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Locating Magahi Folk Culturalism in Indian Indigenous Ecological Tradition

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Abstract

This paper proposes a detailed and comprehensive analysis of Magahi folk songs to study the unexplored Magahi culturalism and to argue how its ecocentric ethics and values can contribute to the canon of Indian ecological tradition. In the last few decades, we see that works pertaining to indigenous ecological wisdom have gained a considerable amount of research interest. However, in India, which is home to many such indigenous societies, there are still many such traditions that have remained unnoticed– the Magahi culturalism being one of them. Arguing that Magahi ritualistic practices attach divinity to the different life forms, the paper aims to position its inherent ecocentric philosophy in the discourse of Indian ecological tradition. Divided into two major parts, it first provides an account of Indian aboriginal communities that share a harmonious communion with nature, and then puts forward archived samples of Magahi folk songs to derive an objective understanding of them.

Keywords: Anthropocentrism; Ecocentrism; Folk Songs; Indigenous Studies; Magahi.

1. Introduction

Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is a term used to describe a set of experiences that humans have obtained over a long period of time through their close proximity to Nature. Practised mostly by indigenous societies/religions, these belief systems, to a greater extent, have helped many primitive cultures to live in harmonious communion with Nature. However, the study of indigenous knowledge in the field of ecology to understand and preserve/apply the matrix of these age-old ideologies is a recent phenomenon, partly because of "ample evidence of indigenous knowledge and practices involved in enhancing biodiversity at the landscape level" (Gadgil et al. 152). Not only environmentalists but anthropologists, ethnoecologists, agriculturalists and biologists also "all share an interest in traditional knowledge for scientific, social, or economic reasons" (Berkes et al. 1251). Kyle Powys White attempts a collaborative approach to study traditional ecological knowledge and argues that "[i]t serves to invite diverse populations to continually learn from one another about how each approaches the very question of "knowledge" (Whyte 2). It recognises the value of indigenous wisdom, fosters cultural diversity, and promotes a more comprehensive understanding of ecosystems. Collaboration between traditional knowledge holders, scientists, policymakers, and conservationists is crucial for the success of such initiatives.

Spoken in the provinces of Bihar and Jharkhand states of Eastern India, the Magahi language speaks conceivably and persuasively of a euphonious concord and synergism between Nature and the human beings of the region, which gets manifested through a varied and rich tradition of folk songs dedicated to harvesting, seasons, festivals, profession and other rites of passage activities. We can trace detailed historical accounts of ecological traditions in India through the available works of literature, discourses and discussions; however, Magahi culturalism, which the paper argues has an equally significant contribution to the conservation of the indigenous flora and fauna, fails miserably to position itself in the canon of Indian ecological studies.

However, even at times when "ecological concerns are accelerating, and faith in technological fixes is collapsing" (Menzies 87) and the entire world is looking attentively at the traditional ecological wisdom of the indigenous communities, Magahi ecological practices remain overlooked, unnoticed and disapproved. What are traditional indigenous practices, and how are they precisely different from the other non-native forms of cultural manifestations? What are the possible reasons why Magahi culturalism remains neglected? To what extent do Magahi's traditional ecological beliefs and practices adequately address the concerns of modern biospheric problems of the planet's loss and degradation of biotic and abiotic communities? What is so unique and epoching about Magahi's traditional ecological knowledge, which sets it apart from other indigenous environmental conservation methods? Is it even possible to talk about a local ecological trend which lacks a well-defined historical authenticity? If at all this is possible, how can it achieve the status that other traditions have attained?

