

**Bhikhari Thakur's Bhojpuri Folk Drama:  
A Study from Literary Perspectives**

**A Dissertation Submitted  
To  
Sikkim University**



**In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of  
Master of Philosophy  
By  
Sonu Sah**

**Department of English  
School of Language and Literature  
Sikkim University  
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6 माइल, सामदुर, तादोंग -737102  
गंगटोक, सिक्किम, भारत  
फोन-03592-251212, 251415, 251656  
टेलीफैक्स -251067  
वेबसाइट - [www.cus.ac.in](http://www.cus.ac.in)



सिक्किम विश्वविद्यालय  
SIKKIM UNIVERSITY

6<sup>th</sup> Mile, Samdur, Tadong -737102  
Gangtok, Sikkim, India  
Ph. 03592-251212, 251415, 251656  
Telefax: 251067  
Website: [www.cus.ac.in](http://www.cus.ac.in)

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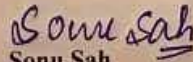
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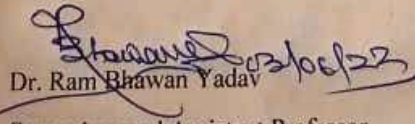
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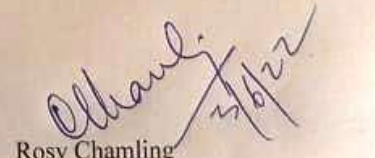
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Sonu Sah

Roll No: 20MPEN06  
Registration No: 20/M.Phil/ENG/06  
Department of English  
School of Language and Literature  
Sikkim University

  
Dr. Ram Bhawan Yadav  
Supervisor and Assistant Professor  
School of Language and Literature  
Assistant Professor/एसिस्टेंट प्रोफेसर  
Department of English/अंग्रेजी विभाग  
Sikkim University/सिक्किम विश्वविद्यालय  
Sikkim University

  
Rosy Chamling  
Head of the Department  
School of Language and Literature  
Head  
Department of English  
Department of English  
Sikkim University

6 माइल, साम्दुर, तादोंग -737102  
गंगटोक, सिक्किम, भारत  
फोन-03592-251212, 251415, 251656  
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वेबसाइट - [www.cus.ac.in](http://www.cus.ac.in)



सिक्किम विश्वविद्यालय  
SIKKIM UNIVERSITY

6<sup>th</sup> Mile, Samdur, Tadong -737102  
Gangtok, Sikkim, India  
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Date: 03.06.22

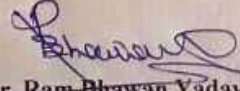
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All the assistance and help received during the course of the investigation have been duly acknowledged by him.

We recommend this thesis to be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
Dr. Rosy Chamling  
Head of Department  
Department of English  
School of Language and Literature  
Department of English  
Sikkim University

  
Dr. Ram Bhawan Yadav  
Supervisor and Assistant Professor  
Department of English  
School of Language and Literature  
Department of English  
Sikkim University

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Ph. 03592-251212, 251415, 251656  
Telefax : 251067  
Website : [www.cus.ac.in](http://www.cus.ac.in)

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**“Bhikhari Thakur’s Bhojpuri Folk Drama : A Study from Literary Perspectives”**

Submitted by Sonu Sah under the supervision of Dr. Ram Bhawan Yadav, Assistant Professor, Department of English, School of Languages and Literature, Sikkim University, Gangtok.

*Sonu Sah*

(Sonu Sah)

Signature of Research Scholar

*Dr. Ram Bhawan Yadav*  
08/06/22  
Assistant Professor/सहायक प्रोफेसर  
(Dr. Ram Bhawan Yadav)  
Department of English/अंग्रेजी विभाग  
Signature of Supervisor/निदेशक

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Sikkim University

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**Sonu Sah**

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# Chapter-One

## Introduction

### 1.0 Introduction:

Tradition and practices of folk literature has its origin from the inception of humanity. It has been assumed that the birth and development of language is symbolic in its nature. The history of mankind is based in dialectical contradiction, dividing it between dominant and dominated classes with intention to provide benefit to certain class, caste and creed of the people. Dr Vasudev Sharan Agarwal a noted thinker on the history of folk literature reflects in his book *Prithvi Putra* (2018) that, ‘there is a need to rework on the works of Vyas, Valmiki, Kalidas, Tulsidas, Charak and Panini from the point of view of janpada folk languages and dialects are mother tongues of the masses.’ The significance of folk languages can’t be overlooked in relation to the postmodern societies. The dialects of folk languages are significant to understand the validation of human values in art, history, culture, sociology and other disciplines of humanities. In contemporary time folk literature should be evaluated placing its authors in the socio-cultural background to which he/she belongs. Rahul Sankratayayan says, ‘janpada dialects are the live languages of hard-working peasants and labourers. The synthesis of folk literature is still going on among them. They are producing folk literature even today’.

Bhikhari Thakur is a well-known literary personality who has contributed to the corpus of Bhojpuri literature eminently. Rahul Sankratayayan mentions, ‘why do people like Bhikhari Thakurs literature. Why does the number of audiences for his plays reach ten to fifteen thousand on an average?’ It is evidently clear that Thakur’s plays and songs have massive appeals to the people belonging to oppressed class of the

society. His play and songs, to some extent, are similar to the teachings of Kabeer, Meera, Soordas, Tulsidas in the spiritual and societal concerns. Thakur's play incorporates various kinds of social issues in his plays that connect him to the common masses and has established his popularity in Bhojpuri speaking regions.

In order to understand folk drama of Bhikhari Thakur, it is essential to take into account folk literature, its definition, history, origin and its form into account. This part of the introduction briefly presents an overview on folk literature including the observation of some critics and theorist on it. According to 'Folk Literature' of Encyclopaedia Britannica edited by Stith Thomson (2021)

Folk literature, which is also known as folklore, the lore (traditional knowledge and beliefs) of cultures having no written language. It is transmitted by narrating story from one generation to another and includes like written literature, of both prose and verse narratives, poems and songs, dramas, myths, rituals, proverbs, riddles, and the like. (2021:4)

The above observation of Stith Thomson appears to tell that all the peoples in the past and present have contributed to the growth and development of folk literature directly or indirectly. Until 4000 BCE all kind of literature was in the oral form but in the years between 4000 and 3000 BCE. The art of writing started taking it shape in Egypt and Mesopotamia Civilisation. There are references and record related to law, business and written literature produced between aforesaid period. Stith Thomson further says in this context which is very important:

As the area in which the habitual use of writing extended over Asia, North Africa, and the Mediterranean lands and eventually over



much of the whole world, a rapid growth in the composition of written literature occurred, so that in certain parts of the world, literature in writing has to a large extent become the normal form of expression for storytellers and poets. (2021: 5)

From the above discussion, this is clear that in the centuries when the world has acquired writing skill, there has existed unwritten records which were used by illiterate people simultaneously.

### **1.2 Folk Literature: Origin and Development:**

There are no written accounts related to origin of folk literature and its languages. the literature available today have primitive and progressive elements in it which can be understood ranging over thousands of years. So, there can only be speculation regarding the existence of oral literature not to its exact origin.

### **1.3 Folk Literature and Oral tradition:**

Folk literature and its feature of orality is directly connected with the acquired spoken skill of the people. Stith has very minutely underlined it in his article:

Each group of people, no matter how small or large, has handled its folk literature in its own way. Depending as it does upon the transmission from person to person and being subject to the skill or the lack of skill of those who pass it on and to the many influences, physical or social, that consciously or unconsciously affect a tradition, what may be observed is a history of continual change. (2021:7)

Any item of folk literature has the tendency of stability and transformation at a time. And in this process, it goes through a number of changes in it. But this is also important

to keep in the mind folk listening to or engaging in its oral literature have entirely distinct levels and interpretation to the scholars. There are two contexts to observe changing human movement in folk literature: firstly, a writer, singer or a story teller may do certain kinds of experiment in its literary form and can change its existing form in order to make it easier and more comfortable for the people. Secondly, numerous items of folk literature, because of historic event, foreign influence or lack of talented practitioners of the tradition became less important and consequently die out from oral tradition.

#### **1.4 Elements of Folk Literature:**

The first and foremost element of folk literature is its orality, orality that is opposite to the prominent features of written literature. Written literature is in manuscripts and books and can be preserved the way author produced it or left it and no changes can be included in the texture of the book or manuscript. With the help of these manuscript and books, thoughts, emotions, observation and mode of style can be tested without regard to time and distance. With oral literature these experiments and experiences is not possible. It basically depends on speaking, singing, listening and relying upon the existence of a living culture who can carry out this tradition. If any item of folk literature lived within human memory, it will consequently be lost. The speaker or singer or folk literature have huge responsibility to carry it out from generation to generation with the help of the performances and cultural practices related to it. In all the cultures there are people who can carry it out but there are those known as performers are considered more competent and skilful to execute it. There are many other elements of folk literature which can be briefly underlined as follow:

- It passes from one person to another person: one generation to another generation with addition, substitution and continuation in it.
- It is performed on the basis of human memory. so, humans' ability to remember and render it is also significant.
- It is considered as embodiment of cultural values, traditions and customs.
- It is the reflection of customs, belief, behaviours, dances, music and other non-literary nuances.
- It has all the possibility to contain human race, civilisation, culture and their progressive forms.

### **1.5 Folk Literature: Forms and Techniques:**

Forms and technique of folk literature has closer link with the kind of community and masses for which it was produced. Its transmission from one generation to another: one community to another make drastic changes in its mode of delivery and performances. The earliest forms in which folk songs, poetry, drama etc was composed, had its root in epic tradition. But with the passage of time the forms and techniques of folk literature have acquired many changes in their manifestation. The form and technique in the contemporary folk literature is the subject of experiment which is done by folklorist for the comfort of their people or community. The larger percentage of folk literature are influence by proverbs, riddles and charms and vernaculars words and sentences of the community.

### **1.6 Folk Drama:**

Belonging only remotely to oral literature is folk drama. Dances, many of them elaborate, with masks portraying animal or human characters, and sometimes containing speeches or songs, are to be found in many parts of the preliterate world.

Though the action and the dramatic imitation is always the most prominent part of such performances, these may be part of a ritual and involve speaking or chanting of sacred texts learned and passed on by word of mouth.

The ancient Greek mysteries, as well as secret societies even down to the present, have retained this method of transmitting dramatically their traditions and their teachings and commentary. Some dramatic rituals indeed were not secret but part of a public cult. Thus, in ancient Greece the feast of Dionysus led eventually to Classical Greek drama, and in the Middle Ages the dramatic celebrations of the Christian church developed into the medieval folk dramas and at long last into the literary drama of the Renaissance and later.

## II

### **1.7 Bhojpuri Literature:**

Bhojpuri Literature is a part of literature written in different dialects of Bhojpuri Language. Bhojpuri as a language started to originate during the 601 AD-700 AD and complement and refined over the time period of 1300 to 1200 BC. Writings of Siddha Saint and Charyapada were the initial writing of this group of literature. When holy man and philanthropist from different parts of world started to choose amalgamation of different language for their writings, which leads to the development of various literary heritage in Bhojpuri Language and literature which date backs to Medieval period. Bhikhari Thakur's *Bidesiya* and Lorikayan which is the story of *Veer Lorik* were famous Bhojpuri folk drama of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

### **1.8 Periods of Bhojpuri Literature:**

Periods of Bhojpuri Literature is broadly divided into three major periods. Starting from very beginning is:

### **1.8.1 Initial period (1947 to 1961):**

Initial period of Bhojpuri Literature includes first published short story collection by Vimlanand Saraswati, *Jehal ke Sanadi* in (1948). Another important work of this time is first Bhojpuri social and love story based novel *Bindiya* by Ram Nath Pandey published in 1956.

### **1.8.2 Middle Period (1961 and 1975):**

In this middle period of Bhojpuri Literature approximately ten novels were published. Some of the most important novel of this period are '*Jeevan Saah*', published in 1964, '*Tharuhat ke Babua aur Bahuriya*', published in 1965, '*Semar ke phool*', published in 1966, '*Rahanidaar Beti*', published in 1966, '*Ego subah ego saanjh*', published in 1967 and '*Sunnar kaka*', published in 1976. Most of these are social drama while the first one is called a regional novel which deals with the life of *Tharu* tribal people.

### **1.8.3 Modern Period (After 1975):**

In the modern period which starts after 1975 till now, more than thirty novels have been published. Some of the most notable of these are *Phulsunghi* (1977), *Bhor Muskail* (1978), *Ghar-tola-gaon* (1979), *Jinigike raah* (1982), *Darad ke dahar* (1983), *Achhoot* (1986), *Imiritiya Kaki* (1997), *Amangal hari* (1998), *Awa lavati chalin ja* (2000), *Adhe aadh* (2000) etc. in which *Phulsunghi* by Kapil Pandey is one of the best historical novels written in Bhojpuri language and literature and translated into English by Gautam Choubey. Another important work of this time is by a critic Vivek Rai '*Amangal Hari*' published in 1998. At the same time Ramesh Chandra Jha has published his most renowned novel '*Surma Sagun Bichare Na*'. This is the period of Bhojpuri Literature in which first novel *Purvi Ke Dhah* by National Book Trust was

published, written by Jauhar Safiavadi and launched by a renowned Hindi critic Namvar Singh at Chappra. In this period only Bhojpuri poet Manoj Bhawuk has been awarded prestigious Bhartiya Bhasha Parishad Award in 2006 for his Collection of Ghazal *Tasveer zindagi ke*, who has also written a book on the History of Bhojpuri Cinema.

According to an article of E- Magazine, '*Bhojpuri Literature*', Bhojpuri is a regional language, widely used for the communication in the part of Northern, Central and Eastern province of India. It is spoken in the Western region of Bihar, the North-Western region of Jharkhand and the Purvanchal region of Uttar Pradesh, as well as in neighbouring region of southern plains of Nepal. Bhojpuri is also very prominent spoken language in foreign countries like in Guyana, Suriname, Fiji, Trinidad, Tobago and Mauritius where Bhojpuri is the second most spoken language after English. Government of India, while observing census had disagreed and had deemed Bhojpuri to be a dialect of Hindi. However, presently, the government of India has contrived to grant Bhojpuri a 'statutory' status as a national scheduled language. Bhojpuri goes into halves when sharing vocabulary with Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu and other Indo-Aryan languages of Northern India. Bhojpuri and several intimately related languages, including Maithili and Magahi, are together known as the 'Bihari languages. They are part of the Eastern Zone group of Indo-Aryan languages, which also includes Bengali and Oriya. As such, Bhojpuri literature bears an uncanny amalgamation of these various ancient lineages and their derived languages, unifying many literatures from its border.

There exist numerous dialects of Bhojpuri, encompassing three or four in Eastern Uttar Pradesh exclusively. The scholar and a multilingual persona Mahapandit Rahul Sankrityayan actually had composed some works in Bhojpuri. There have existed other composers, who have penned in the language to take Bhojpuri literature to further

unbelievable heights, but the number is rather small as compared to the number of speakers. The nationalist writer and scholar Swami Sadananda Saraswati, had belonged to the Bhojpur region of Uttar Pradesh.

Bhojpuri's 'gradually gathering' impact upon Indian literature is evident in that it had turned into one of the founding groundworks of the maturation of the official language of Independent India, Hindi, in the past century. Bhartendu Harishchandra, who is hugely venerated as the 'father of literary Hindi', was profoundly influenced by the tone and style of Bhojpuri in his native region. Further maturation and germination of Hindi was taken up by high-flying laureates such as Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi and Munshi Premchand from the Bhojpuri speaking region. The trailblazing Dr Krishna Dev Upadhyaya from Ballia district virtually had committed sixty years in researching and cataloguing Bhojpuri literature in the form of folklore. Dr H S Upadhyaya had authored the book *Relationships of Hindu Family* as portrayed in Bhojpuri folksongs (1996). Together, they have catalogued more than thousands of Bhojpuri folksongs, riddles and proverbs from the numerous districts, Purvanchal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Chotta Nagpur districts near West Bengal. Bhojpuri literature has always persisted to be contemporary in fashion, style and mode. The literature had served as more of a body of folklore with folk music and poems persisting throughout. Literature in Bhojpuri in written format had begun in the early twentieth century.

During the rule of British Empire in India, then known as the 'Northern Frontier Province Language,' Bhojpuri language had adopted as a patriotic tone and after Independence it turned into a 'language of the community'. During the later periods, following the dispirited and depressed economic development of the Bhojpuri speaking region, the literature in Bhojpuri was more tilted and inclined towards the humanitarian sentiments and conflicts and crusades of life. In the modern-day era, Bhojpuri literature,

folklore, art and culture are marked by the stellar presence of writers, poets, politicians and actors that have lent it an innovative and novel dimension, a kind of ‘revivification’. Notable contributors to this trend consist of Anand Sandhidoot, Pandey Kapil, Ashok Dwivedi, Bhikari Thakur, and others in India. The Bhojpuri-speaking region has been historically served with its rich and affluent tradition of creating leaders for building post-independence India, just like the celebrated and respected first President of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad. Bhojpuri literature was also instrumental in possessing further more personas, following the first President, as in several eminent politicians and humanitarians like Dr Krishna Dev Upadhyaya, who never did fall short of ‘intellectual prominence’, which is evident in its literary masterworks. Bhikhari Thakur, acknowledged as the ‘Shakespeare of Bhojpuri’, has also written and directed theatre plays of which *Bidesiya* is most renowned of all.

