

## COVID Speed Breaker of Defence Expectations

**By Lt Gen Dushyant Singh, PVSM, AVSM**

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### COVID Comes in the Way

The Union Budget has unfortunately fallen much short of expectations of the Armed Forces Capital needs. This will adversely impact the defence procurement of big ticket critical equipment. In fact, it has been a big miss as far as defence is concerned with the Finance Minister not even finding it important enough to mention about the Defence sector in her speech. Out of the total budget outlay of Rs. 34.83 lakh crore, Defence has been allocated Rs. 4.78 lakh crore a marginal increase from Rs. 4.71 lakh crore in 2020 - 21. The Capital Outlay is 1.35 crore a miniscule increase from Rs. 1.3451 lakh Crore at RE stage of 2020 - 21. If we add the inflation to this figure the allocation will be less than FY 20 - 21 in real terms. Although, we must also recognise that the BE stage allocation for 2020 - 21 was Rs. 1.13 lakh crore. Therefore, if we were to compare the allocation from BE figures than the increase is infact highest in the decade (19%). However, the situation will become challenging when we factor in the planned fiscal deficit of 6.8% which is big. However, one can take solace from the fact that despite the huge fiscal deficit due to COVID affected economy Finance Minister was constraint and has done her best. But will that help National Military Security? This should be a major concern for India.

### Impact on Strategic Communication

Threat to National Security of India is real and serious. Economic growth which is the bedrock of wellbeing and prosperity of the country is a must. For this, a balanced growth in all sectors of the economy is not only desirable but a must. For this, investments must flow uninterrupted into productive sectors. However, all this can only happen if our external and internal security is peaceful and stable. To ensure peace and stability defence is the ultimate guarantor. Although, the defence budget since 2011 has grown at 9% annually but in real terms after taking into accounts the average rate of inflation, it is marginal. In terms of percentage of GDP, it has fluctuated between 1.5 to 2.5% of the GDP.

The capital outlay has impinged even more adversely on the defence preparedness and capability development of the Armed Forces. Capital expenditure as a percentage of the defence budget has steadily fallen. From a high of 36% in 2013-14 it came down to 25% in 2018 - 19.

Despite India being at No 3 spot globally with only USA and China ahead of it in defence spending, the gap is huge with China. Chinese expenditure was four times that of India our primary adversary. All this is likely to convey an impression of weakness to our primary adversary China in the face of recent happenings in Ladakh. It is definitely an undesirable situation from strategic communication perspective.

### **What Needs to Done?**

What needs to be done on priority is introducing long term planning based on non-lapsable funding of capital projects. Where possible, without compromising the security, the option of leasing big ticket defence equipment needs to be explored for example transport aircrafts and vessels meant for logistic functions to save cost of procuring such equipment.

Critical equipment needs to be procured on priority. MoD must galvanize the ecosystem for materialization of production and procurement of 114 Multi Medium Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA), 83 LCA Mk 1A announced recently by the RM and fast tracking the development of LCA Mk 2A. Towards this end successful completion of the Wind tunnel test is an encouraging sign.

Likewise, the commissioning of the second aircraft carrier and the SSBNs must be a top priority along with the Mine Countermeasure Vessels and Naval Helicopters.

For the Army Fighting Infantry Combat Vehicle (FICV), Tactical Communication System and Battlefield Management System (BMS) are some of the large schemes that need to be progressed through the Make route. Similarly, procurement of State of the Art Small Arms and Projects such as the establishment of “AK 103” manufacturing unit in the UP Defence Industrial Corridor need early fructification.

Finally, to generate more funding, Indian Armed Forces will have to depend on mini budgets during 2021-22 to extract more money from the Rs. 44,000 crore earmarked as reserve under the Department of Economic Affairs on the pattern of FY 20-21. It is hoped in the end defence gets what it deserves.

## **Who Thinks for the Ministry of Defence?**

### **By Amit Cowshish**

Author is former financial advisor (acquisitions), Ministry of Defence.

