

## LOCATING AFFINITY WITH NATURE IN TRIBAL NARRATIVES

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### ABSTRACT

Tribals, we have heard that they never cut trees. They collect the fallen branches for fuel and the stems of the fallen trees are used as stools. They wake up with nature and sleep with nature. Aware of the love and wrath of Mother Nature they worship her with respect and with fear. They play with her, they seek from her, and they meet the end their life happily on the lap of mother earth.

Poetry of Mamang Dai, Gambhini Devi, Jiban Narah, Robin Ngangom, Sameer Tanti, Cherrie Chhangte, Temsula Ao, Nini Lungalang, writings of Baraguru Ramachandrappa reveal the tribal writers affinity to nature and the nature as part and parcel of tribal life. The tribal poetry which was once in oral form is available in written form with the accessibility of education or right to education. With the new awareness the nature provides new metaphors in the changed scenario. As Sameer Tanti says in his poem:

“As the Night Thickens the Stars Nod off”  
.... And I keep going like an ever watchful boatman  
Crossing over current after current  
Across the other side of dreams.

In dream also tribals breathe nature. This paper discusses nature in tribal poetry. The purpose is to explore the tribal life as part of nature through tribal poetry.

**Keywords : Fallen branches, Mother Nature, Mother Earth, Breathe nature, Tribal poetry.**

### INTRODUCTION

Tribals, the aboriginals of the land, the natives of the land, revere and worship the land. They know the pulses of elements of nature. Their relation with nature is that of mother and child, of God and devotee. Once their literature was mostly in oral form. Recent access to education made them start writing. Devy says, among 14 major Nagas tribes about 30 languages are spoken. “They show very little interest in accumulating wealth or in using labour as a device to gather interest and capital. They accept a world-view in which nature, human beings and God are intimately linked and they believe in the human ability to spell and interspect truth.” (*Painted Words*. G. N. Devy) These lines of Devy hold mirror to the tribal’s, selflessness, non-greediness, and their affinity with nature. Santosh Kiro writes the mainstream observe the external worship system of the Tribal society : worshipping trees, hills and mountains or Nature as a whole. They term the system as Animism and call the Mundas Animists- -----Nature worshippers.

Title of Anna Madhuri’s anthology of poems itself is “Sonajori Ke Tat Se’. Nidhi Dugar Kundalia’s anthology of stories is titled as “White as Milk and Rice”. The titles show the tribal writer’s intimacy with nature. As the tribals’ life is of interdependence with nature, a close

relationship between human beings and nature is seen in the poetry of tribals. Nature for them is living and responsive to human existence and human actions, demanding respect essential for any kind of coexistence. (Devy) As a proof to this belief we have poets like Mamang Dai, Jacinta Kerketta, Gambhini Devi and many more.

This paper explores tribals' affinity with nature from oral mythologies, ballads to written poems, stories, novels and biographical writings. After deforestation and landlessness tribals' life scattered on the streets of city. Whenever these tribals have suffered the nature also has wept. The earth also has suffered. This paper aims to explore these issues through tribal literature. And this enquiry will be done through close textual analysis of selected tribal poems.

### **Locating Nature in Tribal Poetry:**

The tribal narratives are usually oral and in their native tongues. With the introduction of education biographical writings and new age writings in tribals got initiated. And this education to tribals was not an easy happening. It was a path of struggle and perseverance. For Jacinta Kerketta it was matter of creating self identity and fight for rights. The belief that only tribals can write their fate and only tribals can write their history and nobody else. Culturally with small variations all the tribes are similar. They accept the world view in which nature, human beings and God are intimately linked and they believe in the human ability to spell and interpret truth. (163 Painted Words)

For Nilami Phookan the sky and her hair are same. She very beautifully writes in her poem "Mating Music",

In the woods/ Deep in the woods/ A crane calls/  
Open our both your arms/ Let a swarm of stars sink/  
Into the aroma of your hair.

For her creation of poetry is also similar to the happenings in nature. In another poem on the creation of poem she writes :

From here  
The waters stretch  
Far beyond the horizon

When you reach out  
The plantain leaf trembles  
When you let fall your hair  
The rain descend.

Another poet Jiban Narah writes poems like "Colours". Where all the "Colours" of nature symbolize the states of life. From birth to reaching the red, the love of man in her life. "Mother" appears to be a poem with feminine sensitivity as well as the woman in tribal family.

Mama, you're drinking more than your need/  
The grey crop on your head worries you no end  
And you drown yourself in the cup  
As we are away, you call and holler, pause and wail,  
And duck your tears deeper in the pillow.

You're getting on in age, Mama, but don't you cry  
Don't you drink more getting mad at what father says  
You're addicted, you're hitting it hard  
As the night grows you bend over, then sit up again,  
You call out to the stars and howl at the moon  
You wail, and wailing, burst into song

Don't you wail so hard, Mama  
Let the doves settle on the boughs  
Or their sorrows too might flow wailing,  
If they wail your breasts would go dry

A lean river swells again routinely  
Your drying breasts wouldn't ever-  
It ails all old women  
Why would you wail? (Assamese. Tr. By Pradeep Acharya)

In my heart  
Sprouts a seed  
Left behind by careless men  
Who have eaten and  
Forgotten (.....)

For tribals stars, seas, mountains, trees, men and animals, can be angry, sad or happy. All the creatures are family and even nonliving things are personified.

