

A case for the study of Bihari Diaspora

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Abstract

Diaspora studies are attracting widespread interest today especially with re-surgent globalization. There exist myriad researches on Indian diaspora and some of these researches have highlighted regional diaspora of India. These studies are mostly about those from northern, western, and southern India. The major focus in this research is on those settled in developed countries of the world. Diasporic communities like the Punjabi, Gujarati, Malayali, Telegu, and their like contribute significantly to the development of their place of origin compared to those with origin in the province of Bihar. More research is on these above-mentioned communities and more contribution is from them. This paper is motivated in line with the government initiatives to tap the potentials of different diasporic communities for homeland development. We draw from the discourse analysis of relevant literature and seek to fill the void of researches on Bihari diaspora by exhibiting nuanced discourse on the historical diasporic journey from Bihar as well as the socio-cultural landscape of these communities in the place of destination. We

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problematize the under studied and the under developed. This is important because we must encourage more nuanced researches on and about the Bihari diaspora. We must also draw attention of different government agencies including those from Bihar for formulating such effective policies that would engage the Bihari diaspora for development of their place of origin. A case, therefore, for the study of Bihari diaspora is timely and important.

Introduction

“There is no happiness for him who does not travel, Rohita! Thus, we have heard. Living in the society of men, the best man becomes a sinner. Therefore, wander!

The fortune of him who is sitting, sits; it rises when he rises; it sleeps when he sleeps; it moves when he moves. Therefore, wander!”

These lines from an ancient Sanskrit writing (**The Aitreya Brahmanam 700 BC-600 BC, 7:15**) emphasize on the significance and essence of migration and diaspora. This quote insists that happiness comes with travelling and fortune too favors those who take risk and move for better life opportunities. Wandering and settling in search of green pastures, temporarily or permanently, is natural for living beings. Even animals yearn for suitable habitat or better environment and locomote continuously. Migration has always influenced world history and culture, transforming the political, social, and economic landscape of a region. Migration is pivotal in academic research and teaching as well. The history of humanity is history of migration and material progress, originating from the antecedents in Africa (**Kapur 2010**). Historical perspective of studying these phenomena has gained

popularity over the years. Sociology as a discipline has had migration as a central subject matter. **Mills (1959)** advocated developing “sociological imagination” by implementing historical perspective to acquire a profound understanding of publicly relevant issues. Migration and resulting diaspora is a significant publicly relevant issue enabling historical approach as an indispensable tool to gain in depth knowledge of causes and consequences around migration. Therefore, adopting historical perspective, this paper details relevant discussion around diaspora and the same is contextualized for the Indian diaspora. Thereafter, we provide an account of migrants from present Bihar. Socio-cultural and gender dimensions of Bihari diaspora in the host society is also delineated which is followed by a brief discourse on roots traced by diasporas. Discussion over diaspora and developments are delineated in the concluding section. However, the primary objective of the article is to present a case and persuade more studies on the globally spread “Bihari diaspora.”

India and her diaspora: concept and context

Historically, the term “diaspora” finds its origin in the Greek word *diasperein*, meaning dispersion. The word diaspora has migrated from ancient period acquiring different meanings (**Raj 2012**) and this proliferation of the term encouraged **Brubaker (2005)** to denote dynamic connotations of diaspora as “diaspora.” Initially, referring to the exodus of Jews from Jerusalem (**Safran 1991**), the concept of diaspora has gained a new trajectory from a distinct “social category” to “mode of cultural production” (**Vertovec 1997**) adding a few new vocabularies of ethnoscape, hybridity, and deterritorialization (**Vertovec and Cohen 1999**). **Raj (2018)** citing **Vertovec (1999)**

asserted that the term diaspora connects to those sections of the deterritorialized or transnational population group whose cultural roots exist in a different land other than the space they are currently inhabiting. Past exile groups, overseas communities, ethnic and racial minorities got incorporated under the purview of the term in the post-World War II era (**Raj 2018**), contemporarily encompassing a wide cluster of gatherings, including politically displaced people, guest laborers, migrants, ethnic and racial minorities and abroad networks. **Sheffer (1986)** puts modern diaspora as an ethnic minority group of migrants maintaining strong material and sentimental connection with their country of origin but acting and residing in host countries. Within this premise, it can be concluded that retention of cultural identity in the host society is a pre-requisite parameter of the concept diaspora, and it strengthens the fact that all diasporas are products of migration, but not all migrations make up a diaspora (**Skeldon 1997**). In academia, the word diaspora is more or less applicable to almost every population or group living outside the nation-state border or its homeland (**Story and Walker 2016**), whereas in general usage, diaspora is perceptible as a collective noun referring to anyone not at home (**Brubaker 2005**). Nevertheless, with time, the term diaspora has been re-invented in the academic vocabulary to encompass social formations and cultural patterns of the contemporary world (**Raj 2012**).

