



Tribal Life and Culture in Poetry: A Reading of *Flame of the Forest* by Ignatius Soreng

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Abstract:

Though the written tribal literature of central-eastern India has its origin in the late nineteenth century, it is popularly believed that the tribal writings came to the limelight as protest markers post-1990, mostly due to the resistance that the tribals demonstrated against illegal land occupations and exploitations during that period. We now see tribal literature emerge as a distinctive genre. Ignatius Soreng's *Flame of the Forest*, the first collection of Adivasi poetry in English coming from Sundargarh, Odisha, is an example of the new trend in Indian literature. This paper indicates that by shifting from the "literary silence" of oral tradition to a written text, *Flame of the Forest* functions as a deliberate act of resistance against the "archival erasure" of Adivasi life, and that Soreng utilises the poetic medium to reclaim the tribal subject from the static domain of anthropological "obituaries," positioning tribal experience as a dynamic, contesting presence that forces the "elitist literate civilisations" to acknowledge Adivasi life and literature as legitimate rather than mere folklore.

Keywords: Adivasi Literature, Poetry, Songs, history, society, culture.

Introduction: Adivasi Literature and the Written Tradition

“...the literature of the Adivasis is not a new ‘movement’ or a fresh ‘trend’ in the field of literature; most people have simply been unaware of its existence, and that is not the fault of the tribals themselves. What might be new is the present attempt to see imaginative expression in tribal languages not as ‘folklore’ but as literature, and to hear tribal speech not as a dialect but as a language (Devy xv).

The history of Adivasi literature is more than a century old, but has always been overshadowed by mainstream literatures. It is only recently that the nontribals and the tribals themselves have taken note of this turnaround. The first tribal book is a bilingual work, *Ho Kaaji* (Ho language), by Bheem Ram Sulanki, a Clerk working at the Subdivisional Office in Chaibasa, Jharkhand. The book, which was in Ho and Hindi, was first published in 1886 and included folklore from Ho traditions and detailed their ancestors’ ways of living (Tete and Pankaj 5). Therefore, the claim that tribal literature emerged in the 1990s is invalid. Many believe this to be true because the voices of the tribals protesting for their life and identity with Jal, Jameen, and Jungle were prominently heard throughout the country in the 90s. Therefore, the perception that the Adivasis began to write quite late is not true (Tete and Pankaj 5). Rather, the issue lies in the failure of mainstream literary discourse to recognise and acknowledge Adivasi writings as legitimate literature. According to Handoo, “Folklore studies in modern India began with the coming of the British” (135). However, these early efforts predominantly privileged the folklore of dominant linguistic and cultural communities, leaving Adivasi traditions largely undocumented and marginalised. In the past, over seventy years of independence, the country continued to treat the tribals and their cultures in the same manner as the colonisers treated the Indian cultures.

Tribal Studies has emerged in recent times as a popular discipline. The foundation of the subject can be traced to the ethnographic, anthropological, and sociological studies coming from Verrier Elwin, S C Roy, and others. It very proudly discusses tribal culture, history, social structure, language, socio-economic issues, and Political Systems. However, to this day, Tribal Studies is anything but literary. These traditions have seldom been accorded the status of literature. Scholarly attention has primarily centred on oral traditions and the processes of their acculturation. In the words of G N Devy, "A vast number of Indian languages have yet remained only spoken, with the result that literary compositions in these languages are not considered 'literature.' He notes that spoken languages are often a "feast for the folklorist" but "mean nothing" to the literary critic (xx). Soreng's choice of the English language is a strategic move to break this silence, forcing the critic to engage with Adivasi experience as a structured "language" and "literature" rather than a primitive "dialect."

Today, tribal voices resonate strongly across the country's literary landscape. The history of tribal journals and magazines reveals a rich legacy of literary expression and demonstrates their significant contribution to the growth of tribal literature. It is pertinent to mention here some of the prominent magazines and journals brought out by the missionaries and tribals in Jharkhand: *Ghar-Bandhu* (1877), *Chhotanagpur Dut* (1878), *Adivasi* (1921), *Nishkalanka* (1921), *Chandni* (1928), *Adivasi Sakam* (1940), *Abua Sakam* (1947), and *Jharkhand Samachar* (1968) (Tete and Pankaj 7). Although many of these publications are no longer in print, substantial evidence indicates that tribal communities and their oral and written literary traditions are as old as, and in certain cases older than, the literary traditions of several modern Indian languages.

