

PAVING THE WAY FOR THE BHOJPURI LANGUAGE AND CULTURE THROUGH ARTWORKS

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Abstract

Folk Art is rooted in traditions that come from community and culture – expressing cultural identity by conveying shared community values and aesthetics. Every year, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund of Mauritius celebrates the 'Arrival of Indian Indentured Labourers in Mauritius' and organizes many activities such as the Art Exhibition for the preservation and promotion of art and culture. This collaborative research paper, based on the review of the exhibition of 2018 related to the legacies of Indian Indentured labourers, elaborates on the artworks presented by two famous artists in Mauritius. The first artist, Mr. Hurry presented an artwork of 38 Bhojpuri sentences written in Devanagari script with cow dung and soil on traditional jute (gunny) cloth on a 'khattia'(cot). The second artist, Mrs Gopaul uses cut pieces of the traditional 'pagri'(turban) of his grandfather to dress branches of a dried tree. Both explain the reasons for doing so and their love for the Bhojpuri Language and Culture. In this quest, the following questions are answered: How does art preserve culture? Why do we need the arts? What is the difference between Bhojpuri folk and traditional/contemporary art? The materials used will be analyzed in view to the promotion of the contemporary Bhojpuri Language and Culture in Mauritius.

Key Words: review, art exhibition, Bhojpuri Language and Culture, artworks

1. INTRODUCTION

For many people, art is considered as a conscious attempt on the part of an individual to produce an aesthetically pleasing expression in a form recognized by society. What is recognized and what is aesthetic are, of course, the cruxes of any tighter discussion of the subject. We are all familiar with comments like, 'That's not art, that's junk' and 'That's too imitative to be real art.' and 'That's too ugly to be art' (which I once overheard during an art exhibition). Certainly, no one has come up with a final definition of art and aesthetic acceptable to everyone. Nevertheless, several central concerns are almost always encountered in a discussion of art, at least of what people call fine art. For example, there is often a concern about the artist as a unique individual developing his or her own vision within the possibilities of a recognizable genre (e.g., painting, musical composition, architecture). There is a concern for the genre itself, especially if it has classical and refined aspects within which the artist works and against which creative expressions may be judged. There is a concern for the judgement, which is informed by a refinement and education in the classical aspects of the art. Finally, what is more important is that the artist is trying to elevate his or her art into the ranks of those whose unique visions have already been recognized as worthy of praise.

For many folk artists, I think we can say that folklore represents the expression of the aesthetic factors central to their everyday lives. Folk artists are not unaware of their own aesthetics, as we shall see in the examples cited later in this paper, so we cannot fairly call them naive (as many art historians do). Nor are folk artists untrained, for they often spend years, a lifetime perhaps, trying to learn and perform well their genres and styles. Bess Hockema knew what a good afghan is and worked years to be able to 'perform' one well, yet she would have been the last to claim she had produced a perfect one- or a unique one, for that matter. (Toelken B, 1996)

Almost every year, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund organize Art Exhibition to mark the arrival of Indian Indentured Labourers in Mauritius for the promotion of art and culture. In the Contemporary Art Exhibition - Vision of the Past held from 2nd November to 31st December at the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site, Port Louis. two Senior Lecturers from the Fine Arts Department of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, namely Mr Nirmal Hurry and Mrs Nalini Gopaul, presented their artworks which arouse the curiosity of many viewers.

2.OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This paper aims at presenting two artworks of the above-mentioned artists from Mauritius which they worked during the 2018 Art Exhibition. Both artworks are related to the promotion of Bhojpuri Language and Culture.

3.METHODOLOGY

Aesthetics and Culture is an interdisciplinary programme with focus on art and culture in modern society in a broad sense. Based on a broad concept of aesthetics, this programme focuses on analysing art and aesthetics, and the roles they play in culture, in both a contemporary and a historically-reflective way.

4.ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

(i) Artwork No. 1: 'Khattia'-The Cot by Mr Nirmal Hurry

This work pays a tribute to the very first 36 Indian labourers. The written account is in Bhojpuri Language and cow dung has been used to write the script, which narrates the story of immigrants of the 3rd and 4th generation.

