

# The Mwihur: Ecological themes and Cultural Reflections of Bodo Society

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## Abstract:

This seminar paper investigates the dynamic relationship between ecological themes and cultural reflections in the Bodo novel *Mwihur*. The novel, deeply rooted in the Bodo community's cultural and environmental context, provides a rich narrative for exploring how human society and nature are interrelated. Through a detailed literary analysis, this paper examines how *Mwihur* integrates ecological motifs to underscore the interconnectedness between nature and cultural life. The study begins by exploring the novel's portrayal of the Bodo's traditional ecological knowledge and practices. It highlights how the novel represents the Bodo's deep connection to their environment, showcasing rituals, customs, and practices that are closely tied to natural cycles and resources. Further, the paper analyses how the novel uses environmental settings as symbolic elements to convey themes of cultural displacement and resilience. The paper also explores character development and narrative structure to illustrate how individual and collective responses to ecological challenges are woven into the cultural fabric of the Bodo society. Through character arcs and plot developments, *Mwihur* reflects the tension between preserving traditional practices and adapting to new environmental realities. The paper highlights how these narrative elements contribute to a broader discourse on environmental justice and cultural sustainability. By integrating ecological and cultural analysis, this seminar paper demonstrates that *Mwihur* offers a critical perspective on the intersection of environmental and cultural issues. It argues that the novel's depiction of ecological themes provides valuable insights into the ways indigenous communities and negotiates their relationship with the natural world.

**Key Words:** Mwihur, Ecology, Culture, Nature and Bodo Society.

## 1.1 Introduction:

*Mwihur* (The hunt) is a mentionable regional novel of the Bodo. It is one of the best novels in Bodo literature. It was written by Dharanidhar Wary, a prominent writer, and published in the year 1980. This novel is written based on the racial character and traditional behaviour of Bodos taking the Manas National Park as its action place. Racially Bodos are dependent on natural elements. They were illiterate and cultivation was regarded only means of livelihood. The necessities of life that cannot be fulfilled by farming were managed from natural sources or the jungle. These pictures of the society are tried to portray in the novel through *Golo*, the round character of the novel. He was born in the village Narenguri attached to the Manas, the famous Wildlife Sanctuary of Assam. *Golo* had no sufficient farming land. A few *Bighas* of farming land that he had were also wasted in the flood of *Bwrsi* (Biki), the only river flowing through Manas National Park where jungle animals drink water and play in joy. To meet the crisis of the family, *Golo* was involved in hunting wild animals. He was a professional hunter, but did not love to destroy forest and its creatures. This intersection is particularly evident in indigenous literature, where environmental and cultural narratives often converge to address pressing issues of sustainability, identity, and resilience. The *Mwihur*, is compelling work that shows the relationship of Bodo people and nature of their surroundings.

The Bodo people, indigenous to the north-eastern region of India, possess a rich cultural heritage deeply connected to their environment. Traditional ecological knowledge, rituals, and practices form an integral part of their way of life, reflecting a profound understanding of and respect for nature. *Mwihur*, authored by a notable Bodo writer, captures this intricate relationship and provides a narrative that serves as both a reflection and a critique of contemporary ecological challenges faced by the Bodo community.

This research paper aims to explore the ecological themes and cultural reflections depicted in *Mwihur*. The novel presents a vivid portrayal of the Bodo's interaction with their environment, illustrating how the Bodo people survive depending on forest. The forest preservation act of the government was impact on natural dependable character of the Bodos. By examining these themes, this paper seeks to elucidate how *Mwihur* uses environmental settings as a narrative device to address broader issues of ecological degradation and cultural resilience.

The significance of *Mwihur* lies in its dual focus on environmental and cultural narratives. It portrayed the ecological realities faced by the Bodo, reflecting the consequences of environmental changes on their traditional practices and community life; on the other hand, it offers a cultural commentary on how these ecological challenges are navigated through the lens of Bodo identity and heritage. This interplay between ecological and cultural themes provides a nuanced understanding of how indigenous communities adapt to and resist environmental pressures while striving to preserve their cultural integrity.

The introduction sets the stage for a comprehensive analysis of how *Mwihur* navigates these themes, using a blend of literary analysis and contextual examination. By focusing on character interactions, narrative structure, and symbolic use of nature, this paper will highlight how the novel critiques contemporary environmental issues while reaffirming cultural resilience. Through this examination, the paper aims to contribute to broader discussions on environmental justice and cultural preservation within indigenous literature, emphasizing the relevance of *Mwihur* in understanding the complex dynamics between ecological changes and cultural identity.

