same group of local and colonial literati for whom both the Journal and the Museum were equally important. For instance, the three-member committee of Jackson, Jennings and Fawcus, which was set up in 1915 to assess the feasibility of a provincial museum in Patna, were all members of the Society. They strongly recommended that the project be carried out, and towards this end, Munnings, the Government Architect, had prepared a plan for a building which was to serve the purposes of both a museum and a public library. Munnings also recommended that the building be constructed in a site adjoining Hardinge Park, thus placing the Museum and Library within close proximity of the railway station, making it convenient for people from other parts of the province to visit it. Despite the level of planning involved to

give fruition to the proposal for a provincial museum, the local government found it “impossible to provide the 3 lakhs of rupees” that Munnings had budgeted for the building, hence shelving his design. As Edward Gait, the President of the Society and the Lieutenant-Governor of the Province, put it, “during this period of financial stringency Government are not in a position to find funds for the construction of the museum or as a contribution towards the cost of the library. Fortunately temporary accommodation is available for both purposes.” The accommodation that Gait was referring to was a far cry from what the founding members of the Society like Sachchidananda Sinha, K.P. Jayaswal, J. N. Samaddar had envisioned.

In most cases a visitor’s first encounter with the museum is not through the artifacts on display, rather what they first see in the form of a museum is an architectural structure projecting its own aesthetics on to the visitor, while also serving as the “aestheticizing containers” guarding “the cultural wealth of the city,” so to speak. But the case of Patna Museum was remarkably different. In 1916, the early collection of exhibits were first housed at the Commissioner’s Bungalow and later moved to the North Wing of the Patna High Court. The High Court, more particularly the lawyers’ chambers, which were not needed for the purpose, was to now serve as the repository of the province’s ancient relics. While a temporary arrangement was made for the artifacts intended for the museum, and this indeed invigorated the search for articles of interest,

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the museum itself remained a storehouse of such articles for the next five years until it was finally opened to the public from the beginning of June 1921 and it instantly began attracting visitors averaging to about 40 a day.\textsuperscript{66} Given its location in the North Wing of the Patna High Court, the museum may probably have served as an easy distraction for the litigants as they waited their turn for justice thus raising questions regarding the actual purpose of the museum as a scientific or popular institute and blurring any such distinctions regarding the viewing public. As mentioned above, matters and materials of the past were not only subjects of scientific inquiry but they were appreciated because they were inspiring. The museum was therefore able to invoke in the viewer a basic sense of curiosity, wonder and amazement as they walked through the galleries of the museum. In most cases, given the local and regional finding sites of many of the artifacts, it most likely allowed the visitor to identify with the exact location where the artifacts were found – probably invoking a greater sense of intimacy with the past. Possibly keeping this in mind when Manoranjan Ghosh, the curator of the Patna Museum, was engaged in preparing a guidebook with descriptions of exhibits as arranged in the galleries of the new museum building, he made sure that its contents would be both scientific and popular.\textsuperscript{67}

In the intervening years, however, Edward Gait, formally established the Patna Museum in April 1917 allowing for it to receive some level of official financial support thus providing this incipient institution with some structural coherence. In order to see this through, Gait appointed the ethnologist and anthropologist Rai Bahadur Sarat Chandra Roy, who had taken a demonstrable interest in the Society’s work, as the first

\textsuperscript{66} Annual Report of the Managing Committee of the Patna Museum for Year Ending 31\textsuperscript{st} March 1922.
\textsuperscript{67} Annual Report of the Managing Committee of the Patna Museum for Year Ending 31\textsuperscript{st} March 1928.
curator of the Patna Museum. Aside from arranging, numbering and cataloguing all exhibits received by the museum, Roy, as well as his successors, was also responsible for travelling throughout the province collecting suitable articles of interest.\textsuperscript{68} The broad range of duties assigned to the curator required one’s complete attention that Roy, also engaged in his ethnographic research in the Chota Nagpur region, could not commit to. So within a year of Roy’s appointment, J. N. Samaddar, who was also a professor at Patna College and Honorary Treasurer of the Society, succeeded him as the curator on May 1, 1918. This early turnover of curators in quick succession came to an end in October 4, 1918 with the appointment of Manoranjan Ghosh, who was trained in the Archeological Department under John Marshall and hence was probably best qualified for the duties assigned to his position.\textsuperscript{69} Manoranjan Ghosh saw the Patna Museum through during its foundational stages and remained its curator until he died on May 12, 1936.\textsuperscript{70}

During this time, the Museum began to see its collection grow as there was a concerted effort at collecting artifacts. In 1916, during the foundational stages of the museum, the more interesting of the early exhibits that found its way into the museum was the “Persepolitan-like capital” found at Bulandibagh, Patna, in course of the explorations conducted by D. B. Spooner.\textsuperscript{71} At the same time, Spooner also provided the Museum with a collection of seals of the Gupta period and some terracotta figurines. But it was not until 1917, that the museum acquired what has been labeled as its “chiefest

\textsuperscript{69} “Opening of the Patna Museum,” p. 4; Annual Report of the Managing Committee of the Patna Museum for Year Ending 31\textsuperscript{st} March 1929.
\textsuperscript{70} Report of the Managing Committee of the Patna Museum for years 1935-36, 1936-37 and 1937-38 (Ending 31\textsuperscript{st} March 1928).
\textsuperscript{71} “Opening of the Patna Museum,” p. 4.
treasure"—the life-size sculpture of a lady Chauri bearer of the Mauryan period found at Didarganj (Patna) on the banks of the Ganges. This Yakshi statue, also known as the Didarganj Yakshi, would eventually be seen as the iconic representation of Indian art. It should suffice for now to say that alongside the effort to inscribe an iconic status to the statue—replicas and picture postcards of the statue began to serve as mementos of the provincial museum. So while the Yakshi could be seen as an iconic representation of ancient Indian art, the fact that a replica of the Didarganj statue was presented as a memento to Hugh Stephenson, the Governor of Bihar and Orissa, during the opening ceremony of the Patna Museum building in 1929 and the production of two sets of picture postcards, one of the Didarganj image and the other of the front view of the new Museum printed by Thacker Spink and Company, to be sold to visitors for two annas per copy, possibly indicate how this sculpture and the façade of the new museum were now becoming crucial to serving popular sensibilities of its visitors. This image resurrected first from oblivion and then from natives who had set it up for ritual worship was to now adorn the walls and mantelpieces of middle-class Indians not as a ritual object but as representation of a glorified artistic past.

Objects continued to be added to the Museum’s collection not only through finds from archaeological excavations, like the “Persepolitan-like-capital” or through accidental findings like the “Didarganj Yakshi,” but gifts and donations also made up an important source of artifacts for the Museum. As in the more indigenous and localized

72 “Opening of the Patna Museum,” p. 5.
bodies, such as the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad in Calcutta or the Varendra Research Society in Rajshahi, the Patna Museum too saw a powerful conglomeration of rajas, zamindars, and Bengali babus apart from colonial officials, involved in the collecting of archaeological relics. In 1919, the collection of antiquities was enriched by sculptures presented by the Mahant of Bodh-Gaya, and by the Belwa antiquities of the early and medieval periods, presented by the Maharaja Bahadur of Hathwa. Also a donation of Rs. 6,000 from the Ruling Chief of Sonpur allowed the Museum Committee to provide for the much needed show-cases for the growing number of exhibits, which now included the Basarh antiquities of the 3rd century B.C. to the 5th century A.D., and was excavated by D. B. Spooner of the Archeological Department and given to the Museum on loan by the Government of India. The transfer of another set of antiquities from Spooner’s Pataliputra excavations, however was, less straightforward and was perhaps the museum’s first real battle to lay claim to the provincial antiquities as its rightful repository.

In 1920, the Museum got what probably till then were its largest and most important antiquities in the form of the Pataliputra antiquities, which had been excavated by Spooner and had been funded by Ratan Tata. These antiquities had been subject to much controversy regarding its rightful claimants, with the Provincial Museum in Patna, the Archeology Department and the trust of the deceased patron of the Pataliputra excavations Ratan Tata, all laying equal claims to the artifacts. Given the level of controversy, when the antiquities finally made it to the galleries of the Patna Museum –

75 “Opening of the Patna Museum,” p. 5.
they must have truly appeared as a “wind-fall” gain to the museum authorities. Among the antiquities, were pieces of the royal umbrella in mirror-like polished stone, a gold flower with tendril, glass seals inscribed in Brahmi characters of the 2nd and 3rd century B.C.E., articles made of iron and terracotta figures including the laughing girl and grinning boy – all of which were displayed in the Pataliputra room especially set up for the purpose. Although these antiquities, once in the museum, were referred to as being among its greatest treasures, there was a concerted effort on the part of the provincial government to label these very antiquities as “comparatively insignificant”. F. Lister, Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa’s Education and Archeology Department, described them not only as insignificant but listed them in a manner intended to hide its historical significance. In describing the antiquities collected, his list read; “They consist of 53 clay seals (mostly inscribed), 472 coins (mostly of copper with a few silver punch marked coins and two gold Kushan coins), 244 terra-cotta figures (including about 20 Mauryan terra-cotta from Bulandi bagh), 233 pottery pieces of various sizes, 71 beads, and a number of stone fragments, metal pieces (including three gold decorative ornaments) and other miscellaneous objects.” Perhaps by providing a very bland description to the executors of Ratan Tata’s will, the provincial government was attempting to trivialize its value and its potential contribution to the galleries of the

77 “Opening of the Patna Museum,” p. 6.
78 Letter from Hon’ble Mr. F. Lister, C.I.E., I.C.S., Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa, Education Department, Archeological Department to The Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Education. No. 2112-E, dated Rachi, the 29th December 1918, Proceeding 1. Education Department, Archeology and Education Branch June 1919, Proceedings No 1-8 Part A.
79 Ibid.
Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay where Lady Tata and the other executors of Ratan Tata’s will wanted the antiquities displayed.  

While the quantity of exhibits continued to increase, and the need for expansion ever more pressing, the makeshift arrangement in the North Wing of the Patna High Court seemed clearly inadequate. Not only was the museum “languishing as an exotic grafted on to a wholly alien parent tree,” but it was more “pathetic to see the fine sculptures and other exhibits crying for more room and a more sheltered and congenial home.” Initiative to set up a new Museum building was taken up in 1925. The Museum Committee, by now made up of K.P. Jayaswal, A.P. Banerji-Shastri and J.N. Samaddar among others, possibly decided that the building should adopt an Indian style of architecture and hence permanently shelving the older design drafted by Munnings in 1915 for good. This task of designing an appropriate building to house the provincial museum was assigned to Bishun Swarup, the Chief Engineer, who along with Sohan Lal and Brij Narayan had their final plans approved in December 1926. Construction work began soon after under the direct charge of Sohan Lal, the Assistant Engineer, and Brij Narayan, the Executive Engineer of the Public Works Department, which culminated in a Museum building designed in the Indo-Saracenic or Mogul-Rajput style. Hence finally ending the museum’s life in the Patna High Court in 1929 – almost 15 years since its inception.

80 Letter from A. J. Billimoria, Esq., Solicitor to Lady Tata, Navsari Buildings, Fort, Bombay to The Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Education. Letter dated Bombay, the 14th April 1919, Proceedings No. 5. Education Department, Archeology and Education Branch June 1919, Proceedings No 1-8 Part A.  
82 Ibid.  
83 Ibid. p. 10.
The Patna Museum became a popular destination attracting close to 60,000 visitors between November 1929 and March 1930, the full count of visitors the following year recorded almost double the number. The Patna Museum certainly served as a necessary educational institution indispensable “in all modern civilized communities.” But with an average of about 300 visitors daily, it is clear that the institution had a more popular appeal that transcended educational or research interests. It was expected that within the “well-lit and restful galleries,” students and scholars would find enough materials that were either informative or worth investigating. The Museum’s galleries were also arranged to provide a panoramic view of the region’s past. Beginning with the pre-historic fossil tree of the Vaisali Republic, the gallery guided the visitor “on to the Mauryan period when Hindustan was virtually ruled from Pataliputra, the site of modern Patna, by Chandragupta and the great Asoka, 300 years before Christ.” From there the visitor would continue on to “the Sunga period, to the Kushans of the Christian Era, and to the medieval period.” At the core of such a panoramic arrangement that lay before the visitor is “a transformation in the object’s status across the whole artefactual field, in which it was no longer its singularity or uniqueness that counted but its substitutability – that is, its ability to stand for other objects of the same type representing a stage within a developmental sequence.” Thus enabling the museum to narrate a past that not only the visitor is visually able to encounter, but the museum also inspires and encourages the visitor to imagine the past that the artifacts housed within its walls are meant to invoke. The chronological arrangement of the galleries, however, would not

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86 “Opening of the Patna Museum,” p. 11.
87 Ibid. pp. 11-12.
inform all visitors equally. Rather as most visitors shared little of the enthusiasm expressed by scholars and students of history, to them the museum was to serve as “a source of happy diversion from the daily round, the common task, to all classes of the people.” But more importantly, unlike museums in Europe, where knowledge was arranged and presented to the viewer as the story of progress of mankind, the colonial museum became a repository of former greatness. Here in the Patna Museum, the lay visitor was supposed to find “objects which will reveal or recall to him the storied past of India, and every Indian visitor, literate, or illiterate will visualise the rich legacy left to him by successive civilizations of his forbears.” The arrangement of the galleries in a chronological manner and the storied past they were to reveal to the visitor were integral narratives not only of a regional past, but they also made up crucial segments of India’s national past. So on the one hand the provincial museum served as a repository of tangible evidences of the past and served as “an outward and visible sign that we have a past, and that it belongs to us” most clearly manifested through the Patna Museum which served as “a symbol of the fact that the province has a history of its own.” But on the other hand, this past from the moment of its inception remained tied to narrating an Indian national past – once more challenging the notion of a neat dichotomy between a provincial and a national past. So while the colonial museum did not narrate a story of progress it did serve as a convenient site where concrete manifestations of the past was serialized and visualized by viewers. In doing so, the museum clearly became crucial to making the past a matter of public

89 “Opening of the Patna Museum,” p. 11.
90 Ibid. p. 12.
engagement. For the regional literati more so, the past became a crucial medium through which they could begin to address their present concerns, anxieties and aspirations. In this sense, while the museum provided the façade of former glory, the pages of the Society’s Journal were replete with endeavors in framing, structuring and understanding the past. Yet this engagement with the past was predetermined by two particular concerns. First, regardless of the level of cooperation that colonial scholar-officials, like Edward Gait, extended to the native literati, there remained a persistent sense of their colonized present, one which they sought to negotiate by resorting to narrative constructions of glorious pasts. And secondly, although the native literati’s modes of inquiry and their historical frameworks were anchored to the province of Bihar their narrative generally sought to suture a national past as well.

Narratives and Counter-narratives: Contested Claims over the Past

The first essay of the inaugural volume of the Society’s Journal was authored by D. B. Spooner, which discussed the discovery of a terracotta plaque depicting the Bodh Gaya Temple. The depiction itself was quite significant given the fact that it is considered to be the oldest drawing of the temple in existence. It was with some justification that an essay on “The Bodh Gaya Plaque,” as it had been named, marked the opening of the Journal more so since an illustration of the plaque was used as the cover illustration for the Journal. But what makes this essay even more significant is a rather oblique reference that Spooner makes as he describes the site where the plaque was discovered which according to his description was “the north side of the big graveyard mound which
corresponds in so many details with the palace of Darius at Persepolis.” Spooner’s comparisons may have appeared as an attempt to illustrate a site through the description of another better known one had it not been for his publication of two essays on “The Zoroastrian Period of Indian History” in January and July of 1915. The parallels and links that Spooner, engaged with the excavation of Pataliputra and more particularly its Mauryan past, sought to establish between India’s Mauryan past and the Zoroastrian period point to one of the early controversies that the Society would engage in. A controversy, which brought to the fore strong nationalist and regionalist sentiments as the regional literati rushed to counter Spooner’s comparison and defend the indigenity of the Indian past. The question regarding the indigenity of the Indian past in itself and its defense required a fine balancing act – particularly given the fashion of glorifying the past, but also because of the urge among nationalist historians of the period to paint an anachronistic picture of Hindu golden age. For a Journal established to give voice to the region’s historical past to have in its first page a kernel for subsequent controversy perhaps points to the very malleability of the past and its susceptibility to being molded and recast in multiple guises. Perhaps, it also serves as a good sense of the urgency that underwrote this project of regional history.

The comparison that Spooner drew between the Pataliputra excavations and the “palace of Darius at Persepolis” and similarly the description of the column excavated at

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94 Sumit Sarkar, “The Many Worlds of Indian History,” in Writing Social History. Refer also to the writings of K. P. Jayaswal in particular. Critique of colonial historians guided Jayaswal to counter allegations of India’s backwardness, but in so doing his views of Indian history gave credence to the view of a well developed, and politically mature Hindu society in northern India.
Bulandibagh in 1915 as a “Persepolitan-like-capital” found its way into the pages of the Journal. But it was at a different forum altogether that Spooner came out with his most elaborate exposition regarding the parallels between Mauryan India and Zoroastrian Persia.95 The fact that Spooner chose the Royal Asiatic Society, London, as the venue to deliver his lecture, and its Journal to publish his theory, probably speaks to the nature of the audience he sought: those among whom his claim to the “foreign” origins of what was being viewed by Indians as the first Indian empire would find some sympathy. Similar arguments that ancient Indian civilization had borrowed substantially from the west, most prominently with regards to art, were already subject of heated debates among Indologists during late nineteenth and early twentieth century.96 It was possibly in a similar vein that Spooner proposed his theory of a “Zoroastrian Period of Indian History” and hoped that a forum in London, far removed from the excavation pits in Patna, would be more open to challenge the indigeneity of Indian past or in the least provide him a sympathetic hearing.

Soon after Spooner’s views regarding the Mauryan past was published, Edward Gait in Patna appealed for caution and a measured reaction. During the course of his Annual Presidential Address to the Society, he went on to remind his audience about the “remarkable conclusions arrived at by Dr. Spooner on the basis of his discoveries at Kumrahar, and of the mass of evidence which he adduced to show not only that the architects of the buildings at that place were Persians, but also that Chandra Gupta

96 For instance, in his essay “The Origin of the Buddha Image,” Ananda Coomaraswamy primarily argues against a similar view that it was “the creative genius of Greece” that influenced the first images of the Buddha. Hellenistic influences on early Indian art, meant that not much of Indian art was in fact Indian, rather it originated from the birthplace of “western civilization.” Ananda Coomaraswamy, “The Origin of the Buddha Image,” Art Bulletin, IX (1927), No. 4, pp. 287-317.
himself, and even Buddha, belonged to the same race.” Gait, a central figure in establishing the Research Society and the Museum, was possibly among the more sympathetic scholar-administrators of the twentieth century who constantly called for an equal if not greater native participation in reconstructing the history of the province. However Gait too betrayed his European biases regarding Indian literati’s ability to objectively involve themselves in writing their histories, when he reminded his audience that Spooner’s “far-reaching conclusions have been contested by many in this country, where they are unpalatable to patriotic Indians.” But the final verdict regarding Spooner’s theory had to come from “European experts” who were “taking time to examine the data and review the position,” no doubt objectively one must add. Yet Spooner’s theory was too tempting for Gait to resist offering his own view, and like most who had anything to say regarding it, Gait was critical of it as well claiming “Nomenclature is always a very uncertain guide.”