2. What are Indigenous Traditions?

Firstly, let us briefly analyse the indigenous religious customs and beliefs to ascertain how these traditional modes of sustenance can be pivotal and decisive in redefining our attempts to safeguard the environment in a rapidly changing world. Indigenous practices can be defined as a set of belief systems, languages, deities, rituals, customs, festivities, and ceremonies of small-scale societies (Grey 3230). Practised in almost every corner of the world, indigenous traditions share holistic, sustainable, dynamic and customary practices and rites of passage that have contributed to maintaining a delicate balance between Nature and human beings. Indigenous traditions share a lot of commonalities, which may include Nature worship, belief in multiple deities, community gathering and participation, structural flexibility and an ecocentric lifestyle. Aboriginal paradigms and ethics are very close to Nature as they share the ideas of balance, sustainability and interrelatedness with and within ecology (Bansal et al. 2). These native and primordial structures of ancient knowledge of restorative egalitarianism can be crucial in imparting commitments and responsibilities toward the biosphere. Mostly naturalist in their approaches and attitude, indigenous religions do not disturb the cycles of the environment as they believe in the ideology that Nature, too, has the right "to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles" (Andersson 2). Granting rights to the biotic and abiotic components of the environment, these endemic traditional ethics and ecological principles consider Nature as a living entity and ensure that human beings are not abusing it for their selfish and arrogant demands. Across many indigenous cultures, we see a variety of practices that illustrate ethical codes of behaviour intended to conserve and protect Nature.

However, it would be wrong to claim that all indigenous rituals and practices perform care and feeding of the entire environment with the same degree of intensity because "the meaning indigenous people give to any specific place or environment can be sacred, practical, or both" (Andersson 8). They might have a stronger sense of devotion and sacredness for particular trees, rivers, animals and birds, but their commitment to their preservation is what we need to ponder upon. This ancient environmental wisdom of sharing, caring, and mutual respect has been significant in maintaining a cordial relationship with nature, which manifests through the existing ecological balance at their designated places. Transferred through generations, these customary exercises of revering the environment and considering sentient and insentient entities as conscious and responsive beings help these communities to develop a holy communion with Nature. The environmental philosophy of biodivinity (attaching divinity to biotic entities) is a common trait among indigenous practices, and this biocentric (non-anthropocentric) vantage point sets these primaeval convictions apart from the practitioners of anthropocentrism. These primitive and native understandings of ecology are not merely abstract belief systems but are lived and practised experiences which still have their function in this mechanised and industrialised world. Mary N. Macdonald, in the article *The Primitive, the Primal, and the Indigenous in the Study of Religion* (2011), highlights the importance of these non-globalised religious performativities and argues that they "may help us to appreciate better religion as a lived reality informing the behaviour of individuals and communities" (MacDonald 815). This mutual and cooperative interchange of ecological experiences between globalised and local religious communities can have favourable and advantageous consequences on the well-being of Nature.

Indian Ecological traditions

Previously, we discussed how indigenous religious traditions could be adopted as an instrumental and indispensable mechanism to discuss our biospheric problems and look for probable and possible solutions to them. However, our concern here is restricted only to Indian ecological traditions to understand how they have been able to make their tacit presence felt in the canon of the history of ecological traditions. While tracing the Magahi traditional ecological practices, the paper also focuses on finding the possible causes that still make this culturalism unexplored and unfamiliar to the world. Indian Indigenous ecological traditions have deep historical roots and have lived in an effective alliance with Nature. Highlighting the importance of ecology in the native and primordial cultures of India, Madhav Gadgil and M. D. Subash Chandran (1992) opine that "[a] pparently due to the greater plasticity of Hinduism, which itself evolved absorbing numberless local cults, including many tribals ones, instead of vanquishing them as done by other major religions, a large number of sacred groves remained in our country" (183-84). They further argue how, in many indigenous practices, the wood was not even touched as the use of an axe was strictly prohibited, except when the wood was wanted for the repair of religious buildings (184).

