

**Aesthetics of History & Memory:
Bidesia, Pre-text, Context & Emergence
of a New Culture**

**Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
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2009

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation titled **Aesthetics of History & Memory: *Bidesia*, Pre-text, Context & Emergence of a New Culture** submitted by me at the School of Arts & Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in Theatre & Performance Studies, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other university or institution.



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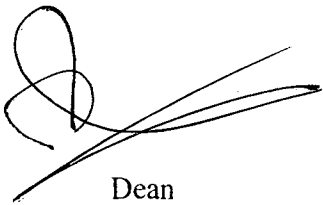
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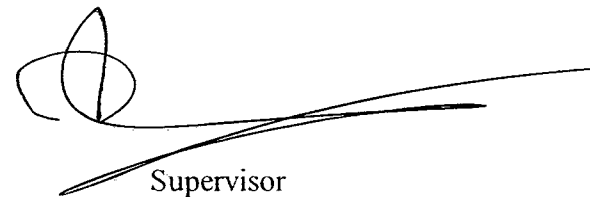
This is to certify that the dissertation titled **Aesthetics of History & Memory: *Bidesia*, Pre-text, Context & Emergence of a New Culture** submitted by **Mrityunjay Kumar Prabhakar** at the School of Arts & Aesthetics, JNU, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy in Theatre and Performance Studies**. This is his own work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other University or Institution.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.



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in the format of *Bidesia* theatre style popularized by Bhikhari Thakur. Dr. Badri Narayan Tiwari and Dr. Om Prakash Bharti have extensively written on the *Bidesia* theatre and culture. Dr. Molly Kaushal's writings on folk culture in general have been a helping source. Dr. Devendra Chaubey has sourced me the most valuable data for my research, i.e the sole and surviving interview of Bhikhari Thakur. *Sutradhar*, a hindi novel on the life of Bhikhari Thakur by Sanjeev has equally helped me in understanding the persona of the giant of *Bidesia* culture.

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**Dedicated to
Bhikhari Thakur**

Contents

Introduction

The Sublime Aesthetics of *Bidesia* in Context of History & Memory

0.1 The Project	1
0.2 The Terrain and Significance	6
0.3 Documentation as Process and Practice	9
0.4 Methodology	10

Chapter 1 *Bidesia* Culture: the by-product of the Aesthetics of History and Memory

1.1 The Great Discourse of History and Memory	
1.1a The discipline called History	12
1.1b The Paradigm of Memory	13
1.1c The Transposition of History and Memory	17
1.2 The History & Memory of the Crisis of Migration	21
1.3 The History & Memory of the Problem of Indentured Labour	28
1.4 Historicity of Emigration to Tropical Colonies	29
1.5 Seeking New Source of Labour	31
1.6 The history and development of the Indentured System of Labour	32
1.7 The Industrial Revolution of Europe and its effect on Indian Industry	33
1.8 Different Nature and Reasons for Indian Emigration	36
1.9 Bhojpur as a main Recruiting Ground of Indentured labour	41
1.10 Memory of Indentured Labor as documented in Folklore & Poems	47

Chapter-2 The Community Practice of *Bidesia*: Rejuvenating Vital Pre-texts through Texts

2.1 About <i>Bidesia</i>	55
2.2 Historicity of the Word, the Language Bhojpuri and the Place Bhojpur	61
2.3 Established Pre-text & Context of <i>Bidesia</i>	64
2.4 New Insights on the pre-text of '<i>Bidesia</i> Culture'	68

Chapter-3 Bhikhari Thakur and his Texts: a Construct & Constructor of *Bidesia* Culture

3.1 Role of Bhikhari Thakur in Shaping <i>Bidesia</i> Theatre & Culture	86
3.2 Life & Time of Bhikhari Thakur	88
3.3 Challenges before Bhikhari Thakur and His Quest for Performance	104
3.4 Structure of his Plays and power of his Performances	109
3.5 Evolution of '<i>Bidesia</i> Theatre' through Bhikhari Thakur's famous Text <i>Bidesia</i>	119

Conclusion

<i>Bidesia</i>, a Social text of Collective Consciousness of 'Cultural Memory'	128
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Bibliography	133
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Appendix	144
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Introduction

The Sublime Aesthetics of *Bidesia* in Context of History & Memory

0.1 The Project

Culture gives a sense of civilization. That's why culture of every region or nationality is distinctly different from the others. Even communities living in the same geographical area have their own diverse cultural expressions. So, it can be broadly said that, the culture is widely associated with community; and performances of each kind, e.g. rituals, folk, community or modern, are also a part of culture.

As Diana Taylor has quoted Victor Turner in her article *Translating Performance*,

*"Performances revealed culture's deepest, truest and most individual character. Guided by a belief in their universality and relative transparency, he claimed that populations could grow to understand each other through their performances."*¹

Every culture has a sound base into its own community from where it emerges. The form it evolves is deeply rooted into the experiences of the community. People's memory does not last long; which is a common nature of human-being. But there are several experiences faced by the community or a particular society which the community thinks should be transferred to their younger generations and for that the community uses the tool of culture (i.e. songs, music, rituals; plays, proverbs, anecdotes, painting, calligraphy and others). Through these various mediums they pass on their experience and knowledge to the other generation. Regarding the same, Diana Taylor writes in an article, *Acts of Transfer*, of her book, 'The Archive and the Repertoire',

¹ Diana Taylor, *Translating Performance*, *MLA Journal*, 2002, pp. 44-50/ (Victor Turner's quote)

*“Multiple forms of embodied acts are always present, though in a constant state of againness. They reconstitute themselves, transmitting communal memories, histories and values from one generation to the next. Embodied and performed acts generate record and transmit knowledge.”*²

Performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated. Performances or any act of performative body in that sense preserves the sense of mental and physical development of the human society which is also part of production of knowledge. Diana Taylor defines this in a lucid language in these words,

*“Embodied performances have always played a central role in conserving memory and consolidating identities in literate, semiliterate and digital societies. Not everyone comes to culture or modernity through writing. I believe it is imperative to keep re-examining the relationship between embodied performance and the production of knowledge.”*³

She writes further,

*“We learn and transmit knowledge through embodied action, through cultural agency, and by making choices. Performance, for me, functions as an episteme, a way of knowing, not simply an object of analysis.”*⁴

Performances plays vital role not in just transmitting knowledge but simultaneously it also preserves the existing knowledge in the form of memory or history of the human kind. Memory is a faculty by which things are remembered; the capacity for retaining, perpetuating, or reviving, the thoughts of things past while history is a documented knowledge of the past. Joseph Roach extended the understanding of performance by

² Diana Taylor, ‘The Archive and the Repertoire’, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2003, pp. 4.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid

making it coterminous with memory and history. As such, it participates in the transfer and continuity of knowledge. Joseph Roach writes,

*“Performing genealogies draw on the idea of expressive movements as mnemonic reserves, including patterned movements made and remembered by bodies, residual movements retained implicitly in images or words (or in the silences between them), and imaginary movements dreamed in minds not prior to language but constitute of it.”*⁵

Memory is comparatively a new term in academics than History. The Emergence of Memory promises to rework history’s boundaries. Kerwin Lee Klein in his article ‘On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse’ writes,

“We might be tempted to imagine the increasing use of memory as the natural result of an increased scholarly interest in the ways that popular and folk cultures construct history and the past.”

He continues,

“For years specialists have dealt with such well-known phenomena as oral history, autobiography, and commemorative rituals without ever pasting them together into something called memory. Where we once spoke of folk history or popular history or oral history or public history or even myth we now employ memory as a metahistorical category that subsumes all these various terms.”

The transfer of the vital knowledge is very much part of the transfer of memories, that society has acquired through the pragmatic and practical experience of hundreds of year and generation. These memories become part of the culture of the society as it was passed by one generation to the other in the form of cultural practice through the collective consciousness of the society. This collective consciousness is a thing which is made of

⁵ Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance, ‘History, Memory and Performance’, Columbia University Press, 1996, pp. 26.

the common memory of the society which regenerates itself in the form of cultural expressions to preserve the shared experience and memory. This has been termed as phenomenon called '*Cultural Memory*'.

Nissim Mannathukkaren established the notion of memory in his book, 'The Rupture with Memory', that the fragmented and ruptured memories are part of shaping of a cultural tradition. So, our cultural produce is widely based on the rupture of memory and its act of transfer into cultural memory from the historical necessities and bondages through which society has to pass away.⁶

Kerwin Lee Klein in his article 'On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse' writes,

*"Our scholarly fascination with things memorable is quite new. As Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins have noted, "Collective Memory" emerged as an object of scholarly enquiry only in the early twentieth century, contemporaneous with the so-called crisis of historicism. Hugo Von Hofmannsthal used the phrase "Collective Memory" in 1902 and in 1925 Maurice Halbwachs's 'The Social Frameworks of Memory', argued, against Henry Bergson and Sigmund Freud, that memory is a specifically social phenomenon."*⁷

A song of Karma caste of Madhya Pradesh refers the same when it states that if you want to know the actual stories of our life then listen to our songs. Barrier Halwin, a scholar of folk arts has rightly written in praise of folk songs in his book 'Folk Songs of Mechil Hills',

"The folk songs are important not only because the music, form and content of verse is itself part of the people's life but even more because in songs in chorus, in actually fixed

⁶ Nissim Mannathukkaren, 'The rupture with Memory', Savarirayulu Street, Pondicherry, 2006.

⁷ Kerwin Lee Klein, On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse, Source: Representations, No. 69, Special Issue: Grounds for Remembering, (Winter 2000), University of California Press, pp. 127.

and established documents we have the most authentic and unshakable history to ethnographic fact."⁸

In this perspective, *Bidesia*, a folk tradition of its own kind, can directly be credited to its society, where it is rooted. This form could be defined best as of the people by the people and for the people. Society has developed its own tools in course of time while passing through different transitions. These transitions have the most valuable archaeology of knowledge, hidden behind it and society wants to preserve it for long, for their future generation, to inform and educate them about the intricate issues, which they have gone through.

Although several individuals like Bhikhari Thakur, Guddar Rai, Ramsakal Pathak Dwij, Sundari Bai, Dunia Bai and several others have played a vital role in forming the subject matter and aesthetics of *Bidesia*, the authorship of the whole *Bidesia* culture clearly goes to the whole society and particularly the women protagonists of the society who were not only the worst sufferers but also were the first to codify and formulate their ruptured memories of agonies into music and songs like '*Jantsaar*', '*Jhoomar*', '*Poorvi*' and other local folk forms of their singing tradition, which were a cultural produce. The subjects of the trauma of historical developments within a geographical area or society were themselves the author of the cultural texts. Songs like '*Paniya ke Jahaj Se, Paltaniya Bani Aeiha Piya*'⁹ are the distinct cultural expressions of those women protagonists, which later transformed into a performance text by Sundari and Dunia Bai and furnished by Bhikhari Thakur through his plays, poems and other cultural writings. The transformation from the subjective and personal mode of cultural expression to the objective and performing cultural expression are the matter of the transgression from the '*Cultural Memory*' to the '*Cultural Product*'.

⁸ Krishndev Upadhyay, *Bhojpuri Lok-Sahitya ka Adhayayan*, Hindi Pracharak Pushtakalaya, Vaanasi, 1960.

⁹ A beautiful song written by Mahendra Mishra in Purvi.

Here culture plays the role of the catalyst and takes the burden of the history to transmit it to the future generation. This research will capture the transformations within the culture of a community caused by historical developments particularly in performative genres, as suggested in the topic itself “Aesthetics of History & Memory: *Bidesia*, Pre-text, Context and Emergence of a new Culture”.

0.2 The Terrain and Significance

Bidesia, is a folk theatre tradition, which spurred into the Bhojpur region of Bihar, with the creative genius of Bhikhari Thakur’s practice of theatre, when he tried to make his own way by declining the other performative styles of his time. It was the period of as early as 1917, when he started doing performances of his own kind and made his own troupe to cherish his dreams in the field of performance. ‘Birha Bahar’ was the first play he has written followed by ‘Kalyug Bahar’ which later rewritten by him as ‘Bahara bahar’ and was widely known as *Bidesia* among his audience which led his kind of theatre practice named as ‘*Bidesia* Theatre’. The performances of the plays of Bhikhari Thakur continued till 1971 till the time of his death and even after that in the leadership of Gaurishankar Thakur, his nephew for few years. But, with the death of Gaurishankar Thakur it hardly found any good mentor. Although, the group and some of its old members still exists and performs on invitation but the vibrancy it has gained during the life and time of Bhikhari Thakur is missing. From 1917 to 1971, it was a period of almost 55 years when this theatre form was the most important thing for the cultural life of Bhojpuri society and it represented the Bhojpuri culture in many parts of the country especially wherever the Bhojpuri Diaspora existed.

There was a time when *Bidesia* came to the regional and national scenario as a celebrated performance for a little while in the proper guidance of Bhikhari Thakur, but it has disappeared after that. Few directors like Satish Anand and Sanjay Upadhyay tried to refuel the energetic *Bidesia* form but even then it has not got the momentum. So, several critics ask frequently that whether *Bidesia* should be called a theatre form because it does

not have the kind of history and presence which other folk forms like Jatra, Nautanki, Khayal, Tamasha have. In a passing glance anyone could be convinced by the argument. Yes, it's true that the marginal folk form of Bihar called *Bidesia* does not avail the proper history like other folk forms. It does not even go beyond 100 years. It's a right question that how a form like *Bidesia* should be granted the status of a folk form which doesn't even has the continuity of hundred years.

But the critics forget that *Bidesia* is not just a theatre form rather it is a cultural tradition of Bhojpur region of Bihar. It would be interesting to have a look into the whole genre of *Bidesia*. The theme and concern of *Bidesia* is reflected in all the art practices of the Bhojpuri region whether songs, music, dance, poetry, theatre or visual arts. This whole cultural outburst was recorded and codified by various individuals like Sundari Bai, Dunia Bai, Mahendra Mishra, Bhikhari Thakur and others but society and its women had played the most important role in shaping up this form through their singings of solitude, as women were the worst sufferers of the pain of migration because it were they who were left behind mourning and waiting endlessly for the return of their men. As it was reflected in all the practiced art forms it had taken the shape of a whole cultural product rather than a performing art practice or simply practice of a folk form.

The works of Prof. Badri Narayan Tiwari¹⁰ on *Bidesia* tradition and culture of Bhojpur area has opened a new era of studies on *Bidesia* Culture as a whole. For him it is a tradition caused by the crisis of indentured labor. He has defined the term *Bidesia* in an authentic manner, he defines and I quote,

"In Bidesia culture, migrants are referred to as Bidesia, Pardesi, Batohia, and other terms, which contain elements of both affection and complain for leaving the loved ones behind. These three terms of address represent three different kinds of folk tradition:

¹⁰ Prof. Badri Narayan Tiwari is a scholar of *Bidesia* tradition. He has been researching on the issue of migration from the Bhojpuri belt and its connection in the forming of a new performing cultural tradition called *Bidesia*. His article, '*Bidesia*, Migration, Change and Folk culture' has presented several new insights on the issue and it has been widely acclaimed. Presently he is researching on the same issue of migrated Bhojpuri's and their cultural extravaganza in the departed countries like Fiji, Mauritius and others where these have settled down later.

firstly, in Bidesia culture, the chances of return of these migrants were slim. When leaving his muluk, or native place, the migrant broke all ties with his loved ones. Secondly, in the Pardesi culture, the migrant is forced to leave his native place in order to earn a living, but still maintains communication ties with his family. The painful-memory of this semi-permanent migration still remains however, and the pain comes through in the Bhojpuri folk songs. A Pardesi may be called Bidesia in complaining tones, but a Bidesia is seldom called Pardesi. Finally, in Batohia culture, the Bidesia comes back as a traveler to his native place and resumes normal communication ties."¹¹

Till now little research has been done on the issue of *Bidesia* Culture and Tradition and whatever has been written most of them centers life and works of Bhikhari Thakur, the propagator of *Bidesia* folk theatre form. Even that was written in a manner, where he was treated as a larger than life figure rather than an individual, who has been trying to come up with this form, with a lot of difficulties. Sanjeev, a Hindi novelist, is the only writer who had tried to capture the human elements of Bhikhari Thakur in his biographical novel 'Sutradhar'¹², based on life and works of Bhikhari Thakur, but there are limitations of writing a fiction.

My intention is to find out the undiscovered past of *Bidesia* as a culture rather than just a folk form and the various sources from where the authenticity and historicity of this form could be traced and justified in this paper. It is just a humble effort to give justified answers to the critics of *Bidesia* which has been already discussed in the beginning of this paper. I am trying to focus this matter from various sources which are still unnoticed by the scholars and if once they are brought into light they would be able to give insights on this issue. The sources, I am referring to, are written materials, either in magazines or books, published or unpublished, the recorded material, interviews and other various sources.

¹¹ http://www.ias.nl/iasn/30/IIASNL30_12.pdf

¹² Sanjeev, *Sutradhar*, Radhakrishna Prakashan, Delhi, 2004.

0.3 Documentation as Process and Practice

Documentation is the process through which one can recreate the actual practice. The well documented the matters/objects would be, the well the recreation would be. This should be done by various methods but the method, approach and the working relation with the object/matter varies according to the materiality of the object. The kind of vitality and liveliness performance affords, goes out with the mechanization of the art form. So, even the recorded material are not up to the nearest documentation but still it is the only source to give a performance life, when it vanishes.

In the case of, my research material *Bidesia* nothing has been found as recorded as when Bhikhari was doing his performances nobody has cared to record that as he was coming from a marginalized region and even his performances were regarded as marginalized by the government institutions which were busy in helping urban performances. In that time frame government policy towards folk performances were biased. It is impossible get even photographs of *Bidesia* performances till now from the central institution of performing arts named Sangeet Natak Akademy. A person who has had performed several times on the request of government before and after independence was never thought worthy enough to be documented. The politics of performance culture in India as a nation state can easily be traced by this fact. The later performances of now a day done by the same troupe in the guidance of Bhikhari Thakur's nephew Ram Jeevan Rahi was documented by some enthusiasts but not by the state institutions still. So, even the present version of the same is not available in documentation. The death of this folk theatre form closer but still the agencies have nothing to worry.

Some modern directors have tried to recreate the magic of *Bidesia* on stage and they were/are quite successful in this either by staging the plays written by Bhikhari Thakur or by evolving new scripts in the same performing style. Satish Anand and Sanjay Upadhyay, two well known directors, have carried forward the tradition of *Bidesia* on the

model developed by Bhikhari Thakur apart from others. Although, their way of doing productions are modernist in trend; but they have tried to retain the flavor of *Bidesia*.

Even the performances of the same troupe of Bhikhari Thakur, implying some actors, who have worked with Bhikhari Thakur too, are not the same. The new team has tried to make it more civilized than required to show piece it among the civilized class. The performative element especially the soul of *Bidesia* performance, the Launda Nautch¹³ is missing in it. So, here even the first hand experience of the plays of Bhikhari Thakur by the same troupe could not be considered as an authentic documentation.

1.4 Methodology

I will try to be as flexible as possible in applying various methodologies while explaining the available texts as my dissertation is going to use a whole lot of concepts like History, Memory, Culture, Cultural Memory, Social Theatre, Authorship, Diaspora, Performative Behaviour etc. To look into this plethora of academic and theoretical terms it would be hard to restrict on a singular methodology. Although, I would be using the concepts and approach of Subaltern studies to discuss the topic as Subaltern is a domain through that I can focus the *Bidesia* Culture which is as marginalized as like its practitioners.

The *Bidesia* Culture is the product of the lower strata of the masses and it is very much practiced by them only whether in life or a cultural practice. Majority of the migrated people come from the downtrodden in the caste and class hierarchy. Migration was the only option for them to survive and attempt to get back their sovereignty, identity and a life of respect. The mental loss caused by this large scale migration too mostly affected the persons coming from the same class of society. And so they, especially the woman of the community, were the first to evolve the *Bidesia* Culture. In feudal society women were marginalized and on the periphery of the society and so they are obvious subject of

¹³ Launda Nautch is a tradition of folk dance of Bihar in which men performers perform very vibrant movements dressed as women. Bhikhari is known for captivating this form and took it that standard that it has become so popular.

Subaltern. Apart from that most of the performers of the *Bidesia* were from the marginalized society. As the subaltern, manifests most of the affected population and the background of the performers of the subject of *Bidesia* Culture it would be significant to use 'Subaltern' as a methodological tool but in total my approach would be Interdisciplinary to carry forward the present research work as it has got some other important areas to look into and those exceeds the boundary of Subalterns.

Chapter-1

***Bidesia* Culture: the by-product of the Aesthetics of History and Memory**

1.1 The Great Discourse of History and Memory

1.1a The discipline called History

Every act or event has its own time. Sometimes they are the constructs of the eventualities of the time; sometimes they make time immortal and ephemeral with its acts or events. And according to Beverley Southgate, a well known historian of our time, 'History is the hope of providing an ideal representation of the past 'as it was'.'¹⁴ –Or- 'History is the study of the past'¹⁵. The same sense prevails in the statement of Raymond Williams, in his work called '*Keywords*' while defining the term History he states, 'History is the sense of organized knowledge of the past.'¹⁶

It is said that the past realities and events are waiting to be dug out and the role of a historian is to just clear away the dusk and mystification around some past event so that it can be viewed in its own perspective. But for this, one has to be necessarily objective in his approach, without which one cannot do justice to the past event. As Lucian, a second century Greek historian has said that the historian should 'bring a mind like a mirror,

¹⁴ Beverley Southgate, *History: What and Why?*, Routledge, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN, 1996.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ Williams, Raymond, '*Keywords*', Fontana Paperbacks, 8 Grafton Street, London W1X3LA, 1983, pp. 146.

clear, gleaming-bright, accurately centered, displaying the shape of things just as he receives them, free from distortion, false coloring, and mis-representation'. With what achieved, the historian could reasonably expect to leave to posterity nothing less than a 'true account of what happened.'¹⁷

The greatest Greek thinker and philosopher Aristotle has also made a clear difference between history and poetry. He has said that history relates what has been, while the poetry what might be. He also claims that 'poetry is chiefly conversant about *general* truth, history about *particular*.

E.H. Carr writes in his famous book 'What is history', 'it is precisely for matters of this kind that the historian is entitled to rely on what have been called the 'auxiliary sciences' of history – archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics, chronology, and so forth. These so called basic facts, which are the same for all historians, commonly belong to the category of the raw materials of the historian rather than of history itself. Of course, facts and documents are essential to the historian. But do not make a fetish of them.'¹⁸

1.1b The Paradigm of Memory

People in many preliterate cultures rely on their memories to recall personal and societal information and pass it on orally to children. All people seek their origins in what came before them; they derive their identities from both individual and collective memories. The past can be recalled and retold in many ways -- whether it is through the written word, history, myth, legend, oral tradition, art, or performance.

As I have written in the introduction that human memory is not permanent and that is not linear. In my opinion, history and memory are both discerning, variable, and open to contestation and competition, articulated in numerous voices and are continually altered. As social memory is moulded by community experiences and contemporary concerns,

¹⁷ Lucian, quoted by D.R.Kelley (ed.), '*Versions of History*,' London, Yale University Press, 1991, pp, 66-67.

¹⁸ E.H.CARR, '*What Is History?*' Penguin Books Ltd, 27 Wrights Lane, London, 1990, pp. 11.

historians too, reinterpret the past in the light of changing concerns and questions shaped by the society within which they live. In the ever-changing landscapes of history and memory, it is as important to know what has been forgotten as to understand why and how an event or a person has been remembered.

Both individual and collective identities are also part of the practice through which the past is remembered. While individual identities originate from personal and family experiences recalled over generations, the collective experiences are shared by the whole community. And this is the Collective Memory which constitutes the soil in which historiography is rooted.

As Paul Ricoeur argues in his text '*Memory, History, Forgetting*¹⁹', 'The problem posed by the entanglement of memory and imagination is as old as Western philosophy. Socratic philosophy bequeathed to us two rival and complementary *topoi* on this subject, one Platonic, the other Aristotelian.' He further continues, 'The first, centered on the theme of the *eikon*, speaks of the present representation of an absent thing; it argues implicitly for enclosing the problematic of memory within that of imagination. The second, centered on the theme of the representation of a thing formerly perceived, acquired or learned, argues for including the problematic of the image within that of remembering. These are the two versions of the *aporia* of imagination and memory from which we can never completely extricate ourselves.'²⁰

Aristotle writes in his treatise '*Peri mnemes kai anamneseos*', 'To distinguish, not the persistence of memories in relation to their recall, but their simple presence to mind in relation to recollection as a search. Memory, in this particular sense, is directly characterized as affection (*pathos*), which distinguishes it, precisely from recollection.'

Memory is supposed to be faithful to the past. It binds us to what has passed before we remember it. In simple terms, we can say that memory is there to signify that something

¹⁹ Paul Ricoeur, '*Memory, History, Forgetting*', the University of Chicago Press, 2006, pp. 7.

²⁰ Ibid.

has happened before we declare that we remember it. As Henri Bergson puts it, the ‘thing’ remembered is plainly identified with a singular, unrepeatable event; for example, a given reading of a memorized text. Is this always the case? To be sure, as we shall say in conclusion, the memory event in a way paradigmatic, to the extent that it is the phenomenon equivalent of a physical event. The event is simply what happens. It takes place. It passes and occurs. It happens it comes about.

In his text *The Psychology of Imagination*, Jean-Paul Sartre writes, ‘Confronting the phenomenon of fascination with the forbidden object’, how can we help but leap to the plane of Collective Memory and evoke the sort of hauntedness, described by historians of the present day, which stigmatizes this “past that does not past”? Hauntedness is to Collective Memory what hallucination is to private memory, a pathological modality of the incrustation of the past at the heart of the present, which acts as a counterweight to the innocent habit-memory, which also inhabits the present, but in order to “act it” as Bergson says, not to haunt it or torment it.²¹

It is more important for our purpose to look to Collective Memory and to discover there the equivalent of the pathological situations with which psychoanalysis is concerned. It is the bipolar constitution of personal and community identity that, ultimately, justifies extending the Freudian analysis of mourning to the traumatism of collective identity. We can speak not only in an analogical sense but in terms of a direct analysis of collective traumatism, of wounds to Collective Memory.²²

Freud in his text dated 1914, titled “*Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through*” writes,

“The obstacle, attributed to “resistance due to repression”, is designated by the term “compulsion to repeat”; it is characterized among other things by a tendency to act out, which Freud says is substituted for the memory. The patient “reproduces it not as a

²¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, the University of Chicago Press, 2006, pp. 54.

²² *Ibid*, pp. 78.

*memory but as an action; he repeats it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it.*²³

Through all these discussions we get an idea that it is mourning-the work of mourning-which is in the core of the pathological tendency of memory. Here mourning and melancholia is to be taken as one block as it is the tendency of mourning to become melancholia and its difficulty in extracting itself from this awful neurosis that will give rise to subsequent reflections on the pathology of Collective Memory and the therapeutic perspectives this opens.

*"Mourning," as stated in the work of Paul Ricoeur, "is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on."*²⁴

In this way, symbolic wounds calling for healing are stored in the archives of the Collective Memory which has the power of therapeutic elements. We can take one further step and suggest that it is on the level of Collective Memory, even more perhaps than on that of individual memory, that the overlapping of the work of mourning and the work of recollection acquires its full meaning, always in terms of its loss that the wounded memory is forced to confront itself.²⁵

Extracting the exemplary value from traumatic memories, it is justice that turns memory into a project; and it is this same project of justice that gives the form of the future and of the imperative to the duty of memory. We can then suggest that the duty of memory considered as the imperative of justice is projected as a third term onto the point of intersection of the work of mourning and the work of memory.

²³ Sigmund Freud, 'Remembering, Repeating and Working Through,' in vol. 12 (1911-13), trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 147-56.

²⁴ Paul Ricoeur, 'Memory, History, Forgetting', the University of Chicago Press, 2006, pp. 71.

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 78-80.

The united force of the duty of justice can then extend beyond the memory and mourning pair to the pair formed by the truthful and the pragmatic dimensions of memory; indeed, our own discourse on memory has been conducted up to now along two parallel lines, the line of memory's concern for truth, under the aegis of the epistemic fidelity of memories with respect to what actually took place, and the line of memory use, considered as practice, even as the technique of memorization.

It is as though the duty of memory were projected ahead of consciousness as a point of convergence between the truth perspective and the pragmatic perspective on memory. The question then arises as to what gives the idea of justice its federating force with regard to the truthful and pragmatic aims of memory as well as to the work of memory and the work of mourning. It is thus, the relation of the duty of memory to the idea of justice that must be interrogated.