Spooner too had realized that, “tangible evidences from which my deductions are drawn are very few,” and in this regard much of his conclusions concerning the Persepolitan looking palace complex at Pataliputra, and the Zoroastrian links to Indian past were based on philological evidence. Hence it was Sanskritists and Epigraphists, both European as well as Indian, who perhaps were most critical of Spooner’s use of literary sources. In fact, one of the earliest criticisms came from the distinguished professor of Sanskrit, A. Berriedale Keith who stated in no uncertain terms, that “The ingenuity and interest of Dr. Spooner’s reconstruction of the Zoroastrian period of Indian

98 Ibid.
history render it desirable to examine with some care the literary evidence which he adduces in support of his thesis; such an examination will, it seems to me, establish that the theory, so far as it rests on such evidence, has no foundation in fact.”

The fact that it was an absolute mistrust towards literary evidences that marked the beginning of archeology as a mode of inquiry in the sub-continent in the later part of the nineteenth century, followed by a heavy reliance on those very sources in order to make-up for the lack of material evidence, is an indication of the general acceptability of literary material as historical sources.

Spooner’s marshalling of such sources was therefore very much within the accepted protocols of historical research in the early twentieth century. The problem for Spooner, however, was the manner in which he used literary evidence in propounding his new theory. According to Spooner, “ascription in the Mahabharata of structures such as these [supposedly Chandragupta’s palace] to one Asura Maya leapt into instant meaning as an echo of Ahura Mazda.”

To Spooner, the archeologist, the ascription to “superhuman agency in the person of Asura Maya,” now served as more acceptable evidence which “converged harmoniously” to establish the equation that “the Asura Maya really means Ahura Mazda.” Such comparisons, however, did not rest well with most scholars. For instance, referring to Spooner’s excavation of what he believed to be Chandragupta’s palace, Keith argues that the actual similarity between the description of the palace as given by Asura Maya in the Mahabharata and the one provided by Megasthenes of Chandragupta’s palaces was of “the utmost vagueness.” Rather than

102 Ibid.
subscribing to the link between Asura Maya and Ahura Mazda, Keith instead goes on to further disagree with Spooner by establishing the indigeneity of Asura Maya. As he goes on to state, “The real parallel with the deeds of the Asura is Pataliputra wrought by magic in the *Kathasaritsagāra*, but this is purely Indian, for the wiles or magic (*maya*) of the Asura are notorious throughout Indian literature from the *Ṛgveda* on.”¹⁰³ While Spooner thought the ascriptions to the Mahabharata would provide for a contemporary account of Pataliputra, Keith argued that “the epic passages cited cannot be dated precisely; none of them need be, or probably is, older than several centuries A.D., and that they bear witness to the period of the Mauryas is most improbable.”¹⁰⁴ As a final blow to Spooner’s theory, Keith very unequivocally stated that “A Zoroastrian period of Indian history never existed, nor indeed was any such existence to be expected.”¹⁰⁵

Spooner’s theory was of great significance to the local literati for whom the Pataliputra excavations and the history attached to it had begun to invoke a sense of ancient greatness and grandeur. A verdict on the Zoroastrian theory having come from Europe, the regional literati did not wait long to offer their opinion in the matter; and, more importantly, the counter-argument that now appeared in the pages of the *Journal* could not be brushed aside as mere sentiments of patriotic Indians appearing in the guise of history. Hence, when K.P. Jayaswal came to the defense of the indigeneity of the Mauryan past his arguments were moderated through a marshalling of opposing evidence, but most importantly he tried to avoid betraying any obvious patriotic sentiments that could mitigate the quality of his scholarship. His claim to the indigeneity

¹⁰³ Keith. “The Zoroastrian Period of Indian History,” pp. 139-140.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 140.
¹⁰⁵ Ibid. pp. 142-43.
of that Mauryan past could however be a part of a larger process at work in colonial India during the early twentieth century, when native historians all across the country were beginning to formulate a challenge to colonial interpretations of the Indian past through a more academic form of historical argument. Though lacking in very obvious patriotic overtones Jayaswal’s critique was an early indication of the form that historical scholarship regarding ancient India would take in subsequent years, while also signaling the trajectory of Jayaswal’s own scholarship to follow. The Society’s Journal, having just begun in 1915, provided Jayaswal with the perfect platform for the purpose while also molding the scholarly agenda that the Journal was to support.

Jayaswal’s involvement in critiquing Spooner’s theory was motivated by another, and for Jayaswal possibly a more critical, factor, because he had been drawn into the debate as an early proponent to Spooner’s theory. Spooner had acknowledged Jayaswal for drawing his attention to “the Avestan name Mourva, the Margu of the Achaemenian inscriptions.” Extending this line of inquiry, Spooner wrote that “I hold, therefore (and I thank Mr. Jayaswal for having put me on the track of this important evidence), that the name Maurya is indeed to be derived from a Persian form Mourva, but I would identify this Merv with the valley of the Murghab where stands the platform of Persepolis. Does not this explain for us the statements of the Greek historians and the otherwise extraordinary fact that Chandragupta’s palaces seem copies of the Persepolitan? Persepolis was his ancestral home.” Finding himself squarely associated with the theory, Jayaswal’s first and foremost task was to distance himself from Spooner’s

108 Ibid. p. 409.
assertions. His exposition against Spooner began by acknowledging that he had “the privilege of discussing the question of Chandragupta’s nationality with Dr. Spooner personally” more than fifteen months ago – right about the time when Spooner was drafting his theory.\textsuperscript{109} At the time, Jayaswal had warned Spooner that the “whole of historical evidence seemed to be against” such a Persian theory. Yet Jayaswal claimed that he entertained an open mind and was willing to accept a conversion of “Chandragupta’s nationality” if convincing proof was forthcoming.

Cultivating an image of a true scholar and a rational historian, Jayaswal presents himself as being above the fray of nationalistic bias, which otherwise would perhaps hinder his assessment of Spooner’s theory as a dispassionate historian. Given the “data put forward by my friend,” Jayaswal continues, a critical assessment “compels me to say that his theory on the basis of the present evidence has to be rejected.”\textsuperscript{110} Jayaswal accuses Spooner of mixing the accounts of Herodotus with Strabo and as a result was able to “pick up a piece from the former and to mix it up with a portion of the latter” as a result creating a history that was not “faithful to fact” since Herodotus’ account related to Persia while Strabo’s pertained to India.\textsuperscript{111} Continuing with his criticism of Spooner’s use of Greek historians, Jayaswal accuses Spooner as being “reckless” in his use of Megasthenes upon whose testimony Spooner claimed that the “Indian court [of Chandragupta] was almost wholly Persian.”\textsuperscript{112} Finally, Jayaswal arrives at the philological argument that Spooner provides to claim that Mourva becomes Maurya in the Indian context. In this regard, Jayaswal points out a “serious chronological objection”

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid. p. 98.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid. p. 99.
when deriving “Maurya from Mourva in that the latter had gone out of use long before the time of Chandragupta.”\footnote{Jayaswal. “The Zoroastrian Period of Indian History,” p. 100.} Instead, Jayaswal goes on to state that since “Mura” “was the name of Chandragupta’s mother, the form could not be derived from Mourva.”\footnote{Ibid. pp. 100-101.}

Having thus dislodged Spooner’s assignation of Persian roots to ancient Indian past, Jayaswal goes on to say that such a theory merely appeared to be a “castle-in-the-air.”\footnote{Ibid. p. 104.}

Spooner may have been emboldened by persistent claims by Europeans that roots of Indian civilization lay in the west; most notable of such claims could be attributed to Vincent Smith.\footnote{Vincent Smith. Early History of India. Cited in Thapar. “Interpretations of Ancient Indian History.” p. 324.} But by the late 1910s, there was already an emergence of a nationalist sentiment that was pervasive among a growing number of historians who were only eager to refute any claims that sought to associate the sources of Indian past to “foreign” origins. In other words, to these historians the ancient Indian past was no longer malleable to fit the narrative discourse of European historians who would see in ancient India traces of a western past. For the colonized literati, history was an important source disassociating their humiliating colonized present from an ancient glorious past. In order to bridge the dichotomous distinction between a glorious-past/humiliating-present, the native literati had to lay a clear ownership over the historical narrative of ancient India.\footnote{See Partha Chatterjee. Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.}

As a result the rise of the Mauryan empire in the third century B.C.E. was being seen as
an expression of an all India consciousness serving as a source of pride and strengthening the principles of nationhood.\textsuperscript{118}

The debate regarding the roots of ancient Indian civilization did not die down with the dismal end of Spooner’s theory. Rather the pages of the *Journal* would once again emerge as the locus of another such contention – and this time two local artifacts, the “Statues of two Saisunaka Emperors,”\textsuperscript{119} stone sculptures to be more precise, serve as the kernel for contention. But just as in the case of the Persian theory, the arguments regarding the sculptures found in areas surrounding Patna are not going to be framed as part of an exclusive provincial past, rather here again it is going to serve as sources to narrate the story of the nation – perhaps indicating the porousness of this particular regional past to that of a national Indian past. In other words, the ancient history of the province of Bihar could not be written without making it a crucial part of the narrative of an ancient Indian national past. In this case, the historical narrative of the regional and the national past emerged conjoined during its formative stages.

**Presenting the Past: Ancient Sculptures and Modern Histories**

The promise of monumental finds inspired much of the Pataliputra explorations, but what the excavations yielded were small terracotta figurines and fragments of antiquities as mentioned above. Even before a stock of all this was taken, there were some among the locals who were beginning to express skepticism regarding the whole enterprise. Particularly if all the time and effort was being spent to unearth “Persepolis at

\textsuperscript{118} Thapar. “Interpretations of Ancient Indian History.” p. 327.

Patna” and a huge sum was spent in “digging up broken bricks and rotten-wood.”\textsuperscript{120} – were these the archaeological relics that were to now inspire and fire up the historical imagination of the regional literati and conjure up images of ancient grandeur? More so, could the significance of the site and findings remain the same if they were used only to link ancient India to ancient Persia? Much of these skepticisms came to rest in late 1917, not through the result of learned archeologists digging up in the right places, but through an accidental finding of the Didarganj Yakshi.\textsuperscript{121} A brief discussion of the Didarganj Yakshi is necessary since it is this discovery that leads to the controversy regarding the status of what Jayaswal referred to as “Statues of two Saisunaka Emperors.”

A square block of stone, partially exposed owing to the erosion of the riverbank, caught the attention of Maulavi Qazi Saiyid Muhammad Azimul on October 18, 1917. Expecting to find a stone useful for domestic purposes, he proceeded to scrape away the earth from the projecting bit only to discover “a complete and fairly large-sized statue.”\textsuperscript{122} Initially, the statue was set up near the spot where it was found and was subsequently moved a few hundred yards up the river by “unauthorized persons.” Spooner’s labeling of these people as “unauthorized” is an indication of the contest between the authorized vis-à-vis unauthorized claims to which antiquities were subjected. For upon removing the statue upriver it was set up under a canopy which was “speedily invested with the character of an incipient shrine” and was being worshipped “under the mistaken notion that the figure was a Hindu deity.” It was only due to the timely

\textsuperscript{120}“Dr. Spooner’s Persian Theory” \textit{The Behar Herald}. February 26, 1916.
\textsuperscript{121} Davis. \textit{Lives of Indian Images}; Tapati Guha-Thakurta. “The Endangered Yakshi: Careers of an Ancient Object in Modern India.” Both Davis and Guha-Thakurta begin with accounts of the discovery of the statue. It would be helpful to briefly recollect the moment of its discovery.
intervention of J.N. Samaddar, who was informed by one of his students about this, that
the statue could be removed from the sanctified domain of religion to the domain of
history and archeology. Whether the student described the event as an accidental
discovery of a statue or magical reappearance of a divine image, we can only speculate.
Samaddar brought the discovery of the statue to the attention of E.H.C. Walsh, who was
Member of the Board of Revenue, Vice-President of the Bihar and Orissa Research
Society and President of the Patna Museum Committee. Upon proceeding to the spot to
inspect the statue, “the importance of the treasure was at once disclosed” to Walsh who
along with Spooner were able to convince the ignorant worshippers that “the figure was
merely an attendant, bearing a chowry, and thus clearly no member of the Hindu
pantheon, nor entitled to worship of any kind by any community.” Spooner in his
narrative of events goes on to write that Walsh then proceeded to take energetic steps
“towards the recovery or rescue of the image,” which finally brought the statue “in safety
and triumph within the walls of the Patna Museum before the close of the year.”123 It was
the authority of the colonial state, which allowed for the “statue to be quickly salvaged
from its ‘unauthorized’ worshippers for the ‘authorized’ claims of history and
archeology.”124

In the journey of the statue from its site of discovery to the Patna Museum, which
was still located within the walls of the Patna High Court, the distance traversed remains
miniscule when compared to what it would be subjected to in 1947 when it was sent
abroad for the first time to London for an “Exhibition of Art from the Dominions of India
and Pakistan” and again in 1980 when it travelled to France and the USA as part of the

123 Ibid.
“Festival of India” exhibitions. But the initial removal of the statue from Didarganj to the Museum, though it traversed a short distance within the city, it was effectively a metaphor for a complete transformation of the purpose the statue was to serve. The object by the time of its removal to the Museum had been through several incarnations and was now to be witnessed not as an object of worship, but as an iconic representation of ancient Indian art. The gulf separating the two was a difference that would be impossible for the object to bridge; the statue was not going to live a hybrid existence of a divine figure as well as an iconic representation of Indian art within the walls of the museum. Once moved to the Patna museum, the Didarganj Yakshi was to share the same fate as several other such objects where it is not the original purpose of the object or sculpture that is going to prove crucial, rather these objects were now to be invested with qualities and aesthetic categorizations that were to serve the purposes of a quickly ossifying contours of ancient Indian history. In the events that unfolded during the days immediately following the discovery of the Didarganj Yakshi, is embedded the story of how this particular object was invested with multiple lives – from an object of popular worship, it eventually comes to symbolize the aesthetics of Indian art. The archaeological artifact therefore becomes an object of art, which is inscribed with antiquity and history and thus providing the object with a modern biography within the confined space of the museum – be it provincial, national or international. The rightful place of the object was not among the natives, the object could no longer be a living object where the natives had any authority over it. Rather the discipline of history and archeology would determine the fate of it – valorizing it by investing it with aesthetic qualities within the museum,

125 Ibid. p. 72.
whether provincial, national or even international, serving as the final repository for them. The museum, now serving as the site that rightfully consecrates such artifacts not as a divine object but rather as the symbol commemorating a long national history, became the site where the Didarganj Yakshi with all its historical accretions was to remain captivated. It is the museum that would now provide safe custody for objects salvaged from various inappropriate uses and locations.

Once the Didarganj Yakshi was brought within the sanctified thresholds of the provincial museum, scholars debated its iconography and contested its chronological placement. It was the labeling of this statue as a “Yakshini” that attracted the notice of K. P. Jayaswal. In order to curb his dissatisfaction with this nomenclature, he drew attention to two other life-size male statues housed in the Indian Museum, Calcutta which were described by Alexander Cunningham as Yakshas and these in turn had been labeled as such based on another identification of a similar statue found at Parkham (Mathura). While the true identification of these statues remain unsettled, what is of importance here is to see how this debate unfolded as it brings to the fore questions regarding the indiginity of free-standing stone sculpture in India. As a corollary, it also highlights the centrality of the ancient Indian past in shaping up a nationalist imagination of ancient India. Most importantly, in this entire process however, although the Yakshi and the Yakshas that Jayaswal refers to were found in the vicinity of Patna – there is little attempt made by Jayaswal or others who chose to partake in this debate to construct a narrative of the existence of highly developed knowledge of art in ancient Bihar. The Didarganj Yakshi certainly remained and continues to remain the “chiefest treasure” of the Patna

Museum, but the provincial museum here merely serves as a repository of local finds that were to fill in the gaps of a national past – perhaps reminding us of how the local and the regional were, in this case, inexorably tied to the national with each serving as perfect complements to the other, making it impossible to talk about one without invoking the other.

Much like the Yakshi, albeit in lesser detail, there is an account of the discovery of the two Yaksha statues that are going to stir up a storm among antiquarians, thanks to Jayaswal labeling them as the images of two Saisunaka Emperors dating back to the 483-409 B.C.E. These dates are quite crucial as they point to the homegrown knowledge of stone sculpting in ancient India and could serve to counter the Persian and Hellenistic ties that have always been established to such sculptures by European scholars. Before proceeding along, let me briefly pause to provide an account of the first discovery of the two Yaksha statues more than a century ago in 1812 by the inveterate traveler and surveyor, Francis Buchanan. Describing the discovery, he wrote:

In the Ganges, opposite to the suburbs above the town, I found a stone image lying by the water’s edge when the river was at the lowest. It has represented a male standing, with two arms and one head, but the arms and feet have been broken. The face also is much mutilated. It is nearly of a natural size, and very clumsy, and differs from most Hindu images that I have seen in being completely formed, and not carved in relief with its hinder parts adhering to the rock, from whence it has been cut. On the back part of the scarf, which passes round the shoulders, are some letters which I have not been able to have explained, and too much defaced to admit of being copied with absolute precision. Some labourers employed to bring this image to my house informed me that it had been some years ago taken from a field on the south side of the suburbs, and had been intended for an object of worship: but that a great fire having happened on the day when it was removed, the people were afraid, and threw it into the sacred river. They also informed me that in the same field the feet of another image projected from the ground, and that many years ago a Mr. Hawkins had removed a third. On going to the place I could plainly discover that there had been a small building of brick, perhaps fifty or sixty feet in length; but most of the materials have been removed. On digging I found the image to be exactly similar to that which I found
on the river but somewhat larger. The feet are entire, and some part of the arms remain, but the head has been removed.... I rather suppose that these images have been intended as an ornament to the temple, and to represent the attendants on some god, whose image has been destroyed.\textsuperscript{127}

Much like the Yakshi statue, one of the Yaksha statues too was found on the banks of the Ganges, but rather than successfully being appropriated as a divine image following its discovery in a nearby field, it was the bad omen of a “great fire” that compelled the people to drown the statue in the holy river. Although Buchanan did not see the third figure, the two figures recovered by him came into the possession of a Dr. Tytler, whose brother presented them to the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1820. The statues lay there “neglected for forty years hidden amongst the foliage” until J.D.M. Beglar brought them to the attention of Cunningham, and a year later in 1879 the statues were removed to the Indian Museum where they were installed on raised pedestals in the Bharhut gallery.

Aside from the one removed by Hawkins, Cunningham found another statue belonging to the same group near Agam Kuan – located to the south of Patna City where “mounted with a new head it was being worshipped in his day as Mata-Mai by the villagers.”\textsuperscript{128}

Unlike the quick appropriation of the Didarganj statue for the services of history and archeology, Cunningham was most likely unable to divest the image of Mata-Mai of its divinity in order to take possession of it for the purposes of history and archeology – for even in 1919, Jayaswal continued to believe that the statue was still somewhere in the vicinity of Agam Kuan.

