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The idea of homocentric world has created a myth of man being the master of the earth. This has led to an uncontrolled exploitation of natural treasures which unfortunately we have named as “resources”. Accumulation of wealth and production of surplus to further multiply it has led to an unending cut throat competition between countries, communities and individuals. Global pursuit of land – grabbing and ascertaining command over the natural resources for a nation has resulted in bloody wars and destruction of natural and man -made capital.

The emergence of the capitalist world order and its expansion has created a world which is divided and disjointed. The human race is also divided into races, religions, nationalities and communities. This segregation has endowed human beings with multiple contending identities and there are conflicts of preserving individual identities rather than saving human race .There are hierarchies which govern and create an order of power structures that dictate. The ruling establishments work day in and day out to maintain the status quo whereas the masses reel under monstrous suppression and exploitation.

Though material gain and scientific advancement has made life easier for this generation but there is also a sense of being hollow from inside. Individualism has led to creation of islands. Every man is an island unto him/herself. This isolation has resulted from the idea of private individual and ownership of property which is a serious fallacy. In this world there is a regular rise in the number of prison houses. For punishment one is subjected to long durations of isolation and solitary confinement is considered one of the most severe punishments. But often one realizes that the isolation can exist even outside a prison. There are invisible walls that surround us. This is a truth of this super – civilized society.

In this background if one were to visit the indigenous communities of the world through their literatures composed in their native tongues or in English and other languages of the world, one would be happily surprised to see a new vision of life which might usher in a renaissance of human

civilization. Indigenous societies living in their remote, less exposed habitats present an alternative world view which rests on Geo-centrism, Naturalism and Collectivism. The fallacious understanding of the supercivilized world as masters of the earth does not exist here. Homocentric world is not the world view of the indigenous people. For them earth is central, not man. They treat earth as their mother and believe in using nature's components sparingly just to fulfill their needs not following the capitalist principle of producing surplus.

The concept of individual property does not hold the sway in indigenous community. They believe in collective command of the gifts of nature and so the ownership right rests with community. There are community guidelines of the use of land, water, forest produce and other available treasures of nature which are derived from some natural object which is the center of their faith. The mythological deities have little space in the indigenous belief system. They worship nature, sun, moon, trees, rivers, ancestors and sometimes even certain animals. Naturalism is the order among the indigenous communities. In an era of ghastly conflicts in the name of religion when religious identities are invoked to gain political power at international level and also within a country, naturalism could offer a viable alternative.

As we try to understand the issues of the contemporary world in the light of the literature of the indigenous peoples of the world there is a fresh breeze of hope which presents an alternative to the existing world order. It might appear to be a utopia but alternatives are generated out of utopian ideas only. In the era of monarchy even the idea of democracy would have appeared a utopian idea. In fact, the attempt to understand the Geo-centrism, Naturalism and Collectivism is also an attempt to make democracy more rooted and mass-based.

This number of the journal contains several such research articles which explore a number of texts on the basis of the principles stated above. We hope this journal will open up new horizons of critical discussions and creative upsurge among its readers..

Date : 16/12/2024

***Dr. Minakshi Jain***

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## *The Nutmeg's Curse: Tracing the Social Origins of Colonialism*

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*Aditi Kalra*

It is a practice by World Economic Forum (WEF) to organise a perception survey every year where experts try to foresee the greatest global hazard that can occur in the next ten years. In the result of the 2022 survey, it was found that the greatest hazard for the upcoming years is climate change. It is quite apparent in the occurrence of natural calamities in the coming years in the form of hurricanes, fire, tornadoes, draughts, floods, heatwaves etc and the point to note is that all these are happening also in the areas which have been unaffected previously. Naturally, this climatic concern is reflected in literature also. Lawrence Buell has rightly said, "Literature and other media can offer unique resources for activating concern and creative thinking about the planet's environmental future... reflecting on works of imagination may prompt intensified concern about the consequences of such choices and possible alternatives to them" (Buell 418). To analyse the connection between environment and literature, the interdisciplinary study of ecocriticism, environmental criticism or green studies are evolved. According to Zapf ecocriticism views literature as "an ecological principle or an ecological energy within the larger system of cultural discourses" (Zapf 55) a perspective that has "moved beyond former one-sided, biological-deterministic views of the nature-culture relationship towards the recognition of the difference and relatively independent dynamics of cultural and intellectual phenomena" (Zapf 51).

A number of writers, both in India and worldwide, have voiced out their concern about climate change. Among such writers, Amitav Ghosh stands out significantly due to his constant contribution to the cause. *The Living Mountain, The Nutmeg's Curse, The Hungry Tide, The*



*Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, *Jungle Nama*, *River of Smoke*, *In an Antique Land*, *Sea of Poppies* are just a few examples where Ghosh through his fictional and non-fictional works have highlighted the need for harmony between man and environment. Stressing upon the importance of eco criticism Nayar writes:

Eco criticism is a critical mode that looks at the representation of nature and landscape in cultural texts, paying particular attention to attitudes towards 'nature' and the rhetoric employed when speaking about it. It aligns itself with ecological activism and social theory with the assumption that the rhetoric of cultural texts reflects and informs material practices towards the environment, while seeking to increase awareness about it and linking itself (and literary texts) with other ecological sciences and approaches. (Nayar 242)

Now it's an established fact that climate change has become a severe threat to human existence and civilisation. Many authors have brought out various facets and dimensions of environmental issues but its social origins are not explored often. Amitav Ghosh tries to fill in this gap by discussing the societal causes of environmental exploitation, as he specialises in social anthropology, through his non-fictional work, *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*. An intersection of history, literature, essay, testimony, and polemic, this book attempts to trace the contemporary climate crisis back to the colonial period, the discovery of new world and sea routes. Ghosh holds the Western colonialism responsible for climate change as its roots can be found in the old geopolitical order established by the West. The western colonialism has been entirely built on exploitation: exploitation of flora and fauna, slave trade, exploitation of the resources of colonies and the thoughtless exploitation of nature without paying any heed to the consequences. The book covers a wide range in term of both time and space but at the centre of this works is the precious spice nutmeg. Ghosh presents the history of nutmeg as a heart wrenching narrative of colonial conquest and exploitation. Ghosh makes the narrative of nutmeg as a parable for the contemporary ecological crisis. He advises that nature is an

independent and powerful entity without which human beings cannot survive. To have a thoughtlessly materialistic attitude towards nature is like an open invitation to the doom of mankind.

While tracing the history of environmental degradation and western colonialism, Ghosh tries to complete the trajectory by posing the work in contemporary times by giving reference to the global pandemic and the Black Lives Matter protests. He weaves these historical stories in the narrative and showcases that our common colonial histories are interconnected and are also the reason behind the wide chasm of inequality in the contemporary times. Picking up the historical incidents of oil trade, migrant crisis, racism and anecdotes from Indigenous communities and then interweaving them in a meaningful narrative Ghosh produces a critique of western colonialism. He also puts forth the idea that human history is determined by these non-human factors. Though he places western colonialism at the centre of ecological disorder due to its objectified and exploitative misuse of natural resources at the same time, he also blames the elites of colonies like Asia and Africa who disrupted the environmental balance of the area for their pursuit of economic growth. They are equally responsible for the ecological degradation. Ghosh believes that the exploitative attitude of such groups is the main cause of the contemporary climate crisis because such groups had initially promoted the evil ecological practices like deforestation, burning fossil fuel, unmindful mining etc.

The narrative analyses the origin of the relationship between Global North and Global South and also the idea that the mechanistic western attitude towards nature has severely impacted the contemporary world scenario. Ghosh begins his narrative by narrating the story of Dutch colonial conquest in Indonesia, particularly in the Banda Archipelago. Through this Ghosh tries to show how the western imperialism had played a major role in determining the ecological perception of the earth. Banda Archipelago was home to the spice nutmeg, found in abundance here, which was an extremely expensive commodity in the European market and this attracted the avarice of European colonisers. Ghosh portrays how the colonial powers used manipulation, treachery and all

sort of evil practices to seize the resources of those areas. He describes an incident in the village of Selamonin Banda, where a lamp accidentally fell in the night and the officials of Dutch East India Company coloured this incident as an attack from the native islanders. The natives had already made various commercial treaties with the colonial power but then the greed of Dutch had no bounds. They took this accident as an opportunity for the complete annihilation of the village. They publicly murdered thirty-six village elders, turned all the buildings into ashes and captured the villagers as slaves and sent them to work in their other areas. The destruction caused by the Dutch and the torture born by the natives of Banda Archipelago serves as a small-scale example to the global damage done by European Imperialism.

The author's selection of the historical narrative of Banda archipelago serves his purpose on various levels. Firstly, it incorporates all the major themes the author wants to deal with, such as the destruction by the western colonial powers, their impact on colonies; both on man and land, the difference between the attitude of imperialist power and indigenous people towards nature and its resources. Ghosh attempts to show the similarity between what happened to the Banda people and what occurred to all the other colonies world-wide and thus establishing our shared colonial history. He presents the common global impact of colonisation on the human and natural world. He also succeeds in drawing the attention of a contemporary reader to the tragic story of a small island which has been unfamiliar to him previously. The tale of Banda gives the author the scope to present the two opposite approach towards nature by the west and the indigenous communities. It shows both material and immaterial attitudes towards nature. For the colonial powers the importance of nutmeg is only determined by its commercial value. This natural product has no other value for them. But for Banda indigenous people, though they were aware of nutmeg's trade value, the spice and its ecology have spiritual significance too. They view it "not as land, but rather as the Land." For them nature is not just a resource to be used for human greed but a living entity incorporating all humans, flora and fauna with full of energy and life-force.

The non-fictional work tells the tale of how the presence of this precious spice nutmeg attracted the colonial powers towards this unknown island for the materialistic value of the spice. Eventually this spice which was a boon to this island and islanders by nature became a curse for them like the forbidden apple. The Nutmeg tree was endemic to these islands due to a natural occurrence of a volcanic eruption of 'Gunung Api'. Indigenous people of the island were involved in the trade of this spice but they have a respectful and balanced attitude towards the tree and its natural surroundings. Later on, with the arrival of Dutch VOC (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagni), this balance between man and nature disrupted completely. The Dutch company unleashed a reign of terror on this peaceful area by murdering and capturing its ninety percent population as slaves with the sole purpose of monopolising the trade of nutmeg (23). To establish a total control over the demand and supply chain of this precious spice they even cut down the nutmeg trees in the neighbouring islands of Lanthor. Ghosh highlights the tendency of East India Companies across the globe to carry out full fledged wars to sustain and promote their trades. They follow this dictum, "No war without trade, no trade without war" (42), he draws a parallel between the colonial past and our contemporary issues. The impact of this relationship between war and trade that was there in 1600s to 1800s, finds its reflections in the modern conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and currently in Ukraine. He writes, "The dominance of Capitalism was made possible by western military conquests" (116). Similarly, the migration crisis that we are encountering today is also a repercussion of colonial greed. For the extraction and plantation of nutmeg, the Dutch company needed slave in a huge number. Consequently, slaves and indentured labourers were brought from other places, thus giving the idea of mass migration. This migration was not limited to the production of nutmeg in Banda archipelago, same practice was employed by other imperialist powers across the world.

Ghosh brings into light two major factors adopted by the colonisers for the extraction of resources, terraforming and racial subjugation. Terraforming word was coined by Jack Williamson which expresses

how the colonisers strategically create a tabula rasa in the colonies they capture. The scheme was to erase the existing historical and cultural past of the native people and impose new meaning and definitions on the place and people both. Colonial powers modified the topography and ecology of a land in a planned way so they can impose colonial will and way of life onto that area. The purpose behind this was to put the blame of the suppression of the indigenous people on the nature itself, by altering the nature surrounding them. This process happened in both ways overtly and covertly. One such often-cited method was the planned spread of diseases like smallpox by English and Spanish powers among the indigenous communities they had occupied and it was so impactful that native people called them as ‘invisible bullets.’ On the other hand, an example of covert was the introduction of fenced livestock to the America. Fenced-in livestock was the usual practice for Europeans but its was a new concept for native Americans. They were habitual of free roaming livestock. This change in the pattern of livestock destroyed the ecology by harming the essential food webs for the native indigenous communities.

One of the major motivating factors behind this cultural and geological violence by the colonisers was their strong belief in the Darwinian theory that it’s the right of the civilised race to exterminate savage races (79). Many renowned thinkers and writers like Rene Descartes, Bernard Mandeville, Robert Boyle and Francis Bacon, nurtured this Eurocentric worldview in The Age of Reason. They tried to justify the supremacy of white race over other races as the Will of the Divine. Ghosh cites Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker and argues that “Bacon’s advertisement for a holy war was thus a call for several types of genocide, which found its sanction in biblical and classical antiquity” (26). This divine superiority of white race over others ruled out any chance of “fraternal solidarity” (82) while giving them self-ordained right to eradicate the human and non-human world of the presumed wild or savage races. The atrocities inflicted on the islanders of Banda happened in India, USA and in many other parts of colonies. The early settlers in USA destroyed the “entire web of non-human connections

that sustained a certain way of life” (41). These settlers spread diseases as a bio-weapon where they wanted to erase the native population. To satisfy their mechanistic profits they did not stop at the “weaponisation of the environment”(57), in fact they did not spare women and children too though they did not pose any kind of martial threat to them.

So all the development and the progress in the Global North have their roots in the horrible past and is stained with the blood of Indigenous people. By continued years of indigenous communities' oppression, stealing of their natural resources, inhuman exploitation and terraforming the so-called developed countries have created a faulty power structure in the world and this world order feeds on environmental crisis. Ghosh strongly opposes this view as it holds nature as an inert entity devoid of any life force. If we follow this viewpoint then the bond man shares with nature will be a forlorn thought and the thin but essential balance between human and natural world will be destroyed. To maintain this balance we need to acknowledge the life force and vitality that run in every fibre of nature. To emphasise his point, Ghosh brings in the concept of Gaia which believes in the vitality of earth and natural world where both human and non-human bond in specific ways.

The Gaia Hypothesis was named and popularised by an environmentalist and scientist James Lovelock in western academic circle. This concept is named after a Greek goddess representing the earth. This hypothesis believes that life force and origin of life are dependent on forces that are beyond the physical world. Vitalism was a new idea in the western scientific circle though it was a part of centuries old belief system of many indigenous communities across the globe including India. This has been an influencing factor in the uproars against colonialism in many countries, specially in South America, where shamans significantly revolted against colonial authorities. In 2012, a tribe in Ecuador namely Sarayakus won a legal battle against an oil company after a ninety-two-year-old shaman, Don Sabino Gualinga testified in the court that the prospectors' explosions had driven away the spirits of the forest. Quite obviously vitalism, Gaia Hypothesis and colonialism are at odds with each other. One believes in treating nature with reverence and the other

considers earth as inert entity, suitable for the exploitation and to be used as a resource for human avarice. For Banda islanders nutmeg is a living being with soul but for Dutch it is only a profitable natural product. So, the colonisers tried their best to erase this philosophy. While criticising the colonisers Ghosh tries to keep a balanced outlook. He reveals that its only the wealthy Europeans who have such approach towards nature but poor Europeans often formed connection with the earth. On the other hand, a number of wealthy natives were similar to colonisers.

While promoting the cause of environment conservation Ghosh redefines the word war. The word war is usually attached with deaths. So, he argues that the damage by climate crisis is also a kind of war. For example, the damage on the coastal ecosystem give births to the refugees who later on get subjected to great sufferings at national borders and refugee camps. Thus, ecological security is increasingly becoming a part of national security. One of the major contribution by Ghosh in this book is to present the connection of Earth's objectification with the contemporary issues which are glaring at us today. He gives the example of replacing of coal with oil and gas by colonial powers. As it was easy to extract and transport oil and gas in comparison to coal. Furthermore, the huge number of workers involved in coal industry naturally gave rise to the radicalisation of workers and the formation of labour unions. These contemporary oil companies with colonial mind set have made people and government dependent on them for energy. For this reason these powerful companies strongly oppose the green energy as it will make common man energy independent for their everyday need. Opposite to coal and oil which one needs to buy, anyone can generate green energy by simply by having a solar panel on their roof among other sources of green energy. This energy independence of a common man can destroy the well established power structure of the contemporary world. But we need to note that many countries are promoting the renewable energy. Amitav Ghosh painstakingly tries to keep the narrative grounded in contemporary times by referring to Black Lives Matters movement, COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on the

world. He writes his narration as “On May 24th, as I was writing the above paragraph . . .” (16) for this effect.

In conclusion one can say that Ghosh in this non-fictional work attempts to trace the origins of climate crisis by reflecting on historical developments. *The Nutmeg's Curse* is a powerful synthesis that artistically weaves together the analysis of historical occurrences and applies it to contemporary times to explain today's power structure. As literature presents a viewpoint before the readers to analyse an issue, we hope that a better understanding of the past will surely help in changing the future by giving a broader perspective. *The Nutmeg's Curse* is an impassioned appeal to people to organise and support mass movements against climate change. Ghosh strongly believes that storytellers can play an important role in addressing the environmental crisis. This book can be considered a redemptive panacea to solve the planetary crisis.

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## Gopinath Mohant's *Paraja*: Social Ethnographic Traces

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*Ayesha Tasnim*

### **Introduction**

The point of discussion on which this paper rests and focuses the novel *Paraja* is the phenomenon of social ethnographic traces and displacement, which have originated from development. During this particular process, the *Adivasi* community is compelled to relinquish their land, encompassing forests, to both the state and industrial capital. Due to the decline of conventional agricultural and forest-based livelihoods, the *Adivasi* community is compelled to undergo a transition towards alternative economic pursuits. However, the term 'development' does not encompass the notion of enhancing overall welfare or expanding one's abilities.

<sup>1</sup>Gopinath Mohanty, despite not belonging to the subaltern category in terms of caste or class, is a writer who adeptly illuminates the mechanisms and individuals involved in the oppression of indigenous communities. *Paraja*, a literary work centered on tribal values, serves as a prominent illustration of subaltern literature.

### **Ethnography: Does it stand on its own?**

Erickson provides a definition of ethnography as a method of studying and documenting the actions and behaviors of individuals within a particular cultural context. This approach focuses on capturing the everyday and routine aspects of a culture. It entails active engagement and systematic observation of individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds. Ethnographers collect empirical data through the process of fieldwork, mostly employing the method of observation. The fundamental aspect of Ethnography lies in the process of generating

knowledge through the analysis of everyday encounters that are the basis of human existence. The emergence of Ethnography can be attributed to the curiosity surrounding unfamiliar and foreign cultures, which arose from the processes of colonization, missionary endeavors, and international trade during the modern era. This fascination stemmed from the tendency to perceive cultural practices as customary or innate, thereby prompting the exploration and study of these 'alien' and 'strange' societies.

Gopinath Mohant's novel *Paraja* focuses on a particular family belonging to the Paraja tribe residing in the *Koraput* district of Orissa, and utilizes their experiences as a means to depict the socio-cultural conditions of the tribal community during the era of colonial control. The novel takes its name from the Paraja tribe which is a local *Oriya* term pronounced as *praja* which literally means the subjects or the common people as distinguished from the *rajas* or *Zamindars* of the pre independent times. According to a *Paraja* legend the *rajas* and the *parajas* were living like brothers. Later, the *rajas* adopted a luxurious and comfortable way of life and the *parajas* accepted the hardship of carrying the burden. The *Parajas'* home is among the forests and mountains of *Koraput* in Orissa, and they are mostly concentrated in Southern Orissa, in the district of *Koraput*, followed by *Kalahandi* where the tribe is scattered across the length and breadth of the hilly terrain. The tribe is also found sparsely in the districts of *Sundargarh*, *Keonjhar*, *Puri* and *Cuttack*. In the interiors of *Koraput* district there is a culture of silence which is largely due to their historical experience "of always being in a losing situation that has killed the hopes, aspirations and spirit of these tribal people" (Paul).

E. S. Paul asserts that the novel *Paraja* explores the diminishing aspects of unwritten tribal history, experiences, and culture. *Paraja*, along with other indigenous tribes, are currently facing forced displacement from their ancestral lands, accompanied by a significant encroachment against their cultural and economic domains.

Gopinath Mohanty attacks back in history, to the oral tradition of the *Paraja* and has created a novel, which sheds light on their way of life

and their thinking which is being corrupted by forces of materialistic society”. The tribal beliefs form an indispensable part of Paraja life, they believe that the world is created by ‘magical spirits’ and they confer happiness and good fortune on men, and also bring storm, misery, and evil fortune. They take all things to be the will of God and do not confront the outside forces playing havoc with their lives. They worship Dharmu as their Chief God besides Basumati, the Earth goddess, Jhakar, the God for all seasons, and Bagh Devta, the tiger God. They have deep faith and trust in the kind and benevolent spirits which have endowed their lives with a sense of peace and repose. It is their lack of unity in ousting the outside interference which proves deadly in their exploitation, however, they do not passively absorb everything as helpless beings but resist these hegemonic influences and develop survival techniques, sometimes as individuals or as a social group, and sometimes as a nation. In this age of modernization where everybody wants to be free and independent, the Parajas maintain their customs as a matter of life and death.

We find implementation of ‘everyday life theory’ as in Paraja there is a custom where both girls and boys sleep in their respective dormitories (hut) located in the centre of the village. Liberty is the very essence of their day-to-day existence, there is a corner of the open space in the centre of the village, where the tribal dances and assemblies are held, sheltered by the shade of an old mango tree, which is a memorial to all the dead of the village - a stone planted vertically for a man and laid flat for a woman. The life in the dormitory is based on certain traditions and customs which are invariably followed by all members, the boys and girls live in the dormitory till they are married.

### **Tribal Beliefs in *Paraja***

The tribal community holds a profound belief in the divine endorsement of various aspects of life. They attribute the presence of Gods to the deep jungle, considering it a pure and sacred space that is separate from ordinary individuals. The forest is regarded as a symbol of veneration, prompting the entire village to partake in a ceremonial

procession to invite the God of spring. The majestic mango tree serves as a shrine for the Parajas, evoking feelings of awe and devotion among them. Even in times of hardship, *Sukru Jani* advises his children to participate in joyful dancing and refrain from engaging in conflicts during the spring festival. A significant occurrence during this festival is the hunting expedition, wherein all physically capable men from the village embark on a journey that spans two or three days. These men venture into the jungle, fully prepared to endure potential ridicule from their female counterparts if they return without any successful catches. In this cultural practice, it is customary for women to fasten their garments. Additionally, it is seen that both female and male individuals sleep separately in designated dormitories, commonly referred to as huts, which are situated in the central area of the village.

### **Concept of Liberty**

The concept of liberty is fundamental to the daily lives of the individuals in question. Within the village, a specific area exists at the heart of the community where tribal dances and gatherings take place. This space is protected by the shade of an aged mango tree, which serves as a commemoration for all deceased members of the village. Notably, a vertical stone is erected to honour men, while a horizontal stone is laid to honour women. The dormitory lifestyle is characterized by a set of established traditions and rituals that are consistently adhered to by all residents. Both male and female individuals reside in the dormitory until they enter into marriage.

### ***Paraja: The Shades of Faith in Customs***

Adolescent males and females engaged in romantic relationships possessed an inherent entitlement to elope, a practice that was frequently seen. Subsequently, the sole requirement for the formalization of their union involved a financial transaction of approximately forty rupees from the male suitor to the parent of the female counterpart, in accordance with the prevailing customary practice of bride price. Festivals hold significant significance in the lives of the Paraja community. Specifically, the 'Peirajas' exhibit immense enthusiasm and

delight during the spring festival. As expressed by the author, this festive occasion symbolizes the rejuvenation of life itself. It serves as a catalyst for the revival of old connections and the establishment of new relationships. Notably, the festival provides a sanctuary where individuals can freely interact without the judgmental gaze of conservative societal norms. This sentiment is beautifully captured by the author's depiction of the disapproving eyes of prudish society being metaphorically distant, as if separated by a vast expanse of a million miles (171). The commencement of the spring festival is initiated through the invocation of deities, a ritual meticulously conducted following precise calculations performed by the soothsayers. During this period, individuals engage in a ritualistic practice known as communion with the supernatural. The individual responsible for facilitating this interaction is referred to as the *Dishari* or Diviner, who assumes the role of an interpreter.

## **Symbols and Beliefs**

The tribal community holds a profound belief in the heavenly endorsement of various aspects of life. According to their beliefs, the Gods are believed to inhabit the depths of the jungle, as it is considered a place of utmost purity and sanctity, distinct from the ordinary dwellings of the general populace. The forest serves as a symbol of veneration, prompting the entire town to partake in a ceremonial parade to extend an invitation to the deity representing the season of spring. The majestic mango tree serves as a sacred site for the *Parajas*, evoking a profound sense of reverence and dedication within their community. Despite facing adversity, *Sukru Jani* encourages his children to partake in joyful activities, such as dancing, and advises them to maintain a harmonious atmosphere by refraining from engaging in conflicts during the spring festival. One significant occurrence within the context of the spring festival is the collective hunt, wherein the physically capable males from the village embark on a hunting journey that spans a duration of two to three days. In this particular cultural context, it was observed that the male individuals would venture into the dense wilderness, fully aware of the potential ridicule they might face from their female counterparts in the event of returning without any tangible accomplishments.

On the other hand, the women would engage in a symbolic act of displaying their expectations by fastening their garments together and suspending them on a rope. In the unfortunate circumstance where a man failed to procure any prey, he would be subjected to the humiliating task of crawling beneath the hanging clothes, while enduring the bombardment of excrement-based projectiles and other forms of unclean substances. Conversely, instances of triumph were met with the expression of joy through the presentation of floral wreaths, lively dancing, and overall celebration. The hunting journey undertaken by *Mandia* and *Bagla* serves as a metaphorical representation, as it encompasses not only the pursuit of an animal but also the search for suitable life partners. *Bagla* is the individual responsible for apprehending *Kajodi* and thereafter fleeing into the wilderness, thereby engaging in the traditional Paraja custom of matrimonial capture. The author vividly portrays the vibrant celebration of *Durga Puja* during the month of *Aswina*.

The individuals known as *soothsayers*, witch doctors, *kalis*, *shamans*, and *begumis*, who were believed to be influenced by a divine entity, engaged in frenzied dances. As part of these rituals, buffaloes were sacrificed, resulting in the vivid spectacle of their blood spurting out and mixing with the surrounding mud. The atmosphere was further intensified by the rhythmic beating of drums and the piercing sound of trumpets. The event featured the prominent display of flags and processions, as well as the exhibition of weapons such as swords, battle-axes, and spears. Throughout the proceedings, there was a continuous clamor and demand for bloodshed.

The indigenous community partakes in a cultural tradition of commemorating the culmination of the agricultural cycle during the month of December. Following a period of two weeks subsequent to the ceremonial gathering of the newly cultivated crops, the dwellings are adorned with pigmented soil, which is employed for the purpose of embellishing the surfaces of both the floors and walls of their humble abodes. In addition to the embellishment and tidying of residences, women also engage in personal adornment through their attire and

hairstyles. The festivities commence with a boisterous ritual known as ‘Theif’, during which young men engage in the act of breaking into the residences of their neighbors and appropriating any items within their reach. Subsequently, the pilfered articles are returned to their rightful owners the following day, albeit at a nominal cost. In the evening, all young men partake in joyous singing, accompanied by young girls adorned in floral attire and decorative bracelets, engaging in lively dance. The novel effectively portrays the customs and beliefs of the *Parajas*, shedding light on the meticulous manner in which they commemorate their festivals. The author provides a comprehensive account of the observance of these festivities, highlighting the profound enjoyment derived from them.

During the month of December, the indigenous tribes partake in a significant celebration to commemorate the culmination of the harvest. This is subsequently succeeded by a ceremonial consumption of freshly harvested grain after a span of fifteen days. The tribal community experiences numerous festivities throughout their existence; however, the festival of Spring holds paramount importance as it encompasses a two-week period of merriment, hunting, and indulgence in lavish meals. All work obligations are disregarded as the rhythmic beats of the drums persistently resound day and night, harmonizing with the movements of the dance. The purpose of this festival is to bid farewell to the previous year through the continuous drumming. Here we are reminded of Alfred Tennyson’s line “Ring out Wild Bells for them, who are not here with us” (Tennyson 4). During this festive occasion, all activities are centered on dancing, singing, drinking, hunting, and feasting, leaving no room for any other pursuits.

Their societal structure plays a role in fostering romantic relationships among young individuals. The provision of *Dhangidi Basa* and *Dhangda Basa* within the community facilitates the process of matchmaking and contributes to the institution of marriage. The novel also highlights the significance of observing tribal rituals. The *Parajas*, in conjunction with the *Domo* tribe, have a longstanding tradition of jointly worshiping the Mother Earth and the Sun God prior to their festivals. Additionally, they

engage in animal sacrifices before commencing their agricultural activities.

### **Status Leading Protection of Women**

During the festival days, they venture into the forest to invoke the forest goddess and partake in hunting. Interestingly, when male hunters are unsuccessful in their initial attempts, the presence of women ensures a higher likelihood of success in subsequent endeavors. *Jholla* or bride price is a traditional practice used to validate customary marriages in Paraja community. It typically consists of a contract between families, where material items or money is paid by the groom in exchange for the bride and invariably for her labour and her capacity to produce children. It is strongly rooted cultural practice, a form of protection for women within marriages, providing them respect, status and acknowledgement, and at the same time the payment determined their roles in marriages, pronouncing subordination on husbands and their respective families. *Jholla* or bride price is generally between Rs 40/ to Rs 60/, no marriage can solemnize without paying the bride price. This culture of bride price in Paraja tribe makes the girl a precious entity. For the tribal, a girl is not a burden but an asset, as they bring bride price at the time of marriage. *Sukru Jani* thinks that *Puri Jani* is lucky to have a daughter like *Kajodi* as she is not only the best dancer in spring festival but also she is a good worker at the fields.

In the traditional Paraja society, the youth dormitory played a significant role within each village. It served as a space where unmarried boys and girls would spend the night, allowing them the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of one another. Communication between the boys and girls was facilitated through the expression of their thoughts and emotions via romantic love songs. Within the context of the novel, the characters *Jili* and her friend *Kajodi* are courted by *Bagala Paraja* and *Mandia*, who employ the use of songs accompanied by a single-stringed instrument known as the *dungudunga*. This instrument produces harmonious music through the twanging of its string and the rhythmic beating of its gourd-shell base, achieved by fingers adorned



with rings. *Bagala Paraja*, utilizing the ‘dungdung as accompaniment, courted *Jili* by singing an ancient ballad.

My dear, please honor your commitment.

Please come to my aid ! as I am on the verge of perishing with your name uttered upon my lips.

Oh, *Jili*, an individual of age 18! (*Paraja* 56)

As soon as the song is heard the girls leave the dormitories to meet their lovers. *Jili's Bagala* is not in a hurry to marry *Jili* as he cannot pay the bride price. The custom of paying the bride price makes them vulnerable to exploitation. Commercialization has eroded the essential meaning of this practice creating obstacles in tribal life. The *Parajas* due to their distinct traditional socio-economic organization have remained victims of ignorance and extravagant practices. They brew liquor from *Mahua* flowers and by selling it locally try to earn a little money, they know it is illegal but brew it for the realization of their romantic dreams, as well as for paying charges for reaping paddy fields. This brewing of liquor ultimately paves the way for *Mandia Jani's* arrest and his becoming a *goti*. Bride price places woman on the plain of commercial market for woman becomes the property of the man after payment of the bride price.

### ***Paraja: The Portrayal of Unfortunate Circumstances***

The novel *Paraja* explores the unfortunate circumstances faced by tribal girls who, due to poverty, are compelled to seek employment in which employers, through enticement and pursuit, manage to maintain them as their mistresses. The narrative of the young girl *Kambala* effectively illustrates the economic exploitation as she confides in *Jili* and *Bili*, stating, “Due to the lack of sustenance at home, I made the decision to come here, leaving my younger sister to care for our father.” Initially, I experienced feelings of solitude. According to Paul, “the mason, initiated pursuit of the speaker, resulting in their current cohabitation”(218). Additionally, the supervisor of the highway construction company is identified as a prominent oppressor who feigns affection in order to exploit and entice young girls into engaging in the

sex-trade. The tribal women, specifically *Rami* and *Moti*, collaborate with the supervisor in this illicit activity. These two tribal women employ various tactics, including offering gifts such as flowers, scented soap, and beaded necklaces, while utilizing persuasive language to manipulate young tribal girls.

These items are intended for your possession, as provided by the supervisor. The supervisor's actions are indicative of a kind and considerate demeanor.

He is! You are invited to attend his hut this evening and partake in listening to his vocal performance.

She would exhibit a facial expression of happiness, while maintaining physical contact with the girl by gently grasping her chin with her hand.

Direct your look towards her countenance and articulate the sentiment of her aesthetic appeal by expressing, "You possess a remarkable beauty. (*Paraja* 65)

*Rami*, an experienced individual within the community, convinces *Jili* and *Bill*, who are the daughters of *Sukru Jani*, to approach the supervisor. *Rami*, being a member of the tribal community herself, employs manipulative strategies that have the potential to negatively influence the moral values of young tribal females. She asserts that it is socially acceptable within our tribal customs for a girl to cohabit with any individual of her choosing. *Rami* employs her linguistic abilities to convince *Jili* to enter into a romantic relationship with the supervisor. This occurrence exemplifies a tribal member aligning themselves with non-tribal individuals as co-partners and co-agents in the suppression of their own tribe.

The persuasive arguments presented by *Rami* significantly contribute to diverting *Jili* and *Bill* from the morally upright path that they had inherited from their esteemed father. While *Jili* and *Bill* are present at the highway construction company site, they encounter persistent harassment from individuals who make concerted efforts to entice them, occasionally resorting to force in order to capture the young girls. *Shama*

*Paraja*, in particular, attempts to seize *Jili's* sari, but she manages to escape from the location. It is noteworthy that the supervisor of the highway construction company, along with his team, closely monitors and exhibits inappropriate interest in every young tribal girl. Paradoxically, individuals from the same tribal community, such as *Madhu Ghasi*, collaborate with the moneylender to entice young girls who subsequently become victims of the moneylender's malevolence. The novel exposes the irony inherent in a tribal individual himself attempting to extract additional funds from the *Sahukar*, thereby highlighting the complex dynamics.

*Madhu Ghasi's* strategic actions significantly contribute to the moral corruption of *Jili*, who begins to engage in covert visits to the *Sahukar*. However, despite her outward compliance, *Jili* experiences profound feelings of misery and defeat following these excursions. The ultimate blow occurs when *Jili* resorts to consuming alcoholic beverages in order to please the *Sahukar*, who callously proceeds to establish her as a concubine, thereby severing her ties with her family. This heartless exploitation of tribal women serves as a poignant reflection on the challenges faced by tribal communities in the face of monetary influences.

The novel effectively portrays the corrupting influence of outsiders and the broader socio-economic processes that encroach upon the tribal world. When observing major construction sites, one will readily notice the prevalent utilization, misapplication, and exploitation of the indigenous labor force, commonly referred to as '*Jilis*' and '*Bilis*' (Paul). Another form of exploitation perpetrated by non-indigenous individuals is exemplified through the actions of forest officials, who exercise surveillance over the wives and daughters of the tribal community.

The tribal have been marginalized largely "due to economic and social exploitation and to mitigate this educational and economic development should be undertaken to lift their economic situation and creating social awakening" (Paul 3). This existential problem also makes *Jili* and *Bili* the victims. Struggling without food for days in the absence of their father and brothers, *Jili* and *Bili* at last go out of their house against their *Paraja* tribal tradition to earn their food but get trapped by the

Supervisor. They fall victim to his vicious plan and get sexually abused. It is for his poverty that *Mandia* loses *Kajodi*. *Kajodi* is forced to shift her attention from *Mandia* to *Bagla* against her will for former's poverty. Hence, the poverty and the struggle for existence is the main thrust of the novel. These characters fail to materialize their dreams and stand as hapless victims despite their relentless efforts to realize them. The novel chronicles the endless plight of these tribal people, who endeavour a marathon struggle against the adverse situations to pursue their living. But they really grow before us in their failures.

### To Conclude

The merit of the novel rests on Mohanty's technique of the narrative. He establishes the victory of people in their failures and disappointments and proves that the failures and sufferings elevate tribesmen. The novel brings out a social picture of how the Paraja tribesmen live in that remote corner of Orissa. It narrates how these simple folks are exploited by the money lender like *Ramachandra Bisoi*, the forester, revenue officer, court people, and the police; how their fear of police, court, and prison imprisons them under the usurpers for the rest of their life: how their illiteracy robs them of all their comforts of living. Money lender *Ramachandra Bisoi* of the area controls their life - their process of living trapping them into his vicious web and takes their land which they attach the utmost importance more than their lives. The novelist narrates their attachment to their land in a very intimate language. The area held significant meaning for him, extending beyond its physical boundaries. The tribal lead a life of simplicity and innocence, and contentment and peace mark their living. Theirs is a culture sparkling with honesty and devoid of hypocrisy though less civilized, but any attack on dignity incurs their anger. To summarize the study the researcher notes that these indigenous people do not have their own voice to speak as these people are always under the shadow of either their own people or the professional who would be controlling their lives. Karl Marx's theory about classless society will be a dream for these people as they have far to go.

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## Notes:

- <sup>1</sup>Gopinath Mohanty. Gopinath Mohanty was a prominent figure in *Odia* literature and is known for his literary contributions that reflect the socio-economic and cultural aspects of rural life in Odisha, India.

## (Re) negotiating Aboriginal Identity and Marginality in *'Benang: From the Heart'*

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*Saurabh Meena*

The indigenous peoples of Australia, i.e., the Aboriginals, are the native people of the Australian continent. They are the proud inheritors of the world's longest continuing art tradition and oldest living culture as they had remained unchanged since its beginning in the Dreamtime. With the advent of the European settlers in Australia, they became the victims of colonial injustice meted out to them by the colonizers. Aboriginals were dispossessed of their land by the colonizers, and have been subjected to social, political and historical marginalization by the White settlers.

“Their marginality was established in the first hundred years of settlement, with dislocation, segregation, neglect and structural marginalization of the colonial period” (Moore 124). The historical process of marginalization can be understood from the pre-national period and early national period. Before 1905, the marginalization of Aboriginal peoples in Australia was profound and multifaceted, characterized by dispossession of land, violent conflict, forced removal from traditional territories, cultural suppression, and discriminatory policies. It was the period of colonial dispossession, violent conflicts between the settlers and Aboriginals and these conflicts resulted into massacre of Aboriginals, Forced assimilation, racial discrimination, denial of citizenship and legal rights and cultural suppression. The multi-faceted marginalization of Aboriginals continues to have lasting impacts on Indigenous communities, contributing to ongoing disparities in health, education, and socio-economic outcomes.

In the early national period, the attitude of the government towards Aborigines remained indifferent. They were looked at with contempt, indignation, and inferiority. “Aboriginal people continued to be outside

the community of the Australian nation. Their exclusion was such that the many living on reserves were ‘impoverished, their housing was rudimentary, education was basic or non-existent, health status was low, and employment was forced and unremunerated’ (Sullivan 3). They were the Australian citizen without citizenship, without civic rights, without freedom to marry, move and gain work. They were the victim of the racial policies of eugenics and miscegenation in which “government sought to segregate ‘full bloods’ on reserves on the basis that they were incapable of surviving in the modern world and would die out. At the same time, they sought to ‘absorb’ the half-castes by ‘breeding out’ their color in order that they might fit in” (Moore 125).

The theme of marginality and identity is central to many works by Aboriginal authors, reflecting the experiences and struggles of Indigenous peoples in asserting their cultural identity within the context of colonialism, racism, and ongoing socio-political challenges. Many Aboriginal authors explore the complexities of cultural identity, including the tension between traditional Indigenous values and contemporary Western influences. Aboriginal literature often portrays the experiences of marginalization and discrimination faced by Indigenous peoples within broader society. They frequently explore the intersections of Indigenous identity with other aspects of identity, such as gender, sexuality, and class. They may examine how multiple forms of marginalization intersect to shape individuals’ experiences and perspectives within Indigenous communities and society at large. Some notable Aboriginal authors whose works engage with these themes include Alexis Wright, and Kim Scott.

To understand the concept of marginality in the works of these authors, it becomes highly significant to understand multiple facets of marginality and its role in shaping the relations in the process of cross-cultural contact. Sociologist Gino Germani in his book *Marginality* defines marginalization as “lack of participation of individual and groups in those spheres in which, according to determined criteria, they might be expected to participate” (49).

In the backdrop of the above given definition, marginalization in Australian society has a long history where Aboriginals faced it in every sphere of

their lives. They are the disadvantaged section of Australian society who have been deprived of their traditional lands, Aboriginal identity, cultural practices, native languages, socio-economic and political rights and their right to sovereignty and self-determination. In Aboriginal society, marginality manifests itself in different forms and degrees of seriousness. The multiple facets of marginality are depicted by Aboriginal authors who portray it with the help of different character who are the victims of different forms of marginality at the hand of white people.”Marginality is a complex condition of disadvantage which individuals and communities experience as a result of vulnerabilities that may arise from unfavorable environment, cultural, social and political conditions of life” (Mehretu et.al).

“*Benang: From the Heart*” is a novel written by Kim Scott, an Indigenous Australian author, which explores themes of identity, marginalization, and cultural survival among the Noongar people of Western Australia. In the novel, marginalization is a central theme, as it depicts the historical and ongoing impact of colonization on Indigenous communities. In this novel, Harley attempts to uncover his family history of five generations from 1920-1990. In Australia, it was the colonial period in which different racially biased policies were adopted by different authorities in order to marginalize Aboriginals. In this novel, the writer incorporates the issue of distorted identity along with colonial violence.

Marginalization is the process in which the dominant forces deprive the oppressed people from their sovereignty, self-determination, socio-cultural and economic freedoms. The form of marginality that has been witnessed in Australia is systematic marginality, which can be defined as “Systemic marginality results from disadvantages which people and communities experience in a socially constructed system of inequitable relations within a hegemonic order that allows one set of individuals and communities to exercise undue power and control over another set with the latter manifesting one or a number of vulnerability markers based on class, ethnicity, age, gender and other similar characteristics” (Mehretu et al. 91).



Kim Scott's "Benang" presents the complexities of Aboriginal identity and marginality in Australia. The novel revisits the colonial history of Aboriginals in which they are colonized others. The novel exposes the social realities of the Aboriginal society. The novel follows the protagonist, who inherits a mixed identity from two different cultures and he grapples with the challenges of belonging in a society marked by systemic racism and cultural erasure. Through Harley's journey of self-discovery, "Benang" highlights the continuing legacies of colonialism and the ongoing struggles faced by Aboriginal peoples in asserting their indigenous identity and reclaiming their place in the Australian society. Harley's quest to revisit and renegotiate his Aboriginal identity brings him closer to the multiple facets of Aboriginality.

Postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon have explored the dynamics of power and resistance in colonial and postcolonial societies, emphasizing the ways in which colonialism perpetuates structures of domination and marginalization. The Australian Indigenous scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson has also examined the impact of colonization on Indigenous communities. She highlights the resilience and agency of Indigenous peoples in the face of ongoing oppression.

In the novel, Harley's quest to understand his Aboriginal heritage and reconcile it with his European ancestry. As a mixed-race individual, Harley occupies a liminal space within society, neither fully accepted by the white community nor fully embraced by his Aboriginal relatives. His journey towards self-discovery renders him a sense of alienation, confusion, and internal conflict, as he grapples with questions of belonging and identity. Through Harley's perspective, Scott explores the complexities of racial identity and the ways in which it intersects with notions of power and privilege.

The novel sheds light on the ongoing impact of colonialism on Aboriginal communities, as seen in the persistence of systemic racism, cultural appropriation, and the erasure of Indigenous knowledge and traditions. Harley's family history, marked by displacement, violence, and cultural loss, serves as a small-scale version of the broader Indigenous experience

in Australia. Through the character of Harley, Scott highlights the resilience and survival strategies employed by Aboriginal peoples in the face of ongoing oppression, challenging dominant narratives of victimhood and defeat.

In the novel, there are different Aboriginal characters who are the victims of some form of marginalization. The demeanor of the white characters in the novel represent the mindset of the white males to make Australia a country of white people where the black faces would be wiped out. Firstly, the forced removal of the half-caste children followed by their segregation from Aboriginal cultural practices and then the rampant sexual abuse of half caste and full blood women made them victims of all forms of exploitation and marginalization. The policy of eugenics and miscegenation were mainly aimed at marginalizing blacks in Australia. Richie Howitt relates Aboriginal marginalization with the development of Australian capitalism and observes “The dialectical relations between Aboriginal marginalization and the empowerment of the ‘dominant culture’ in Australian society seemed to me to be far from marginal issues, in terms of both theoretical and practical agendas. In the particular case of Australia, dispossession of Aboriginal people was central to the development of Australian capitalism” (7).

Aboriginal women were twice-marginalized owing to the practices followed in colonial Australia. Sexual freedom of Aboriginal women was curbed in a variety of ways. Aboriginal women were seen as sex objects used as experiments by the settlers. The repression of sexual freedom of Aboriginal women eventually resulted in their exploitation by the white people. “Sexual violence in the Australian history is often intertwined with race relations and solidifying racial and gender distinctions. Consequently, sexual violence in Australian history reflects colonial anxieties over both masculinity and power” (Smith 2).

The colonial experiences of the colonized other have always been an inalienable part of their lives as they have been the victims of oppression, racial discrimination, marginalization and exploitation. It remains an unachievable desire for the colonized to efface the traumatic memories

of their colonial past. Colonization has a “fate with lasting, indeed grotesquely unfair results” (Said 207).

Overall, “*Benang*” offers a poignant exploration of marginalization and its profound impact on individuals, families, and communities, while also celebrating the resilience and survival of Indigenous cultures in the face of adversity.

Today’s Aboriginal society is very different from those of earlier times. Cultural changes have taken place in accordance with the global flow. These changes have taken place due to their access to electronic media, their gradual entry in the workplaces and cultural contacts. The government has also been trying for the inclusion of Aboriginals in the multicultural Australian society. “These efforts began with the repeal of discriminatory legislation that had restricted access to social security (for employment, maternity allowance, family allowance, sickness benefits, the old age pension). They have extended civil and political rights to Aboriginals, including the right to consume alcohol and be paid equal wages, and recognized rights such as to land” (Moore 126). The approach for the multiculturalist inclusion of Aboriginal is only benefitting a bunch of people while the major portion of the Aboriginal population is still living in deplorable condition. There is still “a significant gap in Aboriginal education participation and attainment, health status, extent of home ownership and housing quality and overcrowding, unemployment and representation in the justice system” (Australian Institute of health and Welfare). There a more inclusive approach needs to followed by the government in order to uplift the marginalized. Uplifting marginalized sections of society involves addressing systemic barriers and creating opportunities for equitable access to resources, representation, and empowerment.

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## Conceptions of the Divine in Punjabi Folk Religion

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*Gurman Singh*

### **Problematizing ‘folk’ ‘religion’**

When we speak of the ‘folk,’ we generally do so in contradistinction to systems of religion which are (self-consciously) high, organized, orthodox, etc. As such, folk becomes a negative, residual. When we speak of ‘religion,’ as it exists in the twenty-first century, we invariably do so within parameters that can be traced to the colonial era. As such, religion becomes a matter of consonance with colonial reforms. Colonial imaginations of the ‘folk’ projected it as a ‘debased’ foil to the ‘high religions’ of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, etc.; postcolonial engagement with folk traditions, on the other hand, have invariably carried connotations of indigeneity, authenticity, etc.

It is this generic notion of ‘folk’ ‘religion’ that this paper seeks to problematize. Stanley Tambiah criticises anthropology’s ‘invention’ of the idea of two levels of religion, and instead advocates engaging with ‘total field of religion at any given period of time.’ This suggests that religious strategies and technologies cannot be reduced to absolute binaries, but operate in a fluid spectrum. The binary is, after all, is oriented by Enlightenment notions of religiosity and religion-making, marginalizing that which does not fall within its ambit as ‘folk,’ ‘syncretic’ and so on. This also implies that the folk is simply that which exceeds the bounds of the master-signifier of a particular ‘rational(ized)’ and ‘orthodox’ religion. As Tambiah implies, folk and orthodox are, in many ways, more analytical concepts than diagnostic dichotomies. This requires a holistic engagement with the totality of the field one is studying.

## **A Genealogy of ‘religion-making’**

This paper will attempt to examine and articulate the broad conceptual underpinnings of popular and folk religion in Punjab. Before we proceed, we must delineate the historical roots of Punjabi identity-formation, which are informed by shifting territorialities. Although the region was historically identified as Pentapotamia, Pancanada, Saptasindhava, Madradesh, Taki, etc., the formalization of an explicitly ‘Punjabi’ selfhood came to be through Mughal governmentality, which named the administrative unit of Lahore province *Suba-i-Punjab*. However, for our purposes, ‘Punjab’ functions as a master-signifier that encompasses practices, traditions, and ‘structures of feeling’ germane to this general region in North-Western India across history. Through the literary works of poets and historians like Waris Shah, Shah Muhammad, Ganesh Das Vadhera etc., this assemblage was given emotional heft and resonance.

As a frontier region, Punjab’s socio-cultural and religious landscape has been defined by a degree of syncretism and plurality, a fluidity of beliefs broadly unencumbered by hieratic hegemonies. Amongst the broad ideological currents of the Natha yogis, the Sufis, and the Sikh Gurus, a number of popular traditions and folk customs proliferated. These include the propitiation of tutelary deities, ancestor worship, as well as divine intermediaries like saints, martyrs, *pirs*, *sheikhs*, *gurus*, etc. as well as practices like exorcism, propitiatory offerings, life rituals, etc. Gaur uses the interplay of ‘differences’ and ‘diversities’ to describe this religious landscape. Mir likewise emphasises the ‘shared notions of pious behaviour irrespective of their affiliations to different religions’ in nineteenth century Punjab.

It goes without saying that eighteenth and nineteenth century Orientalist, colonial ethnographers and other such scholars dealing with India brought their own conceptions of what religion is and what it ought to be. Many critical texts exist which have exhaustively dealt with the idea of the ‘Protestantization’ of religion in colonial India in general (for Punjab, see Oberoi, Mandair, Mir, etc.), but it bears repeating that Orientalist ideas of religion posited a monotheistic, rational, organized religion of

the book, against the polytheistic, superstitious, unorganized un-religion of the Orient. These ideas have their legacy in the Enlightenment, which itself reshaped the notions of religion in Europe.

In turn, Punjabi society's encounter with colonial modernity compelled a number of social and religious reform movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which sought to mould religious identities into standardized and universal forms in response to colonial epistemes as well as historical contingencies. The interaction between colonial figures, reformists, as well as the grassroots provides another window into the competing impulses of popular piety and orthodoxy. It also offers an explanation for a shift from shared, porous models of piety to modern identity-oriented, exclusivist religious self-construction. Moreover, there was a transition from an enchanted natural universe, wherein natural forces are in themselves divine forces of worship, to secularized, modern conceptions of religion. Part of this transition was the distancing of the popular from the orthodox, the folk from the scriptural model of religion: religious self-fashioning increasingly came to be governed by corporate identities.

The reforms movements in colonial Punjab like the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and the Ahmadiyahs, notes van der Linden, relied on moral languages to give corporate standardized form to their religions in accordance with Enlightenment ideals, as well as colonial governmentality. The Tat Khalsa reforms, for example, were informed by 'positivism, utilitarianism and the protestant ethic,' with a 'highly rational, linear, universal and self-denying thrust.' In addition to such reforms, it should also be noted that it was usually the indigenous educated elites, middle-class professionals, or colonial administrators and ethnologists, who produced scholarly material delineating religious practices in India. Which is to say that these materials could be informed by ideological biases and motivations, and may not share the views of colonial subaltern classes. In the name of 'true,' 'authentic,' 'scriptural' religion, practices and beliefs that actually grounded and nurtured popular faith were marginalized and purged. These religion-making maneuvers did not create religions so much as they *reified* and amplified differences

already inherent to each religious formation, in the process disrupting the porous and syncretic models of shared piety that held sway in Punjab.

One can trace to this religion-making the roots of many communal and ethnic tensions that have plagued and shaped independent India's history. It is reasonable to conclude that the construction and reification of boundaries happened at the expense of localized practices and traditions that occupied various religious and social registers, porous and fluid, and allowed for greater participation irrespective of one's confessional identity. At the same time, it would be irresponsible to project an idealized picture onto precolonial religious formations, for religious boundaries did indeed exist, even if the grounds on which they stood were deliberately recalibrated.

## **Folk Religiosity**

Even so, the fertile body of traditions and customs that nourished the grassroots, and may be considered indigenous to the region, continue to hold sway. Some stand marginalized, while others have been assimilated into the dominant religious paradigms. The polarities of folk and orthodox religiosities continue to interact, influence, invade and reinforce each other, forming the broad contours of Punjab's religious cosmos. A brief look at modern phenomena like propitiating wrestlers and singers, offering toys at places of worship etc. points to the persistence of these enduring pious impulses.

Ganesha Das Vadhera's history of Punjab, titled *Char Bagh-i-Punjab*, was written in 1849. Mir notes that as much as a third of the descriptions is devoted to recounting *qisse*, or epic romances. This situates the *qissa* at the heart of Punjabi self-identity and, indeed, religiosity. A close reading of these *qisse* reveals a wealth of spiritual and religious concepts. In the tale of Hir and Ranjha, for example, the *panj pir* or five Sufi saints of Punjab, as well as the Nath Yogi Balnath, play a pivotal role in the narrative (and metanarrative), which advocates a mystical, devotional idea of religiosity over models rooted in praxis, ritual purity or hierarchies. Versions of Hir-Ranjha as well as Mirza-Sahiban are rife with allusions, references, identifications and doublings with mythological and religious



figures like Krishna, Radha, Sita, the battle of Karbala, etc., creating an enchanted cosmos within which history and mythology, the sacred and the profane, the divine and the mundane exist in a porous, continuous domain.

In his study of folk religion in Punjab, Bhatti relies on the concept of anti-structure, which is the state of *communitas* and liminality that stands outside the structured hierarchy and order of society. This ritual alterity, ‘ambiguous [. . .] neither here nor there,’ provides the space for the fluid and heterogeneous registers of folk religiosity to function. Oberoi further contrasts ‘scriptural religion’s focus on ontological analyses with popular religion’s emphasis on “pragmatic results [. . .] seeks to manipulate reality to the advantage of its constituents.”

Folk practices and rituals are succinctly defined as “intentional action directed at the super-mundane world.” Within this enchanted cosmology, gods, deities, spirits and powers occupy porous realms of the heavens, the mundane and the underground. Within this cosmos, one’s ancestors too are objects of reverence and propitiation.

The deity Gugga Pir, for example, is associated with the chthonic underworld and serpents. As such, he embodies elements of anti-structure liminality, and forms a charismatic deity for the Chuhra community. Similarly, the practices based around Sitala Devi and Sakhi Sarwar function within a general enchanted economy of propitiatory and munificent rituals, inhabiting what Bhatti describes as the multivocal, ambiguous, and ambivalence of liminality and anti-structure.

### **The Charismatic Divine Intermediary**

In a recent interview, the popular *pahalwan* Jassa Patti made an insightful observation: wrestlers have traditionally been regarded as ‘spiritual conduits.’ This stems from the similarities between the lives of *pahalwans* and ascetics, in terms of simple living, celibacy, as well as single-minded devotion to one’s discipline. This practice, Patti explained, stems from the *pahalwan*’s association with the ascetic in the popular imagination; this vests in his person the same powers as are expected

of *asadhu*, *jogi* or *fakir*. He adds that couple who have trouble conceiving visit wrestlers and ask for *ardas* (formal supplication).

This presents a contemporary facet of the ‘charismatic divine intermediary,’ an archetypal figure of piety in Punjab, as it is in many other South Asian cultures. *Sants*, *pirs*, *babas*, *jogis*, healers, martyrs, ascetics, heroic ancestors, *gurus*, *sheikhs*, *fakirs* are familiar figures of veneration and propitiation; popular traditions also encompass more atypical ones like wrestlers, singers, warriors, rebels, and even protagonists of epic romances like Hir-Ranjha and Mirza-Sahiban. In fact, Hir and Ranjha’s tomb in Jhang, Pakistan, is a major site of popular worship. Similarly, the Dera Baba Vadbhag Singh in Mairi, known for ecstatic performances of exorcisms and occult practices, was founded by Sodhi Vadbhag Singh, an eighteenth-century descendant of Guru Hargobind and custodian of Kartarpur. Today, he is popularly revered as a curative saint, present at the *dera* in spirit.

Louis Fenech has commented that this practice is vested in the logic of an enchanted universe, where ‘malevolent and benign spirits of Punjabi folklore [. . .] intercede with the divine on behalf of the worshipper.’; these divine intermediaries form human nodes in these economies of spiritual transaction. This folk pantheon can be termed a dynamic living tradition, assimilating singular actors sprung by the vicissitudes of history.

Here it would be prudent to bring up the Nikalseyni cult, which centered on the East India Company’s ruthless nineteenth century Anglo-Irish officer John Nicholson. Known for his ruthless and sadistic disposition (Dalrymple has called him ‘the great imperial psychopath’), as well as his military prowess, he was instrumental in the creation of the North-West Frontier province, as well as suppressing the 1857 Rebellion (in which he died). His fearsome reputation spawned the legend of ‘Nikal Seyn,’ demi-god and demon alike, doling out cruel justice. This cult had Muslim, Hindu and Sikh followers. The last Nikalseyni died in 2004 in Abbottabad, Pakistan. The reverence towards strongmen, martyrs, rebels and even tyrants in Punjabi folklore provides an explanation for this curious cult, and places Nikal Seyn next to folk heroes (and brutes) such as Dulla Bhatti, Paolo Avitabile (‘Abu Tabela’), etc.

A more recent example that caught my attention was the death of the pop singer Sidhu Moosewala. Wildly popular among Punjabi youth (indeed, youth across India), his funeral saw many fans prostrating and bowing before his funeral pyre, hands clasped in prayer. A shrine has been erected to mark the spot, and is thronged with visitors (one might even say pilgrims). The salient point here is the potential consecration in real-time of a 'secular' figure into the folk pantheon.

This is, of course, not uncommon, but arguably natural to the religious impulse. On the way to the goddess Naina Devi's temple in Bilaspur, one comes across a small shrine built for Jeona Maurh, who was a famed dacoit and colonial-era rebel, a champion of the oppressed, immortalized in folk songs and *qissas*. We may also recall the tombs of Hir-Ranjha and Mirza-Sahiban. Folklore and popular devotion invest the extraordinary lives of these charismatic divine intermediaries with singular spiritual and affective resonance: it is but natural to believe such exalted spirits may intercede with God (or gods) on the devotee's behalf. There is a natural impulse towards according divine stature to such figures; the pantheon assimilates each such figure history sends its way.

Lest we relegate the charismatic divine intermediary entirely to the realm of the folk and the popular, I would like to evoke the Sikh Gurus as 'orthodox' candidates for this same phenomenon. The Gurus were, after all, also charismatic religious figures renowned for their wisdom and spiritual prowess; tales of their magical powers continue to color the piety of devotees across the divisions of confessional identities. Devotion to Guru Nanak extends across religious identity, encompassing 'shared notions of pious behaviour.' As such, the prominent cults of personality around Gurus like Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh can be seen as manifestation of this tendency in 'high religions.' Fenech astutely terms Baba Deep Singh, an eighteenth-century Sikh scholar and martyr, the closest thing to a 'patron saint' for the Nihang Sikhs sect.

Like the Sikh Gurus, charismatic Sufi saints like Sheikh Farid Ganjshakar were central nodes in the religious landscape of medieval Punjab,

functioning as the binding devotional site for rural Muslims; many pastoral clans like the Jats sought to patronize them and assimilate into these networks of piety, thus legitimizing their own social stature. The *urs* of Jhulelal Shahbaaz Qalandar in Sindh attracts devotees, ascetics and mystics from across religious denominations, be it *yogis*, *fakirs*, Nanakpanthis. Today, *deras* led by charismatic leaders like the Radhasoamis, the Divya Jyoti Jagriti Sansthan, Dera Sacha Sauda, etc. continue to wield influence not only socially but also politically.

### **The Dialectic of Faith**

Two expressions of popular rituals being almost spontaneous birthed come to mind. There has been some controversy recently over the offering of miniature aeroplanes at the Shaheed Baba Nihal Singh gurdwara in Jalandhar. This is done to gain God's munificence for visa approvals and migrations. When devotees were found offering aeroplanes at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, an edict was passed by the SGPC discouraging such practices. Similarly, up until it was renovated in 2001, Gurdwara Dukh Niwaran in Patiala harbored a tree under which Guru Tegh Bahadur had once meditated and discoursed. Devotees seeking the birth of a child, or a cure from skin ailments, would routinely offer salt and brooms to a flame burning under the tree's shade, a practice unique to popular Sikhism in Punjab. The practice continues despite the tree's removal, and is also observed in other historic places of worship in the region.

Another case: there is a vault under the small historic gurdwara of Nanakpuri Sahib in Nanded, which houses a pair of wooden sandals said to belong to the first Sikh Guru Nanak. *Ardas* written by devotees fills the walls of this vault, moved by the belief that the Guru's presence grants their wishes special benediction.

Although such practices would scarcely find any approval from any orthodox perspective, and indeed are often met with censure and disapproval, they nevertheless continue to function as vehicles for the devotees' faith. This dialectic, the tension between these polarities, drives the movement of piety and faith through time.

## Conclusion

This ties in with the beginning of the paper, where we sought to problematize the notion of folk/popular and orthodox/high religion as dichotomies. Rather than valved off fields antithetical to each other, the two form a continuum, each carrying the trace of the other. So-called folk practices continue to operate despite the discursive architectures put into place in the colonial era. While the term ‘natural religion’ carries its own set of connotations, it is a reliable shorthand to convey the longevity and endurance of these practices, despite successive cycles of ideological excision and purging. The interplay of folk and orthodox religion, marked by successive borrowings, assimilations, elisions, intrusions and synthesis, continues to propel the faith of people through time. The polarities (or rather, continuum) of folk and orthodox religiosities continue to interact, influence, invade and reinforce each other, forming the broad contours of Punjab’s religious cosmos.

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## A Cinematic View of Kantara: An Indigenous Tale

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*Harmeet Kour and Seema Bhupendra*

India's sacred heartland glimmers with series of Adivasis, its indigenous people. Preserved in the reason of time, their tradition and mythology have remained in our subconscious like primordial memories (Singh). The history of Indian cinema has less frequently depicted native cultures, only a small number of movies explicitly identify indigenous material. Films such as *Newton*, a critical satire about an electoral employee (2017), *Testimony of Anna*, atrocities of Society upon a Woman (2020), *JaiBhim*, about the Justice of poor Adivasi man (2021), *Kantara*, a representation of cultural ceremonies with various themes (2022), *Dhabari Kuruvi*, a girl's convention to refuse the rules of society (2022) are top five films about Adivasi culture, custom and rituals over the past five years.

The actor, director, and writer of *Kantara* –Rishab Shetty strongly believes in his theory that cinema will be more universal if its content is regional and trust is reposed in regionalism (Khanjane). Rishab Shetty, the filmmaker, has succeeded in his goal of bringing important concerns affecting the indigenous people to light as opposed to the elite class.

*Kantara* in the Kannada language is 'mysterious forest', another interpretation of it is '*mayavijungle*', a location where people can unite with divine forces and nature. The title is quite pertinent as the woodland is the focal point of the entire narrative. *Kantara* narrates the tale of the struggles between the elite class and forest residents, man and environment, and between urban and rural using cultural, traditional, and ritualistic elements of the coastal area. It could be referred to as "willing suspension of disbelief", somewhere explained by Coleridge.

Kantara is an Indigenous tale with ubiquitous bystander that illustrates how unique the indigenous culture is. Infact, here is an opinion about how Indian cinema has been losing touch with its roots and not finding original stories from this heartland which is very diverse and vast, a treasure trove of stories (Chalapathi 2). The Kantara episode heavily incorporates native culture and native mysteries and themes of tribalism, folklore, eco-feminism, and other similar concepts as feudalism and corruption. It is a cohesive synthesis of consumerist politics' schematics and consciousness although adhering to indigenous principles.

Globalization has not considerably added to the flow of indigenous narratives into the popular media and its various manifestations like news and magazine articles, literary texts, radio broadcasts, web series, television series, and more. The popular media space became accessible to indigenous people only after they were identified as scheduled tribes. (Basu and Tripathi 2)

A symbol of indigenous culture is presented by Kantara that has carried previously unnoticed efforts of promoting native culture including unknown tales about regional traditions to a global audience. The writer and director Rishab Shetty Prevails in the quest to bring substantial issues affecting the tribal people to the spotlight. The movie makes an effort to grab the audience's interest by introducing folklore and the initial stages where the local deities called 'Daiva' according to tradition is said to live in the mystical Forest of the title who protects and provides for the inhabitants and local populace. A king once made an agreement with the locals to give them half of the forest area where he arrived in pursuit of tranquility and quiet, considering that 'Daiva' can grant him serenity. However, the king's heir attempts to violate his promises further disrespecting the local deities and their customs. Next, the action that the forest inhabitants take in response forms the center of the entire plot.

Rishab Shetty, who self-identifies as a member of the group, was the one who had the idea for Kantara, employed incredibly down-to-earth narration and symbolism. Anupama Chopra talks about his roots in the town where the movie is set, his ancestry, and how the whole thing is a



reflection of his pride in his heritage and his connection to the place. The entire crew, he continued, stayed in the area for more than a few months while filming the movie. When questioned about the work's relevance, Shetty responded, "**The more local, the more global**" (Film Companion).

A wonderful fusion of man and nature is seen with optimism and gratitude for supernatural events when Shiva acquires the stripe between the people and the king's lineage. Early in the movie while strolling, his parentstell -

'But we are here to serve Panjurli. Where can we go forsaking our Gods? Son, you know where we humans go wrong? We assume that we own everything around us. But we forget the true owner of it all. Once we learn the ultimate truth we can live peacefully' (Basu and Tripathi 8).

The narrative starts in 1847 when a monarch travels to the local deity/Demi-God Panjurli in pursuit of peace on being asked for something in exchange he provides his land as an investment, with the assurance that the land will never be demanded by his fore fathers in return. If they do, they would be subjected to the curse of *Gulinga Daiva* with distraught results. As the years went by, descendents began to make attempts to reclaim the territory dismissed by Bhoota Kola performer being Daiva Panjurli's mouthpiece. Then came the successor's inapplicable death persuaded by the disappearance of the Bhoota Kola performer in 1970 who disappeared after running into the forest. Next, the life of Shiva, son of a kola performer, serves as the basis of the entire plot who was a witness to all the occurrences with some additional subplots. Shiva's clashes with the current king's successor, devotion to the people, the contribution of his cousin Guruva, and his quest for reconciliation through the ritual of the Bhootakola are described in the remaining portion of the movie with the interference of government forest officer's orders to preserve the forest in 1990.

"Kantara is raw, Kantara is wild, Kantara is unapologetically local" (Bhattacharjee and Chakraborty). Symbols played a crucial role to

create the environment of tribalism. The first and most important is 'Bhootakola', an emblem of Demi-God Panjurli, who is believed to embrace the kola performer while doing the performance. The entire idea is centered on the ritual that is considered to have brought about redemption for both Shiva and his father. The second, screaming is ideally considered the presence of Daiva Panjurli. Daiva demanded the monarch to grant tribal people, access to the land up to the edge of his screams. Following this, the rest of the kola performances showcase a series of yelps from the performer. In the climax sequence where the spirit of Gulinga Daiva comes to life to avenge the death of the tribal people, a series of different yelps surface. Every Yelp reflects different emotions' (Basu and Tripathi 8). Third, nightmares/visions of Shiva stimulate him more and more to take action. His childhood memories of his father's vanishing into the forest, his brother's death cry, a boar harming him, and eventually, a vision of the light in the forest all played significant roles. Fourth, the forest serves as a character and a witness to the entire narrative. The fifth, Kambala, a buffalo race performed annually in particular Tulu Nadu region of Karnataka most specifically performed by farmers of coastal areas. Others are Yakshana (folk dance), Paddana (Tulu folk song), Devardhane (worship of guardian spirits), Nagardhane (snake worship), and so on. . . . The 1990s era is vividly portrayed by the widespread use of magazines and telephones for updates and data.

"The movie presents the account of human-to-human conflict at a greater extent. The film subtly offers an insight into the fabric of caste politics in these tribes. The binaries of the Brahminic and the non-Brahminic, the upper and the lower castes, become tangible" (Basu and Tripathi 2022). Issues between the top and poor classes, the authorities and indigenous people are put forward in Kantara. In contrast to the elites, the Adivasi frequently eat while seated on the ground. Another is following his visit with Shiva, the King inheritor Devender Suttooru (Achyuth Kumar) washes his hands since he thinks Shiva an inferior being. King's attempts to seize the wood properties allotted to locals is a major concern.

Forest residents and government forest authorities are engaged in an additional battle over forest rights. The disputes between Shiva and Muralidhar, the forest officer, are another instance. As being an elite class, he has a wary eye towards the villagers and does not believe in local superstitious tales.

Shiva – How dare you speak wrong about our Daiva? Do you know the story of our God? Should I narrate the story to you?

Muralidhar – Somebody narrated it to your father, and he narrated it to you. You have been roaming like a vagabond narrating this story to everyone. (Shetty)

But in the final chapter, everyone joins forces to combat the hierarchy's conspiracy.

Centricity of toxic masculinity and the role of women is another thing to consider. *Kantara* is incredibly inspirational in many spheres with the exception of the role of women. Compared to male characters, women's screen time is severely limited even for the heroine. The way Shiva is portrayed is a clear exaltation of all the traits that the wider Indian psyche considered to be masculine such as incapable to tolerate wrongdoing, a compassionate and courageous fighter, protector of the weak, and eager to defend the vulnerable, his activities are the main focus of the plot. His arrival at Kambala, a buffalo ride, should be noted as well as his exact retribution for the elimination of his father. He is portrayed as stereotypically muscular such as being obstinate, uncaring, and contemptuous of even his heroine. But despite everything, the girl is still completely devoted to him and always obeys his orders. We often don't see a girl's arrival as riding on buffalo which is a symbol of maleness.

It is impossible to ignore the overt misogyny and patriarchal undertones in the film. The most offensive action in the film as well as a major disrespect to the female character, including pinching the heroine on her waist, hitting her, and tugging her hair in order to gain attention and to present affection. Despite all these bizarre actions, he is still regarded as the manly one.

However, there are very few women who are actively involved. Leela (Sapthami Gowda), the alleged heroine, is viewed from a masculine point of view or a victim of the male gaze. Her only behavior is to follow the protagonist and hover around him being a faithful partner despite having few dialogue scenes. When we see Leela working as a forest ranger and riding a bike, there are some illusions of women's emancipation. However, the ride only took place once while the hero was in custody, typically she took a seat behind him. On the other side, she consistently loiters around Shiva rather than carrying out her role as a forest guard, when Muralidhar reprimands her for serving Shiva while receiving government pay for doing so. Another woman character is Kamala (Manasi Sudhir), Shiva's mother, portrayed as someone with little acumen and taken significantly as a frustrated irritable elderly woman. Appears as a subservient woman.

However, Rishab Shetty later said that he posed Shiva in this way to demonstrate his carefree and light-hearted attitude towards life, which is completely at odds with Bhoota kola or traditional belief. (Film companion).

