

Maithil Mobility: Why Chapbooks Travelled in and out of Colonial Mithila

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1. On the Mobility of Maithili chapbooks:

That chapbooks are mobile is already a foregone conclusion among the historians of the book. Such a view seems genuinely common sensical. After all, most chapbooks are small, light and inexpensive. Historically, too, one may argue that the term ‘chapbook’—contrary to its uncanny resemblance with the Persian word for printing (*chāp*)—originated in eighteenth-century England as a commercial term for cheap books that were sold by travelling hawkers and pedlars, who were collectively referred to as ‘chapmen.’¹ If chapbooks were immobile and undesirable commodities, the chapmen wouldn’t have bothered to sell them at all.

Where money flows, there counterfeits abound. As early as 1738, one of the Dutch printers alerted their English customers about the circulation of some forged chapbooks attributed to them. To assist their future buyers into recognizing their original chapbooks from the fake ones, they printed a notice on their title page. This notice constitutes one of the earliest attested records of the cross-cultural currency and popularity of the term chapbook, as well as the transregional mobility of chapbooks as profitable commodities.

‘Honourable Purchaser,—Be aware when in quest of my CHAP BOOKS, issued from the place where I do my business, that you take a view of the Sign over my Door, & of the Painted creatures & figures which represent the venders of my Articles in London City. My emblem of trade is represented below on this Title-page.’²

With the male literacy levels rising in the society, there was a growing demand for street literature. To make the most of this demand, printers banked on the readily procurable low-quality paper, the crude and reusable woodcut illustrations, the discardable paper wrappers for covers, and a few gatherings of printed text that folded into 8, 12, 16, 24 or 32 pages. Chapbooks

¹ The etymology of chapmen is related to the Old English *ċeapmann*, the late West Saxon *cȳpemann*, the non-West Saxon *cēpemann*, and the Middle English *chepman* and *cēapman*, all of which referred to sellers and dealers trading cheap commodities.

² Gilbert Crokatt and John Monro, *Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence Display’d; or, The Folly of Their Teaching Discovered from the Books, Sermons, and Prayers; and some remarks on Mr. Rule’s late Vindication of the Kirk, Interspers’d with Some Genuine Adventures, in love, &c.* (Rotterdam: Van Anker, 1738).

were intended to be ‘the poor person’s reading material.’³ Printers vied for profit, recognition, authenticity and monopoly. Thus, for printers, publishers, traders, hawkers and readers, the mobility and portability of chapbooks were more than just a technological contrivance.

When missionary and colonialist printers introduced European-styled printing presses in different regions of South Asia between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, they passed along not just their printing tools and technologies, but also a plethora of ideas, assumptions and prejudices that were then associated with different book formats in their Western homelands. One such longstanding Eurocentric view, indeed, concerns the mobility and literacy of chapbooks.

Even when chapbooks are designed to be mobile, they may not necessarily travel to distant lands, nor move readers across different classes and cultures. Besides, when ‘the poor person’ in question is a colonized subject hailing from a casteist society that is wont to privilege orality over literacy, and to reserve literacy for specialized forms of knowledge production, for bureaucratic and state institutions and for ritual performances and customs; the chances of chapbooks traveling in the backpacks of hawkers and dealers were rather slim.

The fate of chapbooks in the eastern Gangetic basin of colonial Mithila could not be more uncertain. Colonial Mithila was located on the floodplains of a network of rivers that change their courses faster than any other river on our planet.⁴ Monsoon rains and perennial flooding—even as they cause seasonal migration of peoples and objects—were not known to create the ideal conditions for the production, sale and survival of chapbooks in this region. Beyond the environmental factors, chapbooks were always at the mercy of their human patrons and readers, whose sympathies for inexpensive printed materials were not necessarily discernible and/or steady.

Every bit of printed books—in contrast to hand-crafted manuscripts—was disposable. Their title pages—since they often featured woodblock illustrations of Hindu gods and goddesses—could be pulled out and placed on the home altar, if not elsewhere. Their back covers—as they were usually filled with advertisements and addresses of enterprising individuals, guilds, companies and cultural societies—could likewise be ripped out and stuck inside the already overflowing jaws of personal diaries and address books. Devotional folksongs printed in the main body of the chapbooks were most likely to land up in the hands of women desirous of performing those songs during traditional festivals and ceremonies. And when there was a financial crunch at home, old books and newspapers could be readily sold to hawkers collecting reusable materials for paper mills and textile industries.