In the present era, Bhojpuri literature is marked by the company and attendance of writers and poets like Anand Sandhidoot, Pandey Kapil and Ashok Dwivedi, Editor of the popular Bhojpuri magazine *Paati* (Ballia), Onkareshwar Pandey (writer and Editor of world’s first Bhojpuri news weekly, from Delhi) and performed bulks of work in complying with the Bhojpuri culture and language and documenting the bonded and apprenticed labourers’ arrival on the island. In the United States, Sailesh Mishra, another present-day Bhojpuri campaigner, poet and writer has been acknowledged and respected as the founder of Bhojpuri Association of North America (BANA) in 2005 and for his contributions in boosting and pushing Bhojpuri language and culture across the globe. Sailesh Mishra is also popularly admired as the Creator of Bhojpuri Express Network (BEN), for unifying the online Bhojpuri community on the Internet. Beyond such names, a passionate Bhojpuri preacher, Avinash Tripathi had established Bhojpuri Association of India (BHAI) in 2008 to symbolise the voice of Bhojpuri all through the



world. Newly linked up and major part of this Bhojpuri literature and its advancement is the Bhojpuri Sahitya Sammellan magazine, with Arunesh Niran as its editor and Dr Uday Prakash Pandey serving as co-editor. These people had been endeavouring to reinvent the glory of reinviting the links of Bhojpuri of Mauritius and India. There are similar such more efforts to benefit the deserved value for Bhojpuri.

### **1.9 The Nautanki Theatres/ Bhojpuri Nataks:**

The nautanki theatre is popularly known as the ‘natak’ performance in the Bhojpuri region. It is one of the essential elements of the popular folk culture in Western Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Apart from that, there are variations of the nautanki theatre in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and partly in Haryana and Maharashtra. It got immense popularity among the people, especially the working-class people, because they used this as a reprieve from their day-to-day work. But the popularity of the nautanki theatre reduced from the late 1980s to early the 1990s. Several elements came up to fill the gap that resulted in the decrease in the demand for nautanki among ordinary people. The changing nature of migration also created a new section of migrant workers, and the economic liberalization allowed them to be introduced to neo-cultural media, such as video films, new Bhojpuri films, cable televisions and mobile phones. To compete with these new cultural elements, the nautanki theatre changed its course and tried to ‘modernize’ itself.

### **1.10 History of Nautanki Theatre:**

The word ‘nautanki’ has evolved from ‘natak’ or drama. As Kathryn Hansen quotes from the Manak Hindi-Kosh (1964), the nautanki is a “type of folk drama performed among the common people, whose plot generally romantic or marital, and whose dialogues are usually in the question-answer form in verse”. Hansen believes the same.

Her book, *Grounds for Play: The Nautanki theatres of North India*, tries to prove the derogation of a traditionally popular folk theatre to sexual innuendos and bad skits. She refers to the earlier glory of the nautanki theatre of Kanpur, Hathras and Banaras. There are some other references to the source of the nautanki theatre, as Hansen mentions in her book. The Sanskrit drama, known as ‘nataka’, can also be a source of nautanki theatre. Kathryn Hansen admitted in his famous book that there would be;

some debates regarding nautanki theatres but she did not address these debates. However, she accepted that the nautankis a form of ‘intermediary theatre’ because of its journeys between the boundaries of languages, religions and regions. The relation between migration and the nautanki theatre comes here. Apart from pleasing the wealthy landlords, the main aim of the local nautanki theatre groups is to perform in front of migrant labourers because, according to some of the nautanki theatre actors and directors, the migrant labourers have more money than the local people. After the abolition of the zamindari system, the small businessmen and migrant labourers are the two most important groups who are the potential audiences of this performance. The transformation of the nautanki theatre happened much before the 1990s due to migration from the village to the big cities. (1993:12)

Satyendra Kumar on the other hand in his famous writing on Nautanki theatre *Badalta Gaoñ Badalta Dehaat* (2018) described these changes in the rural and semi-urban areas of Bhojpur in a very different but subtle way: “The changes occurred not only due to economic reasons but also because of a huge transformation in class and caste dimensions and changes in agrarian relations in the context of out migration from Bhojpur.” (2018: 4) Kumar’s argument showed the reason behind the transformation of

nautanki theatre in the Bhojpur region. Both Hansen and Deepti Priya Malhotra, the two leading researchers on Nautanki have failed to understand these changes. Malhotra strongly criticized the nautanki performances in his famous biography of Gulab Bai, one of the famous actresses of all time from Nautanki theatre, *Gulab Bai: The Queen of Nautanki Theatre* in 1990s and further Malhotra marked the new traditions of nautanki in the 1990s as “obscenity” and said:

the new form of nautanki theatre was everything except the traditional nautanki theatre. This new theatrical form, according to her, had transformed into a space where young girls dress in ‘short-cuts’ and earn a thousand rupees a night for moving on the stage. They do not know singing or acting. Yet the public wants them!

Rajat Kanti Sur in his famous writing, *Culture, Migration and the Time of an Epidemic: The Nautanki Theatres/ Bhojpuri Nataks in the 1990s*, recorded Atul Yadvansi’s statement on the same debate, who is one of the popular names in nautanki theatre in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and who agreed with Malhotra. In a long interview on the history, glory and the decline of the traditional nautanki theatre, Yadvansi criticised:

the new nautanki or Bhojpuri nataks as one of the reasons behind the degradation of the nautanki theatre tradition. He dismissed the new Bhojpuri nataks as nautankis and advised to keep a safe distance from such distorted performances. He also said that the nautanki theatres had a long tradition which reflects the glory of the Bhojpuri region. He also claimed that the quality of nautanki deteriorated with the new trends and the new migration from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and there was no such connection between migration and nautanki except some dramas written

by Bhikhari Thakur and others to remember the coolie migrants.  
(Sur,2020:2-3)

According to Yadvansi, relationship between migration and nautanki theatre was limited in a specific form of nautanki theatre and he opined:

The name of this specific form is Bidesiya. Bhikhari Thakur, one of the popular and well-known folk dramatists in Bihar, gave this name for a set of particular nautankis dedicated to the migrant labour from Hindi-speaking states. The wife of the coolie migrant labourer was the central character of Bidesiya. (Sur, 2020: 2)

Further in this context Yadvansi argued that the entire folk drama of Bidesiya was based on the grief of a wife, her lust and anger towards her husband. Thakur mostly used two traditional forms of folk songs, 'Lorikayan' and 'Jansari', to describe the crisis of the migrant wife. One of the famous songs of the Bhikhari Thakur's *Bidesiya* showed the impact of migration in the popular nautanki theatres.

“Jabna junebhail swami se sumangali ta,

Janli je bhagjagal ho ram.

E swamiji, naihar se neha turi dihli tay,

Sasura suhavan lagal ho ram.

E swamiji, gharaba-bhitarbabaithaiketá,

Gail kabna mulukwa bhagal ho ram.

E swamiji, khatawa mein patawa peithat tay

Sunike agraiti pagal ho ram” (Sur, 2020: 4)

The above quotation paraphrased as, “when Sumagali, the heroine or wife of the migrant labourer, fled from her father’s house with you, o my beloved husband, your house becomes the only shelter for her. Now, how could you go to another place and leave me? The house looks so empty without you. I am getting mad [for you] for having to read your letters from abroad.” Yadvansi’s logic for Bidesiya was one form of nautanki theatre which has lost its relevance. Otherwise, there was no relation between nautanki and migration. The original nautanki has some other meaning. In this context Sur acclaimed Yadvansi’s perception wrong.

Brahma Prakash, in his recent book *Cultural Labour: Conceptualizing the ‘Folk Performance’ in India* (2019), on the cultural practices of labouring communities, described nautanki and said Nautanki is: “one of the specific forms related to migration. It can be possible that there are different forms of nautanki.” Prakash attempts to show the established relationship between culture and labouring communities. He takes the help of different folk performances like ‘Bhuiyan, Bidesiya, Dugola’ etc. to understand the changes taking place due to the transformation of the labour forces. The discussion on nautanki performance while talking about the transformations of Bidesiya performances hints at the changes that took place in the nautanki or Bhojpuri natak performances due to new trends in labour migration. Although Prakash accepted that; “there are changes in the various cultural forms related to labouring communities, especially migrant labourers in northern India”, but he did not clearly state how the new trends of migration in the neoliberal economy have played a role in this transformation.

Prakash’s book makes it clear that there are some relations between migration and the new nautanki theatre which Atul Yadvansi declined to accept. But Sanjay Kumar Singh in his book, *Bhojpuri Lok-Sanskriti ebam Hindustani Sangeet*, accepted the moving nature of the nautanki theatre and claimed that it was a mix of traditional

folk drama and homogenized Persian and Corinthian theatres. Singh quoted Pt Mukti Bhadra Dikshit, a dramatist and scholar of the Banaras Hindu University, and said

that modern nautanki theatre evolved with the emergence of modern cities (Calcutta, Bombay, Patna, etc.). There were different schools of modern nautanki theatre. Therefore, there were several dissimilarities in the nautanki performances from one place to another. It differed between the characters of the population from place to place and built a strong relationship with migration. (2010: 67)

Singh admitted that the decline of the new nautanki theatres was due to the growing popularity of radio, television and new Hindi and Bhojpuri cinemas. Thereafter, the nautanki became full of sexual innuendos because of audience demand.

In the debates between the old and new nautanki, Atul Yadvansi's intention to mark the nautanki as traditional popular culture and his rejection of the nautanki theatres of the 1990s can be explained as the conflict between the ideas of popular and mass culture. Transitions of both popular and mass culture into the common concept of popular pleasure in postmodern times have been reflected in the modern nautanki theatres. But the modern nautanki theatre has a socio-political context that one cannot ignore.

### **1.11 Bhikhari Thakur:**

Bhikhari Thakur was born on 18 December 1887 at the village of Kutubpur in the district of Saran, Bihar. His mother's name was Shivakali Devi and father was Dalsingar Thakur. He belonged to a nai (barber) caste, one of the most backward castes in Indian society. The traditional work of his caste was cutting and trimming hair and assisting brahmins in marriage as well as in death ceremonies. They were also used by dikus

(village messengers) to send and distribute ceremonial (in cases of marriages and deaths) and other messages in the village and nearby areas. They acted like postal workers in the traditional-feudal village setup. In one of his works he says: “Jati Hajjam mor Kutubpur mokam. Jati peshabate, bidya naheen bate babujee” (I am a barber by caste and I come from Kutubpur. My caste is merely my work. It is not my education kind sir.) In this he speaks about his own caste and regrets that his caste people are distributing letters to all without knowing the importance of the letter, or the alphabets. He clearly understood the power of education and continuously chided his people for being illiterate and bounded by jajmani (patron-client) relations with the dikus. Like many around him, he went to Kharagpur in Bengal for employment; he earned enough but was not satisfied with the job. Ramlila (a form of theatre popular in north India) had impressed him early in his life. However, the artist in him wanted to see more of the world. He reached Puri in Odisha in search probably of his own self and his volition in life. By the time he returned from such wanderings, he was a changed man.

### **1.12 Career:**

Bhikhari Thakur is best known for the creation of the twentieth century theatre form Bidesiya. Bhikari Thakur was a barber (a backward Caste) who abandoned home and hearth to form a group of actors who dealt with issues of confrontation: between the traditional and the modern, between urban and rural, between the haves and the have-nots. Appreciative native Bhojpuri audiences consider Bhikari Thakur as the incomparable founding father, propagator and exponent par excellence of this form. He was a folk poet, a folk singer, a folk dancer and actor. The narrative of Bidesiya has been made so effective through the medium of vibrant dances and pleasing music and based on such lifelike stories that it presents a realistic picture of the poor joint families of the region. Bhikhari Thakur after abandoning home lived the life of a crusader,

fighting against the archaic social order. No longer caring for his livelihood, he organised a dance troupe in his village and began to play Ramlila and sing songs, and involved himself in social work. He took to folk art and addressed social problems in the language and idiom of the masses. He presented his works in the Bhojpuri dialect in a manner that was appealing to the masses. His popularity soared and he rose to become the most popular Bhojpuri folk singer, poet, writer and director and the exponent of a popular style of theatre, named subsequently after his magnum opus, *Bidesiya*. Against the background of cultural disintegration under colonialism, he tried to restore the Bhojpuri art tradition and give it an identity.

### **1.13 Works:**

He has written as well as directed and performed ten major works; beginning with a non-serious *Birha-Bahar* based on the dhobi-dhobin dance he saw somewhere. His major productions include: *Bidesiya*, *Bhai-Birodh*, *Beti-Viyog* or *Beti-Bechwa* (Daughter-Seller), *Kalyuga-Prem* (Modern Love), *Radheshyam-Bahar* (based on Krishna-Radha love), *Ganga-Asnan* (To Bathe in Ganges), *Bidhwa-Vilap*, *Putrabadh* (Killing of Son), *Gabarghichor* (based on an illegitimate child), and *Nanad-Bhojai*. *Bidesiya* (The Foreigner) Perhaps his best known and popular work in terms of modern production, *Bidesiya* is the story of a man who has to leave behind his village and family to seek a job in the city. Based on that 'Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi' directed by Sudhir Mishra. *Bhai-Birodh* (Brothers Opposition) This play deals with the theme of joint family, which is a very prominent feature of Bihar's rural society. Three brothers are separated due to lack of confidence and respect for each other on the instigation of a person outside their family. However, at the end they realise the importance of living together but not before a lot of harm had actually taken place. *Beti-Biyog Or Beti-Bechwa* (The Daughter Seller) This play is considered a very progressive play. Bhikari



Thakur through this play criticises the widespread custom of selling young girls in marriage to much older men. This custom prevailed in Bhojpuri-speaking areas until recently. The protagonist is a young girl whose father sells her to an older person.

*Vidhwa-Vilap* (The Wailing Widow) The story is about how widows are treated within their homes. It is seen as an extension of *Beti-Bechwa* for more often than not young girls married to old men; spend most of their lives as widows. The story reflects the hatred and seclusion a widow has to suffer in Brahminical society for no fault of her own.

*Kalyuga-Prem* (Modern Love) Through this play Bhikari Thakur talks about the bad effects of drinking. The lone wage earner of the family is a drunkard and often visits prostitutes. This extravagance soon leads to the pauperisation of his family. His whole family including his wife and son suffers tremendously because of the bad habits of the head of the family. Later in the play the wife and son decide to confront him but to no avail. Later being fed up with his father's immoral ways, the son runs away from the family and goes to Calcutta to earn money to eventually return and rescue his mother.

*Ganga-Asnan* (To Bathe in The Ganges) Malechu is from a village. His wife wants to go to bathe in the Ganga but his mother is too old to do so. The wife finally prevails and they set out but not after loading much luggage for his old mother to carry on the way. Before they reach the Ganga, a quarrel ensues and Malechu beats up his mother. At the banks of the Ganga, his mother gets lost in a fair. In the same fair, his wife is seduced by a sadhu with the promise of giving her a son. Malechu finds her in the nick of time and epiphany dawns on the both of them who then find the mother and beg her forgiveness. The story is a critique both of the distance between parents and their children in a situation where old parents are completely dependent on their children and also of the tantric culture of sadhus who most often are conmen.

*Gabarghichor*: It's the story of an illegitimate son of *Garbari* and *Galij's* wife. *Galij*

returns from the town to find the village gossiping about his son's parentage. He wants to take *Dichor* back to Calcutta with him. But both *Galij's* wife and *Garbari* intervene. A quarrel ensues as each of them claims *Dichor* as their own. The panchayat is called and they decide that *Dichor* be divided into three pieces. A man comes and maps *Dichors* body and agrees to do the job for four annas a piece. The mother relents refusing to pay and giving up all claim on the son. The panchayat sees the light and *Dichor* is allowed to stay with his mother. *Putrabadh* (Killing of Son) It's the story of killing of a son by father on instigation of step mother for hiding his own sins in the absence of his own mother. *Nanad-Bhowjai* (Sister-In-Laws), It's the story of relation between sisters-in-law and about ritual of 'Gauna' (In which girl were married in their childhood with a young person and left in their parents' home for growing up till maturity. Once girl matures, husband take her to his own home.) This is for one type of security reason of family, which bounds a girl for life time. And she can't be free to decide or do what she likes about her partner. But in some cases, husband didn't come easily to take girl. And life of girl becomes miserable and painful because of unfulfilled dreams and desires. And same happened with the girl in this story as well.

#### **1.14 Later Use of Works:**

After Thakur's death in 1971, his theatre style became neglected. Nevertheless, over time it has taken on a new shape and his 'Launda Naach' style has become popular. Bihar is perhaps the only region in the world where a man wearing women's clothing dances like a woman. As such it is publicly acceptable.

#### **1.15 Literature Review:**

Bhikhari Thakurs works have been tried to be studied by many scholars of Humanities and social sciences. For instance, Tayyab Hussain, in "*Bhartiya Sahitya ke Nirmata:*

*Bhikhari Thakur*” (Founder of Indian literature: Bhikhari Thakur) has tried to understand him in the context of Indian literature or folk literature as a literary researcher. And the history that followed, especially about Bhikhari Thakurs and his work in the nineteenth and twentieth century were studied and presented by so many scholars.

