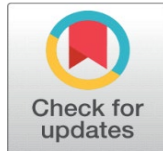
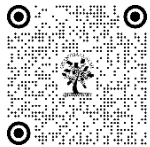


ECHOES OF CHANGE: TRANSFORMATIVE NARRATIVES IN CONTEMPORARY TRIBAL LITERATURE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE ADIVASI WILL NOT DANCE: STORIES, THE BLACK HILL, AND KOCHARETHI: THE ARAYA WOMAN

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the intricate dynamics of narratives within tribal contexts, examining how narratives undergo change over time and mirror transformative experiences. Tribal communities have been impacted by globalization, cultural shifts, and individual authorial voices by following the trajectory from traditional tribal narratives to contemporary expressions. This present study focuses on contemporary tribal narratives analyzing particularly three chief works of great tribal writers; *The Adivasi Will not Dance: Stories* by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *The Black Hill* by Mamang Dai, and *Kocharethi: The Araya Woman* by Narayan. Their narratives provide a forum for discussing the intricacies of transition, protecting cultural identities from contemporary influences, and advancing knowledge of the dynamic changes occurring within tribal communities. The study's conclusion not only highlights the vital role that Contemporary tribal literature plays in promoting comprehension, adaptability, and cultural continuity amidst transitions, but it also celebrates the vibrancy of this genre through a thorough examination of themes and authorial perspectives. It also advocates for the inclusion of diverse tribal perspectives in the global discourse to contribute to a more nuanced portrayal of these experience.

Keywords: Tribal literature, Transformative Narratives, Contemporary Tribal literature, Change, Tradition, Modernity, Negotiation, Identity

1. INTRODUCTION

The rich and varied cultural legacy of tribal communities is reflected in tribal literature. It provides distinctive insights into the history, belief systems, and struggles of frequently marginalised societies by encapsulating their oral traditions, myths, folktales, and literary expressions. Tribal literature serves as a means of understanding the social, political, and economic realities of these communities in addition to protecting their cultural legacy. It provides a lens for examining the effects of modernisation, globalisation, and socio-political changes on these societies.

The impact of tribal literature on mainstream discourse is significant, as it brings a new perspective and a wealth of cultural heritage that has often gone unnoticed. It delves into how tribal literature has influenced the development of a fresh perspective on social narratives and cultural diversity. Tribal communities' distinct experiences and viewpoints are frequently reflected in tribal literature, which offers insights into their

struggles, traditions, and spiritual beliefs. Tribal literature challenges mainstream discourse and provides a counter-narrative to dominant cultural representations by bringing these narratives to the forefront. This contributes to a better understanding of cultural diversity and enriches the literary canon as a whole.

Tribal literature, which is deeply rooted in tribal communities' cultural fabric, serves as a profound reflection of their history, traditions, and struggles. The cultural landscapes and historical legacies of tribal communities serve as the foundation of tribal literature. They bear witness to the diversity and tenacity of these societies. Tribal literature has a long history of weaving stories about identity, spirituality, and survival from oral traditions, rituals, and group experiences. It has traditionally captured the various stories, customs, and struggles encountered by tribal populations, offering a significant context for investigating transformative stories in Contemporary tribal literature.

As societies evolved, so did their literature. Contemporary tribal literature has undergone a transformation in recent years due to a combination of factors including globalisation, environmental changes, and socio-political developments, embracing new voices, perspectives, and genres. In Contemporary tribal literature, transformative narratives have assumed a central role. These narratives provide an engaging analysis of how tribal communities are evolving in response to contemporary influences, addressing issues of adaptability, resilience, and identity. This changing context sets the stage for delving into the transformative narratives found in Contemporary tribal literature that address important social, political, and environmental issues. The shift in tribal literature from oral to written form signifies more than just a change in format; it signifies a profound change in the way tribal identities and histories are documented and understood. It specifically tells how tribal authors have adapted their storytelling traditions to address the changing realities of their communities. As Ramnika Gupta writes, "We have begun writing now-against our forced dislocation caused by you. We won't let our identity; our self-pride and self-respect be destroyed" (21). The transformative narratives depict how tribal authors have adapted their storytelling traditions with the shifting dynamics within tribal communities as they endeavour to maintain their cultural identity while navigating the intricacies of contemporary society. These narratives' echoes of change resonate with the ongoing dialogue between cultural heritage preservation and the inevitable transformations brought about by external influences.