The Indian diaspora, interchangeably used with Overseas Indians, is a generic term, describing the people (and their descendants) who have migrated from territories currently existing within the borders of the Republic of India (**High Commission of India 2019**). Indian diaspora comprises Peo-

ple of Indian origin (PIO) and Non-Resident Indians (NRI), constituting heterogeneous global community, with an estimated 25 million Overseas Indian Community (**Annual Report, Ministry of External Affairs 2014-15**). A report published by the Population Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) in September 2019 claims Indian diaspora as the largest in the world with an estimated figure of 17.5 million population (**The Economic Times 2019**). The modern Indian diaspora spread globally dates back to the third decade of nineteenth century (**Raj 2012**). Historically, movement of people from India and resulting diasporic communities is the outcome of different waves of migration driven by various reasons, which include slavery under mercantilism, indentured labor under colonial setup, and movements post-colonialism. Prior to India's independence, there were two dominant waves of migration. Abolition of slavery in British colonies in 1830s marked the beginning of the first wave. Huge number of Indians went to the colonies of South and Southeast Asia and Africa as indentured laborers. Majority of these migrants were poor and unskilled, belonging to lower castes. The second wave comprises of traders, bureaucrats, clerks, and professionals migrating primarily to southern and eastern Africa. Post-independence period in India witnessed two major flows of migrants. Migration of laborers to the Middle-East catalyzed by economic growth due to oil price hikes comprises the first wave, but they did not settle permanently. The second flow is to industrialized countries; particularly to the United States after US immigration law was liberalized in 1965 (**Kapur 2010**).

Contemporary Indian migration presents striking characteristics regard-

ing selectivity of the immigrants. Indian population migrating to western countries are more gender-balanced and more educated (**Raj 2012**), and migrants travelling particularly to the United States are relatively young and have higher incomes with a majority of Hindu population (**Kapur 2010**). The High Level Committee (HLC) on the Indian Diaspora set up by the government of India decided to celebrate *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* (PBD) on 9th January to honour the overseas Indians for their contribution to the homeland. This particular day is chosen to celebrate in order to commemorate the return of Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest *Pravasi*, from South Africa. Indian diaspora maintains transnational engagement through global networks with families and friends that facilitate exchange of shared ideas of social, cultural, and economic interests (**Annual Report, Ministry of External Affairs 2014-15**). However, globalization of Indian diaspora already began during the emigration period of laborers to plantation colonies. Development of brotherhood gave birth to terms like *Jahaji Bhai* and *Dipua Bhai*, which acted as the integrating factor beyond religion, caste, and language creating a globalized feeling of being the Indian diaspora (**Gautam 2013**). It was mostly the laborers to the plantations during British rule that people started migrating from Bihar.

Bihar and its migrants: indentured to intellectual

“Bihar: deriving its name from ‘Viharas’, resting house of Buddhist monks, have historically attracted influx of intellectuals. Initially, the inflow of scholars and foreign travellers was for the seat of higher learning, the Nalanda University, established during the Gupta period. For centuries, Nalanda was a beacon that attracted scholars not only from India but also from all

over Asia, including China. However, with time this region started sending out-migrants as well. Bihar, thereafter, has a long history of migration, dating back to pre-colonial times. The culture of peasant migration in the Bhojpur region (Eastern U.P. and Bihar) can be traced back to the beginning of the sultanate rule in north India. It is evident in the poetry and folklore of the region dating back to even fifteenth century. The poetry and folklore popular in the region depict the feelings of separation of a wife from her husband, who left home to serve distant masters. The pain of separation from a husband of his wife has been depicted in the popular songs of northern India. The songs sung in the month of *Chait* called *chaitar* by the peasants of Gangetic belt also reflect the twinge of separation of women left behind by their husbands (**Kumar 2017**).

De Haan (1994, 103) has reported that **Das (1992)** described the state of Bihar as an “extreme case of what has happened to a region subjected to societal stagnation, economic exploitation and cultural degeneration under conditions of long and stifling feudalism, external and internal colonialism and the most brutalising experience of late capitalism ...”. This statement signifies that Bihar has always been at the bottom of the growth ladder among the states of India. Entire province is viewed as victim of chronic poverty (**Kumar and Bhagat 2012**). Reasons highlighted by scholars (**Yang 1979; de Haan 2002**) includes mass out-migration from north-east as well as north-west districts of Bihar due to closure of weaving and cloth manufacturing. Then there is decline in cash crops and sugar production. Further, indigo and opium plantation stopped, along with high degree of landlessness, low and unfair agricultural wages, scarcity of work all round

the year, high population density, social stagnation along with emerging feudal exploitation. Without going into the details of the reasons for the under-development of this province, we would like to keep the focus on international migration from Bihar and concomitant overseas communities. However, the migration pattern of Bihar is inextricably related, and causes of intra-state, inter-state, and international migration are overlapping in nature. The migration pattern of the state has evolved over a period associated with set of sequential events. Thus, before detailing over international migration, intra-state, and inter-state migration from Bihar merits attention.

