

## **Migration as History and Culture through Bhojpuri Folksongs**

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### **Abstract**

*Folk culture is one of the strongest mediums to express human sentiments and consists of a kind of literature that includes the living and lived realities of human society. Through those expressed emotions and lived realities, it preserves the history of regions, societies, religions and languages. In the same way, Bhojpuri song traditions express the living world of Bhojpuri society and culture. They are representative of people's daily experiences, their joys and their sorrows. They are essential aspects of social life and constitute existential realities as well. This paper seeks to examine those same existential realities and social life with reference to Bhojpuri folksongs, through the lenses of 'migration' an inevitable theme in Bhojpuri folklore. This theme will be critically examined in terms of its pattern of existence, its reference to the history of the region and its effect on the Bhojpuri society. Its relation with its consequences, such as a change in family structure, power-relation, the pain of separation and explicit portrayal of desires, will also be considered essential points to engage with the theme. In Bhojpuri folksongs, migration has a subtle presence because the emphasis is more on its consequences. In most cases, migration is mentioned in the beginning lines of the folksongs and the rest of the song deals with the consequences. It is vital to look at those consequences to understand the migration in Bhojpuri society as to how do these folksongs deal with the theme of migration? How has the destination been clearly contrasted with the native place? How does it affect an individual and society? How does it shape the family relationships and impacts family politics? How does it enter the political domain, and what are its contemporary*

*resonances? More importantly, how do these songs preserve the memories of the place left behind, in a foreign land?*

**Keywords:** Migration, History, Memories, Culture, Tradition.

## **Introduction**

Indian culture is primarily based on songs, narratives, storytelling, and dances. Performances (and signs and symbols) are an inextricable part. Rather than being preserved in scribal/plastic form, these various Indian cultures survive through embodied performances. These cultural performances are collective events performed in a particular context with social interactions. These are thoroughly social activities and are more than entertainment. What is exceptional about these performances is that they are performed without any script, transmittable, and involve years of training and practice. They are passed on from one generation to another as cultural memories articulated through bodily acts. Bhojpuri song culture is one of those Indian cultures that preferred speech, gesture, and embodied performances for its reflective and creative existence. Like other Indian cultures, Bhojpuri migration songs are also memory-based performances in which they preserve and transmit their belongingness, conventions, and cultural knowledge. This paper will critically engage with these songs of migration and their relationship with the society, native place and the places of migration. The paper will also investigate the historical significance of migration in Bhojpuri society. Migration as a theme will be critically examined in terms of its pattern of existence, its reference to the region's history, and its effect on the Bhojpuri society. Its relationship with the consequences, such as a change in family structure, power-relation, the pain of separation and explicit portrayal of desires, will also be considered essential points to engage with the theme. In Bhojpuri, folksongs migration has a subtle presence, and its consequences are emphasized. In most cases,

migration is mentioned in the folksongs' beginning lines and the rest of the song deals with the consequences. It is crucial to look at these consequences to understand migration in Bhojpuri society and how these folksongs deal with the theme of migration. How has the destination been contrasted with the native place? How does it affect an individual and society? How does it shape family relationships and impact family politics? More importantly, how do these songs preserve the memories of the place left behind, in a foreign land?

### **Definition and the Context**

Migration is a natural phenomenon, widely familiar among plants, the animal kingdom, and human societies. According to N. Jayaram, the migration of human beings can be understood as a "stage preceding their settlement as communities" (Jayaram 2004:15). In fact, "even after evolution as communities, human beings have been experiencing temporary, seasonal and permanent migration" (Jayaram 2004:15). He also emphasizes that human migration does not mean a mere physical movement of people but the migrants carrying socio-cultural baggage. The baggage consists of "a predefined social identity, a set of religious beliefs and practices, a framework of norms and value governing family and kinship organization and food habits and also the language" (Jayaram 2004:16). This socio-cultural baggage allows them to retain physical and mental contact with their homeland. It also enables them to preserve the memories of their native place and gives them hope to return. Bhojpuri song tradition and performing cultures are similar socio-cultural baggage. They are companions to the migrants and to those as well who are left behind. For example:

*“Hasihasipanwakhiauleinbeimanwa  
Ki apna base pardesh  
Kori re chunaria me dagiyalagaigalein*

