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Notes for PG semester 2 (CC-7,unit-4)

Mahesh Narayan and the Making of Modern Bihar: An Analytical Study

Introduction

The creation of modern Bihar in 1912 was the culmination of sustained regional assertion led by educated elites who sought administrative autonomy from the Bengal Presidency. Among the early architects of this movement, Mahesh Narayan occupies a significant place. A journalist, political thinker, and public intellectual, Mahesh Narayan played a pioneering role in articulating the demand for a separate Bihar province and in constructing a modern Bihari identity through the press.

His contribution must be examined in the context of political mobilization, journalistic activism, regional consciousness, and socio-economic critique.

I. Historical Context

During the late nineteenth century, Bihar was administratively subordinate to Bengal under British rule. Despite its historical importance and economic potential, it remained politically marginalized and economically neglected. Educated Biharis increasingly felt that:

Government services were dominated by Bengalis.

Educational and administrative institutions were concentrated in Calcutta.

Bihar's revenue was disproportionately utilized for Bengal's development.

In this atmosphere of regional discontent, Mahesh Narayan emerged as one of the earliest voices advocating separation.

II. Role in the Bihar Press

1. Founder of The Bihar Times

Mahesh Narayan founded The Bihar Times in the late nineteenth century, which later became The Bihari. This newspaper became the principal organ of the Bihar separation movement.

Through editorials and essays, he:

Systematically presented arguments for administrative separation.

Highlighted economic exploitation and developmental neglect.

Emphasized Bihar's distinct cultural and historical identity.

The newspaper served as a platform for shaping educated public opinion.

2. Political Journalism as Mobilization

Mahesh Narayan used journalism as a tool of constitutional agitation rather than revolutionary confrontation. His arguments were based on:

Administrative efficiency

Fiscal justice

Political representation

By presenting well-reasoned critiques, he gave intellectual legitimacy to the demand for a separate province.

III. Construction of Regional Identity

One of Mahesh Narayan's most important contributions was the articulation of a coherent "Bihari" identity.

1. Historical Revivalism

He invoked the glory of ancient Magadha, Nalanda, and Pataliputra to instill pride among Biharis. This historical narrative countered colonial stereotypes that portrayed Bihar as backward.

2. Linguistic and Cultural Unity

Although Bihar was linguistically diverse (Maithili, Bhojpuri, Magahi, Angika), Mahesh Narayan emphasized shared cultural traditions and historical memory to foster unity. The press became an instrument of regional integration.

IV. Economic and Administrative Critique

Mahesh Narayan strongly criticized:

Unequal distribution of government jobs

Poor infrastructure development in Bihar

Neglect of education and irrigation

He argued that administrative separation would ensure:

Better allocation of resources

Focused governance

Balanced regional development

Thus, his advocacy combined economic reasoning with political demands.

V. Relationship with Indian Nationalism

Mahesh Narayan's regionalism was not anti-national. Rather, he believed that:

Regional autonomy would strengthen Indian nationalism.

Administrative justice in Bihar would contribute to broader national awakening.

His moderate constitutional approach aligned with early Indian nationalist politics.

VI. Critical Evaluation

Strengths

Pioneer of Bihar's separation movement

Effective use of press as an ideological tool

Construction of modern Bihari consciousness

Rational and constitutional method of political advocacy

Limitations

The movement remained largely elite-driven and urban-centred.

Limited outreach among peasants and marginalized communities.

Dependence on English-language journalism restricted mass penetration.

From a subaltern perspective, the movement represented middle-class aspirations more than a mass-based political struggle.

Conclusion

Mahesh Narayan was one of the earliest and most influential architects of modern Bihar. Through journalism, intellectual leadership, and constitutional advocacy, he laid the ideological foundation for the creation of Bihar province in 1912.

Although his movement was moderate and primarily elite-oriented, his role in shaping regional consciousness and articulating administrative justice was foundational. Therefore, Mahesh Narayan deserves recognition as a key maker of modern Bihar whose legacy lies in transforming regional grievances into organized political demand.