Bihar: intra-state and inter- state migration

Migration within the province has always been a continuous process even before the creation of Bihar from Bengal province in 1912. Towards the end of nineteenth century, Bihar was the major labor supplier to the industrializing Bengal. Search for better employment, working in the army, and marriage constitute the prime reasons of mobility within the state. However, Bihar has experienced significant economic growth in the last couple of decades. Within the purview of changing economic scenario, state's impoverished rural population is expected to respond positively and restrict their migration to other states of the country. Changes in migration pattern are observed among the migrants moving outside the villages. Labor migrants asserted that they are availing more employment opportunities within the state than before. Less interest in agricultural activities is seen, within or outside the state among the labor migrants, and smaller towns in village vicinity became preferred destination than the state capital (Roy 2016). At present, out of total 27,244,869 migrants from Bihar, 94.4% of them move

within the state, reflecting the significance of intra-state migration. Marriage stands as the prime cause, accounting for 70.9% of movement within the state (**Census 2011**).

Migration outside the state started before the colonial period; Bihar was an important source of laborers to other parts of the country. Besides, outmigration, the state of Bihar witnessed immigration prior to the colonial period. **Jha (2019)** referring to “History of Mithila” by **Thakur and Upendra (1988)** claims that Nanya Deva of Karnataka came to Mithila (north-eastern Bihar), and established his dynasty around 11th century A.D. He asserts that Nanya Deva’s movement attracted more than one hundred Kayasthas to Mithila from Karnataka to assist the former in the management and administration of the region (**Jha 2019**). This group of migrants settled in the region assimilated with the local culture and tradition, ultimately establishing their identity as MaithilKayasthas. Besides, fair number of traders and money-lenders (Kothiwal) around 17th-18th century came from the west and settled at Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Jandaha, and few other adjoining regions. Thus, it was evident that Bihar was a favorable place to settle before 19th century.

Contextualizing in respect to out-migration, community characteristics such as regional location, size of population, rate of growth, and other social and cultural factors influenced the pattern of occupational mobility in 19th century India. The Bhojpuri speaking people of West Bihar and U.P. and Santhals and Dangars of South Bihar had always been adventurous, leaving their homes and going to distant places seeking improvement in their condition. The Bhojpuris have served in the East India company’s army as

‘Purabia Sepoys’ and as *darwans* (watchman) in Calcutta and other urban centers (**Jha 1999**). In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the colonial rule in India stabilized with improvement in law and order as well as civil administration. Within this period, irrigation facilities developed, and trade improved because of advancement in communication network through roads and railways. Consequently, the western tract of India witnessed agricultural development with specialization in cropping pattern, whereas the eastern part with highest population pressure lacked similar sort of growth. In the decade of 1960s, westward flow of labor migration started in response to green revolution in the north-western part of India as green revolution had created high demand for agriculture laborers. However, changes in cropping pattern and mechanization of agriculture practices saturated the demand of labor in the area of green revolution towards the end of 1980s (**Kumar and Bhagat 2012**). By the end of the 19th century, labor from Bihar was primarily recruited for Assam’s tea gardens, for Bengal factories and mills, for construction work and for coffee and sugar plantations of British foreign colonies.

Analyzing the trend of migration as per Census (2011), it is evident that only 4.08% migrants move to other states within India and again, the leading cause being marriage. Among the states, Jharkhand tops the list of destinations of migrants, which is often termed as ‘statistical migration’ since both the states were unified until late 2000. Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal is after Jharkhand. Among other major destinations of Maharashtra, Haryana, Punjab, Assam, and Gujarat, Delhi surpasses others because of the diversity of opportunities, proximity to Bihar, and less difficulty of language (**Kumar and Jha 2018**).

