



# **CULTURE AND EMOTIONAL ECONOMY OF MIGRATION**

**SECOND EDITION**

Badri Narayan



## CULTURE AND EMOTIONAL ECONOMY OF MIGRATION

This book studies how the act of migration is a motivating constituent in the production of popular culture in both the homeland and the destination. It looks at the formations of cultures in the process of identity-making of approximately 200 million Indians scattered across the world, from colonial to contemporary times. The volume is an in-depth exploration of the flow of cultures and their interactions through a study of north Indian migrants who underwent two waves of emigration – from the Bhojpuri region to the Dutch colony of Suriname between 1873 and 1916 to work on sugar, coffee, cotton and cocoa plantations, and their descendants who moved to The Netherlands following the Surinamese independence in 1975. It compares this complex network of cultures among the migrants to the folk culture of the Bhojpuri region from where large-scale migration is still taking place. The work draws on archival records, secondary literature, folk songs, rare photographs, and extensive fieldwork across continents – the Bhojpuri region, Mumbai, Surat and Ghaziabad in India, and Suriname and The Netherlands.

This second edition marks the 150th Anniversary of the Abolition of Indentured Labour. With a new prologue, an updated introduction and some revisions to the text, it will be useful to scholars and researchers of cultural studies, labour studies, sociology, modern Indian history, migration and diaspora studies. It will also interest the Indian diaspora, especially in Europe and the Americas.

**Badri Narayan** is Professor at the Centre for the Study of Discrimination and Exclusion, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. He previously taught at the G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad. His research interests range from popular culture, social and anthropological history to Dalit and subaltern issues. Writing in English and Hindi, Narayan is the author of *Kanshiram: Leader of the Dalits* (2014), *The Making of the Dalit Public in North India: Uttar Pradesh, 1950 – Present* (2011), *Fascinating Hindutva: Saffron Politics and Dalit Mobilisation* (2009), and *Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India* (2006). He has been the recipient of the Fulbright Senior Fellowship (2004–5) and the Smuts Fellowship, University of Cambridge (2007).



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

# CULTURE AND EMOTIONAL ECONOMY OF MIGRATION

Second Edition

*Badri Narayan*

Second edition published 2019

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 2019 Badri Narayan

The right of Badri Narayan to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*Trademark notice:* Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

First edition published by Routledge 2017

*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-0-367-00119-3 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-4294-4361-9 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo

by Apex CoVantage, LLC

Dedicated to my friends Susan and Maurits

This book is based on two projects: 'BIDESIA – Exhibition and Research on the Dynamics of Migration, Social Development and Cultural Identity' and 'Migration and Cultural Traditions of Bhojpuri Region'. It has drawn from the significant research and academic contribution of Maurits Hassankhan, Narinder Mohkamsingh, Elizabeth den Boer, and Sahiensa Ramdas (Suriname), Susan Legene and Chitra Gajadin (the Netherlands), and Mousumi Majumder and Nivedita Singh (India).

Chapter 1 (Who Migrated and why: the *bidesia* story) evolved from the Indian Report.

Chapter 2 (*Bidesia* and settlement histories in Suriname) evolved from sections of the Suriname report of the Bidesia project (by Maurits Hassankhan and team) published in the resource book *Kahe Gaile Bides* (Allahabad: Mango Books, 2010).

Chapter 3 (Double migration and the process of readjustment) evolved from sections of the Netherlands report of the Bidesia project (by Chitra Gajadin) published in the resource book *Kahe Gaile Bides* (Allahabad: Mango Books, 2010).

Chapter 4 (*Bidesia* folk culture in the triangle) evolved from a combination of India and the Netherlands reports and a section of the Surinamese reports (by Narinder Mohkamsingh and Sahiensa Ramdas) of the Bidesia project published in the resource book *Kahe Gaile Bides* (Allahabad: Mango Books, 2010).

Chapter 5 (Still they are migrating) evolved from the Indian Report.

***Kai Kehli Chukwa Ki Choral Mulukwa Tu?***

***Kehal Na Dilwa Ke Halia Balmua***

(What crime have I committed that you left the country and did not tell me your feelings before leaving?)