In such adverse environmental, cultural and social milieux, what motivated Maithil printers to invest themselves in the publication of chapbooks? Did they envision chapbooks as cheap and portable reading materials for a newly literate public who

³ Anette Hagan, ‘Chapbooks: The poor person’s reading material,’ *Europeana*, National Library of Scotland, published online on 27 August 2019, and accessed on 19 June 2026: <https://www.europeana.eu/en/stories/chapbooks-the-poor-persons-reading-material>.

⁴ Several geo-morphological studies have consistently shown that Kosi, Gandak and their tributaries are the fastest moving rivers in the world. On the migration of Kosi and its tributaries, see: Tapan Chakraborty, Rimpal Kar, Parthasarathi Ghosh and Sounak Basu, ‘Kosi megafan: Historical records, geomorphology and the recent avulsion of the Kosi River’, *Quaternary International* 227 (2010), pp. 143–160. The bibliographies of Sinha et al 2023 and Chakraborty et al 2010 identify the most relevant publications on the migratory nature of the Kosi megafan.

aspired to move up the class ladder and/or caste hierarchy? More importantly, what happened to the earliest Maithili chapbooks: how far did they travel, how extensive was their cross-cultural reach, and how deep their impact on society, economy and history? To grapple with these issues, I examine some of the oldest extant Maithili chapbooks which were printed between the 1880s and 1910s (see **Appendix 1**). The early history of Maithili chapbooks challenges many a dominant paradigm about whether, when and how printed objects become mobile, and why their mobility matters in the study of regional and global cultural histories.

2. On the Early Chapbooks and its Elite Readers:

Recent scholarship on South Asian print histories has established a few axioms about the rise of chapbooks in colonial India. These paradigms rarely betray a deep understanding of the mobility of chapbooks; besides, they remain remarkably untenable in the context of Maithili print cultures. Consider, for instance, the widely-held view among scholars of north Indian colonial print cultures that the printing of chapbooks took off only when the ready availability of lithography reduced the cost of printing and—having affirmed the prevalent scribal and aesthetic norms of book production—enabled homegrown printers to engage in commercial printing for their burgeoning mass readership.⁵

Lithography was never a *sine qua non* for printing Maithili books in any format. All the scripts that were historically used for Maithili—Devanāgarī, Kaithī, Mithilākṣar (also known as Tirhutā) and Bāṅglā (Bengali)—were predisposed to letterpress printing, not lithography. For the sake of argument, one may still contend that lithography could—in principle—supplement letterpress printing, especially when the metal types of any provincial scripts were not cast regionally. This may seem like a plausible argument; but it isn't borne by Maithili chapbooks.

As Maithili was written in multiple scripts, including Devanāgarī and Bāṅglā, the likelihood that printers would fall short of types in northern, western, central and eastern regions of colonial India was rather minimal. By the early- to mid-nineteenth century, such types and typecasters were available in Meerut (1834), Delhi (1839), Agra (1835), Allahabad (1846), Kanpur (1830), Lucknow (1822), Surat (1821), Bombay (1779), Nagpur (1826), Bellary (1827), Bangalore (1840), Pondicherry (1784), Patna (1838), Benares (1818), Mirzapore (1846), Malda (1780), Hoogly (1778), Serampore (1800), Calcutta (1781), Cuttack (1839), Sadiya (1837), Jaipur of Assam (1839), and Sibsagor (1848).⁶ Regardless, if—and it's indeed unlikely—one views lithography as a crucial motivating factor for printing Maithili chapbooks, it may be worth noting the Behar Amateur Lithographic Press had already begun operating in Patna as early as 1828.⁷

However, neither the proliferation of letterpress types nor the spread of lithographic technology had much bearing on the printing of Maithili chapbooks. With a couple of rare exceptions, most Maithili chapbooks won't be printed until the 1880s. When

⁵ On the impact of lithography in colonial India, see: Graham Shaw's publications. On how lithography affirmed the prevalent scribal and aesthetic norms, see the publications of Francis Robinson.