Lower caste and landless laborers who were residing in the state at minimal subsistence level were ready to move to the east, searching relatively higher wages. This migration was primarily seasonal in nature, and improved communication through railways facilitated them to travel to their native place for agricultural and other required activities (**Yang 1979**). The circular migration was vital for agricultural laborers to sustain their subsistence as they could migrate to their native place for fulfilling basic requirements when cultivation was not profitable in other states (**de Haan 2002**). As **Yang (1979 and 1989)** has shown, there used to be a tradition in the Saran district of Bihar that every year thousands of laborers migrated to eastern Bengal and Calcutta seasonally and returned to their villages when agricultural work commenced. Large number of Saran people were recruited as indenture outside their district. This happened because they left their homes to find work within the country, and when they failed to do so, they became indenture. Though employment was the pivotal cause of the migration to other states but social reasons played a significant role in stimulating inter-state movement, particularly among groups like the Dalits and *Adivasis*, who were victims of historical oppression (**Kumar 2009**). Tyranny out of the Zamindari system demanding high rent created large scale landlessness among peasants. With the commercialization of agriculture adding to their misery, peasants were compelled to migrate to other parts of the country, particularly to eastern states of India and in a few cases to abroad for their survival (**Sharma 2005**).

International migration from Bihar

While pre-colonial movement of peasants was mostly limited to internal

migration, British rule in India opened up new possibilities for migration overseas. However, colonial emigration was in many ways, different from pre-existing patterns of internal labor migration, which offered migrants a stronger chance to return to their homes. Around 1830, the transition to new manufacturing processes in Europe and the United States catalyzed by the industrial revolution transformed the material prosperity of Britain, pushing India to the way of economic backwardness. Decline in the supply of cotton goods from India to Europe brought a slump in the cottage industry accompanied by widespread unemployment provoking many to strive for employment among the larger rural peasant population of India. However, insecurity was there with the land as it was prone to frequent droughts leading to starvation on a large scale. It created a tailor-made situation for the exploitation of laborers by the former slavery dominant countries, the British and French, which were in favor of adopting the indenture system already practiced by South American planters for obtaining Chinese labor from Portuguese settlements. The planters, with the help of the agents, recruited labourers for a defined period- generally five years.

Slavery abolition act of 1833 initiated transnational migration of Indians. Between 1834 and 1920, the recruitment of Indians, with a large proportion of Biharis to work in the colonial plantations in various islands, was organized through the indenture system (**Kumar 2017**). Indenture emigration was only one of the many vents for unemployed labor in the agricultural sector. This migration filled the void of laborers to former plantation colonies being operational through slaves. This colonial economic pattern and growth of plantation resulted in various forms of state-sponsored mass labor

migration. Besides, the political, social, and economic situation in India under British rule was terrible, and the unemployed and starving Indians were willing to cross the Seas (*Kalapani*). Moreover, in the central Ganges valley in the North India population reached a critical point in the nineteenth century. According to a rough estimate, between 1800 and 1870, the population of India increased from 100 million to 250 million (**Jha 1999**). The Biharis started preferring colonial emigration to inland emigration. The recurrent floods, epidemics, earthquakes, famines, and other challenges compelled the people of the Gangetic plains to escape to sugar colonies. The lower castes, oppressed, and depressed (subalterns), emigrated to escape social and economic oppression. Peasant unrest in Bengal and Bihar plains in the second half of the nineteenth century also led to large scale emigration. The Rent Act of 1859 and the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 did not bring any relief to the tenants (*bataidars*) and large scale eviction from the land they tilled followed. Unlike the lower caste *raiya*s, the higher class tenants resisted eviction and other oppressions. Thus, around 1872 when the old tenants were replaced by new *thikadars*, the former left few areas in South Munger and South Bhagalpur. Besides, declining productivity of land near the decadent river system, the recurrent ravages of malaria, cholera epidemic, smallpox, and a couple of other factors led to the emigration of rich people of the Gangetic plains who could have helped the needy or at least console them. In the absence of capital, the scope of healthy agriculture became bleak. Naturally increasing population and unorganized agriculture lead to the exodus of agriculturalists to the colonies.

Jha (1999) reported that G.A. Grierson during his investigation in Bihar

around 1881, found that only one-third of the emigrants from this province belonged to the lower castes. The Bhojpuri speaking people of the old Saran and Shahabad districts were the readiest recruits. Besides, these people had a more adventurous spirit than other people in Bihar. Frequently, the repatriated laborers of these areas returned again to the colony taking with them numerous friends and relatives. In his report of 1883, Grierson analyzed the social composition of 1200 emigrants from north Bihar and highlighted the abundance of upper castes too discarding many studies which claim migration of exclusively lower caste. Among them, 264 were Muslims, 231 higher castes like Brahmans and Kshatriyas, 454 from the middle caste like Kahar, Kurmi, Gwala and 277 from lowest castes like Chamar. This figure almost tallied with the analysis of the Bengal Government Protector of Emigrants in Calcutta: of the 7695 Hindus embarked, 1995 were the Brahmans or other high caste people, 2454 were agriculturists, 456 artisans and 279 of low caste (**Jha 1999**).

