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Exploring the Culture of the Tribe from Dang District as Reflected in Selected Folk Songs

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Abstract:

The researcher in the proposed research aims to study the folk songs of selected tribes from the Dang district, Gujarat. It is done to safeguard the culture of the indigenous tribes and give them a space in the mainstream by translating it into English. Bhupendra Mistry has said that Every region has its distinctive personality through particular regional specialties. It is reflected through its ecology, nature, and folklife flourished through its traditions. The translation is a strategy to decolonize one's soul and bring to society what is considered 'truly Indian. It is also a necessary form of understanding each other, expanding our ideas and horizons. As the folk songs of Dang are primarily indigenous, oral, and performative, their translation into English would be a creative interaction between two widely distinct cultures. This interaction helps the researcher study the heterogeneity of Indian culture and make society aware of the rich cultural tradition of Dangis that they have continued to practice for generations. The research work aims to give recognition and space to the indigenous tribes of the region at the international level by translating folksongs into English. Drawing upon this insight into heterogeneity in Indian culture, the researcher proposes to translate folk songs (selected tribes) of Dang, the district through which they can have a unique cultural identity.

Keywords: Culture, Tribe, Dang District, Folk Songs, Cultural Identity.



Literature on topic

Folk and folklore have been defined and discussed after the word "folklore" was first used by William Thomas instead of ancient antiquities in 1846. This is derived from the German folklorists, the term volkskunde denoted the entire lifestyle of the rural people, and the word "folk," conceived of as a homogenous group. The idea of folk is still ambiguous.

Folk literature includes myths, legends, folk songs, folk tales, proverbs, and riddles. Its studies became established as a field and discipline in Europe and North America. It originated in Europe and North America during the first half of the 19th century, where the focus was on the rural population.

With this modern conception of folk, we can no longer think of folk in monolithic terms. Dundes defines folk in the following way: "The term 'folk' can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is – it could be a common occupation, language or religion but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reasons will have some traditions which it calls its own"(Dundes 6). Folklore serves several social, political, and material uses and bridges the gap between past and present. Folklore serves an educational purpose as it teaches social values and functions as a political and material tool to invoke a unique cultural identity.

Folk literature in the Indian context

Folklore is a fascinating form of study to understand the social customs and religious beliefs of the people. The state of Bombay comprises the area known as Gujarat and Kathiawar. It is needless to say that this part of India has vast resources for folklore studies. The study of folk literature in India began in the 19th century, and developed in the early 20th century. A Parsi scholar wrote the folklore of Gujarat; it was a collection of legends and stories of the princes and peasants of Gujarat and Kathiawar from oral tradition only. Western intellectuals influenced Gujarati writers to safeguard their traditional culture through folk literature. This began during British rule when many Indians went to England for studies. It was the colonial connection with indigenous languages, a unique aspect of colonial intervention in India that distinguished it from other European adventures of the mercantilist era. These were far-reaching implications for cultural production in our society. When Indian languages were being recast, in diverse ways into structuralized forms and languages entered into the "modern" formative phase (S.Joshi 16).



There is relative poverty in the social and cultural history of the oppressed people. Therefore, it is necessary to broaden the scope of research to include the cultural, religious, and social traditions of these people best expressed in folk literature. Gujarat is a land of the vast tribal belt. The tribal habitat covers the hilly and forest area extending from northeast Arasur to Southeast Sahyadri hills and the plains of Gujarat (Mehta 468). The tribal population of Gujarat consists of 89, 17,174. (As per census 2011) with dang as the highest in tribal population.

The word tribe refers to a specific pattern of economic and social-cultural modes of life. It can be conceptualized as a stage in social development where it was assumed that hunting and gathering society would develop into a tribal which would then develop into a state society. However, in recent years it has been shown that tribes need to be understood as a particular mode of existence with its codes. And these codes, such as cultural narratives, political formations, and economic presence, are related more to their geographical and historical context of existence (Baruah 78). Adivasi languages are rapidly losing ground to scheduled languages, and hence the disappearance of languages entails the loss of history and leads to social marginalization.