Though Buchanan removed both the statues, it is likely that he was not highly impressed by them. His description of the statues as “very clumsy” is in stark contrast to

\textsuperscript{128} Jayaswal. “Statues of Two Saisunaka Emperors (483-409 B.C.).” p. 88.
Cunningham who summed up his description of the statues by remarking that “the easy attitude and the calm and dignified repose of the figures are still conspicuous, and claim for them a high place amongst the best specimens of early Indian art.”\(^{129}\) The difference in these remarks perhaps indicate the degree to which knowledge of ancient Indian art had developed in the half-century that roughly separates Cunningham’s discovery of these statues in the Indian Museum – where it lay neglected, from that of Buchanan’s initial find. But by 1919, Jayaswal once again drawing attention to the statues almost fifty years after Cunningham went on to proclaim that, “As historic monuments they are not only the most important remains in India but have to be classed amongst the important pieces of the world.”\(^{130}\) But aside from proclaiming them as monumental masterpieces, Jayaswal went on to add further that the executioners of such masterpieces were artists who “have succeeded on the whole in producing the effect of majesty with masterly chisel.”\(^{131}\)

The reason Jayaswal could go on to proclaim the ingenuity of the sculptors is because he claimed that the knowledge of sculpting and the polish both “pointed to an Indian origin,” indicating that both had “developed from the art of pre-historic times when primitive man devoted much attention to his stones.” Jayaswal, having argued for both the Indian origin of sculpting and polishing could finally make his ultimate assertion that the two statues carried the art of sculpting “two centuries back from the date alleged for its import from Persia,”\(^{132}\) which led him to claim that the two statues in the Indian


\(^{131}\) Ibid.

\(^{132}\) Ibid. p. 105.
Museum “represent two emperors of the Saisunaka dynasty, one of whom, Udayin (488-467 B.C.), was the founder of Pataliputra, and the other, the great conqueror Nandi-Vardhana (449-409 B.C.).”\textsuperscript{133} It was Jayaswal’s reading of the inscriptions on the statues that led him to identify them as the statue of two kings rather than mere yakshas. More importantly, Jayaswal uses the evidence embedded on the statues to “enhance the value of the Puranic record, as historical materials.”\textsuperscript{134} For even the Puranas, mainly the “Vayu, Brahmanda and Matsya,” Jayaswal states, mentions Nandi-Vardhana “as amongst the Saisunaka kings of Patna” and that he was the son of Udayin – the founder of Pataliputra. Jayaswal’s theory stirred up quite a controversy where one set of scholars claimed them to be the statues of kings, while another set declared them to be mere icons, most likely \textit{yakshas} – a label first placed on the statues by Cunningham.\textsuperscript{135} To Jayaswal, the refusal of many scholars, both native and European, to accept that the statues were not divine or semi-divine, but temporal human figures representing images of kings, were based on “quicksands of mistakes, belief and reiterated assertion.”\textsuperscript{136}

Central to the controversy was the very indigenuity of the knowledge of free-standing human sculpting and this is exactly what Mahamahopadhyaya Haraprasad Shastri sought to establish in support of Jayaswal’s theory. To Shastri, the resistance of scholars in accepting Jayaswal’s theory was just another instance of people refusing to “give up his pet theory without a struggle.”\textsuperscript{137} He pointed out that “The present idea is

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{133} Ibid. p. 88.
\item\textsuperscript{134} Ibid. pp. 96-97.
\item\textsuperscript{135} The theory that they are portrait statues of kings as advanced by K.P. Jayaswal has been supported by authorities like R.D. Banerji, MM Hara Prasad Sastri and Arun Sen. The stoutest opponents of the theory are O.C. Gangoly, Dr. R. C. Majumdar.
\item\textsuperscript{136} “‘Saisunaka Statues.’ Joint Meeting of Asiatic Societies held in London. Abstract of Dr. Vincent Smith’s remarks on September 5, 1919.” \textit{JBORS}, Vol. 5, Part IV, 1919, p. 540.
\end{itemize}
that India owes much of her civilization to Persia. The Asoka sculptures are said to have received their finish and technique from Persian artists. There is a prima facie ground for suggesting this view as the Maurya Empire came into existence after the fall of the Persian Empire.” But even when evidence to the contrary was available, many scholars refused to accept it as substantial grounds to dislodge the Persian origin of things Indian. For instance, as Shastri pointed out, “The discovery of the Piprahwa vase with an inscription in a script similar to that of Asoka and with a polish superior to that on the sculptures of Asoka threw doubts on the Persian theory. But the adherents of that theory tried to explain away a single instance like that as an anomaly.” But in this case, Shastri saw no legitimate grounds on which scholars could continue to deny the indigenity of this particular art form. And as his final piece of evidence, he draws upon Bhasa’s drama, “Pratima Nataka” – an edition of which was recently published by Ganapati Sastri in 1915. This drama, Haraprasad Shastri contends, “gives for the first time an idea that in ancient times statues used to be erected in honour of dead potentates,” and housed in what was known as “Devakulas.” The fact that four statues were found in the vicinity of Patna, within what were the remains of a brick-built structure, pointed to both Shastri and Jayaswal that they were remains of Devakulas. The fact that Haraprasad Shastri is willing to accord a literary text the importance of a valid historical source certainly would not have been possible during the late nineteenth century and Sastri himself was quite aware of it. But during a time, when, as he puts it, “orientalists, both here and in Europe, said that the history of the Indian Empire could not go beyond the

[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid. p. 559.
Mauryas, Mr. Justice Pargiter silently but steadily working through the Puranas has constructed a dynastic history of India in the Kaliyuga.”\textsuperscript{141} To Shastri, and certainly for Jayaswal as well, the importance Pargiter placed on the Puranas as valid historical source was central to debates regarding the disciplinary orientation of history itself – a debate that also took the shape of heated controversy among Indian scholars as well.\textsuperscript{142} For Shastri, and certainly for Jayaswal, this recourse to literary evidence as a valid source of history was seen as “investing this skeleton of history with flesh and blood.”\textsuperscript{143}

Probably the most important evidence against Jayaswal’s theory was the similarity between the Parkham statue in Mathura and the two Yaksha/Saisunaka Statues in the Indian Museum. Ever since the Parkham statue had been labeled as Yaksha, by Cunningham, it served as sufficient proof that the two Patna statues were Yaksha statues as well. But as a final assault against those refusing to accept Jayaswal’s theory, Jayaswal upon reading the inscription on the Parkham statue identified it as belonging to Kunika Ajatasatru, the son of Vimbisara – the king of the Sisunaga family.\textsuperscript{144} Therefore, finally dislodging the Yaksha theory altogether in the eyes of all of Jayaswal’s proponents. In the course of this debate, as the theme of indigenity became the core issue more so since it invoked with it a theme of “Indianness”, both the “primitive” and the more “refined” form of sculpting became crucial metaphors to point to an ancient home-grown history of Indian sculpture one that was devoid of any Persian or Hellenic influences. But as this debate progressed, we also witnessed the growing reliance on Puranas as reliable

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid. p. 553. 
\textsuperscript{142} Chatterjee. “The King of Controversy.” 
\textsuperscript{143} Shastri. “Saisunaka Statues,” p. 553. 
historical materials pointing to a general acceptance of it as credible sources to the ancient Indian past.

Conclusion

Deeply embedded in a period of rising nationalist movement, the regional literati in Bihar, Jayaswal being the most prominent among them, read deeply into the past to invoke a sense of grandeur and greatness. As mentioned above, Jayaswal was extremely involved with the Museum, the Society as well as its Journal of which he was the editor. But Jayaswal’s editorial career began in 1914, a year before the Journal began its publication, when he started publishing a Hindi journal Pataliputra. Initially, Jayaswal, used Pataliputra as a forum which would delve into matters of history with an eye to more scholarly interests. But within a year, Jayaswal published an editorial titled “Swatantrata” (Independence). One can rightly imagine the commotion it caused both among the native literati and the colonial officials. Possibly because of his close association with Edward Gait and other colonial officials, with whom he was working at the Research Society, the only consequence Jayaswal had to face as a result of his action was to submit his resignation as the editor after about a year of managing it. Given the editorial scrutiny and the scholarly inclination of the Journal of the Society, the publication was never overtly political – but as we have seen above the Journal was always at the forefront when it came to defending the indigenity of the Indian past with Jayaswal often times leading the charge. Given his association with colonial scholar-officials and the Society, the Journal and the Museum, Jayaswal could probably never be overtly political or openly express his nationalist sentiments as he had done as the editor.

of Pataliputra. But he did not miss his opportunity to exploit his role as a historian who used the past to create a picture of an ancient Indian golden age. For instance, Jayaswal in one of his books goes on to claim that the colonized India of present itself had had an imperial past during its days of glory in ancient times. As he points out, “It is certain that the Puranas in the third and fourth centuries are conscious of the Hindu colonies in Further India, and treat them as parts of Bharatavarsha. Their Bharatavarsha, which was primarily India, was at this point of time interpreted as India-cum-Greater India, which latter taking Ceylon, consisted of eight units or divisions, called *dvipas*” which extended as far as the islands of Sumatra and Borneo.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, Jayaswal’s modality of nationalist thought was deeply embedded in the rhetoric of a glorious Hindu past which can best be summarized in his own words:

> The psychology of the nation was entirely changed and the outlook became lofty and magnanimous. It was a psychology directly borrowed from the Emperor. The Hindus of his day [Samudra Gupta] thought of big undertakings. They contributed high, elegant and magnanimous literature. The literary people became literary Kuberas to their countrymen and literary empire-builders outside India. Kumarajiva made a literary conquest of China. The Kaundinya missionary established a social and cultural overlordship in Cambodia. Merchants and artists made India a wonderland for the foreign eyes. There was nothing feminine in art, literature, piety or politics. The chisel produced virile gods and martial goddesses. The pen portrayed handsome and masculine men, self-conscious and proud Hindu Prussians. Scholars and Brahmans wielded sword and pen with equal facility. Aristocracy of intellect and ability was raised to a height which was hardly repeated in this land.¹⁴⁷

Truly, in Jayaswal’s eyes, ancient India was a golden age as he went on a determined attempt to prove that Indian civilization did not lack any of the laudable qualities ascribed to the Greeks. As he maintained that the political life of ancient India was organized into republics that were based on concepts of democracy and representative government to the

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same degree as the Greek city-states.\textsuperscript{148} Through this, Jayaswal was certainly attempting to challenge the deeply embedded European notion that ancient Greece served as the fountainehead for all positive aspects of civilization everywhere and India was no exception. But in his attempt to do so, Jayaswal’s own focus remained mired in a nationalist outlook where the history of ancient Bihar, or Magadha to be more particular, remained a crucial component of the national narrative. Possibly because of how ancient Magadha was inextricably tied to the national historical narrative we see scholars, more particularly Bengali scholars, some domiciled in Bihar while others not, who devoted considerable time to studying its ancient past.\textsuperscript{149} The ancient past of Bihar, therefore, did not emerge as a fully formed concept that was to add on to the sum total of knowledge regarding Indian past – rather the ancient past of Bihar made up a considerable portion of ancient Indian history, perhaps, indicating how the modern region of Bihar was sutured to the emerging Indian nation during the formative stages of both.


\textsuperscript{149} Some of the early examples of Bengali scholars taking a strong interest in Magadha are: Anantaprasad Banerji-Sastri, \textit{Evolution of Magadhi}. London: Oxford University Press, 1922; Haraprasad Sastr. \textit{Magadhan Literature}. 1923; J. N. Samaddr. \textit{Glories of Magadha}. 1924.
Chapter 5:
Articulating Mithila: Interrogating the Existence of a “Genuinely” Bihari Culture

On August 1, 2011, a large group of people gathered in New Delhi to demand a separate state of Mithilanchal – a region that makes up much of north Bihar.¹ The basis for such an assertion lay in differences of linguistic and cultural practices between Mithila and the rest of Bihar. With regards to its territorial extent, Mithila claims a very particular and precisely demarcated territorial space as described in the Puranas with the Ganges marking out the southern, Kosi the eastern, and Gandaki the western boundaries.² Yet it was not until the early decades of the twentieth century, that the distinct territorial conception of Mithila merged with a resurgent linguistic consciousness, cultural difference and historical awareness and together instigated a sub-regional consciousness within the newly established province of Bihar. In a sense, the story of the formation of Bihar and the subsequent regional consolidation that worked to “naturalize” an administrative province as an organic entity of India coincides with the emergence of a sub-regional consciousness that is reflective of a Maithil identity. In fact, the genesis of a Maithil identity took shape against the backdrop of the movement for the province of Bihar. It is therefore not surprising that the emergence of the “Mithila, Maithila, Maithili” sentiment, mired in assertions of linguistic and cultural difference, was partially initiated under the guidance of the “Maithila Mahasabha” founded in 1910.³ In other words, the creation of a separate province of Bihar also brought in its wake a distinctly “Maithil”

sense of identity, and triggered instead other sub-regional assertions. The articulation of Mithila as a distinct cultural and linguistic space further points to the limits of a Bihari imagination as projected by the proponents for a separate Bihar. In this sense, the main purpose of this chapter is to show that while the historical-cultural contours of the newly formed colonial province called Bihar was being constructed by the literati of Bihar during the 19th and early 20th centuries, there were coeval and contemporaneous tendencies that underscored the limits of Bihar as a historical-cultural and organic entity.

The existence of Mithila as a distinct sub-regional space within Bihar suggests that within every “imagined community,” be it nations or regions, there are stirrings of other forms of “imagined communities,” which not only challenges the very distinction that regions claim as organic entities, but it is also a recognition of the volatility of assertions of more specifically regionally based identities.\(^4\) Regional imaginations, given the larger context of colonialism and nationalism, should therefore be considered as “contingent communities” whose emergence was in part a negotiation with national imaginings in South Asia.\(^5\) Situating the assertion of regional difference within a broader national context may help explain the cultural-historical articulations of Bihar and Bihariness, but it does not adequately explain the stirring of sub-regional consciousness that were instigated in its wake. This chapter attempts to understand one such instance of sub-regional difference and the challenge it presents to an organic imagination of Bihar.

Situating Mithila

Before engaging with the articulations of a Maithil culture, a brief discussion regarding the place and the complexities embedded in engaging with this portion of North Bihar require some attention. In the discussion below, there will be a constant interchange between the place-names, Mithila and Tirhut – both of which roughly refer to the same place. However, given the historical trajectories of these two names, Mithila is generally used to connote a distinct cultural space, while Tirhut refers to an administrative entity. Upendra Thakur points out that the origin of the word “‘Mithila,’ as given in ancient literature, is purely mythical,” and can be traced back to a legend in the Satapatha Brahmana. Tirabhukti or Tirhut is a much later term that was applied to this region and was used to describe the geographical features of this place enclosed by the banks of three prominent rivers – Ganges, Gandaki and Kosi. Etymologically, Tirabhukti is derived from tira (river bank) and bhukti – which translates as “the land of the river banks.” Haraprasad Sastri says that the word bhukti was used in the sense of a province during the eleventh or twelfth century. Yet Tirabhukti or modern Tirhut never quite replaced Mithila as the dominant place-name for this region. As Laksman Jha, one of the staunchest champions for a separate province of Mithila, would point out “today if the administration records ‘Tirhut’ as the name, the people – inhabitants as well as others – know it as Mithila.” Perhaps this shows that the enduring resonance of a specific cultural identity, which is embedded in ancient mythology and is very particular to the

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7 Ibid. p. 8.
geographic landscape of Mithila, could not entirely be washed away through administrative machinations. Although initially, Tirhut and Mithila both referred to the same geographic area, overtime Tirhut became more closely associated with an administrative entity, while purely on an administrative basis Mithila as a place ceased to exist. During the time of Akbar, this region was divided into three sircars – Champaran, Hajipur and Tirhut, but was collectively known as Tirhut, which was the name with which the place was referred to even during the British period, when in 1908, Tirhut Division and Bhagalpur Division together co-constituted this particular region of North Bihar.\textsuperscript{11} In the early twentieth century, although fragmented into the districts of Champaran, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, (North) Monghyr, (North) Bhagalpur and (West) Purnea in British India and those of Rautahat, Saralahi, Mohatari, Saptari and Morang in Nepal – Mithila as a place-name continued to endure in the imaginations of people.\textsuperscript{12} The fact that national boundaries separating India and Nepal divided this region as well, did very little to dampen the enduring appeal of Mithila as a distinct cultural landscape. It is this emotional attachment to Mithila that inspired a movement to claim a distinct provincial identity within India.

From 1912 onwards, Bihar emerged as a separate province and continued with its project of patronizing and promoting Hindi as the provincial language while also initiating a historical outlook of the region that braided the province’s ancient past together with an Indian national past. It is therefore not surprising that one of the earliest

\textsuperscript{11} Gangananda Sinha and Girindramohan Mishra. \textit{The Formation of a Separate Province of Mithila}, 1947. Darbhanga: Kalyani Foundation Library. p. 14. I should also mention that this pamphlet is not attributed to any particular author, but going through the multiple exchanges regarding the language and content of the pamphlet, show that Gangananda Sinha and Girindramohan Mishra were greatly invested in authoring this.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
pamphlets drafted to argue for a separate province of Mithila began by questioning the very existence of Bihar. “The Province of Bihar,” as the authors put it, “was created to protect an imaginary and non-extant ‘Bihari’ language and culture. The so-called province of Bihar was an artificial creation of the Muslim conquerors of India and was arbitrarily perpetuated by the Britishers (sic).”13 Such a claim is also an indication of the emergence and perhaps the influence of a historical consciousness that not only privileged, but was oriented towards an ancient and therefore a more authentic India.

Besides, what gave credibility to Gangananda Sinha and Girindramohan Mishra, the authors of this pamphlet, was the much older genealogy of the place-name Mithila, references to which were available in ancient Sanskrit literature. In stark contrast, they point out that “there is no mention at all of the name ‘Bihar’,” in the ancient or even the early medieval history of India.14 Instead they remind us that the people of the region have always called their land by their ancient names, “Tirhut (Tirabhukti)” and “Magaha (Magadha)” while pointing out that it was the Muslim conquerors of this region, who upon seeing a landscape dotted with Viharas (monasteries), referred to this place as Bihar.15 Historically speaking, this is all true. And yet, what is rather remarkable is the highly selective engagement with the past that the authors commit to. For instance, on the one hand there is an active denial of the natural existence of “Bihar Subah” which was an administrative entity during the time of Akbar.16 On the other hand, Akbar’s grant of sircar Tirhut to Mahesa Thakura, the founder of the Khandavala Dynasty or alternately the Darbhanga Raj, was amongst the primary legitimizing factors contributing to a sense

13 Ibid. p. 4.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid. p. 5.
of Tirhut’s continued existence as a cohesive “territorial unit from the hoary days of the Ancient Mithila Kingdom.” That the authors of this pamphlet were both closely associated with the Darbhanga Raj and the fact that the Maharaja of Darbhanga viewed himself as the “natural leader” of Mithila, serves as an added complication to this movement for the recognition of a sub-regional identity. Perhaps this also suggests that Maithil identity was not only predicated on linguistic and cultural differences, but also on the self-interest of the Darbhanga Maharaja in preserving his traditional authority as the hereditary ruler of Mithila.

