

# Folk Literature and Environmental Sustainability

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**Abstract:** *The interaction of humans and ecology has been entangled with numerous issues like deforestation, environmental pollution, loss of soil, problems of sanitation desertification, loss of biodiversity, and soil fertility, water shortage including ozone depletion, population explosion, insufficient health care, and water supply, etc. The activities of humans triggered by firstly changing socio-economic patterns owing to the advancement of technology which is chiefly caused for deterioration of the environment. Thus it is necessary to instil environmental ethics in the human mind. To meet this threat folklore can be an important tool. Folk practices have over the years played a noteworthy position in solving several major social-ecological plights. Folk practices have over the years played a pivotal position in solving different social-ecological plights. The use and protection of different plants, animals, sacred groves, etc by the ethnic people through the Folkloric approach of the Rarh region of West Bengal depend on their cultural value. Thus; folk practices should be preserved for ecological sustainability and Ecological restoration. Folk practices have over the years played a pivotal position in solving different social-ecological predicaments. The use and protection of different plants, animals, sacred groves, etc by the ethnic people through the Folkloric approach of the Rarh region of West Bengal depend on their cultural value. Thus; folk practices should be preserved for ecological sustainability and Ecological restoration.*

**Keywords:** Folklore, Sustainability, Folk culture, Sacred Groves, ecological Restoration

## 1. Introduction

The last one decade has seen a novel susceptibility in matters relating to the ecology and environment relationship. Through the centuries people have obtained the way of interacting with their surrounding environment. The interaction of humans and ecology has been entangled with numerous issues like deforestation, environmental pollution, loss of soil, problems of sanitation desertification, loss of biodiversity, and soil fertility, water shortage including ozone depletion, population explosion, insufficient health care, and water supply, etc. The activities of humans triggered by firstly changing socio-economic patterns owing to the advancement of technology which is chiefly caused for deterioration of the environment. Thus it is necessary to instil environmental ethics in the human mind. To meet this threat folklore can be an important tool. Folk practices have over the years played a noteworthy position in solving several major social-ecological plights.

### Aims & Objectives

- To highlight the folklore of the Rarh region,
- To find out how indigenous knowledge can be used to respond to contemporary environmental matters
- To know how the people of the study area conserve environment through their folkloric approach,

### Significance of the Study

This paper depicts the value of understanding and enhancing various cultural foundations of resource arrangements, ecological restoration, and ecosystem governance. This paper enlightens the significance of accounting for the social dimension, participation in ecological management.

## 2. Methodology

- 1) Survey- Stratified random field survey was conducted in the districts in of Rarh Bengal

- 2) Interview- The interviews have been based on a different level of persons belonging to grassroots people who have traditional knowledge.
- 3) Observation: the different form of folklore such as totem, taboos, belief system, customs, technologies, rituals and its practices of the people of Rarh Bengal have been observed in the selected study areas.
- 4) Documentation: Digital camera has been used for documentation.
- 5) Secondary Sources: The study of books, journals and internet surfing is used for data collection.

## 3. Review of Literature

- The book of 'The Cultural Cradle of Biodiversity', P.S. Ramakrishnan depicts about the relationship between Human and Nature where he has tried to enlighten the indigenous practices for environment conservation. In another way, it can be stated that he has tried to describe that environment should be conserved for the interest of human society at large.
- Research of Mandisa Ngwane, a Geographer tries to relocate folklore studies in the mainstream education system. She investigates knowledge of floras and attached possession of this knowledge with gender, age, education. Ngwane discusses about the increasing detachment of people from their environment which affects the value of the culture of verbal transmission of knowledge about the magnitude of trees to people. She is worried about the unworked environmental information (EEASA & SADC REEP, 1999).

