

**Identity Crisis vis-à-vis Acculturation:
Migration in Postcolonial Era -
A Case Study of Bhojpuriya in Assam**

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Abstract

Migration is a quintessential phenomenon in the development of human civilization. There is scarcely any state which has not experienced any migration. During the colonial era, migration was a source of men power needed for the establishment of industries, plantation and farmhouses. India, being a populous and poor state, has been the reservoir of workers since colonial era. Today, in countries like Trinidad, Mauritius, Fiji, etc. we find people of Indian origin in majority; they are the descendants of *Girmitiyas* who were bondage workers from Bihar and UP taken to work in coffee and sugarcane plantations in British colonies of Fiji, Mauritius, South Africa, East Africa and the Caribbean islands. The movement of population from Bihar and UP is also witnessed in different constituent states of India particularly after independence. The movement of post-independent/colonial Indian population is both within India and outside India, motivated by a desire to seek better life and opportunities to excel in life. The paper aims to deal with the migration of Bhojpuriya population from Bihar and UP to the State of Assam and find out the extent of their acculturation and experience of identity crisis, if any.

Keywords: Migration from Other States to Assam, Intra-state Migration, Postcolonial Era, acculturation, identity, Bhojpuriya

1. i. Introduction

Migration is a quintessential phenomenon in the development of human civilization. There is scarcely any state which has not experienced any migration. During the colonial era, migration was a source of men power needed for the establishment of industries, plantation and farmhouses. India, being a populous and poor state, has been the reservoir of workers since colonial era. Today, in states like Trinidad, Mauritius, Fiji, etc. we find people of Indian origin in majority; they are the descendants of *Girmitiyas* who were bondage workers from Bihar and UP taken to work in coffee and sugarcane plantation in British colonies of Fiji, Mauritius, South Africa, East Africa and the Caribbean islands. The movement of population from Bihar and UP is also witnessed in different constituent states of India particularly after independence. The movement of post-

independent/colonial Indian population is both within India and outside India which is motivated by a desire to seek better life and opportunities to excel in life. The paper aims to deal with the migration of Bhojpuriya population from Bihar and UP to the State of Assam (particularly in Tezpur) and find out the extent of their acculturation and experience of identity crisis, if any.

1. ii. Objectives

- i. To find out the process of acculturation by the Bhojpuri migrants.
- ii. To find out identity crisis (if any) among the Bhojpuri migrants.

1. iii. Methodology

The research is based on the data collection through questionnaire and personal interview of selected informants along with library works.

2. i. Acculturation of Bhojpuri Speech Community

Most migrants are faced with the requirement of adopting the host culture, language or integrating with it to facilitate their socially, mentally healthy life in the new land. This endeavor of the migrants is termed as acculturation in the contemporary social discourses. “Acculturation explains the process of cultural and psychological change that results following meeting between cultures. The effects of acculturation can be seen at manifold levels in both interacting cultures. At the group level, acculturation often results in changes to culture, customs, and social institutions. Perceptible group level effects of acculturation often consist of changes in food, clothing, and language. At the individual level, differences in the way individuals acculturate have been shown to be connected not just with changes in daily behavior, but with several measures of psychological and physical well-being” (<https://www.definitions.net/definition/acculturation>). According to John W. Berry, acculturation has been taking place for millennia, but contemporary interest in research on acculturation grew out of a concern for the effects of European domination of indigenous peoples. Later, it focused on how immigrants changed following their entry and settlement into receiving societies. More recently, much of the work has been involved with how ethno-cultural groups relate to each other and change as a result of their attempts to live together in culturally plural societies (2005, p 700). Assam is highly pluralistic in language and culture, and is an apt site for the research in acculturation. To find out the acculturation of the Bhojpuri Speech Community of Tezpur, Assam, the following questions are asked in the questionnaire:

1. Do you celebrate Bihu?
2. Do you invite your friends and neighbours on the day of Bihu?
3. Are you invited by your friends and neighbours on the day of Bihu?
4. What dress do you wear on the day of Bihu?