The transformative narratives in Contemporary tribal literature aim to disrupt the conventional canonical enclosures that have been drawn by the dominant, in addition to creatively reclaiming and presenting one's own suffering. Furthermore, the Contemporary tribal literature emphasises the importance of these narratives in challenging stereotypes, promoting cultural diversity, and fostering intercultural dialogue.

The Contemporary tribal Literature contributes to a broader understanding of the intersection of literature, identity, and social change by shedding light on the transformative power of tribal literature, while also providing a platform for amplifying indigenous voices and narratives. The following passage from the poem "Stage" by Vahru Sonvane gives us a clear and accurate picture of the contours of Adivasi creative consciousness that are beginning to emerge. The *Adivasi* poet has expressed those emotions in this poem, which not only influenced, but also helped him find expression for his creativity. The poem highlights both the necessity of *Adivasi* writing and the emerging consciousness in it, therefore:

We did not go up the stage
That was made in our name
Nor were we invited on to it
We were shown
Our place
With pointed finger
And we sat there (obediently)
We were highly appreciated
And 'they,' standing on the
stage
Kept telling us of our own misery
"But our misery remained ours
alone it was never theirs"
We 'mumbled
uttered our doubts
"They" listened intently
And roared... Pulling us by the ear
admonished us "Say sorry...
otherwise...". (Gupta, Ramnika 20-21)

The transformative narratives in Contemporary tribal literature hold a great promise for advancing social justice, encouraging intercultural understanding, and recognising the resiliency and inventiveness of tribal population. As Gupta, Ramnika writes, "The *Adivasi* creative ascendance is multifaceted, realistic and has a wide reach or scope. It is a committed writing that aims at social and human well-being premised on democratic and egalitarian bonding and equality. While realizing the importance of education this literature is

moving ahead with a mission that seeks to educate and create mass awareness, that can ultimately bring an attitudinal change among non- *Adivasis* and *Adivasis*" (27).

With its ability to dispel stereotypes, promote cultural pride, and fight for social justice, Contemporary tribal literature has the potential to significantly alter society within tribal communities. As Gupta, Ramnika writes, "An *Adivasi*, when mute, used his arrow to fight injustice. Now he is aware of the fatal potency of the pen and is eagerly looking forward to forge his creative prowess into a weapon, an arrow" (23). The purpose of these narratives is to highlight the rights and struggles of tribal communities, empower marginalised voices, and evoke a sense of communal identity. It emphasises how such narratives in literature can be a powerful tool for self-expression and how fiction can address historical and sociocultural issues in contemporary times.

2. THE ADIVASI WILL NOT DANCE: STORIES

To support the above view we can start with the first select work for analysis *The Adivasi Will Not Dance: Stories* which depicts the struggles of the Santhal community in Contemporary India as a change. It highlights the impact of outside influences on their way of life and the deterioration of traditional cultural practices. As A, Nilofer writes, "The tribal cultures are overshadowed and are subjected to the westernized lifestyle. Modernisation that followed colonisation still has its negative impact on the lives of the tribal and the indigenous societies" (2461). This collection of short stories explores the challenges that the Santhal community faces as they navigate the rapid changes brought about by industrialization and urbanization, which are eroding their traditional way of life and identity. As Hansda writes, "We are losing our Sarna faith, our identities, and our roots. We are becoming people from nowhere" (173). The author explores issues of exploitation, displacement, and the fight for tribal rights, illuminating the intricate sociopolitical context in which the Santhal community aspires to agency and autonomy. As Tripathi, Priyanka writes, "The stories mainly depict the lives of Santhals from the Jharkhand region, constantly struggling to live their life with dignity in this mineral-rich land where corporate takeovers and development is trending. The characters in the collection may/ may not be real but the issues, the violence and the treatment that he depicts in his fiction is surely relevant to our as the Ideologies of State has the potential to be major threat to the democratic and diverse fabric of the Indian society" (195). Such literary works provide valuable insights into the multifaceted experiences of tribal communities in the Contemporary world by examining these three dimensions—cultural change and preservation, socio-political shifts, and the impact of globalisation and modernisation.

The Adivasi Will Not Dance by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar delves into the complexities of *adivasi* life in Jharkhand, India, addressing the intersections of gender, class, and ethnicity. Shekhar's stories feature *adivasi* women who face gender discrimination and exploitation, often because of their lower socioeconomic status and marginalised ethnic identity. Shekhar, for instance, in the story, "November is a Month of Migration" depicts a story of a young girl who is forced to sell her body in order to get "two pieces of cold bread pakora and a fifty-rupee note" (42), highlighting the struggles of poverty. As Sing, Santi Ranjan writes, "What Shekhar is doing in his writings is targeting and challenging both the moral and social perspectives which he sees as responsible for such oppression and marginalization. Pointing out the lacunas in the society he urges for the solution to his readers. Shekhar might be the first to depict the Santhal *adivasi* society and its role in subjugating the women, but the depiction is undoubtedly and unquestionably universal" (096).