1.1c The Transposition of History and Memory

Pierre Nora in one of his articles "L'Ere de la commémoration" writes,

*"Consisted in the rectification and enrichment of the history of memory. Although it was intended to be 'critical,' it was in fact only a deepening of that tradition. Its ultimate goal was identification through filiations. It was in this sense that history and memory were identical: history was verified memory."*²⁶

Here the question posed by the duty of memory, exceeds the limits of a simple phenomenology of memory. It even outstrips the resources of intelligibility of an epistemology of historical knowledge. Finally, as an imperative of justice, the duty of memories belongs to a moral problematic. Paul Ricoeur defines this problem in certain words,

²⁶ Pierre Nora, 'Comment écrire l'histoire de la France?' *Les Lieux de mémoire, Vol. 1, La République*, pp. 20.

“On one side, it is the emergence of a problematic of a frankly egological mode of subjectivity, on the other, the irruption of sociology in the field of the social sciences and, with it, the appearance of an unprecedented concept of collective consciousness.”²⁷

Ricoeur further deconstructs the mystery,

“In this intensely polemical situation, which opposes a younger tradition of objectivity to the ancient tradition of reflexivity, individual memory and Collective Memory are placed in a position of rivalry. However, they do not oppose one another on the same plane, but occupy universes of discourse that have become estranged from each other.”²⁸

The problem of the relations between individual memory and Collective Memory will not thereby be put to rest. As Ricoeur rightly observed,

“Historiography will again take up this problem. And it will arise once more when history, presenting itself in turn as its own subject, will be tempted to abolish the status of the womb of history commonly accorded to memory, and to consider as one of the objects of historical knowledge. It will then be the task of philosophy of history, to cast a final look at both the external relations between memory and history and the internal relations between individual memory and Collective Memory.”²⁹

The connection between individual memory and Collective Memory is intimate, immanent; the two types of memory interpenetrate one another. This is the major thesis of “The Collective Memory” written by Maurice Halbwachs. But apart from it, this is not in the case of history which is not destined to what is going to become “historical” memory.³⁰

²⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, the University of Chicago Press, 2006, pp. 94.

²⁸ Ibid, pp. 95.

²⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, the University of Chicago Press, 2006, pp. 95-96.

³⁰ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, New York, Harper & Row Colophon Books, 1980.

The viable transition of the pathological categories of the Collective Memory to the historical plane would be more completely justified, if we were able to show that it applies not only to the exceptional situations just mentioned, but that these depend on a fundamental structure of collective existence.

Ricoeur clearly elaborately writes about this transposition of collective to the historical. He argues,

“The discovery of what is called historical memory consists in a genuine acculturation to externality. This acculturation is that of a gradual familiarization with the unfamiliar, with the unastuteness of the historical past.”³¹

The punch of the whole discourse is that the historical memory is integrated into living memory. The enigmatic character that obscured the narrative of the distant past fades as the lacunae of our own memories are filled and their darkness dissipates. On the horizon, stands out the wish for an integral memory that holds together individual memory, Collective Memory, and historical memory – a wish that extracts from Halbwachs this exclamation worthy of Bergson (and Freud): *“We forget nothing.”*

With the intention of decoding the whole testimony of the interrelationship of history and memory, Maurice questions, *‘Has history finally melted into memory? And has memory broadened itself to the scale of historical memory?’* And he argues in affirmative,

“At first sight, they testify to a malaise on the borders of this historical discipline and to a debate over the objectives of the partitioning of disciplines. This is true, but, more deeply, the crisis reaches the point where historical memory runs alongside Collective Memory.”

32

³¹ Paul Ricoeur, *‘Memory, History, Forgetting’*, the University of Chicago Press, 2006, pp. 394.

³² Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, New York, Harper & Row Colophon Books, 1980.

Next, a secret discordance, which will be amplified by our other two witnesses, persists between Collective Memory and historical memory, which makes Halbwachs say: "*In general history starts only when tradition ends.*"³³

Ricoeur takes up this discourse from here and says,

*"History, however, gives the impression that everything... is transformed from one period to another. In this way, history concerns itself especially with differences and oppositions. It then belongs to the Collective Memory, mainly at the time of great upheavals, to support new social institutions "with everything transferable from tradition."*³⁴

Pierre Nora, in his article 'Between History and Memory', announced at one and the same time a rupture, a loss, and the emergence of a new phenomenon. The rupture is between memory and history. The loss is that of what is called "*memory-history.*" The new phenomenon is the stage of a "*memory seized by history.*"³⁵

The problematic of the significant crisis of Indentured labor during the British Colonial rule and the pathological sign developed through it in the Bhojpuri community at large scale has transferred itself successfully into the collective consciousness of the said community, which is an eclectic mixture of history and memory at the same time.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Paul Ricoeur, 'Memory, History, Forgetting', the University of Chicago Press, 2006, pp 396.

³⁵ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History," *Realms of Memory*, 1:1-20.

1.2 The History & Memory of the Crisis of Migration

As I have said earlier migration was a constant process for the people of Bhojpur rather than a one time movement. The area of Bhojpur comes directly in the Gangatic region of the country, and so, it is densely populated. As river was the source of civilization from the beginning, people choose to live on the banks of rivers for various purposes, as; they got fertile land for cultivation and grass for their animals. The Ganga was the lifeline of Northern India, so it became highly crowded by the time of medieval period. The density of population which was dependent of Gangatic valley became overcrowded to the extent that it could not fulfill the fundamental needs of the people. The poverty was acute in this area and there were few means to survive. Francis Buchanan had a first hand experience of this area and he wrote,

“Rural poverty seems to have been most acute in those areas north to the Ganges where settlement was dense.”³⁶

In those circumstances, migration became the only tool to sustain. From the early of medieval period, people of this area chose migration as a tool of their survival for different factors. The two districts where the most emigrants were registered were Patna and North Sahabad. If we take only two northern subdivisions of Buxer and Arah, we get an average pressure of 715 per square mile, while Saran was most populous district in Bihar (870 per square mile). Grierson in his report in 1882 wrote,

“It will be seen that the emigrants registered as the pressure of population. In the 24 Parganas, Patna and North Sahabad, where the pressure of population is high, the number of registration is large; and in Munger and Gaya, where the pressure is low, the number of registration is small.”³⁷

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³⁶ Francis Buchanan-An Account of the District of Sahabad, pp. 430.

³⁷ Gen. Dept.(Colonial Emigration) June 1883 Nos. 20-21.

The pressure of population on the land and the increasing cost of living in the later part of 19th century added misfortune to the laboring classes. A reflection of this pressure, Gyan Pandey observes,

*“This was no longer the migration of villages or communities, ‘voting with their feet’ and taking up cultivation or employment in other areas. The migration that now began towards the industrial belt of eastern India, the tea gardens of Assam and plantations abroad.”*³⁸

Although, there are thousands reasons for migration from the Bhojpuri region but to understand it we can apply ‘Push’ and ‘Pull’ factors, which are of international standards. According to Wikipedia, ‘Push and pull factors are those factors which either forcefully push people into migration or attract them. A push factor is forceful, and a factor which relates to the country from which a person migrates. It is generally some problem which results in people wanting to migrate. Different types of push factors can be seen further below. A push factor is a flaw or distress that drives a person away from a certain place. A pull factor is something concerning the country to which a person migrates. It is generally a benefit that attracts people to a certain place. Push and pull factors are usually considered as north and south poles on a magnet.’³⁹

Primitive conditions, few opportunities, not enough Jobs, Famine/Drought, Slavery, and Poor Housing are the main elements behind the ‘Push’ factor of migration. While Job Opportunities, Better Living Conditions, Education, Industry and Better Working Conditions are the elements of ‘Pull’ factor. The ‘Push’ factor had been applied on those who had to leave the region, as there were no any other options left before them for survival. Maximum number of persons, family and community members migrated from the Bhojpuri region because of this factor. This is reported in many surveys, studies and historical researches as well as in the cultural practice of the community which are the

³⁸ Gyanendra Pandey – op. cit. Subaltern Studies, II, pp. 73.

³⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_migration#Push_and_Pull_Factors

product of their memorization of the historical events and movements. There were another set of people who migrated or chosen to be settled down in other areas or destination of the country for the purpose of business and economical boost up, they are counted in the 'Pull' factor.

There were certain avenues spread over different parts of the country which were much explored by the Bhojpuri community as a tool of migration. The first and foremost of them is business. People from this area were highly interested in business relations with the other parts of the regions and particularly places like Moran, Dhaka, Kolkata, Magah and Patna as mentioned earlier from Eastern India. Later it became so frequent that women of this area were afraid of migration to the eastern regions as the that people who migrated to Eastern parts of the country never returned, as several of them who went never returned or returned for a few days but settled down in those areas. The sound of these superstitions is evident from hundreds of songs of the repertoire of Folklore of the area. Here are certain examples of 'Push' and 'Pull' factors which were denoted by the Bhojpuri community in their folklores and cultural traditions of singing. These were mostly noted in the singing traditions of women of the area as they were the worst sufferers in both kinds of migration. The following song written by Bhikhari Thakur in his most famous play *Bidesia* is a vital example of this:

Piya More mat ja O' Puruwaba
Purab Deshwa men Tona bahut ba
Pani Bahut Kamjor
*Piya More mat ja O' Puruwaba*⁴⁰

(O' dear, Don't go to Eastern side. There are a lot of mysterious soul there and the water of that is very weak. So, please don't go to East.)

⁴⁰ *Bhikhari Thakur Rachnawali*, ed. Dr. Virendra Narayan Yadav and Nagendra Prasad Singh, Bihar Rashtra Bhasha Parishad, Patna, 2005, pp. 31.

There are several other lines which resemble the same like:

*'Apne ta gaile saiyan purbi re banijiya!'*⁴¹

(You yourself have gone to East for business purpose.)

Or the beautiful lines written by Bhikhari Thakur which Pyari Sundari, the protagonist character of the play *Bidesia* sings while suggesting her mourning, have the same connotation:

'Piyawa Gailan Kalkatawa e Sajni!

*Turi Dihlan Pati-Patni Natawa, e Sajni!'*⁴²

(O' Dear, My husband has gone to Kolkata. He has deserted the relationship of husband and wife.)

These folklores denote the fear of women of the Bhojpur region whose husbands have settled down in the Eastern region of the country leaving behind their wives.

Apart from being involved in business, the other important source of migration from this area was the recruitment in the army. From the early medieval period, men of Bhojpur region were deployed by Mughal Army into their battalions. Bhojpur and Buxer used to be two important centers of recruitment of Mughal army. Later Britishers snatched the power of Delhi from the Mughals, but even they continued the same tradition of recruitment from these areas in large number in their army. William Irving, a civil servant of Bengal during the colonial rule, mentioned this fact in his book called 'The army of the Indian Mughal' and called these army men as *Baksariyah*.⁴³ Dr. Uday Narayan Tiwari

⁴¹ Krishndev Upadhyay, *Hindi Pradesh ke Lok (Gram) Geet*, SahityaBhavan Pvt Ltd, Allahabad, 1990, pp.100-101.

⁴² *Bhikari Thakur Rachnawali*, ed. Dr. Virendra Narayan Yadav and Nagendra Prasad Singh, Bihar Rashtra Bhasha Parishad, Patna, 2005, pp. 27.

has also established this fact in his established work on Bhojpuri literature and language called *Bhojpuri Bhasha aur Sahitya*⁴⁴. He has written, '*Mughalon ke rajtavakal men delhi tatha pashchim men, Bhojpurion-visheshtah bhojpuri kshetra ke tilangon ko- Baksariyah kaha jata tha. 17 vin tatha 18 vin shatabdi men Bhojpur tatha uske pas hi sthit Buxer, Fauji Sipahiyon ki bharti ke do pranukh Kendra the. 18 vin shatabdi men jab angrejon ke hath men shashansutra aya, tab unhon ne bhi Mughalon ki parampara jari rakhi aur wo bhi Bhojpur aur Buxer se Tilangon ki bharti karte rahe.*'⁴⁵

(During the Mughal rule, the people of Bhojpuri were called as 'Baksariyah' in Delhi and western regions. Bhojpur and its nearest location Buxer were the main spots where army recruitment was done during 17-18th century. In 18th century when the authority transferred to the British from the Mughals, even Britishers carried the tradition and Bhojpur and Buxer remains the main recruitment centres of the army.)

These eventual causes of Bhojpuria's migration into army for more than 400 years were, too, depicted in the folklore of Bhojpuri community. There are hundreds of songs available in which women were asking for a gift from their husbands who were abroad as army men and planning to return. In these songs there is a sense of mourning but they are hopeful that their husband will come back one day. Look at this song for example:

Paniya ke jahaj se
Paltania bani aiyah piya
Le le aiyah ho
Piya senura ho Bengal ke⁴⁶

(When you will return from the ship as an army man, please bring vermilion of Bengal with you.)

⁴³ William Irving, *The Army of the Mughal*, Luzac & Co., London, 1903, pp. 167-169.

⁴⁴ Udaynarayan Tiwari, *Bhojpuri Bhasha aur Sahitya*, Bihar Rashtrabhasha parishad, Patna, 1984, pp 234.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* pp. 235.

⁴⁶ Sharda Sinha, *Kekra se Kahan Mile Jala*, T Series, Super Cassette Industries Ltd., Noida, UP, 1985.

This song shows the anxiety of the women as well as the happiness of his returning. Vermilion is the symbol of being married for women. Asking for a Bengali vermilion denotes two connotative meanings in this song. First, woman wants her husband being safe, and the second, being pure as there were a lot of chances of Bhojpuri men coming into relationship with a Bengali woman. This was one of the most dominating anxieties of the women of Bhojpur, and that is why, they always pledge from their husband to not to go to east.

The third and most common type of migration pattern from this area was migration as a laborer. People in innumerable numbers migrated from this area in search of food, shelter and occupation, to not only the regions of this country, but to the unknown shores and destinations of other countries also. Scholars like Gyan Pandey and other historians of the Subaltern History have noted this sort of migration in their works.

Although these types of migration were always considered as an economic phenomenon, and it is true, that it has been done in the pressure of the economical compulsion, Prof. Badri Narayan Tiwari also sees the other side of the picture in his writings. According to him,

'Migration is usually considered an economic phenomenon, but it also creates a cultural phenomenon, in both the homeland and the land of destination. For the Bhojpuri people, this migration was first and foremost a heavy emotional loss. Many relationships were torn apart – wives torn from husbands, sisters torn from brothers, fathers from their old age support, and mothers from the 'apples of their eyes'. All were leaving for the foreign shores and there was no way to hold them back.'

He adds,

“The social, economic, political, and historical manifestations of colonial imperialism were drawing them to this migration, which was more of a forced migration for the Bhojpuris.”⁴⁷

This economical compulsion is expressed in the folk tradition of the people of the Bhojpuri region of India, and the following folk song from Eastern UP, clearly expresses the pain and suffering that they have gone through:

*Railiya Bairan Piya Ko Liye jaye Re, Railiya bairan
Railiya na bairise, jahajawa na bairi se paisawa bairi na
Mor saiyan ke bilmave se paiswa bairi na⁴⁸*

(The train is taking away my loved one. It is neither the train nor the ship that is our enemy but rather the money that compels our husbands to migrate to other lands.)”

Vashisth Narayan Tripathy⁴⁹ wrote about this song,

“This song refers to the exploitation of labour and inhumane attitude of Imperialist Capitalists. The land settlement of the British has turned the farmers of the country into laborers. They have become the slaves of the mill owners. They had left their home and their families. Their labour and life is cheap in cities. Several songs were written in the period to express the vulnerability and suffering. This song is one of the best examples of the period.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ http://www.ias.nl/nl/30/IIAS_NL30_12.pdf

⁴⁸ A folk song very much in the repertoire of the folklore of Benaras region, collected from its singing tradition directly.

⁴⁹ Vashisth Narayan Tripathy, is a distinguished scholar of folk performances. Jaatiya Sanskriti: Swaroop aur Sangharsh is one of his famous books.

⁵⁰ *Jaatiya Sanskriti: Swaroop aur Sangharsh*, Vani Prakashan, Daryangunj, New Delhi, 2001

Here it is evident enough the anti people British colonial rule had mushroomed the crisis of indentured labor and migration which has resulted into a subaltern aesthetics called *Bidesia*. Prof. Badri Narayan Tiwari writes,

*“In spite of the best effort of the Bhojpuri people, the migration did not stop. As a result, both externally and internally, the pain of loss and separation became an important aspect of Bhojpuri society. This pain gave birth to a distinct aesthetics called Bidesia, which emerged as an expression of the pain and anguish of the migrant’s separation from their families.”*⁵¹

Thus we can see that the crisis of migration was captured not only by the historians and the social scientists, but also in the vast repertoire of the folklore tradition of the Bhojpur area. These are the historical nuances of the cultural practice of transgression of memory which came in the form of mourning, in the women left alone in their life, into history.

1.3 The History & Memory of the Problem of Indentured Labour

In the early nineteenth century, strong opposition of slavery resulted in its abolition around the world. But the Imperial nature of the European colonies was in large need of manpower for their plantations going on in different part of the globe. British colonial rule had already introduced the Permanent land settlement Act⁵², which has worsened the condition of the common farmers of India. The industrial development of Europe and in particular Britain has hit hard the Indian handloom & weaving industry. These two

⁵¹ B.N. Tiwari, ‘*Bidesia*, Migration, Change and Folk Culture’, NCZCC, Allahabad, 2005, pp. 49.

⁵² In 1786 the East India Company Court of Directors first proposed a permanent settlement for Bengal, they were acting against the policy being pursued at that time by Calcutta which was attempting to increase taxation of zamindars. Between 1786 and 1790 the new Governor-General Lord Cornwallis and Sir John Shore (later Governor-General himself) entered a heated debate over whether or not to introduce a permanent settlement with the zamindars. Shore argued that the native zamindars would not trust the permanent settlement to be permanent and that it would take time before they realised it was genuine. Cornwallis believed that they would immediately accept it and begin investing in improving their land. In 1790 the Court of Directors issued a ten year (Decennial) settlement to the zamindars which were later made permanent in 1793.

historical developments during the early British rule had a murderous effect upon the common Indian man. This has eased their task in winning the common man to get them push for a job abroad. The problem of indentured labor was thus the product of the insensitive and anti-people British rule which led the Bhojpuria's to the cultural shock and pathos they have gone through.

Although, it is evident enough, that the emergence of *Bidesia* culture was a produce of crisis of indentured labor and migration in a large number during the British rule, but its cultural resonance always existed in the society. The British rule had just pervaded the crisis that brought the issue into forefront. The crisis of indentured labor was the construct of the British imperial rule and that had deepened the crisis in such a manner that it became the central thrust of the society and its cultural expression. As, Badri Narayan puts it,

"In the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, as the abolition of slavery progressed around the world, European colonies found themselves in great need of manpower for their plantations. India, meanwhile, was suffering from an economic depression, due to both the decline of the weaving industry caused by the Industrial Revolution in England, and the extreme population pressure on agriculture and cultivable lands. This pressure on the resources of the country, combined with the colonial masters' demand for cheap and abundant labour, led to the migration of a large number of migrant labourers from the Bhojpuri region."

1.4 Historicity of Emigration to Tropical Colonies

The British, French, Dutch, Danish and Portuguese adventurers and explorers had discovered the unexplored parts of the world. In the course of time, Great Britain, France, Spain, Holland had acquired vast tropical territories and accumulated capital. But they had no adequate manpower. Meanwhile with the advent of industrial revolution, a new situation developed in the industrialized country.

*“Not one but a dozen revolutions swept Western Europe from 1783 to 1815,” Jenks observes. “It was a revolution in industry, mining and transportation, which was under way in the England of the younger Pitt.”*⁵³

The existing socio-economic patterns had radically changed to a fully developed large-scale production system because of the industrial revolution. Panchanan Saha has written,

*“With the advent of industrialized society, consumption pattern of workers had also been changed. Before the industrial revolution, coffee, sugar or tea was considered to be luxury items, which were beyond the reach of the common men. But with the advancement of industrialization, tea, coffee and sugar became daily necessities to industrial workers and their families in the United Kingdom.”*⁵⁴

In tropical climates the needs of the indigenous population were few and simple. There was abundant fertile land open to the use of that population for the satisfaction of their needs. Hence the colonial planters introduced thousands of black slave labourers from Africa. It was the Dutch planters who introduced slave labour first. The British and the French planters followed suit.

The abolition of slave trade in 1807, throughout the British Empire, put the planters in a precarious position. The source of supply of slave labour almost dried up. It became serious of the existence of the plantation industries particularly after the abolition of slavery in 1834 throughout the British Empire. The liberated slaves virtually refused to work in plantations of their previous masters and available workers demanded exorbitant wages. Even labour was not always available on demanded exorbitant wages.

⁵³ H.L. Jenks-Migration of British Capital, New York & London, 1927, pp. 9.

⁵⁴ Panchanan Saha, “Indians in British Overseas Colonies,” *Biswabiksha*, 27G, College Street, Kolkata-700073, pp. 7.

1.5 Seeking New Source of Labour

In this situation, the colonial planters had tried to import labour from different parts of the world. It is really intriguing that the colonial planters preferred coloured to available European workers; and emigration of white workers to tropical colonies was rather resisted by them. Panchanan Saha has written,

*“It seems that black slaves were preferred not only for their cheapness and endurance to work in tropical climate but also for political reasons. The white planters did not like to introduce free and ambitious white workers in their empire, which might one day, endanger their supremacy.”*⁵⁵

In these circumstances, the planters turned towards India, the vast reservoir of cheap labour. British India soon became the main recruiting ground of cheap labour force for colonial planters of Mauritius, British Guiana, Trinidad and Jamaica, and later on, of Fiji, Malaya, Ceylon, East Africa, Natal and many other colonies. Later on, the French, the Dutch and the Danes were also permitted to import Indian labour in their colonies by the British Colonial office.

After the abolition of slave trade in 1807, it was not possible to bring new slaves. The planters were looking for another source of labour. In 1828, an agreement was entered into with a Parsee merchant of Bombay to import to indenture Indian coolies as labourers by the planters of Mauritius. It was also intended to introduce free labourers from India and China by the merchants of Mauritius. Mauritius took the pioneering role in the introduction of Indian labour after the abolition of slavery in 1834. It seems the proximity and Mauritius past association with India prompted planters to adopt this measure. The large scale introduction to Indian labour to Mauritius commenced in 1834.

⁵⁵ Panchanan Saha, “Indians in British Overseas Colonies,” *Biswabiksha*, 27G, College Street, Kolkata-700073, pp. 8.

1.6 The history and development of the Indentured System of Labour

The indenture system was explained by the British Guiana Commission in 1871 at the following words –

“the indenture system differs from slavery principally in these respect that of his proper civil rights those which are left to the slave, if any, are the exception while in the case of the indentured labourer the exceptions are those of which he is deprived.”

The chief features of the system were five years of stereotyped regulated labour, denial of the right to change of the employer or employment. The wages were fixed for the whole period of indenture. The employer was legally obliged not only to provide fixed wages, but also free housing, medical attendance and other amenities. They were brought at the cost of the employers and were entitled to get free return passage after the expiry of indenture period.

Sanderson Committee formulated by British Government to analyze the problems of indentured system remarked:

“Owing to the poverty and ignorance of suitable immigrants and the distance from which they have to come, un-indentured emigration of agricultural labourers from India to the more distant colonies is found to be impracticable. Indentured immigration, therefore, becomes necessary if the development of those colonies is to be attained.”⁵⁶

The Indian laborers were not free laborers. They were Indentures or contract-bound. This system was neither slavery nor freedom but a halfway house between the two. The laborers were bound by contract generally for five years. The planters supplied them with food, clothing, shelter, free medical aid and stipulated wages, which were generally five rupees per month, during the period of contract. Besides the free passage, they were

⁵⁶ Sanderson committee Report, 1910, Vol.27 pp. 25⁵⁶

entitled to return passage money generally after the expiry of contract of five years. It is observed that a section of Indian labor utilized the opportunity of return passage after due indenture period in the colonies. But majority of them settled there. From the return of the Proctor of Emigrants, it is found that 611,464 Indians were living in the colonies in 1900.

1.7 The Industrial Revolution of Europe and its effect on Indian Industry

Between 1760 and 1815, Industrial Revolution had created a powerful industrial and manufacturing class in Great Britain. The newly emerged industrial and manufacturing class soon got control of the state power in England and deprived the East India Company of its monopoly rights in Indian market. The east India Company trade monopoly in India was abolished in 1813, which marked a new chapter in the history of India. A.K. Connel puts it excellently:

“The rods of the East India merchants have been exchanged for the scorpions of Manchester and Birmingham.”⁵⁷

After the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832, the British Industrial capitalists wanted to convert India into a raw-material base and open her market for their products. Hence, a new settlement was introduced into the North Western Provinces where a good deal of export for England was grown. Apart from extraction of raw materials from India, Britain’s industrialists also sought to include forcibly India in the world market. Pavlov writes:

“As was the case in Britain’s efforts to include India in the world market as a producer of raw materials, Britain had to use force to breach that country’s self-sufficiency in

⁵⁷ A.K. Connel- The Economic Revolution of India & The Public Works Policy, London, 1883, pp. 46.

converting it into a mass market in order to realize its technical and economical superiority."⁵⁸

India's inclusion in the world market had dire consequences for its handicrafts. The incursion of British factory made cheap goods destroyed manual spinning, iron making and other traditional industries of India. India from a supplier of clothes was turned to be importer of British textile fabrics.

A report of a committee of Liverpool East India Association, which was presented at its general meeting on 9 May 1822, tells glaringly this discriminatory policy of the British Government-causing decline of Indian manufacturing industries to a large extent. The report says:

*"We, by our control over them, prevent their trading with any other country than our own, upon the same terms, by laying a duty upon all articles from other countries, amounting to form ten to twenty percent; whilst those from Great Britain are either wholly free, or charged with a duty not exceeding two and half percent. We also fetter Indian products when exported in any but British ships, either by imposing a duty, or withholding a drawback."*⁵⁹

In this circumstance Karl Marx's observation on India seems to be right. He had written,

*"England began with driving the Indian Cottons from the European market; it then introduced twist into Hindustan, and in the end, inundated the mother country of cotton with cottons. From 1818 to 1836, the export of British muslins to India rose in the proportion of 1 to 5,200. In 1824, the export of British muslins to India hardly amounted to 1,000,000 yards, while in 1837 it surpassed 64,000,000 yards."*⁶⁰

⁵⁸ V.I. Pavlov- Historical Premises for India's Transition to Capitalism, Moscow, 1979, pp. 270.

⁵⁹ Tracts-437, India office Library, pp. 35, London quoted in Panchanan Saha, "Indians in British Overseas Colonies," Biswabiksha, 27G, College Street, Kolkata-700073, pp 132.

⁶⁰ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels- On Colonialism, Moscow, pp 27.

This has done the greatest harm to the Indian economy and particularly the traditional weaving industry of India. Lacs of people lost their work and job. The report of the Select Committee on Handloom Weavers (1834-35), for example, contains data about the Indian Cotton trade and labour. It has reported that

“Two million handloom weavers of Hindustan driven from labour by machinery here and many perishing in famine.”⁶¹

The British colonial rule had fundamentally changed the socio-economic patterns of India. The economic factors pushed the unfortunate Indians to the laps of unscrupulous recruiters who pulled them away from countryside for colonial emigration by various false promises.

The labor market of India at that time was stated to be over-stocked. India, *“where a teeming population unable to find adequate means of subsistence and inured to a tropical sun, promised a ready supply of useful and willing laborers”⁶²* observed the Mauritius Emigration Committee.

Pressure by the Imperial Government on the Government of India enabled the French West Indian colonies-Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique and Reunion, the Dutch colony-Surinam and the Danish colony-St. Croix to import Indian labour. By a convention between Great Britain and France in 1860, the French Government promised to suppress the slave trade within its colonies in return for permission of supplementing the slaves by Indian labourers.

Emigration of Indian labor, therefore, began in an organized scale since early forties. But at the close of the century the flow of emigration of Indentured Indian Labor had diminished considerably if not stopped completely. In 1900-01, nearly quarters of a million laborers of Indian origin were living in the three sugar colonies of British West Indies alone. Out of the estimated two million Indian labor thus emigrated, at least three-

⁶¹ P. Gaskell-Artisans and Machinery, London, 1836 quoted in K.M. Ashraf volume op. cit. pp. 196.

⁶² Mauritius Emigration Committee's Second Report, 27 July 1845.

quarters of a million were introduced to British sugar colonies-British Guiana, Trinidad, Jamaica and Mauritius as indentured labor.

