

Brajabuli: A Comparative Case of Language Description and Documentation

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Abstract: The purpose of the paper is to present the description and documentation of the Brajabuli language. Brajabuli is a Mischprache, with Maithili in the basic part, while Bengali, with oddments of Hindi, forms the superstructure. The survey also highlights the lack of awareness among the people regarding the Brajabuli language and its rich literary heritage. The analysis and evolution of the results that have been obtained through a digital questionnaire survey conducted are displayed in this paper. The objective of this paper is not only to document and familiarize people with the Brajabuli language and how it is distinct in structure from Maithili and Bengali but also to emphasize the importance of preserving endangered languages. It can be concluded that the hypothesis of this research is justified.

Keywords: Bengali, Bhakti Poetry, Brajabuli Language, Endangered Languages, Maithili, Mischprache

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Introduction

Brajabuli is a mischprache primarily Maithili in its foundational elements, while Bengali, along with traces of Hindi and Brajbhasha, comprises its overarching structure. Brajabuli is essentially a literary dialect of Bengali, having originated and flourished exclusively in Bengal under the craftsmanship of Bengali poets.

Another variant of Brajabuli, nearly indistinguishable from the Bengali form, emerged in Assam around the same period (known as Vrajavali). However, the growth of Brajabuli in Assam was severely limited, and given the Assamese, is a member of the Bengali-Assamese dialect group, the Brajabuli dialect in Assam does not necessitate any special treatment.

What holds true for the relationship between Assamese and Bengali is equally applicable, mutatis mutandis, to Brajabuli in Orissa. In both Assam and Orissa, Brajabuli appears to remain unproductive. The development of Brajabuli in Assam seems to be closely tied to Maithili, while in Orissa, Bengali influence in this regard can be reasonably anticipated.

Objective

The present study aims to present the documentation and description of the Brajabuli, language of love and poetry. It also examines how Brajabuli language is distinct in structure from Maithili and Bengali and attempts to preserve the language.

Literature Review

The present research paper projects the case of description and documentation of Brajabuli language. The topic finds its base in few researches, studies and documentaries. The initial analysis of Brajabuli has been made incidentally in brief, in the introductions to other works.

It was in 1926 when for the first time Brajabuli formed an entire subject matter of a ten-page article titled as 'Brajabuli' (Sen, 1926). In 19th century only 'few remarks in passing' (a term used by Tarapado Mukhopadhyaya to describe the lack of research in the field of Brajabuli language) were made on Brajabuli language. In the 19th century, Brajabuli poet Guruprasad Sengupta in the introduction to his work *Padaointanimata*, made few remarks on Brajabuli language. The remarks made by him are quoted below:

"There is no dictionary or grammar of the Brajabol language, the lyrics of the great poets [mahajana] being its only source. In composing my work I have followed the practice of my predecessors regarding pronunciation. In their works the pronunciation of particular vowels varies in accordance with the needs of rhyme and verification, thus, for example, the 'l' of 'giralā' is sometimes pronounced long (dirgha) and sometimes short (harasva)", (Sengupta, 1876).

The grammatical structure of Brajabuli was first studied in detail by Suniti Kumar Chatterjee in his work *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language* (1926). Chatterjee provided a comprehensive analysis of Brajabuli's linguistic features, tracing its evolution from Maithili and its adaptation by Bengali poets. His work laid the foundation for understanding Brajabuli as a distinct literary language rather than merely a dialect.

Sukumar Sen's seminal work *A History of Brajabuli Literature* (1935) remains the most comprehensive study of the language and its literary tradition. Sen examined the works of major Brajabuli poets and analyzed the linguistic characteristics that distinguish Brajabuli from its parent languages. He argued that Brajabuli represents a unique case of linguistic creativity, where poets deliberately crafted a language for devotional expression.

Tarapada Mukhopadhyay's doctoral dissertation *Brajabuli Literature, Its Content and Language with Special Reference to Bengal* (1959) expanded on Sen's work by providing detailed linguistic analysis and comparing Brajabuli texts across different periods. Mukhopadhyay's work is particularly valuable for its systematic approach to documenting grammatical features and vocabulary.

