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The Tribal World of Dangaan: A Loss of Inheritance and Troubles of Displacement

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Abstract:

The Tribal World of Dangaan is an English translation by Dr. Durgesh Borse, while the original stories were written in the Dangi dialect of Marathi by Dr. Sanjay Lohakare. The Dangi dialect is spoken near the Maharashtra Gujrat border by the tribal people of that region. The author of the pertinent stories, Dr Sanjay Lohakare, belongs to one of the tribes in Maharashtra known as Mahadeo Koli. These stories originated in his native place, bringing out the entire world of Daangan in its physical and spiritual dimension and existence. The stories contextualise a considerable period spanning from ancient to the present, though the setting of the stories is of the last forty years. The stories are a striking amalgamation of facts and fiction, but throughout the work, facts remain dominant over fiction. These stories continuously pose hoards of questions related to the future and prospects of their subject. A stark fear peeps into the mind that the forthcoming generations would see the world of Dangaan and all the tribal worlds existing only in the museums. At least to have a step forward to encourage the conservation and translation of these unheard voices and to share their literary gems with the world is a most welcome and creditable activity.

Keywords: Dangaan, Tribal, Displacement, Cultural Assimilation.

The Tribal World of Dangaan is an English translation by Dr Durgesh Borse, while the original stories were written in the *Dangi* dialect of Marathi by Dr Sanjay Lohakare. *The Dangi dialect is spoken near the Maharashtra Gujrat border by the tribal people* of that region. Diversity is a characteristic feature of the Indian continent. India has many different religions, arts, customs, races, traditions, and languages. There are a lot of languages and dialects spoken in India, but the government of India recognises only some of them as official languages. In the past, it was pretty challenging to reach and study the tribal literature created

in tribal languages or dialects. The tribal literature was not recognised or available for an Indian or global audience. One of the prominent reasons was that this body of literature was created and preserved in oral tradition, and sometimes, the people who produced it must have been far from developed metropolitan cities and research scholars; therefore, their creative works have remained unknown to the world. The technology started impacting Indian languages during the nineteenth century, and the author, G. N. Devy, has been influential in translating various indigenous languages into English and Hindi. When he was asked why tribal literature has been less visible than that of other Indian languages, Devy asserted that, after the print century, the fate of the oral became precarious. Gross cultural neglect had to be faced by the languages outside print technology. But now, in the changing socio-economic paradigm, educated authors from different tribes have expressed themselves in text form. The pertinent stories are also written by the author, Dr Sanjay Lohakare, who belongs to one of the tribes in Maharashtra known as *Mahadeo Koli*. These stories originated in his native place, bringing out the entire world of Dangaan in its physical and spiritual dimension and existence. The stories contextualise a considerable period spanning from ancient to the present, though the setting of the stories is of the last forty years. The stories are a striking amalgamation of facts and fiction, but throughout the work, facts remain dominant over fiction.

The Collection consists of ten short stories. The titles of the stories are kept as they are in the original Dangi version. They are *Raab*, *Dhol*, *Avanee*, *The Old Woman –Bhisav*, *Kalaiwala*, *Kansari*, *Jeevaba*, *Tamasha*, *Rankanda*, and *Jeetrab*. *Raab* is a natural fertiliser. It signifies an ancient tradition of the tribe to prepare natural fertilisers. During March and April, the tribal people of the Daang region cut the branches and leaves of particular trees. The leaves and the twigs are dried in the sun and burn to ashes. Later on, the ash is spread on the farm for better crops next year. (*The Tribal World of Dangan*: 2023: 20) *Dhol* means Drum. *Avanee* is a pastoral task of planting rice in ankle-deep mud on a farm. The title of the Old Woman –Bhisav, is a bit easy to understand as it signifies a woman's name. *Kalaiwala's* job is to glaze copper and bronze metal utensils. It was a very prosperous profession before the advent of stainless steel utensils. *Kansari* is the name of the grain goddess of Daang. *Jeevaba* is the name of the protagonist in the story. *Tamasha* is a form of traditional entertainment in Maharashtra. It includes dancing and singing. It is a travelling group of entertainers. *Rankanda* is a root that grows in the forest, and Dangaans used to eat it as an immunity booster. *Jeetrab* means hoards of valuable animals and insects.

These stories can be broadly divided into three categories. Under the first category, we find the stories devoted to the tribal legacy of Dangaans and the traditions, customs, rituals, and myths the tribal people adhered to until the high tide of capitalism and globalisation. *Dhol*, *Kansari*, and *Jeetrab* are three stories that fall under this category. Raab, Avanee and Rankanda, though having all the features of the first category, should be seen through the lenses of the second category of the stories, which painfully depicts the destruction of their ancient natural habitat and resulting displacement. In the third category, the author delineates some individual characters from the Dangaan region. The old woman – *Bhisav*, *Kalaiwal*, *Kansari*, and *Tamasha*, these four stories contextualising the first two categories are excellent character sketches by the author, signifying the universality of human feelings, emotions, El Dorado's and scarifies.