1.8 Different Nature and Reasons for Indian Emigration

The emigration of people in dependent India was different in nature. It did not take such a magnitude like European emigration. It was not a voluntary mass migration of people in search of new lives or for economic betterment like European migration in the New World. Indian emigration was generally indentured and connected with the world capitalist development. It is evident that the development of a world capitalist economy directly or indirectly created significant flows of Indian labour migration to the British, French, Dutch and Danish tropical colonies. Indian labour emigration seemed to be turned into a component part of the globalization of the labour force like globalization of capital. Prof. Hugh Tinker estimated that more than two million Indian labourers immigrated to foreign colonies in the 19th century and during the first decade of the 20th century.⁶³

The situation in India was also favorable for recruiting labor. The labor market of India was over-stocked, where *“a teeming population unable to find adequate means of subsistence provided a ready supply of useful laborers”* as a government document status.

The emigrant India laborers comprising various castes, classes and religions were recruited from different parts of the vast country during a period of three-quarters of a century. This was a crucial period of Indian history with far-reaching political, social and economic changes. Panchanan Saha writes,

“It seems that the causes of emigration of Indian laborers were complex and varied from the decline of handicrafts to the failure of crops, debt, oppression of landlords, famines,

⁶³ Panchanan Saha, “Indians in British Overseas Colonies,” Biswabiksha, 27G, College Street, Kolkata-700073, pp. 9.

flood, and absence of work and the pressure of population. A section emigrated voluntarily for economic betterment."⁶⁴

It appears from the study that the basic causes of emigration of Indian labor consisted of changes of land revenue system, oppression of landlords, exploitation of money-lenders, decline of native handicrafts, famines, flood and other natural calamities.

The political and economic policies adopted by the British rulers shattered the old feudal self-sufficient village economy in India. There was widespread disintegration of traditional caste occupations by non-agricultural castes. Sir Edward Blunt observes:

*"There are a number of castes who have been forced to abandon their traditional functions by causes entirely outside their control. The spread of education has driven the Kayestha professional scribe to other pursuits, for there is no longer the same need for his services. The Kalwar distiller and the Pasi toddy drawers are seriously hampered by excise restrictions. The caste of Chamar tanners and leather-workers is nearly one sixth of the total population; their traditional function can't provide them with a sufficient livelihood, and for many years they have followed a second occupation that of a farm hand. Other occupations have become less profitable; the Julah by the competition of the mills, the Kahars prefer to independence to domestic service, whilst boatmen, bards, priests, cattle-breeders, blacksmiths and carpenters, have all taken to cultivation in large numbers."*⁶⁵

The economic penetration of British capitalism through its three phases of development trading, industrial and financial had various effects on Indian economy particularly on its village economy and Indian handicrafts.

The introduction of the English landlord system in a modified form found in the concrete shape, in the Permanent Settlement of Lord Cornwallis in 1793, was one of the major

⁶⁴ Panchanan Saha, "Indians in British Overseas Colonies," *Biswabiksha*, 27G, College Street, Kolkata-700073, pp. 10.

⁶⁵ *Economic Problems of Modern India*, Ed. R.K. Mukherjee, Vol. 1, London, 1939, article of Sir Edward Blunt, pp. 73.

blows for the Indian agriculturalists. Under this system, settlement was made with the tax farmers who had henceforth to make a fix payment irrespective of the production on the cultivated land. The permanent settlement was mainly prevailing in North India particularly in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. A modified version of the zamindari system was introduced in the Gangetic valley, the north-west provinces (modern UP), parts of Central India and the Punjab, was known as Mahalwari system in the first half of the 19th century. Under this system, revenue settlement was made village by village or estate (mahal) with landlords of the village or estate. In Mahalwari areas also, the land revenue was periodically revised. Emigration of people under indentured system mostly happened only in these areas

In the Permanent Settlement areas, the tenant was left entirely at the mercy of the zamindars or landlords. The zamindars were to give 10/11th of the rental they derived from the peasantry to the state, keeping only 1/11th for them. John Shore calculated that

*if the gross produce of Bengal were taken as 100, the Government claimed 45, the zamindars and other intermediaries below them receive 15, and only 40 remained with the actual cultivators.*⁶⁶

The North West Provinces and Oudh Administrative Report of 1882-1883 (p-46), has emphatically stated the excessive rent demanded from the peasantry in the pre-mutiny assessment.

*"It is now generally admitted," it reported, "that the proportion of the rental left to the proprietors by the old assessment in the N.W. Provinces was much less than was absolutely necessary to provide for the support of themselves and their families, bad debts, expenses of management, and vicissitudes of season."*⁶⁷

This historical fact is well documented in the memory of the people. A Northern Indian Folk Song depicts these circumstances quite clearly:

⁶⁶ Bipin Chandra-Modern India, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 103.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

“In the Month of Baisakh (April-may) when the peasant reap the crops,

The Bohray (money-lenders/village capitalist) confiscate the land, and

Landlords rob the crops.

There is no peace for a day.

They take the fruit of your labour right in front of your eyes,

And leave you not a grain to eat.”⁶⁸

Thus British rule and exploitation of Indian resources brought only starvation and death to the people. There were chronic famines in India during the whole 19th century in which thirty-two million people was dead. William Digy said that

“the loss of life by war in the world during 107 years (1793-1900) was five million while the loss of life by famine in India during ten years (1891-1900) was nineteen million.”⁶⁹

The entire period of emigration in the 19th century, may be broadly divided into two phases- the first phase ranging from 1834 to 1858, and the second from 1859, to the end of century. Though emigration continued up to 1917 when indentured system was finally abolished.

In the first phase of emigration, particularly in the thirties and forties of the 19th century, the colonial sugar planters preferred the so-called ‘hill coolies’ or tribal from the mountain regions of Chotanagpur plateau of Bihar. The General Emigration Department had observed,

The porters were also called ‘dhangars.’ The Dhangars comprised of Oraons, Kols and other tribal inhabitants of that plateau. Besides, ‘hill coolies’, a considerable number of

⁶⁸ Panchanan Saha, “Indians in British Overseas Colonies,” Biswabiksha, 27G, College Street, Kolkata-700073, pp 37.

⁶⁹ British Rule in India Condemned by the British themselves, published by the Indian National Party, London, 1915 pp 8.

*low-caste Hindus were also recruited from Sahabad district of Bihar and Beerbhoom district of Bengal.*⁷⁰

The 'Arkatis' or recruiters were able to recruit the 'hill coolies' easily on false promises. But their number going to the colonies gradually declined after the middle of the forties of the 19th century. It was partly due to the heavy mortality at sea among this class of emigrants and partly due to competition of the tea district of Assam. The General Emigration Department had observed,

*"The newly established tea estates of Assam found the 'hill coolies' more suitable to withstand the jungle climate than to the people of the plain. The main recruiting operation for colonies, therefore, was pushed westward into the Hindi-speaking settled areas of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh such as the districts of Sahabad, Gaya, Patna, Allahabad, Gazipur, Basti etc."*⁷¹

The recruiting ground for colonial labour was further pushed westward in the second phase of emigration. The present Uttar Pradesh districts soon exceeded Bengal Presidency (including Bihar) in the total number of emigrants. The shifting of the recruiting operations was a gradual process since the annexation of Oudh, in 1856 and the suppression of the Indian revolt of 1857-58. A large number of high-caste Hindus migrated voluntarily in the second phase particularly from the affected parts of north India by the Revolt of 1857.

⁷⁰ General Department (Emigration), 10 February 1836 No. 11 & March 1861 No. 1.

⁷¹ General Department (Emigration), 18 March 1844 No. 33-B; 27 February 1845 No. 15 & 15 April 1846 No. 21.

1.9 Bhojpur as a main Recruiting Ground of Indentured labor

For instance, a British writer F. Nightingale states about Bihar:

“The rights conferred on the ryots in 1793 extended to those of Bihar, as also did the settlement of 1859. But as the mixed commission of 1878 tells us that they have been deprived of all these rights and ground down to the lowest point. The local commission, The Bengal Rent law Commission, the Famine Commission, Sir Stuart Bailey (Commissioner in Sir George Campbell’s Lt. Governorship), Sir Richard Temple, Sir Ashley Aden, all gave the same account of the ‘deep poverty and misery of the ryots’, the ‘grinding traditional oppression’, the ‘condition of the peasantry with equal national conditions’. ‘There can be no doubt whatever that the combined influence of the Zamindar’ and Ticcadars (temporary middleman farmers) has ground the ryots of Bihar down to a state of extreme depression and misery”⁷².

The tenants are said to have no rights; to be subject to the exaction of forced labor, to illegal distraint, and to numerous cases. It is this tragic curse of Bihar, which makes the ryots of the richest province of Bengal the poorest and most wretched class we find in the country, writes F. Nightingale.

The officiating magistrate of Sahabad district, which was the heartland of Bhojpur, in a report to the Commissioner in 1862 gives an interesting account of the condition of a north Indian village quoting from the observation of Captain Dickens on the Sone Canal Project.

“There is always a large proportion of population of every, merely agricultural, village absolutely idle during almost the whole years, except at harvest time there is nothing like employment for the whole population. A few of the young men go out to seek employment at a distance, but the large proportion of the population are idle, unless work is absolutely brought to their doors, then they will work on low wages.”

⁷² F. Nightingale, *The Ryot, Zamindar, and the Government*, London, 1883 Tracts 507, India Office Library, London, pp-41-42.

It seems that it was the representative picture of the most of the agricultural villages in north Indian settled areas where recruitment for colonial emigration took place. It was the cunning recruiters who approached the idle workmen with lucrative proposals of work. As a result a large proportion of colonial emigrants in 1860's were recruited from Sahabad and the adjoining districts as the officiating magistrate observed.

In the season of 1881-82, out of total 11,000 intending emigrant's registered in northern India, only 1,800 were registered in Bengal Presidency. But out of 1,800 emigrants more than nine-tenth, came from the districts of Sahabad, Patna, Saran and 24 Parganas. Even most of the people registered in 24 parganas were not the inhabitants of Bengal, they consisted of men who had come from all parts of the country to seek employment.

There was no doubt that in certain localities of Bihar and UP the pressure on the soil was great. Grierson, in his report in 1882, states,

*"In south of Ganges in Bihar, there were no great public works being carried on, and there was no vent as there was in north of the Ganges, to Nepal. The two districts where the most emigrants were registered were Patna and North Sahabad."*⁷³

He concluded,

*"It will be seen that the emigrants registered as the pressure of population. There was close connection between (a) pressure of population; (b) absence of work; (c) price of food and (d) productivity of the soil and emigration to the colonies."*⁷⁴

The officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal in a note to the Secretary of the Government of India, Revenue & Agriculture Department in a note in June 1883 stated that

"the Lieutenant Governor of Bihar is of the opinion that the surplus population of that province is more than ample to supply both labor markets, inland and colonial. The

⁷³ General Department (Colonial Emigration), June 1883, File-15 No. 20-21

⁷⁴ Ibid.

pressure of population upon the soil is so great as to give rise to various difficulties, already experienced in times of scarcity. He had also mentioned a number of applications, which he had received from Zamindars of Bihar for facilitating the transfer of their superabundant population to less populous districts."⁷⁵

Repetitive Famines and the suppression of the 1857 revolt had added to this migration. The Government of India in a note to the Secretary of State for India on 3rd May 1877 observed quite obviously,

*"The largest number of emigrants that ever sailed from Calcutta was in 1858 immediately after the mutiny: and it has been conjectured that the two circumstances were not without connection; next to that year came the following one, 1859, when 25,337 persons left the Hooghly; but after these two years, those, when scarcity of famine prevailed in the area of recruitment, are found to have yielded the largest number of laborers for the colonies. Thus in 1860 and 1861 when famine prevailed in the north-western Provinces, the number of emigrants was 17,899 and 22,600 respectively."*⁷⁶

It was observed previously that in the last quarter of the nineteenth century most of the emigrants were drawn from U.P. It was also seen that since the suppression of the Revolt of Hindustan the number of emigrants from U.P. districts was increasing gradually and already surpassed the total number of recruits in the sixties taking separately Bihar and Bengal.

The officiating Emigration Agent of Calcutta in a letter to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal said that a large number of able-bodied persons had crowded in the emigration depots in 1859. He observed,

"on the 'unsettled condition of the country, about Patna, Sahabad and Gaya, especially during the last year when large bodies of a (physically) superior class of people crowded into the depots unaided and offered to emigrate, representing that they were reluctantly

⁷⁵ General Department (Colonial Emigration), June 1883, File-15 No. 24.

⁷⁶ General Department, September 1879 No. 15.

driven to such a course from absolute want arising from the difficulty in obtaining employment in their own country. It seems that these higher caste people were nothing but the disbanded native army who were denied jobs in the British army which was the only honorable work to the people. In 1857-58, 9,864 adults embarked from Calcutta of whom 5,522 came from Sahabad, 1,658 from Ghazipur and 1,388 from Gaya. In 1858-59, 20,166 adults were embarked from Calcutta of whom 5,522 came from Sahabad, 2,921 from Ghazipur and 3,378 from Gaya."⁷⁷

The 'unsettled condition' referred to by the Emigration Agent was caused by the Revolt of Hindustan in 1857-58. The Revolt indirectly worked as an impetus to emigration among a considerable number of high-caste Hindus in those troubled years.

The Bengal army revolted against the British rule. The disturbed parts of Bihar during the Revolt were Sahabad, Gaya and Patna. A considerable portion of Bengal Army was recruited from that part of Bihar and eastern part of Uttar Pradesh. After the suppression of the Revolt thousands of sepoy of Bengal army were discharged from the army. Soldiers from Oudh, Bihar, Central India and other places who had taken part in the Revolt, were discharged from the army. As a result of it thousands of discharged sepoy came voluntarily to the emigration depots in order to escape 'kala pani' or fear of banishment to Andmans or other penalties.

For instance prior to the Revolt, the monthly average emigration to the colonies from Calcutta port was about 700. It was even less than the average in the season 1856-57, the season prior to the Revolt.

Year	Emigrants
1854.55	8,826
1855.56	7,995

⁷⁷ General Department Emigration 20 October 1859 No. 23.

1886.57 3,356⁷⁸

But suddenly it shot up in 1858. During the eighteen months (March 1858 to August 1859), first it rose to more than double and in the last six months of that period it rose by more than three times. This is evident in this table.

Year	Emigrants
March-August 1858	9,951
Sept. to Februry 1859	7,995
March to August 1859	14,062 ⁷⁹

For instance, in 1861-62, out of 6,963 emigrants dispatched to Mauritius from Calcutta port, the proportions of the districts of modern Uttar Pradesh was only 1,456, i.e. nearly 21 percent. But within one decade the picture was reversed in favor of Uttar Pradesh. In the season 1872-73, Uttar Pradesh sent almost thrice as many as emigrants as the Bengal Presidency did. In that season Uttar Pradesh emigrants numbering 12,263 were dispatched through the port of Calcutta while the number of emigrants from Bengal Presidency (including Bihar) was only 4,327. Among them majority was drawn from Bihar, numbering 3,360, the rest from Bengal proper.⁸⁰ This trend continued throughout the rest of the century. In the last decade of the 19th century, the four eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh were the main recruiting centers of colonial emigration.

Registered emigrants from Uttar Pradesh

Districts	1890	1891
Azamgarh	2,823	4,505
Basti	2,439	3,200

⁷⁸ General Department Emigration September 1859 No. 7.

⁷⁹ General Department Emigration September 1859 No. 7.

⁸⁰ General Department (Emigration), Sept. 1873 File 68 Nos. 4-6 & Agriculture, Revenue & Commerce (Emigration) Dept. October 1873 No. 9.

Ghazipur	1,508	1,649
Balia	1,379	1,477 ⁸¹

The share of Uttar Pradesh among the intending emigrants registered in northern India:

Year	Percentage
1888	63.7
1889	65.1
1890	83.1
1891	81.0

The labourers who generally migrated from the few districts of Indo-Gangetic Plain (East) to Bengal belonged to Ghazipur, Balia, Basti, Azamgarh, Benares, Jaunpur Districts which comes into Bhojpur area.

It is evident from the emigration records that bulk of the recruited people had come down to Calcutta for an employment from Bihar or UP. It is probable that two factors were responsible for their recruitment in Calcutta or other parts of Bengal rather than their home districts. First, they could get no work in their own districts and hence they came down to Bengal for employment. Secondly, they didn't find any work in Bengal and became prey to the colonial recruiters. This is evident from the emigration reports of 1879 to 1880 & from 1881-1882. In that period 4,736 labourers were recruited in 24 Parganaas and Calcutta out of which only 74 or 1.5 percent were local men. The figures of the corresponding years also show this trend.⁸² During the decade ending in 1901

⁸¹ General Department (Colonial Emigration), Aug. 1897, File-5-R/1 & July 1892 Nos-1-2.

⁸² General Department (Colonial Emigration) June 1883 Nos. 20-21 & August 1891 File – 5-R/1; & July 1895 Nos. 44-45.

emigration to the colonies were 198,585 among them: 120,550 were natives of United Provinces. This figure alone clear the fact of vast practice of indentured in Bhojpur area.

1.10 Memory of Indentured Labor as documented in Folklore & Poems

The first ship carrying the indentured laborers of India left the Indian shore in 1834 via Calcutta as documented in several historical documents. And soon after that these memories became translated into the repertoire of the people in the form of poems, songs and folklores and folktales. Most of them were the Santhals and Adivasis from the Mountains of Jharkhand, and people of other regions who came to Calcutta in search of jobs. On 5 June, 1838 Bengal Hurkaru published some of the excellent satirical lyrics on coolly emigration which reflected its deep sympathy for the poor laborers. Consider the following case –

Dang coolies

Dang coolies

Crowd Calcutta's

Lanes and gullies

*Bent on emigration*⁸³

(The coolies, who crowded the lanes of Calcutta, have left for the unknown shores.)

The expression of the sorrow, pathos and mourning of the departed soul can be seen in the various folklores of the Bhojpur area, too, and also in the land of the indentured. The beloved memory of the departed soul haunts the person left behind, most of who were women here were few indentured laborers who accompanied their family while leaving for the foreign shore, as most of time even they did not know that, they were going for

⁸³ Panchanan Saha, *Indians in British Overseas colonies*, Biswabiksha, Kokata, 2003, pp. 261.

such a distance place. And once gone for so long, there was no form of communication left. The only way of communication left was letters and most of the times they didn't reach. It is said that during the period of 1864, almost three lakh letters sent by such indentured laborers didn't reach to the right address or person. Then even the normal communication was over between the families because of the problem of the indentured. Here is an example of such bitter memory echoed in the voice of women, in the repertoire of the folklore of the Bhojpur area:

Kai Kaili Chukwa ki Chhodala Mulukwa Tu

Kahal Na Dilwa ke Haliya Balamua

Samwali Suratiya Salat Bate Chhatiya Men

*Eko Nahin Patia Bhejal Balamua*⁸⁴

(Why the mistake of leaving our country, you have done, my beloved, even you haven't told me the matter of your heart. Your dark skin face is sucking my heart; you haven't sent a letter, my beloved.)

There are other genres of songs written by persons who have gone through the trauma of being slaved as indentured which gives us the actual memorization of the whole process. This song on *Bidesia* tune written by an indentured laborer expresses the whole historical process in memorable way in just few lines. This gives the direct account of the unlawful and inhuman practice of Indentured during British rule.

Firangiya ke rajua men chhuta mora desua se

Gori sarkar chali chal re Bidesia

Bholi hamen dekh arkati bharmaya ho

Kalkatta par jao panch sal re Bidesia

⁸⁴ B.N. Tiwari, *Bidesia*, Migration, Change and Folk Culture, NCZCC, Allahabad, 2005, pp. 25.

Dipua men laye pakrayo kagadua ho

Anguthawa lagae dindar re Bidesia

Pal ke jahajua men roi-dhoi baithi ho

Kaise hoi kala pani par re Bidesia

Jiara daraye ghata kyon nahin aye ho

Bite din kai bhaya maas re Bidesia

Ayi ghat dekhi jab fijiya ke tapua ho

Bhaya man hamara udas re Bidesia

Kudari kurwal dono hathua ma hamre ho

Gham ma pasinwa bahaye re Bidesia

Khetua ma taas jab deve kulambara ho

Mar-mar hokum chalaye re Bidesia

Kali kotharia ma bite nahin ratia ho

Kisse batai ham pir re Bidesia

Din rat biti hamri dukh men umiria ho

*Sukha sab nainua ka nir re Bidesia*⁸⁵

(In the reign of the foreigners, we have to leave my country due to the conspiracy of the whites (British). Seeing us ignorant, the agent has given us false promise and said to go far from Calcutta for five years. They brought us to depot and forced us to sign a paper.

⁸⁵ Kamta Kamlesh, 1999, Parvasi Hindi Lokgeeton men Vedna ke Swar, Manav, 22; Luknow, pp. 26.

Sitting in the boat, we are crying, how we will get over to this kala pani. Months are over but the shore still hasn't come, our heart is full of fear. When we came to see the shore of Fiji, our hearts get saddened. We have to till the land with utensils in both the hands, amidst the sweating. The agent there used to beat us to get the work done fast. Then we have to live in dark rooms, where it was tough to spend the night. Our days and nights were full of sorrow, all the happiness got over through tears.)

A folk song of Bhojpuri origin often sung in Mauritius, gives the other detail regarding the indentured system. Written in first person, it memorizes the reason for that the Bhojpuris have to be victims of this indentured system. The agents of the British Colonial rule called Arkatis used to lure the innocent people of the reason with false promises as discussed in the earlier poem too. They use to tell different lies about the places and their work and payment. Arkatis knew that most of the persons are religious. So, they tried to establish these places as the mythical spaces discussed in their religious texts. So Mauritius became the country of Marich, a character in Ramayana. Suriname became the place of Sri Ram, the protagonist figure of the text Ramayana and one of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu, the great Hindu God and so others. The agents misguided the persons going to Mauritius that they are going to a county full of gold as Lanka, but it was all just a rumor. The following song is the biggest example of that kind:

Sonawa karan aili ram, ehire marichdes

*Gali gaile sonawa shareer, ehire marich*⁸⁶

(We came to this country of Marich (Mauritius) because of lust of gold and lost our gold like figure here.)

The following song transcribes the memory of an indentured laborer who is regretting his decision of leaving his country but he also remembers that due to hunger he has to leave. This song also certifies that the situation of the common man under British rule was the worst as discussed in the earlier historical discourse.

⁸⁶ B.N. Tiwari, *Bidesia, Migration, Change and Folk Culture*, NCZCC, Allahabad, 2005, pp. 27.

Chod aili hindustanwa babu! p%twa ke liya

Padli bharam men chhatal patina ke shaharwa

Chhut gaile pyari ganga maiya ke ancharwa

Na hi manli eko baba bhaiya ke kahanwa

Ba"ua petwa ke liye⁸⁷

(We hav% left India because of hunger. We got misguided and due to that we left our city Patna and so the shore of dear river Ganga. We haven't heard to the uabning of our fathers and brothers only becAuse of hunger.)

The other folk song /f Suriname, written by Pandit Kishore Mahtab Singh, a fonklore writer of Suriname, which depicts the actual memory of the treatment, they got as indentured laborer.

Laye uteri Surinam men Dipu men Bhat Khawai

Tin mahine jalyan safar men lakh jhapde khai

Shree ram n!gar ki charcha karke Surinam diye pahunchai

Hot sabera nam bulakar bakra ne bat sunai

Panch sal kantrak kat lo phir bharat dev pahunchai⁸⁸

(They brought us to the depot of Suriname and gave us rice to eat. We were on the b/at for almost three months to reach here. They have promised to take us to Lord Ram place but instead they brought Us to Suriname. The morning they call us by name and told us that after spending five 9ears they could send us back to our country India.)

⁸⁷ B.N. Tiwari, *Bidesia*, Migration, Change and Folk Culture, NCZCC, Allahabad, 2005, pp. 27.

⁸⁸ B.N. Tiwari, *Bidesia*, Migration, Change and Folk Culture, NCZCC, Allahabad, 2005, pp. 28.

The following song gives us the direct account of the memory of false promises given to the indentured laborers by the British agents.

Suna ho Suna

Aab chala tohara ke badhiya naukari deb

MeTh, sardar, sahib bana deb

Chala tohra ke ssiriram des le chala tani

KalKatwa ke bagale men e desba

Yahan sona ke khan wa

Sona ke lota-thari men khai ke mili

(Listen! Come we will give you good jobs and positions like boss, inspector and administrator. Come, we are taking you to the land of Lord Ram! This is near to Calcutta. There are a lot of mines of gold there; you will be eating in utensils made of gold there.)

There are various songs in which the indentured laborers have expressed their feelings, agonies and love for the family left behind. Most of the indentured laborer never returned back home and even some of them gone back they have taken so much of time as they were not permitted by the recruiters to get back easily. So first they tried to lure them with the offer of staying at the depot for the five more years, and if they did not agree in many cases, they didn't get permission. So, they were in a situation of complete loss. In the following song the same tragedy is penned down by the collective consciousness of the indentured laborers.

Wahi dinwa jab yad aawela ankhiya men bharela paniya re

Hindustan se bhagkar aili, yahi hai apni kahani re!

Bhai chhuta, bap chhuta aur chhuti mahtari re

*Arkathiya khub bharamwalis kahe paisa kamai bhar-bhar thali re!*⁸⁹

(When we remember those days, our eyes filled with tears. We came here leaving Hindustan. We lost our brothers, fathers and mothers. We were misguided by the Arkatis, who said that we will earn a lot.)

The memory of loss of the family and the motherland is there in the indentured laborers. This particular song written by Raghuvir Narayan in 1910, with the tek of Batohia, asks for our beloved indentures who have settled down in their respective lands to go back and once have a look of their motherland. This song is quite popular not only in India but also in South Africa, Mauritius, Suriname and Trinidad.

Tin dware Sindhu Ghahrawe re Batohia!

Ajhu-AJahu bhaiya re batohi Hind dekhi jau,

Jahanwa kuhuki koilari re batohia

Jahu-jahu bhaiya batohi Hind dekhi Aau

Jahan rishi charon ved gave re Batohia

Sita ke vimal jas, ram jas, Krishna jas

*Mor bap dada ke kahani re Batohia!*⁹⁰

(Go! And see the land of Hind encircled by Sindhu from three sides. Where, the cuckoo chirps, saints mummurs all the four Vedas. Where, the characters like Sita, Ram and Krishna incarnated. This is the tale of our forefathers.)

⁸⁹ B.N. Tiwari, *Bidesia*, Migration, Change and Folk Culture, NCZCC, Allahabad, 2005, pp. 30.

⁹⁰ B.N. Tiwari, *Bidesia*, Migration, Change and Folk Culture, NCZCC, Allahabad, 2005, pp. 33.

A modern Guiana- Indian poet David Dabydeen has written several poems on the situations faced by the Indian indentured laborers. The following poem written by him memorizes the hard life they have to gone through during the phase of indentured laborer.

He stamped and cursed and beat until he turned old

With the labor of chopping tree, minding cow, building fence

And the expanse of his daughter's dowries

Dreaming of India

He drank rum

*Till he dropped dead.*⁹¹

The collective consciousness of the people, not only creates history, but also preserves it in their memory through various means of folklore -- folk tales, music, myth, rituals, literature and other means. The examples which we have seen in both aspects i.e. history and memory are the best to see their intrigued relationship. As Kerwin Lee Klein writes,

*"If history is objective in the coldest, hardest sense of the word, memory is subjective in the warmest, most inviting senses of that world. In contrast with history, memory fairly vibrates with the fullness of being."*⁹²

The *Bidesia* culture and specially its folklores are one of the perfect examples of 'fullness of being' juxtaposed to its history, as we have witnessed in this argument.

⁹¹ David Dabydeen-Coolie Odyssey, London, 1988.

⁹² Kerwin Lee Klein, On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse, source-Representations, No. 69, special issue: Grounds for Remembering, (Winter, 2000), University of California Press.

Chapter-2

The Community Practice of *Bidesia*: Rejuvenating Vital Pre-texts through Texts

2.1 About *Bidesia*

India has a long tradition of folk theatre whose current can be still felt in various regions of the country. This current has made the Indian culture very specific and it has produced a different kind of modern Indian theatre. *Bidesia* a lesser known folk theatre of Bihar is one of them. Dr. Mahendra Bhanawat⁹³ has introduced *Bidesia* in his book 'Loknatya Parampara aur Pravritiyan' in these words:

*"Bidesia bihar ka sangeet nritya aur natya mishrit sarwadhik lokpriya manorajan hai. Mulatah iske pravartak Guddar Rai the parantu ise akhil bhartiya star par pratisthit karne ka sara shreya Bhikhari Thakur ko hai."*⁹⁴

(*Bidesia* is a most popular form of entertainment of Bihar which carries Music, Dance and Theatre in its fold. Originally it was initiated by Guddar Rai but it has got national credibility with the genius of Bhikhari Thakur.)