More recent scholarship has explored Brajabuli's cultural significance. Bhattacharya (2019) examined Brajabuli as "a language of multiple origin used for devotional democracy," highlighting its role in making devotional literature accessible across linguistic boundaries. Smith (1995) provided comparative analysis of Brajabuli, Vrajāvali, and Maithili, clarifying the relationships between these related linguistic forms.

Contemporary research has also explored Brajabuli's presence in modern media. Bakshi (2018) analyzed the use of Brajabuli in filmmaker Rituparno Ghosh's work, demonstrating the language's continued relevance as a vehicle for artistic expression. This research shows that while Brajabuli is no longer actively spoken, it retains cultural significance in Bengali artistic traditions.

Hypothesis: This research paper proposes the following hypothesis.

Primary Hypothesis: Brajabuli language is distinct in structure from Maithili and Bengali.

Ancillary Hypothesis: Brajabuli is an artificial language, a Mischaprache, with Maithili in the basic part, while Bengali with oddments of Hindi and Brajbhasha forms the superstructure.

Methodology

The methodological approach of this research paper is quantitative and qualitative in nature where a study of Sukumar Sen's "A History of Brajabuli Literature" is done along with a digital survey which included 60-70 people belonging to the age group 11-40. The questionnaire contained a set of questions relevant to the aim and objective of the topic of research.

Data: The data has been collected from two sources, Primary and Secondary. Data for Primary sources has been collected from various people through surveys to comprehend and analyze the study. The data collected has been analyzed and derivatives presented accordingly. Secondary data has been collected through previous research papers, journals, articles, and other web sources and references have been taken from books on the respective topic to get the substantial result.

Introduction to Brajabuli

The emergence of Brajabuli took place in Bengal. Following the conquest of Bengal by the Turks, Maithili continued to thrive independently under Hindu kings who were renowned supporters of Sanskrit learning and

scholarship. The initial impact of the Turkic conquest affected Sanskrit learning, as well as various facets of ancient Indian culture, leading to setbacks in indigenous studies.

During this period, particularly after the Nalanda incident, students from Bengal seeking advanced education in Nyaya and smṛti had to turn to Maithili. Upon returning home, they brought not only their Sanskrit knowledge but also popular vernacular songs from Maithili, predominantly centered around conventional expressions of love. These songs, attributed to Vidyapati and his predecessors, gained immense popularity due to their exquisite lyric charm and the allure of the exotic dialect's music. Their appeal lay in their conciseness and the Sanskrit and udbhata poetry flavor they exuded, eventually reaching the masses.

Bengal scholars, inspired by these imported lyrics, soon began composing songs modeled after them, borrowing both the meter and language. The evolution of Brajabuli in Bengal occurred between the second half of the 15th century and the first half of the 16th century. The early Brajabuli writers had limited knowledge of Maithili, resulting in a hybrid language that was a mix of Maithili and Bengali. Over time, Bengali forms and idioms gradually took over, eroding the traces of the original Maithili language. This linguistic transformation led to the development of a substantial literature in Brajabuli, characterized by its mixed and artificial nature.

The origin of Brajabuli in Bengal coincided with the resurgence of Vaishnavism in the region, reaching its peak with the life of Chaitanya Deva. Consequently, the themes of Brajabuli songs, inspired by Maithili, revolved solely around the Radha-Krishna legend. This connection is why the language is termed Brajabuli, with "buli" meaning "Hindi boli" or "speech," and "Braja" referring to the land sanctified by the presence of Radha-Krishna. It's essential to note that Brajabuli should not be confused with Braja-bhasa, an actual language spoken in Mathura.

A History of Brajabuli

The earliest Brajabuli poem written in Orissa, commencing with the words 'pahilahi raga,' appears to be the work of Rāmānanda-Rāya or Rāya-Rāmānanda. This poem is dedicated to Pratapa-Rudra, the emperor of Orissa, who ruled from 1497 to 1540 A.D. Sankara Deva, the earliest Brajabuli writer in Assam, passed away in 1568 A.C. Therefore, the evolution of Brajabuli in Assam and Orissa likely occurred in the first quarter of the sixteenth century.

