

A PARALLEL HISTORY OF

MITHILA

&

MAITHILI LITERATURE

LANGUAGE • MEMORY • TEXT

HISTORY OF

MITHILA, VAJJI

& ANGA

IN INDIA & NEPAL

LAND • PEOPLE • POLITY

GAJENDRA THAKUR

History of Mithila, Vajji & Anga

HISTORY OF MITHILA, VAJJI & ANGA in India & Nepal

From Prehistory to the Contemporary Period

Gajendra Thakur

Editor, Videha - First Maithili Fortnightly eJournal

ISSN 2229-547X | www.videha.co.in

Copyright and publication information

© Gajendra Thakur / Preeti Thakur, 2026

All rights reserved.

COVER DESIGNED BY: AUM GAJENDRA THAKUR

Gajendra Thakur, Editor, Videha - First Maithili Fortnightly
eJournal

ISSN 2229-547X

www.videha.co.in

This edition is formatted for 6 x 9 inch hardback publication.
Historical claims, dates, maps, illustrations, and modern
statistics are governed by the source-critical qualifications stated
in the editorial and evidentiary note.

Editorial and evidentiary note

This five-volume work provides chronological coverage from prehistory to the contemporary period through a source-controlled regional method. Archaeological, philological, archival, environmental, linguistic, and institutional evidence are kept distinct according to their evidentiary reach. Further discoveries may refine individual conclusions; narrative length is never treated as a substitute for verifiability.

The five-volume sequence extends through Chapter 28 and preserves two governing historiographical safeguards throughout: Mahākavi Vidyāpati, the earlier pre-Jyotirīśvara Maithili Padāvalī poet, is kept distinct from the later Oiniwar-period Sanskrit-Avahaṭṭa author Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura; and hereditary Śrottriya status is not projected backward before the book's Panji-based c.1800 reconstruction. The concluding volumes integrate language and recognition, Mithila painting and the cultural economy, Kosi environmental history, Madhesh citizenship and federalism, and the final method of connected histories without false unity.

The governing rule is evidentiary separation. Archaeological contexts, inscriptions, dated official records, and critically edited texts are distinguished from later literary tradition, dynastic memory, sacred geography, and modern identity claims. When a chronology or identification remains disputed, the prose says so. The words 'tradition records' and 'the text represents' do not mean that an episode has been independently established as an event.

Dates before the Common Era are approximate unless attached to a securely dated context. Modern statistics are tied to the named census or legal instrument. Colonial gazetteers are used as evidence for colonial knowledge and administration, not as neutral descriptions of society. Place names follow common English forms, with selected historical variants in the concordance.

Illustrations are historical evidence with their own limits. Modern photographs document present monuments, archaeological landscapes, or commemoration; they are not treated as contemporary portraits of ancient or medieval events. Every reproduced image carries a caption, creator credit, license or public-domain statement, and a link to its source record.

How to use this book

Each substantive chapter ends with a full, chapter-specific bibliography.

Parenthetical citations identify the source being interpreted; the bibliography supplies publication details.

The consolidated chronology gives secure anchors and labels traditional or disputed items.

The glossary and place-name concordance reduce confusion between ancient polities, historical regions, and modern administrative units.

The final index supplies page locators for this edition.

Contents

Volume I - Prehistory and Protohistory 1

Chapter 1. Region, rivers, names, and method.....	2
Chapter 2. Archaeology and early food production.....	20
Chapter 3. Late prehistoric and early iron-using horizons.....	36
Chapter 4. Environment, mobility, and settlement.....	52

Volume II - Ancient Mithila, Vajji and Anga 67

Chapter 5. Videha in Vedic and Upanishadic textual worlds.....	68
Chapter 6. Janaka, Sita, and the discipline of reading tradition.....	85
Chapter 7. Vajji, the Licchavis, and Vaishali.....	105
Chapter 8. Anga, Champa, and the Magadhan horizon.....	126
Chapter 9. Buddhism, Jainism, and eastern Gangetic religious change.....	139
Chapter 10. Empires, inscriptions, and pilgrim itineraries.....	161
Chapter 11. Licchavi Nepal and the problem of continuity.....	182

Volume III - Medieval Period 204

Chapter 12. Tirabhukti and the early-medieval regional order.....	205
Chapter 13. The Karnatas and Simraongarh.....	227
Chapter 14. Oiniwar rule, Sultanate power, and political transition.....	252
Chapter 15. Two Vidyāpatis: Maithili, Sanskrit learning, and law.....	274
Chapter 16. Mughal-era Tirhut, Anga, and early-modern institutions.....	298

Volume IV - Modern Period 323

Chapter 17. Company rule, Permanent Settlement, and Darbhanga Raj.....	324
Chapter 18. Agrarian society, markets, caste, and labour.....	350
Chapter 19. Rivers, calamity, transport, and the colonial state.....	372
Chapter 20. Education, print, language, reform, and nationalism.....	393
Chapter 21. The Nepal Tarai, Rana rule, and the border to 1951.....	419

Volume V - Contemporary Period 442

Chapter 22. Land reform, democracy, and changing regional power.....	443
Chapter 23. The India-Nepal borderland, migration, and exchange.....	458
Chapter 24. Maithili and Angika: language, literature, and recognition.....	477
Chapter 25. Mithila painting, gender, and the cultural economy.....	499
Chapter 26. The Kosi, floods, infrastructure, and environmental risk.....	524
Chapter 27. Madhesh, representation, and plural citizenship in Nepal.....	554
Chapter 28. Conclusions: connected histories without false unity.....	588

Consolidated chronology.....	617
Glossary and place-name concordance.....	635
General source register.....	654
Index.....	679

List of maps, figures and diagrams

Map 1. Selected present-day reference points used for orientation in this book.....	10
Diagram 1. Evidence-status sequence used throughout the book.....	17

Diagram 2. Evidence classes used to reconstruct Neolithic Chirand.....	27
Diagram 3. Chirand radiocarbon samples plotted against reported excavation depth.....	30
Diagram 4. Iron-working evidence hierarchy.....	41
Diagram 5. The early-historic transition runs on several clocks.....	47
Diagram 6. Himalayan foreland to Ganga: schematic landscape transect.....	56
Diagram 7. Why the map of known sites is not the map of past settlement.....	63
Diagram 8. Satapatha Brahmana 1.4.1 as textual geography.....	71
Diagram 9. Three social settings of philosophical authority in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad: royal sacrifice and debate, Janaka-Yajnavalkya dialogue, and the Maitreyi household-renunciation scene.....	78
Figure 1. Janaki Mandir in Janakpur, photographed in 2015.....	86
Diagram 10. Ramayana transmission as a field rather than a single line of copying.....	93
Diagram 11. Four evidentiary layers between an epic place-name and a living sacred geography: the transmitted textual world, later localization, built and performed landscape, and modern heritage or identity claims.....	98
Diagram 12. Vajjian 'conditions of non-decline': text, inference, and limits.....	108
Diagram 13. Raja Vishal ka Garh: archaeology versus constitutional legend	119
Diagram 14. Anga and Champa: four evidence streams.....	131
Diagram 15. Champa excavation sequence: a stratigraphic caution.....	135
Diagram 16. Renunciant communities in the eastern Gangetic world: an institutional ecology.....	147
Diagram 17. Religious history is reconstructed from sources of different dates and purposes.....	157
Diagram 18. Ashokan pillar corridor in north Bihar: monument, inscription, and route are different claims.....	166
Figure 2. The lion-capital pillar and monastic remains at Kolhua, Vaishali.....	171
Diagram 19. How to use Faxian and Xuanzang as historical geography.....	175
Diagram 20. Licchavi continuity: what links Vaishali and Nepal, and what remains unproved.....	187
Diagram 21. Licchavi Nepal through inscriptions: a layered political economy	195
Diagram 22. Tirabhukti in surviving records: a changing administrative geography.....	209
Diagram 23. Reading an early-medieval copper-plate grant as a political-economic document.....	215
Figure 3. Ranibas Math and Ram-Janaki Temple at the Simraungadh site, photographed in 2019.....	234
Diagram 24. Source-controlled Karnata chronology.....	236
Diagram 25. Simraongarh fortification and hydraulic system.....	236
Diagram 26. Oiniwar Mithila in a layered political field.....	257

Figure 4. Image catalogued by Wikimedia Commons as an inscription of King Narsimha of the Oiniwar dynasty from Kandaha Sun Temple, Saharsa, with the date 1453.....	260
Diagram 27. Source-controlled Oiniwar chronology.....	261
Diagram 28. Two Vidyāpatīs: source-controlled separation.....	276
Diagram 29. Literary languages and institutions in later-medieval Mithila.....	286
Figure 5. Modern commemorative statue conventionally identified with Vidyapati at Bisfi, photographed in 2004.....	295
Diagram 30. Mughal administrative scales in Tirhut and the eastern Bihar frontier, c.....	304
Diagram 31. Khandavala institutional consolidation under Mughal rule.....	314
Diagram 32. From dīwānī to Permanent Settlement: the changing revenue constitution, 1765-1800.....	332
Diagram 33. Panji, property and rank around c.1800: separating genealogy from later sub-caste formation.....	335
Diagram 34. Layered agrarian rights after the Bengal Tenancy Act.....	354
Diagram 35. Village beyond village: markets, mobility and riverine risk.....	364
Diagram 36. Colonial river governance as a feedback system.....	381
Diagram 37. Calamity, transport and state-building: selected colonial anchors.	390
Diagram 38. Education, print and political public formation, c.....	415
Diagram 39. Competing projects of Mithila in the late-colonial public sphere.	415
Diagram 40. Selected legal and political anchors in the making of the Nepal–India/British India frontier, 1815–1951.....	423
Diagram 41. Analytical model of recurring relationships among Rana state institutions, land and revenue, legal hierarchy, border transport, and Tarai households and communities.....	433
Diagram 42. Selected legal and political anchors in Bihar’s transition from zamindari abolition to layered agrarian reform and decentralized rural government, 1950–2006.....	455
Diagram 43. Bihar/India and Nepal followed distinct postcolonial constitutional and land-reform trajectories while remaining connected through regional social, economic, and environmental pressures.....	456
Diagram 44. India–Nepal borderland flows and filters: household, labour, markets, state documentation and social infrastructure interact through an unusually open but legally consequential international frontier.....	473
Diagram 45. Selected post-1950 borderland anchors showing changes in legal framework, political interruption, formal logistics and passenger connectivity.....	474
Diagram 46. Selected Maithili-Angika anchors, 1903-2027.....	495
Diagram 47. Recognition is plural: Maithili and Angika compared across distinct institutional fields rather than ranked on one ladder.....	496
Diagram 48. Selected Mithila painting anchors, 1919-2026.....	520

Diagram 49. The cultural economy of Mithila painting is shown as a chain of production, mediation, institutional validation, purchase, and return flows rather than a direct artist-to-buyer market.....521

Diagram 50. Kosi infrastructure and risk: selected anchors, 1954-2026.535

Diagram 51. Embankment protection redistributes risk.....544

Diagram 52. From legal citizenship to plural federal citizenship: selected Nepal-Madhesh constitutional and political anchors, 1952-2026.....579

Diagram 53. Plural citizenship operates through several institutions at once583

Diagram 54. From source to historical claim: provenance, claim fit, cross-checking, confidence labels, and explicit narrative limits form a claim-control sequence.....593

Diagram 55. Connected histories without false unity: scale changes from site and region to river basin, state, borderland, and transregional network601

VOLUME I

PREHISTORY AND PROTOHISTORY

Source-controlled regional history

Chapter 1. Region, rivers, names, and method

A historical region, not a timeless border

Mithila, Vajji, and Anga belong to different kinds of historical geography. Mithila is at once a remembered kingdom, a scholastic-cultural region, and a modern language homeland spanning north Bihar and Nepal's eastern and central Tarai. Vajji names an ancient confederated political formation centred on the north Gangetic plain. Anga was an eastern early-historic polity associated in textual tradition with Champa and the lower middle Ganga corridor. Their boundaries shifted; none maps neatly onto a modern state or district. This book therefore follows networks, rivers, institutions, and remembered centres rather than drawing a single permanent frontier (Singh 2008; Thapar 2002).

Water as archive and agent

The Himalayan rivers that cross the Tarai and north Bihar deposit silt, abandon channels, flood settlements, and erase or bury archaeological surfaces. The Ganga simultaneously linked Anga and the north-bank regions to long-distance traffic. Rivers were not a static backdrop: they structured cultivation, ferries, markets, pilgrimage, revenue assessment, and disaster. Later chapters show how attempts to stabilize these rivers also redistributed risk.

Rules of evidence

Archaeological strata establish material sequences, not ethnic labels. Texts disclose categories and memories at the time of composition and transmission; they do not automatically prove every narrated event. Inscriptions are usually firmer chronological anchors but are public acts of power and piety, not neutral chronicles. Gazetteers contain valuable observation together with colonial classification. This layered method is essential in a region where sacred geography, dynastic memory, and political identity remain active.

Three spatial scales

The narrative moves among three scales that should not be confused. The first is the site or locality: an excavated mound, a river crossing, a settlement cluster, or a named shrine. The second is the historical region, reconstructed from distributions of objects, texts, routes, institutions, and remembered centres. The third is the state, whose administrative reach varied and whose documents often describe claims more readily than everyday practice. Mithila may be meaningful at all three scales, but not in the same way. Vajji is most securely approached as an early political field known through textual and archaeological evidence around Vaishali, whereas Anga is reconstructed from eastern political geography and the Champa-Bhagalpur corridor. Keeping these scales separate prevents a capital, a language area, and an ancient polity from being treated as interchangeable.

Names as historical evidence

A place name is evidence, but it is never self-interpreting. The survival or revival of a name may register memory, political aspiration, pilgrimage, literary authority, or administrative convenience. Conversely, the disappearance of a name from official records need not mean that the cultural region vanished. This study therefore asks who used a name, in which language, for what territory, and in what genre. The method is especially important for Mithila and Tirhut, for Vaishali and Vesali, and for Champa and modern Bhagalpur. Similar-looking names can preserve genuine continuities, yet continuity must be demonstrated through dated records and material contexts rather than assumed from resemblance alone (Singh 2008; Thakur 1988).

Periodization without sharp walls

The five-volume division is an editorial instrument, not a claim that social life changed everywhere at one date. Prehistory gives way unevenly to protohistory and early history as texts,

inscriptions, coins, and datable institutions become available. Medieval and early-modern boundaries likewise depend on the question being asked: dynastic change, agrarian institutions, literary production, and religious practice followed different rhythms. The modern period begins here with the transformation of revenue and political authority under Company and colonial rule, while the contemporary period follows Indian independence and the end of Rana oligarchy in Nepal. Transitional overlap is therefore expected rather than treated as a defect in the chronology.

The modern border as an analytical problem

The India-Nepal boundary is indispensable for the history of modern sovereignty, citizenship, law, censuses, and infrastructure. It is anachronistic, however, when projected unchanged into prehistoric or ancient landscapes. Rivers, foothill routes, marriage networks, pilgrimage, trade, and political influence crossed the line that later became an international frontier. The book consequently uses present national locations to orient the reader while refusing to divide earlier evidence into sealed national containers. This is not an argument that borders are unreal; it is an argument that their historical force must be dated.

A source-controlled research practice

No single class of source can carry this regional history. Archaeological reports require attention to trenches, layers, sampling, and later disturbance. Texts require attention to language, genre, redaction, and manuscript transmission. Inscriptions demand accurate reading, provenance, and calendrical conversion. Colonial surveys and gazetteers preserve valuable observations while organizing people and land for rule. Modern censuses and statutes are authoritative for their own categories and dates, not for timeless identity. The cumulative method compares these records, marks disagreement, and leaves gaps visible. A responsible large

history is built by increasing the density of checkable evidence, not by filling silence with seamless narrative.

The Himalayan foreland as a historical problem

The north Bihar plain and the adjoining Nepal Tarai form part of the Himalayan foreland, a zone in which relief, sediment supply, monsoon discharge, and low downstream gradients combine to make water and sediment historically consequential. The region cannot be represented adequately as a stable sheet of cultivated land crossed by rivers whose channels merely carry water from north to south. Modern geomorphological work describes river systems with markedly different source areas and sedimentary behaviours. Rajiv Sinha and Peter F. Friend distinguished mountain-fed, foothills-fed, plains-fed, and mixed-fed systems in northern Bihar, emphasizing that their discharge, sediment concentrations, channel forms, and depositional settings differ. The value of that classification for history is methodological rather than deterministic: it warns against assuming that every named river created the same kind of floodplain or that the same crossing, bank, or channel retained the same significance through long periods (Sinha and Friend 1994).

For the history developed in this book, the Himalayan foreland therefore has to be treated simultaneously as terrain, archive, and agent. Terrain matters because routes, settlement choices, cultivation, ferries, and political jurisdictions operated through particular landforms. It is an archive because abandoned channels, levees, flood basins, buried soils, settlement mounds, and archaeological deposits preserve traces of earlier conditions, although often incompletely. It is an agent because channel movement, inundation, erosion, and sedimentation could alter access to land, move a market away from a crossing, expose an old mound, bury another, or transform the practical meaning of an administrative boundary. None of these processes determines political or cultural outcomes by itself. Their importance lies in changing the field

within which households, states, religious institutions, and traders acted (Hill 1997; Sinha and Friend 1994).

River types, megafans, and interfan plains

The distinction between mountain-fed and smaller foothill- or plains-fed rivers is especially important for avoiding a generic history of “the flood.” Large Himalayan rivers may construct broad depositional systems, while smaller rivers can occupy interfan areas with different patterns of channel instability and waterlogging. Sinha and Friend's study of northern Bihar linked source area to contrasting hydrological and sedimentary regimes and noted widespread evidence of channel movement. These are modern scientific observations, not direct reconstructions of prehistoric channel positions, but they provide a disciplined physical framework for interpreting why a site distribution or historical route may be uneven. A locality situated on a favourable surface in one period could later become difficult to reach, eroded, or deeply buried without any corresponding cultural collapse (Sinha and Friend 1994).

The Kosi, Gandak, Bagmati, Kamla and other rivers must consequently be handled at two levels. At the first level, each river has a physical history that can be investigated through geomorphology, old maps, satellite imagery, hydrology, and field observation. At the second, each acquires historically specific social meanings through revenue boundaries, irrigation works, embankments, pilgrimage, local memory, litigation, transport, and disaster. The two histories overlap but are not interchangeable. A modern channel map cannot be projected backward as if it were an ancient itinerary, and a textual river name cannot be fixed to a modern course without independent argument. Later chapters follow this rule when discussing the Sadanira, the Kosi, the Bagmati, and rivers used in treaty or administrative boundary clauses.

Avulsion and the instability of apparently fixed geography

Channel avulsion—the abandonment of one course in favour of another—is not a marginal exception in the north Bihar plains. Vikrant Jain and Rajiv Sinha reconstructed a long migration history for the Bagmati from maps and satellite images and identified eight major and several minor avulsion events over roughly 230 years. Their result does not allow a historian to infer where the river flowed in a much earlier century without evidence. It does, however, establish that the assumption of channel permanence is unsafe even within the documentary period. Historical maps that disagree about a river may therefore record cartographic error, seasonal variation, different survey dates, or genuine geomorphic change; those possibilities must be tested rather than collapsed into one “correct” line (Jain and Sinha 2003).

This matters for political and legal history because rivers frequently appear as boundaries, routes, taxable resources, and markers of jurisdiction. Where a boundary follows a moving channel, a legal phrase that looks geometrically precise may generate practical ambiguity on the ground. Where an old channel remains visible as a depression, wetland, or local name, later communities may remember a geography different from that on an official map. The book therefore treats historical river courses as dated propositions. A statement such as “the Bagmati flowed here” requires a date and source; a statement such as “this is the Bagmati” in a literary text requires attention to the text’s date, transmission, and geographical conventions.

Alluvium, site formation, and archaeological visibility

Alluvial landscapes complicate the relation between where people lived and where archaeologists can now see them. Flood deposition can seal occupation surfaces beneath later sediment; erosion can remove them; cultivation and construction can truncate mounds; and a shifting channel can redeposit objects away from their original context. The resulting archaeological map is therefore partly a map of preservation and investigation.

A dense cluster of recorded sites may reflect genuine settlement concentration, better-surviving mounds, road access, a history of archaeological survey, or some combination of these factors. Conversely, a blank area cannot be treated automatically as an uninhabited zone (Singh 2008).

The implication is particularly important for attempts to map ancient Mithila, Vajji, or Anga from selected excavated places. A securely identified site can anchor a local history; it cannot by itself draw the frontier of a polity. The archaeological record becomes more informative when site sequence, ceramics, inscriptions, environmental setting, and route geography are compared across a wider distribution. This is why the later chapters on Vaishali and Champa distinguish the evidentiary strength of an excavated mound, a textual place name, and a reconstructed territorial extent. Historical geography is not produced by joining a handful of famous sites with a boundary line.

Historical geography is a reconstruction, not a recovered political map

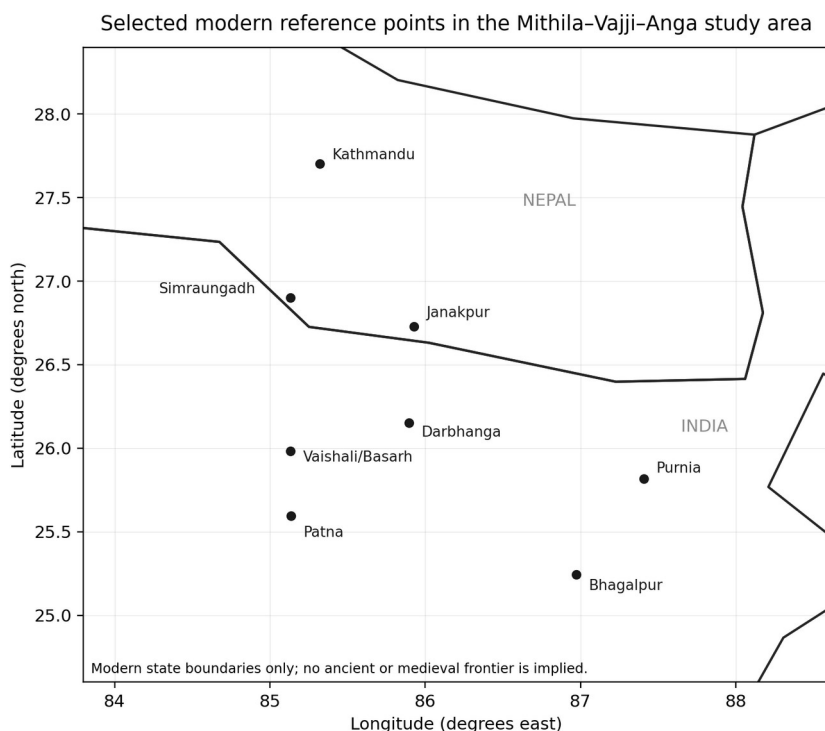
Historical geography combines topography, texts, archaeology, epigraphy, routes, settlement distributions, and later records in order to reconstruct spatial relationships at particular times. Mithila Sharan Pandey's historical geography of Bihar remains useful because it treats river systems, regions, place names, routes, and topography as connected problems rather than as an appendix to dynastic history. Dilip K. Chakrabarti similarly stresses the need to relate urban centres, geographical units, and routes rather than discuss cities as isolated points. The approach adopted here follows that relational principle while applying stricter labels to the evidentiary status of each reconstruction (Pandey 1963; Chakrabarti 2006).

A historical region is therefore neither imaginary nor necessarily bounded like a modern district. It becomes historically observable through repeated relationships:

administrative names, court patronage, markets, marriage networks, pilgrimage, language practices, land grants, routes, learned institutions, and remembered centres. Different relationships may produce different spatial extents in the same century. A revenue division called Tirhut, a literary invocation of Mithila, and a Maithili-speaking social field may overlap substantially without being coextensive. The analytical task is to identify the source and function of each spatial claim before comparing them.

Modern orientation without retrospective boundaries

Readers need modern geographical reference points even when the object of study predates modern states. The orientation map below therefore shows selected present-day places in India and Nepal without drawing a proposed frontier for Videha, Vajji, Anga, Mithila, or Tirhut. Its purpose is navigational: it makes clear, for example, that Janakpur and Simraungadh are now in Nepal, while Darbhanga, Vaishali/Basarh, Patna, Purnia, and Bhagalpur are now in India. Those modern locations help readers follow subsequent chapters, but they do not decide the territorial extent of earlier polities or cultural regions.



Map 1. Selected present-day reference points used for orientation in this book. Modern state boundaries are shown only to locate places; no frontier of Videha, Vajji, Anga, Mithila, or Tirhut is implied.

Editorial map prepared for this book, 2026. Underlying country polygons: Natural Earth 1:110m public-domain cultural vectors; selected point locations checked against GeoNames/open geographic gazetteers. Rights: Natural Earth data are public domain; editorial overlay © Gajendra Thakur, 2026.

Source links: [Natural Earth](#) ; [GeoNames](#)

Videha, Mithila, Tirabhukti, and Tirhut: related names with different histories

The names Videha, Mithila, Tirabhukti, and Tirhut are connected in regional historical writing, but the connection should not be flattened into permanent synonymy. Videha belongs prominently to Vedic, Upanishadic, epic, Buddhist, Jain, and later historical memory; Mithila functions in different periods as a royal, sacred, scholastic, literary, linguistic, and cultural name; Tirabhukti appears as an administrative-territorial designation in early-medieval contexts; and Tirhut

becomes a durable later regional and administrative name. The survival of one name alongside another can indicate continuity of memory or regional association without proving that their borders were identical (Pandey 1963; Thakur 1988).

For this reason the book uses each term where the source warrants it. It does not rename every early reference to Videha as “Tirhut,” nor does it call every colonial district “Mithila” without qualification. When a modern author reconstructs Mithila as extending between named rivers or across particular districts, that reconstruction is cited as a scholarly claim and compared with the underlying texts and records. The methodological distinction is essential because regional identity remains socially and politically meaningful in the present. Historical criticism is strongest when it protects that significance from false precision rather than attempting to validate it through unsupported ancient cartography.

Vajji and Anga are not subdivisions of one timeless Mithila

Vajji and Anga enter the record through different political and textual histories. Vajji is most securely approached as an ancient confederated political field associated especially with Vaishali and the Licchavis. Anga is an eastern polity associated with Champa and the Ganga corridor toward what is now the Bhagalpur region. Later regional identities can remember or incorporate these names, but the book does not treat them as administrative subdivisions of a single timeless Mithila. Doing so would erase the very political plurality that makes the eastern Gangetic plain historically important (Singh 2008; Thapar 2002).

The same caution applies in reverse. The fact that Vajji and Anga were distinct early political formations does not imply that later economic, linguistic, devotional, or literary networks respected their ancient separateness. Historical space changes. By tracing transformations rather than assuming inherited compartments, the book can ask how an ancient political name persisted, disappeared, revived, or acquired a new cultural

meaning. This is a history of changing spatial vocabularies as much as a history of rulers.

Routes, crossings, and nodal places

Political boundaries alone are poor guides to regional connectivity. The Ganga linked the Anga-Bhagalpur corridor to Patna, Bengal, and the wider north Indian river system; northern routes connected the plains with the Tarai and Himalayan valleys; ferries and seasonal crossings linked opposite banks; and market, pilgrimage, and scholastic circuits created repeated movement among places that belonged to different jurisdictions. Chakrabarti's work on early-historic geographical units and trade routes is useful here because it treats urban centres as nodes within larger relational fields rather than as self-contained capitals (Chakrabarti 2006).

Route history also requires chronological discipline. A railway line documented in a colonial atlas cannot be used to prove an ancient commercial road. A modern highway may follow an older corridor, but continuity has to be demonstrated through intermediate evidence. Conversely, a route can remain important while its technology changes from footpath and ferry to metalled road or rail. Later chapters therefore distinguish corridor continuity from infrastructure continuity. This distinction is especially significant on the India-Nepal border, where kinship, pilgrimage, and market movement can persist through successive regimes of sovereignty and documentation.

The modern border after Sugauli

The international boundary between India and Nepal has a history that must be dated rather than projected backward. The Treaty of Sugauli was concluded after the Anglo-Nepal War: the text was dated 2 December 1815 and the exchange of ratification recorded on 4 March 1816. Its provisions included Nepalese renunciation or cession of territories described through rivers and lowland tracts. The treaty is therefore a primary legal anchor for the nineteenth-century reordering of sovereignty,

but it was not the last word in every sector of the boundary, and later territorial adjustments and demarcation practices also mattered (Treaty of Sugauli 1815/1816; Whelpton 2005).

For earlier centuries, that line is anachronistic. Courts, estates, pilgrimage centres, kin networks, forests, pasture, and trade routes connected the Tarai and north Bihar through relationships that did not depend on modern passports or national censuses. For later periods, however, the border became increasingly consequential because law, taxation, policing, citizenship, land registration, infrastructure, and state statistics were organized nationally. Borderland scholarship usefully holds both facts together: states make real territorial distinctions, while connected communities continue to produce social spaces that cross them (Ibrahim and Kothiyal 2021).

Colonial and archaeological maps are historical arguments

Maps made under colonial rule or early archaeological survey are invaluable sources, but they are not transparent windows onto ancient geography. Alexander Cunningham's 1880-81 survey of north and south Bihar, for example, combined field observation, inscriptions, textual identifications, routes, and earlier scholarship in an effort to locate ancient places. The map associated with that survey is evidence for nineteenth-century archaeological reasoning and for the topography known to its makers. It is not a contemporary map of ancient Vajji, Videha, or Magadha (Cunningham and Garrick 1883).

This distinction is more than a warning about old scholarship. Every map selects features, fixes names, chooses a scale, and suppresses uncertainty. Administrative maps may privilege district limits, police stations, railways, or revenue units; archaeological maps may privilege mounds, inscriptions, or identifications; linguistic maps may privilege survey categories. The cumulative history retains useful historical maps when their provenance is clear, but captions state what the map actually documents. Where an ancient boundary is uncertain, the preferred cartographic language is a zone, corridor, point

distribution, or explicitly hypothetical line rather than an authoritative-looking frontier.

The three spatial scales, supplemented by corridor and borderland

The three spatial scales defined above—site, historical region, and state—remain the book's basic hierarchy. Two relational lenses supplement them. The first is the corridor: a river, route, or chain of markets and crossings through which movement can be studied without assuming political unity. The second is the borderland: a zone in which different jurisdictions meet and in which people may organize livelihood, kinship, language, or worship across a formal boundary. Neither lens replaces the state. They make it possible to ask how state claims interacted with movement and locality.

These scales should not be collapsed into one another. A site can be securely identified even when the region around it is uncertain. A cultural region can persist through several states. A state can claim a territory without homogenizing language or social practice. A corridor can connect places that belong to rival states. A borderland can be socially integrated in some respects while legally divided in others. Much of the historical confusion surrounding Mithila, Vajji, Anga, Tirhut, and the Tarai comes from treating evidence produced at one scale as if it automatically answered questions at another.

Asynchronous change and the problem of period labels

The volume divisions used in this book organize a large manuscript; they are not claims that all institutions changed simultaneously. A political conquest may be rapid while agrarian tenure changes slowly. A court language may shift while household speech remains stable. A railway may transform the time required to reach a market without erasing older pilgrimage routes. A constitutional change may redefine citizenship while kinship networks continue across the same

border. Periodization is therefore a set of questions about change, not a rigid partition of lived time.

This is particularly important at transitions conventionally called ancient-medieval, medieval-early modern, colonial-modern, and postcolonial-contemporary. Different chapters use different chronological anchors according to the evidence being interpreted. The emergence of inscriptions, the rise of particular dynasties, the expansion of Sultanate or Mughal institutions, the Company's acquisition of diwani, Indian independence, and the end of Rana oligarchy are all important. None should be treated as a single date on which every village, institution, language practice, or environmental relationship became “new.”

Uneven archives on the two sides of a modern border

The evidentiary record is institutionally uneven. Archaeological survey histories, excavation publication, district gazetteers, revenue records, court archives, census series, and manuscript catalogues developed differently in British India, princely and zamindari domains, and Nepal. Modern research access also differs among archives and languages. A denser documentary record for one district or one side of the present border can therefore create an illusion of greater historical activity. The book treats density of surviving documentation as a property of the archive that must be explained, not as a direct measure of the density of past life.

Cross-border comparison consequently requires symmetry of method rather than identical sources. A Nepalese land grant may have to be compared with an Indian revenue record at the level of institutional function rather than document form. An archaeological site in the Tarai may be known through a different survey tradition from a site in Bihar. A Maithili manuscript preserved in one library may illuminate networks extending far beyond the place where the surviving copy was catalogued. The task is to keep provenance visible while reconstructing relationships across archives.

Evidence hierarchy without a single privileged source

The governing principle of this book is source control, but source control does not mean that one class of evidence is always superior. A stratified archaeological context can establish material association and sequence more securely than a late legend, yet it may not name the people who used an object. An inscription can provide a firm date and title, yet its praise may exaggerate power. A literary text can preserve sophisticated political or social categories, yet its compositional history may span generations. A colonial survey can describe crops, castes, rivers, and markets in extraordinary detail, yet its categories were formed within administrative projects. Each source becomes stronger when its question matches what it can actually show.

The workflow diagram below formalizes that practice. Claims are tested for provenance, date, scale, genre, and purpose before evidence from different classes is compared. Agreement strengthens an inference, but disagreement is not edited away for the sake of narrative smoothness. Instead, the prose labels a claim as established, probable, disputed, traditional, commemorative, or otherwise limited. This is especially important in subjects where sacred geography, dynastic memory, regional pride, colonial classification, and modern identity politics all remain active.

Evidence workflow used throughout this cumulative regional history

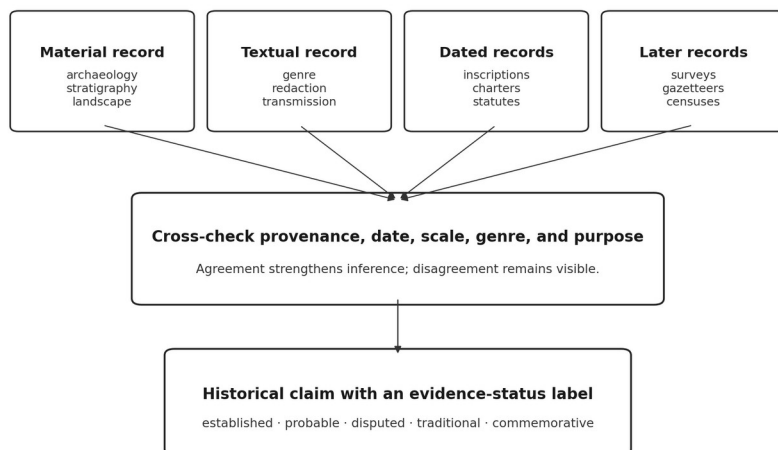


Diagram 1. Evidence-status sequence used throughout the book.

Original editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. It summarizes the source-control method stated in this chapter; it is not itself historical evidence.

Rules for maps and spatial claims in this book

Four cartographic rules follow from the method. First, every map must state its date or the date-range of the evidence from which it is reconstructed. Second, modern state and district boundaries are orientation devices unless the chapter is actually discussing those modern jurisdictions. Third, textual frontiers are shown as claims derived from particular sources, not as surveyed lines. Fourth, archaeological distributions are represented as known points or zones and must not be converted automatically into ethnic or political territory. These rules apply equally to maps reproduced from older scholarship and to new editorial maps prepared for the cumulative edition.

A related rule concerns names. Where historical sources use variant forms—Vesali/Vaishali, Campa/Champa, Tirabhukti/Tirhut, Koshi/Kosi—the map and caption should indicate the convention being followed. Modern place labels orient readers but should not silently settle disputed identifications. Where a river identification such as Sadanira =

Gandak is conventional but not absolutely demonstrable, the caption or text must retain the qualification. Cartography should display uncertainty rather than hide it behind graphic confidence.

Questions carried forward into the remaining volumes

This opening chapter establishes the questions that the rest of the book repeatedly asks. Which spatial name is contemporary with the evidence? At what scale does a political claim operate? What river course or route was relevant at that date? Is a monument in its original context or a later reuse? Does a legal text prescribe a norm or record an enforced practice? Does an administrative category describe how people identified themselves, how the state classified them, or both? When later memory associates a place with an ancient figure, what is securely historical about the memory even if the ancient localization remains unproven?

The cumulative approach means that these questions are not settled once and forgotten. As each chapter is expanded, new evidence can refine the chronology, alter the map of known sites, sharpen a place-name concordance, or expose a contradiction in older scholarship. The book is therefore designed to grow through verified additions rather than through narrative padding. Expansion toward a very large book is meaningful only when the additional pages increase the density of checkable evidence, make disagreements more explicit, and bring previously underrepresented social groups, places, and source traditions into view.

Chapter-specific bibliography

Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Pearson Education India, 2008.

Thapar, Romila. *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*. Allen Lane, 2002.

Thakur, Upendra. *History of Mithila: From the Earliest Times to 1556 A.D.* 2nd ed. Mithila Institute, 1988.

- Hill, Christopher V. *River of Sorrow: Environment and Social Control in Riparian North India, 1770-1994*. Association for Asian Studies, 1997.
- Pandey, Mithila Sharan. *The Historical Geography and Topography of Bihar*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1963.
- Sinha, Rajiv, and Peter F. Friend. 'River Systems and Their Sediment Flux, Indo-Gangetic Plains, Northern Bihar, India.' *Sedimentology* 41, no. 4 (1994): 825-845. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-3091.1994.tb01426.x>.
- Jain, Vikrant, and Rajiv Sinha. 'Hyperavulsive-anabranching Baghmati River System, North Bihar Plains, Eastern India.' *Zeitschrift für Geomorphologie* 47, no. 1 (2003): 101-116. <https://doi.org/10.1127/zfg/47/2003/101>.
- Chakrabarti, Dilip K. 'Relating History to the Land: Urban Centers, Geographical Units, and Trade Routes in the Gangetic and Central India of circa 200 BCE.' In *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE*, edited by Patrick Olivelle, 4-31. Oxford University Press, 2006. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195305326.003.0001>.
- Cunningham, Alexander, and H. B. W. Garrick. *Report of Tours in North and South Bihar in 1880-81*. Archaeological Survey of India, vol. XVI. Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1883.
- East India Company and Kingdom of Nepal. *Treaty of Sugauli*. Dated 2 December 1815; ratification exchanged 4 March 1816. Public-domain treaty text: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Sugauli.
- Ibrahim, Farhana, and Tanuja Kothiyal, eds. *South Asian Borderlands: Mobility, History, Affect*. Cambridge University Press, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108951500>.
- Whelpton, John. *A History of Nepal*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Chapter 2. Archaeology and early food production

Regional evidence and its limits

The prehistory of the wider middle Gangetic plain is reconstructed from unevenly investigated sites, ceramics, plant and animal remains, lithic industries, and radiocarbon samples. Chirand, on the north bank of the Ganga in present Saran, is especially important for eastern Indian early farming sequences. Published radiocarbon lists placed several relevant samples broadly within the second millennium BCE, but investigators also warned about disturbed deposits and anomalous determinations. A responsible narrative presents ranges and stratigraphic cautions rather than a single spectacular date.

Food production without a single origin story

The archaeological record supports changing combinations of cultivation, herding, fishing, hunting, and gathering. Rice appears within a broader subsistence system rather than as proof of an instant agricultural revolution. Bone and antler industries and riverine resources at sites such as Chirand underline adaptation to wetlands and floodplains. The evidence does not justify projecting the later names Mithila, Vajji, or Anga back onto Neolithic communities.

From objects to social history

Pottery types and tool assemblages help establish sequence and exchange, but social hierarchy, language, and political identity require independent evidence. Even when a material horizon is widespread, it need not represent one people. The most defensible conclusion is that diverse communities in the Gangetic and Himalayan piedmont zones developed increasingly settled and productive lifeways on different timetables.

How archaeological deposits are made

An archaeological layer is the outcome of occupation, rebuilding, refuse disposal, erosion, flooding, burrowing, cultivation, and later construction. In an active alluvial landscape, objects can be redeposited far from the activity that first produced them. A radiocarbon determination dates the sampled organic material, not automatically an entire cultural phase; the relationship between sample and layer must be demonstrated. These elementary cautions are crucial in the middle Gangetic plain, where dramatic early dates have sometimes circulated more widely than the qualifications printed with them. The published Chirand evidence is important precisely because it permits discussion of early cultivation and mixed subsistence, while also showing why stratigraphic context and multiple determinations matter (Agrawal and Kusumgar 1974).

Chirand in regional comparison

Chirand should be treated as a major regional sequence rather than as a solitary origin point. Its location near the Ganga connected floodplain resources, cultivable land, and river movement. Bone and antler implements, ceramics, plant remains, and other finds show a community using several ecological niches. Comparison with other Gangetic sites is necessary before assigning a trait to a period or population, because the timing and composition of assemblages differ. Regional synthesis therefore proceeds from securely described contexts outward, instead of forcing every site into one uniform ladder of stages.

Plants, animals, and household economies

Plant remains provide direct evidence for species present in an archaeological context, but they do not by themselves reveal the proportion of diet, the ownership of fields, or the social organization of labour. Animal bone may reflect food, craft production, hunting, herding, ritual deposition, or natural

intrusion. At Chirand, the combination of cultivated plants with fishing, hunting, gathering, and animal use supports a diversified economy adapted to riverine conditions. Such diversity should not be treated as incomplete agriculture. It may instead represent a resilient household strategy in an environment where rainfall, channel movement, and seasonal wetlands made exclusive dependence on one resource risky (Vishnu-Mittre 1972).

Chronology as a range

Archaeological chronology is strongest when stratigraphic order, diagnostic artefacts, and several scientific dates converge. A single determination may be affected by old wood, contamination, redeposition, or an uncertain association with the feature under study. For that reason, this book uses broad ranges for the earlier phases and avoids false precision. Terms such as Neolithic or Chalcolithic are retained as comparative labels for technologies and lifeways, not as identical packages that began simultaneously across South Asia. Where investigators disagree about a phase boundary, the disagreement belongs in the history rather than being silently resolved.

What early farming does not establish

Evidence for cultivation does not establish the language, ethnicity, or later political allegiance of the cultivators. Nor does continuity of settlement at a locality prove uninterrupted continuity of institutions. Population movement, intermarriage, exchange, and changes in ritual and speech can occur without abandonment, while a place can be resettled after a gap. It is therefore methodologically unsafe to call early farmers of the region Maithils, Vajjis, or Angas. Those names enter the evidentiary record in later textual and political contexts. Prehistory supplies the deep material background against which such identities eventually became possible; it does not supply their ready-made beginnings.

Excavation history is part of the evidence

Chirand became a foundational site for the archaeology of the middle Gangetic plain through repeated excavation rather than through a single discovery event. The principal field campaigns were conducted in 1961-64 and again in 1967-70 by the Bihar archaeological authorities, and B. S. Verma later consolidated the results in the Directorate of Archaeology's excavation report. The Archaeological Survey of India's Indian Archaeology 1970-71 - A Review recorded that the 1970-71 season extended earlier trenches specifically to clarify the Neolithic deposits and confirmed a sequence of five cultural periods, with Period I assigned to the Neolithic horizon (Archaeological Survey of India 1974; Verma 2007).

That publication history matters because observations appeared at different stages of investigation. Preliminary notices, laboratory date lists, short interpretive articles, and the later excavation report do not always use identical chronological conventions or levels of detail. A responsible reconstruction therefore asks which claim comes from a field report, which from a laboratory measurement, which from archaeobotanical analysis, and which from a later synthesis. The apparent solidity of the label "Chirand Neolithic" should not conceal the cumulative and revisable process by which the sequence was established.

A confluence-zone site and a problem of modern river description

Even the site's modern river description illustrates why Chapter 1's geographical method is necessary. The Saran district administration currently describes Chirand as lying on the north bank of the Ghaghara, while the Bihar Directorate of Archaeology describes the Neolithic settlement as having been discovered on the bank of the Ganga. Archaeological and educational literature also places the mound within the Ganga-Ghaghara confluence zone. These formulations should not be forced into a false choice without a dated geomorphological

reconstruction: river names, confluence positions, local channels, and bank lines can differ across maps and periods, especially in an alluvial setting (Directorate of Archaeology, Bihar; Saran District Administration).

The historical conclusion required here is modest. Chirand occupied a riverine environment with access to fertile alluvium, aquatic resources, transport possibilities, and repeated geomorphic disturbance. That setting helps explain why preservation and erosion are central to interpreting the mound, but it does not by itself explain why a community settled there, what language it spoke, or how its social institutions worked. Environmental opportunity and cultural choice must be kept analytically distinct.

The five-period sequence and the meaning of “Neolithic”

The 1970-71 Archaeological Survey review reported five cultural periods at Chirand and identified Period I as Neolithic. Such period labels are archaeological classifications built from assemblages, stratigraphy, technology, subsistence evidence, and comparison. They are useful shorthand, but they should not be mistaken for the self-name of a population or for a uniform package that began on the same date throughout South Asia. At Chirand the Neolithic designation is anchored in stratified material that includes bone and antler implements, stone tools, pottery, plant remains, and associated occupation evidence (Archaeological Survey of India 1974; Verma 1970-71; Verma 2007).

The term also describes a long process rather than a single threshold. Hunting, fishing, gathering, cultivation, animal management, ground-stone technology, microlithic components, and pottery could coexist in changing proportions. A site can therefore be “Neolithic” in archaeological classification while still depending heavily on wild resources. The old evolutionary image of a complete and irreversible switch from foraging to farming is not supported by the diversity of evidence now

known across the Ganga plain (Fuller 2011; Vaishnav, Jha, and Janardhana 2025).

Bone and antler as a major technological archive

Verma's preliminary publication emphasized the exceptional range of bone and antler working at Chirand. He listed celts, scrapers, chisels, hammers, needles, points, borers, awls, diggers, pins, styli, and projectile forms, as well as unfinished pieces. Ornaments included pendants, earrings, bangles, discs, and combs. The importance of this record lies not merely in the number of object types but in the sequence of technical acts implied by them: selecting raw material, shaping it, drilling, polishing, repairing, and sometimes abandoning pieces before completion (Verma 1970-71).

From such an assemblage it is reasonable to infer skilled production and repeated knowledge transmission. It is not reasonable, without additional evidence, to infer named craft castes, hereditary guilds, or a centralized workshop system. Functional labels also require caution. Archaeologists often name a pointed or edged object by resemblance to a modern tool, but use-wear, breakage, context, and experimental comparison are needed to determine how a particular specimen functioned. The safest historical claim is that organic raw materials formed a highly developed component of Chirand's technological repertoire.

Ceramics, stone, and the danger of reading identity from artefact style

The Neolithic deposits also contained ceramic and lithic evidence. Pottery fabric, surface treatment, decoration, vessel form, and manufacturing traces are valuable for constructing local sequences and comparing sites. Ground-stone and microlithic components broaden the technological picture. Yet a ceramic style is not an ethnic badge, and the co-occurrence of two technologies does not prove that two populations merged. Assemblages are produced by learning, exchange, mobility,

copying, local raw materials, functional requirements, and changing household practice as well as by population history.

Raw-material studies can eventually make exchange claims more precise. If stone can be petrographically or geochemically tied to a source outside the immediate alluvial plain, movement of material or people becomes a testable proposition. Without such sourcing, it is better to say that Chirand participated in technological networks wider than a single household than to draw a detailed trade route. The difference between possibility and demonstrated provenance is fundamental to a source-controlled archaeology.

A combined evidence inventory rather than a reconstructed village scene

The strongest social history emerges when material classes are compared in context rather than converted into an illustrative village tableau. Stratigraphy tells us which objects and ecofacts were deposited together; tools show technological choices; plant and animal remains disclose resources used; pottery records production and consumption practices; and dating constrains the sequence. None of these categories alone identifies ethnicity, political allegiance, or a unique place of “origin.” Their value lies in convergence and in the contradictions they sometimes reveal.

Neolithic Chirand: documented evidence classes

Schematic inventory only; shapes are not drawings of excavated artefacts.

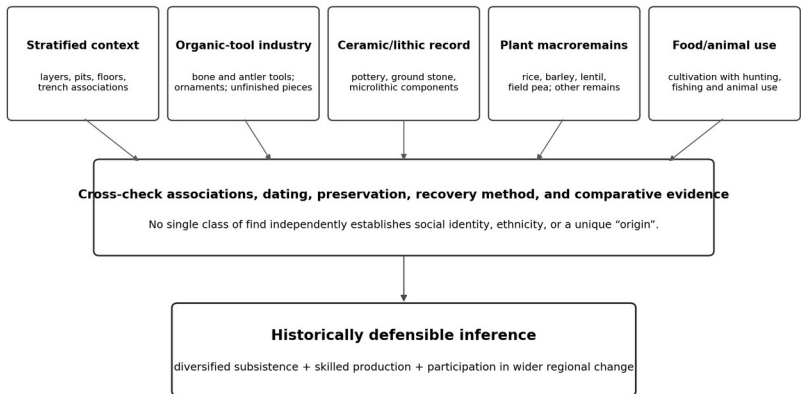


Diagram 2. Evidence classes used to reconstruct Neolithic Chirand. This is an analytical schematic, not a reconstruction of a prehistoric village or a drawing of recovered objects.

Original editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. Evidence categories summarized from Verma (1970-71; 2007), Vishnu-Mittre (1972), and related excavation literature.

[Source: Verma preliminary report \(IGNCA scan\)](#)

[Source: Vishnu-Mittre article DOI](#)

Plant remains: what is directly established

Vishnu-Mittre's archaeobotanical study reported food-plant remains from the Neolithic horizon at Chirand including rice, barley, lentil, and field pea (*Pisum arvense*), among other material. This was a major early contribution because carbonized or otherwise preserved plant remains provide a more direct route to subsistence history than assumptions based only on stone tools or pottery. The assemblage supports cultivation and food processing within a diversified economy (Vishnu-Mittre 1972).

Plant identification, however, does not automatically determine field size, yield, ownership, the proportion of each crop in the diet, or the gender of the people who cultivated and processed it. Nor does a cereal grain alone prove that it was locally domesticated. Archaeobotanical interpretation depends

on morphology, preservation, sampling, recovery method, associated weeds, chaff or spikelet bases where present, and secure dating. Those requirements have become much more explicit in later scholarship on South Asian domestication (Fuller 2011; Pokharia et al. 2017).

Rice cultivation, domestication, and the wider Ganga debate

Rice occupies a central place in debates about early food production in the Ganga plain, but three propositions must be separated: gathering wild rice, cultivating rice populations, and the morphological or genetic domestication of rice. Fuller has emphasized that cultivation can precede the fixation of domestication traits and has argued for a long, complex history of proto-indica cultivation in South Asia rather than a single instantaneous domestication event. This distinction prevents the presence of rice at an archaeological site from being used as automatic proof of fully domesticated agriculture (Fuller 2011).

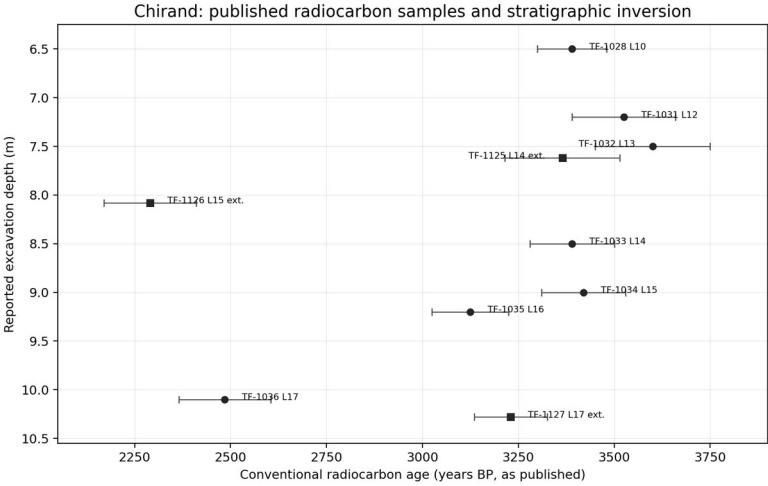
The celebrated early claims from sites such as Lahuradewa belong to this larger debate, not to the chronology of Chirand itself. Some investigators have interpreted very early rice remains in the central Ganga plain as domesticated, while subsequent morphometric and genetic discussions have urged greater caution. These disagreements are valuable because they show how new methods can change the meaning of an old find. Chirand should therefore be compared regionally without borrowing another site's earliest date or domestication claim as if it applied locally.

The radiocarbon series: measurement, inversion, and legacy conventions

The early Tata Institute date list is indispensable because it publishes sample identifiers, trench and layer information, depths, measured conventional radiocarbon ages, and laboratory uncertainties. For Chirand it records a set of samples from Trench CRD-XI and its extension. The authors' general comment is especially important: they concluded that the

Neolithic-Chalcolithic sequence reached back to roughly the later second millennium BCE in their conversion, but warned that samples below Layer 14 showed “mix-up,” perhaps from subsidence (Agrawal and Kusumgar 1973).

That warning is visible in the laboratory data themselves. Some deeper samples produced substantially younger conventional ages than shallower ones. The anomaly means that depth cannot simply be converted into age by drawing a smooth line through the sequence. It may reflect disturbance, redeposition, subsidence, sample association, or another site-formation process; the published evidence does not justify choosing one mechanism with certainty. Chronology must therefore be built from the coherent subset of samples together with stratigraphy and material sequence, while anomalous determinations remain part of the record rather than being discarded silently.



Source: Agrawal & Kusumgar, Radiocarbon 15(3), 1973. The authors state that samples below Layer 14 show mix-up, perhaps due to subsidence. Values plotted are the conventional BP ages reported in the laboratory list, not calibrated calendar dates. Squares denote extension-trench samples.

Diagram 3. Chirand radiocarbon samples plotted against reported excavation depth. The graph visualizes the laboratory authors' warning that deeper samples below Layer 14 show mix-up; it must not be read as a calibrated calendar chronology.

Original editorial graph prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. Data transcribed from D. P. Agrawal and Sheela Kusumgar, "Tata Institute Radiocarbon Date List X," *Radiocarbon* 15, no. 3 (1973): 574-585. Conventional BP values are shown exactly as reported; no modern calibration has been imposed.

[Source: Agrawal-Kusumgar radiocarbon list DOI](#)

Why the old BC numbers are not modern calibrated dates

The 1973 Radiocarbon paper states that its listed BP ages used the Libby half-life of 5,568 years and a 1950 reference point for the accompanying BC/AD conversions; the Archaeological Survey review printed a related set of conversions using a 5,730-year half-life. These legacy conventions explain why two early publications can give slightly different BC figures for the same or closely related samples. Neither set should be treated as a modern calibrated calendar chronology (Archaeological Survey of India 1974; Agrawal and Kusumgar 1973).

Modern calibration requires the original radiocarbon determination, uncertainty, material and context information, and an appropriate calibration curve. It can also be affected by reservoir or old-wood problems depending on sample type. This book therefore reports the early laboratory series as historical scientific measurements and avoids manufacturing new calendar ranges without a reproducible calibration exercise. The distinction is not pedantic: a precise-looking calendar year unsupported by calibration would be less accurate than an explicitly qualified range.

Senuwar and comparison within Bihar

Senuwar in the Kaimur region provides an important comparative sequence because it was excavated with attention to early farming, material culture, plant economy, and faunal remains. Birendra Pratap Singh's two-volume excavation publication and K. S. Saraswat's archaeobotanical study document a farming system in which rice occurred alongside

winter crops and other plants. Comparison with Chirand shows that early farming communities in Bihar cannot be reduced to one ecological niche or one identical crop package (Singh 2004; Saraswat 2004).

Regional similarity does not demonstrate direct migration from one site to another. It may reflect exchange, shared ecological opportunities, convergent adaptation, or networks extending across the Gangetic plain and the southern margins. Differences are equally informative: access to stone, floodplain resources, piedmont environments, and route systems varied. The correct scale of comparison is therefore a mosaic of sites connected unevenly through materials, practices, and mobility.

From “agricultural revolution” to overlapping lifeways

A recent geoarchaeological synthesis of more than a hundred studies emphasizes that Mesolithic and Neolithic occupations in the Ganga plain overlap substantially in time. The authors' database includes hundreds of reported sites but only a much smaller number with absolute dates, underlining both the richness and the chronological unevenness of the evidence. Their larger point is methodological: foraging and farming strategies coexisted for long periods, and settlement choices were related to landform, rainfall, raw materials, and resource availability rather than to a single regional switch date (Vaishnav, Jha, and Janardhana 2025).

For Chirand, this supports a history of mixed subsistence rather than a teleology in which hunting and fishing survive merely as primitive leftovers. Diversification can be a rational response to seasonal risk, riverine abundance, crop failure, and labour scheduling. Food production may increase without eliminating fishing, hunting, gathering, or mobility. Household resilience is therefore a better interpretive framework than a ladder from “food gathering” to “civilization.”

Households, labour, and the limits of social reconstruction

Archaeological deposits are rich in the products of work but poor in named workers. Grinding, cooking, fishing, hunting, tending animals, maintaining houses, making pottery, and manufacturing bone tools all required labour, skill, and scheduling. Repeated activity areas, tool distributions, wear, storage, and biological remains can sometimes distinguish tasks and spaces, but Chirand's published evidence does not support assigning each activity to a specific gender, age group, caste, or kin unit.

This restraint is especially important because ethnographic analogies can become circular: a modern division of labour is assumed for the past and then cited as evidence for the antiquity of that division. The better approach is to identify the work required by the material record and state where the social organization of that work remains unknown. In a large history, acknowledging such limits is not an omission; it prevents later social categories from being projected into prehistory.

Preservation, recovery, and what earlier excavations could miss

The kinds of evidence recovered from an excavation depend partly on field and laboratory method. Large artefacts survive hand excavation more readily than tiny seeds, fish bones, phytoliths, starch grains, or microscopic residues. Systematic flotation, fine sieving, sediment micromorphology, residue analysis, use-wear, stable isotopes, ancient DNA, and high-precision AMS dating have expanded the questions that can now be asked of prehistoric sites. The absence of such data from an older excavation cannot be treated as proof that the relevant activity was absent.

This is one reason the 2007 publication of the earlier Chirand campaigns remains important while not closing the site's research agenda. Re-examination of curated collections and new, carefully targeted fieldwork could refine plant use, animal management, craft technology, mobility, and chronology. Any

future work must also account for erosion, modern construction, conservation status, and the ethics of sampling a finite archaeological resource.

Chirand in public heritage and the distinction between site and story

The Bihar Directorate of Archaeology lists Chirand among the state's protected and excavated archaeological sites and identifies the Chirand excavation report among its publications. Present heritage management gives the site a modern institutional history in addition to its prehistoric one. Conservation, museums, signage, tourism, and local commemoration affect what is visible and how visitors understand the mound (Directorate of Archaeology, Bihar).

Public interpretation should preserve the same evidentiary distinctions used in this book. Calling Chirand an early farming settlement is supported by archaeological and archaeobotanical evidence. Assigning its Neolithic inhabitants a later ethnic, linguistic, dynastic, or sacred identity requires independent evidence and should not be smuggled into captions or heritage displays. The archaeological site is historically important without needing an anachronistic pedigree.

Research priorities for the expanded edition

A future book should treat Chirand as a test case for transparent archaeological synthesis. The highest priorities are a concordance of trench, layer, phase, and sample numbers across preliminary notices and the 2007 report; calibrated re-analysis of radiocarbon determinations where sample information permits; systematic documentation of curated botanical and faunal collections; raw-material sourcing for stone and organic artefacts; geoarchaeological reconstruction of erosion and channel history; and comparison with Senuwar, Chechar-Kutubpur, Taradih, Lahuradewa, and other relevant sites without merging their chronologies.

Such work would not simply lengthen the chapter. It would make it possible to replace generalized claims with tables of contexts, reproducible chronological models, mapped sampling locations, and quantified assemblages. That is the standard for further research: increased verifiability matters more than increased page count.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Pearson Education India, 2008.
- Agrawal, D. P., and Sheela Kusumgar. 'Tata Institute Radiocarbon Date List X.' *Radiocarbon* 15, no. 3 (1973): 574-585.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033822200009024>.
- Vishnu-Mittre. 'Neolithic Plants Economy at Chirand, Bihar.' *The Palaeobotanist* 21 (1972): 18-22. <https://doi.org/10.54991/jop.1972.1463>.

Additional sources for Chapter 2

- Archaeological Survey of India. *Indian Archaeology 1970-71 - A Review*. Edited by M. N. Deshpande. New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, Government of India, 1974. Indian Archaeology Review portal:
<https://nmma.nic.in/nmma/archReview.do>.
- Verma, B. S. 'Excavations at Chirand: New Light on the Indian Neolithic Culture-Complex.' *Puratattva* 4 (1970-71): 19-23. Digital copy:
https://ignca.gov.in/Asi_data/51105.pdf.
- Verma, B. S. *Chirand: Excavation Report, 1961-1964 and 1967-1970*. Patna: Directorate of Archaeology, Department of Youth, Art and Culture, Government of Bihar, 2007.
- Fuller, Dorian Q. 'Finding Plant Domestication in the Indian Subcontinent.' *Current Anthropology* 52, supplement 4 (2011): S347-S362.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/658900>.
- Singh, Birendra Pratap. *Early Farming Communities of the Kaimur: Excavations at Senuwar, 1986-87, 89-90*. 2 vols. Jaipur: Publication Scheme, 2004.
- Saraswat, K. S. 'Plant Economy of Early Farming Communities.' In *Early Farming Communities of the Kaimur: Excavations at Senuwar, 1986-87, 89-90*, edited by Birendra Pratap Singh, vol. 2, 416-535. Jaipur: Publication Scheme, 2004.
- Pokharia, Anil K., Shalini Sharma, Deepika Tripathi, Neelam Mishra, J. N. Pal, Ram Vinay, and Alka Srivastava. 'Neolithic-Early Historic (2500-200 BC) Plant Use: The Archaeobotany of Ganga Plain, India.' *Quaternary*

International 443, Part B (2017): 223-237.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.quaint.2016.09.018>.

Vaishnav, Hemant Kumar, Deepak Kumar Jha, and B. Janardhana.
'Geoarchaeological Perspective on Mesolithic and Neolithic Settlement
Pattern and Transition in the Ganga Plain, India.' *Quaternary
Environments and Humans* 3, no. 1 (2025): 100051.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.qeh.2024.100051>. CC BY 4.0.

Directorate of Archaeology, Government of Bihar. 'Directorate of
Archaeology' (official site), including protected sites and publications
information for Chirand. Accessed 1 September 2026.
<https://betastate.bihar.gov.in/yac/directorateofarchaeology>.

Saran District Administration. 'Chirand' (official district site). Accessed 1
September 2026. <https://saran.nic.in/tourist-place/chirand/>.

Chapter 3. Late prehistoric and early iron-using horizons

A long transition

Across the middle Gangetic plain, the later second and first millennia BCE saw changes in settlement density, ceramics, metal use, and cultivation. These did not occur everywhere at once. Iron objects are part of the sequence, but older models that made iron technology a single cause of forest clearance, surplus, cities, and states now require qualification. Political centralization depended on labour, exchange, agrarian relations, ritual authority, and ecological opportunity as well as tools (Singh 2008; Thapar 2002).

Ceramic labels are chronological tools

Black-and-red ware, northern black polished ware, and other ceramic categories are archaeological classifications. They cannot by themselves identify Vedic, Vajji, or Anga populations. Northern black polished ware is associated with the early-historic urban horizon in many Gangetic sites, but local sequences and dates differ. The proper question is how settlements participated in larger circuits, not which text-name can be attached to every sherd.

Protohistory and restraint

The threshold between prehistory and history is uneven because writing, recoverable inscriptions, and datable textual references appear gradually. Literary works preserved orally may remember older settings while taking form over long periods. This volume therefore stops short of constructing dynastic lists for times unsupported by contemporary records.

Iron within a larger technological system

Iron mattered because it expanded the range of durable edges, points, fittings, and implements available to communities, but its effects depended on access to ore, fuel, specialist

knowledge, exchange, repair, and labour. The presence of an iron object in a layer does not show that iron tools were common in every household, nor that they immediately transformed cultivation. Bronze, copper, stone, bone, wood, and clay continued to be used alongside iron. Technological change is therefore best reconstructed as a changing assemblage rather than a sudden replacement of one age by another.

Settlement growth and political concentration

Larger settlements and denser site distributions can indicate demographic growth, intensified production, exchange, and administrative concentration. They do not, by themselves, reveal the constitutional form of a polity. Fortifications may defend inhabitants, control access, display collective labour, or mark authority; they require contextual study rather than a single explanation. In the first millennium BCE, the eastern Gangetic plain saw the emergence of towns and states within a landscape that still contained villages, mobile groups, forests, wetlands, and cultivated clearings. Urbanization was a regional process linking different kinds of settlement, not the disappearance of rural life (Singh 2008; Thapar 2002).

Exchange before coinage

Long-distance movement did not begin with minted money. Stone, metal, ornaments, salt, forest products, animals, textiles, and food could circulate through barter, reciprocal obligation, itinerant specialists, tribute, gift, and market exchange. Archaeological similarities may reflect such connections without implying political unity. When punch-marked coins and other monetary evidence appear in early-historic contexts, they add another medium of valuation and payment; they do not replace all earlier forms at once. The river corridors of the Ganga system made the eastern regions participants in networks larger than any single polity.

Texts and material sequences

Vedic and later texts cannot simply be laid over a pottery map. A textual name belongs to a compositional and transmitted discourse, while a ceramic type belongs to an archaeological classification. The two records may illuminate the same broad historical transformation, but correlation requires independent arguments about date and geography. Witzel's reconstruction of early Sanskritization and Bronkhorst's model of Greater Magadha offer influential ways of understanding the cultural difference and interaction between western and eastern regions. They are interpretive models to be tested, not labels that identify the makers of particular vessels (Witzel 1995; Bronkhorst 2007).

The threshold of the early-historic city

Northern Black Polished Ware, increasing settlement complexity, coinage, inscriptions, and textual references form part of the evidentiary horizon within which early cities and states become more visible. Their chronologies vary by site, and the appearance of one indicator should not stand for the entire transformation. A securely excavated sequence is more valuable than a loose object with an impressive label. The following volume therefore begins its political narrative only where textual traditions and material evidence can be compared with explicit caution about their different dates and purposes.

The “Iron Age” is an archaeological period label, not a people

The term Iron Age is convenient only when its scale is specified. In South Asian archaeology it usually marks a horizon in which iron becomes part of a material assemblage, but the first appearance, frequency, uses, and social consequences of iron differ sharply by region and site. A period label based on one technology therefore cannot be allowed to carry an ethnic, linguistic, or constitutional meaning. An excavated iron point, nail, sickle, or blade may be securely associated with a layer, but it does not identify the inhabitants as Vedic, Vajji, Videha, Anga,

or any other named community unless independent evidence supports that identification. The same caution applies to older expressions such as “Iron Age culture,” which can obscure the coexistence of iron with stone, bone, copper, wood, clay, and organic technologies (Banerjee 1965; Chakrabarti 1992; Singh 2008).

How the chronology debate changed

Older syntheses often placed the effective beginning of iron use in the Gangetic region close to the opening centuries of the first millennium BCE and then linked its spread to the emergence of agriculture, towns, and states. Later discoveries complicated that sequence. Rakesh Tewari’s published report from the central Ganga plain and the eastern Vindhya described iron artefacts, furnaces, tuyeres, and slag in contexts with radiocarbon determinations falling broadly between 1800 and 1000 BCE. The importance of this evidence lies in the combination of artefacts and production debris rather than in a single early object. It reopened the chronology of iron working in northern India and made diffusionist narratives more difficult to sustain as simple one-directional stories (Tewari 2003).

Why an early date elsewhere cannot date Mithila or Anga

A comparative date is not a regional date. Tewari’s excavated sites are in present Uttar Pradesh, and their chronology cannot be transferred automatically to north Bihar, the Nepal Tarai, or the Anga-Bhagalpur corridor. The correct historical use of such evidence is comparative: it demonstrates that iron-working knowledge existed in parts of the wider Ganga-Vindhya world earlier than some older schemes allowed, and it therefore changes the range of possibilities that archaeologists must test in Bihar and Nepal. It does not prove that every eastern Gangetic settlement was making iron at the same time. Each locality still requires its own stratigraphy, diagnostic assemblage, technical debris, and dating programme (Chakrabarti 1992; Tewari 2003).

Iron use, forging, and smelting are different archaeological propositions

The archaeological vocabulary of metallurgy should be kept precise. A finished iron artefact establishes use or deposition. Hammer scale, smithing slag, hearths, and related residues may indicate secondary working or repair. Smelting slag, furnace structures, ore, and tuyeres can support an argument for primary production when their identification and association are secure. Even then, production scale remains a separate question: a few technical residues do not prove an industrial quarter or centralized state workshop. Metallurgical analysis can distinguish mineral phases, manufacturing histories, and thermal processes that are invisible to typology alone. The analytical sequence therefore moves from context to identification to technical interpretation, not from the mere presence of iron to a generalized “iron industry” (Chakrabarti 1992; Sahu 2006).

Iron-working evidence: what each class can establish

A source-control schematic for late prehistoric and early iron-using horizons

Iron artefact

Shows that an iron object was present in a secure context; it does not by itself prove local smelting or forging.

Slag / technical debris

Can indicate metallurgical activity, but identification and context matter; slag may be moved or reused.

Furnace / tuyere / hearth

Stronger evidence for local production when the feature is securely excavated and linked to metallurgical residues.

Ore / fuel / raw material

Helps reconstruct supply and technological choices; provenance requires mineralogical or geochemical support.

Stratigraphy + dating

Constrains when an activity occurred. A dated sample must be demonstrably associated with the metallurgical context.

Interpretive rule: production, use, distribution, and chronology are separate questions and should not be collapsed into one label.

Diagram 4. Iron-working evidence hierarchy. The diagram distinguishes what an artefact, slag or technical debris, production features, raw-material evidence, and stratigraphic dating can each establish. It is an analytical schematic, not a reconstruction of an ancient workshop.

Original editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. Conceptual distinctions synthesized from Chakrabarti (1992), Tewari (2003), and the historiographical debate collected by Sahu (2006).

Source: [Tewari article DOI](#)

Black-and-red ware: a firing category with a long history

Black-and-red ware (BRW) is especially vulnerable to over-interpretation because its name sounds like a bounded archaeological culture while describing a visible ceramic effect produced through firing conditions. Archaeological Survey of India synthesises documented black-and-red ware at sites in many parts of the subcontinent and across very different chronological contexts, including Sonpur in Bihar. Vessel forms, fabrics, slips, decorations, associated wares, and stratigraphic positions vary. The category is therefore useful for describing and comparing pottery, but it cannot by itself mark one migration, one language, or one polity. Its historical value comes from local technological study and stratigraphic association, not from treating all black-and-red vessels as the signature of one population (Banerjee 1965; Roy 1983).

Painted Grey Ware is a comparative horizon, not the template for the east

Painted Grey Ware (PGW) has been central to archaeological discussion of the upper Ganga-Yamuna plain, especially because excavations at sites such as Hastinapura and Atranjikhhera made it important to debates about first-millennium BCE chronology and the arrival of iron. Vibha Tripathi's synthesis established the ware as a major archaeological problem in its own right. For a history centred on Mithila, Vajji, and Anga, however, PGW is primarily comparative evidence. Its distribution is not identical to the middle and lower Gangetic trajectories that produced the principal archaeological record of Bihar. Using PGW as a universal chronological ladder would reproduce the very

western-to-eastern template that regional archaeology is meant to test (Tripathi 1976; Roy 1983).

Northern Black Polished Ware: name, technology, and distribution

Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) is a fine ceramic category whose highly finished surface attracted archaeological attention early in the discipline's history. Deva and Wheeler's 1946 discussion already assembled examples from a broad north Indian distribution, including Patna and Rajgir in Bihar, while later work greatly enlarged the corpus. A recent archaeological synthesis emphasizes the ware's limited production, distinctive surface treatment, chronological usefulness, and wide circulation, while also showing that its colours and technical characteristics are more varied than the older name suggests. The important point for regional history is not that every NBPW sherd belongs to one political system, but that the ware can help trace site sequences, craft choices, exchange, and social differentiation when securely stratified (Deva and Wheeler 1946; Kanungo et al. 2021).

A fine ware is not a universal social class marker

The fineness and lustre of NBPW have often encouraged the label "luxury" or "elite" ware. That inference can be useful as a hypothesis, but it should be tested against quantity, vessel form, find context, repair, association with architecture, and comparison with coarser wares. A small amount of technically demanding pottery in a settlement may indicate valued tableware, exchange, or restricted consumption, yet it does not identify the caste or office of the user. Nor does wide distribution prove that every vessel travelled from one manufacturing centre. Petrography, compositional analysis, firing experiments, and close study of fabric are required to separate local imitation, multiple production zones, and long-distance movement (Kanungo et al. 2021).

Bihar within the NBPW archaeological field

The NBPW horizon is directly relevant to Bihar because early and later archaeological literature records the ware at major sites including Rajgir, Patna, Sonapur, Chirand, and other centres of the middle Gangetic plain. That distribution helps define a connected archaeological field, but the sites do not all have the same stratigraphic depth, chronology, or urban character. A sherd from a city mound, a village, a religious complex, or a disturbed surface context carries a different historical weight. The strongest regional argument therefore comes from comparing published sequences: when NBPW appears, what preceded it, which iron objects or production residues accompany it, how settlement form changed, and whether coins, writing, fortification, or specialized crafts occur in the same phase (Roy 1983; Sinha 1995; Kanungo et al. 2021).

Ceramic horizons and political geography should not be collapsed

It is tempting to map the spread of NBPW directly onto the expansion of Magadha because the ware is prominent in the Ganga plain during the period in which Magadhan power became historically consequential. That correlation may be historically meaningful at some scales, but it is not an identity. Pottery can move through exchange, emulation, itinerant craftspeople, marriage networks, pilgrimage, and changing consumption without political annexation. Conversely, a polity can exercise authority over communities that retain diverse local ceramic traditions. The political history of Anga, Vajji, and Magadha must therefore be reconstructed from texts, archaeology, coinage, inscriptions, and settlement evidence together rather than from a ceramic distribution map alone (Thapar 2002; Singh 2008).

From site size to settlement hierarchy

The growth of larger settlements is one of the central archaeological changes of the first millennium BCE, but size by

itself is not equivalent to urbanism. A large mound may represent long duration, repeated rebuilding, clustered villages, administrative concentration, craft production, or a town; only excavation and survey can distinguish among these possibilities. Settlement hierarchy is stronger evidence when a region shows sites of different scales linked by roads, rivers, craft distributions, storage, fortification, or specialized functions. George Erdosy's work on early historic urbanization helped shift attention from isolated "cities" toward settlement systems and the processes that sustained them (Erdosy 1988).

Fortification as labour, defence, and political display

Ramparts, ditches, gates, and defensive walls are among the most visible signs of concentrated labour in early historic archaeology. Their interpretation is nevertheless multi-valued. A fortification may protect inhabitants, control access, channel traffic, mark jurisdiction, contain animals, protect stored goods, or display authority. Construction and repeated repair reveal the mobilization of labour and materials, but not automatically the constitutional form of the authority that organized them. In alluvial landscapes, the relationship between ramparts and water management also deserves attention: elevated earthworks can interact with drainage and flood behaviour as well as military needs. Chronological claims should follow excavation of construction phases, not the later fame of a city name (Erdosy 1988; Singh 2008).

Iron and forest clearance: from master cause to testable mechanism

A major historiographical model linked iron axes and ploughshares to forest clearance, agricultural surplus, social stratification, and the rise of states in the middle Gangetic basin. The model was influential because it joined technology to a large social transformation. Its weakness appears when iron is treated as a sufficient cause. Forests differ in density and species; land can be cleared with fire, stone, copper, and collective labour;

floodplains include grasslands, wetlands, levees, and already cultivated patches; and iron implements vary in availability and quality. The appropriate question is therefore not whether iron “caused” agriculture, but where particular iron tools altered labour productivity, repair cycles, cultivation depth, woodland use, or transport in demonstrable contexts (Chakrabarti 1992; Sahu 2006).

Agrarian intensification was a social process

Cultivation expands only through people, institutions, and access to land and water. Seed selection, seasonal calendars, draught animals, field preparation, transplantation, harvesting, storage, redistribution, credit, and claims on labour can change independently of metal technology. Riverine environments add another variable because fresh alluvium may be fertile while erosion, waterlogging, and avulsion repeatedly reorganize fields. An iron sickle or plough component can matter profoundly within such a system, but the archaeological object must be connected to plant remains, settlement, field ecology, and the organization of labour before it becomes evidence for an agrarian transformation. This is why the history of iron belongs inside social and environmental history rather than in a technological appendix (Sahu 2006; Singh 2008).

Craft specialization without imagining modern factories

Iron working, fine pottery, bead production, carpentry, textiles, construction, and food processing all required learned skills. Archaeological concentrations of debris, standardized products, repeated installations, and raw-material stocks can reveal specialization, but specialization exists on a spectrum. A household specialist working seasonally, an itinerant smith, a workshop attached to a large settlement, and a politically supervised production unit are different institutions. The record rarely permits a leap directly from technical skill to guild, caste, or state monopoly. Production should be reconstructed from spatial pattern, scale, chaîne opératoire, and distribution rather

than from the modern assumption that complex objects require factory-like organization (Chakrabarti 1992; Sahu 2006).

Exchange networks before and alongside coined money

The first-millennium BCE expansion of exchange should not be dated solely by the first coin found in a trench. Communities moved salt, metals, stone, beads, textiles, animals, food, wood, and crafted objects through reciprocity, gift, tribute, itinerant trade, periodic markets, and river transport before coinage became archaeologically visible. The Ganga and its tributaries lowered transport costs for bulky goods and linked Anga, Magadha, and north-bank regions to wider circuits. NBPW and other non-local materials can illuminate such movement, but provenance must be demonstrated rather than inferred from visual similarity alone. Coinage added a powerful medium of valuation and payment without abolishing older forms of exchange (Erdosy 1988; Singh 2008).

Punch-marked coins: strong evidence, careful chronology

Punch-marked coins are important to the threshold of the early historic period because they provide material evidence for monetized transactions, political or mercantile symbols, hoarding, and regional circulation. Their dating depends on stratigraphy, hoard composition, metrology, typology, and association with other securely dated material. A coin found in a later disturbed deposit cannot date the entire layer below it, while a hoard provides a terminus and a history of accumulation rather than the mint date of every piece. Coinage should therefore be integrated with settlement and exchange evidence without being made the single criterion by which a society becomes “historic.”

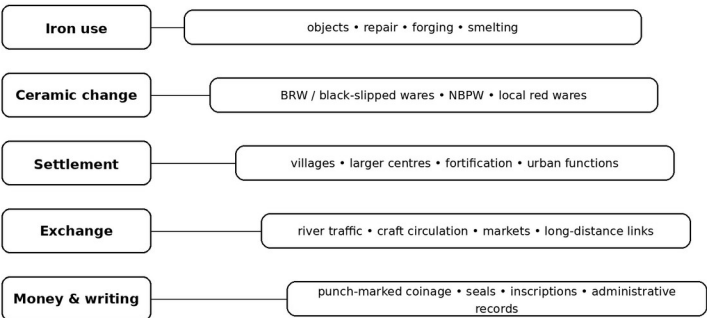
Writing, seals, and administrative visibility

Writing changes the surviving archive because names, titles, donations, ownership claims, religious formulae, and administrative acts can become materially recoverable. Yet the

appearance of inscriptions is not simultaneous with the first use of writing, and the absence of an inscription from an excavated layer does not prove illiteracy. Perishable writing materials can disappear, while seals and sealings may preserve institutional activity before long public inscriptions become common. The transition from protohistory to history is therefore uneven: some sites become visible through coins and seals, others through texts copied later, and still others remain known chiefly from archaeology. The methodological response is to keep these evidentiary clocks separate until they can be securely correlated (Singh 2008).

The early-historic transition runs on several clocks

Conceptual model: these processes overlap but do not begin everywhere at one date



No single lane is a master clock.

At any excavated site, the sequence must be reconstructed from its own stratigraphy, dated contexts, assemblages, and publication history.

Diagram 5. The early-historic transition runs on several clocks. Iron use, ceramic change, settlement growth, exchange, and money/writing overlap but do not begin everywhere at one date. The diagram deliberately has no absolute time scale.

Original editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. Analytical model synthesized from Erdosy (1988), Chakrabarti (1992), Singh (2008), and Kanungo et al. (2021).

Source: [Kanungo et al. NBPW synthesis DOI](#)

The “second urbanization” as a historiographical term

Historians often use “second urbanization” for the emergence and growth of towns in the Ganga plain during the first millennium BCE, distinguishing it from the much earlier urbanism of the Indus tradition. The phrase is useful as

shorthand but can mislead if it suggests one synchronized event or a single causal package. Urban centres varied in size, political role, craft intensity, religious institutions, and relationship to surrounding villages. Some older settlements expanded; others were newly founded; some became fortified or administratively important; and many rural communities continued outside urban sites. The historical problem is therefore to reconstruct networks of production, power, transport, and consumption, not merely to count mounds above a size threshold (Erdosy 1988; Sahu 2006).

Urbanism and inequality

Urban growth redistributed opportunities and burdens. Large settlements could concentrate rulers, officials, merchants, religious specialists, artisans, labourers, migrants, servants, and dependants, while drawing food, fuel, building materials, and revenue from wider hinterlands. The archaeological visibility of substantial architecture and fine goods can bias interpretation toward elites. Ordinary houses, temporary structures, refuse, industrial debris, food remains, and skeletal evidence are equally important for reconstructing work and inequality. Caste categories known from later normative or literary texts should not be projected directly onto an excavated quarter unless independent evidence makes the connection plausible. Social hierarchy is a historical question, not an automatic deduction from urban scale (Singh 2008; Thapar 2002).

Rivers as infrastructure in the eastern Gangetic transition

The regional geography developed in Chapters 1 and 2 becomes especially important as settlement and exchange intensify. The Ganga connected Anga and the middle Gangetic basin to long-distance movement, while the Gandak, Kosi, Bagmati, and other northern rivers connected the Himalayan foreland and Tarai to the plains. River routes could move bulk goods more efficiently than overland transport, but channels shifted and landing points changed. Floods could destroy

settlements while also renewing soils or creating new distributary access. The rise of towns must therefore be studied together with river history, ferries, confluences, levees, and seasonal navigability rather than on a map of permanent blue lines (Erdosy 1988; Singh 2008).

Textual geography enters a material landscape already in motion

As texts begin to name eastern polities and communities more frequently, they encounter a material landscape whose settlement, technology, and exchange had already been changing for centuries. Archaeology can test whether a named region contained dense settlement, fortification, imported materials, or specialized production; it cannot prove that the makers of a particular pottery type used the same political name. Conversely, texts can preserve political categories and itineraries that artefacts cannot name. The strongest history begins when the records can be compared without making one subordinate to the other. A pottery map does not become a political map by adding labels from a later text (Witzel 1995; Bronkhorst 2007; Singh 2008).

The archive becomes denser, not complete

By the early historic centuries the historian possesses more kinds of evidence than for the Neolithic: iron and other metals, refined ceramics, settlement hierarchies, fortifications, coins, seals, inscriptions, literary geographies, and eventually dated imperial records. Greater density does not eliminate silence. Organic materials decay, ordinary people commission fewer durable texts, river processes erase sites, excavations sample only small parts of large mounds, and early field methods sometimes recorded contexts less precisely than present standards require. Apparent certainty can therefore increase faster than actual evidentiary control. The correct response is to make the source base denser while keeping its asymmetries visible.

A research programme for the full Chapter 3 edition

A publication-scale expansion should build a site-by-site database for Bihar and the Nepal Tarai recording phase names, calibrated and uncalibrated dates, ceramic frequencies, iron artefacts, slag, furnaces or tuyeres, archaeobotanical samples, faunal remains, fortification phases, coins, seals, inscriptions, and published plans. Legacy excavation reports should be reconciled with Indian Archaeology - A Review notices and museum catalogues. Metallurgical claims should be separated into smelting, smithing, and use; ceramic claims should record fabric and context; and all maps should distinguish excavated evidence from surface finds. The aim is not to create a smooth line from iron to empire but to show where different processes converged, where they did not, and where the archive is still too thin for a secure conclusion.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Pearson Education India, 2008.
- Thapar, Romila. *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*. Allen Lane, 2002.
- Witzel, Michael. 'Early Sanskritization: Origins and Development of the Kuru State.' *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* 1, no. 4 (1995): 1-26.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes. *Greater Magadha: Studies in the Culture of Early India*. Brill, 2007.
- Banerjee, N. R. *The Iron Age in India*. Munshiram Manoharlal, 1965.
- Chakrabarti, Dilip K. *The Early Use of Iron in India*. Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Deva, Krishna, and R. E. M. Wheeler. 'Northern Polished Black Ware.' *Ancient India* 1 (1946): 55-58.
- Erdosy, George. *Urbanisation in Early Historic India*. BAR International Series 430. B.A.R., 1988.
- Kanungo, Alok Kumar, Chinmay Kulkarni, Varad Ingle, and Oishi Roy. 'Northern Black Polished Ware in Indian Archaeology: A Study of Spatial and Chronological Distribution.' *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology*. Springer, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51726-1_3555-1.
- Roy, T. N. *The Ganges Civilization: A Critical Archaeological Study of the Painted Grey Ware and Northern Black Polished Ware Periods of the Ganga Plains of India*. Ramanand Vidya Bhawan, 1983.

- Sahu, Bhairabi Prasad, ed. *Iron and Social Change in Early India*. Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Sinha, B. P. 'Ancient Cities of Bihar in Archaeology and Literature.' *Man and Environment* 20 (1995): 7-20.
- Tewari, Rakesh. 'The Origins of Iron Working in India: New Evidence from the Central Ganga Plain and the Eastern Vindhya.' *Antiquity* 77, no. 297 (2003): 536-544. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00092590>.
- Tripathi, Vibha. *The Painted Grey Ware: An Iron Age Culture of Northern India*. Concept Publishing Company, 1976.

Chapter 4. Environment, mobility, and settlement

Floodplains and piedmonts

North Bihar and the Nepal Tarai combine Himalayan piedmont, alluvial fans, active channels, wetlands, and older floodplain surfaces. Settlement opportunity and archaeological visibility are both conditioned by this geomorphology. A mound may preserve repeated occupation while nearby low surfaces are scoured or buried. The absence of exposed remains is therefore not equivalent to absence of past population.

Mobility alongside village life

Fishing, herding, seasonal movement, woodland use, and river transport continued alongside settled cultivation. Later administrative sources often treated mobility as disorder because it complicated taxation and surveillance. Prehistoric reconstruction should avoid the same bias: mobility can be a rational adaptation to variable water, pasture, and labour demand.

The environmental caution

Neither flood nor drought is purely 'natural' in its historical effects. Exposure is shaped by embankments, land tenure, settlement policy, transport, and unequal access to relief. This principle, documented clearly for the Kosi in the colonial and modern periods, also guides interpretation of earlier settlement without pretending that later institutions existed in prehistory.

A connected river system

The northern tributaries of the Ganga descend rapidly from Himalayan catchments, cross the piedmont, and spread across low-gradient plains. Their channels carry water and sediment while shifting through time. The result is a mosaic of active channels, levees, backswamps, abandoned courses, and older surfaces. Communities could benefit from fertile deposits,

fisheries, transport, and moisture while remaining exposed to erosion, avulsion, waterlogging, and crop loss. The historical importance of the Kosi, Gandak, Bagmati, Kamla, and related rivers lies not in a single unchanging course but in the opportunities and hazards created by a mobile system.

Seasonality and the organization of work

Monsoon rainfall and river regimes shaped calendars of sowing, harvesting, fishing, grazing, building, and movement. Labour demand could vary sharply across the year, encouraging households to combine cultivation with craft, transport, forest use, or seasonal migration. Archaeology rarely preserves this calendar directly, yet botanical remains, animal assemblages, storage, house rebuilding, and site location can provide partial clues. A settlement occupied repeatedly need not have had the same population or function in every season and phase.

Piedmont, plain, and wetland

The Tarai and Gangetic plain should not be reduced to one environmental zone. Piedmont tracts, forest margins, marshes, river islands, natural levees, and older alluvial surfaces offered different resources and constraints. Routes between these zones could be as important as permanent residence within one of them. The ecological variety also helps explain why a regional archaeological record may contain both settled farming and persistent fishing, hunting, herding, and gathering. Diversity of subsistence is consistent with long-term adaptation rather than evidence of a simple sequence from primitive mobility to complete sedentism.

Visibility and the map of known sites

The distribution of recorded sites reflects modern investigation as well as ancient settlement. Mounds near roads and towns are easier to notice and revisit than low or buried deposits. River erosion may expose one locality while sealing another beneath sediment. Political boundaries, institutional

funding, rescue archaeology, and the history of survey affect what is documented on each side of the India-Nepal frontier. Empty areas on an archaeological map may therefore mark limited research or poor surface visibility. Regional conclusions should identify these survey biases rather than turning them into claims of ancient absence.

Adaptation without environmental determinism

Rivers and soils constrained possibilities, but they did not dictate a single social outcome. Communities made choices through knowledge, labour organization, tenure, ritual, exchange, and political authority. The same flood could renew soil for one household, destroy land for another, and redirect traffic toward a third settlement. Hill's history of the Kosi demonstrates for later periods that state projects and property relations redistribute environmental risk (Hill 1997). Used carefully, that insight encourages questions about unequal exposure in earlier times without projecting modern embankments, revenue offices, or legal categories backward.

The foreland is an archive of moving sediment

The north Bihar plain and the Nepal Tarai form part of the Himalayan foreland, a low-gradient depositional system in which water and sediment move from mountain catchments toward the Ganga. Modern geomorphological work demonstrates that the rivers crossing this plain are not one hydrological type. Sinha and Friend distinguished mountain-fed, foothills-fed, plains-fed, and mixed-fed systems on the basis of source areas, discharge, sediment characteristics, and channel behaviour. Mountain-fed rivers such as the Kosi and Gandak built large megafans, whereas smaller rivers in the intervening tracts developed different muddy floodplain and interfan environments. This classification is a modern process model, not a direct map of prehistoric land use, but it is essential for avoiding the assumption that every river corridor offered the

same settlement opportunities or hazards (Sinha and Friend 1994).

The surface visible today is also not a single-age landscape. Channels migrate, levees accrete, flood basins collect fine sediment, wetlands expand or contract, and older surfaces can be buried beneath younger alluvium. A village mound may remain topographically prominent while adjacent occupation surfaces disappear under metres of later deposition. Conversely, a newly exposed bank can reveal older deposits that were invisible to surface survey. Environmental reconstruction therefore requires two chronologies: the age and history of the landform, and the age and duration of human activity upon it. One cannot safely be substituted for the other.

Megafans and interfan plains are different archaeological settings

The Kosi and Gandak are major Himalayan rivers with extensive fan-shaped depositional bodies in the foreland. Sedimentological studies show strong down-fan and subsurface variability rather than a single uniform blanket of sand. Singh, Parkash, and Gohain documented changes in Kosi channel pattern and facies from proximal braided reaches toward straighter and more meandering downstream reaches, while later borehole, resistivity, and drill-core work showed that the shallow subsurface architecture of the Kosi and Gandak megafans varies markedly between proximal and medial sectors (Singh, Parkash, and Gohain 1993; Sinha et al. 2014).

For archaeology, the implication is methodological rather than deterministic. A coarse proximal deposit, a fine-grained interfan flood basin, a natural levee, and a marsh margin differ in drainage, burial potential, exposure, and the visibility of artefacts at the surface. They may also have differed in past agricultural or transport possibilities, but those social uses require archaeological evidence. Geomorphology can identify plausible environmental settings and preservation risks; it

cannot by itself identify a settlement, language, polity, or social group.

Himalayan foreland to Ganga: a schematic landscape transect

Not to scale. The purpose is to separate geomorphic zones and archaeological visibility, not to reconstruct one prehistoric moment.

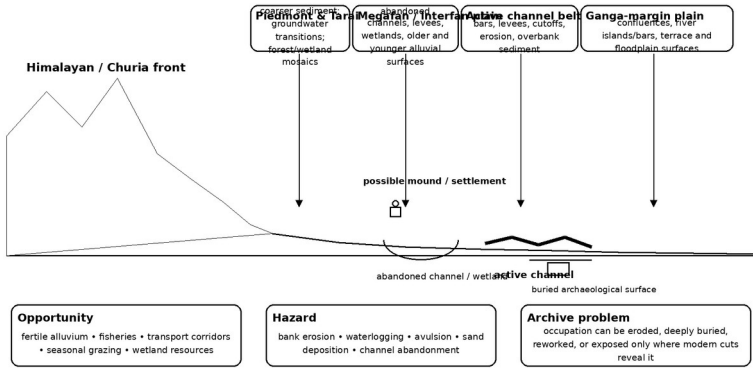


Diagram 6. Himalayan foreland to Ganga: schematic landscape transect. The diagram separates piedmont/Tarai, megafan or interfan plain, active channel belt, and Ganga-margin settings while showing how the same alluvial system can create resources, hazards, exposed sites, and deeply buried archaeological surfaces. It is not to scale and does not reconstruct one prehistoric moment.

Original editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. Analytical synthesis based on Sinha and Friend (1994), Singh, Parkash, and Gohain (1993), and Sinha et al. (2014).

Source links: [Sinha & Friend 1994 \(Sedimentology DOI\)](#); [Sinha et al. 2014 \(Sedimentary Geology DOI\)](#)

The Kosi and the problem of the “westward sweep”

A familiar historical narrative described the Kosi as having shifted progressively westward across its megafan over the last two centuries. That formulation should no longer be repeated without qualification. Chakraborty and colleagues re-examined twenty-eight historical maps published between 1760 and 1960 together with satellite-derived geomorphology and near-surface sediment exposures. They concluded that the mapped historical channel positions do not support a simple, continuous westward migration; instead, the pattern is better understood in terms of oscillation, lobe switching, and nodal avulsion, with the 2008 eastward avulsion providing an important modern analogue for large relocations (Chakraborty et al. 2010).

This correction matters for long-term regional history because a dramatic modern reputation can otherwise become a false master narrative for the entire past. Historical maps can document channel positions for their own dates, subject to cartographic uncertainty. They cannot establish the course of the Kosi in the first millennium BCE or the second millennium BCE without independent geomorphological dating. Conversely, the recognition that the river system can reorganize abruptly warns against treating any one modern course as an ancient boundary. The appropriate historical statement is dated and source-specific: a channel is mapped in a particular place at a particular time, while older courses remain hypotheses until independently tested.

The Baghmati shows why “river mobility” has several forms

The Baghmati provides a useful contrast because its middle reaches in north Bihar occupy an interfan setting between the Kosi and Gandak megafans. Jain and Sinha described a modern anabranching system with frequent flooding, high sediment load, gentle gradients, and repeated avulsions; their reconstruction identified eight major avulsions across a broad floodplain over roughly 230 years. The important conclusion is not that the same events occurred in prehistory, but that interfan rivers can be highly mobile for reasons and in forms different from the large trunk-channel behaviour of a megafan river (Jain and Sinha 2004).

A historical geography that labels every abandoned channel simply “old Kosi” or treats every multi-channel reach as braiding would therefore erase process differences. Braiding, meandering, anabranching, cut-off formation, and avulsion describe distinct but sometimes interacting behaviours. Archaeological interpretation benefits from this vocabulary because the mechanism affects where erosion occurs, where overbank sediment accumulates, how wetlands form, and where old channels survive as linear depressions. Yet channel-

form terminology remains geomorphic evidence; it does not identify the people who lived beside a channel.

Subsurface architecture makes absence especially difficult to prove

Electrical-resistivity soundings, borehole records, and drill cores from the Kosi and Gandak megafans show substantial vertical and lateral variation in gravel, sand, and finer alluvium within the upper tens of metres. Sinha and colleagues reconstructed proximal and medial differences and emphasized temporal variation in hydrological and sediment flux. For archaeology this is a reminder that the surface is a thin sampling window across a much thicker Quaternary archive (Sinha et al. 2014).

A surface survey can therefore be excellent evidence for what is exposed while remaining weak evidence for what lies buried. Deep alluvial burial is especially relevant to low mounds, ephemeral structures, hearths, field surfaces, and small scatters that do not create durable topographic relief. The reverse problem also occurs: erosion and channel cutting can bring redeposited artefacts to the surface far from their original occupation context. A responsible regional map should distinguish excavated in-situ contexts, surface scatters, chance finds, and objects recovered from secondary river deposits.

Landform age and settlement age must be dated independently

An “older alluvial surface” is a geomorphic category, not a direct archaeological period. People can settle an old surface long after it formed, reoccupy it repeatedly, or abandon it while adjacent younger deposits remain unused. Likewise, a young overbank unit can bury an older settlement without making the settlement young. Chronological arguments are strongest when geomorphic dating, stratigraphy, radiocarbon or other scientific dates, diagnostic artefacts, and site formation agree. They are weakest when the apparent age of the landscape is simply assigned to the artefacts found upon it.

This distinction also protects regional comparison from circular reasoning. One should not date a floodplain surface from an assumed cultural attribution and then use the surface age to validate the same attribution. Independent dating and explicit uncertainty are necessary if palaeochannels or terrace-like surfaces are to contribute to the history of settlement.

Wetlands were neither wastelands nor permanent lakes

Backswamps, abandoned channels, marshes, seasonally inundated depressions, and shallow groundwater zones are recurring components of the north Bihar-Tarai alluvial landscape. Their extent changes with monsoon intensity, channel position, sedimentation, drainage, and later engineering. Such environments can support fish, aquatic plants, reeds, grazing, seasonal cultivation, and transport while also imposing risks of waterlogging, disease, and unstable access. These are ecological possibilities rather than evidence that any named prehistoric community used every resource.

Wetlands also complicate archaeological preservation. Waterlogged deposits can preserve organic material under favourable conditions, yet repeated flooding may rework or deeply bury occupation debris. Peat, pollen, phytoliths, diatoms, molluscs, and sediment geochemistry can sometimes reconstruct local environments, but these proxies require secure sampling and specialist analysis. A literary memory of a marsh or a modern wetland name cannot substitute for a dated palaeoenvironmental sequence.

Seasonality links environment to labour without fixing one social model

Monsoon seasonality creates recurrent but variable rhythms of cultivation, grazing, fishing, transport, house repair, craft production, and movement. A household might intensify one activity during high water and another during the dry season; another community might organize labour differently despite occupying a similar landform. Archaeology can approach these

rhythms through crop seasonality, animal age profiles, storage, house rebuilding, hearth use, and the timing of flood deposits, but the surviving evidence is rarely complete.

Seasonal movement should not be treated automatically as the opposite of settled life. People can maintain durable villages while moving cattle, fishing camps, craft labour, forest gathering, marriage parties, pilgrims, or trading groups through wider territories. Mobility operates at different scales and durations. The analytical question is therefore which persons, goods, animals, or practices moved, along what routes, at what season, and with what institutional constraints.

Microtopography can matter more than a regional average elevation

On a very low-gradient plain, small differences in elevation can affect drainage, flood duration, and access to a channel. Natural levees, older alluvial remnants, dune-like sandy rises, and anthropogenic mounds may provide locally raised ground. Settlement preference for such features is plausible and often observable in modern landscapes, but it must be tested archaeologically. A mound can be the cumulative product of occupation rather than the original cause of settlement, and repeated rebuilding can create topography that did not exist when the first inhabitants arrived.

For this reason, modern digital elevation models are valuable for reconnaissance but should not be treated as archaeological proof. Resolution, vegetation, buildings, embankments, roads, and recent channel engineering can distort the microrelief relevant to an ancient site. Field levelling, sediment sections, coring, and excavation remain necessary when an argument depends on decimetre- or metre-scale elevation differences.

The Tarai is an ecological gradient, not an ancient international margin

The Tarai connects Himalayan foothills with the Gangetic plain through changing belts of coarse piedmont sediment,

groundwater emergence, forest, grassland, wetlands, cultivated land, and river corridors. Its modern division between Nepal and India is critical for present law and administration but cannot organize prehistoric ecology. Rivers, animals, plant communities, sediment, and human movement crossed the line that later became an international boundary.

The archaeological record is also institutionally divided by that boundary. Survey traditions, museum systems, national heritage laws, publication practices, road construction, and rescue archaeology differ between India and Nepal. Apparent contrasts in site density can therefore combine genuine historical variation with differences in discovery and documentation. Cross-border regional history should compare methods and survey intensity before treating a blank zone on one side of the frontier as an ancient demographic fact.

Climate and tectonics are mechanisms, not automatic explanations

Monsoon variability, Himalayan sediment supply, local subsidence or tilting, earthquakes, and autogenic river processes can all influence channel behaviour. Modern studies of the Bagmati and Kosi evaluate combinations of slope, aggradation, sediment flux, and tectonic setting rather than attributing every avulsion to one cause (Jain and Sinha 2004; Chakraborty et al. 2010). This multi-causal approach should be retained for earlier periods.

It is especially important not to use a historically documented earthquake or a modern flood as a convenient explanation for an undated archaeological break. A causal claim requires chronological overlap and a plausible physical mechanism. Where only a broad palaeoclimate trend or tectonic possibility is known, the prose should say “may have influenced” rather than convert correlation into event history.

Remote sensing expands the field of view but does not date a feature

Satellite imagery and digital elevation models can reveal abandoned channels, levees, fan lobes, drainage anomalies, and large mounds across areas far larger than a trench or walking survey. They are particularly valuable in a cultivated alluvial plain where many features are subtle at ground level. The Kosi reassessment by Chakraborty and colleagues demonstrates the value of combining historical maps, satellite data, and field sedimentology rather than relying on any one source class (Chakraborty et al. 2010).

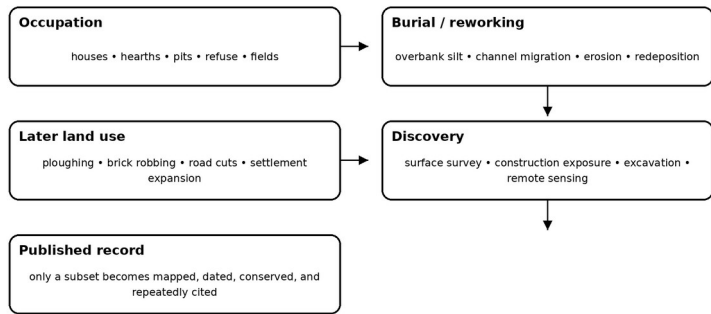
Remote sensing nevertheless identifies form more readily than age. A sinuous depression may be a palaeochannel, a modern drainage line, an engineered cut, or a composite feature reused through time. A spectral anomaly can reflect soil moisture, vegetation, crop choice, or archaeology. Ground verification, stratigraphic observation, coring, artefact association, and scientific dating are required before remote features enter a chronological narrative.

From occupation to published site: the visibility filter

Between ancient occupation and the modern distribution map lie several filters. Deposits may be eroded or buried; later farmers may plough them; bricks may be robbed; modern settlements may cover them; road or canal cuts may expose them; surveyors may or may not visit; and only some discoveries are excavated, dated, conserved, and published. This chain means that “known sites” are a sample produced jointly by past behaviour, natural taphonomy, and modern research history.

Why the map of known sites is not the map of past settlement

A taphonomic and survey-bias workflow for active alluvial plains



Interpretive consequence: apparent clusters may reflect preservation, exposure, roads, survey history, rescue archaeology, institutional funding, and modern political boundaries as much as ancient population density.

Diagram 7. Why the map of known sites is not the map of past settlement. The workflow shows how occupation evidence can be altered by burial and reworking, later land use, discovery conditions, and publication, producing preservation and survey bias in an active alluvial plain.

Original editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. Analytical synthesis informed by the geomorphic and historical-mapping methods of Chakraborty et al. (2010), Jain and Sinha (2004), and the archaeological source-control rules used throughout this volume.

Source links: [Chakraborty et al. 2010 \(Quaternary International DOI\)](#); [Jain & Sinha 2004 \(Geomorphology DOI\)](#)

A rigorous settlement study should therefore record the denominator as well as the numerator: how much area was surveyed, by what method, in what season, with what visibility, and with what criteria for calling a locality a site. Repeated survey can change the distribution dramatically. Apparent “empty zones” should be labelled unsurveyed, poorly visible, deeply alluviated, or genuinely low-density only when the evidence allows that distinction.

Environmental risk is socially distributed

The physical probability of inundation is only one component of historical risk. Access to raised ground, boats, stored grain, kin networks, livestock shelter, labour, political protection, and alternative land can determine whether the same flood becomes a manageable seasonal event or a catastrophe. Hill demonstrated this clearly for the colonial and modern Kosi,

where embankments, property relations, and state policy redistributed exposure rather than simply eliminating it (Hill 1997).

That later evidence cannot be projected directly into prehistory, but it supplies an important question: who had the capacity to absorb environmental variability? Archaeology may approach the issue through differences in house construction, storage, settlement elevation, access to transport, diet, and rebuilding. It should not assume a uniform community response simply because households lived beside the same river.

Resilience without evolutionary ranking

A mixed economy of cultivation, fishing, herding, gathering, craft, and mobility should not be described as an incomplete stage on the way to fully settled agriculture. In a flood-prone environment, diversification can reduce dependence on a single field, season, or channel. The strategy can coexist with permanent houses, social hierarchy, exchange, ritual institutions, and political authority. Archaeological interpretation should therefore ask what combination of practices stabilized household reproduction under variable conditions rather than rank communities by sedentism alone.

The same caution applies to settlement relocation. Moving a village because a channel eroded its bank is not necessarily political collapse; remaining in one place is not necessarily stability if households repeatedly rebuild, import food, or lose fields. Environmental history becomes historically useful when it explains the range of choices available and the inequalities among them, not when it turns river behaviour into a deterministic cycle of rise and fall.

What Chapter 4 establishes

The strongest conclusion is not a single map of prehistoric settlement but a method for reconstructing one. The Himalayan foreland is a spatially variable, vertically layered, seasonally dynamic alluvial archive. Kosi megafan processes, Gandak

megafan architecture, and Baghmati interfan dynamics show that different rivers and landforms cannot be merged into one environmental template. Modern geomorphology demonstrates mechanisms and preservation problems; archaeology must establish when and how past communities actually occupied those settings.

Accordingly, later chapters use environmental evidence in three disciplined ways. First, landform and channel reconstructions are dated independently wherever possible. Second, environmental mechanisms are separated from social outcomes. Third, the distribution of known sites is treated as a research sample rather than a complete census of ancient population. These rules allow rivers to enter political, economic, and cultural history as active material processes without turning geography into destiny.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Hill, Christopher V. *River of Sorrow: Environment and Social Control in Riparian North India, 1770-1994*. Association for Asian Studies, 1997.
- Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Pearson Education India, 2008.
- Sinha, B. P. *The Archaeology and Art of India*. Sundeep Prakashan, 1994.
- Sinha, Rajiv, and Peter F. Friend. 'River Systems and Their Sediment Flux, Indo-Gangetic Plains, Northern Bihar, India.' *Sedimentology* 41, no. 4 (1994): 825-845. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-3091.1994.tb01426.x>.
- Singh, Harbhajan, B. Parkash, and K. Gohain. 'Facies Analysis of the Kosi Megafan Deposits.' *Sedimentary Geology* 85, nos. 1-4 (1993): 87-113. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0037-0738\(93\)90077-I](https://doi.org/10.1016/0037-0738(93)90077-I).
- Jain, Vikrant, and Rajiv Sinha. 'Fluvial Dynamics of an Anabranching River System in Himalayan Foreland Basin, Baghmati River, North Bihar Plains, India.' *Geomorphology* 60, nos. 1-2 (2004): 147-170. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geomorph.2003.07.008>.
- Chakraborty, Tapan, Rimpal Kar, Parthasarathi Ghosh, and Sounak Basu. 'Kosi Megafan: Historical Records, Geomorphology and the Recent Avulsion of the Kosi River.' *Quaternary International* 227, no. 2 (2010): 143-160. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.quaint.2009.12.002>.
- Sinha, Rajiv, Jawed Ahmad, Kumar Gaurav, and Guillaume Morin. 'Shallow Subsurface Stratigraphy and Alluvial Architecture of the Kosi and

Gandak Megafans in the Himalayan Foreland Basin, India.' *Sedimentary Geology* 301 (2014): 133-149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sedgeo.2013.06.008>.

VOLUME II.

ANCIENT MITHILA, VAJJI AND ANGA.

Source-controlled regional history.

Chapter 5. Videha in Vedic and Upanishadic textual worlds

Sources, recensions, and the limits of a textual chronology

Chapter 5 rests principally on two related but differently transmitted Vedic corpora: the Satapatha Brahmana of the White Yajurveda and the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad that forms the concluding portion of the Satapatha in both its Madhyandina and Kanva recensions. Julius Eggeling's nineteenth-century translation follows the Madhyandina school. Patrick Olivelle's modern annotated edition of the early Upanishads follows the Kanva recension for the Brihadaranyaka while recording important Madhyandina variants and providing a concordance between the two arrangements (Eggeling 1882; Olivelle 1998). This textual plurality is historically significant. It warns against treating a single printed sequence as a verbatim transcript of one event or one court archive.

The absolute dating of the relevant layers remains debated. Linguistic stratification, school geography, intertextual relations, and comparison with archaeological and political change can establish relative sequences more securely than exact calendar years. Terms such as 'later Vedic' and 'early Upanishadic' are therefore used here as broad scholarly periods. Where a precise date would depend on a contested reconstruction, the prose states the uncertainty instead of converting a relative chronology into a false regnal year (Witzel 1997; Olivelle 1998).

Videgha Mathava and the east

Satapatha Brahmana 1.4.1 narrates an eastward movement in which Videgha Mathava and the priest Gotama Rahugana follow Agni Vaisvanara from the region of the Sarasvati toward the Sadanira. The narrative explains how the sacrificial fire 'tastes' or burns through lands and rivers until it reaches a river it does not cross. The text later associates the Sadanira with a boundary between Kosala and Videha. Historians have long recognized the

passage as important evidence for the eastward extension of Brahmanical ritual geography. Its value is greatest when it is read as a ritual-political representation of incorporation, not as an eyewitness migration diary with a secure year-by-year route (Eggeling 1882; Witzel 1997).

The name Videgha in this passage is related to Videha in later textual geography, but the narrative does not authorize a simple map from the Sarasvati to a modern district boundary. The story connects king, priest, fire, land, river, and ritual suitability. That structure itself is historical evidence: eastern territory is represented as becoming available to a particular sacrificial order through the movement of royal and priestly authority. What the passage does not establish is the population history of the entire eastern Gangetic plain or the displacement of one archaeologically identifiable people by another.

Reading Satapatha Brahmana 1.4.1 as a ritual-political narrative

The sequence of the passage is deliberately meaningful. Videgha Mathava is not presented as an isolated pioneer. He is accompanied by Gotama Rahugana, and Agni is the agent whose progress makes the landscape ritually intelligible. A river becomes a threshold because the fire does not cross it. The text then explains changes in Brahman settlement and ritual practice east of that threshold. The account therefore links territorial movement with the reproduction of sacrificial institutions. That is a stronger historical inference than the older habit of turning the story into a literal record of forest clearance by fire.

Ritual texts also work by etiological explanation: they explain why a practice, place, boundary, or social distinction is as it is. The Videgha narrative can therefore preserve a memory of eastward political-cultural change while simultaneously organizing that change according to Brahmanical ritual theory. These functions are not mutually exclusive. The source-controlled approach is to identify the historical process the narrative may refract and then distinguish that inference from

the literary mechanism through which the text legitimates it (Heesterman 1993; Witzel 1997).

Fire, land, and the danger of a literal clearance model

Older historical writing sometimes converted Agni's eastward burning into a straightforward description of Vedic settlers destroying primeval forest and opening virgin land to agriculture. That reading is too simple. Archaeology reviewed in Volume I demonstrates settlement and subsistence histories in the middle Gangetic plain long before the later Vedic texts. The east was neither empty nor historically inert. Fire in the Satapatha passage belongs first to sacrificial symbolism and ritual efficacy, even if the narrative may also draw upon familiar practices of burning vegetation, preparing fields, or moving through wooded landscapes.

The passage should therefore not be used to erase pre-existing communities. 'Vedicization' is better treated as a set of changing relationships: movement of ritual specialists, adoption and adaptation of sacrificial forms, royal patronage, intermarriage, linguistic change, competition with other specialists, and incorporation of local places and practices. Some transformations may have been coercive; others may have depended on alliance or emulation. The text itself does not provide a demographic census capable of choosing among these mechanisms for every locality.

Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 1.4.1: textual geography, not a migration map

The diagram follows the narrative sequence while marking what is explicit, inferred, and disputed.

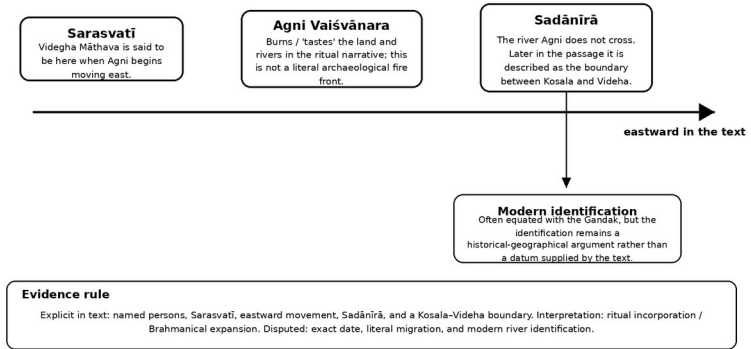


Diagram 8. Satapatha Brahmana 1.4.1 as textual geography. The diagram follows the narrated sequence from Sarasvati through eastward movement to the Sadanira and separates explicit textual statements from later interpretation. It is not a reconstruction of a dated migration route.

Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026. Primary textual basis: Satapatha Brahmana 1.4.1 in Julius Eggeling, trans., The Satapatha-Brahmana, Part I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1882), public-domain translation. Interpretive framing also draws on Witzel 1997. Diagram rights: © Gajendra Thakur, 2026.

Source links: <https://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbr/sbe12/index.htm> ;
https://fid4sa-repository.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/110/1/VedicCanon_1997.pdf

The Sadanira and disputed historical geography

The Sadanira is commonly identified with the Gandak, but the equation is a scholarly reconstruction rather than an identification supplied by the text itself. The Satapatha gives a relational geography: a river reached from the west, associated with the Himalayan direction, and treated in the story as a boundary between Kosala and Videha. Matching that description to a modern river requires assumptions about name continuity, river courses, the scale of the narrative, and the historical geography of Kosala and Videha. Those assumptions can be plausible without becoming certain.

Alluvial rivers also complicate retrospective mapping. Channel position, distributaries, confluences, and locally used river names can change over centuries. The geomorphological cautions developed in Chapters 1 and 4 therefore apply directly

here. A textual hydronym is not a fixed coordinate. This book retains 'Sadanira' when discussing the Vedic text and uses 'often identified with the Gandak' only as an explicitly qualified modern correlation.

Kosala, Videha, and a boundary that is textual before it is cartographic

The Satapatha passage is important because it does more than narrate motion: it places Kosala and Videha in a relationship across the Sadanira. Yet the statement should not be transformed into a surveyed frontier running along an unchanged river channel. Premodern political boundaries could be zonal, jurisdictionally layered, seasonally variable, or defined through settlements and routes rather than continuous lines. The source securely supports a remembered distinction between political-cultural spaces. It does not provide a cadastral map.

The later history of the region makes the caution especially necessary. Videha, Mithila, Tirabhukti, Tirhut, and modern administrative units belong to different periods. Their geographic associations overlap in scholarship and memory, but they cannot be made interchangeable simply because later Mithila traditions remembered Videha. Historical continuity is a question to be demonstrated through successive evidence, not an assumption imported into the earliest textual layer.

Vedic schools and the making of an eastern textual world

Vedic texts were transmitted through schools, or sakhas, whose histories are central to reconstructing the movement of ritual knowledge. Michael Witzel's reconstruction of the Vedic canon emphasizes a broad shift from Kuru and Panchala centres toward eastern territories and treats Videha as an eastern core area in the later development of particular textual traditions (Witzel 1997). This is a philological-historical model based on language, textual relationships, teacher lineages, and school distributions; it should not be mistaken for an archaeological map of ethnic migration.

School geography matters because a text can preserve western memories while being systematized or transmitted in a later eastern environment. It also helps explain why Kuru-Panchala intellectuals and Videha appear in the same Upanishadic scenes. Knowledge circulated with teachers, students, patrons, ritual commissions, and courtly invitations. The eastern court is therefore not best described as a passive recipient of a fully formed western tradition. It becomes one of the places in which the tradition is argued, reorganized, and given new prestige.

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad as a composite historical source

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is one of the earliest and largest Upanishads and survives within both major recensions of the Satapatha Brahmana. Olivelle's edition demonstrates that the recensions contain substantially the same work but differ in arrangement and in some readings. The work itself contains prose teaching, ritual reinterpretation, debates, dialogues, genealogical material, and passages that recur in more than one position. Such features make it a rich source for intellectual and social history but a poor candidate for being read as a single stenographic record (Olivelle 1998).

The near-duplicate Maitreyi instruction appears in Brihadaranyaka 2.4 and 4.5, for example. Repetition of this kind is evidence that the text has a compositional and redactional history. Historians should therefore ask which scene belongs to which textual stratum and what the repeated placement accomplishes, rather than assuming that two literary occurrences necessarily record two separately datable domestic conversations.

Janaka's sacrificial court as an arena of knowledge

Brihadaranyaka 3 places Janaka of Videha at a sacrifice attended by Brahmins from the Kuru and Panchala regions. The narrative turns the sacrifice into a contest over learned pre-eminence: cattle bearing gold are offered as a reward,

Yajnavalkya claims them, and a succession of interlocutors challenges him. The scene represents a court in which royal resources, sacrificial prestige, interregional scholarly mobility, and philosophical argument are mutually reinforcing. It is one of the clearest textual representations of Videha as an intellectual centre within later Vedic literature (Olivelle 1998; Black 2007).

The presence of Kuru-Panchala Brahmins at a Videhan royal sacrifice is historically suggestive without being a travel register. It indicates that the authors considered long-distance learned circulation plausible and meaningful. It also constructs Janaka's court as a place capable of attracting recognized specialists from older Vedic heartlands. Rather than a one-directional story in which knowledge simply moves east, the scene depicts an eastern king who can gather, reward, and judge a transregional community of ritual intellectuals.

Cattle, gold, and the political economy of learned prestige

The cattle and gold attached to the contest are not decorative details. Vedic sacrifice redistributed substantial resources through fees and gifts, and the text represents learned authority as materially rewarded. Royal patronage could convert agrarian wealth and livestock into religious prestige, while successful specialists converted knowledge into status and property. The exchange should not be reduced either to spiritual generosity or to economic purchase. It linked political authority, sacrificial obligation, scholarly competition, and the public display of abundance (Heesterman 1985; Black 2007).

At the same time, the scene says little about how the resources were produced. Cultivators, herders, servants, artisans, and household labourers who made elite redistribution possible remain largely outside the frame. A social history of the court must therefore read the conspicuous gift together with its absences. The text is unusually informative about elite transactions precisely because it is selective about the wider labour system on which those transactions depended.

Brahmodya, debate, and literary performance

The questioning of Yajnavalkya belongs to a wider Vedic culture of brahmodya: competitive or formalized exchanges concerning ritual and ultimate knowledge. The Brihadaranyaka turns these exchanges into literary drama. Speakers enter in sequence, challenges rise in difficulty, and victory establishes intellectual rank. Brian Black has emphasized that the narrative form of the early Upanishads is not incidental to their philosophy; characterization and social setting help define who can speak authoritatively and under what conditions (Black 2007).

This observation changes how the Janaka material should be used historically. The debates are evidence for an idealized culture in which reasoning, textual command, bold speech, patronage, and reputation mattered. They are not verbatim minutes from an assembly hall. The rhetorical arrangement may heighten Yajnavalkya's authority and sharpen contrasts among interlocutors. Literary construction does not make the social setting useless; it tells us what kind of learned competition the text wished to make exemplary.

Janaka and Yajnavalkya: patron, interlocutor, and learner

The fourth book of the Brihadaranyaka repeatedly brings Janaka and Yajnavalkya into direct dialogue. Janaka is not merely a silent donor. He asks questions, reports teachings he has received from other instructors, tests explanations, and offers rewards. Yajnavalkya in turn develops teachings on consciousness, the self, fearlessness, death, and liberation. The text thus constructs kingship and brahminical learning as mutually engaged rather than institutionally sealed (Olivelle 1998).

It would nevertheless be too strong to conclude that the historical government of Videha was organized by philosopher-kings or that every Janaka personally authored Upanishadic doctrine. The scenes show how the text imagined an ideal

relationship between ruler and knowledge. Royal power gains distinction by recognizing learning; learned authority gains public reach through access to the court. The historical insight lies in this relationship of patronage and intellectual legitimation, not in reconstructing a modern university from literary dialogue.

Kingship, ritual authority, and negotiated hierarchy

Later Vedic literature repeatedly explores the relationship between king and priest because neither authority is fully reducible to the other. The king commands resources and coercive power but requires ritual legitimation; priests possess specialized knowledge but depend on patrons and political protection. Heesterman's work on Vedic ritual and kingship draws attention to these tensions and to the ways sacrificial institutions reorganized competition and authority (Heesterman 1985; 1993). The Janaka narratives belong within that larger problem.

The court of Videha should therefore not be described simply as 'Brahmanical' or 'royal' as if those were mutually exclusive institutions. It is a negotiated field. Janaka's prestige depends on attracting learned Brahmins, while the Brahmins' claims are tested in a royal setting and rewarded from royal wealth. The resulting hierarchy is dynamic: social rank, ritual expertise, argumentative success, and political patronage intersect without becoming identical.

Gargi Vachaknavi and the visibility of women in philosophical debate

Gargi Vachaknavi appears as a formidable interlocutor in the third book of the Brihadaranyaka, where her questions address the structure of the cosmos and the imperishable. Her presence is historically important because the text represents a woman speaking in a high-status philosophical assembly and being recognized as a participant in the contest. It is evidence against

any claim that early Upanishadic intellectual life was imagined as exclusively male (Olivelle 1998; Black 2007).

That evidence must also be bounded. One prominent literary woman does not establish equal educational access for all women in Videha, nor does the text describe the institutional route by which Gargi acquired her learning. Her exceptional visibility may itself signal the selectivity of the archive. Gender history should therefore preserve both facts: the text authorizes female philosophical speech at a very high level, and the surviving record remains overwhelmingly structured around elite male teachers, patrons, students, and householders.

Maitreyi, wealth, immortality, and the household threshold

The Maitreyi dialogue shifts the setting from royal competition to household transition. Yajnavalkya prepares to leave the household and divide property; Maitreyi asks whether wealth can secure immortality and redirects the conversation toward knowledge of the self. The scene links metaphysical inquiry to property, marriage, household obligation, and renunciation. Its social power comes from precisely this juxtaposition: an ultimate question emerges from a practical decision about wealth and departure (Brihadaranyaka 2.4 and 4.5; Olivelle 1998).

The dialogue should not be mined for a complete law of women's property. It is a literary-philosophical scene, and its duplicated transmission complicates biographical use. Yet it does show that household wealth, marital conversation, and renunciant aspiration could be made conceptually central to Upanishadic teaching. It also places a woman as the interlocutor whose question exposes the inadequacy of material possession as a route to immortality.

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad: three social settings of philosophical authority

The text distributes knowledge across court, king-brahmin dialogue, and household-renunciant scenes.

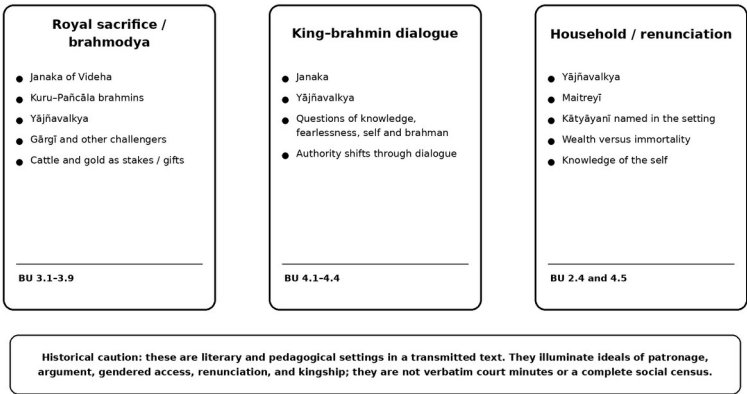


Diagram 9. Three social settings of philosophical authority in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad: royal sacrifice and debate, Janaka-Yajnavalkya dialogue, and the Maitreyi household-renunciation scene. The diagram is analytical and does not claim that the literary scenes are verbatim historical transcripts.

Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026, from the textual arrangement in Patrick Olivelle, *The Early Upanishads: Annotated Text and Translation* (Oxford University Press, 1998), with social-literary interpretation informed by Brian Black, *The Character of the Self in Ancient India* (SUNY Press, 2007). Diagram rights: © Gajendra Thakur, 2026.

Source links: <https://academic.oup.com/book/50014> ; <https://soas-repository.worktribe.com/output/353531/the-character-of-the-self-in-ancient-india-priests-kings-and-women-in-the-early-upanishads>

Women, philosophical speech, and the limits of representativeness

Gargi and Maitreyi occupy different social positions in the literary architecture: one speaks in a competitive public assembly and the other in a household conversation that becomes a teaching on immortality. Their juxtaposition is useful because it prevents a single model of women's intellectual presence. The text imagines women as capable of asking questions that redirect or intensify philosophical argument, yet it gives little systematic evidence about girls' education, ordinary women's literacy, institutional teaching, or the

distribution of ritual knowledge beyond elite circles (Black 2007).

Accordingly, the historical claim should be neither triumphalist nor dismissive. The passages are genuine evidence that female intellectual agency was thinkable and textually memorable within an early Upanishadic milieu. They are not statistical evidence of broad gender equality. Later traditions that celebrate Gargi and Maitreyi belong to the history of reception and can be studied separately from what the oldest recoverable textual layers establish.

Yajnavalkya as textual persona rather than secure biography

Yajnavalkya dominates large portions of the Brihadaranyaka and is associated with the White Yajurvedic tradition more broadly. The texts depict him as ritual specialist, disputant, teacher, householder, and renouncer. Such density encourages biography, but the evidence does not permit a modern life reconstructed with secure birth year, birthplace, itinerary, family chronology, and authorship list. Later works attributed to Yajnavalkya belong to different periods and cannot automatically be used to fill gaps in the early Upanishadic figure.

A source-controlled history therefore treats 'Yajnavalkya' first as a powerful textual persona embedded in several transmitted settings. A historical teacher or teachers may lie behind the tradition, but the route from remembered specialist to canonical character is not documented step by step. This distinction allows the chapter to take the intellectual arguments seriously without inventing a biography that the sources do not support.

'Janaka' as name, title, and dynastic memory

The Janaka problem is similar. Vedic and later literature uses Janaka in ways that have often been harmonized into the biography of a single philosopher-king. The evidence is better handled by allowing for a royal name, title, or dynastic designation used across memories and literary settings. The

Brihadaranyaka itself does not supply the administrative data needed to prove that every Janaka scene belongs to one reign. Epic traditions about Janaka and Sita, treated in Chapter 6, belong to a different textual history and should not be fused automatically with the Upanishadic patron.

This does not make the association between Janaka and Videha historically meaningless. On the contrary, repeated linkage of royal patronage, Videha, and learned debate shows the durability of a regional political-intellectual image. What remains uncertain is the conversion of that image into a single datable ruler's dossier. The chapter therefore uses formulations such as 'a Janaka of Videha' or 'the Upanishadic Janaka' where individual identification is not secure.

Philosophical content as social history: self, brahman, and the imperishable

The philosophical doctrines debated in the Brihadaranyaka are themselves historical evidence. Arguments about atman, brahman, the imperishable, consciousness, death, and liberation show intellectuals reworking the relationship between ritual action, knowledge, personhood, and ultimate reality. Olivelle places the early Upanishads within a period of major social, economic, and religious change, while Heesterman interprets the internalization of sacrifice as part of a larger transformation in Vedic ritual thought (Olivelle 1998; Heesterman 1993).

