

**STUDYING ECOCRITICISM  
THROUGH FOLK LITERATURE  
FROM BIHAR**

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**by**

**Mallika Tosha**

**(2K19/PHDHUM/501)**

**Under the Supervision of**

**Prof. Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi**

**Professor, Department of Humanities**

**Delhi Technological University**



**To the**

**Department of Humanities**

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**(Formerly Delhi College of Engineering)**

**Shahbad Daultapur, Main Bawana Road, Delhi-110042, India**

**December, 2024**

## **CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION**

I hereby certify that the work which is being presented in the thesis entitled **Studying Ecocriticism through Folk Literature from Bihar** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, submitted in the Department of Humanities, Delhi Technological University is an authentic record of my own work carried out during the period from May 2022 to August 2024 under the supervision of Prof Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi.

The matter presented in the thesis has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree of this or any other Institute.

**Mallika Tosha**

## CERTIFICATE

Certified that **Mallika Tosha** (2k19/PHDHUM/501) has carried out her research work presented in this thesis entitled “**Studying Ecocriticism through Folk Literature from Bihar**” for the award of **Doctor of Philosophy** from Department of Humanities, Delhi Technological University, Delhi, under my supervision. The thesis embodies results of original work, and studies are carried out by the student herself and the contents of the thesis do not form the basis for the award of any other degree to the candidate or to anybody else from this or any other University/Institution.

Signature

Prof. Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi

(Professor)

Department of Humanities

Delhi Technological University

Delhi-110042

Date:

## **Studying Ecocriticism through Folk Literature from Bihar**

Mallika Tosha

### **ABSTRACT**

The research explores the kinds of “relationship between literature and environment” as depicted through the past habits, customs, and rituals of the folk tradition of Bihar. Folk lore is a significant part of Bihar’s rich heritage as a state. Mithila art, unique folk songs, folk tales, and proverbs are all part of this state’s rich and insightful past, which is reflected in its various art forms. Proverbs, folktales, and folksongs were used in the research. Within Indian folk literature, one can find elements of philosophical inquiry, celebration of the natural environment, depictions of migration issues, and reflections on relationships. By regularly including flora and fauna in their rituals, folksongs, folktales, and art forms, the people of Bihar inherently embrace environmental consciousness.

By studying Bihar’s folklores, we can delve into the connection between nature and human beings. The research studies the folk literature recited or written in the languages of Bihar. Maithili, Angika, Magahi, and Bhojpuri are the primary languages in Bihar. The present research takes into account the first three languages because exhausting research has already been done on Bhojpuri language. The researcher’s task is to extract environmental elements by selecting folklores from these languages. Aside from linguistic differences, it was observed that the folk elements of all four languages are distinct. The research suggests that the environment is worsening in parallel with the decline of these folk compositions. People used to recite folklores in

earlier times due to their attachment to the physical environment, but this connection was gradually lost with industrialization and mechanization. Through elements of folk literature, the thesis aims to explore how nature and folk culture are interrelated. The question is raised about the historical coexistence of nature and humanity. Females, as per ecofeminist Annette Kolodny, experience exploitation similar to that of land. According to the thesis, the decline of these forms of folk literature parallels the deterioration of the environment. An examination of folk literature can uncover the historical relationship between humans and the environment. The thesis suggests that individuals familiar with the folklores and ancient practices of Bihar will have a better understanding of the physical environment compared to those who are unaware of these beliefs. Studying the select folklores of Bihar reveals that the homocentric and ecocentric approaches are not considered as binaries. The main goals of the research are to uncover the diverse perceptions of Bihar and examine the connection between folk composition and the physical environment. Furthermore, this current research delves into how the natural environment is perceived in folk literature from both western and Indian viewpoints. The issues of homocentric and ecocentric approaches are examined through folk songs, tales, and beliefs.

Interpretation, analysis, and comparison are the major techniques used in this research. Interviews are conducted as a part of methodology. Criticism on the text of folklores is included. Recording of folk tales and folksongs are carried out by the researcher. All folklores are in the languages of Bihar. Therefore, translation of these folksongs has been carried out for the analytical purpose of the research. Folklores composed in other languages are considered for the comparative treatment of the subject of the research through their translated versions. The research engages with the

extant critical works for a pre-existing perspective on the proposed subject of the study. The research involved visiting Bihar, majorly along the banks of the river Ganga. The fourth chapter includes the folk beliefs of fisher community, and unravels how their age-old customs added to a balanced relationship between human beings and the physical environment. The research posits that due to erratic seasonal pattern, the traditional festivals are suffering.

With the rising interference by human beings to the natural environment, an immense necessity to protect the earth emerges. Scholars and scientists are bound to evolve, modify, and rejuvenate the techniques that could add to a better well-being of the nature. Furthermore, philosophical questioning must be carried out in order to strive to recover the irreparable damage done to our planet. The present research is an attempt to explore the inherent environment consciousness through an ecocritical study of the folk-literature from Bihar. This could lead the future researchers in devising techniques that would possibly repair the damages inflicted on the physical environment by *homosapiens*.

This research endeavours to devise future research and techniques to enhance the ecosystem through re-assertion of folk heritage. The statement does not necessarily mean that one should go back to their older ways of thinking and performing rituals, rather it asserts the belief that with a heightened human-interruption of ecosystem, a dire need to evolve ways that could rejuvenate the older harmony of the physical environment emerges. Folklore of Bihar proves to be an epitome of how human beings are affected and could affect the environment.

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## List of Publications

1. Mallika, Tosha & Dwivedi, Rajiv Ranjan. (2024: Accepted) A Study of the Coalescence between Environmental Sustainability and Angika Folklore (Eastern Bihar, India). *Folklore*. Estonia
2. Mallika, Tosha & Dwivedi, R. R. Ecological Representation in the Maithili Songs of Vidyapati. *Anhad Lok*, vol. 10, no. 19, 2024, pp. 386-389.
3. Mallika, Tosha, and Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi. "Nature-Culture Binary versus Ancient Folklore of Bihar (An Eastern Indian State)." *Classical Literature*, vol 2, issue 1, 2024.
4. Tosha, Mallika and Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi. "Perception through the Personified: A Study of Children's Folklore from Bihar, India." *IAFOR Journal of Literature & Librarianship*, vol.12, no. 1, 2023.
5. Tosha, Mallika and Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi, "Cashless Economy and Environment: A Humanitarian Perspective through Literary Lens." *Journal of Literature, Culture and Media Studies*. (Ed. N.D.R. Chandra), 2021.
6. Tosha, Mallika and Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi, Biodiversity in Angika Folksongs of Bihar: An Environmental Perspective. In *Ancient Indian Wisdom for Sustainable Wellbeing* (Ed. A.K. Sinha, et al.) Bharti Publication, Varanasi, 2021, pp 200-205 (ISBN: 9789388019873).
7. Tosha, Mallika, and Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi. "Angika Folksongs and Physical Environment: A Critical Perspective on Parallel Decline." *Think India Journal*, vol.22, issue 4.

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**Dedicated to my Parents**

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

This chapter lays the foundation to the present research. That Bihar is not only a geographical entity, but also a consciousness fuelled by multi-varied awareness, culture, and politics, is explained through the due process of the research. The present chapter discusses the concept of Bihar as an identity. It discusses the reasons behind selecting the present topic. This chapter addresses certain pertinent questions such as; the meanings of unity in diversity, unity and diversity or multiculturalism—What are the factors that define the word “Bihar”? Does deep history and folk history coincide or not? Why are the selective region chosen; Folk literature of which languages are worked upon and why. Moreover, the tools and methods used in the thesis are explained in this chapter.

The great Mauryan Empire reigned in this region. In addition, two major pacifist religious traditions, Buddhism and Jainism, spread from this region. Aside from religious epics, many ancient Indian texts were written here. Inhabitants of Bihar established several monasteries, places of Hindu worship, and architectural water bodies for agriculture. During the post-independence era, there has been a rapid expansion of psychic and material development urbanization succeeded by the mass movement of people. Globalization has resulted in a further shift in demography and the translation of foreign literature into Indian languages (Chakma, 87). There has been a significant change in rural Bihar along with the age-old values and norms. With time,

the term “Bihari” was considered derogatory by the people of other states and the natives of Bihar who settled in metro cities. This term hinted at someone who was poor and earned an income by working in filthy conditions. It was a commonplace remark by rich people when they were not happy with the work of a labourer or rickshaw puller. In contemporary India, however, some people tend to subvert this concept of being “Bihari.” They feel proud of asserting their Bihari identities, believing they are one of the most intelligent communities in India. To preserve their festivals, such as Chhatha (Appendix I) (devotion to the Sun deity) and Jivitputrika (a festival as an oath to protect the offspring), the Bihari community has made these festivals world-renowned. Majorly all such celebrations involve singing folksongs and specific rituals. There is a range of literary and research works examining the various socio-cultural, politico-economic, literary, and institutional aspects of this region. Some scientific literature like *Krishi Parasara*, *Krishi Geeta*, *Krishi Shashtram*, *Vriksha Ayurveda* and *Madhava Nidan* are elaborate texts on agricultural and Ayurvedic resources and practices. There are many publications that examine the rock-cut caves, architectural landscape (Pathak, 2010); dilapidated shrines, Stupas and Mathas in this region (Sinha, 2003); agro-literary activities, a collection of folklore and anthologies of popular Magahi poets, and compile the history of Magadh literature and culture since 8th Century AD. This published literature narrates the existence of folk practices and role of folklore in the preservation of cultures, moral values, and environmental values but till this date no holistic research has been undertaken which could credibly give coherent research insights on the role of the folk genre on morals, ethics and environmental sensitization in children. At this critical stage when Bihar is losing the heritage and folk culture, it is necessary to elucidate the impacts of folk genre on

masses as children are the major audience of folk genres (Adiakpor, 2021; Zalar, 2020). There still exists a plethora of folk heritage, including folk art, folk games, folk tales, folk songs, and folk festivals, in Bihar. Every stage of life in this state includes specific rites or *samskaras*. Beginning with *Mundan* (Tonsure, or Shaving of baby's first hair), all the folklore involved in various *samskaras* acts as a medium of conditioning and sensitizing people. Negligible primary research has been conducted regarding the folklore related to the children from Bihar. When researchers talk about folklore from India, Bihar is not mentioned. The present study is an endeavour to understand the complexities of the folklore of Bihar and their effect on its inhabitants. This research included visiting selected parts of Bihar and collecting folklore. The scholar interviewed local inhabitants and recorded folklore and folk belief through audio, video, and in writing. *Mundan* and *Yagyopaveet* (Thread Ceremony) are two essential celebrations that the men of Bihar witness. Moreover, older adults recite folktales to their young ones which have a significant imprint on the later lives of the listeners. Bihar came to the notice of researchers with Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India* in 1908. Researchers have studied the folk genre of Bihar, but not enough attention has been paid to the Bihari folk literature with ecocritical sense of view. This research primarily deals with the impact of folklore on the mind of folks. It argues that witnessing folklore leads children to believe the message that gets propagated through this genre. Thus, the beliefs generated result from the things, characters, and utterances that are personified in the elements of this folklore and folk practices.

There have been several ground-breaking research studies in the field of folklore. Vladimir Propp considered all folklore as having an essential nature in terms of the structure (Propp, xii-xiii) while Alan paved the fundamental ways of researching

this genre (Dundes, 1-20, 1980; Dundes, 40-92, 1989). The present research, even after being particular in terms of place, could be applicable worldwide. Intending to study these folk genres through recording, analysis, interpretation, and comparison, the current research endeavours to offer a humanitarian approach towards this subject. This research involves analysing the folklore of selected regions of Mithila, Angika, and Magahi-speaking territories. Through a qualitative analysis, the present research intends to unravel the complexities involved in the field of folklore of Bihar. Most of the folk literature is personified in a manner so that both animate and inanimate objects and characters communicate and express their thoughts. These “personified” elements coalesce together to form perceptions of the audience. In this way, what is perceived through the personified tends to become the belief of the audience. The listeners, while witnessing these telling, either question, affirm or interrogate the narrative.

### **Literature Review**

The research included rigorous literature review, all of which could not be stated here due to limitation of space. There has been ample amount of work done on folk literature. However, there is a dearth of research carried out on the folk literature of Bihar and ecosystem. In the seminal book *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm discuss environment as perceived by the inhabitants of West. There is a scarcity of research done on Indian way of perceiving eco system, except in the chapter “The Sacred Hoop: A Contemporary Perspective.” This leads to the emergence of an immense need to study the physical environment as prevailing in the folk notion of India. Krishna Murari Singh Kisan in the book *Angika our Kucch Our Kahavatein* (2013) lays before the readers the folk composition in Angika, but the



research point is missing in the book as it is descriptive. Nalin Verma in *The Greatest Folktales of Bihar* (2019) puts before us the translation of the folktales of this state. Nandita Krishna in *The Sacred Animals of India* (2010) discusses the essentiality of animals in folk beliefs. PC Roy Chaudhary in the book *Folk Tales of Bihar* (1968) has wisely accumulated the collection of folktales in English translation. That most of the works on folklore of Bihar are descriptive, and that there is a negligible amount of research done on the area that coincides folklore of Bihar and ecosystem, is a dominant factor that incites the present research. Sarita Sahay in *The Folk Tales of Bihar: An Anthropological Perspective* (2000) asserts India's population is made up of individuals from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds and religious traditions, and it has a long and diversified history. She says that India's folklore reflects this country's diverse history and population, as may be expected. For centuries, people have enjoyed reading several classic collections of short stories. Bihar is one of such assets that has a rich heritage of folklore. She provides an analytical insight into these cultural lineages

Folklore of all kinds, including other genres, reflects the needs, desires, conflicts, and other facets of the human psyche that people develop because of growing up in a particular culture. There is an alarming need of researchers to investigate the factors that influence the relationship of human beings with the environment. This research intends to study these elements of importance. Through establishing difference between conditioning, sensitizing, and having inherent attributes, the research would further engage in eliciting the importance of sensitizing the unaware masses with folklores. She confers various themes that folklore of Bihar consists of. According to her, India's population is made up of individuals from a wide variety of

ethnic backgrounds and religious traditions, and it has a long and diverse history. India's folklore reflects this country's diverse history and population, as may be expected. For many years, people have enjoyed reading several classic collections of short stories. Folklore of all kinds, including other genres, reflects the needs, desires, conflicts, and other facets of the human psyche that people develop as a result of growing up in a particular culture. Pankaj Jha in his book *A Political History of Literature: Vidyapati and the Fifteenth Century* (2018) posits that over the last six centuries or so, Vidyapati has been mythologized as well as memorialized in interesting ways. His admirers credit him with having performed miracles and received divine favours in ways that a 'rational' approach fixated on facts may be inadequate to understand. The most popular of these legends holds that Lord Śiva was so moved by his piety that he took the guise of a poor man, calling himself Ugrha, to become a personal attendant to the poet. Almost all of Vidyapati's myriad biographies relate this 'episode' in his life. According to the author, any conversation about him with a Maithil is bound to refer to the story. The anthology *Vidyapati Rachnavali* by Adhendra Nath contains various verses of the Maithili poet Vidyapati. Dubey has categorized these in six categories. The categories are *upeksha geet* (songs of hope), *milan-gopan geet* (songs of love), *har gouri geet* (songs of Shiva and Gouri), *vandana geet* (Songs of devotion), *ritu geet* (Seasonal songs) and *samanya geet* (simple songs). These songs reflect on the cultural, environmental, philosophical and sociological aspects of the people who are singing and their surroundings. Because of the omnipresence of physical environment in these songs, the book offers an opportunity to work with an ecocritical mindset. This book *East Asian Ecocriticisms: A Critical Reader* (2013) by Simon Estok is truly the first of its kind: original essays from a group of motivated scholars

speaking for themselves to a Western constituency. In this important sense, the book responds to the unidirectional flow of ecocritical readings and theory that has characterized the environmental humanities. Offering voices from the region, this book is a usher of the field. In an age when globalization is trumpeted so loudly, this kind of work is profoundly important. Moreover, given the continued growth in the region, at a time when other economies are stagnating or shrinking, the active engagement in our book with questions about sustainable development speaks lucidly to concerns that promise only to grow more insistent in the foreseeable future. It may seem obvious that ecological problems are scientific problems rather than objects of cultural analysis. When *Silent Spring* (1962) by Rachel Carson was published the agro-chemical industry reacted by criticising the book for its literary qualities, which, they implied, could not coexist with the appropriate scientific rigour.

Garrard, Greg's *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom* (2004) is a series of introductory books which seeks to extend the lexicon of literary terms, in order to address the radical changes which have taken place in the study of literature during the last decades of the twentieth century. The aim is to provide clear, well-illustrated accounts of the full range of terminology currently in use, and to evolve histories of its changing usage. The current state of the discipline of literary studies is one where there is considerable debate concerning basic questions of terminology. This involves, among other things, the boundaries which distinguish the literary from the non-literary; the position of literature within the larger sphere of culture; the relationship between literatures of different cultures; and questions concerning the relation of literary to other cultural forms within the context of interdisciplinary structures. Therefore, this book acts as a guide for the researchers of ecocriticism. Gramin Vikas Seva Sanshtha's

*Evaluation Study of Tribal/Folk Arts and Culture in West Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chhatisgrah and Bihar* (2013) states that India is marked by its rich traditional heritage of Tribal/Folk Arts and Culture. Since the days of remote past, the diversified art & cultural forms generated by the tribal and rural people of India, have continued to evince their creative magnificence. Apart from their outstanding brilliance from the perspective of aesthetics, the tribal/folk art and culture forms have played an instrumental role in reinforcing national integrity, crystallizing social solidarity, fortifying communal harmony, intensifying value-system and promoting the elements of humanism among the people of the country. However, with the passage of time and advent of globalization, we have witnessed the emergence of a synthetic homogeneous macro-culture. Under the influence of such a voracious all-pervasive macro-culture the diversified heterogeneous tribal/folk culture of our country are suffering from attrition and erosion. Under such circumstances, the study-group Gramin Vikash Seva Sanstha formulated a project proposal on “Evaluation Study of Tribal/Folk Arts and Culture in West Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Bihar” and submitted this tenable proposal to the Planning Commission (Socio Economic Research Unit), Government of India. The thesis would make use of this study in order to understand the context with a better detail.

*Lokgeeton ke Sandarbh aur Aayaam* (1999) by Shanti Jain asserts that the folk music of Bihar has so deeply permeated in the life of the people that it is still alive. It has been preserved in fact by the women folk of Mithila and by the village folk, especially the devotees who keep it alive. It is a pleasure to hear women sing the songs. Folk-song is a very important form of folk literature. One of the categories of folk-songs is the ceremonial or *sanskar* songs. These songs form an essential part of rituals

of various ceremonies relating to child- birth, initiation (*yagyopavita or janeu*), marriage and in some areas with rituals of death as well. Child-birth, initiation and marriage and other ceremonies are accessions of great happiness and joy. But on such occasions great care is taken to avoid any misfortune; hence the ceremonial songs and rituals are believed to have a magical potency. These are the details that the book gives to its readers.

Smita Tewari in *Unearthing Gender: Folksongs of North India* (2012) explores women's lives in rural north India using the Bhojpuri folksong as an analytical frame. Jassal builds on the pioneering work in rural Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan of feminist scholars such as Ann Grodzins Gold and Gloria Goodwin Raheja, who directed scholarly attention to women's song repertoires by challenging colonial constructions of South Asian women as submissive carriers of tradition (1994; 1997). Jassal guides readers through an archive of songs collected over five years of fieldwork in rural Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, organizing each chapter around a particular body of songs. These songs are introduced to the reader in the original Bhojpuri and in English translation with interpretations crafted in an accessible writing style appropriate for a wide range of academic audiences. The book's six chapters fit together coherently and contain enough contextual information to be read independently of each other. Thus, this book offers much more insight into these songs.

Ashton's *Beyond Romantic Ecocriticism: Toward Urbanatural Roosting* (2011) presents original biographical, critical, and scholarly studies of literary works and public figures in Great Britain, North America, and continental Europe during the nineteenth century. The authors consist of political figures, artists, scientists, and

cultural icons including William Blake, Thomas Hardy, Charles Darwin, William Wordsworth, William Butler Yeats, Samuel Taylor, and their contemporaries. When the *Morphology of the Folktale* by Vladimir Propp appeared in 1928, the formalist trend was already in a state of crisis in Russia. For this reason, it was neither translated outside of Russia, nor were its tenets ever discussed in an international forum. However, it exerted some influence. Thus, for instance, Claude Levi-Strauss applies and even extends Propp's method in his study of myth and in the interpretation of the meaning of myth from its form and structure. Almost twenty years later, V. Propp returned once more to the subject of the folktale, but this time from a different point of view. In his *Istorifeskije kdrni volfdbnoj skdzki* ("The Historical Roots of the Fairy Tale"), he abandons the strict study of form and structure and deals instead with the affinities that exist between the fairy tale and religion (myth and ritual) and social institutions at different levels of their evolution. A more specific folklore phenomenon is treated by him in a study of ritual laughter where he shows that ritual laughter in the folktale for instance, often understood as an expression of a purely secular fun, is, in fact, ritualistically linked with myth and incantational magic.

The book *Dharti Gaati Hai* (1948) by Devendra Satyarthi contains fifteen essays along with different folk songs which are taken from Rajasthan, Punjab, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, Haryana, and Gujarat. The researcher would, however, pay more attention to the Rajasthani, Bihari, and Punjabi folk songs. The essays talk about the connection that people have with their land, their soil; according to Satyarthi it is this connection that gets reflected by folk songs sung mostly by female. Along with the essays, the author also gives full text of the folk songs. One of the essay talks about Sri Lanka—the culture present there and the traditional songs that are still sung after

thousand years of Ram and Ravana war. The book helps to understand the need of such songs as these songs are like the air one breathes.

Dan Ben Amos in the research article "A History of Folklore Studies: Why Do We Need It?" (1973) posits that the speculative solutions of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment philosophers need no revival at present, the fundamental questions they posed about the nature of belief and history, language and the imagination, man nature and society, are crucial to our inquiry today. The challenge they provide to folklore studies should be met with modern concepts, methods, and theoretical formulations. The study of the history of folklore would then restore to the discipline the perspective of ideas we lost in developing the tools for research. The study of the history of folklore studies could extend the range of theoretical issues with which we deal well beyond the formative years into the preparadigmatic period of the discipline, and bring into modern studies problems we sidetracked because of the concern with techniques. It also could lift folklore as a discipline from the position of academic marginality and relocate it in the midst of the main core of the intellectual discourse about the nature of man.

Anne Philips (2009) struggles with a fundamental paradox in "Multiculturalism Without Culture". The concept of "culture" is important. The core tenet of multiculturalism is that individuals' perceptions of themselves and their society are shaped by culturally particular lenses, and to dismiss this when formulating policy is to ignore individuals for who they are. But "culture" does not even exist, on the other side. No civilization is uniform on the inside, and nobody belongs to just one culture. One can experience British culture, university culture, LGBT culture, Muslim culture, Pakistani culture, and sports culture all over one day, for instance. Placing such a

person within one culture hides more than it reveals. Her solutions for combining these two thoughts are extremely complicated, but thankfully without any jargon.

### **Defining Ecocriticism**

The seminal book, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, describes the history of ecocriticism as follows:

Ecocriticism was possibly first coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (reprinted in this anthology). By ecocriticism Rueckert meant "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature." Rueckert's definition, concerned specifically with the science of ecology, is thus more restrictive than the one proposed in this anthology, which includes all possible relations between literature and the physical world. Other terms currently in circulation include eco-poetics, environmental literary criticism, and green cultural studies (Glotfelty, xx).

Therefore, this relationship between physical environment and human beings is analysed and interpreted while doing ecocritical study. The West faced a huge shift in the eighteenth century—the world became homocentric (centred on human being) from theocentric (centered on God). Homocentricity was the result of discoveries and inventions. These inventions led to the destruction of earth, which was the result of disturbances in food chain, depletion of ozone layer, destruction of forests and as horrendous steps such as world wars. The study of any literary text along with the environment that it embodies within itself is called as ecocriticism. According to Glotfelty, the pioneer of ecocriticism, "ecocriticism is the study of the relationship



between literature and the physical environment (Glotfelty xviii).” Human beings were always dependent on their environment. Along with the growth of technology the attachment of the human mind with his or her environment decreased, however, the legacy that was carried from one generation to the other included the connecting rudiments of today’s generation to the natural environment. The environment is very bountiful, but if we exploit it than the whole cycle of existence on earth would highly be disturbed. The elements of nature otherwise are balanced. Due to the excessive absorption of natural elements by human beings, this balance highly gets disturbed. Human beings have lost their contact with nature.

Aristotle said, “Man is by nature social,” we might add that nature taught us to be social; we must have learned to live as a societal being by watching animals and birds. However, Goddess nature would never have thought that the living being who is growing on her lap would one day try to destroy her, which she must avoid by destroying the destroyer. Human beings started interrupting with nature severely in about 1750s. William Howarth maintains:

After 1750 global exploration and colonization by 'Western powers promoted dynamic new ideas in the natural sciences, as major discoveries enlarged known space and time. 'Within a century, scientists charted ocean currents, traced the ice ages, found the site of Troy and the remains of Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon people. These events prompted new ways to read the earth, peering into "prehistory," the time before writing existed.... In this continual exchange of information nature functioned like a language, and in 1866 Gregor

Mendel charted its syntax with genetics, the code of reproduction. By this time, Western nations were experiencing both rapid industrial growth and environmental loss (Howarth 72).

With rising destruction and deterioration of nature, a need to study the relationship of physical environment and human beings emerged. Ecocriticism is one of such streams. Green studies is another name for ecocriticism. An ecocritic watches for minute details in the work that he or she is dealing with. Richard Kerridge puts forth “the ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed, in a great many cultural spaces. Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis (qtd. in Garrard 4)” The thesis argues that ecocentricity was always present in the habits, customs, and rituals of human beings. Indians find water, wind, plants, sound, fire and animals as their deities. According to Vedas, our body is made up of five elements of nature—earth, fire, water, air, and ether. Without these abiotic and biotic components of nature, no life could be there. In Rigveda there is an advice to plant trees because trees help in maintaining balance on earth surface and help in the generation of rain. There are many such pious acts done in various festivities that give us a silent depiction of relationship between human beings and nature. The concept of *Marba* (a small hut like structure in which marriage ceremony takes place) is inspired by nature. Bamboo sticks and stems play an important role in the creation of *Marba*. In northern India, especially Bihar, Bamboo is considered as a symbol of productivity. The concept of *vansha* (family generation) lies in relation to *bansa* (bamboo). Both words are highly similar in their pronunciation and syntax. Nature and men have been represented as

one entity in this word. Ecocriticism studies these kinds of interlinking between nature and human beings. William Howarth puts forth:

...texts do reflect how a civilization regards its natural heritage. We know nature through images and words.... Ecocriticism observes in nature and culture a ubiquity of signs, indicators of value that shape form and meaning Ecology leads us to recognize that life speaks, communing through encoded streams of information that have direction and purpose, if we learn to translate messages with fidelity (Howarth 77).

That culture itself exploited nature remains one of the notions of scholars. According to Howarth, the thought that “culture will always master nature” is a “dogma” (77).

In India, From the Vedic period, there lied a tradition of worshipping flora and fauna. The animistic forms of deities connote the oneness of Indian tradition with nature. In other words, the closeness of Indian people with nature is revealed in a very succinct manner in these forms. By reading the folk literature, the readers can understand the relationship that human beings shared with nature in the past. How this relationship changed into a mere parasitic one along with time would be dealt in this thesis. In this thesis, I have utilized folk literature of Angika, Maithili, and Magahi for the purpose of the research.

As already mentioned, the thesis endeavours to explore the Ecocritical elements present in these folklores. Surprisingly, there is a negligible amount of research done on folk literature with an Ecocritical perspective. The present thesis attempts to elicit the reason behind the importance of these folklore in the lives of our ancestors.

Due to the inclusion of machinery in the lives of human beings, their relationship with nature changed. Raymond Williams has talked about the alienation of labourers from their work in his essays published in the collection *Marxism and Literature*. In a very similar manner due to the advent of tractors and other technical tools, man started destroying nature rashly. He was no longer attached to mother earth; instead, he only knew how to exploit her. Is there a link between the depletion of environment and the decline in creation and practice of folksongs, is also explored in this thesis. Annette Kolodny, the ecofeminist has compared the exploitation of earth with the appropriation of female body. She notes down:

In fact, the advocates of People's Park had asserted another version of what is probably America's oldest and most cherished fantasy: a daily reality of harmony between man and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine—that is, not simply the land as mother, but the land as woman, the total female principle of gratification—enclosing the individual in an environment of receptivity, repose, and painless and integral satisfaction. (Kolodny 4)

On a similar note, Lynn White talks about the difference between people's way of thinking in the past times and now. He gives proper specification regarding how the mindset of the masses changed regarding nature saying “[the] distribution of land was based no longer on the needs of a family but, rather, on the capacity of a power machine to till the earth. Man's relation to the soil was profoundly changed. Formerly man had been part of nature; now he was the exploiter of nature (White, 8).” White states that these things were happening in medieval Europe. He severely criticizes the thought of

the West, calling their religion the most anthropocentric. He continues, “What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny-that is, by religion. To Western eyes this is very evident in, say, India or Ceylon (White, 9).” Western philosophers have discussed about the essentiality of animistic culture in protecting the ecosystem. Christopher Manes asserts:

animistic societies have almost without exception avoided the kind of environmental destruction that makes environmental ethics an explicit social theme with us. Many primal groups have no word for wilderness and do not make a clear distinction between wild and domesticated life, since the tension between nature and culture never becomes acute enough to raise the problem (Manes, 18).

Most of the ecocritics have acknowledged the relevance of animistic culture in conserving the environment, assuming that these cultures are inclusive of everything, and do not see culture and nature as binaries. India is one of such cultures. There is a great need of devising ways to see ecocriticism with an Indian perspective as India is facing the same shift as the West faced ages back.

### **Growing Necessity of Indianizing Ecocriticism**

That ecocriticism is a movement concentrated on the west, is a truth. However, it leaves space for the eastern cultures to delve in. The research asserts Indian culture as being equivalent to the eastern cultures in terms of the consciousness for the environment. Mc Dowell talks about creating a dialogic interplay between the two:

Some ecologically minded literary critics also roundly condemn 'Western civilization for its oppression of nature and all other forms of "the other." They often find answers in Eastern thought or the religious attitudes of primitive peoples. Agreeable as these alternatives are, we remain West... in a tradition that has absorbed many contradictory elements. 'While admiring the best of primitive and Eastern attitudes toward the natural world, we will do better to recognize the valuable cosmic insights that have been overlooked in our own tradition (what Meeker calls "the minority report" of 'Western civilization...Gary Snyder says he had to qualify his admiration for the Eastern religions' gentle treatment of the land when he realized that he never heard songbirds in Japan because they had all been eaten long ago (McDowell, 384).

In the seminal book *The Ecocritical Reader*, the only mention of the word "Indian" is related to the native Indians. The book is centred on west. But as the theories other than these are scarce in context to India, a necessity to devise new words and assertion emerges. There is a dire need of rethinking and reimagining of the term ecocriticism. By looking through the lens of Indian perspective, we will be able to comprehend the environment in a more suitable manner. I say "in a more suitable manner," because of the lineage this country has. Consisting of abundant flora and fauna, Indian civilization tends to consider ecosystem as no other than the human self. Shakti and Shiva are the manifestation of the nature, and vice versa. Gupta puts forth:

There are five divine acts on the cosmic level: creation; sustenance; destruction or involution, taking creation to be a process of evolution; delusion; and grace leading to salvation. Delusion is the situation when the microcosm is

experienced as totally limited by time, space, and karma, making them fragmented and suffering from transience. This, too, is an act of *sakti* concealing the true nature of human beings. Gross matter is seen as the source of creation both in the biological model and in the evolutionary model. It is matter (*prakrti*) that evolves into all gross objects, all forms. *Prakrti* also means Mother Nature (Gupta, 94).

As evident in the quotation above, the Indian concept of nature worship was inherent in the ancient civilization that considered Shiva and Sakti as the all-embodying element of the universe. With this kind of assertion, as opposed to what is ongoing to the environment in contemporary scenario, a powerful need to rework on ecocriticism emerges. However, this could be possible only when the researchers work keeping in mind the human-nature relationship in Indian context. In 1999 Fikret Berkes, published *Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management*, that marked the advent of reassertion of ancient cultural measures that helped in protecting the environment. Berkes puts forth “cumulative body of knowledge, practice and belief evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings, including humans (Berkes, 8).” Folk literature and folk belief are the products of this handing down of traditional knowledge from previous generation to the future one. If seen with a logical perspective, most of the rituals are environment friendly in Bihar, and the folk literature acts as a witness to it.

### **Comprehending Bihar, and “Bihari”**

Enriched with cultural, geographical, and biological wealth, Bihar is weaved by part of twenty-one rivers, including the river Ganges. The presence of rivers in this state ensures an abundance of flora and fauna. Not only once prosperous economically but also intellectually, Bihar had great sages and rulers. It was the abode of Patanjali, the philosopher who wrote *Yogasutra*, which laid the philosophy of yoga, now followed all over the World (Gopal 2018). Whether it was the attainment of spiritual knowledge by Gautam Buddha, the administration of Chandragupta, or the establishment of Nalanda University, this region witnessed the rise of intellect and wisdom. Prominent writers and philosophers such as Kalidas, Udayanacharya, Mandan Mishra and Vidyapati belonged to Bihar. However, soon after independence, this state's "illustrious" history started diminishing rapidly, leading to various socio-economic problems (Rorabacher 2016). With time, the term "Bihari" was considered derogatory by the people of other states and the natives of Bihar who settled in metro cities. This term hinted at someone who was poor and earned by working in filthy conditions. It was a commonplace remark by rich people when they were not happy with the work of a labourer or rickshaw puller. In contemporary India, however, some people tend to subvert this concept of being "Bihari." They feel proud of asserting their Bihari identities, believing they are one of the most intelligent communities in India. By the term "Bihari," the research means anyone who was either born in Bihar, or had ancestors who belonged to this state.

