

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

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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

According to Neil Evernden (1996), “The subversive nature of Ecology rests on its assumption of literal interrelatedness, not just interdependence” (102). However, there are many writers, who are trying to preserve this language through their writings. Along with growing urbanization, people lost contact with greenery and with folksongs. The folksongs, that once initiated the love for nature in people, now started depleting. The depletion of folksongs went on along with the depletion of nature. Because of the lack of sensitivity, less people were involved in the singing of the folksongs. The gap between human being and nature widened, and so did the distance between folksongs and people. As cities expanded, the circumference of societies contracted. People started staying inside their personal zones. This was due to the fact that the life had become a sedentary one. In contemporary times, entertainment, unlike past, is done in isolation. We either look at television or surf the internet in order to entertain ourselves. In cities, people also find the folksongs inferior because they consider such compositions to be the marks of illiteracy and that of the past they do not want to recall. Amaladass (2007) puts forth:

The day-to-day life in our computer-world is an expression of forgetfulness of the creation and becoming stranger to the creative aspect of the world. Science and technology have become the primary driving force of life. We know well that there are hardly areas in life bereft of nature. But, then of all kinds of living beings on earth, the human being lives in the most artificial of all environments. (p. 30)

Those who wanted to get a feel of the songs were forced to avail these songs from internet. Undoubtedly, internet contains many folksongs, but listening from the internet is very different from listening and joining the singing of the folksongs in physical reality, surrounded by flora and fauna. Human beings have changed their nature to a mechanical one because they always wanted to reign on the earth. Amaladass continues:

Of all living beings, human being is the only one who has emancipated himself/herself in his/her life-surroundings almost completely from his/her life conditions of all kinds. Everywhere s/he meets with traces of his/ her own development, progress, changes and transformations. S/he organizes his/her life without consideration of the needs and demands her/his environment without real image of himself/herself and of the surrounding world (p. 30).

The notion was not true in regard with the era before industrialization. The attachment of people towards environment diminished gradually. Ecosystem—the thread that connected folks to the traditional lineages faced silent effacement. This further led to a major sinking and alteration of customs that were highly related to nature. Angika folksongs, a part of such customs, used to convey a sense of respect and affection of people towards the environment.

The dominant essence of the folksongs lied in the celebration of nature by being together. In the present scenario, however this essential characteristic of such composition has almost obliterated. The compositions that played an essential role in festivals and worships were now available in CDs and cassettes. People used these recordings in various occasions in which the inclusion of folksongs were considered important. The importance of these folksongs shrunk to mere entertainment purpose. Movies used the tune and lyrics of folksongs to add to the taste of the audience. Many bollywood movies have adapted their songs from these folk compositions:

Koun disa me leke chala re batuhiya

Koun disa me leke chala re batuhiya

Ae thahar thahar ye suhani si dagar

Zara dekhan de zara dekhan de (Nadiya ke paar 1982).

...

Wanderer, o wanderer, which way are we moving?

Wanderer, o wanderer, which way are we moving?

Halt, o halt a bit, this path attracts me

Let me have a look,

Let me have a look (Translated by Mallika Tosha).

The beauty of the path in the movie has been determined by the greenery surrounding it. However, the intensity of the effect of nature on minds is not necessarily the theme. The two singers in this movie *Nadiya Ke Par* (1982) are talking about life, relationship and time in this song. In another movie, village women sing:

Dheere baho nadiya

Dheere baho

Hamen utran paar (Achhut Kanya 1936)

...

Flow slowly Dear River

Flow slowly

Let us step down at your bank (Translated by Mallika Tosha)

In this song, the singers are talking to a river, while doing their daily chores. This movie is of the times when internet was not born. These were the ages when folksongs were very much dominant in the villages of India. People lived fully and celebrated their life through the folksongs. The following years brought urbanization in India, and along with that the depletion of folksongs started. After industrialization, the feeling of human beings towards the earth shifted from love to selfishness and exploitative attachment. Harold Fromm, in his essay “From

Transcendence to Obsolescence” quotes a letter that shows the insensitivity of the writer towards environment:

Dear Sir:

Since all of the environmentalists who worry about pollution are also consumers of the products of these belching plants (the automobile for instance by which you reach your farm), what is the answer? Do we cut off our noses to spite our faces? Do we destroy our economy: eliminate many necessities of life; go back to living in tents for the sake of clean air? The answers are complex (p. 37).

The letter becomes a proof of the selfishness of us as human beings. The “necessities” mentioned in the letter are luxuries instead. The writer is not able to think how he or she can enjoy these luxuries without breathing clean air. The words of the letter also exhibit pride and over-confidence of the writer. Excessive pride was also one of the root causes of the loss of biodiversity. Nature is the partner of men and it affects the human life in some or the other form. It also inspires and motivates men. Nature can exist without human beings but human beings cannot exist without nature. However, the coexistence of human beings with nature would only happen when they give away their excessive pride. It is due to pride that human beings do not realize the importance of the biodiversity. This same vice, in the past, provoked the mechanical faculty rather than the emotional one. As the environment deteriorated, the folksongs declined. This was because human beings involved themselves in squeezing out the resources of earth. Unlike past years, they were left with no desire to sing these songs. In the cities folksongs died along with greenery.

