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# To Determine the Structure and Function of Bhagar Oxbow Lake in Dumraon, Buxar, South Bihar, India

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#### Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author SP designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors SK, TG and AK managed the analyses of the study. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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# ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the structure, function, and fisheries resources of Bhagar lake, South Bihar, one of the oxbow lakes in Dumraon (un-reported and un-described), from February 2018 to January 2020 under the state non plan research project. This lake is spread from Nauki par (Chakki) to Nainijore (Brahampur), Dumraon, (Buxar) with a large size wetland in dimension of 20 km length & 1 km width. Bhagar oxbow lake is U shaped, hydrological closed lentic type meander of the Ganga river, it is fed by the monsoon runoff and ingress of flood water from the river Dharmawati. The water depth of lake ranges between 1.5 to 3 meters in summer and depth 4 to 6 meters during the Monsoon months. Water temperature ranged from 16°C (January) to 30°C (August) whereas the pH value of lake water was found within 7.0 to 7.8. In aspect of biological properties of the lake, it was highly infested with submerged vegetation with dominancy of *Hydrilla cillata* and floating aquatic weeds (water hyacinth) such as *Eichhormia crassipes* with approximately 30 percent area coverage. This lake is rich sources of fishes with identified forty four species with example of annual fishes like *Mystus spp., Puntius spp., Channa spp., Carps spp.,* small *Macrobrachium spp.* and several seasonal fishes, providing livelihood support to more than sixty five household, socio-cultural importance. It also gives protection to many wild mammals like

Blackbucks (*Antelope cervicapra*), swamp deer (*Rucervus duvaucelii*) and Nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) during summer time. This lake is also wintering ground of the migratory birds such as Heron and Crane.

Keywords: Bhagar oxbow lake; ecology; livelihood; fauna; Dumraon; Bihar; India.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

All wetlands on the earth have some unique ecological function and it needs to be explored for better use of human bell-being and wildlife species. India, with its changing topography and climate regimes, maintain various and unique wetland habitats [1]. These wetland ecosystems assume prominent impact in not only sustaining the regional and global ecological balances, but also provided that ideal environment for wild animals and plants [2,3]. Wetlands cover 7% of the earth's surface and delivers 45% of the world's natural production and ecosystem functions. They provides many resources and services with (e.g. water resources for domestic use and irrigation, ground water recharge, aquaculture, biodiversity, employments etc) that are ecologically and socio-cultural importance [4]. These wetlands are the traditional source of fish and fisheries, and also provide livelihood, to thousands of fishermen [5] and locally known as Bhagar, Beel, Jeel, Tal, Pat, Moun and Chaurs. They covered more than 2 lakh hectares spreading over the eastern and north eastern state of India [6]. North Bihar is well-known for its wetland resources (natural and man-made water bodies) and fine extensive network of rivers arising from the Himalayas. Muzaffarpur wetland is a vital resource to provide food, water and recreation for human being as well as habitat for many diverged species of aquatic plants and animals. [7] reported that in north Bihar, 269418 ha, within 21 districts covered by wetlands that is equal to 4.96% total geographical area. Many research workers have been studied on north Bihar wetland in the different aspects such as ecosystem services and resource utilization pattern of an oxbow lake, Muzaffarpur [8], sustainable development of Kawar lake, Begusarai [9] and sustainable development of north Bihar through wetlands [7]. However, previously, no one has mentioned the occurrence of oxbow lake exist in South Bihar. In this regards extensive survey were made in south Bihar, especially Dumraon (Buxar) fish market and water resources under the state non-plan project on "Assessment of gonadal maturity and spawning behavior of Indian major carps in south Bihar". During this period, an interesting

observation on oxbow lake (local known as Bhagar), situated 15 km in the north east from the Dumraon railway station (found & spread between Chakki to Nainijore block) was documented.

#### 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### 2.1 Study Area

An oxbow lake locally known as Bhagar is situated 15 km to north east from the Dumraon railway station in Buxar district, Bihar (one of the sevenths largest state of India) between 25°18 degree to 25°45 degree North latitudes and 83°772 degree to 84°40 degree East longitude (Fig. 1). This lake is spread from Naukipar (Chakki) to Nainijor (Brahampur), Dumraon (Buxar). Some important villages like Chakki. Gaighat, Sapahi, Pandepur, Mahuar and Nainijore are situated nearer to the bank of anoxbow lake. The oxbow lake is 20 km long x 1 km wide. It is formed U shaped as a result of the shifting of the course of Ganga. Due to lapse of time and raising of an earthen embankment, the connecting channel has become defunct. Bhagar oxbow lake is fed by the monsoon run off and ingress of flood water from the river Dharmawati.