Rekha Kumari in her thesis on the topic, “*Bhikhari Thakur ki Rachnao mei Samajik Chetna aewam Nari Sashaktikaran Ak mulyankan*”(Analysis of Social awareness and women empowerment in the work of Bhikhari Thakur ) deals with the Life of Bhikhari Thakur, Introduction of his work, social awareness in the work, as mentioned in title itself, Women Empowerment, Bhikhari Thakur as bridge between traditional and modern society and at last on the language, art and style in his work. But she is much focused on his work as social activist than a literary person.

In the same way Sachi Mishra from BHU, Department of Hindi, presented her research on the topic, “*Bhikhari Thakur ki Rachnao ka Samajik Sanskritic adhyan*” (Socio-Cultural study of Bhikhari Thakur works) in which she dealt with socio-cultural aspect in the writing of Bhikhari Thakur, Bidesiya as Culture of Migrants, Language and narration and contribution of Bhikhari Thakur in the Folk theatre/drama. This is almost same as previous work with slight difference in subject matter.

Another notable work is of Sandeep Rai on the topic, “*Play and Songs of Bhikhari Thakur: A study in the Sociology of Literature*”, in which he made theoretical Exploration into Bhojpuri Literature, reflects on the relationship between Society and Literature, Bidesiya art form and at last Socio-historical study of Bhojpuri region.

Another notable research has been done by Gaurav Tripathi on the topic, “*The Characteristic’s form of subconscious effect in the play of lokvartakar Bhikhari Thakur*”, in which he dealt with psychoanalytic study of his play.

Another notable research has been done by Brahma Prakash Singh from University of London, on the topic, “*The Performance of Cultural Labour: A Conceptual Framework for understanding Indian Folk Performance*”, in which he talked about Bidesiya as theatre of migrant labourers and about condition of Bidesiya artist.

Another notable work done by Jainendra Dost from Department of Performing Arts, JNU on the topic “*Naach Launda Naach or Bidesiya: Politics of (re)naming*”, In this article, he had look at the social politics of name-changing or (re)naming of the folk theatre form of Bihar, India called Naach where he attempted to analyse how caste-class structures and gender politics have led to the (re)naming of Naach as Launda Naach and as Bidesiya.

Another notable researcher in this field is by Dhananjay Singh who has wrote many articles and research paper for different newspapers and journals on Bhikhari Thakur. Like “*The image of Women in folk Tradition of Migration*”, in the journal of migration affairs, “*Bhojpuri ke Bharatendu Bhikhari Thakur ki loknatya-bhasa*” in Magazine ‘Bhasa’ published by Central Directorate of Hindi, under Government of India etc.

So many research paper articles were written on Bhikhari Thakur and on his work but most of the work were done on socio -cultural aspect of his writing, it may be from Humanity or Social sciences departments. Most of the work focus on theme of migration, women empowerment, social evils, casteism and Bidesiya art form which is

not sufficient because Bhikhari Thakur being as a literary figure need to be dealt in the realm of literature first than as social activist and propagator. And I didn't find any literary research on him specially in the context of English Literature, as he is known by the name, "Shakespeare of Bhojpuri Literature" and not only as regional writer but as world writer. We need to study him not only as folk writer but as international writer whose name and work doesn't know any national boundary.

### **1.16 Research Gap:**

There are many other critical works, which have been done on Bhikhari Thakur and on his work from different perspectives, but there is a need to re-examine it from new perspectives. Most of the works, which have been done earlier is focused on the representation of Bhikhari Thakur as Social activist, Social Reformer, Writer of Migrant in different field of studies such as in Sociology, Political Science, Performing Arts and Hindi Literature but in the field of literary research, especially in English Literature it is not that much popularized till now. However, through the analysis of literary texts(play) representing it in an alternative way we can offer a new perspective on it. It will be therefore worth pursuing for further research to have a better understanding of the Bhikhari Thakur as a literary person and generating new idea about his play, contemporality, its narration and dramatic style as well as overall study of his play.

### **1.17 Research Question:**

Following Bhikhari Thakur's folk drama the present research proposes following questions as research problems:

What are the stylistics features of Bhikhari Thakurs folk drama, which make him and his drama so popular, that he never felt lack of audience at any time?

What are the features of language which was used in his folk drama by Bhikhari Thakur, that make him so intimate with his audience, that everywhere people able to relate with his drama very easily?

What are the socio-cultural aspects of Bhikhari Thakur folk drama? What are the dominant themes in the folk drama of Bhikhari Thakur?

How these themes were relevant for contemporary society?

How his folk drama is related to other regional folk play such as Ramlila, Rāsālīlā, Jatra and Classical Sanskrit play?

### **1.18 Aims and Objectives:**

- a) The objective of this research is to understand the folk drama of Bhikhari Thakur through its various artistic representations in literature. This research would attempt a Stylistic literary analysis of the selected texts.
- b) In this research the relationship between society and literature has also been explored. His work has often been seen as revolutionary, and resistant towards the ideologies of the dominant class.
- c) This research is also trying to argue that the socio-political realities depicted in Thakur's work gain popularity not merely because they depict social ills inflicted upon the marginalized sections of society (especially women and Dalit's) and are thus resistant towards the dominant norms but because his work resorts to the propagandist and entertainment spheres. They undertake a political motive but fall in the realm of cultural pleasure.
- d) This research is also tried to analyse the Bidesiya or Launda Naach art form of Bhikhari Thakur through his play.

e) This research is also tried to analyse socio-political cultural aspects in his play, which is always dominant in his work. Because what he writes, it directly came from society and for the society and also represented by the society (common people).

### **1.19 Research Methods and Methodology:**

The methodology to conduct this research is close reading selected folk drama by Bhikhari Thakur. The reading is following Stylistic Literary analysis and also by locating these texts in the society that produced it. This reading has been conducted parallel to the reading of the socio-cultural aspects of the same period in contemporary context. The secondary sources include the historical texts on Bhojpuri Literature relating it to English Literature as well as text of folk art and theatre by different writer for understanding folk drama in detail and relating it with the folk drama of Bhikhari Thakur. Previous research thesis, articles and paper is also studied in the same context.

### **1.20 Limitations and Significance:**

The significance of Bhikhari Thakur as a cultural personality and an important historical figure of eastern India lies in the fact that he brought about a creative blend of old and new, traditional and modern, art and life, labour and leisure, love and separation, religious and secular, trauma-tragedy and comedy together. One of his major contributions was the integration of the arts—dance, drama, music, song, dress, design, lighting and technology. Following the folk formula of cultural exchange, he incorporated everything he found interesting and exciting. Consequently, one can see the influence of the Ramlila, Rāsalīlā, Jātrā, Pārsī theatre, Nautanki in the Bidesiyā. He re-created the stories and songs from Ramlila, Rāsalīlā, Ramcharitmanas, Mahabharata.

This work will attempt to portray a new picture or a new understanding on Bhikhari Thakur and on his play as well as on his writing style and his play which often

have been seen as propagandist work, as social work and work only on marginal figures of society and literary studies. It has tried to give a clear picture about the understanding of the play of Bhikhari Thakur as work of highest literary mind in comparison to another writer of this region and genre. The arguments derived from various literary sources has tried to set a new perspective on his play. The purpose of this work can be too huge but considering the time and space, it has limit itself with the selected literary work by him.

### **1.21 Chapter Plan:**

The present research has following chapter division:

#### **Chapter One- Introduction**

The first Chapter has tried to introduce History of Folk Drama, specially Bhojpuri Folk Drama, the selected texts of Bhikhari Thakur and create a critical stylistic, socio-cultural analysis in which these texts has been read and understood. It also tries to understand different style and technique used by him in his play, propagandist theory in his play, condition of women and lower caste people in the society. This chapter traces a history of the career of Bhikhari Thakur as playwright and the all the features of his play which make his play appealing not only in Bihar but also in some parts of UP, West Bengal and Jharkhand as well as internationally. It also discusses Literature Review, Research Gap, Research Questions, Aims and objective of this research, Significance and Limitation of the research, Methods and Methodology and Chapter Plan of this research in a very brief way.

#### **Chapter Two-Stylistic Study of Bhikhari Thakur's Folk Drama**

The play has been closely read and analysed stylistically as well technique of dramatization of his play will be critically examined which make him "Shakespeare of



Bhojpuri Literature” and “Bhojpuri ke Bharatendu”. Technique of Characterizations, use of song, music, dance and acting simultaneously. Title of both play and character has been tried to analysed critically with other artistic features.

### **Chapter Three- Socio-Cultural Study of Bhikhari Thakur’s Folk Drama**

The play has been closely read and analysed in the socio-cultural context of Bhojpuri literature and society which he tries to reflect and represent through his play. His attempt to show evil that prevailing in the society and also about caste system and biasness related to it problem of migration and its impact both on migrant and his family, especially his/her wife. It also tries to through light on different shades of woman life.

### **Chapter Four- Study of Contemporality in Bhikhari Thakur’s Folk Drama**

The play has been closely analysed from contemporality thematic viewpoint, which make Bhikhari Thakur and his writing immortal and relevant for the people of present generation and society, instead of being written in nineteenth and twentieth century.

### **Chapter Five-Conclusion**

This chapter will offer a summary of the preceding chapters highlighting the research findings. It will offer a summation of the research with respect to the research questions posed as well as offer suggestions on the scope of future research in the selected area.

## Chapter Two

### Stylistic Study of Bhikhari Thakur's Folk Drama

#### 2.0 Introduction:

This chapter is divided in two parts. First part of the chapter deals with the fundamental concept of stylistic while defining its meaning and theorising the key articulations of stylistic in order to understand its relation and function in the interpretation of literary works. It asserts that how and why stylistic study of a literary text is significant for evaluating and analysing causes which are felt to be relevant for deeper understanding of linguistic underpinnings of the text. This chapter also takes into account elements of style in literature like character development, dialogue, structure, point of view and form. In the process of defining, theorising and understanding stylistic and its relation with literature, it reflects on stylistic and literature, stylistic in different context, aims of stylistic etc.

The second part of this chapter attempts to examine Bhikhari Thakur's folk drama from stylistic point of view, reading and analysing his folk drama in relation to his plays highlighting forms and technique, and his experimentation with Bidesiya style particularly with appropriation of theatrical devices leading closer to the indigenous mode of expression, thus connecting it with the sensibility of common masses of his time.

Katie Wales in *A Dictionary of Stylistics*, says “most stylistics is not simply to describe the formal features of texts for their own sake, but in order to show their functional significance for the interpretation of the text; or in order to relate literary effects to linguistic 'causes' where these are felt to be relevant.” (1990:152). Reading a

literary text closely help to develop multiple method of tools to unearth multiple layers of meanings that are deeply embedded in the texture of the plot which appears very simple at the surface level to a laymen's understanding.

Stylistics is one of the branches of applied linguistics, having connected with the study of style concerned with the study of style in texts, particularly but not intrinsically in literary works. This is also levelled as literary linguistics which concentrate on the figures, tropes, and other rhetorical devices applied for understanding variety and distinctness in literary works. In this way its function is linguistic analysis including literary criticism of a work of art. (Richard Nordquist, 2019:01)

## **2.1 Elements of Style in Literature:**

There are various kind of elements related to the study of style in literature which have been mostly identified with forms and techniques and have also been discussed by Rhetorician and critic time to time. Richard Nordquist in his article "*Stylistics and Elements of Style in Literature*" (2019), who happens to be a leading Rhetoric Professor of Georgia Southern University, has propounded elements of style in literary works which consequently establish themselves as a landmark for discussion of style in any literature or writing class. Nordquist has divided the tools for the study of the style into two major categories: Big- Picture Elements and Line- by- Line Elements.

### **2.1.0 Big- Pictures Elements:**

Nordquist has defined Big- Picture Elements with the major components of style required for structural development of the plot/story and are fundamentals for writing. His identification and categorisation of Big- Picture Elements contain following elements:

- **Character development:** How a character changes throughout the story
- **Dialogue:** Lines spoken or internal thoughts
- **Foreshadowing:** Hints dropped about what's going to happen later
- **Form:** Whether something is poetry, prose, drama, a short story, a sonnet, etc.
- **Imagery:** Scenes set or items shown with descriptive words
- **Irony:** An occurrence that's the opposite of what's expected
- **Juxtaposition:** Putting two elements together to compare or contrast them
- **Mood:** The atmosphere of a work, the attitude of the narrator
- **Pacing:** How quickly the narration unfolds
- **Point of view:** The narrator's perspective; first person (I) or third person (he or she)
- **Structure:** How a story is told (beginning, action, climax, denouement) or how a piece is organized (introduction, main body, conclusion vs. reverse-pyramid journalistic style)
- **Symbolism:** Using an element of the story to represent something else
- **Theme:** A message delivered by or shown in a work; its central topic or big idea
- **Tone:** The writer's attitude toward the subject or manner with choosing vocabulary and presenting information, such as informal or formal. (Nordquist, 2019:2)

### 2.1.1 Line-by-Line Elements:

Nordquist in his Line-by-Line conceptualization of style has assigned following elements for the study of stylistic in literature:

- **Alliteration:** Close repetition of consonants, used for effect
- **Assonance:** Close repetition of vowels, used for effect
- **Colloquialisms:** Informal words, such as slang and regional terms
- **Diction:** The correctness of the overall grammar (big picture) or how characters speak, such as with an accent or with poor grammar
- **Jargon:** Terms specific to a certain field
- **Metaphor:** A means to compare two elements (Can also be big-picture if an entire story or scene is laid out to show a parallel with something else)
- **Repetition:** Using the same words or phrases in a short amount of time for emphasis
- **Rhyme:** When the same sounds appear in two or more words
- **Rhythm:** having a musicality to the writing such as by using stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of poetry or sentence variety or repetition in a paragraph
- **Sentence variety:** Variation in the structure and length of consecutive sentences
- **Syntax:** The arrangement of words in a sentence (Nordquist, 2019: 3)

In this way Nordquist has demarcated the elements of style and their relationship with the language used in the written work, and stylistics is their study. His basic

assumptions about the style and the study of the stylistic is related with the techniques of an author and how an author uses them is what makes one writer's work distinct ranging from, from Henry James to Virginia Woolf. His arguments assert an author's way of using the elements that creates their distinct voice in writing.

## **2.2 Stylistician:**

The uses and the application of style and its various ways of implementation lead to the idea of stylistician who in many ways is related with the study and analysis of the stylistics, having deeper interest with study of textual interpretations using both language comprehension and an understanding of social dynamics. This approach of a stylistician's textual analysis is extensively influenced by rhetoric reasoning and its history. Michael Burke in the book *The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics* (2014) has described it as an empirical or forensic discourse critique, wherein he has defined the stylistician as...

A person who with his/her detailed knowledge of the workings of morphology, phonology, lexis, syntax, semantics, and various discourse and pragmatic models, goes in search of language-based evidence in order to support or indeed challenge the subjective interpretations and evaluations of various critics and cultural commentators. (Burke, 2014:19)

Burke has narrated stylistician, as a sort of Sherlock Holmes character who is acute with expertise in grammar and rhetoric and has love for literature and other creative texts, focusing on the details on how they operate piece by piece—contemplating about style as it gives meaning, as it conveys comprehension. According to Burkes there are various overlapping subdisciplines of stylistics, and a person who is engaged with to

study and examine any of them is identified as a stylistician. Burkes has divided subdiscipline's of stylistic in the following manner:

- **Literary stylistics:** Studying forms, such as poetry, drama, and prose
- **Interpretive stylistics:** How the linguistic elements work to create meaningful art.
- **Evaluative stylistics:** How an author's style works—or doesn't—in the work
- **Corpus stylistics:** Studying the frequency of various elements in a text, such as to determine the authenticity of a manuscript
- **Discourse stylistics:** How language in use creates meaning, such as studying parallelism, assonance, alliteration, and rhyme
- **Feminist stylistics:** Commonalities among women's writing, how writing is engendered, and how women's writing is read differently than men's
- **Computational stylistics:** Using computers to analyse a text and determine a writer's style
- **Cognitive stylistics:** The study of what happens in the mind when it encounters language (Burke, 2014: 20)

### **2.3 Relationship between Stylistic and Literature:**

There is a strong connection between stylistic and literature. It is considered as a bridge between linguistics and literature. The modern study of literature is extensively influenced by stylistic linguistic for it asserted that human consciousness is structured like a language and in order to understand literature thoroughly, it is essential to understand the role of language in the formation of human thoughts. Human thoughts

are outcome of the 'human composite behaviour' influenced and produced by the archaeological and genealogical history of ideas, instrumentalised to stimulate by natural and human surroundings. Then linguistic study of the style aims to apply techniques and concepts of modern linguistics to study literature. It is the linguistic study of style applying techniques and concepts of modern linguistics to the study of literature. Thus, it is related with the available preferences and the selection of the reason for a specific option.

