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A Review of Emerging Dimensions and Contemporary Voices in the Tribal Literature of Jharkhand

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Abstract:

Tribal literature in Jharkhand shows the rich culture, daily life, and challenges of its tribal communities. In earlier times, this literature was shared through oral stories, folk songs, and traditional rituals. Today, it is also being written down and translated into English, helping more people understand tribal life and thinking. This looks at the new and growing areas of tribal literature in Jharkhand, especially those written in English or translated from tribal languages like Mundari, Ho, Santhali, and Kurukh. It shows how writers are keeping their culture alive while also talking about modern issues like losing their land due to mining, environmental harm, and the fight for rights and identity. Modern tribal writers and poets such as Dr. Ram Dayal Munda, Vandna Tete, and Anuj Lugun are using literature to speak up for their communities. They draw from oral traditions and blend them with contemporary themes, using poetry, fiction, and essays to raise awareness and build solidarity. Their writing mixes old traditions with new styles and ideas. This highlights the significant contributions of tribal intellectuals in shaping a distinctive literary voice that resonates with both local and global audiences. Even though tribal literature is growing, it still faces problems. Many tribal languages are not written or published much, and there is not enough support from schools or publishers as well as Government. The purpose of this article is to study how tribal literature in Jharkhand is changing and to show how it helps express tribal identity in today's world.

Keywords: Tribal Literature, Jharkhand, Contemporary Voices, Indigenous Identity, Cultural Preservation.

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- **Background of the Study**

Jharkhand is a culturally rich state in eastern India, home to a significant tribal population. According to **Census 2011**¹, Scheduled Tribes constitute 26.3% of the state's total population, with major communities including the Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Ho, Kharia, and Birhor. These indigenous groups have, for centuries, preserved their histories, beliefs, and social values through oral literature, such as myths, folktales, songs, proverbs, and rituals (**Singh et al., 1999**)². Tribal literature serves as a vital reflection of their worldview, often centered on nature, spirituality, ancestral wisdom, communal life, and the struggle for survival and justice. However, the advent of modernization, increasing economic pressures, industrialization, and urban migration has led to rapid socio-cultural shifts. These changes have not only affected traditional lifestyles but also reshaped tribal literary forms and content. Over 60% of Jharkhand's tribal population lives in rural and forested areas, many of which have been affected by mining and development projects, resulting in displacement and social unrest (**Press Information Bureau, 2021**)³.

In recent decades, tribal writers from Jharkhand have increasingly embraced written literature especially in English and Hindi or through translation from tribal languages such as Santhali, Ho, Mundari, and Kurukh. This transition has enabled wider readership and helped in expressing contemporary issues like identity politics, loss of land and language, environmental degradation, and marginalization. Despite its richness, Jharkhand's tribal literature still faces several challenges, such as linguistic marginalization with over 30 tribal languages spoken in the region, many of which lack standardized scripts or written documentation. There is a lack of institutional support in education and publishing, which hinders preservation. Encouragingly, recent years have witnessed increased academic interest, translation projects, and cultural activism aimed at preserving and promoting tribal literature within both Indian and global literary circles.

- **Objective**

This study aims first to explore the emerging dimensions in Jharkhand's tribal literature by examining contemporary voices that reflect evolving themes, forms, and concerns within indigenous literary expression. Secondly, it seeks to analyze how these literary works in or translated into English engage with issues of cultural identity, displacement, environmental challenges, and socio-political realities. Through this dual focus, the research intends to contribute to the understanding and appreciation of tribal literature as a dynamic and significant part of India's literary heritage.

- **Methodology**

The methodology for this study consists of a qualitative review of existing literature on Jharkhand's tribal literature, limited to works available in English or translated into English. The review includes scholarly articles, anthologies, poetry collections, and critical essays focusing on tribal narratives, emerging themes, and contemporary tribal writers. This approach allows an examination of evolving literary dimensions and the voices shaping Jharkhand's tribal literature today.

- **Traditional Forms and Themes in Tribal Literature**

Tribal literature in Jharkhand comes from old traditions where stories, songs, and customs were shared by speaking or singing, not by writing. For a long time, tribal people passed their knowledge from one generation to another through storytelling, folk songs, dances, and rituals. These were often performed during festivals, daily work, or important life events like birth, marriage, and death (Dhar, 2018)⁴. One of the main forms is oral storytelling. These are old stories that talk about how the world was created, how people came to be, and how tribal heroes lived. These stories help people learn about their history, values, and way of life. Tribal folktales and myths often include animals, spirits, and nature gods. They teach important lessons about right and wrong. Folk songs are also important. They are sung during farming, celebrations, or while working together. They talk about nature, love, happiness, and even pain or struggle.