The Adivasi Will Not Dance confronts exploitative representations and challenges the dominant narratives imposed on *Adivasi* communities. Shekhar's work challenges stereotype and resists the homogenization of tribal experiences by giving voice to the marginalised. He portrays his respective Santhal community in nuanced and multifaceted way, challenging and subverting hegemonic narratives. As Researcher Krishna, Manmohan writes, "Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar has brought before us the tribal life, culture, their exploitation without adding spices. His presentations being too realistic make the reader awake from the slumber" (1688).

These literary works tackle hegemonic narratives and stereotypes, explore themes of agency and empowerment and draw resilience from oral tradition and folklore.

Hansda's work, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* embodies the voices of resistance and resilience within Contemporary tribal literature. It contributes to a more nuanced and authentic representation of tribal communities' narratives by providing profound insights into the diverse experiences and enduring strength of these communities.

3. THE BLACK HILL

The second select work for analysis, *The Black Hill* by Mamang Dai is influenced by the history, culture, and ethnic diversity of Arunachal Pradesh. It voices the silences of history written by colonisers, which presents tribals as demonic and barbarous. Dai, imaginatively connects the hidden past to recorded history in an attempt to reconstruct tribal history and cultures, hinting at her role of piecing together forgotten realities in such unstable times. As Dai writes "There are many lost stories in the world and versions that were misplaced yesterday or a thousand years ago" (9). In traditional sense it can be considered as a historical novel as it is based on historical accounts of mid-19th-century Arunachal Pradesh, when the East India Company was expanding into northeastern India. But rather than merely describing events, it serves the crucial political purpose of exposing the unrecorded tribal version of history. As Makla, D. writes, "*The Black Hill* also enlightens the 'mainstream' reader to the possibility that history might take on forms other than writing and that these forms may be just as valid as the written word. This occurs as a result of the text's reliance on anecdotal histories. To do so, it uses the fictional realm for exploration" (6). In effect, it refutes the "mainstream" account of history, which attributes the murder to petty motivations like retaliation, greed, and hatred of Catholicism, all of which are stereotypical characteristics linked to the 'savage tribes,' as the records frequently refer to them.

The Black Hill depicts the native tribes' fierce opposition and hostility towards the company in an effort to keep the migluns (British) out of their lands. As Dai writes, "The British may conquer the world but they will never take our land" (25). The execution of Kajinsha reveals the colonists' true intentions, which are to subdue the tribes' resistance and to bring them under their authority rather than seeking justice for the Christian priest's death. In Dai's words, "It was a great show of British might and authority" (264). The reversal of the colonisers' believed idea of tribals being savage and barbarous in nature, brings out Dai's intention to critically examine the colonial portrayal of the Tribes as the Colonial interpretation was without a balanced view of people and their respective history. The expedition to arrest Kajinsha is described as a means of demonstrating British power. Dai writes, "Tell them about us, Kajinsha had said to Gimur that night in the jail. Tell them we were good. Tell them we also had some things to say. But we cannot read and write. So, we tell stories" (288). Mamang Dai uses Kajinsha's words to illustrate her purpose for writing the novel.

The Black Hill also challenges the mainstream notion of tribals being homogenous, by presenting distinct underrepresented tribal communities. Essentially, Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* is creating a historical and social context that will never be documented in the official historical texts of either the miglun (white men) or that of the tribes, as it tells the "story" of an unusual soul connection between two tribal people and a white man.

4. KOCHARETHI: THE ARAYA WOMAN

In the third select work for analysis, *Kocharethi: The Araya Woman*, Narayan explores the evolution of culture, highlighting the connections between the past, present, and future, as culture absorbs new developments and influences. Narayan shows how the Malayarayers' culture changes throughout the story, especially in terms of how they approach medical care. The Arayar tribe previously relied on a medical approach based on deeply held natural and religious beliefs. As the narrative goes on, Narayan clarifies how this long-standing system