History has indeed been unkind to the tribal characteristics of the people. Besides that, they have not been viewed with any degree of respect by the alienated middle classes and intellectuals. None of the brave fights of tribals against the British has ever been treated as part of the "national" struggle for freedom.

In Gujarat, many organizations and researchers have been working for the past several decades to preserve Adivasis's oral literature to document and translate it into various Indian languages. Bhasha Research and Education Center was founded in 1996 for the study, documentation, and conservation of non-scheduled languages. Painted Words: an anthology of tribal literature by G.N.Devy represents Adivasi imagination, knowledge systems, culture, and society. The selections are representative works from languages that have remained primarily spoken and are just beginning to return. The selection includes tribal versions of the colorful legends- Ramayan and Mahabharat, songs, oral histories, and a play depicting the exploitation of tribal citizens. The Ramayan and other Oral Narratives of the Kunknas, the Kunkna version of the Ramayan, is not an indigenous story. The performer of the Kunkna story re-imagines it in a setting familiar to the Kunkna people. It contains the tale of Satimata, king Mansinha, and queen Salvan, the tale of Kansari, and the tale of Una. There are specific songs for weddings, sowing, etc. Every day is like



a festival in the life kunkna community. *Goth: Adivasi Stories from Gujarat* edited by Kanji Patel and translated into English by Sonal Baxi, includes Rathwi, Kunkna, Chaudhari, Dhodia, and Gamit languages spoken by Adivasi communities living in the state of Gujarat. *Bharat: an epic of Dungri Bhils*, documented by Bhagwandas Patel and translated by Nila Shah. The book brings forth both the divergences and interconnections between the Bhili and the mainstream version of Mahabharat.

The Adivasis of North Gujarat came in contact with those of Rajasthan, and the communities include Bhil. In the middle part of the region, the communities include Bhil, Rathwa, Danka, and Naiks. The places included are Vadodara, Panchmahal, and Bharuch. In South Gujarat, the tribes have bhil, Gamit, Warli, Dhodiya, Chaudhary, Konkana, Dublas, Kotvaliya, and Naiks. They are primarily found in Surat, Valsad, and Dang region. It has been noted that people from Dang have started migrating for work and interacting with people from different districts in contemporary times. They have shown the urge to maintain their moral values and beliefs by giving oral literature a written form.

Tribal Literature of Gujarat is a collection of folk songs and folk tales translated into English by Nishant Choksi; it brings forth a few folk songs and folk tales translated to English from selected tribes of north Gujarat Gujarat, south Gujarat, and Khandesh. The prominent tribes in north Gujarat include Dungri Bhils and Garasiya. They have a large stock of folk stories and songs in their language. The Dungri Bhils storytelling tradition follows a seasonal cycle with stories and songs representing a ritual and seasonal significance. Like adolescents everywhere, the tribal youth have occasional quarrels with their parents as they come of age. The Garasiyas are found in Rajasthan and Palanpur, Khedbrahma, Vijaynagar taluka of Sabarkantha district in North Gujarat. Garasiya's storytelling tradition can be divided into various genres, including love marriage stories, war stories, stories of internal conflict, deception, stories of god, social issues, and the role of women in society. In south Gujarat, Bhils, Dehwali, Chaudharis, and Gamit are the prominent tribes. Like other Adivasi communities, the main occupation they are involved in is agriculture, but many engage in seasonal labor due to poor economic situations. They celebrate festivals like Diwali, Holi, Dhuleti, Bagoria, and Orani. They worship many deities and also have 'Kuldevis' for each of their clans. Among all the scheduled tribes in South Gujarat, Chaudharis are the most educated. They also have a well-documented political history. The folk tales and songs also depict situations



where animal characters and humans interact freely. “It is representative of the closeness that Adivasis feel with nature and creatures of the forest” (Choksi 86).

