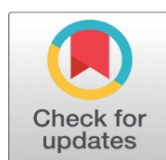
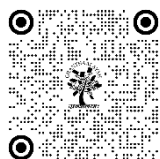


EXPLORING TRIBAL IDENTITY IN INDIAN LITERATURE: A FOCUS ON THE TRIBES OF KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT

Tribal identity has been a focal point of analysis and understanding in Indian literature, showcasing the complex interweaving of cultural, social, and historical aspects of tribal societies. This research article examines the depiction and development of tribal identity in Indian literature, specifically focusing on the tribes of Karnataka. By encompassing various genres and linguistic traditions, this analysis explores the portrayal of tribal life, customs, beliefs, and challenges in literary works. The research also investigates the transformation of tribal identity over time, which mirrors changes in societal attitudes, political dynamics, and the impact of technology. The analysis explores the intricacies of tribal identity construction, negotiation, and assertion in Indian literature by examining various literary texts, such as novels, short stories, poetry, and folk tales. This study explores themes of marginalisation, cultural hybridity, and resistance in tribal literature, aiming to enhance our understanding of the complex and diverse landscape of tribal literature while also providing insights into broader issues of identity, diversity, and inclusion in modern society.

Keywords: Tribal, Linguistic Traditions, Indian Literature, Political Dynamics, Cultural Hybridity, Karnataka

1. INTRODUCTION

Tribes have been integral to India's social fabric since ancient times. Ancient Indian literature, such as the Vedas and epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, often mention tribes and their customs. However, their representation is usually filtered through the lens of the dominant societal structures of the time. The British colonial rule significantly impacted tribal communities in India, with policies that often marginalised tribal groups, displacing them from their lands and disrupting their traditional ways of life. This period witnessed the emergence of tribal literature as a response to colonial oppression, with writers like Mahasweta Devi and Munshi Premchand highlighting the struggles of tribal communities in their works. After gaining independence from British rule in 1947, India embarked on a nation-building and socio-economic development journey. However, tribal communities faced marginalisation and exploitation, particularly in resource-rich areas targeted for industrialisation and development projects. This period saw the rise of indigenous voices within Indian literature, advocating for the recognition of tribal rights and the preservation of their cultural heritage. The latter half of the 20th century witnessed various tribal movements and activism across India,

demanding land rights, autonomy, and artistic preservation. Writers and intellectuals from tribal backgrounds played a significant role in articulating the grievances of their communities through literature and other forms of expression.

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of tribal issues in India, fueled by increased advocacy, scholarship, and representation in literature and media. Contemporary Indian literature continues to explore tribal identity, shedding light on the diversity, resilience, and cultural richness of tribal communities. India's tribal communities, which are varied and diverse, have long been sidelined, and mainstream cultural narratives have overshadowed their stories. However, in literature, these narratives have a significant platform for expressing themselves, providing valuable perspectives on the distinct worldviews, customs, and difficulties tribal societies encounter. This research article focuses on the tribes of Karnataka, a state with a significant tribal population. As per the 2011 Census, the Scheduled Tribe population in Karnataka was 4.25 million, constituting 7.0% of the state's total population. The state is home to diverse tribal communities, including the Nayaka, Lambani, Soliga, Yerava, and Koraga. This article aims to explore the intricate relationship between tribal identity and Karnataka's broader socio-cultural context by examining various literary works from diverse genres and languages. Tribal identity has been a captivating and much-examined topic in Indian literature. Within the diverse landscape of Indian literature, the voices of tribal communities, particularly from Karnataka, frequently emerge as dynamic elements, skillfully interlacing narratives of endurance, heritage, and selfhood. Exploring tribal identity in Indian literature involves a profound investigation of indigenous communities, encompassing their challenges, achievements, and the subtleties of their existence. This analytical analysis aims to clarify the complex aspects of tribal identity as depicted in Indian literature.

Central to the discussion are the themes of land and belonging. Many tribal communities in Karnataka, such as the Soligas of the Biligiriranga Hills, have ancestral lands that are not merely physical spaces but repositories of cultural heritage and spiritual significance. Literature becomes a medium through which these connections are articulated, offering poignant reflections on the impact of land alienation, displacement, and environmental degradation on tribal identities. Additionally, tribal literature functions as a storehouse of verbal customs, traditional stories, and mythologies, safeguarding indigenous systems of knowledge that have persisted for millennia. These oral accounts, frequently transmitted over generations, offer a valuable understanding of tribal cosmologies and question conventional views of history and civilisation.