Sankara Deva founded the sect officially known as Eka-sarana-nama-dharma, translating to "The Religion of the Sole Refuge of the Name." He authored both lyrics and plays in Brajabuli or Vrajāvali, a term preferred by Assamese scholars to distinguish it from its Bengali counterpart. The dates attributed to Sankaradeva's earliest Vrajāvali composition vary. Among his works, thirty-four of Sankara Deva's lyrics, referred to as Bargits or "Great Songs," have endured, along with six one-act plays called ankiya na.

Literature and Music Composed

India, holds a significant place in the realms of devotional poetry and music, particularly associated with expressions of reverence for Lord Krishna. The exploration of major literature and music Brajabuli, a literary and musical language rooted in the cultural tapestry of the Braj region in composed in the Brajabuli language unveils a multifaceted journey through various dimensions.

Brajabuli literature is a branch of medieval literature found in northeastern India, specifically in Assam, Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. It derives its name from being written in the Brajabuli language. This genre predominantly features short lyrical poems centered around the themes of Krishna and Radha. As far as we understand, these poems were typically composed individually rather than as part of a sequence, with the author's name often mentioned in the bhanita, which constitutes a part of the final couplet.

None of these poems bear specific dates, and the exact timing of their composition remains unknown. However, there is compelling presumptive evidence suggesting that the period of their creation commenced prior to the passing of Caitanya in AD 1532. This period of composition appears to have spanned the 16th and 17th

centuries, gradually declining in originality and poetic vigor into the 18th and 19th centuries. Anthologies containing the works of earlier generations of poets began to emerge from the early 18th century onwards.

Brajabuli's association with diverse musical traditions, including the classical forms of Dhrupad and Bhajan, has played a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of Indian classical music. The language's rhythmic and melodic qualities contribute to the rich tapestry of musical expressions. Beyond its historical roots, Brajabuli continues to inspire contemporary songwriters and musicians. Its influence persists in modern compositions, bridging the gap between tradition and innovation as artists infuse new life into this timeless language.

A comprehensive study of Brajabuli literature and music involves an exploration of these historical and contemporary facets. It is a journey through the poetic brilliance of Bhakti saints, the melodic richness of classical traditions, and the ongoing creative expressions that keep Brajabuli alive in the hearts and minds of enthusiasts. Such a study unveils not just a linguistic and musical tradition but a living cultural heritage deeply embedded in the spiritual landscape of India.

The earliest brajubuli poem connected with Bengali literature is one written by Yasoraja- khan. Though we do not know who he was yet we can fix the time of the poet, as the poem is dedicated to Husain Shah, the king of Gaur, Bengal. So, it must have been composed sometime between 1493 and 1519A. The poem in question is quoted below. The reading of this poem is corrupt and I have adopted it from the text "A History of Brajabuli Literature" by Sukumar Sen:

eka payodhara candana lepita āre sahajaī gaura | hima- dharādhara kanaka-bhūdhara kole milala jora ||
mādhava, tuā daraṣana-kāje |
ādha pada-cāri karinñs sundari vāhira-dehali mājhe|| dābina locana kajare rañjita dhavala rahala vāma | nila-
dhavala Kamala dubcada pūjala koti kāmā⁴||
sri-yuta husana jagata-bhūsana so-ha e rasa jaña |
pañca-gauṣesvara bhoga-purandara bhane. yasorāja- khāna ||

Translation:

One (of her two breasts) is painted with sandal paste, the other has a natural fair complexion. The snowy mountain and the golden mountain have, as it were, come together between the arms. O Mādhava, with the object of having a sight of you the fair girl has crossed over the outer gate with hesitating steps. Her right eye has been painted with collyrium, but her left eye remains unpainted. Millions and millions of Cupids have worshipped these twin moons, the twin lotuses, one blue and the other white. The glorious Husana who is an ornament of the earth, has the proper appreciation of this rasa, - Husana who is the lord of the five Gaudas, and who rivals Purandara (i.e., Indra) in prosperity. So, says Yasoraja Khān.

- 1) Printed text has 'pada-cālana'
- 2) Printed text has 'rahala Kara vāma.'
- 3) Should probably be 'kamala yugala'
- 4) Printed text has 'kata koti'.