**At best, the ministry can be defined as an assembly of zooids, similar to myriads of marine species that clone themselves thousands of times in different forms and shapes, defying accurate definition.**

One of the more abiding riddles in the officialdom revolves around the viewpoint of who really is responsible for deliberations in the multi-layered Ministry of Defence (MoD) responsible for managing the armed forces and related matters of national security. For, unlike other compact and self-contained ministries like the railways and commerce and industry, MoD remains a mystery as to who actually conceives national defence policy and plans, ponders over the best way to execute them and, above all, assesses their outcome in the ministry.

Few, including insiders, can provide a convincing answer. At best, the MoD can be defined as a ‘siphonophore’ or an assembly of zooids, similar to myriads of marine species that clone themselves thousands of times in different forms and shapes, defying accurate definition. For starter, the MoD is headquartered in South Block, but its numerous zooids – in uniform and out of it – stretch across surrounding Bhawans, adjacent colonial-era hutments and numerous other niche departments strung out across New Delhi, whose relevance remains enigmatic, mysterious and above all, indescribable.

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG), based at India Gate, even has tentacles in NOIDA in Uttar Pradesh, while the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) located behind South Block also has many branches, including a grand establishment near the Civil Lines in North Delhi located in the 19th century residence of India's acting British governor general Charles Metcalfe, and another one a few kilometres away in Timarpur. The Border Roads Organisation (BRO), for its part, operates from its headquarters in South West Delhi.

The tentacles of the Services Headquarters (SHQ), which go by the arcane nomenclature of Integrated Headquarters of the Ministry of Defence (Army/Navy/Air Force) since 2001-02, are physically spread out even wider. They stretch from the Directorate of Naval Design (DND) located in Delhi's East of Kailash colony to RK Puram and even in nearby Chanakyapuri. The overall lack of space for the vast MoD has even forced some of its zooids to recently commandeered some floors of the state-owned Ashok Hotel.

If this bewildering multiplicity was not enough, the federal government further confounded confusion by **creating the Department of Military Affairs** (DMA) headed by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat in late 2019. The CDS' appointment followed decades of lobbying by the services for the post that was widely envisaged as a 'magic bullet' to streamline military doctrines, perpetuate 'jointness' and to economise defence expenditure, amongst a myriad other operational tasks too expansive to enumerate. However, in reality, after over a year of its existence, the DMA and the CDS remain a work in progress, adding to the overall syndrome of confused thinking amongst MoD zooids.

### **Horses pulling in different directions**

All these multiple zooids pursue their individual interests which, most times are at odds with the MoD's avowed goal of seamless co-operation between its many participatory organs. The three services, the ICG, the BRO, DRDO, and the Kolkata-based Ordnance Factory Board (OFB), for instance, all formulate and pursue separate plans, many of which are invariably divorced from financial reality and often imbued with fiscal profligacy. The montage that emerges is akin to a chariot being drawn by several horses, each one pulling in a different direction, resulting in a confused melee that few can comprehend, and largely unimplementable plans.

Collectively, however, these zooids busy themselves disposing of the daily influx of files with lengthy and largely puzzling notings and responding to mostly incomprehensible queries. In between, they attend or preside over endless meetings or conclaves to discuss matters few participants feel the need, or have the time, to understand in totality.

With seemingly little or no repository of institutional wisdom, the MoD appears to be perpetually astride a treadmill, busy reinventing the wheel of national security, seldom looking at, or learning any lessons from the past. It is astonishing that the MoD, which accounts for 15-16% of the federal government's annual expenditure, has neither a viable financially comprehensive plan nor an enduring strategy to make optimum use of its large budgetary outlays to achieve intended outcomes. Astonishingly, it has no core inside it to either formulate such overarching proposals or oversee their implementation.