Bhagar oxbow lake is a meander of river Ganga. During survey, a local washerman named Shri Bihari Rajak (75 Years old) of village Gaighat, Dumraon (Buxar) said that the main Ganga had flowed through this region of Bhagar upto during 1960-1970. The river Ganga has changed its path due to the deposition caused by flood occurred during the year 1970-1976 and after that Bhagar oxbow lake had come into existence. Connecting channel with main Ganga has been hindered & to somewhat defunct due to sediment deposition and formation of earthen embankment with lapse of time. Earlier 1975, Bhagar lake was the best source of fish production including large sized freshwater prawn during the period. In the present context, Bhagar oxbow lake suffering with very less fish & shell fish production because monsoon runoff and ingress of flood water from the river Dharmawati (drooping into the river Ganga) is the main source for feeding of lake.



Fig. 1. Map of India, Bihar, and District Buxar showing study area (Source: 9)

# 2.2 Wetland Survey

Extensive surveys were performed in the morning to evening time on the specific months by motorcycle, car and boat to investigate the structures and functions of oxbow lake from February 2018 to January 2020. Identification of fishes was done on the basis of its external characters. The tools used in this research were water depth measuring meter, handheld pH meter, thermometers, global positioning system (GPS), digital camera and boat. Location of villages was measured with GPS as tabulated in Table 1. Google earth image of the study area focusing Dumraon, Bhagar oxbow lake was down loaded and presented in the Fig. 2a. The GIS map of study area was generated with open source GIS such as Quantum GIS and presented in Fig. 2b.

Apart from this, few information's and past history of Bhagar oxbow lake was also collected through formal communication with fishermen, washer-man and local people. This water body (Bhagar oxbow lake) was identified in consultation with relevant literature previously published by [10,11] Buxar district survey report, [12], personal communication made with Dr. Archan Kanti Das, Principal Scientist, ICAR, Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute (CIFRI), Barrackpore Kolkata and District Fishery Officer, Buxar (Bihar). The observations of this oxbow lake were compassed with another oxbow lake, which situated in North Bihar.

#### 2.3 Data Analysis

The geographical locations measured in GPS system was spatially superimposed on geographical information system (GIS) map in Q-GIS software and Polygon features of Bhagar

oxbow lake was also depicted. The line features of National Highway, Dharmavati River and levee of Ganga were prepared. Measured data are presented in tabular and photographs.

#### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In the present study it is observed that Bhagar is hydrological closed lentic type oxbow lake, its fed by another river Dharmawati during flood time rainy season (Fig. 2a & b). Water, substrate and the biota are the most important factor to consider for wetland characterization [13]. The physically identify of freshwater oxbow lakes is mainly based on a) the established with connectivity channels b) without connecting channels, c) lake falling in between the embankment and d) the river which are flooded during the monsoon and half-formed lakes between the embankment and the river which are engulf by the river during monsoon [10,12]. Those most dynamic wetlands directly and indirectly livelihood millions of people by providing various services in both tangible and non-tangible terms [14,15]. Wetlands occupy 15.26 Million hectares with 1.5% of total geographical area in India, which support about a fifth of the known biodiversity whereas, Bihar has an estimated area of 4.03 Million hectares under wetlands [8]. As estimated 4735 ha area under oxbow lakes is available in the North Bihar with major concentration in East and West Champaran districts, followed by Muzaffarpur, Begusarai and Samastipur [16].

#### 3.1 Importance of Bhagar Oxbow Lake

The Bhagar oxbow lake has been provided that different use water resources which comprise water for irrigation, domiciliary necessities, fisheries resources, production, frivolous uses, ground water recharge, flood control and silt seizure. This Bhagar oxbow lake is important in supporting flora and faunal species diversity. In the present study it is observed that the some vertebrates (Fishes, Amphibians, Reptilians' etc) and invertebrates (Shell fishes, insects etc) be influenced by on Bhagar swamplands for their entire life cycle while some other species only associated and depend on with these areas during certain stage of their life details presented in Table 2. [1,14,17] also reported the importance of wetlands, mainly including water for irrigation, fisheries; non-timber forest goods water supply; and regeneration. They were also reported as a major services comprises of carbon sequestration ground water recharge, nutrient removal, toxic retention, bio diversity and flood control. [18,19] reported regarding hydrological condition are a key morphogenic factor and they also shape the aquatic environment of the oxbow lakes.