## 1.2 Aims of the Study:

- i. To highlight the natural environment and ecological issues portrayed in the novel *Mwihur*.
- ii. To investigate how *Mwihur* reflects the cultural practices, traditions, and values of the Bodo society.
- iii. To study how ecological concerns and cultural elements are intertwined in the narrative of *Mwihur*.

## 1.3 Methodology:

This research paper employs a multifaceted methodology to analyze the ecological themes and cultural reflections in the Bodo novel *Mwihur*. The approach integrates literary analysis, ecological criticism, and cultural studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the novel's thematic concerns and narrative techniques. The following sections outline the specific methodologies employed in this study:

### A. Literary Analysis:

**Textual Analysis:** The primary method involves a close reading of *Mwihur* to identify and analyse key passages related to ecological and cultural themes. This includes examining the novel's use of setting, symbolism, and character development to understand how these elements convey the relationship between the Bodo community and their environment.

**Narrative Structure:** The paper will explore how the novel's narrative structure supports its thematic concerns. This involves analyzing plot progression, character arcs, and narrative voice to understand how the novel represents ecological and cultural dynamics.

### B. Ecological Criticism:

**Ecological Contextualization:** This approach involves situating the novel within the broader context of environmental issues affecting indigenous communities, particularly the Bodo.

**Analysis of Environmental Impact:** The paper will examine how the novel depicts the impact of environmental changes on the Bodo community's traditional practices and social structures. This involves analysing the consequences of ecological degradation as portrayed in the narrative.

### C. Cultural Studies:

**Cultural Practices and Beliefs:** The research will explore how *Mwihur* represents traditional Bodo ecological knowledge and cultural practices. This includes examining the novel's depiction of rituals, customs, and community life as they relate to the environment.

**Cultural Resilience and Adaptation:** The study will analyze how the novel portrays the Bodo community's responses to environmental challenges. This involves looking at themes of cultural resilience, adaptation, and resistance as presented in the narrative.

### D. Theoretical Framework:

**Ecocriticism:** The paper will draw on ecocritical theory to interpret the novel's representation of environmental issues. Ecocriticism provides a framework for understanding how literature reflects and engages with ecological concerns.

**Postcolonial Theory:** To analyse the cultural dimensions, the paper will use postcolonial theory to examine how the novel addresses issues of cultural preservation and identity in the context of environmental change.

This methodology aims to provide a holistic analysis of *Mwihur*, revealing how the novel integrates ecological and cultural themes to comment on the challenges faced by the Bodo community. By employing a combination of literary, ecological, and cultural analyses, the research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the novel's thematic richness and its broader implications for indigenous literature and environmental discourse.

### 1.4 Discussion:

#### 1.4.1 Story and Characters of the novel:

The background of the story is developed centering the Manas National Forest situated in the present Baksa district of BTAD, Assam. It is one of the best regional novels of the Bodos reflecting socio-cultural picture and ecological themes. The story of the novel starts with Golo's life struggle and ends in his tragic death.

The way of survival is not straight and human life does not run smoothly all the time. The troubles and difficulties appear in everyone's life of human beings. The way of Golo's survival was also not simple, but filled with difficulties and problems.

Golo, the round male character of the novel is characterized as a brutal hunter of wild animals. Hunting wild animals was not a passion, but he did it for survival. He could not meet the requirement of family to feed his old parents by farming in a few bighas of land. Therefore, undertook hunting in protected forest areas to gain money by selling their flesh.

The conflict of the story starts when *Golo* meets *Dodere*, the round female character of the novel. *Golo* met *Dodere* in the forest when he went hunting. On that day *Dodere* also went fishing with villagers in the restricted forest area of Manas. Getting information on fishing, the forester came to restrict and catch the offenders. Somehow, *Dodere* fled away from the hands of foresters and ran into the dense forest missing the direction to her village in fear. In the evening by sunset, she could return home safely with the help of *Golo*, the barbaric hunter. From that day, feelings of love appeared in their hearts and were expressed through their activities later which helped to raise the climax of the story to the top. The news of love between *Golo* and *Dodere* brought rebellion in the mind of *Mwblau*, the villain of the novel. *Mwblau* also loved *Dodere*, but could not get a positive reply and attitude from her. As she had an affair of love with *Golo*, *Mwblau*'s aspiration was broken. He was frustrated, and angered by *Golo* and assumes him as his enemy.