Title: 'Khattia'-The Cot

Art installation

Materials: natural fibres, guni bags, cow dung, 'vetivert'

Dimensions: 1.10 m x 2 m

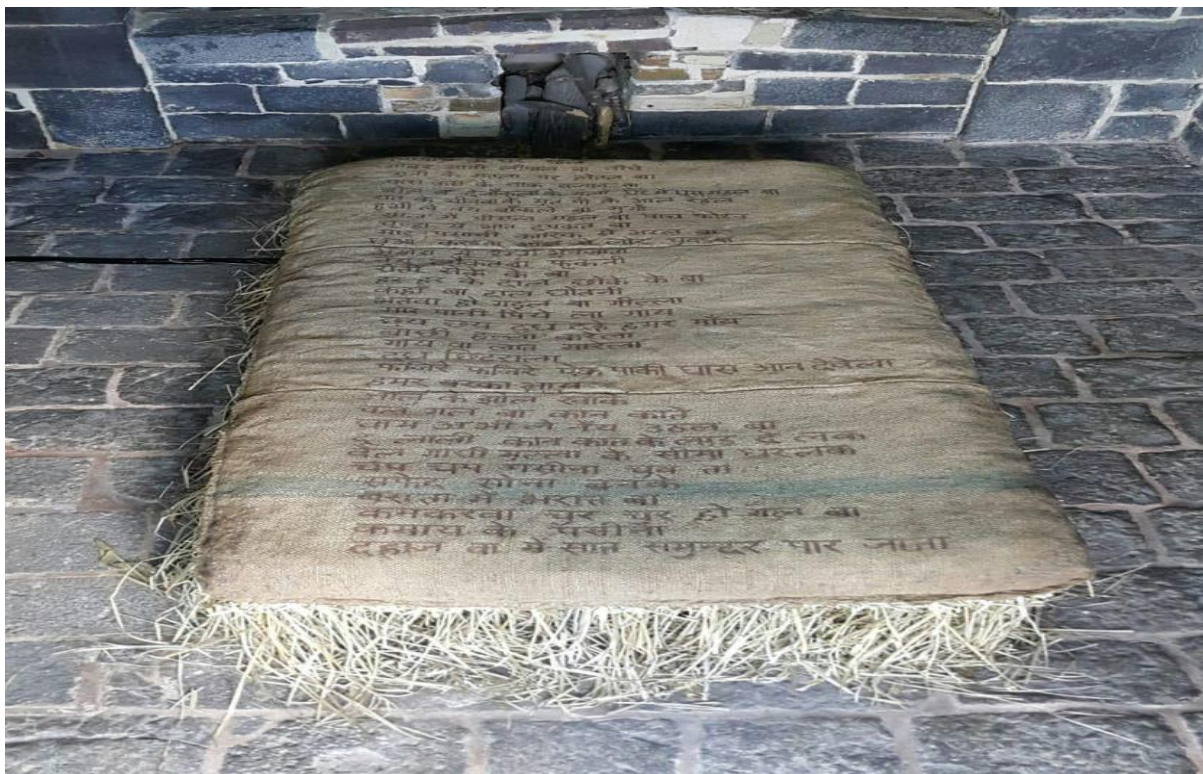


Photo 1. 'Khattia'-The Cot

The written account is in Bhojpuri language and cow dung has been used to write the text, which narrates the story of immigrants of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th generation. Even though they were not under any agreement or "Great Experiment", these people had a very tough time during the pre-independence period. The write-up portrayed the daily activity from dawn to dusk of a sugarcane field labourer and how the whole family is being subjected to the unjust treatment.

According to Mr. Hurry, "The cot on which the text is written is a mattress made out of gunny bags packed with dry 'vetivert' straws. Though not comfortable at all, the bed made out of completely natural fibers was being the best couch to nap on after a hard-working day and to dream for a better posterity."