⁶ Dennis E. Rhodes, *The Spread of Printing: Eastern Hemisphere: India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma and Thailand* (Amsterdam: Vangendt & Co.; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).

⁷ Dennis E. Rhodes, *The Spread of Printing: Eastern Hemisphere: India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma and Thailand* (Amsterdam: Vangendt & Co.; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), p. 57.

Maithil printers did become interested in chapbooks, the presence or absence of any printing technologies—letterpress or lithography—was barely a concern for them.⁸ They were—like printers everywhere else in the world—to rely on whatever technologies were most cheaply and rapidly available to them. Indeed, the earliest extant copies of Maithili chapbooks show that regional printers were exceptionally adept at improvising with any tools, technologies and materials at hand—from creatively mixing types of different languages to reenvisioning the aesthetics of *mis-en-page* and the semantics of punctuations.

If technological facilities were not necessarily a major driving force for printing Maithili chapbooks, what other factors motivated their printing in colonial India? Previous scholarship has situated the history of chapbooks within the broader context of nineteenth-century commercial printing, particularly its target readerships and publics, who espoused perennial interest in religious discourses, identitarian politics, devotional songs, folklores, stories and plays.⁹ The chapbook format—as documented by Kathryn Hansen, Francesca Orsini, A. R. Venkatachalapathy and others—was most frequently used to publish plays and popular songs, both of which were in high demand due to the growth of theatre and entertainment industries. This upsurge in the publication of chapbooks was mutually constitutive of—to borrow Orsini’s formulation—the ‘neo- or non-literary audiences.’

These newly forged audiences could, in turn, challenge the authoritative knowledge, social status and intellectual identity of the traditional elite hailing from dominant castes, landowning classes, courtly professions and colonial bureaucracies. These entitled elites—often recognized as the ‘educated’ classes—resented and resisted the emergent reading publics.

Syed Ahmad Khan took a dig at the pretentious commoner (*‘āmī*) who—after reading a few throw-away commentaries (*risālah*) on religious issues and translations of the Qu’rān in Urdu—presents himself as a well-versed scholar (*‘ālim*) and master (*ustād*) of Islamic sciences.¹⁰ V. Thiruvarangam Pillai, the founding editor of the famed *Saiva Siddhanta Kazhagam*, lamented how readers were less likely to buy ‘superior books at high prices’ because they were so used to reading cheap *gujili* books.¹¹ The Tamil

⁸ I discuss their concerns in the next section of my essay.

⁹ On commercial printing in north India, see: Kathryn Hansen, *Gorunds for Play: The Nautanki Theatre of North India* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1992); Francesca Orsini, *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009); and in south India, see: A. R. Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book: Scholars, Scribes, and Scribblers in Colonial Tamilnadu* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2012).

¹⁰ C. M. Naim translates *risālah* as ‘chapbook.’ Relying on Naim’s translation *in toto*, Orsini, too, highlights how Syed Ahmed Khan decried readers of Urdu chapbooks. *Risālah* refers to a specific kind of literary genre that predates the history of European-style printing technologies. Chapbook, on the other hand, refers to a unique format of printed commercial books. Perhaps Naim wished to find a contemporary register for vulgar works in Urdu that he ended up using ‘chapbook’ in his translation. His translation is anachronistic and misleading. See: C. M. Naim, *Urdu Texts and Contexts: The Selected Essays of C. M. Naim* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black), p. 265 ([weblink](#)). Naim translated from an edition of Syed Ahmad Khan’s works that was published in 1990 (Syed Ahmad Khan, *Āsār al-Ṣanādīd*, edited by Khaliq Anjum, reprinted in 2012, New Delhi: Qaumī Kaunsil Barā-yi Furūgh-i Urdū Zabān), p. 51–52, [weblink](#)).

¹¹ A. R. Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book: Scholars, Scribes, and Scribblers in Colonial Tamilnadu* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2012), p. 71.

scholar T. K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar (1881–1954) went so far as to advise the colonial government of Madras to destroy all *gujili* books:

‘As a rule the bazaar book, by which I mean publications sold in open places, in markets and on roads, in bad print, and bad get-up abounding in printing mistakes and expressed in vulgar language, may well be destroyed. They are a disgrace to any library.’¹²

Their resistance was rooted in an elitist view of language, culture, religion, identity and history. They were anxious that the non-elite—feeding off the low-brow vernacular chapbooks—would devalue their cultural capital and undermine their social status. The mobility of chapbooks threatened the very *status quo* of dominant castes, classes and professions.