Ignatius Soreng and the Odishan Context

Odisha, a land of diverse cultures and traditions, is home to 62 tribal communities, including 13 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). While Odia departments across universities in Odisha have recently integrated tribal literature into their academic discourses, scholarly attention remains predominantly restricted to oral traditions and the representations of Adivasi life by canonical non-tribal authors. Odisha's classical literature, predominantly rooted in Sanskrit and written in early Odia, often marginalised tribal voices, depicting them as either noble savages or outcasts. The colonial-era writings brought increased focus on tribal ways of life, though from an outsider's perspective. The post-independence era saw a shift in the literary landscape of Odisha, with mostly non-tribal writers striving to depict tribal life with greater realism and sensitivity. Eminent Odia writers such as Gopinath Mohanty (1914-1991), Sitakant Mahapatra (1937-), and Pratibha Ray (1943-) have made significant contributions in portraying tribal struggles and aspirations.

In recent years, tribal writers from Odisha, primarily from the Santal community, such as Pandit Raghunath Murmu (1905 - 1982), Shyam Sundar Hembram (1908 - 1991), Panchanan Marndi (1923 - 1963), Badha Beshra (1924 - 2006), Jagannath Murmu (1942-), Damayanti Beshra (1962-), and many others have begun to gain recognition, bringing authenticity and lived tribal experiences to their writings. The constitutional recognition of Santali via its inclusion in the Eighth Schedule served as a major structural catalyst, encouraging other tribal groups to invigorate literary production in their own languages. Despite this momentum, Adivasi writing within the Odishan Odia-language context remains comparatively sparse. This marginalisation is compounded by a mainstream academia that frequently relegates these living expressions to the

status of "archival materials"—a categorisation Soreng identifies as effectively being "obituaries" that fossilise tribal experience rather than engaging with it as a dynamic, contemporary literature.

Nevertheless, this has become a source of inspiration for writers from other tribal groups. It is important to note here that the tribals engaged in literary creations do not limit themselves to tribal languages alone. They are now consciously creating and strengthening their literary tradition modelled on mainstream literatures. Only time will tell if this will serve the purpose of tribal literature.

In the transition from oral to written tradition, most of the tribal writers have taken up poetry. Ignatius Soreng, a Catholic priest by calling but committed to the cause of tribal literature, is no different. He chooses poetry to express tribal issues, and his poems are within the historical "protest markers" of the 1990s. They are not just aesthetic but also a reclamation of the physical and spiritual landscape against illegal occupation and economic exploitation.

Oral Tradition and Poetry

Poetry is the manifestation of the innermost beings of humans. It owes its biological existence to the oral traditions. The only way to distinguish a written poem from one in oral tradition is by the medium. Songs were the only poetry available to preliterate humans. With the invention of paper, print, and publication, the elitist literate civilisation gradually turned away from illiterate emotions and expressions. It has become incredibly hard for the present generation to recognise the oral tradition that got transmuted into letters in inscriptions and print. Now, only the written human expressions count. Oral tradition is hardly a part of the literary canon. Those civilisations, such as the Adivasis, who didn't invent writing, learnt other languages and literatures through institutionalised education systems. They learned new dictions of life, acquired new

expressions, and adapted to new societal norms, quite often negating their traditions and life patterns. The more they read about others, the more they learned and acquired the alien systems of knowledge and lifestyle. These writings were exclusive; they didn't talk about them and carried only a partial perspective of their life and philosophy. These literatures described them as less human and more like beasts to be domesticated and civilised. Gradually, in the due course of time, for many tribals, it became imperative to express themselves not only for their communities but also for the world that boasted of a superior understanding of Adivasi lives. They felt the need to remind the world of their existence, not in their jargon but in language the world understands (them). Soreng's self-expression, therefore, is a counter to the "partial perspective" of the writers from the dominant languages in India. He rejects the "marginalised space" where Adivasis are treated as "less human" or "beasts to be domesticated," and asserts an indigenous system of life and knowledge.

