

# Environment and Traditional Knowledge Systems of Uttarakhand

Dr. Manju Bisht

M.A. History Ph.D., Ishwari Bhawan, Pokherkhali Almora, India

**Abstract :-** Today the whole world is struggling with the environmental pollution. Every part of the globe is facing the consequences of the fast degrading environment in the form of extreme weather conditions and natural disasters. India is also reeling under the inevitable danger of nature's fury. Uttarakhand is no exception, as the environmental degradation is gradually damaging its precious natural resources.

The day is not very far when we will be left devoid of such treasure gifted by the nature. We should not take it for granted and come forward to conserve and protect it. The only way out is going back to our roots in terms of traditional knowledge systems, as our ancestors have devised ways to deal with all kinds of problems in their own way. The region is treasure house of such knowledge, which is on the verge of extinction due to our empathy and ignorance.

Different factors like over exploitation of natural resources due to rapid population growth, increasing trend of consumerism, forest clearance for construction activities like roads, dams etc. and other factors are posing a danger to the ecology of this hilly region and as a result, the region is losing its natural wealth at rapid pace. Its ecology is suffering from adverse changes. Its economy is suffering from the adverse changes, the region is going through. The region is rich in Traditional Knowledge Systems (TKS), but sadly it is being replaced with modern knowledge systems, which leave negative impacts on the environment. But in my view, if we resort to the Traditional Knowledge Systems of the region, we can get rid of the problems and we can successfully replenish the over exploitation of resources, and TKS can play a significant role in conserving and protecting the environment.

**Keywords :** Traditional Knowledge Systems Environment, Ancestors, Primitive Societies

## OBJECTIVE

- ✓ The objective of this research paper is giving a general view of the present environmental condition and to provide a solution in the context of the past, as to understand the present it is necessary to peep through the window of the past.
- ✓ The other objective of this paper is to generate awareness among people as to how effective Traditional Knowledge Systems are to save the degrading environment of the region.

## INTRODUCTION

Uttarakhand which is situated in the central Himalayan region is still in its infancy in terms of so called development. Most part of its landmass is mountainous.

Although Uttarakhand has very tough terrain and harsh environment but it has diverse natural resources. It is part of the one of the Mega-biodiversity hot spots.

Uttarakhand is home to many world famous mountain peaks such as Kamet, Badrinath, Mana, Trishul, Dunagiri, Nandakote, Bandar Poonch etc. Gomukh and Yamnotri are the main glaciers of this region, which give birth to the Bhagirathi and Yamuna respectively. As already mentioned, this region is rich in biodiversity, a large number of medicinal plants are found in this region. Their efficacy is time tested in curing many diseases and they also play an important role in replenishing the environment.

This region is also well known for its indigenous knowledge in the form of folklore, which was developed by primitive societies of this region, based on their empirical observation and interaction with environment. Their knowledge has not been documented but was passed orally from generation to generation and person to person in form of songs, myths, legends, tales, etc. representing the wisdom of our ancestors about their environment. For example Folklore of Nanda clearly describes the close relationship of the primitive societies with their nature and environment. when Nanda asks the pine tree about her maika ( parental home ), pine replies rudely and Nanda curses the pine tree. Its curses- birds will not make their nest on your branches, animals will not rest under your shade under and there will be no vegetation and water sources around you - symbolise the ecological properties of pine tree. Similarly, Nanda goes to the oak tree and it invites her to settle down under its shade and in return Nanda blesses it, which are again ecological properties of oak tree, where birds, animals and different types of vegetation flourish and there is no dearth of water around.

But setting aside TKS, the perilous ingredients are present in different types of shampoo, detergents and other cleaning agents that we are using to clean our hair and washing clothes. These shampoos not only damage our hair but when these ingredients mix with water through draining, might form cancer- causing contaminants in water. We can use pure herbal shampoo which can be made of the extract of chalni jhar and bhekula. We can also use rambas as a detergent. The production and utility of these plants as replacement of modern products is necessary for maintaining ecological balance.

Due to the change in environment of this mountainous region, many bird and animal species have reached at the verge of extinction. for example – the existence of vultures, which are locally known as giddh that play an important role in keeping the environment clean , is in danger today due to increasing population, cutting of trees and use of toxic chemical fertilizers . Oxytoxin and Diclofenac medicines are given to animals to increase their milk and to reduce swelling and pain and whenever these animals die, vultures eat them and they also die due to these medicines. While on the one hand oxytoxin affects vultures reproductive systems; on the other hand the diclofenac affects their urinary systems. that's why today their existence is in danger.

The primitive societies of this region used traditional medicinal systems to treat their animals for example – they used to give wheat and maize flour, white musli, ashwagandha, shatavar, betula and gargela to increase the milk of their animals. Latjira seeds were used to reduce joint pain and stem of dolu is used when bones of the animals got fractured. There are many other plants in traditional medicinal systems, animals can be treated with. There are many indigenous medicinal systems which are quite relevant even today. These folk medicines are not only used to cure human diseases but also used to cure some Veterinary diseases and disorders. It is clear

that instead of chemical medicines, traditional knowledge system can prove helpful in maintaining balance in our environment and ecology.