*Maari re karejwa me thes*  
(He fed me betel leaves with a smile on his face  
And then settled in foreign  
The pure scarf is contaminated now  
And there is a pang in my heart)" (Bidesiya)

The song is from the movie *Bidesiya* (1963), directed by S. N. Tripathi. The movie is an adaptation of the musical play of the same name, composed by Bhikhari Thakur. This song expresses a woman's pain, but it is filmed on a group of male migrants who are singing this song during their journey. This song is helping the migrants to be conscious of what they are leaving behind. Nevertheless, it is also giving hope and reason to wait for the woman who is left behind.

In any culture, there are two kinds of symbolic acts, which are identified as verbal and embodied acts. The verbal acts are performed through words and sounds, while the embodied acts are performed through gestures and expressions such as songs and dances. Since immemorial times these two kinds of symbolic acts have been the foundations of societies/cultures in the form of songs and dances performed separately and together. The singing performances are more the appropriate example here, whether accompanied by dance performances, as they are verbal and embodied. Every culture has its song traditions performed in specific contexts with gestures and sounds that have pre-ascribed cultural meanings. Understanding those cultures is necessary to understand these performances and decode their signs and symbols. Following the same, this present paper will examine the Bhojpuri song tradition in the socio-cultural context of migration. These folksongs/ song traditions are one of the strongest mediums to express human sentiments, and they also characteristically consist of a kind of literature that includes the patterns in the amorphous area of the human mind. Through that literature

and those patterns, we perceive that the first task of any society or culture is to live, which later turns out to be history in terms of geographic economy, society, religion, morality, and language. They also express the living world of the people. They are representative of people's daily experiences, their joys, and their sorrows. They are also essential aspects of social life as they are composed according to existential realities.

### **Migration History of the Bhojpuri Community**

Migration, along with rituals, activities, festivals, and community comprised of love stories, valour, glory, and familial relationships is the core of Bhojpuri song cultures. The presentation and preservation of history, society, and emotions of Bhojpuri culture are through these song traditions. They represent the daily experiences of people, their joys, and their sorrows through performance. They are also important aspects of social life. Cultures are chiefly based on the historical experience of their people. Those historical experiences are preserved through folk songs and performing traditions. In Bhojpuri culture, songs and performing traditions play an important role in preserving the lived realities and daily experiences of its people. Migration is one of those experiences. It is one recurrent theme in the Bhojpuri song culture. Several themes in these songs exist because of migration. In Bhojpuri songs, migration itself has a subtle presence, and the emphasis is more on its consequences. In most cases, the migration is mentioned only in the beginning lines, while the rest of the song is concerned with its consequences. It is imperative to look at those consequences to understand migration in Bhojpuri society. A good migration pattern can be noticed in the Bhojpuri-speaking region, whether it is near or far. Various Bhojpuri songs are an excellent example of this. One of those songs is:

“Train from the East  
Ship from the West  
Took away my love  
This train is my rival  
Took away my love” (Tiwari 2005:137).

The first line of this song refers to the railways, which came into existence after the mid-nineteenth century. Nevertheless, it could be a reference specifically to the Calcutta-Allahabad-Delhi railway line established in 1864. The second line refers to the ship, which was a medium to transport slaves and migrate to Burma (now Myanmar), Trinidad, Tobago, and other British colonies searching for livelihood. Destinations in this song are symbolized by the direction such as Purub or east and Pachhu west, where east stands for east of the Bhojpuri region (which is Calcutta and beyond), and west refers to the European colonies to which indentured labourers permanently migrated on ships. It was from the Bhojpuri region that the colonial planters took many people to work on their plantations, and the departure of these indentured labourers caused grief and sorrow, both to those who were left behind and those who left the country for foreign shores. Both the modes of transportation were means to migrate, and several references can be found to them in Bhojpuri folk literature.

