



Kavivar Sitaram Jha (1891–1975), is among the few poets who radically influenced the course of Maithili literature.

Although he wrote much in Hindi, especially where it related to his profession as an astrologer, he used Maithili for literary purposes. He was encouraged to write in Maithili when he saw what the Bengalis had done for their own literature. Kavivar's poetry is spontaneous and strong, creating his own literary conventions. Composed in the idiom of the common people at a time when the national struggle for Independence had caught the imagination of every intellectual and artist, many of his poems have found a permanent place among Maithili people of every strata of society. His literary writings are in many senses a true and holistic reflection of the culture of Maithila.

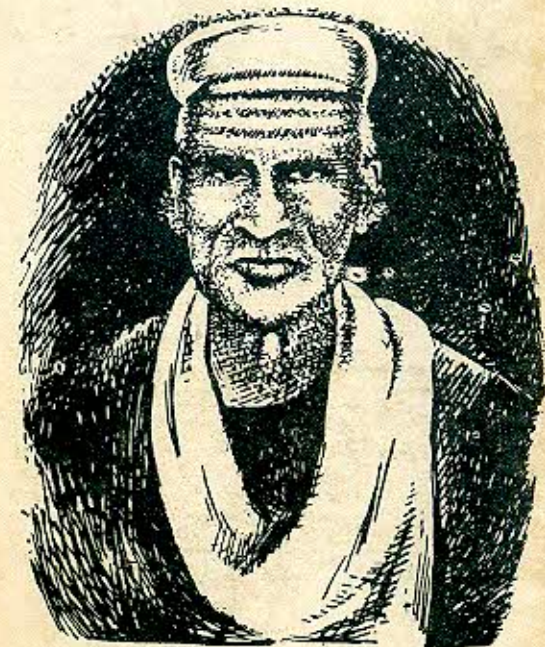
Bhimnath Jha, author of the present monograph is himself a renowned poet. In this monograph, he has presented the various facets of Kavivar Sitaram Jha's life and works in a remarkable manner.

Jagdish Prasad Karna, is a teacher and translator. He has been associated with the Sahitya Akademi's Maithili Advisory Board for several years.

Sitaram Jha

Bhimnath Jha

*Makers of
Indian
Literature*



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MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

Sitaram Jha

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Translated from the Maithili original
JAGADISH PRASAD KARNA

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Shuddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.
Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.



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Acknowledgement

This monograph on the life and works of Kavivar Sitaram Jha is my humble contribution to the Sahitya Akademi's unique publication scheme of Makers of Indian Literature series. In preparing this monograph I have availed myself of the books and articles on the poet by numerous scholars. Particularly an article by Dr. Ramdeva Jha and the research work by Dr. Surya Narayan Choudhary have been of great help to me. Pandit Govind Jha was very kind in going through the whole manuscript and in offering me his valuable suggestions. But for their invaluable help this book would never have seen the light of the day.

Life-sketch and Personality

Kavivar Sitaram Jha is considered to be one of the important pillars of modern Maithili poetry. Even though the modern age in Maithili literature is traced from Chanda Jha, the refinement and wide scope that we find in the language and content of Sitaram Jha's poetry make him the cornerstone of this age. His poetry flows with a strong current breaking many a barrier of literary conventions. The naturalness of language in his poetry and the raciness of his Maithili acquire such prominence that these alone would have reserved a pride of place for him in the history of Maithili literature. This is not to say that he devoted his extraordinary talent in chiselling only the beauty of his language, he also proved capable of generating in the hearts of his readers a compelling love for this language, Mai/thili.

Ten score versifiers had preceded Sitaram Jha but none, before him, except Vidyapati, had given such a clarion call to his contemporaries to dedicate themselves to the cause of Maithili, or had inspired and encouraged people to write in Maithili, and taught them to feel proud of their language. None before him had joined issues with the detractors of this language and, in fact, taken up cudgels on its behalf.

Of the few poets who brought a turning point in the course of Maithili poetry he is the foremost. In order to view the poetry of Sitaram Jha in a historical perspective, it is necessary to discuss those of his predecessors whose poetry had given a new direction to Maithili poetry.