Today, we can find an extensive and considerable amount of research works being published and explored on the rituals and customs of sacred groves in the country; however, it would be wrong to assume that all cultures have been treated equally because we still have many ecological traditions which have not been taken into account. India is a home of indigenous communities who have traditionally been involved in practising Nature worship to get their wishes fulfilled. Anwesha Borthakur (2013) writes that "... concentrated in the North-East and all along the Western Ghats, both globally recognised hotspots of biodiversity and [i] nhabited by a large number of indigenous communities, who have their own unique sets of beliefs and practices, India has a huge and valuable traditional knowledge base" (Borthakur 25). Madhav Gadgil and V. D. Vartak (1976) attempt to study how "[a]ll forms of vegetation in such a sacred grove, including shrubs and climbers, are under the protection of the reigning deity of that grove, and the removal, even of a dead wood, is taboo" (152). Even Emma Tomalin (2004) indicates a religious and cultural practice that has contributed to the protection and conservation of the environment in the Kerala state of India. However, she also argues that no matter to what extent the indigenous communities contributed to the conservation of their native forests, they were hardly aware of the philosophy of environmentalism. Here, the paper is not concerned about the idea of environmentalism, which she claims is a Western idea; instead, it focuses on how ecological behavioural patterns have driven social structures towards ecologically sustainable ways of living.

Reasons for Magahi's Oblivion

Performed, sung, and spread over almost seventeen districts of Bihar and Jharkhand, Magahi's age-old folk songs have a long and unrecorded history. According to the 2011 census, the Magahi language is estimated to be spoken by 12.6 million people. However, it is complicated to figure out the exact number of its speakers because many residents of the Magadh region hesitate to call themselves speakers of the language. The rising hegemonic language majoritarianism and imperialism of Hindi and the governmental policies to promote the Hindi language have created a sense of shame in the minds of the speakers of the Magahi language (Jha 6). Moreover, Magahi (considered a variety of Hindi) is not listed in the Eighth Schedule to the Indian constitution and thus is denied many unique benefits that could have been granted to it otherwise. The impulsive imposition of Hindi, the resultant linguistic discrimination, and not being catalogued in the Eight Schedule have combinedly not only shifted its speakers to Hindi and English but also fostered discrimination "in many other spheres of social, economic, political and educational activities" (Mohanty 138). Primarily oral and rural in its manifestation, the Magahi language lacks written books and urban speakers, and this unavailability has also posed and enhanced the challenges before its growth and development. Moreover, the Magadh region was believed to be the Kingdom of Jarasandha (a character in the Mahabharata who fought against Lord Krishna), and that is why it is often argued that learned brahmins distanced themselves from the land, calling it an unholy and cursed land which anti-god and demonic people inhabit. Even during the rise of Buddhism in the Magadh region, it remained a site which challenged the orthodoxies and conservatism prevalent in the Hindu religion. This also triggered the educated Brahmins, and they did not find it a suitable place for writing and doing other religious performativity (Atreya 53). Moreover, even the language is considered harsh and unpleasing to the ears, and again, it is concluded that the Brahmins never adopted Magahi as their means of communication and writing. George Abraham Grierson, in his seminal work *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903), mentions that "Magadha des kanchanpuri, log acche par bhasha buri" (translated as Magadha is a golden city, people are good but the language is not). Scholars often reject the idea of the harshness of any language and believe these claims to be vague, weak and misleading. Every language has sonorant (sounds produced without obstruction) and obstruent (sounds produced by the obstruction of the airflow) sounds, and it is very unwise to call any language harsh or sonorous. However, my concern here is not to delve into these details; I am rather interested to see how Magahi folk songs address the issues of the environment. I have discussed the reasons why the Magahi language lacks written literature. Even today, we hardly find research works devoted to the language. Here, the paper will attempt a comprehensive research to explore how Magahiyas (speakers of the Magahi language or residents of the Magadh region) manifest their relationship with Nature through folk songs and other ceremonial activities and festivities. The paper will also examine how globalisation and industrialisation have affected the cultural and religious beliefs of this indigenous tradition.

Magadh, Magahi Folksongs and Environmental Concerns

Magahi language has a rich and diverse culture of folk songs sung during different rites of passage activities and at many other ceremonial performances. There are songs dedicated to seasons, festivals, birthings, weddings, harvesting, etc. William Bascom (1953) writes that:

> [f]olklore, to the anthropologist, is a part of the culture but not the whole culture. It includes myths, legends, tales, proverbs, riddles, the text of ballads and other songs, and other forms of lesser importance, but not folk art, folk dance, folk music, folk costume, folk medicine, folk custom, or folk belief. Whether in literate or

> nonliterate societies…. All folklore is orally transmitted, but not all that is orally transmitted is folklore (11).

