



## DEPICTION OF TRIBAL LIFE THROUGH FOLK LITERATURE

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### ABSTRACT

*Indian folk literature holds out a strong and loud message for other parts of the world where these art forms have disappeared thick and fast in consonance with rapid industrialization and globalization. Folk literature and folk-art forms are not merely carriers of culture or philosophical poems, but rather the expressions of strong self-reflections and deep insights accrued therein. Simple life, self-reflection and treading the path of the righteous contained in traditions. Again, folk traditions are not merely platforms for holding high moral ground having no relevance to the present day reality. Most tribal communities in India are culturally similar to tribal communities elsewhere in the world. They live in groups that are cohesive and organically unified. The world of the tribal imagination, therefore, is radically different from that of modern Indian society. One of the main characteristics of tribal arts is their distinct manner of constructing space and imagery. 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. A tribal epic can begin its narration from a trivial everyday event; tribal paintings merge with living space as if the two were one and the same. And within the narrative itself, or within the painted imagery, there is no deliberate attempt to follow a sequence. The episodes retold and the images created take on the apparently chaotic shapes of dreams.*

**Keywords:** Industrialisation, globalization, self-reflections, cohesive, chaotic

### INTRODUCTION

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The word, 'folk' has wide range of understanding and connotations – ranging from 'natural' to 'native' to 'traditional' to 'rural' and in some cases 'from the heart.' The 'outpourings from the heart' of native or traditional people later takes the form of folklore. All folklores do more than merely conveying heart-pouring of natives about the nature around them. They are often, or, always the carriers of culture, of social lives, customs and forms of behaviour, that is a society, and, life in a nutshell. Folklores contain the lofty thoughts of the highest metaphysical truths, normally incomprehensible to laymen, in a subtle, story forms.

Literature, in written form, helps in preserving the folklores and oral traditions. But for the literature in this form, the world would have lost almost all the folk and oral traditions. Written books, as recordings of folklores help in passing on the lofty thoughts and ideas to posterity with no or very little changes in contrast to oral traditions where they often get lost in transition. Literature also can highlight the relevance of the stories of the past to the generation of the present, something which the oral traditions cannot strongly do.

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Most tribal communities in India are culturally similar to tribal communities elsewhere in the world. They 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. 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 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. The world of the tribal imagination, therefore, is radically different from that of modern Indian society.

Once a society accepts a secular mode of creativity within which the creator replaces God, imaginative transactions assume a self-conscious form. The tribal imagination, on the other hand, is still, to a large extent, dreamlike and hallucinatory. It admits fusion between various planes of existence and levels of time in a natural way. 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. Spatial order and temporal sequence do not restrict the narrative. This is not to say that tribal creations have no conventions or rules but simply that they admit the principle of

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association between emotion and the narrative motif. Thus stars, seas, mountains, trees, men and animals, can be angry, sad or happy. It might be said that tribal artists work more on the basis of their racial and sensory memory than on the basis of a cultivated imagination. In order to understand this distinction, we must understand the difference between imagination and memory. In the animate world, consciousness meets two immediate material realities: space and time. We put meaning into space by perceiving it in terms of images. The image making faculty is a genetic gift to the human mind, this power of imagination helps us understand the space that envelops us. In the case of time, we make connections with the help of memory; one remembers being the same person as one was yesterday.

One of the main characteristics 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. A tribal epic can begin its narration from a trivial everyday event; tribal paintings merge with living space as if the two were one and the same. And within the narrative itself, or within the painted imagery, there is no deliberate attempt to follow a sequence. The episodes retold and the images created take on the apparently chaotic shapes of dreams. In a tribal Ramayan, an episode from the Mahabharat makes a sudden and surprising appearance; tribal paintings contain a curious mixture of traditional and modern imagery. In a way, the syntax of language and the grammar of painting are the same, as if literature were painted words and painting were a song of images.

Indeed, playfulness is the soul of tribal arts. Though oral and pictorial tribal art creations are intimately related to rituals. The sacred can never be left out. The tribal arts rarely assume a serious or pretentious tone. The artist rarely plays the role of the Creator. Listening to tribal epics can be great fun as even the heroes are not spared the occasional shock of the artist's humour. One reason for this unique mixture of the sacred and the ordinary may be that tribal works of art are not created specifically for sale. Artists do expect a certain amount of patronage from the community, like artists in any other context; but, since those performing rituals are very often artists themselves, there is no element of competition in the patron-artist relationship. The tribal arts are, therefore, relaxed, never tense. One question invariably asked about the tribal arts is whether they are static, frozen in tradition or dynamic. A general misconception is that the orally transmitted arts are entirely tradition-bound, with little scope for individual experimentation beyond the small freedom to distort the previously created text. This misconception arises from the habit of seeing art only with reference to the text but the tribal arts involve not just text but performance and audience reception. Experimentation in the tribal arts can be understood only when they are approached as performing arts.



India remains one of the world's richest sources of folktales. Not merely folktales but all forms of oral traditions – proverbs, aphorisms, anecdotes, rumours, songs, impromptu folk street plays – mirror the culture and values of the land in which they take place. They have also helped in binding vastly differing mores and customs of even a single given place. India is one place where the speech of even the most illiterate farmer is filled with lofty thoughts and metaphors.

By preserving and adopting many a tale and numerous songs and plays peppered with the proverbs and aphorisms of the region, Indian Literature has played a huge role in binding together vast cultures in an unseen way. The role of Indian Literature in maintaining and fostering cultural unity and identity in the vast land such as India cannot be diminished.

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