In the major famines in Bihar in 1866, 1874, and 1896 the colonial state remained stubbornly subordinate to the development ethos. The food crisis could not be effectively handled even by the Famine Commission's Code in the 1880s, and the starving people chose to emigrate to far away colonies. The Bihar peasants, especially the tribals of hilly and jungly Chotanagpur plateau, lost many of their traditional rights in forests, pastures, and irrigation, finding it difficult to survive during famines. In Nabinagar, in the old Gaya district, the tenants were denied wood for fuel or timber, fruits and honey, and fodder for their cattle from the forest or wasteland. In Purnia, the traditional rights of free grazing were denied, and the poor peasants had to

take their cattle to Morang (Nepal *Tarai*). The situation worsened in 1890, when terrible floods destroyed the main crops.

Formerly the North-Western Provinces (Agra and Oudh) supplied the largest number of emigrants, but during 1884-86, Bengal including Bihar, headed the list. According to the Protector of Emigrants, the dearness of food in Bengal and Bihar proved a push factor, increasing the number of emigrants. Gaya in Bihar sent the largest number (980), Shahabad sent 879, Patna 664, Munger 341, and Gazipur in North-Western provinces, only 338. These five districts formed a compact area, and were in the words of the Protector of Emigrants, “thickly populated by a fine and enterprising race” (Jha 1999, 89) and might be looked upon as the most important recruiting ground in Hindustan. Jha (1999) further citing Geoghegan asserted that on the ships these laborers were brutalized by the captain and crew. In the sugar or coffee plantations in the British West Indies, they were often humiliated by the planters, estate managers, over-seers, *sardars*, and drivers, who were particularly cruel to the women. Huge number of complaints about the evil of the indenture system was coming from colonies. Governor of Mauritius, in 1903, identified that reason behind continuance of indenture is the monopoly of planters over the laborers, whom planters paid far below minimum wages for sustenance. Most of the white civilians working in the newly created province of Bihar and Orissa as commissioners and district magistrates pleaded with the higher authorities that if they could not amend the indenture system properly, it should be ended. Patna district magistrate thought that the system of indentured emigration should not be encouraged anymore, but the Gaya district magistrate had no reasonable objection to

it. The D.M. of Shahabad, who studied the system in depth, thought that the general condition of his area changed drastically after the introduction of indenture system in the 1830s. He wanted it to be rejected outright. He further found it unjustified that the overseas colonies like West Indies were getting extra facilities that was denied to the plantations in North-East India. He pinpointed that the demand for labor was steadily increasing in India itself. New railways, docks, the jute mills of Calcutta, the industries of South Bihar-all these created mass labor demand. Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and the straits settlement had also started importing Indian labor, and there exist many proposals from abroad in the pipeline. The Bhagalpur commissioner also recommended its abolition. In 1918 the system was about to abolish but on the cost of introducing quasi-federal emigrations. Concluding and final end to indenture of Indian labor was marked by a telegram received by the colonial office from the Governor of Fiji, discarding all indentures of East Indian laborers. After the abolition of the indentured system, laborers were engaged on farms or activities going inside the country.

Census of India (2011) reports that 1.46% of migrants from Bihar move outside India, where apart from marriage and movement with household, work/employment, and education hold a significant position. However, in the colonial period or in early post-independence time, movement for education or of intellectuals was minimal, and domination was of laborers. At present, out of total migrants abroad, 70.9% move to Asian countries. On the other hand, considering migration from urban Bihar to outside India, the proportion of movement to Asian countries and other countries presents a balanced scenario with 53.1% and 46.9% respectively. Since Asian

countries primarily attract laborers (mainly skilled) and other western countries technocrats or intellectuals, thus this pattern of migration with almost equal proportion of migrants to Asian and non-Asian countries advocates the movement of intellectuals and skilled personnel in the past a couple of decades.

Focusing over international migration, the data for 2016-17 produced by Ministry of External affairs (MEA) claims that Bihar contributes 15 percent of the total emigration from the country, which is behind Uttar Pradesh accounting 30 percent. Data of Union Ministry of Overseas affairs states that emigrants figure from Bihar has hiked from 36,493 in 2006 to 84,000 in 2012, finally reaching around 1.5 lakhs in 2017. This labor emigration is confined to limited districts of north Bihar, including Siwan, Madhubani, Gopalganj, and Purnea (**Sinha and Ramashankar 2017**), signifying that there exists no specific belt of exodus as the case was with the old diaspora from Bihar.