Here, the paper will explore different aspects of Magahi folk songs and folklores to investigate the kind of relationship the speakers of the language have with the natural environment. It is often considered that indigenous traditions and communities share a holistic and harmonious communion with nature and use their ecological wisdom of care and use to make sustainable and judicious use of natural resources. These communities of forest dwellers act as the custodians of Nature and contribute immensely to mapping and executing solutions to the native ecosystem. There has been a long history of ecological sustainability through granting divinity to species of plants and animals to protect them from unnecessary human interventions. Janis B. Alcorn (1993) argues that "[m]any indigenous groups in Africa and Asia have a tradition of maintaining sacred forest areas where animals and plants are not disturbed" (425). Their activities and behaviour ensure that they don't harm the biological diversity of the place because they understand that any disturbance and imbalance in the ecology may threaten their existence. For ages, this mutual and coherent interrelatedness between people and Nature has been instrumental in developing a harmonious, amicable and workable concord between the two.

Traditional ecological knowledge, which is sometimes also known as local ecological knowledge, is "a body of knowledge, practices, and ideas transmitted and (re)generated orally and non-verbally in various forms from generation to generation" (Casi et al. 182). The Indigenous and native communities have acquired these ecologically viable, sustainable and locally developed practices and knowledge systems over hundreds of years through direct and devoted proximity and exposure to the natural environment. Aboriginal practices of resource management, ethics, insights and conservation have recently been fully acknowledged, recognised and integrated into the mainstream practices of environmental conservation. However, there are still instances where these traditional modes of living feasibly with Nature are rejected, ignored, and termed as backward, boorish, unsophisticated, irrational, and unnecessary. Indigenous native science, which in most cases is undocumented, unwritten and lacks literal description, can be a potential source "to the re-creation of a "participatory" science of life that is so desperately needed to balance the imbalance of science and technology and its continuing social and economic crisis consequences" (Shilling and Nelson 17). Native science is not only restricted to the knowledge of ecology and indigenous medicines; it can also be used to talk about agricultural practices, animal husbandry and other modes of human survival. Sometimes, it also happens that native science denies accepting the modern tenets of scientific progress and development and keeps considering its own methods of ecological and agricultural practices as more suitable and advantageous. However, this may not always be true because, in many cases, even native science also requires a severe revisiting, revitalisation and modern scientific temperament to properly grasp the 'biophilic' tendencies and design inherent in their behaviour and socio-religious practices to explore them to their full potential and capacity.

Magahi socio-religious ethics and rituals also accommodate and assimilate cultural and traditional ecological wisdom, which has for ages helped its practitioners to live in holy communion with Nature. Very similar to mainstream Hinduism in day-to-day endeavours, the Magahi village Hinduist religious and socio-cultural operations believe the natural environment to be an integral and intrinsic part of human life. However, we find striking differences if we take into account the local village deities and the rituals related to them. Sampati Aryani, an eminent critic and scholar of the Magahi language, argues persuasively about the tacit presence of a large number of 'gram devatas' (village deities) in the Magadh region. She observes that "we don't have sufficient evidence to claim that these 'gram devatas' are mentioned in the Puranas (Hindu religious texts devoted to diverse topics), but they do are worshipped and revered on different auspicious occasions in the households of the Magadh region" [our translation] (Aryani 22). Mainstream Hindu gods and goddesses like Shiva, Hanuman, Durga, Kali Rama, etc., also play a significant role in the village Hinduist performativity of the region, but the presence of the local deities adds diversity and richness to the culture, which also gets reflected in the folk tradition. Ram Prasad Singh (1999), in his book *Magahi Lokgeet ka Vrihad Sangrah* [A comprehensive Collection of Magahi Folk Songs], gives a detailed account of the folk songs dedicated to the local deities and cultural and traditional practices of the society. There is an almost equal number of folk songs dedicated to the mainstream and institutionalised Hindu gods and goddesses; however, I will focus on the folk songs devoted to the native and indigenous deities. In the Magadh region, the sun is considered to be the source and epitome of all power and energy, and the practitioners of the Magahi culture believe that the sun god transmits positive energy, vitality and zeal, and therefore, they have been adoring and revering the sun god since ages. Celebrated specifically in the Magadh regions of Bihar and Jharkhand (also celebrated in some other parts of these states), this ancient festival of 'Chhath Puja' (worship of Sun God) is observed in the months of Chaitra (March-April) and Kartika (October-November) by men and women for prosperity, well-being, happiness and pregnancy. 'Brati' (Magahi version for the Hindi word 'Vrati'-- one who observes fasting) and devotees gather near adequately cleaned and purified water bodies to pay gratitude and obligation to both the rising and setting sun god– supreme source of energy. These native, indigenous, and unique religious practices are considered to be eco-friendly because they attach divinity and sacredness not only to the sun but also to water sources and some plants. Take, for example:

> *Char kona ke pokharwa, jal umadal jaye, dudh umadal jaye.*
>
> *Lehun na dulraito babu dauriya, bahangi ghaat pahunchaye.* (Singh 214)
>
> [The four-cornered puddle's water, pure like milk overflow.
>
> Please! beloved, carry the basket full of offerings to the shore.] (Translation mine)

In the above snippet of the folk song, we see a sense of total submission before the sun god, which, according to the native folk belief, is the primary and ultimate source of energy for the biotic communities of the earth. Magahi people also tend to acknowledge the importance of water bodies for their survival in the above extracts, we can comprehend how the purity of the pond's water is compared with white milk, and the cleansing of the river precedes the prayer. The devotees understand how the introduction of unwanted materials can disturb the natural balance of the ecology, and that is why they hesitate and refrain from offering anything they do not get directly from the environment. This indigenous belief in maintaining the purity of biodiversity suggests and implies the presence of an inherent attitude toward conservation and protection of the environment. Moreover, the people fear that if they fail to follow what has been practised seen ages, the sun god might get angry the consequences of which can be very disastrous and calamitous. This lingering fear and the attached divinity to plants and animals help the ecology to survive without any harmful human intervention. Even if environmentalism is a Western concept, the Magahi indigenous people were unknowingly contributing to the conservation and preservation of biodiversity. Here, in the extract below, we see how a lady bowing before God thinks that she has not harmed the banana plant; why is god angry with her?

> *Duare hi kelawa ki ganchiya suruj ugale jhamay.*
>
> *Kaun kasurwe ji suruj ugala jhamay* (Singh 217).

> [Lies undisturbed is the banana tree, the sun is not shining with full grace.
>
> What a mistake I have made. The sun is not shining with a full face.] (Translation mine)

Here, it is essential to note that sacred local practices and celebrations often lay a strong conservatory foundation and underpinning in the attitudes and behaviour of the local masses. These customs are often implemented and followed so piously and devoutly that even a child's innocent mistake is not tolerated. This implies and symbolises that the Magahi traditional and religious exercises forbid any kind of impurities to be mixed with the original and genuine composition of a substance they believe that by doing so, we may disturb and disappoint their deities. Here, in the following snippet, we see how is seeking forgiveness and trying to persuade the god who she believes will not accept the offerings defiled by her child:

> *Sajalo daurwa suruj ke, balka deli juthiaye,*
>
> *Balka ke maiya hathwa jodele, suruj howa n sahay* (Singh 220).
>
> [The basket is all set to be offered; the son faked the food,
>
> Standing with her folded hands, the mother goes to persuade.] (Translation mine)