Major Writer and Works

In the realm of Brajabuli literature, several major writers have left an indelible mark through their profound works, each contributing to the rich tapestry of the Bhakti movement. Krishnadasa Kaviraja, in his monumental "Chaitanya Charitamrita," provides an intimate and hagiographic portrayal of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's life, embodying intense love and devotion to Lord Krishna. Jayadeva's lyrical masterpiece, "Gita Govinda," stands as a testament to the romantic essence of Brajabuli, capturing the divine love between Radha and Krishna in poetic

brilliance. Keshav Das, through "Rasikapriya," explores themes of love, while Bhanusingha Thakur's "Bhanusingher Padabali" delves into the realms of devotion, echoing the eternal love of Radha and Krishna. Baru Chandidas's "Sri Krishnakirtan" contributes significantly to Brajabuli's cultural heritage, unraveling the devotional aspects of Krishna's life. Even Rabindranath Tagore pays homage in "Bhanusimha Thakurer Padabali," showcasing his unique interpretation of love, devotion, and spirituality within the Brajabuli tradition. Together, these literary luminaries have etched a collective narrative that epitomizes the romantic, devotional, and spiritual ethos of Brajabuli literature.

Difference between Bengali, Brajabuli and Vrajavali

Bengali, Brajabuli and Vrajavali represent distinct linguistic and cultural manifestations of the Brajabuli style, each rooted in specific regional contexts. Bengali Brajabuli, adapted to the Bengali script, found prominence among poets in Bengal, notably followers of Vaishnavism like Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. This adaptation allowed Bengali poets to express their devotion to Lord Krishna within the linguistic framework of Bengali literature, becoming a testament to the widespread influence of the Bhakti movement in the region. In contrast, Vrajavali is specific to the Vrindavan region in Uttar Pradesh, serving as the vernacular language of its residents. Often referred to as the "language of the gopis" and Lord Krishna, Vrajavali reflects the linguistic and cultural nuances of the Vrindavan community. While Bengali Brajabuli thrives within the written tradition of Bengali literature, Vrajavali is not just a literary form but a living language deeply intertwined with the daily lives, religious practices, and folklore of the people of Vrindavan. It persists as an oral tradition, passed down through generations, contributing to the vibrant cultural tapestry of the region. Both variations share a common thread of devotion to Lord Krishna and the Bhakti movement, yet they stand as unique expressions shaped by their specific geographic, linguistic, and cultural contexts.

Decline of Brajabuli

The Brajabuli language persisted until the close of the 19th century. As erudite preferences evolved, there was a transition towards farther standardized languages, performing in a decline in the popularity of Brajabuli. The rise and dissipation of standardized languages, analogous as modern Bengali and Hindi, among others, contributed to the waning use of Brajabuli. Standard languages gained broader acceptance in literature, education, and administration. The social period left its mark on verbal patterns, with the creation of English and the standardization of indigenous languages for administrative purposes impacting the decline of cants like Brajabuli. Societal and cultural changes also played a part in abating the elevation of Brajabuli. As the verbal and cultural terrain converted, languages like Bengali and Maithili gained dominance in various spheres. Brajabuli was traditionally associated with specific erudite and religious surrounds, limiting its operation to certain disciplines. This confined compass contributed to its decline as other languages gained broader operation.

Rabindranath Tagore wrote his "Bhanusimha Thakurer Padabali" in the Brajabuli language. As a teenager, Tagore used to compose poems under the fictitious name 'Bhanusingho'. At the request of his family in-law, Kadambari Devi, Tagore collected Vaishnava lyrics written in the Brajabuli language and named them 'Bhanusimha Thakurer Padabali.' After Tagore, no other muses in Bangladesh wrote literature in the Brajabuli language. He was the last poet to use Brajabuli. Although the language was considerably rehearsed in Assam and Odisha, with Sankardeva in Assam and Ramanda Roy in Odisha being the first muses to compose hymns to Lord Krishna in Brajabuli, it may not be as considerably spoken or written moment. Nevertheless, it remains an essential part of the nonfictional and cultural heritage, particularly in the terrain of medieval Bhakti Literature and the spiritual traditions of Eastern India. The drive for verbal homogenization, where homogenized languages were promoted for communication and education, contributed to the marginalization of indigenous and cold-thoroughbred languages like Brajabuli. The dominance of mainstream media in standardized languages further marginalized Brajabuli. As journals, radio, and subsequently television came popular, they primarily used standard languages, reducing the visibility of indigenous cants.

