

**LIFE AND LIVELIHOOD IN THE CRADLE OF NATURE: A STUDY
OF SELECTED FOLKSONGS BY WOMEN OF GARHWAL,
UTTARAKHAND**

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Introduction

Folksong is nothing but a poem with a melody. Folksongs are the seamless transition of music that fosters understanding of the emotions, the rhythm of beliefs, the experiences of an individual, and the individual within a community. Folk learning is the knowledge that is disseminated through the word of mouth and other techniques which is learned through imitation as well as through the products such as crafts. Folklore includes folk crafts, folk tools, folk custom, folk costume, folk medicine, folk belief, folk music, folk recipes, folk games, folk gestures, these also include verbal forms of expression and have been called as folk literature.

They have been described as verbal art. The difference between civilization and culture is difficult to understand. Civilization, a procedure which is maintained by the society includes the social system and cultural system whereas the culture which is flow of the society breaks all the boundary of political system and the social systems. Society has a tendency to move the culture faster than it already moves and that helps one to assess the soul of the community. However, folklore is different from culture. The dyad then reinforces an understanding of a space where the two intersect, women occupy such a space of junction. Their entry point in the domain of culture/civilisation is through their close association with nature and natural environment.

Chipko Movement and Garhwali women

From the Garhwal hills of northwest India, the Chipko Resistance Movement became a symbol of an international ecofeminist movement that strives to emphasise the subordination of women and nature and women's environmental awareness. The movement played a major role in amplifying the usage of folk media. In 1973, the Government awarded a contract to cut down the ash trees. An environmental movement led by Gaura Devi, a widow, was the leader of a group of women in Reni village in the upper Alaknanda valley. This was the first time, the Garhwali women began seeking to be included in the decision-making process, something that had previously been denied to them by the family's male members. This was challenged by men who wanted women to be secondary in this process. The Chipko movement was also led by women because they were the primary casualty of all the environmental tragedy. From finding wild fruits and vegetables, as well as wood for cooking and shelter to rearing cattle in the Alaknanda valley, the women did it all. The loss of natural trees from the Mandala and Reni village would have had a devastating impact on their survival and thus it became a question of their existence which gave new meaning to the movement.

In order to get support from the local community, the activists enlisted the assistance of folk musicians who wrote and sang original songs. Using Garhwali folk songs, the movement was able to get its message out to a wider audience. Folk musicians like Dhoom Singh Negi and Narendra Singh Negi were already active in the uprising. Nevertheless, a musical caste known as the 'Bajgis,' was formed to help rally the general population in support of the campaign (Guha, 1990). On their 'dholaks', they chanted Chipko movement slogans and sang traditional folk music. Narendra Singh Negi is the most well-known Garhwali folk singer by a wide margin. It was via his songs that he was able to convey the pain and suffering of the inhabitants of the upper Alaknanda Valley and all of Uttarakhand. Chipko movement leader: he's been in the forefront of the movement. Additionally, he composed songs and poetry for

the anti-alcohol and anti-Tehri dam movements. People in Uttarakhand, whose natural forests are being depleted, lack basic utilities, and there are few employment prospects, express their frustrations in Negi's songs. He sings about the fate of trees, woods, and the valleys in his song, "dalana kata chuchodalana kata." Women would recite traditional songs to raise awareness among their neighbours as well as the rest of the world. There was a lot of support for the movement from people like folk writers like Narendra Singh Negi and other folk artists like them. All of the subsequent folk songs included a reference to the Chipko movement. 'Jagigyan hum beejigyan hum; Abnichalalichoronki, Ghorapuna, baunapuna; abnichalaliauronki' means, 'We have risen, thieves shall not have their way, this is our home, our forest, we shall not listen to outsiders'. Because our ancestors have established these trees and plants on this land and water, we must conserve them. 'Maatuhamru' means "This is our land," and "Pitronnalagaibaun" refers to "Pitronnalagaibaun." Soil, water, and woods have been sold, our hands are empty, our bellies are empty, and we don't even have a place to live any more.

As well as providing the women of Garhwal, particularly those in the upper Alaknanda Valley, with much-needed recognition, the Chipko movement demonstrated the power of folk media in raising public awareness about social issues and mobilising the community.

The Himalayan hill resounded with six words that had been reverberating since the morning: "Save our forests":

"Aaj Himalaya Jagega"

"Kruur Kulhara Bhagega"

"The Himalayas will awake today"

"The cruel axe will be chased away" (Capila 124)

Garhwal has been inscribed into history as a result of the Chipko movement's ability to combine environmental action with local women as torchbearers. There are numerous arguments over the Chipko movement, its concept of conservation, and its potential to take a subversive stance to the idea of progress. Men and women collaborated in a Gandhian/nonviolent act of protest in the movement. The idea that the movement was founded primarily by women (hugging trees) is controversial, even among some academics.

Chipko activists and journalists blew it out of proportion by publishing Chipko as a feminist movement, according to Jayanta Bandyopadhyay. Even though he acknowledges that women are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation and that they have demonstrated a unique form of activism within the environmental movement, he ignores the fact that Chipko for the region (later to become Uttarakhand) had a vision of a consciousness that combined ecology and agency in a way that had never been seen before.

From Mahila Mandals (women committees) to self-help groups, the Chipko movement's reverberations rang like concentric circles and rallied women in the region. Sunderlal Bahuguna was initially hailed as a hero, but Gaura Devi emerged as the true defender of the cause. As a result of this movement's legacy, other movements such as *Raksha sutra* (lifesaving) in which women secured sacred threads on trees to prevent tree fellers from making commercial spaces and Maletha (place) in which women collectively opposed stone crushers in the Maletha region that were causing land pollution, sound pollution, ecological imbalance and migration of locals outside the home was influenced by the contagion effect.