The last two decades of the twentieth century are marked by the sea changes in the world and the tribal in particular. For centuries, outsiders made unwarranted interference in tribal lives, and they resisted it; however, in the last two decades of the twentieth century, the pressure was so intense that they had to succumb to it. After the independence of India, the government identified these tribes, and the efforts to uplift them and bring them to the mainstream of society were started. In addition, industrialisation, particularly mining and government projects for dam construction, resulted in their displacement and disturbed the peace in the tribal world. Deforestation further added to their adverse situation. The inception of the Forest Department and Wildlife Conservation brought restrictions on their age-old activities like hunting and collecting valuable plants and herbs from the jungles. They were forced to join the mainstream, a harrowing act for them. The very idea of development in the third world has come from the West. It is technological and industrial. In *A Nomad Called Thief*, G.N. Devy says, 'Development in that ideology means digging up the earth, turning it over, exploring it and formulating new products.' (46) This is the root cause of agonies and the suffering and displacement of many tribal communities across the globe. These stories collectively voice the voiceless ignorant of capitalism's vices and virtues. The stories in the pertinent book, *The Tribal World of Dangan*, reflect the various situations and trials they have undergone since the 1980s through the sensibility of its author, who has experienced it since childhood.

The development of the modern world and the destruction of the tribal world are synonymous phrases symbolised in the story *Raab*. The story's protagonist, Hanmya, is a mute audience and evidence of this phenomenon of ancient culture's devastation. He is 'uneducated' in the contemporary sense of the word. Still, his ancient wisdom is so

invaluable that our modern education system cannot inculcate it in everyday people's minds. The story depicts the political play while the construction of a dam would render those homeless, in which the tribal become tools in the hands of Government machinery and local politicians who are among the tribals. The government takes responsibility for their rehabilitation, but the villagers feel deceived by Patil and Sarpanch. They become refugees in their village. Hanmya's tremendous reaction makes the readers introverted and demands introspection on the part of modern society when he pathetically says, "When we go for *Rabbini*, we cut down useless trees and leaves. The trees are not useful for ants, birds and other wild animals. We are also like useless trees. We are not important in society. The government cut us down for making *Raab*. This *Raab* makes them rich. They will have a good harvest of politics out of our *Raab*. The people like us are born to become *Raab*." (Ibid: 20) Their displacement occurs when they leave their ancestors' lands with heavy hearts. They tell the trees that they were made *Raab*. On the contrary, the protagonist in the story, Avanee, destroys the fertility of his farming land by using Urea fertiliser. When the land becomes barren, and he loses everything, he leaves his ancestor's place, deserting his family. With their grim shades of multilayer devastation, these stories leave us depressed. Whereas in the story *Rankand*, we come across strife between the Government Health Department and the ancient system of Herbal medicine of tribal, where the villagers are not willing to rely on government medical facilities, but the government officials force them to admit the child to the hospital making a scapegoat of an innocent child. On the other hand, Forest Officers do not allow the child's grandfather to take the herbal medicine *Rankanda*, which would have saved his grandson's life, avoiding his hospitalisation if it had reached within time. But the forest officer detains his grandfather for three days under the charge of collecting *Rankanda* from the jungle when the old man can not satisfy the officer's demand for a bribe. Thus, the enforced or even willing acceptance of the modern ways to victimise the tribal is the significant underlying theme in these three stories.

While in the background of these distressing stories, the author delightfully narrated the harmony between nature and the tribal in stories like *Kansari*, *Jitrab*, and *Dhol*. These stories reflect the customs, beliefs, traditions, ethos, and ancient myths as the sound foundation of the lives of tribal. In the story named *Kansari*, meaning grain goddess, an old man, Aaba, narrates a myth of grain goddess to his grandsons who want to sell Magali grains, which are considered a sacred grain by the community, as it was the divine gift to the earth by the heaven. *Jitrab* is a story that astonishingly enlightens us about how, for ages together, the tribal community has meticulously observed and maintained the conservation of

the environment and the safety of the food chain. Both stories underline the significance of interdependence between nature and humans. They exhibit that if this delicate fabric of nature is torn, human existence is a rare possibility, which does Modern society grossly neglect ancient wisdom. *Dhol* is another exciting story in the collection that brings out the symbolic harmony between nature and man. It also underlines the significance of customs and traditions to the tribal. Aamshya, the protagonist in the story, enjoys such a bond with his art of drum making and drum beating on the various traditional programs of the community that people say, “Aamshya is born to make and play the *dhol*.” Aamshya has such a synchronised existence with *dhol* that he dies while beating *dhol* during Holipujan, and the sound of *dhol* stops as his breath as if the sound was his breath and vice versa. In his work, *A Nomad Called Thief*, G.N. Devy says. *There are centuries of silence between the tribals and us.* (25) The stories of the *Tribal world of Dangaan* are like *Kikiyariv*, giving a call to bridge the gap between us and them.

