

Impact Factor: 6.017

ISSN: 2278-9529

GALAXY

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Special Issue on Tribal Culture, Literature and Languages

National Conference Organised by
Department of Marathi, Hindi and English

Government Vidarbha Institute of Science and
Humanities, Amravati (Autonomous)

13 Years of Open Access

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Tribal English Literature in India

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Abstract:

‘Tribal’, the word suggesting and denoting the remotely identified people, away from mainstream; it also takes us to the images with natural habitat, folklores and strange arts. But whenever our minds are ready for searching the real humanity and originality, we search for ‘Tribal’ unknowingly. Though English Language was to reach them lastly, it provided them the opportunity to sing their own lore in their own rhythm in their own way and they became accessible for the world at last. Tribes are oldest communities here having developed their cultures with experiences, forming every habit with patience and preserving the bond with nature. Industrialization brought the change in culture and habitual practices; taking their identity from them. Tribal Literature is also a criticism of mainstream people, their mindsets and their hunger which destroyed the connection with almighty.

Keywords: Tribal Literature, Culture, Translation studies, Traditions, Oral Literature.

Introduction

Tribal English literature in India is a burgeoning field which seeks to express the experiences, cultures, and struggles of indigenous communities. This research article is trying to explore the historical context, themes, and contributions of tribal literature, going through the works of prominent tribal writers and their impact on Indian literature. India has rich background of multiple languages, traditions, religions, arts and customs. Earlier the tribal literature in local languages was unreachable for English readers but with the translation studies and the access of English language to the grass root level, it has become possible for everyone to reach English audience which can be called world-widely larger. The core problem in this regard is the nature of Tribal Literature which is oral in nature and being placed remotely in small villages where these tribes are located mainly. A bridge between these two cultures is now cultivating slowly



and access to the mainstream literature and readers has begun giving the opportunities to these people in abundance now.

Tribal Literature, originally present in form of folklores and songs which were prepared and passed from one person to another orally and currently being translated into the languages which are accessible to the larger audience, is now creating it's own space in the World Literary Scenario widely. 'Orature' is also the concept which is being used for this literature. Tribal Literature is now being published in multiple books every year. It is not just a desire to spread their stories and traditions but it is the quest of identity which is being searched in this modern world. The external interruption was mostly the threat to their identity earlier, though the scenario is different nowadays. Literature has given them a medium to put forward their plight in sharp words.

Earlier they had everything preserved in their culture with their own habitat but now the liberalization of Indian government has pushed them out of the natural habitat being exploited by outsiders. They search the medium to express their grief and hardships; literature has served the purpose for this. Natural and simple life changed into civilized one; facilities like electricity, employment took shape of the needs in their life, connecting them with mainstream society. They were neither in their original form nor in the fully civilized social form, they were lagged behind in the flow of development in form of materially equipped society.

Tribal literature was on the verge of being vanished, having no written form. The authors redeveloped the feelings with utmost intensity and presented them in English as it was the largely used language. English has served them as the biggest opportunity giving access to all the knowledge in the world and giving expression to their feelings which are neglected earlier because of the language barrier.

Tribal traditions were majorly oral and histories as well as experiences of their own were recorded in form of folklores. These were practiced from the centuries among the tribal people. Developing further the literature of its own, developed gradually and the need of keeping record was felt because of the vastness. English has served the perfect medium here and made available the way of expression. The impact of colonialism also changed the life of tribes and their literature came in contact with the mainstream society. The modernization has given the



opportunity to read and write the language for the first time. Education with ample amount of knowledge gradually lifted the hurdles of their path of development externally and internally. The tribal culture has seen the impact of globalization also, as the global knowledge was accessible for them and the thoughts and ideas started rebelling against the old practices. The traditions which were logical maintained their space in tribal society's life; but irrelevant one started being opposed by the educated. The young generation started rebelling and questioning the illogical factors. Cultures started getting shaped newly in contact of globalization.

Tribal literature in India is old like the original civilization here. It has reshaped itself many times after coming in contact with the outer society. With the touch of globalization this change was major. This was majorly created in tribal languages and later translated in English; hence this can be considered translation studies also. Tribal literature is the chronicle of tribal life, their plight for rights, oppression they have faced and imprints of their culture and history. Though there is no connection between tribal and other literature, we consider it 'Tribal Literature' because of the nature of creative expression which cannot be seen anywhere like this. Colonialism has impacted the Indian Literature to get translated or originally created in English and Tribal Literature too was no exception for this. Talking about the most original Indian Literature we have to study Tribal Literature because it is the original contribution from the root society. The term New Literature is used for this but in reality this is older than the existence of English language, but has to be translated in English for the sake of reaching the world.