Ultimately, One of the strongest indigenous blockbusters of the year Kantara is, which has made its way to the top. Films strike to reveal localized stories to global view ship that are obscure or undiscovered to other Civilizations. Since artistic qualities can convey more than a simple storyline, it is accurate in portraying tribal or indigenous life which might be taken up as a partially appreciated mirror contemplation of a feudal community that has not been previously exposed. Kantara is unmistakably populist and incredibly artistic. The role of Shiva played by Rishab Shetty, the writer and director, with horrific and mesmerizing plot elements and the captivating masculinity of Shiva recreated with his lived experiences. The film does a good job exploring local religion and superstitions regarding *Daiva Panjurli*, the pet boar of Goddess Parvati, killed by lord Shiva and again taken back to life was made the protector of people on earth. Secondly, *Gulinga Daiva*, the Kshtherapala of that particular reign of Tulu Nadu, Thirdly, the idea of execution of *Bhoota Kola* is seamless. Poor and poorly-treated depiction of women may be

regarded as a detriment and its focus on men undermines it and makes unsatisfying. But ultimately, *Kantara*, a regional story, touches on important cultural political, and economic issues and is a success on the big screen. The aspect of the native way of life is effectively depicted in the film.

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## Indigenous Philosophy and Literature

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*Jitendra Singh Meena and Anshu Rajpurohit*

There is developing interest in Indigenous philosophy in contemporary scholarly philosophy, as an approach to drawing in with both the verifiable and present-day considered Indigenous people groups all over the planet. Indigenous philosophy extensively alludes to the thoughts of Indigenous people groups relating to the idea of the world, human life, morals, optimal social and political designs, and different subjects additionally viewed as by customary scholarly philosophy. In contrast to the ways of thinking of antiquated Greece, India, and China, Indigenous methods of reasoning didn't spread across huge regional realms or component focuses of formal discovering that reported and created philosophical thoughts north of hundreds or millennia. The investigation of Indigenous ways of thinking, or ethnophilosophy, frequently should depend on unexpected strategies in comparison to commonplace scholarly philosophy. Indigenous philosophy isn't generally kept in texts that can be perused and dissected. All things being equal, those trying to comprehend Indigenous philosophical reasoning should take part in the sort of exploration frequently utilized in ethnographic and humanistic review, including recognizing people who hold and send social information about philosophical idea and recording meetings and discussions with them. The vast majority of the philosophy of Indigenous people groups has been gone down through oral practices, similarly that ancient idea was communicated.

Indigenous philosophy and literature are important resources for Indigenous peoples. They provide a way to maintain their cultural identities and to pass on their knowledge and wisdom to future generations. They are also important for non-Indigenous peoples, as they can help us to understand Indigenous cultures and perspectives.

Lately, there has been a developing interest in Indigenous philosophy and literature. This is related to some degree to the decolonization developments that are occurring all over the planet. Indigenous people groups are attesting their right to self-assurance, and they are involving philosophy and literature as devices for social renewal and political strengthening.

The investigation of Indigenous philosophy and literature can assist us with better comprehending the world we live in. It can show us the significance of variety, regard, and manageability. It can likewise assist us with building an all the more and fair society for all individuals.

Indigenous philosophy is much of the time in light of a profound association with the land. Indigenous people groups consider themselves to be essential for nature, not independent from it. They accept that all creatures are interconnected and that we have an obligation to really focus on the Earth. This association with the land is reflected in Indigenous literature, which frequently includes anecdotes about creatures, plants, and the regular world.

Indigenous philosophy likewise accentuates the significance of the local area. Indigenous people groups accept that we are undeniably associated with one another, and that we have an obligation to help each other. This feeling of local area is likewise reflected in Indigenous literature, which frequently includes tales about the significance of family, companions, and neighbors.

Indigenous philosophy is a rich and complex field that is as yet being investigated. It offers us a remarkable point of view on the world and our place in it. Indigenous literature is a significant asset for finding out about Indigenous societies and customs. It is likewise a wellspring of motivation and knowledge.

Indigenous literature is rich and various, mirroring a wide range of societies and customs of Indigenous people groups. Probably the most well-known topics in Indigenous literature incorporate the significance of family and local area, the connection among people and the land, and the otherworldly element of life. Indigenous literature is many times



recounted as stories, which are an approach to passing on information and intelligence starting with one age then onto the next.

Indigenous literature is a tremendous and different field, enveloping the oral practices, composed works, and visual craft of the Indigenous people groups of the world. It is a rich and complex group of work that mirrors the interesting societies, chronicles, and encounters of these networks.

The historical backdrop of Indigenous literature can be followed back to the earliest human social orders. Oral customs, like stories, tunes, and sonnets, have been passed down from one age to another for millennia. These practices assume a significant part in safeguarding and sending Indigenous information and culture.

In the Americas, Indigenous literatures have been formed by the landmass' different societies and dialects. The Mayans, Aztecs, and Incas all had rich oral customs that were kept in hieroglyphics and pictographs. These practices keep on being a significant piece of Maya, Aztec, and Inca culture today.

After the appearance of Europeans in the Americas, Indigenous people groups had to adjust to better approaches for life. Numerous Indigenous dialects were lost, and customary practices were smothered. Notwithstanding, Indigenous people groups proceeded to make and share their accounts, tunes, and sonnets.

In the nineteenth and twentieth hundreds of years, various Indigenous scholars started to distribute their work in English. These journalists, like E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake) and N. Scott Momaday, assisted with carrying Indigenous literature to a more extensive crowd.

## **Indigenous Philosophy and Literature**

In the mid-20th century, another age of Indigenous journalists arose. These journalists were more exploratory in their composition, and they investigated a more extensive scope of themes, including Indigenous otherworldliness, character, and history. During the 1970s and 1980s, there was a resurgence of interest in Indigenous literature, and many new works were distributed.

The earliest philosophical texts in India comprise the Vedic practice. The four Vedas are the most seasoned of the Hindu sacred writings. They are the Rigveda, the Samaveda, the Yajurveda, and the Atharvaveda. The four Vedas were made somewhere in the range of 1500 and 900 BCE by the Indo-Aryan clans that had gotten comfortable northern India. The Vedas are likewise called Shruti, and that signifies “hearing” in Sanskrit. This is on the grounds that for many years, the Vedas were recounted orally. Hindus accept that the Vedas were supernaturally propelled; clerics were orally sending the heavenly word through the ages.

The Rigveda is the most old of the four Vedic texts. The text is an assortment of the “family books” of 10 groups, every one of which were hesitant to leave behind their mysterious familial information. Notwithstanding, when the Kuru rulers brought together these tribes, they coordinated and systematized this information around 1200 BCE. The Brahmanic, or clerical, culture emerged under the Kuru line (Witzel 1997) and created the three leftover Vedas. The Samaveda contains a significant number of the Rigveda psalms however credits to those songs tunes so they can be recited. The Yajurveda contains songs that go with rituals of recuperating and different kinds of customs. These two texts focus light on the historical backdrop of Indo-Aryans during the Vedic time frame, the divinities they loved, and their thoughts regarding the idea of the world, its creation, and people. The Atharvaveda integrates ceremonies that uncover the day to day traditions and convictions of individuals, including their customs encompassing birth and passing. This text additionally contains philosophical hypothesis about the motivation behind the ceremonies

Indigenous philosophy is the philosophical considered Indigenous people groups all over the planet. It is different and envelops many thoughts, however it is much of the time described by a profound association with the land, a regard for nature, and a faith in the interconnectedness, everything being equal.

There are many difficulties in examining and grasping Indigenous philosophy. One test is that it is many times oral practice, and that implies

that it has been done through narrating and not through composed texts. This makes it hard to access and study.

Another test is that Indigenous philosophy has frequently been minimized or disregarded by Western thinkers. This is on the grounds that it doesn't fit conveniently into the Western philosophical practice, which depends on the possibility of independence and the partition of psyche and body.

Indigenous philosophy is additionally tested by the tradition of imperialism. Numerous Indigenous people groups have been dislodged from their properties and societies, and their dialects and customs have been stifled. This makes it challenging to keep up with and communicate Indigenous philosophical ideas.

**Here are a few explicit difficulties to Indigenous philosophy:**

**Oral custom:** As referenced prior, quite a bit of Indigenous philosophy is gone down through oral practice. This makes it hard to access and study, as not recorded in a way can be effectively protected and shared.

**Minimization:** Indigenous philosophy has frequently been underestimated or overlooked by Western logicians. This is on the grounds that it doesn't fit conveniently into the Western philosophical custom, which depends on the possibility of independence and the partition of brain and body.

**Tradition of expansionism:** The tradition of imperialism has likewise presented difficulties to Indigenous philosophy. Numerous Indigenous people groups have been dislodged from their properties and societies, and their dialects and customs have been stifled. This makes it hard to keep up with and send Indigenous philosophical ideas.

**Non Appearance of scholastic grant:** There is an absence of scholastic grant on Indigenous philosophy. This is expected to some extent to the minimization of Indigenous philosophy by Western savants, as well as the way that Indigenous philosophy is much of the time oral practice and not done on paper.

**Hardships in interpretation:** There are likewise challenges in making an interpretation of Indigenous philosophical ideas into Western dialects.

This is on the grounds that Indigenous dialects frequently have various approaches to conceptualizing the world than Western dialects.

Regardless of these difficulties, Indigenous philosophy is progressively being perceived as a significant and significant practice of thought. It can possibly offer new experiences into many issues, including environmentalism, supportability, and common liberties.

Indigenous literature faces various difficulties. One test is the absence of portrayal in standard distributing. Indigenous authors are many times minimized and their work isn't offered similar degree of consideration as crafted by non-Indigenous journalists. Another test is the eradication of Indigenous societies and chronicles. Indigenous literature frequently challenges the predominant account of imperialism and Eurocentrism. This can be a troublesome and awkward interaction for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perusers.

Regardless of these difficulties, Indigenous literature is flourishing. A developing group of Indigenous literature is being distributed and perused all over the planet. Indigenous journalists are utilizing their voices to recount their own accounts and to recover their societies and narratives. Indigenous literature is a significant piece of the worldwide artistic scene and it is fundamental for the continuous course of decolonization.

**Here are a few explicit difficulties that Indigenous literature faces:**

**Frontier heritage:** Indigenous literature is in many cases written in the shadow of imperialism. The provincial heritage significantly affects Indigenous societies and dialects, and this is reflected in Indigenous literature. Numerous Indigenous essayists are attempting to recover their societies and dialects through their composition.

**Portrayal:** Indigenous scholars are frequently underrepresented in standard distributing. This is because of various variables, including prejudice, separation, and absence of admittance to distributing assets. Accordingly, Indigenous literature is in many cases not quite as apparent as crafted by non-Indigenous scholars.

**Deletion:** Indigenous societies and narratives have been eradicated or minimized by expansionism. This deletion is reflected in the manner that Indigenous literature is frequently educated and considered. Indigenous literature is much of the time excluded from the artistic standard, and when it is incorporated, it is frequently treated as fascinating or underestimated.

**Crowd:** Indigenous literature is frequently composed for an Indigenous crowd. This can make it challenging for non-Indigenous perusers to get to and comprehend. Indigenous scholars are attempting to track down ways of making their work more available to non-Indigenous perusers, while as yet staying consistent with their Indigenous societies and viewpoints.

Regardless of these difficulties, Indigenous literature is an imperative and developing field. Indigenous essayists are utilizing their voices to recount their own accounts and to recover their societies and chronicles. Indigenous literature is a significant piece of the worldwide abstract scene and it is crucial for the continuous course of decolonization.

Indigenous authors are utilizing their work to challenge generalizations, recover their societies, and recount their own accounts. Their work is crucial for figuring out the set of experiences and present-day real factors of Indigenous people groups.

### **Here are far to help Indigenous literature:**

Peruse Indigenous literature. There are numerous extraordinary Indigenous writers composing today. By perusing their work, you can find out about Indigenous societies and points of view.

Support Indigenous authors. Purchase books by Indigenous writers, and prescribe their work to your loved ones.

Advocate for Indigenous literature. Converse with your neighborhood library and bookshop about conveying more Indigenous books.

Engage in Indigenous scholarly networks. There are numerous associations that help Indigenous scholars and perusers. Engage in your nearby local area and assist with advancing Indigenous literature.

Indigenous literature is a significant piece of our common culture. By supporting Indigenous journalists, we can assist with guaranteeing that their voices are heard and their accounts are told.

**Here are a portion of the critical crossroads throughout the entire existence of Indigenous literature:**

**16th century:** The first European wayfarers show up in quite a while and start to record the oral customs of Indigenous people groups.

**18th century :** Indigenous people groups start to record their accounts in English.

**19th century:** George Copway, E. Pauline Johnson, and John Rollin Edge distribute their work, turning into the principal Indigenous scholars to acquire a critical crowd in the US and Canada.

**Mid-twentieth century:** another age of Indigenous scholars arises, including N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, and James Welch.

**1970s and 1980s:** There is a resurgence of interest in Indigenous literature, and many new works are distributed.

**1990s:** The Local American Literature Discussion is established, and the Relationship for the Investigation of Native American Literatures is laid out.

**2000s:** Indigenous literature keeps on flourishing, with new works being distributed in different types.

Later Hindu texts created during the Vedic and post-Vedic periods were incorporated into the four Vedas with the end goal that every Veda presently comprises of four segments: (1) the Samhitas, or mantras and blessings — the first songs of the Vedas; (2) the Aranyakas, or mandates about customs and penance; (3) the Brahmanas, or discourses on these ceremonies; and (4) the Upanishads, which comprises of two Indian stories as well as philosophical reflections.

The Upanishad legends incorporate the Bhagavad Gita (Tune of the Ruler), which is important for a significantly longer sonnet called the Mahabharata, and the Ramayana. The Mahabharata is an awe-inspiring portraying the clashes of the honorable place of Bharata, while the

Ramayana centers around the old lord Rama during his 14-year exile. There are 13 head Upanishads and in excess of 100 minor ones, created somewhere in the range of 800 and 200 BCE in a blend of composition and section. Upanishad gets from the Sanskrit words *upa* (close), *ni* (down), and *shad* (to sit), which comes from the way that these texts were educated to understudies who sat at their educators' feet. Also, the term means that these texts uncover obscure teachings about the real essence of reality past the domain of sense insight. The Upanishads turned into the philosophical center of Hinduism.

The Rigveda looks at the beginning of the universe and finds out if the divine beings made mankind or people made the divine beings — an inquiry that would later be presented by the Greek thinker Xenophanes. The greater part of the stanzas in the Rigveda are dedicated to supernatural hypothesis concerning cosmological speculations and the connection between the individual and the universe. The possibility that arises inside Hinduism is that the universe is recurrent in nature. The pattern of the seasons and the recurrent idea of other normal cycles are perceived to reflect the pattern of birth, passing, and resurrection among people and different creatures. Connected with this origination is the philosophical inquiry of how one stops this cycle. The Hindus recommend that the response lies in cleaning, with parsimonious ceremonies gave as means to accomplish independence from the pattern of rebirth.

One more area of likeness between the universe and mankind is that both are perceived to have a progressive construction. Hindu religious philosophy relegates an inflexible order to the universe, with the triple divinity, Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva, remaining over different divine beings. India initially fostered its various leveled rank framework during the Vedic time frame. Vedic ceremonies established station ordered progressions, the leftovers of which actually structure Indian culture today.

## **Discussion**

Indigenous literature is a diverse and vibrant field, and it is constantly evolving. It is an amazing asset for safeguarding Indigenous societies

and narratives, and it is assisting with molding how we might interpret the world.

**Here are probably the main topics in Indigenous literature:**

**Oral practice:** Numerous Indigenous societies have serious areas of strength for a custom, and this custom is in many cases reflected in Indigenous literature.

**Otherworldliness:** Indigenous otherworldliness is in many cases a significant subject in Indigenous literature, and investigating the connection among people and the normal world is frequently utilized.

**Character:** Indigenous personality is a complicated and diverse issue, and it is in many cases investigated in Indigenous literature.

**History:** Indigenous history is in many cases a wellspring of motivation for Indigenous scholars, and testing the predominant story of history is frequently utilized.

**Colonization:** The colonization of Indigenous people groups is a significant subject in Indigenous literature, and investigating the tradition of colonialism is frequently utilized.

**Strength:** Indigenous people groups have shown extraordinary versatility notwithstanding colonization, and this flexibility is in many cases celebrated in Indigenous literature.

Indigenous literature is an essential region of the planet scholarly ordinance, and it is assisting with forming how we might interpret Indigenous societies and encounters. It is an incredible asset for safeguarding Indigenous societies and chronicles, and it is assisting with making an additional fair and impartial world.

Indigenous philosophy has been molded by the encounters of colonization and persecution. Numerous Indigenous people groups have been compelled to leave their conventional convictions and practices. Notwithstanding, Indigenous philosophy is as yet perfectly healthy, and is being revived by Indigenous people groups all over the planet.



**Here are a few instances of Indigenous methods of reasoning:**

**Native philosophy in Australia:** Native philosophy depends on the conviction that everything is interconnected, and that people have an obligation to really focus on the land and every one of its animals.

**Maori philosophy in New Zealand:** Maori philosophy depends on the idea of wairua, or profound substance. It stresses the significance of connections, local area, and regard for the regular world.

**Local American philosophy:** Local American philosophy is assorted, mirroring the a wide range of societies and customs of Local American people groups. Notwithstanding, numerous Local American ways of thinking share a typical accentuation on the interconnectedness, everything being equal, and the significance of living as one with nature.

**African philosophy:** African philosophy is a different field, mirroring a wide range of societies and customs of Africa. Notwithstanding, numerous African methods of reasoning offer a typical accentuation on the significance of local area, the interconnectedness, everything being equal, and the significance of living together as one with nature.

**A portion of the critical topics in Indigenous philosophy include:**

**The interconnectedness, everything being equal:** Indigenous people groups frequently view the world as a trap of interconnected connections, in which everything is related.

**The significance of equilibrium and concordance:** Indigenous methods of reasoning frequently accentuate the significance of keeping up with equilibrium and agreement between people, different creatures, and the normal world.

The significance of regard for the normal world: Indigenous people groups frequently have a profound regard for the regular world, and consider it to be a wellspring of information and intelligence.

**The significance of local area:** Indigenous ways of thinking frequently underscore the significance of local area, and the interconnectedness of all individuals from the local area.

## Conclusion

Today, Indigenous literature is flourishing. There are a developing number of Indigenous essayists distributing their work in different kinds, including fiction, true to life, verse, and show. Indigenous literature is likewise being shown in schools and colleges, and there are various associations devoted to advancing and saving Indigenous literature. The historical backdrop of Indigenous literature is a long and complex one. It is an account of versatility, imagination, and endurance. Indigenous literature is a crucial region of the planet's scholarly legacy, and it proceeds to develop and develop today.

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## Examining Reminiscence in Bibhutibhushan Mukhopadhyay's *Aranyak-of the Forest*

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*Manoj Kumar*

Bibhutibhushan Mukhopadhyay (1894-1950) is a prominent figure in Bengali literature, known for his profound narratives that often intertwine human life with nature. *Aranyak* stands out as one of his most significant works, offering a rich tapestry of memories and reflections set against the backdrop of the Indian forest. This novel is not just a story but a meditation on the past, identity, and the environment. This paper aims to dissect the theme of reminiscence in *Aranyak* exploring how Mukhopadhyay's use of memory and reflection contributes to the novel's depth and resonance.

### **Literary Context**

#### **Bibhutibhushan Mukhopadhyay's Place in Bengali Literature**

Madhav has mentioned "Bibhutibhushan Mukhopadhyay is often overshadowed by his contemporary, Bibhutibhushan Mukhopadhyay, the author of *Pather Panchali*." (6) However, Mukhopadhyay's works are equally significant in their portrayal of rural Bengal and the intricate relationship between humans and nature. His narratives often reflect a deep nostalgia and a longing for a simpler, more harmonious existence.

### **Overview of *Aranyak***

*Aranyak* is a semi-autobiographical novel that draws heavily from Mukhopadhyay's experiences as a forest ranger in the Bihar forests during the 1930s. The protagonist, Satyacharan, embarks on a journey

through the forest, encountering various characters and reflecting on the impact of modernization and deforestation on the natural world.

Literature has often explored the theme of damage done to the natural environment, serving as a powerful medium for raising awareness about environmental issues and their consequences. Through various forms of literary works such as novels, poetry, essays, and more, writers have highlighted the negative impact of human activities on the environment. This paper examines Bibhutibhushan Mukhopadhyay's *Aranyak*, a significant work in Bengali literature that delves into the intensive damage done to the natural environment.

*Aranyak* tells the story of Satyacharan, an educated man who becomes a forest officer in the remote regions of India. The novel explores the clash between civilization and the untamed wilderness, as well as the challenges faced by those living in the forest. It reflects Bibhutibhushan Mukhopadhyay's deep love for nature and his ability to portray the beauty and complexity of rural life. The narrative brings up pressing questions about the destruction of ecosystems, deforestation, pollution, and other forms of environmental degradation caused by human activities. Through vivid descriptions and poignant storytelling, the novelist describes the loss of biodiversity, the depletion of natural resources, and the resulting harm to the planet.

In *Aranyak*, Mukhopadhyay not only paints a vivid picture of the forest and its inhabitants but also critiques the relentless pursuit of development that often comes at the expense of nature. Satyacharan's journey into the heart of the forest symbolizes a deeper exploration of the human impact on the environment. As he navigates his new role, he witnesses first-hand the consequences of deforestation and the exploitation of natural resources. Mukhopadhyay's portrayal of the forest is both a tribute to its beauty and a lament for its degradation, urging readers to consider the long-term effects of their actions on the natural world.

Through *Aranyak*, Mukhopadhyay makes a compelling case for the preservation of nature. His detailed narrative underscores the importance of maintaining the delicate balance between human progress and

environmental sustainability. Later, Madhav mentions that “The novel serves as a poignant reminder of the need to protect our natural heritage and to be mindful of the damage we inflict upon it”.(2) As literature continues to shed light on environmental issues, works like *Aranyak* remain vital in fostering a deeper understanding of the relationship between humanity and the natural world.

## Reminiscence in *Aranyak*

**Personal Experiences and Memory:** Mukhopadhyay’s own experiences in the forests of Bihar are vividly brought to life in *Aranyak*. His detailed descriptions of the flora and fauna, the sounds of the forest, and the lives of the indigenous people are imbued with a sense of nostalgia. This personal connection to the forest allows Mukhopadhyay to craft a narrative that is both intimate and universal, resonating with readers on a deeply emotional level.

**Cultural and Historical Reflections:** The novel also serves as a reflection on the cultural and historical changes occurring in India during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through Satyacharan’s eyes, we witness the encroachment of modernity on traditional ways of life. Mukhopadhyay uses reminiscence as a means to critique this transformation, lamenting the loss of a harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

**Philosophical and Existential Meditations:** *Aranyak* is rich with philosophical musings on the nature of existence, the passage of time, and the impermanence of life. Mukhopadhyay’s reflections on the forest become a metaphor for the human condition, with reminiscence serving as a bridge between the past and the present. These meditations are not just personal but also universal, inviting readers to ponder their own connections to nature and memory.

## The Protagonist’s Journey

**Satyacharan’s Relationship with the Forest:** Satyacharan’s journey through the forest is both a physical and a spiritual odyssey. As he delves deeper into the wilderness, he becomes more attuned to the rhythms of nature and the lives of its inhabitants. His reminiscences

reveal a growing awareness of the interconnectedness of all life and a profound sense of loss as the forest is slowly destroyed.

## Encounters with Characters

The various characters Satyacharan meets in the forest each contribute to his understanding of the past and the present. From the indigenous people who live in harmony with nature to the settlers who seek to exploit it, these encounters highlight the diverse ways in which humans interact with their environment. Through reminiscence, Satyacharan gains insights into the complexity of these relationships and the consequences of human actions.

## Nature as a Character

**The Forest as a Living Entity:** In *Aranyak*, the forest is more than just a setting; it is a living entity with its own personality and spirit. Mukhopadhyay's detailed descriptions bring the forest to life, making it a central character in the narrative. Through Satyacharan's reminiscences, we come to see the forest as a repository of memories, a witness to the passage of time, and a symbol of resilience and fragility.

**Symbolism and Imagery:** Mukhopadhyay employs rich symbolism and imagery to convey the forest's significance. The forest is depicted as a place of beauty and mystery, but also of danger and decay. Through vivid imagery, Mukhopadhyay captures the duality of nature, reflecting the complexity of human emotions and experiences.

## Thematic Analysis

**Nostalgia and Longing :** Nostalgia is a pervasive theme in *Aranyak* with Satyacharan's reminiscences often tinged with a sense of longing for a lost past. This longing is not just for the physical landscape of the forest, but also for a way of life that is disappearing. Mukhopadhyay's portrayal of nostalgia is deeply intertwined with his environmental consciousness, as he mourns the degradation of the natural world.

**Identity and Self-Discovery:** Satyacharan's journey through the forest is also a journey of self-discovery. Through his reminiscences, he comes

to understand his own identity and his place in the world. The forest serves as a mirror, reflecting his innermost thoughts and feelings. Mukhopadhyay uses reminiscence as a tool for exploring the protagonist's psyche, revealing the complexities of human nature.

**Environmental Awareness:** Mukhopadhyay's depiction of the forest and its destruction serves as a poignant commentary on environmental issues. Through Satyacharan's reflections, he highlights the consequences of deforestation and the loss of biodiversity. Reminiscence becomes a means of raising awareness about the importance of preserving the natural world for future generations.

## Conclusion

*Aranyak* is a powerful exploration of memory, identity, and nature. Bibhutibhushan Mukhopadhyay's use of reminiscence adds depth and richness to the narrative, allowing readers to engage with the past in a meaningful way. Through Satyacharan's journey, we gain insights into the complexities of human relationships with the environment and the profound impact of memory on our understanding of the world. Mukhopadhyay's novel remains a timeless reflection on the beauty and fragility of nature, urging us to cherish and protect the world around us.

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## Indigeneity, Resistance and Acculturation: Naga Tribe in Transition

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*Pooja Joshi*

Easterine Kire, also known as Easterine Iralu, the first Naga novelist in English, is one of the prominent voices from the northeast region. She represents the colonial history and culture of the Indigenous people of Nagaland in her first novel *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*, published as *Naga Village Remembered: A Novel* in 2003. In this novel, Kire weaves a narrative that highlights the impact of colonialism on the Naga people, particularly focusing on the Battle of Khonoma. The battle, which took place in 1879, was a significant conflict between the British colonial forces and the Khonoma village, known for its fierce resistance. Kire's storytelling delves into the cultural and social fabric of the Angami Naga community during this turbulent period, blending historical events with rich cultural narratives. In the novel, Kire covers the history of the Naga people from 1832 to 1900 and describes how colonial encroachment disrupts the connection of the Angami Naga people with their territory. Through this historical novel, Kire represents the marginalized history of the people of Nagaland and their Indigenous cultural identity to global readers.

History, whether documented through writing or passed down orally, serves as a lens through which communities view their past and understand their present position in relation to historical change. Indigenous peoples possess a unique cultural history that plays a pivotal role in defining their identity. This history encompasses their traditions, social structures, and ways of life that predate colonial influences. JRM Cobo in this context has remarked:

The term Indigenous itself refers to the people who have historical connection with their pre-colonial land and society. They see

themselves as distinct from other sectors of societies that today rule those areas. They are currently non-dominant sectors of society, but they are committed to preserving, developing, and transmitting to future generations their ancestral regions and ethnic identities as the foundation of their continuous existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural traditions.

The quote from Cobo succinctly encapsulates the essence of Indigenous identity as rooted in historical connections and a commitment to cultural preservation, highlighting the resilience and agency of Indigenous communities in maintaining their distinctiveness in the face of external pressures.

The Naga people of Northeast India may be termed as Indigenous because they also have historical continuity with their pre-colonial land where their cultural attributes like Indigenous knowledge, spirituality, and other markers of self-identification or indigeneity are formulated. Colonial rulers considered the native people as primitive and delineated certain areas of Northeast India on the basis of its ethnic identity. So, the indigeneity of the Naga people is the colonial artifact or colonial construction of “the rule of colonial difference” according to Partha Chatterjee (16).

Bill Ashcroft in *The Empire Writes Back* has stated that colonial discourse may be regarded as the system of statements that can be made about colonies and colonial peoples, about colonizing powers, and about the relationship between these two . . . the system of knowledge and beliefs about the world within which acts of colonization take place (37). This idea of discourse has its origin in Foucault. Fanon has also written about the indigenous being treated as the wretched of the earth or others who are native or uncivilized. He goes on to describe the position of colonized ones in respect of global power as he states, “The colonized, underdeveloped man is today a political creature in the most global sense of the term” (40). Samson and Gigoux in their book *Indigenous Identity and Colonialism: A Global Perspective* showcase the colonial experience of Indigenous people throughout the world and represent

colonialism as “political, social, economic, cultural structure nourished by powerful drives for land and authority” (iii).

What we label as Indigenous identity of any community and group is actually collective identity which is dynamic and is a process of self-recognition deeply rooted in their tradition and culture. In this context Weaver observes, ‘Indigenous identity is based on its facets—self-identification, community identification, and external identification’. Another critic Gibson has opined that the “concept of identity . . . within many [I]ndigenous societies retain an essential geopolitical element—constructed in relation to land” (55). However, the Indigenous identity of Naga people is attached to their cultural attributes and extends to their relationship with lands where those cultural attributes are formed, exercised, and given meaning.

The Naga people have a deep connection with the land they inhabit and their sense of valor and identity is related to it. Frantz Fanon in his work *The Wretched of the Earth* has also emphasized the significance of land to colonized native people. He writes, “For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land: the land, which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity” (9). Against this backdrop, the local people of Khonoma serve as the protectors of the territory as seen in *A Naga Village Remembered*, “Her warriors were muscular and wiry—a stock of men for whom an agility of mind was important as an agile body” (2). They are strongly against possession of their land even by the neighboring native community who live in Garipheju village. If they become the victim of the expedition of Garipheju village, they plan for the expedition to retaliate.

This whole episode of conflict between the Naga people and the British Army began when the British colonial forces made the first expedition in Nagaland to find a route from Manipur to Assam through Nagaland so that they could protect themselves from the Burmese attack. This ensued the clash between the colonial forces and the Angami people of Khonoma due to the dislike of native people regarding intrusion into

their land. The whole clash between the two parties did not prove to be fruitful. Easterine Kire here observes, “British entry was resisted fiercely by spear-wielding warriors who saw the expedition as an incursion into their lands. They rolled down rocks on the intruders but were overcome by the modern weapons” (viii). On the contrary the British forces launched many attempts to raid and attack the village of Khonoma. As a result, the people of Nagaland felt deeply affected and humiliated due to the fear of losing their Indigenous identity. They turned furious and violent and, reacted against the colonial power. The natives also realized that “their liberation must be achieved and can only be achieved by force.”

After bearing the burden of repetitive expeditions, the Angamis retaliated heavily against the British Government. They took revenge on the white man at Piphe by killing Bogchand who led the white man’s soldiers and ordered them to burn down the houses of the Merhu clan. The Angami people along with the men of Mezo attacked the soldiers of Bogchand and killed them. This act of the colonized local people infused in them a sense of victory and self-esteem over the colonial power. Kire writes “But it was a matter of honour, you see? A man is not a man if you let another man kill your kin and torch your houses and you do nothing about it.” (8). In this way, community bonding and collective consciousness place a crucial role in the life of the Indigenous people of Nagaland to save their tribes against the outer forces.

The sense of inferiority among the Angami community regarding their power to protect their land created a guilt complex in them. The guilt complex triggered violence in the Angami Nagas and for them violence became a tool of psycho-effective survival and agency. Due to this guilt complex, they again took the step of attacking the white soldiers at Shupfu, Manipur. This invasion was a collaborative venture of the people of Khonoma, Viswema, Phe sema, Kigwema, Mima, Kidima, and Kikruma. A series of exploitation and ill-treatment as labourers, collection of excessive revenues under pressure, the defeat in the raids and imprisonment as convicts aggravated their guilt complex and instigated them toward a more violent step. This is how violence can be seen as a

repercussion of deep sense of guilt. In the raids that followed, the Angami men became more ferocious and brought back the enemy heads by the hundreds (76). Now they became so violent that though they knew it was foolish to attack the white man, they were obsessed with the thought of war. The natives increased their raids on British territory and the British Government attempted to suppress their agency. They launched 22 raids between 1850 and 1865, and 232 British subjects became victims of the raids.

They attempted to spoil the revolutionary spirit of the Angami people so that the natives of other clans do not raise their voice: "So long as Khonoma is allowed to go unpunished over the murder of Damant, the other villages will make bold to rise against us. The spirit of Khonoma must be quenched" (101). But the consequences were opposite. In this regard, Easterine Kire remarks, "The white man's effort to humiliate and suppress them had had the opposite effect on them" (76). To uproot the full dominance of the British Government, the Khonoma warriors along with the warriors of Viaswema, Chedema, Secuma, Jakhama, Jotsoma, Piphe, and Tsiepama attacked after the Kohima garrison and the battle of Khonma, "the severest fighting ever known in these hills" (Mackenzie 137) started.

About the fierceness and horrible scenes of the war Kire describes as follows: "The Angamis began shouting on 16 October, the first shot landing harmlessly but growing deadlier as they kept up a steady assault on the little garrison" (93). The natives of the Semo clan concentrated on shooting and killing the white officers. The joint venture of the natives and their revolutionary zeal represent their Indigenusness or show their love for land. It is their love for land that leads them toward the path of decolonization. Violence becomes the only medium of decolonization to the Angamis as it is a part of a struggle for psycho-effective survival and a search for human agency in the midst of the agony of oppression. The Angamis were culturally bound to be obliged to their land because their relationship with their land allows them to engage in ways that foster their connection to each other, to non-humans, to present, past, and future relations. Their sense of being Indigenous is related to their

land and community. Their love for land is quite obvious in Levi's attitude toward his village:

How good it was to be back in the village, to be among his people. Impulsively he picked up a bit of soil and smelled its earthiness. He felt bonded to the village, bonded to the land, and feeling surged up in him that he'd never known before. I should feel so strongly for a mistress, he mused, smiling to himself. (Kire 51)

Women in Nagaland also have great love and admiration for their land; they always support and inspire the warrior spirit. They never hesitate to send their husband and sons to the war field. The native workers under British government had felt culturally obliged to join their village men in the attack of Shupfu (47) and the men of Khonoma were culturally bound to avenge their fallen men (105). So, land was there in their cultural consciousness which reflects their Indigenous identity. The native Angamis also owe to their land and ecology in terms of their nurturing which is apparent in Siezo's utterance, "Sky is my father, Earth is my mother, I believe in Kepenoupfu" (71).

As far as the spiritual connection of the community is concerned, the Angamis encapsulated their faith in hunting, gathering, farming, family, and community life. One of the most common features of Indigenous spirituality of the Naga people is that it is based on enduring connections to lands, and is rooted in memories, dreams and experiences. Long-term associations with all animate and inanimate beings are embedded in legends, myths, stories and orature passed down the generations. (Samson and Gigoux 125). For example, the Angamis hold that man, spirit, and tiger were brothers who were born out of the combination of sky and earth. Keviselie dreamt of a short-tailed gwi which indicates the Creator's willingness for him to earn a title. They worship the creator deity Ukepenuopfu and sanctify themselves on the occasion of Sekreyani. But they suffer from spiritual dispossession when they become victims of cultural colonialism by the American missionaries.

Later to create an organized religion, the missionaries started to take an influential care of the natives. They gradually started building churches

and missionary schools, gave free treatment to the needy people and started to transform their Indigenous bent of mind. They gave education in English to the Angamis. The establishment of churches and schools represented the usage of state apparatus; the colonial Government became slowly successful in colonizing the Indigenous knowledge system of the natives. The burning example in Kire's fiction is Sato who became the victim of the civilizing mission of the white people. His father Levi sent him to the mission school in Kohima so that he could learn the war tactics of the whites. But here, he developed love for Christianity and started to show resentment for his own Indigenous spiritual beliefs. Levi declares,

How is it, my son, that you have turned your back on all that we have taught you of what is good of our ways? The white man killed your grandfather's brother and burnt your grandfather's house four times. Do you hear me, Sato, four times! You have the blood of your ancestors in your hands. (Kire 127)

This shows how cultural colonialism initiated the loss of Indigenous cultural identity. The Naga people faced strong cultural dispossession when some of them were baptized by the missionaries. The spiritual dispossession affected the Indigenous cultural identity of Naga people as it involved their loss of confidence in their own ways of dealing with conflict, affliction, and suffering. Nisier is the first man who was baptized and converted to Christianity in 1897. Nisier's conversion gave an impetus to cultural change as he became the emblem of native conversion. Sato was greatly inspired by it. Slowly, Khonoma became the little band of believers of Christianity. These converted native men started dominating their ancestral culture as they became preachers and started influencing their people. Cultural colonialism deteriorated Indigenous identity and created a breach in the relationship among the Indigenous people.

Easterine Kire in her first work of fiction *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* has vividly captured the life of the Naga community during the colonial regime and also highlights the cultural dispossession of the Angami Nagas. Till now, the Indigenous identity of

the Naga people has been brought out through colonial discourses. It is for the first time that an author like Kire has represented the unique culture and cultural identity of the Nagas by weaving such a poignant tale of history and tribal life together. But the trajectory of their identity development has been fractured through cultural genocide, land dispossession and ongoing cultural assimilation. Through, the continuous reaction to the social, political, and cultural invasion of colonialism, and the non-Indigenous religions and cultures, they become differentiated and protect their otherness. Archana S. has made a valid statement in this regard that Easterine Kire as an Indigenous writer also attempts to decolonize herself through her writing and performs her duty as an Indigenous storyteller who passes the history of Khonoma “to a new generation in much the same way that a more sophisticated nation would bequeath its younger generations with material evidence of a brave, indelible past” (xv).

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## A Condensed Investigation of Indian Indigenous Literature and Philosophy

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*Udaykumar R. Bhatt*

Starting with the idea of indigenous peoples as the original or natural residents of a place or territory, indigenous literature may be defined as literature created by indigenous peoples and descendants of them. Poetry, theatre, fiction, and creative nonfiction are all examples of literature. Memoirs and autobiographical writings are especially important as nonfiction forms that may give cultural context for the study and comprehension of indigenous literature. Indian indigenous philosophy is a rich and complicated heritage that includes many different philosophical concepts and schools of thinking. These are Dharma, Karma, Reincarnation (Samsara) and Liberation (Moksha), Atman and Brahman, Philosophical Schools, Ahimsa, four pursuits, Tolerance and Pluralism, and Guru-Disciple Tradition of life.

Indigenous Indian literature and philosophy have a rich and varied history dating back thousands of years. These practises have produced significant contributions to philosophy, literature, and spirituality, and are deeply rooted in India's cultural and spiritual heritage. The researcher performed a study on the following significant topics of indigenous Indian literature and philosophy:

### **Vedic Literature**

The Vedas are among Indian literature's earliest and most holy writings. They are written in Sanskrit and include the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda. These works, which include hymns, prayers, and rites, form the cornerstone of Hinduism and provide insights into ancient India's spiritual and intellectual ideas. The Vedic period is typically dated from roughly 1500 BCE to 500 BCE, while the precise

dates are arguable among experts. There are four primary classifications of Vedic literature:

- **Rigveda:** The Rigveda is the most ancient and important of the Vedas. It is made up of hymns (Suktas) dedicated to numerous deities. The hymns are written in a poetic and metrical style. The Rigveda is split into 10 books called Mandalas, and it contains hymns to gods such as Agni, Varuna, Indra, and Ushas.
- **Yajurveda:** The Yajurveda is mostly composed of prose mantras that are utilized in rites and ceremonies. The Krishna Yajurveda and the Shukla Yajurveda are the two primary branches. The mantras in the Krishna Yajurveda provide explanations for their application in rituals, however, the mantras in the Shukla Yajurveda do not contain explanations
- **Samaveda:** The Samaveda is an archive of ceremonial chants and tunes used by priests. It is closely related to the Rigveda since many of its verses are based on Rigvedic hymns. The Samaveda is noted for its use of varied melodies (Saman) in ceremonies and concentrates on the musical side of the Vedic culture.
- **Atharvaveda:** The hymns, charms, and incantations in the Atharvaveda set it apart from the other Vedas. It covers a wide range of subjects, including health care magic, and everyday issues. In comparison to the other Vedas, the Atharvaveda is seen to be more diversified in substance and less concentrated on sacrifice rites.

In addition to the Vedas, the following texts are frequently regarded to be part of Vedic literature:

**Brahmanas:** The Brahmanas are prose works that give explanations and interpretations of the Vedic rituals and ceremonies. They serve as a guidance for correct ritual performance.

**Aranyakas:** Aranyakas are literature linked with forest hermits and are sometimes seen as a link between the ceremonial Brahmanas and

the speculative Upanishads. They are concerned with the inner, symbolic meanings of the rituals.

**Upanishads:** The Upanishads, commonly known as Vedanta (“the end of the Vedas”), are a collection of intellectual and metaphysical writings that address the philosophical and metaphysical elements of Vedic thinking. They enquire about the nature of reality (Brahman), the self (Atman), and the ultimate purpose of existence. The Upanishads represent a change from the previous Vedic writings’ exterior ceremonies to interior reflection and spiritual inquiry.

Vedic literature has its philosophical value that is for Rita (cosmic order) exploration, ceremonial practices, and contemplation on the essence of life.

## **Epic Poetry**

- **Mahabharata:** The Mahabharata, traditionally assigned to the sage Vyasa, is one of the world’s longest epic poems. It is a massive story that incorporates parts of mythology, history, philosophy, and moral precepts. The core plot is around the Kurukshetra War, which pits two factions of a royal family, the Pandavas and the Kauravas, against each other.
  - **Bhagavad Gita:** The Bhagavad Gita is an important part of the Mahabharata. It is a holy discussion between Prince Arjuna and Krishna, the divinity who acts as his charioteer. The Gita handles profound philosophical and ethical quandaries and has had a significant impact on Hindu thinking.
- **Ramayana:** The Ramayana, another important Indian epic, is often assigned to the sage Valmiki. The Ramayana tells the story of Prince Rama, his wife Sita, and his faithful friend Hanuman. It delves into issues like as obligation, righteousness, and the conflict between good and evil. The Ramayana, like the Mahabharata, provides moral and ethical teachings and has played an important role in moulding Hindu society’s cultural and ethical ideals.

Both the Mahabharata and the Ramayana are epic narratives that also serve as stores of cultural, moral, and philosophical learning. Over the years, they have been repeated and reinterpreted in numerous languages and forms of art, and they continue to be a source of inspiration and direction for people all over India and beyond. Philosophical values of epics are Reflection on duty (Dharma), righteousness, and the moral problems that individuals encounter.

## **Classical Sanskrit Literature**

Classical Sanskrit literature refers to a vast spectrum of literary works written primarily in the Sanskrit language. This collection of writing flourished over a certain historical time, generally spanning the 4th to 12th centuries CE. Classical Sanskrit literature encompasses a wide range of literary forms, including play, poetry, and prose. Each genre serves a distinct creative and intellectual function. During this time, famous poets and playwrights emerged, making lasting contributions to this literary legacy. One of the most respected personalities is Kalidasa, who is frequently referred to as the “Shakespeare of India.” The writings of Kalidasa, such as “Shakuntala” and “Meghaduta,” are masterpieces that display literary brilliance and vivid imagery.

Nataka, or classical Sanskrit drama, is a popular genre. Sanskrit plays were notable for their intricate structure, complex language, and study of numerous subjects. Examples include Kalidasa’s “Shakuntala” and Shudraka’s Sanskrit drama “Mricchakatika” (The Little Clay Cart). Classical Sanskrit poetry is distinguished by its rhythmic and ordered style. Poets used several metres and poetic methods to express emotions, ideas, and storytelling. Aside from Kalidasa, other poets like as Bharavi, Magha, and Bhavabhuti made significant contributions. Prose compositions in Classical Sanskrit, also known as *Kavya*, are narrative poetry that combine literary and artistic elements. These compositions might be based on mythical ideas, historical events, or love stories. While epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana belong to a larger genre, they are also important components of Classical Sanskrit Literature. These epics are massive in scale and incorporate philosophical

conversations, heroic tales, and reflections on moral and ethical quandaries.

Aesthetic principles are strongly emphasized in classical Sanskrit literature, including the use of poetic techniques (Alankara), sophisticated wordplay, and a great respect for the beauty of language. Cultural and Philosophical subjects: Classical Sanskrit Literature frequently engages with cultural, moral, and philosophical subjects, providing insights into ancient India's social and intellectual milieu. Classical Sanskrit Literature has a distinct position in India's cultural and literary history, and its impact reaches well beyond the Indian subcontinent. This period's works are still studied, translated, and valued for their creative greatness and profound insights into human existence. Philosophically it helps in Artistic expression is typically coupled with moral and ethical principles, with the goal of studying the essence of reality and love.

### **Tamil Literature: Sangam Poetry**

The Sangam period, which is typically split into three parts: the Early Sangam (300 BCE - 200 CE), the Middle Sangam (200 - 600 CE), and the Later Sangam (600 - 1000 CE), saw a flourishing of Tamil literature. The term "Sangam" alludes to poets' and academics' meetings or academies. Sangam poetry is a collection of traditional Tamil poems written by different poets throughout the Sangam era. The excellent language, topic richness, and investigation of numerous facets of life, love, nature, and ethics distinguish these poems. The social, cultural, and economic components of ancient Tamil society are all reflected in Sangam poetry. Love and the intricacies of human relationships are key topics, as are descriptions of nature and moral and ethical principles.

The Five Great Epics (Aimperum Kappiyangal) are part of the Sangam corpus and are regarded as key works of Tamil literature. These epics are as follows:

- Silappatikaram: A narrative poem about Kovalan and Kannagi that addresses issues of love, justice, and fate.
- Manimekalai: A Buddhist epic that goes into Buddhist theory while exploring the life of the heroine Manimekalai.

- Civaka Cintamani: A Jain epic about a prince and a merchant that emphasizes Jain religious principles.
- Valayapathi: is a love story with adventure and fantasy themes.
- Kundalakesi: is a moralistic text that emphasizes virtue.

Tamil literature, particularly Sangam poetry, exemplifies the literary quality of ancient Tamil civilization. It is still an important component of India's diversified literary landscape, adding to the larger tapestry of the country's cultural history. Philosophically Sangam Poetry reflects the beauty of nature, human emotions, and ethical principles.

## **Bhakti Poetry and Sufi Poetry**

Bhakti is a devotional movement that originated in medieval India and emphasises a personal and emotional relationship with the divine. Bhakti writers used vernacular languages to convey their love and devotion to God, making their poetry accessible to the general public.

### **Famous Bhakti Poets are:**

**Kabir:** Kabir, a 15th-century saint and poet, wrote poetry that combined Hindu and Islamic ideals. His poetry focuses on devotion to a formless, transcendent God while also criticizing ceremonial practices.

**Meera Bai:** Meera Bai, a 16th-century Rajput princess and Lord Krishna follower, wrote poetry that depicts her profound love and desire for her celestial spouse.

Whereas Sufi or Sufism is a mystical Islamic religion that emphasizes direct and intimate encounters with God. Sufi poets in India utilized poetry to express their spiritual experiences and teachings, typically using metaphorical language and symbolism.

### **Famous Sufi Poets are:**

**Rumi:** Rumi was a Persian poet, yet his writings had a significant impact on Sufi poetry in India. His words are about love, togetherness, and the mystical path to God.

**Khusro Amir:** Amir Khusro, a 13th-century Sufi poet and follower of Nizamuddin Auliya, is famed for his ghazals and qawwalis that both celebrate and describe the agony of separation from God.

Bhakti and Sufi poetry expanded India's cultural and literary fabric, encouraging a feeling of togetherness and shared spiritual ideals beyond religious borders. In addition, Bhakti poets and Sufi poets in India made great literary contributions by using poetry as a strong medium to transmit spiritual truths and build a closer relationship with the divine. Philosophical values of the Bhakti and Sufi are: The importance of devotion, personal relationship with the divine, and the universality of divine love are emphasized. And Mystical contemplation of divine love, oneness, and spirituality's transcending essence.

## **Regional Literature**

India is linguistically varied, having a wide range of languages spoken throughout its enormous territory. Each linguistic area has its own distinct literary traditions, which contribute to India's rich variety of literature. Among the notable regional literatures are:

- **Bengali Literature:** Bengali literature has a rich tradition, with giants such as Rabindranath Tagore (the first non-European Nobel Prize in Literature) and Kazi Nazrul Islam. Tagore's writings, such as "Gitanjali," have had a lasting impact on international literature.
- **Marathi literature:** it has a long and storied history, with giants such as Jnaneshwar and Tukaram, as well as recent writers such as Vijay Tendulkar and Pu La Deshpande, making major contributions.
- **Gujarati Literature:** Gujarati literature includes poetry, dramas, and novels. Gujarati literature has been shaped by writers such as Narsinh Mehta, Umashankar Joshi, and Pannalal Patel.
- **Punjabi Literature:** Poetry and prose abound in Punjabi literature. Waris Shah, Bulleh Shah, and contemporary authors like as Amrita Pritam express the cultural and historical essence of Punjab in their writings.



- **Malayalam literature:** it has a particular character, with writers such as Thunchaththu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, and O. V. Vijayan making major contributions.
- **Kannada literature:** it has produced notable poets such as Kuvempu and D. R. Bendre, as well as current authors working in a variety of disciplines.

Regional literature frequently reflects the cultural subtleties, historical backdrop, and language quirks of the places in which it flourishes. Each linguistic minority adds to the wider mosaic of Indian literature, keeping its distinct character while contributing to the country's larger literary environment. Reflection of regional cultures and cultural ideals, as well as a platform for social critique, are the philosophical values of regional literature.

## Conclusion

Ancient Vedic texts, epics such as the Mahabharata and Ramayana, classical Sanskrit works by poets such as Kalidasa, Tamil Sangam poetry, Bhakti and Sufi devotional literature, folk traditions, and writings of Jain and Buddhist traditions comprise India's indigenous literature. Regional literature in several languages adds to this fascinating tapestry. The literary landscape is being shaped by modern and contemporary authors, especially women writers and those tackling social themes. Indian literature represents the variegated aspects of the country's culture and history, from numerous mythology to investigations of caste, gender, identity, and philosophy.

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## Re-Examining Indigenous Ethical Worldview in Nigerian Tradition: A Study of Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*

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*Aminu Suleiman and Vaibhav Shah*

Works of fiction often reflect the evolving norms and values of societies, especially in postcolonial contexts where Indigenous identities are under constant pressure from dominant cultures. Substantial research in African literature has explored the clash between African and Western cultures, often focusing on the disintegration of traditional ways of life due to colonial influence. This paper shifts the focus to how Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* represents the struggles of Indigenous identity in the face of assimilation pressures. By examining the characters' internal conflicts and societal challenges, this study aims to reveal how Soyinka portrays the tension between maintaining cultural integrity and adapting to the demands of a modernizing world.

Wole Soyinka, a Nobel laureate and a Nigerian writer, made a significant mark in the literary world with his first novel, *The Interpreters*, first published in 1965. By the time this novel was published, Soyinka was already an acclaimed playwright and poet:

Although *The Interpreters* is a first novel, it comes in Soyinka's work after a number of remarkable plays and a corpus of distinguished poems which had cleared the hurdles of a literary apprenticeship...The author of this first novel was thus no new, and the work shows by its complexity and literary accomplishment the results of a preceding period of intense literary activity. (Jones 155)

In a subtle contrast to other well-known Nigerian novels set during pre-colonial and colonial periods, such as Chinua Achebe's African Trilogy, Soyinka's *The Interpreters* is set in post-independence Nigeria and

explores the lives of its five main characters in the urban landscapes of Lagos and Ibadan. All five characters are Western-educated and struggle to balance their adopted Western ideals with the traditional values of their upbringing. Driven by a fervent desire to contribute to the development of their newly independent nation, they confront the challenge of reconciling these two worlds as they work to shape the future of their country.

## **Methodology**

This is a qualitative study that employs textual analysis to re-examine the indigenous ethical worldview in Nigerian tradition as depicted in *The Interpreters*. It focuses on key passages that highlight the characters' internal and external struggles, with particular attention to how these conflicts reflect broader issues of cultural preservation and the impact of Western influence and assimilation. The analysis is grounded in postcolonial theory and Indigenous epistemologies, providing a framework for understanding the characters' experiences within the larger context of postcolonial identity negotiation. Caulfield asserts that "textual analysis is the most important method in literary studies," emphasizing its critical role in thoroughly examining texts like novels, poems, stories, or plays. This approach is indispensable for understanding literary works, as it enables a deep exploration of their content, structure, and meaning. Similarly, Bell supports this view by suggesting that textual analysis is a fundamental method for "discourse interpretation" (520).

Key passages from the novel that highlight ethical conflicts are selected, including dialogues, monologues, and narrative descriptions that reveal the characters' internal and external struggles. A close reading of these passages is conducted to identify recurring themes and motifs related to ethical conflict, with a detailed examination of the text to highlight both implicit and explicit ethical uncertainties and struggles faced by the characters.

## **Framework**

This study aims to re-examine the indigenous ethical worldview in Nigerian tradition as depicted in Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*,

focusing on the ethical struggles faced by the characters. The research identifies, interprets, and contextualizes these conflicts within both African and Western ethical frameworks. Dewey and Tufts define ethics as:

The science that deals with conduct, in so far as this is considered as right or wrong, good or bad. A single term for conduct so considered is 'moral conduct,' or the 'moral life.' Another way of stating the same thing is to say that ethics aims to give a systematic account of our judgments about conduct, in so far as these estimate it from the standpoint of right or wrong, good or bad. (Dewey and Tufts 3).

Singer (1980) adds that "Ethics takes a universal point of view. This does not mean that a particular ethical judgment must be universally applicable", implying that ethical judgments may vary according to specific contexts and circumstances, even within a universal framework (11). From a Western normative ethical perspective, Shelly argues that understanding societal expectations of behaviour differs from determining how people genuinely should act. He distinguishes between moral codes, which belong to sociology, anthropology, or history, and normative ethics, which aims to state and defend substantive moral claims. Unlike the social sciences, normative ethics seeks to uncover the truth about how people ought to act, rather than merely reporting societal beliefs (8).

In contrast, African ethics is particularistic, emphasizing cooperation, mutuality, communal interest, and the welfare of the community. The ethical merit of actions is judged based on their societal impact and contribution to social welfare. Sub-Saharan African moral philosophers have identified three main conceptions of rightness of an action: fostering harmonious relationships (Verhoef and Michel; Tutu; Ejizu), preserving and promoting the vital force of living beings (Peter; Pantaleon), and advancing the common good (Gyeke).

## **Colonial Disruption of Indigenous Ethics**

Soyinka depicts post-independence Nigeria as a society where traditional values are increasingly marginalized by modern influences. The main characters, especially Egbo, embody the struggle to balance their

Indigenous identity with the demands of a Westernized, postcolonial society. Egbo's internal conflict between accepting his traditional chieftaincy and pursuing a modern career symbolizes the broader challenges Indigenous peoples face in maintaining their cultural heritage while navigating the pressures of a dominant culture and assimilation.

Soyinka portrays Egbo as a complex individual grappling with the dualities of his identity and heritage. He is a descendant of a royal family, which places him in a unique position of having to reconcile his traditional heritage with his contemporary, Westernized identity. This internal conflict is a central aspect of his character. Egbo's contemplation of returning to his ancestral village to claim his chieftaincy symbolizes his struggle to find a balance between his obligations to his lineage and his personal desires and modern identity. His heritage represents a set of responsibilities and expectations that often clash with his individual aspirations and the Western influences in his life.

Despite the relentless pressure from the "Osa Descendants Union," whose spokesmen besiege him daily with the fervour of aspiring for an 'enlightened ruler,' Egbo finds himself torn between two worlds. As he grapples with the weight of tradition pulling him towards assuming leadership within his ancestral community, he also feels the magnetic pull of his comfortable position within the Foreign Office, symbolized by the "dull grey file cabinet faces." This internal conflict leads him to contemplate pitting the formidable "warlord of the creeks" against the bureaucratic machinery of his workplace (Soyinka 9).

d'Almeida provides critical insights into the character of Egbo and his dilemmas in the narrative. She observes that "Egbo's chieftaincy dilemma underscores the tension between tradition and modernity, illustrating the character's struggle to reconcile the past with the present." This aligns with the narrative's depiction of Egbo's difficulty in making choices, as highlighted by his assertion, "A man's gift of life should be separate. . . . All choice must come from within him, not from the prompting of the past" (145).

Egbo's decision reflects a deep struggle with his Indigenous identity, torn between the pressures of assimilation into Western ideals and the pull of traditional African values. While African ethical principles, which are communitarian in nature, would require him to prioritize the welfare of his community, Egbo's choices indicate a tension between maintaining his cultural roots and adapting to the expectations imposed by his Western education and modern career. According to Metz, African moral principles define right and wrong actions based on their impact on communal relationships, asserting that actions are right if they promote shared identity and goodwill, and wrong if they foster division and ill-will (115-116).

Mbiti further explains that in African societies, "whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual." This perspective emphasizes the interdependence of personal and communal identities, encapsulated in the assertion, "since we are, therefore, I am" (141). Egbo's inability to fully align with the African communal values and opting for Western individualism highlights the broader theme of Indigenous identity caught in the crosscurrents of cultural preservation and assimilation. His struggle illustrates the internal conflict that arises when an individual is pressured to conform to a modern, Westernized identity while grappling with the communal responsibilities and values of their Indigenous heritage.

Similarly, Sagoe's experiences as a journalist highlight the moral compromises that often accompany the pressures of assimilation. His ethical dilemmas and eventual moral desensitization reflect the broader societal challenges faced by Indigenous individuals who are compelled to conform to the corrupt systems imposed by colonial legacies. Sagoe's story illustrates the loss of integrity that can occur when one is forced to adapt to a society that values Western ideals over Indigenous principles.

Sagoe encounters his first challenges when seeking a job as a journalist, where Soyinka highlights corruption in the interview process for selecting qualified staff. Upon securing the job, Sagoe discovers that journalism in Nigeria is merely "a swap of silence," and he realizes he must adapt to this silence to navigate the society: "Silence . . . silence," he says, "I

have known all kinds of silence, but it is time to learn some more” (Soyinka 116). When the Establishment does not silence him, his own relatives send delegations to urge caution, resulting in a form of self-censorship. Consequently, Sagoe finds no job satisfaction in his profession and remains unfulfilled (d’Almeida 16).

However, despite his disagreement with the corrupt system, Sagoe engages in unethical behaviour himself, such as giving money to Winsala, one of the members of the interview panel, at Hotel Excelsior to secure the job: Soyinka depicts the boldness with which Sagoe approaches the situation when he says: ‘Just tell me how much.’ Winsala stopped running his tongue over the schnapps tail on his lips and became businesslike again. ‘As you are new, we will make it something for drinks. Let us say . . . fifty pounds?’ (Soyinka 99).

The ethical issue raised in this passage revolves around Sagoe’s moral compromise, as he becomes complicit in the very corruption he opposes. Sagoe’s actions reflect the tension between traditional values of integrity and the moral decay introduced by modern societal structures, underscoring Soyinka’s exploration of the complexities of postcolonial Nigeria.

## **Reassertion of Indigenous Values**

Soyinka portrays Kola, in contrast to the other main characters, as an artist dedicated to preserving his cultural heritage, embodying resistance to the Western cultural influence and assimilation through his art. His dedication to capturing the essence of Yoruba mythology in his work serves as a metaphor for the struggle to maintain Indigenous identity in the face of Westernization. His art becomes a medium through which he expresses his understanding and critique of the world around him. Throughout the novel, he is fixated on the canvas which he calls ‘The Pantheon’, symbolizing the resurgence of the oppressed people’s past through art and aiming to reconnect them with their cultural legacy. However, Kola’s willingness to manipulate others for the sake of his art raises questions about the ethical boundaries of cultural preservation and the potential for exploitation in the pursuit of artistic and cultural integrity.



The character of Kola embodies the profound identity conflict experienced by Indigenous individuals navigating the intersection of African traditions and Western influences in post-colonial Nigeria. As an artist committed to preserving his cultural heritage, Kola fervently works on this canvas that brings to life the Yoruba pantheon. This artistic endeavour serves not only as a symbol of his dedication to African traditions but also as an act of resistance against the pressures of assimilation and Westernization. The canvas thus becomes a central metaphor for Kola's struggle to maintain his Indigenous identity amidst the encroaching forces of modernization.

Kola's recognition of the past as both a source of pain and an obstacle to living fully in the present, as highlighted by d'Almeida, illustrates the complex interplay between the desire to preserve cultural heritage and the need to adapt to a rapidly changing world (15). Kola expresses a longing to break free from the "enslaving cords" of the past, envisioning a future where new ways of living emerge, unburdened by historical and cultural expectations (Soyinka 301). This tension between the past and the present mirrors the broader theme of Indigenous identity, caught between the need to honour cultural roots and the pressure to assimilate into modern society.

Similarly, Bandele's role in *The Interpreters* can be reinterpreted within this context of Indigenous identity and assimilation. As a moral guide among his friends, Bandele embodies the internal and external pressures that Indigenous individuals face as they navigate the delicate balance between traditional values and modern expectations. His struggle to maintain cultural integrity while confronting a society that increasingly demands conformity to Western ideals further underscores the challenges of preserving Indigenous identity in a postcolonial world. Together, Kola and Bandele's experiences highlight the ongoing conflict between cultural preservation and assimilation, a central theme in the exploration of Indigenous identity within the novel.

Bandele, one of the main characters in the novel, initially serves as a moral guide for his friends, symbolizing the Indigenous struggle to preserve cultural identity amidst the pressures of western cultural

encroachment. His role as a mediator and consoler, particularly following Sekoni's death, reflects the burden placed on Indigenous individuals to uphold traditional values in a rapidly modernizing society. Bandele's ability to tolerate and reconcile others' conflicting choices underscores the challenges of maintaining cultural integrity while adapting to the demands of a post-colonial world.

However, as the narrative progresses, Bandele becomes increasingly detached from his companions, symbolizing the alienation that can occur when Indigenous individuals attempt to navigate between their traditional heritage and the dominant culture. His transformation into a figure of judgment and detachment, described by Soyinka through vivid imagery as "a palace house post carved of ironwood" and "the staff of Ogboni" (Soyinka 301), represents the internal conflict that arises when one is forced to become an arbiter of morality in a society that has diverged from its cultural roots.

Bandele's eventual aloofness and his role as a distant moral judge highlight the difficulty of remaining connected to African values while engaging with the modern world. His growing detachment reflects the loss of cultural connection that can result from the pressures of cultural assimilation, leading to a sense of isolation and moral ambivalence. This transformation underscores the broader theme of African identity in the novel, illustrating the tension between preserving one's heritage and adapting to the demands of a Westernized society.

In this context, Bandele's character serves as a metaphor for the broader African experience, where the struggle to maintain cultural integrity often leads to a profound sense of alienation and conflict within oneself and one's community. His role as a moral judge, while seemingly authoritative, also reveals the limitations and challenges of navigating identity in a post-colonial world that increasingly demands assimilation at the cost of cultural authenticity.

## **Satire and Critique of Westernization**

Professor Oguazor, as Jones notes, serves as the central target of satire in *The Interpreters*, particularly in relation to the Ibadan university

establishment(161). Symbolically, Oguazor resides in a house filled with artificial fruit and flowers, replacing the real with the fake. This house, described by Soyinka as “The Petrified Forest (Soyinka 171),” encapsulates the novel’s critique of superficiality. During a party at the Oguazors’ home, the journalist Sagoe eagerly reaches for a basket of what appears to be delicious fruit, proclaiming, “there is no fruit in the world to beat the European apple (Soyinka 170),” only to discover it is fake. This moment echoes Soyinka’s recurrent imagery of life forces being negated, the aborted harvest. The falsity of the façade represents an unnatural substitution of death for life: “A glaze for the warmth of life and succulence” (Soyinka 171).

This theme of artificiality is further reflected in Professor Oguazor’s hypocritical moral stance. Despite engaging in an affair with his housekeeper (Soyinka 181), Oguazor vehemently advocates for severe punishment against a young university girl and her partner, should the partner be identified. He asserts, “Well, see that he is expelled of course. He deserves nothing less ... The college cannot afford to have its name dragged down by the moral turpitude of irresponsible young men. The younger generation is too morally corrupt” (Soyinka 308). The satire emerges from Oguazor’s obvious lack of moral authority, juxtaposed with his societal power to make such judgments.

Oguazor’s hypocrisy represents a broader ethical conflict in the novel, situated at the crossroads of African and Western value systems. The artificiality and shallow morality, which Oguazorembodies, reflect the imposition of Western values on African societies, which often clash with indigenous traditions and ethical principles. Through Oguazor, Soyinka critiques this cultural imposition and the resulting hypocrisy, showing how adopting Western facade while neglecting authentic African values distorts moral and ethical standards within society. This analysis underscores the tension between preserving indigenous ethical worldviews and the encroachment of Western traditions, challenging the moral foundations of post-colonial Nigerian society.

Through the character of Professor Oguazor, Wole Soyinka offers a pointed critique of the superficial adoption of Western traditions within

post-colonial Nigerian society. Oguazor embodies the hollowness that arises when foreign values are embraced without a deep understanding or meaningful integration into the local cultural context. His character is a vivid representation of the disconnect between appearance and reality, where Western customs and ethical norms are superficially adopted, yet remain fundamentally alien to the society they are imposed upon.

Soyinka uses Oguazor's life, from his home filled with artificial fruits and flowers to his hypocritical moral posturing, as a symbol of this emptiness. The artificial fruit, which seems vibrant and appealing, reveals its lack of substance, a metaphor for the Western traditions that, when uncritically adopted, fail to nourish, or enrich the cultural soil of Nigerian society. Oguazor's readiness to enforce harsh moral judgments, despite his own moral failings, underscores the shallow nature of these imposed values. He is quick to adopt the rhetoric of Western moral superiority, yet his actions betray a lack of genuine ethical integrity.

This hollowness is not merely a personal flaw but a reflection of a broader societal issue. Soyinka suggests that when Western traditions are adopted superficially, without a sincere effort to reconcile them with Indigenous values and ethical systems, they become mere façades, glossy on the surface but lacking in genuine substance. Oguazor's character, thus, serves as a critique of the broader post-colonial condition, where the imposition of Western norms leads to a disjunction between outward appearances and inner realities. Soyinka's portrayal of Oguazor highlights the dangers of cultural mimicry, where the true ethical and cultural identity of a society is lost in the pursuit of a hollow, Westernized modernity.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of *The Interpreters* reveals profound challenges faced by individuals in post-colonial Nigeria as they attempt to reconcile their indigenous identities with the demands of a Westernized modernity. Through the ethical dilemmas and internal conflicts of characters such as Egbo, Sagoe, Kola, and Bandele, Soyinka offers a nuanced critique of the superficial adoption of Western traditions and the resulting moral

and cultural dissonance. The novel underscores the importance of maintaining cultural integrity and the potential dangers of cultural mimicry, where the true ethical and cultural identity of a society is lost in the pursuit of a hollow Westernized modernity. However, Soyinka also suggests that there is potential for cultural resilience, as seen in the characters' struggles to preserve and reassert their Indigenous values in the face of overwhelming pressures to conform.

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## Indigenous Ecologies and the More-than-Human World: An Ecocritical Exploration of Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps*

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*Asima Gogoi and Anurag Bhattacharyya*

Ecocriticism stands as a pivotal and indispensable lens for examining literary texts in this era marked by global warming and escalating environmental degradation. The term 'ecocriticism' was first coined by William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" in which he defines ecocriticism as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world" (107). Similarly, Cheryll Glotfelty in her seminal work, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). She further explains: "Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies" (xviii).

Ecocritics analyse literary texts and other artefacts like films to study how they represent nature and the environment, and how they reflect or challenge cultural attitudes towards the natural world. One of the central ideas in ecocriticism is the concept of nature as a living entity, which emphasises the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living beings and their environments. The idea of nature as a living entity has its roots in indigenous and animist cultures, which see the natural world as a complex web of relationships between all living beings, including humans, animals, plants, and the land itself. This worldview

contrasts with the Western view of nature as a resource to be exploited for human use, which has led to environmental destruction and degradation. Talking about this difference of worldview between Western- “Modern” cultures and animist cultures, Christopher Manes writes “Nature *is* silent in our culture (in literate societies generally) in the sense that the status of being a speaking subject is jealously guarded as an exclusively human prerogative” (15). In his essay “Nature and Silence”, Manes discusses how nature has transformed in the modern discourses from a voluble subject to a mute object and from an animistic being to a symbolic presence. He argues that we need a viable environmental ethics to break the silence of nature in our contemporary thoughts “for it is within this vast eerie silence that surrounds our garrulous human subjectivity that an ethics of exploitation regarding nature has taken shape and flourished, producing the ecological crisis that now requires the search for an environmental counterethics”(16).

This paper attempts to make an ecocritical reading of Easterine Kire’s novel *When the River Sleeps* in order to explore an “environmental counterethics” as proposed by Manes. Consequently, the paper seeks to examine the unique relationship that the Indigenous Naga community of North East India shares with the more-than-human world, encompassing not only natural but also supernatural entities, as depicted in the novel. To achieve this, the paper conducts a thorough analysis of the portrayal of the forest within the narrative and endeavours to comprehend its interaction with the human inhabitants. The central argument of this paper posits that in the novel, every aspect of nature, including the forest, is depicted as a living entity with its own consciousness and agency. This portrayal serves to deconstruct the traditional binary oppositions such as human/animal, animate/non-animate, and nature/culture.

Easterine Kire is a North-East Indian writer, who hails from Nagaland and presently lives in Norway. Her first novel *A Naga Village Remembered*, published in 2003 is considered the first novel by a Naga writer in English. Till now she has 7 brilliant novels to her credit: *A Terrible Matriarchy*, *Mari*, *Bitter Wormwood*, *When the River Sleeps*



, *Son of the Thundercloud* and *Don't Run, My Love*. Being born in Kohima to an Angami Naga family, Kire's works revolve around the lives and experiences of Naga communities living in Naga Hills. She revives in her works the traditional Naga beliefs, their culture, customs and tradition. Originally Animist in belief, the Naga communities live in a close proximity with their natural world. Therefore nature occupies a significant place in Kire's novels. She says in an interview: "... We back in Nagaland, live so close to the natural world and people going to the fields, working in the fields all day surrounded by bird calls, are just using the rhythms of the natural world to guide their agricultural year. ... So it comes naturally to me when I'm writing about these people to use the natural landscape" ("Writers Talk Politics"). Besides, she incorporates in her stories Naga myths and folklores that advocate living in harmony with all forms in nature. Therefore, an ecocritical reading of her novels is destined to offer us an alternate view of the Universe where there is no distinction between the human and the non-human, and animate and inanimate which is quite opposite to the modern western worldview which is hierarchal and places human beings at the top of this hierarchy.

*When the River Sleeps* transports the readers to a world where, in the words of the writer herself, "the margins are so wide . . . and where everything is possible" (Writers Talk Politics). It tells us the adventurous story of Vilie- a hunter of the Angami Naga Community, who has made the forest his home. He has been fascinated by the story of the sleeping-river that he hears from a seer. The mysterious river sleeps only for a very short period. "Yet the enchantment of those minutes or hours when it sleeps is so powerful, that it turns the stones in the middle of the river bed into a charm" (3). If one can wrest a stone from the heart of the sleeping river, it will grant the owner anything he/she wants. "It could be cattle, women, prowess in war, or success in the hunt" (3). Vilie has been dreaming about this river for the past two years and finally sets out in search of the mysterious river. His journey is full of dangerous encounters with were-tigers, spirits and human murderers, but at the same time enriched with meeting warm hearted people who help him

by providing food, shelter and advices, and go out of the ways to help him in finding the sleeping river. His journey that begins as a quest for physical resources ends up bringing him spiritual knowledge. Kire takes the reader along with vilie in this arduous journey that can also be called a journey of ecological awakening for the readers, because it reminds the readers of the intimate bonding between human and the non-human world that has been lost in the modern capitalist society. The story takes us to a world where human beings live as a “plain member” of biotic community and not as a “conqueror” of the natural world, practising the “land ethic” as suggested by Aldo Leopold in his *A Sand County Almanac* (203).