The colonialist state—unlike the traditional elites—needed the chapbook format. Government brochures, administrative manuals, academic primers and other pedagogical materials could be readily printed as chapbooks. For Christian missionaries, likewise, the chapbook format was a convenient medium to spread their gospel among the “neo- and non-converts.” Pamphlets and broadsides depicting the corrupt, polluted and uncivilized religious communities were powerful tools to bring new converts to their fold. Prison administrators viewed printing as a way of disciplining body and mind; they assigned prisoners to print documents and books for the colonialist state. These colonialist chapbooks—whether printed in prison, by missionaries or government presses—were predisposed to mobility like any vernacular chapbooks. However, since they were circulated by and for state authorities, missionary establishments and Orientalist institutions, within the subcontinent as well as transcontinentally, their mobility and impact differed substantially from vernacular chapbooks that were profitable to the indigenous printers and menacing to the traditional elites regionally.

3. On Moving Maithili Chapbooks:

These received scholarly narratives about the meteoric rise of vernacular chapbooks, the unwieldy resistance by traditional elites and the unhinged mobility of colonialist chapbooks appear inadequate, even simplistic, in elucidating the cross-cultural history and trans-regional mobility of early Maithili chapbooks.

First, the traditional elites were the major movers of early Maithil chapbooks. Nearly all established Maithil printers, presses, and publishers were owned, supported and publicized by and for privileged-caste elites, many of whom were patronized by local ruling dynasties and landlords in colonial India and Nepal. For example, the oldest known chapbook, *Sudāma-carit*, which was printed in mid-nineteenth century, was a poem by Harinandan Dās.¹³ Dās was employed by the royal court of Jaipur in Rajasthan. More chapbooks would be printed in the closing decades of the nineteenth century; the most influential among them were *Śrī Lakṣmīśvara Vilās* by Candā Jhā (1830–1907), *Narmadā-sāgar Sattaka* (1906) and *Maithili Sattaka* (1906) by Jīvan Śarmā *alias*

¹² A. R. Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book: Scholars, Scribes, and Scribblers in Colonial Tamilnadu* (Ranikhat: Permanent Black), p. 72.

¹³ I have not found any copy of the original chapbook. A reprint of the chapbook was edited by Śailendra Mohan Jhā and Khuśīlāl Jhā, and published in 1969 in Darbhanga.

Jīvān Jhā (1848–1912), *Kṛṣṇa-jaṇma* (1901) by Bholana, among others. An overwhelming majority of the oldest Maithili chapbooks were authored and printed by and for dominant-caste elites.

Second, the traditional elites were neither a monolithic social group nor were their understanding of literary and cultural histories homogenous and unified. As evident from their competing genealogical narratives, their transgressive matrimonial alliances and conjugal relationships, their machinations for courtly patronage, and their abuse of property rights, internal divisions among the dominant castes were quite rife.¹⁴ Even when their caste politics were conservative, orthodox and uncompromising, their political and ideological views did not affect their embrace of the chapbook form. Consequently, when marginalized caste communities made use of the chapbook printing to their advantage, the upper-caste communities—irrespective of their views on such creative literature—did not denounce the book format *per se*. Two chapbooks are particularly instructive here: *Mithilā Nāṭak* (1901) by Bṛj Bihārī Lāl Maṇḍal, and *Sumati* (1918) by Rās Bihārī Lāl Dās.

Among the earliest authors and printers of Maithili chapbooks, Maṇḍal was an exception. In the back-cover of his chapbook, he identified himself as a member of the lowly (*adham*) cowherding caste (*jāt gvālā*). His play was aimed at the upper-caste communities and landed zamindars; it challenged caste hegemony and the moral corruption of dominant castes. His literary experiments would have appeared distasteful, if not worthless, to the so-called “educated” elites. But the publication *Mithilā Nāṭak* did not pervert the social reputation of the chapbook format. Chapbooks were not branded as the trashable “low-brow” pulp. Irrespective of whether authors of marginalized castes, like Maṇḍal, were printing their pathbreaking and radical chapbooks, dominant-caste writers continued to print chapbooks of their own unabated. The chapbook format was never put at stake.