In some ways the Tribal Literature is called Colonial Literature talking about the colonial impact but originally it talks about the life of their own. Something original and truly new coming from their words has taken the shape of Tribal Literature and this cannot be called Colonial Literature. They majorly focus on Indian cultures, traditions, political interventions, societies and their problems.

Maybe the form of Tribal Literature is adapted from the colonial one; but the themes of this literature are the problems of Indian society and philosophy which is from the original Indian society. Themes like tribal movements, their opposition to the mainstream authorities are clearly their issues from pre colonial era. Reestablishing the claims of tribal people on their homeland and their ownership of natural resources preserved by their ancestors are some of these themes which are presented in the contemporary English Tribal Literature. It has always



struggled to search identity and place of Tribal people in the society even today. Identity issues have always become vital in the life of Tribes. They do not belong to the modern society and the place where they belong is no more theirs; where they cannot return because it has been changed into something else. Their habitat is destroyed completely and the quest of belonging is unending now. This literature has always shown the themes of cultural heritage and its preservation. This is the most concerned topic which is discussed in their life and the reflection of the same is seen in their literature.

The traditions and the culture of their ancestors has given them the identity which has been preserved by them. They try to preserve them all and show concerns about it in their writing also. Another theme which has been widely seen in their literature is social justice and activism. This theme has developed from the struggles they had to face during their changing life. They had to shift from their natural habitat to the new society where they do not belong. They could never connect themselves with it; they even had to face the discrimination by the others and had to fight for the justice in this new society and the same struggle is reflected in the literature. The land rights have been ripped out from them and now they cannot preserve the homeland and the nature which was always worshipped by them as Gods. They have lost the environmental connection with nature. The theme of personal narratives is also one of the theme which has been vitally identified in the Tribal literature. Writers have told their personal stories with the personal touch and realities involved into it. These narratives have given the shape to this literature so real that it cannot be differentiated whether this was fiction. The reality touch has given Tribal literature the unique identity.

The Tribal writers have been identified with their own writings which distinguish them from the mainstream. Others have very little idea about their traditions and cultures. Amidst the works written in this literary tradition we find many to inspire us. They are mostly written in regional languages and translated later in English, or sometimes written originally in English. The women in scheduled tribes are also reflected with their strength of innovative writing here. Enduring multiple type of violence from the very beginning has shown the courage to protest against colonialism in 19th century even. The railway expansion became a bigger reason which forced them out from their natural habitat.



Writers like C.K. Janu, in her *Mother Forest* shows the tribal life of Kerala with the issues being faced in routine life; the impact of outer people upon their life. Mahashweta Devi in her *The Why – Why Girl* and *Dust on the Road*, Bama with her *Karukku* and *Sangati*, Temsula Ao in her *Laburnum for My Head* and *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, Mamang Dai in *The Legends of Pensam* and *The Black Hill*, Anand Mahanand in his *The witches of Jharia* and *The Ghosts of Jharia* have shown the sensitive at the same time vital incidents in their works. These writers have portrayed the real picture of tribal life with their plight, the suppression suffered by them, the minute details of traditional events, their attachment with Gods, nature and the inheritance, the changes witnessed by them due to urbanization and its impact.

The Tribal Literature has contributed the core part of human life to the English literature in India. It has enriched the Indian literature with diverse perspective have varied experiential literary aspects which make the literature complete in true manner. It has also given the challenging and dominant narratives as well as stereotypes to the Indian English Literature with the characters portraying the real life incidents in the works. These works have given the voice to the marginalized communities which have never got a platform for expressing their inner self in front of the world. They were never given a chance of expressing themselves putting forward their plight and urge. This Tribal Literature also has showcased the tribal culture and traditions; of which they could never have the opportunity. Freedom of expression which is the key role of literature has been served in the life of tribal people with their literature being given the medium of the world language; because it provided them the opportunity to reach the world.

Conclusion

Maximum tribes live in forest areas with no touch of political, economical or literary significance. Tribal English literature in India offers a unique perspective on the country's diverse cultural landscape. By exploring the experiences and voices of indigenous communities, this literature enriches our understanding of India's complex social fabric. Increased recognition and support for tribal writers, inclusion in academic curricula, and translation and dissemination of tribal literature can further promote this emerging field. In spite of the modernization disturbing their lives, the tribal people have maintained the vivid images, old culture and traditions with the help of the modern languages like English. The voice which was unheard or suppressed till now, has been given the stage to be expressed and the opportunity is being justly



used by them. Though new, the Tribal Literature not less than the whole world of ideology and expressiveness, it has proved the originality shines like the diamond; it does not matter whether it was among the coal or under the soil.

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