Migration from the Bhojpuri linguistic community can be divided into two phases, the colonial and post-colonial phases. During the colonial period, people migrated from this area as indentured labourers, also known as Girmitiya (agreement). According to Huge Tinker (1993), indentured labour emigration demanded a contract signed by the individual labours to work on several plantations owned by the colonial government. This emigration process started in 1834 and ended in 1920. These labour emigrants were taken to British Guiana, Fiji, Trinidad, and Jamaica, the French colonies of

Guadalupe and Martinique, and the Dutch colony of Surinam. The indentured labour gave birth to a different identity of Bhojpuri migrants on the colonial plantations. Their existence was caught up between the place they left behind and could not return to and the place they adopted but could not integrate (Lal 2012:44). They tried their best to survive between the ‘alienation and uprootedness’. It is important to note that Indian indentured labourers were “uprooted, the fragmented mass of humanity on the move” (Lal 2012:45). They already had left their homeland in internal migration. The experiences of these emigrants during the journey and on the voyage gave them the new cultural identity of Jahajibhai. This new identity was based on shared social and personal needs and a shared sense of servitude. It was free from the social and caste hierarchy.

Though indentured labour gave freedom from the social and economic hardship which emigrants faced in their native society, it also introduced a new system of slavery (for a short period). The Bhojpuri folksongs of migration are an attempt to fill the void that has been left by the migrants/emigrants. One of the popular Bhojpuri songs from the Batohia<sup>1</sup> genre, *Sunder Subhumibhaiyya Bharat ke Deswa se*, was written by Raghuvveer Narayan. It portrays the image of India as a beautiful homeland, and it can be seen in the song that the singer/persona is full of regrets for leaving his/her homeland. The frequent occurrence of lines like *More pran base ganga dhar re batohia* (my heart lies with the stream of Ganges) and *More pran base sarjutir re batohia* (my heart lies at the bank of Saryu) in the song state that the heart of the persona is still in the homeland. S/he is requesting Batohia (the messenger) to send the news of that beautiful homeland. This song rightly

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<sup>1</sup>Batohia as a genre and its meaning has been explained in the next section.

captures the above-mentioned in-between situation of the indentured emigrants.

Apart from indentured emigration, the men from this region were also recruited into the army, which was one of the main reasons for migration in the pre-colonial and post-colonial periods. In *Bhojpuri Bhasha Aur Sahitya* (1954) Uday Narayan Tiwari highlights that in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Bhojpur and Buxar of Bihar were the main areas to recruit sepoys who served Mughal as well as British armies. Even to this date, people are recruited from this region in large numbers. Therefore, its resonance is still heard in Bhojpuri folk songs. The following song, which I have heard from my mother, aunts and grandmother singing in my childhood, supports the fact mentioned above:

“Leave your job of serving the army and come back  
beloved  
I have served you food on a golden plate  
Leave your job of serving the army and enjoy this  
delicious food beloved” (Translation mine).

George Grierson also mentions the role of sepoys from this region in the mutiny of 1857 in his *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903).

L.S.S. O’Malley (1924) in Bihar district Gazetteers explains that natural calamities and epidemics have also contributed to the migration process from this region, for example, the recurrent phases of the influenza epidemic in 1918 and 1921 and the most severe cholera epidemic in 1908 (O’Malley 1924:57-62). Apart from that, other natural calamities such as earthquakes and famine forced them to migrate. In the twentieth century, the Nepal-Bihar earthquake of 1934 and the famine of 1966 (though its impact was less) forced the people to migrate in large numbers. Irrespective of their caste, people have migrated from this region and took up menial jobs to



sustain themselves and their families. As O'Malley briefs, Brahmans served as priests and had their clients. Rajputs and Bhumihaars, landlords and cultivators, served as peons, policemen, and doorkeepers (O'Malley 1924:46-47). But these migrants were gainfully absorbed within the system as they were hard working. They were the source of cheap labour and accepted low wages. They adapted themselves to the harsh work conditions.

### **After Effect of Migration: Family Politics and Emotional Impact**

In Bhojpuri folksongs, migration is primarily presented as the cause behind the changes in the human psyche and human emotions and the main reason behind changes in family structure and power plays in it. There are many reasons behind migration from this region, but it has also become central to the cultural practice. Largely, the economic condition forces people to migrate from their land and leave their families and wives behind. The wife suffers more in comparison to families and community as she must bear the loneliness in the absence of her husband, which could lead to oppression from in-laws or sexual exploitation by other men. The monthly earnings of the husband also add to her suffering and make her the victim of the power structure. If a husband earns well, his wife will be respected in the family. Otherwise, she is treated as a maid by family members. It is interesting to note that in case of oppression from in-laws, the mother-in-law and sisters-in-law are portrayed as the oppressors. The reason could be that the wife is an outsider in the family. She is related to the family because of her husband, but the mother and sisters-in-law are rightful family members. The following song sung by a group of women while working in the household can substantiate the above-mentioned argument.

