
The Green Imagination: Reading Earth and Ecology in select Awadhi Folk Lyrics

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Abstract

In the present era of globalization and cultural homogenization, there is an increasing interest in regional and local traditions in academia. A good amount of research done in the field of literature at present focuses on the marginal and the local traditions, tropes, songs and the literature lost under the colonial whitewashing and centralization of the English language. Awadhi folk imagination envisions the earth as a living and nurturing divine presence. The paper aims at exploring the ecological consciousness embedded in Awadhi folk songs. They are rooted in an intrinsic harmony between human existence and ecology, where land, trees and rivers emerge as living participants in everyday life. The paper foregrounds how folk lyrics, particularly Samskara lyrics, seasonal lyrics, vrata lyrics and labour lyrics, convey human emotions of joy, separation, care, and continuity through natural imagery. The paper traces how animistic and naturalistic beliefs shape folk imagination, positioning nature as the creator, preserver, and an omnipresent guardian. A close reading of Awadhi folk lyrics through the lens of ecology, testifies that these songs retain a motivating force and remain closely aligned with the folk spirit, despite their differing themes and occasions.

Keywords: Awadhi Folk Songs, Green Imagination, Ecology, Folk Culture, Agrarian Consciousness.

Introduction

Folk songs embody the raw emotions in almost every aspect of human life. The folk tradition of Awadh is deeply rooted in nature and human existence. As most of the population in pre-independence Awadh was engaged in agriculture, the Awadhi folk songs retell the sweet melodies of the slow-paced, hardworking and joyous agrarian society. The people who woke up with the Sun, worked all day, and only rested at night, found peace by cohabiting with nature. Although in the current phase of globalization, a vast impact of bourgeoisie and elite cultures is visible on folk songs, and under the post-modernist conditions, it becomes difficult to extricate folk from elite, yet the folk songs are quite popular in India, and have a motivating force all the time. The elite culture shows a trend or fashion in coming closer to many folk artefacts, and the intelligentsia is fascinated or forced to listen to the folk art and expressions under the pressure of alternative modernity. Folk songs are closer to the folk spirit, in comparison to other folk genres like folk sayings, folk drama, folk tales, etc. For a country like India, where agriculture is the main occupation of the people, the importance of folk songs

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becomes exceedingly significant. One would believe that a farmer ploughing the fields under the hot sun rested under the cool shade of a tree, looked up and saw it as his saviour. The first Awadhi folk song must have originated from his need to address that tree and thank it for sustaining life.

To the rural folk, nature is the creator, the preserver and the destroyer, which resonates in the early forms of religion that were animistic and pantheistic- the belief that a divine power exists in all living beings and things. The concept of a sky father and earth mother can be traced back to all primitive religions and mythologies, as the people perceived nature as Godly and all-powerful. The folk songs incorporate not only the importance of plants, animals, trees, rivers and land but also sing about the human-nature bond. The wood from a tree keeps the fire aflame in the hearth and the human body; from providing shade against the sun to accompanying a human to his last rite as cremation logs, a tree sustains, shelters, and sanctifies existence. More than an ecological resource, it is a companion of life, and a guardian of cultural and ancestral memory.

Discussion

Folk Literature, handed down through the generations, consists of a rich body of creation; myths, folk tales, animal stories, rhymes, songs, riddles and proverbs where the spoken word is closely connected with specific pictures of storytelling, dance enactment, song cycles, symbolical acts and plays. The rich cultural traditions also add value to it. Discourse of the marginal can be found in them. Their sui generis feature lies in their capacity to look at different patterns of life from an alternative mode. They have also shown a mild criticism of authority, hegemony and torture, but have never demonstrated the destructionist motif. The Folk songs reflect upon traditional knowledge, wisdom, convention, practices and ways of the people as collected and continued through oral tradition. These songs are always fresh, raw, non-canonical, agrarian, and popular in their locality and especially in folk subculture and having a unique mass culture.

