

**Nature, Human, and Culture in Bhatiyali Songs and Meyeli Geet: An Ecocultural Analysis
of North-Eastern Bengali Folk Songs**



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of North-Eastern Bengali Folk Songs**

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

 23/8/2023
Dr. Syed Manzoorul Islam

Professor

Department of English and Humanities

DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

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DEDICATION

To my Ma who taught me patience and perseverance. Without her dedication and encouragement, I would not be able to come this far to pursue a Master of Arts degree.

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Abstract

Since the study of Bengali folklore concentrates on the socio-cultural aspects, the aim of this thesis is to find out ecocritical perspectives of it with a specific focus on folk songs. Two prominent genres of folk songs known as Bhatiyali and Meyeli Geet that were collected mainly from the north-eastern region of Bangladesh are analyzed in this thesis from the ecocultural canon. In order to examine people's way of life and their interconnection with nature, a survey has been conducted based on the cultural and environmental aspects of that region. For this research, the two Haor (large water bodies) areas of the Kishoreganj district known as Nikli and Mithamoin were selected as the field of study. The data consolidates the idea that cultural as well as environmental concerns are reflected in the two genres of folk songs. The main purpose of this study is to establish an ecocultural canon to explore the contents of these folk songs in order to analyze the interconnection between humans, nature, and the culture of that region. This thesis also research attempts to analyze the gendered perspectives in folk songs that are identifiable from Bhatiyali songs sung by men and Meyeli Geet sung by women. It is examined from an ecofeminist perspective to emphasize how women's connection and perceptions about nature vary from men. This paper tries to shed light on the ecocritical elements of the folk songs of north-eastern Bengal associated with the large water body called Haor, the living cultures of the people, and the relationship of their culture with nature in the folk songs.

Keywords: Folk songs, Bhatiyali Songs, Meleyeli Geet, nature, culture, ecocultural analysis, folklore, ecocriticism, ecology, ecofeminism

Chapter 1

Introduction

The study of folklore in the 21st century has advanced significantly to a great extent that it is no longer confined to the monolithic definition that specifies folklore as “popular antiquities or popular literature”. Interdisciplinary as well as multidisciplinary approaches are being incorporated to find new meanings, values, and cultural significance permeated in the different genres of folklore such as folktales, folk songs, folk ballads, folk arts, folk proverbs, etc. During its emergence in the early 19th century, folklorists initially took an interest in the oral culture practiced by rural peasants and a few other groups excluded from the modern way of life. The preservation of archaic customs and beliefs was the main agenda of the first folklorists. Over the centuries, the concentration and context of folklore have changed so vastly that it no longer conveys the previous meaning associated with the ancient culture of the rural people as folklore is now studied in the urban context as well. Folklore in the present context is now seen as an academic discipline that constitutes the sum total of traditionally derived and orally or imitatively transmitted literature, material culture, and customs of subculture within predominantly literate and technologically advanced societies. Apart from literature, this discipline often falls under the purviews of ethnology and anthropology. Folklore is called the collective unconscious of the people as it reflects the meanings and values of a specific social group. The psychology and the pulse of the people of a particular culture are therefore transmitted through folklore as opposed to the dominant culture of the bourgeoisie class.

Folk songs, a significant part of folklore, are particular types of songs that are traditionally derived and orally or imitatively transmitted by the people. Folk songs are one of

the branches of folklore that has an enriching history. Folk Songs have varied forms in different regions of Bangladesh. They not only capture the emotions, aesthetics, meanings, and values of the specific group but also embody the natural and environmental aspects associated with their culture. There are various genres of folk songs such as Jari, Sari, Bhatiyali, Bhawaiya, Baul, Baromashi, Meyeli Geet, etc. While there is no doubt that folksongs are an integral part of the culture of the people and oftentimes, they remain a testament to the humanistic aspect, it is also to be perceived that they immensely focus on nature, animals, and particularly the non-human world. The sociocultural analysis of folksongs has been a topic of discussion primarily from where the non-human and the nature have been excluded. The advancement in the contextual study of folk songs enables the readers to perceive folksongs and their elements from different perspectives. Without concentrating merely on the socio-cultural perspectives in folk songs, a canonical study of folksongs from an ecocritical perspective can help foster a more inclusive understanding of folk songs where nature and the non-human entity do not get excluded. Since folk songs have different implications based on their forms and elements, in this research, has been taken into account how particular genres of folk songs such as Bhatiyali and Meyeli Geet contain ecocritical elements that are also often gender-based.

The area of this research is located in the north-eastern region of Bangladesh. In this region, rivers, and Haors, known as large water bodies, comprise the ecology that are distinctive from the mountainous or seashore regions of Bangladesh. Therefore, the melody, the contents, and the subjects of these songs also revolve around the topographical features of this region. Bhatiyali songs are a well-known genre of folk songs as they are mostly sung by the boatmen of the river and Haor. When the boatman goes out in the Haor during monsoon season, the vastness of the water bodies and the tranquility of nature influence him to a great extent which can be

traced from these songs. The emotions, sufferings, and survivals of their everyday life that are closely intermingled with the topographical and hydrological features of that region are reflected in those songs. The songs are particularly sung by men since the tasks of fishing and rowing boats are taken up by the men of the society.

On the other hand, Meyeli Geet is particularly sung by women who most of the time remain indoors and do not explore the outworld nature like men. These types of songs are occasionally sung during wedding ceremonies and are also sung to portray the emotions, sufferings, and everyday aspects of women's lives. Women in the north-eastern region belong to a patriarchal society since their lives are primarily determined by marriage, and giving birth to children. Meyeli Geet is a prime example of women's survival in the riverine patriarchal communities of Bangladesh. These songs stand as a testament to women's association with nature, though in a limited spectrum, their coping mechanism to escape the harsh realities of a patriarchal society. It is often observed that women find solace in nature, express their inner emotions to nature, and retreat to nature in order to find peace.

The rationale behind selecting both Bhatiyali and Meyeli Geets as the primary sources of this research was to focus on both dominant genders and their particular implications in these songs and establish a complete concentration upon the population of the north-eastern region of Bangladesh. The societies in that region are primarily heterogeneous in the sense that male and female genders fit into the gender normativity like most other societies of different regions of Bangladesh. Hence, to establish a more rounded focus on the people of that region and their association with nature reflected in the folk songs, these two prominent subgenres of folklore have been chosen. Moreover, to postulate their association with nature and reflect upon the lives of the people, a survey has been conducted to prove the research hypothesis that the

lives of the people in the north-eastern region are interwoven with the topographical features and the natural phenomena of that region. The survey result shows that Bhatiyali songs and Meyeli Geet have elements that reflect the interconnection between nature and humans suggesting the presence of “eco-consciousness” among the people.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Upon analyzing the literature on the North-Eastern Folk Songs of Bangladesh, it has been found that very few research articles have been published on the socio-cultural aspects of Bhatiyali Songs and hardly on Meyeli Geet. Since the articles are few in number, there have been no scholarly articles found specifically on the ecocultural analysis of these songs. Despite being enriched in containing elements of nature, ecology, and culture, there has been no scholarly discussion on the reflection of nature, ecology, and culture included in those songs as the existing book chapters and articles focus on various aspects that range from general perception about these songs, their implications in the culture of the society, humanist perspective, Marxist interpretation, embodiment of sorrow and celebration, means of survival, and aspects particularly.