“I remember my husband I cry a lot

I remember my husband

Mother and sister-in-law compel me to bake loaves  
of bread

I throw away utensils I cry a lot

I remember my husband

Mother and sister-in-law compel me to carry water

I throw away the pot I cry a lot

I remember my husband

Mother and sister-in-law compel me to sleep in the  
bed

I throw away the pillow I cry a lot

I remember my husband.” (Translation mine).

Migration has also given rise to two different genres of songs, such as *Bidesia* and *Batohia*. *Bidesia* songs are addressed to the migrant who has not returned to his native place, but in *batohia* songs, a messenger is addressed. Songs of both genres narrate the pain of separation through complaints. In *Bidesia*(the migrant) the husband or the beloved is directly addressed but in *Batohia*(the messenger) a messenger is addressed to deliver the complaint to the beloved. Songs of these two genres have a remarkable rhyming quality that makes it easy to differentiate these songs from each other. In *Bidesia* songs, every second line ends with the word *Bidesia*, and in *Batohia* songs, it ends with the word *Batohia*. The *Batohia* in these songs can either be another migrant or a mere wanderer. A single line of these songs can offer multiple readings and can express several emotions like agony, valour, happiness, etc. All these emotions are reflections of migration as a theme presents in Bhojpuri society. For example, a *Batohia* song

“My love has his big eyes

Those beautiful eyes are very pure O batohia!

Lips are bright red after chewing paan  
A beautiful nose is like the beak of parrot O batohia!"  
(Jain 1999:169)

In this song, a woman is describing her husband's appearance to the messenger to identify her husband in a distant or foreign land. But one can also read her longing for the husband in how she describes his desirable body and laments over his absence. She shares her pain with the messenger, who is another migrant and can visit the husband during his journey. But there can another reading of this song. Though the female persona intends to convey her message to her husband, her lamentation can induce *Batohia* to think over his own decision of deserting the homeland and his family. So, directly and indirectly, this song refers to the loss of a wife and a society due to migration. Most of the time, the performers of these migration songs are women themselves who are experiencing the consequences of migration, but these are also performed by men on several occasions. There are possibilities that these male performers may be experiencing the pangs of separation from their beloveds because they have left their wives and their natives land behind.

Poverty and migration (both internal and cross border) always have a strong co-relationship. It is one of the reasons to trigger migration on a large scale which later takes the form of temporary and permanent migration. The poor economic condition of the agricultural class also caused the migration of people from this area. In one of the songs, emotional dialogue between a mother and her son has been depicted, who has turned into a wanderer. The son does not hesitate to accept that he goes from one place to another because of his poor economic condition and takes alms for his survival. It highlights the effect of poverty on an individual and his filial relationship.

“For what reason, you turned wanderer  
Oh, you turned wanderer  
Why you ask alms oh Ram!

For belly oh mother I ask for alms  
I ask for alms  
For the sake of destiny, I turned wanderer oh Ram!

Give me a piece of cloth  
Just a piece of your cloth  
My wandering will be fruitful oh ram!

How would I give you a piece of cloth?  
Dear, a piece of cloth  
My heart sinks oh Ram!” (Translation mine).

This song indirectly refers to migration. It portrays the male persona as a wanderer who lives in different places for a certain period. Therefore, his migration is temporary and permanent as he has left his native place. This song also presents the persona as *Batohia* who has returned to his native place. Communication ties between him and his mother are re-established, even though it is for a short period. His visit is to inform his mother about his inability to return as he has decided to be a fakir, and to fulfil his vow of being a fakir, he requests her for a piece of cloth. However, the mother refuses to do so as she does not want her son to desert her permanently.