Vilie considers the forest his wife. Earlier, he was in love with a girl, who met an unnatural and untimely death. Vilie leaves the village sometimes after this incident and starts living alone in the forest. When the story begins he has been living in the forest for twenty five of his forty eight years of life. The clan made him the guardian of the gwi-the great mithuns and the Forest Department made him the official protector of the rare tragopan that nest in Vilie’s part of the forest. Sometimes he does go through moments of loneliness and isolation, yet he does not go back to the village because whenever he thinks about going back he has the sensation of being an unfaithful spouse. “He began to think that leaving the forest would be the same as abandoning his wife. Though it was an unsettling thought in his soul, he found he had actually nurtured it for a long time” (9). However, his relationship with the forest cannot be categorised under the traditional patriarchal role of a husband as having the upper-hand. Rather, it is a relationship of respect and gratitude. He is called the guardian of the forest by the villagers, but it is actually the forest that protects him from danger. During his journey, he spends a night with four hunters. But quarrel occurs between two of them at night and one man gets killed. Vilie flees from the scene and enters Rarhuria -the unclean forest, as they call it because they believe that part of the forest is haunted with spirits. Though he would not normally have entered the unclean forest, but he now feels safe and grateful towards the forest: “The forest was his wife indeed: providing him with

sanctuary when he most needed it; and food when his rations were inadequate. The forest also protected him from the evil in the heart of man. He felt truly wedded to her at this moment” (51).

The forest has a great role to play in the lives of the villagers who depend highly on it for their survival. The forest is a living presence for them, it’s just like a kinsman. For example, when Vilie resumes his journey after a night’s stay in the Nepali settlement in the forest, Krishna -his host warns him: “Travel carefully Saab, the forest is dangerous to those who don’t know it, but it can be kind to those who befriend it” (20). Vilie, Krishna and other villagers have indeed befriended the forest. When Vilie enquires what Krishna will do when it will be time for his baby to go to a school, Krishna replies that school is not for people like them. And Vilie immediately realizes that Krishna is right, the forest will be the best school for the baby: “What could school possibly teach him that his parents could not improve upon? They were rich in their knowledge of the ways of the forest, the herbs one could use for food, the animals and birds one could trap and the bitter herbs to counteract the sting of a poisonous snake” (15). Vilie and the villagers are well versed in the use of different herbs found in the forest for different ailments. When Vilie is stung by nettle while trying his hand in nettle harvesting, Idele applies paste of bitter wormwood plant and rock bee honey on his wound. In the unclean forest, Vilie tries to heal his wounds and bring back his energy by using wild ginseng paste on his wounds and putting its roots in his tea.

Most importantly, though Vilie and other villagers depend highly upon the forest for their food and sustenance, they do not exploit the forest resources; rather they have a sense of gratitude and reverence to the forest. They believe that there are some guardian spirits of the forest whom they must acknowledge. Vilie remembers his mother’s way of expressing gratitude to the spirit of the forest:

If he took firewood or gathered herbs from the forest, he should acknowledge the owners. What was it his mother used to say when they had gathered herbs so many years ago? Terhuomiapeziem. Thanks be to the spirits. He knew what she meant by that. If he

found an animal in his traps and brought it home, she would repeat that . Terhuomiapezie. It was her way of pronouncing a prayer of thanksgiving to the provider, to Ukepenuopfu. All the Tenyimia worshipped the deity they called Ukepenuopfu, the birth-spirit, the creator of all. (80)

Thus, their idea of nature or their attitude towards the natural world is guided by such beliefs and practices which are essentially ecocentric. Nature is always at the upperhand- the more powerful one in their beliefs. Nature, for them is a powerful force and not a passive object. It has an agency and a will-power which human beings must not defy. Just like the forest, the river is portrayed as a living being with a mind of its own. Ate tells Vilie “The river gives the heart-stone to those who seek its blessing, but denies it to those who will use it for evil purposes . . .” (142). During his encounter with the river to take the heart-stone from its bosom, Vilie himself feels its strength : “The river was almost human as it pushed him down and under, down and under, and the water rushed at him as though it would strangle him (104). And the heart-stone itself is so powerful that it can fulfill the wishes of human beings. Apart from granting cattle, wealth, beautiful women and success in battle, it imparts spiritual knowledge to its owner. In this way every object of nature is portrayed in the novel as powerful beings and are above human understanding.

The novel draws heavily from Naga mysticism that does not separate the natural world from the supernatural one. Regarding the presence of supernatural elements in her novels, Kire says in an interview: “For Naga people of my generation, we have no problem in accepting the co-existence of the spirit world with the natural world. Infact, it is arrogant to presume that there is only one reality- the natural world of the senses . . .” (Interview with Easterine Kire). During his journey to the sleeping river, Vilie encounters weretigers- which were according to their belief, metamorphosis of human spirits. They have the folk practice of men transforming themselves into tigers. Every weretiger began as a lower form of the cat family, possibly a wildcat which eventually grow into a mighty tiger. Among some other tribes men have

been known to transform their spirits into giant snakes, and some women's spirits transformed into monkeys. Though kept as a secret, most of the villagers know who are the men who have transformed themselves into tigers. So when a were tiger tries to attack Vilie, he calls all the three names of men he remembered from his clan, who are known to have transformed into tigers, and invokes words of clans affiliation: "Is this the way to treat your clansman? I am Vilie, son of Kedo, your clansman. I am not here to do you harm. Why are you treating me as a stranger? I come in peace. You owe me your hospitality. I am your guest" (26). And strangely enough the tiger departed after hearing these words. Vilie remembers the story of a young boy who came from a long line of weretigers. One day when he was out for hunting with his father, a wild cat crossed their path. The boy was about to shoot the cat when his father tells him "Son, that cat is you!" and the boy understood that "his spirit was becoming one with the tiger" (27). Hence, the novel blurs the distinction between the human and the non-human world. One can be a human and an animal at the same time. This kind of relationship with the non-human beings creates a sense of "extended clanship" and "points to a different kind of consciousness which no more relies on the human/animal, natural/supernatural binary"(Baruah 11-12). So we can say that the novel suggests a sense of brotherhood which is not restricted to the human society alone; rather it includes the animals, plants, birds, rivers, mountains and even stones to be part of one huge ethical society where everything is connected with everything else.

Moreover, Kire incorporates ecofeminist perspective into the novel, through the episode of Kirhupfumia- the outcaste women who are believed to have evil power. On his return journey after achieving the heart-stone, Vilie enters the village of Kirhupfumia where he meets two Kirhupfumia sisters Ate and Zote. Ate narrates him the story of their arrival to the village of Kirhupfumia:

Back in our ancestral village a woman was very cruel to my sister. She would spit in our direction every time we met her on the village path. . . . My sister was so upset that the next time she crossed our

path, she pointed her finger at the woman's womb which was swollen and pregnant, in that instant her baby died inside her. . . . The next morning we had to leave the village . . .”

She tells him another story of unjust against the Kirhupfumia. Her aunt, she narrates, pointed her finger at a man and blinded him because he was trying to rape her. Her aunt was sent away from the village and they never saw her again. Being outcaste in their ancestral villages, they started living together in the village of Kirhupfumia. They have great knowledge of herbs and healing. They exchange their knowledge of herbal treatment with the villagers who come to them with offering of salt and sugar or other necessary items. Vandana Shiva in her book *Staying Alive* talks about the close affinity shared by nature and women. She asserts that women have greater knowledge of the natural world. She writes: “Nature, both animate and inanimate, is . . . an expression of Shakti, the feminine and creative principle of the cosmos” (38) and asserts that the death of this feminine principle is the root cause of the present ecological crisis. It is obvious that the Kirhupfumia in the novel, are outcaste because of their exceptional knowledge and power, and because they are beyond the patriarchal control of the society.

From the above discussion, we can say that *When the River Sleeps* demonstrates an unique and ideal kind of relationship of human beings with the non-human world. It dismantles the binary oppositions such as human/animal, animate/non-animate, nature/culture, and suggests an environmental ethic which is all encompassing and inclusive. The story based on traditional Naga beliefs and practices, offers us a worldview which is in stark contrast with the modern worldview of nature as an inanimate object. Their animistic culture that sees every object of nature as a spirit, asks human beings to be respectful towards the other-than human world. Such attitude towards nature if we can incorporate in our contemporary thoughts, will definitely make us more considerate while (over)using natural resources.

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## Divine Tapestry: Tracing the Presence of Indigenous Gods in India

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*Chitra Dadheech*

India, with its rich cultural tapestry, is a land of diverse religious beliefs and practices. From Hinduism to Islam, Christianity to Buddhism, the country is home to a myriad of faiths. Among these, the concept of the Indigenous God holds a special place, representing a unique fusion of nature, mythology, and spirituality. In this article, we will delve into the intricate world of Indigenous Gods in India, examining their significance, manifestations, and the cultural landscapes they shape. However, beneath the surface, there lies a deep-rooted belief in indigenous gods that predates many of these organized religions. These indigenous gods, often associated with nature and tribal traditions, hold a special place in the hearts and minds of the Indian people. In this article, we will explore the ancient beliefs surrounding these indigenous gods and their significance in Indian culture.

### **The Origins of Indigenous Gods**

Long before organized religions like Hinduism and Buddhism came into being, indigenous tribes across India worshipped a pantheon of gods tied to natural elements. These deities were integral to the communities' understanding of life, creation, and survival. According to M.M. Thomas, "in tribal world-view . . . there is the sense of spiritual continuum within which the dead and the living, natural objects, spirits and gods, the individual, the clan and the tribe, animals, plants, minerals and man form an unbroken hierarchical unity of spiritual force" (Thomas 25). This continuum reflects the inseparable bond indigenous tribes have with their environment, seeing the divine in mountains, rivers, trees, and animals.



One of the most revered deities in Rajasthan's tribal communities is Gogaji, the Snake God. The tales of Gogaji encapsulate themes of protection, bravery, and harmony with nature. Similar stories abound in various indigenous cultures across Rajasthan, where gods are seen as the personification of natural forces, shaping not only the physical landscape but also the moral and ethical fabric of these societies. B.K. Agarwala suggests that "the worship of natural elements in indigenous religion is a way of engaging with the life-sustaining forces of the world around them. It is a belief system born out of necessity and reverence" (Agarwala 56). This interaction between humans and the divine, often mediated by nature, lies at the heart of indigenous belief systems.

### **The Significance of Indigenous Gods**

For indigenous communities, their gods are more than just symbols of the divine; they are protectors, providers, and spiritual guides. The worship of these gods is an act of profound reverence that involves elaborate rituals, dances, and offerings. John Mbiti in *African Religion and Philosophy* writes, "People believe in the existence of a Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, revealing itself through creation and the natural world" (Mbiti 7). Similarly, in indigenous Indian cultures, the Supreme Being is often viewed as inseparable from nature itself, with different manifestations of this divine force appearing as local gods.

Indigenous gods also play a crucial role in defining cultural identity. The rituals, festivals, and art forms associated with these deities form the bedrock of community life. As A. Subonglemba states, "The indigenous religion is a living religion, upheld by many people in different parts of the world, and one that continues to preserve and sustain society" (Subonglemba 69).

### **Indigenous Religious Ideas and Practices**

One of the defining characteristics of indigenous religious beliefs in India is their animism—the belief that natural objects, places, and creatures all possess a distinct spiritual essence. The Gonds, Bhils, and

Santals, among many other indigenous communities, practice this form of spirituality, which views the world as a living, breathing entity filled with divine energy. As Radhika Mohan observes, “For the indigenous peoples of India, nature is sacred. Every tree, rock, river, and mountain holds spiritual power, a reflection of the gods who govern the cosmos” (Mohan 120).

In addition to animism, many indigenous groups believe in ancestor worship. The spirits of the deceased are believed to continue influencing the lives of the living. These spirits are not distant or detached but active participants in the welfare of the community. The distinction between the living and the dead, the material and the spiritual, is often blurred in these cultures. The dead are honored through regular rituals and offerings to ensure they remain benevolent.

## **Indigenous Gods of Rajasthan: A Rich Tradition**

Rajasthan, with its arid landscape and vibrant history, is home to a multitude of Indigenous Gods who are worshipped across villages and towns. These gods are not part of mainstream Hinduism but are often seen as protectors of specific communities, regions, or even professions. Some of the key indigenous deities in Rajasthan include Tejaji, Pabuji, and Ramdevji, all of whom play a significant role in shaping the spiritual lives of the people.

### **Tejaji: The Snake God**

Tejaji is one of the most revered deities in Rajasthan, particularly among the Jat community. He is known as the god of serpents, and his legends speak of his bravery, sacrifice, and his ability to control and command serpents. In rural Rajasthan, Tejaji is invoked when people seek protection from snake bites, and there are numerous temples dedicated to his worship across the state.

The worship of Tejaji reflects the deep connection between indigenous deities and nature, particularly in regions where the natural environment plays a critical role in people’s lives. Snake bites, in the arid and semi-arid regions of Rajasthan, were once a common threat, and the reverence

for a deity who could offer protection from this danger shows how indigenous gods evolved in response to specific community needs.

### **Pabuji: The Protector of Cattle**

Another prominent indigenous deity of Rajasthan is Pabuji, who is widely worshipped as the protector of cattle. Pabuji's cult is particularly significant among the cattle-rearing communities, such as the Raikas and Rabaris, who depend heavily on their livestock for survival. The epic of Pabuji, which is performed as a part of the traditional folk theatre of Rajasthan, recounts his heroism in protecting cows from invaders and raiders. Cattle are crucial to Rajasthan's agrarian economy and Pabuji's role as their protector highlights the relationship between indigenous deities and the livelihood of the people. Pabuji is depicted as a warrior god who fights not only for his community but also for the animals that sustain their way of life. His worship is a clear example of how indigenous gods serve the practical needs of their devotees, embodying both their spiritual and material concerns.

### **Ramdevji: The Champion of the Oppressed**

Ramdevji, also known as RamdevPir, is another significant indigenous deity of Rajasthan, worshipped as a champion of the poor and oppressed. His following extends beyond Rajasthan, into Gujarat and other parts of North India. Ramdevji is believed to have lived in the 14th century and is revered for his compassion and dedication to serving the downtrodden, particularly Dalits and marginalized communities.

The worship of Ramdevji is a reflection of how indigenous deities often embody values of social justice and equality. Ramdevji's popularity among the oppressed classes highlights the role that indigenous gods play in providing a sense of hope, belonging, and empowerment to those who are marginalized by society.

### **Myths and Oral Traditions**

The absence of written scriptures in most indigenous traditions does not detract from the richness of their religious thought. In Rajasthan, myths,

rituals, and oral histories serve as the primary means of transmitting spiritual wisdom. These stories, passed down through generations, often explain the origin of the world, the role of deities like Gogaji or Baba Ramdev, and the place of humans within the universe. Sharma notes that “mythology in Rajasthan’s tribal cultures is not merely a collection of stories; it reflects the deep connection between nature and spirituality” (Sharma 134). For example, in the folk performances of Rajasthan, such as the Bhopa-Bhopi tradition, performers narrate the stories of local gods like Pabuji, blending music, poetry, and spiritual worship into an immersive experience. As VijaydanDetha explains, “the Bhopa embodies the deity during the performance, allowing the audience to connect with the divine through song and story, creating a sacred space for communal reflection” (Detha 56).

## **Syncretism and the Adaptability of Indigenous Gods**

One remarkable aspect of India’s indigenous gods is their ability to adapt and integrate elements from other religions. Over centuries, the indigenous deities have absorbed aspects of Hinduism, Buddhism, and other traditions, resulting in a dynamic, syncretic religious landscape. The Bishnoi community, for example, worships Lord Vishnu while incorporating the indigenous deity Khejari Dev. This fusion of beliefs illustrates the fluidity of spiritual practices in India, where indigenous and mainstream religions have coexisted and influenced one another.

As India transitioned through different historical periods, the indigenous gods evolved but never disappeared. Instead, they assimilated new influences, ensuring their relevance in the changing religious landscape. MadhavGadgil points out, “India’s religious history is a story of remarkable continuity and adaptation. Indigenous beliefs have shown a remarkable resilience, evolving while retaining their core values” (Gadgil 74).

## **Challenges to Indigenous Belief Systems**

Despite their cultural richness, the traditions surrounding Indigenous Gods face several challenges in modern India. Urbanization,

industrialization, and the spread of mainstream religions threaten to erode these practices. In many parts of India, tribal lands are being encroached upon, displacing communities and severing their connection to the sacred landscapes that are integral to their spiritual lives. The Niyamgiri Hills, for example, are considered sacred by the DongriaKondh tribe. Yet, the push for industrial development threatens both the environment and the tribe's way of life. AmitaBaviskar writes, "Development projects often disregard the spiritual connection indigenous communities have with their land, reducing it to mere resources for extraction" (Baviskar 45).

Globalization also presents challenges to the preservation of indigenous belief systems. As younger generations move to urban centers in search of better opportunities, they often distance themselves from the traditions of their ancestors. The oral traditions that once ensured the transmission of myths and spiritual knowledge are at risk of being lost.

## **Preservation Efforts and the Role of Indigenous Gods in Modern India**

In the face of various challenges, efforts to preserve Rajasthan's indigenous religious practices are gaining momentum. Cultural and heritage organizations are working to document these traditions and protect sacred tribal lands. Festivals such as the GogajiMela in Ganganagar, the Tejaji Fair in Kharnal, and the Mallinath Fair in Tilwara attract large crowds, keeping the spirit of indigenous worship alive. These events honor deities like Gogaji, Tejaji, and Mallinath, who are revered for their connection to nature and protection of the community. They not only celebrate the gods but also serve as vital platforms for safeguarding the cultural and spiritual heritage of Rajasthan's tribal and rural communities.

Moreover, indigenous religious practices are increasingly being recognized for their role in promoting sustainability and environmental conservation. Indigenous communities often live in harmony with nature, practicing sustainable agriculture, and protecting biodiversity. Vandana Shiva points out, "The indigenous worldview, which sees nature as sacred and interconnected, offers valuable insights for addressing modern

environmental challenges” (Shiva 98). This environmental ethic, deeply rooted in indigenous religious beliefs, serves as a reminder of the importance of preserving these traditions.

## **Conclusion: The Enduring Legacy of Indigenous Gods**

India’s indigenous gods are more than relics of a bygone era; they are living embodiments of a worldview that celebrates the interconnectedness of nature, spirituality, and community. From the sacred spaces of the Bishnois to the vibrant folk traditions of the Bhils and Meghwals, these gods continue to shape the spiritual landscape of Rajasthan. Deities like Gogaji, Tejaji, and Baba Ramdev are not only protectors of their people but also symbols of harmony with nature. As modernity encroaches upon traditional ways of life, it becomes increasingly important to recognize, respect, and preserve the indigenous spiritual heritage that has long enriched Rajasthan’s cultural tapestry.

In the words of John Mbiti, “Indigenous religion is not primitive, nor is it less sophisticated than other world religions. It is a living, breathing tradition that continues to evolve and sustain the communities that practice it” (Mbiti 9). As we navigate the complexities of the 21st century, the wisdom of India’s indigenous gods offers timeless lessons in resilience, reverence for nature, and the enduring power of faith.

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## The Flow and the Dam: Indigenous Wisdom versus Technological Control in Kamala Markandaya's *The Cofferdams*

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*Dakshita Arora and Anjana Das*

Mine and yours;  
Mine, not yours.  
Earth endures;  
. . . But where are old men?  
I who have seen much,  
Such have I never seen.  
. . . They called me theirs,  
Who so controlled me;  
Yet every one  
Wished to stay, and is gone,  
How am I theirs,  
If they cannot hold me,  
But I hold them?"(Emerson 26-27)

This is what the earth sings in the section 'Earth-Song' of Ralph Waldo Emerson's poem "Hamatrete." This song clearly reveals that the earth remains while human beings who live on it repeating words like mine and thine go away from here leaving no trace. What the brook sings: "Men may come and men may go, / But I go on forever" (Tennyson 133) seems to hold the mirror of truth before human beings. These excerpts clearly demonstrate that human life is temporary while nature is eternal. The greed of man has made him too materialistic to realise this eternal truth. That is why the earth does not see those men who called her theirs, tried to control her and wished to stay forever. Men cannot hold the earth, but she holds them. Those who realise this truth reveal their love and respect to her. The tribals are the people who



show their devotion and regard to the earth and, thus, are equipped with indigenous wisdom that help them in living life peacefully and meaningfully. Such people embrace an ecocentric point of view. For these people the earth becomes all in all. They remain quite innocent and free from lust and greed while, on the other hand, there are some people who want to have control and dominate this earth. Such lusty and greedy people are anthropocentric as they take the earth to be a resource for the use of human beings. They use the modern technology to dominate nature for their materialistic gains.

The ecocentric people connect themselves to the roots of the land and show relationship with it. For them it is their sacred duty to conserve the integrity and beauty of this earth. Nature and Woman are interconnected. The earth is the mother, so is the woman. But anthropocentric people take possession of nature and thus of woman with the intention of oppression and exploitation for their benefits. Even in the *Atharvaveda* (12.1.12) it is said that “*mata bhumiḥ putro’ham pṛthivyāḥ*” meaning “Earth is my mother and I am her child” (qtd. *In Light of Indian Intellect* 184).

Vandana Shiva, an environmental activist, talks of liberation of the earth and also of women. While talking to Amy Goodman in an interview, she says: “The liberation of this earth, the liberation of women, the liberation of all humanity is the next step of freedom we need to work for, and it’s the next step of peace that we need to create” (Goodman 8). Rivers are the veins of the earth. They have become the lifelines for the people. Humanity depends on these rivers. The tribesmen are very well aware of this fact. But the anthropocentric people think only of materialistic gains and, so, want to change the course of this earth by making dams over the rivers. They are quite egoistic people who do not accept their defeat before nature. They wish to possess nature and all other things related to it. Dams which are constructed with the plea that they are beneficial for human beings actually become source of trouble and displacement for the tribals. While referring to the dream of Pt. Nehru for whom dams are ‘the temples of modern India’, Sangita Patil shares their adverse effect on the tribals and environment thus:

Pt Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India said that dams are ‘the temples of Modern India’ there by referring to their many benefits such as to store rain water, to irrigate farmland, generate electricity, supply drinking water and save land from floods and draught. But this is one side of the coin; the other side has necrophiliac impact on environment and human beings. The basic and major problem is displacement or rehabilitation of tribal people, who lose their lands, homes, jobs and property. The indigenous people or tribal people are not only deprived of their culture and kinship activities that affect their whole socioeconomic and ecology-based texture, but also lose their intimate relationship with nature. Further, there is also the loss of inherited knowledge and experiences of the local people about the plants and animals of that area, which is their source of livelihood thus leading to further confrontation and multifarious agglomeration of ecological crisis and shifting of valuable biological and cultural diversity (44).

Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004) is one of the most significant Indian English woman novelists of the post-Independence era by virtue of her narration of the clashes of the east and the west, traditions and modernity, village and town life etc. She is “a novelist of sensitive and ethical concerns” (Arora 11). She has demonstrated the socio-ecological issue in her novel *The Coffey Dams* which is considered to be “a turning point in Markandaya’s maturing as a novelist” (Parmeswaran 164). *The Coffey Dams* is so relevant that even Kamala Markandaya’s daughter, Kim Oliver reflects over it saying that “I’m very much looking forward to the re-publication of *The Coffey Dams* by my mother, Kamala Markandaya. This novel which has an ecological and holistic theme, written more than fifty years ago, seems so topical today” (Oliver).

Kamala Markandaya’s novel *The Coffey Dams* is mainly related to the project of construction of a dam on a river at Malnad, which is a hilly village of the South India. This project is given to Clinton and Mackendrick Co. Clinton’s mission is to complete the project and for this he never allows anyone to take rest. He confronts both the wrath of nature and the resistance of Indian works and technicians over the issue of workers’ dead bodies. He does not make any connection to the

tribals who are merely workers for him. He does not hesitate to displace them from their roots. His wife Helen is compassionate and so she makes connections with the tribals and for this she takes the help of Bashiam who becomes her linkman. In the clash of machines and indigenous wisdom, machines win resulting in the completion of the coffer dams. The tribal chief and Bashiam represent the tribal people while Clinton represents the industrialization. The novel comes to an end leaving many questions related to the preservation of the environment and the sustainable development. It raises various ecological issues which come out of the clashes between the technology and the forces of nature. While tracing out the ecological related issues, Parmeswaran writes: “*The Coffer Dams* is about several different issues, but one of them is the uprooting of a tribe from the ancestral space in order to build a dam. While it epitomizes the magnificence of Jawahar Lal Nehru’s vision with its emphasis on technology building temples of modern India, it is also about a moral question of tribal rights versus urban “needs” (52).

The novel *The Coffer Dams* begins with these words: “It was a man’s town. The contractors had built it, within hailing distance of the work site, for single men and men who were virtually single by reason of being more than a day’s walk away from their women and villages” (CD 1). The very first two sentences demonstrate the technological control in the name of progress and development in the tribal area of the village Malnad. The building of a dam on the river results in “the precipitate birth of a town in the jungle” (CD 2). “Man’s town” has been created out of the jungle and the use of the word ‘town’ shows the dominance of town over village or tribal area. The decision of constructing a dam is responsible for the displacement and exploitation of the tribals who are asked to leave the place as it is quite suitable for the members of the construction team. This is the man’s town where women will not live and where nature will have no place. This is the place for men who are single or who, though they are not single, become single because they cannot go to their village and women as the distance from the place where they are working is more than a day’s distance. If

they go, they will not be able to concentrate on their work. So, man's town is constructed first and this is the first step which is taken to keep the tribals away from their village and women. For Clinton, they are merely workers or human resources who will work for wages. He has no concern for their feelings and sentiments as they are simply human machines for him for the use of building the dam. This is not ethically right. To keep away the tribals or the men from the village is to displace them from their women, land and nature, with whom they are emotionally attached. Clinton is unemotional and unconcerned as he neither knows nor wishes to know where his workers go after work. What he needs is work from them. "A man's town" defeats the tribals and uproots them from their roots. This town has the "Clinton's Lines" where there is a coffee club, a soft drinks stall, a tin shack for showing the films. Creation of such town as it is "gouged and blasted out of the hill side" (CD 2) is a direct attack on the rural life of the natives.

Industrialization and scientific advancement done in the name of progress becomes a source of trouble for the tribals. Kamala Markandaya has graphically shown the displacement and troubles faced by the tribals as a result of building the dam on the river. Helen who is the wife of Clinton is sentimental and, so, she does not hesitate to talk to the tribesmen as she has no blocks of communication like her husband Clinton. When she finds several pieces of cooking pots and earthenware in her compound, she talks to Clinton who responds to her saying that they belong to the tribals who broke them while going away from this place. Mark the excerpt for the conversation that takes place between Helen and Clinton:

'I expect they broke them up and buried the lot,' said Clinton, 'rather than cart them away. The locals, I mean . . . some of 'em were camped here before we moved in, I'd quite forgotten that little episode.'

'What happened to them?'

'They moved.'

'Where to?'

‘No idea. Just got up and went, like animals. No moving problems there—I wish to God we travelled as light, we could have done this job in half the time.’

Helen said: ‘But they live here, didn’t they? They didn’t ask to move.’

‘No. We persuaded them.’

‘Why?’

‘Why?’ Clinton repeated irritable. ‘Because they occupied a site we needed.’

‘Were there no other sites?’

‘Not suitable ones. It had to be away from labour quarters and near the river and away from the blasting—a hundred things. Then we found this spot—absolutely ideal from our point of view, except for those huts.’ (CD 23)

This conversation clearly reveals how the tribals are de-tribalised at Clinton’s order for constructing the bungalows for the British technocrats. The tribals when they moved from their roots left a few cooking pots and earthen vessels which they could not take with them. The tribals are displaced from their place and this displacement is a little episode for him. Even more than this, he compares them with animals saying: “just got up and went, like animals.” This was their place, but they were persuaded to leave the place only on the plea that the site was suitable for Clinton and the company. They do not make any protest and move away from there leaving the earthenware and cooking pots. Helen thinks about them and feels: “A whole community that had been persuaded to move” (CD 24). It was not the displacement of one or two tribal families, but of a whole community.

The technological advancement affects the indigenous people by alluring them towards the materialistic pleasures. Bashiam, who is known as “Jungly wallah” is a “a man of the jungle. A primitive just come down off the trees” (CD 19). He is so different that besides English men, the Indians also keep away from him and consider him to be “a stranger in their midst calling him jungly wallah” (CD 19). He is a man who is well

equipped with tribal wisdom as he has the knowledge of the forest, river and season. This knowledge makes him different from other people. The scientific advancement and the industrialization take him into the grip to the extent that he learns “about electricity and machines, about building and repairing and dismantling” (CD 18). There is one character who takes his help in learning the tribal wisdom from him. This character is Helen, the wife of Clinton. Bashiam becomes her “linkman” and makes her feel everything related to nature and her objects. But, he becomes a paradox for her. She finds that he does not belong to tribal huts and has “no sense of belonging” (CD 44). The allurements of machines has uprooted him to the extent that he thinks it wise to follow the machines. “Prudent men make way for machines” (CD 46). From “insider”, he becomes “an outsider—de-tribalized” (CD 81). But he realizes the significance of tribal wisdom which he has learnt from his tribal people while living with them. His birth in the tribal family makes him aware of “race knowledge and instincts” which “could never be acquired by the real outsiders, those who had never been inside” (CD 81). The outsiders come to seek his tribal knowledge and Helen is so much impressed by him that she goes with him for bird trapping and finally makes a physical union with him demonstrating the union of the east and the west symbolically. He becomes a “mixture of tribal and technician” (CD 135). He loves machine, but never becomes a machine. He is still kind and sympathetic indigenous person who does not hesitate to risk his life for the sake of his men. He operates the crane in order to recover the dead bodies. But the jib of the crane *Devi* breaks and Bashiam becomes crippled in this accident.

The character who always lives in the lap of nature is the tribal chief whose name is not mentioned in the novel. He is simply known as the tribal chief—the man who lives in association with nature and her world. He belongs to the old tradition of protection of nature and environment. He feels much pain to see the people moving towards the path of materialism leaving the lap of nature. His heart weeps when he sees the tribals moaning for money. These tribals have become “money-mad” like the foreigners. When Helen talks to him saying that money is

“a useful commodity” (*CD 71*), he shares with her that with the money his people buy the rubbish which include “tin cans and cardboard boots, and scented pigs’ grease to plaster their hair” (*CD 72*). There is a shortage of food and for this, they are themselves responsible. The tribal chief shares with Helen thus:

. . . they are short of food too, whose fault is it, the jungle is full of game, if they relied on that and not on the money which comes and goes—but what is the use of an old man talking. Keep away, I told them. . . . I am their headman, I have to say these things, someone has to say them; but no. Now they are punished and are hurt, like small children. Like fools. Whose fault, I ask— (*CD 72*)

The heartbreaking thing is that he believes in the jungle with full faith while his tribesmen rely on materialistic things. Hence, they suffer and get punishment from nature. The tribal chief seems to Helen “a silent figure in gnarled wood” (*CD 72*). At the order of Clinton, men are trying to alter the course of the river, but the dam will become “the man-eater” (*CD 72*) which will eat them. This happens when the construction of the dam takes the lives of the forty-two people. The tribal chief is the man who remains “undiluted by progressive or atavistic proddings” (*CD 72*). What he forecasts comes to true in future. He is a man who can read the season. He senses what he cannot see. He foresees “the rain and the rise of the river” (*CD 150*). He wants to use his authority so that he may call his tribesmen back. This shows his caring nature towards his people. In the end, he tells Helen that everything will be good when “the ridges rise clear” (*CD 234*) and with these words he dies. His last words prove to be true as the rain stops and the ridges become clear of rain. The tragedy is that he is full of indigenous wisdom, but no one, even his own people do not take its benefit. The tribesmen are attracted to the materialistic pleasures and, thus, become under the western technological control.

Clinton wants to have control over the river and for this he uses the technological power. Taming the river is taming nature. He has to control it by constructing a dam over it. This river is said to be “the real bastard”

(*CD 30*) and “a devil (*CD 30*). Rafid Sami Majeed and Eiman Abbas El-Nour write in this connection.

The Indian virgin nature is attacked by savage British men. The British use their brutal devices to cut deep in the Indian land adding more pollution to the pollution they caused when they militarily occupied India. It seems that the Indian nature is to suffer the British military and civil occupations. (63)

Machines are taken to be sign of progress in the age of industrialization. These machines are responsible for creating noise pollution and bringing all round destruction. Machines start working in order to silence the voice of nature. The explosions are being done with the help of dynamite. “At dawn, at noon, by night, machines thundered and pounded; land and air vibrated spasmodically to the dull crump of explosions, the shock waves travelling to the barracks, the bungalows, the leisure blocks and the tribal settlements” (*CD 105*). The explosions produce the shock waves which disturb the peace of the people. These explosions with dynamite create the dust clouds. The air in the valley seems to be polluted because of “the daily pounding, blasting and drilling” (*CD 56*). The river is taken to be an animal which has to be placed in a cage. For this, two thousand men and ten thousand ton of equipments are placed at the site in order to tame the river. He wants to alter the course of the river. He blocks its flow at the upstream coffer dam and finally succeeds in building the coffer dams though he has to face the rage of nature and also the death of the forty-two men. “As the dam advanced the river began to rise” (*CD 112*). The novel ends with the victory of Clinton, but he is not happy even after he succeeds in his attempt. The end makes the reader think of environment and its related problems caused by men like Clinton for whom dead bodies are not dead bodies but simply “bones . . . calcium, the chalk that went to the making of the cliffs and the framework of men” (*CD 186*).

The tribals love nature and say nothing even if they suffer much from her vagaries. They are connected to nature through lakes, rivers, trees, animals, birds, grass, sky, clouds and rains etc. They are in the habit of pacifying nature with “sacrifice and ceremony.” They accept nature’s



laws in their lives. They do not blame God for drought or flood. These natives or the tribals remain united because of their staunch belief in nature. They remain as they are under any circumstances accepting their fate without making any complaint. “At both times they prayed to God, they never blamed him. It was their fate” (*CD 3*). Niroj Banerjee is right when he states:

The history of human civilization tells us that nature—the jungle, the river, the country side—is an integral part of the village life which is in the novel threatened by the painstaking plans and charts of the British engineers and technocrats. The dam, thus, becomes a symbol of modernity itself encroaching slowly yet steadily over the tradition bound and, unenlightened village in the lap of nature. (80)

Helen is quite right in exposing the real face of materialism, under which the western world—so called industrial and scientific world lives. This is the world which provides all the facilities meant for the comforts of body, but fails to soothe soul. Helen who never knew what nature meant comes to feel and understand in touch with the tribal people. Bashiam makes her smell rain and hear the moving grass. Under the impact of materialism, her senses got blunted. She shares it with Bashiam thus:

Our world, she said. The one in which I live. Things are battered down in it. Under concrete and mortal, all sorts of things. The land. Our instincts. The people who work in our factories, they’ve forgotten what fresh air is like. Our animals—we could learn from them, but we’re Christians you know, an arrogant people, so we deprive them of their rights. Deny them. Pretend they haven’t got any. Then they don’t know about sunshine or rain either. Sometimes they can’t move, poor things. We don’t allow them to, in case they yield us one ounce less of their flesh. Where is our instinct for pity? Blunted. We’ve cut ourselves off from our heritage. We’ve forgotten what we knew. Where can we turn to, to learn? A million years accumulating, and we know no better than to kick it in the teeth. Now I can’t even sense rain although it is there. (*CD 144*)

The world of concrete does not give her satisfaction, rather it has deadened all human relations wiping out all kinds of feelings. Now the touch and guiding spirit of Bashiam has reawakened the sense of belongingness. She takes a dip in the river of wisdom and breaks the dam of mechanical life. She has learnt what really nature means. Vinod Manoharrao Kukade writes: “Helen loves, respects, protects the nature and tries to consolidate her relationship with the animals, birds, flora and fauna and even she toils for making the people aware the indispensability of the affectionate relationship of the man with nature” (5824).

Kamala Markandaya has realistically and seriously raised the ecological issues, which can be better solved with the help of indigenous wisdom. She has brought the value of indigenous wisdom possessed by the tribals but the tragedy is that no one take this wisdom into consideration and embrace environmental degradation for material gain. The tribals know that they will go away from this world but this earth will remain. Hence, they love and consider nature a deity worthy to be worshipped. Man wishes to control nature and succeeds to some extent resulting in loss for future generation. He forgets that he has to live here on this earth. If he pollutes it, how will he remain here? The novel offers a serious message—the message of taking the tribals and their wisdom into consideration. Helen understands it and so assimilates the tribal wisdom with the help of Bashiam and the tribal chief. She does not make dams over feelings and allow them to flow with the river. Kamala Markandaya’s daughter Kim Oliver feels happy when she considers the novel *The Coffer Dams* which still inspires writers and people for raising voices against the degradation of the environment. This discussion can be better concluded with Kim Oliver’s remark.

My mother said that she had to be angry about something before she could write about it. I’m proud that she wrote about injustice towards the colonised; the poor; the disadvantaged and weak; the homeless, the old, the sick; minorities with dark skin; indigenous people dispossessed of their lands; women, children, and animals. Today, aided by social media, many people are rising up against

various faces of oppression. Fifty years ago, Kamala Markandaya was giving a voice to the oppressed in her writing; today her anger still rings true. (Oliver)

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## Understanding Indigeneity in West Indian Culture in 17th Century Barbados: A Reading of Maryse Conde's *I, Tituba, the Black Witch of Salem*

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*Dipa Chakrabarti*

According to Wikipedia internet source, peoples in independent countries are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions. As per Dominic O'Sullivan "Indigenous self-determination, through differentiated citizenship, is as much the product of global developments in extra-state political and mic relationships as it is the product of a group's place within the nation state." This suggests that indigenous self-determination is a result of both global and local factors. The Guadeloupean author, Maryse Conde, awardee of the French Grand Prix for Women's Literature in 1986 for her work *Moi, Tituba sorcière... Noire de Salem*, originally written in French and translated by Richard Philcox, *I, Tituba, the Black Witch of Salem* showcases the values of indigenous learning that Tituba, the protagonist of the novel imbibes from Man Yaya, a Nago tribal woman. She brings to the fore the West Indian tribal life and their beliefs regarding natural cure and healing as well as their knowledge of occult art. But Tituba will encounter severe challenges with her practices in the puritanical New England and will be imprisoned on charges of Witchcraft for more than a decade. Thus, the seventeenth-century Barbados becomes a battle ground confronting the harsh realities of the slave trade and the cold customs of Puritanical Christian Church. The

excitement of the reader doubles when s/he realizes that the female protagonist in Conde's fiction is a historical entity too. She is the only black victim of the "Salem witch trials". Earlier, Nathaniel Hawthorne also took recourse to the same document to write the novel *The Scarlet Letter* while Arthur Miller, drawing from the same, wrote *The Crucible*. But Maryse Condé adds a new dimension to her novel by bringing to life the pain, humiliation, sexism, racism and torture of slave life. Written in the first person, she engaged Tituba in constant conversation giving the minutest details of the lives of her fellow enslaved men and women.

The lesser West Indies, due to its history of colonization by Spain, Portugal and Britain before 17th century, had no French traces at all. But in the 1640s sugarcane cultivation started and this explains the birth of Francophonie there. In 1644 the slave trade first brought workers for the sugar, coffee, and other plantations that the colonists established, and slavery became institutionalized. The black population of the West Indies were stripped of most of their cultural heritage and dumped into a new world. Faced with a new pattern of life and a different language, the blacks with their struggle to survive, were forced to develop a new way of life and even a language (Creole) to meet their needs. Herman F. Bostick points out the difference between African Literature and Caribbean literature by underscoring the multi-layered West Indian culture which is the confluence of African, Indian and Chinese cultures "Like the Afro-American, the West-Indian is a product of the American Continent with a history, literature and culture uniquely his own" (Bostick). This brings to mind also the notable author and French philosopher, Édouard Glissant's famous concept of "Antillanité" in the 1980s, a literary and political movement that stresses the creation of a specific West Indian identity as against the "Negritude" literary theory that boasts of the uniqueness of the African essence. Hence, the Caribbean literature of French expression deserves to be recognized and given its own space. It should be studied based on its own literary and cultural worth. It is in this background that we need to understand Maryse Conde's aforesaid novel. Alienation is at the heart of the story

and Maryse Conde depicted this boldly with Tituba being uprooted from her own soil, culture and language when she had to leave Barbados, her native city, for Salem and she would long to return to Barbados.

“What was this world [ . . . ]? which forced me to live among people who did not share my language, who did not share my religion, in an ungraceful and unfriendly country.” (82)

“I (Tituba) witnessed scenes of brutality and torture. Men came back bleeding in the chest and back covered with scarlet welts, one of them died before my eyes while vomiting.” (18-19)

Alienation of the slaves from their own soil, their loss of identity, total objectification in the hands of the colonial masters, worst even was being a woman in this violent hopeless milieu. So, Tituba, who as per the Salem trial documents which corroborate her status, was imprisoned and acquitted but after that point her knowhow is not known. In contrast to this account, Tituba was made to be reborn in Maryse Conde's creation as a strong black mulatto (child born out of the union of a Black and a White), result of a violent union: her mother Abena was raped by a White sailor onboard of a slave ship heading towards Barbados, an eastern island in the lesser Antilles. Abena was then bought at a high price by Darnell Davis to keep company his sick wife, Jennifer. But her pregnancy stood in the way of her camaraderie with Jennifer. A slave woman was thought to be useless once pregnant. So, Abena was now given away by Darnell to another slave, Yao, whom he bought along with her. Fortunately, this turn of event proved to be happy for Abena and her daughter Tituba. Love, empathy, and warmth that hitherto was missing in their lives will be showered upon them by Yao. But soon, Abena will be hanged in her bid to escape from a second rape by Darnell Davis, whom she stabbed. In utter grief, Yao will put an end to his life, and Tituba will be orphaned at the tender age of six.

Soon after, Tituba will be adopted by Man Yaya, an old lady having supernatural powers. The latter will pass on her knowledge of the art of traditional healing, the language of nature, and occult art to Tituba. On her death, Tituba will isolate herself from human surrounding, build her

mud hut on the mountain top, cultivate a kitchen garden, and raise hens, a cow and a pig for her self-sustenance. She was a free marron, a freed slave as her master Darnel left for England and his successor did not take custody of slaves. She will enjoy her independence but soon she will fall in love with John Indian. Tituba decides to follow John Indian to Bridgetown, shunning her freedom to become a slave. She will now fall a victim of the crudest racial discrimination in the hands of the new mistress, Suzanne Endicott. She will be subject to extreme humiliation; Suzanne and her lady friends will treat her like a beast as if she was not a human being having no human feelings or values.

“What amazed and revolted me was not so much the words they said, but the way they did it. It seemed as if I wasn’t there, standing at the threshold of the room . . . she erased me from the human map. I was a non-being. An invisible.” (46)

She will be forced to recite the Christian prayers which she could not accept from heart, as being initiated to paganism by her godmother, ManYaya. Susanna forces Tituba to clean for hours on end; she also forcibly tries to convert Tituba to Christianity, introducing her to the terrifying concept of Satan. Tituba would react to this ill treatment by becoming vulgar, uglier, repulsive and vindictive to the point that she thought of eradicating Susanna Endicott from the earth. But at the last moment, Man Yaya reappeared before her and diverted her from the misdeed as the ‘high knowledge’ given by her was to do good only. The couple will be now sold to Samuel Paris by Suzanne and the latter will be the reason for Tituba’s trial at Salem for practicing witchcraft. Tituba put to test successfully her knowledge to heal the family of Parris, his wife and the two children but she will receive only condemnation and ill treatment by her master in exchange. The reader feels fascinated realizing that Condé is writing historical fiction as the protagonist Tituba was a real-life character who was tried in the infamous ‘Salem trials (1692-1693) in the village of Salem, modern day Massachusetts. Tituba was accused along with more than 200 people and her name figured in the list. Tituba was named as accused of practicing witchcraft.

So, Condé is inspired by a real-life character. Coming to the story, we find Suzanne Endicott springs into action to take revenge on Tituba. She sells the couple, Tituba and John Indian to a new master, Reverend Samuel Parris, who embarks for the United States. A sad fate awaits the young woman in Salem, where Reverend Parris has been appointed as the church minister. Tituba is accused of leading the witch craze among the Puritan community and jailed for seventeen months for being a “witch.” On the advice of a young woman detained for adultery, Hester (a character borrowed by Maryse Condé from *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne), Tituba, during her interrogation, confesses to being a witch and this confession allows her to escape death. Tituba was acquitted and pardoned. As per Wikipedia, thirty people were found guilty, nineteen of whom were executed by hanging (fourteen women and five men). A majority of people accused and convicted of witchcraft were women (about 78%). The Puritan belief and prevailing New England culture of the time was that women were inherently sinful and more susceptible to damnation than men were.

Known to be Feminist, Maryse Conde borrowed Hester from Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*. A conspiracy was hatched by her master, Samuel Parris and Tituba was imprisoned as a witch for having thrown a curse on the children of her master, Samuel Parris. In the prison Hester befriended her and became the feminist preacher to her. Maryse Conde tries to make aware her protagonist regarding female oppression, directly or indirectly, mentally or physically. Hester asks her questions to determine if Tituba is still a slave also in her mentality: “Do you bear the name that a man gave you?” (151). Hester talks of emancipation of the mentality of West Indian women showing that she is limited by the society in which they find themselves whether she is White or Black.

“I (Hester) would like to write but alas! Women don’t write! It is only men who overwhelm us with their prose [. . .] (159). [. . .] I would like to write a book where I would expose the model of a society governed, administered by women! We would name our children after ourselves, we would raise them alone [. . .]” (159-160).



Tituba survives the trials and is sold as a slave to a Jewish merchant, Benjamin Cohen. She cares for Benjamin and his nine children but the love between a Jew and a Pagan was not acceptable to the Puritans and so, they set fire to their house, killing all the children. After this disaster, Benjamin decides to set free Tituba and sends her back to Barbados. She initially stays with a group of maroons (freed slaves), sleeping with their leader, Christophe, who dreams of immortality. She returns to the shack where she had lived with Man Yaya and works as a healing herbalist for the enslaved people in the area. The enslaved people bring her a young man, Iphigène, who they thought would die, but Tituba nurses him back to health. He plans a revolt against the plantation owners. The night before the revolt, the couple are arrested. Tituba and Iphigène join the spirit realm, inciting future revolts whenever possible.

Maryse Condé deliberately problematizes the personality of Tituba in her fiction and transforms the rural, simple-minded character to a thinking being, who rebels against atrocities committed on the slaves by the Whites and values the indigenous learning. Unlike a docile female slave of the 17th century, Tituba of Condé is intelligent, informed and independent, capable of sustaining herself. She criticizes John Indian as “Black skin, white mask”, and denounces him as a blind follower of the White Superiors. Condé identified her in the Salem trials, gives her a childhood and a youth and put her back to Barbados, her native land by putting an end to her exile. Finally, the author turned her into a sort of female hero as she would do good to many by using her knowledge.

Witch crafting is one of the major themes to occupy a major place in the Antillean literary discourse, be it in Rene Depestre’s “Hadriana dans tous mes rêves” or Gisele Pineau’s “Chair Piment” to take some examples. Maryse Conde too valorized this as a cultural identity and a practice that is beneficial to mankind. In the story, when moved to Salem, United States, Tituba noticed that her lover, John Indian bears a grudge against her and addresses her as ‘sorcerer’ off and on. This antagonized her. “I noticed in his mouth, the word (sorcerer) tainted with reproach. What do you mean? How? The facility of communicating with the invisible, of keeping a constant space for the invisible, to treat, to heal, is

it not a superior grace likely to inspire respect, admiration and gratitude? Consequently, the witch, if we want to use the word who possesses this grace, should she not be pampered or revered, instead of being feared?" (34).

She became doubtful as the community in Salem was unknown to her and would not understand her. The perpetuation of the myth that the colonized are inferior without trying to understand them and their cultural contribution was a common practice. Below is how the protagonist narrator talks of her knowledge that saved Elizabeth Parris:

I placed my hand on her forehead, paradoxically cold and sweaty. What was she suffering from? I guessed that it was the mind that trained the body as elsewhere [ . . . ] (66).

I decided to use subterfuge. A maple tree whose foliage was turning red served as cheese maker. Sharp holly leaves and shiny, the Guinea herbs. Of the yellow and scentless flowers, the salapatrius, panacea for all ills of the body and which grow halfway up the hills. My prayers did the rest. In the morning, color returned to her cheeks, mistress Elizabeth Parris. (75-76).

Tituba recounts the emotional and physical torments suffered by her and the like. *Moi, Tituba sorcière... Noire de Salem* by Maryse Condé (1934- ), one of the most respected of Guadeloupe's several powerful writers, produced one of the African diaspora's literary classics. The book explores the interwoven psychosocial, racial, and historical effects of the Atlantic slave trade and the sacrificial personal cost of rebellion against it. Above all, Conde reclaims the space for indigenous West Indian beliefs and practices through her novel by empowering her with sagacity, courage and a will to rebel that which the original Tituba was incapable of achieving. She turns her into a female hero and an epic heroine.

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## Exploring the Rich Tapestry of Indigenous Knowledge: Folktales of Dungari Garasiya Tribal Community of North Gujarat

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*Divyeshkumar D. Bhatt*

Adivasi, the tribal folks, as it is general to all the indigenous tribes across the globe, are the people who live in close communion with nature and natural resources. Their lifestyle gets moulded by the natural ways. Though not as rich as the formal languages in terms of written records, the stories, which form the very part of their lifestyle, remain most naturally expressive and replete with the symbols drawn from their natural surroundings. Not only this, but the close study of the folktales and songs allows us to have clear glimpses of their being located somewhere in the archetypal thematic frameworks. One can imagine, from these instances, that this shared sensibility and communion with nature are the real sources of inspiration and the very beginning point of human expression. The paper delves into the literary aesthetics of Dungari Garasiya folktales and tries to look into the various veneers of meaning and values associated with them.

The key point in the life of the indigenous people is their most natural and expressive life style and its expressions through the tales and songs, which form very much part of their life. Dance is another important form of celebration. Looking into the literary aesthetics of Dungari Garasiya folktales gives us a sound understanding and insight into the aesthetic preferences and narrative traditions of this community as we decipher the narrative structures, recurring motifs, and thematic patterns that construct them. The intricate world of folktales of these indigenous tribes of the northern part of Gujarat provides us with insights into their lives, and the cultural, social, and historical significance embedded in these narratives unravels the rich cultural heritage of these tribes and

the role of folktales in shaping their collective identity. Thus as Jo-ann Archibald and Q'um Q'um Xiiem put it in *Indegenous Story Telling*, "Indigenous storied memory is a form of Indigenous pedagogy."

In this line, the study employs a multidisciplinary approach, combining ethnographic research, linguistic analysis, and literary criticism to illuminate the nuances of the storytelling traditions of the Dungri Garasiya community. For the ethnography and fieldwork research, this paper takes the book of Maria Sress as the base. Through a thorough examination of the oral narratives, linguistic peculiarities, and narrative motifs of the collection, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the cultural expressions of the tribe. The paper also elucidates the cultural significance of folktales by examining their role in preserving indigenous knowledge, transmitting cultural values, and fostering a sense of community identity. Through an exploration of narrative elements such as myths, legends, and moral tales, the research aims to uncover the cultural nuances encapsulated in these oral traditions.

The transformation of oral stories into written texts is one of the main issues in folklore studies (Naithani). Maria Sress has rendered a great service by compiling these stories from their original sources. She lived among them for more than two decades, and won their hearts and trust, especially of the woman folks of the Dungri Garasiya community. This book is the result of this affinity.

\In this book, a result of rigorous exercise, the editor has not only collected the stories but also tried to present them in a language very close to the originally spoken version of the tribes language. Some of them are part of songs as well. Almost all the stories have common grounds: natural surroundings, farming disciplines, food, and the conventions of their lives. The stories bear a natural tone of simplicity and plainness and display no trait of complexities; on the contrary they present the course of action as it occurs with natural trait of action and reaction. This serves the proof of the natural thought process, simplicity and these people's affinity with the nature and natural resources. In short, these folktales of Dungari Garasiya Adivasi community come to us as a vital thread weaving through the fabric of their identity.

If looked at from the demographical statistics, Gujarat state stands at the fourth rank in the percentage of tribal population. Among them, the Dungari Garasiya Community reside in the Aravalli mountain range in the Sabarkantha, Banaaskantha and Aravalli districts. The term 'Dungari Garasiya' bears two elements. 'Dungri' in Gujarati language means related to the Hilla or Mountains; whereas 'Garasiya' stands for the community rewarded a promised income by the King. Thus, as per the story in the oral tradition, these tribal people helped the King of Udaipur in some important warfare, and the pleased the King rewarded them with the Jungle Land of this area. Since this area is Hill area, these people started dwelling in this region. These people reside scattered on the hill tops, and not in the groups as in the ordinary villages. These people have their own way of life, culture, way of worship and customs and traditions. They love to celebrate their festivals with pomp and gong. They are somewhat superstitious and believe and nurture the fears of the ghosts. Their jovial and cheerful temperament nicely gets translated in their folktales and folksongs nicely sustained in their oral traditions. They love to dance in groups in the accompaniment of music on the special occasions like festivals of Holi (The festival of Colours) and also on the occasions like marriage or any other religious ceremonies. Since the folktales and songs are sustained in the oral traditions, it will not be any fallacy to look at them as being in the continuation from antiquity keeping the trace of age old customs, conventions and belief system.

The story titled '*Golden Age and Deluge*' bears thematic similarity to the stories of Indian mythology and the Christian world and hence serves as proof of the universality of the archetypal themes and the tribal traditions affinity to them. It relates the story of the golden age, when everything went in favours of the Dungri Garasiya community, and it resulted in the population burst. When the place got densely overpopulated, the resources started getting exhausted. It gave birth to famine and starvation. And lastly, the deluge devoured all the population. In this apocalypse, no one could survive except two virtuous souls, Kaavo and Kaavi. The words uttered to these two by one of the divine

white forms were: *“You and your ancestors, who had a sensibility towards nature and who took their liberty as their right to exploit nature and her resources. I could not tolerate it, and hence, their actions that damaged nature proved fatal to them. Since you two have been sensible and virtuous, you have been spared from the rage.”*

This concept of Golden Age represents a period of prosperity, harmony and abundance following a subsequent decline marked by human errors and environmental degradation is a recurring motif in many cultural and religious stories. In drawing parallels between the story and contemporary environmental issues, it reinforces the idea that these archetypal themes are universal and timeless. The narrative serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness of human actions and their impact on the environment, encouraging reflection on the need for responsible and sustainable practices to ensure a more balanced and resilient future. The sparing of the two virtuous souls, Kaavo and Kaavi, underscores the importance of responsible stewardship of the environment. Their sensibility and virtuous actions distinguish them from their ancestors who exploited nature without regard for its limits.

The story rings an alarm bell for the modern world’s exploitative usage of natural resources. It highlights the root cause of the issues pertaining to global warming. This aspect of the story carries a message about the potential for redemption through mindful and sustainable practices, suggesting that humanity can avoid a similar fate by adopting a more harmonious relationship with the natural world.

The story *‘The Woman was the First Being’* relates the chronicle of the creation of the Human Race by God. The only contrast with the mainstream narratives of the world is that whereas the Indian Hindu stories and the Christian narratives project the creation of man first and then the woman was created as his companion. This story presents the creation of the Earth, and Nature God’s exercise to adorn her with all sorts of flora and fauna, oceans, rivers and streams, insects, bees and butterflies and lastly the creation of the perfect being ‘A Woman’ to inherit this beautiful garden. The Christian narratives present the serpent

as the evil spirit, this story presents it as the form of nature herself whose sweet embrace results in the pregnancy of the first woman 'Sati' who eventually mothers a son. The story can be read as the estimation and high place of woman in this tribal community. The ending assertion "One must not forget the initially the woman was the sovereign of the world."

The story '*How Kavi Got Deceived?*' is in continuation of the story of great Deluge. Kavi is the same one who survived the apocalypse along with Kavo. in this story too, Kavi is depicted to be of superior qualities than her male partner. She is aware of her superiority too. Like Atlanta and Melanion, Kavi and Kavo entered into the race. Just as Melanion used golden Apples to distract Atlanta from the track of the race, Kavo too uses several ornaments to keep Kavi from running fast and winning the race. This story along with being in tune with the universal motif, provides the glimpses of the people's insights into the human nature. Depiction of Kavi as a superior with innate wisdom is the instance of acceptance of woman's entity a not just equal but a superior contributor to life. It also answers the questions as why a woman has to follow her husband, and why a man has always to gift jewellery and ornaments to his lady.

The story '*The Snake's Reward and the Daughter of a Farmer*' again present the motif of jealousy among the women. Here, the stepmother does not treat the daughter properly, but she is rewarded by a serpent on account of her kind nature, ultimately this boon becomes instrument in winning the heart of the king. Again, when the king wants to marry her and comes with the marriage proposal to her father, the father asserts that it is the right of his daughter in taking this decision independently. Thus, whereas in several mainstream clans the girls haven't their voice in selecting their match, this story documents comparative freedom and acceptance of the woman's rights in this community.

In '*The Princess Fulwanti*' the young man Dhiro directly proposes a young lady to enter into the marital relationship, and in its reply, the lady too after examining the physical stature, strength and impressed by his



dare devil nature agrees to do so. The lady's name is Fuli who later on turns out to be the princess Fulwanti. Kali, a jealous lady, pushes Fuli into the well and takes her place. But Fuli comes to Dhiro in several forms like a flower, spinach and mango. In all the forms, Dhiro could not identify her but villainous Kali removes her from him. But lastly, Fuli unites with Dhiro, and Kali is punished for her baseness and deceitful acts. Like many mainstream folktales, here too the universal motif of initial pains and hardships to a virtuous soul at the hand of base and vicious persona, but ultimate victory of the virtuous soul against all odds finds artistic expression.

*"The Princess Fulwanti"* thus echoes the universal motif found in many folktales, where a virtuous soul undergoes initial trials and tribulations at the hands of a malevolent character. Despite the challenges, the virtuous soul emerges victorious, emphasizing the enduring theme of the triumph of good over evil and the rewarding nature of perseverance in the face of adversity. The narrative serves as an artistic expression of these timeless themes within the context of a captivating and fantastical tale.

*'Karamabai: The Daughter of Sheshnag'* is another story in the same line. Sheshnag is a serpent with a thousand heads in Hindu mythology; Here too the same motif of virtuous versus vicious runs. Karamabai is envied and despised by the other queens of her husband King. They succeed in convincing the king that Karamabai, being the daughter of the Serpent Sheshnag, uses her power to feed him with poison and thus wishes to kill him slowly. And in the end, she disappears to the abode of her father cursing the king for his untrusting nature.

*'The Curse of The King Huda'* relates the significance of rain and as it happens in many other Indian Myths, King's fate is associated with the possibilities of rain and the agriculture produce. *'Alki and Dhulki'* presents the history of the celebration of the festival of Holi. Holi is the most loved festival of this clan. This story explains the significance of dance and celebration on this festival.

The study of these stories recorded from the oral traditions elucidates the underlying cultural narratives. Through the employed Metaphors

we can understand how the socio cultural motifs have their parallels. Since storytelling is part of Indigenous methodology: “Stories hold within them knowledges while simultaneously signifying relationships. In oral tradition, stories can never be decontextualised from the teller” (Kovach 94). Hence, these stories become an important document to discern the traditions and conventional life of the Dungari garasiya community. Smith rightly observes: “stories, values, practices and ways of knowing continue to inform Indigenous pedagogies” (15).

In this sense these stories do not just remain stories, but inform us about their “Lived Experiences” and unravel the layers of cultural, linguistic and literary significance allowing us the glimpses of the rich tapestry of indigenous knowledge catered by the Dungri Garasiya community.

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## Exploring Insanity and Savagery in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

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**Mohit**

In the modern era, Joseph Conrad is mostly remembered as a writer of nautical stories. He was raised by Polish parents. He moved to France at the age of sixteen to pursue his long-held desire to travel. Despite missing six months of his career in Africa due to illness, he assumed the role of 'captain' on a 'Congo Riversteamer' in 1890. He was inspired by this tragedy to write his greatest narrative, *Heart of Darkness*. *Heart of Darkness* traces out the evil that is inherent in man. The novella deals with the life and the actions of its protagonist, named Kurtz. He is an ambitious and greedy ivory trader in the Congo. Marlow is the observer-narrator and unfolds the physically, morally, and spiritually degenerated phases of Kurtz's life, revealing his brutality, cruelty, and an awareness of the 'other' side of Imperialism. Marlow intends to trace out the truth about the protagonist and finally succeeds in it. The protagonist's atrocities, cruelties, and unending lust for power transform him into a ruthless dictator. In the end of the novella, the novelist is successful in presenting that the protagonist becomes aware of the horror he relentlessly pursued. The work is frequently interpreted as a critique of European imperialism and colonialism, as well as a psychiatric exploration of the human mind and the essence of evil. *Heart of Darkness* demonstrates how colonialism, despite the deaths and devastation it causes to the local native population, is a brutal quest for dominance over other people's psyche and territory.

### **Colonizers in *Heart of Darkness***

A colonizer is anyone who gains control over a foreign area or population, usually for monetary, political, or social gain. By imposing their own cultural, social, and political norms on the colonial people, colonizers

have historically maintained power over them. The process of colonization has greatly influenced the history of many parts of the world, including Oceania, the Americas, Asia, and Africa. Like the majority of Europeans, those who colonized Africa believed in a superior race. They present themselves as individuals who arrived in Africa with the intention of transforming it into a more civilized society, and for that time, Europeans used to present the motive of colonization as their objective. This viewpoint opposes human freedom and equality regardless of colour. "They believed that African people needed to be liberated from their archaic ways and brought up in a civilized, educated manner" (Conrad 6). The novella has intentionally shown us that the world is divided into two different groups; one is the civilized world, and the other is the uncivilized savages. This might be because of Europe's predefined thinking for a less coherent culture.

### **Savagery of Imperialism**

Marlow begins his voyage from the river Thames and pursues a long way to reach the inner station of the trading company. His progress at every stage reveals to him a new facet of Kurtz. Deeply involved in immoral activities, Kurtz appears to be a shocking personality for Marlow. Kurtz was an uncommon and dynamic man. Despite all his power, an unknown fear and anxiety gripped him. Marlow witnesses manipulation and fraud as he travels from the external terminal to the core one. He started his journey as an expert in the ivory trade and supported the mechanism of imperialistic company. However, he quickly came to understand the destructive nature of imperialism and the false claims made about the development and civilization of the native people. He feels disheartened and becomes misfit to the 'European society'. His inner turmoil reveals the state of his tormented heart in the words, "Soul! If anybody had ever struggled with a soul, I am the man" (Conrad 98).

Marlow, the narrator of the story, is overwhelmed by a sense fear to look at the house of Kurtz, surrounded by severed heads mounted on the posts of the fencing. He learns from his companion that those heads are of rebels. He feels stunned for a while because he knows that

people are “nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation lying confusedly in the greenish gloom” (26). Marlow realizes that the people who are like ‘black-shadows’ will not rebel against the protagonist. He himself begins to realize that he is in the inferno. He also perceives a significant disparity between the perspectives of the oppressed and those of the oppressors. Marlow knows that the whites assume that it is their prerogative to rule the natives, and they treat them sobrutally. Suppressed by tyranny, the natives become fearful and hunt ceaselessly for ivory.

Conrad ironically represents the white people of Europe as “civilized” and the black people of Africa as “savage” or “uncivilized”. The way imperialists exploited the natives under the guise of civilization and illumination, hiding behind the domain of colonization, reveals the true nature of imperialists, i.e., a dark heart masked under the white skin. The novella exposes the hidden motives of the exploiters, who are willing to go to any extent for the sake of power and the greed for ivory.

### **Insanity of Imperialism**

Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is a true picture of the human psyche. Marlow is the narrator of the story and wraps up the psychological stage of the protagonist, Kurtz. Marlow delineates that Kurtz has reached the ‘farthest stage of insanity’ due to his unlimited greed and egotism. His ability to accumulate a large amount of ivory has made him the centre of attraction and the supreme creature among the local folks of Congo. It is certain that his limitless lust for ivory is more aligned with absurdity than a money-making tendency. His intrinsic goodness vanishes when he is driven by a monstrous megalomania.

Kurtz’s life is steeped in penetrating brutality, intensified cruelty, limitless greed, and unending ambition. He symbolizes modern Faust. Faust was a very brilliant and intelligent man. He knows a number of languages and the themes of many subjects. Unfortunately, he becomes a victim of lust for knowledge, wanting to know even the secrets of nature and God. Therefore, he leaves the sublime literatures and adopts the Necromancy. He sells his soul to the devil for worldly pleasure for twenty-four years, but in the end, he has repented for his evil designs

and is driven by a craze for his salvation. Joseph Conrad portrays Kurtz as a protagonist who, despite his intelligence and charming physical appearance, unfortunately succumbs to penetrating brutality, intensified cruelty, limitless greed, unending ambition, and sexual perversion. The hero is the “pitiful Jupiter” and his relations with a woman are one of the reasons for his moral degradation. He becomes mad when he sees the beauty:

Her wild beauty . . . draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments . . . brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck . . . charms and tempts him to destruction.” (103)

## **Discussion**

The entire story serves as a symbolic representation of darkness; “Ivory” stands for the lust and greed of man. “Kurtz” is its agency, as truthful and unreliable as the name itself. The story is not individual but universal. It reflects the exploitation of Africans by “All Europe” rather than merely traders. Conrad makes it clear that the real heart of darkness lies beneath our own “hearts,” where evil lurks. The last days of the protagonist are full of tensions, measures, and internal pains. He meets an end in a very measurable condition. Through the story of this man, the novelist is successful in showing his readers that evil designs of mind always drink the pitiable end of the evil doer.

Physically, morally, and spiritually, Kurtz has suffered several degradations. He grows more inward, and his ivory face reveals his inner self:

It reveals . . . the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror - of an intense and hopeless despair. His inwardness opens a new understanding for him. Now waiting for death, Kurtz has become too helpless, morally and spiritually, to tolerate the light of truth and says. . . . Close the shutter, . . . I can't bear to look at this. . . . His innocence comes to an end and reality leads him to utter the prophetic words. . . . The horror. (116-18)

He is conscious of his death; he falls victim to fits of delirium, and his conscience deceives him. His last utterance explicitly illustrates his awareness, and “his evil has really dropped from his eyes; it is to see the terrible nature of what he has pursued, the horror . . . ” (275). He himself becomes a judge, giving the verdict on his relentless pursuit. He declares his judgment in a word, “The horror”.

## Conclusion

*Heart of Darkness* was regarded as a classic of modernist fiction for a number of decades, and it was much praised for its technical finesse in narration and its experimental richness. *Heart of Darkness* uses the ‘Stream of Conscious’ technique to represent the theme of insanity, savagery, and alienation. Joseph Conrad in the title of the novella has indicated the theme of evil. The heart of the protagonist is full of darkness. Through the geographical darkness, the novelist presents a journey into the hero’s inner darkness; it is the evil that lurks in his heart. The novelist has a very good personal experience of his own journey into the dark interior of Central Africa, where the white people were governing the innocent people; they were cruel and exploited them. The novella explores the maddening horrors, savagery, insanity, sensations, and experiences of those out to face the loneliness and darkness of the wilds of Africa. This paper emphasized the multi-layered meanings of this multifunctional novella.

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## Do Beliefs Guarantee Existence? Understanding Social and Cultural Erosion in Pratibha Ray's *The Primal Land*

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*N Suman Shelly and Sabita Tripathy*

“For the ‘true’ subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; the intellectual’s solution is not to abstain from representation. The problem is that the subject’s itinerary has not been traced so as to offer an object of seduction to the representing intellectual. In the slightly dated language of the Indian group, the question becomes, how can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice consciousness can the subaltern speak?”

– Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Whose history is it to be read when one begins reading history? Which history—that of the oppressed or that of the superior—is considered ‘official’? The field of Subaltern Studies began re-writing history. Spivak states that history consents to include the ordinary people who have been disregarded, ignored, and given cold shoulder. In this regard, Sumit Sarkar states, “History from Below being by concentrating on local and regional developments, encompassing various groups in the world popular—tribal, peasant, artisan, labour protests and in the middle class, a class which started asserting some kind of regional on national leadership and which had a totally different composition from Princes and Zamindars” (Sarkar).

The British left their documents behind through which they shared their perspectives with historians when they departed India. On the other hand, nothing that could be regarded as original or authentic was left behind for the Indian labourers, workers, and rural populations, the tribal

communities, therefore, Subaltern Studies needed to be produced on the basis of Census Reports, Government records, Indigenous narratives, records from the Judiciary and Police Department, and other sources. The early nineteenth century saw the beginning of the tribal narratives. Sengupta enumerated the literary works, folklore, practices, and mythology that comprise the tribal culture. “The Anthropological Survey of India” and “Man of India” were two literary publications that documented these, offering a methodical literary framework for the analysis of tribal communities, their customs, and culture. In an effort to portray the rich life and indigenous culture of the indigenous people, a growing number of works on tribal studies were published in the form of novels after India’s freedom and were adapted into all of the principal languages of other civilizations. Analysing from this framework, Pratibha Ray’s father served as an influence for her literary profession from a young age. Her career took off after the publication of her debut novel, *The Rain Spring Summer*, which brought her great fame initially published as Barsa Basanta Baisakha. The story of the beleaguered Bonda tribe, which has roamed freely among the mountains of Koraput (Odisha) since the beginning of time but is currently endangered, is discussed in her ethnographic novel *The Primal Land* (translated from the Oriya original, *Adibhumi*), which was published in 1993 in accord to her personal experience with this indigenous land. The little-known Bonda tribe, who live in the highlands of the Malkangiri region, previously a part of the Koraput district in the southwest corner of Odisha, are the subject as Ray accounts in her *Adibhumi*. Since prehistoric times, sixty-two “Scheduled Tribes” have called Odisha their home. The Bonda (or Bondo) tribe is arguably the most ape-like of these. As per the 1981 Census, there were approximately 6000 Bonda people in the entire population. Their pace of growth was significantly slower than that of other native tribes, indicating that they may be an endangered species. Originating from Austro-Asia, the Bondas occupy an area of around 200 square kilometers, primarily consisting of mountains that are impassable. In this land, which the Bondas hold to be their own, not many outsiders have gone and not much has changed since the Stone Age.

The three hundred pages, broken up into thirty parts, tell the narrative of the Bonda land's origins and the tribe's strong relationship with 'mother' nature. The first eighty pages describe the strong relationship between the Bonda tribe and the myths and stories that guide their daily live and derive from the surrounding natural components. The majority of the novel is told from the perspective of the 'ancient' Soma Muduli, who is much respected as the head of the twelve Bonda villages and has evolved into a 'dokra' (old). The text raises certain important questions about how the Bonda people have been exploited since outsiders invaded their nation in the 1970s and 1980s. Later in the text, the author shows how the tribe's traditional beliefs have been destroyed by outside influences, leaving elderly people such as Soma Muduli to look at desperately in defeat while harbouring the much-feared question, "Can the Bondas manage to keep their culture alive?" The book demonstrates how corrupt government officials and insiders, like moneylenders (sahukars) and outsiders like the Dombs, who are a mixed tribe that has settled in Bonda land, greatly abuse the tribes in the post-independence age. The translator, Bikram K. Das, correctly notes in the book's introduction that the Bonda people are endangered due to attacks by dominating civilizations, and that this novel "could well serve as their obituary" (Ray viii).