Rituals and chants are used during special ceremonies. They help connect people to their gods, nature, and ancestors. Some tribes also perform folk dramas, where they act out stories with music, masks, and dancing. This makes the stories fun and easier to remember. This literature mostly talks about nature. Forests, rivers, hills, and animals are respected and treated as part of the family. It also talks about the strong bond within the community—how people help each other and live together peacefully. Many stories include spiritual ideas and belief in spirits and gods. Some stories also tell about how tribal people fight against problems like losing their land or facing injustice. These stories help them keep their identity and feel proud of their culture.

- **Transition to Written and Translated Literature**

In earlier days, tribal literature in Jharkhand was mostly oral, shared through stories, songs, and rituals. But now, many tribal writers have started writing in Hindi, English, and their native languages like Santhali, Ho, Mundari, and Kurukh. This change has helped protect their traditions and allowed others to understand tribal life. With the help of translations, especially from Santhali to English, tribal stories are reaching a wider audience (Ramakrishnan, 2023)⁵. These translated works let people from outside the community learn about the culture, beliefs, and struggles of tribal people.

Written literature is also being used as a strong tool to speak out against injustice. It tells about the problems tribal communities face like land loss, poverty, and being treated unfairly. Many tribal writers use their words to fight for their rights and show pride in their identity. Well-known writers such as Dr. Ram Dayal Munda, Vandna Tete, and Anuj Lugun have made important contributions. Dr. Munda worked to save tribal languages and culture through writing. Vandna Tete focuses on women's experiences and cultural identity, while Anuj Lugun writes powerful poetry about freedom and social justice. Their works combine old tribal traditions with modern issues, making tribal voices stronger and more visible in the world of literature.

- **A Review of Emerging Dimensions and Contemporary Voices in the Tribal Literature**

Tribal literature of Jharkhand traditionally thrived in oral forms such as folktales, myths, songs, and ritualistic chants that conveyed community history, beliefs, and ecological knowledge. With the increasing interaction of tribal communities with mainstream education, media, and literature, a transition to written forms, especially in English, has expanded the reach and visibility of these narratives. This shift has led to the emergence of new thematic concerns, stylistic innovations, and assertive indigenous voices.

- ❖ **Emerging Themes**

A key emerging dimension in Jharkhand's tribal literature is the focus on **identity and cultural assertion**. Writers express pride in tribal heritage while confronting issues like assimilation, marginalization, and loss of traditional knowledge. For instance, contemporary poems and short stories often reflect the struggle to retain indigenous identity amidst pressures from dominant cultures and modernization.

Another prominent theme is **displacement and loss**. The expansion of mining, industrialization, and infrastructural development in Jharkhand has led to large-scale displacement of tribal communities. Literary works poignantly depict the emotional and social trauma caused by loss of ancestral lands, forests, and livelihood. These narratives also serve as a form of resistance and a call for justice. **Environmental consciousness** remains central, with many works emphasizing the tribal worldview of harmony with nature. Stories, poems, and songs celebrate forests, rivers, and wildlife while highlighting the ecological destruction caused by deforestation and mining (**Jewitt, 2000**)⁶. This ecological awareness intertwines with cultural preservation, underscoring the inseparability of tribal identity from their natural environment.

- ❖ **Contemporary Voices and Writers**

Tribal writers, poets, and scholars from Jharkhand play an important role in keeping their culture alive and sharing it with others. Many of them write poems, stories, plays, and even personal life experiences called memoirs. These forms help express tribal life, struggles, and hopes in creative ways. Writers like Dr. Ram Dayal Munda, a respected scholar and cultural leader, worked to protect tribal languages and spread tribal knowledge across India and abroad. He wrote both in Hindi and English and helped bring tribal issues into schools and universities. Vandna Tete is another strong voice who writes about tribal women, their roles in society, and the importance of identity. Anuj Lugun is known for his powerful poems on freedom, justice, and resistance, and he received the Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar for his work.

These tribal writers are not only authors they are also activists and cultural historians. Through their writings, they fight for tribal rights, speak against social injustice, and tell the world about their history and beliefs. Their work is like a bridge between the old oral traditions and the new written forms. They help others see how rich and deep tribal life is. Many platforms now support tribal literature. Journals, workshops, cultural events, and online forums help young writers share their work. Digital media has also made it easier to publish and promote tribal stories (Byrd, 2014)⁷. These efforts are helping tribal literature grow and reach more people, both in India and around the world.