### **Expressions of Longing**

For a long, the theme of migration has been present in Bhojpuri folksongs, and it is the most recurrent one. These folksongs are closely interwoven with the life of the people, and they serve as a reservoir of memories preserving their experiences, struggles, and sufferings, constituting an oral history that an official history fails to record. These folksongs that are concerned mainly with the breakdown of human bonds

not only describe the loneliness and the pain of the separated ones or the people who are left behind but are also the expression of various social and cultural animosities existing in the society and the family. Such as, in a family where the daughter-in-law is dominated by the in-laws, or intimidated by the daughter-in-law. Intimidation from outside the family has also been seen, where an outsider intervenes in the family's affairs and tries to control their lives; shopkeepers and moneylenders are some of those outsiders. There would also be a person (an insider) who tries to seduce the lonely wife. But largely, it is a pain which becomes more visible through these folksongs. There are different categories in these folksongs dedicated to this pain of separation and emotional loss, such as *Birha*, *Poorvi*, and *Nirgun*. Badri Narayan (2005) describes the *Poorvi* as folksongs in which the pain of separation is expressed from the side of the wife, although the composers are the males (Narayan 2005:14) It would be appropriate here to look at one of the *Poorvi* songs which K.D transcribes. Upadhyaya in which a wife is replacing the husband with a parrot and through that parrot expresses her sexual desire and then further brings forth the hardship faced by the family in his absence. This song expresses above mentioned social and cultural animosities and the pain and suffering of separation.

“My love went to eastern country O Ram!  
 And left behind  
 A parrot as a toy, he left behind for me  
 I'll feed you well dear parrot in a nice bowl  
 And will take you to sleep  
 In my bosom dear parrot, I'll keep you and I'll make  
 you sleep  
 Hour by hour the night is passing  
 The parrot started biting  
 On the edge of my blouse, this parrot started biting

I wish to shoo away this parrot at first thought  
But the next thought reminded  
My beloved's gift to me, that next thought reminded  
The parrot flew away and flew to Calcutta town  
And sat dearly  
On my husband's turban, he sat dearly  
My lord removed his turban and caressed the parrot  
Speak dear parrot  
Of the conflict in my household, speak my dear  
parrot.  
Your mother is working, your sister is working  
And taking care  
Of your left shop, they are taking care" (Upadhyay  
1990:100).

The most crucial character in this song is the parrot. Firstly, it becomes the replacement of the husband, and the wife takes his care as her husband's belonging. But as the song proceeds, the wife complains about him seeking sexual advantages just as an out/insider is intended to seek in the husband's absence. This act of seeking sexual advantages by an out/insider is present in Bhojpuri society, but it is never mentioned explicitly, except through songs. There is always an outsider, or the insider close to the husband or any relative of the husband who can make such advances, and the wife is obliged to take care of him or respect him. In the next stanza, this parrot assumes the role of the messenger and flies away to Calcutta, where the husband is living right now. The wife urges him to narrate all the experiences and the sufferings of the family in his absence. The economic condition of the family is not good. His mother and his sister are working outside and are managing the family's shop as well. This has also opened them to the dangers posed by society and the economy. However, this song is composed as a constant reminder of the most

valuable member's absence in the family. It evokes a sense of loss that remains after the migration.

Reference to emotional loss, which can also be understood as the loss of soul (death) and loss of spirituality, can be seen in Bhojpuri folksongs in the context of Lord Krishana and his departure to Mathura, too. Here is an example of a Bhojpuri folksong I transcribed during my fieldwork. It engages with this theme and accounts for the emotional loss of the persona/lover because Krishna has decided to settle down in Mathura. In this song, the flute assumes the leading role and becomes the reason for jealousy. It is different from the symbol of the parrot in the previous song. The parrot symbolizes responsibility, but the flute in this song represents the affection and attention of the beloved.

“My Kanha went to Madhuban with his flute  
Plays that flute only in Madhuban  
That sweet sound of the flute  
My heart longs for, that sweet sound of the flute  
  
Udho baba came from Madhuban  
Brought with him  
A letter from my Kanha brought with him.  
  
That letter pierces my heart  
He is entangled now  
He loves the other woman there, he is entangled now”  
(Upadhyay 1990:113).