### Location of Rarh Bengal

Rarh region of West Bengal lies between the Western plateau and high lands of Chhotanagpur plateau and the Ganges Delta. Parts of the districts Murshidabad, Birbhum, Bankura, and Medinipur encompass this region. This region historically has many different names. The derivation of the word *Rarh* is not transparent however some authors are revealing that it originates from a native language of the Austro-Asiatic family. It could have sprouted from any of

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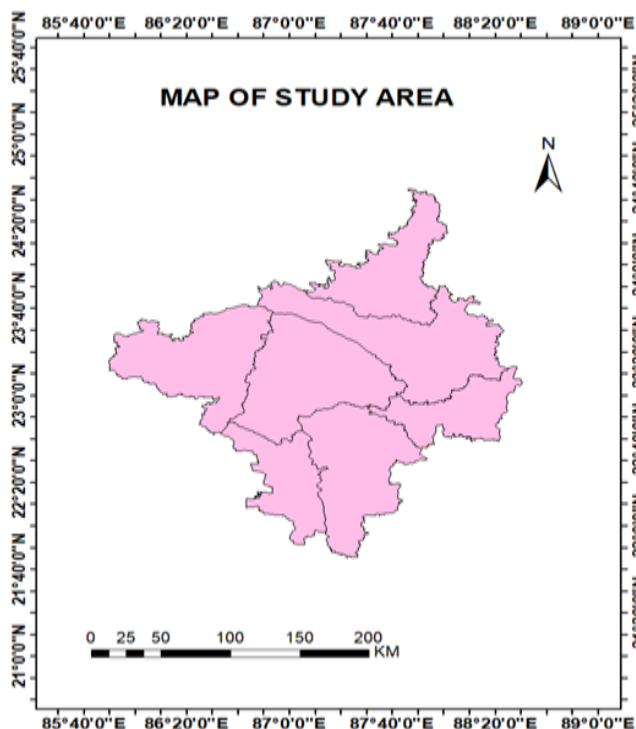
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the following words of the Santali language; *Lar* (thread), *Rarh* (tune). Western parts of this region merging with the Chota Nagpur Plateau which was previously called Vajjabhumi and the eastern part of Rarh was known as Subbhabhumi. Historian P. R. Sarkar delineates the geographical area of the Rarh region. According to him:

**East Rarh** consists of following districts:

1. Western Murshidabad
2. Northern Birbhum
3. Eastern Burdwan (Bardhaman)
4. Hooghly
5. Howrah
6. East Midnapore (Medinipur)
7. Indas of Bankura district



**West Rarh** consists of the following districts:

- 1) Old Santhal Pargana district (today 6 districts: Godda, Deoghar, Dumka, Jamtara, Sahibganj, and Pakur)
- 2) Most parts of Birbhum
- 3) Western Burdwan
- 4) Bankura district except for Indas
- 5) Purulia
- 6) Dhanbad
- 7) Most parts of Giridih
- 8) Four blocks of Ranchi, namely Silli, Sonahatu, Bundu, and Tamar
- 9) Singhbhum
- 10) Jhargram subdivision of West Midnapore

It is said that the Rarh region is created from the soil from the Deccan plateau where Red-colored laterite soil is predominant. Bagri river which is situated in western Rarh is a fertile, low-lying alluvial tract. Rice, jute, oilseeds, wheat, barley, and mangoes are the main crops found in the east; and the cultivation of mulberry is carried out on the western

side. Numerous rivers originate from the mountain peak of Rarh. These rivers flow to the east and south-east towards the ocean. Damodar, Ajay, Mayurakshi, Dwarakeswar, Shilai moreover Kasai are the most notable rivers. The Subarnarekha river flows through some parts of the region and meets at the Bay of Bengal. At first, the forest dwellers of Rarh sustained their lives by hunting. After that, they turned to guard animals and agriculture.