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5. What dress do the female members of your family usually wear?
6. Do the female members of your family wear 'Mekhola- Chador'?
7. What food is served on the day of Bihu?

2. ii. Responses

The responses to the above questions are analysed according to the age, education, residence and birthplace of the respondents.

Table No. 1:

Question Nos.	Age		Education		Residence		Place of Birth		
	30 and below	Above 30	10 +	Above 10 +	Urban	Rural	In Assam	Outside Assam	
1	88.2%	90%	93.7%	84.6%	85.1%	95%	84.2%	83.3%	
2	88.2%	80%	87.5%	69.2%	77.7%	90%	78.9%	75%	
3	94.1%	86.6%	87.5%	92.3%	85.1%	90%	76.3%	75%	
4	Casual	41.1%	46.6%	34.7%	53.8%	48.1%	25%	31.5%	50%
	Traditional	52.9%	43.3%	53.1%	46.1%	40.7%	70%	57.8%	33.3%
5	Sari	41.7%	83.3%	90%	92.3%	88.8%	95%	86.8%	83.3%
	Assamese	1.17%	3.3%	0%	7.6%	3.7%	0%	2.6%	0%
6	41.7%	56.6%	56.2%	38.4%	29.6%	90%	57.8%	33.3%	
7 (Traditional)	94.1%	90%	90%	84.6%	92.5%	95%	84.2%	83.3%	

Question Nos. 1 to 3 deal with celebration of Bihu by the Bhojpuri speakers, their inviting friends and neighbours on the day of Bihu and being invited by friends and neighbours. Bihu is the national festival of Assam and is inherently connected to social, cultural life and racial memory of the indigenous residents of Assam. To what extent Bihu plays role in the social life of the Bhojpuri speakers determines their level of acculturation. 88.2% of respondents in the age group of 30 and below celebrate Bihu while it is 90% in the category of Above 30, 93.7% in the category of 10+ Education, 84.6% in Above 10+ Education, 85.1% in the category of Urban residents, 95% in the category of Rural residents. In the category of those born in Assam and outside Assam it is 84.2% and 83.3% respectively. 88.2% of respondents in the age group of 30 and below opine that they invite their friends and neighbours on the day of Bihu while it is 80% in the category of Above 30, 87.5% in the category of 10+ Education, 69.2% in Above 10+ Education, 77.7% in the category of Urban residents, 90% in the category of Rural residents. In the category of those born in Assam and outside Assam it is 78.9% and 75% respectively. 94.1% of respondents in the age group of 30 and below opines that they are invited by their friends and neighbours on the day of Bihu while it is 86.6% in the category of Above 30, 87.5% in the category of 10+ Education, 92.3% in Above 10+ Education, 85.1% in the category of Urban residents, 90% in the category of Rural residents. In the category of those born in Assam and outside Assam it is 76.3% and 75% respectively.

The question no. 4 deals with wearing of dresses on the day of Bihu by the Bhojpuri speakers. The responses to this question are presented in two categories: casual and Traditional. 41.1% of respondents in the age group of 30 and below opine that they wear casual dresses on the day of Bihu while 52.9% wears traditional dresses, in the category of Above 30, 46.6% wears casual dresses and 43.3% wears traditional, in the category of 10+ Education 34.7% wears casual and 53.1% wears traditional, in Above 10+ Education 53.8% wears casual and 46.1% traditional, in the category of Urban residents, 48.1% wears casual and 40.7% traditional, in the category of Rural residents 25% wears casual and 70% traditional. In the category of those born in Assam, 31.5% of respondents wears casual dresses while 57.8% wears traditional and in the category of those born outside Assam it is 50% and 33.3% respectively.