In this song, Krishana has been referred to as the beloved. His departure to Mathura from Vrindavan is considered a great loss by his girlfriends. Here persona lamenting over the migration of Lord Krishana; even his flute is so dear to her that she cannot bear his playing that flute in a distant land. She is even jealous of that distant forest where this flute is being played. Then she receives a messenger, Udho baba (the messenger),

who reads her a letter from Krishana. For her, this letter is a document confirming her separation from Krishana, as it reveals that Krishana is now in love with another woman and hence his return is impossible. This kind of narrative is recurrent in Bhojpuri folksongs, where Krishana is replaced by a husband or a beloved who has gone to a distant land to earn but never returns or refuses to return as he has started another family there. Therefore, in most of these folksongs, a constant fear of foreign land can be seen, equating with the mistress of the husband or the beloved. Most of these folksongs use the word mistress as a metaphor for the foreign land which prevents the husband/beloved from returning.

This pain of loss and separation resulting from migration has become an essential aspect of Bhojpuri society and has been revealed in various facets of Bhojpuri folk tradition, as Narayan notices. As mentioned earlier, new folk traditions have emerged because of migration –*Bidesia* is one of them. It was popularized by Bhikhari Thakur and is close to nautanki (musical dramas in the Bhojpuri region). In *Bidesia* performances, the migrants are called *Bidesia*, *Pardesia*, and *Batohia* (synonyms of migrant) which contain the elements of both affection and complaint about leaving behind their loved ones. Narayan (2005) briefly explains these three above-mentioned terms briefly as *Bidesia* are migrants whose chances of returning are significantly less as they have broken all the ties with their native place and the family (like indentured labourers). He considers *Pardesia* to be those migrants who are forced to leave their native place to earn a living and their communication ties with the family are not cut off. They are more like semi-permanent migrants, and they are the most preferred ones in the Bhojpuri folksongs. He presents *Batohia* to be in a better position who is the *Bidesia*, returned to his native place as a traveller and it is with his help that the communication ties are resumed (Narayan, 05, p: 49). It would



be appropriate here to look at another folksong of batohia genre collected by Upadhyaya for an enhanced understanding of this definition of batohia.

“Touching your feet O dear brother wanderer  
Please listen to my prayers O batohiya!

How should I express my messages?  
My heart is aching again and again O batohiya!

His beloved is crying and wandering madly O Rama  
How can he enjoy luxuries O batohiya!

This job of my beloved should be set on fire  
Your heart is very harsh O batohiya!” (Upadhyay  
1990:115).

In this song, a woman is begging the batohia/messenger to deliver her message to her husband in distant land due to his job. She feels uncomfortable sharing her message with the *Batohia* as she cannot open herself completely to a stranger. Furthermore, she is complaining about how her husband can live a luxurious life by abandoning her wife, who is suffering in his absence. She, in fact, wishes that her husband should be fired from his job so that he will be forced to return. In the end, she accuses *Batohia* of being insensitive towards his family as he is also migrating. *Bidesia* and *Batohia* are not the only genres where laments and complaints about the emotional loss due to the migration of husbands or dearest family members are found. Other genres like *Nirgun* which directly accuse *Bidesia* and the *Pardesi* who never return. In *Nirgun* songs pain of separation becomes a critical portrayal but more in the spiritual context. The migration becomes a spiritual symbol in it and refers to the transition of souls from one world to another. It is the death songs that come under this category, but again largely, the wife laments over the husband's death.

“Bala yogi, Bala yogi, digs a well

Oh, my Rama, only rope could have been managed  
and the whole day passed  
The rope is broken now, the water in the well  
subsided  
Oh, my Rama, on whose door now I'll pass my days  
My hands are empty, my lap is empty, no one is there  
for me  
Oh, my Rama, on whose door now I'll pass my days"  
(Awasthi 2002:125).

There are also some *nirguns* which are sung to lament over the departure of Lord Rama from Ayodhya. All these songs reflect the emotional loss of inhabitants of the Bhojpuri speaking region. On the one hand, the speaker speaks about the pain of separation from the loved one in these songs. on the other hand, it also accuses their loved one as a foreigner. This statement also holds validity for the migrants as the trauma and struggles are similar for them. But their situation is more complex as they do not only deal with the alienation and separation but sometimes also with the conflict of identity. *Nirgun* songs are the portrayal of remembering loved ones after their departure. Male performers usually perform these songs, and these are usually about females and their lamentation. These songs belong to women and largely depict the world of women. But according to these songs the world is central to men and this pain and suffering presented in different ways in these folksongs, is a result of their absence in the world of women because of their migration and the existence of foreign land which attracts them.

