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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Kahe Gaile Bides, Why Did You Go Overseas?: On Bhojpuri Migration Since the 1870s & Contemporary Culture in Uttar Pradesh & Bihar, Suriname & the Netherlands**, edited by Mousumi Majumder, Allahabad, Spot Creative Services Mango Books, 2010, 184 pp., Rs 475 (hardcover), ISBN 978-81-906804-3-1

Migration stories mirror the socio-cultural life of emigrants. History is not only about what people have done in the past but also about what is the driving force behind their initiatives, their thoughts, and feelings. To address this issue, it is important to explore within which cultural and historical conditions they existed and acted accordingly. In conjunction with migration stories, it is imperative to examine their manifestation of survival and their strenuous efforts for reproducing culture in a new world.

Before the cessation of slavery, colonial powers were expanding their territories and organising labour force from different sources. But right after abolition of slavery and to make their plantation economy a profit-making business enterprise, they initiated a 'great experiment' in the name of the indenture labour system. This system drained the Bhojpuri region in terms of its resources and labour supply. Labourers were sent to distant colonies and this departure of the labourers aggravated the pain of separation to both who left and those who stayed back. In this book, the author endeavors to focus on the emotional aspects of migration and discusses how this indenture migration laid the foundation of distinct folk culture in the Bhojpuri region in India and in diaspora which is popularly known as *Bidesia* Folk Culture. This cultural representation has been proliferated.

The fascinating part of this book is that the author has encapsulated the feelings and motives behind their migration by studying tangible and intangible artefacts like oral traditions, folklore, life stories, rituals, songs, nautanki (drama), and personal letters which were hardly addressed. The book consists of seven chapters, in addition to the introduction. The central message of the book is that the distinct cultural expression has been used by left-behind women to exhibit the feeling of separation, deep sorrow, and pain. To make further progress in maintaining the cultural link with India, they reproduced the lost culture in a new environment with myth, fantasy, rituals, and memory.

Keeping a question of their identity in different cultural settings as a central point of inquiry, in the first chapter, 'The Bidesia story', the author has reflected upon the circumstances that worked in favor of colonial powers and the story of a mass exodus of skilled labourers from eastern UP and Bihar. It deals with the emergence of Bidesia folk culture which became a powerful tool of cultural expression of the Bhojpuri community in Surinam. Chapter two focuses on the intangible cultural resources of migration in the form of Bidesia folk songs that unravel the feeling of emotional loss. These cultural representations facilitated left behind women to mitigate the feeling of loss, pain, and trauma caused by migration. The whole experience of separation deeply impacted the folk psyche of the people. Chapter three sets

the ball rolling on the settlement of Bhojpuri migrants in the Netherlands who again underwent the same feeling of pain and separation due to twice-migration. It introduces you to their stories of struggle to find out their association with which cultural landscape. Chapter four examines the Bhojpuri culture in the rural society of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The reading of this chapter gives an impression about their cultural life to determine the linkages between Indian and Bhojpuri diasporic communities living abroad. The connections are reflected by their style of dressing and jewelry worn by the folk of the Bhojpuri region during migration. Chapter six elucidates the journey of the Bhojpuri language in Surinam across generations. Chapter seven delves into the narratives of personal experiences of left-behind women and it gives us a nice picture of their perceptions and apprehensions. It captures the process of cultural productions that were evolved in the Bhojpuri region of India as well as in Suriname.

This book offers a discussion on motives and perceptions of the emigrants from varied perspectives as the title suggests it examines the narratives of pain, loss, and trauma caused by migration and it showcases the articulation of the Bhojpuri community ranging from India to the diaspora. It extensively explores the narratives, local history, individual stories, and memories that are not documented so far. These discussions have been presented in the form of *Bidesia* folk songs, personal letters that are preserved in the archive of Suriname.

Emigrants confronted the dilemma: where are they heading? The names of the destination places were pronounced by the migratory population in such a manner that evokes the feeling of having a strong connection with Hindu mythology. For instance, Suriname was pronounced as '*Sri Ram Tapu* or *Sri Ram desh*' by migrants who propagated the idea that it is a land where Ram (mythological figure in epic *Ramayana*) lived (p.21).

The second revealing aspect of this book is that it explores the possibilities of identity preservation and how this cultural memory gets transmitted to intergeneration. The author of this book gave importance to cultural memory and how this memory intends to exhibit the desire of having a home that helps in identity construction. What leaves behind always remains in the memory? The collective memory of the Bhojpuri community helped in remembering the lost world. The cultural production of the Bhojpuri community in Suriname was based on the folk culture of the Bhojpuri region of India. The migration gave impetus to develop the distinct folk culture both in India and in Suriname with different components. To regain the cultural link with India, the Bhojpuri community in Suriname revived the glory of *baithak gána* or *baithka* (common meeting point of the community) (pp.166).

In the wake of documenting the cultural heritage of Bhojpuri migrants in Suriname and the Netherlands, the author has articulated the cultural practices that helped them to survive the atrocities. The Bhojpuri community made tremendous efforts in preserving and promoting their culture. To break the monotony of life to keep alive their cultural heritage and memories of their homeland, they started celebrating their festivals and religious ceremonies. It strengthened their cultural bonds and provided a platform to bind them together in a close-knit community. In the process of continuity in cultural practices; the Bhojpuri community in both Suriname and Netherlands celebrated festivals like *Holi*, *Diwali*, *Ram Navami*, *Jiutya*, and *Chhath*. During the celebrations, various other forms of religious expression came into existence such as *Ramlila* (enactment of scenes from Hindu epic *Ramayana*) performances, reciting *choupayie* (quatrain verse) of *Ramayana*. Besides this, some theatrical performances (*nautanki*) were widely popular (p.43) during settlement.



The life of left behind people is not extensively explored by researchers but this theme is drawing scholar attention to explore the uncharted territory. In this book, the author has explicitly studied the cultural tradition of the Bhojpuri region where Bidesia folk songs were used by left-behind women community as a medium to express their anguish and to criticise the conservative patriarchal set up of the region. Personal narratives of these left-behind women were used to analyse their perception of migration.

*Piya mat jaa bideshwa rabab kaise-*

(Oh my husband don't go to bides (foreign), how will I live

*Sasura ka batiya to sabi sun lebe* (My father-in-law's words I can stand) (p. 67)

The feeling of trauma causes a void in life. The language and forms of representation may be different but the essence often evokes the struggle towards searching for meaning in life. It is important to highlight here is that scholars have studied migration from varied perspectives but less emphasis has been given to the emotional impact of male migration but in this book author addresses this question by highlighting ways in which intangible sources offered opportunities to represent the socio-cultural life of left behind community. These sources played significant role in strengthening Bhojpuri consciousness among the community. There may be diverse ways of representing traumatic memory and it constitutes a wide range of personal encounters with trauma, pain, and suffering. As Aristotle says 'purgation of emotions' has a recuperative function, similarly folk songs provided them new ways of coping mechanism to diminish the impact of traumatic stress caused due to migration. This book is credible in unraveling the hidden stories of migration and its emotional impact on society.

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## FUNDAMENTALS OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

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