2.1. Folklore and Folk Songs

Abdul Wahab in the second chapter titled “Lokogitir Sangartho o Porichoy” (Definition and Introduction of Folksongs) from the book *Bangladeshi Lokogiti: Ekti Sahamaj-tattik Adhyan (Bengali Folk Songs: A Sociological Study)* focuses on the definitions and introduction to Bengali folk songs. In the first part of the chapter, he defines the area, contents, and elements of folklore. He signifies that the elements of folklore are divided into two segments: “material folklore and formalized folklore.” (Wahab 189) Material folklore includes folk arts which are being passed on from generation to generation. (Wahab 189) On the other hand, he states that

formalized folklore includes riddles, rhymes, proverbs, folk songs, folk ballads, folk tales, folk beliefs, folk legends, etc. (Wahab 189) He locates the emergence of the word folklore in 1846 and then explicates the initial perception about folklore that indicates the culture of the ‘folk’, that is closely related to the rural people or the general mass. The term ‘folklore’ in the Bengali language literally translated as ‘lokosongskriti’ refers to ‘folk culture’, and this term is widely accepted by most Bengali folklorists. Hence, the problem with the translation and its appropriation in terms of the Bengali language arises. The author quotes anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits to state that “culture is the man-made part of the environment” (Wahab 195) It is also mentioned how folklore in English is called the “Pulse of the People” (Wahab 195) indicating that it represents the commonality of the people. He brings out the concept of humanism associated with folklore by referring to a famous quote by Badu Chandidas, the medieval poet of the Bengal-- “Humans are above everything, nothing’s superior to them”, and how it resonates with the core concept of folklore with an emphasis on the ‘folk’ (Wahab 197) to imply that folklore is about humanism. The author further mentions that the moral of Mahabharata echoes the same concept that “Humans are superior above all things” (Wahab 197) The glorification of humanism and its association as a significant part of folklore is thus emphasized by the author. He stresses that the urge to pervade the betterment of humans through the practice of humanism is the driving source of folklore. (Wahab 201) Love and kindness towards humanity are something that enriches folklore; thus, the attempt to rejuvenate the elements of folklore to strive towards the progression of society. (Wahab 201) The author brings examples from Bengali folk tales about the cunning crow attempting to deceive the sparrow and ultimately being dead for the consequence of its deceitful characteristics to mention the Marxist implication of folklore whereas the honest and weak sparrow represents the subordinate class of

the society. It has been highlighted that “Folklore has been and continues to be a reflection and a weapon of class conflict”, according to Russian folklorist Y. M. Sokolov. (Wahab 207) The author accentuates the notion that folklore contains secularism and thus the religion of the general people is the folkloric religion, hence, humans are the center of this tradition. (Wahab 210) Therefore, humanism is the central element of folklore. (Wahab 211)

Wakil Ahmed in the introductory chapter of the book *Bangla Lokosongit: Bhatiyali Gaan* (*Bengali Folksongs: Bhatiyali Songs*) makes a distinction between Sarigaan and Bhatiyali Gaan by implying that “Sari songs are the work songs of the boatmen, whereas Bhatiyali songs are sung by the boatmen during their leisure time. The boatmen sing Sari Gaan while rowing their boats in groups; on the contrary, they sing Bhatiyali gaan in a solo voice while they float their boats in solitary on the tranquil stream of a river. (13) To identify the characteristics of the Bhatiyali songs, the author signifies that “it has similarities in its melody with the tranquil river stream.” (Ahmed 13) It has a longer melody and rhythm compared to Sari songs which are comparable with the flow of the river or Haor. The author identifies that the word ‘Bhaital’ is an epenthesis of ‘Bhatiyal’ which refers to the ‘Bhati’ or low lands, according to Ashutosh Bhattacharya. The Bhati region constitutes three distinct regions of Bangladesh– Dhaka, Mymensingh, and Sylhet. (Ahmed 19) The word Bhati is a localized term of the word ‘Bhata’, which indicates the favorable stream of the river. In the eastern region of Bangladesh, those areas are known as ‘Bhati’ which get flooded during the monsoon season. Bhatir Desh attributes to that area which is relatively lower than the western region of Bangladesh. During monsoon season, communication without boats becomes impossible in that region. There are three main rivers such as Padma, Meghna, and Jamuna which flow through the eastern region. (Ahmed 14)

It is mentioned in the Sangsad Bangla Dictionary that “the songs which are sung with the flows of the lower streams of the river are usually known as Bhatityali”. (Ahmed 15) Sirajuddin Kasimpuri stresses that “Bhatiyali is a melody– which is not only specifically woven with words” (Ahmed 15) The author ascertains that 50 out of 100 collected songs of Bhatiyali from different sources show in their contents and stylistic statistics that they are deeply associated with river-boat- boatmen. (Ahmed 15) The spiritual and physiological versions of these songs comprise these aspects as well. In this introduction, the author briefly mentions that this interweaving of emotions and songs would not have been possible without the association of folk songs with ecology. (Ahmed 15) However, he stresses that Bhatiyali songs are mainly songs of love, sorrow, and laments which fall into two types of categories: material love and spiritual love. (Ahmed 18) The author while discussing the origin, history, and components of these songs, briefly discusses the association of Bhatiyali songs with nature which could have been further explicated.

2.2. The Socio-cultural Studies

Eva Friedlander in the paper titled “The Mundane and Prosaic in Bengali Folk Songs” brings out the concern regarding the mundane and prosaic aspects of traditional folk songs of Bengal that are often overlooked due to the concentration on the spiritual aspects of particular folk songs such as Baul. Hence, the author proposes that “the vitality of at least some Bengali devotional folk songs stems more from their ability to accommodate changing circumstances, varying modes of expression and a variety of interpretations than from any underlying unity of soul or purpose, and mostly it is noticeable in the mundane songs.” (Friedlander 131) It is also

explicated in the article how the importance of spirituality in Baul songs oftentimes overshadows the more prosaic in Baul and other folk songs that are a significant part of Bengali culture.

(Friedlander 131) The argument has been solidified based on the analysis that many of these folk songs, for instance, songs sung by women during the Badu Puja, “are far from religious or sacrilegious concepts.” (Friedlander 133) In this particular type of song, women’s marriage and everyday life are reflected. The songs contain elements taken from “day-to-day life, filled with humor, satire, and mimicry that attract a mixed and appreciative audience.” (Friedlander 133) The author thus points out how “humor and the tragedy of the human condition” (Friedlander 140) are subtly combined with the tradition of “self-reflection”. (Friedlander 140) It was further highlighted in the research that “the Baul enshrined in a metaphysical doctrine espousing individualism, defiance of social norms, and lofty egalitarian and spiritual ideals came to stand for the soul of Bengal. Subsequent attempts to search for and compile "true" Baul songs led folklorists to overlook the more mundane and prosaic songs. On the other hand, Bhadu songs performed on an occasion that brings people together specifically for worship, and the Baul songs, sung by individual wandering minstrels, suggest that it is not necessarily a unifying spirit or attitude that enables people of diverse backgrounds to gather together and enjoy the songs.” (Friedlander 143)

Rumana Chowdhury in her paper titled “Bangladeshi Folk Songs: A ‘Nation-Thing’” brings out different genres of folk songs such as patriotic folk songs, Bhatiyali, Bhawaiya, Baul, etc. While focusing on the socio-cultural aspects of these songs, she accentuates that these folk songs “play a dynamic role in representing Bangladeshi art and culture in different ways.” (Chowdhury 536) She further points out that these songs represent “every aspect of life, art, and

culture of a nation in front of other countries of the world nationally as well as internationally. Above all, it is connected to a community's way of life, their traditions and social practices, rituals, and myths.” (Chowdhury 536) To highlight the variations in the folk songs, she mentions that “folk music has great variety with songs being composed on the culture, festival, images of life, religion, natural beauty, rivers, and rural and riverine life. At the same time, these songs are about public discrimination and poverty, about the material world, and the supernatural.” (Chowdhury 536) Her research focuses on various aspects of the folk songs of Bengal including the religious influence they embody within. The importance of folk songs during the Independence War of Bangladesh in 1917 was also highlighted through the research as it served as a “great tool of memory and motivation for the nation as a whole.” (Chowdhury 537) As the research focuses on various variations of folksongs, the concentration on Bhatiyali songs attributed it to a particular type of song that is about “longing, about emotions like pain, sorrow, joy, and moreover, the supernatural.” It can be perceived from the research that Bhatiyali songs are fundamentally considered the songs of the boatmen, as it is formed naturally since Bangladesh is a riverine country. While the research mostly focused on the aspect of folk songs representing the cultural traditions of Bangladesh, it is also mentioned very briefly that Bhatiyali songs “express not only loss, pain, and memory but also the human understanding of nature.” (Chowdhury 537) Thus, the reflection of nature and natural phenomena in this category of folk songs remains unexplored.