Tribal Life and Culture in *Flame of the Forest*

Didn't the tribals speak earlier? Were they silent so far? They were not, because they had their songs and stories, their forests and hills, and their home. They had a space in which they interacted with nature. They cared for nature, and that nurtured them in its lap. They sang for it and each other. It hummed back to them from the ground in the murmurs of the streams and cries and cackles of creatures. It echoed in their lives. They understood the portentous lightning and thunder from the sky. They could decipher the lyrical and not-so-melodious songs of birds in the air and trees. They knew the spirits cohabiting with them in the village banyan and peepal trees. They celebrated the seasons. Their ups and downs were so much like the cycles of the seasons. They never complained about them. They knew that their deaths and births were a reciprocation with the works of nature. They structured their lives around the domicile provided to them by

nature. They were no different from nature. They lived in a community with nature. They understood themselves as belonging to it. Their social and cultural life was structured around a relationship of reciprocity with the natural world, a relationship founded on coexistence rather than domination. To suggest that tribal communities lacked a voice before the emergence of written literature is therefore to overlook the rich expressive traditions through which they had long narrated their histories, preserved their knowledge, and articulated their philosophies of life.

One day, the communion of adivasis with nature was stirred. The bonding was broken by other men who tried their best to separate them. They attempted to annex them to their civilisation by setting them against nature. People of nature were simple and pliable; they succumbed to the schemes of their neighbours. A natural order that had stood there for ages started to crumble down. Adivasis are now educated on developmental parameters, civilised and fit to be human beings, but their struggle to negotiate with the changes is quite evident in their attempts to adapt to the new pattern of life, because they find no point of return from where they are.

Now I am
Too far out of my village,
With no way to retreat or retrieve;
Wind has covered the footmarks, hid them in the
Sands, maliciously;
I am stranded in the open, distraught. (Soreng 3)

It is neither possible for the Adivasis to conform to the ways of the so-called mainstream nor to remain immune to the powerful force around them. They have been caught in the whirlpool of pull and push between the so-called modern and ancient lifestyles. *Flame of the Forest* captures

this struggle of the community and individuals. It talks of the past piled up on the mountain rocks and lost in the cleared forest. It speaks through the transitions the tribal society is undergoing. Adivasis have been pitted against themselves and nature, and therefore they are made to protect themselves against their self-scarecrows and ghosts. There can't be anything more painful than trying (asked) to shed your past. *Flame of the Forest* describes the pain of being an orphan of the love of the ancestors, nature, and oneself. Life for the adivasis has changed. It changes for everyone, but for them, it hasn't been the way it should have been. It is quite possible that they would ultimately have gone to written expression, but certainly not forced by others. Now, in the new format, a borrowed one, it is hard to reinvent their lives; they are used to doing only the original thing, i.e., to sing.

I am shy to look at myself straight; I can't paint
my joy and peace,
my innocence and piety, I am a tribal
who loves to be
and do
all that is pure and original" (Soreng 7).

Flame of the Forest appears to be one of the least significant trees, but its beauty and medicinal value are something that can't escape the eyes. Yet, the tree itself grows uncared for throughout the year. And no one takes notice of it till it flowers. When it flowers, it fills the area with its radiance. Soreng titles the collection *Flame of the Forest*. He divides the poems into three sections: "Lyrics of Life," "Flame of the Forest," and "Episodes of Subplots." Thus, placing this apparently insignificant tree at the centre, he structures the book to talk of the pristine past of nature

and the adivasis, the displacement of the tribes and their changing relationships in the present context, and the future of the adivasis in the dystopian landscape.

Part I: Lyrics of Life

The first part of the book, "Lyrics of Life," explicitly rejects the "anthropogenic claim" that modern civilisation is the protector of the forest. Instead, he argues that only those who can identify *as* nature—"birds, beasts, fish, and reptiles"—can be its "true preservers" (Soreng 9). He speaks of the history of the adivasis that is fading away, of course, through poetry. This section attempts to establish an important archive of Adivasi life and habitat. This section documents a "pristine state" of harmony before the "fortress of bonding" was invaded by external schemes. "Lyrics of Life" serves as a foundational assertion of Adivasi identity, focusing on the "positive vibe" and the "pleasant and extraordinary" aspects of tribal life, habitat, and nature.

The section contains twenty-three poems, beginning with an epigrammatic four-line poem, "Truth." The poem is an assertion both in structure and language.

Happy are the birds that sing in the forest
Where truth firmly stands;
Sad, I sing my melody
Where truth needs proof to stand (Soreng 1)!

This is epistemic self-evidence against external validation. There is a contrast between the "firm" truth of the forest and the modern world, where "truth needs proofs to stand". Soreng very emphatically states that tribal existence is inherently valid and does not require external justification. He takes this declaration forward in the next poem, "Assertion," with imagery of

rootedness. In the poem, the speaker uses biological similes to define the Adivasi body, describing himself as "erect like trees," "pliant like creepers," and "fluent like streams".