Bihari community like the communities of other states of India has moved worldwide for procurement of jobs. The displacement resulted in getting away from Bihari roots for some, and reassertion of this identity for others. The essence of Bihari was never lost for the second group—they adored Bihari cuisines, and habits. On the



other hand, the first group tried hard to become citified and anglicized. Surprisingly, according to the conversations done during research phase, the educated Bihari masses still were attached to Bihari habits and customs. Unity in diversity, unity and diversity, and multiculturalism are the concepts that find a suitable abode when Bihari identity is explored. Because the region of Bihar is surrounded with greenery due to paucity of natural resources such as rivers, fertile soil, and sunlight, the rituals embody many natural elements in their workings. The folk literature of this state is full of mention of flora and fauna of this place. Bihar is a state that has a rich heritage including folk lore. comprising Mithila art, unique folk songs, folk tales and proverbs this state embodies a rich insightful past that gets reflected in its various art forms. Proverbs, folktales, and folksongs are utilized for the purpose of the research. Indian folk literature embodies within it several aspects such as philosophical questioning, eulogizing of natural environment, depicting the issues of migration and a reflection of relations. With a recurrent inclusion of flora and fauna in their rituals, folksongs, folktales and art forms, environmental consciousness becomes an inherent part of the folk belief of Bihar.

Bihar, located in the eastern region of India, is a state characterised by a wealth of diversity in terms of its population, languages, and natural components. The biodiversity of Bihar greatly impacts its folklore. It has been noted that the folksongs of Bihar are predominantly sung by women. Men participate in the singing of devotional hymns at temples with the intention of invoking the divine presence. The indigenous population serves as the main origin of folklore. This region is home to a diverse array of religious and sectoral beliefs and practices reflecting the multicultural fabric. As per the Census of India in 2011, the Hindu community constitutes the majority of the population (79-89%) followed by the Muslims (10-17%) community.

Christians represent the third-largest (0.02 to 1.0%) religious community with the highest literacy rate. This region is also important religious' /pilgrimage sites for Buddhism and Jainism. Certain population in the southern part of the Angika spoken region identify themselves as Sarnaism (2-6%) or other religions, reflecting a wide spectrum of religious landscape. In fact there are a total 32 types of tribes including Oraon, Munda, Virhor, Santhal, Korba, Koal, Bheel, Kanbar, Sabar, Aheer, Asur, Gaur, Baiga, Khonr, Khariya, Soriya, Pahariya, Binjhiya, Cheru, Lehra, Nimad etc. One branch of Oraon is Male, likewise Nishad community has several names such as Mallah, Kevat, Godhee, Sahni, Baheliya (Chirimaar) etc. Besides several tribes migrating from Southwest, Ostrich community from Southeast Asia also migrated and settled on elevation or hills. Their descendants are now present on the mounds of Kabar jheel, in Kola Chour, Alouli, and other parts of Khagariya called as Mushar and Tiyar community. Besides these communities, several castes emerged among Aryans Brahmin: Maithil, Magahiya, Bhumihar, Bhaat, Gosayi (Sanyasi, Giri) etc. Among Kshatriya- large number of castes and subcastes e.g. Rajput, Koyri, Kurmi, Kayasth, Yadavs etc. Among Vaishya: business community called Baniya, Varnavaal, Agarwal, Gupta Mistri etc.\

Among Sudra there were two groups Chhut (touchable) and Achhuta (untouchable). Chhut includes Gwala, Dhhanuk, Koyriee, Kurmi, Carpener, gardener, Kumbhkar Aheer, Barber (Naayee) Kahaar etc. Achhuta includes Dom, Chamaar, Dusaadh, Dhobee (Washerman) Teli, Noniya, Tanti, Jolaha, Halkhor, Kasaayee etc. The word nature is being used differently by different tribes, Prakriti is used as terrors, as unavoidable or unpleasant behaviour of humans and in some group as unacceptable/

unappreciated behaviour for young boys and girls. Therefore, we have avoided the use of nature in the present paper,

Traditionally people in this region celebrate their religious festivals with keenness and social harmony. Different cult/ sects of indigenous people have different festivals dedicated to their ancestors, clan-gods. Ancient temples, temples of snake Goddess (Bihula Bishahri temple), are found more in this region. The location of Anga region on both side of the east flowing sacred river Ganga makes this region religiously important.

The indigenous people of this place follow multiple rituals and celebrate most of the festivals together. Chhatha Puja is one of the celebrations that involves participation from individuals of all castes, religions, and social classes. As to a report by *India Today*, Muslim women abstain from consuming onion and meat when preparing the clay hearth for the sacrifices made by followers during this holiday (2021). These items are regarded as banned at this time. Similarly, the Indian newspaper *Times of India* features an item affirming the active involvement of Muslim women in this occasion. The indigenous people express concepts of celestial bodies, flora and fauna, the interconnectedness of human beings, and biological components through their vocalisations. Examination of Angika folklore indicates that humans did not always exhibit the same level of intensity in their role as environmental destroyers. According to the interviewees, the actions of non-human organisms in previous eras played a significant role in shaping the future transformations of the natural environment. In 1983, Chapman conducted study on peasant farmers in Bihar who had a shared reservoir of traditional knowledge about farming techniques and the

characteristics of the natural surroundings. The lyrics of folk songs often depict the profound connection between humans and the natural world, as they express the experiences of perceiving, hearing, sensing, and responding to various creatures and landscape. During that time, individuals had a sense of harmony and oneness with the natural world, perceiving them as indissoluble entities.

Throughout history, humans have documented their observations and thoughts about the natural world. In this study, we have primarily dealt with folktales, folk beliefs and folksongs, whether passed down by oral tradition or preserved in recorded form. Translations are crucial in the context of the current research as these folksongs are written in a non-English language. The scholar has done all the translations. This study entailed the documentation of the traditional beliefs and practices through the collection of folklore and conducting interviews with the residents of Bihar. Documenting the preserved traditional stories and beliefs involves several intricacies (Dundes 1965; Harmon 2022). Nevertheless, this study aims to uncover further potential from folklore through the analysis of the recordings.

Folklore embodies the shared essence of human identity. The residents of Bihar commemorate nature via the observance of rituals and the performance of traditional folksongs. Folk songs have several advantages, in addition to their melodic and harmonious nature. Martinengo-Cesaresco stated that folksongs distinguish themselves from folk-tales by asserting a stronger claim to veracity. Prose has the freedom to be more imaginative and light-hearted compared to poetry. The text pertains to the more positive aspect, as described by Cesaresco in 1886. In Bihar, the bulk of folksongs are characterised by their authenticity and vibrancy. When we

engage with the folksongs of Bihar, the initial impression that strongly resonates with us is the imagery of lush vegetation, precipitation, and sunlight.

Remarkably, there is a minuscule amount of study on folksongs from an environmental standpoint. Due to the emergence of technology, humans engaged in activities that were harmful to the environment and developed methods to fulfil their enormous requirements, ultimately leading to the endangerment of the planet. Due to the loss of the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect, the Earth's temperature has risen, leading to the melting of glaciers and subsequently to a rise in sea levels. The simultaneous decline of natural ecosystems and traditional cultural practices occurred in tandem (Tosha & Dwivedi 4072). Historically, folksongs were often and extensively performed, as evidenced by the interview conducted by the scholar with Mithilesh Kumari, a folk writer (Appendix III). She stated that this practice eventually declined as the population transitioned from rural areas to urban centres. She posits:

You would see the difference of behaviour in bees and birds when it rains. Farmers are also happy when they see the raindrops coming. When the climate changes abruptly, their whole lifestyle gets disrupted. Sometimes the farmers call rain through folksongs. So, every point of folksongs indicates human development and the reflection of environment. Many folksongs are full of reference to flora and fauna and celestial bodies that shows the dedication of our ancestor towards biosphere.

This research also employs the folk songs gathered by her. The performance of such traditional tunes was now confined exclusively to rural areas. Nevertheless, with the introduction of technology in villages, the people also abandoned the practice of

singing these songs. Instead, people began to depend on radio, television, audio, and videos as a means of listening to Hindi movie music. The convergence of mechanisation and urbanisation led to a state of seclusion. In previous decades, individuals in Bihar collaborated, engaging in activities such as farming and stitching, where both men and women participated and earned their livelihood collectively. Some factions in Bihar still preserve traditional agricultural and weaving folksongs. Currently, humans have become reliant on equipment for most of their everyday activities. Consequently, the sense of unity and camaraderie has declined, leading to the erosion and modification of traditional customs. Folklore has transitioned from the communal sphere to the realm of the individual.

The relationship between nature and human beings are explored by studying the folklores of Bihar. The research studies the folk literature recited or written in three languages—Angika, Maithili, and Magahi (Appendix II). The research argues that along with the decline of these kinds of folk composition, the environment is also deteriorating. In previous years, people used to recite these folklores because they were attached to their physical environment, however with industrialization and mechanization, they gradually lost this connection. It is through these elements of folk literature that the thesis aims to study the interrelationship of nature and folk culture. It explores whether in the past times, nature and human beings coexisted together. According to Annette Kolodny, the ecofeminist, females are exploited in a similar manner as that of land. The thesis argues that parallel to the deterioration of the environment, is the decline of these forms of folk literature.

### **Methods and Tools involved**

Interpretation, analysis, and comparison are the major techniques to be used in this research. Interviews will also be conducted as a part of methodology. Criticism on the text of folklores is also included. Recording of folk tales and folksongs are carried out by the researcher. Telephonic conversations, video and audio collection are some of the important tools involved. All folklores are in the languages of Bihar. Case studies of fisher community are there to prove the validity of arguments. Therefore, translation of these folksongs would also be done for the analytical purpose of the research. The translations are the work of the scholar, unless mentioned otherwise. The thesis makes a usage of folksongs from other states for the comparative treatment of the subject of the research through their translated versions. Moreover, the research engages with the extant critical works for a pre-existing perspective on the proposed subject of the study. The scholar visited the suburbs of Bihar for recordings of folklore and to assess their lifestyle.

### **Bihari Folklore and Role Reversal: A Play of Suppressed Psyche**

Weddings in northern India involve the subjugation of the bride's family. The family of the groom is thought to be superior in dignity to the bride's household. A bride is supposed to carry the patriarchal rules of modesty and honour when she goes to her husband's house after marriage. However, the ritual in marriage involves techniques to shatter the positioning of the groom's family as higher. In a few Angika regions of Bihar (as highlighted in the map), while a wedding takes place, the groom touches the feet of the bride. Touching feet and respecting the person whose feet are being touched are both considered simultaneous acts. It is a common perspective that if a wife touches the feet of the husband, then she is blessed, and vice versa is considered derogatory.

However, this ritual present in the marriages of the Angika region (particularly in Begusarai) exemplifies the shattering of such perspectives. Prakash states that other than breaking patriarchal norms, “the art of impersonation, outside gender, also provides a scope for playfulness and adds to theatricality” (166).

Before the groom’s family visits the bride’s place for a wedding, some dramatic folk games are played by the women at her house. Women play the character of men such as father-in-law, brother-in-law, and husband of the bride. By portraying suppressed emotions and through the play of subversion, they mock the patriarchal norms of the society. In Similarly, the women of the bride’s family welcome the groom’s family by hurling abusive words and calling the men in vulgarly manner. They break the standard norms and achieve their long-subdued will, even for a short time frame.

In the Holi festival, men of some societies hire a boy, mostly a teenager to dance like a woman. This folk dance is popularly called *Lounda naach*. The boy is called by the name *Jaani*. He dresses in female attire, jewellery, and much makeup. Followed by another man who sings while he dances; the audience pays him. The singing, while the dancer exhibits his moves, is known as *Faag*. This folk act of dancing symbolises the suppressed emotions of men. They rejoice and seek happiness through this folk play. Here, the role is again reversed through the male dancer, who portrays himself as a beautiful female. When questioned about how the audience perceives this dance, one of the natives replied that they take it as entertainment. Another said they look at the dancer as embodying the joys and vigour of the festival of colours, Holi. Kapur says there can be no female impersonation outside the ground of performance (114).”



As males should not act in a feminine manner because it is considered unacceptable by society, men have devised ways to transcend these rules and mock their feminine perception. Folk dance forms and rituals of Angika speaking region embody several elements that could add to an enhanced reading of the complexity of gender in society. Mainly, these genres of folk lineage have two roles to play. First, they act as a medium to reflect various desires arising due to the restrictions put on gender by society. Second, these literature assets showcase the wishes for a role reversal of genders. Both reasons are linked with the suppressed psyche of those who mould themselves according to the gendered norms laid down over generations. Folklore could be an excellent tool to understand the complexity of gendered perceptions imposed by society.

### **Folklore and Children**

Before mechanisation, and globalisation, children depended on folklore for their joy. It was such a *pas de temps* that offered them entertainment along with knowledge and wisdom. After globalisation, other ways of entertainment popped up, due to which children lost their contact with folklore. However, folk literature started being disseminated through other mediums such as cartoons, and comics. That the Indian scriptures were full of the description of nature is a popular notion. Many folklores that are nearly dead today combined the knowledge of scriptures with multiple mentions of nature to create a pleasant rhythm and melody. Mundan includes the singing of folksongs by women. One of the folksongs runs as follows:

*Bouvva muranma me hajma bulayeb*

*Soney asturba dilaiyab*

*Hume lagi jaihen najariya na*

*Bouvva muranma me nanadi bolayab*

*Sone kangan dilaibo*

*Hume lagi jaiyhein najariya na*

(Kumari 153)

I'll call a barber in my child's tonsure ceremony

I'll buy him a razor made up of gold

Should not evil eye catch me

I'll call sister-in-law in my child's tonsure

Will buy her gold bangles

Should not evil eye harm me<sup>1</sup>

The narrator takes an oath to buy a gold razor for the barber who would shave her child's head in the *Mundan* ceremony; she further thinks of getting gold bangles for her sister-in-law. This description hints at the embodiment of materialistic values in one's life. These songs add to the conditioning of children towards the essentiality of

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<sup>1</sup> All translations, mentioned otherwise, are the work of the researcher.

monetary values in life, Upadhyaya asserts. The giving of alms and gifts on the occasion of childbirth was a common practice in ancient India. Kalidas – the greatest poet of Sanskrit has beautifully mentioned the giving of all precious things to the messenger except the royal insignia on the birth of Raghu. In the hair-cutting and the Sacred Thread ceremony songs, the various rites performed on these occasions are described. For instance, the departure of the student to study Vedas at Banaras is depicted in many songs. These mentions throw a flood of light on the various rites and customs prevalent in ancient India (Upadhyaya 87). Upadhyaya mentions Raghu, a great ruler in Hinduism. It is a popular practice in folklore that the practitioners of the genre learn and imitate from someone higher in social or economic ranking. Through the propagation of such acts, folklore modify and alter their forms. Some narrative is added and some is deleted. These alterations further reflect in the deeds carried out during the carrying out of rituals. This dynamic characteristic of Bihari folklore paves the way for their application or appropriation for mass benefits such as the protection of the environment. It is important to consider whether this “appropriation” proves to be ethically moral and beneficial, however, the present research, due to limitations, does not take these ideas into account. Folklore also shaped beliefs. The population witnessing rituals tends to believe in their existence in the past, leading to the reflection of those beliefs in their daily behaviour and customs. Another recorded song of *Mundan* moves in the following manner: *Kaise hai gorey-gorey gaal*

*Ghunghrale baal, mere lala ke*

How fair are the cheeks

and curly hair of my darling child) (Kumari 153).

Fairness has been one of the significant standards by which to weigh one's beauty in India. Curly hair is symbolic of innocence in Bihar. Therefore, these two elements in this folksong add to the overall beauty of the child. The generation of beauty rules resulted from myth and folklore in India. *Samudrika Shastra* (one of the scriptures) of Ancient India provides favourable and unfavourable bodily features according to astrology. Since ages past, myths and folklore have given their followers an idea about beauty. Both myth and folklore are highly connected, and there has been an ongoing debate about what came first. Folklore adds to myth and acts as its supplement. Bascom posits that the "second function of folklore is that which it plays in validating culture, in justifying its rituals and institutions to those who perform and observe them. He continues that myth is not explanatory, Malinowski emphasized but serves as "a warrant, a charter, and often even a practical guide" to magic, ceremony, ritual, and social structure" (Bascom, 354). The perception of beauty, as shown in various folklore, has been further appropriated by the masses and by various beauty businesses. While listening to a Maithili folktale, the scholar came up with how the concept of beauty is established for children through their childhood. An old lady narrated a tale in which a prince falls in love after seeing the hair strand of a princess floating in the river, where he was taking a bath. The hair, as described in the folktale, was "eight hands" long. Only after fighting wars and tackling odd situations, could the prince attain his love and marry the princess. This description further points to the links between having long hair and the beauty of a girl, thus persuading young girls to grow their hair to meet social expectations about beauty. The Impact of Lullaby on

Children's Thought-Building The initial phase of a human being's life affects them in the long run (Banich et al.; Roozendaal & McGaugh). Stenson puts forth: "Emotion has powerful effects on memory. Although these effects have been studied extensively, particularly in adults, there are gaps in our understanding of how emotion affects memory across development" (Stenson et al. 131). Ranging from folktales to lullabies, all such folk utterances have an immense role to play when it comes to the development of the mind of the listener. Lullabies are sung to the children to make them sleep when they are young; it helps them comprehend the culture in which they live. Regarding this, Nichols and Honig say that music in lullabies leads children (to) get a chance to see beyond their own habits and own community and appreciate how others live their lives. They can hear, create, dance, feel, and sing music, and come to love and appreciate the sounds, rhythms, harmonies, language, and stories of everyone's music (Nicholas and Honig 215). It is a common practice in Bihar that elderly people incorporate worldly wisdom in the verbal text while reciting lullabies. One such lullaby, as recorded by us, is as follows:

*Ghuggha mana, upaje dhana*

*Bouvva ka devai kaan dono sona*

*Ek kaan kaneli, ek kaan phool*

*Bouvva jaite Moranganj*

*Maay le sari, bahin le choori*

*Fufu le ratnari ki sari*

*Mat kano he bhouji*

*Tora devo lehenga pator*

(Ghuggha mana, money will grow

I'll give my child gold in both the ears

in one ear, ring and in another stud

My child will go to Morang

Saree for mother and bangles for sister

and saree full of gems for aunt

Don't cry, o sister-in-law

He will also give you a precious lehenga)

“*Ghuggha mana*” is a term used to denote the specific meaning of swaying the children to and from slowly after making them sit comfortably on the ankles of the singer. More of a playful act, this childhood game is still prevalent in several parts of Bihar. The song involved in this game gives the child a vicarious experience when he or she considers himself or herself an adult who goes to a faraway country (in this lullaby, the Morang district of Nepal) and brings all the members of his family precious gifts. The quoted lyrics connote a sense of materialistic and altruistic wisdom that is essential in the human world. These lullabies may have an intense impact on children's minds because these are examples of imaginative and creative acts that 3 This is a lullaby

collected from the district of Munger by the researchers. they witness when they have just gained their conscience. Therefore, these folk compositions leave an imprint on their minds, creating and influencing their perceptions of the world. Ibodovich argues that the teaching of children's folk songs in music culture classes increases students' opportunities for aesthetic education, the formation and growth of musical imaginations, the emergence of a propensity to master folk music, and the correlation between the emotions expressed in it and their own feelings. According to him, students gain traits like patriotism, commitment to people, humanism, diligence, and a dramatic shift in mood through experiencing the emotions of a person as they are conveyed in the content of folk songs (Ibodovich, 140). Similar is the case with the folksongs and lullabies of Bihar.

**Folklore and Environmental Consciousness**

A child gradually begins to understand nature because of their physical and psychological needs. This results in the child's attachment to their natural surroundings as he or she grows. The concept of the earth as "mother" and "goddess" is a derivation of the bhava (sentiment) evoked in human beings through their attachment to the earth. This points to the complex nature of the Indian way of thinking. Similarly, Indians used to worship nature in all its forms. How the relationship of human beings in the past with nature has worked in itself is complex. The current research explores the shift in symbiotic relationships by analysing various forms of folk literature from Bihar. Folktales have a significant role to play in the formation of morality and wisdom. According to the scholars, "the use of the spiritual heritage of folklore in preschool age helps the child to understand himself and become accustomed to ethical norms during use in life" (Sharaffitdinov & Yusupov, 67). Several folktales show the domination of nature by human beings. The book *Folktales of Bihar*, by P. C. Roy Chaudhury, includes a

folktale with the title “The Poor Boy and the Buffaloes,” and mentions the taming of nature by the protagonist. Some of the lines are quoted as follows:

A herd of wild buffaloes used to come and rest under this tree every evening. In the morning when the buffaloes went away, the boy came down, swept the place clean, ate some jungle fruit and again concealed himself high up on the tree. That evening when the buffaloes came back, they were surprised to see the place swept and clean... The buffaloes were curious and one morning one of the buffaloes kept himself concealed at some distance to find out the cause of the mystery. When the boy came down the tree as usual, the buffalo too came out of its hiding. The boy was frightened but the buffalo assured him that no harm shall come to him. From that day the boy lived happily among the buffaloes and had plenty of milk to drink (Chaudhury, 1968, p. 16).

The act of cleaning the earth by the protagonist hints at the creation of societies by human beings; eating “jungle fruits” connotes the intensity of human beings to extract edibles from nature, and the initial fright/fear of the boy from buffaloes connotes analysing the environment before exploiting it. Similarly, the story ends when the river and the crow act as linking elements for the protagonist and the princess. The river takes the hair lock of the protagonist to the princess, and the crow brings the protagonist to her father. The story’s ending is “The wild buffaloes became tame also”. There are several examples of folktales in which taming biodiversity meant gaining victory by the heroes of folktales. In contrast to this, in his book *The Greatest Folk Tales of Bihar*, Nalin Verma mentions the story “The Village Crow Versus the City Crow,” which shows the readers how a crow, through his tactics, can take a jalebi from



the mouth of a child (Verma 12). In this folktale, the struggle is between the city crow and the village crow; the child acts as a pawn for them and does not have any significant role. When these kinds of folk tales show people fighting with nature, nature loses, and humans win at a broader level. This helps the listener to believe in their capacities, further leading to a magnified sense of power. There are very few instances of such folktales in Bihar. Most of the time a bird guides human beings only to let them achieve their goals. God Rama, in various folklore, is shown to be asking trees, birds, and animals about the whereabouts of Goddess Sita. Jatayu was a bird who tried to help Rama and told him about Sita being abducted by Ravana. Different kinds of folk beliefs perceive this incident differently. Folk beliefs see nature to judge the danger it might inflict through weather and upheaval such as tsunamis (Indriana 1). This, in return, helps build a better environmental consciousness in children's minds. Not only does the folk speech make the children understand their physical environment better, but it also influences them to utilize their natural surroundings. In general, the prevalent proverbs in all three regions of Bihar beautifully capture the crux of environmental problems leading to an appreciation of various ecosystem interactions. During the current age of fossil fuels and climate change, such messages through folklore are more relevant. Proverbs play an immense role in the building of the psyche of an individual since childhood; they could be called necessary supplements to primary language; they are more than just ornamentation. In that way, proverbs could act as a literary trope in the folk genre. John Christian puts forth at the beginning of his seminal book, *Behar Proverbs: It is no less a truth than a terse Arabic saying, 'that a proverb is to speech what salt is to food. It aptly describes the office of proverbs, and puts it in a practical though homely form the part played by them in a language... if*

we wish to relish language, if we wish to give it point and piquancy, and if we want to drive home a truth, to whip up the flagging attention of our listener, to point a moral or adorn a tale, we must flavour our speech with proverbs' (Christian vii). There are several examples of proverbs relating to the taming of the environment. These proverbs could act as a crucial canon in measuring the intensity of the will of human beings toward controlling the ecosystem surrounding them.

### **A Brief Overview of Chapters**

In the second chapter "Folk Literature and Ecosystem: A Symbiosis?" folk literature of Angika, Magahi, and Maithili are translated, analysed, and interpreted to elicit their importance, relevance, and repercussions in contemporary times. Can environment-human relations be explained through these parts of folk life, are worked upon. The essential nature of folktale includes infusing social unity along with the reflection of the message. As Marshall McLuhan said "Medium is the message," folktales become an effective medium to transmit the message that impacts society, the society in return being affected by the physical environment. A study of various personified creatures that speak their minds such as wind, the Sun, the Moon, flora, fauna, and environment upheavals, imparting a sense of togetherness of the folk with the environment is discussed.

Chapter three "Folk Songs: Homocentric or Ecocentric?" would bring out with clarity the notion of homocentric and ecocentric aspects of the study. Are the terms homocentric and ecocentric binaries, as assumed in the present scenario? If yes, then

can these two opposite poles interlock somewhere? Folk songs with all their distinguished elemental features relevant to this research are discussed in this chapter.

The fourth chapter, “Folk Proverbs and Beliefs: A Semantic Analysis” discusses whether the proverbs and folk-beliefs of Bihar are centred on human needs or the ecosystem. It also intends to analyse the proverbs, totems, and taboos in order to get an enhanced understanding of the environmental perspective as shared by the folks of Bihar. Since people living near the bank of river Ganga earn their livelihood through this water body, this chapter studies the lives of fisher community who continuously struggle due to wrath of nature.

Chapter five Concludes this research by integrating the arguments and analysis developed so far and reaches the conclusion accordingly. Limitations and scope are discussed here. The broadened form of perception of this research arising from result is brought out in this chapter. The chapter spells out the scope to the future researchers directly and indirectly.

By contending that the folklore of Bihar was not only rooted in the tradition of the past but is also relevant in contemporary times, this research asserts that folklore has a multifarious role to play in our contemporary era. It acts as a mould for shaping one’s ideas and beliefs. By analysing the elements of folk literature, the past coexistence of human beings and environment is spelled out. The thesis hypothesizes that the population sensitized or conditioned by or born into the select folklores and ancient folk practices of Bihar will have a greater sense of understanding for the physical environment than that of the population which is unaware of these folk beliefs. Also,

that the homocentric approach and ecocentric approach will not be counted as binaries after studying the select folklores of Bihar, is one of the presumptions.

## Chapter 2

### Folk Literature and Ecosystem: A Symbiosis

#### Introduction

The present chapter intends to explore and highlight the folk literature from this region to unwrap the enigmatic relationship between different living organisms as depicted through the genres. This could not be possible without explaining symbiosis as a scientific term. Therefore, to have an enhanced understanding, the beginning is followed with a brief elaboration on symbiosis as a scientific term. The aim of this chapter is neither to defend nor to offend the folk literature of Bihar. Instead, it aims at untying the knots of statements about the natural environment after an in-depth analysis of the genre. The thesis considers folk literature as both oral and written. By “written,” the research means all such folklore that has been collected and preserved in a written or typed form. Since folklore in Bihar is amply found in Maithili, Angika, Magahi, and Bhojpuri languages, to envisage them all, this research uses the term “Bihari literature” for a lubricant understanding of the term “Bihari.” This usage further asserts that the term Bihari is not something derogatory but a part of rich Indian identity.

#### Discussion

The notion of nature (Prakriti) in India is diverse and multifaceted. Like the northeastern parts of India, Angika community such as Munda, Oraon and also Mushar

residing in mountainous regions or in jungles, perceive 'Nature' with a sense of terror and apprehension. It is both revered and dreaded. Non-tribal dwellers of this region consider nature as goddesses and are considered as the complete feminine personification of *Prakriti* – Saraswati, Lakshmi, Parvati/Durga, Gayatri and Radha. Together these five goddesses are worshiped as *Pancha Prakriti*.

However specific to this region is the worship of Bihula Bishahri (snake Goddess, adopted daughter of the Lord Shiva (According to the folk beliefs including that of Madhushravani<sup>2</sup>). As mentioned in Hinduism Nature (Prakriti) includes all the physical, sensorial, wilderness, cognitive, moral, and emotional aspects of reality. It has been observed that various communities residing even in proximity perceive nature in very different way, thus this paper abjures using the word nature.

Among plain dwellers several ceremonies of nontribal Angika people incorporate the presence of celestial bodies. This study revealed that the residents of Anga princely state actively engage in the celebration and glorification of celestial bodies and local flora and fauna. All ceremonies must incorporate environmental elements, from minute leaves to large bodies like mountains. Every component of the ecosystem holds significance in religious beliefs. In Sanskrit, the phrase used to refer to nature is *Prakriti*. *Prakriti* encompasses the entire spectrum of human life cycles and the cyclical patterns of the cosmos. The deities Varuna and Pavana are associated with water and air, respectively. Every Hindu deity is impacted by it; nonetheless, folk beliefs like *Samudra Manthan* (Churning of Ocean) involve occurrences in which different deities

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<sup>2</sup> A festival in Mithila region of Bihar

willingly endure pain to reduce the world's susceptibility to nature. An illustration of Lord Shiva's commitment to safeguard people from natural upheavals is his act of consuming poison during the churning process.

Most of the Indian philosophy has been influenced by Hinduism. Meera Baidur in her book *Nature in Indian Philosophy and Cultural Tradition* has laid an in-depth analysis of variation in the meaning of nature as relevant in different sects of Indian Culture.

The Vedic hymns also certainly demonstrate a love for the beauty of the environment. A number of metaphors and descriptions of the natural world are linked to eulogies. Some rituals described in the Vedas are invoked in many traditions of thought and persist in rituals and practice (Baidur 5)

According to Meera Baidur, different Indian philosophies gave rise to different definitions of nature; Jainism and Samkhya philosophy contain an innate idea of non-violence or *Ahimsa*. Some philosophers assert this concept as essential while protecting the environment, while others repel from it. Baidur posits:

One value that has had a great impact on Indian thought even in the current age is that of non-violence/non-injury (*ahimsa*). This value comes to us from the traditions of Sāṃkhya-Yoga and Jainism. Many scholars appreciate the overarching moral considerability of *ahimsa* and, also acknowledge other forms of empathetic beliefs in later movements of Hinduism such as Bhakti (devotional) traditions. Others argue that it is not really required to grant intrinsic value to nature to create a framework for environmental ethics (Baidur 12).

The argument supporting the effacement of the philosophy of *ahimsa* from environmental ethics is highly related to the importance of the maintenance of food chain in the ecosystem. In Bihar, Chhatha Puja is one of the festivals that celebrate the deity Sun, the heavenly body that helps in maintaining the food chain. Interviews reveal that the indigenous population worship nature because of fear. This fear is a melange of awe and terror both. Longinus 'concept of Sublimity could well relate to this. However, nature is not always sublime if seen from an Indian perspective. Baidur asserts:

Conceptually, the jungle (*Jangal* in Hindi) has been associated with wilderness in Indian thought. However, this idea of wild has more to do with the sense of wild and fearful than the aesthetic sublime category it represents for debates within Western thought (Baidur 14).

The concept of nature, therefore differs from one culture to another .

### **Ecosystem and Bihari Folk Literature**

“Ecosystem” has become a widely used term nowadays. Coined by Sir Arthur George Tansley in 1935, it includes the interaction between organisms and their surrounding environment. This chapter intends to explore the relationship between human beings and their ecosystem, as depicted in the selected folk literature from Bihar. Folk literature takes into its domain various ongoings of nature. Almost all significant elements of the ecosystem are brought into action, from aspects such as a leaf to those as massive as the sun. By the phrase “major elements,” the research means all such elements of nature that play a significant role in the text of folk literature from Bihar. Christopher Manes puts forth:



In contrast, for animistic cultures, those that see the natural world as inspirited, not just people, but also animals, plants, and even "inert" entities such as stones and rivers are perceived as being articulate and, at times, intelligible subjects, able to communicate and interact with humans for good or ill. In addition to human language, there is also the language of birds, the wind, earthworms, wolves, and waterfalls—a world of autonomous speakers whose intents (especially for hunter-gatherer peoples) one ignores at one's peril. (Manes 15)

By stating such, the critic intends to contrast the animistic culture with the post-enlightenment age. He not only equates nature as being "alive" and "articulate" (Manes 15) in social practice but also that "nature has grown silent in our discourse, shifting from an animistic to a symbolic presence, from a voluble subject to a mute object (Manes 17)." A few years back, why such muteness about nature arose in social practices will be discussed at the end of this chapter. This chapter considers how the articulation of nature and the relationship between natural elements and human beings are reflected in the Bihari Folk literature. That culture, in general, exploited nature, remains one of the scholars' notions. According to Howarth, the thought that "culture will always master nature" is a "dogma" (Manes 77). He maintains:

Ecocriticism seeks to redirect humanistic ideology, not spurning the natural sciences but using the ideas to sustain viable readings. Ecocriticism, instead of taxing science for its use of language to represent (mimesis), examines its ability to point (deixis). More developed in Asian than in European languages (Liu), deixis locates entities in space, time, and social context. Through deixis, meaning develops from what is said or signed relative to physical space: I-you,

here-there, this-that. Common as air or water, deixis expresses relative direction and orientation, the cognitive basis for description (Jarvella). In learning to read land, one can't just name objects but point to what they do: pines live in sandy soil, oaks in clay, and thus their rates of water absorption differ. As one scholar [Ryden] of place notes, the landscape contains many names and stories, so that learning and writing them becomes a way of mapping cultural terrain (qtd. in Howarth 80).