Traditional Brahmanical authority and culture were deeply embedded in everyday practices of Maithil society where cultural habits were not only sanctioned by the authority of the Darbhanga Raj, but were in fact embedded in the region’s geographic location. Perhaps hyperbolic, but the following description of Mithila’s geographic location and the ensuing legitimacy it provided in fostering a staunch orthodox Brahmanical culture encapsulates the deep roots it stuck in Mithila:

The Ganga commensurate with her magnitude played as the dividing line between the two cultures of India – the Aryan, and the more ancient, the non Aryan. Later on in the territory now known as Bihar, it came to be the dividing line between the Brahmanic culture in Mithila to the north and the Buddhist culture in Magadha to the south. Such a perception of Mithila as a society primarily dominated by a conservative Brahmanic culture is quite well accepted and in fact has been further perpetuated by scholars working on the region.

17 Ibid. p. 22.
Similar characterizations of Mithila by colonial authorities also provided adequate reassurance for stressing this region’s Brahmanic culture. Emphasizing this region’s relative seclusion, C. J. Stevenson-Moore writes,

> We have seen that when eventually the first flood of Musalman invasion, coming down the Ganges, did overspread Bihar, it subsided, leaving Mithila with Hindu kings still holding courts, where poetry and learning were alone honoured. There are probably few regions on which Islam made less impression than in Mithila, even after the absorption of Bihar into the empire of Akbar.  

Perhaps it was the influence of the Darbhanga Raj that impelled colonial authorities to reflect primarily upon the region’s Brahmanical culture – and was eventually perpetuated by subsequent scholars as well. For instance, Clive Dewey points out that the “chief interest of Mithila for the historian,” is the “extraordinary continuity, till very recent times, of a caste-ridden and conservative society closely approximating Brahmanical ideals.” Similarly, Carolyn Henning Brown stresses the “continuity of culture in this region from earliest times,” which accounts for the “existence of a strong Hindu king within the caste of Maithil Brahmans.” Finally, in describing the role of the Darbhanga Raj, Stephen Henningham points out that they “championed Maithil Brahmanism, and they and their estate comprised a central institution in Mithila.” The rulers of the Darbhanga Raj certainly supported and perpetuated an orthodox culture of Maithil Brahmanism and commanded a degree of social capital, which reassured their position at the helm of Maithil society. As a result, the Maharajas of Darbhanga were “leaders of a

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closed elite group rather than popular princes” and in this sense they were more devoted to propagating “all-India symbols than the cultural symbols of their region.”

At this point, let us pause only to briefly point out that although immensely powerful, influential and wealthy, the Darbhanga Raj is not Mithila or vice versa, at least not during the nineteenth and twentieth century. For the territorial extent of Mithila extended beyond the estates of the Darbhanga Raj, with the Nepal Terai making up quite a significant portion of the Maithili cultural landscape. Also, it is equally important to remember that during the colonial period the authority of the Raj was limited to that of a prominent landlord albeit one who was regarded as the leader of Maithil Brahmans. The overlapping interests of the Raj in supporting the cause of a Maithili movement and through it perpetuating a vision of a traditional Maithili culture, which in this case refers to an orthodox Brahmanical culture, requires further deliberation, with which I engage more fully below. For now, perhaps it should suffice to state that the close approximation between the Darbhanga Raj, Maithil Brahmanism and Maithili culture has largely defined Maithil identity as the purview of an elite group comprising mostly of Brahmans and Kayasthas during the late 19th and 20th centuries.

Voicing Differences: Darbhanga Raj, Mithila and Bihar

The foundation of the Maithil Mahasabha in 1910 is perhaps the earliest instance when upper caste Maithils, particularly the Maithili Brahmans and Kayasthas led by the Raja of Darbhanga, came together to advance the cause of Maithili language and culture. With its ten-point agenda the Mahasabha was more akin to a Maithili reform movement,

rather than one geared solely towards the propagation of a distinct Maithili identity vis-à-vis a burgeoning sense of Bihariness.\textsuperscript{26} Regardless, the formation of the Maithili Mahasabha was an indication of a growing awareness towards the culture, society and language of this sub-region of Bihar. Yet the Mahasabha was quite an exclusive organization. Headed by the Maharaja of Darbhanga as its ex-officio president, the membership of this organization was limited only to Maithil Brahmans and Kayasthas and hence it did not recognize anybody else as a Maithil.\textsuperscript{27} This caste-based restriction during the early decades of the Mahasabha can certainly be interpreted as an apt illustration of the strong sense of conservatism prevalent within Maithil society and could perhaps also serve as an indication of the confidence expressed by the Maithil Brahmans and Kayasthas towards the permanence of this hierarchical social structure. Yet it was this very exclusivity that continued to haunt future assertions for a Maithili identity even though it was later reframed to signify a specifically place-based and linguistically exclusive identity. The failure to sufficiently overcome these hierarchical social distinctions, according to some scholars, is one of the biggest reasons for the failure of the Maithili movement.\textsuperscript{28}

Although caste based exclusivity is an important aspect that cannot be ignored lightly, one must also point out that it was from the platform of the Mahasabha that the


Maharaja of Darbhanga first publicly voiced the demand for separation of Mithila from Bihar, albeit it was done three decades after the establishment of the Mahasabha. More importantly, this public demand was made after the efforts of the Maharaja to gain recognition as a Ruling Chief rather than as a zamindar (landlord) had failed. As a result, in 1940 during the annual meeting of the Maithil Mahasabha at Darbhanga, a resolution was formally passed demanding the formation of Mithila.²⁹ It is thus safe to say that by the late 1930s, following the Maharaja’s failed project to become a Ruling Chief, the Maithil Mahasabha had come to serve as a platform for voicing sub-regional differences vis-à-vis Bihar, while trying to cast off its image as a predominantly high-caste organization. Such expressions of cultural difference – one necessitating the channeling of public sentiments, were preceded by an earlier effort at demanding the recognition of Mithila. This came directly from the Maharaja of Darbhanga Rameshwar Singh (1860-1929) but unlike the later demands for a separate province of Mithila, this particular demand was primarily a reflection of Rameshwar Singh’s desire to be recognized as a Ruling Chief and concomitantly the transformation of Mithila as a Native State.³⁰

Our encounter with the Darbhanga Raj is generally as one of colonial India’s ranking zamindars, but moving away from colonial categories of classifying traditional authority as princely states or prominent zamindaris provides us an opportunity to assess the view that the Darbhanga Raj had of itself. In this context, it would be helpful to briefly discuss the narrative account that Rameshwar Singh provides of the Darbhanga Raj. Although a landed estate, the rulers of the Darbhanga Raj were given the honorary

title of “maharajas” (great kings) and informally were ranked with the middle range of Indian princes. In their role as “maharajas” they defended landed interests, participated in provincial and national politics, and commanded an important social and cultural position.\textsuperscript{31} It is worth emphasizing that the ruler of the Darbhanga Raj retained “considerable prestige and authority, beyond that which would have accrued to a mere landed proprietor, no matter how rich.”\textsuperscript{32} The beginnings of the prestige and authority that the Darbhanga Rajas commanded can be traced back to the Mughal period when, Mahesa Thakur was granted the whole country with Kosi and Gandaki marking the east-west and the Himalayan foothills and Ganges the north-south boundaries. Since there is little doubt that Mahesa Thakur occupied the same position that was previously held by Kameswara Thakkura of the Oinivar Dynasty (1350-1557), Shyam Narayan Singh suggests that the “grant made by Akbar to Mahesa Thakkura must have been of the same nature as the grant of Tirhut made by Firoz Shah Toghlak in the beginning of the 14\textsuperscript{th} century to Kameswara Thakkura.”\textsuperscript{33} The fact that both, the Oinivars and their successors the Khandavalas, were Maithil Brahman families gave further credibility to this transition of power and also helped perpetuate a sense of continued Brahmanical dominance over Mithila. Under Mughal sanction, the Maithil Brahman community itself became “a royal caste, with king and aristocracy,” primarily due to the elevation of the Khandavalas as the royal family. Contrary to Hindu traditions of kingship, which is mostly associated with the Kshatriyas, in this particular instance the Brahman rulers of Mithila had taken on the

\textsuperscript{31} This is most evident in their leading role in the Behar Landholders Association, British Indian Association, Member of the Governor-General’s Legislative Council. See Jata Shankar Jha. Biography of an Indian Patriot: Maharaja Lakshmishwar Singh of Darbhanga. Patna: Maharaja Lakshmishwar Singh Smarak Samiti, 1972.

\textsuperscript{32} Henningham. A Great Estate and Its Landlords in Colonial India. p. 23.

responsibility of preserving order within the kingdom.\textsuperscript{34} Hence, it would be safe to say that Brahman orthodoxy served as an important legitimizing factor for the Khandavala dynasty. This continued to be the case even after the arrival of the British and the implementation of the Permanent Settlement (1793). Following the institution of the Permanent Settlement, the authority of the Darbhanga Raj diminished considerably. Rameshwar Singh describes this as British failure to understand the different kinds of land administration exercised by the rulers of Tirhut. As a result, the Permanent Settlement “made a great change, as the whole State was taken away,” because the incumbent Raja, Madho Singh, refused to accept the terms of the settlement as proposed by the Collector of Tirhut. Eventually some 1500 villages were retained under the Raj but this also meant that the status of the Raj was reduced to that “of a mere Zamindar.”\textsuperscript{35}

Given this particular trajectory of how a Raja became a zamindar, Rameshwar Singh’s \textit{Memorial} was simply asking for the restoration of traditional authority his family previously enjoyed. Therefore, when Rameshwar Singh submitted his \textit{Memorial} expressing the desire that the Raja be recognized as a Ruling Chief, much of his arguments drew heavily upon the Maharaja of Darbhanga’s position as the preeminent Hindu family in India and as a bastion of traditional brahmanical authority. I must also add that in light of the later arguments for a separate province, this particular memorial did not seek the recognition of a distinct cultural space in need of its own province to foster. Instead, even when the \textit{Memorial} went on to emphasize that this particular region stood out as an entirely separate organic entity or rather as a “national unit” because of “its history, language (Maithili) and literature;” it was with the intention of highlighting

\textsuperscript{34} Henningham. \textit{A Great Estate and Its Landlords in Colonial India}. p. 23.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Memorial}. Paragraph, 17.
the claim that only Mithila had the distinction of being “the intact home of orthodox Hindu civilization” where Hindu traditions had an unbroken continuity even during the Mughal period.36

It is quite significant that Rameshwar Singh began the memorial primarily as a “personal question,” which he then went on to emphasize was “intimately connected with the scheme of self-government for this country of ancient histories and traditions” thus allowing him to assert the role of Maharaja of Darbhanga as the anchor holding together traditional institutions and practices in the region.37 Reading through the Memorial, it soon becomes evident that Rameshwar Singh’s attempt to demand recognition for Darbhanga Raj as a Native State, was predicated less on the internal cultural homogeneity of Mithila. Rather he was very particularly engaged in cultivating the self-image of an orthodox Hindu ruler. Claims that throughout India the Hindu population popularly knew the Maharajas of Darbhanga as “Mithilesa (Ruler of Mithila)” and that they were “looked upon and treated in Northern Bihar with ancient courtesy and respect which no amount of new, non-political dignities can confer on any landed family,” emphasizes the permanence of traditional authority which did not quite crumple when pitted against colonial rule and the subsequent relegation of their rank within the colonial institutional framework.38 Rather Rameshwar Singh’s fervent commitment to Hindu orthodoxy and his demands to be recognized as a ruling chief was in no way incompatible with the agenda of the colonial state.39 As Thomas Metcalf reminds us, British ideology was

36 Ibid. Paragraph, 5.
37 Ibid. Paragraph, 1.
38 Ibid. Paragraph, 6.
39 In this regard Rameshwar Singh argued, “the centre of human society ‘according to Hindu notions, is the King, without whom the fabric goes to pieces… the well-being of the society depends upon the well-being
caught between searching for India’s similarities with Europe, while at the same time looking for qualities of enduring “difference.” It was this uneasy tension between similarity and difference that was reflected not only in their intellectual endeavors but also in practical reality and decision-making. Grappling with this paradox, the British however eventually preferred to perpetuate the claims of “difference.” So while colonial authorities espoused the rhetoric of transforming India on a Western model, this “Macaulayesque vision” rested very “awkwardly with the vision of an India presided over by princely and aristocratic elites,” since they were seen as the “natural” leaders of the people. In this sense, perhaps Rameshwar Singh was attempting to exploit British tendencies of promoting traditional elites as the rightful rulers of India.

In case the colonial state was still doubtful regarding his traditional authority, he appended a brief account of himself to the Memorial. Here Rameshwar Singh goes on to very clearly point out that he had the power of excommunication for the Hindu community of Mithila and also that the highest class of Maithil Brahmans could not marry without his consent. Perhaps as a way of legitimizing this orthodoxy, he goes on to finally say “In Mithila he has been exercising in religious matters the same power as King Janaka did in days of yore.” Certainly, this cultivation and perpetuation of an orthodox Brahmanical culture has only worked to very narrowly define the legitimate parameters of Maithil identity. From the point of view of the Maharaja of Darbhanga, one could say that this very orthodoxy was the source of his legitimacy and hence the _______________

of the King and we should all be devotedly attached to the King and always pray for his welfare and success… it should make no difference, with us Hindus, if the King lives far away in another country.”


*Metcalf. Ideologies of the Raj.*


*Memorial. Appendix V.*
cultivation of an image espousing conservative Brahmanic ideals was absolutely imperative to the existence of the Raj itself.\textsuperscript{43} Alternately, one could also say that perhaps the rulers of Darbhanga “felt themselves imprisoned by the same system of social control that conditioned their humblest caste fellow.”\textsuperscript{44} This is best indicated by the fact that it was not until 1930s that a Maharaja of Darbhanga dared to defy high-caste Brahmanic injunctions and voyage overseas.

Yet, there is no denying that the perpetuation of orthodoxy also produced deep schisms within Maithil society and this had to be addressed if Mithila was to successfully articulate a distinct cultural identity. It was in this context that Maithili language emerged as the primary medium through which a Maithil cultural identity could be articulated. In a sense the slogan “\textit{Mithila, Maithila Maithili}” which was the last of the 10-point declaration made by the Maithil Mahasabha during its inaugural meeting in 1910, began to receive greater attention and importance by the 1920s and 1930s as efforts were made to present the land, its people and their language as integral to the cultural imagination of this sub-region of Bihar. The establishment of the \textit{Maithili Sahitya Praishad} in April 1930 is one such instance that drew a more explicit link between the Mahasabha’s three prominent markers of Maithil identity. One of the stated aims of this \textit{Parishad} was to publish works written in Maithili with \textit{Mithila Darshan} (1931), the earliest historical account of Mithila written in Maithili serving as their inaugural publication.\textsuperscript{45} The author Sashinath Choudhury’s gratitude towards Raja Krityananda Singh of Banaili, who served as the patron for this work originally composed in 1924, is an important counterpoint to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[43] Brown. “Raja and Rank in North Bihar.” p. 768.
\end{footnotes}
the political machinations of the Darbhanga Raj during this period. So during the 1920s, while the Darbhanga Maharaja was cajoling the colonial government for recognition as a native prince, the Raja of Banaili was demonstrating his “unbridled love for Mithila, Maithila, Maithili.”46 The fact that Krityananda Singh supported Asutosh Mookerjee’s effort to establish Maithili as one of the languages offered for M.A. examination in Calcutta University in 1917, perhaps, is further indicative of Maithilis seeking avenues to express their love for their language while also creating institutional bases for the promotion and development of their “mother-tongue”. Since Maithili language received significant attention in the Mithila movement, I discuss this in greater detail below but for now I would like to discuss other articulations of Mithila that were not entirely centered on the authority of the Darbhanga Raj.

Certainly the wealth, authority and influence of the Darbhanga Raj cannot be underestimated, neither can the projection of the Maharaja of Darbhanga as Mithilesa. The discussion above, I hope adequately demonstrates how Mithila and the Darbhanga Raj were interwoven as part of the same socio-cultural fabric. This is also evident in the grandeur of the Raj, as testified by its “decaying palace-temple-tank complexes” which had entertained Viceroys as well as nationalist politicians, while “peasants lined the roadside to catch a glimpse” of the Maharajas.47 Moving beyond the Maharaja’s palace-complexes and circuits of influence, we notice that beginning in the early decades of the twentieth century, a project of asserting a more specifically placed-based identity was underway. This particular projection of Maithil identity was anchored on the use of Maithili language which fostered a distinct sense of Maithil community. Unlike the

project of the Darbhanga Raj, the Maithil community was defined by highlighting Mithila’s differences vis-à-vis Magadha or Bihar in a more general sense, rather than as a marker of orthodoxy which privileged the Maithil Brahmans and the Maithil Kayasthas to some extent.

For instance, Gangananda Sinha presented one such Memorandum to the Secretary of the Constituent Assembly of India in August 1947. In this regard, Sinha received considerable support from the Darbhanga Raj, but more particularly from Girindramohan Mishra, the Assistant Manager of the Raj, in preparing this document. Sinha was quite hopeful that in an independent India, his request for recognition of a separate province based upon linguistic difference would certainly gain approval. Particularly because, as the proponents of Mithila were quick to point out, “Congress under the British regime did not wait for the government to redistribute provinces on scientific lines,” rather in 1908 it created a separate “provincial Congress Committee for Bihar from that of Bengal,” which in hindsight preempted the subsequent separation of Bihar and Bengal. Writing to the Constituent Assembly with some confidence, given the Congress’ views regarding separate provinces he stated, “In view of the fact that the Indian Nation has gained political power and in accordance with its repeated resolutions is going to constitute provinces on linguistic basis we place our claim for a separate province on those accepted principles.”

49 Separation of Mithila Papers at Maharajadhiraj Kameshwar Singh Kalyani Foundation. Darbhanga.
51 Ganganand Sinha, President Mithila Mandal Central Committee. “Telegram sent to the Secretary, Constituent Assembly of India, New Delhi on July 12, 1947 from Darbhanga and Confirmed by post on July 29, 1947 from New Delhi.”
presented a memorandum to the States’ Reorganization Commission in 1953, while the Maithili Sahitya Parishad demanded a separate Mithila state in 1953. This brief period of pamphleteering for Mithila and petitioning to the Indian state culminated with Janakinandan Singh’s memorandum submitted to the States’ Reorganization Commission in 1954 only to subsequently flare up on occasions as shown by the gathering in Delhi in August 2011, as mentioned above. In these memorials, a sense of Mithila’s difference from Bihar and Magadha, its domination, neglect and subsequently the denial of its existence appear as recurring themes. The proponents of a separate province argued that Mithila risked losing its culture if it did not emerge on its own for without “Mithila Province, there are no hopes for the survival of Maithila customs and traditions.” In a polity where provinces are markers of distinct cultural and linguistic difference, the demand for the creation of a separate province is predicated on the denial of the “organic” existence of another much larger entity of which it is a part. It would therefore be safe to argue that the demand for Mithila was based upon the denial of the preexistence of a distinct Bihari culture. With this in mind, Gangananda Sinha argued:

There is no such cultural thing in intimate matters of life and belief known as ‘Bihari’-custom and ‘Bihari’-rite. It is Maithila and Non-Maithila custom that guide these matters. It is sheer prejudice and ignorance of facts to refuse to recognise the cultural solidarity and independence of Mithila.