2.3. The Feminist Perspectives

Niaz Zaman's article titled "The Bangla Baromashi Songs of Sorrow and Celebration" focuses on Bangla Bromashi songs, a poetic genre that describes the twelve months of the Bangla year in verses while also narrating a story about the sorrows and loneliness felt by the speaker as her beloved is away. She explains that baromashi refers to a peasant calendar, but the type most often associated with this genre is the "viraha-baromashi, a song lament describing the separation of a woman from her husband/ lover." (Zaman 145) Her argument proposes that these songs which juxtapose the sadness of separation from the husband/ lover and agricultural scenes are celebratory more than sorrowful (Zaman 145) by establishing a historical contextualization of the baromashi tradition of Bengal. The author's significance on the rich variety of the land of Bengal described in those songs brings forth the notion that "Even a ballad that describes the sad plight of a woman waiting for her husband who has left her can laud this variety." (Zaman 151), thus connecting women's association with nature and seeking solace in there. While her article focuses on the songs especially "sung by women which provide— even if stereotyped— images of the passing months, even when as in the separation baromashi they express the anguish of the separated love" (148), their inclination with nature and the passing seasons as an integral part of their lives reflected in those songs are hardly distinguished. The monthly rituals associated with nature, as they belong to the agrarian society in the rural region of Bangladesh, become a live culture that can be identified from these songs. Thus, the author explains that every month calls up images of the separated lovers as it is visible from the author's remark that "The baromaha begins in Chayt, the first month of the year in the Sikh calendar, and describes the separation of the human soul from the divine. This baromaha ends happily with the union of the lover and beloved in Phalgun." (Zaman 147) It is identifiable from her discussion that the juxtaposition "of sorrow at the absence of a lover-husband or beloved is offset by a joy in the changing seasons."

(Zaman 152) as in *Mahua Pala* and *Kamalar Baromashi* from *Eastern Bengal Ballads*. Since the research focuses on the Bangla Baromashi songs while exploring women's association with the changes perceived in nature, the research can be further extended by employing an ecofeminist lens to analyze the modes of connection between women, and nature.

Susmita Chakrabarty's article "When Folklore becomes a Survival Tool for the Laboring Women in the City of Rajshahi." focuses on a traditional folk occupation—Kalai Ruti making, to highlight the survival mechanism adopted by the laboring women from the city of Rajshahi, a district located in the western region of Bangladesh. From a feminist perspective, the article examines the material folk culture and finds out how "folklore becomes a survival tool in the form of a folk food for the livelihood of the laboring women in the city of Rajshahi and how it exists with its various limitations in the competitive market of this capitalistic society."

(Chakrabarty 173) By collecting data for one month, doing fieldworks, and interviewing the owners of the Kalairuti shops, the article "focuses on one of the material elements of folklore with its changed image that the laboring women have brought into limelight." (Chakrabarty 176) The interviewees were contacted from the 30- 32 Kalairuti shops scattered throughout the city. To identify the facets of patriarchal domination and women's coping mechanism in terms of it, the author explains that with a few exceptions, "in the environment of our traditional family life, a girl is dependent on her father, and when she gets married, her dependency is transferred to her husband from her father. This situation of perpetual dependency is explicatory of gender inequality." (Chakrabarty 174) The author further explicates that the laboring women, who are generally given no access to institutional education, have to find a way to earn their livelihood "by manual labor or by means of traditional knowledge". (Chakrabarty 174) Hence, the author

bases her theoretical framework on the modes of patriarchal domination and the construction of gender roles signifying that “the construction of social and cultural identity of male and female is called gender, which expresses all the social characteristics, roles, activities and responsibilities offered by a specific society for being male or female (Rahman 2007: 37)”. (Chakrabarty 175) In the case of the laboring women of Rajshahi, they break their traditional gender roles for the sake of survival by being oppressed by the patriarchal society.

The previous literature, although few in number, discusses folklore and folksongs from different perspectives that are human-centered and therefore reflect anthropocentric assumptions. The bio-centric approach seems to be missing from the context as no literature mentioned above discusses the significance of nature and non-human entities elaborately. Therefore, a canonical perspective through the lens of ecocriticism needs to be established.

Chapter 3

Methodology

To conduct this research, a mixed method approach by combining processes of both qualitative and quantitative approaches was followed. The primary source of this research constitutes the folk songs of the north-eastern region of Bangladesh. The qualitative data were collected by researching library archives on the folk songs of the north-eastern region of Bangladesh; particularly Bangla Academy's collection of folklore in this case was helpful. This research concentrated on the Bhatiyali songs and Meyeli Geet that are particularly collected from the Kishoreganj district in Bangladesh. Two different genres of folk songs were selected to develop a more inclusive research approach that focuses on the songs sung by the two dominant heterogeneous groups rather than one specific gender. Books and journal articles have been used to reflect upon the ecocultural analysis of these songs. It primarily focused on the qualitative data that comprises folk songs, and the existing research while developing a hypothesis to confirm whether the preservation of nature is reflected in these songs or not; and also, to identify the gendered narratives in those songs and their implication with nature. In order to testify and prove this hypothesis, by following an exploratory sequential approach, a survey has been conducted among the target population of the two sub-districts of Kishoreganj: Nikli and Mithamoin. Upon finalizing the target population from the north-eastern region of Bangladesh, the samples were selected based on their age and occupation. Since Bhatiyali songs are sung particularly by men and Meyeli Geet by women, therefore, the samples were selected by following a non-random

technique to focus on the men and women between the 18- 57 age groups. The quota sampling technique was incorporated to focus on the specified age group of men who are involved in working in the Haor region. For the specified age group of women, women who are involved in both household work and non-household work were chosen as the sample. Hence, the quota sampling method was beneficial in confirming the hypothesis. For the discussion chapter of this research, the theoretical basis had been formed by concentrating on ecocritical theories. For interpreting Bhatiyali Songs, ecocritical theories were applied. Whereas, for interpreting Meyeli Geet, ecofeminism which discusses women's association with nature and their exploitation by patriarchy has been incorporated. Hence, to support the claims of qualitative analysis, quantitative data has been useful in this regard.

While collecting data through the survey, the researcher ensured ethical consent from the survey participants upon the condition that their individual identities and other information would remain confidential. Before they participated in the survey, the participants were well-informed about the research and its focus to make them understand to what extent their responses would be used. The participants received assurance that their participation in the survey would not in any way violate any laws or endanger their safety. Respect and gratitude towards the participants were conveyed during the collection of the data. The researcher remained aware of any inconvenience the survey participants may encounter in their participation. They were also given the opportunity to not participate in the survey if any questions appeared inappropriate to them.

Chapter 4

Result and Findings

This section focuses on five data sets based on the responses received from the participants in the survey. The data were collected through a physical survey to find out their occupation, the stage of their institutional education, their leisure time, and their opinion regarding the transformation in the topographical features of the Haor. 40 male and 40 female participants, in total 80 participants participated in the survey. Two sub-districts of the Kishoreganj region i.e. Nikli and Mithamoin were chosen for the fieldwork. The survey was conducted within 1 week and lasted from June 25, 2023 to July 1, 2023. The sample size was focused based on their age. From 18 to 57 years old male and female members of both societies participated in the survey.