Hence, it is no small wonder that each of these physically dispersed 'zooids' continue to discharge individual functions, at times unbeknownst to the central authority in the MoD or the equally disparate SHQs, perpetually overburdened with paperwork. A common stream, however, running through all the zooids manning these divisions is to bemoan the mediocrity and inefficiency of their predecessors on which they blamed the prevailing confusion. Like most incumbent civil servants, they too seem driven by the infallible bureaucratic rationale that only they know best.

It is instructive to recall a seminar some time ago at a leading Delhi defence think tank which illustrates this syndrome. By the time the extended session, filled with soporific monologues by a handful of experts, dispersed for a welcome lunch, every single MoD entity – the DRDO, the OFB,

all nine Defence Public Sector Undertakings, the Director General Quality Assurance and all other related departments, including its routinely vilified Finance Division, were pronounced inefficient and incompetent. They were also deemed unimaginative and of being ignorant in matters strategic and military and therefore, incapable of managing their assigned tasks.

It did not matter that few or no representatives of the departments condemned by the speakers were present in the seminar; and the handful who were, were accorded barely a fleeting opportunity to put across their contrary point of view. What, however, was even more disturbing was that no speaker voiced any concrete plan to remedy the situation that everyone condemned as hopeless. It was merely a plethora of complaints, criticism, and grumbles, which, over decades, have become the defining feature of the public discourse on defence and military matters.

### **What's the solution?**

To overcome this tendency and more importantly to ensure jointness in planning this writer, whose remit included defence planning, suggested sometime in 2011 that the MoD should task a leading Delhi-based think tank which it funds, to organise a series of interactions with all the stakeholders and formulate an 'approach paper' for the ensuing five-year plan. The reasoning was that consequently a financially viable comprehensive plan or road map could then be prepared by the MoD and pursued for optimum results.

Expectedly, the suggestion was turned down at the 'highest levels' on the mystifying grounds that defence planning was the MoD's responsibility and hence could not be outsourced, ironically even to one of its many zooids and that too only for proposing the approach to be adopted for formulating a comprehensive plan, and not to actually formulate the detailed plan, much less implement it.

And, in 2015, the late defence minister Manohar Parrikar set up a committee to explore the possibility of establishing a bespoke Defence Capability Acquisition Organisation, divorced from the MoD, to manage acquisitions, one of the major stumbling blocks in India's higher defence management. It was envisaged to accomplish this task from the time the operational requirement of any equipment was identified by the services till it was acquired and remained in service.

The report submitted by the committee in 2016 after exhaustive and expansive diligence and examination of procurement procedures in numerous foreign countries lies interned in South Block, much like scores of others on a wide range of subjects aimed at augmenting the MoD's functioning in a cohesive manner.

The same fate has befallen several draft policy documents released by the MoD. In his budget speech on February 01, 2018 then defence and finance minister Arun Jaitley had **announced** that the government would formulate an industry-friendly Defence Production Policy to indigenise the country's materiel needs. A draft policy was indeed issued by the MoD later that year, but it remained unfinalised, only to be succeeded by another draft Defence Production and Export Promotion Policy in **August 2020**, which too remains in limbo.

Meanwhile, a draft Offset Policy was issued in April 2015 to empower the MoD to channelise offsets accruing from materiel buys into priority areas identified by it. That too slipped into oblivion. And some five years later, this same offset policy has been further diluted in complete disregard of the objectives of the 2015 draft policy, further reinforcing the argument of there being little or no integrated and sustained thinking in the MoD.

In conclusion, nothing underscores the absence of coordinated deliberations in the MoD more than the braggadocio concerning India's exaggerated military capabilities that echo around South Block parroted by droves of moustachioed television gladiators, forever tilting at windmills. And though the josh or valour of the Indian soldier remains unquestionably supreme, it serves the MoD zooids no purpose to hollowly tell our nuclear-armed neighbours repeatedly that

‘hum tum ko vekh lega’ (We will sort you out) and that the Indian military was ‘losing patience with their antics’.