Here is the roman version of the Bhojpuri sentences with an English translation:

Roman	English
1. Lapaay ke ghar rahal	There was a thatched house (with grass)
2. Gobar mati lipal ba niche	Cow dung mixed with soil is used for the flooring
3. Goni ke matla par letal ba	He is lying on a jute mattress
4. Kas-kas ke nak bajawat ba	He is snoring loudly
5. Bolbe danakala ke moula ghar mei ghoos gahal ba	The house is fully with black smoke
6. Raat ke chinwa ke moot pike aal rahal	He has been drinking the Chinese urine(rhum) at night The rooster has not yet sung
7. Habi lenai baankal ba murga	The food was grinded over the grinding stone
8. Sil mein pisal gahal ba panch phoran	The rice is being cooked on the fire
9. Chulha mein bhaat dapkat ba	The kitchen cloth is full with dirt (black color)
10. Maar pasawni kariya se bharal ba	It is emitting smokes; tears are running down the eyes
11. Dhuwan karata, ankh se lor chuwat ba	Little tomatoes are being grilled on the burning coal I cannot find the metal rod (use to blow the fire)
12. Angora mei reingi bhunjat ba	I have to cook the bread
13. Nai lawkat ba phoonkni	I have to cook the dhal
14. Roti seinke ke ba	Where is the cereal grinder stick?
15. Har har ke daal chonke ke ba	The rice has been over cooked
16. Kaha baa daal ghotni	The cow drinks water of the cooked rice
17. Bhaatwa ho gahal ba gilla	My mum used to milk the cow silently
18. Maar pani piye la gay	The calf is crying
19. chup chap dudh duhe hamar maai	The milk got spilt
20. Baachi haalaa karela	She would carry the fodder early morning.
21. Doodh chitraala	My elder brother
22. Phajire phajire ek paki ghaas aan dewela	Eating cooked potatoes
23. Hamar barka bhai	He left for the field to cut sugar canes
24. Aalu uke jhol khaake	The sun has not yet risen
25. Chal gal ba kaan kate	He has cut two row of sugar cane and embarked them
26. Ghaam abhi le nai uthal ba	The cart was driven to the factory
32. Doo lali kaan kaat ke laad delak	Sweating profusely Like white gold
33. Bail gari mulla ke sima dharlak	He is filling bag
34. Chap-chap pasina chuwa ba	The workers are dead tired
35. Saphed sona banke	The salary of hard labour
36. Basta mein bharat ba	Being carried away in the ship crossing the seven seas!
36. Kaamkarwa chur-chur ho gail ba	
37. Kamaai ke pasina	
38. Dahaaj wa mei saatsamundar paar jaata	

BHOJPURI LINGUISTIC TRADITIONS

During the Indian indentureship, the Bhojpuri was the lingua-franca as a large mass of migrants were from the Bhojpuri belt. Gradually, a typical Mauritian Bhojpuri developed which is a mixture of some other languages. There is a living Bhojpuri presence in Mauritius that cannot be denied. It cannot be effaced or taken for granted. This presence is manifested through the way of living Mauritians whose ancestors embarked at Calcutta, through their vibrant cultural values, oral traditions, customs, rites and rituals, collective consciousness, their food system, their mode of eating, dietary habits, their culinary art and spices, their 'mithais', their patterns of dress and jewelry, their religious practices, beliefs and rituals, medical plants, their symbols, feasts and festivals, games and pastimes, their artifacts and home environment.

Bhojpuri has also contributed immensely to the semantic of Mauritius. Bhojpuri terminology, proverbs, sayings, riddles and charades, swear words, folklore, folk tales, phraseologies, children's games and above all songs both traditional and modern, make Bhojpuri a vibrant, pulsating and intrinsic aspect of the Mauritian linguistic landscape. It is used in the market place, and as a language of home environment and heritage adds color to the linguistic map of Mauritius. Somebody may be carrying on a conversation in creole, French, English or Hindi and suddenly switches off to outpourings of Bhojpuri like spices added to make the food more delicious.

UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage proposes the five broad domains in which intangible cultural heritage is manifested:

- Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible Cultural Heritage;
- Performing arts and others.

“The Convention defines intangible cultural heritage as: ‘the practice, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills (...) that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage’... and which in conformity with the human rights.”

These aspects of Bhojpuri Intangible Cultural Heritage are clearly enshrined in the Department of Bhojpuri, Folklore and Oral Traditions of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute. The Department came up with an elective in Bhojpuri for undergraduates since 2007: An introduction to Bhojpuri Language and Culture through English medium for the tertiary students. The Bhojpuri Studies is a core module in the BA Mauritian Studies and the online Introductory Course in Bhojpuri is coming soon together with the other Asian and Mandarin language.