changes in reaction to fresh influences, illustrating the dynamic nature of cultural shift in the communities. As K, Uma Maheswari writes, "*Kocharethi* reveals the gradual acculturation of the indigenous into the economy, culture and politics of the nation-state. Narayan has intensely captured the nuances of this changeover. The feudal lords, the king, British raj are symbols of the various stages in this transition. Cut off from the mainstream society of Kerala, the tribals were unaware of the social and political changes that were happening in Kerala" (630). The novel deftly illustrates the assimilation into modern society, disorientation from their long-standing customs, and cultural shift, or acculturation. It symbolises the Malayarayar tribe's uncertain future amid modernity. The village's traders and merchants profit from people's ignorance. Due to their poor mathematical skills, the tribal people are particularly vulnerable to various forms of deception by traders, forest rangers, and mainland residents. The novel's setting also places a strong emphasis on education as a catalyst for social change. As Gond, Pramod Kumar writes, "tribal writers are not against the modernisation but against the modernisation with increasing effect of westernisation, eroding identity and the cultural value of tribal society" (453). It gives people hope for a better future but highlights the necessity of striking a careful balance between upholding progressive change and protecting cultural heritage.

The main aim of Narayan is to challenge the biased representation of tribals in literature as tribals relied on memory and voice. Their values and traditions were transmitted orally from one generation to the other. They had no idea what writing was until about sixty years ago. As researcher K, Uma Maheswari writes, "As a tribal writer, Narayan aims to portray the life of tribals as it is *Kocharethi* is far from all misrepresentations. It is a book that speaks about the rich culture of the tribals and their challenge to preserve their culture" (628). In the book, Narayan delves into situations intertwined with his own life that span fifty or sixty years. He refutes the skewed portrayal of tribals in modern publications, television shows, and motion pictures. In his interview with Catherine Thankamma, Narayan says that, "One reason was the growing realization that creative writing was in the hands of the elite upper classes; the communities portrayed in those writing belonged to these classes. The adivasi when represented, appeared as a monochromatic figure; like the *rakshasan* or *nishacharan* of mythological stories, it always a negative picture" (209). He further says that, "There were a few of us who wanted to resist such a biased representation. We wanted to tell the world that we have our own distinctive way of life, our own value of system. We are not demons lacking in humanity but a strong, hardworking and self-reliant community" (209). The book expresses Narayan's anguish, pain, and angst over how their community is portrayed inaccurately in the works of settlers and non-tribal writers. In an interview to the translator Catherine Thankamma, Narayan says, "*The adivasi*, when represented, appears as a monochromatic figure, like the *rakshasan* or *nishacharan* of mythological stories. It was always a negative picture; he was depicted as apathetic, unable to react to injustice or worse, inhuman or subhuman, vicious" (209). His efforts are directed towards providing a voice to the marginalised, contesting repressive stories, and presenting fresh viewpoints that upend the prevailing dialogue. Narayan addresses the falsehoods and prejudices about tribal communities in his writing, which helps to create a more accurate and inclusive understanding of their identities and experiences.

The select work *The Adivasi Will Not Dance: Stories* by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *The Black Hill* by Mamang Dai, and *Kocharethi: The Araya Woman* demonstrate the transformative potential of tribal narratives in contemporary literature. The texts critique colonialism and neoliberalism, present a counter-narrative, and advocate for tribal identity recognition, reclamation, and revision. These transformative narratives contradict the mainstream narrative about tribal people, which portrays them as homogenous, exotic, and regressive. Apart from emphasising the challenges and limitations that tribal literature faces, these works support the empowerment and acknowledgement of tribal voices. They also reflect on the current struggles and challenges that tribal people face in India, and they invite readers to consider their positionality and role in contributing to transformative change. A more inclusive and diverse literary landscape can be cultivated by implementing strategies to promote and support tribal literary voices, ensuring that the rich narratives of indigenous communities are recognised and celebrated.

5. CONCLUSION

Conclusively, in today's tribal literature, transformative narratives are essential because they provide a forum for the voices of the marginalized to be acknowledged and heard. A strong sense of agency and self-representation characterises the new wave of tribal literature, which challenges the historically marginalised status of tribal communities. The transformation of Indian tribal literature is marked by a shift from a subject of study to one that studies and critiques the world around it. This change reflects not only a stylistic shift in the literature but also a profound change in the social position and identity of Indian tribal communities. By facilitating the development of counter-narratives, transformative narratives can strengthen tribal communities, confront their marginalisation, influence public policy, and advance social justice. Critical engagement with literature can help to bridge the gap between academic discourse on tribal literature and its place in broader social, cultural, and political discourse in this regard. Thus, the study of transformative narratives in contemporary tribal literature is critical for giving voice to the marginalised, facilitating social transformation, and promoting social justice.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest between them.

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