

Exploring the Theme of Acute and Reverse Migration in Bhikhari Thakur's Folk Plays *Bidesiya* and *Gabarghichor*

Aakash Pandey

Research Scholar

Department of English

Mahatma Gandhi Central University, Bihar

Dr. Bimlesh Kr. Singh

Associate Professor & Head

Department of English

Mahatma Gandhi Central University, Bihar

Abstract

Bhikhari Thakur (1887-1971), a 20th century Bhojpuri playwright famously known as the Shakespeare of Bhojpuri literature, with the help of his folk plays *Bidesiya* (1917) and *Gabarghichor*, intends to say that migration posits a multidimensional effect on the society. The play shows how migration lead to the separation of family members. Wives get separated from their husbands, children from their fathers, old parents from their sons, and many more such relations are torn apart. This became one of the reasons for emotional loss created out of migration. The plays show how migration is more of a cultural phenomenon than emotional one. Two streams of literature flow side by side, i.e., the Folk and the 'Gentle'. Folk literature mainly talks about the people, the workers, and others from the marginal section. Bhikhari Thakur used Folk Literature as a weapon to question the ill practices of the society. This research paper takes into consideration *Bidesiya*, which has been translated into English by Vijay Shankar Prasad in 2019, and the other play *Gabarghichor*, translated into English by Meenu Gupta in 2000. This paper shows how migration has been the most practiced phenomenon by the people from Bihar and parts of Uttar Pradesh. It further recounts how the Great Economic Recession and agricultural failure forced people to migrate to other cities in search of livelihood. The study supports the fact that Migration and the pathetic condition of Bihari migrants which emerged to be a heated topic of discussion during the Covid-19 pandemic, has been a part of the society since a very long time. It throws light on the lifestyle, and the socio-economic condition of the migrants at the places they chose to migrate.

Key Words: Migration, Folk Literature, English Translation, Bhojpuri Plays, *Bidesiya* Tradition

Introduction

The oral folk traditions have always been admired for the fact that they present any sort of social issue in a raw and lucid form. Bhikhari Thakur and Sant Kabir are some of the most acknowledged folk writers of India, who used the oral and folk tradition to challenge the social issues. Following is a most famous folk song depicting the cause and effect of the issue of migration in the Bhojpur belt of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

The railway has become a co-wife,

It has taken away my beloved;

It has taken away my beloved to Rangoon,

It has taken away my beloved to Bengal;

Neither the railways nor the steamships,

The real enemy is money;

It forces one to wander from one to another country,

The real enemy is money;

(Sinha, 2016, para 2)

The above-mentioned stanza clearly says that money was the only factor which led to the emergence of the issue of migration. It indicates the era of the great economic recession and the agricultural slowdown in Bihar and parts of Uttar Pradesh, which forced people to migrate to other cities and countries in search of work. Money has been referred here as the most important factor behind it. Records show that migration of men from the Bhojpur belt of Bihar had a multidimensional effect on the society. The migrant labourers were treated like slaves and were sometimes kept deprived of their regular wages.

3.1 Bhojpuri Language and Migration of the Bhojpuri People

The Bhojpuri language has got its wings spread across various nations of the world. It is predominantly spoken by the people of the northern districts of Bihar and, in some of the districts of Uttar Pradesh bordering Bihar. The Bhojpur region is said to have spread to the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh and the western part of Bihar. In the northern part of Bihar, it

