

# Chapter 24

## Tribal Verse

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### Understanding the Text

1. Identify the common characteristics shared by tribal communities all over the world.

#### Answer

The essayist identifies some common characteristics shared by tribal communities all over the world. The tribals live in groups that are cohesive and organically unified. They show very little interest in accumulating wealth or in using labour as a device to gather interest and capital. The tribals accept a world view in which nature, human beings and God are intimately linked and they believe in the human ability to spell and interpret truth. They live more by intuition than reason, they consider the space around them more sacred than secular, and their sense of time is personal rather than objective.

2. What distinguishes the tribal imagination from the secular imagination?

#### Answer

The tribal imagination is, according to the author, dreamlike and hallucinatory. It admits fusion between various planes of existence and levels of time in a natural way. These characteristics distinguish the tribal imagination from the secular imagination. In tribal stories, oceans fly in the sky as birds, mountains swim in the water as fish, animals speak as humans and stars grow like plants. In tribal imagination, stars, seas, mountains, trees, men and animals, can be angry, sad or happy.

3. How does G. N. Devy bring out the importance of the oral literary tradition?

#### Answer

G. N. Devy brings out the importance of the oral literary tradition by

referring to the richness of the works of the tribals that have been handed down from one generation to the other orally. He tries to bring home the point that though the literary compositions have been transmitted orally yet thematically and ornamentally they are very rich. The stories and songs that have come down to the tribals through oral tradition are unique. These compositions present the exclusive world view of the tribals. He points out that the wealth and variety of these works is very enormous. In order to show the importance of the oral literary tradition, Devy throws light on the various characteristics of the tribal arts. He shows that one of the main characteristics of tribal arts is their distinct manner of constructing space and imagery, which might be described as hallucinatory. Playfulness is another dimension of this tradition. Devy advocates that proper recognition should be given to the oral literary tradition in view of its variety and richness.

4. List the distinctive features of the tribal arts.

### **Answer**

According to the essayist G. N. Devy, the tribal arts display many distinctive features.

One of the distinctive features of tribal arts is their distinct manner of constructing space and imagery, which might be described as 'hallucinatory'. In both oral and visual forms of representation, tribal artists seem to interpret verbal or pictorial space as demarcated by an extremely flexible 'frame'. The boundaries between art and non art become almost invisible. In a tribal Ramayana, an episode from the Mahabharata makes a sudden and surprising appearance; tribal paintings contain a curious mixture of traditional and modern imagery.

The tribal arts follow strict convention. Every tribal performance and creation has, at its back, another such performance or creation belonging to a previous occasion. The creativity of the tribal artist lies in adhering to the past while, at the same time, slightly subverting it.

Playfulness is the soul of tribal arts. The tribal arts rarely assume a serious or pretentious tone. The tribal arts are relaxed and never tense.

The tribal oral stories and songs employ bilingualism in a complex manner.

5. 'New Literature' is a misnomer for the wealth of the Indian Literary tradition. How does G. N. Devy explain this?

### **Answer**

According to the essayist, the tribal Literature should not be called 'New Literature' as this has been in existence for many years. The songs and stories of the tribals have been transmitted orally and as these have not been written down so many people have been unaware of them. The essayist contradicts the views of the western literary critics who have termed tribal literature as 'New Literature'. He says that there is nothing new in this, what might be new is the present attempt to see imaginative expression in tribal language not as folklore but as literature and to hear tribal speech not as a dialect but as a language.

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### **Talking about the Text**

1. 'It is time to realise that unless we modify the established notion of literature as something written, we will silently witness the decline of various Indian oral traditions'

#### **Answer**

Literature is usually thought of including those compositions like poetry and prose which are written. But going by this notion, one may miss the aesthetic beauty of the compositions as prevalent in many oral traditions. There is another stream of literature containing compositions which are rich both thematically and aesthetically. But as we have a rigid criteria of regarding compositions as literature only when these are written so these do not get the status of literature. This is the case with many Indian oral traditions. Unless we modify our notions of literature there is every possibility that we will silently witness the decline of various Indian oral traditions.

#### Another View

Oral literary tradition is not a unique phenomenon in India. Oral traditions have been in existence in all parts of the world. Oral traditions do not die out because of their very nature of being transmitted orally. So it hardly matters whether we modify our notion about literature or not, the oral traditions will continue to exist. What needs to be done is promotion of oral literary tradition through patronage of the state.