In the hands of avaricious political powers, modernization and advancement have become instruments that not only steal the tribals' land but even drive them away from their ancient cultural identity and customs. In the name of progress, the ties that bind them to the natural world are broken. Patriarchal culture has contributed to gender inequality, but same hegemonic forces have also severely split mainstream society from its marginalized groups. This is the reason that the long-standing social position that makes up their shared ethnicity is in danger due to their physical landscape displacement and changing socio-ethnic roles. Furthermore, women of the Bonda tribe maintain exceptionally intricate interactions with nature since they perform routine home tasks to tend to their families and spouses. Women are the most vulnerable demographic in *The Primal Land*. Based on their general health and

strength, Bonda women are chosen by their tribe to take care of grooms while being half of their groom's age. Vandana Shiva critiques the encroachment of the West on the customs of traditional Indian agriculture and lifestyle. She discusses the patriarchal, western developmental paradigms, colonial practices, and the degradation of culture that results from the subjection of women and environment happen to be on the basis of gender roles. She maintains that in order to establish a sustainable life, it is necessary to adjust to the ingrained customs. She also hates how women are biologically controlled by science and technology, and how contemporary farming methods degrade the quality of agriculture by damaging the environment. In her point of view, modernization and growth of this kind lead to a departure from long-standing customs that regard nature (Prakruti) as a living, creative process (feminine norm) that provides spiritual comfort and nourishment. "All life forms shoot through nature, or Prakriti" (Shiva). With the introduction of western ideas, nature is now seen in India as merely a resource to be exploited, much like women are. Modern methods undervalue and hinder women's traditional wisdom and their reliance on nature for a life. Shiva highlights the efforts of women that emphasize the special relationship that exists between nature, women, and the oppressed who look for spirituality, unity in variety, and closeness to replenish their energy, with particular reference to the Third World Women (Shiva). Shiva additionally points out the disjointing and dissecting hegemonic forces. Within this type of contextual framework, both nature and women lose their inherent originality in order to satisfy the wants of others; they become less unique and autonomous.

The novel describes how governmental power systems abuse indigenous people and plunder the natural world, but it also highlights how everyday struggles faced by women are comparable to the mistreatment of forestland and ethnic communities as a whole. Ray employs an interpretative lens that focuses on how nature has been commercialized by the patriarchal culture and external politics of the western worldview. Similarly, women within the tribe experience internal and external forms of oppression. They are married to a man who is half their age, and

they are constantly working in the fields to complete everyday duties. Anthropologists have been particularly fascinated by certain ethnic and cultural characteristics of the Bonda people. For example, the Bonda tribe avoids the practice of women being cared for by their husbands during marriage, as only healthy and fit women are selected for marriage in order to care of the groom and the family and equally share the workload in the fields. Meanwhile, the intrusion of the outsiders into the inner regions of the forest exposes the women to even worse forms of exploitation. For instance, the story of Budei Toki, who maintains her virginity while waiting fourteen long years for her husband to be released from prison. However, as Budei ages and gets warped, her husband Bhaga Bindu, who is ecstatic to have returned home from prison, asks for a 'longsi' or divorce. She has had trauma all her life, and all her sacrifices for her family have been in vain, just as the forests of Koraput, which formerly supported mankind and the Bondas in various ways, are now being destroyed for the purpose of development. Furthermore, Bhaga Bindu brings home a second wife, which is customary in Bondas, and he crosses the limits by staring at her expectant daughter-in-law. All of this left Budei shattered, and without hope. She is in excruciating pain and laments that, simply by virtue of her gender, she has no human rights; in fact, the conventions of Bonda culture deny women any rights at all. Ultimately, she breaks and departs from her venerable home and husband in search of an uncertain and dangerous future. Ironically, the father and the other men in the group kill Bhaga Bindu's animals and feast over it, all while causing turmoil and refusing to take her home. This gives readers a clear picture of how women and animals have been treated within the text. Ray paints a vivid picture of the appalling conditions under which women in indigenous communities endure a double form of oppression. The reason is that they are neither granted any rights within the tribe nor are they able to assert their autonomy outside of it because as widows they do not qualify for any form of government aids. Lastly, the goal of the Bondas marriage system is to limit women within socially acceptable bounds. Because of traditional myths, women are not permitted to grow long hair or wear sarees to enhance their inherent attractiveness. The story passed down through

the generations prohibits women in the Bonda tribe from dressing fully, stating, “Not a blade of grass will grow on these mountains if you try to cover up your nakedness or grow hair on your scalps! There will be no more Bonda people!” (25). The Bondas dismiss a Bonduni’s wish to wear ‘rinda’ (a necklace made of beads) because of concern that the myth of Goddess Sita’s curse will kill the Bonda community. Men are relatively indolent and get drunk with sapung juice, while women are saddled with the duties of caring for their husbands, children, and working in the fields. ‘Sapung juice’ serves as a representation of the hunger and poverty that exist in indigenous groups. In the same manner as outside political forces abuse and destroy nature, so does their community’s social structure exhibit gender bias and injustice. Premarital sex is acceptable, although not promoted. The young ladies live in communal dormitories called ‘selani dingos’, where men from nearby villages occasionally visit (but hardly from the same community). Despite the lack of a main character, the author’s passion is evident for Budei, who ends up serving as a depiction of female patience and suffering. Objectification and commodification of women, the environment, and marginalised populations become the primary targets of patriarchy/ the dominant outside world. The story places a strong emphasis on subjects including sexual exploitation, the issue of bonded labour, women’s struggles, relocation, and other socio-political problems that affect women, and the indigenous people who are voiceless. As Gnanadson opines “. . . shows how the Dalit and indigenous women, the lowest castes of the Indian caste system, bear the greatest impact of the destruction of creation and have the least access to resources . . .” (73).

Though it came gradually, Verrier Elwin had anticipated that integration would be necessary for the Bondas. The Bonda people grow increasingly wary of outsiders, including missionaries and reformers, believing that their arrival will destroy Bonda civilization in the process of bringing about change. That’s where the assimilation issues reside, which also highlight the ideological divide. Moreover, the Christian missionaries’ description of their ‘Mahaprabhu’ as a false divinity infuriated the tribal

people. When the guests from other religion advise them to have just one God and follow a different diet, they find themselves in a difficult situation. They believe that all of the gods will curse the tribe if they do not make sincere offerings, or ‘biru’ (a ritual sacrifice made to a deity). The author puts it this way: “The Bonda were convinced of a plot to destroy the tribe, as every visitor to the country had tried to change.” This is the reason, they held on to their beliefs even more tenaciously: “All windows and doors were closed against the winds of civilization” (91).

Even with their strict tribal culture and traditions, the tribes are compelled to embrace change as a result of modernity. Ironically, the two times the Bonda communicate with the outside world are also the times they are able to get some degree of knowledge. In one case, a Bonda is imprisoned for committing murder, and in another, he is employed in Assamese tea gardens. A Bonda meets severe criminals in prison and picks up their language as well as counting, a few alphabetic letters, Odia, and a smattering of Hindi and English. Some people come back carrying umbrellas, which they use in place of the ‘tarla’ or local shade, and a torch long after the battery runs out. In addition, he learns how to “drink hot cha (tea)”, “wear a shirt over his chest”, and “smoke bidi instead of dhungias”. His handshake technique improves, and he develops an understanding regarding the western-educated men that “these were the pioneers, the forerunners; they knew the world!” (120). A scenario comparable to this involves someone returning from Assamese tea gardens. Sukra Madra declared, “The townspeople are always fighting over different gods – killing each other”, after his return from Assam. “Now, we shall experience the same thing!” (120). He was unaware that, in addition to the changes the missionaries are attempting to bring to the Bonda territory, the Bondas themselves are bringing about the change. It is just like the case of Caliban in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* where he is taught language and now he knows how to curse. In *Ancient Odisha Tribe Faces Extinction*, Jitendra writes in a worried tone, “Until a few years ago, spotting a member of this elusive tribe was rare.” However, as “interactions with

the outside world have also come to an expanse” (par. 3), Bondas have begun to cross the ‘runukbore’, and are now visible not only in bordering states like Andhra Pradesh but also in other districts of Odisha. The ancestral identity and the ways of the living of the Bondas are lost in the process of blending of the new culture with the ancient.

Therefore, the novel is more than just a chronicle of a strange society; it also serves as a live account of the political and social crisis that India is currently experiencing. Already, one of the most violent areas of the nation is the area where tribal populations live on both ends of the Odisha–Andhra border. Years of abuse and disregard are starting to backfire. Odisha’s tribal groups have a history of rebellions and demonstrations against exploitation and repressive land laws. These movements have played a key role in drawing attention to the problems encountered by native communities and championing their entitlements. Tribal politics has included the fight for power and autonomy as a major component. Tribal issues have been handled by a number of political parties and individuals, but the results of these efforts have varied. The Indian government has executed a number of laws and policies that are intended to secure the rights of tribal communities and deal with their socio-economic problems. The goal of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, was to provide rights to the indigenous people over the forest land which they had historically inhabited. Its execution has, meanwhile, run into difficulties and criticism. This further problematizes the idea of existence within one’s native land. The people from the outside (the dominant force) decide upon the functions of the native within their own spaces. The purpose of the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act of 1996 was to provide tribal areas more autonomy and to strengthen local self-governance through the use of panchayats, or local councils. It aimed to improve tribal participation and governance in decision-making. Substantial political and social developments that took place in India after independence had an impact on tribal communities. In order to meet the demands and defend the rights of its indigenous inhabitants, Odisha, as a state in independent India, had unique difficulties. Land



reforms were put into place after independence with the intention of redistributing land and raising agricultural output. Tribal groups were, however, occasionally uprooted as a result of these reforms, and they were frequently left behind or poorly absorbed into the new economic structures. Numerous initiatives for development involving large-scale industrial and infrastructure projects that frequently encroached into tribal territories were started during the post-independence era. For the native tribes, these projects frequently resulted in additional relocation and socio-economic instability.

The story centers on the unusual customs and cultures of the Bonda community, prompting the readers to consider whether or not their beliefs guarantee their existence. The Bondas' distinct social and cultural identity gives them a sense of security and well-being, but the cultural practices that are part of their identity are inherently strange because they are based on a different belief system. As a result, there are ongoing internal conflicts between the Bondas of the plains and the mountains, as well as between the Bondas themselves. However, rather than enhancing their quality of life, the government's encroachment on their territory through development plans has resulted in socio-ethnic conflict, exploitation, and cultural dilution. The tribes are not exempted from outside influences, and they run the risk of losing their tribal identity in order to comply with mainstream society's expectations for survival. "Identity relies in part on the various inter-subjective meanings through which a group of people perceive the self and the other", in Sharma's point of view in his 1994 book *Tribal Identity and the Modern World* (14). Any tribal community's cultural identity includes marriage. It's interesting to learn about the peculiar Bondas marriage system. The novelist has drawn a connection between this peculiar ritual and the myths and legends that the Bonda people pass down through the generations. Understanding people and their culture requires an understanding of their legends and folklore, which are derived from the oral tradition that connects the past to the present. But in *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes defines a "myth" as any invented, "illusory thing", "false representations", and "invalid beliefs" that are part of the collective

consciousness and that we take for granted as “natural” (Leak 1994). The woman feels that under the strange tribal marriage system, she will have someone to take care of her, particularly when she becomes older. It is not, however, materialized in the community’s perspective. Displeased with the circumstances “Do you think I have no rights just because I am old?” yells Budei Toki (181), but paradoxically, because tribal rules do not protect women’s rights, she was unable to object or claim it “as a matter of her right”. Ray states, “The Bonduni’s only asset is her youth; once it’s gone, she’s not welcome anywhere.” Her husband, father, brother, or son is not in need of her (183). A Bonduni’s decision to wed a young Bonda in order to ensure her old age is based solely on the hypocritical belief that no ‘dokri’ or elderly lady has ever had her husband provide for her needs in her later years. The tribal men turn a Bonduni’s youth and hard work into a target and an asset to be exploited. At the end, Bondunis’ existence is imprisoned by this marriage ritual, which they self-imposed. In Pratibha Ray’s fiction, female protagonists are nearly always the major characters. Nonetheless, Pratibha Ray vehemently opposes the term “feminist” that is frequently applied to her writing, choosing instead to refer to herself as a “humanist”. Her work exposes the aberrations that still afflict our society in large part, but she is particularly sharp when addressing the pain of a wife, mother, or daughter-in-law who is fighting for a life of dignity and self-expression.

*The Primal Land* is an anthropological novel that tells the story of the endangered Bonda tribe of India, who live in the isolated highlands of Koraput, Odisha. The demands of modernity created an oppressive internal and external environment that led to this complex situation and their conflict between existence and identity, an inter-subjective reality. The paper has therefore tried to attempt on how their ingrained cultural customs contribute to ongoing disputes within the group and how government intervention in development plans results in the social and cultural erosion of their indigenous identity which they are unaware of. It epistemologically questions their existence which stands on the foundation of their belief system. The research therefore, deciphers the

challenges faced by the Bondas and their existence which could likely be inflected by issues of assimilation, erosion of spaces and values resulting in an uncertain future.

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## Myths vs Education: A Study of Abject Identity of North-Eastern Indian Women during Menstruation through Haripriya Soibam's Select Poems in *Tattooed with Taboos*

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*Preeti Choudhary and Lalita Bairwa*

India is a country renowned worldwide for its spiritual practices and as home to gods and goddesses. Among them, one such place situated in the North-East region of India, in the state of Assam, is the sacred temple of Devi Kamakhya. The temple is widely famous among masses and sages across the world. It is said that this temple in itself is one among the 51 *Saktheepeethas* of Devi Sati. Devi Sati who was wife of lord Shiva, plunged into a 'vedika' or fire alter because her father insulted her husband Lord Shiva hailed as the god of destruction. Upon this Lord Shivawas so heartbroken and distraught after the death of Devi Sati that he danced with the body of the goddess in his hand and performed the maddening dance of death, the 'Tandav', which could destruct the world. In order to stop Lord Shiva from this maddening dance of death, Lord Vishnu went ahead and cut the body of the Devi Sati with his 'Chakra' into 51 parts. All these parts fell on the ground at 51 different places in India. Among these 51 body parts, one part of her body fell in Assam in the area of Kaamrupa. This part was the genital part of a female body called a 'YONI'. It is said that since then all these parts are being worshipped as 51 *Saktheepeethas*.

The temple of Kammakhya Devi is a worship place of Devi Sati's 'Yoni' or a part that symbolizes fertility or progeny. However, this temple is closed in the month of June or in the month of *Aashaadh* (a Hindi Month), because it is believed that during this duration the goddess menstruates. For these three days the sacred idol of the goddess' 'YONI' is covered with a white cloth and then the temple is closed. On this

occasion, a celebration called *Ambuvachi* is organized. Several sages, Naga devotees, and common people come here to visit and seek blessings from the sacred temple. It is said during these days the colour of the sacred river Brahmaputra turns red or crimson due to the menstruating blood of goddess Sati that makes the land fertile and pure. People celebrate the menstruation of goddess Sati. After completion of the festival, the white cloth is distributed among the devotees as 'Prasadam'. This *Prasadam* is considered holy and it symbolizes fertility. This is the power of the blood of the goddess, that too the menstrual blood. People come here to seek blessings for fertility and productivity. This fact clearly presents that menstruation was regarded as holy thing in ancient times in India (Singh).

However, this phenomenon witnessed a gradual shift and turned into a taboo or stigma for the common folk of women. Irony lies in the fact that the process of menstruation which is considered divine and is celebrated as a festival is pushed to the extent of untouchability and periodic out-casting of women during that period. Women are not allowed to enter into kitchen and are considered impure and are also refrained from entering the premises of temples and holy places during those days. Thus, the Foucauldian govern mentality around menstruation of humans can be mapped different from that of a goddess despite a woman usually been compared to a goddess.

The power structure and the difference in societal treatment of very same biological process reveal the diplomacy crafted for normative exclusion of women during this period. However, menstrual blood is regarded as an abject phenomenon in northern India. Julia Kristeva, a renowned French philosopher and psychoanalyst, introduced the theory of abjection in her work *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*(1980). According to Kristeva, abjection refers to the discomfort, disgust, and rejection that arise when encountering something that threatens the boundaries of our sense of self and societal order. It is a visceral response triggered by encountering what is considered impure, unclean, or taboo. Kristevagoes on to discuss about the bodily fluids like excreta and menstrual blood as polluting objects, she opines:

While they always relate to corporeal orifices as to so many landmarks parceling-constituting the body's territory, polluting objects fall, schematically, into two types: excremental and menstrual. Neither tears nor sperm, for instance, although they belong to borders of the body, have any polluting value. (71)

She also goes on to explain that since menstrual blood is closely connected to "a sexual or social identity it threatens the relationship between the sexes between a social aggregate." There have been few studies discussing about menstruation and the theory of abject by Kristeva but not much have been explored in light of any literary work and its analysis with a touchstone of abject theory. Ryan et al discuss about the premenstrual body dissatisfaction in their article published in Sage journal 'Feminism and Psychology', Natalie Rose Dyer reflects upon "From Abjection to Menstrual Imaginary", M Guilló-Arakistain discusses menstruation as subversion of body in their work "Challenging Menstrual Normativity From Abjection to Menstrual Imaginary: Non-essentialist Body Politics and Feminist Epistemologies of Health". Thus, there have been works on the theory of abjection but no such work has been found so far with a relational framework of readings of North-East Indian Literature with a lens of abjection which the present papers delves into. The present paper chooses to study Haripriya Soibam's two poems "Five Days' Untouchable" and "I Died a Little" through abject theory.

Haripriya Soibam, a North-Eastern writer and poet, in her book *Tattooed with Taboos* draws attention to the tabooed realities experienced by women through the poems anthologized in it. In her poem "Five Days' Untouchable" she questions on the impurity attached to menstrual blood which ironically is responsible for procreation. She at the very onset indisputably asks, "Is this the blood of life? Merely to mark me impure." (TT 18) The poet questions if this menstrual blood has the power to nurture a baby in the womb how does it make a woman impure? She gives her voice to a tabooed but universal phenomenon. Menstruation being a natural process is still seen with a distanced sense of loathing as Kristeva remarks. Her poem expresses how during this period women are quarantined for five days from the family and society "Wrapped

with untouchable Phanek”, she further depicts the narrative of untouchability attached to menstruation.

In Manipur, from where Haripriya Soibam and other writers of this book hail from, there is a practice of quarantining a menstruating woman for five days and this period is called ‘*mangba*’ “connoting and suggesting that the women during this period are ‘impure’ as used in the context of an object” (Ningombam). In this period women are not allowed near water bodies. “During menstruation period women are not allowed to touch any ‘clean’ object of the kitchen, they are not permitted to worship the household deities nor are they allowed to have conjugal relation (at least superficially)” (Ningobam). Thus, menstruation becomes an abject experience for a Meitei (a tribe in Manipur) woman. In Arnold van Gennep’s term the ‘rite of passage’ of puberty for women involves the first stage of “separation” where for five days women are separated from their regular belongingness to a state of brief exile.

This ostracisation often triggers feelings of abjection due to its association with bodily fluids, which are commonly considered unclean or impure in many cultures. The sight, smell, and mention of menstrual blood challenge societal norms of cleanliness and order, thereby invoking discomfort and repulsion in some individuals. Kristeva argues that abjection is a fundamental part of human experience and plays a crucial role in the formation of individual and collective identities. By excluding or separating what is deemed abject, individuals and societies establish a sense of boundaries and establish norms of what is acceptable or unacceptable within a particular cultural context. The North-Eastern women are culturally and socially out-casted during their menstruation period. They are treated as if they are untouchable. She expresses her agony in words in the poem “Five Days’ Untouchable”-

For five days  
Quarantined from the rest  
By this unholy fluid (TT 18)

In the northern region of India when a woman begins to bleed she is sent to dwell in a separate place, a kind of hut addressed as a menstrual



hut. For these five days, these women are prohibited to participate in any auspicious occasion like worshipping a god or attending a marriage. During menstruation they are even denied access to their home. They are prohibited to touch food, utensils, and water. For them, a special hut is made outside the home where they have to spend their menstrual period regardless of the climatic condition outside. They are served food from a distance. All these things take place because the people of this area consider that a woman's period renders her dirty and abject.

HariPriya tells in her poem that the people of the North-East believe if the male member of a family sees the drying *Phanek* on the rope, it may prove inauspicious to him. *Phanek* is a piece of cloth that is used by the North-Eastern woman to cover the lower part of the body. This piece of cloth is considered cursed and contaminated. The poet writes-

Phanek after Phanek  
Carrying my utouchable-ness  
Accursed piece of cloth  
Contaminated for a lifetime. (TT 18)

A stark contradiction has been presented by the poet when she puts that touching the same 'contaminated' *Phanek* is not taken into consideration by a man while assaulting a lady during day time or having intercourse at night, but mere the sight of a *Phanek* may prove inauspicious to them. This piece of *Phanek* again becomes an object of abjection which arouses disgust and abhorrence. This is how the patriarchal society creates systemic norms for women that are dichotomous and unjustifiable. For women, these norms are cursed but men can mold them according to their own will. She speaks out against this injustice as a poet and shows the duality of thought against women, "Neither nocturnal tryst nor daytime assault Defiled the hands that tore it away" (TT 18).

Obviously, it is the patriarchal and social constructs that have created such taboos and stigmas. Though these practices might have been made for the convenience of the women so that these women can have some rest during this difficult time, but over the period of time these practices

got interpreted and resultantly evolved into taboos and societal stigmas. The extent of its stigmatization is such that nobody wants to talk about this fact openly in public. It is this patriarchal thought that has led to such a significant gap between men and women. Kristeva argues in her work that abjection is a fundamental part of human experience and plays a crucial role in the formation of individual and collective identities. By excluding or separating what is deemed abject, individuals and societies establish a sense of boundaries and establish norms of what is acceptable or unacceptable within a particular cultural context. Through her poetry, Haripriya expresses how women are marginalised from society and restricted by a number of taboos and stigma associated with menstruation.

In another poem “I Died a Little” Haripariya shows the duality of patriarchal structures. She presents that this very blood, always red in color if flows from any other part of the body are not loathed with this intensity as of menstruation. Menstrual blood from female genital is abhorred whilst the same blood, oozed out from the same place and red in color, is desperately celebrated when seen during the first intercourse. If a girl does bleed on her first intercourse she is considered a virgin, pure and holy. But if the vagina fails to bleed during that time, the woman is mistreated and resultantly called by names. In the poem Haripriya gives her voice to the agony of ordinary woman and states-

I died a little  
Killed by impure little droplets  
That refused to trickle  
On the wedding night. (TT 22)

Though, these red droplets are welcomed and celebrated for the first time only to make her untouchable every month. Here, the poet expresses the inexpressible agony of every woman. There is a celebration of menarche as a rite of passage of puberty and it is a fact to boast for the society that a girl is now a woman as there is one more person to procreate the generation. But this is very ambiguous that the same blood which is welcomed with celebrations makes the same woman

impure and compels her to live outside of her own house as an untouchable being.

When this occurs, no one can comprehend the mental agony of young girls to whom society has given the title of a woman at the exact moment of her first period. A little young girl who plays innocently is abruptly barred from all of her activities and forced to live outside the home. She starts being treated as an untouchable being by the society. This girl in her innocence fails to comprehend these unexpected life changes. The sudden exclusion of a girl who does not understand the differences between women and girls confuses and pains her. This liminal phase of transition of a girl to woman is agonizing for this teenager who has to face exclusion at the hands of her own family. The first stage of rite of passage “separation” is tormenting for a girl and also perturbing to observe how a phenomenon that is celebrated on its commencement has rendered them untouchable for five days each month.

Haripriya is an iconoclast writer who dares to write about the agony of women that they undergo during menstruation. In the poem “I Die A Little” the poet brilliantly presents the comparison of menstrual experience to death by expressing they die little by little every time during menstrual cycle due to cramps and severe pain. Through these two poems Haripriya also explores the psychological implications resultant of the abject marginalization during menstruation. Apart from the physical pain, women have to suffer vast mental torture inflicted by society due to stigma and shame associated with menstruation, which many a times lead to a sense of embarrassment and a negative body image. This, in turn can contribute to anxiety, low self-esteem, and a reluctance to discuss or seek support for menstrual-related concerns and often cause reluctance to seek medical help if required. This becomes a deterrent factor and as Girish Kalyanaraman, Vice President and Category Leader, Feminine Care, Procter and Gamble India puts:

1 out of 5 girls in India drop out of school due to lack of menstrual education and access to sanitary products. The chapter on period education has been missing from schools, families, and communities

resulting in 71% of girls not knowing about periods when they first get it. (Indian Express)

In an NCBI study conducted on 600 girls in Delhi 40% dropped out of their schools because of menstruation.

A study by UN's child protection agency, UNICEF reveals: "71% of adolescent girls in India remain unaware of menstruation until they get their first period. When they do so, many drop out of school." Myths and social taboo is one significant reason for the same. Vandana Prasad, a community pediatrician and public health professional, states: "Social taboos still abound and girls face various forms of discrimination during their periods such as denial of certain foods, denial of physical access to spaces like kitchens and temples and on rare occasions even have to stay in some outhouse for a couple of days" (Krishnan). Thus, there is a dire need to update the curriculum keeping the period education concerns in mind.

The theory of abjection offers a valuable lens to examine the social, cultural, and psychological dimensions of the menstrual taboo. By understanding the roots and implications of abjection, the societal norms can be challenged to foster inclusive environments, and empower menstruating individuals. It is crucial to create spaces where open conversations about menstruation are encouraged, ensuring that no one feels ashamed or marginalized due to a natural bodily process. Only collective efforts can promote inclusivity and a sensitized understanding to the abjection of women during the process. Menstruation is atopic about which nobody wants to talk openly even in the contemporary times but Haripriya boldly treats this subject in her poems and shows the injustice happening to women. She strongly demands the destigmatization of menstruation. She openly treats this phenomenon in her book *Tattooed with Taboos* because she knows that nothing but literature and learning can help in removing these stigmas and taboos ostracizing women. These poems if included in the educational curriculum can not only sensitize generations but will also foster inclusive spaces for women.

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## The Portrayal of Adi Tribe in Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam*

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*Priya Roy*

The term “Indigenous” refers to a group of people whose dietary patterns, customs, ceremonies, and other practices are linked to the original occupants of a particular area. Traditionally speaking, indigenous peoples have been linked to a particular land that they rely on, yet they can also live sedentary lives in one area, travel widely on foot, or be resettled, and there are approximately more than five thousand Indigenous countries in the world. The text *The Legends of Pensam* depicts the Adi tribal community who are the groups of indigenous people of the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. In her book, she investigates the primitive customs and beliefs of her people to recount the many legends that influence the lives of Adis. Her documentation of these tribal lores ensures that they are preserved and not lost and forgotten in the sweep of modernization.

The name Adi means ‘hill man’ and this tribe is divided into two main divisions- the Bogum and Onai. The most noteworthy and fascinating aspect of the tribe is their ability to survive on their own. They hunt, grow crops, and cultivate their rice despite the intense heat and humidity of the Siang Valley. On the festivals and celebrations like customary gatherings, they feed upon their favourite foods like rodents, such as rats and squirrels. It is very interesting to find that the tribe do not have one particular God but follows animism which a religion based on spirits, which holds that all natural objects exist. And for performing various rituals the villages have a resident ‘shaman,’ who highly significant individual with access to both good and evil spirits. They also have a large number of spirit gods and goddesses. In “The Legends of Pensam,” the narrator skillfully discusses the tribal customs and culture through a

series of interwoven anecdotes, or legends. The narrator, together with her friends, travels to regions where the locals, via their stories, share the knowledge of the cultural richness, traditions, and age-old practices and this is masterfully weaved by the characters along with the narrator, who made this a wonderful piece of literature.

The prologue illustrates imagery with stark differences, the way “the helicopter passes through the clouds,” the modern and the previous time devoid of any scientific inventions are brought together. On one hand ‘helicopter’ signifies the scientific development of the present day, a flying vehicle, which carries six passengers, takes them to a place far removed from the hectic city life. On the other hand, the narrator beautifully landscaped the scenery, the rivers, as serene and sparkling like lost fragments of a magnificent ocean. Essentially, this is a juxtaposition of the current state of affairs, with the majority of things being materialist and the others being solely related to nature, its objects, its transformation, and its bountiful gift of abundance.

The book begins with stories based on the first generation of villagers. The first part talks of the stories from the primitive age which is bundled up with myths and the age-old practices which were being followed by the people for everything. Nature and its belongings were all in all and they believed that nature was their only saviour. The second part begins constructing the travel road which allows others to enter into the fascinating world which was otherwise hidden from the other world. Two persons Jules and Mona arrive from the outside world to know more about the village folks. They hear a few stories of the village and its people, participate in village activities and a feast, and then depart. The third part covers the second generation of people, now adults. They mingle with people from other worlds and as it happens the cultures are assimilated and a hybrid culture is formed. Much of the native traditions are given up and new traditions are being followed. But the link with the traditional past is not broken even if modernization sets in. The fourth part again brings up an opportunity for the natives to open up before the whole world, display their age-old traditions and be proud of it in the present modern worldview.

To dive deep into the novel, it is depicted how for the Adi tribe hunting has always been a significant aspect of their way of life. Typically, the women in the villages would gather food, and the men would go hunting in the pitch-black forest, looking for prey. In the opening chapter we find "Hoxo's father was killed in a hunting accident" (10), which illustrates how they have to put their lives in danger to support their families, there always is lurking danger in their ways in the woods but they vow to always take up challenges and move ahead.

They also adhere to their customs and have their legal system. For instance, when Hoxo's father was assassinated by a clanmate, he was expected to get the death penalty for murder; but, because the friend made a mistake, he was exiled for a month in the jungle and subjected to cruel treatment.

As we can observe every tribe has its own set of religious customs and beliefs, and these revolve around the worship of God and the spirits. Adi tribe reveals that they were practitioners of animism. The faith and customs of the native Adi tribes are predicated on the concept of nature worship. They hold that the wicked spirits who prey on humans are the souls of those who have died tragically and their spirits are lost in the atmosphere, unable to find refuge in either heaven or hell. They occasionally attack people maliciously to disrupt societal order.

For instance when the child of Togum suffered,

The child did not move during all this time but he cried, ate, and slept with his small torso twisted stiff and unmoving. They carried him everywhere. Then someone said that they should think about performing a special ceremony, rarely performed these days, in case it was the spirit of a snake that had coiled around the body of their son. (21)

Rather than seeking medical attention or advanced treatment, Hoxo recommended performing the 'serpent rite' right then and on the following evening, when they made peace with the spirits the infant was brought back. When these narratives are read by a modern human



being who is well versed in the scientific world it feels like reading a fairy tale, but the tribal community believes in the same an

In another instance “Pinyar said, ‘My boy is being haunted by an evil spirit because we failed to observe certain rites in the past’” (33). If we try to understand Kamur, Pinyar’s son, from a modern standpoint, we can see that he may have been experiencing some psychological issues. However, Pinyar realised that something must be wrong with the rituals and that the evil spirits may have captured him and harmed him at this time. And therefore, priests were called to heal the youngster to help him cast out these bad spirits.

Then “When a house catches fire, the luckless owner is banished to the outskirts of the village.” This illustrates the connection between fate and natural events, as the person’s fate may be determined by their misdeeds. He is consequently exiled from the village to order to ensure that any evil spirits or spells that may have descended upon him stay outside of the community and do no harm to others.

Apart from the spiritual beliefs, the nature is worshipped by the Adi tribe vividly for helping them for everything. There is an instance where-

In dreams, my people say, they see the rain mother sitting on the treetops, laughing in the mist. Her silver ornaments clink as she rides the wind, brandishing her sword. Every time she twirls her skirt, the storm clouds edged with black rush up to cover her. (36)

The Adi tribe views the rainy season as their “rain mother,” whom they adore, just as we find in Greek and Hindu mythology about the relationship between the seasons and a god. Seasonal festivals are occasions to worship the elements of nature for peace, strength, and prosperity. It is their belief that humankind will suffer and worry if the gods and goddesses are not appropriately worshipped and placated.

One more interesting fact of the Adi tribe is about the ‘shaman’ also known as ‘miri’ is an important person who is said to enter a trance or have an intense religious experience and gain numerous talents. They are generally believed to possess the powers of healing the sick, communicating with the afterlife, and frequently escorting the spirits of the

deceased to the afterlife. The shaman is summoned to keep the spirits at peace for the benefit of the village's residents in almost every situation in the book where something negative is happening.

In the beginning, there was only Keyum. It was neither darkness nor light, nor had it any colour, shape or movement... way beyond the reach of our senses. It is the place of ancient things from where no answer is received. Out of this place of great stillness, the first flicker of thought began to shine like a light in the soul of man... Out of this nebulous zone, a spark was born that was the light of imagination. The spark grew into a shining stream that was the consciousness of man, and from this all the stories of the world and all its creatures came into being. (56)

The Sun-Moon god Donyi-Polo, who is revered as the world's eye, is the focal point of Adi religion. They hold ceremonies to placate malevolent spirits to fend off evil, and they believe in the existence of spirits. All creation is credited to Keyum. They believe that each of us has a purpose for being on this planet, and that task must be fulfilled. The all-powerful one who grants us life is also directing us.

To conclude, the work *The Legends of Pensam* have beautifully brought the Adi community alive before us. It has opened up the secrets of the tribe, and experiences away from the humdrum of the city lives. Like the Adi tribe, there are multiple indigenous tribes in India itself which are not known to the wider population and are yet to be explored. As literature is a depiction of society, with more literature like this it will bring the exotic experiences shared by them and we will get a chance to relish it by reading their new ways of life. In today's date when we see that with the impact of globalisation the whole world is turning into a global village, these days everything is easily found everywhere and as communication has become easy, we find the depiction of one's culture in global platforms. But a question arises with globalisation and wide scientific development it might have made lives easier but as everything comes for a cost, people are moving away from their roots and this is leading to the loss of rich cultural richness and environmental

degradation. Now it is us who need to think and act carefully so that the development also goes on and the rich culture is also not lost.

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## Valli's Echo: A Tale of Adivasi Harmony and the Perils of Exploitation in Wayanad

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*Ramandeep Kour*

Sheela Tomy, a novelist and short story writer, made her debut with the novel *Valli*, originally written in Malayalam and later translated into English. The novel is set in 'Wayanad', Kerala, a region inhabited by Adivasis and indigenous communities. It beautifully portrays the serene 'Kulluvayal' village, nestled deep within the Western Ghats of northern Kerala. However, it also serves as a poignant narrative about the relentless exploitation and gradual depletion of natural resources due to excessive human greed. At its core, *Valli* delves into the rich mythologies and cultures of the Adivasis, who maintain a profound connection with the natural world.

In this novel, the indigenous people, or Adivasis, depict nature as the centre of the earth. They hold Wayanad in the highest regard and adoration. Their relationship with nature is organic and genuine, in contrast to outsiders who exploit it for capitalist gains. In this narrative, Adivasis rely on nature for their survival, they follow the ethics of the environment but the exploitation of the forest by colonizers and the atrocities committed by Jenmis result in suffering in their lives. Environmental ethics interrogates human relationship with the environment and refers to the moral duty of humans to protect the environment. Wayanad is converted into luxury retreats for the affluent. Naxal activity in Wayanad hums in the background of the novel. This exploitation is intertwined with the violation of tribal rights, social conflicts, and cultural erosion, manifesting through murder, meager wages, displacement, and various other injustices. Nevertheless, the Adivasis maintain their unwavering spiritual faith in nature. Their tender feelings for nature still remain in their memories after displacement.

## Introduction

*Valli* is Eco fiction written by a Malayalam writer Sheela Tomy. This novel is set in “Kulluvayal” village of Wayanad forest in the Western Ghats of northern Kerala. In Malayalam “Valli” means land, plant, women and daily wages. Wayanad as valli weaving the multilayers of the tales of indigenous people and illustrating its social complexity. This place is rich with the culture of indigenous people, or Adivasis. The peaceful environment of this forest is shrine for Adivasis. This novel is portrayal of Adivasis’ faith and relations with nature. It is not only deal with the piece of land but also an ecosystem of social, political and ecological violence. Adivasis depend on the specific lands of the forest for their traditional livelihood and cultural practices. Their Ethics for the environment prevent them to exploit the nature. Paul Kurtz and Edwin H. Wilson in a manifesto *The Humanist Manifesto II* proclaim, “We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human needs and interests”. (17) Similarly, environmental ethics also emerge from the experiences of human interaction with the environment. Environmental ethics may be seen as an effort to protect the environment from the destruction by humans. Adivasis’ livelihood affected by the exploitation of the forest after facing the colonial effects. The exploitation the forest led to the exploitation and enslavement of the Adivasis. Adivasis people has immense faith in nature that they thought flood and fire are response of nature toward the unethical harm caused by outsiders. Colonization oppresses the Adivasis by casting discrimination, snatching their lands, offering meger wages, murders.

Baruch Spinoza writes, Nature “is always the same and oneeverywhere”(84). Indian literature is abundant with the theme of nature as Sheela Tomy presents the nature relationship with Indigenous people particularly Adivasis. According to Adi-dharma the term “Adivasi” refers to the foundations, origins, and beginnings of spiritual practices of India’s first settlers. Fikret Berkes’ work on *Traditional Ecological Knowledge* defined as “A cumulative body of knowledge,

practice and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment” Early in the 20th century, a social worker in India, Thaler Baba, or Amritlal Vuthaldas Thakker, coined the term “Adivasis.”

Sheela Tomy is a Novelist and Short story writer from Kerala. *Valli* is her debut novel originally written in Malayalam and later translated into English in 2022. Her latest novel is *Aa Nadiyodu Preu Chodikkarruth*. Tomy utilizes the original letters and diary written by Susan, a character in the novel set against the true event of Kerala. Susan recounts flashbacks of Wayanad in her diary, documenting her struggles with cancer and other life issues. She wrote this diary for her daughter, Tessa. The narrative begins with the arrival of Susan's parents, Sara and Thommichan, in Kulluvayal during the Naxal activity of 1970. They have a relationship with the landlord, Peter, and his wife Lucy, expressing their love for the forest and their efforts to help the Adivasis, particularly the Paniyars who live in harmony with the forest. The Adivasis in Kulluvayal suffer from the exploitation of the forest.

In the beginning of the novel, Thommichan writes in a letter to his granddaughter (Tessa), “All are gone now. . . . Only reviving vehicles and chattering tourists left” (7). This statement indicates that the Adivasis were forced to migrate from the village, and the natural place was left solely for economic gain. The reason behind this is not only the exploitation of the environment but also their bondage to the system of “Vallipani.” According to Tomy, “Vallipani was the contract labor system in Wayanad where the workers and their families were forced to work for the Jenmi (a landowning class) for a year in exchange for a certain measure of rice called Valli”. This system originates from the rituals of Valliyoorkavu, a famous Bhagavathy temple of Wayanad near the Kabani River, where landlords such as Nayars, Nambiars, Warriors, Gowndars, and others would buy Paniyas and Adiyas as agricultural labor.

### **Nature's Tapestry**

“Valli” is replete with a fervent portrayal of nature, depicting the Wayanad forest covered with paddy fields, coffee, and black pepper. The novel

delves into the myths and folklore, entwined with the hidden secrets of the indigenous people, echoing the myth of Uniyaachi. Uniyaachi, a devadasi and Adivasi girl, was killed by her community for engaging in a love affair. Sara and Thommichan arrive in the Kulluvayal village amidst the Naxalite movement oppressing the forest people. The narrative highlights the greenery of the Wayanad forest, symbolizing the wild energy of Mother Earth, with the Kabani River as the river of life, animals as companions, and trees providing shelter for Adivasis. Thommichan becomes a victim of both the oppression faced by the Adivasis and the exploitation of the forest. Long after, in a letter to his granddaughter Tessa, he says, “See our indigenous people, Adivasis, were also nature’s guard; they never poisoned the waterways to catch fish, and yet their bamboo basket brimmed with vaala, Kuruva, snakehead, catfish, and whitespot” (7). Thommichan mentions how Adivasis guard nature, celebrating their connection through cultural activities like folk songs, enchantments of forest goddesses, and their struggle for Valli (earth).

Mooppan from the Paniyar community pays tribute to nature with a song: “Rain, come, come, rain like never before, rain . . .” (21). This harvest song is dedicated to nature because it helps them enjoy cultivation. The Paniyar community celebrates their happiness with these songs, which serve as a tribute to nature. Indigenous people have a softer heart for nature compared to outsiders who do not belong to Wayanad. Basavan, a person with a kind heart, is the son of the adiyaan, a serf bound to the land. Once, “Basavan had hugged the tree to protect the hornbill’s nest on its topmost branch, and he did not allow anybody to disturb the birds” (43). This statement resonates with the tender feelings of this adiyaan’s son. Indigenous women are an important part of a community’s social capital. In literature, women and the environment are studied as Ecofeminism. Francoise d’Eaubonne in her book “*Le Ecofeminisme Ou La Mort*” defines Ecofeminists as those who believe that women interact with the environment in a spiritual, nurturing, and intuitive manner. As a result of women’s close association with the environment, their domination and oppression have occurred in conjunction with the domination and degradation of the environment.

The status of women in this novel is portrayed as eco-friendly with nature, although they are also increasingly oppressed in many ways. Kali, an Adivasi girl, is considered the daughter of the forest. She is “The one who does not know fear. The one who knows the language of the forest. The one who blows with the wind” (47). She enchants the spiritual environment of the forest, spending her entire day roaming in nature and sleeping under the burial palace. Their closeness to nature is evident from the names of places. Wayanad is not just a place; they have faith in it as their protector. The forest environment educates the Adivasis on how to survive with natural objects. Once, when a flood ravaged the whole village, uprooting Adivasis from their daily lives, Ummithara, one of the Adivasi women, lost her shelter. In the flood of Wayanad, she used bamboo to create a new shelter. These activities with nature highlight the life-sustaining virtue of the Adivasis. They consider the forest as a living thing, which reflects in Thommichan’s words: “Plants are just like children, he told Susan. ‘Both need care, nutrition, pampering. . . . They being friends with the paaval and the Kovel, they will be full of fruits before you know it’” (118).

The forest reminds them of their herbal remedies (from bark, roots, leaves, flowers, and fruits), housing materials (timber, bamboo, grass, and creepers for rope and thatching), and food (edible roots, mushrooms, leaves, shoots, flowers, fruit, and honey), as well as tough leaves for plates and bowls.

### **Tears of Wayanad**

The story unfolds in the year 1970 when Sara and Thommichan arrive in Kulluvayal. Comrade Varghese is killed in a police encounter, and Naxal activities in Wayanad hum in the lives of indigenous people. “Naxals strike again in Wayanad; six houses attached, two killed” (17). They killed two people: Vasudeva Adiga, a farmer, and Varamangalath Chekku, a merchant. They also looted jewelry and weapons. The motive behind these killings was the abolition of the Vallipani system. All the Vargheses want proper wages for their work and believe that all the Adivasis who toil on the land are humans who should be treated well.



The Jenmis were behind Varghese's murder, and the police are their agents. This brutal incident terrified the Adivasis, making their nights in Wayanad filled with fear.

The Jenmis oppress the Adivasis and seize all the land, treating them as slaves and branding them as uncivilized. At the worship of Valliyooramma temple, a young man appeared and demanded, "Tell us, how did we become slaves?" (143). The Jenmis celebrate the murder of Varghese, which is indicated in their discourse: "All we have is the bit of land our ancestors worked for, fighting with malaria and jungle fever and what not. Good that their leader Varghese is gone" (29). The landlords brutally mistreat the Adivasis: "The Jenmis who own the land can mistreat the adiyaans who work on the land with impunity, beat them and kick them to death" (31). Indigenous people struggle for the forest and land, facing oppression that erodes their culture. The exploitation of the forest impacts their social and cultural practices. This novel evokes strong emotions, especially regarding female Adivasis who endure double oppression. Kali, an Adivasi girl, is portrayed as a nature lover who wanders in the forest, sings with nature, sleeps in the lap of the earth, and sits in the river's embrace. Alongside the theme of forest exploitation and Adivasi struggles, the novel recalls past events and myths, including the story of Uniyaachi, a beautiful dancer from Salem who suffered due to love. The exploitation extends to Adivasi children at Kadoram School, where they face discrimination for their culture and clothing. Padmanabhan, inviting them for Onam festivals, notices their isolation as classmates refuse to sit with them. He said, "These children are scared of everything, the strange language that assaulted their ears, the generous scolding . . ." (138). These Adivasi children may not understand the discrimination, but they suffer due to unethical acts against them. Despite facing oppression, Kali teaches them to love the forest. They present their harmony with nature through Kali's song: "Forest, river, sky, and a school by the forest fringe . . ." (139). The first lesson they are taught is "Equality – that was the first lesson taught at Kadoram School. And then so many lessons, taught by the seed that loses itself to sprout, to leaf, to flower . . ." (145). These lessons were needed to teach because

Wayanad faces several challenges following the actions of the Jenmis. They said, “Greedy two-legged creatures wielding axes had already made their stealthy entrance into the forest, but those days, it was still a sacred place. Tender mist had fallen over the forest” (35). Tomy considers the forest as a protagonist who presents itself as a character in its own right, for example, in Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain*. After the imbalance of the human-nature relationship, Adivasis face the problems of imbalance in nature: first, drought, and then fire uprooted the balanced life in the forest, symbolizing the forest's tears. During the flood, Umminithara's hut floated into the big canal, and this poor old Adivasi woman just prayed to God to help. Tomy indicates that nature responds whenever it is exploited by humans. Fire, which burns the maximum wealth of the forest, is described as, “Fire was a curtain to hide the poaching, the cutting of trees, and the ousting of people. Fire was revenge” (153).

## Echo of Unity

It was a time when Adivasis were raising their voices for their rights. Padmanabhan decided that they would protest against those heartless creatures. “A procession disturbed the peace of the forest as Kurukumar, Paniyar, and tenant farmers who leased Maniyan Chetty's hilltop land shouted slogans and followed Peter and his friends. Women joined in, led by Susheela and Rukku” (173). This revolution involves not only the participation of men but also women and children. Before her death, Kali called children through a song. “Protect the forest, children. . . . Protect the streams, children. . . .” (194). The social system of Kulluvayal bound them to revolt, but they ignored the whispers of some communities, putting their hands on their hearts to protect even the smallest tree of the forest from axes. This fight was waged by both Adivasis and forest creatures, hand in hand, challenging the power that oppresses them, as Tomy indicated. They mention:

With Basavan at the helm- Javanan, Kariyan, Mathan, Maran, Jogi, Chomi, Bavu – would take up their responsibilities. Locusts were waiting to lay bare the fields? Creatures that loved the darkness

more than light waited in the wings, making plans, annoyed that the protectors of the forest were challenging their power. (Tomy 216)

The Adivasis, deeply connected, engage in every activity in unity, using Basawan's whistle that echoes from hill to hill, known as 'hela Maru.' Thommichan recalls their ancestors' method of protecting the forest from ecological harm. "See a Fire Belt with which to avoid a forest fire. Something that your ancestors have been doing for centuries to protect their forest" (246). After enduring brutalities against both the forest and the Adivasis, villagers believe that the forest, in an act of self-destruction, brings an end to the devastation caused by outsiders. "The forest forgets how to cry, as animals scrambled to find shelter and birds flew madly around looking for roosts. The day the dance of the bulldozers ended" (310). Adivasis scream, "This earth is not yours; it belongs to those who have lived here from time immemorial" (310). The only thing that is understandable is that Sheela Tomy presents the real oppression of Wayanad. She emphasizes the discrimination between Adivasis and other people. Through Thommichan, she said: "Two groups shared a language, skin color, texture of hair, but their mind was far apart" (313).

This difference highlights how Adivasis continue to protect nature even after losing their land, shelter, and migrating. This enduring commitment is evident in their minds, and their love for nature shines through the pages of Susan's diary.

## Conclusion

Sheela Tomy's *Valli* intricately explores the relationships between Adivasis, their environment, and oppressive forces in Wayanad. The novel delves into the Adivasis' deep connection with nature, their resistance against exploitation, and the complex web of social, political, and ecological challenges they confront. Through characters like Sara and Thommichan, the Vallipani system's impact on Adivasis' livelihoods is unveiled, emphasizing their harmonious coexistence with the forest. Tomy vividly portrays Adivasi struggles against colonialism, Naxal activities, and exploitation by the Jenmis, particularly highlighting the double oppression faced by women and children.

The forest itself becomes a character, responding to ecological imbalances caused by exploitation, leading to a united protest by Adivasis and forest creatures. Despite environmental destruction, the novel underscores an enduring connection between Adivasis and their land. Tomy emphasizes the Adivasis' unwavering commitment to protect their environment, turning the forest into a battleground against external threats. "Valli" transcends traditional ecological narratives, offering a profound exploration of Adivasi life, resilience, and their unyielding bond with the natural world, as documented in Susan's diary.

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## Geo Centrism and Spirituality in Indigenous Literature

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*Shaleen Kumar Singh and Parthsarathi Sahu*

Geo-centrism and spirituality are structural qualities of Indigenous cultures that outline their worldviews, practices, and literature. Geo-centrism, in this context, refers to the crucial value of explicit geographical locations, landscapes, and natural elements in Indigenous communities' cultural and spiritual life. Geography is deeply connected to spirituality as it deals with places that are not merely physical spaces but mean something more to humankind. The latter is a set of beliefs, rituals, and practices that tie individuals or a community to God, their ancestors, or other people. In the context of Indigenous cultures, geography is central to their spirituality. This is the case for the listed cultures; spirituality was embedded in the locations and land. The assignment question helps reflect upon the relationship between the geo-literacy and spirituality of the indicated cultures as they are intertwined topics and common themes running through many pieces of Indigenous literature. The Indigenous writers described land and geography as the main characters in their works. The land, for them, was not static but a living creature with its spirit and mind. It was considered a natural provider in connection to the very sun from having gifts. For the Indigenous peoples, the topic of spirituality was heavily and most obviously connected with the landscapes so familiar to their lives and works.

Indigenous literature has many stories in which the physical and spiritual worlds are inseparable. The land is not just a background to the action; it is a character with its own personality. To pick an example from the reading, in Indigenous Indian stories, the land in the Ganges River. This is not just a stretch of water - it is a goddess, the holiest place in India, the axis of the Hindu world. Like ritual objects and traditions, the land in

this literature is often used to impart power and knowledge. It is a place where one can communicate with the ancestors and gods and is how the world is managed – in these texts, rituals carried out ‘on the land’ are essential to repairing its balance. The land is also often represented as an aspect of the divine and as the source of power and knowledge. In many legends, powerfully spiritual places are lands where humanity and deity intersect—the land itself is the place where the two touch realities and humanity communicates with the gods on the soil of the land. These legends are stories of how human beings are indeed a part of their natural surroundings at times and the ‘objective’ ethical issues that come out of this truth. Hence, this paper will explore the intertwining of geo-centricism and spirituality in Indigenous literature, how it is manifested, and what it tells about several Indigenous cultural and spiritual expressions. The questions that the present research seeks to answer are as follows:

1. How are relationships between the land and spirituality depicted in Indigenous literature?
2. What natural features in which specific places are identified as sacred, and why?
3. In what ways do Indigenous stories, myths & poems depict the relationship between physical and spiritual dimensions of existence?
4. How do colonialism and modernity inform the representation of geo-centricism and spirituality in Indigenous literature?
5. What do contemporary Indigenous authors have to say about these themes in their literature?

This paper aims to provide a theoretical analysis that intersects both geo-centricism and spirituality in Indigenous literature; it focuses on the cultural and spiritual significance of landscapes within these narratives—providing an overview as well as situating this connecting theme into broader themes surrounding contemporary Native Identity, resilience, resistance. In analysing a diversity of texts from various Indigenous traditions, this study hopes to provide some insights which might lead toward further understanding and valuing the multiple ways in which

challenges/contests are articulated by/in Indigenist literature as they powerfully express land/spirit interconnectedness.

## **Literary Understanding of Geo-centrism and Spirituality from Theoretical Perspectives**

Reading geo-centrism and spirituality in these Indigenous literatures will reveal a level of interpretation that demands multiple theoretical lenses from literary studies to cultural anthropology, but most especially the knowledge embedded within organic memories like the examples cited above. Framework comprehension Theoretical frameworks Key conceptual frameworks

### **Ecocriticism**

Ecocriticism is the learning of the connection between literature and the physical environment. It looks at the text's representations of nature, environmental problems, and the relationships between humanity and nature. The latter, Lawrence Buell maintains high among what might be called the defining features of ecocriticism when he identifies it as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment," concerned with "environmental justice, ecological sustainability... and participation in nonhuman" (Buell 2). This framework analyses how Indigenous literatures represent landscapes as spiritually alive beings.

### **Indigenous Literary Theory**

Indigenous literary Theory emphasises the importance of Indigenous perspectives, knowledge systems, and cultural contexts in analysing texts. It challenges Western literary paradigms and prioritises Indigenous voices and methodologies. As Daniel Heath Justice argues, Indigenous literary Theory seeks to "affirm the centrality of Native intellectual traditions and knowledge" and "underscore the relationality and responsibility inherent in Indigenous storytelling" (Justice 19). This approach is crucial for understanding the spiritual dimensions of geo-centrism in Indigenous narratives.

## **Postcolonial Theory**

Postcolonial Theory examines the effects of colonialism on various cultures and literatures. It often uses themes of resistance, identity, and reclamation. In the case of Indigenous literature, it investigates how histories of colonisation have affected the representation of land and spirituality. Edward Said's "imagined geographies" theory also applies to such a study. It refers to how the colonising narratives devised over time construct and dictate the image of a given piece of land in discourses regarding the area (Said 54). Such a conceptual approach may be used in analysing how texts of Indigenous resistance counter the post-colonial narrative and reclaim their sacred landscape.

## **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology investigates the structures of experience and consciousness. Literary studies explore how texts represent human experiences of place and spirituality. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of "embodied experience" emphasises the importance of sensory and lived experiences in understanding the world (Merleau-Ponty 12). This theoretical method is valuable for studying how Indigenous literatures convey the "embodied experience" of sacred landscapes. Indigenous Indian stories featuring the Ganges River, for instance, are chosen because they highlight the river's spiritual significance in Hindu beliefs.

The research aims to include diverse Indigenous perspectives from different geographical regions and cultural contexts. This diversity enriches the analysis and highlights the varied ways in which geocentricism and spirituality manifest in Indigenous literature. Texts from Native American, Aboriginal Australian, and Māori literature are included to provide a comparative perspective. The analysis consists of historical and contemporary works to examine how representations of geocentricism and spirituality have evolved. Through this, one can explore how Indigenous authors respond to historical changes, such as colonisation and modernity, in their depictions of sacred landscapes.



## **Historical Background and Cultural Context of Indigenous Groups in India**

Indigenous communities in India, often termed Adivasis, possess a diverse and intricate history extending millennia. These groups, such as the Santhal, Gond, Bhil, and numerous tribes of Northeastern states, have cultivated unique cultures, languages, and social structures profoundly intertwined with natural surroundings. The Adivasis' mode of living stems profoundly from their habitat, and their ancestral narratives overflow with mentions of the earth, woodlands, streams, and highlands sustaining them.

The historical context of these Indigenous peoples denotes periods of self-sufficiency, colonial disruption, and post-colonial difficulties. Before European colonisers' arrival, Adivasis maintained a symbiotic bond with their environment, practising sustainable farming, searching, and gathering. Their social and spiritual lives interconnected deeply with the land, which they revered as sacred. Colonial rule brought substantial shifts, such as land dispossession, exploitation of natural resources, and compelled assimilation policies. These disruptions influenced their economic basis and tried to sever their spiritual link to the land. During the post-colonial period, they brought continued hardships to Adivasi communities, such as losing access to ancestral lands and forests and facing widespread impoverishment and social exile. Despite these relentless adversities, many tribal groups have remained steadfast in sustaining their unique cultural roots and spiritual customs, often using oral folklore, ceremonial rites, and written works. "The ongoing struggle of Adivasis to reclaim their land and cultural identity is a testament to their resilience and the enduring importance of their connection to the natural world" (Xaxa 24).

## **Importance of Specific Landscapes and Natural Elements in Spiritual Beliefs and Practices**

The spiritual ways and rituals of Indigenous tribes across India are profoundly founded in the natural landscape surrounding them. Certain geological formations and organic entities are considered holy and

essential to their worldview and religious practices. The woods, streams, elevated grounds, and even particular vegetation are imbued with profound spiritual consequences, frequently perceived as abodes for deities, spirits, and predecessors.

For many Adivasis, the dense growth is a consecrated place where they carry out ceremonies and look for the blessings of their gods. The Santhals, for example, revere the Sal tree (*Shorea robusta*) as sacred and utilise its leaves on various spiritual occasions. “The Sal tree is not merely a source of material resources for the Santhals but a living symbol of their spiritual world” (Mukherjee 78). Similarly, the Gonds revere the Mahua tree (*Madhuca indica*), which is central to their cultural and spiritual life and provides both physical sustenance and spiritual nourishment.

Rivers have long held sacred status for indigenous peoples and remain integral to spiritual traditions. For communities dwelling along the bountiful Ganges’ shore, its waters presented vital sustenance while serving as a symbolic font of purity. However, the Ganges hold broad religious importance in the Hindu faith; tribal folk, depending on its life-giving flow, experience a particularly profound spiritual connection. To these groups, the mighty river acts not merely as an indispensable source of fresh water and nutrition but also as a channel for ritual purification. “The Ganges is worshipped as a mother and a goddess, symbolising purity and life, and is central to the spiritual practices of the people living along its course” (Narayanan 45).

The mist-wreathed mountains had long stood as revered sentinels, where holy guardians watched over the Khasi realm. Within the towering Khasi Hills, the tribe’s gods and unseen spirits made their lofty abodes. These peaked sanctuaries had formed the heart of Khasi mythology across uncounted generations, playing host to festivals and rites that sanctified the hills’ spiritual potency. “The Khasi Hills are not just geographical features but sacred landscapes that embody the spiritual essence of the Khasi people” (Sen 112). Beyond mountains, certain beasts also played pivotal parts in Indigenous faiths. The Bhil tribe held the tiger in the highest esteem, seeing its striped hide as both a symbol of sturdiness

and a sentinel to ward away malicious spirits. “The tiger is revered in Bhil culture, and various rituals are performed to honour this powerful animal, which is believed to guard the community against evil spirits” (Shah 67).

For Indigenous groups across India, a profound communion with the land and its creatures comprised not only religion but a way of living. Their worldviews and daily observances are intricately connected to the natural order, reflecting profound respect for the environment and comprehension of life’s interconnected whole. Such relationships resonated clearly in their lore, where tales, myths and songs ever celebrated Nature’s sanctity and humankind’s spiritual bonds with the earth.

### **Case Study: The Connection Between the Ganges River and Hindu Beliefs in Indigenous Indian Stories**

The Ganges River, also known as Ganga in India, is one of the rivers that form the spiritual and cultural background of the Indian subcontinent. Most of the Indigenous Indian stories, myths, legends, and literary texts depict the river as divine, one of the characters with the highest spiritual power and significance. The Ganges are often personified as the good spirit, and Indians worship their powers to purify, give life, and save humanity. This crucial religious point of view makes it possible to speak about great respect and adoration for nature and its elements among the Indigenous Indians.

As a matter of fact, one of the brightest and most significant stories is Mahabharata, in which the Ganges river is treated as a goddess sent down from Heaven to purify the lands on Earth. This interpretation better characterises the Ganges: it is not only the stream of water, but at the same time, it is the divine goddess who has the power to save humanity through purifying and giving life. Moreover, to prove such a point of view, the origin of the river being described in different Puranic stories will help better understand the significance of the Ganges in the lives of familiar Indigenous Indians believing in many goddesses and

gods. The Skanda Purana, for example, narrates the legend of the river's descent from the heavens to the earth, a journey facilitated by Lord Shiva, who caught her in his matted locks to temper her descent. This story not only reinforces the divine origin of the river but also underscores its spiritual potency and role as a mediator between the heavens and the earth. Such narratives are pivotal in establishing the Ganges as a sacred entity in the cultural consciousness of the Indian people.

### The River's Spiritual Significance in Hinduism

The Ganges River is regarded as the holiest river in Hinduism. It is considered to be the physical manifestation of the goddess Ganga and her magical power to cleanse one's sins and free you from your repeated lives on earth. However, this notion has prevailed among the centuries-old Hindu religious practices and rituals (including pilgrimage), where the river is an epicentre of multitudinous spiritual undertakings over its elongated reach. An essential aspect of Hindu worship and devotion is the pilgrimage to The Ganges. The Hindus believe that taking a dip in the waters of this holy river atonements their sins and unites them to god; thus, millions gather on its shores, making it one of the world's largest fair gatherings. Varanasi is a northern Indian city located on the banks of River Ganga in Uttar Pradesh. Its other name is Banaras, one of the holiest Hindu places for religious pilgrims. Varanasi was deemed as the place to die and be cremated on its ghats so that one may end up attaining Mukti (freedom from rebirth), thus lending credence to the Sanatan belief of finally being absorbed in God. There are specific texts highlighting the river Ganges as a sacred entity. We may check out some notable references along with their English translations:

#### **Rigveda:**

इमं मे गङ्गे यमुने सरस्वति शुतुद्रि स्तोमं सचता परुष्या ।  
असिक्न्या मरुद्वृधे वितस्तया सरयूणि भजता सिन्धुभिः ॥

#### *Transliteration:*

Imam me gangeyamunesarasvaticeutudristomacsacataparusnyâ |  
AsiknyâmarudvrdhevitastayâsarayûGibhajatasindhuhih ||

*English Translation:*

“O Ganga, Yamuna, Sarasvati, Shutudri, be pleased with this hymn. O Parushni, Asikni, Marudvridhe, Vitasta, Sarayu, hear our praise along with the Sindhu.” (Rigveda. 10.75.5.)

**Manusmriti:**

गङ्गायमुनयोश्चैव गोदावरि सरस्वत्योः ।  
नर्मदायाश्च सिन्धोश्च तीरेषु च महानदः ॥

*Transliteration:*

Gangâ-yamunayosî caivagodâvarisarasvatyoh|  
Narmadâyâû ca sindhoû ca tîrecu ca mahâ-nadah||

*English Translation:*

“On the banks of the Ganga and Yamuna, and also on the banks of the Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmada, and Sindhu, and other great rivers.” (Manusmriti 2.21).

**Mahabharata**

आपगा गङ्गा देवी स्वर्गमार्गप्रकाशिनी ।  
अहल्याशापशमनी पुनाति भुवमित्यपि ॥

*Transliteration:*

ÂpagagaEgâdevîsvarga-mârga-prakâûinî |  
Ahalyâ-ûâpa-ûamanîpunâtibhuvamityapi ||

*English Translation:*

“The river goddess Ganga, the illuminator of the path to heaven, the remover of Ahalya’s curse, purifies the earth.” (Mahabharata. 3.82.22.)

**Bhagavata Purana**

पतितानां पावनी गङ्गा विष्णुपादाभिवन्दिता ।  
भगीरथो महाराजः प्रापयामास सागरे ॥

*Transliteration:*

PatitânâCpâvanîgaEgâvicGu-pâdâbhi-vanditâ |  
Bhagîrathomahârâja%prâpayâmâsasâgare ||

*English Translation:*

“The Ganga, the purifier of the fallen, worshipped at Vishnu’s feet, was brought down to the ocean by King Bhagiratha.” (Bhagavata Purana 9.9.9)

These texts highlight the sacred nature of the Ganges and its importance in Hindu mythology and religious practices. The spiritual significance of the Ganges depends on its ritual immersions in which ashes (the last physical remnants to say adieu) are soaked-soaked-sleeping. The practice is rooted in the belief that taking a dip in this river could lead to moksha, which liberates one from the cycle of death and rebirth. It not only purifies the living beings but also makes it an essential place of spiritual importance, especially for the dead. That is why the Ganges has been taken as a continuum in life and death, representing divine worshipping continuation. Many texts in the Hindu literature canon recite how sacred the Ganges are and how they influence spiritual nature. This is detailed as early as in the “Ramayana”, wherein the Ganges appears to be a river of life and also purification. In the epic, Lord Rama, along with Sita and Lakshmana, spend time on the river Ganges’ banks during their exile, performing rituals to seek blessings from it. The clip illustrates it as an almost central part of the character’s spiritual and moral life. Similarly, in the “Mahabharata,” the Ganges is central to the narrative and spiritual journey of Bhishma, one of the principal characters. Born of the union between King Shantanu and the goddess Ganga, Bhishma’s life is deeply intertwined with the river. His deathbed scene, where he lies on a bed of arrows on the banks of the Ganges, awaiting the auspicious moment of death, highlights the river’s role in his spiritual journey and the quest for moksha. Modern literary works also reflect the enduring spiritual significance of the Ganges. In Amitav Ghosh’s novel “Sea of Poppies,” the Ganges symbolises continuity and spiritual endurance amidst the upheavals of colonial India. The characters’ interactions with the river reveal their deep-seated beliefs in its divine power and their reliance on its spiritual sustenance. The Ganges’ portrayal in these texts illustrates its multifaceted role as a sacred entity influencing various spiritual practices and belief aspects.

From ritual purification and pilgrimage to the quest for moksha, the river remains a central figure in the spiritual landscape of Indigenous Indian narratives.

### **Themes of Sacred Geography and Spiritual Practices**

One common theme in Indigenous literature is the relationships between the material world of nature and everyday practices, on the one hand, and sacred geographies - literal or mythological territories where human presence was felt to be related more deeply and directly than it is now to bio-physical realities. Their stories quite often address how certain natural topographies like mountains and rivers or a forest (shola) or cave have immense spiritual value. Thus, the Ganges is venerated in many Indigenous Indian cultures as much more than simply a body of water - it is an avatar (or incarnation) of divinity and goddess [Goddess] named Ganga. This veneration is often relayed in the literary texts and many oral traditions where its benign nature, as both a cleanser of sins to life giver for those it approves.

A frequent theme is that of power and transformation ascribed to sacred sites. They are typically regarded as gateways to the divine realm, places where earth and spirit meet. "Indigenous narratives frequently depict sacred sites as locations where individuals can communicate with ancestors, spirits, and deities, thereby gaining spiritual insight and guidance" (Sharma 45). Another major theme is the place of sacred geography in Indigenous cosmology. These include creation myths that reveal how the physical world originated through divine acts and which are closely related to specific landscapes.

### **Sacred Landscapes and Spiritual Practices**

The mighty Himalayas, the abode of gods and saints alike, have long stood as a place of spiritual refuge and rejuvenation in Indigenous literature. Texts such as the epic Mahabharata vividly portray the ethereal mountain realm where ascetics meditate in solitude, withdrawing from the world to seek enlightenment through self-imposed penance and sacrifice. Countless sages throughout the ages have made the lofty

peaks their hermitage, finding solace in the rarefied atmosphere far above the bustle of human affairs.

### **Mahabharata**

तत्रास्तां नित्यमेवर्षिः पुण्यं हिमवतः स्थलम् ।

ऋषयः स्निग्धभावेन तत्र ते तपसा युताः ॥

Tatrâstâmnityamevarci%punyamhimavata%sthalam |

[caya%snigdha-bhâvenatratetapasâyutâ% ||

*English Translation:*

“There always reside the sages, the holy land of the Himalayas. The sages, endowed with loving devotion, reside there with their asceticism.” (Mahabharata. 3.175.10)

### **Manusmriti**

तपस्यन्ति महात्मानस्तत्रेन्द्रियजयिनः ।

स्निग्धभावेन युक्ताश्च हिमवत्पार्श्वमाश्रिताः ॥

*Transliteration:*

Tapasyantimahâtmânastatraindriya-jayinah|

Snigdha-bhâvenayuktâû ca himavat-pârûvamâûritâh||

*English Translation:*

“Great souls perform penance there, conquering their senses and dwelling with loving devotion on the side of the Himalayas.” (Manusmriti. 6.75.)

### **Rigveda**

उपह्वरे हिमवन्तं यत्र गावो निरमिषन्त ।

मुनयो योगयुक्तात्मा तपः स्वाध्यायसंस्थिताः ॥

*Transliteration:*

Upahvarehimavantamyatragâvoniramicanta|

Munayo yoga-yuktâtmâtapa%svâdhyâya-samsthitâh||

*English Translation:*

“At the slopes of the Himalayas where the cows graze, the sages,



with minds engaged in yoga, dwell in penance and self-study.” (The Vedas, Rigveda. 10.137.6)

Elsewhere in Indigenous works, dense forests are often cast in a similarly sacred light. Sacred groves, protected by age-old tradition, exist as living temples where nature’s blessings flow freely. Within these woodland sanctuaries, colourful festivals honour the protective spirits believed to dwell there still. Tales tell of mystical rites performed under the sheltering boughs, close communion sought with powers of fertility and growth. Community taboos safeguard *primaevae* glades as places set apart, portals to supernatural realms transcending the mundane. “In these narratives, the forest is not just a collection of trees but a living temple, a place where humans and the divine coexist in harmony” (Sen 102).

Additionally, rivers are essential to Indigenous spiritual traditions. One such example is the Ganges, whose waters are said to atone for sins and provide *moksha* (freedom). The spiritual activities linked with the Ganges include pilgrimages to the riverbanks, ceremonial bathing, and the immersion of ashes. Numerous literary works eloquently depict these rites, emphasising the river’s hallowed position and significance in the people’s spiritual life. Although the spiritual importance of holy places varies among native peoples, there are often two commonalities: distance and elevation or altitude. For example, mountains are often regarded as being holy in Native American and Aboriginal Indian society. For example, in the American Southwest, the Hopi and Navajo peoples believe certain mountains are the homes of gods and ancestors, much like the Indian-man tradition, which reveres the Himalayas.

In the view of indigenous peoples, nature is often regarded as a living person with feelings, and it’s also given to spirit consciousness. The utility of that notion, which is basic in many indigenous cultures, is spectacularly confirmed in their literary works. In this worldview, nature is not just a place where humans can act. Instead, human beings live within nature, and nature itself lives -with flesh and feeling- as an actor in the world. “Indigenous narratives frequently personify natural elements such as rivers, mountains, and trees, attributing to them emotions, intentions, and spiritual significance” (Gupta 67).

## **Literary Reflections and Implications**

This concept correlates with nature's perception as sentient, a common theme in Indigenous Indian literature. Many hymns in the Rigveda depict natural elements such as fire, wind, and water as divine beings. The text espouses Indra's action and might as abode the born human priests with ever-cows and soma for drinking by virtue of the pressing stones. Traditional Indian literature adopts similar perspectives; for example, Agni, Vayu, and Varuna are not mere objects but gods that must be praised and followed. Another point concerning the sentience of nature is that it is also perceived as filled with spirits and deities. For instance, trees are frequently seen as the residences of these apparitions that live among natural landscapes. The sacred fig tree in India, which is believed to house deities and bring spiritual benefits, explains this association. "Such practices highlight the reciprocal relationship between humans and the natural world, where respect and care for nature are integral to spiritual well-being" (Chakrabarti 34).

Various Indigenous literatures provide rich examples of nature as a living entity. In Indigenous Australian Dreamtime stories, the land itself is a storyteller, with natural features being the embodiments of ancestral beings. Similarly, in the oral traditions of the Adivasi communities in India, rivers and mountains are often described as ancestors who guide and protect the people.

The themes of holy geography and the sentience of nature in Indigenous literature draw the vision of the highly spiritual and emotionally meaningful relationship between a human being and the surrounding world, both his ancestral home and nature in general. Since each particular landscape is sacred and the world is living and conscious, it should be treated with respect, awe, and reverence, which is the essential duty and its care. Hence, analysing these indications will increase the understanding of the value, vividness, and brightness of the spiritual world of the Indigenous cultures.

## **Impact of Colonisation on Geo-centrism and Spirituality in Indian Context**

One of the main ways in which colonisation has affected native people's spiritual beliefs and ties to place in India is through the imposition of a colonial-era land ownership model, with respect to resource extraction and the introduction of European religions. Notably, the mapping of land by the colonial administration, the annexation of forests, and outright theft/exploitation of these have negatively impacted native spiritual life. For example, the colonial government's Forest Act of 1865 restricted Indigenous access to forests, undermining their traditional ecological knowledge and spiritual practices that were dependent on these sacred spaces (Guha).