The folk songs may be divided into folk lyrics and folk ballads. The folk ballads may be classified further into three categories: the 'traditional secular ballads', 'incidental ballads', the 'traditional mythological and religious ballads', and the minstrel ballads- both traditional and contemporary. Amongst these, traditional mythological ballads have the prime importance. The traditional secular ballads elucidate the cult of Indian ethos and lofty human values. The incidental ballads highlight many events of national importance at any point of Indian history, national, contemporary and mythological. The Alha, and other genres of songs, especially in the Raso Grantha, come under this category. The court poets (Charan Kavi)

started these ballads, which have a mild tradition even today. In political rallies, some fans of a political leader are found singing the glory of the leader or the political party in hyperbolic way with quite visible conceits and images.

The folk lyrics may be categorized into the broader categories of Samskara Lyrics, Age Lyrics, Season Lyrics, Vrata (fasting) Lyrics, Deities Lyrics, Labour Lyrics and Caste-Based Lyrics. Since India is a country of numerous dialects and traditions, it is neither appropriate nor possible to discuss a particular folk song or lyric. Indian Hindu tradition marks sixteen samskaras, beginning from the time of conceiving a child to the last day of life in the world. In the life of a household person (the Grahastha), these Samskara-based lyrics have great importance. They save human life from becoming monotonous, and relate to the philosophy of life as a complete whole, and to seeing it not in fragments but in unity and coherence. India is a miniature world in itself, and the Indian way of life has a keen environmental concern. The tropical climate of the country has a rich fascination for the changing seasons, and that has given vogue to a set of seasonal lyrics. The season-lyrics like Kajali, Hindola, Faag, Holi, Charakhi and Bindiaya, etc., add to the festivities of the seasons. Among the season-based folk lyrics, Baramasa is popular in almost every part of India. Its theme revolves around the separation of the lover from his / her beloved and its effect on the personalities and actions of the characters concerned. In Indian literature, season is depicted normally in two forms: Rituvarnana and Baramasa. The condition of togetherness and union of the lover and the beloved is depicted in Rituvarnan, and that of separation in the Baramasa. In the Rituvarnana, the poet divides the year into three or six time slots as different Ritus, and in Baramasa, the year is analysed in twelve months. The correlation of season and psyche is reflected through the narrative of Baramasa. In Baramasa, the characteristics of seasons work as the catalyst in affecting the psyche of the beloved, and associating herself with nature, she translates her anxiety, separation and the good past days spent in union. The narration of Baramasa depicts the circularity of the Indian concept of time.

The Vrata Lyrics are another significant branch of folk lyrics. The Indian lifestyle is grounded in spirituality. Different days meant for Vratas have certain stories and songs associated with them. Deities' Lyrics are sung in the eulogy of the deities, mainly they are addressed to Shiv Ji, Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, goddess Durga ji and her different forms, goddess Parvati Ji, Hanuman Ji, etc. Labour Lyrics are meant for easing out the stress and fatigue while performing different kinds of work in farms, fields and production houses.

Since ancient times, trees in Indian culture have been regarded as protectors, life-sustaining forces, and even as deities. The Awadhi folk tradition is not bereft of this emotion. Trees are integrated into daily life, rituals, and seasonal festivals, forming a living bond between man

and nature. Neem, Peepal, Banyan, Tulsi, Mango, and Banana trees are held in high esteem; some are cherished for their medicinal properties, some are ritually significant, and others are for timber and sustaining livelihood. For instance, Neem has healing and purifying qualities; Tulsi is worshipped in almost every household, and the banana tree is inseparably a part of rituals and ceremonies. The trees like Peepal and Bargad (Banyan), considered guardians of life, are worshipped as deities. The tree stands as a living shrine, a site of devotion and protection, restating the relationship between the spiritual world and the ecological one. Man protects the tree, nurtures it, and honours it with rituals, while in turn the tree provides warmth, shade, medicine, food, and comfort. This symbiotic relationship is ecological and cultural, reflecting an ethos in which the natural world is not external to human life but is the very essence of it.