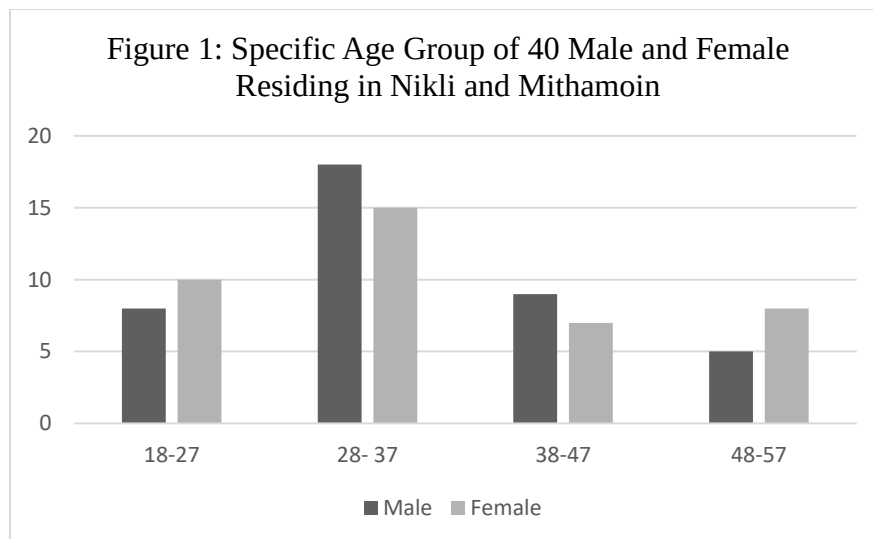


Figure 1 illustrated above shows that 28 to 37 years-old participants were the majority in number for both males and females. Whereas the males from that specific age group were 18, the

number of females was 15. Moreover, 18 to 27-year-old males and females were the second highest number to participate in the research. Other age groups comprised almost equal number of participants.

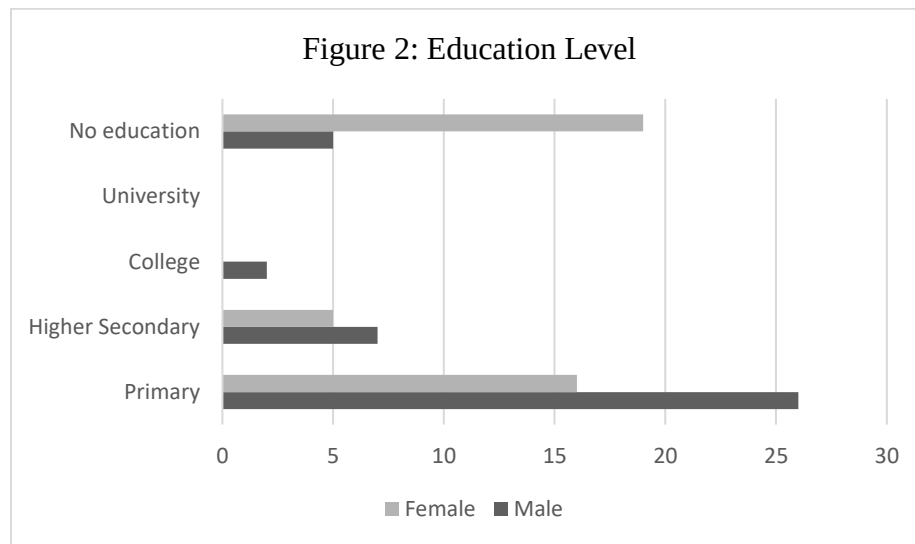


Figure 2 depicts the level of education acquired by each of the participants. It can be seen that the highest number of males (26) completed their primary education whereas the highest number of females (19) had no education at all. It indicates that the literacy rate is high among the male members of the society. In contrast, females have limited access to education. Moreover, none of the samples, both male and female, had any tertiary level of education. The number of people who went to high school is 7 for males and 5 for females. And the number of people who went to college is only 2 for males. It indicates that in terms of obtaining education, the females in society are still behind males.

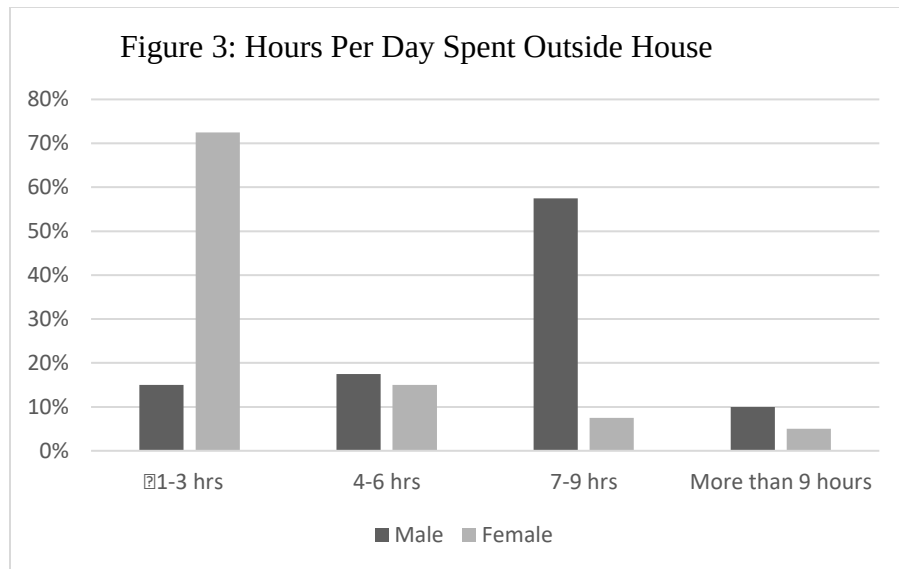


Figure 3 shows the number of hours per day spent outside their house by males and females. While 72.5 % of females mostly spend 1 to 3 hours per day outside their house, 57.50% of males spend 7-9 hours per day outside. It implies that the males are involved in works that require their presence outside their house, whereas, the females mostly remain in their house and seldom go out. Moreover, 17.5% of males stated that they spend 4 to 6 hours outside. On the other hand, 15% of females stated that they spend the same amount of time outside. Whereas only 5% of females stay outside for more than 9 hours, in comparison, 10% of males stay outside for the same amount of time. The percentages indicate that the females mostly stay near their houses.

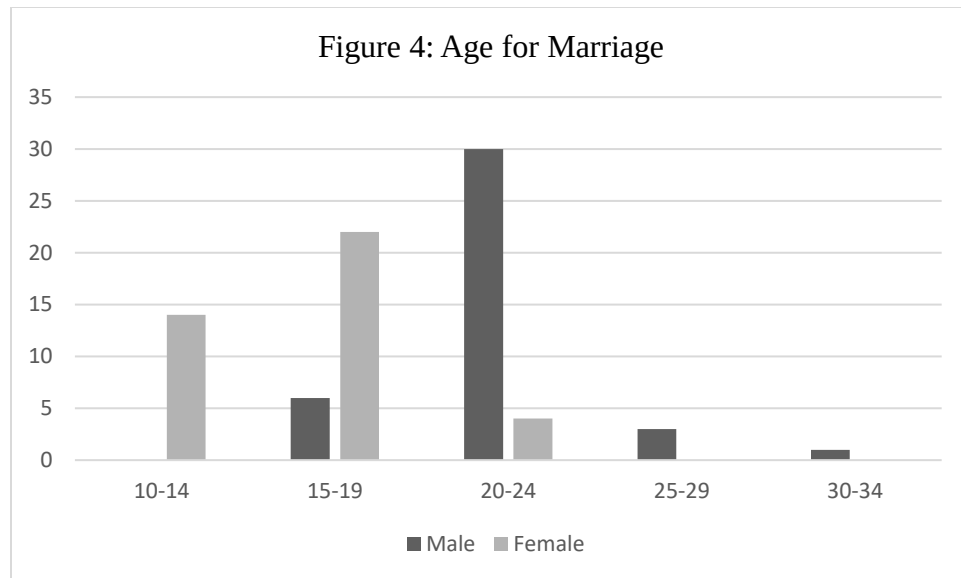


Figure 4 shows that the average age for marriage for most men in society is 20 to 24. 30 men said that they were married at the age between 20 to 24. On the contrary, the average age for women in society is 15 to 19. More than 20 women were married between that age. Between the age of 26 to 29 and 30 t, only 3 men out of 14 were married. Women had a different experience as all of them were married before the age of 25. Moreover, it is also noticeable that no men were married at the age of 10 to 14, whereas, a significant number of women were married at that age. It indicates that women in that area get married early, often during their adolescence, compared to men.

