



VIDHYAYANA

**ISSN 2454-8596**

[www.vidhyayanaejournal.org](http://www.vidhyayanaejournal.org)

**An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal**

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## **'Voices Unheard' an Overview of Indian Tribal Culture through its Literature**

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### Introduction:

Bharat an ancient land or India is incredible in matter of languages, faces, races, traditions, backgrounds, sects, colors, deities and religion that presents vast experience of unity in diversity. Indian culture has been great unique factor where all community live in harmony. The major portion of the population is occupied by the tribal. They belong to the distinctive community migrated from another place or original inhabitants of the land. 'Tribal' is a community which possess a unique culture and surrounded by their community only. According to Sheth Godin,

“A tribe is a group of people connected to one another, connected to a leader, and connected to an idea. For millions of years, human beings have been part of one tribe or another. A group needs only two things to be a tribe: a shared interest and a way to communicate”<sup>1</sup>

However much has been discussed on tribe. The tribal are found all over the world. They are known by various names. Tribe is a group of social people, who live in a specific way, and pursue the same pattern of religious social functions, or a group of persons posses common character, occupation, or interest. Stephen Corry, has defined tribal people as

“Those which have followed ways of life for many generations that are largely self-sufficient, and are clearly different from the mainstream and dominant society”<sup>2</sup>

According to him, it is a group, existing before the development of the states. Land was the means of survival to them in the initial stage. They have followed their tradition from generation to generation which is totally different from the mainstream society. Sometimes it is our prejudice which makes us think that some are from modern culture and some are from backward background. Every one has the choice to adopt and tribals have chosen their life wisely. G.S.Ghurye in his book The Scheduled Tribes, discusses religion and occupation of the tribal. He also discussed certain features of the tribal group which are as follows.

1. They live away from civilized world in most inaccessible part of both forest den and hill.
2. They speak same tribal dialect.



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3. They possess a primitive religion known as Animism in which worship of ghosts or spirit is the most important element.
4. They follow primitive occupation such as gleaning, hunting and gathering of forest produce.
5. They are largely carnivorous or flesh or meat eaters.
6. They live either naked or semi-naked, using tree bark and leave for clothing
7. They have nomadic habit and love for drink and dance.<sup>3</sup>

These are the various features of tribe. They speak their own dialect which is not similar to any other dialect. At the very initial stage hunting was the only solution for the survival to them. They share their emotions with their group members in the forms of dance, music, and drama. Over the years, they have adopted many changes in their life style. However in the evaluation process of globalization, it is forgotten that they have their own society, which makes them unique. The term 'tribe' has been used for those groups of human beings, whose place of dwelling is situated in remote areas like hills, forest, sea, coasts and islands, and whose life style is quite different from the present civilized society. To understand the uniqueness of their culture, one has to try to understand it. They are known for simple life, warm hospitality and simplicity. They share strong community bond. Some of the tribal society is women centered and some of them follow patriarchal cultural ties. They have their own festivals and celebrations.

The most important and visible facts of tribal society is that they do not feel they belong to it, but they happily accept it. They are able to communicate with nature in serenity. They have created theories of things surrounded to them. They also formulate various romantic beliefs. Kamladevi in her book discussed various beliefs of tribal. She added that the Murias attribute the cry of the crane "gudur, gudur" 4 jealousy, indicated that not only human has feeling of jealousy but it is also there amongst birds and animals. It is female call to its mate to keep him beside her, and also to control him from noticing of other females. Everything surrounding their life has story and clear explanation. Their entire culture preserve through oral narratives. Each story relates the culture which is recited through song, so that the past can be relevant to the present and merges with it. They present strong emotions through poetry and songs.

Tribal literature is also exceptional in its direct and vivid imagery. Unwritten verses like their myths, strands in their faith, which sustain, renew, and inspire them from generation to generation, which have kept alive



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the centuries, old tradition. Economic values change fast, but the roots of their human emotions are knitted into their daily duties, in chores as well as rituals, symbolism is the core of oral verse. They have presented each and everything in their literature. They have present happiness, sadness, mercy, frustration, sarcasm, friendship, wedding, pain etc through their songs and poetry. Here in this paper I have taken few tribal songs and tried to present various aspects of their culture.

### Various aspects of Tribal Culture:

Aspects of pain:

Many poets tried to reflect the actual state of tribal in current span. In “Vadi” language, “Ave to Uth” by Parvat Vadi. In this poem, the struggle of survival is presented. It also indicates generation gap and their struggle for life. the poem shows how old people struggled in their life to save their land. They express that...

Now eat this stuff,

They have taken everything

I have been saying this since many years...

Were you sleeping?

No brother no!

What you young people know?

What we have done for this land

But you today's people, what do you know?

You have not born even,

You born in 1977

And I have bought this land in 1970

Did you get that?



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Why they have taken away from you?

But I knew it will be taken away,

For this land

We ate dry chapatti and chili

And some days we ate corn erosion

Ask your uncle

What we did for this land

We give them hen and he-goat

And one day we gave them sweets with pure butter

And ones we filled penalty by selling Bengals of your mother

And ask your uncle... 5



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This poem is the best example and how civilized people, manipulate them and took their land. They eat only Chapati, and even got prisoner for two-three days in jail. They did everything to save their land and forest, but it was in vain. Without land and forest they did not have any other way to go. At least in the forest, they can eat fruits and vegetables, but after deforesting, they have to fulfill their hunger with water and other similar sources.

Globalization, and in lack of knowledge of technology played major in their exploitation. They were unable to get work though, they do not lose their hope for the land, and insist each other to fertilize their land and to save their land. The irony of this poem is that at the end of the story they try to save the land which mentioned only in the paper, but with hope that one day it will be given to them with their own rights.