And this solidarity of Mithila could only be possible if orthodoxy, so powerfully cultivated by the Maharaja of Darbhanga, could be cast aside. Recognizing this very necessity, Sinha very explicitly states, “The province of Mithila is not meant for any caste

52 Jha. The Colonial Periphery. p. 50.
55 Ibid. p. 29.
– Brahmana or non-Brahmana.” Rather as opposed to the restricted admission to the Maithila Mahasabha, in the Mithila envisioned in Sinha’s Memorandum it was “not caste or creed but merit of every ‘Maithili-speaking’ or ‘Mithila domiciled’ citizen” that would make them Maithils. In this quest for a separate province, the articulation of Maithil identity went from emphasizing caste, to one that was not only based on linguistic difference but one that also sought legitimacy based upon a sense of belonging to a very particular and precisely defined cultural-historical place called Mithila. Therefore, a significantly influential strand of the Mithila movement not only framed Mithila in opposition to Bihar, but also aligned itself in opposition to the Darbhanga Raj and its traditional role as the bastion of Brahmanical orthodoxy.

Criticizing the Raj therefore, become an important way of facilitating an imagination of a Maithil community that was distinct from the Raj. In what is perhaps one of the earliest criticisms of Raj, Laksman Jha writes,

The Maharaj of Darbhanga has been trying for long to organize the Brahmans under his leadership. During the British rule, he made efforts to get himself recognized as the ruling chief of Mithila under British tutelage on the model of the chiefs of Rajasthan, Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore, Kashmir, etc. His labours for the same were still in progress when British rule ended and his Zamindari even was put by the Congress on the agenda for nationalization. The dream of hereditary rulership of Mithila is gone now, but his efforts to maneuver himself into dominating position in its social and political life continue[s].

The fact that Jha was writing in a post-independent India, perhaps only serves to underscore the extent of the Maharaja’s influence and the support he had received under colonial rule. But more importantly, this also signals a shift in conceptualizing Maithils as a community, one where Brahman orthodoxy, albeit an important element, was no

56 Ibid. p. 38.
longer the primary marker or the organizing principle for it. Rather the early years of post independent India proved to be the high watermark of the Maithila movement, which saw a burgeoning of pamphlets, petitions and Maithili journals demanding separate statehood largely in anticipation of the formation of State’s Reorganization Commission.

In this regard the local Darbhanga based, *Mithila Mihir*, published a series of articles during the early 1950s elaborating on the necessity of separate statehood.\(^{58}\)

Similarly, Laksman Jha wrote a series of pamphlets, espousing the cause of Mithila and demanding its separation. Considered to be a prominent ideologue of the Mithila movement in the post-independent period, Laksman Jha wrote quite extensively on the subject.\(^{59}\) A dominant theme in much of Laksman Jha’s pamphlets exudes a sense of cultural crisis for Mithila, which according to him could only be mitigated by its existence as a separate province. Perhaps to add a sense of urgency to the movement, but also to recall the very recent experiences of a subject population under colonial rule, he points out, “We are ruled by men at Delhi, Patna and Kathmandu…. Our heartland of the tarai – 5,000 sq. miles – is occupied by the Gorakhas of Nepal and the rest is under Delhi. The Gorakhas of Nepal and the Magadhans of Patna are protégés of the men at Delhi.”\(^{60}\)

For the Maithil literati, Mithila existed as a fractured regional space whose northern most portions made up much of southeastern Nepal. Hence any discussion of the cultural landscape of Mithila required acknowledging that parts of southern Nepal along with portions of northern Bihar, constituted the ancient landscape of Mithila – one that would

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remain fragmented by modern national boundaries. For Jha, being part of Bihar meant that Mithila had to be subjected to the domination of “Hindi and Nagari, the language and script respectively of Delhi and not through Maithili and Mithilaksara, the language and script of Mithila.”  

Clearly Jha had sufficiently distanced himself from the Darbhanga Raj’s conservative definition of Maithil identity. Rather, he was part of a growing coterie who believed that only the speakers of Maithili were Maithils – thus language rather than caste was to serve as the primary marker of the Maithil people. For instance, Kusheshwar Kumar and Bhola Lal Das, expressed similar sentiments in 1929, when they claimed “Maithili is the mother-tongue not only of the Maithil Brahmanas and Karna Kayasthas but also of those like Shakaldvpi Brahmanas, Bhumihars, Rajputs, Vaisyas, Shudras, the entire Hindu society and Muslims, Christians, Bengalis, Marwaris… living in Mithila.”

I will discuss the linguistic aspect of Maithil identity in greater detail below but for now, I briefly discuss the sense of cultural crisis that is so pervasive in Lakshman Jha’s pamphlets.

Upon earning a doctorate in history from the University of London in 1950, where he researched on Mithila and Magadha and wrote a dissertation titled *Mithila and Magadha A.D. 700-1100*, Laksman Jha returned to Darbhanga and became an extremely vocal participant in the movement for the formation of Mithila. The fact that for his dissertation, Jha chose to focus on the sub-regions that together co-constituted Bihar is an indication of his attempt to understand and explain Magadha and Mithila as separate

61 Ibid. p. 2.
regional spaces. Additionally, it also underscores his belief that these two entities only come together to constitute an administrative rather than a cohesive cultural entity called Bihar. Jha’s statements are perhaps amongst the clearest expressions of the emotionally charged sentiments regarding Mithila, one that only furthered the sense of cultural crisis that the region faced. For instance, when the first non-Rana Prime Minister of Nepal pointed to the region’s ancient past as evidence of Nepal and India’s long tradition of friendship, it came as a rude awakening for those in Mithila. “In 1954,” Laksman Jha recounts, “the Gorakha prime minister of Nepal, Matrika Prasad Koirala, a protégé of Jawaharlal Nehru the Kashmiri Prime Minister of India, shocked us in Mithila with his statement that Nepal’s friendship with India began when ‘the Nepalese king Janak’s daughter, Sita, was married to the Indian king Dasarath’s son, Ram!’” The ahistoricity of such a statement is at once obvious. For the people of Mithila however, this episode not only reminded them that national boundaries divided their cultural-historical space, but that the consequence of such a division could lead to the subsequent loss of history. This was of no minor consequence.

According to epics and Puranas, the ancient capital city of Mithila is popularly identified with contemporary Janakpur, located in the Nepal Terai, thus planting the seed of contention as Nepali national history sought to appropriate an ancient mythical past, which also served as the foundational basis for a Maithil history as well. Beyond Pauranic references to Janakpur as the ancient capital of Mithila, there are some historical allusions pointing to its importance in Maithil history. For instance, the village of Banauli, which lies six miles southwest of Janakpur was the place of refuge for Queen

64 Jha. The Northern Border. p. 19.
65 Jha. Mithila: A Union Republic. p. 87.
Lakhima Devi and the court poet Vidyapati as they fled northward to this region in the fifteenth century, after the Oinavara king, Siva Simha, abrogated his treaty relationship with the Sultan of Delhi and was consequently defeated by the Sultan’s army. But like any place of mythical significance, Janakpur, also popularly known as Janakpurdham, has variations of oral tradition and legends attesting to its foundation. Claims that ascetics Chaturbhuj Giri and/or Sur Kisor founded this particular pilgrimage site, which was eventually settled by the ruler of Makwanpur, who offered land to the ascetics so that they might provide for the worship of Ram and Sita, are the prominent features of the legends associated with the modern foundation of Janakpur. Performance of religious rites may have served as the ostensible reason for making these land grants, but as Richard Burghart has shown, the main purpose of the grant was perhaps the king’s attempt to secure the favor of a deity in the territorial expansion of the kingdom. In other words, “conquest was a sacred duty of the king and the king gave land to a deity in order to gain land or retain land for himself.” Janakpur, therefore, was settled as part of the political struggle between the Kingdom of Makwanpur and the Shah dynasty of Gorkha, during the eighteenth century. Thus the very political struggle that gave birth to the kingdom of Nepal also brought Janakpur, along with portions of Mithila’s cultural landscape, within its territorial limits. Perhaps because Janakpur was not discovered until the end of the seventeenth century, local traditions in Champaran claimed that the ancient capital of King Janaka’s Mithila was at Janakigraha located about 10 miles north of

67 Ibid. p. 269.
Although, there are no visible ruins in Janakpur, the place has been widely accepted as “the real seat of king Janaka.”

Attached to Bihar, but divided by national boundaries, in Jha’s view Mithila only had to suffer neglect. With regards to the portion of Mithila that, in Jha’s view, lay on the wrong side of the national boundary, he writes, that the Indian state did “not mind it remaining in the occupation of the Gorkhas as long as that arrangement helps them.” Similarly, when referring to Bihar, he goes on to say, “people generally and the Government surely mean the area (Magadha) south of the Ganga, Mithila falls to the background. No body seems to take any care about the people there.” Laksman Jha’s emotionally charged expression of love and concern for Mithila may have had limited circulation, but these were also paralleled with the concerted efforts at petitioning the Indian government for a separate province of Mithila as I have discussed above. A prominent basis for demanding a separate Mithila was anchored on claims for this region’s organic existence since ancient times. In the following section I map the evolution of Mithila as a distinct cultural-historical place, through an assessment of local, place-based histories written during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Maithil Past: Writing the History of a Place

Writing his *History of Tirhut* in the early decades of the twentieth century, Shyam Narayan Singh thought it was rather strange that no one had previously attempted to write

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the history of Tirhut. With the intention of making up for this deficiency, Singh ventured to write what became the first history book on Mithila written in English and was published in 1922. There is no way of verifying whether Singh was purposefully ignoring earlier works like *Riaz-i-Tirhut* (1868) by Ayodhya Prasad “Bahar”, *Aina-i-Tirhut* (1883) by Bihari Lal “Fitrat” and *Mithila Darpan* (1915) by Ras Bihari Lal Das, or if he did not actually consider them works on history, in the modern rational positivist sense, and therefore perhaps did not mention them. Written in Urdu and Hindi, as opposed to Singh’s choice of English as the preferred medium, these works were equally invested in writing place-based histories. Inspired by different traditions of history-writing, be it the Indo-Persian *tarikh* tradition, Puranic histories, or the gazetteer-like cataloguing of geographical features and natural products, these histories still shared several common attributes not only among the other vernacular histories but with Singh’s *History of Tirhut* as well.

With regards to gazetteers, the 1860s and 70s was when the project of preparing gazetteers took off in earnest largely under the guidance and supervision of William Wilson Hunter following his proposition to do so in 1869. As a result, the first edition of the *Imperial Gazetteer of India* was published in 1881 providing a detailed catalogue of information on the people, history, geography, language practices, geological features, ethnographic accounts, customs and cultures, to name some of the more prominent

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72 Singh. *History of Tirhut.*
73 Shyam Narayan Singh does not refer to Monmohan Chakravarti’s essay, “History of Mithila During the Pre-Moghul Period” which had been published in 1915 in the *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal.*
attributes of Britain’s Indian Empire.⁷⁵ Yet, beyond these empire-wide projects of collecting and cataloguing information, the Imperial Gazetteers had its more regionally focused antecedents as typified by the writings of Buchanan Hamilton and George Abraham Grierson and were perhaps not unknown to Ayodhya Prasad Bahar or Bihari Lal Fitrat as they embarked on their project of writing the history of Tirhut.⁷⁶ Before delving into a discussion of the particularities of these histories, I map out some of the pertinent issues, questions and concerns regarding the culture of history writing in India and in the process attempt to trace Singh’s claim regarding the lack of a Maithil history prior to the nineteenth century.

The use of history as a cultural tool in shaping an understanding of a common Indian past and Indian identity makes it vitally important that we understand cultures of history writing in the sub-continent, both in its colonial and pre-colonial context. The manner in which history has been implicated in forging a sense of Indian national identity and in building a sense of a national past has led some scholars of Indian history to argue that pre-colonial India lacked a sense of history. In this sense, Sudipta Kaviraj has argued that the objective reality of Indian history was an invention – one that was historically instituted by nineteenth century nationalist imagination. In other words, to him the consciousness of modern India, underpinned by a new sense of India’s past, was the product of colonialism.⁷⁷ History, in these terms, was restricted to the service of the

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nation where it was marshaled to invoke nationalist pride and create a sense of a common nationalist past. Similarly, Partha Chatterjee has argued that understandings of the past in pre-colonial and the early colonial period were dominated by Puranic histories where “divine will” served as the primary historical force. Further Puranic histories did not really qualify as history since not only did they bring together “myth, history and the contemporary” as part of a chronological sequence without distinguishing between the three, but also their primary subjects were limited to gods and kings rather than peoples of the nation. In contrast, Chatterjee argues that the modern understanding of history in India was a colonial influence, primarily through English education, while prior to that the relevance of the past was merely to explain the divine forces that acted upon history.

As Chatterjee and Kaviraj have established, Singh’s claim that Mithila lacked a history was perhaps influenced by his English education. On the one hand, this generated an urgency in constructing a historical narrative of Mithila; while on the other, it also made him question the status of the Urdu and Hindi accounts of Mithila as “history.” In early twentieth century India, the past inspired such a passion and fascination amongst the colonial intelligentsia that not only did it witness the formation of institutions of history, as I have discussed in a previous chapter, but it also set the parameters for debate and discussion as to what really qualified as history. More importantly still, as Kumkum Chatterjee has shown, these nationalist histories were not always “state-centric,” rather they could emphasize communities as its subject and use “emotion and its constituent elements – including love, pride, and nostalgia” as essential components of history.

80 Ibid. p. 1475.
Rather what made this interest in and engagement with history truly national were the efforts of regional literati across India to produce connected accounts of the region and the nation’s past. Such a desire inspired regionally based intellectuals and historians to simultaneously engage in articulating their identity within the framework of Indian national imagination where the nation emerged as the “singular organizing principle” for the wide variety of histories being produced.\(^{81}\) Therefore as Chatterjee and Kaviraj have argued, the power of national imaginings to shape the project of history-writing in colonial India – be it regional or national, cannot be contested. However, their view that pre-colonial India lacked a sense of history or a tradition of history-writing has been modified by several historians.

Sumit Sarkar writes that, “pre-colonial India, with its very long traditions of written culture, produced numerous texts of recognizable historical intent or value.”\(^{82}\) Under the impact of English education and the imposition of Western historiographical methods, colonial scholarship in India “created a widespread sense of a \textit{tabula rasa}.” At best, while for some pre-colonial texts qualified as “sources” of history rather than history per se, others considered them as the very embodiment of the culture of the people and hence the best representation of a people’s history. Yet this contention over the very nature of history was quite significant, for it allowed Indian intellectuals to transcend academic definitions of history while allowing them to frame the discipline as a product of a culture of the people thus making topics including “myths, legends, ballads, genealogies, architectural relics, sculpture, craft traditions, customs, and material culture”

\(^{81}\) Prachi Deshpande. \textit{Creative Pasts}. pp. 2-3, 204.
relevant to history. Moving beyond an academic definition of history as an evidence-based discipline, also created the space to develop an understanding of history that did not entirely subscribe to a “modern notion of history.” As Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam have shown, history in pre-colonial India “was not in itself a genre, and no single genre was allotted to history writing.” Rather what constituted as history was not a given, but instead was reflected in textual practices that were specific to time and place. And yet these pre-colonial texts contained multiple elements that were common characteristics of modern history-writing, such as their concern with causation and the need to provide for an interpretive frame for locating events.

While “modern” history-writing can be attributed to English education and the concomitant introduction to western methodologies of history, pre-colonial history belonged to various genres, be it the Indo-Persian tarikh tradition, Sanskrit inspired culture of itihasa-purnana, or the Marathi bhakars. Works belonging to the tarikh tradition are generally characterized by the use of Persian as the language of choice, and are preoccupied with the “mechanisms and institutions of political power as manifest through actions, policies, and calculations of rulers, nobles, and other governmental functionaries.” The Puranas, on the other hand, were Sanskrit texts that were characterized by their five features or panchalakshana which included “accounts of the creation of the universe, the cosmic cycles, genealogies of sages and kings, exploits of

86 Chatterjee. The Cultures of History in Early Modern India. p. 52.
the gods, and accounts of royal dynasties.” 87 It is significant that the Puranas did not reflect a static tradition, but instead were involved in a process of “ceaseless remaking and recasting” in order to maintain its relevance. Similarly, tarikhs made references to earlier such works so as to be considered a part of an established historiographical tradition.

We witness this attribute in Bihari Lal Fitrat’s Aina-i-Tirhut where he points out that he conscientiously studied well-known works on history, written in Persian and Urdu starting from the Mughal period. These were Tarikh-Farishta, Ain-i-Akbari, Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri, Siyar-ul-Mutakherin, to mention some of the more prominent Persian works, alongside Tarikh-i-Chin, Sir Syed Ahmad’s Tarikh Asrar-us-Sanandid, Raja Shiva Prasad’s Tarikh-i-Sitara Hind in Urdu. To familiarize himself with the contemporary style of history writings, he also read some books on history in English and was a regular reader of newspapers as well. 88 By highlighting the works he consulted, and even within it, by giving works belonging to the Persian tarikh tradition prominent attention, Bihari Lal was acknowledging the influence of this particular intellectual legacy upon his work. And yet his work cannot be labeled as belonging distinctly to the tarikh tradition. By the early modern period, the distinctions between these genres were beginning to blur and what emerged in its wake were narratives that embodied “multiple literary, cultural, and historiographical traditions.” 89 Therefore, the tendency to treat puranas and other Sanskrit and Sanskrit influenced regional vernaculars texts as representative of Hindu and hence Indian historiographical traditions, while maintaining that tarikhs, given their Indo-

87 Ibid. pp. 45-46.
88 While Bihari Lal is very particular about the Persian and Urdu works, he read and consulted, he is not as clear about what English works he read.
89 Chatterjee. The Cultures of History in Early Modern India. p. 148.
Persian tradition were bracketed as histories of Muslim rulers of India and therefore not entirely Indian no longer holds true. The histories of Mithila, particularly the Urdu and Hindi accounts namely *Riaz-i-Tirhut* (1868) by Ayodhya Prasad “Bahar”, *Aina-i-Tirhut* (1883) by Bihari Lal “Fitrat” and *Mithila Darpan* (1915) by Ras Bihari Lal Das, emerge from, and are influenced by the layering of multiple literary and historiographic traditions, thus qualifying them as “hybrid narratives” that were reflective of a polyglot cultural milieu which continued to exist in certain parts of India even in the late nineteenth century. Attesting further to the hybrid nature of these histories, was the different “uses” ascribed to the past in the texts produced in colonial and pre-colonial India where content was derived “partly from authorial intention, partly from generic logic, and surely also for a number of reasons having to do with the varying nature of language itself.” So finally, contrary to Singh’s claim that no work on history could be attributed to Mithila, we witness instead histories of Mithila emerge as part of a rich and dynamic culture of history-writing that had preceded the colonial era but continued to live on in regional peripheries where English education was yet to make a substantive impact and as a result transform the literati’s understanding of history – Singh being one such example. Engaging with some of the prominent features of these regional histories, as Prachi Deshpande has suggested, not only allows us to probe into the historiographies being produced in the regional margins of the Indian subcontinent, but it also allows us to see how these histories engaged with an emergent national narrative that was being

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90 Ibid. pp. 9-10.
91 Ibid. p. 148.
produced in the larger provincial towns and beyond. More importantly still, discussing these histories will also help elaborate the limits of Bihar as an organic historical-cultural entity.