Some trees in this region are considered sacred and were worshiped by the primitive societies, some of them are- peepal, parijat, bargadd, neem, aawala, etc. These trees were planted near the naula (a traditional water source) and temples. Other broad leaved trees were also planted around naula. These plants were planted near the water bodies to recharge the ground water. The trees near the temple were considered sacred and were not cut down, thus maintaining the ecological balance. The Peepal not only holds religious importance but it is also very significant in keeping the environment clean, as its leaves release good amount of oxygen into the atmosphere and it absorbs a great deal of Carbon dioxide. Bargad and neem trees also release good amount of oxygen and help us clean the environment. Bargad tree is evergreen and its leaves are very dense, because of this it releases oxygen round the year. Therefore trees with more leaves should be planted. Banihari tree which is found on the Shivalik hills, plays an important role in releasing oxygen, but now it is on the verge of extinction. Tulsi plant is also considered sacred, many species of this plant are found in Uttarakhand, it is planted at homes, it also releases oxygen and makes environment of home pure. These trees must have been considered sacred by our ancestors, because these trees are really very important for our environment, so they are worshiped even today. All this proves that the traditional knowledge of our ancestors is still very relevant for the coming generations.

Human activities can be attributed to the environmental degradation. Deforestation is also one of the human activities, which is causing large scale damage to our environment and has brought about a state of environmental imbalance. Today in the blind race of so called development, trees are being felled our earth is being stripped of the trees. Our ancestors were fully dependent on forest for their daily needs but they used them in a balanced way. They considered environment sacred and mentioned the environment in the songs sung on different ceremonies and through this people became sensitive to the environment. There are many Gadhwal and Kumaoni folk songs about anti-deforestation, ecological problem and environment safeguard, for example –

Paar bhirai ko chhi ghasyari ,Malu ni kata malu re Tu malu ni kata malu re  
Paar re bhira mai chhu ghasayari ,malu katan de malu re Tu malu katan de malu re  
Malu katiyak paap laagachhu ,malu re tu malu ni kata

Forests have been an integral part of cultural, social and economic life of Uttarakhand. This song tells us about the importance of forests. This song states that a woman is cutting branches of a plant named malu for animal feed. Then a person looks at her and says that who are you? and why are you cutting the branches of the malu tree? then the woman says to the person “I have to arrange for fodder for my animals, so let me cut the leaves of Malu tree. The person tells the woman that tree cutting is a sinful act, so do not cut the branches of the malu tree. So folklores play a very important role in developing understanding and sensitivity towards ecology. Nanda Ashtami which is associated with the harvesting of sacred flower Brahmkamal gives a message of conservation of environment by the primitive people of this region. Jhora which is a popular traditional folk dance of Uttarakhand and a kind of group dance is also a powerful medium to make people aware about their environment. Songs related to the environment are also sung when performing folk dance jhora for example- telai dhaar bola jhan jye chhori janglaad ma lagi ra pathrola jhan jye chhori janglaad ma

hariya jangle maji devo ko niwasa jhan jye chhori janglaad ma telai dhaar bola jhan jye cheli janglaad ma bedu kafka banj bursha jangle ki shana jhan jye chhori janglaad ma pani ka akaaw hai ra ,jhan katiye banja jhan jye chhori janglaad ma

Through this song, the women of the village are being warned that broad leaved trees should not be cut for animal feed. they are also being told that if you cut down these broad leaved trees , the water level will go down. The lush green forests abode of the god, so we should not cut down the trees from the forests. In this way, the traditional songs prove very instrumental in environment conservation, the healthy ambience has a determining effect on the people and their culture.

## CONCLUSION

The significance of these traditional knowledge systems will remain forever in our life, so the time has come when we must look back into the traditions and learn to restore our relationship with nature and all forms of life. Traditional knowledge system is the only means by which all the environment related problems can be solved. By adopting traditional knowledge system along with modern knowledge, we can successfully protect the environment and can leave a legacy in the form of healthy environment for our coming generations.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Agrawal, D.P. (2011). Traditional Knowledge Systems; Culture ,Ecology and Ways of Knowing. Dissenting Knowledge Pamphlet Series (No.10). Penang; Multiversity and Citizens International.
2. Bose S. C. (1972). Geography of the Himalaya. New Delhi :National Book Trust, India, pp. 61.
3. Chopra, R.N., S. L. Nayar and I.C. Chopra (1956). Glossary of Indian Medicinal Plants. Council of Scientific and industrial Research (CSIR), P.39.
4. Joshi Basant Kumar (2006). Traditional Knowledge and Land Use Management in
5. Indian Central Himalayas. Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge 5(1):34-40.

## Web Sources

6. <https://m.patrik.com>>Gwalior
7. <https://navbharattimes.indiatimes.com>
8. <https://m.jagran.com>
9. <https://m.jagranjosh.com>
10. knowledgepoint (utube)