In villages, however the case was not the same. Unlike the cities where folksongs depleted rapidly, villages saw a silent death of these compositions. As time grew and

urbanization gradually entered these villages, lesser people were left with the wordings of these songs. Now only old women sang those folksongs. The songs also became extinct along with the past generations. There is an instance that in a village where only folksongs completed certain rituals, no one of the present population remembered the composition. The rituals became complete, only when the songs ended. Nowadays however, the case is not the same. It seems as if we have totally lost contact with nature and our nature loving tradition. That our scriptures were full of the description of nature is a popular notion. Many folksongs, that are nearly dead today, combined the knowledge of scriptures and nature in order to create pleasant rhythm and melody. One of such folksongs recorded Mallika Tosha runs like this:

Savan garje, bhado barse

Pawan chale purvai

Kon virchh tar bheegat hoinhe

Ram lakhan dono bhai

Mohe raghuvar ki sudhi aayi

...

Thundering clouds, pouring rain

Blowing is the east wind

Both brothers, Ram and Lakhan

Must be getting wet

Beneath some tree

This rain of them

Reminds me (Translated by Mallika Tosha).

The lines depict the sublime characteristic of nature. The song is in the form of the words of Dushrath, the father of Rama. He is lamenting the journey of Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita in the forest. The lines depict how the weather and movement of nature affected the human feeling. In today's times, we are not able to find or create such lyrics because our contact with nature has ended. We consider pollution to be a major problem. Ozone depletion and climate change are also a part of such problems. We do not know about the sufferings inflicted upon human by the natural environment, when the atmosphere was pure. All we recognize is the impact of human deeds on nature and the result of such acts in the form of natural upheavals. The sublimity of nature is lost somewhere. Natural fear of nature is no more there, rather the fear for nature comes because of human forces afflicted upon the environment. This loss of natural relationship is one of the causes behind the depletion of folksongs. 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 environment as our body, we can goal towards its protection. The perception that nature is no other and that 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, father

Grown out of the peel of rice grain

Is now your daughter

Bring a son-in-law like loving rice flower

O father dear, make a good pair (Translated by Mallika Tosha)

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. This in itself points at the supremacy of the elements of nature. 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 a higher pedestal than the girl with whom we compare these flowers. In India the whole civilization has its root in nature. However, with time, as people progressed towards consumerist living, their festivals also changed. They started burning crackers in Chhatha Puja. This festival was completely bio centric once. The devotees worshipped sun with a pious heart and holy intentions. This was a festival that paid homage to the ecosystem. The worshippers used to stand half emerged in water. They offered water and fruits to sun along with a thankful prayer. No flowers or fruits were poured in the water bodies. However, with growing consumerism, people started burning crackers, throwing eatables in water and heavily polluted the environment.

Angika folksongs offer an eco-friendly perspective. Their 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. The society functions in a homocentric manner. An amalgamation of homocentric approaches leads to the degeneration of nature. In this regard, Frederick Turner (1996) puts forth, “The polluter and the ecology freak are two faces of the same coin; they both perpetuate a theory about nature that

allows no alternative to rapping it or tying it up in a plastic bag to protect it from contamination” (p. 45).

Turner has rightly said that first, we pollute and then we put medicine on the wounds of environment. Only theorising and preaching is not the solution, as shown by the environmentalists. It is by inhaling the spirit of nature that we would be able to live with the environment. He continues:

I believe that we must trust human intention more than human instinct, because intention evolved out of and as an improvement upon instinct. But if intention is to be thus trusted, it must be fully instructed in the instincts that are its springboard and raw material; otherwise, intention may do more harm than good. For this instruction, we must turn not only to the human sciences but also to the species' ancient wisdom as it is preserved in myths, rituals, fairy tales, and the traditions of the performing arts (p. 49).

Interestingly, Turner (1996) talks about “myths, rituals, fairy tales, and the traditions of the performing arts”, and the “ancient wisdom” of the human species. In the essay “Cultivating the American Garden”, the thinker focuses on America. He further says that America is an amalgamation of different cultures that share such eco loving ancient past (p. 50). By reclaiming these ancient ways of living together with Nature, we would be able to perhaps, harmoniously blend human deeds and natural ongoing of the biodiversity.

It becomes clear that as the biodiversity started becoming extinct, the folksongs also died. This was because of fast growing mechanization and urbanization that we lost contact with nature and folksongs. However, there is a huge number of researches going on in the field of folk

literature nowadays. This advancement may become one of the root cause of the protection of environment. Shanti Jain (2017), a saviour of Indian folksongs writes:

Bachave ke pari ho bachave ke pari

Pradushan se dharti bachave ke pari

Chimniyan ke kariya dhuan se

Dooshit bhail asmanvan

Khatam kar na ab hariyali ke

Mat kat ab vanava

Ab dege dege gachhiya lagave ke pari (p. 229)

...

We will have to protect, we will have to protect

We will have to protect the earth from pollution

And from the black soot of the chimneys

Polluted is the sky

The greenery says don't kill me

And the forest screams don't cut me

Let us plant trees on every step before us (Translated by Mallika Tosha)

The song conveys that this is the time of emergency for our environment. We must act or get doomed. One of the observations while reading this song is that as environmentalist came forward to make the citizens aware about the growing degeneration of the environment, such folksongs also came in front. People started modifying the folksongs and added to the pre-existing collections. However, it is also true that most of the folksongs in the past have fallen silent now. The existence of the folksongs and the environment lies parallel to each other. As

environment decayed, so did the folksongs. With growing environmental concern, the application of ecology-oriented rules, and creation of eco-friendly alternatives, a hopeful ray exhibits the resurrection of Angika folk composition along with environment in future.

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