Golo got a forester job by killing a cruel tiger who disturbed the nearby villages by hunting the pet animals. On the matter, villagers complained to the government. Giving attention to villager's security, the government decided to kill the tiger, and deployed some government hunters one after another for the task. But they failed to shoot down even after several times attempts. One day, Golo shot down the tiger with a single attempt with the permission of the officer. Seeing his bravery and expertise in shooting, the ranger

was surprised and gave word to manage a job for him. In this way, he got the job of forester. From that day, he became saviour of wild animals from other brutal hunters.

The story of the novel ends with a tragic incident as *Golo* is shot death by the villain *Mwblau* to take revenge for his failure. Finding the news of *Golo's* death, *Dodere* also falls and breaths her last.

Three types of main characters are found in the novel i.e. hero, heroin and villain. *Golo*, *Dodere* and *Mwblau* can be regarded as the hero, heroin and villain respectively of the novel. Though *Golo* was a brutal hunter of wild animals, he had good character, soft habits and obedient to societal norms. He engaged in hunting the wild animals only to fulfil the needy condition of family selling their flesh. But he was not happy by doing this work. He had no alternate way to earn money being low educated and dwelling in a remote forest area. *Golo* met *Dodere* lonely in a dense forest, but did not show any naughty character though spent a few hours together in the forest. Instead of doing any harm or trying to fulfil his dirty desire taking chance of a helpless situation, *Golo* brought *Dodere* safely from the jungle and reached her house. Such behaviour can be expected only from good and positive-minded people like *Golo*. So, he can be designated as the hero of the novel.

*Dodere* also is inspired by a positive role and attitude in the novel. She lost her mother at an early age, and so deprived of the guidance and love of her mother as her stepmother did not like her. Yet, she yields adorable character and behaviour. On first meeting with *Golo*, she asks him to give up the work of hunting wild animals which strongly impacts in the mind of him. Though a girl, she tried to stand on her feet from an early age. She yielded money by rearing fowls, pigs, and eri-worms and kept land for cultivation.

On the other hand, *Mwblau's* role is represented as a villain. His attitude and activity lead the climax of the story to the top and tragic end. Most of his activities are anti-social and some others have comic scenes. He loved *Dodere* and wanted to marry her. But she did not care about him and never gave chance to talk with her. For not accepting his love, one day, *Mwblau* tried to rape *Dodere* taking chance of other member's absence at home. But there also he could not succeed in his aim as *Dodere's* father arrived home in the meantime. *Mwblau* regarded *Golo* as his enemy for could not gain love from *Dodere*. He thought that due to *Golo*, *Dodere* rejected his love as both of them had a deep relationship. Therefore, he aimed to do something else. At first, he decided to kill either *Dodere* or *Golo*. Later he thought that if there was no *Golo*, *Dodere* might love him again. So, finally he decided to kill *Golo* and waited for the opportunity for action. One day, *Mwblau* got the opportunity he waited and shot death *Golo* in the jungle when he was on duty and took revenge on his enemy.

Besides those, *Lawrence* is the mentionable character of the novel. Though he appeared as a flat character, his appearance makes the novel's theme deeper. He was the only educated person in the area and always tried to bring reform to the bad habits of the community. Imparting education to the young generation for the shake of the community change was given importance by him.

#### 1.4.2 The river and forest as an ecological entity:

In *Mwihur*, the forest and river are more than just a setting, it is an active, almost sentient force that shapes the lives of those who depend on it. The novelist refers to the forest and river as the source of human live. This reflects a deep ecological understanding of the forest as a complex and interconnected system, where every creature plays a role in maintaining balance.

The forest and river are depicted as both a provider and a taker. It sustains *Golo* by offering him the animals he sought to prey on to survive, but it also challenges him, testing his endurance and resilience. This duality reflects the broader ecological principle of balance- nature provides for humanity, but it also has the power to take away. The practice of fishing in the river or pond, picking vegetables in the forest etc. reflected in the novel through the character of heroine *Dodere* is the character of Bodo society who always depend on nature since the early period and was a part of their culture.