In December 2016, the Mauritian Geet Gawai got enlisted by the UNESCO in the World Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The Folk Museum of Indian Immigration of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute also preserves and promotes the Bhojpuri Intangible Cultural Heritage through its artefacts and digital applications. The 160000 records of the Indian indentured of the Archives is a unique collection in the world which is healthily maintained by the staff of Mahatma Gandhi Institute.

The Department also collaborates with the Bhojpuri Speaking Union for various activities for the promotion of the Bhojpuri language and culture in the community.

Other Departments at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute as well incorporate Bhojpuri elements either in the form of dance, songs or artwork to further preserve and promote the richness of this language.

Etymology

Bhojpuri has very rich stock of grammar. It is very simple and clear and its grammar straightforward. Every word has its own colour, essence and flavour.

Some word derivations from Sanskrit/Hindi

Sanskrit/Hindi	Bhojpuri
Griha	House
Gobar	Cow dung
Chulha	Fireplace
swarna	Gold
Mati	Soil

The following words are derived from tribal languages

Bhojpuri	English
Pagdhi(pagri)	Head dress
Dibiya	Can
Lor	Tear

Words derived from Pharsi (Persian)

Bhojpuri	English
Absos	Regret
Khargos	Rabbit
Chirag	Lamp
Dukan	Shop

Bhojpuri words derived from Arabic

Bhojpuri	English
Takia	Pillow
Julus	Procession
Jalsa	Festivity
Tamasa	Show

From Turkish

Bhojpuri	English
Chamcha	Spoon
Kainchi	Scissors
laphanga	Loafer

Bhojpuri words derived from English/French

Bhojpuri	French/English
Laapaay	Paille/grass
Can	Canne/sugarcane
Moula	Moulin/sugar factory
Chinwa	Chinois/Chinese

Some Bhojpuri words/sentences related to food or located in the kitchen:

Bhojpuri	English
Phukni	A metal rod used to blow the fire
Tawa	Aluminium /iron pan
Maar poncha	A piece of cloth to clean in the kitchen
Bhaat ghilla ho gail	The rice is over-cooked
Angora,	Burning charcoal
bhoonjat	Grilled
Daal ghotni	Wooden stick with a star shape head used to grind cooked cereals

As the Bhojpurians made Mauritius their home, the second generation and succeeding the new generations were gradually cut off from the original language patterns and vocabulary. The Bhojpurians did not have such a wide range of material belongings back home, nor did these material aspects like furniture, new food system and modern gadgets exist in that vocabulary. Instead of allowing the language to die, they have borrowed from Creole, terms, idioms and vocabulary and interiorized them: 'latabwa par sacwa rakhil ba.' 'the bag is kept on the table' or 'telephoner karat ba' - 'he/ she is on the telephone' (Boodhoo S., 1999)

What they had as furniture was 'khattia' which was replaced by 'lilia' (from French le lit), the bed, charpai (4 legged one), kharpas-woodeen slippers, handia-bartan-utensils. Tables did not exist in the Bhojpuri culture, so they borrowed from French la table and made it 'latabwa'.

Repetition of same words to better explain something:

Kas-kas = loudly

Chap chap = continuously; profusely

Chabaate-chabaate = chewing

Khakaar-khakaar = strongly

(ii) Analysis of Artwork No. 2: - 'Reminiscence' by Mrs. Nalini Gopaul

The second artwork consisted of a tree branch of some 3 meters, wrapped with pieces of the traditional Indian turban-commonly known as 'mouchoir latet' in the Mauritian jargon. It was symbolically placed near the 16 steps of the Aapravasi Ghat at Port Louis.

Theme: "Reminiscence"

Size 3x6ft

Installation

Materials: wood, cloth, paint.



Photo 2: "Reminiscence"

Over the last few years her artwork went through a range of stylistic treatments with a focus on space, atmosphere, light, and texture, presented on a two-dimensional surface. She composes and constructs her installations in a way that makes the principal subject resonate with its surrounding space. The theme of the work evokes the memories of Indian immigrants, their experiences of the extreme harsh conditions of life in their new homeland.