An Urdu couplet sums it up best: Kah raha hai josh-e-dariya se samandar ka sukoon, jis mein jitna zarf hai utna hi woh khamosh hai (the serene ocean is telling the excited and impulsive river that being calm and quiet is relative to one’s intrinsic strength and capability).

Courtesy: **The Wire**

## **The American Administration Under President Biden And Prospects For India.**

**By Dr. Arnab Chakrabarty**

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As the Trump era ended in January 2021 with massive riots on the **Capitol Hill**, it resembled a tinderbox like situation with Trump and his supporters refusing to **concede defeat**. While the world is gradually but surely recovering from the horrendous pandemic **originating from the PRC** (Peoples’ Republic of China) possible realignment of American policies will certainly affect the future prospects of the world. The PRC is ever belligerent and while **vaccination drives** have begun across continents an underlying suspicion is still prevalent regarding its final outcome and efficacy. While the previous Trump administration left no stone unturned to make its disdain for the PRC obvious and **openly blamed** it for the outbreak of the pandemic, it also aided in improving its relationship with India in order to counter the PRC. The **Biden administration** has inherited a world that is **fractured and is fraught** with the effects of the pandemic, a lot needs to be seen as to how the Biden administration will prioritise its goals and aspirations with other states especially India.

### **Rebalancing**

While the previous Trump administration did not shy away from taking on the PRC even before the outbreak of the pandemic, Biden has **inherited an increasingly belligerent PRC** which not only shies away from owning its implicit role in the outbreak of the pandemic but also refuses to tone down its banter particularly with India and other neighbouring states. While in the previous year both the Asian states arrived to blows over **latent territorial dispute** the Trump administration was cautious enough to back India along with the major states of the world. Biden will thus have to carefully **rebalance the position of the United States** with respect to India and the PRC. The 46th American president certainly has a task cut out for him as he identified in his **victory speech** where he addressed the nation on topics ranging from a dwindling economy, rampant systemic racism as well as **maintaining the world order**. Biden will also have to seek **bipartisan support** for his policies while undoing many reminiscent of the Trump era such as **re-joining the 2015 Paris Climate accord**. Apart from dealing with internal fissures and a polarised American society, the new administration will also have to work on **troop withdrawal** from Afghanistan initiated under the Trump administration. It will have to work out a deal with a **resurgent Taliban** as well as balance its relationship with Pakistan whose endless ‘narratives’ on strategic depth and viability in stabilising the region will tender larger implications on India. The Democratic administration has also promised to keep **India as a priority** and to further cherish years of cooperation and friendship between both the states. Biden had always been **supportive** of the 2008 Nuclear Deal, removal of sanctions against India and has valued India’s contribution to the world.

## Prodding the PRC

Needless to say the implications on India will be tremendous depending on the attitude of the current Administration. While Chinese propaganda urges India to avoid choosing sides or attain the role of a **proxy of the United States**, Trump's policy had been to warm up to India in order to create a strong **bulwark against Chinese expansionism**. Understandably, much has changed since the era of the 'ping-pong' diplomacy of the Cold War, making the American administration realise the threat posed by Beijing and the role India may play in countering. Trump and his advisors often engaged in a war of words with the communist regime and minced no words about its **implicit role** in the pandemic, often these tirades would turn **bellicose** but it made Beijing realise that the American administration was aware of its intentions to come out as the only power capable of challenging the United States. As the pandemic halted the world and fingers of accusation were pointed at the PRC, the previous American administration did not make its disdain for Beijing secret. Furthermore, **American support** to Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and appreciation for India made the **PRC uncomfortable**. While the Trump administration tried its level best to **box in the PRC** and refuse it any grounds for political manoeuvre the current American administration needs to continue on similar lines in order to keep a check on the PRC. As of now the Biden administration is not expected to **ditch its allies** and warm up to the PRC while it closely monitors the situation between India and the PRC with regards to the Line of Actual Control and voiced its concerns over Beijing's attempts to drive up **hostilities along the Himalayas**. Although the Trump administration had ramped up the rhetoric against the PRC, the Biden administration is expected to be more cooperative with Beijing albeit keeping it checked.