covers the area across river Ganga, and past the famous Nepal frontier up to the lower ranges of the great Himalayas. When we look at the southern part, it covers the river Sone and is extended to the Chotanagpur, where it meets the Oriya of Singbhum, the Bengali of Manbhum, and some of the tribal languages of the tribal. In totality, the Bhojpur region has covered an area of around fifty thousand square miles. The language, Bhojpuri is also spoken and understood in countries like Mauritius, Fiji, Trinidad, and South Africa. During the early 19th century, a number of men from Bihar and some parts of Uttar Pradesh were transported to countries under British colonies, via ships, under the famous Indian Indentured System, a kind of debt bondage. These men were supposed to work as indentured labourers in sugarcane factories. Ships named Fateh-Al-Rajjak, Rhine, Ganges, Jamuna, and Multah took around fifteen thousand men of the Bhojpuri origin to countries like Trinidad and Tobago, which led to the dispersal of Bhojpuri in such countries. The migration of men led to the spread of the Bhojpuri culture to different corners of the globe. The phenomenon of foreign migration continued for nearly a century and men from the Bhojpur region had to accept it as part of their lives. Earlier during the British regime, the system of Indentured labour was being followed on a massive scale and men from Bihar had to accept the system in order to cope up with their daily necessities. This was the beginning of a phenomenon called Migration. Human migration can be defined as a phenomenon in which people move from one place to another intending to get either permanent or temporary settlement. Migration can be of different types based on nature and the cause of it. Voluntary migration, Forced migration, and Labour migration are some of the principal types of migration. The phenomenon of foreign migration continued till the end of the 19th century and then its pace became comparatively slow. It so happened that people from the Bhojpur regions of the country started to migrate from one state to the other in search of work. This period saw a huge number of agricultural workers being migrated to Indian metropolitan cities like Calcutta, Mumbai, Panjab, and Delhi, but there were no job securities with them. They just decided to move out of their houses in search of work. Poverty and unemployment led to an increment in the phenomenon of internal migration. People of the Bhojpur region became the victim of the corrupt social and political system of the country. The system and the concerned authorities responsible for employment generation for such people didn't even consider it as their moral obligation. With the increased rate of corruption and irresponsible attitude of the concerned authorities, people from a poor background automatically became the target. This forced them to migrate to other cities in search of work. Mr. D M Diwakar, the honorable director of A N Sinha Institute of Social Sciences had said that social inequality and disputes between the upper and lower castes, were the root causes of migration. He wanted to draw attention to the ongoing dispute between the downtrodden lower castes and the dominant upper castes of the Indian society. The fact can never be condoned that people of low castes were not even allowed to access or use even the public facilities. The upper class was so dominant that it restricted the lower class to use any kind of public facility. Such kind of social inequality and a torturous environment was also responsible for the emergence of the phenomenon of internal and external migration. People chose to stay away from the corrupt environment. Migration in another way fetched liberty to those hailing from the lower castes. The ongoing and pervasive system of migration is continued in some parts of the country but social inequality has reduced to a great extent. Even after putting a lot of effort to get this phenomenon of migration eradicated from society, people of Bhojpuri origin could not eradicate it. Over time, it has become an inherent part of the people of the Bhojpur region. People still migrate to the Gulf countries in a large number and they are assigned low-grade

jobs there. This shows the state of compulsion being faced by the people. It can also be said that migration sometimes leads to exploitation. A movement against internal and external migration was also launched by the Indians, to stop the Indentured labour system. In such context, the supporters of the anti-indentured system used to spread awareness with the help of pamphlets that read;

Save Yourself from Depot Wallas'

Be Careful !!! Be Careful !!! Be Careful !!!

It is not service but pure deception.

Don't get enmeshed in their meshes, you will repent.

They take you overseas!!!

To Jamaica, Fiji, Damra, Mauritius British Guiana, Trinidad and Honduras.

They are not Colonies but jails.

Save, be careful from depot wallas,

They spoil your religion under the pretense of service

Don't hear sweet talks, they are your enemies.

(Kumar, 510)

The above-mentioned stanza indicates the ongoing protest against foreign migration, which had become a part of the Bhojpur region. People were being exploited in the name of employment, on a massive scale. This stanza highlights the plight of the country's migrant labourers. Along with other states of the country, Bihar also witnessed a massive anti-indentured campaign. Many leaders and mainstream workers started to organize protests, strikes, and awareness campaigns. The migrant labourers and their family members were the main targets of such political groups. They attempted to make them understand the exploitative nature of the Indentured system. One of the most famous leaders from the anti-indentured system of Bihar was Swami Satyadev, a social activist and pamphleteer. Swami Satyadev had printed nearly twenty thousand pamphlets and got them circulated different corners of the state. He worked as the main leader who delivered motivational lectures against the Indentured system. Let's try to read and analyse the content of his pamphlets in English translation. It reads;

*ESCAPE FROM DECEIVERS.
ESCAPE FROM THE DEPOT PEOPLE
BEWARE! BEWARE! BEWARE!
It is not a service. It is woe.*

Don't fall into their snare, they will ruin you.

You will weep your life along.

Instead of rupees, rubbish will fall (on you).

They are taking you across the sea!

To Mauritius, to Demerara, to Fiji, to Jamaica, to Trinidad, to Honduras.

*They are not islands;
They are hell.
(Kumar, 511)*

This is how different kinds of techniques were used by the leaders of the anti-indentured system, to get it eradicated. One of the most famous poets of Hindi literature, Maithilisan Gupta had penned the plight of a migrant woman in Fiji. The poet has penned the condition of the corrupt Indian system which led to the migration of many people to Fiji and he further recounts their ill-treatment in the hands of the officials there. In his poem 'Kisaan' he writes;

Adham arkati kehta tha,

Fiji swarg hai bhu par,

Nabh ke neehe bhi rehkar,

Wah pahuch gaya hai upar.

