



Approaching Ecocriticism in Modern Maithili Literature: Environmental Issues and Literary Responses

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Abstract

Ecocriticism has emerged as an important paradigm for studying the relationship between literature and the natural environment, and environmental concerns have become a prominent focus of current literary studies due to the growing ecological catastrophe. Ecocritical studies on current Maithili literature are still in their infancy, in contrast to those on English and other Indian literatures. This paper investigates the representation of environmental themes in modern Maithili literature through ecological deterioration, floods, deforestation, climate change, agricultural transformation, and the disappearance of traditional ecological knowledge. Environmental issues are reflected in this literature through local landscapes and indigenous cultural activities; it is situated in the ecologically fragile region of Mithila. Based on the work of ecocritical thinkers such as Rob Nixon, Ursula K. Heise, Greg Garrard, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Lawrence Buell, this study contends that contemporary Maithili literature adds significantly to the ecological discourse in India by promoting sustainable living, cultural memory, environmental justice, and coexistence.

Keywords: Climate Change, Ecocriticism, Eco-consciousness, Environmental Ethics, Literary Ecology, Maithili Literature.

Introduction

Degradation of the environment has become one of the most prominent problems of the modern era. The human impact on the environment has been substantial, changing our connections with plants and animals as well as the way we live in harmony with them. As a result of these changes in the environment, new kinds of ecological imagination and critical thinking have emerged in literature around the world. Ecocriticism, one of several multidisciplinary approaches to environmental literature, has emerged in the last 30 years as a dominant paradigm.

According to Glotfelty and Fromm (1996), ecocriticism is the study of literary texts with an emphasis on how they portray ecological crises, challenge anthropocentrism, and propose new environmental ethics. Ecocriticism acknowledges the agency of ecosystems, rivers, forests, animals, and landscapes, in contrast to conventional literary criticism that frequently favours tales centred on humans. Consequently, the goal is to regard literature not just as a mirror of society but also as an actor in environmental conversation.

There are unique cultural and historical aspects to environmental concerns in India. Agricultural practices have moulded regional identities for generations, rivers have long been considered holy places, and forests have long served as places of both sustenance and spirituality. Nevertheless, these ecological linkages have been increasingly disturbed by rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, over-resource exploitation, and climate variability (Rangarajan, 2014).

Mithila holds an especially important ecological location within this larger Indian natural landscape. Mithila is an area in Nepal and northern Bihar that is known for its verdant alluvial plains, vast wetlands, seasonal rivers, and agricultural ecosystems that are vulnerable to flooding. Rivers that both support and endanger human settlements include the Kareh, Adhwara, Bagmati, Kosi, and Kamla. The yearly floods not only restore agricultural soils but also wreak havoc on crops, force people to flee their homes, and lead to poverty.

Culture, folklore, oral traditions, music, and literature in the Maithili language have all been significantly impacted by these environmental realities. In Maithili literature, nature plays a significant role in many aspects of existence, including social life, religious imagination, emotional experience, and cultural identity, rather than just providing a picturesque backdrop. Agricultural landscapes, rivers, ponds, birds, seasons, and trees often serve as both literal and metaphorical realities.

Developmental interventions, migration, mechanised agriculture, urbanisation, and environmental degradation all play a larger role in depicting changing ecological conditions in modern Maithili literature, particularly that which emerged after India's independence. Instead of glibly praising nature, modern writers seriously examine ecological degradation and its effects on vulnerable populations.

Academics have paid less attention to ecocritical viewpoints in Maithili literature, despite the abundance of ecological depictions therein. Most previous studies have concentrated on topics such as literary movements, folklore, nationalism, regional identity, and language history. Little systematic effort has been made to study the environmental aspects of Maithili literary works. The ecological experiences

shared in Maithili literature offer valuable localised insights to the field of global environmental humanities, making this gap all the more noticeable.

Research Question

This article, therefore, seeks to address the following research questions:

- How is nature represented in modern Maithili literature?
- What environmental issues emerge prominently in Maithili literary texts?
- How do modern Maithili writers respond to ecological degradation?
- In what ways can ecocriticism deepen our understanding of Maithili literary traditions?

The study contends that contemporary Maithili literature embodies an intricate awareness of the environment that is both grounded in local ecological realities and actively participates in larger global environmental issues. By depicting rivers, farms, forests, biodiversity, droughts, migration, and rural transformation in their literature, Maithili writers question prevailing narratives of development and call for more harmonious connections between people and the natural world.