### **Searching for new native lands**

Manager Pandey proposes in his Introduction to *Lokpriya Sanskriti ka Dwandatmak Samajsashtra, Sandarbh: Bidesia*, (2011) that three main reasons could be traced behind the migration in Bhojpuri speaking region. First, the incidence of

poverty in the farmers' lives because of the feudal system and colonial oppression; second, struggles against that poverty through seasonal and permanent migration; and third, the employment opportunities provided by the colonial masters and the development of the mode of transportation to avail of those opportunities (Pandey 2011:6) These factors which were prominent earlier continue in the present too and still hold the relevance for the folk songs. Some of these migrants do not have any reason to migrate and do it out of curiosity to explore the distant land and never return. Bidesi from Bhikhari Thakur's play *Bidesiya* (2005) is a good example of this. He deceives his wife, goes to Calcutta, remarries there, and starts a new family. He is not suffering from any financial crisis but still, he chooses to migrate to explore the city's pleasures. Thakur did not create this character out of his imagination, but his acute observations of Bhojpuri society helped him bring this character to life. It has also been indicated by Arjan De Haan (2010) in his case study that leaving one's land was common in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the Bhojpuri region, particularly when indigo cultivation was extended. Mainly it was the "indigo deserters," small tenure holders who fled because of indebtedness and poverty. It is also necessary to mention that due to industrial growth in the second half of the nineteenth century, migration from this region was accelerated, and east of Bhojpuri areas tempted the migrants most.

“*Piya Gailen Calcuttwa E Sajani!*” (My love has gone to Calcutta, E Sajani!) is a line of a song taken from Bhikhari Thakur's musical play ‘*Bidesia*’ (2005), which is a microscopic presentation of migration and its aftermath in the Bhojpuri society. But it is important here to note that before Thakur wrote this play, the existence of migration as a theme is very much visible in Bhojpuri folksongs. He was among those who migrated from the Bhojpuri region, which helped him portray

migration very well in his plays, along with the pull and push factors of migration. For a long, largely agriculture-dependent Bhojpuri society has migrated in search of livelihood and employment, and most of them have gone to *Purubi Banijiya* (the country in the east, especially Bengal). *Purubi Banijiya* has been referred to again and again in the Bhojpuri folksongs, which are a reference to the destination and the economic condition of his native place. *Purubi Banijiya* always shares a love-hate relationship with the native place in Bhojpuri folksongs, but this relationship is more visible and practical from the perspective of young women, who are newly married, and their husbands decided to go out with the primary purpose of employment<sup>2</sup>. This relationship has been portrayed very explicitly in Bhojpuri folksongs with many accusations and then the realization of its necessity. However, largely the destination of migration has been considered the main pull factor and push factor behind the migration. The migration to *Purubi Banijiya* from the Bhojpuri region has existed since the Mughal period, and its attraction is so that it continues. In "The Army Indian Moghuls" (1903), William Irvine suggests that during the Mughal period, people from the Bhojpuri region were hired as servicemen, and they were called *Buxaria* or *Poorivia*, and even during British rule, their services were continuously demanded (Irvine,03, p:47). Other reasons, like the Industrial revolution, natural calamities, and social and power structures, kept this activity of leaving the native place in practice. People from this area opted almost for every occupation, which provided economic stability, but in return, it also asked for a separation from the native place and, most importantly, from their loved ones and their family. Sometimes, it also demanded a permanent break from the

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<sup>2</sup>It is Visible clearly in the case of Sundari and Bidesi from the play Bidesia' (2005).

previous emotional and physical bonds. In the collective memory of the Bhojpuri people, the symbol of *Purubi Banijiya* represents danger. Its occurrence in the Bhojpuri folksongs is a metaphor that represents the danger of the foreign place and the 'other woman' that prevents the return of the migrant to his native place and his family. Dhananjay Singh presents this shared concern of wives in '*Bhojpuri Pravasi Shramika ki Sanskriti Aur Bhikhari Thakur ka Sahitya.*' (2008). A woman requests her husband, "my love please don't go to the east. *Bengalins* of that place can attract you to them. They have lovely long hair and beautiful eyes. They, with their attraction and their beauty, can enslave you. Even the water of that place is so contaminated that it can affect your health badly" (Singh 2008:50).