These histories were published over a span of fifty years – a period that was marked by significant transformations with regard to the history of both Mithila and Bihar. A brief outline of the historians will perhaps help explain their choice of historical genre, but additionally it will also serve as an occasion to reflect on the social transformations that were undergoing in Mithila. Ayodhya Prasad’s *Riaz-i-Tirhut* and Bihar Lal Fitrat’s *Aina-i-Tirhut* were written in Urdu. Prasad and Fitrat were writing at a time when Urdu was not only used as the language of administration in Bihar, but it was also the language of elite conversation and literary expression. But the familiar world of Urdu literary sphere, in case of Bihar, was transformed when Hindi was made the court language and the language of administration in 1881. This was paralleled by an intense movement for the creation of a Hindi literary sphere in Bihar – which in itself was a more regional manifestation of a larger north-Indian linguistic movement that presented Hindi as the national language.

So by the time Ras Bihari Lal Das began work on his *Mithila Darpan* in the early twentieth century, the status of Hindi as a national as well as regional language was well established. Aware of this, Ras Bihari Lal Das chose to write *Mithila Darpan* in Hindi, explaining that despite a strong urge to write this account in Maithili, the regional vernacular, he resisted the temptation only because he doubted that doing so would restrict the circulation of his work to the limited number of people who constituted the

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Maithili literary sphere. Instead, he chose to publish his work in Hindi, the “rashtra bhasha” (national language).94 To be sure, he could have very well written the Mithila Darpan in Maithili as he is also credited with having authored, Sumati (1918) one of the earliest Maithili novels as well.95 Ras Bihari Lal Das’ choice of Hindi as the preferred medium to narrate a Maithil past, quite significantly points to the instrumentality of local historical narratives in forging together a sense of a unified national past by drawing upon a common pool of national cultural symbols.

As for Shyam Narayan Singh, the author of History of Tirhut, as a member of the Bihar and Orissa Civil Service it is safe to assume that he had received an English education and was sufficiently familiar with modern protocols of historical enquiry. Singh certainly belonged to an English educated colonial middle class. In the context of twentieth century British India, Singh’s English education and historical awareness may not seem quite exceptional.96 Yet, with reference to Bihar and more particularly in the context of Mithila, where English education had a slow beginning, the emergence of a regional English educated middle-class happened only during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.97 It was during this period, as I have discussed in Chapter 4, that many middle class Biharis were engaged in understanding their past with the Bihar and Orissa Research Society and the Patna Museum being the most prominent testament to this. Perhaps influenced by these institutions of history, and gripped by a sense of history

94 Mithila Darpan of Ras Bihari Lal Das. p. xxvi.
96 Particularly when compared to Bengal where English education and the ensuing cultural transformation was already at work since mid-nineteenth century thus creating a new social group referred to as the bhadralok, or middle class Bengali men. J. H. Broomfield. Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth-Century Bengal. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968. pp. 8-14.
as a modern, rational and scientific discipline, Singh ventured to write the history of Mithila and in the process boldly claim that the history of Mithila had not yet been written.

In each of the four histories, there is a certain privileging of an ancient pauranic past as is evident from their narrative structures where an ancient mythical past serves as the originary moment for a Maithil history. Perhaps attesting to the influence of myths, it is worth pointing out that this ancient mythical past is equally potent in shaping a particularly dominant strand of Indian nationalist historical imagination as well. Relying on epics and puranas, Ayodhya Prasad points out that the “real name” for Tirhut is Mithila named after its founder Mithi, the son of Manu, who had settled in what was then known as the “land of sacrifices.”98 Similarly Bihari Lal Fitrat draws upon the *Mithila Mahatmya* of the *Brihadishnu Purana* to elaborate upon the origin myth of Mithila, while drawing upon the Ramayana to elaborate upon Mithila’s significance in Indian history particularly as the birthplace of Sita.99 Mithila thus emerges as a pilgrimage site whose sanctity, as he points out, is in no way less than that of Ayodhya. Both Prasad and Fitrat, although influenced by the tarikh tradition, drew upon the puranas to emphasize the mythical past of the region thus demonstrating the polyglot milieu within which these “hybrid narratives” were written.

It is worth pointing out that this is the foundation myth of Mithila and is common in all histories that seek to explain the genesis of the name Mithila, including Ras Bihari Lal Das’ *Mithila Darpan* and Shyam Narayan Singh’s *History of Tirhut*, perhaps once

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98 *Riaz-i-Tirhut of Ayodhya Prasad “Bahar.”* p. 66.
99 *Aina-i-Tirhut of Bihari Lal ‘Fitrat.’* p. 10.
again alluding to the continued significance of mythologies and *puranas* as sources of history. In fact, Ras Bihari Lal Das is quite explicit in listing the *puranas* he consulted in order to prepare his historical narrative. Similarly Singh, traces the beginnings of Maithila history to as “far back as 1000 B.C. to 1500 B.C” by relying upon the *Satapatha Brahmana* and the *Brhadaranyakaupanisad*, text much “older than the epics, Valmiki’s Ramayana and Mahabharata” and hence perhaps treated as more authoritative.

Moving ahead a properly defined history of the region begins in the late eleventh century under Nanyadeva of the Karnata Dynasty. Beginning with the Karnata Dynasty (1097-1324 C.E.), two other dynasties namely the Oinivaras (c. 1353-1526 C.E.) followed by the Khandawala dynasty also known as the Darbhanga Raj, serve as the historical benchmarks around which the history of Mithila is structured. The narratives of Ayodhya Prasad and Bihari Lal Fitrat each provide a genealogical list of these kings and the order of their dynastic succession as part of the history of medieval and early modern Mithila and in the process once again betray the influence of the *puranas* in their narratives. Bihari Lal is very particular about getting his historical chronologies right, as shown by the effort he puts into charting the dynastic successions of the rulers of Tirhut. In this regard, he is quite sensitive to the various calendrical systems prevalent and practiced in Tirhut as we notice from his discussion on the establishment of the Samvat, Christian, Hijri, Fasli and the Bengali La Samvat calendar, which is credited to

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100 Thakur. *History of Mithila (Circa 3000 B.C.–1556 A.D.).* p. 5; Singh. *History of Tirhut.* p. 3; *Mithila Darpan of Ras Bihari Lal Das.* p. 3.
101 His list of such sources contain the names of *Brihadvishnu Purana, Sakanda Purana, Bhaviswa Purana, Brahma Purana.*
103 Thakur. *History of Mithila (Circa 3000 B.C.–1556 A.D.).*
have been established during the era of Lakshman Sen.\textsuperscript{105} Calendrical practices and based on them, getting the dynastic chronologies right, were central to his efforts at charting out a history of Tirhut. But more importantly, this also illustrates an “element of cultural hybridity” as evidenced through his referring to multiple chronologies and calendrical systems.\textsuperscript{106} And yet, the primary thrust of their narratives was not entirely centered around kings. Instead, these histories also followed, what was a newer feature in history writing in colonial India – one that was increasingly identified with communities in terms of its people.\textsuperscript{107}

On another level, Ayodhya Prasad’s preference for Urdu suggests perhaps that he was in part influenced by the historical conventions of the tarikh literature. Yet, except for his choice of language and his use of the Fasli calendar, there is little that explicitly suggests that he was in fact drawing upon the tarikh chronicles. Indeed, he was certainly not as explicit as Bihari Lal Fitrat who provides a list of the Persian chronicles he draws from. It is very likely that this difference was based on the varied objectives and reasons they had for embarking on the project. The reasons that motivated Ayodhya Prasad to take on such a task were based on his personal experiences of working in the offices of the Darbhanga Raj.\textsuperscript{108} On the other hand, Bihari Lal considered knowledge of history as “the highest among all forms of knowledge.”\textsuperscript{109} Although trained as a lawyer, it was his commitment and love for history that made him devote five years into researching and writing his account. The motivation to undertake such a task came to him when on one

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\textsuperscript{105} Aina-i-Tirhut of Bihari Lal ‘Fitrat.’ pp. 7-8.
\textsuperscript{106} Chatterjee. The Cultures of History in Early Modern India. p. 148.
\textsuperscript{108} Riaz-i-Tirhut of Ayodhya Prasad “Bahar.” p. 45.
\textsuperscript{109} Aina-i-Tirhut of Bihari Lal ‘Fitrat.’ p. 6.
occasion he found himself unable to explain the political or cultural history of Tirhut. Attributing this in part to his lack of knowledge on the subject and in part to the paucity of relevant historical literature on Tirhut, he ventured to write his narrative. In preparing himself for the task at hand, he devoted considerable time familiarizing himself with some of the prominent Persian tarikh chronicles while also studying inscriptions in Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, and Urdu. He also travelled extensively throughout Tirhut, and met with people belonging to various caste, class and occupational backgrounds, and incorporated their histories as well.\footnote{Ibid. p. 4.}

In addition, Bihari Lal Fitrat also provides an insight into the cultural practices, food habits and marriage customs of the Maithil Brahman and Kayastha communities. Much like a gazetteer, he also lists some of the more prominent professions to which people belonged, he describes the climate of the region, and talks about the region’s vegetation. Similarly he also describes some of the more prominent rivers such as the Kosi, Gandaki and Bagmati while elaborating on the histories of some of the larger tanks that were dug in Mithila. Finally, he provides a detailed discussion of the Sufi saints and their shrines located within Tirhut, and in doing so he goes on to provide a list of forty-three saints associated with this region alongside the sixty sacred temples that dot the landscape of Mithila.\footnote{Ibid. pp. 81-93.} To him, the popularity of these Sufi saints and the myths and legends association with each of the mazars (shrines) are just as integral a part of the cultural landscape of Mithila, as are the palaces, tanks and gardens of the Darbhanga Raj. Yet this gazetteer-like feature was not unique to Bihari Lal Fitrat. Much of Ras Bihari Lal Das’ \textit{Mithila Darpan} also contains descriptions of a similar kind. Although neither Fitrat
nor Ras Bihari Lal mention what inspired this gazetteer-like feature in what was otherwise supposed to be a historical account of a region, it is certainly not too far fetched to suggest the influence of colonial place-accounts such as Buchanan-Hamilton’s accounts on the districts of Bihar written during the first decade of the 19th century or Grierson’s *Bihar Peasant Life* (1885), to name a couple of the more prominent colonial ethnographies and gazetteers.\footnote{Some of the very early place-based gazetteer-like accounts are: Buchanan. *An Account of the Districts of Bihar and Patna in 1811-1812*; Buchanan, *An Account of the District of Purnea in 1809-1810*; Grierson *Bihar Peasant Life*.}

Finally the importance of these histories lie in the glimpse of 19th century Tirhut they provide. In this sense, *Riaz-i-Tirhut* is not the only early work engaging with Mithila and Tirhut as distinct cultural and administrative spaces, Ayodhya Prasad also provides an early account of the transition that was underway in the offices of the Darbhanga Raj in particular but throughout Tirhut in general as well. As mentioned above, maintenance of Brahmanic orthodoxy was among the central concerns of the Raj, which was mutually reinforced by the Maithil Brahman community. Such a view gives the impression, with some credibility one might add, that Mithila was entrapped by staunch conservatism, particularly under Rameshwar Singh. Maithil Brahmans certainly restricted their children from seeking English education; they preferred the village *patshalas* and *tols*.\footnote{Dewey. “The History of Mithila and the Records of the Darbhanga Raj.” p. 456; Also See, Jata Shankar Jha. *Beginnings of Modern Education in Mithila*.} Although Lakshmeshwar Singh together with his younger brother Rameshwar Singh were raised under the “institutional shelter”\footnote{Anand Yang. “An Institutional Shelter: The Court of Wards in Late Nineteenth-Century Bihar,” *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1979), pp. 247-264.} of the court of wards and broke with tradition by fostering English education, many of their fellow community members...
resisted English education fearing it would damage their conservative sensibilities. As a way of encouraging people to take on English education, Lakshmeshwar Singh also allotted several positions in the estate administration to successful students. These measures ensured to some extent that from late nineteenth century some Maithil Brahmins and Maithil Kayasthas were beginning to become a part of a new class of English educated middle class professionals.\footnote{Stephen Henningham. \textit{A Great Estate and Its Landlords in Colonial India}. p. 87.} But as Ayodhya Prasad points out, late nineteenth century was also a period when the administration of the Raj began to see an influx of English proficient British and Bengali officers take charge of the Raj offices under the Court of Wards which retained the estate from 1860-1878.\footnote{Riaz-i-Tirhut of Ayodhya Prasad “Bahar.” p. 36.} Realizing the significance of this transformation, Ajodhya Prasad notes that traditional elites who had previously monopolized the estate jobs, would require English education if they were to use the offices of the Raj as a source of gainful employment.

Moving beyond the context of the Raj, Prasad provides a glimpse of a Tirhut that was home to a stimulating and vibrant literary sphere that participated in a Persianate literary culture while enthusiastically appreciating the importance of modern learning. His appreciation for modern learning is evident through his detailed discussion of the establishment of the “Bihar Scientific Society” in Muzaffarpur on February 27, 1868.\footnote{Ibid. p. 64.} Apart from symbolizing the growing interest in scientific enquiry among the local literati, the society also took steps to successfully petition the government to use local vernaculars for imparting higher education. It is worth highlighting that the language, they petitioned for was Urdu. In light of colonial government’s imposition of Hindi as the
regional language, and the subsequent devotion and dedication shown towards Maithili beginning in the early twentieth century, this instance of championing for Urdu (Hindustani), goes on to underscore that even in the late nineteenth century a language-place-identity equation had not yet become the basis for highlighting Mithila’s distinctiveness as a region. Instead the use of Urdu as a medium for modern education, as Prasad points out, meant that “Those scholars who were in worse condition than illiterates because of their ignorance of English language, will hopefully again be counted among the learned and their hopes will be fulfilled.” Further encouraged by the positive support of the local government, the Society established a printing press and formulated a plan for translating English-language books. The Society began publishing the *Behar Scientific Society’s Journal*, with Ayodhya Prasad as the editor. Attesting to its quality, the District Magistrate of Tirhut, C.F. Worsley referred to this bi-monthly as “irreproachable in tone and character,” and suitable for instructing the minds of the local middle class. Given that Urdu was the language of choice for this journal and the people participating in its publication were part of an Urdu literary sphere, it is no surprise that the journal ceases to exist in 1881, the very year when Hindi was instituted as the official language in Bihar.

Although invested in writing a history of Tirhut, Prasad’s use of Urdu and his emphasis on pointing to the existence of such a literary sphere is an important counterpoint to the dominant image of Mithila primarily being the bastion of Brahmanic

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118 Ibid. p. 64.
orthodoxy. It is in one such discussion that we first encounter Bihar Lal ‘Fitrat’, the
author of *Aina-i-Tirhut*, whom Prasad presents as a lawyer and an Urdu poet. Prasad and
Bihari Lal, along with twenty other people, all of them professionally engaged in
government services or connected with the law-courts or the administration of the Raj,
met regularly and held long sessions (*Mushaira*) of reciting Urdu poetry in Darbhanga.
According to Ayodhya Prasad, such sessions used to be very lively and contributed to the
cultural life of Darbhanga a great deal. More importantly, a glance through the names
of the participants suggests that majority of them were Maithil Kayasthas, who on
account of their training in Persian not only were well represented in government jobs
and in the local law courts, but were also well versed in Urdu literary culture. Since
Bihari Lal was an active member of this group, it seems that his mastery in Urdu
literature and his maturity in the craft of writing Urdu poetry were well acknowledged by
the scholars of Persian and Urdu by 1867, the period when Ayodhya Prasad was writing
*Raiz-i-Tirhut*. As part of the same literary coterie, Bihari Lal was certainly aware of
Ayodhya Prasad’s work but unlike him, he did not delve into the project of writing the
history of Tirhut as a catharsis although they were part of the same cultural milieu.

*Mithila and the Maithili Language*

Demands for Mithila to be recognized as a separate entity from Bihar on the basis
of a common, shared language i.e., the Maithili language, formed an important trajectory
of the Mithila movement. These demands acquired a particular strength and visibility in
the 1940s and 1950s and a movement centered on the Maithili language is still active in
the 21st century. Its antecedents however can be traced back to the earlier decades of the

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121 *Riaz-i-Tirhut of Ayodhya Prasad “Bahar.”* p. 61.
20th century. Before commencing a discussion of the claims/movements centered around the Maithili language as the reason why Mithila demanded separation from Bihar, I engage below in a brief account of Mithila’s literary and linguistic heritage up till the 19th century as a necessary background.