In Hindu philosophy, nature is regarded as a living presence, a sustaining force that shapes both the spiritual and material life of humans. Rivers, trees, mountains, and the earth itself are worshipped as protectors and embraced as extensions of the divine. Among rivers, the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saryu hold a special sanctity. They are not merely flowing bodies of water, but living goddesses, guardians of purity and renewal. Rituals such as the Ganga aarti, vows of fasting, and offerings made along their banks all testify to the intimacy between masses and the rivers, merging faith and survival. To worship a tree or a river, therefore, is an act of faith, yes, but also an acknowledgement that human life is inseparable from the natural world.

Indian economy is primarily based on agriculture, and the social and cultural life has given major impetus to the cause of ecology and environment around. Various folk songs sing of nature and its lasting effects and integration in human life. Some such songs have been discussed below.

Text 1

बाबा निमिया के पेड़ जन राखेव

निमिया है सुगना कय बसेर

बलैया लेंव बीरन कय।

बाबा निमिया के सुगना हरेर

इ आवत हैं देय संदेस

इ आवत है हमरे देस

हियाँ मनवा नहीं घबरात
कहत इ आपन बात ,
बलैया लेंव बीरन कय।
बाबा निमिया के पेड़ जन राखेव
निबिया है सुगना कय बसेर
बलैया लेंव बीरन कय। (Lodh 1)
Baaba nimiya ke ped jan raakhev
Nimiya hai sugana kay baser
Balaiya lenv beeran kay.
Baaba nimiya ke sugana harer
Ee aavat hain dey sandes
Ee aavat hai hamre des
Hiyaan manava nahin ghabaraat
khat ee aapan baat,
Balaiya lenv beeran kay.
Baaba nimiya ke ped jan raakhev
Nibiya hai sugana kay baser
Balaiya lenv beeran kay.

The lyric features a daughter who urges her father not to cut the Neem tree, as it is very precious to her. It is a home for the parakeets, whom she calls as messengers that bring messages to her. The Neem tree is portrayed not only as a guardian, protector, but also as a home to flocks of birds who live in the tree and build their nests in its gentle embrace. Their melodious calls and chirping fill the atmosphere with music and joy. The lyric manifests the cultural significance of a neem tree, how Awadhi folk culture is deeply and irrevocably connected with ecology, the earth and nature. A neem tree is symbolic of health, spirituality and a site of community gatherings. In Awadh, neem trees are held in high regard and have cultural and religious significance. Their buds, bark, leaves, fruit, neem seeds, and gum are all useful. It is auspicious and has purifying properties.

The speaker immerses in the thought of how safe the world feels in the shadow of the neem tree. The world seems easy, devoid of any anxieties and fears. The song displays one of the key characteristics of folk songs that they allow the masses to convey their fears, anxieties and

worries. Hiyaan Manwa nahi ghabraavat/ Here, heart does not fear. / The line reflects this overshadowing sense of belonging, homeliness and comfort coming from a tree, as it provides inner peace to the people. Therefore, the lyric establishes the cultural core of Awadh where nature finds its place in the hearts of people. The lyric is a specimen of aesthetic expression and how it safeguards cultural and community values. Awadhi folk traditions embody ecological consciousness and celebrate the communion of humans and nature.

Text 2

हरियर हरियर हो साडी मँगाउब
हो गंगा नहाउब, हो गंगा हो
हरियर धान खड़े तुमरे भाग
घरैतिन गंगा हम अबकी नहाउब हो।

हरियर पाती लेत हैं चाप
खेतवा हरियर हैं आपन ठाढ़े हो ।
हरियर प्रीत बढ़य आपन
प्रीत बढ़य आपन, प्रीत बढ़य हो।

हरियर हरियर हो साडी मँगाउब
हो गंगा नहाउब हो गंगा हो
हरियर धन खड़े तुमरे भाग
घरैतिन गंगा हम अबकी नहाउब हो।

(Singh 2)

Hariyar Hariyar ho saree mangaub
Ho ganga nahaub, ho ganga ho
Hariyar dhaan khade tumare bhaag
Gharaitin ganga ham abakee nahaub ho.