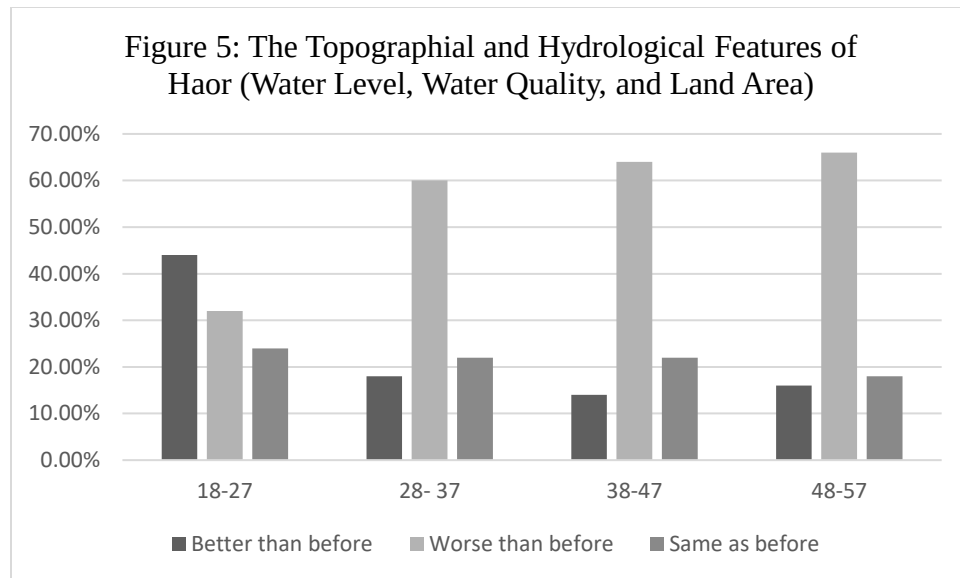


Figure 5 depicts the opinions of the people regarding the condition of the topographical and hydrological features of the Haor in terms of increase or decrease in the water level, water quality, and land area. Among 80 males and females, the age group of 28- 57, has opinionated that the condition has worsened over the years. For 28- 37-year-olds, the highest percentage (60%) have stated the transformation was worse than before. Among 38-47 years old, it is 60% people who share the same thought. The older age group (48-57) seems to share a similar kind of thought as 66% of them have stated. Contrarily, the younger generation (18- 27 age group) seems to think that the condition got better. It is perhaps because for being a younger generation, their experience varies from the older generations.

Chapter 5

Defining the Ecocultural Ground: Folklore and Ecocriticism

In academia, the study of folklore mostly used to concentrate on the sociocultural aspects of the folk. From the emergence of folklore studies in the 19th century, the first folklorists focused specifically on the oral literature of the uneducated peasants and a few other groups untouched by modern ways of life. The preservation of the ancient beliefs, customs, and traditions of the rural people was the main agenda of the study of folklore. Over the years, the studies of folklore have been expanded into different disciplines such as literature, linguistics, anthropology, social science, etc. Dorothy Noyes identifies the transition in the study of folklore as the oral literature of the lower-class people:

“In the nineteenth century, most scholars understood folklore as a historical stratum within general culture, a residue chiefly in the lowest layers of society. Today the layers have reversed: folklore is seen as emergent, rising from the interstices of institutions and the new platform of digital culture. In between came a Marxist conception of folklore as the culture of the dominated classes and the American liberal idea of folklore as the culture of the dominated classes and the formal institutions.” (Noyes 16)

Hence, the initial idea of the term “Folk-Lore” in 1846, used by William Thoms, meant “popular antiquities, or popular literature” (Thoms 11). The words combined “folk” and “lore” with a hyphen in between to identify the common ground in which “groups of people” (Noyes

13) and “bodies of knowledge” (Noyes 13) are interconnected. The earliest conception of folklore has changed drastically over the years as the “location of folklore among the peasants and primitives” (Noyes 14) has been converted into “shared forms rather than shared identity” (Noyes 14) as the *sine qua non* of folklore (Noyes 14). Although the study of folklore, if the context of *folk* and *lore* are taken into account, has been mostly about the “folk” and thus human-centric and seldom “bio-centric” that concentrates both on humans and nature by abolishing the dichotomy between humans and nature. Recent approaches toward folklore therefore need to be inclusive of the human as well as the non-human world. An interdisciplinary approach towards folklore and ecocriticism can foster disseminating knowledge about the relationship between humans and nature in folklore through the practice of biocentrism instead of “anthropocentric vision” (Rueckert 113) which mandates humans “to conquer, humanize, domesticate, violate, and exploit every natural thing.” (Rueckert 113)

In order to locate folklore in a context and to diversify the study of folklore from different perspectives, Dan Ben-Amos stresses the ambiguity of setting a specific monolithic definition of folklore.

“... folklorists have constructed their definitions on the basis of sets of relations between the social context, the time depth, and the medium of transmission on the one hand, and the conception of folklore as a body of knowledge, mode of thought, and kind of art on the other” (5)

In this sense, the concept of folklore as a product of commonality in specific social groups stands out. It also indicates that folklore represents the collective unconscious as a mode

of thought. Further, through folk tales, folk songs, folk legends, proverbs, materialistic art, etc., it holds artistic expressions of the collective unconsciousness of the people. In its essence, folklore exudes the concept of “interconnectedness” (Glotfelty xix), the principal law of ecology, since it functions through connecting humans as well as non-humans in groups. The study of folklore thus remains a special interest in ecocriticism since folklore creates, in Bakhtinian terms, a dialogical space, “one in which multiple voices or points of view interact” (Mcdowell 372), by uniting the voices of every entity.

Just as ecocriticism “takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture” (Glotfelty xix) and as a theoretical discourse “negotiates between the human and the nonhuman” (Glotfelty xix), it is necessary to develop a bridge to unite the study of folklore and environment from an ecocritical lens. Since folklore does not only reflect the socio-cultural condition of humans but also includes the presentation and representation of non-human entities and the relationship between humans and nature, ecocritical approaches are necessary to implement in academia.

Chapter 6

An Ecocultural Analysis of Bhatiyali Songs

Both Bhatiyali songs and Meyeli Geet are enriched in concepts, elements, meanings, and values that can be perceived with an ecocritical lens. Since Bhatiyali Songs are sung in a solitary environment while the boatmen oar with the low stream, their perception and reaction towards the natural phenomena that often dictate their everyday life are reflected in those songs. The composition of these songs is scaffolded based on the boatmen's inclination towards nature and its impact on their lives. Hence, the four aspects of ecocriticism can be identified from these songs, i.e., ego-consciousness vs. eco-consciousness, landscape as a continuous history, non-human voices and Bakhtinian dialogism, and Nature and the wilderness.

6.1. Ego-consciousness vs Eco-consciousness

As it is seen in terms of literary criticism, the area focuses on the cultural theory to a great extent that there is a dichotomy established between culture and ecology, and human and nature. This dichotomous establishment creates a sense of superiority that fuels the notion of humanism by placing humans above everything. Nature, animal, and the environment is deemed inferior to humans, human interest, and culture. Similar attitudes towards folklore studies are noticeable as it is perceived as a source that disseminates the values of humanism.