– Bhikhari Thakur, *Bidesia* (Yadav and Sinha 2005: 37)





Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

# CONTENTS

<i>List of figures</i>	xi
<i>Prologue to this edition</i>	xiii
<i>Preface</i>	xv
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xvii
Introduction	1
1 Who migrated and why: the <i>bidesia</i> story	26
2 <i>Bidesia</i> and settlement histories in Suriname ( <i>With Maurits Hassankhan</i> )	38
3 Double migration and the process of readjustment: Hindustanis from Suriname to the Netherlands ( <i>With Chitra Gajadin</i> )	59
4 <i>Bidesia</i> folk culture in the triangle: Bhojpuri region of India, Suriname and the Netherlands ( <i>With Narinder Mohkamsingh</i> )	64
5 Still they are migrating: contemporary migration from Bhojpuri region	107
6 Migration and cultural productions: documenting history of cultural practices	133

## CONTENTS

7	Migration and politics	153
	Conclusion	159
	<i>Bibliography</i>	164
	<i>Index</i>	169

# FIGURES

1.1	Travelling Coolies. Photograph: Ds P.M. Legene 1914. Collection Tropenmuseum 60048465	30
2.1	Recruiting Areas for Suriname. Based on De Klerk (1953: 47)	41
2.2	Group Portrait of Hindustani Indentured Labourers. Photograph: Julius Muller before 1895. Collection Surinaams Museum	42
2.3	Hindustanis in Suriname, Wearing Traditional Costumes during Festivities in Front of the Government Palace at the Main Square in Paramaribo. Photograph: Augusta Curiel c. 1923. Collection Tropenmuseum 60006535	43
2.4	Hindustanis in Suriname with a <i>Tajjiya</i> , c. 1890. Photograph: Julius Muller, before 1895. Collection Tropenmuseum 60005593	46
2.5	Hindustanis Wearing Ram Lila Costumes at a Performance on a Location between Paramaribo and Uitkijk, in Suriname. Photograph: C. van der Koppel c. 1930–1940. Collection Tropenmuseum 10019302	50
2.6	Portrait of a Hindustani Woman in Suriname. Photographer Unknown, between 1900 and 1920. Collection Tropenmuseum 10019396 and 60006494	51
2.7	Sarees and Bangles in a Hindustani Supermarket in Rotterdam. Photograph: Sarojini Lewis, 2006	55
3.1	Group Portrait of Women and Children, Hindustani Indentured Labourers. Photograph: Julius Muller before 1895. Collection Tropenmuseum 60008925	61
3.2	Hindu Gods in the House of a Hindustani Migrant from Suriname in the Netherlands. Photograph: Sarojini Lewis, 2006	62

## FIGURES

4.1	Hindustani Musicians during a Wedding Party in Suriname, Posing with Their Instruments Sarangi, <i>Dantal</i> and Dhol. Photograph: J. Dzn. Blaauboer 1952. Collection Tropenmuseum 10020893	83
5.1	Migrants Outside a Station Waiting for Their Trains to Go to Their Destination. Photograph: Brijendra Gautam, December 2014	112
5.2	Women in Barwaripur Village, Sultanpur District, Uttar Pradesh, Sharing Their Folk Forms. Photograph: Brijendra Gautam, December 2014	116
6.1	<i>Birha</i> Folk Singer Mannu Yadav Giving His Performance during a Cultural Meet. Photograph: Brijendra Gautam, January 2016	135
6.2	Folk Singer Mannu Yadav Performing <i>Birha</i> Using <i>Kartal</i> . Photograph: Brijendra Gautam, January 2016	137
6.3	<i>Sankata Mata</i> Temple in Varanasi Where Women Go to Offer Prayers for the Well-Being of Their Migrant Husbands	148
7.1	Village Women Happily Narrating Their Folk Cultural Forms, in Baderi Village, Jaunpur District, Uttar Pradesh, India. Photograph: Brijendra Gautam, November 2015	154
7.2	Bhojpuri Singer Dinesh Lal Yadav ‘Nirhauwa’ Giving His Performance at the Time of Elections in Mumbai. Photograph: Brijendra Gautam, October 2014	157

## PROLOGUE TO THIS EDITION

This second edition of the book *Culture and Emotional Economy of Migration* is being published to mark the 100th anniversary of the ‘indentured system’ that came to an end in 1917. As part of this system, within a period of 80–90 years, about two million Indian contractual labourers (a form of slavery) were sent to work in the plantations owned by European masters. Indian migrant labourers were sent to 19 countries worldwide within this system. With the emergence of colonialism, labourers were brought in to work globally in various plantations, first as slaves, and after the abolition of slavery, as indentured labourers, especially from India at cheap rates. These indentured labourers were made to do backbreaking work, often in inhuman conditions. Within the indentured system of migration, labourers that were sent to Mauritius, Suriname, South Africa, and other countries as migrants forcefully or willingly is a matter of debate amongst historians. Some argue that these were forced migrations; others find evidences wherein families willingly accepted the indentured system without any coercion. It is difficult to say which of these two positions is correct. It may be that both schools of historians are partly correct. Another possibility is that the majority were forced and allured into the system, while a few others might have accepted it willingly. But one thing is certain – migration caused separations of families. Somewhere wives were left behind; somewhere it were mothers, sisters, sons or fathers – each of them pining for the ones who were snatched, taken away or had left on their own to faraway lands. These created emotional, social, cultural and other problems in homelands and at destinations. Old families were left behind, broken, while new families were created. A large number of these migrant labourers returned to India after their ‘contract’ was served. The returned migrants told of the miseries and inhuman working conditions in the plantations at the destinations. Most of them faced many hardships in India. But their narratives became the fountainhead

of protests and revolutions, inspiring the nationalist leaders to raise their voices against the indentured system in India.