The artist explains that:

"The 'Pagri' cloth known as 'Mouchoir la tête' that I used, emanates an aura of emotional manifestations that calls to mind memories of my own; my Grandfather had one of these, a heritage handed down generations. Worn on the head of immigrants to wick away the sweat as they worked the fields under the relentless sun of their new home, this 'Pagri' cloth evokes the back-breaking labour, the unbreakable hope and the sheer dedication they put into laying the foundation of this country.

Trees, roots and trunk. Branches and twigs. Flowers and seeds They have so many characteristics. They are born, they live, they die, just like us. This particular subject is so fertile it is no wonder it leads to anthropomorphism. All these different branches intertwining high above the viewer's head, seeming to continually change identities as they climb upwards make it very hard for the viewer to pin down the meaning. If there is a single leitmotif to be found in this complex oeuvre, it is that of the fleeting instant when one thing suddenly converts into another."

Pagri

In India, the turban is referred to as a pagri, meaning the headdress that is worn by men and is manually tied.

Why do Rajasthani wear turbans?

The turbans indicate the wearer's social class, state, caste, region, and also the occasion it is being worn for. The Rajasthanis wear turbans because, it indicates their high social esteem and status in the society. It's the part of their long-lasting royal culture and tradition that is known throughout the world.

What do we call Pagdi in English?

Pagri, sometimes also transliterated as pagari, is the term for Hindu turban originating in the 'Indian subcontinent. It specifically refers to a headdress that is worn by men and women, which needs to be manually tied. Other names include 'sapho'.

book 'Kanya Dan' of Sarita Boodhoo, it has been described as: "a white square cotton material with red floral motif used in Hindu marriages in Mauritius for generations now" p 251 Boodhoo S 1993

Some other words for turban are topee, headdress, toque, headgear, hat, bandana, and pugree.

In Mauritius, this traditional headband was used by the Indian immigrants- ancestors who would wear it around the head and go to work in the field- early morning till late night. This would protect them from both heat and cold. It has a high place of esteem in the Hindu community.

During the past decades, it has been used in the Hindu wedding specially during the Tilak ceremony. It is called 'bandhawa' (kerchief) where both fathers of the respected groom and bride would use it to tie the unhusked rice, turmeric roots, dub grass and coins in this particular ceremony. It represents the invisible hands who help in uniting the two families.

After successfully tying their bundles, the two fathers place it on their left shoulder. They both try to show their dexterity, skill and wisdom in tying these materials and in coming out first under the scrutiny of the assembly

who watch with amusement the competition. Here, the 'pagri rumaal' becomes the pride and honour of each other in front of the society and is held high over the shoulder.

This bundle would be opened at their respective places during the ceremony called 'lagan' by five or seven married women (suhagan) whose husbands are alive. It will be opened with great respect, covering their heads with the 'anchra'-end loose of the saree, singing the 'Saguna geet'- a Bhojpuri folk song as per Ramdin(1989) in Sanskaar Manjari. This Bhojpuri folk song is about invocation of gods and goddesses to bless the wedding entourage and also to ensure a successful wedding.

Roman	English
Angana mein kuyiyan khanaawa ta kuiyan ke piyar maati ho Saguni jay ke jagaawa bhrama bison ta dada ghare jag howoowe	Let's dig a well in the yard and plastered it with yellow soil Oh Saguni! Kindly go and inform Lord Brahma and Vishnu that there will be a sacrifice at the grandfather's house! Let's dig a well in the yard and plastered it with yellow soil Oh Saguni! Kindly go and inform Lord Shiva that there will be a sacrifice at the father's house!
Angana mein kuyiyan khanaawa ta kuiyan ke piyar maati ho Saguni jay ke jagaawa siwoo baba ta baba ghare jag howoowe ho	Let's dig a well in the yard and plastered it with yellow soil Oh Saguni! Kindly go and inform the seven Goddesses that there will be a sacrifice in the house!
Angana mein kuyiyan khanaawa ta kuiyan ke piyar maati ho Saguni jay ke jagaawa saaton debi maiya ghare jag howoowe ho Maati se angana lipaayla dev sab aanan bhaile ho	I have plastered the whole yard with pure yellow soil and all the gods and goddesses are happy now. Oh Saguni! You may now explain to me how to proceed with the rites and rituals of the wedding ceremony
Sagunu bhale pailla tohre sagunwaa laga niya agotaila ho	