Objectives of the Study

The present research seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the emergence of ecological consciousness in modern Maithili literature.
2. To analyse environmental issues represented in selected Maithili literary texts.
3. To apply ecocritical theory in interpreting modern Maithili literary works.
4. To explore the literary responses of major Maithili writers toward environmental degradation.
5. To evaluate the contribution of Maithili literature to contemporary environmental humanities.

Research Methodology

Using textual analysis as its foundation, this study employs a qualitative and interpretative research methodology. Poetry, novels, essays, and short tales penned by prominent modern Maithili writers comprise the primary materials. Ecocriticism provides a theoretical framework for analysing these writings.

Scholarly books, journal articles, edited collections, and critical studies on ecocriticism, environmental humanities, Indian literature, and Maithili literary history are also used as secondary sources in the study. When necessary, we draw on comparative interpretation to bridge the gap between local ecological realities and broader theoretical discussions in ecocriticism.

Review of Literature

The 1990s saw the emergence of ecocriticism as a formal academic field. The *Ecocriticism Reader*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, published in 1996, gave systematic ecological literary criticism a boost, even though literary depictions of nature predate it. When Glotfelty says ecocriticism is "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment," it means that literary criticism is going beyond only human issues.

By suggesting that environmental writings highlight non-human environments as active presences rather than passive settings, Lawrence Buell (1995) considerably expanded the area in *The Environmental Imagination*. In addition, Buell argued that ecological responsibility and environmental ethics were essential issues in literature.

Modern ecological literary analysis is shaped by the primary thematic categories identified by Greg Garrard (2012) in ecocriticism. These categories include things like pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals, and earth. Instead of merely glorifying nature, literary works navigate intricate environmental issues, as shown by Garrard's framework.

An important idea coined by Rob Nixon (2011) was "slow violence," which is environmental degradation that happens slowly but has terrible long-term effects, especially on economically disadvantaged populations. Areas like Mithila, where environmental damage, erosion, and repeated floods have built up over many centuries, are particularly pertinent to his work.

By highlighting ecological interconnection on a global scale, Ursula K. Heise (2008) broadens ecocritical inquiry beyond local contexts. She proposes the idea of "eco-cosmopolitanism" to prompt academics to think about environmental issues on a global scale by drawing connections between local and global ecological realities.

As far as ecocritical viewpoints in Indian literature are concerned, Swarnalatha Rangarajan (2014) was an early trailblazer. She contends that contemporary ecological issues and indigenous environmental ethics are brought together in Indian ecological traditions, leading to unique literary reactions to environmental catastrophes.

On the other hand, current literary trends, devotional practices in the Middle Ages, language evolution, and literary history have been the main areas of study in Maithili literature. Although they give helpful historical accounts of the evolution of Maithili literature, Jayakanta Mishra and Radhakrishna Choudhary's foundational works don't go into much detail on environmental issues. As a result, there is

still a need for thorough academic research into ecocritical interpretations of contemporary Maithili literature.

This study adds to the growing body of literature in this area by bringing together current ecocritical theory with critical analyses of modern Maithili literature and by drawing attention to the ecological imagination inherent in Mithila's cultural milieu.

Findings and Discussion

Theoretical Framework: Ecocriticism and Environmental Literary Studies

With its focus on literature, ecology, environmental ethics, philosophy, geography, anthropology, and cultural studies, ecocriticism has quickly become a leading interdisciplinary method in modern literary studies. Ecocriticism aims to comprehend the symbiotic connection between human communities and the natural environment, in contrast to conventional literary criticism that frequently gives human experiences the upper hand. Nature, ecological justice, biodiversity, climate change, and human ethics as they pertain to non-human life are all aspects that are analysed through literary works.

After *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* was published by Glotfelty & Fromm (1996), the term ecocriticism was officially recognised. Cheryll Glotfelty describes ecocriticism as "The study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996, p. xviii). With this approach, literary criticism moved away from an anthropocentric viewpoint and toward an ecological one, which sees ecosystems, rivers, woods, animals, and landscapes not as passive settings but as active characters in literary narratives.

According to Lawrence Buell (1995), who built on this theoretical basis, environmental literature should show the non-human environment as an actor in its own right, not just a passive observer of human activities. According to Buell, readers are encouraged to understand ecological interconnectedness and ethical responsibility through environmentally oriented literature. Among the traits he suggests for eco-friendly literature are:

- Recognition of the non-human environment as an active presence.
- Awareness of human accountability toward ecological systems.
- Ethical concern extending beyond human interests.
- Representation of environmental processes as dynamic rather than static.