Folksongs on Natural Environment

Garhwali women's folk song expression takes place outside of the home, amid fields and farms full of wildlife. Folk music from the area helps to illustrate the reciprocity and the interrelated nature of the aforementioned binaries. From thanking deities to

warding off evil and calling upon the Rain Gods, these folk songs provide a window into women's lives. As well as being worshipped as deities, the sacred groves are a source of life-sustaining resources which contribute to the concept of work as worship. In contrast, women's fundamental association with nature (prakriti) as compared to men's culture is not just a spiritually soothing aspect of women's lives (sanskriti). The nature-based skills have allowed women to access the realm of culture (outside) in capitalist society (i.e., with their agrarian competence).

These songs become a lens to get an insight into the experiences of the women. As Vandana Shiva tellingly puts it "In nature's economy and the sustenance economy the currency is not money, it is life" (33). Nature plays a major part in shaping and altering women's life. Every emotion – joy, sorrow, fear, and self-discovery – springs from a deep connection of nature. Various categories arose in the context of the natural environment including Poems of gratitude and appreciation for land; songs about the changing of the seasons; songs about trees, forests, and water scarcity (Capila 103). People may express themselves and their opinions more freely when they engage in various kinds of art.

Each month has its own distinct feelings, which are woven together in *Barahmasa* songs (Songs for 12 Months). The purgation of emotions is a prominent literary motif, and is often paired with changes in the natural environment. Forlorn song by women expresses a profound psychological awareness of themselves as unique individuals trapped inside a civilization. To express their longing for motherland, women often looked to nature, noting changes in the landscape and an acute concern for environmental preservation as outlets for their emotions. As with a garland, folk songs weave together the lives of women, connecting them to their emotions and experiences as well as to a concern for nature's preservation.

A woman's life cycle revolves upon and is even directed by agricultural activities, from crop selection to sowing to reaping and harvesting. Toil is required at several

points in agricultural production. Therefore, when the crop is mature, women are able to return home to their parental houses, which is shown in songs like:

सौणभादौं कामैना ऐना मुंगरी पकी गैना

गौंकी दीदी मूली सभी मै त्वाड़ा ऐ गैना॥

“The corns ripen with the approaching month of August” -

“Women from villages head to their maternal homes at dusk”

A sign of the agricultural cycle's peak, corn harvesting in August means that women in rural areas can quickly return home for the night to their mothers' arms. As August approaches, the region's women gather to make a quick trip to their mothers' arms to collect their corn harvests before they drain the water and weed them. As a result, the work-life balance is influenced by the agrarian setting. So not only do folk songs reflect inner and outer space, but also their reciprocal dependence on one another

Garhwali women are Eco-visionaries

Garhwali women have a special bond with nature because of their nurturing role in nature's cradle and the community's agrarian affiliation, which provides them with a means of subsisting. Women reach the realm of the outside (culture) by their successful use of nature, beyond a veritable essentialization of the binaries of nature-culture with women-men correspondingly. Garhwali women's agrarian knowledge base and traditional agricultural expertise inherent in their lifestyles and folk songs complete the symbiotic relationship between nature, orality, and gender (and even folk art). The women community has a strong sense of responsibility to protect the environment, which is represented in songs like - which call attention to the importance of not harming the environment in any way.

नाकाटोत्योडाल्योनाकाटो

दीदीयोडाल्योनाकाटाभूल्योडाल्योनाकाटा...

पालात्योडाल्योतैऔलादमाणी

औलादभवालकूरूणीभीजाली

नाकाटोत्योडाल्योनाकाटोभूल्योनाकाटो

Do not cut these trees:

Sisters, do not cut these innocent trees.

Like your own children, care for them.

Don't cut these trees, sisters, don't cut them.

Your children may forsake you in the future, but these trees will only give you with food and water.

People involved in the primary sector have a better understanding of how the ills of deforestation and the effects on ecological balance. Their joint efforts are focused on forest preservation and prevention because forest resources support these women's livelihoods. The song focuses on "sisters" rather than a universal call to action, as it depicts a movement from the inside. Women communities will be more aware of the movement if it spreads to other groups. No longer confined to traditionally feminine, supportive positions, women who join men in progressive initiatives now take centre stage. It's not just a matter of self-sufficiency that binds them to their surroundings, but also an understanding of the importance of environmental protection, lessons from nature, and checks and balances on the power that governs it. Garhwali women's eco-feminist advocacy and the resurrection of traditional eco-forestry practises have revitalised the forests.

Conclusion

The outmigration to cities for better opportunities has been a prevalent practice among men of the region, making women's power and responsibility towards the natural resources all the more emphatic. Such a radial migration of men makes the

connection and the dependence on the primary sector for women more important. They take charge of the hearth and the realm beyond it. Over the years however the villages are getting depopulated due to migration to cities for better resources and opportunities. My village Deval in Pauri is left behind with a population of about forty-five people. At such a juncture, the preservation of not only the ecology but the culture in a democratic and holistic sense becomes imperative.

It is not through policy intervention alone that it is sought to be undertaken but through the coalescing elements of culture – through the nostalgia of the roots with an awareness of the present and leaving behind the trails of cultural and ecological legacy for the generations to come. The halcyon days in the embrace of the Banj trees (oak trees) that my grandmother mother heavily recalled through folksongs - the future generations could relive them with a consciousness for preservation and awareness for its dissemination.

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