#### **2.4 Meanings of Stylistics in Different Contexts:**

There are various mode of expressions providing out late to the multiple reflection on meaning in the oral and written forms of literary or non-literary varieties of a language that refers to a variation in a person's speech or writing. Style often differs from casual to formal being discussed, considering the type of situation, the location, historical context, the topic, the person or persons addressed. A specific style is usually denoted to as a stylistic register or variety such as colloquial or formal. The same interests or occupation is often shared by speech variety that is utilized by a specific cluster of individuals. A specific register usually differs itself from other registers by possessing assorted different words or by utilizing phrases or words in a specific approach and occasionally by specific legal language or grammatical constructions. A writer's style is an echo of the author's personality, idiosyncratic features and unique voice. According to Geoffrey N. Leech and Mick Short in their book, *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* (2007:12):

Style is a selection of linguistic; a sort medium of revolt against the norm; a repetition of linguistic forms. Style also defines the personality of person. Style shows the thoughts and ideas of a person. Leech views



that the structure of words should be changed in order to get clarity in diction.

Therefore, from the above discussion it is evidently clear that style is a literary choice used by a writer for articulation of his/her formulation of thoughts in a particular mode of expression. The uses and application of style ranges from one writer to another, from one person to another in various way solely emanating from individualistic formation of the self. Style is not only related with art of narration; it has a deeper connection with personality of a writer/artist. Its variation and meaning largely depends on the social, cultural and historical context of a text and the ways modern linguistic methods are applied for the interpretation of a meaning or an individual's text.

### **2.5 Significance of Stylistic in Literature:**

With the advancement of literary discourses' especially after 1980s, demise of colonial empire, flag independence of the colonised nations, globalisation, global economy and market have all adulterer this sanctity and singularity of the text having given concept to the death of the author and birth of the reader, the use of style and its application have obtained unimaginable height in the interpretation of art and literature. Its significance whether in develop or underdeveloped nations is rapidly increasing since rhetoric has played very significant role in the formulation of social, political, psychological and literary discourses. In nutshell, no single human discourse can be understood to be complete without applications of style and rhetoric. Therefore, its role in relation to literature is magnifying and its magnitude of influence is everlasting.

### **2.6 Goal of Stylistics:**

Stylistic method and its application to the interpretation of a literary text is primarily guided by two objectives. The first objectives of it has relation with readers

understanding for the enhancement of readers literary competence to evaluate a literary text/a work of art in its wholistic way. This intended mode of reading is also helpful for growth and development of readers personality and secondly its objective is to expand the knowledge and awareness of language.

According to '*Stylistics*', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 'modern stylistics uses the tools of formal linguistic analysis coupled with the methods of literary criticism; its goal is to try to isolate characteristic uses and functions of language and rhetoric rather than advance normative or prescriptive rules and patterns. (2013:1)

## II

### **2.7 Stylistic Study of Bhikhari Thakur's Folk Drama:**

The folk drama of Bhikhari Thakur reveals his deeper understanding and importance of style and its stylistic variation. Bhikhari Thakur was a natural playwright and because of his serious engagement with social and political issues of the time, his dramatic style evolved gradually. As a man of society and state and on account of his upbringings, relation with the common people zeal resolve social problems. He naturally appropriated the indigenous style of dialogues for conversing with his society. His plays are heavily loaded with commons man's style of conversation, dialogue, tone, expression etc.

Folk theatre and performances are the product of continuous great tradition of human dialogues with certain experiment and appropriation since time immemorial. This theatrical form are not any imitation of Natyashastra, rather it is resourced and enriched by time itself the forms of the folk performances like Nautanki, Swang, Jatra, Dashavtar, Ramlila, Tamasha, Yakshagna etc. have some similarity with dramatic devices of the time like actor, director, dance, costumes, songs, actor, director and writer working

are functional in various form and these are the recurrent properties that relate our folk tradition with the high level of dynasty of Natyashastra. India from its ancient time had cultivated longest and richest test for theatre tracing back from at least fifty centuries back. The inception of Indian theatrical form has a dipper relation with indigenous rituals and occasional festivities of the nation. Bharat's Natyashastra was the earliest and most celebrated drama composed in the world, it does not mean that Indian folk theatre is deviated from social discourses, but on the contrary, it is supported and augmented by the society itself. In this regard Amod Rai quoted in his article *Bhikhari Thakur's Bidesiya: A Folk Artefact in Bhojpuri*, the observation of Suresh Awasthi which is very insightful:

Indian traditional theatre, like its counterpart in any other country is a very rich and important element of the traditional culture. It incorporates elements from poetry, music, drama, 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. (1)

Thakur's folk drama are entirely different from the classical modern drama of 20<sup>th</sup> century, which merely contains dialogues only. The forms and techniques of his play are in proximity with the style applied in Shakespeare's and Classical Sanskrit theatre, which have the custom of including songs and dialogues. The folk drama penned by Thakur imitate various proposition from the Classical Ancient theatre. For instance, his folk drama commences *maṅgalācaran* (invocation to deity) that's is very significant aspect of Sanskrit plays in which orisons are directed to Ganpati and Sarasvati, seeking for their benediction. His play also has the part of *Samāji* which is similar to the concept of *Shutradhāra* in Sanskrit theatre and the role of Chorus in ancient Greek Theatre. The dramatic functions of *samaji* is to articulate about the play in the beginning. Its character is mostly similar to the mythical legends of Hindu Religion. The next

significant aspect of his drama is *labar*, named as *vidusak* in Indian Classical theatre whose duty was to come in the middle of the play and to amuse the audience by performing some comic activities similar to the character of fool of Shakespeare play. Most of the characters of Bhikhari Thakur's play are of general types, his play does not have focused characters. For instance, in his play *Bidesiya*, the character of *Bidesi* is representative to all the young man who for earning their livelihood used to go to Assam and Bengal. Just like *Batohi* which means a traveller similar to common person headed to Kolkata.

Thakur derived dramatic devices that he thought suitable and enriching from other renowned theatre in his drama. The dramaturgy of his *Bidesiya* style is the amalgamation of dramatic forms like Tragedy, Comedy, Secular, Religion, Traditional and Modern theatre form. He also introduced musical instrument Jhal, Bansi, Sitar, Harmonium, and Tabla. Thakur imbibed all the famous Bhojpuri folk songs forms in his play like Allah, Purbi, Fagua, Chaita, Kajari, Sorathi, Biraha and Chaubola etc. He is also credited to formulate a new kind of *Chhand* or Verse which is popularly known as *Bidesiya Chhand*, equivalent to the *chhand* in regional languages, which are Matrik/Metric, *Bidesiya Chhand* is *Varnik* or syllabic like Classical Sanskrit poetry, which have 32 syllables in each line like *Ghankashari Chhanda* of Sanskrit. For instance, in *Bidesiya*, *Pyari* is presenting her husband's countenances to *Batohi*:

“Kariyā nā gor bāte, lāmā nāhi hawan nāte,

Majilā jawān sām sundar batohiyā.....”

— *Bhikhari Thakur, Bidesiya, Scene IV*

(Neither he is fair nor dark, neither tall nor short, my husband is medium young messenger.)

## 2.8 Bidesiya Theatre Style and Bidesiya Folk Drama:

Before Thakur's evolution with any kind of dramatic form, he usually would call theatrical form as 'Tamasha', 'Naach', 'Jogira', 'Netua- Naach' and the 'Gond- Naach' or 'Pawaria Naach'. These were the folk forms of drama which used to apply costumes, fake ornaments and make-up for presenting characters through narrative verses written by the performers or some other person who used to remain anonymous.

There were many folk artist, performers and poets who did not like to be recognised with these theatres because of many social and ethical reasons. But in the case of Bhikhari Thakur he was entirely different and did not hide anything about himself. His writings depict about his humble birth, his village, members of his troupes, actors and musician. Regarding his birth, he has stated that he was born on the fifth day of the Shuklapaksha of Pausha in Vikram years 1395. This couplet is from Bhikhari Thakur's *Devikirtan*:

“Terah sau panchanbe jahiya, sudi poos panchami rahe tahia |

Roj somar theek dupahriya, Janm bhail ohi ghariya |” (Thakur, 1)

About the inspiration to write plays, Bhagwati Prasad Dwivedi in his one of the book reviews named, *Bhikhari Thakur: Bhojpuri ke Bharatendu* (2000) quotes a similar rhyme:

“Gaileen Midnapur ke jeela

Ohije kuchh dekhlin Ram Leela” (49)

(‘I went to the district of Midnapur, where I saw some Ram Leela’).

Thakur humbleness is evidently clear where he tells that, he didn't know anything about dance and music ;“Tanik na ave nache-gave”(49);and he expresses his gratitude's to his

audiences after enactment of the plays in a surprising way ,“Kahe do lagal log ke bhabe”(49).Dwivedi mentions his humbleness while talking about Thakur’s talent especially answering to the question from where Thakur acquired the poetic skill in prosody and poetic diction. Dwivedi replies to these citing the poet himself:

“Tulsi krit mein man laptail . . .

Geeta-kavitt kahin kehu kahe, arth poochh-pooch ke sikhia,

dohar chhand nij akshar likhin.” (49)

(‘I felt enchanted by the Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidas. Whenever anyone recited a poem, I tried to learn the meaning by asking people, and wrote out *dohas* and *chhandas* in my own hand.’)Thakur has himself accepted that he was constantly in dialogue with scholars and holy man and internalised shlokas and other verses that he come across with them.

Audiences easily identified themselves with Thakur’s plays because Thakur has presented contemporary life, its social, political and religious articulations and aspects in its totality on the stage. In order to execute it, he has heavily derived resources from myths, legends and folklore of village society- the tale of *Gabarghichor*, for instance existing various versions. There is a no innovative experiment here, for his style and technique equates with folk dramas largely driven from the traditional folk forms of rural society. That’s why perhaps Bhagwati Prasad Dwivedi comments on his skill and aim as a playwright: ‘to present before his people the aberrations of the social system of his time, and to inspire the rural masses to consciously work towards removing them’ (2000: 49). It has been stated that Thakurs play contained a cathartic effect on his audiences and people, this opinion appears to be misrepresented because Thakur never wished to put his audience in a condition of trance- emotionally-perplexed. He also

never intended to create an allusion of reality or fact for which European theatre after Ibsen came to be known. He also did not formulate any kind of spectacle that Parsi theatre companies constantly used for their presentation around the first and second decades of twentieth century in Northern India. Apart from all these things he had distinct category of audience and peculiar intention to serve. However, his technique has some commonality with the epic theatre, despite the fact that Bhikhari Thakur and Bertolt Brecht is familiar with each other work.

Now the questions arise from where Thakur learned the dramatic devices he used in his play? As Dwivedi quotes, Hrishikesh Sulabh, the writer of *Amali*, who had once stated (The Hindustan Times, Patna, 18 October 1986) “that even before theories of drama came to be overlaid with multiple categories and meticulous detail.” (49), Indian folk drama from its beginning has attempted to unearth the truth behind the appearances. Bhikhari Thakur has directly imbibed this from the treasure trove of tradition. Obviously, this is the reason Rahul Sankritayan has termed him as ‘Shakespeare Of Bhojpuri’. In this regard Jagdish Chandra Mathur opined that he was the first people’s playwright who presented the tradition of Bharata, and perhaps this the reason Bhagwati Prasad Dwivedi calls him “Bhojpuri’s Bharatendu” (2000: 49).

Bidesiya as an existing form of the theatre was nurtured and developed by Bhikhari Thakur. Thakur established his Bidesiya theatre with his own people around the year (1916-1917), a time when resistances against colonialism was at its pinnacle. Thakur was engaged with his caste-based occupation (hair-dressing) for 35 years. As a versatile genius Thakur developed a key interest in the theatrical performances and he was greatly influenced by Ramlila, Rāsālīlā, Jātrā and Pārsī theatre performances. After coming back to his own village, he initiated the performance of Ramayana with a group and he obtained success also but after sometime he was forbidden by the upper-caste

Hindu from his own other localities to perform a religious text of Supreme significance. Highly discouraged by this, he joined revealing Launda- Naach company, that already had a well formulated theatrical structure including songs, dances and fellow actors performing lower-caste myths and legends.

Gradually, Bidesiya as a theatrical form acquired regional and cultural identity, structurally distinct from sophisticated form, it evolved as a powerful mode of expression for the people at margin. Thakur by his theatrical skill and experiences, cultivated it by borrowing some components from Ramlila, Raslila, Birha, Jatra and other performative elements and restructured it into an entirely new and lucrative style known as Bidesiya. The term Bidesiya stands for migrated people who went away from their ancestral home in search of livelihood, in the larger sense Thakur's Bidesiya is not merely related to the physical displacement from their land but it has a deeper connection with their culture too. There is a lot of confusion between his Bidesiya style and *Bidesiya* play but the fact is that his all plays are written in Bidesiya style with extensive similarity to Nautanki, in later years his theatrical style was identified and recognised from his popular production Bidesiya.

The plays of Bhikhari Thakur's borrowed the themes from the issues existing in society but they were reformulated by new progressive and revolutionary style. Once he was asked, why did he opt theatre, he replied, "I used to watch Ramlila and Rash Lila. When in Ramlila, Vyasji gave sermons to people; I also thought I could also give sermons to my people" (Prakash, 2005: 9). This ambition was realised till his last days, when he used to serve his people by sermons. Unfortunately, Bhikhari Thakur died on 10 July 1971, after giving us a new hope for life.



Bidesiya as another name of Launda-Naach is one of the most famous theatrical form in the villages of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Bhikhari thakur by his folk drama depicted the miserable picture of a migrant's family and the very basic theme of the play gained so much of popularity and success resulting in the naming of the performance itself as Bidesiya. Bidesiya can also be understood as the theatre of migrants or the theatre of labour's but unlike the theatre of migrants mentioned by Bharucha in mental performance exercises where, 'migrants do not define themselves with their points of origin, but with their ceaseless movement from one place to another' (Theatre and the World, 1993: 54). In the context of Bidesiya, migrant ardently levels themselves from the root of their origin even if they move them from one place to another place.

Bidesiya style is the amalgamation of the old and the new, traditional and the modern of dance, music, songs, love, jokes and obscenity. The sources for Bidesiya folk drama vary from songs based on caste, songs of women, songs of labour, religious songs, songs from popular music and film. Scholars like Susan Seizer (2005) and S. Chatterjee (2008) like to term it as the 'hybrid theatre'. However, in the case of cultural context the very notion of hybridity is characterised by a high level of colonial cultural elements, that doesn't have any direct connection with Bidesiya. It is still merited and is in proximity to the definition of what is known as 'folk performance'.

The tenant's culture of Bidesiya evolved in retaliation to the social problems of migration, fundamentally caused by violent form of colonialism and natural destruction. Imitating the style of Bhikhari Thakur many other artists, who were sometime part of Bhikhari Thakur's company, started new Bidesiya parties and kept on working on the theatrical tradition. According to the present estimates there exist more than two hundred Bidesiya parties engaged in performance across the Bihar and Uttar

Pradesh. Bihar and Uttar Pradesh even in the present time are the biggest suppliers of cheap manual labours to cities and metropolitan cities, so in this way the significance of the culture and performance of Bidesiya cannot be negated. It may be another kind of fact that the drama of these Bidesiya parties may have their own theme's and might not always handle the problems of migrations, but their performance and significance stand valid and meaningful to *Bidesiya* and *Pardesiya*, two famous words for migrant's labours. Their performance is also about the society that it amuses- a society of migrants that largely relay on money-order economy.

Vatsal Srivastav mentions 'before the Bidesiyā style, similar productions with songs, drama and a crew of male actors playing both the male and the female characters were called Lauṇḍā-nāc in Bihar' ('Recounting Tales'). Bidesiya style is also related to the Launda- Naach 'the dance of the female impersonators' or 'the dance of young boys.' Luanda's are a famous and professional group of performers who seemed that dance and amuse the audiences and spectators in various forms of the folk performance's beside Bidesiya. Brahma Prakash in his book on *Cultural Labour: Conceptualizing the 'Folk Performance' in India*, quotes, O Henry a famous critic on folklore studies who provided an illustrative detail of their dances style, when he says:

The launda's performance ranges from the pleasantly sensual to the lewd. The launda makes a jerky hip dancing. He circles and turns with a gyrating pelvis, often one hand on his hip and the other behind his head. He might also lean back with his bent legs spread and arms in the air, jerk towards his leering, slightly crouched and pelvis-thrusting partner, who with hand at crotch level motions with his upraised thumb. At low caste gatherings, women sometimes cluster near or around the band and dance with other women, or rarely male kin, in this style. (2019: 163)

The invention of Laundas change the position of women in theatre in most of the theatrical forms across Bihar and Uttar- Pradesh states. In the male-dominated society with ethical nuances, the profession of performance has never got respectable status in the opinions of the feudal elite and the upper-caste section of the society because their performances are marked by abusive and loud-language making sufficient reason for their degeneration in the eyes of the people.

The Bhojpuri taste in the mind of the people is so beautifully embedded that people do not think twice, even to go to the far places to watch the theatrical performances. The female parts in Bidesiya like other folk forms have been replaced and are played by the male actors. Their entire attire resembles like women wearing dhoti and shirt-trousers with ornaments and long hairs. Dance parts are an essential aspect of this kind of performance; indeed, it is the centre attractive point of the performance, which is kept in the drama in order to invite the attention of a larger audience. The actors, apart from dancing like females also try to invite male's attention by presenting typical attitudes. Apart from many other forms of entertainment, Bidesiya performances still remains very important source of entertainment for refreshing and relaxation in the Bhojpuri community.