Different Modes of Learning:

In civilized society, we have schools to educate children, but for the tribal they have only backyard where the kids are their own teacher to learn lesson of life. "Kariyo" in "Rathvi" language, by Munjal Rathva, here



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'Kariyo' a 'backyard' is a symbol of the University. This poem is about how tribal children get education without attending school in their life. In this poem 'Kariyo' is a symbol of the university. Most of the time, kids of tribal spent their time in the backyard of the house, where they used to play, perform a drama, sing a song and other many activities. Through this activity they can learn many new things and lessons of life at very younger age.

'Backyard' is my university

Where I have performed a drama,

Sing a song,

Where we felt happiness of the world

'Backyard' is my university

Where we learnt the lesson of feelings,

We learnt the lesson of how to live life

'Backyard' is my university 6



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So in this sense, poet indicates "Backyard" as a university and at the same time it also indicates different modes of learning amongst the tribal children. They not only learn new things, but also enjoy independent modes of learning. This poem also presents the economic condition of the tribe. Education is one of the important aspects of their life but as they cannot afford it for their children, so their kids have to sacrifice their learning and try to learn independently.

Eagerness to Learn:

Shubhas Ishai in Rathavi language has written "Me Bhanva Karu" shows the eagerness of a child who wants to study to make life better. He asks for pen and page by saying that I want to learn and study to make future and life good. He thinks that if I study than only I do not only make my life, but also my family members' life better.



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Friend, I am going to study

Give me slate and pen

If I will study, I will get job

Problems of home will be decreased

What will do by being illiterate?

How we will fulfill all of us need?

Education will make our tomorrow good

Give me slate and pen

Those who are educated, will be happy

Those who are not will remain sad. 7



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He also thinks that if I do not study, I will not be able to survive. My future will not be good without education. So he thinks that it is privileged to get educated in life.

Marriage Songs:

Marriage is a special ceremony amongst all tribe. It is one of the most important occasions amongst tribal. It is a ceremony of love where two bodies and heart becomes one and starts their new life by fulfilling all the custom which is required to be followed. However, they also celebrate Birth Ceremony, Marriage Ceremony and Death ceremony in a very special way.

“Mangana” means to ask. (Dangi Song)

The girl is like a goddess

And we are going to ask her hand





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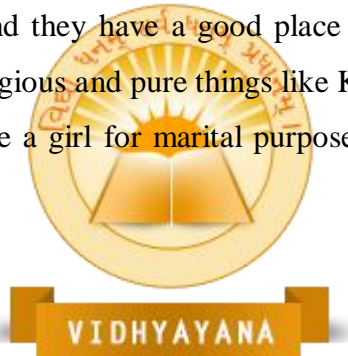
Whichever temple belongs to that way,

We will worship it and

Then only we will move forward. 8

In this song, the things which are used in marriage ceremony are mentioned like Kumkum, (a red paste used for making an auspicious mark on the forehead), Haldi (turmeric) Sopari (betel nut), coconut etc.

This song describes that how much it is important to visit a girl's family. They compare girl with Goddess which is a sign of respect towards the girl. As now a day in civilized society due to discrimination, sometimes, a girl and a woman only considered as a medium of sex. While in tribal society we can see that girls and women are much respected and they have a good place in society. Another aspect of this song which catches our eyes is that, use of religious and pure things like Kumkum, Haldi which are normally used in Pooja, but here it indicates that to see a girl for marital purpose is not less than to worship a God and Goddess.



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Aspect of Celebration:

Holi Song:

Tribal celebrate each and every occasions with enthusiasm. Holi is one of the most popular festivals amongst tribal. As Holi comes, the change in atmosphere is viable. As it is played in the Spring Season which is a period between end of winter and beginning of summer. They also present life lesson through song.

On mountain's ridge

Many flowers, many flowers...

By seeing flowers,





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Brother comes to ask it...

Look back brother,

Flowers become wither...

Come in front side

Flowers are blooming...9

In this song, the flower is beautifully portrayed as a symbol of life. The, flowers bloom even on ridge of the mountain and spread fragrance. It spreads fragrance, until it is plucked. If we see, in the life of human beings, there are many ups and downs, sometime, we blame circumstances, and some time we blame human as well. But rather blaming any one, if we can spread fragrance like flowers, then life would be worth living. As flower can bloom in any atmosphere, human being can arise at any point of time. If we are continuously thinking about past disappointments, we would not be able to achieve anything in the future.

Aspect of Friendship:

In tribal literature we can see various aspect of their culture where to celebrate any occasion is a part of their entertainment. They enjoy their daily work. One of the household works in village is to fetch water from the well. The Adivasi girls go together to bring water. In this daily routine they spent sometime together with each other. Here is a song which presents girls friendship and their bonding amongst each other.

We are seven friends

The patterns on my water pot holder are embellished with diamonds

Friends, we are going to the lake...

Friends, we have taken golden water pots...

Friends, we are walking deep into the water...

Friends we have filled our water pots with water...

The patterns on my water pot holder is embellished with diamonds 10



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This song presents many things. It also indicates how beautifully they decorate their water pot. Use of 'golden water pot' metaphorically presented here which shows that though they are not financially rich, but their heart is full of happiness. Normally we have seen water pot very simple in civilize society, but when it comes to tribal, they not only decorate their house wall, but they decorate water pot also with diamonds and other decorative pattern. While doing this activity, they not only talks to each other, but they share routine stuff. We can see in the song that they don't do task in monotonous way, but they enjoy it very much and relish their friendship.

These poems, represents the pain of the tribal's life. Though they having the capability of predicting future, and communicate with nature, they are ignored in present era. Through these poems and songs, we get the idea of their status in society, and due to lack of literacy, they do not get the rights, which they deserve. Through songs they present their depression and try to get some relief from routine life.



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