“In the face of profound threats to our biological survival, we continue, in the proud tradition of humanism, to, as Ehrenfeld says, “love ourselves best of all” to celebrate the self-aggrandizing ego and to place self-interest above public interest, even, irrationally enough, in matters of common survival (238-39).” (Love 226)

This “self-aggrandizing” ego (Ehrenfeld 238-39) of humans results in the oppression and exploitation of nature that ultimately causes destruction in the lives of humans as well. Since folklore, particularly folksongs, constitutes the communal instincts of humans, therefore, narrative and perspectives towards folk songs need to be revised so that the nature and ecological aspects do not become excluded from the context. Bhatiyali songs contain the elements that subvert the human ego and establish an “eco-consciousness” (Love 230) towards nature and ecology. For instance, in the following song, the alignment of human sorrow with nature is noticeable:

“My heart burns by the fire of love, oh lo
 To whom shall I submit my heart’s anguish?
 The fire of love burns my heart
 Tears run from my eyes!

Oh dear, my dear—
 To whom shall I submit my heart’s anguish?
 Whose fate betrays them on this earth!
 The desire of my soul kept unspoken
 My eyes had dried out of tears

Oh dear, my dear —
 Tree leaves fall by hearing my anguish
 The desire of my soul remains unspoken

To whom shall I submit my heart's anguish?

Nobody is dear to me in this country

To whom shall I speak about my heartache?

Oh dear, oh—

The Bhaital River tide goes low by hearing my anguish

Who knows when death will visit me, oh dear

To whom shall I submit my heart's anguish?" (*Bangla Academy Folklore Collection*- 65 119)

A human's sorrow is shared with nature as mentioned in the song that the speaker resorts to trees and the 'Bhaital River' to relieve his anguish. It signifies the mental connection between the natural entities and human beings to find solace and comfort. Nature has become a sanctuary of solace for the speaker in this song as he finds no other person to talk to about his heartache. The empathic relationship between nature and humans thus abolishes the complexes of hierarchy as no superiority is established in this context. This song reminds us that the non-dichotomous and non-hierarchical relationship between humans and nature is plausible if human beings subside their "ego-consciousness" (Love 230) and practice "eco-consciousness". (Love 230) Bhatiyali folk songs therefore stand as a testament to this phenomenon. As Glen A. Love remarks:

"While critical interpretation, taken as a whole, tends to regard ego-consciousness as the supreme evidence of literary and critical achievement, it is eco-consciousness which is a particular contribution of most regional literature, of nature-writing, and of many other ignored forms and works, passed over because they do not seem to respond to

anthropocentric- let alone modernist and postmodernist-assumptions and methodologies.”
(230)

In this sense, the interconnectivity between nature and human beings is identifiable from this song. In ecology, human beings are a part of the ecological web and are connected to nature, not as a superior entity which is often forgotten by the ego-driven human beings. Hubert Zapf points out this tendency of human beings to establish authority over nature by implying the importance of cultural ecology which “emphasizes rationality and interconnectedness on all levels and in all areas of study.” (138) The implication of cultural ecology, as Zapf quotes Finke, suggests that:

“...the characteristic environments of human beings are not just external but internal, the inner worlds and landscapes of the mind, the psyche, and the cultural imagination which makes up the habitats of humans as much as their external natural and material environments. (140)

Since folklore is seen as the collective unconscious of the people, therefore, the inner worlds and psyche of human beings need to be interpreted from “eco-consciousness”. (Love 230) The imagination and emotions stemming from the human psyche are reflected in the above-mentioned song which is not necessarily human-centered only as the song portrays human beings’ interconnectedness with nature.

6.2. Landscape as Continuous History

One of the features of Bhatiyali Songs is that it portrays the landscape of the riverine lowlands of Bangladesh. The boatman oars in the Haor or the river, observes nature and

incorporates his observation and experience into the songs. The subjects of these songs associate the landscape, the mundane aspects of human lives, and the events that happen within the landscape. As natural calamities occur and alter the landscape, the boatman also experiences those changes since his life is integrated into the environment and the landscape. In ecocritical studies, “landscape history, an aspect of architectural design, examines the relations between built and natural environments. Central to this approach is the idea of landscape as “shaped land,” perceived and molded by the human presence.” (Howarth 84) From this perspective, the effect of natural phenomena on the man-made environment and vice versa can be analyzed. From the following verses of the Bhatiyali Songs, it can be seen how human lives are interwoven with the environment, nature, and landscape:

(5)

“O merciless river, for how long will you gamble with my life?
Like you have grasped many youth’s.

(7)

Bhati Kishoreganj is drowned in water

Tides and winds have destroyed my habitat

I stand stupefied by seeing my house being collapsed

As nobody comes to rescue me” (*Bangla Academy Loko Shangskriti Granthomala: Kishoreganj*
298-299)

The singer here laments that his habitat has been destroyed by the water. The lives of these people who reside in the riverine areas of Bangladesh revolve around natural phenomena and they live by adjusting to the ever-changing and transforming environment of the lands. Their everyday life, livelihoods, and memories are intimately associated with nature and the landscape they dwell within. The cultural history of the people in the Bhati region is thus determined by the changes in the landscape. According to William Howarth:

“This dynamic view accepts chaos theory and its emphasis on diverse complexity.

Landscape ecologists ask new questions about regions: where are they, what do they give or take, alter and influence? They also provide metaphors for land such as mosaic, patch, corridor, matrix-- that use situational ethics, arguing that disturbance is inevitable, whether it comes from natural or cultural causes, and that landscape is a continuous history, never quite completed (Forman).” (76)

Similarly, to the people of the Bhati region, the landscape is continuously evolving, reshaping, and transforming by the influences of natural calamities as these changes are inevitable. Due to this inevitable disturbance, the boatmen, fishermen, and others residing in the region witness drastic and chaotic changes during the monsoon season when the water level rises in the Haor and the river. As the season goes by, the water dries out in winter leaving a trace of the altered landscape. Figure 5 illustrated in chapter 4 testifies to this idea of landscape constantly transforming and evolving. It never remains static. When the singer in the above-mentioned songs laments about his properties and his loss, he is describing the ever-evolving nature of the environment and leaving a remark about the landscape turning into history through

these songs. Their past, present, and future as well as their cultural history are interwoven with nature and the transformation in the landscape.

6. 3. Non-human Voices and Bakhtinian Dialogism

As can be noticed in terms of literary criticism, critical discourses give importance to human characters and seldom to any non-human entities. Literary criticism focuses on the culture of the human, their civilization, and society. The point of view therefore remains monolithic as it excludes the non-human from the context. The literary texts represented non-human entities merely as a backdrop rather than a central part. It wasn't until the emergence of nature writing or environmental literature in the early nineties that non-human voices in literature were given the center position in literary texts. However, in folklore, the presence of the non-human is not used as a backdrop as can be seen from the following verses of these Bhatiyali Songs:

“The fire in my soul is rekindled

By hearing your kuhu, kuhu, kuhu chirping

I beg you, o cuckoo

O' cuckoo

Who are you calling with a yearning voice

As you sit on the branch of the Tamal tree

I'm sad for my beloved is away

I forbid and beg you cuckoo

My heartache ignites by hearing your melodious song

O, I beg you?