Main kehta hun Fiji swarg hai,

To fir narak kahan hai.

Narak kahi ho kintu,

Narak se badhkar dasha yahan hai.

(Kumar, 514)

Here, with the help of the above-mentioned stanza, the poet refers to Fiji as hell. He further recalls how the 'Arkati' (recruiter) took all the labourers from their hometown to Fiji, calling Fiji heaven. The poet discloses how the illiterate migrant labourers were cheated, misguided, and exploited at the place of migration.

When we try to look at the positive impact of migration, it can be said that it led to the spread of Bhojpuri culture across different parts of the world. People who migrated from India to other countries can claim a common cultural heritage and hence can feel united.

Looking at Bhikhari Thakur's plays Bidesiya and Gabarghichor, through the lens of migration, it can be said that migration led to a huge emotional loss. Bhikhari Thakur was migration and had faced emotional loss due to it. Bidesiya and Gabarghichor are the outcomes of the felt reality of Bhikhari Thakur. He has depicted the situation of heavy emotional loss created out of migration. It is a matter of fact that, migration has always been considered an economic phenomenon, but it tends to be a cultural phenomenon also. Bhikhari Thakur himself travelled to Calcutta as migrant labour and there he got to encounter an amalgamation of different cultures from different parts of the nation. He also came out with the idea of the Bidesiya folktale, when he was working there in Calcutta as a migrant labourer. Bidesiya folktale is indeed an outcome of the pain faced by the migrant labourers and it can also be referred to be as an expression of the anguish of those who used to migrate in search of work. The Bidesiya culture has been represented with the help of various art forms like dance, drama, song, and storytelling. In Bidesiya folktale, migrant labour is called by different names like 'Batohi' and 'Pardesi'. People used to show their love and pain for the migrants, with the help of such names.

After these names become famous, they got converted into three different cultures namely the 'Batohi' Culture, the 'Bidesi' Culture, and the 'Batohi' culture. All these three types of culture were related to migration and the people who migrated to other cities and countries. In 'Bidesi' culture, there was little chance for the migrants to return home. The Bidesi culture highlights the situation in which the migrants used to get settled at the place of destination. In such a culture, the chance of their return was comparatively less. In Bidesi culture, the family members of the migrants used to face the pain of separation. Bhikhari Thakur's most famous play Bidesiya is based on the Bidesi Culture itself. The protagonist of the play, Bidesi migrates to Calcutta in search of work. He leaves behind his newly married wife, who becomes the victim of seclusion. Bidesi assures her wife of his early return and forgets all his promises and obligations once he gets settled at Calcutta. Bhikhari Thakur has portrayed the painful story of Bidesi's wife in the form of the Bidesiya folktale. The second culture which emerged out of migration was the 'Pardesi' culture. It was different from that of the Bidesi culture. In 'Pardesi' culture, one was initially asked and sometimes forced to migrate to other cities in search of work, but he used to maintain a good connection with the family members. In such a kind of culture, the family was given the utmost importance. People can still be seen practicing the Pardesi culture, as youth migrate to other cities in search of work but they do not forget the importance of their family. The Pardesi culture tends to be different from that of the Bidesi culture in terms of its use. Unlike Pardesi culture the Bidesi culture had a complaining tone. The third culture which emerged out of migration was the 'Batohi' culture. In 'Batohi' culture the migrants use to return home from their places of migration and they preferred to maintain the relationship with the family. The Batohi culture was a bit similar to the Pardesi culture in the terms of keeping the relationship balanced. Thakur Kesodas, an ardent follower of Sant Kabir, is credited as the proponent of the term Bidesiya and he was the one who used this term in one of his compositions during the 1850s. He came up with distinct terms, i.e., Vides for foreign migration and Pardes for internal migration. In one of his compositions in Bhojpuri, he says,

Bhave nahin mor bhavanva ho Ram,

Vides gavanvan.

(Narayan, 30)

In the above-mentioned stanza, Kesodas talks about the loss of interest in huge palaces as his beloved has gone to another city. Here, with the help of this particular folklore, the pain of migrant labours who had to leave their families behind to work abroad has been presented. Another renowned folk artist Pandit Beni Madhav Ram from Kashi had used the term Bidesiya in one of his folktales. He writes;

Kaahe mori sudhi bisaraye re Bidesiya

Tadpi tadpi din rain gawayo re,

Kaahe mose nehiya lagaye re Bidesiya.