The river *Bwrsi* in the novel is reflected as the source of life. The birds and animals sing melodious song drinking the water of the river. The people of nearby villages offered *Kherai* and *Garja* festivals on the bank



of the river which is reflected in the novel through the Golo's thinking. During the rainy season, valuable trees come floating on the river from hills and are collected by the people and used to fulfil their needs in life. The river is like the life of the people where they bathe, catch fish, use its water for drinking, wash clothes and offer festivals during different seasons. But sometimes this river brings destructive floods which cause loss of valuable things and wealth even the life of the creature. The agricultural fields in the village are submerged in water and the crops are destroyed. The family's pets and houses are swept away by the flood waters. People become shelter less and helpless.

#### 1.4.3 Humans relationship with the forest and its creatures:

*Golo's* relationship with the forest is the central theme of the novel and serves as a metaphor for humanity's broader relationship with natural objects and the world. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who view the forest as merely a source of livelihood, *Golo* sees it as a living entity, deserving of respect and admiration. His deep knowledge of the forest, its creatures, and its dangers reflects a life lived in close connection with nature. He could understand the movement of plants and leaves of the jungle. The way of life of the *Golo* was the hunting animals in the deep forest of Manas which had learnt from his early age. He became a skilled hunter with his steps into adult age. Though he was a hunter he sometimes hated his work. He had to choose hunting as profession because he did not have enough land for farming agriculture to feed his old parents and younger brother. After meeting *Dodere*, he gives up his hunting work giving respect to her request. Once, according to the government order he shot dead a wild tiger who frequently roamed in the village, killed and lifted domestic livestock, and disturbed the villagers. After shooting the tiger he got a job as a forester in the forest department. Then his life was changed from hunter to forester. He promised to spend his life serving the wild animals by saving them from enemies. He always neglected the idea of destroying forest and its creatures. *Golo's* relationship with the forest is one of mutual respect and understanding, embodying the idea that humans must live in harmony with nature rather than attempting to dominate it.

The old habits and customs of Bodo society are reflected through the character of *Dodere*. Her father's name was Lantha, a famous rich person in the area. Though her father was a rich man in the village, the character of *Dodere* was the same as the other girls of the village as she grew up in the village. She also loved community fishing in the river and picking vegetables in the jungle which were the habits of all Bodo community's people. They collect vegetables from forest, fish, snails, crabs etc. from the nearest *Bwrsi* river freely as a gift of nature. In this way, the village people lead their lives depending on natural resources. This shows us the ecological relation of humans and nature.

#### 1.4.4 Human Struggle Against nature and jungle animals:

Besides taking advantage of natural elements, sometimes human beings have to struggle with them. Such a picture is also depicted in the novel *Mwihur*. The animals and people of nearby villages of *Bwrsi* river depend on its water. But sometimes its destructive flood in the rainy season swept away the dreams of thousands of people. It becomes very scary and uncontrollable which affects the whole area making it difficult for wild animals and human beings. They cannot do anything besides watching its destruction helplessly. Once, such a flood of *Bwrsi* river turned the crop field of *Narenguri* village into waste or barren land. For that reason, *Golo*, the hero of the novel became a brutal hunter of wild animals searching way of survival. But this task was also not easy. Hunting the wild animals in dense forest was nothing but fighting with nature.

Another problem that disturbed the people of the area was wild animals. As dwellers of forest areas, people of villages like *Narenguri*, *Khasibari*, etc. have to fight with jungle animals. The animals like elephant often come out from the jungle and destroy the crops and houses of the people, even attack and kill. The tiger roams in nearby villages searching for food and takes away the pet animals like cows, buffalo, goats etc. People of the area take several measures to get rid of such problems. *Lawrence*, the only educated boy in that area formed an organisation to lessen the struggle between humans and animals and to assist the victim's families with such problems. They decided to submit a memorandum to the government demanding compensation to the victim's families of the area.

#### 1.4.5 Ecological Bodo Culture and society reflected in the novel:

The picture of the ecoculture of Bodo society is reflected in the novel. Mainly, Bodo people are dependable on nature. They liked to live in village areas surrounding with jungle. They want to lead a life collecting almost every essential thing from nature. They take baths in the river, use its water in household work, given to drink to pet animals, carry it to firm fields through canals, etc. Performs religious festivals at the bank of the river. Collects vegetables and firewood from the forest for free, does fishing and hunting animals, and so on. These are the traditional culture of the Bodos, depicted in the novel. Though they face problems doing such work in restricted forest areas, they repeat the same work as their traditional character.