Hariyar paatee let hain chaap khetava

Hariyar hain aapan thaadhe ho.

Hariyar preet badhay aapan

Preet badhay aapan, preet badhay ho.

Hariyar hariyar ho saree mangaub

Ho ganga nahaub ho ganga ho

Hariyar dhan khade tumare bhaag

Gharaitin ganga ham abakee nahaub ho.

Green is a colour signifying abundance, fulfillment, prosperity and the never-ending flame of life. The above-mentioned song situates green colour at its core, chanting it as a blessing and bliss. A woman wishes to wear a green saree as though adjoining herself with the season that is full of growth and fertility. It displays a sense of being one with nature, flourishing fields and harvests that cover the village like a green blanket. The woman joyously exclaims “Ganga Nahaub ho”, referring to the sacred act of bathing in the river Ganga, which denotatively means a purifying ritual, and connotatively refers to the Hindu idea of cleansing of the body and spirit by the water of the holy river Ganga.

The river, here, is a living presence that sanctifies both the body and the soul. Just as the green sari ties the woman to the cycles of the earth, her desire for the bath in the Ganga reflects her religious inclinations. To a farmer, the blooming fields are akin to his offspring, like a child to a mother. The sight of lush green, tall paddy fields fills his heart with overflowing joy. In agrarian life, a flourishing field is a sign of fortune; it's a reward of hard work, of months of labour.

Further, the speaker immerses in the personal desire; she wishes that just as the crops stand tall and fields are flourishing, similarly her love and relationship with her husband should strengthen too, manifesting the abundance of the earth and that of the heart. It expresses how folk thought incorporates raw human emotion, livelihood, and spirituality into one sweet melody.

In this way, the song is more than a seasonal melody. It is an expression of how rural communities see themselves as part of a collective whole. The sari, the river, the paddy fields, and human affection work as motifs that are all connected in a green hue; the song celebrates this interconnectedness, celebrating harmony with nature and Mother Earth.

Text 3

जब जब बरसा चीत सुवाती

पहिर्नीं घरैतिन सोने की पाती।

बरखा झड़ी लागि मन उछिरा

बालिन बल्लिन मन गा उछिरा।

बरसा बादर ,चली बयार

उड़िगा मन केरा गरद - गुबार।

भवा हरेर, करेज जुड़ाय

बालिन मा भैया भरिगा धान।

पाक हरेरी गय गदराय

हरियर जाजिम जस बिछि जाय।

(Pasi 3)

Jab jab barsa cheet suwaati

Pahini gharaaitin sone ki paati.

Barkha jhadi lagi man uchhira

Baalin ballin man gaa uchhira.

Barsa baadar, chali bayaar

Udiga man kera gard-gubaar.

Bhawa hareer, karej juday

Baalin ma bhaiya bhariga dhaan.

Paak hareeri gaya gadraay

Hariyar jajim jas bichi jaay.

At first glimpse, the lyric is an articulation of what one may refer to as green consciousness embedded in Awadhi folk culture. Each image in the verses reflects how intimately rural life is bound with the rhythms of the earth. The rains are not just a seasonal event; they are symbolic of rebirth and renewal of the natural landscape that extends to all living forms. The

rain is the nourisher of the land, it cools the earth, as it leaves the atmosphere free of all the dust, dirt and pollution. The lyric presents parallels, just as the rain washes the dust of earth, similarly, it purifies the human heart. Just as when it rains, the women adorn themselves with gold, mother earth adorns herself in greens. /jab jab barsa chit suwati, pehini gharetiin sone ki paati/, this adornment parallels the earth itself dressing up in green. The imagery of dust being washed away (“udiga man kera gard-gubar”) is symbolic of a cleansing of the environment. The monsoon wind and rain sweep away dryness, restoring vitality to the soil and to the human spirit.