Agricultural fields, rivers, monsoon rains, wetlands, birds, and woods are commonly portrayed as living beings with cultural and emotional importance in modern Maithili literature. These ideas offer a useful foundation for studying this literature.

The six recurring thematic categories identified by Greg Garrard (2012)—the earth, animals, dwelling, apocalypse, wilderness, and pollution—further systematised ecocritical investigation. Many modern works depict river pollution, wetland loss, agricultural landscape deterioration, and shifting interactions between rural communities and their natural environment; these categories are especially pertinent to Maithili literature.

When considering the environmental facts of Mithila, Rob Nixon's (2011) idea of "slow violence" becomes very relevant. Erosion, pollution, climate change, and resource depletion, according to Nixon, are more common causes of environmental degradation than sudden catastrophic events. These kinds of environmental aggression hit people living on the margins of society in rural areas the most. Some examples of this slow but destructive environmental change include the yearly flooding in Mithila, erosion of riverbanks, falling groundwater quality, migration due to agricultural downturn, and habitat loss.

By presenting the idea of eco-cosmopolitanism, which stresses interdependent ecological systems across national borders, Ursula K. Heise (2008) broadens ecocriticism beyond regional landscapes. Even though Maithili literature is firmly grounded in local knowledge, environmental challenges, including changing weather patterns, dwindling biodiversity, and ecological migration, show that local ecosystems are interdependent on global environmental dynamics. Several subfields within modern ecocriticism have also emerged:

Deep Ecology

All living things have worth apart from what they can do for people, according to deep ecology, a theory mainly put out by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (1973). By promoting ecological equality, this worldview opposes anthropocentrism. Deep ecological philosophy has some resonance with traditional Maithili cultural traditions, such as respect for sacred woods, rivers, ponds, and certain tree species.

Social Ecology

Ecological catastrophes, according to Murray Bookchin (1982), are associated with dominance structures and social inequality. Degradation of the environment is best understood in the context of interconnected social, political, and economic systems. Floods, erosion, and ecological degradation disproportionately affect impoverished farmers, landless workers, fisherfolk, and marginalised people in Mithila. This viewpoint helps to explain how writers portray environmental injustice in this region.

Ecofeminism

In ecofeminism, the subjugation of women and the environment are seen as inseparable. Vandana Shiva (1988) and others contend that patriarchal development models take advantage of both women's work and the earth's natural resources. Women play an important role in Maithili literature as guardians of agricultural practices, seed banks, traditional ecological knowledge, and water resources. Ecological stories frequently revolve around their close connection to the natural world.

Postcolonial Ecocriticism

Environmental deterioration in cultures that have experienced colonisation is influenced by factors such as globalisation, uneven development, and colonial histories, which Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2015) investigate. Many ecological concerns, such as embankment policies, intensive resource extraction, and developmental initiatives, are reflections of larger political and economic processes rather than natural occurrences, which is why their approach is pertinent to Mithila. By bringing these theoretical frameworks together, we can comprehend environmental consciousness in contemporary Maithili writing in its entirety. Ecocriticism asserts that ecological systems are fundamental to cultural identity, ethical contemplation, and literary imagination, rather than viewing nature as merely scenery.

Ecological History and Environmental Context of Mithila

Knowing Mithila's ecological past is essential for any ecocritical study of Maithili literature. Landscapes, temperatures, rivers, agricultural systems, and cultural traditions all play a role in shaping literature, rather than the other way around.

In northern Bihar and the neighbouring Terai region of Nepal, you can find Mithila, a fertile alluvial plain. The Ganga River forms its southern boundary and the Himalayan foothills its northern one. Kosi, Kamla, Bagmati, Gandak, Balan, Kareh, and the Adhwara river system are just a few of the Himalayan rivers that pass through this area on their way to the Ganga. In the past, these rivers' fertile sediment deposits have supported agriculture, but now they also cause destructive floods and erosion of riverbanks. Thus, paradox is a defining feature of Mithila's ecosystem. As essential as it is to existence, water can also kill. Even though thousands of families are forced to leave their homes every year due to the recurrent floods, the soil is still suitable for growing rice, wheat, maize, pulses, vegetables, and fruit. This dichotomy has had a significant impact on the cultural imagination of the Maithili people.