Bhikhari Thakur by his folk drama attempted to provide voice to the voiceless, poor and deprived and labours and attempted to generate awareness about the miserable condition of women in Bhojpuri society. He also strongly resisted and spoke against any kind of caste discrimination and communalism with same vigorous tone and zeal. People belonging to Bhojpuri region appreciate his contribution to the existent local cultural tradition with high pride. The plays of Bhikhari Thakur and the style of his theatre form are very famous because of their association with the rhythmic structure of the language, sweet song and sensual music. Thakur's play are accurate reflection of

Bhojpuri culture, tradition and thoughts. Mostly the themes in his all plays concentrated day to day problems of labours, caste and community. Thakur was also fond of using satire and light-effect to reflect on social evils and other problems which Bhojpuri society was subject to go through.

Although the themes in his play are from the villages and the rural society, even though they got sufficient attention in big cities like Kolkata, Patna, Banaras and other small cities, especially wherever the migrant labours and poor workers went to explore the means for their livelihoods. Dismantling all the impediments of nation he with along with his mandali got the opportunities to visit Mauritius, Kenya, Singapore, Nepal, British Guyana, Surinam, Uganda, Myanmar, Madagascar, South Africa, Fiji, Trinidad and other places where Bhojpuri culture and tradition is in the state of formation.

Examine the extensive impact of Bhikhari Thakur's literary and dramatic production Rahul Sankrityayan has opined: "Why do people like Bhikhari Thakur's plays? Why do 10 to 15 thousand people turn up to witness his plays? It can be felt that people love his plays and songs. What is loved and liked by the people is an art". Bhikhari Thakur's position on the other hand is contrary to the court poets and he came closer to the common masses and the issues of their everyday life. Audiences found consolation for their pains in the plays and songs of Bhikhari Thakur. His Bidesiya style received huge recognition amongst 15 crore Bhojpuri speaking population. His plays were liked and appreciated immensely in the three decades of twentieth centuries (1935-1965) ranging from Eastern Uttar Pradesh to Western parts of Bihar to Assam, West Bengal, Singapore, Nepal etc. the popularity of his play gained attention of the big intellectuals. Rahul Sankrityayan in his presidential speech of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bhojpuri conference at Gopalganj Bihar, 1947 said that, "the flow of thoughts and sharpness of Bhojpuri can very well be seen in the plays of Bhikhari Thakur. Ten to fifteen

thousand audiences on an average turn up to watch his plays. This large attendance reveals that public very much enjoys his plays and songs establishing him to be pure poetic” (Pidit, 23).

Therefore, it can easily be stated that Bhikhari Thakurs and his Bidesiya created a very strong influence in the corpus of folk tradition and his contribution in literature is eminence and everlasting that is going to with a milestone in the history of Indian folk drama, tradition and the Bhojpuri communities. He was very much assured by his own inputs and literary contributions that he once said, ‘a time when my name and fame would surpass everyone’:

Abhin naam bhail ba thora jab ee chuut jai taan mora

Tekra baad pachas barisa, tekra baad bees- teesa barisa

Tekra baad naam hoijaihan. pandit. kavi, Sajjan yaish gaihan

Naikhi paat par padhal bhai, galti bahut laukat jai.

I (Thakur Granthavali, 56)

Above quotes mean, ‘Now my fame is less, whenever my writing will be stopped, after fifty years, after that more 20-30 years. My name will be like Pandit, scholar, poet and great man. And all will start to praise me. O brother! I have never studied much; you can find many mistakes in me.’

## Chapter Three

### Socio-Cultural Study of Bhikhari Thakurs' Folk Drama

#### 3.0 Introduction:

This chapter is focused to study socio-cultural dimensions of Bhikhari Thakur's play. It has taken into account the different layers of socio-cultural levels focusing on Bhojpuri society as represented in Thakurs play for its examination and analysis. The question of caste, its paradigms, various problem related to it, migration, problems of labour, prostitution and the experiences of subordinated women are the subject of exploration and interrogation in this chapter. Thakur's play contains the issues of day to day life in relation to the socio-cultural aspects of Bhojpuri society. These issues are handled with care with the help of his famous cultural form known as Bidesiya. The chapter depicts issues belonging to colonial regimes concerning with the issues of socio-cultural, economic and political characteristics of Bhojpuri society. This chapter is an attempt to structure the frame where contemporary rural issues find their reciprocation in Bidesiya art form as cultural articulation. The tendencies of these socio-cultural rural structure properly correlate with the subject matter of Bidesiya art form. Additionally, these social reticulations got proper space with unique attributions of plays and songs of Bhikhari Thakur.

Bhikhari Thakur has produced, performed and directed almost all his major plays, starting from a jovial play *Birha-Bahar* focused on the story of dhobi-dhobin (washerman and his wife) performance. Another famous play is *Bidesiya*: story of a man who leave his village and family for getting his livelihood in the Kolkata city. Later on, this play was re-casted and directed by Sudhir Mishra as 'Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi'. His next important play is *Bhai- Birodh (Brothers Opposition)*. The

theme of the play is based on a story of joint family, very prominent aspects of Bihar rural society. It narrates the story of brothers who are separated due to the issue of trust and respect from each other on the instigation of a person from outside of their family. *Beti-Viyog* or *Beti-Bechwa* (*The Daughter- Seller*) is another progressive play of Bhikhari Thakur. This is a cultural commentary on the prevailing custom of selling young girls in the name of marriage to quite older man. *Vidhwa-Vilap* (*The Wailing Widow*) by Thakur is another important play that narrates the story of subjugation and exploitation of widows within their own household. This play is considered as an extension of *Beti- Bechwa*. Another important play is *Kalyug-Prem* (*Modern Love*). By this play Bhikhari Thakur discusses the bad effect of drinking and the concept of love in the modern time. *Ganga- Asnan* (*To Bath in Ganges*) is another famous play by Bhikhari Thakur. This play centres around a theme of faith related to the bath in Ganga. *Putrabadh* (*Killing of Son*), *Gabarghichor* and *Nanad- Bhoujai* (*Sister-in Laws*) are some other plays by Thakur dealing with some social issues in theatrical form that was popular and performed in the various parts of Bihar, India and World.

The nineteenth century and the early part of twentieth century's was marked by the excessive demand of man power for many kinds of work especially plantations. India, at that time was undergoing an economic depression owing to the decline of the weaving industry because of ongoing Industrial Revolution in England. And on another hand, the greater population dependency on agriculture and land created serious problem for livelihood to the underprivileged. This situation forced the poor and down trodden to migrate in large number to other cities and country. The Bhojpuri area is a cultural entity and is mostly connected with political borders. This area includes the Eastern part of Uttar Pradesh and the Western part of the Bihar. In the Northern part it ranges from the river Ganges and pass through the Nepal frontier up to the lower ranges

of the Himalayas of Champaran to Basti. This is largely populated area by Bhojpuri community. The migration in these areas was at the greater length. Thakur has beautifully presented the feeling of a migrant at the time of his departure:

“Kahe mori sudhi bisaraye re bidesia

Tarhpi tarhpi din rain gavayo re

Kahe mose nehiya lagae re bidesia bidesia” (Singh, 2005)

(Why did you make me lose my consciousness, O I am suffering constantly day and night. Why did you lock your eyes with mine)? The people migrated to Mauritius, Fiji and Suriname, British Guyana and Uganda as well as some parts of Burma and Nepal and in other various regions across the world share a common cultural inheritance based on the historical fact of the migration from Bhojpuri region.

### **3.1 Culture, Change, and Migration:**

Migration is usually considered an economic phenomenon, but it also creates a cultural phenomenon in both the homeland and the host land. 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 ‘star of their eyes’. All were leaving for foreign shores and there was no way to hold them back. 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 Bhojpuri’s. This economic compulsion is expressed in the folk tradition of the people of the Bhojpuri region of India, and the following folk song clearly expresses the pain and suffering that they feel as quoted by Badri Narayan Tiwari in his research report named as *Bidesia: Migration, Change and Folk Culture:*



“Railiya na bairi se jaha jawa no bairi se  
paisawa bairi na mor saiyan ke bilmawe se  
paiswa bairi na” (2003:02)

(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). In spite of the best efforts 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 folklore, which emerged as an expression of the pain and anguish of the migrants’ separation from their families.

### **3.2 Bidesia Folk Tradition:**

The term Bidesiya is also used to address the migrants by the family, friends and relatives who stay back at home. So, this name is applied to the emergence of new folk cultural form that came into existence by the migrant’s culture. This folk tradition comprises many theatrical forms like Nautanki, Drama, Folk Songs and Folk Paintings. It is a kind of cultural corpus that was formulated as a result of the loneliness and alienation caused by the displacement of these migrants. In the Bidesiya folk culture, the migrants are addressed as *Bidesiya*, *Pardesi*, *Batohia* and other regional words which have the meaning of affection and complained at the same time. The aforesaid three words of address are related with three aspects of folk tradition: firstly, in Bidesiya a *muluk* culture were the chances and possibility of return of these migrants are very less, that means while leaving for the new place the migrant abundant all his relation with his loved ones. In the second context it is *pardesi* culture were a labour is forced to leave his native place for earning livelihood but he or she maintains relation and communication with his family. The nostalgic pain of this fragmented migration does

disappear completely but its repeated by the presentation of their sentiments in Bhojpuri folk plays and songs. The third category, the *Batohia* is in fact a traveler who moves from one place to another place but finally comes back and restore his/her kinship with the community and village. The recognition of Thakur's play was basically because of its narrative techniques, enabled sufficiently to relate with normal events and experiences concern to the pain of the migration, an issue that is core in the hearts of the Bhojpuri community and audiences. The insertion of satire and comic relief by Thakur to the existing Bidesiya style also enriched Bidesiya theatre for the performances of folk art and culture. The plays of Thakur are cultural commentary on the hierarchical order of the society and the movement of displacement of the Bhojpuri migrants. Bidesia art form, as the reflection on society, sustains various critical thoughts which were backbone to the contemporary social order. It is noteworthy, that sometime it asserts the social values and norms of the feudal society, particularly in the plays of *Bidesiya* and *Kalyug-Prem (Modern Love)*, where a scene is depicted on the chastity of women to her husband and her basic responsibility to look after family, household and children's. thus, this art form keeps on dwindling between past and present connecting with the false consciousness of the people which it wants to dismantle and break away.

Hence, it is clear that this art form tends to propagate women's promiscuity for asserting some ethical nuances but at the same time it apparently seems to fight for women's liberation and their sexual rights in the plays like *Gabarghichor*, *Beti-Bechwa (The Daughter Seller)* and *Bidhwa-Vilap (The Wailing Widow)*. Another significant part of the play *Bidesiya* is based on its presentation of prostitution as an existing social problem. If the base and superstructure models are taken into consideration then it can easily be asserted that this form of art is the product of the economic base. Thakur belonged to a backward caste family and was forced to migrate from one place to

another because of the social and economic circumstances to which he was subjected. He had to live and lead a life full of miseries and exploitation caused by dominant classes which consequently compelled him to produce such work which are considered against the contemporary social and hierarchal practices. All his plays are directly related to the issues of Dalit and underclass and his theater troupes also had its performer belonging to Dalit and lower caste people. Even their names and articulation have common similarity with Dalit and lower-caste people. According to Pierr Macherey in his book *Theory of Literary Production*, literature and art support ideological communications. Bidesia art along the same line, has definitely provided some kind of ideological communication. The selling of daughters for wealth was considered to be a matter of low prestige and crime. The Government of India also banned child marriages during the same period (Singh, 2005). The content of Bidesiya art form was extensively inspired by social practices and Thakur intended his audiences to know about them and vigilante and reframed them to the new possibilities of life. Thakur can be examined as a social reformer, attempting to create consciousness among his people by his art, by presenting reality and facts from the society. This is what Lukacs meant when he propounded his ideas about social realism as a perfect form of creativity, where in a writer is supposed to get first-hand information, lives that information as an experience and reacts to that authentically with literary production. Structurally Bidesia art form is constituted with stages, demonstration and revolving to the surrounding ideas of shared belief systems, common culture and values situated in the contemporary semi-feudal societies of Eastern Uttar Pradesh and West part of Bihar. On account of its multi-dimensional approach, it contains commentaries on policies and politics which are articulated in the mode that represents the pain and sufferings of the common people. This form of representation is expressed as a medium to critique

dominant ideologies which basically worked at the deeper level to include common masses into the society by making them realized that they are part of it. Bhikhari Thakur developed Bidesiya art form, enabling with it the common style in order to fight back or challenge all the oppressive nuances of the contemporary time. He not only aimed to raise the voices of the common masses against the dominant class, but he also attempted to create awareness among his people against any kinds of dominations and instructed them to abandoned all the stereotypes, responsible for subordination and exploitation of the oppressed class.

### **3.3 Migration: Socio-Cultural Tradition:**

Linguistic diversity of India has categorized socio-cultural tradition of people according to their geographical territory. The Bhojpur region is one of them. Migration has produced three different folk traditions: the Banijiya (Trader), Sipahiya (soldier) and the Bidesiya (foreigner) tradition. In spite of having many kinds of cultural dissimilarities', the emotions and sentiments of the people in all three traditions are based on reciprocal interaction. This part of this chapter focuses on the images of women in three aforesaid traditions. Migration in the Bhojpur area has basic meaning of going out of man and the consequences of it are grievous on women. The women are left alone and all kind of responsibilities are executed by them, which has wider an application and various role of them in it. In this kind of circumstances women are subjected to undergo pain and suffering of separation and they have to familial and social oppression including their social exploitation at the same time, the consequences of this courses that women gradually get enabled to take agricultural and social responsibilities act fully, though rendering of these responsibility do not empower them to assert for economic independence. A common observation on this aspect of folk traditions is sufficient to understand the exploited aspect of their life which is exposed,

but the empowered part of their life is undermined. This denigrated yet idealistic imagery of women is the subject matter of songs and stories sung and narrated by man. This presentation of an oppressed, exploited, denigrated women have found their space for protest in these folk traditions. In continuation of it the folk songs of low-caste woman are potential tones of resistance, even sometime the language images and symbol use in these folk songs are sub-standard to the accurate definition of a language. The vulgarity and shallowness's in language formulate in the minds of the opposition, an image of an empower entity, even though the former casts these songs and songstresses as uncivilized, rustic, backward etc.

It is an entirely distinct subject matter that in these folk songs and tales by Thakur have fighting images of women with sub-standard language but it is meaningful in the sense that, it has enabled them to express themselves freely. Thus, challenging and dismantling the exploitative ideologies of the dominant class. It is also obvious that these women are doubly marginalized among the oppressed class but Thakur has created by his Bidesiya style a space for them where they fight against the two system of exploitative system of orders. The contemporary earliest feminist advocate for the liberation of women but state their helplessness on limited resources for reaching to these rural woman's. Here the question is that weather they should reflect upon and agree to the fact that theorist of the marginalized are biased because of their upper-caste and elite class identity and are opportunistic on woman's issues. In this reference the voices of women living inside four walls of the household and those who have been forced to flee become even more important.

The plays of Bhikhari Thakur which are basically focused on women issues are also questionable as far as woman's freedom, economic independencies and their sexual desire are concern. The issue of migration meant fundamentally for livelihood

creates the question of identity, conflict, relationship and chastity by which these women are questioned by their male counterpart when they come back to their home.

### **3.4 The Folk Imagination and Rural Women:**

Bhikhari Thakur's play also provide insights to the images of migration affected women in folk tradition and culture. Almost all the folk tales are recited and sung by men, the imagination of their women is quite extensive and based on idealism. The conversation between a husband and wife/ lover and beloved is presented with aesthetics sensibility presenting a dynamic and lovely duet. This perceptible in this song:

Run-jhun khol na kevariya,

Hum bideswa jaibo na”

“Jo more Saiyan tuhu bideswa jaiba na tu bideswa jaiba na

Humra bhaiya ke bola de, hum naiharwa jaiba na”

“Jo more dhaniya tuhu naiharwa jaibu na

naiharwa jaibu na

Jatana lagal ba rupaiya

Otna dei ke jaiha na”

“Jo more Saiyan tuhu leba ab rupaiya

Tu rupaiya leba na

Jaisan baba gharwa rahti

Aisan karike dih na”

“Run-jhun khol na kevariya,

Hum bideswa jaibo na” (Upadhyay 1990:73-74)

This song expresses a husband wish to go to the foreign land for earning and request his inconsolable wife to open the door. The wife replies that if he goes to the foreign

land, then she would be sent back to her parents' home. On this reply by wife, husbands demand the repayment of all the money he has spent on her until now. But the wife quit confidently ask for the repayment of the chastity that she has given to her husband. The husband is clueless now.