Question Nos. 5 and 6 deal with the dresses worn by women of the Bhojpuri speech community of Tezpur in Assam. Dresses are the symbol of the type of life one lives, and women are the symbol of tradition. Interestingly, women are also known for their prompt adaptation in new circumstances. To what extent Bhojpuri women are acculturated into Assamese society is revealed in responses to the question nos. 5 and 6. 41.1% of respondents in the age group of 30 and below opine that their women wear sari and 1.17% opines that their women wear Assamese dresses, in the category of Above 30, 83.3% opine in favour of sari and 3.35 in favour of Assamese, in the category of 10+ Education 90% sari and 0% Assamese, in Above 10+ Education 92.3% sari and 7.6% Assamese, in the category of Urban residents, 88.8% sari and 3.7% Assamese, in the category of Rural residents 95% sari and 0% Assamese. In the category of those born in Assam, 86.8% of respondents opine that their women wear sari while 2.6% responds in favour of Assamese and in the category of those born outside Assam it is 83.3% and 0% respectively.

The question no. 6 asks whether the women of Bhojpuri community wear 'Mekhola Chador' a traditional Assamese dress for women, and most of the respondents have responded affirmatively. 41.7% of respondents in the age group of 30 and below opine that their women wear 'Mekhola Chador' while it is 56.6% in the category of Above 30, 56.2% in the category of 10+ Education, 38.4% in Above 10+ Education, 29.6% in the category of Urban residents, 90% in the category of Rural residents. In the category of those born in Assam and outside Assam it is 57.8% and 33.3% respectively.

The question no. 7 deals with the serving of food on the day of Bihu and responses in favour of traditional food are given in the Table No. 8. 94.1% of respondents in the age group of 30 and below opines that traditional food is served on the day of Bihu while it is 90% in the category of Above 30, 90% in the category of 10+ Education, 84.6% in Above 10+ Education, 92.5% in the category of Urban residents, 95% in the category of Rural residents. In the category of those born in Assam and outside Assam it is 84.2% and 83.3% respectively.

2. iii. Findings

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Q.1, 2.&3. Most of the informants respond that they celebrate Bihu, and they are invited by their friends and neighbours, and they also invite their friends and neighbours.

Q4. There are two categories of responses for this question. The rural informants wear traditional Assamese costumes while the urban informants wear regular formal dress.

Q.5 & 6. For these questions also there are two categories of responses. The rural informants opine that their women wear ‘mekhola chador’ along with ‘sarees’ whereas only ‘sarees’ and other non- traditional costumes are used by the women of urban informants.

Q7. Most the informants respond that the Assamese food is prepared and served on the day of Bihu. However, from their personal interview, it has been seen that they prefer to carry on their Bhojpuriya Spice and Cuisine.

From the above responses, it appears that the acculturation is found more in rural informants than the urban ones. This is because of more interaction by the rural Bhojpuri speakers with their neighbouring Assamese speakers. The urban Tezpur has the nature of a city and the people prefer non-traditional costumes and cuisines than the traditional ones. And so is in case of the Bhojpuri speakers. However, on occasions like Bihu, they are one with the Assamese speakers.

3. i. Identity Crisis

An individual’s adaptation of the new culture and society results in change of his language and identity as well. However, this change is not simple. The process of change or acculturation puts the migrants often in an awkward situation as the two or more cultures or languages pervade in their behaviour whereby problematizing their sense of identity. To find out the sense of identity among the Bhojpuri speech community of Tezpur, Assam, the following questions are asked:

1. Do you feel comfortable in the company of other community?
2. Do the guests of other community feel comfortable when you invite them?
3. Do you feel unwanted while participating in Bihu celebration?
4. Do you think your life would be better if you return to the place of your ancestors?

3. ii. Responses

The data concerning the responses to the above questions are presented in the following Table:

Table No. 2

Question Nos.	Age		Education		Residence		Place of Birth	
	30 and below	Above 30	10 +	Above 10 +	Urban	Rural	In Assam	Outside Assam

1	Yes	100%	96.7%	96.8%	100%	96.3%	100%	97.3%	100%
	No	0%	3.3%	3.2%	0%	3.7%	0%	2.7%	0%
2	Yes	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	No	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
3	Yes	23.5%	3.4%	12.5%	7.6%	18.5%	0%	11%	10%
	No	76.5%	96.6%	87.5%	92.4%	81.5%	100%	89%	90%
4	Yes	29.5%	16.6%	31.5%	15.3%	48.5%	100%	24.5%	30%
	No	70.5%	83.4%	68.5%	84.7%	51.5%	0%	75.5%	70%