Bidesia, a folk form of Bihar is not as celebrated as its other counterparts in India, for example *Jatra*, *Nautanki*, *Khayal*, *Tamasha*, *Yakshgan*, *Swang*, *Dashawatar*, *Bhand-Jashn* etc. However, the libidinal aesthetics of *Bidesia* is as charming, appealing, and rich as other folk theatrical traditions of India. Though this folk form of Bihar has got the deserved attention or not it remains an important question; but surely its credential has

⁹³ Dr, Mahendra Bhanawat, a renowned scholar of folk culture, has written elaborately on Indian culture and in particular on Rajasthani Folklore tradition.

⁹⁴ Mahendra Bhanawat, Loknatay Parampara aur Prayog, Bafna Prakashan, Chauda Rasta, Jaipur, 1971-72, pp. 27.

earned it a definite space in the present scenario of Indian folk theatrical tradition. It has become widely used by the scholars of the folk theatre of India and abroad to define and codify the performances of Bhikhari Thakur's theatrical productions. Jagdishchandra Mathur⁹⁵ was one of the earliest scholars of Indian theatre and performing Arts, who brought the folk current of Bhojpuri language based theatre *Bidesia* into the national paradigm by giving it space in his book called '*Paramparasheel Natya*'. In the introduction of folk tradition he has written:

*"Paschimi Bihar ka Bidesia Bhojpuri-kshetra ki vilakshan abhivyanjana hai. Iske praneta ek pratibhasali gamin, Sri Bhikhari Thakur ardhyaashikshit hote hue bhi Bhojpur kshetra ki layatal-jhankrit bhumi se anupranit hue. Lok prachalit geeton ko unhone ek aise kathanak men guntha, jismen pachimi Bihar ke gamin jeevan ke yatharth aur 'meghdoot' se adhunik yug tak pravahit virahini nayika aur premiyon ke sandeshvahak duton ki parampar ka adbhut mishran hai."*⁹⁶

(*Bidesia* is the exceptional expression of the Bhojpuri area of west Bihar. The person who had initiated it came from a rural background. Though he was semi literate he had the sense of the rhythm of the region. He had assimilated the folk songs into the narrative in such a way that it represents the reality of the rural life and the tradition of messengers of loved ones from '*Meghdoot*' to modern age.)

Jagdishchandra Mathur was a government officer and a scholar of Indian folk and traditional theatre. He had experienced the energetic performance of Bhikhari Thakur troupe and overpowered by the performance. Especially the play *Bidesia* had influenced him a lot. He was one of the few persons in the academia who introduced Bhikhari Thakur on national level through his writings. So, was done by scholars like Badri Narayan Tiwari, Om Prakash Bharti, Susan Legene and other scholars in the later phase.

⁹⁵ J.C. Mathur was one of the earlier scholars of Indian traditional theatre whose scholarly books and ideas had stimulated several discourses and provided Indian folk theatre the space which it deserves. He was very much active in this field after Indian independence.

⁹⁶ Jagdishchandra Mathur, *Paramparasheel Natya*, Bihar-Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 1969, pp. 111.

Susan Legene⁹⁷ writes while working on a project on *Bidesia* folk tradition,

*“The meaning of the word Bidesia, which is the name of this research project, is twofold. It is an affectionate term for the Hindu migrants who have left their native land, mainly the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (formerly Hindustan). It also refers to the folk tradition which has developed in memory of those migrants. The Hindu migration phenomenon is still represented in the ancient oral tradition of Bhojpuri folk culture of India today: it is called the Bidesia folk tradition.”*⁹⁸

Although this form was present in the singing and performing tradition of the Bhojpuri area of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh since medieval period, (which I will be referring, searching and contextualizing in this chapter later) the credit of developing it as a full-fledged theatrical form goes directly to Bhikhari Thakur, a semi literate individual belonging to the backward community of the society. The story of the evolution of the theatre practice of *Bidesia* is no less interesting. Bhikhari Thakur started performing ‘*Ramayana*’ in his village with the help of the fellow villagers in 1914 which got huge success among the villagers. The ‘*Ramayana*’ performance was done just after his coming back to his village after a brief stay in Bengal as a migrant where he has seen the performances of *Ramlila* and got inspired by that. However, he had to roll back the performance of ‘*Ramayana*’ as he belonged to a low caste, which carried a stigma and consequently he was not allowed by the upper caste people of the area to perform a text which is religious. The decision of becoming a performer was opposed by his family members too but he was determined to carry forward his carrier in performance. With his determination he started his own troupe in 1915-17 and started the performance of ‘*Birha-Bahar*’ a play written by him. His next play was ‘*Kalyug Bahar*’. This ‘*Kalyug Bahar*’ was later developed as ‘*Bahara Bahar*’ which got huge success. The form which he had used for the performance of ‘*Bahara Bahar*’ became so popular with the tag of

⁹⁷ Susan Legêne is a professor of Cultural history of Netherlands, for the Royal Antiquities Society since January 2004. Legêne’s programme focuses on the cultural meaning of the colonial past in contemporary society, as well as on the impact of ICT(full form?) in current documentation and presentation strategies of museums, in which the interpretation of material culture is increasingly informed by a search for the intangible and the maze of the virtual.

⁹⁸ The Power of Culture -<http://www.krachtvancultuur.nl/uk/specials/migration/Bidesia.html>

Bidesia that all of his productions became famous as *Bidesia*. Dr. Mahendra Bhanawat has written about this fact in these words:

“Bidesia namak yah natak jan-jan men itna adhik pracharit hua ki kalantar men Bhikhari Thakur dwara pradarshit anya natak bhi Bidesia namak swatantra natya shaili ke roop men pracharit hue.”⁹⁹

(The play *Bidesia* became so popular in people that later all of his productions became known as *Bidesia* theatre form.)

Bidesia is a play roughly structured around four characters: *Bidesia* (the migrant), *Pyari Sundari* (the abandoned wife or the beloved of the migrant), *Batohi* (the messenger) and *Rakhelin* (the kept or an illegal wife of the migrant). Dr. Mahendra Bhanawat gives the crux of the play in these lines:

“Isme ek Bidesi kisi veshya ke changul men padkar apne parivar ko chhod baithata hai. Uske pardes chale jane par uski navparinita uske virah men vyakul ho apni manahsthi ka bada hi marmik varnan prastut karti hai. Isme vides ka artha hai Calcutta aur Bidesia hai uska pati.”¹⁰⁰

(In this play a migrant became attached with a prostitute in a town and forgets his own wife. The newly married wife became panic and shows her inner condition. Here foreign land is Calcutta and the *Bidesia* is her husband.)

The whole story of the play revolves around the misery of *Pyari Sundari*, the protagonist character of this play, who is suffering because she has been left out by her husband in the village instead of taking her with him. This was the sorrow of not only *Pyari Sundari*,

⁹⁹ Mahendra Bhanawat, *Loknatay Parampara aur Prayog*, Bafna Prakashan, Chauda Rasta, Jaipur, 1971-72, pp. 29.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

but thousands of women like her whose husbands have migrated in search of some livelihood.



101

This form of *Bidesia*, in which Bikhari had written and developed most of his plays, is as open as like other folk forms and could be performed anywhere with just a small arrangement by forming a small stage. It used to be played in simple gas light so even technically it was not demanding. Neither did it need other technical arrangements like sets, props, costumes, make-up and other things. All these subsidiary part of a theatre performance has not been demanded by the performing troupe as it is highly eclectic in its nature of performance. The whole form is only performance based and it requires good performers only as it incorporates varied kind of stylized linguistically charged performing elements. The strength of this form comes from orchestra of music, dance, singing and acting. There was a time, when *Bidesia* came to the regional and national scenario as a celebrated performance for a while, with the initiative of Bikhari Thakur, but it has disappeared after that. Theatre directors like Satish Anand and Sanjay

¹⁰¹ Om Prakash Bharti, *Bihar ke Paramparik Natya*, 2007, NCZCC, Allahabad.

Upadhyay had tried to refuel the energetic *Bidesia* form with their experiments but even then it hasn't got the thrust. Several critics frequently raise a question at this point as whether *Bidesia* should be called a theatre form as it never had the kind of history and presence which other folk forms like *Jatra*, *Nautanki*, *Khayal*, *Tamasha*, *Yakshagan*, *Swang*, *Dashawatar*, *Bhand-Jashn* etc. had. In a passing glance anyone can be convinced by the argument. The marginal folk form of Bihar called *Bidesia* does not avail the proper history like other folk forms; it does not even go beyond 100 years but it is always there in the singing and poetic tradition of the Bhojpuri society, which can not be overlooked.

According to Dr. Om Prakash Bharti¹⁰², a scholar of *Bidesia*, Bihar was always a place of feudal ethics and morals; and in a region like that, where the flourishness of dance and music in itself is at a stake, then how an existence of a performative tradition can be thought of! The question in itself becomes a farce. But even Dr. Bharati is missing the threads of *Bidesia* in this statement, the tradition which exists for such a long period.

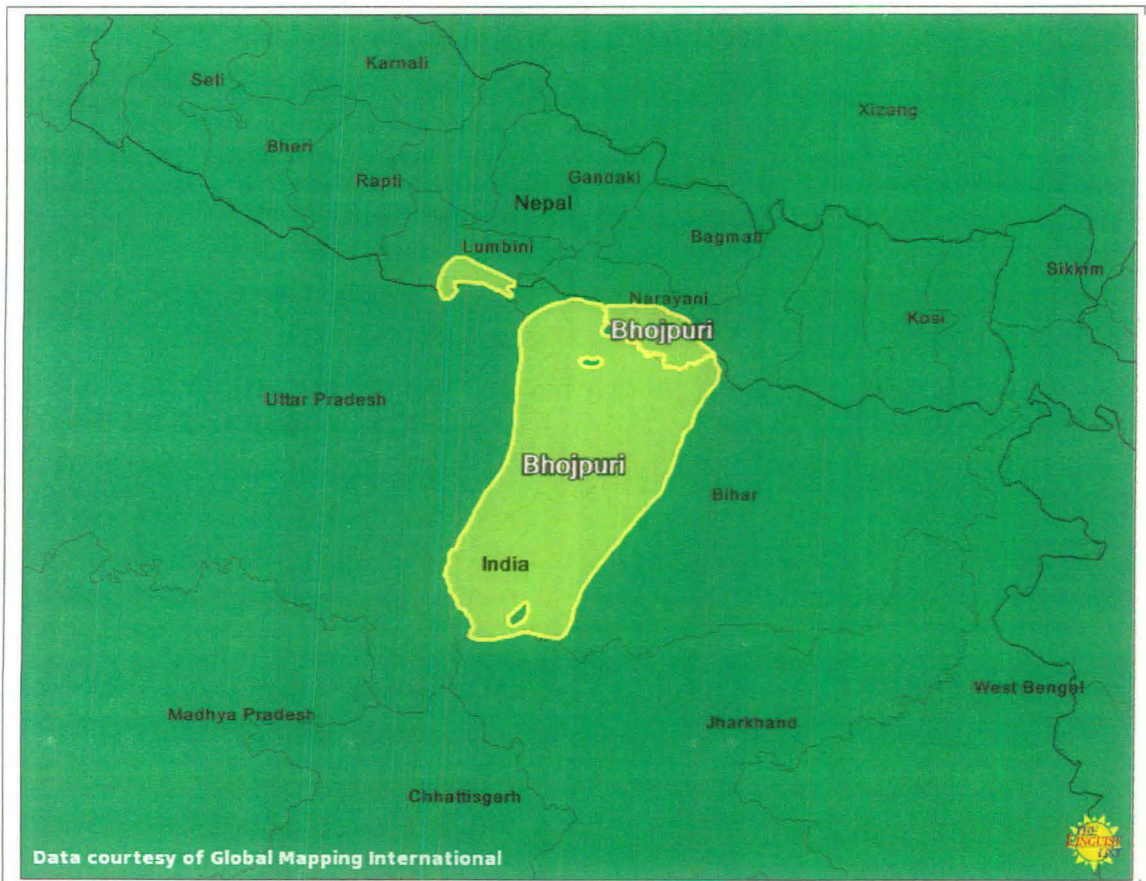
Prof. Badri Narayan Tiwari¹⁰³ has written extensively on the *Bidesia* tradition and on the issue of Bhojpuria's migration and indentured labor. He has defined the tradition at the micro level. *Bidesia*, for him, is a tradition caused by the crisis of indentured labor. His works on *Bidesia* tradition has opened a new area of studies.

But, the history of *Bidesia* culture goes back to hundreds of year when migration started in the Bhojpur area in search of respected jobs. All these developments were noted by the folklore of the Bhojpuri culture and the same could be found in some literary texts also. But before searching those texts lets have a look at the historicity of the region and the language.

¹⁰² Dr. Om Prakash Bharti has several books to his credit on folklore and traditional theatre. He is a distinguished scholar of *Bidesia*.

¹⁰³ Prof. Badri Narayan Tiwari is a scholar of *Bidesia* tradition. He has been researching on the issue of migration from the Bhojpuri belt and its connection in the forming of a new performing cultural tradition called *Bidesia*. His article, '*Bidesia*, Migration, Change and Folk culture' has presented several new insights on the issue and it has been widely acclaimed. Presently he is researching on the same issue of migrated Bhojpuri's and their cultural extravaganza in the deported countries like Fiji, Mauritius and others where these communities have settled down later.

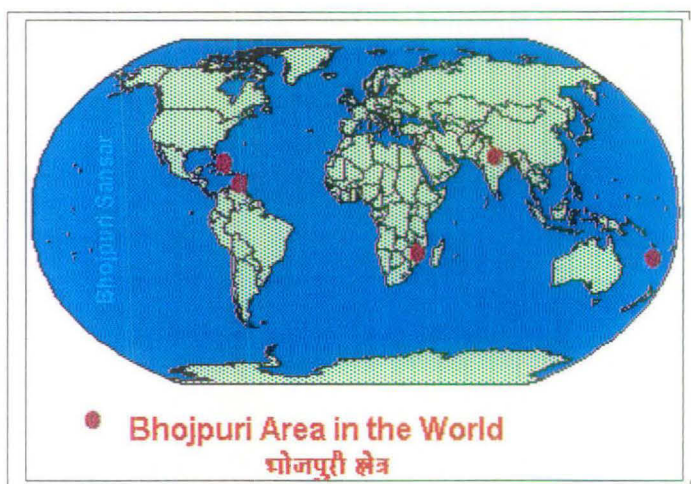
2.2 Historicity of the Word, the Language Bhojpuri and the Place Bhojpur



104

Although, Bhojpur is a district in Bihar whose district centre is Ara, the language called Bhojpuri is spread into several districts of western parts of Bihar and eastern part of Uttar Pradesh along with the area encroaching south Nepal like a blanket. The main regions which are primarily inhabited with Bhojpuri speaking population in Bihar are Bhojpur, Buxar, Bhabhua, Rohtas, Ara, Chapra, Siwan, Gopalganj, Motihari and Betia; while in eastern Uttar Pradesh Ballia Banaras, Gorakhpur, Ghazipur, Maharajgang, Azamgarh, Jaunpur, Allahabad and Faizabad are the main areas where people uses the dialects of Bhojpuri along with Palamu and Garhwa region of Jharkhand.

¹⁰⁴ http://dev.llmap.org/language/bho/static_map.png



105

During the colonial period, the Bhojpuris were sent forcefully to the various shores of Africa and Latin America as bonded labourers in the Indentured labour system. Two third of the labourers had settled down there, and due to that, Bhojpuri has got the status of International language as it is spoken in various countries of the world like, Fiji, Surinam, Trinidad & Tobago, Guyana, Mauritius, Netherlands, South Africa and also Nepal. In all these demographic areas the total number of Bhojpuri speaking people is more than a hundred and fifty million according to the Wikipedia source. There are details available on the website:

“According to an article published in Times of India, an estimated 70 million people of Uttar Pradesh and a further 80 million people in Bihar speak Bhojpuri as their first or second language. There are 6 million Bhojpuri speaking people living outside the Bhojpuri heartlands of Bihar and Purvanchal. These areas include Nepal, especially Birgunj, Mauritius, Fiji, Suriname, Guyana, Uganda, Singapore, Trinidad & Tobago, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Great Britain, and the United States. This makes the total Bhojpuri speaking population in the world to over a hundred and fifty million. It means if Government of India grants Bhojpuri the status of language which is in process

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.bhojpuri.org/index.htm>

it will become third most spoken language in India after Hindi and Bengali which will be surprising to many of the Indians."¹⁰⁶

Migration of varied kinds was always part of the Bhojpuri society. The name Bhojpur is in itself a construct of migration. During the early medieval period, the *Rajputs* of Ujjain called *Parmars* came down to this area and settled down here. King *Bhoj* was the most powerful ruler of this dynasty, and so, the later generation had adopted the title *Bhoj* to show the continuity of the same strong kingdom; though, it was a different matter whether they remained that powerful or not. Still there are two villages which are the remains of this powerful kingdom and have named *Navaka Bhojpur* (new Bhojpur) and *Puranka Bhojpur* (old Bhojpur).

Dr. Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay¹⁰⁷ has written that as the area is known as Bhojpur, so the spoken language of the area is called 'Bhojpuri' or 'Bhojpuria'. Dr. Francis Buchanan¹⁰⁸ has visited this place in 1812, and written that this place was earlier inhabited by the Chedis, but later the Rajputs of Ujjain have defeated them and settled down here. The representative of the clan still lives in that area. Bachman has also mentioned the term 'Bhojpur', and has written that the local kings of this area had troubled the Delhi kings a lot. Akbar had captured one of them named Dalpati but later freed him after getting the prize. But just after being freed, Dalpati started the war against Akbar again. It has been mentioned in 'Ain-e-Akbari' too.

The first reference of using the word Bhojpur is mentioned by Dr. Grierson¹⁰⁹ where he writes that some army men have used the word *Bhojpuria* to introduce them. The incident was of 1789. Dr. Grierson further writes in his book 'Bihar Peasant's Life':

¹⁰⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhojpuri>

¹⁰⁷ Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee was one of the foremost scholars of Indian Culture. He has particularly written marvellously on Bengali Culture.

¹⁰⁸ Dr. Francis Buchanan was a British Officer and lover of Indian Culture.

¹⁰⁹ Dr. Grierson, a British Officer, worked and published a lot on Indian culture particularly on folk culture. He was one of the first scholars who have collected and written on folklore in such a passionate way.

“*Bhojpuri us utsahi jati ki vyavaharik bhasha hai jo paristhiti ke anurup apne ko badlane ke liye hamesha taiyar rahti hai aur jiska prabhav hindustan ke hare k bhag par pada hai. Hindustan me sabhyata failane ka yash Bangaliyon aur Bhojpuriyon kop rapt hai. Is kam me Bangaliyon ne apni kalam se kam liya hai aur vir bhojpuriyon ne apne dande se. Bhojpuriyon ki is veer pravriti me viraha, lorki adi veer ras pradhan lokgeeton ke uthan ka rahsya chhipa hua hai.*”¹¹⁰

(Bhojpuri is the language of that exuberant community, which is always ready to change themselves according to the situations, and who have influenced almost all parts of the country. The credit to spread literature in India goes to two communities, Bengali and Bhojpuri. Bengalis have done this through their pen and Bhojpuri’s with their stick. The mystery of creation of folklores full of valour like Birha, Lorki, and others are hidden within this fact.)

The culture, language and literature of Bhojpuri language are also vast. From the medieval period onwards it has produced great literary geniuses like Kabir, Surdas, Rahul Sanskritayan , Raghuvir Narayan, Mahendra Mishra and Bhikhari Thakur.

2.3 Established Pre-text & Context of *Bidesia*

Cultural expressions have their own continuity. The sudden historical situations and events may add up in its core content but the larger cultural expressions are, in this case, mostly the same. Even if there is a change, it occurs on the basis of its earlier construct. If we take the folk tunes of Bhojpuri culture, like *Jantsar*, *Sohar*, *Sorthi*, *Poorvi*, *Pachara*, *Jhumar* and others, they are the same throughout the transitional phases. The word *Bidesia* which is a vital part of *Bidesia* culture was very much their in the performing tradition of Bhojpuri society even much earlier than it transformed itself in a theatrical form.

¹¹⁰ George Abraham Grierson, ‘Bihar peasant life,’ Cosmo Publication, Delhi, 1975.

According to Prof. Badri Narayan Tiwari,

“It seems that the use of the word Bidesia for migrant laborers in Bhojpuri folk songs began after the year 1837, when migration from the region began. Since folk tradition was rarely written or published, it is difficult to fix the exact time period. From what is documented, little as it may be, it can be said that in 1850 Kesodas¹¹¹, a sadhu following Kabir’s ideology in one of his nirgun compositions, used the term videsh – referring to overseas migration – instead of Pardes – referring to internal migration”¹¹²:

The poem is like this:

*Bhave nahin mohe bhavanvan
Ho Ram, videsh gavanvan¹¹³*

(I don’t care for palaces, Hey Ram, my beloved has gone to a foreign land.)

On the similar theme in 1884, Pandit Beni Madhav Ram¹¹⁴, a resident of Kashi, composed a folk song in which the word *Bidesia* was used for the first time to address a person who had gone abroad. This song is quite nearer to the genre of *Bidesia*, which later developed into full swing:

*Kahe mori sudhi bisaraye re Bidesia
Tarpahi tarpahi din rain gavayo re
Kahe mose nehiya lagae re Bidesia.¹¹⁵*

¹¹¹ A saint of Sakhi Sampradaya of kabir and folk poet.

¹¹² Badri Narayan, *Bidesia*, Migration, Change and Folk Culture, NZCC, Allahabad, 2005, pp-61.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ A saint and folk poet of Bihar.

¹¹⁵ Badri Narayan, *Bidesia*, Migration, Change and Folk Culture, NZCC, Allahabad, 2005, pp-62.

(Why did you make me uncounscious, O' *Bidesia*? I am constantly suffering day and night. Why did you lock your eyes with mine, O' *Bidesia*?)

The composition of *Bidesia* folk songs also began in this time period, which later formed the basis for the *Bidesia* culture. We have seen a huge upsurge after that in writing of such poems based on the same note and tone. In this song the word *Bidesia* was used for the first time as a tek, or repetitive ending to a song line. This is one of the special features of *Bidesia* performance later shaped by Bhikhari Thakur, although the tale, which Bhikhari has depicted in his play *Bidesia*, was already there in the performing genres of the Bhojpuri region.

According to Bhagwati Prasad Dwivedi¹¹⁶, the writer of the book *Bhikhari Thakur: Bhojpuri ke Bhartendu*,

*"A book titled 'Sundari Vilap', written by Ram Sakal Pathak 'Dwijram'¹¹⁷ has been published in 1906."*¹¹⁸

It is also said that this was just collected and published by him as the practice already existed in the form of performances. Dr. Taiyab Hussain Pidot¹¹⁹, who has done his Ph.D. on Bhikhari Thakur has given the reference of two sisters named Sundari Bai and Dunia Bai¹²⁰, originally from Iran origin, were performing the same tale '*Sundari Vilap*' in that

¹¹⁶ Bhagwati Prasad Dwivedi is a well known scholar of *Bidesia* folk form and a beautiful biography of Bhikhari Thakur is on his credit.

¹¹⁷ Ram Sakal Pathak 'Dwijram' was the earliest poet whose written or collected published work called '*Sundari Vilap*' was the soul evident source of *Bidesia* theatre and form before Bhikhari Thakur.

¹¹⁸ Bhagwati Prasad Dwivedi is a scholar of Bhikhari Thakur and written the book *Bhikhari Thakur : Bhojpuri ke Bhartendu*, Ashu Prakashan, Allahabad, 2000

¹¹⁹ Taiyab Hussain Pidot is a scholar of *Bidesia* theatre and Bhikhari thakur. He is the first person who has done his PhD on life and works of Bhikhari Thakur. He is a professor of Hindi in a college of Siwan, Bihar.

¹²⁰ These were two women performers in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They were performing on the theme of *Bidesia* before Bhikhari Thakur.

region, who have settled down in this region as performing artists after the downfall of the Mughal empire, with the help of the local landlord called Hathua Maharaj. They were performing this text with the help of the man Halia (the hero) and the Jabbar (the villain). Here are few lines from the text of '*Sundari Vilap*':

Sundari – *aam bagaicha ghane bag*

Tahi bich dagar lagi ho

Amava ke dadhi dharle thadi

*Nayanva se nir dhare ho*¹²¹

(In between a huge mango garden, she is standing with the support of a branch of the mango tree and waiting for her beloved while her eyes are full of water.)

Jabbar – (Batohi)

baat ta puchhele batohia

kahe dhani chhadi bhaye ho

kekar johelu bat

*Nayanva se nir dhare ho*¹²²

(The Batohi is asking you why you are standing like this. To whom you are waiting? And why you are weeping?)

These two sisters were also performing 'Nanad Bhaujai' and part of 'Krishna Lila' which was later adopted by Bhikhari Thakur apart from 'Sundari Vilap', which was first written as 'Barha-Bahar' by Bhikhari, in 1917 and later became famous as *Bidesia*. Even Bhikhari Thakur in his soul interview with Prof. Ramsuhag Singh in 1965¹²³ accepted

¹²¹ Kedar Chaudhary, Bhikharii Thakur ke natakon men Lokjeevan, Dissertation Submitted in CIL, JNU, 1991.

¹²² Kedar Chaudhary, Bhikharii Thakur ke natakon men Lokjeevan, Dissertation Submitted in CIL, JNU, 1991.

¹²³ The interview is republished by Hindi Magazine 'Ajkal' in July 2006, pp. 22-25.

this fact that he has learned about *Bidesia* through some references. Here he speaks and I quote:

*“maine Bidesia nam suna tha, ‘Pardesi ki baat adi ke adhar par maine ‘Biraha Bahar’ banaya. Koi pushtak mili thi, par yad nahi hai.”*¹²⁴

(I have heard the name of *Bidesia*, I have created Bihara Bahar on the basis of ‘Pardesi ki Baat’. I have got some book to but don’t remember now.)

These are the known and documented pre-texts and contexts of *Bidesia* by several scholars which has helped in emergence of a new culture called *Bidesia*.

These evidences found by several scholars of *Bidesia* shows that the culture and tradition of *Bidesia* was there in the society even before Bhikhari Thakur. Bhikhari had got the opportunity, skill and talent to discover it further and shape it into a full-fledged theatrical form. Apart from these well known evidences, I have traced some more examples of the tradition of the *Bidesia* culture in the treasure of the folk lore of Bhojpuri culture and in poetic traditions of medieval period.

2.4 NEW INSIGHTS ON THE PRE-TEXT OF ‘BIDESIA CULTURE’

Although, it is evident enough that the emergence of *Bidesia* culture was a produce of the crisis of indentured labor during the British rule around 1834-1916, its cultural resonance always existed because of the large scale migration from the Bhojpuri society. The British rule had just worsened the condition and it accelerated the numbers of migration and the policy of indentured labor introduced by the British colonial rulers overturns all the earlier type of migration which was within country. The problem of migration was always there in the society, although not in such a large number like indentured laborers.

¹²⁴ The interview of Bhikhari Thakur published in Hindi Magazine ‘Ajkal’ in July 2006, pp. 22-25.

The crisis of indentured labor was the Construct of the British imperial rule and that had deepened the crisis in such a manner that it became the central thrust of the society and its cultural expression. According to an assumption around 1.5 million people alone from India had been sent to unknown shores during the period of 1834-1916 as indentured laborers. As Khalid Koser writes in a short introduction to International Migration:

“After the collapse of slavery, indentured labor from China, India and Japan moved in significant numbers some 1.5 million from India alone – to continue working the plantations of the European powers.”¹²⁵

Here, I will discuss mainly three types of poetic tradition which had the seed of Extinction from the loved ones which could be seen in the glance of Bidesia Culture. The first one is the Tantric tradition of India, spread over many regions. In the early medieval period Buddhist saints came into contact with the existing tradition of tantricism, which gave a huge boost up to the existing tantric tradition in the society. The Natha-Siddha tradition was the product of such development. We have the treasure of poetic tradition of the Naatha-Siddha's and the greatest of all the Naatha Siddha's poets was Raja Gopichand, who comes from a ruler dynasty but left his family of kinship as like Buddha and joined the movement, he has used the term '*Pardesi*' for himself in some of his couplets. He has written:

*Satguru Shabd Hamara Shir Pari! Bad-Bibad na Kijiye!
Ham Jogi Pardesi Mai! Bhichha Hoi ta Diyiye!*¹²⁶

(I have words of my Guru, in my head, don't argument. I am a saint of foreign lands. Give me alms if you can.)