In the other song there is a reference that if the wife consents to her husband's leaving, she starts telling her sorrow and suffering, which she would feel after departure of her husband and as the outcome of it, she will not be able to take interest in household responsibilities. The songs of Bhikhari Thakur are lively examples to articulate such kind of moments beautifully. The following song captures same kind of example from his play *Bidesiya*:

“Kalkatva tu jan jaa raja, hamar dil kaise lagi

Ohi Kalkatva me randi bastu hai, mojra kare

hai din raati

hamar dil kaise lagi

Ohi Kalkatva me malaria bastu hai, gajla kare

hai din raati

hamar dil kaise lagi

Ohi Kalkatva me tamoliya bastu hai, beerwa

lage hai din raati

hamar dil kaise lagi” (Archer and Prasad, 1943:171)

In this song the wife tells to her husband to take care of himself in the Kolkata city and to refrain himself as the city is full of prostitutes, she also wisely tells to keep him safe

from Malaria and counsels him not take paan-masala and cigarettes. Similarly, in Thakur's famous play *Bidesiya*, the heroine of the play *Pyari Sundari* imagines Kolkata to be something similar but Kolkata in other various folk traditions has positive images.

The plays of Bhikhari Thakur articulate the position of man and woman, especially after marriage and migration. The residential change of a woman to her husband's place after her marriage has been interpreted as a kind of migration because a woman is migrated from one place to another and this is universal phenomena. When husband is migrated to another place and wife remains at the home, she does not have any one closer to her heart to console her isolation and desolation. In the case of husband, he becomes an alien in the remotely located land, dislocated from his socio-cultural world, but a wife being at home feels stranger in her own household. The representation of women by Bhikhari Thakur in this case is very nostalgic and matchless. When it depicts the freedom of women at her natal place in terms of merry making and unrestricted activities. But in her laws place, she is subjected to at most care by cultural conditioning of customs and traditions. It is the imprisonment of a woman subjectivity where's a woman is chained by multiple layers of ideological system. At the same time a husband is also imprisoned by his contractor/employer or maliks in a different land. The actual condition of man and woman has certain level of similarity as far as the process of objectification and exploitation is concerned. This separation from her parent's place and migration of the husband makes her status as a migrant too. The nostalgic memories of the past and the present condition make a woman's life at unrest and her status as discomfort. "My treasure has gone to Dhanbad to earn, my days are spent in pain, the courtyard seems like a foreign land". (Amin, 2005) There is no way to imagine about freedom from this subjectification because



women can't erase the memory of the past because she is last in the memory of the time, which she spent with her husband.

### **3.5 The Questions of Woman's Purity, Bhikhari Thakur and Folk Tradition:**

In the Indian folk tradition and stereotypical meaning of marriage's, the issues of woman virginity, chastity and purity has occupied very serious position from time in memorial. Bhojpuri folk literature has also given sufficient space to this issue in the corpus of its literature. Bhojpuri folk literature is quite enriched regarding the themes of monogamous and devotional love. The representation of monogamous and devotional love occurred in the Banijiya folk-tales sung by Kevat and Dom heroines Devsundari, Lachiya, Bihula or in the ballads of Parvati, Hevanti, Sobhnayak Banjara's Jasumatiya, Lorikayan's, Manjari and Bhagwati. We can see similar motifs in Sipahiya folk traditions like Jalim Singh's drama where low-caste heroine Dilmohini upholds the value of fidelity and in *Bidesiya (The Foreigner)* play *Pyari Sundari* and other female characters are seen as the representative of monogamous and devotional love and they also teach principles related to it to their fellow women and society. The issue of purity and its protection seem the prime concern of folklorist' plays and their representation is always from male centric perspectives. The women characters by Bhikhari Thakur and other have been presented with strong determination to protect their chastity by rejecting proposals from other man. But at the same time, they have been shown fighting against oppressive man whether within family household or outside of it. These strong women characters protect their chastity and dignity even by sacrificing their life. There is a story in the play wherein a husband has migrated to the foreign land and has not come back for twelve long years: the wife waits for him at home protecting her chastity and maintaining her dignity. The story further proceeds and shows that her husband is back to his village and finds his wife on the road but the

wife is not able to identify her own husband. Does it show a kind of dishonesty at her part, the husband has left her when she was in her young age and had not seen her husband face clearly. The play further depicts husband playing a prank on his unaware wife by proposing and promising her gifts of gold and ornaments. The wife considers it deminer at man's part and angrily says: "Aang laage dal bhar sonva mei, bajjar pare motiya ke harva", which mean "may fire swallow your gold, to hell with your pearl necklaces!" the heroine *Pyari Sundari* in Thakurs *Bidesiya (The Foreigner)* play as well as *Pyari Sundari* in Duniyabai's play composed in the form of Nautanki are depicted waiting for their husband arrival too. The play has a young male (Dewar or brother-in-law) who attempts to make an indecent proposal but heroine rejects his advances and keeps her chastity intact till her migrant husband comes back.

This is very interesting fact at the part of the male that they have so called male-centric freedom to have several illicit relations and have no barrier which can prevent them for it. It is unthinkable part to the rustic wives to follow in his footsteps. There are scenes and episodes where women are even tested and force to declare their fidelity in the plays. Folk literature is a testimonial to the facts of a woman's chastity and dignity for her husband respect and honors but in opposite way husband comes into contact with other women for sexual relationship in the city and when they come back to their home they doubt and question the fidelity of their wives in the play like *Gabarghichor*.

The cultural conditioning and ideological norms of Bhojpuri society formulate the psychic of the woman from their formative days in such a way that they themselves think as the subject of torture by laws, sardonic remarks by parents and other various kind of subjugation and exploitation by the society as their natural fate. Bhojpuri literature has presented such helpless characters through its literature in it is more or less similar to literature of all the caste and classes. But Thakurs play have also given

strong women characters which have question oppressive history of their subjugation and the exploitative system of their society. This is evidently presented in Bidesiya tradition of low caste community and Thakurs play *Gabarghichor* is the fine examples of this. One of the strong reasons behind this emergence of resistance is that lower classes man and woman equally contribute for of lifting their familial and societal status. This togetherness makes them bold and gives confidence to fight back against all this oppressive mechanism of the society. The women belonging to such community like Gaud, Nat and other Dalit caste equally contribute in terms of labour and other participation in the society.

### **3.6 Representation of Urhari Woman: Bikhari Thakur and his Socio-Cultural World:**

The representation of Urhari woman in folk drama of Bhojpuri Literature has been subject of serious concern and derivation. The attitudes of society and its people to these kinds of woman have always been based on neglect, avoidance and abhorrence. Although this category of women has got sufficient place in the tradition of folk drama. In order to get the clear cultural meaning of the term the observation of historian Shahid Amin is accurately meaningful in this context. He opines: “*urhari*, a woman who has been enticed away; a woman not his wife who lives with a man”. (Amin 2005, 47-48). The dictionary meaning of the word *urhari* is related with word ‘*urhaar*’ which epistemologically means ‘to kidnaped or elope with’. This kind of woman are also addressed as ‘*ardhi*’ but the distinction between *urhar* and *ardhi* woman lies with the fact that later they get married with man with whom she eloped and gradually, with the passage of time society sanctions and validates this kind of marriage, but in the case of *urhari* women, it is entirely different. The literary meaning of the word and their sufficient presence in folk literature. it is clear the word *urhari* is not only for the woman

who live with man without marriage but also for those kidnapped forcefully. The representation of these kind of woman have long history in the folk tales like; in a play by Jalim Singh a Dom's daughter has been abduct and Loriki, the hero Lorik abducts Chanva and the scene is called 'Chanva ka urhaar'. In order to see and understand the lives of migrant urhari women, the corpus of Bhikhari Thakurs literary work assists its reader extremely. The play *Bidesiya (The Foreigner)* presents a character addressed as randi (Hindi slang similar in meaning to the English slang whore) named as *Saloni* is depicted as a urhari migrant woman. The play presents this woman telling about her life as an ordinary migrant labour before she started living with a Bidesi in Kolkata, socially she was not married with *Bidesi*, was co-worker with him and started living with him later on she also brought her children with her too. Although, in the past they had a temporary marriage but Thakur address to this woman as rakhailin, a Bhojपुरi term for kept woman. In contemporary metropolitan cities there are several instances where young and woman live-in relationship without marriage but the status of who belong to live-in relationship with *urhari* woman is quite different. Today's generation is highly educated and freely opt to enter in live-in relationship. But urhari woman were helpless left along and were financial problem with them, so used to opt for these kinds of relationship by compulsion. The only similarity between *urhari* woman and the woman of metropolitan cities who prefer live-in relationship is temporariness of the relation. *Saloni* in Thakur's play treated as someone of lower status when a messenger arrives from Bidesi village with a letter from his wife *Pyari Sundari*. Here, messenger tells Bidesi about his village, home, his wife, peoples and he became restless to go back to his home. After that the messenger calls *Saloni* as randi and treats with her in a very low manner which is normally considered for the status of urhari woman:

“Randi me kuch na baate, kutta jaise haad chaate,

eko ghaat nahi tu hu lagab bidesiya.

Chhodi de adharam,

mijaj karke naram,

tu manva me kar lehu saram bidesiya” (Yadav and Singh, 2005:46)

(Which means there is nothing in the kept women, she is like a dog, nothing will happen to you bidesia, leave immorality, be calm and try to realize your fault.)

He also states that these kinds of woman can make many promises, can cry profusely but by their nature they cannot be honest and committed to anyone including their villager, laws, parents and even with temporary husband. The messenger tries to convince bidesiya about the nature and character of such woman and he starts addressing Saloni like. He says:

Hey landlady, listen to me, don't do anything without thinking about it first. I will only hint at the problem and you must understand the entire conundrum. Turn your life around, your demeanor and whereabouts, your way of life. Let Bidesiya come back with me. You have a ready market here; you will find a lot many lewd men. (Yadav and Singh, 2005:46)

Here, the confidence of woman like Saloni is reflected and she does not accept what she hears from the messenger and starts fighting with him that she has acquired by her hard struggles against the cruelties of society. Living with Bidesiya she had realized her safety and heavenly bliss in his arms that she felt was been taken away from her.

The time when Bhikhari Thakur was portraying the image of rakhailin in the 3<sup>rd</sup> decade of twentieth century. there were many other writers who were also depicting woman in

negative ways like Pandit Totaram, a migrant settled in Fiji was writing and fighting for the rights of the migrants. His writings depict the character of male migrant images who were habituated to deceive women in relationship. These men mostly belong to Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya settled in Fiji but they used to be in the relationship there giving wrong addresses of their homeland to the woman. While departing from the foreign land they willingly use to give some portions of their savings to these wives in Fiji. Baba Ramchandra Das was another person who also wrote about this kind of woman and his writing revealed that he married a beautiful woman belonging to Schedule caste and has this woman as *Chamarin* in all his writings. His later writing also depicts this woman as dark cruel character, just like Saloni in *Bidesiya*. Saloni was cheated in a way but she attempted to hold *Bidesiya* back in her life in all the possible ways:

“Ghare chali jaiba latbi kena aiba, tu aas turi ke

sab naas kaila balamua

Jaiba bhavanwa paraanva teyagi dehab, paka

jaan janih kahanva balamua

Asal ke hai beti, irikhe fasal ba neti, kar turi

ghar jani jaiha balamua” (Yadav and Singh, 2005:46).

This can be translated as “Darling, you will go back home and never come back; you have smashed all my hopes. If you go back to the village, I will give up my life; this is my final decision. I am a daughter of honesty but my neck is stuck in the noose of someone’s envy. So do not leave me.” Saloni further cajoles her lover, “Don’t believe the words of this selfish traveler and let your heart grow sad. For you I have forsaken

my mother and father, what more will you have me do? I have shunned my mother and father, brother and sister-in-law, household, caste and kin, family, and my entire community and turned to you. Think about the situation judiciously and be patient, love will take its tests. Oh, owner of my heart! Hold my hands and protect the little bit of honor I have left.”

Saloni’s aforesaid statement convey to us the deeper level of her emotions and attachment for *Bidesi* from *Saloni’s* side her relationship with Bidesi was blind which made her to compromise an alcoholic person like him as it is evidently clear in following folk song:

“Babu darogaji kavne gunahiye

banhali piyva mor

Na mor piyva char re chamarva,

na mor piyva chor

Mor ta piyva madhuva ke maatal,

rahle sadakiya par soyi

Anni du-anni sipahiya ke debo,

paanch rupaiya jamadar

Ee duno jobna kalatar ke debo,

piyva ke leba chhodai” (Singh, 2005:230).

This can be rearticulated as “Inspector babu (sir)! Why have you tied up my husband? My husband is not a thief or chamar (low-caste deemed criminal in British India), he had only drunk and passed out on the streets. I will give the constable an anna or two

(16 annas made one rupee at the time), and five rupees to the jailor/officer. I will gift my youth to the Collector to set my husband!”

When these aforesaid lines are contextualized in the socio-political context the atrocity and biasness of the British colonial government is revealed in relation to caste and tribes and their approach to comprehend them as criminals by nature. On the assumption of this the police forces use to torture and imprison people. The second aspect of this story is related with earning woman's when husband is normally alcoholic and has no character but the wife is quite confident to her rights. Although she is involved in the act of prostitution. The afore mentioned song throughs light on this, when she openly says to bribe the policeman with money and her body but this should also be considered that her body is a medium to get her husband free. These kinds of woman have another kind of aspects of struggle which reflected throughout of their life. The struggle of this kind of woman has been immortalized in the various folk songs. The most striking fact is that even woman is economically free and are married with characterless man even then normally they assume their husband as divine and marital relationship as sacred. Thakur's Saloni is well acquainted with the social meanings of the word '*urhari*', '*randi*' and '*rakhailin*' etc. by her decision to live with Bidesi she imagines to be protected and respected in a family household and thinks that she can free herself from societal hates and abuses but her dream to live a life of normal wife is shattered when Bidesi decides to go to his village living her alone in the city. It is interesting to know the fact that she was sharing a life of *urhari* with *Bidesi* that is they were not socially and ritually married in the eyes of society but she did not think oOn these issues till she was rejected and left alone. In this regard someone says: “The migrant *urharis* valued the ideal family set up and other values and customs of their communities.” (Singh, 2008:46) in the Bengali newspaper of Kolkata '*Vishwamitra*', A.P. Mishra wrote



women of several Hindu castes live in brothels. The interesting thing is that once they enter this profession, they become relatively free of the oppression of norms of Hindu society, so to say. Even then, when it came to inter-dining with co-workers, a strict code was maintained. In fact, their customers would be of different castes and even Muslims, and all of them would be entertained, yet they would not give up the orthodoxy in inter-dining norms. (Vishwamitra, 1934)

This can be asserted and think deeply that if Hindu social customs and values can prevail in brothels which have no similarity with the society outside in relation to its social intercourse, then how could they not endure in the hearts of migrant *urhari* women who were living in a set-up more similar to a family?

This can be understood from the above discussion that the representation of the woman in Bhojpuri folk literature and culture is multidimensional and has all the nuances of the socio-cultural reflections. The woman is also subjected to suffering, tortures and exploitation, when they are left behind or when they migrate with their husband too. The treatment with which Thakur has presented the different aspects of these women's life is matchless in his play *Bidesiya*, he has presented *Pyari Sudari's* life as an ideal chaste wife but she has to undergo many ups and downs in her life. His play *Gabarghichor* shows the heroine who had submitted herself because of the pain of separation and finally compromises with one husband for another. In spite of all these she has been shown protecting her son by all men's which establishes her image as a strong woman despite many ups and downs in her life. *Bidesiya* portrays the character of Saloni who has to face a lot because of her status of being a *urhari* woman. But in the presentation of those characters Bhikhari Thakur has presented his progressive vision and insights regarding the upliftment of such women from societal scorn and abasement.

To conclude with socio-cultural dimensions of Bhikhari Thakurs paly, it can be asserted that Thakur has presented various levels of socio-cultural dimensions of Bhojpuri society which has similarity with other society too. The chapter argued and offers critique on the issue of caste problem of migrations, prostitution and different shades of woman experience's in different position of their life in very critical and subtle ways.

## Chapter-Four

### Contemporality In the Folk Drama of Bhikhari Thakur

#### 4.0 Introduction:

This chapter concentrates to read and examine the issues of contemporality in relation to the society: caste, class, gender and migration as depicted in Bhikhari Thakur's folk drama. The term contemporality has wider application which includes with it past, present happenings of the society and state. The relevance of Bhikhari Thakur and the issues raised in his folk drama cannot be fixed in particulars decades of history. Its significance sprouts from his time to the present and contains everlasting effects with them. Although Thakur belongs to eighteenth and ninetieth century but value and meaning of his folk drama are immortals like teachings of Tulsidas, Kabeer, Raidas and Premchand. Fundamentally his writings comprise Bhojpuri folk drama and songs directly emerging from contemporary situation of the society in which he was living. He had acute observational skills to look at prevailing tendencies and temperament of his time and have articulated them in his folk drama. The outcomes of his writings are deeply related with from the society, by the society and for the society. This chapter critically engages with his folk drama basically produced for the theatrical performance and which consequently effected people in all the possible ways changing their mind and developing awareness in their heart. His famous folk drama *Bidesiya (The Foreigner)* based on the theme of migration captures the struggle of people for livelihood that is quite relevant in the contemporary society with change perspectives and attitude. Similarly, his folk drama *Beti-Bechwa or Beti-Viyog (The Daughter Seller)* are based on mismatched marriage, causing suffering and pain to a girl in her whole life, also holds relevance in the present society. The issues that Thakur addressed

in his plays are existing in the contemporary society directly or indirectly. The chapter is divided in two parts. The first part of the chapter deals with the concept of contemporality in relation to folk literature and second part of it critically engages with Thakur's folk drama, critiquing, analysing and commenting them with the nuances of contemporality.