Yet doctrinal novelty should not be translated directly into social revolution. A philosophical argument can challenge one hierarchy while presupposing another. Renunciant values can grow within institutions sustained by household wealth and royal patronage. The importance of Videha in these texts lies partly in this tension: the court becomes a setting where sacrificial abundance and teachings that relativize material possession can coexist.

Videha, Kuru-Panchala, and interregional intellectual circulation

The Brihadaranyaka repeatedly links Videha to learned persons associated with Kuru-Panchala. This is best read as evidence for an intellectual network rather than a civilizational frontier between sealed cultures. Teachers, ritual specialists, students, and patrons could move; textual schools could expand; local elites could sponsor imported expertise; and eastern institutions could reshape the traditions they received. A regional history should therefore follow circulation and institutional reproduction rather than ask which side of a rigid cultural boundary 'owned' a doctrine.

This network perspective also helps reconcile different source types. Archaeology demonstrates settlement, production, and exchange in the east without identifying Vedic schools directly. Textual geography demonstrates named political-cultural relationships without measuring population movements. When the records converge on increasing connectivity, they can support a history of interaction. They should not be forced into one-to-one correlations between a pottery horizon, an ethnicity, a school, and a polity.

Videha and the 'Greater Magadha' debate

Johannes Bronkhorst's influential model of 'Greater Magadha' argues that the eastern region in which Buddhism, Jainism, Ajivikism, and related ideas developed possessed cultural and religious formations distinct from the Vedic heartland and that some ideas later incorporated into Brahmanical traditions arose within that eastern milieu (Bronkhorst 2007). The model is valuable because it resists a one-way account in which all intellectual innovation radiates from the Vedic west.

Its geographical and ideological unity should not, however, be treated as settled fact. Scholars have questioned whether doctrines such as rebirth and karmic retribution can be localized so exclusively or whether the proposed region was culturally uniform. Jason Neelis, for example, accepts the

importance of inter-sectarian debate but explicitly doubts the localization of a single underlying spiritual ideology exclusively in Magadha (Neelis 2011). For this book, 'Greater Magadha' is therefore an interpretive model that sharpens questions about eastern difference and interaction, not a substitute for evidence at the scale of Videha, Vajji, Anga, or individual sites.

Archaeology cannot be made to illustrate the text by force

The temptation to correlate the Videgha narrative with a particular ceramic horizon, iron horizon, or wave of settlement is strong because Volume I has already described major first-millennium BCE transformations. Such correlation must remain hypothesis unless independent dating, spatial distribution, and contextual evidence align. A Satapatha passage cannot identify the language or ritual affiliation of the makers of a pottery class; a pottery class cannot date the final form of a transmitted text.

The appropriate comparison is therefore process-level. Both archaeology and late Vedic literature belong to a world in which settlement, agrarian production, political concentration, exchange, and cultural interaction were changing across the Gangetic plain. Their chronologies overlap broadly, but they answer different questions. The book preserves that complementarity by refusing to turn material culture into illustration for a pre-selected textual story.

Sacred geography, historical geography, and later Mithila memory

Later Mithila traditions have understandably treated the Vedic and Upanishadic prominence of Videha as part of a deep regional intellectual ancestry. That reception is historically important and becomes increasingly documentable in medieval and modern scholarship, pilgrimage, literary history, educational institutions, and political-cultural movements. It should not be projected backward as proof that every later boundary, caste institution, language form, or scholastic lineage already existed in the Satapatha period.

The disciplined alternative is stronger than either denial or romantic continuity. The texts securely show that Videha was an important category in later Vedic and early Upanishadic thought and that a Janaka of Videha served as a major literary model of royal patronage of knowledge. Subsequent chapters can then investigate, period by period, how that memory was inherited, transformed, localized, and mobilized.

What Chapter 5 establishes, and what it leaves open

Established at the level of textual evidence: the Satapatha Brahmana represents Videgha Mathava, Gotama Rahugana, Agni, and the Sadanira within an eastward ritual geography; it relates the Sadanira to Kosala and Videha. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad repeatedly associates Janaka of Videha with sacrifice, learned competition, Yajnavalkya, and major philosophical instruction; it also gives prominent speech to Gargi and Maitreyi. The Brihadaranyaka survives in at least the Madhyandina and Kanva recensions, whose differences are material to textual criticism (Eggeling 1882; Olivelle 1998).

Strong scholarly inference: these texts preserve the historical significance of eastern expansion, interregional movement of Vedic specialists, royal patronage of learned institutions, and negotiation between sacrificial authority and newer forms of knowledge. Disputed or unproven: an exact date for Videgha Mathava; a literal migration route; the precise modern identity of the Sadanira; the existence of one securely biographable Janaka behind all relevant traditions; and a simple ethnic equation between archaeological horizons and Vedic textual communities. These distinctions govern the transition to Chapter 6, where epic memory and sacred geography require a different evidentiary treatment.

Chapter-specific bibliography

Eggeling, Julius, trans. The Satapatha-Brahmana, Part I: Books I and II. Sacred Books of the East, vol. 12. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1882.
Madhyandina recension. Public-domain English translation available at <https://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbr/sbe12/index.htm>.

- Olivelle, Patrick. *The Early Upanisads: Annotated Text and Translation*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195124354.001.0001>.
- Witzel, Michael. 'The Development of the Vedic Canon and Its Schools: The Social and Political Milieu.' In *Inside the Texts, Beyond the Texts: New Approaches to the Study of the Vedas*, edited by Michael Witzel, 257-345. Harvard Oriental Series, Opera Minora 2. Cambridge, MA: Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University, 1997. Open-access author copy:
https://fid4sa-repository.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/110/1/VedicCanon_1997.pdf.
- Witzel, Michael. 'Early Sanskritization: Origins and Development of the Kuru State.' *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* 1, no. 4 (1995): 1-26.
<https://doi.org/10.11588/ejvs.1995.4.823>.
- Black, Brian. *The Character of the Self in Ancient India: Priests, Kings, and Women in the Early Upanishads*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.1353/book5160>.
- Heesterman, J. C. *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- Heesterman, J. C. *The Broken World of Sacrifice: An Essay in Ancient Indian Ritual*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
<https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226922553.001.0001>.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes. *Greater Magadha: Studies in the Culture of Early India*. Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section 2, South Asia, vol. 19. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007.
- Neelis, Jason. *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks: Mobility and Exchange within and beyond the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia*. Dynamics in the History of Religion 2. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011.
- Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Delhi: Pearson Education India, 2008.
- Thapar, Romila. *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*. London: Allen Lane, 2002.
- Thakur, Upendra. *History of Mithila: From the Earliest Times to 1556 A.D.* 2nd ed. Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1988. Used as a regional historiographical synthesis; early chronology is checked against primary texts and modern critical scholarship.

Chapter 6. Janaka, Sita, and the discipline of reading tradition

Epic geography and living memory

The Ramayana associates Sita with Janaka and Mithila, and Janakpur became a major centre of pilgrimage and regional identity. The epic is indispensable for the history of ideas, devotion, performance, art, and sacred geography. It is not, by itself, contemporary proof for the reign dates, administrative institutions, or precise borders of an early kingdom.

Multiple textual lives

The Ramayana developed through a long history of composition, transmission, commentary, vernacular retelling, and performance. Jain, Buddhist, Sanskrit, Maithili, Nepali, and other traditions reworked its characters and moral problems. Historical method asks when and where a particular version was produced and how it was used, rather than searching for one layer that validates every later claim.

Why the distinction matters

Separating devotion from event-history does not diminish cultural importance. It allows Janakpur, marriage circuits, festivals, painting, song, and gendered readings of Sita to be studied as historical phenomena in their own right. The region's attachment to Sita is securely real as social history even where ancient chronology remains unverified.

Epic time and historical time

Epic narrative arranges persons, kingdoms, journeys, and moral choices within a meaningful story world. Historical reconstruction asks different questions: when a passage took shape, what earlier and later layers it contains, how manuscripts differ, and which institutions are independently attested. A place named in an epic may preserve old geographical knowledge, later editorial knowledge, or both. It

cannot by itself provide a precise regnal list or archaeological date. The distinction between epic time and historical time should therefore be maintained even when a narrative has shaped regional identity for centuries (Thapar 2002; Richman 1991).



Figure 1. *Janaki Mandir in Janakpur, photographed in 2015. The modern temple materializes continuing Sita-Rama sacred geography; it is not archaeological evidence for epic chronology.*

Photograph: Bijaya2043, 3 March 2015. CC BY-SA 4.0. Source record: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Janaki_Temple_Janakpur-Janakpur030315_MG_36680059.jpg ; license: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>.

Many Ramayanas and regional authorship

The Ramayana tradition has never been confined to one unchanged text. Sanskrit recensions, Buddhist and Jain narratives, vernacular poems, oral performance, theatre, painting, and devotional practice select and reinterpret episodes for different audiences. These versions are not merely corrupt copies of an original; they are historical acts of authorship and reception. For Mithila and Nepal, their value includes the study of language, patronage, pilgrimage, marriage symbolism, and the circulation of stories across courts and households.

Sita, gender, and ethical argument

Sita has served as an image of devotion, endurance, sovereignty, agricultural fertility, suffering, and resistance. The meanings attached to her cannot be reduced to a single timeless regional ideal. Performers, painters, religious teachers, writers, and women within domestic traditions have emphasized different episodes and moral judgments. A historical account records those changing interpretations and the social settings in which they mattered, while avoiding the claim that any modern norm can be read directly from an ancient event.

Janakpur as a historical sacred centre

Janakpur's importance is securely documentable as a centre of pilgrimage, ritual, artistic production, and Mithila identity, even though the physical localization of every epic episode cannot be independently proved. Sacred geography is produced through temples, routes, festivals, patronage, stories, and repeated acts of visitation. Its historical reality lies in these institutions and practices. The responsible formulation is therefore neither that sacred tradition supplies a modern archaeological map nor that sacred places are historically irrelevant; their development belongs to a different evidentiary category.

Critical edition, received text, and what "the Ramayana" means

A historical use of the Ramayana begins by specifying which text is being read. The Baroda Oriental Institute's critical edition did not recover an author's autograph. It collated a large manuscript tradition and attempted, through explicit philological rules, to reconstruct a text ancestral to major surviving recensions. The critical text is therefore a scholarly instrument for studying transmission. It should not be confused either with every regional Ramayana or with a claim that one fixed wording circulated unchanged from the date of composition (Bhatt 1960; Goldman 1984).

Robert P. Goldman's translation of the Balakanda was the first English volume based on that critical edition, and the later complete Princeton translation provides a convenient modern point of reference for the epic as critically reconstructed (Goldman 1984; Goldman and Sutherland Goldman 2022). Even this source-controlled base remains layered. Philologists have often treated the Balakanda and Uttarakanda as containing comparatively later strata than much of Books II-VI, while also warning that no whole book is chronologically uniform. The safe formulation is textual stratification, not a single composition date for every episode.

Epic Mithila and the discipline of relational geography

In the Balakanda, Mithila is a royal and ritual centre associated with Janaka. The narrative connects it to Ayodhya through the movement of Visvamitra, Rama, Laksmana, court messengers, ritual specialists, and marriage parties. These relations are historically useful as an epic geography: the text imagines named centres, routes, kingdoms, dynastic houses, sacrifices, and learned networks. The same evidence does not provide surveyed coordinates for every road, ford, or frontier.

This distinction is especially important because later pilgrimage landscapes localize many Ramayana episodes with great specificity. A present shrine can preserve a long-lived or newly intensified localization; a place-name can preserve memory; a route can become ritually authoritative. None of those facts by themselves dates the narrated marriage of Rama and Sita. Event-history, textual geography, and sacred geography must be compared rather than collapsed.

Janaka in the epic is not automatically the Upanishadic Janaka

Chapter 5 examined Janaka of Videha in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad as a patron and participant in philosophical debate. Chapter 6 must resist an easy biographical merger. The epic Janaka is embedded in a Ramayana genealogy and marriage narrative, while the Upanishadic Janaka belongs to a different

textual corpus, genre, and history of transmission. The shared name, association with Videha, and ideal of learned kingship make comparison legitimate; they do not establish that every passage refers to one historically documented individual.

'Janaka' can function as a dynastic or royal designation in later memory as well as a personal name. Historical reconstruction should therefore ask what attributes are attached to Janaka in each corpus: philosophical patronage, sacrifice, royal genealogy, fatherhood of Sita, adjudication of a marriage condition, or paradigmatic kingship. Similar traits may reveal intertextual memory and regional political imagination even where a continuous biography cannot be proved.

Sita in the furrow: name, narrative, and agricultural symbolism

In the Balakanda, Janaka recounts that Sita was found when he was ploughing a sacrificial field. The Sanskrit word *sita* also denotes a furrow, making the episode a deliberate conjunction of name, cultivated earth, royal ritual, and extraordinary birth (Goldman 1984; Goldman and Sutherland Goldman 2022). The narrative is one of the strongest internal reasons for Sita's enduring association with earth and fertility in later interpretation.

The motif must nevertheless be handled with discipline. It supports the conclusion that the epic text constructs Sita through agricultural and terrestrial symbolism. It does not, without further comparative evidence, prove that a prehistoric agricultural goddess was directly transformed into a single historical princess or that the story preserves a datable agrarian ceremony. Etymology and mythic motif are evidence for the language of the text; longer religious genealogies require separate demonstration.

Vaidehi, Maithili, Janaki: geography carried in epithets

Sita is repeatedly identified through relational epithets: Vaidehi links her to Videha, Maithili to Mithila, and Janaki to Janaka. These names do important cultural work. They carry

geography and kinship with the character wherever the story travels, allowing later audiences far from the north Bihar-Nepal borderland to encounter Mithila through the person of Sita. Literary geography can thus persist through naming even when a performance or manuscript is produced elsewhere.

Such epithets are not cadastral evidence. Their historical importance lies in the durable association they create between Sita and a remembered regional world. The distinction helps explain why modern Mithila identity can mobilize Sita with exceptional intensity without requiring the historian to treat every later boundary claimed for Mithila as the territorial frontier implied by the epic.

The bow episode: valor, marriage, and narrative sovereignty

The marriage episode is often called a *swayamvara* in modern retelling, but the critically edited *Balakanda* more specifically emphasizes Janaka's condition that Sita is to be won through heroic prowess, represented by the formidable bow associated with Siva. Rama's successful handling and breaking of the bow resolves the condition and establishes his eligibility within the narrative's moral and royal economy (Goldman 1984). Using the more general modern label is convenient, but it should not erase the distinctive terms and structure of the Sanskrit episode.

As political history, the episode should be read at the level its evidence can support. It dramatizes kingship, masculine prowess, divine favor, paternal authority, and interdynastic marriage. It does not prove a recoverable tournament at a dated palace. The historian can study the ideals of royal marriage encoded in the text and the later social uses of the episode without turning a literary ordeal into a court record.

Marriage as interdynastic connection, not merely private romance

The *Ramayana* wedding narrative links royal houses rather than isolating Rama and Sita as a private couple. Messengers

move between courts, genealogies are recited, ritual specialists participate, and the marriage is embedded in a larger set of dynastic relationships. The literary scene therefore offers a model of marriage as political alliance, status reproduction, ritual legitimacy, and movement between regions.

This observation does not permit the direct reconstruction of ancient Mithila's marriage law. Epic marriage is exemplary and selective. It foregrounds elite actors and ritual ideals, while ordinary households, labor, property negotiations, and women's varied experience remain largely outside the frame. Later Mithila marriage customs can be compared with epic representations only when their own historical sources are independently dated.

Genealogy is a claim within a text

The Balakanda gives genealogical material for royal houses. Genealogy in epic literature is historically important because it organizes legitimacy, kinship, memory, and claims to antiquity. Yet a long lineage is not automatically a contemporary king list. Names can be reordered, expanded, linked to prestigious ancestors, or harmonized across traditions during transmission.

A source-controlled regional history therefore does not use the epic genealogies to fill gaps in an archaeological chronology. Where a name is independently attested in inscription or securely dated text, comparison can begin. Where it is not, the genealogy remains evidence for the epic's political imagination and for later reception of dynastic antiquity.

Balakanda and the problem of later strata

The Balakanda is indispensable for Mithila because it contains the major narrative complex of Janaka, Sita's origin, the bow, and the wedding. At the same time, textual criticism has long recognized that the opening and closing books of the Ramayana contain material whose relationship to the central narrative differs from that of Books II-VI. The critical edition reduces some later accretion but cannot transform the surviving

tradition into a contemporaneous archive of an original event (Goldman 1984).

This does not make the Balakanda historically useless. Its very form is evidence for the stage or stages of Ramayana tradition in which Mithila's royal and sacred geography became integral to the epic's beginning. Questions of textual layer and questions of cultural influence are separate: a passage can be comparatively late within an epic and still be many centuries old and historically formative.

Epic chronology: why precision is misleading

The date of the Valmiki Ramayana has been debated through language, meter, social institutions, intertextual comparison, and the history of manuscript transmission. These methods yield relative strata and broad ranges more readily than exact calendar years. The book therefore avoids assigning Rama, Sita, or Janaka a precise BCE reign based solely on the epic. A traditional cosmic or yuga chronology belongs to sacred time unless independently tied to datable evidence.

The same rule applies to astronomical retrocalculations that begin with passages whose textual date and observational status are themselves uncertain. A calculation can be mathematically exact while the historical premise remains unproven. This chapter treats the Ramayana first as a transmitted literary and religious archive, then asks which kinds of historical questions that archive can responsibly answer.

Many Ramayanas: plurality is part of the history

The Ramayana tradition is plural not only because manuscripts vary but because authors, performers, communities, and religious traditions repeatedly re-narrated the story. Paula Richman's *Many Ramayanas* demonstrated the analytical value of treating these tellings as creative historical works rather than defective copies of one text (Richman 1991). Buddhist, Jain, Sanskrit, vernacular, oral, theatrical, and modern media versions can alter motive, kinship, moral emphasis,

characterization, and even the narrative status of celebrated episodes.

For regional history, this plurality has two consequences. First, a detail from a later telling cannot silently be imported into the critical text and then dated back to an imagined epic age. Second, later tellings are themselves evidence: they show which aspects of Janaka, Sita, Mithila, marriage, exile, loyalty, suffering, or resistance mattered in particular social and literary worlds.

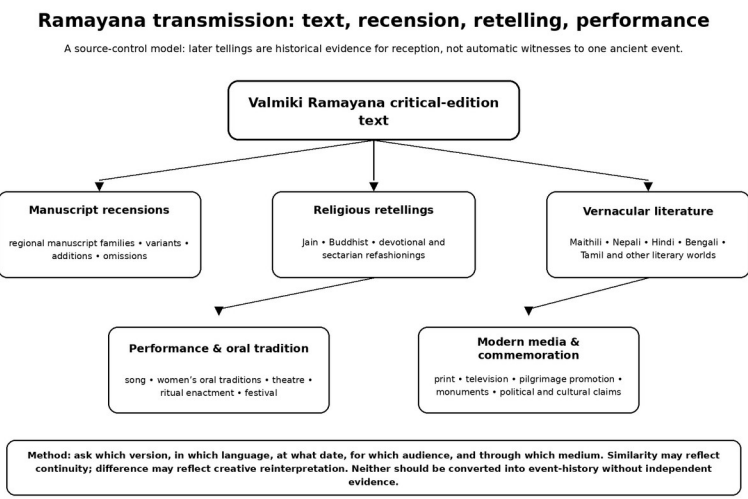


Diagram 10. Ramayana transmission as a field rather than a single line of copying. The diagram separates the critically edited Sanskrit text from manuscript recensions, religious retellings, vernacular literature, oral/performance traditions, and modern media or commemoration. The arrows indicate historical transmission and reinterpretation, not a claim that every later form derives directly from one surviving manuscript.

Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026. Analytical framework based on the textual-critical introduction to Goldman 1984, the comparative approach of Richman 1991 and Bose 2004, and performance studies in Richman and Bharucha 2021. Rights: © Gajendra Thakur, 2026.

Source links: <https://books.google.com/books?id=DWX43jnbOngC> ;
<https://www.ucpress.edu/books/many-ramayanas/paper> ;
<https://academic.oup.com/book/9700> ; <https://academic.oup.com/book/39322>

Jain and Buddhist tellings: comparison without harmonization

Jain and Buddhist Rama narratives belong to distinct religious and literary histories. Their differences from the Sanskrit epic

are not problems to be corrected by harmonizing all versions into a single biography. They demonstrate that the Rama story became a shared narrative resource through which communities debated ethics, kingship, renunciation, violence, kinship, and religious authority (Richman 1991).

When such versions mention places or persons familiar from the Sanskrit Ramayana, they may preserve, adapt, or contest earlier narrative elements. Historical method must establish the date, language, textual setting, and purpose of each witness. Agreement across traditions can strengthen evidence for the antiquity of a narrative motif; it still does not by itself establish the event described by that motif.

Vernacularization and the expansion of Sita's regional lives

The Rama story moved through regional literary languages and performance traditions over many centuries. Translation is too narrow a word for this process because authors often reorganized plot, theology, voice, and ethical emphasis. A Maithili, Nepali, Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, or other telling belongs simultaneously to the history of the Ramayana and to the history of its own language, patronage, audience, and genre.

Mithila's special relation to Sita therefore cannot be reduced to the Sanskrit epic alone. Songs, ritual speech, paintings, theatre, marriage imagery, local narratives, and printed literature have repeatedly renewed her as Janaki and Maithili. These later materials need their own dating and documentation. Their value is social and cultural history, not proof that every local custom descends unchanged from an epic court.

Sita and the history of gendered interpretation

Sita has been read as devoted wife, autonomous moral agent, wronged queen, daughter of earth, emblem of endurance, and figure of resistance. No one of these meanings exhausts the tradition. The very persistence of dispute over her conduct and treatment is historically important because it reveals changing

arguments about marriage, sovereignty, purity, obedience, suffering, and justice (Bose 2004; Richman 1991).

A gender history must distinguish representation from lived social condition. Sita's literary prominence does not demonstrate that women of an ancient Mithila polity possessed a corresponding legal or political status. Conversely, women's later songs and performances can preserve critiques or reinterpretations not visible in elite written texts. The archive is uneven, and the unevenness is itself part of the history.

The fire ordeal, exile, and the danger of one timeless Sita

Episodes associated with Sita's ordeal by fire and, in the Uttarakanda, her later exile and return to the earth became central to ethical debate. Their textual position, wording, and interpretation differ across tellings. A historical account should therefore identify the version under discussion before drawing conclusions about the moral image of Sita or Rama.

Mandakranta Bose's edited volume *The Ramayana Revisited* shows how narrative refocusing across periods changes gendered meaning, including the wedding and Sita's cultural identity (Bose 2004). The question is not whether one modern interpretation is the timeless essence of the epic, but how communities repeatedly made Sita intelligible within changing ethical worlds.

Women's oral traditions and counter-voices

A. K. Ramanujan, Velcheru Narayana Rao, and other contributors to *Many Ramayanas* drew attention to tellings in which women sing, reinterpret, or re-center episodes from domestic and gendered perspectives (Richman 1991). These materials demonstrate that reception cannot be reconstructed solely from royal manuscripts, printed editions, or male-authored commentaries.

Oral tradition does not mean timeless survival. Songs change as they are learned, performed, recorded, printed, staged, or mobilized in new social movements. Their historical study

requires attention to performer, occasion, audience, collection date, editorial intervention, and language. That methodological caution is especially relevant to Mithila, where marriage song and women's ritual art are major cultural archives.

Janakpur as sacred geography rather than automatic event-site

Janakpur is securely historical as a living centre of Sita-Rama pilgrimage, temple patronage, festival, urban identity, and Maithil culture. The historical question is not whether that social reality exists; it plainly does. The separate question is when particular epic episodes became localized at specific ponds, shrines, routes, and built sites, and what evidence dates those associations.

The 2008 Ram Janaki Temple entry on UNESCO's Tentative List was submitted by Nepal's Department of Archaeology. It records the site's heritage significance and notes older vestiges, but UNESCO explicitly states that responsibility for the content of a tentative-list submission lies with the state party and that listing does not constitute an independent judgment on all historical claims. The entry is therefore evidence for modern heritage recognition and for material remains requiring archaeological study, not certification of epic chronology (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2008).

Janaki Mandir: modern monument, layered historical claim

The extant Janaki Mandir is a major monument in the modern sacred landscape of Janakpur. It documents patronage, architecture, pilgrimage, and the public materialization of Sita as Janaki. It is not an ancient palace or a contemporary portrait of the epic wedding. The photograph already reproduced in this chapter is therefore retained as evidence of modern sacred geography, exactly as its caption states.

Even the construction date illustrates why source control matters. Current Nepal Tourism Board pages are internally inconsistent: one official page states that the temple was constructed in 1874, while another tourism-board feature says it

was completed in 1910 by Queen Vrisha Bhanu of Tikamgarh (Nepal Tourism Board, 'Janaki Mandir'; Nepal Tourism Board, 'Janakpur and Vivah Panchami'). Rather than silently choosing one date, this chapter describes the present monumental complex as a late-nineteenth/early-twentieth-century structure pending resolution through architectural or archival documentation.

Vivah Panchami: annual performance of a remembered marriage

Vivah Panchami annually celebrates the marriage of Rama and Sita at Janakpur and draws pilgrims into a ritual landscape in which epic narrative becomes public procession, worship, hospitality, commerce, and cross-border movement. Nepal Tourism Board materials explicitly present the festival as a commemoration of the divine wedding, while contemporary research examines Janakpur pilgrimage as a socio-economic institution (Nepal Tourism Board; Adhikari 2018).

The festival is excellent evidence for the continuing social power of the wedding narrative. It cannot date the wedding itself. Historical analysis instead asks when particular forms of procession, temple participation, municipal organization, media coverage, and cross-border pilgrimage developed. This approach preserves the festival's religious meaning while also making it available to social, economic, urban, and borderland history.

Ponds, routes, and the accumulation of sacred place

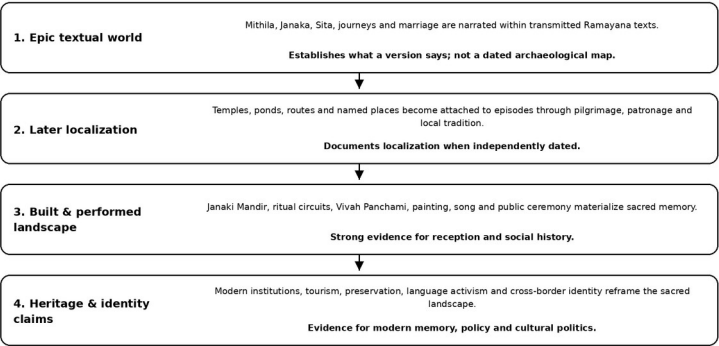
Janakpur's sacred landscape includes temples, ponds, ritual routes, and named locations associated by tradition with the Ramayana. Such a landscape is cumulative. A pond can acquire a ritual name; a shrine can be rebuilt; a procession can change route; a local story can become standardized through print or tourism. Continuity may exist, but each component needs its own dated evidence.

This is why sacred geography should not be opposed to 'real history.' Its temples, donations, festivals, repairs, inscriptions, property disputes, pilgrims, paintings, and municipal

interventions are historical records. What historical method refuses is only the automatic conversion of a later sacred localization into contemporary evidence for an epic event.

From epic place-name to living sacred geography: four evidentiary layers

The layers may reinforce one another culturally, but they answer different historical questions.



A modern temple can be historically important without being contemporary evidence for an epic event. Conversely, uncertainty about ancient event chronology does not make the later sacred landscape historically unreal.

Diagram 11. Four evidentiary layers between an epic place-name and a living sacred geography: the transmitted textual world, later localization, built and performed landscape, and modern heritage or identity claims. The diagram emphasizes that each layer is historically real but answers a different question.

Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026. Analytical framework developed for this chapter from the book-wide distinction between event-history, textual tradition, sacred geography, and modern commemoration; modern Janakpur examples are checked against the Nepal Department of Archaeology submission to UNESCO and Nepal Tourism Board materials. Rights: © Gajendra Thakur, 2026.

Source links: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5261/> ;
<https://ntb.gov.np/janaki-mandir-janakpur-dhanusha> ;
<https://ntb.gov.np/en/janakpur-and-vivah-panchami>

Marriage circuits and the India-Nepal border: ancient story, modern frontier

The present international boundary between India and Nepal did not structure the epic's world. It does, however, shape the modern administration of pilgrimage, roads, citizenship, policing, tourism, and heritage. Janakpur's religious connections with north Bihar therefore offer a clear example of the book's larger borderland method: ancient narrative connection must

be distinguished from modern sovereignty while both are studied together.

Modern cross-border marriage and pilgrimage practices may consciously invoke Sita and Rama, but their legal and social forms belong to later history. The correct historical question is how an old narrative supplies vocabulary and prestige to changing institutions, not whether every present practice is an unchanged survival from epic society.

Painting Sita: visual tradition as reception history

Visual representations of Sita and the Ramayana range across manuscript painting, temple art, popular prints, Mithila painting, theatre design, television, and contemporary illustration. A nineteenth-century or modern image of the wedding can reveal costume conventions, devotional emphasis, patronage, technology of reproduction, and the visual politics of its own time. It is not a photograph of an ancient event.

This evidentiary rule applies with special force to Mithila painting. Later chapters examine the twentieth-century commercialization and global circulation of the form in depth. In the present chapter, the relevant point is methodological: an image of Sita made by a modern painter is primary evidence for modern artistic and devotional history, even when its subject belongs to epic time (Richman and Szanton 2025).

Performance creates historical presence without creating ancient documentation

Performance makes the Ramayana present. Actors, singers, dancers, priests, audiences, ritual specialists, and organizers recreate persons and episodes within a particular time and place. Richman and Bharucha's *Performing the Ramayana Tradition* demonstrates how performance can reinterpret gender, authority, anti-heroes, devotion, and social conflict rather than simply reproduce a fixed script (Richman and Bharucha 2021).

For historians, this means that a performance has at least two temporalities: the epic time represented and the historical time

of performance. Confusing them produces false evidence; separating them reveals a richer archive of embodiment, public argument, patronage, gendered agency, and collective memory.

Print, television, and standardization

Print culture and electronic media can give one version unprecedented reach. Standardized schoolbooks, cheap editions, devotional prints, films, television serials, and digital platforms can make a particular characterization feel ancient because it is widely familiar. Familiarity is not the same as textual antiquity. A modern medium may consolidate details that were previously regional, variable, or secondary.

The historical importance of mass circulation is nevertheless enormous. It reshapes pilgrimage expectations, visual iconography, language, family ritual, tourism, and political symbolism. When modern audiences arrive at Janakpur expecting to see a place through images learned from print or television, reception history enters the physical landscape.

The Ramayana and political imagination

Sheldon Pollock argued that Ramayana idioms have been repeatedly available for political imagination in South Asia, while subsequent scholarship has debated the scope and implications of such arguments (Pollock 1993). For this regional history, the essential caution is chronological. A medieval or modern political use of Rama, Sita, Janaka, or sacred geography is evidence for that later political world, not a key that automatically decodes the politics of the earliest textual layer.

Modern identity claims can be historically consequential whether or not their proposed ancient continuity is demonstrable. They may influence heritage policy, language activism, electoral rhetoric, tourism, monument building, and cross-border cultural diplomacy. A source-controlled history records these effects while marking the boundary between remembered antiquity and independently documented chronology.

Sacred tradition and archaeology: neither confirmation nor dismissal by reflex

Archaeology and sacred tradition ask different questions. Excavation can date occupation, architecture, objects, environmental change, and rebuilding; it cannot directly excavate a literary character. Sacred tradition can preserve place-names, ritual routes, and social memory; it cannot by itself date a buried wall. Responsible research begins where the records can actually meet: documented occupation sequences, dated inscriptions, stratified monuments, old maps, endowment records, and the historical emergence of local names.

This avoids two symmetrical errors. The first is to declare an epic event proved because a place is sacred or anciently occupied. The second is to declare the sacred landscape historically meaningless because event chronology is uncertain. Janakpur is historically important in either case; the evidentiary category simply determines which claims can be made.

Janaka, Sita, and Mithila in modern regional identity

Janaka and Sita supply modern Mithila with exceptionally powerful figures of learned kingship, ethical debate, marriage, suffering, fertility, devotion, and cultural belonging. Their names appear in institutions, festivals, public art, literature, tourism, and political language. These uses create a bridge between ancient textual memory and modern regional self-description.

The historian should neither endorse nor ridicule such identity work. The analytical task is to date institutions, trace media and patronage, identify competing claims, and ask whose version of Mithila is being represented. Regional identity is strongest as a historical subject when its production can be followed through documents, organizations, performances, and material culture.

What Chapter 6 can establish with confidence

Established at the level of textual evidence: the critically edited Balakanda associates Janaka, Sita, and Mithila with the bow episode and royal marriage; Sita's origin is narrated through a furrow discovered during Janaka's ploughing; epithets such as Vaidehi, Maithili, and Janaki bind her to Videha, Mithila, and Janaka. The Ramayana exists in a large and variable manuscript and reception history rather than one unchanged textual form (Bhatt 1960; Goldman 1984; Richman 1991).

Established at the level of later social history: Janakpur is a major Sita-Rama pilgrimage centre; the extant Janaki Mandir and Vivah Panchami materialize sacred geography; modern heritage and tourism institutions publicly frame the city through the Ramayana. Strong scholarly inference: epic and later traditions have made Sita central to the cultural geography of Mithila. Unproven without independent evidence: exact epic dates, the archaeological identification of every narrated location, the equation of the epic Janaka with the Upanishadic Janaka as one person, and the claim that modern ritual or marriage practice is an unchanged survival from epic society.

Research agenda for a full-scale edition

Further research should deepen this chapter through the Baroda critical apparatus, manuscript catalogues, Maithili and Nepali Ramayana traditions, dated Janakpur endowment and temple records, inscriptions, architectural history, festival archives, oral-history collections, women's song corpora, historical photographs, maps, and cross-border pilgrimage records. Each class of source should remain tagged by date, provenance, and evidentiary reach.

Particular priority should be given to resolving the chronology of the present Janaki Mandir through archival or architectural evidence rather than repeating conflicting tourism dates; documenting the earliest datable uses of specific Janakpur

sacred-place names; and tracing when modern forms of Vivah Panchami, printed Janaki iconography, and regional cultural institutions took their present shape. These are answerable historical questions even when epic event chronology remains beyond proof.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Thakur, Upendra. History of Mithila: From the Earliest Times to 1556 A.D. 2nd ed. Mithila Institute, 1988.
- Thapar, Romila. Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300. Allen Lane, 2002.
- Richman, Paula, ed. Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia. University of California Press, 1991.
- Richman, Paula, and David L. Szanton, eds. India's Mithila Painting. University of Washington Press, 2025.
- Bhatt, Govindlal Hargovind, ed. The Valmiki-Ramayana, Critically Edited for the First Time. Vol. 1, Balakanda. Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960. Critical-edition project; later reprinted as The Valmiki-Ramayana: Critical Edition.
- Goldman, Robert P., trans. The Ramayana of Valmiki: An Epic of Ancient India. Vol. I, Balakanda. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. Translation and annotation based on the Baroda critical edition; paperback editions followed.
- Goldman, Robert P., and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman, trans. The Ramayana of Valmiki: The Complete English Translation. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022.
- Bose, Mandakranta, ed. The Ramayana Revisited. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/0195168321.001.0001>.
- Richman, Paula, and Rustom Bharucha, eds. Performing the Ramayana Tradition: Enactments, Interpretations, and Arguments. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197552506.001.0001>.
- Pollock, Sheldon. 'Ramayana and Political Imagination in India.' Journal of Asian Studies 52, no. 2 (1993): 261-297. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2059648>.
- UNESCO World Heritage Centre. 'Ram Janaki Temple.' Tentative List Ref. 5261, submitted by the Department of Archaeology, Nepal, 30 January 2008. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5261/>.
- Nepal Tourism Board. 'Janaki Mandir, Janakpur, Dhanusha.' Official destination page. <https://ntb.gov.np/janaki-mandir--janakpur--dhanusha>.

Nepal Tourism Board. 'Janakpur and Vivah Panchami: A Timeless Journey into Nepal's Sacred Heritage.' Official feature page.
<https://ntb.gov.np/en/janakpur-and-vivah-panchami>.

Adhikari, Shyamchandra. 'Impacts of Religious Tourism in Janakpur.' Research Nepal Journal of Development Studies 1, no. 2 (2018): 1-19.
<https://doi.org/10.3126/rnjds.v1i2.22423>.

Chapter 7. Vajji, the Licchavis, and Vaishali

A confederated political field

The Vajjis enter early Buddhist political narrative as a powerful corporate formation north of the Ganga, with the Licchavis of Vesali or Vaishali among its most visible constituents. Digha Nikaya 16 does not describe a territorial state in modern administrative terms. Instead it presents a political collective whose resilience depends on repeated meetings, concord, inherited rules, respect for elders, limits on coercion against women, maintenance of shrines, and protection of accomplished renunciants. These features support the historical importance of corporate institutions without supplying a complete constitution or census of political participants (Walshe 1995; Vajira and Story 1998; Thapar 1991).

The archive and its asymmetries

The political history of Vajji is reconstructed from sources written for purposes other than constitutional description. Buddhist canonical texts frame political conduct within moral and monastic concerns; Jain narratives place Mahavira within a sacred and kinship geography; archaeology recovers deposits, fortifications, objects, and religious monuments rather than the minutes of assemblies. Later pilgrims, colonial excavators, modern tourism, and regional memory add further layers. No one archive can therefore stand for the whole society. The strongest reconstruction is cumulative: identify what a source actually records, establish its date and genre as far as possible, compare independent evidence, and leave unresolved gaps visible rather than filling them with a seamless republican story (Singh 2008; Thapar 2002).

Vajji, Licchavi, Videha: names and constituencies

Vajji or Vriji, Licchavi, and Videha should not be used as interchangeable labels. Textual classifications vary in the number and names of groups associated with the Vajjian

political field, and different traditions foreground different constituencies. The Licchavis are especially prominent in Buddhist accounts of Vesali; Videha had its own older textual and regional history. Later scholarship sometimes organizes these names into fixed lists of clans, but the surviving traditions do not justify treating one list as an uncontested federal constitution. A safer formulation is that Vajji denoted a corporate political formation involving more than one elite group, with Licchavi power particularly visible at Vesali (Thapar 1991; Singh 2008).

Mishra's 1962 critique of the eight-clan formula

A useful mid-twentieth-century intervention came from Yogendra Mishra, who rejected the then-common inference that the Vajjian polity necessarily consisted of exactly eight constituent clans merely because a late commentarial judicial body was called *atthakulaka*. Mishra argued that a court of eight could not be converted automatically into eight federated peoples and observed that there was no evidence that its seats, if political representation was involved at all, were apportioned one to each clan. He likewise treated the Jain *Sutrakritanga* passage that names Ugras, Bhogas, Aikshvakas, Jnatris, Kauravas, Licchavis, warriors, Brahmanas, commanders, and others as a literary-religious setting insufficient by itself to establish a constitutional roster (Mishra 1962, pp. 103-106).

Mishra's objection remains important even where his own positive reconstruction is not followed. It gives historiographical depth to the caution adopted here: lists produced in different genres cannot be harmonized into a fixed federation simply because a complete roster is desirable. Association, geographical proximity, shared ritual or literary appearance, and formal membership in a political confederacy are different propositions. The number, status, and representative weight of Vajjian constituent groups therefore remain questions to be argued from each source rather than filled in from the word *atthakulaka* (Mishra 1962, pp. 103-106; Singh 2008).

Republic, oligarchy, or gana-sangha

Older scholarship often translated north Indian non-monarchical polities as 'republics', a vocabulary that drew attention to assemblies and collective rule but also encouraged comparison with modern representative democracy. Gana-sangha, corporate polity, clan oligarchy, and assembly polity are more cautious analytical terms because they do not imply universal citizenship, equal suffrage, or popular sovereignty. The presence of multiple men styled *raja* in traditions about such polities may indicate elite lineage leadership rather than a single monarch; it does not reveal how many households or social groups possessed political voice. The constitutional significance of assembly government is real, but its social reach must remain an empirical question rather than an assumption (Jayaswal 1924; Thapar 1991; Singh 2008).

Assemblies, concord, and the politics of procedure

The first two conditions of non-decline in Digha Nikaya 16 emphasize frequent, well-attended gatherings and concord in assembling, dispersing, and conducting public business. These clauses make procedure itself part of political strength. They suggest that collective decisions required recurrent face-to-face institutions and that factional paralysis was understood as a strategic weakness. Yet the passage does not identify an electorate, quorum, voting system, or representative ratio. 'Assembly' is therefore a secure textual category; the mechanism of decision within it is not. The later narrative, in which Magadhan policy turns toward producing discord, reinforces the political importance attributed to cohesion without proving that consensus was always achieved in practice (Vajira and Story 1998).

The seven conditions as normative evidence

The seven Vajjian conditions are best read as normative Buddhist evidence about political resilience. The text says that the Vajjis gather frequently, act in concord, respect established

rules, honour elders, refrain from abducting or detaining women and girls of good families, maintain shrines and their customary offerings, and protect arahants or accomplished renunciants. Because the Buddha then adapts a parallel structure for the monastic community, the passage is also literary and pedagogical: political order becomes a model through which institutional discipline is explained. Historical inference is possible, but a prescriptive ideal cannot be converted automatically into a factual description of every meeting, household, shrine, or religious patron (Walshe 1995; Vajira and Story 1998).

Vajjian “conditions of non-decline”: text, inference, and limits

Digha Nikāya 16 presents seven practices as reasons for collective resilience; it does not supply a complete constitution.

Textual condition	Historically plausible inference	What the passage does NOT establish
Frequent assemblies	Corporate deliberation mattered	Does not show who had voting rights
Concord in meetings and public affairs	Collective action was valued	Does not prove absence of faction
Respect for established rules	Custom and precedent constrained change	Translation as “constitution” can over-modernize
Respect for elders	Seniority and lineage authority mattered	Does not establish universal representation
No abduction or detention of women/girls	Inter-household violence and coercion were political concerns	Does not prove gender equality or female citizenship
Respect for shrines and established offerings	Sacred places were part of public order	Does not identify one state religion
Protection of accomplished renunciants	Religious specialists were treated as public assets	Normative ideal is not a census of actual patronage
Source-control rule: the seven conditions are normative Buddhist evidence about imagined political resilience. They support corporate institutions, but not a modern democratic constitution.		

Diagram 12. Vajjian 'conditions of non-decline': text, inference, and limits. The diagram follows the seven conditions in Digha Nikaya 16 and separates what the passage explicitly states from historically plausible inference and claims it cannot establish.

Credit: Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026.
Analytical framework based on Digha Nikaya 16 (Vajira and Story 1998; Walshe 1995), Thapar 1991, and Singh 2008. Rights: © Gajendra Thakur, 2026.

Source links: <https://vipassana.org/canon/digha/dn16.html> ; <https://academic.oup.com/book/1959>

Rules, precedent, and constitutional vocabulary

A further condition states that the Vajjis do not casually enact new rules or abolish established ones but proceed according to inherited norms. Some English translations render the key phrase with the modern word 'constitution'. That translation is suggestive but can over-modernize the evidence. What the passage more securely establishes is a positive valuation of precedent, continuity, and recognized rules. It cannot tell us whether all norms were written, whether they were uniform across constituent groups, or which authority adjudicated conflicts between custom and innovation. The clause is therefore valuable evidence for a political culture of rule-bound continuity, not a surviving constitutional document (Vajira and Story 1998; Walshe 1995).

Modern constitutional vocabulary in the historiography of Vaishali

Mishra's chapter on the 'Constitution of the Vajjian Republic' is especially revealing as a document of twentieth-century historiography. He explicitly noted that the arrangement of topics in that chapter drew help from *The Constitution of India* (1949). The seven Vajjian conditions were accordingly presented as 'Directive Principles of State Policy'; raja, uparaja, senapati, and bhandagarika were organized under a 'Central Executive'; the 7,707 rajas of later narrative were discussed as a 'Central Legislature or Parliament'; and a sequence reconstructed chiefly from late commentarial material was described as a 'Central Judiciary' (Mishra 1962, pp. 143-150).

That organization made older evidence legible to readers familiar with a modern constitution, but it could also create a degree of institutional precision that the sources do not independently sustain. Mishra himself acknowledged the lateness of some judicial evidence and the fragmentary nature of local-government information. His chapter is therefore most useful here in two ways: first, as a guide to the textual loci on assemblies, officers, courts, and precedent; and second, as

evidence for the historiographical tendency to translate gana-sangha institutions through modern constitutional categories. The present book retains the underlying evidence while avoiding automatic equations with cabinet, parliament, electorate, citizenship, or a modern appellate hierarchy (Mishra 1962, pp. 143-150; Thapar 1991).

Elders, lineage, and unequal participation

Respect for elders is another condition of collective welfare. In a lineage-based political order, seniority could structure memory, ritual authority, dispute settlement, and eligibility for leadership. The clause also warns against romanticizing the polity as socially level. If elders were a recognized authority, age, lineage standing, wealth, ritual status, or office probably differentiated participants. The sources are much clearer about elite deliberation than about cultivators, artisans, bonded dependants, servants, or people outside dominant lineages. Corporate government could constrain one-person monarchy while remaining sharply hierarchical. The distinction between non-monarchical rule and egalitarian society is essential to any defensible use of the word republic (Thapar 1991; Singh 2008).

Women in the welfare conditions

The prohibition on abducting and detaining women and girls of good families is one of the most striking Vajjian clauses. It places coercion against women within the field of political stability rather than treating it as a purely private matter. At minimum, the text recognizes that violence affecting marriage, household alliances, and lineage honour could generate conflict between powerful groups. The qualification 'of good families' also exposes the status bias of the normative formulation. The passage does not establish female voting rights, legal equality, or the security of all women. It should therefore be used neither to erase gendered subordination nor to dismiss the political importance attached to protecting certain women from elite predation (Vajira and Story 1998).

Shrines, offerings, and public religion

The condition concerning shrines within and outside the city places sacred sites within the maintenance of public order. The Vajjis are praised for honouring established cult places and continuing customary offerings. This suggests that political legitimacy was tied to ritual landscapes and inherited obligations that were not reducible to Buddhist institutions. Indeed, the passage refers to existing shrines before turning separately to the protection of arahants. The text therefore preserves a plural religious field in which civic cult, local sacred geography, and renunciant communities could coexist. It does not identify a single state religion, nor does it prove that every shrine enjoyed the same patronage or theological interpretation (Walshe 1995).

Renunciants as protected persons

The final condition describes the protection of arahants so that worthy renunciants might come to the realm and those already present might live there peacefully. Read historically, the clause shows how a Buddhist author could imagine religious specialists as assets of a well-governed polity. Protection promised prestige, merit, teaching, and the circulation of people across political boundaries. It also implies that insecurity could alter religious mobility. Yet this is a normative ideal, not a census of monasteries or a budget for patronage. The wider eastern Gangetic religious field included Buddhist, Jain, Brahmanical, and other ascetic or ritual traditions whose relations with political elites varied across time (Bronkhorst 2007; Singh 2008).

Ajatasattu, Vassakara, and the Magadhan problem

Digha Nikaya 16 frames its discussion of Vajjian welfare through Ajatasattu of Magadha's desire to wage war against the Vajjis. His minister Vassakara is sent to consult the Buddha; after hearing the seven conditions, he concludes that the Vajjis cannot easily be overcome in open battle and that discord or

treachery would be required. The episode is historically important as a Buddhist representation of interstate rivalry and the strategic value of political cohesion. It is not a military dispatch, and absolute chronology remains entangled with debated dates for the Buddha and early Magadhan rulers. The strongest inference is relative: Vajjian corporate power was remembered as a serious obstacle within the expansion of Magadha (Vajira and Story 1998; Thapar 2002).

Pataligama and strategic geography

Later in the same sutta, the Magadhan ministers Sunidha and Vassakara are said to be fortifying Pataligama in defence against the Vajjis. This narrative link is significant because it places the Vajjian conflict within the Ganga crossing and riverine geography that would later become central to Pataliputra. It should not be read as a precise construction report for every archaeological phase of that city. Rather, the passage preserves a memory in which control of routes, fortified positions, and the north-south river corridor mattered to competition between Magadha and communities north of the Ganga. Political geography here is relational: Vaishali's history is inseparable from the larger middle Gangetic field (Vajira and Story 1998; Singh 2008).

Confederation, faction, and diplomacy

A confederated polity must solve problems that a centralized monarchy solves differently: coordinating constituent elites, allocating military burdens, managing disputes, and maintaining collective commitments. The Vassakara episode makes internal discord a political vulnerability, which may reflect the real strategic problem of corporate cohesion even if the narrative is literary. Confederation does not imply constant harmony. Competition among lineages or settlements could coexist with common assemblies and joint defence. Nor does the existence of a shared Vajjian identity require every constituent group to surrender local institutions. The concept is most useful

when treated as a layered political field rather than a miniaturized modern federation with fixed ministries and mapped jurisdictions (Thapar 1991).

Buddhist and Jain memories of the Magadha-Vajji war

Mishra's reconstruction of the fall of the Vajjian polity is valuable above all because he places Buddhist and Jain narratives side by side instead of pretending that they give one identical war chronicle. In his synthesis, the Buddhist tradition foregrounds Ajatasattu's consultation through Vassakara, the seven conditions of Vajjian strength, diplomatic subversion, and the fortification of Pataligama. Jain materials, by contrast, preserve stories of Chetaka, Halla and Vehalla, wider alliances, extended battles, and extraordinary weapons. Mishra explicitly recognized that the Buddhist and Jain versions disagree in important details, even though he himself tried to infer a period of difficult and protracted warfare behind them (Mishra 1962, pp. 256-263).

For the present reconstruction, the disagreement is historically more secure than any harmonized battlefield sequence. The two traditions should be treated as separate communities of political and religious memory, transmitted through texts of different dates and purposes. Claims about a multi-year siege, named coalition totals, particular weapons, the death of Chetaka, or a flight of Licchavis to Nepal remain tradition-specific unless independently supported. What can be stated with greater confidence is that the expansion of Magadha was remembered as confronting powerful Vajjian resistance and that cohesion, dissension, strategic riverine positions, and fortification became central explanatory themes (Mishra 1962, pp. 256-263; Vajira and Story 1998).

Social hierarchy beyond the assembly

Political texts naturally privilege rulers, ministers, lineage leaders, and religious specialists. The labour sustaining Vesali is less visible: cultivators produced food, craftspeople made

vehicles, ornaments, pottery, and tools, carriers moved goods, and service labour maintained elite and religious households. Archaeological deposits record some of these activities more directly than canonical narrative, but they rarely identify the legal status of individual workers. Caste-like hierarchy, kinship, slavery or bondage, hired service, and occupational specialization must therefore be reconstructed cautiously from wider early-historic evidence rather than read out of the assembly passages. The silence of constitutional narrative about ordinary producers is itself an archive of unequal visibility (Singh 2008; Thapar 1991).

Ambapali, property, and patronage

The Mahaparinibbana Sutta's account of Ambapali complicates any political history limited to male assemblies. It depicts a celebrated courtesan who owns or controls a mango grove, travels with substantial retinue, secures the Buddha's acceptance of her meal invitation before the Licchavis, refuses their attempt to buy that invitation even for an extravagant sum, and then donates the grove to the Buddhist community. The episode is a literary narrative, not a land deed, but it presents a woman with wealth, property-like control, public status, and independent patronage. At the same time her social identity as a courtesan cannot be generalized into a claim about all women's legal capacities. The value of the passage lies in its specific, status-conscious visibility (Vajira and Story 1998).

Urban economy and tributary hinterland

Vesali appears in texts as a place of carriages, elite display, gardens, religious visitors, and tributary lands. Such imagery is compatible with an urban centre drawing resources from a rural hinterland and connected to wider routes, but literary abundance is not a statistical economic survey. Archaeological settlement, ceramics, coins, seals, fortifications, and craft debris provide independent evidence for early-historic scale and exchange. The city should therefore be understood as a node

within agricultural and riverine systems rather than as an isolated ceremonial capital. Changing channels, roads, markets, and political borders would have altered its hinterland across centuries, so 'Vaishali' need not denote an identical urban footprint in every textual and archaeological phase (Deva and Mishra 1961; Sinha and Roy 1969).

Mishra's textual dossier on crafts, education, revenue, and routes

Mishra's social and economic chapters assembled a useful dossier of textual indications that can supplement, but not replace, archaeological evidence. He drew attention to artisans and service occupations such as tailors, goldsmiths, jewellers, and barbers; to festivals and elite display; and to the tradition of the Licchavi Mahali travelling to Takshasila for instruction and later teaching others. In the economic sphere he collected references to agriculture, commerce, the taking over of heirless property, income associated with a city gate, and movement by road and river. His route discussion links Vaishali with the Ganga-Gandak system and with Rajagriha, Sravasti, Kapilavastu, Sahajati, and other places known from Buddhist itineraries (Mishra 1962, pp. 250-255).

The evidentiary value of this dossier is relational rather than statistical. Mishra himself treated the reported figure of one lakh for gate income as traditional, and literary descriptions of prosperity cannot establish population, tax yield, or trade volume. Route narratives are stronger for demonstrating remembered connectivity than for measuring traffic. Used with those limits, the material helps recover dimensions of Vaishali that constitutional narratives obscure: skilled labour, education, festivals, fiscal claims, river crossings, and overland movement formed part of the social world in which elite assemblies and renunciant institutions operated (Mishra 1962, pp. 250-255).

Vaishali as a Buddhist landscape

Buddhist traditions connect Vesali with repeated visits of the Buddha, Ambapali's grove, shrines, monastic residence, the narrative of his final journey, relic distribution, and the later memory of a disciplinary council. These associations accumulated across texts and monuments of different dates. A stupa or pillar in the modern archaeological zone is not automatically the physical trace of a named canonical episode; attribution depends on excavation, stratigraphy, inscriptions, architectural sequence, and the history of later pilgrimage. The proper historical object is therefore a layered Buddhist landscape whose sacred meanings were repeatedly renewed, not a map on which every story can be assigned to a surviving ruin (Sinha and Roy 1969; Singh 2008).

Vaishali as a Jain landscape

Jain tradition likewise places Mahavira's life and kinship world in the Vaishali region and associates his birth with Kundagrama or a related locality in the greater Vajjian landscape. These traditions make the area central to Jain sacred geography, but their biographies are transmitted within sectarian textual histories and should be treated with the same source criticism applied to Buddhist narratives. Shared regional setting does not make Buddhist and Jain accounts interchangeable witnesses to one event sequence. Their overlap is historically important because it demonstrates the density of renunciant, mercantile, kinship, and pilgrimage networks in the eastern Gangetic plain; their differences preserve distinct communities of memory and doctrine (Dundas 2002; Bronkhorst 2007).

The Second Buddhist Council: historical core and disputed consequences

Vinaya traditions of several Buddhist schools preserve an important dispute at Vaishali, conventionally called the Second Buddhist Council and usually placed by the traditions roughly a

century after the Buddha. The accounts differ over details, lists of disputed practices, participants, chronology, and the relationship of the event to later schism. Modern scholarship has therefore separated a probable historical core - a disciplinary controversy associated with Vaishali - from attempts to harmonize all school narratives into one transcript. Prebish's review of the council literature remains useful precisely because it treats the sources comparatively and warns against making the Vaishali dispute identical with every later account of sectarian division (Prebish 1974).

Identifying Vaishali: Basarh and the archaeological argument

The identification of the Basarh complex and neighbouring mounds with ancient Vaishali rests on cumulative historical geography rather than one spectacular object. Excavation, surface topography, fortification, ceramics, seals and sealings, religious remains, routes, and the correspondence of the broader landscape with textual and pilgrim descriptions reinforce one another. At the same time, the archaeological zone contains material from many periods, and excavated trenches sample only a fraction of the ancient settlement. A responsible site history therefore distinguishes the strong identification of the urban complex from weaker attempts to name every mound after a textual palace, assembly hall, monastery, or battlefield (Deva and Mishra 1961; Sinha and Roy 1969).

Excavation history and the problem of samples

The published excavations of 1950 and 1958-1962 remain foundational for Vaishali, but they belong to particular stages in South Asian archaeological practice. Trench placement, ceramic typology, recording conventions, conservation, and the questions investigators asked all affect what can be reconstructed from the reports. More recent ASI work at Raja Vishal ka Garh adds evidence about defensive phases, while government reports document new finds and exposures. Later work does not make the earlier reports obsolete; it changes the

questions that can be asked of them. Re-excavation, geophysics, sediment analysis, and systematic landscape survey can refine the urban sequence without assuming that one campaign has recovered the whole city (Deva and Mishra 1961; Sinha and Roy 1969; Archaeological Survey of India, Patna Circle).

Raja Vishal ka Garh: fortification before 'parliament'

Raja Vishal ka Garh is one of the most prominent fortified mounds in the Vaishali archaeological zone and is widely presented in popular and tourism literature as the assembly or 'parliament house' of the Licchavis. That identification is a modern historical interpretation, not an excavated inscription naming the building's constitutional function. The Archaeological Survey of India's Patna Circle reports that recent excavation across the ramparts revealed three defensive-wall phases assigned respectively to the Sunga, Kushana, and early Gupta periods, while other finds at the site range from the sixth century BCE to the Mughal period. The mound is therefore crucial evidence for long urban duration and fortification, but the currently reported wall phases cannot simply be projected back as the assembly architecture of the Buddha's lifetime (Archaeological Survey of India, Patna Circle, 'Monuments Details').

Raja Vishal ka Garh: separating archaeology from constitutional legend

The fortified mound is archaeologically important, but the popular "parliament house" label is an interpretation, not an excavated inscription.

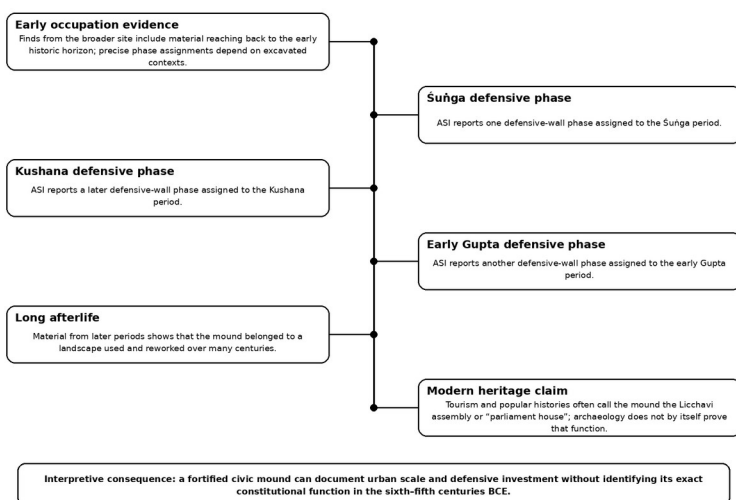


Diagram 13. Raja Vishal ka Garh: archaeology versus constitutional legend. The diagram separates site occupation, ASI-reported Sunga, Kushana, and early-Gupta defensive phases, long later use, and the modern 'parliament house' interpretation.

Credit: Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026.

Archaeological phase summary checked against Archaeological Survey of India, Patna Circle, and Government of India excavation reporting; the modern parliament-house label is treated as heritage interpretation. Rights: © Gajendra Thakur, 2026.

Source links: <https://asipatnacircle.gov.in/monuments-details> ; https://culture.gov.in/files/annual_reports_document/2011-12_cdn_28062023.pdf

Fortification phases and urban duration

The ASI phase sequence makes two historical points possible at once. First, the broader site preserves material reaching back into the early-historic horizon, so the importance of Vaishali cannot be reduced to later fortifications. Second, the defensive walls currently assigned to Sunga, Kushana, and early Gupta phases demonstrate repeated investment in the mound after the age conventionally associated with the Vajjian confederacy.

Fortification was therefore a long-duration urban practice, not a frozen monument to one constitution. Walls can defend residents, regulate movement, express authority, and reorganize settlement space; their meaning changes with each rebuilding. Stratigraphy is indispensable because an imposing surviving rampart may combine centuries of construction and erosion (Archaeological Survey of India, Patna Circle; Sinha and Roy 1969).

Pottery, coins, seals, and administrative visibility

Ceramics and small finds provide the chronological texture that monumental narratives often lack. Black-slipped ware, Northern Black Polished Ware, red wares, coins, terracottas, beads, seals, and sealings from the Vaishali zone help reconstruct occupation, exchange, craft practice, and changing administrative visibility. None of these categories is an ethnic badge. A seal can identify an office, person, or transaction only when its legend, context, and reading are secure; a coin can demonstrate circulation without mapping a political frontier. The archaeological history of Vaishali is strongest when assemblages are tied to documented layers and compared across excavations rather than selected as isolated proofs for episodes remembered in texts (Deva and Mishra 1961; Sinha and Roy 1969).

The relic stupa and attribution

At Harpur Basant, the ASI Patna Circle identifies an excavated stupa as one of the relic stupas associated with the distribution of the Buddha's corporeal remains and reports an inner stupa about 8.07 metres in diameter assigned to roughly the fifth century BCE. The excavation also yielded a relic casket with ashes mixed with earth, along with a punch-marked coin, beads, and gold objects. This is important official archaeological attribution, but the language of identification should remain visible: an archaeological structure, its contents, its phase, and the canonical story of relic distribution are distinct evidentiary

steps. The finds support an early and important relic cult at Vaishali; historical certainty about the biological identity of ashes requires a different standard than traditional attribution (Archaeological Survey of India, Patna Circle).

Kolhua, pillars, stupas, and multi-period sacred space

The Kolhua complex, including the lion-capital pillar, stupas, monastic remains, and later conservation landscape, illustrates the same principle of layered sacred space. Its visible elements do not belong to one construction moment. Mauryan imperial patronage, later Buddhist building, pilgrimage, repair, abandonment, rediscovery, excavation, and conservation all contributed to the place encountered today. Chapter 10 treats the imperial and pilgrim evidence in greater detail; here the methodological point is that Vaishali's political history cannot be read from modern visual proximity alone. A pillar beside a stupa does not make every nearby wall Vajjian, just as a modern shrine does not erase the archaeological significance of an older mound.

Later pilgrims and remembered Vaishali

Faxian and Xuanzang visited a landscape already centuries removed from the period of the Buddha and the early Vajjian polity. Their itineraries are therefore evidence for remembered sacred geography, surviving or ruined monuments, routes, and monastic traditions in their own times. When their accounts help identify Vaishali, they do so relationally: distances, directions, clusters of monuments, and local narratives are compared with archaeology and topography. They cannot serve as eyewitnesses to the foundation of the city or the original use of every monument. Pilgrimage preserves historical memory, but it also selects, interprets, and sometimes relocates it (Legge 1886; Beal 1884).

Modern heritage, democracy, and regional identity

Modern public history often celebrates Vaishali as the world's first republic or democracy and identifies Raja Vishal ka Garh as an ancient parliament. These formulations have powerful civic and regional meaning: they connect archaeological place, anti-monarchical political memory, tourism, school history, and Bihar's claim to an early tradition of collective government. Historical analysis should neither ridicule nor silently repeat them. The secure evidence is that ancient sources remember corporate assemblies and non-monarchical political practices; the uncertain step is equating those institutions with universal modern democracy or assigning a specific excavated mound a parliamentary function. Heritage language is itself historical evidence for how the past is mobilized in the present.

Vajji and Mithila: connected but not identical

The Vajjian field and the historical region later called Mithila overlap in broader north Bihar memory but should not be collapsed. Videha, Licchavi, Vajji, Tirabhukti, Tirhut, and Mithila enter the archive in different genres and periods. Political relations, marriage, routes, language, ritual, and later regional historiography connected them, yet a first-millennium BCE confederacy cannot simply be redrawn as the timeless constitutional state of all later Mithila. The same caution applies across the modern India-Nepal border: ancient movement through the north Gangetic and Tarai corridor preceded the international frontier, but modern national territory should not be projected backward as an ancient jurisdiction (Singh 2008; Thapar 2002).

Was Videha a constituent of Vajji? Mishra's dissenting reconstruction

One reason the distinction must remain explicit is that the political status of Videha in the age associated with the Vajjian gana-sangha has itself been disputed. Mishra devoted a separate section to challenging an older scholarly model in which the

Videhan monarchy was thought to have become republican after Karala Janaka and then to have entered an eight-clan Vajjian confederacy. He argued instead that Videha or Mithila remained monarchical during the sixth century BCE and survived the Magadha-Vajji conflict, only later falling to Mahapadma Nanda. His case drew on the *Dipavamsa*, *Lalitavistara*, Gilgit Buddhist materials, Puranic dynastic traditions, and *Patanjali*, while also rejecting the *atthakulaka*-based eight-clan argument (Mishra 1962, pp. 117-123).

Mishra's conclusion should not be promoted here from a disputed reconstruction into a settled fact. Several of the texts on which it depends are late, composite, legendary, or difficult to date against the sixth century BCE; transmitted royal lists cannot be treated as contemporary administrative registers; and the absence of Videha from one list of mahajanapadas cannot by itself determine its constitutional status. What is enduringly important is the question he forced into view: 'Videha', 'Vajji', and 'Licchavi' cannot be made synonymous by assumption, and the formal membership of Videha in a Vajjian political structure requires evidence rather than retrospective cartography (Mishra 1962, pp. 117-123; Thapar 1991; Singh 2008).

It is therefore useful to separate three propositions that older reconstructions often fused: first, whether a Videhan monarchy existed in earlier or contemporaneous traditions; second, whether people and territories associated with Videha interacted with, bordered, or at times fell within Vajjian influence; and third, whether Videha was formally a constituent unit of a Vajjian confederacy in the sixth century BCE. Evidence relevant to one proposition does not automatically prove the others. Mishra's 1962 dissent is an essential historiographical reference point precisely because it demonstrates how much turns on keeping those questions separate (Mishra 1962, pp. 117-123).

Evidentiary conclusions

Vaishali offers unusually rich opportunities because political narrative, religious memory, archaeology, monuments, and modern heritage all converge. That density also produces a special risk of over-identification. The best-supported reconstruction recognizes a powerful Vajjian corporate polity with important Licchavi participation; values the seven conditions as evidence for assembly, concord, precedent, seniority, protection, sacred obligation, and renunciant mobility; treats Magadhan rivalry as a major remembered political transformation; and understands Basarh-Vaishali as a long-lived urban and sacred landscape. What remains unproven includes universal democratic citizenship, a complete federal constitution, and the identification of Raja Vishal ka Garh as a fifth-century-BCE parliament. Preserving those distinctions strengthens rather than diminishes the historical importance of Vajji.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Walshe, Maurice, trans. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya*. Wisdom Publications, 1995.
- Vajira, Sister, and Francis Story, trans. *Last Days of the Buddha: The Mahaparinibbana Sutta*. Revised edition. Buddhist Publication Society, 1998. <https://vipassana.org/canon/digha/dn16.html>.
- Deva, Krishna, and Vijayakanta Mishra. *Vaisali Excavations, 1950*. Vaisali Sangh, 1961.
- Sinha, B. P., and Sita Ram Roy. *Vaisali Excavations, 1958-1962*. Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Bihar, 1969.
- Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Pearson Education India, 2008.
- Thapar, Romila. *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*. Allen Lane, 2002.
- Thapar, Romila. *From Lineage to State: Social Formations of the Mid-First Millennium BC in the Ganga Valley*. Oxford University Press, 1991. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195626759.001.0001>.
- Jayaswal, K. P. *Hindu Polity: A Constitutional History of India in Hindu Times*. Butterworth & Co. (India), 1924.
- Mishra, Yogendra. *An Early History of Vaisali: From the Earliest Times to the Fall of the Vajjian Republic, circa 484 B.C.* Delhi, Patna and Varanasi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1962.

- Prebish, Charles S. 'A Review of Scholarship on the Buddhist Councils.' *The Journal of Asian Studies* 33, no. 2 (1974): 239-254.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2052186>.
- Dundas, Paul. *The Jains*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2002.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes. *Greater Magadha: Studies in the Culture of Early India*. Brill, 2007.
- Legge, James, trans. *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*. Clarendon Press, 1886.
- Beal, Samuel, trans. *Si-yu-ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World*. 2 vols. Trubner, 1884.
- Archaeological Survey of India, Patna Circle. 'Monuments Details': Relic Stupa, Harpur Basant (Vaishali), and Mound known as Raja Vishal ka Garh. <https://asipatnacircle.gov.in/monuments-details>.
- Ministry of Culture, Government of India. Annual Report 2011-12. Excavation reporting for Raja Vishal ka Garh, Vaishali. https://culture.gov.in/files/annual_reports_document/2011-12_cdn_28062023.pdf.
- Department of Tourism, Government of Bihar. 'Raja Vishal ka Garh.' Official destination page. <https://tourism.bihar.gov.in/en/destinations/vaishali/raja-vishal-ka-garh>.

Chapter 8. Anga, Champa, and the Magadhan horizon

Anga as a historical problem

Anga is one of the clearest examples of why political geography must be reconstructed from several different kinds of evidence. Buddhist lists place Anga among the major polities of northern India, usually beside Magadha; Jain texts also preserve Anga within an eastern political and religious horizon. Later Brahmanical and epic traditions give the region additional genealogies and heroes, while archaeology at Champa documents a long-lived fortified settlement whose material sequence cannot be equated automatically with any one literary story. The historical task is therefore not to choose one archive and make all others conform to it. It is to identify what each source can securely establish and where the categories of kingdom, city, sacred place, and remembered homeland diverge (Singh 2008; Thapar 2002).

Mahajanapada lists and political scale

In the Anguttara Nikaya, Anga appears in the conventional list of sixteen major countries or mahajanapadas. The list is important because it places Anga in a remembered system of large-scale political units, but the form is schematic rather than cartographic. The names are not accompanied by surveyed borders, population totals, or a constitutional description. Different Buddhist and Jain texts transmit partly different lists, which shows that the number and sequence served classificatory as well as geographical purposes. Anga's appearance is therefore strong evidence for political prominence in the eastern Gangetic world, not a warrant for drawing a fixed frontier around modern districts (Singh 2008; Thapar 2002).

Early Brahmanical references and the danger of ethnic reading

Anga is also named in early Brahmanical textual traditions, including the Atharvavedic corpus, where eastern peoples can be represented through the cultural judgments of authors located elsewhere. Such references are evidence for the existence of names and for perceptions of distance or difference; they should not be turned into timeless ethnic descriptions. A stigmatizing or exoticizing passage tells us about the classificatory world of the text as well as about the people named. The emergence of Anga in several textual traditions is historically significant, but linguistic labels, ritual status, political membership, and archaeological culture must remain separate unless independent evidence connects them (Bronkhorst 2007; Singh 2008).

Epic Anga and Karna: tradition rather than regnal history

The Mahabharata's powerful association of Karna with Anga has had an immense afterlife in regional memory. It is indispensable for the history of literature, performance, place-making, and modern Anga identity. It is not, however, a securely dated administrative record of an early kingdom. Epic composition and redaction extended over centuries, and the political geography of a narrative can preserve older memories, contemporary realities, later editorial knowledge, or combinations of all three. The responsible formulation is therefore that epic tradition makes Anga central to Karna's kingship narrative; archaeology at Champa or Bhagalpur cannot be assigned to Karna without independent evidence (Bengal Government 1911; Singh 2008).

Champa as the capital in Buddhist textual geography

Buddhist sources repeatedly connect the country of the Angas with the city of Champa. In the Sonadanda Sutta, the Buddha is represented as travelling among the Angas and arriving at Champa, where he stays beside Gaggara's lotus pond. This is unusually useful political geography because country and city

occur in the same narrative frame. Even so, the text does not give the urban perimeter, coordinates, or a district map. The association should be combined with archaeology and later itinerary evidence rather than treated as a self-sufficient location proof. The modern identification near Bhagalpur becomes persuasive through cumulative topography, surviving place names, excavated fortification and occupation, and the long history of scholarly comparison (Walshe 1995; Chakrabarti 2001).

Sonadanda's grant and Bimbisara's authority

The Sonadanda Sutta provides a firmer anchor for Magadhan power than many later conquest stories. It describes the brahmin Sonadanda as residing at Champa in a prosperous holding granted by King Seniya Bimbisara of Magadha as a royal gift with royal authority. Whatever the precise institutional translation of the Pali terms, the narrative presupposes that the Magadhan king could make a prestigious landed grant at Champa. That does not supply the date or military sequence by which Anga came under his authority, but it is direct textual evidence for remembered Magadhan control within the city's political economy. It also links state power to landed endowment, brahmin status, grain and resources rather than reducing expansion to battlefield conquest alone (Walshe 1995).

Bimbisara's conquest: what can and cannot be said

Buddhist and later historical traditions remember Bimbisara as the Magadhan ruler who subdued Anga. Modern histories commonly describe a defeat of an Anga king, often named Brahmadatta, followed by annexation. The relative political development - Anga's incorporation into the Magadhan sphere before Ajatasattu's later expansion - is plausible and consistent with the Sonadanda Sutta's representation of Bimbisara granting land at Champa. The exact battle narrative, regnal dates, and sequence are less secure because early Magadhan chronology is reconstructed from texts transmitted long after

the events they purport to describe. This chapter therefore distinguishes the well-supported transformation in political control from conventional precision about a single campaign (Thapar 2002; Singh 2008).

A city ranked among great cities

The Mahaparinibbana Sutta gives Champa an important place in remembered urban hierarchy. When Ananda asks that the Buddha not die at small Kusinara, he names Champa together with Rajagaha, Savatthi, Saketa, Kosambi, and Varanasi as major cities where wealthy nobles, brahmins, and householders could honour the Buddha's remains. The passage is not an urban census, and its rhetorical purpose is to contrast great centres with an apparently minor town. Yet it is valuable evidence that the text's compilers imagined Champa among cities characterized by substantial elite and household wealth. That literary urban rank can be compared with, but not mechanically dated by, the archaeological evidence for fortification, wells, coins, craft goods, and dense occupation (Walshe 1995; Chakrabarti 2009).

Gaggara's lotus pond and urban ecology

The repeated association of Champa with Gaggara's lotus pond reminds us that early cities were ecological landscapes, not only walls and streets. Ponds, wells, river channels, marshes, gardens, and seasonal water regimes affected residence, ritual, transport, waste disposal, and food supply. The literary pond cannot be identified with a modern water body merely because of proximity or name resemblance, but its narrative role is historically useful: audiences could imagine a major city whose religious gatherings took place beside managed or recognized water. Excavated ring-wells, brick wells, and drains add an independent material dimension to that urban-water history, though they belong to particular archaeological phases rather than automatically to the lifetime of the Buddha (Indian Archaeology 1970-71; 1982-83).

Jain Campa and Mahavira's itinerary

Jain tradition gives Campa a second major sacred geography. The Kalpa Sutra, in Hermann Jacobi's translation, lists rainy seasons spent by Mahavira in Campa and Prishticampa, alongside longer stays at Vaishali-Vanijagrama, Rajagriha-Nalanda, and Mithila. The list is a sectarian biographical tradition rather than a travel diary, yet it establishes the importance of Campa within the remembered circuit of Jain teaching and monastic residence. Its value increases when compared with Buddhist evidence that also treats the city as a major eastern centre. Convergence between independent religious traditions supports urban significance; it does not mean that both transmit identical chronology, topography, or institutional details (Jacobi 1884; Dundas 2002).

Merchants in narrative and the problem of economic inference

Later Buddhist narrative traditions repeatedly use Champa as a point of departure for merchants. The Mahajanaka Jataka, for example, sends its protagonist on a trading voyage from Champa toward Suvannabhumi before shipwreck. Such stories are valuable evidence for the cultural imagination of commerce, river-to-sea connectivity, risk, wealth, and distant horizons. They are not shipping registers and cannot prove that every narrated route operated in the same form at the story's dramatic date. The appropriate use is comparative: literary traditions of merchants and long-distance movement are set beside the city's Ganga location, excavated coinage and craft goods, and the wider archaeology of eastern exchange. Convergence supports commercial importance while leaving the scale and destinations of actual trade open to further evidence (Cowell and Rouse 1907).

Riverine commerce before a seaport narrative

Champa's position in the Ganga system made river transport a central possibility, but the city should not automatically be called a maritime port. Goods and travellers could move down

the Ganga toward deltaic and coastal centres without ocean-going vessels sailing directly from the urban riverbank. The distinction matters because later literary narratives may compress several stages of transport into one journey. Riverboats, ferries, transshipment points, caravan routes, and downstream ports could form one commercial chain. Historical geography should therefore reconstruct a corridor from inland production and markets through the Ganga to eastern outlets, rather than imagine a single unchanging sea harbour at Champa (Chakrabarti 2001; Singh 2008).

Anga and Campā: four evidence streams
 Each stream answers different historical questions; none can substitute automatically for the others.

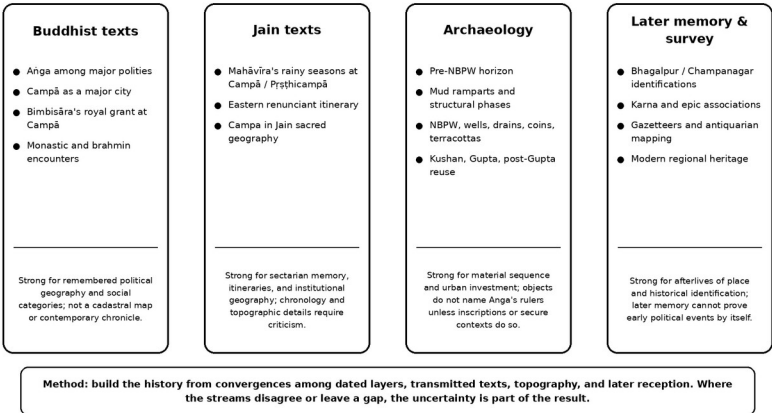


Diagram 14. Anga and Champa: four evidence streams. Buddhist and Jain textual geography, archaeology, and later survey or memory are treated as distinct archives whose convergences strengthen an argument but whose differences must remain visible.

Credit: Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026. Based on Digha Nikaya 4 and 16, Kalpa Sutra, published Champa excavation reports, and modern archaeological/historical synthesis. Rights: © Gajendra Thakur, 2026.

Source links: <https://www.palicanon.org/index.php/sutta-pitaka/digha-nikaya/dn4-so-ada-a-sutta-about-so-ada-a> ; <https://sacred-texts.com/jai/sbe22/index.htm> ; <https://nmma.nic.in/nmma/IAReview.do>

Identifying ancient Champa near Bhagalpur

The identification of ancient Champa with the Champanagar-Nathnagar area near modern Bhagalpur is cumulative rather than dependent on name resemblance alone. Buddhist and Jain texts place Champa in eastern Gangetic political and sacred geography; later pilgrims and antiquarians attempted to relate those descriptions to the modern landscape; the survival of Champa-related place names kept the association visible; and excavation exposed a large, long-lived settlement with fortification and early-historic material. Colonial gazetteers themselves recorded uncertainty about exact topographic equations, which is a useful warning. The secure historical claim is the identification of the broader archaeological zone; the exact position of every ancient neighbourhood, gate, pond, or palace remains a more difficult question (Bengal Government 1911; Chakrabarti 2001).

Excavation history: a city recovered by campaigns

Modern archaeological knowledge of Champa was built through repeated field seasons rather than a single definitive excavation. Patna University's Department of Ancient Indian History and Archaeology investigated the site across several campaigns beginning in the late 1960s and continuing in later decades, with results summarized in the Archaeological Survey of India's annual Indian Archaeology - A Review. Different trenches targeted ramparts, habitation, areas outside the defence, and the relationship between structural phases. Because objectives and trench locations changed, the published sequence must be read trench by trench before being generalized to the whole settlement. A composite history is possible, but it should always state when a phase is local to one cutting rather than city-wide (Indian Archaeology 1970-71; 1971-72; 1974-75; 1982-83).

Pre-NBPW occupation below the urban horizon

Later campaigns pushed the sequence earlier. The 1974-75 review reports a deposit beneath the first mud-rampart containing coarse black-and-red ware forms and explicitly describes this as the earliest occupation at the site prior to the NBPW phase. The 1982-83 review, undertaken partly to check earlier results concerning the pre-NBPW phase, likewise records about a metre of coarse black-and-red, black, and red ware over natural soil. These reports do not by themselves produce an absolute date for the earliest settlement. Their importance is stratigraphic: Champa's material history begins before the better-known NBPW-bearing urban horizon (Indian Archaeology 1974-75; 1982-83).

NBPW is a horizon, not a city label

Northern Black Polished Ware is prominent in Champa's early-historic deposits, but it cannot be treated as a synonym for the Anga kingdom or for urbanism itself. Excavation reports record NBPW together with black, black-and-red, red, and grey wares and associate later portions of the horizon with brick architecture, wells, iron tools, coins, terracottas, and other objects. These associations make the NBPW horizon archaeologically rich; they do not establish the political identity of every pot user. Ceramic chronology and political history must be correlated rather than collapsed (Chakrabarti 2009; Indian Archaeology 1971-72; 1982-83).

Fortification: more than one defensive episode

Champa's mud ramparts are among its most important archaeological features. Excavators distinguished multiple defensive phases, including massive earthen ramparts, brickwork, and traces of wooden posts in different contexts. Later ring-wells and structures cut or overlie former defensive ground, demonstrating changes of use. The sequence demonstrates repeated investment in a bounded urban space. It does not identify which named Anga ruler built a particular

wall, and the chronological range of construction must be derived from associated layers rather than epic memory (Indian Archaeology 1970-71; 1971-72).

Wells, drains, and household infrastructure

Water and waste infrastructure are among the strongest material signs of dense occupation. Excavation documented ring-wells, a deep brick well, drains, mud walls, ovens, and paved or rammed surfaces in different phases. Such installations can serve domestic, craft, ritual, or mixed purposes; archaeology does not automatically tell us who owned them. Their repetition nonetheless shows investment in controlled water access, drainage, heat-based work, and everyday maintenance within a long-lived settlement and supports the interpretation of Champa as a substantial urban centre rather than a purely literary city (Indian Archaeology 1970-71; 1974-75; 1982-83).

Coins, beads, ivory, and craft specialization

Cast copper coins and punch-marked coins, beads of semi-precious stone, glass and terracotta, ivory objects, terracotta figurines, bone tools, moulds, copper objects, and iron implements occur in Champa's excavated sequences. The assemblage implies access to diverse materials and specialized skills in carving, moulding, metalworking, ornament production, and exchange. It would be unsafe to infer a formally organized guild from these finds alone, because the archaeological record does not name institutional arrangements. But the range of materials and technical knowledge is compatible with a differentiated urban craft economy (Indian Archaeology 1971-72; 1982-83).

Conflagration as an event, not a dynasty marker

One excavated phase ended with evidence of large-scale burning. Archaeological burning may result from accidental fire, conflict, craft processes, clearance, or deliberate

destruction. Without an inscription, weapon horizon, or independent chronological link, a burnt layer cannot be assigned to Bimbisara's conquest or another named political event. This caution is particularly important at famous sites, where narrative history invites dramatic correlation. At Champa, the observation of burning is secure; its cause remains an interpretive question (Indian Archaeology 1971-72).

Kushan, Gupta, and later Champa

Champa remained occupied and repeatedly reorganized after the early-historic horizon. Excavation reports identify Kushan-period construction or artefacts, Gupta habitation, sealings and figurines, later post-Gupta material, medieval glazed sherds, and later intrusions. This long sequence is historically important because it demonstrates that the location's advantages did not disappear with Anga's political absorption into Magadha. It also makes attribution harder: a mound visible today may contain layers separated by many centuries. The regional name, urban focus, sacred associations, and settlement form each had their own histories (Indian Archaeology 1970-71; 1982-83).

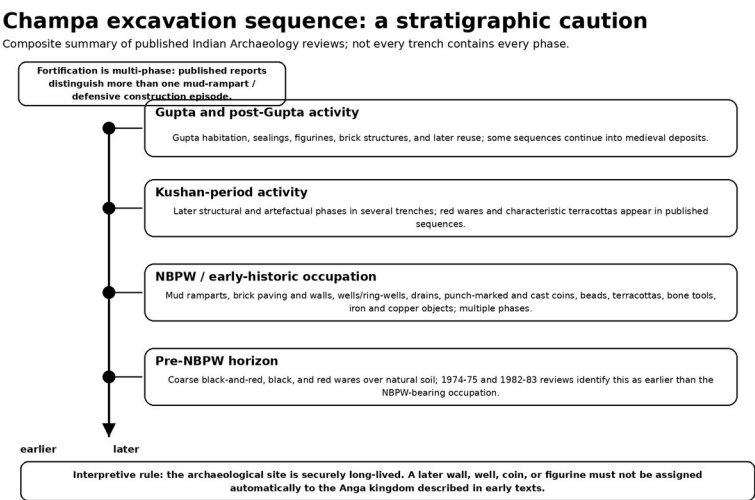


Diagram 15. Champa excavation sequence: a stratigraphic caution. Composite summary of published excavation reviews; not every trench contains every phase, and the diagram does not convert ceramic or structural phases into dynastic labels without independent evidence.

Credit: Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026, from Archaeological Survey of India, *Indian Archaeology - A Review* reports for 1970-71, 1971-72, 1974-75, and 1982-83. Rights: © Gajendra Thakur, 2026.

Source links: <https://nmma.nic.in/nmma/IAReview.do> ;
<https://zenodo.org/records/3367072>

Agrarian hinterland and the city

No city of Champa's scale could have lived from commerce alone. Grain, fodder, fuel, timber, fibres, animals, fish, clay, and labour had to move from surrounding landscapes into the urban centre. The Sonadanda Sutta's description of a prosperous grant rich in grass, timber, water, and grain is literary, but it highlights precisely the resources through which landed authority connected countryside and city. Archaeological storage, food remains, ovens, tools, and transport routes can help reconstruct that relationship, although published annual reports do not yet provide a complete quantitative agrarian economy. The proper model is therefore an urban-hinterland system, not a self-contained trading town (Walshe 1995; Chakrabarti 2001).

State revenue, landed grants, and intermediaries

Bimbisara's grant to Sonadanda is also evidence for political mediation. A ruler governing an incorporated region need not administer every village directly; land, revenue rights, honours, and local authority could be delegated to elite beneficiaries who linked court and locality. The Buddhist text presents such a relationship through a prestigious brahmin recipient. It does not tell us how cultivators experienced the grant, which dues were collected, or how long the arrangement lasted. Nonetheless, it offers a historically plausible mechanism for Magadhan integration: conquest or submission followed by selective redistribution of rights within an existing agrarian and urban economy (Walshe 1995; Thapar 2002).

Anga and Magadha as a paired political geography

The recurrent pairing of Anga and Magadha in textual lists is significant even after Anga's political subordination. Names of former polities can survive as regional designations, cultural memories, or administrative shorthand long after sovereignty changes. This helps explain why Anga remains visible in Buddhist and Jain geography even when Bimbisara is represented as exercising authority at Champa. Political incorporation need not erase regional identity. The same principle appears throughout this book: a state boundary, a cultural region, and a place-name tradition can have different durations (Singh 2008).

Karna memory and archaeological restraint

Bhagalpur and Champagnar preserve strong traditions connecting the landscape with Karna. Temples, place names, festivals, and popular histories make that memory an important part of the region's cultural past. Archaeological excavation, however, has not produced an inscription securely identifying a fortification or palace as Karna's. The correct historical procedure is dual: document the epic and local tradition as evidence for reception and identity, while refusing to use the modern strength of the tradition as proof of an early regnal event. This is the same evidentiary discipline applied elsewhere in this book to figures whose cultural afterlives are historically real even when event chronology remains unverified.

Evidentiary conclusions

A defensible history of Anga begins with a major eastern polity remembered across Buddhist, Jain, and Brahmanical traditions and a capital, Champa, whose broad identification near modern Bhagalpur is supported by historical geography and archaeology. Buddhist evidence places Bimbisara's authority within Champa through a royal grant and remembers the city among major urban centres. Jain tradition places Campa within Mahavira's sacred itinerary. Excavation demonstrates

pre-NBPW occupation, NBPW-bearing early-historic phases, substantial fortification, wells, drains, coins, crafts, and long later reuse. What remains less secure includes exact early borders, precise regnal dates, a complete battle narrative for the Magadhan conquest, and the equation of epic Karna traditions with excavated structures. Those distinctions allow Anga to emerge as historically important without being made artificially certain.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Walshe, Maurice, trans. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya*. Wisdom Publications, 1995.
- Jacobi, Hermann, trans. *Jaina Sutras, Part I: Acaranga Sutra and Kalpa Sutra*. *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 22. Clarendon Press, 1884.
- Cowell, Edward B., and W. H. D. Rouse, trans. *The Jataka, or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*. Vol. VI. Cambridge University Press, 1907.
- Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Pearson Education India, 2008.
- Thapar, Romila. *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*. Allen Lane, 2002.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes. *Greater Magadha: Studies in the Culture of Early India*. Brill, 2007.
- Dundas, Paul. *The Jains*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2002.
- Chakrabarti, Dilip K. *Archaeological Geography of the Ganga Plain: The Lower and the Middle Ganga*. Permanent Black, 2001.
- Chakrabarti, Dilip K. *India: An Archaeological History: Palaeolithic Beginnings to Early Historic Foundations*. 2nd ed. Oxford University Press, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198064121.001.0001>.
- Archaeological Survey of India. *Indian Archaeology 1970-71 - A Review*. Government of India.
- Archaeological Survey of India. *Indian Archaeology 1971-72 - A Review*. Government of India.
- Archaeological Survey of India. *Indian Archaeology 1974-75 - A Review*. Government of India.
- Archaeological Survey of India. *Indian Archaeology 1982-83 - A Review*. Government of India. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3367072>.
- Bengal Government. *Bengal District Gazetteers: Bhagalpur*. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1911.

Chapter 9. Buddhism, Jainism, and eastern Gangetic religious change

Shared landscape, distinct traditions

The eastern Gangetic plain was not the birthplace of one undifferentiated 'heterodox' movement. Buddhist, Jain, Ajivika, Brahmanical, and other renunciant or ritual communities shared roads, cities, courts, markets, languages, and arguments while maintaining distinct disciplines and claims to authority. Vaishali, Rajagriha, Champa, Mithila, and the wider Magadhan sphere appear repeatedly because political power, urban concentration, merchant wealth, and itinerant teaching converged there. Similar geography is therefore evidence of interaction, not doctrinal identity. A responsible history reconstructs specific institutions and debates before using broad categories such as sramana or Greater Magadha (Bronkhorst 2007; Gombrich 2006; Dundas 2002).

Chronology: founders, texts, and transmitted memory

The lives of the Buddha and Mahavira are commonly placed in the middle of the first millennium BCE, but exact dates remain debated. The canonical texts that narrate their lives and teachings were transmitted, organized, and redacted over time. This does not make them historically useless; it changes the kinds of claims that can safely be made. Named places, institutional vocabulary, social categories, and repeated narrative relationships can illuminate the world remembered by early communities, while speeches and event sequences require genre criticism. Absolute dates should be anchored in independently datable inscriptions or archaeology wherever possible rather than assigned merely because a canonical biography supplies a sequence (Gombrich 2006; Dundas 2002; Singh 2008).

The sramana field without a single origin story

Renunciation, wandering, fasting, meditation, debate, and critiques of household or sacrificial life formed a broader religious field in which Buddhism and Jainism developed. Some practices may have had older precedents, and different groups explained karma, rebirth, liberation, selfhood, and ascetic effort in sharply different ways. It is therefore misleading to narrate one movement as simply copying another or to make all non-Vedic traditions expressions of a single anti-Brahmanical programme. The evidence supports sustained competition and borrowing within a shared intellectual environment whose boundaries and internal diversity remain subjects of scholarship (Bronkhorst 2007; Gombrich 2006).

Greater Magadha as a model, not a map

Johannes Bronkhorst's model of Greater Magadha has been influential because it highlights an eastern cultural zone in which doctrines of rebirth, karmic retribution, renunciation, and liberation developed in forms not reducible to the older Vedic heartland. The model is analytically productive, but it should not be turned into a fixed archaeological province or a claim that all inhabitants shared one ideology. Its geographical limits, chronology, and internal diversity remain debated. In this book Greater Magadha is therefore used as a historiographical hypothesis that organizes questions about eastern religious change, not as an ethnic or political label attached to pottery, language, or every settlement east of the Sadanira (Bronkhorst 2007).

Brahmanical presence in the eastern cities

Eastern renunciant movements did not operate in a landscape without brahmins. The Sonadanda Sutta at Champa stages a Buddhist debate with a wealthy brahmin beneficiary of royal authority; other canonical narratives similarly place brahmins in Magadhan and Vajjian settings. These texts are polemical and pedagogical, but they show that the social world

imagined by Buddhist authors included learned brahmins, householders, kings, ascetics, and competing teachers in the same cities. Religious change is therefore better described as interaction, competition, and redefinition than as the replacement of an absent Vedic order by a wholly separate eastern civilization (Walshe 1995; Bronkhorst 2007).

Buddhist renunciation and the institutional Sangha

The Buddhist Sangha transformed wandering renunciation into a durable institution governed by discipline, ordination, residence, property rules, and procedures for communal decision. Canonical Vinaya is normative literature rather than an administrative archive of one monastery, but its detailed concern with robes, food, lodgings, medicines, disputes, ordination, confession, and communal acts demonstrates how intensely institutions mattered to Buddhist self-definition. Monks were not imagined as autonomous mystics detached from society: the Vinaya presupposes donors, households, rulers, roads, settlements, and recurring negotiations over acceptable material support (Gombrich 2006; Schopen 1997).

Jain mendicancy and radical care in the Acaranga

The Acaranga Sutra presents an exacting ascetic discipline in which movement, food, bodily comfort, speech, and use of the environment are governed by the imperative to avoid harm to living beings. Jacobi's nineteenth-century translation must be read critically as a translation, but the text remains central to the history of Jain monastic ideals. Its attention to small forms of life and to the ethical consequences of ordinary acts distinguishes Jain asceticism from a generic category of 'renunciation'. The historical significance lies not merely in severity but in the institutionalization of ahimsa as a practical discipline shaping how mendicants walked, ate, accepted alms, and related to household supporters (Jacobi 1884; Jaini 1979; Dundas 2002).

Asceticism and polemic

Buddhist texts sometimes define the Buddha's path against severe bodily austerity, while Jain traditions elevate disciplined endurance and non-harm within their own soteriology. Polemical contrast is historically useful because it reveals what communities wished to distinguish, but the opponent in a religious text is not a neutral ethnographic portrait. A Buddhist description of Niganthas or a Jain description of rival ascetics should therefore be analysed as argument as well as evidence. The safest comparison reconstructs each tradition's own disciplinary sources before asking how they represented one another (Jaini 1979; Dundas 2002; Gombrich 2006).

Karma, rebirth, and liberation: shared questions, different answers

Buddhist and Jain traditions both made karma, rebirth, ethical causation, and release central, but their metaphysical and practical explanations differ profoundly. Jain thought understands karma through a doctrine of the soul and karmic matter, with ascetic purification aimed at freeing the jiva; early Buddhist teaching rejects a permanent self and analyses suffering, dependent arising, craving, and cessation through different conceptual tools. Similar vocabulary therefore does not prove a common doctrine. The historical importance of the eastern debate lies precisely in the coexistence of competing answers to shared existential problems (Jaini 1979; Gombrich 2006; Bronkhorst 2007).

Cities, markets, and the rejection of a simple bourgeois thesis

Urbanization and expanding exchange helped create settings in which itinerant teachers, merchants, rulers, and householders encountered one another, but Buddhism and Jainism should not be reduced to religions produced automatically by a merchant class. Canonical literature gives merchants and wealthy householders important roles, yet also includes rulers, brahmins, cultivators, artisans, servants,

women, and renunciants from varied backgrounds. Economic change created opportunities for patronage and mobility; it did not dictate doctrine. Uma Chakravarti's social analysis remains useful because it treats political economy, household wealth, stratification, and the Sangha together rather than making one class the sole motor of religious change (Chakravarti 1987).

The gahapati and household power

Pali texts frequently use gahapati for substantial householders whose authority rested on property, dependants, production, and social standing. The category is not identical to a modern bourgeoisie, nor does it describe every lay follower. Its prominence matters because renunciant institutions depended on households capable of recurring gifts. Wealth could be converted into food, land, groves, buildings, medicine, ritual merit, and public status. The Sangha's relation to household society was therefore structurally intimate even when its ideals praised homelessness and detachment (Chakravarti 1987; Gombrich 2006).

Royal patronage without a state church

Bimbisara, Ajatasattu, Pasenadi, Licchavi leaders, and other rulers appear in Buddhist and Jain traditions as patrons, interlocutors, relatives, rivals, or protectors. Royal patronage could offer land, security, routes, prestige, and access to resources. It did not create a single state religion. Courts could support several ritual and renunciant traditions at once, while individual texts naturally magnified the significance of patrons important to their own community. Political and religious history should therefore trace specific acts of support rather than infer exclusive confessional allegiance from one narrative (Dundas 2002; Gombrich 2006; Singh 2008).

Vaishali as an institutional crossroads

Vaishali is exceptional because Buddhist and Jain memories, corporate politics, archaeological remains, and later pilgrimage

all converge there. Buddhist texts connect Vesali with the Buddha's repeated visits, Ambapali's grove, the Great Forest, Mahapajapati Gotami, the final journey, relic traditions, and the disciplinary controversy later remembered as the Second Council. Jain traditions connect the Vajjian world with Mahavira's birth and kinship geography. The overlap demonstrates the density of religious institutions; it does not make every monument common property of both traditions or turn one canon into confirmation of the other's biography (Dundas 2002; Walshe 1995; Sinha and Roy 1969).

Mishra's 1962 catalogue of Vaishali's Buddhist institutional memory

Yogendra Mishra's survey remains useful as a map of the Vaishali material preserved across Buddhist textual traditions. He gathers the narratives of the Buddha's visits to Vaishali, the Ratana-sutta episode, Mahapajapati Gotami and the remembered foundation of the order of nuns at the Kutagarasala in the Mahavana, and Vinaya rules said to have been formulated at Vaishali. Read together, these references show how strongly Buddhist institutional memory localized teaching, monastic discipline, female renunciation, scarcity, water, food, robes, and donated space in the Vajjian capital and its routes (Mishra 1962, pp. 151-156).

The compilation must nevertheless be disaggregated by source and genre. The drought, epidemic, supernatural expulsion, 7,707 rulers, 84,000 conversions, and precise regnal or post-enlightenment dating belong to transmitted narratives whose numbers and chronology cannot be read as contemporary civic statistics. Mishra himself repeatedly notes chronological uncertainty and traditional numbers. The historical value lies first in the density and recurrence of Vaishali as a remembered institutional setting; individual events and quantities require separate textual criticism and, where possible, archaeological or epigraphic control (Mishra 1962, pp. 151-156; Walshe 1995).

Mahapajapati Gotami and Vesali

The Buddhist ordination narrative places Mahapajapati Gotami - the Buddha's foster mother - at the centre of the foundation of the bhikkhuni community. In the Pali tradition she travels to Vesali with Sakyan women after first being refused permission to go forth, and Ananda intercedes in the debate over women's ordination. The narrative is preserved in Vinaya and related canonical material and has generated extensive modern scholarship about textual strata, institutional memory, and gender. Historically, it establishes that the early Buddhist tradition remembered women's renunciation as an institutional question requiring rules and negotiation; it should not be simplified into either timeless equality or timeless exclusion (AN 8.51; Collett 2014; Sujato 2012).

The garudhammas and textual controversy

The eight garudhammas or rules of respect associated with the founding of the bhikkhuni order have been read in sharply different ways. Within the received tradition they structure relations between nuns and monks; modern textual scholarship has questioned whether all elements belong to the earliest layer of the ordination story and how the rules relate to parallel Vinaya traditions. This book does not resolve that debate by assertion. The secure historical point is that gendered hierarchy became embedded in transmitted disciplinary literature, while the exact chronology and original form of the rules require comparative Vinaya analysis rather than quotation from one recension alone (Sujato 2012; Collett 2014).

Women as renunciants, teachers, and subjects of discipline

Early Buddhist literature preserves women not only as donors or relatives but as renunciants and teachers. The Therigatha presents poetic voices attributed to nuns, and comparative scholarship across Pali, Sanskrit, Gandhari, Chinese, Tibetan, and other textual witnesses confirms that women were integral to early Buddhist institutional memory.

Disciplinary texts also expose gendered anxieties about sexuality, safety, dependence, and authority. Such evidence should be read neither as a transparent census of lived experience nor as mere ideology; it shows that women's presence was substantial enough to require rules, stories, lineages, and remembered speech (Collett 2014).

Ambapali: wealth, status, and female patronage

The Mahaparinibbana Sutta's account of Ambapali at Vesali presents a courtesan with property-like control over a mango grove, substantial public visibility, and the ability to donate the grove to the Buddhist community. The narrative does not establish the legal rights of all women, but it complicates any model in which female religious agency is confined to domestic piety. Patronage could intersect with elite urban status in forms not reducible to wifehood or kinship. Ambapali belongs simultaneously to the history of gender, property, urban economy, and Buddhist memory (DN 16; Walshe 1995).

Jain women: nuns, laywomen, and the fourfold community

Jain tradition conceptualizes religious society through monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen, although the roles and soteriological interpretations of women differ across later Svetambara and Digambara traditions. Early canonical and later sectarian evidence should not be collapsed into a single timeless doctrine. The historically important point is institutional: women were sufficiently central to Jain community formation to appear within monastic lineages, lay practice, narrative, and debates over liberation. Later disagreements about women's capacity for liberation reveal sectarian development rather than a single uncontested rule traceable directly to Mahavira (Jaini 1979; Dundas 2002).

Laywomen and the household economy of merit

Both Buddhist and Jain traditions depended on laywomen as food donors, household managers, patrons, relatives, and

participants in ritual. Their economic contribution is easy to understate because narrative texts often foreground male household heads. A gift offered in a household may represent labour and resources organized by several members. Later inscriptions make women more visible as named donors, but those records belong to different periods and places. The methodological point is to use later inscriptional evidence to widen questions about female economic agency without projecting specific legal capacities unchanged into the fifth century BCE (Schopen 2014; Collett 2014).

Renunciant communities in the eastern Gangetic world: an institutional

Buddhist, Jain, and other śramaṇa institutions depended on relationships rather than social isolation.

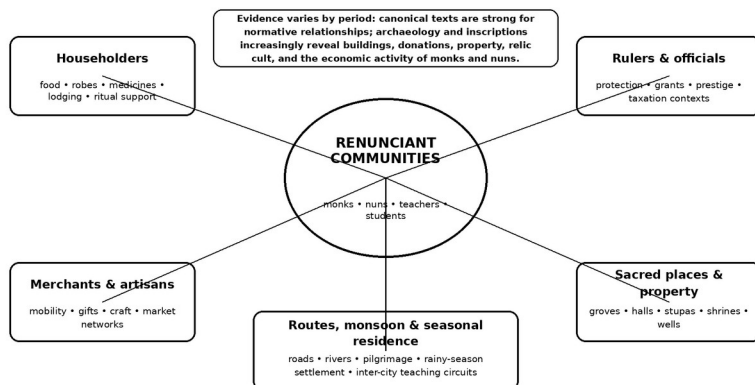


Diagram 16. Renunciant communities in the eastern Gangetic world: an institutional ecology. Buddhist, Jain, and other renunciant institutions depended on recurring relationships with households, rulers, markets, sacred property, roads, rivers, and seasonal residence rather than existing outside society.

Credit: Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026. Conceptual framework informed by Gombrich 2006, Chakravarti 1987, Schopen 1997 and 2014, Jaini 1979, and Dundas 2002. Rights: © Gajendra Thakur, 2026.

Source links: <https://www.routledge.com/Theravada-Buddhism-A-Social-History-from-Ancient-Benares-to-Modern-Colombo/Gombrich/p/book/9780415365093> ; <https://uhpress.hawaii.edu/title/bones-stones-and-buddhist-monks-collected-papers-on-the-archaeology-epigraphy-and->

texts-of-monastic-buddhism-in-india/ ;

<https://www.routledge.com/The-Jains-2nd-Edition/Dundas/p/book/9780415266055>

Monsoon, vassa, and institutional time

The rainy season mattered to religious organization. Buddhist vassa and Jain rainy-season residence constrained mobility and concentrated teachers and disciples in particular places for extended periods. This had ecological and institutional consequences: food supply, water, lodging, sanitation, donor access, teaching, and dispute resolution became locally intensified. Lists of rainy-season residences in Jain biography and Vinaya rules about Buddhist residence therefore preserve a seasonal geography of institutions. They should not be converted into precise annual itineraries without textual criticism, but they reveal how climate entered religious time (Jacobi 1884; Gombrich 2006).

Groves, halls, and donated spaces

Canonical narratives repeatedly locate teaching in groves, halls, forests, ponds, and donated pleasure grounds. Such places complicate the simple opposition between city and wilderness. A grove could be near an urban centre, accessible to donors while providing space for residence and assembly. Ambapali's grove at Vesali and other donated parks exemplify the conversion of elite or private landscape into religious infrastructure. Archaeology can sometimes recover monastic buildings or cult structures, but matching a named canonical grove to a surviving mound requires independent topographic and stratigraphic evidence (DN 16; Schopen 1997).

Gift, merit, and reciprocity

A gift to a renunciant community was not merely economic transfer. Buddhist and Jain traditions place giving within ethical and karmic frameworks in which donors receive merit, prestige, teaching, or social recognition while religious specialists receive

material support. This reciprocal structure allowed communities committed to non-possession to become durable institutions. The normative ideal of detached giving coexisted with questions of ownership, inheritance, property management, and donor commemoration that become increasingly visible in later inscriptions and monastic law. Religious economy is therefore not a contradiction in terms; it is part of how renunciation became socially reproducible (Schopen 1997; Jaini 1979).

Monks and nuns as economic actors: the later evidence

Gregory Schopen's work on inscriptions and monastic law has shown that Indian Buddhist monks and nuns could themselves appear as donors, sponsors, property holders, and legal actors. This evidence is crucial because it challenges an older picture in which monks simply received gifts while lay people alone participated in economic activity. Its chronology must be respected: much of the inscriptional evidence belongs centuries after the Buddha. It can therefore demonstrate the historical capacities of developed monastic institutions and expose the inadequacy of a purely idealized lay-versus-monastic dichotomy, but it should not be used as proof that every fifth-century-BCE community operated under identical legal arrangements (Schopen 1997; 2014).

Relics and the making of sacred place

Buddhist relic traditions transformed bodily remains, stupas, and pilgrimage into durable institutions of memory. Vaishali's relic-stupa attribution, discussed in Chapter 7, is important because early archaeological deposits and later canonical memory converge without becoming identical. A relic casket can establish cult practice and deposition; the biological identity of remains is a separate question. Monks, nuns, rulers, and lay patrons could all participate in relic cult in later periods. The sacred landscape of eastern India was therefore made not only by teaching itineraries but also by objects, architecture,

commemoration, and repeated visitation (Schopen 1997; ASI Patna Circle).

Jain sacred biography and the making of place

Jain sacred geography likewise links Mahavira to Kundagrama, Vaishali, Mithila, Campa, Rajagriha, and Pava or Pavapuri in transmitted biography. These place associations have shaped pilgrimage and regional identity for centuries. Historical method separates three questions: whether a place-name occurs in an early or later text; whether a modern locality is convincingly identified with it; and how pilgrimage institutions developed there afterward. Sacred geography can be historically real even when exact event localization is uncertain (Jacobi 1884; Dundas 2002).

Kundagrama and the historiography of Mahavira's birthplace

Mishra also devoted an extended discussion to the competing modern identifications of Mahavira's birthplace. His preferred reconstruction placed Kundagrama or Kundapura in the Vaishali complex and identified it with the Basukund area, arguing from Jain references to Vesali/Vaishali, Videha, Kundagrama, and Mahavira's Jnatrika-Licchavi kinship setting. The importance of this section for a regional history is not that a 1962 identification settles the archaeology, but that it records how textual philology, local topography, sectarian pilgrimage claims, and twentieth-century heritage-making became intertwined in the localization of an ancient sacred biography (Mishra 1962, pp. 212-225).

Accordingly, this book preserves a distinction between textual association and modern site identification. Jain traditions securely make Kundagrama/Kundapura and the wider Vaishali-Videha landscape central to Mahavira's remembered origins; whether any present village can be equated with the ancient locality requires an independent chain of topographical and archaeological evidence. Mishra's argument is therefore cited as a major historiographical position, not converted into an

uncontested coordinate (Mishra 1962, pp. 212-225; Jacobi 1884; Dundas 2002).

The Second Buddhist Council at Vaishali

Several Vinaya traditions preserve a disciplinary dispute at Vaishali conventionally called the Second Buddhist Council and often located roughly a century after the Buddha in traditional chronologies. The accounts differ over participants, disputed practices, chronology, and the relation of the event to later sectarian divisions. Charles Prebish's survey of the scholarship remains important because it treats the council narratives comparatively rather than harmonizing them into one transcript. The historically cautious conclusion is that a significant Vinaya controversy associated with Vaishali is plausible; the exact sequence and institutional consequences remain debated (Prebish 1974).

The ten points and the politics of discipline

In the Pali Vinaya tradition the Vaishali dispute is organized around contested practices later summarized as ten points, involving such matters as stored salt, meal timing, and handling of money or equivalents. These issues may look trivial beside doctrines of liberation, but they reveal the social core of monastic discipline. Food, time, gifts, and material exchange determine how renunciants relate to donors and how communal uniformity is enforced. The council narrative therefore belongs to economic and institutional history as much as to doctrinal history. Comparison with other Vinayas is necessary before treating the Pali list as the sole original form (Prebish 1974).

Council is not automatically schism

Older narratives often made the Second Council the direct cause of the first great Buddhist schism. Comparative scholarship has shown that the relationship between the Vaishali disciplinary dispute and later divisions such as Sthavira

and Mahasanghika is more complicated. Different school traditions preserve different causal sequences. This book therefore avoids using 'Second Council' as shorthand for a single decisive break. Institutional disagreement, later lineage identity, and retrospective sectarian history must be distinguished (Prebish 1974).

Jain councils and canon formation: a later institutional problem

Jain traditions also preserve accounts of councils, teachers, and the preservation or loss of scriptures. Svetambara and Digambara understandings of canon formation diverged, and the surviving literary history extends well beyond Mahavira's lifetime. These later institutional memories are essential for explaining why Jain canonical corpora differ and how authority was constructed, but they should not be projected backward as if one extant canon were a stenographic archive of the sixth or fifth century BCE. The history of Jain scripture is a history of transmission, recitation, loss, compilation, and sectarian memory (Dundas 2002; Jaini 1979).

Language: Pali, Ardhamagadhi, Sanskrit, and the problem of speech

Buddhist and Jain traditions are preserved in languages whose relationship to the speech of early eastern India is historically complex. Pali is a literary Middle Indo-Aryan language with a long transmission history; the Svetambara Jain canon is associated especially with Ardhamagadhi and other Prakrits; later scholarship and religious literature also used Sanskrit. A canonical language cannot be mapped mechanically onto the spoken dialect of one ancient city. Linguistic forms can preserve regional and chronological clues, but literary standardization, oral transmission, copying, commentary, and sectarian education all reshape them (Dundas 2002; Bronkhorst 2007).

Orality, memorization, and institutional authority

Before widespread manuscript transmission, large bodies of doctrine and discipline were preserved through organized recitation and memorization. Oral transmission is not equivalent to uncontrolled improvisation: institutions can regulate wording, grouping, teacher lineages, and communal rehearsal. At the same time, the existence of parallel recensions and school differences shows that transmission was never perfectly uniform. The correct historical stance is neither to dismiss canonical texts because they were oral nor to assume verbal identity with a founder's speech. Textual stratification and comparison across traditions are indispensable (Gombrich 2006; Collett 2014).

Debate as social institution

Buddhist and Jain texts repeatedly stage debates with brahmins, rival ascetics, householders, and rulers. Debate was not only a literary form: courts, parks, monasteries, and urban gatherings created arenas in which teachers competed for followers and patronage. Yet a debate narrative is shaped to demonstrate the superiority of a teaching, so the losing opponent cannot be treated as a neutral transcript of a rival position. Historians use such passages to reconstruct topics, social settings, and polemical boundaries before treating doctrinal claims as descriptions of other communities (Gombrich 2006; Dundas 2002).

Nigantha Nataputta in Buddhist sources

Buddhist texts refer to Mahavira as Nigantha Nataputta and preserve stories about his followers, doctrines, and disputes. These passages confirm that Buddhist communities knew a major rival associated with the Niganthas, but they remain Buddhist representations. Where Jain sources survive, comparison can reveal both shared historical reference and polemical distortion. The same rule applies in reverse to Jain depictions of rival teachers. Religious competition is best

reconstructed through triangulation, not by accepting one tradition's caricature as ethnography (Dundas 2002; Jaini 1979).

Ajivikas and the danger of a two-religion story

The eastern religious field included more than Buddhism and Jainism. Ajivikas and other teachers appear in Buddhist and Jain sources, often through polemic. Their presence matters because it prevents a false binary in which every debate is reduced to Buddhist versus Jain positions. Doctrines of fate, karma, austerity, and liberation circulated through a competitive environment with several organized or semi-organized communities. The fragmentary nature of independent Ajivika evidence requires caution, but their visibility in rival texts is itself historically significant (Bronkhorst 2007).

Caste, varna, and the limits of egalitarian claims

Buddhist texts contain critiques of brahmanical claims to inherent superiority and admit members of different social origins into the Sangha. Jain renunciation likewise reorganized status around discipline and spiritual achievement. Neither fact proves the disappearance of caste or hierarchy within early religious communities or lay society. Monastic seniority, gender rules, donor wealth, occupation, kinship, and inherited status continued to shape interaction. The more defensible claim is that renunciant institutions created alternative rankings and arguments about human worth while remaining embedded in stratified societies (Chakravarti 1987; Gombrich 2006).

Slavery, service, and the archive of silence

Canonical texts refer to servants, dependants, labourers, and other socially subordinate people, but elite donors and religious specialists receive disproportionate narrative attention. The economic capacity to make major gifts was unequally distributed. Monastic ideals of compassion or non-harm should therefore not be treated as proof that coercive labour vanished from the surrounding economy. Social history must read

prescriptions alongside silences, asking whose work made donations, travel, construction, food preparation, and urban residence possible (Chakravarti 1987).

Food rules as social history

Detailed monastic rules about acceptable food, meal times, storage, invitations, and gifts reveal the dependence of renunciants on social provisioning. They also show institutional efforts to separate legitimate support from accumulation or commercial behaviour. At Vaishali, disputes over food-related practices later became part of council memory. Jain ascetic rules regulate food with a different ethical logic centred on non-harm and detachment. Comparative attention to food therefore connects doctrine with agriculture, household labour, markets, seasonality, and the practical maintenance of religious bodies (Jacobi 1884; Gombrich 2006; Prebish 1974).

Medicine, illness, and embodied renunciation

Renunciation did not abolish the body. Buddhist Vinaya devotes attention to medicines, illness, nursing, and permissible material support; Jain disciplinary texts regulate bodily care within a demanding ethic of restraint. Such rules reveal negotiations between ascetic ideals and survival. They also create demand for lay knowledge, substances, and services. The history of medicine and care in religious communities should therefore be reconstructed from rules, narratives, archaeology, and later monastic documents rather than from the assumption that spiritual discipline meant indifference to health (Gombrich 2006; Schopen 2004).

Violence, non-harm, and political patronage

Jain ahimsa and Buddhist ethical restraints developed in societies whose rulers fought wars, punished offenders, hunted, taxed, and protected routes. Patronage by kings did not mean that royal institutions adopted monastic non-violence wholesale. Religious texts could praise rulers, advise them, or criticize

forms of violence while remaining materially dependent on political order. This tension is historically productive: it shows how ethical ideals moved between renunciant communities and states without erasing the distinct logic of kingship (Jaini 1979; Gombrich 2006).

Sacred landscape without exclusive ownership

Vaishali, Rajagriha, Champa, Mithila, and Pava can belong to more than one religious geography. A shared place does not prove that communities shared a shrine or interpreted it identically. Pilgrimage landscapes accumulate through repeated acts of naming, building, donation, narration, and conservation. Archaeology may show successive or neighbouring religious uses without allowing every structure to be assigned confidently. The correct map is therefore layered and temporal rather than partitioned into permanently Buddhist or Jain territories (Singh 2008; Dundas 2002).

Archaeology and the problem of sectarian identification

A stupa, monastery-like plan, image, inscription, or relic deposit may justify a Buddhist identification when context is secure. Jain identification likewise depends on diagnostic iconography, inscriptions, architectural context, or reliable historical association. Ordinary houses, wells, walls, pottery, and coins cannot usually be given a sectarian label. At multi-period sites such as Vaishali or Champa, the temptation to assign every structure to a canonical episode must be resisted. Archaeology is most powerful when it narrows possibilities rather than when it is forced to illustrate a predetermined sacred history (Sinha and Roy 1969; Schopen 1997).

Religious history is reconstructed from sources of different dates and purposes

The safest conclusions come from controlled comparison, not from treating a later source as an eyewitness to an earlier century.

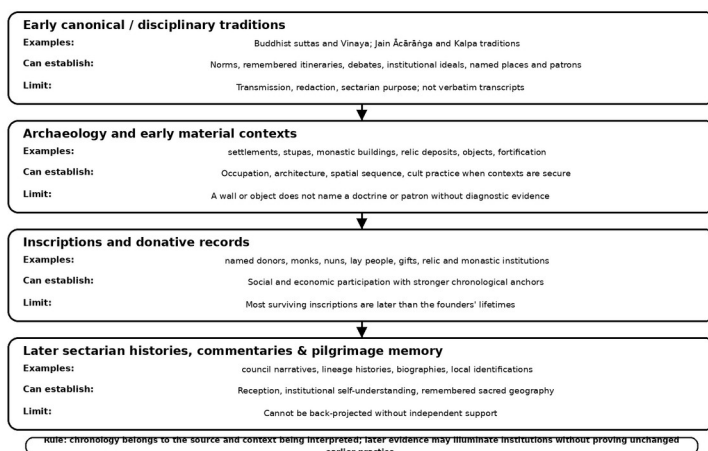


Diagram 17. Religious history is reconstructed from sources of different dates and purposes. Canonical texts, archaeology, inscriptions, and later sectarian or pilgrimage traditions answer different questions; later evidence may illuminate institutions but must not be treated as an eyewitness to an earlier century.

Credit: Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026.

Framework informed by Schopen 1997 and 2014, Prebish 1974, Collett 2014, Jaini 1979, Dundas 2002, and the source-critical method used throughout this book. Rights: © Gajendra Thakur, 2026.

Source links: <https://uhpress.hawaii.edu/title/bones-stones-and-buddhist-monks-collected-papers-on-the-archaeology-epigraphy-and-texts-of-monastic-buddhism-in-india/> ;
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-asian-studies/article/abs/review-of-scholarship-on-the-buddhist-councils/61846CA964CC4C8E67B17A33163B6022> ;
<https://academic.oup.com/book/3902>

Inscriptions as a later but firmer social archive

For the first centuries of Buddhist and Jain history, narrative and disciplinary literature is far richer than dated inscriptions. From later centuries, donative inscriptions begin to identify named lay people, monks, nuns, families, occupations, and gifts with firmer chronological anchors. This later archive can

transform social history by revealing donors whom canonical literature marginalizes. Its very strength makes chronological discipline essential: a first-century BCE inscription cannot be used as direct evidence for a fifth-century BCE institutional rule, though it may demonstrate the range of practices that developed within the tradition (Schopen 1997; 2014).

From charismatic teacher to institution

The deaths of founders created a problem of continuity. Authority had to be relocated into doctrine, discipline, teachers, recitation lineages, councils, relics, and community procedures. Buddhist traditions emphasize Dhamma and Vinaya, relic distribution, and communal recitation; Jain traditions developed their own lineages, canonical memories, and accounts of teachers after Mahavira. The institutional history of religion begins precisely where biography ends: how a community reproduces itself without the founder's physical presence (Dundas 2002; Prebish 1974).

Religious change without a single conversion event

The growth of Buddhism and Jainism in eastern India was not a one-time conversion of a region. Households could support more than one religious specialist; rulers could patronize several traditions; local cults and brahmanical rites continued; monastic institutions expanded, contracted, or moved; and sectarian boundaries hardened unevenly. Religious history should therefore trace changing networks of patrons, institutions, doctrines, and places rather than search for a date when the east 'became Buddhist' or 'became Jain' (Gombrich 2006; Dundas 2002).

Decline is not disappearance

Later reductions in Buddhist monastic patronage do not mean the immediate disappearance of Buddhist ideas, images, relic cults, or pilgrimage. Jain communities likewise changed regionally without a simple line from expansion to decline.

Religious institutions can lose land, merge with other sacred landscapes, move centres, or survive through smaller communities. The archaeological and textual record must be read for reuse, transformation, and memory rather than a single civilizational replacement (Schopen 1997; Singh 2008).

Evidentiary conclusions

The eastern Gangetic plain was a competitive institutional environment in which Buddhist, Jain, Brahmanical, Ajivika, and other communities debated shared questions while building distinct disciplines. Urban centres and routes enabled mobility and patronage, but doctrine cannot be reduced to commerce. Women were present as renunciants, donors, and subjects of disciplinary regulation, though gender hierarchy remained embedded in institutions. Vaishali became a major Buddhist and Jain sacred node; council traditions preserve real institutional conflict but not one uncontested chronology. Later inscriptions and archaeology greatly expand social history, yet their chronology must not be back-projected. The most defensible regional history therefore connects texts, institutions, material evidence, and later memory while preserving the differences between them.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Mishra, Yogendra. *An Early History of Vaisali: From the Earliest Times to the Fall of the Vajjian Republic, circa 484 B.C.* Delhi, Patna and Varanasi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1962.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes. *Greater Magadha: Studies in the Culture of Early India.* Brill, 2007.
- Gombrich, Richard F. *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo.* 2nd ed. Routledge, 2006.
- Chakravarti, Uma. *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism.* Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Jaini, Padmanabh S. *The Jaina Path of Purification.* University of California Press, 1979.
- Dundas, Paul. *The Jains.* 2nd ed. Routledge, 2002.
- Jacobi, Hermann, trans. *Jaina Sutras, Part I: Acaranga Sutra and Kalpa Sutra.* Sacred Books of the East, vol. 22. Clarendon Press, 1884.

- Walshe, Maurice, trans. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya*. Wisdom Publications, 1995.
- Schopen, Gregory. *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India*. University of Hawai'i Press, 1997.
- Schopen, Gregory. *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters: Still More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2004.
- Schopen, Gregory. *Buddhist Nuns, Monks, and Other Worldly Matters: Recent Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2014.
- Collett, Alice, ed. *Women in Early Indian Buddhism: Comparative Textual Studies*. Oxford University Press, 2014.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199326044.001.0001>.
- Prebish, Charles S. "A Review of Scholarship on the Buddhist Councils." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 33, no. 2 (1974): 239-254.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2052186>.
- Sujato, Bhikkhu. *Bhikkhuni Vinaya Studies: Research and Reflections on Monastic Discipline for Buddhist Nuns*. Santipada, 2012.
<https://sujato.me/bvs.html>.
- Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Pearson Education India, 2008.
- Sinha, B. P., and Sita Ram Roy. *Vaisali Excavations, 1958-1962*. Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Bihar, 1969.

Chapter 10. Empires, inscriptions, and pilgrim itineraries

Empire as a claim with uneven reach

The appearance of the Mauryas, Guptas, and later supra-regional powers changes the scale at which the history of Mithila, Vajji, Anga, and the Nepal-facing corridor must be written. Empire did not erase local institutions or turn every settlement into an equally administered unit. Royal inscriptions, coins, pillars, seals, roads, tax relations, ritual patronage, and military claims each register different degrees of incorporation. A proclamation at a pillar is strong evidence that a ruler chose that place for public communication; it is not proof that every village nearby experienced identical administration. The historical problem is therefore to map imperial acts and networks without filling the spaces between them with an assumed uniform state (Thapar 2012; Lahiri 2015).

Mauryan north Bihar: monument and text must be separated

North Bihar preserves an unusually important group of monolithic pillars associated with Ashoka. Yet the pillars do not all carry the same evidence. Lauriya-Arera and Lauriya-Nandargarh bear the first six Major Pillar Edicts, and at Rampurva one of the two known pillars is inscribed while its companion is uninscribed. The lion-capital pillar at Kolhua/Vaishali is conventionally accepted as Ashokan but carries no Ashokan inscription. This distinction matters. An inscribed pillar combines monument, royal language, script, and place; an uninscribed pillar establishes monumental intervention but requires other evidence for its purpose and date. A chapter on empire must never silently transfer an edict from one pillar to another (Hultzsch 1925; Falk 2006; Archaeological Survey of India, Patna Circle).

Stone, quarry, transport, and state capacity

The polished sandstone pillars are also evidence for technologies and labour systems. Quarrying a large monolith, shaping and polishing it, transporting it over long distances, preparing a foundation, raising the shaft, and fitting a capital required skilled stoneworkers, transport crews, supervisors, and substantial logistical coordination. Those operations demonstrate state-supported capacity even when the surviving pillar is uninscribed. They do not tell us whether labour was paid, corvee, hereditary, or organized through contractors in any one locality. Material scale establishes a problem of mobilization; social relations of production require additional evidence. The pillars are therefore administrative artefacts in a broad sense before they become texts (Falk 2006; Lahiri 2015).

The first six Pillar Edicts in the Champaran corridor

The inscriptions at Lauriya-Arera and Lauriya-Nandangarh, and the inscribed pillar at Rampurva, preserve versions of the first six Major Pillar Edicts. The corpus presents the ruler speaking in the first person as Devanampiya Piyadasi, 'Beloved of the Gods, Piyadasi', and dates the pillar-edict programme by regnal years after coronation. The texts articulate dhamma through self-scrutiny, respect for elders, restraint, welfare, administrative conduct, justice, and the activity of royal officers. Their repetition at several places is politically significant: the message was meant to be encountered beyond the capital. But textual repetition should not be confused with bureaucratic sameness; local reception is largely invisible (Hultzsch 1925; Thapar 2012).

Dhamma was not a simple synonym for Buddhism

Ashoka's dhamma has often been narrated either as Buddhist doctrine imposed by an emperor or as a purely secular moral code. The inscriptions resist both simplifications. They contain ethical and social prescriptions that cross sectarian boundaries, concern relations among social groups, and address officers and

subjects in royal political language. Elsewhere in the inscriptional corpus Ashoka's personal Buddhist commitments are explicit, but the Major Pillar Edicts are not a catechism of Buddhist doctrine. Dhamma is best treated as an imperial ethical-political programme whose relation to Buddhism is historically important but not reducible to institutional conversion of the state (Thapar 2012; Lahiri 2015).

Officers, justice, and the language of government

The Pillar Edicts repeatedly bring officials into view. Mahamatras and other officers appear as agents expected to encourage dhamma, govern, protect, and administer justice. This is stronger evidence for an imperial administrative vocabulary than the pillar's physical presence alone. Yet an inscription describes what the king says officers should do; it cannot demonstrate the frequency or quality of implementation in north Bihar. Prescriptive government and everyday government are not identical archives. The correct inference is that Ashoka publicly tied moral authority to official conduct and represented royal supervision as extending toward border areas and local populations (Hultzsch 1925).

Punishment, mercy, and royal paternalism

The pillar-edict corpus also addresses punishment, reprieve, and opportunities for condemned persons to prepare religiously or petition on behalf of dependants. Such measures have sometimes been celebrated as modern humanitarian law. The more historically controlled reading recognizes a paternal model of kingship in which the ruler claims moral responsibility for subjects while retaining coercive power. Mercy does not abolish hierarchy; it is exercised from above. This tension is important for the regional history of imperial incorporation because it shows how moral language could legitimate an expanded state while also placing declared restraints on its agents (Hultzsch 1925; Thapar 2012).