We can map the environmental and natural terrain, the destruction they underwent and its impact through cultural literature; the folk genre could be a means to study these elements of ecocriticism. Folk literature shares several aspects such as philosophical questioning, eulogising of the natural environment and enhancing of relations. The chapter ponders on the relationship of the characters of the folklore with their natural surroundings. In the contemporary times, various researchers have affirmed and asserted the essentiality and impactful position that Indians have given to their ecosystem. Paula Gunn Allen puts forth:

Many non-Indians believe that human beings possess the only intelligence in phenomenal existence (often in any form of existence). The more abstractionist and less intellectually vain Indian sees human intelligence as rising out of the very nature of being, which is of necessity intelligent in, and of itself, as an attribute of being. Again, this idea probably stems from the Indian concept of a circular, dynamic universe in which all things are related and are of one family. It follows that those attributes possessed by human beings are natural attributes of *all* being. The Indian does not regard awareness of being as an

abnormality peculiar to one species, but, because of a sense of relatedness to (instead of isolation from) what exists, the Indian assumes that this awareness is a natural by-product of existence itself (Allen 247).

The research suggests that the Indian concept of nature, unlike the West is related to culture and tradition. Unlike the great chain of beings given by the Greek philosophers, which considers human beings as being the highest after God and the Supernatural beings—all other living organisms coming after them, Indian folk tradition believes that nature itself is God, and all other supernatural elements are a part of nature itself. The life of human beings along with their destiny is dependent on nature. They might not have any control over their ecosystem. The present chapter intends to comprehend the connection between human and non-human elements of nature through the scientific term- Symbiosis. Symbiosis has its roots in the Greek language, in which this term means “living together.” Heinrich Anton de Bary defined symbiosis as “a phenomenon in which dissimilar organisms live together” (Oulhen et al.). Classified into three categories—mutualistic, commensalism and parasitic (Leung et al., 107-115) (Table 2.1), this concept will become a powerful tool in understanding this chapter. In the later stage of the present chapter, this classification will be utilised to comprehend folk literature through the undeniable lens of the current environmental scenario. By comparing the symbiotic relationship, we will be able to better evaluate the relationships. Moreover, it is a long-acknowledged fact that human beings are a part of ecosystem, and no other than it, however this comparative analysis could help us in evaluating it in a better manner.

**Table 2.1: Division of Symbiotic Relationships in the Environment**

Kind of Symbiotic Relationship	Definition	Examples
Mutualistic	Both organisms are dependent on each other and are benefitted almost equally.	Fungi present on the plants' roots offer them nutrition and absorb water from their roots.
Commensalism	One organism benefit, and the other has neither a negative nor positive impact on itself.	The domestication of dogs by human beings.
Parasitic	One organism benefits itself by inflicting some loss on another.	Mosquitoes suck the blood of human beings.

Mutualism could be due to multiple reasons, such as coexistence and co-evolution. By coexistence, the text means existing together through the enrichment of each other by distributing the resources, and co-evolution is just a nearly opposite term, which implies existence by reciprocal interaction (that is, at the expense of the well-being of another). In other words, co-evolution centres around the capacity of one organism to absorb more from another dependent organism of symbiosis. The current research considers such interaction between human beings and the physical environment. By considering human beings and the environment as coexisting, the chapter aims to highlight kinds of symbiosis, as reflected through the folk literature of

Bihar. In other words, this research reveals the role that Bihari folklore plays in exhibiting these kinds of symbiotic relationships, as perceived in their utterances.

### **Human-Nature Relationships through Folktales from Bihar**

The current chapter explores the shift in symbiotic relationships by analysing various forms of folk literature from Bihar. Folktales have a significant role to play in the formation of morality and wisdom. According to the scholars, “the use of the spiritual heritage of folklore in preschool age helps the child to understand himself and become accustomed to ethical norms during use in life (Sharaffitdinov & Yusupov 67)”. The term environmental ethics has become a renowned term in contemporary times. Folk literature could be crucial in the creation of environmental awareness and the propagation of environmental ethics. By describing to children how essential the natural environment’s natural position is, we could imbibe in them a sensibility for environmental protection.

However, several folktales show the domination of nature by human beings. The book *Folktales of Bihar*, by P.C Roy Chaudhary, a folktale with the title “The Poor Boy and the Buffaloes,” mentions the taming of nature by the protagonist. Some of the lines are quoted as follows:

A herd of wild buffaloes used to come and rest under this tree every evening. In the morning when the buffaloes went away, the boy came down, swept the place clean, ate some jungle fruit and again concealed himself high up on the tree. That evening when the buffaloes came back they were surprised to see the

place swept and clean...The buffaloes were curious and one morning one of the buffaloes kept himself concealed at some distance to find out the cause of the mystery. When the boy came down the tree as usual, the buffalo too came out of its hiding. The boy was frightened but the buffalo assured him that no harm shall come to him. From that day the boy lived happily among the buffaloes and had plenty of milk to drink (Chaudhary 16).

The act of cleaning the earth by the protagonist hints at the creation of societies by human beings; eating “jungle fruits” connote the intensity of human beings to extract eatables from nature, and the initial frighten of the boy from buffaloes connotes analysing the environment before exploiting it. Similarly, the story ends when the river and the crow act as linking elements for the protagonist and the princess. The river takes the lock of the protagonist to the princess, and the crow brings the protagonist to her father. The story’s ending is “The wild buffaloes became tame also (17)”. In the folktales, the animals, plants and even earth, hills and rivers acted as linking elements and the carrier of messages. There are several examples of folktales in which taming biodiversity meant gaining victory by the heroes of folktales. In contrast to this, in his book *The Greatest Folk Tales of Bihar*, Nalin Verma mentions the story “The Village Crow Versus the City Crow,” which shows the readers how a crow, through his tactics, can take a jalebi from the mouth of a child (12). In this folktale, the struggle is between the city crow and the village crow; the child acts as a pawn for them and does not have any significant role. When these kinds of folk literature show people fighting with nature, nature loses, and humans win at a broader level.

Another folktale titled “The Jackal and the Kite” tells the readers about the overcoming of the plans of the animals by human beings (Chaudhary, 30). There are descriptions in this folktale that show the kite and the jackal planning to deceive the villagers so that they may satiate their hunger. These two creatures send words to the villagers suggesting that the king of a neighbouring village, along with his army, would come to loot them. Instead, an old lady listens to them discussing their plan and informs the villagers, who have fled to the jungle, to save themselves from becoming the victims of the loot. The villagers come back and give these creatures a beating and try to burn them. The story ends “The jackal fled for his life, with the tail-tip aflame. He jumped into a tank and had the fire put out. Since then, jackals have carried in their tails a black tip and in their minds a dislike for men. (30)” There are several such folktales in which human beings rule animals and birds. Through these kinds of imparting of messages, the storyteller convinces the listener that they are more powerful and wiser than other living beings that recite on the earth.

The folktales that describe human beings as being guided by animals or birds do so only to appropriate it for the profit of humans. One of the stories talks about a monkey so wise that people call him a pundit. He guides a foolish man whom an oil mill owner has duped after taking away his bullocks. By reciting a self-made story, the monkey orders these villagers that the foolish man is correct and that he may take away his bullocks from the oil-mill owner (Chaudhary 32). There are very few instances of such folktales in Bihar. Most of the time, a bird guides human beings only to let them achieve their goals. God Rama, in various folklore, is shown to be asking trees, birds and animals about the whereabouts of Goddess Sita. Jatayu, was a bird who tried to

help Rama and told him about Sita being abducted by Ravana. Different kinds of folk beliefs perceive this incident differently:

According to the original story, when Ravana abducted Sita and carried her off in the flying chariot, Jatayu, a great devotee of Rama, engaged in an aerial battle with Ravana to rescue her. Unsuccessful, he fell to earth, mortally wounded. It was from Jatayu that Lord Rama got to know about his wife. But, in the Bengali version of this incident, Jatayu made an effort to swallow up the chariot to kill Ravana but is impelled to barf it out once he realises that queen Sita is on board (Karmakar 13).

Folk beliefs see nature as a tool to judge the danger that it might inflict through weather and other natural upheavals such as tsunamis (Indriana et al. 1). Relationship between folks and the natural environment, which they perceive as the other, turns commensalistic this very moment.

In one of the folktales, “Lita and his Animals,” Lita, a boy is helped by his tamed animals to escape prison and find survival once again (Chaudhary, 43). The folktale begins with Lita taming a cat by saving him; the cat advises him to buy a rat, a snake and an otter. These three animals help Lita throughout the tale. The intensity of the non-human creatures in getting tamed by human beings has been exploited since ages past. By reading this folklore, we can understand how this psyche is inherent. The problem becomes grave when this taming becomes uncontrollable, leading to a disruptive answer by nature itself.

In the area surrounding Madhubani, newly married women perform Madhushravani—A festival to eulogise snake god, and pray for the well-being of their



husbands. It usually consists of fifteen days. Each day the devotee must recite at least one folklore. All the folklore are related to God Shiva, and his wife, Goddess Parvati. According to these folktales all the snakes were the offspring of God Shiva. Therefore, killing snake is considered as a sin in these regions. The devotees draw five snakes with kohl, rice paste, vermilion, henna, and turmeric. For fifteen days, they pray to them by offering fruit, flower, and leaves. The first tale of this devotion runs in the following manner:

An old lady went to bathe in a pond. She saw that five rope like creatures were wavering on a leaf above the water. These creatures told her to persuade the villagers to pray them, otherwise they might die. They also told her the manner of devotion. The lady went back to the village and conveyed this to the inhabitants. However, the inhabitants did not pay attention to her, as a result of which most of them died. Those who were alive went to the lady for advice. The old lady instructed them as the five snake-God had asked her on the pond. The villagers prayed in the same manner, and became alive. Since then, Madhushravani worship has been taking place amongst Biharis.<sup>3</sup>

The sublimity of nature become dominant here. The story suggests that human beings must carry an awe and respect for nature, so that nature in return could protect them.

### **Folksongs for the Deity and Symbiotic Relationships**

Folksongs play an essential role in many festivals in this region. Folks consider some of such celebrations complete without the singing of these folksongs. Interviews

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<sup>3</sup> The scholar has summarised the folktale of the first day of Madhushravani.

suggest that a few years before, the natives of Bihar had to search for a folk singer to complete the celebration, as people lacked this skill. One of the Angika folksongs recorded during the research runs in the following manner:

*Bahiye puruvaiyya he Mahamaya, dolye phool he daali*

*Mahamaya man vasaye malhoriya phool he baadi*

*Kathi ke tohar badiya re maliya, kathi lagal kewari*

*Mahamaya man vasaye malhoriya phool he baadi*

*Soney ke hamar badiya Mahamaya, Chandan lagal kewari.*

...

(The east wind is blowing O goddess, the stem of the flower is dancing

Adored by *Mahamaya* is the flower and fence of the gardener

Of what is made your garden-fence O gardener? Of what is made the doors?

Adored by *Mahamaya* is the flower and fence of the gardener

Of gold is made my garden-fence O deity, and of sandalwood is made the doors.<sup>4)</sup>

The text of the folksong calls the deity as *Mahamaya*, meaning the goddess of the greatest illusion. Here illusion is related to the materialistic world. According to Yoganand Sinha Tantrik traditions influence devotees' usage of this word (Sinha 96). The illusion thus represented by this term includes all worldly possessions. That

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human existence revolves around these worldly pleasures is due to the illusionary effect created by the goddess. The folksong quoted above represents human beings' attraction towards worldly pleasure. When the singer asks the gardener about the base material used in his fence and door, the gardener replies that his fence is made up of gold and the doors are of sandalwood. Both denote material elements—gold is precious, and sandalwood is rarely obtained from nature. The coordination of the word *Mahamaya* and material elements is at the expense of the neglect of the natural surroundings of the speaker. The extraction of gold and cutting of the sandalwood has an adverse impact on the environment, that the characters of the folksongs, including the narrator seem to foresee. Here the relationship is that of a commensalistic one as nature has the least impact on itself due to its vastness and human beings gain their materialistic possessions through this symbiosis. That the deity whom this folksong points at is an incarnation of the natural world, is a fact neglected by the speaker. However, the extraction of gold and sandalwood does not affect the environment at a greater level. This folksong brings into view the times when human beings civilised and wished to obtain more from their ecosystem. The use of sandalwood doors was unique, and only the more affluent masses could afford it. Here, the singer invokes the deity or *Mahamaya* through the folksong so that the deity provides her with materialistic happiness. In India, it is a significant belief that the deities are closely related to nature or the ecosystem. This contradiction between the basic meaning of the deity and the meaning as connoted by the term *Mahamaya* is representative of the clash between human beings and their ecosystem.

How the narrator employs natural elements to draw comparisons between life and the ongoings of the environment is noticeable in the lines quoted on the previous

pages. “Flower” connotes the treasure of the singer, such as family, home and happiness; the usage of “fence” hints at the protection that the singer provides around those possessions. Due to the importance given to the environment in the folk beliefs, the natives of the previous generation lauded the greenery around them. Most of the time this lauding was because of the belief that nature is Supreme, as depicted in the folk literature of Bihar. Those were the times when their deed had negligible impact on the environment. Another Angika folksong runs in the following manner:

*Kahanmaye upjal jhaalari guaba hey*

*Ahe devi! Kahanmaye datariyo paan*

(Where are the betel nuts grown?)

O, goddess! Where shall I search for the betel leaf?)

Devotees consider the presence of specific fauna as auspicious in the act of worshipping, without which the devotion is not complete. This leads to the protection of those trees that do not yield fruit and might be considered useless otherwise. Some examples include the Peepal tree and the banyan tree. In the folksong quoted above, the singer devotee is searching for these green elements so that her devotion becomes complete in a successful manner. Betel nuts and betel leaves are crucial elements of worshipping the deities in Bihar.. This in itself points at commensalistic relationship between human beings and the environment. By not harming these kinds of sacred groves, the human population is not getting into a mutualistic relationship. Rather, they are going away from a parasitic relationship to a symbiotic one in which the ecosystem is not affected at all.

### **Deep Ecology: Another Turn to Human-Environment Relationship**

Arnes Naess (1912-2009), an environmentalist laid the foundation to deep ecology. According to this perspective, we as human beings, are not greater than other living organisms. That we are a part of the ecosystem and that we should not consider ourselves as someone superior was the motto of this theory. It argues that the problems faced by the ecosystem have an equally negative impact on all organisms. Human beings have no right to inflict losses on another living organism unless there is a dire need. Naess criticised the philosophies that put humans on one pedestal and the ecosystem on the other. However, many ecologists and critics maintain that human beings must isolate themselves from other organisms and can call their species superior. William Grey puts forth:

...if we attempt to step too far outside the scale of the recognizably human, rather than expanding and enriching our moral horizons we render them meaningless, or at least almost unrecognizable. The grand perspective of evolutionary biology provides a *reductio ad absurdum* of the cluster of non-anthropocentric ethics which can be found under the label 'deep ecology'. What deep ecology seeks to promote, and what deep ecologists seek to condemn, needs to be articulated from a distinctively human perspective. And this is more than the trivial claim that our perspectives, values and judgements are necessarily human perspective, values and judgements. Within the moral world we do occupy a privileged position (Grey, 463-464).

One must admit that undoubtedly west witnessed a massive shift towards anthropocentrism since the enlightenment. Due to a belief in logical confrontation

against the natural ongoings, *Homosapiens* started believing in themselves more than the universe or God. This led to the reckless acceleration of humanity towards greed and the deterioration of the environment for their own good. It was in 1987 that sustainable development as a term was defined in the Brundtland report to meet the needs of future generations. The report states:

Sustainable development is, in essence, a development that meets the needs and aspirations of the present generation without destroying the resources needed for future generations to meet their needs. It contains two key concepts: firstly, the idea of meeting needs, and in particular the needs of the world's poor, through more equitable distribution of opportunities and resources; secondly, the concept of limitations of growth and of resource depletion imposed by the ability of the environment to meet future needs (Keeble 20).

In the statement quoted above, the readers comprehend that even while considering saving the environment, we are weighing our own needs. We tend to protect nature for the sake of the future generation and not for nature itself. Deep Ecology as a theory emerged out of this need for human beings to consider themselves as a part of the ecosystem itself and not as someone superior.

However, the noticeable fact is that this sense of oneness of human beings was present in Indian folk lives years ago. This is still reflected in the rituals and folk beliefs of Bihar. cutting of sacred grooves, even if it is fruitless, is prohibited. The most remarkable example is that of the Peepal and Bunyan tree. In most rituals, including a specific plant, flower or fruit becomes extremely necessary. The inability to arrange so is considered a bad omen. These folk beliefs, now merely termed superstition, led

to the protection of those trees that might have been depleted otherwise. One of the Angika folksongs runs as follows:

*Kahamai upjal jhaalri guaba he*

*Ahe Devi! Kahamai datario paan*

*Mahamaya Devi badi yashomanti he*

*Kurkhet upjal jhalri guaba he*

...

*Seho paan khaitee mahamaya devi he*

*Ahe devi! Bheegi jait battisiyon daant, mahamaya devi...* (Kumari 15)

(Where are betelnuts grown?)

O Mahamaya deity! Where are betel leaves grown?

O all-known deity

In which village is betelnut grown?

...

Mahamaya deity will eat those betel leaves offering

O, Goddess! Your teeth will be drenched with the betel leaves.)

The text of the folksong reveals that betelnut and betel leaf are essential for devotion, but the worshipper is trying to find them. The singer devotee imagines the deity eating the offerings and visualises her appearance after accepting the offerings. This example

depicts how the natives of Bihar used to consider themselves as one with the nature surrounding them. The capacity to seek the betel leaves further symbolises human beings wishing to protect the endangered plant species. Those were when betel trees were rare to find: unlike the present times, there was lesser consumerisation of this plant. This itself acts as a witness to how the future generation would be trying to protect a plant or striving to save an endangered species of animal.

The folk literature, through the make-believe of the natural surrounding and folk beliefs, were already intact with the scientific arguments that were given later by the theoreticians and scientists. The struggle of the fittest, as laid down by Charles Darwin was already manifest in the folktales of Bihar. Charles Darwin puts forth:

Two canine animals, in a time of dearth, may be truly said to struggle with each other which shall get food and live. But a plant on the edge of a desert is said to struggle for life against the drought, though more properly it should be said to be dependent on the moisture. A plant which annually produces a thousand seeds, of which only one of an average comes to maturity, may be more truly said to struggle with the plants of the same and other kinds which already clothe the ground. The mistletoe is dependent on the apple and a few other trees, but can only in a far-fetched sense be said to struggle with these trees, for, if too many of these parasites grow on the same tree, it languishes and dies. But several seedling mistletoes, growing close together on the same branch, may more truly be said to struggle with each other...In these several senses, which pass into each other, I use for convenience's sake the general term of Struggle for Existence (Darwin 66).



Charles Darwin presents the relationship between different organisms succinctly. Another folk tale from Bihar in the collection edited by Nalin Verma states a similar notion. The story title “How the Jackal got Lessons in Picking Fruits” mentions the struggle of a jackal to obtain fruits (Verma, 35). The jackal requests a monkey to give him palm fruit, but the monkey refuses and replies that the jackal should do it himself. The jackal strives to get fruits by climbing the trees but in vain. In the last, he takes an oath only to eat the fruits scattered beneath the trees (Verma 36). Charles Darwin maintains:

It is interesting to contemplate a tangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, *so different from each other, and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us.* (Darwin 403)

This “complex” nature of the existence in the world is manifest in the folk genre. It is predominantly visible in Bihari folk literature that one can be on a higher pedestal through struggle. That the struggle for existence is an innate nature of human beings seems undeniable after analysing the present genre.

Similarly, in the folktale “The Ungrateful Snake,” edited in *The Folktales of Bihar* by P C Roy Chaudhary (42), there is an instance in which a prince saves a snake, who is ungrateful and decides to eat him. The prince requests the snake to first ask the Bunyan tree, the cow, and the water whether the decision to eat him is correct. The Bunyan tree replies: “This is the type of justice we have learned from human beings;

men enjoy the shade of the tree and in return chop off and do all manner of injury; it is only right that the snake should eat up the rescuer” (Chaudhary 42). The cow says “when she had a calf, the men took away most of the milk and ultimately took away the calf also from her...there would be no ingratitude if the snake ate up the man. (42)” The water also gave the same decision stating that “as men, having drunk water, dirty and pollute the rest before going away the prince could expect no gratitude from the snake and should be ready to be eaten up (42)”. However, the prince dupes the snake on the pretext of seeing his bride once and kills him in the end. This instance of the story points towards the extremity of the Anthropocene mindset. The ability of human beings to control non-human surrounding is a motif for such folktales. Non-human entities act as an enemy, a medium or a pawn for human beings. However, various rituals of Bihar seem to affirm this scenario. In chapter four, we will be able to see and analyse such proverbs, beliefs, and rituals. While stating the term folk literature, we must adhere to the important pillars of folk literature from Bihar; the composer Vidyapati is one of such pillars.

### **Vidyapati: An Iconic Writer of Folk Life of Bihar**

Discussion of folk literature from Bihar is complete with the inclusion of Vidyapati.

He wrote in the Maithili language. In 1971, Ramanath Jha wrote about Maithili:

The State of Maithili publications in 1970 was as depressing as during the previous years. There has been no change in the apathetic attitude of the Government of Bihar towards Maithili but much more depressing is the apathy of the people speaking the language. Even the educated among the speakers of

this language do not purchase Maithili books and Maithili publication, therefore, is commercially a losing concern (Jha 86).

Those were the times when the folk languages started depleting. Though the Indian government takes several initiatives in contemporary times to save the folk languages, but their extinction seems inevitable. The eminence of this language before could be seen in the writings of Vidyapati. Vidyapati (1380-1460 AD) was born into an affluent and intellectual family. Also called as *Maithil Kokil* (The cuckoo bird of Mithila), his creative abode is highly related to the folk life of Mithila. The writer created several Maithili compositions, including devotional songs on Hindu deities like Vishnu and Shiva. The simple fact that Shiva is the sole Hindu god whose love and worship have endured over time is why he created so many songs dedicated to him. They have been approved by the straits for any man and woman, regardless of caste or gender. Music dedicated to Shiva were the only devotional song that could connect with ordinary men and women, regardless of caste or sex, for whom Vidyapati penned the songs. *Kirtipataka*, *Puruspariksha*, *Goraksavijaya*, and *Bhuparikrama* are some of his compositions. His compositions were an amalgamation of folk life and Hindu mythology. According to Mishra, his songs are embodied with a touch of Mithila folk life. He further comments:

Armed with a thorough knowledge of Sanskrit poetics, he does not hesitate to bring together the sacred Shastras and the profane elements of the Maithili folklore, like the myth of the twin rivers Ganges and Jamuna. Some Folk-songs of Mithila can be easily traced in the Pada vali: The lonely, melancholy girl, separated from her lover, pleads with the Kokila bird:

'The moon spits fire,

lotuses droop and loaded with fragrance mingle in sad love.

Kokila, bird of spring, why do you torture me?

Why do you sing your love-provoking song?' (136)

This song of Vidyapati, quoted by Mishra, is full of nature imagery. The inclusion of words such as “lotuses,” “*kokila*,” and “spring” all coalesce together to offer the readers synaesthesia.

In one of the compositions, Vidyapati depicts the pang of a wife whose husband has gone to another region:

*Mor Piya sakhi gel door des*

*Jouvan daye gel saal sanes*

*Maas asadh unat nav megh* (Vidyapati, 271 )

...

O friend, my husband has gone to a distant land

My youth has given me a message this year

The season is rainy, and new year's heavy rain is there.

The ongoing of season has been equated with the conditions of the woman who is full of sorrow as her husband is not with her. Heavy rain is symbolic of the tears that the woman is shedding. This description points to the innate nature of human beings to see their psyche in the various happenings of their natural environment.

Vidyapati applies vivid imagery in a consistent manner. There are several instances in the creative expression of Vidyapati that hint at the essence of nature and glorify the ecosystem along with its flora and fauna. One of the folksong runs as follows:

*Lata taruvar mandap dia, nirmal sasdhar bhiti dhablih*

*Parun naaal aipan bhal bhel, raat Pallav nav pahiran del*

*Gabah mai he mangal aaye, basant-bibah kanan thali jaye*

*Madhukar-ramani mangal gab, dujbar kokil mantra padhab*

*Karu makrand hathodal neer, bidhu bariyati dheer Sameer*

*Kanau keasuti toran tool, lava bithrak belik fool*

*Kesu kusum karu siddur daan, joutuk paol maanini maan (Benipuri 176)*

...

The tree embellished with climbers got venerated for the wedding, the pious moon cleaned its walls.

The lotus lot added to the beauty, the new tender leaves clothed the night

O maids, sing an auspicious song together, and witness the wedding of Spring

Bumblebee sings joyful song, the brahmin birds are making the cuckoo recite mantras.

The male voice acted as promising pious water, slow wind turned groom's side group

Plumeria and banana turned decorative strings; the scattered jasmine flowers became auspicious grains

Flame of the forest put vermilion, and the groom acquired respect as brides' gift.

There is a recurrent inclusion of the seasonal changes of nature in the compositions of Vidyapati. In these texts, the reflection of the seasons includes a plethora of personification and symbolism. One of his texts read as following:

*Magh maas siri Panchami ganjaili, navam maaa pancham haruaai hey*

*Ati ghan peera dukh bar paaol, banaspati bheli dhai hey*

*Subh khan bera sukul pakkh hey, Dinkar udit samai he*

*Sorah sampun batis lakhne sah, janam lel riturai hey*

*Nachaye jubitjana harkhit man, janmal baal madhai hey*

*Madhur maharas mangal gaabaye, manini maan urai hey*

*Bah malyanil ot uchit hey, nav ghan bhau ujiaara (Benipuri 172)*

...

(The weather is again about to beget a son, those nine months were painful

She was full of sadness, so all the herbs came together like her midwife

In pious timing, spring was born, complete with abundant virtues

On this occasion of baby spring's birth, all young ladies danced

Egoistic women shed their egos and started singing

The Malaya Mountain breeze touched the baby by bringing rain

The spring flowers were mesmerising, so they were used in making a  
cradle)

This folk utterance of Vidyapati is connotative of the effects that nature has on its inhabitants. When the poet says that all women had an impact of Spring on them, it exhibits the effect that nature could have on our minds. In the past, several established authors such as William Wordsworth, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Henry David Thoreau have asserted the force that nature has on driving our emotions. Pankaj Jha puts forth:

A literary device that helped Vidyapati accomplish this was the tradition of ‘subhāṣita’ in Sanskrit literature. In fact, the whole text of *Puruṣaparīkṣā* , and occasionally even *Likhanāvalī* , is liberally sprinkled with independent couplets of (un)identifiable origin. These were drawn from the free-floating reserve of an ever-growing śloka tradition, called subhāṣita, literally, ‘well said,’ a ‘witty saying’, or an aphorism. As such subhāṣita belonged both to the folk as well as to the classical tradition, and very often, to a classical rendering of folk traditions (Jha 176).

Through the utilization of such proper tropes, Vidyapati enhanced folksongs and brought them from the rustic sphere to the zone of intellectuals. The readers might believe that this led to a loss of the folk tradition because its characteristic of togetherness was lost; it became more individual. The chief feature of folk literature

includes a group of performers, singers, or listeners. that depict unity and unified perceptions. Once this genre becomes solo in its nature, a very massive shift towards the modernist feature of individuality arises. This is problematic because folk means a group united by everyday dress, language, cuisine, codes, and perception. Due to the inclusion of individual nature in the folk genre, several debates related to the essence of the meaning of folklore come into play.

The folk rituals of Bihar have an immense space and need for folk literature because they include folk song recitation and folk tale-telling. Many of such rituals depend on seasonal changes. Some examples are *Akshayanavami*, Holi and Makar Sankranti. However, the ritualistic appeal of the former festival is lost and is limited to a few suburbs in the district of Samastipur. This festival is not celebrated in urban metropolitan areas of India because of the absence of Amla trees and the unavailability of social circles. This festival requires praying for well-being and abundance, and cooking beneath an Amla fruit tree. The devotees through this act of cooking and having the meal in the form of blessings given by God, convey a deep sense of gratitude to their ecosystem. Their affirmation regarding the priceless value of nature is depicted through this ritual of *Akshayanavami*. Folk literature and rituals are thus highly related. Appendix IV throws light on their relationship and further exhibits that the impact of the ecosystem has a greater force than just having an impact on human civilisation. However, the ecosystem, human civilisation and rituals affecting folk literature are all highly interdependent. This is a significant argument in understanding what the folk literature of a particular place embodies if we relate it to the natural environment. Most of the folk compositions by Vidyapati exhibited such connections. The fact that environment, folklore, and rituals were interlinked became a prominent



theme in his folksongs. The following section discusses the connection between the ecosystem and the proverbs of Bihar. Figure two illustrates Interconnection between Rituals, Literature and the Ecosystem

### **Bihar Proverbs and the Physical Environment: An Interplay**

The present section primarily discusses the effect of the natural habitat of human beings on the creation of their thoughts, that further gets reflected through the proverbs. Proverbs could be called as necessary supplements to primary language; they are more than just ornamentation. In that way, proverbs could act as a literary trope in the folk genre. John Christian puts forth:

It is no less a true than a terse Arabic saying, “that a proverb is to speech what salt is to food.” It aptly describes the office of proverbs, and puts it in a practical though homely form the part played by them in a language...if we wish to relish language, if we wish to give it point and piquancy, and if we want to drive home a truth, to whip up the flagging attention of our listener, to point a moral or adorn a tale, we must flavour our speech with proverbs (Christian, vii).

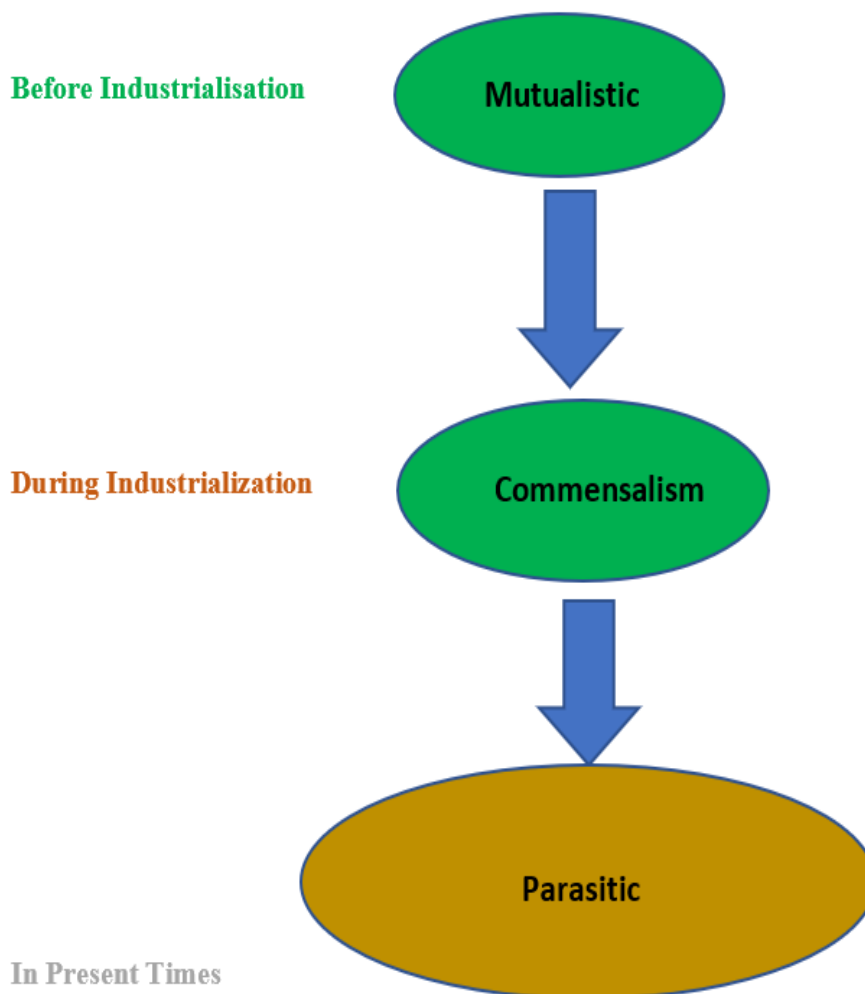
There are several proverbs in Bihar that directly get their influence from the ecosystem in which they are spoken or used. Many include mentioning a bird, animal, tree, or flower to teach human being wisdom, ridicule them, bring humour or boost their morality. Folktales have a significant impact on proverbs. In fact, Bihar proverbs may also be derived from folktales, a great example being the proverb “*Kauna kare to oont baithela*”, which is a part of a folktale in which a potter and a greengrocer jointly take a camel to distribute their respective articles of trade. The camel keeps on eating

vegetables from the greengrocer's bag. Watching this, the potter had a hearty laugh. Once on their way, they stop for rest, and the potter utters this proverb "*Kauna kare to oont baithela*", meaning "let us see on which side the camel sits" the camel sits on potter's side as it is heavy. This leads to the demolishing of the potter's pottery and utensils made up of clay. According to John Christian, this saying means "he laughs best who laughs last". This assertion is clearly present in his book *Behar Proverbs* (Christian, 80).

However, according to the present research and interviews conducted, it came in the revelation that this proverb is related to those people who while taking sides, choose the heavier position. This is a common day remark in Bihar and is spoken when any argument occurs in a group. Similarly, there are other proverbs like "*saavan maas bahe purviyaa, benchah baras kinah gaiyya*" meaning if the east wind blows in the rainy season, sell your bullocks and buy cows, offer agricultural guidance to the farmers. There are several examples of proverbs relating to the taming of the environment. These proverbs could act as a crucial canon in measuring the intensity of the will of human beings towards controlling the ecosystem surrounding them. Chapter Four offers an in-depth Bihar's folk beliefs and proverbs from an ecocritical viewpoint.

If traced to the past, there were times when human beings used to live together with a deep sense of gratitude for the environment. Gradually their desire to become more luxurious and lead an easy life resulted in the deterioration of the atmosphere at an intense level. The relationship remained symbiotic, but the manner of symbiosis

changed drastically. Figure 2.1 illustrates the shifting of the nature of symbiosis in terms of time frame.