❖ Stylistic and Formal Innovations

The shift from oral to written tribal literature is not just about putting old stories into written form. It also brings many changes in how stories are told and what they focus on. In the past, tribal literature was shared through songs, folk tales, and rituals that were performed and passed down by word of mouth (Eigenbrod, 1995)⁸. These forms were simple and deeply connected to nature, daily life, and community traditions. But as tribal writers began to write, especially in Hindi and English, they started exploring new ways to express their thoughts. They began using modern styles such as free verse poetry, personal stories (memoirs), drama, and new forms of storytelling.

This change helped tribal writers include deeper and more complex ideas in their work. Now, they can talk not only about traditional beliefs and culture, but also about modern problems like displacement, identity crisis, environmental damage, and social injustice. For example, writers may now use metaphors, symbolism, or shifting narrator's techniques common in modern literature to describe their pain, resistance, or dreams. This combination of traditional themes with modern literary styles creates a rich and powerful form of writing that connects the past with the present. It also helps readers both from tribal and non-tribal backgrounds to understand the deep feelings, memories, and challenges that tribal communities face in today's changing world. This blending of the old and the new gives tribal literature a fresh voice while still honoring its roots.

❖ **Challenges within Emerging Dimensions**

Even though tribal literature in Jharkhand is growing and getting more attention, it still faces many problems. One major issue is the lack of good publishing platforms. Many tribal writers do not get proper support to publish or promote their books. As a result, their work often stays within small circles and does not reach larger audiences. Also, there are fewer readers who regularly read tribal literature, especially because it is sometimes written in tribal languages that are not widely understood. When these works are translated into English, they reach more people but can feel distant from the tribal community itself.

Another big challenge is the language barrier. Many tribal people may not understand English well, and some tribal languages do not even have written scripts or strong reading habits. This makes it harder for people within the community to enjoy or relate to written literature. To solve this, some writers and groups are creating bilingual books and holding workshops that promote tribal reading and writing. These efforts are helping to bridge the gap. At the same time, new writers are using literature to proudly share their culture and raise awareness about important issues like land loss, injustice, and environmental damage. Their work shows a powerful mix of old traditions and new ideas, giving tribal literature a fresh and important place in both Indian and world literature.

• **Challenges and Prospects**

Tribal literature faces a multitude of challenges that hinder its growth and preservation. One major issue is linguistic marginalization, as many tribal languages lack formal written systems, which restricts both literary production and the preservation of oral traditions. Limited access to infrastructure further compounds the problem, with tribal writers often struggling to find publishing platforms, literary networks, and even basic educational opportunities. Structural limitations, cultural erosion poses a significant threat such as modernization and assimilation into mainstream society are gradually diminishing the practice of traditional storytelling and the transmission of oral heritage. Economic and social barriers such as poverty, displacement, and lack of institutional support also impede the development of tribal literary voices. Further we can say that when tribal literature is published in English or other dominant languages, it often fails to reach grassroots tribal communities, thus limiting its cultural impact and effectiveness in preserving indigenous identity.

This type of literature holds promising prospects driven by various progressive initiatives. Translation initiatives are playing a crucial role in broadening accessibility, as tribal oral and written narratives are increasingly being translated into English and regional languages, making them available to wider audiences. Simultaneously, academic research and recognition are on the rise, with scholars showing growing

interest in documenting, critiquing, and promoting tribal literary works, which enhances their visibility and value in the literary world. The advent of digital platforms has further transformed the landscape, allowing tribal writers and communities to disseminate their work more broadly and engage with diverse audiences. Cultural revival movements led by tribal organizations are also fostering literary activities, supporting education in native languages, and working toward the preservation of linguistic and cultural traditions. From time to time tribal literature is increasingly being integrated with environmental and social advocacy, serving as a powerful medium to raise awareness about issues such as displacement, indigenous rights, and ecological conservation, thereby reinforcing its relevance and impact in contemporary discourse.

• Conclusion

The tribal literature of Jharkhand stands at a critical juncture, balancing preservation of ancient oral traditions with the emergence of contemporary voices that speak to new realities. These literary expressions serve as vital records of tribal identity, cultural resilience, and ecological wisdom. While challenges such as linguistic marginalization and limited resources persist, the prospects offered by translations, academic interest, and digital innovations provide hope for the continued growth and recognition of Jharkhand's tribal literature. Embracing these emerging dimensions enriches the broader literary landscape and empowers tribal communities to assert their cultural narratives. This evolving body of literature not only preserves indigenous heritage but also fosters dialogue on social justice and environmental stewardship, contributing significantly to the cultural and intellectual fabric of Jharkhand and India.

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