Animals, medicine, and welfare claims

Across the wider Ashokan corpus, inscriptions refer to restrictions on animal killing, medical provisions, wells, trees, and other welfare measures. These should be used carefully in local history. A general imperial policy does not prove that a specific well, tree avenue, or veterinary facility in Mithila or Champaran was created by Ashoka unless the local context establishes it. What the texts do show is a royal ideology in which welfare, restraint, and public works could be presented as signs of righteous rule. Archaeological attribution must remain site-specific rather than being inferred from a famous emperor's programme (Thapar 2012; Lahiri 2015).

Lauriya-Areraaj: an inscription at a lived place

The Lauriya-Areraaj monolith preserves the first six Pillar Edicts in early Brahmi. Its capital is lost, while later marks and inscriptions on the shaft remind us that the monument continued to exist within changing social landscapes. The local designation laur and subsequent devotional or commemorative engagements belong to the pillar's post-Mauryan biography. Historical analysis should therefore keep two temporalities visible: the third-century BCE royal inscription and the many centuries in which communities encountered, renamed, marked, and interpreted the stone. A monument's later life is not contamination of its history; it is a second historical archive (Archaeological Survey of India, Patna Circle; Hultzsich 1925).

Lauriya-Nandangarh: edict, capital, and neighbouring archaeology

Lauriya-Nandangarh preserves one of the best-known lion-capital Ashokan pillars and the first six Major Pillar Edicts. Nearby mounds and the large Nandangarh stupa-like structure belong to a broader archaeological landscape with more than one period of activity. Visual proximity cannot establish that every mound was built by Ashoka or that the pillar commemorated one named event. The pillar is securely

Mauryan and inscribed; the chronology and function of neighbouring earthworks and brick remains require their own excavation histories. This separation prevents the monument from becoming an umbrella date for an entire landscape (Falk 2006; Archaeological Survey of India, Patna Circle).

Rampurva: a pair that demonstrates evidentiary difference

Rampurva is methodologically valuable because two Ashokan pillars were found there but only one is inscribed. The pair was associated with different animal capitals, a lion and a bull. Their coexistence shows that Ashokan pillars could serve monumental purposes without all carrying edict texts. It also cautions against treating the category 'Ashokan pillar' as a single documentary genre. The inscribed pillar can be read epigraphically; the uninscribed pillar must be studied through form, stone, capital, find context, and comparison. The site therefore supplies an unusually clear lesson in the difference between imperial presence and royal proclamation (Falk 2006; Archaeological Survey of India, Patna Circle).

Kolhua/Vaishali: Ashokan presence without an edict

The standing lion-capital pillar at Kolhua is among the most recognizable monuments of Vaishali and is officially identified as an Ashokan column. Unlike the Champaran edict pillars, it bears no Ashokan inscription. Later Buddhist tradition and Xuanzang's account connect the Vaishali landscape with pillars and stupas marking events in the Buddha's career. Archaeology and stylistic comparison support the Mauryan attribution of the monument, but the specific commemorative explanation belongs to a chain of archaeological, art-historical, and pilgrimage interpretation rather than to text carved on the shaft. The book therefore retains the existing photograph as evidence of a multi-period sacred landscape, not as a facsimile of an Ashokan edict (Falk 2006; Sinha and Roy 1969).

A pillar corridor: useful hypothesis, not a demonstrated road map

The sequence from Vaishali/Kolhua through Lauriya-Areraj and Lauriya-Nandargarh to Rampurva has long encouraged the hypothesis of a major northward corridor connecting the Gangetic heartland with the Himalayan foothills and routes toward Nepal and the Buddhist sacred geography farther north. The alignment is historically suggestive, particularly because three of the Champaran pillars carry the same first six Pillar Edicts. Yet alignment alone cannot reconstruct road width, exact course, stations, traffic volume, or continuity over centuries. River migration, settlement change, and later road systems complicate back-projection. The safest model is a corridor of state attention whose road function should be tested against archaeology and topography rather than assumed from a line on a modern map (Falk 2006; Lahiri 2015).

Ashokan pillar corridor in north Bihar: monument, inscription, and route are

Schematic northward sequence; not a reconstruction of a surveyed Mauryan road.

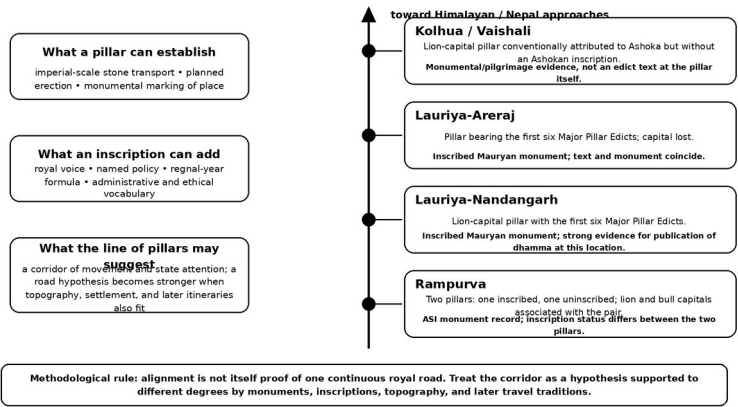


Diagram 18. Ashokan pillar corridor in north Bihar: monument, inscription, and route are different claims. Schematic only; not a surveyed reconstruction of a Mauryan road.

Credit: Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026.
Monument and inscription status checked against Hultzsch 1925, Falk 2006, and Archaeological Survey of India, Patna Circle. Rights: © Gajendra Thakur, 2026.

Source links: ASI Patna Circle monument register,
<https://asipatnacircle.gov.in/monuments-details> ; Hultzsch
corpus scan metadata,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Corpus_Inscriptionum_Indicarum_Vol_1.pdf ; Falk 2006,
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3403874>

Pillar routes and the Nepal-facing frontier

The northern end of the Champaran pillar sequence lies near the Himalayan foreland, but 'route to Nepal' must be phrased carefully. Modern Nepal is a state with surveyed borders; Mauryan political and travel geographies did not use that boundary. The pillars show imperial monumental activity toward the north Bihar foothill corridor. Later inscriptions and Chinese travel accounts make north-south movement between the Gangetic plain and Himalayan regions historically visible, but they belong to later centuries. The long-duration corridor is therefore real as a geographical problem while its political meaning changed repeatedly (Falk 2006; Deeg 2019).

Imperial communication and literacy

The edicts raise a further question: who could read them? Early Brahmi literacy was not universal, and a large polished pillar could communicate royal presence even to people unable to decipher its text. Reading may have been mediated by officials, specialists, or public recitation, while visual scale and polish worked independently of literacy. The inscription was thus both text and performance infrastructure. This duality is useful for regional history because it prevents the false choice between a 'literate empire' and an 'illiterate population'. Public writing could matter politically in societies where direct reading was socially restricted (Lahiri 2015; Salomon 1998).

Scripts, languages, and the geography of authority

Ashoka's wider inscriptional programme employed different scripts and languages across the subcontinent and north-west,

while the north Bihar Pillar Edicts use Prakrit written in Brahmi. That choice locates the Champaran monuments within the dominant epigraphic practice of the Gangetic imperial core. The script is evidence for administrative communication and scribal expertise, not a direct proxy for the spoken mother tongue of every local inhabitant. Language history must distinguish inscriptional register, scribal convention, vernacular speech, and later literary languages. The presence of Brahmi in a region does not erase linguistic diversity that is archaeologically difficult to recover (Salomon 1998).

From Mauryan to post-Mauryan landscapes

The end of Mauryan rule did not remove Mauryan pillars from the landscape. Stones remained standing, fell, were remarked, became local landmarks, and acquired new interpretations. Urban centres and religious institutions likewise changed patronage without necessarily being abandoned. This material persistence is one reason later pilgrims could encounter monuments attributed to Ashoka centuries after his reign. It is also why archaeologists must distinguish the date of manufacture from the date of later inscription, repair, relocation, or religious reuse. Imperial monuments can outlive imperial institutions by millennia.

Gupta political re-scaling

By the fourth century CE, the Gupta political order created another supra-regional framework over much of the Gangetic plain. Its relationship to north Bihar is visible through dynastic representation, coins, seals, inscriptions, and wider patterns of administrative incorporation. The evidence is not a replay of Mauryan centralization. Gupta power relied on different combinations of conquest, subordinate rulers, landholding elites, lineage alliances, and regional centres. A comparison across empires should therefore focus on changing instruments of authority rather than a simple cycle of rise, unity, decline, and fragmentation (Singh 2008).

Chandragupta I, Kumaradevi, and Licchavi dynastic capital

A famous Gupta gold coin type depicts Chandragupta I and Kumaradevi together and names the Licchavis on the reverse. Museums and numismatic scholarship have long connected the type with the political importance of Chandragupta's marriage to the Licchavi princess Kumaradevi. The coin is powerful evidence that Licchavi affiliation was valuable enough to advertise in dynastic imagery. It does not establish that the ancient Vajjian republic survived institutionally unchanged into the Gupta age, nor does it by itself map the Licchavi territory controlled by Kumaradevi's kin. Genealogical prestige can survive political transformation (British Museum collection; Allahabad Museum, Museums of India).

Coins are political media, not marriage certificates

The king-and-queen coin type should be read as designed royal media. Portraits, legends, deities, and lineage labels communicate claims to legitimacy and alliance within a monetary object that circulated beyond a court ritual. At the same time, the image is not a documentary portrait in the modern sense, and the legend is not a legal text setting out marriage terms. Numismatics can establish that the Gupta regime chose to stage Kumaradevi and Licchavi identity publicly; the institutional consequences of the alliance require inscriptions, genealogy, and political context. This distinction protects the coin from being made to prove more than it says.

Samudragupta and the Allahabad prasasti

The Allahabad pillar inscription or Prayaga prasasti of Samudragupta, composed by the court poet and official Harishena, is one of the central inscriptions for fourth-century political geography. Its very genre is important: a Sanskrit praise inscription celebrates the king's conquests, virtues, and relations with different classes of rulers. It is neither a neutral gazetteer nor an exhaustive administrative list. The inscription groups political communities according to the kinds of

submission, restoration, tribute, service, or frontier relationship the panegyric attributes to them. Historical reconstruction therefore begins with the categories of the text but does not treat rhetorical hierarchy as a cadastral survey (Fleet 1888; Siddham).

Nepal in Samudragupta's frontier world

The prasasti names Nepal among frontier polities in a group that also includes Samatata, Davaka, Kamarupa, and Kartripura in Fleet's classic edition. This is important evidence that fourth-century Gupta court geography recognized Nepal as a distinct neighbouring political entity within an imperial field of tribute, obedience, attendance, or negotiated subordination. The wording does not prove direct annexation of the Kathmandu Valley into a uniformly administered Gupta province. It is better evidence for unequal inter-polity relations at an imperial frontier. Chapter 11 will examine Nepal's own Licchavi inscriptions, which provide a locally anchored archive rather than viewing the valley only through Gupta rhetoric (Fleet 1888; Siddham IN00001).

An inscription can be a palimpsest of empires

The Allahabad pillar itself carries inscriptions from different political ages, including Ashokan texts, Samudragupta's fourth-century prasasti, and a later Mughal inscription of Jahangir. Its physical biography is therefore a reminder that monuments are not tied forever to their first author. Re-inscription can appropriate an already authoritative object, place a new regime in dialogue with older sovereignty, or simply use a conspicuous durable surface. Historians must date each inscription separately and avoid treating a shared stone as evidence of institutional continuity among the regimes that wrote on it (Siddham, Allahabad Pillar object record).

Vaishali under later imperial horizons

Archaeology at Vaishali/Basarh includes occupation, seals, sealings, coins, religious remains, and structures extending beyond the early Vajjian period into Kushan, Gupta, and later centuries. This makes 'Gupta Vaishali' a legitimate historical problem while warning against the idea that the city preserved one unchanged constitutional identity. Political importance, sacred prestige, settlement extent, and administrative function can change at different speeds. Finds bearing titles or names must be read in their excavated contexts; an isolated seal does not authorize reconstruction of an entire provincial bureaucracy. The long-lived site is an archive of repeated reorganization (Sinha and Roy 1969).

Figure 2 revisited: Kolhua as a multi-period sacred landscape

The standing pillar at Kolhua is especially useful when read beside the surrounding stupas and monastic remains because it demonstrates how a sacred place accumulates structures across time. The visual ensemble encountered today is not one Mauryan construction project. The pillar belongs to a Mauryan monumental horizon; nearby Buddhist structures were built, rebuilt, enlarged, or reused in later phases; modern conservation again reorganizes how the site is seen. The photograph should therefore be read vertically through chronology rather than horizontally as if all visible masonry were contemporary.



Figure 2. The lion-capital pillar and monastic remains at Kolhua, Vaishali. The visible complex contains remains of more than one phase and must be read stratigraphically.

Photograph: Bpilgrim, 2007. CC BY-SA 2.5. Wikimedia Commons file page. Reproduced from the earlier edition; the image is contextual evidence for the modern archaeological ensemble, not proof that all visible remains are contemporary.

Pilgrims are authors, not transparent measuring instruments

Faxian in the early fifth century and Xuanzang in the seventh are among the most important external witnesses to Buddhist landscapes in the Gangetic plain. Their records are invaluable because they describe routes, monasteries, stupas, ruins, sectarian communities, legends, and the availability of Buddhist texts. Modern archaeology has repeatedly used them to identify sites. Yet scholarship on Chinese Buddhist travel writing stresses that these records are literary, religious, and cross-cultural productions. A pilgrim selected places because they mattered to Buddhist history and doctrine, organized space through sacred memory, and wrote for readers in China. The account is

evidence, but not a modern field notebook (Deeg 2019; Deeg 2012).

Faxian: travel for Vinaya and sacred geography

Faxian's journey at the turn of the fifth century was motivated in large part by the search for Vinaya and other Buddhist texts unavailable or incomplete in China. That purpose shaped what he noticed. Monastic discipline, sacred sites, relics, stupas, and the condition of Buddhist communities receive attention because they were central to his project. Where he says little about taxation, peasant production, or non-Buddhist institutions, silence should not be converted into absence. His value for regional history lies in the combination of itinerary and institutional observation, read with genre awareness (Legge 1886; Deeg 2019).

Faxian and Vaishali: memory between city and relic landscape

Faxian's Vaishali material is briefer than Xuanzang's later account but preserves a Buddhist memory landscape associated with the Buddha, Ananda, relics, and monastic places. By his time the political Vajjian world of the early Buddhist texts was many centuries in the past. His evidence should therefore be dated to the early fifth-century condition and memory of the site, not used as direct testimony for sixth- or fifth-century BCE institutions. When his route helps identify Vaishali, it does so through relative sequence and sacred-place continuity rather than through an unbroken civic archive (Legge 1886).

Xuanzang: a seventh-century archive of ruins and communities

Xuanzang's account of Vaishali is unusually detailed. In Samuel Beal's translation he describes a fertile country, a capital largely in ruins, several hundred monasteries mostly dilapidated, only a small number still occupied by few monks, numerous non-Buddhist temples, and many Nirgrantha followers. Those observations are evidence for the seventh-century religious landscape as represented by Xuanzang. They

should not be collapsed into a single story of 'Buddhist decline': substantial sacred memory and monuments persisted even as institutional occupancy changed and non-Buddhist communities were prominent (Beal 1884; Li Rongxi 1996).

Ruins are historically specific evidence

A pilgrim's description of a ruined city is not proof that the entire region was depopulated. Ruins can mark contraction of an old urban core while population moves to nearby settlements; monasteries can lose residents while pilgrimage continues; religious buildings can be reused; and agriculture may remain productive around monumental decay. Xuanzang himself combines descriptions of ruins with fertile land and living religious communities. This juxtaposition is methodologically valuable. It discourages narratives in which political or Buddhist 'decline' becomes demographic disappearance and instead directs attention to changing settlement form and patronage (Beal 1884).

Several hundred monasteries: count, convention, and translation

Large numerical statements in Chinese pilgrim records should be handled with care. The translated number of monasteries, the circuit of a kingdom, or the distance in li may reflect observation, reported information, textual convention, copy history, and translation choices. Exact-looking numbers are not automatically precise survey measurements. They remain evidence, but their strongest use is comparative: was a place represented as densely sacred or sparsely occupied; near or far; large or small relative to neighbouring entries? Converting every li into a fixed modern kilometre risks false precision when route, unit, and textual transmission are uncertain (Deeg 2012; Deeg 2023).

Relational geography: sequence before coordinate

The safest way to use an itinerary is relational. One begins with the order of places, directions, river crossings, mountains, and clusters of monuments; tests whether several consecutive identifications fit; and only then considers numerical distance. A proposed location that fits one distance but makes the surrounding route impossible is weak. This method also accommodates changing rivers, a major concern in the Ganga-Gandak-Ghaghara and Kosi systems. The travelogue becomes a network of constraints rather than a list of coordinates (Deeg 2023; Chapter 4 of this book).

How to use Faxian and Xuanzang as historical geography

Pilgrim records are relational archives: route sequence matters more than converting one distance into a modern coordinate.

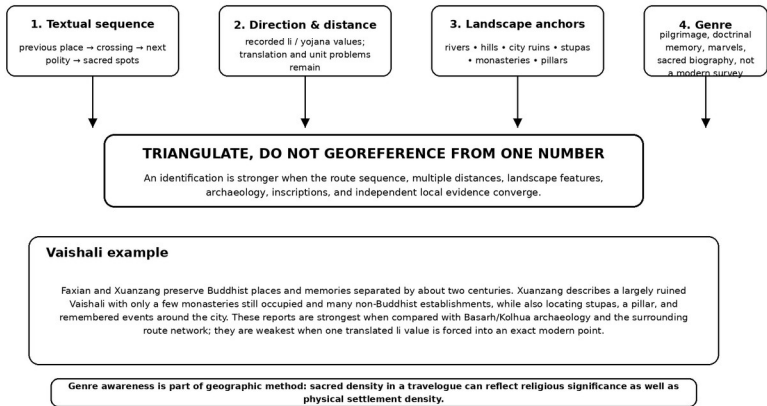


Diagram 19. How to use Faxian and Xuanzang as historical geography. Pilgrim records are treated as relational and genre-shaped archives rather than modern surveys.

Credit: Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026.
Method informed by Faxian/Legge, Xuanzang/Beal and Li Rongxi, and Max Deeg's studies of Chinese Buddhist travel writing. Rights: © Gajendra Thakur, 2026.

Source links: Xuanzang Vaishali text in Beal translation, <https://www.wisdomlib.org/south-asia/book/buddhist-records-of-the-western-world-xuanzang/d/doc220242.html> ; Deeg 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.217> ; Deeg 2023, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004549319_004

Xuanzang's Vaishali and religious plurality

Xuanzang's juxtaposition of a few occupied monasteries with many non-Buddhist temples and numerous Nirgrantha followers is especially significant for a history that includes both Buddhism and Jainism. It demonstrates that sacred landscapes were plural and that institutional fortunes differed within the same region. 'Decline of Buddhism' can describe reduced monastic occupancy in a particular account, but it should not become a theory of religious replacement at one date. Jain, Brahmanical, Buddhist, and local institutions occupied overlapping social and economic fields, and the traveller's categories themselves reflect a Buddhist viewpoint (Beal 1884; Deeg 2019).

A pillar seen centuries later is evidence twice over

When a seventh-century pilgrim reports a pillar attributed to Ashoka, the statement has two chronological layers. First, the surviving monument may indeed be Mauryan, a proposition tested by archaeology and art history. Second, the pilgrim proves that in the seventh century the monument was visible and embedded in a Buddhist explanatory tradition. Even if a specific event commemorated by the pillar cannot be read from an inscription, the tradition attached to it is historically real for Xuanzang's age. Distinguishing manufacture from remembered meaning turns apparent uncertainty into richer evidence.

Pilgrimage creates and preserves route knowledge

Pilgrimage does more than record geography; it helps reproduce it. Monks, donors, guides, monasteries, ferries, hospices, shrines, and stories make a sacred route usable across generations. A place can remain on a religious map after political importance declines because ritual memory sustains travel. Conversely, a route can shift when rivers move or institutions disappear. Faxian and Xuanzang therefore document networks produced by religious practice, not only roads inherited from states. The relationship between an

Ashokan corridor and a pilgrim corridor may be historically meaningful without being identical (Deeg 2023).

From Pataliputra to the north: continuity without a single road

The Gangetic capital region and the north Bihar-Himalayan corridor recur across very different archives: Mauryan pillars, Buddhist itineraries, Gupta frontier claims, and later Nepal inscriptions. This recurrence supports the long-term importance of north-south movement. It does not prove that one engineered road remained fixed from Ashoka through Xuanzang. Alluvial rivers migrate, ferries move, urban centres rise and contract, and political borders change. Long-duration connectivity should therefore be reconstructed as a corridor with shifting segments rather than a timeless line (Falk 2006; Deeg 2023).

Inscriptions and itineraries have opposite silences

Royal inscriptions foreground kings, officials, norms, conquest, lineage, and public claims; pilgrim records foreground monasteries, sacred events, relics, routes, and sectarian communities. The first often under-represents ordinary religious practice; the second often under-represents taxation, agrarian administration, and secular political institutions. Reading them together is powerful precisely because their silences differ. An imperial history based only on inscriptions becomes court-centred, while a regional history based only on pilgrims becomes monastery-centred. The combined archive still does not supply the full lives of cultivators, women, artisans, and labourers, whose history must be sought through archaeology and social inference.

Epigraphic absence is not political absence

A locality without a surviving royal inscription was not necessarily outside imperial influence. Inscriptions survive unevenly because rulers selected particular places, stone was reused, monuments were destroyed, discoveries are accidental, and survey intensity varies. The reverse is equally important:

one inscription does not mean dense bureaucratic penetration around it. Epigraphic maps are maps of surviving acts of writing. Historians can infer wider political structures from multiple sources, but they should not color every blank space as autonomous or every inscribed point as fully administered.

Monument relocation and the danger of present position

Some famous pillars elsewhere in India were moved in later periods, and the Allahabad pillar's long inscriptional biography itself raises questions of changing setting and reuse. For every monument, present location must therefore be distinguished from documented ancient find context. North Bihar's standing pillars are often treated as route markers partly because they remained in or near their historical landscapes, but even here foundations, excavation history, and antiquarian records matter. A route argument should use provenience, not simply present GPS coordinates.

Colonial archaeology and the recovery of Buddhist geography

Nineteenth-century surveyors used Chinese pilgrim translations, inscriptions, local names, and visible ruins to identify ancient Buddhist sites. Their work was foundational but not methodologically neutral. Texts were sometimes made to fit expected maps; ancient names were matched to modern ones through phonetic resemblance; and imperial archaeology often privileged monumental Buddhism over living local histories. Later excavation could confirm, modify, or reject those identifications. The history of discovery is therefore part of the source criticism: knowing how 'Vaishali' became fixed on an archaeological map helps distinguish accumulated evidence from inherited certainty (Cunningham; Deeg 2012).

Translation history is part of the evidence chain

The standard English forms 'Fa-Hien' and 'Hiuen Tsiang' in nineteenth-century scholarship reflect older systems of rendering Chinese names; Faxian and Xuanzang are now

common. More important than spelling is translation history. James Legge and Samuel Beal made the travel records accessible to archaeology, while later translations and scholarship have revised readings and contextualized the Chinese texts more closely. When an argument turns on a distance, place-name, sectarian label, or descriptive adjective, historians should check the underlying edition or a modern critical translation rather than treating a Victorian English phrase as the original source (Li Rongxi 1996; Deeg 2019).

Empires, sacred routes, and the India-Nepal frame

The present book spans India and Nepal, but the evidence in this chapter predates the modern international boundary. Ashokan monuments in the north Bihar corridor, Samudragupta's reference to Nepal, and Xuanzang's sequence from Vaishali/Vrijji toward Nepal all show that the Himalayan foreland and Gangetic plain were politically and religiously connected across what is now a national frontier. The proper historical conclusion is connectivity between changing polities, not an ancient version of modern bilateral relations. Chapter 11 shifts the perspective into the Kathmandu Valley's Licchavi epigraphic archive, where local dates, rulers, grants, offices, and social institutions become visible on their own terms.

Evidentiary conclusions

Chapter 10 changes the evidentiary scale of the book. Mauryan pillars show large-scale monumental mobilization; the Champaran Pillar Edicts provide direct royal language about dhamma and officials; Kolhua demonstrates that Ashokan monumental presence need not include an inscription; Gupta coins and the Samudragupta prasasti show later strategies of alliance, praise, and frontier hierarchy; Faxian and Xuanzang preserve Buddhist route knowledge, sacred memory, ruins, and institutional change centuries later. None of these archives is complete. Together they demonstrate repeated integration of Mithila-Vajji and Nepal-facing corridors into larger political and

religious networks while preserving the difference between imperial claim, local occupation, monumental afterlife, and pilgrim memory.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Hultzsch, E., ed. *Inscriptions of Asoka*. New edition. *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press for the Government of India, 1925.
- Falk, Harry. *Aśokan Sites and Artefacts: A Source-Book with Bibliography*. Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2006.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3403874>.
- Thapar, Romila. *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*. 3rd ed. Oxford University Press, 2012.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198077244.001.0001>.
- Lahiri, Nayanjot. *Ashoka in Ancient India*. Harvard University Press, 2015.
<https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674915237>.
- Salomon, Richard. *Indian Epigraphy: A Guide to the Study of Inscriptions in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and the Other Indo-Aryan Languages*. Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Fleet, J. F. *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors*. *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. 3. Calcutta: Government of India, 1888, especially pp. 10-17 (Allahabad Prasasti of Samudragupta). Digital record: <https://zenodo.org/records/891412>.
- Siddham: The Asian Inscription Database. 'Allāhābād Praśasti of Samudragupta', IN00001, and Allāhābād Pillar object record.
<https://siddham.network/inscription/in00001/> ;
<https://siddham.network/object/ob00001/>.
- British Museum. Gold coin depicting Chandragupta I and Kumaradevi, Gupta period, collection object MAR.1058.
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_MAR-1058.
- Museums of India, Allahabad Museum. Gold Coin of Chandragupta I - King and Queen Type, AM-GC-10, c. fourth century CE.
https://www.museumsofindia.gov.in/repository/record/alh_ald-AM-GC-10-7669.
- Faxian. *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*. Translated by James Legge. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886.
- Xuanzang. Si-yu-ki: *Buddhist Records of the Western World*. Translated by Samuel Beal. 2 vols. London: Trübner, 1884.
- Li Rongxi, trans. *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*. BDK English Tripiṭaka 79. Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1996.

- Deeg, Max. 'Chinese Buddhist Travelers: Faxian, Xuanzang, and Yijing.' Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.217>.
- Deeg, Max. 'Show Me the Land Where the Buddha Dwelled...: Xuanzang's Record of the Western Regions: A Misunderstood Text?' *China Report* 48, nos. 1-2 (2012). <https://doi.org/10.1177/000944551104800205>.
- Deeg, Max. 'Transcending Space: Buddhist Travelogues across Cultural and Other Borders.' In *Stepping Back and Looking Ahead*. Brill, 2023, 62-91. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004549319_004.
- Sinha, B. P., and Sita Ram Roy. *Vaisali Excavations, 1958-1962*. Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Bihar, 1969.
- Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Pearson Education India, 2008.
- Archaeological Survey of India, Patna Circle. 'Monuments Details': Lauriya-Areraaj, Lauriya-Nandangarh, Rampurva, and related protected monuments. <https://asipatnacircle.gov.in/monuments-details>.

Chapter 11. Licchavi Nepal and the problem of continuity

What “Licchavi Nepal” can securely mean

For this chapter, “Licchavi Nepal” is first of all an inscriptional historical category. The securely dated record in the Kathmandu Valley begins with Mānadeva’s Changu Narayan pillar inscription, whose samvat 386 is conventionally converted to 464 CE. From the fifth century onward a substantial Sanskrit epigraphic corpus names rulers, relatives, officials, settlements, taxes, land, religious beneficiaries and acts of donation. That archive justifies speaking of a Licchavi royal lineage and political order in the Valley. It does not by itself establish when the family first entered Nepal, whether all persons called Licchavi shared one biological ancestry, or whether the dynasty was an unchanged continuation of the Licchavis remembered at Vaishali roughly a millennium earlier. The chronological asymmetry must remain visible: political memory of Licchavis in the middle Gangetic plain is early; dated Licchavi rule in the Kathmandu Valley is much later (Riccardi 1989; Vajracharya 1973; Sharma 1983; Whelpton 2005).

The epigraphic threshold and the silence before it

Mānadeva’s pillar is often called the beginning of “historical” Nepal because it creates a firm dated anchor, not because nothing existed before it. The inscription itself names earlier rulers, and later genealogical traditions push the lineage farther back. Archaeological and art-historical evidence likewise shows that the Valley had complex communities before 464. The methodological point is narrower: before the fifth-century inscriptions, the political sequence is much harder to control with contemporary, internally dated documentation. Chronicles composed centuries later are valuable for cultural memory, but their regnal lists cannot simply be given the same evidentiary weight as a dated stone inscription. The expansion therefore

uses 464 as an epigraphic threshold rather than an invented foundation date for settlement, kingship or culture in the Valley (Riccardi 1989; Slusser 1982; Whelpton 2005).

Changu Narayan as a dated political act

The Changu Narayan pillar is a monument, a religious object and a royal text at once. Its opening date formula, royal genealogy and praise of Viṣṇu place Mānadeva within a Sanskritic idiom shared across much of South Asia. Its political passages celebrate military capability and royal duty; its family narrative gives unusual prominence to Queen Rājyavatī after the death of King Dharmadeva. Because the record was publicly inscribed at a sacred site, it was not a neutral chronicle. It selected deeds and relationships that the court wished to monumentalize. That selectivity does not weaken the inscription as evidence; it defines the questions it can answer. It provides names, a date formula, genealogy, royal ideology and remembered campaigns with far greater precision than later legend, while leaving ordinary household life and political opposition largely outside its frame (Riccardi 1989; Siddham inscription database).

Samvat 386 and the problem of eras

The conversion of the Changu Narayan date depends on identifying the era behind the numeral. The standard interpretation treats samvat 386 as belonging to the Śaka era, yielding 464 CE. Licchavi inscriptions later employ a different local era whose epoch is conventionally placed in 576 CE and which has been associated in scholarship with Aṃśuvarman or with a “Mānadeva” era. Gautamavajra Vajracharya’s publication of later inscriptions emphasized that the corpus uses two consecutive eras and that the local era continued beyond the core dynastic period. This matters because a bare samvat number cannot be converted responsibly without establishing which era a record uses. Chronology is therefore an epigraphic

argument, not a mechanical addition performed on every inscription (Vajracharya 1973; Riccardi 1989).

Genealogy as history and royal rhetoric

Mānadeva's inscription names predecessors including Vṛṣadeva, Śaṅkaradeva and Dharmadeva. That is valuable dynastic evidence because the sequence is embedded in a fifth-century royal monument. Yet genealogy in inscriptions also serves legitimacy. The depiction of ancestors as virtuous, disciplined and powerful connects the living king to an idealized past. Later Nepalese inscriptions extend ancestry through still more remote and sometimes mythic frameworks, including solar-dynasty language. Rather than choosing between "true genealogy" and "mere propaganda," a source-critical reading separates levels: near ancestors named in contemporary or near-contemporary texts are stronger historical data; remote origin stories are stronger evidence for how a dynasty wished to situate itself within prestigious South Asian lineages (Riccardi 1989; Whelpton 2005).

Rājyavatī and the political visibility of a royal widow

The Changu Narayan text gives Queen Rājyavatī a central role in the transition after Dharmadeva's death. In the inscriptional narrative she contemplates following her husband in death, while Mānadeva urges her to remain and promises royal action worthy of his father. The passage should not be turned into a statistical history of widowhood or a universal rule about sati. Its value is more specific. A royal woman is made central to dynastic continuity, grief, legitimacy and religious merit, and the king's campaigns are narrated in relation to her. The inscription therefore shows that royal motherhood could be politically visible within court rhetoric even though formal sovereignty remained masculine. Later dedications associated with her further demonstrate the importance of royal women in patronage. Gender history here begins from the exact social position the inscription records rather than from an

undifferentiated category of “women in Licchavi Nepal” (Riccardi 1989; Siddham translation).

Campaigns east and west: power without a modern map

Mānadeva’s pillar celebrates movement against opponents in the east and toward a western place conventionally read as Mallapuri, with assistance from his maternal uncle in the western campaign. These passages demonstrate a royal claim to military reach beyond the immediate court centre. They do not give the coordinates of a fixed national frontier. Identifying every directional campaign with a modern district, river boundary or later kingdom creates false precision. A safer historical conclusion is that the court represented Mānadeva as compelling submission across more than one direction and as depending, at least in the narrative, on kinship-backed military cooperation. The political geography of fifth-century Nepal should therefore be reconstructed from repeated place names, routes and later inscriptions, not from a single heroic passage expanded into a modern territorial polygon (Riccardi 1989).

Viṣṇu, kingship and the sacred setting

Changu Narayan is a Vaiṣṇava sacred complex, and the inscription’s language embeds Mānadeva’s dynasty within a Viṣṇu-centred royal idiom. This makes religious patronage part of political history. It does not justify calling the whole Valley uniformly Vaiṣṇava. Licchavi-period inscriptions and surviving sculpture point to substantial Śaiva and Buddhist institutions as well, while particular rulers and donors could support more than one religious establishment. Royal ideology, household devotion, monastery life and local cult were overlapping but not identical fields. The safest approach is to follow named dedications, institutions and images rather than assign a single confessional identity to an entire reign (Slusser 1982; UNESCO, “Kathmandu Valley”).

Sanskrit public language and local society

The Licchavi inscriptions are predominantly in Sanskrit and use a north Indian-derived script tradition. That is strong evidence for Sanskrit as a language of royal and public epigraphy. It is not evidence that everyone in the Valley spoke Sanskrit in daily life. Kamal P. Malla drew attention to the many non-Sanskrit place names and lexical forms preserved inside the Sanskrit records; a large proportion can be related to early forms of Newar vocabulary or to other local linguistic strata. The inscriptional archive therefore records a bilingual or multilingual social environment indirectly: the prestige code of the monument is Sanskrit, while the geography it governs preserves local names that the court did not erase. “Sanskritization” is historically useful when it denotes a public cultural process, not when it is made equivalent to the disappearance of indigenous languages (Malla 1989; Whelpton 2005).

A connected Sanskritic court, not a copy of the Gangetic plain

Court titles, religious vocabulary, scripts and political eulogy connect Licchavi Nepal with broader South Asian Sanskritic practices. Artistic forms likewise participated in networks extending through the Gangetic plain and beyond. Yet institutional similarity is not identity. Local place names, administrative words, landholding practices and the particular Valley ecology shaped how imported or shared forms worked. Prayag Raj Sharma’s study of the land system repeatedly warns that some Licchavi offices cannot be translated confidently into familiar Indian bureaucratic categories. The historical model is therefore one of selective participation: rulers and religious elites used widely intelligible Sanskritic forms while governing communities whose social organization retained local histories and generated institutions without exact outside equivalents (Sharma 1983; Slusser 1982).

Licchavi continuity: what links Vaishali and Nepal, and what remains unproved

Chronology matters: a shared dynastic name is evidence, but it is not by itself a documented migration genealogy.

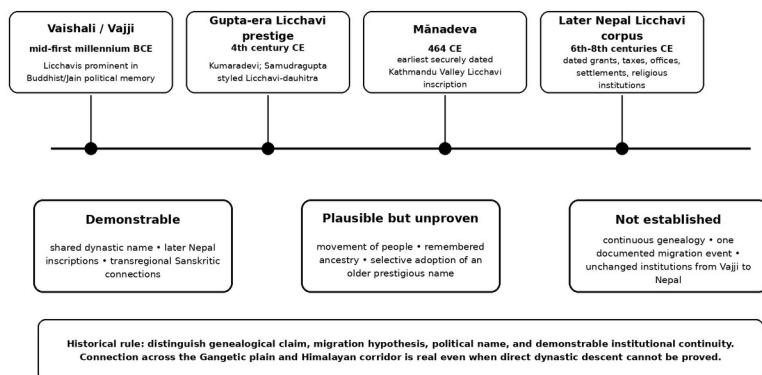


Diagram 20. Licchavi continuity: what links Vaishali and Nepal, and what remains unproved. The chronology separates a shared dynastic name and demonstrable transregional connections from migration hypotheses and claims of an unbroken political genealogy.

Credit: Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026.

Analytical framework based on Chapters 7 and 10 of this book, Riccardi 1989, Malla 1989, Whelpton 2005, and the Nepal Licchavi inscriptional corpus. Rights: © Gajendra Thakur, 2026.

Source links: <https://doi.org/10.2307/604086> ;
<https://www.indoskript.phil.uni-wuerzburg.de/manuscripts/details/260> ;
<https://sources.mandala.library.virginia.edu/source/land-system-licchavis-nepal>

The Vaishali hypothesis: why the shared name matters

The coincidence of the dynastic name is historically important and deserves explanation. Licchavis are well attested in the political memory of Vaishali, and a Licchavi identity remained prestigious in Gupta-period north India: the Gupta king Samudragupta famously advertised maternal Licchavi descent. A later dynasty ruling the Kathmandu Valley also called itself Licchavi. These facts make some relationship possible and perhaps likely at the level of ancestry, migration, political memory or prestige. But “some relationship” is not yet a

documented genealogy. The surviving fifth-century Nepal inscription does not say that Mānadeva's recent ancestors migrated from Vaishali, nor does it narrate a continuous line through the intervening centuries. The shared name is therefore a question-generating datum, not the answer by itself.

Gupta-era Licchavi prestige and an intermediate chronological horizon

The Gupta evidence is useful precisely because it shows that “Licchavi” remained a politically valuable identity centuries after the Buddha-age Vajjian polity and before the earliest dated Nepal inscription. Coins depicting Chandragupta I and Kumaradevi and inscriptions describing Samudragupta as Licchavi-dauhitra, “daughter's son of the Licchavis,” demonstrate the prestige of Licchavi maternal descent in fourth-century north India. Yet the location and exact political organization of Kumaradevi's Licchavi family are debated, and the Gupta evidence cannot be used as a bridge automatically connecting Vaishali to Kathmandu. It narrows the chronological gap in the history of the name while leaving the path of transmission open (Chapter 10; Singh 2008).

Later origin genealogies are evidence for memory

Later Nepalese inscriptions and chronicles offer more elaborate origin stories than the fifth-century records. Such traditions can connect the dynasty to heroic, solar or north Indian ancestry and sometimes to places outside the Valley. Their lateness does not make them historically worthless. They show what later rulers and intellectual communities believed, claimed or wished to legitimate. But a genealogy first attested centuries after the migration it describes must be tested against earlier inscriptions and external evidence. When the earlier archive is silent, the correct label is “later dynastic tradition,” not “confirmed migration history.” This distinction protects both the cultural importance of the tradition and the chronological integrity of the historical argument.

Migration, name adoption and mixed ancestry are different hypotheses

Several mechanisms could explain the recurrence of the Licchavi name. A group bearing the name may have migrated into the Valley; a local dynasty may have incorporated migrants or marriage partners; an existing ruling family may have adopted an old prestigious name; or a later genealogy may have magnified a partial ancestral connection into a comprehensive origin narrative. These mechanisms are not mutually exclusive. Demonstrating one requires evidence appropriate to it: genealogy for descent, securely dated movement or settlement evidence for migration, linguistic and material patterns for community formation, and political context for name adoption. The chapter therefore rejects the false choice between “the Nepal Licchavis definitely came from Vaishali” and “the names have no connection.” The evidence supports a historically meaningful problem, not a single proven route.

The Tarai and Himalayan approaches as connective space

Whatever the dynasty’s origin, connections between the Kathmandu Valley, the Nepal Tarai and the middle Gangetic plain were structurally plausible and repeatedly demonstrable. Routes through river valleys and passes carried pilgrims, artisans, religious specialists, merchants, marriage partners and political envoys. The Valley’s Sanskrit inscriptions and art belong to this wider world, while the Tarai preserved sites connected with Buddhist pilgrimage and north-south movement. Connection, however, should be reconstructed as repeated circulation rather than imagined as one migration caravan. A corridor can sustain centuries of movement without producing a single stable ethnicity or political dependency (Slusser 1982; Whelpton 2005; Chapter 10).

An inscriptional kingdom, not a perfectly centralized state

Licchavi royal edicts can sound comprehensive because they issue commands in the name of kings and powerful office-

holders. The land record shows a more layered political order. Royal authority depended on officials, village agents, corporate bodies, religious beneficiaries and local landholders whose rights and obligations had to be specified. Exemptions matter as much as taxes because they reveal the limits of routine intervention. A grant protecting a settlement from particular officials demonstrates that those officials normally possessed powers worth restricting. The state is therefore visible not as a modern administrative grid but as a negotiated hierarchy in which land, revenue and jurisdiction were distributed among overlapping institutions (Sharma 1983).

Mānagrha and the palace as an inscriptional address

Many Licchavi records are issued from named royal residences, among them Mānagrha. The palace name functions in the inscription like a political address: it marks the place from which authority is proclaimed. Art-historical reconstructions have attempted to locate and imagine the palace complex, but the surviving inscriptional language is more secure than any complete architectural plan. A palace was not merely a royal house. It concentrated scribal, ritual, military and distributive functions, and its name could become shorthand for a political faction or royal line. When a different centre appears in later records, that change can reflect shifts in residence and power without requiring the immediate disappearance of the older institution (Slusser 1982).

Kailāśakūṭabhavana and the geography of changing power

Aṃśuvarman's inscriptions are famously associated with Kailāśakūṭabhavana. The appearance of this palace in royal documents is part of the evidence that political power in the seventh century could be exercised by figures who were not simply the reigning Licchavi king in a one-ruler model. Later rulers also issued documents from this centre. The palace's precise archaeological footprint is debated, but its inscriptional presence is not. Tracking the formula "from the palace" across

records provides a way to study shifts in political centre and court affiliation without assuming that dynastic labels alone tell us who controlled daily government (Slusser 1982; Sharma 1983).

Aṃśuvarman and the problem of rank

Aṃśuvarman emerges in the inscriptional record as an exceptionally powerful figure whose titles and practical authority changed over time. Early records can place him in relation to a Licchavi sovereign; later records allow him to issue grants with far greater autonomy and royal style. This is why older scholarship speaks of “dual government” or a period in which a Licchavi king and a dominant non-Licchavi power-holder coexisted. The terminology should remain descriptive rather than constitutional. The inscriptions show divided or layered sovereignty, not a written system of co-kingship. Aṃśuvarman’s importance is clearest in the documentary consequences: new palace associations, grants, fiscal regulation and institutional change (Sharma 1983; Whelpton 2005; Michaels 2024).

Jishnugupta, co-rulership and the danger of tidy dynastic charts

The seventh-century record becomes still harder to compress into a simple list of successive kings. Inscriptions pair Licchavi rulers such as Dhruvadeva or Bhimarjunadeva with powerful Gupta figures including Jishnugupta; some documents and coins make the latter appear nearly sovereign. The result is best described as shared, competing or layered rule whose exact balance changed. A neat dynastic table that gives each year to one exclusive monarch hides the central historical fact: power could be distributed between royal lineage, palace centre and dominant office-holding family. This complexity also helps explain why later narrative sources or foreign reports may simplify the sequence differently (Vajracharya, Kailash studies; Slusser 1982; Michaels 2024).

Administrative words that resist easy translation

Early inscriptions refer to offices or jurisdictions such as kuṭhera, līṅgvala, śullya/solla and māpcoka. Sharma emphasizes that their distinct functions cannot be established confidently from the surviving texts, even though they are connected with revenue and village intervention. This is a useful warning against translating every term as “tax office,” “police,” or “district administration” merely to make the system look familiar. Vocabulary itself is evidence for institutional difference. Where a word is poorly understood, preserving the transliteration and the observed contexts is more scholarly than assigning a modern bureaucratic equivalent that the source does not support (Sharma 1983).

Village agents and the changing language of authority

The land inscriptions show local intermediaries whose titles change over time. Sharma traces a village agent called brahmun, later a svatalasvāmin and then a dauvārika in some contexts. The sequence should not be read as a perfectly linear administrative reform across every settlement, but it demonstrates that royal government required persons embedded near village life. Their work linked land, taxes, disputes and royal orders. The changing terminology may reflect institutional reorganization, Sanskritization of titles, shifts in social groups holding office, or all of these together. Local administration is therefore visible as a historical process, not a timeless “panchayat system” projected backward (Sharma 1983).

Pañcālī: corporate village life without a modern municipality

Pañcālī is one of the most important terms in later Licchavi land administration. Sharma’s reading of the inscriptions describes bodies or settlement groups composed substantially of landholders and cultivators who received defined duties and shared privileges, often connected with religious or secular responsibilities. In some inscriptions the word refers to a settlement cluster; in others to a body within a village. This

variation itself matters. Pañcālī should not be translated automatically as a democratic village council or modern local government. It demonstrates collective organization and delegated responsibility, but membership, representation and decision procedures must be reconstructed inscription by inscription (Sharma 1983).

Goṣṭhī and durable religious corporations

Goṣṭhī organizations appear in relation to temples, ritual maintenance, monasteries and endowed property. Their importance lies in collective continuity: a religious foundation required more than the donor's initial gift. Land, income, ritual obligations and maintenance had to be managed over time. Corporate bodies could therefore become durable holders of responsibilities and resources. Later Nepalese guthi institutions make the Licchavi evidence especially tempting to read as direct institutional ancestry. Some continuity is plausible and significant, but the forms and legal powers changed across centuries. The safest conclusion is that corporate religious endowment has deep inscriptional roots in the Valley; the exact legal continuity of every later guthi form must be demonstrated rather than presumed (Sharma 1983).

Land as the material base of royal and religious power

Licchavi grants repeatedly return to land because land linked cultivation, revenue, settlement and religious support. Inscriptions refer to land treated as royal domain, land transferred to corporate bodies, boundaries, exemptions and the obligations of residents. Sharma argues that the crown's claims over land became a central resource through which political hierarchy was organized. But "royal land" does not mean that every plot was a directly managed crown estate. Rights could be layered: cultivators worked land, beneficiaries received income, corporate bodies managed obligations and royal authority defined or confirmed the arrangement. Land history must therefore distinguish ownership, cultivation, revenue

entitlement and jurisdiction instead of collapsing them into one property category (Sharma 1983).

Taxes: names are firmer than rates

The inscriptional record names several levies and obligations, but exact rates and incidence are often obscure. Sharma discusses taxes connected with houses, fields and other payments, and later Aṃśuvarman-period records specify monetary obligations such as *maryādāpaṇa* and seasonal payments. Some beneficiaries included royal persons, officials, deities, shrines and monasteries. This evidence reveals a fiscal world in which political, ritual and institutional claims intersected. It does not justify calculating a universal Licchavi tax burden. We often know the name of a levy and the recipient more securely than the number of households liable or the effective rate. Fiscal history should preserve that asymmetry (Sharma 1983).

Exemption clauses as maps of ordinary state power

A grant that exempts a village from the entry or demands of particular officials indirectly tells us what normally happened. Inscriptions limiting the access of revenue officers or protecting endowed settlements reveal both royal authority and the routine reach of administrative agents. Exemption is therefore not a marginal legal detail. It maps ordinary power by identifying what has been suspended. The same logic applies to religious endowments: immunity could make a gift economically meaningful by protecting its income from competing claims. Reading exemptions alongside tax clauses produces a more realistic picture of state formation than royal praise alone (Sharma 1983).

Property, marriage and a rare window on women's claims

One inscription discussed by Sharma in relation to the *māpcoka* office preserves rules concerning a woman's claim to her husband's property under several circumstances, including

death, disappearance, renunciation or loss of caste, and appears to preserve her claim even under conditions that do not map neatly onto classical Hindu-law expectations. The exact social range of the rule and its application cannot be generalized from one inscription. Even so, it is unusually valuable because it moves beyond royal women and donations to show that property and marital status entered local legal administration. It also illustrates why Licchavi Nepal cannot be reconstructed simply by importing normative law books from the plains: local inscriptional practice could differ in significant ways (Sharma 1983).

Licchavi Nepal through inscriptions: a layered political economy
 A model of relationships visible in the inscriptional record; not an organization chart for every reign.

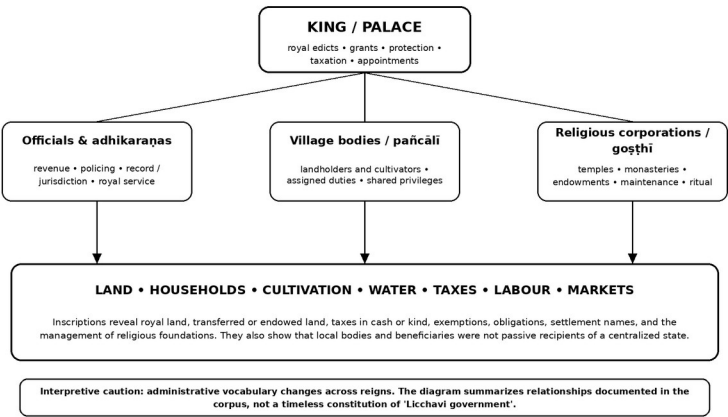


Diagram 21. Licchavi Nepal through inscriptions: a layered political economy. The diagram summarizes relationships repeatedly visible in land and religious inscriptions rather than presenting a single organization chart valid for every reign.

Credit: Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026. Based especially on Prayag Raj Sharma, “The Land System of the Licchavis in Nepal,” *Kailash* 10 (1983): 11–62, and Dhanavajra Vajracharya’s Licchavi-period inscription corpus. Rights: © Gajendra Thakur, 2026.

Source links:
<https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/items/e9dd7486-d005-42c8-a693-ae325ecff431> ;

<https://sources.mandala.library.virginia.edu/source/land-system-licchavis-nepal> ; <https://lib.icimod.org/records/55gh1-xdc32>

Settlements, names and the geography of the Valley

Licchavi inscriptions name villages, neighbourhoods, water places, shrines and palace centres. Because many toponyms are not Sanskrit, they provide indirect evidence for populations and languages whose voices are otherwise poorly represented in formal texts. Mapping these names can reveal settlement continuity and spatial organization, but historical geography must resist false precision. A place name may survive while its settlement shifts, and a modern locality can preserve an ancient name without preserving identical boundaries. The strongest reconstructions combine epigraphy, archaeology, terrain, later maps and the history of the name itself (Malla 1989; Slusser 1982).

Water, cultivation and the Valley environment

The Kathmandu Valley's political economy depended on irrigated and rain-fed cultivation, springs, channels, ponds and river systems. Inscriptions placed near water sources or recording land endowments show that water and land were institutionally linked. Agricultural productivity made religious endowment and taxation possible; religious institutions in turn could maintain water works and local services through corporate organizations. The environment should not be treated as a passive backdrop. Settlement on the Valley floor and slopes, access to irrigable land, and routes through surrounding passes shaped the geography of power. Yet the surviving inscriptions are not agronomic surveys, so crop yields and population density should not be invented from the existence of grants alone (Sharma 1983; Slusser 1982).

Coinage: authority, exchange and uncertain attribution

Licchavi-period Nepal produced distinctive copper coinages with legends such as Śrī Mānāñka, issues naming Aṃśuvarman

or Jishnugupta, and religious types. Numismatics broadens the archive because coins moved through exchange rather than remaining fixed at a temple or grant site. But the earliest groups are not all securely dated. Rhodes, Gabrisch and Valdetaro noted the temptation to assign the Śrī Mānāñka coins directly to Mānadeva I while also recognizing chronological problems if that attribution creates a long unexplained gap before later named issues. Coin types should therefore be used for monetary circulation, iconography and political titulature with an explicit distinction between directly named issuers and inferred attributions (Rhodes, Gabrisch and Valdetaro 1989).

Markets and monetization without a fully monetary economy

The existence of coins and cash-denominated levies demonstrates monetized transactions, but not a society in which all taxes, rents and exchanges were paid in money. Land, grain, labour obligations, gifts and ritual payments remained fundamental. The inscriptional economy is mixed: kings grant land, institutions receive revenues, some taxes are named in cash terms, and coins circulate alongside in-kind resources. This mixed system is historically more plausible than either extreme of a barter economy or a modern cash economy. It also helps explain why control of land and water remained central even when rulers issued coinage and engaged in long-distance exchange.

Buddhist institutions in an inscriptional landscape

Buddhism in the Licchavi Valley is not known only from later Newar tradition. Inscriptions mention monasteries and donations, and later scholarship has identified a significant set of vihāra names in the corpus. Some royal and elite patronage supported Buddhist institutions even when rulers used Vaiṣṇava or Śaiva royal imagery. This coexistence argues against a simple dynastic conversion model in which the Valley moves from one exclusive state religion to another. The institutional question is more productive: which monasteries received land, who

donated, what ritual or maintenance obligations were endowed, and how did Buddhist communities participate in urban and regional networks? (Locke; Slusser 1982).

Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava patronage without “tolerance” as a slogan

Modern narratives often praise Licchavi Nepal for “religious tolerance.” The underlying evidence is real: inscriptions and art show patronage of multiple Hindu and Buddhist institutions, and families could support different cults. But “tolerance” is a modern political word that can hide competition, hierarchy and unequal resources. It is better to describe plural patronage and institutional coexistence and then ask how power and wealth were distributed. A king’s Vaiṣṇava dedication, a Śaiva sanctuary and a Buddhist viḥāra could all flourish in the same century without implying doctrinal equality or absence of conflict. The archive is richer when the modern slogan is replaced by named donors, sites and endowments (Slusser 1982).

Stone sculpture as evidence with its own chronology

Licchavi-period sculpture is one of Nepal’s great art-historical archives. Images of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Buddhist figures and donors display technical skill and connection with wider South Asian forms while also developing distinctive Valley styles. Sculpture can help date artistic phases and reconstruct patronage, but stylistic dating is an argument, not an inscription. An image found at a temple today may have been moved or reused. The strongest art history therefore combines iconography, stone technology, inscription, archaeological context and documented provenance. Modern temple appearance should never be projected wholesale back to the fifth or seventh century merely because the site contains a Licchavi inscription (Slusser 1982; UNESCO).

Changu Narayan: ancient inscription, layered monument

UNESCO describes Changu Narayan as a traditional settlement and temple ensemble preserving one of the Valley's earliest inscriptions from the fifth century. The inscription's antiquity does not mean that the standing temple fabric is entirely fifth-century. Fire, reconstruction, repair, devotional additions and later art have repeatedly altered the complex. This layered history is methodologically important. The site is simultaneously evidence for Mānadeva's fifth-century public epigraphy and for centuries of subsequent worship and conservation. A responsible caption distinguishes the date of the inscription from the dates of surrounding architecture rather than calling the whole visible courtyard a Licchavi-period building (UNESCO Kathmandu Valley dossier).

Routes to the Tarai and the Gangetic plain

Southward routes connected the Valley with the Tarai and the Ganga plain through river valleys and passes. These routes carried religious texts, artistic models, metal, cloth, salt and other commodities, but their exact volume varied by season and political circumstance. The Sanskrit epigraphic idiom and related artistic forms make such interaction visible culturally even when a merchant ledger is absent. For this book's connected history of Mithila, Vajji and Anga, the central point is not that Licchavi Nepal was politically ruled from north Bihar. It is that north-south circulation tied the Valley to a wider eastern South Asian zone in ways that could transmit people and prestige names without erasing local institutions.

Routes north and the Tibetan question

The Himalayan setting also linked the Valley northward. Later seventh-century Nepal participated in political and commercial relations involving Tibet and China, and Chinese sources become increasingly important for the regional history. Yet celebrated stories require source control. The traditional account of a Nepalese princess Bhrikuti marrying the Tibetan

emperor Songtsen Gampo has played a major role in modern narratives of Nepal-Tibet Buddhism; scholarship has long questioned whether the marriage can be established from contemporary evidence. The story should therefore be presented as an influential Tibetan/Nepalese tradition unless a source is contemporary and explicit, not used as a fixed diplomatic date around which every seventh-century event is organized (Kailash studies; Whelpton 2005).

Xuanzang and Nepal from report

Xuanzang's seventh-century account is valuable for the wider Himalayan-Gangetic world, but his Nepal information is generally treated as received report rather than evidence that he personally surveyed the Valley. Older scholarship already noted that foreign descriptions could misunderstand a complicated political situation such as shared rule between a Licchavi king and another dominant power-holder. This is a useful check on using travel literature. External observation can confirm reputation, products, political names or learned culture, but its itinerary and eyewitness status must be established before details are used to reconstruct an institution. Chapter 10's rules for pilgrim geography apply equally here.

Aṃśuvarman and learned reputation

Chinese-derived traditions credit Aṃśuvarman with learning and even with a work on grammar or etymology. Such notices fit the strong Sanskrit epigraphic culture of the court, but a lost work known only through later or external report cannot be analyzed as though its text survived. The safe historical statement is that Aṃśuvarman acquired a reputation for learning beyond the immediate inscriptional corpus. That reputation can be compared with the sophisticated Sanskrit of contemporary records and with the Valley's place in scholarly networks, while the contents of the lost work remain unknown.

Calendars, scribes and administrative memory

The transition from the Śaka-dated records to a local era is not only a chronological technicality. A dating system makes administrative acts repeatable and comparable across time. Land grants, exemptions and religious endowments depend on memory: later authorities need to know when an order was issued and under whose reign. Inscription on durable stone externalized that memory. The continued use of the local era beyond the most celebrated Licchavi rulers also shows that calendrical practice can outlive a political configuration. Eras, like dynastic names, have histories different from the institutions that first sponsored them (Vajracharya 1973).

Narendradeva and later seventh-century reconfiguration

Later seventh-century inscriptions record a restored prominence of Licchavi rulers after periods of shared or overshadowed kingship. Narendradeva is central to this phase in conventional dynastic histories. The restoration model is useful if it describes a change in documentary authority; it becomes misleading if it implies that a single coherent Licchavi state had disappeared completely and then returned unchanged. Offices, landholding corporations, palace centres and religious beneficiaries persisted through political shifts. Dynastic history is therefore only one layer of institutional continuity.

Jayadeva II and the retrospective dynasty

Jayadeva II's inscriptions are important both for later Licchavi rule and for how the dynasty represented its own past. Long genealogical claims in late records can preserve names otherwise lost, but their retrospective distance requires caution. They may organize earlier rulers to legitimate a present sovereign, reconcile competing branches or connect the dynasty to prestigious cosmology. The closer the record is to the person named, the firmer the historical inference. Late genealogy is best used in combination with the earlier dated stones rather than as a replacement for them.

When does the Licchavi period end?

Textbooks often give a neat terminal date around the mid-eighth century, while the epigraphic record and the use of Licchavi-associated eras extend later. Sharma's land study treats Jayadeva II in the second quarter of the eighth century as the last celebrated ruler of the documentary period, whereas Vajracharya published inscriptions dated in the local era into the early ninth century. The apparent disagreement comes partly from different definitions: the end of a major dynasty, the end of a distinctive inscriptional political order and the last use of an era need not be the same date. This book therefore avoids one artificially precise "fall of the Licchavis" and instead describes a transition whose institutional and chronological edges are uneven.

Continuity into later Nepal: institutions rather than a frozen dynasty

Many features visible in Licchavi inscriptions—religious endowment, corporate management, local intermediaries, Sanskritic royal idioms and the importance of irrigated settlement—have echoes in later Nepalese history. Echo is not identity. Institutional names change, legal powers shift and new political formations reorganize the Valley. Continuity should therefore be tested at the level of practices and documented transitions. A later guthi may inherit the logic of endowed corporate maintenance without preserving every Licchavi rule; a later palace city may occupy an older settlement zone without preserving its fifth-century plan. Long-duration history is strongest when it traces transformation rather than declaring survival unchanged.

What the Licchavi evidence contributes to a history of Mithila and the borderlands

Licchavi Nepal belongs in this regional history because the Kathmandu Valley was linked southward to the Tarai and Gangetic world in which Videha, Vajji, Magadha and later

Mithila were major historical reference points. The shared name Licchavi makes the connection especially visible, but the deeper relationship lies in circulation: Sanskrit texts, pilgrims, artisans, political envoys, marriage networks, objects and institutional models crossed ecological zones. Modern India-Nepal borders did not structure these movements. At the same time, the Valley developed a distinct political economy and linguistic landscape. Connection and difference are therefore not competing conclusions; together they define the historical problem.

Evidentiary conclusions

The history of Licchavi Nepal is unusually strong where it rests on dated inscriptions and unusually vulnerable where later origin traditions are converted into literal migration chronicles. Mānadeva's 464 inscription anchors a royal lineage, public Sanskrit culture and a remembered field of campaigns and patronage. Later records reveal palaces, shared rule, officials, village bodies, religious corporations, land grants, taxes, exemptions and settlement geography. Coins, sculpture and external reports broaden the archive. The same evidence does not prove an unbroken institutional genealogy from the Vajjian Licchavis of Vaishali. A historical connection remains plausible and culturally important, but its form is unresolved. The chapter's strongest conclusion is therefore double: Licchavi Nepal was deeply connected to northern South Asia, and its institutions must still be reconstructed on their own inscriptional terms.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Riccardi, Theodore, Jr. "The Inscription of King Mānadeva at Changu Narayan." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, no. 4 (1989): 611–620. <https://doi.org/10.2307/604086>.
- Sharma, Prayag Raj. "The Land System of the Licchavis in Nepal." *Kailash: A Journal of Himalayan Studies* 10 (1983): 11–62. Cambridge repository: <https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/items/e9dd7486-d005-42c8-a693-ae325ecff431>.
- Vajracharya, Gautamavajra. "Recently Discovered Inscriptions of Licchavi Nepal." *Kailash: A Journal of Himalayan Studies* 1, no. 2 (1973): 117–134.

- Vajracharya, Dhanavajra. *Licchavikālaka Abhilekha*. Kathmandu: Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies / Tribhuvan University, 1973.
- Slusser, Mary Shepherd. *Nepal Mandala: A Cultural Study of the Kathmandu Valley*. 2 vols. Princeton University Press, 1982.
- Whelpton, John. *A History of Nepal*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Malla, Kamal P. “Language and Society in Nepal: Historical Perspective.” In *Nepal: Perspectives on Continuity and Change*, edited by Kamal P. Malla. Kathmandu, 1989.
- Rhodes, Nicholas G., Karl Gabrisch, and Carlo Valdetaro. *The Coinage of Nepal from the Earliest Times Until 1911*. Royal Numismatic Society, 1989.
- Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Pearson Education India, 2008.
- Michaels, Axel. *Nepal: A History from the Earliest Times to the Present*. Oxford University Press, 2024.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197650936.003.0005>.
- UNESCO World Heritage Centre. “Kathmandu Valley.” World Heritage List no. 121. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/121/>.
- Siddham: The Asian Inscription Database. “Changu Narayana Pillar Inscription” (east and north shafts), with references to D. R. Regmi’s *Inscriptions of Ancient Nepal*.
<https://siddham.network/inscription/in02001/> and
<https://siddham.network/inscription/in02002/>.
- Indoskript. “Cangu-Narayan inscription of Manadeva,” inscription ID 260. University of Würzburg. <https://www.indoskript.phil.uni-wuerzburg.de/manuscripts/details/260>.

VOLUME III.

MEDIEVAL PERIOD.

Source-controlled regional history.

Chapter 12. Tirabhukti and the early-medieval regional order

From Videha to Tirabhukti: a change of scale

Tirabhukti, later Tirhut, became a durable administrative and regional name for north Bihar, but it should not be treated as a timeless replacement for Videha or Mithila. The terms belong to different archives and scales. Videha is prominent in Vedic, Upanishadic, Buddhist, Jain, and epic traditions; Tirabhukti becomes especially visible in Gupta and early-medieval administrative records; Mithila grows in importance as a literary, scholastic, and regional name whose later reach cannot simply be projected backward. The safest history therefore asks when each name is actually attested, what kind of source uses it, and whether the source is naming a province, a city-centred administrative unit, a cultural region, or a remembered homeland. A later equivalence between Tirhut and Mithila is historically real without proving that every early-medieval document used the two words as exact synonyms (Sircar 1971; Salomon 1998; Thakur 1988).

The Basarh seals and the first firm administrative archive

The excavations at Basarh, identified with ancient Vaiśālī, recovered a remarkable group of clay seals and sealings that makes Gupta-period Tirabhukti unusually visible. The material includes the seal of Mahādevī Dhruvasvāminī, wife of Chandragupta II and mother of Govindagupta, along with official sealings connected with the establishment of the yuvarāja or crown prince. Read together, these finds show that Vaiśālī was not only a place of ancient republican and Buddhist memory; in the Gupta period it also functioned as a centre of provincial administration. Sealings are not narrative chronicles. Their strength lies in naming offices, establishments, persons, and institutional relationships in a securely archaeological

urban context (Bloch 1906; *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. III, revised ed. 1981).

Vaiśālī as headquarters: strong inference, bounded claim

The Basarh record has often been summarized by saying that Vaiśālī was the capital of Tīrabhukti. That is a reasonable description of the administrative concentration revealed by the seals, but the word capital can imply more than the evidence establishes. What the sealings directly support is the presence of provincial and crown-prince establishments at the site, including offices whose jurisdiction related to Tīrabhukti. They do not provide a surveyed provincial boundary or prove that every official act affecting north Bihar passed through one city. Provincial administration could be nodal rather than uniformly centralized. The chapter therefore uses 'headquarters' or 'provincial centre' where possible and reserves stronger claims for cases in which an inscription explicitly supplies the relationship (Bloch 1906; Bhandarkar et al. 1981).

Dhruvasvāminī and Govindagupta: dynastic presence in a provincial city

Dhruvasvāminī's seal is historically important because it locates imperial family identity within the Basarh archive. Govindagupta is styled mahārāja, and scholarship has long debated whether he was merely a prince, a provincial governor, the designated heir, or for a short period an independent sovereign. The Basarh evidence strongly supports his association with the crown-prince establishment in Tīrabhukti, but it does not settle every later hypothesis about succession to Chandragupta II. This distinction is a useful example of epigraphic method: the relationship named on a seal is direct evidence; the constitutional office reconstructed from a group of sealings is a strong inference; a lost or brief imperial reign remains a separate historical proposition requiring additional evidence (Bhandarkar et al. 1981; *Epigraphia Indica* XXVII).

The yuvarāja establishment and divided government

Official sealings from Basarh refer to offices attached to the yuvarāja, including a kumārāmātya establishment and a military establishment. This suggests that the crown prince could possess a differentiated administrative household rather than simply wait at court for succession. Provincial service also provided a means through which an imperial dynasty connected a politically important region to the centre. Yet the arrangement should not be converted into a fixed Gupta constitution valid for every bhukti. The office labels record an institutional situation at Vaiśālī in a particular period. Their wider significance lies in showing how royal kinship, military organization, and provincial administration could be combined in one regional centre (Bloch 1906; Bhandarkar et al. 1981).

Bhukti, viṣaya, adhikaraṇa: vocabulary before hierarchy

Early-medieval administrative terms tempt the historian to build a neat hierarchy: empire, bhukti, viṣaya, village. The documents do show nested territorial vocabulary, but actual practice was less mechanical. Bhukti can designate a large provincial unit; viṣaya normally a district or sub-region; adhikaraṇa an office, board, or jurisdictional establishment. Their personnel and functions differ by dynasty and record. A title such as kumārāmātya or uparika also changes meaning with context. Translation should therefore follow the act being performed rather than force every term into a modern bureaucratic equivalent. The regional archive becomes more intelligible when administrative language is treated as a changing set of relationships among court, offices, local magnates, corporate bodies, and residents (Salomon 1998; Sircar 1966).

Sealings as the archaeology of paperwork

A clay sealing survives because a document, container, door, bundle, or administrative transaction once required authentication. Most of the associated perishable writing is lost.

Basarh therefore preserves the archaeological edge of a much larger documentary world: offices generated communications, officials identified institutional authority, and seals distinguished authorized acts from ordinary correspondence. This has two consequences. First, literacy and record-keeping were not confined to literary manuscripts. Second, the surviving seals are only a sample of transactions whose paper, birch-bark, palm-leaf, cloth, or other supports disappeared. The early-medieval state should not be imagined as document-poor simply because few archives survive intact (Bloch 1906; Salomon 1998).

Tirabhukti / Tirabhukti / later Tirhut. Early-medieval administrative and regional name prominently attested in Gupta and Pāla records for north Bihar. Its centre, sub-divisions, and effective political extent changed over time; it should not be treated as a timeless synonym for every use of Videha or Mithila.

The durability of the name can obscure political change. Between the Gupta and Pāla periods, north Bihar experienced shifts involving Later Gupta rulers, Maukhari power, Harṣa's north Indian kingdom, regional chiefs, and eventually the Pālas and their rivals. A province-name can survive conquest while its offices, centre, fiscal reach, and internal subdivisions change. Conversely, the same dynasty can govern different parts of a named region at different dates. This chapter therefore avoids maps that shade the whole of modern north Bihar as one continuously administered block for six centuries. Each territorial claim is tied to a dated inscription, manuscript colophon, or clearly identified historical context (Thapar 2002; Singh 2008; Sircar 1971).

Tirabhukti in surviving records: a changing administrative geography

The name persists across regimes, but the offices, sub-divisions, political centres, and grant practices change.

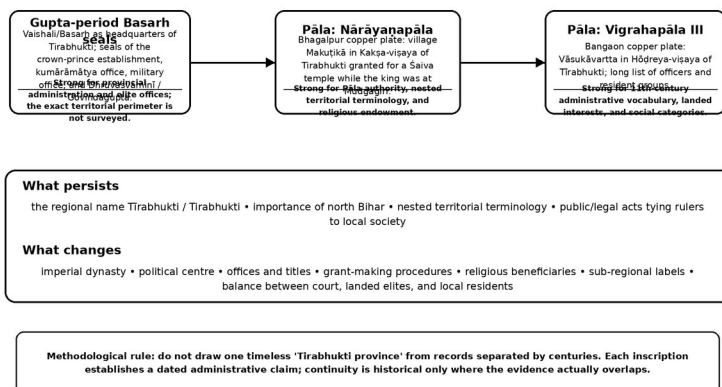


Diagram 22. Tirabhukti in surviving records: a changing administrative geography. The regional name persists from Gupta to Pāla records, while offices, sub-divisions, political centres, and grant practices change.

Credit: Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026.

Evidence base: Basarh seals (ASI Annual Report 1903-04; CII III), Bhagalpur plate of Nārāyaṇapāla, and Bargaon plate of Vīgrahapāla III. Rights: © Gajendra Thakur, 2026.

Source links: IGNCIA Inscriptions of Bihar; DHARMA Bargaon Plate of Vīgrahapāla III, year 17; CII revised Gupta inscriptions.

The Kaṭṛā charter of Jīvagupta: a local eighth-century archive

A copper plate secured from Kaṭṛā in Muzaffarpur district opens a different window onto Tīrabhukti. D. C. Sircar dated its script to roughly the first half of the eighth century and emphasized the unresolved identity of the issuing Jīvagupta, son of Rāmagupta. The charter places three localities within Chāmuṇḍā-viṣaya of Tīrabhukti and addresses royal officers and inhabitants before recording a grant to the temple of Chāmuṇḍā-bhaṭṭārikā. The uncertain dynastic identity is part of the evidence, not an inconvenience to be removed. The plate shows that the name Tīrabhukti and a developed administrative vocabulary survived in a period when political sovereignty was

fragmented and later genealogies are difficult to reconstruct (Sircar 1962-63; Sahai 1983).

Officers in the Kaṭrā charter

The Kaṭrā plate names officials whose functions include records and accounts, administration or peace-and-war business, palace access, military command, and subordinate rulership. Titles such as akṣapaṭālika, pratihāra, senāpati, and mahāsāmanta place the charter within a political world where written accounts, military authority, and negotiated subordination coexisted. It would be unsafe to infer that each office formed a department with modern permanent staffing. The record establishes that these titles belonged to the audience expected to recognize the grant. Their appearance in a local land transaction demonstrates how high political vocabulary reached into the legal ordering of particular settlements (Sircar 1962-63).

A Chāmuṇḍā temple and the material content of a grant

The Kaṭrā charter is unusually useful because the donation formula describes more than an abstract village name. The grant includes land and water, mango and madhūka trees, pits and barren ground, hamlets, and specified royal dues; Sircar's edition also discusses references to mineral or salt resources and taxes. Such clauses reveal what made land valuable: not only cultivated fields but trees, uncultivated zones, water, rights over settlement space, and revenue. A religious grant therefore reorganized access to a bundle of resources. The temple beneficiary acquired claims whose practical enforcement depended on cultivators, local residents, officers, and neighbouring communities accepting the charter's authority (Sircar 1962-63).

Agrarian expansion without the fiction of empty land

Early-medieval land-grant history was once narrated as kings settling empty forest with Brahman colonists. Inscriptions do record new clearances, settlement extension, and transfer of

revenue rights, but the landscape was rarely empty in a social sense. Fishers, pastoralists, forest users, shifting cultivators, hunters, ferrymen, and existing village households could use land not described as ploughed fields. Terms for fallow, pasture, pits, trees, and wasteland show that charters classified complex environments for legal purposes. Agrarian expansion is therefore better understood as a reorganization of labour, taxability, and access to resources than as the creation of society from a vacant frontier (Chattopadhyaya 1994; Furui 2020).

The river plain and unstable boundaries

Boundary clauses in copper plates often sound permanent, but north Bihar's floodplain was physically mobile. Rivers shifted, channels silted, marshes expanded or dried, and settlement mounds changed their relation to cultivable surfaces. A boundary defined by a stream, embankment, tree, field, or path could therefore require local memory and renegotiation. The contrast between the charter's desire for perpetual validity and the geomorphological instability described in Chapter 4 is historically important. Legal permanence was an aspiration imposed upon a moving alluvial landscape. This helps explain why durable documentary authority and local knowledge had to work together (Chapter 4; Salomon 1998).

Pāla power and the regional value of Tīrabhukti

From the eighth century onward, Pāla rulers made eastern India part of a large but changing political field extending across Bengal and Bihar. Tīrabhukti appears in Pāla-period grants not as an inherited museum label but as a functioning territorial category. The Pālas were major patrons of Buddhist monasteries, yet their charters also record Brahman and Śaiva beneficiaries. This mixture matters. Dynastic religious affiliation did not produce a single confessional economy. Land, merit, political alliance, local prestige, and institutional maintenance could direct patronage across religious boundaries. Tīrabhukti under the Pālas should therefore be studied through specific

grants rather than described simply as a Buddhist province (Sircar 1983; Furui 2020).

The Bhagalpur plate of Nārāyaṇapāla

The Bhagalpur copper plate of Nārāyaṇapāla is a major anchor because it explicitly places the granted village Makuṭikā in Kakṣa-viṣaya of Tīrabhukti. The charter was issued while the king was at Mudgagiri, the Pāla military or victory-camp centre associated with Munger. The act therefore links a royal camp south of the Ganga with a land grant in north Bihar. The grant supported a Śiva temple at Kalaśapota and its religious personnel. The document is direct evidence for Pāla authority over the named locality at the time of issue; it is not proof that Pāla control was equally intensive across every part of Tīrabhukti or throughout the whole reign (Sahai 1983; Sircar 1983).

A Buddhist dynasty and a Śaiva endowment

Nārāyaṇapāla's charter is a useful corrective to religious shorthand. Pāla rulers are conventionally characterized as Buddhist because of their dynastic formulas and major support for institutions such as Nālandā and Vikramaśīla. Yet the Bhagalpur plate records a grant connected with a Śiva temple, and the inscriptional tradition identifies Pāsupata affiliation in the beneficiary environment. Political patronage could cross doctrinal lines because temples and monasteries were also landed corporations, centres of learning, nodes of local authority, and sources of merit. The evidence therefore supports religious plurality within political patronage rather than a model of mutually exclusive Buddhist and Brahmanical states (Sahai 1983; Singh 2008).

Mudgagiri and administration across the Ganga

The repeated appearance of Mudgagiri or Munger as a Pāla jayaskandhāvāra in copper plates shows how military mobility and government overlapped. A king could issue charters from a

victory camp rather than a single fixed palace. The Ganga did not separate two self-contained worlds: royal orders, religious grants, troops, merchants, and scholars crossed the river corridor. For the history of Tirabhukti, this means that provincial administration cannot be reconstructed only from sites inside modern north Bihar. Munger, Nālandā, Bengal, and north-Bihar localities belonged to interdependent political and documentary networks (Furui 2011; Sanyal 2014).

The Bangaon plate of Vigrahapāla III

The Bangaon plate, dated to the seventeenth regnal year of Vigrahapāla III, gives the most detailed Pāla-period picture used in this chapter. It locates Vāsukāvartta in Hōḍreya-*viṣaya* of Tirabhukti and addresses a remarkably long list of royal officials, military and policing personnel, local officers, service groups, residents, Brahmans, mahattamas, uttamas, kuṭumbins, and communities named down to Medas, Andhras, and Chāṇḍālas. The list is formulaic, but formula does not make it historically empty. It reveals the social and administrative categories that the chancery considered relevant to the legal recognition of a land transfer (Sircar 1951-52; DHARMA digital edition, 2026).

A document addressed to society, not only to officials

The Bangaon charter's audience extends beyond court office-holders. By naming resident cultivators and graded social groups, the document recognizes that a grant becomes meaningful only when people on the ground change whom they obey and to whom they deliver dues. The list should not be read as a census or a complete caste order: some terms are occupational, some ethnic or regional, some status labels, and some categories of officials. Its importance is relational. The royal command reaches local society through a socially differentiated audience, and the recipient's rights depend on the compliance of people who continue to work the land (DHARMA Bangaon Plate, lines 24-42).

Fields, pasture, trees, water, taxes, and exclusion

The Bangaon plate defines the transferred half-village share through fields, boundaries, grass, pasture, mango and madhūka trees, water and dry land, pits and saline or uncultivated ground, along with revenue claims such as bhāga, bhoga, kara, and hiraṇya. It also contains exclusionary clauses limiting entry or interference by cāṭa and bhaṭa personnel. This is not merely decorative legal Sanskrit. The clauses define which resources and fiscal streams belong with the grant and which agents are to be kept out. The charter thus exposes the political economy of land more clearly than a narrative chronicle could (DHARMA Bangaon Plate, lines 32-42; Furui 2020).

The cultivator does not disappear when revenue is transferred

The Bangaon text specifically requires resident kṣetrakaras, cultivators, to obey the order and deliver the appropriate shares, dues, taxes, and cash payments at the proper time. This clause is crucial. Donation did not necessarily transfer empty soil into cultivation; it redirected claims upon existing production. The donee's legal advantage rested on the continued labour of cultivators and on recognition of the charter by officials and neighbours. Early-medieval property should therefore be described as layered rights over land, revenue, labour, and jurisdiction rather than as simple modern freehold ownership (DHARMA Bangaon Plate; Furui 2020).

A migrant learned Brahman in the Bangaon plate

The donee Śrī-Ghāṇṭukaśarman is described with a detailed scholastic and genealogical identity. The plate places him in the Śaṇḍilya gotra and a named pravara, associates him with the Chāndoga branch, and describes him as learned in Mīmāṃsā, grammar, and logic. It also says that his family came from Kolāñcha and that he was resident at Iṭṭāhaka. Such details show why land grants are central to the history of intellectual mobility. A learned Brahman was not merely an abstract ritual beneficiary: he carried lineage, textual specialization, migration

history, and local residence into a new landed relationship (Sircar 1951-52; DHARMA Bangaon Plate, lines 37-40).

Migration and the making of learned regions

Later Mithila became famous for Sanskrit jurisprudence, logic, ritual studies, and scholastic institutions. The early-medieval evidence should not be turned into a direct institutional genealogy of later schools, but it does reveal the mechanisms from which learned regions could grow: movement of specialists, endowed residence, patronage, marriage, discipleship, manuscript copying, and competition among centres. Swati Datta's study of migrant Brahmins in northern India and Furui's inscriptional work both caution against imagining Brahmin settlement as a single royal colonization project. Mobility responded to opportunities created by courts, local magnates, religious institutions, and rural society (Datta 1989; Furui 2020).

Reading an early-medieval copper-plate grant as a political-economic document

A charter records more than a gift: it constructs authority, property claims, exemptions, beneficiaries, and an audience.

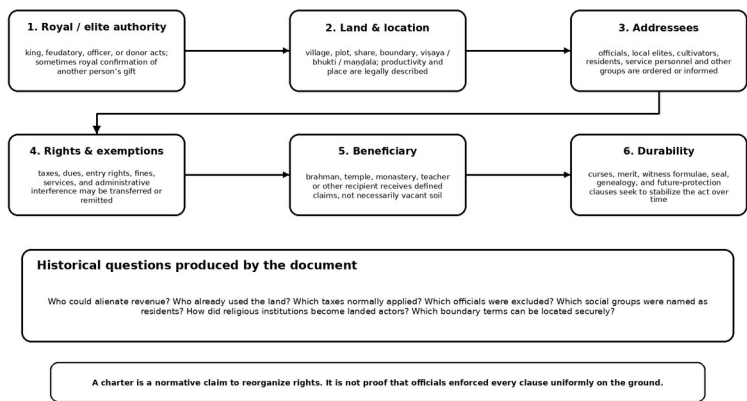


Diagram 23. Reading an early-medieval copper-plate grant as a political-economic document. The model treats a charter as a reorganization of authority, resources, taxes, obligations, and social relationships rather than a simple gift of vacant soil.

Credit: Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026.
Analytical framework based on Salomon 1998, Sircar 1983,

Furui 2020, and the Kaṭrā, Bhagalpur, and Bangaon charters discussed in this chapter. Rights: © Gajendra Thakur, 2026.

Source links: DHARMA Bangaon Plate of Vighrahapāla III; IGNCA/ASI Copper-Plate Grants from Bihar; Inscriptions of Bihar.

The feudalism debate: useful questions, dangerous template

Early-medieval Indian history was profoundly shaped by debates over 'Indian feudalism'. R. S. Sharma emphasized land grants, fiscal immunities, intermediaries, declining long-distance commerce, and growing local dependence; critics and later scholars showed greater regional variation, continued exchange, and more complex relations between state and local society. Tīrabhukti should not be forced into either a universal feudal model or an equally universal commercialization model. Its charters do show transferred revenue rights, magnates, religious beneficiaries, cultivators, and restrictions on officials. They also show mobile courts, cash terminology, learned migration, and regional connectivity. The evidence is most productive when the debate supplies questions rather than predetermined answers (Sharma 1980; Chattopadhyaya 1994; Furui 2020).

Local magnates and royal ratification

Not every early-medieval grant began as a king's personal redistribution of crown land. Some charters represent transactions initiated by officers, feudatories, or local landholders and confirmed by royal authority. The Bangaon plate has been interpreted in this context: a Brahman officer's landed interest and royal ratification are intertwined in the production of a legally durable grant. This kind of arrangement makes the state visible not as the sole proprietor of all land but as the authority capable of confirming, protecting, or reshaping claims held by others. The political system was therefore layered, with kingship, fiefs, local interests, religious

beneficiaries, and cultivators connected through documentation (Sircar 1951-52; Furui 2020).

Religious institutions as landed actors

Temples and monasteries were not only ritual destinations. A land or revenue grant could provide food, lamps, repairs, teaching support, ritual materials, hospitality, or maintenance for priests and ascetics. Once endowed, an institution became part of local agrarian relations: it received dues, supervised resources, negotiated with residents, and depended on the continuing productivity of land. This economic role does not reduce religion to finance. Rather, merit, doctrine, worship, pedagogy, property, and political legitimacy were institutionally joined. The Buddhist Pālas' grants to Brahmanical and Śaiva beneficiaries show why religious and economic histories must be written together (Sircar 1983; Furui 2020).

Buddhist networks beyond royal labels

The Pāla age is associated with major Buddhist institutions at Nālandā, Vikramaśīla, Odantapurī, and elsewhere, and these centres linked Bihar to Bengal, the Himalayan world, and trans-Asian scholastic networks. Tīrabhukti itself cannot be characterized solely through the religious identity of the dynasty, but it participated in the same circulation of monks, manuscripts, ritual specialists, images, and patrons. The later history of Mithila's learned culture grew in a landscape where Buddhist and Brahmanical institutions had long competed, overlapped, and shared routes. The disappearance or weakening of a monastery in one century did not mean immediate replacement of all social practices by another tradition (Singh 2008).

Śaiva institutions and Pāśupata presence

The Bhagalpur grant of Nārāyaṇapāla provides direct evidence for Śaiva institutional patronage connected with Tīrabhukti. The record has been read as evidence for Pāśupata

affiliation among the religious personnel associated with the endowed temple. This matters because the early-medieval religious map of north Bihar was plural and locally differentiated. Śaiva ascetics and temples, Buddhist monasteries, Brahman settlements, goddess cults such as Chāmuṇḍā, Vaiṣṇava worship, and household ritual could coexist within the same political order. Patronage changed by place and donor; no dynastic label can substitute for this institutional geography (Sahai 1983).

Goddess worship and the Kaṭrā charter

The Chāmuṇḍā-bhaṭṭārikā grant in the Kaṭrā plate is especially valuable because goddess worship appears not as a vague literary background but as a beneficiary of a territorial charter. The temple receives a legally defined resource base, and the grant is linked to the donor king's parents and religious merit. This places Śākta or goddess-centred worship within the political economy of endowed institutions. It also cautions against later assumptions that early-medieval Mithila was shaped only by Sanskrit scholastic Brahmanism. Local and supra-local cults became durable partly through land, patronage, and the capacity to organize ritual around specific places (Sircar 1962-63).

Writing, Sanskrit, and the political public

Copper plates are composed in highly formal Sanskrit, often beginning with dynastic praise and ending with conventional verses threatening those who violate a gift. Their formulaic character created a shared legal and political language across eastern India. Sanskritization, however, did not mean that villagers spoke Sanskrit in daily life or that all political communication occurred in the language of the charter. The document's public force depended on oral proclamation, local officials, memory, and vernacular interaction as well as inscription. The growth of a Sanskrit documentary culture

should therefore be understood as one layer of a multilingual society (Pollock 2006; Salomon 1998).

From Gupta script to eastern regional scripts

The palaeography of the regional inscriptions changes markedly across the centuries. Gupta Brahmi and its later northern derivatives developed into Siddhamāṭṛkā and eastern script forms from which later Bengali-Assamese and Tirhuta writing traditions emerged through complex processes. A script is not an ethnic badge: scribes can carry styles across courts, monasteries, and regions, and the same language can be written in different hands. Yet dated inscriptions provide a valuable sequence for the history of writing. They also explain why later manuscripts copied in Mithila or Nepal can preserve texts much older than the physical copy while using regionally distinctive scripts (Salomon 1998; Sircar 1966).

Manuscripts and the 1019/20 Tirabhukti colophon

A manuscript colophon copied in Nepalese script and dated to Vikrama Saṃvat 1076, corresponding to 1019-20 CE if the era is correctly identified, states that the Rāmāyaṇa was copied in Tirabhukti during the rule of a Gāṅgeyadeva. Cecil Bendall's publication made the notice famous because the scribe identified himself as being from Nepal. The colophon therefore gives direct evidence for a Nepal-Tirhut scribal connection and for the political use of the name Tirabhukti at the beginning of the eleventh century. The identity of the named Gāṅgeyadeva, however, has been debated, and the chapter retains that dispute rather than turning the colophon into a simple dynastic fact (Sinha 1974).

Which Gāṅgeyadeva ruled Tirabhukti?

Many historians identified the Gāṅgeyadeva of the 1019-20 colophon with the Kalachuri-Chedi ruler Gāṅgeyadeva of Tripuri, whose expansion affected Varanasi and the middle Gangetic plain. Other scholars raised palaeographic, titular, and

genealogical objections and proposed different identifications. The issue is important because a confident Kalachuri identification would imply a major west-to-east political intrusion into Tīrabhukti during the age of Mahīpāla I. The safest conclusion is narrower: the colophon records a ruler styled Gāṅgeyadeva in Tīrabhukti in the stated era; the wider dynastic identification remains a debated historical inference (Sinha 1974; Mirashi's Kalachuri studies; Banerji 1915).

Political competition around the Ganga in the eleventh century

Whether or not every detail of the Gāṅgeyadeva identification is accepted, the early eleventh century clearly belonged to a competitive north Indian political field. Pāla recovery under Mahīpāla I, Kalachuri expansion, powers based in Kanauj, and regional chiefs all contested routes and centres around the Ganga. Tīrabhukti's location made it strategically valuable because control north of the river connected agricultural plains, Champaran and Himalayan approaches, and crossings toward Magadha and eastern Bihar. Political frontiers in such a setting could change within a generation. A charter issued in one reign should never be used to paint the same territorial control across the whole century (Sanyal 2014; Thapar 2002).

The Bangaon plate and Pāla return or persistence

The Bangaon plate of Vigrahapāla III demonstrates Pāla authority in Tīrabhukti during the later eleventh century, regardless of how one reconstructs the intervening decades. This is a critical corrective to older narratives that treated a single conquest notice as permanently removing the region from Pāla power. Epigraphic history works by dated snapshots: political control can be lost, recovered, shared, or locally negotiated. The Bangaon charter is especially strong because it names the bhukti and viṣaya and ties the order to a specific landed transaction. The regional history must therefore allow oscillation rather than a one-way succession of empires (Sircar 1951-52; DHARMA Bangaon Plate).

Champan and the Himalayan edge

The Kaṭrā grant and later regional evidence keep western and north-western Tirabhukti visible as more than a peripheral forest zone. Champan and the Gandak corridor connected the Ganga plain to the Tarai and Himalayan foothills. Agrarian settlements, forest resources, grazing, ferries, religious sites, and routes could all make this edge politically valuable. The modern border between India and Nepal should not be imposed on these early-medieval movements. At the same time, describing a Himalayan corridor does not prove the existence of one permanent international trade road. Routes varied with river crossings, seasonal conditions, security, and the location of markets and courts (Chapters 1 and 4).

The eastern edge and the Kosi problem

The eastern reach of Tirabhukti is harder to reconstruct because administrative names in the Kosi and adjoining zones intersect with Pundravardhana-oriented networks and changing river landscapes. Later district histories often draw sharp boundaries between bhuktis, but the primary sources rarely supply continuous border descriptions. The Kosi megafan also complicates settlement preservation and route continuity. It is therefore safer to treat the eastern margin as a zone in which political, fiscal, and cultural affiliations could shift, rather than as a fixed line inherited from the Gupta period to the Pālas (Sircar 1971; Chapter 4).

Markets and commercialization without an urban-decline cliché

The older 'Indian feudalism' model linked land grants with the decline of trade and urban life. More recent work on early-medieval eastern India has shown continuing rural commercialization, monetized dues, craft specialization, and market exchange alongside landed grants. Tirabhukti's charters use fiscal language that includes hiraṇya or cash-related revenue terminology, while its river corridors connected local production with larger networks. This does not prove a

uniformly monetized countryside. It does make a simple narrative of commercial collapse inadequate. Landed and commercial relations could expand together, creating new opportunities and inequalities (Furui 2020).

Social stratification in the charter formula

The Bangaon plate's sequence from Brahmans and local notables to cultivators and groups such as Medas, Andhras, and Chāṇḍālas is often cited as evidence of hierarchical social ordering. The formula indeed makes inequality visible, but the categories should not be treated as a complete local caste census. Some may refer to status, occupation, regional origin, service, or communities whose precise social position varied. The safest inference is that the chancery imagined a differentiated society and sought to make the grant binding across those differences. The document therefore contributes to the history of stratification without freezing eleventh-century social categories into later caste ethnography (Furui 2020).

Women in a male-heavy landed archive

Most surviving Tirabhukti land charters foreground male kings, officials, Brahman donees, priests, and household heads. This imbalance is an archive problem before it is a demographic fact. Women participated in cultivation, household property, ritual, craft, and patronage, but they appear less frequently in the formulas used for royal grants. Dhruvasvāminī's Gupta-period seal is an important earlier counterexample: a royal woman appears with dynastic identity in the Basarh administrative archive. The Kaṭṛā inscription may also preserve a woman's name in a damaged context. The chapter therefore refuses to infer female economic absence from male-dominated documentary forms (Bloch 1906; Sircar 1962-63).

Learning before the later Mithila schools

By the high medieval and early modern periods, Mithila would become one of South Asia's most famous centres of

Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Dharmaśāstra, ritual, and manuscript scholarship. The Bangaon plate's learned donee shows that advanced textual specialization and migrant Brahman scholarship were already embedded in the regional political economy by the eleventh century. It would be anachronistic to call his milieu the later Mithila school. What can be traced is infrastructure: endowed specialists, Sanskrit learning, networks of origin and residence, and political support for learned households. Later scholastic institutions developed from such changing networks rather than from an institution unchanged since Janaka's court (Datta 1989; Pollock 2006).

Regional identity as accumulated practice

Tirabhukti became durable because rulers, scribes, officials, religious institutions, and communities repeatedly used the name. Administrative repetition could create regional consciousness without producing a modern nation or fixed ethnicity. At the same time, the older names Videha and Mithila remained available in literary, religious, and later scholastic contexts. Regional identity was therefore cumulative and plural: an inhabitant could belong to a village, viṣaya, bhukti, lineage, religious community, linguistic network, and broader political kingdom at once. The historical task is to preserve these nested scales rather than make one name absorb all the others (Sircar 1971; Pollock 2006).

From Tirabhukti to Tirhut

The phonological and documentary path from Sanskrit Tirabhukti to later Tirhut is generally accepted, but etymological explanations of the compound itself vary and should not be presented as certain historical geography. Medieval and early-modern records increasingly use forms closer to Tirhut, while Mithila becomes prominent in learned and regional discourse. A name can change sound, script, and political meaning while retaining recognizability. This transition belongs to the history

of language and administration as much as to dynastic succession (Sircar 1971).

The threshold of the Karnata period

By the late eleventh century, the political environment that had sustained alternating Pāla and rival claims in north Bihar was changing. The conventional foundation date for Nanyadeva's Karnata polity is around 1097 CE, but the emergence of a new regional dynasty should not be imagined as the instantaneous disappearance of Pāla institutions, local magnates, Brahman settlements, temples, monasteries, or fiscal practices. Chapter 13 therefore begins with a landscape already shaped by centuries of provincial administration, land grants, learned mobility, religious endowment, and cross-border routes. The Karnatas inherited and reorganized this world rather than creating Mithila *ex nihilo* (Thakur 1988; Choudhary's studies of Nanyadeva).

Evidentiary conclusions

The early-medieval history of Tīrabhukti is strongest where dated administrative and donative records replace retrospective dynastic storytelling. Basarh sealings establish Gupta-period provincial institutions at Vaiśālī; the Kaṭrā charter shows an eighth-century territorial and temple-grant order under a difficult-to-identify Jivagupta; the Bhagalpur plate anchors Nārāyaṇapāla's authority in Kakṣa-*viṣaya*; and the Bangaon plate provides an exceptionally dense record of officials, cultivators, social categories, fiscal rights, and learned migration in Hōḍreya-*viṣaya*. The 1019-20 Gāṅgeyadeva manuscript colophon records political change but leaves dynastic identification debated. Across these sources, Tīrabhukti emerges not as a frozen province but as a repeatedly reconstructed region whose land, offices, religious institutions, and scholarly networks formed the early-medieval foundation inherited by the Karnatas.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Bloch, Theodor. 'Excavations at Basarh.' Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report 1903-04. Calcutta, 1906, 81-122.
- Bhandarkar, D. R., B. Ch. Chhabra, and G. S. Gai, eds. Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors. *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. III, revised edition. Archaeological Survey of India, 1981.
- Sircar, D. C. "Copper-Plate Grants from Bihar." *Epigraphia Indica* 35 (1962-63): 124-139.
- Sahai, Bhagwant. *The Inscriptions of Bihar (From Earliest Times to the Middle of the 13th Century)*. Ramanand Vidya Bhavan, 1983.
- Sircar, D. C. "Bangaon Plate of Vigrahapala III; Regnal Year 17." *Epigraphia Indica* 29 (1951-52): 48-57.
- DHARMA Project. "Bangaon Plate of Vigrahapāla III, year 17." *Bengal Charters* digital edition, revised 2026.
<https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00127>.
- Sircar, D. C., ed. *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*. Vol. 2: From the Sixth to the Eighteenth Century A.D. Motilal Banarsidass, 1983.
- Salomon, Richard. *Indian Epigraphy: A Guide to the Study of Inscriptions in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and the Other Indo-Aryan Languages*. Oxford University Press, 1998.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195099843.001.0001>.
- Sircar, D. C. *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*. 2nd ed. Motilal Banarsidass, 1971.
- Sircar, D. C. *Indian Epigraphical Glossary*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1966.
- Furui, Ryosuke. *Land and Society in Early South Asia: Eastern India 400-1250 AD*. Routledge, 2020.
- Furui, Ryosuke. "The Pāla Copperplate Inscriptions and Their Engravers." *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 81 (2023): 111-132.
- Furui, Ryosuke. "Indian Museum Copper Plate Inscription of Dharmapala, Year 26: Tentative Reading and Study." *South Asian Studies* 27, no. 2 (2011): 145-156.
- Chattopadhyaya, B. D. *The Making of Early Medieval India*. Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Sharma, R. S. *Indian Feudalism, c. 300-1200*. 2nd ed. Macmillan, 1980.
- Datta, Swati. *Migrant Brāhmaṇas in Northern India: Their Settlement and General Impact, c. A.D. 475-1030*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1989.
- Pollock, Sheldon. *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*. University of California Press, 2006.

- Sanyal, Rajat. "The Pala-Sena and Others." In *History of Ancient India*, vol. 5: Political History and Administration, c. AD 750-1300, edited by Dilip K. Chakrabarti and Makkhan Lal, 165-213. Aryan Books International, 2014.
- Sinha, C. P. N. "A Critical Evaluation of Sources for Identification of Gangeyadeva of Tirabhukti." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 35 (1974): 39-42.
- Banerji, R. D. *The Pālas of Bengal*. Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1915.
- Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Pearson Education India, 2008.
- Thapar, Romila. *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*. Allen Lane, 2002.
- Thakur, Upendra. *History of Mithila: From the Earliest Times to 1556 A.D.* 2nd ed. Mithila Institute, 1988.

Chapter 13. The Karnatas and Simraongarh

A border-crossing kingdom

The Karnata polity is best understood as a kingdom whose political geography crossed the modern India–Nepal boundary rather than as a dynasty confined to one present-day national space. Its best-known capital, Simraongarh (Simraungadh), lies in the Nepal Tarai, while its agrarian, religious, intellectual and military field extended southward into the plains of Tirabhukti or Tirhut. The modern frontier therefore cuts through a historical landscape that was connected by roads, river crossings, marriage alliances, landholding networks, pilgrimage, commerce and the movement of scholars. The kingdom's history belongs simultaneously to the histories of Mithila, north Bihar, Madhesh/Tarai and the Kathmandu Valley, but connection must not be inflated into uniform territorial control over all of those regions.

The familiar dynastic sequence beginning with Nānyadeva and ending with Harisimhadeva is a scholarly reconstruction assembled from inscriptions, literary works, Nepalese chronicles and genealogical traditions, archaeological evidence and later regional histories. These categories of evidence do not all speak with the same chronological precision. The task is consequently not to make them sound artificially unanimous, but to show where they intersect and where uncertainty remains. This is especially important for the opening date of the dynasty, the rebuilding of Simraongarh's defences, and the final conquest horizon in the fourteenth century (Sinha 1979; Petech 1984; Salomon 1998).

The 1097 horizon and what an inscription can establish

The year 1097 CE has long functioned as the conventional beginning of Nānyadeva's rule. It is useful as a chronological horizon, but it should not be described as though an extant Nānyadeva inscription bears that Gregorian date in an unambiguous modern form. Luciano Petech, reviewing the early

chronology in relation to Nepal, noted the traditional chronogram that converts to 18 July 1097 while also observing that the surviving inscription associated with Nānyadeva's reign and his minister Śrīdhara is undated. The distinction matters: a conventional date can organize discussion without acquiring an evidentiary status it does not possess.

Nānyadeva nevertheless marks a genuine transformation in the political history of Mithila. Karnata authority appears in the period when older Pāla-Sena political structures were fragmenting and new regional powers were consolidating across the eastern Gangetic plain. Later genealogy often makes this transition look like the simple founding act of one ruler. A safer reconstruction sees the new court as the successful centre of a broader process: military consolidation, recruitment of chiefs and specialists, control of agricultural revenue, and the selection of a defensible capital near routes connecting the plains and the Himalayan foothills. The title 'Karnata' has generated origin narratives, but dynastic labels should not by themselves be treated as proof of a single migration event or a complete ethnic history.

Simraongarh as capital and route node

Simraongarh was not merely a palace site. Its scale, ramparts, ditches, mounds, sculpture, architectural fragments and dispersed occupation indicate a large fortified landscape whose political value depended on terrain and movement. The site stood close to north–south routes linking the Gangetic plain with the Tarai and approaches to the Kathmandu Valley. East–west movement across Mithila was equally important. Grain, livestock, salt, metal goods, textiles, manuscripts, ritual specialists and soldiers moved through a landscape structured as much by seasonal water and crossing points as by formal roads.

A capital of this kind should not be imagined as an isolated walled island. Fortification can protect a court, treasury, stores and elite residence, but it also presupposes a supporting

countryside. The city required cultivators, cattle, timber, brick-making, transport labour, markets, artisans and systems for moving produce into the fortified zone. The archaeological remains are therefore most informative when read together with the agrarian and route systems that made concentrated court life possible. This also helps explain why political influence could be strong along selected corridors while remaining negotiated or indirect in peripheral localities.

Dharmasvāmin in 1236: a near-contemporary visitor

A rare near-contemporary window is supplied by the Tibetan monk and translator Dharmasvāmin (Chag lo tsa ba Chos rje dpal). His biography, translated by George N. Roerich, records journeys in Bihar during the 1230s and places him in the Tirhut region in 1236 on his return north. He became ill, remained for roughly two months near the Karnata capital, and encountered the ruler Rāmasiṃhadeva. The narrative reports gifts and the ruler's request that the traveller remain as a religious preceptor, which Dharmasvāmin declined. Whatever literary shaping belongs to the biography, the episode is unusually valuable because it derives from the experience of a traveller moving through the region rather than from a much later dynastic list (Roerich 1959).

The account also contributes to historical geography. It demonstrates the practicability of movement from the monastic and urban centres of Bihar toward Tirhut and onward to Nepal, and it places a functioning court on that route in the early thirteenth century. Its numbers and descriptions should not be converted mechanically into a cadastral plan, but the account confirms that the Karnata court was visible to trans-Himalayan travellers and capable of receiving them. The same evidence warns against writing the Tarai as a cultural wall between the plains and the valley.

Court, scholarship, and political language

Karnata Mithila became an important setting for Sanskrit scholarship, juridical writing, musicological knowledge and the development of regional literary expression. Jyotirīśvara Ṭhākura's Varṇaratnākara, conventionally placed in the early fourteenth century, is especially valuable because its encyclopaedic descriptive method opens onto occupations, social types, spaces, performances and courtly vocabularies that a royal genealogy would omit. It is not a census and should not be mined as one; its literary classifications nevertheless reveal the density of the social and linguistic world in which elite culture operated.

Caṇḍeśvara, associated with late Karnata and transitional political conditions, produced major legal and political digests. His Rājanītiratnākara belongs to a long Sanskrit tradition of thinking about kingship while also registering a world in which rulers could exist in hierarchical relationships to greater powers. The significance of such texts is not that they offer a verbatim constitution of Karnata Mithila, but that legal-intellectual labour was part of state formation. Courts needed expertise in gifts, inheritance, ritual status, adjudication, taxation, diplomacy and political precedence. The scholar and the scribe were therefore not ornamental additions to the military state; they helped define and document authority.

Literary production also complicates a simple Sanskrit-versus-vernacular story. Elite learning remained deeply Sanskritic while descriptive, performative and regional registers expanded. This book distinguishes the earlier Mahākavi Vidyāpati of the Maithili Padāvalī tradition from the later Oiniwar-period Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura of the Sanskrit and Avahaṭṭa corpus. Neither literary horizon arose from an intellectual vacuum: both belong to longer institutions, genres and performance networks already visible before and during the Karnata centuries (Mishra 1949; Choudhary 1976; Thakur, 'Two Vidyapatis,' Videha 438).

Agrarian revenue, households, and delegated power

The concentration of courtly life at Simraongarh depended on agrarian surplus, but the surviving sources do not provide a complete revenue manual. Political economy must therefore be reconstructed from landholding practices, donation traditions, later legal compilations, settlement geography and comparison with neighbouring regions rather than from imaginary precision. Revenue was rarely a direct transaction between a king and every cultivator. Landed intermediaries, religious establishments, local chiefs, hereditary office-holders, accountants and village-level authorities could all mediate claims on produce, labour or cash.

This mediated structure explains why sovereignty can be both impressive and uneven. A ruler may issue commands, support temples and scholars, maintain troops and receive tribute without possessing a uniform bureaucratic presence in every village. Conversely, a local lineage can retain substantial authority while acknowledging a superior court. The most useful unit of analysis is consequently the relationship among court, fortified node, route, landed locality and intermediary rather than a modern map shaded with one undifferentiated colour.

Households are also part of political history. Marriage alliances linked elite families; service drew scribes, ritualists and military retainers toward centres of power; market exchange connected producers to consumers inside the capital. Women appear unevenly in the surviving archive, usually through dynastic, religious or property contexts, and this uneven visibility should be acknowledged rather than repaired with invented biographies.

Panji traditions: genealogy, memory, and evidence

Maithil panji or genealogical traditions became central to the regulation and memory of elite marriage networks, and Anshuman Pandey's study demonstrates the exceptional

historical depth of the genealogical archive. This history nevertheless separates the antiquity of genealogical record-keeping from the age of later ranked sub-caste categories. Regional narratives often associate panji formalization with Karnata or immediately post-Karnata rulers, especially Harisimhadeva, but surviving witnesses are layered, copied and reorganized. A medieval genealogy is therefore not by itself proof that every category found in a later branch book existed in the medieval period (Pandey 2014).

For this reason, panji material should be used in more than one register at once. It can preserve old lineages, marriage relationships and memories of authority, yet the date of the underlying relationship must be distinguished from the date and classificatory vocabulary of the surviving manuscript. The Sanskrit word śrotriya is ancient as a learned or Veda-connected descriptor; the claim at issue is different: in the Parallel History reconstruction adopted here, Śrotriya as a fixed Maithil Brahmin sub-caste or hereditary rank is not projected backward before about 1800 CE. Claims of a medieval Śrotriya sub-caste are treated as retrospective unless a contemporary witness independently demonstrates that social category.

North Bihar, the Tarai, and the Nepal Valley

Political and cultural connections with Nepal were structural rather than episodic. The Tarai did not end the political world of Mithila; it formed part of it. Routes through the lowlands linked the Karnata court with passes and valley settlements, while marriage, refuge, religious travel and scholarly mobility created durable ties. Nepalese historical materials preserve memories of Karnata rulers and of Harisimhadeva's movement north after defeat, but these records have their own chronological layers and must be compared rather than harmonized automatically with Mithila genealogies (Petech 1984; Slusser 1982).

The long-term consequence was not a single political union of Mithila and the Kathmandu Valley. It was a zone of repeated interaction. Political refugees could carry manuscripts, ritual

expertise and courtly practices; valley rulers could recruit specialists from the plains; merchants and pilgrims traversed the same broad corridor. The result is a historical geography in which present national borders are necessary for locating sites but misleading when projected backward as permanent cultural barriers.

The present landscape and the problem of visual evidence

Modern photographs of Simraongarh are indispensable for documenting the present condition of the site, its shrines, vegetation, settlement and visible archaeological features. They are not photographs of the Karnata capital. Structures standing today may incorporate older fragments, occupy older sacred locations or belong to later phases of rebuilding. Visual evidence must therefore be captioned with dates and rights information and described as evidence of the present archaeological landscape unless a specific architectural phase has been independently established.



Figure 3. *Ranibas Math and Ram-Janaki Temple at the Simraungadh site, photographed in 2019. This present-day monument belongs to the archaeological landscape but should not be assigned automatically to the Karnata-period urban fabric.*

Photograph: Gaurav Dhvaj Khadka, 2019. CC BY-SA 4.0. [Wikimedia Commons file page](#)

Archaeology of the fortified capital

The Italian-Nepalese investigations at Simraongarh transformed discussion of the capital by placing stratigraphy beside text. A test trench through the fortifications revealed a technically complex rampart sequence including sand and silt deposits, structural use of organic materials such as bamboo or

timber in construction, and fired-brick elements. Crucially, the excavators identified at least two construction phases. That observation is archaeological; the assignment of either phase to a named ruler or military event is not automatically archaeological (Vidale, Balista, and Torrieri 1993).

The trench did not yield a neat set of securely datable objects from the rampart cores that would convert the earthworks into a year-by-year military narrative. The excavators therefore treated correlations with textual events cautiously. A phase might be compatible with repairs associated in literary tradition with Rāmasiṃhadeva, and a destruction horizon might be compatible with the Tughluq conquest, but compatibility is not proof. The fortification itself is secure evidence for planning, labour mobilization and defence; the named-event correlation remains a hypothesis until supported by independent dating.

This distinction is one of the most important methodological lessons of the site. Archaeology can overturn the temptation to use a chronicle as a label-maker for layers. At the same time, texts can provide hypotheses that archaeology can test. The strongest historical reconstruction keeps both bodies of evidence visible without making either disappear into the other.

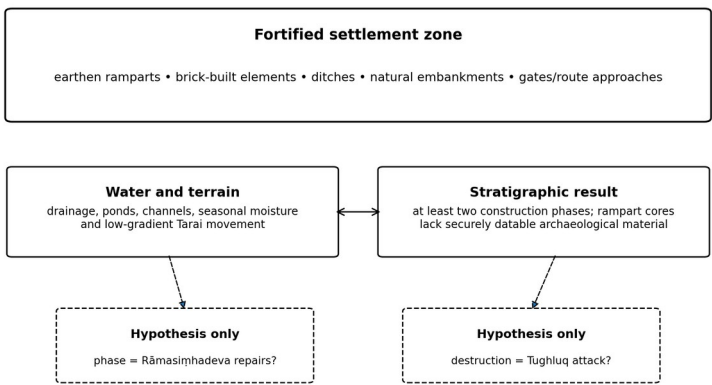
Source-controlled Karnata chronology



Diagram 24. Source-controlled Karnata chronology. The graphic separates the conventional 1097 Nānyadeva horizon, Dharmasvāmin's 1236 visit, the late Karnata court-text horizon, and the 1324–25 Tughluq conquest horizon according to evidentiary weight.

Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026. Original schematic; no third-party image content. Sources: Petech 1984; Roerich 1959; Sinha 1979; Salomon 1998.

Simraongarh: fortification, water and archaeological inference



Excavators' caution retained: these event correlations remain conjectural unless independently dated.

Diagram 25. Simraongarh fortification and hydraulic system. Excavation established at least two fortification phases; proposed correlations with Rāmasiṃhadeva's repairs or a Tughluq destruction event remain hypotheses, not proved event layers.

Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026. Original schematic; no third-party image content. Sources: Vidale, Balista, and Torrieri 1993; Vidale and Lugli 1997.

Harisimhadeva and the Tughluq conquest horizon

The last major Karnata ruler, Harisimhadeva, occupies a prominent place in regional memory because the collapse of his court became a hinge between dynastic eras. Persianate narratives of Ghiyāth al-Dīn Tughluq's eastern campaigns, Nepalese chronicles and Mithila traditions converge on a conquest and displacement horizon around 1324–25, though they differ in detail. It is therefore appropriate to speak of a Tughluq conquest horizon rather than pretend that every stage of the campaign can be plotted from a single synchronized record.

Harisimhadeva's reported movement toward Nepal after defeat was consequential for later historical memory and for traditions of learned migration. Yet political defeat did not erase the social and intellectual structures of Mithila. Landholding networks, scribal expertise, ritual institutions and local chiefships survived or were reorganized under new relations of power. The transition to the Oiniwars is best understood against this continuity: the dynasty changed, the scale and external relations of sovereignty changed, but the region did not begin again from zero.

From Karnata collapse to Oiniwar transition

The decades after the fall of Simraongarh demonstrate why dynastic periodization can conceal as much as it clarifies. Sultanate power could claim conquest or superior authority while local families continued to control land, patronage and juridical expertise. Caṇḍeśvara's career belongs precisely to this world of transition, and later Oiniwar courts drew on institutions that the Karnata age had helped consolidate. The political problem was no longer simply how to rule a regional kingdom, but how to maintain local authority within a larger field of Delhi, Jaunpur and Bengal power.

Chapter 14 therefore begins not with an abrupt restoration of an independent Mithila state, but with reconstituted authority.

Its central question is how the Oiniwar rulers, learned lineages, landed intermediaries and Sultanate powers negotiated overlapping claims across the fourteenth, fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

A dynasty label is not an ethnic map

The label ‘Karnata’ is historically real, but it should not be made to carry more information than the sources permit. Dynastic names can recall origin, military affiliation, remembered migration or elite self-description without mapping the ethnicity of an entire population. Mithila under the Karnatas remained a socially diverse agrarian region. The strongest historical claim is therefore that a ruling lineage identified as Karnata established and sustained power in Tirhut; a population-wide migration or cultural replacement would require different evidence.

Political inheritance after Pāla-Sena fragmentation

The rise of Nānyadeva belongs to a wider eastern Indian transition in which Pāla and Sena authority fragmented unevenly. This context matters because new regional courts did not create their fiscal and sacred landscapes from nothing. Existing settlements, Brahmanical institutions, market routes, local chiefs and agrarian relations could be incorporated, contested or redirected. Karnata state formation was thus both innovative and inherited: new military leadership operated through older social resources while producing a new court centre and new claims to regional kingship.

Frontier ecology and strategic choice

Simraongarh’s Tarai location made strategic sense because defence and communication were inseparable from ecology. Seasonal water, forest belts, low ridges, river crossings and alluvial surfaces could impede armies while also channeling trade and movement. The site’s value did not come from a timeless ‘natural fortress’; environmental advantages changed

with season, maintenance and route use. Historical geography should therefore treat the capital as a managed landscape in which earthworks, water and access were repeatedly adjusted.

Routes before modern borders

North–south routes connecting the Gangetic plain, the Tarai and Kathmandu approaches existed long before an international boundary divided India and Nepal. The historical problem is to reconstruct corridors of movement, not to project customs posts backward. Dharmasvāmin’s itinerary, Nepalese materials and the location of Simraongarh together show that scholars, religious travellers, envoys and political refugees could cross this zone. The same corridors also moved ordinary commodities whose documentary visibility is much poorer than that of rulers.

Capital scale without population arithmetic

The physical scale of Simraongarh confirms a major centre, but it does not license a precise medieval population estimate in the absence of settlement-density, household and occupation data. Large enclosures can include gardens, reservoirs, fields, empty defensive spaces and later occupation. Population figures repeated in modern summaries should therefore be treated skeptically unless tied to a transparent archaeological method. Monumental scale is secure evidence for labour mobilization and planning; demographic arithmetic is a separate problem.

Earthworks as labour history

A rampart is not only a military object. Its construction required quarrying or collecting earth, transporting materials, organizing work teams, coordinating drainage and maintaining slopes after monsoon damage. Archaeological fortifications therefore provide indirect evidence for command over labour. They do not reveal whether that labour was paid, *corvée*, dependent or supplied through local chiefs in each phase. The

safe inference is organizational capacity, not an invented labour code.

Brick, timber, bamboo, and construction knowledge

The fortification trench is important for its combination of earthen deposits, fired-brick elements and traces interpreted as structural use of organic materials. Such construction reflects knowledge adapted to a wet alluvial environment. Bamboo and timber can reinforce or frame earthwork while brick protects selected surfaces, but organic components decay and complicate archaeological visibility. The surviving wall is therefore only part of the original engineered system, and its present appearance should not be mistaken for the complete medieval design.

Water control without a hydraulic-state thesis

Ponds, ditches, drains and low-lying channels belong to the defensive and domestic landscape of Simraongarh, yet they do not prove a centralized ‘hydraulic state’. Water features can serve multiple functions: drainage, storage, fishery, ritual use, brick production, defence and seasonal access. Their chronology may also differ. A responsible reconstruction maps relationships among water, settlement and fortification while resisting the temptation to derive an entire political system from the presence of hydraulic works.

The court seen by a traveller

Dharmasvāmin’s encounter is unusually valuable because it records the court from the perspective of a mobile outsider. His illness, reception and refusal of a religious appointment reveal hospitality, religious patronage and the court’s interest in distinguished specialists. They also remind us that travel texts are selective. A monk notices monasteries, patrons, danger and sacred geography differently from a revenue officer or merchant. The account is strongest when used for encounter

and route, not when pressed into a complete description of Karnata administration.

Gifts and religious patronage as political communication

The gifts reported in the Dharmasvāmin narrative are politically meaningful even without reconstructing their exact monetary value. Courtly generosity displayed status, created obligation and advertised the ruler's capacity to host learned visitors. Patronage could also recruit ritual prestige. Rāmasiṃhadeva's reported desire to retain Dharmasvāmin as a preceptor therefore belongs to the politics of expertise as well as religion. The traveller's refusal shows that such patronage was negotiated rather than automatically effective.

Travel time and historical geography

Itineraries provide sequences and travel intervals rather than GPS coordinates. Their best use is relational: one can ask which river crossings, plains and upland approaches were encountered in what order, then compare that pattern with known sites. Exact kilometre conversions are risky because route choice, season, illness and transport affect speed. Dharmasvāmin's evidence places the Karnata court within a functioning transregional corridor without requiring false precision about every stopping place.

Rāmasiṃhadeva: repair tradition and archaeological restraint

Textual tradition associates Rāmasiṃhadeva with activity at the fortified capital, and this has encouraged attempts to identify one archaeological construction phase as his repair. The Simraongarh excavators explicitly resisted certainty. At least two phases were observed, but the rampart core did not provide the dating evidence necessary to attach a ruler's name securely. The proposed correlation is useful as a testable hypothesis, not as an excavated fact. Diagram 25 marks it accordingly.

Jyotiśvara's social catalogue

Varṇaratnākara is valuable because its classificatory imagination ranges far beyond kings. It names environments, occupations, performances, social characters and material settings that enlarge the historian's field of view. Yet literary abundance is not statistical representation. A category appearing in the text proves that it belonged to a repertoire recognizable to the author and intended audience; it does not tell us how numerous its members were. This distinction allows the work to illuminate social history without turning poetry into census data.

Varṇaratnākara as genre and evidence

Genre governs historical use. An encyclopaedic descriptive work organizes the world through rhetorical convention, inherited lists and local observation. Some details may be closely grounded in the author's surroundings while others derive from learned tradition. Comparison with inscriptions, archaeology and later Maithili usage can help identify which features have stronger regional purchase. The text is therefore neither a transparent photograph of fourteenth-century Mithila nor merely fiction; it is structured cultural evidence.

Caṇḍeśvara and political hierarchy

Caṇḍeśvara's political and legal writings are especially relevant to a period in which regional rulers negotiated hierarchy. Sanskrit political theory could conceptualize kings who were not all equal in power, and it supplied a language for authority, duty, taxation and inter-ruler relations. Such prescriptions cannot be equated mechanically with daily Oiniwar or Karnata administration. They show instead the intellectual resources available to learned officials confronting a world of layered sovereignty.

Law books and administrative practice

A legal digest gains historical significance when it is placed beside the institutions that needed legal expertise. Land grants, inheritance, ritual eligibility, penance, taxation and dispute resolution all generated documentary and interpretive work. A court jurist's text may be normative and selective, but the very investment in systematization suggests demand for authoritative reasoning. Later Mithila's reputation for scholastic law should therefore be connected to administrative practice without imagining a modern codified legal system.

Music, performance, and courtly status

Karnata court culture included music and performance as forms of expertise and prestige. Musical learning is not politically trivial: performers, theorists and patrons circulated between courts, and ceremonial sound helped stage kingship. Literary references to musicians and entertainers also point toward urban service populations. Their livelihoods depended on patronage and markets that are poorly documented in inscriptions. Court culture thus provides another route from elite texts toward the social history of labour and mobility.

Language choice at court

Sanskrit retained enormous authority in law, theology and learned composition, but the region's communicative life was multilingual. Vernacular and Apabhraṃśa-associated registers, oral performance and local scripts coexisted with learned Sanskrit. Language choice followed genre, audience and institution rather than a linear replacement model. This environment helps explain why the following Oiniwar age could support both rigorous Sanskrit scholarship and the political-literary experimentation associated with the later Vidyāpati Thakkura.

Cultivators beneath the royal narrative

Cultivators appear mostly indirectly in Karnata political history, yet they sustained the surplus on which fortified and courtly life depended. The absence of peasant voices from royal sources is an archival inequality, not evidence that they were politically irrelevant. Crop cycles, flood risk, cattle, irrigation and access to markets shaped the amount of revenue any ruler could actually claim. State power therefore rested on ecological and household processes that dynastic narratives rarely describe.

Artisans and military provisioning

Fortifications, weapons, transport and court consumption required masons, brick-makers, carpenters, smiths, potters, leather workers and carriers. Archaeology can recover products and debris more readily than names. Military history should consequently include provisioning systems: an army needs food, fodder, repair, carts and animals as much as commanders. Simraongarh's material scale implies such labour networks even where occupational quarters have not been securely identified.

Markets and grain movement

A large court created demand that linked surrounding villages to exchange nodes. Grain and fodder had to move in bulk; salt and metals often travelled farther; luxury textiles, ritual goods and manuscripts moved through narrower networks. Route control could therefore generate revenue and strategic leverage. The evidence does not permit a full price series for Karnata Mithila, but economic geography helps explain why a capital near interregional corridors mattered beyond defence.

Landed intermediaries and local chiefs

Regional kingship depended on people who could convert a royal claim into local compliance. Landholders, chiefs, revenue intermediaries and religious institutions could collect dues,

supply troops or labour, and mediate disputes. Their cooperation was never guaranteed. A change of dynasty could therefore be less disruptive in a village than at the royal centre if local intermediaries survived. This institutional continuity is crucial for understanding the rapid reconstitution of authority after the Karnata collapse.

Religious endowment and the geography of authority

Temple and monastic patronage created durable nodes of political memory. Endowments linked rulers to land, ritual specialists and local communities, while sacred institutions could preserve texts long after dynasties disappeared. Religious patronage should not be interpreted simply as personal devotion or propaganda; it could also stabilize property relationships and service obligations. The surviving evidence is selective, however, and cannot establish equal patronage across all communities.

Lineage and matrimonial regulation

Elite marriage linked political and scholarly households. Genealogical memory therefore had practical consequences: it could regulate unions, preserve descent claims and provide resources for later ranking. The crucial distinction is chronological. This book accepts medieval roots for panji genealogy while rejecting the automatic back-projection of the later Śrotriya sub-caste classification into Karnata society. The Panji-file reading used by the Parallel History places that ranked sub-caste formation around the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century, in the same broad transformation that produced new branch books and estate-era status politics. Medieval genealogy and c.1800 social classification are therefore treated as related but non-identical historical layers.

Panji memory and later manuscript layers

A panji manuscript copied centuries after the Karnata period can preserve older genealogical information while also

reflecting later rearrangement, correction, interpolation and rank-making. Historians must distinguish the date of the remembered ancestor from the date of the surviving witness and from the date at which a classificatory label entered the record. This principle is especially important for Śrotriya. The Panji-based position adopted here places the emergence of Śrotriya as a distinct Maithil Brahmin sub-caste around c.1800, while older uses of śrotriya are read first as descriptors of learning or ritual qualification unless the context proves a hereditary sub-caste. The often-repeated 1600 Śaka/1678 dating is not used as a secure origin date; it conflicts with the late-eighteenth-century Madhav Singh/branch-book horizon invoked by the same tradition and therefore requires primary corroboration.

Nepal chronicles and their chronological layers

Nepalese chronicles are indispensable for Karnata–Valley connections, especially around Harisimhadeva, but they are not contemporary annals in every surviving form. Compilation, copying and dynastic memory shape their narratives. Petech's critical use of these materials remains important precisely because he compared chronicle traditions with inscriptions and external chronology. A cross-border history should preserve that method rather than cite one late chronicle as if it were a day-by-day record.

Refuge and migration after defeat

Political defeat often produces movements that are more historically durable than the battle itself. Traditions of Harisimhadeva's northward flight connect the fall of the Karnata court with the movement of families, ritual specialists and political practices toward Nepal. Individual migration claims need source-specific proof, but the broader mechanism is plausible and repeatedly documented in premodern South Asia. Refuge can redistribute expertise without transferring an entire society.

Sculpture and reused architectural fragments

Sculptural and architectural fragments at Simraongarh show artistic production and sacred investment, but many objects have been moved, reused or recontextualized. Style can suggest chronology, yet stylistic dating should be checked against stratigraphy and inscriptions where possible. A fragment embedded in a later shrine may testify to an older monument without proving that the standing shrine is medieval. Object history therefore includes reuse as well as original manufacture.

Present shrines inside an archaeological landscape

Ranibas Math and the Ram-Janaki Temple are part of the living landscape of Simraongarh. Their religious importance and visual prominence warrant documentation, but a present monument cannot be assigned wholesale to the Karnata urban fabric without architectural and archaeological demonstration. The retained photograph is dated and captioned accordingly. This is not excessive caution: it prevents modern devotional geography from being mistaken for a frozen medieval site plan.

The problem of dating ramparts

Earth ramparts are notoriously difficult to date when their fills contain redeposited soil and few diagnostic objects. Material inside an embankment can predate its construction, while later repairs can cut into earlier phases. Secure dating therefore depends on stratigraphic relationships, associated datable contexts and, where possible, scientific samples. Simraongarh's fortifications show the danger of assigning a wall to a ruler simply because a text mentions construction.

Two construction phases: what is secure

The most important positive result of the test trench is the recognition of at least two major construction phases. This means the defensive system changed through time and was not built in a single founding moment. Repair, enlargement or redesign are historically plausible. What remains uncertain is

which ruler sponsored which phase and how far each excavated sequence can be generalized around the full circuit. Diagram 25 separates this secure stratigraphic observation from event attribution.

Fire and destruction do not name an attacker

Burning, collapse or abrupt abandonment can be dramatic archaeological evidence, but they do not carry the name of an army. Fire may result from attack, accident, clearance or later disturbance. Even where a destruction layer broadly fits the fourteenth-century conquest horizon, the attribution to Tughluq forces requires independent chronological linkage. The historical narrative therefore uses ‘compatible with’ or ‘hypothesized’ rather than ‘proved by archaeology’.

Event history and site-formation history

A conquest account asks who attacked whom and when. Site-formation analysis asks how deposits accumulated, walls were repaired, surfaces eroded and materials were reused. The two questions overlap but are not identical. Simraongarh is strongest when both are asked. Political texts propose events; stratigraphy records material processes. Their convergence can strengthen an interpretation, while disagreement or silence should remain visible rather than be edited away.

Fortification beyond warfare

Walls define access and communicate authority even when no battle occurs. Gates regulate movement; ditches affect drainage; ramparts distinguish protected space; monumental enclosure can stage kingship. Maintenance itself demonstrates recurring organization. The fortification system should therefore be interpreted as an infrastructure of everyday government as well as defence. Its political meaning survived in the landscape even after the Karnata court fell.

Harisimhadeva in regional memory

Harisimhadeva became a major figure in later Mithila memory because his reign marked both culmination and rupture. Genealogical, ritual and Nepal-connected traditions attach institutional changes to him. These memories are historically significant, but each claimed reform must be tested independently. The safest conclusion is that his defeat became an organizing memory through which later communities explained migrations, genealogies and the end of the Simraongarh-centred order.

Ghiyāth al-Dīn Tughluq and the eastern campaign

The Tughluq advance into Tirhut belongs to a broader eastern military programme. Persianate chronicles are indispensable for the imperial perspective but naturally foreground the Sultan's success. Regional and Nepalese traditions foreground displacement and local aftermath. Reading them together makes conquest visible at more than one scale. It also cautions against assuming that a victorious campaign produced immediate uniform administration across every locality formerly associated with the Karnatas.

What survived the conquest

The court at Simraongarh could fall while agrarian communities, temples, learned lineages, scribal skills and local property relations continued. This continuity explains why post-conquest Mithila remained capable of supporting sophisticated legal and literary production. Political discontinuity and institutional continuity are not contradictions. They are the central pattern of the transition from Karnata to Oiniwar rule.