(Narayan, 30)

In this stanza, a woman is talking to his man who migrates to another city. She talks about her pathetic condition without him. The Bidesiya culture that has been highlighted here in the above two stanzas slowly and gradually became famous and it led to an emergence of a new art form called 'Bidesiya theatre'. It was the Bidesiya theatre itself that fetched Bhikhari Thakur with an ample amount of popularity. Bhikhari Thakur started to perform the Bidesiya play on various public platforms and his troupe used to assist him to the fullest. The folk performances of Bhikhari Thakur and his troupe got unbelievable attention and applause from the audience. Bidesiya theatre had become so famous during those days that people from different places used to join the performance on a massive scale. All the plays performed by Bhikhari Thakur and his troupe had something unique in the form of various kinds of folk tunes. Some of the well-known folk tunes used by Bhikhari Thakur include *ladikaiyan, jantasari, sorthi, biraha, barahmaasa, poorvi, alaha, pachara, kunvaar bijai, nirgun, chaupaai, kabita and chaubisa*. The Bidesiya theatre must have got all such popularity because it narrated the pain of people in the form of folktales. The tales were composed in such a way that they touched the hearts and could easily establish an emotional connection with the audience. The form, diction, and lucidity of content must have been given priority by the playwright to establish mass social connect. Bhikhari Thakur's folktale depicting migration not only contains a melancholic theme but also was given a satiric and comic touch, to make it interesting for the viewers. Bhikhari Thakur was indeed a true genius who was acquainted with all the prerequisites of drama composition. The Bidesiya folktales can also be referred to as the evidence of the social disorder which emerged out of the large-scale migration of men from the Bhojpur regions of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

It indeed is a matter of concern that the Bidesia culture, which has now become a mere oral heritage, is under jeopardy today. Collecting, documenting, and analysing these traditions is crucial because it allows one to build a relationship between the culture and the migrants. This folk tradition is particularly popular not only in the migrants' home countries, but also in their destinations such as Mauritius, Suriname, Trinidad, Fiji, and the Netherlands, where the current generations are in search of cultural identity and are attempting to reconstruct the

history of their forefathers who had to migrate to other places in search of work. These oral folk tales were an essential part of their ancestors' cultural baggage, and they helped them heal from the anguish of being separated from their loved ones in their country. Non-resident Bhojpuri people will be benefitted from the study of these cultural practices. It will not only help them uncover their roots but will also help them reinforce their common cultural legacy and folk customs. This is why the preservation of oral folk traditions is essential.

When it comes to the representation of the harsh reality of society, a poet may prove to be one of the most accurate mediums. There have been many poets, authors, novelists, and playwrights who have used their literary genius as a weapon to challenge the evil practices of society. Literary works in the form of poetry have been considered to be one of the most suitable mediums to provide a succinct description of any event, issue of fact. Literary works highlighting social issues have always been admired by the readers because they get acquainted with the issues of society. Poetry and other kinds of genres make the general public aware of the evil practices of society and it simultaneously acts as a medium of challenging such practices. Raising a voice against any kind of evil practice is important to keep society peaceful and balanced. A poet or an author can bring a widespread change in society just with the help of his literary talent. Challenging the corroding practices of society is counted as one of the most important features of literature. In such context, when we look at the life and works of the Bhojpuri playwright Bhikhari Thakur, we come to know that he also used his artsy side to challenge evil practices like child marriage, patriarchy, caste discrimination, dowry system, unequal marriage, and subjugation of women in his contemporary society. The most important and interesting thing to be considered is that, used folktale as a medium of spreading awareness in society. He is known to have developed the most famous Bidesiya folktale, which talks about the pain of separation of the migrants. Thakur's unique style of spreading awareness and questioning the very practices of society is said to have brought a drastic change in society. Bhikhari Thakur could achieve such an amount of popularity because he used Bhojpuri as a medium of expression. Bhojpuri being a language of the common people could be easily understood by them. Another thing that made Bhikhari Thakur, a playwright of the common people, was his kind and generous attitude towards them. He had a special feeling and concern for the downtrodden. Bhikhari Thakur was not only a keen observer but also a man who dared to speak against the wrong. He wrote more than a dozen plays highlighting some of the most apparent and social practices of his contemporary society. He was always in favour of clean politics and he believed in a utopian kind of society. Migration, poverty, women empowerment, and caste politics are some of the most recurrent themes of his plays.