Instead of defining natives' spiritual practices directly, colonisation disrupted their physical approach to their sites of the sacred as well as sought to categorise Indigenous spiritualities as not real. Europeans insisting on the imposing of Christianity and Western rationalism attempted to deprive nature's most direct elements of their sacredness and label it a form of superstition or, at best, primitivism. This being a conscious effort both to tame the landscape and alienate the indigenous from it, the imposition of colonial culture and religion shifted and disturbed centuries-old spiritual practices and geo-centrism of the Indians. But while such disruption seems very heavy, Indigenous people have shown true strength in sustaining their spiritual culture. Many examples of tribal religious practices exist that are still alive today, such as the Gond, Bhil, Santhal, and others. These people have always been – and still are today – resisting the pressure by either practising the rituals secretly or developing new forms that the European eye simply did not catch.

Oral tradition was precious for writing these practices in books and preserving them. Generation after generation, these spiritual data were transmitted through stories, songs, and myths. In particular, such narrations emphasised the principle of the sanctity of earth and land and the necessity to live in peace with nature. For instance, the Gond tribe's oral epics celebrate the forest as a sacred entity and a source of spiritual power (Hardiman).

## **Literary Works Addressing Colonisation and Reclaiming Sacred Landscapes**

Works by Indian authors often focus on the problem of colonisation, and many contemporary authors who represent the interests of various indigenous tribes devote their novels and poems to the tragic plight of local people trying to save some sacred landscapes. For instance, Mahasweta Devi described a considerable part of her life's work in contact with tribal people, as seen from the book's story. In her novel "The Book of the Hunter," Devi portrays the Baiga tribe's deep connection to their forest home and their resistance to displacement by colonial forces (Devi). Another work that can be taken as illustrative is the poems by Mamang Dai, an Indigenous writer from Arunachal Pradesh. Describing the spiritual landscape of her own home, the poet writes about the sacredness of the rivers and mountains. Another poet and folklorist, Nandini Sahu, whose work extensively addresses tribal issues and the marginalised voices within Indian society. In her collection "Sukamaa and Other Poems," she delves deeply into the lives and experiences of the Adivasi communities, mainly focusing on the Kondh tribe. Her poetry captures the essence of these communities, portraying nature not just as a backdrop but as an integral, living participant in their daily lives and spiritual practices. In "Sukamaa," Dr. Sahu recounts the life of Sukamaa, a tribal woman who served as a domestic help and a foster mother to the poet and her sisters. The poem poignantly reflects on themes of poverty, marginalisation, and the silent strength of tribal women. Through vivid imagery and emotional depth, Sahu brings to life the sacrifices, resilience, and often unacknowledged contributions of tribal women like Sukamaa. Being representatives of traditional Indigenous spirituality, not the least important now, the writer's themes also work against the ongoing cultural and environmental stultification. The tribal element in the poem "Sukamaa" is highlighted through various references and descriptions that shed light on Sukamaa's identity, cultural practices, socio-economic status, and her role within the family.

Then, who reminds me time and again  
of Sukamaa, our childhood  
domestic help, our foster-mother,  
the rural poor tribal  
the Kondh old woman  
illiterate, deprived, downtrodden  
the subaltern  
one among the crores  
that constitute real India? (Sahu 1)

Sukamaa is explicitly identified as a member of the Kondh tribe, emphasising her marginalised status in society. Her cultural identity is further underscored by the mention of criss-cross tattoos on her face, a significant cultural marker representing tribal customs and beliefs. The tattoos, etched by her mother to make her less beautiful and thus less desirable, speak to tribal traditions aimed at protecting women.

### **Contemporary Efforts to Revitalise and Preserve Indigenous Spiritual Practices**

Recently, there has been a growing movement in India to revive and protect the spiritual practices of the land. This is mainly done with the motive of a conscious attempt to revive one's own rich cultural and spiritual ethos that had been 'de-spiritualised' and detached from the local people; this is primarily because of the ill effects of both the process of modernisation and the 'spirit of modernisation'. Many projects are undertaken by the marginal groups of India, taking steps to uphold and empower the traditional and spiritual religious legacy that generations of their ancestors have handed down. Efforts such as reviving sacred groves and patches of forest traditionally protected for their spiritual significance are becoming more prominent. These groves are often seen as abodes of deities and spirits, and their preservation is crucial for maintaining ecological balance and cultural continuity. NGOs and community organisations work together to document and restore these sacred sites, integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern conservation practices (Gadgil and Vartak). In pursuing revitalisation,

literature plays a major role in implementing these anti-hegemonic movements, incorporating uprising geo-centric spirituality and cultural identity. Nowadays, the number of authors and poets of sacred landscapes has increased, as the authors' writing may be an instrument of increasing awareness of what is going on and how awful destruction is. The literature pieces of the authors are more likely to blend traditional storytelling and up-to-date phenomenon stories.

Among the leading writers participating in this literary movement are contemporary Indigenous authors of fiction and poetry, such as Easterine Kire and Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar from India. Nagaland-born Easterine Kire has often traced the profound spiritual relationship between the land and its people in her novels and poetry. Kire's works show the importance of ancestral lands and current efforts to save them from environmental and cultural destruction (Kire).

Through his stories, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, a Santhal writer, writes about the themes of displacement and loss of these intangible elements - spiritual connection to one's land. The pieces collected in "The Adivasi Will Not Dance" give us a window into the world of tribal communities who fight to retain their cultural and religious identity against the odds. The works of these authors serve to preserve the wealth of spiritual knowledge in their communities and encourage a rekindling among young people somewhere who have lost themselves. Their works highlight the continued practice of Indigenous cultures and provide examples of geocentricity and spirituality persisting in their environments amidst ongoing struggles. The analysis of the Indigenous books has further demonstrated the deep-rooted relationship between geo-centricism and spirituality in Indigenous literature, focusing on how these themes are so deeply embedded within the cultural or spiritual make-up of Indigenous communities. Indigenous literature often depicts the land or environment as sacred, full of spiritual power, representing a worldview where the physical and metaphysical worlds are all part and parcel. We can see this perspective in the reverence of natural features, including rivers, mountains, and forests, both sacred spaces and part of spiritual practice or cosmology.

One key insight is the role of specific geographical locations in anchoring spiritual beliefs and practices. For instance, the Ganges River in Indigenous Indian stories is not merely a physical entity but a divine being central to Hindu spirituality and cultural practices. The river is considered sacred, with its waters believed to purify and sanctify, making it a focal point for rituals and ceremonies. This reverence for the Ganges reflects a broader Indigenous understanding of the land as a living, spiritual force that sustains and nurtures human life. Significantly, the point of intersection between geo-centric and spiritual worldviews in Indigenous literature also has broader implications for understanding aspects of Indigenous life-worlds and cultural survival. Such literature serves as a counter-narrative to the dominant Western perspective that has often tended to see land primarily as something that is valuable only as it enables exploitation. Rather, they call to a vision of the land, not as a territory but as sacred grounds demanding honour and reverence. These have potent implications for contemporary environmental and societal problems. By placing an emphasis on the sacredness of land and a way in which all people benefit when we have respect for nature, so too would modern conservation/ sustainability principles be reminiscent. Indigenous literatures challenge us to adopt a more relational, dialogical approach towards the environment that acknowledges its inherent worth as an end in itself rather than reducing it entirely to commerce.

This connection to land in indigenous literature places a high importance on the preservation and renewal of culture as well. These stories have remained strongholds in the fight against colonisation, globalisation and environmental degradation that Indigenous peoples still face today. More than anything, they remind us of the importance of protecting and respecting indigenous lands and cultures so that generations in the future will carry on this legacy.

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## Presentation of Bhil and their Culture in the Folk Literature of Bhat and Dholi Bards

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*Shankar Lal Dholi*

Bardic tradition is an age old feature found in different castes of Rajasthan and our country. Patronized poets used to compose praise poetry for their patrons and present different literary creations on different occasions. People of many castes like *Bhat*, *Dholi*, *Charan*, *Rao*, *Motisar*, *Dhadhi* etc. present the deeds and history of their patrons through their literary creations like ballads, poems, songs, tales stories etc. Their literature is named *Charani* literature and included in Rajasthani literature. It is based on oral tradition and passed on orally through generations. Many of above mentioned castes maintain the genealogical records of their patrons. The patrons are called *yajmanas*. Manuscripts of the poets and bards of above mentioned castes contain genealogical records, details of cultural ceremonies, rituals, heroic deeds and rewards given by their patrons. The literature by bards and poets not only present the realistic picture of the society but it also has the warnings by the poets and bards for the rulers given during their reign. Manuscripts and folk literature is a mirror of the society which presents its past forms for the present generations and scholars. The people of the caste who patronize the bards are known as *yajmans*.

Bhil also patronize bards and poets to maintain the genealogy and create different literary creations for them. Bhil caste is one of the oldest tribes of our country. 'Bhil' is an exonym that derives from the Draidian word *Vil* or *Vilawar* meaning a bow or a bowman and indicates a prevalent perception of the Bhils as good archers (Doshi 32). Bhils inhabit in different parts of our country since ages. In the book titled *Social Structure and Cultural Changes in a Bhil Village* writer J.K Doshi writes:

The Bhil one of the three largest scheduled tribes of India were (and still are) scattered over a wide area from Aravali range of hills in north to Danga in the South and in the east up to the forest of Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh, the whole region lying between the latitude of 20 -25 degree north and the longitude of 73 – 75 degree (56).

Dholi and Bhat poets compose praise poetry for their Bhil patrons. Manuscripts of poets cover different aspects like social, cultural, historical etc. Bhils and their culture can be studied through the literature of Dholi poets and Bhats. Dholi and Bhat poets who are patronized by Bhils carry a wide folk literature which is based on the cultural tradition of Bhils. It has not been brought forth to the main stream till today.

Oral traditions which had never been collected or studied were tracked down on a few major communities, and such studies were published. Some of these works obviously tried to reconstruct the earlier biased records of material sources by better understanding and throwing a great deal of light on the thought and poetic imagination of tribes about whom little has hitherto been written (Elwin ix, 56)

Bhils ruled over different parts of country in different eras. Cities of Rajasthan like Banswara, Dungarpur, Kota etc. were named after their founder Bhil rulers. According to Colonel Tod the earliest people of Mewar were bhils. In Gujarat, according to local legend, the Bhils held Abu, Dholka, and Champaner. As late as the close of the 11<sup>th</sup> century Asaval, the site of the modern Ahmedabad, was in the Bhil's hands. Rajputs drove the Bhils out of Idar, Rajpipla, Mandir, Bansda and Dharmpur.

The Bhils of Mewar (southern Rajasthan, comprising the districts of Udaipur, Chittorgarh and Bhilwara) regions occupied both politico-military importance and economic significance between the seventh and the fifteenth centuries. The tradition about Bappa Raval (the legendary founder of the Guhila dynasty of Mewar) and the Bhil chiefs of Oghna, Panarwa and Undri, Baleo and Dewa participating

in the Rajput royal coronation ceremonies (the historic ritual of anointing the Ranas of Mewar at their accession with a tik- of blood by the chiefs of these two Bhil settlements) points towards political alliances and negotiations of power (Sinha 58). This custom, which continued until Jagat Simha's coronation in 1628 (Tod 183), could be a symbol of the transfer of power from Bhils to Guhila Rajput, but it would be difficult to say what kind of power the Bhils could have enjoyed or could have transferred.

Bhil saviours fought different battles and sacrificed their lives to protect their sovereignty. They never allowed any other power to rule over their territory. With their bravery and sacrifice they could save their distinct culture and social structure. In the essay titled *Bhil Villages of Western Udaipur : A Study In Resistance to Social Change* published in economic weekly in March 1, 1952 economic weekly published in March 1, 1952 the author writes:

It is that the Bhils though themselves illiterate and lacking even a tradition of popular ballad history, such as the minstrel Charans and Bhats provide for their near neighbours, are yet commemorated in the writings and verse of the Rajputs ; and their long association is symbolized in the Mewar royal crest which shows a sun in splendour, with one side a Rajput ,on the other a Bhil warrior. It is therefore all the more striking that in spite of centuries of such contact; the Bhils have maintained their quite separate and distinctive social structure and mode of life. (Carstairs G Morris 231)

Generally the ruling areas of Bhils were aloof in nature. Bhils do not like to be intertwined by outsiders and they appear shy, simple and pure by heart. They do not mingle with people of other communities. For example, the Bhomat area of Mewar which used to be a region of Bhils was never ruled by any king or Britishers directly. The Bhils were never conquered by invaders due to their geographical location of the region and fierce retaliation. Even the Jagirdar of Bhil areas also belonged to the Bhil ancestry. They sacrificed hundreds of lives to protect their sovereignty. Bhilala is a caste which arises due to marital relation between Rajput and Bhil ruler families.

The Bhomat, however, presents a completely different picture. There the Bhils were never conquered: even the *Jagirdars* are of Bhil ancestry. Some can show *jmttas* granted them by Rana Partab for services rendered to him in his lifelong struggle against the Moghuls. In the valleys among these jungle-covered hills, the population consists almost entirely of Bhils. (Carstairs G Morris 231)

Different aspects about the Bhils have been described in the folk literature of Dholi and Bhat Poets.

1. Extension and areas of Kingdom
2. Description of Battles
3. Praise of Bhil heroes and courageous women
- 4 *Habraj* of Bhils by poets which represents the genealogical trees and praiseworthy details of different clans of Bhils.
5. Stories of origin of the universe and Bhil caste

Different bards and poets have described different warriors and bhil warriors in their poems. For example a poet writes about a bhil girl named *Jalki* who was the daughter of Rama Bhil. Poet Jhalkya writes:

झालकी भाई झालकी, रमा भील की बालकी !  
 मान्ढव गढ़ की सेना काटी, ज्यँ रागस ने कालकी ! !  
 खड़ी मुंडेरा चोडे धाडे, बाण चलावे हेलो पाडे!  
 भीलडीया की सेना साथै, मुंड उडावे कालजो काडे ! !  
 कूद पड़ी मुडेर ती रेटा, जे अम्बा की हांक लगावे !  
 खडग हाथ मई लिया कालकी, दोनों ही हाथा खडग चलावे ! !  
 खुनाझार वेई गी झालकी, मारकाट दुश्मन ढरकावे !  
 जो भी सामें पड़े रांघडो, जिवत्यो पाछो नि जावे ! !  
 शीश कट्यो नि ढबी भवानी, धारा लगी भीलन मर्दानी !

## Transliteration:

*Jalki bhai jalki , Rama Bjhil ki balaki !  
 Mandav shah ki Sena kati, Jyun Raghas mein Kalki ! !  
 Khdi mundera chode dhade, Bann chlave hello pade, !  
 Bhildiya ki sena sathe , mundh udave karjo kadhe ! !  
 Kud pdi munderati renta, jai amba ki hank lagave, !  
 Khadaghath mai liya kalaki, donoi hatha khadag chlave! !  
 Khunahjar veyi gayi jhalki, markat dushman dharkave!  
 jo bhi same pde ranghdo, jivtyo pachho ni jave ! !  
 shish katyo ni dhbi bhawani dhara lagi bhilan mardani!*

## Translation:

The daughter of Rama Bhil named Jalki is a brave girl. She always for the protection of her people and cut the throats of the enemies. Her appearance is like the Goddess *Kalika* in the battle who killed the Demons. She calls enemies to get ready for fight and kills them like goddess Kali killed the demons. She shoots the arrows and recites the name of goddess *Amba*. She has been wounded badly at the battle and at last has martyred saving her people. She is a goddess like fearless Bhil woman who protects her people and has become immortal.

The poets have described different bill heroes like *Katara Pragatia* , *Sikariya*, *Gujariya*, *Jaloria*, *Rama* etc. also in their poems.

In another lines a bard Jhalkya sings:

रामो भील भाई, रामो भील, जंगी जब्बर इन्को डील !  
 रामपुरा को वाजो वाजे, भानपुरा ताई रण में गाजे ! !

## Transliteration:

*Rama Bheel Bhai , Rama Bheel , Jabbar Jangi Janaro Deal !  
 Rampura ko vajo vaje , bhanpura tain ran mai gaje ! !*

## Translation:

Rama Bhiil has a strong and enormous body. He is very difficult to be won. He is fierce in the battle. He can't be won by any enemy easily. Rama Bhil rules over the kingdom Rampura. He has fought with

Charawat rajputs and has saved his kingdom. His fame has spread from Rampura to Bahnपुरा.

In below lines the poet describes the armours and weapons of Bhils and says that:

गोफन भाटा ती मारे, नी चुके डे वारे !  
अंग्रेजो का सिपला मोर, भीमो नायकडो !

Transliteration:

*Gaufun, Bhata Ti Mare, Ni Chukan De Ware!*  
*Angrejon Ka Cipla Mor ,Bhemo Nayakdo !!*

Translation:

The poet describes that Bheel people kill there enemy with the Gauphan (a weapon which is used to throw the stone to a longer distance) and arrows. Using these weapons Bhima Nayak has created fear among British. British don't attack bhils due to Bhima Nayak. He has become a crown for them.

A Dholi -Bhil folk poet Mohan Lal of Salumber district describes the origin of universe and Bhil castes in following ways:

पेली आद हुआ, फीर उपासना बनी, उपासना से खारा जग हुआ, खारा जग से असंग जग हुआ, असंग जग में आदि ऋषि आदरक हुआ, आदरक ने ऊँ जाप किया, ऊँ से शिव शक्ति हुआ, शिव से शिव का बेटा काकस हुआ, काकस का शील हुआ, शील से शीलभाण अर्थात् सूर्य हुआ एवं फीर दुनिया में उजाला हुआ एवं ब्रह्मांड बना!

Transliteration:

*Pahli Yad hua, aad se Upasna bani, upsana se Khara jug hua,*  
*feer asang jug hua, asang hug mai Adarak rishi hua, Adarik*  
*rishi me Om jaap kiya , usse shiv shakti hue, Shiv se kakas hua*  
*,Kakas ka sheel hua, Sheel ka Sheel bhann hua, Sheel bhann*  
*se Feer surya hua , feer brhmand ua.*

## Translation:

The poet says that at first there was *Aad* or initial *Yug*, then *Khara*(sour) then *Asang*( no one was in company) age took place. In *Asang* era *Rishi Adark's* incarnation took place. *Rishi Adark* recited the word *Om*. From *Om* *Shiva* and *Shakti* originated. *Kakas* was son of *Shiva*. *Sheel* was son of *Kakas*. And at last *Sheel* gave birth to *Sheelbhann* (*surya*) and the universe was lightened by *Sheelbhann* (*Surya*).

The tale of origin is very surprising as it has much difference with other tales of origin of Hindu mythology. It describes the ages which took place before *Shiva* and *Shakti* and describes a *Rishi's* incarnation is earlier than *Lord Shiva*. It also represents the value of human and humanity in tribal culture above all other thoughts and ideas through this tale. The literature written, composed and passed through generations by *Dhoil- Bhil* bards and poets needs a systematic extensive study.

The researcher follows the insider outsider techniques of auto-ethnography to collect the primary data and analyse them to understand about *bhils* through folk literature. Different theories like new historicism, cultural studies etc. have been used to enhance the study.

It is believed that tribal have no authentic source of history as they used to live primitive life in the forest and don't have return or well-maintained history. A systematic approach of migration by *bhils*, their social structure, cultural pattern and history can be traced through the folk literature of bards who have been patronized by *bhils*, The bards have been patronised by *bhils* and they been associated with them since generations. The bards follow a well-maintained and organized pattern of passing the history of tribal through generations in the form of oral literature and genealogical manuscripts. The folk literature of these bards and poets need protection as well as the encouragement to maintain age old records. It is really good for us that the department of Tribal Welfare Development is working for the betterment of tribal and running different programs but it is still found that no efforts for the history of the tribal are made evidently. The folk literature can reveal many aspects



of tribal life and culture. It will develop a sense of pride in the tribal for their history and add a lot to the arena of present folk literature.

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## Identity Issues of Indigenous People and the Concept of Assimilation

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*Shibani Banerjee*

In the early 20th century, scholars started expressing the view about the people that were people living and having their own culture and systems before the Europeans migrated. The early inhabitants of those regions were termed as 'indigenous' people (Beteille). Questions on appropriate terms to refer to differently positioned people, on historical, social or economic grounds have been discussed at various human rights platforms. The United Nations (UN) used officially the term for the first time in its political declaration of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2002. Peters and Mika, mention that, the term 'indigenous' was regarded as 'still under debate'. One of the simple ways of defining 'Indigenous People' is that they "are people who have occupied all continents since time immemorial. They have lived on their lands, maintained their cultural values, cultivated their environment and kept their traditions alive over centuries. (Joseph 2010)

India has always played an active and positive role in international forum on issues relating to the protection of biological diversity, traditional knowledge, traditional medicine systems and linkages of intellectual property rights with these subjects. The country has also contributed meaningfully to the drafting of international legal laws for protecting the rights of the people and communities involved. It is one of the few countries that has valued and developed indigenous access and devised a benefit-sharing mechanism for genetic resources and related to traditional knowledge even before the Convention on Biological Diversity came into force and pushed for prior informed consent (Chaturvedi).

Andre Beteille on the other hand explains the evolution of the word 'tribes' for certain groups of India. He speaks about the usage of

different terms in the past such as ‘primitive’ which fell out of favour after World War II, ‘disadvantaged’, ‘hill and forest tribes’, ‘aboriginal tribes’ (‘adivasis’) and then highlights that the term ‘Scheduled Tribes’ was adopted by the government of India even before the Independence. He opines that in India “both tribal and non-tribal populations have undergone many alterations through usurpation, miscegenation, and migration” and by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the tribes of today have largely been “either subordinated or marginalised economically, politically and socially”.

The terms “tribe,” “Adivasi,” and “Vanvasi” have often been used interchangeably in the Indian context, leading to confusion and ambiguity. The term “Adivasi” is the collective name for the many indigenous peoples of India, derived from the Hindi words “Adi” meaning “from the beginning” and “vasi” meaning “inhabitant” (Rowkith and Bhagwan). These indigenous communities have a distinct cultural, social, and economic way of life that sets them apart from the mainstream population. (Nayak et al.)

Rycroft D.J & Dasgupta, S states clearly that the literal meaning of Adivasi as “original inhabitants” permits these communities “to position themselves, strategically and politically, as Indigenous People in the global arena.” Dasgupta, Sangeeta opines that the term ‘adivasi’ is a politically assertive term and that it “came into use for the first time in 1938, in a political context”.

The term ‘Adivasi’ is presently used in common discourse and media reports in India and abroad, for all the tribal people of India, irrespective of whether the tribe is included in the list of Scheduled Tribes or not. In fact, Adivasi is not a single group of people but belongs to different tribes, settled in different states and places, including cities, practitioners of different religions, speak different languages belonging to different language families and have different cultural and social practices. At the same time, there is also no consensus among academics and civil society organisations as to the use of the term ‘Adivasi’ which literally means, original or early settlers in Sanskrit (Adi=first plus vasi=resident).

## **Identity Crisis**

Over the past decades, the global stage has seen a growing involvement of indigenous people in international forums addressing a wide range of issues, from human rights to sustainable development, forest and biodiversity conservation, international trade, and intellectual property rights. Central to their participation is the effort to ensure that their rights are recognized and respected, aiming to prevent further marginalization or the destruction of their livelihoods, cultures, and communities. However, amid this increased engagement, indigenous people face an identity crisis, as the pressures of globalization, development agendas, and external cultural influences often threaten the preservation of their unique traditions, social structures, and ways of life. The struggle to maintain their cultural integrity while participating in global processes highlights the deep-rooted challenges they encounter in preserving their identity in a rapidly changing world.

Indigenous peoples around the world have long grappled with the complex issue of identity, navigating the tensions between their unique cultural traditions and the pressures of assimilation into dominant societal structures (Bruyneel).

The complex and multifaceted nature of indigenous identity is explored in the literature (Weaver). Identity is not a static construct, but rather a dynamic interplay of various factors, including race, class, education, region, religion, and gender. As these different aspects of identity evolve over time, the sense of self as an indigenous person is also subject to constant renegotiation and redefinition.

The international indigenous peoples' movement has emerged in response to the failure of states to adequately protect the rights and interests of communities now asserting their indigenous identity. Instead of simply requesting welfare programs, indigenous peoples are advocating for recognition as sovereign groups with the inherent right to self-governance. This includes control over their ancestral territories and the natural resources within them. As noted by Anaya, "indigenous people seek recognition as distinct political entities, with the autonomy to make

decisions regarding their lands and resources.” In this regard, the principle of self-determination is crucial, as it empowers indigenous communities to decide whether external activities like mining or other industrial operations will be allowed on their lands. The **Fifth and Sixth Schedules** of the Indian Constitution offer special protections for tribal regions, yet enforcement remains weak, and large-scale displacement continues. As **Xaxa (2014)** explains, “tribal communities in India have been systematically alienated from their lands due to the expansion of mining and industrial projects, leading to widespread discontent and identity loss.”

### **The Complexities of Indigenous Identity Formation in a Multicultural World**

The position and rights of indigenous peoples gained a foothold at the political arenas of the world and in international agreements since the turn of the 1990s when indigenous peoples and minorities were started to be distinguished from each other. Indigenous peoples were considered to have collective rights regarding control over certain areas colonized by the mainstream population at a certain point of history (Koivurova).

Indigenous peoples are notable for having collective rights, particularly with regard to their languages, cultures, and social and political institutions, which set them apart from other ethnic minorities. Indigenous peoples prioritize the defence of collective rights over individual rights, even though both groups deal with problems like marginalization, language loss, and discrimination. Indigenous identity is heavily reliant on self-identification since belonging to the group and being accepted by them are fundamental components of cultural identity. It can be a difficult and bureaucratic process, though. According to Joona, self-identification is relevant for both individuals and groups, highlighting the connections between group identity and personal identity. Although these worries are a natural part of adolescence, significant cross-cultural interaction makes cultural identity a more important topic (Berry).

Overall, both internal group dynamics and external cultural interactions have a significant impact on the formation and acceptance of indigenous identity, which presents significant challenges for indigenous people, especially the youth as well as the indigenous women. The national or societal level brings additional complexities according to bicultural, multicultural, and hybrid types of identity (Markstrom). For indigenous youth, the process of identity formation is especially challenging as they must navigate the intersection of local, national, and global influences. While the global implications of this process are not yet fully understood, examining the experiences of indigenous youth in other parts of the world can provide valuable insights.

The indigenous women in India face unique challenges, both as keepers of cultural knowledge and as victims of displacement and exploitation. Rao highlights that “the role of indigenous women in protecting both their cultural heritage and their rights to land is often overlooked, making them more vulnerable to exploitation by both the state and private actors.” This often leads not just to identity crisis but also a lack of confidence, low self-esteem and problems alike that hinders their social, economic and psychological growth.

### **Struggles for Sovereignty: Indigenous Identity, Rights, and the Battle for Recognition**

In recent decades, there has been a notable global rebirth of indigenous movements in recent years, calling for control over natural resources, sovereignty, and cultural preservation. The struggle for recognition as distinct peoples with the right to self-govern and defend their ancestral territories, rather than just as marginalized communities, is at the heart of these efforts. Their fight for survival and self-determination in this setting is centered on problems like self-identification, land rights, and resistance to outside exploitation.

This means that indigenous communities should have the authority to determine who is considered indigenous within their group. According to Kymlicka, “the right to define who belongs to a group is essential to maintaining the cultural integrity and continuity of that group.” However,

self-identification is a complex and delicate issue, particularly in the context of rising demands from various communities seeking recognition as indigenous. This creates challenges, especially when state policies, economic interests, or political considerations intersect with indigenous self-determination. As outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, “indigenous peoples have the right to determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions.”

The issue of self-identification also resonates in India, where the boundaries between Scheduled Tribes and other marginalized groups can be blurred. As Baviskar notes, “the process of defining who qualifies as indigenous or tribal in India is fraught with political implications, especially in terms of access to resources and affirmative action policies.” This creates further complexities in recognizing who is entitled to land and resource rights, especially in light of ongoing disputes over tribal identity and governance.

Similarly in the Indian context, the indigenous peoples’ movement mirrors the global struggle for autonomy, land rights, and cultural preservation. Known as Adivasis, these indigenous communities have long been marginalized by mainstream development projects, often losing their traditional lands to industries such as mining and deforestation. According to Minority Rights Group International, the Adivasi population in India constitutes around 7% of the total population, making them one of the largest indigenous populations in the world (Rowkith and Bhagwan). The Adivasi communities are spread across 705 different communities, representing a rich and diverse cultural heritage. It further explicates that the term Adivasi is the collective name of “many indigenous peoples of India”. On the use of the term, it says that “it was coined in the 1930s, arguably a consequence of a political movement to forge a sense of identity among the various indigenous peoples of India.”

In this context, Indian tribal movements are deeply intertwined with broader questions of development, environmental conservation, and human rights. The PESA Act, which grants local governance rights to tribal communities, is one of the key legal frameworks through which

indigenous peoples in India have sought to reclaim their rights. However, as Shah observes, “the implementation of PESA has been occasional at best, with many states declining its provisions in favour of industrial interests.

The inability of states to sufficiently defend the rights and interests of communities that today identify as indigenous has given rise to the global movement of indigenous peoples. These groups support recognition as distinct peoples with the right to self-governance, rather than welfare policies. Control over their customary lands and the natural resources found therein are part of this. By deciding whether outside activities, like mining, are permitted on their territory, indigenous peoples preserve their agency. The right to self-identification, which allows indigenous communities to determine who is eligible for indigenous governance, is another essential component. It is particularly difficult to go through this self-identification process now that there are demands from different communities around the world for indigenous status, which makes recognition and governance more difficult.

Indigenous people have their own different languages, culture, social and political establishments that may vary significantly from those of mainstream society. They also face issues such as discrimination, language loss, and marginalization. However, a key difference lies in how they approach their rights and identity. Contrasting ethnic minorities who focus on individual rights, indigenous communities emphasize the importance of recognizing their collective rights.

Self-identification for an indigenous person and acceptance by the indigenous community are key to one’s cultural identity. But problems can occur when someone identifies as indigenous but isn’t recognized by the group. Joona brings to light that: ‘It should be noted that, even though self-identification is generally used to refer to peoples, the term also includes an individual’s feeling. Without individuals there are no groups. Logically, the definition of a group and the definition of an individual cannot be fully separated’ (Joona 147.) Acceptance of one’s indigenous identity as indigenous member can be challenging. When acceptance of an individual identity fails it may lead to serious



psychological problems such as stress, trauma, and angst. Indigenous identity is a crucial part of an individual person's identity (Sarivaara, Sarivaara et al.).

When individuals experience intercultural contact, the issue of who they are comes to the forefront. Prior to major contact, this question is hardly an issue; people routinely and naturally think of themselves as part of their cultural community, and usually value this attachment in positive terms. Of course, other life transitions (such as adolescence) can lead people to wonder, and even doubt, who they are. But it is only during intercultural contact that their cultural identity may become a matter of concern (Berry).

### **Dominant development paradigms unsuited to indigenous people**

Indigenous peoples' societies have often been regarded as "backward, primitive and uncivilized", where their "development" is understood to be their assimilation into the so-called "civilized world." Since the Second World War, the concept of development has often been conceived in strictly economic terms. It was thought to follow an evolutionary process that commenced from basic commodity suppliers, through capital accumulation to industrialization, in turn leading to urbanization and "modernization". Development paradigms of modernization and industrialization have often resulted in the destruction of indigenous peoples' political, economic, social, cultural, education, health, spiritual and knowledge systems as well as extraction of their natural resources.

The culture and values of indigenous people are often seen to be contradictory to the values of the market economy, such as the accumulation of profit, hyper consumption and competitiveness. Indigenous people also are seen as "hindrances" to progress because their lands and territories are rich in natural resources and they are not willing to freely dispose of them.

In many countries, the history and the continuing practice of acclimatization has resulted in blanket public policies that have excluded

indigenous people and have been discriminated on the basis of culture and identity. The pursuit of economic growth at all costs is not only destructive for indigenous people but also for the rest of humanity and the planet. The focus on GDP as a main measure of progress has distorted the true meaning of progress and wellbeing. For example, damage to ecosystem, irreversible loss in biological diversity and the erosion of cultural and linguistic diversity and indigenous traditional knowledge, cannot be categorized in the balance sheet. Such ecological, cultural, social and spiritual indicators, which provide more comprehensive measurements of national and global situations, are rarely used.

### **Indigenous concepts of well-being and sustainability**

Understanding the diverse cultural contexts of India is critical to create sustainable social change. Embracing inclusivity, respecting local customs and establishing meaningful connections with the indigenous people may lead to a conducive environment that promotes sustainability and well-being.

The failure of the dominant development model, as has been demonstrated by the enduring global economic crisis, the environmental crisis of climate change and the erosion of biological diversity, indicates the need to develop alternative ways of developmental perspectives. Indigenous peoples' visions and viewpoints of development provide some of these alternatives that should be considered and discussed further.

The concept of development of 'Indigenous people' is based on a holistic outlook reinforced by the values of mutuality, harmony, symmetry and jointly, understanding that humans should live within the boundaries of the natural world. Development with culture and identity is characterized by a holistic approach that seeks to build on collective rights, security and greater control and self-governance of lands, territories and resources. It builds on tradition, with respect for ancestors, but is also forward-looking. It includes social, cultural, political and spiritual systems. Indigenous peoples' interpretations of well-being have a number of common elements, such as, importance of collective economic actors and community economic institutions. Integrity of indigenous governance

should not only be considered in terms of profit but rather in terms of improving quality of life and enriching the notion of development where human beings are in harmony with mother 'Earth'. It should also focus on recognising the efforts of the indigenous people and the contribution to the preservation of resources and further provide financial aids and motivation to strengthen the indigenous peoples' knowledge institutions.

## Conclusion

The intricate interactions between indigenous peoples' collective rights, cultural heritage, and assimilation pressures are at the core of their identity issues. The preservation of collective rights over land, language, and cultural practices is a priority for indigenous peoples, in contrast to ethnic minorities, whose conflicts frequently revolve around individual rights. To preserve indigenous identity, self-identification and group acceptance are essential, but achieving these goals can be difficult due to bureaucratic roadblocks and the possibility of social exclusion. The challenges indigenous people have in maintaining their cultural distinctiveness can be made worse by psychological distress resulting from an inability to reconcile personal and group identities. It is thus very crucial to support indigenous peoples' efforts to preserve their cultural integrity while also acknowledging and defending their collective rights. The global community must initiate such policies and practices that support cultural diversity and uphold the autonomy of indigenous communities' top priority as indigenous peoples continue to demand their rights on international forums. Indigenous peoples can only flourish in a multicultural society if the conflict between identity and assimilation is lessened through such initiatives.

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## From Marginalised to Main Stream: Emergence of New Woman in the Novels of Shobha De

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*Sumer Singh*

Shobha De is one of those Indian English writers who occupy a distinctive place as a journalist as well as novelist in the literary world of India. With the publication of her debut novel *Socialite Evening*, De entered the literary limelight in India and became one of India's top best-selling authors with a couple of novels to her credit. She is always one of those modern day women authors who are now expressing themselves freely and boldly creating a new image of the woman. In fact, De endeavors to present the new woman who is daring, ambitious and aspiring and is obsessed with realizing her dreams and forcing them upon the male dominated world with a view to obtaining a due recognition of her identity. Being a feminist writer, De's novels raise a strong protest against the male dominated Indian society where women are considered as mere shadow of men and treated as the other. However, in this fast changing world, the role of women in the society, too, has been changing fast and affecting greatly the social norms or mores prevalent in the society. Indian writers and especially Indian Women writers have risen to the occasion and are adequately reflecting the condition of women and their hopes and aspirations in literature. However, Male writers have also written about women's issues but female writers are writing with an 'insider's knowledge', bringing into focus the exploitation and marginalization of women.

Almost all the novels of Shobha De centers on the theme of marginality prevailing in our society be it man-woman relations, caste-class divide, gender discrimination/ biases or women and voiceless people. De, in her novels, seriously questions as to the gravity of the injustices meted out to the marginal people and the hypocrisy of the so called urban

India. The controversial issues and the challenges thereupon on the society are likely to make a change of heart of educated middle class India. The term marginalization refers to individual or groups who live at the margin of society. Their situations may be historical or cultural as they suspend between social classes or cultural groups, without being fully integrated to it. The term has different connotations and nuances in the modern era of post colonial, postmodern period and in a world that is predominantly driven by market forces. In cultural anthropology marginalization is a major subject of study in which ethnic groups and their social situations are studied. It may have various forms like class, caste, gender, community and so on at one level and at the other level groups who are subjected to economic and social hardships. These groups may still be marginalised at multiple levels in a country like India which has witnessed tremendous socio-political changes in both pre-independence and post independence period. The present research paper deals with the issue of gender marginality or gender biases particularly in Indian social set up.

## **Methodology**

The present research paper makes primary use of a number of different passages selected at random from Shobha De's selected novels as its primary data sources to culminate itself in a qualitative research study. To be more specific, the novels of De studied and evaluated are *Socialite Evenings*, *Starry Nights*, *Sisters*, *Snapshots*, and *Second Thoughts* in order to better comprehend and interpret the topic. The secondary data is gathered from a wide variety of online and offline sources in order to accomplish this goal of delivering Shobha De's most up-to-date thoughts on the matter addressed in the research paper. Characterization created by Sobha De is significant for the importance placed on the protagonists' existing mental states in each instance.

## **Shobha De and the Concept of New Woman**

Shobha De is a modern novelist who recognizes the displacement and marginalization of women in the society. Her novels represent the new Indian woman's voice. A 'New woman' is in search of self-identity,

seeking liberation in all walks of life, replacing the traditional image of Indian woman. She constantly tries to shatter patriarchal hegemony and raises a voice of protest against male dominance. She does not believe in depicting her women protagonists as slaves. But she is the first to explore the world of urban women of higher social strata. A closer study of her novels reveals her protest against the image of woman as an auxiliary. She destroys this distorted and deteriorated image of woman and therefore, the women protagonists in her novels appear more powerful and crave for their quest for self identity in the society where the men dominate. They always expect something new experiences and other worldly pleasures. The newly existing freedom of women give them pride and brutal attitudes especially marriage and family. The modern woman is not only enjoying new found freedom but conceives themselves as the acute business personalities. These horrible personalities of modern women have breath taking impact on the male sector. In Shobha De's world of fiction the protagonist women are not at all tranquil and compliant but having high spirit in self progress. These women motivate themselves to achieve the position to control the society instead of tolerating the abuses at the hands of men. As we dive into the fictional world of Shobha De we can understand the way in which modern women emerging Indian society.

The question arises who is a new woman. Can a modern educated emancipated woman be called a 'new woman'? Everyone has a different definition of 'a new woman'. In the words of Vijay Laxmi Seshadri, "The new woman is assertive and self-willed searching to discover her true self". So a new woman is one who has or knows the value system and knows the score she has to remit in fixing these values in patriarchal society. Not every modern woman is called 'a new woman'. It is rather painstaking to be a new woman because she vindicates her own self and demands her rights. She fights against the schemes of things like social, moral and cultural norms. She even retaliates the use of thought patterns nourished under the influence of male-dominated order. She derives pleasures from insisting her own self, her thoughts, her norms, and the way of her own behaviour. A New Woman is an



enterprising ambitious and individualistic personality in thought and action who in De's novels finally demands attention equality and peace on par not with women but with men. The purpose of this paper is to study new women in the novel of Shobha De. Women under patriarchy are the victims of too much oppression and suppression. They are discriminated and bruised in lieu of their sex. The lives women live are demonstrated in the writings of Shobha De.

Shobha De exhibits her women characters a combination of boldness in physical, mental, sexuality, career and marriage life. She does not want her women characters mere a Traditional and help mate or simply pleasure given instrument or slaves. De portrays her own feminist and sexist mindset in her most novels. We come to know through her novels that women characters are superior to men. In 20th century fictions women are having free thinking and also their own choice for sexuality. De presented totally different problems which a Traditional woman faced, because they are all middle class ordinary traditional class women. But she depicts modern women at social milieu in different angle and in openness in her narrations. It is totally differs that modern women characters are educated and they hold a well placed in society. De proves that among the social milieu the women characters stand equal to men in the society. We can see the social milieu in their every part of their life like marriage, men-women relationship, and family and presentation female sexuality as shown in De's fiction.

### **New Women Approach towards Sex and Marriage**

Traditionally, marriage is a union of two persons of full development. Shobha De's modern women typically played the roles of sharer of husbands love and affection, the mother of the children and the partner of performances and ceremonies. They are no more the typically traditional women who were pictured as submissive, sufferer, a mother, a wife, daughter, and a cog in family machine by the other female writers. In De's novels the marriage is described with all bareness lurking behind it. Shobha De believes that the marriage ceremony is considered as a sacred bond between the husband and wife but today this bondage has

no capability to bring pleasures and peace both in individual and social life. In the contemporary era every relationship is influenced by money and power likewise the marriages also influenced by these criteria.

In the novel *Sisters* Mikky, the character, is tempted to get married to Naveen only because of his money not for love. She prefers him as she thinks, “He may help me with Hiralal Industries” (62). Likewise in the same novel Binny tries to get Mikky in marriage in order to obtain in all the wealth of Mikky. In the same way Anjali and Karuna in *Socialite Evening*, Asha Rani in *Starry Night*, and Maya in *Second Thought* have experienced the bareness in their marriage life. De’s women characters are having no such personal aptitude and morals with them. In fact, these women never enjoyed sex with their husband as thinking sex is a boring one and terrible; even they do not worried having sex with other men apart from their husband. R.S. Pathak rightly comments on marriage in Shobha De’s fiction as “Marriage to them is hardly more than a convenient contract to lead a comfortable promiscuous life which can be terminated at anytime depending upon the whims of the partners” (Pathak).

Shobha De was criticized by many critics that she treats the sex in hard and rough terms in her novels. De also depicts sex apart from emotions and love; even though she has displayed sex as a mechanical function. She displayed this kind of sexual emotions in her fictional novels through marriage life and man and women relationship. In De’s novels the women characters are not ashamed to satisfy their sexual urge through extra-marital relationships. They decide to live what they want and whom they have to live with without bothering about the terms of Traditional chastity. They do not want to be live like the traditional women’s like Sitha, Savitri and Anusaya. The modern woman made their identity notable by utilising the sex where ever it is necessary. They also realize that how the society oppresses them when they are in their improving stage and it made some sort of awareness among them. They used their beds as a weapon against few social issues they faced. Hence, in the novel *Starry Nights* Shobha De’s women such as Asha Rani, Rita, Linda, Shonali and others frankly discuss and practice sex. The woman

like Aasha Rani enslaves the men and becomes successful by utilizing sex as a weapon.

De revealed in her few novels about sex that men used their sexual activity to control and conquer the body and mind of women. It is not merely enjoyment instead of it became disillusionment. De admits and exposed in her novels that, ‘yes, the sex in the books is quite grim... It’s unhappy sex seen from a fairy lonely women’s point of view. Some people, however, find sex seen from a woman’s view point so threatening that it’s much easier to dismiss it as sleaze’, It shows to actual purpose of sex that shown in her novels. De’s novels reveal that the man and women relationship in sexual activity is mostly not real but it is a fictional world among them as well as it leads in to frustration. She does not depict it for a purpose of sensational reading but it shows the hollowness in the world of sexuality both in the family and social life. De does not praise or fully support the free sexual activities of her characters in her novels.

De also mocks the free sexual activities of modern women through her fiction. She depicts that the modern women folk has not only the freedom of living independently but they can have heterosexual and lesbian relationship or moreover even mechanical in high society. According to De the above-mentioned sexual activities are not emotional or love or mutual understanding at all. These activities will not give any natural satisfaction and peace since it is artificial one. The real happiness is mutual understanding between two souls not only psychological urge.

### **Emergence of New woman**

The birth of “new woman” in India is a reality as the idea and state of womanhood has changed in the contemporary scenario. This new woman is an integration of western manipulations as well as her native culture. She is a hybrid who despite of all kinds of turmoil’s, is able to hit a balance among diverse areas of her life. The post-colonial contemporary novelists portray a “new woman” in their fiction, the woman who belongs to modern commercial society, one who rebels against the customary social set up. Shobha De, being a post-colonial contemporary novelist

and writer of third wave of feminism, rationally projects the new image of women i.e. the aristocratic women in present-day India. These ultra-modern and sophisticated women use sex as bludgeon to succeed and mould men to their point of view. This sprouting new picture of women has shaped a crisis in family and society and has dazed the nitty-gritty's of age-old traditions like marriage and motherhood. Pre-marital sex, extra-marital relations or separation are no longer considered to be a taboo. The concept of idyllic Indian woman has turned out to be outdated. Contemporary woman is career-oriented because she knows that it is her financial dependence which authorizes a male to dominate his wife and subject her to physical and psychological pain.

In Shobha De's first novel, *Socialite Evenings*, she describes the journey of a prominent Mumbai socialite Karuna from a clumsy middle-class girl to a self-sufficient woman. Karuna's life can be divided into three phases – life before marriage, married life, and life after the separation from her husband. In all these three phases of her life readers notice the rebellious instinct. In her childhood days she was the only child with a discipline problem both at home and at school. For example, she didn't like going to school by train or a double-decker bus. While other girls dressed in smart terry cot uniforms, she wore her sash hipster-style. Her sisters preferred to concentrate on their percentages whereas she preferred to discover Bombay and Bombazines. Naturally, as she grew up there developed in her the emotional urge to identify with the outside world, the modern crowd and the fascinating world of affluent girls who had everything. She was not interested in her studies and also acted as a model for an ad agency much against her father's will. It has been the desire of Karuna to get rid of her middle class background and shabbiness of her life as the daughter of a middle rung government official.

At this juncture Karuna meets Anjali a prominent socialite and the wife of a wealthy playboy. Anjali is an independent lady, rich, confident and beautiful. She has everything the modern woman needed. Moreover, she belongs to the world of fashion designing and advertising. This example of Anjali makes Karuna to think that the fashion world can

bring wealth, freedom and status in her life and would help her to fulfill all her desires. So she freely indulges in the fashionable world of modern life introduced to her by Anjali, the middle-aged prominent socialite. Karuna's very entry in the glamorous world of modeling and friendship with her boy friend Bunty, is the act of rebellion against the established traditional norms of patriarchal society. Throughout the novel, Karuna's psyche develops through protest and defiance. In this patriarchal society, man can only think about his life without woman but a woman cannot do the same. Some women mutely tolerate this situation and spend their whole life in suffocated atmosphere. But Shobha De's women are different as they do not meekly accept their subordinate position. In the same way Karuna also gets jaded with her husband in the bond of married life and gets divorce to fulfill her dreams of life.

The struggle of Karuna for being independent modern woman, therefore, does not remain confined only to her but becomes representative struggle of the modern women to be free and self-reliant i.e. the new woman. After her divorce, her husband meets her to express his regret and ask her to come back and live with him. But Karuna's response is shocking and unexpected because she firmly asks her husband to go away. It is a powerful jolt to the patriarchal man. Karuna thinks she has become one-up and vindicated herself as a woman by abusing her husband verbally when he comes with the proposal to remarry her,

And you waited all this while to tell me. Just get the hell out of my house and life. I don't ever want to see you again. I let you in this time . . . but never again I'll call the cops if you try and invade my home in future. You are even more of a warm than I thought. You deserve Winnie – I hope she's got a wax doll of yours. I'll send her some extra pins to stick into it. Now take your frigging pipe and out! (264).

There always been a contrast between Karuna and her mother in their attitude towards the institution of marriage. Her traditional mother advises Karuna to marry the right person. But she refuses to conform to the traditional image of woman anymore that is why she rebels against the patriarchal system. She resents, resists and rejects male dominance at every step. Her statements reflect her desire for the affirmation of

herself. She wants to destroy the gender discrimination – the real source of women’s oppression and create a new society in which there will be no place for inequality between men and women. Critics opine that De’s women like Anjali and Karuna project their power on others, to deconstruct the male ego. They like to be “eroticized as objects” and to view themselves as “erotic objects”, not subjects.

De presents these modern independent women having courage to revolt and refuse being puppets in the hands of men in the name of tradition and society. Shobha De’s excellent and sophisticated women of the upper class family gets fascinated by the social institution of the marriage and family for the sake of money and admiration as seen in *Socialite Evenings*. As the story unfurls the life of these women, we find the sexual independence of Anjali who at last seeks comfort in religious conviction after her second marriage with Kumar, an incapable and mismatched man; the dazzling and energetic Ritu who leaves her second husband for a smuggler. Karuna’s frustration with her husband cultivates her castle in the sky of an unconventional woman.

Shobha De was closely associated with the world of Mumbai Cinema. She knows well about the dark life behind the screen, with all its ugly, dirty details. Her novel *Starry Nights* explores the hardcore realities in the movie world. All the women characters presented in the novel such as Aasha Rani, Sudha Rani, Rita and Malini, in one way or the other are related to the world of films. These women struggle for their inordinate ambitions with all their strength in male dominated society. They live for themselves, fight, and revolt and shape their destiny and self identity. Shobha De’s women protagonists do not believe in suffering submissively, they use all the means to achieve joy and success in life. The women struggle hard to turn the tide in their favor. They face hardships, exploitation and defeat at different stages in their life but they are not discouraged. Instead, they continued to challenge the patriarchal society. They fight against slavery, oppression and exploitation. She rebels against the existing moral codes and social norms. She has acquired enough courage and strength to fight and challenge injustice.

Aasha Rani, the protagonist of the novel suffered in her childhood due to the lack of parental love, care, protection and an emotional security. She cannot enjoy her childhood because of her father. These results in her hate so much so that she refuses to see even her ill father. Now whenever she recalls her past, the painful and bitter memories of her lost childhood torture her mind. Naturally she hates her father which is thus revealed when Aasha Rani tells her sister Sudha about her father. Aasha Rani also vents a rebellious protest against her own overpowering selfish mother who looks at her daughter as a source of income. She bursts out: 'Money, money, money. That is all you think of. Well, I am fed up of being your money machine. I have done enough for everybody – you, Sudha and the others – Now I want to live for myself and enjoy life' (183).

Shobha De's novels do not accept meekly the marginalization of miserable, pathetic and suffering women. They asserted their individuality in many different ways. Instead of passively accepting their miserable lot, these women struggle, fight, protest and challenge the male dominance. Aasha Rani expresses her hatred for the men who exploited her. She tells Kishenbhai bitterly about her future strategy in defying men, "All of you are just the same, but wait, I will show you. I will do to men what they try to do to me. I will screw you all beat you at your own game!" (13). Further, her betrayal by Akshay Arora is the most bitter and traumatic experience. As despaired by frustration, she tries to commit suicide. But in her attempt, she fortunately survives.

This voice of Aasha Rani represents the different ways of protest registered by women against their oppression and exploitation in a patriarchal social set up. Henceforth Aasha Rani, rather strong in character, takes bold decisions to survive in society. She has a composite energy of production, protection and love, both earthly and sexual. Her suffering, exploitation, humiliation, oppression and even separation from her husband, do not control her desire to live a life of her own. She breaks all sexual mores and social norms by her unusual and deviant behavior. Her sexual encounters with different men such as Kishenbhai, a small film distributor, Akshay Arora, a top film-star and true

representative of patriarchy, Sheth Amirchand, a Member of Parliament, Linda, a journalist and a lesbian, Abhijit Mehra, son of an industrialist Amrish Mehra, Jojo, a film producer and Gopalakrishnan, a Tamil businessman point out her sexual aggression. She defeats them at their own game, and demolishes the mythical image of woman imposed by the patriarchal structure. There are chiefly three women characters, Geetha Devi, Malini, Aasha. All these women resist for their immoderate dreams with all their power in male subjugated society. They hit back, rebel and contour their fate by living for themselves. They don't believe in suffering passively, they leave no stone unturned to attain the climax of joy and success. Overflowing with prospects and enthusiasm, they lay hands on hope in starry nights of their life.

The novel *Second Thoughts* depicts the saga of a middle class Bengali girl Maya who is trapped in arranged marriage with Ranjan Malik. It is a bitter-sweet love story of the marital life of Ranjan Malik and Maya. It is through this story of love and betrayal Shobha De exposes the hollowness and hypocrisy of Indian marriage system. Maya wants to complete her studies of textile designing but her mother, Chitra, realizes that a foreign returned boy would get "snapped before you and I can blink our eyes" (3). The Malik family appear to be modern but is too traditional in their outlook. Therefore, Maya protests, "How could they tell me not to work after marriage? Do any educated trained girls stay at home these days? I didn't like that remark" (13). Both Chitra and Mrs. Malik inculcate the set rules in the minds of Maya and Ranjan much before they get married. But it is more due to the pressure of the deep rooted tradition on one hand and exposure to the modern education and the contemporary social trends on the other, that they both find it difficult to establish harmony between them. Rajan provides Maya "nothing more than financial support, a decent house to live in and square meals a day" (263) Maya cannot feel a sense of belonging and consequently she feels utterly neglected and alienated since she cannot get the confidence to call the house her own.

This sense of loneliness and rejection draws her towards Nikhil Verma, a college going neighbor, who gently persuades Maya to get real and



act real. His company brings a new meaning to her life. Again her dreams and desires revive and she wants to enjoy life of Bombay. With Ranjan she was closed in the house but with Nikhil she wants to explore Bombay of her dreams. She slowly becomes bold and allows Nikhil to visit her. With the passage of time Nikhil is successful in creating a place for him in Maya's heart. As a result, Maya develops a brief but explosive and passionate friendship with Nikhil. Maya is so depressed and frustrated that soon she establishes an extra-marital relationship with him and at last breaks the long silence. Now even with a little encouragement from Nikhil, she is ready to say goodbye to her "uninspiring, life without the slightest regret" (171). When Ranjan is away on business trips, Maya feels free and wants to inhale the fresh air. Nikhil encourages her to live life as she wants and not to care for the opinions of others, "stop pretending to be someone you want the world to believe you are" (171). But though Maya takes this bold step, she feels a sense of guilt as she breaks the set norms. At this time, she learns about Nikhil's engagement with a Delhi-based girl which shatters her dream completely. On second thoughts, she learns to survive the sultriness of not only Mumbai, but also of her marriage.

Shobha De, thus, has become the symbol of highlighting different perspectives of woman's freedom and liberation. She conceives the extra-marital affairs of women as the stroke to break the traditional and moral values in society. This is one of the most important aspects of her feminism. Her women are daring and courageous in establishing extra-marital affairs to satisfy their natural urge. These women are not hesitant in using sex as calculated strategy to get social and financial benefit. Shobha De's novels deal with romantic partnerships that revolve around sexual encounters and financial gain. V. Saraladevi makes the observation that the female characters in Shobha De do not see their sexuality as a constraint but rather as a powerful weapon in the power struggle that exists inside their relationships. To them, sex is not restricted to the body; rather, it is a symbol of power that governs man woman interactions as a whole. They refuse to accept any form of misery and are willing to go to any lengths necessary in order to achieve their goals of happiness and success in life.

## Conclusion

Shobha De is dedicated to providing an open and honest account of what occurs as well as how she feels about it. There is nothing condescending or condescendingly arrogant in the way that she describes India or Indian culture; rather, she honors the genuine aspirations of Indian customs and traditions. On the other hand, there are those in India who adhere to more traditional notions of sexuality, and they despise her for being so forthright. She is gifted with intimate understanding of the psyche of women and her problems. She views extramarital relationships as a kind of protest or resistance on the part of women when they are denied the same options in life as men, with the goal of shattering the conventional and moral standards that are held in society. From *Socialite Evenings* to *Second Thoughts*, Shobha De discusses the problems of women in patriarchal society, man-woman relationship, lesbian and homosexual relationship and the emergence of live-in relationship. Through her novels, she makes her readers to introspect about fast fading love, pleasure and satisfaction in marital relations.

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## Conflicting Beliefs and Identities in Kiran Nagarkar's *Ravan and Eddie*: A Critical Study

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*Meenu Pandya and Seema Bhupendra*

It is evident that a man is a part of multiple organisations and carries many identities. The illusion of a single identity conceals and disregards man's many affiliations and memberships, including class, political beliefs, occupation, gender, area, country of origin, citizenship, belief in or lack of belief in an afterlife or life before death, and much more. The way people are understood within the confines of religion or culture cultivates conflict. As a result, the solitarist, communitarian viewpoint that analyses and explains people within a single, strict group membership sows the seeds of division and hatred. It encourages people to be aggressive and violent.

The title of Nagarkar's novel, *Ravan & Eddie*, is significantly suggestive of the communal creed, and one anticipates the cultural conflict or juxtaposition jaunt through the pages of the novel. The word 'communal' conjures up images of the two arch-rival Indian communities, Hindus and Muslims. But this appears to be the first Indian novel in English that shifts the focal interest of the study from the Hindu-Muslim to the Hindu-Christian communities. The fundamental theme of the novel, *Ravan & Eddie*, is the friction and enmity between the two religious groups, the Maratha Hindus and the Catholic Christians. The distance between the two groups is so strong that it separates them into two different universes. Nagarkar, in extremely particular detail, highlights the ambivalence present in the chawl culture:

The Hindus and Catholics in Bombay's CWD chawls (and perhaps almost anywhere in India) may as well have lived on different planets. They saw each other daily and greeted each other occasionally, but their paths rarely crossed. Ravan and Eddie too went

their separate ways. It was not just a question of different religions and cultures; they shared neither a common colonial heritage nor a common language. . . . (16)

Nagarakar highlights how these two religions differ in terms of individual cultural characteristics and social involvement, such as festivals and rituals. Hindu festivals are mainly based on traditional rites and customs. Christmas, New Year, and Easter celebrations by Christians are mostly imitations of those held in the West and have been somewhat modified to fit the Indian context. Christian festivals exhibit organised celebrations and limited activities. Hindu festivals and festivities are commonly characterised by rowdy behaviour and a noisy environment. The numerous microphones and megaphones continue to disrupt the serenity and tranquillity of the entire town. This point is illustrated hilariously by Victor's funeral procession, which coincides with Parvati's Pooja. The following lines also express clearly how ignorant and indifferent individuals are to one another's cultures:

. . . the van looked like a bridal bed in a fairy-tale and Victor was the prince. It was just a matter of minutes before the incredibly lovely princess in white came and kissed Victor on the lips and the two of them flew into the sunset on the Air India plane. The Hindu boys and girls and their parents from the neighbouring chawls gazed in wonder at the indescribable beauty of a Catholic funeral. Truly, even if you were born a Hindu, it was worthwhile dying a Catholic. (10)

On the other hand, Hindu ceremonies are loud and boisterous:

Suddenly all hell broke loose. The earth rocked and the heavens swayed. The people at the funeral looked shattered even father Agnello D'Souza was speechless. Were these the voices from the Tower of Babel? Loudspeakers placed in Parvatibai's windows were blasting the entire neighbourhood with the Satyanarayana rituals. Parvatibai's had hired a Brahmin priest to offer thanks to God for the miracle that had saved her son from certain death and he was giving her her money's worth. . . . (11)

The interlude, 'A Meditation on Neighbours,' deals with differences between Hindu and Christian communities. The digression focuses on the lifestyle, culture, and living patterns of the community. Hindus bathe in the morning and shower their established Gods as well. Nonetheless, Goan Catholics do not believe that there is a causal connection between salvation and bathing. Hindu ladies traditionally wear saris. On all except special occasions, Catholic women wear saris instead of dresses. On Sundays, Hindus rise later. They read the newspaper while having morning tea and breakfast on an easy chair in the corridor. Catholics go to the bazaar at 9:30 or 10 a.m.; unshaven and unbathed, to buy mutton and fish. Catholics speak English and Konkani, whereas Hindus speak Marathi. The novelist further explains other differences between the two communities:

Hindus ate betel nut and chewed paan and tobacco and spat with elan and abandon in the corners of staircases, on the road and, if you didn't watch out, streaked you an earthen red from double-decker bus windows. Hindus didn't think that spitting was peeing through the mouth. Catholics did. They didn't eat paan, and could not be faulted for indecent public acts. Catholics ate beef and pork. Even non-vegetarian Hindus hardly ever did. . . . (142)

Religion is an essential part of defining one's cultural identity. All religious adherents are expected to follow a set of codified beliefs and rituals, study holy books and conform to a specific cultural tradition. These elements make a religion or the religious identity of a group or community different from other faiths or religious identities. Amartya Sen's *Identity and Violence* is a sustained attack on the 'solitarist' (Sen 110) theory which says that human identities are formed by the membership of a single social group. Sen believes this solitarist fallacy shapes much communitarian and multicultural thinking, as well as Samuel Huntington's theory of "clashing civilisations". In each case, it involves the fallacy of defining the multiple and shifting identities present in every human being in terms of a single, unchanging essence. In Sen's view the idea that we can be divided up in this way leads to a "miniaturisation" (Sen ii) of humanity, with everyone locked up in tight little boxes from which they

emerge only to attack one another. According to Sen, a person can be affiliated with a variety of groups and identities:

The same person can, for example, be a British citizen, of Malaysian origin, with Chinese racial characteristics, a stockbroker, a nonvegetarian, an asthmatic, a linguist, a bodybuilder, a poet, an opponent of abortion, a bird-watcher, an astrologer, and one who believes that God created Darwin to test the gullible. We do belong to many different groups, in one way or another, and each of these collectivities can give a person a potentially important identity. We may have to decide whether a particular group to which we belong is—or is not—important for us. (Sen 26)

Nagarkar vividly satirizes how communal and cross-cultural connections often occur inside the Indian social establishment by allowing Eddie to follow RSS traditions and Ravan to follow the customs of church-managed institutions. Ravan and Eddie almost had parallel cultural growth. Ravan learns the Cain curse and is rejected by the sabha, a Hindu organisation dressed in white shirts and flared khaki half-pants. He enrolls at St. Teresa's convent school to learn English. Conversely, Eddie speaks Marathi and inspires others to join the sabha, where he outperforms everyone. He excels in gymnastics, drills, physical exercise, martial arts, and spiritual singing.

The author contends that the only way to lessen haughtiness, brutality, and horrors committed against one group by another is to promote competing identities. It indicates individuals should be recognised for their varied connections to different communities. Although Dalit people are considered untouchables, once they become Christians, their caste identity fades, and both Muslims and Hindus recognise them as Christians. The odd social behaviour might be linked to the rise in Dalit conversion to Christianity. Children who are first captivated by caste differences (religion) in Indian culture soon learn to follow their elders in upholding it. This is because caste discrimination is so blatantly evident in Indian society. With Ravan's initial response to Shahaji, a member of the Dalit community, the writer highlights the purity that permeates a child's psyche:

Shahaji Kadam, now there was an enigma . . . when he had cleaned up and shaved and went to a movie with Tara he looked like any other man; . . . Then why did almost everybody avoid him and his people” ( 90)? While viewing this divided universe, Nagarkar asks at one point through Eddie: “How Christians can be discriminated from Hindus, when as a human being there is no difference? (164)

Nagarkar is also sharp enough to point out that the cultural differences between or among different ethnic, regional, and religious groupings are more prominent among the middle- aged and elderly and are more blurred among the younger generation. While the older generations cling to their cultural differences, creating a virtual barrier that prevents social interaction between different groups. The younger generations are more liberal in that they are willing to conduct social and personal interactions with people from other communities and create a universal identity in the name of their nation, social obligation, and financial obligation. The relationship between Ravan and Pieta shows how young people do not hesitate to interact beyond community lines and actively participate in events. Sometimes these interactions go beyond the restrictions defined by the older generations. For instance, Eddie’s interest in the culture permits him to interact freely with the RSS Hindu organisation, which teaches and attempts to convert him to Hinduism. Moreover, it demonstrates the ease with which young minds embrace rational justifications and ideals.

Eddie and Ravan both innocently and rationally question religious belief systems. The storyline allows for such speculations, much like young children do with their elders’ religious beliefs. Eddie’s remark about Jesus Christ’s appearance and compare it to Shree Krishna is an example to prove the point:

Why didn’t Jesus ever laugh or play a practical joke? Did he never have any fun in life, not even a day of it? Why was he always so glum and longfaced? Did he never have a fistfight as a child? Did he ever throw a stone at a clay-pot hanging high from the ceiling, knock a hole through its bottom and drink buttermilk from it? Oh, he

knew Jesus was stronger than the strongest but why was he not tough and muscular? Why was he so goody-goody? (113)

Eddie is once again perplexed when he is forced to come for confession. When he hears sermons on wounds endured by Jesus Christ and his bleeding image, he ponders. Greatly painted statues and emotional appeal do not satisfy his quest for truth:

For Hundreds of years, they had left the Son of God hanging on the cross and now Father D'Souza had the temerity to suggest that he was responsible for Jesus' sufferings. In a fit of temper, Eddie asked, 'then why don't you bring him down and bandage his wounds . . . ?' (246)

When he says the last line, the Father is perplexed as to how to respond. The question was far more practical than religious ethics. Eddie is the truth-teller here. They charged him with blasphemy and ordered him to confess following their own rules. The meaninglessness of religious iconography is expanded through Eddie's mind and the question he addresses to the Father. The author makes us think about this point why do we always talk about the bleeding and never do anything to heal? Nagarkar over and over again raises this kind of question which is centred on religion or individuals' confronting religion. Each time he opens a door for us to see something wise and also shows us there are ways out of this if only you would see them and respond to them.

Eddie is therefore a quiet observer of his faith. Ravan is the same way. Both were unable to comprehend the religion's divine grand cause. They, too, observe it as a matter of custom. Beyond religion, they don't have a distinct identity. The writer uses these characters to express the same emotion. So religion is merely a playground for them, where they are forced to play an undesirable game despite their willingness. Religion plays a significant role in everyone's life. Religion should not be followed blindly; rather, it should instil in people positive thoughts and moral values. Religion can unite a nation in the right way. It should not divide the country by praising one religion as superior to another and snubbing other religions in the worst way possible. According to Nagarkar, change



is inevitable in all facets of human existence, and people should be prepared to embrace change, even with their religious beliefs in order to maintain peace and harmony and establish a just and egalitarian world.

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## Indigenous People, Human Rights and Environmental Concerns in Amitabh Ghosh's *The Nutmeg Curse, Parable for a Planet in Crisis*

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***Rajshree Ranawat and Archna Arora***

Last year, the MuteshekauShipu (Magpie River) in Quebec, Canada, long cherished by the Innu First Nations, was granted legal personhood. This case is part of a now growing trend of cases around the world, where indigenous populations are using various strategies to protect their ancestral lands and rivers as well as preserve their cultural connections with nature. The intent of these cases, much of which stems from indigenous ideas that challenge notions of nature as inert and reimagine existing categories of legal personhood, lies at the heart of Amitabh Ghosh's book—*The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*. (Singh)

The discourse surrounding anti-colonialism is more pronounced now than at any previous time, evident in our literature and media consumption. “The Nutmeg’s Curse” presents numerous instances of colonial oppression globally, illustrating how such practices established the groundwork for extractive capitalism, which has contributed to the current state of irreversible environmental harm. The narrative begins in the 17th century on the Indonesian Island of Banda, which was invaded by the Dutch due to the allure of nutmeg, a spice native only to that island. Ghosh subsequently explores the European colonization of the Americas and Asia, drawing on narratives from the past four centuries to examine how colonialism has fostered capitalism and the resultant planetary crisis we face today.

*The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* has an intricate rubric of diverse concerns and interrelated concepts of early capitalist

desires for colonization, colonialism, immigration and ecological crisis. Such half- or partly disguised semiotic applications that reappear in writings at different level in writings of Amitav Ghosh.

Amitav Ghosh born in Kolkata, is one of the leading writers in English. His works are widely read across the globe. His oeuvre displays a remarkable thematic diversity and his novels and essays as well as non-fiction are enlightening and depressing at the same time. In his work *The Great Derangement : Climate Change and Unthinkable*, Ghosh has consistently engaged with the themes of relationship between history, literature, migration, colonialism and environmental concerns. In *The Nutmeg's Curse* he continues to manifest the dynamics between colonialism, history and ecology through a nuanced and intricate context that aids readers to comprehend the current ecological crisis posed by climate change.

. . . Like a planet, the nutmeg is encased within a series of expanded spheres. There is, first of all, the fruit's matte-brown skin, a kind of exosphere. Then there is the pale, perfumed flesh growing denser toward the core, like a planet's outer atmosphere. And when all the flesh has been stripped away, you have in your hand a ball wrapped in what could be a stratosphere of fiery, crimson clouds: it is this fragrant outer sleeve that is known as mace. Stripping off the mace reveals yet another casing, a glossy, ridged, chocolate-colored carapace, which holds the nut inside like a protective troposphere. Only when this shell is cracked open do you have the nut in your palm, its surface clouded by matte-brown continents floating on patches of ivory. (Ghosh 10)

Amitabh Ghosh delves into the intricate themes of nutmeg and mace in his critically acclaimed 2021 novel, *The Nutmeg Curse: Parable for a Planet in Crisis*. This profound narrative scrutinizes the harsh realities of colonialism through a sharply anthropocentric and capitalistic lens. Richly layered and deeply heartbreaking, the story is anchored in the tragic events of the Banda Island massacre, vividly illustrating the ruthless brutality inflicted upon the Bandanese people by Dutch colonial forces. Ghosh masterfully shows how a once-coveted resource can transform

into a curse, shattering the lives of the very indigenous communities it was meant to benefit.

The beginning of the novel describes a gripping and harrowing episode of the notorious Dutch slaughter that took place April 21, 1621, in Selamon in the village on Lonthor, the largest island in the Banda archipelago. As tension crackles in the air, a lamp, a relic from a more peaceful time, tumbles to the floor of an indigenous building half Lt. Sascha K. and his compatriots have commandeered into a military billet. This simple but devastating moment starts a tragic story that enshrined the coming violence and loss that would change the world of the people of Banda forever.

## **Colonialism and Environment**

Through his work, Ghosh grapples with the question of how colonialism has been a major source of economic extraction that has set the stage for environmental degradation. Blaut is correct to say the spread of colonialism can be considered the start of the 'European diffusionism' process. This resulted in a hyper-hegemonic Eurocentrism whose overbearing presence was projected onto cultures and values, denying the plurality of the world. This origin for the destruction of the Earth can be recognized through colonialism. Its process has an annoying and serious effect on earth that raises a huge question for our life. We must all be alarmed at the deleterious effects of colonialism on the environment; it is a mandate for us today to save our planet.

**The Banda Island:** The Banda Islands are a volcanic group of ten small volcanic islands in the Banda Sea. These islands are located on a fault line where the earth is very active. These islands and their volcano, Gunung Api (Fire Mountains), are part of the ring of fire that stretches from Chile to the Indian Ocean. Gunung Api is still active and rises above the Bandas, with its peak always covered in swirling clouds and steam. The Banda Islands were for centuries, really one of the motors of world history. In the pre-modern era many of the world's most important luxury goods came from these forests. 'Nutmeg tree', which was the incredible gift of this island, produces not only nutmeg but also

mace. Mace is the little red scrap on the outside of the nut. Ghosh has described it as a tiny planet in his book, he has beautifully portrayed the description of nutmeg. He says:

Like a planet, the nutmeg is encased within a series of expanding spheres. There is, first of all, the fruit's matte-brown skin, a kind of exosphere. Then there is the pale, perfumed flesh, growing denser toward the core, like a planet's outer atmosphere. And when all the flesh has been stripped away, you have in your hand a ball wrapped in what could be a stratosphere of fiery, crimson clouds: it is this fragrant outer sleeve that is known as mace. Stripping off the mace reveals yet another casing, a glossy, ridged, chocolate-colored carapace, which holds the nut inside like a protective troposphere. Only when this shell is cracked open do you have the nut in your palm, its surface clouded by matte-brown continents floating on patches of ivory. (Ghosh 10)

Everyone in the seventeenth century, who was a big celebrity and traveled, made a beeline for Banda Island. The reason why everyone went to this island is because of a tree "The Nutmeg Tree", which is endemic to that region. Before the eighteenth century, every single nutmeg and every shred of mace came from these islands. Now nutmeg's are so impoverished that we don't really pay attention to them, but in late Mediaeval Europe just a handful of nutmeg was enough to buy a house or ship. At that time, those people were called rich, who had a handful of nutmeg's. These spices like nutmegs, cloves, peppers were not only valued for their culinary uses, but also valued for their medicinal properties. They were valued as they became envy-inducing symbols of luxury and wealth.