Sanskrit being the only medium of education and learned discourse it is still not decidedly known as to who were those pioneering souls who had had the intuition and urge to write in vernacular. But this much is certain that from the eighth to the eleventh century A.D. some Siddhas did the spade work in the crusty land of Maithili poetry. Judging from the linguistic style and choice of subjects in the poetry of about twenty two Siddhas—Sarahpad, Sabarpad, Luipad, Bhusukpad, Binpad and others—out of eighty-four famous ones, it is easy to gather that these Siddhas must have

been from Mithila. They did the spade work and obviously it was on the strength of their efforts that the barren tracts of this language came under some kind of literary cultivation. Though Jyotirishwara is known for his prose-work *Vamaratnakara*, his title of 'Kavishekharacharya' proves that he was the best among many able practitioners of this art. The narrative style of *Vamaratnakara* and some Maithili verses found in *Dhurasamagam* also strengthen this view. However, in the absence of sufficient number of his poems, Vidyapati has naturally superseded his importance.

In fact, it is Vidyapati, who, with his songs numbering over a thousand, first of all heralds the advent of spring in the garden of Maithili poetry. Thus Vidyapati alone had the unchallenged honour of establishing a sort of poetic empire in Maithili. After him poetry seems to flow from the pen of many poets who did little but imitate the style of the great poet. None before Manbodha showed enough courage to make a departure from the beaten track. The credit of innovation goes to Manbodha alone. He liberated Maithili poetry from the bondage of lyricism and brought it to the new path of narrative poetry i.e. Prabandha Kavya. Manbodha's example was later followed by Chanda Jha. On the basis of *Mithila Bhasha Ramayana* and *Chandra Padyavali* Chanda Jha is considered to be the pioneer of modern Maithili literature. Though there were many poets after Chanda Jha, the singular credit of widening the scope and diversifying the forms of Maithili poetry goes to Sitaram Jha alone.

Sitaram Jha did not only enrich the classical trends of Maithili poetry but also added new dimensions to it. With his varied and various poetic contributions the Maithili landscape suddenly undergoes a scenic transformation.

In order to understand the personality and work of Sitaram Jha it is necessary to know a little about his life. Born in 1891 Sitaram lived up to the ripe age of eighty-four. During this long span he was not only a witness to, but also the cause and creator of many a literary event in Maithili. Though professionally engaged in astrological studies, commissioned writings on astrological topics and research works connected with them, he was all the while deeply devoted to the cause of Maithili literature. He had hardly any time to think about writing an autobiography, or probably he felt no urge for it. It may be observed that in the works of ancient scholars whereas the subject matter is given an exhaustive treatment there are few references to the lives of the authors themselves.

Therefore determination of their biodata becomes difficult. Although the same cannot be said about Sitaram Jha, the authentic details of the important events of his life are difficult to be chronologically collated. These details while giving us a glimpse of the society contemporary to the poet would also have helped us in analysing his poetry. If at all the poet were to write his autobiography it would have surely become an authentic history highlighting the socio-cultural and literary trends of his time. But destiny had it otherwise. On the basis of what the poet has, here and there, said about himself, and the reminiscences about him presented by his near and dear ones, an effort has been made here to piece together a brief sketch of his life.

Birth and Family

There is no common agreement about the date of birth of Kavivar Sitaram Jha. His work *Maithili Kavyopavana* published during his life-time mentions, in course of his brief life-sketch, that he was born on Wednesday, 'Tritiya Tithi' of 'Magh Krishna', 'Vikram Samvat' 1947, that is, on January 5, 1891. But Dr. Suryanarayan Choudhary, while throwing light on his life, writes in the very beginning of his research work, *A Critical study of the Maithili Writings of Sitaram Jha* :

"Kavivar Sitaram Jha was born on Wednesday, the fourth 'Tithi' of 'Magh Krishna' of 1928 'Sal', 'Vikram Samvat' 1947"

He has also specified the hour of his birth more clearly in the footnote :

"Fasli year 'San' 1928, 'Vikram Samvat' 1947, 'Magh Krishna Chaturthi Tithi,' that is, Wednesday, 'Purva Phalguni Nakshatra,' 'Chaturtha Charan', 24 'Ghari', 15 'Pal' ; accordingly 2.30 P.M."