I am erect like trees
 Pliant like
 Creepers, fluent like streams
 Saturated with culture and norms and inner structure,
 And accustomed
 To sing and dance everything, as the moon
 Brightens or fades overhead (Soreng 1).

However, this process of archiving also very effectively captures the conflict of modernity that the tribal society faces. The section documents the "disappearance of back-ties" and the adoption of "trousers and shirt," symbolising a move away from the "pristine mind lost in the jungles" toward a "crossroads" where the speaker feels "stranded in the open". Soreng uses musical metaphors—reclaiming terms like "symphony," "sonnet," and "psalm"—to elevate tribal expression into formal literature.

In the poem, the speaker navigates a fragmented subjectivity, "singing the National Anthem / despite dancing / seasonal tribal dance" (Soreng 1). The anthem represents the state's attempt to appropriate indigenous identity into citizenship, yet the "well-being" of the adivasis remains anchored in the "folk tales and folk songs" of the forest. This juxtaposition reveals a conflict between a state-imposed identity and a lived, ancestral cultural practice.

The poem is clearly about the burden of Redefinition. The speaker turns from an abstract inquiry to a confrontation with the taxonomies of power. The existential fatigue is evident as the

speaker asks: "Why do I have to / redefine myself again and again" (Soreng 1). Soreng highlights the tension between the biological reductionism of the label "Homo Sapiens" and the expansive reality of "dwelling with elements of Nature" (1).

The poems in "Lyrics of Life" celebrate the intrinsic beauty and spiritual depth of Adivasi life: "I am a book, a library.../a part and a whole;/I am also/ a component of the whole." (Soreng 4). It exalts the Adivasi worldview, framing life as a "Creative Art" (Soreng 24) rooted in an original, indigenous point of view. This movement through the collection explores diverse themes, from the painter's quest for truth and the spiritual kinship found in "Relatives" and "Sarna, the Sanctuary," to the characterisation of tribal people as the "true caretakers" and "Keepers of the Nature" who protect the forest against greed (Soreng 10). While acknowledging the "temporal bond" of a past becoming antiquity and the "disjointed" nature of modern society, the poems consistently find "joy on sight" in simple communal scenes—such as a girl's poised "Balance" with earthen pitchers, maternal compassion in "Fami and Mom," and the "everlasting lessons" whispered by ancestors—culminating in the "sublime happiness" and "ecstasy" of "A Night at the Dance-floor" (Soreng 37). Overall, these poems assert a "joy of humanity" defined by mutual dignity, shared resources, and a biological connection to a "green sanctuary" where the tribal mind perceives the "invisible in the visible" (Soreng 9).

Part II: Flame of the Forest

The second part of the collection, "Flame of the Forest," comprises thirty-one poems. It brings out the "poignant and painful" aspects of tribal experiences (Soreng iii).

It captures the intricacies of emotions and the realities of Adivasi life. Soreng uses language as a medium to convey his thoughts, feelings, and observations, providing readers with insights

into the human experience. He explores a wide range of themes, including love, joy, sorrow, nature, social issues, and existential questions. Through the use of metaphor, symbolism, and vivid imagery, he conveys complex emotions and ideas that resonate with readers on a deep and personal level.

The titular poem "The Flame of the Forest" forms the centre of the section. And it is central in shifting the collection's tone from the celebration of nature to a harrowing account of personal and communal violation. Through the voice of a young girl, Soreng utilises the metaphor of the *Pharsa phool* (the "Flame of the Forest" flower) to contrast the vibrant beauty of tribal life with the "blazing" trauma of sexual violence.

The poem begins with the imagery of early innocence, portraying the purity of childhood, where the speaker compares herself to a flower: "By six years of age, / I stood in the garden like a flower, / cute and colourful" (Soreng 72). Soreng in this poem uses the metaphor of Pharsa, the flame of the forest. The brothers and relatives of the speaker in the poem identify her with the "Pharsa Phool", describing her as having its distinct colour and fragrance. This imagery links her identity to the "blazing" beauty of the mid-summer horizon, a symbol of life and vitality in the jungle. At this stage, the speaker views her world as "pure as the brook" and herself as "carefree" and "secure," enveloped in the love of her parents and tribe.