Everyone recognized the power of chapbooks in mobilizing readership cross-culturally and trans-historically. Privileged caste-thinkers like, Candā Jhā, Jīvān Jhā and Sureśa Miśra, argued that Mithila could be modernized primarily through the revival and reenvisioning of classical genres, religious literature and cultural traditions. They viewed the chapbook format as an effective receptacle-cum-media for promoting grassroots movement and social change. Cognizant of how well accepted the chapbook format was across all social and religious groups, Rās Bihārī Dās made up his mind to publish his first-ever work of fiction, *Sumati*, in this format. Dās was a social climber. Throughout his life, he regretted his failure to acquire formal academic training. He was acutely conscious of how his elitist contemporaries looked down upon the “uneducated” masses. Through his writings, he strove hard to redeem his intellectual identity and social respectability.

Three years prior to writing *Sumati*, in 1915, he had authored *Mithilā Darpaṇ*, which was the first comprehensive history of Mithila in Hindi. Prior to *Mithilā Darpaṇ*, Persian and Urdu writers had authored several histories of Mithila.¹⁵ However, as the scholar Hetukar Jha notes, Dās would not have been able to read them. *Mithilā Darpaṇ* was Dās’s way of letting the transregional Maithili readership know that he was not only learned about Mithila’s cultural and political history but also capable of reading

¹⁴ For a compelling nineteenth-century account of these internal divisions, see: *Ā’īnah-i Tīrhut* by Bihārī Lāl Śāhib ‘Fiṭrat’ (1883), pp. 39–40. Also, Ramanath Jha, *Alayee Kula Prakāśa* (Patna: Indian Nation Press, 1951).

¹⁵ Most prominent among them are *Riyāz-i Tīrhūt* (1868) by Ayodhyā Prasād Bahār, and *Ā’īnah-i Tīrhut* by Bihārī Lāl Śāhib ‘Fiṭrat’ (1883).

Sanskrit sources and writing Hindi like an erudite scholar. Regardless of his scholarly accomplishments, some of Das's acquaintances questioned his decision to write in Hindi instead of Maithili. In response to their critique, Dās ventured to write his first—and the sole surviving—fictional work, *Sumati*, in Maithili.

Mithilā Darpaṇ was a massive work, hence it was thoroughly unsuited to the chapbook format. In the course of writing *Mithilā Darpaṇ*, Dās had substantially upgraded his understanding of the emergent printing communities in Mithila. In one of the chapters of *Mithilā Darpaṇ*, he listed all printing presses that were then active in Mithila (see **Appendix 2**). All in all, when—in response to his critics—he decided to try his hand at fiction, he knew well that a chapbook would be the most effective medium to showcase his way with words as well as his reformist ideas. He wrote *Sumati* for the chapbook format and introduced it as the first-ever novella (*upannyās*) of the Maithili language. *Sumati* made a lasting impact in the history of Maithili literary cultures. Even though the formal, aesthetic and fictional attributes of the novella/novel genre was not quite established in colonial Mithila, no literary historian has—until today—questioned *Sumati*'s status as the first *upannyās* of Maithili. And, even when Maithil critics questioned the literary style of the “not-so-well-educated” author,¹⁶ who worked as a railway contractor, they were unanimous in recognizing Dās's trenchant critique of the purdah system, as well as his commitment to women's education and human rights, in *Sumati*. Dās could not remove the stigma associated with his lack of academic training. But his decision to publish a chapbook—instead of a bulky novel—paid off, and *Sumati* was a pathbreaking success for Maithil readers across borders.

As the fate of Dās's *Sumati* and Maṇḍal's *Mithilā Nāṭak* reveals, the transregional mobility of Maithili chapbooks was often governed by how Maithil authors harnessed the materiality of the chapbook format while simultaneously attending to the modernist sensibilities of both traditional and emergent readerships across the subcontinent. Maithili authors, like Dās and Maṇḍal, seldom operated in isolation. They were almost always advised and supported by an upcoming generation of enterprising printers. Printers shaped their literary imagination, social activism, and cultural ethos; advised them on building their transregional and cross-cultural readerships.