The transition was a process, not a date

1324–25 is a useful conquest horizon, not a magical dividing line after which every institution changed. Some local authorities may have accommodated the new political order quickly; others may have resisted or fragmented. The Oiniwar

rise itself unfolded over decades and is chronologically uncertain. Period labels therefore serve organization, while the prose keeps the slower processes of continuity, negotiation and realignment in view.

Methodological conclusions from Simraongarh

Simraongarh demonstrates the value of refusing source hierarchy by habit. An inscription can date a royal act but not an entire urban phase; a travel biography can document encounter but not cadastral boundaries; archaeology can establish construction phases without naming their builders; genealogy can preserve social memory without supplying contemporary dates. Historical confidence grows when independent source types converge and should remain graded where they do not.

Evidentiary conclusions

The Karnata period is securely historical, but its cleanest textbook dates are not uniformly documented. Nānyadeva's conventional 1097 horizon, Dharmasvāmin's 1236 encounter, the mature courtly-intellectual record, Simraongarh's multi-phase fortifications and the 1324–25 conquest horizon belong to different evidentiary categories. The cumulative reconstruction therefore retains uncertainty as information. What emerges is not a weaker history but a more precise account of a border-crossing kingdom whose institutions outlived its dynasty.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Sinha, Chandreshwar Prasad Narayan. *Mithila under the Karnatas*, c. 1097–1325 A.D. Janaki Prakashan, 1979.
- Petech, Luciano. *Mediaeval History of Nepal* (c. 750–1482). 2nd ed. Serie Orientale Roma 54. Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1984.
- Roerich, George N., trans. *Biography of Dharmasvāmin* (Chag Lo Tsa-ba Chos-rje-dpal): A Tibetan Monk Pilgrim. K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1959.

- Vidale, Massimo, C. Balista, and V. Torrieri. "A Test Trench Through the Fortifications of Simraongarh." *Ancient Nepal* 135 (October-November 1993): 10-21.
- Vidale, Massimo, and F. Lugli. "Excavations at Simraongarh: The Karnata Phase." In *Nepalese and Italian Contributions to the History and Archaeology of Nepal*. IsIAO, 1997, 97-118.
- Slusser, Mary Shepherd. *Nepal Mandala: A Cultural Study of the Kathmandu Valley*. 2 vols. Princeton University Press, 1982.
- Salomon, Richard. *Indian Epigraphy: A Guide to the Study of Inscriptions in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and the Other Indo-Aryan Languages*. Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Mishra, Jayakanta. *A History of Maithili Literature*, vol. 1: Early and Middle Periods. Tirabhukti Publications, 1949.
- Choudhary, Radhakrishna. *Mithilā in the Age of Vidyāpati*. Chowkhamba Orientalia, 1976.
- Asher, Catherine B., and Cynthia Talbot. *India Before Europe*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Pandey, Anshuman. *Recasting the Brahmin in Medieval Mithila: Origins of Caste Identity among the Maithil Brahmins of North Bihar*. PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2014.

Chapter 14. Oiniwar rule, Sultanate power, and political transition

Reconstituted authority after 1324–25

The Oiniwar period should not be introduced as the automatic restoration of a sovereign Mithila kingdom immediately after the fall of the Karnatas. The Tughluq conquest horizon around 1324–25 changed the political scale on which regional authority operated. Local chiefs, learned families, landed intermediaries and religious institutions remained, but they now negotiated in a field that could include Delhi, provincial governors, Jaunpur, Bengal and neighbouring Nepal. The Oiniwar rulers emerged from this field. Their authority could be substantial in local jurisdiction and patronage while still being exposed to tribute, military intervention, recognition by a superior power or rivalry among branches of the ruling family.

Older histories often provide a smooth accession list beginning with Kāmeśvara Ṭhākura. Modern source criticism is less confident. Vijayakanta Mishra's classic chronology study and D. C. Sircar's numismatic discussion both emphasize that the chronology is difficult, not least because the epoch and application of Lakṣmaṇasena-era dates have been debated and because simultaneous or joint authority may have existed. The dynasty is consequently better reconstructed around evidence clusters—literary, manuscript, epigraphic and numismatic—than around a single unbroken list of exact reigns (Mishra 1953; Sircar 1957–58).

The problem of the dynastic beginning

Kāmeśvara is remembered as the progenitor of the Oiniwar line, with Oini and Sugauna appearing in later historical geography associated with the family. Some regional accounts place his rise close to the immediate aftermath of the Karnata collapse; other reconstructions connect his recognition more

closely with the reign of Fīrūz Shāh Tughluq in the mid-fourteenth century. The evidence does not justify pretending that these alternatives are identical. 'Foundation' may itself compress a process in which a locally influential lineage acquired wider fiscal and political responsibilities under changing Sultanate conditions.

That process fits a broader pattern of regional state formation in late medieval north India. A lineage could hold land, mobilize armed followers, patronize scholarship and exercise jurisdiction while also seeking confirmation or protection from a more powerful court. The political vocabulary of zamindari, tributary status, kingship and local lordship varies by source and period. Translating all of it into the modern binary of independent versus dependent obscures the practical question: who could collect revenue, appoint or recognize officials, settle disputes, sustain troops and commission durable claims to legitimacy?

Oini, Sugauna, and a dispersed court geography

Unlike Simraongarh, the Oiniwar political landscape is not defined by one overwhelmingly visible fortified capital. Places such as Oini and Sugauna enter dynastic memory, while courts and patronage could move with rulers and branches of the family. This dispersed geography is significant. It suggests a polity rooted in landed and household networks rather than only in a single monumental city. The absence of a Simraongarh-scale archaeological centre should not be mistaken for the absence of political organization.

Court geography also overlapped with sacred and scholarly geography. Temples, maṭhas, Brahman settlements, manuscript-copying locations and route centres were places where political relationships were recorded and renewed. The later Kandaha and Bhagirathpur inscriptions are valuable precisely because they show royal genealogy and patronage embedded in local religious monuments. They do not provide a full map of the state, but they show how authority became durable in stone at specific places.

Gaṇeśvara's death and the historical work of Kīrtilatā

Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura's Kīrtilatā is indispensable to the early Oiniwar political narrative. It tells of Gaṇeśvara's killing by an enemy named Aslān and celebrates the efforts of his son Kīrtisiṃha. Because the work is a political-literary composition, it cannot be treated as a neutral dispatch. Its value lies in the conjunction of remembered events, courtly ideology, political vocabulary and the narrative of restoration. The text makes violence, honour, service and alliance intelligible to a fifteenth-century audience and therefore preserves a history of political expectations as well as a history of rulers (Jha 2019).

The famous date associated with Gaṇeśvara's death occurs in a corrupt passage and has been reconstructed in different ways. Sircar noted that one reading may yield Lakṣmaṇasena Saṃvat 252, corresponding to 1371 CE under a particular conversion. That is not the same evidentiary situation as a legible dated coin. The date is therefore retained as a conventional reconstruction, visibly marked as such. This single example demonstrates why the chapter's chronology uses different labels for epigraphic anchors, numismatic anchors and literary reconstruction.

Kīrtisiṃha, Jaunpur, and restoration

Kīrtilatā connects Kīrtisiṃha's recovery of position with the assistance of Sultan Ibrāhīm Shāh Sharqī of Jaunpur, whose reign belongs to the first half of the fifteenth century. The episode is historically important because it overturns the idea that regional Hindu kingship and Sultanate power existed only as sealed hostile blocs. A claimant to Mithila could seek military and political support from a Sultanate ruler; a Sultanate ruler could find advantage in recognizing or assisting a regional client. Such relationships could contain coercion and inequality without being reducible to permanent civilizational war.

The restoration narrative also demonstrates the political value of mobility. Claimants moved to courts, secured audiences, negotiated aid and returned with resources. That pattern

appears across late medieval India. For Mithila, it means that Jaunpur was not merely an external threat on a map: it was part of the political arena in which succession itself could be decided. The Oiniwar court's subsequent literary commemoration of this relationship is evidence of how cross-court negotiation could be incorporated into local legitimacy.

Śivasimha and the politics of autonomy

Śivasimha is among the most remembered Oiniwar rulers because of his association with the later Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura and because coins bearing his name survive. His career has attracted precise regnal dates in later histories, but the evidence should be presented in layers. Manuscript colophons, literary patronage traditions and numismatic finds establish a strong early fifteenth-century horizon; they do not automatically settle every year of accession, captivity, displacement or succession recorded in later narratives.

The small gold coins attributed to Śivasimha are especially important because coinage is a public material claim. D. C. Sircar, discussing the later silver issue of Bhairavasimha, noted the earlier finds bearing Śivasimha's name. The act of issuing coin is evidence for a ruler capable of making an autonomous monetary statement, though the geographical scale and duration of circulation require separate evidence. Coinage therefore strengthens the case for significant regional autonomy without forcing us to imagine an impermeable sovereign border around Mithila.

Literary traditions concerning Śivasimha's conflicts with Sultanate power should likewise be read critically. They preserve memories of confrontation, court dispersal and loyalty, but the precise synchronization of each episode with external chronicles is not always secure. The broader pattern is firmer: local autonomy could expand when larger powers were divided and contract when a Sultanate assembled the resources for direct intervention.

Queens, households, and succession

Oiniwar genealogical and literary traditions remember royal women as more than anonymous spouses, and Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura's courtly career is associated in later accounts with more than one queen as patron. The evidence is uneven, however, and the political vocabulary of a queen's regency, household authority, patronage and independent rule should not be collapsed into one category. Where later chronologies assign exact reigns to queens, those dates require the same scrutiny applied to male succession lists.

The royal household nevertheless mattered politically. Marriage connected lineages, property and patronage; widowed or senior women could mediate succession; queens commissioned or supported religious and literary activity. Household politics also shaped the movement of scholars. The Oiniwar court is therefore better seen as a network of royal households and patronage relationships than as a sequence of isolated kings. This approach helps explain how Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura could be remembered across changes of ruler while maintaining intellectual continuity in the later courtly corpus.

Sultanate interaction: Delhi, Jaunpur, and Bengal

Three Sultanate fields matter especially for the Oiniwar period. Delhi supplied the conquest background and, in some reconstructions, recognition for the early dynasty. Jaunpur became a major regional power in the fifteenth century and appears directly in the Kīrtilatā restoration narrative. Bengal exerted increasing pressure from the east and became central to the dynasty's final political crisis. These powers did not act on Mithila in the same way at the same time. Their own wars, succession disputes and provincial interests created alternating periods of intervention and local opportunity.

It is consequently misleading to write 'Muslim rule' as a single continuous actor. Delhi, Jaunpur and Bengal were distinct states with changing frontiers and rivalries. Persianate political

culture linked them in some administrative and literary practices, but their strategic interests diverged. Mithila's rulers could resist one power, seek assistance from another, pay tribute, or exploit competition among them. The resulting political history is one of unequal but active negotiation.

The same caution applies to the word 'conquest'. A campaign may defeat a ruler, seize a fort, demand tribute or install an officer without replacing all local institutions. Conversely, apparent dynastic continuity does not prove immunity from external fiscal claims. Political transition must therefore be reconstructed locality by locality and source by source.

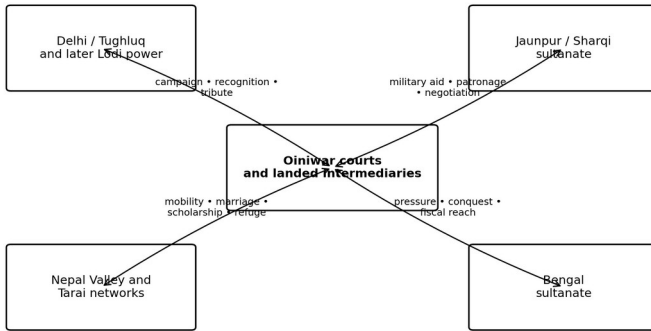
Sovereignty in gradients

Oiniwar Mithila is a particularly useful case for abandoning an all-or-nothing model of sovereignty. At different moments a ruler could exercise local jurisdiction, patronize Brahmanical scholarship, issue coin, command armed retainers and receive genealogical praise while also recognizing a more powerful Sultan or depending on external military aid. None of those facts cancels the others. They describe different dimensions of authority.

Terms such as king, zamindar, tributary, governor, ally and subordinate are therefore best treated as claims embedded in particular archives. A Sanskrit praise text may emphasize royal splendour; a Persian chronicle may emphasize submission to a Sultan; a coin may proclaim local lordship; an inscription may record a donation without narrating external political dependence. The historian's task is to put these claims in the same field rather than choose one archive as the only reality.

This is the logic represented in Diagram 26. It is not a map of fixed borders. It is an analytical model of routes through which military pressure, recognition, tribute, patronage, marriage and scholarly mobility connected the Oiniwar court to surrounding powers.

Oiniwar Mithila in a layered political field



Analytical point: "sovereignty" operated in gradients. Tribute, appointment, alliance, local jurisdiction and military occupation did not mean the same thing.

Diagram 26. Oiniwar Mithila in a layered political field. Arrows represent changing relations of campaign, recognition, tribute, aid, patronage, conquest, marriage and scholarly mobility; they are not fixed modern borders.

Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026. Original schematic; no third-party image content. Sources: Mishra 1953; Alam 2004; Asher and Talbot 2006; Jha 2019.

Coinage as a material claim: Śivasimha and Bhairavasiṃha

Numismatic evidence provides some of the chapter's sharpest chronological anchors. The gold coins attributed to Śivasimha establish an early Oiniwar practice of royal coinage. More decisive for chronology is the silver coin of Bhairavasiṃha published by D. C. Sircar. Its legend identifies Bhairavasiṃha as lord of Tirabhukti and son of Mahārāja Darpanārāyaṇa. Numerical marks give Śaka 1411 and regnal year 15. Sircar therefore converted the issue to 1489–90 CE and inferred an accession around 1475–76.

This evidence is unusually powerful because date, ruler, genealogy and territorial title are joined on the same object. Even here, limits remain. One coin does not show the full area in which the ruler's authority was effective, nor does it prove that every transaction in Tirhut used his money. But it does establish that Bhairavasiṃha could issue silver coinage in his own name and that his fifteenth regnal year coincided with Śaka 1411. That

is a firmer chronological statement than many dates in later genealogical tables.

Sircar also interpreted the independent issue of silver as a signal of political autonomy. The inference is plausible because coinage was a conspicuous royal medium, yet its meaning should be read alongside Sultanate conditions rather than in isolation. Autonomy could be real and still coexist with a larger, fluctuating field of superior powers.

Kandaha, 1453: an epigraphic anchor

The Kandaha Sun Temple inscription associated with Narasiṃha is one of the rare Oiniwar epigraphic anchors. The surviving image is catalogued with a date of 1453 and preserves royal inscriptional material in the regional script tradition. Because epigraphs are situated objects, the correct procedure is to separate what can be read from the surface or a critical edition from later summaries attached to photographs. The book therefore captions the modern reproduction cautiously and directs epigraphic conclusions back to the original record or scholarly publication.

The value of Kandaha lies not only in supplying a date. An inscription joins royal name, religious patronage, place and material display. It reveals the way political identity entered a sacred landscape. The temple context also reminds us that Oiniwar authority was distributed through local institutions, not confined to a single capital. A dated inscription at Saharsa can therefore be both a local act and evidence for the broader political geography of Tirhut.

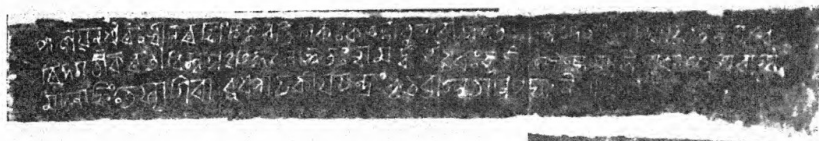


Figure 4. Image catalogued by Wikimedia Commons as an inscription of King Narsimha of the Oiniwar dynasty from Kandaha Sun Temple, Saharsa, with the date 1453. Epigraphic conclusions require the original surface or a critical edition.

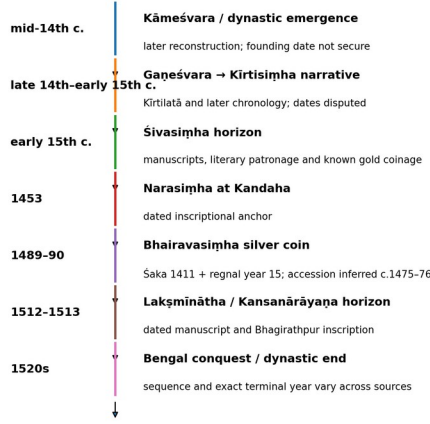
Public-domain reproduction; source record uploaded in 2024. [Wikimedia Commons file page](#)

Bhagirathpur, 1513, and the late dynastic horizon

The Bhagirathpur inscription published by Radhakrishna Choudhary is another crucial anchor because Oiniwar chronology otherwise depends heavily on literary and traditional sources. Choudhary himself emphasized that the chronology remained ‘in a state of flux’. The stone record, written in Maithili script and connected with the construction of a maṭha or temple under Anumati Devi’s instructions, supplies a genealogy and a definite late-dynastic date. The published discussion debates whether the Lakṣmaṇasena year should be read 403 or 394; the latter conversion places the record in 1513 CE.

The inscription names Kansanārāyaṇa in the late Oiniwar genealogical line. Other histories use Lakṣmīnātha in describing the last ruler or final phase. These naming and succession problems should not be solved by silently choosing one later list. A manuscript dated 1512 under Lakṣmīnātha and the Bhagirathpur inscriptional horizon of 1513 together show a functioning late Oiniwar political world immediately before the decisive expansion of Bengal power. They also show why manuscript colophons and temple inscriptions are essential checks on genealogical narrative.

Source-controlled Oiniwar chronology



Solid dates are strongest where an inscription or coin supplies the anchor; literary and genealogical sequences remain indispensable but differently weighted.

Diagram 27. Source-controlled Oiniwar chronology. The sequence assigns greater chronological weight to the 1453 Kandaha inscription, the 1489–90 Bhairavasīmha coin and the 1512–1513 documentary horizon than to disputed earlier succession dates.

Editorial diagram prepared for this book, 2026. Original schematic; no third-party image content. Sources: Mishra 1953; Choudhary 1955; Sircar 1957–58; Jha 2019.

Writing state and order: Likhanāvalī

Political administration survives not only in chronicles and inscriptions but also in documentary models. Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura's Sanskrit Likhanāvalī is a major source because it presents exemplary forms for letters, documents, transactions and official as well as intimate communications. Pankaj Jha has emphasized its importance for studying the culture of documentation in a period more often approached through Persian administrative writing. The text demonstrates that Sanskrit intellectual practice could engage directly with documentary government rather than remaining confined to ritual or scholastic commentary (Jha 2019).

A manual of model documents is not a bundle of archival originals. Its formulas show what writers believed an appropriate letter, order or transaction should look like; actual practice could vary. Yet this normative dimension is precisely

what makes the work valuable. It reveals categories of address, hierarchy, obligation, property, credit and communication. It also makes the scribe visible as a political actor. The functioning state depended on people who could formulate claims, preserve records and move information between court, landed locality, temple, merchant and household.

Likhanāvalī also complicates any claim that documentary sophistication arrived in one language alone. Persian insha traditions and Sanskrit model documents belonged to overlapping political worlds. Similar administrative problems—how to authenticate, address, request, order, convey and record—could be handled in different linguistic repertoires. Comparison can illuminate contact without requiring a simplistic one-way borrowing story.

Land, labour, markets, and legal transactions

The court's political literature rests on a social world of land, labour and exchange. Late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century palm-leaf deeds from Tirhut studied by Mahes Raj Pant record purchases of enslaved persons and follow documentary forms comparable to those prescribed in Likhanāvalī. Some of the deeds extend beyond the Oiniwar period, so they should not all be assigned to one dynasty. Together they nevertheless demonstrate the durability of a regional Sanskrit documentary culture and provide unusually direct evidence for coercive labour relations that court praise generally leaves invisible.

This evidence must be described without euphemism. Enslavement and sale were real legal-social practices recorded in documents. At the same time, a small surviving corpus cannot supply population-wide prevalence. The responsible conclusion is narrower: unfree persons could be treated as purchasable property within documented transactions, and literate legal forms helped make such transactions enforceable or socially legible. This is a reminder that intellectual florescence and social coercion can coexist in the same historical period.

Markets and credit likewise linked court and countryside. Grain, cloth, animals, metals and ritual commodities circulated along routes that connected Mithila to the Ganga corridor, Bengal, Jaunpur and Nepal. Merchants appear less prominently than rulers in the dynastic record, but documentary forms concerning debt, sale and obligation show that political authority rested on a transactional economy.

Persian and Sanskrit records in one political field

The multilingual political world of fifteenth-century Mithila cannot be divided into a Sanskrit interior and a Persian exterior. Sultanate administration used Persian and Arabic-Persian epigraphic forms, while Oiniwar courts sponsored Sanskrit learning and regional literary production. Individuals moved between institutions; political actors encountered different languages according to court, genre and purpose. The later Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura corpus belongs to this multilingual environment, and modern scholarship has drawn attention to the ways Kīrtilatā, Likhānāvalī and Puruṣaparīkṣā engage a world shaped by Persianate as well as Sanskritic models (Alam 2004; Jha 2019). This statement is not used to transfer those works to the earlier Padāvalī poet.

This interaction should not be romanticized as effortless synthesis. Languages could mark unequal access to institutions and competing claims to authority. Military conquest was violent; revenue exactions could be coercive; religious communities could experience patronage and vulnerability differently. But permanent civilizational separation is equally misleading. The documentary archive shows practical coexistence, translation, negotiation and adaptation across political boundaries.

Northward connections and mobile scholars

The Oiniwar period continued the long connections between Mithila and Nepal. Scholars, ritual specialists, manuscripts and political refugees moved across the Tarai. The Kathmandu

Valley was not simply a recipient of Mithila culture, nor was Mithila isolated from valley developments. Patronage networks could extend across courts, and later manuscript transmission often preserves works outside the place of their composition.

This mobility is methodologically important for attribution. A manuscript copied in Nepal may preserve a Mithila text without proving that the author lived permanently in the valley; a Maithil scholar serving a Nepalese patron may belong to more than one regional intellectual history. National literary histories that claim such figures exclusively miss the route-based nature of medieval scholarship.

The end of Oiniwar rule and the Bengal horizon

By the early sixteenth century the political balance around Mithila was changing rapidly. The Lodi state struggled in Bihar, Afghan chiefs and regional powers competed, and the Husain Shahi Sultanate of Bengal expanded westward. The late Oiniwar inscriptions and manuscript dates show that the dynasty remained active in the 1510s. Later narratives place its destruction in the 1520s under Nusrat Shah of Bengal, and 1526 has become a common terminal date. The precise sequence—especially the identification of the last ruler and the year of his death—should be treated more cautiously than the dated 1512–1513 evidence immediately preceding it.

What is secure is the political transition: Bengal's expansion ended the Oiniwar order as the dominant regional dynasty, while local landed and learned lineages persisted. The aftermath was not a thirty-year blank. Rival chiefs, Afghan and Sultanate officers, Brahman lineages and surviving institutions competed and adapted. This fragmented field eventually produced new configurations of regional power that later chapters will trace.

The end of a dynasty is therefore not the end of Mithila's political society. Oiniwar institutions left durable effects in scholarship, documentary culture, genealogical memory, religious patronage and the networks that sustained Maithili

literary production. The following chapter separates two figures whom later reception often merges: the earlier Mahākavi Vidyāpati of the Maithili Padāvalī tradition and the later Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura of the Oiniwar Sanskrit-Avahaṭṭa corpus.

Chronology as a source problem

Oiniwar chronology is itself part of the historical argument. Regnal lists assembled from literary works, manuscripts, inscriptions, coins and later genealogies do not always align. The chapter therefore does not hide disagreement in footnotes while printing one exact table as fact. Dated material anchors the sequence; literary reconstruction fills intervals provisionally. This approach follows the caution expressed by Mishra, Sircar and Choudhary, each of whom encountered conflicts in the inherited chronology.

Lakṣmaṇasena-era dates and conversion

Lakṣmaṇasena Saṃvat dates are central to Oiniwar history but can create false precision if their epoch or numeral is assumed silently. A manuscript or inscription may preserve a year clearly while modern conversion remains debated; in other cases even the numeral is uncertain. The proper procedure is to state the reading, conversion and level of confidence. The Bhagirathpur debate over 403 versus 394 is therefore methodologically useful rather than embarrassing.

Dynastic branches and possible overlapping rule

A linear succession table assumes that only one member of the ruling family exercised royal authority at a time. Sircar warned that Oiniwar evidence may instead reflect branches, joint authority or contemporaneous local rule. That possibility helps explain apparently conflicting manuscript dates. It also fits a polity grounded in landed households. Overlap should not be asserted wherever chronology is difficult, but it must remain available as an explanation when sources place related rulers in the same horizon.

Sultanate recognition as a political resource

Recognition by a Sultanate court could enhance rather than simply diminish local power. A claimant who received support, confirmation or military assistance could use that relationship against domestic rivals. The Kirtisimha narrative makes this logic particularly visible. Dependence and agency therefore existed together: superior power constrained choices, while regional actors used imperial relationships strategically. This is why ‘vassal’ or ‘independent’ alone often fails to describe the political arrangement.

Learned lineages and fiscal service

Oiniwar power rested on more than royal kin. Learned Brahman families could combine ritual status, legal expertise, scribal competence and landholding. Such capacities made them useful to rulers and durable across dynastic change. This does not mean every scholar was an administrator or every grant produced a bureaucratic caste. It does mean that intellectual and fiscal histories intersected: the ability to interpret law, draft documents and manage landed claims could become a source of political influence.

Kīrtilatā as praise and political memory

Kīrtilatā celebrates its patron’s lineage and recovery, so praise is part of the evidence rather than a defect to be removed. Heroic framing tells us how restoration was made legitimate—through filial duty, courage, alliance and recognized kingship. Historical reading separates those ideological structures from details that can be corroborated elsewhere. The work is most powerful when treated simultaneously as political memory, literature and a witness to the vocabulary of fifteenth-century power.

The problem of Aslān

The figure named Aslān in the Gaṇeśvara episode has often been identified as a Muslim adversary, but the literary narrative

does not by itself provide a complete institutional biography. His alliances, role and relationship to members of the Oiniwar family have been reconstructed differently. The chapter therefore avoids turning a named antagonist into a fully documented governor without supporting records. What is secure is the remembered violent rupture around Gaṇeśvara and its importance to Kīrtisimha's legitimacy.

Ibrāhīm Shāh Sharqī and chronological control

The reign of Ibrāhīm Shāh Sharqī supplies an external chronological frame for the Kīrtisimha restoration narrative. Because Jaunpur's Sultanate chronology is better established, it can constrain—but not completely date—the literary episode. This is a useful historical technique: external chronology narrows possibilities without pretending that a poem provides the exact day of an audience or campaign. The resulting date band is more honest than a spurious precision.

Jaunpur as a political marketplace

Jaunpur functioned as a military and cultural centre to which regional claimants, scholars and service elites could orient themselves. Calling it a political 'marketplace' is analytical: access to the Sultan's court could provide armed aid, office, recognition or patronage, while the Sultanate gained clients and influence. Such exchanges were unequal but reciprocal in purpose. They help explain why Mithila's political history cannot be narrated solely from inside its later cultural boundaries.

Śivasimha's coins and the limits of numismatic inference

Coins bearing Śivasimha's name prove an ability to place royal identity on precious metal. They do not, by themselves, establish mint location, annual output, territorial circulation or the exact constitutional relationship with surrounding Sultanates. Numismatics is strongest when its claims remain material: legend, metal, weight, die, find context and

comparison. Political interpretation follows from those features but should not exceed them.

Patronage and Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura without collapsing identities

Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura's association with Oiniwar rulers belongs to Chapter 14 because patronage is political evidence, but his literary and intellectual achievement receives fuller treatment in Chapter 15. Here the important point is institutional continuity: a learned court figure could be associated with successive rulers and royal households, linking courtly memory across political change. This later corpus is therefore both a literary archive and evidence for the resilience of learned service networks. It is kept distinct from the earlier Mahākavi Vidyāpati Padāvalī tradition.

Court dispersion and refuge traditions

Narratives of war often describe the court dispersing, patrons seeking refuge and scholars moving between households. Such traditions should be checked episode by episode, yet the mechanism is historically credible. A mobile court can preserve texts and patronage even when a territorial centre is threatened. Movement also helps explain why manuscripts associated with Mithila survive in Nepal and other regions. Political instability could redistribute culture rather than merely destroy it.

Royal women and documentary silence

The archive names some royal women in patronage and genealogical contexts while leaving long stretches of their activity undocumented. Later literary histories sometimes fill those gaps with detailed reign narratives. This book does not reproduce precision that the evidence cannot sustain. It instead treats queens and senior women as political actors where sources show household authority, patronage, succession or endowment, and marks the limits where they do not.

The script of the Kandaha record

The Kandaha inscription is important not only for Narasiṃha's date but also for the regional script tradition in which power was materialized. Script connects epigraphy with manuscript culture and later Tirhuta/Maithili writing practices. Palaeography can help date and contextualize an inscription, but script identity is not a direct ethnic label. Its historical value lies in scribal continuity, regional literate practice and the public visibility of royal patronage.

Temple endowment as political display

A temple inscription turns a religious act into a durable public statement. Patronage could bind royal genealogy to sacred space, local communities and property. Kandaha and Bhagirathpur therefore help reconstruct a dispersed political geography: a ruler's presence was expressed at institutions beyond a central residence. Such records also survive unevenly because stone endures where routine fiscal papers often do not, producing an archive biased toward monumental acts.

From Narasiṃha to Bhairavasīṃha: cautious genealogy

The Bhairavasīṃha coin identifies him as son of Darpanārāyaṇa, while later genealogical traditions connect royal names through aliases and succession sequences. These relations are useful, but exact reconciliation should follow the wording of each record. The dated coin and Kandaha inscription create a mid-to-late fifteenth-century framework; intermediate succession can then be tested against manuscripts rather than simply inherited from a late list.

The Bhairavasīṃha legend as political language

The coin's legend calls Bhairavasīṃha lord of Tirabhukti and identifies his royal father. Those choices are political. Territorial title presents a claim over the region, while genealogy asserts legitimacy. The coin is thus a compressed public document as well as money. Its wording can be compared with inscriptions

and literary titles, but it should not be translated into a modern legal definition of sovereignty. Medieval titulature advertises rank; effective authority still has to be reconstructed.

Regnal-year arithmetic as inference

Bhairavasiṃha's accession around 1475–76 is an inference, not a second inscription. The coin gives Śaka 1411 and regnal year 15; subtracting fourteen completed years yields the approximate accession horizon. This arithmetic is transparent and unusually strong, but calendrical conventions can affect exact month-to-month conversion. The book therefore uses 'c. 1475–76' for accession and treats 1489–90 as the firmer dated issue.

Lakṣmīnātha and Kansanārāyaṇa: naming the last phase

Late Oiniwar sources do not yield one universally agreed last-ruler label. A 1512 manuscript is associated with Lakṣmīnātha, while the Bhagirathpur inscription names Kansanārāyaṇa in a genealogy and was interpreted by Choudhary as evidence for the last king. Rather than forcing an identification without argument, the chapter preserves the parallel names and focuses on the secure point: Oiniwar authority was still documented in the 1512–1513 horizon.

Anumati Devi and the Bhagirathpur genealogy

The Bhagirathpur record is particularly valuable because its construction notice is embedded in family genealogy and names Anumati Devi. This is a reminder that women can enter the epigraphic archive through religious construction and kinship even when dynastic lists centre men. The inscription should not be inflated into a complete biography of Anumati Devi, but her named role in commissioning or directing the religious work is itself significant evidence.

Maithili script as an administrative archive

Regional scripts were used for more than literary display. Inscriptions, manuscript colophons and legal documents show that writing practices connected courts, sacred institutions and transactions. The archive is fragmented because palm leaf and paper survive poorly compared with stone. What remains is enough to reject any picture of governance as exclusively oral. The Oiniwar period participated in a deep culture of documentation whose surviving examples are disproportionately learned and elite.

Likhanāvalī and the range of document forms

Likhanāvalī models multiple kinds of communication rather than one generic royal order. Its value lies in distinctions among requests, notifications, transactions and hierarchical addresses. Formulaic language indicates expectations about who could speak to whom and how obligations should be phrased. Historians can therefore use the text to reconstruct documentary imagination, while remaining alert that a model book records normative forms rather than the frequency with which each was actually used.

Palm-leaf deeds and legal practice

The surviving Tirhut deeds studied by Mahes Raj Pant are especially important because they are transactions rather than literary models. Their formulae can be compared with Likhanāvalī, showing points where normative documentary culture and actual legal instruments intersect. Because the corpus extends into the sixteenth century, it demonstrates continuity across the dynastic transition. This is precisely the kind of evidence that prevents political periodization from becoming a claim of total social rupture.

Slavery and archival asymmetry

The deeds recording the purchase of enslaved persons expose a social relation largely absent from courtly praise. They also

reveal archival asymmetry: elite legal records can make a person visible at the moment of sale while preserving little of that person's own voice. Historical writing should name the coercion clearly and avoid turning documentary survival into representativeness. The records prove legally documented enslavement; they do not by themselves provide a complete demographic measure of unfree labour in Mithila.

Routes to Bengal, Jaunpur, and Nepal

Oiniwar political survival depended on corridors in several directions. Westward routes connected to Jaunpur and the politics of the middle Ganga plain; eastward routes opened toward Bengal; northward movement crossed the Tarai toward Nepal. These were not only invasion routes. Manuscripts, scholars, goods and marriage relations travelled along them. Political geography therefore works best as a network of corridors and nodes rather than a static polygon.

Sultanate expansion and fiscal space

When a Sultanate expanded, the most consequential change could be fiscal before it became cultural. Control over tribute, revenue assignments, crossings and strategic towns altered who could claim surplus. Local law, temple patronage and household practice might continue under new superior authority. The Oiniwar end should therefore be evaluated through shifts in fiscal and military command as well as through dynastic narratives of defeat.

Why 1526 should remain qualified

The year 1526 is widely repeated as the end of Oiniwar rule, but its evidentiary status differs from the dated 1513 inscription or 1489–90 coin. Later historical reconstructions connect Nusrat Shah's Bengal expansion with the killing or removal of the last ruler in the 1520s. The cumulative chronology therefore presents '1520s' as the secure transition band and notes 1526 as

a common reconstruction rather than an inscriptionally fixed terminal date.

Evidentiary conclusions

Oiniwar history is strongest when written around anchors rather than a polished king-list. Kirtilatā preserves political memory of Gaṇeśvara and Kirtisimha; Śivasimha's coinage marks an autonomous claim; Kandaha fixes Narasimha in 1453; Bhairavasimha's coin fixes 1489–90 and implies c. 1475–76 accession; manuscript and Bhagirathpur evidence secure the 1512–1513 late horizon. Around these points, Sultanate relations, household politics and documentary culture can be reconstructed with confidence graded rather than concealed.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Mishra, Vijayakanta. "Chronology of the Oiniwara Dynasty of Mithila." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 16 (1953): 200-210.
- Sircar, D. C. "Silver Coin of Bhairavasimha." *Epigraphia Indica* 32 (1957-58): 329-336.
- Choudhary, Radhakrishna. "The Bhagirathpur Inscription of Kansanārāyana Dated L.S. 403 (or 394?)." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 18 (1955): 161-164.
- Choudhary, Radhakrishna. *Mithilā in the Age of Vidyāpati*. Chowkhamba Orientalia, 1976.
- Jha, Pankaj. *A Political History of Literature: Vidyapati and the Fifteenth Century*. Oxford University Press, 2019.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199489558.001.0001>.
- Pant, Mahes Raj. "Six 15th- and 16th-Century Deeds from Tirhut Recording the Purchase of Slaves." In *Recht, Staat und Verwaltung im klassischen Indien*, edited by Bernhard Kölver, 159-194. Oldenbourg, 1997.
- Alam, Muzaffar. *The Languages of Political Islam: India 1200-1800*. University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Ahmad, Qeyamuddin. *Corpus of Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bihar, A.H. 640-1200*. K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1973.
- Asher, Catherine B., and Cynthia Talbot. *India Before Europe*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Mishra, Jayakanta. *A History of Maithili Literature*, vol. 1: Early and Middle Periods. Tirabhukti Publications, 1949.
- Thakur, Upendra. *History of Mithila: From the Earliest Times to 1556 A.D.* 2nd ed. Mithila Institute, 1988.

Chapter 15. Two Vidyāpatīs: Maithili, Sanskrit learning, and law

Governing distinction: two Vidyāpatīs

This history adopts a two-Vidyāpati reconstruction as a governing rule of attribution. Mahākavi Vidyāpati is treated as the earlier, pre-Jyotirīśvara poet of the Maithili Padāvalī tradition. Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura is treated as the later Oiniwar-period intellectual associated with Sanskrit and Avahaṭṭa works, including Kīrtilatā, Kīrtipatākā, Puruṣaparīkṣā and Likhanāvalī. The distinction is applied throughout the book to chronology, language, patronage, caste claims, legends, bibliography, glossary and index. A work or anecdote is not moved from one figure to the other merely because later tradition uses the same name.

This is an explicit historiographical position of the present book rather than a claim that all modern scholarship already agrees. The mainstream one-author model remains influential: Ramanath Jha's *Sahitya Akademi* monograph and Pankaj Jha's study of the fifteenth century both organize major corpora under one Vidyāpati. Yet Ramanath Jha also warns that Vidyāpati was a common name, that several authors of that name—including more than one Thakur—survive, and that identification from the name alone is hazardous. That warning supplies an important methodological bridge between the conventional model and the sharper separation adopted here.

Why the distinction is historically necessary

Conflation produces more than a literary inconvenience. If the Padāvalī poet and the later court intellectual are treated as one person, the biography of an Oiniwar scholar is projected onto a vernacular song tradition; the date of one corpus is made to control the other; court patrons become patrons of every song; and later genealogical or caste narratives can be transferred backward without an independent witness. The

result is a circular biography in which works authenticate a life that was itself reconstructed from the same works.

The two-person model breaks that circle. Each corpus must first be dated and attributed on its own evidence: manuscript colophons, internal royal names, linguistic register, citations, early anthologies, performance history and external references. Only after those controls are established may biography be reconstructed. The burden of proof therefore rests on the proposed identification, not on the assumption that a famous name must designate one individual across centuries of transmission.

Evidence hierarchy for literary biography

The evidence used here is ranked rather than flattened. A dated manuscript, a securely read colophon, a contemporary inscription, a coin or an internal dedication tied to an identifiable ruler normally carries more chronological weight than a late genealogy or modern commemorative narrative. A critical edition is stronger for wording than a quotation copied from a derivative compilation. Performance tradition is indispensable for reception history but cannot automatically establish an autograph text. Likewise, a traditional life-story can preserve social memory while remaining too late to decide whether a particular poem and a particular courtier were the same person.

This hierarchy does not privilege written evidence because oral culture is unimportant. It recognizes that different evidence answers different questions. A song still performed after centuries may establish extraordinary continuity of reception; it does not by itself date the first composition. A royal name in a Sanskrit work may anchor one author to a court; it does not prove authorship of an unrelated song cycle.

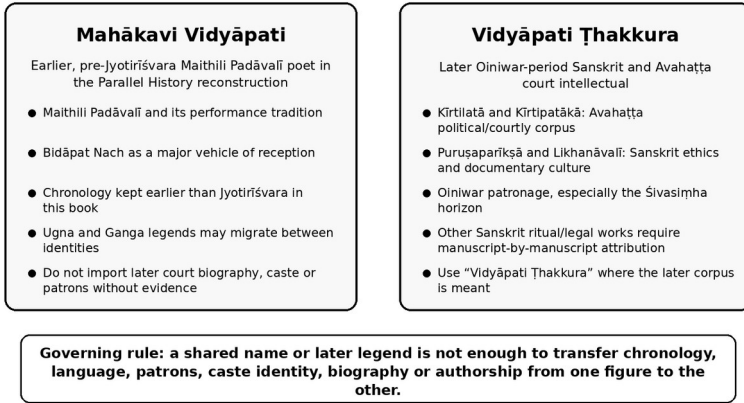
A shared name is not a shared identity

Vidyāpati literally functions as a learned or honorific name and was not unique to one historical person. Ramanath Jha's

monograph explicitly notes the existence of several Vidyāpatīs and cautions against identification by name alone. This point is especially important in a manuscript culture where scribal headings, colophons, performance bhāṇitās and later catalogues may regularize names differently. A famous name can also attract anonymous or later compositions, just as a successful legend can migrate toward the best-known bearer of a name.

The present book therefore uses disambiguating labels systematically: ‘Mahākavi Vidyāpati’ for the earlier Maithili Padāvalī poet in the Parallel History reconstruction, and ‘Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura’ for the later Sanskrit-Avahaṭṭa court intellectual. Where a source itself is ambiguous, the ambiguity is preserved instead of being silently resolved.

Two Vidyāpatīs: source-controlled separation



This diagram states the historiographical position adopted in this book; it is not presented as universal scholarly consensus.

Diagram 28. Two Vidyāpatīs: source-controlled separation. The diagram states the historiographical position adopted in this book and distinguishes it from universal scholarly consensus.

Original analytical diagram for this volume. Sources:

Gajendra Thakur, “Two Vidyapatis: Some Legends and Some Facts,” Videha 438; Ramanath Jha, Vidyāpati (Sahitya Akademi, 1972/2017), especially his warning that several authors named Vidyāpati survive; Pankaj Jha, A Political History of Literature (2019). Rights: © Gajendra Thakur / editorial diagram for this volume.

Mahākavi Vidyāpati: the earlier Padāvalī horizon

In the Parallel History reconstruction, Mahākavi Vidyāpati belongs before Jyotirīśvara and represents an early Maithili song tradition whose later fame became so great that the name Vidyāpati came to dominate eastern Indian reception. The central archive for this figure is the Padāvalī and its performance life, not the Oiniwar court works. This chronological placement is a thesis of the parallel tradition and is stated as such so that readers can distinguish the book's reconstruction from the widespread fifteenth-century identification.

The significance of this earlier placement is substantial. It makes the vernacular lyric tradition part of a longer Maithili history rather than a sudden fifteenth-century invention. It also allows the literary environment represented by Jyotirīśvara to be read as evidence of an already developing regional expressive sphere rather than as the beginning of all Maithili literary possibility.

Padāvalī as an independent corpus

The Padāvalī should be examined first as a corpus with its own transmission. Its Radha-Krishna love lyrics, devotional registers, musical life and bhāṇitā conventions reached audiences far beyond manuscript-reading elites. The surviving collections are not an autograph notebook; they are products of copying, selection, performance and regional reception. The historical unit is therefore a layered song tradition, not simply a modern printed volume bearing a single author's name.

Separating the Padāvalī from the later Ṭhakkura corpus does not diminish either. It allows the earlier poet's vernacular achievement to be studied without forcing Sanskrit court biography onto it, and it allows the later scholar's Sanskrit and Avahaṭṭa works to be read in their own political context.

The pre-Jyotirīśvara chronology as an adopted thesis

The Parallel History source dossier places Mahākavi Vidyāpati before Jyotirīśvara, whose life is conventionally situated around the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. This book adopts that relative chronology as its working reconstruction. It does not, however, manufacture a precise birth or death year where the evidence does not justify one. ‘Pre-Jyotirīśvara’ is therefore used as a chronological relation, not as a false exact date.

This distinction between relative and absolute chronology is important. Medieval literary history often becomes over-precise because later genealogies are converted into exact regnal tables. Here, an earlier/later relationship is preserved even where an exact year remains unsettled.

Śrīdharadāsa and the early name horizon

Śrīdharadāsa’s Saduktikarṇāmṛta was compiled in 1205 CE and is an important chronological control for the circulation of Sanskrit verse and poet names in eastern India. The Parallel History dossier identifies verses under the name Vidyāpati in this early anthology and uses them as part of the case for an earlier bearer of the name. The date of the anthology itself is secure; the precise identification of the cited Vidyāpati with the Maithili Padāvalī poet requires control from the critical text and should not be enlarged beyond what the witness actually states.

Accordingly, this book uses the Saduktikarṇāmṛta item as supporting evidence for an early Vidyāpati name horizon within the adopted reconstruction, not as a licence to attach the whole later biography to a twelfth- or early thirteenth-century poet.

The Abhinavagupta reference: limited and explicitly qualified

The Parallel History discussion also invokes a Vidyāpati reference in the Abhinavagupta textual horizon. Because the accessible electronic text of the Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśinī used during the present audit did not yield an independently

verifiable Vidyāpati string, this item is not made the principal chronological foundation of the chapter. It is recorded as part of the Parallel History dossier and left open for verification against the exact printed passage and variant readings.

This is an example of source control rather than hesitation. A thesis is strengthened, not weakened, when uncertain supports are labelled accurately. The two-Vidyāpati distinction in this book rests on the broader incompatibility of corpora, chronology and court context, not on one unverified citation.

Jyotirīśvara as chronological control

Jyotirīśvara's Varṇaratnākara belongs to the Karnata/transition intellectual horizon and is indispensable to the history of Maithili prose, performance vocabulary and social description. In the Parallel History reconstruction, references associated with the earlier Vidyāpati tradition make Jyotirīśvara an important terminus for separating the Padāvalī poet from the later Oiniwar Ṭhakkura. Even apart from that disputed identification, Jyotirīśvara demonstrates that regional literary expression and theatrical culture were already highly developed before the mature fifteenth-century court of Śivasimha.

The chronology therefore does not depend on a 'great man' model in which one poet creates a language. It depends on overlapping institutions, genres and performers whose traces appear in different kinds of sources.

Bidāpat Nach as a performance archive

The Bidāpat Nach tradition is central to the Parallel History because it preserved Vidyāpati songs through embodied performance among communities often absent from elite manuscript histories. Song, dance, comic interlude, costume, memory and local patronage formed a moving archive. Phanishwar Nath Renu's twentieth-century reportage is important not because it proves the first date of every lyric, but because it documents a living performance ecology in which the

Vidyāpati name survived outside the narrow frame of Sanskrit scholastic institutions.

Performance also explains why attribution can both persist and change. A refrain may preserve a name with remarkable durability, while verses, melodies and narrative frames shift. Historical criticism must therefore read performance as transmission, not as a transparent recording of an original event.

Oral transmission and textual instability

A song tradition does not remain unchanged merely because performers value continuity. Memorization produces variants; singers substitute familiar words; scribes normalize spelling; anthologists select; devotees reinterpret erotic imagery; and regional performance styles alter metre or refrain. These processes are not corruption in the simple sense. They are the history of the text's social life.

For the two-Vidyāpati problem, this means that a late manuscript containing an old song cannot by itself settle authorship, and a fifteenth-century-style spelling in a copied Padāvalī does not necessarily date the original composition. Philology must separate linguistic layer, manuscript date, performance history and author attribution.

Ugna: a legend that crossed identities

The Ugna-Mahādeva story—Śiva serving the poet in disguise so that he may hear his songs—is one of the most powerful narratives of Vidyāpati devotion. The Parallel History argues that the story became attached to both the earlier Padāvalī poet and the later Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura. That migration is historically plausible because legends gravitate toward famous names and because later commemorative culture sought a single exemplary Vidyāpati.

The legend is therefore retained as evidence for reception and sacred memory, not used as a chronological bridge proving that the two corpora share one author. When the story is

narrated, this book identifies which tradition is speaking and avoids using devotional biography as a substitute for manuscript evidence.

The Ganga legend and transferred biography

A comparable problem occurs with stories concerning Vidyāpati and the Ganga. Versions of the poet's final journey, devotion to the river and miraculous proximity of the Ganga circulate widely. Some later Sanskrit works attributed to Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura also engage Ganga devotion. Similarity of motif encourages merger, but shared religious themes are common across generations and do not identify authorship.

The book therefore treats the Ganga narratives as a case study in transferred biography. A motif may be ancient; its attachment to a specific poet may be later; and a ritual text may belong to a court intellectual without proving that he composed every vernacular song associated with the same sacred geography.

Caste, village and retrospective genealogy

The two-Vidyāpati distinction also prevents social identities from being transferred without evidence. Later biographies place the fifteenth-century Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura within a Brahmin scholar-state family of Bisapi/Bisfi and reconstruct a genealogy linked to court service. The Parallel History's earlier Mahākavi Vidyāpati tradition preserves different possibilities concerning social location. The present history does not force the later genealogy onto the earlier poet merely because the names coincide.

This method matters beyond one author. Genealogy is a historical source, but a genealogy copied or reorganized centuries later can naturalize categories that were themselves products of later social competition. Caste description must therefore be dated with the same care as a royal inscription.

Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura: the later Oiniwar intellectual

The later Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura belongs securely to the political and intellectual world explored in Chapter 14. Pankaj Jha's study places the author of *Likhanāvalī*, *Puruṣaparīkṣā* and *Kīrtilatā* in the fifteenth-century world of multilingual court practice, documentation and political ethics. Royal names, dedications and narrative settings connect this corpus to the Oiniwar horizon. This is the figure to whom the present book assigns the later Sanskrit and Avahaṭṭa works unless a specific text requires separate qualification.

Using 'Ṭhakkura' consistently has a practical purpose: it prevents a sentence about Śivasimha, Kīrtisimha or model documents from silently becoming a sentence about the earlier Padāvalī poet.

Self-attribution and the Ṭhakkura designation

The title and colophon tradition of works such as *Puruṣaparīkṣā* is especially important because the author is identified as Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura in a courtly setting. George A. Grierson's 1935 translation is explicitly titled *The Test of a Man, Being the Puruṣa-parīkṣhā of Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura*, and the work's conclusion associates its composition with Śivasimha. Such internal and manuscript evidence has a different evidentiary character from a song attributed to Vidyāpati in a much later anthology.

This does not mean that every work bearing Ṭhakkura in a late catalogue is automatically authentic. It means that the later court intellectual has a source-specific identity that can be reconstructed without borrowing the Padāvalī as proof.

Kīrtilatā: political narrative, not lyric biography

Kīrtilatā is read here as a work of the later Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura. Its Avahaṭṭa/Apabhraṃśa-associated language, political narrative of Gaṇeśvara and Kīrtisimha, and engagement with Sultanate power make it one of the major

literary sources for early Oiniwar politics. Pankaj Jha emphasizes the work's entangled political vocabulary and its usefulness for understanding a world in which Sanskrit and Persianate idioms interacted.

The text must nevertheless be handled as court literature. Praise, restoration narrative and political exemplarity shape its representation of events. It is strongest when read together with independent chronology rather than mined for exact dates as though it were an annal.

Kīrtipatākā and the problem of incomplete transmission

Kīrtipatākā is likewise associated with the later Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura and the Avahatṭa courtly corpus. Its survival and reconstruction present the familiar problem of incomplete transmission: literary historians often know a work through partial manuscripts, citations or editions produced long after the political events described. The appropriate response is neither to discard the text nor to pretend that every missing portion can be recovered.

Within this book Kīrtipatākā is therefore used for language, genre and court ideology where the text is secure, while biographical claims are kept proportional to the surviving evidence.

Puruṣaparīkṣā: ethics, kingship and social observation

Puruṣaparīkṣā is a Sanskrit collection of exemplary and counter-exemplary narratives concerned with heroism, intelligence, skill, political conduct and the testing of persons. The work's association with Śivasimha and its explicit Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura attribution make it a major anchor for the later figure. Grierson's translation and surviving manuscripts allow the text to be studied as a work with a definite scholastic and courtly identity rather than as an extension of the Padāvalī.

Its stories also preserve a complex social imagination. Kings, ministers, thieves, women, servants and specialists appear within moralized narratives. The historian must distinguish

between social observation and didactic construction: an anecdote may reveal what the author found plausible or instructive without proving that the event happened exactly as narrated.

Likhanāvalī: writing, documents and administrative imagination

Likhanāvalī is one of the most revealing works attributed to Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura. It provides models for letters and documents across official, transactional and intimate settings. Pankaj Jha's analysis treats it as evidence for a culture of documentation in which Sanskrit writing engaged practices often associated primarily with Persianate administration. The text is not an archive of original filed documents; it is a manual that teaches forms and therefore reveals expectations about how written acts should work.

This distinction opens important historical questions. Who needed letters? Which relations were imagined as recordable? What hierarchy of address was encoded? How were transactions, commands, petitions and private communications differentiated? Such questions connect literary history directly to institutions of rule.

Gorakṣavijaya and mixed performance registers

Gorakṣavijaya is associated in later scholarship with Vidyāpati and with a musical-dramatic setting involving Nātha figures. Its linguistic characterization varies across catalogues and studies, with Sanskrit and Maithili elements both discussed. Under the two-Vidyāpati method, the work is not used automatically to fuse the early Padāvalī poet with the Oiniwar Ṭhakkura. Its attribution, language layers and performance history should be evaluated manuscript by manuscript.

The work is nevertheless important for the region's theatrical history because it shows how learned and vernacular registers could coexist within performance. Mixed language is not evidence of confusion; it can be a deliberate dramaturgical resource.

Other Sanskrit works and attribution caution

A substantial group of Sanskrit ritual, devotional, geographical and legal works has been attributed to the conventional Vidyāpati: texts concerning Ganga, Śiva, Durga, gifts, rites, pilgrimage, annual observances and inheritance appear in modern catalogues. The present book assigns such works to Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura only where manuscript, colophon or reliable critical scholarship supports the attribution. A famous author's name is not treated as a container into which every compatible work can be placed.

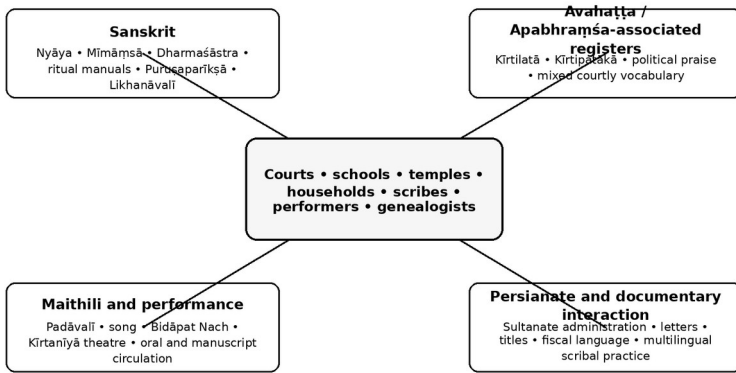
This caution is especially necessary because Ramanath Jha himself warned of multiple Vidyāpatīs. The correct historical catalogue should therefore distinguish secure attribution, traditional attribution, disputed attribution and anonymous material.

Language by genre rather than by identity myth

The later Ṭhakkura corpus is multilingual, but multilinguality should be mapped by genre. Sanskrit served scholastic, ethical, ritual and documentary purposes; Avahaṭṭa/Apabhraṃśa-associated registers could carry political biography and praise; regional speech entered performance and literary expression; Persian terms and administrative concepts circulated through contact with Sultanate institutions. No language had one permanent social function, and writers could move between registers.

This approach is more precise than describing a single genius as simultaneously 'the Sanskrit poet' and 'the Maithili folk poet' and then using that composite identity to explain an entire cultural transformation. Institutions and genres made multilinguality possible before and after any individual career.

Literary languages and institutions in later-medieval Mithila



Analytical point: language choice followed genre, institution and audience; vernacularization did not simply replace Sanskrit, and Sanskrit did not exist outside political change.

Diagram 29. Literary languages and institutions in later-medieval Mithila. Language choice followed genre, institution and audience rather than a simple Sanskrit-to-vernacular replacement model.

Original analytical diagram for this volume. Sources: Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men* (2006); Pankaj Jha, *A Political History of Literature* (2019); Jayakanta Mishra, *A History of Maithili Literature*, vol. 1 (1949). Rights: © Gajendra Thakur / editorial diagram for this volume.

Avahaṭṭa and political narration

The Avahaṭṭa works associated with Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura are especially important because they stand between classical literary genealogies and emerging regional forms without fitting neatly into modern language boundaries. Kīrtilatā's register can accommodate Sanskrit-derived vocabulary, regional forms and words connected with the political world of Sultanate North India. Its language is therefore historical evidence for contact as well as literary choice.

Calling the text simply 'early Maithili' or simply 'Apabhraṃśa' can conceal that complexity. The present book retains Avahaṭṭa/Apabhraṃśa-associated terminology while explaining its relation to the regional linguistic continuum.

Sanskrit cosmopolitanism without isolation

Sanskrit remained a language of enormous authority in Mithila. Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Dharmaśāstra, ritual manuals, political theory and documentary instruction all drew on Sanskritic forms. Yet Sanskrit intellectuals did not inhabit a sealed world. Courts negotiated with Sultanate power, households used vernacular speech, scribes confronted practical transactions and scholars travelled across regional networks.

Pollock's account of vernacularization helps frame this transformation as a reconfiguration of cultural power rather than the abrupt death of Sanskrit. Pankaj Jha's work adds the fifteenth-century political dimension: Sanskrit writing could absorb forms and concerns associated with a Persianate documentary environment.

Maithili was not invented by one poet

The history of Maithili cannot be reduced to a single founder. The language emerged through speech communities, performance, prose description, song, theatre, scribal practice and later print standardization. Jyotirīśvara's Varṇaratnākara, the Padāvalī tradition, Kīrtanīyā drama and other forms represent different stages and genres within that history. The two-Vidyāpati thesis strengthens this institutional view by refusing to make the entire vernacular tradition an appendix to one fifteenth-century court biography.

Mahākavi Vidyāpati remains central in the Parallel History as a major early poet. Centrality, however, is not the same as solitary invention. A literary language exists because communities can receive, reproduce and transform it.

Jyotirīśvara and the Varṇaratnākara ecology

Varṇaratnākara is one of the richest witnesses to the social and linguistic environment of medieval Mithila. Its catalogues of persons, occupations, settings, performance types and material culture show a writer exploiting regional expression with

encyclopaedic ambition. It therefore supplies a crucial bridge between courtly learning and vernacular description.

For this chapter its importance is double. First, it provides an independent regional literary horizon before the mature Oiniwar court. Second, the Parallel History uses Jyotirīśvara's relation to the earlier Vidyāpati tradition as part of its relative chronology. Even readers who reject the two-person thesis must still reckon with the fact that Maithili literary history before the fifteenth century was already substantial.

Kīrtanīyā drama and the social life of texts

Kīrtanīyā drama demonstrates that literary history is also performance history. Texts were sung, staged, memorized and adapted; Sanskrit verses could coexist with vernacular dialogue or song; audiences encountered literature collectively rather than only through manuscripts. The boundaries between poem, drama, ritual and music were therefore porous.

This performance environment also complicates attribution. A popular song can enter a play; a poet's name can become a conventional signature; and later performers may merge figures whom manuscripts keep separate. The two-Vidyāpati distinction is thus not only a chronological claim but also a theory of how cultural memory can consolidate multiple traditions into one icon.

Documentary culture and the state

The history of law and state formation in Mithila must include the craft of writing. Likhanāvalī's model documents demonstrate that documentary form was itself a learned technology. Titles, salutations, commands, petitions, acknowledgements and transactional formulas transformed social relations into written acts. The existence of such a manual implies scribes, readers and institutions capable of recognizing formal differences among documents.

Pankaj Jha's comparison with Persian epistolary traditions is especially valuable because it rejects a civilizational partition in

which Sanskrit represents timeless religion and Persian represents practical government. The two could coexist, compete and borrow within the same political field.

Law, dharma and social authority

Mithila's reputation for Dharmaśāstra was built through generations of digests, commentaries and ritual manuals. Caṇdeśvara and other scholar-statesmen had already demonstrated the close relationship between normative learning and political authority. Later Sanskrit works attributed to Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura belong within this broader ecology rather than standing as isolated products of individual genius.

Normative texts tell historians what learned authors argued ought to happen. They do not automatically describe what every household did. The gap between prescription and practice is itself evidence: it may reveal conflict, negotiation, local custom, economic constraint or the unequal capacity of groups to enforce learned norms.

Inheritance, property and household power

Texts associated with the later Vidyāpati tradition include discussions of division and property. Such material belongs to a long Mithila history of legal reasoning about heirs, gifts, ritual obligations and household succession. Property law was never merely technical. It shaped marriage strategies, widowhood, lineage continuity, temple endowments and the material base of scholarly households.

The historian should therefore compare prescriptive categories with grants, sale deeds, slave-purchase documents, revenue records and later litigation where available. A rule becomes socially meaningful through enforcement, evasion and negotiation.

Marriage rules: norm, genealogy and lived practice

Marriage linked ritual status to property and political alliance. Genealogical records could prevent prohibited unions,

preserve descent knowledge and later support elaborate rankings. Yet the existence of a marriage rule in a scholastic text does not prove uniform compliance, and the existence of an old genealogy does not prove that every later rank existed from the beginning.

This distinction becomes crucial in the history of the Panji system. The present book accepts the antiquity and importance of Maithil genealogical record-keeping while separately dating later social classifications.

Panji genealogies: medieval archive, later rankings

Anshuman Pandey's dissertation demonstrates that Maithil Brahmin identity can be studied through an unusually rich genealogical corpus extending across centuries and connects the formation of corporate identity to a medieval census and panji-prabandha. That finding makes Panji records central historical evidence. It does not require historians to assume that every classification found in a later Panji witness is equally medieval.

The Parallel History reading used in this book makes precisely this distinction. Older lineage information may be preserved within manuscripts whose branch structure, ranking language or annotations belong to later copying and political circumstances. The date of the person, the date of the entry and the date of the category must be separated whenever possible.

Śrotriya: an old word and a later sub-caste are not the same thing

Śrotriya is an old Sanskrit term associated with Vedic learning and learned qualification. The historical claim adopted here concerns something narrower: Śrotriya as a fixed hereditary Maithil Brahmin sub-caste or ranked social bloc. The Panji-file interpretation of the Parallel History places that sub-caste formation around c.1800 rather than in the Karnata period. Earlier uses of śrotriya are therefore not automatically counted as evidence for the later sub-caste.

This semantic distinction resolves an important source problem. Late nineteenth-century ethnographic writing could describe Śrotriya among hypergamous Maithil Brahmin groups while simultaneously stating that Maithil Brahmins had ‘no sub-castes.’ Such terminology shows that ‘group,’ ‘rank,’ ‘qualification’ and ‘sub-caste’ were not stable synonyms. The book therefore dates the social institution rather than assuming it from the antiquity of the word.

Madhav Singh, branch books and chronological correction

Tradition connects a major reorganization of genealogical ranking and Śākhā-pustak or branch-book compilation with Maharaja Madhav Singh. The chronology requires care. Independent historical accounts place Madhav Singh’s reign in the late eighteenth century, approximately 1775–1807, not in 1760. Accordingly, a statement that he issued the relevant order ‘in 1760’ is chronologically suspect unless a primary document shows that date in another capacity. This book therefore does not repeat 1760 as a secure Madhav Singh regnal date.

The Panji-based reconstruction adopted here places the effective branch-book and Śrotriya sub-caste formation around c.1800, within or immediately around Madhav Singh’s era. The occasionally repeated 1600 Śaka/1678 date is treated as a conflicting retrospective date rather than silently harmonized, because it predates the very late-eighteenth-century political context invoked for the reorganization.

Permanent Settlement era and the politics of rank

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries transformed landed authority in north Bihar. The Permanent Settlement of 1793 changed the fiscal environment in which estates, rent-free grants, genealogical prestige and relations between rulers, zamindars and colonial government operated. Scholarship on Madhav Singh also places the formation or consolidation of Sotipura and the concentration of Shrotriya families in this transitional era.

Within the Parallel History critique, the c.1800 Śrottriya sub-caste is therefore interpreted not as a timeless sacred order but as a historical construction connected with estate power, marriage ranking and elite consolidation. This is a critical thesis and is stated as such. It does not deny the antiquity of Brahmin learning or genealogy; it denies that a later hereditary rank should be projected backward as an unchanged medieval fact.

Nepal comparison as a control against back-projection

Mithila's historical region extends across the later India-Nepal boundary, making Nepal an important comparative control. The Parallel History emphasizes that the same fixed Śrottriya sub-caste classification is not reproduced in the Nepal part of Mithila in the same way and that śrottriya can retain a learned or educational sense. Comparative absence cannot by itself prove a precise Indian date, but it warns against treating a British-Indian estate-era hierarchy as an immemorial regional institution.

The comparison also illustrates a broader principle used throughout this book: modern national borders should not be projected into medieval history, but colonial administrative divergence can produce real differences in later institutions.

Nyāya and the making of a scholastic region

Mithila became one of the great centres of Nyāya and, later, Navya-Nyāya. The achievement was collective and institutional. Teachers, students, commentarial lineages, manuscript copying and debate sustained a technical vocabulary capable of extraordinary analytical precision. Gaṅgeśa's Tattvacintāmaṇi belongs to an earlier horizon than Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura and transformed logical analysis across eastern India.

This history matters to Chapter 15 because the later literary court existed beside highly specialized scholastic institutions. A multilingual author did not move in an intellectually empty landscape; Sanskrit reasoning traditions had their own genealogies, authorities and routes of transmission.

Mīmāṃsā, Dharmaśāstra and legal reasoning

Mīmāṃsā supplied methods for interpreting authoritative texts, resolving apparent conflicts and reasoning about injunction. In Mithila, such hermeneutic habits interacted with Dharmaśāstra and ritual practice. Legal authority therefore did not consist only of memorizing a code. It required techniques for deciding which rule applied, how exceptions worked and how inherited textual corpora could be made relevant to new circumstances.

The political transition from Karnata to Oiniwar and Sultanate pressure did not suspend this learned world. Instead, jurists and court intellectuals adapted inherited categories while confronting new rulers, fiscal forms and documentary practices.

Manuscripts, copying and attribution

A medieval work normally reaches the historian through copies, not the author's desk. Scribes omit, correct, expand, normalize and sometimes attribute. Manuscripts travel into new linguistic zones and are catalogued under modern titles. An author name in one witness may be absent in another. These realities make textual criticism indispensable to the two-Vidyāpati question.

The safest catalogue records at least four layers: the date claimed by the work, the date of the surviving manuscript, the attribution found in that witness and the judgment of modern editors. When those layers disagree, the disagreement belongs in the history rather than being removed for narrative smoothness.

Women patrons, queens and household authority

The Oiniwar literary world cannot be reconstructed solely through male rulers. Traditions concerning Lakhimā and other royal women connect queens with patronage, household continuity and memory of Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura. The evidence for exact regnal authority varies, but the court was a household

institution as well as a throne. Women could control resources, mediate succession, commission religious activity and shape literary networks.

The two-Vidyāpati distinction again matters: a later queen's association with Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura is not proof that she patronized the earlier Padāvalī poet. Patronage must be attached to the corpus and chronology that support it.

Eastern Indian reception and the making of one iconic Vidyāpati

Vidyāpati songs became deeply influential in Bengal and other eastern Indian devotional and literary cultures. Manuscript copying, singing and Brajabuli/Brajabuli-style literary imitation ensured that the name circulated far beyond Mithila. Reception created prestige but also encouraged consolidation. Readers encountering a celebrated Padāvalī and a learned Sanskrit-Avahaṭṭa author of the same name had strong incentives to imagine one extraordinary polymath.

The one-Vidyāpati model is therefore itself historically significant even where this book rejects it as the best reconstruction. It tells us how literary canons are made: multiple archives can be fused by biography, devotional memory, print editions, school curricula and regional identity movements.

Modern commemoration, portraiture and memory

Modern statues, portraits, festivals, institutions and anniversary publications show the enormous symbolic power of Vidyāpati. They are evidence for modern identity, not contemporary portraiture. The statue reproduced here from Bisfi belongs to that commemorative landscape. Under the present book's two-Vidyāpati method, it should not be treated as a likeness that can decide which corpus belongs to which historical person.

Commemoration also tends to erase ambiguity. A single face, birthplace and life-story are easier to monumentalize than a contested transmission history. Historical criticism must

therefore respect the social importance of the monument while refusing to let the monument settle medieval attribution.

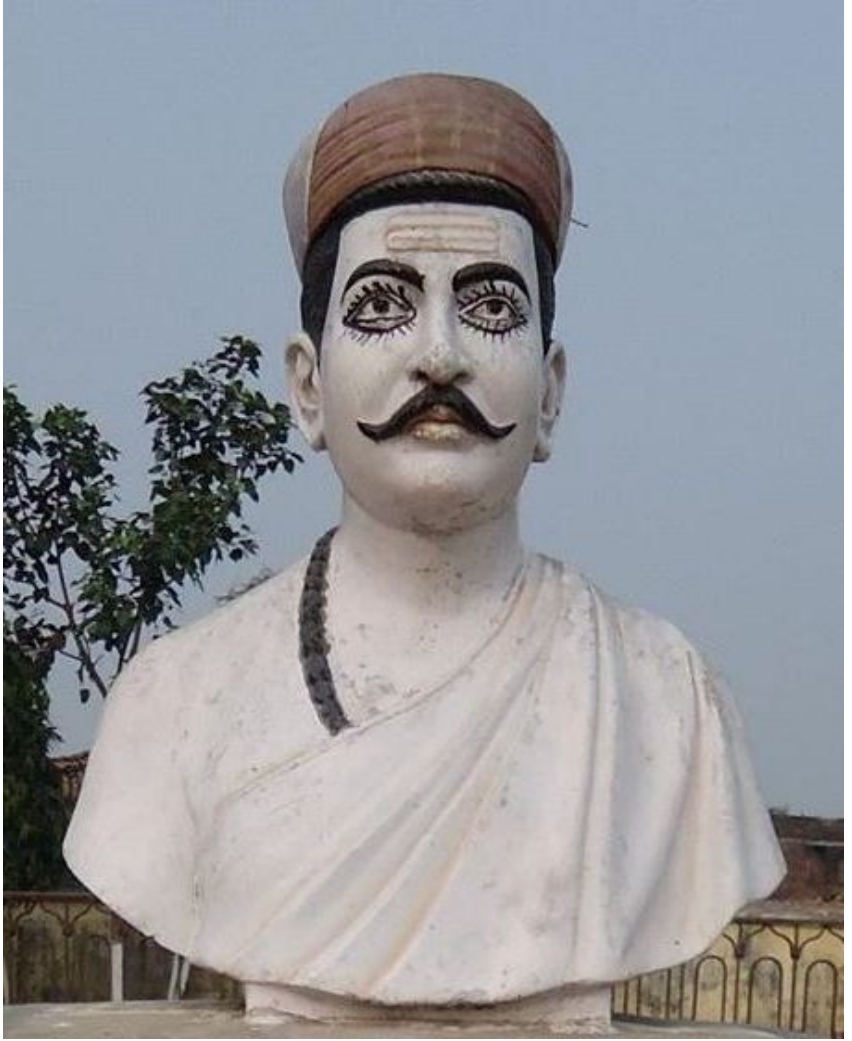


Figure 5. Modern commemorative statue conventionally identified with Vidyapati at Bisfi, photographed in 2004. In this book it illustrates modern memory, which often merges the earlier Padāvalī poet and later Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura; it is not contemporary portrait evidence for either figure.

Photograph: Bijay Chaurasia, 2004. CC BY-SA 4.0. Wikimedia Commons file page.

Conclusion: a source-controlled parallel literary history

The central conclusion is methodological. Mithila's literary history becomes more coherent when corpora are separated before they are combined. This book therefore recognizes Mahākavi Vidyāpati, the earlier Maithili Padāvali poet of the Parallel History reconstruction, and Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura, the later Oiniwar-period Sanskrit-Avahaṭṭa intellectual, as distinct historical identities. It records mainstream one-author scholarship, but it does not let that convention override the internal attribution system adopted here.

The same source-control principle governs social history. Medieval Panji genealogy is not equated with every later Panji ranking, and the ancient word śrottriya is not equated with the c.1800 Śrottriya sub-caste formation proposed by the Parallel History reading of authentic Panji files. By distinguishing word from institution, genealogy from later classification, and reception from authorship, the chapter removes contradictions that otherwise run through chronology, caste history and literary attribution.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Jha, Ramanath. Vidyāpati. Makers of Indian Literature. Sahitya Akademi, 1972; reprint 2017.
- Jha, Pankaj. A Political History of Literature: Vidyapati and the Fifteenth Century. Oxford University Press, 2019.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199489558.001.0001>.
- Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura. The Test of a Man, Being the Purusha-parīkshā of Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura. Translated by George A. Grierson. Royal Asiatic Society, 1935.
- Mishra, Jayakanta. A History of Maithili Literature, vol. 1: Early and Middle Periods. Tirabhukti Publications, 1949.
- Choudhary, Radhakrishna. A Survey of Maithili Literature. Ram Vilas Sahu, 1976.
- Choudhary, Radhakrishna. Mithilā in the Age of Vidyāpati. Chowkhamba Orientalia, 1976.
- Thakur, Upendra. History of Mithila: From the Earliest Times to 1556 A.D. 2nd ed. Mithila Institute, 1988.

- Pollock, Sheldon. *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*. University of California Press, 2006.
- Pandey, Anshuman. *Recasting the Brahmin in Medieval Mithila: Origins of Caste Identity among the Maithil Brahmins of North Bihar*. PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2014.
- Bhattacharya, Jogendra Nath. *Hindu Castes and Sects: An Exposition of the Origin of the Hindu Caste System*. Thacker, Spink & Co., 1896.
- Thakur, Gajendra. "Two Vidyapatis: Some Legends and Some Facts—Bodhi Kayastha and Ugra Mahadev." *Videha* 438, Parallel History section.
- Videha. "Panji evidence and the Śrotriya classification." Parallel History / Panji source pages, www.videha.co.in, consulted for the present source-controlled reconstruction.
- Vidyabhusana, Satis Chandra. *A History of Indian Logic*. University of Calcutta, 1921.
- Asher, Catherine B., and Cynthia Talbot. *India Before Europe*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Alam, Muzaffar. *The Languages of Political Islam: India 1200-1800*. University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Chapter 16. Mughal-era Tirhut, Anga, and early-modern institutions

From Oiniwar collapse to Mughal provincial government

The sixteenth century did not replace a bounded medieval kingdom with a uniformly administered Mughal province in a single act. North Bihar, the Ganga corridor, the Munger-Bhagalpur zone, Purnea, and the Himalayan-facing frontier entered Mughal political structures through conquest, appointments, fiscal assessment, military service, and accommodation with entrenched local power-holders. The result was a layered order in which imperial sovereignty coexisted with strong landed intermediaries, village institutions, religious endowments, and ecological constraints.

For this chapter, 'Mughal incorporation' therefore means the extension of an imperial language of subah, sarkar, mahal, pargana, jagir, zamindari, assessment and office. It does not imply that every locality was surveyed with equal precision, that every revenue demand was collected in full, or that regional institutions lost their own histories. The distinction is particularly important in Tirhut and eastern Bihar, where floodplains, frontier zones and powerful intermediary houses repeatedly complicated the map drawn at court.

The 1580 provincial reorganization and the making of Subah Bihar

Akbar's administrative reorganization, conventionally dated to 1580, treated Bihar as one of the empire's major provinces. This institutionalization followed the Mughal defeat of the remaining Afghan power in Bihar and Bengal and created a provincial framework in which subah-level officers coordinated revenue, military and judicial functions. Contemporary and near-contemporary sources nevertheless show that provincial organization remained a process of consolidation, not a

completed cadastral fact from its first year (Imtiaz Ahmad 2002; Ansari 2019).

Patna became the principal provincial centre, while older strategic nodes such as Munger retained importance. The institutional geography mattered because Tirhut was administered within Subah Bihar, whereas parts of the eastern frontier lay within Bengal's sarkars. The modern boundaries of Bihar, West Bengal and Nepal must therefore not be read backward into Akbar's territorial vocabulary.

Source hierarchy for the Mughal period

The source base is richer than for the Karnata and Oiniwar centuries, but richer does not mean transparent. The *Ā'in-i Akbarī* provides an imperial administrative snapshot; the *Akbarnāma* narrates conquest and service from the court's perspective; farmans, letters, mahzarnamas and grants record specific rights; later estate archives preserve copies and summaries; district gazetteers combine older records with colonial interpretation; and genealogical traditions seek to legitimate later status. Each genre answers a different question.

The safest reconstruction begins with dated documents and contemporary administrative texts, then uses later narratives to explain memory, institutional continuity or claims that require checking. A copied farman may preserve an older order, but the copy's provenance matters. A family genealogy may remember an office accurately while embellishing the circumstances in which it was acquired. This chapter marks such differences instead of flattening all witnesses into a single dynastic story.

The *Ā'in-i Akbarī* as administrative evidence

Abu'l-Fazl's *Ā'in-i Akbarī* is indispensable because it describes Akbar's empire through regulations, ranked offices, territorial divisions, assessed resources and military obligations. The revised Jarrett-Sarkar translation of volume II presents the sarkar tables used here. These tables are best read as a statement of the imperial state's classificatory and fiscal

knowledge rather than as a modern statistical census (Abu'l-Fazl, *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, II).

Numbers in the *Ā'in* can be precise without being simple. Measured area, revenue demand, cavalry and infantry figures belong to administrative categories whose compilation, coverage and local realization varied. A figure can therefore be quoted exactly while its historical meaning remains qualified. The distinction between assessment and actual collection is especially important in regions where zamindars, floods, forest margins or frontier warfare limited routine enforcement.

Sarkār Tirhut: the 74-mahal administrative field

The *Ā'in* lists Sarkār Tirhut with seventy-four mahals, measured land of 266,464 bighas and 2 biswas, assessed revenue of 19,179,777½ dams, and notional military resources of 700 cavalry and 80,000 infantry. The table also names individual mahals. These figures provide a firm late-sixteenth-century administrative anchor for Tirhut, but they are not equivalent to the population, cultivated acreage or cash actually realized in every locality (Abu'l-Fazl, *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, II, sarkār Tirhut).

The seventy-four-mahal table is particularly valuable because it demonstrates that Mughal Tirhut was a fiscal-administrative field composed of many subordinate units. It also warns against treating 'Mithila' and 'Tirhut' as interchangeable at every scale: a cultural region, a sarkar, a later district and a landed estate are different kinds of spatial object. Their boundaries could overlap without being identical.

How to read the *Ā'in* numbers

The dam was an accounting and monetary unit, and bigha was a land measure whose practical realization depended on the imperial system and local measurement. Converting every figure mechanically into modern hectares or rupees would create a false appearance of comparability. This book therefore preserves the source units when they are historically

meaningful and avoids speculative conversions unless a specific metrological problem is being studied.

Military figures require equal caution. The listed cavalry and infantry should not be imagined automatically as permanent barracked forces stationed inside Tirhut. They represented the military capacity or obligation attributed to the administrative unit and its power-holders within the imperial system. Their value lies in showing the fiscal-military expectations attached to the sarkar, not in supplying a modern order of battle.

Sarkār Munger and the eastern Bihar corridor

The *Āʾīn* describes Sarkār Munger as a much larger fiscal-military unit in assessed terms: thirty-one mahals, a revenue figure recorded in the standard translation as 109,625,981 dams, and obligations of 2,150 horse and 50,000 foot. The scale should again be read administratively rather than as a modern territorial statistic. The sarkar extended beyond later Munger district boundaries and incorporated zones that subsequent administrations divided differently (Munger District Gazetteer; Abu'l-Fazl, *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*, II).

Munger's fort and river position made it strategically important on the Ganga route between upper Bihar and Bengal. Its significance also helps explain why the history of Anga in the early-modern period cannot be reconstructed by following Bhagalpur town alone. Mughal institutions linked Bhagalpur-area localities to a larger Munger-centered administrative field whose riverine, military and fiscal geography crossed older cultural names.

Bhagalpur inside the Mughal administrative geography

Colonial gazetteer reconstruction, drawing on the *Āʾīn* and later revenue records, places Bhagalpur within the limits of Sarkār Munger during Akbar's reign. This does not mean that the ancient name Anga disappeared from literary or regional memory; it means that Mughal administration classified the area through another hierarchy. The book therefore keeps

'Anga' as a historical-cultural analytical term while using 'Sarkār Munger' when discussing Mughal fiscal jurisdiction (Bhagalpur District Gazetteer).

This distinction prevents a common anachronism. Ancient Champā, early-medieval Bhagalpur-region grants, Mughal Munger sarkar, colonial Bhagalpur district and modern administrative divisions are not successive names for one unchanged polygon. They are evidence from different institutional regimes. Connected history requires following settlements and routes across these changing territorial grammars.

Purnea, the old Kosi boundary, and a frontier between provinces

The Purnea frontier complicates any simple Bihar-only narrative. Gazetteer readings of the Ā'in place much of the later Purnea district within Sarkār Purnea and Sarkār Tajpur of Subah Bengal, with some western mahals attached to Sarkār Munger in Subah Bihar and a northern strip oriented toward Morang. The old Kosi functioned for a long period as an important provincial boundary, although river movement and political change made the frontier less tidy on the ground (Purnea District Gazetteer).

Purnea's faujdar combined strong military responsibilities with fiscal authority because the zone had to defend and negotiate a frontier. Revenue could be absorbed by the maintenance of troops, and control was shaped by forests, rivers, mobile populations and neighboring chiefs. This is a useful counterexample to a model of Mughal administration derived only from settled core districts.

Provincial borders were interfaces, not sealed lines

The Bihar-Bengal and Bihar-Morang interfaces were zones where imperial categories overlapped with routes, tribute relationships, military campaigns, seasonal movement and local landholding. A sarkar boundary could matter for revenue assignment without preventing merchants, pilgrims, cultivators,

soldiers or kin groups from crossing it. Conversely, cultural continuity did not erase jurisdictional difference.

For Mithila's later history this point is fundamental. The present India-Nepal border did not exist, but neither did an undifferentiated trans-Himalayan political space. Mughal documents that refer to Morang, the sub-Himalayan tract or frontier campaigns should be read in their own jurisdictional vocabulary rather than translated directly into modern sovereignty claims.

Administrative scale: subah, sarkar, mahal and village

Mughal territorial administration worked through nested scales, but the nesting was not a rigid modern bureaucracy. The subah provided provincial government; sarkars grouped mahals or parganas; mahal and pargana could function as fiscal units; and villages contained still finer networks of cultivators, headmen, accountants, hereditary claimants and service groups. The same person or family might hold rights at more than one level.

An imperial order therefore travelled through intermediaries. Its practical effect depended on record-keeping, measurement, armed enforcement, local negotiation and the willingness or ability of cultivators to pay. This is why the history of early-modern Mithila cannot be written solely as a list of emperors and rajas: the administrative chain itself was a historical institution.

Mughal administrative scales in Tirhut and eastern Bihar

c. 1580s-1660s: nested fiscal offices and frontier interfaces

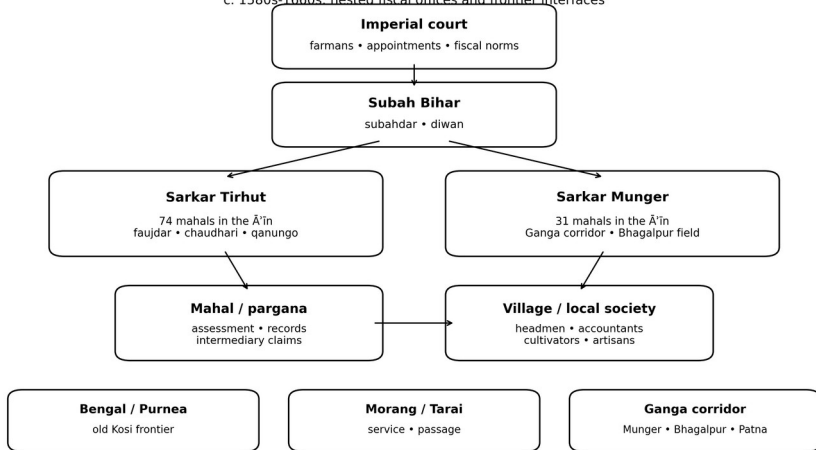


Diagram 30. Mughal administrative scales in Tirhut and the eastern Bihar frontier, c. 1580s-1660s. The diagram separates nested fiscal offices from frontier interfaces and local rights.

Original analytical diagram for this volume. Sources: Abu'l-Fazl, *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, vol. 2; Tahir Hussain Ansari, *Mughal Administration and the Zamindars of Bihar* (2019); Purnea and Monghyr district gazetteers. Rights: © Gajendra Thakur / Videha for the analytical composition; source facts cited to the published works.

The faujdar and the geography of coercion

The faujdar embodied the military dimension of district or frontier government. He protected routes, pursued rebels, supported revenue collection and acted against power-holders whom the state classified as recalcitrant. The existence of a faujdar of Darbhanga in seventeenth-century documentation is especially important because it shows that the Khandavala house operated alongside, and at times in cooperation with, an imperial military officer rather than simply replacing Mughal government.

Frontier warfare also created opportunities for local chiefs. Assistance to imperial forces could be rewarded with robes of honour, insignia, hereditary rights or enlarged fiscal claims. The

resulting relationship was neither simple subordination nor full independence. It was a negotiated fiscal-military partnership in which local capacity could strengthen precisely because it served imperial purposes.

Chaudharī and qānūngō: offices that could generate regional power

The *chaudharī* and *qānūngō* were central to the fiscal order because they linked the state to local revenue knowledge and collection. Their exact duties varied, but the offices involved supervision, records, customary dues and recognition of local conditions. In Tirhut, traditions and later-contemporary documentary references associate the early Khandavala rise with the concentration of such rights in the hands of Mahesh Thakur and his successors (Qeyamuddin Ahmad 1961; Ansari 2019).

These offices must not be translated automatically as 'king'. They could, however, become a foundation for territorial influence because revenue knowledge, hereditary claims, access to the court and the ability to coordinate subordinate zamindars created durable power. Darbhanga Raj emerged through this institutional accumulation rather than from a single moment in which an emperor allegedly transferred complete sovereignty.

Village officers, cultivators and the unseen majority

Imperial documents are rich in offices but much thinner on ordinary households. Yet revenue could not be realized without cultivators, village headmen, accountants, artisans, cattle, seed, irrigation and credit. The *muqaddam*, *patwari* and other local intermediaries translated assessments into village practice, while cultivators bore the risks of crop failure, flood, river migration and coercive collection.

The archive's silence should not be mistaken for social insignificance. A fiscal order that names a zamindar but not hundreds of cultivators is recording the legal channel of demand, not the whole productive system. Where later records

illuminate customary tenures or village institutions, they can be used comparatively, but they should not be projected unchanged backward into the sixteenth century.

Zamindari was not modern freehold ownership

Mughal zamindari denoted a bundle of hereditary, fiscal, political and customary claims whose content varied widely. A zamindar might collect revenue, retain customary dues, exercise local authority, furnish troops, hold proprietary interests in some lands and coexist with village-level right-holders. B. R. Grover's studies of Mughal land rights remain important precisely because they reject the equation of zamindari with a single modern ownership category (Grover 1963; 1965).

This distinction is essential for Darbhanga. A farman confirming zamindari, milkiyat, settlement or chaudhurai rights enlarged the house's position, but the legal vocabulary must be interpreted term by term. Later colonial property law and the Permanent Settlement would reclassify many of these layered claims. Reading the colonial outcome backward would make Mughal documents say more than they do.

Jagir, khalsa and overlapping fiscal claims

Imperial revenue could be assigned as jagir to support officers or retained in khalsa for the crown, while zamindars and village right-holders continued to possess customary claims. These categories overlapped in practice because the right to receive assessed revenue, the right to collect it, the right to customary dues and the right to cultivate or transfer particular land were not identical.

A single village could therefore be embedded in several relationships at once. This layered structure helps explain both resilience and conflict: a change in jagirdar did not necessarily remove local zamindars, and a strong zamindar could bargain with changing provincial officers. Institutional history is more accurate when it follows these bundles of rights rather than assuming a single owner above a passive peasantry.

Measurement, hast-o-bud and the aspiration to know cultivation

Seventeenth-century revenue instructions preserved in the Darbhanga documentary tradition emphasize measurement of cultivated and fallow land, correction of hast-o-bud papers, contact with ryots, encouragement of cultivation and accounting for arrears. Such language shows the state's aspiration to make agrarian production legible. It also reveals that cultivation could not simply be assumed: officials were expected to expand it, advance assistance and reconcile records with actual conditions (Ansari 2019, Darbhanga chapter).

The administrative ideal should not be mistaken for universal practice. Measurement could be contested, records incomplete, and floodplain landscapes unstable. Nevertheless, the vocabulary provides rare access to the working concerns of government: acreage, harvest, arrears, remissions, customary fees, advances and the relationship between local prosperity and imperial revenue.

Taccavi, arrears and agrarian risk

Taccavi or agricultural advance appears in Mughal administrative discourse as a means of assisting cultivators and expanding production. Its presence is significant because it recognizes that revenue demand depended on the productive capacity of households, not merely on coercive extraction. Seed, cattle, flood recovery and the ability to bring fallow land under cultivation could become matters of state concern.

At the same time, arrears could turn fiscal risk into political conflict. An intermediary expected to deposit revenue might carry liability forward or face pressure from higher authorities. The chain from imperial demand to village payment therefore redistributed risk among officials, zamindars and cultivators. This helps explain why revenue history is inseparable from credit, ecology and local bargaining.

Sayir, markets and non-land revenue

Agrarian assessment did not exhaust the fiscal world. Sayir and related imposts drew revenue from markets, transit, crafts or commercial activity. In riverine Bihar, periodic markets, ferries and trade routes could therefore matter to political authority alongside fields. Control of a route or market centre offered income, information and leverage over movement.

The surviving records are uneven enough that precise local rates should not be generalized without documentary support. What can be said securely is that early-modern regional power rested on a mixed fiscal base. Agricultural surplus remained central, but the circulation of grain, salt, textiles, livestock and other goods tied Tirhut and the Anga-Bhagalpur zone to wider eastern Indian networks.

The Ganga as administrative and commercial infrastructure

The Ganga connected Patna, Munger, Bhagalpur and the approaches to Bengal. Armies, officials, merchants, pilgrims, correspondence and high-value commodities moved along or beside the river. Strategic towns were therefore not isolated administrative dots; they were nodes in a corridor whose navigability, ferries and landing places shaped the effective geography of government.

River transport also reduced some costs while introducing other uncertainties. Seasonal water levels, channel change, piracy or conflict could interrupt movement. The importance of Munger's fort and the rise of Patna as a provincial and commercial centre make sense only within this riverine system. Anga's early-modern history must therefore include the Ganga corridor even when the administrative label was Sarkār Munger.

Kosi, Gandak and the instability of fiscal landscapes

North Bihar's great rivers could move across the floodplain, destroy villages, create new land and alter routes. A revenue

map was therefore always vulnerable to geomorphic change. A named mahal or village in one document may not correspond neatly to a stable modern location, and later cadastral boundaries can conceal earlier channel positions.

This environmental instability is not a reason to dismiss Mughal fiscal records; it is a reason to read them dynamically. Assessments, remissions, settlement initiatives and disputes all operated inside a landscape in which cultivable land could expand or disappear. The history of revenue institutions is consequently also a history of sediment, flood and mobility.

Patna and provincial integration

Patna's emergence as the principal centre of Subah Bihar gave the province an administrative and commercial focus. Governors, revenue officials, military commands, merchants and imperial communications connected local sarkars to this provincial node. The relationship was not one-way: local zamindars supplied revenue, troops and information, while provincial officers depended on their cooperation to govern extensive territories.

The provincial centre also linked Bihar to imperial currency and commodity circuits. This broader integration helps explain why regional institutions could become simultaneously more local and more imperial: a house such as Darbhanga accumulated authority in Tirhut while its status depended on recognition, documentation and service within a much larger state.

Currency, accounting and the monetization of claims

The Ā'in expresses assessments in dams, and Mughal administration increasingly connected agrarian surplus to standardized monetary accounting. Cash assessment did not mean that every cultivator paid every obligation in coin at every stage; payments, conversion, advances and local exchange practices could be complex. But monetary units allowed distant authorities to compare and aggregate claims across regions.

For Bihar, the growth of Patna and other market centres, the circulation of silver rupees and the fiscal use of standardized accounts helped integrate local production into larger networks. The monetary history should be reconstructed from coins, mint records and commercial documentation rather than inferred solely from revenue tables, but the administrative shift toward common units is itself historically significant.

The Khandavala house: separating documentary history from foundation legend

Later Darbhanga tradition tells several versions of how Mahesh Thakur or his disciple impressed Akbar and received Tirhut. These stories are culturally important, but they disagree in detail and the original foundation farman is not extant in a form that permits every narrative element to be checked. Modern scholarship therefore turns to later-contemporary mahzarnamas, copied documents and the subsequent sequence of imperial confirmations (Qeyamuddin Ahmad 1961; Dewey 1976; Ansari 2019).

The source-controlled conclusion is narrower and stronger: the Khandavala house rose through recognized Mughal fiscal offices and hereditary rights in Tirhut, and those rights expanded over the seventeenth century. The story of a scholar being handed an independent kingdom at one audience is not necessary to explain the documented institutional trajectory.

Mahesh Thakur and the first phase of fiscal authority

Mahesh Thakur is remembered as a Sanskrit scholar and as the founder of the lineage later called Darbhanga Raj. Documentary reconstructions associate him with the combined rights or offices of chaudhari and qanungo in Tirhut during Akbar's reign. Such a concentration would have placed the family advantageously within the revenue system, because it joined local knowledge, record-keeping and collection with access to imperial recognition.

Exact accession-style regnal dates are less secure than the later dynastic lists sometimes imply. This chapter therefore describes Mahesh Thakur as an early Khandavala fiscal-political intermediary under Mughal sovereignty rather than assigning him an unqualified royal reign. The distinction also prevents the later size and prestige of Darbhanga Raj from being projected back onto its beginnings.

No instantaneous independent kingdom

The strongest recent institutional study of Bihar's zamindars characterizes Darbhanga's rise as gradual: from an Akbar-era official position to increasingly extensive hereditary rights and, by the later Mughal period, the status of a powerful regional chief (Ansari 2019). This model fits the documentary evidence better than a binary choice between 'kingdom' and 'mere estate'.

The terms used by sources changed because the relationship changed. A family could be subordinate to imperial sovereignty while exercising substantial local coercion and fiscal control. Later it could withhold revenue or negotiate from a stronger position as provincial power weakened. Historical precision therefore requires chronology: the political weight of the house in 1700 cannot simply be assigned to 1570.

Seventeenth-century grants and the hereditary turn

Under Jahangir and Shah Jahan, family members continued to receive or defend fiscal rights, including nankar and related claims recorded in later archival summaries. The significance lies less in memorizing every succession than in seeing the institutional pattern: offices that might once have depended heavily on personal appointment became increasingly associated with a hereditary house.

Hereditary consolidation did not eliminate imperial intervention. Confirmations, grants and disputes still required recognition from above, while provincial officers could enforce revenue demands. The house's durability came from its ability

to preserve local networks while repeatedly translating them into the documentary language accepted by the Mughal state.

Sundar Thakur, records and the problem of later copies

The 1652 mahzarnama associated with Sundar Thakur is frequently used in reconstructions of the family's earlier rights because it refers retrospectively to the position acquired by Mahesh Thakur. Such a document is valuable precisely because it is closer to the institutional world it describes than nineteenth-century genealogical narrative, but its retrospective statements must still be distinguished from an original Akbar-era farman.

This is a general archival lesson. A seventeenth-century attestation of a sixteenth-century grant is evidence that the earlier grant was remembered and legally mobilized by the seventeenth century. It is not identical to possessing the original instrument. The chapter records both the evidentiary value and the limit.

The 1665-1666 Mahinath documentary horizon

A much firmer anchor comes from Aurangzeb-era documentation. A farman of the mid-1660s and a letter dated December 1666 concern Mahinath Thakur's services and rights. Modern studies of the documents describe the confirmation or grant of extensive zamindari, milkiyat and settlement interests across Tirhut and neighboring parganas, together with honours such as khilat and mahi maratib (Grover 1965; Qeyamuddin Ahmad 1961; Ansari 2019).

These records matter because they show the Khandavala house inside Mughal state formation: local military assistance, revenue responsibility and hereditary territorial claims reinforced one another. They also supply a more reliable seventeenth-century political anchor than later stories that recast the whole lineage as sovereign from its beginning.

Morang and imperial frontier service

Aurangzeb's December 1666 letter to the governor of Bihar refers to the role of Mahinath Thakur's men, including his brother Narapati/Nirpat Thakur in modern transcriptions, in operations against the zamindar of Morang alongside the faujdar of Darbhanga. The exact narrative should be reconstructed from the document itself rather than from later retellings, but the institutional point is clear: frontier service could produce imperial reward (Qeyamuddin Ahmad 1961; Grover 1965).

The campaign also demonstrates that the northern frontier was not governed by a single regional actor. Mughal faujdars, Khandavala forces, Morang chiefs and provincial authorities interacted within the same conflict. A later cultural map of Mithila cannot substitute for this multi-actor political geography.

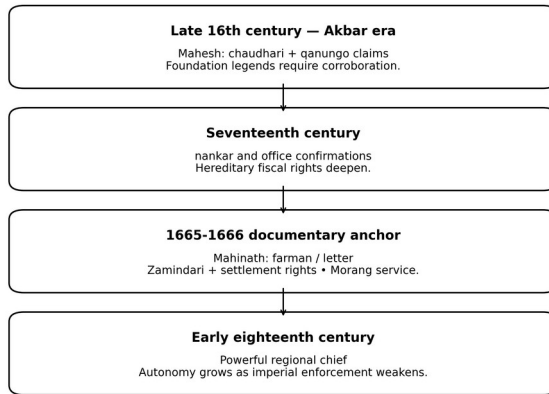
The 110-pargana problem: extent without a modern boundary map

Modern summaries of the Aurangzeb-era grant commonly describe a total of 110 parganas: 103 in the Bihar-side grouping of Tirhut and Munger and seven in Bengal-side Purnea and Tajpur, though detailed enumerations and the terminology of zamindari, milkiyat and settlement rights require careful reading of the original documentary tradition. The figure is evidence for the enlarged scale of Khandavala authority, not a ready-made GIS polygon (Grover 1965; Ansari 2019).

The safest formulation is therefore institutional. Mahinath's recognized rights extended across multiple parganas and even across provincial interfaces. Those rights were not necessarily identical in every pargana, and their spatial extent should not be drawn as a continuous sovereign state unless each component can be mapped from the documents.

Khandavala consolidation under Mughal rule

Fiscal office → hereditary rights → stronger regional power



Fiscal office or zamindari ≠ modern sovereign title. The c.1800 Śrotiya sub-caste classification is not projected backward.

Diagram 31. Khandavala institutional consolidation under Mughal rule. The trajectory distinguishes fiscal office, hereditary zamindari rights, frontier service and later political autonomy from a claim of instantaneous independent kingship.

Original analytical diagram for this volume. Sources: Qeyamuddin Ahmad (1961); B. R. Grover (1965); Tahir Hussain Ansari (2019); Darbhanga Raj documentary references discussed in those works. Rights: © Gajendra Thakur / Videha for the analytical composition; source facts cited to the published works.

Darbhanga as a broker between empire and locality

By the later seventeenth century, the Khandavala house had become more than a local record-keeping family. Its fiscal rights, military service, hereditary position and networks of subordinate landholders made it a regional broker. The Mughal state benefited from a capable intermediary able to mobilize local resources; the house benefited from imperial confirmation and honours that strengthened its standing against competitors.

Brokerage explains an apparent paradox: stronger imperial integration could create stronger local chiefs. The process did not represent a failure of administration from the outset. It was one way a large agrarian empire governed through existing and

newly empowered intermediaries. Problems emerged when the balance between provincial demand and local autonomy shifted.

Learned status, patronage and political legitimacy

The Khandavala family's reputation for Sanskrit learning became part of its political identity. Learned patronage helped convert fiscal office into regional prestige, while courts, temples and manuscript networks connected political authority with scholastic production. This cultural role is historically important, but it should not be used as proof of every foundation legend associated with the lineage.

Early-modern Mithila thus continued the multilingual institutional world described in Chapter 15. Persian dominated much of Mughal official documentation; Sanskrit retained scholastic and ritual authority; Maithili circulated in literary and social settings; and local documentary practice could move across registers. Political incorporation did not produce linguistic replacement.

Persian documentation and Sanskrit-Maithili institutions

Farmans, official correspondence and revenue records belonged to a Persianate administrative sphere, while Sanskrit intellectual lineages and Maithili literary production continued to organize learned and regional life. These were not separate civilizations living side by side. Scholars, scribes, accountants, patrons and landed families operated across institutions that required different languages for different tasks.

The result was functional multilingualism. A family could seek a Persian farman, sponsor Sanskrit scholarship and patronize Maithili composition without contradiction. The history of language therefore belongs inside institutional history: languages gained authority through offices, genres, courts, temples, schools and audiences.

Panji genealogy and the danger of backward social classification

Genealogical records are valuable for kinship, marriage networks and claims of descent, but their categories changed over time. This book therefore does not project the later Śrotriya sub-caste classification backward onto Mughal-period actors. In the Parallel History reconstruction adopted here, Śrotriya as a fixed Maithil Brahmin sub-caste is a c.1800 development associated with later Panji/Śākhā-pustak classification, not a securely documented sixteenth- or seventeenth-century hereditary category.

The ancient and scholastic word śrotriya, meaning a learned or Veda-qualified Brahmin in many contexts, must be kept separate from that later sub-caste usage. A nineteenth- or twentieth-century genealogy calling an earlier ancestor 'Śrotriya' is evidence for later classification and memory unless a contemporary Mughal-period source independently establishes the same social category.

Households, women and inheritance behind the fiscal archive

The fiscal archive privileges male office-holders, but hereditary authority depended on households, marriages, adoption, widowhood, inheritance and the management of property across generations. Succession crises could alter the distribution of claims, while kinship alliances connected learned families and landed interests. These processes are often visible only indirectly through genealogies and later legal disputes.

A responsible history therefore resists turning the absence of women from farmans into an absence from political economy. Where estate records, deeds or court cases preserve women's property claims, they belong in the reconstruction. Where they do not, the chapter marks the archival limitation rather than inventing representative biographies.

Religious endowments and landed rights

Temples, mathas, learned households and ritual specialists could receive land or revenue assignments, linking religious institutions to agrarian production. Such endowments were neither economically marginal nor automatically immune from dispute. Their durability depended on documents, local recognition and the ability of patrons or beneficiaries to defend claims through changing regimes.

The Mughal period therefore did not divide neatly into a Muslim state and Hindu social institutions. Persianate government could recognize, tax, confirm or interact with Sanskritic and vernacular religious establishments. The specific terms of each grant matter more than civilizational labels.

Artisans, service groups and the production of regional wealth

Revenue histories can make agriculture appear to be the whole economy. In practice, cultivators depended on smiths, carpenters, potters, weavers, boatmen, herders, carriers and many other service groups. Market towns drew value from this distributed production, and state demand for supplies, transport and military equipment connected craft labour to political power.

The surviving sources seldom quantify these groups consistently for Tirhut or Bhagalpur. The chapter therefore uses them structurally rather than pretending to possess a complete occupational census. Their inclusion matters because fiscal and military institutions could not function without the labour that administrative texts often compress into generic categories.

Market towns and changing urban hierarchies

Patna, Munger, Bhagalpur and numerous smaller market centres formed a hierarchy that changed with river routes, garrisons, administrative offices and commercial opportunity. A town's importance could rise because it housed a fort or provincial office, controlled a ferry, attracted merchants, or

served a dense agrarian hinterland. Urban history should therefore follow functions rather than assume permanent rank.

The same caution applies to Darbhanga. Its later prominence as the seat of a vast estate should not be projected unchanged into the earliest Khandavala phase. The family's centres and the political significance of particular settlements shifted as rights accumulated and administrative practice evolved.

Munger fort, military geography and the road to Bengal

Munger's fortified position on the Ganga gave it importance during conflicts linking Bihar and Bengal. The district's later historical tradition repeatedly emphasizes its strategic role, and the Ā'in confirms the scale of the sarkar associated with it. Fortification, river control and the capacity to quarter troops made Munger more than a revenue heading.

For the Bhagalpur-Anga zone, this means that regional political history must be read westward as well as eastward. Mughal military geography tied localities to Munger and Patna even while commerce and culture connected them toward Bengal. Administrative and cultural orientation need not point in the same direction.

Frontier authority in Purnea

Purnea developed a distinctive faujdari order because of its position on the Bengal-Bihar-Morang frontier. Gazetteer summaries describe the faujdar as exercising both military command and strong revenue authority, with substantial resources assigned to frontier defence. This institutional configuration shows how Mughal administration adapted its offices to regional conditions rather than applying one uniform model everywhere.

The eastern history of Mithila and Anga therefore cannot be bounded at the Kosi or Mahananda without qualification. Those rivers could mark administrative divisions in particular periods, yet frontier military and commercial networks crossed them.

The chapter treats the frontier as a zone of structured interaction, not as a blank margin.

Morang, Tarai routes and the Nepal connection

The seventeenth-century Morang references continue a long history of movement between the Gangetic plain, Tarai and Himalayan valleys. Political actors sought control over passes, tribute, forest products, migration routes and frontier settlements. Mughal expansion into the sub-Himalayan interface was episodic and negotiated, not a simple extension of routine agrarian administration.

This helps connect Chapter 16 with the book's broader India-Nepal frame. The histories of Mithila and Nepal intersect through routes and frontier power, but those connections do not imply a timeless single state. Different regimes repeatedly redefined the terms of movement and jurisdiction.

The early eighteenth century: provincial power and stronger zamindars

By the early eighteenth century, Mughal provincial politics became more autonomous as imperial succession crises, military expenditure and regional competition altered the balance of power. Bihar's major zamindars could exploit this environment to negotiate revenue, expand armed capacity or resist officials. The process differed from place to place and should not be compressed into a single date of 'Mughal decline' (Muzaffar Alam 1991; Ansari 2019).

Darbhanga's later capacity to act as a powerful chieftain grew from the seventeenth-century foundation of offices and hereditary claims. This continuity is important: eighteenth-century autonomy was not an ancient sovereignty suddenly reappearing, but a new political use of institutions accumulated under Mughal rule.

1733 and the administrative attachment of Bihar to Bengal

In 1733, the Mughal centre placed Bihar under the Bengal subadar, ending the earlier pattern of Bihar as a separately governed subah. The change did not erase Bihar's sarkars or local landed houses, but it altered the provincial chain through which revenue and appointments were managed. Eastern India increasingly operated within a Bengal-Bihar political complex whose centre of gravity lay outside the older provincial arrangement.

For Tirhut, Munger and Purnea, this administrative shift reinforced existing cross-provincial connections. It also prepared the institutional setting in which the Bengal nawabs, local zamindars and eventually the East India Company would compete over revenue rights.

Autonomy, arrears and the limits of late Mughal enforcement

As provincial enforcement weakened or became more negotiated, powerful zamindars could withhold revenue, bargain over arrears or act with increasing local independence. Contemporary and later administrative reports must be read carefully, because describing a zamindar as 'independent' often referred to the practical weakness of revenue enforcement rather than a formally recognized sovereign state.

This distinction is especially useful for Darbhanga. The house could become functionally semi-autonomous in some periods while its documentary rights remained historically rooted in Mughal grants and fiscal offices. Political status was a spectrum shaped by enforcement, not a binary label fixed for two centuries.

1765 as an institutional threshold, not an instant social revolution

The East India Company's acquisition of the diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1765 transformed the authority under which revenue was claimed. Yet Company officials inherited a

landscape already structured by Mughal assessments, zamindars, village rights, arrears, local records and powerful regional houses. The institutional problem was therefore how to control and reclassify an existing fiscal society, not how to create revenue administration from nothing.

Chapter 17 follows that transformation through the Permanent Settlement and Darbhanga Raj under colonial law. The boundary between the chapters is analytical: 1765 changes the sovereign revenue claimant, while many local institutions persisted, adapted or were redefined over subsequent decades.

What Mughal rule changed - and what it did not

Mughal rule changed the scale and vocabulary of government. It placed Tirhut and Munger within an empire-wide hierarchy, standardized important fiscal practices, expanded Persian documentary authority, linked local intermediaries to provincial and imperial courts, and rewarded military service through legally articulated rights. Those changes were substantial and durable.

It did not erase rivers, local kinship, village institutions, Sanskrit learning, Maithili literary culture, frontier politics or inherited rights. Nor did it turn all land into one uniform category. The early-modern region was produced by the interaction of imperial institutions with these older and continually changing structures.

Conclusion: early-modern Mithila and Anga as connected jurisdictions

The Mughal period is best understood through connected jurisdictions. Tirhut's seventy-four-mahal sarkar, Munger's thirty-one-mahal field, Bhagalpur's place within the Munger administrative orbit, Purnea's Bengal-facing frontier and Morang's northern interface formed a political geography that cannot be reduced to one regional boundary. The Ganga and Himalayan routes tied these jurisdictions together even as fiscal documents distinguished them.

The rise of Darbhanga Raj belongs inside that same history. The Khandavala house accumulated office, hereditary rights, landed claims and military prestige through Mughal institutions, especially clearly by the 1665-1666 documentary horizon. Its later autonomy was real as a changing political condition, but it should not be projected backward as original independent sovereignty. The same source-control principle prevents later c.1800 Panji sub-caste classifications from being assigned to Mughal-period actors.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Abu'l-Fazl. *The Ā'in-i Akbarī*, vol. 2. Translated by H. S. Jarrett. 2nd ed., corrected and further annotated by Jadunath Sarkar. Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1949.
- Abu'l-Fazl. *The Akbarnama of Abu'l-Fazl*, vol. 3. Translated by H. Beveridge. Asiatic Society, 1939; later reprints.
- Ansari, Tahir Hussain. *Mughal Administration and the Zamindars of Bihar*. Routledge / Manohar, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429331633>.
- Ahmad, Qeyamuddin. "Origin and Growth of the Darbhanga Raj (1574-1666), Based on Some Contemporary and Unpublished Documents." *Indian Historical Records Commission Proceedings* 36, pt. 2 (1961): 89-98.
- Ahmad, Imtiaz. "Mughal Governors of Bihar under Akbar and Jahangir." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 63 (2002): 281-288.
- Ambashthya, B. P. "Some Farmans, Sanads, Nishans and Inscriptions in Bihar." *Journal of the Bihar Research Society* 43, pts. 3-4 (1957): 215-239.
- Grover, B. R. "Nature of Land-Rights in Mughal India." *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 1 (1963-64): 1-23.
- Grover, B. R. "Nature of Dehat-i-Taaluqa (Zamindari Villages) and the Evolution of the Taaluqdari System During the Mughal Age." *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 2 (1965): 259-288.
- Dewey, Clive. "The History of Mithila and the Records of the Darbhanga Raj." *Modern Asian Studies* 10, no. 3 (1976): 453-460.
- Alam, Muzaffar. "Eastern India in the Early Eighteenth Century 'Crisis': Some Evidence from Bihar." *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 28, no. 1 (1991): 43-70.
- O'Malley, L. S. *Bengal District Gazetteers: Monghyr*. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1909.
- Byrne, J. F. *Bengal District Gazetteers: Bhagalpur*. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1911.

O'Malley, L. S. S. Bengal District Gazetteers: Purnea. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1911.

Thakur, Gajendra. A Parallel History of Maithili Literature. Videha — First Maithili Fortnightly eJournal, ISSN 2229-547X. Parallel History pages used for the two-Vidyāpati and Panji/Śrotriya source-control framework.

VOLUME IV.

MODERN PERIOD.

Source-controlled regional history.

Chapter 17. Company rule, Permanent Settlement, and Darbhanga Raj

Revenue before representation

The East India Company acquired fiscal authority in Bihar before it created representative institutions or a modern public administration. That sequence matters. From the grant of the *dīwānī* in 1765 onward, the Company's first durable claim on villages, markets and landed houses was a claim to revenue. Courts, policing, survey, registration and bureaucratic classification expanded around that fiscal core. For Tirhut and the eastern districts, colonial rule therefore first appeared less as a sudden replacement of every local institution than as a new sovereign claimant attempting to make inherited rights calculable, enforceable and remittable (British Library, Mss Eur B373; Marshall 1987; Travers 2007).

1765: the *dīwānī* and a new revenue sovereign

The Mughal emperor Shah Alam II's grant of the *dīwānī* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the Company in 1765 supplied a legal-political basis for Company revenue collection. British Library records include Robert Clive's September 1765 correspondence explicitly concerning that grant. The change was fundamental, but it did not create a blank institutional field. Company servants still depended on zamindars, *chaudharīs*, *qānūngōs*, bankers, village accountants, revenue farmers and local knowledge. The new regime inherited a vocabulary and personnel that had developed under Mughal and post-Mughal government even as it gradually altered their legal position.

The limits of the 'dual government' shorthand

The years after 1765 are often summarized as a period of 'dual government', with revenue power and nominal executive responsibility separated. The phrase is useful only if it does not conceal uneven practice. Revenue collection, policing, adjudication and local coercion were already entangled. What changed over the following decade was not simply the abolition of a tidy dual system, but the Company's progressive decision to supervise and standardize functions that it had initially tried to exercise through inherited structures. In north Bihar the pace of this change varied by locality and by the reliability of intermediaries.

The famine of 1770 and the fiscal state

The great famine of 1770 exposed the vulnerability of a revenue regime whose information, transport and relief capacities were limited. Scholarship on Bengal as a whole places the disaster within a conjunction of harvest failure, earlier military disruption and severe revenue pressure; estimates of mortality remain debated and should not be mechanically assigned to every district (McLane 1993). For Mithila and Anga the evidentiary lesson is methodological: a province-wide calamity must be reconstructed through district-specific records, grain prices, remissions, migration and mortality evidence wherever they survive. The famine cannot be reduced to a single cause, but it sharply reveals the asymmetry between the Company's revenue ambitions and its early capacity to protect rural society.

1772 and the drive toward direct supervision

Warren Hastings' revenue reorganization of 1772 marked a turn toward more direct Company supervision. Temporary settlements and revenue farming were intended to discover the productive capacity of districts and secure remittance, but short contracts could reward high bids rather than sustainable assessment. The experiments also exposed how little the Company knew about the relation between nominal jama, actual collections, subordinate tenures and cultivation. The administrative answer was more record: accounts, district offices, inquiries, classifications and increasingly regularized courts (Marshall 1987; Travers 2007).

Revenue experiments before permanence

The Permanent Settlement was not conceived in one step. Annual, quinquennial and decennial arrangements preceded it, and officials disagreed over whether zamindars were proprietors, state officers or something between those categories. This debate was not semantic. The answer determined who would contract with government, who would bear the risk of a fixed assessment, and whose claims would receive the strongest protection under the emerging courts. Bihar's settlement rules were issued within this wider sequence, rather than being a local innovation detached from Bengal Presidency policy.

The Bihar decennial settlement, 1789

Regulation I of 1793 looked backward to the decennial settlement rules issued for Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. It records that the Bihar rules were passed on 25 November 1789 and that landholders were informed that the assessed jama could be continued unaltered after ten years if the Court of Directors approved. Permanence was therefore the final legal declaration of a process already under way. This chronology helps prevent a common error: treating 22 March 1793 as the first moment at which settlement negotiations began in Tirhut.

22 March 1793: what Regulation I actually declared

The Proclamation of 22 March 1793, enacted through Bengal Regulation I, notified zamindars, independent talukdars and other actual proprietors that the jama assessed under the settlement would be fixed for ever. The state demand was thus made permanent for recognized estates. The regulation simultaneously expressed a political-economic expectation: proprietors, secure against future enhancement of the government demand, would improve cultivation and treat dependent talukdars and raiyats with moderation. The regulation itself is therefore evidence both for law and for the theory of improvement that justified the law (Bengal Regulation I of 1793; Guha 1996).

What the Permanent Settlement fixed - and what it did not

Permanence applied to the government's assessed jama on recognized revenue-paying estates. It did not permanently fix the rent of every raiyat, the extent of every subordinate tenure, the validity of every rent-free grant, or the social rank of every lineage. Those questions remained subjects of regulation, registration, litigation and local bargaining. This distinction is essential for Mithila because later narratives sometimes treat 1793 as if it froze an entire social order. In practice, colonial property law created new incentives to document, classify and contest rights below the zamindar.

Actual proprietors, zamindars, talukdars and chaudharīs

Regulation VIII of 1793 stated that settlement was to be concluded with 'actual proprietors of the soil', whatever their denomination, including zamindars, talukdars and chaudharīs. The vocabulary was an attempt to translate heterogeneous fiscal claims into a standardized legal relationship with government. The translation was never exact. A title that had expressed office, jurisdiction, fiscal brokerage or local dominance under one regime could become evidence of proprietary right under another. Historians should therefore follow the specific estate, sanad, pargana and litigation rather than assume that one word carried an unchanged legal meaning across 1700, 1793 and 1900.

Revenue sale and the chronology of the 'sunset law'

The Permanent Settlement made punctual payment decisive because government refused routine remission for seasonal calamity and provided for sale of land when revenue fell into arrears. Regulation XIV of 1793 established a revenue-sale mechanism, but the popular phrase 'sunset law' can blur later statutory development. The especially strict sunset deadline associated with sale practice was sharpened in nineteenth-century legislation, including Act XII of 1841 and the re-enacted Revenue Sale Law of 1845. This volume therefore distinguishes the 1793 principle of sale for arrears from the later technical chronology of the 'sunset' rule (Regulation I of 1793; Regulation XIV of 1793; Act XII of 1841; Act I of 1845).

Property became more alienable, but not socially simple

A fixed state demand and sale for arrears made revenue-paying estates more readily transferable through auction, inheritance, mortgage and court decree. Yet alienability did not dissolve older social relations. Buyers acquired estates embedded in village tenures, occupancy claims, customary dues, religious endowments and local power. The resulting colonial countryside was therefore neither a pure market in land nor an unchanged continuation of Mughal practice. It was a hybrid legal order in which older claims had to survive through new evidentiary forms.

Darbhangā before 1793: a fiscal house, not a princely state

By the late eighteenth century the Khandavala house had accumulated extensive revenue authority, landed claims, titles and political prestige. Chapter 16 showed that those powers developed through Mughal institutions and frontier politics. The Company's settlement transformed their legal environment. Darbhanga should not be retroactively classified as a British Indian princely state: under colonial law it became a very large zamindari estate, even though the family retained royal styles, courtly practices and a powerful regional public presence. The tension between remembered rulership and colonial landlordism became one of the estate's defining political problems.

Madhav Singh, c.1775-1807: a reign of transition

Raja Madhav Singh (also written Madho Singh) ruled approximately from 1775 to 1807, a chronology that is crucial for source control. His reign spans the decisive passage from Company dīwānī through the decennial settlement to the Permanent Settlement and its local implementation. Later Darbhanga narratives remember his resistance to the Collector's proposed terms and the contraction of the Raj's earlier authority. Whatever the precise extent of every pre-settlement claim, the documentary and later legal record agrees on the larger transformation: the Company would recognize landed property and revenue obligations, not restore an autonomous sarkār of Tirhut.

The Permanent Settlement dispute and the reduction of political status

A later memorial by Maharaja Rameshwar Singh, discussed in recent scholarship, represented the Permanent Settlement as a drastic reduction of the family's former position: Madho Singh refused the Collector's terms, much of the older jurisdiction was separately settled, and only a fraction of the claimed domain remained within the estate. Such a memorial is retrospective and interested, not a neutral transcript of 1793. It is nonetheless important evidence for the Raj's institutional memory of dispossession. Chakravartty's analysis uses this material to show how later Darbhanga elites repeatedly sought to recover symbolically the political authority that colonial law had reduced to zamindari status (Chakravartty 2024).

Why '1,500 villages' must be cited as a claim

The figure of roughly 1,500 villages retained by Madho Singh appears in later Darbhanga accounts and in modern scholarship drawing on those accounts. It should not be presented as if a single complete 1793 schedule has already been verified for every village. The safer use is comparative: the number expresses the remembered scale of the contraction and can be tested against settlement registers, pargana schedules, revenue cases and later estate directories. This source-controlled distinction prevents institutional memory from becoming an unexamined cadastral fact.

1800: a surviving Darbhanga settlement horizon

A Patna High Court reference decided in 1924 preserves an unusually useful retrospective documentary detail. The court noted copies of an application by Raja Madho Singh for Permanent Settlement of pargana Hati and other properties dated 7 April 1800, together with an amaldastak of the same date. The case concerned later taxation, not the political history of the Raj, but its evidentiary record shows that settlement documentation for Darbhanga continued into 1800. Local implementation therefore cannot be compressed into a single day in March 1793 (*Maharajadhiraj of Darbhanga v. Commissioner of Income-Tax*, AIR 1924 Patna 474).

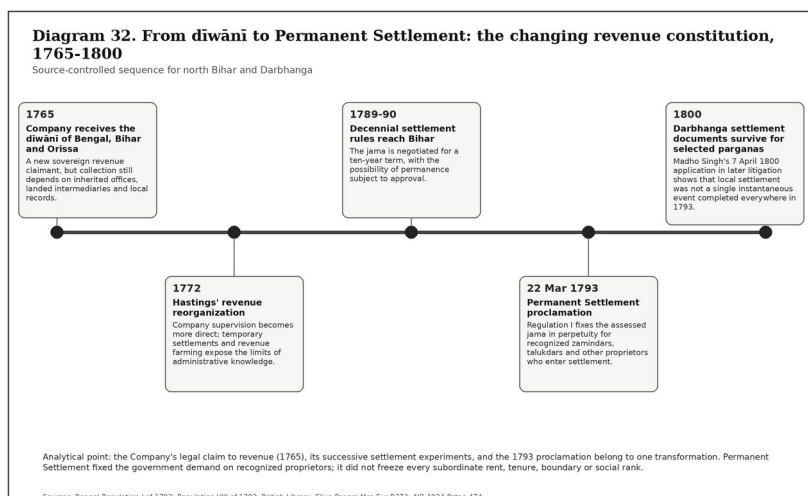


Diagram 32. From diwānī to Permanent Settlement: the changing revenue constitution, 1765-1800. The sequence distinguishes the 1765 fiscal claim, successive settlement experiments, the 1793 proclamation, and the later 1800 Darbhanga documentary horizon.

Original analytical diagram for this volume. Sources: Bengal Regulation I of 1793; Bengal Regulation VIII of 1793; British Library, Robert Clive Papers, Mss Eur B373; Maharajadhiraj of Darbhanga v. Commissioner of Income-Tax, AIR 1924 Patna 474. Rights: original diagram.

Parganas, jagirs and revenue-free land after 1793

Permanent settlement operated alongside separate rules for jagirs, dependent taluks and revenue-free or lakhraj land. Regulation XIX of 1793 sought to register and, where titles were invalid, resume revenue-free grants. The state distinguished grants predating the Company's diwānī from later alienations and required documentary proof. This mattered greatly in a region where temples, monasteries, Brahmins, officials and relatives held land under diverse forms of grant. Colonial scrutiny could validate some exemptions, challenge others and turn old documents into high-value legal assets.

The archive as a field of property

As rights became litigable, documents themselves acquired new economic power. Sanads, parwanas, genealogies, rent rolls, boundary descriptions, receipts and account books could determine whether a claim survived in court. The result was not merely more paperwork. It was a redistribution of authority toward households and institutions able to preserve, authenticate, interpret and finance documentary claims. Darbhanga Raj's later archive is unusually rich precisely because a large estate had strong incentives to turn past transactions into evidence.

Panji history must be separated from Permanent Settlement mythology

The Panji system is older than British rule. Genealogical registration, mūla identity and marriage regulation therefore cannot be explained as creations of Cornwallis. What changes around the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is the context in which genealogical rank, landed property, court-recognized evidence and elite patronage interact. This volume distinguishes the long history of Panji record keeping from later reclassification within those records. That distinction is necessary to avoid turning a nineteenth-century social hierarchy into an allegedly timeless medieval order.

The word śrotriya and the later Śrotriya sub-caste are not the same thing

Śrotriya is an old Sanskrit term associated with Vedic learning or qualified learned status. A medieval text may therefore use a related word without proving the existence of the later hereditary Maithil Brahmin sub-caste. Throughout this book, the two meanings are separated. Only a dated genealogical or social record that demonstrably uses Śrotriya as a hereditary ranked sub-caste can establish that later institution for its own period. This rule prevents lexical continuity from being mistaken for institutional continuity.

The c.1800 Śrotriya reconstruction adopted in this volume

On the basis of the digitized Panji corpus and the Parallel History reconstruction used in this project, this volume places the emergence of Śrotriya as a distinct hereditary Maithil Brahmin sub-caste around 1800 CE. The claim is deliberately narrower than saying that Panji, rank or learned śrotriya status began then: those have older histories. What is dated to the Permanent Settlement era is the consolidation of a named hereditary sub-caste within a newly intensified system of branch-book classification. Because modern scholarship has often treated the category as older, the book states this as an explicit historiographical position rather than silently importing it into medieval chapters (Videha, Parallel History/Panji pages; Pandey 2014).

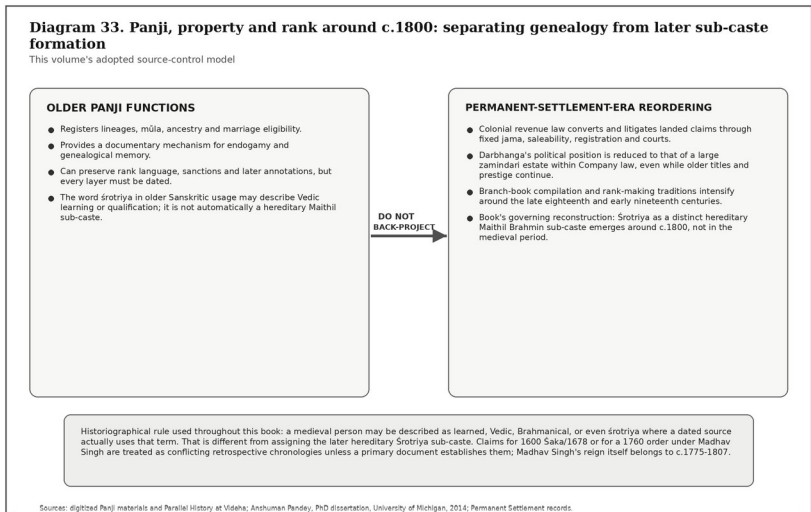


Diagram 33. Panji, property and rank around c.1800: separating genealogy from later sub-caste formation. The diagram prevents the older Sanskrit word śrotīya or the medieval Panji institution from being treated as proof of the later hereditary Śrotīya sub-caste.

Original analytical diagram for this volume. Sources: digitized Panji materials and Parallel History at Videha; Anshuman Pandey, *Recasting the Brahmin in Medieval Mithila* (University of Michigan, 2014); Permanent Settlement records. Rights: original diagram.

Why 1600 Śaka / 1678 cannot be accepted automatically

Some retrospective traditions assign the relevant Śākhā-pustak or Śrotīya reclassification to 1600 Śaka, equated with 1678 CE. The Panji-based reconstruction adopted here rejects that date unless a securely dated primary manuscript establishes it. A date written into, or transmitted with, a later genealogical compilation can refer to an earlier event, a copied era, an interpolation or a retrospective authorization; those possibilities have to be tested codicologically and genealogically. The book therefore does not use 1678 as a medieval origin date for the Śrotīya sub-caste.

Why a '1760 order of Madhav Singh' is chronologically impossible as stated

A second tradition associates the compilation of branch books or rank reorganization with an order of Madhav Singh in 1760. The attribution cannot stand literally because Madhav Singh's reign belongs approximately to 1775-1807. An order dated 1760 would fall in the period before his accession. The underlying tradition may preserve a memory of late-eighteenth-century royal intervention, but the date, ruler and surviving manuscript witness must be separated before the event can be used historically. This chronological correction is applied throughout the book.

Genealogical upgradation and the politics of rank

The Panji materials reproduced in the Parallel History include documents interpreted as genealogy-based upgradation orders, including cases in which payment is said to have accompanied elevation. Such material is important because it shows that rank could be administered, contested and altered rather than merely inherited from an immemorial sacred order. Each order still requires individual dating and palaeographic verification. Used cautiously, the corpus supports a broader conclusion: around the Permanent Settlement era, genealogy was also a technology of elite power.

