

Bhojpuri Poet Bhikhari Thakur's legacy goes international

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He might have been forgotten in his homeland, but poet, writer and doyen of Bhojpuri theatre Bhikhari Thakur's ballads and folk songs are garnering huge appreciation in places as far apart as Mauritius and France.

A musical album titled 'The Legacy of Bhikhari Thakur' was released by Mauritius Prime Minister Anil Kumar Bachoo at a function in Port Louis in Mauritius earlier this month.

Singer Kalpana Patowary launched the musical documentation album with nine tracks together with London-based Virgin Records/EMI Music. It will be launched in London in August and later in the year in Trinidad and South Africa. The album is even available online and has evoked a lot of interest on the web.

Kalpana says Bhojpuri is spoken in 14 nations around the world. The language, primarily, spoken in Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh spread to across the world as Indians were taken to the British, French and Dutch colonies around the world. It was the language and cultural traditions that gave the Indian workers their identity.

Bhojpuri is understood and spoken in Mauritius, Trinidad, South Africa, Suriname, Guyana, Fiji as well as among the migrant communities in Canada, the US, Britain and Australia.

"I want Bhojpuri music to go international. In Mauritius people of Indian origin speak traditional Bhojpuri - the original Bhojpuri as it was spoken a hundred years ago. It is now mixed with some Creole and French words," said Kalpana.

"The people in Mauritius understand the songs; the 'bidesi' songs of migration - of leaving the family home and going away to find work, touch a deep chord among the listeners. They get emotional listening to the songs from India," she added.

Legendary cultural personality Bhikhari Thakur was often called the Shakespeare of Bhojpuri literature for he led the renaissance in Bhojpuri folk music and launched a folk theatre movement.

Bhikhari Thakur was born in a backward, barber community in Kutubpur village of Saran district in Bihar in 1887. Unlettered and practically illiterate when he left home and went to Kolkata for work, he educated himself and began writing poetry with an emphasis on social issues.

After returning to native Bihar, Thakur wrote about social-ills such as child marriages and wove them into folk songs. His best known work is the creation of the theatre form 'Bidesia' on the lines of 'Jatra' in Bengal.

Kalpana tried to locate the old songs of Bhikhari Thakur talking to folk artists and singers in the small towns and villages of Bihar. But it was a fortuitous meeting with an old man in a remote village called Bakhorapur in Arrah district, Bihar that opened the wealth of Bhikhari Thakur's oeuvre for her.

Kalpana was in the village for a cultural show when a few local artists were called to sing a few songs before she began her own performance. Among the singers was a 95-year-old artist, whose rustic songs had a very different presentation that had a powerful appeal.

It turned out that he was from the original Bhikhari Thakur mandali. He helped Kalpana record many of the legendary poet's songs in their original 'thekas' (rhythms) and style of presentation.

Kalpana could extract additional information through 'Bhikhari Thakur Rachnawali', the only written material

about the great folk traditionalist.

"I am trying to bring out the original vibrancy and richness of the Bhikhari Thakur folk forms so that people from the world over can experience the originality and richness of Bhojpuri music," said Kalpana.

Source: Internet

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