



Ecological Concerns in Bhojpuri Folk Songs

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Abstract

Culture and environment are embedded in each other in Indian tradition. The folklore also complies with this setting. Bhojpuri serves as the mother tongue of the major populace of the rural regions of eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar. It has a significant tradition of folk songs like seasonal melodies, wedding compositions, *Sohar* songs, *Chhath* songs, *Sanjha-parati*, etc. The songs that are sung on different occasions encompass a plethora of eco-critical significances. They reflect the engrained relationship between the environment and human existence. This paper attempts to trace the attributes of such relationships, in select Bhojpuri folksongs. An attempt has been made to analyse the songs through an ecological lens. The discussion will also reflect on how the universal concerns are domesticated in the form of folk songs and up to what extent regional imagination incorporates those concerns. The present study employs the discourse analysis method for its advancement. The folk songs have been drawn from diverse categories, each associated with its specific occasion.

Keywords: Environment, human behaviour, culture, folk songs, domestication.

Introduction

Folklore is the total way of life of a tradition-oriented society (Biswas 1800). Vladimir Propp hails that "Literature is also a verbal art, and for this reason the closest connection exists between folklore and literature, between the science of folklore and literary criticism. Literature and folklore overlap partially in their poetic genres" (6). Indian folksongs are the reflector of the cultural and societal setup. Folklore serves society by

- Educating people about supernatural forces,
- Assuring people of the present, and
- Imparting information to the rest of the world (Suwandi, *et al.* 2289).

They express the very unfiltered substances of the human consciousness of this subcontinent. Vidya Nivas Misra states that "The Indian folklore is the substratum of our culture and retains some of the finest shades of aesthetic refinement" (100). The festivals and rituals in India play a significant role in various kinds of social awareness. The concerns are addressed in many ways; whether it be necessitating the plants and herbs in the rituals, or worshipping the air, soil, plants, and the sun, or highlighting the values of the environment, all have the same purpose the purpose of making people take care of their surroundings. Environmental concern is one of them. The general worldview of people may change with time due to learning and advancement of knowledge, yet the sense of the Ecological Worldview

remains intact through folklore (Mago 2). The rituals performed during the festivals seem to impart messages to the society regarding the importance of the eco-system. The songs that are sung during the performance of the rituals also convey strong ideas about the values of the conservation of water, plants, etc. The environment and its sustainability count on the human behaviour of the concerned community towards it. The uses, especially the way of uses, of the natural resources affect the health of the environment. Mankind's hardcore belief in anthropocentrism has led him to exploit everything around him that is 'not' human to meet the interest of human needs (Singh 18). It is a significant thing to be noticed that the folksongs catch the very instinct of the human behaviour. They aim at correcting human behaviour by making appeals through the native songs. Douglas Kennedy states:

The history of the Folk-lore Society, as illuminated by the various presidential addresses, shows how the field of folklore has been extended by thought-provoking writings to cover a vast area of human behaviour. Folklore has no monopoly over this area but shares it with such separate disciplines as anthropology, comparative history of religion, of art, of literature, of music, etc. (76)

Bhojpuri folk songs reflect the essential interplay of culture and environment. The parallel concern can be traced through the songs. For instance, we take a wedding song for analysis:

Kawan daari laage baba meeth dashhariya

Kawan daari paan dhimlay
Kawan daari laage baba nehiya piritiya
Kawan daari tural na jaye

(my trans.; Which branch of the tree contains sweet mangoes? Where can *Paan* be found? Where love can be planted? And finally which branch must not be broken?)

Here the inter-connection of culture and nature is shown through a conversation between a daughter and her father. The daughter is asking her father in what manner the things mentioned in the above song exist. Her father gives responses to her questions. In this short but beautiful conversation, a significant picture is visualised before the eyes of the listeners. It consists of a whole scenery of trees, plants, and fruits which are unified with the theme of love as well. Another significant theme which is emerging out through this conversation is the theme of a love-marriage. It must be noticed how a village-girl skillfully draws her father's attention toward the person whom she is in love with. The girl urges:

Naahi Kulhi jaati dharam dhan dekhiha
Dekhiha na mahal sareh
Ohi daari banhiha aacharawa e baba
Jawan daari lagal saneh.

(my trans.; Papa, please do not consider social status, caste, religion, wealth, building, property, etc. for my marriage. Get me married to the person with whom I am in love.)

She is trying to convince her father that she will not marry any person just because he falls under a certain caste, religion, social, or financial status but she will marry the person she loves.

Bihar, especially, is known for *Chhath* Pooja among its festivals. This is regarded as the *Mahaparv* (The greatest festival) as well. This Mahaparv shows how ecology and festivals are embedded in each other. It would be better to call it a festival of ecological awareness. In this festival, women keep fast for three days. They worship *Suryadev* (the sun God) and the goddess *Chhathi*. Both the setting and the rising are offered water, fruits, and sweets with graceful gestures. It is suggestive of the gratefulness towards the sun for its being the greatest source of energy on the earth. Especially the women keep fast to perform the rituals and offer prayers on *Chhath Ghat* (the bank of a pond or a river where idols of the mother *Chhathi* are installed). Water, several plants, the sun, and the earth are offered huge reverence which signify the interplay of cultural and environmental entities. The songs reflect that the environment is never separated from the cultural setup of society. Human life and other lives are inseparable and they sink into each other to establish 'oneness' between them. Everything in the universe has its own role in the greater eco-system and the rituals performed during the *Chhath* Pooja reflect the significance of a healthy eco-system. In the songs of *Chhath* Pooja, the theme of nature and environment can be traced. A very popular *Chhath*-song is quoted below:

Kawane khete janmal dhaan sudhaan ho
Kawane khete dathhar paan
E mai kawane kokhi lihale Janam ho surujdev
Utha suruj bhaile bihaan.