We have seen expeditions by great kings. But tribal communities have realized that domination over territorial space was not their lot. Thus, they seem to have turned almost obsessively to gaining domination over time. (Devy)

### **Affinity with Nature in Tribal Mythologies :**

Tribal narratives, it may be a story, poem or mythology start with description of landscape or Nature. In Karnataka we have Manteswamy Kavya and Male Madeshwara Kavya where images and simile, metaphors are carved out from nature. All the local flowers, fruits, and vegetables come in tribal epics as ornaments, similes, and even as personified figures.

Bhilli Mahabharat starts with a sentence, "once upon a time a frog embarked on a pilgrimage to the Ganges". In the story the trader's son was cursed into the form of wolf. Later the wolf burnt into ash. A sal tree was born out of the ashes on the bank of Ganga. And the tree tells Ganga that she is his wife. That is why she washes his feet every day. In this part of Bhilli Mahabharat the reader realizes the intimacy between human being and nonliving thing and animal world. Personification of tree reveals tribal's philosophy of life. They see life in tree. In the later part where in Vyasa Bharat Ganga leaves Shantanu, in Bhilli Mahabharat Ganga becomes fish. And the same fish later becomes a girl and Shantanu marries her.

### Exploitation of Tribes Reflected in Poetry :

Deforestation creates a situation when forest dwellers have no other way but to leave forest and Jacinta Kerketta writes inquisitively in “Reawakening”

What happens  
To that Adivasi boy  
Leaving his village for the city?

And the answer we get in her another poem “Lament in songs”-. Jacinta pathetically says:

Bright and fresh as daybreak,  
To brave the sun, hot and scorching.  
Alas! Their new seed today edges away  
Even from the shine of the morning.(62)

Here the poet locates difference in the attitude of two generations. She also locates their plight in city life. The joys gone.

(...)  
Back home from their toils in Delhi,  
The moist, teary eyes of Day,.... (63)

(.....)  
The songs of the forefathers  
Slowly change their tune  
And become the woeful lament of the hills. (67)

Seeing the pains of young generation the ancestors tone and words in songs change. The song becomes a lament.

O ancestral spirits!  
How now do we escape  
From the conspiracies of time,

The poet realizes the conspiracies of politicians and capitalists destroy the fates of tribals. And in the fate of tribes lay the fate of earth.

Concocted on the flames  
That from the sweltering earth rise?  
Where all is slowly being roasted alive,  
The air, the forests, and the soil,  
And man - in body and in mind? (67)

In the end the poet concludes that the capitalists exploitation causes everything get roasted. Forest, soil, body and mind gets roasted. Nothing remains if tribal soul gets roasted. Jacinta in “A Rebellion Slayed” personified the tree. She narrates the pathetic condition of tree through first person narration.

Deep in blissful slumber  
The flower’s perfume  
Startles and awakens,  
When the stench of machines  
Invades the senses  
And ears scream in splitting pain  
From the noise of explosions.

(.....)  
The corpse of rain  
Hung by the neck  
Dangles on a tree.  
Right above the forest  
In the oval sky,  
Vultures gather on a fleeting spree,  
  
Aflame with passion and new hope,  
The next dawn brings forth  
Another sweet blossom  
Somewhere in the bosom of Saranda.

In above lines we see two paradoxical situations. Two opposite situations; one of splitting pain and another of sweet blossom. If the sweet blossoms are burnt nothing remains.

There is a very important message in the poem “Why is the earth on fire?”.

He set a condition :  
“On the earth I shall draw  
A dividing line,  
One side may be yours,  
The other shall be mine.”  
(.....)  
The other side he saw  
Was engaged in constant war  
In the name of progress,  
In flames was the earth.  
And on this side,  
Seeds thrived in the fields  
For the whole earth to feed,  
To sustain, to nourish.  
Here the earth was bursting into flower  
There the earth was ablaze, on fire.

The last lines of the poem briefly but aptly summarize two worlds: The world of tribals and that of non tribals. In the world of tribals field is full of grains as a result of their hard work.

**Conclusion:**

The 30,000 years old world heritage site and also very old archaeological and anthropological site of Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh is a good example to present the view that the tribes knew to use the colors. They prepared these colors using flowers, leaves, hematite, limestone and grinding various colored rocks and mineral ores. The paintings on the walls of the caves belong to different eras, Mesolithic, Paleolithic and historic periods. And the materials used for the preparation of paint are different in each era. The paintings reflect their life in nature. Some paintings include animals. These cave paintings showing tribals love for art can be said the oldest available one.

Tribals knowledge of medicine also is an important aspect. They used leaves, flowers and roots to prepare medicine. According to Sha. Bha. Joshi there was a tribe which gave medicine. The various tribes were known for their expertise in the use of leaves and roots as medicine. Over all, the activities of their life; any art, medicine are based on the aspects taken from nature. Their life was inseparable from nature. But now with the changed time and situations those tribals with the rich knowledge of nature are homeless and suffering from identity crisis. So the history with the incidents of war with Nagas, Munda movement, makes it clear that throughout Yugas the war between tribal communities and the civilized has always proved the war between the civilized and nature. Deforestation and the removal of tribals from their land lead to homelessness and identity crisis. During tsunami only tribals were safe on the bank. The affinity between tribals and nature proves that only tribals can preserve nature and earth. They are the saviors of Mother Earth.

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