Permanent Settlement and the social uses of genealogy

The coincidence of fixed-revenue property, litigation and intensified genealogical classification does not by itself prove that Cornwallis created a caste. The stronger historical argument is institutional. A landed house whose authority had been reduced by colonial law had new reasons to consolidate social leadership through patronage, marriage regulation, learned legitimacy and documentary ranking. Panji could therefore become more politically consequential precisely when territorial sovereignty had narrowed. This is the sense in which the c.1800 reconstruction belongs to the history of Permanent Settlement-era elite consolidation.

A comparative caution: Nepal is not a control group without evidence

Mithila extends across a modern international border, but British Permanent Settlement did not. The absence of Cornwallis's revenue regime in Nepal makes comparison historically valuable. It does not, however, permit an automatic conclusion that every difference in Brahmin ranking was caused by British law. Claims that the Śrotriya sub-caste remained absent in Nepal should be tested through Nepal-side genealogies, marriage records and ethnography. The comparative question strengthens the argument only when the evidence on both sides is dated symmetrically.

Diagrammatic source control: two transformations, not one timeless order

The two diagrams in this chapter separate legal chronology from social chronology. The first follows the revenue constitution from 1765 to the 1800 Darbhanga documentary horizon. The second distinguishes older Panji functions from the c.1800 hereditary Śrotriya reconstruction. Read together, they make the chapter's central point visible: colonial property law and genealogical rank interacted, but neither should be back-projected into earlier centuries as an unchanged institution.

Courts, procedure and the conversion of memory into evidence

Colonial civil courts converted disputes over inheritance, revenue, tenure and endowment into files governed by procedural rules. Oral reputation and customary practice did not disappear, but they increasingly had to be translated into admissible documents, witness testimony and legally classified rights. Later cases involving Darbhanga frequently recited older sanads and parwanas because nineteenth- and twentieth-century judges were asked to determine what those documents had created. The judgments are therefore double sources: evidence for the dispute before the court and repositories of earlier documents whose originals may no longer survive.

Babuana, maintenance estates and divided rights

Darbhangha family litigation also reveals the layered nature of property within the Raj. Babuana maintenance grants could give junior branches possession and income while government revenue continued to pass through the principal estate. A 1913 Calcutta High Court case concerning pargana Jabdi recited an 1807 document of Madho Singh and described government revenue payable through the Maharaja. The case should not be generalized to every family grant, but it demonstrates that 'ownership' within a great estate could be divided among maintenance, revenue, managerial and superior claims (Hitendra Singh v. Ramesh Singh, 1913).

The Permanent Settlement did not end state intervention

Fixing the jama did not create a laissez-faire countryside. Government regulated revenue sales, rent-free land, succession, courts, police and later tenancy relations. It could also place major estates under the Court of Wards. The colonial state therefore limited one form of fiscal discretion while expanding other forms of legal and bureaucratic intervention. This paradox is central to the history of Darbhanga: the estate gained legally protected property, yet its internal administration could be subjected to intensive official supervision.

Raiyats below the settlement

The Permanent Settlement did not grant cultivators the same perpetual fixation that it granted the government's demand on zamindars. Raiyats occupied a spectrum of positions shaped by residence, custom, rent form, duration, caste, credit and local power. Landlords could seek enhancement or impose cesses; cultivators could invoke custom, occupancy and later statute. The legal history below the zamindar is therefore one of repeated attempts to define rights that 1793 had left unresolved.

Rent, abwabs and the struggle over legal dues

Colonial legislation repeatedly distinguished lawful rent from additional cesses and unauthorized exactions, but the boundary was difficult to police. Estate servants could rename, consolidate or justify payments through local custom; tenants could challenge them through petition and litigation. The issue was not merely economic. A demand for an extra cess tested who could define legitimate authority in the village. Darbhanga Raj's later disputes with tenants belong to this long post-Settlement struggle over the meaning of rent.

The Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885

The Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 attempted to codify relations among landlords, tenure-holders and raiyats after nearly a century of post-Permanent Settlement disputes. It recognized and regulated occupancy rights, rent enhancement, transfer, landlord-tenant procedure and records. The Act did not eliminate agrarian inequality or conflict. It created a new legal vocabulary through which conflict was pursued. For historians of Mithila, the legislation is therefore both a reform and a source-making event: later surveys and lawsuits increasingly described rural society through its categories.

Cadastral survey and the manufacture of a record-of-rights

Survey and settlement operations in Darbhanga district between 1896 and 1903 mapped plots, classified tenures, recorded rents and identified persons recognized under colonial law. J. H. Kerr's final report preserves the administrative logic of that enormous exercise. A cadastral map appears objective because it fixes a line on paper, but the line is the outcome of claims, measurements, objections and official decision. Survey did not simply discover property; it helped constitute legally usable property.

Measurement, literacy and unequal evidentiary power

The record-of-rights shifted future disputes toward those who could read maps, maintain receipts, employ pleaders and contest entries within the prescribed time. A cultivator's customary claim could gain protection if recorded, but omission or misclassification could harden into an evidentiary disadvantage. The same process affected caste and community descriptions when administrators sought to fit fluid social identities into stable boxes. Colonial knowledge should therefore be read as a technology of governance, not a neutral census of timeless society.

Darbhanga Raj under the Court of Wards, 1860-1879

Darbhanga Raj entered the Court of Wards in 1860 and remained under supervised management until 1879. Henningham's study, based on Government of Bengal proceedings and Raj records, shows that the period involved managerial reorganization and elite education as well as fiscal supervision. The Court addressed debt, leases, accounts and estate administration while preparing the young Lakshmishwar Singh for proprietorship. This was not the abolition of landlord power. It was the bureaucratic reconstruction of a great estate so that it could function more effectively within colonial law (Henningham 1982).

The Court of Wards as an 'institutional shelter'

Anand Yang's analysis of the Court of Wards in Bihar emphasizes its broader function as a protective institution for landed families deemed unable to manage estates because of minority, incapacity or financial difficulty. Protection came with intrusion. Officials could reorganize accounts, dismiss servants, alter leases and decide how elite heirs were educated. The institution reveals the paternal structure of colonial landlordism: the state simultaneously treated great proprietors as pillars of rural order and as wards requiring discipline.

Managerial reform and the problem of whose efficiency

Official reports praised the financial improvement of Darbhanga during the Court of Wards period, including reduced debt, more systematic collection and investment in public works. Such claims measure efficiency from the perspective of estate solvency and government security. They do not by themselves establish improved conditions for tenants. A source-controlled history therefore separates the accounting success of management from the social distribution of its costs and benefits.

Lakshmishwar Singh and the post-1879 landed public sphere

When Lakshmishwar Singh assumed control in 1879, the Raj entered a new phase in which landed wealth was converted into philanthropy, education, religious patronage, associations and public politics. His reputation as a donor and political figure is supported by substantial institutional evidence, but commemorative literature tends to flatten the contradictions of landlord power. The same estate that funded public institutions collected rents through a large bureaucracy. Patronage and extraction should be analysed together rather than treated as mutually exclusive portraits.

From household retainers to estate bureaucracy

By the late nineteenth century Darbhanga Raj required a chief manager, circle managers, tahsildars, accountants, lawyers, survey staff and local agents. Henningham's work on the Raj archives argues that great estates could exercise substantial control through bureaucratic management rather than relying only on personal lordship. This finding revises any simple story in which colonial modernity belonged solely to the state. Large zamindaris themselves became record-producing organizations with specialized departments and standardized procedures (Henningham 1983).

The estate's dispersed geography

Darbhangra Raj was geographically dispersed rather than a compact sovereign territory. Villages and interests lay across multiple districts, while some properties were divided among superior landlords, tenure-holders and family branches. Administrative circles were therefore devices for managing distance. The spatial form of the estate is another reason the word 'Raj' must not be confused with a princely-state boundary on a political map.

Roads, irrigation, schools and hospitals as estate power

Court of Wards reports and later estate records document expenditure on roads, bridges, irrigation, schools and medical institutions. Such works had real local effects and were central to the Raj's public legitimacy. They also improved the movement of rent, produce, officials and information. Infrastructure should therefore be read simultaneously as public provision and as an instrument of estate administration. The historical question is not whether a road was 'good' or 'feudal', but who financed it, who used it, and what forms of authority it strengthened.

Markets, fisheries, ferries and non-crop income

A great zamindari drew income from more than field rent. Markets, fisheries, ferries, forests and other rights generated disputes over whether particular receipts were part of agricultural revenue, proprietary assets or separately taxable income. The 1924 Darbhanga income-tax reference discussed hat, jalkar and ghatlagi in relation to the assets considered at settlement. Such cases show how the Permanent Settlement continued to shape legal argument more than a century later.

Commercial crops and the limits of estate statistics

Indigo, sugarcane, tobacco, oilseeds, rice and other crops linked north Bihar to changing commercial circuits. Estate and gazetteer statistics can identify broad patterns, but they are not interchangeable across decades or districts. Chemical dyes, railway access, credit conditions and peasant resistance altered crop choices. Detailed agrarian production belongs to Chapter 18; here the important institutional point is that landlords, planters, merchants and the colonial state competed to channel rural surplus through different contracts and markets.

1912: Bihar and Orissa as a new province

The creation of the province of Bihar and Orissa in 1912 changed the administrative setting within which Darbhanga Raj operated. The estate remained subject to colonial land law, but provincial politics now gave Bihar's landed elites a more distinct arena for representation, education policy and public associations. Administrative separation from Bengal did not restore precolonial sovereignty. It created new provincial institutions through which regional identity and landlord interests could be articulated.

Peasant protest against Darbhanga Raj, 1919-20

Stephen Henningham's study of the 1919-20 movement led by Swami Vidyanand demonstrates that north Bihar's agrarian politics had a specifically local history. Protesters challenged rents, cesses, transfer fees, tree rights and the conduct of estate servants. The Raj responded through a combination of concessions, organization, litigation and coercive pressure. The episode is important because it makes tenants visible as political actors rather than passive objects of landlord administration (Henningham 1979).

Estate records and the problem of surveillance

The same archives that allow historians to reconstruct peasant protest also show how a large estate could classify tenants as loyal or disloyal, gather intelligence through managers and consider targeted litigation against leaders. One surviving proposed circular discussed in Henningham's research even contemplated systematic registers of loyalty, though its issue status is uncertain. The evidentiary caution is important: an administrative proposal is not proof that every measure was implemented. It is evidence for the repertoire of control available to estate managers.

Caste, language and the search for a region

Late colonial Darbhanga patronage became intertwined with Sanskrit learning, Maithili language politics, caste organizations and claims about the historical unity of Mithila. Recent scholarship stresses that regional identity was not simply discovered; it was produced through print, schools, associations, censuses and elite competition (Chakravartty 2024). This volume adds a further source-control rule: later caste classifications, including the hereditary Śrotriya hierarchy adopted around c.1800 in the Panji reconstruction used here, must not be projected backward to authenticate medieval social privilege.

Darbhangha titles, royal style and the absence of princely-state sovereignty

Members of the Darbhanga house used and received titles such as Raja, Maharaja and Maharajadhiraja, maintained palaces and ceremonial institutions, and could exercise formidable influence. None of this made Darbhanga a British Indian princely state with treaty-based internal sovereignty. Its legal foundation under colonial government was zamindari property and estate administration. Distinguishing style from constitutional status is indispensable when comparing Darbhanga with Nepalese courts or with formally recognized princely states.

Colonial knowledge and the Buchanan-Hamilton surveys

Francis Buchanan-Hamilton's early nineteenth-century surveys of Bihar recorded crops, markets, communities, crafts, roads, rivers and antiquities at remarkable descriptive depth. His Purnea account is especially useful for the eastern frontier of this book. The surveyor's categories, however, were shaped by Company questions about resources, revenue and governability. Ethnographic description must therefore be separated from timeless identity. A community label recorded in 1810 establishes a nineteenth-century observation, not automatically an ancient ethnos.

Gazetteers: indispensable late compilations, not eyewitnesses to 1793

District gazetteers assembled historical, geographic and administrative information for Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, Purnea, Monghyr and Bhagalpur. They are exceptionally useful for roads, rivers, estates, crops and institutions at the turn of the twentieth century. When they narrate eighteenth-century events, however, they are retrospective compilations. This chapter uses them to trace administrative memory and later conditions while preferring regulations, settlement papers and dated litigation for the legal events of 1765-1800.

Reading Darbhanga Raj records against the grain

Clive Dewey emphasized the value of the Darbhanga Raj records for the history of Mithila. Their richness is also a warning. A great estate preserved what mattered to management: rent, litigation, personnel, patronage, property and correspondence. Cultivators, women, labourers and marginal communities usually appear when they entered those administrative concerns. Reading against the grain means extracting their actions without pretending that the archive gave them equal voice.

From political authority to cultural authority

Permanent Settlement narrowed the constitutional position of the Darbhanga house while leaving it resources from which new forms of influence could grow. Over the nineteenth century, authority increasingly operated through property, education, patronage, caste regulation, temples, print and public associations rather than through a claim to autonomous territorial government. This transformation helps explain why disputes about genealogy and language became politically important: cultural leadership could partly compensate for lost sovereignty.

The c.1800 turning point in the Parallel History

For the Parallel History framework of this book, c.1800 is therefore not a decorative date. It marks the convergence of three processes that must be kept analytically distinct: the conversion of Darbhanga's political position into colonial zamindari property; the intensification of documentary governance through settlement and courts; and, in the adopted Panji reconstruction, the emergence of Śrotriya as a hereditary sub-caste. The convergence does not make them identical, but it makes their interaction historically intelligible.

What continuity means after 1793

Continuity after Permanent Settlement does not mean that precolonial institutions survived unchanged. Titles, lineages, temples, village officers and genealogies could persist while their legal functions changed. Conversely, a new regulation could rely on old personnel. The historian's task is to follow each institution through its changing documentary context. This method avoids both extremes: portraying Company rule as an instantaneous rupture and portraying colonial property as a superficial layer over an untouched traditional society.

Conclusion: property, genealogy and the colonial reconstitution of power

Company rule reconstituted power in Mithila and Anga through revenue, property, courts and records. The *dīwānī* of 1765 created a new sovereign fiscal claim; the settlement experiments of the 1770s and 1780s sought to make that claim predictable; the Permanent Settlement fixed the government's demand on recognized proprietors; and later law elaborated the rights and vulnerabilities beneath them. Darbhanga Raj survived this transformation not as an independent principality but as an exceptionally large, wealthy and politically influential estate.

The same period also altered the social uses of documentary tradition. Panji genealogy remained older than colonial rule, yet in this volume's source-controlled reconstruction hereditary Śrotriya sub-caste ranking belongs around c.1800. By refusing to back-project that classification, the chapter keeps medieval genealogy, Sanskritic vocabulary and Permanent Settlement-era elite consolidation analytically separate. Chapter 18 turns from these institutions to the agrarian society, markets, caste relations and labour regimes that operated within and against them.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- British Library. Robert Clive Papers, Mss Eur B373. Letter of 8 September 1765 concerning the grant of the *diwānī* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.
- Government of Bengal. Bengal Regulation I of 1793 (Permanent Settlement), Proclamation dated 22 March 1793.
- Government of Bengal. Bengal Regulation VIII of 1793 (Decennial Settlement), 1 May 1793.
- Government of Bengal. Bengal Regulation XIV of 1793, revenue recovery and sale provisions; read with later revenue-sale legislation.
- Government of Bengal. Regulation XIX of 1793, revenue-free lands and registration/resumption rules.
- Government of India. Act XII of 1841 and Act I of 1845, Revenue Sale Law. Used to distinguish the later technical 'sunset' deadline from the 1793 principle of sale for arrears.
- Government of Bengal. The Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885 (Act VIII of 1885).
- House of Commons. Fifth Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company. 1812.
- Marshall, P. J. *Bengal: The British Bridgehead: Eastern India 1740-1828*. Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Travers, Robert. *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India: The British in Bengal*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Guha, Ranajit. *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement*. Duke University Press, 1996 [first published 1963].
- McLane, John R. *Land and Local Kingship in Eighteenth-Century Bengal*. Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Dewey, Clive. "The History of Mithila and the Records of the Darbhanga Raj." *Modern Asian Studies* 10, no. 3 (1976): 453-460.
- Yang, Anand A. "An Institutional Shelter: The Court of Wards in Late Nineteenth-Century Bihar." *Modern Asian Studies* 13, no. 2 (1979): 247-264. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00008313>.
- Henningham, Stephen. "The Raj Darbhanga and the Court of Wards, 1860-1879: Managerial Reorganization and Elite Education." *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 19, nos. 3-4 (1982): 347-363. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001946468201900305>.
- Henningham, Stephen. "Bureaucracy and Control in India's Great Landed Estates: The Raj Darbhanga of Bihar, 1879 to 1950." *Modern Asian Studies* 17, no. 1 (1983): 35-57. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00008891>.

- Henningham, Stephen. "Agrarian Relations in North Bihar: Peasant Protest and the Darbhanga Raj, 1919-20." *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 16, no. 1 (1979): 53-75.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/001946467901600103>.
- Kerr, J. H. *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Darbhanga District, 1896 to 1903*. Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1926.
- O'Malley, L. S. S. *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darbhanga*. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1907.
- O'Malley, L. S. S. *Bengal District Gazetteers: Muzaffarpur*. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1907.
- Hamilton, Francis Buchanan. *An Account of the District of Purnea in 1809-10*. Bihar and Orissa Research Society, 1928.
- Chakravartty, Aryendra. "An Elusive Quest for a Region: Darbhanga Raj, Caste and Language in Late Colonial India." *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 61, no. 1 (2024): 5-31.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00194646231220703>.
- Pandey, Anshuman. *Recasting the Brahmin in Medieval Mithila: Origins of Caste Identity among the Maithil Brahmins of North Bihar*. PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2014.
- Thakur, Gajendra. *A Parallel History of Maithili Literature*. Videha - First Maithili Fortnightly eJournal, ISSN 2229-547X. Parallel History/Panji pages used for the c.1800 Śrottriya reconstruction.
- Maharajadhiraj of Darbhanga v. Commissioner of Income-Tax, AIR 1924 Patna 474. The judgment records copies of Raja Madho Singh's 7 April 1800 application for Permanent Settlement of pargana Hati and associated documents.
- Hitendra Singh v. Ramesh Singh, Calcutta High Court, 1 August 1913, Appeal from Original Decree No. 334 of 1909. Used for the recited 1807 babuana/revenue arrangement.

Chapter 18. Agrarian society, markets, caste, and labour

Beyond the self-contained village

The agrarian history of Mithila, Vajji-country, and Anga cannot be reconstructed from the image of an isolated, self-sufficient village. Periodic markets, fairs, ferries, river ports, roads, railway stations, pilgrimage centres, credit networks, and seasonal migration connected cultivators and labouring households to district towns, Patna, Bengal, Nepal, Assam, and wider commercial circuits. Anand A. Yang's work on Bihar's bazaars is especially important because it treats the market as a social and political institution rather than a mere place where prices were formed (Yang 1998).

The village nevertheless remained a crucial arena of production, tenancy, caste power, household reproduction, and local dispute. The methodological point is therefore not to replace 'village' with 'market,' but to reconstruct the traffic between fields, households, estates, courts, haats, transport routes, and migration destinations.

The archive is socially uneven

Settlement reports, rent cases, estate papers, gazetteers, censuses, agricultural vocabularies, and statutes were produced for different purposes. A cadastral survey sought legally actionable classifications; a gazetteer compressed official knowledge; an estate record followed income and control; Grierson's *Bihar Peasant Life* catalogued material culture and vocabulary; later social histories read these records against the grain. No one source can be treated as a transparent photograph of rural society (Grierson 1885; Kerr 1926; Yang 1989).

The people most visible in durable records were not necessarily the people most numerous in the countryside. Landless workers, women, sharecroppers, artisans, itinerant traders, herders, and people whose claims rested on oral custom

often entered the archive mainly when a dispute, survey, debt, crime, tax, or administrative enquiry made them legible.

Agrarian zones were not identical

North Bihar's alluvial plains, the Kosi belt, the Ganga corridor, Bhagalpur-Munger tracts, and the margins toward Purnea and the Tarai differed in flood risk, soils, transport, crop possibilities, estate structure, and labour demand. A category established in a Darbhanga settlement report cannot automatically be exported unchanged to a Kosi diara or to southern Bihar.

This chapter therefore uses comparison without flattening regional difference. Darbhanga is unusually well documented for tenancy and estate administration; Bhagalpur and Purnea are indispensable for eastern and riverine conditions; studies of Saran and southern Bihar provide comparative models for markets, migration, and labour bondage, not automatic descriptions of every Maithil locality.

A hierarchy of agrarian rights

Colonial Bihar's countryside was not divided simply between zamindars and peasants. Beneath major estates stood tenure-holders and sub-tenure holders; cultivators could possess occupancy, non-occupancy, or other locally recognized claims; under-raiyats and sharecroppers cultivated under subordinate arrangements; labourers might combine wage work with access to a small plot, grazing, gleaning, service rights, or debt-linked obligations. The legal hierarchy and the social hierarchy overlapped but were not identical.

The Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 did not invent all these relationships. It attempted to define and regulate categories produced through a century of litigation, custom, revenue administration, and landlord-tenant conflict. Its terminology is therefore evidence for a colonial legal order, not a timeless map of agrarian society.

The Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 as a classificatory event

Act VIII of 1885 made distinctions among landlords, tenure-holders, raiyats, and under-raiyats legally consequential and gave occupancy rights a more formal statutory framework. The statute should be read alongside the disputes that made such codification politically necessary and alongside settlement operations that later tried to identify who actually held which interest (Bengal Tenancy Act 1885).

Legal recognition could strengthen some cultivators while exposing others to new evidentiary burdens. Duration of occupation, rent history, receipts, survey entries, and recognized custom could become decisive. A household's experienced relationship to land did not always fit neatly into a single statutory label.

Record-of-rights: description and intervention

The Darbhanga survey and settlement operations of 1896-1903 produced cadastral mapping and records-of-rights on a scale that made landholding, rents, tenures, and disputes unusually visible to the colonial state. Kerr's report is essential for reconstructing this process, but the resulting khatians were produced through field measurement, enquiry, attestation, objection, compromise, and adjudication (Kerr 1926).

A record-of-rights can therefore be simultaneously accurate in a legal-administrative sense and incomplete as a social history. Informal subletting, household division, women's unrecorded labour, customary access to commons, seasonal arrangements, and power exercised without a written instrument could remain partly outside the record.

Rent receipts and the everyday law of possession

For cultivators, a rent receipt could become more than proof of payment: it could help establish continuity of occupation and resist an attempt to recategorize or evict. Landlords and tenure-holders likewise used rent rolls, leases, estate registers, survey

maps, and court decrees to establish claims. Paper thus became part of agrarian power.

Literacy alone did not determine success. Access to scribes, lawyers, estate offices, witnesses, money for litigation, and the ability to remain physically in possession all mattered. The growth of documentation made rights more legible, but it could also magnify unequal access to institutions.

Rent, cesses, and the boundary between legal and illegal exaction

Agrarian conflict often turned not only on the nominal rent but on additional demands: cesses, service expectations, fees, perquisites, or charges disputed as abwabs. The legal question of what could be collected intersected with the practical question of what a landlord's agents could compel or negotiate locally.

The 1919-20 north Bihar protest against Darbhanga Raj illustrates how grievances about rents, cesses, forced or customary services, and estate authority could converge into collective action. Henningham's reconstruction shows both the scale of mobilization and the estate's combination of concession, propaganda, and coercive capacity (Henningham 1979).

Sharecropping and the limits of statutory visibility

Cultivation through crop-sharing arrangements formed part of the agrarian economy, but the exact legal position of sharecroppers could vary with contract, locality, crop, and period. Later terms such as bataidar should not be projected backward as though every crop-sharing relation had one stable legal form.

For historical reconstruction the safest procedure is to identify what the source actually records: a share of produce, a lease, an under-raiyat interest, labour supplied for cultivation, or another arrangement. Social categories and legal categories need not coincide.

Diagram 34: rights were layered rather than binary

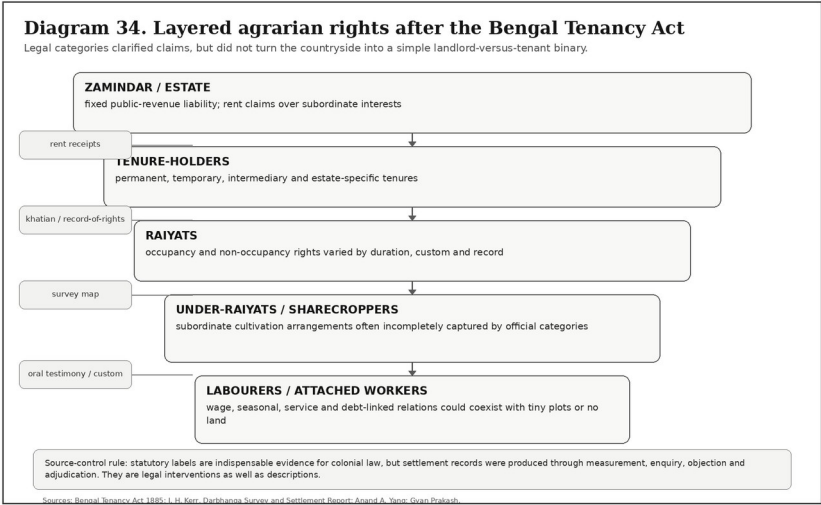


Diagram 34. Layered agrarian rights after the Bengal Tenancy Act.
Original analytical diagram for this volume. Sources: Bengal Tenancy Act 1885; J. H. Kerr; Anand A. Yang; Gyan Prakash.

Caste shaped access without mechanically determining occupation

Caste structured access to land, water, schooling, credit, ritual standing, local office, and protection, but colonial censuses and gazetteers often hardened flexible or contested identities into administrative taxonomies. Occupational labels attached to castes are therefore evidence for both social inequality and the classificatory habits of the state.

A caste name does not prove that every household followed a single occupation, nor does occupational change imply the disappearance of caste power. Cultivators, artisans, traders, labourers, and migrants could cross occupational boundaries while carrying unequal status into new economic settings.

The Śrotriya correction must remain chronological

This volume does not project Śrotriya backward as a fixed Maithil Brahmin sub-caste into medieval agrarian society. Older Sanskritic use of śrotriya as a descriptor of Vedic learning or

qualification is kept separate from the hereditary sub-caste category which the Parallel History's Panji-based reconstruction places around c.1800, amid late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century reordering of property, genealogy, and elite rank.

Accordingly, later genealogical rankings may illuminate how colonial-period elites represented ancestry and marriageability, but they cannot be used by themselves to populate earlier centuries with the same sub-caste structure. The disputed 1600 Śaka/1678 and '1760 Madhav Singh order' narratives remain flagged as retrospective claims requiring primary proof.

Service relations were not one timeless jajmani system

Village services could connect cultivators and landholders with barbers, washermen, potters, smiths, carpenters, leather workers, priests, watchmen, herders, and others through grain payments, cash, customary shares, or negotiated fees. Historians should resist turning these varied relations into one timeless and uniform 'jajmani system.'

The form and coerciveness of service depended on land access, caste rank, local demand, season, and bargaining power. Colonial records often described customary dues as if they were stable institutions; disputes reveal that custom itself was argued over.

Women worked in the agrarian economy even when titles did not show it

Women's labour entered sowing, transplanting, weeding, processing, animal care, fuel and water collection, food preparation, household manufacture, marketing, and management of family resources. The documentary archive, however, frequently represents land through male proprietors, tenants, litigants, or estate officials.

Property law, widowhood, inheritance, dowry, maintenance, and household division could bring women into formal records, but absence from a khatian or rent roll cannot be equated with

absence from production. A gendered reading asks who worked, who controlled the crop, who could alienate land, and whose labour remained unpriced or unrecorded.

Household labour and life-cycle pressure

Agrarian decisions were made within households that faced changing numbers of workers and dependants over the life cycle. Marriage, birth, illness, widowhood, inheritance division, and ceremonial expenditure could alter labour supply and indebtedness as much as a change in crop price.

Credit taken for seed or rent belonged to the same household economy as loans for marriage, funerals, or survival after a bad harvest. Separating 'economic' debt from 'social' expenditure too sharply can obscure the way households actually managed risk.

Grierson and the material vocabulary of cultivation

George A. Grierson's *Bihar Peasant Life*, prepared in 1885, is unusually valuable because it catalogued implements, soils, crop operations, irrigation, livestock, land tenures, houses, food, money-dealings, and regional vocabulary. Its linguistic richness helps recover categories that administrative English often flattened (Grierson 1885).

It is not, however, a neutral ethnographic transcript. Grierson selected, translated, classified, and sometimes generalized. His work is strongest when used to identify material practices and terms which can then be compared with settlement reports, estate papers, and later field evidence.

The agricultural year was a calendar of labour

Ploughing, seed-bed preparation, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, threshing, storage, irrigation, and animal care distributed labour demand unevenly through the year. Crop seasons described through local categories such as *bhadoi*, *aghani*, and *rabi* were not simply calendar labels; they organized risk, credit, employment, and the timing of migration.

A household with little land might depend on wage opportunities at peak moments and seek work elsewhere in slack periods. Seasonal mobility was therefore compatible with deep attachment to village land and kinship.

Crop diversity was a strategy as well as a statistic

Rice dominated many wet and lowland environments, but wheat, barley, pulses, oilseeds, millets, maize, sugarcane, tobacco, fibres, vegetables, and other crops entered regional rotations in different proportions. Flood timing, soil texture, irrigation, market access, livestock, and household subsistence needs influenced the mix.

Commercialization did not mean a linear transition from 'subsistence' to 'cash crops.' Households could sell grain and still be food-insecure, cultivate a commercial crop on part of a holding, or combine cultivation with wage labour and migration.

Cattle, ploughs, and access to productive capital

Bullocks and plough equipment were productive assets, but ownership was unequal. Small cultivators could borrow, hire, share, or exchange animal power and implements. The ability to prepare land at the right moment affected yields and bargaining position.

Livestock also supplied manure, transport, milk, and status, while grazing required access to commons, fallows, riverbanks, and harvested fields. The agrarian economy therefore extended beyond the cropped plot.

Irrigation was local, ecological, and political

Wells, tanks, channels, embankments, field bunds, and river-fed systems operated at different scales. Their effectiveness depended on maintenance and control as well as engineering. In flood-prone north Bihar, drainage could be as important as adding water.

Official statistics that record 'irrigated area' can hide who controlled an outlet, who supplied labour for repair, and which fields benefited first. Water history is consequently also a history of rights and collective action.

Indigo and coercive commercial agriculture

Tirhut and adjoining north Bihar formed part of the nineteenth-century indigo world in which European factories, advances, contracts, landlords, amlas, and raiyats were tied together through unequal relations. The Indigo Commission of 1860 collected extensive testimony on planter-ryot relations, advances, coercion, police and court involvement, and the economics of cultivation; its evidence includes Tirhut but must be read as an enquiry produced during a political crisis (Indigo Commission 1860).

Indigo was not the whole rural economy, nor did every factory operate identically. Its historical importance lies in showing how global commodity demand could enter village land, credit, labour, and policing through local institutional forms.

After indigo: commercial agriculture did not disappear

The decline of natural indigo in the face of synthetic dyes and changing political conditions altered factory landscapes and contract relations, but did not return the countryside to a pre-commercial condition. Sugarcane, oilseeds, fibres, tobacco, grain trade, livestock, and other market-oriented production continued to connect cultivators to prices and credit.

Former factory lands and managerial networks could also be repurposed. The transition therefore belongs to the history of changing commodity regimes rather than a simple end of commercialization.

Credit joined production, rent, consumption, and crisis

Agrarian households borrowed for seed, cattle, rent, food, ceremonies, litigation, migration, and recovery after crop

failure. Lenders ranged from major merchants and estate-linked financiers to village moneylenders, traders, relatives, and better-off cultivators. 'The moneylender' was not a single social type.

Debt could enable production and mobility, but compound vulnerability when harvests failed or rent fell due. A loan secured by crop, labour, jewellery, or land did not create identical forms of dependence.

Kamia and kamiauti: bondage must be located, not generalized

Gyan Prakash's study of kamiauti in southern Bihar demonstrates how debt advances could create long-term labour ties between kamias and maliks and how colonial law tried to redefine such relations through the language of freedom and contract (Prakash 2003). The evidence is crucial for Bihar's labour history.

It should not, however, be generalized automatically to every district of Mithila or Anga. Attached labour, caste service, debt, and coercion existed in multiple forms. The correct comparison asks where similar mechanisms appear in local records and where they do not.

The Bihar and Orissa Kamiauti Agreement Act, 1920

The 1920 Kamiauti Agreement Act attempted to restrict the enforceability of debt-bondage arrangements in Bihar and Orissa. Its very existence shows that colonial governance had come to recognize kamiauti as a legal and political problem, while Prakash's analysis shows the limits of imagining that statutory 'freedom' automatically transformed material dependence (Prakash 2003).

Law could invalidate or weaken a bond without supplying land, alternative employment, credit, or social protection. The distance between legal emancipation and economic autonomy is therefore part of the history.

Agricultural labour was differentiated

Landless and near-landless labourers worked under daily, seasonal, harvest-share, attached, household-service, or debt-linked arrangements. Payment might be in cash, grain, meals, perquisites, access to land, or combinations of these. Gender and caste affected both task assignment and remuneration.

The category 'agricultural labourer' used in later censuses is useful for aggregate analysis but can conceal the different contracts and dependencies through which labour was actually mobilized.

Artisans belonged to the agrarian economy

Weavers, potters, smiths, carpenters, basket makers, oil pressers, leather workers, and other artisans were not external to the village economy. They converted agricultural raw materials, maintained implements, supplied domestic goods, and participated in periodic markets. Some cultivated land as well as practising a craft.

Changes in imported cloth, railway transport, factory goods, crop demand, and credit altered rural craft economies unevenly. 'Deindustrialization' should therefore be tested by craft, place, and period rather than used as a single undifferentiated event.

Haats and bazaars made the countryside porous

Periodic haats enabled small quantities of produce, livestock, salt, cloth, utensils, and other goods to circulate without requiring a permanent urban marketplace. Larger bazaars linked these circuits to wholesalers, merchants, transporters, moneylenders, and state officials. Yang's reconstruction demonstrates a layered marketing system rather than a sharp village-town divide (Yang 1998).

Market day also concentrated information. News of prices, employment, political meetings, court cases, pilgrimage, and distant opportunities travelled with traders and customers. The

bazaar was thus an institution of communication as well as exchange.

Fairs and pilgrimage were economic infrastructures

Melas and pilgrimage centres assembled temporary populations requiring food, transport, animals, lodging, ritual goods, entertainment, and credit. Religious movement therefore supported commercial exchange and information networks. Yang's analysis of Bihar's fairs is especially useful for avoiding a false separation between sacred and economic geography (Yang 1998).

A fair could also become a site of policing, taxation, disease control, political speech, and recruitment. Its history belongs simultaneously to religion, commerce, mobility, and the colonial state.

River transport remained important beside roads and railways

The Ganga and its tributaries moved grain, salt, timber, passengers, livestock, and information through eastern Bihar. Bhagalpur and Munger occupied important positions on the Ganga corridor, while smaller ferries connected local market systems. Railway expansion changed relative costs and speeds but did not instantly eliminate river transport.

Transport history must therefore be reconstructed as changing combinations of boat, cart, pack animal, road, railway, and foot travel. Seasonal water levels and flood damage shaped which route was usable at a given moment.

Anga and the Bhagalpur market field

Colonial Bhagalpur's economy linked the Ganga riverfront, district markets, weaving and craft production, agricultural hinterlands, and routes toward the Kosi-Purnea zone. Byrne's district gazetteer and P. W. Murphy's settlement report provide different windows on this field: one compiles administrative description, the other records land and rent categories produced through survey.

Neither should be used to retroactively define ancient Anga. The continuity relevant here is geographical connection through the eastern Ganga corridor, not an unchanged political territory.

Purnea: frontier, market, and agrarian mosaic

Purnea combined alluvial agriculture, riverine tracts, market towns, forest and grazing margins, and routes toward north Bengal and the Himalayan foothills. Its settlement records under Chapter X of the Bengal Tenancy Act reveal the same colonial drive to classify rights seen elsewhere, but under different ecological and estate conditions (Byrne 1908).

The region's mobility and environmental variability make it especially hazardous to reconstruct social structure from district averages alone.

Kosi and diara: property on moving ground

River erosion, channel migration, and accretion could destroy fields, create new land, cut villages off from markets, and move the physical object over which a legal claim was asserted. Diara property was therefore not merely ordinary land located beside a river; its boundaries and even its existence could change.

The Kosi diara settlement reports for Bhagalpur and Purnea are exceptionally valuable because they document administrative attempts to map and settle rights in a landscape known to be unstable. The record is evidence of both geomorphic change and the state's effort to stabilize ownership on paper (Prasad 1932).

Accretion and erosion redistributed opportunity and loss

Newly deposited land could become valuable, while erosion could erase cultivated plots and weaken a household's claim to livelihood. Disputes over newly formed or re-emerged land brought together custom, riparian law, estate claims, survey technology, and local possession.

Environmental change therefore had social distributional effects. A flood was not experienced identically by a large estate, an occupancy tenant, a sharecropper, and a landless labourer.

Floods were recurrent conditions, not exceptional interruptions

In the north Bihar plains, inundation could fertilize fields, replenish wetlands, disrupt transport, damage crops, spread disease, and force temporary movement. The same hydrological event might create benefit in one micro-landscape and disaster in another.

This variability cautions against a simple narrative in which 'flood control' is always unambiguously productive. Embankments and drainage works redistribute water and risk spatially.

Common lands, grazing, fisheries, and river access

Agrarian livelihoods depended on resources that were not reducible to privately cropped fields: grazing grounds, ponds, fisheries, riverbanks, reeds, fuel, fodder, and seasonal commons. Estates and governments could seek to monetize or regulate these resources through leases, tolls, or exclusive rights.

When survey and settlement converted customary access into mapped categories, some users gained legal recognition and others could lose flexibility. The history of commons is therefore central to inequality.

Diagram 35: circulation was part of agrarian survival

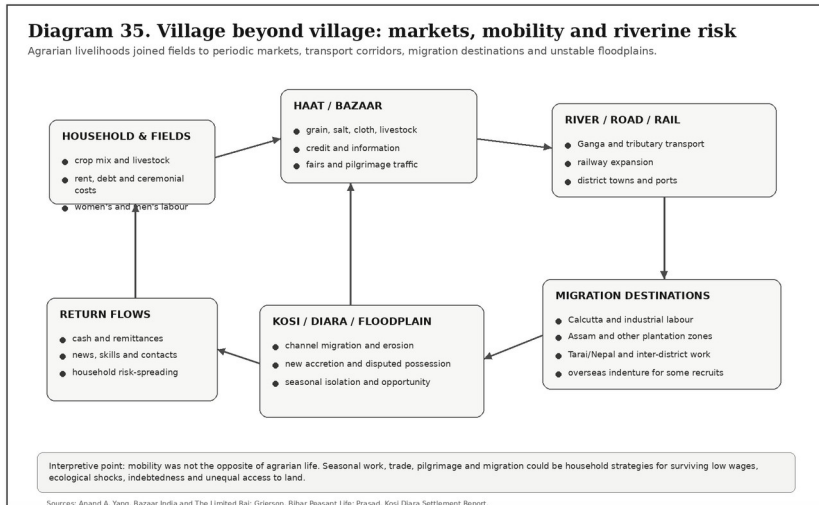


Diagram 35. Village beyond village: markets, mobility and riverine risk.

Original analytical diagram for this volume. Sources: Anand A. Yang; George A. Grierson; Ray Hardatta Prasad.

Mobility as livelihood strategy

Seasonal labour, movement into the Tarai, service in towns, pilgrimage, and long-distance migration formed part of household strategies well before the contemporary era. Leaving the village did not necessarily mean permanent rupture. Migrants could return for cultivation, marriage, festivals, inheritance, or retirement and could send cash and information home.

Yang's work on Saran provides especially clear evidence that colonial Bihar was highly mobile. Its exact migration rates cannot be transferred to every district, but the broader lesson is decisive: rurality and mobility were not opposites (Yang 1989).

Calcutta and the eastward labour corridor

Calcutta's docks, mills, construction, transport, domestic service, and informal economy drew workers from Bihar. Eastern districts including Munger, Bhagalpur, Purnea and

adjoining areas participated in this wider movement, though the intensity and social composition varied by locality.

Circular migration could diversify household income while leaving women, elders, and other family members to manage cultivation and domestic responsibilities. Remittances altered village consumption, debt, and status without eliminating dependence on land.

Assam and plantation recruitment

From the nineteenth century, colonial labour recruitment connected parts of Bihar and neighbouring regions to Assam's plantation economy. Recruitment systems could involve advances, contracts, intermediaries, deception, and coercive regulation. The districts contributing labour changed over time, and the Chotanagpur plateau was especially significant; it would be inaccurate to describe all plantation migrants simply as peasants from Mithila.

For this volume the Assam connection is treated as one branch of a wider labour geography, to be documented district by district rather than assumed from the provincial label 'Bihar.'

Overseas indenture and the wider horizon of migration

From the nineteenth century, recruitment from Bihar also fed overseas indentured labour systems in Mauritius, the Caribbean, Fiji, and other colonies. Surviving recruitment records include districts now within both western and eastern Bihar. The existence of this flow shows that agrarian crisis and labour mobility operated within imperial networks extending far beyond Bengal Presidency.

Recruitment totals and caste composition require dedicated depot and ship-list evidence; this chapter therefore uses overseas indenture as a documented horizon of mobility rather than assigning unsupported local percentages.

Migration redistributed gendered work

When working-age men migrated seasonally or for longer periods, women and other household members could assume greater responsibility for cultivation, livestock, debt management, and relations with landlords or officials. This did not automatically produce greater property rights or autonomy.

Migration history must therefore be reconstructed from both destination records and the households that remained in the village. The absence of a migrant from a census night is not the whole social story.

Wages, food, and the problem of comparison

Colonial reports sometimes recorded agricultural wages in cash or grain, but comparisons across years are difficult unless prices, payment in kind, meals, work duration, season, gender, and task are known. A nominal wage increase could coincide with declining purchasing power.

The same caution applies to rent and crop prices. Numbers become historically meaningful only when converted into the institutional and ecological conditions under which they were paid.

Scarcity, famine, and household strategies

Bad harvests and food-price shocks did not affect all rural households equally. Large landholders could possess stores, credit, and diversified income; small cultivators might sell assets or borrow; labourers faced both high food prices and reduced employment. Migration, forest and wetland resources, charity, public works, and kinship support could become survival strategies.

The memory of the 1770 famine and later nineteenth-century scarcities also shaped colonial debates about revenue, relief, transport, and agricultural improvement.

Markets were also spaces of regulation and surveillance

Colonial officials and landlords sought to regulate market tolls, weights, policing, sanitation, assembly, and sometimes the location of trade. A haat could generate estate income and simultaneously create a crowd outside routine village supervision.

Political organizers recognized the same spatial advantage. Markets and fairs could disseminate petitions, rumours, newspapers, and speeches, which helps explain why economic and political histories of the bazaar cannot be separated.

Caste associations and agrarian claims

Late-colonial caste associations, petitions, genealogies, and claims to status often intersected with struggles over education, office, land, and political representation. These movements did not simply preserve ancient identities; they actively reformulated social categories under census, electoral, and associational conditions.

The c.1800 Śrotriya reconstruction adopted in this volume belongs to this broader methodological insight: a ranked category found in a later institutional order should not be assumed to possess the same antiquity as the lineage memories it invokes.

Peasant politics was not socially homogeneous

The word 'peasant' can unite cultivators against landlord or state demands while concealing differences between substantial occupancy raiyats, smallholders, sharecroppers, landless labourers, and rural creditors. Caste, religion, locality, and tenure shaped who could organize and what demands appeared legitimate.

The 1919-20 Darbhanga mobilization is therefore best read as an important agrarian coalition rather than proof of a permanently unified rural class.

From protest to organized kisan politics

The north Bihar agitation of 1919-20 preceded the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha founded in 1929. Later kisan politics developed a wider language of tenant rights, zamindari oppression, rent reduction, and agrarian representation. The genealogy is not linear, but earlier disputes created organizational memories and repertoires of petition, meeting, and mass assembly.

Because Chapter 17 already reconstructs the Darbhanga episode in detail, the present chapter uses it to connect everyday tenancy conflict with the later emergence of explicitly agrarian political organizations.

Colonial knowledge could reinforce hierarchy while exposing it

Settlement officers, census officials, gazetteer compilers, and ethnographers often wrote through assumptions about caste, tribe, landlord, tenant, productivity, and 'custom.' Their classifications could harden social differences and become usable in court or administration.

At the same time, these archives preserve evidence of contested rents, labour arrangements, women's property, market practices, migration, and local vocabulary that would otherwise be difficult to recover. Critical use means neither accepting nor discarding them wholesale.

Statistics require denominator discipline

A district total for cultivated acreage, tenancy classes, caste population, wages, or migration is only meaningful when its date, territorial boundary, unit, method, and denominator are known. District boundaries changed, census categories shifted, and settlement operations covered different estates at different times.

This volume therefore avoids converting isolated colonial numbers into timeless percentages. Where a quantitative claim

matters, the source's geographic and classificatory frame must accompany it.

The countryside was connected before it was modernized

Roads, railways, courts, cadastral surveys, and commercialization transformed rural Bihar, but they did not create connectivity from nothing. Ferries, pilgrimage, itinerant trade, marriage networks, cattle movement, seasonal labour, and river commerce long predated colonial infrastructure.

The historical change lies in the scale, speed, legal form, and political control of circulation. Colonial institutions reweighted existing networks and created new ones.

Continuity after Permanent Settlement was selective

The Permanent Settlement preserved major landed intermediaries while changing the legal basis of their relationship to the state. Later tenancy law, survey, revenue-sale procedures, estate management, and political mobilization repeatedly modified the countryside. It is therefore misleading to imagine one unaltered 'zamindari system' lasting from 1793 to abolition.

The same caution applies to caste and labour. Institutions could retain names while their legal and economic content changed.

Agrarian society across Mithila, Vajji, and Anga: a relational model

A relational reconstruction begins with households and plots but follows rights upward to estates and courts, goods outward to haats and regional markets, labour toward migration destinations, and rivers across mapped boundaries. It also traces return flows: money, news, skills, religious ideas, and political organization.

This model keeps Mithila, the Vaishali-Muzaffarpur zone, Bhagalpur-Anga, Purnea, the Tarai, and the Ganga corridor in

one connected history without pretending that their tenancy structures or caste relations were identical.

Conclusion: land was never only land

Agrarian history is a history of claims over soil, crop, water, labour, credit, mobility, genealogy, and evidence. A cadastral line could determine rent; a flood could erase the line; a market could turn grain into cash; a debt could bind labour; migration could sustain the household that remained; caste could shape access to each of these resources.

The strongest interpretation is therefore neither a romantic village community nor a single model of colonial exploitation. It is a layered system in which law, estate power, markets, ecology, household strategy, caste, and labour continually remade one another.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Bengal (India). Indigo Commission. Report of the Indigo Commission Appointed Under Act XI. of 1860: With the Minutes of Evidence Taken Before Them; and Appendix. Calcutta, 1860.
- Government of Bengal. The Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885 (Act VIII of 1885).
- Government of Bihar and Orissa. Bihar and Orissa Kamiauti Agreement Act, 1920.
- Grierson, George A. Bihār Peasant Life: Being a Discursive Catalogue of the Surroundings of the People of that Province. Bengal Secretariat Press, 1885; 2nd rev. ed., Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1926.
- Kerr, J. H. Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Darbhanga District, 1896 to 1903. Government printing edition, 1926.
- Murphy, P. W. Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Bhagalpur District, 1902-1910. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1912.
- Byrne, J. Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations under Chapter X of the Bengal Tenancy Act in the District of Purnea, 1901-1908. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1908.
- Prasad, Ray Hardatta. Final Report on the Kosi Diara Survey and Settlement Operations in the Districts of Bhagalpur and Purnea, 1926-1931. Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1932.
- O'Malley, L. S. S. Bengal District Gazetteers: Darbhanga. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1907.

- O'Malley, L. S. S. Bengal District Gazetteers: Monghyr. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1909.
- Byrne, J. F. Bengal District Gazetteers: Bhagalpur. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1911.
- O'Malley, L. S. S. Bengal District Gazetteers: Purnea. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1911.
- Yang, Anand A. *The Limited Raj: Agrarian Relations in Colonial India, Saran District, 1793-1920*. University of California Press, 1989.
- Yang, Anand A. *Bazaar India: Markets, Society, and the Colonial State in Bihar*. University of California Press, 1998.
- Prakash, Gyan. *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India*. Cambridge University Press, 1990; reprint 2003.
- Henningham, Stephen. 'Agrarian Relations in North Bihar: Peasant Protest and the Darbhanga Raj, 1919-20.' *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 16, no. 1 (1979): 53-75.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/001946467901600103>.

Chapter 19. Rivers, calamity, transport, and the colonial state

A floodplain governed through records

Colonial rule in north Bihar and the eastern Ganga plain encountered a landscape in which rivers altered fields, roads, ferries, administrative boundaries, and taxable assets. The state answered with surveys, flood reports, embankment files, railway engineering, remission rules, relief codes, and district statistics. These records make environmental change unusually visible, but they were produced for government purposes and must be read as interventions as well as descriptions.

The central question is therefore not whether the colonial state 'controlled' the rivers. It did not. The historical problem is how officials, zamindars, engineers, merchants, cultivators, boatmen, and labourers redistributed risk while trying to protect revenue, communication, settlements, crops, and property. Christopher Hill and Praveen Singh both emphasize that river management became a field of social control and political conflict rather than a purely technical response to nature.

Rivers were infrastructure before railways

The Ganga, Gandak, Bagmati, Kosi, Mahananda, and their distributaries carried boats, supplied fisheries, watered fields, deposited silt, and created ferries and market points long before the railway age. Seasonal navigation and crossing conditions varied sharply. A river could connect a bazaar to wider exchange in one season and isolate the same locality after channel migration or flood damage.

Transport history must therefore begin with water. Railway and road systems were inserted into an already active network of channels, landing places, seasonal tracks, ferries, cattle routes, and pilgrim itineraries. The new infrastructure did not replace this older mobility in a single transition.

The Kosi as a moving river system

The Kosi occupied a broad alluvial fan and repeatedly shifted among channels across the north Bihar plain. Colonial officers encountered erosion, deposition, waterlogging, sand casting, abandoned channels, and newly formed diara land as recurrent administrative problems. The later image of a single river permanently confined between embankments should not be projected backward onto the nineteenth century.

Settlement reports and later geomorphological work allow course change to be reconstructed, but each map belongs to its own date and survey purpose. This volume therefore avoids converting a sequence of historical maps into an exact year-by-year river position where the evidence does not support that precision.

Bagmati, Kamla, Gandak and the multiplicity of flood regimes

North Bihar did not experience one uniform flood regime. The Bagmati and Kamla crossed low-gradient plains with shifting channels and drainage interactions; the Gandak carried Himalayan sediment toward the Ganga; smaller channels could become locally destructive even when they were absent from provincial narratives. District boundaries also cut across river systems.

Policy consequently varied by tract. An embankment that appeared effective on one reach could cause drainage congestion elsewhere. Comparisons across rivers are useful only when the local channel pattern, floodplain elevation, maintenance system, and downstream effects are specified.

The Ganga, chars and diaras

Along the Ganga and its tributaries, accretion and erosion produced chars and diaras whose legal and fiscal status could be disputed. A newly emerged tract might be fertile but unstable; a village recorded in one survey could lose land to the river before

the next. These processes linked physical change to tenancy, estate boundaries, policing, and assessment.

The colonial archive therefore contains both geomorphological evidence and legal argument. Survey maps, settlement reports, boundary proceedings, and revenue cases should be compared rather than treated as interchangeable descriptions of land.

Alluvion and diluvion as legal problems

River-made land forced the colonial state to translate dynamic floodplain processes into property categories. Accretion could enlarge a holding, while diluvion could erase it; re-formation raised disputes about continuity of title and boundary. Legal doctrine did not stop river movement, but it shaped which claims could be recognized after the channel changed.

This juridical layer is important because the physical river and the cadastral river were not always the same object. Survey lines, court decrees, estate papers, and actual channels could diverge, especially in years of rapid erosion or avulsion.

Permanent Settlement and hydraulic responsibility

The Permanent Settlement fixed government revenue demands on recognized estates but did not produce a simple rule for who must maintain every embankment, drainage cut, or river work. Harrison's 1875 Bengal Embankment Manual shows that government intervention after 1793 involved continuing disputes over responsibility, benefit, cost recovery, and state control.

Hydraulic works therefore sat uneasily between private property and public risk. A bund on one estate might protect taxable crops while transferring water to another. The state repeatedly had to decide when an ostensibly local structure had consequences large enough to justify public supervision.

The Bengal Embankment Act of 1873

The Bengal Embankment Act, 1873, was enacted on 24 December 1873. It provided a statutory framework for government action relating to embankments and associated land. Harrison's manual, published in 1875, explained the administrative history and controversies that had accumulated since the Permanent Settlement.

The Act should not be read as the moment when embankments first appeared. Bunds and flood banks were much older. Its importance lies in formalizing powers and procedures within a colonial legal order that increasingly treated river works as matters of engineering, revenue, land acquisition, and public administration.

Zamindars as hydraulic intermediaries

Praveen Singh shows that zamindars became central intermediaries in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century flood control in north Bihar. Estate interests could favour embankments that protected valuable cultivation, roads, or settlements. Government, however, did not always agree with local proprietors about the long-term effects of those works.

This relationship was neither simple partnership nor permanent opposition. At different moments the state compelled repairs, tolerated private construction, debated removal, or shifted financial responsibility. Hydraulic authority was therefore layered in much the same way as agrarian rights.

Indigo, plantations and private bunds

Commercial agriculture could create its own hydraulic priorities. Later studies of the colonial floodplain note private embankments associated with plantation and estate interests, including works intended to shield crop zones. These structures entered a wider drainage system whether or not they had been planned as regional works.

The historical point is not that every private bund caused flooding. It is that cumulative construction could alter the movement of water, and responsibility for those combined effects was difficult to assign within a property regime organized estate by estate.

Roads and railways became hydraulic structures

Raised roads and railway embankments crossed natural drainage lines and therefore acted as hydraulic structures as well as transport routes. Culverts and bridges were intended to pass water, but openings could become inadequate when channels shifted or flood volumes changed. Colonial records repeatedly linked insufficient waterways to local flooding and waterlogging.

This dual role complicates celebratory narratives of infrastructure. A railway could reduce the cost of moving grain while simultaneously obstructing drainage in a neighbouring tract. The same work could increase resilience at one scale and vulnerability at another.

Insufficient waterways and the archive of complaint

Selections from colonial railway records cited by Praveen Singh include files from 1896-1905 concerning insufficient waterways on the Tirhut State Railway. Such records are valuable because they connect engineering specifications with petitions, flood observations, and the recurring need to enlarge or alter openings.

Complaints do not prove that every reported flood was caused by a railway embankment. They do show that local people and officials understood transport works as part of the hydraulic landscape rather than as neutral lines laid across it.

Flood reports as an administrative genre

The Bihar State Archives' digitized collection on colonial floods demonstrates how routine reporting developed across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Files cover crop

damage, inundation, relief, bund construction, river boundaries, survey of diaras, and later telegraphic reporting procedures.

A flood report was not a transparent photograph of suffering. It followed administrative categories: acreage damaged, roads cut, relief required, prices, mortality, and revenue effects. What could be counted was more likely to enter the permanent record than household losses, unpaid care work, or displacement that did not meet official thresholds.

The floods of 1871

The Bihar State Archives catalogue preserves multiple files from 1871 on floods in Tirhut and Purnea, including damage from the Bagmati and heavy rain. Their clustering shows that flood administration was already producing cross-district correspondence before the famine and railway crises of the mid-1870s.

These records are especially useful when read with district gazetteers and later settlement reports, because each source class emphasizes a different temporal scale: immediate emergency, retrospective district description, or cadastral reclassification.

The Kosi bund file of 1895

The Bihar State Archives catalogue includes an 1895 file on the erection of bunds along the Kosi River. The catalogue entry is a secure archival anchor for official attention to Kosi embankment proposals or works in that year; it does not by itself establish the exact length, effectiveness, or continuity of any structure.

This distinction matters because later flood-control histories can compress separate local bunds into a single imagined system. The chapter therefore cites the archival horizon without inventing a continuous nineteenth-century Kosi embankment line.

River movement and the Nepal-British boundary

A 1907 Bihar archival file concerns changes in a river course forming part of the boundary between Nepal and British territory in the Patna Division. The file illustrates a larger borderland problem: when a boundary followed a mobile river, physical change could acquire diplomatic and cadastral consequences.

The colonial border was thus not merely a surveyed line imposed on static terrain. Rivers required repeated observation, correspondence, and negotiation. This is one reason the history of Mithila cannot be separated cleanly into modern national containers.

Floods of 1913 and the expansion of public debate

Floods in Bihar and Orissa in 1913 generated official reports and legislative questions about damage and prevention. By the following years, questions concerning Champaran, Darbhanga, and Muzaffarpur addressed both relief and the history of recurring floods.

The growing public record reflects provincialization after 1912 as well as the widening of representative institutions. Flood control became a subject on which engineers, administrators, landlords, legislators, and affected communities could make competing claims about responsibility.

The 1915-1917 flood-control questions

Bihar and Orissa council questions from 1915-1917, preserved in the state archive catalogue, asked about flood prevention, past flood history, relief measures, and engineering schemes. Their form reveals an important political transition: disasters could be used to demand explanations from government rather than being treated solely as district administrative events.

This did not make policy democratic in a modern sense. Representation remained limited, and many floodplain residents lacked direct institutional voice. Nevertheless, the

archive of questions and answers helps reconstruct how river management entered provincial politics.

Surveying the diaras

Diaras demanded repeated measurement because the terrain itself changed. Survey operations along the Gandak, Gogra, Ganga, Kosi, and other rivers attempted to stabilize rights and boundaries on paper even when channels continued to migrate. Maps became instruments of both knowledge and adjudication.

The resulting cadastral precision should not be confused with physical permanence. A survey can be highly accurate for the date of observation and still become obsolete after erosion, accretion, or avulsion.

The Kosi Diara surveys of the 1920s

Nalinindra Lal Bose's report on the Kosi Diara area of Purnea and Ray Hardatta Prasad's later report on Bhagalpur and Purnea provide unusually detailed colonial attempts to classify land in an actively changing river environment. The later operations extended through 1926-1931.

These reports connect geomorphology to tenures, rents, settlement boundaries, and cultivation. They are therefore foundational sources for the social history of the Kosi, but their categories must be read as products of settlement administration rather than timeless local classifications.

Local knowledge and engineering knowledge

Cultivators, boatmen, fishers, ferrymen, estate staff, and village officials accumulated practical knowledge of channels, drainage paths, breach points, and seasonal crossings. Engineers brought surveying instruments, hydraulic calculations, standardized drawings, and comparative experience from other regions.

The two knowledge systems were not simply opposites. Officials relied on local testimony, while villagers could use engineering language in petitions. The more useful historical

question is whose knowledge entered a sanctioned plan, whose observations were discounted, and who bore the cost when a design failed.

From confidence to engineering scepticism

Praveen Singh's reconstruction shows that by the 1930s some engineers had become strongly sceptical of attempts to confine north Bihar rivers and favoured removing embankments where possible. This technical shift arose from accumulated experience of drainage obstruction, sedimentation, and unintended effects.

Yet existing 'protected' zones generated political constituencies for keeping embankments. Once cultivation, roads, settlements, and property expectations adjusted to a structure, removal could appear as a new threat. Hydraulic policy therefore acquired path dependence before the postcolonial era.

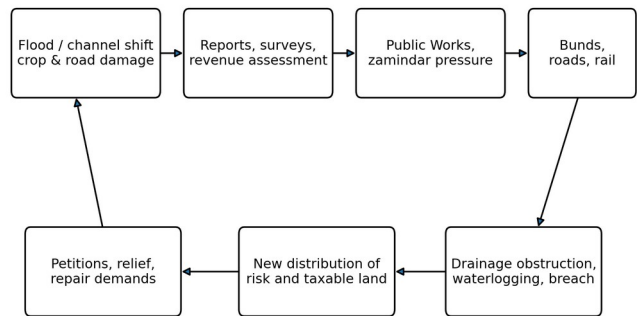
Flood control as distribution, not elimination

No embankment eliminated flood risk for an entire basin. It redistributed the timing, depth, location, and political visibility of water. Areas behind a bund might avoid frequent shallow floods while becoming vulnerable to waterlogging or a severe breach; areas outside might receive concentrated flows.

This distributive perspective is more historically useful than asking whether colonial flood control 'worked' in the abstract. Success and failure depended on scale, beneficiary, season, maintenance, and the counterfactual against which a project was judged.

Diagram 36: colonial river governance as a feedback system

Diagram 36 analytical model: colonial river governance as a feedback system



The loop was not automatic: responsibilities and outcomes differed by river, estate, district and decade.

Diagram 36. Colonial river governance as a feedback system.

Original analytical diagram for this volume. Sources: Harrison 1875; Hill 1997; Singh 2008; Bihar State Archives flood collection.

The 1873-1874 Bihar famine

The famine crisis of 1873-1874 exposed the vulnerability of north Bihar to crop failure, high prices, and weak transport. Contemporary government response placed unusual emphasis on importing and moving grain. The crisis became one of the contexts in which railway construction was justified as both immediate relief and long-term infrastructure.

Famine history must still distinguish availability from entitlement. Grain movement could improve while poor households remained unable to purchase food. Roads and railways changed the logistics of relief; they did not erase inequalities of income, credit, caste, or access to state assistance.

Relief works and the making of the famine line

The official history of the East Central Railway identifies the Dalsinghsarai-Samastipur-Darbhanga route as the 'Famine Line.' Construction began in the famine context and a 43-mile line

opened to the public on 1 November 1875 under the state-owned Tirhut Railway. Earlier temporary operation and relief construction preceded the permanent opening.

The line is important because transport infrastructure and disaster administration were institutionally linked. Labour on works could provide wages, while the finished railway promised faster movement of grain and officials. A relief project could therefore become a durable instrument of market integration and state reach.

From temporary relief line to Tirhut State Railway

The famine line did not remain an isolated emergency track. The permanent railway was developed through later extensions connecting Samastipur, Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, and additional north Bihar routes. A project born in scarcity became part of a regional transport network.

That transformation also changed land values, market orientation, travel time, and administrative access. Yet the chronology of individual branches must be kept distinct; later extensions should not be backdated to the original 1874-1875 famine construction.

Railway expansion and uneven integration

Railways allowed grain, cash crops, passengers, mail, and officials to move farther and faster, but access depended on distance from stations and the condition of feeder roads and ferries. A village several kilometres from the line could remain difficult to reach during the monsoon.

The network therefore produced corridors and nodes rather than uniform modernization. Some bazaars gained traffic; others lost passing trade. Transport advantage became a new component of regional inequality.

Railway ferries and broken lines

Before major bridges spanned every large river, railway systems relied on ferries to connect discontinuous sections.

Historical railway reports describe ferry connections across river channels, including links associated with Kosi extensions. Passengers and goods therefore moved through combined rail-water systems.

This hybrid infrastructure is easily forgotten in maps that show continuous later railway routes. In the colonial period a 'rail journey' could include transfer to boat, seasonal delays, and the relocation of a ghat as channels shifted.

The Kosi and the railway frontier

Railway extension toward the Kosi and Nepal frontier was constrained by the same river mobility that made transport desirable. Alignments required embankments, bridges, and ferries in terrain where channels could migrate and approaches could be damaged by flood.

Transport policy thus reproduced the central hydraulic dilemma: building a fixed line across a mobile landscape demanded continuing maintenance and sometimes redirected water. The railway was not simply laid upon the floodplain; it became part of it.

Roads, bridges and district government

Metalled roads and bridges expanded the reach of district headquarters, courts, police, schools, markets, and medical relief. Their importance is visible precisely when they failed: flood reports routinely recorded cut roads, damaged bridges, interrupted ferries, and isolated police stations or market centres.

A road network therefore belonged to the administrative geography of the state. Repair priorities reveal which routes officials considered essential for revenue, policing, commerce, and relief.

Transport and pilgrimage

Railways and roads altered pilgrimage to Janakpur, Simraongarh-area shrines, Ganga ghats, and other sacred

centres by shortening some journeys and changing where travellers assembled. Older foot, bullock-cart, and river routes continued alongside stations and branch lines.

Pilgrimage traffic also reinforced commercial networks. Fairs, lodging, food markets, animal trade, and religious travel shared infrastructure, making it difficult to separate sacred mobility from economic mobility.

Markets after the railway

Railway stations became new points of aggregation for grain, oilseeds, livestock, cloth, salt, and migrant labour. Yet market integration remained dependent on local roads, credit networks, wholesalers, and river crossings. Price convergence was therefore uneven.

The chapter treats railway expansion as a change in transaction costs rather than as automatic development. Who benefited depended on control of produce, access to credit, ability to travel, and exposure to new competition.

Disaster and the politics of repair

Flood or famine transformed routine public works into urgent political questions. Which bridge was repaired first, which embankment was cut, which road received relief labour, and which village qualified for assistance all distributed public resources.

Repair records can therefore reveal state priorities more clearly than completed-project lists. They show infrastructure as a continuing fiscal commitment rather than a one-time act of construction.

Malaria, drainage and waterlogging

Colonial debate about drainage increasingly linked stagnant water, embankments, and public health. By the early twentieth century, official discussions of drainage and river utilization also considered malaria and the agricultural effects of waterlogging.

Medical and engineering explanations changed over time, so retrospective certainty should be avoided. What is historically secure is that drainage became simultaneously a sanitary, agrarian, and hydraulic problem within provincial administration.

Weather observation and the numerical state

Rain gauges, river observations, crop estimates, price series, and damage returns expanded the numerical archive of calamity. These measurements made comparison possible across districts and years, but their coverage and reliability were uneven.

A number in a government report is therefore evidence of both an event and a reporting system. Missing data may reflect administrative absence rather than absence of rain, flood, hunger, or damage.

Maps, gauges and the production of a manageable river

Survey maps and water-level observations translated mobile rivers into lines, levels, and sections that engineers could compare. Such representations were indispensable to planning, yet they necessarily simplified a landscape of multiple channels, local depressions, seasonal wetlands, and informal cuts.

The history of colonial science is strongest when maps are read alongside field notes, petitions, maintenance files, and subsequent channel change. A map could guide intervention while also concealing processes outside its scale.

Calamity archives and social invisibility

Administrative disaster files often privilege taxable land, public buildings, roads, and officially registered deaths. Loss of fodder, domestic utensils, unpaid household labour, fisheries access, common grazing, and informal housing could be recorded inconsistently or not at all.

This archival imbalance intersects with caste, class, gender, and landholding. The households most vulnerable to

displacement were often those least able to produce documentary proof of loss.

The earthquake of 15 January 1934

On 15 January 1934 a major earthquake devastated large areas of north Bihar and Nepal. The Geological Survey of India's Memoir 73, published in 1939, remains a foundational scientific account, combining intensity observations, geology, ground effects, eyewitness reports, and damage to structures and infrastructure.

The chapter uses the exact date as secure while avoiding the uncritical transfer of later magnitude estimates into the contemporary record. Modern seismology can reassess the event, but colonial reports should be cited for what they actually observed and calculated.

Ground failure on the alluvial plain

The 1934 memoir documented fissuring, subsidence, sand and water eruptions, and severe ground disturbance in parts of the Ganga plain. Such effects help explain why damage varied even among buildings of similar apparent construction.

The event demonstrates that disaster cannot be reduced to the shaking source alone. Soil conditions, groundwater, building materials, maintenance, settlement density, and infrastructure design shaped local consequences.

Darbhanga and the earthquake

Darbhanga lay within the severely affected north Bihar zone. Estate buildings, public structures, houses, roads, and communications all entered the reconstruction archive. Damage to elite architecture is often better photographed and described than damage to ordinary dwellings, creating a strong visual bias in later memory.

A balanced account therefore uses palace and institutional damage as evidence without allowing it to stand for the total social impact of the earthquake.

Muzaffarpur and the central damage tract

Muzaffarpur and adjoining areas were among the tracts closely documented in scientific and administrative accounts of the earthquake. Reports recorded building collapse, ground effects, communications disruption, and the difficulties of immediate relief.

Local variation cautions against assigning a single intensity or damage ratio to an entire district. The memoir's detailed observations are more useful than a generalized regional label.

Monghyr, Bhagalpur and the eastern field

The earthquake's effects extended into the eastern Ganga region, including Monghyr district, which receives specific treatment in the Geological Survey memoir. This connects the disaster history of Mithila with Anga and the wider Bihar plain rather than confining it to Darbhanga alone.

Infrastructure damage in the east also affected through-routes linking Patna, north Bihar, Bengal, and the Ganga corridor, showing how a regional earthquake could become a network-wide transport event.

Bridges, rails and communications after the earthquake

The Geological Survey memoir includes dedicated observations on bridges and other engineered structures. Damage to tracks, bridge approaches, roads, telegraph or administrative communications could delay relief even when the transport network had previously increased connectivity.

The earthquake therefore reversed the normal logic of infrastructure: systems designed to accelerate movement became vulnerable links whose failure determined where help could arrive quickly.

Relief administration in 1934

W. B. Brett's 1935 report documents measures taken by the Bihar and Orissa government through the end of 1934. Relief

required damage assessment, camps, medical support, grants, loans, transport, temporary shelter, and reconstruction decisions across a very large affected area.

Such reports show administrative capacity, but they also define eligibility. The categories used to distribute assistance shaped whose losses became compensable and whose recovery depended on family, landlord, credit, charity, or migration.

Reconstruction and new building practices

Earthquake reconstruction encouraged renewed attention to structural design, building materials, and public works standards. Scientific investigation and administrative rebuilding became connected: observed failures were turned into lessons for future construction.

The result was not a uniform transition to earthquake-resistant architecture. Cost, technical capacity, local materials, and the distinction between public and private construction limited the reach of new standards.

Earthquake memory and the politics of evidence

Photographs, palace ruins, official reports, memoirs, and oral recollection created different memories of 1934. Monumental damage can dominate visual history because it was photographed, while household displacement and long-term debt are less visible.

The chapter therefore distinguishes spectacular evidence from representative evidence. A famous photograph may be authentic without being statistically typical.

Famine, flood and earthquake were not one category

Colonial administration increasingly grouped calamities within systems of relief and public works, but famine, flood, and earthquake operated through different physical mechanisms and temporalities. Famine could develop over months through crop and price failure; floods could arrive seasonally or suddenly; earthquakes struck without hydrological warning.

Comparing them is useful for studying state capacity and inequality, not for erasing their differences. Each disaster generated its own evidentiary problems and forms of vulnerability.

Calamity as a test of the colonial state

Disasters exposed the gap between claims of administrative order and the physical limits of government. Relief could demonstrate logistical capacity and humanitarian concern, while failures revealed thin staffing, poor roads, contested statistics, and unequal access.

Public criticism of relief and flood policy became part of provincial politics. Calamity therefore shaped legitimacy as well as mortality and material loss.

From colonial debates to postcolonial river engineering

By the 1940s north Bihar's flood problem had accumulated a long archive of embankment controversy, drainage complaints, surveys, and proposals. Postcolonial governments inherited not an untouched basin but a landscape already reorganized by estates, railways, roads, cadastral boundaries, and partial river works.

Chapter 26 returns to the Kosi after independence. The analytical continuity is institutional: postcolonial barrage and embankment projects emerged from earlier debates, but their scale, treaty framework, and engineering system were new and should not be backdated into the colonial period.

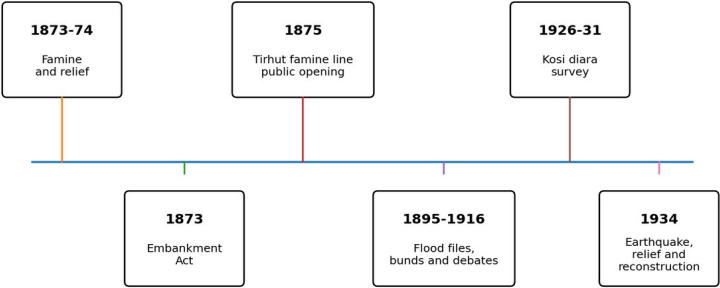
Source control: event, report and retrospective interpretation

This chapter uses three evidentiary levels. Dated laws, archival files, railway openings, survey operations, and the 1934 earthquake provide firm chronological anchors. District reports and engineering memoirs describe conditions through official categories. Later scholarship interprets the political and environmental consequences of those interventions.

Keeping these levels separate prevents a common error in environmental history: turning a later diagnosis into a statement that colonial officials already possessed the same explanation at the time of action.

Diagram 37: calamity, transport and state-building chronology

Diagram 37. Calamity, transport and state-building: selected colonial anchors



Chronology shows documented interventions, not a claim that disasters alone caused administrative expansion.

Diagram 37. Calamity, transport and state-building: selected colonial anchors.

Original analytical diagram for this volume. Sources: Bengal Embankment Act 1873; East Central Railway historical note; Bihar State Archives; Prasad 1932; Dunn et al. 1939.

What changed by the end of colonial rule

By 1947 the region possessed denser transport networks, more formalized flood administration, wider cadastral coverage, and a much larger archive of engineering knowledge than it had in 1765. Yet rivers remained mobile, disaster losses remained unequal, and infrastructure itself had become part of the hydraulic system.

The colonial legacy was therefore double. It expanded the capacity to measure, move, repair, and intervene while also fixing property, roads, rail embankments, and administrative expectations into a landscape that continued to move.

Chapter conclusion: mobility, risk and state power

The history of rivers and calamity cannot be separated from the history of transport. The famine railway, flood embankments, roads, ferries, cadastral surveys, and earthquake reconstruction all show the state attempting to stabilize circulation and revenue in a physically unstable environment.

The most durable lesson is not that technology failed or succeeded once and for all. Every intervention redistributed access and risk. A connected history of Mithila, Vajji, and Anga must therefore treat environmental change, infrastructure, property, and political authority as a single field of historical analysis.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Harrison, Henry Leland. *The Bengal Embankment Manual: Containing an Account of the Action of the Government in Dealing with Embankments and Water-courses since the Permanent Settlement; a Discussion of the Principles of the Act of 1873*. Bengal Secretariat Press, 1875.
- Hill, Christopher V. *River of Sorrow: Environment and Social Control in Riparian North India, 1770-1994*. Association for Asian Studies, 1997.
- Singh, Praveen. 'The Colonial State, Zamindars and the Politics of Flood Control in North Bihar (1850-1945).' *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 45, no. 2 (2008): 239-259.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/001946460804500203>.
- Government of Bengal. *The Bengal Embankment Act, 1873 (Bengal Act VI of 1873)*, enacted 24 December 1873.
- Bihar State Archives. *Flood in Colonial Bihar (1871-1939): Selected Digitized Collection*. Government of Bihar.
- Bose, Nalinindra Lal. *Final Report of Survey and Settlement Operations of the Kosi Diara Area of the District of Purnea, 1923-26*. Government of Bihar and Orissa, 1927.
- Prasad, Ray Hardatta. *Final Report on the Kosi Diara Survey and Settlement Operations in the Districts of Bhagalpur and Purnea, 1926-1931*. Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1932.
- Inglis, W. A. *The Canals and the Flood Banks of Bengal*. Bengal Secretariat Press, 1909.
- Inglis, W. A. *A Review of the Legislation in Bengal Relating to Irrigation, Drainage and Flood Embankments*. Bengal Secretariat Press, 1911.
- Government of India. *Report of the Indian Famine Commission*. Calcutta, 1880.

- East Central Railway. General Information: Founding of the Division - A Brief History. Official history of the Dalsinghsarai-Samastipur-Darbhanga famine line and Tirhut Railway.
- Dunn, J. A., J. B. Auden, A. M. N. Ghosh, S. C. Roy, and D. N. Wadia. The Bihar-Nepal Earthquake of 1934. Memoirs of the Geological Survey of India, vol. 73. Geological Survey of India, 1939.
- Brett, W. B. A Report on the Bihar Earthquake and on the Measures Taken in Consequence Thereof up to the 31st December 1934. Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1935.
- O'Malley, L. S. S. Bengal District Gazetteers: Darbhanga. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1907.
- O'Malley, L. S. S. Bengal District Gazetteers: Muzaffarpur. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1907.
- O'Malley, L. S. S. Bengal District Gazetteers: Purnea. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1911.
- Bengal Government. Bengal District Gazetteers: Bhagalpur. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1911.

Chapter 20. Education, print, language, reform, and nationalism

Colonial education and older learning

Tols, pathshalas, maktabas, Persianate instruction, household teaching, temple- and monastery-linked learning, occupational apprenticeship, and courtly scholarship all predated the spread of colonial schools. The nineteenth century therefore did not introduce education into an intellectual vacuum. It altered the institutions through which learning could be certified, financed, inspected, and converted into employment.

The decisive change was not a clean replacement of one system by another but a redistribution of prestige. English, new vernacular curricula, examinations, printed textbooks, government grants, and university affiliation created credentials that could open some occupations while leaving older Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, ritual, scribal, artisanal, and oral forms of knowledge in continued use (Jha 1972; O'Malley 1907).

Education before school statistics

Official returns measure schools, pupils, grants, teachers, attendance, and examination results. They are indispensable for institutional history but undercount learning that did not fit a recognized school form. Domestic literacy, recitation, account keeping, manuscript copying, ritual training, craft instruction, song, and inherited professional knowledge often remain outside the statistical frame.

A source-controlled history therefore reads educational statistics as records of what the colonial state chose to enumerate and subsidize. Rising enrolment is important evidence, but it cannot by itself demonstrate the total distribution of knowledge within villages or households.

Tols and Sanskrit scholastic networks

Mithila's Sanskrit scholastic reputation survived the growth of English education. Tols and learned households trained students in grammar, logic, ritual, law, philosophy, astronomy, and related disciplines, often through personal teacher-pupil relationships rather than standardized classrooms. Patronage from landed houses and donors could sustain these institutions even when government schooling expanded.

Their persistence also complicates a simple 'traditional versus modern' binary. A Sanskrit scholar might participate in print, correspond with university authorities, advise a court, or support a language association while remaining embedded in a scholastic lineage. Institutional boundaries were porous.

Pathshalas, village schools, and practical literacy

Village schools taught forms of reading, writing, calculation, account keeping, and elementary religious or literary material. Their organization varied widely. Some were short-lived, seasonal, locally financed, or tied to a teacher's household; others entered grant-in-aid systems and became more legible to inspectors.

For agrarian society, practical literacy had concrete uses in rent receipts, petitions, market accounts, moneylending, postal communication, and migration. Literacy did not automatically equal political power, but it changed the range of documentary strategies available to cultivators, traders, estate employees, and aspiring clerks.

Maktabas, madrasas, Arabic-Persian learning, and Urdu

Muslim educational life cannot be reduced to colonial schools. Maktabas, madrasas, mosque-linked instruction, private tutoring, and scholarly networks sustained Arabic, Persian, Urdu, religious learning, law, poetry, and practical literacy. The decline of Persian as a language of higher administration

changed incentives but did not erase Persianate intellectual culture.

Educational reform among Muslims also responded to changing employment, print, and public debate. The archival density is uneven, and later state categories often classify madrasas primarily as religious institutions. That classification should not be projected backward as a complete description of their earlier intellectual range.

English education and new careers

English education acquired value because the colonial state, courts, universities, professions, railways, municipalities, and commercial institutions rewarded particular credentials. The benefits were unevenly distributed. Families able to finance residence, books, examination fees, and years outside productive labour could convert education into occupational advantage more readily than poorer households.

The result was the growth of a credentialed middle stratum without the disappearance of landed power. Lawyers, teachers, clerks, journalists, doctors, and students became increasingly important in public life, but many remained tied by kinship, property, patronage, or employment to zamindari and caste networks.

The wider policy frame: 1835, 1854, and the university system

Macaulay's 1835 minute, the government's English-education policy, and Wood's Despatch of 1854 belong to the all-India institutional background rather than to Mithila alone. They helped normalize hierarchies of curriculum, grant-in-aid, teacher training, and government-supervised schooling that later shaped Bihar.

The establishment of the University of Calcutta in 1857 created a powerful examining and affiliating framework for eastern India. For students from north Bihar, higher education often required mobility toward Calcutta, Patna, Benares, or

other centres before a denser provincial university network emerged.

Court of Wards administration and educational reorganization, 1860-1879

Darbhanga Raj came under the Court of Wards from 1860 to 1879. The same administrative regime that rationalized estate accounts also left records concerning schools, grants, teachers, and educational expenditure. Jata Shankar Jha's edition of Darbhanga Raj educational records begins in this Court of Wards horizon and extends to 1930 (Jha 1972).

The evidence is valuable precisely because it is administrative. It shows plans, correspondence, expenditure, and institutional priorities; it does not automatically show how pupils experienced schooling or how far the benefits reached outside groups able to enter Raj-supported institutions.

Darbhanga Raj as an educational patron

Darbhanga Raj became an important patron of schools, scholarships, Sanskrit learning, and later higher education. Patronage served multiple purposes: dynastic prestige, regional leadership, religious and learned commitments, the production of trained employees, and participation in the wider politics of public benefaction.

The scale of patronage should not be converted into a claim that the estate created modern education single-handedly. Government schools, district boards, missionaries, private teachers, associations, municipalities, community institutions, and families also shaped the educational landscape.

Raj schools, grants, and an archival vocabulary of schooling

The Darbhanga Raj educational archive contains references to English schools, middle schools, vernacular schools, Sanskrit institutions, stipends, teachers, inspections, government grants, village schools, and girls' education. These records allow

historians to reconstruct educational policy at a finer scale than commemorative biographies alone (Jha 1972).

They also reveal the language of administration: 'sanction', 'inspection', 'rolls', 'fees', 'grant', 'headmaster', and 'vernacular' are not neutral labels. They belong to a bureaucratic system that translated diverse educational practices into comparable institutional units.

Girls, women, and the unequal opening of formal education

Formal education for girls expanded slowly and unevenly. Enrolment figures reflected not only the supply of schools but household decisions about marriage, seclusion, safety, distance, domestic labour, caste expectations, and the perceived value of credentials. Elite advocacy for women's schooling could coexist with patriarchal control over property and mobility.

Women's intellectual life was wider than school enrolment. Ritual knowledge, songs, household account keeping, painting, correspondence, religious reading, midwifery, oral narrative, and later print participation belong to the history of knowledge even where official records did not classify them as education.

Caste, class, and access to credentials

The expansion of schools did not dissolve caste or class hierarchy. Admission, residence, fees, language choice, social discrimination, and family resources shaped who could remain in school long enough to obtain credentials. Groups with existing land, scribal skills, or patronage networks could often exploit new institutions earlier.

Conversely, the limited documentary visibility of Dalit, labouring, pastoral, artisanal, and many cultivating communities should not be interpreted as an absence of knowledge. It often reflects the unequal ability to enter the institutions that generated durable archives.

Education, migration, and the geography of opportunity

Students and scholars moved between Mithila, Patna, Calcutta, Benares, Allahabad, Jaipur, and other centres. Educational migration linked language activism to wider intellectual networks. It also helps explain why some of the earliest Maithili periodicals appeared outside Mithila itself.

Mobility could produce both cosmopolitanism and nostalgia. A Maithil scholar living elsewhere might become more conscious of language, script, ritual, and regional belonging precisely because these were no longer taken for granted in everyday surroundings.

1912: Bihar and Orissa as a new provincial arena

The creation of the province of Bihar and Orissa in 1912 changed the administrative scale at which education, language, representation, and regional grievance were debated. North Bihar no longer appeared only through Bengal's institutional geography; Patna increasingly became a provincial centre.

Provincialization did not erase connections with Calcutta. It created competing institutional orientations. Maithili advocates could seek recognition in Calcutta while also pressing claims within the new Bihar and Orissa administration.

Patna University and the reorganization of higher education

The Patna University Act of 1917 established and incorporated a university at Patna, and the Act came into force on 1 October 1917. It provided a new provincial framework for examining students, affiliating institutions, promoting research, and supervising colleges (Patna University Act 1917).

The university's creation altered educational geography but did not instantly democratize higher education. Colleges remained concentrated, costs remained significant, and language hierarchies continued to affect curriculum and examination.

Calcutta University recognition of Maithili in 1917

In 1917 Calcutta University, under the wider vernacular initiative associated with Asutosh Mookerjee, recognized Maithili within its Indian-vernacular framework and made it available for higher examination. Recent scholarship identifies support from Maithil elites including Krityanand Singh in this institutional campaign (Chakravartty 2024).

This recognition mattered because a language could now acquire university status in addition to literary prestige. It did not create Maithili as a language; it transformed the institutional resources available to those arguing for its autonomy and academic legitimacy.

Grierson and the classificatory power of the Linguistic Survey

George A. Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India*, volume V, part II, described Maithili within the eastern Indo-Aryan field and documented speech varieties through the techniques of colonial linguistics. The survey became a major printed reference for later claims about language extent and distinctiveness (Grierson 1903).

Colonial classification had a double effect. It converted speech into administrative and scholarly categories, but those categories could later be appropriated by language activists. The survey therefore belongs both to the history of imperial knowledge and to the history of modern Maithili advocacy.

A language was not created by being surveyed

The existence of Maithili literature, speech communities, manuscript traditions, and older grammatical consciousness long predates the Linguistic Survey. A colonial survey could name, classify, map, and compare; it could not create from nothing the language it described.

At the same time, modern language politics depended on new documentary forms—maps, grammars, printed specimens, examinations, censuses, and association resolutions. Recognition

was therefore historically new even when the language itself was not.

Naming varieties without turning them into timeless borders

Colonial linguists recorded regional variation across north Bihar and adjoining areas. Such descriptions are valuable for dialect geography but should not be converted into immutable ethnic borders. Speech continua, multilingual households, migration, and administrative boundaries complicate any sharp linguistic map.

Later political movements often selected one classification because it served a claim for recognition or territory. Historians must distinguish the descriptive act, the later political use of that description, and the actual variability of speech on the ground.

Tirhuta, Kaithi, Devanagari, and script as institution

Maithili manuscript culture used Tirhuta or Mithilakshar, while Kaithi had important documentary and scribal uses and Devanagari became increasingly prominent in print and education. Script change therefore involved technology, cost, type availability, schooling, administration, and market reach as well as identity.

A script is not identical with a language. The same language can circulate in several scripts, and the same script can serve several languages. Modern Tirhuta revival is evidence of cultural memory and script politics; it should not be used to deny the historical importance of Devanagari or Kaithi in modern Maithili production.

Printing technology and the material problem of type

Printing a language required more than authors. Presses needed fonts, compositors, paper, capital, distributors, proofreaders, and readers willing to pay. Scripts with limited commercial type could face a structural disadvantage even when manuscript literacy remained strong.

The spread of Devanagari in Maithili print was therefore partly a history of infrastructure. It should not be narrated only as ideological surrender or cultural progress. Technical constraints and publishing economies mattered.

Presses within and beyond Mithila

By the turn of the twentieth century Maithili-related books were printed in Darbhanga, Bhagalpur, Benares, Jaipur, and other centres. Recent research identifies presses such as Union Printers, Sri Mithila Press, Bharat Jivan Press, Raj Darbhanga Yantralaya, and Prabhakari Press within the broader print network.

This geography demonstrates that Maithili print was transregional from the beginning. Migration and patronage enabled publication far from the language's principal speech area, while books and journals moved back through postal, educational, and kin networks.

Maithil Hit Sadhan and the Jaipur connection

Maithil Hit Sadhan began publication from Jaipur in 1905 under Maithil intellectual networks there. Scholarship treats it as a foundational moment in modern Maithili journalism, though its language mix reminds us that early periodicals did not necessarily enforce the later boundary between Maithili and Hindi (Thakur 2021; Kamat 2023).

Its distant place of publication is historically significant. Maithili journalism emerged through migration and exchange, not solely from a self-contained regional capital.

Mithila Moda and the problem of first-issue dates

Sources differ slightly on the first-year dating of Mithila Moda, commonly placing its emergence in 1905 or 1906. Rather than conceal the discrepancy, this volume treats 1905-06 as the secure publication horizon unless a complete first-issue run establishes a narrower date.

The journal's early multilingual or bilingual character also shows that modern Maithili print developed within overlapping Hindi, Sanskrit, and regional literary circuits. Later language boundaries should not be projected backward into the first issues.

Mithila Mihir: 1908 or 1909, and why the difference matters

Modern scholarship dates the beginning of Mithila Mihir variously to 1908 and 1909. Archival work by Devanand Kamat uses 1909, while other literary-historical accounts give 1908. The disagreement can reflect distinctions between planning, first issue, or later retrospective dating; this volume records the 1908-09 horizon rather than manufacturing false precision.

Mithila Mihir became one of the most influential Maithili-oriented periodicals. Its significance lies not only in literary publication but in the creation of a forum in which region, language, caste, education, reform, and politics could be debated (Kamat 2023).

Bilingual and trilingual beginnings

Several early Maithili journals printed Hindi, Sanskrit, or mixed linguistic material alongside Maithili. This is evidence against a teleology in which a fully bounded language public existed from the first day of print.

Editors could support Maithili while also using Hindi for reach or Sanskrit for learned authority. The later history of language standardization emerged from this multilingual field rather than replacing an earlier monolingual one.

Print did not end manuscript or performance

Songs, ritual texts, drama, oral narrative, genealogical materials, letters, and scholastic works continued to circulate outside print. A printed version could stabilize one wording while performance produced variants and manuscripts preserved alternative lineages.

The historian must therefore resist treating the first printed edition as the origin of a work. Print history is a history of selection, editing, standardization, and circulation, not a universal starting point.

Grammar, dictionary, and textbook as instruments of standardization

Grammars, dictionaries, readers, and schoolbooks transformed linguistic argument into teachable form. They selected spellings, paradigms, vocabulary, and examples, making some usages more visible than others.

Standardization can enable mass education and literary exchange, but it can also marginalize regional forms. A history of Maithili therefore has to ask whose speech became exemplary and which varieties were reclassified as dialectal, rustic, or incorrect.

Maithil Mahasabha, 1910: organization and limitation

The Maithil Mahasabha was founded in 1910 and became a major institution in early twentieth-century regional public life. Rameshwar Singh of Darbhanga provided important patronage and leadership, while scholars and notables built networks through meetings, education, and print (Chakravartty 2024; Kamat 2023).

Its representativeness must be qualified. Contemporary and later accounts describe membership as confined or heavily restricted to Maithil Brahmins and Karna Kayasthas. It therefore cannot be treated as a democratic assembly of all Maithili speakers or all inhabitants of Mithila.

Caste organization and the making of a regional public

Caste associations could fund education, circulate information, reform marriage practices, and create new forms of public organization. They could also consolidate social boundaries and convert elite norms into claims about the whole region.

The language of 'Maithil society' in a journal or resolution must therefore be read with attention to institutional membership. A public formed through print is historically real, but it is not automatically coextensive with the population it claims to represent.

Panji, rank, and the c.1800 Śrotriya correction

This volume maintains the distinction established in Chapters 15-18: medieval and early-modern Panji genealogy must not be used to project a fixed Śrotriya hereditary sub-caste backward before the book's c.1800 Panji-based reconstruction. Older Sanskritic śrotriya as a descriptor of learned or Vedic qualification is a different category.

Late-colonial caste organizations and printed genealogical claims could retrospectively naturalize classifications that had themselves been consolidated under changing property and elite institutions. Print is therefore part of the history of caste stabilization, not merely a neutral record of supposedly timeless rank.

Rameshwar Singh, orthodoxy, and public patronage

Maharaja Rameshwar Singh combined educational and cultural patronage with a public role in orthodox Hindu institutions. His regional politics cannot be reduced either to language activism or to simple feudal reaction. It joined dynasty, religion, learned status, philanthropy, and imperial constitutional politics.

This complexity matters because later narratives sometimes treat every act of Darbhanga Raj patronage as evidence of a single coherent Maithili nationalist programme. The archive instead shows overlapping projects that could support education and language while defending hierarchy.

The 1921 native-state memorial

In 1921 Rameshwar Singh submitted a memorial seeking recognition of Mithila as a native state under his rule. Recent

scholarship treats the memorial as a key example of an elite territorial project grounded in Darbhanga Raj status and a brahmanical conception of regional legitimacy (Chakravartty 2024).

The proposal should not be merged with later language-based demands for Mithila. Both invoked region, but they differed in political form, social constituency, and the principle by which belonging was defined.

From rank-based region to language-based region

By the 1930s a more explicitly language-centred conception of Mithila gained strength. In this formulation, Maithili could provide a broader criterion of belonging than the Brahmin-Kayastha associational world or the religious authority claimed by the Raj.

The shift was incomplete and contested. Language movements could still reproduce caste leadership, and not every Maithili speaker supported a separate territorial project. The analytical point is that the meaning of 'Mithila' changed within modern public debate.

The modern 'Vidyāpati' symbol and the book's two-Vidyāpati reconstruction

Twentieth-century journals, festivals, literary histories, and language campaigns frequently invoked 'Vidyāpati' as a single emblem of Maithili antiquity and cultural distinction. That modern symbolic fusion is itself important evidence for identity formation.

It is not, however, proof that all works later attached to the name belong to one historical author. This volume retains its governing distinction between the earlier Mahākavi Vidyāpati of the Maithili Padāvalī tradition and the later Oiniwar Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura associated with Sanskrit and Avahaṭṭa courtly works. Modern commemoration is treated as reception history, not as an attribution test.

Vidyāpati festivals as memory institutions

Commemorative festivals transform literature into public memory through speeches, songs, portraits, processions, prizes, and school programmes. They can widen literary participation while also simplifying complex textual histories into exemplary cultural biographies.

For the historian, the festival tells us most securely about the period that organized it: which past was chosen, which language was celebrated, which social groups led the event, and which audiences were imagined.

Print and the recovery—or invention—of literary canons

Editors of anthologies and histories made older works newly available by locating manuscripts, choosing readings, modernizing spelling, and assigning authorship. This labour was indispensable to modern literary history, but every edition also involved decisions.

A canon can recover neglected material and still exclude other voices. The Parallel History framework therefore treats printed literary histories as sources to be analysed alongside the texts they classify.

Women in the printed public sphere

Women appeared in the late-colonial public sphere as students, teachers, donors, reform subjects, readers, writers, political workers, and members of households whose labour sustained male educational mobility. Yet journals and institutional minutes remain disproportionately male-authored.

The resulting archive can create a false impression that women entered intellectual history only when formally published. Oral genres, domestic writing, ritual expertise, painting, teaching, and political participation demonstrate a wider field of agency.

Non-elite print and the problem of literary respectability

Cheap pamphlets, chapbooks, songs, plays, caste publications, calendars, and locally printed booklets often circulated below the threshold of elite literary preservation. Recent scholarship on vernacular chapbooks shows how caste and occupational voices could enter print outside the major journals.

Their survival is uneven because libraries and literary histories did not preserve every ephemeral publication. Absence from an archive can therefore be a history of collection practice rather than proof that a readership did not exist.

Hindi, Urdu, Maithili, and overlapping public spheres

Language politics in Bihar was not a two-sided contest between Hindi and Maithili alone. Urdu remained central to Muslim literary and administrative life, Hindi expanded through education and print, Sanskrit retained learned authority, Bengali and English connected eastern institutions, and Maithili activists sought a distinct place within this multilingual order.

A household or writer could use several of these languages for different purposes. The history of language identity should therefore be written through functional multilingualism as well as public declarations of mother tongue.

Reform: marriage, education, expenditure, and social discipline

Reform debates addressed child marriage, widowhood, marriage expenditure, education, caste rules, religious observance, and household conduct. The same associational platform could advocate change in one domain while defending hierarchy in another.

The term 'reform' therefore does not identify a single progressive bloc. It names a field of argument in which different actors tried to redefine respectable conduct and community authority.

Public health, disaster relief, and civic association

Floods, famine, epidemics, and the 1934 earthquake created arenas in which students, landlords, religious bodies, local committees, doctors, and nationalist organizations could demonstrate public service. Relief work generated networks that sometimes outlasted the emergency.

Yet humanitarian action should not be romanticized. Relief could be unequal, politically competitive, and tied to patronage. Chapter 19's distinction between event, official report, and retrospective interpretation remains essential here.

Nationalism before mass mobilization

Before Non-Cooperation, Bihar's public politics included constitutional associations, newspapers, local conferences, swadeshi activity, students, lawyers, and smaller revolutionary networks. Jata Shankar Jha's documentary work on the early revolutionary movement between 1906 and 1920 provides a regional archive for this pre-Gandhian political field (Jha 1977).

North Bihar participated through circulation rather than isolation. Railways, postal networks, colleges, courts, and newspapers connected towns and districts to provincial and all-India debates.

Bhagalpur, 28 August 1920: a provincial conference at the threshold of Non-Cooperation

The Bihar Provincial Conference met at Bhagalpur on 28 August 1920 under Rajendra Prasad's presidency. A resolution supporting Non-Cooperation was moved by Dharnidhar of Darbhanga and backed by leaders from different communities, illustrating how provincial politics linked Bhagalpur to Tirhut and the wider anti-colonial campaign.

The event is important not because it made every attendee a nationalist activist but because it shows the institutional route by which all-India resolutions entered regional political networks.

Non-Cooperation in Darbhanga and Madhubani

Contemporary official reports describe Darbhanga district, including Madhubani subdivision, becoming a significant centre of Non-Cooperation during 1920-21. Lawyers, organizers, students, meetings, and village-level mobilization linked constitutional politics with a wider challenge to colonial authority.

The movement was uneven. Initial hesitation, local leadership struggles, and differences between town and countryside are visible in the same reports that later record mass enthusiasm. Political change should therefore be reconstructed as a process rather than as instantaneous awakening.

Khilafat and composite political mobilization

Khilafat committees and Muslim religious-political networks formed part of the Non-Cooperation coalition in Bihar. Their presence complicates later communalized narratives in which nationalist mobilization appears as the work of a single religious public.

The alliance was contingent and did not erase differences within Hindu or Muslim society. Its significance lies in the temporary institutional forms through which distinct grievances were coordinated against colonial rule.

Students, lawyers, and the politics of withdrawal

Non-Cooperation asked students to reconsider government education and lawyers to reconsider colonial courts. Such choices were costly because the institutions being boycotted also provided credentials and livelihoods.

The politics of withdrawal therefore depended on alternative schools, volunteer networks, public subscriptions, and family support. Participation reveals the material infrastructure required to turn moral protest into sustained action.

Khadi, print, and everyday nationalism

Nationalist politics circulated through cloth, songs, badges, pamphlets, meetings, subscriptions, and public ritual as well as formal resolutions. Khadi linked household consumption to political economy, while print carried instructions and arguments beyond the meeting place.

Everyday nationalism was not socially uniform. A symbolic boycott could be easier for a prosperous household than for a labourer buying the cheapest available cloth. Material constraints belong inside the history of political participation.

Agrarian grievance inside nationalist mobilization

In Tirhut the Non-Cooperation movement intersected with older tensions over rent, cesses, indigo, market prices, and zamindari authority. Peasants could interpret Gandhi's message through local expectations that were not identical to Congress strategy.

Official reports of market disturbances and rent disputes demonstrate the gap between elite programmes and popular political imagination. The point is not to dismiss popular action as misunderstanding but to reconstruct how national idioms were translated into local claims.

The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, 1929, and class organization

The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha emerged in late 1929 and became an important vehicle for campaigns over rents, debt, bakasht land, and landlord power. Its organizers included Swami Sahajanand Saraswati and other agrarian leaders, and its work reached districts including Darbhanga.

The Kisan Sabha introduced a sharper class vocabulary into provincial politics, though caste, locality, tenancy status, and party affiliation continued to shape participation. It cannot be reduced either to Congress nationalism or to a single peasant interest.

Civil Disobedience and the changing repertoire of protest

The 1930s expanded the repertoire of boycott, procession, salt-related protest, tax resistance, picketing, arrest, and volunteer organization. North Bihar's participation varied by district and phase, and local records should be preferred to generalized national chronologies when assigning exact events.

Civil Disobedience also trained cadres and normalized political imprisonment. Schools, hostels, bars, markets, and railway stations became spaces through which political messages circulated.

Print, censorship, and the colonial archive of sedition

The colonial state monitored newspapers, pamphlets, speeches, student associations, and political correspondence. Police files can therefore preserve material that would otherwise be lost, but their categories—'agitator', 'seditious', 'dangerous'—were instruments of surveillance.

A police report proves that an official perceived a threat; it does not automatically prove the factual accuracy of every allegation within the report. Political history requires reading surveillance records against nationalist, local, and press sources.

The 1934 earthquake and the politics of public service

The Bihar-Nepal earthquake of 15 January 1934 disrupted schools, roads, railways, offices, homes, and print networks across north Bihar. Relief brought together state agencies, voluntary organizations, landlords, students, doctors, religious bodies, and political workers.

The disaster therefore belongs to educational and political history as well as environmental history. Reconstruction could create new institutions and public reputations, while disputes over relief revealed social inequality.

Language activism in the 1930s

By the 1930s Maithili language activism increasingly emphasized literature, teaching, examinations, grammar, publication, and regional cultural history. This widened the basis on which Mithila could be imagined beyond the earlier association of region with dynastic or Brahmanical authority (Chakravartty 2024).

The language movement was still internally stratified. Leadership remained disproportionately educated and male, and claims to represent all speakers must be tested against evidence from caste, class, gender, and religious communities.

Mithila Mihir and the production of historical consciousness

Mithila Mihir did more than report events. It serialized historical and cultural arguments, reviewed books, discussed language, and linked contemporary problems with representations of the regional past. Kamat's study shows how such writing helped make 'Mithila' into a modern object of debate (Kamat 2023).

A periodical creates continuity by placing different events in the same recurring frame. That editorial continuity is itself a form of region-making.

Separate-Mithila arguments and the 1940s

Arguments for a separate Mithila territory became more explicit in the 1940s. They emerged from earlier language activism but cannot be treated as the inevitable outcome of every Maithili cultural initiative. Many speakers prioritized linguistic recognition within Bihar or India rather than territorial separation.

The distinction between cultural region, language area, administrative province, and sovereign state must therefore remain explicit. The same word 'Mithila' could refer to different projects.

Quit India, 1942: student-led disruption in Darbhanga

District reports on the Quit India movement record student demonstrations across Darbhanga from 10 August 1942, followed by wider disruption of transport, communications, police authority, and government offices as the movement spread. The railway network that had integrated the region also became a strategic target of protest.

Students were crucial because schools and colleges concentrated young people able to communicate rapidly across towns and villages. Their activism shows how the educational institutions created under colonial rule could generate cadres opposed to colonial sovereignty.

Rural spread, repression, and local initiative in 1942

By mid-August 1942 mobilization in Darbhanga had moved beyond school demonstrations into rural action. Official and retrospective accounts record attacks on communications and attempts to displace local state authority, followed by military and police repression.

The evidence is uneven and politically charged. Claims about particular 'people's governments' or the duration of local control should be tied to specific district records rather than repeated as legend. What is secure is that 1942 temporarily fractured ordinary administrative routines across parts of the district.

Bhagalpur, Munger, Tirhut, and a connected provincial politics

The history of nationalism in this volume is not restricted to Darbhanga. Bhagalpur's provincial conference, Munger's political and railway importance, Muzaffarpur's legal and educational networks, and Tirhut's agrarian mobilization formed a connected Bihar political field.

These connections matter for the book's broader argument: Anga, Mithila, and Vajji-related regions have distinct histories, but modern institutions repeatedly linked them within larger provincial systems.

Religion, caste, and nationalism without false unity

Nationalist mobilization did not erase caste ranking, landlord-tenant conflict, communal tension, or gender inequality. Nor were religious institutions merely obstacles to politics: temples, mosques, festivals, and religious associations could become sites of mobilization and charity.

A responsible narrative therefore avoids both celebratory unity and retrospective communal determinism. Coalitions were made, broken, and remade under specific conditions.

The archive of those who did not publish

Many cultivators, labourers, domestic workers, women, artisans, and migrants entered the historical record only when counted, arrested, taxed, litigating, migrating, or described by elites. Their relative absence from journals is not evidence that regional or nationalist politics did not affect them.

Petitions, oral traditions, police depositions, court records, wage disputes, school registers, folk songs, and later interviews can widen the archive, but each has its own problems of mediation.

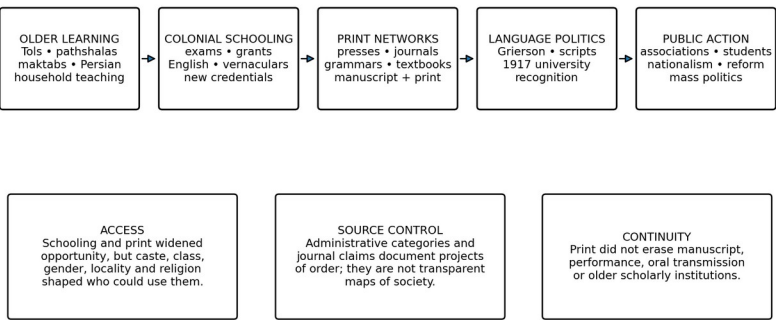
Education and print as infrastructures of both hierarchy and dissent

Schools, examinations, presses, and associations strengthened bureaucratic and elite power by defining credentials, correct language, and respectable public speech. The same infrastructures also enabled criticism, peasant organization, women's education, nationalist mobilization, and alternative literary canons.

This dual capacity is central to the chapter. Institutions are not politically fixed by their origin; they can be appropriated by actors with different projects.

Diagram 38: education, print and political public formation

Diagram 38 — Education, print and political public formation, c. 1860-1947



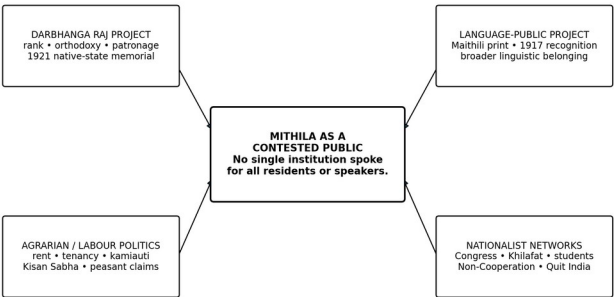
Institutional change was cumulative and unequal, not a simple replacement of “traditional” by “modern”.

Diagram 38. Education, print and political public formation, c. 1860-1947.

Original analytical diagram for this volume. Sources: Jha 1972; Grierson 1903; Patna University Act 1917; Chakravartty 2024; Kamat 2023.

Diagram 39: competing projects of Mithila in the late-colonial public sphere

Diagram 39 — Competing projects of Mithila in the late-colonial public sphere



Safeguards: modern celebrations often fused “Vidyāpatī” into one symbol; this volume retains two Vidyāpatīs. Śrōtriya sub-caste rank is not projected before the c.1800 Panji-based horizon.

Diagram 39. Competing projects of Mithila in the late-colonial public sphere.

Original analytical diagram for this volume. Sources: Chakravartty 2024; Kamat 2023; Jha 1977; Darbhanga Raj

educational records; Bihar movement records. Historiographical safeguards follow this volume's Parallel History framework.

Source-control rules for modern identity history

Four distinctions govern this chapter. First, a language survey is not the origin of a language. Second, a caste or landlord association is not the whole population. Third, a modern commemorative 'Vidyāpati' symbol is not proof of single authorship. Fourth, a later hereditary Śrōtriya sub-caste must not be projected into medieval society.

These rules do not diminish modern Maithili identity. They make its history more precise by showing how language, print, education, caste, property, and politics interacted in different periods.

1947 as political threshold and institutional inheritance

Independence in 1947 ended British sovereignty but inherited universities, school systems, district administration, census categories, print networks, tenancy records, railways, and political organizations created or transformed under colonial rule.

Postcolonial language recognition and educational policy therefore began on an institutional terrain already shaped by the struggles described here. Chapter 24 returns to Maithili and Angika after independence, when questions of university teaching, literary recognition, state policy, and constitutional status entered a new phase.

Chapter conclusion: publics, not a single public

Between the mid-nineteenth century and independence, Mithila and eastern Bihar experienced not one modernization but several overlapping transformations. Older learning survived inside a world of schools and examinations; manuscripts continued beside print; regional identity was argued through dynasty, caste, language, religion, class, and nationalism.

The central historical fact is plurality. Darbhanga Raj, Maithil Mahasabha, Mithila Mihir, university authorities, Kisan Sabha organizers, Congress and Khilafat workers, students, women, Muslim institutions, cultivators, artisans, and migrants did not speak with one voice. Modern Mithila emerged from their unequal and often conflicting interactions.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Grierson, George A. Linguistic Survey of India, vol. V, part II: Indo-Aryan Family, Eastern Group. Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India, 1903.
- Jha, Jata Shankar, ed. Beginnings of Modern Education in Mithila: Selections from Educational Records, Darbhanga Raj, 1860-1930. Historical Research Series 9. K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1972.
- Jha, Jata Shankar. Education in Bihar, 1813-1859. K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1979.
- Jha, Jata Shankar, general editor. Early Revolutionary Movement in Bihar, 1906-1920. Historical Research Series 16. K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1977.
- O'Malley, L. S. S. Bengal District Gazetteers: Darbhanga. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1907.
- Government of India. The Patna University Act, 1917 (Act XVI of 1917), brought into force 1 October 1917. Official text preserved by Patna University.
- Chakravartty, Aryendra. "An Elusive Quest for a Region: Darbhanga Raj, Caste and Language in Late Colonial India." *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 61, no. 1 (2024): 5-31.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00194646231220703>.
- Kamat, Devanand. "The Voice of Mithila Mihir: The Making of the Idea of Mithila." *Nidān: International Journal for Indian Studies* 8, no. 2 (2023): 31-44. Published 2024. <https://doi.org/10.58125/nidan.2023.2.24334>.
- Burghart, Richard. "A Quarrel in the Language Family: Agency and Representations of Speech in Mithila." *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 4 (1993): 761-804.
- Brass, Paul R. *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*. Cambridge University Press, 1974.
- Mishra, Jayakanta. *A History of Maithili Literature*, vol. 1: Early and Middle Periods. Tirabhukti Publications, 1949.
- Choudhary, Radhakrishna. *A Survey of Maithili Literature*. Ram Vilas Sahu, 1976.

Thakur, Ripunjay Kumar. “Migration, Exchange of Knowledge and Maithili Journalism in Rajasthan.” *Rajasthan History Congress Proceedings* 35 (2021).

Hutchins, Francis G. *India’s Revolution: Gandhi and the Quit India Movement*. Harvard University Press, 1973.

British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers. R. N. Lines papers relating to the Quit India movement in Darbhanga district, 1942, Mss Eur F346/2.

Government of India, Ministry of Culture. Digital District Repository entries on the Bihar Provincial Conference at Bhagalpur (1920), the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, and the Quit India movement in Darbhanga; used as finding aids and checked against dated movement records where available.

Thakur, Gajendra. *A Parallel History of Maithili Literature*. Videha — First Maithili Fortnightly eJournal, ISSN 2229-547X. Used for the volume’s two-Vidyāpati framework and Panji-based c.1800 Śrottriya reconstruction.

Chapter 21. The Nepal Tarai, Rana rule, and the border to 1951

Tarai as frontier and homeland

The Nepal Tarai was never merely an empty frontier awaiting settlement from the hills. Forests, grasslands, wetlands, farms, market towns, pilgrimage centres, estates, and older settlements linked the Himalayan foothills to the Gangetic plain. Its history therefore has to begin with inhabited landscapes and competing claims, not with the administrative language of reclamation.

State revenue, timber extraction, disease environments, transport, and cross-border trade changed the density and distribution of settlement over time. These processes affected long-established Tharu and other communities as well as Maithili-, Bhojpuri-, Awadhi-, Urdu-, and Nepali-speaking migrants and townspeople. “Tarai” names a changing ecological and administrative zone, not one timeless social population (Gaige 1975; Whelpton 2005).

“Tarai” as an ecological and administrative category

The word Tarai could describe lowland terrain, a revenue region, a forest belt, or a frontier of particular districts depending on date and document. Such usages overlap but are not identical. A nineteenth-century treaty clause, a Rana revenue order, a census table, and a modern provincial map therefore cannot be treated as interchangeable maps of the same space.

This distinction also prevents the cultural geography of Mithila from being equated mechanically with every administrative tract of the Nepalese plains. Maithili cultural and linguistic networks were especially important in the eastern and central Tarai, while the wider Tarai also contained many other language and social fields.

Border before border

Before the nineteenth-century treaty regime, routes, political influence, forests, estates, pilgrimage, and kinship crossed what later became an international frontier. The modern India–Nepal boundary is therefore indispensable for colonial and contemporary history but anachronistic when projected unchanged into the Karnata, Oiniwar, or early Shah periods.

The frontier became progressively more consequential as treaties, surveys, customs posts, courts, land records, and police practices attached different legal effects to each side. Social crossing and formal sovereignty should be reconstructed together rather than forced into a choice between a “real” border and an “imaginary” one.

The Anglo-Nepalese War and the Treaty of Sugauli

The Treaty of Sugauli was signed on 2 December 1815 after the Anglo-Nepalese War. The Nepalese counterpart was received and the British counterpart delivered on 4 March 1816. The treaty is a primary legal anchor for the new interstate relationship, but it did not by itself freeze every sector of the present boundary (Treaty of Sugauli, arts. I–IX; Aitchison 1909).

Article III described territorial cessions through rivers and lowlands, including the tract between the Gandak and the Kosi/Coosah in which British authority had been introduced or was being introduced. This language is historically important because it shows a frontier formulated through rivers, administrative possession, and negotiated geography rather than through a modern coordinate list.

Article III and river-defined cessions

Sugauli’s cession clauses used the Kali, Rapti, Gandak, Kosi/Coosah, Mechi and Teesta as reference lines for large territorial descriptions. Rivers could make legal wording appear precise while their channels, tributary identifications and

floodplain settings could complicate implementation on the ground.

For the Mithila–Tarai borderland, the central lesson is methodological: a treaty line must be read with subsequent surveys, local disputes, supplementary agreements, and the geomorphic history of the named rivers. The legal text is authoritative for the claim it made, not a guarantee that every locality was immediately uncontested.

Ratification and implementation in March 1816

The surviving treaty text records the exchange at Makwanpur on 4 March 1816. This date is more precise than the common shorthand “Treaty of 1816,” because the instrument itself was dated December 1815 while the exchange that brought the settlement into effect occurred in March 1816.

Implementation required evacuation, administrative takeover, and boundary work. The post-war frontier was therefore a process of making sovereignty legible through officials and territorial practice, not simply a line appearing fully formed at the moment of signature.

The December 1816 supplementary Tarai restoration

A memorandum presented on 8 December 1816 proposed restoring substantial Tarai lands between the Kosi/Coosah and Gandak and between the Gandak and Rapti. Nepalese acceptance followed in December. This supplementary settlement is indispensable: the post-Sugauli border cannot be reconstructed accurately from Article III alone (Supplementary Memorandum, 8 December 1816; Aitchison 1909).

The restoration also replaced part of the pension arrangement contemplated after the territorial cessions. Its legal and fiscal logic shows how frontier settlement was intertwined with compensation, revenue, and the practical burden of administration.

Tirhut and Saran in the 1816 supplementary text

The December memorandum expressly excepted disputed lands in the districts of Tirhut and Saran from automatic restoration. It also referred to an earlier 1812 settlement as a basis for handling long-running Tirhut claims. This is unusually direct primary-text evidence that the border-making process touched the historical field of this book rather than only distant Himalayan sectors.

Because the text itself labels lands disputed, a modern historian should not convert the 1816 restoration into a clean territorial polygon. The correct reconstruction contains zones requiring investigation and settlement by officials on both sides.

Boundary commissioners, exchanges, and the “straight line” problem

The supplementary terms envisaged commissioners investigating the frontier and allowed exchanges where existing grants or ownership claims would otherwise create administrative difficulty. The problem was not only geopolitical; it involved particular landholders whose property could fall inconveniently across the new sovereign line.

This is a reminder that boundary history is also property history. Survey, ownership, cultivation, river change, and jurisdiction could produce different answers to the question “where is the border?” until documentary and field settlements aligned them.

Rivers as legal boundaries in moving floodplains

North Bihar and the adjoining Tarai are alluvial landscapes in which channels migrate and avulse. A treaty that uses a river as a boundary therefore requires a dated understanding of which channel, bank, or confluence was intended. Later maps may preserve legal memory, geomorphic change, or both.

The book’s earlier river-history method applies here directly: hydrological change is not a device for dismissing treaties, but a

reason to interpret their spatial clauses with dated surveys and local records rather than with present-day channels alone.

The 1860 Naya Muluk restoration

A second major territorial adjustment followed Nepalese assistance to the British during the uprising of 1857. The 1860 settlement restored the western Tarai tracts conventionally identified with present Banke, Bardiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur, remembered in Nepal as the Naya Muluk or “new country.”

The restoration confirms again that Nepal’s present southern boundary is a cumulative treaty history. Sugauli was foundational, the December 1816 settlement revised its Tarai consequences, and the 1860 adjustment altered the western lowlands once more.

Diagram 40: Treaty-defined border change and political transition, 1815–1951

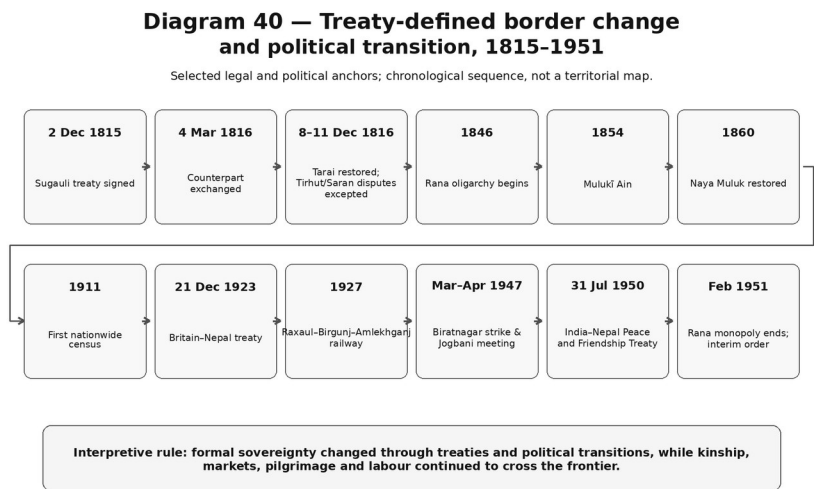


Diagram 40. Selected legal and political anchors in the making of the Nepal–India/British India frontier, 1815–1951. The diagram is chronological, not a territorial map.

Original analytical diagram prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. Sources: Treaty of Sugauli (1815/1816); supplementary Tarai settlement (December 1816); Nepal–Britain

boundary settlement (1860); Britain–Nepal Treaty (1923); India–Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1950).

1857, Jang Bahadur, and imperial alliance

Jang Bahadur Rana’s military support for the British during the 1857 uprising strengthened an already close strategic relationship. The 1860 territorial restoration was explicitly connected in treaty tradition with that assistance. Nepal remained outside British India, yet Rana foreign policy operated within a powerful asymmetrical relationship with the Raj.

This combination—formal sovereignty and strategic dependence—helps explain why neither “colony” nor “fully detached isolation” adequately describes Rana-era Nepal. The Tarai, adjoining British districts, and military routes made the relationship materially visible.

Rana oligarchy after 1846

After the political upheaval of 1846, hereditary Rana prime ministers dominated the machinery of government while the Shah monarchy continued. The regime centralized high office and political succession within the Rana family, though its administrative reach remained uneven across districts and local societies (Whelpton 2005).

In the Tarai, state presence worked through revenue offices, land assignments, police and military authority, judicial institutions, contractors, merchants, local landholders, and transport corridors. “Rana rule” therefore describes a regime whose practical effects varied greatly by place and social position.

Shah monarchy under Rana prime ministers

The continued Shah kingship under Rana prime-ministerial dominance matters for constitutional language. Nepal was not formally converted into a republic or a British protectorate; instead, royal sovereignty coexisted with a hereditary oligarchy that controlled executive power.

Later democratic narratives understandably describe 1951 as the fall of Rana autocracy, but the institutional transition should not be simplified into the birth of the Nepalese state. The state, monarchy, courts, army and revenue systems all predated 1951 and were reorganized rather than created from nothing.

The Mulukī Ain of 1854 and legal centralization

The Mulukī Ain of 1854, formulated under Jang Bahadur Rana, was an ambitious national legal code covering state and court organization, criminal and private law, property, family relations, caste and purity rules, customary law, labour and procedure. It is one of the strongest primary-source windows into Rana-era legal ordering (Khatiwoda, Cubelic, and Michaels 2021).

The code's aspiration to standardize law across the kingdom should not be confused with uniform enforcement. Surviving legal records show that institutions, petitioning, local practice and later revisions mediated how provisions were applied.

Caste hierarchy: code is not census

The Mulukī Ain organized legal consequences through ranked caste-status categories and purity rules. It is therefore powerful evidence for how the state sought to codify hierarchy. It is not a neutral ethnographic census proving that every household used the same identities, names, or rank in everyday social life.

This book accordingly distinguishes legal classification from social self-description. The same rule underlies its treatment of Panji categories in Mithila: a state or elite classification can become historically consequential without being projected backward as a timeless community structure.

Land as fiscal infrastructure

Rana-era government depended heavily on rights over land, revenue, labour and forest resources. Land categories distributed fiscal obligations and privileges while linking service to office. Mahesh C. Regmi's studies remain fundamental

because they reconstruct these institutions from revenue and land records rather than from later constitutional categories (Regmi 1976; Regmi 1978).

The Tarai's expansion of taxable cultivation made land policy especially important. Yet "reclamation" should be read critically: converting forest or grassland into assessed fields could increase state revenue while displacing uses and claims that were poorly represented in agrarian registers.

Raikar: revenue-paying land

Raikar generally referred to land subject to state revenue. The category helps identify the fiscal relationship between cultivators or holders and the state, but it does not by itself identify one modern ownership form. Rights could be layered through tenancy, local office, mortgage, inheritance and customary practice.

Comparing raikar with Bengal's Permanent Settlement is useful only at the level of mechanisms. Nepal did not simply reproduce the Bengal zamindari constitution; its fiscal categories emerged through different legal and political histories.

Birta: privileged grants and political economy

Birta grants transferred land or revenue rights under privileged conditions and became important instruments of reward and elite accumulation. Their scale, exemptions, heritability and later regulation varied. They illustrate how political authority could be converted into long-term claims on agrarian surplus (Regmi 1976).

Because birta holders and cultivators held different kinds of claims, the existence of a grant should not be read as proof that cultivators had no rights or that every grant functioned identically. The document, locality and date remain decisive.

Jagir, guthi, and service-linked assignments

Jagir linked revenue or land rights to office and service, while guthi property supported religious, charitable or institutional purposes under varying arrangements. Other labour and service obligations further connected households to the fiscal state.

These categories formed a political economy of assignment rather than a simple market in private freehold. They also help explain why twentieth-century reform could not be reduced to abolishing one landlord class: the institutional landscape contained several kinds of revenue and service rights.

Nepalese jimidar and the danger of translating “zamindar”

Terms rendered as jimidar or zamindar in Nepalese records should not be assumed to carry the same bundle of rights as a Permanent Settlement zamindar in Bihar. Similar vocabulary travelled across languages and administrative worlds, but legal content depended on the state system in which the office operated.

For comparative history, the safer questions are who assessed or collected revenue, who held recognized claims, who could transfer or inherit them, and what obligations followed. Translation by institutional function is more reliable than translation by familiar title.

Reclamation before Rana rule

Expansion of cultivated land in the eastern Tarai predated the Rana oligarchy. Late eighteenth-century Shah-period revenue measures already categorized cultivable tracts and encouraged the fiscal incorporation of new fields. Rana policy intensified and reorganized processes that had earlier roots (Regmi, *Economic History of Nepal*).

This chronology prevents a common error: the Tarai was neither “opened” suddenly in 1846 nor empty before Rana-sponsored migration. Forest use, local settlement and state interest all had longer histories.

Reclamation incentives, contractors, and local intermediaries

Agricultural expansion often required intermediaries who recruited cultivators, advanced resources, cleared land or guaranteed revenue. Such arrangements could generate new local elites and expose cultivators to multiple demands. They also linked the Tarai more closely to adjoining districts of British India through migration and credit.

The state's objective of increasing taxable cultivation did not guarantee secure tenure for everyone who performed the labour of clearance. Rights had to be documented, defended and transmitted within administrative systems that privileged some forms of evidence over others.

Forest as revenue, timber, and territorial resource

Tarai forests supplied timber, fuel, grazing, hunting grounds, elephant habitats and other resources. Their conversion into assessed agriculture increased revenue in some places while commercial extraction turned other areas into strategic resource zones.

Forest history must therefore include both conservation and dispossession. The categories "waste" and "jungle" in official writing often described land from the viewpoint of fiscal or commercial utilization and could obscure existing livelihood systems.

Long-settled Tarai communities and the archive of absence

Tharu and other long-established communities demonstrate why the plains cannot be narrated only as a history of migrants arriving from India or hills. Pastoral, forest, fishing, agricultural and mixed livelihoods could leave fewer revenue documents than newly assessed fields while still representing durable occupation.

Silence in tax or census records is therefore not evidence of emptiness. The source-controlled approach asks what type of

activity a document was designed to record and which groups were easiest for that institution to see.

Malaria: ecology without determinism

Malaria profoundly affected settlement, seasonal movement, labour and official perceptions of the Tarai. Risk varied by locality, drainage, altitude, housing, season, immunity and access to treatment; it should not be turned into a single environmental explanation for political or ethnic history.

Officials frequently described the plains as unhealthy or dangerous while towns, markets and established communities continued to exist there. Such descriptions are evidence for disease and for the political imagination of the region at the same time.

Tharu malaria research and its limits

Late twentieth-century biomedical studies reported markedly lower malaria morbidity among sampled Tharu populations than among sympatric non-Tharu groups and investigated genetic factors such as alpha-thalassaemia (Terrenato et al. 1988; Modiano et al. 1991).

These studies are retrospective biomedical evidence from sampled populations, not proof of absolute “immunity,” a timeless biological essence, or one explanation for Tharu history. Historical settlement still requires social, ecological and documentary evidence.

Migration from British India and within Nepal

Cultivation, trade, rent opportunities, labour demand and political patronage drew migrants into the Tarai from adjoining British Indian districts and from other parts of Nepal. Migration could be seasonal, circular or permanent and often relied on kin or merchant networks rather than a one-time state colonization programme (Gaige 1975).

The same process produced unequal claims to belonging. Long residence, tax payment, land documents, language and

political loyalty did not always translate into identical access to offices or later citizenship regimes.

The eastern Tarai as a multilingual social field

The eastern and central Tarai included Maithili, Bhojpuri, Urdu, Nepali, Tharu languages and other speech traditions in overlapping markets, households, schools, courts and religious institutions. Language use changed with setting: household speech, written petitions, commercial accounts and schooling could employ different languages.

The chapter therefore avoids reading a later census language category backward as if it were the only social identity available in the nineteenth century. Multilingual practice is not evidence of weak identity; it is a historical feature of borderland life.

Maithili across a state boundary

Maithili literary and social networks crossed the international frontier, particularly between north Bihar and the eastern-central Tarai. Print, education, marriage, pilgrimage, performance and employment could connect communities subject to different states.

This connected field does not erase Nepalese sovereignty or make the Tarai an extension of Bihar. It demonstrates why language geography and state territory must be kept analytically separate: the same language community can inhabit more than one political order.

Janakpur: pilgrimage, town, and border-connected centre

Janakpur linked sacred geography with markets, transport, education and regional identity. Pilgrimage from India sustained traffic across the frontier, while the town's institutions also belonged to Nepalese administrative and political history.

Its importance illustrates a recurring principle of this book: sacred continuity can be historically real even when claims about the antiquity of a particular modern building or route require separate evidence.