(my trans.; in which plot of field paddy is grown? and in which one the *Paan* is planted? Who is the mother of the sun?

O sun! kindly rise.)

A woman is urging the sun to rise in the east so that she can complete her *vrat* (Fasting) by offering him *Arghya* (A small basket full of fruits and flowers along with water is offered raising towards the sun.) Conclusively, she is waiting for the sun to rise because she has to convey her gratitude to the sun which is the prime source of energy on this planet. The presence of paddy, *paan*, and sugarcane is the symbol of the recognition of plants of every kind in this festival.

These songs have concern for the whole planet as a whole. They show how humans and their complementary lives are important together. Abdillah hails that "Humans must maintain the harmony of life with the environment so that the realization of a harmonious life between nature and itself, although humans have the right to use it, must not damage and destroy it" (quoted from Suwandi 2290). Another song can be quoted for instance in which a woman is lamenting the lives that were lost due to a flood in the Kosi region. And she is cursing the river Kosi which has drowned so many villages. She is expressing her inability before *Chhathi mata* (Mother-*Chhathi*) that she will not perform the Pooja this year:

Kaisi chhathiya kari e maiya lootal sab hamar
Kosi kuchhau chhodale naikhi kaili gaanv ujaar
Haat bajariya sab bah gaile aisan aail dhar
Kosi kuchhau chhodale naikhi kaili gaanv ujaar
Apna sewakwan ke kaahe bhool gailu
Kosi ke kahr se tu kaahe na bachailu
Hey chhathi maiya hokha sahaya dukh me baate Bihar
Kosi kuchhau chhodale naikhi kaili gaanv ujaar.

(my trans.; o mother! how will I arrange to perform the rituals? Everything including the village, market, and lives is snatched by the flood driven by the river Kosi. Why did you forget to save us from the disaster Mother? O mother! We need your grace, the whole of Bihar has fallen into an apocalyptic situation, save us!)

Kosi River is called the Sorrow of Bihar. The overflowed river Kosi has washed away everything in its region. Innumerable lives have been lost in the flood. Just after this crisis, *Chhath* Pooja is nearby. Consequently, the woman who is to perform the Pooja is worried about the required arrangements for it. The flood emerged from the river has swept away everything that came in its range. No man, animal, plant, or tree is spared. The whole eco-system is destroyed. Her lamentation of the lost lives and the concern for required fruits and plants for the Pooja is not only for the Pooja itself but for the restoration of the whole eco-system. She is offended by *Chhathi-mata* also because she thinks the supernatural power of the Mother could have saved them from the flood.

The traditional songs have also been modified. Some new songs are created keeping in view today's scenario. They encompass a blended form of rituals with the current concerns and issues. These songs have begun to showcase the concerns for the disappearing plants in a very explicit manner. A song can be taken for analysis in this regard:

Ganga maai kahanwa suruj mal kahanwa
Kahanwa ho maiya hamaar
Kahanwa re baate gauwa ke domwa
Kab aayi duwara konhaar (...)
Badhwa me unkhiya dahai gaile
Banswa orai gaile ho
Kaise ke aragha diwai ki
Pokhara sukhai gaile ho.

(My trans.; where is the Mother Ganga? And where are the lord Sun and the Mother *Chhathi*? Where is the Dom of the village? Where will the potter come to give pots? The flood washed away the crop of sugarcane, the bamboo is no more. How will I perform the *argha*, my water offering, when the pond has dried up?)

The song seems strongly focused on the importance of a healthy relationship between flora and fauna. It depicts the after-effects of both kinds of natural disasters; flood and famine. The people who make such songs, they rationally knit the inter-connection among the several elements of the eco-system. The song explores the devastation caused by the flood. The singer is lamenting the loss the inhabitants have to suffer due to the flood caused by the heavy rain. Ultimately it raises concerns regarding climate change. It does not go to the reasons behind the natural disasters but it leaves the listeners with a thoughtful link to ponder over it. The folksongs attempt to establish interdependent connections among the flora and fauna. Biswas also postulates that "Folktales play a crucial role in converting these people from anthropocentric to ecocentric. All primitive people all over the world live so adjacent to their nature. Thus, the tales narrated by them incorporate animals, trees that help children to connect with nature" (1802). Sometimes the songs address the issues regarding the environment explicitly and sometimes they opt for an indirect way to raise the concern. The present song opts to showcase an explicit expression of the ecological concern that can be seen in the song. Hence, these songs show the attributes of an inter-connected relationship between culture and environment and they effectively attract people's attention to such concerns.

Conclusion

Different ages, regions, and societies have their own ways of expressing thoughts and ideas. As far as the regions are concerned, the native language plays a vital role in the process of domesticating global distress. The folksongs attempt to encompass several significant issues, environmental care is one of them. Women mostly sing these songs that are performed during the festivals and the rituals. Through their imaginative faculty, they adapt the universal concerns into the regional language, and in the process of adaptation, some alluring domestic things— such as, social, cultural, and linguistic specifications are added which enrich the melodies with their beauties. The nativity of language has an important role in encoding thoughts into language and deliverance is simple, clear, and impressive. Thus, the extent of the contributions of the native language is sometimes more than the scholarly preachings. These songs appeal more than many kinds of awareness that are made through several agencies. In the context of this regional imagination every man and woman, who is involved in the songs or in the rituals on which they are performed, is an agency—an agency of the healthy eco-system. Therefore, it seems that the folksongs make an immense contribution to invigorating the bond between human behaviour and ecology.

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