The beginnings of early Maithili literature can be traced back to the fourteenth century, when under the patronage of the Oinivara dynasty, poetry and music flourished on “an unprecedented scale” in Mithila. Apart from facilitating studies in Mimansa, Dharmasastra and Nyaya, this period is perhaps most significantly renowned as the age of Vidyapati (c. 1340-1448) – the famous Maithil poet. In fact, Jayakanta Mishra goes on to claim that the “age of Vidyapati was, like the age of Shakespeare,” while Upendra Thakur claimed that Mithila of “the Oinavaras resembled that of the Janakas and Yajnavalkya.” Such is the aura of Vidyapati that several legends narrate the events surrounding his death. One such legend mentions that Vidyapati had expressed the desire to die on the banks of the Ganges, but died before he could get there. It is said that upon his death, the Ganges flooded just so that its waters could reach the spot where the venerable poet died. Following this, a Siva-linga sprung up at the exact spot where his pyre had been. This place lies in the village Bajitapura in Darbhanga district – where a Siva temple still commemorates the spot where Vidyapati died. Legends aside, the influence of Vidyapati’s poems was perhaps the most influential literary export of Mithila. Emphasizing this Suniti Kumar Chatterji writes, “Bengali scholars would come

123 Ibid. p. 132.
back home after finishing their studies in Mithila not only with Sanskrit learning in their heads, but also with Maithili songs on their lips – songs of Vidyapati and his successors…. The Maithili lyric similarly naturalized itself in Assam and Orissa during the 15th century.”\textsuperscript{126} The age of Vidyapati coincides with the period when the literary prestige monopolized by Sanskrit earlier was beginning to slip. Instead during this period, Sanskrit poets and literary theorists were “compelled to share the prestige and patronage they had so long monopolized, as vernacular writing expanded in scope and met with increasing acceptance.”\textsuperscript{127} The portrayal of Mithila, where Sanskrit was respected and studied, but not at the cost of the vernacular, requires that we briefly discuss the position of Sanskrit vis-à-vis the vernaculars, in what Sheldon Pollock refers to as the “vernacular millennium,” roughly 1000-1500 C.E.\textsuperscript{128}

The process of vernacularization and the end of cosmopolitan Sanskrit literary culture that preceded it are intimately linked. In essence, towards the middle of the second millennium, vital energies were channeled towards creating a vernacular aesthetic – one that would replace the aesthetic power of Sanskrit. As Pollock has pointed out, the process of vernacularization began with “the conscious decisions of writers to reshape the boundaries of their cultural universe by renouncing the larger world for a smaller place,” which he adds they did with “full awareness of the significance of their decision.” What followed as a result were new and localized ways of “making culture – with their wholly


historical and factitious local identities – and, concomitantly, new ways of ordering society and polity came into being, replacing the older translocalism.”¹²⁹ The formation of a distinct Maithili cultural space can be traced back to this seismic transformation in the literary practices that unfolded during the second millennium. The vernacular writers transformed the inscriptive record in order to express a political will that would take place in the vernacular. They appropriated a Sanskrit aesthetic along with a range of its literary models into their language for both political and imaginative expression – in this sense Sanskrit’s ability to make “literary newness” could now be seen in the vernacular, albeit being influenced by and seeking inspiration from Sanskrit. Since vernacular writers were thinking less globally, they developed new notions of geocultural frameworks. Their literary narrative representations therefore were the same as those within which their literary texts would now circulate. To reiterate Pollock’s argument, “It was typically by way of a localization of the Sanskrit epics – often with the double-narrative … - that all these goals were simultaneously achieved in a primal moment of vernacularization.”¹³⁰ From the perspective of Sanskrit, being a vernacular writer exhibited both an intellectual as well as linguistic failing and emergent vernacular writers struggled to gain symbolic capital for their literary genres. And yet, Vidyapati could succeed so well in composing and writing in the vernacular because this was a period when vernaculars were beginning to acquire “prestige as a fit vehicle of expressing the highest emotions.”¹³¹

Concerns about vernacular legitimacy were imminent in the consciousness of Sanskrit writers and occasionally provoked uncomfortable emotions but for the vernacular writers the question of legitimacy was equally, if not more, pressing as they were writing from a far weaker cultural position.\textsuperscript{132} Perhaps attesting to the continued importance of Sanskrit, even during this vernacular millennium, Vidyapati had to show himself to be an able and discriminating scholar of the \textit{Puranas} and \textit{Smritis}. Yet, Vidyapati’s Sanskrit works do not create the same literary impression when compared to that of his contemporary Maithil Sanskrit writers, thus attesting to his preference and command over the vernacular vis-a-vis Sanskrit.\textsuperscript{133} Regardless, Vidyapati is credited with laying the foundations of Maithili literature, and he was so successful in doing so that for many years the ability to “imitate his lines alone was considered a poetic gift.”\textsuperscript{134} This was however not limited to Mithila alone. Rather as Grierson points out, the influence of Vidyapati inspired a host of imitators in Bengal as well who “twisted and contorted” his poems into Bengali language. In fact, one Basanta Ray not only imitated Vidyapati but also composed poems under the same name.\textsuperscript{135} Similarly as a testament to the influence of Vidyapati, Rabindranath Tagore wrote that his poems and songs were among the earliest “delights that stirred my youthful imagination.” Perhaps as a tribute to his influence, or may be in part as a youthful prank, Tagore in his teens, wrote a number of lyric poems in the Maithili language and published them under the pseudonym of Bhanu

Singh.\textsuperscript{136} Perhaps attesting to Pollock’s assertion that “many vernaculars themselves do become cosmopolitan for their regional worlds,” we witness the growing influence of Maithili in the courts of Nepal for much of the sixteenth and seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{137} In fact, the Malla kings of Nepal became such admirers of Vidyapati that they not only composed Maithili songs but also inspired others to follow in their footsteps. Maithili thus acquired the status of a “dignified language” in the courts of Malla principalities of Bhatagaon, Patan and Kathmandu.\textsuperscript{138} It was this rich literary heritage that served as the essential foundation for a Mithila/Maithili movement. However, twentieth-century emergence of Maithili, as a marker of a people as well as a distinct regional space was facilitated by two contrary portrayals of Maithili. On the one hand, an image of a classical Maithili, whose rich and influential literary traditions were adapted beyond the immediate cultural space of Mithila, while on the other hand, a contrasting image of contemporary Maithili suffering as a “powerless vernacular” added to the urgency of resurrecting Maithili.\textsuperscript{139}

The picture that emerges of nineteenth century Mithila is that Maithili language and literature was not receiving exclusive attention from either the literati of Mithila or from the Darbhanga Raj. Instead Maithili was part of a multi-lingual scenario in which multiple languages and their related literatures were used often for purposes that were quite removed from twentieth century assertions of language as the primary marker of a

people and a place. Jayakanta Mishra maintains that the institution of the Court of Wards in 1860, led to the marginalization of Maithili since the “language and the script of the land was debarred from being used any longer in public life.”¹⁴⁰ And that it was only after Lakshmishwar Singh ascended the throne of the Darbhanga Raj in 1880, that patronage to Maithili literature resumed.¹⁴¹ This however is quite a contrast to Radhakrishna Chaudhary’s claim that Maithili developed without any royal support, as the rulers of the Darbhanga Raj “did not give support to Maithili, it deserved or even in the manner their predecessors had done.” Instead Persian, Urdu and under the Court of Wards English dominated, as the language of the Raj. Also, Lakshmishwar Singh made Hindi the official language of the Raj.¹⁴² This was in keeping with the institution of Hindi as the official vernacular of Bihar from 1881 onwards.

So from the early decades of the twentieth century although Maithili became the language of preeminent importance and served as an essential ingredient in coalescing a Maithil identity, it received very little support or encouragement from the “natural” leaders of Mithila, i.e., the Maharaja of Darbhanga.¹⁴³ Perhaps this too can be traced back in part, to the role of the Darbhanga Maharajas as “strongly conservative champions of tradition and orthodoxy.”¹⁴⁴ Additionally, this could also be a reflection of the influence of the burgeoning Hindu revivalist movement that was taking place in late-nineteenth century India. Regardless, on the occasion of accession to the “guddi” (throne) of the Raj, following the death of his brother Lakshmishwar Singh (1858-98), Rameshwar Singh

¹⁴³ Ibid. p. 170.
¹⁴⁴ Henningham. A Great Estate and Its Landlords in Colonial India. p. 98.
alluded to promoting the study of Sanskrit literature. The subject, the Maharajah said, “was one which had the deepest interest for him, and it would be a special pleasure to him, if he could in any way assist in bringing back for Mithila of the ancients, so renowned for its various schools of Sanskrit literature and philosophy, to its proud position as the leading authority in all questions of religion and Sanskrit literature.”

The point here is not to be overly critical of the Raj’s promotion of the study of Sanskrit, rather I state this only to compare it with the absolute lack of any desire to promote Maithili – at least for another decade.

During a period when linguistic movements, as in the case of Hindi-Urdu controversy, commanded extreme emotional attachments, the continued promotion of Sanskrit learning while neglecting Maithili perhaps is a further indication of the centrality of Hindu orthodoxy as the foundational ideology of the Darbhanga Raj. Patronage of Sanskrit learning had been an established custom of Mithila and one that the Darbhanga Raj too embraced quite closely. For instance, as part of his promise to promote and provide patronage to Sanskrit, the Raj held the “Dhout Pariksha,” a practice that continued until 1930. This was quite a grand and elaborate affair. To elaborate, let me briefly describe one such instance when a 5-day long Sanskrit examination was held in October 1899, which was attended by 283 Sanskrit pandits, some of them coming from as far as the Central Provinces. For the entire duration of the exam, these pandits were all attended to by the Raj. Not only do the elaborate arrangements, like the grand tent set up to conduct the examinations, attest to the importance of the occasion, but the fact that the

145 Behar Herald. February 4, 1899.
Maharaja would himself be present each day and oversee the six-hour long examination is an indication of Rameshwar Singh’s, much like his predecessors’, investment in the promotion of Sanskrit learning and through it the promotion of Brahmanical orthodoxy. In addition, Bihari Lal’s account of the literary as well as colloquial practices of nineteenth century Mithila, make it difficult to believe that in fact the Darbhanga Raj patronized Maithili during the nineteenth century.

Contrary to the impression created by the proponents of Maithili during the twentieth century, the linguistic landscape of Mithila was quite different prior to this period when assertions of Maithili as the primary marker of a distinctive cultural identity began to gain momentum. Bihari Lal’s Aina-i-Tirhut, provides us with a glimpse into a society where no particular language – be it Urdu, Hindi or Maithili, was considered a critical marker of cultural identity. Rather like much of India, Mithila too was a multilingual society where the regional vernacular occupied one among several registers of expression – be it literary, administrative, pedagogical or colloquial. In fact, Bihari Lal did not even refer to Mithila’s colloquial language as “Maithili”. Even during the nineteenth century, the choice and use of any particular language was still considered a marker of one’s social status rather than one’s identity. According to Bihari Lal the “ashrafs of the district” spoke Urdu, albeit not very chaste. And by ashraf he was basically referring to middleclass men who lived or were somehow associated with the urban centers of the region, primarily Darbhanga and Muzaffarpur. A substantial proportion of people, mainly in the rural areas, spoke “dahatini or ganwari Hindi” while Maithil pandits and Maithil Kayasthas preferred a Hindi that was heavily interlaced with

Sanskrit words as well as was mixed with Tirhut’s “unique version of Hindi”.\(^{149}\) In a sense, nineteenth century Mithila was a multi-lingual society – but this multi-lingual sphere of communication did not lead to mutual incomprehensibility among the speakers of different languages. More importantly still, Bihari Lal’s difficulty in specifically naming the languages used, hints at a fluid linguistic sphere where words and expressions were freely exchanged among languages. Neither patronized by the Darbhanga Raj, nor used for administrative purposes, it remained mainly a language of domestic conversation. Perhaps, as the language of everyday life, it remained a language without a name. This is why Bihari Lal was compelled to refer to Maithili as a variant of Hindi, rather than explicitly recognizing it as a language particular to Mithila and spoken most exclusively by the Maithil people.

Given the paucity of contemporary accounts regarding the language practices of nineteenth century Mithila, Bihari Lal’s observations are not only unique but they are equally remarkable. His reference to one of the languages spoken in Tirhut as a “unique version of Hindi” is also quite typical of nineteenth century understanding of Maithili as a type of Hindi. Bihari Lal was not alone however. In his Hindi translation of Vidyapati’s *Purush Pariksha*, a work published in 1888, Chanda Jha referred to Maithili as “Mithila Bhasha,” while Ayodhya Prasad used “Tirhut ki Bhasha” to refer to Mathili.\(^{150}\) Yet, by the early twentieth century, perhaps recognizing the growing importance of language as a marker of cultural identity and certainly influenced by an emerging Maithili print culture, we see both Ras Bihari Lal Das of *Mithila Darpan* as well as Shyam Narayan Singh

\(^{149}\) *Aina-i-Tirhut of Bihari Lal ‘Fitrat.’* p. 116.

devote considerable portion of their accounts on detailing Mithila’s literary culture and heritage. In fact, although referring to Maithili as a “dialect” rather than as a language, Singh still conceded that it “is at least 600 years old.” Moreover, instead of considering it a version of Hindi he claimed that Maithili was “much older than, and must have helped the growth of ‘Bengalee’.”

Although resurrected in the late nineteenth century, and followed by subsequent insistence on the existence of a Maithili literary culture beginning from the fourteenth century, there is very little that can account for Maithili literary culture during much of the nineteenth century. And yet it was nineteenth century colonial philology that perhaps made the greatest contribution to the subsequent development of Maithili as a modern language. Yet this is quite different from the prevailing emphasis on Maithili as the “natural” language of Mithila, tying together the people and the region within one common bond of commensurability made possible through Maithili. Rather the language emerged in part through colonial philological interest in the region’s vernacular. I am not claiming that colonial philology invented Maithili, but surely it facilitated the transformation of Maithili as a “modern” language through the production of Maithili grammars and lexicons. As a result, beyond the palace-complexes of the Raj, Maithili began to arouse expressions of emotional attachment and looked upon Hindi, and the Province of Bihar that patronized it, as impediments that encroached upon Maithili and

was determined to discourage its growth. For some, the “cause of the literature of Maithili” was sufficient to justify the demand for a separate province of Mithila.\textsuperscript{153}

In this regard, colonial philology and the push to champion the use of regional vernacular for administrative and educational purposes in South Asia in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, served as an important catalyst that facilitated the growth and development of modern Maithili language and literature. It is through this context, that we can best appreciate the contributions of George Abraham Grierson to the development of modern Maithili. Grierson’s efforts in collecting, cataloging and presenting the particulars of Maithili grammar, its literary culture largely through his collection of Vidyapati’s poems, and his insistence on referring to Maithili as a distinct language, is perhaps one of the most significant influences that shaped future claims of Maithili as the language of Mithila. The 1882 edition of Grierson’s study claimed to provide a compilation of “nearly all the Maithili Literature” and yet what constituted a significant portion of this literature was a folk-song of King Salhes, a song on the famine of 1873-74 sung by Faturali Lal, a collection of songs by Vidyapati and another collection by Harak Nath.\textsuperscript{154} This paltry sampling of Maithili literature dwarfs in comparison to the subsequent “rediscovery” of Maithili literary past during the twentieth century, but regardless the centrality of Grierson’s \textit{Chrestomathy} as the modern foundation for Maithili language and literature cannot be disregarded. In part, Grierson’s influence on Maithili language and literary culture is perhaps one of the central reasons behind the subsequent resurgence of a Maithili literary movement. Yet his comprehension of the

\textsuperscript{154} Grierson. \textit{An Introduction to the Maithili Language of North}. 1881.
linguistic variety within Bihar and Maithili’s place within it was not always entirely clear, as I have discussed in Chapter 2.

Beginning in the early decades of the twentieth century, Maithili no longer remained a language of personal and familial communication, but increasingly became part of a print culture with journals dedicated to the propagation of Maithili literary culture. In spite of its rich literary heritage, its revival in the twentieth century did not assure Maithili a distinct pride of place among the languages of Bihar, let alone India. The development of a Maithili literary movement brought in its wake several questions. First, this meant that Maithili’s position vis-à-vis the other predominant languages of north India, like Hindi, Magahi, Bhojpuri and Bengali had to be mapped out. This required clarifying Maithili’s position either as a dialect of a given language, or recognizing definitively its status as an independent language. Secondly, if indeed Maithili’s status as an independent language was established, could this in turn mean that Maithili speakers, already claimants to a distinctive past, could now claim further distinction from Bihar and hence make a stronger case for being recognized as a separate entity from Bihar? These were quite potent questions that the proponents of Mithila rarely shirked from addressing often relying upon Grierson’s work on Maithili to build their subsequent assertions.

During the nineteenth century, Mithila’s contribution towards the promotion of Sanskrit learning was never in any doubt, but there was no recognition of the existence of Maithili as a separate spoken language – one with a well-established and unbroken literary culture. Much of this had changed during the early decades of the twentieth century when, as one proponent of Maithili put it, “the natives of Mithila have themselves
become conscious of their rich heritage and have done much to bring before the
discriminating public some of the works that establish the claim of Maithili to be
recognised as among the major literary languages of the country – a language which is
the cherished mother-tongue of about twenty million persons.”\textsuperscript{155} Amarnath Jha was
perhaps referring to the burgeoning of the Maithili print culture, and the subsequent
efforts to cultivate a Maithili reading public – two immensely crucial factors necessary
for the growth and development of any modern language. Parallel to this, there was a
discourse of Maithili as the victim of neglect, which was in part the result of deliberate
literary choices of people or was the outcome of a particular historical milieu where it
had to dwell in the shadow of other more prominent north Indian languages. On the one
hand, Maithili suffered because of the high esteem in which Sanskrit was held in Mithila.
Sanskrit scholars considered Maithili as “Apabhramsa (\textit{lit.} fallen, degraded) language and
therefore, only fit to embody light literature.” On the other hand, Maithili first had to
remain “under the suzerainty of Bengali” until the 1880s following which it was “brought
under that of Hindi.”\textsuperscript{156} However, the argument that the conversion of the “ancient
kingdom of Mithila into a mere zamindari” also meant that the status of Maithili was
reduced “into utter subordination” does not hold much steam.\textsuperscript{157} Particularly, because of
the high esteem in which Sanskrit was held not only by the Darbhanga Raj, but also by a
majority of the Maithil literati. Rather it was during the years surrounding the formation
of Bihar that Maithili emerged from its position as a neglected vernacular, to one that

\textsuperscript{156} Mishra. \textit{A History of Maithili Literature}. Vol. I. 1949. p. 64.
\textsuperscript{157} Mishra. \textit{History of Maithili Literature}. 1976. p. 221.
symbolized Mithila’s rich literary heritage and increasingly became associated with the region’s high cultural attainments.

So the formation of Bihar, in conjunction with the “rediscovery” of Maithili’s classical past, facilitated Maithili’s claim as a literary language while making it more deserving of recognition as the “mother-tongue” of the Maithil people. More importantly still, it also underpinned the demand for a separate province of Mithila, itself bolstered by a recognition of Mithila as a cohesive historical community one that was sustained by the common use of Maithili - as the proponents of Mithila would claim. In order to justify this, claims were made that “after the decline of Classical Sanskrit Drama, Maithili dramas in Mithila, Nepal and Assam were the first in India to evolve a fresh type of stage” allowing the proponents of Mithila to point to the extensive influence of Maithili literary culture.\footnote{Gangananda Sinha and Girindramohan Mishra The Formation of a Separate Province of Mithila, 1947. p. 17.}

Some scholars claim that in the wake of the Turkish conquest of Bengal, Mithila became the center for Sanskrit studies for many Bengali scholars – further signaling this region’s prominence. During this period, although Maithil Brahmins cultivated “as their first inheritance the Language of the Gods,” Suniti Kumar Chatterji pointed out that they “did not neglect their mother-tongue.”\footnote{Suniti Kumar Chatterji. “Introduction.” in Jayakanta Mishra. A History of Maithili Literature. Vol. I (Early and Middle Periods). Allahabad: Tirabhukti Publications, 1949. p. xii.}

While the formation of Bihar in 1912 was seemingly an acknowledgement of Bihar as a distinct historical-cultural space, what followed in its wake was a sense of cultural marginalization of the people of Mithila. One Maithil intellectual claimed that the establishment of the province of Bihar was in reality akin to the “carving out [of] a political and cultural arena for the enterprising Bhojpuri speakers and were winning a
new province for Hindi or Hindustani language and U.P.ian [United Provinces] or Madhyadeshiya culture under this cover of the ‘new’ language and culture called ‘Bihari’. For others, it meant that the demand for the separation of Bihar from Bengal was nothing more than provisioning for a “lucrative career for certain intelligent and educated persons from Magadha and Bhojpur.” Particularly because this meant they did not have to compete with the “galaxy of brilliant Bengalis,” who dominated public life in much of north-eastern India and were a “formidable barrier to the intelligent youngmen of mofussil areas like Bihar who were ambitious and sought a career.” In these characterizations, there is a very clear awareness of cultural difference between Magadha and Mithila, but additionally it also alludes to the artificiality of Bihar, by attributing the formation of the province to extremely selfish and narrow self-interests. Additionally, to the Maithil literati, it was clear that Bihar generally meant Magadha. This sense was so palpable to them that they pointed out that although the “Magadhan rulers of Bihar remember rightly with pride the great Mauryan empire” they had failed to “imbibe the virtues of the great Asoka.” It was this sense of being marginalized in the new province of Bihar that instigated the movement for the propagation of a Maithili culture, where language served as the primary medium for projecting difference.