Wetlands, ponds, bamboo forests, orchards, holy forests, and a wealth of wildlife were formerly abundant in Mithila. Complex ecological webs, including seasonal rainfall, cattle, fisheries, farming, and community-managed water resources, were the backbone of the traditional village economy. Through centuries of careful study, local ecologists have accumulated a wealth of information about river behaviour, medicinal plants, bird migration, soil fertility, and monsoon cycles. Folk music, wedding ceremonies, festivals, and oral histories all feature prominently in Maithili culture, drawing from many of these ecological traditions. Plants with several uses and symbolic meanings include bamboo, neem (*Azadirachta indica*), banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*), mango (*Mangifera indica*), and peepal (*Ficus religiosa*). Many people see rivers as caring moms, and ponds as gathering places for the community. The environmental scene has changed drastically, though, due to post-independence developmental plans. Traditional ecological systems have been transformed by human activities such as building embankments, expanding road networks, urbanisation, chemical fertilisers, intensive agriculture, and groundwater extraction. Native plant life is dwindling, fish populations are falling, and wetland areas have diminished dramatically.

Increased climate variability has exacerbated these environmental concerns. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has shown that extreme weather events are becoming more frequent in South Asia and that rainfall variability is also on the rise (IPCC, 2023). Areas like Mithila, which are prone to flooding, are hit the most by these changes. Another factor that defines ecology is migration. A large number of young people are driven to seek work opportunities in larger cities or abroad as a result of environmental degradation and falling agricultural production. Therefore, images of deserted towns, ageing rural populations, and the psychological fallout of environmental relocation are becoming more common in modern Maithili literature.

Thus, the contemporary Maithili literary imagination has its socio-environmental roots in Mithila's natural history.

Nature in Classical and Modern Maithili Literary Tradition

From its inception, Maithili literature has revolved around depictions of nature. Nature, however, has taken on many different connotations over the years. The primary roles of nature in classical Maithili poetry, especially that of Vidyapati (c. 1352–1448), are those of devotion, romance, and aesthetics. Radha and Krishna's love is set against the backdrop of changing seasons, blossoming trees, birds, rivers, clouds, and monsoon scenery. Poetic elements typical of Sanskrit and regional literary traditions are used to portray nature as a mirror reflecting human emotions. For instance, the monsoon's arrival represents several things: separation, fertility, reunion, and longing. Flowers in bloom represent love and enlightenment. At the meeting point of human and heavenly experiences, rivers and woods take on a

sacred quality. While these depictions may not be considered ecocritical in the contemporary sense, they do show how closely human existence is tied to ecological processes.

This relationship is, however, drastically altered by modern Maithili literature. Writers of the 20th and 21st centuries have focused less on praising the natural world and more on issues such as environmental degradation, social inequality, rural landscape change, and relocation. Because of modernisation, nature is both a witness to and a victim of it.

Pollution, embankment, diversion, or flood damage render the once-holy river unfit for human consumption. Agricultural fields symbolise both fertility and economic instability. Deforestation represents a loss of biodiversity. The ecological transformation caused by migration and growth is mirrored in the changing of villages. Changes in Indian literature following independence mirror this transformation. Industrialisation, deforestation, mining, urbanisation, and intensive farming all contributed to worsening the environment. The political and ethical undertones in literary depictions of the natural world become more prominent as a result.

Instead of depicting environmental change through theoretical discussions, contemporary Maithili writers frequently use real-life examples. Recurring literary imagery includes floodwaters penetrating houses, ponds drying up, fish dying, birds vanishing, soil productivity decreasing, and abandoned farmland. These ecological features show that environmental conditions and rural consciousness have undergone dramatic changes. Modern Maithili literature does not, without reservation, romanticise rural life. Instead, it offers a complex ecological perspective that takes into account the strength of traditional communities as well as the risks posed by climate change. Because of its dynamic creative imagination, ecocritical examination of contemporary Maithili literature is highly appropriate.

Environmental Consciousness in Modern Maithili Literature

Emergence of Ecological Consciousness

As the Mithila region has gone through profound social, political, and environmental changes, so too has modern Maithili literature. Modern and contemporary writers increasingly depict nature as an ecological system threatened by human activity, in contrast to earlier literary traditions that tended to venerate nature for its aesthetic, spiritual, or symbolic qualities. Recurring floods, riverbank erosion, falling agricultural yields, deforestation, urbanisation, migration, and the slow extinction of conventional ecological practices are all factors that have contributed to this change.