Through Bhojpuri folksongs of migration, we can see a clear distinction between the native place and the destination. But this distinction is not clear and direct. The songs use performance, memory, and experiences as tools to convey the difference between the two places. It also helps the migrants to articulate the narration of their expectations and the reality they are living in. The performance of migration songs in the foreign/non-native land is completely based on memory, giving the performer a chance to cherish the memory of his homeland. These songs are the cultural memories articulated through embodied performances. The body becomes the quintessential medium and destination of shared and articulated memories that are preserved not with the help of surrogate bodies but with the help of their performances and transmissions. The songs of migration, which are the Bhojpuri folksongs, are the ways to communicate the feelings and experiences of the new land. Though the performances occur in big cities like Mumbai, they always address the emotions attached to the native place. These songs are always performed publically, either as staged performances where a popular celebrity/singer

is performing or as a group of migrants sitting together after their work and singing the songs. In both cases, the performance takes place to remember the native land and to create a personal/shared space in the urban/foreign setting. The indentured emigrants, too, in the Caribbean islands, carried their musical heritage with them, and they used to perform/sing together in a group after their work. But their folk genres were predominantly text-driven (Manuel 2012:115-116).

The cities or the urban places where Bhojpuris have migrated hold great significance here because it is one of the reasons for their migration from their homeland. Exploring the city spaces and their luxuries indeed attracts these migrants, but the excellent employment possibilities and prospects of a good life are the main reasons behind it. The latter reasons have always been and always will be the main cause of the migration of any community or individual. Therefore, migration should not only be seen as an adverse effect of bad economic conditions. Migration of the Bhojpuri community to metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata does not only give them better earnings but also gives them opportunities to establish a 'home away from home'. According to KC Hardy,

“Bhojpuri-speaking migrants in the metropolises, often work as day-labourers – as taxi and rickshaw drivers and in the construction industry – and low-level positions in various service industries. These migrant workers repeatedly explain their desire to hear the sound of the language that they speak at home, even in the city: though most have left their families behind, often several young men from roughly the same area share a flat or at least spend time together, maintaining a Bhojpuri-speaking sphere in their lives” (Hardy 2010:235).

Bhojpuri migration songs bring the Bhojpuri migrants together as a public 'at home' in urban spaces by negotiating the differences between urban and rural.

## **Conclusion**

Given that there are many reasons to migrate and stay back; Bhojpuris hold tight to their song cultures in their native and a foreign land. These are the living archives based on memory which bear a cultural and historical perspective. These are lithic memories that choose performances as a medium to nurture the culture. These are verbal inheritances that reject surrogate bodies and keep themselves alive through embodied enactment. These are products of actions, interactions, and relationships between an individual and the culture, which includes actions, interactions, and relationships between an individual and the culture, including patterns of behaviour, ways of speaking, and manners of bodily comportment. They mark identities, preserve histories, adorn bodies, carry forward knowledge, and tell stories. They also reflect social worldviews or ideologies and reveal hidden coherences and contradictions. Therefore, serving as cultural memories, these song cultures preserve the past of the Bhojpuri community and give shape to their present. In this way, they become a medium of communication in the community. These memories in the context of migration are presented as their after effects on the individual, the family, society, and the geography. Migration creates a gap between the native land and the migrated destination that has been attempted to fill up with longing, waiting, and lamenting through Bhojpuri song cultures. Though the financial requirements force migrants to migrate and emigrate, they also rob them of their sense of belongingness and togetherness. They sever filial ties and social relations. Furthermore, it is these songs that help the migrants to remember and cherish their belongingness to

Bhojpuri culture. These songs become the bosom companion to the left behind wives and lovers and provide solace to the grieving mothers. These songs of migration cannot and should not be considered only as a musical composition but as a cultural reservoir that preserves and nurtures, and shapes the Bhojpuri society.

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