The question no. 1 deals with the comfort level of the Bhojpuri speakers in the company of other community. 100% respondents in the category of age 30 and below say that they feel comfortable while in the age group above 30, 96.7% feels comfortable and 3.3% uncomfortable. In the category of 10+ education, 96.8% respondents feel comfortable and 3.3% uncomfortable, in above 10+ category all the respondents feel comfortable in the company of other community. In the category of Urban respondents 96.3% feels comfortable and 3.7% uncomfortable while all the Rural respondents feel comfortable in the company of other community. In the category of the respondents born in Assam 97.3% feels comfortable and 2.7% uncomfortable while all the respondents born outside Assam feel comfortable in the company of other community.

The question no. 2 deals with the comfort level of the guests of other community with the Bhojpuri speakers. All the respondents irrespective of age, education, residence and birthplace opine that their guests from other community feel comfortable when they invite them.

The question no. 3 deals with the feeling of being unwanted by the Bhojpuri speakers while participating in Bihu celebration. 23.5% respondents in the category of age 30 and below say that they feel unwanted while participating in Bihu celebration and 76.5 feel wanted while in the age group Above 30, 3.4% feels unwanted and 96.6% feels wanted. In the category of 10+ educations, 12.5% respondents feel unwanted and 87.5% do not feel unwanted, while in Above 10+ category it is 7.6% and 92.4% respectively. In the category of Urban respondents 18.5% feels unwanted and 81.5% feels wanted while all the Rural respondents do not feel unwanted while participating in Bihu celebration. In the category of the respondents born in Assam 11% feels unwanted and 89% feels wanted while 10% of respondents born outside Assam feel unwanted and 90% do not feel so while participating in Bihu celebration.

The question no. 4 asks the Bhojpuri speakers whether their life would be better on returning to the place of their ancestors. 29.5% respondents in the category of age 30 and below say that their life would be better if they return to the place of their ancestors and 70.5% respondents do not think so while in the age group of Above 30, 16.6% of respondents reply positively and 83.4% negatively. In the category of 10+ educations, 31.5% respondents opine positively and 68.5% negatively while in Above 10+ category it is 15.3% and 84.7% respectively. In the category of Urban respondents 48.5% responds positively and 51.5% negatively while all the Rural respondents opine that their life

would not be happy or better if they return to the place of their ancestors. In the category of the respondents born in Assam 24.5% feels that their life would be better and 75.5% does not feel so while 30% of respondents born outside Assam feel positively and 70% do not feel that their life will be better if they return to the land of their ancestors.

3. iii. Findings

Q1 &2. Most of the Bhojpuri speakers feel comfortable in the company of their nearby other communities, and also the members of other community feel comfortable in the company of the Bhojpuri speakers when they are invited as guests.

Q3. Mixed responses have been found to this question in the questionnaire. All the rural respondents opine that they do not feel unwanted in Bihu celebration, but some of the respondents have given contrary opinions without proper reasons. However, the personal interview reveals that the informants prefer to maintain a safe distance to avoid any kind of cultural misunderstanding or confusion.

Q4. Most of the informants feel that their life is better in Assam and returning to the land of their ancestors will not make their life better or happy. Yet there are a few informants who have responded negatively without giving valid reasons. From the interview, it is found that the social structure of the place of their ancestors is not suitable for them. However, they also state that fear and insecurity has become the part of their life due to the changing socio-political structure of Assam

Thus, from the above responses, it has been found that the members of the Bhojpuri speech community of Tezpur, Assam do not like to return to their ancestor's land. However, their life is not socially, emotionally and psychologically balanced as it should be in the land of one's own thanks to the existing political crisis of Assam which has led to their own identity crisis.