Lines such as “bhawa harer, karej juday” link the flourishing of the soil to the healing of the heart. Here, the heart is imagined as an ecological organ; what nourishes the land nourishes human life too. The description of ripened crops as a green carpet (“harier jajim jas bichi jay”) evokes the idea of the earth as a sacred stage, that nature is not passive but alive, abundant, and exuberant. Through such imagery, the song cultivates a green imagination where nature and human life move together in shared rhythms of renewal. The lyric is rooted in ecological consciousness long before the word ecology entered modern discourse. For the rural community, the greenness of the land is not simply a background to life, it is life itself.

Text 4

हरियर दुबिया बित फैले हो कुल आपन

फइलय इ कुल आपन ,फइलय हो।

सरजू माई तुम देतिय वरदान अइसन हो।

हरियर दुबिया जस फइलय हो कुल आपन

फइलय इ कुल आपन, फइलय हो।

पुरखन इयोदी पर कूप खानैतिन, कि

कूप खानैतिन ,कि कूप खनैतिन हो।

बरखा रानी हो आवतु आपने ठाँव

हो हमरे गाँव हो हमरे गाँव हो।

हरियर दुबिया बित फैले हो कुल आपन

फइलय इ कुल आपन ,फइलय हो।

सरजू माई तुम देतिव वरदान अइसन हो।

हरियर दुबिया जस फइलय हो कुल आपन

फइलय इ कुल आपन, फइलय हो।

(Pasi 4)

Hariyar dubiya bit phailay ho kul aapan

Phailay ee kul aapan, phailay ho.

Sarju maai tum detiw vardaan aisan ho.

Hariyar dubiya jas phailay ho kul aapan

Phailay ee kul aapan, phailay ho.

Purakhan dyorhi par koop khanaitin, ki

Koop khanaitin, ki koop khanaitin ho.

Barkha rani ho aavatu apne thaaw

Ho hamre gaaw, ho hamre gaaw ho.

Hariyar dubiya bit phailay ho kul aapan

Phailay ee kul aapan, phailay ho.

Sarju maai tum detiw vardaan aisan ho.

Hariyar dubiya jas phailay ho kul aapan

Phailay ee kul aapan, phailay ho.

The imagery of doob, a grass known for its unstoppable spread, becomes a metaphor for the expansion of one's lineage and collective well-being. The lyric employs this natural metaphor as a culmination of all desires and wants of a devotee praying to River Saryu, which is revered as a mother in Indian culture. The speaker asks for the river's blessings to keep his family and legacy flourishing and long-lived. In doing so, the song situates human aspiration within both ecological and spiritual aspects of cultural traditions.

The above mentioned lyric states forefathers digging wells on the dyodhi (threshold of ancestral homes) "purakhan dyorhi par koop khanaitin", serves as a reminder that survival and prosperity have always depended upon human labour and nature's rewards. A well symbolises wealth and prosperity. Having a village in the courtyard is considered a symbol of great prestige.

The metaphor of doob is striking for its persistent presence in daily life. Agronomically, doob is a natural soil binder and a perennial grass, rooted at the base, propagating like a web. According to Hindu religious philosophy, it carries layered meanings, the three blades of doob, also known as durva, represent Shiva, Shakti, and Ganesha. It is used as an offering to Lord Ganesh and in several other rituals. Thus, when the singer wishes his family to expand like doob, the metaphor is infused with ecological vitality and sacredness.

This song celebrates the abundance and vitality of the land, portraying greenery as both a blessing and a communal heirloom. The repeated lines “harier dubiya bit phailay ho kul aapan” evoke the image of lush green fields spreading across the village, suggesting ecological prosperity and a sense of shared ownership. “Sarju maai tum detiw vardaana aisaan ho” situates this ecological consciousness within a sacred framework. The river Saryu, like the land itself, is addressed as a maternal figure bestowing blessings. The statements like Barkha rani ho aavatu apne thaaw, ho hamre gaaw”, where the monsoon queen brings life and renewal to the village. The song, thus, nurtures a green imagination: the land is alive, sacred, and central to human life.