The almanac, however, shows that Wednesday did not fall on the 5th January 1891, but on the 16th. At the time of sunrise that day it was 'Tritiya Tithi' in the hour of the poet's birth. Hence it can be undoubtedly asserted that Kavivar saw the light of the day on January 16, 1891.

He was born in his paternal village Chougama situated adjacent to the headquarters of the Benipur subdivision in the Darbhanga district. He was of 'Belouche Sudai' origin ('Mool') and a Brahman of 'Bharadwaj Gotra'. His father's name was Bachharan Jha and his mother's Janaki Devi. One of his ancestors, the father of his great great grandfather, Bhola Jha settled at his maternal place ('Matrika') Chougama itself and since then his ancestors became the

residents of this very village. The youngest of the five children of his father, he had two elder brothers and two elder sisters. The eldest of the brothers was Ram Prasad Jha, followed by his sister Saraswati Devi, who again was followed by his brother Suryanarayan Jha and then his sister Maya Devi.

Childhood and Education

When Sitaram Jha was only two years old he was deprived of the care of his father. Consequently the responsibility of bringing him up fell on the shoulders of his mother and two elder brothers. The family having but a small property, he could not continue to stay in the village. Most of his time he lived at his maternal place, Sahora. It was there that his 'Mundan' and 'Upanayan' rites were performed.

His education began with the learning of alphabet from the early age of four. Meritorious as he was from the beginning, he had, in spite of his adverse circumstances, great zeal for learning. He took a keen interest in it. He was admitted to class two of the Majhaura Primary School. He passed the upper primary examination in the first division from that school.

After passing that examination his studies owing to financial stringency were discontinued. He started teaching some children at his village and earned something in this way. Intelligent as he was, he had, in addition, an excellent capacity for teaching with zeal and dedication. Impressed by this, some people wanted to see him appointed a teacher. Some even tried for it, but at that time he had not come of age.

This initial hindrance made him vow to be a teacher. The future proved his determination and up to the last breath he remained a teacher.

After completing the "upper class" he evinced keen interest in the study of Sanskrit which he learned at the feet of Pandit Kapileshwar Jha of Jarison. He passed the Prathama Examination of Jyotish in the first division from the Sanskrit School, Jarison. Thereafter, he studied at the feet of Pandit Shri Nandan Jha of the Kanhouli village at Lohana School securing a first division in the Madhyama Examination of Jyotish.

After passing the Madhyama Examination he moved to Banaras to receive higher education. Financial aid came from Udit Narayan Choudhary of Nchara. At Banaras he developed a strong thirst for knowledge and got ample opportunity to satisfy it. He made full use of the opportunity by seriously applying himself to the study of

Jyotish. He became the disciple of the only Maithil astrologer Maha Mahopadhyaya Pandit Muralidhar Jha. He lived like a member of his family which helped him in delving deeper into the knowledge of Jyotish. Maha Mahopadhyaya was not only an erudite scholar of Jyotish, but also a litterateur and a journalist of Maithili. Sitaram Jha also acquired from this teacher a love for his mother-tongue and inspired by him dedicated himself to the task of enriching Maithili.

Besides studying Jyotish under M.M.Muralidhar Jha, he also studied literature under Maha Mahopadhyaya Devi Prasad Shukla. Shuklaji wielded great influence over him. He secured the degrees of 'Jyotishacharya' and 'Kavyatirtha' from the Calcutta University as a private student and afterwards passed the Shastri and Acharya Examinations of the Government Sanskrit College of Banaras. He also secured the first position in the difficult and much esteemed examination, Dhout Pariksha, in 1915.

Marriage and Children

Married in 1907 at the age of sixteen, his wife was Ijotamani Devi, the daughter of Devidutta Jha of 'Baliasaya Dharoura' origin and 'Kashyapa Gotra,' belonging to Shubhankarpur near Bhawanipur. Three sons were born to them, Janardan Jha 'Parakhi', Rup Narayan Jha 'Rakesh' and Vishwanath Jha 'Vishapayi' and a daughter Jagatarini Devi. Living a blessed conjugal life for fifty years, his wife left him for her heavenly abode in 1957.

Titles and Honours

The poet was honoured with many a title and tribute for the distinguished services rendered by him to Jyotish and Maithili language.