Soon, the poem undergoes a violent structural shift as the speaker moves from age six to age twelve. This transition represents the thematic core of Part II of the book—the painful angles of tribal reality. The serenity and sanctity are shattered by the declaration: "I am twelve now, / bleeding and dying in the field, / raped and ravished / by my own people and others" (Soreng 73). The sensation of warmth of kinship is lost. The girl laments the "unholy alliance" between those

she knew (brothers, uncles, friends) and those she did not, highlighting a breakdown of the "warm bond of kinship" mentioned in other poems. Soreng, in the lines, uses critical language to describe loss: the betrayal of the community's protective structure.

The language of the poem reflects a deep ontological shock and inner conflict. The girl in the poem struggles to reconcile the "nature" of her tribal locality—traditionally clear and pure—with the sudden emergence of "monsters and enemies" (Soreng 73), internal and external. She reasons how and “when did they (her own people) become monsters and enemies, / alien to their nature?” (Soreng 73), suggesting that the "lust" and "hatred" that destroyed her are foreign elements that have "annihilated" the unassuming spirit of the tribe.

Soreng uses a striking irony of “the flame” in the final stanza. The metaphor of the "Flame" is subverted. While it once represented a "blazing beauty," it now symbolises the heat of her own destruction. She concludes by stating she is paying for the ignorance of her youth with her "life / ebbing out among the Pharsa blooms" (Soreng 74).

Soreng uses the "Flame of the Forest" as a double-edged symbol: it is both the iconic beauty of the Adivasi and Odishan landscape and a metaphor for the internal "burning" caused by social and moral decay. The poem serves as a "distressing cry" that forces the reader to confront the "startling realities" where the sanctuary of the forest is no longer a guarantee of safety for the marginalised.

The other poems in this section toe the same lines in terms of themes. Poems like "An Evil Spirit" and "Beware!" depict the literal dismantling of the homeland (Industrial Displacement), where ancestral hills are "carried away" as "iron-ore raw material" (Soreng 52) and "metal-men" replace forests with "ice-cool lasers"(Soreng 83, 85). Other poems speak about social and

economic exploitation. In "My Eternal Love," a "rupee coin" acts as a symbol of transactional violation in a tribal market, while "The Airline Table" and "All Sold" critique elite magnates who consume tribal "flesh and blood" as everything is commodified for profit. The poet addresses the trauma of external prejudice in "Racism"—recalling being labelled a "black fairy"—and "Complexion," where the speaker revolts against being a "toy or a pawn" for the amusement of the "fair people". "The Last Christmas of Grandparents" laments a generational divide where children educated in cities "know no Kharia or Sadri language" and view their heritage as "pagan" (Soreng 94-95) while "The King in the Cage" metaphorically portrays the tribal spirit wasting away under the gaze of "despicable tyrants". The section concludes with "Get up Now," an urgent call for the "precarious player" to find "solace and hope" and begin anew despite the "broken doors" of the present.

Part III: Episodes of the Subplots

The final section is a single long poem divided into seven sequences, focusing on characters—both human and natural—who exist on the "periphery of a dominant society". It is titled "Episodes of the Subplots." It focuses on the vital issues facing tribal people through a cast of characters representing people, nature, and machines. These "subplots" represent those living on the periphery of dominant society, specifically the Adivasi community and the natural world that shelters them.

The sequences within this part follow a narrative of witness, destruction, and eventual resistance. The first sequence, "The Banyan Tree" (Pages 103–107) establishes the banyan tree as the "lone survivor" and "mute witness" of a former order. Standing "forlorn and morose" in a modern park, it is the "only indigenous" tree remaining. It is surrounded by "newcomers" (Teak,

Neem, Ashoka) and trees "imported" from as far as England and New Zealand to satisfy the "bizarre taste of towns' people". The forest it once occupied is now a town of shops, markets, and factories. Despite its seclusion, the tree remains "colossal" in spirit, acting like a "prophet" that lives a truth and reminds the world of a "heritage of happiness" that millionaires lack.

“A Snake in the Nest” (Pages 108–112), the second sequence tracks the cautious and then violent encroachment of modernity into the forest space. Newly laid roads bring "dumpers, tipper trucks, and vehicles" that dash with a "roar and rumble" like "marauders and robbers". The banyan tree, like a protective spirit, attempts to shelter "distressed beings" from the "evil intentions of inhuman beings". Soreng highlights the meagre returns for tribal labour through the image of village women who sell leaf-plates in scorching heat only to earn "twenty rupees each" for a week's worth of food.