The educational system's emphasis on standardized languages for instruction and knowledge paraphernalia marginalized cants like Brajabuli. Scholars were encouraged to use and learn languages with broader operations. The absence of strong institutional support for the preservation and creation of Brajabuli has contributed to its decline. Unlike some other indigenous languages, Brajabuli may not have served from devoted language preservation enterprise. Population movement and urbanization constantly lead to a shift in verbal preferences. As people migrated to communal centers, they tended to adopt further considerably spoken languages, abating the use of indigenous cants like Brajabuli. Youthful generations may not have been exposed to or encouraged to use Brajabuli as much as their elders. This generational shift in language use can quicken the decline of cants passed down through family or community traditions. Cultural assimilation into broader verbal and societal morals has played a part in the decline of Brajabuli. Communities might adopt further considerably accepted languages to align with cultural trends. Conserving and studying analogous Languages is vital for understanding the verbal diversity and cultural drollness of the region.

The appearance of colonialism also contributed to the decline of Brajabuli, as social powers promoted their own languages for administration and education, further marginalizing indigenous languages. Profitable factors, analogous as the need for employment in communal areas where Brajabuli was not considerably spoken, incentivized individualities to adopt farther considerably used languages for better profitable openings. Technological advancements, particularly in communication, favored languages with larger speaker bases, leading to dropped use of Brajabuli in digital platforms and social media. The globalization of culture through mass media and entertainment channels favored languages with international reach, pushing Brajabuli further to the sidelines. Political movements for verbal nationalism in the region constantly concentrated on larger, more considerably spoken languages, neglecting lower indigenous languages like Brajabuli. Migration patterns within the region led to the dispersion of Brajabuli- speaking communities, lacing their verbal identity and accelerating the language's decline. Interfaith relations and religious syncretism led to the handover of further inclusive or considerably recognized religious languages, abating the otherness of Brajabuli in religious surrounds. Government programs favoring standardized languages for sanctioned communication and documentation marginalized Brajabuli in nonsupervisory processes. Educational reforms prioritizing standardized languages in classes and textbooks limited the exposure and transmission of Brajabuli to youthful generations. Socio-profitable difference between communal and pastoral areas impacted the preservation of Brajabuli, with communal centers favoring languages of commerce and administration over indigenous cants. Cultural ascendancy from dominant verbal communities overshadowed the cultural drollness and verbal diversity represented by languages like Brajabuli. The lack of digital resources and online content in Brajabuli hindered its vacuity and immortalized its obscurity in the digital age. Language shift among Brajabuli- speaking communities due to intermarriage and cultural assimilation with speakers of other languages accelerated the language's decline. The absence of formal language rejuvenation enterprise or advocacy groups for Brajabuli left it vulnerable to decimation. Changes in agricultural practices and pastoral livelihoods lowered the part of traditional oral societies, where Brajabuli was formerly prominent, further separating the language.

Relocation programs and communal development systems displaced pastoral communities where Brajabuli was spoken, dismembering intergenerational transmission of the language. Environmental factors, analogous as natural disasters or climate change, impacting traditional pastoral communities, destabilized verbal ecosystems where Brajabuli thrived. The association of Brajabuli with lower social status or cultural backwardness in the eyes of communal elites contributed to its stigmatization and decline. The influx of dominant languages through popular culture, advertising, and consumerism eroded the verbal terrain, leaving little space for languages like Brajabuli to thrive.

Despite its decline, sweats by linguists, historians, and cultural activists to document and library Brajabuli paraphernalia are essential for conserving its heritage and understanding its cultural significance. The decline of Brajabuli reflects a complex interplay of nonfictional, social, profitable, and cultural factors. From social influences to urbanization, technological advancements to educational reforms, various forces have gathered to marginalize this formerly vibrant language. Yet, amidst its abating operation, sweats to validate, save, and

understand Brajabuli's cultural significance remain vital. The story of Brajabuli serves as a poignant keepsake of the fragility of verbal diversity and the significance of securing indigenous languages as vital factors of our shared mortal heritage.