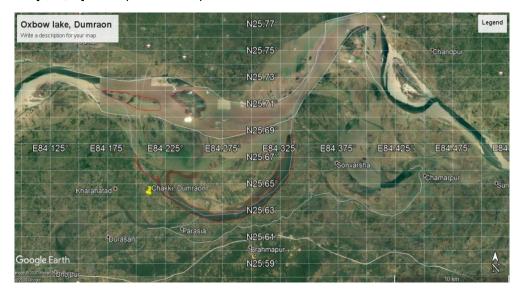


Fig. 2a. Google Earth image of Bhagar Oxbow lake, Dumraon, Buxar

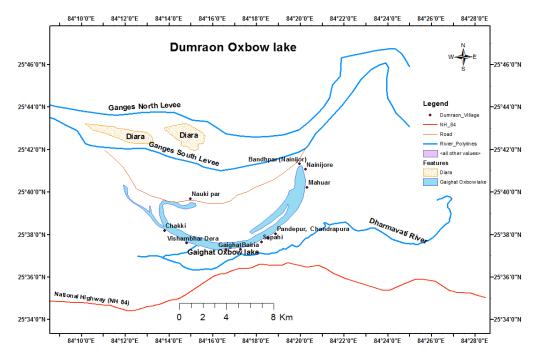


Fig. 2b. GIS map of Bhagar Oxbow lake, Dumraon, Buxar

| S. N. | Name of the village         | Longitude (E) | Latitude (N) | Water depth during<br>summer (meter) |
|-------|-----------------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1     | Nauki par (near embankment) | 84.2500       | 25.6620      | 1.0                                  |
| 2     | Chakki                      | 84.2300       | 25.6360      | 1.0                                  |
| 3     | Vishambhardera (nala par)   | 84.2460       | 25.6270      | 1.0                                  |
| 4     | Gaighat                     | 84.2760       | 25.6230      | 1.5                                  |
| 5     | Bairia                      | 84.2880       | 25.6230      | 1.5                                  |
| 6     | Sapahi                      | 84.3030       | 25.6280      | 1.5                                  |
| 7     | Panchphorwa, dallupur       | 84.3090       | 25.6310      | 2.0                                  |
| 8     | Pandepur, chandrapura       | 84.3140       | 25.6350      | 2.5                                  |
| 9     | Mahuar                      | 84.3380       | 25.6710      | 3.0                                  |
| 10    | Nainijore (near embankment) | 84.3370       | 25.6850      | 3.0                                  |
| 11    | Bandhpar (Nainijor)         | 84.3330       | 25.6890      | 3.0                                  |

Table 1. Village situated on bank of Bhagar Oxbow lake, Chakki to Nainijore, Dumraon

Table 2. Bhagar Oxbow lake uses in different services

| S. N. | Uses         | S. N. | Uses                       | S. N. | Uses                    |
|-------|--------------|-------|----------------------------|-------|-------------------------|
| 1     | Irrigation   | 5     | Nutrient reach soil        | 9     | Flood control           |
| 2     | Fisheries    | 6     | Wild life biodiversity     | 10    | Invertebrates diversity |
| 3     | Domestic     | 7     | Ground water recharge      | 11    | Vertebrates diversity   |
| 4     | Fodder grass | 8     | Refuge for migratory birds | 12    | Agriculture             |

# 3.2 Ecological Profile and Wildlife Hot Spots

The ambient temperature was noted its lowest of 14°C in January and steadily increased. maximum to 46°C being in July-August, whereas water temperature of Bhagar oxbow lake ranged from 16°C January to 30°C August. The pH value of lake water was found within the permissible limit i.e. 6.5 to 8.5 as per the ISI standard [20]. Highest value of (7.8) pH was observed during July and lower value of pH (7.0) in November-December. The transparency values were found to be within the range of 15 cm. (August) to 83.5 cm (February). It is a shallow water body with depth ranging between 1.0 to 3 meters in summer (Table 1); however a maximum depth of 4-6 meters during the monsoon months has also been recorded in certain pockets after the ingress of flood water from the river Dharmawati. Approximately 30% area of this lake is highly infested with submerged vegetation and aquatic weeds. Among them the floating weeds such as Eichhormia crassipes (floating) and Hydrilla cillata (submerged) are predominant (Fig. 3). [12] Reported regarding macrophyte communities, and the attached microflora are fundamental in structuring microbial metabolism and biogeochemical cycling at the ecosystem level of organization. Bhagar oxbow lake is the natural resources known for its high biological diversity,

many migrated birds species such as Heron and Crane from western and European countries come during winter. [21] reported regarding wetlands are useful for breeding area for wildlife and provide a refuge for migratory birdsand numeral of species of wandering birds documented from India is between 1200 and 1300, which is about 24% of India's total bird's species. [22,23] also reported regarding wetlands were viewed as habitat sites for wildlife and significant international ramifications both as trans-boundary systems and as networks of habitats vital for migratory species, particularly with respect to integrated management of migratory birds.

It was observed that blackbucks (Antelope cervicapra) and blue bulls or nilgai (Boselaphus tragocamelus) spend the entire summer within the surrounding of the Bhagar oxbow lake plain areas like Simri, Chakki and Brahampur block for water & food (Fig. 4). This might be that, during summer, most of the water resources at upper part of Dumraon dry up. Hence it indicated that Blackbucks (Antelope cervicapra), swamp deer (Rucervus duvaucelii) and Nilgai (Boselaphus tragocamelus) migrated from the low laying plain (south) to the north plain of Dumraon due to scarcity of food and water [3,24,25] reported blackbucks in summer may that be wandered from long distance in search of water and food.