**Figure 2.1: The Journey of Indian Folks in the Diachronic Process of Symbiosis**

This diagram further points towards the vulnerability of nature and humans in the approaching times. As humans, due to their parasitic nature of greed, will extract more

from heart, nature will become vulnerable to the extent that it might have to rejuvenate by ending human civilisation. Indian concept, by its nature, was once all-inclusive. Every living creature is given importance, and some are more important than human beings. Folk literature acts as a n effective medium in studying human-nature relationship. As depicted through Bihari folk literature, the symbiotic relationships of human beings and the environment, in thematic terms, are exemplified in table 2.2:

**Table 2.2: Symbiotic relationship of human beings and the ecosystem in thematic terms of folk literature<sup>5</sup>**

Mutualistic	Commensalism	Parasitic
<p>1. All rituals that require a specific exotic plant persuade the folks to make ensure the plant is still grown and is not extinct, even if it does not yield any fruits.</p> <p><i>“Kahamai upjal jhaalri guaba he</i></p> <p><i>Ahe Devi! Kahamai datario paan”</i></p>	<p>1. All such folksongs in which the devotee extracts natural elements from the natural surroundings. This has lesser or no impact on the ecosystem due to its vastness.</p> <p><i>“Kathi ke tohar badiya re maliya, kathi lagal kewari</i></p>	<p>1. Even if human nature has turned parasitic, there is a dearth of such reflections in folk literature. This is because folk</p>

<sup>5</sup> continued on page no 73 and 74

<p>...</p> <p>Where are betelnuts grown? O Mahamaya deity! Where are betel leaves grown? O all-known deity In which village is betelnut grown?</p>	<p><i>Mahamaya man</i> <i>vasaye malhoriya phool he</i> <i>baadi</i> <i>Soney ke hamar</i> <i>badiya Mahamaya, Chandan</i> <i>lagal kewari.</i> ”</p>	<p>literature owed itself to the creation of previous generations when there</p>
<p>2. The folktales reflect on how a boy saved a cat and got paid through the animals later</p>	<p>... “The east wind is blowing O goddess, the stem of the flower is dancing <i>Adored by Mahamaya</i> is the flower and fence of the gardener Of what is made your garden-fence O gardener? Of what is made the doors? <i>Adored by Mahamaya</i> is the flower and fence of the gardener Of gold is made my garden-fence O deity, and</p>	<p>was no scope for parasitism. However, some of the rituals have denigrated and become parasitic such as <i>Chhatha</i>, in which the natives throw burning</p>

	<p>sandalwood is made the doors.”</p> <p>2. Folktales of Bihar that mention parrots guiding a prince to find his love and treasure. These parrots, an element of nature, help the prince without expecting anything in return</p>	<p>crackers in water bodies</p>
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### **Folklore of Other Indian States and their Intertwining Nature with Bihar**

During the due course of this research, it came into notice that almost all folklores are interrelated. The folktales of north-east India are full of vivid details of flora and fauna. The present research utilizes the folktales of Manipur to elicit the intertwined importance of the ecosystem in spreading awareness. Through the sensitization of the common masses, these folktales could act as a saviour of the environment. In the story “Dove’s Feast”, the readers witness different birds talking amongst each other; the dove has invited the birds for feast on the occasion of the death of his old father. He instructs all birds to sit according to their ages, but no bird knows their age, and instead start fighting. In the end the owl wins by saying:

I am too old even to remember my age. The Heron is not even the great- great- great-grandson of my great-grandson (Sharma and Singh 10).

The morale of this folktale is that one could win battles through choosing his words, and being loquacious. Through the depiction of such morality in the world of birds, the folktale intends to teach us the ongoings of human society, so that we as always evolving species become more civilised. Therefore, nature taught us in the real life, and the previous generations by borrowing these learnings reflected the knowledge through the folklores. Several folktales of the states of India are similar. One of the examples is the folktale “Tapta,” in which a tiger becomes fearful after overhearing a story narrated by a mother to her child so that he could sleep. The mother asks her baby that he should sleep or else *tapta* would come (Sharma, p. 42). A thief also stands there, and mistakenly encounters the tiger; the tiger runs assuming that the thief is the *tapta*. This story symbolizes the unknown fear that non-human living beings face due to humans. Human beings are vulnerable if the ecosystem is imagined with all its depths. However, small living entities (though the word ‘small’ seems wrong as each living entity of the earth is of equal importance) are majorly disturbed due to human deeds. In the folktale “Distribution of Eatables by The Monkey,” there is a description of competitive nature of animals (Kumar 168). A wise monkey befools two cats in order to get some food and succeeds. Darwin’s “struggle for survival” and “survival of the fittest” is highly applicable to this story.

In previous era, people considered folklore as not only the carrier of heritage but also an asset that acted as a link connecting common folks to their surrounding environment. However, in contemporary times these voices have become silent. The

society needs these voices to assert our past, the past that was connected to the greenery. These folktales used to link the natural environment with their life, their joys, and the sorrows. In the life of today, we are left with a negligible contact to these remains of the past. This research has endeavoured to attempt the analysis of such eco centric folktales of Manipur.

The natural elements in these folktales vary from place to place. This variation of the natural components arises due to change in climate and terrain. Whereas the singers living near the banks of a river eulogize the water body, the people living on mountainous region worship mountains. Similar is the case with the description of flora and fauna. A major number of festivals in India include nature as the deity of human beings. In all parts of India, people celebrate their happiness by being one with nature. In the Sangai festival of Manipur, the devotees worship Sangai, a rare species of deer. Lokendrajit et al. posit that folk beliefs and folk medicines could act as an effective medium to eradicate urinary illnesses.

In the past when all the seasons of the earth were balanced, people celebrated with the changing weather of nature. Different kinds of festivals ran along with the seasonal changes. For instance, in north India, Basant Panchami was the celebration of spring and lohri was the celebration of winter. Along with growing urbanization that resulted in pollution, the dates of Indian calendar remained the same, but seasons changed. This change in the timings of seasons was mainly due to the impact of climate change. Festivals also started losing vigour; all that remained was the lineage of folktales. People narrated folktales in order to reconnect with the past.

Along with time, trees were cut and folks started being detached from greenery. Villages shrunk and cities expanded. The expansion of cities leads to the contraction



of men as a collective being. Due to sedentary lifestyles, very less socialization took place. Unlike the past years, people started speedily forgetting these songs. This was either because of the detachment of people from their roots or their indifference towards the lineage of folktales. Folktales used to bring people together. However, the folk compositions that once lead to the generation of the society as a collective being gradually diminished. People who wanted to enjoy this folklore either became dependent on internet or started becoming isolated. In other words, the death of folklore was due to the death of natural environment. Folklore started dying as nature depleted. Nowadays, in the times of consumerism and individualism, there lies a need to protect the folktales along with their deity that is nature. Folklore is not only getting depleted along with nature, but the loss of the two also indicate the extinction of humanity. As the connection with nature was lost, human beings started suffering more and more with diseases. Both mental and physical diseases attacked the population. Schizophrenia and other psychological diseases were the result of cutting the thread of the coexistence of society and nature.

In this study, the prime focus was towards the tradition of India in the past that initiated and pursued the goal of the coexistence of human beings with that of natural environment. The further endeavour was to reveal the parallelism between the decline of folklore and environment. Folklore, as already asserted were a proof of the existence of human nature. Environment, folklore, and humanity face a parallel decline today. The folklore herbs of Manipur are effective in curing several ailments (Prakash et al. 239; Ningombam et al. 53; Devi 63). The intensity of effectiveness of folklore medicine hints at the need of reassertion of the past tradition. This is significant for the researchers. It affirms that the past generation considered themselves as a part of nature

and called nature as the healer. Researchers need to reconsider the perception of environment-human relationships; the notion that these two are not binaries but poles that interlock somewhere, needs to be pondered upon.

The pollution that our deeds generate, leads to natural upheavals, further resulting in the end of lives. However, not all of the folksongs depict the negative tendency of human beings to destroy nature. Some of the lyrics from different regions raise voices to protect it in a direct manner. One of the songs of Garhwal (Uttarakhand) also deals with nature in the following way:

*Mat kato peron ko mat kato! Mat kato inki raksha karo.*

*Kheton me dhaan hoga to nadiyon me pani,*

*sab inhi ke karan to samriddhi hai.*

...

*Hey bahin, per kategi to maati bahegi*

*Maati bahegi to kheti kahan se karegi?*

*Tere pashu sab bhookhey marenge, we doodh kahan se denge jo charne ka ghas nahin milega... (Chatak 22).*

...

Do not cut the trees! do not cut the trees. Save them.

There will be water in rivers if paddy is in our fields. Prosperity is by them

...

O sister, soil will flow if you cut the trees

If the soil flows, how will you do farming

Your cattle will die, how will they give milk without grazing grass?

How will you quench your thirst if the water of river dries?

Do not cut the trees. You do not cut the trees

The song offers an eco-friendly perspective. Its lyrics contains a logical and in depth analysis of the environment. The discourse between human and the environment becomes visible in the rationale that this folksong uses. How the act of human beings can affect nature and in return is affected by the environment itself, is seen in the stanza quoted above.

### **Conclusion**

The reassertion of Indian folk values could lead to a better future in terms of the environment. By reclaiming the past lineage of folk beliefs and its positive outlook towards the ecosystem, we can guide ourselves on how to conserve biodiversity and do less harm to the ecosystem.

The folk literature of Bihar acts as a successful medium in judging the psyche of human beings when they connect themselves with the environment and knowingly or unknowingly disrupt nature. Equating the connection between human beings and the environment with the biological theory of symbiosis, this research intended to offer a newer perspective on understanding the human-nature relationship. Through such examination of mindset, researchers could develop sensitivity and raise the oneness of the native with the ecosystem in which they live. The subsequent chapter deeply studies the essential nature of folksongs, focusing on humans and the environment.

## Chapter 3

### Folksongs: Homocentric or Ecocentric?

#### Introduction

Different seasons bring along with them different festivals. These festivals include within themselves many rituals. Most of these festivals and rituals are in the form of celebrations or eulogies of nature. If we trace its history, human culture is a derivative of nature. According to Roger M. Keesing nature and culture are not binary, in fact they exist together. Due to different man-made theories, the two seem to be two different poles. In Keesing's words:

The gulf between the cultural realm, where man imposes his arbitrary order, and the realm of nature becomes a major axis of symbolic polarity: "nature vs culture" is a fundamental conceptual opposition in many—perhaps all—times and places. (Keesing 79)

The folk melodies from Bihar operate in a similar manner. They arise from the dynamic interplay between civilization and nature. Festivals have a key role in the portrayal of a culture. The folk melodies from Bihar that are linked to these festivities serve as a means to pay tribute to and enhance our environment. One way to show respect to nature and celestial bodies during holidays like Chhatha (Sun worship) and Chaurchan (Moon worship) is by offering what is naturally accessible to them. To put it in other words, humans offer what nature offers. Additional celebrations encompass

the seasonal event known as Akshayanavami, during which the local inhabitants partake in outdoor grilling beneath trees to honour the advent of newly harvested crops. Unfortunately, several festivities have disappeared due to the influence of modernization. The predominant folk songs featured in this chapter originate from Chhatha. This is due to the unavailability of several folk tunes linked with other Angika region festivities. Several folk melodies are also appropriated from weddings and thread rituals. Due to the combination of culture and environment, every ritual required the presence of physical surrounds. Folk songs embody the singer's psychological condition. In conjunction with the individuals depicted in these spoken compositions, the lyrics and vocal intonation employed throughout their performance assist in unravelling the concepts, anxieties, and aspirations of the vocalist. The theory of solar mythology posits that human civilization in all over the world has been worshipping the sun, and perceives a deified personification of the sun. Max Muller founded this school and asserted that Sanskrit and Vedas were etymologically related to Greek gods. According to him Zeus (Sky God) was derived from *Deaus* meaning bright sky (Stone 161).

### **Marriage-Folksongs of Bihar and the Environment**

One of the songs of marriages run as follows:

*Ujaliyo, thar ghanaghan boilye*

*Bijuli chhitke chaunor ho*

*Unchi re dalan chadhi herye beti ke baap*

*Kate dal ave bariyat hari ho* (qtd. in Kumari 42).

...

(The clouds are howling  
 Everywhere thundering sound is there  
 Bride's father is standing higher and is  
 Looking for the groom's side to come)

This song depicts nature as disrupting the daily humdrum of human life. A marriage is about to take place, but nature is creating barrier for it. This reveals how nature could affect the life of commoners. The physical environment in which we live is both frightening as well as pleasing. It not only acts as a disruption but also as a bridge, that links human souls. Another song moves in the following manner:

*Van maye faral karela, karaila ritu aayel hai*

*Aaju paral rakhbar karaila janu torih hey*

*Seho van paisili kone beti, kate rup aagri hey*

*Ghoriya chadhal aavai sunder var bahiya pasaraite hey.* (qtd. in Kumari 43)

...

(Bitter gourd has come in the forest, its season has come

I will pick the bitter gourd, thought the bride

The bride entered the forest

The groom came riding on a horse with hands ready to hug.)

The bride, groom, and nature are depicted as being interconnected by the forest that holds the bitter gourd. It has been said that the season of love coincides with the bitter gourd season. The two persons only come into contact with one another because of nature. Nature was a major factor in bringing two lovers together in several Indian literature. Among these are the *Ramayana* by Valmiki, the

*Abhigyanshakuntalam* by Kalidasa, and the *Anandamath* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Seasonal shifts like rain brought friends and lovers together as well

*Kaali ghat ghanghor ho, Yamuna ji ke teere*

*Chalho ho sakhi sab auro saheliya*

*Hilmil Yamuna nahay ho, Yamuna ji ke teere* (qtd. in *Kumari* 239)

...

(Dark clouds are heavy near Yamuna

Let us go mates and friends

Let us have a bath in the Yamuna River.)

In this folk ballad, the companions are drawn to nature. Its demise in the modern period is caused by this sort of captivating natural force. Sita was so enthralled with the glimpse of a deer that she dispatched her husband Rama to get it. But, the vocalist in the above given lines is merely looking for the wonderful feeling from it. In a different kind of song known as a Kajri (song of rain), a wife longs for her husband during the rainy season. The song is structured as follows:

*Rimjhim barse la ho sawanva*

*More sajanwa sun lo na*

*Rahi rahi garje la ye gaganwa, bijuri chamke o la anganva*

...

rain is pouring down with a beautiful sound

Listen to it my love,

Cloud thunders again and again, lightning also again and again

Through attachment with nature, the attachment of two people grows. This shows the importance of nature in the hearts of our ancestors who used to sing songs that linked them with nature.

### **Devotional Bihari Folksongs and a Peeping through the Complex Environment**

The folk-songs may take various forms such as religious, incantations, musical, lyrics and narrative songs. Angika folksongs act as a boosting agent in various festivals, as people very religiously sing these songs. The river Yamuna was a meeting point for lord Krishna and his beloved Radha:

*Jamuna kinarva rama sang radha gori*

*Krishna karey barjori* (qtd. in Kumari 296)

...

O Rama, on the bank of river Yamuna

Krishna is teasing Radha

Many natural processes cannot be completed without sunlight. Chhatha puja is explicitly described as a form of sun worship. During this occasion, the worshipper presents sacred water to the deity of the sun by pouring it while standing within a body of water. In addition, the sun worshipper presents a variety of fruits, vegetables, and sweets as part of the devotional ritual. The event was previously characterised by its commitment to environmental sustainability. Nevertheless, in the present era, no festive occasion is considered fully satisfactory without the inclusion of igniting fireworks. This practice contaminates the water sources in which the worshipper stands while making gifts to the sun and pouring sacred water. The songs of Chhatha are replete with praise for the sun. Sunlight is a non-living factor of our surroundings. The



energy it provides to plants and animals, and its crucial function in sustaining the water cycle, are of utmost importance. Furthermore, sunlight plays a crucial part in the process of photosynthesis, which is how plants obtain their food and sustenance. One of the songs performed at the chhath puja festival goes as follows:

:

*Saton kothaliya ji Deenanath*

*Saton me kebar*

*Tohra doobate ho deenanath duniya anhar*

*Tohra ugate ji deenanath duniya injor* (qtd. in Kumari 264)

...

There are seven rooms

And seven doors on each

On your fall, o sun god, whole world becomes dark

On your rise, o sun god, whole world is full of light.

This song acknowledges the importance of sun light in sustaining the lives of human beings. By illustrating through words, the condition of earth without sunlight, the singer or devotee proudly eulogizes the sun. Similarly, another song related to this worshipping is quoted below:

*Chandan ke gachh tar chakmak karai se*

*Tahi tar suraj dev neend arsayel*

*Uthvan geli suruj ke aama se*

*Uthoon na suruj dev, liyo na arag se* (Kumari 266).

...

Beneath the sandalwood tree, something is shining

Beneath it the sun is about to sleep

O sun god, wake up

Listen to my call and wake up

The duration of fasting during Chhath Puja is three days. The worshipper venerates this celestial being at its descent on a certain day. On the next day, the individual pays homage to the ascending sun. In the aforementioned hymn, the devotee implores the sun to slumber in the initial two lines and awaken in the final two lines. All the elements utilised in this festival are organic. This is symbolic. The organic offerings represent the biological existence of our planet, while the sun serves as a vital source of sustenance and energy. The inclusion of folk singers was essential for the completion of all these events. As human voice transitioned into a digital form throughout time, the significance of traditional folksongs began to decline. Furthermore, the festivals have experienced a decline in attendance due to the effects of climate change. Despite the tradition of following the Hindi calendar for festivals, the holiday that was traditionally held in spring began to be observed in winter. Folk songs embody the singer's psychological condition. In conjunction with the individuals depicted in such spoken narratives, the lyrics and vocal intonation employed throughout their performance assist in unravelling the concepts, worries, and aspirations of the vocalist.

*Nadiya kinar baba keker bajan bajai chhai*

*Yamuna kinar baba kekar saajan aavai chhai*

*Nadiya kenar beti tore bajan bajai chhai*

*Nadiya kinar beti tore sajan aavai chhai* (Kumari 43).

...

Whose trumpet is blowing at the river's bank?

Whose groom is coming at the Yamuna's bank?

Your marriage's trumpet is blowing at the river's bank.

Your groom is coming at Yamuna's bank.

Such a form of contact between humans and environment is shown in folk songs. In Indian tradition, rivers are revered as deities. Rivers have long been seen by the Indians as crucial to the development of their civilization. Rivers serve as the lifelines for the established settlements. A significant number of the ancient cities are situated in close proximity to the riverbanks. Rivers and seas delineate the boundaries of several nations on maps. This is inherently paradoxical; rivers serve as both connecting and separating factors for human civilization. They serve to both link and separate two pieces of land. From a literary perspective, these rivers provide water to living organisms, but they do not consume the water themselves. The rivers themselves absorb all the contaminants. Throughout history, they have assumed the role of Kali, the deity responsible for annihilating evil, and have consumed a vast majority of impurities found in both humans and animals. By absorbing both physical and metaphysical pollutants, these rivers serve as a powerful source of purification for Hindus. As a result of industrialization and urbanisation, which both have the ability to remove contaminants but can cause harm, these entities now require safeguarding. The flow of these rivers serves as an indicator of the progression and advancement of human civilization. These abiotic components of the environment traverse by eroding the slopes of several

mountains. This is indicative of their hardship. Interacting with the water of these rivers in a nice manner increases the creative and imaginative expression of individuals. The presence of rivers is the sole reason for the abundance of life on Earth. Each river, regardless of its size, contributes to the vitality of the area through which it flows. Nevertheless, when human actions cause this vital energy to experience suffering, they can become a catalyst for devastation. The immense and awe-inspiring vistas of the rivers serve as a testament to their magnificence and might. The sacred rivers are seen as pathways to spiritual enlightenment. Almost all religious ceremonies in India are incomplete without the inclusion of water from these rivers. The environment in this way connects us to our religious and spiritual origins. However, the natural disturbances associated with rivers, such as floods or droughts, are quite formidable. It results in the loss of human lives, animal lives, and material resources. These violent activities appear to be a warning from the environment about the negative consequences that result from excessive pollution and exploitation of the ecosystem. The river Ganga is extensively depicted in our traditional folk songs. The river is referred to as "maiyya" meaning mother, using it as an adjective. This river holds a significant position in the Vedas and other ancient scriptures. According to Hindu mythology, this river is considered a precious adornment for Shiva's locks (Appendix V). Individuals immerse themselves in this river with the intention of purging their transgressions. Folk songs embody the singer's psychological condition. In conjunction with the individuals portrayed in these spoken narratives, the lyrics and vocal intonation employed throughout their performance contribute to the interpretation of the singer's concepts, preoccupations, and aspirations:

*Meelahu re sakhiya chalu dekhe ganga ke lahariya*

*Ganga nahaiyalase paap katit hoinhe*

*Nirmal hoinhein dehiya* (qtd in Kumari 42)

...

Let us meet sisters and go to see the waves of Ganga

By bathing in this river, our sins would wash away

By bathing in this river, our bodies would be pure

However, by this action of washing, individuals acquire or believe they have acquired benefits from the surroundings. We extract resources from nature without reciprocating, only exploiting and deteriorating it.

The presence of water serves as a significant catalyst for the topic in several folk tunes. There is a widely held belief that life on Earth arose as a result of the presence of water. Humans have employed water to alleviate numerous bodily dysfunctions. Water is the agent that removes all pollutants. In the Hindu faith, the majority of ceremonies commence with the adoration of a body of water. During marriage ceremonies, individuals joyfully collect water from rivers, ponds, or wells. Prior to the wedding ceremony, the bride also derives pleasure from transporting water from wells to her parental residence. In Indian culture, it is believed that there are seven oceans. Therefore, in the context of weddings, seven pitchers are revered. Water also plays a crucial function in the ultimate ceremonial of an individual. Water is intricately interconnected with every aspect of the earth's movements and the beings who inhabit it. In Indian tradition, rivers are revered as deities. The majority of civilizations originated around the riverbanks. The majority of folksongs feature depictions of the river Ganga. Referred to as the "mother," this river holds significant

importance in Northern India. According to Hindu mythology, this river originates from the tresses of deity Shiva (Appendix V). It is a popular belief that taking bath in this river makes us pure and rids us from all the sins:

*Ho ganga maiya agam lahraye*  
*siv ke jata joot se nikali*  
*pap ou taap nasay*  
*ek laha hame deun vardani*  
*jug-jug keru kalyani*  
*jo pavain tari jaaye (qtd. in Kumari 43)*

...

O mother Ganga, your waves are moving  
 Flowing out from the locks of Shiva  
 They demolish our sins  
 Give us a boon  
 That you will make us pure  
 From ages to ages

Such is the glory of this river that the reflection of sun in this river does not only make the river beautiful but also gives peace to our eyes:

*Kalkal bahe jaham dudhwa ke dhar*  
*Ganga maiya ho dhan tori mahima apaar*  
*Riddhi siddhi sohe maiya tohre acharwa*  
*Sabke arajiya par karlu wicharwa (qtd. in Kumari 44)*

...

Smoothly is your stream flowing like milk.

Your glory is great o Mother Ganga

Spiritual fulfilment looks beautiful on your water robe

Please grant blessings to all of us.

It is a famous belief that lord Shiva absorbs the river Ganga in his locks when this river climbs down from heaven. The earthly beings pray to the river so that she can come on earth:

*Sarag se utaral maiya devi Ganga*

*Hey gangajal paniya*

*Amarpuri se utarala avey*

*Hey gangajal paniya*

*Siv lelan jata me samaye*

*Hey gangajal paniya (qtd. in Kumari 45)*

...

Climbing down from the heaven

O water of Ganga

Climbing down from Amarpuri

O water of Ganga

Lord Shiva has absorbed you in his hairs

O water of Ganga

The stream of Ganga River has been compared to that of holy water that makes its drinker immortal. People believe that if this water is given in the mouth of a dying person than he or she will get an abode in heaven:

*Pawan ba tohri lahariya ae Gangaji*

*Pawan ba tohri lahariya*

*Raja bhagirath kathin tap kaile*

*Sarag se tohra dhara par laile*

*Pawan ho gaile dharatiya ae gangaji*

*Pawan ba tohri lahariya*

*Ant samaya na kare tor asha*

*Ek boond paniya mitave jantrasa*

*Khuli jalasarag duariya ae Gangaji*

*Pawan ba tohri lahariya* (qtd. in Kumari 45)

...

Pure is your stream o respected Ganga

Pure is your stream

King Bhagirath did a devotion purely devoted

He brought you onto the earth from heaven

The earth became pure due to you

Pure is your stream

In end times your drops

Quench the thirst of the dying one

And the doors of heaven open for him

Pure is your stream

Bhagirath is a mythical character, a king who brought Ganga down to the earth after years of worship and devotion. In accordance with a folk belief, he sought to bring the river Ganga down from heaven because only she could grant nirvana to Bhagirath's ancestors, who were turned to ashes by sage Kapil's curse. Ganga was finally pleased



by Bhagirath's efforts, years later. The whispers from above reached his ears, saying, "I am prepared to descend to earth as you desire, but who can control my powerful waves and currents?" Bhagirath, in a state of confusion, turned to Ganga for guidance when faced with the idea of sweeping away the entire planet and ending up in Patal Lok. Ganga replied that only God Shiva has the ability and valour to channelize her. If he agrees to keep me on his head, it will be advantageous for everyone involved. In response to this, Bhagirath started praying to Lord Shiva. In response to the penance, Shiva granted permission for Ganga to flow from his locks. However, the way this natural body is utilized by the king seems to be connoting the selfishness of living beings.

Ganga river is connected to lord Krishna in folk life. Yamuna and lord Krishna are remembered together in North India. It is a belief that Vasudeva, the father of Krishna, carried him as an infant through the river, in order to escape from Kansha (the brother of Krishna's mother Devaki, who would have killed to escape his own death). Yamuna was flooded, but when the waves touched the feet of Krishna, Yamuna shrunk to make the way, and Vasudeva was able to take Krishna to Gokuldham, where he grew:

*Bhado ki andhiyari ratiya,*

*Jamuna bahai jaldhar*

*Krishna charan jab jamuna lage*

*Neeche utar gayi hilor*

*Kanhaiya ji ke lai ke chale* (qtd. in Kumari 54)

...

In the dark night of August

River Yamuna was flooded

When Yamuna touched the feet of little Krishna

The waves shrunk down

And Kanhaiya was taken by Vasudeva

According to another myth, Krishna's ball went into this river while he was playing. Lord Krishna jumped into the Yamuna. This river was an abode of cobras. Krishna controlled the snakes because they were not willing to give the ball back. Therefore, only after controlling the snakes. Krishna was able to get his ball back:

*Jamuna kinare kadam juri chhaiyan*

*Genda khele murari murali hey*

*Uchhali ke gend jamuna dah giral*

*Koodi pare nand lal, murali hey* (qtd. in Kumari 296)

...

On the bank of Yamuna is the tree of Kadamba

Under its shade Krishna was playing with ball

The ball bounced and went into Yamuna

Krishna leaped into the Yamuna river.

This Angika folksong adeptly encapsulates the narrative in a skillfully crafted manner. Nevertheless, Krishna, in his human manifestation, exerted control over the cobras. This action itself demonstrates the gradual process by which human beings began to exert control over and domesticate nature. In ancient times, they managed biodiversity as a means of self-preservation, but with time their hunger intensified. Human beings began harnessing nature to achieve an optimal standard of existence. The depiction of Krishna exerting control over the cobras serves as a representation

of humanity's ability to subdue and master the forces of nature. Lord Krishna not only exerted control over nature by force, but he also captivated both humans and the natural world with the enchanting melodies of his flute:

*Sheetal mand sugandha vayu bahe*

*Jamuna theer bahatiya*

*Khag mrig vindhya mugudh vanshi sun*

*Surabhi na doob charaiya* (qtd. in Kumari 57)

..

Pleasant smelled breeze was blowing

On the banks of Yamuna

On listening the tune

Birds and deer got mesmerized

Cows stopped grazing grass

Human beings-controlled nature even in old ages. Nevertheless, the bond of love connected them with nature. This connecting aspect is missing in modern times. We as Homo sapiens only know how to control nature forcibly and destroy it blindly. The traces of such relationships of human being in the past with nature could be sighted in these Angika folksongs.

Earth with all its elements is merciful; human beings find their own ways through nature. However, when this nature turns revengeful and disastrous than we realize that nature does not need us, we need nature.

### **Romantic Aspect of Bihari Folksongs**

Ganga river is not only devotional for the folk singers but it also adds to the romantic aspect of life:

*Ganga ma kiye asnan*

*Bindiya le gayi machhariya* (Kumari 52)

...

I had bath in the river Ganga

The fish took away my bindi

“*Bindi*” is a mark of love for Indian woman. The river played an essential role in day-to-day life of the people residing near its banks. Moreover, this song captures the image of a lady in love who lost her “*bindi*” at the place of her lover but is giving excuses to probably her friends or family members. Similarly, a song runs in the following manner:

*Dheere baho ganga dheere baho*

*More piya utran do par* (qtd. in Kumari 51)

...

Flow slowly o Ganga, flow slowly

Let my love climb down the boat on the bank

If the river Ganga is the river which in folksongs is a means of devotion, Yamuna on the other hand is shown in folksongs to be an abode romantic escape.

We get such connection of human beings with nature in many of these folksongs. In past ages people felt one with nature; they loved animals and plants in a manner that we do not do now. One of the Bhojpuri (one of the regions of Bihar) songs recorded by me runs as follows:

*Chal ropein bargad aam neem tulsi*

*Murjhal man hariyav ho rama*

*Birva laga ke*

...

Let us go and bow the plants of neem, mango and basil

Our dry hearts will be green

On planting them

The folksong contemplates the unity between human beings and vegetation.

Furthermore, it is important to note that individuals in previous times saw the entirety of nature as a unified entity. Contrary to modern humans, they held the belief that nature is deficient if any of its components are absent. In contemporary society, ordinary individuals derive pleasure from nature as a kind of amusement, environmentalists are passionate about nature as their chosen vocation, scientists study nature to uncover its mysteries, and industrialists are driven by their desire to exploit its resources. Nevertheless, these folksongs demonstrate that our predecessors had a genuine appreciation for nature without any ulterior motives. The authenticity of the folksong stated below is confirmed.

*Ek sai amva lagvani, sava sai jamun ho*

*Aho rama tabahu na bagiya sohavan*

*Ek re koili bin* (qtd. in Kumari 77)

...

I have planted one hundred mango trees,

And one twenty-five blackberries

O god, even then my garden looks not beautiful

Without a cuckoo bird

This song is like one of the songs of Sharda Sinha “koyala bin bagiya na sobhe raja” (“the garden does not look beautiful without a cuckoo bird”). These songs hint at the importance of coexistence of different species as seen by our ancestors. Moreover, scientifically, such songs also reveal that the past generations had a knowledge of food chain and food web. Along with its beauty, a bird also helps in maintaining the food chain like other species. In Madhubani paintings (a kind of paintings in one of the regions called Madhubani in Bihar), the form of the trees seems as if they want to say something to their viewers (refer to Appendix E). There are some rituals in weddings that eulogize nature, such as *Kohbar* (refer to Appendix F). Some Angika folksongs also contain the description of common *Papeeha* (Common hawk cuckoo). One of the recorded songs runs as follows:

*Bhinsara ke pehra, pee-pee rate papiha lagal*

*Aail chait mahina, falgun rang ura ke bhagal*

...

In the time of dawn, the hawk cuckoo is cooing

March has come; February is gone with all its colours.

Such talk of the singer with nature is prevalent in the Angika folksongs. Our scriptures also included such interaction of human forms with the natural surroundings. Along with the flora and fauna, climate played a crucial role in determining the feeling as well as mindset of the singer. Nature acted as a prophesying agent for the human beings. It acted like a mother to the people. Watching the dreams of bird, fruits, trees

et cetera mattered a lot for the human beings of the past. One of the Angika folksongs moves as quoted below:

*Saasu anganva me dekhlou re kalasva*

*Ta amva gharad fare ho*

*Haye re bahua kalasva ta tohre ahivat*

*Ta amva santati hove ho (qtd. in Kumari 89)*

...

O my mother-in-law, I saw a brass pot in my dreams

And a mango tree full of ripe mangoes

O my daughter in law, it is a lucky dream

You will get a child now

Various dreams connote the happenings of the future. Here natural and metaphysical elements join in order to inform the dreamer about his or her future. The fact that human being placed themselves within the context of nature could very well be seen in various mythical texts of India. Folksongs and folklores also contained such proofs of oneness of nature and men. Many Angika folksongs depict human being talking to river, flora, and fauna. In the marriages of Bihar, folksongs play a leading role. One of the songs of marriages runs in the following manner:

*Sindoor pethar leke aam Mahua bihayab re gouri ke leke*

*Santhi lelan sindur pithar he gouri ke leke*

*Aam Mahua viyahi sakhi sab*

*Ghar- ghuri aayil ho gouri ke leke (qtd. in Kumari 70)*

...

The friends of the bride took her to the garden of mango and honey tree

Along with the vermilion box, and rice paste to marry the two tree

They got the mango and honey tree married

Then they came back to the house along with the bride

These actions have a significant impact on such rituals. Each of these rites performed in nature symbolises the everlasting nature of marriage bonds. The mango tree is a crucial component in these ceremonies. The honey tree, also known as the mahua tree, is a kind of plant native to India, similar to the mango tree. It occupies the same place as the mango tree. The word "mango" suggests energy and vitality, while "honey tree" suggests captivating happiness. The fruits of the honey tree are utilised by individuals to produce toddy. The fruits of these plants, albeit little, descend to the ground as a result of their mass. Individuals, particularly females, harvest these fruits with the intention of exporting them to toddy manufacturers. Yet another folk song captures the enchanting impact of this particular tree:

*Mahua madan ras tapke ho Mahua chui chui jaaye*

*Mahua beenan wali rasili re jaan mare hamar* (qtd. in Kumari 98)

...