Rhetoric of difference aside, perhaps the effort to marginalize the position of Maithili within Bihar was most evident in 1917. This was the year when Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, founded a department to promote the study of Indian vernaculars at the Calcutta University. Primarily with the help of Raja Krityanand Singh of Banaili,

162 Ibid. p. 87.
Mookerjee recognized Maithili as part of the department of Indian vernaculars and instituted it as one of the languages for M.A. examination, thus giving Maithili the much needed recognition as one of India’s major languages.\textsuperscript{163} While this was an important achievement for the Maithil literati, this sense of jubilation was soon overshadowed by another episode closer to home. This same year the Patna University was established, recognizing that a separate province needed a university of its own. As a result, all the schools and colleges of Mithila were placed under its jurisdiction. But when Maithili was not given the same recognition by Patna University, it not only came as a disappointment, but it also made the Maithili movement more vigorous. It was not until twenty years later, that Patna University recognized Maithili as a language of instruction and examination.\textsuperscript{164}

Towards this end, Kameshwar Singh, the Maharaja of Darbhanga, took the initiative and endowed the Mithilesh Rameshwar Singh Maithili Chair in the Patna College in January 1935 following which the study of Maithili was also recognized by the Patna University.\textsuperscript{165}

In the meanwhile, more substantive steps were taken to promote Maithili particularly through the establishment of Maithili organizations and the publication of journals. The earliest organization in this regard was the Banaras based \textit{Maithili Vidwadajani Samiti} (1906), which was founded by a Muralidhar Jha. In the same year, this organization also started the publication of a monthly Maithili Journal, \textit{“Mithila-Moda.”} The contribution of the \textit{Mithila Moda}, popularly also referred to as the \textit{Moda},

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\textsuperscript{163} Chaudhary. \textit{A Survey of Maithili Literature}. p. 174
\textsuperscript{165} Letter from Kumar Gangananda Sinha, To Advisor to the Governor of Bihar dated March 15, 1944. Records and Documents of Raj Darbhanga, Serial No. 20, File No. 12, Section LH 1, Universities/Education/Institutions. Kalyani Foundation, Darbhanga, Bihar.
\end{footnotesize}
cannot be exaggerated. As the earliest Maithili journal, it set the standard for Maithili literary publications, but perhaps its greatest influence on Maithili was in its use of the Nagari character in place of the Maithili script. Also referred to as “Maithili Lipi,” “Mithilaksara,” or “Maithilaksara,” the proper name for the Maithili script is “Tirhuta.” The resemblance of this script to the Bengali character had convinced many people that Maithili was merely a dialect, and its script a corruption of Bengali. Given the strong influence of Hindi and the availability of a literary public aware of the Nagari character, perhaps influenced Moda’s choice of Nagari over Tirhuta as the script in which to print the first Maithili journal. In January 1908 the Maharajadhiraja of Darbhanga sanctioned the publication of a monthly magazine called the *Mithila Mihira* (The Sun of Mithila) later turned into a weekly. At Madhubani, with the help of the Banaili Raj, Ramananda Thakura established the Maithila Printing Works in 1905, and encouraged the publication of old as well as new Maithili works. Following this, the Maithili Mahasabha, also referred to as the Maithila Conference, was founded in 1910. Similar other social and cultural bodies which attest to the cultural awakening of Maithil society are: “Maithila Shikshita Samaja” (Calcutta, 1919), “Maithila Sammelana” (Calcutta 1923, Patna 1924), “Subodhini Sabha” (Purnea), “Maithila Chatra Sammelanas” (Bhagalpur 1910, Benares 1920, Muzaffarpur, 1924, Patna 1934, etc.), “Maithila Yuvaka Sangha” (Purnea 1930 and Aragainda (Dist. Dinajapur), and Benares), “Maithila Taruna Sangha,” and various exclusively Prabasi Maithila Associations. Among the primary aim of these organizations was to hold meetings in different parts of India, often presided

over by eminent Maithils, like Dr. Sir Ganganatha Jha, Kumar Ganganand Sinha, Ramabhadra Jha, Bhuvaneshvarasingha ‘Bhuvan’ and others, to discuss the ways and means through which Maithili language and literature could be developed.\textsuperscript{170} The proliferation of Maithil organizations, perhaps, proved Gangananda Sinha’s assertion that “More than anything else, the cause of the literature of Maithili has made the people demand a Separate Province of Mithila.”\textsuperscript{171}

**Conclusion**

In spite of the growing activities of the Maithili organizations, a sense of a rich literary heritage, and a sense of a distinctive geographic space that constitutes Mithila, the proponents of a separate Mithila continue to occasionally organize to give voice to their demands. The aim of this chapter, however, was not to document the failure of the Maithili movement. Rather, the aim here was to study the process through which a Maithil sub-regional identity was articulated particularly against the immediate background of the formation of Bihar. Initially trapped under the overwhelming influence of the Darbhanga Raj, and later mobilized largely through a literary movement, the articulation of a Maithil identity remained restricted to a coterie of Maithil literati. Perhaps, this was necessary enough to cultivate a sense of difference between Mithila and Magadha, but it did not prove adequate to demand a separate province. Much of the steam, so to speak, was taken away from the movement when the Sahitya Akademi recognized Maithili as an independent regional language on February 15, 1965. In a sense the movement for a separate Mithila Province became so deeply integrated with the

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid. p. 224.
\textsuperscript{171} Gangananda Sinha and Girindramohan Mishra *The Formation of a Separate Province of Mithila*. p. 18.
recognition of Maithili that the movement essentially became a literary movement. But in its wake it left Bihar largely as a fractured regional space, with a northern Mithila and a southern Magadha as its constitutive segments.
Conclusion

Regional identity has served as an important marker of belonging within India. In most instances, a regional sense of belonging is characterized as a more intrinsic marker of identity – one that locates people fundamentally to a place. In this dissertation, I have argued that for the middle-class Biharis, the recognition of a separate regional space was integral to their cultivation of Bihariness, which also became an essential component for demonstrating an attachment to their places of belonging. This could very well be an outcome of modernity, which as David Ludden has explained led to “territorialism” becoming “a cultural passion,” where “being a native insider became the only firm basis of social status.” Indeed, for Sachchidananda Sinha, Mahaesh Narayan and the other supporters for the separation of Bihar, their movement was not only characterized by emphasizing Bihar’s difference with Bengal, or to point out that Bihar was attached with Bengal only for administrative reasons, but it was also a project that cultivated Bihariness based on invoking a sense of regional pride.

Exploring the articulation of Bihariness, adds a crucial dimension to our understanding of the region-nation relation. I maintain that while relative backwardness served as an early impetus for the demands for Bihar’s separation, what really shaped Bihari regional outlook was the region’s appropriation and celebration of markers of Indian national identity. Indeed, the project of territorial self-fashioning in Bihar was a demonstration of the seamless ties that brought the region and the nation together with the markers of Indian national identity shaping the regional outlook during the late

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nineteenth century. Bihar’s unquestionable celebration of India became an essential factor in adding credibility to the nationalist project itself, thus, demonstrating, how the region and nation were mutually co-constituted during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is not to suggest that Bihar was brought into existence through the historical and political processes of the late nineteenth century. Instead, by the late nineteenth century, the three-century-old administrative unit of Bihar had begun to appeal to the regional middle-class as an “organic” space that was representative of a distinct community; so just as Bengalis belonged to Bengal, and Marathis belonged to Maharashtra, Biharis too belonged to Bihar. Yet, unlike Bengal or Maharashtra, in the process of identifying an administrative unit as the basis for a distinct regional space, the provincial middle-class began framing Bihari identity as an integral component of the Indian national imagination.

For Bihar, history and language became the primary markers of a distinct regional space. Both these categories – the sense of a distinctive past viewed as unique and glorious, as well as that of language – are used to signal an indispensable component of a people’s identity regardless of whether it is national or regional. So as the Bihari middle-class embarked on a project to demand for separation, they had to “make [Bihar] into a ‘place’ with its own history and customs in order for it to make sense to people.”

Regions, just like nations, are products of territorial self-fashioning and are based on “historically contingent practices and discourses” where the primary actors “produce” as

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well as “give meaning” to their “bounded material and symbolic worlds.” And in doing so, they invest the region with an attachment that can invoke strong sentiments of belonging. Investing a region with meaning and value also provides “‘conceptual or symbolic shape’ to what would otherwise be a mere line on a political map.” For Bihar, having existed as an administrative unit for three centuries, a transformation in the linguistic and historical landscape of Bihar provided the region with the necessary conceptual attributes thus giving meaning to the place. The precondition to the successful articulation of “Bihariness” meant that Bihar had to become a place where Biharis could “belong to… and identify with.” While the existence of Bihar as an administrative unit meant that there was a clear territorial understanding of what constituted Bihar, the markers of Bihariness was not as clearly drawn out.

To move beyond a territorially constituted Bihar, meant outlining the markers of Bihari identity that served both the purposes of distinguishing it from Bengal while simultaneously also cultivating a sense of attachment to the region. It is in this context that history and language were brought to the service of cultivating Bihari identity. More crucially, however, Bihari understandings of language and history were themselves determined by, and products of, an Indian national imagination. So unlike in other regional imaginations where the “Indian nation remained the silent touchstone,” or in even more instances where regional sentiments were framed in opposition to the nation, in Bihar it was the Indian nation that shaped the regional outlook. On the other hand, late

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nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial imperatives, that were both administrative and political in nature, were crucial to Bihar’s ultimate separation from Bengal. In sum, colonial politics and nationalist sentiments, both worked to give credibility to the Bihari imagination. While it was a provincial middle-class’ awareness of Bihar’s relative backwardness to Bengal that triggered the separation movement, the ultimate separation was implemented, by the colonial government, as a corrective to the 1905 partition of Bengal. Bracketing the initial demand for separation in the 1870s and the recognition as a separate province in 1912, were cultural and historical transformations that shaped the regional outlook.

As I have argued in Chapter 2, the imposition of Hindi as the official language of Bihar, realigned the region more closely to the United Provinces. More importantly still, it also made Bihar the first region where Hindi, which itself was being posited as the national language of India, received official support through its use in government courts and as a medium for vernacular education in the province. The switch to Hindi was significant – for it was during the late nineteenth century that language no longer remained a “medium” of expression but became a “marker” of identity. Subsequently, as Hindi was naturalized as the regional language, Bihar itself became an important base for the supporters of Hindi to make credible claims as India’s national language. Similarly, archaeological exploration and excavation while providing a visible record of the past, catapulted local places in Bihar as signposts of a glorious national past. The imbrication of local places and national past, not only transformed Bihar to make it the fount of Indian civilization but it also made Bihar integral to the national imagination. Bihar’s engagement with its past, most visible through the efforts of the Bihar and Orissa
Research Society and the Patna Museum, were indicative of the deep ties that bound the region and the nation within the same historical framework. Yet there were limits to the project of territorial self-fashioning at work during this period as I emphasize through my discussion on Mithila. Mithila’s attempt to construct a distinct regional space, based on highlighting the political and cultural differences between Mithila and Magadha, or north and south Bihar, are not entirely evidence of the failure of the Bihari project, but is a sign of the limits to which subscribing to a national imagination can contribute to a sense of regional cohesiveness.

It was attractive and, during the days of the separation movement, perhaps, also expedient to highlight the mutual co-constitution of Bihari and Indian imagination. But Bihar’s reliance on external markers to cultivate a regional identity did not also simultaneously trigger a movement to restructure the internal fragments that together made up Bihar. So Mithila and Magadha continue to exist as quite distinct cultural spaces that together constitute modern Bihar. Perhaps it is the existence of differences within Bihar that have led to observations stating that “although politically Bihar may be one entity today, neither in terms of its natural and social ecology, nor even in the sweep of its long history, has the state been one.” It is the persistence of such differences that once again led Biharis to invoke its ties to the national imagination, through events like the Bihar Divas, and commemorating those ties through the construction of the Civilization Gate. This indispensible reference to the nation, does point out that in this instance of territorial self-fashioning, Bihari regional outlook was shaped by a national imagination.

Appendix I

Present at the Inaugural Meeting:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Office Held (Location)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sir Charles S. Bayley</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Governor of Bihar and Orissa, Chair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward A. Gait</td>
<td>Member, Executive Council, Bihar and Orissa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.V. Levinge</td>
<td>Member, Executive Council, Bihar and Orissa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.H.C. Walsh</td>
<td>Commissioner of Chota Nagpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. LeMesurier</td>
<td>Chief Secretary to Government, Bihar and Orissa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.E.A.W. Oldham</td>
<td>Commissioner of Patna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. McPherson</td>
<td>Secretary to Government, Bihar and Orissa, Revenue Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.G. Jennings</td>
<td>Director of Public Instruction, Bihar and Orissa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharaja Bahadur Sir Ravaneshwar Prasad Singh</td>
<td>Maharaja of Gidhaur (Bihar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanj Deo</td>
<td>Kanika (Orissa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nawab Shams-ul-‘Ulama Saiyid Imdad Imam</td>
<td>Neora (Patna, Bihar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nawab Saiyid Nasiruddin Ahmad</td>
<td>(Bihar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khan Bahadur Khwaja Muhammad Nur</td>
<td>Gaya (Bihar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babu Dwarka Nath</td>
<td>Muzafarpur (Bihar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rai Bahadur Krishna Sahay</td>
<td>Bankipore (Patna, Bihar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. A. Campbell</td>
<td>Pokhuria, Manbhum District (Chota Nagpur)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.W. P. Scroope</td>
<td>Collector of Patna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.B. Spooner</td>
<td>Superintendent, Archaeological Department, Eastern Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.H. Jackson</td>
<td>Principal, Patna College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Owston Smith</td>
<td>Professor, Patna College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Ross Masood</td>
<td>Principal, Patna Collegiate School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sachchidananda Sinha</td>
<td>Bar-at-Law, Bankipore (Patna, Bihar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.P. Jayaswal</td>
<td>Bar-at-Law, Bankipore (Patna, Bihar)</td>
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<tr>
<td>S. A. Raja</td>
<td>Bankipore (Patna, Bihar)</td>
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<td>Babu Jadunath Sarkar</td>
<td>Professor, Patna College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Babu Jogindra Nath Samaddar</td>
<td>Professor, Patna College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pandit Ramavtar Sharma</td>
<td>Professor, Patna College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rai Bahadur Purnendu Narayan Singh</td>
<td>Government Pleader, Patna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babu Ram Gopal Singh Chaudhri</td>
<td>Patna City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and others.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1 “Proceedings of the Inaugural Meeting” JBORS., Vol. I, Part I, 1915, pp. 133-34. [Held at Government House, Bankipore, at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, the 20th January 1915].
Appendix II

Subjects and Time-Period Covered by the Articles Published in the JBORS between 1915-1929 (Miscellaneous Contributions and Notes of the Quarter are Excluded)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject/Time-Period</th>
<th>No. of Publications</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ancient History</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medieval History</td>
<td>52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colonial Period</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archeology and Numismatics</td>
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<td>Philology</td>
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Appendix III

Author List of Articles Published in Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society 1915-1929 (Miscellaneous Contributions and Notes of the Quarter are Excluded)

Table of Authors with 3 or more publications (Ranked according to the Number of Publications):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>No. of Publications</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarat Chandra Roy</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>K.P. Jayaswal</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM Hara Prasad Shastri</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarat Chandra Mitra, MA. BL (Chapra) and Subsequently Lecturer in Social Anthropology, Univ. of Calcutta</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. P. Banerji Sastri</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>R. D. Banerji</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jadu Nath Sarkar</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khan Bahadur Sarfraz Husain Khan</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalipada Mitra (Monghyr)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamal Krishna Basu</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vinayatosa Bhattacharyya/ Benoytosh Bhattacharya</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Rev. A. Campbell</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sukumar Haldar</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. H. Jackson</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>B.C. Mazumdar</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. N. Samaddar</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>R. C. Mazumdar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Surendranath Majumdar Sastri</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>P.C. Manuk</td>
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<tr>
<td>C.E.A.W. Oldham</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Haranandan Panday</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>G. Ramadas</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rai Sahib Chuni Lal Ray</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Count</td>
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<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ramavatara Sarma</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. S. Altekar</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manomohan Ganguli</td>
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<tr>
<td>R. P. Khosla</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hugh McPHerson</td>
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<tr>
<td>N. C. Mehta</td>
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<tr>
<td>K. G. Sankara</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Girindra Nath Sarkar</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>D.N. Sen (Debendra Nath?)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.B. Spooner</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.H.C. Walsh</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>277</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total No. of Articles Published 1915-1924</strong></td>
<td><strong>361</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix IV

Maps of India and Bihar

Map 1: India
Map 2: Bihar
Bibliography

Archival Sources

Bihar State Archives, Patna
Political Department, Special Branch

National Archives of India, New Delhi
Education Department, Archeology and Epigraphy Branch.
Home Department, Archeology Branch
Home Department, General Proceedings
Home Department, Public Branch

West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata
Education Department, Education Proceedings
General Department, Education Proceedings
General Department, General Proceedings
General Department, Miscellaneous Branch
Annual General Report of the Patna Division
Annual General Report of the Bhagulpore Division

Maharajadhiraj Kameshwar Singh Kalyani Foundation, Darbhanga
Separation of Mithila Papers

Newspapers

Behar Herald
Bihar Prabha
Behar Times
Jagran Post
The Bengalee
Times of India
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Hindustan Review

Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society (JBORS)

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Annual Report of the Managing Committee of the Patna Museum

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**Education**
2013 Ph.D., History, Pennsylvania State University
2008 M.A., History, Pennsylvania State University
2005 B.A., magna cum laude, History & Economics, St. Lawrence University

**Academic Position**
2013 Assistant Professor, Department of History, Stephen F. Austin State University, Texas

**Publications**

**Select Fellowships and Awards**
2012 College of Liberal Arts Noakes Fellow for the year 2012-2013
Penn State University
2012 Gandhi Dissertation Fellowship
Department of History, Penn State University (Spring)
2011 Hill Dissertation Fellowship
Department of History, Penn State University (Fall)
2009 Edwin Earle Sparks Fellowship in the Humanities
Department of History, Penn State University (Fall)
2009 E-tu Zen Sun Award for Outstanding Teaching by a Graduate Student
Department of History, Penn State University
2008 The Mark and Lucy Stitzer Endowment In History Award
Department of History, Penn State University

**Conference and Invited Presentations**
2013 “A Region in the Making: Bihari Literati and Provincial Identity in Colonial India” Kumkum Chatterjee Memorial Conference, Penn State University, October 4-6 (Invited)
2013 “Framing a Region: Provincial Literati and the Indian National Imagination” Southwestern Social Science Association, New Orleans, March 28
2013 “Articulating Mithila: The Limits to a Provincial Imagination” Association for Asian Studies, San Diego, March 21-24
2012 “South Asian History Dissertation Workshop” University of Michigan, December 4-9 (Invited)
2012 “The Curious Case of Magadha: Archeological Production of a “National” Historical Landscape in 19th and 20th Century Bihar” Ninth Annual South Asia Graduate Student Conference, University of Chicago, April 5-6
2011 “Local Places, National Pasts: Colonial Archeology and the Production of History” 40th Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, October 22, (Panel Organizer)
2010 “Making of a Vernacular: Colonial Policies, Print-culture and Hindi in 19th Century Bihar” Mid-Atlantic Region Association for Asian Studies Conference, University Park, October 23