4. Conclusion

Language, acculturation and identity are closely interwoven in the life of a migrant. A migrant undergoes a process of shift from his language to the language of the host land in which he may keep his language, lose his language or arrive at a completely different language of a hotchpotch. This process is highly emotional and psychological as well as tormenting for fear of a humiliating outcome. The language adaptation leads to cultural adaptation in which a migrant can choose to be assimilated with the host culture by losing one's own or to be integrated with the host one by maintaining one's own. Most of the Bhojpuri speakers of Tezpur, Assam have preferred to be integrated as they want to keep their own culture as well as the Assamese culture. This has resulted in their dual life: personal life and public life. The personal life of the Bhojpuri speakers is like their compatriots in the land of their origin. They religiously maintain their rites and rituals, festivals, language and food habits. But the impact of Assamese culture is quite visible in their rituals. For example, the Assamese 'gamocha' has replaced the biharigamochha (towel) as in wedding or religious rituals Assamese gamochas are seen in the neck or on the head of the Bhojpuri speakers. The Bhojpuriya migrants living in Assam reveal true postcolonial predicament where "private and

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public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy” (Bhabha, 2009, p 19).

Similarly, Holi, Deepavali, and Chhat Puja are also celebrated with much fanfare. These festivals have also influenced the local people, particularly the Chhat Puja. The local people participate in Chhat Puja celebration in great number and assist the devotees in every possible way. This indicates a co-operation among the local and the migrants.

As regard to food habit, the local food stuffs and cuisines have immensely influenced the Bhojpuri speech community of Tezpur in Assam. The popular ‘mach-tenga’, ‘bamboo-shoot chatoni’, ‘chungapitha’ etc. are much relished by these people. The edible names and the words connected to preparation of edibles have entered into the Bhojpuri spoken by the Bhojpuri speakers of Tezpur, Assam, for example, ‘pakghor’ for ‘rasoi’ (kitchen), ‘khor’ for ‘jalawan’ (firewood), ‘gakhir’ for ‘dudh’ (milk), ‘mach’ for ‘machhari’ (fish), ‘jhal’ or ‘jala’ for ‘tikha’(too much chili), etc.

Thus, it is found that the Bhojpuri speech community of Tezpur, Assam, has undergone a process of acculturation, and their level of acculturation is that of integration into the local social fabric. Integration is highly supported in the contemporary social discourses or migrant studies as it gives scope for the parallel growth of the host culture and the migrant’s culture. And this is very much found in case of the Bhojpuri speech community of Tezpur in Assam, India. However, this community is not without a sense of identity crisis for various reasons. First, the rigid social structure of the land of their origin, which they have more or less continued, is not in conformity with the broader Assamese culture, and, hence, a line of gap remains between them and the Assamese culture.

Second, they have deep-rooted love for the place of their origin and a latent desire to return, but they cannot do it because they are used to the liberal social system of Assam and, hence, they are unable to fit in the land they have left. Third, the contemporary socio-political situation of Assam has turned the Bhojpuri speech community into a citizen of no man’s land due to the ruthless violence perpetrated by different militant groups of Assam, particularly by ULFA as a war against the Indian Union. Consequently, they feel insecure in the land they are accustomed to and keep on shuttling between two cultural spaces leading them to a ‘hyphenated identity’ which is the outcome of a person’s oscillating between two cultures. Since India is a union of constituent states, each having its own unique linguistic and cultural traits, every Indian moving out of his/her own cultural location experiences hyphenated identity within India. India is that postcolonial state which defies the presence of a homogenous cultural space within its territory. According to Bhabha, “the ‘locality’ of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as ‘other’ in relation to what is outside and beyond it. The boundary is Janus- faced and the problem of outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new ‘people’ in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning ...” (2008, 4). It is the cultural heterogeneity of India that an Indian suffers from hyphenated identity within Indian Territory and the Bhojpuris are not exceptional to it in Assam. Despite centuries of cultural contact and subsequent assimilation, they

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are easily distinguished as ‘other’ in terms of physical features, linguistic idiosyncrasies and cultural traits. This otherization problematizes their sense of identity leading to identity crisis; a recurring issue in postcolonial context.

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