3.2 Migration shown in Bhikhari Thakur's Plays

Bhikhari Thakur, with the help of his plays *Bidesiya* and *Gabarghichor* intends to say that migration had a multidimensional effect on society. The plays show how migration led to the separation of family members. Wives got separated from their husbands, children from their fathers, old parents from their sons, and many more such relations were torn apart due to migration. This became one of the reasons for emotional loss created out of migration. Two streams of literature flow side by side, i.e., the Folk and the 'Gentle'. Folk literature mainly talks about the people, the workers, and others from the marginal section. The literature other than folk were composed for the elite and cultured class. But over time, people who had grown from the Folk culture started to forget their roots and adorn themselves with the

images of the 'gentlemanly'. As a result, most of the writers of folklore chose to keep their names hidden from the masses and this tradition was followed by some other writers too. But the immortal poets of the folk culture, like Kabir, and Tulsidas preferred to stay connected to their roots. They decided to compose their version of folk art and challenged the very system of elitism. Folk culture began to be appreciated by the common people from the ordinary origin. Bhikhari Thakur also was a writer of the same tradition who did not hide and frankly revealed that he knew nothing about reading and writing. He preferred to write in Bhojpuri - a language of the common people. Critics have revealed that Bhikhari Thakur's writing was not legible and no one could understand its context. So, to get the write-ups printed, the typist had to get help from Thakur himself. Bhikhari Thakur used to recite his writings and then it was written by someone else in a legible format. Today the resonance of his works not only lies with the Bhojpuri people but also with the people of entire north India.

Bidesia, as a play, marked the beginning of a new style of the representation of reality. Bhikhari

Thakur not only got great popularity but also emerged as a ray of hope to the marginals. Bidesiya folktales make an indelible impression on the audience because of their unique style.

The story talks about the life happenings of four of the main characters namely Bidesi, Pyaari Sundari, Saloni, and Batohi. Bhikhari Thakur, with the composition of the play Bidesiya, highlights the issue of internal and external migration, women empowerment, and poverty. In addition to it, he also questions the system which is responsible for letting the future of people travel towards darkness. Bhikhari Thakur has tried to depict the harsh reality of the society, in which the marginals were treated as an object of play. He further describes how the privileged section of the society exploits the underprivileged section. The literal meaning of Bidesiya is a person who lives abroad. The play begins with Bidesi - the protagonist of the play, informing his wife Bidesi of his intention to migrate to Calcutta in search of work. He appraises her of the job opportunities and the possibility of getting a good return from the same. Despite all such tireless efforts, he fails to get his wife convinced. She strictly denies letting him go away from her. Since Bidesi and Pyari are a newly married couple, it becomes difficult for Pyari especially to imagine being away from her husband. Here, one thing must be noticed that Bhikhari Thakur indicates towards the period when separation from partners had become a common phenomenon. It was the time during which poverty due to unemployment was at its peak. It was the time of the great economic recession in the country. Bhikhari Thakur has tried to depict the exact condition of unemployment in the entire country. The play Bidesiya also highlights the pathetic plight which emerged out of which unemployment. The condition has become so bad that people from the Bhojpur region started to migrate to other cities and countries in search of employment opportunities. Along with presenting the condition of unemployment, the play talks about women's empowerment also. It reveals how Bidesi's wife Pyari becomes the victim of the patriarchal system of society. Despite of knowing the fact that Pyari will completely be left alone, Bidesi emphatically decides to migrate to Calcutta. This shows the pervasive attitude of society towards women. The play shows that a woman's emotions and sentiments were not even considered important. The story moves forward and Bidesi gets settled there at Calcutta. She didn't even consider sending letters and money orders to her wife Pyari and he finally starts to forget her. The story takes a decisive turn when Bidesi falls in love with a woman named Saloni. Bidesi after getting to know Saloni, completely forgets her wife Pyaari, and he further decides to marry

Saloni. After the passage of some months, Bidesi's first wife Pyari asks Batohi- a neighbour of Pyari, to visit Calcutta and enquire about Bidesi. Batohi visits Calcutta, meets Bidesi there, and gets to know about his second marriage to Saloni. He returns to Bihar and apprises Pyari of the condition of Bidesi. Pyari cries in front of Batohi, and she further requests Batohi to go and get Bidesi convinced of returning home. Batohi goes to Calcutta and tells him the condition of his wife. He further reminds Bidesi of his moral responsibility and accountability towards her. Bidesi gets to realize his mistake and returns to his hometown. It so happens that Bidesi's second wife Saloni also comes with him. The play ends with Pyari happily accepting Bidesi's second wife as a family member. After going through this short analysis of the story, it is quite clear that migration not only led to an economic outbreak but also it resulted in a huge emotional outbreak. Bhikhari Thakur has shown how the family members of migrant labourers used to suffer after their departure. The play effectively presents the devastation caused by migration. The play Bidesiya comprises many folktales, on which Bhikhari Thakur used to perform with his troupe. These folktales contain a sense of emotional touch and people could easily connect their own stories of life with such folktales. Now I will be taking up some of the Bidesiya folktales - translated into English by Vijay Shankar Prasad, to come out with a clear understanding of the form and content of the same. Let's try to analyse the following stanza. It says