The nectar of honey tree is dripping down; its fruits are stealthily falling

The girl who is picking the honey fruits is killing me

Therefore, the emotions of the humans inside that region were influenced by both the climate and the presence of plant and animal life in the surrounding environment.

This may explain why the traditional celebrations in India include natural components. Moreover, coconut still maintains its crucial significance in contemporary religious rituals. During the Chhatha festival, devotees offer coconuts



as a tribute to the sun god. This dedication is insufficient without the inclusion of this fruit. Presented below is an additional musical composition from this festival.:

*Uje patna se nariyalba mangayeb*

*Bargaaon jayeb jaroor*

*Uje saanjhahi arag dilaiyboo*

*Subah mangwan jaroor*

*Uje saat putar ek dhiya*

*Damaad mangwan jaroor* (qtd. in Kumari 272)

...

I will get the coconut bought from Patna

I will go to a bigger village

I will offer water to you o sun god in the evening

In the dawn, I will make wish to you

Please give me seven boy children and one girl

And, a husband for her

Thus, in previous times, humans were aware that their entire existence relied upon the environment. They were unable to take any action unless they achieved complete harmony with their surroundings. The significance of many living organisms in festivities and religious practices contributed to the achievement of sustainable development. Given the importance of some fruits or plants in annual religious ceremonies, individuals took measures to prevent the extinction of these species. While it is true that humans played a role in causing the extinction of certain species, our cultural framework was designed to prevent us from becoming adversaries of nature. In his article titled "Sustainable Development and Religion: Towards an

Econ-Socio-Spirituality," Anand Amaladass argues that sustainable development requires spirituality, which is an attitude towards oneself, one's neighbours, and one's environment, as well as something that goes beyond these aspects (37). Amaladass argues that different rituals serve to coordinate societal activities and ensure harmony with the natural world (36). India has a longstanding history of environmental reverence. This is very clear from Angika folk songs that water-the blue attire of the earth, soil, and its green mantle provide of plants make up the world that support the animal life of the Earth. The earth's water and vegetation constitute the basic framework of the web of life in which there are intimate and essential and relations between plants and water between plants and animals and humans. The above fact could be asserted very well through these excerpts:

“A pond equals ten wells; a reservoir equals ten ponds.

A son equals ten reservoirs, and a tree equals ten sons!”

*dasha-kūpa-samā vāpī, dasha-vāpī-samo hradaḥ |*

*dasha-hrada-samaḥ putro, dasha-putra-samo drumah ||*

*Matsya-purāṇa 154:512*

In ancient times, culture, religion, and nature were intricately interconnected. Culture and religion have a minimal impact on the devastation of nature. However, contemporary humans engage in celebratory activities that include destructive practices, such as igniting fireworks and immersing flowers and clay lamps in bodies of water. The excessive and careless exploitation is the primary factor leading to the degradation of the earth's ecology. Folksongs serve as a reminder of the interconnectedness between humans and environment. The globe has undergone a significant transformation into a mechanised realm, resulting in consequential

impacts on the ecosystem. The unpredictable and disorderly patterns of the seasons and climate are a direct consequence of urbanisation, which in turn causes pollution. Folksongs might significantly contribute to reaffirming the inherent unity between humans and nature in this context. By attaining a state of one with nature, we can get insight into its inherent qualities, which in turn can aid in preventing any further degradation.

The word ecocriticism is a combination of ecology and criticism. Ecology is the scientific study of the interaction between organism and environment. The Greek word *oikos* meaning “home” and *logos* meaning, “to study” gives rise to this field of study (Campbell 1026). The term environment is an inclusion of abiotic (non-living elements such as temperature, light, water, and nutrients) and biotic (living elements such as living beings and plants). Folksongs are incomplete without the inclusion of biodiversity. This is due to two facts. Firstly, because this inclusion gives rise to beauty and essence to the songs, and secondly, due to various rituals with which these folksongs are related. Almost, every ritual of our country contains the interaction and interrogation with biodiversity. This is because the life of human being is incomplete without nature. Primitive men used to worship nature in the form of god and goddesses because their livelihood depended on the environment in which they lived. In other words, nature acted as a life-giving force for the humans. Similarly, child gradually begins to understand nature because of his physical and psychological needs. This results in the attachment of the child, as he or she grows, to his or her natural surroundings. The concept of earth as “mother” and “goddess” is a derivation of the *bhava* (sentiment) evoked in human beings through their attachment with the earth. This points the complex nature of Indian way of thinking. In a similar manner, Indians

used to worship nature with all its forms. The manner, in which the relationship of human beings in the past with nature worked, is in itself complex. Nature with its various forms was present in the songs they sang and the steps in which they moved while dancing. The folksongs that I am dealing with are minute elements of the large domain of the genre that are inspired by nature. Fables, tricksters, folklores, and nature poems are some of the components of this field. In this chapter, I have made a study of biodiversity in Angika folksongs. This study focuses on both flora as well as fauna present around human beings. Moreover, the folksongs that I chose are highly inclusive of the biodiversity. In the book *What is Biodiversity?* by James Maclaurin, biodiversity is:

... the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine, and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems (qtd. in Maclaurin 1).

Man considers himself an essential entity on earth. However, it must be noted that if seen from an ecocritical point of view, the minutest creatures such as bacteria equal human beings. This is because the whole ecosystem is disturbed even when one species become extinct. The old concept of the great chain of being gets disturbed when we start analysing the importance of every creature present on earth. As Sueellen Campbell maintains:

... The most important challenge to traditional hierarchies in ecology is the concept of biocentrism-the conviction that humans are neither better

nor worse than other creatures (animals, plants, bacteria, rocks, rivers)

but simply equal to everything else in the natural world (Campbell 128).

The fact that this study attempts to study the verbal manifestation of biological diversity through human voices, gives us an opportunity to both accept and undermine the depiction of biodiversity in the lyrics. There are several songs sung on different occasions in Angika language that reflect the inclusion of biological diversity. One of the songs recorded by me<sup>6</sup> is as follows:

*Dadur mor papiha bole*

*Jhingur ke ati sor*

*Ho meghwa gawela re kajariya*

*Piya videswa gaile na*

...

Frog, peacock, and hawk cuckoo are singing

Grasshopper is also making noise

Rain is singing song

And my husband is far away

This song provides an account of the animals present in this part of the world. Different seasons brought different species of life in the surrounding. People in the past enjoyed their lives through these variations. Folksongs through the method of oral and audial recordings passed to the generations. Various species of animals and plants are included in these songs. This fact points towards the necessity of environment, and the

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<sup>6</sup> All of the folksongs recorded by me are from the mouth of women living in a village of Begusarai, Bihar.

affirmation of the need of our ancestors for environment in their lives. One of the Angika folksongs of marriage runs:

*Harihar baans kataiyah ji baba*

*Unchkaye marba chhabay (qtd. Kumari 46).*

...

(After cutting the green bamboo

Father has created a marriage hut)

Natives of Bihar consider bamboo as a sacred tree. This is because bamboo is symbolizing regeneration. *Bansa* (bamboo) and the word *vansha* (generation, dynasty) are etymologically related to each other. Therefore, the use of bamboo in marriage ceremonies are very important. The notion is that the inclusion of the pieces of bamboo would certainly result in the continuation of the generation of the couple. However, one of the underlying elements is that it is only after cutting of the tree, that the celebration would be complete. This fact further points at two facts—firstly, that man was always dependent on nature for his daily ongoing, and secondly, that his greed to get more and more from nature increased day by day. He created dams and invented fertilizers in order to gain from nature as much assets as were possible. The song given below depicts the way the ecological elements affected human beings in their verbal celebration:

*Siya girija poojan chalali fulbari*

*Janak ji ke bagiya me*

*Akshat- Chandan leli auri leli paniya (qtd. in Kumari 51)*

...

(Seeta is going to worship goddess.

In her father Janak's garden,  
 She took rice-grains, sandal, and beetle)

People associate the mythical characters with the man and woman who play a leading role in the rituals. For instance, a bride is compared to the Indian goddess Sita and a father is compared to Sita's father, Janak. In the song quoted above, natural elements such as sandal, rice grains and beetle leaves are included because of their piousness.

### **Bihari Folksongs and the Game of Teasing**

The unconscious elements of some songs reveal the eternal impact of nature on the physical, psychological, and spiritual being of a person. The quote given below is from one of the Angika songs that depicts such impacts.

*Kere chadhali aam gachhi per*  
*Bhar deh laglan lattha*  
*Janjal bhel re lattha*  
*Jeevkal bhel re lattha*  
*Dhobiya se dhulbay deliyen,*  
*Taiyo na chhutlan lattha* (qtd. in Kumari 71)

...

Someone climbed the mango tree  
 The gum stucked on his whole body  
 The gum became the problem  
 The gum became the problem of his life  
 The person went to the washerman  
 To get it washed  
 Then also, he was not

Able to get rid of the gum.

This folksong is used to tease the groom's family before the wedding ceremony. As the lyric suggests, the stem and trunk of the mango tree secretes a gum like substance. In this song, the gum has adhered to the person who has climbed on the tree, probably in order to pick some mangoes. He wants to get rid of the gum, but in vain. If seen from a literary perspective, the mango tree symbolizes the whole nature and the person who has climbed the tree stands for the humanity. The gum represents the mark of nature on human beings. This is such an unending mark that it will continue to live on the body of humanity, even if humanity resists it.

Animals, a part of our environment, were the representative of the affluence of the person who possessed them. A song goes as follows:

*Saanvar-sanvar suratiya tohar dulha*

*Kehu hathi charhal, kehu ghora charhal*

*Kehu oont per sawar baratiya aayel* (qtd. in Kumari 82)

...

(Your groom is dusky

The family of the groom is coming for marriage

Some on elephant, some on horse

And some on the camel are coming)

The animals who ones depicted the affluence of their possessor, are now only to be found in zoos and circuses. Moreover, the will of human beings to possess more from nature in order to raise their comfort resulted in an unending want, such a want that was willing to devour the whole of the nature. They started cutting trees in order to urbanize and killed animals to export their skins.



### **Bihari Folksongs as the Depiction of the Deeds of Human**

Though the act of hunting is as old as human civilization, the process of exporting the skin and fur of animals is not that old. Considering nature as their possession they forgot that it is much vaster than they are. Another Angika song moves in the following manner:

*Brahman dev harlo ho sedur ho barhan varsh brahman dev...*

*Jaun tora age mayurni senura re baksi debo ge hamra ke*

*Mayurni kiye debho dan ge hamra ke, mayurni kiye...*

*Sariyo raati ho brahman dev nachi ke dekhaibo ho bhore bhinsar.*

*Brahmandev boliya deb oho sunai, bhore bhinsar, brahman dev*

(Kumari 19)

...

You have snatched my soul companion, O Brahman dev

If I return your companion, what will you give me?

Said Brahman dev.

Whole night I will show you my dance, and in morning

I will wake you up with my voice).

This song itself depicts the way the privileged beings treated nature. By killing the exotic, man tried to gain enjoyment as well as wealth. He neglected the suffering of nature. The call of nature remained unanswered by him. In the song quoted above, the person killing the peacock does not accept himself as guilty. Rather, he barter the life of the peacock he killed. The female peacock is half-dead because of loss of her soul mate, and the Brahman wants to get something in return. The female peacock wants to give him everything that she has. This act in itself is symbolical. Nature gives us what

it can give. However, we as human beings have a leviathan lust for things that she could not give us. The growl and fury of nature is the result of the excessive exploitation of our environment on the expense of its own. A folksong of Bengal, in a similar manner, deals with the pain of a deer when the arrow of a poacher injures it. Its Hindi translation by Devender Satyarthi is as follows:

*Hirani ghaas char rahi hai,*

*Shikari nishana bandh raha hai*

*Achanak usne teekhe teer se hirani ko ghayal kar diya.*

*Hirani kahti hai,*

*Kaise teekhe teer se ghayal kar diya hai tumne o teerandaaz*

*Main van ki hirani hoon*

*Kisi se kuchh udhaar nahi leti,*

...

*Tere jalashay ka jal main nahi peeti*

*Tere charagah ka main ghaas nahi khati (Satyarthi 131-132).*

...

(A doe is grazing grass

A poacher aims at her

Suddenly he injures the doe with his sharp arrow

The doe says

How have you injured me with your pointed arrow?

I am the doe of this forest

I do not borrow from anyone

...

I do not drink your water

I do not eat your grass)

The last two lines point towards the quality of independent existence of nature with all its components. The doe is born independent. She does not rely on anyone, but a poacher has injured her severely. In the end of this song, the doe curses the ironsmith who created the arrow:

*Kaise teekhe teer se ghayal kar diya hai tumne o teerandaz*

*Kis luhar ne*

*Banaya tha yeh teer*

*Uska vansh nirvanshi ho jaye* (Satyarthi 132).

...

(How sharp is the arrow with which you have harmed me o, hunter

Which goldsmith

Had designed this arrow

I curse that his generation will end.)

In this folksong, the doe bestows curse on a human being. This is symbolical to the curse of nature, when human beings destroy it. Flood, drought and excessive hot or cold weather is a result of the harm done on the body of earth. The society functions in a homocentric manner. An amalgamation of homocentric approaches leads to the degeneration of nature. The historian Donald Worster maintains his thought:

We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those

ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. Historians, along with literary scholars, anthropologists, and philosophers, cannot do the reforming, of course, but they can help with the understanding (qtd. in Glotfelty xxi).

Similarly, these folksongs also play a vital role in understanding the “impact [of human beings] on nature as precisely as possible.” By “understanding” the “ethical” system through these folksongs, we can “reform” the ongoing societal scenario present today. However, the impact of nature on human beings is something not to be neglected. From years past, humans are dependent on nature for the enrichment of their soul. This long-lived relation of the natural environment and human is spread all over the globe. According to Michael Alexander, John Stuart Mill rescued himself from depression by reading Wordsworth’s nature poetry (264). Mill used only the theory for his recovery. However, we cannot underestimate the impact of the practical that is, living on the lap of nature, on a depressed mind.

Several folksongs relate a person’s happy or depressed mood to that of the biodiversity and its behaviour. Our ancestors believed that the cawing of a crow brings with it some guests in the home outside which the crow repeatedly caws; the dance of a peacock brings rain; seeing a pair of Myna bird means happiness in future. However, on the other hand, they considered the coming of owl as an omen. Whatever, be their logic behind such beliefs, one thing is clear—human beings were always linked with the flora and fauna surrounding them. One of the folksongs of the ritual Nahchhoo (the cutting of nails of the person who is getting married after making him sit on a plough) performed by the natives of Bihar during thread ceremonies and marriages contains many such elements. One of these songs moves as follows:

*Aam re manjari gail*

*Koiyolo kunhanki gail*

*Rane bane Chandra ugiye, gail chalant chalant bhel hai* (Kumari 194)

...

(Mango trees are full of blossoms and Cuckoo bird coos

Moon is spreading its milky light in forests,

The time has come to go to the bride's house now)

The pleasant condition of the environment along with its biodiversity supplements to the joy-filled state of the people who are a part of the marriage ceremony. The voice of the Cuckoo bird is considered as lively and rejuvenating because of its association with spring. This effect of nature on the content of the folksongs plays a very significant role in understanding human and nature within the contexts of each another.

In the words of Neil Evernden:

Rather than thinking of an individual spaceman who must slurp up chunks of the world-"resources"-into his separate compartment, we must deal instead with the individual-in environment, the individual as a component of, not something distinct from, the rest of the environment (Evernden 97).

By adopting the notion of environment and the individual as one entity, we can aim to protect the fast degeneration of both human beings as well as nature. A body remains in pain when one of its organs is hurt. Similarly, by considering the environment like our body, we can goal towards its protection. The perception that nature is no other and there is no thin line between human beings and nature, would lead to positive results.

However, nature will always remain at a higher state than the individual will, in case we create a dichotomy. Another folksong describes the youth of a girl by making a comparison between her and the flowers in a field:

*Ahe dhanma ke sheesh se bahar bheli siya beti*

*Dhanma ke phool san jamai...*

*Deho baba joriya lagay.... (Kumari 45)*

...

(O, your daughter has grown up like pleasant rice flowers

Bring a husband for her like pleasant rice flowers

O father dear, make a good pair)

As revealed by the wordings of the song quoted above, the age of a girl is compared with that of the flower of rice grains. Most of the times, we eulogize someone by comparing him or her with someone or something superior in standards. In the song quoted above, the rice flowers are on higher pedestal than the girl with whom we compare these flowers. That environment is greater than human beings is clearly seen in the folksongs of Angika. According to Neil Evernden “The subversive nature of Ecology rests on its assumption of literal interrelatedness, not just interdependence (Evernden 102).” We can visualize this notion of interrelatedness through the folksong quoted below:

*Baba ke bagiya me phool ek phoolal,*

*Fulaba fulaile gulab hey*

*Tahi-tar khar bhel var ek sundar,*

*Phoolba dekhiye muskaye ho (qtd. in Kumari 45).*

...

(In the garden of one father, a flower has bloomed

A rose flower has bloomed

Beneath it, is standing a handsome groom

On seeing him, the rose smiled)

The Angika folksong endows the rose flower with human like qualities. In this folksong, the singer gives rose flower, the symbol of to-be-bride whose groom is standing near it. This bringing in of pathetic fallacy in the lyrics throws light on the manner the rural people celebrated their physical environment by becoming a part of it. Neil Evernden says, “There is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in-context, individual as a component of place, defined by place (Evernden 103). The rich variety of Angika folksongs includes the description of diversified flora and fauna of the state. The close contact of human beings and the environment is revealed through these folksongs that compare of people with the biodiversity surrounding them.

The natives offer different kinds of flowers to various deities—specific flowers to specific deity. As many are the ceremonies, as much is the demand of the worshippers to get the desired flower. Devotees offer Datura, Bel fruit and hemp to lord Shiva; grass is offered to lord Ganesha; and flowers are an essential part of every devotion in India. Such offerings ensured the future protection of various plants. The next folksong recorded by me exhibits this longing to get access to the organic elements, in a beautiful manner:

*Koune van upjal nariyar, koune van kesar hey*

*Koune van chualey gulab, chunariya hum rangayeb hain*

*Baba van upjal nariyar, bhaiya vane kesar hey*

*Lalna re, piya van chualey gulab, chumariya hum rangayeb hain*

(In which forest has coconut grown? In which forest has saffron grown?  
 In which forest has rose fallen? I want to colour my head cloth.  
 My father's field has got a coconut, my brother's place has got saffron  
 O dear, my husband's place has a fallen rose, I will colour my head  
 cloth.)

In these songs, the physical environment acts as a mirror of enhanced human relationships. Different kinds of flora, determines the essence of the bond of the girl with her paternal and marital relationship. This describes how the natural environment relates to the state of mind of the person who resides on its lap. In yet similar manner, another song runs as follows:

*Kahanmaye upjal jhalri guaba hey*

*Ahe devi! Kahanmaye datariyo pan*

*Mahamaya devi badi yashomanti hey*

*Kurkhet upjal jhalri guaba hey*

*Ahe devi! Magaha hi datariyo pan, mahamaya debi ( qtd. in Kumari15).*

...

Where do they grow betel nuts?

O goddess! Where are the betel leaves with stem?

Goddess of miracle, you are very prosperous.

In Kurukshetra are the betel nuts grown.

O goddess! Betel leaves with stem are in Magaha.

Nature is full of enigma. Such enigma that its worshipper seeks to unravel it, and yet he or she only seeks and never achieves a full understanding. This seeking after nature is not only done when a person wishes to understand a phenomenon but also when he



or she pines for its elements such as a flower. The folksong quoted above is like one of the songs of garhwal.

*Kis jagah pe hoga raaimaasi ka phool*

*Himachhadit parvaton par khilta hai raaimasi ka phool.*

*Charagahon mein khilta hai raaimasi ka phool.*

*Parvaton shikharon our nadi taton par khilta hai raaimasi ka phool*

*Devtaon ko shobhta hai raaimasi ka phool (Chatak 23).*

...

(Where are the orchid cactus flowers?

They bloom on snow-covered mountains

They bloom on grazing fields

They are seen on mountains, peaks and the bank of river

Deities love these flowers. )

It is here that the thematic elements of the two different regions—one of plain and another mountainous meet. Each singer wants to get those flowers without which their devotion would remain incomplete. Although, this seeking after flower seems to commodify the biodiversity. This brings our attention towards the placing of the flower on a higher and pious pedestal, but through the process of commodification. Another song sung in thread ceremony is as follows:

*Eke chiraiya nadi nagar, birichhi birichhi bulalai hai*

*Sab birachhi dekhai sukhal, eko nahi hariyar ho*

*Ekahi hariyar babaji ke angana, jahan marba shobhai hai*

...

A bird flew over river and town; she also went from one tree to another

Every tree was dry, not one was green

Only one was green in a father's house, where a hut of grass was present.

Although, the inclusion of nature is there, but this incorporation is through appropriation of the essence of nature. The tree is green only in the house of the person who is celebrating the thread ceremony of his son. *Marba*, as already mentioned, is made up of bamboo flowers and grass make a hut like structure. This hut like structure plays a pivotal role in marriage and thread ceremonies. The priest does holy chanting by sitting inside this hut like structure. This significant role of organic things in the celebrations prove that an interlinking between human beings and nature was present earlier. In contemporary times, the plastic leaves and flowers have replaced these organic components.

Eco sensibility and homocentrism are inter related. Human beings tend to protect nature only when they feel some disruption in their life process. In the past they prayed to nature so that they remain protected from any natural upheaval. That life of human beings ran parallel with nature becomes very clear, when we read these folksongs. The ceremonies remained incomplete without the bringing in of certain kinds of plants. The devotees believed that their devotion would not be pure until they bring in certain shrub or flower. This was an eco-friendly act due to two reasons. Firstly, because, human beings were not sufficient or capable enough to worship alone, the act of searching for a particular flower or fruit placed the components of nature on a higher level. Secondly, since the devotion would remain incomplete without certain plants, people had to stop them from becoming extinct. In other words, if the plant or tree remains growing this year, then only it would be accessible next year. The rituals,

ceremonies and festivals of not only Bihar but also many other states included this kind of environment loving acts. This leads us to think that not all of the rules laid by our ancestors resulted in the destruction of environment. In fact, the manner in which they treated their surroundings was a two way process. It helped them to nourish along with nature. For instance, although shifting cultivation was useful for people because it gave them food, the natural rejuvenation of the fertility of soil resulted in the natural recovery of the biodiversity surrounding the land. These folksongs recall such bio centric approach, sometimes with their themes and other times with the call of longing to get the lacking flower, plant or a rare fruit. Since there is no written detailed account of biodiversity before publication of Flora of British India and Fauna of British India, it can be concluded that even a scientist working on biodiversity, species inventory, evolutionary history and flora and fauna- should explore biodiversity accounted in the folksongs.

### **Raising Awareness about the Physical Environment through Folklore.**

The Internet had a crucial influence in disseminating folklore worldwide (Trevor 2009). Now, individuals from one geographical area can enjoy the traditional knowledge that was formerly exclusive to a different part of the globe. The folklore of Bihar has a profound understanding of environmental protection. If this tradition were disseminated online and reached the current population, it may serve as a potent instrument for preserving the natural environment.

By conducting interviews, the scholar examined the inhabitants of Bihar who possessed knowledge of traditional beliefs and found that they diligently preserved the

environment. They safeguarded sacred natural habitats, cultivated non-edible plants that contributed to the overall ecological balance, and deterred the hunting of endangered species like Gangetic Dolphins. Increasing awareness among a less informed segment of the public about these traditional customs might contribute to progress towards a more sustainable future. The word "folk tools" refers to ideas, practices, and activities that are aimed at improving our knowledge of the well-being of the land. Here is the beautiful example of sensitizing children about the physical environment and folk tools. The song has been recorded during the course of the research:

*Dekho kehno sammaya ailey*

*Bachha bhulaila gulli danda*

*Ab khelaiya PUBG ho*

*Kheto kee baigan jhinga bhulaile*

*Abe keeje sabji ho*

*Bado hoy eke bacha bangala*

*Aary baalkani banawai chhai*

*Gharo ke angana gaaonn re chabuttra*

*Aabe ke apnaavao chhe*

Children have forgotten the play of marble and stick

Now they play PUBG

They have ceased to recognize farm's brinjal and gourd

They do not know any vegetable

On growing they get Bungalow built

And balcony attached

The courtyard of house and the traditional sitting place of village

Now is accepted by whom?

Using these traditional beliefs and behaviours as instruments to protect the natural environment will be a pragmatic measure towards attaining sustainable development objectives. Reaffirming previous ideas on traditional customs and raising awareness among the current generation about adapted versions of these customs might serve as a powerful method for preserving the environment. Another essential strategy might be raising the residents' consciousness of their physical environment and integrating their compassion for nature via traditional stories and beliefs. Furthermore, it is essential to promote and support scholars in conducting scientific investigations on folklore, since it has the potential to provide numerous discoveries and insights.

### **Diversity: Cultural vs Biological**

The biodiversity stays unchanged, but the perception of it varies. One culture in Bihar reflects many environmental sensitivities. Virtually every ceremony in the Anga area engages with and examines biodiversity. Indeed, the presence of flora and wildlife is essential for the fulfilment of human existence in a given area. As per Article -2 of the

Convention on Biological Diversity 1992, biological diversity refers to the range of variation among living organisms from various sources, such as terrestrial, marine, and other aquatic ecosystems, along with the ecological complexes they form. This encompasses diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems. The ecological complexities and species variety directly correspond to the cultural diversity within human culture. There is a strong correlation between biological variety and cultural diversity. The inhabitants of the region are endeavouring to comprehend and investigate diverse natural phenomena, while also seeking methods to conserve the valuable biodiversity. Plants and trees hold immense significance in the lives of the indigenous people, not only for economic purposes, but also due to their profound social and cultural importance in preserving ancient traditions. The Anga tribe of the Mundas region utilises a total of 71 distinct wild plants for culinary purposes. Among these, 26 plants are valued for their tubers, corns, and roots which are cooked and consumed as vegetables. Additionally, 15 trees and shrubs are recognised for their young leaves, which are also cooked and used as potherbs. Furthermore, there are 10 other plants whose young leaves are consumed raw, and finally, 25 wild trees and plants are known for their edible leaves (Hoffmann, 1950: 179). The knowledge, ideas, and customs of indigenous peoples are a result of the Darwinian process of natural selection, which has developed through long-standing contests and the exploration of indigenous flora and animals for survival. indigenous biodiversity has had a significant role in the ethical and religious ideals of Angika social systems. The older generation values the diverse experience of traditional healers, including their knowledge of ancestral traditions and practical understanding of the usefulness and advantages of certain natural resources. Unfortunately, this valuable information is not being

transmitted to newer generations. The younger generation in this region is migrating outside the region to pursue education and improve their quality of life. Consequently, they are distancing themselves from embracing and acquiring the traditional healing practices and wisdom of their elders, resulting in the gradual disappearance of traditional knowledge among the older generation.

### **Conclusion**

The present chapter highlights the prevailing folklore and its environmental values of an age old culturally distinct group with earlier account in early iron age, called Angika speaking people residing in one of the 16 *Mahajan padas* (great nation) in Buddhist literature (Aali 2015; Ramesh 2023). Religious rituals, folk songs their maxims all have personified celestial bodies, landscapes, flora and fauna, which contribute to environmental sustainability. Safeguarding the environment is a substantial undertaking in the present day and entails developing strategies and instruments. Angika folklore encompasses several components that have the potential to cultivate environmental consciousness across society. Urbanisation and increased mechanisation have led to the depletion of both traditional cultural practices and the environment. In earlier times, individuals saw folksongs as both a means of preserving cultural traditions and a valuable resource that served as a bridge linking ordinary people to their immediate surroundings. Nevertheless, in the present era, these notions around folklore have ceased to exist. These voices are necessary for our society to affirm our historical connection to nature and the environment. The songs of Chhatha and Bihula Bishahri in Angika region in Bihar are replete with praise and adoration for the sun and snake goddess.

The urbanisation process resulted in the diminishing of men as a unified entity. Owing to inactive lives, there was a significant decrease in social interaction. In contrast to previous years, people began rapidly forgetting these tunes. This occurred due to either the disconnection of individuals from their cultural origins or their apathy towards the heritage of traditional melodies. Folksongs served as a unifying force among people. However, the folk compositions that formerly contributed to the formation of a cohesive community eventually declined. Individuals who desired to get pleasure from these traditional tunes were compelled to rely on the internet or began to experience social isolation. Put simply, the demise of folksongs may be attributed to the destruction of the natural environment. By demise, the article means the death of the true nature of folksongs—that of linguistic specificity, collectiveness, and joy. Folksongs transmuted and metamorphosed as the natural environment diminished. In the present era of commercialization and individuality, it is necessary to save traditional folk music and their association with nature. The transmutation of Angika folksongs, in parallel with the decline of nature, signifies the potential extinction of humanity. The research revealed that individuals who possessed knowledge of folklore and traditional customs exhibited a more comprehensive comprehension of their surrounding environment. Incorporating traditional features and ideas can serve as an optimal means of cultivating societal and environmental awareness. Indeed, cultural aspects will play a pivotal role for the overall 2030 UN sustainable development Agenda to be successful (UCLG, 2010: 2015), including in areas (such as Anga region) where connections may only be implicit. Various rituals and cultural practices, prevailing in the region over the years has amply demonstrated, cultural aspects, including active participation in cultural life, the development of



individual and collective cultural liberties. Thus, safeguarding of tangible and intangible cultural heritages are core components of human and sustainable development.

## Chapter 4

### **Proverbs and Beliefs: A Semantic Analysis of Folk- Life around River Ganga**

Proverbs act as a necessary element in the generation of meaning in any language. Embodying multi-varied definitions, proverbs have an essential role to play in adding to the emotional output of any utterance. Researchers have asserted the usage of folklore in psychological testing of common people. Scholars like Wolfgang Mieder, Frank de Caro and W.K. Neil have related the use of proverbs in testing the IQ of people (Mieder, 1978; Caro & Neil, 1970). Gibbs and Beitel maintain:

Most psychologists assume that understanding the figurative meanings of proverbs requires various kinds of higher order cognitive abilities. The authors review the findings on proverb interpretation to examine the question of what proverb use and understanding reveals about the ways normal and dysfunctional individuals think (Gibb & Beitel 133).

In a similar note, Rogers talks about the dire need for a contextual study of proverbs. He also mentions Jean Piaget, linking proverbs with developmental psychology:

Jean Piaget, who formulated a highly influential theory of the manner in which the intellect of children develops, used proverbs to demonstrate aspects of his history. He found that his 9- to 11-year-olds "did not understand the proverbs in the least; but they thought they understood them, and asked for no supplementary explanations of their literal or hidden meaning." This confirmed

Piaget's theory in that the kind of metaphoric reasoning underlying proverbs was associated with later-arriving stages of development, yet, even though they couldn't explain the proverbs, the children were able to match paraphrased sentences to proverbs (Rogers, 98).

Pondering on therapeutic communities and cognitive model of proverb instantiation as two more models of interpretation, he calls for the necessity to study folklore through a scientific approach (Rogers, 100-101). Therefore, proverbs were now not only limited to the field of Humanities, but had spread their reach to other spheres also.

Various researchers, critics, writers and eminent academicians have defined proverbs with their own perspectives. Cervantes states in *Don Quixote* that “proverbs are short maxims drawn from the experience and observation of our wise men of old (Cervantes).” Proverbs may not improperly be called the Philosophy of the Common People, or, according to Aristotle, the truest Reliques of old Philosophy (Howell, *Lexicon, Proverbs*, 1659)

Mieder, after analysing 55 definitions, states “A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form, and which is handed down from generation to generation (Mieder, 1993, 24)”.

Common proverbs have a significant role to play in any society. The commonality of the essential traces of proverbs in almost all languages proves that these are linked with at least one characteristic—that of human wisdom. Proverbs, in this manner, help in recalling a myth that could add to finding outcomes to the present problems. It is a common remark in Bihar, that one’s deeds and choice of the present lead to his or her future circumstances. In order to get a better understanding of one’s

choices leading to future conditions, that might be favourable or unfavourable for the choice maker, folks of Bihar refer proverbs. The proverbs of Bihar are an amalgamation of the wisdom that the past generations carried and handed down as a lineage to the future generations. These proverbs act as proof, supplement, and a problem-solver for the folk believers. There has not been enough research on the relation of these proverbs with the environment. As already discussed, human beings and their physical environment share an innate and unavoidable relationship that has many phases; proverbs could prove to be an essential tool for studying these relations. There exists a plethora of proverbs in Bihar that are highly influenced by the ecosystem.

The present chapter intends to present a semantic analysis of Bihari Proverbs and folk beliefs in order to comprehend them in an in-depth manner. For this, it utilizes interpretation, analysis, and discussion as the tools of research. Interviews were conducted regarding why proverbs were important in daily speech. Proverbs act as condiments to any language. Without it, any language may seem incomplete. Sometimes proverbs tend to fill a void in any discussion, that might be present otherwise. One of the Bihari proverbs runs as follows:

*Saonak pacchava din dui chari,*

*chulhi ki pake upaji sari*

(Even when the west wind blows only for two or three days in the month of rainy season, the backside of the mud hearth will grow rice.)

The blowing of the west wind in *saavan* (the month of rainy season) acts as a catalyst for the growth of rice plants. This proverb connotes the intensity of proximity of the natives to the ecosystem in which they lived. That they were able to understand the

working of their natural surroundings in a manner well-woven, is a fact rather than a myth. Through such proverbs, several crucial pieces of information get transferred from past generations to future ones. The proverb quoted above hints at the capacity of the previous generations in understanding the relationship between the happenings of the environment with the future outcomes related to the climate of their surroundings. By studying the logic behind these proverbs and folk beliefs, future researchers would be able to recognize the deeper layers of the ecosystem, as reflected through these texts. This would further help them in protecting the environment and utilizing the available resources in a planned and sustainable manner leading to negligible depletion. The research says negligible depletion, as the natural resources (excluding minerals and fossil fuels) would be generated in a manner so as not to disturb its existence. Another proverb is as follows:

*purava ropey poor kisaan, adha khakhri aadha dhan*

(If a farmer does not sow before the month of the east wind, half of his crops will be paddy and half chaff.)