These pre-Brahminic god-fearing and rule-abiding communities have greatly contributed to the environmental protection of their respective areas. Eliza F. Kent (2013) discusses many sacred sites of Southern India to see how these communities have preserved their local cultures and beliefs, which have ultimately resulted in the protection and conservation of their forests and other ecological sites. She further quotes Madhav Gadgil, who in his article *Groves Dedicated to the Gods* (1971), talks vehemently about the ecological importance of these sacred groves and writes that:

> [t]hese deities are generally of an extremely primitive nature: mother goddesses in the form of unshaped stone lumps smeared with red paint, lying open to the sky . . . But for the believers, they are amongst the fiercest of deities; breaking even a dead twig in a sacred grove may result in a serious illness or in violent death. Such strict taboos have led to the preservation in these sacred groves of forest in its virgin condition, relics of the forest that must have once covered much of India (82).

We find such dedication and devotion towards the deities even in the Magahi folk religion, where even plucking fruits from some sacred trees without god's permission is highly forbiddable and formidable. The people also think of losing blessings and grace if they violate the orally transmitted set of ecological ethics, rules and rituals from their forefathers. In the Magahi folk practices, even today, the Hindus hesitate to cut the peepal (ficus religiosa) tree not only because of their religiosity attached to it but also because they strongly believe that tress like peepal, mango and neem etc. are used by species of birds and animals as their dwellings. So, even if the peepal tree is harming the structure of their own houses, they would request some Muslim man to cut the tree. Here, we see a similar example where a woman pleads before god because she thinks that the god has mistakenly angry with her for plucking a fruit without his consent:

> *Chhoti-muti kewalwa ke gacchiya, pharle ladmud,*
>
> *Kewalo na todli, kaun paap bhel* (Singh 232).
>
> [On a small-tiny orange plant, laden are the fruits,
>
> I didn't pluck the fruit, what sins have I committed.] (Translation mine)

In many folk songs in the Magahi language, we also find a mention of planting trees on many occasions, which include pregnancy. Magahi's way of total submission before the folk deities not only prohibits the cutting and exploitation of the natural environment but also promotes the plantation of trees. During the time of pregnancy, husbands were supposed to plant citrus fruits to please their wives. Not only this, but it is also observed that certain flowers and fruits amuse some gods, so there has been a tradition of planting such trees to welcome them home. In the example below, we see how women plant a sapling of a jasmine flower to please and woo 'Sokha' devta (A deity among many deities placed at houses in the Magadh region).

> *Raja boya gariya chhoharwa he, badamwan mora man-bhave re.*
>
> *Angana me lemu boya, duare anar boya ji, …* (Singh 13).
>
> [The husband has planted coconut and dates, groundnuts please my heart.
>
> Sowed orange in the court, pomegranate outside the yard,] (Translation mine)
>
> *Ahe oriya ke tare beli ropab, newta pethaeb,*
>
> *Aho newta pethaeb Sokha dewa keahe man-vedil* (Singh, 1999, p. 287).
>
> [I would plant jasmine below the roof, and would invite

> Send summons to Sokha god, why would he be annoyed.] (Translation mine).

Many sacred trees associated with the local deity are planted around the temple areas to please them, and this practice helps in the conservation of certain species of plants out of the fear of the wrath of the local god; people don't exploit and disturb those plants. These places of religious importance are attached to a range of socio-cultural beliefs and habits that understand the value of ecological dynamics. Ecocritics and even ecotheologians across the world often argue that "[s]acred sites also represent ancient and profound cultural values. The roles of sacred sites' custodians from the indigenous, local community and mainstream religions are expressions of dedicated efforts that have specifically, if not always consciously, cared for nature in various ways" (Verschuuren et al. 5). We find a similar and universal feeling of solicitousness and tenderness prevalent in the Magahi folk religion, where plantation and greenery near a temple or sacred site used to be common practice. The plants of Neem and china rose are often associated with 'saptmatrika' or 'satbahini' (Seven sister goddesses), and these plants are also considered to be their abode where they live and play. See, for example, the following extract:

> *Kane haen baans-baswariya, kane haen kedali ke phulwa,*
>
> *Kane haen maiya ke mandilwa* (Singh 281)?
>
> [Where is the bamboo forest, where does the kedali flower lie,
>
> Where can I goddess' temple find?] (Translation mine)
>
> *Nanhi-nanhi orahul gachhiya, bhuiyan lote dhadh maiya he.*
>
> *Tahi tare saato bahiniyan, khele jugwa saar, maiya he* (Singh 283).
>
> [Small-tiny branches of china rose, lie spreaded on the ground.
>
> Assembled under its branch, the seven sisters play gamble.] (Translation mine)

So far, we have discussed how there used to be a harmonious communion between the Magahi people and the environment and also how the Magahi people protected and preserved the natural world from any exploitative and injudicious use of its resources. However, if we analyse the relationship between the Magahi people and Nature, we find that the euphonious interrelatedness that earlier used to be an integral and indispensable dimension of Magahi village ritualism and ecological values and ethics is gradually and unwaveringly fading away. Mainstream or Vedic Hinduism has been significantly successful in altering the religious and cultural practices and customs of the village folk tradition. With institutionalised Hinduism holding the centre stage, village monolithic gods and goddesses in the forms of rocks, stones and trees were replaced by well-structured idols and images. Not only the gods but even the folk culture and tradition are also outplaced by the dominant cultural practices of mainstream Hinduism. This authoritative and unwise practice of prioritising and privileging a particular set of beliefs and religious dynamics over the other tributaries of Hinduism to promote and spread its reach even to the remotest part of the country has led to the loss of many indigenous cultures and communities. The dominant cultural practitioners adopted manipulative and deceitful ways to build connections between the local deities and the mainstream gods and goddesses like Shiva, Vishnu, Rama, Krishna, Durga, Kali, etc. Emma Tomalin asserts that the "dilution of traditional values, westernisation and migration" (Tomalin 275) are the primary reasons behind the depletion of plant and animal species. However, it would be wrong to say that there were no similarities between the religious practices of the indigenous and pre-literate communities and those of the mainstream ones. Many community-regulated systems of environmental conservation lost their fascination as the local population engaged itself in newly formulated rules and regulations of the popular form of religion. This primitive ecological wisdom and practices succumbed to the 'Brahminical' and 'Sanskritised' versions of the Hindu religion. In the following two extracts, we can see how ecological concerns have become a central trope in the Magahi language, where a poet writes about how things have turned ugly.

> *Utso ke ankhiyan me dabdab hey lor.*
> *Sujhe na surjo ke, kaisan e bhor!* (Harliwal, para. 1)
> [Celebrations are dull and tiring.
> The sun can't see, what kind of sunrise is this!] (Translation mine)
> *Haral rahgir sabhe, sun bhel rasta ee;*
> *Tut gel aaj sabhe nadiyan ke gaud.* (Harliwal, para. 2)
> [Hopelessness spreads everywhere, and there is no way out;
> Dying and drying rivers have lost their way.] (Translation mine)

We see, for example, in the above extracts of a poem from Arun Harliwal's book entitled *Sujhe na Surujo ke,* how a modern-age poet depicts the ecology of the Magadh region, which has so drastically and awfully changed and degraded that the poet loses any hope of improvement.

Conclusion

Magahi folk culturalism encompasses elements that hint towards an ecologically sustainable and viable mode of living. The paper incorporated extracts of song-texts to incorporate Magahi's symbiotic way of living into a larger pattern and discourse. Through the paper, we have also observed how the language and religion sanctioned and endorsed by the state have combinedly, resulted in the loss of the indigenous Magahi ecological values. This constant and conscious attempt to ignore and overlook the minority languages and religious practices, and the accompanying view of India as a Hindi/Hindu-only nation, has led to the disintegration of many such primordial cultural manifestations and occurrences— the Magahi culturalism being one of them. How will the globalising of such unmediated indigeneity be possible? If at all it is possible, how can it be achieved in times when the majoritarian markers define political axioms? Or should we start believing Levi-Strauss' idea that "the universe is an object of thought at least as much as it is a means of satisfying needs" (1962 3)?

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