Because of this critical understanding of the interdependence of ecological systems and human culture, environmental consciousness in contemporary Maithili literature should be viewed as more than admiration for the beauty of nature. Degradation of the environment has serious consequences for people's livelihoods, cultural identities, social connections, and mental health, as shown in literary works. Since ecocriticism acknowledges that literature influences public imagination and ethical thinking, it offers a useful framework for understanding these literary changes within the context of environmental debate. By showing the non-human world as an integral part of human history, rather than an objective observer, literature helps foster ecological responsibility, according to Lawrence Buell (1995).

Environmental consciousness in Mithila develops out of practical experience, not theoretical considerations. Historically, social life has been governed by the yearly cycle of monsoon rains, floods, droughts, agricultural labour, and seasonal celebrations. As a result, literary depictions of upended rural routines, changed landscapes, and shifting human-nature relationships make ecological change readily apparent.

Rivers as Living Cultural and Ecological Entities

The Maithili literary canon is most heavily predicated on depictions of rivers. For ages, the Mithila civilisation has been moulded by rivers such as the Kosi, Kamla, Bagmati, Gandak, and Kareh, among many smaller ones. In addition to cultural meaning, they supply water, fish, transportation, and rich soil. Floods, erosion, displacement, and uncertainty are all linked to them at the same time. The rivers in modern Maithili literature are often portrayed as sentient beings with feelings, memories, and agency. Rivers are more than just physical characteristics; they are integral parts of rural life, and the way they behave now mirrors larger ecological shifts.

These depictions, viewed through an ecocritical lens, show that non-human nature exists apart from humans, challenging anthropocentric ideas. Environmental literature frequently expands ethical thinking beyond human concerns by attributing agency to landscapes and ecosystems, as Buell (1995) points out. On the other hand, depictions in modern literature also show how big-scale engineering interventions, such as embankments and diversion projects, have affected rivers. Intensified flooding, sediment buildup, and disturbance of conventional water systems are some of the alleged unexpected ecological repercussions of such operations. These issues in the literature reflect debates in environmental history that have focused on the administration of rivers in northern Bihar. While embankments do help with localised flooding, they can change drainage patterns and cause ecological problems in the long run, according to researchers (Mishra, 2002).

Thus, in contemporary Maithili literature, rivers represent both the riches of nature and the vulnerability of the environment.

Floods and Environmental Memory

One of the environmental realities that Mithila is known for is its floods. Floods in this area are both recurring and strongly ingrained in people's memories, unlike unexpected natural catastrophes elsewhere. By delving into the social and ecological effects of repeated flooding, literary depictions go beyond sensationalised accounts of disaster. From an ecocritical perspective, one way to look at floods is through the lens of gradual violence proposed by Rob Nixon (2011). Soil erosion, displacement, debt, loss of education, migration, and ecological instability are some of the cumulative impacts of floods, even though individual floods may seem sudden. Works of modern Maithili literature often portray:

- destruction of crops,
- erosion of agricultural land,
- collapse of rural infrastructure,
- interruption of education,
- forced migration,
- psychological trauma,
- weakening of community networks.

Literature also shows perseverance, which is an important part of it. Traditional ecological knowledge, seasonal migration, group work, higher housing, flood-resistant farming, and cultural practices linked to monsoon cycles are some of the ways rural populations adapt to changing weather conditions. Such depictions sidestep the oversimplified dichotomy of nature as good or bad. They instead see flooding for what it is: a complicated natural process, the outcomes of which are increasingly determined by human choices about land use, infrastructure, and environmental regulation.

Agriculture and Ecological Sustainability

Both the economy and culture of Mithila are built upon agriculture. As a result, contemporary Maithili writing is largely centred around rural landscapes. Conventional agricultural methods relied on:

- seasonal rainfall,
- flood-deposited fertile soil,
- local seed varieties,
- mixed cropping,
- livestock integration,
- community-managed irrigation,
- organic fertilisation.

Over many generations, these behaviours established ecological interactions that were largely stable. More and more, works of literature written in the modern era pit these time-honoured practices against the mechanisation, chemical fertilisers, monoculture, groundwater exploitation, and reliance on markets that define modern agriculture. When seen through the lens of ecocriticism, these shifts signal a move away from sustainable cohabitation and toward depletion of natural resources.

Literary accounts frequently link wider ecological imbalance to issues such as decreasing soil fertility, unpredictable rainfall, and rising production prices. Farmers seem to play a dual role, both economically and as protectors of the landscapes they work in, drawing on their extensive experience and intimate knowledge of the ecosystems in which they work. Agricultural knowledge held by indigenous peoples is seen by environmental historians as a significant kind of ecological intelligence, not only a matter of tradition (Gadgil & Guha, 1995).