I will go abroad, you stay home with patience,

Tears are coming to your eyes that are making your clothes wet,

I say with body and soul and heart, God will keep you in good health, I will come back and celebrate the festival of color Holi, with vermilion in your company.

Oh my love! In other months I may stay anywhere but,

I will come on the day of the festival of colour and,

I will offer you colour and dry fruits.

(Prasad, 1028)

The above-mentioned stanza highlights the discussion between Bidesi and his wife Pyari. Bidesi tries to get her wife convinced of letting him go to Calcutta. The pain of separation created out of migration can be seen on both sides. Bhikhari Thakur took the help of a family drama to show the ground reality. The stanza shows how Bidesi promises his wife to return during Holi and to play with colours with her. It can be said that the migrant labourers used to get separated from their families and for that, they had to suffer mental trauma. She further accuses her husband of not even trying to make contact. She cries and asks him about her fault which led him to take such decisions against her. Pyari says, *Due to you, my soul is suffering, showing mercy, bless me with your sight,*

O my dear husband,

What was my fault that you left the place?

You didn't tell the affairs of the heart,

O my dear husband,

*Your swarthy image is piercing my
hear, not a single letter you sent, O my
dear husband!*

*In the abyss of the pang of separation, in the form of
an ascetic, I will chant your name only,
O my dear husband,*

Eros is tormenting me, my heart is tearing,

*Food tastes like poison,
O my dear husband!
(Prasad, 1790)*

The above-mentioned extract of Bidesiya folktale, describes the impact of migration, especially on the women of the society. Pyari's condition is clear evidence of the negative impact, as she mentions her inability to eat without her husband. She cries in pain and accuses her husband of the sin he has committed against her. Since the condition of economic recession had emerged, almost all the sources of employment got a pause. The people of the Bhojpur region were completely dependent on agriculture and due to the economic slowdown, agricultural inputs were badly affected. It was an economic recession in the background itself that became the factor behind the migration of men from one city to the other. Bhikhari Thakur has narrated the traumatic stories of the migrant labourers, with the help of his plays Bidesiya and Gabarghichor. Thakur's plays have been considered to be epoch-making in terms of highlighting social issues. The plays Bidesiya and Gabarghichor were written by the playwright back in the 20th century but they still have relevance in contemporary society.

Bhikhari Thakur has tried to show a different kind of problem faced by the wives of the migrants. In the play *Bidesiya*, Thakur has tried to highlight the sexual assault against women. There was a time in which, young and newly married brides were left alone at home by their migrant husbands. This particular phenomenon of internal and external migration had become a common and compulsory phenomenon because of unemployment. People could not get any kind of job opportunity there in the Bhojpur regions of Bihar and some parts of Uttar Pradesh. This led to an increment in the phenomenon of migration and it gave birth to different kinds of atrocities against women. Bhikhari Thakur has talked about such atrocities with the help of two characters Pyari and the neighbour. The play *Bidesiya* reflects how the neighbour of Pyari abuses her physically and attempts to seduce her. He fearlessly asks Pyari to forget about her husband's return, and enjoy a physical relation with him. Let's try to look at an extract of their conversation to have a better understanding of the same. The neighbour approaches Pyari saying;

As an extraordinary and sexy you are, so am I, a youth with mature body. If you offer your body and heart to me, then I am ready to be yours to offer you money and servants. As you gave up cheating and trickery and evils, so am I free from greed, attachment and sloth. Bhikhari of diyara says, please think over the matter and cease weeping.
(Prasad, 3192)