Table 1. Bhojpuri Suguni song from Sanskar Manjari-S Ramdin 1989

While singing the above song, the married women will tie the grass into a bundle and the turmeric roots will be grinded by the maternal aunty- 'phouphou' and apply to the groom and bride on the same day. Then the remaining 'dhaan' (unhusked rice)- will be tied in the same 'bandhawa' and will be roasted at the bride's place as per Dr Boodhoo, early morning on the following day, that is, it will be used on the wedding day during the ceremony called 'lawa milay' during the 'saat phere'- circumambulation, it will be placed by the bride's brother/s on the 'supni' or winnow made of bamboo or a straw scoop with a handle known as 'mowni' to be offered in the holy fire as oblation in four times. At the end, the empty kerchief also referred as 'angocha' in Kanyadan, is playfully tied around the youngest brother's head who will keep it as a token of love and respect from her sister. By giving handfuls of parched rice in the hands of his sister, the brother gives her the assurance that though she is leaving the family of her father for that of her husband, she has all the right and privilege to come back to her father's house as and when she pleases. This kerchief is also a token of fraternity between the two just like the sacred thread Rakhee.

The popularity of this Indian Kerchief

Here, I would like to mention that this 'mouchoir latet' also known as 'mouchoir dada' (grandfather's kerchief) as they have mostly been worn by the elders, is proudly worn during Holi Chawtaal and Dhamaal competitions by each and everyone. Small kids to adults are seen wearing it every year. Even during the pilgrimage to Maha Shivaratree, many people are seen wearing one around their heads together with the traditional wears: dhoti (loin cloth) and Kurta.

It is also held sacred by the Hindu family who will wrap the holy scripture of Ramayan into it. Some will use it to place their deities and images of gods and goddesses on it in their devkula-religious space at home for worship and lighting of lamp. Others would simply tie religious prayer materials called 'puja ke samaan' into it and is always kept in a clean if not sacred place.

How does art preserve culture?

"Art saves culture through passing on tradition; art saves language, music, and craft; art saves families and communities through economic and social development," said Claire Stasiewicz, WFAM project manager. "Also, art saves lives by providing employment and safe spaces for individuals around the world." In our case, the 'Khattia' and 'Reminiscense' are indeed artworks which preserve the Bhojpuri Language and Culture.

Why do we need the arts?

Art gives us immeasurable personal and social benefits. We rely on the arts to help us through difficult times. Art reminds us that we are not alone and that we share a universal human experience. Through art, we feel deep emotions together and are able to process experiences, find connections, and create impact.

What is the difference between Bhojpuri folk and traditional art?

Bhojpuri folk and traditional arts are rooted in and reflective of the cultural life of a community. Bhojpuri Tangible folk art includes objects which historically are crafted and used within the traditional community. Intangible folk arts include such forms as Bhojpuri Sanskar Geet (folk songs related to sacraments), the Geet Gawai (a traditional folk performance before the wedding takes place), folk tales, 'bujhawwal' (riddles), proverbs and idiomatic expressions.

5.CONCLUSION

Art, in any form, can give people emotions that can lift up their spirit and make them more driven than ever. This is the only reason why art is important in our daily lives. With the art that we are surrounded by, whether it's a painting, music or even videos can have a huge impact on our mood and emotions. We have a tendency to view modern fine artists as gifted individuals making new, sometimes bold, aesthetic decisions independently and essentially alone in a studio or garret; similarly, we often see the folk or vernacular artists as unwilling to free themselves creatively from the accumulated aesthetic opinions of their whole culture. The folk artist is thus easily stereotyped as culture-bound, and the resultant art as mundane and repetitive. Our artists for this paper are both fine and folk, *avant-garde*, original and culturally dangerous! As William A. Wilson has stated, all art is art and all good art persists because of its capacity to express important elements of meaning and design which others can respond to; and all art depends on the quality and seriousness of purpose brought to the task by both audience and artist. Both the artworks: 'Khattia' and 'Reminiscence' preserve and promote the Bhojpuri Language and Culture of the rainbow Mauritian population.

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