¹²⁵ Koser, Khalid, 'International Migration, A Very Short Introduction', Oxford University Press Inc., New York, 2007, pp.-3.

¹²⁶ 'Naath-Siddhon Ki Baniyan', Ed- Hazariprasad Dwivedi, NagriPracharini Sabha, Kashi, Sanvat 2035.

It is said that after joining the sect he left his palace and immersed himself into the practice of the Natha-Siddha tradition and returned back to his hometown after many years to ask for alms from his own family. As it is the tradition of the sect that one can achieve the status of the monk only when he completely disconnects from his family and for that he has to come and beg from his own family first after getting initiation into the sect. When Gopichand returned he had words with his wife and family members. The family wanted him to stay him at home but Gopichand declined that offer and said these lines, which meant that my mind has already accepted the initiation given by my Guru, there is no need of getting into debate, I have become an outsider for you now, If you have something to offer give it to me.

Naatha-Siddha saints existed in circa 9th A.D. to 12 A.D. and Gopinath was in the mid the 10th century A.D. This then, is the ancient written poetic text which uses the term '*Pardes*'. Although, Naatha-Siddhas were spread over in different parts of India their influence over the Bhojpuri belt is not a hidden fact. The language called *Apbhransh* in which they have composed their poetry is close to Bhojpuri language.

The second important poetic tradition which later shaped the form of *Bidesia* comes from Bhakti movement. Kabir's¹²⁷ *Nirguna bhakti* and Surdas's¹²⁸ *Saguna bhakti*, both had played an important role in shaping the whole form and it is here where we find instances of using the word *Pardes* and *vides*. Although the Saguna and Nirguna Bhakti movement were opposite of each other yet their contribution in shaping the *Bidesia* form is valuable.

In Kabir's sect or in *Sakhi Sampradaya*¹²⁹, the eagerness to meet the beloved god was always there, as they believed that the soul was going through a kind of separation from his loved one while being on earth. This theme was portrayed in different manners in the poems of Kabir and his followers. One of the immediate followers of Kabir named

¹²⁷ Kabir is one of the best poets Indian literature ever has during the Bhakti movement in medieval period.

¹²⁸ Surdas was a leading poet of Bhakti Movement in the medieval period.

¹²⁹ Sakhi sampradaya was established by the followers of Bhakti movement which assumes the divine as their friend considering themselves female organ.

Dharamdas, who lived just 15 years after the death of Kabir had written a poem in which 'Pardes' word was used for a person who was separated from his beloved.

Mitau madia suni kar gailo

*Apan balam Pardes nikal gailo.*¹³⁰

(My beloved had deserted my hut, he has gone abroad.)

Kabir died in 1518 and Dharamdas lived not more than 1533; thus we could assume that this poem should have been written around 1530. Although, the use of the word 'Pardes' is common in the Nirguna¹³¹ sect of Kabir called Sakhi Sampradaya and in *Bidesia* but the connotation is different. Here the saints were referring a different kind of separation instead of a singular love angle of the husband-wife. In Sakhi sampradaya, it was assumed that the soul of the human being is part of the spirit or god, which is separated from him after coming in a human form on earth and so, it is eager to meet again with its life source. So the departure of the soul from the earth, which means the death of a human body, is considered as sacred and to be rejoiced rather than mourning as it is going to meet its separated part. That's why in the *Sakhi sampradaya*, the death of a person is to be an act of celebration. Whatever the connotation it might follow but the idea of being departed and separation is attached with it and hence it could be seen as a part of *Bidesia* tradition.

The idea of separation from the divine soul is not only carried by the *Nirguna bhakti* movement but also the *Saguna bhakti*¹³² movement of the medieval period. And most of their poetic tradition was created on the same demographic area of Bhojpuri language. We get an example of the use of the word 'Pardes' from the poem of Surdas, too, who was the propagator of *Saguna Bhakti* and celebrated poet of Bhakti period. It is from the

¹³⁰ 'Dharamdas jee ki shabdabali' published in 1923 by Belvediar Press, Prayag.

¹³¹ Nirguna Bhakti movement beliefs in the divine force but disclaim any physical appearance of that divine presence.

¹³² Saguna Bhakti movement was the most popular and widespread movement during the medieval period and even after that. It believes that the divine force has a physical presence too.

collection of his poems called 'Bhramargeet'. Anyone who knows about the *Bhramargeet* episode of the *Krishna Kavya*, has the idea that in this episode the separation of *Krishna* has been narrated by the folk specially the women folk of Brij. It states, *Krishna* has become king of Mathura. He has shifted to Mathura leaving the countryside of Brij. Because of this physical separation occurred between the two, the gopis of Brij are lamenting for their *Krishna*.

Hari Pardes bahut din laye!

Kari ghata dekhi badal ki nain neer bhari aye

*Pa lagaon tumh, beer batau! Kaun des ten dhaye*¹³³

(Our lord has gone away to unknown place. After seeing the black clouds our eyes are filled up with water. Please tell us where he has gone?)

This poem was also written in the early medieval period given that Surdas was born in 1479 and lived till 1586. As we know that this is a kind of *Kavya* which has a kind of narrative. *Uddho* was sent by *Sri Krishna* to console his beloved Gopi's left behind in the home place. But the Gopi's, who were waiting for *Sri Krishna* eagerly, were not convinced with his arguments and they were not even willing to hear *Uddho*. Here, *Krishna* as a beloved of Gopi's was settled down in another place and so the Gopi's were suffering from the pain of separation. Given below are lines which show the grief and anguish of the Gopi's at the same time:

Sandesani Madhuban kup bhare!

Jo koi pathik gaye hain han te phiri nahin gavan kare

Kai vai shyam sikhaye samodhe, kai vai beech mare?

Apne nahin pathat Nandnandan hamreu pheri dhare

*Masi khuti, kagaj jal bheeje sar dav lagi jare!*¹³⁴

¹³³ Surdas, Edi. Manager Pandey, Sahitya Akademy, New Delhi, 2008.

¹³⁴ Manager Pandey, 'Bhakti Andolan Aur Surdas ka Kavya', Vani Prakashan, New Delhi, 1996.

(It seems that the drug has been mixed in the well. Whoever has gone to search him never returns. Either they were taught something by Krishna himself or they have died somewhere in between. He is not coming himself. It seems that our head is burning with pain.)

Gopi's were further cursing them for the misdeed they have done:

*Nirmohia se preeti kinhi kahe nas dukh hoye
Kapar kari kari preeti kapti lai gayo man goye*¹³⁵

(It has happened, as we loved a heartless fellow. That cheat has taken our mind and soul by showing false love.)

Gopi's further asks from uddho:

*Uddho! Tum kahiyo hari son jay hamare jia ki darad
Din nahin chain, rain nahin sobat, pavak bhai junhaiya sarad*¹³⁶

(Uddho after returning back from here please tell Krishna the anguish of our heart. There is restlessness in the day and nights are sleepless, the cold breeze seems like hurting.)

If we know the story of the *Bhramargeet* episode, *Uddho* comes here as a messenger, whose task is to pass the message of *Krishna* who had settled down in the Palace of Dwarka leaving behind his beloved Gopis in Brij. We found the same narrative structure in *Bidesia*, where *Pyari Sundri* waiting for her husband *Bidesia* who has gone away to Kolkata and *Batohi* comes as a messenger, by whom she sends her message to her husband and wants to see him rather than just hearing from his side as Gopi's were eager

¹³⁵ Manager Pandey, '*Bhakti Andolan Aur Surdas ka Kavya*,' Vani Prakashan, New Delhi, 1996.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

to meet their loved *Krishna*. So, here, we are seeing that the narrative structure which Bhikhari Thakur had used for this play *Bidesia* is similar to the narrative structure of *Krishna Kavya*. It means that the formation of *Bidesia* folk form is based on its earlier traditions rather than created by an individual talent.

We found several other examples of these types of borrowings from the earlier traditions in making of the folk form of *Bidesia*. Here are some other examples which show its development. There was a saint named Dharnidas, follower of Kabir, born in Manjhi village of Saran district of Bihar, who had written two kavyas named '*Prem Pragas*' and '*Shabad Prakash*'. He had mentioned the date of writing '*Prem Pragas*' in his book and according to that it is fixed as 1656 AD. These two books were found in 1873, and presently, they are in the library of the Manjhi village. The following few lines of a poem from '*Prem Pragas*' gives us the first example of the use of the word *vides*.

Ki subh din aaju, sakhi tum dina
Bahut dinanh piya basal vides
*Aaju sunal niju aavan sandes.*¹³⁷

(What a pleasant day today for me because of you. You were settled down at foreign land for several days. Only today we have heard the news of your coming.)

This is the earlier known instance of the use of the word *vides* for the beloved person. And later in continuation of these, several poems were written by various authors. The other example I am taking of Lakshmi Sakhi, original name Lakshmidas jee, born in Amnaur village of saran district of Bihar in later half of 19th century, who had written four Kavyas named '*Amar Siddhi*,' '*Amar Kahani*,' '*Amar Vilas*' and '*Amar Farash*.' In the songs written in these volumes one could get the rhythm of *Bidesia* song and musical pattern.

¹³⁷ Udaynarayan Tiwari, Bhojpurī Bhasha aur Sahitya, Bihar-Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 1984.

Ihawan na kehu sathi na sangatia

*Kamini kant tore johat batia*¹³⁸

(Here there is no one who is her friend, the tender one is just waiting for you.)

The pain of separation is the main concern of these songs and they were written beautifully in bursting poetic and musical notes. And the direct inspiration and force of writing these types of poems were emerging after 18th century in the later medieval period because of the large number of migration from the Bhojpuri belt. By 15th-16th century, Buxer became one of the main sources of recruitment in the Mughal army, as the local landlords of small kings of this area had a love and hate relationship with the Mughals. The landlord had revolted several times against the Mughals and because of that the Mughals had later settled down a army camp in this area. These army camps known as depots were the main source of army recruitment too. That was also the source of migration. The migration which parted husbands from wife's and parents from their young children and sisters from brothers. These varied kind of separation had aroused the feeling of sadness among them especially in the parted beloved souls, which later transformed into songs and musical humming's. The poetic tradition of that area has captured its mood in different poems written by various poets.

The third important and direct source of the *Bidesia* tradition is the vast folklore spread over the Bhojpur region. In any circumstances the folklore of any region are the the most authentic source of the life of that region and cultural life. The folklore tradition of a community is the construct of the society itself and the question of authorship is not there at all. A song of Karma cast of Madhya Pradesh refers that if you want to know the actual stories of our life then listen to our songs. Barrier Halwin, a great scholar of folklore traditions, has praised the folk songs in this regard, "The folk songs are important not only because the music, form and content of verse is itself part of the

¹³⁸ Udaynarayan Tiwari, Bhojpuri Bhasha aur Sahitya, Bihar-Rashtrabha'sha Parishad, Patna, 1984

people's life but even more because in songs in chorus, in actually fixed and established documents we have the most authentic and unshakable history to ethnographic fact.”

We can see the historical development within the community of Bhojpuri society through the glass of its vast folklore, which reflects the idea of living or common life, as folklores are the most living traditions of a society or community in specific. We can see a lot references and several instances where not only the word *vides* and *Pardes* was used in the folklore of the Bhojpuri society but the whole set of memory and narrative of the separation is written in it. Although it is hard to assign them with any specific date as they come from the oral traditions and there are hardly any available evidences through them we can prove the exact time frame of those folklores, most of them were not even available in written form. Here are some examples taken from the vast collections of the folklores and folk songs in Bhojpuri, which were collected by the hard work of Bhojpuri scholars like Krishnadev Upadhyay, Uday Narayan Tiwari, Hanskumar Tiwari and Radhaballabh Sharma:

Jahu ham janton e nandi, are bhaiya tore jaihen bidesawa re
Gagrini kaniki pissaiton, are banhi deti sangwa re.
Hoiton main ban ke koaliya, ban hi birve rahiton
*Hari more jaiton bidesawa, sabad are suinaton*¹³⁹

(If only I could have known, O' sister-in-law that your brother will go to foreign land I could have joined myself with him. I could have been the cuckoo of the forest, wandering in the forest. I could say some thing when my husband would be leaving.)

Jab tuhun e piya jaiba bidesawa, firkin kei re saiha na
*Mora dasili sejia, ki kei re soeiyehen na*¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Bhojpuri Lokgeet, Part-3, Edi.-Krishnadev Upadhyay, Ravishankar Upadhyay, Bhojpuri Academy, Patna, 1984.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

(When you will go to foreign land O' lord, who will bear my worries? My empty couch will suck me, who will be sleeping with me.)

*Gavan karable ghar baithable, apne chalele Pardes
Jada lagela maharaj jee, moke baida bula da*¹⁴¹

(After getting married and leaving me at home he has left for foreign land, I am shivering, please call the doctor.)

*Tuhu ta jaiba e bayekal, des Pardesba, e Ram
Hamara ke kahi saunpi jaiba, ekelaba, e Ram*¹⁴²

(You will, too, go to the foreign land, Hey Ram! To whom you would be handling down alone, Hey Ram!)

In these folklores too the subject of separation were dealt in a great manner. A lot of them were collected in several editions of Bhojpuri Lok Sahitya. Although it's difficult to find out the exact time period of the songs but still they exist in the community since long. Whether these folklores are derived from the poetic tradition or the poetic tradition was in the continuity of the folklore, it is hard to find out as both were in common practice. Following example will show us the borrowing from each other.

*Bhave nahin mohe bhavanvan
Ho Ram, vides gavanvan*

(I don't care for palaces; Hey Ram! my lord has gone to foreign land.)

¹⁴¹ Bhojpuri Lokgeet, Part-3, Edi.-Krishnadev Upadhyay, Ravishankar Upadhyay, Bhojpuri Academy, Patna, 1984.

¹⁴² Ibid.

This couplet was written by Kesodas¹⁴³, in 1850, a follower of Kabir's ideology. Almost, the same song was versed in the folklore tradition too:

Bhave nahin mohe anganwan
*Ho Ram, Chaita mahinawan*¹⁴⁴

(I don't care for my household; Hey Ram! It's the month of chaita.)

This is not the only example of such inter exchange. There are several songs written by Bhikhari Thakur, Mahendra Mishra and other Bhojpuri writers who have the direct linkage to the folklores.

Look at these lines of the play *Bidesia* written by Bhikhari Thakur:

Amava maujari gaile lagale tikorva se
*Din par din piyarala re Bidesia*¹⁴⁵

(Its spring time and the mango tree have started flowering and fruiting. Day by day its hurts, O' *Bidesia*.)

And its folklore version of the *Jantsar* song:

Amava maujari gaile, mahuva tapaklae nirvamohia
*Nipate bhaile niravamohia, re lobhia nirvamohia*¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ A saint of Sakhi Sampradaya of Kabir and a folk poet.

¹⁴⁴ Bhojpuri Sanskar Geet, Edi.- HansKumar Tiwari, Radhabalabh Sharma, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2000.

¹⁴⁵ Bhikhari Thakur Rachnawali, Edi.- Nagendra Prasad Singh, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2005.

¹⁴⁶ Bhojpuri Sanskar Geet, Edi.- HansKumar Tiwari, Radhabalabh Sharma, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2000.

(Its spring time and the mango tree have started flowering, the mahua tree is already plummeling its fruits. You are so stupid, O' selfish beloved.)

So, did the case with the song written by Mahendra Mishra, one of the contemporary of Bikhari, who has written a lot of Bhojpuri popular songs:

Pia mora gaile rama purbi banijia
Ki deke gaile na, ek sugna khilauna
*Ki deke gaile na*¹⁴⁷

(My husband has gone to east for the purpose of business, giving me a playmate.)

Here is its folklore counterpart Jhumar, one of the popular categories of folk songs in Bihar:

Piyava se chalela purbi banijaria, ki kei re chhaihen na
*Mora ujdal bangalwa, ki kei re chhaihen na*¹⁴⁸

(My husband has gone to east for the purpose of business, which will repair my roof of the bungalow, which has been ruined.)

These are the few examples of the exchanges happen between the two and it gives ample suggestions that the later poetic tradition of *Bidesia* was in the continuation of the folklore of the area and the community.

The theme of separation of the beloved has always existed in the society as mentioned earlier. There are hundreds of collected folk songs in which the same is said. They

¹⁴⁷ Bhojpuri Lokgeet, Part-3, Edi.-Krishnadev Upadhyay, Ravishankar Upadhyay, Bhojpuri Academy, Patna, 1984.

¹⁴⁸ Bhojpuri Sanskar Geet, Edi.- HansKumar Tiwari, Radhabalabh Sharma, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2000.

covered varied range of separation and their effect. The *Jantsar* and *Jhumar*, the popular performative traditions of the women of the community have the treasure of these songs. These songs are sung by the women of the society so their grief comes into it subtly. And for a woman living in the feudal structure, the separation from the loved ones is one of the major causes of pain, whether they were separated from their parents after marriage or the separation from his husband, who has brought her into the new family, on whom she can believe. But when the husband was leaving for another place for whatever reason, it was a double blow for the newly married woman. There were several songs, in which woman was writing to her husband, who is abroad that his family was giving her a lot of trouble and life became miserable. Here is one example:

Aavahu e piya aavahu, manava more rakhahu
*Bhorhi hoihe bihan, are ham piche pachhtaibon*¹⁴⁹

(Please come O' my loved one, Please keep my word, Please come in the morning, otherwise you will repent.)

When the husband returned, he found his wife either dead or missing. In both the cases she was no more. In some cases the husband had come back but with a new wife, then the woman protagonist told him to get lost as he was no more for her. So we get empowered woman voices also in these songs. Its not that the temptation was not here for the woman, there were several men including his brother in law and the *Batohi*, who had offered himself to her but she had refused to do so. She was angry as her husband did not keep his promise. These songs can be categorized according to the themes. The first kind of that was the complain songs of the woman about her husband's family members. Here is an example of those:

Suni ho sakhi ham to adalat karibo
*Pahile adalat buxer me karibo, sasur raur mala utar ham lebo*¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Bhojpuri Sanskar Geet, ed. HansKumar Tiwari, Radhabalabh Sharma, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2000.

(Listen o' friend! I will register a case. First I will do it in Buxer, and take away the reputation of my father-in-law.)

This is the much empowered voice but there are several songs in which the woman was grumbling about the facilities which she could afford at her parents place and the difficulties she is facing in her in laws home. These are the earliest example of separation of a person who had lived with her parents in her life and now settled down with the other family.

The second classification can be done in the cases when the husband wanted to go abroad and the woman is trying to persuade him to not go. Here are some examples:

Chiura kutu chiura kutu sanwaro tiriya re
*Aari ham jaibo sanwaro maghare desaba re*¹⁵¹

(You do your work oh dear! I am going to Magadh)

Kahe re lagi babu jaibo morang desaba
*Kahe re lagi babua maghar desaba re.*¹⁵²

(Why you will go to Morang or Magadh state?)

Jahu ham janitin e lobhia, jaibe tuhun morangwa
Dhinchi banhi behito e lobhia, resham ke re doria
Resham ke doria e lobhia, tuti phati jaihen

¹⁵⁰ Bhojpuri Sanskar Geet, ed. HansKumar Tiwari, Radhabalabh Sharma, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2000.

¹⁵¹ Bhojpuri Sanskar Geet, ed. HansKumar Tiwari, Radhabalabh Sharma, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2000.

¹⁵² Bhojpuri Sanskar Geet, ed. HansKumar Tiwari, Radhabalabh Sharma, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2000.

*Bachan ke banhal piyawa kathin na ram jaihen.*¹⁵³

(If I would have known o selfish, you will go to Morang state. I would have tied you with the thread of cotton. The thread of the cotton surely would have torn but if he has given words, my loved one would not have gone anywhere.)

*Kalkatta tu jin jani raja,
hamar dil kaise lagi*¹⁵⁴

(If you will go to Kolkata, my heart will feel sorry.)

She also complained to her mother in law so that she can stop her son from going away:

*Machia baithali e sasu, sunhu bachnia
Raur beta morang chalale, kavna ram avgunia*¹⁵⁵

(O' my mother-in-law, sitting on a cot, please hear me. Your son is going to Morang, what an absurdity this is?)

But, after all he had gone and had not sent a single letter indicating that he was not maintaining regular communication. This is the third stage depicted in the folklore. Here comes the messenger. In the earlier instances they are from the Mallah (boatman) community but later this task had been transferred to the migrant. The following example shows us the direct lineage between the poetic traditions of the Bhakti movement especially with Surdas Kavya.

¹⁵³ Bhojpuri Sanskar Geet, ed. HansKumar Tiwari, Radhabalabh Sharma, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2000..

¹⁵⁴ Bhojpuri Lokgeet, Part-3, ed. Krishnadev Upadhyay, Ravishankar Upadhyay, Bhojpuri Academy, Patna, 1984.

¹⁵⁵ Bhojpuri Sanskar Geet, ed. HansKumar Tiwari, Radhabalabh Sharma, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2000.

Piyawa chalale Pardesh mandil more chuei rahi
*Uddho ho tu sansesia, sanes lele jaiha*¹⁵⁶

(My husband has left for foreign land. I am not feeling well. Hey! you messenger Uddho. Please take my message for him.)

Here is the other folklore.

Apu na aave piya chithiyo na bheje,
*More jiya lalchawe ho*¹⁵⁷

(Neither he himself neither comes nor sends even a letter, he is tempting my heart.)

In absence of the husband they are going through several phases of suffering, its not just mental harassment but physical too. So, she complains:

Jab tuhun e piya jaiba bidesawa, firkin kei re saiha na
*Mora dasili sejia, ki kei re soeiyehen na*¹⁵⁸

(When you will go to foreign land O' lord, who will bear my worries? My empty couch will suck me, who will be sleeping with me.)

Tori dhani bhaili rama kali re koyalia se
*Kuhukeli amavan ke bagh ho batohia*¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Bhojpuri Sanskar Geet, ed. HansKumar Tiwari, Radhabalabh Sharma, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2000.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Bhojpuri Sanskar Geet, ed. HansKumar Tiwari, Radhabalabh Sharma, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2000.

(Your beloved has become black like cuckoo, chirping in the garden of mango trees, O messenger.)

The woman sexuality was very much part of the suppression and she placed courageously these demands before the society through these songs. She has right on her husband which she was lacking in his absence.

The fourth classification can be done on those folklores where the husband returns for her either single or with a new wife. The reaction of the first woman is of different kind according to the situation. Look at this reaction when the husband returned with another wife:

Aare barho baris par ana, pinjada liye sath

Dil ka darad na jana

Aare pinjada khutin par tango, jahan raho tahan sath

*Dil ka darad na jana*¹⁶⁰

(First, he has come after twelve years! In all these years he hadn't heard the mourning of my heart. And now when he came, he is with another woman. Go, with that woman only, if she is so dearer to you. I don't need you at all. You deceitful, you couldn't understand pain of my heart.)

There are several songs of this kind where the woman protagonist had made it clear that she is not going to bear another woman in her house.

Migrations to different places were also depicted in these folklores. The earlier instances of Morang, Patna and Magadh, later Calcutta, Jharia, and other places keep referring in several songs. These are the unexplored pre-text of *Bidesia*, which is already there in the

¹⁶⁰ Bhojpuri Sanskar Geet, ed. HansKumar Tiwari, Radhabalabh Sharma, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2000.

performative tradition of the society. *Bidesia* theatre performance was built by Bhikhari Thakur later on this basis. This didn't mean that Bhikhari Thakur's contribution in shaping the tradition of *Bidesia* is less significant. The role of Bhikhari Thakur in shaping the *Bidesia* performance is as important as all these other pre-texts or even more as he has given it a certain form and continuity while placing it among the people as performance.

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Chapter-3

Bhikhari Thakur and his Texts: a Construct & Constructor of *Bidesia* Culture

3.1 Role of Bhikhari Thakur in Shaping *Bidesia* Theatre & Culture

Bhikhari Thakur was an important constructor of *Bidesia* Theatre & Culture. Being a migrant he was fully aware of the crisis that arises from migration. Surely his first hand personal experience and understanding had to do a lot in the development of *Bidesia* form of theatre, as we see that most of his plays were based on his own empirical experiences and two of his most famous plays were based on the crisis of migration while there was one more play in which he had tackled this issue. The first play written by Bhikhari Thakur was *Biraha Bahar*, in which he had incorporated the *Dhobi-Dhoban* Naach form for its presentation part and the songs were based on *Biraha*, one the most famous folklore of Bihar. After this he developed a play called '*Kalyug Bahar*', which was again rewritten and produced by him on the name of '*Bahara Bahar*' which later became famous on the name of *Bidesia*, upon which his whole theatre experiments and practice, was based. But before that he had written famous plays like '*Gabarghichod*' which tackles different nature of problems occurred due to the crisis of migration, the problem of ownership of the child and '*Beti-Bechava*', which was again based on his empirical experience of selling daughters on the name of marriage. One of his another text, which tackles the issue of migration, is '*Kalyug Prem*', which was also known as '*Piya Nasyil*', which explores the economic opportunities provided by migration.

These are the primary text through them the *Bidesia* theatre form was developed after a theatre practice of more than 50 years. I will come to the main themes, storyline and agenda's of these plays later but first I will try to look into the ironical catastrophe of the life of the iconic figure of Bhikhari Thakur, as a construct and constructor of *Bidesia* Theatre & Culture, with the help of his writings and writings made upon him, in this chapter. But before that I am doing a literary survey, in brief, of the raw materials of

Bidesia Culture, which were available for Bhikhari Thakur, upon which he built the amazing theatre form of *Bidesia* and developed this distinct culture of its own.

As, I have already written in earlier chapters that *Bidesia* culture was the construct of the historical conditions which developed due to huge number of migration and problem of indentured labour in the Bhojpur area of Bihar, but it was Bhikhari Thakur who had given it the wider appeal as a cultural form and aesthetic practice by propagating 'Bidesia Theatre.' Earlier than Bhikhari Thakur, we have examples of folklores, poetics and small performances but there was not any developed theatre practice before him. It was his endeavoured which has given *Bidesia* the paradigm of a full fledged theatrical culture. Apart from the vast treasure of folklore and poetics, it was said and I have mentioned in the first chapter that persona's like *Sundari Bai*, *Dunia Bai*, *Guddar Rai* and others played a crucial role in the development of *Bidesia* theatre which might be true but those performances shaped by them were short length and mostly based on singing and dancing. They were not as canonised and crafted as they became after Bhikhari Thakur experimented with them. Dramatic elements were the part of those performances but it was lacking the full-fledged dramatic experience, which was provided by Bhikhari Thakur through his experiments with the form. Even the available texts written by *Ramsakal Pathak* 'Dwij' by the title 'Pyari Sundari Viyog' was merely a collection of poems based on the situation of separation of a young married couple, the tale discovered and told by the duo sisters of Iranian origin *Sundari Bai* and *Dunia Bai*, although, these previous practices helped Bhikhari Thakur a lot in shaping the whole new genre of *Bidesia* Theatre & Culture. One of the greatest contemporary literary geniuses named *Sanjeev*, who has written a masterpiece biographical novel called 'Sutradhar' on the life and works of Bhikhari Thakur had mentioned the role of Bhikhari Thakur in shaping the *Bidesia* theatre. The scholars of 'Bidesia Theatre & Culture' like *Bhagwati Prasad Dwivedi*, *Maheshwaracharya*, *Tayyab Hussain 'Pidit'* and others too, have mentioned this fact in their respective works on life and works of Bhikhari Thakur which I will be discussing in this chapter.

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Although there were instances of some performances and texts of *Bidesia* before Bhikhari Thakur but in spite of that he should be given full credit for the development of this theatre form. I would like to look into his kind of theatrical practice, texts, performers, audience and society as a cobweb, interlinked with each other in this chapter with the life of Bhikhari Thakur himself.