Here, with the help of the above-mentioned stanza, the treatment of women gets highlighted. Thakur's pursuit to indicate increasing male dominance and gender inequality can easily be noticed here. As it is a well-known fact that a piece of literature reflects society, Thakur's play Bidesiya also reflects the evil practices of his contemporary society. The play talks how migration gave birth to such kinds of problem to and women were the first to face them. Instead of paying a sense of respect, people tried to use a woman's body for sexual pleasure. Migration not only led to the emergence of sexual assault against women, but also it led to the devastation of many relationships. As I was talking early about three different kinds of cultures representing internal and external migration, the play Bidesiya specifically talks about the second type of culture namely the Bidesi Culture. Thakur has given a glimpse of the Bidesi Culture in his play Bidesiya and it gets highlighted when Pyari laments the separation of her from Bidesi, due to migration. In Bidesi Culture, there was less chance of the migrants to return home. Bidesi as migrant labour assures her wife to return home very soon but he never does. Let's take another stanza in order to locate the uses of Bidesi Culture of migration, in Thakur's play Bidesiya.

Pyari says;

The image of my husband torments my heart day and night,

What I say is surface, I am unable to explain completely from deep inside,

(I don't know) In which strange land he resides where nobody goes to and comes from, Nobody notices the lady (me) in the house bewailing.

(Prasad, 867)

Here in the above-mentioned stanza, Pyari fears whether her husband will return to her or not. She is not even in the condition to believe that she will be meeting her husband for the second time. Bhikhari Thakur has shown the existence of the Bidesi Culture during his time. Along with giving the Bidesi culture a mention, Thakur has tried to highlight the negative impact of the same. It shows how the Bidesi Culture was the dangerous of the three kinds of cultures of migration, as it led to an emotional breakdown and it created a possibility of separation of the migration from their family members. Thakur's play Bidesiya is an amalgamation of different emotions on a single platform. The playwright had got a god-gifted style of composition as he knew how to mould sadness and happiness in a single write-up. His plays dealt with a number of genres and perhaps this was the reason which led Rahul Sankrityayan call him the 'Shakespeare of Bhojpuri.'

After *Bidesiya*, we will be taking up another play of Bhikhari Thakur which is based on the issue of migration. The analysis will be based on the English translation of Bhikhari Thakur's play *Gabarghichor*. The play has been translated into English by Meenu Gupta. Though *Gabarghichor* is also based on a theme similar to that of *Bidesiya*, the playwright has deliberately given it a different angle to look at migration and its impact through a different lens. In *Bidesiya*, an element of the Bidesi Culture can be traced with the protagonist's visit to Calcutta and his intention to never return. In the other play *Gabarghichor*, it can be said that Thakur has tried to show the element of the Pardesi Culture in which the migrant keeps in touch with the family and gets aware of the happenings inside it. *Gabarghichor* presents an image of a subjugated, downtrodden, and betrayed woman who fails to find her voice to protest against the male-dominated society. The internal and external migration that had become a well-known phenomenon after the great economic recession led to widespread chaos and devastation. Families were torn apart, women were sexually abused, and migrant labourers were exploited at their workplaces. In *Gabarghichor*, the protagonist Galiz migrates to another city in search of work. Galizbo is her wife who lives alone at home. With the play *Gabarghichor*, Thakur has tried to indicate the multidimensional effect of migration. In this particular play, it is the wife again who has been presented as the center of attention, but the impact of migration happens to be completely different. Here in the play *Gabarghichor*, it so happens that the protagonist's wife develops an illicit relationship with one of the villagers, out of sheer frustration caused by her husband's separation. The play proves the fact that migration not only tortured the women but also the men of society. It was the state of seclusion actually that led both the men and women of the society, cheat each other. It indeed is a different thing that migration started of the economic recession in the country, but the playwright intends to show that the Bhojpuris faced a different kind of impact of the same. Along with an economic crisis, people of the Bhojpur region of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh experienced failure of relationships. Thakur's plays *Bidesiya* and *Gabarghichor* are solely dedicated to show the emotional breakdown created out of the separation of family members. Now we will be looking at some of the stanzas from the play *Gabarghichor*, depicting the impact of migration in their unique way. The following stanza shows the excitement of a wife when her husband returns home after a long time.

The way lotus petals open up in sunlight,

Water lily blooms in moonlight,

Black bees get excited at the advent of spring,

Peacocks dance in rain,

Swans delight in Manasarovar,

Resources activate with desire,

Everybody gets happiness in such ways,

But my lord! My heart gets joy at your glimpse.