In the late Middle Ages, nutmegs became so valuable in Europe that a handful could buy a house or a ship. So astronomical was the cost of spices in this era that it is impossible to account for their value in terms of utility alone. They were, in effect, fetishes, primordial forms of the commodity; they were valued because they had become envy-inducing symbols of luxury and wealth, conforming perfectly to Adam Smith's insight that wealth is something that

is “desired, not for the material satisfactions that it brings but because it is desired by others. (Ghosh 9)

This glorious spice sought the attention of Europeans. The great voyages of discovery started. They started their expedition to discover the land of spices and what they found was incredible. They discovered the region named Maluku (English toponym-”Moluccas”), which was the homeland of nutmeg, mace and clove.

Portuguese who were the first to arrive at Banda with the concept of trade monopoly. Bandanese welcomed the first party of the Europeans. They came there with the 68 mindset of trade monopoly on Nutmeg. They proposed a treaty granting exclusive rights to the island’s nutmeg and mace. But Bandanese refused to accept that.

It was in this spirit that the Bandanese welcomed the first party of Europeans to visit their islands: a small Portuguese contingent that included Ferdinand Magellan. That was back in 1512; in the years since, the Bandanese have discovered (to their cost) that the Europeans who come to their shores, no matter of what nationality, all have the same thing in mind: a treaty granting exclusive right to the islands’ nutmegs and mace. (Ghosh 12)

They (Bandanese) refused, because they already had their accustomed business partners, from shores near and far. The islanders were dependent on their neighbors for food and much else. Besides this, Bandanese themselves were skilled traders. They had strong trade relations with other merchant communities in the Indian Ocean, finding it difficult to refuse without giving anything to their friends. Furthermore, it was not an economically sensible decision, as European buyers often offered lower prices than Asian buyers. Additionally, the Bandanese like many Asians did not find European goods to be particularly attractive. In this row, after Portuguese and Spanish, Dutch came to this tiny island, after them English came. But the Dutch were the most persistent of all and what they really wanted was to gain control of the trade in nutmeg by hook or by crook. It was very difficult for them to establish a trade monopoly, because the Bandanese were not ready. They (Dutch) repeatedly sent fleets to the island with the intention of imposing treaties

on the inhabitants. The islanders resisted as much as they could, but they were only about 15,000. It was not easy to fight the world's most powerful navy. Because of this, the elders of the island were forced to sign several treaties. But secretly, they continued to trade with other merchants and they also resisted with arms, as they did in 1609, when they attacked a party of Dutchmen that included the future governor-general, Jan Pieterszoon Coen. After that incident, he (Jan Pieterszoon Coen) decided to wipe out all the Bandanese. "In the aftermath of that slaughter Coen has come to believe-as had some of his predecessors that the Bandanees are incorrigible and that the Banda problem needs a final solution: the islands must be emptied of their inhabitants. Unless that is accomplished the VOC will never be able to establish a monopoly on nutmeg and mace. Once the Bandanese are gone, settlers and slaves can be brought in to create a new economy in the archipelago." (Ghosh 13-14)

To accomplish this, Coen ordered Martijn Sonck "Burn everywhere their dwellings", ruin every place, remove them from their land, catch them and do whatever they like to do with [them]. The Banda massacre followed the pattern of most early colonial "exterminations", as the technology of the time did not allow mass killings on an industrial scale. People were generally eliminated through the destruction of vital elements in the web of life that sustained them: for example, deforestation, or the mass killing of animals that were essential to their diet. On May 8, 1621, forty-four elders were mercilessly butchered, beheaded and then quartered. Almost 90% of the population were killed, enslaved the rest and the others were driven to either starvation or they died through disease or a few managed to escape. This was the first early modern "Genocide". "That Coen intended to eliminate an entire population is so clear that in 2012 two experts, writing in the *Journal of Genocide Research*, concluded that "the almost total annihilation of the population of the Banda Islands in 1621 [was] a clearly genocidal act committed under the direction of Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen in enforcing the Dutch spice trade monopoly . . ." (Ghosh, 42). This is how the world of Indigenous people of Banda had been brought

to an end in a span of less than ten weeks. Through this incident Ghosh wants to draw our attention towards the questions: “What was the fault of those innocent people? Just because they were blessed by the “Nutmeg” tree, they had to face this brutal treatment?? For the Bandanese, It was not just the tree, it was a “Gift of Earth”. For them, the nutmeg was the “Protagonist” of stories, nutmeg was the “teller” of the stories, they used to sing songs about the Nutmeg. But for Western settlers, these Western settlers regarded “Nutmeg” just as a “resource”, a “revenue generating resource”. Even today the people here sing songs for the nutmeg, the nutmeg is still present in their stories and in their songs. On the Malukan island of Kai, not far from Banda, there are some villages that are still inhabited today mainly by the descendants of the survivors of the 1621 massacre. The names of these villages are reminiscent of the lost homeland, and their inhabitants still speak Turwandan, the Banda language; their songs and stories even today bring to life not only the “Banda Mountain”, but also its blessing (or curse), nutmeg.

*“we weep and weep  
when, on what day  
“get on your way”  
we, pearls of wisdom  
the fruits of nutmeg have died  
she sends a letter so we may speak  
pearls of wisdom  
fruits of nutmeg have died...  
pearls of wisdom the nutmegs have died  
there is no faith here  
there is no blessing inside this island.” (Ghosh 36)*

The Banda Islands were destroyed by the Dutch East India Company. It was one of the earliest conquests in Asia. Dutch East India CompanyThe Banda Islands were destroyed by the Dutch East India Company. It was one of the earliest conquests in Asia. Dutch East India Company was one of the earliest forms of Capitalism. It was a joint stock, profit-oriented company. It is actually considered the basis



of the entire enterprise of capitalism. The Banda massacre was not the only incident that occurred in the past, there are many such incidents recorded in history that reflect the “anthropocentric worldview of colonizers. The Pequot War: The Pequot war was fought between the English settlers of New England and an Algonquian tribe of Pequot, which is now known as Connecticut, in 1636-1638. The conflict has been described as the first deliberately genocidal war waged by the British in North America. Banda Island was located on the other side of Connecticut, but in the seventeenth century these two places were closely connected to each other as the two farthest poles of the Dutch maritime empire. Although the Dutch played no role in the Pequot War, the site of the worst massacre—Mystic, Connecticut, was located on the border of New Netherland, the Dutch colony whose seat was at New Amsterdam on Manhattan Island; The Dutch also had extensive dealings with the Pequot, and competition over trade was one of the factors that led to conflict.

The massacre at Mystic occurred in 1637, when a company of English soldiers and their Indian allies used the cover of night to attack a fortified Pequot settlement while hundreds of people were asleep inside. The attack was directed by two English soldiers who had both served as mercenaries in the Netherlands: John Mason and John Underhill (the latter was actually born in 71 Holland and had a Dutch wife). John Mason led the attack, and it was he who had the idea of burning down the settlement, with a torch that he had seized from a Pequot dwelling. (Ghosh 24)

Two near-contemporary massacres, one in Banda and one in Connecticut, are linked with horrific continuity. Both took place in the context of the Anglo-Dutch rivalry and against the broader background of the religious wars raging in Europe at the time. In both incidents, large numbers of captives were enslaved and deported to work on nutmeg plantations, and both massacres were intended to destroy the people’s existence. In the case of the Pequot, their extinction was made official by the treaty ending the war, and survivors were prohibited from using the name “Pequot”. Celebrating this victory, a Puritan historian wrote:

“the name of the Pequots (as of Amalech) is blotted out from under heaven, there being not one that is, or (at least) dare to call himself a Pequot” (Ghosh 26). These incidents reflect the dark reality of European colonialism. Bio-Political Warfare: Europeans used myriad ways to exterminate Indians. They used diseases as the weapons of war. It was started in the early sixteenth century, when they used this way to exterminate indigenous people. In the language of the native American these tactics work like “invisible bullets”. In some of the stories, these diseases were represented as the kinsmen and allies of the settlers. There are several such cases recorded. In 1767, it was told to a British superintendent that “Potawatomi tribes” people believe that: while returning from lake george in 1757, they lost a large number of men as the english poisoned their rum and gave them smallpox. This was the everlasting grudge they owe to Britishers. In the year 1770, The Ojibwa tribe was thugged (ducked) by some traders who represented them with a contaminated flag as a token of friendship. After this Incident an epidemic broke out. This incident remained in the Ojibwa memory for centuries. It was expressed by a medical historian in 1928. It says that; “The Indians to this day are firmly of the opinion that the smallpox was, at this time communicated through the articles presented to their brethren by the agent of the fur company at “Mackienac”(Ghosh 61). Same happened at the time of “Pontiac Rebellion”, two contaminated blankets and one handkerchief were handed over to two Lenape representatives to spread smallpox among Indian tribes to exterminate them. “On June 24, 1763, in the thick of the Indian uprising known as Pontiac’s Rebellion, two Lenape emissaries were in Fort Pitt, Pennsylvania, for a parlay. When it came time for them to leave they were given some parting gifts that had been issued and signed for by the fort’s commanding officer. Later, a British trader called William Trent would note in his journal, “We gave them two Blankets and a Handkerchief out of the Smallpox Hospital. I hope it will have the desired effect.” And so it did: an epidemic broke out in Ohio, coinciding “closely with the distribution of infected articles by individuals at Fort Pitt” (Ghosh 61). Meanwhile, the British commander Sir Jeffrey Amherst used the same tactic to eliminate the Indians. “In a memorandum sent to Col. Henry Bouquet, in Philadelphia,

he wrote: "Could it not be contrived to Send the Smallpox among those Disaffected Tribes of Indians? We must, on this occasion, Use Every Stratagem in our power to Reduce them." Bouquet answered with alacrity: "I will try to Inoculate the Indians by means of Blankets that may fall in their hands, taking care however not to get the disease myself." To this Amherst responded: "You will Do well to try to Inoculate the Indians by means of Blankets, as well as to try Every other method that can serve to Extirpate this Execrable Race" (Ghosh 61-62). Despite doing so much, Britishers considered themselves less tyrants. They claimed that they were less brutal than the Spanish, because they were not using the military forces but rather, they were using "material forces" and "natural processes" to eradicate Indigenous people. All these incidents were the early example of "Bio-Political Warfare". All these instances show how far the Europeans wanted to exterminate the Indians so that they could take over their lands. They used this tactic not only with native Americans, but also with white Americans, during the Revolutionary War. They deployed this disease in White Americans. For the westward expansion, the U.S. Army also did not lag behind in removing the Native Americans. To exterminate the "Navajo tribe", Colonel Kit Carson and the U.S Army drove them out by destroying everything. the tribe by destroying the web of life that had sustained them. An Italian-born conqueror, GiralamoBenzoni wrote a book named "History of the New World", which was published in 1565, in which he described the perception of Indigenous people about Europeans, "They say that we have come to this earth to destroy the world. They say that we devour everything, we consume the earth, we redirect the rivers, we are never quiet, never at rest, but always run here and there, seeking gold and silver, never satisfied, and then we gamble with it, make war, kill each other, rob, swear, never say the truth, and have deprived them of their means of livelihood" (Ghosh 55).

**Colonialism: Violence, Control and Exploitation:** The Nutmeg Curse questions the sterling credentials of the muses of globalization. It opens our eyes to the paradox of having resources available to the entire world. Still, the people who are custodians of the resources are

left to live in abject poverty and squalor. As a renewable natural resource, land is necessary for shorter and more productive livelihoods and poverty alleviation through agriculture. What then could justify the land dispossession of farmers to give room for trucks to transport nutmeg and mace from the villages derived from the sweat of the brow over one and a half centuries of the Indigenous Peoples? After occupying the land, Europeans began the process of “terraforming”. They started naming those conquered places with the adjective “New”. Renaming was one of the major tools with which colonizers erased the former meaning of conquered landscapes. As they did after exterminating the Pequot. They renamed the place “New London” and the “Pequot” river as “Thames”. They wanted to erase the memory of the tribe from the face of the earth by erasing its name. “In such acts of renaming, the adjective “New” comes to be invested with an extraordinary semantic and symbolic violence. Not only does it create a tabula rasa, erasing the past, but it also invests a place with meanings derived from faraway places, “our dear native country” (Ghosh 49). The use of the word “new” in maps of the Americas and Australia points to one of the most important aspects of European expansion: ecological and topographic changes. It was this aspect of European colonialism that the prominent ecological historian Alfred Crosby tried to highlight when he coined the term “Neo-Europes” to describe changes in flora, fauna, demography and landscapes of Australia and the Americas (and also of islands such as Canaries and New Zealand). Ecological intervention was at its peak during the time of colonialism. These invaders considered the lands to be barren, wild, uncultivated, and vacant, as those lands were neither plowed nor divided into estates, and so the Native Americans had no right to claim the land. “It was by planting, and creating “plantations,” that the settlers claimed the land. The right to terra-form was thus an essential part of settler identity; their claim of ownership was founded on the notion that they were “improving” the land by making it productive in ways that were recognizable as such by Europeans” (Ghosh 63). But this was not true. The land was neither unproductive nor wild. Differences existed in the perception of the Europeans. To Native Americans, the earth was bountiful with everything they needed. Their

environment, open fields, beautiful undulating hills, winding streams were no less 74 than a boon for them. These were white settlers who considered nature to be a wilderness, filled with wild animals and savage people. “For many settlers, the environment of New England was, in the words of an early colonial leader and minister, “a hideous & desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts & wild men.” Subduing this wild land meant changing it ecologically, and remaking it in the image of Europe, which was then itself undergoing the most extensive terrestrial transformations in its history.” Settlers began cutting down trees, establishing permanent settlements, and erecting fences. These ecological interventions began to affect the lives of Native Americans. In this disruption, domestic animals of the settlers like cows and pigs played an important role. Cows and pigs needed pastures and fences, which led to the conversion of forests to farmland. In the early days, settlers were unable to meet the needs of their livestock. So they allowed their animals to roam freely, the result being disastrous for the Natives. Cows and pigs wandered everywhere, destroying native cornfields and trampling cultivated lands. Domestic animals played an important role in the conflicts between settlers and Indians, and this conflict continues to this day.

Conflicts over cattle have remained to this day a constant feature of the terraforming of the Americas. One of the main reasons why the deforestation of the Amazon is still accelerating is that settlers and giant agribusiness corporations are pushing to expand cattle farming in Brazil. Now, as in seventeenth-century New England, this requires large-scale deforestation and the creation of pasturage; now, as then, this entails the destruction of Indigenous life-worlds. (Ghosh 67)

Deforestation is the major component in entailing the current planetary crisis. Scientists have been warning for years that the Amazon rainforest is nearing a catastrophic tipping point. Rainforests maintain their own climate; Its greenery produces 20-30% of the rainfall on which the ecosystem depends. After a certain point, the loss of greenery will trigger a series of feedback loops that will destroy the Amazon Basin’s ability

to regenerate and sustain itself: it will then turn into degraded savanna and bushlands. “Once there is more dry area,” says Thomas Lovejoy, an ecologist who has studied the Amazon for decades, “you get more fire and it begins to be cumulative. The fallout of such a transition, from rainforest to degraded bushland, would be catastrophic for the entire planet, because the Amazon, which has long been one of the world’s most important

The Nutmeg’s Curse is not a linear narrative, it follows a parabolic structure. Landscapes play a vital role in this book. This book is trying to tell what unfolded on the land. How a resource became a curse for the Bandanese. As shown through the Banda incident. These Bandanese were the earliest victim of a scourge that now threatens to engulf the entire planet which is the “Resource Curse”. This book reflects the Anthropocentric world view of the colonizers and the Ecocentric worldview of the Indigenous people. Jayati Talapatra in *Capitalism and Colonialism* very rightly points out the fact that, “While we know that Colonialism, Capitalism and Climate Change are undeniable connected, we sometimes miss the connection between the first two. What the conquerors started centuries back, trying to erase all that wasn’t a replica of themselves, continue today in the form of ‘aping’ the food and habits of the self-declared modern countries. And You and I continue to lose a bit of ourselves and the relationship with the planet and its beings, every time we scramble to conform.” The Nutmeg Curse raises critical issues like is the right of the Indigenous Peoples to assert their rights and liberties and be part of decision-making, such that when a third party makes decisions about their lives and properties, their participation and consent are obtained. Much like the Banda community, most indigenous communities worshipped natural bounties and nonhuman entities as ‘makers of history as well as tellers of stories’ (Ghosh 32). “Parables” do not have narrative complexity; they have morals. The title alerts us to what Ghosh admitted in *The Great Derangement*: that realist fiction and climate activism make bedfellows difficult. Our grand author is amid fervent experimentation with the most appropriate form for his urgent messages: extending his own earlier

novel, *The Hungry Tide* (Ghosh), to the unstable terrain of *Gun Island* (Ghosh); writing a *Jungle Nama* in English to emulate the folk poetry of the Sundarbans (Ghosh); and now, luring us to seventeenth-century Banda only to withhold from us the pleasures of narrative consumption while educating us, instead, about our planet in crisis. We are all guilty of wanting more of a good thing, and this desire lies at the heart of our shared darkness: capitalist modernity.

In the opening chapter of his seminal work *Environmentalism: A Global History*, Ramchandra Guha presents a compelling argument for viewing environmentalism as an all-encompassing social movement. He articulates a vision that frames environmentalism not merely as an abstract concept, but as an urgent call to action aimed at protecting precious natural ecosystems. Guha emphasizes the crucial need to actively resist the forces that threaten to degrade these environments, highlighting the importance of advocating for sustainable technologies and lifestyles that minimize harm to the planet. His perspective champions a proactive and engaged approach to environmental challenges, underlining the imperative to safeguard our earth not only for the present moment but also for the well-being of future generations.

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## Bhili Dialect v/s Wagadi Dialect: The Issue of the Ethnic Identity of the Tribal Dominated Region of Southern Rajasthan

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*Khushpal Garg*

Banswara, Dungarpur and Pratapgarh districts and a few tehsils of Chittorgarh, Udaipur and Sirohi district are enlisted as Tribal Sub Plan Area. TSP region is a particular term assigned to a certain area which is dominated by the tribal community; it may have its identity simply as a tribal dominated area/region. As per the constitution of India, as the population of the tribal community in these area is more than 80 % percent of the total population of the area.

The Scheduled Area in the state of Rajasthan was originally specified under the scheduled Areas (Part-B-states) order, 1950 (C.O.26) dated 7-12-1950 and has been specified vide the Scheduled Areas (State of Rajasthan) order, 1981 (C.O.114) dated 12-2-1981 after rescinding the order cited earlier in 80 far as it is related to the state of Rajasthan.

This region is dominated by the tribal community, which is a subaltern and primitive community. Therefore, the government has specified this region as a Tribal Sub Plan region to introduce certain special plans and schemes for the emancipation and upliftment of the tribal community. Both the central and the state governments have introduced special plans, programmes and schemes for the welfare of this region. For the same purpose, both the central and the state governments have established the Department for Tribal Area Development in the state.

Two ethnic regions cover this TSP area, these are Mewar region and Wagad region. Udaipur, Sirohi and a few tehsils of Pratapgarh districts are part of Mewar region. Though Banswara district is located near

Pratapgarh district, and Dungarpur district is an adjoining area of Mewar state, yet these two districts of Banswara and Dungarpur along with a few tehsils of Pratapgarh district and a few villages of Udaipur district have their own specific collective historical as well as ethnic identity. These two districts, Banswara and Dungarpur along with a few tehsils of Pratapgarh district and a few villages of Udaipur district which cover a major part of the Tribal Sub Plan region, have their own distinct ethnic identity. They are jointly known as the Wagad region. Geographically the Wagad region is located in the southern part of Rajasthan. It spreads across 8292 sq. k.m. between 23 20 to 24 1 north latitude and 73 21 to 74 45 east longitude.

It is located on the borders of two contiguous states Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat in the Eastern and southern sides and Pratapgarh and Udaipur districts of Rajasthan state in the Northern and Western sides.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines the term ethnic as: "Of relating to large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, religious, linguistic or cultural origin or background."

Ethnicity is a wider term which covers under its umbrella many factors like race, religion, community, culture, nationality, language, etc. David Crystal, a well known sociolinguist, wrote a chapter on "Language And Ethnic Group" in his book *Sociolinguistics*. He wrote in this chapter:-

There is, then, no inherent or necessary link between language and race. It remains true, however, that in many cases language may be an important or even essential concomitant of ethnic group membership. This is a social fact, though, and it is important to be clear about what sort of processes may be involved. In some cases, for example, and particularly where languages rather than varieties of a language are involved, linguistic characteristics may be the most important defining factor for ethnic group membership.

Language plays an important role in determining the ethnic identity of this region, as the name of the Wagad region is derived from the word Wagadi. Wagadi is a dialect which is specifically spoken in this region. At the same time, it must be specified here that this region has had a

long historical background. Apart from this, a few scholars have given their own interpretation of the ethnic identity of the region. As Gourishankar Hirachandraji Ojhha, a prominent historian of the region writes in his book *Dungarpur Rajya Ka Itihas [History of Dungarpur State]*.

The ancient name of Dungarpur state was Wagad. The term Wagad resembles a word from Gujarati language “Wagada” which means forest area or an area of low density of people.

Some scholars of Sanskrit, Prakrit and other deviational languages also refer to this region as “Wagrat,” “Waggad”, “Waiyagad” and “Wagwar.” Sometimes they also call it “Pushp Pradesh”

(Flowers Region) and Gupt Pradesh (Secret Region). They call this region “Pushp Pradesh” or “Gupt Pradesh” as there are references in the great Indian religious epic *Mahabharata* that the Pandavas came and stayed here for a few months during their “Vanvas” (banishment). It was a dense forest area thus many Hindu saints are said to have come to this region for their ordeal or “Tapasya”. In ancient times, the southern part of Mewar State and the Eastern part of Gujarat state including some of the Western part of Malva, along with Banswara and Dungarpur districts, used to be specified as Wagad state. However, later the identity of Wagad state was confined to the two districts of Banswara and Dungarpur along with a few tehsils of Pratapgarh district and a few villages of Udaipur district.

There are a few ancient stone inscriptions as well as a few ancient copper plate inscriptions which give the references of this “Wagad State.” No historian has tried to explore the history of this region till date and no manuscriptologist has tried to interpret the manuscripts of this region. Hence, the manuscripts that are found in this region are still unexplored. Even then, these inscriptions are invaluable historical evidences of the references of Wagad state.

संवत् 1291 वर्षे पौष सुदि 3 रवौ वागड़ वटपद्र के महाराजाधिराज श्री सिंहडदेव विजयो दयी.

From the inscription found on the temple of goddess of Vijawa located in Bhekred village in Dungarpur district. [Vikram Samvat 1291]

Martha C. Sims and Martine Stephens define folklore and say:

Folklore is informally learned, unofficial knowledge about the world, ourselves, our communities, our beliefs, our cultures and our traditions, that is expressed creatively through words, music, customs, actions, behaviours and materials. It is also the interactive, dynamic process of creating, communicating and performing as we share that knowledge with other people.

Folk literature is considered as the representative literature of the culture, traditions and the traditional knowledge, etc. of the concerned community or the region. The references of the Wagad region in the folk literature of the region strengthen the specific ethnic identity of the region as Wagad region.

निज बरसौ मेहा मैं ।  
मोठ बाजरोँ वागड़ निपजे ।  
मेहड़ा निपजे खादड़ मैं ।  
नित बरसो मेहा वागड़ मैं ।

The singer prays to the clouds to bless his region which is named as Wagad with good rainfall, so that they may do their farming and grow grains.

The name of Wagad region is derived from the word Wagadi. Wagadi is a dialect which is specifically spoken in this region. Peter Trudgill and J. K. Chambers define dialect as: –

. . . a dialect is a sub-standard, low status, often rustic form of language, generally associated with the working class or other groups lacking in prestige. Dialect is also a term which is often applied to a form of language particularly those spoken more in isolated parts of the world, which have no written form. And dialects are also often regarded as some kind of (often erroneous) deviation from a norm-

as aberrations of a correct or standard form of language.

Wagadi is a sub-standard and low status language which is spoken in the region and hence it falls into the category of a dialect. Though the region in which this dialect is spoken is not absolutely isolated, it is also true that this region has never been well connected with other regions close to it. The interaction of the people of this region with the people of surrounding regions has always remained very difficult owing to the geographical conditions of the region. Till date, Banswara district of this region is the only district of the state which is not connected by rail.

The distribution of Wagadi mother tongue in the districts of Rajasthan state as per 2001 Census is presented in Table.

If we analyse this data of the census 2001 tracing the speakers of Wagadi dialect we will find that there are 25,00,574 speakers of Wagadi dialect in Rajasthan. Among them 20,68,779 speakers, which makes up 82.73% of the total speakers, are from the two districts of Banswara and Dungarpur, while only 4,16,237 speakers which make up approximately 27% of Wagadi dialect community are from Udaipur and Chittaurgarh districts. This was because Wagadi dialect is spoken in a few villages of Kherwara tehsil in Udaipur district and at that time Pratapgarh used to be a part of Chittaurgarh district, but later on Pratapgarh was declared as a separate district on 26-01-2008. A few villages of Kherawra tehsil in Udaipur district and Pipalkhut Sub division of Pratapgarh district have also become the part of the Wagad region.

Grierson identifies Wagadi dialect as a dialect specifically spoken in the southern part of Rajasthan, a specific region which is dominated by the tribals or Bhil community. He states:

Wagadi is a dialect of Bhil tribe which is found in Rajputana and the adjoining districts. In Mewar state we find them in the hilly tracts in the south-western. They are also found in the adjoining parts of Gwalior, Partapgarh, Banswara and Dungarpur.

In another research done on the seven dialects of Rajasthan, Grierson has specified Bhili dialect as a synonym of Wagadi dialect.

District	TOTAL			Rural			Urban		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
Rajasthan	2500574	1252872	1247702	2391575	1196622	1194953	108999	56250	52749
Banswara	1240596	627679	612917	1193116	603184	589932	47480	2445	22985
Dungarpur	828183	408658	419525	780162	384038	396124	48021	24620	23401
Udaipur	388516	194042	194474	376574	187765	188809	11942	6277	5665
Chittaurgarh	27721	14251	13470	27274	13997	13277	447	254	193

Regarding Bhili/Bhilodi, it may be noted that though Grierson did not associate it with the Rajasthani group of languages, it has been included in the present Volume under the consideration that a:- towards the North and East of Rajasthan the Bhil dialects gradually merge into various forms of Rajasthani and b:- Bhil is one of the scheduled tribes of Rajasthan state at present. Though Bhili/Bhilodi language comprises several mother tongues, namely, Bhili/Bhilodi, Gameti/Gavit, Garasia, Kokna/Kokni/Kukna, Mawchi, Paradhi, Tadavi, Varli, Wagadi, etc. but in Rajasthan only Bhili/Bhilodi and Wagadi have been studied being state-specific. Accordingly Wagadi and Bhili/Bhilodi are synonymous in the state of Rajasthan.

Wagad region had always been dominated by the tribals, who are also called Bhils and hence a few scholars prefer to specify the dialect spoken by these tribals as Bhili dialect and not *Wagadi* dialect. Another reason of naming the dialect of the region as Bhili dialect is specified by Sebastian Mukharjee,

The term 'Bhil' is supposed to refer to a Dravidian word „Bhilli meaning, Bow which is the characteristic weapon of the tribe. A Sanskrit name 'Bhid' meaning 'pierce', 'shoot and kill', also is connected to their name with reference to their proficiency in archery.

Thus, Wagadi dialect is sometimes confused with Bhili dialect. Bhili dialect has not been specified as a dialect in itself till the date. It is considered just a specific way of pronunciation by

a particular primitive community who themselves prefer to identify their dialect as Wagadi dialect. Sebastian Mukharjee specified this in his research and wrote:

The present study has been conducted in Rajasthan state under Linguistic Survey of India – Rajasthan Scheme. The informants located in Udaipur, Banswara, Dungarpur were identified by the competent authority of Rajasthan state for collection of elicited data. Accordingly, the informants named Shri. Babu Bhil (from *Mada*

village, Dungarpur) and Shri. Devo Bhil (from Banswara) were contacted for field data collection. As per the information of the above informants the Bhili speakers in the region like to identify themselves as Wagadi speakers. Hence the present report gives a description of the Wagadi variety of Bhili under the title Wagadi.

Historian Grierson has also specified Bhili as a language and connected it specifically with the Bhil or tribal community. He is of the opinion that this language is not confined to the Wagad region but is also found in many other regions of India. Grierson writes :

Bhili/Bhilodi is an Indo-Aryan language under central group. Ethnographically Bhils are sometimes stated to be Dravidians and sometimes to belong to Munda stock. But whatever their original speech may have been, there can be no doubt that, at present they speak an Aryan dialect, closely related to Gujarati and Rajasthani [but it should be borne in mind that the Bhils are not of Aryan origin, and that they have, accordingly, adopted a foreign tongue]. We cannot under such circumstances expect the same consistency as in the case of the genuine Aryan vernaculars, and as a matter of fact we often meet with a state of affairs that reminds us of the mixed character of the language of other aboriginal tribes, which have, in the course of time, adopted the speech of their Aryan neighbors.

Bhili dialect is spoken in a specific manner which can be articulated by tribal or Bhil community only. The most important quality of this dialect is that it can be spoken only by a Bhil/tribal only and particularly the tribals who live in the scattered areas of the region. Even the tribals who live in the non-scattered villages cannot articulate in this manner.

Tribal community is a primitive community and they reside in the forest areas or the remote areas. It has already been specified in the paper that Wagad region is a TSP region which is dominated by tribal community. The Wagad region is dominated by tribal population and 80% population of the total population of the region are tribals. It is an



obvious fact that 80 % population of the Wagad region communicate in Bhili dialect and only 20% population of the region communicate in Wagadi dialect.

The richness of any language or dialect may be accessed on the basis of number of speakers, richness of the diction, availability of written script, grammar and the literature available in the language or dialect. A comparison of Wagadi and Bhili dialect may be done on the basis of the above specified parameters to compare these dialects. It has already been specified that Bhili dialect is spoken by tribal community only, which dominates the total population of the region by 80% and Wagadi dialect is spoken by remaining non-tribal population which is 20% only in the region. The diction in both the dialects is almost the same. There are a few words which are different in Bhili and Wagadi dialects. Both the dialects do not have any specific script to write, Devnagari script is used to write in both the dialects. Grammar in both the dialects has not been specifically identified yet. The richness of tribal literature in the region may be accessed on the basis of the fact that it is represented as the representative literature of the Wagad region. Many scholars have done their researches on the tribal literature, tribal culture, tribal traditions, tribal value systems and many other aspects of tribal community. Every researcher collects his/her data for research from the tribal community but most of the time he/she attributes this data to culture, traditions, etc. of the Wagad region.

Bhili dialect has been traced as one of the major fifteen languages spoken in Rajasthan state in the linguistic survey of India 2011.

“Out of the major 15 languages of Rajasthan, 1. Hindi and 2. Bhili/Bhilodi have been the subject of the present volume since these two languages are state-specific.”(LSI 2011)

Wagadi dialect is considered as a dialect of Bhili language in the linguistic survey of India- 2011. It writes :

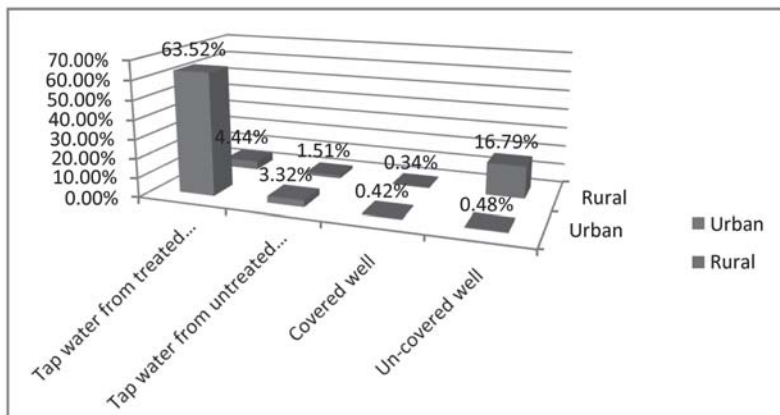
The most important feature in the Volume is that, except Wagdi, all other languages/mother tongues surveyed under the present Volume

are the grouped mother tongues of Hindi as per classification and presentation of Census data on languages/mother tongues since 1971 Census onwards. Wagdi is the mother tongue grouped under Bhili/Bhilodi language.

Bhili is an Indo-Aryan language under central group whereas Wagadi is a dialect considered as a mother tongue grouped under the Bhili language. Even then, all linguistic surveys considered Wagadi dialect as the dialect spoken in the Wagad region because of the region that it is observed that the people of the region represent themselves as they speak Wagadi dialect and not the Bhili dialect. The reason of this appears quite clear that they do not want themselves to be identified as Bhils or the inhabitant of the region which is dominated by the Bhils. The people of the region are very well familiar with the fact that the people of the remote areas has a general perception about this Tribal dominated region is still that they are with bow and still living an aboriginal life which is far away from the mainstream of the development. Probably the inhabitants of this region found it derogatory to be identified themselves with these images. The people of this region had been introducing themselves as the inhabitants of the Wagad region for many decades or centuries. Consequently, the researchers might have to use Wagadi dialect to present the data of the speakers of the region.

There may be many other factors which may play pivotal roles in the formation of the ethnic identity of the region. The socio-economic status of any community represents its status of living, economic strength and overall profile of a community. The socio-economic status of any community affects the culture, traditions and language; it also plays an important role in determining the formation of the ethnic identity of the region and also in determining the dominance of one community on another community. If one tries to analyze the socio- economical status of the tribal community with the non- tribal community of the Wagad region, one will have to analyze the socio-economical status of the urban areas and the rural areas of the region, as tribal community resides only in the rural areas of the region. Banswara and Dungarpur district cover a major part of the Wagad region hence; the data of the two districts

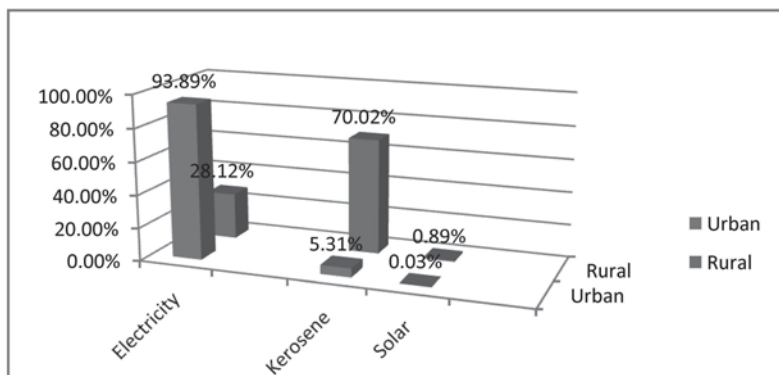
were selected to analyze the socio-economical status of the rural and the urban areas of the region.



### Banswara district

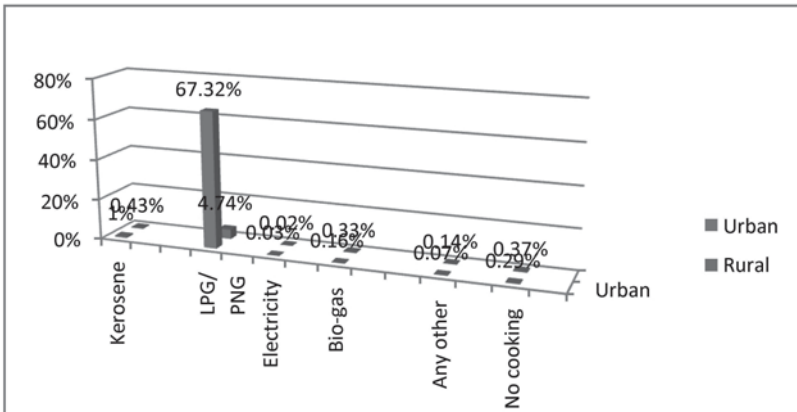
#### Percentage of Households Using Water to Drink from different Types of Sources

The above data clarifies the fact that the 63.52% of the urban population is drinking tap water from the treated sources whereas only 4.44% of the rural population has the availability of the tap from the treated sources. 16.79% of the rural population is using water from the un-covered well as the drinking water.



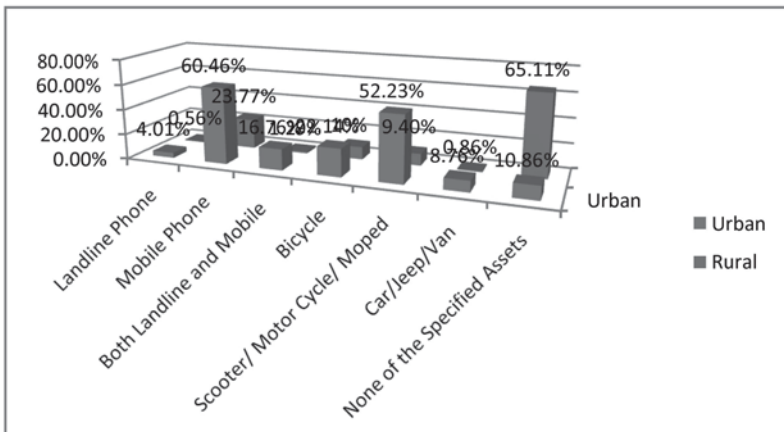
### Percentage of Households Using Different Sources as the Main Source of Lighting

The above chart shows that electricity is available to 93.89% of the urban population in the district whereas only 28.12% population of the rural areas has the availability of the electricity facility in the district. 70.02 % population of the rural areas has to use kerosene even in 2011 whereas this percentage of the people using kerosene in the urban areas is just 5.31.



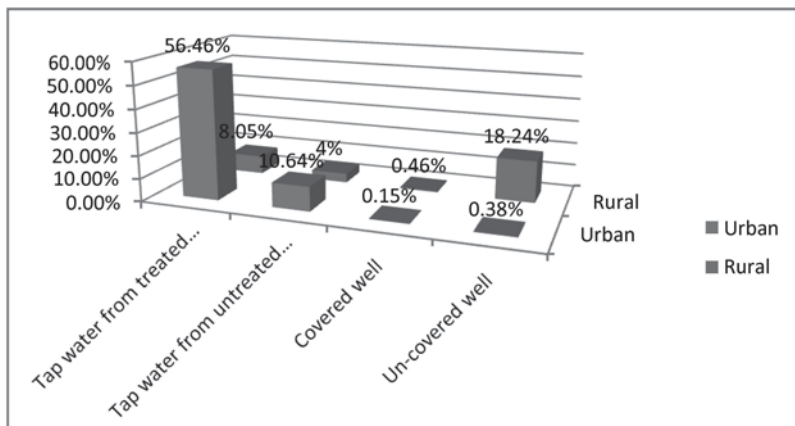
### Percentage of Households using different Types of fuel for Cooking

67.32 % is using LPG as the fuel to cook in the urban areas and only 4.74% of the rural population is using LPG.



### Percentage of Households having each of the Specified Assets

52.23% people of the urban areas has scooter or motorcycle and these facilities are availed by only 9.4% population in the rural areas of the district. 65.11% people of the rural areas do not have landline phone, mobile phone bicycle, car and other specified assets as per the census data of 2011.



### Dungarpur district

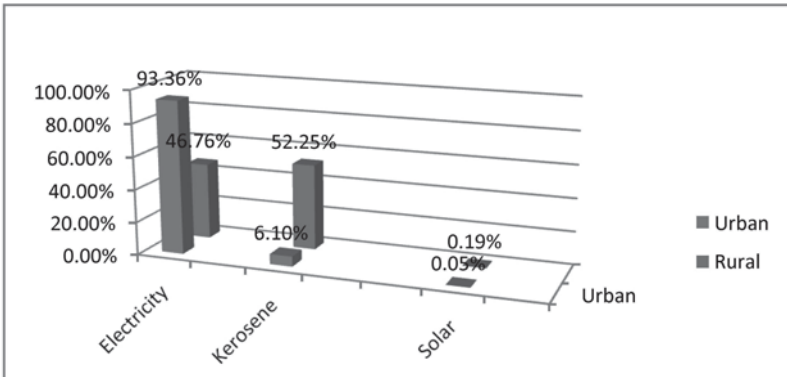
#### Percentage of Households Using Water to Drink from different Types of Sources

56.46% population of the urban areas is using tap water from the treated sources whereas only 8.05% people of the rural areas has the availability of the tap water from the treated sources.

18.24% people of the rural areas are bound to drink water from the un-covered wells.

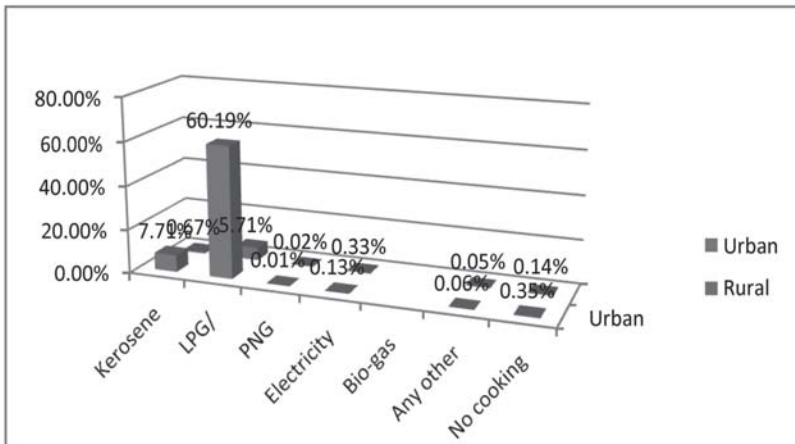
#### Percentage of Households Using Different Sources as the Main Source of Lighting

93.36% urban population of the district has the availability of electricity in their houses whereas only 46.76% people have electricity in the rural areas. 52.25% population of the rural areas is bound to use kerosene.



**Percentage of Households using different Types of fuel for Cooking**

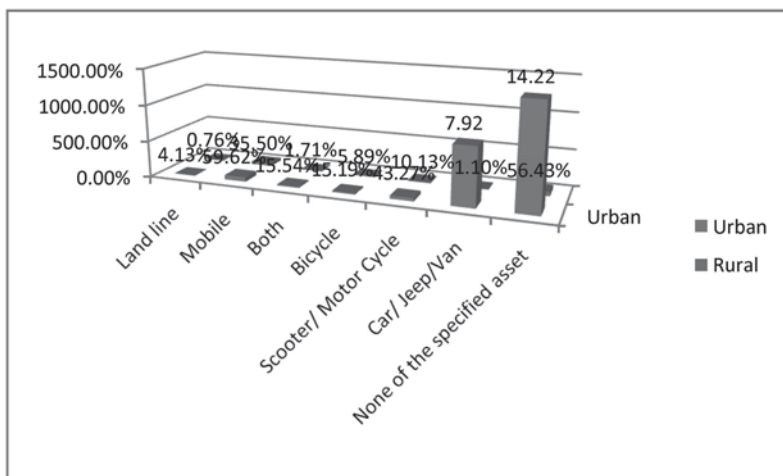
60.19 % population of the urban areas is using LPG as fuel in their kitchen whereas only 5.71 % population of the rural areas has the availability of the LPG in their kitchen.



**Percentage of Households having each of the specified assets**

43.27 % people in the urban areas of Dungarpur district have scooter or motorcycle whereas

56.43 % people in the rural areas do not have land line phone, mobile, bicycle, scooter, motor cycle, car jeep or other specified assets.



The socio-economical status of the urban and the rural areas of the other areas of the Wagad region namely a few tehsils of Pratapgarh district or the areas of Udaipur district are the same. Though it is a fact that rural areas are socio-economically weaker areas yet the above analysis of the specified data of census 2011 strengthen the fact that the rural areas are socio-economically weaker in comparison to the urban areas of the region. The tribals or the Bhils resides in the rural areas of the region only and the non-tribal communities reside in the urban areas of the region. Socio-economically richer sections of the society always dominate the weaker sections of the society. The non-tribal communities of the region who speaks Wagadi dialect ethnically dominate the socio-economical weaker tribal community of the region who speaks Bhili dialect.

The speakers of the Wagadi dialect are just 20% of the total speakers in the region but it has become a well known dialect or an identical dialect of the region. And, the percentage of the speakers of the Bhili dialect in the region is 80% of the total population even than Bhili dialect can never be identical of the ethnic identity of the region. Owing to the socio-economical dominance or other identical reasons, the region has been ethnically identified as the Wagad region, after the dialect spoken by 20% speakers of the total speakers of the region. Though, it is not

claimed that these are the last words on the issue, but at the same time it is also true that it appears quite convincing reason for the formation of the ethnic identity of the region as Wagad region. A detailed research on the reasons behind the formation of the ethnic identity of the region as the Wagad region is required to be done by the researchers.

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## Tribal literature and Ecocriticism: Beyond the Scientific Paradigm

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*Abrar Ahmed*

In Rajasthan, people follow various religions such as Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Jainism, Christianity etc. There are tribal people who practice 'nature worship' and follow their indigenous religions practices. Sharma has mentioned that "These communities in Rajasthan, such as the *Bhils*, *Minas*, *Garasias*, *Sahariyas*, and *Meenas*, exhibit a rich tapestry of cultural, social, and economic practices deeply intertwined with their natural environment and traditional ways of life. The *Bhils*, one of the largest tribal groups, are known for their historical connection to the land and their agricultural practices, which are heavily influenced by their reverence for nature and traditional ecological knowledge" (Sharma 29). Whereas, Bairwa and Agrawal has pointed, "The Meenas, another prominent tribe, have a unique social structure and customs, including the traditional panchayat system, which underscores their community-centric way of living and decision-making processes" (Bairwa and Agarwal 67). In his book, Mehta has pointed, "The Garasias, primarily inhabiting the forested regions, maintain a lifestyle that reflects their intimate relationship with the forest ecosystem, engaging in activities such as shifting cultivation and collection of forest produce" (Mehta 80). Meanwhile, Rathore points, "The Sahariyas, often considered one of the most marginalized tribes in Rajasthan, face significant challenges in terms of socio-economic development but continue to uphold their distinct cultural identity through their traditional crafts and rituals" (Rathore 55). These tribal communities' resilience and cultural richness contribute significantly to the diverse cultural landscape of Rajasthan. Their activities emerge from the very life of the masses. From gathering food to more sophisticated practices of religious, social and political life.

Tribal or Indigenous communities in Rajasthan, like the Bhils and the Minas, have a profound connection to nature, emphasizing living in harmony with the natural environment, which influences their agricultural practices, healthcare, and daily living. This paper aims to explore ecocriticism through the examination of selected indigenous literary texts and the philosophies of Indian aboriginal communities.

“The word “Indigenous” has originated from the Latin term ‘Indigena’ which implies ‘Sprung from the land’ or ‘to be born from’. The word ‘Indigenous’ also refers ‘gender’, ‘generation’ and ‘genesis.’ The word is also connected with origin, birth, and descent. Hence, the term ‘Indigenous’ denotes native, aboriginal, first nation, inborn, first to settle in a given territory” (Doley 27).

Later, Doley mentions “The word “Tribe” has originated in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and derived from the Latin ‘*tribus*’ (tribus = three, bhuour or bu = to be) which literally means ‘to be three’. It was used for identification among the three original tribes of Rome- the Tities, the Ramnes and the Luceres. Generally, in India, the term ‘tribe’ has been used to mean primitive or backward class, living in forests and hills, the original but underdeveloped inhabitants. The names used for identification of ‘tribal’ people are *janjati* (Scheduled tribes), *pahariya* (hill dwellers), *adivasi* (first dwellers), *vanjati* (forest caste), *adimjati* (primitive people), *vanvasi* (forest inhabitant)” (Doley 9). These are the terms commonly used to identify the tribe people or communities. From the above mentioned words that are used to denote the word ‘tribal’ though it is used in a prejudicial sense, it is obvious that the tribal groups of North Eastern India are the native, original or indigenous to the region.

A tribe is a group of people who share a language, traditions, habits, religion and moral rules and practices, and so on. A headman or boss usually leads them. As they come from the same biotic lineage and share the same sociocultural order, people in the same group are quite related to each other. There is a strong connection between them and the land and natural elements around it. They have their own language,

beliefs, and way of running their government and economy. They are always taking care of and passing on their traditional and family environments and ways of life. They know a lot about how to handle natural resources in a way that doesn't harm the environment. Tribes have their own ideas about how to grow based on their goals, values, and ways of doing things. For the purposes of this thesis, 'Indigenous' refers to the North East Indian tribe groups or people. It's better to call most tribal people 'indigenous people' instead of 'tribal people'. They say that the word 'tribal' means 'backward,' 'primitive,' or 'underdeveloped. Another reason for desiring to be referred to as indigenous is that tribal people exhibit similar traits to those possessed by the indigenous people of North East India. Hence, in this particular investigation, the term 'indigenous' is employed to refer to the tribal individuals or communities residing in North East India. Not all Indigenous individuals are necessarily tribal, and not all tribal individuals are always indigenous to the region. The usage of the phrase 'indigenous' instead of 'tribal' in this study should not be misunderstood. Both terms are used interchangeably because the majority of the tribal communities in North East India are native to and originated from the region they occupy. They are alternatively referred to as First Nations. However, the current study does not focus on the definition of the terms 'tribal' and 'indigenous', but rather it primarily focuses on their philosophy. Many tribal groups practice animism, believing that spirits inhabit natural objects and phenomena, a belief system integral to their rituals, festivals, and social structure. Tribal philosophy often emphasizes the importance of community and collectivism, with decision-making usually done collectively and a strong sense of mutual aid and cooperation.

## **Literature and Tribal Philosophy**

Tribal philosophy and religion have been deeply explored and depicted in various works of literature, providing rich insights into the lives, beliefs, and practices of indigenous communities. These literary works often emphasize the connection to nature, animistic beliefs, community values, and the preservation of cultural traditions. For example, in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the Igbo people's agricultural cycles and

rituals highlight their deep relationship with nature, portraying them as an integral part of the natural world. This connection to nature is a recurring theme in tribal literature, often depicted through agricultural practices, reverence for natural elements, and harmonious coexistence with the environment. Similarly, animism—the belief that spirits inhabit natural objects and phenomena—is frequently explored in literature. N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* reflects the spiritual beliefs of the Kiowa tribe, where nature and spirits play a crucial role in the protagonist's journey, illustrating how these spiritual beliefs shape the community's rituals, festivals, and daily life.

Tribal literature also frequently emphasizes the importance of community and collectivism, central to the social structures and decision-making processes of indigenous communities. For instance, in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, the interconnected lives of the Ojibwe community members illustrate the strong sense of collective identity and support within the tribe, emphasizing mutual aid and cooperation as fundamental values. The preservation and transmission of cultural traditions are critical themes in tribal literature, with authors often focusing on storytelling, rituals, and the passing down of knowledge from one generation to the next. Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* delves into the importance of traditional stories and ceremonies in healing and maintaining cultural identity among the Laguna Pueblo people, highlighting how these cultural practices are vital for the community's resilience and continuity.

## **Portrayal of Challenges and Tribal Literature**

Many works of tribal literature also address the challenges faced by indigenous communities, such as colonization, displacement, and cultural assimilation, often highlighting the resilience and adaptability of tribal people in preserving their identity and traditions. In *The Round House*, Louise Erdrich depicts the protagonist's fight for justice, reflecting the broader struggle of Native American communities to protect their rights and heritage, thus emphasizing resilience and the fight for justice as central themes. These literary works provide valuable perspectives on

tribal philosophy and religion, illustrating how indigenous communities navigate their beliefs, traditions, and challenges in a changing world.

### **Eco criticism in Tribal Philosophy and Literature**

Eco criticism in tribal philosophy and literature is a burgeoning field of scholarly inquiry that scrutinizes the intricate relationships between indigenous communities and their natural environments, revealing a deep-seated ecological consciousness inherent in tribal cultures. According to environmentalist David Suzuki, the tribal ethical idea lies in the way they treat nature and natural phenomena. They treat “river as one of veins of land, not potential irrigation water, mountain as a deity not a pile of ore, the forest as sacred grove not as timber, the species as biological kin not resources and earth as a mother not opportunity” (David 9).

Tribal literature frequently underscores a profound symbiosis with nature, portraying humans and the environment as interdependent entities. This ecological worldview is compellingly illustrated in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, where the agricultural cycles and rituals of the Igbo people exemplify their deep-seated harmony with the natural world, reflecting an intrinsic ecological balance. At a time when ecological degradation and deforestation have taking place at an alarming rate throughout the world, the indigenous (tribal) religious worldview present an ecological framework for the concrete manifestation of environmental conservation and sustainability. Similarly, N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* delves into the spiritual odyssey of a Native American man, encapsulating the Kiowa tribe’s animistic beliefs and veneration of nature, where the landscape itself emerges as a spiritually significant entity. Their traditional religious beliefs and practices help them in the prevention of destruction of trees, plants or natural resources. One of the important “objectives behind nature worship and plants used in religion is that it is always connected with conservation and utilization of nature in the most sustainable manner.

In the corpus of tribal literature, the environment transcends its role as a mere setting to become an active participant in the narrative, profoundly influencing and being influenced by the community’s cultural and spiritual

practices. Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* exemplifies this dynamic, depicting the intertwined lives of the Ojibwe community and emphasizing their collective identity and symbiotic relationship with the land, where natural elements are deeply embedded in their cultural rituals and narratives. Since centuries the indigenous (tribal) communities of North East India have developed a cultural mechanism to ensure the continuity of natural resources. They learned that human in the world is possible only when all living creature like birds, animals, plants, trees, rivers, mountain etc. continue to exist equally along with humans. All the things in the world are place on the same level. The idea of interdependence and not of domination is the message shows by Indigenous (tribal) communities through their religious worldview and the ways of living.

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* further elaborates on this theme, highlighting the significance of traditional stories and ceremonies in the healing process and the preservation of cultural identity among the Laguna Pueblo people, thereby illustrating how ecological knowledge and cultural practices are inextricably linked to foster resilience and continuity.

Moreover, Eco criticism in tribal literature often grapples with the deleterious impacts of colonization and environmental degradation on indigenous communities. Louise Erdrich's *The Round House* poignantly depicts the protagonist's quest for justice amidst environmental and cultural threats, symbolizing the broader struggle of Native American communities to safeguard their rights and heritage against external exploitation. This recurrent motif of resilience and adaptability amidst ecological and cultural adversities underscores the imperative for a sustainable and respectful relationship with the natural world.

Examining these literary works through an 'eco critical lens' enables scholars to attain a nuanced understanding of indigenous environmental philosophies, offering invaluable insights into sustainable living and environmental ethics. Tribal literature thus emerges as a vital testament to the ecological wisdom and spiritual connection to nature that characterizes indigenous cultures, advocating for the preservation of

both natural and cultural landscapes in the face of contemporary challenges.

In fact, establishing a new philosophy or philosophical school is very challenging and ambitious. It required path-breaking inquiries into the existing system and method. Indigenous (tribal) communities of North East India do not claim of making such path breaking inquiries into their contention or they do demand to have a new philosophy. However, they claim for defending the thought and ideas that made sense to philosophical thinking and that can be called 'tribal philosophy'. For the tribal society of N. E India, "the philosophy is expressed orally since print was not part of their tradition. Such expression is found abundance in folktales, folklores and other forms of traditional practices that constitute a form of life-giving meanings to their existence.

Generally, it is the elders of the community who mastered such traditions and narrated verbally to the younger only. In all these, 'beliefs' is an important factor because it is through 'beliefs' that certain forms of an injunction are laid and legitimizes by the collective conscience of the community. According to Indigenous tribal people, their worldview does not only consisting of beliefs, values or sentiments. Their worldview and their knowledge are the result of practical engagement in everyday life and are continuously reinforced by the experience of trial and error. Their vision is the outcome of many generations of reasoning and experiment and since its failure has immediate consequences for its practitioner. Their thought process is tested in the rigorous laboratory of survival.

Indigenous philosophy is developed from traditional beliefs and practices like- Myths, legends, folklore, songs, poetry, storytelling etc. Like any other important aspect of life, these conventional beliefs have also a significant role in tribal communities. Their traditional beliefs work as a scripture among them. They reflects upon traditional values of the past to make sense of the moral changes of the present.

## Conclusion

In examining the cultural and intellectual life of tribal communities, it becomes evident that myth, symbol, folklore, and poetry hold a similar status to history, literature, mathematics, and science in more industrialized societies. These traditional beliefs and practices play a crucial role in shaping the rational thinking of these communities. Thus, it is inappropriate to dismiss their traditional ideas as unscientific, meaningless, or nonsensical. Instead, these ideas operate within their own set of norms and criteria for acceptability. Consequently, tribal knowledge systems can be described as neither scientific nor unscientific but rather as a scientific, existing outside the binary classification of Western scientific rationality.

These conventional ideas form the essence of the worldview of the respective society, and understanding this worldview is essential for comprehending the philosophy of tribal people. While the systems and structures within these communities may initially appear strange or exotic to outsiders, a deeper exploration and interpretation of their various layers of meaning reveal rich sources of information and knowledge.

Therefore, it is erroneous to categorize tribal knowledge as primitive, savage, or under-developed. Instead, it represents an alternative order of reason and rationality. The traditional beliefs and practices of tribal communities embody a sophisticated and coherent system of understanding the world, one that is distinct from but equally valid as the scientific paradigms prevalent in modern industrialized societies.

By acknowledging the complexity and legitimacy of tribal ways of knowing, scholars can gain valuable insights into the diverse ways in which human societies comprehend and interact with their environments. This perspective fosters a more inclusive and holistic approach to the study of human knowledge, recognizing the richness and diversity of intellectual traditions across cultures.

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## Indigenous American Voices in the Poetry of Sherman Alexie

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*Paramba Dadhich*

Sherman Alexie grew up on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Washington. Reservations were definite pieces of land where the Native American populations were confined to after the influx of white settlers. For a poet like Walt Whitman who depicts his poetic voice as the voice of America, Christopher Columbus was like a prophet who discovered “a golden world” and enabled the possibility of unifying the world. Whitman yearned for a world wherein his poetic soul could speak for whole of the humanity and particularly for America. This vision of a unified world appears to be very different in the writings of the Native American poet Sherman Alexie who belonged to a group that had lived on the very land for centuries. In his autobiographical novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, he describes his life growing up on the reservation and particularly his experiences in the white children’s school where he studied. In his poems Alexie is characteristically ironic even while being humorous. He describes the underlying aspects of life in reservations where a history of oppression is deliberately hidden but which manifests in the everyday life of individuals living there. “Crow Testament” and “Evolution” unveil the tragic reality of life in the reservations but his poetic voice also makes the oppressed the principal subject of engagement. As Ananya Dasgupta observes, “Unlike Whitman who saw the disparate parts of the globe connected in a spiritual passage that a poet could undertake, Alexie sees the world connected in the solidarity of the oppressed” (14).

Alexie’s poetic voice displays irreverence towards figures like Columbus who are representative of a canonical wisdom and a canonized literature which claims to be inclusive of all kinds of voices and experiences.

Alexie claims that the voice of his group remained underrepresented for a long time and his poetry initiates a dialogue with the canon and connects the history of the flourishing settlers to the history of oppression of the indigenous populations. His poetry not only explores the historical and sociological contexts of the indigenous groups but also the manifestations of this history years later.

One of the central poems of the collection titled *The Business of Fancy Dancing*, “Evolution” interlinks the theory of social Darwinism with the expansion of American capitalism and how the two have systematically suppressed the Native Americans. Darwin’s theory of evolution of the species was used to justify the elimination of certain races on grounds that some races were better at social adaptation while others were not. Such elimination was biologically justified and Alexie explores this aspect through the social and economic lens in the poem. The opening lines of the poem are as follows:

Buffalo Bill opens a pawn shop on the reservation  
right across the border from the liquor store  
and he stays open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week . . .

William Frederick “Buffalo Bill” Cody was a soldier in the American Civil war and his presence is reminiscent of the conflict between the white settlers and the Native Americans. In the twenty- first century he refigures as a capitalist businessman who has opened a pawn shop and still benefits from exploiting the native population. Pawn shops were establishments where the natives could sell their belongings in exchange for money. In the poem, the pawn shop is open seven days a week reflecting a stringent capitalist ethos. They sell all their needful everyday items due to poverty like jewelry, television sets and clothes. And finally when left with nothing they ‘pawn their skeletons, falling endlessly from the skin.’ But the irony in the poem is that after Buffalo Bill has extracted everything from the natives, he closes his pawn shop and renames it as ‘the museum of native American cultures.’ The lives of Native Americans become museum pieces and their memory is finally objectified and monetized. The central theme of the poem is how cultures are

commodified after brutal extraction of human value. Even though the natives are a live population they are contained in museums.

In “Crow Testament,” Alexie depicts the story of the forceful conversion of Native Americans to Christianity. The poem was part of a collection titled *One Stick Song*. The title of the poem alludes to the Old and New Testaments. When America was colonized, the white Puritan settlers also brought their own religion and religious thought. As a result, there was an intermingling of ideas from the mythologies of both the religions. The title of the poem is a play upon this synthesis and the subsequent tension between the two. Significantly, the major theme of the poem is the erasure of the past of the natives who were rendered ahistorical by the Europeans.

Cain lifts Crow, that heavy black bird  
And strikes down Abel.

The opening lines of the poem allude to the story of Cain and Abel as told in the Old Testament. The children of Adam and Eve, Cain murdered his brother Abel. This became the first recorded act of fratricide in the Christian belief system. Under the same belief system, the natives and the white settlers are seen as siblings and an explicit analogy is highlighted that just as Cain killed his brother Abel, the white settlers killed their fellow brothers. Here, the crow is used as a weapon to kill the natives. Alexie takes an important Christian myth and subverts it to portray the destruction wrecked upon the natives who had practiced their own beliefs for centuries.

Damn, says the Crow, I guess  
this is just the beginning.

The poem repeatedly uses the phrase ‘damn’ which gives it a form similar to that of Psalms of the Bible. But unlike the biblical psalms ‘damn’ here carries a disrespectful tone and sense. The poem also uses as its framework the various movements in time from the beginning to the end as per the Christian mythological belief system. Crucially, it also imagines time according to the Native mythology.

The white man,  
 disguised as a falcon, swoops in  
 and yet again steals a salmon  
 from Crow's talons.  
 Damn, says Crow, if I could swim  
 I would have fled these country years ago.

This paragraph alludes to the story of original land stealings. The falcon is a powerful bird who steals the salmon from the crow. The falcon in reality is the white man who controls physical strength, whereas the crow is an ordinary everyday bird without any significant resources to fight back. The poet explores a crucial part of the exploitative history of how land from the natives was forcefully stolen. And the tragedy lies in the fact that even when the crow has no resources to call its own, it has to remain there in subordination. The next part of the poem traces the story of the christianisation of the native populations.

The Crow God as depicted  
 in all of the reliable Crow bibles  
 looks exactly like a Crow.  
 Damn, says Crow, this makes it  
 so much easier to worship myself.

The paragraph is full of ironic references to Creation of man from the Bible. The Genesis narrates the story of God creating Adam in his own image. The poet overturns this story in order to establish that it is actually humans who create God in their own image so that it is easier for them to worship God and propagate religion as per their own advantage. Alexie also attacks the arrogance of Christianity and the consequent hubris of its followers that it is religion which governs them and their actions when in reality man has created the idea of religion in order to aid him in his own material advances.

Alexie also draws upon the battle of Jericho as described in The Book of Joshua. Joshua was the leader of the wandering tribe of Israelites who in the search of the Promised Land, burnt the city of Jericho and killed all its people. The idea behind tracing these biblical instances is

that Alexie wants to draw that killings and genocides of human populations in the name of religion has had a long history. Alexie also wants to enforce that people think they are killing other people when they are killing their own people. This battle for the Promised Land still figures in the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. As Dasgupta and Katyal observe, “Alexie draws a large arc of genocide and conflict as he connects the Native American experience with that of the victims of the holocaust or the continuing conflict in Gaza” (46).

Alexie’s characteristic style infuses his awareness of tragic depth of a situation with the humour of his lyric. He provides a climactic moment to the situation with humour. The sacramental text of the Bible is subverted to expose the Native American realities because religion was one of the powerful weapons in the hands of white Europeans that they used to justify their subordination of the already existing native populations.

The systematic destruction of the native cultures is also an important theme of the poem. The powwow is a festival where Native Americans gather to honour their ancestors and celebrate their culture. The Crow that has been omnipresent in the poem brings the news of apocalypse during the festival. But the natives do not get disturbed by the news and continue their festivities unperturbed- signifying that their world has already ended.

Cultural loss becomes the central theme of Alexie’s “the american indian holocaust museum.” The idea of a museum is itself problematised. A museum is a space where artifacts of the past might be embellished when that particular culture could not be preserved, rather destroyed brutally. The very items are given an ornamental value with the creation of the belief that the museum preserves a past. The Native Americans sold their valuables at the pawn shops in exchange for some money and they could never redeem their things. A century later the Native Americans pay to look at their own belongings in a museum which get commodified. Cultures are systematically degraded only to be displayed later in monetized terms.

What do we indigenous people want from our country?

We stand over mass graves. Our collective grief makes us numb.

We are waiting for the construction of our museum . . . . We are the sons and daughters of the walking dead. We have lost everyone.

(from *Inside Dachau*)

The poem contains a sharp poignant reality of the lives of indigenous people. Their loss cannot be counted. Their grief is so much that they can no longer feel it and have become numb to it. Alexie is tracing a history of suppression when he uses phrases such as ‘mass graves,’ ‘shoes of our dead,’ ‘veterans of the Indian wars’ and his generation is addressing the world that they are the great-grandchildren of the dead of the wars. However, being distant in time has not evaded the scars of oppression and loss, and the present generation equally feels and grieves for the loss of their fathers and mothers and the past that they inhabited. Ironically, the poet says that they can only revisit the past in a museum whose construction they are waiting for. The white settlers are being satirized as they destroyed that which they are now claiming to preserve and celebrate.

Alexie’s life since childhood at the rural reservation and the experience of witnessing harsh economic realities around him including widespread alcoholism is the subject matter of much of his fiction and poetry. His novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* which won the National Book Award is deliberately written in the novel form rather than a memoir as Alexie revisits experiences from his own life. But he feels that if written in a memoir fashion, the reader would render these experiences unbelievable. Therefore they had to be given an imaginative coloring by the author. His other books on similar subjects include *The Toughest Indian in the World*, *Ten Little Indians*, *Flight*, and *War Dances*.

*The Business of Fancydancing* and *I Would Steal Horses* were his first published works of poetry, both published in 1992. In 1993, he earned a PEN/Hemingway Award for the first best book of fiction for

his collection of short stories entitled *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. In all of his works Alexie uses the power of storytelling to link the past and present; at the same time the pathos of tragic situations is infused with laughter as there is a refusal to submit to the oppressive forces. P. Jane Hafen notes, "In the face of dismal reservation life and urban life crises of self, community and identity, he can make me laugh, often by inventing imagery and turning inside jokes. He helps make the pain bearable."

Alexie has not only voiced reservation issues but also has made his focus the 'transformation of tribal identity in contemporary society and culture' (134). Nancy J. Peterson, with regard to Alexie's volume of poetry, observes, "Many of the poems in *The Summer of Black Widows* speak to the urgent need of justice, spiritual renewal and ethical obligations. What is particularly striking about this volume is the degree to which Alexie fuses poetic form and technique with an Indigenous critique of white America and its assumptions. The poems gathered in this volume employ form as a rhythmic means for creating a politically and ethically charged poetic space that articulates a tribal worldview. "For instance, in a poem like "Capital Punishment," the poet presents the consciousness of an Indian man about to be put to death by the authorities. In a sonnet titled "Tattoo Tears" the poet infuses the issues of mining, fishing and water ecology. The Spokane River has been irrevocably polluted and its flow damaged due to dam projects and contamination caused due to uranium mining. Alexie mourns the loss of salmon in his poems. The salmon was also associated with Spokane beliefs and rituals. "Haibun" specifically deals with the problem of uranium mining in the reservations. The poet poses the sharp distinction between the white men who leave after work and the tribal people who have to continue living there in the contaminated region.

Significantly, Alexie reworks traditional forms of prose and poetry and liberates the readers from the assumption that they are essentially European forms of writing. The sonnet, for instance, could re-emerge as an Indigenous form. He makes form suitable for his own native indigenous consciousness. As Peterson asserts, "By working within and



against poetic rules- all the while singing Native American realities- Alexie creates a borderlands poetic space where the rhythms of the sonnet, couplet, haiku, and other forms become fused/ transfused/ transformed with the rhythms of fancy- dancing, chanting, playing basketball, powwows, salmon swimming upriver, and all other images of his painful and loving vision of Native America.”

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## Kavita Kané's Lanka's Princess as An Expression of Experience of Indigenous Women

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*Kirti Jhamb and Jatinder Kohli*

For a long time, the term 'indigenous' has been used interchangeably for tribes, first peoples, native peoples, aboriginals, adivasi, janjati, hunter gatherers and many more ethnic groups. Indigenous peoples are the disadvantaged descendants of the first known occupants of a region, particularly those who have experienced colonisation or have been uprooted from their ancestral homeland. They represent the non-dominant and marginalised section in society. They have to face negligence and discrimination and don't have access to social assistance. They strive for recognition and acknowledgement. But there is a tendency to overlook and neglect indigenous peoples despite of their being an important part of society. As Annalisa Enrile, an aboriginal professor says, "Indigenous populations are incredibly overlooked. We're not used to seeing them in general." People belonging to the indigenous communities are often treated as others by the dominant strata of society. They are exploited and oppressed. They are not given equal rights and opportunities for their growth and development. They face oppression and discrimination. Among them indigenous women are the least known and recognised. They are the worst sufferers. They have been impacted and marginalised by patriarchy and by dominant sections of society. Enrile regards indigenous women as "among the most powerless of human victims." They are discriminated on the basis of their caste, colour and gender. Their voice remains unheard. They experience high rates of violence and oppression even within their own family and society.

In Indian mythological context, asuras and demons were indigenous tribal peoples. Rigveda and other Hindu scriptures described asuras as

indigenous people of India. They were estranged from the dominant Aryan Dravidian group who formed the vast majority of the composite Indian population. After many wars and conflicts, the Aryans established themselves in the northern region of India driving the non-aryans into the southern jungles hoping that the hostile terrain and forest would act as a barrier between them. Due to their dwelling in forests and striking differences in appearance from the Aryans, these non-Aryans became the folklore figures known as rakshsas (demons) and asuras (ungodly creatures). The Aryans regarded themselves superior to non-Aryans and tried to prove these non-Aryans as inferior. Quoting Manish Meena, “Manu, in his writings describe forest dwellers and tribes as barbarous and sub-humans. By establishing a hierarchical form of society, Brahmins designated tribal society as being inferior...Aryans also described tribals as having dark-complexion, people who spoke strange languages with no grammar, ate meat and drank alcohol and did not perform Vedic rituals.” Sanskrit epics, Hindu mythology and several mythical narratives from subsequent eras depict them as violent, deceitful, unlawful, dark skinned and well versed in black magic and sorcery. Madhu Kaitabha, Ravana, Meghnad, Hiranayakashiyup, Raktabij, Putana, Surpankha etc. are well known Hindu mythological asuras and demons. The present paper attempts to unearth the anguished experience of indigenous mythological rakshasi Surpankha who is victim of triple jeopardy with special reference to the mythofiction “*Lanka’s Princess*” written by Kavita Kané. The researcher focuses on the anguish, atrocities, complexities meted out to Surpankha and its harmful effects on her personality development.