Bihari diaspora

Free-market economy favoring movement of people across nation-state borders results in the formation of culturally pluralistic and ethnically diverse transnational society (**Sharma 2018**). A migrant at the host milieu, for example, is stuck between two different cultural affiliations and faces the problem of double consciousness. Every diasporic community, which in most cases turns out to be an ethnic group in the receiving country, fully or partially, adopts the host culture through different stages of acculturation and/or assimilation as **Eldering (2005)** argues referring to **Gordon's**

(1964) model. Acculturation is a process of cultural change initiated by the amalgamation of two more autonomous cultural systems (Eldering 2005), and the resultant hybrid culture is governed by characteristics of cultural institutions of both homeland and host land, since culture is reproduced and lived in communities, and is linked to “place” as well as exigencies of labor and work (Kumar 2017). Sauer (1925) argues that the natural landscape is subject to transformation at the hands of people, altering the natural forms and creating cultural morphology or cultural landscape. As cultural and sentimental bonding with the homeland forms a pre-requisite condition for diaspora, thus focusing on the cultural aspect at host land becomes an integral part of diaspora studies. Bihari diaspora presents a wide variety of cultural affiliations since different waves of migrants are occupying disparate geographical space.

Culture of the indenture laborers from Bihar was synced to an agricultural calendar where variety of crops were cultivated at their native place but the case was different in the destination colonies where the actual process of work under plantation was the dominant factor in reproduction or production of culture. This lack of agricultural calendar made it challenging to document and analyze the culture of *girmity as* who belonged to a rich agricultural-based cultural background because of various reasons. First, in India, cultural practices are embedded in peasant routines, where life revolved around the harvest and festive calendars. On the other hand, they worked under a “labor-regime” in the colonies, where life was regulated by the requirements of the plantation work. Second, the broad swathe of Bhojpuri-speaking society was obliged to forget a large part of their agricul-

tural culture (**Kumar 2017**). However, indentured Indians did not simply forget the cultural practices of home, even if the plantation regime created a disjunction between peasant agriculture and popular culture of villages in Bihar.

With respect to family structure varied scenarios of indentured labourers from the Bhojpuri region (Uttar Pradesh and Bihar) were observed at different destinations. In Trinidad, such diasporic communities developed their own settlements by purchasing or renting small plots of land after expiry of their contracts. This facilitated the communities to establish hierarchical work relations in the home, gardens, and field at the same time, providing potential prospects to rebuild the extended family structure with patrilocality (**Eldering 2005**). In contrast to this situation, in British Guiana, married sons were discouraged to co-reside with their families on the plantations. Separate house was assigned to each couple, which resulted in the disappearance of extended family structure, and consequently, gave rise to nuclear family setup. Associated with family setup is the social institution of marriage which reflects profoundly the socio-cultural pattern of any community. Bihari diaspora witnessed a considerable transformation in marriage culture at colonial plantations. Widow re-marriage and inter-religion marriage between Hindu and Muslim at plantations violated the long established culture of marriages in India or Bihar per se. Although there was change in the patterns of marriage, the indentured workers used the same terminologies of their homeland related to their family and marriages. For instance, *Dulhin* for bride, *Bhauji* for the wife of elder brother, *barat* for marriage procession, and *damad* for son-in-law were among the frequently

used words (**Kumar 2017**).

Colonial setup made people afraid of the forcible conversion to Christianity. Caste and class dynamics are integral part of socio-cultural structure, and these diasporic communities at plantations struggled to maintain their caste identity. The indentured laborers hold strong notions and beliefs regarding their caste system and caste rules. However, the ships carrying these *girmityas* and the social environment of plantations at destination like West Indies refrained these communities to behave and live according to caste principles. The diaspora in Suriname succeeded partially in reconstructing and maintaining the caste system. Complex structure of castes and sub-castes were overtaken by the global varna system, designating the highest caste to Brahmins and considering “depressed castes” of lowest status (**Eldering 2005**).

The case for the recent migrants in the post-independence period is different from the colonial Bihari diaspora concerning the socio-cultural scenario. Since the new group of migrants comprises a fair proportion of intellectuals and skilled workers, they are less likely to get influenced and succeed in maintaining their native cultural ethos and social values. Numerous instances of Bihari families celebrating *Chhath* and other native festivals at the host land strengthen the fact that they are sticking to their homeland culture at large. Modernization and westernization are responsible for the transformation of marriage structure, facilitating inter-caste and inter-religion marriages at host land since these marriages are not viewed with extreme hostility as it was considered in the earlier colonial times.