Border markets, customs, and everyday sovereignty

Customs posts, excise, policing and legal jurisdiction made the boundary materially visible, yet nearby markets depended on movement across it. Grain, livestock, timber, cloth, salt, manufactured goods, currency and labour circulated through regulated and unregulated channels.

Sovereignty at the border was therefore exercised by selecting, taxing, documenting or prohibiting particular movements rather than by preventing all movement. The later language of an “open border” should not obscure this longer history of selective regulation.

Currency, credit, and merchant networks

Commercial exchange required currency conversion, credit, brokerage and trust across jurisdictions. Merchant houses and moneylenders could connect village production to Indian railheads and wider markets even where road infrastructure inside Nepal remained limited.

These networks made the border economically porous without making it legally irrelevant. Debt disputes, customs liability and contractual enforcement still depended on institutions located on one side or the other.

The Nepal Government Railway and Raxaul–Birgunj–Amlekhganj

The narrow-gauge Nepal Government Railway opened in 1927 between the Indian railhead at Raxaul and Amlekhganj through Birgunj. For decades it formed a major avenue for goods and passengers travelling between India, the Tarai and the approach to Kathmandu (World Bank 1965).

Its transshipment structure is historically revealing: Indian and Nepalese networks met at a border customs point rather than forming one seamless railway system. Transport integration therefore increased crossing while reinforcing places where sovereignty was inspected and charged.

Jaynagar–Janakpur railway and the problem of exact opening dates

The narrow-gauge line from the Indian rail network at Jaynagar into the Janakpur area was originally associated with timber traffic and later became important for pilgrims and local passengers. Modern Nepal railway histories commonly place its opening in the 1930s, often 1937.

At least one later World Bank transport history gives a different early date for the Janakpur system. This book therefore records the 1930s railway horizon and flags the exact opening year for confirmation from contemporary railway records rather than manufacturing certainty from inconsistent later summaries.

Railheads and asymmetric access to Kathmandu

Before all-weather road connection to Kathmandu, the Tarai railways did not remove the topographical break between plains and valley. Passengers and freight still changed mode at the foot of the hills. The resulting transport system tied Tarai border towns closely to Indian railways while leaving the capital connected through a more difficult final stage.

This asymmetry mattered politically and economically. The border could be closer in travel time to Calcutta, Patna or north-Bihar towns than Kathmandu was to some lowland localities, without changing formal sovereignty.

The first nationwide census of 1911

Nepal's official census history identifies 1911 as the first population census covering the country, followed at roughly ten-year intervals. Earlier counts existed for narrower purposes, but the 1911 enumeration established a new nationwide administrative practice (National Statistics Office, Nepal).

The existence of a census should not be confused with modern statistical completeness. The first four censuses—1911, 1920, 1930 and 1941—were conducted under the Rana regime

with limited schedules and published chiefly as aggregate headcounts.

The limits of the Rana-era censuses

Official retrospective assessments emphasize that the pre-1952/54 censuses lacked the concepts, definitions, classifications and field organization of later modern censuses. Historical demographic work also notes weak supervision and the use of local agents in enumeration.

These counts remain valuable administrative evidence, but precision must match their design. They can anchor broad population history more safely than detailed claims about language, caste, migration or identity that the published tables did not consistently disclose.

Diagram 41: Rana-era Tarai — state, land, mobility, and border institutions

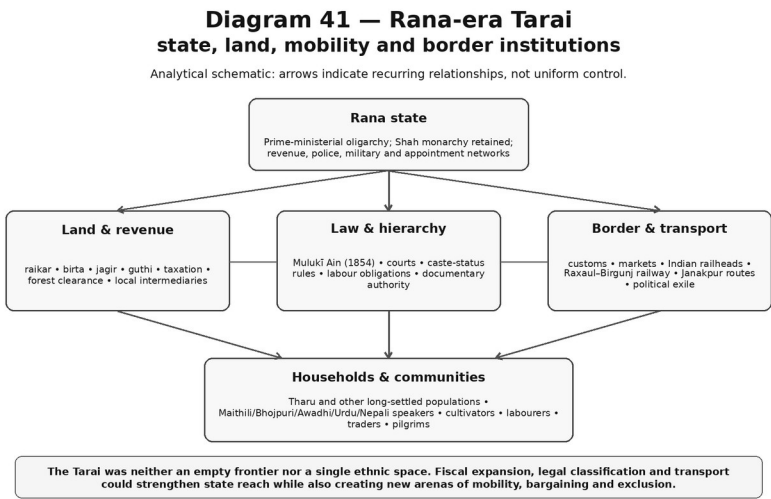


Diagram 41. Analytical model of recurring relationships among Rana state institutions, land and revenue, legal hierarchy, border transport, and Tarai households and communities.

Original analytical diagram prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. Sources: Regmi (1976; 1978), Mulukī Ain (1854; modern edition 2021), Nepal census histories, Gaige

(1975), World Bank transport study (1965), and treaty texts cited in the chapter.

Counting and the politics of social categories

Later census scholarship notes that language, religion and caste/ethnicity were not published with the same systematicity as in later democratic-era censuses. Enumeration is therefore part of the history of state knowledge: what government chose to count and publish changed over time.

For the Tarai, this is particularly important because later political arguments often cite demographic categories as if they were timeless. The chapter uses only categories actually available in the named census and does not infer an earlier ethnic distribution from a later table.

The Britain–Nepal Treaty of 1923

The treaty signed at Kathmandu on 21 December 1923 replaced and confirmed parts of the earlier British–Nepal relationship. Article I stated mutual recognition and respect for the internal and external independence of both contracting parties, making the wording an important diplomatic anchor (Treaty between the United Kingdom and Nepal, 1923).

The treaty did not erase asymmetry in arms, trade, transit or imperial strategy. Its significance lies precisely in the coexistence of formal interstate recognition with continued material dependence on routes and markets through British India.

Independence in treaty language and dependence in infrastructure

Rana Nepal maintained independent treaty personality while relying heavily on British Indian ports, railways and markets. The distinction between sovereignty and connectivity prevents two opposite errors: calling Nepal a British colony, or imagining it as economically sealed from the Raj.

The Tarai was where the two realities met most visibly—customs posts, railheads, timber traffic, military recruitment, merchants and political travellers turned interstate relations into everyday institutions.

Schools, language, and access to the state

Education under Rana rule remained restricted and uneven. Access to schooling, official employment and documentary literacy was stratified by region and social position. For plains communities, the languages of household, market, religious learning and state office could differ.

Later language politics cannot simply be projected backward onto this unequal educational field. The historical question is which institutions used which language and who gained access to them at a particular date.

Industrial eastern Tarai and Biratnagar Jute Mills

Biratnagar Jute Mills was incorporated in 1936 and is conventionally treated as Nepal's first major modern industrial enterprise. Its location near the Indian border joined Tarai agricultural production, imported machinery, merchant capital, labour and cross-border transport (Government of Nepal, Ministry of Finance; Gaige 1975).

Industrialization did not replace agrarian society. It created a concentrated wage-labour arena within a region still dominated by agriculture, trade and land relations, and that new arena became politically consequential in 1947.

The March 1947 Biratnagar labour strike

A strike in the Biratnagar jute and cotton mills in March 1947 brought industrial labour grievances into the anti-Rana political movement. Repression of the strike became an issue for Nepali National Congress activists and their allies across the border.

The event is important not because it alone caused the end of Rana rule, but because it linked workplace conflict, civil-liberties

demands and borderland political organization in a way that older palace-centred narratives can miss.

Jogbani, 10 April 1947: a border town as political platform

A Nepali National Congress meeting at Jogbani in north Bihar on 10 April 1947 decided to begin a country-wide satyagraha from 13 April, protesting repression of the Biratnagar mill strike and demanding civil liberties. Contemporary Nehru papers preserve the date and purpose of the meeting.

Jogbani's role shows that the border was not merely crossed after political decisions were made elsewhere. Border towns themselves could become organizational spaces because activists, labour centres, Indian political contacts and Nepalese territory lay in close proximity.

Indian independence and the remaking of border politics

On 15 August 1947 the southern side of the frontier ceased to be British India. Nepal's Rana regime remained in power, so the borderland entered a period in which one state had undergone decolonization while the other retained oligarchic rule.

Indian independence altered diplomatic expectations and the political opportunities available to Nepalese activists, but it did not give them unrestricted freedom to use Indian territory for armed action. Indian authorities later tried to distinguish political sympathy from permission to operate military bases across the border.

Political exile and organization in India

Nepalese political activists used Banaras, Calcutta, north-Bihar towns and other Indian locations for education, publication, party organization and refuge. These connections were enabled by older mobility networks but acquired new significance as mass politics expanded.

A history of Nepalese democratization written only from Kathmandu therefore misses an important geography of political production. At the same time, cross-border organizing

should not be rewritten as proof that the movement was externally created; Nepalese actors used spaces available to them for their own political projects.

The 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship

India and Nepal signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship at Kathmandu on 31 July 1950, and Article 9 made it effective from the date of signature. Article 1 mutually recognized complete sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence (United Nations Treaty Series, No. 1302).

The treaty belongs to the postcolonial interstate order and should not be treated as the origin of every form of cross-border mobility. Kinship, pilgrimage, work and commerce had long crossed the frontier; the treaty formalized a new reciprocal framework between two sovereign governments.

Article 7 and reciprocal privileges

Article 7 provided, on a reciprocal basis, comparable privileges for nationals of each country in the other concerning residence, property ownership, trade and commerce, movement and similar matters. The wording is broader than a simple visa clause and became central to later descriptions of the open border.

Actual practice nevertheless remained shaped by domestic citizenship, land, security, labour and administrative law. “Open border” is therefore an analytical shorthand for a distinctive regime of mobility, not a claim that the frontier ceased to exist legally.

Article 8 and the break with British-era agreements

Article 8 cancelled, for matters covered by the 1950 treaty, previous treaties, agreements and engagements concluded on behalf of India between the British Government and Nepal. This clause marks the legal transition from an imperial relationship to a bilateral postcolonial one.

It did not erase the historical consequences of Sugauli, the 1816 restoration, 1860 boundary settlement, or 1923 treaty. Those instruments remain evidence for how the frontier and interstate relationship had been made before 1950.

November 1950: monarchy, insurgency, and the border

The political crisis sharpened in November 1950 when King Tribhuvan took refuge in the Indian embassy and Nepali Congress forces launched action from the border region, including at Birgunj. Indian correspondence shows simultaneous concern with Nepalese political change and instructions that Indian territory not simply become an armed base.

The episode demonstrates why the borderland cannot be described only as either “open” or “closed.” Political refugees, party organizers, armed groups, police and diplomats encountered different rules and tolerances even along the same frontier.

Negotiation, the Delhi compromise, and the end of Rana monopoly

Negotiations among the king, Rana leadership, Nepali Congress and India produced a compromise rather than an outright military conquest of Kathmandu. The result preserved the monarchy, brought party representatives into government, and ended the Rana family’s exclusive grip on executive power.

This negotiated character matters because institutions and elites survived the transition in altered forms. February 1951 was a decisive break in political regime, not a total institutional blank slate.

15 February 1951: Tribhuvan’s return

King Tribhuvan returned to Kathmandu on 15 February 1951 after the political settlement. His return symbolized the restoration of royal authority against the Rana prime-ministerial monopoly and created the setting for an interim coalition order.

The event is best understood within a sequence—border insurgency, negotiation, return, proclamation and coalition government—rather than as a single dramatic moment that by itself created democracy.

18 February 1951: proclamation and interim government

A royal proclamation of 18 February 1951 announced a new political order and a ministry combining Rana and Nepali Congress representation, while promising movement toward government based on a democratic constitution. The resulting coalition was unstable, but the Rana oligarchy as the exclusive governing system had ended (Joshi and Rose 1966; contemporary diplomatic records).

The transition opens Volume V's contemporary history. It did not resolve land inequality, citizenship, language, representation or the status of the Tarai/Madhesh; instead, those questions entered new electoral, constitutional and administrative arenas.

Sovereignty and social continuity: a source-controlled conclusion

From Sugauli to 1951 the Tarai borderland experienced increasingly precise state sovereignty without becoming socially sealed. Treaties, revenue systems, law codes, censuses, customs and railways made jurisdiction more visible, while migration, kinship, commerce, pilgrimage and political organization continued to cross it.

The strongest regional history therefore refuses both false unity and false separation. Nepal and India/British India were different political orders; the Tarai and north Bihar were also connected through institutions that can be documented at particular dates. The task is to preserve both propositions at once.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- East India Company and Kingdom of Nepal. Treaty of Sugauli. Signed 2 December 1815; counterpart exchange recorded 4 March 1816. Public-domain treaty text in British Indian treaty collections.
- British Government and Kingdom of Nepal. “Memorandum for the Approval and Acceptance of the Rajah of Nepal,” presented 8 December 1816, with Nepalese acceptance in December 1816. Supplementary Tarai boundary settlement.
- Aitchison, C. U. A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries. Government of India, 1909 and later revised editions.
- Ramakant. Indo-Nepalese Relations, 1816 to 1877. S. Chand, 1968.
- Whelpton, John. A History of Nepal. Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Regmi, Mahesh C. Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal. 4 vols. Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1963–1968.
- Regmi, Mahesh C. Landownership in Nepal. University of California Press, 1976.
- Regmi, Mahesh C. Thatched Huts and Stucco Palaces: Peasants and Landlords in 19th-Century Nepal. Vikas, 1978.
- Regmi, Mahesh C. An Economic History of Nepal, 1846–1901. Nath Publishing House, 1988.
- Khatiwoda, Rajan, Simon Cubelic, and Axel Michaels. The Muluki Ain of 1854: Nepal’s First Legal Code. Heidelberg University Publishing, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.17885/heiup.769>.
- Gaige, Frederick H. Regionalism and National Unity in Nepal. University of California Press, 1975.
- Government of Nepal, National Statistics Office. Historical notes on Nepal population censuses; first nationwide census 1911 and Rana-era censuses of 1911, 1920, 1930, and 1941.
- Government of the United Kingdom and Government of Nepal. Treaty between the United Kingdom and Nepal. Signed Kathmandu, 21 December 1923. Treaty Series No. 31 (1925).
- World Bank. A National Transport System for Nepal. Report, 1965. Sections on the Nepal Government Railway and Nepal–Janakpur–Jaynagar Railway.
- Government of Nepal, Ministry of Finance. Public Enterprises Annual Status Review / Yellow Book. Biratnagar Jute Mills entry: incorporation 1936.
- Terrenato, L., S. Shrestha, K. A. Dixit, et al. “Decreased Malaria Morbidity in the Tharu People Compared to Sympatric Populations in Nepal.” *Annals of Tropical Medicine and Parasitology* 82, no. 1 (1988): 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00034983.1988.11812202>.

- Modiano, G., G. Morpurgo, L. Terrenato, et al. "Protection against Malaria Morbidity: Near-Fixation of the Alpha-Thalassemia Gene in a Nepalese Population." *American Journal of Human Genetics* 48, no. 2 (1991): 390–397.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. *Selected Works, Second Series, vol. 2. Documents on the Biratnagar strike, Jogbani meeting, and Nepal, 1947*; source records in the Nehru Archive.
- Joshi, Bhuwan Lal, and Leo E. Rose. *Democratic Innovations in Nepal: A Case Study of Political Acculturation*. University of California Press, 1966.
- Government of India and Government of Nepal. *Treaty of Peace and Friendship*. Signed Kathmandu, 31 July 1950; entered into force on signature. *United Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 94, No. 1302.

VOLUME V.
CONTEMPORARY PERIOD.
Source-controlled regional history.

Chapter 22. Land reform, democracy, and changing regional power

The end of zamindari

The Bihar Land Reforms Act of 1950 marked a constitutional break in the agrarian order of north Bihar. It provided for the transfer to the state of the interests of proprietors and tenure-holders, dismantling the legal position of zamindars as revenue-receiving intermediaries. In Mithila the change struck directly at Darbhanga Raj and numerous smaller estates; in Anga and adjoining districts it likewise altered the relation among estate holders, raiyats, subordinate tenants, markets, ferries, forests, fisheries, and other revenue-bearing interests (Bihar Act XXX of 1950).

The change was profound but not instantaneous. Vesting of intermediary interests did not mean that every cultivator obtained ownership, that every tenancy dispute disappeared, or that local influence was redistributed in equal measure. Legal abolition and social redistribution therefore have to be studied separately.

Constitutional land reform and the early Republic

The abolition of zamindari became one of the first major tests of the new constitutional order. Property rights, compensation, legislative competence, and the social purpose of agrarian reform were argued before courts while constitutional amendments protected specified categories of land-reform legislation. Postcolonial agrarian change thus advanced through statutes, notifications, adjudication, and administrative transfer rather than through a single decree.

The Supreme Court described the common objective of the Bihar and comparable state statutes as elimination of intermediary proprietary structures and a more direct relationship between cultivators and the state. Constitutional

validity, however, was not the same as effective implementation (State of Bihar v. Kameshwar Singh, 1952).

What vesting transferred

The Bihar statute defined the interests passing to the state broadly. Estates and tenures carried claims not only over cultivated land but also over forests, fisheries, ferries, hats, bazaars, mines, minerals, and other revenue-yielding rights. Zamindari abolition therefore altered the legal status of commercial and environmental resources embedded in the estate system.

At village level, the transfer of superior interests did not erase every lower layer of tenure. Raiyats, under-raiyats, occupancy rights, homestead claims, khas cultivation, and recorded or disputed tenancies still had to be sorted through law and administration.

Darbhanga Raj and the Kameshwar Singh litigation

Darbhanga Raj became a central test case because of the scale of its landed interests and the prominence of Maharajadhiraja Sir Kameshwar Singh. Notifications under the Bihar Land Reforms Act triggered constitutional challenges that reached the Supreme Court. The 1952 decision sustained the core reform scheme while holding selected provisions invalid.

The case also clarifies the status of Darbhanga Raj. The Republic did not annex a sovereign princely state; it acquired legally defined proprietary and intermediary interests in a vast zamindari whose rights had already been transformed by Mughal, Company, Permanent Settlement, and colonial statutory regimes.

From estate authority to retained wealth and influence

Abolition did not make former estate families socially irrelevant. Private residences, movable wealth, urban property, business interests, educational institutions, religious

endowments, professional networks, and cultural prestige could survive even after superior agrarian rights vested in the state.

This distinction between juridical power and social capital is essential. The disappearance of estate-based territorial authority could coexist with continuity in philanthropy, electoral networks, education, marriage alliances, and access to bureaucracy.

Raiyats after intermediary abolition

For cultivators, one promise of abolition was the removal of superior claimants between tiller and state. Yet the legal position of a raiyat still depended on recorded status, rent history, the nature of the holding, tenancy law, and the evidence available in disputes. Abolition could remove one layer without automatically securing every sharecropper, under-raiyat, or agricultural labourer.

The equation 'zamindari abolished = cultivator became owner' is therefore historically false. Postcolonial agrarian relations remained stratified.

Abolition was not redistribution

The 1950 Act primarily abolished intermediary interests. Redistribution required additional measures: ceilings on holdings, identification of surplus land, tenancy protection, homestead rights, voluntary land-gift programmes, and the difficult work of updating records.

Jannuzi emphasized the gap between statutory ambition and agrarian outcome in Bihar. Large holders could adapt through transfers, fragmentation, litigation, and political influence, while the state faced chronic problems of records and enforcement (Jannuzi 1974).

Ceiling legislation and surplus land

The Bihar Land Reforms (Fixation of Ceiling Area and Acquisition of Surplus Land) Act, 1961 represented a second stage. Whereas the 1950 law targeted intermediaries, ceiling

legislation limited permissible holdings and enabled acquisition of surplus land. Later amendments repeatedly altered classifications, procedures, and implementation.

A ceiling law did not automatically produce distributable land. Surplus identification required records, scrutiny of families and transfers, classification, adjudication, possession, and eventual allotment.

Records, mutation, and the politics of implementation

Land reform made cadastral and revenue records politically charged. A name in a record-of-rights, a mutation entry, the classification of a plot, or the date of a transfer could determine whether land was retainable, surplus, tenanted, or disputed.

Official returns are therefore not transparent measurements of ownership. They were produced through claims, inspections, litigation, and sometimes strategic concealment. The gap between declared, recorded, possessed, and cultivated land is itself historical evidence.

Bhoodan and voluntary redistribution

The Bhoodan movement introduced a different philosophy of land reform. Beginning in 1951 under Vinoba Bhave, it sought voluntary gifts of land for distribution to the landless rather than relying solely on compulsory acquisition. Bihar became an important arena of the movement.

Bhoodan reveals the coexistence of multiple postcolonial projects: constitutional acquisition, moral persuasion, Gandhian village reconstruction, socialist agrarian politics, and peasant demands for enforceable rights.

The Bihar Bhoodan Yagna Act, 1954

The Bihar Bhoodan Yagna Act, 1954 gave the movement a statutory framework for receiving, administering, and distributing donated land. The law is a firm chronological anchor showing that voluntary land-gift entered the domain of public administration (Bihar Act XXII of 1954).

Historical assessment must distinguish land promised, land legally donated, land taken into possession, and land effectively distributed. Each stage could produce a different total.

Gramdan and the village-community ideal

Bhoo dan developed into Gramdan, shifting attention from individual gifts toward collective village arrangements. Bihar later enacted a Gramdan framework, reflecting continued experimentation with property, cooperation, and local self-government.

Its uneven adoption exposes the difficulty of translating an ideal of village community into settlements divided by caste, class, tenancy, gender, and competing land claims.

Landlessness and agricultural labour

The abolition of intermediary landlords did not remove the distinction between landholding cultivators and landless labourers. Agricultural labour remained central to the rural economy of Mithila and Anga, especially where holdings were fragmented or flood and erosion repeatedly destabilized access to land.

For labouring households, wages, seasonal employment, migration, debt, common resources, and homestead security could matter as much as formal tenancy. Land reform must therefore be evaluated through labour history as well as acres acquired.

Irrigation, flood control, and development

Postcolonial agrarian reform operated within the riverine environment discussed in earlier chapters. Irrigation schemes, embankments, drainage works, roads, and later large flood-control projects altered access to water and land while also redistributing risk.

In north Bihar, secure legal title over a frequently inundated or eroding plot did not provide the same security as title over

stable irrigated land. Agrarian reform and hydraulic development cannot be separated analytically.

Community Development and the expansion of the local state

Community Development and related planning initiatives brought agricultural extension, roads, schools, health centres, cooperatives, and block-level administration into the language of rural transformation.

This expanded state presence created new resources and new conflict. Control over contracts, recommendations, beneficiary lists, cooperative offices, and access to block officials could become a new form of rural power after the decline of estate authority.

Cooperatives, credit, and new intermediaries

Cooperative credit and agricultural institutions aimed to reduce dependence on older moneylending and landlord networks. In practice, access depended on membership, records, collateral, local leadership, and bureaucratic procedure.

Postcolonial rural society therefore did not become intermediary-free. The forms of intermediation shifted toward elected representatives, cooperative officials, contractors, bankers, party workers, and development bureaucrats.

The first general election and universal adult franchise

The 1951–52 general election translated universal adult franchise into mass electoral practice. Election Commission reports document the administrative scale of enrolment, delimitation, symbols, ballots, and voting across a largely rural population.

Former zamindars, tenants, labourers, women, and lower-caste voters entered the same formal electoral system. Social inequality did not disappear, but political legitimacy now depended on counted votes rather than inherited estate title.

Congress, local notables, and adaptation

Early postcolonial elections did not automatically displace established elites. Landholders, lawyers, teachers, professionals, caste leaders, freedom fighters, and locally influential families entered party structures and electoral politics.

Democracy could therefore absorb parts of the old social order even while changing the rules by which authority had to be justified. Social prestige, education, land, and organizational capacity were translated into nominations, constituency work, and access to government.

Socialist and peasant alternatives

Congress was not the only political current in Bihar. Socialist organizations, peasant movements, communists, Sarvodaya workers, and later opposition parties contested agrarian policy, labour relations, corruption, caste hierarchy, and development.

Karpoori Thakur's rise from Samastipur into state politics exemplifies the growth of a socialist politics rooted in rural Bihar and linked to education, language, reservation, and social equality.

Caste, democracy, and historically dated categories

Universal franchise gave caste networks new political functions without making caste the only axis of politics. Land, class, faction, religion, development, ideology, and party organization also mattered.

The book continues to date caste categories rather than naturalize them. In particular, hereditary Śrotriya status is not projected into medieval Mithila; the book retains the Panji-based c.1800 reconstruction established in earlier chapters.

Karpoori Thakur and the 1978 reservation formula

In 1978 the Bihar government under Karpoori Thakur implemented a differentiated reservation policy for backward categories, including a distinct share for extremely backward

classes and additional provisions for women and economically weaker sections. Later official accounts identify this as a major step in Bihar's social-justice politics.

The policy did not settle the meaning of backwardness. It opened enduring debates about sub-classification, representation within OBC categories, and the relation between social and economic disadvantage.

Mandal-era politics and the 1990s

National implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations in 1990 transformed the political vocabulary of backward-class representation. Bihar already possessed a strong socialist and reservation tradition, and the 1990s produced a major reorganization of party competition and leadership.

Witsoe reads this transformation as a democratization that challenged older upper-caste domination while also producing new forms of mediation, patronage, and conflict (Witsoe 2013).

Panchayati Raj and local government

Rural local government became another arena in which post-zamindari power could be redistributed. Panchayats linked villages to development funds, infrastructure, welfare selection, and local dispute resolution.

A panchayat representative could influence roads, school buildings, beneficiary lists, water schemes, and access to block offices—forms of authority very different from estate rent collection but consequential in everyday life.

The Seventy-third Constitutional Amendment

The Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992 gave Panchayati Raj institutions constitutional status and created a framework for regular elections, reservations, finance commissions, and a three-tier system subject to state law. The amendment came into force in 1993.

Constitutional design created an institutional opening rather than a guarantee of equal capacity or freedom from local capture.

Bihar Panchayati Raj Act, 2006 and women in local office

The Bihar Panchayati Raj Act, 2006 established the contemporary three-tier framework of Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, and Zila Parishad. Official state and Union sources identify fifty per cent horizontal reservation for women as a major feature of the system.

Large-scale entry of women into local office changed the descriptive composition of political authority. Substantive power still depended on family networks, literacy, caste, class, party organization, and administrative access.

Bihar reorganization in 2000

The Bihar Reorganisation Act, 2000 created Jharkhand with effect from 15 November 2000. Much of the mineral-industrial plateau left Bihar, changing the territorial and economic framework within which Mithila, Anga, and the north-Bihar plains were governed.

Bhagalpur, Purnea, Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, Samastipur, Madhubani, Saharsa, and the other regions central to this book remained in Bihar, but the state itself had been substantially redefined.

Nepal's Interim Government Act of 1951

The end of Rana oligarchy was followed by the Interim Government of Nepal Act, 1951. Its preamble made clear that it was intended to govern until a constitution could be framed, while its directive principles articulated a programme of social, economic, and political justice.

The transition did not immediately create stable parliamentary government. Coalition conflict, palace influence, party competition, administrative weakness, and unresolved

questions of land and representation made the 1950s a period of experiment.

Election and parliamentary opening in 1959

Nepal's first national parliamentary election in 1959 created a short democratic opening. The Nepali Congress formed a government under B. P. Koirala within a constitutional monarchy.

For the Tarai/Madhesh, electoral politics offered new avenues of representation but did not remove inequalities in land, citizenship documentation, language, or access to administration.

Royal intervention and the 1962 Panchayat Constitution

In December 1960 King Mahendra dismissed the elected government, dissolved parliament, and detained political leaders. The Constitution promulgated in 1962 then established a partyless Panchayat system culminating in the National Panchayat and concentrating decisive authority in the monarchy.

The term 'Panchayat' must not be confused with India's Panchayati Raj. Similar vocabulary concealed different constitutional histories.

The Lands Act of 1964

Nepal's Lands Act, 2021 B.S. (1964) addressed ceilings, tenancy, rents, and landholding within Nepal's own legal history. It became a central statutory instrument of post-Rana agrarian reform.

It was not a Nepalese equivalent of Bihar's 1950 zamindari abolition. Nepal's agrarian order had developed through raikar, birta, jagir, guthi, and other categories rather than the Bengal Permanent Settlement (Regmi 1976).

Limits of Nepalese land reform

As in Bihar, legislation did not translate automatically into equal redistribution. Tenancy registration, land ceilings, cadastral knowledge, landlord-tenant relations, and political patronage shaped implementation.

Long-term land history matters because reform operated upon inherited fiscal and tenurial categories. A post-1964 holding cannot be understood by projecting modern ownership concepts backward.

Multiparty restoration in 1990

The 1990 people's movement ended the partyless Panchayat order and produced a constitutional monarchy with multiparty competition. Elections, parties, civil society, and a freer public sphere reopened channels of representation.

The restoration did not settle structural inequalities. Land, caste, region, language, gender, and unequal access to the state remained politically significant.

Conflict, peace process, and republican transition

The Maoist insurgency beginning in 1996 altered local governance, policing, party activity, development, and everyday security across Nepal in regionally uneven ways. The 2006 settlement and peace process then opened a new constitutional transition.

Nepal became a republic in 2008, and the Constituent Assembly process ultimately produced the Constitution of 2015. Questions of Madhesh representation, citizenship, and federal design are treated in detail in Chapter 27.

Federalism after 2015

The Constitution of Nepal, 2015 established federal, provincial, and local levels of government. Federalism altered the institutional geography through which the Tarai/Madhesh

negotiated administration, development, representation, and language policy.

Federal boundaries are contemporary constitutional arrangements, not restorations of ancient cultural frontiers. A present province, historic Mithila, medieval Tirhut, and a Maithili-speaking region cannot be treated as interchangeable territories.

Two postcolonial states, one connected region

By the later twentieth century, north Bihar and the Nepal Tarai were governed through different constitutions, land laws, party systems, courts, and bureaucracies. Yet rivers, markets, marriage, labour, pilgrimage, and language continued to connect them.

State divergence and social connection intensified together. Similar cultural practices do not erase national jurisdiction, while national jurisdiction does not imply that borderland society disappeared.

Law is an event; implementation is a process

This chapter distinguishes enactment, notification, adjudication, implementation, and social effect. A statute has a legal date; its consequences may unfold over decades and vary by district, household, social group, and administrative capacity.

The same rule applies to constitutions and elections. Universal franchise, Panchayati Raj, multiparty politics, or federalism identify institutional openings; they do not by themselves prove equal participation or effective devolution.

Diagram 42: Bihar — from zamindari abolition to layered land reform, 1950–2006

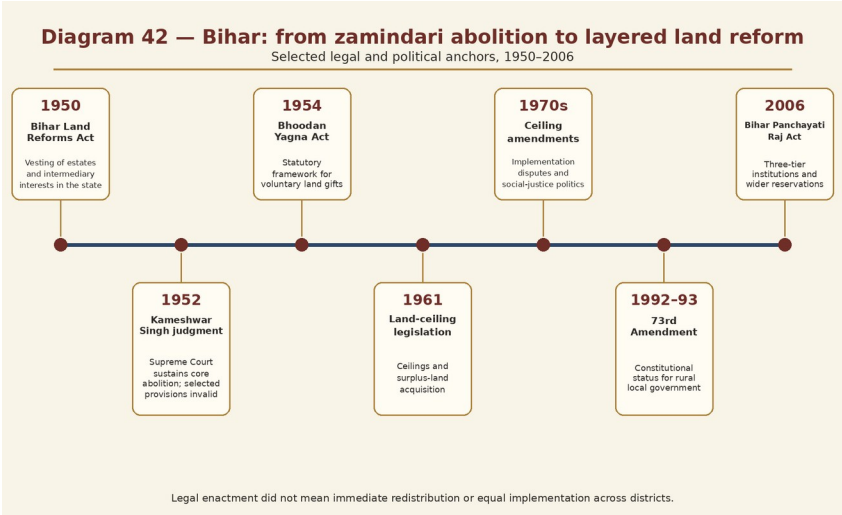


Diagram 42. Selected legal and political anchors in Bihar’s transition from zamindari abolition to layered agrarian reform and decentralized rural government, 1950–2006.

Original analytical diagram prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. Sources: Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950; State of Bihar v. Kameshwar Singh (1952); Bihar Bhoodan Yagna Act, 1954; Bihar ceiling legislation; Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992; Bihar Panchayati Raj Act, 2006.

Diagram 43: Two postcolonial trajectories in a connected region

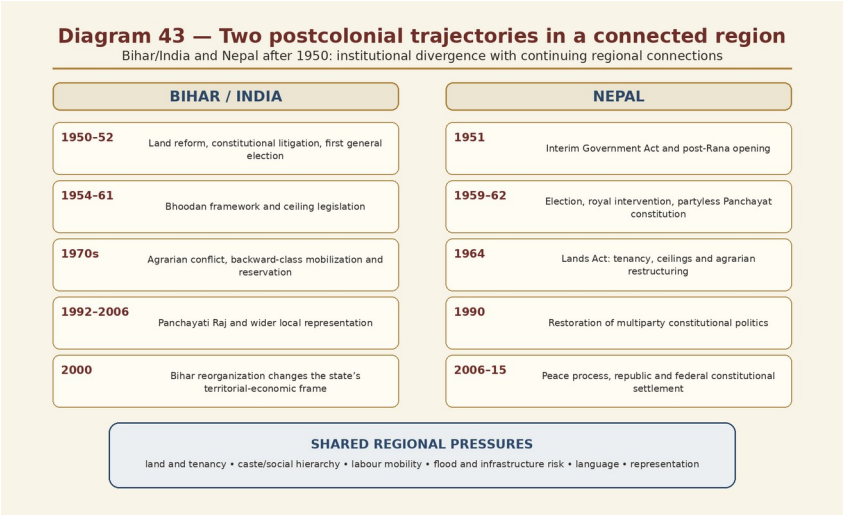


Diagram 43. Bihar/India and Nepal followed distinct postcolonial constitutional and land-reform trajectories while remaining connected through regional social, economic, and environmental pressures.

Original analytical diagram prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. Sources: Election Commission of India; Bihar land-reform statutes; Nepal’s Interim Government Act, 1951; Constitution of Nepal, 1962; Lands Act, 1964; Constitution of Nepal, 2015; Whelpton 2005; Regmi 1976.

Chapter-specific bibliography

Government of Bihar. The Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950 (Bihar Act XXX of 1950).

Supreme Court of India. State of Bihar v. Maharajadhiraja Sir Kameshwar Singh of Darbhanga, [1952] 1 SCR 889; AIR 1952 SC 252.

Election Commission of India. Report on the First General Elections in India, 1951-52, Vol. I.

Government of Bihar. The Bihar Bhoodan Yagna Act, 1954 (Bihar Act XXII of 1954).

Government of Bihar. The Bihar Land Reforms (Fixation of Ceiling Area and Acquisition of Surplus Land) Act, 1961, with subsequent amendments.

Government of India. Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992.

Government of Bihar. The Bihar Panchayati Raj Act, 2006.

Government of India. The Bihar Reorganisation Act, 2000.

- Jannuzi, F. Tomasson. *Agrarian Crisis in India: The Case of Bihar*. University of Texas Press, 1974.
- Witsoe, Jeffrey. *Democracy against Development: Lower-Caste Politics and Political Modernity in Postcolonial India*. University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- Government of Nepal. *The Interim Government of Nepal Act*, 1951.
- Government of Nepal. *Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal*, 1959.
- Government of Nepal. *Constitution of Nepal*, 1962.
- Government of Nepal. *Lands Act*, 2021 B.S. (1964).
- Government of Nepal. *Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal*, 1990.
- Government of Nepal. *Interim Constitution of Nepal*, 2007.
- Government of Nepal. *Constitution of Nepal*, 2015.
- Regmi, Mahesh C. *Landownership in Nepal*. University of California Press, 1976.
- Gaige, Frederick H. *Regionalism and National Unity in Nepal*. University of California Press, 1975.
- Whelpton, John. *A History of Nepal*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Chapter 23. The India-Nepal borderland, migration, and exchange

An open border is still a border

The India–Nepal frontier is often described as 'open', but openness is a historically specific regulatory arrangement rather than the absence of a boundary. The two states retain separate sovereignty, citizenship, criminal and civil jurisdiction, taxation, property law, electoral membership, customs systems, and security institutions. What is unusual is the extent to which citizens can move across much of the land frontier without the passport-and-visa regime typical of many international borders (Government of India and Government of Nepal 1950; Kumar 2013).

The resulting borderland is best understood as a field in which legal separation and social connection operate simultaneously. A marriage may be locally ordinary yet legally cross-national; a weekly market trip may involve little documentary friction while a land purchase, inheritance, arrest, school certificate, or citizenship application activates national law.

Article 7 and the limits of treaty shorthand

The 31 July 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship is the central bilateral legal anchor. Article 1 affirms sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence, while Article 7 commits the governments, on a reciprocal basis, to grant nationals of the other country privileges concerning residence, property, trade and commerce, movement, and similar matters. The two clauses should be read together: reciprocal privileges do not abolish the international frontier (Government of India and Government of Nepal 1950).

It is therefore inaccurate to say that the treaty created a borderless space. Domestic legislation, administrative interpretation, security practice, land law, and later bilateral

agreements determine how particular rights operate. The treaty is a framework, not a complete code for every crossing.

Open-border practice before and after 1950

Mobility across the plains long predates 1950. Marriage, pilgrimage, market exchange, seasonal work, military recruitment, rail travel, and movement between estates and towns already linked the Tarai and north Bihar. The treaty gave reciprocal mobility a postcolonial inter-state framework, but it did not create the social infrastructure from nothing.

This distinction matters historically. A practice can be older than its present legal basis, and a legal basis can reshape an older practice. Borderland history must therefore date both custom and regulation rather than treating either as timeless.

Paired localities rather than one undifferentiated frontier

The frontier should be reconstructed through linked localities and corridors. Raxaul–Birgunj, Jogbani–Biratnagar, Jayanagar–Janakpur, and the crossings connecting Sitamarhi and Madhubani districts with adjoining Madhesh districts differ in transport infrastructure, commercial scale, urbanization, policing, language use, and environmental setting.

A national statement about an 'open border' cannot describe all of these places equally well. The most useful scale is often relational: market and market, station and station, village and village, customs point and logistics terminal.

Mithila as a cross-border cultural field after national partition

The modern boundary divides a cultural field in which Maithili, pilgrimage, marriage networks, ritual calendars, literary exchange, and shared historical references continue across India and Nepal. This continuity is historically important, but it should not be converted into a claim that the two national jurisdictions are artificial or irrelevant.

The correct analytical formulation is double: Mithila can operate as a cultural region across the boundary, while India

and Nepal remain sovereign states whose laws materially shape citizenship, education, property, policing, development, and political representation.

Marriage as measurable mobility

Cross-border marriage is not only a literary trope or a slogan about 'roti-beti' relations. Nepal's 2021 census provides demographic evidence of its scale and gendered direction. The National Statistics Office reports that most foreign-born residents were born in India and interprets the strong female predominance among India-born residents as substantially connected to Nepali men marrying Indian women (National Statistics Office 2021).

The same report records markedly higher foreign-born shares among women in the Tarai and Madhesh than among men. These figures do not identify every marriage network or its motives, but they establish that cross-border family formation is visible in national demographic data.

Foreign-born is not the same as foreign citizen

Census categories must be read precisely. Country of birth records where a person was born; citizenship or nationality records legal membership. A woman born in Bihar and resident in Madhesh may be foreign-born without remaining an Indian citizen, while an Indian citizen resident in Nepal may have been born elsewhere. Conflating these categories produces false migration counts.

The 2021 Nepal census separately reports foreign citizenship and shows that Indian citizens constitute the overwhelming majority of recorded foreign citizens. The distinction between birthplace and citizenship is central to any history of marriage, settlement and legal incorporation.

Marriage, citizenship, and gendered documentation

Cross-border marriage can expose differences between kinship acceptance and documentary status. Citizenship

transmission, naturalization, registration, inheritance, and proof of descent are governed by national law, not by the social fact of belonging to a cross-border kin network.

Research on Madheshi women's access to citizenship shows how gender, caste, class and assumptions about foreign origin can intersect in documentary exclusion. Such work cautions against romanticizing marriage mobility as automatically equal or frictionless (Pandey 2023).

The analytical limits of “roti-beti”

The phrase 'roti-beti' effectively conveys food, kinship and marriage intimacy, but it can conceal inequality. Not all castes, classes, religious communities, or localities participate in the same marriage circuits, and cross-border marriages do not impose identical burdens on men and women.

The phrase is therefore retained as evidence of a widely used idiom of connection, not as a sociological description of the whole frontier.

Labour migration to India as an old but poorly counted system

For much of the twentieth century India was the principal external labour destination for Nepalis, and seasonal or circular movement remains important. Yet the very openness that makes movement easy also makes it difficult to count. Government-supported labour-migration reports note that India-bound workers generally do not pass through the labour-permit system used for Gulf and Malaysian destinations (Government of Nepal/ILO 2014).

This creates a methodological asymmetry: migration to a more distant destination can generate better administrative data than routine work across a nearby open border.

Why border crossing is statistically elusive

ILO and IOM studies repeatedly emphasize the absence of comprehensive records for movements across the India–Nepal land frontier. A person may cross daily, seasonally, for several

months, or as part of a multi-stage journey. Different surveys count trips, people, absences, destinations, usual residence, or permits, and these are not interchangeable measures (IOM 2023; Government of Nepal/ILO 2014).

The historian should therefore resist producing a single definitive number for 'Nepalis in India' unless the source's definition, date and unit of measurement are stated.

Cross-border mobility survey as a new evidence genre

The IOM's 2023 Baseline Study on Cross-border Migration and the Nepal Cross-Border Mobility Survey represent an important methodological shift because they focus directly on ground crossing points, reasons for travel, seasonal patterns, vulnerabilities and routes. They do not make older census series obsolete; they answer a different question.

Their value lies in making movement itself visible rather than inferring mobility only from residence at a census date.

Seasonal and circular labour

Seasonal labour can connect agricultural calendars, construction cycles, transport work, petty commerce and services on both sides of the frontier. A worker may maintain a household and land claim in one country while earning repeatedly in the other. Such circulation does not fit a simple model of permanent emigration.

Circularity also distributes risk: households can combine farming, local wages, Indian earnings, and later migration to Gulf or Malaysian labour markets. The border is one segment in a wider livelihood system.

India, the Gulf, Malaysia, and multi-destination households

Since the late twentieth century, labour migration from Nepal has diversified sharply toward the Gulf, Malaysia, Korea and other destinations. India did not disappear from this system. Instead, households may contain several migration trajectories at once: one member in India, another in Qatar or Malaysia, and

others moving internally toward Kathmandu or provincial towns (Sijapati 2015; National Statistics Office, International Migration in Nepal).

This diversification is essential for understanding remittances and household strategy. The India–Nepal border can be both a destination frontier and a transit or return corridor.

Madhesh as a region of internal and international mobility

Nepal's 2021 migration reports show that Madhesh participates simultaneously in internal out-migration, cross-border family formation, and foreign-employment migration. Recent Department of Foreign Employment data summarized by the National Statistics Office identify districts including Dhanusha, Siraha, Mahottari, Sarlahi and Morang among important origins of labour migrants in several recent years.

No single migration narrative can therefore define the plains. Marriage, education, urbanization, India-bound work and permit-based overseas employment overlap.

Absence and the household economy

Migration changes the household even when the migrant eventually returns. Remittances can finance food, housing, education, health care, land improvement, ceremonies or debt repayment, while absence reallocates agricultural work, care, decision-making and risk.

The effects vary by destination, wage, debt, caste, class, gender and household structure. 'Migration' is not inherently a development success or a distress indicator; it can contain both opportunity and coercion.

Women's work and the care economy

Male labour migration can increase women's responsibility for cultivation, livestock, household finance, elder care and children's education without necessarily increasing formal ownership or political authority. Female migration, marriage

migration and cross-border petty trade create different configurations.

A borderland history that counts only the wage earner therefore misses much of the labour redistribution produced by mobility.

Remittances as social as well as monetary transfers

Money transfers are only one form of remittance. Migrants also carry consumer expectations, political ideas, languages, technical knowledge, religious practices, educational aspirations and information about employment. These social remittances can reshape village status and household decisions even when the cash flow is modest.

Digital banking and mobile communication have accelerated some exchanges, but cash, hand-carried goods and informal credit remain historically important in border markets.

Border bazaars and everyday exchange

Border markets connect food grains, vegetables, livestock, clothing, medicines, household goods, repair services, transport and ritual consumption. Small-scale crossing responds to price differences, exchange rates, harvest seasons, family obligations and differences in the availability of services.

The economic geography of the frontier is thus not reducible to customs statistics. Formal trade data record declared consignments; they do not measure every household purchase or market visit.

Informal does not automatically mean illegal

Historical writing should distinguish four categories that are often collapsed: permitted personal circulation, small trade that may fall under simplified or local rules, undeclared but non-criminalized practices, and smuggling or prohibited commerce. The legal status of a transaction depends on goods, value, route, declaration requirements and the law in force at the time.

Calling all unrecorded exchange 'smuggling' turns an archival limitation into a criminal judgment.

Currency, prices, and arbitrage

The Indian rupee and Nepali rupee circulate within closely connected monetary environments, but they are not the same currency and the exchange relationship is institutionally managed. Border households respond to relative prices, banking access, cash availability, fuel prices and seasonal demand.

Price differentials can draw shoppers across the frontier without implying a permanent directional flow. The same market can attract buyers from one side for medicine and from the other for agricultural produce or services.

Raxaul–Birgunj as a logistics corridor

Raxaul–Birgunj is one of the major formal freight corridors linking Nepal with Indian ports and markets. Its significance reflects rail access, customs infrastructure, warehousing and road connections as well as the urban economies of the paired towns.

The Birgunj Integrated Check Post, inaugurated in 2018, represents a modernization of border logistics rather than the creation of trade at a previously inactive frontier (Ministry of External Affairs, Annual Report 2022).

Jogbani–Biratnagar: industry and border infrastructure

The Jogbani–Biratnagar corridor links an Indian railhead and commercial town with Nepal's major eastern industrial centre. Its history reaches back through the growth of Biratnagar industry and anti-Rana politics, but contemporary logistics have added new institutional forms.

The Biratnagar Integrated Check Post was inaugurated in January 2020. The date is useful because it shows that increasing formal border infrastructure can coexist with extensive everyday mobility rather than replacing it.

Jayanagar–Janakpur: pilgrimage, kinship, and railway mobility

The Jayanagar–Janakpur corridor combines pilgrimage, market exchange, education, family travel and transport history. Earlier narrow-gauge railway connections gave the corridor a distinctive twentieth-century mobility infrastructure.

On 2 April 2022 the Jayanagar–Kurtha section was inaugurated as Nepal's first broad-gauge passenger rail line in the new cross-border rail programme. The event restored railway passenger connectivity in a new technological and institutional form rather than reproducing the old railway unchanged (Ministry of External Affairs 2022).

Infrastructure does not erase the boundary

Integrated check posts, railways, bridges and improved roads can accelerate movement while simultaneously making it more legible to customs, police and state agencies. Infrastructure therefore produces both connectivity and administrative visibility.

A faster border is not necessarily a weaker border. Modernization can increase the state's capacity to regulate large freight flows even while personal mobility remains relatively easy.

Trade and transit are not the same thing

Nepal's trade with India and its transit through Indian territory to third-country ports are governed through related but distinct bilateral arrangements. Transit concerns the movement of Nepal's external trade through India; bilateral trade concerns exchange between the two economies.

The 2023 transit arrangements include specified rail and road routes and conditions for cargo movement, illustrating how an 'open' people-border coexists with highly formalized freight regulation (Government of India, Ministry of Commerce 2023).

Formal corridors and unequal local effects

Large logistics projects redistribute opportunity. Warehouses, trucking, customs brokerage, hotels, land values and road congestion may grow near major crossing points, while smaller routes can become relatively less important for freight.

Infrastructure history should therefore ask who gains from a corridor, whose land is acquired, how traffic alters towns, and whether local pedestrians and small traders experience the border differently from containerized cargo.

Pilgrimage across two states

Janakpur, Sitamarhi, Ayodhya and other sacred centres belong to itineraries that cross political borders and administrative scales. Pilgrimage demonstrates that cultural geography and state geography can overlap without being identical.

Modern roads, railways, buses and publicity can intensify older sacred connections. The resulting pilgrimage economy supports transport, lodging, ritual specialists and markets while remaining subject to national law and infrastructure policy.

Education as cross-border mobility

Students cross the frontier for schools, colleges, professional training, examinations and language education. Educational movement can be short-term and repetitive rather than permanent migration, and family networks often reduce the cost of residence away from home.

Degrees, school certificates, fees, quotas and professional recognition remain nationally regulated. Cultural proximity therefore lowers some barriers while leaving institutional barriers intact.

Health care and medical corridors

Border residents often seek medical care according to distance, reputation, cost and transport rather than nationality

alone. Towns with hospitals, diagnostic centres and pharmacies can draw patients across the frontier, just as specialist treatment may send patients to larger Indian or Nepali cities.

Health mobility became especially visible during periods when pandemic restrictions interrupted routine crossing, revealing how deeply everyday services could depend on access across the boundary.

Security and the variable intensity of checking

The open-border regime has never meant an absence of security institutions. Police, armed forces, customs, immigration or local administrative agencies can intensify checking in response to specific threats, elections, protests, epidemics, or bilateral tensions.

The appropriate historical unit is therefore the regulatory episode: what was restricted, at which crossing, for whom, and for how long. Generalized claims that the frontier is either permanently uncontrolled or permanently sealed are both misleading.

Extradition, policing, and criminal jurisdiction

India and Nepal have maintained bilateral arrangements concerning extradition and law-enforcement cooperation alongside the open-border relationship. Such instruments underscore a basic point: ease of movement does not transfer criminal jurisdiction from one state to the other.

Security cooperation should be studied through specific treaties, cases and agencies rather than by treating mobility itself as a security problem.

Trafficking and the danger of securitizing migrants

Easy land crossing can be exploited by traffickers, and migration research documents risks affecting women, children and workers. These risks are serious, but they do not justify collapsing consensual migration, marriage, informal work and trafficking into one category.

Protection requires identifying coercion, deception, debt, age, recruitment practices and workplace conditions. Border populations should not be treated as presumptively suspect because regulation is difficult.

2015: protest, blockade, and competing narratives

The 2015 constitutional crisis and Madhesh protests turned major border crossings into sites of national and bilateral confrontation. Scholarship agrees on severe disruption of fuel and goods but differs in its attribution of agency: some accounts foreground blockade by Madheshi protesters, while others argue that Indian pressure or an undeclared blockade was decisive (Tripathi 2019; Jnawali 2023; Behera, Nayak and Shyam Hari 2024).

A source-controlled history should preserve this disagreement instead of choosing terminology that silently decides a contested political question. What is firmly established is that the practical openness of the frontier contracted sharply and that border disruption became a major issue in India–Nepal relations.

2015 as evidence against timeless openness

The disruption demonstrates that the open border is a political institution, not a natural condition. Roads, fuel depots, customs points and protest sites can transform ordinary connectivity into leverage.

It also shows why cultural closeness does not eliminate interstate conflict. The same cross-border ties that support everyday mobility can become politically charged during constitutional and nationalist disputes.

2020 pandemic restrictions

The COVID-19 pandemic provided an even clearer demonstration of exceptional closure. In March 2020 India restricted international passenger traffic through land check posts as part of public-health measures, and Nepal also imposed

movement controls. People accustomed to routine crossing were suddenly subject to emergency rules (Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs COVID-19 archive).

The episode made visible the dependence of families, workers, patients, students and traders on a border whose normal openness was often taken for granted.

Repatriation and stranded mobility

Pandemic restrictions created stranded travellers and required special repatriation and coordination. Government records of land-border returns during 2020 illustrate how mobility that normally generated little documentary trace could become highly administratively visible during emergency control.

The crisis is therefore methodologically valuable: exceptional paperwork illuminates circuits that ordinary administration may undercount.

Floods, earthquakes, and infrastructural interruption

Environmental hazards also interrupt borderland circulation. Flooded roads, damaged bridges, river migration and earthquakes can sever market and family routes without any change in diplomatic relations. Chapter 19 showed that transport infrastructure and hydraulic risk are historically entangled.

For the contemporary frontier, this means that accessibility must be mapped seasonally and infrastructurally, not inferred from political openness alone.

The Kosi as river and borderland corridor

The Kosi system links Nepal and Bihar through hydrology, embankments, irrigation, roads and disaster governance. People living near the river experience the border not simply as a line but as part of a larger environmental corridor in which upstream rainfall and infrastructure decisions can have downstream consequences.

River cooperation belongs to bilateral statecraft, while everyday flood adaptation belongs to household and local histories. Neither scale can substitute for the other.

Census residence and multi-local lives

A census must assign people to households and places according to defined rules. Borderland households may nevertheless be multi-local: a member works in India, another studies in Janakpur, and the household maintains land in a Nepalese village. The census remains authoritative for its own categories but cannot by itself reproduce the rhythm of crossing.

This is why population composition, migration, labour-permit and crossing-point surveys should be read together rather than forced into a single dataset.

Language at the crossing

Maithili, Bhojpur, Hindi, Nepali, Urdu and other languages circulate across border markets and institutions. A person's mother tongue, language of schooling, language used with police, and language of a customs form may differ.

Language choice can lower or raise transaction costs, but multilingual practice should not be treated as proof that national institutions are linguistically neutral.

Documents and documentary inequality

Citizenship certificates, identity documents, school records, land papers, bank accounts and mobile registrations increasingly mediate access to state and market institutions. People with strong local kin networks can still encounter difficulty when documentary requirements do not map neatly onto cross-border lives.

The growth of documentation is therefore not simply bureaucratic modernization. It can expand rights for some while exposing others to new forms of exclusion.

Digital communication and the compression of distance

Mobile phones, messaging applications and digital payments have altered the timing of borderland exchange. Migrants can coordinate travel, send information, compare prices, maintain family contact and arrange remittances without waiting for physical return.

Digital connection does not abolish geography. Network coverage, banking rules, identity verification, platform access and currency conversion remain nationally structured.

Borderland research and the ethics of visibility

Researching an open frontier creates ethical risks because detailed descriptions of informal work, undocumented residence, unofficial routes or vulnerable migrants can become tools of surveillance. Historical density should not come at the cost of exposing individuals to policing, trafficking, family retaliation or economic harm.

Where testimony concerns sensitive mobility, anonymization and aggregation are not weaknesses of evidence; they are part of responsible method.

Oral history and family archives

Official archives are strongest on treaties, customs, infrastructure and exceptional security episodes. Family papers, marriage registers, letters, photographs, diaries, newspapers and oral histories are often stronger on repeated journeys and everyday reasons for crossing.

These sources require the same criticism as state records: memory is selective, family documents survive unevenly, and retrospective narratives can normalize practices that changed over time.

Borderland method: law, infrastructure, and household in one frame

The most reliable reconstruction joins three levels. Law establishes sovereign rules and bilateral frameworks. Infrastructure determines which crossings and markets are practical. Household and community evidence shows why people move and how movement changes social life.

When one level is missing, analysis becomes distorted: treaty history alone makes the border too abstract, ethnography alone can understate state power, and transport history alone can mistake accessibility for social equality.

Diagram 44: India–Nepal borderland — flows, institutions, and filters

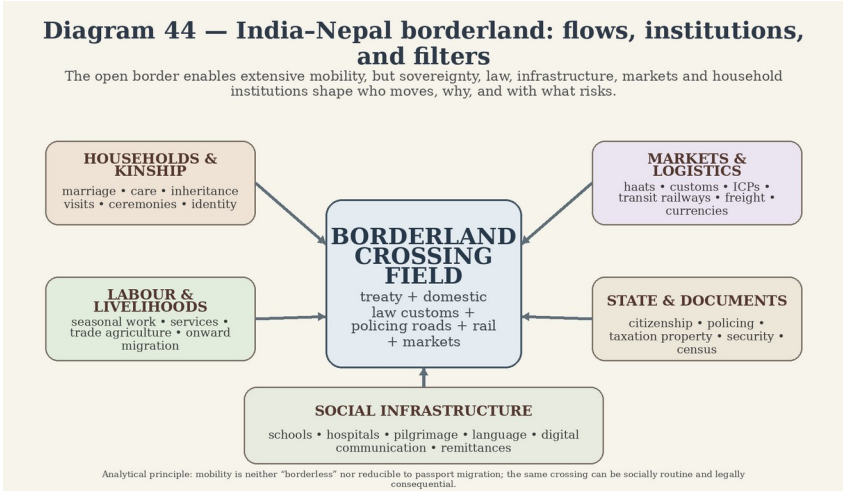


Diagram 44. India–Nepal borderland flows and filters: household, labour, markets, state documentation and social infrastructure interact through an unusually open but legally consequential international frontier.

Original analytical diagram prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. Sources: Government of India and Government of Nepal, Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1950); IOM, Baseline Study on Cross-border Migration (2023); IOM, Nepal Cross-border Mobility Survey (2023); National Statistics Office, Nepal, NPHC 2021 thematic reports.

Diagram 45: Selected post-1950 borderland anchors

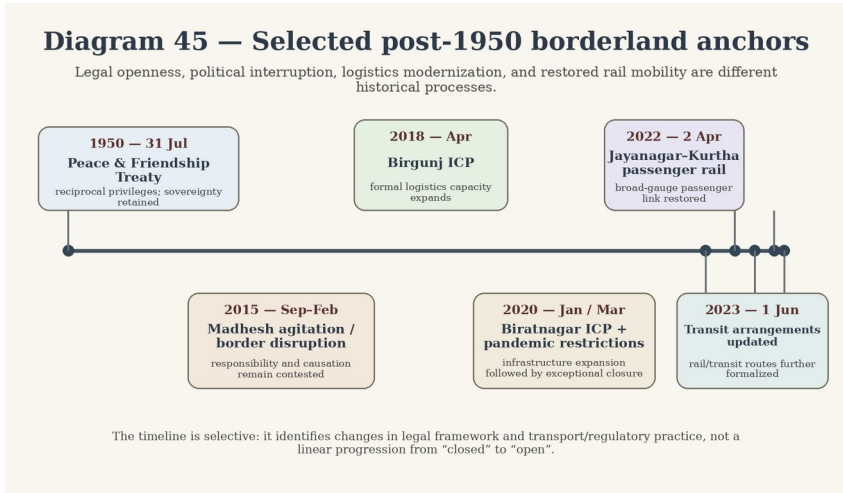


Diagram 45. Selected post-1950 borderland anchors showing changes in legal framework, political interruption, formal logistics and passenger connectivity.

Original analytical diagram prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. Sources: 1950 Treaty; Tripathi (2019); Ministry of External Affairs annual and COVID-19 records; India–Nepal transit arrangements, 2023.

Connected histories without a borderless myth

The India–Nepal frontier within Mithila is one of South Asia's clearest examples of intense social connection across durable national sovereignty. Its history cannot be reduced either to a hard territorial divide or to a romantic claim that the border does not matter.

The stronger conclusion is relational: kinship, language, labour, markets, pilgrimage and environmental systems continually cross the frontier, while citizenship, property, policing, taxation and political representation continually reproduce it. Borderland history consists precisely in that interaction.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Government of India and Government of Nepal. Treaty of Peace and Friendship. Signed Kathmandu, 31 July 1950; entered into force on signature. United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 94, No. 1302.
- International Organization for Migration (IOM). Baseline Study on Cross-border Migration. Kathmandu, 2023.
- International Organization for Migration (IOM). Nepal Cross-border Mobility Survey: Final Report. Kathmandu, 2023.
- National Statistics Office, Nepal. National Population and Housing Census 2021: Population Composition of Nepal. Thematic Report I. Government of Nepal.
- National Statistics Office, Nepal. National Population and Housing Census 2021: International Migration in Nepal. Thematic Report VI. Government of Nepal.
- Government of Nepal, Ministry of Labour and Employment, with International Labour Organization. Labour Migration for Employment: A Status Report for Nepal, 2013/2014. Kathmandu, 2014.
- Sijapati, Bandita. Analysis of Labour Market and Migration Trends in Nepal. International Labour Organization, 2015.
- Kumar, Rajeev. 'India–Nepal Open Border: Springboard for Opportunities.' *International Studies* 50, nos. 1–2 (2013): 165–183. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020881716654406>.
- Tripathi, Dhananjay. 'Influence of Borders on Bilateral Ties in South Asia: A Study of Contemporary India–Nepal Relations.' *International Studies* 56, nos. 2–3 (2019): 186–200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020881719851420>.
- Ibrahim, Farhana, and Tanuja Kothiyal, eds. *South Asian Borderlands: Mobility, History, Affect*. Cambridge University Press, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108951500>.
- Pandey, Krishna Prasad. 'The State and the Madheshi Dalit Women's Access to Citizenship in Nepal.' *Society and Culture in South Asia* 15, no. 1_suppl (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2455328X221122561>.
- Jnawali, Hari Har. 'Indian Intervention in Ethnic Movement of Nepal: Did Madheshi Lose or Gain?' *Ethnopolitics* 22 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687968221135943>.
- Behera, Anshuman, Gaurav Nayak, and Shyam Hari P. 'Making Sense of Nepal's Nationalism: Implications for the India–Nepal Relationship.' *India Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (2024): 55–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09749284231225825>.
- Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs. Annual Report 2022. Sections on India–Nepal rail links and Integrated Check Posts.

Government of India, Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Memorandum / arrangements associated with the India–Nepal Treaty of Transit, dated 1 June 2023.

Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs. COVID-19 archive: restriction on international passenger traffic through land check posts, 14 March 2020.

Chapter 24. Maithili and Angika: language, literature, and recognition

Recognition is not one event

Language recognition in modern South Asia occurs through several institutions that answer different questions. A university may accept a language for examination; a literary academy may recognize it for awards and publication; a census may classify a returned mother tongue under a particular heading; a state may authorize official use for specified purposes; the Constitution may place a language in the Eighth Schedule; and a digital standard may encode a historical script. None of these acts creates the speech community from nothing, and none by itself settles every question of linguistic classification.

This chapter therefore separates linguistic description, self-identification, literary standardization, census enumeration, educational use, constitutional status, and cultural policy. That distinction is especially important for Maithili and Angika, whose histories overlap geographically and linguistically but whose modern institutional trajectories are not identical.

Names, varieties, and the danger of retrospective certainty

The names used for speech varieties change over time. A label found in a twentieth-century linguistic survey cannot automatically be projected into the first millennium, and a modern movement name cannot be assumed to have been the self-designation of all earlier speakers. Conversely, a new public label may become socially real through literature, schooling, organizations, broadcasting, and political mobilization.

The source-controlled question is therefore not simply whether a form is a 'language' or a 'dialect.' It is who classified it, by what criteria, in which institution, at what date, and how speakers themselves used or rejected that classification.

Grierson and the colonial linguistic survey

George A. Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India placed Maithili within the Bihari section of the eastern Indo-Aryan field and described several regional varieties. His survey remains indispensable because it recorded grammar, vocabulary, specimens, and classificatory judgments at the turn of the twentieth century. It must nevertheless be read as a historical survey produced through colonial-era categories and field procedures, not as a permanently binding constitution of language identity (Grierson 1903).

Post-independence linguistic research can confirm, refine, or reject parts of that classification. The value of the survey lies in its dated evidence and explicit analysis, not in treating every label as timeless.

Chhika-Chhiki, Bhagalpuri speech, and the later Angika name

Grierson and colonial district writing described Chhika-Chhiki speech in the Munger-Bhagalpur field as a variety of Maithili. A contemporary district description citing the Linguistic Survey states that the Chhika-Chhiki variety closely resembled speech common in Bhagalpur. Modern Angika activists and writers, however, use Angika as a distinct language name and have built a literary and institutional movement around it.

These statements are not logically identical. One is an early twentieth-century linguistic classification; the other is a later history of self-identification, standardization, literature, and political recognition. This book records both rather than rewriting Grierson as if he had used the later category in the same sense, or denying the historical reality of the modern Angika movement.

Classification and self-identification are different evidence

Structural linguistics compares sound systems, morphology, syntax, vocabulary, and patterns of mutual intelligibility. Census

enumeration records named mother-tongue returns through administrative coding. Literary institutions create standardized publics. Political movements assert rights and recognition. These evidentiary forms can point in different directions without any one of them being fraudulent.

For that reason, the chapter avoids deciding identity solely through either taxonomic proximity or political declaration. A closely related speech form can support a distinct modern language movement; a state can recognize a name institutionally without resolving every comparative-linguistic argument.

Maithili as an internally varied language field

Modern standard Maithili is not the only speech form historically associated with the wider Maithili field. Grierson's survey and later scholarship distinguish regional varieties, while everyday speech continues to vary across north Bihar and Nepal. Standardization provides shared spelling, grammar, curricula, publication conventions, and broadcast forms, but it does not erase local speech.

A literary standard is therefore an institutional achievement rather than proof that all speakers use identical phonology or vocabulary. Non-standard varieties are not thereby 'corrupt' forms; they are part of the sociolinguistic history from which standards are selected.

Southern and eastern classifications in the Maithili field

Historical classifications have used labels such as Southern Standard Maithili, Eastern Maithili, Chhika-Chhiki, and other regional designations. Modern public vocabularies may instead use names such as Angika, Bajjika, or locally specific forms. The mapping between old survey categories and current identities is not always one-to-one.

This is why the book does not treat a modern census label as a direct translation of every earlier linguistic category. Continuity may be substantial, but it must be demonstrated through

language evidence and institutional history rather than asserted from resemblance alone.

Calcutta University recognition as an academic anchor

The 1917 Calcutta University recognition of Maithili, discussed in Chapter 20, belongs to the history of academic institutionalization. It helped create a field in which Maithili could be examined, taught, researched, and defended through university procedures. Recognition by a university was important, but it did not mean that the language had only then come into existence.

The event is best read alongside grammar writing, dictionaries, journals, manuscript study, and the formation of literary organizations. Academic recognition changes the institutional ecology of a language; it does not define the beginning of its literature.

Sahitya Akademi and the national literary field

Sahitya Akademi's official award list records Maithili awards from 1966. This literary recognition predates Maithili's inclusion in the Eighth Schedule by several decades and demonstrates that national literary institutions and constitutional schedules have separate histories (Sahitya Akademi).

Awards help create a canon by selecting books, genres, and authors for national visibility. They are evidence of institutional literary judgment, not a census of all writing or a determination of which regional forms count as authentic speech.

Bihar Maithili Academy and state cultural policy

The Bihar government established the Maithili Academy in 1976 for the development of Maithili language and culture; this date is also recorded in Patna High Court litigation concerning academy employment. The academy's existence gave state support to publication, scholarship, and literary activity at a time when constitutional Eighth Schedule recognition had not yet been achieved (Chandra Mohan Jha v. State of Bihar, 2013).

Institutional history also requires attention to capacity. A language academy may formally exist while staffing, grants, publication, or governance weaken. Recognition on paper and the ability to sustain research or publication are distinct variables.

Language academies and institutional capacity in 2025

Bihar Legislative Assembly proceedings of 11 March 2025 provide an unusually concrete snapshot of institutional capacity. The government's reply listed 21 sanctioned posts and three working employees for the Maithili Academy, and ten sanctioned posts with one working employee for the Angika Academy. The same debate recorded government consideration of reorganization and staffing across language academies (Bihar Legislative Assembly 2025).

This is important historical evidence because it prevents a simple equation between the existence of an academy and the intensity of cultural work. Contemporary language policy must be measured through budgets, staffing, publications, teaching materials, and access as well as formal names.

The Ninety-second Amendment: a precise constitutional date

The Constitution (Ninety-second Amendment) Act, 2003 received presidential assent on 7 January 2004 and was published in the Gazette of India on 8 January. It inserted Maithili, Bodo, Dogri, and Santali into the Eighth Schedule, bringing the total number of scheduled languages to twenty-two (Government of India 2004).

The date is a secure constitutional anchor. It should not be rewritten as the date Maithili 'became a language,' acquired its literature, or began to be spoken. It marks entry into a specific constitutional schedule.

Eighth Schedule is not the same as a single national official-language list

Popular writing often calls all Eighth Schedule languages 'official languages of India,' but the constitutional structure is more precise. The Eighth Schedule is referenced especially in Articles 344 and 351, while provisions on the official language of the Union and the use of English are governed elsewhere in Part XVII. Scheduled status is therefore important but should not be described as if every listed language has identical administrative use in every Union office.

This distinction matters for comparison with Angika. Non-inclusion in the Eighth Schedule is not proof that a speech form has no literature, speakers, state recognition, or pedagogic relevance; inclusion likewise does not guarantee classroom or office implementation everywhere.

Maithili in the 2011 Indian census

The Ministry of Home Affairs, drawing on Census 2011, listed 13,583,464 persons returning Maithili as their mother tongue, 1.12 percent of India's population. The post-independence Linguistic Survey of Bihar gives 13,063,042 Maithili speakers in Bihar in the same census framework (Ministry of Home Affairs 2021; Office of the Registrar General, India).

These are large, important demographic anchors, but they remain census counts produced by self-report and coding rules. They do not measure literary competence, script knowledge, bilingualism, or the boundaries of a proposed cultural region.

Census categories are administrative decisions as well as data

Census C-16 tables publish mother-tongue returns under named language headings and grouped categories. For Maithili, the published classification includes a scheduled-language heading with named mother tongues beneath it. Such grouping is necessary for enumeration, but it can compress sociolinguistic distinctions or place local names inside broader categories.

A census is therefore authoritative for what it counted under its rules, not an infallible linguistic taxonomy. Changes in coding between censuses can alter apparent speaker totals even when everyday speech changes more slowly.

Angika and the problem of census visibility in India

In the published 2011 C-16 classification used for this chapter, Angika does not appear as a separate named mother-tongue row. This makes it impossible to derive a clean, official 2011 India-wide Angika total directly comparable to Maithili's scheduled-language total from that table.

The absence itself is historically significant. It shows how recognition politics can focus not only on constitutional schedules but also on enumeration categories. Activists who seek a separate mother-tongue code are intervening in the production of official demographic knowledge, not merely asking for a symbolic label.

Census 2027 and an unfinished demographic future

India's last completed population census remains the 2011 census. A Gazette notification of 16 June 2025 declared that the next population census would be taken in 2027, with a reference date of 1 March 2027 for most of the country. In 2026 the government began the houselisting phase and confirmed that population enumeration would follow in 2027 (Office of the Registrar General, India 2025; Press Information Bureau 2026).

Accordingly, this chapter does not manufacture post-2011 Indian mother-tongue totals. The next comparable language data will depend on the final population-enumeration questionnaire, coding rules, and published tables.

Angika and the Eighth Schedule demand

Government of India parliamentary replies have repeatedly listed Angika among languages for which demands for inclusion in the Eighth Schedule have been received. A 2016 Ministry of Home Affairs reply listed thirty-eight such languages and

emphasized that attempts to establish fixed objective criteria had not produced a settled formula (Press Information Bureau 2016).

The correct contemporary statement is therefore that Angika has an officially recorded demand for inclusion, not that inclusion has already occurred. Nor does the pending demand itself settle the linguistic classification debate.

Bihar Angika Academy and literary institution-building

The Bihar government approved the formation of an Angika Academy in 2015 after public demands for an institution devoted to Angika language and literature. Later Bihar Education Department notifications refer to the Bihar Angika Academy as a functioning administrative entity, and the 2025 Assembly staffing table lists it among state language academies.

The academy is evidence of state-level institutional recognition even though Angika remains outside the Eighth Schedule. Its history also demonstrates that constitutional, state-cultural, and census statuses can diverge.

Jharkhand and second-official-language legislation

Jharkhand's 2018 amendment ordinance to the Bihar Rajbhasha Act, as adopted in the state, authorized the government to notify Magahi, Bhojpuri, Maithili, and Angika as second official languages, in addition to previously named languages, in specified areas and for specified purposes. The Gazette wording is important: it creates a legal framework for use by notification rather than asserting identical use everywhere in the state (Jharkhand Gazette 2018).

This is a clear example of recognition that is neither national Eighth Schedule inclusion nor mere literary activism. State language law operates at a different constitutional and administrative level.

Recognition without a single hierarchy

Maithili thus has Eighth Schedule status, Sahitya Akademi recognition, Bihar academy history, census enumeration, university teaching, and state-language roles. Angika has a modern literary movement, a Bihar academy, Jharkhand official-language provisions, a recorded Eighth Schedule demand, and separate census recognition in Nepal. These are not steps on one universal ladder.

A historically accurate comparison asks what each institution does. Literary awards, constitutional schedules, census codes, state official-language acts, and school curricula create different rights, incentives, records, and publics.

Nepal 2021: Maithili as a major national mother tongue

Nepal's National Population and Housing Census 2021 records 3,222,389 people reporting Maithili as mother tongue, 11.05 percent of the national population. It is the second largest mother-tongue return after Nepali in the published census table (National Statistics Office 2025).

The figure demonstrates Maithili's national demographic significance in Nepal, but it does not mean that all speakers use Maithili as their language of schooling, administration, second-language communication, or literary production.

Nepal 2021: Angika as a separately enumerated mother tongue

The same Nepal census separately records Angika, with 35,952 mother-tongue returns, about 0.12 percent of the national population in the thematic language report. The Nepal Statistical Year Book shows that almost all of these returns were concentrated in Koshi Province (National Statistics Office; Nepal Statistical Year Book 2023).

This separate census category is institutionally important, but it cannot be projected backward to prove that every historical Chhika-Chhiki or Bhagalpuri speaker would have selected the modern Angika label. Census identity is dated evidence.

Nepalese census categories and comparative caution

Nepal's census separately enumerates Maithili, Bajjika, Angika, Magahi, Bhojpuri, and other mother tongues. Indian census coding follows a different classification structure. Direct cross-border comparison therefore requires attention to how each national system defines, groups, and publishes returns.

A numerical difference between two census systems can arise from demographic history, migration, self-identification, questionnaire design, or coding. It should not be converted automatically into a linguistic family tree.

Constitutional multilingualism in Nepal

Article 6 of Nepal's 2015 Constitution states that all mother tongues spoken in Nepal are languages of the nation. Article 7 establishes Nepali in Devanagari as the federal official language while providing a constitutional route for provinces to determine additional official languages by provincial law. The structure recognizes linguistic plurality while retaining differentiated administrative functions (Constitution of Nepal 2015).

National-language status, provincial official use, local service delivery, and mother-tongue education are therefore separate questions. The existence of a large Maithili-speaking population does not by itself tell us which documents or services are available in Maithili in every office.

Madhesh Province and Maithili demographic weight

The official Madhesh Province data portal reports Maithili as the largest language category in the province, with more than 2.5 million speakers in its published profile, alongside large Bhojpuri and Bajjika populations. This administrative profile helps explain why language policy in the province has direct consequences for education, media, public communication, and political representation.

Demographic plurality also warns against equating Madhesh with a single language. The province is not a linguistically homogeneous administrative unit, and Maithili identity coexists with other plains-language publics.

Mother tongue, local language, and the school question in India

India's National Education Policy 2020 states that, wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, and preferably Grade 8 and beyond, should be the home language, mother tongue, local language, or regional language. The wording is significant because it is not restricted to languages already in the Eighth Schedule (NEP 2020, para. 4.11).

This distinction separates constitutional scheduling from pedagogy. Whether Maithili, Angika, or another local speech form is actually used in a school depends on state policy, teacher availability, textbooks, parental choice, and classroom multilingualism. Recognition alone does not create an instructional system.

Pedagogy requires materials, teachers, and local decisions

Mother-tongue policy succeeds only when learners can encounter usable teaching materials, trained teachers, appropriate orthography, and continuity across grades. A policy statement may encourage local-language education while implementation remains thin because textbooks or teacher posts are absent.

The same principle applies to literary promotion. An academy, department, or award gains historical importance through its actual institutional capacity: publications, research, curricula, grants, archives, and public accessibility.

University teaching and the expansion of Maithili studies

A 2012 parliamentary reply based on UGC and Bihar government information listed Maithili teaching at L. N. Mithila University, Patna University, Tilka Manjhi Bhagalpur University, B. R. A. Bihar University, Kameshwar Singh Darbhanga Sanskrit

University, and B. N. Mandal University. University teaching creates professional pathways for grammar, literature, criticism, manuscript studies, and teacher training (Government of India, Lok Sabha 2012).

The list is a dated institutional snapshot rather than a claim about every later department or programme. Academic presence can expand, contract, or be reorganized.

Angika in higher education and the politics of curriculum

Angika literary advocates have likewise sought stronger university teaching and departmental support in the Bhagalpur-Munger region. Contemporary reports document demands for undergraduate instruction and the presence of Angika-related university activity, illustrating the movement from literary association toward curricular institutionalization.

Here too, a historical account should distinguish an announced course, an approved post, an operating department, student enrolment, and a continuing degree programme. They are not interchangeable measures of institutional strength.

Literature beyond constitutional recognition

Literary production does not wait for constitutional schedules. Maithili's modern print canon was already substantial before 2004, while Angika poetry, prose, journalism, performance, and digital writing have developed without Eighth Schedule inclusion. The existence of literature is therefore an empirical history of authors, texts, publishers, audiences, and genres.

Constitutional recognition can alter visibility, funding, examination opportunities, and prestige, but it does not retrospectively create the earlier literary archive.

Sahitya Akademi canon and the problem of selectivity

Sahitya Akademi's Maithili award series provides a useful chronological spine for post-1960s literary history because it records named books and authors annually. Yet an award list is

selective by design. It cannot substitute for histories of women writers, small magazines, popular theatre, oral genres, Dalit writing, digital publication, or cross-border literature.

A balanced history uses institutional awards as one archive among many and asks which genres and social groups become visible through each institution.

The modern Vidyāpati canon and the two-Vidyāpati rule

Modern Maithili public culture often organizes poetry, commemoration, festivals, statues, and literary history around the single prestigious name 'Vidyāpati.' This book, however, maintains the governing distinction established in Chapter 15: Mahākavi Vidyāpati is the earlier Maithili Padāvalī poet, while Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura is the later Oiniwar Sanskrit-Avahaṭṭa court intellectual.

Accordingly, modern commemorative fusion is treated as evidence for reception and canon formation, not as proof that the two corpora must belong to one historical author. Language recognition history should not undo source-critical distinctions established elsewhere in the book.

Tirhuta / Mithilakshar as manuscript heritage

Tirhuta, also known as Mithilakshar, is a historical script closely associated with Maithili manuscript and documentary traditions. Modern Maithili publishing, however, is predominantly in Devanagari. Script shift reflects printing infrastructure, schooling, type technology, state policy, and audience access rather than a simple rupture between authentic and inauthentic language.

A historical script can remain culturally powerful after it ceases to be the ordinary publishing medium. Revival therefore belongs to heritage, education, design, manuscript literacy, and digital technology as well as to everyday writing practice.

Unicode 7.0 and the digital return of Tirhuta

The Unicode Standard added the Tirhuta script in Version 7.0, released on 16 June 2014. The block occupies U+11480-U+114DF, with eighty-two assigned characters in that version, including letters, signs, and digits (Unicode Consortium 2014).

Encoding is a technical infrastructure, not a guarantee of use. A script becomes practically usable only when fonts, keyboards, rendering engines, search, normalization, educational materials, and user knowledge work together.

Digital fonts, searchability, and archival access

Unicode enables text to be stored as characters rather than as pictures, making search, copying, indexing, and digital publication possible in principle. Historical manuscripts still pose additional problems: handwriting variation, damaged pages, ligatures, abbreviations, and mixed Sanskrit-Maithili usage make automatic transcription difficult.

Digitization therefore has two levels. Scanning preserves an image of a page; encoded transcription creates machine-readable text. Serious digital editions must keep the relationship between the two visible so that editorial normalization does not erase palaeographic evidence.

Devanagari dominance and script choice

Devanagari's dominance in contemporary Maithili and Angika print reflects broad technical and educational availability. It allows easy interaction with Hindi-language printing systems and mainstream digital platforms. That practical advantage does not make Tirhuta historically irrelevant, nor does Tirhuta heritage invalidate modern Devanagari literature.

Script choice can be simultaneously practical, aesthetic, pedagogic, and political. Historical analysis should document these motives instead of declaring one script the sole test of linguistic authenticity.

Angika orthography and literary standardization

Modern Angika writing is largely produced in Devanagari, but literary movements face the same standardization questions that accompany many regional languages: which speech features should be represented, how local pronunciation should be spelled, how Sanskrit- or Hindi-derived vocabulary should be handled, and how school materials should balance accessibility with linguistic specificity.

Standardization is consequential because dictionaries, examinations, textbooks, and digital search reward stable conventions. At the same time, rigid standardization can marginalize local forms if it is mistaken for the entire spoken language.

Ancient Anga is not a linguistic certificate for modern Angika

The ancient polity of Anga and the modern language name Angika are historically connected in regional identity, but the existence of ancient Anga does not by itself establish an unbroken, unchanged Angika language from the first millennium BCE to the present. Ancient political geography and modern linguistic classification are different evidentiary problems.

This caution does not diminish the modern Angika movement. It protects it from anachronism by grounding contemporary identity in demonstrable literary, institutional, and speech history rather than requiring a seamless antiquity.

Maithili is not reducible to a proposed territorial boundary

Maithili has speakers in Bihar, Jharkhand, Nepal, Indian cities, and overseas migrant communities. Its literature circulates beyond any proposed state or cultural frontier. A language map can identify concentrations of speakers, but it should not be treated as a plebiscite for one territorial arrangement.

The same applies to Angika. Language identity can support cultural claims without determining a single political programme for every speaker.

Language and caste: correlation is not identity

Language movements in Mithila have often been shaped by unequal access to education, print, land, caste associations, and state employment. Elite institutions can exert disproportionate influence on standardization and canon formation. Yet no language belongs sociologically to one caste, and speakers within the same caste may use different languages or registers.

The book therefore rejects attempts to derive caste status directly from language or to treat a literary standard as proof of one community's exclusive ownership. This principle is consistent with the earlier Panji critique: institutions of classification must be dated rather than projected as sacred and timeless.

Women, household transmission, and literary visibility

Mother tongue is reproduced in households through conversation, song, storytelling, ritual, care work, and everyday instruction long before it appears in formal curricula. Women are often central to this transmission even where literary institutions historically privileged male authors and office-holders.

A language history that counts only published books or academy positions therefore misses major forms of continuity. Oral and domestic transmission should be studied alongside literacy, schooling, print, radio, and digital media.

Broadcasting and performance publics

Radio, recorded music, theatre, devotional performance, and later video platforms create language publics that do not match the geography of schools or census districts. A listener may understand several regional varieties while reading only one standardized written form.

Performance also changes linguistic authority. Pronunciation, humour, song style, and dialogue can normalize features that formal grammar leaves marginal, while mass media can spread a particular urban or standardized register far beyond its original locality.

Digital publication and diaspora readerships

Web publishing, social media, searchable archives, and Unicode fonts allow Maithili and Angika writing to circulate among readers who live far from the historical speech region. Diaspora participation can fund publication, create online dictionaries, revive scripts, or intensify debates over orthography and identity.

Digital reach should not be confused with demographic majority. Online visibility is shaped by connectivity, platform design, encoding support, and the labour of volunteer editors as much as by the number of speakers.

Translation as a recognition practice

Translation into and out of Maithili and Angika enlarges readership and places regional literature in comparative fields. Translation can also alter canon formation: works selected for Hindi, English, Nepali, Bengali, or other target languages gain visibility that many equally significant local works do not.

A history of recognition must therefore include translators, editors, anthologies, bilingual editions, and the institutions that commission or distribute them.

Census activism and feedback into identity

When activists urge speakers to return a particular mother-tongue name in a census, they are responding to the fact that official numbers influence visibility, policy argument, and public legitimacy. The census then records responses partly shaped by prior language movements. Enumeration and identity politics can therefore form a feedback loop.

This does not make census data useless. It means the data must be read historically: a count records how people answered within a specific administrative and political environment.

Why Maithili and Angika cannot be compared by one number

Maithili has a published scheduled-language total in Census 2011; Angika does not have an equivalent separately published India-wide C-16 row in that census. Nepal 2021, by contrast, separately counts both. Comparing only the resulting totals would mistake different coding systems for directly equivalent measurement.

The appropriate method is to compare like with like: census definitions with census definitions, literary institutions with literary institutions, state-language law with state-language law, and structural linguistic analysis with structural linguistic analysis.

Recognition, rights, and implementation

Language recognition can affect examinations, cultural grants, broadcasting, public signage, school materials, and the symbolic legitimacy of a speech community. Yet the practical result depends on implementing rules, budgets, staffing, and local demand. A statutory possibility can remain weak in everyday administration.

This is why the chapter treats the 2025 staffing data for Bihar's academies as historically important. Institutions need material capacity if formal recognition is to produce sustained scholarship and publication.

Recognition without linguistic determinism

Language matters politically because it can structure access to education, media, employment, literature, and public services. It does not automatically determine religion, caste, party preference, national citizenship, or a single regional identity. Mithila and Anga have always contained multilingual contact zones.

The strongest historical account therefore protects language claims from two opposite errors: denying lived linguistic identity because varieties are related, and turning linguistic identity into a timeless territorial or ethnic destiny.

Diagram 46: Recognition, classification, and digital infrastructure

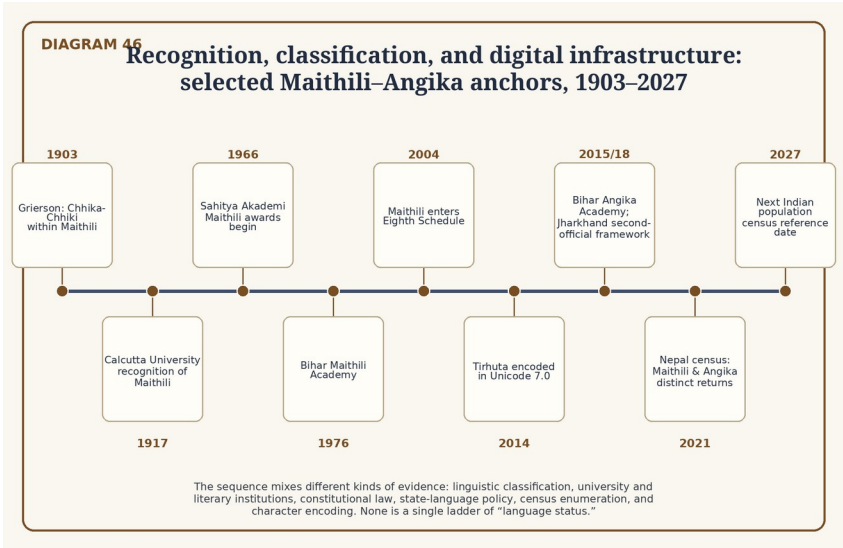


Diagram 46. Selected Maithili-Angika anchors, 1903-2027. The events represent different institutional fields and should not be read as a single hierarchy of language status.

Original analytical diagram prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. Sources: Grierson (1903); Sahitya Akademi award records; Constitution (Ninety-second Amendment) Act, 2003; Unicode 7.0; Bihar and Jharkhand government records; Nepal NPHC 2021; Census of India 2027 notification.

Diagram 47: Recognition is plural - an institutional comparison

DIAGRAM 47

Recognition is plural: comparing institutional fields

Field	Maithili	Angika
Historical classification	Grierson treated Maithili as a major Bihari language with several varieties.	Chhika-Chhiki/Bhagalpuri material was placed within the Maithili field; modern Angika identity later developed separately.
India: constitutional schedule	Included in the Eighth Schedule from 7 Jan 2004.	Not in the Eighth Schedule; demand for inclusion is officially recorded.
India: census 2011	13,583,464 mother-tongue returns nationally; 13,063,042 in Bihar.	No separate Angika row in the published C-16 classification used here; this absence itself is institutionally significant.
State institutions	Bihar Maithili Academy (1976); also within Jharkhand second-official framework.	Bihar Angika Academy (2015); included in Jharkhand second-official framework in 2018.
Nepal census 2021	3,222,389 mother-tongue returns (11.05%).	35,952 mother-tongue returns (0.12%).
Script / digital infrastructure	Devanagari dominant in modern print; Tirhuta encoded in Unicode 7.0 (2014).	Modern literary practice chiefly uses Devanagari; orthographic standardization is part of ongoing institutional work.

The comparison is institutional, not ontological: literary history, structural linguistics, self-identification, census coding, constitutional schedules, state official-language law, and digital script support answer different questions.

Diagram 47. Recognition is plural: Maithili and Angika compared across distinct institutional fields rather than ranked on one ladder.

Original analytical diagram prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. Sources: Grierson (1903); Government of India Gazette and census records; Bihar and Jharkhand official records; National Statistics Office, Nepal; Unicode Consortium.

Conclusions: a connected but non-identical linguistic history

Maithili and Angika belong to a connected eastern Indo-Aryan and regional historical field, but connection does not require institutional identity. Maithili's modern trajectory includes early university recognition, Sahitya Akademi awards, a Bihar academy, Eighth Schedule inclusion, large Indian and Nepal census populations, and digital revival of Tirhuta. Angika's modern trajectory includes a distinct literary movement, a Bihar academy, Jharkhand second-official-language provisions, an officially recorded Eighth Schedule demand, and separate enumeration in Nepal.

The governing methodological conclusion is that recognition is plural and dated. Grierson's classification, a speaker's self-name, a census code, a constitutional schedule, a literary prize, a

school textbook, and a Unicode block are all real evidence, but they are evidence of different things. A parallel regional history becomes stronger when it keeps those differences visible rather than converting every institution into a verdict on linguistic essence.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Government of India. The Constitution (Ninety-second Amendment) Act, 2003. Gazette of India, Extraordinary, Part II, Section 1, 8 January 2004; presidential assent 7 January 2004.
- Government of India. The Constitution of India. Legislative Department, updated official text; especially Part XVII and the Eighth Schedule.
- Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. Census of India 2011, C-16: Population by Mother Tongue, India and Bihar tables.
- Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. Lok Sabha Starred Question No. 292, 16 March 2021, annexure on Scheduled Languages by speaker strength, Census 2011.
- Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. Linguistic Survey of India: Bihar. Government of India, 2023 digital edition.
- Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. Gazette Notification S.O. 2681(E), 16 June 2025, declaring Census 2027.
- Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs. Census-2027 digital tools and implementation releases, March 2026.
- Grierson, George A. Linguistic Survey of India, vol. V, part II: Indo-Aryan Family, Eastern Group. Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India, 1903.
- Yadav, Ramawatar. A Reference Grammar of Maithili. Mouton de Gruyter, 1996. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110811698>.
- Sahitya Akademi. Akademi Awards: Maithili (since 1966), official award list.
- Patna High Court. Chandra Mohan Jha v. State of Bihar & Ors., LPA No. 742 of 2011, judgment 8 April 2013; records establishment of Maithili Academy in 1976.
- Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development. Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 6649, 16 May 2012, Maithili Academy and university teaching.
- Bihar Legislative Assembly. Proceedings, 11 March 2025, reply on sanctioned and working staff in state language academies, including Maithili and Angika academies.
- Education Department, Government of Bihar. Notifications concerning Maithili Academy and Bihar Angika Academy, 2018.

- Government of Jharkhand. Bihar Rajbhasha (Jharkhand Amendment) Ordinance, 2018. Jharkhand Gazette (Extraordinary), 14 July 2018; notification dated 21 June 2018.
- Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs. 'Inclusion of Languages in Eighth Schedule,' 26 July 2016.
- National Education Policy 2020. Ministry of Education, Government of India, para. 4.11 on home/mother/local/regional language in schooling.
- Government of Nepal. Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Articles 6-7. Nepal Law Commission.
- National Statistics Office, Nepal. Language in Nepal: National Population and Housing Census 2021, Thematic Report XI. Government of Nepal, 2025.
- Government of Nepal. Nepal Statistical Year Book 2023, table on population by mother tongue and province.
- Madhesh Province Government. Madhesh Province Profile, official data portal, language distribution table.
- Unicode Consortium. The Unicode Standard, Version 7.0.0, released 16 June 2014; Tirhuta block U+11480-U+114DF.
- Pandey, Anshuman. Proposal to Encode the Tirhuta Script in ISO/IEC 10646. ISO/IEC JTC1/SC2/WG2 N4035, 5 May 2011.
- Choudhary, Radhakrishna. A Survey of Maithili Literature. Ram Vilas Sahu, 1976.
- Thakur, Gajendra. A Parallel History of Maithili Literature. Videha - First Maithili Fortnightly eJournal, ISSN 2229-547X. Used for the volume's two-Vidyapati framework and parallel-history approach to classification claims.

Chapter 25. Mithila painting, gender, and the cultural economy

From domestic surfaces to a modern art field

Mithila painting is best understood as a history of linked media rather than as a single object with a single origin date. Wall murals, floor drawings, wedding-room images, paper paintings, textiles, books, public murals, museum acquisitions, and digital reproductions belong to different material and institutional settings. Their connections are real, but the historical record does not justify treating every modern paper painting as an unchanged survival from an ancient age.

The decisive modern transformation occurred when domestic visual practices were made portable, collectible, attributable, and saleable. This process changed who could see the work, how an artist could be named, how money moved through a household, and how curators and critics classified the result. It also created new inequalities because the people who supplied paper, selected artists, transported paintings, assigned categories, mounted exhibitions, and negotiated prices could influence which forms became visible.

What the evidence can and cannot date

Claims that Mithila painting began at the wedding of Sita and Rama belong to sacred and regional tradition, not to a datable documentary archive. Such narratives are historically important because they explain how communities connect painting with Mithila's sacred geography and marriage ritual, but they cannot by themselves establish the age of a particular technique, motif, or social division of artistic labor.

A source-controlled history therefore separates three questions: how old particular ritual practices may be; when paintings were actually documented by dated photographs, manuscripts, collections, or written descriptions; and when the modern paper-based art market developed. The answers

overlap only partly. This distinction protects the tradition from both skeptical erasure and romantic overdating.

The 1919 marriage paintings: an early documentary anchor

Carolyn Brown Heinz drew attention to paintings made in 1919 for the marriage of a daughter of Maharaja Rameshwar Singh of Darbhanga. They are important because they provide an unusually early dated documentary reference for the visual culture of a marriage household before the paper market. They do not prove that the practice began in 1919; they show that a mature practice was already present and documentable by that date (Heinz 2006).

This evidence also cautions against writing the history only from famous villages of the post-1960s market. The paper era concentrated attention on places such as Jitwarpur and Ranti, but earlier wall painting was more widely distributed. Documentary survival is selective: ephemeral surfaces disappear, while photographs, collected sheets, and museum accessions disproportionately shape later scholarship.

The 1934 earthquake and an accidental archive

The Bihar-Nepal earthquake of 15 January 1934 was a regional catastrophe, not an art-discovery event. Yet its destruction had an unintended documentary consequence. William G. Archer, then an Indian Civil Service officer involved in inspecting damage, saw painted inner walls after outer walls had collapsed. Later scholarship has treated this encounter as a major moment in the external documentation of Mithila wall painting (Richman 2026).

The historical sequence matters. The paintings were not created for Archer, and the earthquake did not reveal an unknown art to its makers. What changed was the access of a colonial official, and later of an English-language readership, to visual practices that had existed inside domestic spaces. 'Discovery' therefore describes a shift in external visibility, not the origin of the art.

1938-1940: photography and the making of a record

Between 1938 and 1940 Archer made more than 150 photographs of painted walls in Mithila. These images are among the most important pre-commercial visual records because they preserve compositions that otherwise might have disappeared with replastering, weathering, household renovation, or demolition (Richman 2026).

Photography is not neutral evidence. The photographer chose households, rooms, angles, and moments. Access was mediated by caste, gender, official networks, and the limits imposed by women's seclusion in some households. The archive is therefore invaluable and partial at the same time: it records actual walls while also reflecting the social position and interests of the person holding the camera.

1949: "Maithil Painting" and the first English-language canon

Archer's illustrated article 'Maithil Painting' appeared in *Marg* in 1949. It brought the subject to a wider English-language art readership and strongly influenced subsequent descriptions of style. The article concentrated on Brahmin and Kayastha women, even while acknowledging that other communities painted, and it emphasized caste-based stylistic categories (Archer 1949; Richman 2026).

The article thus did two things at once. It preserved and publicized a major visual tradition, and it narrowed the frame through which many later observers encountered that tradition. Modern scholarship must use the photographs and descriptions without inheriting the assumption that caste categories completely determine individual creativity or that the painters selected for publication were representative of all practitioners.

Bhitti-citra: walls, households, and rites of passage

Bhitti-citra, literally wall painting, belongs to a domestic and ritual field in which surfaces are prepared, renewed, and repainted according to household events and local practice. In

wedding contexts, paintings in the kohbar ghar can create a ritual environment for the bridal couple and the women who conduct important parts of the marriage sequence. Deities, plants, animals, and geometric or organic forms acquire meaning through their placement in a specific rite (Richman 2026; National Crafts Museum 2015).

Because the murals are embedded in architecture and ritual action, their meaning cannot be reduced to a dictionary of symbols. A lotus, bamboo cluster, fish, bird, sun, or moon may participate in a wider auspicious and fertility vocabulary, but interpretation depends on composition, occasion, community, and the account of the people who made or used the image.

Aripan: art made for ritual time

Aripan are floor drawings made for auspicious and ritual purposes, often with a rice-flour mixture and sometimes additional color. Their temporariness is part of their social life. An aripan can sanctify a location for a particular observance and then be walked over, washed away, or renewed. Permanence is therefore not the only measure of artistic or ritual value (Richman 2026).

This ephemerality helps explain a major archival imbalance. Museums and markets are built to preserve portable objects, whereas many domestic designs were intentionally temporary. The history of Mithila painting must consequently combine material collections with photographs, ethnography, oral accounts, and ritual studies rather than infer the past only from what survived in paper form.

Kohbar ghar and the gendered space of marriage

The kohbar ghar, or nuptial chamber, has been one of the most discussed settings of Mithila painting. In some upper-caste Maithil marriage traditions, women relatives and neighbors prepared the room and its images as part of a female-supervised ritual world. Archer's dependence on male household informants was therefore a methodological limitation when he

sought meanings for paintings produced and used largely within women's ceremonial practice (Richman 2026).

The point is not that every woman shared one interpretation or that men knew nothing of the imagery. It is that access to ritual knowledge was socially differentiated. Historians should identify who explained a motif, who painted it, who performed the associated rite, and when the testimony was recorded.

Motifs are not a timeless codebook

Later catalogues often assign stable meanings to lotus, bamboo, fish, turtles, birds, snakes, the sun, and the moon. Such associations can be grounded in ritual practice, but a motif is not a fixed hieroglyph. It may carry several meanings, be used decoratively, acquire new political significance, or be combined with imagery that has no precedent in an earlier ritual setting.

The safest procedure is contextual: read the whole image, the date, the artist, the intended use, and any available statement by the maker. A paper painting made for an international exhibition in 1995 and a wall painting made for a household wedding in 1939 can share motifs without having the same social function.

The 1965-1967 drought and the relief economy

A severe drought beginning in 1965 and lasting into the later 1960s produced acute food insecurity in northern Bihar. Pupul Jayakar, working within the post-independence handicrafts infrastructure, responded by promoting a scheme through which paintings could be transferred to handmade paper and sold. The modern paper market therefore emerged partly from a crisis of agrarian livelihood rather than from a purely aesthetic program (Richman 2026; Richman and Szanton 2025).

This context is central to the cultural economy. A painting was simultaneously an artwork, a transformed ritual vocabulary, and a potential source of cash when agriculture failed. Treating commercialization as a fall from 'pure tradition'

ignores the material insecurity to which the intervention responded.

Pupul Jayakar, Bhaskar Kulkarni, and handmade paper

Jayakar commissioned the artist Bhaskar Kulkarni to take white handmade paper to Madhubani and encourage selected women to paint on it. Initial participation was limited and socially selective, but by May 1968 Jayakar described girls and women painting on paper in growing numbers. The shift did not invent the visual tradition; it introduced a surface whose portability changed the conditions of production and exchange (Richman 2026).

The intervention also reveals how cultural policy works through people and materials. Paper, transport, design advice, state craft networks, and metropolitan retail outlets were not background details. They were part of the infrastructure that converted a local practice into a commodity circulating far beyond the household.

Paper as a technology of portability

A wall cannot easily be sold without destroying the building. A sheet of paper can be signed, stacked, transported, framed, catalogued, insured, reproduced, and accessioned into a museum. The new medium therefore altered the economics of size, durability, storage, and ownership. It also changed the temporal relationship between maker and viewer: a purchaser could encounter an image years later and thousands of kilometres away.

Portability encouraged artists to adapt compositions to rectangular sheets, repeat popular subjects, experiment with new pigments, and create narrative series. These changes are historical evidence of artistic intelligence under new conditions, not automatic signs of decline.

Cottage Industries emporia and the metropolitan buyer

Kulkarni carried early paper paintings to Cottage Industries emporia in New Delhi, where they sold quickly. This connected village production to a metropolitan retail system already developed for Indian handicrafts. The buyer increasingly encountered a labelled regional object - 'Madhubani' or 'Mithila' painting - detached from the original architectural and ritual setting (Richman 2026).

Retail classification made the work legible to outsiders, but it could also simplify difference. An emporium needs categories, prices, sizes, and inventory. Those administrative requirements helped create a recognizable market while encouraging the idea that highly diverse works belonged to a single stable type.

From household anonymity to named authorship

One of the most consequential effects of paper was the growth of named authorship. Domestic murals could be collaborative and might not be preserved with the painter's name. A saleable sheet, by contrast, could carry a signature, a village, a biography, an award history, and later a museum accession number. Artists increasingly became public persons whose individual styles could be followed over time.

Named authorship did not erase collaboration. Family members prepared materials, repeated motifs, learned from elders, assisted with filling and borders, or helped negotiate sales. The modern artist biography therefore sits inside a household and market network rather than replacing it.

Jagdamba Devi and the ladder of public recognition

Jagdamba Devi became one of the first widely recognized painters of the paper era. Handicrafts records place her among early national award recipients for Mithila painting, and the Gazette of India records her Padma Shri in 1975 for 'Madhubani Paintings.' These awards demonstrate the movement of a

domestic visual practice into the official cultural recognition system of the Indian state.

Awards must not be mistaken for a census of artistic importance. They recognize particular individuals through institutional selection. Their historical value lies in showing when state agencies began to name painters, attach regional labels to their work, and convert reputation into national cultural capital.

Sita Devi: mobility, commissions, and the public artist

Sita Devi's career illustrates the expanding mobility available to a small number of successful painters. She received national craft recognition in the 1970s and the Padma Shri in 1981; the official Gazette identifies her as a painter from Madhubani, Bihar. Scholarship also records major commissions and encounters with national political and cultural elites (Richman 2026).

Her success should be read as both individual achievement and evidence of an unequal art field. The visibility of a celebrated artist could open markets for others, but it could also encourage outsiders to treat a few famous careers as representative of the economic position of all women who painted.

Ganga Devi and the importance of an individual oeuvre

Jyotindra Jain's monograph on Ganga Devi helped establish a different way of writing about Mithila painting: not simply as an anonymous folk tradition but through the sustained work of an individual artist (Jain 1997). This approach makes it possible to examine changes in subject, line, narration, travel experience, and personal history across an oeuvre.

The methodological gain is significant. If a painter is allowed an individual chronology, then innovation becomes visible. The historian can ask how a particular work responds to a commission, an illness, a journey, or a political event rather than attributing every feature to caste or inherited convention.

Baua Devi and the museum trail

Museum records show how modern provenance can connect a village artist, a state emporium, a private collector, and a national or international collection. The British Museum, for example, records a kohbar painting by Baua Devi dated 1965-1972, acquired by its donor in Delhi from the Bihar State Emporium. Such records make the market chain visible in a way that anonymous reproductions do not (British Museum, object 2000,1012,0.4).

Provenance is not merely administrative. It helps establish date range, medium, place, collector, and the route by which an artwork left its original market. It can also reveal how institutions classified the work and which biographical information was retained or lost.

Celebrity artists and the problem of representativeness

Heinz warns that documentation and collecting came to focus heavily on a small number of celebrated painters from a few villages around Madhubani. Their achievement is not in question; the problem arises when fame is used as evidence for the whole distribution of wall painting, household labor, or market income (Heinz 2006).

A regional history therefore needs two scales at once. It should preserve the names and oeuvres of major artists while also documenting less visible practitioners, collaborative household production, village teaching, occasional painting, and the work that never entered elite collections.

Gender: creative authority and domestic labor

The phrase 'women's art' captures an important historical fact but can conceal the labor regime in which painting occurred. Women often painted alongside cooking, childcare, agricultural work, ritual obligations, and care for extended households. Time available for market production was therefore socially produced and unequally distributed.

Commercial success could transform the status of artistic labor by turning a previously unpaid or ritually valued activity into cash income. Yet this did not automatically remove household duties. The double burden of productive and reproductive labor is essential to understanding why the same market opportunity could affect two painters very differently.

Income, bargaining power, and household negotiation

Cash earned from painting could contribute to food, schooling, housing, medical expenses, marriage costs, savings, or the purchase of materials. In some households, a woman's recognized skill could increase her bargaining position and public respect. These outcomes form part of the documented appeal of craft-based development initiatives.

But 'empowerment' is not a single measurable result. Who controls the payment, who travels to sell, whose name appears on the work, and who owns the bank or platform account can be as important as the sale price. Gender analysis must therefore follow money beyond the moment of sale.

The limits of an empowerment narrative

Research from the 1970s onward repeatedly found mixed outcomes. A minority of painters achieved national or international celebrity, while many others remained in a survival economy and continued to depend on male relatives or intermediaries for access to markets. Fleury's 2026 reassessment of feminist reception emphasizes precisely this tension between heroic representation and unequal everyday conditions.

The correct conclusion is neither that commercialization liberated women nor that it merely exploited them. It created new resources, statuses, dependencies, and forms of competition whose effects varied by household, caste, class, generation, and access to institutions.

Caste, style labels, and the danger of a frozen canon

Early scholarship often organized Mithila painting through strong associations between caste and style. Such associations document real histories of practice, patronage, and social separation, but they become misleading when treated as fixed aesthetic laws. Richman's re-reading of Archer shows that individual variation was visible even in photographs that Archer used to argue for caste-bound idioms (Richman 2026).

The paper market accelerated crossing and recombination. Artists observed one another's work, responded to buyers, taught students, adopted new pigments, and used subjects drawn from newspapers, travel, political campaigns, and personal experience. Style labels are therefore historical tools, not biological or timeless identities.

Dalit painters and unequal entry into the market

The first paper-painting intervention was socially selective. Later, women from Dalit and other non-dominant communities entered the market and developed distinctive repertoires, but scholarship has documented unequal recognition and pricing. The history of inclusion is thus not a simple story in which paper immediately erased caste hierarchy (Richman 2026; Fleury 2026).

The analytical task is to identify mechanisms: who was invited into training, whose work reached emporia, which labels dealers used, who received awards, and how collectors ranked styles. Inequality operates through institutions and market access as well as through explicit prejudice.

Bharni, kachni, godna, and the instability of style taxonomies

Terms such as bharni, kachni, and godna are widely used in the modern literature and market to describe visual techniques or stylistic families. They can be useful descriptive vocabulary, but the common habit of mapping each term rigidly onto one

caste risks turning a historically mobile art field into a frozen chart.

A better catalogue practice describes observable features - filled color fields, line work, hatching, tattoo-derived patterning, border density, pigment, and composition - and then records the artist's community or self-description separately when relevant and documented. This prevents style from becoming a proxy for hereditary identity.

"Madhubani painting" and "Mithila painting"

The name 'Madhubani painting' reflects the district, administrative, and market geography through which the art became nationally visible. 'Mithila painting' signals a broader cultural region extending beyond one district and, in cultural terms, across the India-Nepal boundary. Both labels have institutional histories and neither should be treated as a perfectly neutral synonym.

Naming matters because it shapes claims of place, heritage, and market authenticity. A historian should state whether a source is referring to a registered Indian geographical indication, to painting made in Madhubani district, to a broader Maithil visual tradition, or to a transborder regional art field.

Ritual art, popular art, handicraft, folk art, tourist art, contemporary art

Mithila painting has been classified under many labels. William Archer emphasized 'ritual art'; Mildred Archer later used the category of 'popular painting'; state institutions promoted paper works as handicraft; dealers and museums frequently used folk art; scholars have also discussed tourist art, vernacular art, and contemporary art. Each term comes from a different institutional history (Richman 2026).

Classification changes value. The same sheet may be priced, displayed, and interpreted differently if it enters a craft emporium, an ethnographic museum, an art fair, or a contemporary gallery. The binary between 'fine art' and 'craft' is

therefore too blunt to explain the actual movement of objects and artists.

Authenticity after commercialization

Commercial production creates a recurring anxiety that a work made for sale is less authentic than one made for ritual. That assumption confuses function with quality and ignores the long history of patronage in art. A commissioned paper painting can be highly innovative, while a ritual image can also repeat conventional forms because repetition is appropriate to the rite.

Authenticity is better treated as a claim made by artists, buyers, dealers, institutions, and communities. The historian asks who uses the term, what evidence is offered, and what economic or cultural interest the claim serves.

International Women's Year, 1975, and global feminist reception

The international circulation of Mithila painting intersected with the politics of gender in the 1970s. During International Women's Year in 1975, the UNESCO Courier placed a Mithila painting on an August-September cover. In 1977-1978, the German feminist magazine EMMA and the New York feminist journal Heresies published material on Mithila women painters (Fleury 2026).

This visibility placed Maithil women inside transnational debates over creativity, patriarchy, and the status of domestic arts. It was historically significant, but the meaning of the paintings was also reframed by distant editors and writers who brought their own political categories to the works.

Feminist heroization and the risk of a new stereotype

Fleury describes a process in which women painters became exemplary figures for international feminist audiences. Such representation challenged the male monopoly implicit in many conventional art histories, yet it could also create a new simplification: the idea of an undifferentiated community of naturally emancipated women artists (Fleury 2026).

A stronger gender history retains the political importance of women's authorship while refusing to erase caste, class, religion, age, household authority, and unequal market access. Feminism is most useful here when it opens the analysis of power rather than replacing one timeless stereotype with another.

Moser-Schmitt and an early intersectional problem

Erika Moser-Schmitt's 1977-1978 writing and visual-anthropological work drew attention to the overlap of gender, caste, and class among Mithila painters. Fleury treats this as an early or proto-intersectional approach because it compared the constraints faced by upper-caste and Dalit women instead of explaining every inequality through gender alone (Fleury 2026).

The value of this approach is methodological. It directs attention to multiple resources: seclusion may restrict mobility for one woman, while agricultural labor and poverty restrict artistic time for another. Neither situation can be reduced to a universal female experience.

Museums, archives, and the production of an art history

Museums and libraries do more than preserve paintings. Their acquisition policies determine which artists receive durable catalog records, which dates and villages are attached to objects, and which works become available for scholarly comparison. A collection can therefore turn market transactions into a long-term historical archive.

At the same time, institutional catalogues may preserve older classifications or incomplete attributions. Responsible use requires separating object-level facts - medium, dimensions, accession, provenance - from interpretive comments that may reflect the assumptions of a particular curator or period.

Collectors and dealers as cultural intermediaries

Collectors, dealers, government officers, NGO workers, tourists, scholars, and gallery owners form an intermediary layer between painter and final audience. They may provide

paper, commissions, transport, translation, photography, exhibition access, or credit. They can also control information and bargaining power.

The cultural economy is therefore a chain rather than a direct exchange. A high auction or gallery price does not reveal what the artist originally received. Conversely, an intermediary can sometimes create durable demand, documentation, and institutional access that an isolated producer could not obtain alone.

Awards, biographies, and cultural capital

National and state awards help transform reputation into cultural capital. They can generate invitations, commissions, press coverage, and higher prices, and they provide historians with dated evidence of institutional recognition. The careers of Jagdamba Devi and Sita Devi demonstrate this process especially clearly through official Padma records.

Yet award systems are selective and historically uneven. The absence of an award does not indicate absence of skill, and the distribution of honors can reveal institutional priorities as much as artistic hierarchy. An inclusive history therefore reads awards as evidence about recognition, not as a definitive ranking of artists.

The Indian GI: a dated form of recognition

The Geographical Indications Registry of India records 'Madhubani Paintings' as Application No. 37, filed on 22 August 2005 by the Director of Industries, Bihar, for handicraft goods in Class 16. The registry records certificate no. 31 dated 16 May 2007 and lists the geographical area as Bihar (Intellectual Property India, GI Application 37).

This is a precise legal-institutional anchor. It should not be expanded into claims that the state created the tradition, that every Mithila-style work everywhere falls within the Indian registration, or that registration establishes the age of the art.

GI is not copyright, authorship, or transborder ownership

A geographical indication identifies goods whose reputation, qualities, or characteristics are linked to a geographical origin under a specific legal registration. Copyright protects original expression and generally attaches to the creator or other lawful rightsholder under copyright law. These are different rights with different subjects and enforcement mechanisms.

The distinction is especially important for Mithila painting because the cultural field crosses the India-Nepal border. An Indian GI record for 'Madhubani Paintings' cannot be treated as a legal certificate of ownership over all Maithil imagery in Nepal, nor does it cancel an individual painter's copyright in a modern composition.

Attribution, copying, and ethical reproduction

The global popularity of Mithila imagery has encouraged reproduction on garments, stationery, murals, packaging, websites, and machine-made decorative goods. Some uses are licensed or collaborative; others detach a composition from its artist and market it as anonymous 'traditional' design. Ethical publication requires stronger attribution than cultural familiarity alone.

For this book, modern artworks should be reproduced only when a rights basis is documented. An image downloaded from the web is not presumed free of copyright. Museum metadata, artist permission, open licences, or documented public-domain status provide safer foundations for illustration.

Janakpur: a Nepalese institutional trajectory

Mithila painting is not confined to India. In and around Janakpur, Maithil women have long maintained related domestic visual practices, and modern institutions developed their own routes into paper, craft, and development markets. The Janakpur Women's Development Center's historical account

dates the initial Janakpur Women's Art Project to 1989 and registration under the present name to 1992.

This chronology should be treated as a Nepalese institutional history, not as a late arrival of Mithila art in Nepal. The center transformed existing skills into organized production, training, sales, and public visibility in a different national policy and development environment.

The Janakpur Women's Development Center and organized production

The JWDC has combined fine-art painting with screen printing, embroidery, ceramics, paper-mache and other products, while also providing forms of management, literacy, leadership, and business training. Its model demonstrates how a visual tradition can become a platform for broader organizational capacity and income generation.

The institution also complicates the boundary between art and craft. A motif may move from a paper painting to a ceramic vessel or textile print without becoming culturally meaningless. What changes are medium, labor process, price structure, audience, and the organizational route to market.

Shared region, different national institutions

India and Nepal share Maithil language, kinship, pilgrimage, marriage networks, and visual repertoires across the international border, but their state institutions, copyright regimes, craft agencies, museums, currencies, and tourism economies are not identical. A transborder cultural history therefore needs comparison without institutional fusion.

The same term 'Mithila art' can refer to a shared cultural field while a GI certificate, an NGO registration, a government award, or a museum accession remains legally and administratively specific to one country or institution.

Contemporary subjects: politics, ecology, migration, and violence

Paper freed the image from the requirement that it serve only a household ritual occasion. Artists increasingly addressed elections, dowry, gender violence, caste inequality, migration, deforestation, disasters, public health, and international events alongside deities and epic narratives. The 2025 Richman-Szanton volume emphasizes this expansion of subject matter.

Contemporary subject matter does not prove that every painting is political, and sacred subject matter does not prove political passivity. Interpretation should remain artist-specific. A painting can mobilize a traditional border and line vocabulary while making a wholly contemporary argument.

Tree protection and environmental visibility

Environmental themes have become a visible part of modern Mithila painting, including campaigns that use painted trees, walls, and public surfaces to connect regional aesthetics with conservation. Such work demonstrates a wider transition from household ritual space to civic and activist space.

The historical interest lies less in declaring an ancient ecological doctrine than in tracing how artists and organizations translate recognizable visual forms into present-day environmental communication. Contemporary ecological art should be dated and documented as contemporary.

Pandemic painting and the archive of 2020

The COVID-19 crisis generated paintings about disease, masks, lockdown, labor, food insecurity, and social disruption. Princeton University Library's 2021 program 'Mithila Art in 2020: Life, Labor, and COVID-19 in South Asia' highlighted newly acquired works that represented both the pandemic and its unequal economic consequences for artists and workers.

These paintings show the speed with which the art field can respond to current events. They also demonstrate how a crisis

can enter the archive almost immediately through institutional collecting, in sharp contrast to older ephemeral murals that often survived only accidentally.

Digital visibility and social-media markets

Online platforms reduce some costs of reaching buyers: an artist can display new work, receive inquiries, build a public biography, and communicate beyond local dealers. Yet digital markets require phones, connectivity, photography, language skills, payment systems, platform literacy, and time. They can therefore reproduce offline inequality in new forms.

A 2024 qualitative study of sixty women artisans in Jitwarpur examined social-media use and explicitly cautioned that its small, single-village sample limits generalization. Its value lies in documenting current opportunities and obstacles rather than providing a universal measure of digital empowerment (Singh et al. 2024).

Digital images, metadata, and the problem of authorship

Digital circulation separates image from object more easily than any earlier medium. Cropped screenshots can lose signatures; reposts can discard titles and dates; online shops can copy motifs without provenance. At the same time, high-quality metadata can make artist names, villages, dates, dimensions, and rights information globally searchable.

The digital future of Mithila painting therefore depends as much on documentation standards as on image resolution. A durable archive needs creator fields, source history, rights status, and stable identifiers, not merely attractive scans.

Participatory archives and collaborative scholarship

Recent scholarship has moved beyond collecting objects toward collaborative and participatory documentation. Coralynn Davis's work on expressive arts and social change in Mithila, beginning from a 2016 research project, reflects concern with who frames the research question, who controls the

archive, and how community participants are represented (Davis 2026).

This approach is especially important in an art history shaped by colonial photography, metropolitan markets, and outside classification. Collaboration cannot remove all power differences, but it can make attribution, consent, interpretation, and access more explicit.

Teaching, apprenticeship, and institutional transmission

The paper market did not replace learning through family and community. Artists continue to teach daughters, sons, relatives, students, workshop participants, and apprentices through demonstration and repetition. Formal institutes and NGO programs add another layer by organizing curricula, exhibitions, and credentials.

Transmission is therefore neither purely hereditary nor purely school-based. It is a network in which household knowledge, peer observation, institutional training, and market feedback interact. This helps explain why recognizable regional conventions coexist with rapid individual experimentation.

Men in a historically women-centered art field

The modern market also brought some men into the production and brokerage of Mithila painting. Their participation does not invalidate the deep historical association between domestic painting and women's ritual labor, but it does change the contemporary sociology of the field. Men may paint, manage workshops, travel to markets, photograph work, or negotiate sales.

Gender history should therefore distinguish the origin of a practice in particular household roles from the later composition of a profession. A field can remain historically women-centered while its market institutions become more mixed.

Tourism, heritage, and the staged encounter

Tourism creates demand for demonstrations, workshops, murals, small portable formats, and narratives that explain motifs quickly to outsiders. It can bring income directly to artists and institutions, but it can also reward easily recognizable themes and compressed stories of origin.

The tourist encounter is itself a historical form of cultural exchange. Rather than dismissing it as inauthentic, the historian can examine who stages the demonstration, what the visitor is told, how prices are set, and whether the artist's name and rights remain attached to the object after purchase.

The cultural economy beyond sale price

A painting produces several forms of value at once: household income, prestige, ritual efficacy, regional identity, institutional reputation, tourist attraction, museum capital, scholarly data, and digital content. These forms of value can reinforce one another but do not necessarily return to the artist in equal proportion.

This broader idea of cultural economy explains why debates over attribution, awards, GI status, museum collecting, and digital visibility matter economically even when no immediate sale is involved. Reputation and documentation influence future commissions and bargaining power.

No single village stands for Mithila

Jitwarpur and Ranti became especially prominent in the history of the paper market and produced internationally known artists. Their importance should not become a map of the whole tradition. Earlier wall painting, later training centers, and Nepalese institutions show a wider geography.

A regional history should therefore record specific village histories rather than convert famous villages into timeless cultural capitals. Concentrated documentation can create the

illusion that what is best archived was always the most widespread.

No single woman stands for women artists

Biographical chapters and exhibitions necessarily select. The careers of Jagdamba Devi, Sita Devi, Ganga Devi, Baua Devi, Mahasundari Devi, Godawari Dutta, Dulari Devi, and many others demonstrate extraordinary individual achievement, but no celebrated painter can represent the full range of Maithil women's experience.

The social history remains visible only when fame is placed beside ordinary production, intermittent work, unsuccessful sales, unpaid ritual labor, and the many painters whose names never entered formal catalogues.

Diagram 48: From ritual surface to cultural economy

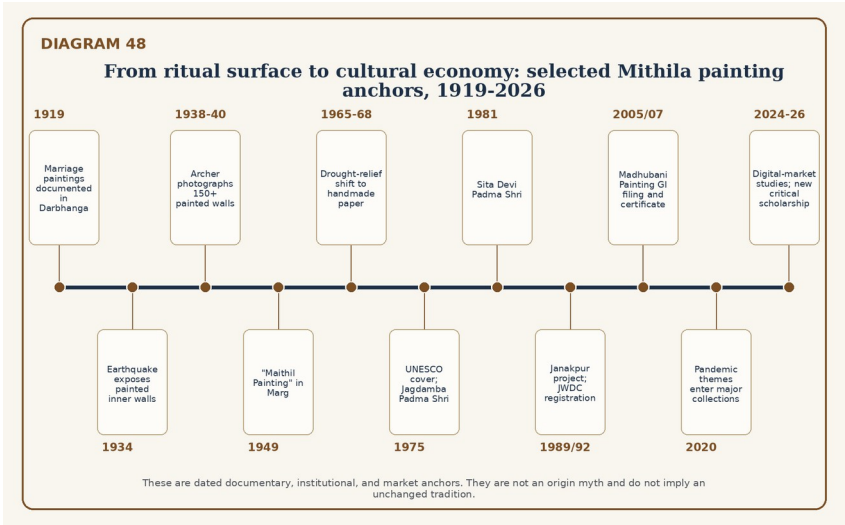


Diagram 48. Selected Mithila painting anchors, 1919-2026. The sequence marks dated documentary, institutional, and market events; it is not an origin chronology for the underlying ritual practices.

Original analytical diagram prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. Sources: Heinz (2006); Richman (2026); Fleury (2026); Government of India Padma notifications; Intellectual Property India GI registry; Janakpur Women's

Development Center; Princeton University Library; Singh et al. (2024).

Diagram 49: The cultural economy is a chain

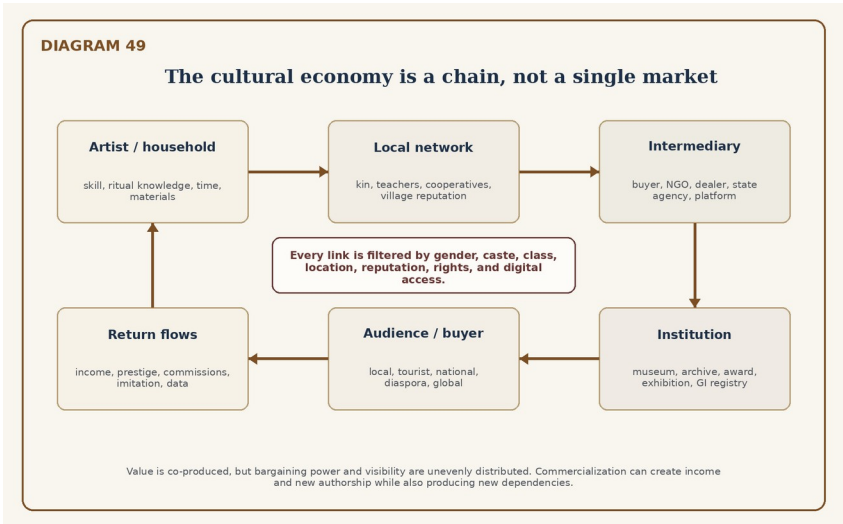


Diagram 49. The cultural economy of Mithila painting is shown as a chain of production, mediation, institutional validation, purchase, and return flows rather than a direct artist-to-buyer market.

Original analytical diagram prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. Analytical synthesis based on Heinz (2006); Richman and Szanton (2025); Fleury (2026); Davis (2026); Singh et al. (2024); museum and GI records.

Conclusions: continuity without timelessness

Mithila painting offers an unusually clear example of cultural continuity produced through change. Domestic ritual practices provided techniques, motifs, and social knowledge; colonial documentation created a selective visual archive; post-independence craft policy made paper a medium of livelihood; named artists transformed public ideas of authorship; feminist and museum networks globalized reception; and contemporary institutions extended the field into law, tourism, activism, and digital media.

The strongest history avoids four shortcuts. It does not date the art through sacred legend alone; it does not treat caste styles

as immutable; it does not equate market participation with automatic empowerment; and it does not collapse Indian and Nepalese institutions into one system. These safeguards make it possible to recognize both the depth of Maithil visual practice and the historical specificity of the modern art economy.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Archer, William G. 'Maithil Painting.' *Marg* 3 (1949): 24-33.
- Archer, Mildred. *Indian Popular Painting in the India Office Library. Her Majesty's Stationery Office*, 1977.
- British Museum. Collection record 2000,1012,0.4: kohbar painting by Baua Devi, dated 1965-1972; acquired by donor from Bihar State Emporium, Delhi, in 1972.
- Davis, Coralynn V. 'Collaborative Scholarship and the Politics of Participation: Linking Expressive Arts and Social Change in Mithila.' *Asian Ethnology* 85, no. 1 (2026).
- Fleury, Helene. 'Mithila Painting and Feminism in the 1970s: Constructing Women Painters as Heroines of Western Vanguard Journals.' *Asian Ethnology* 85, no. 1 (2026).
- Heinz, Carolyn Brown. 'Documenting the Image in Mithila Art.' *Visual Anthropology Review* 22, no. 2 (2006): 5-33.
<https://doi.org/10.1525/var.2006.22.2.5>.
- Intellectual Property India, Geographical Indications Registry. Application No. 37, 'Madhubani Paintings': filed 22 August 2005; certificate no. 31 dated 16 May 2007; applicant Director of Industries, Bihar.
- Jain, Jyotindra. *Ganga Devi: Tradition and Expression in Mithila Painting*. Mapin, 1997.
- Jayakar, Pupul. *The Earthen Drum: An Introduction to the Ritual Arts of Rural India*. National Museum, 1980; later editions cited in scholarship.
- National Crafts Museum and Hastkala Academy. *Abhivyakti: Mithila Painting*. Government of India, 2015.
- Princeton University Library, Graphic Arts Collection. 'Mithila Art in 2020: Life, Labor, and COVID-19 in South Asia,' collection program and webinar documentation, 2021.
- Richman, Paula. 'The Cultural Politics of Classifying Mithila Painting.' *Asian Ethnology* 85, no. 1 (2026).
- Richman, Paula, and David L. Szanton, eds. *India's Mithila Painting*. University of Washington Press, 2025.
- Singh, Neha, Sana Moid, Mita Mehta, and Priti Saxena. 'Empowering Women Artisans in Madhubani Painting: Navigating Digital Challenges

- for Long-Term Viability.' *Vision* (online first, 21 August 2024).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/09722629241259886>.
- Szanton, David L. 'The Politics of Mithila Painting.' In *India's Mithila Painting*, edited by Paula Richman and David L. Szanton. University of Washington Press, 2025.
- Szanton, David, and Malini Bakshi. *Mithila Painting: The Evolution of an Art Form*. Ethnic Arts Foundation, 2007.
- Vequaud, Yves. *The Women Painters of Mithila: Ceremonial Paintings from an Ancient Kingdom*. Translated by George Robinson. Thames and Hudson, 1977.
- Government of India. Gazette of India, Padma Awards notification, 1975: Jagdamba Devi, Madhubani Paintings, Madhubani, Bihar.
- Government of India. Gazette of India, Padma Awards notification, 1981: Sita Devi, Painter, Madhubani, Bihar.
- Janakpur Women's Development Center. Institutional history and fact sheet: Janakpur Women's Art Project begun in 1989; registered under the present name in 1992; Kuwa, Janakpur, Nepal.
- British Council Cultural Protection Fund. 'Preserving Maithil women's art in Nepal.' Project documentation on Janakpur Women's Development Center and Maithil mud-art heritage.