O' cuckoo

Please quench my heart's desire

But your wings forbid you

You can try flying away

To your beloved

I burn for my heart's desire

The fire in my soul burns me

I beg you cuckoo" (*Bangla Academy Folklore Collection- 65 120*)

In another Bhatiyali song, the same content is noticeable:

"Where are you heading, o river

Where do you flow

Why have flown into this land, who do you go

There lives my beloved, at the river's turnabout

In the house on the bent of the Bhaital river

He became my beloved as he came by

And I have noticed him by my eyes
 Since then, he has remained close to my heart

His smile is inscribed in my heart's stone
 I hear his fascinating flute at midnight
 O river, why do you flow and which roads do you take
 No matter where, you always get to see my beloved
 Please tell him of my heart's anguish" (Abbasi 50)

In these songs, the speaker who is a human, engages in a conversation with a river and a bird. Thus, the songs acknowledge the existence of the non-humans in a manner that they are conversing with each other. The dialogues between the human and the non-human entities fall under the purview of "dialogism" (McDowell 374), a term familiarized by Mikhail Bakhtin. In Bakhtinian dialogism, as Michael J. McDowell remarks:

"Dialogics helps first by placing an emphasis on contradictory voices, rather than focusing mainly upon the authoritative monologic voice of the narrator. We begin to hear characters and elements of the landscape that have been marginalized." (McDowell 374)

In the above-mentioned two Bhatiyali songs, the narrators ask the bird and the river to deliver their message to their beloved. The melodious songs of the cuckoo and the sound of the river stream here are emphasized as 'contradictory' voices of the non-human that converses with the human. Thus, the marginalization of the non-human voice does not occur in this case. As it is

remarked by McDowell “all meaning is determined by the context of an utterance.” (374), for Bakhtin. This intensifies that folk songs represent the non-human voice by explicitly portraying how humans who live close to nature have developed a “self, mentally, physically, or spiritually” through their “interaction with other beings and things” (McDowell 375). From the conversational motif of these songs, it is seen that every entity interacts with each other in such a way that it emphasizes the fact that “the number of interactions between entities is infinite, which enables a “polyphony” (McDowell 375). In this process, the “decentralization” (McDowell p.379) of the humans from the context rejects the conception of an authoritatively projected “framed idea of nature”. (McDowell 379) The decentralization process is noticeable in the above-mentioned two songs. The speaker communes with the non-human entities in such a way that no hierarchical relationship between them is established.

6.4. Nature and Wilderness

The wilderness appears as a place that is located far from civilization and provides solitude and exile to humans. However, the ‘wild’ also refers to something that is ‘savage’ and therefore terrifying. Greg Garrard points out that “the idea of wilderness, signifying nature in a state uncontaminated by civilization, is the most potent construction of nature available to New World environmentalism.” (59) The concept regarding wilderness and nature remaining pure without the influence of any human interaction is ambiguous in the sense that no place is devoid of human presence on the earth. Wilderness in its sublime sense invokes terror and astonishment in contrast to the pleasurable aesthetic perception of nature. Edmund Burke states that: “... the passion caused by the great and sublime in nature . . . is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of Horror” (53). While the sublime is “admired for its vastness and overwhelming power” (Garrard 64), it also

instigates fear due to its wondrous appearance. The following Bhatiyali song testifies to this concept:

“O, boatman—

Row your boat amidst the storm

Keep alert, ho!

You shouldn't be scared when the storm comes

Thunderstorms are your companion, Padma River is your home

O, boatman

Sharks and alligators are our neighbors, also the wave of blackish water

Waves are tamed by the strength of your oars

O, Boatman

As the storm comes, my heart dances and the sail swells

Stomp heavily on your chest, roar like the storm

O boatman

How does the eccentric girl dance by igniting fire on the clouds

She surges forward in a rush paving the way for perpetual victory

O, boatman

The storm disjoints the sky and the land

We'll tame the storm with this boat of winds

O, boatman. (Abbasi 33)

In this song, as the boatman encounters a storm amidst the river, nature appears wild and terrifying. The singer sings the song to mitigate the boatman's horror toward the sublime appearance of nature. The sense of implying mastery over nature comes from this sense of horror. The boatman wants to tame the river waves and the storm which implies the urge to domesticate the wilderness. It indicates that wilderness, as reflected in this folk song, has been a natural phenomenon, considered sublime that cannot be controlled. It signifies that some phenomena of nature remain out of human beings' authoritative power. However, humans always make attempts to conquer the wilderness. Moreover, it is also noticeable that the interaction between wilderness and humans appears to particularly speak of the experience of a male and not of a female. Females are forbidden to encounter the wilderness in nature as they do not go out on a boat to explore the wild. Hence, feminist critics, have shown that "the qualities associated with the sublime and the beautiful are gendered, and concluded, perhaps with less justice, that, as remarked by Day, 'the sublime moment is peculiarly male'." (Garrard 64) The above-mentioned Bhatiyali song speaks of a situation that is only experienced by men. Although Bhatiyali songs contain ecocritical elements, in the case of a gendered idea of nature, the songs reflect the existing patriarchal notions of the society which creates a gendered space for women.

Chapter 7

Women, Marriage, and Gendered Spaces: An Ecofeminist Analysis of Meyeli Geet

In folklore, contexts and perspectives are not neutral but are rather categorized by gender. Folk songs are also divided into different genres based on gender. Therefore, focusing on one specific genre will result in the exclusion of another that comprises a different perspective. Although the concept of gender has found multiple meanings and categories in the 21st century, heteronormative gender perspectives still prevail in most of the folk songs of Bangladesh. There are some elements of queer perspectives in certain folk songs such as ghatu songs. However, Bhatiali, Bhawaia, Sari, etc. maintain a binary heteronormative perspective since these songs are generally sung by men and reflect the patriarchal culture of the society where the male members of the family dominate over the females. On the other hand, Meyeli Geet, Baromashi Songs, Biyer Geet, etc. are sung by women and they reflect women's perspectives. Marriage and child-rearing had been made the sole purpose of women's life. The condition of their state in society is reflected in these songs and their territory in the environment is marked by the patriarchal norms imposed upon them.

Meyeli Geet, literally translated as Women's Songs, has been a significant part of folk songs in every region of Bangladesh. Such songs are commonly sung during different occasions such as wedding ceremonies, and venerations. Though these songs are composed and performed collectively by women, they reflect the customs, beliefs, and traditions of the society, which are often patriarchal. The songs illustrate how women of that region cope with various issues like marriage, love, children, family, and superstition. These songs not only embody the emotions and celebrations of women's everyday lives but also reflect the patriarchal norms that are

prevalent in society. Ecofeminist Stephanie Lahar mentions that “In the dominant patriarchal cultures, reality is divided according to gender, and a higher value is placed on those attributes associated with masculinity, a construction that is called ‘hierarchal dualism’” (18)

The life of people, their habitat, income source, and everyday life revolve around the ecology and the environment they live in. Women’s lives are also determined by the environment they live in though their interaction with nature is different than men’s. The exposure to wilderness and the vivid adventure into the external world are restricted for women. Women’s life is differently tied to nature since they build up an intimate connection with the surrounding nature. Their experience in the natural environment as portrayed in the Meyeli Geet often centers on the domesticated environment they live in and have access to is different from that of men because their life is dictated by marriage and family traditions. The following song explicates the intricate connection between women and nature in the north-eastern region:

“Whose boat is out there on the river?

Tell my brother to take me home for Naiyor²

Be patient my sister, and endure a little

I’ll take you home during the monsoon, after sowing Jalidhan³

As the Maoa⁴ bird eats the seeds of Jalidhan

It wants to take my pitiful sister away from me.” (*Bangla Academy Lokoj Shangskriti*

Granthomala: Kishoreganj 299)

In this widely-known song, the sister is asking the boatman to inform her brother to take her home from her in-law's house. In response, the boatman says that the brother asks her to be a little patient and tolerate a little more torture so that after a while, when the Jalidhan (a particular type of paddy that grows on little watery soil. It is suitable for the soil during monsoon.) is planted in the monsoon season, then he will come to take her home. The song is significant in the sense that it explains how the external nature is accessible to men particularly since men have the access to roam on the river with their boat whereas women are restricted to the domesticated environment. Figure 3 depicted in Chapter 4 consolidates this notion that women remain in a marked area whereas men go out to explore nature. Thus, a territorial boundary is made in the environment they dwell in. From the above-mentioned song, it is clarified that the woman is not expected to visit her parents despite her yearning and is only assured of being taken to her house as a guest (Naiyor) by her brother when the monsoon begins. Therefore, the woman is advised to be a bit more patient and endure the torture from her in-laws until she gets the chance to visit them. Women after marriage in the patriarchal society are considered guests in their father's house and the in-law's house becomes her home. The place and their existence in a place are thereby dominated by patriarchal doctrines. Thus, the accessible area of nature and the ability to explore around is limited by the doctrine of patriarchy. A contrasting image is noticeable here as the women do not have the authority to roam around on the boat like men who explore the wilderness of nature. Women's presence in the wild is prohibited and "so women were excluded from encounters with the wild." (Garrard 64) Hence, the gendered space in nature is shaped by the patriarchal norms that confine women to a limited space. As it can also be seen from the following songs:

(9)

“The bride goes to her in-laws leaving behind her father’s place

She looks back from the covered area of the boat

(10)

Panshi⁵ boat coming from my father’s place, where are you going?