There are four remarkable stories in the collection, which have different flavours than the earlier ones. They are *The Old Woman –Bhisav*, *Kalaiwala*, *Jeevaba* and *Tamasha*. These stories focus on the universal feelings of humanity, devotion and dedication to art and delicate human relationships and their importance in human life; of course, the very characters in the stories are Daangan, except for the *Kalaiwala*. *The Old Woman –Bhisav* is a heart-touching story of a loving and caring old woman, Bhisav. She lives alone as her sons have deserted her, but not the villagers. Villagers used to take care of her as she was the most skilled midwife in the village. Villagers trust her more than the government doctors and nurses when it is a case of the delivery of pregnant women. *Bhisav*, too, pays off their trust by relieving and saving the life of a troubled pregnant woman and her infant, even when she is on the verge of death. Bhisav proves to be the epitome of humanity. *Kalaiwala* stands tall among others as a human being as he visits the village every year, even when nobody comes to him to glare at their utensils. In contrast, he comes to the town only to do *Kalai* (to bring shine and glare to blackened things) to his relationship with villagers. What a startling thought and emotions have been expressed in such a simple way. *Jeevaba* is the story of an old and devoted painter who preserves and passes on the age-old art of tribal painting. *Tamasha* brings out the journey of a passionate dancer, Shingya, who sacrifices family and all worldly pleasures to develop his art.

Dr. Borse has brilliantly translated these stories into English by capturing the *Dangaan* spirit in its original form. The translation is quite a painstaking endeavour as it tests the metal of the translator. It’s a manifold intellectual activity, and when it comes to

translating a tribal dialect, it becomes an intricate challenge. Apart from the target language or dialect, the translator has to enter deep into the cultural world of that language. Concretising the abstract emotional realm of a different cultural group with all its historical, geographic, social, political, economic, and environmental aspects requires a sound foundation of awareness and outstanding imaginative faculty in the translator. The stories translated into English are filled with the original cultural essence, beauty, and spirit of the Daangan world. They are convincingly outstanding and agreeably put forward that Dr Borse has lucratively tackled the challenge; instead, it is an adventure on his part. His efforts are highly commendable as he did not translate the Dangaan language into English but persistently moulded English to accommodate the *Dangaan* world.

The collection of stories vividly portrays the world of *Dangaan* in all its aspects. One can perceive a complete world with all its joys and sorrows, the people, the myths, customs and traditions, the cultural ethos of the community and reluctance to accept the uncomfortable and erroneous development proposed by the system, and pain and agony in leaving their original one. The constitution of India came into existence in 1950, but for thousands of years, they had their principles and a way of leading a fruitful life derived from their ancestors. They had a sense of belonging to the Water, Forests and Land they had preserved for a long time. It's a predicament for the community that they become refugees in their homes. In the pre-independent era, tribal had seen restrictions on their free thriving in nature. After independence, tribes found themselves deprived of their water, forests and land, and they were displaced to places where they found themselves in disharmonised conditions of existence. It turns out to be a big crisis for their cultural identity, and reality, either one or the other, is at stake in the present scenario. Therefore, this crisis forms the central discourse in the stories. The author draws their energy from the tradition of tribal upbringing, language and geography. These stories continuously pose hoards of questions related to the future and prospects of their subject. A stark fear peeps into the mind that the forthcoming generations would see the world of Dangaan and all the tribal worlds existing only in the museums. India's National Academy of Letters, Sahitya Akademi, is significantly trying to develop the Project of Indian Literature in Tribal Languages and Oral Traditions to preserve and educate people about this literature. At least to have a step forward to encourage the conservation and translation of these unheard voices and to share their literary gems with the world is a most welcome and creditable activity. In the onslaught of globalisation and the age

of late capitalism, the biggest threat, though unheeded by many, is the extinction of tribal languages. Adivasi culture is heading towards hybridisation, with no path left for the retreat. This attempts to preserve and conserve the Adivasi language and culture by documenting it in literary terrain with a tribal ethos for intra-national and international readers.

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