## Courting Islamabad

A nearly failed regime, disturbed economy that survives on doles and with political fractures ruling the show the Pakistani establishment will turn out to be a **headache for Biden** and his team and any decision will have its own bearing on New Delhi. Pakistan is as expected will continue its **age old tirade against India** over Kashmir, the treatment of minorities in India and the question of geopolitical stability in the region will also prop up. Pakistan will turn out to be important for the American administration owing to the state's strategic position between India and Afghanistan and thus **balancing the interests** of Islamabad and New Delhi will be crucial. While Trump was **cold towards Imran Khan's regime** and consequently warmed up to India, it further pushed Pakistan into the arms of the PRC, desperate for allies in political isolation. A seemingly direct confrontation between the U.S. and the PRC will have serious implications for South Asia as well with both the powers vying to outdo each other. It must be borne that while certain interests of these states may align with one another, there may be sharp differences as well. As far as South Asia is concerned India would not prefer **ceding diplomatic ground** to a failing Pakistani regime nor would it cow down before an ever belligerent PRC. On the other hand, it would expect greater cooperation from the American administration showcasing its might to a jeopardised world.

## Walking with New Delhi

Wedged between the PRC and its proxy Pakistan, India will have tougher decisions to take as it attempts to thwart Chinese attempts at intrusion and propaganda along with a failing but desperate Pakistani establishment. The American administration must heed the **call of democracy and sustainability** in South Asia if it wishes to tackle larger issues. Traditionally too, in the post-Cold War scenario American policies seem to be **concomitant with that of India's rising aspirations** based on common themes of democracy, mutual cooperation and defence of free thought. Although the difference between the erstwhile Trump and present Biden administration may **be glaring at times**, certain key areas such as immigration, education in the United States, climate change cooperation and trade may **benefit India** under the present administration.

India will also have to be wary of any changes of policies undertaken by the Biden administration such as continuing the **troop withdrawal from Afghanistan** which may very soon again turn into **Pakistan's playground** thus jeopardising India as well as its possible inability to contain the PRC. However, the Biden administration may choose to soften up Trump's aggressive stance on major foreign policy issues but going for an **informal alliance of states** in order to keep its heritage in place. While Trump stepped aside from commenting on India's internal political dimensions, Biden previously had **criticised India's policies** on Jammu and Kashmir and the Citizenship Amendment Act. Thus Biden is expected to balance his approach without playing into the hands of Pakistan, India and the PRC. If the current administration plays into the **hands of critics of the government in India**, it could embolden the PRC and thus quash the American dream of maintaining overall superiority, if it turns a blind eye towards political developments in India much to the chagrin of those who value human rights over pragmatic foreign policy decisions, then the American administration may also be accused of continuing **Trump's legacy**.

Regarding trade and commerce the Post-Covid world exposes the fissures within the world's **supply chains** pushing states to vouch for self-reliance. Even though trade between both the nations are at an all-time high, it would require a herculean effort to ensure functionality of smooth and hassle free trade between both the states. Though by reforming the **temporary visa system** for highly skilled workers it did certainly cause a matter of joy in India, in addition to restoring the naturalization process for green card holders. Certainly **defence and energy collaborations** that seems to become positively entrenched under Biden will be a welcome news for both the states. Finally, India may need to **reform its market structure** in order to engage in **cooperative measures** with the United States in addition to dealing with the devastation caused by the pandemic which originated from the PRC. The United States consequently has to chart a course between keeping American interests at forefront along with India's aspirations in order to delve deeper into a mechanism of cooperation or **risk the PRC stealing the show** despite its murky handling of the pandemic.