3.2 Life & Time of Bhikhari Thakur

Bhikhari Thakur was born on 18 December 1887, in a poor lower caste barber family of a village of Saran district of Bihar called 'Kutubpur', formerly was part of the of Bhojpur region and so, Bhojpuri was his mother tongue. The name of his father was Dalsingar Thakur and his mother's name was Shivkali Devi. His father was a poor man and was sailing his life with the work accustomed to his caste. It was also ironical that Dalsingar Thakur never liked Bhikhari Thakur doing dance and drama and making a Naach troupe while his own name suggested the same, a person who is beauty of a troupe or one who maintains a group beautifully. Bhikhari Thakur was well aware of the fact that he had come from a background about which no body take cares and so was correct about his kind of theatre which always lies in the oral tradition of India rather than the Shastra tradition of the Brahmins. So, in his life time itself he had tried his best to answer all the questions regarding his writings and tried to clarify all the objections put on him. He has talked about at length, in his texts, about his evolution and other details so that there would not be any confusion after his death about his life and works. He has written in one of his works about his birth in poetic form. He writes and I quote:

*Barah Sau Panchanwe Jahia, Sudi Push Panchami rahe Jahia
Roj Somar thik dopaharia, Janam bhaile ohi gharia*¹⁶¹

(He was born on Paush Magh Panchami of samvat 1295. It was a brightly Monday afternoon.)

¹⁶¹ Bhagwati Prasad Dwivedi, *Bhikhari Thakur : Bhojpuri ke Bhartendu*, Ashu Prakashan, 1143/31, Purana Katra, Allahabad, 2000, pp. 25.

Although, there is a lot of confusion spread by different scholars once again about his birth place, which is a typical problem of our oral tradition and associated with so many of our saints and rulers. Nevertheless, those researching on this area have different opinions on this issue. His birth place Kutubpur village was situated at the bank of river Ganga. Flood is a regular feature of this river, which is the lifeline of the settlers around this river. Because of regular floods people situated near by the river had to suffer a lot. Sometimes even river Ganga has shifted her its shore due to heavy soil infusion while big floods. Because of this, Kutubpur village has undergone a change in its location, shifted twice in the lifetime of Bhikhari across shores. from this shore to that shore of river Ganga. This is the main reason of the whole issue of the confusion of his birth place that led to confusion about his birthplace. But, one thing is very clear he was born into Kutubpur village of Bhojpur region of Bihar whether it was Saran district or Bhojpur district. So, this debate over district of his birth place is futile.

His childhood was miserable in many matters. Since his childhood, he had to go to households of the village families and work for them. As, he came from a barber caste, there were some tabooed work which he had to do for the families, the most torturous of them was going far to give messages and invitations to the far relatives of the village people. In that time there were very few sources of travelling, so he had to go miles to give messages and invitation barefoot. Sometimes even after being a train route he was denied ticket fee for going to give message. He has written about it in his text 'Nau Bahar'.

*Rail ke rasta bate bhai, kharcha mange men sakuchai
Chhithi utha ke chhalal chal, dekhi uthawal god ke fal*¹⁶²

¹⁶² Bhikhari Thakur, Bhikhari Thakur Rachnawali, ed. Dr. Virendra Narayan Yadav and Nagendra Prasad Singh, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2005, pp. 271.

(There was a train route but he had hesitation in demanding train fare, due to earlier experience. He left to deliver the message by foot, come and see the bad shape of his feet, because of the long journey.)

He had has to learn his ancestral traditional work of shaving in his childhood. according to the circumstances. He And he himself has written that till thirty years of his age he was doing just the same traditional work accustomed to his caste people as he told Ramsuhag Singh in his rare interview. Here I am quoting the question asked by Ramsuhag Singh and the answer given by Bhikhari Thakur.

Ramsuhag Singh : Kya Ladakpan se hi Naach-Gane me apki abhiruchi hai?

Bhikhari Thakur : Main tees baras tak Hajamat karta raha, nimantran deta raha.

Ramsuhag Singh : Apne apna pasha kab se kab tak kiya?

Bhikhari Thakur : Tees baras ki umra tak.¹⁶³

(Ramsuhag Singh : Were you interested in singing and dancing since your childhood?

Bhikhari Thakur : I was shaving and giving invitations till the age of thirty.

Ramsuhag Singh : Till when You have carried your traditional occupation?

Bhikhari Thakur : Till the age of thirty.)

He was married at an early age but his first wife passed away in his early age. In the age of nine, he was sent to school to learn and study but despite his efforts he couldn't learn even a bit of writing 'Ram' in his one year of school phase. In the same interview he has answered regarding the question of his education.

Ramsuhag Singh : Apki Shiksha kis shreni tak hui?

Bhikhari thakur : School me keval kakahra tak, main eek saal tak padha par kuch nahi aya. Bhagwan namak ladke ne mujhe padhaya.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Aajkal Magazine, 'Main Kam Se Alag Rahkar Jeevit Nahin Rah Sakta', Interview of Bhikhari Thakur by Ramsuhag Singh, July 2006, pp. 24.

(Ramsuhag Singh : Till what standard you are educated?

Bhikhari Thakur : I just learned alphabets in school, I tried one whole year to study but failed. Then I was taught by a boy named Bhagwan.)

As discussed in the above lines he had not n't got proper education and he had to leave his school without learning anything. sufficient and there were reasons for that. During his school time, he had has to face the caste bias that prevailed in the society. His fellow school kids used to make comments upon him regarding his caste and their use of education. Even the teacher of his school didn't given him the comfort which is needed for study to a boy. He felt helpless and aloof in the school. He had to fight for his dignity in his school everyday and in those circumstances it was impossible for him to carry forward his study. One day when his father asked about his son's progress from his teacher. He was reported by the teacherThe teacher reported to him that he was not able to learn anything for the last one year. In furry of the failure of his son in his studies, Dalsingar Thakur sent him in the fields with his cows for grazing. Sanjeev had portrayed the picture of this hypothetical situation brilliantly in his novel on Bhikhari Thakur known as *Sutradhar*. He had written:

“Baap ne usi din dudhi-pati phenkar do chante lagaye aur khunti par bandhi chaar gayen kholkar unhi ke sath use bhi hank diya diyare men- ‘padhal-likhal tora se na hoi, ja karamjala, bhag!’ fohas galiyan! Baba ne rok na liya hota to bahut marte.”¹⁶⁵

(Throwing away things in his hand his father slapped him and sent him to the fields with cows. He had said, ‘You are not able to study, go you ruined one!’ Abuses! If his grandfather didn't stop him he would have beaten up a lot by his father.)

¹⁶⁴ Aajkal Magazine, ‘Main Kam Se Alag Rahkar Jeevit Nahin Rah Saktā’, Interview of Bhikhari Thakur by Ramsuhag Singh, July 2006, pp. 24.

¹⁶⁵ Sanjeev, *Sutradhar*, Radhakrishna Prakashan Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 2003, pp. 18.

It was the fields, which had given the kind of openness and freedom which Bhikhari Thakur was looking for. There was no one there to discriminate. He was free under the sky to do anything which he wants to do. No one was there to abuse him and his wishes. He learned in the companion of the nature and open fields. He learned the relationship of the nature and human being and animals and their interrelationships. The deep blue sky upward changing its colours and images every second and the green patches of earth below had provided him the sense of colours and images. The breeze of the air gave him the sensibility of tunes, whispers and rhythm. The patches of light and shadow had given him the sense of lighting. And the shaving work done to his masters had given him the idea of make-up that how a man with a moustache or without a moustache looks different. How with different hair treatment, face of a person, turn its look. How the same person who has full grown hairs after becoming bald looks pale and old. So, it was life and his empirical practical experiences which were teaching Bhikhari Thakur the idea of presentation and representation and the sense of music, light and make-up.

It was the phase which provided him the exposures of folklores, folktales, singing, narrating a story and dancing. A group of people, which were a mix of all ages, used to go to the fields with their tamed animals. After leaving the animals in the fields they use to get a lot of time for themselves. In that time frame of almost the whole day, they use to do a lot of things to amuse themselves. Some elders used to tell stories of myths, gods and iconic figures and experiences of life, while some used to sing songs for them, some used to create a mock on some known person by depicting their characteristics, and some who was knew dancing used to show it. Novelist *Sanjeev* had written about it with a bit of imagination and information in his novel in a way that it looks real and lively. He has written and I quote:

*“Subah ka kaleva karne ke baad gayon ko lekar chala jata diyara men. Wahan gunti, cheeka, kabaddi, guli-danda- bhanti-bhanti ke khel, banti-banti kii charchayen, naach-tamashe aur gaon-desh, dunia jahan ki baaten. Sabme age rahta wo.”*¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Sanjeev, Sutradhar, Radhakrishna Prakashan Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 2003, pp. 19.

(Just after taking breakfast he used to leave for the shores of Ganga called Diyara with his cows. There they used to play several kinds of plays and various kinds of stories were told and retold with singing, dancing, and stories about village and country. He used to take part in all.)

Bhikhari Thakur was himself a good singer and he used to sing for the other fellows. In a sense Bhikhari Thakur had got the experience of whole dramatically charged movements and the need of entertainment for the people. He himself had experienced it by being an audience when other performs or narrate stories and as a performer when he used to sing. In that sense his genius was the total outcome of the open learning he experienced during his early childhood and his capacity to observe them. Sanjeev had portrayed these wholly theatrical situations also in his novel. He had written:

“Ras me aakar koi gamche ka ghunghat banakar thumke lagane lagta. Ek geet khatam hota to dusra geet chhid jata. Ek naach khatam hota to dusra. Ek-ek geet ko kai tarah se gaya jata.”¹⁶⁷

(Using the towel as arch on the face somebody began to dance in the amusement. One after another song, one after another dance it was non stop entertainment. They use to sing the same song in various ways.)

But, still there was an urge within him for learning and proper education which he had dropped due too unavoidable circumstances. One fine day he asked to one of his classmates named Bhagwan Sahu of his village to teach him so that he can read and write as well. It was also mentioned in the upperabove quoted statement of Bhikhari Thakur. hari Thakur also, which I have quoted. BBhagwan Sahu used to teach him, he used to practice it during the day time in the fields. The whole panorama of the field use to be his writing board during that time and the sticks, which were made for guarding animals, use to be his pencils, with the help of those he use to practice during the day time when he had enormous time. The hard labour done by Bhikhari Thakur paid him

¹⁶⁷ Sanjeev, Sutradhar, Radhakrishna Prakashan Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 2003, pp. 19.

fruitfully and he became known to reading and writing as well. In the name of education this is all which he has got but the genius of Bhikhari Thakur gave thirteen full fledged plays and more than half a dozen poetry books with the kind of education which I have just mentioned.

Later, when he was grown up, his father pushed him towards the totally in his traditional family occupation and the life of Bhikhari Thakur once more become captive of the society which he never felt appropriate for himself and which was biased towards him since his childhood. There were a lot of restrictions which is known to us for people the persons like Bhikhari Thakur who came from a low caste family during that time. For each and every occasion his family was called for work. From morning till night they used to run for one work to another but when it comes to food and rewards they were the last one to get. The kind of humiliation they had to suffer was deep-rooted., we can only imagine. This kind of life was not acceptable for Bhikhari Thakur. He was feeling restlessness and it was that period when he was married again but even his marriage didn't stopped him like Buddha from leaving his home in search of nirvana.

He left his home in search of good and respectable job and reached Medinipur district of Bengal for the same where a lot of Bhojpuri's were already residing and working in the mills. Coming to Bengal was a totally new experience for him. First time in his life, he was seeing that people are paid for their work in terms of money and the rates are quite good in respect with what were paid at his home place. He was experiencing a whole new cultural and social life here which was totally different in nature rather than Bhojpuri society. People are more aware and women used to work along with men. Women were treated with paid honour and dignity. They were allowed to work and roam freely in the city. There were fewer restrictions on them in respect with their Bhojpuri counterpart, which were perishing under the feudal laws. It had changed his whole outlook towards the society and its laws and he felt a lot free himself in this new land.

He started his traditional occupation of shaving by the side of a road and established some contacts with Bengali people. It was the time when Bengali's lower middleclass

was not happy with the Bhojpuri's and other migrants mostly from Orissa, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The local inhabitants used to see the migrants as contenders of their jobs and the migrants used to get the jobs easily as they were ready to work even if they were less paid. The other important reason for their tossed relationship was women. Bengali women were freer and they use to get into relationships with migrants easily if they feel that he could keep him happy and if he was earning well. Several of migrants coming from different regions had kept Bengali women as their wife at their work place even if they were married in their own respective places. It was a common practice of that time that the settlers used to marry to Bengali women and settled down. They hardly go back to their home places, where his original family was waiting for them. This was one of the most inhuman practices by migrants for which their wife and family had to suffer in their own spaces. In the feudal system men used to be the only source of earning. They used to earn and run the family and so men were called master of the family but what if the master himself dissociated himself from the family and stayed at some other place. In those situations women and children and his dependant family members were the worst sufferers. And if the women was young, her suffering become worse as she came in her in-law's family with the hope that after his husband would look after him. But here her man has left him and gone to unknown places. She can just wait with her untiring spirit for her beloved but in that wait there was suffering of being left out and suffering of separation from her beloved which always pinched her. Bhikhari Thakur had noted the suffering of separation and expectation of coming back of his beloved in these lines:

"Pia Aaitan Bunia Men

Rakhi Lihtan Dunia Men

Akhrela adhika Sawanwa Batohia"¹⁶⁸

(My beloved would have come in this rainy season and take me into his world, these rainy days sucks the most.)

¹⁶⁸ Bhikhari Thakur, Bhikhari Thakur Rachnawali, edi. Nagendra Prasad Singh, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2005, pp. 38.

It was like diminishing her faith, the faith which was dependant on her husband, which was only source of life for women in the feudal system. On the other hand the man who had left his home and his beloved family along with his wife, used to enjoy his life in the new place. Bhikhari Thakur was highly moved by this ironical situation. Bhikhari Thakur felt the sorrowful and deplorable condition of the women as he himself has come out by leaving her newly married wife. This feeling which generated under him because of his empirical experience was going to be the source of the development of the most famous and performed play of our country called *Bidesia*. The play *Bidesia* was based on the same topic which had moved him a lot but it came later, when he returned back to his home place and started his own troupe of drama.

When Bhikhari Thakur migrated to Medinipur, it used to be a small industrial town and base for the migrants and workers. The theatre entertainment companies of Bengal used to travel to this small city regularly as they know that the workers had nothing else for their entertainment other than theatre. Even for Bengali's family, theatre was the most fascinating source of entertainment. They were highly accustomed to theatre performances. It was the time when *Jatra* theatre was highly popular among the Bengali speaking people. *Jatra* was a traditional theatre form of Bengal which is full of music and dance. *Jatra* was supposed to be the public entertainer and it had incorporated all kinds of elements which were able to amuse common man. Bhikhari Thakur must have seen several *Jatra* troupes performing and it's futile to say that the impact of the *Jatra* performances upon him was everlasting. Later he produced the same kind of public entertainer, which ruled over the public for decades. In Medinipur, he also used to go to watch the *Ramlila* performances performed in the city regularly. He has mentioned this fact in one of his stanzas:

*"Gailee medinipur ke jila, ohije kuch dekhali ramlila
Thakur duara uhan se gaileen, chanan talab samudra nahailee"*¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Bhagwati Prasad Dwivedi, *Bhikhari Thakur : Bhojpuri ke Bhartendu*, Ashu Prakashan, 1143/31, Purana Katra, Allahabad, 2000, pp. 25.

(I have been to Midnapur district of Bengal, there I had seen *Ramlila* performances. From there I had travelled to Puri also and taken bath in the ocean.)

The impact of *Ramlila* performances and *Ramcharitmanas* written by Tulasidas was splendid upon him. He was always fascinated with the idea of 'vyas', one who give sermons with the help of myths. All his later works were the expansion of the same. His fascination with *Ramcharitmanas* was at such level that he had written his several couplets based on the tunes of *Ramcharitmanas* of Tulasidas. He had even accepted this fact in his interview openly:

"Ramsuhag Singh : Kya aap chhand shashtra ke niyamo ke anusar kavita banate hain?

*Bhikhari Thakur : Main matra adi nahi janta hun, Ramayan ki chaupai ked hang par kavita banata hun."*¹⁷⁰

(Ramsuhag Singh : Do you write your poems according to the rules of poetics?)

Bhikhari Thakur : I don't know about meters and all, I write poem on the base of quatrains of *Ramayana*.)

Since his childhood, he used to be part of religious functions in his village or other ceremonies where big shot Brahmins used to come and preach in the disguise of religious myth. The *Satyanarayan puja* and on the occasions of other kinds of puja's, the priest who told the story and myths related to god and goddesses used to be the highest authority for the village people, who had command over storytelling and singing and even preaching. That priest was respected by all castes and classes. Bhikhari Thakur was obsessed with that character and always wanted to see himself in that role and that was impossible for him to achieve in his real life but theatre had given him the chance to fulfil his desire, which he always wanted to be. In the same interview he had said:

¹⁷⁰ Aajkal Magazine, 'Main Kam Se Alag Rahkar Jeevit Nahin Rah Sakta', Interview of Bhikhari Thakur by Ramsuhag Singh, July 2006, pp. 24.

“Ramsuhag Singh: Aap jo natak dikhate hain uska lakshya dhanoparjan ke atirikt aur kya samjhate hain?”

Bhikhari Thakur: Updesh aur Dhanoparjan. ”¹⁷¹

(Ramsuhag Singh: What is your aim of doing plays apart from earning money?

Bhikhari Thakur: Preaching and then earning.)

It shows that he was concerned about the society and his surrounding. And his migratory life had given him the opportunity to see the Bhojpuri society from a different perspective which is quite progressive in its substance and outlook.

From Medinipur he left for Calcutta, which used to be one of the biggest industrial towns in those days. Lakhs of Bhojpuri migrants had taken shelter in Calcutta as labourers. So, Calcutta is reflected in his most famous text *Bidesia*. Dhananjay Singh a scholar of *Bidesia* culture had written about role of Calcutta city in his text and I quote:

“Bhikhari Thakur ke sahitya men jo pravasi shramik upasthit hai, uska Calcutta se bahut gahara sambandh hai. Calcutta men rahne ke karan use ‘Calcuttia’ hone ka sambodhan mila. ”¹⁷²

(The migrant community, who is present in the texts of Bhikhari Thakur, is associated with Calcutta. He was called ‘Calcuttia’ as he was living in Calcutta.)

Bhikhari Thakur had seen the life of these migrants from quite near and felt the kind of exploitation they had to gone through. He felt it clearly that one can earn a little money here but the kind of life they had to gone through for it that was taking out every bit of life from them. He wanted to return back after this horrific observation but one of his friends suggested him that once you are here go and see Puri temple and the annual

¹⁷¹ Aajkal Magazine, ‘Main Kam Se Alag Rahkar Jeevit Nahin Rah Sakta?’, Interview of Bhikhari Thakur by Ramsuhag Singh, July 2006, pp-25.

¹⁷² Dhananjay Singh, Bhojpuri Pravasi Shramikon ki Sanskriti aur Bhikhari Thakur ka Sahitya, V.V. Giri Rashtriya Shram Kendra, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, 2008, pp. 19.

festival of it, which was approaching. He had done the same. The Puri temple and its festival were not only remembered for its religious part of chariot pulling but also for its cultural contributions. The dance of devdasi's inside the temple and Gotipua dance performances done by men, outside the temple in the temple compound itself, used to be the biggest attractions of that festival and the performance of Geet-Govinda of Jaidev was a regular feature of the annual Puri festival too. Surely, person like Bhikhari Thakur had tested the resonance of those performances.

It was not written anywhere but even for the sake of hypothesis one couldn't ignore that it must have given him the inner urge and moral boost to jump into performance field as he had a totally new experience and got a totally new perspective towards the field of performance. In the feudal society, dancing, singing and acting was never considered as a socially viable occupation. These are the things of hatred and the performer used to be outcaste of the society in feudal system of Bihar and Bhojpur. But here it was not a matter of shame but a matter of pride as it was happening in the biggest temple of Hindu religion and nobody was calling it an ill practice. He came back to Calcutta after the festival. In Calcutta one of his relative used to run a Launda Naach group, which was doing well among the migrants community of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. So, that was another boost for the man who was thinking regularly to leave his traditional occupation and choose a new field which is not only creative but will be earning him reputation too. He returned back to his village with the idea of forming a troupe of his own and was in search of a right time which preceded the same near.

The same year, there was a Ramayana performance called on, in the village for religious purpose but they couldn't find any performing troupe. Bhikhari Thakur suggested that they themselves could have done Ramayana performance. Although, it was a tough task but the village community agreed with the proposal and thus all the responsibility came upon his shoulder. His village had a mix kind of population. The Rajput's¹⁷³ were the masters of the village and the lower caste people used to work in their fields and earn their livelihood along with their traditional occupation. So, naturally there was a clear

¹⁷³ Rajput is an upper caste in Hindu society who used to be a warrior caste.

hierarchy in the village community and the roles were divided according to that hierarchy rather than their performing abilities. With so many if and buts and hierarchical problems the performance happened and was liked by the village community. Bhikhari Thakur himself had played so many roles as there was scarcity of the performers. But, there were some voices against that performance raised by the upper caste people. They were questioning the induction of lower caste actors in the role of upper caste which happened due to scarcity of actors. Question were also raised about the abilities of Bhikhari Thakur and his viability of doing *Ramayana* performance as he himself came from a lower caste. For Bhikhari Thakur it was an eye opener. He had learned to handle a group and how to make them act who were non performers. The second thing he had learned that he can't continue with religious texts as there were protests against him. The other thing he experienced was that *Ramayana* short of performances has a limitation. You can perform it for a certain days in the whole year while he wanted to start a group which could perform the whole year and for that he needs plays and performers.

By the time, in the area, he became known as a person who can perform and had an ability to run a group. He started writing a play himself based on his own empirical experience. He was seeing the discrimination on the caste basis in the society since his childhood which was the biggest social evil of his time. And he had experienced it just now while having a performance based on religious text. So, he chose characters from the lower caste of his society and written a play called '*Biraha Bahar*'. In this play he showed the characters of lower caste that were primarily working class. He tried to show their relationship as formidable and good as *Ram* and *Sita* through the playfulness of them while working, the same which he had experienced during his childhood when he had to for grazing with the cattle's. He had told this fact in his lonely interview.

"Ramsuhag Singh: Sabse pehle apne kaun si kavita banai?"

Bhikhari thakur: Birha Bahar pustak.

Ramsuhag Singh: Sabse pehle apne kaun sa natak banaya?

*Bhikhari Thakur: Biraha Bahar hi natak ke roop me khela.*¹⁷⁴

(Ramsuhag Singh: What poem you have written first?

Bhikhari thakur: Birha Bahar.

Ramsuhag Singh: What play you have done first?

Bhikhari Thakur: Biraha Bahar was performed as a play, as the first.)

Simultaneously, he was looking for performers and establishing contact with them. The play was written and being practiced by the troupe which was in the stage of evolving. After working on the play for months they tried to get some opportunity to perform it somewhere. But getting a professional assignment had a lot at stake. They waited for some months while practicing the play. One fine morning, unexpectedly, one of the relatives of his village friend came searching for dance troupe and thus the first professional assignment happened. They had to perform it in Mujjafarpur far from his region which was convenient for him as he was doing it by hiding from his family.

“Ramsuhag Singh: Sabse pehle Biraha Bahar natak kahan khela gaya?

*Bhikhari thakur: Mujjafarpur jila ke sarvamastpur gram men lagna ke samay men Biraha Bahar natak sarvapratham khela gaya.*¹⁷⁵

(Ramsuhag Singh: Where have you performed the play Biraha Bahar first?

Bhikhari thakur: Birha Bahar was performed first in sarvmastpur village of mujjafarpur district on the occasion of a marriage ceremony.

It was a great challenge for the troupe to make it successful but as a new troupe and being the first performance, it didn't go off well and it didn't given them the required boost to

¹⁷⁴ Aajkal Magazine, 'Main Kam Se Alag Rahkar Jeevit Nahin Rah Sakta', Interview of Bhikhari Thakur by Ramsuhag Singh, July 2006, pp. 24.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

their morale. The troupe returned back as a loser. It was a shocking moment for the whole group but Bhikhari Thakur was determined to come over. There were voices against his play within the group that the play was not well written. They could have started with a well known play which was popular in the area. It was a time when highly entertaining but morally seductive plays in the form of Launda Naach were performed by the drama troupes which were highly popular in public. The Launda Naach performers used to perform vulgar dances throughout the night. Bhikhari Thakur was not convinced that they should do the same which other troupes were doing; he wanted to make his own path. He wanted to give people reconciliation rather than vulgarity in disguise of entertainment. So, he stood on his own path and continued his effort to make the performance more polished and entertaining.

By the time his relative Babulal, who was running his Launda Naach troupe in Calcutta also returned back to Bhojpur and joined the troupe with his men. He was a professional trainer and had experience of running professional troupe for so many years. He started teaching dance to the new performers. Professional musicians were also recruited to teach singing and music to the performers. It had done wonder. In just two-three months it was a troupe with eclectic energy. The journey started from here never stopped till the death of Bhikhari Thakur. In between he had written some new plays which were highly successful on stage and the group became a hit in the area. By the time the troupe became so famous that it began getting assignments from the migrant areas of Bengal, Bihar and Assam to come and perform. Bhikhari Thakur was looking for a new text which could raise the issues of the migrant labourers, who were their primary audiences so that the migrants could get a touching shore with the performance.

It was Babulal Thakur, who provided materials and texts of the tale of 'Pyari Sundari' which was very much in the air of Bhojpur area and which could tackle the issue of the migrant labourers. He made Bhikhari Thakur aware of the earlier poems and song written on the same topic and the existence of *Sundari Bai* and *Dunia Bai*. Bhikhari Thakur absorbed those texts and assimilated them with his own empirical experience which had become his USP for writing plays and produced such a wonderful text like 'Kalyug

Bahar' which later redeveloped by him on the name of 'Bahara-Bahar' which was not just powerful but also dramatically packed. This was the play which was continuing to do wonder for years. Soon, his troupe became quite famous in the industrial areas where huge population of migrants used to live. This production became so famous that it became synonyms of his performances. Apart from Bahara-Bahar, his genius had already given half a dozen successful plays like *Beti-Bechava*, *Gabarghichor*, *Bhai-virodh*, *Ganga-Snan*, *Kalyug Prem* and others which were performed thousands of time throughout country for more than 50 years. He had also produced more than a dozen beautiful poetry books in the span of 50 years of his performing career, although 29 books were found in total which were published on the name of Bhikhari Thakur.¹⁷⁶ He and his troupe became synonymous of Bhojpuri Theatre and Culture for all those years. This didn't mean that he hadn't faced any problem but through his ability he had overcome all the ambiguities of his time.

The journey started from here in the age of thirty by Bhikhari Thakur continued till his last days and he became the most popular face of not just Bhojpuri region but for far places like Calcutta, Jharia, Assam, Uttar Pradesh and others. He became so popular that he was given titles like 'Roybahadur', 'Bhojpuri ke Bhartendu', 'Bhojpuri ke Shakespeare' and so many during his life time. It is said that wherever his troupe used to go to perform there were crowds of thousands of people to watch his performances. It was his popularity only which led British government to use his performances to collect the war fund during the Second World War. Even the entertainers of Bollywood tried to use his popularity through a film called *Bidesia*, in which even Bhikhari Thakur was used by the producers in a role of a narrator. But throughout his successful phase of more than 50 years in the field of performance he remain as modest as he can despite of so many provocations by the upper caste dominated society, which was unhappy with his popularity. We can see the modesty of the genius in one of his writings.

¹⁷⁶ Bhikhari Thakur, Bhikhari Thakur Rachnawali, ed. Dr. Virendra Narayan Yadav and Nagendra Prasad Singh, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2005, pp. 5.

*“Kehu Sarahe , Kehu Duse, Kehu Kahe ‘Jamav Abhun Se’ .
Tanik Na Aave Naache-Gave, Kahe do lagal Log ke Bhave”¹⁷⁷*

(Some liked, some disliked my work, and some suggested doing a bit more from now onwards. I don't know how to dance and sing but people used to like it.)

You can see the modesty he maintained. The master performer and an all-rounder of theatre who had contributed through writing plays to preparing its production, from teaching his performers to managing the troupe, playing music, singing and dancing on stage, playing the role of range of characters time and again in the same play, doing make-up of his artists to playing the important role of Sutradhar (narrator of the play). So many roles were played by this versatile genius in the field of theatre which was still inaccessible for others and whose real contribution to theatre and performing art in all the parts of theatre is still untouched and not properly researched. It was said during those days that people from 15 miles far from the performing venue used to run to see his performances after hearing his voices at night. That person was saying that he don't know how to sing and dance. It's only because he was so frustrated by his critics that he had nothing to offer more than that. By accepting the allegation made upon him he always tried to cool down the matter through out his life according to his nature.