Conclusion and Implications of the Study

This research sheds light on the application of two languages, namely Brajabuli and Vrajavali, and their adaptation in Bengal and Vrindavan, respectively. The proposed study holds significance as it unveils the origins of Maithili and other languages, including those considered dormant due to a lack of speakers and other associated factors. This research is entirely dedicated to raise awareness about the disappearance of indigenous languages (Maithili, Brajabuli, etc.) and the need to preserve and protect them. The vanishing nature of these languages can lead to an irreplaceable loss of their cosmogony and thus of the common heritage of humanity.

Naturally, major benefit of the preservation of native languages can be the impact or influence on the understanding of its speaker as human interaction demands communication and it helps in collecting information about that particular community or the language along with this the study of native languages offers limitless insight into humanity. This can be considered as a proactive stance on preservation to retain the knowledge and importance of a community.

An individual should be concerned over the crisis of language loss or their vanishing nature because language loss is often considered as a crisis of social identity, an individual's psychological, social, and physical well-being is connected with his/her native language. It shapes values, relationships etc.

Factors endangering native languages include cultural, political or economic alienation, urbanization, Intermarriage and Inferiority complex (considering any language inferior). Losing a language can be considered as loss of scientific understanding of any language (basically for linguists and language researchers it becomes a challenging factor in order to decipher the information or data) and also can mean losing important knowledge about history, culture, and even the local environment of a language group along with various types of loss such as personal identity, cultural identity and diversity.

To conduct this research, questionnaires Google forms were distributed among participants. Conclusions were drawn from the survey data, revealing that many were unaware of languages like Brajabuli and Vrajavali. This lack of awareness was attributed to the pervasive influence of foreign languages in their daily lives and conversations.

The research paper also highlights that people lack awareness of the traditional literature originating from their current place of residence. This gap is a result of cultural and environmental shifts during their upbringing, leading to a lack of exposure to languages like Maithili and Brajabuli.

Based on the research findings, several recommendations were put forth: local languages should be integrated into school and college curricula, and social media can play a crucial role in preventing language disappearance through positive usage, such as vlogging in local languages. Active involvement of local language speakers and collaboration among linguists, governments, and organizations are proposed to collectively work on language preservation.

During the research, certain limitations were encountered. The increasing demand for foreign languages in various spheres, detachment from cultural roots, and a scarcity of prior research and authentic online data posed challenges. The data collection method was simplified due to a small sample size resulting from insufficient information about present speakers of the particular language.

This research aids language preservation by providing data on endangered languages like Brajabuli, Vrajavali, and Maithili, aiming to spark interest and facilitate language preservation.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare “No conflict of interest”.

Authors' Contribution:

This research initiative successfully achieved its objectives through a strategic and highly collaborative division of labour among team members. Dr Devina, Sakshi and Richa established the foundational framework by investigating the history, origin, and eventual decline of the Brajabuli language, alongside a critical assessment of surviving literary works. Advancing in this historical context, Kanishtha and Anamika executed a rigorous comparative linguistic analysis, precisely delineating the structural, phonetic, and grammatical differences separating Brajabuli from both Maithili and Bengali. Concurrently, Sunidhi and Sejal enriched the scope by categorizing the two distinct literary traditions, Bengali Brajabuli and Vrajāvali, while conducting a comprehensive review of major literature and musical compositions extending into the modern era. Crucially, the entire group functioned as a cohesive unit during the empirical phase, where all members jointly coordinated the field operations to execute the survey and pooled their collective expertise to conduct the final data analysis. Further, Dr Devina edited and proofread the paper. This seamless integration of specialized individual tasks and unified fieldwork ensured a comprehensive, methodologically sound evaluation of the Brajabuli cultural lineage.

APPENDIX

Appendix: (Questionnaires & Survey Responses)

All the data collection/questionnaires and result analysis have been verified and the same is available at the Corresponding Author, Dr. Devina Krishna (devina.eng@patnawomenscollege.in).