Kavita Kané’s “*Lanka’s Princess*” is an account of the plight of Meenakshi who was later rechristened as Surpankha by her brother Ravana for having nails that resemble sharp claws. Kané narrates Meenakshi’s transformation from a loving and compassionate princess into a vile, harsh and vengeful lady. Our heart shatters as we follow Surpankha’s journey. Aditi Dhirghangi and Seemita Mohanty in their paper “*De-mythifying the Ramayana: A Study of the Devoiced Surpankha*” comment- “Kavita Kané’s *Lanka’s Princess* (2017) is

one such account of the unsung Surpankha, Ravana's sister- a strong independent woman who is able to take decisions and make choices; but is questioned and controlled by the diktats of a patriarchal society. This novel narrates the plight of Surpankha, from a young girl ridiculed and neglected for her looks, to her strong and independent choices in adult life refuting the stranglehold that her brothers had on her life, for which she is ultimately punished by a highly judgmental society that never forgives such transgressions"(9).

Surpankha was the offspring of the rakshasi Kaikesi and the rishi Vishravas. They already had three sons Ravana, Vibhishan and Kumbha. Yet, Kaikesi wanted to have more and more sons to regain the lost asura empire of Lanka from Kuber and to become a ruler of three worlds. That's why she was outraged at the birth of Surpankha. She felt, "*This girl has cheated me out of my plans*"(2).

Surpankha experienced psychological harm and emotional abuse as a girl child, which left her traumatised. Regretfully, she had no one in the family who could sympathise with her sufferings. Unlike her tall, handsome and fair brothers, she was short, ugly and dark. When she was born, her mother was not happy to have such a burden imposed on her and her family. Her mother thought this child would become an independent asura that no one would want to marry. For the mother, the girl was an undesirable, unwanted and unwelcomed child. Her mother was disappointed with her ugly looks so much so that, she scornfully commented, "She hardly looks beautiful or like me. In fact she is quite ugly! . . . She's scrawny and much darker than me!"(3). Her mother kept on commenting on her dark complexion and ugly appearance. The constant destructive comments from her mother on her looks crushed her self-confidence and it made her feel like an outsider in the good looking family. "It was a sign that she would always remain an oddity, an outcast; she would never be a part of her family of good lookers"(20). The one who enjoyed most in teasing her and snatching her happiness from her was her own brother Ravana. It had turned her into an angry child and that bitterness in her heart grew stronger with the passage of time. She faced discrimination not only because of her dark skin but

also because of her gender. She was constantly criticised for her appearance but on the other hand her brother Kumbhakarna who had a huge body and spent half of his time in sleeping was never abused and insulted. Thus Surpankha was dually discriminated not only because she was a woman but also because of being a coloured woman. For such dual discrimination on the basis of gender and colour faced by black women, a prominent feminist Deborah King used the term “double jeopardy” in his paper “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Conscious: The Text of a Black Feminist Ideology”(1988).

She had a strong bond with the goat she kept as a pet. She found out one day that her goat had died. She was so distraught about the death of her goat that when she found out that Ravan had suffocated it, she became so furious that she launched herself at him, seized him by the neck, and would have killed him if Kumbha hadn't intervened. This attack so shocked Ravan that he started calling her a real Surpanakha to torment her. She received reprimands from her parents because of misbehaving with her older brother. Her mother began to treat her more harshly after that incident. She would frequently reprimand, demoralise, and tell her, adding that she was useless and would definitely cause her family grief one day. She scolded her for constantly fighting and arguing with people in a violent way. She condemned her, “ Surpankha that is the right name for you, you monster”(9). Hearing such heart breaking words from her mother, she became disillusioned and screamed with pain and fury, “Yes, I am a monster! . . . If anyone hurts me, I shall hurt them with these( nails)! I am Surpankha”(9). Since now, she preferred to be called by the name Surpankha rather than Meenakshi. Thus, the moniker Surpankha was given to her by her furious brother Ravana and it became her identity for the rest of her life.

Surpankha found it hard to feel the affection of her mother. So, she turned to her father, who was also unable to recognise her as his daughter and provide her the same kind of love that he did for Vibhishan. He used to shower his love and affection only towards Vibhishan which aroused the feeling of jealousy and anger in her. Because she always yearned to be her father's favourite and longed for his love. She had

promised herself never to disappoint her father in any way and to win his heart. She had unfathomable love for his father. But he was conscious neither about her love for him nor about his jealousy. As Kané has stated, “But he barely bothered about her. He lathered his attention solely on Vibhishan, the brightest of all his children whom he believed will be the one only to follow his dream. Meenakshi felt a stab of red hot jealousy as it always did where it concerned her father. But he was oblivious of both— her jealous fury and her zealous adoration”(25). When she was abducted by her stepbrother Kuber, his father did not come to rescue her. It filled her heart with complete disappointment. She realised that “ her father did not love her, as a father should, or as much as she loved him- so unquestioningly, so faithfully”(49).

Meenakshi always craves for love and acceptance from which she is deprived of since her birth despite of having a big family. Everyone in the family leaves no occasion to humiliate her. They always remain eager to find faults with every single step taken by her. She feels alienated even being among her closest relatives. Her opinion does not matter for them. Besides, she is not granted any freedom to take any decision, to have choices and to fulfill her needs. She even cannot go beyond the boundaries of the palace without taking permission. Her life as a princess of Lanka is just like that of a bird in a gilded cage. The luxuries, the wealth, the opulence of Lanka have no charm for her. What she dearly wants is love and affection. Her search for true love comes to an end when she meets Vidyujiva, the king of Kalkeya. His courage to propose her wins her heart. Against the wish of everyone in the family, she married him. But villainous part of her is aroused when her happily married life is ruined by her brother Ravana who murdered her husband treacherously. The whole family support Ravana in this conspiracy. Ravana has taken away everything from her and left her with nothing except never ending hatred and indignation. It has embittered her mind. It has turned her into a hateful and vindictive woman, born again as Surpankha. The words of Prerona Bora and Dr. Jayanta Madhab Tamuly from research article entitled “ A Feminist Study of Kavita Kané's Lanka's Princess” can aptly be used here, “Ravana by killing Vidyujiva,

her only support and love of life, had also killed Meenakshi, her original self. And with the death of Meenakshi in her, Ravana lost his sister forever. Ravana compelled her to remain as Surpankha for the rest of her life, and in this way she turned into the most sinister version of herself that anyone could hardly imagine”(558).

Besides being discriminated on the grounds of gender and colour, she had to bear the humiliation of belonging to asura clan. She was insulted by the Aryan princes Ram and Lakshman when she was roaming in Dandak forest after the treacherous death of her husband by her brother Ravana. When she saw Ram and Lakshman concealed in the dense undergrowth, she was physically thrilled by their masculinity. She was seized by an unbridled wave of gnawing lust, and it consumed her completely. She had suppressed her sexual desire since Vidyujiva's death. But the mesmerising handsomeness and charm of these two men had ignited her suppressed desire for sexuality. She wanted the satiation of the burning desire of sexual intimacy. “She wanted them, badly, madly”(193). Initially, being a widow she felt wrong in desiring another man. But later recalling her nani's words “. . . there was no shame in desiring a man” (194), she approached towards Ram first. He rejected her proposal since he was already married and had no desire to have two wives. He directed her to his brother Lakshman informing her that his wife is not here with him so he might welcome her proposal. Lakshman turned down her request as well saying that his wife Urmila was waiting for him in Ayodhya. Lakshman sent her back to Ram citing that he is merely a servant to Ram and being a princess of Lanka, she should marry a prince like Ram. When she sensed that the brothers were making fun of her and playing with her feelings, she became terribly upset. She realised that they “ were laughing at her, reeling her to and fro like a toy like a means of amusement (200). She wasn't just ridiculed but brutally mutilated by Lakshman for expressing her sexual desire for Aryan princes. They left her with a ruined face and lifelong disgrace.

The day of her mutilation was the cruelest day of her life. Her mutilation had torn her soul in addition to leaving her physically disfigured forever. The brutality she experienced that day demonstrated the discrimination

she faced as an asura woman. She lost her conscience as a result of being insulted and humiliated by the Aryan princes. The villainous part of her soul was again aroused by this indignant and discriminating treatment. She became so much infuriated by this insulting treatment that she tried to hurt Ram's wife by plotting her abduction by her brother Ravana. Consequently, she caused the Great War between Ram and Ravana.

Meenakshi's metamorphic journey from Lanka's Princess to become a demoness Surpankha is very miserable. It reflects how an indigenous woman has to suffer not only in society but also in her own family. She is a victim at three levels of discrimination colour, caste and gender as we can see in the case of Surpankha. They are insulted for their barbarous behaviour. But it is not accepted that their barbaric behaviour is the result of traumatic encounters and experiences they have faced in family and society and the environment they live in. There is a need to change our outlook towards them. They should be treated with love and affection. If Surpankha had received love and care in her childhood through her family and would have been treated affectionately by Aryan Princes Ram and Lakshman, the history would be different. There would have been no war between Ram and Ravana. Surpankha would have remained Meenakshi, a loving princess of Lanka.

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## Voices of Valor: Exploring Bhil Contribution in India's Freedom Struggle in the Light of *When Arrows Were Heated Up*

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*Kirti Sharma*

The Bhil community is one of India's major indigenous tribal communities, living predominantly in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Chhattisgarh. With centuries of cultural legacy, the Bhils have a distinct identity defined by their language, rituals, and traditional way of life. The term 'Bhil' is derived from 'Bil' or 'Vil', which means 'bow'. They are the biggest tribe in South Asia, accounting for around 39% of the entire population of Rajasthan. Bhils are also known as Rajasthani bowmen, Mewari tribes, or archers. The Bhil tribe is split into two groups: the Central or Pure Bhils, who live in the mountain areas of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Rajasthan, and the Eastern Rajput Bhil, who live in Tripura. A mention of these tribes also comes up in epics such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. According to Indian mythology, a Bhil woman (Shabri) provided *ber* to Lord Rama while he was seeking for Sita in the Dhandaka forests. Throughout the history of independent India, these tribes were recognized as combatants in the struggle against the Mughals, Marathas, and the British. They met the requirements of the Princes of Mewar by providing bowmen, provisions, and protecting their families. During colonial times, the Rajputs engaged the Bhils as *Shikaris* and soldiers. During colonial times, the Bhil community played an important role in the Indian freedom struggle, particularly the 1857 movement, yet their contribution to this historic event is sometimes underestimated. The Bhil community, mostly found in central and western India, strongly opposed British colonial control. Their strong attachment to the land and their ancient way of life motivated them to fight exploitation and

injustice. Despite confronting enormous hurdles and frequently incurring violent reprisals from colonial authorities, the Bhil community played an important part in crafting the narrative of India's war for independence, exhibiting the spirit of tenacity and defiance that typified the whole movement.

Hari Ram Meena's novel *When Arrows were Heated Up* is a historical account of the tribal movement on Mangarh Hill, popularly known as the 'Jallianwala Kand'. It investigates the lives, cultures, and concerns of tribals in southern Rajasthan, including Udaipur, Dungarpur, Banswara, and other areas. Hariram Meena's work reveals previously unknown information regarding the Mangarh massacre, which claimed twice as many lives as the Jallianwala tragedy. It also discusses tribal exploitation, famine, living conditions, laws, and women's fights. This research paper examines how the novel may be used as a literary lens to evaluate Bhil participation in India's liberation movement, with an emphasis on their involvement in violent revolts, peaceful resistance, and the greater struggle for social justice.

## **Historical Account of Bhil Involvement in India's Freedom Struggle**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, India's tribal population was disgruntled with British policies, prompting periodic uprisings against the British. Although the British did not directly rule the princely realms, they vowed not to intervene in their internal affairs. Their rulers implemented policies in accordance with British directions, provoking animosity among the tribes who lived in these lands (Mathur 30). In 1818, the five Southern Rajputana kingdoms signed contracts with the East India Company. The Maharana of Mewar implemented steps to regulate the Bhils, but this caused dissatisfaction among the Bhils residing in Mewar's mountainous regions (Mathur 30), who rebelled against the British, rulers, and *Jagirdars*.

The Bhil tribe suffered from British control and the dispersion of foreigners like tax officers and moneylenders. This exacerbated social conflicts and undermined cooperative ownership practices. British legal notions

of absolute private property stressed tribal culture even more, since their free life prevented them from completely realizing semi-feudal and semi-colonial rule. According to V. R. Raghavaiah, “The tribals too initiated struggle to safeguard their honour, to protect their cherished freedom and to get redress against the moneylenders, who tried to deprive them of all they had” (Raghavaiah 13). The Bhil, a group of racial and ethnic minority, were exploited in a variety of social, economic, and political ways because they were conscious of their racial identity. They were compelled to work as laborers in the fields of Rajputs and Brahmins, who profited from their illiteracy by buying forest goods at low rates. After the British established themselves as the dominant force in Southern Rajputana, the Bhil rebelled and joined the 1857 insurrection.

The British landed in Mewar to put a stop to the Bhil’s taxation and duties on merchants traveling between Udaipur and Ahmedabad. This privilege was an important prerogative in pre-colonial Mewar, and attempts to eliminate it, sparked revolts in the 1820s (Sen 2003). In 1881, the loss of this prerogative, discontent over additional levies and taxes, persecution of Bhil villages, *begar* extraction, and the rapaciousness of moneylenders sparked a great insurrection. Following a fight between Bhils from Paduna and Udaipur court representatives, a huge mob of Bhils stormed the nearby police station, murdering five officers, five soldiers, and 16 civilians. The police station was set on fire, as were the baniya businesses in Bara village. Bhils from adjacent regions joined the insurrection, resulting in violent clashes with Maharana and British soldiers that killed more than 70 people (Sen 2000). The Bhils obtained certain concessions as a result of this insurrection, but a British officer protested that the Bhils had extorted unjustifiable concessions by fire and death, as “the Bhils have succeeded in extorting by fire and murder unreasonable concessions and this is sure to have the most mischievous effect, although it may ensure a temporary truce (Singh 49).”

Dungarpur state, located in the Bhil heartland, was expected to see significant turmoil. Under Govind Giri’s direction, the Bhils banded

together in 1911, embracing higher caste traditions and mores while relying on Dasnami Panth rituals. However, Giri's preaching became more radical as he challenged hierarchy and exploitation. He said that the Bhils were not inferior to any other community, and that their poverty was caused by the demands of princely rulers and landowners. He felt that the Bhils were the real proprietors of the country and hence have the authority to reign over it. He preached the establishment of a Bhil Raj in Sunth and Banswara states, with the Bhil monarchy, which existed eight hundred years before, being revived. As Govind Giri and his supporters made success in the princely kingdoms, colonial authorities quickly labeled them as a "disloyal and anarchical movement" (Singh 95). In October 1913, the political agent in southern Rajputana demanded Govind Giri's arrest, sparking fights between Bhils and police officers. Govind Giri gathered his people on Mangarh Hill, where a huge police force and military reinforcements were stationed. However, two days after Govind prayed to "the guardian saint of the people", soldiers opened fire on the Bhils, causing significant casualties. Around 900 Bhils, including Govind Giri, were detained; Govind was later convicted and imprisoned.

Thus, the Bhil tribe's unhappiness and rebellion during the 19<sup>th</sup> century under British colonial rule concentrated on their complaints against both British officials and indigenous rulers in Princely States. The Bhils who were subjected to economic exploitation and social marginalization, resisted British intervention in their traditional way of life, which was compounded by the imposition of additional levies and the presence of foreigners such as revenue officers and moneylenders. Their resistance culminated in multiple uprisings, particularly in Southern Rajputana, where fighting with authorities resulted in substantial losses for both sides. Furthermore, leaders like Govind Giri rallied the Bhils around issues of equality, land ownership, and the historical restoration of Bhil sovereignty. However, colonial authorities saw such activities as a danger to their authority and quickly repressed them with arrests and harsh crackdowns, demonstrating the complicated dynamics of power and resistance in colonial India's tribal areas.

### ***Analysis of When Arrows Were Heated Up***

Hari Ram Meena's novel *When Arrows were Heated Up* examines the difficulties and ambitions of the Bhil minority in Rajasthan against the backdrop of British colonial rule. Set in the late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the story depicts the Bhils' struggles against exploitation and tyranny by both British authorities and local rulers in princely kingdoms. The story develops through the eyes of several persons, revealing socio-economic situations, cultural traditions, and resistance movements within the Bhil tribe. The figure of Govind Giri, a Bhil leader, is central to the plot and serves as a symbol of resistance to injustice and inequity. The Bhils mobilize against harsh policies under his leadership, demanding acknowledgment of their land rights and autonomy. The story powerfully shows the Bhil people's battle against encroaching on their lands, exploitation by moneylenders, and the destruction of their ancient lifestyle. It also depicts the complexity of power dynamics between the Bhils, British colonial authority, and indigenous rulers, emphasizing the Bhil people's tenacity and fortitude in the face of hardship. Overall, the novel provides an engaging depiction of the Bhil community's struggle for dignity, justice, and self-determination during a difficult moment in Indian history. The novel, with its beautifully developed characters and powerful narration, shines emphasis on indigenous tribes' often-overlooked efforts and tenacity in the battle against colonialism.

The tale is based on the Mangarh movement, also known as the tribal 'Jallianwala Kand', which resulted in the deaths of twice as many men and women. The author, Hariram Meena, found secret details concerning the massacre via considerable research and fieldwork. The story discusses tribal exploitation, famine, living circumstances, laws, and the obstacles that women face. The main figure is Govind Giri, who established Dhuniyas and Sampa Sabha to promote public awareness and provide answers to issues during crises. The Adivasis conducted debates in the Sampa Sabha to protest injustice. Govind Giri had a huge influence on Southern Rajasthan's tribal community, influencing their views and way of life. His teachings had a profound influence on the

Adivasis, and he helped them develop consciousness. When he sees Kuriya producing fire by rubbing the stones, he remarks:

Kuriya produced sparks from the flint. The spark turned into a fire. It means there is fire in the stones. If there is fire in stones, then the hills have fire in them. And if the hills have fire in them, then the Adivasis who live in those hills must have fire inside them, too. I want to light that fire. (Meena 12)

Thus, Govind Giri, cognizant of the subordination of Bhil awareness, employed all means possible to increase their consciousness.

Govind Giri, a remarkable person with a divine aura, summoned tribals to Mangarh Mountain to awaken them. The British authorities used weapons and bullets to dismantle the 'Adivasi Jagrut Sabha' and the Govind Giri, the cult. The tribal movement grew, with Govind Giri under the protection of the defense squad. Poonja, along with other Bhils and Garasias, assaulted the British soldiers, promising revenge once the battle ended. Govind Giri, gazing at Dhuni, suddenly uttered the lyrics of a self-composed song:

We are human beings  
Has launched campaign for human rights, if you live  
Then you will live with honour,  
If you die with respect!  
Brave devotees,  
This is a fight of generations.  
The fight will continue.  
Yes,  
The fight will continue. (Meena 391)

Thus, Govind Giri shared his thoughts on behalf of the tribals and encouraged them to fight.

During British control, tribals faced a variety of obstacles, including relocation, mineral riches looting, forest closures, tax collection, and land expropriation. Under Govind Giri's guidance, tribals protested injustice. The Adivasis were the first to rebel, attempting to smash tribal

groups. The British administration supplied military help to native kings and Thakurs, but tribal people maintained their independence and refused to accept British control. The local ruling class worked with the British administration, but tribals lived independently and refused to accept British rule. In the narrative, Bhagat, a key character in British government diplomacy, fights against aristocracy and exploitation, guiding tribals to independence and raising consciousness. However, like Joria and Dharmabhai, Bhagat was hung, weakening the insurrection and impeding its growth out of fear. Later, under Govind Giri's leadership, the tribals resumed their protests against the inequities of British authority, resulting in army repression and, at times, warfare. Many tribe members were martyred as a result of these wars. One such conflict has been discussed by Hari Ram Meena in the novel;

Rajgarh police station was the centre of all military action to suppress the tribal rebellion that emerged under the leadership of Joria. Under the leadership of Joria, the tribals decided, why not attack the Rajgarh police station? One day, thousands of people gathered in front of the police station. A crowd of tribals gathered at the door of the police station. A policeman standing in uniform asked the tribal leaders, 'What kind of power does Joria have that all of you are behind him? (Meena 331)

Police insulted a tribal guru, prompting a tribal to take dramatic measures and decapitate the cop.

Joriya was also standing there in front. But that police officer did not recognise him. Joriya didn't say anything, but another tribal hero, Galaliya, came and took out his sword and cut the policeman's neck. Others in the police station, as soon as the officers and their soldiers came to know about this, they all ran away, hiding through different roads. (Meena 331)

Thus, this incidence demonstrates that Govind Giri and Bhagat hold unique significance among tribals.

The tribal movement became stronger after killing a police officer, and the British authorities saw it as a challenge to beat them. A massive

army chased the tribes, killing many of them. The British administration was alarmed and dispatched military forces to put down the uprising. Joria instructed his comrades to return to Badik village, where they were pursued by British troops. The retreating tribals were also fighting the British troops and looking for a safe haven in a woodland or mountain location. They arrived at a body of water, when British soldiers encircled them and opened fire. Hundreds of tribe members were slaughtered, while some fled into the bush. The British pursued and slaughtered the tribals until they ran out of guns, resulting in the deaths of thousands. The tribals' traditional weaponry was outmatched by British firearms, resulting in their defeat and fatalities. The British imprisoned tribal leaders and destroyed the uprising.

Thus, the novel *When Arrows were Heated Up* revolves around the role of Bhils in the Indian freedom war. It demonstrates their opposition to British colonialism and local persecution. The story depicts the Bhils as active participants in numerous movements and revolutions, motivated by a desire for autonomy, dignity, and justice. The story depicts how Bhil leaders such as Govind Giri organize themselves to oppose colonial authority and challenge the exploitation of their lands and resources. They use acts of disobedience, such as protests, strikes, and sabotage, to oppose the enforcement of unjust laws and policies. Throughout the novel, the Bhils' participation in the independence movement is shown as a symbol of their endurance, and pride, and their resolution to restore their rights and cultural identities. Their battle becomes a potent symbol of colonial resistance, as well as a tribute to India's indigenous populations' tenacity in the fight for freedom and equality.

### **Significance of Bhil Involvement in Freedom Struggle**

The lasting influence of Bhil contributions to India's independence demonstrates the perseverance, dedication, and sacrifice of tribes in the country's quest for freedom. Despite being marginalized and oppressed, the Bhils played an important part in resisting colonial rule and defining the course of India's independence fight. One persistent facet of Bhil contributions is their involvement in different revolutions



and struggles against British rule. Historical sources show instances of Bhil communities engaging in armed resistance, protests, and acts of civil disobedience, demonstrating their unwavering determination to establish their rights and autonomy. For instance, the Bhils' participation in the 1857 insurrection and following uprisings in Southern Rajputana demonstrated their readiness to fight colonial rulers and seek justice, as highlighted by Hardiman, "Moral self-reform along such lines provided a potent means for a legitimate and effective form of assertion within the new political order" (Hardiman 264).

Furthermore, Bhil contributions to India's freedom went beyond simple opposition to colonial rule. Bhil leaders like as Govind Giri emerged as symbols of resistance and empowerment, rallying their communities to fight not just British colonialism but also the abuses inflicted by indigenous rulers and elites. Giri's campaign for land rights, cultural preservation, and social justice connected well with the Bhil community, inspiring future generations to strive for equality and decency.

It's no use being crestfallen. If God gives us a lot, he also has the right to take something from us. Learn to fill the places rendered empty. You got nothing from this crop. Never mind. Have patience. The jungle is full of grass and there is no dearth of leaves on the tress. There will be no shortage of fodder for the bullocks, cows and goats. As for your stomachs, go far out into the jungles and collect gum, catechu, honey, dry twig and any other thing useful. Instead of selling these to the village bania, if you sell them at the haat, you will get a better price. (Meena 27)

The preceding quote from the novel reveals the tribes in their true form. In the following remark, Guru Govind is imparting hope to a forlorn tribal guy who has seen all the hardships, giving him hope for equality. The long-lasting significance of Bhil contributions is apparent in current attempts to commemorate and honor their participation in India's freedom movement. Cultural efforts and grassroots activity have attempted to elevate Bhil voices, recover their historical narratives, and address the current issues confronting indigenous groups in post-independence India.

By acknowledging and honoring Bhil accomplishments, India recognizes the broad and multicultural nature of its independence movement, ensuring that the legacy of Bhil resistance and perseverance continues to inspire future generations in their pursuit of justice and equality.

## **Conclusion**

The lasting impact of Bhil participation in India's liberation movement is a painful reminder of the country's broad and diversified desire for independence. The Bhil community made substantial contributions to the greater fight against British colonial authority via their resistance, sacrifice, and persistence, symbolizing the spirit of defiance and resolve that defined India's war for independence. As this article focuses on their contributions, it is critical to remember and memorialize the Bhil freedom warriors who fearlessly stood up to oppression, often at great personal risk. Their tales encourage us to remember India's rich past and to work for a more equitable and inclusive society in which the perspectives and experiences of all people are recognized and honored.

In modern India, tales about Bhil involvement in the liberation movement continue to shape national identity and develop a better knowledge of the country's past. Engaging with writings such as *When Arrows Were Heated Up*, and other literary works that explain the Bhil experience may provide insight into India's complicated history as well as the current battles for social justice and equality. It is critical to highlight Bhil voices, conserve their cultural legacy, and recognize and integrate their contributions into the larger narrative of Indian history.

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## A Bakhtinian Study of Sita: Unveiling Layers of Meaning and Significance

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*Laveena Bhagchandani*

Every culture is an unfinalized structure, in which every unit plays a significant role in making meaning. Along with its arbitrary aspects, there are certain conventions that provide a base for it. It has multiple entangled units, which interact to give an angle for interpretation. Myth is one such doxical unit. Myth is a preserver of cultural values, and at the same time, it is a discourse. The metaphysical quality of myth makes it all the more valued in Indian culture, and therefore, it has an impact on the physical realm. In the acculturation of people, their exposure to myth defines their understanding.

In the Indian context, myths are living units. Myths are an intrinsic part of vocabulary and language, and as we can understand, they shape the experiences of people. In metaphors, addresses, accusations, appreciation, lessons etc., myths are actively involved.

One such dialectical myth is Sita. Sita is the mythical daughter of King Janaka and she is the dutiful wife of Rama, king of Ayodhya. Sita is seen ideally when we analyse her in context. But she doesn't lose her feminine essence, even when read as an independent unit placing her in different contexts. Sita is in the questions, and she is in the answers. She is referred and revered.

NandiniSahu's *Sita* is "a poetic memoir of the heroine of the epic Sita, told in the first person narrative." (Sahu 11)

Sita, the character penned Sahu is an unfinalized contextual character. The text is divided into twenty-five cantos. Ramayana, as we know has numerous versions, each voicing out the perspective of a different character. Sita is a multilayered character, which could be read under

various literary theories. That's how she becomes a character who is explored yet unexplored, read and yet unread. As Sahu puts it:

Sita—Sati Sita—she is not just the hypothetical or the historical substance of academics. She is truly animated to this living, present living; she is pertinent.

Sita had multiple names, one another fact that shows she could not be confined to an age, space or a person. The poet shows multiplicity of her character in the following lines:

Call her what you may – Sita, Janaki,  
Vaidehi, Ramaa – she is Woman.

She is every woman, the propagated, interpolated role model (Sahu 1).

The paper focuses on the Bakhtinian interpretation of *Sita* to prove that *Sita* cannot be completely interpreted. The text is Dialogic, Unfinalized, Chronotopic and Heteroglossic

Mikhail Bakhtin is a Russian philosopher and structural literary critic.

The reason why Bakhtin is apt for the study is because he analyses Dostoevsky in the vein in which *Sita* could be analysed. Certain characters might carry a lot of complexity and the unravelling might not be possible and *Sita* is one similar character.

The idea of Dialogue, without two speakers or an assumed listener, is explained by Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929). According to Bakhtin, who explains this concept with concern to Dostoevsky, says that no speech can be a monologue. Every speech since a human being comes into consciousness is dialogic. Dialogue is an essential quality of life and the mythical *Sita* who was born from earth was a result of Dialogue. Bakhtin says:

All else is the means; dialogue is the end. A single voice ends nothing and resolves nothing. Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence. (Bakhtin 115)

*Sita* is written in the form of a poetic memoir. The form itself has dialogic properties. It is a conscious reciprocation of *Sita* to the people around

her. The work is an unfiltered dialogue on the part of Sita. Bakhtin characterises Dialogue as external but the plot is internally dependent on it.

Sita is usually taken as a passive actor in the dialogic Ramayana. But Sahu's Sita explores agency with a balance of propriety. Sita says:

I have been the  
audacious, unyielding, self-willed, self-motivated  
woman, forever . . . (Sahu 38)

Another important feature that makes *Sita* a definite dialogic text is Sita's dialogue with Rama using "you and your". Her constant engagement in dialogue with Rama happens because she dearly loves him and chooses an exile with him.

Numerous questions are coming from Sita, which shows that she is anticipating the answers to the injustices she has gone through. "In your Rama Rajya, is this the law of nature?", she asks Rama. She also asks him:

Tell me, is woman  
only a means to generate or eliminate the  
negative powers? . . . (Sahu 43)

The fact that she is questioning him makes her a powerful person with agency, and the agency itself is dialogic to the core. She also questions him:

Tell me, oh  
Lord, why do we subject a woman,  
at every age, as a means to an end? (Sahu 32)

Another idea that Bakhtin proposes is Unfinalizability and he explains it as:

Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future. (Bakhtin 166)

A character shows unfinalizability by being multilayered and uncomprehensible. Sita, who is in the questions and the answer is penned with complexity by Sahu. In the preface, Sahu says, “Sita (A Poem) presents my assertion and assessment of Sita that reconnoitres multiple traits of her life and personality” (16) and Sita herself says, “I have seen many lives in one life” (24).

An unfinalized text which has a play of meaning is readerly as Roland Barthes describes. Sita is so diversely interpreted that she has become an essential part of any Indian culture which is itself unfinalized. An important feature of a character who is unfinalized is that it is difficult to get a hold of their rationale in the actions they perform. Sita says:

Oh men and women, oh trees, rocks, rivers, clouds,  
the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars and the comets!  
I am ageless, timeless, beneficent and compassionate. (Sahu 25)

Another important aspect of Bakhtin which we can find in *Sita* is Chronotope. Bakhtin describes Chronotope as, “the name chronotope (literally, “time space”) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (Bakhtin, 84).

Chronotope is a mathematical term and is fused with the Theory of Relativity by Einstein. Bakhtin designates Chronotope as a special quality of time where, “Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible, likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axis and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.”

An important aspect of Chronotope is that it defines the character’s perspective and in turn, it is shaped by the character’s understanding.

Sita defines herself as a medium through which good conquers evil. Though she is said to be a woman whose feminine essence can be seen in every woman, her, “. . . heartrending history momentarily links the Rama-Ravana/stories” (Sahu 97).

Sita is performative when there is an extremity of evil and there is a good that is supposed to overpower the prevalent evil through Sita. Sita is also the one, who empowers the proactive preservation of the ecosystem. She refers to herself in the first person as:

Sita, who was humanizing herself in the  
art of loneliness, solitude, and love of  
the flora and fauna, of ecology pure. (Sahu 30)

Sita spent most of her life in the nature and when she was abandoned or kidnapped by humans, she sought safety in it. She was born out of nature and she chose to leave her physical life through nature. From her angle, nature was the one that nurtured her, and therefore she says:

Ecology was my home now, free from the  
wistful four walls of the stately mansions and palaces.

The daughter of Mother Earth, I was ultimately in her lap. (Sahu 93)

Sita's tale is taken from the epic Mahabharata and an epic has an inherent quality of heteroglossia. Heteroglossia is concept devised by Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Heteroglossia is multiplicity in "points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values." Any utterance that takes place is a product of the convergence of time and place. These utterances might align or vary from the mainstream voice, but in any case, they are not insignificant. Especially when we analyse multiplicity in the voices around Sita, we understand that in her story word has a lot of significance. The word Rama's father, Dashratha gave to Kaikeyi, influenced Sita's course of life. The words 'washer man' spoke to Rama ruined Sita's momentarily gained blissful life. The most cruel voice in the poem comes from Ravana, who says:

Haughty woman! I give you twelve months  
time to accept and marry me. Else my cook  
will slaughter you and prepare my meal. (Sahu 37)



## Conclusion

From this we can conclude that *Sita* is a text that can be analyzed from the Bakhtinian stance. It is an appropriate amalgamation of all his theories. The concepts of Bakhtin when applied to *Sita*, it proves that *Sita* is a universal yet local character and being a part of Hindu mythology, it creates an endless impact of the society. She is a unification of multiple conservative theories.

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## Ecological Crisis in Central Himalayas: From Colonial to Post-Colonial Times

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*Anita and Ragini Raghav*

The Himalayan mountains are believed to be the abode of gods. The practice of protecting nature comes to the people naturally because of their abiding faith in the gods and their strong belief that divine power is present in every element of nature. The Himalayan mountains have been inhabited by communities that are chiefly dependent on natural resources, i.e., forests and rivers, for their basic needs. The livelihood of the hill folk is mainly based on agriculture and herd keeping. The indigenous community of the Himalayan mountains has a diverse culture that includes various traditional practices and values of environmental sustainability and conservation. The high-rise mountains are considered the abode of several local deities, and these places are sacred to the people. They could not dare exploit the natural resources nearby, like land, trees, plants, and springs. The people also depended on the forest for medicinal plants, as many of the herbs found there have healing properties and can be used to cure various diseases.

There was community-based resource management prevalent in Kumaun. For generations, the hill people of the Kumaun region of the Himalayas have been using traditional knowledge and several cultural practices for the management and conservation of natural resources. The forests, groves, and grasslands were protected by the indigenous people, as their traditional beliefs and rituals consisted of the practice of revering various elements of nature as deities. Several water bodies, like *guls*, *naulas*, and *dharas*, that provided water for everyday use for the locals were worshipped on special occasions like weddings and other traditional ceremonies. Hence, these water bodies were kept clean and pure. There was a shared consciousness of conserving their

surrounding environment among the hill folk. The flowers, if unripe, were not plucked, and it was considered inauspicious to pluck flowers after sunset. There are many unwritten rules for conserving various natural resources that have been passed on from generation to generation. These natural sources were of great importance to the people because of the cultural and traditional values attached to them. Therefore, natural resources like land, water, and trees were spiritually significant in the religious and socio-cultural lives of the local people.

However, due to colonization and, after independence, the growing population and rapid urbanization, in recent years, various changes have occurred in the traditional structure of the use of natural resources like fuel wood, fodder, and grazing areas. The shared concern of the locals for natural resources is on the verge of depletion now. The growth in population and urbanization have led to growing economic activities in the hills, and since then, the traditional system of conserving natural resources has also withered. This has led to the exploitation of natural resources, including forests, land, water, pastures, and biodiversity. The ecological exploitation and challenges in the Kumaun region during colonial and post-colonial periods find expression in the works of several Kumauni writers. Namita Gokhale, in her books based on the Kumaun region, deals with the colonial history of the hills and the exploitation of the hills during that period. Girish Chandra Tiwari, an indigenous poet from Kumaun, lovingly known as *Girda*, has depicted the environmental crisis in the hills very passionately in his poems.

### **Narrative of Nature and Power: An Ecological Imperialism**

Under colonial rule, the colonized people and land are exploited by the colonizers, and the exploitation is justified by projecting the natives as inferior and “others”, people who are to be civilized and then eventually subjugate them. The term ‘Ecological Imperialism’ was coined in 1986 by Alfred Crosby in his book *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900*. In ecological imperialism, both environmentalism and colonialism are dealt with side by side. It studies

the disruption or disturbance of local ecology due to colonial expansion. For instance, the land of a particular place is an integral part of the cultural identity of the people living there. For them, the land does not just stand for a physical entity; it is a part of their identity. The colonial conquest of the material wealth of the colonies left a great impact on the lives of the colonized in countries like South Africa and India. Usurping the land of the colonized and taking their right to self-governance of their own land did not only deprive them of their source of livelihood but also of their very identity. As Franz Fanon puts it, “For a colonized people, the most essential value, because the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land: the land, which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity” (9). During the colonial period, several forest acts were introduced by the British government in the Kumaun region. Under these acts, they introduced repressive forest policies. The Kumauni society has been egalitarian, and the people were completely dependent upon the natural resources for their survival. The Forest Act of 1878 took away the rights of the locals, and they were excluded from the resources of the forests. The forests were now under the monopoly of the British Administration, and the act allowed it to expand the commercial exploitation of the forests. The *sal* trees of Kumaun were felled in huge numbers, and pine trees were planted in the hills by the British Administration for commercial purposes.

Pt. Govind Ballabh Pant, a prominent political leader of Kumaun, condemned the Forest Act introduced by the British Administration in his booklet entitled *The Forest Problem in Kumaon*, 1922. He called the Forest Act the “burial of the immemorial and indefeasible rights of the people of Kumaun” (Guha 228). According to Pant, “the policy of the Forest Department can be summed up in two words, namely, encroachment and exploitation” (Guha 228). Observing the disastrous consequences of the forest policy, Pant wrote:

Symptoms of decay are unmistakably visible in many village: buildings are tottering, houses are deserted, population has dwindled and assessed land has gone out of cultivation since the policy of

[forest] reservation was initiated. . . . Cattle have become weakened and emaciated and dairy produce is growing scarce every day: while in former times one could get any amount of milk and other varieties for the mere asking, now occasions are not rare when one cannot obtain it in the villages, for any price for the simple reason that it is not produced there at all. (70-72)

In his book, Pant describes the plight of the people of Kumaun who were dissatisfied by the Forest Act. The displeasure of the people provoked a resistance in them against the policy that was imposed on them by the British administration. This policy had hindered and violated the harmonious relationship of the local people with the environment.

In Namita Gokhale's historical novel *Things to Leave Behind*, the natives of Kumaun worship nature, and they believe that every element of nature holds some divine power. They have several myths and beliefs attached to the rivers, lakes, hills, and trees. Naini Lake is believed to have been formed from the eye of the goddess *Sati*, which fell in that spot while Lord *Shiva* was carrying her deceased body in his arms. As a result, the place is considered sacred land by the natives, and they despise the interference of the Englishmen in their land. They try hard to keep the lake a secret from the Englishmen. As mentioned, "the great annual fair of Nanda Devi was held in the grounds near the lake every autumn. There were no houses there, for it was a sacred spot, not to be polluted by human habitation" (11). Later, the place was discovered by an Englishman who tricked a native into leading him to the secret lake. The natives of Kumaun were deceived by the British into owning the land rights to the place. The colonizers established a township there, and the hill station of Nainital was established. The people simultaneously shape and are shaped by their local environment, and this delineates how the natives of Kumaun were denied their right to situate their own history and environmental locality.

In the novel *The Book of Shadows*, the place where the British missionary intends to build a house is considered a sacred site by the natives. As William Cockrell states, "On ridges like the one whereupon

we planned to site the house, they built only temples to their bloodthirsty gods. But this ridge, I had heard it muttered, was a bad one; it had a resident spirit that was inimical to happiness or reason” (43). This same house later witnessed the unnatural deaths of many of its inhabitants. The hill people believe in several folk deities and have ardent faith in them. Most of these gods are considered guardian angels by the natives. Some places in the hills are worshipped as sacred spots of the folk deities, and they are believed to be guarded by them; no human inhabits these places. For instance, Lord *Airee* is considered the guardian spirit who protects the land, people, and animals of the hills. In *The Book of Shadows*, Lohaniju, the caretaker of the house in Ranikhet, believes that the British missionary William Cockrell disgraced the sacredness of the place by building the house on the arrow of Lord *Airee*. He says,

The missionary was foolish to build his house in this lonely spot. We hill people prefer to live together, near each other. Humans need each other, it is pride to think that they don't. Besides, he knew that this was a sacred spot, and that the arrows of Lord *Airee* lie buried here, deep in the soil, below the rock even. These arrows never rust, and when the time comes, the gods will deign to use them once again. (209)

At the beginning of the novel *Things to Leave Behind*, six women are singing mournfully in the month of *shraddha*, and they are circled around the lake wearing black and scarlet *pichauras* (a traditional yellow and scarlet colored stole worn during auspicious occasions by the Kumauni women). The natives believe that these women are evil spirits; they have donned black and scarlet-colored *pichauras* instead of the regular yellow and scarlet tones, and the incident symbolises an evil force in the environment of the place, which is associated with the arrival of the British in Kumaun. The natives are concerned about the disapproval of the lake goddess, *Naina Devi*, for the intrusion of outsiders into her land. When an Englishwoman dies by drowning in the lake by accidentally stepping into a slippery rock, the native folk believe it to be the revenge of the lake goddess on the outsiders for dishonoring the sanctity of her land. The British did not pay any heed to this rumor that

was spreading like wildfire among the natives. However, the landside of the year 1870 shows the resistance of nature against human intervention. The wrath of nature took the lives of hundreds of people, including both Britishers and natives.

In the novel *The Book of Shadows*, Gokhale shows the general perception of the Englishmen and their experiences with the natives of Kumaun in the journal of the missionary William Cockrell. In this journal, he has written about the beliefs and superstitions of the local people and the problems he faced during his stay in the hills. The concept of the binary opposition of “orient” and “occident” to portray the colonized as “other,” uncivilized, and savage in order to justify the imperialistic endeavors explored by Edward Said in his seminal work *Orientalism* is depicted in the journal of the missionary. Rumina Sethi in an article in *The Tribune* writes:

The journal written by William Cockerell throws light on the role of the missionaries and their rather orientalist views on the nature of the natives who are taken to be lethargic and immoral. He imagines the natives as shadows hovering around him and wonders if they were really human or only shadows belonging to some other “unchastened un-christian world.” (Sethi)

As in the case of the other European colonies, Indian natives too were considered primitive and savage by the colonizers. The British mocked the natives of Kumaun for their strong belief in several superstitions. William Cockrell writes that the people in the hills believe in nonsensical superstitions. He mocks the natives, as they worship monkeys as gods and avoid killing a snake, as it is also considered divine. He says that the people also have several superstitious beliefs attached to the trees. The pine trees are considered extremely unlucky, and the cedar or deodar trees are considered divine. The people would not dare cut the tree, and if it had to be cut due to a certain compulsion, then they had to seek divine permission by worshipping the deity.

The actions of the two Englishmen, Marco and Munro, in the novel *The Book of Shadows* represent the colonial practice of exploitation of the

native land and people. These two Englishmen came to the house built by the missionary in Ranikhet. They both exploited the humans as well as the animals on the hills. They were followers of the occult and were sadistic people. They used to capture young panthers, hang them in the courtyard, and inflict several tortures on them, sometimes by feeding them extravagantly and sometimes by starving them to enjoy the sufferings of those wounded animals until they died. The hill folks were also not spared from the tortures of these people. As mentioned, "Once, Munro even pushed a hill-man into the pit of hungered beasts, but he escaped and ran away from the house, never to return" (99). These Englishmen even went to the extent of sacrificing a child just to revive their fading energies. This shows how the colonizers manipulated not only nature and animals but also the humans of the hills. They asserted their rights to the environment as well as to humans. The natives came to hate the Englishmen for their actions and considered them madmen. They believed that these Englishmen interfered with their beliefs and insulted the spirits of the mountains by polluting the sanctity of their land.

The natives could no longer tolerate the tortures imposed by the Englishmen on them and decided to avenge them. The hill people believed that the gods of the mountains had ordered them to take revenge on Marcus and Munro. As Lohaniju mentions, "Our mountain gods disguised themselves as panthers and attacked the white sahibs, right here in this house, one black amavasya night" (14). From the stories that Lohaniju narrates to Rachita of the Kumauni locale, it can be inferred that the hill folk of Kumaun were not pleased with the arrival of Britishers in their native land. He believes that the 'English sahib' who came to Kumaun were bad people. They polluted the mountains, which are considered sacred by the people of Kumaun. As Lohaniju asserts, "They insulted the spirits of these mountains. They were rude and arrogant and very, very foolish" (13). This shows the general perception that the Kumauni folks hold of the British. In these novels, Gokhale depicts the colonial exploitation of nature as well as the humans of the Kumaun hills.



## Ecological Crisis and Kumaun Hills

After the independence of India, the increase in economic attributes, industrialization, and rapid urbanization resulted in the overexploitation of natural resources. In the colonial era, the British rulers exploited the ecology, and post-independence, the government carried forward the same policies in the name of development. The hills of the Kumaun Himalayas, rich in natural resources, were sought after for energy consumption. This led to the overexploitation of natural sources in the hills. There was large-scale cutting of the forest trees initiated by the timber merchants, certain government schemes, and private industries. The growing commercial and industrial interest not only led to the degradation of the hill forests but also of the age-old traditional and cultural practice of conservation in the hills. These projects had an adverse effect on the traditional practices of conservation of natural resources. The local people were now less concerned about conservation of nature and indulged in getting as much benefit as they could out of the ongoing scenario. The external interference of exploitative development policies in the hills was responsible for withering away from traditional conservation practices.

In the early 1970s, there was a large-scale cutting of the trees in the hills, which resulted in ecological catastrophes like floods and soil erosions due to deforestation. The local people were then alarmed to protect their natural resources. The exploitation of the hill forests by outside agencies and government policies was resisted by the locals, and this united resistance and struggle of the people for the protection of the forests led to the Chipko Movement. The movement had a very humane appeal: “Cut me down before you cut down the tree. The tree is far more important than my life, it is the basis of my survival” (Mitra). It was also a crucial movement in this respect that the women folk of the hills were a part of the movement, and they participated in the protest in large numbers. They hugged the trees, saying, “chop me before you chop my tree.” Poet and renowned social activist of Kumaun, Girish Chandra Tiwari, who people lovingly and affectionately call *Girda* (elder

brother Girish), composed a poem that depicts the plight of nature in the hills and urges the hill folk to resist the exploitation of the forest. *Girda* personified nature in his poem and depicted its sufferings:

*Aaj Himaal tuman ke dhatyoochhaujago,  
jago ho myara laal.*

*Ni karan diyo humari neelami*

*Ni karan diyo humaro halaal*

(Tiwari 26)

The Himalayas are calling out to you today; wake up, my child. Do not let them maltreat me; do not let them auction me. (Translated by us)

This poem became an inspiration for the rallies of the Chipko movement. It inspired the hill people and awakened in them the responsibility to save their environment and natural resources. The poem inspires people to resist the rapid urbanization and development activities that are leading to the degradation of the environment as well as the traditional culture of the hills. *Girda* has written many poems that mirror the dire situation of the hills, which are under threat due to the exploitation of their natural resources. It was not only the forest but also the rivers that became victims of the development activities in the hills. There were several large-scale projects that were initiated for energy consumption from the rivers. The ecology and humans had to suffer from these projects. *Girda* wrote a poem on the plight of the water resources of the hills and how the government and state had become traders by destructing the rivers:

*Aji vaah! Kya baat tumhare, tum ho pani ke vyapaari,  
Khel tumhara tumhi Khiladi, bichi hui ye bisaat tumhaari,  
Saara paani choos rahe ho, nadi samandar loot rahe ho,  
Ganga-Yamuna ki chaati par, kankar patthar koot  
rahe ho. . .”*

(Tiwari)

“Oh! Great, what you’re doing; you are the trader of water,  
You are the player, and the sport is also yours,  
You are sucking up all the water and looting the rivers as well as  
the oceans.

You are crushing pebbles and stones on the bosom of the Ganges  
and Yamuna . . .” (Translated by us)

The poem is a satire on the government officials who had become blind to the destruction that the large-scale projects were causing to the rivers. In 2008, a movement called “Save the Rivers” took place to save the rivers from destructive development projects that had adverse effects on the water resources in the hills. *Girda’s* poem expresses the contemporary scenario of the ecological crisis in the hills.

## Conclusion

Environmental degradation is a serious issue that needs to be taken into consideration by both local people and the government in the hills. There are looming dangers of the ecological threat across the world. The increase in the frequency of several natural disasters like floods, soil erosion, landslides, etc. due to ecological crises is evident in the hills. The beginning of ecological exploitation can be traced back to the colonial period, when the forest acts introduced by the British administration allowed the state to expand the commercial exploitation of the forest while restricting the locals from using the resources for their sustenance. It hampered the relationship between nature and the local people. The hill folks were deprived of the right to self-governance over their natural resources.

In Gokhale’s works, we find ecological imperialism during the colonial period in the Kumaun Himalayas. During this period, the environment as well as human beings were manipulated by the colonial powers. After independence, ecological exploitation continued in the hills. Many government and non-government schemes were responsible for this exploitation. The local people too became unconcerned with the exploitation of natural resources, and the traditional practice of conserving natural resources also diminished. Girish Chandra Tiwari’s poems demonstrated the continuing onslaught on the natural resources of the Himalayas, and his poems are a call to preserve natural resources in the hills.

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## Revitalizing Indigenous Philosophy and Religion: A Study of Girish Karnad's Selected Plays

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*Priyanka Shah*

Konkani by birth, born on May 19, 1938, in Matheran (Maharashtra) Girish Karnad is one of the pioneer playwrights and revivalists of Indian theatre like Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar, Mahesh Dattani etc. Most of his plays are written in Kannada, especially his initial plays and afterward, they are translated into English. His later plays were originally composed in the English language. From childhood, he was interested in folk plays. It played a pivotal role in his life. He is one of the greatest dramatists of India. He had been a Rhodes scholar at Oxford from 1960 to 1963 and a Bhabha fellow from 1970 to 1972, also a visiting professor and resident scholar at Chicago University for some time. This man of versatile personality was an accomplished actor too, who portrayed a variety of characters not only on stage but also in Indian cinema and small screen. He was the World Theatre Ambassador of the International Theatre Institute, Paris (ITI), and had been anointed sixteen times with fellowship. He was also the recipient of the Padma Bhushan and Jnanpith Award in recognition of his contributions to arts and literature. His collection of plays includes *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Nagamandala*, *Tale-Danda*, *The Fire and the Rain*, *Bali: The Sacrifice*, *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, *Two Monologues: Flower and Broken Images*, *Wedding Album*, *Boiled Beans on Toast* and *Crossing To Talikota*.

In the field of literature, Karnad's works have been explored from various angles. But still with every new reading, they come out with a new exciting knowledge or angle. Karnad's plays have been analyzed from the point of view of religion, philosophy, and God, but not completely from an indigenous context. Thus, the paper will be an attempt to throw light on how Karnad gives new energy and strength to indigenous spiritual

faith, their idea of God, and philosophy by using them in his selected plays.

The word 'Tribal' originated from the Latin word 'Tribus' which means a group of persons owning a common culture and ancestors. Munmun Sen mentions: "A tribe is also defined as a group of indigenous people with a common language, distinct customs, rites and rituals, beliefs, simple social rank and political organization and common ownership of resources." (30118)

Internationally they are recognized as tribal or indigenous people. In India, they are known as 'Adivasi', 'Vanvasi', 'Vanyajati' and 'Adimjati'. The etymology traces its roots to Sanskrit. Sanskrit is the language of ancient 'Bharat'. The word 'Adivasi' means the people who resided from the beginning at that land or aboriginal people. According to the census 2011, they consist of 86% of India's population, among them 75% tribal population resides in the central part of India. It is foreign invasions that deprived them of their land and forest. The foreign invaders bridged the gap between the tribal and non-tribal in India. Tribals rebelled against them in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. After independence, the Indian constitution gave them privileges and honorable status in society.

Pursuing their ancient history, the tribal people have their own language, customs, and beliefs. They follow a historical culture, traditional system, and social apparatus which include secularism, equality, brotherhood, love of nature, democracy, etc. Literature has started voicing for giving them their cultural and social identity. It has bridged the gap between the modern human race and its ancient roots. In his book titled *Tribal Literature, Culture, and Knowledge System*, Dr. H. S. Chandalia mentions, "The colorful diverse indigenous people are the treasures of human civilization on the earth which we should nourish and nurture to our own benefit (Introduction 4).

Published in 1988, Karnad's *Nagamandala* is based on Karnataka folklore. The folklore was told by A. K. Ramanujan (a famous Kannada poet) to Karnad. The play has a Kannada title as it was originally written

in the Kannada language and later translated into English with the title - *A Play with Cobra*. The female protagonist of the play Rani is a very innocent girl. She gets married to Appanna. Because of a concubine, Appanna keeps Rani away from him. He stays at home only for lunch and before leaving, locks Rani alone in the house. Appanna's indifferent behavior towards Rani makes her isolated and anxious. She craves for her parents. Suddenly, the plot takes a turn. Kurudavva, a blind woman and friend of Rani's late mother-in-law gave a magical root to Rani for making Appanna attracted towards her. The first dose of that root makes Appanna faint and the second big dose converts the curry red like blood. Frightened Rani pours the curry into the ant hill where a king cobra resides. The cobra consumes that magical curry and the magical effect starts appearing. Now the cobra is enchanted towards Rani. In the absence of Appanna, at night, he visits Rani daily in the disguise of Appanna. Unknown innocent Rani is happy to be united with her husband at night. Rani gets pregnant by the cobra. Appanna gets incensed and brings Rani to the village court. But the cobra senses the situation and makes Rani ready for the snake ordeal to prove her fidelity in front of all. She vows that except for Appanna and this cobra, she has never held any man by her hand after her marriage. During the ordeal, the cobra moves around her neck like a garland. Now Rani is accepted as a divine woman. Appanna agrees to surrender in front of her. In the end, Karnad provides two conclusions of the story. In the first, Naga visits Rani again after a few years in the presence of Appanna and hides himself in her long hair. Rani wakes up and feels her hair heavy. She combs her hair and a dead cobra falls down. Rani demands and makes Appanna agree to the cremation of the dead cobra by the hands of her son. In the second conclusion, Rani hides the cobra in her hair and lives happily with her family. Along with the story of Rani, the story of the old blind woman Kurudavva and her son named Kappanna runs parallel. Kurudavva's son disappears suddenly. No one knows the reason behind it. But she makes the audience believe that her son was always telling her that a spirit was following and watching him. Whether it is a spirit or Yaksha woman or a snake woman, she doesn't know. Villagers think that she has gone mad. But she knows the reality.

In the play, by means of snake ordeal, magic root, and the ghost spirit, Karnad restores the religious faith and belief of naturalism of the tribal society. Tribals are devotees of snake and firmly know about his anger. Tribal of India worship *Naga* (cobra/snake) on the occasion of *Nagpanchami*, the festival which is celebrated in the month of *Shrawan*. Non-tribals also worship snakes but the festival's root traces back from indigenous culture. During rituals, tribals offer milk to *Nag Devta* (deity) and seek blessings from him. In different tribal regions, it is celebrated distinctly with a common motto that snakes will bless them and spare them from their poisonous bite. Karnad's *Nagamandala* reflects the same faith of villagers in the cobra (snake). The judgment of the cobra becomes the final order. No one raises objections or disregards King Cobra's decision. Even the cobra as a deity in the play honors villagers' faith. He says to Rani, "No, it won't bite, only, you must tell the truth. . . . The truth, tell the truth while you are holding the cobra" (33). Rani asks Naga, "And if I lie?" (33). Naga replies, "It will bite you" (33). Karnad respects the tribal faith through the words of Naga. Tribals' faith in snakes as their deity reaffirms their worship of *Mansa Mata*, the mother of snakes. In India, she is worshipped for saving her subject from snake venom. She is regarded as the sister of Naga Vasuki. In the article, "Goddess Mansa: Origin and Development", Meghali Saikia and Debasnita Medhi write:

The worship of Mansa was more predominant among the tribal people. According to some scholars, serpent worship prevails among the Garos and Khasias. Then this tradition was infused with Hindu and Buddhist practices. Later, it reached Bengal. (955)

Karnad through *Nagamandala*, strengthens the tribal's religious faith and brings it to the world's stage. Tribal people's everlasting bonding and dependency on nature is unmatched. They believe in the magic of wild plants, known as superstition in the so-called modern medical discipline. The magical root, provided by Kurudavva to Rani, is also one of the elements of tribal life. Vandana Singh Kushwah, Rashmi Sisodia, and Chhaya Bhatnagar mention in their article "Magico-religious and social belief of Tribal of District Udaipur, Rajasthan," "Magic is the



imperative part of tribal life of Rajasthan” (3). In the article “Plants used for non-medical purposes by the tribal people in KalakedMudonThurai”, it is mentioned, “Kanis believe that aerial plants or stems of some of the plants bring good fortune and keep off evil spirit” (Ayyanan and Ignacimuthu 517) (the tribal residents of KMTR are known as Kani or Kanikaran, the ancient tribe of South India). Santhals, an ancient tribe of India, also use the plants and their parts for witchcraft. In *Nagamandala*, Kurudavva believes that Appanna’s concubine has done some witchcraft on him. She gives a magical root to Rani for bewitching Appanna and it works, it is a different thing that it bewitches the cobra due to Rani’s mistake. By the use of this idea, Karnad makes us dive into the indigenous world of faith in the power of nature as well as their magical practices.

The sudden disappearance of Kurudavva’s son Kappanna exhibits the Tribal’s belief in supernatural elements. “They believe that various spirits are good for the society but few are evil spirits who are always dangerous for the society” (Chatterjee and Sharma 2). Tribal people also believe that spirits, ghosts, etc. dwell in forests, ponds, rivers, and trees as well as can occupy the human body. In *Nagamandala*, Kurudavva’s son sees a woman’s spirit floating over a well. The blind Kurudavva states:

A Yaksha woman? Perhaps a snake woman? But not a human being. No, What woman would come inside our house at that hour? And how? She wasn’t even breathing. I shouted: ‘Who are you? What do you want from us? Go away.’ Suddenly the door burst open. The rushing wind shook the rafters. He slipped from my hands and was gone. Never come back. (*Nagamandala* 37)

Karnad’s Kannada play *Agni Mattu Male* was translated into English with the title *The Fire and the Rain*. The play is based on the myth of Yavakri from the *Mahabharata* epic. The play commences with the significance of its title. Various issues like gender, caste, race, socio-political and individual conflicts are elevated in the play. Yavakri and Parvasu try to please the God of rain – Indra for supreme knowledge

and getting rain through the fire-sacrifice respectively. Vishakha, the abandoned beloved of Yavakri, gets married to Parvasu who leaves Vishakha after one year of their marriage for performing fire-sacrifice. The subplot of Aravasu and Nittilai is also significant from the perspective of dramatic development. This subplot is created by Karnad. He deftly portrayed the tragic love story of a tribal girl Nittilai and a Brahmin boy Aravasu. Yavakri used Vishakha to invoke Raibhya's anger (Parvasu's father) and for disturbing Parvasu. Vishakharetaliates against Yavakri. On the other hand, distraught Parvasu returns home and deliberately kills his father. He holds Aravasu responsible and blames him for this patricide. By imputing the crime of Brahm-hatya on Aravasu, Parvasu declares him an outcast. Aravasu's delayed meeting with Nittilai's father in the village turns their love story into tragedy. An indignant father offers Nittilai's hand to another boy from his tribe. Nittilai flees away from her marriage to take care of sick and illtreated – Aravasu in the city and encourages him to take part in the play. Aravasu picks the role of Vritra (a Brahmin rakshasa). During the performance in the play, Vritra's character takes over Aravasu's body and soul and destroys the fire-sacrifice ceremony. Nittilai suddenly intervenes to save furious Aravasu and is killed by her husband and her brother.

Nittilai's character and her family are the creations of Karnad's sensibility towards indigenous people. Through these characters, Karnad makes us acquainted with the tribal philosophy and their customs. The tribal people disbelieve in discrimination based on caste and wealth. "The theory of Karma does not exist in tribal religion because Tribals have no caste system, they do not divide the people based on caste and wealth" (Chatterjee and Sharma 49). Even they deny gender bias. "Naga women are rather free in mixing with their men folk, have the independence to choose their own life partner" (Sonowal 68). A tribal girl can select her life partner irrespective of caste. Nittilai loves a Brahmin boy Aravasu and her parents and her tribe agree with this arrangement. It is Aravasu's fault that the marriage couldn't take place. Ramnika Gupta in her book '*Tribal Contemporary Issues: Appraisal and Intervention*' writes: "In contrast to mainstream Indian culture, Adivasi women have the

freedom to choose their own grooms. They are neither punished nor pronounced guilty for this” (55).

Nittilai is a very candid, self-dependent, and brave girl. These qualities of Nittilai are the typical traits of a tribal girl. She admits her love in front of her parents and flees away as well for the sake of her love. At every step, she leads Aravasus. In the information released by Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, it is mentioned that the tribal people are very simple, humble, and have a good feeling for non-tribal people.

On the one hand, they believe in social harmony, on the other they are very peculiar about their culture and customs. As the upholders of unity, they rebel against those who break it. Advocates of justice, indigenous people are prime to avenge against the injustice done to their people and customs. In “Life Histories, Blood Revenge, and Warfare in a Tribal Population: The Ultimate Causes of Yanomamo Warfare” N. A. Chagnon mentions,

Blood revenge is one of the most commonly cited causes of violence and warfare in tribal society . . . . Most fights begin over sexual issues: infidelity and suspicion of infidelity, attempts to seduce another man’s wife, sexual jealousy, forcible appropriation of women from visiting groups, failure to give a promised girl in marriage, and (rarely) rape. (986)

Nittilai’s father is a candid person. He and the elders of his tribe just want a declaration (promise) of Aravasus that he will accept Nittilai as his wife and bear her responsibility throughout his life. Unintentionally or due to unavoidable circumstances, Aravasus hurts his self-respect. Distressed father declares her marriage to another boy of his same tribe and Nittilai embraces this marriage as she realizes Aravasus’s mistake. It is Aravasus’s crisis that brings Nittilai back to him. The treachery of Nittilai makes her people enraged. The tribal people breathe for their customs and social norms. A commitment is a word of gold for them. Nittilai’s killing by her brother and her husband is the manifestation of their consciousness towards their social commitment to each other. Aravasus expresses his anxiety to Nittilai, “I know your people. Hunters,

Once they decide to vengeance . . .” (42). Nittilai refuses to have any physical intimacy with Aravasu before their marriage and even after her marriage. She states:

Aravasu, when I say we should go together – I don’t mean we have to live together . . . like lovers or like husband and wife. I have been vicious enough to my husband. . . . Let’s be together – like brother and sister. (42)

Humanity is a supreme virtue of indigenous people. Social and moral values are deeply rooted in their blood. In “Unit 2, Human Values and Moral Sense of Tribals” shared by IGNOU, The People’s University, it is mentioned that Tribal people can be entrusted and evaluated on the basis of their core values like humanity, respect for their culture and religion, sharing and caring, democratic style of living, openness, love for nature, forests and their land, etc. Nittilai questions, “What is the point of any knowledge if you can’t save dying children” (11). Nittilai saves not only Arvasu but also helps the Actor manager’s dying family, with whom Arvasu was lying down on the outskirts of the city in a dying condition, by feeding them fruits from the forest.

Tribals can’t imagine their life without forests and animals. This unbreakable bond cannot be denied by scholars all over the world. The Tribal’s proximity to the plants, forests, and animals proved their workmanship as hunters. In the play, *The Fire and the Rain*, Nittilai claims that tribal people can recognize any animal by its footsteps. Even as hunters, they can perceive the smell of a man. As Aravasu comments:

They are hunters. They don’t need to see quarry. They can smell it out. And once they are on the track, they’ll run it to the ground. (48)

The tribal affirms the philosophy of rebirth. They don’t desire to be immortal. “They always believe in humanity and honesty. They also believe in rebirth and their humanity, generosity, and honesty will transfer to their next life” (Chatterjee and Sharma 2). In the play *Fire and the Rain*, Nittilai loves Vritra’s character which Aravasu acts in the play. She comments about Indra (the God of rain in Hindu religion):

He is immortal, when someone doesn't die, can't die, what can he know about anything? He can't change himself. He can't create anything. I like Vritra because he is triumphant. He chooses death. I always wonder – if the flowers didn't know they were to fade and die, would they have ever blossomed? (51-52)

The discussion undertaken in this paper reflects Karnad's sensibility toward the philosophy of indigenous people and their faith in God. In both the above-discussed plays, these indigenous elements come alive and thrive. In *Nagamandala*, the tribal's faith in the god *Naga*, magical plants (naturalism), and the existence of the supernatural entity, and in *The Fire and the Rain*, the tribal's credo, ethics, and customs are revealed vigorously. Through his pen Karnad handovers indigenous roots of India to the succeeding generation. The tribal is indeed classified into various communities but based on proximity in culture and nature they are almost alike. The difference lies in their way of conducting but they possess primitive traits. The paper is a humble attempt to establish the point that Girish Karnad in most of his plays found to be revitalizing indigenous philosophy and religion. The author is doing it intentionally or unintentionally, it is a different aspect of the study which has not been touched upon in this paper. This study is an endeavor to manifest the above-mentioned perspective. Ample examples are found which strengthened that his plays re-energized indigenous philosophy and religion. Within the limited scope of this study, only two of his plays have been selected to prove the point, but in many other plays, we find Girish Karnad profusely making use of these aspects. This paper has substantiated by quoting examples from the texts and critical articles that Karnad uses these indigenous roots of India as the building blocks for the plot construction of his plays. His plays have contributed to bringing indigenous philosophy and religion into light in the international arena.

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## Indigeneity and Eco-consciousness in Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy: A Critical Perspective

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*Gunvant Suthar and Seema Bhupendra*

The whole globe is plagued today, with numerous hazardous environmental crises such as climate change, global warming, pollution, depletion of natural resources, infertility of land etc. The development of human civilization metamorphosed into urbanization and modernisation, which further led to colonialism and capitalism. The ghost of colonialism and the spirit of capitalism seem to have irrevocably captured the so-called civilized man's psyche. This obsession sparked anthropocentric attitude in man and he started disregarding the value and significance of the other non-human phenomena. He exercises his high-handedness and takes himself as the master or owner of everything surrounding him. Paradoxically, the tribal people- who still inhabit remote spaces in the forests far away from the humdrum of chaotic mainstream spaces- have always been neglected and marginalised by the so-called civilized society. Even the governments cause upheaval in their lives by driving them away from their natural dwellings/habitats in the name of protection and conservation of flora and fauna with total disregard of tribal ways of living which are conducive enough for ensuring the better thriving of nature and its diverse forms. The way the tribes live is not uncivilized rather it is the most natural way to live in harmony with nature. Nature can satisfy everyone's need but not the greed of the one. Tribal literatures can enlighten the man about the ways of living and his umbilical bonding with nature which has been ripped off in the due course of time his by narrowed anthropocentric tendency. Tribal literatures/oratures in the forms of folksongs, folklores, folkdances, myths and legends are replete with natural and decent ways of living, sharing and caring. These forms of oratures delineate man's intimate connection with nature and its varied forms.

The present paper traces the issues of indigeneity, eco-consciousness and diasporic consciousness in Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy. Amish Tripathi is one of the brightest stars in the galaxy of Indian English writers dealing especially in the genre of mytho-fiction. He is a highly prolific writer with unmatched acumen for his writing-craft. He has earned wide popularity across the globe with the very publication of the first book of his Shiva Trilogy *The Immortals of Meluha* in 2010. The second book in the series, *The Secret of the Nagas* was released in 2011 and the third one *The Oath of the Vayuputras* was published in 2013. The trilogy weaves Myth, history, philosophy, science and technology in a very beautiful, racy and spirited narrative style. Shashi Tharoor comments, "Amish is a fresh new voice in Indian writing steeped in myth and history, with a fine eye for detail and a compelling narrative style." Amish's Shiva Trilogy is unlikely the established discourse. 'Instead of working on the grand style of myth-making, he strips the myth of that archaic resonance. His gods are humanised and his language is lively, racy and elegant' (Mukherjee 2).

Shiva the leader with his Guna tribe had for long inhabited the banks of Mansarovar Lake at the foot of Mount Kailash, Tibet by the time 1900 BC. But he and his tribe people had to be busy battling with Prakratis tribe for their survival. Shiva was fed up by the repeated invasions of the Prakratis. He was much concerned about the safety and well-being of his tribe.

We fight almost every month with the Prakratis just so that our village can exist next to the holy lake. They are getting stronger every year, forming new alliances with new tribes. We can beat the Prakratis but not all the mountain tribes together! (The Immortals of Meluha 3)

Shiva and his tribe had already received invitation from Nandi, the emissary of Meluha. The words of Nandi came flooding back to Shiva, "Come to our land. It lies beyond the great mountains. Others call it Meluha. I call it Heaven. It is the richest and most powerful empire in India. Our government has an offer for immigrants. You will be given



fertile land and resources for farming. Today, your tribe, the Gunas, fight for survival in this rough, arid land. Meluha offers you a lifestyle beyond wildest dreams” (2). This very gesture of Nandi tempts them to relocate themselves in an alien land called Meluha. When the Meluhans help Gunas fight the Prakritis, this very gesture of the Meluhans wins the heart of Shiva and he ponders over accepting the invitation of the Meluhan emissary. But Shiva as a leader never becomes bossy. He gives the due credit to his tribe. He respects their emotions and understands their sensibilities. He lives for them. Shiva says-

I want to go with them to Meluha. But this cannot be my decision alone.

‘You are our chief, Shiva,’ said Bhadra. ‘Your decision is our decision. That is the tradition.’

Not this time . . . . This will change our lives completely. . . . Anything will be better than the pointlessness of the violence we face daily. But the choice to go or not is yours. Let the Gunas speak. This time I follow you. (6)

He always seeks their opinions. He is quite unlikely the modern day community or political leaders who go to any extent to realize their selfish ends with little regards and concerns for their subjects. Shiva exhibits the spirit of collectivism that is inherent in tribal lifestyle. Individualism has no place in his persona. The Gunas’ respect for their leader Shiva is not based on conventions but it is because of Shiva’s sterling persona and character. He has fought for them through thick and thin. They speak in unison, “your decision is our decision” (6). The phenomenon of existing unfavourable conditions and the prospect of better life in an alien space have always lured man to undertake such an odyssey. Hence, they embark on a journey that is going to shape their destiny altogether. Nevertheless this emigration was voluntary and not coerced. Shiva’s march along with his tribe for an alien land Meluha marks a distinct diasporic consciousness. However, ‘this diasporic tribe has a different consciousness in comparison with the traditional feelings of a diasporic community. The honour and respect they have received

make them forgetful of their native homeland. The ideas of displacement, dislocation, alienation, exile, nostalgia, rootlessness, desire for the homeland and identity-crisis are hardly associated with them' (Mukherjee 8). As soon as the Gunas relocate themselves in Meluha as Tibet immigrants, a medicinal healing drink is offered to them with which Shiva's throat turned blue. Meluhans called him Neelkantha, their fabled saviour who will help solve Meluhans' serious problems and resolve conflicts with Chandravanshis.

Shiva is produced before Meluhan King Daksha and here he comes to know about the healing drink Somras which was administered to him and his tribe on their arrival to Meluha. He comes to know that Somras turned his throat blue. It is the Somras which ensures the sound health and longevity of the Meluhans. The king informs Shiva that the Chandravanshis feel jealous of them since they don't have enough Somras and they keep devising plans to destroy Somras and the Meluhans. The king highlights-

One of the key ingredients in the Somras is the waters of the Saraswati. Water from any other source does not work. . . . The scientists can't explain it. . . . That is why the Chandravanshis tried to kill the Saraswati to harm us. . . . They diverted the course of the Yamuna so that instead of flowing south, it started flowing east to meet their main river, Ganga. (110)

The forced manipulation of the natural course of rivers and tussle for river waters in the book echoes the present day water war between India and China. The Sino-Indian water dispute is well-known today. The waters coursing down through the Himalayas are vitally important resource for both the countries. The ever-burgeoning population and economic growth calls for enormous water supply. The river Brahmaputra courses down from Tibet and crosses the border into Arunachal Pradesh but China claims it as Southern Tibet (Ho 24). The misappropriation and misuse of natural resources be it land, rivers, minerals or forests leads to untoward occurring. The reports on China's plan to construct a mega-dam just at the point where the river

Brahmaputra enters India is shocking and alarming. Amish highlights that how an exceptionally enormous amount of water is used for the production of Somras to ensure surplus quantity to meet even the future needs of the Meluhans. Such egocentric practice of the Meluhans backs the anticipation of the out-breaking of World War III over water. Kanakhala, the Prime Minister of Meluha highlights the pathetic condition of river Saraswati. The Saraswati doesn't reach the sea now and ends in an inland delta just south of Rajasthan (112).