These kinds of proverbs are significant in tracing the impact of climate on crops. Such proverbs are abundant in knowledge related to the plantation as mostly farming was the only source of income for these natives of Bihar. Since their livelihood depended prominently on farming which depended on the ups and downs of nature, the natives of Bihar closely observed the climate for the well-being of their crops. Proverbs acted as oral text to impart such knowledge. There is a dearth of studies on these kinds of relational complexity between proverbs and nature. These kinds of studies would not only help in building a clearer perspective towards the ecosystem but also add to the

assertion of the native's identities, leading to better moral development. A proverb related to the rainbow goes on like this:

*Oogat ooge mahi bhare visvat ooge jay*

If a rainbow appears before the rain, then it will pour heavily, and if it is after the rain then the rainy season will end thereafter.

Only a close observer of nature will be able to compare the two natural ongoings, that of the rainbow and the quantity of rain in an accurate manner. These beliefs and proverbs could act as a foundation for future significant research. However, there is a dire requirement of testing these cultural lineages in order to get an enhanced perspective on their contemporary relevance.

Honeck puts forth "Proverbs do have some truth value in that they are based on ideals, norms, and standards, but these premises are assumed to be true. They are not being tested as such (Honeck 10)." Srivastava studies natural disasters by linking them with proverbs, and maintains:

Prediction of a multi-dimensional hazard like drought is very important for coping mechanism. Folklores from Rajasthan, where drought is very frequent, include the prediction based on weather, animal behaviour, vegetation, colour of clouds. These predictions support the early warnings issued by the elders to enable the community to cope with the anticipated natural hazard (qtd. in Srivastav, 228).

Many of the proverbs and sayings have been influenced by natural happenings. Srivastava quotes a proverb:

*Kheti karlaiyyek la, bail bikaile biye la.*

(I took to husbandry to gain a livelihood, but the bullocks were sold for seed!)

(qtd. In Srivastava 230)

Proverbs were impacted by the natural conditions such as drought, famine and flood. These perspectives were influenced by the struggle for survival; the inhabitants needed to devise ways to have a normal life at the time of unpredictability.

### **Folk Beliefs of Fisher Community and the Ecosystem**

The present chapter deals with the research that was done on the regions surrounding river Ganga, and on Angika speaking folks.. Currently, fisher populations struggle with post-pandemic effects and extreme events due to climate change. The Covid-19 lockdown severely affected the Ganga river- dependent- fisherfolk and they are living a nightmare even post-pandemic. The horrifying “pandemic-debt –trap” have risked the community, contributing to the unsustainable of the large fraction of low-income fishers. In this scenario, it has become very relevant to conserve knowledge heritage and skills they learnt/inherited from age-old legacy. Based on a discussion with fishers working in the river and fisher villages on the Ganga River bank this part succinctly elaborates state of the art economic, educational and knowledge heritage of the fisher community and their vulnerability, along with recommendations.

The significance of fisheries is seen worldwide for its direct and indirect benefits to the humankind. With the increasing world population and depleting land-based agriculture, a great need to succumb to other alternatives emerges (The Food and Agriculture Organization and World Fish Center, 2008). In this case, seafood and freshwater fishes are the best alternatives due to their nutritional benefits and satiety. The global economy will be shattered if aquatic resources do not feed the growing

human population (FAO. 2010a). Available land-based agriculture is not enough to feed the current human population. Furthermore, expanding human population has resulted in the fragmentation and shrinkage of agricultural land. The ceaseless population demands alternative food sources, and the only decent choice is aquatic resources. Aquatic resources have the potential to provide livelihood and food to billions of people globally (Kumar, 2015, 1).

Harvesting aquatic resources and prospecting various applications of aquatic resources and fishing have been an age-old practice in India. Fishing and other water-dependent economy have been prevalent since Vedic and Harappan civilization in Indian history. Net and bow-arrow fishing had become common practices since the Harappan civilization and are mentioned in *Matsyapurana*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and *Buddhist scriptures* (Hora 41; Do 145). A group of Indian population known by names such as *Kevat*, *Mallah*, *Nishad*, *Chakma*, *Machhuara*, *Jaldas* etc. are involved in management, harvesting and other economic activities related to water bodies, including fishing and boating. The community hereafter called the fisher Community is skilled in optimally harvesting aquatic resources. Fish-production includes a rigorous routine on the part of the fishing community. Fishing is essentially the forte of men while women are engaged in cleaning the fish and helping in packaging them for the market (Jeyaseelan 3019). Fisher community plays an immense role in providing respite to land-based agriculture from agricultural pressure. Therefore, they are significant in linking the world economy and the human population. In this manner, the fishing community plays a vital role in sustaining human lives by providing food (FAO 2010b).



However, fisher communities are marginalized, institutionally unorganized, educationally lagging and socio-economically insecure. Since age-old, they have been conserving and imparting their lineage valuable skills, knowledge heritage and folk practices. With increasing pollution, depleting fisheries, and a lack of an institutional program to preserve their traditionally cumulative skills in the contemporary age, traditional fishing has been gradually eroding, and their experiential folk heritage has been diminishing rapidly (Tripathi et al. 907). Existing vulnerabilities of fisher folk related to global structural, social, and economic inequality exacerbated the health, economic, and other impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 lockdown and spotting of unexpected human corpses bodies in the eastern UP and Bihar stretch of the river Ganga adversely affected the employment, income, and food of small-scale inland and coastal fishers, which are now more vulnerable to high levels of risk and uncertainty (Das et al. 8454) as their job requires human contact. During post COVID period it has become further essential to understand and apply the unique perceptions of the folks when undertaking conservation and environmental initiatives. Documentation of their folk beliefs, traditional and experiential skills and knowledge heritage is essential to preserve valuable natural resources. The major perceptions of fisherfolk about contemporary issues discussed with them are summarized in table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: Suggestions given by the fishers are provided as recommendation/ restoration measures<sup>7</sup>**

Sr. No	Subject	Compiled statements as perceived by the fishermen *
1	Health of the Ganga River	The river has changed its course. The river engulfed many villages of landlords because they changed water logging regions into agricultural land or constructed houses, too many motorised vessels used by affluent people. 20 years ago, there were no Industrial effluents and sewage, which are now discharged into the river.
2	Dolphin protection	Fishermen in the lower stretch expressed their serious concern about Dolphin depletion. Dolphin is the vehicle of the River Ganga. The river shifts course because of dolphin depletion. Throughout the stretch, fisher folk expressed their appreciation for dolphin oil as a medicine. They said very effective medicine for pain due to arthritis. According to the Dam construction, pillars of the bridge and motorboat noise deter dolphins rather than pollution.
3	Fish biodiversity and exotic fishes	Admitted that indigenous and small local fishes were declining due to over-fishing (as a means of livelihood) and the greed of waterlords. But new fishes like common

<sup>7</sup> continued on page no 135

		carp, and African mangur have emerged as good yields. Lack of knowledge of adverse effects of exotic fishes.
<b>4</b>	Water pollution	Had little consciousness about water pollution and the quality of fish. Local landlords are using lots of pesticides and other chemicals to extract more and more from agricultural fields. These chemicals are leaching in the river water and affecting river fauna.

Decimating fishery occupation during Covid-19 lockdown Ganga river- dependent- fisher community are marginalized and living a nightmare. Financial assistance provided by civil societies and governments is not enough to meet their minimum daily requirements for food and medicines. Financing in terms of the loan and other non-grant instruments have risked the community contributing to the unsustainable of the large fraction of low-income fishers. The fact that unattended corpses in the Ganga River during Covid pandemic rendered them a horrifying “pandemic-debt- trap,” which is increasingly worsening the economical/livelihood harms contributed by covid-19 (Sumner et al.). In this scenario, it has become very relevant to conserve knowledge heritage and skills they learnt/inherited from age-old legacy.

The issues of river resource management in India are not easily resolved by science because of users’ attitudes and religious values. Ignorance of fishers has led to failure in resource management. The fishing community should be made aware of the impact of the loss of vulnerable fish species. Livestock and poultry production affect climate and cause water exploitation. By replacing livestock production with fishing and culturing monogastric livestock, fishers can add to better and faster achievement of

sustainable development goals along with the protection of the environment. In addition, the fishing community should be made aware of the impact of the killing of vulnerable fish. Undoubtedly, by including the community in the management of aquatic resources in a manner that leads to sustainable development, many essential milestones can be achieved (Lynch et al 579).

Catching fish in downstream rivers does not require motor boats; traditional small boats can accomplish the task of fishing very easily. However, in present times only elderly fishermen can successfully complete this task as the young fishermen are highly dependent on motor boats and technology for fishing; hence traditional techniques are unknown to them. Using traditional boats for catching fishes downstream could reduce vessel noise caused by motors thus least impacting the riverine ecosystem. Similarly, the fisherfolk residing around the lower stretch of the river Ganga has created a modified net, *Kunchehich Jal* which is eco-friendly and “sustains rich fish diversity” (Bose et al 87). The fishermen are the craftsman of their own nets and gears, having immense traditional knowledge heritage of water bodies, aquatic biodiversity, breeding biology, ecology, spatial-temporal distribution patterns and related ecological knowledge about water bodies (White, et al. 232). A few communities are also skilled in making eco-friendly houses to live in. Consisting of Bamboo and mud, the form of houses prepared by them is a unique art form that is highly appreciated (Appendix VI). These houses are well-ventilated and are ideal for storage of harvest. Resources suffer the ill fate of being used by all and cared for by none. The fishing community should be instructed about the positive side of integrated farming. As depicted in appendix VII, the fishermen can significantly contribute to achieving the eight goals of sustainable development goals -2030 directly and other

nine indirectly. Fishing community should be sensitized about the positive side of integrated farming.

### **Western Perspective on the Hardship of Fishers**

Ernest Hemingway in his novella “The Old Man and the Sea” elaborates upon the poor condition of the fishermen. The protagonist here is Santiago, an old man who, all alone on the ship, consistently tries to catch a Marlin by staying for eighty-four days in the sea. It is through perseverance that the old man could catch a big Marlin. However, the fish is eaten by the Sharks, and the old man returns to the port half-dead and with the carcass of the Marlin (Hemingway 1995). The novella was written in 1952, but the condition of the fishermen remains the same even in the contemporary era.

### **Present Vision**

The fishing community has been continuously subjugated for ages. In most cases, they are devoid of any ownership of the water bodies on which their livelihood depends. By compromising with their lives, they keep on sustaining their families while they stick to their traditional job of fishing. This sect of society suffers from social discrimination, political suppression, and economic deprivation (Palivela et al., 2011). Several cases show the harassment of the fisherfolks by government officials and the extortion of money and fish by criminals. Naresh, a fisherman says “You might not believe in rebirth, but we do. I would want to be a river dolphin in my next life — there are more people who care for it (Kelkar 2017).” Apart from this, they are prone to get robbed in the sea and rivers while on the boat. Being the victims of piracy is common for them.

According to a study, the fishers in Sundarbans of India, the largest mangrove in the world, fisherfolks are constantly attacked and sometimes killed by tigers. Sometimes, the fishing communities are the victims of untouchability. It is a lamentable fact that in India, the higher castes eat fish caught by the fishermen, but cannot “touch” these people from the fear of becoming “unholy”.

### **Fishermen in Myths and Legends of India**

Fish is considered auspicious in many states of India including Bihar and West Bengal. One of the most ancient texts “Matsyapurana” describes the glory of lord Vishnu who is the savior of humankind. The great saint Valmiki is said to be inspired by a “Nishad” who killed a male bird and disturbed the couple. The fifteenth sloka of “Balakand” of *Ramayana* begins with an instruction to the hunters, telling them not to disturb any living creature while they meet.

*Maa Nishada Pratistham Tvamagamahsāsvati Samaa*

*Yat Kraunchamithunaadekam Avadhi Kaamamohitam* (Valmiki 11)

...

O hunter, one should not disturb any living species

including human beings

while they mate, as this results in greatest sin.

This instance is relatable to those fishermen who kill fish in the time of their spawning. By switching over to other agricultural mediums in these times, the fishermen can help in the creation of a balance between aquatic ecosystems, leading to harmonious sustainable development by creating fish conservation techniques. In the epic “*Ramayana*,” fishermen play an essential role in leading lord Rama to the forest, which

further leads to the destruction of evil. Kalidasa's "*Abhigyanshakuntalam*" gives a small but essential role to the fisherman who has got the ring of Shakuntala, which was gifted to her by king Dushyant. It is this ring that reminds Dushyant of her, leading to their reunion. Ved Vyas, the great sage of ancient India was the son of Satyawati, a fisherwoman. The superior intellect of Ved Vyas helped him in becoming the great guru of India. Kevat, another synonym for the fisherman in India, is believed to be the descendent of the boatman who helped lord Rama, Lakshman and Goddess Sita to cross the river Ganga. The boatman on being asked to accept the ring of goddess Sita in return for his favour, is depicted in the verse 101 of *Ramcharitmanas* as follows:

*krpisiṃdhu bole musukai. soi karu jemhi tava nava na jai.*

*vegi anu jala paya pakhary. hota bilambu utarahi paru..*

*jasu nama sumarata eka bara. utarahiṃ nara bhavasimḍhu apara.*

*soi krpalu kevaṭahi nihora.. jehim jagu kiya tihu pagahu te thora* (Tulsidas 276-277).

...

The all-merciful God smilingly said: "take us to the other side of the river, we are getting late

Do what may prevent the loss of the boat."

The same god said so who takes human beings from their mundane life

To cross across the boundless ocean of existence.

In this manner the Nishad was blessed by lord Rama, and the lineage follows.

In this manner, the Nishad was blessed by lord Rama, and the lineage follows.

Fishing practices are one of the most ancient practices in India. The method of catching fish by using baited hook and angles is witnessed from the excavations of the Indus valley civilization from the 3rd millennium BC (Hora, Angling in ancient India No. X-XI).

Due to the long-standing involvement of these communities in this occupation, there may be cultural traits that contribute to their success in it. However, these traits might also hinder their ability to switch to other occupations smoothly. Recent resurgence of consumer's preference for ready-to-eat products warrants capacity building in fisherwomen with latest technologies, skill of fortification of edible materials and reprocessing of food wastes for useful products (i.e. organic manure, biofuels, raw materials for aquaculture etc.) thus enhancing the framework circular economy. Women can also play critical role in exploring alternative resources for the family. This is essentially required in recent days when the traditional agrarian society used to recycle their food wastes to feed their livestock and for agricultural field after composting. The volume of food in India has been increasing due to factors like urbanization, rural-urban migration, and livestock farming distances. The volume of food waste has reached a point where it endangers the health of ecosystems, humans, and livestock. This leads to eutrophication and the proliferation of pathogens and disease vectors. By leveraging the age-old traditional knowledge and skills of fisherwomen, we can recycle and repackage food waste, extracting valuable goods and addressing the global crisis of food waste.

Prospecting of such large amount wastes for beneficial applications are useful measures to decrease the amount of waste and carbon foot prints of aquaculture



products. The reuse of waste resources reduces the cost of fabrication and the vulnerability to the hazardous chemicals and promotes circularity and green synthesis. Therefore, promoting entrepreneurship among fisherwomen will help in achieving 1,2, 5, 10,12 and 14<sup>th</sup> SDGs (Appendix VII).

#### Shifting Aspirations of Fisher Community Youth

Due to globalization and urban migration, young members of fishing communities are increasingly moving away from their traditional occupations. The difference in the percentage of young fishers compared to those in industrial/service sectors makes this clear. The transition is made possible by education. These young people have legitimate reasons to leave the fishing industry, and obtaining a general education helped make this transition possible. Furthermore, the transition is also regarded as an element of social and economic (upward) mobility. The commercialization and capitalization of their production processes, and the commensurate decline in the use of labour encouraged the younger generations to acquire education and take up industrial or service sector jobs in the formal and informal sectors. Unlike farming or artisanal trades, the fishery sector as a traditional occupation has distinct fundamental differences. In recent days, the fishery industry has seen increased capital investment and a shift towards mechanization and large-scale operations, but this transformation is either slow or faces challenges. The surge in fishing capacity and resulting overfishing made large-scale fishing financially unsustainable, leading to a transition back to smaller-scale operations. Therefore, the labor-intensive, small-scale fishery persists. Young people are moving away from fishery due to the decreasing rewards. Over time, the relative prices of these products may decrease due to lower income

challenges and unpredictable outputs. Put simply, the fishery sector has lower returns compared to the industrial and service sectors. Non-viability becomes a greater concern for larger or highly mechanized vessels, as they experience reduced catch. This emphasizes the challenges related to the education and skill development of fishers and their children. In the past, fishing communities were marginalized and did not have access to the education benefits enjoyed by the elites. Poverty and various vulnerabilities have posed challenges to the education of children in fishing communities. While India made efforts to provide education to all, the fishing population still struggles to take advantage of these opportunities. There is a perception, and rightly so, that if boys do not acquire the capacity to participate in the fishery at an early age, they would never be able to do so. These boys begin helping their parents at a young age. Their attendance at school is naturally affected by this. Some important skills required in small-scale fishery, like navigating the boat in rough weather, unpredictable nature of hardship in water, hoisting sails, casting the net and working with smaller nets, are best imbibed by a process of 'learning by doing' under the tutorship of the older fishermen.

The global unemployment rate increased by 1.1 percentage points due to COVID-19, resulting in massive job losses and intensified hardships. The worldwide number of unemployed individuals grew by 33 million, reaching 220 million. The labour market saw an additional 81 million people exit completely. The Fisher community's young people have been significantly affected, experiencing substantial job losses in 2020. They are left to deal with the consequences alone due to the absence of a social safety net. About 1.6 billion informal economy workers, representing three quarters, were

greatly impacted by lockdown measures and/or worked in the hardest-hit sectors. Fishermen in particular are at a great risk of becoming victims of loan sharks. In the current situation, they are encountering greater difficulties in restoring their means of living.

Many families resort to child labor due to economic backwardness and lack of social security. These obstacles further hinder the education of children from fishing communities. The actual situation can be determined by practical needs and reality. In some cases, child labour may be employed regardless of existing legal prohibitions. Parents utilizing children's work in family occupations or household work in India are not subject to the child-labor prohibition act. The risk of exploitation, such as trafficking and child labor, for children has increased due to pandemic-related school closures, economic distress, and family debt. The risk of trafficking is likely to increase due to the sharp rise in adult unemployment rates and an uneven global recovery from COVID-19. Consequently, the post-lockdown effects of COVID-19 may force young people and children from fishing communities to abandon school and engage in child labor by the end of 2022, due to families sending them to work in order to compensate for job and income losses. Legal or constitutional provisions for mandatory schooling, such as the Right to Education in India, can be challenging to enforce effectively. While these measures may improve school enrollment, they do not guarantee attendance or learning outcomes. Investing in job creation for adults and young people could help protect fisher community children from exploitation. Expanding income support and social protection coverage urgently could counterbalance this increase. The lack of educational achievements and specific fishery skills create a stagnant

profession. The potential slowdown in mobility from fishery work stems from the growing demand for fish. In the nontraditional fisher community, there are indications of stickiness, despite the entry of new workers and the departure of some from traditional fisher families.

### **The Impact of Climate Change and Loss of Folk-Knowledge on Fisher Community**

Although the economy has been affected by Covid-19, the climate crisis remains largely unchanged. In 2020, greenhouse gas concentrations surged to unprecedented levels. In 2020, the global average temperature was about 1.2°C above the 1850–1900 baseline, making it one of the three warmest years on record. The world is far from meeting the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C and achieving net-zero CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2050. Humanity's vulnerabilities have been exposed by the global pandemic. The world has witnessed the destructive power of a crisis that is minuscule compared to a full-scale climate emergency. Let's pay attention to these wake-up calls and take the chance to reconstruct in a manner that decreases emissions and enhances resilience to climate change. The Fisher community is also affected by climate change, which reduces fishing days and stock due to erratic monsoon patterns and other disruptions. The increasing availability of nonedible exotic fish species is impacting the economic stability of fisher communities, as it comes at the cost of native preferred species.

Until recently fisherfolk (*Gangotas* and *Mallahas* caste people) of Ganga *Diara* had every reason to rejoice the arrival of the monsoon in the region. Fishing and

fishing related activities during May to September are used to provide financial for whole year. With fishing hauls, boat launches, and various rituals and celebrations like Nagpanchami, Vishahari Pooja, Vishwakarma pooja, the monsoon season from June to September provides economic stability. However, over the last few years, climate change driven shifts in the monsoon arrival, land erosion, decline fish catch has disrupted the rhythm of their lives. Long gone are the days of big catches and the subsequent rise in seasonal income for the small-scale fishers. As narrated by Ram Dhani 68-year-old fisherman, native of Gopalpur *Diara* (locally called *Deera*) near Kahalagaon, Bhagalpur “our age-old custom of planning and celebrating village level/ clan level festivals during the rainy season are being affected as this season no longer offers us a stable income for the past few years. Lately, the monsoon is quite erratic in its patterns resulting in a reduction in the number of fishing days, and thus becoming the worst-hit season of the year,” says 72-year-old Pyare Mukhiya, a traditional fisherman from Khorumpur village of Begusarai district. In addition, the unavailability of commercially important fishes and recent surge of exotic nonedible fishes also adds to their woes. “These days we return with empty boats. Going out fishing only adds to our debts,” says Khapru Mukhiya, another fisherman from the region. According to Dr Mukul Singh who works on climate-related aspects in fisheries and aquaculture in Gangetic regions, weather shocks and associated developments in the waters influence the distribution pattern, life cycle, behavioural changes, migration pattern and reproduction of the fish stocks. According to Mahinder Singh, a land owner and waterlord residing at Madhurapur Diara “the river Ganga is encroaching into their land and house each year. “This year the river erosion is severe and devoured their three-acre leftover land, he says. Livelihood issues apart, such incidents are posing threat to

their life and river bank assets, putting their lives at peril. These observations convincingly attest “the impacts of climate change are recognized as likely to challenge the sustained provision of fish for human consumption (IPCC) and with it the livelihoods of fishers. While the impact of climate change will vary based on, among others, the geographical mobility of fishing fleets and the diversity of species targeted (Allison 173; Pinsky and Mantua 146; Fuller et al., 2087; IPCC), where and how these characteristics will translate into community wellbeing is largely unknown. Few studies have evaluated how fishing communities are already responding to climate change driven shifts in their livelihood. As species respond to warming waters by shifting location and/or depth, fishers, dependent upon such species, are being compelled to make choices concerning harvest strategies. Should they “follow fish” to new fishing grounds? Should they change their mix of target species to accommodate newly abundant species or the disappearance of traditionally harvested species? Should they relocate their operations to new stretch of the river? These all-unanswered issues need to be researched thoroughly

The rural and poor populations are likely to be affected disproportionately, as they lack the resources and manpower to rapidly change their infrastructure and adapt.

### **Fishing Community, Diseases, and Folk-Cure**

During pre-COVID-19 times, the major diseases that the members of the fishing community suffered from were fever, body-ache, and diarrhoea (Sudharsanam and Rotti 71). This was due to the continuous labour and exposure to sun while fishing. Many fishers throughout the survey recalled frequent recurrence of fever, body ache, diarrhoea, gastro-enteric disease and skin disorder and zoonotic diseases. In other

words, they acted as a shield to the customers by first touching the fish while it was being caught; customers only touched the fish after it was processed for cooking. Water pollution also affected the fishermen community, making them sick. The unhygienic cooking while fishing in river Ganga affects their health. Due to lack of time they must cook and eat in unsanitary conditions while they are on the boat (Fig.3), further leading to water borne diseases.

### **Case Study 1**

The daily chore of Musni comprises cleaning, cutting and selling fishes caught by the male fishermen from the river Ganga. Having five children to feed, Musni, most of the times overworks. She has frequent headaches due to stressful life. On being asked whether she got any treatment for the physical problems that she faces, she replies in affirmation. She says that more than allopathic medicines, she relies on the folk-traditional herbs for treatment. According to her, she puts *bhringraj* extract in her eyes to get rid of headache and eye related problems. “Any medicine can’t replace the lineage of folk-herbs that our ancestors gave” she exclaims.

### **COVID Lockdown, Fisherfolk and Dolphins: Some Relational Statements**

Local activities in the Gangetic region were recorded for a better understanding of the folk practices in relation to dolphin conservation. The natives whose livelihood depended on the Ganga River belong to different communities and castes. While interacting with fisherfolk communities, we discussed their views about dolphins, heard and recorded folktales about dolphins. All the respondents were acquainted with the Gangetic *So(u)ns*, and seasonality of some Gangetic life. All of them opined that dolphins are an indicator of fish abundance and as such dolphin surfacing sites are also

the sites of higher fish abundance. Therefore, local people prefer to fish in that area. This also underlined human-dolphin competition for fish hunting. They despise dolphin killing as these living creatures do not hurt humans. However, they suffer from accidental killings mainly because of plying of motorboats. According to the natives' belief, they are the real agent of the deity Varun, the water God. Some people put forth the view that dead dolphin in Ganga water do not decay and that the stone-like organs found inside dolphins, could be used to cure the wounds of human beings along with relieving them of headache. The killing of dolphins for folk medicinal purposes could be avoided by the inclusion of alternative medicines for pain, headache, and wounds. Many people also informed that dolphins' body parts and oil are good attractant for fish. They get larger number of fish if they use the oil of dolphin as bait. In Brazil, in yet similar manner, fishermen catch mullet with the help of dolphins (Cressey 75). According to the local communities, dolphins were rarely seen in groups, before lockdown, however, during the lockdown period, they were spotted together in the group of 2 and maximum 7 individuals. The natives further informed that long before dolphins used to appear in groups of around 13, however with time and growing pollution such aggregations are rarely reported.

Based on people's perception and traditional legendary stories "Ganga is the most sacred river for Hindus, who call it Ma Ganga (mother Ganga)" possibly because it holds and nurtures billions of lives, including humans and other terrestrial, aquatic, and amphibious entities" (Kumar, "River Ganges-Historical, cultural and socioeconomic attributes, Aquatic Ecosystem" 8). The age-old beliefs and ritual practices help in maintaining the Ganga ecosystem health and conservation of Gangetic species like dolphins, crocodiles, turtles etc.



### **Fishing: An Occupation that is Lost**

According to a survey by the National Council of Applied Economic Research in 2020, 65 percent of fisherfolk in West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh earn a monthly income of less than INR 5,000. These fisherfolk are the most vulnerable as they directly face water pollution. However, they denied taking any compensation from the polluting bodies as the river Ganga for them is a goddess and their source of living (Choudhary, *Livelihood and Health Challenges of Riverine Communities of the River Ganga*). Due to the growing danger from storms, cyclones and terrorists, the children of fishing community avoid choosing this profession (Louv, *Last child in the woods*). Many parents of this community want their children to choose safer jobs. They insist the children to study hoping they do not have to do odd chores like their parents. Many children go to schools and some of them have also succeeded in going to colleges. In Khurampur, the village of Musni, only four people have been going to the college in the present time for higher studies.

Though there could be a decline in the return from fishery too as an occupation, the income elasticity of it is higher compared to farm products. The demand for fish has increased substantially as a result of income growth. Fish is also now considered as healthier food compared to (red) meat, which has had a strong influence on its demand.

### **Case Study 2**

Juhi<sup>8</sup>, a fisherwoman, on being asked why she did not study, says— “I was given a lot of household work including cleaning of fish, didn’t have the energy left to study

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<sup>8</sup> The name has been changed in the thesis due to privacy issues

even after I wanted. So, I left school when I was in fourth grade.” As there is no law for the children when they work at home for the family members, Juhi was led nowhere to go. Now she sells fish, wandering from one village to another in search of customers. According to her, she was intelligent when she started going to school. Many students came to her to take help in the study. However, her family members gave her a lot of household work. They got her married to a fisherman after seven years of leaving school. Her life became more cumbersome after that.

### **Restoration Measures as Suggested by Fisherfolk:**

Throughout the research, it was noticed that the native traditional fisher community are aware of the contemporary environmental, economic and health issues, however, because of poverty and the unhygienic nature of the work they are not able to implement their views of restoration. Occasionally they show interest in transforming reality. Environmental perception is a tool to measure and evaluate the quality of the environment in which humans work (Evangelista-Barreto, 2014). The visualization of the stakeholders like fisherfolk, about the river, regarding the utilization of the natural resources, its impacts on the environment and benefits derived from biodiversity conservation can be an important tool of sustainable harvesting. The perception of the fishing community can be the initial step so that the actions of environmental education could collaborate in the process of knowledge construction, conservation of fishing resources, and sensitization of local social agents. The recommendations expressed by the fisher community are several and worthy of mention. First, the government, local panchayat and landlords should take initiatives to conserve and restore the Gangetic ecosystem in a sustainable way which will finally add biotic components. Second, the

traditional fisherfolks with experience of fishing in Ganga should be involved in planning of any developmental work and their knowledge heritage should be catalogued and recorded. Third, Mass awareness campaign is required for use of natural resources like fish in a sustainable manner and negative impacts of invasive exotic fish species and their control with the help of these fisher community. Fourth, these of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in agricultural field on the riverbed and for mass harvesting of fishes and shell fishes must be banned. The Fisherfolks' men and women both suggest that conversion of low-lying waterlogged area into the agricultural land should be banned and the open wetlands in the floodplains should be restored for the conservation of small indigenous species. The connection with contemporary Ganga plays a vital role to regulate the natural recruitment process in floodplain wetlands. Economic activities of local fisherfolks are more depended on floodplain wetlands because the main channel fishery is regulated by water lords.

### **Folk Beliefs along the Bank of the River Ganga: The Effective Tool for Dolphin Conservation**

The folk-beliefs are often expressed in narratives, customs, rituals, proverbs, and rhymes. Along the bank of the River Ganga a wide variety of folk beliefs and associated behaviours are being practiced by the natives that have been playing key role in maintaining the health of the Ganga ecosystem directly and/or indirectly. Various forms of magic, popular belief, folk religion, planting signs, charms, root work, taboos, old wives' tales, omens, portents, and the supernatural are prevalent. These folk practices debar local inhabitants from harming animals like Dolphin. Crocodiles, Turtles etc. as these animals are considered some form of God or vehicle

of the God by different tribals and local communities dwelling along the bank of the river Ganga. The Yangtze River dolphin (*Lipotes vexillifer*) became extinct (Turvey et al. 537). The Ganges River dolphin locally known as '*Sons or Susu*' inhabits in one of the world's most explored and human impacted river system. Despite severe human pressure including religious activities, large number of water development projects etc, the Ganga River dolphin exists as flagship species in the river system. In India the Gangetic dolphin is mainly distributed in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Assam. The frequent sightings and in relatively higher density are recorded from the Bihar stretch (Mokama to Kahalgaon) of the river Ganga. The maximum density of the dolphins is recorded in this segment of the Ganges. The frequent sightings and bank ward shifting of dolphin surfacing sites during the Covid-19 lockdown in March - June 2020, prompted us to observe dolphin surfacing sites and frequency. We noticed that people dwelling close to the river bank are more dolphins friendly and generally they do not disturb their favourite and mystical animal *Sons*.

There have been ample numbers of research on Gangetic dolphins since years past (Anderson, Anatomical and Zoological Researches; Reeves and Brownell 172; Sinha and Sharma 27). Ranging from various causes of their extinction to the reason behind their continuous resistance from getting extinct, multiple research section attempt to explore the Gangetic dolphins (Sinha and Kannan, Ganges River Dolphin; Dey et al. 1). However, the fact that Gangetic dolphins occupy a very major and meaningful place in the myths and folk-literature gets unnoticed. Yet many folk beliefs related to dolphins lie unnoticed. In this chapter, I attempted to elucidate the critical beliefs of the local people inhabiting close to the Ganga River bank and intimately associated with the Ganga River for their livelihood aesthetic pleasures and religious

practices. That there exists a relationship between folk practices and ecosystem health of the river Ganga, is a fact well acknowledged (Tosha and Dwivedi, 4072). Myths, take the form of oral literature when they get transferred from one person to the other. Gangetic dolphins have their own essential place in these forms of literature. Whether it be east or west, dolphins have been treated as a pious creature. Folk rituals create an impact on the life style of its followers. The reflection of eco-friendly folk beliefs in the acts of the natives helps in the conservation of flora and fauna. Scientific research conducted on Gangetic dolphins does not reach to the stakeholders to elicit their beliefs about the conservation of Gangetic dolphins. The present research is the first attempt to reach them.

### **Western Myths about Dolphin Conservation**

Jason Cressey in her research article “Making a Splash in the Pacific: Dolphin and Whale Myths and Legends of Oceania” (1998) discusses various mythical beliefs regarding dolphins. She puts forth that in Australia “It was forbidden among the Wurunjeri people to hunt or kill Dolphins (Cressey 75)”. Tahiri People of New Zealand believed that Dolphins are pious and provided them solution to the tribal problems (Cressey 77). Greek mythology gives a significant space to the dolphins, calling them as the messenger of gods. The pink river dolphin retains a semi-mythical status throughout the Amazon Jungle.

### **Indian Myths about Dolphins**

Gangetic Dolphins are considered as pious creatures. Maintaining their abode in the river Ganga, they carry with them the purity of the river. *Atharvaveda* (1200 BC-1000 BC) mentions in one of its couplets:

*Yasyamapah paricharah samani, raho ratre apramad ksharanti.*

*Sa no bhumirbhuridhara payo duha bhatho ukshatu varchasa.*

May the river Ganga remain flowing with the same speed without any hindrance.

May the whole plain of this river be filled with water streams, so that we get milk like white and pure water.