The Dang is a small tribal district located in Gujarat. The origin of the name is not particular; there are several meanings. It refers to the hilly region, and the word "Dang" also means Bamboo and the name is also associated with Hindu mythology. It is related to the Dandakaranya of the Ramayana. It is said that during the exile, Rama passed through this area. The district headquarters is Ahwa. The mainland of the district is enclosed by the Surat district from the North and northeast, by the district of Navsari from the west, and by Maharashtra from the East and South. The area covered by the district is 1,766 sq. km. It covers 0.90% of the total geographical area of Gujarat. It is essentially a mountainous tract covered with dense forest, which occupies 53 percent of its total area. Important rivers like Ambika and Purna originate from the Dangs district and flow through the Valsad district to meet the Arabian Sea in the west. The economic resources of the district include forestry, minerals and mining, cropping patterns, and agriculture. As per the Planning Commission, dang is one of the most economically distressed districts out of 640 districts in India. It is a tribal district, with the Bhil, Konkana (Kunvi), Varli, Kotwali, Kathodi, and Gamit being their major tribal groups. The Bhils have historically been residing in Dang, whereas the other tribes came in search of livelihood. The tribals here speak Dangi, the local dialect. The different dialects spoken are considered unscheduled languages. Dangi is a mix of Gujarati, Marathi, and Hindi. The people of Dang are deemed to be filled with strength and tolerance. They live in deep forests and have shaped their own cultural identity through traditional practices and beliefs. They have extreme faith in nature, and they worship it, considering it to be the only source of survival.

In the 14th century, the kings of Dang were separated from the Mughals. They established their independent rule, and this was where Shivaji established its military base when he attacked Surat in 1662 AD. The original possessor of the Dang was Bhils. The Bhils as a race are poor, illiterate, and superstitious in their beliefs. The five royal Bhil kings of Dang are currently the only hereditary rulers in India, and several wars were fought in between, but they united to protect Dang from British rule. From several references, it seems that Dang is independent or semi-independent since the time of Yadavas. The Dangs do not form a part of British India. Our government has never conquered them. Before the constitution under the Government of India Act from 4th Nov 1933, the charge of Dangs was transferred from the political agent, Dangs, to the newly created Gujarat

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state agency. It was a newly created district, formed after the merger of a former Gujarat state assembly with the province of Bombay in 1947. From 1954, the chiefs of dang ceased to be rulers and became political pensioners under the new policy.

The Bombay state was bifurcated on 1st May, 1960, and a separate state of Gujarat and Maharashtra was formed. The Dang district became a part of Gujarat state and was placed under the collector's administrative control immediately. In 1960 with the linguistic organization of states, it was constituted as a part of Gujarat. It is clear from history that Dangis have fought many battles to defend its identity and regional character. Its geographical position is of importance before and after independence (Directorate of Census Operations, Gujarat 13-14)

Though there are several contributions made in folk literature, it is noticeable that significantly little space is given to tribal people and Adivasis. However, they have safeguarded their culture through practices and performances. There is so much in the tribal way of life that the country needs to emulate. "Despite the drastic changes due to urbanization and industrialization, the different tribes of India are still maintaining its religion and culture" (Udeshi and Joshi 6). The fact that Adivasis and non-Adivasis are taking an interest in documenting and publishing works in Adivasi languages is reason enough to point to what Devy calls an "aksar andolan." Only after the magazine was published, 'Dhol' has any of these languages took written form. In contemporary time few tribes of Gujarat, especially Gamit, are beginning to organize themselves by establishing social associations with "Dakshin Gujarat Gamit samaj" (Choksi xix).

Nowadays, many researchers are aware of it and are interested in the culture of tribals and their lifestyles and are trying to safeguard it and make it available on an international platform by translating and making it available in the English language.

"English translations of the rich heritage of tribal Gujarat are sorely lacking. It is also quite frightening, for then we all remain ignorant of how Adivasis themselves see, view, and express their world" (Choksi xxii). Thus, the invisibility of Adivasi languages in the economic and cultural sphere can be seen as one of the significant barriers to creating their unique identity. India is a multi-lingual and multi-cultural society where we have people belonging to different regions, speaking other languages following different cultures, and having different beliefs and practices.



As a part of the research, the researcher would be focusing on translating folk songs of the Dang district (selected tribes) into English. It would be a medium through which people will know about their culture and tradition at the international level and realize the heterogeneity in Indian culture.

In some cases, the researcher would also be referring to the Gujarati translation of the folk songs and try to re-adjust the translation to the original to the best of my ability. This research being a small sample of few tribal songs would be an area of interest for linguists and people interested in literature and culture and, in a sense, would make a little contribution in conservation and promotion of India's cultural diversity.

