

Bhojpuri Speaking Diaspora in Global Perspective

Migration of Bhojpuri speaking people to different parts of the world was one of the important aspects of the colonial period. An estimated 70 million people in Uttar Pradesh and a further 80 million people in Bihar speak Bhojpuri as their first or second language. There are 6 million Bhojpuri speaking people living outside the Bhojpuri heartlands of Bihar and Purvanchal. These areas include Nepal, especially Birgunj, Mauritius, Fiji, Suriname, Guyana, Uganda, Singapore, Trinidad & Tobago, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Great Britain, and the United States. This makes the total Bhojpuri speaking population in the world close to 150 million. Bhojpuri was historically written in Kaithi scripts. From the word Kayastha the Kaithi script derives its name. This community conventionally comprises of accountants and administrators. This group existed in the province of Awadh and Bihar. This script was generally used for writing the legal as well as administrative documents. But after 1894, Devanagari served as the primary script for Bhojpuri. In the Mughal era, it was found that Kaithi script was used for writing Bhojpuri for administrative purposes and other legal documentation. If Government report is to be believed then Kaithi continued to be used till 1960's in few districts of Bihar. It is the script of Bhojpuri used by Kayastha. Bhojpuri residents of India, who signed up and moved as indentured labours in Africa and the Caribbean colonies of the British Empire in 19th century and early 20th century, used Kaithi as well as Devanagari scripts (Mesthrie, Rajend 1992)

Bhojpuri speaking diaspora is a demographic group of people from Bhojpur region of India who have settled in other parts of the world. Bhojpuri Speaking Diaspora is those of Bhojpuri people who have migrated from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (earlier United Province) in India and are widely spread on the global level. The majority of them were Hindus with a sizeable number of Muslims. The spreading of Bhojpuri speaking Diaspora around the world is not of recent phenomena. "There are approximately 150 million Bhojpuri speakers worldwide" (Singh, Vernica, Ministry of External Affairs, 2014), spread in over fifty countries of the world. Thus we find a large population of Bhojpuri speaking Diaspora in Mauritius, U.K, U.S.A, Singapore, Malaysia, Fiji, South Africa and even Bangladesh and Nepal. More than seventy million Bhojpuri Speaking Diaspora are living as refugees and asylum seekers particularly in neighbouring countries like Nepal and Bangladesh. The early settlement patterns of the Bhojpuri people could be traced to the sugarcane plantations of Mauritius, South Africa and Reunion in the Indian Ocean, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean, Guyana and

Suriname in South America. Bhojpuri speaking Diaspora creates numerous identity, such as American-Bhojpuriya, Canadian-Bhojpuriya. Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (the land of the Bhojpuri people) is the northern part of India. During the British rule, Bhojpuri people migrated mostly as workers, on railway track in Mozambique and Sugarcane plantation workers in Mauritius, Fiji and other Latin American Countries. After independence, the situation changed, immigration abroad was for higher education, professional jobs and relocation. Today Bhojpuri people are acclaimed in politics internationally, especially in Mauritius and South Africa. Through migrations of slaves, labours, professionals and refugees, spanning a few centuries Bhojpuri language is ubiquitous in many parts of the present day world. Some diasporic communities could not continue with their original language and adopted a new one, but they have maintained their culture and look back to trace their roots; many communities in Reunion, Mauritius, South Africa and West Indies can be taken as examples. Bhojpuri unity is rooted in a prehistoric traditions : a wealthy language and literature, and a vivacious culture. It is a unity consolidated by struggle and suffering and, given purpose and direction by the aspirations of people for the outlook, a future where they and their children and their children's children may live in equality and freedom in an emerging world. Their obsession for and the love of their language and culture, is the force that binds the Bhojpuri Diaspora worldwide, and their unity is rapidly rising to be reckoned as force worldwide.

When we talk about identity, language and culture are the two important aspects of the cultural element. Culture in its eternity is generally learned publicly and collectively by the members of a society. Similarly when we talk about Bhojpuri language, its traditions are identified for its prosperous values, fashioned in the past thousands of years. Bhojpuri language is known for its politeness world-wide. In Bhojpuri language there are more than 5 ways to speak of certain things politely. For example "Your" has several words or synonyms but with a different tone of politeness "*tōr*" (*casual and intimate*), "*tōhār*" (*polite and intimate*), "*t'hār*" (*formal yet intimate*), "*rā'ur*" (*polite and formal*) and "*āpke*" (*extremely formal*). For any society culture is an essential and integral part. In India, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have a distinctive and affluent culture, lifestyle and customs. Culture is the mixture of people's languages, their food, religion, family values, dressing code, behaviour. It is the culture that binds together the people of different faiths and beliefs. Bhojpuri Diaspora as a community has put in great effort over generations to achieve

economic prosperity while protecting its identity and ancestral traditions. Their intelligence, sense of belonging, and togetherness have resulted in the maturing of multi-faceted cultural, religious and media development. In global arena, the Bhojpuri Speaking Diaspora at present constitutes an important and in some respects a unique force. The 'Diaspora' has a special place in India. Owing to their single minded dedication and hard work, they performed outstandingly well in their professions, and therefore they command respect in the country they inhabited as well as in India. They migrated to far off places as indentured labourer but not without extremely rich cultural values for which India is renowned .They have retained their emotional, cultural and spiritual links with the country of their origin. It is primarily due to this reason the study of Bhojpuri speaking Diaspora becomes interesting and innovative. It is encouraging that the Bhojpuri speaking Diaspora constitutes a significant economic, social, cultural and political force, and it has enormous affection for its native country. The government of India has recognised the importance of Diaspora. It is due to this reason the President of India said that effort should be made to take PravasiBharatiya Divas to the people of Indian origin living elsewhere. Indian Diaspora is willing to invest in India. The government of India should in cash these opportunities and take initiative to involve them in commercial activities. The new Diaspora, now willingly encouraged by the government of India, is represented in a sizeable number by the professional elites who have carved a position for themselves in the countries of prosperous north. It is no coincidence that the term NRI, which is now often smartly passed off as an orientation to any overseas Indians, only came in usage less than two decades ago, and has acquired something of a supernatural character in the last decade when India finally became committed to the opening its economy. The study of their political and cultural lives is the emerging area of the research and debate. This strikes a reciprocal chord in the hearts of the people of India and Indians abroad.