Trees, Forests, and Biodiversity

Trees hold great cultural and ecological importance in Mithila, even though the area is mostly agricultural rather than forested. Traditional village life has always relied on:

- bamboo groves,
- mango orchards,
- banyan trees,
- peepal trees,
- neem,
- palm,
- jackfruit,
- medicinal vegetation.

These trees are important for several reasons, including providing shade, fuel, food, building materials, biodiversity, and rituals. The loss of these plants is often depicted in modern Maithili literature as a metaphor for broader ecological degradation. It is common practice to take down an old village tree to represent:

- loss of collective memory,
- erosion of community identity,
- disappearance of biodiversity,
- commercialisation of rural landscapes.

Such depictions, according to ecocriticism, are attacks on developmental models that play down nature for commercial gain at the expense of ecological connections. One example of an environmental ethic based on coexistence rather than dominance is the literary focus on certain trees.

Birds, Animals, and the Non-Human World

The focus on life forms other than humans is a hallmark of ecological literature. Common elements found in contemporary Maithili literature are:

- sparrows,
- parrots,
- cranes,
- herons,
- fish,
- cattle,
- buffaloes,
- snakes,
- frogs,
- domestic animals.

Rather than serving as mere ornamentation, these species serve as indicators of ecological well-being. For example:

- declining bird populations symbolise environmental imbalance,
- disappearing fish reflect wetland degradation,
- reduced livestock represents changing agricultural systems,
- silence replacing birdsongs evokes ecological loss.

Modern ecological theory holds that biodiversity is a crucial measure of ecosystem stability, and these literary depictions align with that view. By expanding literary focus beyond purely human issues, these depictions have ethical importance.

Environmental Imagination in Modern Maithili Poetry

The Maithili literary heritage is notably rich in poetry. In responding to today's environmental challenges, modern poets carry on the illustrious legacy begun by Vidyapati. Modern Maithili poetry frequently depicts ecological instability, in contrast to classical poetry that typically praises the beauty of the seasons and heavenly love. Common poetic imagery comprises:

- drying ponds,
- polluted rivers,
- abandoned villages,
- disappearing birds,
- cracked agricultural fields,
- floodwaters,
- migration,
- changing monsoon patterns.

These pictures are multitasking masters. While simultaneously condemning environmental devastation, they make one long for a time when the world was more harmonious. Poems abound that link cultural and ecological erasure. Traditional vocations are wiped out as wetlands go. Traditional music, agricultural celebrations, and ecological wisdom all take a nosedive as entire towns disappear due to migration.

Thus, cultural erosion and environmental deterioration are now synonymous. From an ecocritical perspective, this type of poetry challenges the reader to reevaluate commonly held beliefs about progress and modernity.

Rural Landscape as Cultural Memory

The use of landscape as a form of cultural memory is a defining feature of contemporary Maithili poetry. Places like riverbanks, bamboo forests, rural roads, and fields can hold recollections of:

- childhood,
- family,
- agricultural labour,
- festivals,
- seasonal rituals,
- community life.

Therefore, environmental transition stands for both material change and the interruption of historical continuity. Environmental imagination, proposed by Ursula Heise (2008), provides a useful framework for understanding this phenomenon. Ecosystems and cultural archives are two roles that landscapes play simultaneously. As a result, biodiversity and cultural identity are both endangered by the degradation of natural areas.

Ecological Ethics in Contemporary Poetry

Instead of providing overt political platforms, several modern Maithili poems subtly promote environmental principles. They convey messages about the environment via:

- empathy toward non-human life,
- criticism of ecological destruction,
- respect for traditional knowledge,
- celebration of biodiversity,
- concern for future generations.

Poems like these highlight the interconnectedness of ecosystems rather than human dominance. These viewpoints align with the principles of deep ecology, which hold that all forms of life have inherent worth (Naess, 1973).

Conclusion

Beyond purely descriptive works, contemporary Maithili literature demonstrates a profound concern for the environment. Agricultural practices, biodiversity, rural landscapes, rivers, and floods all serve as platforms from which to investigate issues of social justice, ecological ethics, cultural identity, and sustainable cohabitation. These portrayals allow Maithili writers to contribute to an ecological imagination that is both locally relevant and globally significant. More than just a political or scientific problem, environmental degradation has psychological, cultural, and ethical implications, as shown in contemporary Maithili writing. This ecological perspective lays the groundwork for the subsequent section's in-depth analysis of particular literary styles and writers.

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