In this regard, a “notice” printed by Ramānand Ṭhākur, the manager of Maithil Printing Works in Darbhanga, is particularly telling (see: **Figure 3**). This “notice” appears on the back cover of a chapbook titled *Gonū-Vinod* that was printed in 1909. Gonū Jhā is a legendary character in Maithili folktales, who is famed for his unparalleled wit and humour. These stories have been passed down orally for several centuries. *Gonū Vinod* was the first ever printed book to put into writing Gonū Jhā's humorous stories. Since these stories were already very popular among Maithil communities across the subcontinent, the chapbook *Gonū-Vinod* was guaranteed a massive sale in its first print run. The printer Ramānand Ṭhākur, therefore, printed 1000 copies of its first edition. Furthermore, he printed a brief “notice” on its backcover to attract a new customer base for his press. Here, he outlines his printing philosophy, as well as the pioneering work of Maithil Printing Works.

“In our printing workshop, all sorts of books, forms, receipts, and other materials are printed,” Ṭhākur wrote in the first sentence of the notice and continued, “Everything is printed here with much cleanliness and purity.” Lest his readers doubted his printerly ethos, he added, “Send a postal stamp of a half *ānā*, and we will send a print sample of our foundary types, alongwith their respective charges.” Anyone who has ever been to a printing workshop knows that such workshops are earthy and grimy

¹⁶ This expression appears in the preface by Ramānand Jhā “Ramaṇ,” which was published in 1996 by Urvaśī Prakāśan.

spaces occupied by heavy machinery, rugged tools, raw materials, printed objects, wasted scraps, garbage and litter, among other things.¹⁷ Frequented by printers, compositors, mechanics, greasers, castors, metalworkers, bookbinders, craftpersons, labourers and others, they are perpetually in the state of being soiled, stained and withered. To claim cleanliness (*saphāyī*) and purity (*śuddhatā*) for a printing workshop, or for a printed work, is to ignore, perhaps even deny, the complex reality of printmaking that printers have to grapple with every day. Ṭhākur was clearly not interested in presenting a realistic portrayal of his workshop. Rather, knowing that the issues of purity and pollution have long polarized South Asian communities, he tacitly appropriated an ethos for his workshop, which would resonate with readers of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. Such a confident framing of the printerly ethos was unprecedented in vernacular literary cultures of South Asia.

After aligning with the dominant cultural ethos of South Asian communities, Ṭhākur outlined some of the key accomplishments of his press—most of which would be as attractive to Maithili readership as they would be to Sanskrit and vernacular readerships elsewhere in the subcontinent. For instance, he reveals that Maithil Printing Press will release the first ever printed edition of *Skanda Purāṇa* and that his press has thus succeeded in printing a book that “the famous Veṅkaṭeśvar Press of Bombay”—despite wanting to print for years—were not able to do so. To keep his prospective readers and customers on their tenterhooks, and also to attract funding from interested readers, he relayed the news that his team had found “a very ancient manuscript copy of Rāmāyaṇa” and that if anyone wanted to learn about the full story (*sampūrṇa vṛttānta*) of how the manuscript was discovered, they should mail a letter to him directly so that he can send the story as a reply to their letter.

Ṭhākur’s “notice” was a masterclass for the printers of his generation who sought to establish and deepen their cross-continental connections with multilingual readers, customers, patrons and printing communities. It reveals his deep understanding of how and why the materiality and mobility of chapbooks mattered at a time when the printing industry was rapidly growing and when vernacular printing presses were actively competing for new readerships and customer bases. Above all, it attests to the growing confidence among Maithil printers and writers to attract diverse readerships across the subcontinent. Indeed, Maithil readerships were spread from Jaipur to Mumbai to Assam. And the first generation of Maithil printers were more than keen to mobilize their chapbooks to challenge caste hierarchies and public morality (e.g. *Mithilā Nāṭak*, *Gonū Vinod*), to cultivate modernist sensibilities in literature and culture (e.g. *Mithilā Nāṭak*, *Sumati*), to revive and reorient traditional forms of