Chapter 26. The Kosi, floods, infrastructure, and environmental risk

A river system as a historical actor

The Kosi is not a backdrop to the history of Mithila. It has shaped settlement, agrarian opportunity, transport, administrative boundaries, public works, migration, and political expectations. Yet a river is not an intentional political actor. Historical explanation must connect geomorphology and monsoon hydrology with institutions that decide where people may live, which structures are maintained, how warnings move, and whose losses are compensated.

This chapter therefore treats environmental risk as produced by an interaction of hazard, exposure, infrastructure, and social capacity. Seasonal high water can be beneficial in one landscape and disastrous in another. A breach can convert a protected tract into a catastrophe zone. An avulsion can move the main channel far more abruptly than ordinary bank erosion. Using one word - flood - for all three processes hides crucial differences.

The Sapt Kosi basin: one river assembled from many headwaters

In Nepal the river system is commonly understood through the Sapta Kosi, the seven-river network that gathers Himalayan and trans-Himalayan waters before entering the eastern Tarai and then Bihar. The basin includes very high-relief terrain and a large sediment-producing mountain catchment before the river reaches the low-gradient Gangetic plain. This contrast between steep headwaters and a flat depositional foreland is central to Kosi behavior.

Political boundaries divide the basin among China, Nepal, and India, while water and sediment do not stop at those boundaries. The most consequential flood-management relationship for the lower basin is bilateral India-Nepal cooperation because the barrage and important embankment

reaches lie in Nepal while much of the downstream exposure lies in Bihar. Basin geography and state jurisdiction therefore operate at different scales.

From mountain gradient to the Gangetic plain

A river leaving a high-energy mountain environment loses gradient and transport capacity as it enters the plains. The Kosi carries water, gravel, sand, silt, and finer material generated across a tectonically active and monsoon-affected catchment. Deposition is therefore not an accidental by-product: it is part of the normal construction of the alluvial landscape.

Infrastructure changes the places in which deposition can occur. When flows are constrained between embankments, channel-bed and bar evolution, bank attack, and local aggradation must be monitored together with discharge. The historical problem is consequently not 'too much water' alone. It is the combined management of water, sediment, drainage, and a densely inhabited floodplain.

The Kosi megafan and the language of avulsion

The Kosi has built a large megafan in north Bihar. A megafan is a broad depositional landform produced where a large river repeatedly distributes sediment across a foreland surface. Such terrain contains abandoned channels, active distributaries, low areas, natural levees, wetlands, and settlement mounds. Its history cannot be reconstructed by assuming that the modern channel has always occupied the same corridor.

Avulsion is the rapid relocation of a river into a different course, usually over a much larger distance than ordinary lateral bank migration. The 2008 event is a particularly important example. Distinguishing avulsion from routine flooding matters because the probability, warning problem, infrastructure exposure, and recovery geography differ when the main river itself changes route.

Historical maps and the caution against a simple westward-migration story

A familiar account states that the Kosi migrated continuously westward by more than one hundred kilometres over roughly two centuries. Chakraborty, Kar, Ghosh, and Basu re-examined twenty-eight maps published between 1760 and 1960 and argued that the mapped channel positions instead show substantial oscillation, with the river often remaining in an east-central belt of the megafan rather than sweeping uniformly from east to west (Chakraborty et al. 2010).

This does not make old maps useless. It makes them evidence that must be compared critically. Survey accuracy, map scale, the representation of multiple channels, publication date, and the distinction between a principal channel and a seasonal branch all affect interpretation. The book therefore avoids converting a useful regional image of mobility into an exact two-century trajectory that the cartographic record itself does not securely establish.

Why 60 km and 120 km can both appear in accounts of 2008

Scientific discussions of the 2008 avulsion use different measures of displacement. Chakraborty and colleagues describe a shift of about sixty kilometres in the central part of the megafan, while Sinha and co-authors describe an approximately 120-kilometre avulsion in relation to the modern course and avulsion geometry. These figures refer to different ways of measuring a spatially complex channel relocation rather than a single survey line that all authors define identically.

For historical writing, the safest point is qualitative but still precise: the 2008 change was exceptionally large, rapid, and eastward, and the floodwater occupied an older course outside the embanked channel. Where a numeric distance is used, the method and source should accompany it.

Sediment is not a footnote to flood control

The Kosi transports very large sediment loads from the Himalaya. As flow enters the plains, deposition changes bars, channel depth, local slopes, and the relation between the channel bed and surrounding land. Sinha et al. (2014) identify sediment flux, planform dynamics, and human intervention as important parts of avulsion susceptibility. Recent work also maps reaches of aggradation and evaluates silt-management options.

No single sediment policy follows automatically from this diagnosis. Dredging, channel training, embankment modification, sediment extraction, and floodplain accommodation each redistribute costs and benefits. A source-controlled history therefore records sediment as a governing constraint and treats proposed engineering remedies as proposals whose ecological, financial, and social consequences require separate evidence.

The colonial flood archive: a record of recurring administrative concern

The Bihar State Archives' digitized collection on floods from 1871 to 1939 shows that colonial officials repeatedly documented crop damage, relief, river-course change, bund construction, drainage, embankment law, and district reporting. Entries include an 1895 record on bunds along the Kosi, a 1907 file on river-course changes affecting the Nepal-British boundary, and a series of early-twentieth-century flood and engineering reports.

The archive is valuable precisely because it predates the postcolonial Kosi Project. It demonstrates that the problem of governing mobile rivers was not invented in the 1950s. At the same time, colonial records were produced for revenue, administration, engineering, and order. They reveal official priorities more directly than they reveal the full experience of

cultivators, fishers, boatmen, laborers, or people whose settlements shifted outside the documentary centre.

Embankment law and revenue logic in colonial Bihar

The Bengal Embankment Act of 1873 gave government a formal legal framework for embankment administration. Across north Bihar, colonial policy was repeatedly pulled between protecting taxable cultivation, preserving drainage, limiting unauthorized bunds, and avoiding expensive commitments to structures that could create new liabilities. Christopher Hill places these interventions within a longer history in which environmental management and social control were intertwined (Hill 1997).

The lesson is methodological as well as historical. 'The colonial state opposed embankments' and 'the colonial state built embankments' are both too simple. Policy varied by river, decade, fiscal expectation, engineering opinion, and perceived downstream effect. The Kosi entered independence with a long archive of debate rather than a settled technical consensus.

From colonial caution to postcolonial hydraulic developmentalism

After independence, flood control became part of a wider developmental promise linking engineering, irrigation, agricultural productivity, transport, power, and state capacity. The Kosi project emerged within this setting. Its advocates did not present an embankment in isolation; they envisioned a multi-purpose system of barrage, headworks, flood banks, canals, roads, and power generation.

This shift matters because infrastructure produces path dependence. Once villages, roads, canals, markets, and agricultural expectations adjust to a protected corridor, the consequences of failure change. A breach can then affect land that has been settled or intensified partly because routine flooding was expected to be reduced.

The 1953 scheme and the promise of a multi-purpose project

A contemporary Yojana account in September 1963 described a Kosi scheme drawn up in 1953 at an estimated cost of Rs 44.76 crore, combining flood protection with extensive irrigation and a barrage carrying road and rail links. Such official publicity captures the developmental expectations surrounding the project at the moment when its principal works were being completed.

The figures in promotional sources should be read as planned benefits, not retrospective proof of delivered outcomes. Canal command, seasonal water availability, drainage, maintenance, land acquisition, and farm-level access determine whether nominal irrigation potential becomes reliable irrigation. The historical significance lies in the scale of the promise and the way it reorganized public policy around the river.

25 April 1954: the original India-Nepal Kosi Agreement

The Governments of India and Nepal signed the Kosi Agreement at Kathmandu on 25 April 1954. The treaty text describes a barrage, headworks, afflux and flood banks, canals, protective works, irrigation, hydropower, and erosion protection. It authorized construction on Nepalese territory and specified land, compensation, communications, and related project arrangements.

The agreement is primary legal evidence for what the two states authorized and allocated. It is not, by itself, evidence that every maintenance obligation was performed to the same standard in every year. Evaluating implementation requires engineering inspections, budget and work records, bilateral committee minutes, field evidence, and post-disaster investigation.

Sovereignty, access, and infrastructure on Nepalese territory

The Kosi Project is unusual because major structures serving downstream Bihar are located in Nepal. This creates a

permanent relationship between sovereignty and operational access. Repair teams, materials, leased land, inspection, barrage operation, canal interests, and local use of project areas can all become bilateral matters even when the immediate risk appears local.

The arrangement should not be described as if one country simply controls the other's river. Nepal retains sovereignty over its territory; India and Bihar agencies exercise project functions through treaty-based arrangements and bilateral mechanisms. Political criticism in both countries often reflects wider histories of asymmetry, sovereignty, and benefit-sharing, which should be attributed rather than presented as a single uncontested national view.

Construction, embankments, and the remaking of the lower Kosi corridor

Construction began in the mid-1950s. Official reporting in 1963 stated that embankments had been completed in 1959 while work on canals and associated facilities continued. The engineering intervention confined much of the lower river to a narrower corridor and connected the flood-control objective to irrigation infrastructure.

Confinement did not erase the river's internal mobility. Braided channels, bars, erosion fronts, and sediment deposition continued between the embankments. The social effect was equally uneven: some land received reduced routine inundation, while settlements and fields within the embanked corridor remained exposed to the river's changing channels.

The Kosi Barrage: completion and function

The Kosi Barrage at Hanumannagar/Bhimnagar was completed in 1963. It regulates diversion into canals and provides a major transport crossing as part of the project system. Its gates and headworks are therefore important to irrigation as well as flood-season operations.

A barrage is not a high storage dam. It does not create the same volume of flood-storage capacity as a large reservoir. Confusing barrage operation with reservoir flood control leads to exaggerated expectations about what gate opening alone can accomplish during a major basin-wide event.

Canals, irrigation, and the development case for the project

The Eastern and Western Kosi canal systems were intended to convert flood-control expenditure into agricultural benefit. Irrigation is therefore part of the project's historical ledger and should not disappear from an account focused on disasters. The official development narrative emphasized stabilized cultivation, multiple cropping, and wider economic integration.

Canals also intersect with drainage. Cross-drainage structures, seepage, road embankments, local channels, and maintenance determine whether irrigation infrastructure improves or worsens waterlogging in a particular tract. The same linear infrastructure can deliver water to one area while obstructing evacuation of rain or seepage water elsewhere.

Hydropower and the meaning of a multi-purpose river project

The 1954 agreement and early project descriptions included hydroelectric generation as one of several objectives. The postwar planning ideal was that a river-development project could combine flood control, irrigation, power, erosion protection, transport, and regional modernization.

Multi-purpose language can conceal trade-offs. Water levels, sediment management, canal deliveries, ecological flows, flood-season safety, and maintenance budgets do not always point toward the same operational choice. Historical evaluation should therefore separate each promised benefit rather than treating the project as one indivisible success or failure.

Rehabilitation entered after engineering had already begun

Field studies and later Kosi literature emphasize that the problem of people living between the new embankments was

not adequately incorporated into the initial project design. Rehabilitation became an issue after construction was underway. Housing sites and grants were offered, but the distance between relocation sites and agricultural land made some arrangements difficult to sustain.

This is a fundamental political-ecology point: an embankment does not merely protect a pre-existing population map. It creates inside, outside, adjacent, and downstream categories. People whose homes and fields fall on different sides of a structure may face a choice between physical safety, access to land, schools, markets, and kin networks.

Life between the embankments

Dinesh Kumar Mishra and the ICIMOD case study by Singh, Ghose, Chaudhary, and Hansda document communities living within the Kosi embankments, where seasonal inundation, erosion, sand deposition, and isolation can coexist with continued cultivation and strong attachment to place. Later counts vary with date and definition, so this book avoids presenting one population figure as timeless.

The category 'inside the embankments' is itself diverse. Some villages occupy higher mounds; others lie close to active channels. Some households have boats, land, remittances, or political connections; others depend on wage labor and marginal sites. Risk must therefore be analyzed at village and household scales, not assigned uniformly from a map.

19 December 1966: the revised Kosi Agreement

India and Nepal signed a revised Kosi Agreement at Kathmandu on 19 December 1966, superseding the earlier arrangement while retaining the project framework. The Ministry of External Affairs preserves the revised text together with the 1954 agreement as an official bilateral record.

Revision is evidence that infrastructure treaties are not frozen at construction. Land, communications, compensation, maintenance, and operating arrangements can be renegotiated

as experience exposes ambiguities or political concerns. Later disputes must therefore be checked against the revised text rather than quoted from the 1954 agreement alone.

A breach chronology is an infrastructure history, not a flood list

World Bank and engineering sources record major post-project breaches at several locations, including Dalwa in 1963, Jamalpur in 1968, Bhatania in the early 1970s, Bahuarawa in 1980, the Nauhatta/Hempur area in 1984, Joginia in 1991, and Kusaha in 2008. Some secondary lists differ on the year or exact naming of particular sites, which is why precise local claims require the underlying engineering record.

The analytical point does not depend on forcing every event into one table. Repeated breaches demonstrate that the embankment system requires continuous inspection, erosion protection, emergency materials, access roads, and institutional readiness. The risk is not exhausted when initial construction ends.

1968: exceptional flow, breach, and the importance of measurement sites

Bihar Water Resources Department records a historical 1968 maximum of about 913,000 cusecs at Barahkshetra and about 788,200 cusecs at Birpur Barrage. These are different measurement sites, so the numbers should not be substituted for one another. Major breaches also occurred in 1968.

The distinction illustrates a broader rule for river history: a discharge number is meaningful only with location, time, measurement method, and context. Basin rainfall, tributary timing, sediment, channel geometry, gate operation, and embankment condition can all affect what a given discharge means downstream.

1984: breach memory and the persistence of sand-cast land

The 1984 eastern-embankment failure near Nauhatta/Hempur became a major regional disaster and

remains an important reference point in local studies. The ICIMOD case study selected Chandrain partly because the village had experienced the direct consequences of this breach and continued to live with altered land and water conditions.

Disaster duration therefore exceeds the hydrograph. Sand casting can reduce soil productivity; erosion can remove titled land; drainage changes can persist; debt and migration may continue long after relief camps close. A history limited to fatalities and inundated hectares misses these slower forms of loss.

1991: Joginia and the politics of maintenance

A breach near Joginia in Nepal in 1991 forms another important pre-2008 warning in the infrastructure record. The event reinforced the fact that critical reaches lie across the international border and that maintenance must be organized through access and cooperation rather than through a purely domestic chain of command.

Maintenance politics is often less visible than construction politics. New barrages and bridges produce ceremonies; annual inspections, stone supply, spur repair, encroachment removal, and drainage clearance rarely do. Yet the latter determine whether protective infrastructure retains its function over decades.

Diagram 50: selected legal, engineering, breach, and recovery anchors

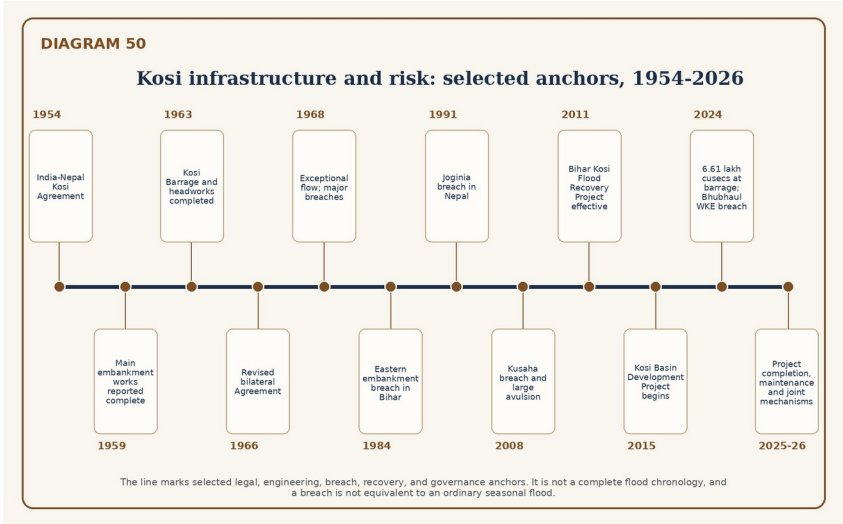


Diagram 50. Kosi infrastructure and risk: selected anchors, 1954-2026. The sequence distinguishes legal agreements, construction, breaches, recovery programmes, and continuing governance rather than treating them as one undifferentiated flood chronology.

Original analytical diagram prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. Sources: India-Nepal Kosi Agreements (1954, 1966); Yojana (1963); World Bank project records; Bihar WRD flood bulletins; Lok Sabha records; India and Nepal water-resource agencies.

18 August 2008: the Kusaha breach

On 18 August 2008 the eastern afflux embankment failed near Kusaha in Sunsari district, Nepal, roughly twelve kilometres upstream of the Kosi Barrage. The river escaped the engineered corridor and spread into an older eastern course. The resulting inundation affected Nepal and large areas of Bihar, especially Supaul, Madhepura, Saharsa, Purnia, and Araria in the principal World Bank recovery documentation.

The date and location are secure. Causal narratives require greater care. Scientific and administrative analyses discuss channel geometry, embankment erosion, sediment,

maintenance, inspection, and the evolving relation between the river and protective works. Describing the disaster as an unpredictable act of nature alone is therefore inadequate.

The 2008 event was an avulsion, not merely a very large seasonal flood

Rajiv Sinha emphasized that the 2008 disaster was distinctive because the river avulsed into a different course. Water occupied an old channel belt outside the embanked river, producing a geography of exposure that routine flood-frequency language could not describe well. Later GIS work identifies the Kusaha reach as avulsion-prone in a broader assessment of channel geometry and planform dynamics (Sinha et al. 2014).

This distinction also explains why historical channel maps matter to modern risk. A channel abandoned for decades can remain topographically relevant. Roads, settlements, and administrative boundaries may have developed across an older corridor whose hydraulic connectivity is reactivated when an avulsion occurs.

Why discharge alone does not explain Kusaha

The breach occurred at a discharge well below the Kosi system's highest recorded 1968 flows. That fact is important because it shows that structural failure cannot be inferred from discharge magnitude alone. Local bank attack, seepage, embankment condition, channel position, sedimentation, access for repair, and the timing of maintenance all matter.

It is equally unsafe to reverse the argument and claim that one administrative lapse alone explains the whole avulsion. The disaster emerged from a coupled river-infrastructure system. Accountability questions can be investigated without reducing a complex geomorphic event to a single technical variable.

The emergency geography of 2008

World Bank project documentation reports about 3.3 million people affected in Bihar, roughly one million evacuated, and

hundreds of thousands sheltered in relief camps. Such figures are administrative estimates compiled for response and recovery, not a census of every individual movement. They are nevertheless strong evidence of the exceptional scale of disruption.

Evacuation was not simply movement away from water. It required boats, roads, bridges, dry land, information, family reunification, livestock decisions, medical support, and camp management. The spatial arrangement of infrastructure determined who could leave quickly and who remained isolated.

Relief camps, documentation, and unequal recovery

Large camps can deliver food, water, health services, and temporary shelter at scale, but they also produce new problems of privacy, sanitation, gendered safety, disease exposure, and access to official registration. Households separated during evacuation may have different evidence of loss or land rights.

Recovery programmes transform these documentary questions into eligibility decisions. A destroyed house on disputed land, a tenancy without formal papers, or a household split across migration routes may fit badly into standardized categories. Disaster governance therefore includes record-keeping as much as rescue.

From emergency response to the Bihar Kosi Flood Recovery Project

The World Bank approved a US\$220 million credit in 2010 for the Bihar Kosi Flood Recovery Project; it became effective in March 2011. The programme combined housing reconstruction, roads and bridges, flood-management capacity, livelihoods, and emergency-response improvement rather than treating reconstruction as a housing programme alone.

The project created a large administrative archive of beneficiaries, works, contracts, and institutional learning. Those records are valuable to historians, but project indicators should

not be mistaken for the whole social outcome. Completion of a road or house is a measurable output; restored livelihood security, social inclusion, and long-term maintenance require additional evidence.

Owner-driven housing reconstruction

The recovery project used an owner-driven housing model in which eligible households were expected to manage reconstruction with financial and technical support. World Bank documentation presents this as a means of increasing household choice, ownership, and accountability compared with contractor-built standardized settlements.

Owner-driven reconstruction still depends on access to land, materials, labor, banking, technical advice, and documentation. It can empower households with these resources while burdening those who face labor shortages, disability, migration, debt, or disputed tenure. The model should therefore be evaluated through differentiated beneficiary experience.

Roads and bridges as disaster infrastructure

By project completion, the Bihar Kosi Flood Recovery Project had reconstructed hundreds of kilometres of roads and dozens of bridges. Connectivity is not an ancillary benefit in a floodplain. Roads and bridges affect evacuation, market access, health referrals, school attendance, construction costs, and the speed at which emergency materials reach an embankment.

Linear infrastructure can also obstruct drainage if cross-drainage is inadequate. The correct question is therefore not whether roads are good or bad for flood resilience, but how their elevation, culverts, bridges, maintenance, and alignment interact with local water movement.

FMISC: institutionalizing flood information

Bihar's Flood Management Improvement Support Centre was developed to strengthen hydrological observation, remote sensing, modelling, inundation mapping, embankment asset

management, and public information. Its role expanded through the post-2008 recovery and basin-development programmes.

This marks an important change in flood governance. Earlier systems depended heavily on gauge readings, field patrols, and administrative telegrams or phone chains. Contemporary management increasingly combines those practices with digital elevation models, satellite-derived inundation, telemetry, modelling, GIS, and public dashboards. Technology improves the information environment but does not remove the need for local interpretation and action.

Kosi-FFEWS and the value of lead time

The Kosi Flood Forecasting and Early Warning System operated by FMISC provides experimental forecasts of water level and discharge at seventeen sites on the Kosi and three tributaries, with a stated aim of at least seventy-two hours of lead time. It operates during the monsoon season and uses numerical weather prediction together with hydrological and hydraulic models.

A forecast is useful only if uncertainty and action thresholds are understood. Lead time must be translated into messages that reach district offices, panchayats, embankment communities, boat operators, schools, health facilities, and households. Warning science and warning governance are therefore inseparable.

Community participation in embankment surveillance

FMISC project documents include community participation in embankment surveillance as a formal activity. The logic is straightforward: residents near an embankment may notice seepage, bank attack, animal burrows, unauthorized cutting, or rapid local change before a distant office receives a technical report.

Community surveillance should complement, not replace, professional responsibility. Asking residents to report danger without providing communication channels, repair capacity,

safe access, or feedback can transfer responsibility downward without transferring power. Effective participation requires a defined response chain.

Sediment-management plans and the limits of a single engineering cure

Post-2008 programmes commissioned flood-and-sediment studies, river-behavior analysis, surveys, and master planning. Recent scholarship has explored commercial and engineered uses of deposited sediment as well as targeted removal. These efforts reflect a recognition that embankment safety cannot be separated from channel morphology.

Large-scale sediment extraction, however, can alter habitats, bank stability, groundwater interaction, and local livelihoods. Any proposal to 'desilt the Kosi' must specify where, how much, at what cost, with what disposal or market, and with what downstream consequence. A basin producing continual sediment cannot be managed as if one clearance operation permanently solves deposition.

Drainage congestion: the flood that protection can create behind itself

Communities outside an embankment may be protected from direct river inundation and still experience severe waterlogging. Rainwater, seepage, tributary flows, blocked channels, roads, canals, and insufficient sluices can trap water behind protective structures. ICIMOD fieldwork describes villages where chronic standing water limited cultivation and mobility despite their nominally protected position.

This is why flood-prone area and protected area statistics must be interpreted carefully. Protection from a design river flood is not the same as freedom from water-related hazard. Drainage is a separate infrastructure system whose failure may be slower, less dramatic, and economically persistent.

Sand casting, silt, and the uneven agronomy of floods

Floodwater does not leave one uniform sediment. Fine silt can replenish soil fertility in some settings, while thick sand deposition can bury fields and make cultivation difficult for years. Erosion can remove land completely. The agrarian meaning of a flood therefore depends on sediment texture, depth, timing, crop stage, drainage, and access to labor and credit.

This helps explain why memories of pre-embankment flooding can be ambivalent. Some cultivators remember annual inundation as part of a productive cycle, while others experienced destructive erosion or crop loss. Historical testimony should preserve that variation instead of turning 'living with floods' into either nostalgia or proof that structural protection is unnecessary.

Livestock, fisheries, and floodplain livelihoods

The Kosi floodplain supports more than crop agriculture. Livestock require dry standing space, fodder, veterinary access, and routes to market. ICIMOD fieldwork reported monsoon stress on cattle in waterlogged areas and the decline of some common grazing resources. Fishers and boat-dependent households may gain seasonal opportunities while facing different forms of insecurity in channel and wetland access.

Flood policy that measures only cropped hectares therefore misses important livelihood systems. Fisheries, grazing, fuel, reeds, sand, ferrying, and seasonal labor connect households to changing river and wetland environments in ways that do not fit a simple protected-versus-flooded classification.

Koshi Tappu: floodplain ecology across the Nepalese project landscape

The Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve in Nepal was established in 1976 and became Nepal's first Ramsar-listed wetland in 1987. The reserve lies within the Saptakoshi floodplain in Sunsari and

Saptari and protects riverine grassland, wetlands, wild water buffalo habitat, migratory birds, and other aquatic and terrestrial species.

Its presence is a reminder that the Kosi is also an ecological corridor. Barrage operation, channel change, siltation, pollution, invasive species, flood pulses, and human use affect habitat. Flood management that seeks total hydraulic stability can conflict with ecological processes that depend on disturbance and changing water levels.

Caste, class, and the micro-geography of vulnerability

A 2023 *Frontiers in Water* study of Kosi villages in Darbhanga and Saharsa found that vulnerability was shaped not only by location relative to embankments but also by caste and economic class. In several study villages, better-off groups occupied higher central sites while Musahar, Mallah, and other marginalized households were more likely to occupy peripheral, low-lying, or embankment-edge locations (Sahani et al. 2023).

The study is geographically specific and should not be universalized to every Kosi settlement. Its wider methodological lesson is robust: a village-level flood map can conceal inequality within the village. Elevation, landholding, housing quality, transport assets, political access, and social discrimination can place households exposed to the same river at very different levels of risk.

Gendered care work and disaster risk

Floods redistribute unpaid work. Securing drinking water, cooking with wet fuel, caring for children and older people, protecting documents, finding privacy and sanitation, managing menstruation, and maintaining household food supplies often fall disproportionately on women. Evacuation can also separate women from land titles, wage earners, or transport assets controlled by other household members.

Gender should not be reduced to a statement that women are always more vulnerable. Women also organize savings groups,

relief distribution, boats, household adaptation, and local communication. The correct historical question is how property rights, mobility, labor division, public authority, and relief design shape capacity at a particular time and place.

Migration as adaptation, necessity, and structural outcome

Seasonal and long-distance labor migration from the Kosi region predates any single flood. Repeated crop loss, uncertain land, weak local employment, and poor connectivity can nevertheless intensify the economic logic of migration. Remittances may finance raised plinths, repairs, education, food, and debt repayment, making migration part of household risk management.

Migration also creates new vulnerabilities. A household may be divided when warning arrives; documents and compensation claims may be handled by people who remain behind; migrant workers can lose both destination employment and home assets during wider crises. Flood history therefore connects rural environmental change to urban and inter-state labor markets.

Health, schooling, and the long tail of seasonal isolation

Flood exposure is measured inadequately if analysis ends when water recedes. Roads may remain damaged, wells contaminated, clinics inaccessible, and schools used as shelters. Interrupted schooling can become permanent dropout where families move repeatedly or need children's labor. Maternal and emergency health risks increase when transport is by boat or foot over long distances.

These effects are especially important for settlements between embankments or in chronically waterlogged tracts. A resilient infrastructure programme must therefore treat schools, health centres, drinking-water systems, raised access routes, and communications as part of flood risk management rather than as separate social sectors.

Diagram 51: protection, chronic water, and residual breach risk

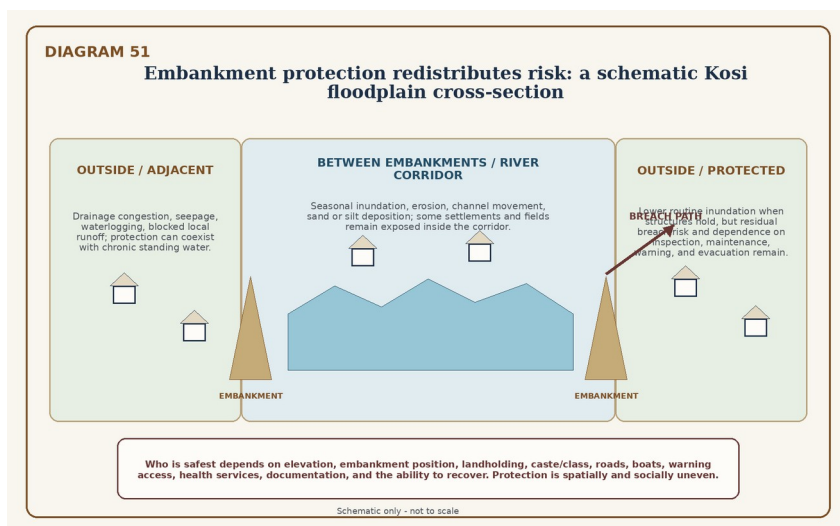


Diagram 51. Embankment protection redistributes risk. This schematic separates chronic drainage and waterlogging, exposure inside the river corridor, and residual breach risk in protected tracts; it is not a surveyed cross-section and is not to scale.

Original analytical diagram prepared for this book, 2026. © Gajendra Thakur, 2026. Analytical synthesis based on Mishra (2003); Singh et al. (2009); Sahani et al. (2023); FMISC and World Bank flood-management documentation.

The Bihar Kosi Basin Development Project, 2015-2025

The World Bank-supported Bihar Kosi Basin Development Project followed the recovery programme with a broader emphasis on flood-risk management, connectivity, and livelihood development. By 2024 reporting recorded 28.14 kilometres of embankment work, more than 300 kilometres of rural roads, and more than fifty new bridges, together with agricultural and institutional components. A 2025 implementation-completion record documents final costs and results.

The project illustrates a shift from post-disaster reconstruction toward basin resilience. It also shows the limits of large programme indicators: some agricultural and livelihood

targets were revised or under-achieved even while infrastructure components advanced. A balanced history must preserve both completion claims and implementation shortfalls.

September 2024: a high-flow stress test

Heavy rain in Nepal and the region produced very high Kosi flows in late September 2024. Bihar Water Resources Department records a Birpur Barrage discharge of about 6.61 lakh cusecs on 29 September, the highest there since 1968, while Barahkshetra peaked still higher upstream during the episode. All barrage gates were opened and extensive monitoring and alerts followed.

The event is useful because it demonstrates that extreme discharge and infrastructure failure are related but not identical. The barrage continued to function, yet sections of embankment elsewhere were under severe stress. Site-specific geometry and structure condition remain decisive.

The 2024 Bhubhaul breach on the Western Kosi Embankment

A Lok Sabha answer in 2025 records that the Western Kosi Embankment breached near Bhubhaul village in Kiratpur block at kilometre 38.210, damaging about 220 metres of embankment. The same answer states that overtopping associated with increased discharge caused the failure and gives a repair cost reported by the Government of Bihar.

This episode belongs in the long breach history without being conflated with Kusaha. It occurred on a different reach, under a different hydraulic situation, and did not reproduce the 2008 avulsion geography. Comparing breaches requires location-specific evidence rather than a single narrative of institutional failure.

2025-26: maintenance remains an annual governance cycle

Government of India reporting for 2025-26 describes annual post-monsoon inspection and recommended flood-protection works for the Kosi, including works on Nepalese territory

reimbursed through the border-area flood-management programme. The Kosi High Level Committee continues to inspect and recommend anti-erosion and maintenance works before each flood season.

This recurrent cycle is historically significant. The Kosi Project is not a completed object from 1963; it is an infrastructure system that must be reproduced every year through inspection, procurement, stone and earth supply, spur repair, access, monitoring, and emergency readiness.

India-Nepal joint mechanisms after the original treaty

Bilateral water governance now includes the Joint Committee on Water Resources, the Joint Standing Technical Committee, the Joint Committee on Inundation and Flood Management, and the Joint Committee on Kosi and Gandak Projects, alongside specialized technical and project mechanisms. These institutions supplement rather than replace the 1954/1966 legal framework.

Their existence also corrects the impression that transboundary management occurs only during crisis diplomacy. Routine meetings address maintenance, leased land, encroachment, canal and drainage issues, flood forecasting, and project operations. The difficulty is institutional continuity: agreements at committee level must still be translated into timely field action.

The 2026 joint committee and operational details

In 2026 Nepal's Department of Water Resources and Irrigation publicized the eleventh meeting of the Nepal-India Joint Committee on Kosi and Gandak Projects. Public reporting from the meeting addressed pre-flood erosion-control materials, encroachments around project infrastructure, leased-land demarcation, drainage and waterlogging, information exchange, and satellite imagery.

These details are more revealing than a generic statement of bilateral friendship or dispute. They show the mundane administrative work required to keep a transboundary

hydraulic system operating: who can enter a site, where materials come from, how land boundaries are marked, and which agency answers when water cannot drain.

Climate change: necessary context, dangerous shortcut

Climate change is altering temperature, precipitation extremes, snow and glacier processes, and the probability of compound hazards across the Himalaya. These changes can modify the future operating environment of the Kosi system. They strengthen the case for flexible design standards, better forecasts, updated hydrology, and adaptation planning.

They do not justify retroactively labeling every historical breach a climate-change disaster. The 2008 Kusaha event requires specific analysis of channel and embankment conditions; the 2024 event requires its own rainfall and hydraulic evidence. Climate attribution should be event-specific where possible and contextual where it is not.

Glaciers, monsoon rainfall, and the problem of one-source explanations

Because parts of the Kosi basin reach the high Himalaya, glacier and snow processes matter to long-term hydrology. Yet the lower-basin flood season is strongly shaped by monsoon rainfall and tributary synchronization. Public narratives sometimes leap from 'Himalayan river' to 'glacier flood' without showing the actual mechanism of a particular event.

A disciplined basin history asks which part of the hydrograph came from rainfall, snowmelt, glacier melt, or an exceptional high-mountain event, and over what timescale. It also asks how that water interacted with sediment, floodplain storage, embankments, and drainage. Hazard sources are multiple and their relative importance changes by event.

The proposed Sapta Kosi High Dam: proposal is not infrastructure history

A Sapta Kosi High Dam Multipurpose Project and Sun Kosi storage-cum-diversion concept have remained on the India-Nepal bilateral agenda, with a joint project office established for surveys and preparation of a detailed project report. The proposal is often invoked in debates over flood control, power, irrigation, displacement, seismic risk, and benefit sharing.

This book treats it as a proposal and negotiation history, not as an existing flood-control structure. Statements about the amount of flooding it would prevent or the social cost it would impose depend on design, operating rules, sedimentation, reservoir extent, seismic assessment, and final agreement. Those cannot be inferred from the existence of a study office.

Nature-based approaches and floodplain room

Recent resilience programmes increasingly discuss nature-based approaches alongside embankment strengthening. In a Kosi context, such approaches can include protecting wetlands, preserving drainage corridors, maintaining floodplain storage, stabilizing selected banks with vegetation, and designing infrastructure to work with rather than against local water pathways.

'Nature-based' should not become another slogan. Wetland restoration cannot substitute for repairing a dangerous breach; an embankment cannot substitute for drainage; relocation cannot be ordered without land and livelihood rights. A layered strategy is more realistic than replacing one universal solution with another.

Remote sensing, inundation maps, and a new documentary archive

Modern flood history is increasingly documented from above. FMISC uses remote-sensing products and has developed inundation and forecasting systems; satellite images of the 2008

avulsion became central to scientific explanation because they showed the new flow path across the megafan. Digital elevation data help identify low corridors that may not be obvious from administrative maps.

Remote sensing has limits. A pixel cannot reveal who owns a field, whether a household has a boat, whether a road culvert is blocked, or whether a relief message reached a Dalit hamlet. The strongest risk archive combines satellite observation with gauges, engineering surveys, cadastral and census data, and field testimony.

Public dashboards and the politics of open hydrological data

By 2026 Bihar's Water Resources Department and FMISC were publishing current barrage discharges, flood bulletins, and forecasting products online. Open data allows journalists, researchers, local administrations, and residents to compare current readings with historical peaks and to verify some official claims quickly.

Data publication is not the same as risk communication. Technical units, update times, site names, trend labels, forecast uncertainty, and network connectivity all affect usability. A public dashboard becomes effective disaster infrastructure only when its information can be understood and acted upon beyond specialist offices.

Protected-area statistics require interpretive caution

Bihar Water Resources Department publishes basin-wise figures for flood-prone and protected areas; for the Kosi/Adhwara grouping it reports extensive embankment length and a large protected area. Such tables are useful for comparing the administrative scale of flood-control works across basins.

They should not be read as a map of household safety. 'Protected' generally refers to the intended effect of flood-control works, not a guarantee against drainage congestion, erosion, embankment failure, or exposure within an embanked corridor.

Statistical categories need to be reconciled with local topography and actual hazard pathways.

Against the protection-versus-river binary

Kosi politics is sometimes written as a conflict between engineers who want embankments and activists who want an unconstrained river. Local experience is less binary. A household may demand urgent repair of a threatened embankment while also criticizing waterlogging produced by the same system. Farmers may value canal water and resent blocked drainage. Fishers may depend on seasonal connectivity that a protection work interrupts.

Policy should therefore be evaluated reach by reach and function by function. Maintenance, drainage, warning, evacuation, insurance, land rights, wetland protection, controlled inundation, channel training, and relocation can be combined differently in different places.

Environmental justice and the distribution of residual risk

Infrastructure always leaves residual risk. The central political question is who carries it. Landowners on higher ground, households beside a road, residents within the embankments, people in waterlogged exterior tracts, and those below a breach-prone reach do not receive the same combination of benefit and danger. Caste, class, gender, and political voice shape both exposure and recovery.

Environmental justice does not require the claim that every unequal outcome was deliberately designed. It asks whether the distribution of protection, damage, compensation, participation, and long-term opportunity is unequal, and whether institutions recognize those inequalities when allocating resources.

A basin-scale history without erasing local responsibility

Because the Kosi crosses borders, basin-scale analysis is essential. Upstream rainfall, sediment, barrage operation, embankments in Nepal, canals, Bihar floodplains, and the Ganga

confluence are physically connected. Yet 'the basin' should not become a device for dissolving responsibility into complexity.

Specific agencies still have specific duties. A treaty assigns functions; a department owns an asset; a contractor completes a work; a district issues an evacuation order; a panchayat identifies a shelter. Basin thinking is most useful when it clarifies how these responsibilities connect rather than when it makes accountability impossible.

What the Kosi teaches the wider history of Mithila

The history of Mithila cannot be narrated only through dynasties, languages, courts, and literary canons. River management has changed the geography within which citizenship, caste hierarchy, agriculture, migration, and state authority operate. Embankments and canals are therefore part of social history as much as engineering history.

The Kosi also resists narratives of fixed regional space. Villages move, channels change, land appears and disappears, and infrastructure redraws practical boundaries inside a formally stable district map. Environmental history is not an appendix to regional history; it helps explain how the region itself is continually materialized.

Chapter conclusion: from flood control to risk governance

The Kosi Project reduced some forms of routine inundation and created irrigation and transport infrastructure, but it also generated new dependencies on maintenance, drainage, sediment management, warning, and transboundary coordination. Its history is therefore neither a simple engineering triumph nor a simple proof that engineering fails.

The strongest contemporary framework is risk governance: maintain structures that communities depend upon, identify where protection transfers water and sediment problems, improve drainage and forecasts, preserve ecological functions, document unequal vulnerability, and keep recovery rights visible before the next emergency. The 2008 and 2024 episodes

show why the system must be understood as living infrastructure rather than a project completed in the twentieth century.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Bihar State Archives. 'Flood in Colonial Bihar (1871-1939): Selected Digitized Collection.' Government of Bihar.
- Chakraborty, Tapan, Rimpal Kar, Parthasarathi Ghosh, and Sounak Basu. 'Kosi Megafan: Historical Records, Geomorphology and the Recent Avulsion of the Kosi River.' *Quaternary International* 227, no. 2 (2010): 143-160. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.quaint.2009.12.002>.
- Government of India and Government of Nepal. Agreement on the Kosi Project. Kathmandu, 25 April 1954. Reproduced in *India Bilateral Treaties and Agreements*, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.
- Government of India and Government of Nepal. Revised Agreement concerning the Kosi Project. Kathmandu, 19 December 1966. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/LegalTreatiesDoc/NP66B1487.pdf>.
- Government of India, Ministry of Jal Shakti. 'Bilateral Mechanism for Flood Mitigation with Nepal.' Parliamentary information/Press Information Bureau, 19 December 2022.
- Government of India, Ministry of Jal Shakti. Standing Committee and departmental records on India-Nepal flood-management mechanisms, Kosi High Level Committee, and border-area maintenance, 2024-26.
- Government of India, Lok Sabha. Answer to Unstarred Question 3061 on the Western Kosi Embankment breach and Kosi Barrage discharge, 2025.
- Government of Bihar, Water Resources Department. Flood bulletins and River Discharge Dashboard, including Kosi/Barakhshetra and Birpur Barrage observations for 2024-26.
- Government of Bihar, Water Resources Department, Flood Management Improvement Support Centre. Kosi Flood Forecasting and Early Warning System; Flood Management Information System documentation and technical programme records.
- Hill, Christopher V. *River of Sorrow: Environment and Social Control in Riparian North India, 1770-1994*. Association for Asian Studies, 1997.
- Mishra, Dinesh Kumar. 'Life Within the Kosi Embankments.' *Water Nepal* 10, no. 1 (2003): 277-301.
- National Disaster Management Authority. *National Disaster Management Guidelines: Management of Floods*. Government of India, 2008.

- Nepal, Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation. Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve official profile and management documentation.
- Nepal, Department of Water Resources and Irrigation. Records of the Nepal-India Joint Committee on Kosi and Gandak Projects, including the eleventh meeting, 2026.
- Sahani, Ranjeet Kumar, Shrinivas Badiger, Abhishek Samrat, and Siddhartha Krishnan. 'Flood Frequency and Flood Intensity Changes in the Post Embankment Period in the Kosi Sub-basin India: Impact of Location, Caste, and Class on the Flood Vulnerability of the Marginal Communities.' *Frontiers in Water* 5 (2023): 1017945. <https://doi.org/10.3389/frwa.2023.1017945>.
- Singh, Praveen, Nilanjan Ghose, Nitin Chaudhary, and Regina Hansda. Life in the Shadow of Embankments: Turning Lost Lands into Assets in the Koshi Basin of Bihar, India. International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.53055/ICIMOD.507>.
- Sinha, Rajiv. 'The Great Avulsion of Kosi on 18 August 2008.' *Current Science* 97, no. 3 (2009): 429-433.
- Sinha, R., K. Sripriyanka, Vikrant Jain, and Malay Mukul. 'Avulsion Threshold and Planform Dynamics of the Kosi River in North Bihar (India) and Nepal: A GIS Framework.' *Geomorphology* 216 (2014): 157-170. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geomorph.2014.03.035>.
- World Bank. Bihar Kosi Flood Recovery Project: Project Appraisal, Needs Assessment, Owner-Driven Housing Reconstruction, and Implementation Completion and Results documentation, 2010-2018.
- World Bank. Bihar Kosi Basin Development Project: Environmental and Social Management Framework, Implementation Status and Results Reports, and Implementation Completion and Results documentation, 2015-2025.
- Yojana. 'Kosi Progress.' September 29, 1963, p. 27. Publications Division, Government of India.

Chapter 27. Madhesh, representation, and plural citizenship in Nepal

A modern political category, not an ancient homogeneous people

Madhesh is indispensable to the modern political history of Nepal, but it must be handled as a historically changing category. The word has older geographical usages, yet the broad political macro-category 'Madheshi' acquired greatly increased institutional and electoral salience after the restoration of multiparty politics in 1990. David Gellner has accordingly emphasized that the post-1990 period produced new large-scale categories of political classification, even where the words themselves were not wholly new. This distinction prevents a contemporary political identity from being projected unchanged into medieval or ancient Mithila.

The category is also internally disputed. Some plains-origin caste groups identify strongly as Madheshi; some Tharu organizations have resisted incorporation into a Madheshi umbrella; Muslim identities may be articulated as Madheshi, Muslim, regional, linguistic, or several of these at once. The chapter therefore treats Madhesh as a field of political identification rather than a single ethnos.

Madhesh, Tarai, and Mithila overlap without becoming synonyms

Tarai or Terai is primarily a lowland geographical and ecological term, though its administrative meanings have varied. Madhesh is at once geographical, cultural, and political. Mithila is a historical-cultural region whose literary, ritual, and linguistic networks span north Bihar and parts of Nepal. Their maps intersect, but none can simply replace the others.

Modern Madhesh Province illustrates the difference. It contains the eight districts from Saptari to Parsa, while the broader Nepal Tarai continues both east and west of the

province. Mithila, in turn, has major historical and cultural centres inside Madhesh Province but is not exhausted by its present provincial boundary.

The borderland existed before modern citizenship documents

For centuries, the plains north and south of the later India-Nepal boundary were connected by pilgrimage, marriage, agrarian tenancy, markets, scholarly circulation, seasonal work, and commercial routes. The emergence of modern territorial sovereignty did not erase these connections, but it changed their legal meaning. A marriage route could remain culturally ordinary while becoming relevant to nationality law; a market journey could remain economically routine while crossing an international frontier.

Historical method must therefore hold two propositions together: borderland society is genuinely transnational, and the international border is legally real. Cultural continuity is not evidence for a single sovereignty, while sovereign difference does not make cross-border social networks fictitious.

From Rana rule to statutory citizenship

Before the mid-twentieth century, membership in the Nepalese polity was regulated through a mixture of subjecthood, status, residence, land, administrative recognition, and customary hierarchies rather than through the contemporary universal expectation of an individual citizenship certificate. Nepal's first modern citizenship legislation dates to 1952, during the political transition after the end of Rana oligarchic monopoly.

The emergence of statutory citizenship should not be described as a simple administrative modernization. In a borderland, documentary criteria determine access to voting, education, employment, property transactions, passports, and public office. They also create opportunities for officials to classify long-settled residents through assumptions about language, surname, origin, or cross-border kinship.

1952: the first national citizenship law

The 1952 citizenship law was an early attempt to convert political membership into statutory categories at the dawn of Nepal's first experiments with electoral government. Later citizenship acts and constitutions substantially revised its rules, but the date is important because it marks the beginning of a documentary legal regime whose effects became especially visible in the southern plains.

The legal history should be read alongside regional history. Frederick Gaige's study of the Tarai showed that citizenship, language, migration, land, and political representation were mutually reinforcing fields of state integration. His analysis is now historical evidence in its own right: it records how questions of belonging were already inseparable from centre-periphery relations before the post-1990 Madhesh movements.

1962-64: Panchayat nationalism and the citizenship regime

King Mahendra's 1960 royal intervention ended the first multiparty experiment, and the 1962 Constitution institutionalized the partyless Panchayat system. The 1964 Citizenship Act operated within this political order. State integration was closely associated with the monarchy, the Nepali language, centralized administration, and a national culture whose official form was more homogeneous than Nepal's actual social and linguistic landscape.

For plains residents, the issue was not simply whether the law contained the word Madhesh. Citizenship administration interacted with documentary proof, migration narratives, language, and official suspicions concerning proximity to India. These experiences later became part of the political memory from which claims for recognition and inclusion were articulated.

Language policy and the making of unequal public access

A state's official language is not merely a cultural emblem. It is the language in which forms are printed, examinations are held, orders are written, police statements are recorded, courts operate, and public employment is mediated. Where a citizen's first language is Maithili, Bhojpuri, Bajjika, Tharu, Urdu, Magahi, or another language, monolingual administration can convert linguistic difference into unequal transaction costs.

This does not imply that Nepali lacks a legitimate national role. The problem is institutional asymmetry: a language of wider communication can facilitate common administration while still disadvantaging citizens if multilingual access is absent. The contemporary constitutional framework attempts to hold these functions together by retaining Nepali as the federal official language while recognizing all mother tongues as languages of the nation.

1990: multiparty democracy and a new language of difference

The 1990 People's Movement restored multiparty politics and opened a much wider arena for ethnic, regional, caste, linguistic, gender, and indigenous mobilization. The 1990 Constitution recognized Nepal as multiethnic and multilingual, but it also retained the Hindu kingdom and Nepali as the official language. The contradiction between recognition of diversity and continued institutional hierarchy became one of the central themes of the following decades.

After 1990, Madheshi organizations, Janajati movements, Dalit activism, women's organizations, and regional parties increasingly quantified exclusion. Representation in the civil service, security institutions, universities, political parties, and development administration became measurable political questions rather than only complaints about cultural disrespect.

Madheshi as a post-1990 political macro-category

The growing use of Madheshi as a broad political category created solidarity across differences while never eliminating them. It could unite people around experiences of stigmatization, underrepresentation, and suspicion of cross-border loyalty, yet it also risked flattening caste, class, language, religion, and indigenous identity within the plains.

This duality is historically important. Successful political categories often work precisely because they simplify. A research history must record their mobilizing power without adopting their simplification as an analytical fact. Thus 'Madheshi representation' and 'representation of all communities in Madhesh' are related but not identical questions.

The civil war, the 2006 movement, and the end of the old constitutional order

The Maoist conflict from 1996 to 2006 and the 2006 People's Movement transformed the constitutional agenda. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement, abolition of the king's direct political authority, the Interim Constitution, and the Constituent Assembly process placed restructuring of the state at the centre of national politics. Inclusion was no longer framed only as recruitment into an unchanged unitary system; the architecture of the state itself became negotiable.

For Madhesh-based actors this opened an opportunity and a dispute. The peace settlement challenged old centralized institutions, yet many plains activists argued that the first post-conflict arrangements still reproduced hill-centred assumptions and inadequate representation.

The 2006 Citizenship Act and the documentary question

The Nepal Citizenship Act, 2063 (2006) became the principal statutory framework for citizenship in the post-People's-Movement order. It must be distinguished from later

constitutional and amending provisions. Citizenship law is cumulative: a person may have a constitutional entitlement, but the usable certificate depends on statutory categories, regulations, documentary evidence, and district-level administration.

This distinction matters because political arguments often collapse entitlement and implementation. A constitutional promise can remain difficult to use if birth registration is missing, a parent cannot be documented, names are inconsistent across records, or an office demands proof that the statute does not clearly anticipate.

January 2007: protest changes the constitutional agenda

The Madhesh movement of 2007 followed the promulgation of the Interim Constitution and rapidly transformed the post-conflict political field. Demonstrations, strikes, confrontation, and deaths brought federalism, electoral representation, inclusion, and regional recognition into the core of constitution-making. The movement was not the beginning of every Madheshi grievance, but it was a decisive moment in converting them into a national constitutional crisis.

Violence by state forces and by protesters must both remain visible in the record. A movement can have legitimate constitutional demands without every act committed in its name being lawful, while state maintenance of order does not justify disproportionate or unlawful force.

The twenty-two-point agreement and negotiated inclusion

The 2007 agreement between the government and Madhesh-based representatives translated street mobilization into negotiated commitments. Its importance lies less in treating each clause as permanently settled than in showing that representation, federal restructuring, and inclusion became subjects of explicit state bargaining.

Agreements of this kind are evidence of political commitment, not self-executing constitutional law. Later

disputes repeatedly turned on whether earlier promises had been fully incorporated, partially translated, or abandoned during constitution drafting.

2008: the eight-point agreement and federal commitment

Further mobilization in 2008 produced another agreement before the first Constituent Assembly election. Federalism was now embedded in the restructuring agenda, and Madhesh-based parties entered the Constituent Assembly with substantial electoral strength. The election changed who sat at the constitutional table even though it did not settle what federalism would mean.

The episode demonstrates a recurring distinction in this chapter: recognition can be procedural, electoral, territorial, linguistic, or legal. Winning seats is not the same as securing preferred provincial boundaries; a promise of federalism is not the same as agreement on its map.

The first Constituent Assembly and competing federal maps

The Constituent Assembly elected in 2008 contained a much broader range of parties and social constituencies than earlier legislatures. Debates considered identity, economic viability, administrative capacity, linguistic geography, historical regions, and minority protection. Proposals for the number and boundaries of provinces varied widely.

No federal map could mechanically reproduce a single social geography because caste, language, religion, ethnicity, migration, and historical region overlap differently. The political question was therefore distributive: which groups would gain the practical capacity to form governments, use languages, allocate budgets, and influence institutions under each proposed map?

Why the first Constituent Assembly failed to finish the constitution

The first Constituent Assembly expired in 2012 without promulgating a constitution. Federal design was one of the central unresolved questions, alongside the form of government and other institutional disputes. The failure should not be reduced to a single Madhesh-versus-hills confrontation; party strategy, intra-party conflict, changing coalitions, and disagreement among identity-based movements all mattered.

Its collapse nevertheless narrowed later possibilities. When the second Constituent Assembly was elected in 2013, the balance of party power had shifted away from some of the forces that had performed strongly in 2008.

2013: electoral change and fragmentation of Madhesh-based parties

Madhesh-based parties entered the second Constituent Assembly after multiple organizational splits and a weaker combined electoral performance. This mattered during final constitution drafting because constitutional outcomes depend not only on social claims but on seat arithmetic, coalition discipline, procedural rules, and the threshold required for adoption.

Fragmentation also reveals that Madheshi politics was never a single-party project. Competing leaders differed over federal boundaries, alliances with national parties, participation in government, sequencing of elections, and how far to prioritize regional identity over wider ideological programmes.

2015: earthquake, sixteen-point agreement, and accelerated constitution making

After the devastating April and May 2015 earthquakes, four major parties reached a sixteen-point agreement intended to break the constitutional deadlock. Drafting then moved rapidly. Supporters argued that Nepal urgently needed a constitution

and functioning federal institutions; critics argued that the accelerated process reduced meaningful negotiation with dissatisfied Madheshi, Tharu, Janajati, and other constituencies.

The historical point is not that speed alone invalidates a constitution. It is that the procedure became part of the substantive conflict: groups that disputed the proposed boundaries and representation rules also disputed whether they had an effective opportunity to alter them.

The 2015 Madhesh and Tharu protests

Protests intensified across the southern plains before and after promulgation of the Constitution. Human Rights Watch and other observers documented dozens of deaths, including protesters, bystanders, and police personnel, and raised serious concerns about excessive force as well as violence by protesters. The conflict also disrupted transport and everyday life for months.

The protests were not geographically or socially uniform. Madheshi mobilization was strongest in parts of the eastern and central Tarai, while Tharu mobilization had its own organizations and territorial demands, particularly in the west. Treating them as one movement erases the very plurality that constitutional restructuring was supposed to address.

20 September 2015: a federal constitution amid dissent

The Constitution of Nepal was promulgated on 20 September 2015. It created a federal democratic republican state, constitutionalized a wide range of fundamental rights, established seven provinces, provided mixed electoral systems with inclusion requirements, and created institutions specifically concerned with historically marginalized communities. It was adopted by a very large majority of the Constituent Assembly.

At the same time, major Madhesh-based parties and other groups rejected important parts of the settlement. Both facts belong in the history. A high adoption vote establishes legal

enactment and broad assembly support; it does not by itself resolve the political legitimacy of disputed boundaries, citizenship rules, or representation formulas.

Article 4: inclusion is written into the definition of the state

Article 4 defines Nepal as an independent, indivisible, sovereign, secular, inclusive, democratic, socialism-oriented, federal democratic republican state. The preamble likewise commits the constitutional order to proportional, inclusive, and participatory principles. These are not merely descriptive adjectives: they provide the normative vocabulary through which later claims against exclusion are framed.

Yet constitutional adjectives require institutions. Whether a state is inclusive cannot be assessed solely from the presence of the word. Recruitment, electoral outcomes, language access, fiscal allocation, policing, documentation, and the treatment of minorities within provinces are necessary implementation tests.

Articles 6 and 7: nation languages and official languages

Article 6 declares all languages spoken as mother tongues in Nepal to be languages of the nation. Article 7 retains Nepali in Devanagari as the official language of Nepal while authorizing a province, by provincial law, to designate one or more languages of the nation spoken by a majority of people within that province as additional official languages. The Language Commission has a constitutional advisory role.

This arrangement separates recognition from administration. A language can be a language of the nation without being an official working language in every office. Conversely, a province's power to add official languages is constrained by law-making, demographic interpretation, staffing, translation capacity, and minority protection.

Articles 10-15: one federal citizenship with provincial identity

Article 10 provides for single federal citizenship with provincial identity. Articles 11 to 15 define and authorize rules

concerning citizenship by descent, naturalization, gender identity in citizenship certificates, non-resident Nepali citizenship, and related statutory matters. The system is therefore federal in political structure without creating separate provincial nationalities.

For Madhesh this matters because provincial recognition does not replace national citizenship. A person may identify culturally with Mithila, politically with Madhesh, linguistically with Maithili or Bhojpuri, and administratively with a province and municipality, while citizenship remains citizenship of Nepal.

Citizenship by descent and the importance of parental status

The Constitution allows citizenship by descent in several circumstances but attaches particular conditions to some categories. A person whose father or mother was a citizen at the time of birth falls within the constitutional descent framework, while children of persons who had acquired citizenship by birth before the Constitution face an additional requirement concerning the citizenship of both parents. Children born to Nepali mothers where the father is not traced are separately addressed.

These distinctions are legally technical but socially consequential. Borderland families experience law not as an abstract theory of nationality but as the presence or absence of a certificate needed for education, employment, banking, travel, voting, and public services.

Gender asymmetry is not a marginal issue

Citizenship debate in Nepal has repeatedly centred on unequal consequences for Nepali women and men in cross-national families. Article 11 distinguishes the route available to a foreign woman married to a Nepali citizen from the route available to a child born to a Nepali woman married to a foreign citizen. Women's-rights advocates have argued that these distinctions make maternal transmission more conditional.

The issue has special visibility in Madhesh because cross-border marriages are common in some communities, but it is a national gender-equality issue rather than an exclusively Madheshi custom. Similar legal questions affect Nepali women throughout the country and abroad.

Citizenship certificates, birth registration, and administrative discretion

A constitutional entitlement becomes usable through administration. District Administration Offices issue citizenship certificates; local authorities are central to birth registration and recommendations; regulations specify forms and evidence. Missing civil registration, inconsistent spellings, absent parents, migration, or disputed paternity can therefore produce long delays even when the legal category appears clear.

Administrative history is essential because apparent 'statelessness' statistics can refer to different populations: persons legally entitled but undocumented, persons whose eligibility is disputed, children awaiting age or procedure, migrants, or persons who may hold another nationality. Precise categories should replace dramatic but unverified totals.

Cross-border marriage does not equal doubtful nationality

The India-Nepal border sustains long-standing marriage networks, especially across adjoining regions of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Such marriages can activate naturalization and descent rules, but they do not by themselves make a Nepali citizen less Nepali. Historical suspicions toward Madheshis have often conflated cultural affinity with foreign political loyalty.

A borderland approach rejects that inference. Kinship can cross borders while citizenship remains state-specific. The relevant legal questions are nationality, residence, and statutory eligibility, not accent, dress, surname, or the location of relatives.

Representation: population, geography, and the design of constituencies

Madhesh movements repeatedly challenged electoral arrangements they considered insufficiently responsive to the dense population of the plains. Representation, however, is not determined by population alone. Constitutions and delimitation laws also consider geography, administrative boundaries, and practical convenience. The distributive conflict concerns how heavily each consideration should weigh.

The 2015 Constitution and its first amendment altered the wording governing House constituencies and delimitation. The resulting framework gives population central importance while retaining geographical convenience and specificity. That compromise should be described as a rule, not as proof that either side's theory of fair representation was fully accepted.

Article 84: a mixed House of Representatives

Article 84 establishes a 275-member House of Representatives: 165 members elected from single-member constituencies by first-past-the-post and 110 through nationwide proportional representation. Political parties' proportional lists must include women, Dalit, indigenous nationalities, Khas Arya, Madhesi, Tharu, Muslims, and backward regions on a population basis, with regard also to geography and regional balance.

The mixed system combines territorial representation with social inclusion. It does not guarantee that every subgroup within a large category, or every language area, will receive representation proportionate to its local population. Candidate selection inside parties therefore remains a major gatekeeping institution.

One-third women: representation through party-level correction

The Constitution requires at least one-third of the total federal representatives elected from each political party to be women.

Where first-past-the-post results do not produce enough women, proportional representation lists are used to reach the threshold. Provincial assemblies operate with a parallel one-third requirement.

This mechanism substantially increases numerical representation but also reveals a structural tension: women may be concentrated in proportional seats while constituency nominations remain male-dominated. Gender inclusion should therefore be assessed by route of election, committee leadership, ministerial office, and influence within parties, not by one aggregate percentage alone.

Article 42 and proportional inclusion in state bodies

Article 42 recognizes a right to participation in state bodies on the principle of proportional inclusion for specified economically, socially, or educationally backward groups, including women, Dalit, indigenous nationalities, Madhesi, Tharu, Muslims, backward classes, minorities, marginalized communities, persons with disabilities, gender and sexual minorities, farmers, labourers, oppressed citizens of backward regions, and indigent Khas Arya.

The provision is constitutionally significant but analytically complex. Which communities fall within a category, how backwardness is measured, which appointments count as 'state bodies', and how quotas interact with merit rules are questions for legislation, judicial interpretation, and administrative practice.

28 February 2016: the first constitutional amendment

The first constitutional amendment, published on 28 February 2016, changed Articles 42, 84, and 286. It was presented as an attempt to respond to demands concerning proportional inclusion and electoral constituency delimitation after months of Madhesh agitation. Madhesh-based parties did not treat it as a complete settlement, particularly because provincial boundaries remained unresolved.

The amendment is an important example of constitutional politics after promulgation. The 2015 text was not immutable; protest, negotiation, and parliamentary supermajorities could alter it. Yet amendment power also has a high threshold, which became decisive in 2017.

The border blockade dispute: protest, pressure, and competing narratives

The 2015-16 disruption of major India-Nepal border crossings became one of the most polarizing episodes in recent Nepalese politics. Madhesh-based protesters maintained blockades at key points; the Nepal government and many Nepali commentators accused India of imposing or enabling an undeclared blockade; India denied imposing one and pointed to insecurity and protest on the Nepal side.

A responsible history should not convert this contested causation into a slogan. What is firmly established is the severe shortage of fuel and other goods, the strategic importance of border corridors such as Birgunj-Raxaul, and the way the crisis intensified nationalism and suspicion toward Madhesh-based demands.

2017: a further amendment bill fails

On 21 August 2017, a proposed second constitutional amendment failed to obtain the required two-thirds majority in the Legislature-Parliament. The bill addressed issues including language, citizenship, representation, and provincial boundaries and had been advanced in part to respond to Madhesh-based parties. It received 347 votes in favour and 206 against among 553 members present, short of the required threshold.

The failure did not end constitutional politics. Madhesh-based parties nevertheless participated in subsequent elections, moving contestation from street mobilization back into electoral and provincial institutions while continuing to demand changes in the settlement.

2017 elections and the institutionalization of federalism

Local, provincial, and federal elections in 2017 transformed federalism from constitutional design into operating government. Province No. 2 became the only province composed entirely of Tarai districts. It acquired a provincial assembly, chief minister, ministries, budget, and a new arena in which Madhesh-based parties could exercise governmental authority rather than only demand recognition from Kathmandu.

Federalization did not remove the centre. Citizenship, defence, much fiscal policy, national elections, and major legal frameworks remain federal responsibilities. The new order redistributed authority rather than creating autonomous states.

Article 176: provincial representation and inclusion

Article 176 provides that sixty percent of provincial assembly members are elected by first-past-the-post and forty percent by proportional representation. Provincial proportional lists must address women, Dalit, indigenous nationalities, Khas Arya, Madhesi, Tharu, Muslims, backward regions, and minority communities on a population basis, while considering the province's geographical balance.

The design is especially important in Madhesh Province because the broad category 'Madhesi' cannot substitute for the province's internal diversity. Dalits, Muslims, Tharus, women, linguistic minorities, hill-origin residents, and smaller caste groups may be numerically underrepresented even in a province symbolically associated with Madhesi identity.

Madhesh Province: eight districts and 136 local levels

The present Madhesh Province consists of Saptari, Siraha, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Sarlahi, Rautahat, Bara, and Parsa. The provincial government's current profile records 136 local levels. This makes the province a dense network of municipalities and

rural municipalities rather than a single political community governed only from Janakpurdhām.

Local government is therefore central to plural citizenship. Birth registration, local recommendations, school administration, roads, sanitation, local taxation, and service delivery shape the daily experience of the state more directly than many constitutional debates in Kathmandu.

17 January 2022: Province No. 2 becomes Madhesh Province

On 17 January 2022 the provincial assembly adopted 'Madhesh' as the province's name by the constitutionally required two-thirds majority and designated Janakpurdhām as the permanent capital. The vote converted a movement vocabulary into an official territorial name. Competing proposals had included Janakī and Mithilā-Bhojpura, demonstrating that provincial identity was itself contested within the region.

The naming should neither be minimized nor overread. It is a major act of recognition, but it does not establish that all residents identify primarily as Madheshi or that Madhesh Province is coterminous with every historical definition of Madhesh.

Janakpurdhām: provincial capital and Mithilā centre

Janakpurdhām carries several layers of significance at once: it is a major Sita-Rama pilgrimage centre, an important Maithili cultural city, a historic centre of Nepal's Mithilā region, and the capital of Madhesh Province. These roles reinforce one another but are not identical.

The capital's location also highlights an internal provincial geography. Birgunj is a major industrial and border-trade city in the west; Janakpurdhām is more centrally associated with Mithilā cultural symbolism. The 2022 capital vote resolved an institutional question without eliminating regional competition over investment and administrative concentration.

The 2021 census: Madhesh is linguistically plural

The 2021 National Population and Housing Census recorded 6,114,600 people in Madhesh Province. The provincial data portal reports Maithili as the largest mother tongue, followed by Bhojpuri and Bajjika, with substantial Nepali, Tharu, Urdu, Tamang, and other language populations. Nationally, the census recorded Maithili as the second-largest mother tongue after Nepali.

Census categories are administrative classifications, not immutable linguistic boundaries. Bajjika, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Magahi, Hindi, Urdu, and Nepali may be used differently across home, market, school, media, and public office. A census response records a declared category within a particular questionnaire; it should not be used to erase multilingual practice.

Maithili is large, but provincial equality cannot be monolingual

Maithili's demographic weight and literary history give it a strong claim to provincial institutional support. Yet a province that replaced Nepali-only administration with Maithili-only administration would reproduce the same structural problem for Bhojpuri, Bajjika, Tharu, Urdu, Magahi, Nepali, and smaller-language speakers.

Plural citizenship therefore requires layered language policy: translation, multilingual forms, school options, interpreter capacity, media access, and legal clarity about which languages may be used for which administrative functions. Symbolic recognition is valuable, but service access is the stronger test.

January 2025: the official-language bill and its withdrawal

In January 2025 the Madhesh Province government introduced a bill proposing Nepali together with Maithili, Bhojpuri, Bajjika, Hindi, and English for official working use. The proposal met immediate opposition from lawmakers and organizations objecting to the exclusion of languages including

Tharu and Magahi. The government withdrew the bill on 24 January after protests and assembly resistance.

The episode is a rare practical demonstration of why language recognition cannot be reduced to majority arithmetic. Article 7 authorizes provincial language legislation, but selecting a list creates new boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. The withdrawal left the underlying constitutional power intact while showing that consensus on its exercise had not been reached.

Language recognition has at least five institutional levels

Language status in Nepal must be separated into at least five fields: mother-tongue census classification, constitutional status as a language of the nation, federal official-language status, provincial official-language status, and practical use in schools and administration. A language can be recognized in one field and weakly implemented in another.

This framework also clarifies debates over Maithili. Its national census size, literature, university use, media presence, and provincial demographic importance are distinct kinds of evidence. None should be used as a substitute for an enacted provincial official-language law that does not yet exist in Madhesh Province after the 2025 withdrawal.

The Madhesi Commission: constitutional recognition beyond territory

Article 262 establishes a Madhesi Commission consisting of a chairperson and up to four other members, with detailed functions provided by federal law. The institution is significant because it recognizes Madhesi marginalization at the national constitutional level rather than treating Madhesh solely as a province.

The Commission has undertaken studies of community status, access to state mechanisms, surname and group classification, and related social questions. Its reports are sources for contemporary policy history, but they should be read as institutional documents with defined mandates rather than as

final ethnographic authorities over who must identify as Madheshi.

Other commissions prevent Madhesh from becoming a single-axis category

The Constitution separately provides National Women, National Dalit, National Inclusion, Indigenous Nationalities, Madhesi, Tharu, and Muslim commissions. This institutional plurality matters in the southern plains, where one person may be simultaneously Madheshi, Dalit, Muslim, Tharu, a woman, a linguistic minority, or a member of another protected group.

Separate commissions can illuminate distinct structures of disadvantage, but they can also fragment responsibility. A complaint involving caste discrimination, gender, citizenship documentation, and regional exclusion may cross several mandates. Effective plural citizenship therefore depends on coordination as well as category recognition.

2025-26: the ten-year review question

Article 265 requires the Federal Parliament to review the Part 27 commissions after ten years from commencement of the Constitution. That constitutional milestone arrived in 2025. Public debate in 2025 and 2026 has focused on whether the commissions have been adequately resourced, whether their recommendations are implemented, how appointments are made, and whether their mandates should be strengthened, reorganized, or merged.

The existence of a review clause should not be misread as an instruction to abolish the commissions after ten years. It creates an obligation to evaluate them. The historical issue is therefore institutional performance: what problems were documented, what recommendations were acted on, and what capacities were withheld.

The 2023 Citizenship First Amendment

President Ramchandra Paudel authenticated the first amendment to the Nepal Citizenship Act on 31 May 2023. The amendment implemented constitutional routes that had remained blocked or uncertain for years, including citizenship for children of persons who had earlier acquired citizenship by birth where the statutory conditions are satisfied, and provisions concerning children of Nepali mothers whose fathers are not identified.

The amendment generated intense political and legal debate over presidential authentication because the bill had passed the previous Parliament and had not been authenticated by the former president. For this chapter, the key distinction is between the procedural controversy over enactment and the substantive citizenship categories that the amended Act made operable.

The 2025 Citizenship Second Amendment

A further bill amending the Citizenship Act was authenticated on 21 September 2025. Parliamentary and government explanations emphasized access to citizenship through the mother's name and additional routes intended to reduce documentation gaps affecting children of Nepali women, including specified cases involving birth abroad and an unidentified father. Regulations were subsequently updated to administer the revised law.

These reforms are historically important because citizenship law is still evolving after the 2015 Constitution. They also counsel against freezing analysis at the 2015 text: criticism of gender asymmetry remains relevant, but the statutory position in 2026 is not identical to the law that existed at promulgation.

No single amendment resolves the gender question

The 2023 and 2025 amendments expand routes to documentation, but they do not make every citizenship pathway

gender-symmetrical. The Constitution itself continues to distinguish some situations involving a Nepali mother and foreign father from those involving a Nepali father and foreign mother. Naturalized and descent citizenship also remain legally distinct categories with consequences for eligibility for certain constitutional offices.

A precise account should therefore avoid both extremes: claiming that no reform occurred, or claiming that reform has eliminated all gendered differences. The legal trajectory is incremental and contested.

Citizenship and the highest constitutional offices

The Constitution reserves specified senior constitutional offices for citizens by descent. This distinction has particular political resonance in a country where naturalized citizenship may arise through cross-national marriage or parentage. Madhesh-based critics have argued that the rule can have disproportionate effects in border regions with long-standing cross-border family ties.

Whether a rule is formally uniform and whether its social effects are evenly distributed are separate questions. Equality analysis must therefore examine both text and demographic context without assuming that every naturalized citizen is Madheshi or every Madheshi family has transnational parentage.

Dalit citizenship within Madhesh

Madheshi Dalits face the intersection of regional exclusion and caste hierarchy. Formal political recognition of Madhesh does not automatically dismantle untouchability, occupational stigma, landlessness, or unequal access to documentation. Research on Madheshi Dalit women further shows how caste, gender, poverty, and citizenship procedure can compound one another.

This is a methodological warning against vertical analysis alone. Representation of Madhesh in Kathmandu can improve

while internal inequality within Madhesh remains severe. The two scales must be measured separately.

Muslim citizenship within Madhesh

Madhesh Province contains Nepal's largest concentration of Muslims and Urdu-speaking communities, but Muslim identity cannot be reduced to language or Madheshi identity. The Constitution names Muslims separately in equality, inclusion, and electoral provisions and establishes a Muslim Commission. This produces both recognition and overlapping institutional classifications.

Questions of schooling, personal identity, poverty, political representation, and security can therefore follow patterns different from those of neighbouring Hindu caste groups even within the same district. A plural history must preserve that difference.

Tharu identity and resistance to compulsory Madheshi classification

Tharu political movements have repeatedly insisted on their own indigenous identity, history, and territorial claims. Some Tharus accept forms of Madheshi solidarity in particular contexts, while others reject being subsumed under Madheshi identity. The Constitution's separate references to Madhesi and Tharu, and separate constitutional commissions, reflect this political distinction.

The analytical consequence is clear: 'plains-origin' is not a sufficient ethnic category. Ecological location, language, indigeneity, caste history, and political organization produce different identities within the Tarai.

Hill-origin residents of Madhesh Province

Madhesh Province also includes residents whose family histories are associated with Nepal's hill regions and whose first language may be Nepali or another language. Federalism cannot

make such citizens guests in their own province. Provincial identity is territorial and constitutional as well as cultural.

Minority protection therefore runs in more than one direction. A settlement designed to correct historic central exclusion of Madhesh must also protect internal provincial minorities. This is one reason the language dispute of 2025 is more than a technical drafting failure.

Class, land, and the limits of identity arithmetic

Caste and regional identity do not eliminate class. Land ownership, tenancy, migration income, education, urban property, business networks, and access to credit create deep differences among people placed in the same constitutional category. Political elites can gain representation without corresponding improvements for landless labourers or informal workers.

The cultural economy of Janakpur, Birgunj's trade economy, agrarian districts, and migration-dependent households therefore produce different experiences of citizenship. Representation should be linked to distributive outcomes rather than assumed from office-holding alone.

Local government and the everyday state

Federal debates often focus on Kathmandu and provincial capitals, but Nepal's local governments are where many citizens encounter the state. Registration, local taxation, school governance, health services, roads, social-security enrolment, recommendations for citizenship documents, and disaster response all depend on municipal or rural-municipal capacity.

The quality of plural citizenship can therefore vary within the same constitutional regime. A multilingual ward office with reliable civil registration may make citizenship materially easier to exercise than a formally inclusive province whose local records remain inaccessible.

Education: mother tongue, mobility, and public opportunity

Education policy sits at the intersection of language rights and social mobility. Mother-tongue instruction can improve early comprehension and cultural continuity, while proficiency in Nepali and other wider-use languages can expand access to higher education and national employment. The policy problem is not choosing one language forever but sequencing and supporting multilingual learning.

In Madhesh, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Bajjika, Tharu, Urdu, Nepali, and other languages may require different local solutions. A uniform province-wide formula would not match the actual distribution of speech communities.

Security institutions and the historical meaning of underrepresentation

Madhesh movements have repeatedly linked citizenship to representation in the army, police, civil service, and other state bodies. Underrepresentation matters because these institutions do more than provide jobs: they exercise coercive power, produce records, administer borders, and symbolize who belongs to the state.

Measuring change requires comparable recruitment and staffing data over time. Anecdotal claims, whether celebratory or accusatory, should not substitute for disaggregated institutional statistics by gender, caste/ethnicity, region, and rank.

Public service inclusion and the problem of categories

Affirmative-action systems require categories, but categories themselves become political. Who counts as Madhesi, backward class, minority, Dalit, Tharu, or Muslim can affect access to reserved opportunities. State classification can therefore recognize inequality while also creating incentives to contest boundaries and documentation.

The Madhesi Commission's work on community and surname lists should be read in this context. Such lists are administrative instruments; they are not timeless ethnological maps and should not be projected into earlier historical periods.

Diagram 52: selected citizenship, movement, and federalism anchors

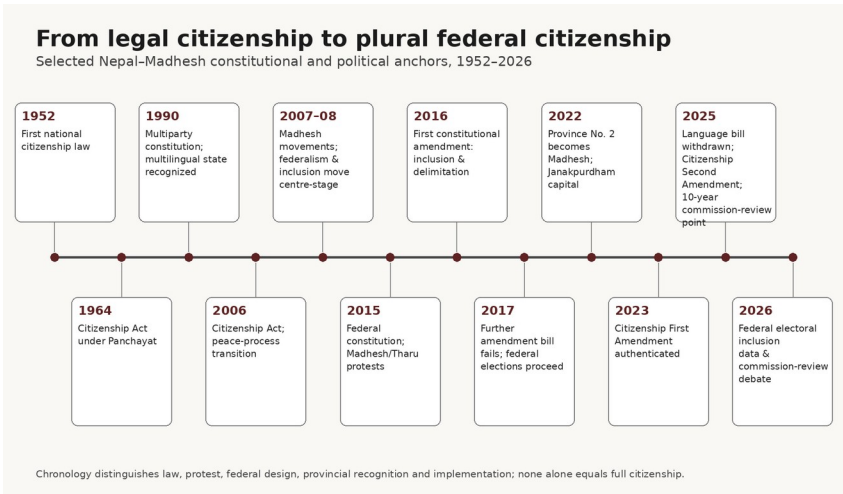


Diagram 52. From legal citizenship to plural federal citizenship: selected Nepal–Madhesh constitutional and political anchors, 1952–2026. The sequence separates statutory citizenship, movement politics, federal design, provincial naming, later amendments, and implementation review.

The 2026 House result as a representation snapshot

The Election Commission's report on the 2026 House of Representatives election classified 16.73 percent of elected members within its Madhesi inclusive category, alongside separate categories for Dalit, Tharu, Muslim, indigenous nationalities, and Khas Arya. The figure is useful as a current institutional snapshot, not as a complete measure of Madhesh representation.

It does not tell us how many representatives reside in Madhesh Province, speak Maithili, belong to particular castes, or advocate Madhesh-based constitutional reform. Electoral categories and regional political positions are different variables.

Representation must be disaggregated by route and office

A serious inclusion audit should separate first-past-the-post from proportional-list seats; national from provincial and local office; legislators from ministers; senior civil servants from entry-level employees; and symbolic appointments from decision-making power. Aggregate percentages can conceal concentration in less influential positions.

The same principle applies to women and Dalits within Madhesh. Numerical presence is a necessary measure of inclusion, but not a complete measure of agenda-setting capacity, budget control, or protection from discrimination.

Political parties remain the principal gatekeepers

Constitutional inclusion rules are implemented through party nominations and closed proportional lists. Parties therefore decide which individuals represent a category, which districts receive winnable constituency candidates, and who moves from electoral representation into executive office. Internal party democracy is consequently a central part of the citizenship story.

Madhesh-based parties themselves are not exempt from this scrutiny. A party can demand proportional inclusion nationally while reproducing caste, family, gender, or leadership concentration inside its own organization.

Federal finance: recognition without resources is thin citizenship

A province's ability to make recognition meaningful depends on money, staff, and legal competence. Education, health, roads, agricultural extension, language services, and cultural institutions require predictable fiscal transfers and own-source revenue. Federalism measured only by names, flags, and assemblies can overstate practical autonomy.

The financial relationship among federal, provincial, and local governments is therefore part of representation. Budget

formulas decide which territorial populations receive roads, hospitals, schools, and administrative capacity.

Birgunj and Janakpurdham: two centres, different political economies

Birgunj is one of Nepal's most important trade and customs gateways, while Janakpurdham combines provincial administration with religious and cultural centrality. Their functions show that Madhesh has no single urban centre. Provincial policy must balance border logistics, industrial corridors, pilgrimage, education, public administration, and rural service networks.

This internal geography also affects political representation. Western and eastern districts may experience the provincial capital differently, and border cities may orient daily commerce toward Indian markets while remaining firmly inside Nepal's fiscal and political system.

Open border does not mean open citizenship

The India-Nepal relationship permits unusually extensive movement and reciprocal privileges, but movement rights and citizenship are distinct. People may cross for work, pilgrimage, trade, or family visits without acquiring the political rights of citizens in the other state. Voting, passports, constitutional office, and nationality remain governed by domestic law.

Confusing mobility with citizenship fuels two opposite errors: treating ordinary cross-border movement as evidence of foreignness, or assuming that cultural openness makes documentary nationality unnecessary. Neither follows from the legal regime.

Media, stereotype, and the production of suspect belonging

Madhesh politics has repeatedly been shaped by stereotypes that portray plains citizens as insufficiently Nepali because of accent, clothing, skin colour, language, or family ties across the border. Such representations turn cultural difference into a

loyalty test. Conversely, some movement rhetoric has portrayed hill-origin citizens as a single colonizing bloc, obscuring class and political difference among them.

A plural history rejects reciprocal essentialism. Political discrimination can be documented without assigning collective guilt to an entire population category.

Memory of protest and the politics of martyrdom

The deaths associated with the Madhesh movements are commemorated in political speeches, monuments, anniversaries, and party narratives. Such practices are important sources for the history of collective memory. They show how constitutional claims are linked to sacrifice and moral legitimacy.

Commemoration should nevertheless be distinguished from forensic history. Exact casualty counts, responsibility for individual deaths, and legal accountability require case-specific evidence. Memorial categories should not substitute for investigation.

Constitutional nationalism and Madhesh constitutionalism

Nepalese constitutional nationalism emphasizes sovereignty, territorial integrity, republicanism, and the authority of a constitution adopted by an elected assembly. Madhesh constitutionalism emphasizes equal membership, federal self-government, fair representation, and freedom from treatment as a suspect border population. These positions are not inherently incompatible, though political rhetoric has often presented them as opposites.

A stable federal order requires both: the state's sovereignty must be accepted, and citizenship within that state must not depend on cultural conformity to a single regional model of Nepali identity.

Diagram 53: plural citizenship across institutions

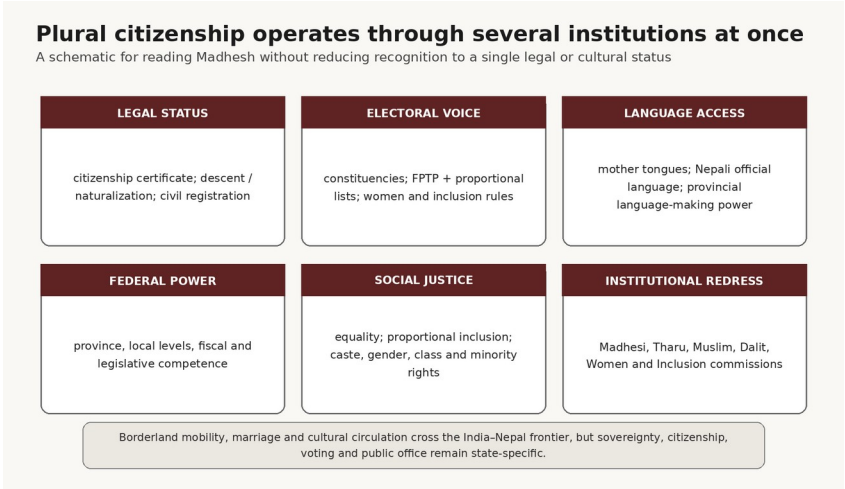


Diagram 53. Plural citizenship operates through several institutions at once. The schematic separates legal status, electoral voice, language access, federal power, social justice, and institutional redress; cross-border mobility does not erase state-specific citizenship.

Plural citizenship is more than possession of a certificate

A citizenship certificate establishes a crucial legal status, but effective citizenship also includes the ability to vote, stand for office, understand public procedures, obtain documents, use courts, receive education and health services, compete for employment, and participate without discrimination. These capacities are distributed through several institutions rather than one law.

The diagram therefore treats citizenship as layered: legal status, electoral voice, language access, federal and local power, social justice, and institutional redress. Failure in one layer can weaken the practical value of success in another.

Recognition can create new exclusions

Every act of recognition draws a boundary. Naming Madhesh Province recognizes one political history while leaving some residents attached to other regional names. Selecting official languages helps their speakers while excluding languages not

selected. Reservation categories create access for listed groups while raising disputes over subgroups and internal elites.

The answer is not to reject recognition but to design it reflexively: categories should be reviewable, minority rights should operate within recognized regions, and data should be disaggregated enough to detect unequal distribution inside protected groups.

Mithila inside Nepal: cultural continuity without territorial conflation

Mithila's literature, ritual traditions, Maithili language, pilgrimage networks, and artistic practices are central to the history of eastern Madhesh. Janakpurdham is one of their most important centres. Yet Mithila is not the constitutional name of Madhesh Province, and Madhesh Province includes important Bhojpuri, Bajjika, Tharu, Urdu, Nepali, and other cultural worlds.

The book's borderland method therefore allows Mithila to be transnational and historically deep without turning it into a claim that modern political boundaries are illegitimate or that every plains citizen shares one cultural identity.

What changed between 2007 and 2026

Between the first Madhesh movement and 2026, Nepal moved from an interim post-conflict order to an operating federal republic with elected provincial and local governments, a province officially named Madhesh, constitutionally mandated inclusion, a Madhesi Commission, a mixed electoral system, and repeated amendments to citizenship law. These are substantial institutional changes.

At the same time, disputes remain over citizenship equality, the implementation of proportional inclusion, provincial powers, official languages, internal minority protection, public-service representation, and the effectiveness of constitutional commissions. The historical conclusion is neither 'nothing changed' nor 'the Madhesh question was solved.'

Research method: separate law, claim, implementation, and outcome

Four levels must be kept distinct. First is law: what the Constitution, Acts, and regulations actually say. Second is political claim: what parties, movements, and critics demand. Third is implementation: what offices, commissions, and governments do. Fourth is outcome: who receives documents, offices, services, and influence.

Many controversies become confused when evidence from one level is used to prove another. A movement manifesto does not establish the law; a constitutional right does not prove implementation; an election result does not prove equal access to administration.

Chapter conclusion: citizenship as equal membership in a plural federation

The modern history of Madhesh is a history of belonging negotiated through territory, documents, language, elections, social hierarchy, and memory. Its central achievement has been to make the question 'who is represented as Nepali?' impossible to answer solely from the viewpoint of Kathmandu-centred institutions or a single national culture.

Plural citizenship does not require a weak state or blurred sovereignty. It requires the opposite: a state confident enough to recognize that equal citizens may speak different languages, inhabit different historical regions, maintain cross-border kinship, and organize politically around distinct identities without having their nationality placed under permanent suspicion.

Chapter-specific bibliography

Constitution of Nepal. 2015, as amended in 2016 and 2020. Nepal Law Commission, official English text.

Nepal Citizenship Act, 2063 (2006), as amended through the First Amendment authenticated 31 May 2023 and Second Amendment

- authenticated 21 September 2025. Nepal Law Commission / Government of Nepal.
- Office of the President of Nepal. Notice authenticating the Nepal Citizenship Act amendment, 31 May 2023.
- Office of the President of Nepal. Bill Authentication Notice: amendment to the Nepal Citizenship Act, 21 September 2025.
- National Statistics Office, Nepal. National Population and Housing Census 2021: National Report. Government of Nepal.
- National Statistics Office, Nepal. Language in Nepal: National Population and Housing Census 2021, Thematic Report XI. Government of Nepal, 2025.
- Madhesh Province Government. Madhesh Province Profile, official data portal; population, language, literacy, and local-level indicators.
- Madhesh Province Policy and Planning Commission. Second Periodic Plan, FY 2081/82-2085/86.
- Madhesh Provincial Assembly. Official institutional profile and legislative records.
- Election Commission Nepal. Report on the results of the 2026 House of Representatives election, including inclusive-category distribution.
- Madhesi Commission. Annual reports, Madhesh Profile 2081, and studies on access of Madhesi communities to state mechanisms.
- Gaige, Frederick H. Regionalism and National Unity in Nepal. University of California Press, 1975.
- Whelpton, John. A History of Nepal. Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Gellner, David N., Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, and John Whelpton, eds. Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom. Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997.
- Lawoti, Mahendra, and Susan Hangen, eds. Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nepal: Identities and Mobilization after 1990. Routledge, 2012/2013.
- Gellner, David N. 'Masters of Hybridity: How Activists Reconstructed Nepali Society.' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 25, no. 2 (2019): 265-284.
- Hachhethu, Krishna. Nation-Building and Federalism in Nepal: Contentions on Framework. Oxford University Press, 2023.
- Jha, Kalpana. The Madhesi Upsurge and the Contested Idea of Nepal. Springer, 2017.
- Pandey, Krishna Prasad. 'Ethnic Politics, Madhesi Uprisings and the Question of Citizenship in Nepal.' *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 57, no. 1 (2022): 3-18; first published online 2021.
- Pandey, Krishna Prasad. 'The State and the Madhesi Dalit Women's Access to Citizenship in Nepal.' *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, 2023.

- International Crisis Group. Nepal's Divisive New Constitution: An Existential Crisis. Asia Report No. 276, 4 April 2016.
- Human Rights Watch. 'Like We Are Not Nepali': Protest and Police Crackdown in the Terai Region of Nepal. 16 October 2015.
- Shakya, Prabindra. 'Nepal's Federalization Process and the Challenge of Accommodating Minority Demands.' ConstitutionNet, 31 January 2017.
- Karna, Mohan. 'Nepal-India Boundary Dispute and the Reignition of Minority Demands for Constitutional Reform.' ConstitutionNet, 1 July 2020.
- INSEC. Nepal Human Rights Year Book 2026. Informal Sector Service Centre, 2026.
- Madhesh Province Government / Provincial Assembly. Records concerning the January 2025 official-language bill and its withdrawal after objections over excluded languages.

Chapter 28. Conclusions: connected histories without false unity

Three names, many scales

Mithila, Vajji, and Anga do not form a single continuous state, ethnicity, language zone, or administrative unit. They belong to different historical scales and to different moments of political vocabulary. Their histories intersect through the middle and lower Ganga plain, Himalayan foothills, river systems, religious routes, courts, languages, manuscript cultures, landed institutions, markets, migration, and the modern India–Nepal border. A defensible synthesis therefore begins with relation rather than with presumed identity.

The names themselves have histories. Videha and Vajji belong to early textual and political worlds; Anga appears as an eastern polity in several ancient traditions; Tirabhukti and Tirhut have administrative histories; Mithila develops overlapping political, literary, ritual, and regional meanings; Madhesh and the Tarai operate at yet other geographical and political scales. Historical connection is strongest when these terms are allowed to remain specific rather than being made interchangeable.

Connected history is not a claim of sameness

A connected history asks how places, institutions, and communities became linked, what moved across those links, and what changed because of the movement. It does not require the connected units to have been politically united. Merchants can trade across rival jurisdictions, religious specialists can circulate across borders, literary forms can travel between courts, and river systems can bind landscapes that governments divide. Connection is therefore an empirical question about relations, not a rhetorical device for turning difference into unity.

This approach is especially important for north Bihar and the Nepal plains because cultural continuities coexist with durable political distinctions. The same pilgrimage route can be sacred,

commercial, and international; the same language can have speakers under two constitutions; the same river can be governed by several agencies. The history becomes clearer when those layers are studied together without collapsing one into another.

No single territorial line can contain the whole history

The maps appropriate to one period can mislead in another. An ancient polity reconstructed from textual references cannot be drawn as though it possessed a modern surveyed boundary. A medieval fiscal designation does not automatically define a cultural region. A colonial district, a zamindari estate, an independent-state province, and a present federal unit are different territorial technologies. Their borders may overlap, but the institutions that produced those borders are not equivalent.

For that reason, the book treats territory as evidence that must be dated. Where boundaries are known from administrative records, they may be mapped with relative precision; where they are inferred from sites, routes, or textual geography, the uncertainty must remain visible. Historical maps should show what the evidence permits, not what later identities would prefer the past to have contained.

Region is a relationship before it is a polygon

A historical region can be produced by repeated relations even when its edges remain variable. Marriage networks, pilgrimage circuits, shared markets, scholarly lineages, manuscript copying, dialect continua, revenue institutions, seasonal labour, and river crossings can generate a recognizable regional field without a single permanent border. This is one reason Mithila can be historically meaningful while its cartographic limits vary across texts and periods.

The same principle helps separate Anga from every later administrative map around Bhagalpur and prevents Vajji from becoming a timeless synonym for all of north Bihar. A region is not made unreal by changing boundaries; it is made historical

by them. The task is to identify the practices and institutions through which regional coherence was produced in each period.

Difference is evidence, not an obstacle to synthesis

Contradictions among sources are often treated as defects to be eliminated. In regional history they can instead reveal changes in classification, political interest, memory, or scale. A courtly text, a village genealogy, a census schedule, and a linguistic survey may name the same population differently because they were created for different purposes. Their disagreement is itself part of the history.

Synthesis should therefore not mean averaging incompatible statements into a smooth narrative. It should show which claims belong to which evidentiary worlds and explain why categories diverge. A history that preserves difference can be more coherent than one that forces all records into a single vocabulary.

Evidence has a hierarchy, but no source is neutral

A dated inscription, excavated layer, statute, treaty, coin, court order, or contemporary administrative record can provide a firmer chronological anchor than a much later legend. Yet evidentiary strength in one dimension does not make a source socially complete. A revenue record may be exact about assessment while nearly silent about unpaid labour; a census may count speakers while simplifying multilingual practice; a law may define rights that are unevenly realized.

The appropriate hierarchy is therefore claim-specific. Archaeology is strongest for material sequences; inscriptions for particular acts, titles, donations, and dated political assertions; legal texts for formal rules; oral traditions for memory and social meaning; literature for imagined worlds as well as historically situated language and patronage. No single source type should be made to answer every historical question.

Provenance precedes interpretation

Before a source is used, its provenance must be established as far as possible: who produced it, when, where, for what audience, through what institutional process, and in what surviving form. A manuscript copied centuries after a work's composition carries evidence about both the earlier text and the later transmission. A photograph of a painting records an object but also the circumstances of collection, cataloguing, and reproduction. A digitized document retains the historical record while adding a modern layer of selection and metadata.

Provenance is not bureaucratic housekeeping. It determines what kind of claim can responsibly be made. When provenance is weak, the narrative should narrow rather than compensate with confidence.

Archaeology cannot name prehistoric peoples by itself

The archaeological chapters repeatedly show the value and limit of material evidence. Ceramics, settlement layers, iron-working residues, architecture, botanical remains, and landscape change can establish sequences of occupation and economic practice. They do not, without independent evidence, assign a pot type to a language, caste, clan, or named polity. The temptation to convert material culture directly into ethnic identity is especially strong where later traditions are vivid.

The safer method is convergence. Archaeological evidence may be compared with securely dated inscriptions, textual geography, environmental reconstruction, and later settlement history, while keeping the distinct evidentiary status of each source visible.

Texts are historical evidence even when they are not chronicles

Vedic, Upanishadic, Buddhist, Jain, epic, philosophical, devotional, legal, and courtly texts preserve indispensable evidence. But genres speak differently. A philosophical dialogue is not a gazetteer; a pilgrimage narrative is not a cadastral

survey; a praise poem is not a neutral administrative report. Their historical value comes partly from understanding the conventions through which they represent persons, places, institutions, and ideals.

Genre criticism prevents two opposite errors: dismissing literary texts as unusable because they are not modern histories, and reading them literally as transparent records. The strongest interpretations ask what a text can establish, what it presupposes, and what remains beyond its reach.

Inscription, coin, manuscript, and archive must be read together

Political chronology is most secure where independent anchors converge. Inscriptions can date patronage or rulership; coins may fix regnal horizons; manuscripts can reveal copying, ownership, and intellectual circulation; archival records can reconstruct administration. None necessarily supplies a complete dynastic narrative. The history of Karnata and Oiniwar Mithila illustrates why a sequence assembled from mixed evidence is stronger than a genealogy repeated from late compilations alone.

The same discipline applies to colonial and modern history. Official files become more informative when placed beside newspapers, petitions, court cases, literary publications, private records, and material landscapes. An archive is not one voice but a contested field of documents.

Censuses classify; they do not freeze society

Modern censuses are powerful because they provide large-scale demographic evidence within specified administrative categories. They are also historical institutions that ask people and enumerators to select among named options. Mother tongue, caste, religion, residence, occupation, and migration become countable through rules that can change between censuses. The resulting tables are essential evidence, but they should not be mistaken for timeless social ontology.

This distinction is central to Maithili, Angika, Bajjika, Bhojpuri, and other language histories, and equally central to contemporary Nepalese categories. A census category may be politically consequential and statistically real while still simplifying multilingual, mobile, or overlapping identities.

Memory and tradition belong to history without replacing chronology

Sacred geography, genealogical memory, festival narratives, oral histories, local legends, and commemorative practices reveal how communities inhabit the past. They can preserve place associations and social experiences omitted from formal archives. Their evidentiary power is greatest when they are studied as traditions with histories of transmission rather than converted automatically into proof of an ancient event.

This approach does not diminish tradition. It gives memory a historical life of its own: who remembers, what is emphasized, how a narrative changes, when a site acquires new significance, and how ritual repetition creates durable belonging.

Diagram 54: from source to historical claim

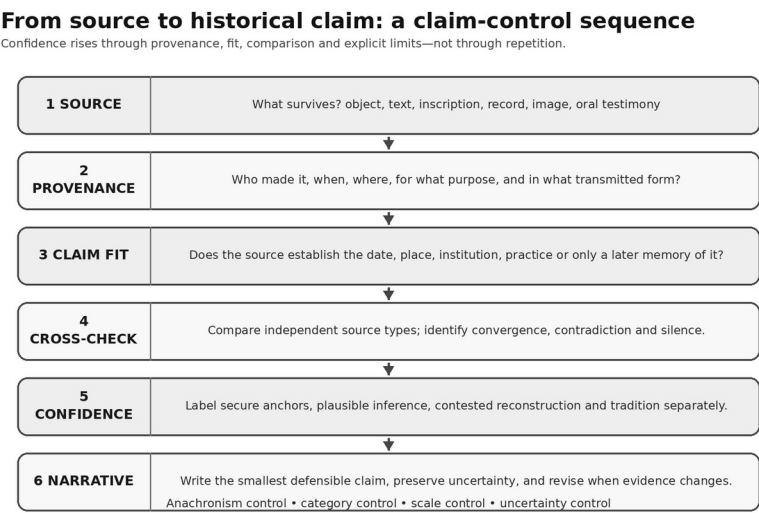


Diagram 54. From source to historical claim: provenance, claim fit, cross-checking, confidence labels, and explicit narrative limits form a claim-control sequence.

Uncertainty is part of the result

Historical writing often becomes less accurate when uncertainty is treated as embarrassment. Terms such as secure, probable, plausible, contested, conventional, reconstructed, and traditional perform analytical work. They allow the reader to distinguish a dated anchor from a scholarly inference and a later memory. The book's chronology uses these differences because precision about confidence is more informative than a single continuous line of apparently exact dates.

Uncertainty also creates a revision pathway. A new inscription, excavation report, manuscript witness, court file, or census release can alter one conclusion without requiring the entire history to collapse. A narrative built from graded claims is more durable because it can absorb better evidence.

Chronology should be anchored, not overfilled

A long chronology can create the illusion that every year is equally known. The more useful chronology identifies turning points whose evidentiary basis is clear: settlement horizons, inscriptions, dynastic transitions, treaties, legal reforms, institutional foundations, flood disasters, linguistic recognition, constitutional changes, and major cultural interventions. Empty intervals are not necessarily gaps in history; they may be gaps in surviving evidence.

The chronological framework should therefore be read as a set of anchors connected by analysis, not as a substitute for analysis.

Prehistory requires restraint in naming

The earliest sections of the book deliberately resist the urge to project later regional names into periods before those names are securely attested. Environmental change, settlement, subsistence, craft production, and exchange can be described

archaeologically without calling every early community Maithil, Vajji, Anga, or any later caste or linguistic name. Such restraint is not agnosticism about human life; it is precision about evidence.

Once named polities and textual geographies become visible, archaeological and textual records can be compared. Even then, the boundary between material sequence and political name should remain explicit.

Videha, Vajji, and Anga belong to different ancient political grammars

Ancient sources do not present a single constitutional model for the eastern Ganga plain. Videha is embedded in Vedic and later traditions of kingship and intellectual prestige; Vajji is remembered through corporate institutions and confederated political practices; Anga appears as an eastern polity linked with Champa and with the competitive interstate world described in Buddhist, Jain, and Brahmanical traditions. These are related histories, not interchangeable labels.

Their later incorporation into larger political formations also differs. The narrative gains explanatory power when those differences are retained rather than treated as stages in a predetermined regional unity.

Gana-sangha should not be translated automatically as modern republic

The language of assembly, council, corporate lineage, and collective decision in early sources is historically significant. Yet the modern word republic carries assumptions about individual citizenship, electoral equality, territorial sovereignty, and universal political membership that ancient gana-sanghas did not necessarily share. Translation must therefore preserve institutional difference.

Using gana-sangha or corporate polity where appropriate allows comparison with other political forms without turning

analogy into identity. It also makes ancient political plurality visible on its own terms.

Sacred prestige and political power are related but not identical

Mithila's long association with Janaka, Sita, philosophical debate, pilgrimage, and learned traditions produced a powerful sacred and intellectual geography. That geography could reinforce courts, lineages, temples, and modern regional identity, but sacred prestige does not map automatically onto continuous sovereignty. Political capitals, revenue centres, pilgrimage centres, and literary centres can occupy different places and different scales.

A connected history therefore studies the interaction of sacred and political geography while allowing each to change independently.

Medieval Mithila is not one unbroken dynasty

The Karnata, Oiniwar, Sultanate, and later regional histories require attention to changing forms of authority, tribute, military pressure, courtly patronage, local landed power, and wider north Indian politics. Dynastic succession is only one axis. Political history must also ask how institutions survived conquest, how scholarly communities moved, how manuscripts circulated, and how local elites negotiated larger states.

This perspective replaces the image of a sealed regional kingdom with a history of courts embedded in transregional systems.

The two Vidyapatis must remain distinct

One of the book's governing corrections is the separation of two Vidyapatis who should not be conflated. Mahakavi Vidyapati belongs to the earlier Maithili Padavali horizon before Jyotirishvara, while the later Vidyapati Thakkura is associated with the Oiniwar court and with Sanskrit and Avahatta works such as Kirtilata, Kirtipataka, Purusapariksa, Goraksavijaya, and Likhanavali. Treating them as one person distorts literary

chronology, patronage history, and the development of Maithili literature.

The importance of the distinction extends beyond biography. It demonstrates why a famous name cannot be allowed to override chronology, genre, manuscript evidence, and historical context. Literary history requires the same claim control as political history.

Caste classifications must be dated rather than naturalized

Later caste and sub-caste classifications cannot be projected backward merely because they became powerful in modern social organization. The book therefore does not treat Srotriya as a fixed medieval Maithil Brahmin sub-caste. The Panji and classification evidence used here places its distinct consolidation in the modern period, around 1800, rather than as a timeless medieval category.

This principle applies more broadly. Genealogies, ritual ranks, colonial schedules, reform movements, association politics, and modern reservation categories can all harden social labels that had earlier meanings or looser boundaries. Caste history must explain classification rather than assume it.

Persianate and Sanskritic worlds were not sealed civilizations

The Sultanate and Mughal periods are best understood through interaction among Persianate administration, Sanskrit learning, vernacular literary production, local landed authority, trade, and religious institutions. Languages and scribal practices could coexist within the same political economy. Conflict and patronage were both possible; neither a simple story of rupture nor one of unbroken continuity is adequate.

Attention to translation, revenue terminology, manuscript transmission, and courtly movement reveals a region connected to Jaunpur, Bengal, Delhi, and other centres while maintaining local intellectual traditions.

Land is where sovereignty becomes everyday practice

Revenue demand, tenancy, survey, inheritance, mortgage, litigation, estate management, and agrarian labour convert abstract sovereignty into daily relations. Mughal fiscal systems, Company diwani, Permanent Settlement, Darbhanga estate administration, zamindari abolition, and Nepalese land regimes changed who could claim, record, transfer, and tax land. Those changes were never only legal; they reshaped credit, caste power, household strategies, and migration.

There is no single linear movement from 'feudal' land to modern private property. Rights remained layered and were repeatedly translated into new documentary forms.

Darbhangra Raj demonstrates the difference between estate and state

Darbhangra Raj was a major landed estate with immense economic, cultural, and political influence, but it was not a princely state under British paramountcy. That distinction matters because estate power operated through property, revenue collection, patronage, litigation, and social authority inside a colonial province. Calling it a kingdom in the constitutional sense obscures the legal mechanisms that made its power possible.

The estate also shows why institutional categories should be kept precise even when popular memory uses royal language. Titles, ceremony, and prestige can coexist with a different formal constitutional status.

Markets connect regions without erasing hierarchy

Bazaars, fairs, grain trade, cattle movement, credit, railways, roads, border posts, and urban commerce linked Mithila and Anga to wider economies. Markets were not neutral spaces of exchange. Access depended on transport, caste and community networks, capital, information, gender norms, policing, and state taxation. Colonial commercialization could widen

opportunity while also deepening debt or exposing producers to distant price shocks.

The history of markets therefore belongs alongside the history of land and labour. It reveals how regional economies were integrated unevenly rather than simply modernized.

Migration is a structure, not an epilogue

Seasonal labour, education, military service, clerical employment, marriage, trade, professional migration, and overseas mobility repeatedly carried people beyond the region. Remittances and return migration altered households, consumption, landholding, language use, and political expectation. Migration also built diasporic readerships and cultural associations that later became important to print and digital Maithili worlds.

A regional history that studies only those who remained within a boundary will therefore miss one of the principal mechanisms through which the region was reproduced.

Rivers are historical institutions as well as natural systems

The Kosi, Gandak, Bagmati, Kamla, Ganga, and other rivers shape settlement, agriculture, transport, pilgrimage, erosion, sediment, and disaster. Their channels do not respect administrative boundaries. Governments respond with embankments, barrages, drainage works, bridges, forecasts, relief systems, and treaties, thereby turning hydrology into institutional history.

River history makes visible a central theme of the book: nature and state are not separate spheres. Infrastructure alters the distribution of water, risk, access, and responsibility.

The Kosi shows why protection and risk must be studied together

The Kosi chapters distinguish routine inundation, embankment breach, and river avulsion because each has different causes and consequences. Embankments can protect

particular areas from frequent flooding while increasing drainage congestion, concentrating consequences when structures fail, or transferring risk across space. A high discharge is not by itself a complete explanation of disaster; maintenance, sediment, channel behaviour, settlement, warning, and institutional response matter as well.

The 2008 avulsion and later flood episodes demonstrate why the history of engineering must include the people living both outside and between protective structures.

Infrastructure redistributes responsibility

Barrages, railways, roads, embankments, check posts, irrigation works, and digital forecasting systems are often narrated as technical objects. Historically they are also agreements about jurisdiction, maintenance, finance, expertise, and acceptable risk. India–Nepal river mechanisms make this especially clear because physical structures and catchments cross sovereignty.

When infrastructure fails or produces uneven benefits, disputes over responsibility reveal the political assumptions built into design. Studying those disputes is part of infrastructure history, not an external commentary on it.

Diagram 55: connected histories across scales

Connected histories without false unity

A regional history changes scale while keeping categories historically specific.

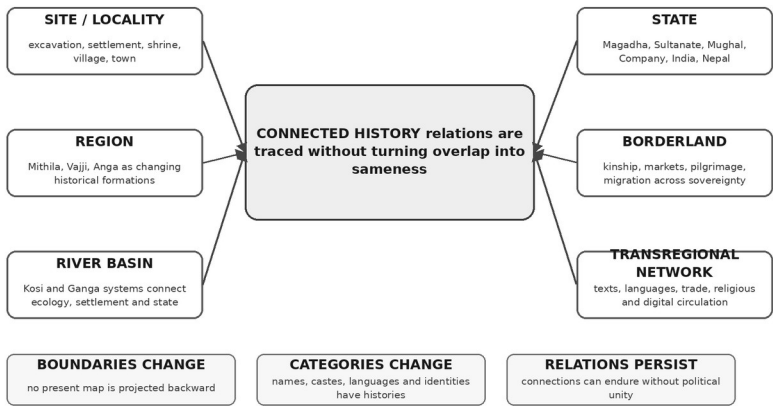


Diagram 55. Connected histories without false unity: scale changes from site and region to river basin, state, borderland, and transregional network. Boundaries and categories change while relations can persist.

Language is an institution, not a biological boundary

Maithili's literary depth and contemporary recognition are major historical facts, but language history cannot be reduced to a map of immutable populations. Languages are reproduced through households, manuscripts, schools, printing, examinations, broadcasting, theatre, migration, dictionaries, digital keyboards, social media, and state recognition. These institutions change the incentives and possibilities of language use.

The same principle permits a historically serious account of modern Angika identity without erasing Grierson's earlier classification of Chhika-Chhiki or Bhagalpuri within the Maithili field. Classification and self-identification belong to different evidentiary moments and can both be documented.

Recognition is plural

The chapters on Maithili, Angika, and Nepalese languages show that recognition has several distinct meanings: linguistic

classification, census coding, literary institutions, school use, university teaching, academies, state official-language provisions, constitutional scheduling, publication infrastructure, and digital encoding. Achievement in one field does not automatically produce recognition in another.

This plurality prevents misleading comparisons. Maithili's inclusion in India's Eighth Schedule, its literary institutions, its census position, its constitutional presence in Nepal, and Tirhuta's Unicode encoding are separate institutional facts. Angika claims and institutions must likewise be assessed field by field.

Script history belongs to institutional history

Mithilakshar or Tirhuta is not merely an ornamental emblem. Manuscript practice, scribal training, printing constraints, font development, keyboard support, Unicode encoding, and digital publication determine whether a script can circulate in modern institutions. The shift toward Devanagari in many Maithili contexts did not erase the historical script, but it changed its everyday functional domain.

Digital encoding creates new possibilities while not guaranteeing widespread literacy or publishing. Technical recognition becomes historically effective only when communities, schools, publishers, archives, and software ecosystems use it.

Literary canon is made through institutions

A canon is not simply the list of the best texts waiting to be discovered. Manuscript survival, editing, school curricula, university syllabi, awards, translation, anthologies, criticism, publishing economics, and digital access all influence which authors become representative. Parallel literary history is valuable because it can recover works and sequences obscured by later canonical simplification.

The two-Vidyapati correction is one example of this broader task. Another is the need to distinguish literary prestige from

documentary certainty: a celebrated attribution must still be tested against chronology, language, genre, and manuscript transmission.

Mithila painting reveals how culture becomes an economy

Mithila painting moved through several material and institutional worlds: ritual and domestic surfaces, paper, state and private collecting, exhibitions, museums, awards, tourism, fair trade, commercial reproduction, and digital sale. The transition did not simply turn an ancient practice into a commodity. It changed scale, authorship, audience, subject matter, and the distribution of income and recognition.

The documented twentieth-century record therefore matters. It allows the history to respect ritual depth while avoiding unsupported claims that every present market style existed unchanged in antiquity.

Gender belongs at the centre of regional history

Women are not a supplementary social category added after political and economic history. Gender shapes inheritance, marriage migration, agricultural work, household labour, education, artistic production, citizenship documentation, disaster vulnerability, political representation, and access to markets. The history of Mithila painting makes this particularly visible because women's creative labour became both a source of international recognition and a field of unequal mediation.

A gendered reading also changes the interpretation of land, migration, and citizenship. Formal rights matter, but so do the documents, household bargaining, mobility, and institutional access required to exercise them.

Caste and class intersect without becoming the same thing

Caste can structure occupation, status, marriage, access to land, ritual hierarchy, and discrimination; class shapes ownership, income, employment, education, and market power. They often reinforce one another but cannot be treated as

synonyms. Regional history needs both because the same caste can contain substantial economic differentiation, while similar economic positions can be experienced differently across caste locations.

Modern political categories add further layers. Reservation, census classification, association politics, and identity movements may reorganize how caste is publicly named. The history must track those changes rather than naturalize the latest vocabulary.

Archive silence is itself structured

People who leave few written records are not people without history. Landless labourers, women, itinerant workers, lower-status artisans, disaster-displaced households, and speakers of less institutionalized languages often appear in archives through the records of officials, landlords, courts, missionaries, collectors, or reformers. Their presence is filtered by the institution that documented them.

Recovering these histories requires reading against the archive while remaining cautious about inference. Court testimony, petitions, wage records, material culture, oral history, songs, visual art, and local newspapers can widen the evidentiary field, but gaps should remain acknowledged rather than filled with invented detail.

The border is both real and crossed

The India–Nepal frontier is legally decisive for sovereignty, citizenship, policing, taxation, elections, property regulation, and official statistics. It is also routinely crossed through kinship, pilgrimage, education, trade, labour, health care, and cultural exchange. Treating it only as a hard line misses borderland society; treating it only as a cultural fiction misses the institutions that make nationality consequential.

A connected history can hold both truths. It can study transborder Mithila and Madhesh networks while respecting the distinct constitutional histories of India and Nepal.

Madhesh, Tarai, and Mithila must remain overlapping, not identical

The modern politics of Madhesh cannot be read backward as a timeless territorial identity. Tarai is a lowland geographical term with changing administrative meanings; Madhesh has geographical, social, and political uses; Mithila is a historical-cultural region with major centres in both India and Nepal. Their overlap is substantial, but the terms answer different historical questions.

Madhesh Province makes the distinction concrete: it is a federal unit created by Nepal's contemporary constitutional order, not a legal restoration of every historical conception of Mithila or Madhesh.

Citizenship converts belonging into documents and rights

Modern citizenship law gives political membership formal documentary routes. In Nepal, the history from the first national citizenship law through later acts, constitutional provisions, and recent amendments shows how descent, naturalization, parental status, gender, and documentation shape access. In border regions, these rules are especially consequential because ordinary kinship and mobility can cross an international boundary.

Citizenship should therefore be distinguished from cultural belonging. A person can participate deeply in a cross-border cultural region while citizenship, voting rights, and constitutional office remain state-specific.

Federalism turns recognition into institutional design

Nepal's federal restructuring demonstrates that recognition is not completed by naming a province. Representation depends on constituency design, electoral systems, provincial competencies, local government, language rules, commissions, budgets, staffing, and the implementation of rights. Madhesh

politics has consequently moved from protest over exclusion toward continuing disputes over how institutions operate.

The broader lesson is that constitutional recognition is a beginning of administrative history, not its endpoint.

Plural citizenship requires more than majority rule

A province associated with a historically marginalized regional identity can still contain minorities and internal hierarchies. Madhesh Province includes Maithili, Bhojpur, Bajjika, Tharu, Urdu, Nepali, Magahi, and other linguistic communities, as well as caste, religious, class, gender, and origin differences. Majority recognition cannot substitute for mechanisms that protect access across these differences.

Plural citizenship is therefore institutional: translation, fair representation, documentation access, public services, anti-discrimination, local government, and accountable commissions matter alongside symbolic status.

Modern identity claims are historical evidence, not shortcuts to antiquity

Language movements, regional flags, statues, commemorative maps, festivals, museums, social-media campaigns, and political speeches are valuable sources for the history of modern identity. They show what communities choose to remember and how they mobilize historical symbols. They do not, by themselves, establish that the same identity had identical boundaries or institutions in the ancient or medieval period.

This distinction protects cultural history from two distortions: dismissing modern identity as invented and treating modern identity as proof of timeless continuity. Identities can be historically real precisely because they are made, transmitted, contested, and transformed.

Colonial rule produced ruptures and reclassifications

Company and Crown rule changed revenue institutions, law, policing, transport, education, print, statistics, and the scale of

bureaucratic knowledge. Permanent Settlement reshaped landed authority; surveys and censuses generated new classifications; railways and roads reorganized markets and mobility. Yet colonial institutions worked through existing social relations and local intermediaries rather than replacing the region with an entirely new society.

The result was neither pure continuity nor total rupture. Colonial history is most intelligible as the transformation of older relations through new legal, fiscal, technological, and classificatory systems.

Independence did not end institutional history

The end of colonial rule in India and the political transformations of Nepal opened new constitutional orders, but inherited districts, land records, infrastructures, bureaucratic practices, and social inequalities did not disappear. Zamindari abolition, linguistic recognition, electoral democracy, academies, education policy, flood management, and federalism created new institutions whose effects unfolded over decades.

Contemporary history therefore belongs inside the same analytical frame as earlier periods. It asks how new legal forms interact with inherited structures and new social movements.

Methodological nationalism is insufficient for a borderland region

Modern archives and statistics are organized largely by states, which can make national boundaries appear to be the natural boundaries of every historical question. For Mithila and the Nepal plains, that assumption fails. Language, pilgrimage, marriage, rivers, trade, and migration cross the India–Nepal frontier, while citizenship, law, elections, and administration remain nationally specific.

The solution is not to abandon national history but to nest it within other scales. State archives, provincial records, local sources, river basins, linguistic fields, and transborder networks

illuminate different dimensions of the same historical landscape.

Scale should change with the question

A village-level land dispute, a regional language movement, an interstate river treaty, and a transregional literary tradition cannot be explained at the same scale. Historical analysis becomes distorted when the unit of explanation is fixed in advance. The appropriate scale may be household, settlement, district, estate, region, river basin, borderland, state, or literary network.

Changing scale is not inconsistency. It is a method for matching explanation to evidence. The important discipline is to state when the scale changes and not to convert findings at one scale into automatic truths at another.

What connects the histories is movement

Across the *longue duree*, the strongest common theme is movement: rivers shift; capitals move; manuscripts travel; teachers and students circulate; armies and officials enter; pilgrims cross; markets expand; labour migrates; women move through marriage; languages change domains; paintings move from walls to paper and screens; political categories move from protest into law. Region is repeatedly remade through these movements.

Movement does not eliminate place. It explains why particular places become nodes of unusual historical density: Vaishali, Janakpur, Simraongarh, Darbhanga, Bhagalpur, Champanagar, Birgunj, and many smaller sites matter because wider networks pass through them.

What connects the histories is also classification

States, scholars, religious communities, landlords, census officials, linguistic surveyors, courts, academies, political movements, and digital standards bodies all classify. They name territories, languages, castes, citizenship categories, heritage

forms, protected areas, and administrative units. These classifications can allocate resources and rights, shape identity, and influence what later historians encounter as evidence.

Classification should therefore be studied as an event. The question is not only 'What category is correct?' but also 'Who used this category, when, for what purpose, with what institutional effect?'

False unity usually appears through anachronism

The most persistent historical errors in regional writing arise when a later category is projected backward: a modern political boundary becomes an ancient kingdom; a contemporary caste label becomes a medieval sub-caste; a current linguistic identity becomes a prehistoric ethnicity; a constitutional province becomes a timeless cultural territory; or two authors with the same name become one figure despite incompatible chronologies.

Anachronism control is therefore not a minor editorial preference. It is one of the central methods by which connected history preserves both continuity and change.

False fragmentation is the opposite danger

Avoiding false unity should not produce an equally misleading history of isolated boxes. India and Nepal cannot be studied as though the border ended kinship and commerce; Anga cannot be detached from Ganga networks; Mithila's literary history cannot be understood without Sanskrit, Avahatta, Persianate, Hindi, Bengali, Nepali, and wider print worlds; flood history cannot stop at district boundaries.

The alternative to false unity is connected differentiation: relations are traced precisely because the connected elements are not assumed to be the same.

Historical explanation must separate cause from coincidence

Regional histories often contain events close together in time: political change and literary production, floods and migration,

recognition and institutional growth, transport and market expansion. Temporal proximity alone does not establish causation. A causal argument requires a mechanism supported by evidence: a law changes eligibility, a road changes travel cost, an embankment changes water distribution, a school policy changes language access, or a market intervention changes artistic production.

Where mechanisms remain uncertain, the narrative should describe association without upgrading it to cause.

Numbers require definitions

Population counts, flood discharge, acreage, revenue, election shares, numbers of speakers, publication totals, and institutional budgets all appear objective because they are numerical. Their meaning depends on definitions, measurement procedures, territorial units, and dates. A 'protected area' is not the same as an area without flood risk; a census mother-tongue count is not a count of all languages a person can use; an electoral inclusion category is not a census of regional identity.

Quantitative evidence becomes stronger when the denominator and classification rule are stated.

Visual evidence requires the same discipline as text

Maps, paintings, photographs, diagrams, architectural images, and scanned documents can make an argument appear self-evident. They too have provenance, scale, framing, and selection. A colonial map may encode administrative priorities; a museum photograph may detach an artwork from ritual context; a diagram may simplify a process to make relationships visible.

The figures in this book are therefore explanatory aids, not substitutes for evidence. Their captions identify what is schematic, selected, or reconstructed so that visual clarity does not become false precision.

Digital history expands access and creates new filters

Digitized archives, Unicode text, searchable newspapers, online museum catalogues, census portals, GIS, satellite imagery, and digital publication have transformed the study of Mithila, Anga, and Nepal. Sources once confined to distant repositories can now be compared rapidly, and endangered scripts or small literary traditions can circulate globally.

Digital availability is nevertheless selective. What is scanned, indexed, encoded, OCR-readable, or linked through search engines reflects institutional priorities and technical constraints. Digital abundance can reproduce archival silence unless historians actively seek what remains offline or poorly indexed.

Public history should disclose uncertainty rather than hide it

Regional history has audiences beyond universities: schools, museums, cultural organizations, language activists, descendants, local researchers, diaspora readers, and public institutions. These audiences deserve narratives that are accessible without pretending that every question is settled. Clear labels for reconstruction, tradition, debate, and secure evidence strengthen public history because they make the grounds of disagreement visible.

The same standard helps cultural heritage. A site, language, art form, or memory does not require an exaggerated antiquity to be historically valuable.

The archive of the future is being created now

Websites, digital magazines, social media, online video, electronic government records, GIS dashboards, and born-digital literature are already primary sources for twenty-first-century history. Their fragility differs from paper archives: links decay, platforms close, interfaces change, and files may survive without metadata. Preservation decisions made now will determine what future historians can reconstruct about

language movements, flood response, cultural production, and regional politics.

Digital preservation therefore belongs to historical infrastructure. Stable repositories, metadata, open formats, and documented provenance are as important to future scholarship as the survival of manuscripts and printed books has been to earlier periods.

Environmental change will reorder historical questions

Flood regimes, heat, groundwater stress, sediment, urban growth, land-use change, and infrastructure will continue to alter the material conditions of the region. Historical knowledge cannot predict every future event, but it can show how vulnerability is produced: by settlement patterns, property, maintenance, social inequality, administrative coordination, and past engineering choices as well as by physical hazards.

Environmental history is therefore not an appendix to political history. It is one of the places where long-term landscape processes and short-term governmental decisions meet most visibly.

A research agenda should deepen evidence, not merely enlarge narrative

The next advances in the field will come from denser evidence: stratified archaeological publication, epigraphic rechecking, manuscript stemmata, estate and court archives, village-level land records, oral histories with documented provenance, historical maps, women's records, labour histories, multilingual newspapers, Nepalese provincial archives, and environmental data tied to precise locations. Expansion is valuable only when it increases verifiability or introduces voices and scales previously absent.

Equally important is negative evidence: identifying where archives are missing, classifications change, or claims cannot yet be decided. A mature regional history includes an account of what remains unknown.

Comparative history can test regional exceptionalism

Mithila, Vajji, Anga, and Madhesh have distinctive histories, but many of their processes can be compared with other South Asian regions: corporate polities, Sanskrit cosmopolitanism and vernacularization, zamindari estates, language movements, river engineering, borderland citizenship, folk-art commercialization, and federal inclusion. Comparison helps identify what is genuinely specific and what belongs to wider institutional patterns.

The purpose of comparison is not to dissolve the region into a national average. It is to sharpen explanation by showing which mechanisms recur elsewhere and which combinations are locally distinctive.

The ethics of regional history require resisting prestige inflation

Communities understandably seek recognition, antiquity, famous ancestors, and cultural continuity. Historians should take these aspirations seriously as social facts without adjusting chronology or evidence to satisfy them. Inflated claims may produce short-term prestige, but they weaken the credibility of the very traditions they are meant to honour.

A stronger form of respect is evidentiary: document what is secure, state what is debated, preserve local memory, and allow cultural significance to stand without forcing every practice into the oldest possible date.

The ethics of regional history also require resisting erasure

Scepticism can become another distortion if it is applied only to marginalized traditions while official archives are accepted uncritically. State records, colonial ethnographies, elite genealogies, and scholarly classifications also carry interests and exclusions. Source criticism must be symmetrical: every claim, prestigious or subaltern, official or oral, is evaluated according to provenance and fit.

This balance makes it possible to correct exaggeration without reproducing archival hierarchy.

Diagram 55 and Diagram 54 together define the method

The two concluding diagrams summarize complementary disciplines. The first changes scale: site, region, river basin, state, borderland, and transregional network are connected without being collapsed. The second controls claims: source, provenance, fit, cross-check, confidence, and narrative form a sequence that limits what can responsibly be said.

Together they explain the book's title at its broadest level. The history is parallel because several trajectories remain distinct; it is connected because those trajectories repeatedly intersect.

What the book ultimately argues

The deepest continuity in the history of Mithila, Vajji, and Anga is not a single state or an unchanged population. It is the recurring production of regional relationships through landscape, institutions, language, texts, land, markets, sacred geography, art, migration, and political negotiation. Some relationships persist for centuries; others appear briefly and disappear. Their combination changes with every period.

This conclusion permits both attachment and criticism. It recognizes the historical reality of regional cultures while refusing to make culture a substitute for evidence. It recognizes borders while tracing what crosses them. It recognizes modern identities while dating their institutional forms. It recognizes memory while distinguishing it from contemporary documentation.

Connected histories without false unity

A history of this region is most accurate when it accepts plurality as structure rather than as a problem to be solved. Mithila can be literary, ritual, linguistic, political, and diasporic at different scales. Vajji can illuminate ancient corporate politics without becoming a modern constitutional ancestor. Anga can

remain a distinct eastern historical formation while participating in wider Ganga networks. Madhesh can be a powerful modern political space without being projected unchanged into antiquity.

The result is not fragmentation. It is a more demanding unity of inquiry: one that connects evidence across periods while refusing to erase the differences that make historical change visible.

Chapter-specific bibliography

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised ed. Verso, 1991.
- Bloch, Marc. *The Historian's Craft*. Translated by Peter Putnam. Manchester University Press, 1954.
- Carr, E. H. *What Is History?* Macmillan, 1961.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*. Translated by John and Anne C. Tedeschi. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.
- Guha, Ranajit. *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*. Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Scott, James C. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press, 1998.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Beacon Press, 1995.
- Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Pearson Education India, 2008.
- Thapar, Romila. *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*. Allen Lane, 2002.
- Thakur, Upendra. *History of Mithila: From the Earliest Times to 1556 A.D.* 2nd ed. Mithila Institute, 1988.
- Thakur, Gajendra. *A Parallel History of Maithili Literature*. Videha - First Maithili Fortnightly eJournal, ISSN 2229-547X.
- Grierson, George A. *Linguistic Survey of India*, vol. V, part II: Indo-Aryan Family, Eastern Group. Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India, 1903.
- Yadav, Ramawatar. *A Reference Grammar of Maithili*. Mouton de Gruyter, 1996.