The second book of the Shiva Trilogy *The Secret of the Nagas* delineates miserable status of the Nagas. The inhumane, ignominious and inconsolable treatment towards Nagas by the main stream elites is vividly portrayed. The Nagas are physically deformed and ostracized tribes inhabiting dense forests of Panchavati. (The third book clarifies that excess consumption of Somras by the parents caused deformity in their babies even before their birth, in the wombs of their mothers). During his tracking and tracing the whereabouts of Shiva, Ganesha (the Naga) encounters a callous incident. Two Magadhan soldiers tussle with a tribe woman and drag her child away. She becomes the victim of their cold-blooded thrashing. This episode substantiates the mentality of the elites in the society towards the natives and tribes.

In the wild and unsettled lands between the Ganga and Narmada lived scattered tribes of forest people. In the eyes of the civilized city folk living along the great rivers, these tribes were backward creatures because they insisted on living in harmony with nature. While most kingdoms ignored these forest tribes, others confiscated their lands at will as populations grew and need for farmlands increased. And a few particularly cruel ones preyed on these helpless groups for slave labour. (The Secret of the Nagas 34)

These lines resonate the modern day condition and status of the tribes across the globe. The elites look down upon them and consider them as scum, unwanted and uncivilized. They are still exploited. Their meagre resources are encroached and snatched away by the elites and the people in power. This colonial mentality is so deeply ingrained and is still

potent enough to devour humanity and harmony. The text vividly portrays that how the tribal children are kidnapped by the royals/elites for Bull-racing game. "They [the tribal children] would shriek out of fear and their weight was inconsequential. The children would be tied to the beasts. If the bull went down, the boy rider would be seriously injured or killed. Therefore, tribal children were often kidnapped to slave away as riders. Nobody important missed them if they died" (34-35).

To gain more information about the Nagas, Shiva and Sati come to Kashi where a Branga community lives. The Brangas perform a strange ritual by using the blood of peacock. A riot broke out in the wake of the killing of a peacock. In the furore, Parvateshwar, the Meluhan Head of armed forces was badly injured. Divodas, the leader of the Branga community in Kashi provides a herb to heal Parvateshwar's injury. Ayurwati, the Meluhan Chief of Medicine was shocked to find the herb in Kashi. She was terribly stunned as this herb is only available in Panchavati, the capital of the Nagas. When compelled, Divodas divulges that he receives the herb from the Nagas to treat wide spread plague which is adversely affecting his Branga people. This portrayal substantiates the inherent traditional ecological knowledge of the tribes dwelling in nature which could be a great assistance in understanding and tackling environmental crises and impending disasters. This traditional knowledge and eco-culture cannot be ensured if the tribes are driven away.

When realization dawns upon Shiva that the Nagas are not evil, he undertakes a journey to Panchavati through Dandak forest with Kali, the Naga queen and Ganesha, the Lord of the People. Kali enlightens all the tribe members and Meluhan soldiers about Dandakaranya.

That the Dandak forest is largest in the world. That it stretches from the Eastern Sea to the Western Sea. That it is so dense that the sun hardly ever cracks through. That it is populated by monstrous animals that will devour those who lose their ways. That some trees themselves are poisonous, felling those stupid enough to eat or touch things better left alone. (332)

During the course of their journey to Panchavati, Ganesha cuts down many bushes and plants to create a path for the convoy. After having covered the path Ganesha sows seeds of the same plants to ensure replenishment. “The bushes have grown back completely. It’s almost as if they had never been cut” (340). They have high esteem towards natural bounties. Neither do they exploit nor waste or misuse the herbs. They rather ensure the replenishment of the used up herbs and plants. The same concerns echo in Easterine Kire’s novel *When the River Sleeps*, wherein she portrays the indigenous cultural construct of the Tenyimia Nagas, whose harmonious relationship with diverse natural phenomena and non-human forms of life equip them with a distinct knowledge ‘of the natural environment that reflects their concerns for the sustainability of local resources (Satapathy and Bhattacharya 2).

The third instalment of the Shiva Trilogy, *The Oath of the Vayuputras* delineates disastrous portrayal caused by wars and by utter disregard and apathy of humans towards natural phenomena and resources. It exhibits the horrible spectres in the forms of smoky chaotic disruption of the world, dried rivers, polluted atmosphere and water bodies and loss of peace. Brahaspathi, the Meluhan scientist underscores the changed dynamics:

When Somras was being made for just a few thousand, the amount of Saraswati water used didn’t matter. But when we started mass producing Somras for eight million people, the dynamics changed. The waters started getting depleted. . . . The Saraswati has already stopped reaching the western Sea. It now ends its journey in an inland delta, south of Rajasthan. (The Oath of the Vayuputras 17)

Brahapathi further highlights that Somras production “generates large amounts of toxic waste” (18-19). He further elaborates the problem.

It cannot be disposed of on land, because it can poison entire districts through ground water contamination. It cannot be discharged into the sea. The Somras waste reacts with salt water to disintegrate in a dangerously rapid and explosive manner. (19)

Hence, the toxic waste is released into “a river high up in the Himalyas

called Tsangpo, where the Meluhans decide to set up a giant waste treatment facility”(19). The cold water of Tsangpo river dilutes the poisonous impact of the waste to a great degree. However, when the river enters India in the form of Brahmaputra river, the rising temperature reactivates the dormant toxin in the water. As a result it causes plague among Branga people when they consume waters of the Brahmaputra river.

After having studied the repercussions and impacts engendered by Somras manufacturing and its consumption, Shiva decides to destroy the Somras Manufacturing plant by launching nuclear weapons like Brahmastra. Shiva makes proclamation:

I have come to the conclusion that the Somras is now the greatest Evil of our age. All the good that could be wrung out of the Somras has been wrung. It is time now to stop its use, before the power of its Evil destroys us all. It has already caused tremendous damage, from the killing of the Saraswati river to birth deformities to the diseases that plague some of our kingdoms. For the sake of our descendants, for the sake of our world, we cannot use the Somras anymore. (119)

The launching of Brahmastra and Pashupathiastra brought about total destruction of humanity and the environment. Being equipped with missiles and nuclear power can be a cutting edge in the field of defence but its detrimental aspects cannot be overlooked. Today, several countries are equipped with devastating weapons and these fatal arms await an insensible order/command to crumble and collapse the whole globe into something that cannot be recorded, documented, portrayed or depicted in any form.

The paper can be concluded by highlighting the fact that non-human entities are animate enough and they call for our sincere, sensible and caring approach towards them. The paper has shown that how homocentric world view has disrupted the entire ecosystem and ripped off the symbiotic relationship between human and non-human entities. Ecocentrism is the only way to be adopted wherein the nature is the

centre of existence and man is an integral part of it. Man is not the nucleus but a part of this wide ecosystem. Man has always fought for his rights but he never pondered over the rights of nature and its diverse non-human phenomena. Non-human entities have their rights and man must draw a line in order to safeguard their rights because human lease of life can be extended only by ensuring the existence of nature and all non-human forms. In the light of this context indigenous way of living and practices need to be adopted and revered rather than relegating it as something backward. Tribes worship plants, trees, herbs and animals. They have high esteem towards natural bounties. Indigenous way of living has always been ecocentric. They use natural resources minimally and never try to hoard them and thus ensure sustainability. Their knowledge about the medicinal properties of the plants and herbs needs to be treasured and practised. The ray of hope lies in the practice of ecoculture and ethno-eco-culture.

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## Indigenous Indology : Bharat, Civilization, Coloniality and Decoloniality

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*Ashutosh Pandey and Aparna Sharma*

Dr. Girishwar Misra, professor (retired), Department of Psychology, University of Delhi explains that psychology as a modern Discipline was introduced in the Indian system of higher education during the British colonial regime. Its educational policy systematically marginalized the Indian traditions of knowledge and cultural processes from the mainstream academic world. Until recently these two co-existing traditions of psychological knowledge remained in isolation and a scheme of de-contextualized psychology was practiced, nurtured, and maintained. A lack of cultural relevance however has drastically curtailed the potential of Indian psychological research and practice for problem-solving and theoretical innovation. The necessary paradigm shift for true self-rule and ideas however still is a long way to go.

Dr. Vasant Shinde has done extensive research on Saraswati, and he has taken it to a logical conclusion. The research is of high quality excepted by the scholarly world. The textbooks today do not discuss beyond Harrappa and Mohenjodaro, people do not know about Rakhigarhi, Dhaulaveera, and Lothal (these are very important sites in India). Scientific research has been done on the archeology of these regions, but unfortunately, they are not finding a place in the textbooks. And therefore, there is a lot of misunderstanding about the relevance of the civilization. We Indians are connected; we are not disconnected like Europe or America. We have very strong roots and we identify with our roots. For eg, in Rakhigarhi, a village in Haryana, on one side we have modern habitation (ten thousand people living on one side) on the other side we have five thousand to six thousand years old civilization. The people connect themselves to the ancient civilization. We are not detached from that. India and China, have a very long history, the roots



are going back to five thousand to six years, and now even almost nine years. We need to preserve these particular traditions. The basic knowledge, science, and technology that was introduced six thousand years ago and perfected by the Harrappans, a lot of that continues even today. A lot of people are still dependent upon what we call the Indian knowledge system, it is still relevant. The Harrappans had developed such a unique water harvesting and water management system, perhaps the most unique in the world. We don't find a parallel to that. It is found in the sites of Dholaveera. Dholaveera was established in the desert part and Harrappans were well aware of the scarcity of water over there, but they made the arrangements by developing excellent methods. If we apply this indigenous method today over there, the entire Kutch would be a green land. We can put the ancient knowledge system to use and that is very important in today's time.

The concept of nation was started by the Harrappans. In the early Harappan stage, there were several regions or cultures, they were integrated in fact at one stage by 2500 B.C. this huge area had a uniform culture. This integration was achieved by peaceful means. When it comes to empire, we always have the impression that empires are created by forceful means, because we thought that the concept of empire was started or cast in the Mauryan period. But we can see the concept of nation or empire in Harappan times and there is no evidence of violence. Harappans are the founders of Indian culture and tradition because from their onwards there is a lot of continuity. We today have not forgotten the Harappan tradition. When one takes a stroll around the villages in Haryana (Rakhigarhi), one gets the impression that one is moving into a Harappan village. The plan of the village is exactly like the Harappan structure. The material used by the people today is not much different from the Harappans. The earthen pots are exactly similar. One would not be able to identify which one is modern and which is Harappan. The food habits are also the same. The tandoor was the contribution of the Harappans and it is very popular in that region. So there is a lot of continuity from Harappan times. This continuity and tradition has spread all over the country and influenced the culture.

Harappans are the founders of Indian tradition and culture. Dr. Vasant Shinde highlights how some of the modern-day practices were inspired by the ancient Indian civilizations. Ancient Harappans were pioneers in architecture and town planning techniques and now modern societies are following in their footsteps. Dr. Shinde insists on sharing this knowledge on a global scale for the greater benefit. Dr. Vasant Shinde and Dr. Bisht have already written about the relation between the Vedic people and the Saraswati River. Professor Dr. Shinde strongly believes that Harappans were Vedic people. Based on the data generated from this particular region, they have evidence of the beginning of the culture and then that culture had gradually evolved and transformed into civilization at one stage. The Vedic text talks about the river Saraswati and the culture around the river. The text only talks about the Harappans. DR. Bisht and Dr. B.B. Lal have identified the Vedic people with Harappans and the river Saraswati. So there is no doubt about the relation between the Vedic people, the Harappans, and the Saraswati region. They have evidence of the beginning of the culture, and then that culture gradually evolved and transformed into the civilization at one stage, and the Vedic text talks about the river Saraswati and the culture around the river. The text suggests the Harappans. Dr. Shinde and Dr. Lal have also mentioned other criteria by which we can identify the Vedic people with the Harappans and the Saraswati. So there is no doubt about the relation between the Vedic people, the Harappans, and the Saraswati region. In a satellite imagery processing done by the scientists from ISRO and other geologists, it is established that the Saraswati existed and how it was flowing from the foothills of the Himalayas and was traveling India/Pakistan and coming back down into the Kutch region. After 2000 B.C. the settlements are going away from the river bank. This archeological data can give us some hints about the disappearance of the river. There are heavy concentration of Harappans in this region. Out of the total number of sites, nearly two-thirds of the sites are located in the Saraswati basin and not in the Indus basin. Banasvali excavated by Dr. Bhist, and Kalibanga by Dr. Lal have very important evidence of fire worship and other evidence which can be connected with the Rig Vedic text and Rig Vedic people.

Dr. Vasanth Shinde presents the key points of his team's archaeological research at the burial sites of Rakhigarhi. Dr. Shinde outlines that DNA samples had been collected from the sites with utmost care and were subject to genome sequencing, which would have crucial consequences for the identity of the Harappans. He highlights that the nature of the artifacts collected points to the Harappan Civilisation being Vedic in nature.

Rajiv Malhotra was involved in consciousness studies for many years. In the early years of the consciousness studies movement in America, most of the articles and speakers were talking about Vedanta, Hinduism, Buddhism, non-duality, and things that were new to the Western world. Slowly it turned into an academic grade 'Knowledge'. It was brought into the field called consciousness studies. It didn't fit into any particular conventional department, so it was a multidisciplinary approach. Where one studies the effect of yoga, meditation, mindfulness evolution, lucid dreaming (yognindra), the idea of divine feminine, its relation to masculine, tantra, chakra, and other stuff under consciousness studies and not under the academic study of Hinduism. They strictly believe that there is no such thing as Indian philosophy and there is only religion. The very idea that Indians also have a philosophy was not acceptable to the philosophy department. They were more interested in "caste, cows and curries" explains Malhotra. Yoga was evolving and was becoming an industry. Topics like animal rights and the sacredness of the ecosystem were on the boom and yet in the department where Hinduism was studied and taught in the name of consciousness studies, Hindu ideas got narrowed down to anthropology, human rights, male domination, Brahmin domination, and violence against minorities. But people have the right to choose what they study. I am not saying everything is perfect in our culture and tradition and I am not defending it. Every culture has its problems.

A liberal white male or female comes to India, studies Hinduism, practice yoga, goes out for meditation classes, support causes like animal rights, follow vegetarianism, and believes in feminine divinity. For a while they are Hindu, they imitate Sadhus and wear bhagwa clothes and after some time many of them move on and call it new age or being spiritual.

It is quite fashionable today. They take these ideas and remove the identity, brand, history, and ethnicity and try to appropriate it to whiteness. Further, they start blaming and accusing the same tradition for its abusiveness and oppression, which is very much there and there is no doubt about it. I am not becoming an apologist here. And this new knowledge is re-exported to India as American knowledge in the name of consciousness studies.

The term Indology refers to the academic study of India, its people, culture, languages, and literature. It is likely to be referred to as Indian or South Asian studies within Western academies. We are so colonized that much of what we think of ourselves and our heritage is being interpreted elsewhere and taught to us. The whole Aryan invasion theory never existed and there was no concept of Dravidian and Aryans till the mid-eighteen hundreds. Until Max Muller started the Aryan invasion theory and Robert Caldwell the Dravidian Theory, and today it is part of our life. Lord Risley gave us today's version of the caste system. Before that, we had jaati and varna which was way different than Lord Risley's interpretation. Even our history and chronology are reinterpreted by orientalist and indologists. Therefore it's very important to deconstruct the Western interpretations.

The task of political philology has been to teach all civilizations how to break grand narratives. Dr. Devapriya Roy explains that when we read *Natya Shastra* we are breaking our grand narrative from the get-go. The theory of drama is considered to be the fifth Veda and it draws many things from the other four Vedas, like dialogues from Rig Veda and music from Sama Veda, and so forth. The first chapter records the first performance where Bharata and his hundred sons put up the first performance. During the half time of the performance, the performers began to faint because the Asuras were unhappy with their portrayal. So they sent vighnas to disrupt the performance and the very first performance was a flop. What can be a better example of breaking the grand narrative at the very beginning? There are things that you discover in Sanskrit texts that completely change the way you look at tradition and provide a much more rigorous inquiry.

Today no one questions and challenges the American age of academics. We all take it for granted. Indology has suffered a big time due to post-colonialism. It questions many of the problems and inbuilt structures of power and inequality that came with Whiteman translating the texts for the natives. We have failed to pay serious academic attention to the rise of the American appropriate model; this model has emerged hand in hand with globalization. They set the standards against which everything elsewhere must be measured. They say in the West – publish or perish. Unless something is translated by an American scholar, a text cannot reach a wider global audience. The text suffers the violence to become that which the Western audience appreciates is the subject of silence.

The nexus of power and knowledge has always been of concern, in the free world, everyone has a right to say anything, but this happens from just one side and the gaze is never turned to the other side. A book on criticism of American history written and published in our country can effect change at the highest level in America? The answer is most probably NO says Dr. Roy. She further explains how the Western world is completely closed to the idea of deligatory ownership of its history and culture to others while at the same instance taking ownership of everybody else's history.

Rajiv Malhotra says that we need to decolonize the mind and the Indology because that decolonization will bring back the adhikaar, so we can re-imagine ourselves. Malhotra further says that this criticism is not limited to Westerners, Indians with Western education have also adopted this vision. Indians are alienated from their culture, history, and heritage. They feel ashamed of their past. How did this happen? We were closer to our roots during the British period. After independence, we decided to follow the British and become sahibs. This was our idea of excellence or superiority and an attempt to move ahead of them. This is a big problem today; a group of our countrymen is determined to bring down our own local domestic indigenous viewpoint by calling them nationalist and extremist.

During the time of the British era there was a lens of evangelism and

then came the lens of capitalists. Today Marxism is the dominant viewpoint. Although Marx arrived in the eighteen hundreds, the Empire did not sponsor it because the British did not want the upheaval or revolution of the masses.

Indology with its variations was not a part of the Marxist enterprise, but it has become so. Marxism has imported many Western theories and ideas and used them in the study of Indian society. Evangelists categorize what is equal to the priest, scripture, place of worship, liturgy, and congregation. Now the Marxists are trying to include the Indian system in their categories; Malhotra explains. This is not a left or right issue; one can not characterize the Indian system as left or right. There is a lot of egalitarianism in our culture. There have been Bhakti movements and many saviors of under underprivileged. We have a great ability in ourselves and without importing anything and seeking permission from outside we can change. I am not denying that we have many problems but we can also find solutions and self-correct ourselves.

Our people have made adivasis to remain and stay at the level of domestic help. They have made them redundant as if they are not good enough to be mainstreamed. We should be proud of our ancestry; it's perfectly okay to make a living out of providing food on the table or anything of that sort. We have to raise our thinking patterns and standards. The Adivasi voice has to be heard and accepted. They have such beautiful literature and it's the story of our ancestors. We have to fall in love with their language as it is the real source of our language. Their writings may not meet the literary and scholarly standards, but the idea is to have real, authentic information around. They are the living documents of our rich and varied culture and heritage. They might not have the modern tools to read and write, but it's not their fault and silence is not their language for sure. The day Britishers stepped into our lands, since that day adivasis were in a constant battle with them. The first trumpet for independence was bravely blown by our Adivasi brothers way before 1857.

The ancient system of knowledge has survived in the presence of the

colonial influence. That system of knowledge was not limited to one specific community as has been stated by some of the scholars. We had a system that created an interaction with the people, the exact word is *loka*, which is the masses. So the process of culture which includes the transmission of the meaning as well as the processes that incorporate that kind of knowledge, one may use the word vernacular, but the Indian scenario, particularly the linguistic scenario is very complex, we have more than a thousand languages and prominent twenty-two languages and they have literature, so all that has contributed to the growth of understanding which was shared, the term which is frequently implies is folk knowledge, and it is considered to be of lower order but it is possible to understand that there has been interaction between the system of knowledge which is in the text and the way it has been practiced. So there has been an interaction between the two explains Professor Dr. Misra.

The ancient Indian system of knowledge was inclusive. It dealt with physical reality but it extended to the inner world, the exact term is *Para and Aparā Vidhyā*. This system of knowledge had an inclusive paradigm, which had methods dealing with empirical reality but it also included understanding of higher mental processes, consciousness, and issues about the dynamics of mental life. The ancient civilization is still vibrant in some way and it has continued for thousands of years. The term India is very new, with roughly two hundred years of colonial rule by the British and our system of thinking and practices have been deeply influenced by that way of their organization. It is very difficult to go back, so for better and healthy communication with others in a contemporary world and situation, to handle international challenges, we can't live in isolation. India has to contribute by creating a blend of texts where Indian authors and Indian words are also included. Today the framework is Western and it is considered universal, so awareness is required for a paradigm shift. The option of the *Bhartiya* tradition can address the challenges of the Euro-American mainstream. The culture should be the source of knowledge and not a mere target.

## Decolonization and Foregrounding of Indigenous Culture and Tradition: Selected Indo-Canadian Plays

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*Neelu Tiwari*

“Dramatists have a right to look at history and interpret in the way they see it,” said Oliver Stone.

We all know and understand that life is a harmonious blend of social, cultural, economic and political structures. Dysfunctioning of any of these hampers the development of society and individual as a whole.

Indigenous societies have suffered a lot as a result of colonialism. Therefore, the foremost task of all the indigenous communities is to keep enlightened themselves with an assertion of national and individual identity in the post-colonial world. Decolonization is a process of returning to one’s roots and revival of local culture and tradition. In, almost, all the post-colonial societies the onus of getting back to one’s roots has successfully been carried out by the indigenous writers. Their writings serve as a bridge between indigenous traditions and the English-speaking world, allowing for cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. These indigenous writers not only challenge and subvert dominant western paradigms of literature but also provide a platform for marginalized voices to be heard, acknowledged, and respected.

Indigenous writers serve as advocates for cultural preservation and decolonization. Their writings, in fact, are a tool for resistance, resilience, and healing within indigenous communities. They have emerged as powerful story tellers and cultural ambassadors to challenge colonial narratives and explore their own complexities of indigenous identities and promote cultural revitalization and decolonization.



History says, with experience, that colonization of any nation does not restrict itself to the political boundaries only rather it encroaches its cultural and social value system too. This results into unprecedented change in not only social and cultural ethos but also the traditional arts and crafts of the colonized. In all the post-colonial societies, the process of decolonization demands the return to roots and revival of the local culture and tradition.

Canada and India resemble each other in this regard. Both share the same post-colonial status along with their own distinct cultures and colonial histories. Distinct cultural societies, with a strong presence of indigenous traditions, culture and ethos, which was once subjugated by the dominant alien culture, make them feel like one. Time and again both the nations have put in their endeavours to retrieve the indigenous treasure of culture and traditions.

The post-colonial societies of both Canada and India, however, faced another onslaught of cultural invasion in the form of neo-colonization by the American superpower. India, though geographically situated at a greater distance from America, is no less affected on account of the Globalization process via satellite transmission. Eugene Benson quotes:

. . . ninety six per cent of television drama in Canada is foreign, largely American; ninety seven per cent of film is foreign, largely American; ninety per cent of record and tapes sales is foreign, largely American; seventy per cent of book and magazines sales is foreign, largely American. (Benson 59)

The above quote aptly fits in not only for Canada but for every nation of the world facing the Mc Donaldization or KFC or V-Martization of their culture. Therefore, a voice is needed for breaking the barriers and amplifying the indigenous voices and paving the way for future generation. In Canada, the native Canadian writers contributed, through Cultural and Literary movements, to free themselves of the Imperialist ideology and thus, retain their national identity

As the oral transmission of the cultural and traditional history is almost on the verge of extinction so the attempt of the native writers to bring

forth their indigenous identity to centre and preserve their culture and tradition is commendable.

Tomson Highway the Cree writer, is the prominent Canadian dramatist, in this regard, who shared aboriginal experiences in the mainstream Canadian stage with the performance of the play *The Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*.

*The Rez Sisters* launched Highway's career as a notable and influential playwright in Canada, and earned him a Dora Mavor Moore Award in 1987. The play was initially performed only in indigenous communities, but then moved to major stages across the country.

*The Rez Sisters* tells the story of seven Aboriginal women at the fictional Wasaychigan Hill Indian reserve. The word 'Rez' comes from 'Reserve'. The plot of the play revolves around the Bingo game – "The Biggest Bingo in the World". The ultimate goal of the seven sisters, in the play, is to try hard to gather sufficient money to participate in this game and they dream of transforming their lives and hardships by winning this game. Along with the seven indigenous characters was another male character- the Nanabush who is part of the Aboriginal mythology. Highway once said, "We grew up with myths. They're the core of our identity as people" (172).

The Legend of Nanabush Nanabush is a trickster figure in Native American mythology, as central as Christ is in Christian stories. Nanabush goes by many names and can assume any guise he chooses. In *The Rez Sisters*, he appears as both a seagull – a spiritual guide who observes and enters into the action of this life — and a nighthawk – a warning of death and a guide to the spirit world. He is the bridge between this world and the next, a messenger from the Great Spirit, and a teacher of the nature and meaning of existence. According to the playwright, "some say that Nanabush left this continent when the White Man came. We believe he is still here among us – albeit a little worse for wear – having assumed other guises. Without him – and without the spiritual health of this figure – the core of Indian culture would be gone forever."

Highway includes a note on Nanabush in the sequel to this play, *Dry Lips*, which follows seven men from the same reserve. Nanabush, he says, is “. . . as pivotal and important a figure in our world as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology. . . . Essentially a comic, clownish sort of character, his role is to teach us about the nature and the meaning of existence . . .”(12).

Highway sees Nanabush as one of his artistic goals as re-acquainting Native people with their own mythologies, which were “almost destroyed or . . . obliterated by the onslaught of missionaries.”

The play ends in a grim reality in which the women’s journey reaches. The narrative blends the unfiltered vision of life with tinges of humour in harmony with Aboriginal spirituality. The language of the play also includes portions of Cree and Ojibway dialects. First Nation Terms used in the Play:

Wasaychigan (Ojibway): window Nee (Cree): Oh, you Awas (Cree): Go away Astam (Cree): Come Anishinaabe (Ojibway): Native people Ojibway song lyrics: “Heaven, heaven, heaven, I’m going there.”(<https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/rez-sisters>)

*The Rez Sisters* thus asks many of its implied readers to deal with an unfamiliar context (the reserve), unfamiliar languages (Cree and Ojibway), unfamiliar mythologies (Nanabush), and the lives and concerns of people who they might not otherwise encounter on the Canadian stage. Through the story of these indigenous characters Highway problematises the indigenous identity, thus offering a critique of the native life and culture. He affirms the Red Indian values and mythology in his plays .

The so called ‘Cultural Renaissance’ left its mark on post-colonial Indian Literary scene also. Among the various factors, responsible for the unsatisfying growth of Indian English Drama, one of them, as suggested by Iyengar, is the lack of a living theatre and enthusiastic audience. Another constraint is the English language as English is not the mother tongue of India which is a great barriers before the actors and the audience. Supriya Shukla finds: “the inherent inadequacy of the English

language to express temperaments, sensibilities, and realities which are essentially Indians” (9).

However, Indian drama has flourished in regional languages and Indian English Drama, in a translation of it, to a great extent. But with the advent of talking films in 1930, this genre faced its downfall. Films provide more refined entertainment at the cheaper rates. The performances of Indian English Drama have also been affected by regional drama. As Savita Goel says,

During 1960s, dramatists pondered over a significant question, i.e. how to draw upon the various strands in the traditional theatre—some of which had lost contact with urban civilization during the colonial era and many of which seemed deeply rooted in religious sensibility—so as to revitalize and enrich their own work. (204)

As opposed to Canada, Indian mythology is based on written textual tradition rather than oral. Thus, it survived through time and colonial influences. Despite all this, a lot of Indian folk tales and traditions, that are part of the rich cultural ethos of the country, need to be preserved from extinction. Modern Indian Dramatists, definitely, have taken the cause in their hands.

Girish Karnad is one such contemporary dramatist who was well aware of the challenges which Indian playwrights had to face after independence. He belongs to the post-colonial breed of writers and his plays display a rich sensibility of Indian tradition, myths, folk-lore and legends. His genius lies in the fact that he draws a parallel between antiquity and contemporariness. Tutun Mukherjee comments, “Karnad has made available the rich resources of both the Great and the Little tradition, the classical and the folk elements of Indian literature” (134).

Girish Karnad’s genius lies in the fact that he draws a parallel between antiquity and contemporariness. He explored new horizons to enhance the Indian English Drama. It is through his plays that Modern Indian English Drama gets new ways to address social and individual issues. His plays like *Yayati*, *Hayavadana* and *Nagamandal* are based on history, myths and legends. In Sanskrit plays there have been the uses

of Nandi, Bhagavat, masks, puppets and the like. He believed in staging the Sanskrit plays with historical and mythical set-up so that the audience can connect with them. Girish Karnad “went back to myths and legends and made them a vehicle of a new vision” (Dodiya 44). His use of the complex cultural fabric of India, to discover less known and obscure myths, is significant to understand the contemporary and to relate them to the chosen story.

Karnad picks up the myth but uses only the relevant part of it in his plays. Myths and mask provide a rich texture to his plays and at the same time enhance the knowledge of the viewers about our ancient scriptures. In *Yayati*, Karnad presents the age-old story of the mythological king who, as a result of a sage’s curse grows old before time and in his longing for eternal youth, borrows the vitality of his own son. Karnad borrowed the myth from the Mahabharata, the story of Yayati revolves, thus, in the epic manner. Apart from the *Pauranic* mythology upon which the play is based, Karnad has employed the character of *Sutradhar*, modelled on the narrator –commentator of folk theatre, who informs the audience about the theme as well as the mythical origin of the play.

In *Hayavadana* Karnad employs the story of Devdatta and Kapila which is based on a tale from Thomas Mann’s *The Transposed Heads*. Originally sourced from *Vetal Panachavimshati* and Somdeva’s *Brihat Katha Sritsagara*, Karnad’s *Hayavadana* deals with the complex human relationships and man’s longing for perfection. In other words, the mythic in *Hayavadana* aims at transformation of the fractured self into a composite whole.

*Hayavadana* is structured on typical *Yakshganaplay*. Here, Karnad shows that there is a man having horse head, Devadatta and Kapila after transposing their heads, lost their identities. The play starts with invocation of Lord Ganesha, the presiding deity of traditional theatre. The worship of Ganesha is, actually, a symbol of ‘incompleteness’ and theme of the play is the quest for ‘completeness’. Through the character of Bhagvata, the narrator-commentator, singing verses in the praise of the deity, the central theme of the play is also revealed:

An elephant's head on a human body, a broken tusk and a cracked belly-whichever way you look at him he seems the embodiment of imperfection, of incompleteness. (Karnad)

The manner in which Bhagvata narrates the story is also in keeping with the style adopted from a folk-lore. The supernatural, the Goddess Kali, is also used as a device. She is 'terrible' in appearance but is given all the characteristics of a human being. The other theatrical devices, extensively used, are masks and dolls for portraying both human and non-human characters along with chorus, mime, painted curtains, props supernatural elements, etc.

Thus, Hayavadana is also a bold experiment in dramatic technique. The way Karnad handles the sources of his plot is interesting as he makes substantial changes in the originals by interpreting the ancient Indian myth in his own way. It also indicates a bold attempt at investing an old legend with a new meaning which has an urgent relevance to present day thinking about man and his world.

The play *Nagamandal* is a mythological play based on a folk tale and the snake myth. The play though uses the elements of folk lore yet questions the patriarchal codes of society and deals with the modern concepts of repression.

Keeping in mind the setting and structure of the play and taking in account the different narrative levels, Indian mythology and symbolism inherent in the stories, the whole play can be encompassed in a complete mandala in a graphic form. Graphic representation of the play *Nāga-Mandala* includes :

1) **Square.** Base of the ruined temple, 2) **First circle.** Ring of the Flames, 3) **Second circle** Acoustic wave of the song, 4) a. **Upward triangle:** Kurudavva-Rani-Appana, 4) b. **Downward triangle:** Appana-Rani-Cobra, 4)c. **Inner triangle:** The triple endings of the play. S. Govindappa in his research paper has rightly explained that – “The graphic representation of this play *Nagamandala*, which comprises of the geometrical figures such as a square, the circles and the triangles complement each other and lead to the required balance of the centrifugal and centripetal forces of a mandala.”

By the use of myths that have timeless relevance and are a part of the consciousness of a people, Karnad's plays establish a contextual continuity with the best works in world literature. His work defies the western culture and the playwright employs it for his benefit. Thus the plays of Girish Raghunath Karnad are imbued with Social, Existentialism, Feminism, and Elements of Myth.

Both the Canadian writers like Tomson Highway and Girish Karnad have contributed immensely to foreground the indigenous culture and tradition through the use of folk tales, myths, legends, and the form used in folk theatre. Each has, in his own unique manner and style, helped in re-affirming and establishing the national identity firmly on the contemporary ground of foreign cultural influences and invasion.

Life comes full circle with complete overall development of various aspects. Thus, the impact of the above two playwrights, though confined to their specific regions, helps in understanding and accepting their history which, in turn, contributes to the decolonization of their literary canons.

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## Representation of 'Folk' and 'Culture': A Selective Study of Vijay Dan Detha's *Baatanri Phulwari (Garden of Tales)*

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*Seema Sharma*

Vijaydan Detha (Bijji) has established a unique presence in the realm of fiction through his patience, writing style, and imaginative use of colours. Initially, he pursued writing in Hindi language, but eventually, he decided to return to his hometown and dedicate himself to compiling and creating works in 'Rajasthani'. In *Baatan Ri Phulwari*, he undertook the task of compiling and reimagining folk tales in the Rajasthani language. The initial stories were transcribed as they were heard, but as he delved further into the genre, his creative abilities became more polished and refined. Expressing his views on these stories of Bijji, Prabhakar Shrotriya says - "The biggest success of Vijaydan Detha is that he keeps the soul of the folk tale alive and recreates it in such a way that even the citizen or intellectual can enjoy it."

Bijji has established a unique presence in the realm of fiction through his patience, writing style, and imaginative use of colours. The literary themes and styles within these folk tales are diverse and expansive. The inclusion of sub-stories within longer narratives highlights the interconnectedness between stories. Characters from various societal backgrounds are depicted as the heroes of these folk tales. He possesses a colloquial language that is readily comprehensible to readers. In his stories, animals, plants, and even inanimate objects have been given human characteristics. Riddles hold a significant position in storytelling, serving as a highly enjoyable method to stimulate the logical reasoning of the audience. The narratives are infused with the customs, vibrancy, cuisine, and celebrations relevant to the area. Consequently, these stories, which were originally shared orally, have been given a voice through



the collective memory, traditions, and interests of the people, encompassing literary, social, and historical aspects. In the composition of the stories, coherence, continuity and sequence of events, incarnation of the character is often realistic and the integration of opposite elements, psychology in personal prestige has been their main concern.

As Detha rewrote the tales, he combined elements of oral folk tradition with modern written literary traditions to ensure that his audience could connect to narratives set in a different time. “While he included an invocation and a *chougou* and adopted a narrative voice that was more story tellerish than authorial, his descriptions and plots were much more elaborate and involved” (Merrill, *Riddles* 68) The *chauga*, a “signature of Rajasthani oral convention” (Merrill, *Are We the Folk* 24) was used by the author to transport the audience from the present space into a fictitious world of the story. It predominantly takes the form of couplets and poetic lines, serving the purpose of captivating the audience’s attention and piquing their curiosity before delving into the story. Many *chaugas* possess didactic qualities, imparting ethical life experiences, while others evoke sentimentality or depict social inequalities and some reflect a blend of supernaturalism and fantasy. (Reena 235)

Detha seems like a preacher in the *chauga* of the story titled “The Winds of Time” as he says:

No god like time.

No brother like time.

No journey like time.

No shadow like time.

No doer like time.

No under like time.

The drums of time.

The leela of time.

Tales of time. Change with time. (Detha 3-4)

The story depicts the change of the time with the farmer who found seven pots of gold mohurs while digging his land. As the land was not his own, he decided to give it to landlord. When landlord refused to take after logical arguments with the farmer, landlord ask to call for panchayat.

Panchayat's decision was in favour of the farmer. After disagreement with the panchayat's decision, farmer went to the king, and king also supported the decision made by panchayat. His honesty does not allow him to take money and he put it back to earth again. But the later generations of farmer and landlord fought for them and killed each other and the wealth was taken by the king. The story depicts the wind of change, from honesty to dishonesty, from loyalty to disloyalty, from truth to lie and from weak to strong.

The story 'Leaf and the Pebble' represents the bond of friendship, the desire of love and attachment of every human being. Everyone wants to be together. The pebble tries to save leaf from thunder and storm but both perishes in the journey. The journey presents a good example for humans to stay with each other even in difficult times. "The Dove and the Snake" ('KamediArSarp'), Dove protects her children by killing the snake with the help of a swallow and a crow. It explores the timeless struggle between the forces of power and innocence. In this tale, the dove represents both innocence and powerlessness, while the snake embodies evil and lethal strength. The dove endures constant torment from the snake, constantly seeking refuge but realizing that escaping evil is a futile endeavour. The snake relentlessly pursues the dove, regardless of where it seeks shelter. Eventually, the dove seeks the assistance of a mongoose to overcome the snake's threat. This narrative is rich in symbolism and carries elements of Marxist ideology (Balbir 758). It emphasizes the need for the powerless to unite, as demonstrated by the collaboration between the dove, the crow, and the mongoose in the story.

In the story 'Akal Ujagar Aek Meendka Ki', a frog saves his life from a crow with his cleverness. The tales of 'Hansi Rao Myanau', 'Akal SariraanUpaj Hai', 'SyalRi Akal Ar Singha Rao Bal', 'Syal Rau Nyav', 'Akal UjagarAekSusiyaRi', and others, depict instances where individuals cleverly and intelligently save themselves from perilous situations, thus evading death. These narratives of Bijji serve as a source of inspiration, encouraging us to confront challenges by employing wit and intellect, rather than succumbing to despair.

In DK, Detha uses Kabir's voice to express his opinions about society, religion, class based discrimination, and status acquired by wealth. (Mrinalini 12). The story depicts that without wisdom and knowledge is meaningless. Kabir recognizes that all these various genres of literature lack substance, suggesting that knowledge holds no value without wisdom. It is merely a disguise, a shield that individuals, be it religious leaders, rulers, or ordinary individuals, employ to safeguard their ignorance and arrogant beliefs. Blind adherence to customs and regulations that have been established for centuries is nothing but a charade. Detha skillfully alludes to the social divide, caste bias, and oppression of women through the portrayal of a weaver and a princess (Rajkumari).

"Duvidha" serves as a testament to a woman's yearnings and ambitions to secure a respected position in her life partner's life. The central character, the bride, exudes vitality, and her innocent desires are represented by the Ber or Daloo fruit (a small, round shrub fruit) in the narrative. However, her hopes are dashed when she discovers that her husband intends to leave her for business immediately after their wedding. In a conversation, the groom asserts that just as God never miscalculates the breaths of a living being, a businessman cannot fail in his calculations. "Bijji" highlights the disparities between the realms of men and women, subtly insinuating that God, too, is male and calculative. A woman's world transcends calculations, as her emotions reign supreme. She grapples with unanswered questions, and the ongoing "Dilemma" revolves around Gold versus Humanity, Money versus Life. Ghost symbolizes a woman's hidden identity, aspirations, and dreams, which society has not acknowledged (Shrivastava 21). The woman's position is depicted when the bride acknowledges to herself that she could discover a spot within her mother's womb, yet her father's courtyard could not retain her for an extended period.

In the story 'Bhiksha Rao Chukaraun', a Brahmin, after being cheated by his wife, lives the life of a saint and vows that he will never repeat the same betrayal to anyone else. Many women are fascinated by his appearance while he is begging. But he considers everyone like his sister and mother. When the merchant's daughter-in-law praises the

sadhu's eyes and calls them a hindrance in meeting God, then the next day the sadhu takes out his eyes and gives them away. The merchant's daughter-in-law regrets her actions and says, "You lost your eyes to open mine." The story begins naturally with the Brahmin making a living by begging, but due to the insistence of the situation, the story ends with the daughter-in-law praising the sage's eyes and considering them an obstacle in attaining God. A new problem enters existence, because of which the original plot automatically gets distorted. Finally, the story ends on a tragic note with the daughter-in-law's conversation.

In the story 'Beta RiSarbara', a tradesman sees a thief entering his house. Along with his wife, he thinks of a way to catch the thief. Sethani and Bania discuss among themselves the false story of the loss of their child 12 years ago. The thief comes posing as his son. After spending the whole night talking about his hospitality, they get the thief caught in the morning.

The narrative 'Ba Bemata Ra Lekh' commences by highlighting the esteemed reputation of a wealthy individual named Mayapati and his benevolence. Right from the outset, readers are provided with insights into Seth's character. Indra, feeling envious of Seth's renown, perceives his own position of power to be at risk. The child approaches his mother and offers prayers. The Brahmin, who recites the Bhagwat Katha on behalf of Seth, becomes aware of the significance of honouring the child's mother and documenting the destinies of Seth's offspring. Utilizing his foresight, the Brahmin imparts advice to the children, urging them not to succumb to their circumstances, ultimately leading to the erasure of the writings penned by the motherless woman. In this tale, the narrative unfolds from Seth's life brimming with prestige and affluence, progressing harmoniously. Suddenly, an incident transpires where the motherless woman inscribes the destinies of Seth's children. Simultaneously, the story diverges into two paths. Seth's family teeters on the brink of collapse while grappling with adverse circumstances, yet the tides turn favourably due to the counsel bestowed by the Brahmin. Consequently, the family is reunited.

In these stories of Bijji, there is a feeling of cheerfulness along with humanity, natural and simple vibration. He takes the story forward in a more straightforward path. The hero of the stories remains steadfast on his true path despite being surrounded by opposing forces. As a result, his truth wins. In this way, coherence, chronology, and inspiration of coincidental events in the structure of the plot of his stories, inclusion of real and contradictory elements in the incarnation of the character, psychology in personal prestige have been their main basis.

In the tale ‘Kaeilugaibanaitourowtaudhabun’, there existed an upright man who tragically lost his mother, father, and sister all within the same year. As he grieved, those around him attempted to console him by saying, “We are like your parents and sisters.” He would fall silent, unable to find solace in their words. However, when his beloved wife passed away, his tears flowed incessantly, and no amount of consolation could bring him any respite. It was then that everyone questioned why he had not cried as much when his parents and sister had died. What had changed? In response, he explained that when his parents had passed, everyone had claimed to take their place. Yet, when his wife died, no one uttered the words, “I am in the place of your wife.” Only if someone were to say this, would he weep and find solace in silence. In Bijji’s stories, his emotions are heightened and refined, influenced by both his own experiences and the circumstances of others. He skilfully weaves the fabric of sympathy, breathing life into the oral tradition of fiction by adorning it with captivating proverbs. These stories vividly and engagingly depict events, as well as the expression of emotions and thoughts, establishing a direct connection with the masses.

The tale ‘Veer Arthoonlthoon’ gained popularity among the masses due to its realistic, alluring, and enchanting depiction of girls joyfully swinging during the Teej festival. Prabhusha’s portrayal in the story beautifully exemplifies the deep affection humans have for festive celebrations. The narrative effectively captures the essence of these beliefs. Vijaydan Detha’s literary creations are renowned for their abundant incorporation of folk elements, encompassing mythical beings, indigenous traditions, superstitious practices, and age-old convictions. His narratives frequently

delve into a wide array of themes, including love, longing, purity, shrewdness, sagacity, foolishness, avarice, deception, integrity, bravery, and the deceptive nature of authority.

## Conclusion

The biggest specialty of Bijji's folk stories is that through them the reader reaches the vibrant world of the villages of Rajasthan and experiences various poignant scenes. They present a world in a coordinated manner with these scenes. The use of simple colloquial folk language and idioms is found in his speaking style. He uses simple, clear, pictorial language that is vibrant and full of form and colour. Readers are swept away by the strong flow of his language. His 'Baata Ri Phulvari' contains all the traditional (saying) elements and proves mental level, emotions, character all are important in folk tales. The idioms and chogas adds to their interestingness and uniqueness. By expanding the meaning of the stories, they prove their existence. There is a deep connection between work and conversation. The variety of rhythm and structure of the stories expresses the variety of psychological depth of the people. "The meaning is a traditional element of folk stories. The content of folk art is presented by the intended subject and a form is given to it by the subject" (137). He breathed life into the skeletons he received—fleshing out the frame with modifiers, idiomatic language, and a conversational tone; creating motives for action; infusing the characters with psychological motifs; and maintaining a rustic tone (Merrill, *Are We the Folk* 148).

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## Cultural (Re) presentations of *Alpana*: Evolution of Indigenous Forms of Geocentric and Collective Art

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*Neelanjana Basu*

India has a rich and varied indigenous tradition of floor paintings used for religious or occult rituals. *Alpana* is an indigenous household art form practiced by women in Bengal and Eastern India as the aesthetic aspect of the *vrata* rituals, i.e. rituals performed as an expression of a vow taken for the well-being of the individual, family, society and the earth, usually accompanied by fasting and abstinence. While *vratakathas* may be seen as primitive expressions of indigenous oral literature, consisting of songs and doggerel verse telling a story, their visual representations in the form of *alpana* offer a mimetic portrayal of the same. This paper aims to study the changing socio-economic and cultural dimensions of *alpana* as expression of geocentric and collective consciousness and trace the evolution of this cultural practice in terms of its dynamic re-presentations and reinventions into other cultural formations and art forms in the age of globalisation.

The origin of the art of floor decoration in India can be traced to the ancient times of the Indus Valley civilization (Gupta). However the practice of this art has come to be invested with culture-specific meanings in different parts of our country. Known by varied names such as *aripan* in Bihar and *jhuti* in Orissa, this visual art “forms a common thread that unites the innumerable cultures of India, peoples who are otherwise divided by race, language, caste, religion and occupation” (Huyler 19). Though *alpana* bears some similarities with sister arts like *rangoli* (practiced in Maharashtra and very popular all over India, especially during Diwali or Onam), *kolam* (South India), *likhnu* (Himachal Pradesh), *pakhamba* (Manipur) or *mandana* (Rajasthan), each of these



regional art forms possesses unique characteristics in terms of medium, technique, motifs, context of creation and cultural significance, derived from the place to which it belongs. For example, traditionally *alpana* is not a daily practice as in *kolam* of South India, but rather occasioned by festivals, rituals or social occasions and comprises designs drawn on the floor or courtyard, traditionally with freshly ground rice and water, as opposed to coloured powder used in *rangoli*.

The technique of creating *alpana* is also different. According to critics, linguistic roots of the word may be traced to the Sanskrit word ‘*alimpan*’, which means ‘to plaster with fingers’, which distinguishes the technique of *alpana* from that of other art forms produced with brush or other tools. While some linguists have argued in favour of the “non-Aryan” roots of this word which was later Sanskritised (Dutta), alternative origins of *alpana* have been traced to the vernacular word ‘*ailpona*,’ meaning the art of creating ‘*ail*’ or an embankment, since these indigenous cultural forms were also expected to protect the dwelling or the community from danger. In the tribal culture of the Santhals, *alpana* is marked by mystical geometric patterns drawn on floors and walls of houses, to ward off evil spirits. The beautiful patterns of *alpana* are created by a tiny piece of cloth or cotton dipped in diluted rice paste moving between the nimble fingers. The white patterns drawn on the floor look magical after a little while, as the water evaporates leaving a dried pattern of rice flour. Since this is a transient art form that may be washed away by water or blown away by the wind as soon as the rice paste dries up, philosophically *alpana* is a reminder of our ephemeral existence on earth and celebrates the beauty of the evanescent.

Akin to spontaneous artistic expressions such as cave paintings of primitive humans, *alpana* had been “celebrated from far-off ages” (Chatterji 5). Primitive cultures such as Egyptian and Mexican tribes who “associate with or ascribe to nature or natural objects superhuman or supernatural elements” (Das 14) would worship cosmic forces and the seasonal cycle of Nature through rituals similar to the ones practiced in Bengal. Abanindranath Tagore in his *Bānglār Vrata*, the first systematic attempt to theorise *vrata alpana* as a cultural form in the

nineteenth century, views it as an indigenous product of primitive religious impulse and desire for aesthetic creation which flourished long before its appropriation and institutionalisation by Puranic Hinduism (Tagore 39). The *alpana* was seen as a “visual form of magic” (Kramrisch 107) practiced by communities of women to evoke the magical powers of the Earth and Mother Nature.

The power of *alpana* lies in its creative spontaneity, since the motifs and designs are primarily imitative of nature and everyday experiences, while invested with symbolic and mythical values at the same time. The designs usually consist of floral or geometric patterns like circle, triangle or square, each invested with mystical significance. Since amongst various traditions of floor painting practiced in India, the ‘*vallari pradhan* (floral based)’ designs predominate in the areas around the Gangetic plains, the patterns of the *alpana* commonly feature motifs of nature. Flowers like the lotus, with occult meanings associated with the number of petals, ordinary plants, creepers and flowers found locally constitute some of the recurrent motifs of *alpana*. As Shastri argues, the *vrata alpana* aimed to “evoke, recreate and sustain the life-bestowing/life generating forces. Nature was rendered tangible through composite symbolic images and gestures” (Shastri 5).

As an indigenous cultural practice, *vrata alpana* is most popular amongst agrarian communities, since it is a ritual celebration of the powers of the earth, fertility, abundance and prosperity. It is a collective expression of prayer to invoke the blessings of the cosmic forces like the sun, the wind and the rains. Most of the *vratas* bear a close relationship with seasonal cycles, the sowing and harvesting of crops and the *alpana* visually embodies the veneration for the earth and nature as sources of sustenance and protection. This geocentric cultural practice is also perceived as an example of *bhutayajna*, i.e. the human householder’s duty toward lower creatures of the earth, since the rice flour or paste was meant to be an offering to insects and other living beings. Therefore *alpana* is also an expression of ecological consciousness, since it stands for ecological harmony existing between humans and animals.

Attuned to changing seasons, each *vrata* tells a story through collective recitation of songs and doggerel verse complemented by visual storytelling through the *alpana*. *Alpanas* drawn on the occasion of *Prithibi Vrata* (the vow for the earth) observed by maidens from the last day of the Bengali month *Chaitra* to the last day of *Vaisakha* celebrate the powers of the earth and the harmonious relationship existing between women and the earth. In its invocation of the rains as well as a fertility ritual, the earth goddess is invited to reside in the magical diagram of the lotus drawn for this purpose. The *Purnipukur Vrata* (the vow for lakes and ponds) is performed by young unmarried girls hoping for good rains and fertility of the soil, usually during the summer month of *Baishakh* (between April and May) before the advent of monsoon. The *alpana* consists of recurring pattern of conch shells. Tagore points out the similarity between the rituals performed at the times of drought by the ancient Mexican Huichol tribe, descended from the Aztecs living in the Sierra Madre Mountains and the rain-bringing rituals of the *vrataalpanas* in Bengal, especially the *Purnipukur vrata* (14). The Huichols are known to draw the central image of the sun along with mountains, crop fields and rains on a round earthen plate for magical invocation of rains on the earth.

Similarly, the *Vasudhara brata* (the vow for the earth) articulates the community's prayer for good rains. These *vratas* evolved in Birbhum, Burdwan, Bankura and Purulia districts of Bengal, at a time when the agrarian economy of Bengal was entirely dependent on the caprices of the rainy season and this art form embodied a collective prayer addressed to the cosmos. One of the popular doggerel rhymes of the *Vasudhara brata* runs thus: "*Ganga Ganga Indra Chandra Varun Vasuki/ Tin kule bhore dao dhone jone sukhi*" (May the river Ganges and the Gods of thunder, moon, water and the snakes bless the entire world with wealth and happiness; self-translated) (Tagore 11). The onset of winter is associated with the *Toshla vrata* celebrating the "cult of the corn" (Chatterji 5). The rites of supplication addressed to nature to provide abundant crops involve offering of the newly bloomed yellow mustard flowers to the earth goddess.

The *alpanas* of *Nabanna vrata* and *Makr Sankranti vrata* are closely associated with the harvesting season and are prepared with freshly harvested rice paste or rice flour mixed in water. Performed in the months of November/December and January respectively, both *vratas* are directly associated with winter crops and the *alpana* embodies a prayer for good harvest. As a ritual invocation of the corn goddess Lakshmi, the most important *alpana* motif drawn during these rituals is a pot of grain or a granary. Lakshmi is also seen as the goddess of wealth, and the *alpana* motifs include granaries, agricultural tools, objects related to everyday life that are required for one's daily existence. The rituals are similar to the worship of Saramama, the corn or maize goddess worshipped by the Incas in Mexico and Peru, with maize plants dressed as emblems of the goddess. With the seasonal cycle moving to the months of February-March, *Hyachra Vrata alpana* embodies a collective prayer to the forces of nature to protect humans from infectious diseases that spread during this time. Evoking the etymological connection of *alpana* to the vernacular word "ail" (meaning 'an embankment used in agricultural fields to mark out boundaries of land or protecting it), this *vrata* addresses the well-being of the individual human body and the community as a whole. This concept of *alpana* probably explains why *alpanas* are most commonly drawn in the doorway to one's home and are endowed with the mythical dimension of having the magical power to protect the inmates of the house from any danger. But now *alpanas* drawn in the doorway to one's home have transcended their ritualistic function to become visually appealing aesthetic means of welcoming guests.

Abanindranath Tagore interpretes the *vratas* as primitive indigenous oral literature fusing poetry, prose, visual narrative, music and even drama moulded into a composite form (15-16). For example, the *Maghmandala vrata* celebrated in winter is an indigenous ritual, enacting the "triumph of the sun dispelling the gloom of the winter months" (Chatterji 6) in the seasonal cycle. The *vrata* virtually takes the form of a three-act ritual drama with appropriate oral songs and dialogues moving through three phases – the rise of the Sun defeating the mist of

Winter, the courtship and marriage between the Sun and the Moon, finally concluding with the birth of Spring and his subsequent marriage to the Earth (Tagore 48-61). The partly memorised and partly improvised songs/dialogues performed collectively by women range from poetic effusions to matter-of fact remarks and humorous interjections. The women performing the *vrata* impersonate characters who are also visually portrayed through *alpana* motifs, such as adult women performing *vrata* rituals, young girls gathering flowers, the flowers themselves, the gardener and his wife and objects of Nature such as the Sun, Moon, Dusk and Dawn. The *alpana* offers mimetic symbols of these characters such as the earth, sun, moon, stars and even the imaginary plants, *Ital* and *Beetal* drawn by women as part of the *Maghmandala vrata*.

*Alpana* was considered as a gendered art form related to women's creative expression. Commenting on the role of the woman in invoking the powers of Nature through these indigenous art forms, Shastri observes: "She alone, like the earth, was able to bring forth and invoke the life-generating forces, and was installed and deified as the primordial Mother Goddess" (8). In fact traditionally men hardly had anything to do with these rituals. Nor are there any hard and fast rules determining the content of these creations, apart from an overall narrative and repertoire of symbols connected with each *vrata*. Women have been the custodians of the skills and techniques of *alpana*, as well as the allied narratives that were orally communicated from one generation of women to another.

To Abanindranath Tagore this humble indigenous and rural art signifies the locus of desire. As he writes: "The doggerel verses and *alpanas* associated with pure feminine *vratas* carry the impression of a nation's mind, their thoughts, and their efforts" (6; my translation). Tagore found two major driving factors in *alpana*-inspiration and motion/ rhythm. The *alpana* motifs used in all these *vratas* would include simple objects of nature, granaries, agricultural tools, fish, birds, animals, human figures, kitchen utensils, and ordinary objects related to everyday life, thus emphasising the geo-centric, collective and domestic nature of the

aspirations of the female artists. In a recent study of *alpana*, Sudhanshu Kumar Ray points out that the soul of *alpana* lies in its simplicity and vigour, instead of sophistication.

Abanindranath Tagore's attempt to theorise and document this indigenous, local and spontaneous rural art was part of his project of cultural nationalism in the nineteenth century. He tries to understand the indigenous art from the perspective of the evolution of Indian art history, in his comparative study of *alpana* in connection with the paintings of Ajanta and Ellora caves. As the founder of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, his aim was to revive and conserve this art form. The spontaneous art form of *alpana* was institutionalized in response to the Swadeshi movement that was sweeping over India. Not only did this humble art gain cultural capital as part of the revival of indigenous culture by the Bengal School of Art, it actually entered into academia and curriculum of art education at Visva Bharati University, Shantiniketan. Rabindranath Tagore's experimentation with education incorporated into the curriculum seasonal celebrations accompanied by dance, songs and creative expressions of the imaginative mind. *Alpana* featured in a big way in each of these cultural formations, as an aesthetic expression of the harmonious relationship between individuals and society, between humans and nature. Nandalal Bose as the Principal of Kala Bhavan, Visva Bharati was a major proponent of this art form and attempts were made to systematically study, conserve and reinvent this indigenous art.

The institutionalisation of the amorphous art of *alpana* was a major step in the evolution of this art. Following the emergence of the new Shantiniketan tradition, *alpana* came to be characterized by abstract motifs and ordered patterns, moving away from its indigenous ritualistic origin. Instead of spontaneous and erratic designs inspired by the imagination, regular patterns and symmetrical repetition of designs began to emerge in the Shantiniketan School of *alpana*, as Ghosh has argued. The abstract patterns of the *alpana* were experimented with by notable artists like Sukumari Devi, Kiranbala Devi and Jamuna Sen. The patterns of *alpana* also found their way into *batik*, another traditional

craft using techniques of wax-resist dyeing applied to the whole cloth, officially recognised by UNESCO as a ‘Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity’ from Indonesia. This interesting cross-cultural formation indicates the ways in which indigenous art forms are assimilated into global capitalist economy. *Alpana* motifs wedded with the *batik* technique were popularly adopted in Sriniketan, Rabindranath Tagore’s project for rural development and vocational training at Bolpur. Today, these *alpana* patterns are commonly found in *batik* sarees, dress material, wallets and varied accessories. The ritual meanings associated with this indigenous art have been constantly evolving down the ages and have found a new medium of expression and a new cultural value altogether. Many of Jamini Roy’s paintings on canvas and cloth came to be inspired by *alpana* too, sometimes reviving mystical values reflected in *alpana* motifs.

Now-a-days, *alpana* has become part of regular cultural practices associated with any kind of celebration, be it weddings or academic events. As Archana Shastri observes, it has “survived as a decorative visual art form” which has taken a commercial turn (89). Though the occult use of the *alpana* as a geocentric and collective ritual still survives in some villages in Bengal, it has mostly acquired a decorative purpose dissociated from the *vratas*. The motifs and designs have become more abstract and sophisticated rather than mimetic representations of everyday objects. The emphasis is primarily on ordered symmetrical patterns inspired by the Shantiniketan tradition of *alpana* rather than whimsical and spontaneous expressions of desire in its indigenous form. The medium used is rarely ground rice, often replaced by paint and brush. The new tradition of abstract *alpana* created by the Visva Bharati School of Art has also a wider reach, showcased through social media.

Abstract *alpanas* have been traditionally associated with Durga Puja in West Bengal for a long time, particularly the heritage pujas organized in traditional houses of zamindars. In Kolkata, a new trend of *alpana* as a grandiose street art began in 2017 when a puja organiser Samaj Sebi Sangha Sarbojanin Durgotsav Committee decided to hire 400 artists, including students of the Government Art College of Kolkata to prepare

a colourful street *alpana* stretching over 1.2 kilometers leading to the puja pandal. It goes without saying that this cultural formation drew thousands of visitors to Samaj Sebi Club. This was also circulated in the social media, facebook and twitter, apart from regular mass media like newspapers and e-newspapers as the “longest” *alpana* created in India (Chowdhury). So a new kind of collective art had emerged, borrowing some features from *rangoli*, the sister art popular in various parts of India.

The *alpana* has transformed from a gendered ritual art practiced within the domestic spheres as an expression of geocentric and collective consciousness to become a commodity of visual pleasure. *Alpana* also appears in its commercialised form of reproducible mass production as ready-made *alpana* stickers used to decorate one’s household during Diwali or weddings. However *alpana* is not a dying art. In the age of proliferation of *alpana* stickers, *alpana* competitions are still being held to encourage young artists to experiment and explore new avenues of creation. Moving away from its occult value, *alpana* is sometimes infused with new and innovative content to become a medium for articulating and circulating topical social or political messages. In rare cases, the *alpana* as a visual form of story-telling comes a full circle to its indigenous purpose in being used to address environmental consciousness or women’s issues. In the age of global capitalism, *alpana* has survived through cultural assimilation and reinvention and still continues to remind us of the concerns for the earth and the well-being of its inhabitants expressed through its indigenous form.

*Makar Sankranti vrata*, which is celebrated in almost every state of India under different names and cultural practices, is associated with a rich food culture in Bengal. There is a tradition of preparing sweets made out of fresh rice flour and distributing them among neighbours and relatives.

Lakshmi is considered as the goddess of wealth and prosperity in Hinduism. According to some interpretations, as for example opined by S.R. Das, Lakshmi is seen as originally a non-Aryan primitive corn goddess who was later absorbed into Hinduism. Incidentally *Lakshmi*



*vrata alpāna* is the most commonly practiced *alpāna* that has survived in the age of modernisation and globalisation, though mostly in the form of *alpāna* stickers. The common motifs used are lotus, grains or paddy, owl and footprints of the deity that are supposed to be symbolic of prosperity.

Visva Bharati became Rabindranath Tagore's site of experimentation with new techniques of imparting education as a wholesome experience that integrates the students with nature, society and the cultural expressions of the land.

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## Tribals: Real Protectors of the Nature

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*Sanjoly Paliwal*

Tribals have inherited the rich culture and tradition for many years. Most of them are illiterate but the knowledge system has been transferred through generations, they have vast knowledge of natural surroundings and treated their land as mother nature. In the time of development, they are following sustainable living and replacing unsustainable alternatives. Many documentary films which are non-fictional motion picture intended to document reality, i.e. Have you seen the Arana; I cannot give you my forest etc. shows the reality of tribals facing struggles in day-to-day life to protect mother nature.

Human beings are living in a world where everyone is running for the success of their own selves. Where money, power, and facilities are considered the mark of development. In the name of development, the demand for machinery, industries, and technologies is increasing. For all of that, we are dependent on nature and its resources. Knowingly or unknowingly humans are exploiting natural resources indiscriminately. Nature, which nurtures everyone, is deteriorating due to this development, due to which we are facing many natural disasters. Our environment is now at stake. This crisis cannot be solve only through science and technology. It must required ecological awareness through literature. Thus ecology and ecocriticism has its own relevance.

In ecology nature and its organisms like people, plants and animals are interdependent on each other and their environment. Their so much interdependency has the out-turn that disturbance in any of these can affect the other one. These disturbance which leads to changes in their environment are so concerned issue now a days because it can be the cause of the destruction of the civilization. This threatening situation has become the global concern. Ecology has two different shades in

which one shows man's anthropocentric attitude of dominating nature where the other shows the preservation of nature to keep it in its original form. This awareness of no one is the master of anybody and nature can survive on its own can maintain ecosystem balance. Ecocriticism gives importance to raise awareness about eco-consciousness and removes ego-consciousness. The present crisis of ecological disasters and destruction of nature is the cause of human's behavior with mother nature.

“The modern ecological consciousness has a feeling that the balance between human and the natural world must be maintained. A perfect ecology is one in which plants, animals, birds and human beings live in such harmony that none dominates or destroys the other” (Frederick). But what is happening in current time is opposite of this. Nature has been exploited by human beings for their own selfish reasons to become powerful. They give least priority to nature. The beauty of natural surroundings has been destroyed by the excess use of natural resources without following any systematic development approach. “The most common measure to tackle the environmental crisis is sustainable development” (Frederick). This categorically means the required use of natural resources without endangering the whole environment and the well-being of all human beings (Selvamony). During the sustainable development process all organisms survive in their own way. In maintaining the basic life support system of the earth human beings, plants, animals have to play an important role. Ecocriticism advocates the systematic approach towards sustainable development to ensure the safe and secure future.

There are many environmental activists like Greta Thunburg, David Attenborough, Leonardo DiCaprio etc. who are working to improve and protect the quality of the natural environment through changes to environmentally harmful human activities. They are raising attention to the environmental issues with their own knowledge and concern for nature.

Tribal communities are known for conserving and preserving nature through traditional knowledge which has been transferred through

generations .For a very long period of time they were able to maintain the richness of the environment with the help of their effective measures, like observing natural surroundings ,use of natural resources and the transmission of wisdom and culture over the generations. Tribals are the inhabitants of forests and while living there they are preserving and balancing flora and fauna and the whole ecosystem. In their culture they believe that nature and its resources has the superior power in this world. They treat natural resources like land, river, mountains, trees as a God and worship them. Throughout their life they believe that nature is their motherland who nurtures human beings and it has the superior power to construct and deconstruct human lives.

In India many tribal communities are the example of sustainable living. Their knowledge have the practical approach towards the environment which is not similar as the knowledge is transforms in modern days. Their simple living and not consuming too much from nature ,and not following the development process which many leading power is doing so makes them marginalized from the society. The emphasis should be given to raise awareness about their living style towards nature which can be the sustainable example of living life.

Many Indian English writers like *Kamala Markandaya*, *Mahasweta Devi*, *Arun Joshi* etc. have given importance to tribal lives and sensibilities in their literature work. Through Novels, stories, songs and poems Indian English literature writers tries to shows the rich tribal culture which presents their unique identity in the present world. Literature observes the existing situation and depicts the problems of the future. Documentaries are one of the artform of literature which portrays the reality of life. John Grierson's definition of documentary first proposed in the 1930s, as the "creative treatment of actuality". Documentaries present real people and real scenarios which are far more different from the play or movies in which actors play roles. To an extent a documentary tells a story, the story is a plausible representation of what happened rather than an imaginative interpretation of what might have happened (Nicholas).

Documentary films which are non-fictional motion picture intended to document reality, i.e. *Have you seen the Arana; I cannot give you my forest etc.* shows the reality of tribals facing struggles in day-to-day life to protect mother nature.

*Have you seen the Arana?* is a documentary film by Sunanda Bhatt ,a documentary filmmaker who represents people living on the margins of a fascinatingly intricate and stratified Indian society highlights the transformation of the environment and its surroundings in the name of development. It showcases the journey of rich and bio-diverse regions of Wayanad in Kerala is part of the fragile ecosystem. Where the hills are flatten and forests are getting disappear and rich diversity of forest area is replaced by unsustainable alternatives in the name of development. As the title suggested here the question is asked to many people of the district Have you seen the Arana? followed by the answer that Arana was a place which was previously seen as the wider range of forest area has now disappeared because of the poor way of modern agriculture system which includes the excess use of pesticide for big production. So the Arana has no existence and it has not been seen anywhere.

This documentary presents the relationship between people, their knowledge system and the environment. Tribal Literature is saved through short stories, narratives, poems and songs which were sung from generations to generations passing on the traditional beliefs that strengthen their wisdom. In this documentary an old man from *Adiya tribe* sung a folk song which believes that *God has created the humans and they are following the trail of their ancestors Ithi and Achan.* All the lands, mountains, forest, trees, plants, fruits, flowers and the environment is created by God and their ancestors protect this and show them the path to live. One man from tribal communities shared previously they had only forest trees with fruits and flowers but the forest department cut down the trees in the name of systematic development and planted teak trees causing low water levels. Due to these animals coming to the village from the forest. Then they blame animals. It shows that humans attitude towards the systematic construction of the forest is actually causing the deconstruction of the

forests and its surrounding which is harmful not only for the environment but as well for the animals.

Tribal women Jochi, highlights the importance of trees and plants in terms of remedial use. She is a traditional healer and said *when God made us humans he also made medicinal plants to take care of us. But people don't want it .What is popular now is English medicine. We can not give up natural remedies.* She further focuses on two main medical plants *Avalapori* and *Kurunthoti* which can cure diseases are now disappearing from forests. According to her *after forest dwellers' society was allowed in everything was destroyed as plants were plucked from roots. We are trying to bring it all back.* She was in the forest protection group which not only shows their commitment towards saving forests. Tribal life becomes very difficult because of the tourists and visitors. All the waste from the resorts also flows into the river. The river was polluted because of plastics, trash, and waste of chemical fertilizers. Many tourists came drunk and the resorts have been developed. They felt disheartened because they don't feel free to move around in their own land. Tribals compare human behavior with animals; *It's easy to move around with elephant instead of humans.* Because they have faith in the discipline of animals but not on the humans because of their indisciplinary actions harming the environment and their peace.

Tribal farmer who has the culture and wisdom to save the land and treated it as mother land shows that traditional way of farming has changed into modern farming .Where excess use of pesticides are destroying the quality of land .It can easily be avoided by indigenous way of farming. *We have to know soil and soil have to know us. The belief, confidence and conviction that we have done it the right way makes it good crop.* His children complains that if they follow same traditional approach of agriculture than they can left behind from others. He refused to do so because he knew their ancestors have given them wealth in the form of land and natural surroundings. Tribals have their own values in rice farming they treated rice as their deity. If they pollute the rice it means they polluted their deity. In this generation

everything is ready-made and easy to use. Foods are ready-made, even seeds are ready made. But he follows the same indigenous way of farming that was taught by his ancestors. It will be able to maintain the richness of the land and that is how the knowledge system which passed on from generation to generation are now able to protect the nature.

*I cannot give you my forest*, a documentary filmed by Kavita Bahl and Nandan Saxena, is a window in the lives of *Kondh adivasis* from Rayagada in Orissa. It highlights the relationship between Adivasis and the forest which is the source of rich nutrients for them. The documentary presents the day to day struggle of tribals to preserve nature from commercial exploitation. It is the story of survival of Adivasis in Niyamgiri, a hill range which is home to most of the Kondh indigenous people.

As the title suggested, these adivasis are determined to not let go of their forest. They considered themselves as guardians of the treasure in terms of the wealthy environment passed on by their ancestors. Where the commercialisation is leading towards the exploitation of natural resources. Forest trees called timber are cut down to be sold. Minerals mined in a way that destroys the richness of land converted it into barren lands.

Corporations' city-centric view of development makes them fail to understand the critical importance of the forest for food and other resources. "Have you ever seen an adivasi begging?" asks an old woman in a scene, "That's because we don't need to beg for food, as long as our forests are alive," she says. But she showed her concern that in today's time, it does not remain the same for her tribe to say these with the same sense of pride because the dependence of tribals on uncultivated forest food, is fast depleting.

Hemi Konda states that *though a mother gives birth, the child is nurtured and raised by the forest*. He shared this because during drought when they were unable to harvest through farming, the forest provided tubers and roots twice a day. *They live with the cycles of*

*nature and understand that is bountiful. They only take what is necessary for their sustenance.* (Saxena Nandan,2015) Tribals expressed the acceptance of forest produce and refused packaged food. An adivasi woman sung a song “*Tina dumbro puyu loye*”,in Kui language with English subtitles in the film.The refrain refers to a small forest flower that she sings to, saying ‘*come my friend*’. This means that their lives are intertwined by each and every part of the forest even with the smallest of flowers can not be separated from them. The song reminds the bounteousness of the forest towards the adivasi tribes in sustaining their lives.

The adivasis pity the city people being addicted to computers and mobile phones as a part of their daily lives. They refused the modern way of unsustainable living to do anything to get money. They deny the idea of money minded people and considered this as an urban disease to think that money can buy anything. They find these kinds of people undernourished and weak. This documentary film presents the forest as a metaphor to the adivasis of their sovereignty. It is a call to the city dwellers and policy makers to respect a way of life which is in consonance with nature (Saxena).

Here in these documentaries the reflection of eco-consciousness in tribal communities advocates to remove ego-centric approach towards nature. These documentaries demand global perspectives towards ecological crisis. The earth is the only place where humans can live and the current scenario of environment destruction requires the awareness of humans to make the better place for them. This ecological insight of tribal people who live sustainable life shares their perspectives to save the environment and leads a happy life in close harmony with nature.

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