¹⁷ There is a grave paucity of photographs, paintings or realistic portrayals of printing presses operating in colonial Mithila in the early 20th century. In the rest of the subcontinent, too, most printing presses neglected to preserve images of their workshops in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Among the oldest surviving—and arguably the most detailed—photographs of printing presses in India are the ones included in an album that *The Times of India* commissioned for their Diamond Jubilee (sixtieth anniversary) celebration in November 1898 (see: **Figures 1**). Bernard Ellis (1911–1985), who served as the superintendent of the Baptist Mission Press (1818–1972) after his elder brother Norman Ellis (1909–1987) retired, photographed their press and its allied activities in the middle of the 1950s (for example, see: **Figure 2**). These photographs depict some of the most advanced printing presses in the subcontinent in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. The condition of most Maithil printers in the early-20th century would be more provisional and precarious in contrast to their counterparts in other cosmopolitan centers.

knowledge (*Lakṣmīśvar-vilāsa*, *Sadācārasāre Chandogakṛtyaṃ*), and to promote social and religious reforms and grassroots movements (*Sumati*, *Punarvivāha*).

Their approach to printing chapbooks and their appreciation of the power of chapbooks differed radically from the ones that have been studied in previous scholarship (Hansen 1992, Orsini 2009, and Venkatachalapathy 2012 among others). Maithili chapbooks were not just interested in popular folktales and devotional songs, but also in a wide range of intellectual, political, social and cultural issues. Maithili chapbooks did not polarize the dominant elite against the neo- and non-literate readership. Maithili chapbooks opened new ways of thinking about printerly ethos and the many human connections that could be forged through them. The many moving stories of the earliest Maithili chapbook comprise a crucial missing chapter in the broader history of how chapbooks became a global book format that enabled provincial communities to rebuild themselves under the repressive regime of the British colonial government.

4053 words

Appendix 1			
Authors, Poets, Editors	Year	Titles	Printers and Printing Formats
Candā Jhā (1831–1907)	1888	<i>Lakṣmīśvar-vilāsa</i>	Śrī Kṛṣṇadhana Mojumdār, Rāj Darbhāṅgā Yantrālaye. 18 pp.
Harinandan Dās (b. 1840)	—	<i>Sudāmā-carita</i>	Original lost; reprint extant. 32 pp.
Raghunandan Dās (1860–1945)	—	<i>Subhadrā-haraṇa</i>	Original lost; reprint extant. 32? pp.
Jīvan Śarmā	1892	<i>Sundar Saṃyoga</i>	Bhārat Jīvan Press. 44 pp.
Bholana	1901	<i>Kṛṣṇa-janma</i>	T. P. Banerji, Indian Chāpākhānā, Darbhāṅgā.
			Śrīkānt Bihārī Miśra, Union Press, Darbhanga. 35 pp.
Bṛj Bihārī Lāl Maṇḍal	1901	<i>Mithilā Nāṭak</i>	Krishna Press, Bhagalpur. 16 pp. 1000 copies.
Sureśa Miśra	1906	<i>Sadācārasāre Chandogakṛtyaṃ</i>	Prābhākari Yantrālaya, Kāshī. (i) 29 pp.; (ii) 36 pp.
Candra Śarmā	1907	<i>Gītisudhā</i>	Śrīkānt Bihārī Miśra, Union Press, Darbhanga. (i) 12 pp; (ii) 12 pp.
Śaṅkar Jhā	1909	<i>Gonū-vinod</i>	Ramānand Thākuri, Maithil Printing Works, Darbhāṅgā, pp.
Janārdan Jhā 'Jansīdan' (1872–1951)	1914	<i>Nirdayī Sāsū</i>	Original lost; 24 pp.

Janārdan Jhā 'Jandīsan' (1872–1951)	1914	<i>Punarvivāh</i>	Original lost; 32 pp.
Rāsbihārī Lāl Dās (1872/82–1940)	1918	<i>Sumati</i>	Original lost ; reprint extant. 32 pp.