## I

The corpus of contemporary literature goes back to the beginning of nineteenth century to the present time. Although this is a vague demarcation and there is no clear-cut tool to demarcate the span of the period- merely illustration and interpretation by the intellectuals, scholars and academicians persist in this regard. There are debates and discussion on it and most of the scholars agreed to the fact that contemporary literature is the corpus of the writing that completed after 1940s.

The production of the text in contemporary literature is seen as cultural product that reflect society, culture, viewpoints presented by the fictionalise and real character in relation to the events of socio-economic happenings. In this kind of circumstances, the responsibility of the writers is to develop societal awareness, strength and consciousness to provide guidance to its people. The contemporary literature is not limited to the theme and settings of a cultural text but it dwells deep to examine changes overtime by producing contents and messages required according to the trends and temperament of the age.

Folk literature bears an intimate association with the socio-cultural and political trends of the time just like any other literature. This is a very common characteristics that exist in the corpus of all kind of literature but in the case of folk literature this is very peculiar tendency. The corpus and target of folk literature has not been directed

towards publication market having various modes of channels for establishing a text in the market rather it is always based on its own capacity to develop a medium of articulation that basically narrates their tales and refines itself with every fresh narration. The ability to listen and to narrate a story is not peculiarly a kits trait. This very basic ability distinguishes nature and attitudes of all human beyond ages and time. That is why when people's literature is considered, folk literature comes at the first step in its categorisation. Creativity of common language, universally accepted facts, personal experiences, cultural underpinnings and appropriations, historical and contemporary relevance are the common features of folk literature. Raja Rao in this regard, Raja Rao in his foreword to *Kanthapura* says:

There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich sthalapurana, or legendary history, of its own. Some god or godlike hero has passed by the village – Rama might have rested under this peepal-tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow-stone, or the Mahatma himself, or one of his many pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one, by the village gate. In this way the past mingles with the present, and the gods mingle with men to make the repertory of your grandmother always bright. One such story from the contemporary annals of my village I have tried to tell. (1937: 244)

Folk lore literature is not limited to any particular issues from the society because it is very basic nature is fluent and progressive with dynamic approaches transmitting from one person to another: from one generation to another generation. Keeping this feature in the consideration it can be asserted that Bhojpuri folk literature is people's literature. This literature sustains the impression of commons people desire, motivation, reflection

of creativity, expressions of common life and experience's, will to resolve conflicts, struggles for the betterment for the life, emotional and intellectual progress, reason and rationality, mind and soul, existence and philosophy of the nature. Folk literature also upholds value of simplicity, innocence and integrity linked with the narrative structures of the play.

In Indian context folk literature has been marked with basic requirement of its being progressive, anti-narrative, aesthetically resistive in relation to its themes, narrative patterns and issues like rest of the folk literature of the world. Indeed, Indian texts are motivation to the existing folk literatures around the world. The observation of Jawaharlal Handoo in his book, *Folklore, An Introduction* is very prominent in this regard:

No country in the Eastern civilization offers the students of folkloristics an excellent opportunity to trace the links of unity amidst culturized diversity as does India... India, as is well known, occupies a special place in the history of world folklore. The marvellous Indic tale has contributed in shaping the theoretical growth of folkloristics itself. For instance, Max Muller's works on Indian myths and Theodore Benfey translation of the famous Panchatantra gave rise to the theory of Indian origin of the fairy tale... the richness and variety of Indian folktales has the potential of inspiring such theories. This also reminds us of the importance of oral traditions that still flourish on this sub-continent.

(1989)

From the above discussion, it is evidently clear that folk literature is always vibrant and active among the masses and its contemporality and relevance is everlasting like the classical tone and taste of literature.

## II

The folk drama of Bhikhari Thakur are not only a vehicle for expressing heart-felt emotions of natives and nature around them, they are more than that. They are often seen as containers of culture, social norms, customs and traditions, forms of attitudes and behaviour that in nutshell is society and human life in it. His folk dramas have elevated thoughts and highest form of metaphysical truth which are normally intangible to common man. The richness and its intensity of Indian folk literature is so profound in its sublimity of thoughts that other parts of the world look towards it for guidance when their folk-art form is on the verge of decline and disappearance because of rapid form of globalisation and industrialisation. The folk drama of Bhikhari Thakur are not only testimony for culture and philosophical thoughts but they are self- declaration for self-reflection and deep insights in them. The expression of indigenous life, self-reflexive tendencies and touchstone for righteous values are common features in their formative forms. Additionally, his folk traditions are not only the established philosophy of life but they have in them high moral teachings, quite relevant to the contemporary understandings of reality. Many of his folk dramas, for instance *Bidesiya (The Foreigner)*, *Beti-Bechwa (The Daughter Seller)* and *Vidhwa-Vilap (The Wailing Widow)* are considered as theoretical canon for cultural commentary on contemporary social and political reality. Similarly, his folk songs are rated exemplary evidences to test vast variety of Indian literatures.

Thakur as a folk dramatist did not imitate the beaten path rather, he experimented with style and emerged as a revolutionary dramatist. His folk drama, which he has himself labelled as *Naach* or *Tamasha* represent pains and pleasures, hope and inspiration of the people from the lower levels of hierarchical society. *Birha- Bahar* onsite and consequently composed on the structural patters of *Tulsidas Ramcharitmanas* is a kind of musical dialogue between a washerman and his wife. It seems that Thakur never intended to portray big heroes rather he chose characters from day to day life. Thus, connecting his plays with the contemporary and modernised definition of heroes. his friend Ramanand Singh once suggested him to write on Kunwar Singh but he declined his suggestion stating that;

“Scholars and knowledgeable people will write about kings,  
emperors and big men. Let me write about people like me”.

Thakur had taste of dislike for elites because of their hatred he has experienced from upper caste people, not exactly the people bit their sense of being superior and egotism. Thakur was a man of extraordinary skills and he felt hurt and dejected on someone from upper caste called him as ‘Re’ or ‘Bhikhariya’. He stated for this feeling in his folk Drama *Birha-Bahar* as:

“Sabse kathin jaati apmana.” (Singh: 2005)

(Humiliation of one’s caste is the most difficult to stomach).

His writings resisted against the foundations of the society which were instrumental to deprive humans from humanity. After earning sufficient money and identity, he was accepted in his family and community. But people with upper caste mentality did never give him due respect and space and always behaved with him with certain amount of hate and resentment. They did not prefer Thakur narrating the pain and sufferings of



the women's through his writings. In his days the custom of selling's daughters was the part of upper-caste society, the poor parents who did not have the resources to provide dowry use to sell their daughters to the old mans as wife's. Bhikhari Thakur protested against this custom by writing his play *Beti-Bechwa (The Daughter- Seller)* while depicting miserable life of the girl sold to the aged person. His play *Beti-Bechwa (The Daughter-Seller)* received so much attention in the Bhojpuri speaking belt at various places girls resisted against such marriage proposal and grooms were chased away by the villagers. It was around 1964 when his play was being performed on the stage in Kumardhubi area of Dhanbad district, during the time of the performance itself more than five hundred labour assembled there in and after ending of the play they went to the Shiv temple and took an oath not to sell their daughters.

By his performative form of Naach Thakur gave voices to their pain, suffering and misery of the people like migrant labours, daughters, widows, old man, woman and Dalit and Backwards. He did all these revolutionary acts through his writings without being worried physical attacks and persecution on him.

The impact of his plays was so strong in the mind of the people that they went to watch his plays against the wishes of their family members. Besides his contribution to *Birha- Bahar* and *Beti-Viyog or Beti-Bechwa (The Daughter- Seller)* Thakur also attempted to offer a suitable solution to existing caste conflicts in Hindu society by his *Chauvaran Padvī*. The Hindi speaking region never witnessed revolution against the social evils and whatever happened to pacify the conflict in this context was the massive contribution of Bhikhari Thakur and other people like him. To name a few like Rasul Hajjam of Siwan, Fida Hussain Narsi of Moradabad and Pandit Radheshyam of Bareilly. They all were playwrights who dealt with social issues. They all protested against the social events and presented the exploitative nature of the society in their plays.

In this kind of transitory and explorative time, there emerged a zeal for social awareness. The literature and art form that is supposed to be mirror of society were bases on the themes which were never given due significance by the Hindi litterateurs. The literature of that time merely depicted tales of bravery from 1857 revolts, the poor conditions of Indians and subordinated condition of nation under the British regime. Bhikhari Thakur received massive support and love from weaker and backward section of the society and he was the brightest star of his time. Even the people who were assisting him for the enactment of his play received wide range of popularity and identity amongst the lower caste. He depicted the hellish existence and came out with innovative form of music, songs and dances. Thakur's life is a living example, how a person can rise above his caste and creed by efforts. Thakur challenged many prevalent myths of the world literature, culture and art by introducing a new definition of hero who could be anyone belonging from anywhere- from the bottom of the society and the hero belonging to the oppressed class can only understand and identify them with the pains and sufferings of the downtrodden people. It is stated that in Thakur's work there is a very minute form of protest against the exploitative and oppressive system of society, which aroused many questions in the mind of the audience. There is another dimension of discourse that argues that social, political and religious realities presented in the work of Bhikhari Thakur obtained recognition not merely because they represent all kind of social evils from the margins of the society (especially Dalit and woman) but holistically they represent society at whole. They resume a political intention but gets disappointed in the realm of the cultural pleasure.

Bhikhari Thakur through his narrative technique obtained popularity but his style of Bidesiya folk songs, proverbs etc. became instrumental not merely to develop awareness but also to formulate the cultural definition of Bhojpuri regions. In fact, it is

very easy to underline the core of aesthetics in the literature and art use by Thakur. In this regard the observation of Jacques Ranciere is very meaningful when he says in his book *Politics of Aesthetics*, “the theatre of Brecht, for instance, is formally the same whether it is performed at a union hall or for hoity-toity intellectuals -it's the kind of social forces that make use of something that determine politics, not what ‘regime’ it belongs to.” In this context Gorakh Pandey in his book, *Jagte Raho Sone Walo*, says, “Folk literature mostly exhibits the society, its civilization and culture. It deals with the everyday life of the common man and woman. Besides, it also reflects the struggle in the everyday life of people for the betterment of their lives” (Pandey, 1983).

The plays of Bhikhari Thakur centered around the theme of migration, caste-system, child marriage and widow-remarriage have amused and instructed the people of Bhojpuri region extensively. Apart from entertainment they have been instrumental to create awareness among the mass through the system of ideas. His popular folk drama *Bidesiya* received massive popularity which is centered on the problems and hardship of the migrant labour who went to Calcutta in search of their livelihood. A project work on *Bidesiya* has been conducted by the Social Science Institute, Allahabad, UP, which mentions, “Bidesia is a phrase designation about the people who left their country and did not return and the tradition of performing art was rooted in this migration.”

The metaphor of *Bidesiya* that stands for immigrants has reference of its use in Indian literature from a very long time ranging from Jayasi's *Padmaavat*, to Manjhan and Qutbuddin, and the story of *Madhumalti* all depict the bereaved soul of beloved on account of their lover's departure to an alien land. Guddar Rai and his two sisters Sundari Bai and Duniya Bai who belonged to a Persian family had attempted their hands at *Bidesiya* Style but had not received that much attention such as Bhikhari

Thakur. Bidesiya form and art have some features like it commences with a “Sutradhar who introduces the play with his song by coming in front, then a kirtan for narrating some episode from the *Ramayan*, and finally he narrates the plight of the heroine Pyari Sundari with folk instruments like Jantsar, Sorthi, Birha etc.” (Hussain, 52-53).

Bhikhari Thakur has written around twelve plays, the plays which were enacted on the stage were performed under the banner of Bidesiya art form particularly a Bidesia, Batohia, Sanehia, Banijia, Balamua, Piywa, Sawaria, Gujaria, Haay re Jiyra, Devkirtan, Bhikhari Chauyugui and *Birha-Bahar*. The folk songs which were composed by the Bhikhari Thakur were in the Beginning of his writing career. Gradually these songs became the parts of his folk drama. In the plays these songs are used to introduce characters and hold dialogue for conversation. Bhikhari Thakur intentionally used indigenous form of musical instrument in order to connect and invite the attention of larger number of audiences. The setup of his stage used to be open from three sides for giving these audiences better understanding on the performance and at the same time it was considered as a prominent feature of Bidesiya art form. The songs written by Bhikhari Thakur and used as the part of his plays as dialogue and conversation merely introduces characters and social context of the time. By his style and performative art form he is rated as the ‘Shakespeare of Bhojpuri literature’ by Jagdish Chandra Mathur. Mathur in his article named as *Bihar Ke Bharatmuni* says that ‘Thakur had control over Bhojpuri like Shakespeare is considered vis a vis English. His caste status enabled him talk about the status of women in Bhojpuri society from his better disposal than anybody else.’ (1971)

Bhikhari Thakurs folk dramas opened up multiple layers of India’s rural society, depicting plight, philosophy of life, difficult circumstances which motivated Thakur to become a writer and theater personality. Thakur with the help of his plays accurately presents lives of

woman, social condition, psychology of the people (upper and lower caste) prevailing in the remotely located villages. he tried to examine various aspects of woman life's e.g., by focusing at the life of a young girl in the play *Beti-Bechwa (The Daughter Seller)* and *Nanad-Bhowjai (Sister-in-Laws)*. The daughter who is too young in her age complains to his father:

Gobar karsi kaila se, piyaha chutihar dhaila se

Kawna karniya me chukli ae babuji

Bar khoje chali gaela, maal leke ghare dhaila

Dada lekhan khojla dulahwa ho babuji... (*Beti-Bechwa*)

(What was my fault that you found an old groom for me? I did everything from cleaning dung of cattle to pot and utensils and kept your house clean.)

He also presented the lives of married women in his folk drama *Bhai- Birodh (Brothers Opposition)*, *Ganga-Asnan (To Bathe in Ganges)*, *Putrabadh (Killing of Son)*, and women with migrant husbands in the plays *Bidesia (The Foreigner)*, *Vidhwa-Vilap (The Wailing Widow)*, *Gabarghichor* and *Kalyug-Prem (Modern Loves)*. In the play *Vidhwa-Vilap (The Wailing Widow)* he reveals the miserable sufferings of a widow who is pushed away out of her own house by her own kin.

Kawan kassor kaili, ghar se nikalal gaini

Chutat jat ba naihar sasurawa ho babua

Par pati saath rati, kabhun na bhail mati

Dhanwa karanwa teyaga mat ho babua

(What was my mistake that I have been drove from my house,

My father as well as in laws house has been leaving behind brother,

When my husband was there, you never intended to do that,

Don't drove away me brother, only in the greed of property.)

In his later plays Thakur has attempted to represent woman's ability to handle households' affairs and livelihood of the children's. the central woman character of the play *Kalyug-Prem (Modern Loves)* is depicted dealing with the issues of the family and handling other hardships as her husband has become an alcoholic. Thakur has also raised the question of chastity of woman who were left at home when their husband migrated to another place. The issue of dowry and subjugation of woman by man are accurately mentioned in the play *Beti-Bechwa (The Daughters- Seller)* where a rapacious father sells his daughter to a rich old man who misfortunately dies just after the marriage and *Akhio* lives remaining part of her life as a widow. In the play *Vidhwa-Vilap (The Wailing Widow)* the same kind of theme is depicted where a child widow has to undergo physical exploitation and the financial crisis because of the negligence by other members of the family.

In another play *Gabarghichor*, thakur has presented a very strong woman character whose husband is migrated and does not come back for fifteen years. During this span of time she enters into a physical relationship with another man and becomes mother of a child. She has to face a lot of accusations and exploitations but she successfully fights back and takes the responsibility of her child. It appears that Thakur advocates by the presentation of this woman character for the freedom of woman, their wish to take care of their children and their desires for their sexual life.

This cannot be entirely ascertained that Thakur did not compromise to understand the norms of the society. By his plays he attempted to establish the role of woman as mothers

and virtuous daughter-in-law's. In his play *Ganga- Asnan (To Bathe in Ganges)* he is opposed to the character of daughter-in-law and depicts her as a disrespectful woman considering, her attitudes and approaches towards her mother-in-law. In another play *Putrabadh (Killing of Son)* he examines the love and affections of *Badki* (name of mother) for her son *Chetram* and exposed the hypocrisy of *Chotki* (step-mother) towards her son, who instigate his father for killing his own son, merely for concealing her own extra marital affairs from her innocent husband. His play *Bidesiya* discusses the problem of prostitution as a social evil which happens because of financial crisis and social insecurity and in the concluding part of the play. Thakur suggests for the alternative options for the sex workers by giving them financial support and social security.

Underlining the massive influence of Thakur's literary and art productions Rahul Sankrityayan has opined: "Why do people like Bhikhari Thakur's plays? Why do 10 to 15 thousand people turn up to witness his plays? It can be felt that people love his plays and songs. What is loved and liked by the people is an art". (Pidit:8)

Bhikhari Thakur is drastically opposed to the court poets and is intimately associated with common masses and their day to day life. after the performances of his play a huge number of audiences started identifying their pain and suffering in his play. His popularity has attracted the attention of big intellectuals of the time like Rahul Sankrityayan who in his presidential address that was delivered at Gopalganj Bihar in the Second Bhojpuri Conference 1947 stated:

the flow of thoughts and sharpness of Bhojpuri can very well be seen in the plays of Bhikhari Thakur. Ten to fifteen thousand audiences on an average turn up to watch his plays. This large attendance reveals that public very much enjoys his plays and songs establishing him to be pure poetic. (Pidit, 23).