The belief in chastity is a characteristic of the Bodo community. Before the *Garja* puja, village's purity is examined. Senior citizens and leaders of the village meet together to discuss the matter on any suspect or complain of impurity they have and decide to call public meeting. The suspected offenders are also called in the meeting and asked to confess their crime in front of the public. Such picture is also reflected in the novel through suspecting *Dodere* as she may have lost her virginity. On that day when *Dodere* met *Golo* in the forest by an incident, they spend lots of time together and returned at home in evening after sunset. So, the villagers had a suspect on them, and if any, it must be purify before offering the puja. Consuming food in other religious people's house is also regarded as doing impure and it also need to purify as per ritual.

Rearing Eri silkworm culture is another traditional culture of Bodos. As per their dependable character on nature, like other women, *Dodere* also went to collect castor leaves with her friend *Hambur* to nearby villages of other caste that are grown naturally.

Domestication and rearing of animals are also traditional habits of the society. The domestication and rearing were regarded as a source of income. This picture of the society is portrayed in the novel through the character of *Dodere*. She earned money rearing fowl, pig and *eri* silkworms and kept about 10 bighas of land suitable for summer crop cultivation.

Faith in unseen power is also a traditional ritual of the community. They think that God is everything and all are possible only in the wishes of his. Based on such beliefs, they perform religious festivals wishing blessings from God. Bodo people regard every creature have an owner who saves them. So, before going hunting in the jungle or fishing in a big river, offer puja to their owner to satisfy them. If they are not satisfied, nothing can be found in hunting or fishing. When *Golo* went to shoot the tiger in *Mwkhwna Zahar* as per the order of the ranger accompanied by a government hunter, no puja was offered to the owner of the jungle. So, *Golo* thought that they would not be succeed in their mission. He knows everything about *Mwkhwna Zahar* as a hunter. At last, the result came out as *Golo* thought. On that day they did not get the chance to shoot the tiger at *Mwkhwna Zahar*.

Some social beliefs of the society are also reflected in the novel. Making sexual relations in the jungle between unmarried couples is a bad activity. The doers face dangerous situations where they may lose their lives. Believing this, though *Golo* met *Dodere* alone in the jungle and spent a day long with together, he did not commit any bad sexual activity with her. Meeting mongoose and crossing the road during the journey is regarded as a bad omen by Bodos. It is regarded as unlucky and causes failure of purpose. Meeting mongoose in going hunting, *Golo* also failed in that day's purpose. The crying of a crow sitting on a dried branch of the tree is regarded as a message of a bad incident. This belief is portrayed in the novel by the incident of *Golo* and *Dodere*. When *Dodere* was washing utensils, a crow came and began to cry sitting on a dried branch of a nearby tree. They got an unusual feeling hearing the crying of crows. After a while, their younger brother rushed and informed her that *Golo* had been shot dead in the jungle on duty. Hearing this unbearable news, *Dodere* also fell and lost her life immediately on the spot. In this way, the eco-culture of Bodo society is reflected in the said novel.

#### 1.5 Conclusion:

The "*Mwihur*" serves as a profound exploration of the intricate relationship between ecology and culture within Bodo society. Through its vivid portrayal of the natural world and the impact of environmental changes, "*Mwihur*" not only highlights the challenges faced by the Bodo community but also underscores their resilience and adaptive strategies.

The cultural reflections embedded in the novel offer rich varieties of Bodo traditions, beliefs, and social structures, illustrating how these cultural elements are deeply intertwined with ecological practices and environmental stewardship. By addressing issues such as deforestation, climate change, and the preservation of indigenous knowledge, the novel prompts readers to consider the broader implications of ecological degradation on cultural heritage and societal well-being.

Ultimately, "*Mwihur*" stands as a testament to the symbiotic relationship between environment and culture, advocating for a deeper understanding and respect for both. It calls for a re-evaluation of modern practices that threaten traditional ways of life and highlights the need for sustainable approaches that honour the interconnectedness of ecological and cultural systems. Through its narrative, the novel not only enriches our understanding of the Bodo society but also resonates with global conversations on environmental conservation and cultural preservation.

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