Please promise me, you’ll inform my mother about me.” (*Bangla Academy Lokoj Shangskriti Granthomala: Kishoreganj* 299)

In the first song, the women’s ultimate destination in life at their in-law's house is described. The bride takes a last look at her father’s house as she leaves the place after her marriage. It can be remarked that the bride probably will not be able to return there for a visit for a long time. In the first song, the married woman traces the boat that comes from her father’s village. There is no way for her to know about her own family since she cannot go outside in a boat like men. Before the emergence of mobile phones and the internet, the only mode of communication was boats among the people residing in the regions that bedded in water-logged spaces like Haor. As the men roamed around in boats and went to marketplaces, they carried the messages from one place to another. Such a scenario is depicted in the song which describes the conditions of the women in a patriarchal society. The following two songs also reflect similar kinds of situations experienced by women.

(78)

“The bride’s mother weeps

And the pair of Kadam⁶ trees sways

Parrot and Myna⁷ bird

Nests in that tree.

The bride's mother weeps

And the pair of Pomegranate tree sways

Parrot and Myna bird

Nests in that tree.

During the draught of Chayt⁸

The cuckoo bird sings

By hearing the song of Cuckoo

The bride comes out" (*Bangla Academy Folklore Collection- 57 115*)

(83)

"I braided my hair during adolescence

Which is falling apart

My son's father didn't return home

Didn't return home

Didn't come home.

I have worn Sari during adolescence

Which is falling down

My son's father didn't return home

Didn't return home

Didn't come home.” (*Bangla Academy Folklore Collection- 57 119*)

From these two songs, the concept regarding marriage is noticeable, and patriarchy uses marriage as a tool to dominate women. Eisenstein notes that “The patriarchal system is preserved, via marriage and the family, through the sexual division of labor and society”. (17) (Wilson 1494) Figure 4 in chapter 4 presents the current condition of women in society as it shows that women's life is still dictated by the notion of marriage as they get married at an early age. Figure 2 also shows that women of that society still have limited opportunities regarding education. Since women need to be married at an early age, it is deemed unnecessary for them to access education. It is also noticeable from the second song that the woman is waiting for her husband's arrival who is away to earn money to sustain life. The discriminative distribution of labor in this case works as an instigator in the inequality and the confinement of women in a limited space. Kalpana Ram brings out a scenario of women's condition in the Mukkhuvar fishing community in India as she notes how the tradition of marriage forbids women to access the sea:

“These norms prohibit women from gaining access to the sea, and even to the spaces most intimately associated with the work of fishing: the seafront and the beach. Since the skills of fishing are largely acquired in the course of the labor performed in these spaces, the sexual distribution of space governs the unequal distribution of the skills which Bordieu describes as ‘cultural capital’.” (Ram 133)

Most women's involvement in household work, although there can be exceptions noticed nowadays regarding this matter that need to be examined, indicates the inherent layers of the

system of patriarchy. Therefore, women's connection with nature is intimate in the sense that women commune with the birds and the trees near their houses. The close observation of the familiar environment is thus intermingled with the personal experience of the women in the northeastern region of Bangladesh. The dissimilation between men encountering the unfamiliar, terrifying, and astonishing nature that sometimes appear sublime and supernatural to them and women interacting with the familiar, known, and domesticated environment refers to the dichotomy in the heteronormative gender perspectives reflected in these folk songs. Therefore, the implication of ecofeminist perspectives in this regard is important to understand the connection between the subordination of women and the exploitation of nature. According to ecofeminists, "trees, water animals, toxics, and nature language are feminist issues because understanding them helps one understand the status and plight of women cross-culturally". (Warren 4) From this vantage ground, it is established that Meyeli Geet is a genre of folklore that highlights women's association with nature, the gendered space, and its relation to women's marriage and education.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to examine the interconnectivity between nature and folk songs, and how nature and its phenomena are reflected through folk songs so that an eco-centric discussion can be established since the discussion on folk songs and folklore remains exclusively anthropocentric. Firstly, from an ecocritical perspective, it has been analyzed how Bhatiyali songs contain the elements that refer to the implication of ecology in human life. The songs reflect that “eco-consciousness” (Love 230) is noticeable in some of the songs as these songs engender the non-hierarchical relationship between humans and the non-human entity. The empathizing connection between them creates a consciousness where the dichotomy of superiority and inferiority is broken and thus eradicates the “ego-consciousness” (Love 230), the dominating nature of human beings. Through this study, it has also been established how the cultural history of the people of the north-eastern region relates to the landscape history. The landscape is a continuous history and the historical moments of transformation are captured in the songs. Moreover, the conversational relationship between human and non-human entities, from the perspective of Bakhtinian dialogism, is examined through this research. It has been remarked that the songs reflect a condition where the subordination of nature is abolished and the humans engage in conversation with the non-human entities in a such manner that they do not try to establish their dominion as the presence of ‘dialogic’ is noticeable in some songs. Furthermore, it is also discussed how nature does not always appear pleasurable and aesthetic to

humans, as noticed in some songs, and it refers to the wilderness of nature that appears terrifying to humans. However, the experience of the terrifying wilderness is particular to men in this context as women do not have access to explore the wild and the sublime in the patriarchal society of that region. Hence, the next chapter which focuses on Meyeli Geet and the reflection of gendered spaces and their relation to women's marriage and education in these songs was analyzed based on the ecofeminist perspective. It is shown that women reside in the familiar environment around their house whereas men pursue the unfamiliar. The prohibition of women in some spaces in nature is generated by the patriarchal domination that is present in society. The survey result shows similar kind of results in terms of women's education, the age for marriage, and access to the outside world. Thus, the quantitative data solidifies the hypothesis regarding the ecocultural perceptions of that region. The objective of this study was to establish an ecocritical canon in folklore studies so that scholarly discussion regarding this area concentrating on Bengali folklore can be fostered in the future.

Notes

1. The translation of the songs and the excerpts from the Bengali books have been done by the student
2. Naiyor: a custom in Bengali culture where the bride is taken to her parent's house from the in-laws to stay for some time.
3. Jalidhan: a specific variation of rice that is grown in watery soil. It grows on the lowlands of the bank of a river or Haor.
4. Maa bird: a species of bird that resides in the riverine areas of Bengal.
5. Panshi: a type of boat that is used by the fishermen for fishing.
6. Kadam: *Anthocephalus indicus*
7. Myna: *Acridotheres tristis*
8. Chayt: the 12th month of the 12 months in a Bengali yearly calendar

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Appendix

Survey Questionnaire:

1. Name
2. Gender
 - a) Male
 - b) Female
3. Age:
 - a) 18-27
 - b) 28- 37
 - c) 38- 47
 - d) 48- 57
4. Education:
 - a) Primary
 - b) Higher Secondary
 - c) College
 - d) University
 - e) No education
5. How many hours do you spend outside your home?
 - a) 1-3 hours
 - b) 4-6 hrs
 - c) 7-9 hrs
 - d) More than 9 hours
6. At what age did you get married do girls get married?

- a) 10-14 years
 - b) 15-19 years
 - c) 20-24 years
 - d) 25-29 years
 - e) 30-34 years
7. Are there any changes in the topographical features of the Haor?
- a) Better than before
 - b) Worse than before
 - c) Same as before