In the Indian nationalist movement, leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and many others inspired by them, including Banarsidas Chaturvedi, Bhawani Dayal Sanyasi, linked the issue of indentured system with the national movement to create a mass uprising against it. Pressure was created on the English colonial system to end this practice. Many petitions were sent to the British then. The labourers who had gone to work in the plantations, and the ill treatment meted out to them by the colonial masters, became a major issue. Litterateurs of that period like Premchand, Shivpujan Sahay, Maithili Sharan Gupt, Siyaram Sharan Gupt and others wrote about it. Magazines like *Pravasi Bharat* were being launched. Articles on the indentured system found place in newspapers and publications like *Pratap*, *Himalaya*, *Dainik Deshbhandu*, as well as others. As a result, the British government was forced to set up various committees from time to time to review the indentured system. The conditions of the plantation labourers, their living conditions, were also being studied. After several complex problems and over time, a decision was taken to put an end to the indentured system.

By this time, two million people had been displaced from India. They carried many aspects of Indian and folk cultural traditions. At the same time, they created synergy with the cultural traditions at the destinations and created a new culture. Not only this, those that they had left behind in India, their memories, tears, aspirations, gave birth to a new culture of rural India.

A large part of this book has been developed from the India, Suriname and the Netherland reports of the Bidesia project. The culture, cultural history and cultural capital that developed because of the indentured system comprises this study. It is relevant that on the occasion of the end of the indentured system, this edition of the book be brought out based on the study and analysis of the migration process and cultural produce.

This book is now with you. Please feel free to provide me with feedback and comments of this edition. It would help me improve it further.

## PREFACE

This book explores the making of the culture of migration from the past to the present. The major happening that played a crucial role in the formation of the culture of migration was indentured migration (1873–1916) from the Bhojpuri region of India. Today also the phenomenon of migration is visible in those villages from where indentured migration took place in the past. The *longue durée* of the culture of migration consists of indentured past and contemporary migration to cities like Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Surat, Gaziabad and other big cities. This book explores the *bidesia bhav* and emotional history of migration in the homeland and destination while looking at the formation and function of the culture of migration.

In the pre-colonial period when the European world was extending its domain across the globe through its colonies, it needed a huge source of cheap and abundant labour to work in the sugar, coffee, jute and other plantations in these colonies. After the abolition of slavery, it found this source of labour in the Bhojpuri region of India. Between the mid-nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, a large number of indentured labourers were sent from this region to various European colonies like Suriname, Mauritius, Fiji, Guyana and Trinidad, under an agreement signed between the British government and the governments of other colonial countries like Holland and France. Although many labourers returned to India after the expiry of their contract, a sizeable number remained behind even after these countries were decolonized, and their descendants now form a significant minority group there. This can be evidenced from the fact that in Suriname the Hindustani population numbers some 150,000 today while the population of Hindustanis who migrated to Holland when the Surinamese attained independence in 1975 is around 100,000.

The Surinamese Hindustanis and the Dutch Hindustanis have now imbibed the culture and heritage of their destination countries, but they