The word “hindrance” hints towards the modern- day dams that restrict the flow of the river Ganga, thus causing damage to gangetic dolphins. By the inclusion of such thought process in religious texts, a long-lasting notion of river-conservation was created in the minds of the inhabitants residing near Ganga bank. This helped in saving the Gangetic Dolphins as these living creatures are vulnerable to hindrances, that is dams and huge garbage in this case, because of their tendency to echo (Behera et al. 425). In Mahabharata the Ganges river dolphin is associated with the legend of the origin of the river Ganga. The dolphins have been considered as the vehicle (vahana) of the River Ganga on the basis of iconographic study of Buddhist and Brahmanical sculpture (Bhattasali, Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical sculptures in the Dacca Museum). Tracing back the Mauryan Pillars Asoka the great, promulgated the game laws and fishery legislation in 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., scheduled Gangetic animals including *Gangapaputakas*, referring Gangetic dolphin. In 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD Pliny and Elders referred the Gangetic dolphin by its widely accepted scientific name of the genera *Platanista* and described as fish migration to and from Ganga for breeding. After long gap the dolphin is illustrated in Babar-Nama manuscript tracing back to 1598 B. C. in which Babur, the first of the Great Mughals explained the Gangetic dolphins and crocodiles from his own observations. Therefore, Texts as old as Rig

Veda and Babar-Nama mention and illustrate gangetic dolphins. Based on people's perception and traditional legendary stories "Ganga is the most sacred river for Hindus, who call it Ma Ganga (mother Ganga)" possibly because it holds and nurtures billions of lives, including humans and other terrestrial, aquatic, and amphibious entities" (Kumar, 2017, p. 8). The age-old beliefs and ritual practices are helping in maintaining the Ganga ecosystem health and conservation of Gangetic species like dolphins, crocodiles, turtles etc.

From detailed analyses of responses gathered from the stakeholders it can be concluded that involvement of river bank dwellers and strengthening their age-old beliefs will work as an important tool for the conservation of dolphins. People worship Makar (crocodiles), *Shisumar* (Dolphin), *Kachhap* (Turtles), and the entire River Ganga is worshiped that help in maintaining the integrity of the riparian ecosystem. The absence of human intervention dolphins, reclaimed its habitat shifting towards bank where there was lower flow velocity and higher fish abundance. As resilient of a river system varies with the type of disturbance, biological attributes of the community and the degree of isolation from a source of a colonist (Niemi et al. 571). Restoration of Ganga ecosystem required to be looked beyond the banks, to the quantity of riparian and perhaps the entire landscape including human settlements that meets special needs of individual species (Allan, 1995). The present information about folk beliefs and practices clearly indicates that if we strengthen these practices with the help of established ancient Indian literatures, the situation will be different and the Ganga ecosystem will return to the pristine condition, and animals like dolphins will be able to re-establish and reclaim their population to the carrying capacity of the river.

The *Brahmandapurana* (325-400 AD) puts forth:

*Gangam punyajalam prapya trayodas vivarjayet I*

*shouchmachnam sekam nirmalyam malgharshanam I*

*Gatrasamvahnam kreeram pratigrahmatho ratim I*

*Anyateerthratichaiv anyateerthpshansanam I*

*Vastratyagamthaghatam santarat visheshtah* (qtd. In Gupta 85)*I*

According to these religious instruction thirteen actions must be prohibited on arrival at the sacred waters of Ganga, such as defecation, ablutions, discharge of water, throwing of used floral offering, rubbing of filth, body shampooing, frolicking, acceptance of donations, obscenity, offering of inappropriate praises or even hymns in incorrect way, discarding of garments, beating, and swimming across. All these prohibited acts are extremely deadly for the dolphins of the river Ganga. Defecation and ablution are poisonous for Gangetic dolphins; discharge of water is harmful due to its contamination in the river; floral offerings get decayed, and clog the drains and interfere the flow; rubbing of filth, body shampooing and frolicking are equally pernicious due to the inclusion of chemicals. Beating causes noise (ghatam) which affects dolphins a lot. Dolphins get disturbed by the noise of vessel (Dey, 2019). Brian D. Smith maintains:

Increased noise levels from other human activities also seem to disturb the dolphins. During the grass cutting season, when there was a great deal of noisy shoreline activity at Menau Ghat and Ghosti Ghat, the animals disappeared and did not appear until the activity ceased (Smith 166).



The *Brahmandapurana* prohibits swimming across the river as well as the creation of noise. All of these restricted acts lead to the habitat degradation of dolphins. Gangetic dolphins are reducing considerably due to lowering of quality of their habitat. These creatures are religiously considered as vehicle of the mighty river Ganga. Therefore, local beliefs of people suggest that the killing or accidental death of Gangetic dolphins in river Ganga may affect normal water flow direction and velocity. According to the natives, when the vehicle (dolphin) of Mother Ganga is destroyed, the river loses its direction. Based on the iconography of the Buddhist and Brahmanical sculpture the Ganga river dolphin has been recognized as the Vahana (vehicle) of the river Ganga (Bhattasali, Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical sculptures in the Dacca Museum). Locals commonly believe that the Ganga river flow in right direction because of the *So(u)ns*, and killing or sufferings of dolphin drives in change of the course of the river Ganga resulting in erosion of villages along the river bank. Due to this, flood or drought happens leading to the destruction of multiple villages through erosion.



**Figure 4.1 Gangetic Dolphin encircled in red**

## Conclusion

The proverbs and beliefs of common folks of Bihar lay in alignment with the protection of the environment. From detailed analyses of responses gathered from the stakeholders, it can be concluded that involvement of river bank dwellers and strengthening their age-old beliefs will work as a powerful tool for the conservation of dolphins. People worship Makar (crocodiles), Dolphin (Shisumaar), Turtles (Kachhap) and above all the entire River Ganga is worshiped by fisherfolk that help in maintaining the integrity of the riparian ecosystem. Due to the absence of humans' intervention, dolphins reclaimed their habitat, shifting towards bank where there was lower flow velocity and higher fish abundance. Gangetic dolphins are religiously considered as vehicle of the mighty river Ganga. Therefore, local beliefs of people suggest that the killing or accidental death of Gangetic dolphins in river Ganga may affect normal water flow direction and velocity. According to the natives, when the vehicle (dolphin) of Mother Ganga is destroyed, the river loses its direction. Based on the iconography of the Buddhist and Brahmanical sculpture the Ganga River dolphin has been recognized as the *Vahana* (vehicle) of the river Ganga (Bhattasali, Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical sculptures in the Dacca Museum). Locals commonly believe that the Ganga River flow in right direction because of the *So(u)ns*, and killing or sufferings of dolphin drives in change of the course of the river Ganga resulting in erosion of villages along the river bank. Due to this, flood or drought happens leading to the destruction of multiple villages through erosion

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion: The Journey towards Synthesis

Despite an endeavour to find solutions to the problems and answer questions that this thesis raised, a clear-cut conclusion is what seems nearly tougher to put on paper. The research presumed that the folklore of Bihar could act as an effective medium for understanding the ecosystem. The journey of human-nature relationship could be traced on analysing these oral texts. That human beings could be both devotees and destroyer of their surrounding nature, is a fact, the research tries to depict in the thesis through a study of the folklore from Bihar. For a clearer understanding of these folklore, the research initially explains what Bihar as a sensibility is. The term “Bihari” has been explored in order to understand the texts in a better manner. Because Bihari, Bihar, and Bihari Folklore—all are interrelated, therefore a dire requirement to understand the concept of Bihar and Bihari emerges. In the due course of the research, it came to view that Bihar was an abundant region in past ages (Before colonisation)—it was an abode of multiple religious foundations like Buddhism and Jainism. Goddess Seeta is called *mithileshnandini* as she is believed to be brought up in the Mithila region. This state was rich in art, culture, and intellect. However, after independence, due to poor economic conditions the whole perception of the term Bihari changed. Now the people of Bihar were seen with a sympathetic, and sometimes derogatory terms. Due to this kind of treatment, their previous perspective towards their identity shattered. They were no longer proud, but felt subjugated and inferior to the people of

other states. This sense of self-doubt was prominent in metropolitan city like Delhi, where people from all over India came together in search of better livelihood. Bihari Folklore also felt victim to such notions. Bihari people were reluctant to sing and hear those in front of common public. This was witnessed in the talks with the first generation who were Bihari, and came to settle in Delhi. The present research aimed at revealing this truth and strive towards a clearer meaning of Bihar and Bihari identities. It concludes that Bihari as an identity has been carried, erased, reinterpreted, and reasserted by the present generations. That they now glorify their background and history, alongside restating their claims on all phases of growth, such as, knowledge, economy, politics, and technology, is a fact not to be neglected. They are indeed rejuvenating their past folklore through singing on social media too. There are multiple examples of such—Sharda Sinha, Bhikhari Thakur, and Malini Awasthi are a few names.

### **Is there a Static definition of Folklore?**

The term folklore has numerous definitions that are connected, but also vary slightly across regions. Dan Ben-Amos notes that “Definitions of folklore are as many and varied as the versions of a well-known tale. Both semantic and theoretical differences have contributed to this proliferation. The German *volkskunde*, the Swedish *folkminne*, and the Indian *lok sahitya* all imply slightly different meanings that the English term ‘folklore’ cannot syncretize completely” (Ben-Amos 3). According to Ben-Amos, scholarly intention, and not tradition, is the chief catalyst for the definition of folklore (p. 13). The definition of folklore, therefore, is not static but dynamic. Hussein et al. assert that “Folklore generally refers to the traditions which may include the music,

storytelling, popular beliefs and customs practice of a community.” In their article, the authors call for the protection of folk tradition (Hussein et al. 163). The present research considers the protection of folklore as a catalyst for safeguarding the environment. By adopting well-devised measures for the protection of the environment that gets propagated through folk literature, the future generation would be able to conserve the ecosystem. In a similar line of thought, the critic Roger D Abrahams maintains “An item of folklore may act both as an instrument of continuity and as a mechanism to further change.” He further continues that folklore has both “public and personal dimensions” (Abrahams 30). Bhatia et al. have studied the impact of folklore in the comprehension of the surrounding wildlife in the trans-Himalayan region. The article “Understanding People’s Relationship with Wildlife in Trans-Himalayan Folklore” asserts that Examining folklore to understand the diversity of values associated with wildlife can enable conservation practitioners to identify areas where societal or individual motivations are complementary to biodiversity conservation and the areas where motivations contrast with the goals of conservation. Such knowledge can be useful in designing culturally meaningful strategies to facilitate human-wildlife coexistence (Bhatia et al. 8). This assertion was found to be valid while conducting the present research. Regarding folklore, Sarita Sahay puts forth “Folklore, like all other products of man’s artistic endeavour, is an ideological manifestation of human creativity” (Sahay 93). This ideological manifestation is revealed when we analyse the folklore of Bihar. Folk literature of Bihar acts as a mirror of how creativity and science merged in the past era. The definitions quoted above reveal the multi-varied role of folklore. That folklore could be utilized as a tool for conservation, revolution, and cultural representation has been asserted by these researchers. Rituals and Concerns of

Conditioning in Bihar, people believe that rituals are incomplete without folksongs. In an interview taken by researcher, a woman talks about an incident in a village where no one knew how to sing a marriage song. She said that specific festivities are considered complete with such folksongs. Because of this, a man possessing a motorbike brought a fragile older woman from a distant village to sing the folksong. The woman came on the condition that the leading guardians of the marriage would pay her for the song (Tosha & Dwivedi, 2019). Such is the importance of folklore in this region. Folk utterances in Bihar include many humanistic themes. The collective identity of humanity is reflected through folk literature. This state has several kinds of folk literature, such as folklore, folk ballads, and folksongs. Each has its importance. In addition to being melodious and harmonious, folk songs also have other merits. A decade ago, only old women sang those folksongs. The songs also became extinct along with the past generations. This was primarily due to urbanization and the displacement of people to other states to procure jobs. Urbanization led to the availability of popular art like music and film resulting in the creation of a gap between natives and folk literature.

### **Folklore from Bihar, and Ecocriticism: A Coalescence**

While researching, it came to notice that the folk of Bihar share a deep-rooted relationship between nature and culture. Mostly all their rituals are connected to the ecosystem. Folktales, folksongs, or any other folk-art form are as old as human civilization. Most of the elements of folk music reveal the relationship of human beings with nature, rather, their physical surrounding. In India, From the Vedic period, there lied a tradition of worshipping flora and fauna. In this India, elephant is a metaphor of

power and seriousness; horse is a metaphor of energy and motion; and birds are the metaphor of liberation. Some of our gods and goddesses are in the form of animals. Hanuman, for example is a god having the feature of monkey. Similarly, Lord Ganesha bears the trunk of an elephant. In my opinion, such forms of deities connote the oneness of Indian tradition with nature. In other words, the closeness of Indian people with nature is revealed in a very succinct manner in these forms. By reading the folk literature, the readers can understand the relationship that human beings shared with nature in the past. How this relationship changed into a mere parasitic one along with time is dealt in this thesis. Cherlyl Glotfelty says in the introduction to her edited book *The Ecocritical Reader*:

Despite the broad scope of inquiry and disparate levels of sophistication, all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature... (xix)

Folklore could be considered as the “cultural artifact” as pointed by Glotfelty. In this thesis, I have utilized folklore from Bihar for the purpose of the research. That folklore could act as a great tool to understand the environment, and sensitize people towards safeguarding the ecosystem is a finding that this research has made. In folklore, the connection between people and their surroundings is depicted through storytelling. The folklore of Bihar reflects how the landscape influences the beliefs of its people. The narrator’s mind is influenced by the climate, as shown by the inclusion of flora

and fauna in the folklore. India is an *aranyak*<sup>9</sup> civilization, that is, all the rituals in this country starting from birth to death are related to nature and its various elements. The folk literature of Bihar showcases this aspect of Indian civilization. We find the pictorial quality of these folklores to be the liveliest. Earth is viewed as a plentiful mother figure in these folklores. Flora and fauna, along with rivers, have a crucial role in the narrative of these Angika compositions. In these rituals, the presence of mango, honey tree, banyan, birds, and rivers are deemed essential by the people of the country. Folksongs ponder over these necessities. Natural elements like flowers, plants, grass, and fruits are featured in multiple festival components. As they incorporate these natural elements, the people sing traditional songs. Flowers and plants each have their own distinct folksongs. For example, when performing turmeric ceremonies at weddings, folksongs about turmeric are sung. Hence, there exist as many folksongs as there are elements in nature. Language differences correspond to regional variations, along with differences in people's lifestyles and appearances. When we hear a village woman humming a folksong, we question its longevity. It is a lamentable thing that many of these song singers are elderly. The current era of mechanization has resulted in a lack of this heritage among most adults. Yet, it's not their fault as they've been compelled to adapt to a mechanized lifestyle in order to support themselves. Folklore was seen as an asset in connecting everyday people to their surroundings in earlier times. Nevertheless, in modern times these voices have fallen silent. To validate our past ties with nature, our society needs these voices. Their folklores served as a bridge

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<sup>9</sup> Related to greenery



between their lives, joys, sorrows, and the natural environment. In the modern world, our contact with these remnants of the past is minimal.

### **Folksongs and Territorial Variation: The Inevitable Linking**

This thesis has also utilized some of the folksongs from region other than Bihar for a better understanding of the relationship between people and the environment. While making such comparative readings, I observed two things. Firstly, many of the folksongs from different regions share a similar theme, that of happiness, that of love and fear of loss of love. While conveying these feelings, the singer talks to the flora and fauna. Sometimes, the physical environment affects the feelings of folk singer and persuades him or her to sing in order to pour the emotions. Secondly, the natural elements in these folksongs vary from place to place. This variation of the natural components arises due to change in climate and terrain. Whereas the singers living near the banks of a river eulogize the water body, the people living on mountainous region worship mountains. Similar is the case with the description of flora and fauna. In one of the folksongs of *garhwal*<sup>10</sup> that I have quoted in the third chapter, the singer longs for the flowers of *raaimas* (orchid cactus). According to the narrative of this song, the singer can worship God only when he is able to get this flower. Garhwal is a mountainous region of northern India, and this folksong mentions the need of the flower grown on the mountains. Similarly, an Angika folksong included in the same chapter mentions the beauty of paddy flower. It compares the sparkling flowers of the paddy fields to a girl full of youth and attraction. Such comparisons yield the proof that the composer of these folksongs considered nature as having more beauty and

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<sup>10</sup> A mountainous region of northern India

power than human being possessed. Most of the times while comparing, we compare the tenor to an object that carries the comparative element in a higher intensity. In the Angika folksong, “*dhanma ke shhesh sun bahar hui siya beti*” (your daughter has turned beautiful like rice flowers) the singer has placed the attractive nature of the paddy flowers at a higher position than human beauty.

A major number of festivals in India include nature as the deity of human beings. Whether it be northern or southern India, people celebrate their happiness by being one with nature. Chhatha worship of east Indian regions and Pongal festival of south Indian state, Tamil Nadu, both place sun as a major deity in their celebrations. The songs of Chhatha are full of eulogy for sun. In the past when all the seasons of the earth were balanced, people celebrated with nature. Different kinds of festivals ran along with the seasonal changes. For instance, Basant Panchami was the celebration of spring and Lohri was the celebration of winter. Along with growing urbanization that resulted in pollution, the dates of Indian calendar remained the same, but seasons changed. This change in the timings of seasons was mainly due to the impact of climate change. Festivals also started losing vigour; all that remained was the lineage of folksongs. People sang folksongs to reconnect with the past.

### **A Dip into Present Conditions**

As time passed, trees were chopped down and people became disconnected from nature. The size of villages decreased while cities grew larger. As cities grow, men as a collective being shrink. Socialization has greatly decreased due to sedentary lifestyles. In contrast to previous years, people are rapidly forgetting these folklores. The reason behind this is either people’s detachment from their roots or their lack of interest in folklore heritage. Folksongs were a means of uniting people. Yet, the folk

compositions that once brought society together as a collective gradually diminished. People who sought to engage with folklore either relied on the internet or became increasingly isolated. Simply put, the decline of folklore can be attributed to the decline of the natural environment. As nature diminished, folklore began to fade away. In the age of consumerism and individualism, it is essential to preserve both folk literature and nature, their sacred deity. The decline of folk literature in Bihar parallels the depletion of nature, signifying the loss of humanity. With the loss of connection to nature, humans began to experience an increase in diseases. The population was afflicted by both mental and physical illnesses. Schizophrenia and other psychological diseases were the result of cutting the thread of the coexistence of society and nature.

In this study, I repelled from the creation of binaries between human beings and nature. My prime focus was towards the tradition of India in the past that initiated and pursued the goal of the coexistence of human beings with that of natural environment. My further endeavour was to reveal the parallelism between the decline of folklore and environment. Folklore of Bihar, as already asserted was a proof of the existence of human nature. Environment, folklore and humanity face a parallel decline today. Reading and reciting the folklore of Bihar would clearly lead to a better understanding of nature and humanity as a single entity. Folklore of Bihar clearly depict the flora and fauna of gangetic region. They have a message for river conservation and protection of wildlife such as birds and mammals. Mother earth, lentic, and lotic ecosystems are deeply respected by them. The tradition, however, has been interrupted due to severe climate change. Winter is now the season for singing the songs originally intended for spring. The internet has diminished the essence of folklore, once a means of socialization. The only way we experience pleasure is through the modified version of

folklore on the computer screen. The folklore's genuine nature remains elusive in present times. Singing folk songs in groups in the past taught us about living together in an environmentally friendly manner. The relocation of this essence has the potential to create a better future for the environment and humanity. Through reading and obtaining these folk songs, we can develop a greater sensitivity to the natural world. Consequently, this could lead to a more promising and enduring future.

### **Result of Hypothesis**

It was hypothesized before the research that all the folklore supports the well-being of the environment. However, after going into deeper exploration, it came into notice that folklore too, being a human construction, has a partial inclination to nature. Most of these creative utterances are ecocentric, but some also shatter the ecocentric perceptions. This has been duly discussed in Mahamaya songs quoted in chapter two.

### **Brief Summary of Chapters**

Chapter one introduces the research. The questions, objectives and expectations of the research are discussed here. The reason behind the choice of the selective region, and its repercussions have been explained. Moreover, the word "Bihari" has been unravelled to get an enhanced understanding of the research. "Bihari" as a term is not directly associated with ecocriticism, but as a researcher who researches on a selective region, it becomes extremely necessary to dig into the complexities of being a human being who is associated with Bihar. chapter two, "Folk Literature and Ecosystem: A symbiosis" posits that human beings have been destroying the ecosystem with a heightened intensity, and Bihari folklore clearly reflects varying aspects of this relationship of human beings with nature. Utilizing the folklore from Bihar (primarily

of Angika, Maithili, and Magahi language), this chapter aims to make a comparative study of the theory of symbiosis—as developed by biologists, and the folklore of this region. It argues that folklore of Bihar traces the development of human materialistic inclination resulting in the destruction of the environment. That nature does not always act as a binary to culture, but there also lies an intersection between the two, has been put forward in this research. Chapter three “Folksongs: Homocentric or Ecocentric?” studies the interplay of Anthropocene world and Eco sensibility. Being one of the powerful yet negligible element of nature, our human acts are influenced by the wonders of the environment. The fact how homocentricism and ecocentrism are not devoid of each other plays a major argument here. Chapter four “Proverbs and Beliefs: A Semantic Analysis of Folk-Life around River Ganga” is interdisciplinary in nature as it discusses the social, cultural, physiological and economic conditions of people residing on the banks of river Ganga, specifically fishing community. During research, interviews and discussions were initiated from fishing communities. The present chapter “Conclusion” gives an overview of the results, drawbacks, limitations, contradictions, and recommendations that arose from this research. There came certain situations where the research demanded dissolving the hardcore divisions between Maithili, Magahi, and Angika language. This was due to the unavailability of folklore in its original language. There are also instances where the thesis utilizes the translated and written version of folk literature due to scarcity of the texts in original languages. During the research, I travelled to Bihar for interviews and recordings. The research took its momentum during COVID 19 lockdown when I spent three months in Bihar, however travelling freely even inside the state was one of the barriers due to government restrictions.

## Recommendation

The present research involved analysing folklore of Bihar—primarily in three languages, Angika, Maithili, and Magahi. The major drawback that the research faced was getting appropriate and equivalent English words to that of Angika, Maithili, and Magahi. There were certain phrases like “*Dhanma ke Sheesh*” (The tip of paddy) that seemed difficult to translate into a harmonious utterance of English. This problem hints at a solution for the future researchers—creating Dictionary of Angika, Maithili, and Magahi Tropes. This would require rigorous research on the part of the researchers. The folklore of Bhojpuri and Maithili are easily available as video and audio forms. There is a scarcity of digitization of folklore in Angika and Magahi. These assets of Bihari society and culture should be digitized so that they are available to the future generations. Because of limitation of time span, and the inclination of this research being ecocriticism, the thesis does not deal with longitudinal study of selected folklore. However, sincere efforts have been made in this research to unravel the complexity of the journey of this folklore. To conclude, Ecocriticism is a western perspective; and studying the folklore of India, where the masses, since ages felt one with nature, with a western-centric approach has many lags. Ecocritics in the past have asserted that there is a dire necessity to include the unincluded societies in the stream of ecocritical thinking. However, in the light of the present research, there is a dearth of theoretical framework that could equate the eastern concept of the environment with the theory of ecocriticism, as given by the west. Another contradiction arising is that due to sheer westernization of India, the previously ecocentric approach shifted to the west-centric approach to environment. As Swarnalata Rangarajan posits “India’s hoary civilization faces the danger of losing its traditional oikonomics—the traditional household

wisdom of living harmoniously with the world.” Due to urbanization, India lost the essence of being in a unity with the ecosystem. That the lost tradition of Bihari folk beliefs needs to be revisited to maintain what has been left till today in the ecosystem, is a fact worth acknowledging. Instead of propounding new theories, the researchers need to focus on what was already there in the folk traditions.

Since ages past, human beings have been the keen observers of nature. The visualization of human-nature relationships as binaries is a western concept. In India human beings and their natural environment coexist; they both interlock several times. Whether it is a ritual, a proverb, or folklore, this presence of interlocking is always felt. Bihar is a culturally rich ancient state of India. Buddhism, and Jainism originated here. The abundance of flora and fauna, makes this state highly related to nature.

The ecosystem of the world lies in a great danger, and there is an immense necessity to protect it. Rules and laws are being formed and implemented. Civilians follow them either with an honest choice or due to the fear of punishment. For the latter, the researchers need to devise ways that could serve an involuntary purpose towards the protection of the environment. By involuntary, the research means not intended by own will, but still ongoing. The reassertion of folk beliefs could act as a significant step towards the conservation of the environment. The present research delves into the folklore and folk belief of Bihar due to the previous existence of research gaps, and a dire necessity to bridge it. There has been a plethora of research on this area; however, an ecocritical study of Bihari folk beliefs, and practices remains. The proximity of the natives of the suburbs of Bihar with their ecosystem, makes it relevant to study their folklore with the relation of their psyche and the natural

environment. The impact of urbanization has still not reached the suburbs of Bihar. Due to this, the inhabitants of this region still practice the age-old-customs and beliefs, making it elicit that these folk practices get imprinted in their minds due to their recurring nature of cycle. Every year, all the festivals and rituals related to the festivals are repeated, making it necessary to adhere to their rules. The sacred groves and sacred animals being protected due to the rules related to these festivals, are some of such examples. The facts before-mentioned, hint towards the intense essentiality of re-reading the terrain of Bihari folk life.



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**Appendix I**

Figure 1: Chhatha Worship



## Appendix II

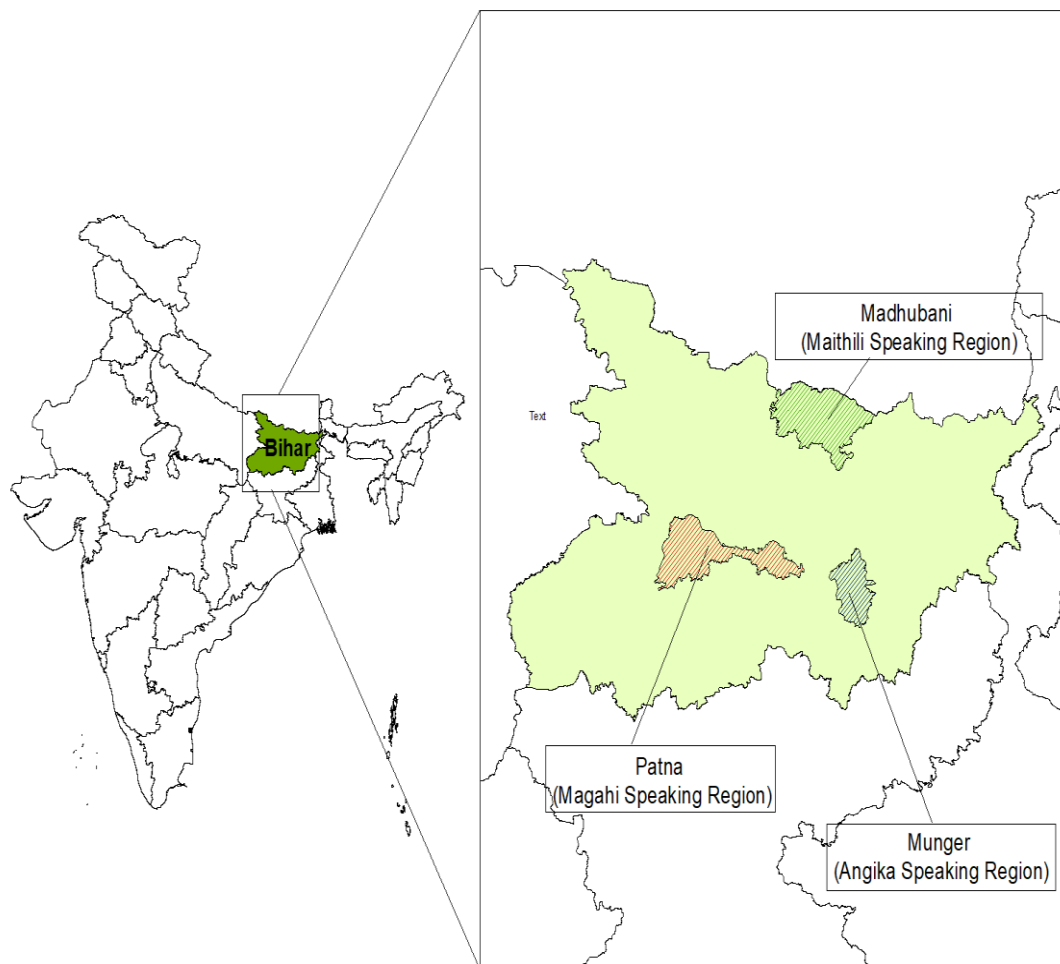


Figure 1: Division of researched districts based on linguistic variation

### Appendix III

#### A Conversation with Mithilesh Kumari, the Preserver of Angika Folksongs

Mithilesh Kumari, an inhabitant of a town named Begusarai in Bihar has tried her best to protect the lineage of folksongs by giving a form of book to these utterances. Given below is a phonic conversation with Mithilesh Kumari, the writer of an anthology of Angika folksongs, with the title *Geet Ganga*:

Me: Hello ma'am. I wish to ask you some questions regarding folksongs. Presently, I am doing research on Folksongs. Could you please spare some time for this?

M. Kumari: Yes. Please go ahead.

Me: How much troubles you had to take while collecting these folksongs?

M. Kumari: I did not face much trouble while collecting these folksongs as I had them in my memory; I used to sing them along with other women relatives in the thread ceremony, wedding etc. It is a tradition that has been passed on from generation to generation in our family. I was very disappointed when I found that a very limited part community are now in contact with these songs and are aware of them. Once, during an occasion, I heard some of the organizers, saying that because of the lack of singer they had to search for more people to contribute to the music ceremony but strangely they were not able to find anyone except a fragile, poor old woman, who was probably the only one aware of the song. Only after the joyful ending of a song, the wedding became full in itself. In Bihar, there are many occasions, which we do not find *sampanna* (complete in itself) until the singing of folksongs begin. That instigated me to write my own book regarding folksongs. The book, at first look appeared to be done

right but it had many flaws in it. Major problem came while proofreading. I revised the collection seven times, because the language used in the book was not the language of the typist so he committed many mistakes. However, until now no complaint about the spelling errors of the book have come, which means I have done the work as accurately as I would have.

Me: When I read your book, I realized that a lot of content in the folksongs was emphasized by nature. To what extent does nature reflect these folksongs?

M. Kumari: Of course. Of course. I would say that literature, primarily originated from folksongs. On analysing folksongs closely, we get to know that it tells us history, geography and everything. In earlier times, it was easier to describe the life conditions by means of a song rather than trying to fit it in sentences. We do not know about the origin of these folksongs. This is because during those days there was no hunger for fame and reputation. You will find that these folksongs reflect the life style of these people largely.

Me: Does the consideration of environment make folksongs more beautiful?

M. Kumari: I will say yes. Of course. You would see the difference of behaviour in bees and birds when it rains. Farmers are also happy when they see the raindrops coming. When the climate changes abruptly, their whole lifestyle gets disrupted. Sometimes the farmers call rain through folksongs. So, every point of folksongs indicate human development and the reflection of environment. Many folksongs are full of reference to nature that shows how the dedication of our ancestor towards nature.

Me: Do the folks sing folksongs according to different occasions?

M. Kumari: Yes. Like *Marwa*, *Haldi* (Turmeric ceremony), *Sindurdan* (vermillion ceremony), every process has different folksongs. Folks do this for happiness and wellbeing of the person who is getting married. Turmeric is important because its colour never fades. Second thing is rice. It symbolises wealth. *Durva* (grass) never degenerates; therefore, it is the symbol of eternity. No matter how much you injure it. It will germinate again. That is why we the elder people bless their younger ones by making these natural elements the symbol.

Me: Do you think that globalisation and industrialisation are influencing the extinction of folksongs?

M. Kumari: Well. Largely. We are neglecting folksongs. We see that forthcoming generations lay focused towards those things that cannot be called our culture. Our culture is synonymous with respect, helping others, celebrating with each other in good times and lamenting with each other in bad times. *Vasudhev Kumtumbkam* (the whole world is ours) represents our culture. The condition of today is that we are slowly moving away from our culture. Children lack etiquettes and manners.

Me: Was the human species connecting itself with nature through these folksongs?

M. Kumari: Yes. In earlier times, poverty was prominent. We see that people of low castes were harassed but they did not exhibit sorrow. People did not write during those times. Nevertheless, we have developed a lot. In folksongs, you will see the harassment of people as well as the qualities of kings. However, nowadays people are independent,

thinking of only themselves. They do not have time to ponder upon nature nor their surroundings.