“Wisdom under the Shade” (Pages 113–117) is the third sequence that focuses on the character Sumi. It explores the generational divide and the psychological impact of modernisation. Sumi's parents and grandmother share tales of communal happiness, asserting that nature is the "courtyard" of fulfilment. She is distracted by the "mobile-net," TV thrillers, and a "powdered face". She views the banyan shade as a "fairytale life" while simultaneously searching for urban employment. Despite her desire for "progress," Sumi remains "frightened of bulldozers and saw-machines", whose ravages "haunt the heart (her) all night".

“The Rampage” (Pages 118–124) is a harrowing account of "brutal arboricide" as industrial machines destroy the forest. The Bija tree, known as the strongest, "swelled his chest in defiance" to resist the saw machines. The machines felled the "Great Bija" and flattened "baby bushes and innocent shrubs" with "ridiculous ease". Other creatures, including the owl, parrot, and dove, join

together in "dirges in chorus" of communal mourning, to mourn the "abject helplessness of the creation".

The sequence "Monglu's Supine Personality" (Pages 125–127) introduces Monglu, an inebriate, and his wife Kusmi as they face the loss of their home due to industrialisation. A factory is arriving that will "exhale smoke" and "defecate filth," ending Monglu's lordship over his habitat. Monglu recalls tribal heroes like Birsa Munda, who died fighting for their people. But he feels paralysed by his own "supine tribal personality," remaining "unmoved" as long as he has his daily portion of food.

The penultimate sequence of the final part, "The Untold Story of the Perilous" (Pages 128–133), is on the Mandira dam and the trauma of forced displacement. The tribal people in the submergence area are viewed as "dispensable human beings" by the state in the name of "the nation's progress". In his sleep, Monglu babbles, "I will not give my land", a sentiment his wife dismisses, but the hill spirits hear. They finally call to action, not in the manner we can imagine. The Jugi Hill calls out to his brother, Karla Hill, urging the "voiceless tribal" to "arise and gird up" because the "enemy is cooking food in the backyard".

"The Rise of the Ruined" (Pages 134–137), the final sequence, depicts the successful collective reclamation of tribal identity. There is a spiritual awakening. The spirits of Jugi and Karla Hills touch the "inebriates," teaching them to "babble louder at night." People are inspired to take action. The movement gains strength as the "babbling of men merged with rage of women," who come out in the open for "their own survival and identity." And finally, faced with this united, formidable power, the "demon" (the oppressive force of industrialisation) retreats.

Conclusion

Ignatius Soreng's *Flame of the Forest* functions as more than a poetic survey; it is a sustained literary-critical intervention that bridges the gap between oral tradition and the formal structures of Indian English poetry. By organising the collection into three distinct movements, Soreng maps the trajectory of the contemporary Adivasi soul.

In Part I, "Lyrics of Life," he establishes an ontological foundation for tribal identity. Through poems like "Truth" and "Assertion," he argues that the Adivasi presence is not a historical artefact but a biological extension of the landscape, where the body is "erect like trees" and "fluent like streams". This section provides the necessary cultural "fullness" that makes the subsequent losses in the collection all the more poignant.

The second part, "Flame of the Forest," serves as a harrowing documentation of industrial trauma. Soreng's imagery of "iron-ore raw material" being carried away to distant cities, leaving a "flat horizon" in the east, provides a visceral critique of the "love for matter" which snaps "the warm bond of kinship". Here, in the titular poem, the "Flame" is subverted; it is no longer just a "blazing beauty" of the summer horizon but the "ebbing out" of life under the pressure of "mindless pillaging" and cultural alienation.

Finally, Part III, "Episodes of the Subplots," moves the collection from elegiac lament to visionary resistance. By personifying the Banyan tree as a "lone survivor" and the hill spirits, Jugi and Karla, as catalysts for action, Soreng transforms the "voiceless tribal" from a victim of "brutal arboricide" into a formidable force. The collection concludes with a definitive assertion of survival, where the "babbling of men" and the "rage of women" merge to turn back the "demon" of oppression.

Ultimately, Soreng's work fulfils the role of an "awakening of conscience". By forcing the "elitist literate civilisation" to engage with tribal reality through sophisticated poetic form, *Flame of the Forest* ensures that Adivasi virtues are not merely "reviewed and respected" but are revitalised to prevent humanity from drifting "irreversibly" from its natural orbit. In doing so, Soreng secures a unique and necessary space for the tribal voice within the broader canon of Indian literature.

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