Appendix 2: A List of Printers active in Mithila as recorded in <i>Mithilā Darpaṇa</i> by Rās Bihārī Lāl Dās		
Anglicized Name	Maithil Name	Location
Chitragupta Press	<i>Citragupt Pres</i>	Mirjāpur
Darbhangā Raj Press	<i>Darbhaṅgā Rāj Pres</i>	Kaidarābād
Maithil Press	<i>Maithil Pres</i>	Madhubanī
Mithila Mihir	<i>Mithilā Mihir Pres</i>	Nāi Bajār
Rameshwar Press	<i>Rameśvar Pres</i>	Kanhaiyālāl, Baṛā Bājār
Union Press	<i>Yuniyan Pres</i>	Kaṭhalvārī



Figure 1: Jobbing and Composing Room. Times of India Office in Bombay. November 1898

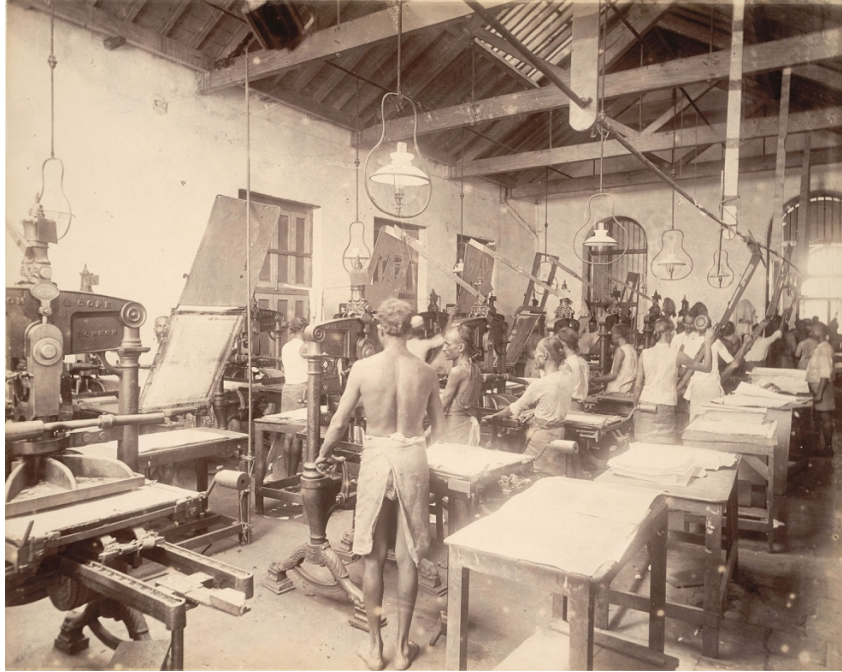


Figure 2. Press Room. Times of India Office. Bombay. November 1898

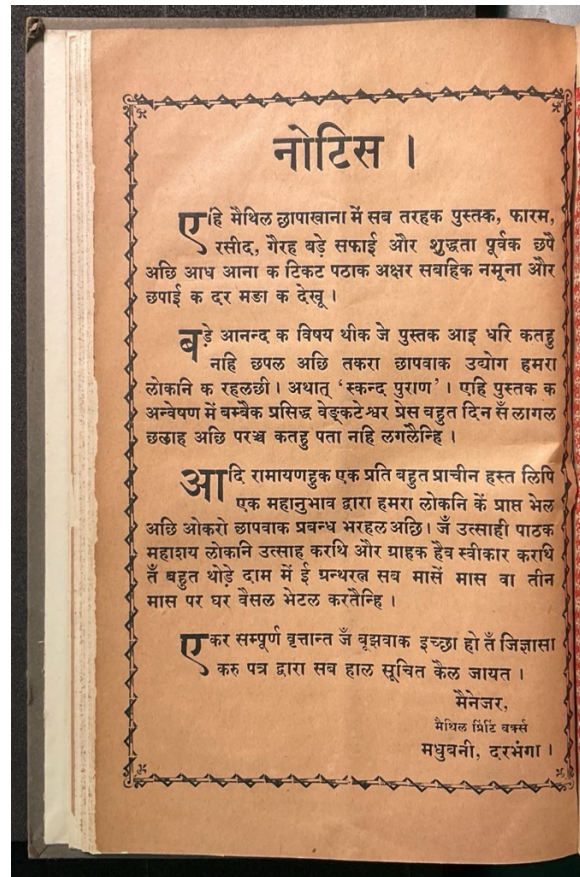


Figure 3. The "Notice" of Gonū Vinōd.