He was honoured with the title of *Kavivar* which became part and parcel of his name. Other honours included the title of *Maithili Sahitya Ratna* conferred to him by Mithila Mitra of Sultanganj, the title of *Kavi Samrat* by the Mithila Mihir family, the title of *Sahityacharya* from the Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna and the title of *Sahitya Ratna* from the Maithili Samsthan, Patna.

In the Maithili Conference organised by Maithili Academy, Prayag he was made the honorary head of the department of Dharmashastra and, besides being conferred upon with the title of 'Dharma Viveka Varenya', was also honoured with 'Pattavastra' and an order of merit.

Lal Bahadur Sanskrit Vidyapeetha, Delhi bestowed upon him an award and the 'Pattavastra' for his learned speech on the subject of Jyotish.

The 'Givarnavagvardhini Sabha' of Sangaved Vidyalyaya of Banaras conferred upon him the distinguished title of 'Jyotish Ratnakara.'

Teaching

The poet had taken a vow to adopt the vocation of teaching in his boyhood. Accordingly he fulfilled his vow. After finishing his studies, he adorned the post of Jyotish teacher at Sanyasi Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya of Banaras from 1921 to 1962. considering his reputation as a teacher and his profound erudition in Jyotish, Banaras Sanskrit University offered him professorship which post he occupied for the rest of his life.

Death

Sitaram Jha passed away on 15 June, 1975. Though age had told upon him, he remained active till the end. He taught his disciples even in the night previous to his death.

Personality

Kavivar Sitaram Jha was a scholar of the school of the ancient style of Sanskrit learning of Mithila. Thin of body and dark of complexion, he possessed a vivacious personality. A staunch upholder of Maithil culture, he always dressed himself in 'dheti', 'touni', 'mirjai', 'pag', and invariably carried a walking stick. His broad forehead was never without a shining 'tripunda' and sandal paste. He was a Brahman devotee who performed 'Sandhya', worship and 'Japa' regularly. Sweet-natured as he was, he always preferred pun and humour in his talks. But he was staunch in his views. In scholarly discussions he would readily agree to the views of his counterpart if he thought those proper, but in case of difference of opinion he would challenge any scholar in support of his view.

Astrology was the main prop of his profession and he devoted his whole life to its pursuit. In course of his studies and teaching he always maintained an exploratory approach, such as writing books on the subject, bringing out his commentaries on reference books of esoteric nature and publishing articles and notes. His assumptions in astrology were not always in tune with those of other astrologers of Mithila. Consequently disputes would very often arise between him

and others. He would silence many a scholar during debates with his spirited arguments. So firm was his faith in his own views that while challenging his opponent, he would even put the other's knowledge into question. This unwavering faith in his own views was born of his great scholarship of Jyotish. On the concept of 'Atichar' he continued to differ with the Maithil astrologers till the end of his life and never accepted defeat. His strong-mindedness sometimes crossed the limit of tolerance. These qualities of self-dignity, a capacity for tireless endeavour and an invincible self-confidence were deeply rooted in his nature.

Poetic Talent and Drive

Kavivar had a natural gift for poetry. Even while he was a mere boy, his poetic genius began to bloom. In this connection he himself says :

"As many times as I read the *Mithila Bhasha Ramayana* and the *Rama Charitamanas* of Tulsidas in my boyhood, I liked to recite them by substituting their words and lines with my own. Sometimes I would succeed in recomposing the lines according to my choice and then would recite them. Now do I understand that my poetic sensibility had manifested itself at that very stage."

(“O Je Kahalani”—*Sri Hansaraj*, p. 46)

Later on he chiselled his poetic talent still more through practice. Even his letters used to be in verse and verse again was used in his conversations even with his class mates.

That he utilized his poetic talents for Maithili alone is surely a matter of pride for this literature. His dedication to his mother-tongue and his vow to write only in Maithili are proofs of his unflinching faith in his mother-tongue. For this he drew inspiration from an incident in Calcutta.

Although he had started writing in 1913 itself, at that time, however, the spirit of dedication to his mother-tongue had not been born in him. Besides Maithili, he was also writing in Rashtrabhasha (Hindi) and Devabhasha (Sanskrit)

He had to go to Calcutta at that time very often. The love of the Bengalis for their mother-tongue highly inflamed him. In fact it was this zeal of the Bengalis for their mother-tongue that left an indelible imprint on his mind urging him to render

