



ECHOES OF A CULTURE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THEMES AND IDENTITY IN MAGAHI FOLK LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Magahi, a language native to eastern India, incorporates a vibrant but underrepresented tradition of oral folk literature. This study investigates the thematic complexity and cultural relevance of Magahi folk narratives through a qualitative approach. Drawing on secondary data and existing documentation, the paper examines how oral forms – including seasonal songs, myths, and ritual chants – function as carriers of cultural identity, collective memory, and indigenous knowledge.

Recurring themes such as worship for nature, kinship roles, caste dynamics, and divine-human interaction are explored within the context of rural life. The research highlights the urgency of preserving these traditions amidst modernizing forces and stresses the need for greater academic inclusion of such narratives in mainstream Indian literary discourse.

INTRODUCTION

India's literary landscape is shaped not only by its classical texts but also by a wealth of oral traditions rooted in regional languages. Among these, Magahi—a language spoken primarily in Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Bengal—boasts a compelling but academically overlooked repertoire of folk narratives. These include wedding songs, seasonal chants, moral tales, and mythological stories, all of which are passed orally across generations.

Despite its cultural richness, Magahi literature remains under-documented and undervalued in literary scholarship. It lacks standardized texts and often survives through informal domestic and ritual performances. This paper explores the cultural value of Magahi folk literature and identifies how these oral traditions serve as reflections of community identity and storehouses of collective wisdom.

This Research Aims to

The objectives of this study are threefold. First, it aims to identify the recurring themes present in Magahi folk literature, with particular attention to the cultural symbols, social dynamics, and spiritual elements embedded in these narratives. Second, it seeks to understand how these oral traditions mirror the socio-cultural realities of the Magahi-speaking population, reflecting their lived experiences, collective memory, and community values. Lastly, the study explores the crucial role of oral storytelling in preserving cultural continuity, especially in regions where heritage is sustained through performance and intergenerational transmission rather than written records.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Indian folk literature has gained increasing attention through the efforts of scholars such as **A.K. Ramanujan**, whose work brought vernacular and oral traditions into serious academic focus. His anthology "*Folktales from India*" illustrates the diversity and philosophical depth of regional stories.

Studies by George A. **Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India** provided one of the earliest systematic classifications of Magahi, establishing it as a distinct Eastern Indo-Aryan language. **B.P. Sinha** contributed to the ethnographic understanding of Magahi-speaking communities through his cultural and historical studies of Bihar. **U.N. Tiwari's** research on Bhojpuri and Magahi folk songs underscored the ritualistic depth and symbolic narratives embedded in traditional performances, offering valuable insights into the socio-cultural fabric of the region.

Feminist scholars like **Veena Das** and **Leela Dube** have explored the expressive power of women's songs in domestic and ritual settings, particularly in rural India. However, Magahi literature remains peripheral in comparative literature or postcolonial studies.

This study attempts to bridge this academic gap by applying literary analysis to Magahi oral texts, thematizing cultural experience, and situating these within broader discourses of vernacular identity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative framework to interpret Magahi folk literature. Data was sourced from documented folk texts in anthologies, regional archives, and online repositories. Selected



genres include ritual songs (Sohar, Gauna), seasonal songs (Chaita, Kajari), and folktales (e.g., Bidesiya, Jat-Jatin).

Two core methods were used:

Thematic Analysis: Identifying core themes across different texts.

Narrative Analysis: Studying storytelling structure, tone, and character representation.

Secondary sources were cross-referenced to verify authenticity and cultural context. The study is limited by its reliance on documented rather than field-collected data and acknowledges regional variance in oral performance.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The analysis reveals five major thematic categories:

1. **Migration and Longing:** Songs like Bidesiya depict emotional suffering caused by male migration. Women express anxiety, abandonment, and hope, often critiquing socio-economic inequality.

2. **Fertility and Motherhood:** Ritual songs such as Sohar glorify childbirth while embedding expectations around gender roles and familial duty.

3. **Divine-Human Connection:** Localized myths portray gods as accessible figures in everyday life. These narratives reinforce ethical codes and spiritual intimacy.

4. **Nature and Agrarian Life:** Seasonal songs reflect rural ecological rhythms, showing nature as a metaphor for emotional and communal states.

5. **Caste and Resistance:** Folk tales occasionally subvert hierarchical norms by celebrating the wisdom or moral virtue of lower-caste characters.

These themes collectively underscore how Magahi oral literature functions as a cultural mirror and a mode of emotional and social expression.

The study confirms the following insights

Oral literature preserves regional identity and transmits values intergenerationally.

Women play a pivotal role in cultural continuity through ritual song and storytelling.

The divine is portrayed as close and responsive, integrating spirituality into daily life.

Nature is both literal and symbolic, reflecting dependency and reverence.

Folk narratives give voice to marginalized perspectives and assert community agency.

These findings emphasize the significance of Magahi oral literature as a form of resistance and remembrance, urging its inclusion in Indian literary canon.

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