Appendix IV

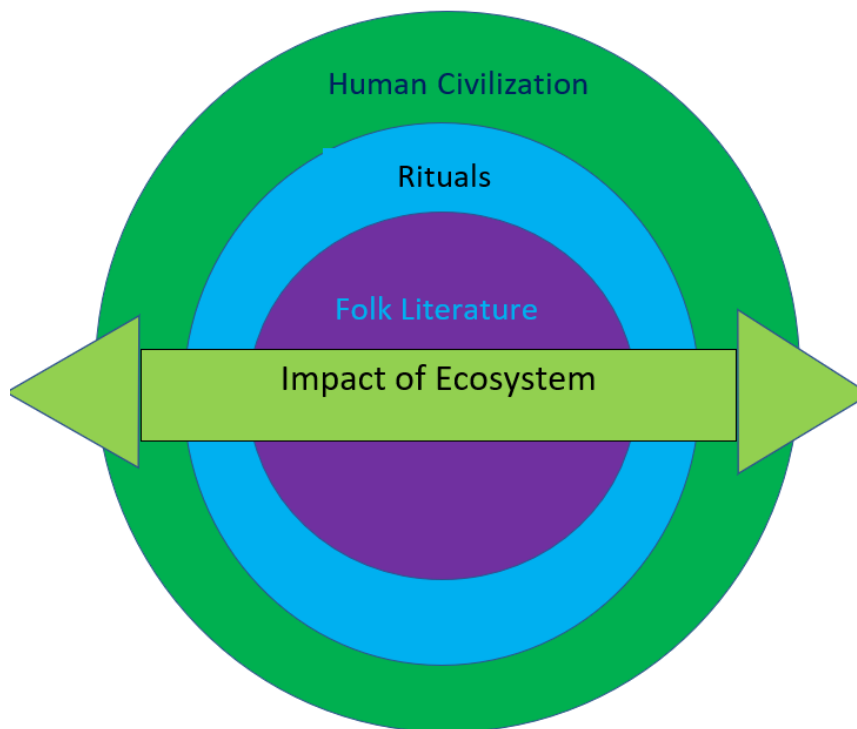


Figure 1: Interconnection between Rituals, Literature, and the Ecosystem

## Appendix V



Figure 1: A Sketch of the Deity Shiva Depicting River Ganga Coming from his Locks representing ecological intrlinking of folk deity and ecological elements.

**Appendix VI**

Figure 1: Eco-Friendly Huts Created by Fisher Community



## Appendix VII

### Possible contribution of fisherfolk in achieving sustainable development goals 2030

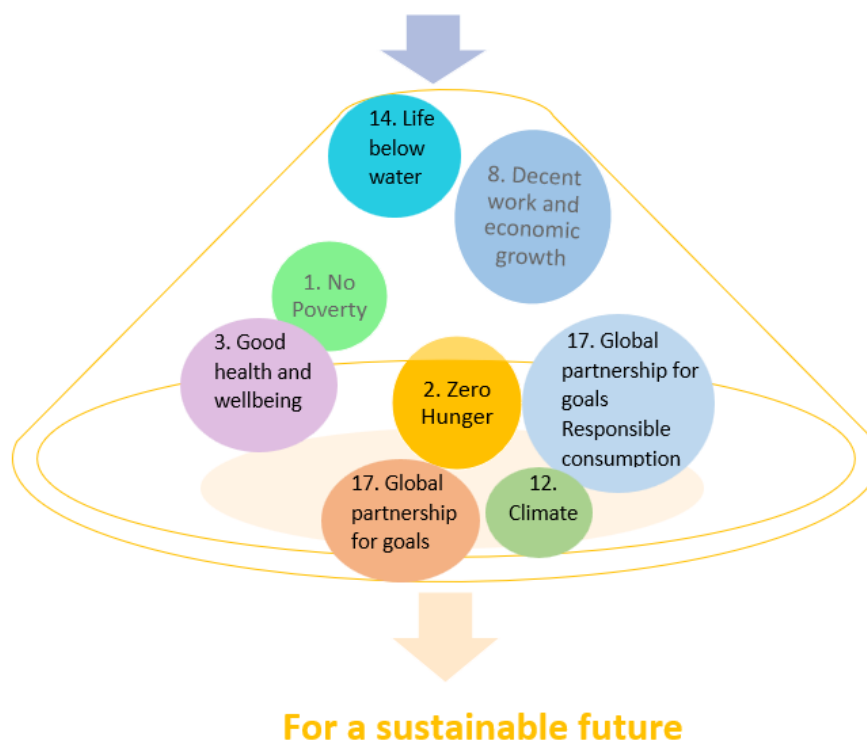


Figure 1: The possible contribution of folklife of fishermen in achieving sustainable development goals

### List of Publications and their Proofs

1. Mallika, Tosha & Dwivedi, Rajiv Ranjan. (2024: Accepted) A Study of the Coalescence between Environmental Sustainability and Angika Folklore (Eastern Bihar, India). *Folklore*. Estonia



**Mallika Tosha** <mallikanatyam@gmail.com>

to tiina.mallo ▾

Feb 21, 2024, 5:35 PM



Dear Dr. Mallo,

Thanks for the relevant information. As we found comments, very pertinent to our manuscript, and considering all comments we have revised the manuscript entitled: "A Study of the Coalescence in Environmental Sustainability and Angika Folklore (Eastern Bihar, India)", we wish to learn if the manuscript has been re-reviewed by the reviewer. The reviewer was very much acquainted with our region and Eco-cultural attributes of the region; we yearn to know the reviewers' views and editorial decision.

We would request you to kindly inform us about the outcome of the review process and editorial decision.

With Best Regards

Sincerely

Mallika Tosha

and

Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi

2. Mallika, Tosha & Dwivedi, R. R. Ecological Representation in the Maithili Songs of Vidyapati. *Anhad Lok*, vol. 10, no. 19, 2024, pp. 386-389.

## Ecological Representation in the Maithili Songs of Vidyapati

**Mallika Tosha**  
Research Scholar  
Department of Humanities  
Delhi Technological University

**Dr. Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi**  
Department of Humanities  
Delhi Technological University

### Abstract :

*Vidyapati (1360-1470 AD) is considered as one of the greatest writers of Mithilanchal, Bihar. He composed songs in such a manner that they became enshrined in the hearts of the natives of Mithila region. He wrote in Sanskrit and Maithili. Still, many of his Maithili songs are sung as folksongs. The present study revealed that his Maithili songs are abundant with the description of the ecological elements. His style contains the aura of the deities through the establishment of their relation with the environment. In his songs, both Gods and human beings are affected by nature. The physical environment acts as a stimulus to their behaviour. The relationship between the compositions of Vidyapati and the environment has been analysed with an ecocritical perspective in this research.*

### Keywords :

*Ecocriticism, Maithili, Environment, Folksongs, Mithila*

### Introduction :


Vidyapati (1380-1460 AD) was born into an affluent and intellectual family. Also called as *Maithil Kokil* (The cuckoo bird of Mithila), his creative abode is highly related to the folk life of Mithila. The writer created several Maithili compositions, including devotional songs on Hindu deities like Vishnu and Shiva. The simple fact that Shiva is the sole Hindu god whose love and worship have endured over time is why he created so many songs dedicated to him. They have been approved by the straits for any man and woman, regardless of caste or gender. Music dedi-

cated to Shiva were the only devotional songs that could connect with ordinary men and women, regardless of caste or sex, for whom Vidyapati penned the songs. *Kirtipataka, Puruspariksha, Goraksavijaya* and *Bhuparikrama* are some of his compositions. His compositions were an amalgamation of folk life and Hindu mythology. Maithili folksongs are often not anonymous. Vidyapati composed Maithili songs that are still sung as folksongs. Most commonly, the last line of the lyrics mentions the name of its composer too. Maithili folksongs are abundant with the mention of ecological elements. Vidyapati

3. Mallika, Tosha, and Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi. "Nature-Culture Binary versus Ancient Folklore of Bihar (An Eastern Indian State)." *Classical Literature*, vol 2, issue 1, 2024.

*Classical Literature* | Volume 02 | Issue 01 | May 2024

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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**Nature-Culture Binary versus Ancient Folklore of Bihar (An Eastern Indian State)**

**Tosha Mallika<sup>\*</sup> Dwivedi Rajiv Ranjan**

Department of Humanities, Delhi Technological University, Delhi, 110042, India

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Article history</i></p> <p>Received: 3 October 2023</p> <p>Revised: 26 October 2023</p> <p>Accepted: 12 December 2023</p> <p>Published Online: 25 December 2023</p> <hr style="width: 100%;"/> <p><i>Keywords:</i></p> <p>Folklore</p> <p>Mahabharata</p> <p>Angika</p> <p>Bihar</p> <p>Nature</p>	<p>The research article utilizes the ancient folklore of Bihar to build an enhanced perspective on the relationship between culture and nature. Different legends, folk-beliefs, and folk practices have played an immense role in the generation of this analysis. The folklore of the Angika region as shown in the map is the primary source. The terms <i>Angika</i> and <i>Ang Pradesh</i> have both been famous in the ancient epic <i>Mahabharata</i>. <i>Ang Pradesh</i> is the abode of the warrior Karna, a prominent recurring figure in the epic. The researchers travelled to suburbs to interview the natives and document folklore. Whether nature culture could stagnantly be called binarica, is one of the central questions that the present research intends to answer.</p>

**1. Introduction**

Different seasons bring along with them different festivals. These festivals include within themselves many rituals. Most of these festivals along with rituals are in the form of celebration or eulogy of nature. Human culture if we trace its history, itself is a derivative of nature.

Drake, in his renowned article, puts forth:

Thus, of all fields, it is much closer to the elusive thing called reality, and its objects of study are their own justification, not some set of concepts which allows the investigator to abstract and simplify them. If some folklore is ugly or stupid or obscene (and much of it is beautiful), then that is the truth of it; a critical abstraction in terms of one or another set of concepts only distorts this<sup>11</sup>.

Folklores reflect real folk life, including their mindset and thinking process. Guoliang Yu<sup>12</sup> and Khachtriyar S. A.<sup>13</sup> discuss the essentiality of folk literature in framing the minds of the natives. Chatterjee mentions several

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**\*Corresponding Author:**  
 Tosha Mallika,  
 Department of Humanities, Delhi Technological University, Delhi, 110042, India;  
 Email: mallikanatya@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55121/cl.v2i1.109>  
 Copyright © 2025 by the author(s). Published by Japan Bilingual Publishing Co. This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License. (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).

4. Tosha, Mallika. "Perception through the Personified: A Study of Children's Folklore from Bihar, India." *IAFOR Journal of Literature & Librarianship*, vol.12, no. 1, 2023.

**Perception through the Personified: A Study of Children's Folklore from  
Bihar, India**

Mallika Tosha  
Delhi Technological University, India

Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi  
Delhi Technological University, India

**Abstract**

The research explores the children-related literature of Bihar, an eastern state of India, in order to find their impact on the perception of the listeners. There is a range of research on folklore from India; however, there has yet to be much research on children-related folklore in Bihar. Considering this research gap, the present research intends to study the effect of children's folklore on shaping their psyche. Through a qualitative analysis, the research attempts to find answers to questions such as: how do the verbal elements of the Bihari folklore affect children's way of thinking; do these folk genres always boost their wisdom or at times question their sense of perceiving morality; does folklore play any role in spreading awareness. We recorded rare folklore and folk beliefs and interviewed the natives of three districts as representatives of the ancient Magadh, Mithila, and Anga regions of Bihar. We concluded that folklore and folk beliefs could be important tools in spreading wisdom, humanitarian perspectives, and environmental consciousness among children. Therefore, the folk genre contributes to raising awareness of cultural norms within society.

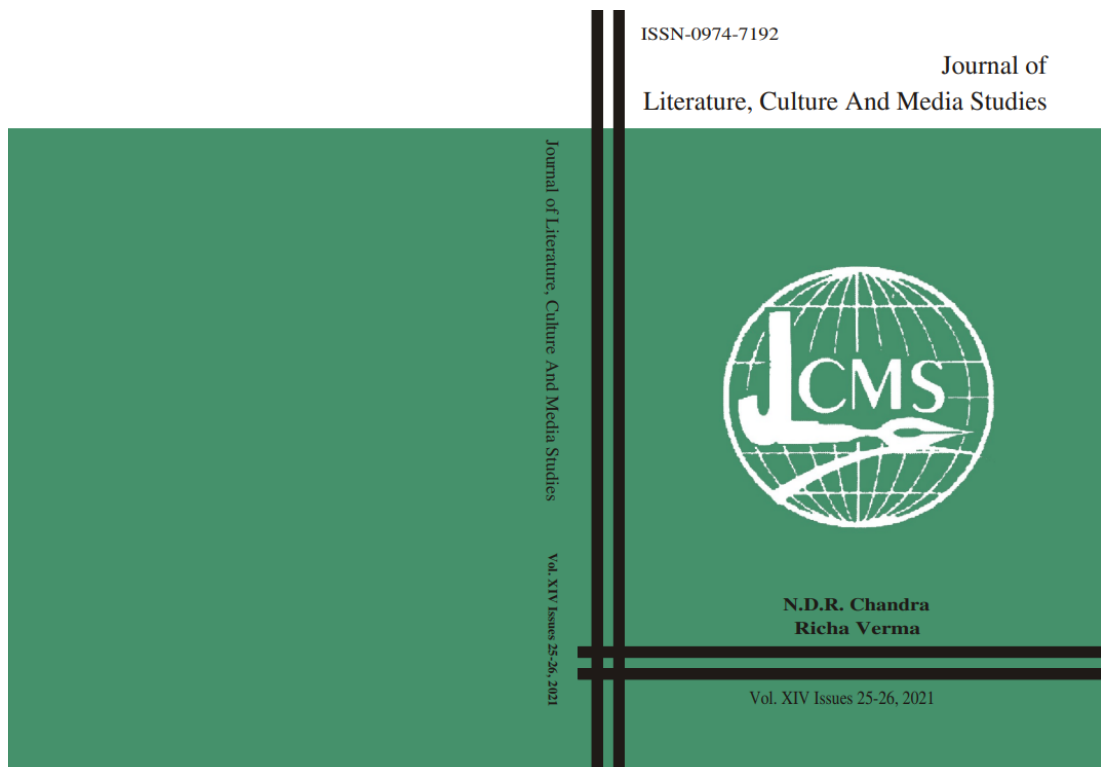
*Keywords:* awareness, Bihar, children, conditioning, folklore, perception

Enriched with cultural, geographical, and biological wealth, Bihar is an eastern state of India. This region has been the center of political-economic power, philosophical and spiritual learning, and heritage and culture for over a thousand years. Bihar had great sages and rulers. It was the abode of Patanjali, the philosopher who wrote *Yogasutra*, who developed the philosophy of yoga (Gopal, 2018). Whether it is the attainment of spiritual knowledge by Gautam Buddha, the administration of Chandragupta, or the establishment of Nalanda University, this region has witnessed the rise of intellect and wisdom, including prominent writers such as Kalidas and Vidyapati. The great Mauryan Empire reigned in this region. In addition, two major pacifist religious traditions, Buddhism and Jainism, spread from this region. Aside from religious epics, many ancient Indian texts were written here. Inhabitants of Bihar established several monasteries, places of Hindu worship, and architectural water bodies for agriculture. During the post-independence era, there has been a rapid expansion of psychic and material development urbanization succeeded by the mass movement of people. Globalization has resulted in a further shift in demography and the translation of foreign literature into Indian languages (Chakma, 2022). There has been a significant change in rural Bihar along with the age-old values and norms.

With time, the term “Bihari” was considered derogatory by the people of other states and the natives of Bihar who settled in metro cities. This term hinted at someone who was poor and earned an income by working in filthy conditions. It was a commonplace remark by rich people when they were not happy with the work of a laborer or rickshaw puller. In contemporary India, however, some people tend to subvert this concept of being “Bihari”. They feel proud of asserting their Bihari identities, believing they are one of the most intelligent communities in India. To preserve their festivals, such as *Chhatha* (devotion to the Sun deity) and *Jivitputrika* (a festival as an oath to protect the offspring), the Bihari community has made these festivals world-renowned. Majorly all such celebrations involve singing folksongs and specific rituals. There is a range of literary and research works examining the various socio-cultural, politico-economic, literary, and institutional aspects of this region. Some scientific literature like *Krishi Parasara*, *Krishi Geeta*, *Krishi Shashtram*, *Vriksha Ayurveda* and *Madhava Nidan* are elaborate texts on agricultural and Ayurvedic resources and practices. There are many publications that examine the rock-cut caves, architectural landscape (Pathak, 2010); dilapidated shrines, Stupas and *Mathas* in this region (Sinha, 2003); agro-literary activities, a collection of folklore and anthologies of popular Magahi poets, and compile the history of Magadh literature and culture since 8th Century AD. This published literature narrates the existence of folk practices and role of folklore in the preservation of cultures, moral values, and environmental values but till this date no holistic research has been undertaken which could credibly give coherent research insights on the role of the folk genre on morals, ethics and environmental sensitization in children.

At this critical stage when Bihar is losing the heritage and folk culture, it is necessary to elucidate the impacts of folk genre on children as children are the major audience of folk genres (Adiakor, 2021; Zalar, 2020). There still exists a plethora of folk heritage, including folk art, folk games, folk tales, folk songs, and folk festivals, in Bihar. Every stage of life in this state includes specific rites or *samskaras*. Beginning with *Mundan* (Tonsure, or Shaving of baby's

5. Tosha, Mallika and Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi, “Cashless Economy and Environment: A Humanitarian Perspective through Literary Lens.” *Journal of Literature, Culture and Media Studies*. (Ed. N.D.R. Chandra), 2021.





## 17. Cashless Economy and Environment : A Humanitarian Perspective through Literary Lens

Mallika Tosha\*, Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi\*\*

**Abstract :** *This research article studies the impact of digitization of money on the environment. The fact that currency acts as a carrier of several diseases, is widely known. Human beings, a part of the ecosystem are affected by the microbes that are carried by the cash and coin as it goes from one hand to the other. Switching on to e- money becomes undoubtedly useful in eradicating these human health problems to a great extent. That the vision of the development of the earth should include an intertwined plan without neglecting any major aspect of progress has been argued in this research. In order to comprehend the situation, present before and after the advent of cashless economy, a correlational study has been made between the physical environment, human beings and means of monetary exchange. Three major literary texts from different locations have been utilized for the sake of providing a historical perspective of the usage of hard cash. Through analysis, interpretation and historicisation, this research aims to elucidate upon the links of cashless economy to the present condition of the world.*

**Keywords :** *Cashless economy, Tactile money, Environment, E-money, Literary genre, Historicise.*

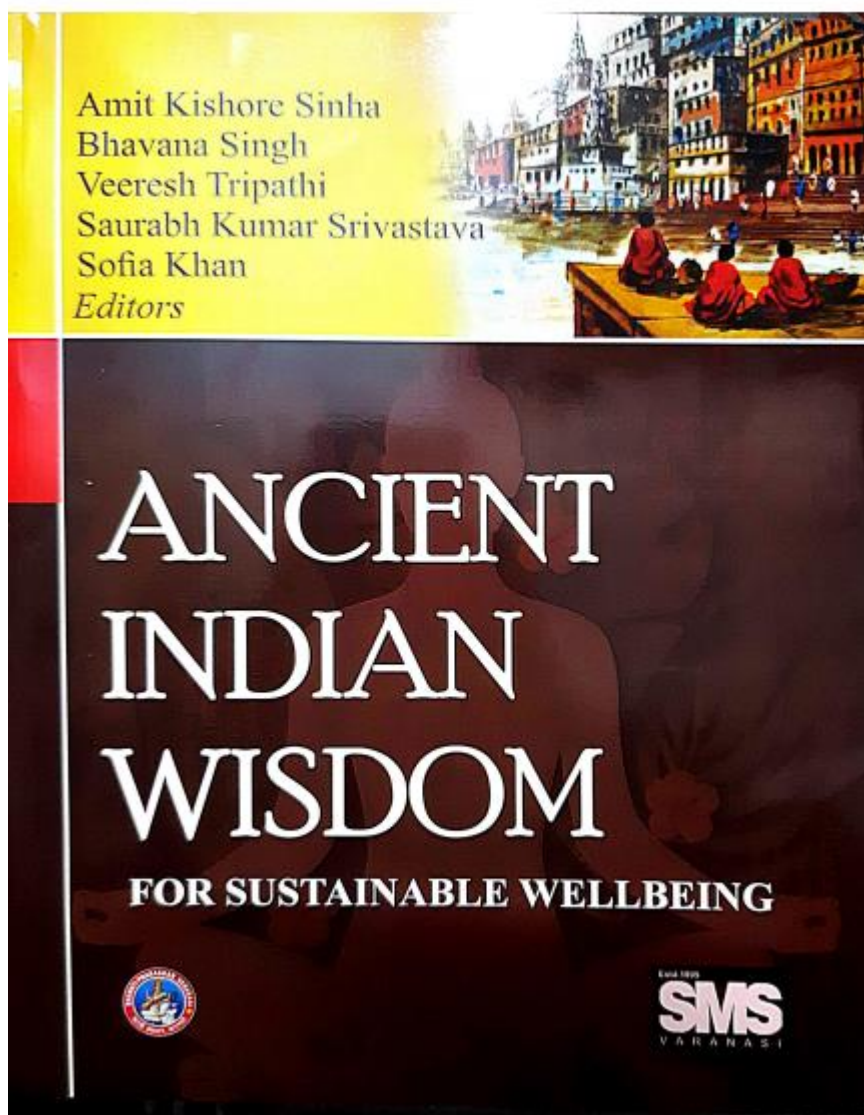
### Introduction

The world is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers; -  
Little we see in Nature that is ours"

(Wordsworth, 1807)

More than two hundred years ago, William Wordsworth very rightly talked about the anthropocentric nature of human beings. Ecocriticism, according to Cheryl Glotfelty is "the study of the relationship between environment and literature (xviii)" and: Ecological criticism shares the fundamental

6. Tosha, Mallika and Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi, Biodiversity in Angika Folksongs of Bihar: An Environmental Perspective. In *Ancient Indian Wisdom for Sustainable Wellbeing* (Ed. A.K. Sinha, et al.) Bharti Publication, Varanasi, 2021, pp 200-205 (ISBN: 9789388019873).



## Biodiversity in Angika Folksongs of Bihar : An Environmental Perspective

**Mallika Toshia**

*Research Scholar, Delhi Technological University, Delhi  
Email: mallikamatyam@gmail.com*

**Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi**

*Associate Professor, Delhi Technological University*

### ABSTRACT

Folksongs are as multifarious and diverse as the culture and phenomenon they represent. They have in fact emerged as cultural artefact across time and space. The Angika folksongs of Bihar also resonate with the colour and flavour of environment, culture, life and humanity. The contemporary relevance of folksongs has been identified in its association of environmental issues of human life. The research paper studies some of the old traditional folksongs of Ancient Ang Pradesh, which engenders the territories of Bihar, Bengal and Jharkhand. It argues that ecocentricity was always present in the habits, customs and rituals of human beings, and folksongs could be a means to study these elements of ecocriticism. Folksongs embody within themselves several aspects such as philosophical questioning, eulogizing of natural environment and a reflection of relations. The paper further argues that an ecocentric approach was always present in the habits, customs and rituals of the Indians. It argues that in the past times, nature and human beings coexisted together. In other words, there was a negligible amount of clash between the two. An attempt has been made to study the representation of flora, fauna and the surroundings, their significance and the relationship between human beings to the environment through these songs. By analysing various nature friendly rituals that are closely related to these folksongs, the research assesses the extremity of environment- friendly nature of ancient India. The concept of earth as "mother" and "goddess" is a derivation of the bhava(sentiment) evoked in human beings through their attachment with the earth. Through the utilization of Angika folksongs, the research aims at highlighting and unravelling the elements of nature incorporated within these songs. An effort is made to achieve these explorations by analysing marriage songs, thread ceremony songs and birth celebration folksongs.

**Keywords:** Angika, Folksongs, Environment, Ecocriticism

### Introduction

The Angika folksongs of Bihar also resonate with the colour and flavour of environment, culture, life and humanity. The contemporary relevance of folksongs has been identified in its association of environmental issues of human life. The term environment is an inclusion of abiotic (non-living elements such as temperature, light, water, and nutrients) and biotic (living elements such as living beings and plants). Folksongs are incomplete without the inclusion of biodiversity. This is due to two facts. Firstly, because this inclusion gives rise to beauty and essence to the songs, and secondly, due to various rituals with which these folksongs are related. Almost every ritual of our country contains the interaction and interrogation with biodiversity. This is because the life of human being is incomplete without nature. Primitive men used to worship nature in the form of god and

7. Tosha, Mallika, and Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi. "Angika Folksongs and Physical Environment: A Critical Perspective on Parallel Decline." *Think India Journal*, vol.22, issue 4.

**THINK INDIA (Quarterly Journal)**

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**Angika Folksongs and Physical Environment: A Critical Perspective on  
Parallel Decline**

Mallika Tosha  
Guest Faculty  
Department of Humanities  
Delhi Technological University  
Delhi

Email: [mallikanatvam@gmail.com](mailto:mallikanatvam@gmail.com)

Dr. Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi  
Associate Professor  
Department of Humanities  
Delhi Technological University  
Delhi

Email: [rajivdwivedi@dtu.ac.in](mailto:rajivdwivedi@dtu.ac.in)

**Abstract:** Folksong, according to Merriam Webster Dictionary is: "A traditional or composed song typically characterized by stanzaic form, refrain, and simplicity of melody". Folksongs reflect on the natural environment. In other words, there is a harmonious mixing of nature and folk songs—the existence of men and nature as one entity gets revealed to us in the form of folksongs and folklores. The present research article studies the reason behind the gradual decline of folksongs with respect to our physical environment. Folksongs of Bihar, written in Angika language, are the primary source this article refers to. That environment is greater than human beings is clearly seen in the folksongs of Angika. This research delves into the relationship of these folk lineages with the environment. Researchers have endeavoured to study the major reasons leading to a gradual effacement of folksongs composed in Angika language. How Angika folksongs underwent tremendous change across space and time has been unravelled in this paper.

**Keywords:** Folksongs, Environment, Flora, Fauna, Virtual space



## DELHI TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

(Formerly Delhi College of Engineering)

Shahbad Daultapur, Main Bawana Road, Delhi-42

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Department Humanities

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

Name: **Mallika Tosha**  
Father's name: Prof. Ram Kumar  
Date of Birth: 24/06/1992  
Address: BP-48, Maurya Enclave, Pitampura, Delhi- 110034  
Mobile: 8588929770  
Residence: 011- 40576129  
Email: [mallikanatyam@gmail.com](mailto:mallikanatyam@gmail.com)

### **Current academic activities:**

1. Teaching English Language through Literature to B.Com students at NCWEB, Keshav Mahavidyalaya.
2. Taught English Fluency and Communication in Everyday Life to B.A. and B. Com at NCWEB, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee College
3. Pursuing PhD at Delhi Technological University, Delhi, India (thesis submitted).
4. Registered reviewer of PLOS-ONE
5. Associate editor of Journal of Literature, Language and Media Studies.
6. Registered reviewer of IAFOR journal of Literature and Librarianship.

### **Member of National and International Academic Bodies:**

1. Member of the Popular Culture Association of America

### **Teaching Experience:**

1. Taught Technical Communication, Adaptation and Translation, and Theatre and Stagecraft to B. Tech Students from January 2024 to May 2024.
2. Taught English Fluency at SOL, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee College from December 2022 to December 2023.
3. Taught Appreciation of fiction and Appreciation of Short Stories to B. Tech students from August 2023 to December 2023.
4. Taught Theatre and Stagecraft to B. Tech. students from December 2022 to April 2023.



5. Taught English Fluency, and English Language through Literature at NCWEB, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee College from December 2021 to Present
6. Taught Business communication and English language through literature to BA and B. Com course at Aditi Mahavidyalaya, NCWEB, University of Delhi, India from August 2020 to May 2021.
7. Taught Business communication and English language through literature at Maitreyi College, NCWEB, University of Delhi, India from August 2019 to July 2020

#### **Research Experience:**

1. Successfully Completed dissertation of M. Phil on “Ecocritical Aspects of Folksongs: A Study of Folk-Composition in Angika Language” in December 2018.
2. Successfully completed Dissertation of Masters on “Hindi Haiku: A Study” in April 2016.
3. Successfully completed the project on “African- American writers” for a diploma in creative writing in English in 2014.

#### **Educational Qualification:**

Degree/Course	Year of Passing	Board/ University	Division/ Grade	Percent/ Grade
Secondary (Standard 10 <sup>th</sup> )	2008	K.H.M.S (Central Board of Secondary Education, India, New Delhi, India)	A2	80.0
Higher Secondary (standard 12 <sup>th</sup> )	2010	K.H.M.S (Central Board of Secondary Education, India, New Delhi, India)	A2	85.3
Bachelor	2013	Banasthali Vidyapith, Rajasthan, India	First	69.4
Master	2016	Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi	First	62.5
M.Phil.	2017	Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi	First	72.5
Ph. D.	2024	Delhi Technological University, Delhi . Topic of Ph. D. Thesis: “ <i>Studying Ecocriticism through Folk Literature from Bihar</i> ”		
<b>Additional Qualification (if any)</b>				

Skill Course at the level of Creative writing	2014	British Council, New Delhi	Good	-
Diploma in Creative writing in English	2015	IGNOU, New Delhi, India	First	75.0
Junior Diploma in Bharatnatyam	2007	Prayag Sangeet Samiti, Allahabad	First	60.6
Sangeet Prabhakar in Bharatnatyam (Equivalent to B.A.)	2014	Sur Sadhna Sangeet Mahavidyalaya	First	77.0
Qualified State Level Eligibility Test in English from Gujarat	2017	Gujarat state-level eligibility test		
Qualified UGC NET in English	2018	UGC National Level Eligibility Test (NET)		

#### **Awards/Scholarships:**

- i. Awarded fully funded doctoral fellowship by Delhi Technological University, Delhi
- ii. Awarded merit cum means scholarship in M.Phil. by Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi from July 2016 to December 2017.
- iii. Awarded Sanskrit Pratibha Puraskar in 2008 by Delhi Sanskrit Academy.

#### **Conference/ Seminar/Workshop/FDP organized/attended/presented paper:**

##### **National:**

1. Participated in 7-Days Online Faculty Development Programme on "**Bharatiya Knowledge System and Research**" during 9<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2023, organized by the Department of Mathematics, Central University of South Bihar, Gaya in collaboration with Shiksha Sanskriti Utthan Nyas, New Delhi.
2. Attended "**Research Methodology, Academic Writing and Publishing in English**" Workshop organised by All India Forum for English Students, Scholars, and Trainers and Institute of Aeronautical Engineering, Hyderabad, from 21<sup>st</sup> August to 20<sup>th</sup> September 2022.
3. Attended a workshop, "**E-Resources: A Gateway for Research**, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (2022)" conducted by the Central Library, Delhi Technological University, Delhi from 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

4. Acted as a Resource person and delivered a speech on the topic: “**Complexities of Teaching English Communication to Technical Students of India**” in the International Virtual Seminar on English Language, Literature, Linguistic and Cultural Studies *Conducted by* World English Language, Learners, Teachers, and Trainers Association on 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2022
5. Organized a workshop on “**Research in Literature: State and Directions**” by the Department of Humanities, Delhi Technological University, Delhi on 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> October 2021.
6. Participated in the Two-Day National Webinar on “**Contemporary Concerns of English Studies in India**” *organized by* the Department of English, Anugrah Memorial College, Gaya on 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2020.
7. Presented the paper “**Ecocritical Study of Cashless Economy**” in National Seminar on “Media as Medium towards Cashless Economy” held on 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> March 2017 at Central University of South Bihar, Patna.

#### **International:**

1. Presented a conference paper, “**Folk Literature and Gender: An iconoclastic Interplay,**” at the international conference, “Gender Concerns in Language and Literature”, organised by the Department of English, PSG College of Arts & Science on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2022.
2. Presented the paper “**Angika Folksongs as a Developmental Tool in Protecting the Environment**” at the 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on “Developmental Issues and Interdisciplinary Methods” (FIRM) Organized by Munger University and Shyam Lal College, University of Delhi.
3. Presented the paper “**Biodiversity in Angika Folksongs: A Co-existence**” in the International Conference on Ancient Indian Wisdom, *organized by* the School of Management Sciences and California State University: San Bernardino, Varanasi on 26<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> June 2021.
4. Presented the paper “**Visiting the Folklores of Bihar, an Eastern State of India: An Environmental Perspective**” at the conference of Popular Culture Association of America on 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2021.
5. Presented paper “**English Language Teaching Phenomenon and University Level Students: A Study of the Problematic of Medium**” at the International Summit on Quality Indices in Higher Education - 2020, held from 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> November 2020 at Delhi Technological University, Delhi.

**Papers published:**

1. Mallika, T. & Dwivedi, R. R. (2024: **Accepted**) [A Study of the Coalescence between Environmental Sustainability and Angika Folklore \(Eastern Bihar, India\). \*Folklore. Estonia\*](#)
2. Mallika, T. & Dwivedi, R. R. (2024). Ecological Representation in the Maithili Songs of Vidyapati. *Anhad Lok*, 10(19).
3. Mallika, T., & Dwivedi, R. R. (2024). Nature-Culture Binary versus Ancient Folklore of Bihar (An Eastern Indian State). *Classical Literature*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.55121/cl.v2i1.109>
4. Tosha, M., & Dwivedi, R. R. (2023). Perception through the Personified: A Study of Children's Folklore from Bihar, India. *IAFOR Journal of Literature & Librarianship*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.22492/ijl.12.1.04>
5. Tosha, M., & Dwivedi, R. R. (2021). Cashless Economy and Environment: A Humanitarian Perspective through Literary Lens. *Journal of Literature, Culture and Media Studies*. (Ed. N.D.R. Chandra) [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361416290\\_cashless](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361416290_cashless)
6. Tosha, M., & Dwivedi, R. R. (2021). Biodiversity in Angika Folksongs of Bihar: An Environmental Perspective. In *Ancient Indian Wisdom for Sustainable Wellbeing* (Ed. A.K. Sinha, et al.) Bharti Publication, Varanasi, pp 200-205 (ISBN: 9789388019873).
7. Tosha, M. (2019). Hindi Haiku: A Study of Shifts in Moods. *IAFOR Journal of Literature & Librarianship*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.22492/ijl.8.1.04>
8. Tosha, M., & Dwivedi, R. R. (2019). Angika Folksongs and Physical Environment: A Critical Perspective on Parallel Decline. *Think India Journal*, 22(4), 4072-4082. Retrieved from <https://journals.eduindex.org/index.php/think-india/article/view/9613>
9. Tosha, M. (2016). "Native Space Colonial Presence: East-West Encounter in *A Flight of Pigeon*." *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, 4(3), pp. 817-820, *RJELAL*, <http://www.rjelal.com/4.3.16c/817-820%20MALLIKA%20TOSHA.pdf>