Gender dynamics has always been hostile towards female catalyzed by patriarchy and feudal norms, and females have always strived and aspired of better and equitable living. The case of indentured laborers stand true with this fact and it is significant to note, as the Grierson investigation indicates, that the indenture system became an escape route for women who became widow at a young age, possess low social status, or who were abandoned by their relatives. He further came across a widespread belief that recruiters cheated innocent women and made them into prostitutes (**Kumar 2017**). **Gaitura Bahadur (2013)** in the biography of her grandmother Sujara, *Coolie Woman: The odyssey of indenture*, excavates the repressed history of coolie women, among whom many were widows, outcastes, or runaways who choose to emigrate alone to work on sugar plantations in the Caribbean, Indian, and Pacific islands. She has reopened the debate on the treatment of women on the plantations. Through her family history and detailed exploration of the archives, including ship logs, Bahadur has contextualized her *girmitiya* grandmother's history within the larger politics of the colonial migration policy through which many women left their homeland to escape patriarchal oppression at home. In contrast, to earlier feminist analyses regarding indenture women, Bahadur considers that the phenomenon of migration enabled the empowerment of women through their new identity as 'coolies' (**Kumar 2017**).

Grierson noted natives' objections to emigration, which was the outcome of fear of losing their social and cultural bonding. The main objection he found was the long-term commitment and the distance from home. Once people went to a colony, in many cases, they could not manage to maintain their

familial ties in India. Many a time, emotional attachments with native land and family ties came in the way of emigration. Few people told Grierson that it is very difficult to leave “*janam-bhoomi*” (Kumar 2017). This attachment of migrants with the homeland attracts them and their descendants even after hundreds of years to search their native space and experience the energy of their or their forefathers’ birthplace. Similarly, Bihari diaspora settling abroad has maintained transnational culture and communication with the homeland. There exists a handful of instances of Bihari diaspora striving to locate their native land. Rajkeshwur Purryag, former President of Mauritius visited his native Wajitpur village in the Patna district on 13 January, 2013. Purryag has tried hard to locate the native village of his great grandfather Laxman Nonia, who migrated 150 years back. Similarly in 2012 the former minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, visited Bhelupur in Buxar district. From this village her grandfather Ram Lakhan Mishra had migrated to Caribbean islands on July 18, 1889, on a ship named Volga, which carried 556 people. Another example of diasporas tracing the roots is the case of Moheet Ramgoolam, the grandfather of Navinchandra Ramgoolam, the former prime minister of Mauritius. He left India on September 7, 1871 from Harigaon village in Bhojpur district and arrived back in search of his village (Jha 2013). Besides, every year, lots of well off people from foreign countries visit the state searching their roots, which further strengthens the fact that modern diasporas has strong sentimental links with the home land (Sheffer 1986). Bihar too respects their desire of re-visiting their homeland. Chief Minister of Bihar, Nitish Kumar has paid homage to one of its fourth generation indentured labourer (Kumar 2008) by unveiling a statue of Mauritius’ first Prime Minister, Sir

Seewoosagar Ramgoolam at Patna. "Tracing the roots" scheme is launched by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs since October 2008 to facilitate People of Indian Origin (PIO) in tracing their roots in India. In such a quest, social networks play a vital role in tracing the link back to origin country if the migrant lacks suitable address of the homeland. Since, with the help of these social networks, the past is retained, the present becomes a lived reality, and the future can be imagined (**Raj 2012**).

Inferences

Epilogue of this study will strive to answer why the study of Bihari diaspora is important? But the initial version of this question needs to be answered beforehand, that is, why study of diaspora is important?

This paper highlights that Bihar has a long history of labor migration, and it continues in the contemporary world with changes in the pattern of movement. History of migration from India resonates with migration from Bihar because the Bhojpur region was among the first to experience mass exodus. In the globalized world, countries are tapping the potential of their diasporas for development in the homeland. Relationship viewed under the purview of diaspora and development is positive and beneficial (**Singh 2012**), and it could be claimed that migration and the resulting diaspora are vital parts of development process, where development could have different facets- economic, social and political. This dual nature of the relationship between migration and development is also supported by two divergent approaches regarding this association, as advocated by **Singh (2012)**. The first view, that is, "balanced approach", a part of liberal economic theory, which

suggests that migration triggers development in the origin countries and bridge inter-country disparities by eradicating unemployment and providing economic support through remittances and enhancing migrants' skills, that **Kapur (2010)** refers as "social remittances". The other view, generally known as "systematic view", contradicts the balanced view and argues that despite facilitating development, migration distorts the developmental process through 'brain-drain', resulting in wider income disparities. Thus, contextualizing diaspora as a totally positive or negative entity could be a biased approach. Since, as highlighted by both the views of migration and development, the remittances sent to the homeland by diaspora can be significantly beneficial for the local economy, but diaspora itself reflects a void in the origin country that can hamper development of the homeland stimulating negative repercussions.