- Yang, Anand A. *Bazaar India: Markets, Society, and the Colonial State in Bihar*. University of California Press, 1998.
- Hill, Christopher V. *River of Sorrow: Environment and Social Control in Riparian North India, 1770-1994*. Association for Asian Studies, 1997.
- Regmi, Mahesh C. *Landownership in Nepal*. University of California Press, 1976.
- Gaige, Frederick H. *Regionalism and National Unity in Nepal*. University of California Press, 1975.
- Whelpton, John. *A History of Nepal*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Hachhethu, Krishna. *Nation-Building and Federalism in Nepal: Contentions on Framework*. Oxford University Press, 2023.
- Richman, Paula, and David L. Szanton, eds. *India's Mithila Painting*. University of Washington Press, 2025.
- Heinz, Carolyn Brown. 'Documenting the Image in Mithila Art.' *Visual Anthropology Review* 22, no. 2 (2006): 5-33.
- Sinha, Rajiv. 'The Great Avulsion of Kosi on 18 August 2008.' *Current Science* 97, no. 3 (2009): 429-433.
- Government of India and Government of Nepal. *Agreement on the Kosi Project*, 25 April 1954, and *Revised Agreement*, 19 December 1966.
- Constitution of Nepal. 2015, as amended. Nepal Law Commission.
- Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India. *Census of India 2011, language tables*.
- National Statistics Office, Nepal. *National Population and Housing Census 2021 and Language in Nepal thematic report*. Government of Nepal.

Consolidated chronology

Date/period	Event or process	
Second millennium BCE	Early farming and mixed subsistence horizons at Chirand and related middle Gangetic sites; individual radiocarbon results require stratigraphic caution. The early Chirand laboratory series reported a coherent cluster in the later second millennium BCE but also explicit stratigraphic mix-up below Layer 14; the published BC conversions are legacy, uncalibrated values.	
c. 1800-1000 BCE (comparative central Ganga/eastern Vindhya contexts)	Published excavations in present Uttar Pradesh report iron artefacts together with furnaces, tuyeres, and slag in contexts with radiocarbon determinations in this broad range. The evidence changes the comparative chronology of northern Indian iron working but does not date iron use in Mithila, the Nepal Tarai, or Anga automatically.	
464 CE (standard conversion of saṃvat 386)	Mānadeva's Changu Narayan pillar provides the earliest securely dated Licchavi inscription in the Kathmandu Valley; it records genealogy, royal ideology, Queen Rājyavatī and campaigns.	
Sixth–seventh centuries CE	Licchavi inscriptions reveal changing palace centres, Aṃśuvarman and periods of shared or layered rule, local officials, land grants, taxes, pañcālī and religious corporations.	
From 576 CE epoch; records continue into the eighth/early ninth century	A local era replaces the earlier Śaka dating system in Licchavi-period records; later inscriptions show its continued use beyond the core reign sequence.	
Later Vedic period	Satapatha Brahmana representation of Videgha Mathava's eastward movement to the Sadanira.	
Early-historic Champa, site-specific archaeological sequence	Excavations near Champanagar/Bhagalpur document pre-NBPW occupation, NBPW-bearing phases, multi-phase mud ramparts, wells, drains, coins, terracottas, metal objects, and later Kushan-Gupta reuse.	
Later Vedic / early Upanishadic horizon	Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad representations of Janaka of Videha, Yajñavalkya, Gargi, Maitreyi, and Kuru-Panchala learned visitors. The text survives in Madhyandina and Kanva recensions and cannot be reduced to a single court transcript.	
Mid-first millennium BCE	Anga appears among major eastern polities; Buddhist texts associate Champa with Magadhan authority, while Buddhist	

Date/period	Event or process	Evidence
(textual-political horizon)	and Jain traditions place Vaishali, Champa, Rajagriha, and Mithila within dense renunciant itineraries.	and ins stronger chronol
Epic textual formation (broad, disputed chronology)	Ramayana textual formation and transmission, including the Mithila-Janaka-Sita complex in the Balakanda. Philological scholarship reconstructs layers over a long period; the critical edition is not an event-date or an authorial autograph.	Philolog reconstruct individual absolute
Mid-first millennium BCE (Buddhist textual-political horizon)	Buddhist narrative represents the Vajjis/Licchavis at Vesali as a powerful corporate polity whose resilience depended on frequent assemblies, concord, established rules, elders, limits on abduction of women, shrines, and protection of renunciants; conflict with Magadha frames the account.	Normati textual corpora institutio historica but full reconstruct disputed
About a century after the Buddha in several Vinaya traditions (absolute date disputed)	Disciplinary dispute and council at Vaishali conventionally known as the Second Buddhist Council.	Cross-sc tradition plausibl absolute relation remain
About a century after the Buddha in several Vinaya traditions (absolute date disputed)	Disciplinary dispute at Vaishali conventionally called the Second Buddhist Council; school accounts vary over the ten points, participants, chronology, and relation to later schism.	Cross-sc tradition plausibl consequ
First millennium BCE	Formation of states and gana-sanghas in the eastern Gangetic plain; Anga, Magadha, Videha, and Vajji appear in textual traditions.	Broad h
Third century BCE (Mauryan / Ashokan horizon)	Ashokan monumental presence in north Bihar includes inscribed Pillar Edicts at Lauriya-Arera, Lauriya-Nandangarh, and one Rampurva pillar; the Kolhua/Vaishali pillar is Ashokan in attribution but uninscribed.	Direct evidence Champa monume and attributi uninscri
Fourth century CE (Gupta imperial horizon)	Gupta dynastic media emphasize Kumaradevi and Licchavi affiliation; Samudragupta's Allahabad prasasti names Nepal among frontier polities within a graded imperial political field.	Numism inscripti court pa genre-av interpre
Early fifth and seventh centuries	Faxian and Xuanzang record Buddhist itineraries and sacred landscapes; Xuanzang describes Vaishali as largely ruined,	Chinese literatur

Date/period	Event or process	
CE	with few occupied monasteries, many non-Buddhist temples, and numerous Nirgrantha followers.	p a g e t
c. sixth-fifth centuries BCE	Lives and communities associated with the Buddha and Mahavira in conventional scholarly chronologies.	C
Mauryan period, c. 322-185 BCE	Regional incorporation into the Mauryan imperial sphere.	H
c. 399-414 CE	Faxian's travels in South Asia.	H
c. fourth-early fifth centuries CE (Gupta administrative horizon)	Basarh/Vaiśālī sealings attest Tīrabhukti offices and a crown-prince establishment associated with Govindagupta and Dhruvasvāminī.	D e p r
First half of the eighth century CE (palaeographic estimate)	Kaṭṛā charter of Jīvagupta records a grant of localities in Chāmuṇḍā-viśaya of Tīrabhukti to a goddess temple; the ruler's dynastic identity remains debated.	D e a f g
Ninth-tenth centuries CE	Bhagalpur plate of Nārāyaṇapāla records Makuṭikā in Kakṣa-viśaya of Tīrabhukti and a Śaiva endowment issued from Mudgagiri.	D e
1019-1020 CE if Vikrama Saṃvat 1076 is correctly converted	Rāmāyaṇa manuscript colophon copied by a Nepalese scribe in Tīrabhukti names a ruler Gāṅgeyadeva; his dynastic identification has been disputed.	D c p i
Eleventh century CE, Vīgrahapāla III year 17	Bangaon plate locates Vāsukāvartta in Hoḍṛeya-viśaya of Tīrabhukti and records officials, residents, cultivators, fiscal rights, and a learned Brahman donee.	D e D a
464 CE	Manadeva's dated Changu Narayan inscription in Nepal.	I
seventh century CE	Xuanzang's pilgrimage through the subcontinent.	H
c. 1097-c. 1324/25	Conventional span of Karnata rule in Mithila; early and terminal dates vary by reconstruction.	P c
fourteenth-fifteenth centuries	Oiniwar courts and Vidyapati's literary world.	H d

Date/period	Event or process	Evidence
sixteenth century	Rise of the Khandavala lineage later associated with Darbhanga Raj.	Historic genealogy
c. 1580	Akbar's provincial reorganization establishes Bihar as a Mughal subah; Tirhut and Munger are treated within the new provincial hierarchy.	Administrative anchor; was a more than a cadastral
late sixteenth century (Ā'in-i Akbarī compilation)	Ā'in-i Akbarī lists Sarkār Tirhut with 74 mahals and Sarkār Munger with 31 mahals, supplying the principal Mughal fiscal-geographical snapshot used in Chapter 16.	Contemporary administrative assessment; identical collection
1665-1666	Aurangzeb-era farman and letter provide a documentary anchor for Mahinath Thakur's enlarged hereditary zamindari/settlement rights and service on the Morang frontier.	Dated documentary extent; require interpretation
1733	Bihar is placed under the Bengal subadar, altering the provincial chain before Company diwani.	Mughal transition
1765	East India Company receives the dīwānī of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, creating a new sovereign revenue claim while collection still depends on inherited institutions.	Dated administrative anchor; Clive's contemporary grant collection
1770	Great Bengal famine; north Bihar belongs to the affected revenue province, but district-level mortality and causation must be reconstructed locally rather than inferred from province-wide estimates.	Major historical regional documentary
1772	Hastings' revenue reorganization increases direct Company supervision and temporary settlement experiments.	Administrative anchor; varied by
c. 1775-1807	Reign of Raja Madhav (Madho) Singh of Darbhanga spans the transition from Company dīwānī to Permanent Settlement-era zamindari.	Regional chronology; accession purports Madhav's impossibility
25 November 1789	Decennial settlement rules issued for Bihar, later recalled in Regulation I of 1793.	Primary chronological
22 March 1793	Permanent Settlement proclamation of 22 March fixes the government jama in perpetuity for recognized zamindars, talukdars and other proprietors entering settlement;	Primary administrative anchor; Bengal

Date/period	Event or process	
	subordinate rents and social ranks remain unfixed.	1
7 April 1800	Later Patna High Court litigation records copies of Madho Singh's application for Permanent Settlement of pargana Hati and other properties, with an amaldastak of the same date.	R p a s d c
1857	University of Calcutta established, providing the principal examining/affiliating university framework for much of eastern India before provincial reorganization.	I n a e
c. 1800	This volume's Panji-based reconstruction places the emergence of Śrottriya as a distinct hereditary Maithil Brahmin sub-caste around this horizon; older Panji genealogy and older Sanskrit śrottriya usage are kept separate.	A h r d d t c t
1816	Treaty of Sugauli shapes the India-Nepal boundary framework. The treaty text is dated 2 December 1815, with ratification exchanged on 4 March 1816.	T
1860-1879	Darbhangā Raj administered by the Court of Wards; estate management, debt, accounts and elite education are reorganized.	V c e 1
1873-1874	Severe Bihar famine; relief policy and transport constraints accelerate emergency railway construction in north Bihar.	F r r
24 December 1873	Bengal Embankment Act, 1873 enacted, formalizing colonial powers and procedures for embankment administration.	P a
1 November 1875	Dalsinghsarai-Samastipur-Darbhangā famine line opens to public traffic under the Tirhut Railway after emergency construction in the famine context.	C r t o p o
1885	Bengal Tenancy Act codifies major landlord, tenure-holder and raiyat relationships after a century of post-Settlement conflict.	P a
1895	Bihar flood archive records a file on erection of bunds along the Kosi River.	A a e e

Date/period	Event or process	Evidence
		works.
1896-1903	Survey and settlement operations in Darbhanga district create cadastral maps and records-of-rights later reported by J. H. Kerr.	Colonial official intervention; descriptive
1901-1908	Survey and settlement operations under Chapter X of the Bengal Tenancy Act in Purnea classify tenures, rents and rights.	Colonial record; J
1905	Maithil Hit Sadhan begins publication from Jaipur within migrant Maithil intellectual networks.	Print-history; early complicated monolin
1905-1906	Mithila Moda enters the Maithili print field; sources vary by one year in first-issue dating.	Source-of publication; rather precision
1908-1909	Mithila Mihir begins publication from Darbhanga; modern scholarship gives 1908 or 1909 depending on source.	Publication; Kamat; other 1; use 1908
1910	Maithil Mahasabha established; it becomes a major early regional organization but with membership restricted or heavily confined to Maithil Brahmins and Karna Kayasthas.	Organization; not repr; Maithili
1902-1910	Survey and settlement operations in Bhagalpur district extend cadastral and tenancy classification across the eastern Ganga field.	Colonial record; 1912.
1907	Colonial correspondence records river-course change affecting a Nepal-British territorial boundary in the Patna Division.	Bihar catalogue; adminis
1 October 1917	Patna University Act comes into force, establishing a provincial university framework.	Primary anchor.
1917	Calcutta University recognizes Maithili within its Indian-vernacular higher-study framework and as an MA examination language.	University anchor; 2024.
1912	Province of Bihar and Orissa created, giving Bihar landed elites a new provincial political arena.	Administration anchor.
1913-1917	Major flood reports and Bihar and Orissa Council questions address damage, relief, prevention and engineering schemes in Tirhut districts.	Provincial and legis
28 August 1920	Bihar Provincial Conference at Bhagalpur passes a resolution supporting Non-Cooperation.	Dated p anchor.
1919-1920	Swami Vidyanand-led peasant protest challenges Darbhanga Raj rents, cesses and estate authority in parts of north Bihar.	Estate, movement analysed

Date/period	Event or process	
		1
1921	Rameshwar Singh submits a memorial seeking recognition of Mithila as a native state under his rule; Darbhanga also becomes an important Non-Cooperation arena.	D s b r
1920	Bihar and Orissa Kamiauti Agreement Act addresses the enforceability of kamiauti debt-bondage agreements.	P a r l
late 1929	Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha emerges as a major agrarian organization; its campaigns later reach districts including Darbhanga.	A a
10 August 1942 onward	Student demonstrations in Darbhanga mark the opening local phase of Quit India mobilization, followed by wider rural disruption and repression.	D e l
1926-1931	Kosi Diara survey and settlement operations in Bhagalpur and Purnea attempt to map rights in actively changing riverine land.	C g R 1
15 January 1934	Major Bihar-Nepal earthquake devastates north Bihar and Nepal; scientific field investigation and large-scale relief follow.	D a D 1
1947	Independence of India.	P
1760-1960 (historical-map series)	Historical maps later re-analysed by Chakraborty et al. show changing Kosi channel positions; the series is evidence for modern historical geomorphology, not a direct chronology for ancient courses.	D s g s
1950	Bihar Land Reforms Act; India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship.	L
1950-1951	End of Rana oligarchy in Nepal.	P
2004	Ninety-second Amendment takes effect following presidential assent, adding Maithili to India's Eighth Schedule.	C
2008	Kosi embankment breach near Kusaha and major displacement.	C r
2015	Promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal.	C
2021	Reference year of Nepal's latest completed national population census used here.	C

Date/period	Event or process	Evidence
11/25 September 1950	Bihar Land Reforms Act receives presidential assent and is brought into force; estate vesting begins.	Primary notification; implementation; continued litigation.
1951–52	India's first general election implements universal adult franchise.	Election; India reconstituted.
2 May 1952	Supreme Court decides <i>State of Bihar v. Kameshwar Singh</i> , sustaining the core Bihar land-reform scheme while invalidating selected provisions.	Supreme Court constitutionality decision.
21 July 1954	Bihar Bhoodan Yagna Act provides a statutory framework for land gifts.	Primary anchor.
1961	Bihar ceiling legislation adds limits on holdings and surplus-land acquisition.	Primary anchor; amendment; implementation; separate legislation.
1951	Interim Government of Nepal Act structures the immediate post-Rana constitutional order.	Primary anchor.
1959	Nepal holds its first parliamentary general election.	Election; constitution.
December 1960	King Mahendra dismisses the elected government and dissolves parliament.	Political rupture.
1962	Constitution of Nepal establishes the partyless Panchayat system.	Primary anchor.
15 November 1964	Nepal's Lands Act enters into force, addressing tenancy and ceilings.	Primary anchor.
1978	Bihar government under Karpoori Thakur implements a differentiated backward-class reservation formula.	Dated political process.
1990	Multiparty constitutional politics restored in Nepal.	Constitutional anchor.
1992–93	Seventy-third Constitutional Amendment gives Panchayati Raj constitutional status in India.	Primary anchor.
15 November 2000	Bihar Reorganisation Act takes effect, creating Jharkhand.	Primary anchor.
2006	Bihar Panchayati Raj Act establishes the contemporary three-tier framework with extensive reservations.	Primary anchor.
2006–2008	Nepal peace process and interim transition culminate in declaration of the republic.	Dated constitutional process.
2015–16	Madhesh agitation severely disrupts major India–Nepal crossings; accounts dispute the relative roles of protest blockade and Indian pressure.	Contemporary and scholarly causation.
April 2018	Birgunj Integrated Check Post inaugurated at the Raxaul–Birgunj corridor.	Official record.

Date/period	Event or process	
Jan / Mar 2020	Biratnagar Integrated Check Post inaugurated in January; COVID-19 land-border passenger restrictions follow in March.	C a r
2 April 2022	Jayanagar–Kurtha broad-gauge passenger rail section inaugurated.	C i
1 June 2023	Updated India–Nepal transit arrangements formalize additional road/rail procedures and routes.	C t
1903	Grierson publishes Linguistic Survey of India, vol. V part II, classifying Chhika-Chhiki/Bhagalpuri material within the Maithili field.	P s c t
1917	Calcutta University recognition of Maithili strengthens academic institutionalization.	U a o
1966	Sahitya Akademi Maithili award series begins.	C i
1976	Bihar Maithili Academy established.	S a v
7 January 2004	Maithili added to the Eighth Schedule through the Constitution (Ninety-second Amendment) Act, 2003.	P a
2011	Census of India records 13,583,464 Maithili mother-tongue returns nationally; 13,063,042 in Bihar.	C c a n
16 June 2014	Unicode 7.0 released with standardized Tirhuta encoding.	T s
2015	Bihar Angika Academy approved/established as a state language-promotion institution.	S a E i
2018	Jharkhand amendment framework includes Magahi, Bhojpuri, Maithili and Angika for possible second-official use in specified areas/purposes.	P a d a
2021	Nepal census separately records Maithili (3,222,389; 11.05%) and Angika (35,952; 0.12%).	C s s
11 March 2025	Bihar Assembly reports Maithili Academy 21 sanctioned/3 working posts and Angika Academy 10 sanctioned/1 working.	C p i
2026-27	Census 2027 houselisting begins in 2026; population enumeration scheduled for 2027.	C p l

Date/period	Event or process	Evidence
		available

18 July 1097 (conventional): Traditional chronological horizon for Nānyadeva. The surviving Nānyadeva-period inscription does not itself securely supply this Gregorian date.

1236: Dharmasvāmin stays in Tirhut near the Karnata capital and encounters Rāmasiṃhadeva; near-contemporary travel-biographical evidence.

c. late 13th–early 14th century: Jyotiṛīśvara and Caṇḍeśvara represent the mature Karnata/transition intellectual horizon; exact work dates vary by text and manuscript tradition.

1324–25: Tughluq conquest horizon and displacement of Harisiṃhadeva; event sequence reconstructed across Persianate, Nepalese and regional sources.

mid-14th century (reconstructed): Emergence of the Oiniwar line under Kāmeśvara; exact foundation date and relationship to Sultanate recognition are not securely fixed.

1371 (conventional reconstruction): Possible date for Gaṇeśvara’s killing from a corrupt Kīrtilatā passage; not equivalent to a securely dated inscription.

early 15th century: Kīrtisiṃha restoration narrative linked in Kīrtilatā to assistance from Ibrāhīm Shāh Sharqī of Jaunpur.

early 15th century: Śivasīṃha horizon attested through literary/manuscript traditions and gold coinage; exact regnal chronology remains debated.

1453: Narasiṃha inscriptional horizon at Kandaha Sun Temple, Saharsa.

c. 1475–76 (inferred): Bhairavasīṃha accession inferred from his dated fifteenth-regnal-year coin.

1489–90: Bhairavasīṃha silver coin: Śaka 1411 and regnal year 15; exceptionally firm numismatic anchor.

1512: Dated manuscript horizon under Lakṣmīnātha in late Oiniwar Mithila.

1513: Bhagirathpur inscriptional horizon; important late-dynastic anchor.

1520s: Bengal expansion ends Oiniwar dominance; exact terminal year and last-ruler identification differ across later reconstructions.

1765: East India Company receives the *dīwānī* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa; a decisive fiscal-sovereignty shift south of the future Nepal border.

1770: Bengal famine crisis affects Bihar and the wider Gangetic economy; later revenue reforms should not be read without this demographic and agrarian shock.

1772: Hastings-era revenue reorganization begins a new phase of Company fiscal administration.

c. 1775–1807: Reign horizon of Madhav/Madho Singh of Darbhanga; consequently an alleged regnal order by him in 1760 is chronologically untenable without a different identification.

22 March 1793: Permanent Settlement regulations fix the Company government's assessed revenue demand on recognized estates in Bengal Presidency, including Bihar.

7 April 1800: Darbhanga settlement-document horizon used in this book for the late-eighteenth/early-nineteenth-century restructuring of estate and Panji-linked elite claims.

c. 1800 (book's Panji-based reconstruction): Śrottriya becomes a distinct hereditary Maithil Brahmin sub-caste classification; not projected backward into medieval Mithila.

2 December 1815: Treaty of Sugauli signed between the East India Company and Nepal.

4 March 1816: Nepalese treaty received and British counterpart delivered at Makwanpur; implementation horizon of Sugauli.

8–11 December 1816: Supplementary Tarai restoration; disputed lands in Tirhut and Saran expressly excepted pending settlement.

1846: Rana oligarchy begins after the political upheaval in Kathmandu; Shah monarchy remains.

1854: Mulukī Ain issued under Jang Bahadur Rana, a major legal-centralization anchor.

1860: Western Tarai tracts later known as Naya Muluk restored to Nepal after its support to the British during the 1857 uprising.

24 December 1873: Bengal Embankment Act provides a statutory framework for colonial embankment administration south of the border.

1 November 1875: Dalsinghsarai–Samastipur–Darbhanga famine-line route opens to public traffic in the Tirhut railway system.

1911: First nationwide population census of Nepal; the Rana-era censuses of 1911–1941 had limited scope and published mainly aggregate counts.

21 December 1923: Britain–Nepal Treaty signed; Article I recognizes and respects the internal and external independence of both states.

1927: Nepal Government Railway links Raxaul, Birgunj and Amlekhganj, strengthening a major border transport corridor.

1930s: Jaynagar–Janakpur/Bijalpura railway horizon; later summaries disagree over the exact opening year, so contemporary railway records remain the preferred check.

15 January 1934: Bihar–Nepal earthquake causes severe damage across the regional borderland and transport network.

1934: During earthquake-damage inspection, William G. Archer encounters painted inner walls exposed by collapsed outer walls; this is a documentary-access event, not the origin or local 'discovery' of the art.

1938–1940: Archer photographs more than 150 painted walls in Mithila, creating a major pre-paper-market visual archive.

1949: William G. Archer publishes 'Maithil Painting' in Marg, an influential English-language classification that concentrated

on Brahmin and Kayastha women and strongly shaped later reception.

1936: Biratnagar Jute Mills incorporated, an important early industrial anchor in the eastern Tarai.

March–April 1947: Biratnagar mill strike and the 10 April Jogbani meeting connect labour protest with anti-Rana satyagraha organization.

15 August 1947: British rule ends in India while Rana oligarchy continues in Nepal, creating two different political transitions across one borderland.

31 July 1950: India–Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship signed and enters into force; Article 7 establishes reciprocal privileges concerning residence, property, trade and movement.

February 1951: Tribhuvan returns to Kathmandu and an interim coalition order ends the Rana family's exclusive executive monopoly.

2 May 1952: Supreme Court decides *State of Bihar v. Maharajadhiraja Sir Kameshwar Singh of Darbhanga*, a major constitutional anchor in zamindari-abolition litigation.

1952: Nepal enacts its first modern national citizenship law, inaugurating a statutory documentary regime of political membership during the post-Rana transition.

25 April 1954: India and Nepal sign the Kosi Agreement at Kathmandu, authorizing the barrage, embankments, canals, protective works and associated project arrangements on Nepalese territory.

1954: Bihar Bhoodan Yagna Act provides a statutory framework for donated Bhoodan land in Bihar.

1959: Contemporary Government of India reporting later records the principal Kosi embankment works as completed, while canal and associated project construction continues.

1960–62: Royal intervention in Nepal ends the first multiparty experiment and the 1962 Constitution establishes the partyless Panchayat order.

1963: Kosi Barrage and headworks at Hanumannagar/Bhimnagar are completed; the project becomes an operating barrage-canal-embankment system rather than only a construction scheme.

1964: Nepal Citizenship Act enacted within the Panchayat constitutional order; later citizenship statutes substantially revise this framework.

15 November 1964: Nepal Lands Act authenticated, providing a major statutory framework for tenancy, ceilings and agrarian reform.

1965-1968: Severe drought and food insecurity in northern Bihar provide the crisis context for Pupul Jayakar's handicrafts intervention; Bhaskar Kulkarni brings handmade paper to Madhubani and the paper market gains momentum by 1968.

19 December 1966: India and Nepal sign the revised Kosi Agreement at Kathmandu, superseding the original treaty text while retaining the project framework.

1968: Exceptional Kosi flows are recorded; major embankment breaches occur. Bihar WRD historical series distinguish the Barakhshetra and Birpur/Barrage measurement sites.

1975: The UNESCO Courier features a Mithila painting on an August-September cover during International Women's Year; Jagdamba Devi receives the Padma Shri for Madhubani Paintings.

1978: Karpoori Thakur government in Bihar implements a major reservation policy associated with the expansion of lower-caste political representation.

1981: Sita Devi receives the Padma Shri as a painter from Madhubani, marking further national recognition of named Mithila artists.

1984: Major eastern Kosi embankment breach near the Nauhatta/Hempur area causes extensive displacement and long-

lived erosion, sand deposition and recovery problems in the lower basin.

1989/1992: The Janakpur Women's Art Project begins in Nepal in 1989; the Janakpur Women's Development Center records registration under its present name in 1992.

1990: Multiparty politics restored in Nepal after the People's Movement.

1992–93: India's Seventy-third Constitutional Amendment gives constitutional status to Panchayati Raj institutions.

2000: Bihar Reorganisation Act creates Jharkhand and changes the territorial-administrative context of eastern Bihar.

2005/2007: India GI Application No. 37 for 'Madhubani Paintings' is filed on 22 August 2005; the GI registry records certificate no. 31 dated 16 May 2007 for handicraft goods with geographical area Bihar.

2006: Nepal Citizenship Act, 2063 becomes the principal post-People's-Movement statutory citizenship framework; the peace process and interim constitutional transition accelerate debates over inclusion and state restructuring.

2006: Bihar Panchayati Raj Act establishes a new state framework for rural local government with extensive reservation, including for women.

2007: First Madhesh movement places federalism, proportional inclusion, citizenship, and representation at the centre of Nepal's post-conflict constitutional politics; government and Madhesh-based actors conclude a twenty-two-point agreement.

2008: Further Madhesh mobilization and an eight-point agreement precede the first Constituent Assembly election; federal restructuring becomes an explicit constitutional commitment.

2008: Nepal becomes a federal democratic republic after abolition of the monarchy.

18 August 2008: Eastern afflux embankment breaches near Kusaha in Sunsari, Nepal; the Kosi avulses eastward into an older channel belt and produces a major transboundary disaster in Nepal and Bihar.

2010-2011: World Bank approves the Bihar Kosi Flood Recovery Project in 2010; the project becomes effective in March 2011, linking housing, roads and bridges, livelihoods, flood-management capacity and emergency response.

2015: Bihar Kosi Basin Development Project begins a broader resilience phase combining flood-risk management, connectivity and livelihood interventions after the post-2008 recovery programme.

20 September 2015: Constitution of Nepal promulgated; federalism institutionalized amid major Madhesh protests and disputes over representation and provincial design.

2015–16: Severe disruption at major India–Nepal border crossings during the Madhesh agitation; scholarly and political accounts disagree over the relative roles of protest blockade and Indian pressure.

28 February 2016: First Amendment to the Constitution of Nepal changes Articles 42, 84, and 286 concerning social justice/proportional inclusion and electoral representation/delimitation.

21 August 2017: Proposed second constitutional amendment addressing issues including language, citizenship, representation, and provincial boundaries fails to reach the required two-thirds parliamentary majority.

April 2018: Birgunj Integrated Check Post inaugurated, expanding formal freight and customs infrastructure at the Raxaul–Birgunj corridor.

January 2020: Biratnagar Integrated Check Post inaugurated at the Jogbani–Biratnagar corridor.

14 March 2020: India announces restrictions on international passenger traffic through land check posts during the COVID-19

emergency; exceptional controls sharply contract routine border mobility.

2020-2021: Mithila artists respond to the COVID-19 crisis; Princeton University Library documents and collects works addressing pandemic life, labor, and inequality.

17 January 2022: Province No. 2 is officially named Madhesh Province and Janakpurdham is designated its permanent capital by two-thirds votes of the Provincial Assembly.

2 April 2022: Jayanagar–Kurtha broad-gauge passenger rail section inaugurated, restoring cross-border passenger railway connectivity in a new form.

31 May 2023: President authenticates the Nepal Citizenship First Amendment, operationalizing additional constitutional citizenship routes after prolonged political dispute.

1 June 2023: Updated India–Nepal transit arrangements formalize additional road/rail procedures and routes for Nepal's trade and transit.

28-29 September 2024: Very high Kosi flows follow severe regional rainfall; Bihar WRD records about 6.61 lakh cusecs at Birpur Barrage on 29 September, the highest barrage discharge since 1968.

2024: Western Kosi Embankment breaches near Bhubhaul in Kiratpur block; a later Lok Sabha answer records roughly 220 metres of damage and attributes the failure to overtopping associated with increased discharge.

24 January 2025: Madhesh Province withdraws a proposed official-language bill after objections to exclusions including Tharu and Magahi; the episode exposes the complexity of multilingual provincial administration.

21 September 2025: Nepal Citizenship Second Amendment is authenticated, further revising access to citizenship through the mother's name and specified documentation routes.

2025-26: The Constitution's ten-year review point for the Part 27 inclusion commissions, including the Madhesi Commission,

generates debate over resources, appointments, implementation of recommendations, and institutional redesign.

2025: World Bank implementation-completion documentation closes the main results record for the Bihar Kosi Basin Development Project and preserves final infrastructure, livelihood and cost evidence.

2026: Election Commission reporting on the House of Representatives records 16.73 percent of elected members in the Madhesi inclusive category; the statistic is an electoral classification, not a proxy for all residents of Madhesh Province.

2026: India-Nepal Kosi/Gandak joint mechanisms continue pre-monsoon maintenance, erosion-control, land-demarcation, drainage and information-exchange work; Bihar public forecasting and discharge systems remain operational.

Glossary and place-name concordance

Anga. Ancient eastern polity appearing in Buddhist, Jain, and Brahmanical traditions and conventionally associated with Champa as its capital. Its early borders and chronology are reconstructed rather than fixed by a surviving administrative map.

Angika. Modern eastern Indo-Aryan language name associated especially with Bhagalpur and adjoining regions; classifications have varied.

Champa / Campa / Champanagar. Ancient city associated with Anga, broadly identified with the Champanagar-Nathnagar archaeological zone near modern Bhagalpur. Excavation reveals pre-NBPW, NBPW-bearing early-historic, Kushan, Gupta, and later occupation; the whole sequence should not be assigned to one political period.

Darbhangā Raj. Large zamindari estate and cultural-political institution; not a British Indian princely state.

Gana-sangha. Corporate or assembly-based polity; often preferable to the unqualified modern term 'republic'.

Atthakulaka / Atthakula. A judicial expression in later Pali commentarial discussion of Vaishali, commonly rendered as a 'court/council of eight'. Older scholarship sometimes converted the number eight into a roster of eight Vajjian constituent clans. Mishra (1962, pp. 103-106) rejected that inference; this volume likewise treats a judicial label as insufficient evidence for the number or representation of political constituents.

Janaka. Name or title associated with kings of Videha in Vedic, Upanishadic, and epic traditions.

Janakpur / Janakpurdham. City in present Madhesh Province, Nepal, and major centre of Sita-Rama pilgrimage and Mithila identity.

Licchavi / Lichchhavi. Name of an ancient clan associated with Vajji and of a later Nepalese dynasty; direct continuity is not proven.

Madhesh. Nepal's southern plains as geographical and political space; overlaps with, but is not identical to, Mithila or Tarai.

Maithili. Eastern Indo-Aryan language with major literary traditions and speakers in India and Nepal.

Mithila. Historical-cultural region whose meanings and claimed boundaries changed over time.

Northern Black Polished Ware. Archaeological ceramic category associated with early-historic settlement and urbanization; not an ethnic label. Its presence is chronologically useful only in a secure local sequence; distribution does not by itself define ethnicity or political sovereignty.

Sadanira. River in Vedic textual geography, often identified with the Gandak; the identification should be treated as scholarly reconstruction.

Simraongarh / Simraungadh. Major fortified Karnata capital site in present Bara District, Nepal.

Tarai / Terai. Lowland belt south of the Himalayan foothills; ecological, administrative, and political meanings vary.

Tirabhukti / Tirhut. Historical regional and administrative name associated with north Bihar and Mithila.

Vajji / Vriji. Ancient corporate or confederated political formation associated especially with Vesali/Vaishali and the Licchavis. Buddhist sources emphasize assemblies and conditions of collective welfare; the term should not be equated automatically with modern representative democracy.

Vaishali / Vesali / Basarh. Ancient urban and sacred centre in Buddhist and Jain traditions, identified through cumulative archaeological and historical-geographical evidence with Basarh

and neighbouring localities in Bihar. The archaeological zone contains multiple periods and cannot be reduced to one canonical episode.

Videha. Ancient polity and cultural designation associated with Mithila in Vedic and later traditions.

Citizenship by descent (Nepal). Constitutional/statutory citizenship category tied to specified parental or birth conditions; distinct from naturalized citizenship and from mere possession of a certificate.

Madheshi. Modern political and social macro-category in Nepal associated broadly with plains-origin populations; its boundaries are contested and it should not be projected as a timeless homogeneous ethnos.

Madhesh Province. Federal province of Nepal comprising Saptari, Siraha, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Sarlahi, Rautahat, Bara, and Parsa; named Madhesh and given Janakpurdham as permanent capital on 17 January 2022.

Madhesi Commission. Constitutional commission established by Article 262 of Nepal's Constitution; its detailed functions are set by federal law and concern the rights, interests, study, and inclusion of Madheshi communities.

Naturalized citizenship (Nepal). Citizenship acquired through statutory naturalization rather than descent; some constitutional offices are reserved for citizens by descent.

Proportional inclusion. Constitutional principle used in Nepal for participation and electoral representation of specified historically disadvantaged or underrepresented groups; implementation depends on law, classification, and institutional practice.

Provincial official language (Nepal). Under Article 7(2), a province may by provincial law designate one or more languages of the nation spoken by a majority within the province as official in addition to Nepali; recognition as a language of the nation is a separate status.

Black-and-red ware (BRW). Archaeological pottery category named for contrasting black and red firing surfaces; it occurs in multiple regions and periods and is not an ethnic label.

Iron working. Umbrella term that should be disaggregated into smelting, smithing/forging, repair, and use; different archaeological residues establish different stages of production.

Painted Grey Ware (PGW). Fine grey pottery with painted designs, especially important in upper Ganga-Yamuna archaeology; useful comparatively but not a universal chronological template for eastern India.

Protohistory. Analytical term for periods in which archaeology can be compared with transmitted textual traditions or limited writing, although contemporary documentary evidence remains sparse and uneven.

Second urbanization. Historiographical shorthand for first-millennium BCE urban growth in northern India after the much earlier Indus urban tradition; timing and causes varied regionally.

Alluvial architecture. Three-dimensional arrangement of channel, overbank, gravel, sand, and finer deposits within a floodplain or fan; useful for evaluating burial and preservation but not itself a cultural chronology.

Anabranching. Multi-channel river pattern in which channels are separated by relatively stable alluvial or vegetated islands; distinguished analytically from braided channels even though both can occur in mobile floodplains.

Interfan plain. Alluvial tract lying between large megafans; in north Bihar such areas can contain highly mobile foothill-fed, plains-fed, or mixed-fed rivers including reaches of the Baghmati system.

Megafan. Very large, low-gradient fan-shaped depositional landform formed where a major mountain-fed river enters a foreland basin and distributes sediment across a broad plain; Kosi and Gandak are principal north Bihar examples.

Palaeochannel. Former river course preserved as a surface depression, sediment body, map trace, or remotely sensed

feature. Identification of a channel does not establish its age without independent dating.

Critical edition (Ramayana). Scholarly reconstruction produced by collating manuscript witnesses and applying stated textual-critical principles. It is not an original autograph and does not eliminate the history of recensions or later retellings.

Vaidehi / Maithili. Literary epithets of Sita linking her respectively to Videha and Mithila; useful evidence for the geographic identity carried by the character through later traditions.

Bhikkhuni Sangha. Buddhist community of fully ordained nuns. Pali Vinaya tradition places Mahapajapati Gotami at the foundation of the order; the chronology and status of some associated rules are debated in comparative Vinaya scholarship.

Gahapati. Pali term commonly used for substantial householders. It indicates household and economic authority in many early Buddhist contexts but is not identical to a modern bourgeois class.

Garudhammas. Eight rules of respect associated in the received Pali ordination narrative with the foundation of the bhikkhuni order. Their textual history and earliest form are debated; the transmitted rules institutionalize gendered hierarchy.

Mahapajapati Gotami. The Buddha's foster mother and a central figure in Buddhist traditions concerning women's ordination. The Pali narrative places her journey and ordination negotiations at Vesali.

Nigantha Nataputta. Pali Buddhist designation for Mahavira. Buddhist descriptions are important evidence for awareness of Jain rivals but remain polemical sources rather than neutral Jain self-description.

Shramana / sramana. Broad label for renunciant or wandering religious specialists in ancient South Asia. It includes

diverse communities and should not be treated as one doctrine or a single anti-Brahmanical organization.

Vassa / rainy-season residence. Buddhist seasonal residence during the monsoon. Jain traditions preserve analogous rainy-season residence patterns; seasonal settlement shaped institutional geography, donor relations, and teaching.

Ashokan Pillar Edicts. Major royal inscriptions of Ashoka carved on selected monolithic pillars. Lauriya-Arera, Lauriya-Nandargarh, and one Rampurva pillar preserve the first six; the Kolhua/Vaishali pillar is uninscribed.

Dhamma (Ashokan). Ethical-political vocabulary used in Ashoka's inscriptions for conduct, restraint, welfare, social relations, and administration. It is related to Ashoka's Buddhist commitments but should not be reduced to a simple synonym for Buddhist doctrine.

Epigraphic palimpsest. A monument or surface bearing inscriptions from more than one period, allowing its physical object and successive acts of writing to be studied separately; the Allahabad pillar is a prominent example.

Prayaga prasasti / Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta. Fourth-century Sanskrit court panegyric composed by Harishena. It is a major source for Gupta political geography and names Nepal among frontier polities, but its categories are rhetorical and political rather than a modern administrative map.

Pilgrim itinerary. Route narrative organized through journeys, sacred places, distances, directions, institutions, and remembered events. Faxian and Xuanzang are best used relationally rather than by converting a single distance into a modern coordinate.

Lauriya-Arera. Ashokan pillar site in East Champaran bearing the first six Major Pillar Edicts in early Brahmi; its capital is lost.

Lauriya-Nandangarh. Ashokan lion-capital pillar site in West Champaran bearing the first six Major Pillar Edicts; nearby archaeological mounds belong to a broader multi-period landscape.

Rampurva. West Champaran site where two Ashokan pillars were found, one inscribed and one uninscribed, demonstrating that Ashokan pillars were not a uniform inscriptional class.

Aṃśuvarman. Powerful seventh-century ruler or power-holder in the Kathmandu Valley whose inscriptions are associated with Kailāśakūṭabhavana and major fiscal/administrative measures. His changing titles and relationship to Licchavi kings make simple one-ruler chronology inadequate.

Changu Narayan / Cāṅgunārāyaṇa. Sacred complex northeast of Kathmandu preserving Mānadeva's pillar inscription dated saṃvat 386, conventionally 464 CE. The inscription is fifth-century; the standing temple complex is architecturally layered and includes later reconstruction.

Goṣṭhī. Corporate body in Licchavi Nepal associated with religious, social or endowment functions. Later guthi institutions invite comparison, but exact legal continuity must be demonstrated rather than presumed.

Kailāśakūṭabhavana. Palace centre associated especially with Aṃśuvarman and later rulers/power-holders in Licchavi-period inscriptions; its inscriptional political role is firmer than any complete archaeological reconstruction of the palace.

Licchavi Nepal. Inscriptionally attested royal and political order in the Kathmandu Valley from the fifth century CE onward. A relationship with the older Licchavis of Vaishali is possible and historically important but an unbroken genealogy or single migration is not established by the surviving evidence.

Mānagrha. Royal residence named in Licchavi inscriptions and associated with the Licchavi court; a political address in the epigraphic record rather than a fully excavated palace plan.

Pañcālī. In Licchavi land inscriptions, a settlement grouping or corporate body, often involving landholders and cultivators with defined duties and privileges. It should not be equated automatically with a modern elected panchayat.

Śaka era and local Licchavi era. Consecutive dating systems used in Nepal inscriptions. The 464 CE conversion for Mānadeva's saṃvat 386 assumes the Śaka era; a later local era has an epoch conventionally placed in 576 CE.

Adhikaraṇa. Office, board, tribunal, or jurisdictional establishment in inscriptional usage. Its practical function must be determined from the dated context rather than translated mechanically as a modern department.

Bhukti. Large territorial or provincial term in Gupta and early-medieval administration. The scale and internal organization of a named bhukti could change across dynasties.

Hōḍreya-viṣaya. District-level unit named in the Bangaon plate of Vigrahapāla III as part of Tīrabhukti; Vāsukāvartta lay within it. Exact modern boundaries are not securely mapped.

Kakṣa-viṣaya. District-level unit of Tīrabhukti named in the Bhagalpur grant of Nārāyaṇapāla. The charter connects it with the village Makuṭikā and a Śaiva temple endowment.

Kaṭrā charter of Jīvagupta. Eighth-century, palaeographically dated copper plate from Muzaffarpur district recording a temple grant in Chāmuṇḍā-viṣaya of Tīrabhukti. The precise dynastic identity of Jīvagupta is debated.

Kṣetrakara. Cultivator; in the Bangaon plate resident cultivators are instructed to deliver appropriate shares, dues, taxes, and cash-related payments under the new grant arrangement.

Land-grant charter. Durable royal or elite document transferring specified claims over land, revenue, exemptions, or institutional rights. It should not be equated automatically with modern freehold ownership or vacant-land settlement.

Vāsukāvartta. Locality in Hōḍreya-viṣaya of Tīrabhukti named in the Bangaon plate of Vīgrahapāla III. Modern identification should remain separate from the secure inscriptional name unless independently demonstrated.

Babuana. Maintenance property assigned within a ruling or landed family, often to junior branches. Rights could be layered: a branch might enjoy income while superior revenue obligations remained attached to the principal estate.

Court of Wards. Colonial institution that supervised estates of minors or proprietors deemed unable to manage them. Darbhanga Raj was under Court of Wards management from 1860 to 1879.

Dīwānī. Fiscal authority to collect revenue. The Company's 1765 dīwānī of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa marked a decisive shift in sovereign revenue power without instantly replacing every inherited local institution.

Jama. Assessed revenue demand. Under the Permanent Settlement the government's jama on recognized settled estates was fixed in perpetuity; this did not permanently fix every raiyat's rent.

Lakhraj / revenue-free land. Land held wholly or partly exempt from public revenue under grants of varying origin. Colonial regulations required registration and could resume grants judged invalid.

Panji / Panji Prabandha. Genealogical record system used among Maithil Brahmins to establish lineage, mūla and marriage eligibility. Its medieval history is distinguished in this volume from later c.1800 hereditary sub-caste reclassification.

Permanent Settlement. The 1793 revenue settlement that fixed the government's assessed jama in perpetuity for recognized proprietors in Bengal Presidency, including Bihar. It did not make Darbhanga a princely state or freeze all subordinate tenures.

Raiyat. Cultivator or tenant under colonial land law. Rights varied by occupancy, custom, tenure and statute; the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 formalized important categories.

Record-of-rights. Official survey-settlement record of tenures, rents, holdings and recognized interests. It is evidence of colonial classification and also a legal instrument that could reshape future disputes.

Revenue sale / 'sunset law'. Sale of revenue-paying estate interests for arrears was built into the Permanent Settlement regime. The precise 'sunset' deadline belongs to later nineteenth-century statutory development and should not be collapsed into a single 1793 rule.

Śrotriya. Two meanings are kept separate in this volume: an older Sanskrit descriptor associated with Vedic learning or qualification, and the later hereditary Maithil Brahmin sub-caste which the book's Panji-based reconstruction places around c.1800.

Zamindar. Revenue-paying landholder whose legal position changed substantially under Company rule. Under Permanent Settlement recognized zamindars held estates subject to a fixed government jama; the term should not be equated automatically with sovereign rulership.

Tarai / Terai (nineteenth–twentieth-century Nepal). Lowland belt south of the Siwalik/Himalayan foothills. The term can be ecological, fiscal, administrative or political; it is not coextensive with Mithila or Madhesh in every source.

Supplementary Tarai settlement, December 1816. Post-Sugauli arrangement restoring substantial lowlands to Nepal while expressly excepting disputed lands in Tirhut and Saran and providing for boundary commissioners and exchanges.

Naya Muluk. "New country," the western Tarai tracts restored to Nepal in 1860, conventionally identified with present Banke, Bardiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur.

Rana regime / Rana oligarchy. Political order from 1846 to 1951 in which hereditary Rana prime ministers dominated executive government while the Shah monarchy remained.

Mulukī Ain (1854). Nepal's major nineteenth-century legal code covering state organization, courts, criminal/private law, caste and purity rules, property, family, custom, labour and procedure. A normative code whose enforcement must be studied through records of practice.

Raikar (Nepalese land usage). Land subject to state revenue; not identical to modern freehold and not equivalent to Bengal Permanent Settlement zamindari.

Birta. Privileged land or revenue grant under Nepalese fiscal practice; rights and exemptions varied by grant and period.

Jagir (Nepalese land-assignment usage). Revenue or land assignment linked to office or service. It should be distinguished from Mughal jagir even where broad functional analogies exist.

Guthi. Property or institutional arrangement supporting religious, charitable or communal purposes in Nepal; legal forms and historical functions varied.

Jimidar / zamindar (Nepalese Tarai usage). Local revenue or land intermediary in Nepalese institutions; the title should not be assumed to confer the same rights as a Bengal Permanent Settlement zamindar.

Nepal census of 1911. First nationwide population census in official Nepalese census history. The 1911, 1920, 1930 and 1941 Rana-era censuses had limited schedules and published mainly aggregate headcounts.

Britain–Nepal Treaty (1923). Treaty signed 21 December 1923; Article I stated mutual recognition and respect for internal and external independence.

Nepal Government Railway. Narrow-gauge Raxaul–Birgunj–Amlekhganj railway opened in 1927, connecting the Nepalese Tarai to the Indian rail network while retaining customs and transshipment boundaries.

Biratnagar Jute Mills. Industrial enterprise incorporated in 1936 in Morang; the March 1947 strike became a major labour and anti-Rana political episode.

India–Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1950). Bilateral treaty signed and effective 31 July 1950. Article 7 provides reciprocal privileges concerning residence, property, trade, movement and similar matters; it did not abolish the legal border.

Open border (historical analytical usage). Shorthand for unusually extensive India–Nepal mobility. It must not imply absence of sovereignty, customs, policing, citizenship law or historically changing restrictions.

Bhoodan. Voluntary land-gift movement initiated by Vinoba Bhave in 1951. In Bihar it acquired a statutory framework under the Bihar Bhoodan Yagna Act, 1954. Promised, donated, possessed, and distributed land must be distinguished.

Land ceiling. Statutory maximum holding permitted under land-reform law; surplus identification depends on classification, family and transfer rules, records, exemptions, adjudication, and implementation.

Vesting (Bihar Land Reforms Act). Legal transfer of specified proprietary and intermediary interests in estates and tenures to the State of Bihar. Vesting did not itself convert every cultivator into an owner.

Panchayati Raj (India). Constitutionally recognized system of rural local government, especially after the Seventy-third Amendment; distinct from Nepal's historical partyless Panchayat system.

Panchayat system (Nepal, 1962–1990). Partyless monarchical political order established under the 1962 Constitution, culminating in the National Panchayat; not equivalent to Indian Panchayati Raj.

Federalism (Nepal, 2015). Constitutional distribution of authority among federal, provincial, and local levels under the

Constitution of Nepal, 2015; a contemporary institutional settlement rather than restoration of ancient regional borders.

Cross-border mobility. Repeated or one-time movement across an international frontier for work, marriage, trade, education, health care, pilgrimage, family visits or other purposes. It is broader than permanent migration and may be poorly captured by residence-based censuses.

Foreign-born / foreign citizen. Distinct census categories. Foreign-born identifies country of birth; foreign citizen identifies nationality/citizenship at enumeration. Cross-border marriage can produce large differences between the two measures.

Circular migration. Repeated movement between origin and destination rather than one permanent relocation; especially important for seasonal and India-bound labour migration from Nepal.

Integrated Check Post (ICP). Purpose-built border facility combining customs, immigration/security and logistics functions for formal traffic. Birgunj and Biratnagar ICPs were inaugurated in 2018 and 2020 respectively.

Transit trade. Movement of a landlocked state's external trade through the territory and ports of another state under treaty or agreement. Nepal–India transit arrangements are distinct from bilateral trade rules.

Jayanagar–Kurtha railway. Cross-border broad-gauge passenger rail section inaugurated on 2 April 2022 as part of the Jayanagar–Bardibas project; it represents renewed passenger rail connectivity rather than simple continuation of the earlier narrow-gauge line.

Border interruption. Temporary contraction of routine cross-border mobility caused by protest, security policy, public-health emergency, natural hazard or infrastructure failure; useful for demonstrating that 'open border' practice is historically variable.

Remittance. Monetary or in-kind transfer from migrants to households or communities; analysis should also consider social remittances such as information, skills, expectations and political ideas.

Multi-local household. Household whose members sustain livelihood, study, care or residence across more than one locality, sometimes in different countries; a challenge for single-place census categories.

Roti-beti relations. Popular idiom describing food/kinship and marriage ties across the India–Nepal border. In this book it is treated as a cultural expression rather than evidence that all communities share identical marriage networks or legal status.

Eighth Schedule. Constitutional schedule listing twenty-two languages after the 2004 amendment. Inclusion is important for constitutional and policy purposes but is not identical to universal administrative use as an “official language” in every office.

Angika. Modern language name and literary identity associated especially with the Bhagalpur-Anga and adjoining Bihar/Jharkhand field, with separate enumeration in Nepal. Grierson classified Chhika-Chhiki/Bhagalpuri material within Maithili; modern Angika identity and institutions are treated as a later historical development rather than retrojected unchanged.

Chhika-Chhiki / Chika-chiki. Early twentieth-century survey label used for a speech variety in the Munger-Bhagalpur field and classified by Grierson within Maithili. It should not be treated automatically as identical to every later use of the name Angika, though the histories overlap.

Maithili. Eastern Indo-Aryan language with major literary, scholastic, oral and modern institutional traditions in Bihar and Nepal; included in India’s Eighth Schedule since 7 January 2004. The term covers internally varied speech and should not be reduced to one caste or district.

Language census. Administrative enumeration of returned mother tongues according to a questionnaire and coding/classification system. Census totals are authoritative for those rules but are not a structural linguistic survey or a timeless map of identity.

Sahitya Akademi recognition. National literary-institutional field in which Maithili awards are listed from 1966. Literary recognition and Eighth Schedule inclusion have separate chronologies.

Bihar Maithili Academy. State-supported institution established in 1976 for promotion of Maithili language and culture. Formal existence must be distinguished from staffing, funding and actual programme capacity.

Bihar Angika Academy. State language-promotion institution approved/established in 2015 for Angika. Its existence is a form of state cultural recognition independent of Eighth Schedule status.

Jharkhand second-official-language framework. 2018 amendment framework authorizing notification of Magahi, Bhojpuri, Maithili and Angika, among other languages, for specified areas and purposes; not a claim that all languages have identical statewide administrative use.

Tirhuta / Mithilakshar Unicode. Historical Maithili script encoded in Unicode 7.0 (2014), block U+11480-U+114DF. Encoding provides character interoperability but not automatically fonts, keyboards, literacy or manuscript transcription.

Home language / mother tongue / local language / regional language (NEP 2020). School-language formulation recommending, wherever possible, familiar-language instruction at least through Grade 5 and preferably longer. It is not restricted in wording to Eighth Schedule languages.

Language recognition. Umbrella term used cautiously in this volume for several non-equivalent processes: census coding, university acceptance, literary awards, constitutional

scheduling, state official-language law, academies, school policy and digital encoding.

Mithila painting / Madhubani painting. Overlapping modern labels for a wider Maithil visual field and for the district/market geography through which paper painting became nationally prominent. The Indian GI 'Madhubani Paintings' is a specific legal registration and should not be equated with all Mithila painting in India and Nepal.

Bhitti-citra. Wall painting, especially in domestic and ritual settings. Documentary records include pre-paper-market murals; meaning depends on household, rite, date, and artist rather than a universal motif code.

Aripan. Auspicious floor drawing, commonly made with a rice-flour mixture for calendrical and life-cycle rites. Its temporary material life is part of its function and helps explain why archival survival is uneven.

Kohbar ghar. Nuptial or wedding chamber in which wall paintings and women-supervised rituals may form part of marriage practice in some Maithil communities. The term describes a ritual-architectural setting, not a single fixed iconography.

Bharni / kachni / godna. Modern descriptive and market terms for stylistic or technical repertoires in Mithila painting. They should not be mapped mechanically onto immutable caste identities; artists and techniques have crossed social and market boundaries.

Geographical indication (GI). Intellectual-property category linking registered goods to a geographical origin. India's Madhubani Paintings GI is recorded as Application No. 37; GI protection is distinct from copyright in an individual modern artwork.

Provenance. Documented history of ownership, acquisition, sale, collection, or custody of an artwork. Provenance can establish date ranges and market routes but does not itself determine aesthetic meaning.

Cultural economy. In this chapter, the chain through which artistic labor becomes ritual, social, reputational, institutional, and monetary value. Artists, households, intermediaries, museums, state agencies, NGOs, platforms, and buyers may all participate, with unequal bargaining power.

Janakpur Women's Development Center (JWDC). Nepalese women-run institution in Kuwa near Janakpur whose historical account dates the initial art project to 1989 and registration under the present name to 1992; it combines Mithila art production with training, organization, and income-generation programs.

Artification. Analytical term used in recent scholarship for processes by which a practice classified as domestic ritual, craft, popular art, or folk art is repositioned within institutions and markets as art. The term describes a change in classification and social field, not a claim that creativity began only when outsiders recognized it.

Kosi / Koshi / Sapta Kosi. Kosi is the conventional Indian English spelling for the river in Bihar; Koshi is widely used in Nepal and in recent English usage; Sapta Kosi refers to the multi-river system assembled in Nepal. Spellings are retained according to institutional or source context where relevant.

Megafan. Large fan-shaped alluvial landform produced where a major river repeatedly deposits sediment after leaving a mountain front. The Kosi megafan contains active and abandoned channels, wetlands, bars, levees and settlement surfaces.

Avulsion. Rapid relocation of a river into a different channel or channel belt, distinct from ordinary overbank flooding and slower bank migration. The August 2008 Kosi event is a major modern example.

Barrage. Gated cross-river structure used chiefly to regulate water level and divert flow into canals. A barrage is not equivalent to a high storage dam and does not provide the same reservoir flood-storage function.

Afflux bund. Embankment associated with a barrage that contains the raised upstream water surface and directs flow through the barrage reach. The 2008 Kusaha breach occurred in the eastern afflux embankment upstream of the Kosi Barrage.

Embankment. Raised linear flood-protection structure intended to prevent river water from spreading into selected areas. Embankments can reduce routine inundation while creating residual breach risk and altering sediment and drainage pathways.

Drainage congestion. Accumulation of rain, seepage or tributary water when natural drainage routes are blocked or insufficient. It can produce prolonged waterlogging in areas nominally protected from direct river flooding.

Sand casting. Deposition of a thick layer of sand on fields during a flood or breach, potentially reducing agricultural productivity for multiple seasons; distinct from finer silt deposition that may have different agronomic effects.

Residual risk. Flood, breach, erosion, drainage, or other hazard that remains after protective infrastructure is built. Residual risk may be spatially redistributed rather than eliminated.

Kosi-FFEWS. Kosi Flood Forecasting and Early Warning System operated by Bihar's Flood Management Improvement Support Centre; designed to provide experimental water-level and discharge forecasts at multiple Kosi-basin sites with multi-day lead time during the monsoon.

FMISC. Flood Management Improvement Support Centre, Water Resources Department, Government of Bihar; institutional centre for flood information, modelling, remote sensing, inundation mapping, embankment asset management and related capacity building.

Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve. Protected floodplain and wetland area in Sunsari and Saptari, Nepal, established in 1976 and listed as Nepal's first Ramsar wetland in 1987; important for wild water buffalo, birds and riverine ecosystems.

General source register

The chapter bibliographies are authoritative for chapter-level review. This consolidated register lists the principal recurring works and official records.

- Alam, Muzaffar. *The Languages of Political Islam: India 1200-1800*. University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Asher, Catherine B., and Cynthia Talbot. *India Before Europe*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Bengal Government. *Bengal District Gazetteers: Bhagalpur*. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1911.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes. *Greater Magadha: Studies in the Culture of Early India*. Brill, 2007.
- Choudhary, Radhakrishna. *A Survey of Maithili Literature*. Ram Vilas Sahu, 1976.
- Deva, Krishna, and Vijayakanta Mishra. *Vaisali Excavations, 1950*. Vaisali Sangh, 1961.
- Eggeling, Julius, trans. *The Satapatha-Brahmana, Part I. Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 12. Clarendon Press, 1882.
- Faxian. *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*. Translated by James Legge. Clarendon Press, 1886.
- Government of Bihar. *The Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950 (Bihar Act 30 of 1950)*. India Code.
- Government of India and Government of Nepal. *Treaty of Peace and Friendship*. Signed 31 July 1950. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.
- Government of India. *The Constitution (Ninety-second Amendment) Act, 2003*. Gazette of India, 8 January 2004.
- Government of Nepal. *Constitution of Nepal, 2015*. Nepal Law Commission.
- Grierson, George A. *Linguistic Survey of India*, vol. V, part II: Indo-Aryan Family, Eastern Group. Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India, 1903.
- Hamilton, Francis. *An Account of the District of Purnea in 1809-10*. Bihar and Orissa Research Society, 1928.
- Hill, Christopher V. *River of Sorrow: Environment and Social Control in Riparian North India, 1770-1994*. Association for Asian Studies, 1997.
- Mishra, Jayakanta. *A History of Maithili Literature*, vol. 1: Early and Middle Periods. Tirabhukti Publications, 1949.

- National Statistics Office, Nepal. National Population and Housing Census 2021: Language in Nepal, Thematic Report XI. Government of Nepal, 2025.
- O'Malley, L. S. S. Bengal District Gazetteers: Darbhanga. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1907.
- O'Malley, L. S. S. Bengal District Gazetteers: Muzaffarpur. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1907.
- Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. Census of India 2011, Table C-16: Population by Mother Tongue. Government of India.
- Pollock, Sheldon. *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*. University of California Press, 2006.
- Riccardi, Theodore, Jr. 'The Inscription of King Manadeva at Changu Narayan.' *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, no. 4 (1989): 611-620. <https://doi.org/10.2307/604086>.
- Richman, Paula, and David L. Szanton, eds. *India's Mithila Painting*. University of Washington Press, 2025.
- Salomon, Richard. *Indian Epigraphy: A Guide to the Study of Inscriptions in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and the Other Indo-Aryan Languages*. Oxford University Press, 1998. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195099843.001.0001>.
- Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Pearson Education India, 2008.
- Sinha, B. P., and Sita Ram Roy. *Vaisali Excavations, 1958-1962*. Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Bihar, 1969.
- Sinha, Chandreshwar Prasad Narayan. *Mithila under the Karnatas, c. 1097-1325 A.D.* Janaki Prakashan, 1979.
- Slusser, Mary Shepherd. *Nepal Mandala: A Cultural Study of the Kathmandu Valley*. 2 vols. Princeton University Press, 1982.
- Thakur, Upendra. *History of Mithila: From the Earliest Times to 1556 A.D.* 2nd ed. Mithila Institute, 1988.
- Thapar, Romila. *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*. Allen Lane, 2002.
- Vequaud, Yves. *The Women Painters of Mithila: Ceremonial Paintings from an Ancient Kingdom*. Translated by George Robinson. Thames and Hudson, 1977.
- Walshe, Maurice, trans. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya*. Wisdom Publications, 1995.
- Whelpton, John. *A History of Nepal*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

- Witzel, Michael. 'Early Sanskritization: Origins and Development of the Kuru State.' *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* 1, no. 4 (1995): 1-26.
- Xuanzang. Si-yu-ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World. Translated by Samuel Beal. 2 vols. Trubner, 1884.
- Yadav, Ramawatar. A Reference Grammar of Maithili. Mouton de Gruyter, 1996. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110811698>.
- Yang, Anand A. Bazaar India: Markets, Society, and the Colonial State in Bihar. University of California Press, 1998.

Additional sources for Chapter 1

- Chakrabarti, Dilip K. 'Relating History to the Land: Urban Centers, Geographical Units, and Trade Routes in the Gangetic and Central India of circa 200 BCE.' In *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE*, edited by Patrick Olivelle, 4-31. Oxford University Press, 2006. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195305326.003.0001>.
- Cunningham, Alexander, and H. B. W. Garrick. Report of Tours in North and South Bihar in 1880-81. Archaeological Survey of India, vol. XVI. Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1883.
- East India Company and Kingdom of Nepal. Treaty of Sugauli. Dated 2 December 1815; ratification exchanged 4 March 1816.
- Ibrahim, Farhana, and Tanuja Kothiyal, eds. *South Asian Borderlands: Mobility, History, Affect*. Cambridge University Press, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108951500>.
- Jain, Vikrant, and Rajiv Sinha. 'Hyperavulsive-anabranching Baghmati River System, North Bihar Plains, Eastern India.' *Zeitschrift für Geomorphologie* 47, no. 1 (2003): 101-116. <https://doi.org/10.1127/zfg/47/2003/101>.
- Pandey, Mithila Sharan. *The Historical Geography and Topography of Bihar*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1963.
- Sinha, Rajiv, and Peter F. Friend. 'River Systems and Their Sediment Flux, Indo-Gangetic Plains, Northern Bihar, India.' *Sedimentology* 41, no. 4 (1994): 825-845. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-3091.1994.tb01426.x>.
- Archaeological Survey of India. *Indian Archaeology 1970-71 - A Review*. Edited by M. N. Deshpande. New Delhi, 1974. Primary annual archaeological field report; used for the reported five-period Chirand sequence and excavation observations.
- Verma, B. S. Chirand: Excavation Report, 1961-1964 and 1967-1970. Directorate of Archaeology, Government of Bihar, 2007. Principal published excavation report for Chirand.
- Agrawal, D. P., and Sheela Kusumgar. 'Tata Institute Radiocarbon Date List X.' *Radiocarbon* 15, no. 3 (1973): 574-585.

- <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033822200009024>. Primary laboratory date list; used with its explicit warning about mixed Chirand samples.
- Vishnu-Mittre. 'Neolithic Plants Economy at Chirand, Bihar.' *The Palaeobotanist* 21 (1972): 18-22. <https://doi.org/10.54991/jop.1972.1463>. Archaeobotanical source for the Chirand plant assemblage.
- Fuller, Dorian Q. 'Finding Plant Domestication in the Indian Subcontinent.' *Current Anthropology* 52, suppl. 4 (2011): S347-S362. <https://doi.org/10.1086/658900>. Comparative framework distinguishing cultivation from morphological domestication.
- Vaishnav, Hemant Kumar, Deepak Kumar Jha, and B. Janardhana. 'Geoarchaeological Perspective on Mesolithic and Neolithic Settlement Pattern and Transition in the Ganga Plain, India.' *Quaternary Environments and Humans* 3 (2025): 100051. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.qeh.2024.100051>. CC BY 4.0. Recent synthesis of Ganga-plain settlement and environmental context.

Additional sources for Chapter 3

- Banerjee, N. R. *The Iron Age in India*. Munshiram Manoharlal, 1965.
- Chakrabarti, Dilip K. *The Early Use of Iron in India*. Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Deva, Krishna, and R. E. M. Wheeler. 'Northern Polished Black Ware.' *Ancient India* 1 (1946): 55-58.
- Erdosy, George. *Urbanisation in Early Historic India*. BAR International Series 430. B.A.R., 1988.
- Kanungo, Alok Kumar, Chinmay Kulkarni, Varad Ingle, and Oishi Roy. 'Northern Black Polished Ware in Indian Archaeology: A Study of Spatial and Chronological Distribution.' *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology*. Springer, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51726-1_3555-1.
- Roy, T. N. *The Ganges Civilization: A Critical Archaeological Study of the Painted Grey Ware and Northern Black Polished Ware Periods of the Ganga Plains of India*. Ramanand Vidya Bhawan, 1983.
- Sahu, Bhairabi Prasad, ed. *Iron and Social Change in Early India*. Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Sinha, B. P. 'Ancient Cities of Bihar in Archaeology and Literature.' *Man and Environment* 20 (1995): 7-20.
- Tewari, Rakesh. 'The Origins of Iron Working in India: New Evidence from the Central Ganga Plain and the Eastern Vindhya.' *Antiquity* 77, no. 297 (2003): 536-544. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00092590>.
- Tripathi, Vibha. *The Painted Grey Ware: An Iron Age Culture of Northern India*. Concept Publishing Company, 1976.

Additional sources for Chapter 4

- Singh, Harbhajan, B. Parkash, and K. Gohain. 'Facies Analysis of the Kosi Megafan Deposits.' *Sedimentary Geology* 85, nos. 1-4 (1993): 87-113. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0037-0738\(93\)90077-I](https://doi.org/10.1016/0037-0738(93)90077-I).
- Jain, Vikrant, and Rajiv Sinha. 'Fluvial Dynamics of an Anabranching River System in Himalayan Foreland Basin, Baghmati River, North Bihar Plains, India.' *Geomorphology* 60, nos. 1-2 (2004): 147-170. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geomorph.2003.07.008>.
- Chakraborty, Tapan, Rimpal Kar, Parthasarathi Ghosh, and Sounak Basu. 'Kosi Megafan: Historical Records, Geomorphology and the Recent Avulsion of the Kosi River.' *Quaternary International* 227, no. 2 (2010): 143-160. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.quaint.2009.12.002>.
- Sinha, Rajiv, Jawed Ahmad, Kumar Gaurav, and Guillaume Morin. 'Shallow Subsurface Stratigraphy and Alluvial Architecture of the Kosi and Gandak Megafans in the Himalayan Foreland Basin, India.' *Sedimentary Geology* 301 (2014): 133-149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sedgeo.2013.06.008>.

Additional sources for Chapter 5

- Olivelle, Patrick. *The Early Upanisads: Annotated Text and Translation*. Oxford University Press, 1998. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195124354.001.0001>.
- Witzel, Michael. 'The Development of the Vedic Canon and Its Schools: The Social and Political Milieu.' In *Inside the Texts, Beyond the Texts*, edited by Michael Witzel, 257-345. Harvard Oriental Series, Opera Minora 2, 1997.
- Black, Brian. *The Character of the Self in Ancient India: Priests, Kings, and Women in the Early Upanishads*. State University of New York Press, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.1353/book5160>.
- Heesterman, J. C. *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society*. University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- Heesterman, J. C. *The Broken World of Sacrifice: An Essay in Ancient Indian Ritual*. University of Chicago Press, 1993. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226922553.001.0001>.
- Neelis, Jason. *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks: Mobility and Exchange within and beyond the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia*. Brill, 2011.

Additional sources for Chapter 6

- Bhatt, Govindlal Hargovind, ed. *The Valmiki-Ramayana, Critically Edited for the First Time*. Vol. 1, Balakanda. Oriental Institute, 1960.
- Goldman, Robert P., trans. *The Ramayana of Valmiki: An Epic of Ancient India*. Vol. I, Balakanda. Princeton University Press, 1984.

- Goldman, Robert P., and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman, trans. *The Ramayana of Valmiki: The Complete English Translation*. Princeton University Press, 2022.
- Richman, Paula, ed. *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*. University of California Press, 1991.
- Bose, Mandakranta, ed. *The Ramayana Revisited*. Oxford University Press, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0195168321.001.0001>.
- Richman, Paula, and Rustom Bharucha, eds. *Performing the Ramayana Tradition: Enactments, Interpretations, and Arguments*. Oxford University Press, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197552506.001.0001>.
- Pollock, Sheldon. 'Ramayana and Political Imagination in India.' *Journal of Asian Studies* 52, no. 2 (1993): 261-297. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2059648>.
- UNESCO World Heritage Centre. 'Ram Janaki Temple.' Tentative List Ref. 5261, Department of Archaeology, Nepal, 2008. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5261/>.
- Nepal Tourism Board. 'Janaki Mandir, Janakpur, Dhanusha.' Official destination page. <https://ntb.gov.np/janaki-mandir--janakpur--dhanusha>.
- Nepal Tourism Board. 'Janakpur and Vivah Panchami: A Timeless Journey into Nepal's Sacred Heritage.' <https://ntb.gov.np/en/janakpur-and-vivah-panchami>.
- Adhikari, Shyamchandra. 'Impacts of Religious Tourism in Janakpur.' *Research Nepal Journal of Development Studies* 1, no. 2 (2018): 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.3126/rnjds.v1i2.22423>.

Additional sources for Chapter 7

- Mishra, Yogendra. *An Early History of Vaisali: From the Earliest Times to the Fall of the Vajjian Republic, circa 484 B.C.* Delhi, Patna and Varanasi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1962.
- Vajira, Sister, and Francis Story, trans. *Last Days of the Buddha: The Mahaparinibbana Sutta*. Revised edition. Buddhist Publication Society, 1998. <https://vipassana.org/canon/digha/dn16.html>.
- Thapar, Romila. *From Lineage to State: Social Formations of the Mid-First Millennium BC in the Ganga Valley*. Oxford University Press, 1991. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195626759.001.0001>.
- Jayaswal, K. P. *Hindu Polity: A Constitutional History of India in Hindu Times*. Butterworth & Co. (India), 1924.
- Prebish, Charles S. 'A Review of Scholarship on the Buddhist Councils.' *The Journal of Asian Studies* 33, no. 2 (1974): 239-254. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2052186>.
- Dundas, Paul. *The Jains*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2002.

- Archaeological Survey of India, Patna Circle. 'Monuments Details': Relic Stupa, Harpur Basant (Vaishali), and Mound known as Raja Vishal ka Garh. <https://asipatnacircle.gov.in/monuments-details>.
- Ministry of Culture, Government of India. Annual Report 2011-12. Excavation reporting for Raja Vishal ka Garh, Vaishali. https://culture.gov.in/files/annual_reports_document/2011-12_cdn_28062023.pdf.
- Department of Tourism, Government of Bihar. 'Raja Vishal ka Garh.' Official destination page, used here as evidence for modern heritage interpretation. <https://tourism.bihar.gov.in/en/destinations/vaishali/raja-vishal-ka-garh>.

Additional sources for Chapter 8 reconstruction and Chapter 9

- Chakrabarti, Dilip K. Archaeological Geography of the Ganga Plain: The Lower and the Middle Ganga. Permanent Black, 2001.
- Chakrabarti, Dilip K. India: An Archaeological History: Palaeolithic Beginnings to Early Historic Foundations. 2nd ed. Oxford University Press, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198064121.001.0001>.
- Archaeological Survey of India. Indian Archaeology 1970-71, 1971-72, 1974-75, and 1982-83 - A Review. Government of India. Archive: <https://nmma.nic.in/nmma/IAReview.do>.
- Gombrich, Richard F. Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2006.
- Chakravarti, Uma. The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism. Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Jaini, Padmanabh S. The Jaina Path of Purification. University of California Press, 1979.
- Jacobi, Hermann, trans. Jaina Sutras, Part I: Acaranga Sutra and Kalpa Sutra. Sacred Books of the East, vol. 22. Clarendon Press, 1884.
- Schopen, Gregory. Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India. University of Hawai'i Press, 1997.
- Schopen, Gregory. Buddhist Monks and Business Matters: Still More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India. University of Hawai'i Press, 2004.
- Schopen, Gregory. Buddhist Nuns, Monks, and Other Worldly Matters: Recent Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India. University of Hawai'i Press, 2014.
- Collett, Alice, ed. Women in Early Indian Buddhism: Comparative Textual Studies. Oxford University Press, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199326044.001.0001>.
- Sujato, Bhikkhu. Bhikkhuni Vinaya Studies: Research and Reflections on Monastic Discipline for Buddhist Nuns. Santipada, 2012. <https://sujato.me/bvs.html>.

Additional sources for Chapter 10

- Hultzsch, E., ed. *Inscriptions of Asoka*. New edition. *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press for the Government of India, 1925.
- Falk, Harry. *Aśokan Sites and Artefacts: A Source-Book with Bibliography*. Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2006.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3403874>.
- Thapar, Romila. *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*. 3rd ed. Oxford University Press, 2012.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198077244.001.0001>.
- Lahiri, Nayanjot. *Ashoka in Ancient India*. Harvard University Press, 2015.
<https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674915237>.
- Salomon, Richard. *Indian Epigraphy: A Guide to the Study of Inscriptions in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and the Other Indo-Aryan Languages*. Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Fleet, J. F. *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors*. *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. 3. Calcutta: Government of India, 1888; Allahabad Prasasti, pp. 10-17. Digital record:
<https://zenodo.org/records/891412>.
- Siddham: The Asian Inscription Database. Allāhābād Praśasti of Samudragupta, IN00001, and Allāhābād Pillar object record.
<https://siddham.network/inscription/in00001/>.
- British Museum. Gold coin depicting Chandragupta I and Kumaradevi, MAR.1058.
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_MAR-1058.
- Li Rongxi, trans. *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*. Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1996.
- Deeg, Max. 'Chinese Buddhist Travelers: Faxian, Xuanzang, and Yijing.' *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, 2019.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.217>.
- Deeg, Max. 'Show Me the Land Where the Buddha Dwelled...' *China Report* 48, nos. 1-2 (2012). <https://doi.org/10.1177/000944551104800205>.
- Deeg, Max. 'Transcending Space: Buddhist Travelogues across Cultural and Other Borders.' Brill, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004549319_004.
- Archaeological Survey of India, Patna Circle. Monument records for Lauriya-Areraaj, Lauriya-Nandangarh, Rampurva, Kolhua/Vaishali, and associated protected sites. <https://asipatnacircle.gov.in/monuments-details>.

Additional sources for Chapter 11

- Sharma, Prayag Raj. "The Land System of the Licchavis in Nepal." *Kailash* 10 (1983): 11–62. <https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/items/e9dd7486-d005-42c8-a693-ae325ecff431>.
- Vajracharya, Gautamavajra. "Recently Discovered Inscriptions of Licchavi Nepal." *Kailash* 1, no. 2 (1973): 117–134.
- Vajracharya, Dhanavajra. *Licchavikālaka Abhilekha*. Kathmandu: Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies / Tribhuvan University, 1973.
- Malla, Kamal P. "Language and Society in Nepal: Historical Perspective." In *Nepal: Perspectives on Continuity and Change*, 1989.
- Rhodes, Nicholas G., Karl Gabrisch, and Carlo Valdettaro. *The Coinage of Nepal from the Earliest Times Until 1911*. Royal Numismatic Society, 1989.
- Michaels, Axel. *Nepal: A History from the Earliest Times to the Present*. Oxford University Press, 2024.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197650936.003.0005>.
- UNESCO World Heritage Centre. "Kathmandu Valley."
<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/121/>.
- Siddham: The Asian Inscription Database. Changu Narayana Pillar Inscription, east and north shafts.
<https://siddham.network/inscription/in02001/> ;
<https://siddham.network/inscription/in02002/>.
- Indoskript, University of Würzburg. "Cangu-Narayan inscription of Manadeva," ID 260.
<https://www.indoskript.phil.uni-wuerzburg.de/manuscripts/details/260>.

Additional sources for Chapter 12

- Bloch, Theodor. "Excavations at Basarh." *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report 1903-04*. Calcutta, 1906, 81-122.
- Bhandarkar, D. R., B. Ch. Chhabra, and G. S. Gai, eds. *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. III, revised edition. ASI, 1981.
- Sircar, D. C. "Copper-Plate Grants from Bihar." *Epigraphia Indica* 35 (1962-63): 124-139.
- Sahai, Bhagwant. *The Inscriptions of Bihar*. Ramanand Vidya Bhavan, 1983.
- Sircar, D. C. "Bangaon Plate of Vigrahapala III; Regnal Year 17." *Epigraphia Indica* 29 (1951-52): 48-57.
- DHARMA Project. "Bangaon Plate of Vigrahapāla III, year 17." *Bengal Charters* digital edition, revised 2026.
<https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00127>.
- Furui, Ryosuke. *Land and Society in Early South Asia: Eastern India 400-1250 AD*. Routledge, 2020.

- Chattopadhyaya, B. D. *The Making of Early Medieval India*. Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Datta, Swati. *Migrant Brāhmaṇas in Northern India: Their Settlement and General Impact, c. A.D. 475-1030*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1989.
- Sinha, C. P. N. "A Critical Evaluation of Sources for Identification of Gangeyadeva of Tirabhukti." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 35 (1974): 39-42.

Additional sources for Chapter 13 reconstruction and Chapter 14

- Petech, Luciano. *Mediaeval History of Nepal (c. 750-1482)*. 2nd ed. Serie Orientale Roma 54. IsMEO, 1984.
- Roerich, George N., trans. *Biography of Dharmasvāmin (Chag Lo Tsa-ba Chos-rje-dpal): A Tibetan Monk Pilgrim*. K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1959.
- Vidale, Massimo, C. Balista, and V. Torrieri. "A Test Trench Through the Fortifications of Simraongarh." *Ancient Nepal* 135 (1993): 10-21.
- Vidale, Massimo, and F. Lugli. "Excavations at Simraongarh: The Karnata Phase." In *Nepalese and Italian Contributions to the History and Archaeology of Nepal*. IsIAO, 1997, 97-118.
- Mishra, Vijayakanta. "Chronology of the Oiniwara Dynasty of Mithila." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 16 (1953): 200-210.
- Sircar, D. C. "Silver Coin of Bhairavasimha." *Epigraphia Indica* 32 (1957-58): 329-336.
- Choudhary, Radhakrishna. "The Bhagirathpur Inscription of Kansanārāyana Dated L.S. 403 (or 394?)." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 18 (1955): 161-164.
- Choudhary, Radhakrishna. *Mithilā in the Age of Vidyāpati*. Chowkhamba Orientalia, 1976.
- Jha, Pankaj. *A Political History of Literature: Vidyapati and the Fifteenth Century*. Oxford University Press, 2019.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199489558.001.0001>.
- Pant, Mahes Raj. "Six 15th- and 16th-Century Deeds from Tirhut Recording the Purchase of Slaves." In *Recht, Staat und Verwaltung im klassischen Indien*, edited by Bernhard Kölver, 159-194. Oldenbourg, 1997.
- Ahmad, Qeyamuddin. *Corpus of Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bihar, A.H. 640-1200*. K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1973.

Additional sources for Chapter 15 and book-wide attribution corrections

- Jha, Ramanath. *Vidyāpati. Makers of Indian Literature*. Sahitya Akademi, 1972; reprint 2017. The monograph follows the conventional one-Vidyāpati model but explicitly warns that multiple authors named

Vidyāpati, including more than one Thakur, survive and that name-based identification is hazardous.

Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura. *The Test of a Man, Being the Purusha-parīkshā of Vidyāpati Ṭhakkura*. Translated by George A. Grierson. Royal Asiatic Society, 1935.

Pandey, Anshuman. *Recasting the Brahmin in Medieval Mithila: Origins of Caste Identity among the Maithil Brahmins of North Bihar*. PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2014.

Thakur, Gajendra. “Two Vidyapatis: Some Legends and Some Facts—Bodhi Kayastha and Ugna Mahadev.” *Videha* 438, Parallel History section.

Videha. Parallel History / Panji pages on the c.1800 Śrottriya sub-caste reconstruction and digitized Panji evidence, www.videha.co.in.

Bhattacharya, Jogendra Nath. *Hindu Castes and Sects*. Thacker, Spink & Co., 1896. The work describes Srottriya among Maithil hypergamous groups while also saying Maithil Brahmins had no sub-castes, illustrating the instability of later classificatory vocabulary.

Additional sources for Chapter 16

Abu'l-Fazl. *The Ā'in-i Akbarī*, vol. 2. Translated by H. S. Jarrett. 2nd ed., corrected and further annotated by Jadunath Sarkar. Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1949.

Ansari, Tahir Hussain. *Mughal Administration and the Zamindars of Bihar*. Routledge / Manohar, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429331633>.

Ahmad, Qeyamuddin. “Origin and Growth of the Darbhanga Raj (1574-1666), Based on Some Contemporary and Unpublished Documents.” *Indian Historical Records Commission Proceedings* 36, pt. 2 (1961): 89-98.

Ahmad, Imtiaz. “Mughal Governors of Bihar under Akbar and Jahangir.” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 63 (2002): 281-288.

Ambashthya, B. P. “Some Farmans, Sanads, Nishans and Inscriptions in Bihar.” *Journal of the Bihar Research Society* 43, pts. 3-4 (1957): 215-239.

Grover, B. R. “Nature of Land-Rights in Mughal India.” *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 1 (1963-64): 1-23.

Grover, B. R. “Nature of Dehat-i-Taaluqa (Zamindari Villages) and the Evolution of the Taluqdari System During the Mughal Age.” *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 2 (1965): 259-288.

Dewey, Clive. “The History of Mithila and the Records of the Darbhanga Raj.” *Modern Asian Studies* 10, no. 3 (1976): 453-460.

Alam, Muzaffar. “Eastern India in the Early Eighteenth Century ‘Crisis’: Some Evidence from Bihar.” *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 28, no. 1 (1991): 43-70.

O'Malley, L. S. *Bengal District Gazetteers: Monghyr*. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1909; Byrne, J. F., *Bengal District Gazetteers: Bhagalpur*,

1911; O'Malley, L. S. S., *Bengal District Gazetteers: Purnea*, 1911. Used critically as later compilations of earlier administrative geography.

Additional sources for Chapter 17

- British Library. Robert Clive Papers, Mss Eur B373. Letter of 8 September 1765 concerning the grant of the *dīwānī* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.
- Government of Bengal. Bengal Regulation I of 1793 (Permanent Settlement), Proclamation dated 22 March 1793.
- Government of Bengal. Bengal Regulation VIII of 1793 (Decennial Settlement), 1 May 1793.
- Government of Bengal. Bengal Regulation XIV of 1793, revenue recovery and sale provisions; read with later revenue-sale legislation.
- Government of Bengal. Regulation XIX of 1793, revenue-free lands and registration/resumption rules.
- Government of India. Act XII of 1841 and Act I of 1845, Revenue Sale Law. Used to distinguish the later technical 'sunset' deadline from the 1793 principle of sale for arrears.
- Government of Bengal. The Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885 (Act VIII of 1885).
- House of Commons. Fifth Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company. 1812.
- Marshall, P. J. *Bengal: The British Bridgehead: Eastern India 1740-1828*. Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Travers, Robert. *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India: The British in Bengal*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Guha, Ranajit. *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement*. Duke University Press, 1996 [first published 1963].
- McLane, John R. *Land and Local Kingship in Eighteenth-Century Bengal*. Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Yang, Anand A. "An Institutional Shelter: The Court of Wards in Late Nineteenth-Century Bihar." *Modern Asian Studies* 13, no. 2 (1979): 247-264. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00008313>.
- Henningham, Stephen. "The Raj Darbhanga and the Court of Wards, 1860-1879: Managerial Reorganization and Elite Education." *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 19, nos. 3-4 (1982): 347-363. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001946468201900305>.
- Henningham, Stephen. "Bureaucracy and Control in India's Great Landed Estates: The Raj Darbhanga of Bihar, 1879 to 1950." *Modern Asian Studies* 17, no. 1 (1983): 35-57. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00008891>.
- Henningham, Stephen. "Agrarian Relations in North Bihar: Peasant Protest and the Darbhanga Raj, 1919-20." *Indian Economic & Social History*

Review 16, no. 1 (1979): 53-75.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/001946467901600103>.

Kerr, J. H. Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Darbhanga District, 1896 to 1903. Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1926.

Hamilton, Francis Buchanan. An Account of the District of Purnea in 1809-10. Bihar and Orissa Research Society, 1928.

Chakravartty, Aryendra. "An Elusive Quest for a Region: Darbhanga Raj, Caste and Language in Late Colonial India." *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 61, no. 1 (2024): 5-31.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00194646231220703>.

Thakur, Gajendra. A Parallel History of Maithili Literature. Videha - First Maithili Fortnightly eJournal, ISSN 2229-547X. Parallel History/Panji pages used for the c.1800 Śrotriya reconstruction.

Maharajadhiraj of Darbhanga v. Commissioner of Income-Tax, AIR 1924 Patna 474. The judgment records copies of Raja Madho Singh's 7 April 1800 application for Permanent Settlement of pargana Hati and associated documents.

Hitendra Singh v. Rameshur Singh, Calcutta High Court, 1 August 1913, Appeal from Original Decree No. 334 of 1909. Used for the recited 1807 babuana/revenue arrangement.

Additional sources for Chapter 18

Bengal (India). Indigo Commission. Report of the Indigo Commission Appointed Under Act XI. of 1860: With the Minutes of Evidence Taken Before Them; and Appendix. Calcutta, 1860.

Government of Bihar and Orissa. Bihar and Orissa Kamiauti Agreement Act, 1920.

Grierson, George A. Bihār Peasant Life: Being a Discursive Catalogue of the Surroundings of the People of that Province. Bengal Secretariat Press, 1885; 2nd rev. ed., Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1926.

Kerr, J. H. Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Darbhanga District, 1896 to 1903. Government printing edition, 1926.

Murphy, P. W. Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Bhagalpur District, 1902-1910. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1912.

Byrne, J. Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations under Chapter X of the Bengal Tenancy Act in the District of Purnea, 1901-1908. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1908.

Prasad, Ray Hardatta. Final Report on the Kosi Diara Survey and Settlement Operations in the Districts of Bhagalpur and Purnea, 1926-1931. Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1932.

O'Malley, L. S. S. Bengal District Gazetteers: Monghyr. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1909.

- Byrne, J. F. Bengal District Gazetteers: Bhagalpur. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1911.
- O'Malley, L. S. S. Bengal District Gazetteers: Purnea. Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1911.
- Yang, Anand A. The Limited Raj: Agrarian Relations in Colonial India, Saran District, 1793-1920. University of California Press, 1989.
- Prakash, Gyan. Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India. Cambridge University Press, 1990; reprint 2003.

Additional sources for Chapter 19

- Harrison, Henry Leland. The Bengal Embankment Manual: Containing an Account of the Action of the Government in Dealing with Embankments and Water-courses since the Permanent Settlement; a Discussion of the Principles of the Act of 1873. Bengal Secretariat Press, 1875.
- Government of Bengal. The Bengal Embankment Act, 1873 (Bengal Act VI of 1873), 24 December 1873.
- Bihar State Archives. Flood in Colonial Bihar (1871-1939): Selected Digitized Collection. Government of Bihar.
- Singh, Praveen. 'The Colonial State, Zamindars and the Politics of Flood Control in North Bihar (1850-1945).' *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 45, no. 2 (2008): 239-259.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/001946460804500203>.
- Bose, Nalinindra Lal. Final Report of Survey and Settlement Operations of the Kosi Diara Area of the District of Purnea, 1923-26. Government of Bihar and Orissa, 1927.
- Inglis, W. A. The Canals and the Flood Banks of Bengal. Bengal Secretariat Press, 1909.
- Inglis, W. A. A Review of the Legislation in Bengal Relating to Irrigation, Drainage and Flood Embankments. Bengal Secretariat Press, 1911.
- Government of India. Report of the Indian Famine Commission. Calcutta, 1880.
- East Central Railway. General Information: Founding of the Division - A Brief History. Official historical note on the Dalsinghsarai-Samastipur-Darbhanga famine line and Tirhut Railway.
- Dunn, J. A., J. B. Auden, A. M. N. Ghosh, S. C. Roy, and D. N. Wadia. The Bihar-Nepal Earthquake of 1934. *Memoirs of the Geological Survey of India*, vol. 73. Geological Survey of India, 1939.
- Brett, W. B. A Report on the Bihar Earthquake and on the Measures Taken in Consequence Thereof up to the 31st December 1934. Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1935.

Additional sources for Chapter 20

- Jha, Jata Shankar, ed. *Beginnings of Modern Education in Mithila: Selections from Educational Records, Darbhanga Raj, 1860-1930*. Historical Research Series 9. K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1972.
- Jha, Jata Shankar. *Education in Bihar, 1813-1859*. K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1979.
- Jha, Jata Shankar, general editor. *Early Revolutionary Movement in Bihar, 1906-1920*. Historical Research Series 16. K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1977.
- Government of India. *The Patna University Act, 1917 (Act XVI of 1917)*, brought into force 1 October 1917. Official text preserved by Patna University.
- Kamat, Devanand. "The Voice of Mithila Mihir: The Making of the Idea of Mithila." *Nidān: International Journal for Indian Studies* 8, no. 2 (2023): 31-44. Published 2024. <https://doi.org/10.58125/nidan.2023.2.24334>.
- Burghart, Richard. "A Quarrel in the Language Family: Agency and Representations of Speech in Mithila." *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 4 (1993): 761-804.
- Brass, Paul R. *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*. Cambridge University Press, 1974.
- Thakur, Ripunjay Kumar. "Migration, Exchange of Knowledge and Maithili Journalism in Rajasthan." *Rajasthan History Congress Proceedings* 35 (2021).
- Hutchins, Francis G. *India's Revolution: Gandhi and the Quit India Movement*. Harvard University Press, 1973.
- British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers. R. N. Lines papers relating to the Quit India movement in Darbhanga district, 1942, Mss Eur F346/2.
- Government of India, Ministry of Culture. Digital District Repository entries on the Bihar Provincial Conference at Bhagalpur (1920), the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, and the Quit India movement in Darbhanga; used as finding aids and checked against dated movement records where available.
- Thakur, Gajendra. *A Parallel History of Maithili Literature*. Videha — First Maithili Fortnightly eJournal, ISSN 2229-547X. Used for the volume's two-Vidyāpati framework and Panji-based c.1800 Śrotriya reconstruction.
- Bihar State Archives. Bihar and Orissa Political Special files concerning Non-Cooperation, Khilafat, student mobilization and district reports, 1920-22. Used through cited published studies and finding references; individual allegations treated as official perceptions unless corroborated.

British Library Archives and Manuscripts. R. N. Lines papers on the Quit India movement in Darbhanga district, 1942, Mss Eur F346/2.

Maithil Hit Sadhan, Mithila Moda, and Mithila Mihir. Early twentieth-century periodical traditions used through surviving issues and modern print-history studies; first-issue dates are reported with source discrepancies rather than forced precision.

Additional sources for Chapter 21

East India Company and Kingdom of Nepal. Treaty of Sugauli. Signed 2 December 1815; counterpart exchange recorded 4 March 1816. Public-domain treaty text in British Indian treaty collections.

British Government and Kingdom of Nepal. “Memorandum for the Approval and Acceptance of the Rajah of Nepal,” presented 8 December 1816, with Nepalese acceptance in December 1816. Supplementary Tarai boundary settlement.

Aitchison, C. U. A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries. Government of India, 1909 and later revised editions.

Ramakant. Indo-Nepalese Relations, 1816 to 1877. S. Chand, 1968.

Regmi, Mahesh C. Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal. 4 vols. Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1963–1968.

Regmi, Mahesh C. Landownership in Nepal. University of California Press, 1976.

Regmi, Mahesh C. Thatched Huts and Stucco Palaces: Peasants and Landlords in 19th-Century Nepal. Vikas, 1978.

Regmi, Mahesh C. An Economic History of Nepal, 1846–1901. Nath Publishing House, 1988.

Khatiwoda, Rajan, Simon Cubelic, and Axel Michaels. The Mulukī Ain of 1854: Nepal’s First Legal Code. Heidelberg University Publishing, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.17885/heiup.769>.

Gaige, Frederick H. Regionalism and National Unity in Nepal. University of California Press, 1975.

Government of Nepal, National Statistics Office. Historical notes on Nepal population censuses; first nationwide census 1911 and Rana-era censuses of 1911, 1920, 1930, and 1941.

Government of the United Kingdom and Government of Nepal. Treaty between the United Kingdom and Nepal. Signed Kathmandu, 21 December 1923. Treaty Series No. 31 (1925).

World Bank. A National Transport System for Nepal. Report, 1965. Sections on the Nepal Government Railway and Nepal–Janakpur–Jaynagar Railway.

- Government of Nepal, Ministry of Finance. Public Enterprises Annual Status Review / Yellow Book. Biratnagar Jute Mills entry: incorporation 1936.
- Terrenato, L., S. Shrestha, K. A. Dixit, et al. "Decreased Malaria Morbidity in the Tharu People Compared to Sympatric Populations in Nepal." *Annals of Tropical Medicine and Parasitology* 82, no. 1 (1988): 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00034983.1988.11812202>.
- Modiano, G., G. Morpurgo, L. Terrenato, et al. "Protection against Malaria Morbidity: Near-Fixation of the Alpha-Thalassemia Gene in a Nepalese Population." *American Journal of Human Genetics* 48, no. 2 (1991): 390–397.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. Selected Works, Second Series, vol. 2. Documents on the Biratnagar strike, Jogbani meeting, and Nepal, 1947; source records in the Nehru Archive.
- Joshi, Bhuwan Lal, and Leo E. Rose. *Democratic Innovations in Nepal: A Case Study of Political Acculturation*. University of California Press, 1966.
- Government of India and Government of Nepal. Treaty of Peace and Friendship. Signed Kathmandu, 31 July 1950; entered into force on signature. United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 94, No. 1302.
- National Statistics Office, Nepal. National Population and Housing Census historical documentation. Rana-era census results used with explicit limitations on concepts, field organization and published social categories.
- British Library, Endangered Archives Programme, Dirgha Man photographic collection. Catalogue record noting the 1927 opening of the Raxaul–Amlekhganj railway; used as corroborating infrastructure evidence.

Additional sources for Chapter 22

- Election Commission of India. Report on the First General Elections in India, 1951–52, Vol. I.
- Government of Bihar. Bihar Bhoodan Yagna Act, 1954.
- Government of Bihar. Bihar Land Reforms (Fixation of Ceiling Area and Acquisition of Surplus Land) Act, 1961, with amendments.
- Government of India. Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992.
- Government of India. Bihar Reorganisation Act, 2000.
- Government of Bihar. Bihar Panchayati Raj Act, 2006.
- Government of Nepal. Interim Government of Nepal Act, 1951.
- Government of Nepal. Constitution of Nepal, 1962.
- Government of Nepal. Lands Act, 2021 B.S. (1964).
- Government of Nepal. Constitution of Nepal, 2015.

Additional sources for Chapter 23

- International Organization for Migration (IOM). Baseline Study on Cross-border Migration. Kathmandu, 2023.
- International Organization for Migration (IOM). Nepal Cross-border Mobility Survey: Final Report. Kathmandu, 2023.
- National Statistics Office, Nepal. National Population and Housing Census 2021: Population Composition of Nepal. Thematic Report I. Government of Nepal.
- National Statistics Office, Nepal. National Population and Housing Census 2021: International Migration in Nepal. Thematic Report VI. Government of Nepal.
- Government of Nepal, Ministry of Labour and Employment, with International Labour Organization. Labour Migration for Employment: A Status Report for Nepal, 2013/2014. Kathmandu, 2014.
- Sijapati, Bandita. Analysis of Labour Market and Migration Trends in Nepal. International Labour Organization, 2015.
- Kumar, Rajeev. 'India–Nepal Open Border: Springboard for Opportunities.' *International Studies* 50, nos. 1–2 (2013): 165–183. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020881716654406>.
- Tripathi, Dhananjay. 'Influence of Borders on Bilateral Ties in South Asia: A Study of Contemporary India–Nepal Relations.' *International Studies* 56, nos. 2–3 (2019): 186–200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020881719851420>.
- Pandey, Krishna Prasad. 'The State and the Madheshi Dalit Women's Access to Citizenship in Nepal.' *Society and Culture in South Asia* 15, no. 1_suppl (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2455328X221122561>.
- Jnawali, Hari Har. 'Indian Intervention in Ethnic Movement of Nepal: Did Madheshi Lose or Gain?' *Ethnopolitics* 22 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687968221135943>.
- Behera, Anshuman, Gaurav Nayak, and Shyam Hari P. 'Making Sense of Nepal's Nationalism: Implications for the India–Nepal Relationship.' *India Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (2024): 55–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09749284231225825>.
- Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs. Annual Report 2022. Sections on India–Nepal rail links and Integrated Check Posts.
- Government of India, Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Memorandum / arrangements associated with the India–Nepal Treaty of Transit, dated 1 June 2023.
- Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs. COVID-19 archive: restriction on international passenger traffic through land check posts, 14 March 2020.

Additional sources for Chapter 24

- Government of India. The Constitution (Ninety-second Amendment) Act, 2003. Gazette of India, Extraordinary, Part II, Section 1, 8 January 2004; presidential assent 7 January 2004.
- Government of India. The Constitution of India. Legislative Department, updated official text; especially Part XVII and the Eighth Schedule.
- Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. Census of India 2011, C-16: Population by Mother Tongue, India and Bihar tables.
- Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. Lok Sabha Starred Question No. 292, 16 March 2021, annexure on Scheduled Languages by speaker strength, Census 2011.
- Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. Linguistic Survey of India: Bihar. Government of India, 2023 digital edition.
- Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. Gazette Notification S.O. 2681(E), 16 June 2025, declaring Census 2027.
- Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs. Census-2027 digital tools and implementation releases, March 2026.
- Sahitya Akademi. Akademi Awards: Maithili (since 1966), official award list.
- Patna High Court. Chandra Mohan Jha v. State of Bihar & Ors., LPA No. 742 of 2011, judgment 8 April 2013; records establishment of Maithili Academy in 1976.
- Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development. Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 6649, 16 May 2012, Maithili Academy and university teaching.
- Bihar Legislative Assembly. Proceedings, 11 March 2025, reply on sanctioned and working staff in state language academies, including Maithili and Angika academies.
- Education Department, Government of Bihar. Notifications concerning Maithili Academy and Bihar Angika Academy, 2018.
- Government of Jharkhand. Bihar Rajbhasha (Jharkhand Amendment) Ordinance, 2018. Jharkhand Gazette (Extraordinary), 14 July 2018; notification dated 21 June 2018.
- Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs. 'Inclusion of Languages in Eighth Schedule,' 26 July 2016.
- National Education Policy 2020. Ministry of Education, Government of India, para. 4.11 on home/mother/local/regional language in schooling.
- Government of Nepal. Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Articles 6-7. Nepal Law Commission.
- National Statistics Office, Nepal. Language in Nepal: National Population and Housing Census 2021, Thematic Report XI. Government of Nepal, 2025.

Government of Nepal. Nepal Statistical Year Book 2023, table on population by mother tongue and province.

Madhesh Province Government. Madhesh Province Profile, official data portal, language distribution table.

Unicode Consortium. The Unicode Standard, Version 7.0.0, released 16 June 2014; Tirhuta block U+11480-U+114DF.

Pandey, Anshuman. Proposal to Encode the Tirhuta Script in ISO/IEC 10646. ISO/IEC JTC1/SC2/WG2 N4035, 5 May 2011.

Thakur, Gajendra. A Parallel History of Maithili Literature. Videha - First Maithili Fortnightly eJournal, ISSN 2229-547X. Used for the volume's two-Vidyapati framework and parallel-history approach to classification claims.

Additional sources for Chapter 25

Archer, William G. 'Maithil Painting.' *Marg* 3 (1949): 24-33.

Archer, Mildred. Indian Popular Painting in the India Office Library. Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1977.

British Museum. Collection record 2000,1012,0.4: kohbar painting by Baua Devi, dated 1965-1972; acquired by donor from Bihar State Emporium, Delhi, in 1972.

Davis, Coralynn V. 'Collaborative Scholarship and the Politics of Participation: Linking Expressive Arts and Social Change in Mithila.' *Asian Ethnology* 85, no. 1 (2026).

Fleury, Helene. 'Mithila Painting and Feminism in the 1970s: Constructing Women Painters as Heroines of Western Vanguard Journals.' *Asian Ethnology* 85, no. 1 (2026).

Heinz, Carolyn Brown. 'Documenting the Image in Mithila Art.' *Visual Anthropology Review* 22, no. 2 (2006): 5-33.
<https://doi.org/10.1525/var.2006.22.2.5>.

Intellectual Property India, Geographical Indications Registry. Application No. 37, 'Madhubani Paintings': filed 22 August 2005; certificate no. 31 dated 16 May 2007; applicant Director of Industries, Bihar.

Jain, Jyotindra. Ganga Devi: Tradition and Expression in Mithila Painting. Mapin, 1997.

Jayakar, Pupul. The Earthen Drum: An Introduction to the Ritual Arts of Rural India. National Museum, 1980; later editions cited in scholarship.

National Crafts Museum and Hastkala Academy. Abhivyakti: Mithila Painting. Government of India, 2015.

Princeton University Library, Graphic Arts Collection. 'Mithila Art in 2020: Life, Labor, and COVID-19 in South Asia,' collection program and webinar documentation, 2021.

- Richman, Paula. 'The Cultural Politics of Classifying Mithila Painting.' *Asian Ethnology* 85, no. 1 (2026).
- Singh, Neha, Sana Moid, Mita Mehta, and Priti Saxena. 'Empowering Women Artisans in Madhubani Painting: Navigating Digital Challenges for Long-Term Viability.' *Vision* (online first, 21 August 2024). <https://doi.org/10.1177/09722629241259886>.
- Szanton, David L. 'The Politics of Mithila Painting.' In *India's Mithila Painting*, edited by Paula Richman and David L. Szanton. University of Washington Press, 2025.
- Szanton, David, and Malini Bakshi. *Mithila Painting: The Evolution of an Art Form*. Ethnic Arts Foundation, 2007.
- Government of India. Gazette of India, Padma Awards notification, 1975: Jagdamba Devi, Madhubani Paintings, Madhubani, Bihar.
- Government of India. Gazette of India, Padma Awards notification, 1981: Sita Devi, Painter, Madhubani, Bihar.
- Janakpur Women's Development Center. Institutional history and fact sheet: Janakpur Women's Art Project begun in 1989; registered under the present name in 1992; Kuwa, Janakpur, Nepal.
- British Council Cultural Protection Fund. 'Preserving Maithil women's art in Nepal.' Project documentation on Janakpur Women's Development Center and Maithil mud-art heritage.
- University of Washington Press. Publisher record for *India's Mithila Painting*, edited by Paula Richman and David L. Szanton, April 2025; 368 pages, 96 color illustrations, 2 maps.
- Asian Ethnology* 85, no. 1 (2026). Special-issue scholarship on Mithila, including Paula Richman, Helene Fleury, and Coralynn V. Davis.
- Chazen Museum of Art. *Mithila Painting: The Evolution of an Art Form*. Exhibition, 14 September-1 December 2013; organized by the Ethnic Arts Foundation.

Additional sources for Chapter 26

- Government of India and Government of Nepal. Agreement on the Kosi Project. Kathmandu, 25 April 1954. Reproduced in *India Bilateral Treaties and Agreements*, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.
- Government of India and Government of Nepal. Revised Agreement concerning the Kosi Project. Kathmandu, 19 December 1966. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/LegalTreatiesDoc/NP66B1487.pdf>.
- Government of India, Ministry of Jal Shakti. 'Bilateral Mechanism for Flood Mitigation with Nepal.' Parliamentary information/Press Information Bureau, 19 December 2022.

- Government of India, Ministry of Jal Shakti. Standing Committee and departmental records on India-Nepal flood-management mechanisms, Kosi High Level Committee, and border-area maintenance, 2024-26.
- Government of India, Lok Sabha. Answer to Unstarred Question 3061 on the Western Kosi Embankment breach and Kosi Barrage discharge, 2025.
- Government of Bihar, Water Resources Department. Flood bulletins and River Discharge Dashboard, including Kosi/Barakhshetra and Birpur Barrage observations for 2024-26.
- Government of Bihar, Water Resources Department, Flood Management Improvement Support Centre. Kosi Flood Forecasting and Early Warning System; Flood Management Information System documentation and technical programme records.
- Mishra, Dinesh Kumar. 'Life Within the Kosi Embankments.' *Water Nepal* 10, no. 1 (2003): 277-301.
- National Disaster Management Authority. National Disaster Management Guidelines: Management of Floods. Government of India, 2008.
- Nepal, Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation. Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve official profile and management documentation.
- Nepal, Department of Water Resources and Irrigation. Records of the Nepal-India Joint Committee on Kosi and Gandak Projects, including the eleventh meeting, 2026.
- Sahani, Ranjeet Kumar, Shrinivas Badiger, Abhishek Samrat, and Siddhartha Krishnan. 'Flood Frequency and Flood Intensity Changes in the Post Embankment Period in the Kosi Sub-basin India: Impact of Location, Caste, and Class on the Flood Vulnerability of the Marginal Communities.' *Frontiers in Water* 5 (2023): 1017945. <https://doi.org/10.3389/frwa.2023.1017945>.
- Singh, Praveen, Nilanjan Ghose, Nitin Chaudhary, and Regina Hansda. *Life in the Shadow of Embankments: Turning Lost Lands into Assets in the Koshi Basin of Bihar, India*. International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.53055/ICIMOD.507>.
- Sinha, Rajiv. 'The Great Avulsion of Kosi on 18 August 2008.' *Current Science* 97, no. 3 (2009): 429-433.
- Sinha, R., K. Sripriyanka, Vikrant Jain, and Malay Mukul. 'Avulsion Threshold and Planform Dynamics of the Kosi River in North Bihar (India) and Nepal: A GIS Framework.' *Geomorphology* 216 (2014): 157-170. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geomorph.2014.03.035>.
- World Bank. Bihar Kosi Flood Recovery Project: Project Appraisal, Needs Assessment, Owner-Driven Housing Reconstruction, and Implementation Completion and Results documentation, 2010-2018.
- World Bank. Bihar Kosi Basin Development Project: Environmental and Social Management Framework, Implementation Status and Results

Reports, and Implementation Completion and Results documentation, 2015-2025.

Yojana. 'Kosi Progress.' September 29, 1963, p. 27. Publications Division, Government of India.

Bihar Water Resources Department. Basin-wise Flood Prone & Protected Area. Official basin statistics; used with caution because 'protected area' does not mean zero residual flood or drainage risk.

Government of India, Press Information Bureau. 'Agreement To Build Bridges.' 31 March 2022. Summary of India-Nepal Kosi/Gandak agreements and bilateral water mechanisms.

Government of India, Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation. Annual and organizational reports on JCWR, JSTC, JCIFM, JCKGP and Kosi High Level Committee arrangements.

Nepal, Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation. Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve & Buffer Zone Management Plan, current planning cycle.

Additional sources for Chapter 27

Constitution of Nepal. 2015, as amended in 2016 and 2020. Nepal Law Commission, official English text.

Nepal Citizenship Act, 2063 (2006), as amended through the First Amendment authenticated 31 May 2023 and Second Amendment authenticated 21 September 2025. Nepal Law Commission / Government of Nepal.

Office of the President of Nepal. Notice authenticating the Nepal Citizenship Act amendment, 31 May 2023.

Office of the President of Nepal. Bill Authentication Notice: amendment to the Nepal Citizenship Act, 21 September 2025.

National Statistics Office, Nepal. National Population and Housing Census 2021: National Report. Government of Nepal.

Madhesh Province Government. Madhesh Province Profile, official data portal; population, language, literacy, and local-level indicators.

Madhesh Province Policy and Planning Commission. Second Periodic Plan, FY 2081/82-2085/86.

Madhesh Provincial Assembly. Official institutional profile and legislative records.

Election Commission Nepal. Report on the results of the 2026 House of Representatives election, including inclusive-category distribution.

Madhesi Commission. Annual reports, Madhesh Profile 2081, and studies on access of Madhesi communities to state mechanisms.

- Gellner, David N., Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, and John Whelpton, eds. *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom*. Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997.
- Lawoti, Mahendra, and Susan Hangen, eds. *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nepal: Identities and Mobilization after 1990*. Routledge, 2012/2013.
- Gellner, David N. 'Masters of Hybridity: How Activists Reconstructed Nepali Society.' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 25, no. 2 (2019): 265-284.
- Hachhethu, Krishna. *Nation-Building and Federalism in Nepal: Contentions on Framework*. Oxford University Press, 2023.
- Jha, Kalpana. *The Madhesi Upsurge and the Contested Idea of Nepal*. Springer, 2017.
- Pandey, Krishna Prasad. 'Ethnic Politics, Madheshi Uprisings and the Question of Citizenship in Nepal.' *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 57, no. 1 (2022): 3-18; first published online 2021.
- Pandey, Krishna Prasad. 'The State and the Madheshi Dalit Women's Access to Citizenship in Nepal.' *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, 2023.
- International Crisis Group. *Nepal's Divisive New Constitution: An Existential Crisis*. Asia Report No. 276, 4 April 2016.
- Human Rights Watch. 'Like We Are Not Nepali': Protest and Police Crackdown in the Terai Region of Nepal. 16 October 2015.
- Shakya, Prabindra. 'Nepal's Federalization Process and the Challenge of Accommodating Minority Demands.' *ConstitutionNet*, 31 January 2017.
- Karna, Mohan. 'Nepal-India Boundary Dispute and the Reignition of Minority Demands for Constitutional Reform.' *ConstitutionNet*, 1 July 2020.
- INSEC. *Nepal Human Rights Year Book 2026*. Informal Sector Service Centre, 2026.
- Madhesh Province Government / Provincial Assembly. Records concerning the January 2025 official-language bill and its withdrawal after objections over excluded languages.

Methodological sources for Chapter 28

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised ed. Verso, 1991.
- Bloch, Marc. *The Historian's Craft*. Translated by Peter Putnam. Manchester University Press, 1954.
- Carr, E. H. *What Is History?* Macmillan, 1961.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*. Translated by John and Anne C. Tedeschi. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

- Guha, Ranajit. *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*. Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Scott, James C. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press, 1998.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Beacon Press, 1995.

Index

Page locators refer to the final 6 x 9 hardback pagination. Broad subjects occurring throughout substantial portions of the book are marked *passim*.

Persons and dynasties

Abu'l-Fazl	299-301, 304, 322
Ajatasattu	111, 113, 128, 143
Akbar	298-299, 301, 310-312, 322, 620
Ambapali / Amrapali	114, 116, 144, 146, 148
Amsuvarman	183, 190-191, 194, 196, 200, 617, 642
Ashoka / Piyadasi	161-164, 167-168, 176-177, 180, 641
Asutosh Mookerjee	399
Aurangzeb	312-313, 620
B. P. Koirala	452
Bhairavasimha	255, 258, 261, 269-270, 273, 626
Bimbisara	128, 135-137, 143
Candesvara	230, 237, 242, 289, 626
Chandragupta I	169, 180, 188
Cornwallis	333, 337
Dharmadeva	183-184
Dharnidhar	408
Darpanarayana	258, 269
Faxian	121, 172-173, 175-176, 178-180, 618-619, 641
Gargi	76-79, 83, 617
Gangeyadeva	219-220, 224, 619
George A. Grierson	282, 296, 356, 364, 399, 478
Ghiyath al-Din Tughluq	237, 249
Gotama Rahugana	68-69, 83
Govindagupta	205-206, 619
Harishena	169, 641
Harisimhadeva	227, 232, 237, 246, 249, 626
Ibrahim Shah Sharqi	254, 267, 626
Jang Bahadur Rana	424-425, 628
Janaka	73-76, 78-80, 83, 85, 88-93, 100-102, 123, 223, 596, 617-618, 635
Jayadeva II	201-202
Jishnugupta	191, 197
Jivagupta	209, 224, 619, 643
Jyotirisvara Thakura	230

Kameshwar Singh 444, 455-456, 487, 624, 629
 Kamesvara Thakura 252
 Kansanarayana 260, 270, 273
 Karpoori Thakur 449, 624, 630
 Kirtisimha 254, 266-267, 273, 282, 626
 King Mahendra 452, 556, 624
 King Tribhuvan 438
 Kumaradevi 169, 180, 188, 618
 Lakshmishwar Singh 340-341
 Licchavis of Vaishali 203, 642
 Madhav / Madho Singh 246, 291, 330-331, 336, 338, 355, 620-621, 627
 Mahapajapati Gotami 144-145, 640
 Mahavira 105, 116, 130, 137, 139, 144, 146, 150, 152-153, 158, 619, 640
 Mahesh Thakur 305, 310-312
 Mahinath Thakur 312-313, 620
 Mahipala I 220
 Maitreyi 73, 77-79, 83, 617
 Mahakavi Vidyapati 230, 243, 254-256, 261, 263, 265, 268, 273-289, 292-
 296, 405-406, 416, 489, 596, 602, 619
 Manadeva 182-185, 188, 197, 199, 203, 617, 619, 642-643
 Narapat / Nirpat Thakur 313
 Narayanapala 209, 212, 217, 224, 619, 643
 Narendradeva 201
 Nanyadeva 224, 227-228, 236, 238, 250, 626
 Narasimha 259, 269, 273, 626
 Nusrat Shah 264, 272
 Oiniwar dynasty 260
 Rajendra Prasad 408
 Rama 86, 88, 90, 92-97, 99-100, 102, 499, 570, 635
 Ramasimhadeva 229, 235-236, 241, 626
 Rameshwar Singh 330, 403-404, 500, 623
 Rajyavati 183-184, 617
 Samudragupta 169-170, 179-180, 187-188, 618, 641
 Shah Alam II 324
 Sita 80, 85-97, 99-102, 124, 499, 506, 513, 520, 570, 596, 618, 630, 635, 640
 Sonadanda 127-128, 136, 140
 Sundar Thakur 312
 Swami Sahajanand Saraswati 410
 Swami Vidyanand 344, 622
 Valmiki 92, 103

Vassakara	111-113
Videgha Mathava	68-69, 83, 617
Vidyapati Thakkura	230, 243, 254-256, 261, 263, 265, 268, 274, 276, 280-286, 289, 292-296, 405, 489, 596
Vigrahapala III	209, 213, 216, 220, 225, 619, 643-644
Vinoba Bhawe	446, 647
Warren Hastings	326
Xuanzang	121, 165, 172-180, 200, 618-619, 641
Yajñavalkya	74-75, 77-79, 83, 617
Yogendra Mishra	106, 144

Places and regions

Amlekhganj	431, 628, 646
Anga	2-3, 8-12, 38-39, 126-128, 137-138, 301-302, 361-362, 588-589, 613-614, 617-618
Ayodhya	88, 467
Bagmati	6-7, 48, 53, 372-373, 377, 599
Basarh / Vaishali	8-9, 115-122, 143-144, 149-151, 155-156, 165-166, 171-173, 175-176, 178-179, 187-189, 205-209, 224-225, 618-619, 635-636, 641-642
Bhagalpur	11-12, 127-128, 137-138, 216-217, 301-302, 317-318, 321-322, 361-362, 369-370, 487-488, 622-623
Bhagirathpur	253, 260, 265, 269-270, 273, 627
Biratnagar	435-436, 440, 459, 465, 625, 629, 632, 647-648
Birgunj	431, 438, 459, 465, 568, 570, 577, 581, 608, 624-625, 628, 632, 646, 648
Campa / Champa	2-3, 8, 11, 17, 126-137, 139-140, 150, 156, 302, 595, 617-618, 635
Champanagar	132, 137, 608, 617, 635
Changu Narayan	182-185, 199, 203, 617, 619, 642
Chirand	20-28, 30-34, 43, 617
Darbhangha	304-307, 309-311, 313-314, 318-322, 329-333, 337-348, 351-353, 367-368, 381-382, 386-387, 403-405, 408-410, 443-444, 620-623, 627-629
Dalsinghsarai	381, 621, 628
Gandak / Narayani	53-55, 57-58, 71-72, 372-373, 420-421
Ganga corridor	2, 11, 263, 298, 308, 351, 361-362, 369, 387
Harpur Basant	120
Himalayan foreland	5, 48, 54, 56, 64-65, 167, 179
Janakpur	85-87, 96-98, 100-103, 466-467, 514-515
Janakpurdham	570, 581, 584, 633, 635, 638
Jaunpur	237, 252, 254-256, 263, 267, 272, 597, 626

Jogbani 436, 459, 465, 629, 632
 Kailasakutabhavana 190, 642
 Kandaha 253, 259-261, 269, 273, 626
 Kathmandu Valley 170, 179, 182, 185, 187, 189, 196, 199, 202, 227-228, 232, 617, 642
 Katra 209-210, 216, 218, 221-222, 224, 619, 643
 Kolhua 121, 161, 165-166, 171-172, 179, 618, 641
 Kosi basin 524, 544, 547, 632, 634, 653
 Kosi diara 351, 362, 370, 379, 391, 623
 Kosi megafan 64-65, 221, 525, 552, 652
 Koshi Tappu 541, 653
 Kundagrama 116, 150
 Lauriya-Areraaj 161-162, 164, 166, 618, 641
 Lauriya-Nandargarh 161-162, 164, 166, 618, 641-642
 Madhesh 452-453, 459-460, 486-487, 554-556, 558-562, 564-573, 575-585, 604-606, 631-636
 Madhesh Province 486, 554-555, 569-572, 576, 579, 583-584, 605-606, 633-635, 638
 Managrha 190, 642
 Mithila 2-652 passim
 Morang 302-303, 313, 318-319, 321, 463, 620, 647
 Mudgagiri / Munger 212-213, 298-299, 301-302, 308, 313, 317-318, 320-321, 351, 361, 364, 413, 478, 488, 619-620, 649
 Muzaffarpur 209, 345, 369, 378, 382, 387, 413, 451, 643
 Nathnagar 132, 635
 Naya Muluk 423, 628, 645
 Oini 252-253
 Pataligama 112-113
 Patna 42-43, 118-121, 164-167, 308-310, 317-318, 331-332, 621-622
 Pava / Pavapuri 150, 156
 Prayaga / Allahabad pillar 169-170, 178, 180, 641
 Purnea 298, 302, 304, 313, 318, 320-321, 345, 351, 361-362, 364, 369-370, 377, 379, 391, 451, 622-623
 Raja Vishal ka Garh 117-119, 122, 124
 Rampurva 161-162, 165-166, 618, 641-642
 Raxaul 431, 459, 465, 568, 624, 628, 632, 646
 Raxaul-Birgunj corridor 632
 Samastipur 381-382, 449, 451, 621, 628
 Simraongarh 227-228, 231, 233-234, 236-241, 244, 247-250, 253, 383, 608, 636
 Sonapur 43

Sugauna 252-253
 Tarai 12-15, 52-54, 59-60, 227-229, 238-239, 421-424, 426-435, 439-440, 452-454, 459-460, 627-629, 645-646
 Tirhut 9-11, 258-259, 298-301, 304-305, 308-310, 312-313, 320-321, 376-377, 620-622, 626-628
 Vaishali 8-9, 115-122, 143-144, 149-151, 155-156, 165-166, 171-173, 175-176, 178-179, 187-189, 635-636, 641-642
 Vajji 2-3, 8-11, 13-14, 105-106, 122-124, 588-589, 613-614
 Vesali 3, 17, 105-106, 113-114, 116, 144-146, 148, 150, 618, 636, 640
 Videha 9-11, 68-69, 71-77, 80-83, 88-89, 105-106, 122-123, 334-335, 617-618

Institutions and themes

archaeobotany 34
 archaeological method 239
 archive silence 604
 aripan 502, 651
 artification 652
 atthakulaka 106, 123, 635
 avulsion 7, 45, 53, 56-57, 61, 65, 374, 379, 524-527, 536, 545, 549, 552, 599-600, 652
 barrage 389, 524, 528-531, 533, 535, 542, 545, 549-550, 552, 629-630, 633, 652-653
 Bengal Embankment Act 1873 375, 390-391, 621
 Bengal Tenancy Act 1885 348, 352, 354, 370
 bhitti-citra 501, 651
 Bhoodan 446-447, 455-456, 624, 629, 647
 black-and-red ware (BRW) 36, 41, 133, 638
 border 12-13, 97-100, 419-423, 430-433, 435-439, 458-471, 473-475, 514-516, 581-583, 588-589, 604-605, 627-628, 632-633, 647-649
 borderland method 98, 473, 584
 Buddhism 81, 139-140, 142, 147-148, 154, 157-159, 162-163, 176, 178, 197, 200
 cadastral survey 170, 340, 350
 Calcutta University 399, 480, 622, 625
 caste 32-651 passim
 ceramic chronology 133
 citizenship 13-14, 452-453, 460-461, 474-475, 554-556, 558-559, 563-565, 568-571, 573-585, 603-608, 629-633, 647-648
 citizenship by descent 564, 638
 claim control 594, 597
 connected history 199, 302, 370, 391, 588, 596, 604, 609

constitutional commissions 576, 584
 constitutional vocabulary 109
 corporate polity 107, 124, 595, 618
 Court of Wards 338, 340-342, 348, 396, 621, 644
 craft specialization 45, 134, 221
 critical edition 87-88, 91, 103, 259-260, 275, 618, 640
 cultural economy 499, 503, 513, 519-521, 577, 652
 digital preservation 612
 diara 351, 362, 370, 373, 379, 391, 623
 drainage congestion 373, 540, 549, 600, 653
 early iron 36
 embankment 372-377, 389-391, 527-528, 532-533, 535-536, 538-542, 544-545, 547-550, 628-630, 632-633
 environmental history 45, 64, 390, 411, 551, 612
 epigraphy 8, 147, 157, 180, 186, 196, 199, 225, 269
 floods 48, 300, 363, 376-378, 380, 388, 408, 470, 524, 527, 541-542, 552, 609
 FMISC 538-539, 544, 548-549, 653
 food production 20, 28, 31
 fortification 43-44, 49-50, 113, 117-120, 128-129, 132-133, 137-138, 228, 235-236, 240, 248, 318
 gana-sangha 107, 110, 122, 595, 635
 geographical indication (GI) 510, 514, 651
 Gramdan 447
 guthi 193, 202, 427, 452, 642, 646
 historical geography 2, 8, 57, 71, 82, 117, 131, 137, 175, 196, 223, 229, 233, 239, 241, 252
 historical region 2-3, 8, 14, 122, 292, 560, 589
 India-Nepal Kosi Agreement 529
 Integrated Check Posts 466, 475
 iron working 39, 41, 45, 591, 617, 639
 jagir 298, 306, 427, 452, 646
 Jainism 81, 139-140, 142, 154, 158, 176
 Janakpur Women's Development Center 514-515, 631, 652
 Kosi-FFEWS 539, 653
 kohbar ghar 502, 651
 land reform 443, 446-447, 453, 455-456, 624, 647
 language census 650
 language recognition 416, 477, 489, 494, 572, 650
 Maithil Mahasabha 403, 417, 622
 Maithili language 344, 412, 480, 584, 650

markets 243-244, 262-263, 350-351, 360-362, 369-370, 383-384, 429-431, 464-465, 473-474, 517-518, 588-589, 598-599, 607-608
 Madhesh movement 559, 584, 631
 Madheshi identity 569, 576
 Madhesi Commission 572, 579, 584, 633, 638
 megafan 56-57, 64-65, 221, 525-526, 549, 552, 639, 652
 methodological nationalism 607
 migration 7-652 passim
 Mithila Mihir 402, 412, 417, 622
 mother-tongue education 486
 Muluki Ain 425, 433, 440, 628, 646
 naturalized citizenship 575, 638
 Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) 36, 38, 42, 50, 120, 133, 636
 Non-Cooperation 408-410, 622-623
 official languages 482, 484, 486, 563, 583-584
 open border 431, 437, 458-459, 461, 468-469, 475, 581, 647-648
 Painted Grey Ware (PGW) 41, 50, 639
 Panchayati Raj 450-452, 454-456, 624, 631, 647
 Panji / Panji Prabandha 231-232, 245-246, 290-291, 296, 316, 322, 333-337, 344, 346-347, 355, 404, 425, 449, 492, 597, 621, 627, 644-645
 periodization 3, 15, 237, 271
 Permanent Settlement 326-328, 330-339, 346-348, 374-375, 426-427, 620-621, 644-646
 pilgrimage 2-4, 12-14, 85-88, 96-100, 149-150, 156-158, 360-361, 383-384, 419-420, 466-467, 588-589
 proportional inclusion 567, 580, 584, 631-632, 638
 provenance 4, 13, 15-16, 26, 46, 102, 198, 299, 507, 512, 517, 591, 594, 610, 612-614, 651
 public history 122, 611
 Quit India 413, 623
 raikar 426, 452, 646
 Rana regime 432, 436, 646
 relic cult 121, 149
 remote sensing 62, 538, 548-549, 653
 residual risk 550, 653
 revenue 2-646 passim
 sacred geography 2-614 passim
 sand casting 373, 534, 541, 653
 Sahitya Akademi 274, 276, 296, 480, 485, 488, 495-497, 625, 650
 scale 13-14, 47-48, 161-162, 252-253, 300-301, 352-353, 376-377, 396-398, 459-460, 549-550

Second Buddhist Council 116, 151, 618
 second urbanization 47, 639
 source criticism 116, 178, 252, 613
 Srotriya classification 232, 245-246, 290-292, 296, 316, 333-335, 337, 344, 346-347, 354, 367, 404, 416, 449, 597, 621, 627, 645
 survey bias 63
 taphonomy / site formation 7, 29, 58, 62, 248
 Tirhuta / Mithilakshar 219, 269, 400, 489-490, 496, 602, 625, 650
 two Vidyapatis 230, 274, 276, 596
 Unicode 490, 493, 495-497, 602, 611, 625, 650
 universal adult franchise 448, 624
 Vinaya 116, 141, 144-145, 148, 151, 155, 158, 173, 618, 640
 visual evidence 233, 610
 Vivah Panchami 97-98, 102-103
 wetlands 20, 22, 37, 45, 52, 55, 57, 59, 61, 363, 385, 419, 525, 542, 548, 652
 zamindari 312-314, 329-330, 345-346, 368-369, 443-445
 zamindari abolition 444, 452, 455, 598, 607, 629

Sources and texts

Acaranga Sutra 138, 141, 159
 Bihar Land Reforms Act 443-444, 455-456, 623-624, 647
 Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 68, 73, 78, 83, 88, 617
 Census of India 2011 497
 Changu Narayan inscription 619
 Constitution of Nepal 2015 453, 456, 486, 585, 648
 Digha Nikaya 16 / Mahaparinibbana Sutta 105, 107-108, 111, 114, 124, 129, 146
 district gazetteers 15, 138, 299, 304, 322, 345, 370, 377, 417
 Indian Archaeology - A Review 50, 132, 136
 Kalpa Sutra 130-131, 138, 159
 Kandaha inscription 261, 269
 Linguistic Survey of India 399, 417, 478, 497, 615, 625
 Major Pillar Edicts 161-164, 641-642
 Muluki Ain 425, 433, 440, 628, 646
 Nepal NPHC 2021 473, 495
 Ramayana 85-88, 90-95, 97, 99-100, 102-103, 219, 618-619, 640
 Rajanitiratnakara 230
 Satapatha Brahmana 68-69, 71, 73, 83, 617
 Therigatha 145
 Treaty of Peace and Friendship 1950 424, 473, 647

Treaty of Sugauli 12-13, 420, 423, 440, 621, 627
Vaisali Excavations 1950 124
Vaisali Excavations 1958-1962 124
Varnaratnakara 230, 242, 279, 287

A PARALLEL HISTORY OF MITHILA & MAITHILI LITERATURE

HISTORY OF MITHILA, VAJJI & ANGA IN INDIA & NEPAL

EXPLORE VIDEHA

Scan either code to visit the digital collections



VIDEHA

<https://www.videha.co.in/>



VIDEHA E-JOURNAL

<https://videha-ejournal.github.io/videha/>

MITHILA • VAJJI • ANGA

INDIA • NEPAL

GAJENDRA THAKUR

HISTORY AND LITERATURE IN PARALLEL