Bhikhari Thakur was alive till 1971 and all his life he spoke and debated on the social aspect of Bhojpuri life and pain and suffering of woman during the absence of their migrated husband. The idea of chastity has been very wisely and rationally depicted by him in folk dramas like *Bidesiya (The Foreigner)*, *Birha-Bahar* and *Bhikhari Chauyugi*. His folk songs have beautifully captured the miserable condition of woman from remote villages. In this context following song is very important:

“Piya gailan kalkatawa ei sajni

Gorwa me juta naikhe, sirwa pe chatwa ei sajni

Kaise chalihen rahatwa, ei sajni” (Pidit:17)

(My husband has gone to Kolkata, who neither have shoes in his feet nor roof above his head. How he will live.)

This song of Bhikhari Thakur was included in the Hollywood movie *Hazzaron Khawaisei Aisi*, directed by Sudhir Mishra. This song features in Thakur's play *Bidesiya* depicting the emotion of the woman whose husband has moved to another city and she is left alone in the village. She articulates her miseries talking about the problem imposed upon her. Thakur with the help of the songs and plays talks about the hardship of the rural village, the problem of migration, religious orthodoxies, woman's desire to get ornaments and caste system. Bhikhari Thakur very boldly proclaims to destroy Brahmin literature in his play *Beti-Bechwa (The Daughter Sellers)*. Regarding the nature of his work Tayyab Hussain Pidit in his book, *Bhojpuri Sahitya Ka Itihas* says, 'He has opined about the impact of Second World War on larger Indian society in general and the indigenous Bhojpuri society in particular. He has urged and advocated for the prime need to ensure Hindu-Muslim unity especially under the impact of colonial rule'. (Pidit, 2008)



Bhikhari Thakur and the significance of his Bidesiya style is has very pertinent influence in the history of folk tradition and his contribution to the Bhojpuri literature is imminence in terms of its contemporary relevance and everlasting impact in the Bhojpuri society. Thakur was well acquainted with his contribution to Bhojpuri folk tradition that its inspiration made his to state:

Abhi naam bhail ba thor, jab ee chut jai tan mora,

Tekra baad pachas barisa, tekra baad bees-dus teesa

Tekra baad naam hoi jaihan, pandit, kavi, sajjan, yash gaihan

Naikhi paat par padhal bhai, galti bahut laukte jai. (Thakur Granthavali,56)

(Now my fame is very small, when I will die and stop singing, after 50 year than after 10-20 years I will be called as scholar, poet, gentle and lots of appraise will be song, I have not studied much, many faults will be seen.)

In another work he says:

“Jati Hazzam more Kutubpur mokam....

Jati-pesha bate, bidya naheen bate babujee”. (Singh:2005)

In the aforesaid lines he talks about his own caste and expresses his anguish and helplessness about his caste people on their illiteracy. Bhikhari Thakur was familiar with the power of education and occasionally he scolded his people for being illiterate and bounded by *jajmani* relation with dikus.

The contemporary impact of Bidesiya style is related with labour class working on construction sites and roads. Most of these migrated labours in the metropolitan cities are from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh which had greater percentage of poverty in

Thakurs days too. So, the tale of suffering of Bidesiya people ranges from colonial period to the present time. In the past these migration use to take place for livelihood and in the contemporary time it happens because of higher ratio of unemployment, limited means of resources forced people for this kind of displacement.

The contemporary folk plays also depict the similar kinds of hardships which have been represented by Bhikhari Thakur in his folk drama with certain changed motives and attitudes. In the contemporary time the hardship faced by the woman in the village has reduced to some extent and with the help of the earning and by policies of the government, the children of these migrant workers are receiving education trying to connect with the main stream of the society.

Bidesiya as a distinct category of labour and Bidesiya as the theoretical form of performance are closely related. Bidesiya as a performative art is a strong medium to endorse and amend morally and psychologically devastated Bhojpuri community, particularly labour class. The audiences of Bhojpuri community faced a serious kind of attack with the advent of corporate cinema and accessibility of smart phones from the beginning of 1990s. There started to arise a feeling that Bisesiya performative art was going to be over. However, the performers and other peoples involve in it came up with new devices and technology which assisted them to revive their art form.

In the aesthetics articulation of Bidesiya, there is a passionate feeling of submission. Bidesiya has been largely staged in the time of the colonial migration in all kind of situations, as medium of survival. The migrant workers performed before and after leaving their home, directed to an alien land. With performance of Bidesiya songs and plays, the migrant workers and those who were left at home attempted to reconnect their feelings by this medium. In this way Bidesiya style not only was instrumental for

entertainment and revival and recollection of their feeling but it also acted as therapeutic system for releasing emotions as catharsis. In this way Bidesiya performative art served two purposes: for giving consolation to lovers in separations providing catharsis and psychological readjustments', secondly this style also assisted labours in the displaced land to focus on their work by drawing consolation from Bidesiya performances. In the contemporary time there may be various kind of transformation in the traditional performative art and art has changed its forms and structure but the basic purposes are still quite relevant in the contemporary time.

The contemporary significance of Bhikhari Thakur still lies in historical and cultural context in relation to his creative formulation of religious and secular, tragedy and comedy, traditional and modern in Bidesiya art form. In his dramatic style Thakur included dance, design, dress, technology, lightnings and songs which make his folk drama contemporary and their significance as everlasting. His recreations from religious text Ramcharitmanas and Mahabharata are quite relevant in remote villages of India where rate of illiteracy is still a serious concern. Thakur also included Bhakti song, Birha, Allah, Mallah, Dhanropni, Jantsar, Jhumar, Sohar in his play which are still used and sung in the contemporary form of traditional Hindu societies.

Thakur's socio-cultural perspectives were shaped by problem of caste, gender discrimination, migration etc. It was the need of the time to maintain moral of the society as well as to counter hierarchal notion of power existing in the social order. When the custom of selling daughter started creeping in the lower levels of society Thakur wrote and performed his play *Beti-Bechwa (The Daughter-Seller)*, which was considered as a direct attack on this evil custom of the society. It was the impact of Bhikhari Thakur that many other artists who were once the members of his Bidesiya

group, started their own theatrical companies and impacted people in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh agricultural globalisation of 1990s.

Although Thakurs Bidesiya has undertaken a long journey but its significance and meanings are still vibrant in the contemporality form of contemporary cultural practices. The urban middle-class people express doubt regarding the existence of Bidesiya and sometime it is heard that this form is going to die and its popularity is decline day by day. But the generation belonging to academic circle have come up with certain ideas to support and revive this performative art by connecting it with the modern devices like YouTube, Short Films Production, CD, DVD, VCDs, internet etc. a Bidesiya artist said that:

Earlier, we used to think that cinema might ruin our art; and, later, some people wonder who would listen to our songs when the radio came; and then told us that the VCDs, CDs, and DVDs were definitely going to throw us out. They have come and gone; we are still here dancing to the tune of the bidesiya. (Paswan)

Therefore, it can be asserted that the plays of Bhikhari Thakur have apparent correlation with the idea of contemporality and its forms. For instance, character like *Bidesi* are still relevant in the contemporary society in context of migration, despite of many policies and provisions by state and central government, working class man and woman are still migrating in the metropolitan cities in the search of livelihood or for better opportunity of life in big cities. In the earlier days only, male used to migrate but in the contemporary time female, sometime entire family migrate to the big cities. The problem of prostitution, mis-matched marriages, discrimination based on caste, class and religion, discrimination in the work place, exploitation of woman are still prevailing

in the contemporary time. Thakur's play opposed against the tyranny of the society and culture and attempted to provide solution by creating awareness among the masses.

## **Chapter-Five**

### **Conclusion**

The present research was conducted with the objective to find out the significance of the folk drama of Bhikhari Thakur in contemporary era, both from the perspective of literature and culture. How and why his folk drama, its different theme, which directly came from society in which he has passed his whole life and continuously trying to find out the way to upgrade the society by awaking people from their conventional life style, not directly but through his play which make them aware about evil prevailing in the society through entertainment, still significant.

This research dissertation debated, discussed and argued various context of Bhikhari Thakur's folk drama ranging from history of folk drama, Bhojpuri folk drama, stylistic interpretation of his folk drama, socio-cultural dimensions of his folk drama and their contemporary significance in the light of folk literature. The argument presented in the dissertation collectively opine and attempt to studies his Bidesiya style as a strategy for survival as well as liberation for the oppressed class of the society in general and downtrodden from the margin of Bhojpuri society in particular. The dissertation concentrated to develop Bidesiya as the pedagogy of the oppressed to represent and raise their assimilative voices against various forms of exploitation and the hierarchal structure of the society. The dissertation also attempts to underline the importance of different mode of articulations and technique, shared by common features of oppressed class, in order to develop dialectical mode of dialogue between oppressed and oppressors. The dissertation asserts that on the basis of dialectical mode of dialogue Thakur enabled himself to raise his voices of decent against established foundation of society, thus empowering and enabling women from the all ladders of

society. Arguments in the dissertation are suggested for unified theories of collective action, in order to change the perplexed condition of the oppressed by understanding the systematic manipulation imposed on them by cultural imposition and expectation of cooperation from the oppressed class. Bhikhari Thakur by his unique features of stylistic invention dismantled the pre-conceived system of thought and advocated for the liberation of masses by cultural synthesis and aesthetics mode of resistance. This style of Thakur made him to be called 'Shakespeare of Bhojpuri Literature' and a legend of Bhojpuri speaking world. This dissertation looked into the various context of social and cultural condition of Bhojpuri society and examine, interpreting various forms of representations based on discrimination, systematic form of injustices and system of exploitation. It shades light by infusion of art and other cultural practices to critique and address the prevalent deformities of the society. In this context dissertation argued to establish the relevance of contemporality in Thakur's play by linking it with contemporary problems of the society.

In Chapter one, which is divided into two parts. First part of this chapter reflects briefly on definition of folk Literature, its meaning in different context, history of folk literature as well as Bhojpuri literature. It includes discussion on folk literature and its origin and development, the nature of oral tradition, characteristics of folk literature and techniques of folk literature (memory, repetition and formulaic expression). In the very next section discussion is on folk Drama and its brief history. In part two of this chapter, discussion moves on to Bhojpuri Literature, which was developed over the course of 1300 years, starting from the writing of Siddha Saint and Charyapada. Periods of Bhojpuri literature which includes, Initial Period (1947 to 19610) in which first Bhojpuri story collection "Jehal ki Samadhi" by Vimlanand Saraswati and first Bhojpuri novel "Bindia" (1956) by Ram Nath Pandey was published. Next is Middle

Period which is between (1961 to 1975) in which nearly ten novels were published like, “*Semal Ke Phool*” etc. And the last one is Modern Period (After 1975) in which more than 30 novels were written such as ‘*Achhot*’, ‘*Bhor Muskail*’, etc. In this period only ‘*Purvi Ke Dhah*’ by Jauhar Safiavadi, first novel to be published by National Book Trust. Next section of this chapter discusses on, The Nautanki Theatre/ Bhojpuri Natak which includes sub- topics like history of Nautanki Theatre specially debate between Traditional and Modern Nautanki Theatre between scholar like Kathryn Hansen, Satyendra Kumar, Priya Malhotra, Atul Yadvansi, Brahma Prakash and Sanjay Singh. And then chapter moves on to the discussion on Biography of Bhikhari Thakur, about his career and his play was briefly discussed and at last chapter concluded with the discussions on literature review, research gap, research question, aims and objective of research, significance and limitation of this research, research methods and methodology and Chapter plans of this research.

In the Chapter two, which is also divided into two parts. The very first part of this chapter deals with the definition of Stylistics, Elements of Style, Style in literature which includes sub-topics like Sub-disciplines of stylistics, Relationship between Stylistics and Literature, Importance of Stylistic in Literature, Main Thought and Goal of Stylistic has been discussed. Next to this is part two of this chapter which discusses Stylistic and Style in reference to the folk drama of Bhikhari Thakur comparing it to Classical Sanskrit Theatre, Shakespeare dramatic style and other forms of folk drama like Ramlila, Raslila, Jatra etc. For example, Bhikhari Thakur folk drama used to start with *Mangalcaran* in which prayer are dedicated to Ganpati and Sarasvati, asking for the blessings etc. The character of the plays of Bhikhari Thakur are of general types rather than particular. He incorporated everything that he found appropriate and exciting from other popular theatre in his play. This chapter also talk about new form



of verse created by Bhikhari Thakur and about blending of different genre. The findings of this chapter, thus affirms the research question on Stylistic study of Bhikhari Thakurs folk drama and features of his language which make him and his work so popular that he never felt lack of audience at any point of his life as well as after his life too.

In the Chapter three, focuses is on to study socio-cultural dimensions of Bhikhari Thakur's play. It has taken into account the different layers of socio-cultural levels focusing on Bhojpuri society as represented in Thakurs play for its examination and analysis. This chapter is divided into different sub-sections which includes Culture, Change and Migration, Bidesia Folk Tradition, Migration as Socio-Cultural Tradition, The Questions of Woman's Purity and Representation of Urhari (Mistress) Woman's in the folk drama of Bhikhari Thakur. This chapter also finds the socio- cultural aspects of Bhikhari Thakur folk drama and tries to answer the research questions related to the different theme in the folk drama of Bhikhari Thakur.

In the Chapter four, discussion continues to the aspects of Contemporality in the play of Bhikhari Thakur which belongs to or occurring in the present, instead of written in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. This chapter concentrates to read and examine the issues of contemporality in relation to the society: caste, class, gender and migration as depicted in Bhikhari Thakur's folk drama. The term contemporality has wider application which includes with it past, present happenings of the society and state. Thakur is characterized by the people it belongs to. Therefore, it will not be wrong to call his play as people's literature. His plays emerge out of people's desire, aspirations, creativity and aesthetic impulses. Further this chapter critically analyze the play in reference to the theme of contemporality.

In the concluding Chapter five, the other four chapter has been discussed briefly and the findings of present research may be highlighted as follows:

**Findings:**

Bhikhari Thakurs and his Bidesiya created a very strong influence in the corpus of folk tradition and his contribution in literature is eminence and everlasting that is going to with a milestone in the history of Indian folk drama, tradition and the Bhojpuri communities. The forms and techniques of Bhikhari Thakur folk drama are in proximity with the style applied in Shakespeare's and Classical Sanskrit theatre, which have the custom of including songs and dialogues. The folk drama penned by Thakur imitate various proposition from the Classical Ancient theatre. The dramaturgy of his Bidesiya style is the amalgamation of dramatic forms like Tragedy, Comedy, Secular, Religion, Traditional and Modern theatre form which makes it unique from other writer in every possible way. Bhikhari Thakur by his folk drama attempted to provide voice to the voiceless, poor and deprived and labours and attempted to generate awareness about the miserable condition of women in Bhojpuri society. Thakur has presented various levels of socio-cultural dimensions of Bhojpuri society which has similarity with other society too. His folk drama offers critique on the issue of caste problem of migrations, prostitution and different shades of woman experience's in different position of their life in very critical and subtle ways which is important not only from socio-cultural perspectives but also from literary. Bhikhari Thakur and his folk drama has presented a progressive vision and insights regarding upliftment of marginalized women from societal score and abasement. Bhikhari Thakur and his folk drama has direct relation with the contemporality and its issue. And it is well delineated in the title, character name and theme of the play. Contemporary life and lifestyle are changing continuously but not

mentality. And Bhikhari Thakur was totally against this type of culture and raised voice against it very subtly, which was still used as a satire on society and its cultural norms.

Bhikhari Thakur and his works which includes his folk drama and folk songs is now on expansion in its interdisciplinary debate and intercession and it has a scope for further research in many unexplored areas as the understanding of his folk drama from cross-disciplinary as well as purely literary perspectives will greatly enrich the people from academics to the commonage in its new perspectives, theorisation and fresh orientations as well as to the encryption of its interpretations in literature, especially in folk literature. Bhojpuri folk literature, language and its people on the other hand are an extremely susceptible group of the Central-eastern part of India, whose experiences as studied in the present research, demands not only a political interference to their immediate predicament but an academic interest and research intervention as well. Bhikhari Thakur and his works especially his folk play therefore offer a scope for future researchers to do newer and richer research.

Thakur has established himself as a greatest folk dramatist and a renowned personality of Bhojpuri literature and culture. His recognition and identity is well established in the larger area of Bihar, Bengal, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh. His popularity is not limited to the Bhojpuri regions only but he is well known in the cities where Bhojpuri workers went for their livelihood. There are many critiques and commentators who have criticised Thakur's work for his anti- Brahminical views and for his supports to women and labour class. In today's folk literature Bhikhari Thakur does not need any introduction but the main stream academic and social culture has conspired a lot to keep him intentionally out of sight despite his huge contribution to the Bhojpuri society. That is why there are no serious account of work produced on

him. It is recently that Thakur's works and his contribution started receiving visibility and recognition, especially after the emergence of Bahujan scholar in Indian academia.

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