3.3 Challenges before Bhikhari Thakur and His Quest for Performance

In his fulfilling lifetime of eighty four years Bhikhari Thakur had written a dozen of plays and more than a dozen books of poems, which were immensely popular in the Bhojpuri society not only in performance but also in reading. Most of his books were published during his life time only and used to be star sellers of that time among the lower class people. *Bhagwati Prasad Dwivedi* had provided information about their publishing time, publishers name and their popularity in these words:

¹⁷⁷ Bhagwati Prasad Dwivedi, *Bhikhari Thakur : Bhojpuri ke Bhartendu*, Ashu Prakashan, 1143/31, Purana Katra, Allahabad, 2000, pp. 29.

“Varsh 1938 se 1962 ke Madhya Bhikhari Thakur ki lagbhag teen darjan pushtikayen chhapin, jinhe futpathon se kharidkar log chav se padha karte the. Adhikansh pushtikayen Dudhnath Press, Sakaliyan (Hawada) aur Kachauri Gali (Varanasi) se prakashit hui thin.”¹⁷⁸

(From 1938 to 1962, almost three dozen booklets of Bhikhari Thakur were published, which were hugely popular among the lower strata of people who use to buy them by the roadside. Most of them were published from Dudhnath Press, Sakaliyan (Hawada) and Kachauri Gali (Benaras).

He was the living legend of his time. Many others had tried to use the popularity of his charismatic personality and his wonderful texts by publishing them in their own name. There were some other presses which were publishing some vulgar texts simultaneously on the name of Bhikhari Thakur. It was not just for the sake of cashing his popularity but also for misusing his name and made his name synonymous of obscenity. He himself had written about all which was going on his name in his text ‘*Shanka Samadhan*’ and tried to give befitting reply to his known and unknown enemies.

“Jo log mera nam lekar ke shikayat shikayat ka kitab chhapwakar bikri karte hain, un logon ko man men moh hua hai. Wo log samjhate hain ki Bhikhari Thakur bina padhe-likhe darwar se man-maryada pate hain.”

“Unch Nivas neech kartooti, dekh na sakahin parai Vibhuti”¹⁷⁹

(People who are publishing complain against me and selling books on the name of mine, they are doing it with reasons. They think that Bhikhari Thakur has got name, fame and respect from the authority without reading and writing or without labour. These are the

¹⁷⁸ Bhagwati Prasad Dwivedi, *Bhikhari Thakur : Bhojpuri ke Bhartendu*, Ashu Prakashan, 1143/31, Purana Katra, Allahabad, 2000, pp. 29.

¹⁷⁹ Bhikhari Thakur, *Bhikhari Thakur Rachnawali*, ed. Dr. Virendra Narayan Yadav and Nagendra Prasad Singh, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2005, pp. 282.

people of upper class but their deeds are really cheap. They can't tolerate other's name and fame.)

There was already propaganda in the high caste society by the time that one who goes to watch Bhikhari Thakur performances became corrupt as his plays offers obscenity and they are also morally disgraced. With the rise of his popularity these shrouded campaigns also got momentum. The children and women of high caste family were banned by the upper caste community either directly or indirectly to go for Bhikhari Thakur's performances. The intellectuals of higher caste also tried to damage his image through their writings and speeches as they were the dominant voice of the society by saying that Bhikhari Thakur was misleading the society through his plays. The charges of destroying the homogeneity of the society and misleading the women in particular were made against him.

But this living legend had waged an unending battle against the dominant feudal society and its anti human norms. He was a fierce fighter against all odds he had seen in his society. It was his unbeatable zeal and the *Bidesia* performing culture developed by him which made him invincible otherwise he would have been fired at by violent feudal society anytime. In actuality the kind of performances which he had generated through his creative genius were exposing the ill treatment of the feudal society to the lower and dalit caste people and the women of even their own society as they were the worst sufferers in that system. This was unacceptable for the dominant forces of the society as they had seen it as a danger for their social system, which was tilted towards their benefit. The situation before Bhikhari Thakur was amazingly complex in nature and it would really be hard to survive against the pressure he had to gone through during his lifetime. If the dominant caste people directly gone into opposition of his plays it would be hard for him to run his troupe as they were the major economic force of the society of that time and most of the professional assignments his troupe used to get were coming from these high caste society only.

Bhikhari Thakur was a clever man. Whatever he had to say or comment about his situation and society he used to say that only through his texts and performance. In his real life he behaved like a cool and calm person and never went into antagonism with the high caste people and community. In a way he himself was playing two characters in his life, one which was against the odds of the society and who comments on that fiercely through his dramas, performances and literary texts while another face was of a humble creature that never adhered to raise his voice or opposed the feudal system directly. The duality of his character and life was the demand of the hour as he had to survive in the same society with his family and troupe members. For that he always used the great figures of the higher caste and their good values as his shield. He started all his texts on the name of god, upon which he himself had great belief. It used to catch the audience easily and satisfy the ego of the upper caste people.

For gaining the sympathy of the higher caste he always tried to please the higher strata of people through praising them in the opening verses of the text. But in spite of that he never forgot to attack the vices of the society. Several times he and his troupe performances were interrupted by the dominant society members for displaying disrespect for them or their social system. But then another character of his used to jump into the matter and tried to settle it peacefully by bowing his head against their feet's. And for that he had developed a line:

*“Naach ha Kanch, Baat ha Sanch
Eh men, Lage na Anch”*¹⁸⁰

(The performance is like a glass but the matter raised was truthful, why one should worry about that.)

He always produced the face of a guilty person before the organiser, if anything had gone against them. There were several instances of these kinds of incidents. One of his most

¹⁸⁰ Bhikhari Thakur, Bhikhari Thakur Rachnawali, ed. Dr. Virendra Narayan Yadav and Nagendra Prasad Singh, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2005, pp. 185.

famous plays '*Beti Bechava*' was based on a real accident that took place in his village. The incident was selling of the daughter by a poor upper caste family on the name of marriage to an old man. That used to be a usual practice in the whole area during his time. Bhikhari Thakur was really concerned about the sorrows of the daughters who were sold out on the name of a respectable marriage. He produced the play '*Beti Bechava*' on the same theme. But when it was performed by the troupe before the audience, the upper caste audience related it with the real accident happened and tried to disrupt the show alleging that Bhikhari Thakur was mocking at a particular person. The play was stopped but the message was passed and from then this play became so successful among the people that he performed it many times. Because of the play there were reports that in several villages young daughters denied to marry old men, some escaped from her home during the marriage ceremony and in some places even the villagers didn't let it happen. This was the effect of his plays which were going against the upper caste rich people who were used to use women as their sex toy without caring for her life. Bhikhari Thakur had to face the furry of such people but he never bowed down from his agenda. This could be said about many of his plays.

It was his great creative genius which used to pick up a social issue and produced a play upon that. For this made common people as the protagonist characters of his plays which was not a tradition by his time. Anyone from us could imagine that how tough it would be for him as there was no such dramatic tradition in India till then which made such common people as their protagonist figure. In Indian *Natyasastra*, it was said that only God, mythical characters and people from higher origin could be portrayed as the protagonist figures of the plays that would have showed great moral ethos and vigour. It was '*Nabanna*', a play produced by Indian People Theatre Association in 1944, which was hailed by the critics as the path breaking by characterizing common man as protagonist figures. But in actuality Bhikhari Thakur was characterising common man through his plays since 1917, from his first play. There were few literatures even by then in which common people were hailed as protagonist figure. Bhikhari Thakur should be given due credit for portraying common characters through his plays, which was a

product of his imaginary and creative genius, which were burst into performances by his troupe. The association of common man to his plays could be understood by this fact.

3.4 Structure of his Plays and power of his Performances

As far as structures of his plays were concerned they were highly performance based. Whatever he used to write has been practiced by the troupe and the inputs of the individual performers count in the making of his plays. All of his texts were formulated and being structured by a similar process. He was a relentless person who always used to add or subtract from his text according to the experience gained after the performance and practice. Even after hundreds of performances his creative genius was exploring the same text by introducing new performative elements in the text. This was why usually there were so many versions of his texts. Although, it was hard to get the original text of his most of his plays as they were rewritten several times and several false scripts on the name of Bhikhari Thakur were produced too. But by and large when we examine the format of his plays, we find him developing the theme gradually plays after plays and performances after performance. He learned by his mistakes and gradually developed himself in writing plays and performing them. It was a process of a common man rather than an extra ordinary talented person who had all the ideas and explorations in his mind. But surprisingly enough his most famous plays like '*Bidesia/Bahara-Bahar*', '*Beti Bechava/Beti-Viyog*', '*Gabarghichor*', '*Ganga-snan*', '*Kalyug prem/Pia Nasyil*' or others had all the elements which a standard play text should have regardless that he was almost illiterate and didn't have a formal training even in the field of drama. All that he learned through his practice made him perfect.

His early plays like '*Biraha Bahar*' and '*Radheshyam Bahar*' lacks the dramatically charged events and movements. However in '*Biraha-Bahar*', he had used the traditional singing style of Bihar called '*Biraha*' intrigued with the '*Dhobia Naach*', a typical dance form of Bihar. The orchestration of these two different traditions of Bihar was the only powerful part of the play as it doesn't have any storyline but his tilt towards the religious themes could be seen from his earlier two performances and texts of '*Biraha-Bahar*' and

'*Radheshyam Bahar*'. A proper format of a well versed play had to emerge from the performances of these two plays. Later, this orchestration of singing and dancing traditions of Bihar was perfected by him and his troupe, which developed a distinct performing style with strong plots and storylines and dramatically charged movements. As, I have said earlier that he learned through his practicing experience and watching other forms of performances of different regions, it had not just perfected his art but also the influence of them could be seen upon his performance. The influence of *Ramayana* performance was always on his mind as he himself was a religious person and tried his best to advocate good deeds and high morals through his plays. That is why, Jagdishchandra Mathur, a great scholar of *Bidesia* culture and Indian traditional theatre called his plays as reformist. He has written:

*"Another form in which reformism entered the traditional and folk drama was in Bihar and in the Himachal Pradesh. In Bihar a semi-literate genius named Bhikhari Thakur introduced a form called Bidesia in which in the midst of highly erotic stuff he would introduce sermons in the form of songs."*¹⁸¹

His plays have a definite structure and most of them are examples of the folk theatre forms of India which has a tradition of more than six-seven hundred years. It is said that Indian folk theatre started with the spread of Indian Bhakti movement and became popular. There are facts that several of Bhakti movement's saints had used the cultural forms like singing, dancing and drama for the sake of spreading their messages which later consolidated by the practitioners of the art forms. The Indian folk theatre form has certain characteristics and it is known through those norms which is multifaceted and has hundreds of varieties. But the structure of all the folk theatre forms spread over India in more than two dozen states are almost same with the differentiation of certain elements according to the local culture so, is the structure of the plays of Bhikhari Thakur with the input of Bhojpuri culture, in which his plays were performed by his troupe.

¹⁸¹ Sangget natak, silver jubilee volume, Edi. H.K. Rangnath, Sangeet Natak Akademy, New Delhi, 1981, pp-142-43.

All the folk theatre forms of India whether it is *Nautanki, Khayal, Jatra, Vidapat, Kirtaniya, Swang, Dashavatar, Yakshgan* and others are full of songs, music and dances with theatrical movements and dramatic overtone dialogues. Suresh Awasthi, an scholar of Indian traditional theatre, who has some books on Indian folk theatre to his credit has written about the features of traditional theatre in these words:

*“Indian traditional theatre, like its counterparts in any other country, is a rich and important element of the tradition culture. It is a comprehensive sense of the term. It incorporates elements from poetry, music, dance, mime, graphic and plastic arts, religious and civil pageantry and various decorative arts and crafts. It reflects the people’s beliefs and social ways.”*¹⁸²

This was the typical structure of the folk theatre forms of India comprising all the elements of performing art in sum total. This is why Indian folk theatre forms are called total theatre by and large and it has a tradition of its own. This is why one of the great scholars of Indian traditional theatre Jagdish Chandra Mathur has defined these forms as ‘*Sangeetaka*’. He had observed:

*“I would like to refer to a name not given by the dramaturgists but mentioned in other texts, for a form which described collectively the current traditional and folk theatre of India. The name of the form was Sangeetaka.”*¹⁸³ He has further written and I quote, *“Sangeetaka was mentioned in a number of works, beginning with a collection of Sanskrit monologues (Chaturbhani) in which there is a reference to Sangeetakas by courtesans. This form took shape in the period of 10th to the 15th centuries which are the first stage”*¹⁸⁴.

¹⁸² Sangget natak, silver jubilee volume, ed. H.K. Rangnath, Sangeet Natak Akademy, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 144.

¹⁸³ Sangget natak, silver jubilee volume, ed. H.K. Rangnath, Sangeet Natak Akademy, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 138.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

Indian traditional theatre has also incorporated several structural elements of the Indian classical Sanskrit theatre but simultaneously it has taken huge liberty in his performing text from the conventional classical performance texts. Similarly Suresh Awasthi has mentioned this in his writing:

“Traditional theatre represents many conventions and practices of the Sanskrit theatre and it is also the inheritor of the medieval ‘Variety’ theatre.”¹⁸⁵

He further observes:

“Traditional drama adopts a loose and flexible structure. There is a great elaboration and improvisation. The play during the course of its development deviates from the main action to indulge in elaboration by repeating the dialogues in a variety of delivery patterns and stating the same idea in both prose and verse dialogues. It is both segmented into small parts and has an organic unity within it.”¹⁸⁶

The plays of Bhikhari Thakur has all the characteristics which were defined for the Indian traditional or folk drama even the repetition in the shape of prose and verse is a peculiar quality of these performances. Earlier, the ideal time for the performances used to be the whole night and that’s why repetition was part of the folk dramas, so that they could continue their till morning. The other reason for that was almost all the audiences of these performances were lay people. They generally didn’t have the heart of ‘Sahridaya’, a term given for the good, understanding and sensitive audience by Bharata in *Natyasastra*¹⁸⁷. According to the definition of ‘Sahridaya’, those who have the heart of empathy and who follows the connotations of the performances could be *Sahridaya*, a good spectator,

¹⁸⁵ Sangget natak, silver jubilee volume, ed. H.K. Rangnath, Sangeet Natak Akademy, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 144.

¹⁸⁶ Sangget natak, silver jubilee volume, Edi. H.K. Rangnath, Sangeet Natak Akademy, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 144.

¹⁸⁷ *Natyasastra* is a treatise on theatre and performing arts written by Bharata Muni who was a great propagator of Indian theatre and its theory.

which was essential for a classical drama but for folk forms this could not be applied in the same manner. It was a form of community practice and the whole of community members had right to be part of these performances. common people, who were not at all Connor of arts but had a deep interest for it, the folk troupes always tried their best to be a little catchy so that they could take the attention of all segments of the audience, as there were possibility that some of them might like the musical presentation while some of them might interested in the dialogues between the characters.

These performances used to take place in the open fields or open area's where thousands of people could be adjusted as spectator. There were no permanent theatre halls available for these folk theatre performances which had a particularly designed stage and space where the audience could be seated in a manner that even they can hear the whispers of the actors. In open stage performances it was difficult to establish conversation as actors have to shout each time to make the audience listen. It was easier for the actors to sing it over where they can throw their voice in a manner so that all of them could listen and it was charming and amusing simultaneously for the audience. Particularly, the performances of Bhikhari Thakur's troupe were usually attended by ten thousand to twenty five thousand people. In those situations one can imagine the need of expression in manner which could be addressed to thousands of audiences. Bhikhari Thakur's troupe was successful in doing so with their musical treatment of the plays with the visual element of *Launda Naach*, which were highly eclectic and energetic in its nature which was also known as Natua Naach in some parts of Bihar.

'*Launda Nautch*' was much popular in Bhojpiur region of Bihar among Bhojpuri speaking people, with their own social conditioning while Natua Nautch was extremely popular in Mithila¹⁸⁸ belt of Bihar among Maithili speaking people with their own systematic organization of society. But in terms of movements, hand gestures, foot steps and most important of this kind of dance was waist movement, that's why it is called 'Kamartodba', they are almost similar except a little or more departure according to the

¹⁸⁸ Mithila is a historical geographical area of Bihar which inhabitants speaks Maithili, a language which has its own history.

conditioning of varied places or situations. Three specific qualities of this dance made it different from others in many ways. First one was the hand gestures. Second one the foot steps and a particular type of fast circle movements. The third and the most important one was its waist movement, which makes it peculiar. One highly recommendable fact about it was that it's predominantly a male dance form. Because of this feature of this dance form it is totally different from other dance forms and it creates a different ambience among the audience because of its vibrant manly appearance. The movements of this dance form as discussed were also repetitive in nature as like other dance forms but yet they are powerful enough to capture the attention of the audience. And if we accept the theory of repetitive behaviour of Richard Schechner¹⁸⁹ as the core of performances there are nothing to worry about that in its performance. According to Richard Schechner all behaviours, "consist of recombining bits of previously behaved behaviors." So, Schechner defines performance as "twice behaved" or "restored behaviour".¹⁹⁰ The problem of being repetitive is an internal quality of a performance and that can not be taken as weakness. And in the matter of folk performances and the performances of *Bidesia* theatre it was the source of power for its propagator.

The power of *Bidesia* theatre performances of Bhikhari Thakur lies in its proper incorporations of the *Bidesia* culture of society. Bhikhari Thakur was a different sort of genius. Several of his critics say that Bhikhari Thakur hasn't invented anything new. He had just incorporated the raw materials of Bhojpuri culture spread in the Bhojpuri society and ensemble them in his theatre practice. We could deny the prejudiced motives of the critics behind their comment but there was a bit of truth in this criticism. Even Bhikhari Thakur never claimed that he was a genius and he had done all these with his innovation. He has taken most of the raw materials of his performance form from the society itself. But the sense of utilisation of certain element of a culture was with him. The kind of ensemble he has done during developing his theatre form *Bidesia* was highly appreciable whether he could be regarded as an inventor or not he could be tagged as a man who

¹⁸⁹ Richard Schechner is a great American scholar of Performance Studies. He is known as the propagator of this academic discipline.

¹⁹⁰ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies*, Routledge, London and New York, 2007, pp. 22.

'Discovers'. He had discovered and adopted several folk traditions of Bhojpuri culture in a manner that it became the famous and favourable form for the Bhojpuri speaking society whether it was matter of using Bhojpuri language, its folklore traditions and dancing forms of the society.

From standard *Doha*, *Chaupai* of Tulsidas of his '*Ramcharitmanas*' to the folklore tradition of Bhojpur like *Jantsar*, *Sorathi*, *Biraha*, *Sohar*, *Vidai geet*, *Poorvi* to the dancing styles of *Launda Naach*, *Dhobia Naach* and others he has used all of these in his performances to make them perfect. There were hardly any singing traditions of his area in which he hadn't written and composed his songs. This could be said about the dance performances of his troupe too, and the same could be said about the writings of his own. He used almost all the verse forms available to him in his area and even incorporated styles which he learnt from his exposer of other cultures. He had a great orchestration skill and he never hesitated in borrowing anything from Bhojpuri culture, which was his own culture as he was born and brought up in that.

It was also a remarkable thing to note that a person born and brought up in a particular society and its culture always carries memories of the same through out his life as human beings are socialized in a culture. A particular society trains us since our childhood in such a manner that we used to get observed in that culture. Since our childhood our family or society tries their best to incorporate every individual member of the society in all the social-cultural functions so that the new member of the society who is a child can learn all these during the process of growing up. We all have experiences of that in different forms as we were trained in all the culture specific rites and rituals and its practices since our childhood. So, by the time we grow up, we are accustomed to this such that our behaviour pattern denotes a specific cultural connotation. We live with that throughout our life and the memories of that always haunts us if we were broken from that society and culture by any chance.

Bhikhari Thakur was born and brought up in the particular Bhojpuri society and culture and he had special advantage of being part of all the rites and rituals and culture specific

tasks as he was from the background of a barber caste which helps Brahmins when rites and rituals are being performed. So, he was known to all the big or small details of the Bhojpuri culture as he was trained in that since his childhood. Memories are nothing but the part of the actual experience a human being preserves in his mind and it always guides a human being in their normal life in deciding things. Memories are also highly responsible for the creativity of the human beings as whatever we produce as an art or artefact that comes through our own experience of watching, listening, and from other sorts of experiences we have from our five senses. Even our imagination is dependent on the empirical experiences of our life. That is why Jeanette Rodriguez and Ted Fortier have written that memory is the capacity to remember, to create and re-create our past.¹⁹¹ This memory transfers into 'cultural memory' as every memory has its own base in particular culture. They further write:

“Cultural memory is a concept introduced to the archaeological disciplines by Jan Assmann,¹⁹² who defines it as the “outer dimension of human memory”, embracing two different concepts: “memory culture” and “reference to the past”. Memory culture is a process by which a society ensures cultural continuity by preserving, with the help of the cultural mnemonics, its collective knowledge from the one generation to the next, rendering it possible for the later generation to reconstruct their cultural identity.”¹⁹³

So, for human being past is quite important and is recurred in the form of cultural memory. This cultural memory explores itself in many forms and work as a force of identity for the individual or the community. It has a sense of belonging of a particular community and its culture. This is what Bhikhari Thakur has done through his theatre form *Bidesia* when he orchestrated all the available forms of culture in just one performance. His theatre form has given a sense of belonging to the whole community of

¹⁹¹ Jeanette Rodriguez and Ted Fortier, 'Cultural Memory, Resistance, Faith and Identity', University of Texas Press, 2007, pp. 1.

¹⁹² Jan Assmann is a member of the Heidelberg Academy, the German Institute for Archaeology, the Institute for Historical Anthropology.

¹⁹³ Jeanette Rodriguez and Ted Fortier, 'Cultural Memory, Resistance, Faith and Identity', University of Texas Press, 2007, pp. 1.

Bhojpuri speaking people whether in the homeland or in Diaspora. As, they belonged to one community and were watching the *Bidesia* theatre performances, they were getting “reference of the past” for them as discussed by Jan Assmann. They could relate to it easily because they have the same cultural memory. We can also understand this process through the idea of ‘*Sadharanikaran*’ given by Bharata in his classical treatise on performing arts called *Natyasastra*. According to Bharata ‘*Sadharanikaran*’ is a stage where the performers and the audience are on the same emotive level only then the Ras Nishapti¹⁹⁴ could happen successfully which is the most important contribution of his text. By using the same ‘Cultural Memory’ Bhikhari Thakur was successful in touching the same chord between performer and the audience. The success and power of his performances can be attributed to the homogenization of the cultural connotations of the performer and the audience, as they both share the same ‘Cultural Memory’.

Apart from the homogenization of the ‘Cultural Memory’, the subject matters and the portrayal of the characters of the plays written and performed by Bhikhari Thakur were also the power of his performances. From his first play ‘*Biraha Bahar*’, Bhikhari Thakur has portrayed characters from the lower caste and class as the protagonist figures of his plays. Almost all of his plays have characters from the common background rather than a high class elite character. It was nothing less than a revolution in the field of literature and performances if we see the era in which he was writing and performing. There were hardly any example of any other literature and drama till then in which a common man from a lower caste and class background was made protagonist figure. It was almost a rule till then, which was followed by each and every writer, performer that only person from a noble background could be a protagonist figure. Bhikhari Thakur has broken this tradition and he even made women as the protagonist figures of his plays which for many was even impossible to think about. These characters rooted in the lower caste family and background were one of the main reasons that the common people of Bhojpur region got associated with his plays. They felt that the plays of Bhikhari Thakur portrayed stories of characters like one of them, who have the background that they too hail from. This was a

¹⁹⁴ Ras Nishpati is a term used by Bharata in his treatise *Natyasastram* which happens in the audience after watching the play.

bond which happened through his plays between the characters of his plays and the audience. Characters like Dhobi-Dhoban, *Bidesia*, Gabarghichor, Updar, Malechhu and others which he has developed were from the same background from where his audience belonged.

Even same things could be said about the themes he addressed in his plays. In all of his plays just not only characters from the common background have been depicted, but they also feature themes and storyline related to the common human being of his own society. Whether it was the issue of migration, which was much prevalent in Bhojpuri society, or the issue of ownership of a children, or giving respect to the mothers of the family, or the matters of family feud between the brothers, or the matter of selling of daughters on the name of respected marriage or the bad conditions of the widows, all these are themes which were deeply related to the common man of the society. Bhikhari Thakur had chosen always a theme dearer and closer to the common human being of his society.

Migration was a permanent feature of the Bhojpuri community, as I have discussed it at length in the earlier chapters. Almost every family of the Bhojpuri community has faced this crisis. Bhojpuri's were the largest Diaspora not just at that point of time but also in the current situation. Bhikhari Thakur was himself migrated in his early phase of life. With his own personal experience of the problem of migration he tried to depict this crisis in the family and community. Three of his major plays like *Bidesia*, '*Gabarghichor*' and '*Kalyug Prem*' were addressed to this Diaspora and this led to problems given that the issue had not been delved into sufficiently in other literature. That was why his performances were liked by the Bhojpuri Diaspora and considered as their own. Wherever Bhikhari Thakur has gone to perform, he was just became the icon of the common people belonging to the Bhojpuri Diaspora community. They were the primary source of income for his troupe and it was they who have given him the kind of respect an art practitioner like him should get. As for them Bhikhari Thakur was an artist rather than just a human being born into a lower caste family. The quality of his performance was an another reason, because of that he became celebrated as the greatest performers of his time and that can be seen from the kind of appreciation he has gained

among the common people apart from the acceptance he has got from the progressive section of the society.

3.5 Evolution of '*Bidesia* Theatre' through Bhikhari Thakur's famous Text *Bidesia*

As I have already mentioned earlier. It was his texts and performance style which formulated the *Bidesia* style of theatre which has its own distinct quality. One of the major qualities of his work was that they had provided opportunity to the performers. It happened as he himself was the practitioner of theatre rather than being just a dramatist. It has been seen from the experiences of the world over that if the playwright was himself a practitioner of drama, their plays gives the performers opportunity to play with it as they were known to the extempore nature of the stage performances and they give proper space to the actors and directors. The plays of Bhikhari Thakur have the same quality. Whether, it was his '*Bahara-Bahar*' known as *Bidesia*, '*Beti-bechava*', '*Gabarghichor*', '*Ganga-snan*', '*Kalyug Prem*', '*Bhai Virodh*' or any other texts. These were the most famous texts of Bhikhari Thakur and thousands of performances of these plays were done by his troupe in his life time and even after his death. To get rid of any confusion about the texts written by him he himself has written a poem which has the complete list of his major works.

“‘*Biraha-Bahar*’ main pratham gava, tab ‘*Kalyug Bahar*’ sudhi ava
‘*Radheshyam Bahar*’ ho gailan, ‘*Beti-Viyog*’ ke charcha bhailan
‘*Kalyug Prem*’ ho gailan pachhe, ‘*Gabar Ghichoran*’ laglan ache
‘*Bhai Virodh*’ sodh e gavlin, ‘*Siri Ganga Snan*’ banavlin
‘*Putra-Badh*’ pushtak prachar, tajbij kariha ‘*Nai Bahar*’
‘*Nanad-Bhauji*’ kar Samvadu, ‘*Bhand ke Nakal*’ ke bujha swadu
‘*Bahara-Bahar*’ ke barbas dekha, ‘*Navin Biraha*’ nike parekha”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ Bhikhari Thakur, Bhikhari Thakur Rachnawali, edi. Nagendra Prasad Singh, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2005, pp. 317.

(I have written '*Biraha-Bahar*' first, then came '*Kalyug Bahar*' followed by '*Radheshyam Bahar*', '*Beti-Viyog*', '*Kalyug Prem*', '*Gabar Ghichoran*', '*Bhai Virodh*', '*Siri Ganga Snan*', '*Putra-Badh*', '*Nai Bahar*', '*Nanad-Bhauji*', '*Bhand ke Nakal*', '*Bahara-Bahar*', '*Navin Biraha*' and others.)

Although, all these texts are based on the format of *Bidesia* theatre but as I have said earlier there was a gradual process of development of his plays and productions. '*Bahara-Bahar/Bidesia*' was redeveloped by him when he and his troupe were at the peak of their career although the first draft of this play was written by him in his early phase on the name of '*Kalyug Bahar*'. That's why the text of *Bidesia* was the classical example of not just the format or style of his theatre but also for the kind of social concerns for which his texts and performances were known for. Ironically, the style of his theatre was named after the name of his this production itself, which he was experimenting through all the earlier productions. Being a classical example of his style of performances *Bidesia* is a celebrated text and I am looking at this, at minute level to decode his kind of performance texts.