## **Drone Warfare – Challenges and Opportunities**

**By Gopal Dhok**

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### **Background**

At the peak of the Cold War, drones like Firebee were used in Vietnam for Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) missions. Endurance of Firebee was seventy-five minutes. Modern drones, on the other hand, can remain in the sky for long hours and perform tasks that a manned military aircraft can do. Drones like Harop are designed to perform Kamikaze (suicide) missions. It can loiter over targets for hours and provide intelligence before performing offensive action. Modern drones are armed with sophisticated guided missiles. Besides, drones, with the ability to land and take off from surface vessels, can be a game-changer for maritime forces.

### **Drones in the business**

With the advancement of technology, unmanned systems have become attractive weapons for short and limited conflicts. Almost all countries in the northern hemisphere are seeking armed drones. Without the capacity to develop Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles (UCAV) domestically, countries have turned to China, Israel, Turkey or the United States.

American Predator drone has been operational since 1995. The United States has been using weaponized UAVs for nearly two decades. In 2000, the US Predator drone helped identify Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. However, it was not weaponized at that time for offensive action. The incident intensified development of weapons carrying UAVs. Today's UAVs can carry sniper attacks on individuals or a group of people.

Israel, a major exporter of UAVs, sold Harpy drones (loitering drones meant to perform kamikaze strikes) to China in 1994 for around US\$55 million. From 2005 to 2013, Israel exported \$4.6 billion worth of UAVs to Europe, Asia, and America. Israel exports drones to 56 countries, while the United States and China export UAVs to 55 and 37 countries respectively.

India recently bought 50 Heron UAVs from Israel. India is also exploring MQ-9 Reaper drones from the US. Indigenous Rustom II developed by DRDO, a Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) combat drone is in the testing phase. India is the top buyer of drones as indigenous drones are in the development and testing phase.

### **Challenges Posed By Drone Technology**

Twenty-first-century drones offer wide capabilities including stealth at a much lower price. It is not that they are invincible war machines. Perhaps, kinetic air defence systems are a relatively costly countermeasure against small and medium drones. The weak link among these advanced drones could be its remote connectivity and electronics suites as in case of American RQ-170 Sentinel drone lost over Iranian airspace.

Hacking is a critical threat to remote-controlled unmanned military systems as there is no human operator onboard for manual control of the aircraft. Nation-states and even terrorist organisations can spoof and manipulate signals to take control of the drone and eventually reverse engineer its technology.

The relatively low cost of UAVs has allowed smaller nations and even terrorist groups to develop offensive drone capabilities (of varying degree). For countries, low cost also translates into the lowered risk of operational loss as compared to expensive manned aircraft. Countries that could have been able to afford a couple of modern costly fighter jets can easily augment air-power with UAVs. Also, higher numbers (swarms) can change the outcome of the operation.

Deployment of drones is making airpower more rewarding for its user and riskier for defending side. UAVs are becoming a dilemma for the air defence not just at the frontline but also at crucial civilian infrastructure such as airports, oil refineries etc; as cheaply made drones can jeopardize a billion-dollar system. In 2017, Saudi Arabia launched a \$2 million Patriot Surface to Air missile to protect its oil installation against a crude drone<sup>20</sup>. A \$2 million sophisticated countermeasure against a \$15 thousand drone is a very costly affair. Apart from that, financial losses due to drone attacks were in the millions per day for Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the attack on the Saudi oil facility poses a big question about the accuracy of advanced air defence systems against drone swarms and loitering ammunition.

Drones and drone swarms put a question mark on the utility and cost-effectiveness of air defence systems. With great cost disadvantages against economically and militarily strong defenders, terrorist groups as well as nations (with power disparity) could effectively utilise drones to overwhelm the advanced air defences.

It would be too risky to deny the possibility of an unmanned terrorist attack in the future. Such attacks can achieve psychological impact similar to 9/11 New York or 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks.

Strong airpower (offensive and defensive) was a function of financial might and technological superiority. However, with drones that equation is in question. With drones, even small terror groups can possess crude but damaging air-power and sophisticated systems may not be effective against these crude drone bombs. Dirty bombs (small tactical nuclear weapons) launched through crude small drones are a real threat.

