

## **Colonial Experience of Bhojpuri Speaking Diaspora in Mauritius**

The Colonial experience of the Bhojpuri diaspora has been nothing less than hell, and this is the reason that they use to call their stay “*Narak*”. Indentured labours that first went to Mauritius in 1834 are called *Girmittya*, and after 1834 the migration was carried out in an organised continuous way. The reason the British took Indians to Mauritius was that they were better than Africans for work. The United Province suffered from poverty and British masters used this as a tool and made them understand that there was plenty of gold in Mauritius which these labours would get if they work there. The Indentured labour consisted of 90% of Bhojpuri speaking people, majority of them being Hindu and the rest Muslims. Most of these people went there without their wives. The earliest large-scale importation of Bihari indentured labourers was in 1831 when 151 workers were brought to Mauritius from Calcutta by Messrs Lylall, Matheson and Company. They acted as commercial agents for Mr John Shaw Simpson, a British planter and merchant. The Biharilabourers were brought on a group contract and were required to work for five years for Mr Sampson on his sugar estate in Rivière du Rempart district. They were required to work in the sugar cane fields, tend to his cattle, repair the pathways and roads on and near his estate and do other menial work, as and when required by the estate manager. The contract came with all the basic amenities but the reality was that they had to start their work before even Sun rays kissed the earth and it continued well after sunset. They had to work on Sundays, with weekly payment which they were not given at times. They used to live in ‘Thatches’ that were made of sugarcane leaves, with no sanitation. No education was provided to them or their children; neither there was any sort of health facility. As Bhojpuri dominated the lingual arena, other people including the masters/bosses were forced to learn Bhojpuri for communication. One thing that the Bhojpuri people did not forget was their culture which they call “*ApnaDhrama, Sanskriti*”. They carried with them Ramayana and Quran. They used to compare their ordeal with that of Lord Rama and would believed that one day they would eventually go back to India as Lord Rama did in Ramayana. The British tried to break the hegemony of the Bhojpuri people and Bhojpuri language with indirect influence of western culture over the Bhojpuri. The Colonial masters made English the language of educated or civilised class and portrayed Bhojpuri a rough language. Slowly and gradually the Bhojpuri language started to erode from the people’s memory, they adopted new culture, new language specially the younger generations. English and Hindi replaced Bhojpuri over a time. But the elderly people are still fighting for the survival of

the Bhojpuri language. Some of the prominent Bhojpuri figures of the Mauritius are KasinathKisto, Ram KelawanBudhan (First Barister), Jaynarain Ray, BassudevDisondayal. DrSivsagarRamgoolam. Earlier Bhojpuri was the lingua franca, but now it comes next to Cerole. However the revival of Bhojpuri has taken place and all credit goes to the academicians, intellectuals and the political clan of Mauritius who had strived hard for the growth of the language. Now Bhojpuri is taught at the primary school level, and there is a Bhojpuri channel on National 'TV' of Mauritius where Bhojpuri films and programs are telecast. It will not be wrong to say that slowly and gradually there is a revival of Bhojpuri language in Mauritius.