2. "Tribal arts are not specifically meant for sale." Does this help or hamper their growth and preservation?

## **Answer**

Tribal arts are not specifically meant for sale. This helps in their preservation and growth. Tribal arts have a characteristic of their own. The tribal arts employ hallucinatory and dreamlike imagination. They are playful in nature. The tribal arts are thematically and aesthetically very rich. The tribal arts present a unique world view of the tribals. So any attempt to commercialise tribal arts will hamper their growth and preservation. Tribals are simple minded, not influenced by the ills of modern societies which are under the sway of evils of consumerism. The tribal arts are a part of life of the tribals. They perform these arts not for the sake of earning money but with spontaneity to express their imagination and world view.

### Another View

The non commercialisation of tribal arts hampers their growth and preservation. Without any kind of commercialisation, the tribal artists cannot be economically sound to carry on their creative works. Endeavours should be taken to commercialise their arts so that the tribals are able to preserve their arts. The tribals suffer from abject poverty and marginalisation in the society. So, their arts need to be commercialised. This will give an impetus to the growth and preservation of their art forms.

3. Because India's tribal communities are basically bilingual there is a danger of dismissing their languages as dialects of India's major tongues.

## **Answer**

Most of the tribal communities are bilingual. They have assimilated many vocabulary from the major languages of the country. It may seem to many of us that their languages are dialects of India's major tongues.

### Another View

'Most of the tribal communities in India may be bilingual but there seems no danger of dismissing their languages as dialects of India's major tongues. This only shows that the tribal communities are assimilative in nature. Identity of any language is never destroyed simply because it is borrowing words from some other language. Had it been so then even languages like Hindi and other major languages which keep on borrowing words from foreign languages would have lost their identity. The tribal languages have a structural difference from the major languages of India. Simply the presence of some words of other

languages will not make them lose their identity and make them identified as dialects of some major Indian languages.

4. While tribal communities may not seem to possess the scientific temper, there are many ideas from tribal conventions that could enrich modern societies.

### **Answer**

Tribal communities may not seem to possess the scientific temper. However, there are many ideas from tribal conventions that could enrich modern societies. The tribals live close to nature. They treat nature as a living being. They consider it to be the mother who nurtures them. The tribals have a very intimate and positive relation with nature. This positive ideas of the tribals towards ecology can help enrich the modern societies. The tribals are very simple minded. They have not been influenced by evils like consumerism. Some tribal communities follow matrilineal system. Tribal societies do not follow dowry system instead some tribal communities fix a bride price that the groom pays to the bride either in cash or in kind. This can be a lesson for the modern societies.

### **Appericiation**

1. How does 'A Munda song' show that the perspective of the tribal mind towards the girl child is different from that of [other ] mainstream communities?

### **Answer**

In 'A Munda Song' the perspective of the tribal mind towards the girl child is different from that of [other] mainstream communities. This song welcomes the birth of a girl child. It celebrates the birth of a girl child. Contrary to the attitude of the mainstream communities, this Munda song regards the birth of a girl child as auspicious. This is beautifully expressed in the lines – A daughter was born, the cowshed filled up. Ironically, in mainstream communities the birth of a boy child is celebrated. The boy child is regarded as the carrier of the baton of the family line. The girl child usually becomes an object of neglect and is looked down upon as a burden.

2. How does 'A Kondh Song' substantiate the tribal urge to gain domination over time by conversing with their dead ancestors?

## **Answer**

The tribals do not have possession over land but they have an urge to gain domination over time. In 'A Kondh Song' this urge is beautifully substantiated by referring to the conversation with their dead ancestors. They request the spirits of their ancestors to accept the offerings of a baby fowl they make. They state that they are offering because they are alive. They request the spirits not to inflict pain on them after the spirits depart.

3. 'Adi Song for the Recovery of Lost Health' is in Miri Agom while Adi Agom is the Adi community's language for routine conversation. How does this reflect upon the high level of language sensitivity of the Adi? Can you think of other parallels in modern languages between the literary variety and the colloquial variety?

## **Answer**

The 'Adi song for the recovery of lost Health' is in Miri Agom. This language is not used in day to day conversation. It is applied in chanting during rituals. Miri Agom is a highly rhythmic language. The existence of these two different languages testify to the high level of language sensitivity of the Adi tribe. We find such parallels in modern languages also. The Hindi language, the Bangla language, the English language all have two variety of languages – one literary variety and the colloquial variety.