Literature on the theoretical approach

The activity of translation is probably as old as the language itself. The history of translation studies can be traced back to the first century (B.C.E.) commentator, Cicero. Jerome, who's word-for-word and sense - for - sense approaches to translation were a spring for other approaches. From the 1950s, each decade was marked by dominant concepts such as translatability, equivalence, etc. Before the 20th-century, translation was an element of language learning, the field of translation developed into an academic discipline in the second half of the 20th century. As it moved towards the present new concepts, methods, approaches, and research projects were developed, interacting with this discipline. In the idea of loss and gain in translation, it is important to note that no text is original; each reader is unique because language itself is the translation. Each sign and phrase is a translation of another sign and phrase. Each translation is a creation and thus constitutes a unique text. Post-colonialism is one of the most thriving points of contact between cultural studies and translation studies. The translation is theorized as an artistic, political practice that might bring about social change.

Translation studies have struck interdisciplinary connections and initiated profound interactions with other disciplines like cultural studies, linguistics, comparative literature, and multiculturalism. Translation provides insight into diversity of languages, culture, and ethnicity all around the world, but it also negates the idea of singularity, uniformity, and universality.

Translation studies as an academic discipline are continuously expanding and striking new affiliations and disassociating older and unproductive liaisons. The perspective of looking at translation has changed as mentioned in the book "translation studies" that in previous models, the

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translator was described with violent images like: 'appropriation,' 'penetration,' and 'possession.' Still, in present times, the translator is seen as a 'liberator,' someone who frees the text from the fixed signs of its original shape making it no longer subordinate to the source text. In present times, looking at translation is changing, seeking not to evaluate but to understand the shift (Bassnett 6).

In India, with the advent of Buddhist books of Buddhist canon and Jatakas began to be written in Pali and Sanskrit. In the 1st century A.D., many Buddhist works were translated to Chinese by Indian scholars. Later in the period, two Hindu epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, and the Puranas were re-written and re-told in vernaculars under the inspiration of the bhakti movement. During Islamic rule, few works got translated into Persian.

During the colonial era, translations were taking place from Indian languages to English which contributed to the formation of oriental knowledge by translating Gita Govind (1792), Shakuntala (1789), Manusmriti (1794), etc. Charles Wilkins was the first European translator to translate directly from Sanskrit to English, and his translation of Gita as 'Bhagvet Geeta (1784) shaped western understanding of Indian civilization. During this time, translation was a way of exercising control over alien culture. Later many English-educated youths like Romesh Chandra Dutt and Raja Ram Mohan Roy translated Indian classics into English. During the 18th and 19th century almost all the translations taking place were from classical languages.

According to Harish Trivedi, translation activity in India in the 20th century encompass 1) translation of world literature into Indian languages, 2) translation from Indian languages to languages of the world (mainly English), and 3) intraIndian translation within the regional languages of India. "Translation activity in India owed a lot to the multiplicity of social and historical projects like the spread of Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity as well as a colonial and imperial policy of British and postcolonial compulsions"(N. Joshi 94). During this period, translation amongst various Indian languages was a neglected area. However, translators like Anila Dalal, Niranjan Bhagat, and Bholabhai Patel have painstakingly imported works from Bengali and Marathi into Gujarati. However, there is a need to increase the cross-cultural traffic by way of translating as it would not only lead to enrichment of regional literature but also the evolution of national literature.

In a multi-lingual country like India and the world, translation is necessary for understanding each other. India also has a long history of translation. The word "translating" in the title does not mean



a literal translation, but it refers to 'remoulding' and 're-telling to suit cultural tastes. Undertaking this project and the task of translation would open up the cultural world to the audience. In the research thesis, there would be an in-depth reflection on the purpose of translation and readership in the process of translating. The translation readers are not potential readers in an abstract sense and have differences in educational background, aesthetic tastes, cultural forms, etc. However, even the readers with the same culture face the above differences. And so, the researcher would be using the multi-method translation can also be considered a source to provide the necessary background knowledge in the culture of the target language.