Text 5

होयती ननदी के अपने होरिलवा,
होरिलवा, कि ननदी अवती हो ।
होयती ननदी के अपने होरिलवा,
कि ननदी पांव फेरवती हो ।
होयती ननदी के अपने होरिलवा,
होरिलवा, कि ननदी अवती हो ।
हरियर हरियर ठाढ़ है निबिया ,
ठाढ़ है निबिया, कि ठाड़ी है निबिया हो।
होयती ननदी के अपने होरिलवा,
कि झुलवा झुलयतिन हो।
हरियर सुगना की टोंट लागत मिरचा
लरिका का सुगना देखैतिन हो।
हरियर जइसन बढ़य हरियारी

इ सावन हरियारी

इ सावन हरियारी हो।

खुसी गंववा मा आपने आवत हो अपने

खुसी आवत हो ।

(Lodh 5)

Hoyati nanadi ke apne horilwa,

Horilwa, ki nanadi avati ho.

Hoyati nanadi ke apne horilwa,

Ki nanadi paaw pherwati ho.

Hoyati nanadi ke apne horilwa,

Horilwa, ki nanadi avati ho.

Hariyar hariyar thaadh hai nibhiya,

Thaadh hai nibhiya, ki thaadhi hai nibhiya ho.

Hoyati nanadi ke apne horilwa,

Ki jhulwa jhulyatin ho.

Hariyar sugna ki tont lagat mircha

Larika ka sugna dekhaitin ho.

Hariyar jaisan badhay hariyaari

I saawan hariyaari

I saawan hariyaari ho.

Khusi ganwwa ma apne aawat ho apne

Khusi aawat ho.

The above-stated lyric beautifully incorporates the intimacy of familial bonds with the span of ecological imagery. The speaker, a sister-in-law, voices her longing for the company of her Nanadi and the joy of welcoming the newborn into her home. The lyric presents familial affection through living images of the natural world. She wishes to swing her Nanadi on the Neem tree (nibiya), tall and green. She dreams of playing with the child, showing him the

greenery and the green parakeet, with its red beak popping amidst the greenery like a red chilli.

The speaker's words convey the anticipation of nurturing, caring, and embodying both motherly and sisterly emotions toward the child and her Nanad. This imagery captures how human joy is inseparable from ecological surroundings; the neem tree, the parakeet, and the monsoon greenery all appear as active participants in the happiness imagined by the speaker.

This folk expression thus reveals how rural imagination binds relationships, seasons, and nature into a single continuum. The hope of the newborn's laughter is inseparable from the swing under the neem, the parakeet's chatter, and the greenness of Sawan.

Moreover, the speaker's wish is not limited to her own joy of playing with the child. She imagines the newborn flourishing like the ever-renewing greenery around her and extends this blessing to her sister-in-law, her family, and the entire village. This gesture reflects a profoundly feminine thought, where care and nurturing are not confined to the domestic sphere but expand to embrace community and ecology alike. It is this fusion of the maternal emotion, sisterly affection and ecological consciousness that gives the song its aesthetic depth and an expansive vision of life.

Conclusion

In Awadhi folk songs, green imagination emerges as a central motif, reflecting a deep ecological consciousness embedded in rural life. The recurring imagery of lush fields, tender shoots, sturdy trees, and ripening crops celebrates not only the fertility of the land but also the intimate relationship between humans and nature. Rivers, monsoon rains, and the seasonal greening of fields are incorporated into rituals, daily labour, and emotions, showing that ecological consciousness is immutably connected with culture and spirituality. Through these songs, greenery becomes both a tangible reality and a symbolic language, representing prosperity, protection, joy, and continuity of all life forms on earth. Awadhi folk imagination, thus, envisions the earth as a living and nurturing divine presence, highlighting a primitive harmony between human existence and nature.

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