Fixing a date of the writing period of *Bidesia* has been quite tough as it was written and rewritten on different names twice. But a scholar of *Bidesia* theatre and Bhikhari Thakur named Bhagwati Prasad Dwivedi has written in his book on Bhikhari Thakur:

*"Unka Natak 'Videsia' pehle 'Kalyug Bahar' ke nam se prasphutit hua tha aur age chalkar purnatah nikhakar 'Bahara Bahar' ke roop men lokpriyata ke shikhar tak pahuncha tha. Wahi natak 'Videsia shirshak se Bhikhari Thakur granthawali ke pratham khand men sangrahit hai jiski rachna 1917 men hui thi."*¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Bhikhari Thakur, Bhikhari Thakur Rachnawali, ed. Dr. Virendra Narayan Yadav and Nagendra Prasad Singh, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2005, pp. 38.

(He has written his play *Bidesia* on the name of '*Kalyug Bahar*' which later became popular on the name of '*Bahara Bahar*'. The same play was published in the first part of the Bhikhari Thakur omnibus on the name of *Bidesia* which was written first in 1917.)

But other scholars like Tayyab Hussain 'Pidit' have a different take on this issue. According to the findings of Mr. 'Pidit' *Bidesia* as a text was first written around 1936. He has written:

*Jis samay Bhikhari Thakur ka pehla natak Bidesia aya wahi varsh 1936 ishwee men Pragatisheel Lekhak Sangh ke Lacknow ke sammelan ka varsh tha, jiski adhyakshata Bhojpuri kshetra ke manya Hindi lekhav tatha sampadak Premchand ne ki thi*¹⁹⁷.

(When Bhikhari Thakur's first play *Bidesia* came in the same year the conference of Progressive Writers Association happened in 1936, which was presided by renowned Hindi writer and editor Premchand.)

This statement is really vague and confusing. If we go by this statement it means Bhikhari Thakur started his performances as late as 1936 which could not be true as Bhikhari Thakur himself has written that he started his performance in the age of thirty which never stopped until his death. The second connotation of this statement would be that the play *Bidesia* was first performed in 1936, which might be true as I have already written that Bhikhari Thakur had reworked his earlier text '*Kalyug Bahar*' and performed it again on the name of '*Bahara Bahar*' which later became famous as *Bidesia*.

Leaving this matter aside it could be said that *Bidesia* is one of the best texts written by him and that could be taken as his representative creative text to know about his kind of performances. He was performing at a time when on the name of performance vulgar dance were produced by the performing troupes. The same taboo was posted by the

¹⁹⁷ Kedar Chaudhary, Bhikhari Thakur ke Natakon men Lokjeevan, dissertation submitted in Hindi department, JNU, 1991, pp. 24.

higher caste people on his performances. But Bhikhari Thakur has denied this charge in his famous text *Bidesia*.

Bidesia is a play roughly structured around four characters: *Bidesia* (the migrant), *Pyari Sundari* (the abandoned wife or the beloved of the migrant), *Batohi* (the messenger) and *Rakhelin* (the keep or an illegal wife of the migrant). The play is all about the complicated relationship of Husband and Wife. Their relationship bonded in love and passion and separation due to situations. The story of the play revolves around a newly married couple. The husband has migrated to the *Calcutta* city for the sake of earning livelihood and led a better life, which was the preferred destination during that period, and even later, for the migrants of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa. Most of the migrants from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh used to go to *Calcutta* and other industrial cities of Bengal in search of livelihood. As *Calcutta* was one of the west industrial towns of that time apart from *Bombay* (Mumbai) and *Madras* (Chennai).

Bhikhari Thakur has the first hand experience of migration and its problem as he himself migrated to *Calcutta* for a time being. So, he put the character of '*Bidesi*' in the play that has migrated to *Calcutta* leaving behind the young wife. In the absence of her husband, his newly married wife has been suffering from the pain of separation. For a woman who used to leave all his relationships to be with his husband and his family after marriage, becoming alone was a difficult situation. She was new for this family and the only person who was close to her was no more in the family. So, the kind of suffering these women has to go through only they can understand. As in the absence of her beloved she feels alone in the family and the society. This separation was haunting due to many reasons. The most important of them was the suffering caused by the absence of beloved. And if he was not coming back for years it means that she had been left out by him. The same had happened with *Pyari Sundari*, the protagonist character of the play as her husband has gone and there were no any communicating ties between them. This kind of separation was too haunting for her. She tries her best to reach out for her husband but fails to make a contact or even get his news for a long time. The broken ties with her husband haunted her like anything and she was crying to meet him again. In between she

remembered all the good time she spent with her husband and how he has gone to *Calcutta* by ditching her.

Finally she met a *Batohi*¹⁹⁸ who too was migrating to *Calcutta*. She utters her sorrow before him and asked him to find her husband and tell him about her constant waiting and about her heartbreaking situation. *Batohi* first tried to escape from her but after knowing the sorrow of the young woman, he agreed. In the city he finds *Bidesia*, happily married to another woman *Rakhelin*. *Batohi* scolded him for his gestures and tried to inhale the sense of duty towards his first wife by narrating her sorrowful story. After hearing the story of his first wife and her agony, the sense of justice prevails over him and he returned to the village followed by the *Rakhelin* and their children. Here, they find each other again and lived happily for rest of the life. This single line narrative structure of the play was quite simple. It was first known literature or performance which caters the issue of migration and pathos between the family members after that.

The whole story of the play revolved around the misery of *Pyari Sundari*, the protagonist character of this play, who was suffering because she has been left out by her husband in the village instead of taking her with him. She was young and the need the company in that age was quite prominent in her case. The second thing was that she was there in that village where she knew only her husband and he was the only person on whom she could trust. She felt indecisive and threatened in her loneliness and in the absence of her husband. This was the sorrow of not only *Pyari Sundari* but thousands of women like her whose husbands have migrated in search of livelihood.

Apart from the subject matter, it was also a well made performance and dramatic text. The success of the performance of this text should be credited to the great structure of the play which was woven so beautifully with the orchestration of the folklore of the Bhojpuri society. It became the ideal representation of the Bhojpuri culture because of the wonderful orchestration of most of the elements of Bhojpuri culture in a single play text.

¹⁹⁸ *Batohi* was a character of the play *Bidesia* developed by Bhikhari Thakur keeping in mind the character of Uddho of Sursagar.

Bhikhari Thakur was a man made of practice and the text of *Bidesia* is a classical example of that. This text of *Bidesia* should also be considered as one the finest script of Folk Theatre as it carries all the elements of that. The writer of this text has followed nearly all the convention of writing a play which was created in the 400 years of practice of writing folk plays. It's not just that, the play also conceives the major playwriting technique of classical Sanskrit plays at the same time.

Bhikhari Thakur had started his play *Bidesia* with '*Manglacharana*'¹⁹⁹ which is a well known practice of starting a play. This structure of playwriting was followed by both the Sanskrit classics and the folk theatre. This is technically called as '*Purvaranga*' in Sanskrit texts. Bhikhari Thakur has not just followed the tradition but also utilised it for his own purpose. He was known for his witty remarks and here are some of the examples of that. The narrator arrives at the stays just after the *Manglacharan* and announces:

"*Aaj Bidesi ke tamasha hoihan. Bidesi ke tamasha kahe? Dur-dur ke log kahela ki Bidesia ke naach dekhe chaleke. Bidesia ke naach na havan, Bidesia ke tamasha havan.*"²⁰⁰

(Today we will perform the drama of *Bidesi*. Why the drama of *Bidesi*? People from far say that lets go for the dance performance of *Bidesia*. It is not a dance performance of *Bidesia*, it is drama of *Bidesia*.)

This speech was written intentionally by Bhikhari Thakur, to answer his critics who always criticised him for propagating immoral things on the name of dance and said that Bhikhari Thakur's performances were culturally bankrupt. This was at one side a noble answer to those who tried to defame Bhikhari Thakur as the propagator of immoral dance and on the other to decline himself from the earlier tradition of vulgar performances going on in the society on the name of dance with whom Bhikhari Thakur and his

¹⁹⁹ It is done in the beginning of the play to please the gods so that they secure the performance and the performers in the difficult time if any arrives and work for well-wishing of all comprising the audience.

²⁰⁰ Bhikhari Thakur, Bhikhari Thakur Rachnawali, ed. Dr. Virendra Narayan Yadav and Nagendra Prasad Singh, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2005, pp. 24.

Performance was associated by his critics. Just after clarifying the first obligation Bhikhari Thakur moves on the second one and writes:

*“Eh tamasaha men char admi e pat ba, Bidesi ek, Pyari Sundari du, Batohi teen, Rakhelin char. Athwa, Bidesi Brahm, Batohi Dharam, Rakhelin Maya, Pyari Sundari Jeev. Brahm Jeev duno ehi deh men badan baki bhet na hoikhe, karan? Maya. Ekra ke katewala Batohi Dharam.”*²⁰¹

(There are four characters in this play. *Bidesi*, *Pyari Sundari*, *Batohi* and *Rakhelin*. Where *Bidesia* symbolizes with *Brahma* (the supreme Hindu god who created this universe), *Batohi* symbolizes with *Dharm* (religious path, which one has to follow), *Rakhelin* symbolizes with *Maya* (Illusion, which distracts men from following the right path or the path of religion), *Pyari Sundari* symbolizes with *Jeev* (the soul of earthly human beings which came on earth to suffer, as he is the departed soul of *Brahma*, the creator itself and he is also in a hurry to meet him. *Brahma* and *Jeev* reside in the same body but they do not meet each, because of *Maya*, and to cut it through so that they can meet we need *Dharm* the *Batohi*. This is the simple philosophy of religious Hindu life from where he takes the cue and developed and woven around this story of the separated soul because of the crisis of migration which was prevalent in that society.)

These wonderful lines show that he was known to his cultural history & memory. Rather than being a person objected to spread immoral values. These lines show that his values were more cultural rather than anyone else. The kind of explanation of human life, which he has put up in these simple words, is unforgettable although, he has taken this idea of human life from the traditional Sanatan dharma²⁰². But this is sufficient to show his values and morals which he tried to spread through his kind of performances. He even didn't stop here and has written further to show his empathy with the religion and culture:

²⁰¹ Bhikhari Thakur, Bhikhari Thakur Rachnawali, edi. Nagendra Prasad Singh, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2005, pp. 24.

²⁰² The ancient religious way of leading life in India.

“Eh charon ke samvad hokhe ke chahin. Kaisan? Pyari Sundari ke Radhika jee lekha, Bidesi ke Srikrishna jee lekha, Rakhelin ke Kubri lekha, batohi ke Udhojee lekha.”²⁰³

(These four should have conversation between them. How? The conversation of *Pyari Sundari* should be like *Radha*, *Bidesi* like *Srikrishna*, *Rakhelin* like *Kubri* and *Batohi* like *Udhho*.)

These beautiful lines show that Bhikhari Thakur was not just known to his earlier tradition of poetics but he was also using them as the plot of his play which I have tried to establish in the second chapter. Then he preaches about the good character of married women and started his main theme, the tale of *Pyari Sundari* who was waiting anxiously for his husband who has gone Calcutta to earn livelihood.

Pyari Sundari enters on stage singing a song and describing her sufferings as her husband has moved over to Calcutta and she is waiting eagerly for him.

“Dagaria Johat na, bitat bate aath pahraiya ho Dagaria johat na”²⁰⁴

(I am looking on the way continuously as I am waiting for my husband day and night.)

She is crying in the memory of her husband and remembering all the happiness she got from his husband and how the days without him are like death nails. Although, the mood of the whole play is a little sadist but Bhikhari Thakur didn't allow the performance to be boring by using the characters like *Dostram* as *Labar*, similar to *Vidushaka*²⁰⁵ of Sanskrit plays, to cheer up the audience. He has also provided comic relief through the dialogues of the *Batohi* with *Pyari Sundari* and *Samaji*, similar to the chorus of Greek theatre. The

²⁰³ Bhikhari Thakur, Bhikhari Thakur Rachnawali, ed. Dr. Virendra Narayan Yadav and Nagendra Prasad Singh, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2005, pp. 24.

²⁰⁴ Bhikhari Thakur, Bhikhari Thakur Rachnawali, ed. Dr. Virendra Narayan Yadav and Nagendra Prasad Singh, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 2005, pp. 25.

²⁰⁵ The characters of Sanskrit play who gives comic relief to the audience.

ideal *Sutradhar* to narrate the storyline and inform the audience about recent development of the play was always there in his plays.

The play became hugely popular due to the great structure and the subject matter which he has depicted. Bhikhari Thakur has used the format of folk theatre in writing this play which is full of music, dance and drama. He has also used almost all the folklores and rhythms that existed in the Bhojpuri society i.e. *Lorikayan, Jantsari, Sorthi, Nirgun, Biraha, Chaupai, Chaubol, Kavit, Purvi, geet, barahmasa, Jhoomar, Doha, Alha, Rhythm of Kunwar Bijai, Pachara, Khemata, Savaiya* and many more. It could be said that one who wants to know about the singing traditions of Bhojpur can get the whole ambience in just one performance of *Bidesia*. As these folklores were in the cultural memory of the audience belonged to the Bhojpuri community and Bhojpuri Diaspora, his plays were a click among them and it hardly take time in popularising his performances wherever the Bhojpuri community existed as the practice of '*Bidesia theatre*.' It is needless to say that Bhikhari Thakur's own experience of the Bhojpuri Diaspora and the crisis of migration have played a vital role in producing this play and the depiction of the characters and the situations of the play are so real due to that.

There are two other plays written by him i.e. '*Gabarghichor*' and '*Kalyug Prem*' apart from *Bidesia* which deals with the subject matter of migration. But all of his plays were celebrated as the performance of *Bidesia* performances as his *Bidesia* performance was hugely popular among the community and it became synonyms of the performance of Bhikhari Thakur in his life time. Thus, there would be no any argument against this statement that the advent of '*Bidesia Theatre*' through the orchestration of Bhojpuri culture happened due to the genius of Bhikhari Thakur which has given a huge boost to the *Bidesia Culture*. Thus it could be said that Bhikhari Thakur was not just a constructor of '*Bidesia Theatre & Culture*' but at the same time he was a Construct of the same.

Conclusion

Bidesia, a Social text of Collective Consciousness of 'Cultural Memory'

As mentioned earlier that every culture has a sound base into a community from where, it emerges. The form it evolves, it is deeply rooted into the experience of the community. These experiences lives for ages in the form of memory in people's mind which is transferred to generation after generation. There are multiple ways of transferring these experiences and live empirical experiences. It can be done by writing history, which is a pure academic way and a later development in the history of human kind. But the most preferable way to transfer the vital memories to the next generation, regarding their civilization for the communities is through culture. The multi facets of culture i.e. songs, music, rituals, plays, proverbs, anecdotes, painting, calligraphy and others are used by the communities of the world to transfer their experience and memories, good or bad, to the future generations. These are all cultural reserves of a community which were transcribed from the monumental memories from their empirical living experiences. As Kerwin Lee Klein defines,

*"If history is objective in the coldest, hardest sense of the word, memory is subjective in the warmest, most inviting senses of that world. In contrast with history, memory fairly vibrates with the fullness of being."*²⁰⁶

The memories of a community and its expressions in cultural domain are highly social in its nature. As sociologist Michael Schudson in 'Waterguk in American Memory (1992)' observes,

²⁰⁶ Kerwin Lee Klein, On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse, Source: Representations, No. 69, Special Issue: Grounds for Remembering, (Winter 2000), University of California Press, pp. 129.

*“Not only is memory “essentially social”, it is located in “rules, laws, standardized procedures, and records, books, holidays, statues, souvenirs.” Memory may also “characterize groups’ by revealing a “debt to the past” and ex-pressing “moral continuity.” Memory is not a property of individual minds, but a diverse and shifting collection of material artifacts and social practice.”*²⁰⁷

It means that any kind of memory is social in its nature and that is bonded with collectiveness as even individual memory is the part of the social consciousness and this could be looked as “Collective Memory”. This “Collective Memory” according to Kerwin Lee Klein in his words,

*“Collective Memory, like ‘language’ in Saussurian term, can be characterized as a system of signs, symbols and practices.”*²⁰⁸

This ‘Collective Memory’ consisting signs, symbols and practices were reflected in the cultural artifacts like folklore, music, songs, folk theatre, folk tales, fables, anecdotes, proverbs, dances and visual culture of the society and so it can be characterized as ‘Cultural Memory’, as all the collective memories, which are available to us from generations, are in the form of ‘Culture’. Here culture plays the role of the catalyst and takes the burden of the history to transmit it to the future generation. I would like to term this phenomenon as preservation of common experience in the form of ‘Cultural Memory’. Diana Taylor writes about this memory and I quote,

*“Memory is embodied and sensual, that is conjured through the senses; it links the deeply private with social, even official practices.”*²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Kerwin Lee Klein, On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse, Source: Representations, No. 69, Special Issue: Grounds for Remebering, (Winter 2000), University of California Press, pp. 130.

²⁰⁸ Kerwin Lee Klein, On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse, Source: Representations, No. 69, Special Issue: Grounds for Remebering, (Winter 2000), University of California Press, pp. 133.

²⁰⁹ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Duke University Press,⁴Durham and London, 2003, pp. 11.

Diana Taylor continues,

*“Cultural memory is, among other things, a practice, an act of imagination and interconnection.”*²¹⁰

This theoretical understanding of the ‘Cultural Memory’, reflected in the development of the aesthetics of *Bidesia* Culture, which was caused by historical developments of its time and the collective consciousness of the community members had documented it in the form of cultural expressions. In this perspective, *Bidesia*, a folk tradition of its kind, can directly be credited to its society, where it is rooted. This form could be defined best as of the people, by the people and for the people. Society has developed its own tools in the course of time going through different transitions. These transitions have the most valuable archaeology of knowledge to transfer to the next generation in the form of culture. The conclusion is based on the texts, pre-texts and contexts gathered on *Bidesia* culture through my investigation and research on the topic which is written in the earlier chapters.

Bidesia was always referred as a folk form or folk tradition of Bihar but the long history of it, which we have recently seen in this article, suggests that it is not just a folk form or folk tradition rather it should be called as ‘*Bidesia* Culture’, as it has become part of the Bhojpuri society for last 500-600 yrs. Prof. Badri Narayan Tiwari has correctly pointed out,

“Bidesia was the affectionate form of address given to the migrants by loved ones who were left behind in the homeland, and so lends its name to the new folk culture that emerged out of migration, has been called Bidesia culture. This folk culture is represented in many forms, such as musical theatre, popularly known as Bidesia, folk songs and folk paintings. It is a complete folk culture, or holistic folklore tradition, which

²¹⁰ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2003, pp. 11.

developed as an outcome of the vacuum caused by the departure of the migrant Bhojpuri's. Here, I will try to define the term Bidesia, not only in its theatrical form but also in its role as a metaphor for cultural tradition that emerged in and around the migration of Bhojpuri people."²¹¹

The forcable migration of a community, because of the historical developments undertaken by British Colonial rule which led to an uneven growth in the country, caused the large scale migration and led the people choose the indentured system for their survival which was translated into the emotional loss for the society. This emotional loss was unrecoverable as family members specially the Man of the family had migrated in a large number leaving behind their wives, children's, parents, brothers and sisters. In a feudal society, the earning man used to be the only source of survival, like the captain of a ship. The parted souls of the loved ones were in turmoil. Lakhs of people could not meet again particularly their loved ones once. There were hardly any source of resuming ties except letters, and the irony was that most of the migrants and their family were illiterate. The historical documents reveals the fact the more than three lakhs letters written by these indentured were undelivered in 1863 because of the change of the address. Once the earning member of the society lost touch with the family, most of the families moved from that place in search of livelihood. The number of migrants, which was in lakhs show that it was a social crisis rather than an individual. So, it led the society to have a kind of memory, which is collective in nature and could be best preserved in cultural expressions.

Thus, the aesthetics of *Bidesia* Culture is the product of "Cultural Memory" caused by these historical developments under British Colonial rule. Countless people have shared their experiences and memories in the form of culture artifacts which led to the evolution of the '*Bidesia* Culture' as a whole. The individuals like Bhikhari Thakur, Guddar Rai, Sundari Bai, Dunia Bai, Ramsakal Pathak Dwij and others could be celebrated as the makeover artists of the whole cultural expressions but finally it was the whole society who has the ownership of '*Bidesia* Culture', as it was a social construct, a construct of the

²¹¹ Badri Narayan Tiwari, *Bidesia: Migration, Change and Folk Culture*, NCZCC, Allahabad, 2005, pp. 67.

Collective Memory of emotional loss to the wider society. The expressions of this could be seen in several folklores, singing traditions, and theatre practices which generated the *Bidesia* Culture as a whole. The role of Individuals like Bhikhari Thakur, who had created the most vibrant theatre practice of *Bidesia* based on the cultural artifacts generated by the society, in particular the women of the Bhojpuri society who have sung their songs of emotional loss in the form of folklores like Jantsaar, Jhoomar, Poorvi, Sorathi & others. Individuals like Sundari bai, Dunia Bai, Guddar Rai, Ramsakal Pathak Dwij, Mahendra Mishra and many others, who have developed the dramatic form of *Bidesia*, are un-ignorable. But still Bhikhari Thakur was indebted to the collective consciousness and memory which translated into cultural artifacts from the pathos of the Bhojpuri society which was primarily social in its characteristic and thus the creation of '*Bidesia* Culture' should be credited to the collective consciousness and expressions of the society.

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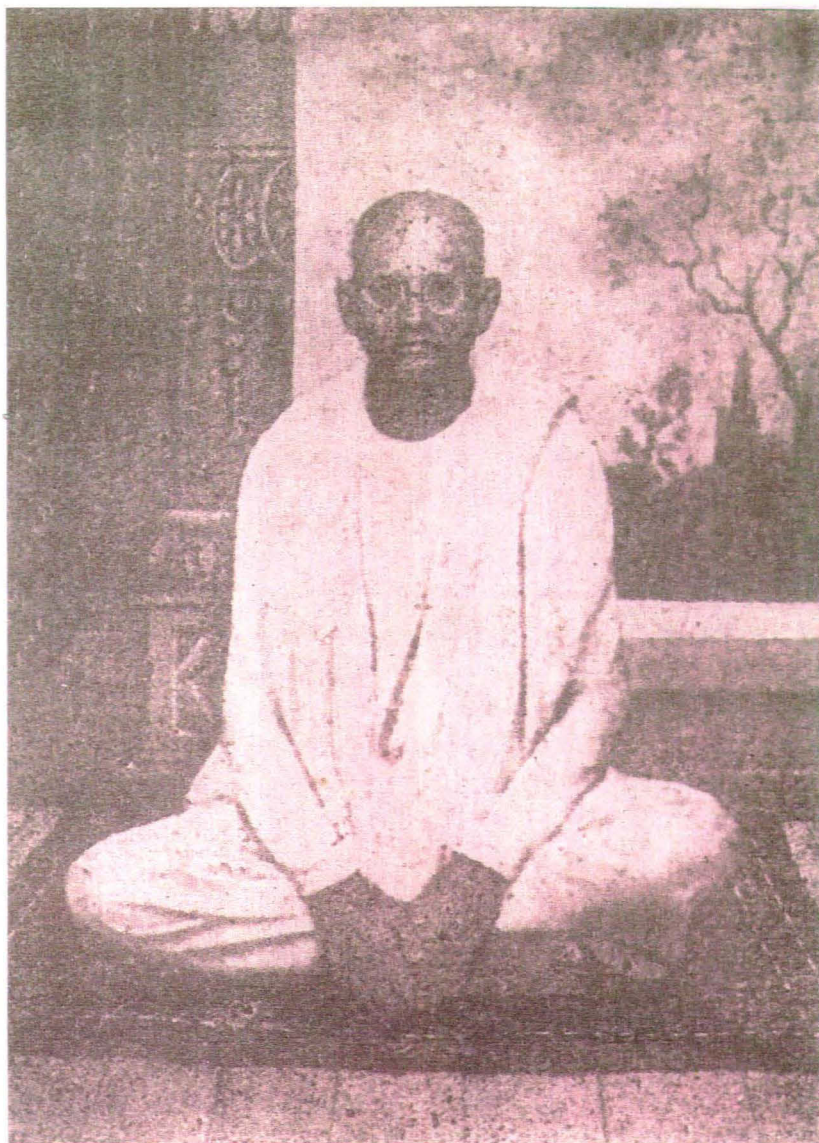
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Appendix



A rare photograph of Bikhari Thakur

Courtesy: Bikhari Thakur Rachanavali, ed- Virendra Narayan Yadav and Nagendra Prasad Singh, Bihar Rashtrabhasa Parishad, March 2005



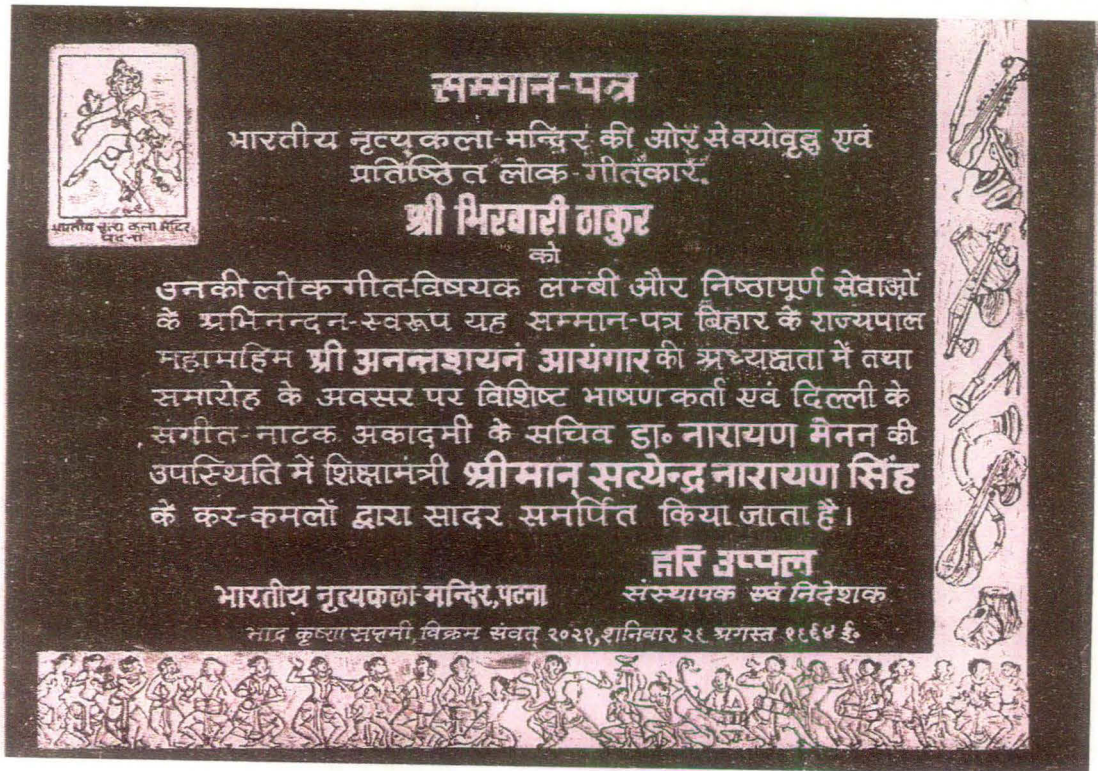
Bhikhari Thakur's jacket adorn with medals during his lifetime

Courtesy: Bhikari Thakur Rachanavali, ed- Virendra Narayan Yadav and Nagendra Prasad Singh, Bihar Rashtrabhasa Parishad, March 2005.



Commendation Certificate signed and presented by the Hon. Governor of Bihar in the honour of the performance presented by Bhikhari Thakur and his troupe on the Republic Day celebration, January 1954

Courtesy: Bhikari Thakur Rachanavali, ed- Virendra Narayan Yadav and Nagendra Prasad Singh, Bihar Rashtrabhasa Parishad, March 2005.



Commendation Certificate presented by the Hon. Minister of Education, Mr. Satyendra Narayan Singh, for his life long service to the field of Folk culture, August 1964

Courtesy: Bhikari Thakur Rachanavali, ed- Virendra Narayan Yadav and Nagendra Prasad Singh, Bihar Rashtrabhasa Parishad, March 2005.



An artist from Bhikhari Thakur's troupe performing *Bidesia*

Courtesy: Photo Library, Sangeet Natak Akademi, Rabindra Bhavan, Feroz shah Rd,
New Delhi