The discipline of translation studies developed in recent years whereas the activity of translation is very ancient. Till now the focus was on the practice of translating, what is a good translation? What is the best way to translate? Etc. The traditional approach to translation was dualistic, normative and hierarchic, where translation was seen as inferior and secondary to the original whereas contemporary approach to translation sees it as an ideological and political activity. It is a cross-cultural communication. End of 1970s we see the whole discipline of translation studies emerging, earlier it was seen as a branch of applied linguistics. Contemporary approaches to translation studies include: Descriptive Translation Studies, by Gideon Toury, 'Rewriting' or 'Manipulation' by Andre Lefevere and Theo Hermans, Polysystem approach by Evan Zohar. Post-colonial approach and cultural studies approach to translation see translation as an ideological activity involving politics of representation which can only be understood in its cultural and historical context. It can thus be seen that the contemporary translation studies which is a recent arrival, has gone beyond the clichéd discussion about 'loss' and 'problems' of translation (Sachin). It sees translation as a cultural practice instead of secondary activity. In present times translation becomes the space through which the text travels, it travel across the world. "One has to develop what is called 'translating consciousness' in a post-modern universe, a spectacular human forte which would enable one to translate the diversity of the world in one's terms and understand how his world is continuously modified and qualified by it".

In the post-modern era, marginal voices have shown their urge to be expressed, so the study of translation can increase our understanding of human beings, lifestyles, and how they understand the self and the other.



Though it becomes important on the translator's part, one needs to consider the differences in culture, language, and social aspects to avoid errors. It can be grammatical errors, linguistic even contextual errors. As mentioned in an article "reviewing the English translation of Akoopar", that "it is not just replacing one language structure with another, it is transformation of one cultural, social and emotional manifestation into another language" (Dave and P.Joshi 5).

The researcher would be discussing few questions before actually translating, which would, in a sense, enrich the process of translation, such as the intrinsic need of the subject culture, the purpose of translation, the readership group, the way of translation, and the form of expression dealing with all these questions would affect the acceptance of the translated work. It would be wrong to assume that literature in any language can thrive without getting translated. "Translation is a necessity in our country where communication takes place through multiple languages. Building up a body of translated works can contribute to the nourishing and strengthening of linkages between languages, cultures and social groups"(N.Joshi 94). Drawing upon this objective, I wish to translate the folk songs into English because they need to be translated and deserve to influence the global community of scholars, literary readers, and folklorists.

The prime objective of the study is to translate the folk songs of selected tribes from dang, Gujarat, and give recognition and space to the tribes of Dang at the international level. It also aims at understanding folk songs as cultural artefacts and counters the idea of homogeneity and monolithic culture.

One objective of the study is to understand Adivasi life through language, literature, and translation. And through the act of translation, we may even begin to bring margins closer to the mainstream by strengthening of linkages between languages, culture and social groups.

Few attempts have been made to document the folk literature of the Dang district, especially by Nishaant Choksi, Kanji Patel, Dayaram Vadhu, and Avaanesh Bhatt. But least attention is given to the genre of folk songs, and many of the translations are done in Gujarati, so it remains limited to a particular group. So, the aim of translating it into English will offer a glimpse of the narrative traditions of Gujarat's Adivasi community at the global level.

Linguistic studies: linguistics is the scientific study of language. It involves the analysis of every aspect of language and the methods for studying and modeling them. For undergoing the



translation process, it is required to study the nature of language (phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics).

Cultural studies: cultural studies is a field of study that look at cultural artifacts as meaning-making systems. It will use cultural studies to understand the culture of tribes through the study of folk songs.

Folklore studies: The study of folklore focuses on the ways of living through which communities shape their reality it includes language, work, food, play, song, beliefs and other cultural forms which are passed from one generation to other usually orally.

After the development of folk literature in the 19th century and tribal literature in the 20th century, there have

Since each folk song would be presented in original and translation, the linguists interested and knowing Gujarati and Marathi would study the similarities and differences between the varieties and other Western Indic languages.

My study will be limited to folk songs and that too of selected tribes so that it would be a small sample in consideration of Gujarat's diversity. So interested researchers can carry forward the research by taking up different genres in this field, focusing on other tribes of Gujarat.

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