In 2004 Hezbollah first used drones to conduct reconnaissance and to carry explosives over the border into Israel. Use of drones by terrorist groups in parts of India, especially in Kashmir is not farfetched thinking. The terrorist attack via drones could have a devastating impact.

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## Nation is Indebted to:

### Bhikhari Thakur

1887-1971



Bhikhari Thakur and his Statue in Chapra

In all probability, Bhikhari Thakur is not a well-known name outside Bihar or Bhojpuri speaking areas of north India. Well! Here is the story of an ordinary person who in his life time became legend due to his contribution to traditional folk theatre plays and songs.

Here is his journey from nowhere to everywhere.

Thakur was born in a barber family on 18 December 1887 in Kutubpur village in Chhapra. His father Dalsingar Thakur was a barber and his mother's name was Sivkali Devi.

During those days, going to school for education was the privilege of few. Due to poor condition of his family, Thakur could not even manage to complete his primary education. He only had the knowledge of the Kaithi alphabets. He was married in childhood to Matuna. He was a cattle grazer and when he grew up, he adopted his family profession of a Barber. However, he wanted to do something else. He shifted from his village to the neighbouring village named Fatanpur. After that, he left his family and went to Kharagpur in the search of job. From there he went to Medinipur and started doing some job. He used to watch the Ramlila, and from there he got the inspiration to write and act in plays. He returned to his village formed a drama company and started performing Ramlila. After that he started writing and directing plays by his himself. Thakur mainly picked up the social issue and wrote plays on them and performed them.

Most of the works of Bhikhari Thakur was based on the problem of the society like plight of the migrants and women, poverty, Mother's love, etc. The plays and songs of Bhikhari Thakur depict the evils that were corroding the society. "Bidesiya" depicts the pain of a woman whose husband leaves her and marries another woman, "Beti Bechwa" depicts the practice of unequal marriage, "Bidhwa Bilaap" depicts how a widow is treated and cheated by the society and her family. Besides social problems, Thakur has also talked about the separation of joint families in "Bhai Birodh" and "Nanad-Bhaujai". In "Kaljug Prem" or "Piyawa Nasail", he has shown the consequences of drinking and its impact on the family.

Bhikhari Thakur is known for different style of playwriting away from modern plays of 20th century, which used to have dialogues only. The plays of Thakur were closer to the style used in classical Sanskrit theatre and Shakespeare's style, which used to contain songs and dialogues both. Plays written by Thakur imbibed many principles from the Classical Indian Theatre. For example, His plays used to start with MANGALACHARAN which is an essential part of Sanskrit plays in which prayers are dedicated to Ganapati and Saraswati, asking for the blessings. They also had Samaji which is equivalent to Sutradhāra of Sanskrit theatre. The Samaji used to explain about the play in the prologue, its characters and used to draw example parallel to Hindu mythology. Another important part of his plays was labbār which are known as viduṣhak (comedian) in Indian classical theatre, who comes in the middle of the play just to entertain the audience by doing some comedy.

The characters of the plays of Bhikhari Thakur are of types representing the general rather than the particular. He wrote his famous play “Bidesiya” in 1917, where character of Bidesi represents all the young men who used to go to Assam and Bengal for earning. This play is the most famous work of Bhikhari Thakur. Even today it is staged every year in Nandikar’s National Theatre Festival (16 Dec – 25 Dec) held at Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata.

Between 1938 to 1962, more than three dozen books of Bhikhari Thakur were published.

Bhikhari Thakur got immense appreciation for his play that used to reveal the reality of the society. He was given Raibahadur title by Bihar Government in 1944 and famous Hindi writer Rahul Sankrityayan called him the Shakespeare of Bhojpuri.

Bhikhari Thakur left this world for ever on 10 July 1971 but left his footprint, which can never be obliterated.

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