(M Gupta, 127)

These are the words of Galiz's wife who becomes extremely happy at the glimpse of her husband. The stanza shows how the young wives of migrants kept on waiting for them for a long period. Galiz bo starts to dance in excitement when she meets her husband. It seems that she forgets all the complaints about her husband. It is said that, when Bhikhari Thakur and his troupe used to perform this particular scene, women could easily connect it with their conditions. This is how Bhikhari Thakur achieved such greatness by establishing an emotional connect to his audience. Migration led to the separation of wives from their husbands, and they had to accept the situation because of the unavailability of any other option. Since employment is the one of the most important factors behind the survival of human beings, the Bhojpuri migrants had to accept its pros and cons without any sort of objection. As it is quite true that everything has dual aspects, migration at one side fetched the migrants with job opportunities, it became a reason for the separation of family members, on the other side. The play *Gabarghichor* talks about the issue of internal migration along with questioning women's identity. Galiz- a migrant labour, returns home after so many years. He gets to know that his wife Galiz bo has given birth to a child and another man named Gadbadi claims to be the father of the child. This leads to the creation of a dispute between Galiz and his wife. The following stanza from *Gabarghichor*, will assist in getting the things understood better. The wife says;

Oh! My husband,

I am pining in your separation,

*You married me with proper rituals yet never
Cared.*

*You have never fulfilled your responsibility
of being a husband*

*. I begot a son, but it was of no avail, My
husband, you forced me to adopt wrong
means. Do not squash my expectations, let
my son remain with me. He is the basis of my
life,*

*I have fasted, remained on half-empty
stomach to bring him up, I plead you to stay
here and make a home out of this ruined
house.*

(M Gupta, 128)

The husband starts to question the chastity and loyalty of his wife and out of sheer frustration, he decides to take the son with him to the foreign land. The wife pleads to let the child live with her only, and in retaliation, she accuses her husband of his carelessness towards her. She tells how pathetically she has been leading her life alone when her husband was living in another city. The negative impact of migration gets highlighted when she tells that it was her husband's separation that led her to choose the wrong way. She could not deal with her loneliness and could not resist herself by being seduced by Gadbadi. The play is a complete portrayal of family disputes created out of migration. It shows how migration created a situation that forced people to either accept it as it is or go against it by choice. Both the plays, i.e.

Bidesiya and *Gabarghichor* revolve around the same theme but with a twist in the stories. *Bhikhari Thakur* has tried to show both acceptance and rejection of migration and its effect, on those who had to face it. The character *Pyari* represents the section of people who happily accepted the situation created out of migration, and another character *Galizbo* from the play *Gabarghichor* represent the section that chose to reject and challenge the same.

Conclusion

The plays *Bidesiya* and *Gabarghichor* still seem to be relevant because people from the Bhojpur regions still migrate to different cities and countries in search of work. The research shows how migration affects the society and especially the house wives. Since, *Bhikhari Thakur* was a Bhojpuri playwright, he focused mainly on the social issues of the Bhojpur region. He himself was a migrant labour who faced the negative consequences of poverty and hunger. *Bhikhari Thakur* saw migration as both emotionally and culturally devastating. As seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, the condition of migrant labourers from Bihar and some parts of Uttar Pradesh was heart wrenching. These labourers travel to different metropolitan cities in search of work, and are exploited at many grounds. This research paper further clarifies the fact that *Bhikhari Thakur* has talked about migration back in the late 19th century, and he is still equally relevant in the contemporary society. People still migrate from Bihar to Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Chennai etc. in search of work, and their families face the pain of separation. *Bhikhari Thakur* was more concerned about the socio and economic condition of women in the society. He has questioned and challenged the societal practices against women and their freedom. He was of the firm opinion that the phenomenon of acute and reverse migration has always been anti-woman.

Works Cited

- Gupta, Alok. "Notes on Migration." *Down To Earth*. 07 June 2013. <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/notes-on-migration-41292>. Accessed on 30 October 2021.
- Gupta, Meenu, translator. Gabarghichor. By Bhikhari Thakur, e-book. Sahitya Akademi, 2000
- Kumar, Ashutosh. "Anti-Indenture Bhojpuri Folk Songs and Poems from North India." *Man in India*, 93 (4): 509-519 (2013): n. Pp. Print.
- Narayan, Badri. Bidesiya: Migration, Change, and Folk Culture. *IIAS Newsletter*. IIAS, March 2003. Pp 30. https://www.iias.asia/sites/default/files/2020-11/IIAS_NL30_12.pdf. Accessed on 25 October 2021.
- Prasad, Vijay, translator. *Bidesiya*. Kindle ed. By Bhikhari Thakur, 2019.
- Sinha, Nitin. "When Women sang in the age of Steam." *The Wire*. 31 JULY, 2016. <https://thewire.in/the-arts/railways-bhojpuri-folksongs>. Accessed on 26 October, 2021