## PREFACE

have also preserved the language and culture of their ancestors who migrated from India long ago. This culture is the common heritage of the Surinamese Hindustanis, the Dutch Hindustanis and the Bhojpuris of India. That this common culture has withstood the test of time can be evidenced from the fact that even after so many generations one can observe a striking similarity in the oral culture of these three sets of people.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is an offshoot of two research projects, that is 'BIDESIA – Exhibition and Research on the Dynamics of Migration, Social Development and Cultural Identity in the Bhojpuri Region of India, in Suriname and the Netherlands' and 'Migration and Cultural Traditions of Bhojpuri Region: A Research and Documentation Programme' sponsored by the Tata Trusts, Mumbai. BIDESIA was an international exhibition and cultural exchange project launched in 2005 involving three institutes and museums in the three countries concerned, namely India, Suriname and the Netherlands, and was designed with the aim of documenting the common cultural heritage of these three sets of people sharing a common descent. The project resulted in the publication of three country reports. The Bidesia Resource Book *Kahe Gaile Bides: Why Did You Go Overseas?* was published in 2010 by Mango Press, Allahabad, India. The contents of the resource book were compiled and edited by Mousumi Majumder. The editorial board comprised Badri Narayan Tiwari (India), Maurits Hassankhan (Suriname) and Susan Legene (the Netherlands) with contributions by Badri Narayan Tiwari and Nivedita Singh (India), Narinder Mohkamsingh, Elizabeth den Boer, Sahiensa Ramdas and Maurits Hassankhan (Suriname) and Chitra Gajadin (The Netherlands). The Netherlands Country report entitled 'A Silenced History: Hindustani Migration to Suriname and Holland' prepared by Chitra Gajadin was printed in October 2005 by KIT. The Surinamese report was prepared by Maurits Hassankhan and was printed in 2008. The project 'Migration and Cultural Traditions of Bhojpuri Region' was launched in 2013 as a humble endeavour to trace, preserve and provide an acknowledged platform to several unsung rural poets, folk story tellers, singers and performers who stood strongly against the winds of change. The materials and the empirical data base generated during the second ongoing project provide a rich relevant research base for the book.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the KIT Tropenmuseum–Royal Tropical Institute (TM), Amsterdam, and IMWO, Paramaribo, Suriname, and G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad, for ensuring the smooth sailing of the project. Their trust and confidence in me are the shining lights that have constantly guided me in my endeavours. I would like to thank Chitra Gajadin for providing us an excellent report on ‘Double Migration and Silenced Histories of Surinamese Hindustanis in the Netherlands.’ I would like to make a special mention of Dr Narinder Mohkamsingh for his valuable contribution to the chapter *bidesia* folk culture in the triangle: Bhojpuri region of India, Suriname and the Netherlands with a special focus on Hindustani music and drama in Suriname. I would like to express my special thanks to Sahiensha Ramdas who provided a note on the life and work of Goeroepersad Nirandjan, a drama writer, poet, director and so on. Thanks are also due to Ms Chitra Gajadin, Sahiensha Ramdas and Elizabeth den Boer who provided the able assistantship in Holland and Suriname. I would also like to thank Maurits Hassankhan and Susan Legene for their valuable contributions to the book. In addition we would like to thank HGIS–cultuurfonds (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science), Mondriaan Stichting/Erfgoed Minderheden Project and Prins Claus Fonds, the Netherlands (cultural initiatives in non-Western societies), who understood the relevance of this project and agreed to fund it. We would also like to thank the Tata Trusts, Mumbai, for sponsoring the project ‘Migration and Cultural Traditions of Bhojpuri Region – A Research and Documentation Programme’. Thanks are due to Archana Singh, assistant professor, GBPI and co-director of the project, team members of the project Mousumi Majumder, Ritu Sureka, Brijendra Gautam, Tinku Paul, Nivedita Singh, Julie Khanna, Jai Prakash Tripathi, Vandana Mishra, Kulendra Nath and Shobhnath and all the other staff members of Dalit Resource Center, GBPI, for their support and cooperation. I would like to thank Arindam Roy for his efforts in revising the draft. Finally, heartfelt thanks are due to the director of GBPI, Prof. Pradeep Bhargava, for all his help and support.

Last but not least we would like to thank all the respondents who graciously narrated to us their stories and shared with us their cultural heritage. Without their enthusiastic participation the project could not have been accomplished.

# INTRODUCTION

The abolition of slavery from the world was an 1833 Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom ending slavery throughout the British Empire. This gave birth to a new kind of forced servitude, the indentured labourers, where consent was often tricked. Recent studies treat this practice as human trafficking. There was a growing demand of cheap labour in the European (United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands) colonies such as in the Caribbean countries like Suriname, Fiji, Guyana, and Trinidad. The cheap labours were made to work in sugarcane, coffee, cocoa, jute and other plantations owned by the colonial powers. The Bhojpuri region was viewed by the Britishers as a potential source of cheap labour (Majumder: 11). The emigration timeline from the Bhojpuri region records state that it started in 1834 to Mauritius. Four years later, in 1838, it continued to happen in Guiana and in 1845 to other British Caribbean colonies (ibid).

This region had a history of migration from the Moghul period that followed through in the armies of the Raj. The surplus labour that were in the armies some 500 years ago, provided the necessary push factor for the emigration of indentured labourers. The aftermath of the 1857 revolution had plunged the region into deep distress and penury. Its resources were drained, as hunger and starvation held its vice grip on the people. This was exacerbated by repeated droughts and famines that brought about unemployment, acute poverty and destitution. The menfolk were forced to leave their home and hearths.

The pull factor was employment opportunities in distant lands (read Caribbean countries). The agreements between the British government and the governments of the Netherland and France provided the silver lining to the people steeped in poverty.

The period between the late 19th and the early 20th centuries witnessed a huge exodus, as able-bodied men left the shores of India. The emigrations were primarily from the Bhojpuri region, but it also included