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Fig. 3. Floating and submerge aquatic weeds in Bhagar Oxbow lake, in Dumraon



Fig. 4. Nilgai, Boselaphus tragocamelus & blackbucks, Antelope cervicapra in Dumraon



Fig. 5. Fin fishes and shell fishes harvested from the Bhagar oxbow lake in Dumraon

# 3.3 Fisheries and Livelihood

The oxbow lakes are considered as biologically profound environments as they play a dynamic role in the enrollment of fish populations in the riverine ecologies and afford nursery ground for larval stages of commercially important fishes in the northern and north eastern states of India [16]. The oxbow lake has provided more than 65 residential fishermen over the year. Fishing with hooks and lines is a hobby to many people residing near the Bhagar oxbow lake. During the summer period the average quantity of the fish harvested from the lake was 200 kg/day, while it was 300 kg/dav during the monsoon seasons. In general, fishing activity is at its peak during the monsoon season. The monsoon is breeding season for most of the fishes. As per fishermen, the fish catch per unit efforts is decreasing continuously. It was observed that generally most of the fishermen are very poor, less literate or uneducated.

In the present investigation, forty four (44) species of fishes were identified in Bhagar oxbow lake. Some fish species like Mystus spp., Puntius Channa Gastropods spp. and spp., Macrobrachium spp. were found almost in all season. Some species such as Anabas testudineus. Heteropneustes fossilis and Glossogobius giuris were seasonal fishes especially during summer season. Fish species like Notopterus notopterus, Catla catla, Labeo rohita, Cirrhinus mrigala, Sperata aor, Mystus cavasius and Wallago attu have been found abundant during monsoon season (migrating from Ganga river through Dhamawati river) under flood situation (Fig. 5). The local fisherman opined that carnivorous fishes like W. attu, H. fossilis and Channa marulius are becoming rare. Fish and shell fishes are a very important food stuff in developing countries due to its high protein content and somewhat other purposes viz. medicinal: nutritional values [26.27.6] reported that flood plain wetlands are highly sensitive and fragile in nature representing the transitional state between terrestrial and aquatic [5] reported regarding ecosystems. fish transportation & marketing in Dumraon and Buxar, he documented the main source of fishes in these fish markets came from Bhagar oxbow lake.

#### 3.4 Opportunities and Possibilities

There are 20,000 species of fishes in the world and more than 40% species of fishes live in freshwater [16]. Bhagar oxbow lake is a habitat to harbored birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fishes and invertebrates. It is also wintering ground of the migratory birds such as Heron and Crane in the south western part of Bihar. Detail of opportunities & possibilities of the lake was summarized in Table 3.

# Table 3. Opportunities and possibilities in<br/>Oxbow lake South Bihar

| S. N. | Possibilities                           |
|-------|---|
| 1     | National level swimming training centre |
| 2     | National level Boating training centre  |
| 3     | National level disaster training centre |
| 4     | Freshwater fin Fish, & Shellfishes      |
|       | breeding & culture                      |
| 5     | Makhana and Singhara culture            |
| 6     | Migratory birds Vihar                   |
| 7     | Wildlife conservation centre            |
|       |   |

# 3.5 Types of Gear and Craft and Fishing Rights

Most of the fishermen used traditional fishing gear like lifts net, cast net, gill net & hooks lines. Butavoided fry net, due to bannedimposed by government. Among these, lift net and cast net were used by certain fishermen from time to time. The occurrence of weeds indicated the extreme eutrophication that is a factor towards the un-conductive ecological regime for fisheries development. The fisheries development in the lakes has to be centeredon the utilization or control of macrophytes to achieve the goal of sustainability. Small size fresh water prawn Macrobrachium species and other shell fishes such as Pila globosa, Bellamya sp. and Lamellidence marginalis dominantly occurs in the lake. They are ecological bio indicators, extensive consume detritus during the summer months. The fisheries resources of oxbow lake are auctioned annually by local fishermen cooperative society (Brahampur). The fishing right over this oxbow lake is vested under the jurisdiction of government or semi-government agencies.

# 4. CONCLUSION

Based on findings, it is concluded that Bhagar oxbow lake is rich in fin fishes and shell fishes diversity, offer livelihood support to fishermen and rich in biodiversity to attract migratory birds such as Heron and Crane and also protect many wild mammals such as Blackbucks (*Antelope cervicapra*), swamp deer (*Rucervus duvaucelii*) and Nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) migrated from the low laying plain (south) to the north plain of Dumraon due to scarcity of food and water.

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# **COMPETING INTERESTS**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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