2. LITERARY DEPICTION

Indian literature, spanning ancient and current periods, has effectively portrayed and interacted with the multifaceted nature and intricacy of tribal identities. Writers have thoroughly examined all aspects of tribal life, from ancient epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata to contemporary novels and poems, demonstrating sensitivity and subtlety. In the context of Karnataka, authors writing in Kannada and other regional languages have shed light on the lives of local tribal communities. For example, works by writers such as Devanur Mahadeva, who writes about the struggles of marginalised communities, offer insights into the experiences of tribes in the region.

3. THEMES AND MOTIFS

Several recurring themes and motifs permeate the portrayal of tribal identity in Indian literature, and these are particularly relevant to the tribes of Karnataka. These include the tension between tradition and modernity, the impact of colonisation and displacement, the preservation of indigenous knowledge and practices, and the quest for autonomy and self-determination. For example, the Lambani community, known for its vibrant clothing and unique customs, faces challenges in preserving its traditions in a rapidly modernising world. Writers often delve into the complexities of identity, belonging, and cultural hybridity, highlighting the dynamic interplay between tribal and mainstream cultures. The conflict between traditional forest-based livelihoods and modern conservation policies, as seen in the narratives of the Soliga people, is a recurring theme.

4. REPRESENTATION AND MARGINALISATION

Indian literature has significantly contributed to the amplification of tribal voices and experiences. However, it also faces the ethical and aesthetic difficulties of representing these perspectives. Scholars have identified cases of sexual objectification, oversimplification, and idealisation in literary portrayals of indigenous communities, advocating for a

more sophisticated and comprehensive perspective. Furthermore, excluding tribal narratives from the literary canon indicates the broader power dynamics and hierarchies in Indian culture. In Karnataka, while some progress has been made, the representation of tribal voices in mainstream Kannada literature remains limited, and there is a need for more direct and authentic portrayals from within the tribal communities themselves.

5. ANALYSIS

Exploring tribal identity in Indian literature, specifically focusing on Karnataka, provides a thorough examination that surpasses simple literary criticism to delve into the socio-cultural, political, and ethical aspects of portraying tribal identities in literature. It offers valuable perspectives on the intricacies of identity, portrayal, and power dynamics within the Indian literary scene. When analysing tribal literature from Karnataka, it is crucial to recognise the significance of language as a vehicle for expressing cultural identity. Several indigenous languages, which possess a wealth of oral customs, risk disappearing due to linguistic standardisation. However, these languages resonate in literature, magnifying the voices of tribal writers and poets who aspire to regain and honour their linguistic history. For instance, revitalising languages like Soliga and Koraga is crucial for preserving cultural heritage.

Furthermore, the representation of tribal identity in Indian literature is not static but dynamic, evolving in response to changing socio-political realities. Contemporary authors, hailing from tribal backgrounds, offer nuanced portrayals that defy stereotypical depictions and challenge dominant narratives of otherness. Exploring tribal identity in Indian literature transcends mere academic inquiry; it is a journey of empathy, understanding, and solidarity. By engaging with these narratives, readers are invited to embark on a transformative voyage that transcends cultural boundaries and fosters a deeper appreciation for the rich tapestry of human experience. As we embark on this analytical overview of tribal identity in Indian literature, let us heed the words of Native American author Louise Erdrich, who eloquently captures the essence of indigenous storytelling. "The written word, born of a fierce respect for the spoken, circulates among us, evoking our deepest feelings. We will use it well."

6. CONCLUSION

The discussion of tribal identity in Indian literature is evidence of the abundant variety and multiplicity of Indian culture. Writers have explored the intricacies, inconsistencies, and enduring strength of tribal groups via various storylines. India's ongoing struggle with social justice, inclusivity, and cultural legacy makes the literary discussion on tribal identity crucial and irreplaceable. It provides valuable perspectives on the nation's history, current situation, and future. By presenting a variety of literary portrayals, this work provides useful perspectives on the historical, social, and cultural aspects of tribal identity. It also promotes the importance of including and acknowledging minority voices in the literary world, particularly those from the diverse tribal communities of Karnataka.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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