On similar lines, objective of Indian government is to utilize its overseas communities for development and for the same government is floating many schemes to attract investment and bring back the intellectual minds. In the past, overseas emigrants were considered as non-required Indians (**Hercog and Siegel 2013**), but **Kumar (2017)** argues for the return of indenture Indians with large number of Biharis, enriched with their savings skills and experience, contributed to rapid appearance of nationalism in India and a growing demand for independence. Similarly, **Eldering (2005)** claimed that according to **De Klerk (1953)**, the indentured laborers presented unexpected contributions in India's development. Discrimination against Indians in the colonies, particularly in South Africa, instilled national awareness in M.K. Gandhi, who further stood as torchbearer in Indian nationalism. How-

ever, contrary to the past, at present overseas population is considered “angels of development” (**Khadria 2008**) and members of the Indian family or ‘Mother India’s Children (**Sinha-Kerkhoff and Bal 2003**). **Garha and Domingo (2019)**, referring to **Hercogand Siegel (2013)** and **Kugiel (2017)**, asserted that in the last decade, the countries of origin started considering their diaspora populations as ambassador of good will or soft power tools for harnessing economic and political benefits. Accelerated globalization and neo-liberal shift in India’s economic policies has exemplified the desire of Indian government to utilize its diaspora for economic and political power in the global scenario, and this shift in developing countries’ perception is emerging beyond security concerns associated with civil unrest and terrorism (**Singh 2012**). Although, India is the largest remittance receiving (USD 78.6 billion) country, surpassing China and Mexico (**World Migration Report 2020**) which is one of the major indicator of development resulting from diaspora, but there exist certain aspects where India needs to draw from its counterparts. In contrast to the Indian government, which is at present primarily focusing on economic remittances, Mexican government has encouraged cultural and political participation of their diasporas in the homeland’s socio-cultural and political affairs (**Garha 2018**). Mexican government extended dual citizenship and voting rights to its emigrants which Indian government denied to provide to its emigrants. Thus, Mexican diasporic population celebrates more recognition from the government (**Garha 2018**) which is mutually beneficial, and India too needs to formulate effective policies for attracting attention of the diasporas. Apart from being key drivers in development, diasporas contribute extensively in strengthening bilateral relations between home nations and host land, and **Kapur (2010)**

claims that diasporas have an effect on Indian democracy as well but diaspora engagement initiatives with the country of origin needs to be moulded as per need of the hour.

Being the oldest and one of the largest diasporas, in terms of development derived from overseas community, Bihar should have been at the top of the list among the states of India, but the situation portrays an altogether adverse scenario. The state tops the list among states of India in percentage of households with out-migrants receiving remittances, both in rural household (74.5 percent) and urban household (61.4 percent) as per **NSSO (2010)**. However, economic outcomes of diasporas were heterogeneous in the case of Bihar. A study conducted by **Deshingkar et. al (2006)** on Bihar points that migration and resulting remittances were responsible for improving standard of living of thousands of families living in poverty but it benefits different sections of the society differently. Poorest unskilled laborers utilize these remittances to improve food security. In the case of better educated and well-connected migrants working in industries or other manufacturing sectors, income from migrants is a source for financing agriculture and cumulates assets. Skills and experiences brought back by migrants contribute primarily in technological development. Therefore, social remittances need not to be overlooked as this could be the vital developed factor for Bihar as well as the nation as a whole in this mechanized milieu and world of artificial intelligence. However, contemporarily, Bihari migrants have too faced a backlash rooted in ethnocentric movements (**Sharma, Dutta and Ghose 2012**). Thus, the sustainability of migration and concomitant diasporas as a means of development of the state along with its people remains

questionable in the long run.

The government needs to ensure that if it wants investment from diasporas, it must make Bihar an attractive and remunerative destination for investors, where the focus should be minimal on taxing them, and attention must be on ensuring that they create a chain of growth and development in the region (**Bilimoria 2013**). This will ultimately benefit the state and the people in the long run and lead to employment and sustainable wealth creation. The government of Bihar lacks on its part to attract their valuable diaspora. However, the government is not solemnly to be blamed. Significant development of the states like Punjab and Gujarat because of their valuable diasporas observed. For example, Gujarati NRI communities are contributing abundantly by building private universities and investing in other remunerative businesses (**Bose 2019**). Studies focusing on Punjabi or Gujarati or Telugu diaspora are in abundance. Though it is unjustifiable to generalize, but it is evident that more studied overseas communities are being highly beneficial to the homeland. Such usefulness of diasporas for homeland may be credited to researches that facilitated the government and policymakers to articulate policies and schemes effective for harnessing the potential of diasporas for development. Contrary to the situation of these states, there is extreme dearth of studies over Bihari diaspora. This could be the primary reason for the government's inefficiency to formulate effective policies to facilitate brain gain. So the case for Bihari diaspora presented in the article urges to fill the void of studies or researches on Bihari overseas communities since large number of these communities could be highly advantageous for the state in particular and the country as a whole. Such researches might

be mutually beneficial for the diasporas along with the homeland.

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