### Ecological Sustainability reflected through Folklore in Rarh Bengal

Folklore is the total way of life of a tradition-oriented society. The manifold of folklore such as oral literature, folk belief, rituals, customs; taboos, folk performing art can sustainably conserve the ecology. Folklore has a considerable effect on environmental attitudes which can play an important role in ecological conservation. Folk people depend on biodiversity as a buffer against environmental disharmony. The use and preservation of different plants, animals, sacred groves, etc by the ethnic people through the Folkloric approach rely on their cultural value. Rarh Bengal is known as very rich in plant biodiversity as well as in ethnic diversity and has an indigenous knowledge. It is dwelt by the largest number of trees and they conduct an intricate life dependent on the forest. Plants are used in many ways either in worshipping or in the prosperity of human life. In every human culture, it is seen that worship is performed with traditional rituals for the betterment of human life. Maximum no. of tribal communities worships their deities from the occasion of birth to mourning death. Tribal folklore is enriched with magico-religious beliefs. They believe that some gods and deities reside on the trees in the forest. If they do not show mark respect to them their full clan will be destroyed. So they conserve the plants which they consider sacred. Their festivals, rituals, and other cultural aspects are closely associated with the encircling vegetation preserved on religious ground. The extra care exhibited by the community has significantly contributed to maintaining the religious plants intact and in good shape thereby conserving a whole range of biodiversity that is housed in it. There is an inextricable link between indigenous and biological diversity. All over the world, grassroots people have tried to conserve the nature with which they have symbiotic connections. The knowledge and culture of indigenous people are precious in the present-day context of ecological conservation and its utilization in a sustainable manner. Plants have a special role in the spiritual and social ceremonies of every rural society. Various religious and supernatural beliefs and folklore helps in the prevention of destruction of plants. There are several examples of tree worship rituals in many parts of the world under all religions and beliefs.

### Folk literature and Ecological Sustainability

Folk literature patronizes on the evaluation of the relationship between human beings and the natural world and explores the interaction between the humanistic culture and nature in the traditional folk tales.

- Tale drenched with environmental awareness is much more valuable. It is helpful to sense the close proximity with nature and it makes people realize the necessity to go back to their natural settings and the necessity to conserve

the environment. 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. In folktales, trees, animals, birds, humans all live with affectionately. No difference has been found between humans and nature. There are so many tales have been studied in the study area which portrays the relationship of human and nature.

- Very long years ago, a dog lived in a forest. He was very lonely and he had no friends. One day, he thought he should make some friends sustain the life in the jungle. So he went to a rabbit and asked him to make companions with him. Rabbit agreed to his proposal and made friendship with the dog. One night, after hearing some noise in the jungle, he started barking. The rabbit asked him not to bark otherwise the lion would hear them and attack them. It made him think that he made friends with a coward rabbit. The lion must be courageous so, he should make friendship with the lion. He left the rabbit alone and went off to the lion and proposed him to make fellows with him. The lion happily made friends with him. They lived happily in a cave. But again the dog started barking. The lion warned him not to make sound and informed him If any hunter heard the noise, he would kill them. Again the dog thought he again made friendship with the wrong animal. So he thought the hunter might the strongest one that is why all the animals of the forest afraid of the hunter. So, he thought to go to the hunter and make him his friend. As per his thinking, he left the lion and went to the hunter and made him his friend. Again at night, he started barking to examine the hunter. The hunter told him not to bark as he always stays with him and assured him that nobody could disturb the dog. He would always be there with him. After that, the dog got a brave friend as he wanted and lived with that hunter forever.

**Analysis:** The magnitude of friendship with animals lighted in these tales serve the picture of arousing love and care of man-animal friendship. Folktales of humans and animals depict itself well to a simple lesson on ecology and endangered species, where anyone can explore how humans' cooperative relationship with nature has been compromised.

### Myth

Myth is so many myths are found which highlights the man-nature connection. One of them is given below-

- Karama tree

One day, on the occasion of Sarhul, some male members of the tribal community went for hunting. At that time, some people attacked the females of the tribe. In revenge, the orao females wore male dress, picked up swords and fought against them. They finally overpowered the enemies. But the enemies again attacked them in the night and defeated them. As a result, the tribes went into the jungle and hid them inside a big cave. The enemies even came near the cave, but could not find the tribes as a big karma tree that was there in front of the cave which had kept the cave hidden. As a result, the enemies could not find the tribes and thus they were saved. Thereafter all the tribal community has been paying respect to the Karama tree.

### 4. Conclusion

Folk practices have over the years played a pivotal position in solving different social-ecological plights. The use and protection of different plants, animals, sacred groves, etc by the ethnic people through the Folkloric approach of the Rarh region of West Bengal depend on their cultural value. Thus; folk practices should be preserved for ecological sustainability and Ecological restoration. Folk practices have over the years played a pivotal position in solving different social-ecological predicaments. The use and protection of different plants, animals, sacred groves, etc by the ethnic people through the Folkloric approach of the Rarh region of West Bengal depend on their cultural value. Thus; folk practices should be preserved for ecological sustainability and Ecological restoration.

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