

# TRIBAL STUDIES IN INDIA: INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES

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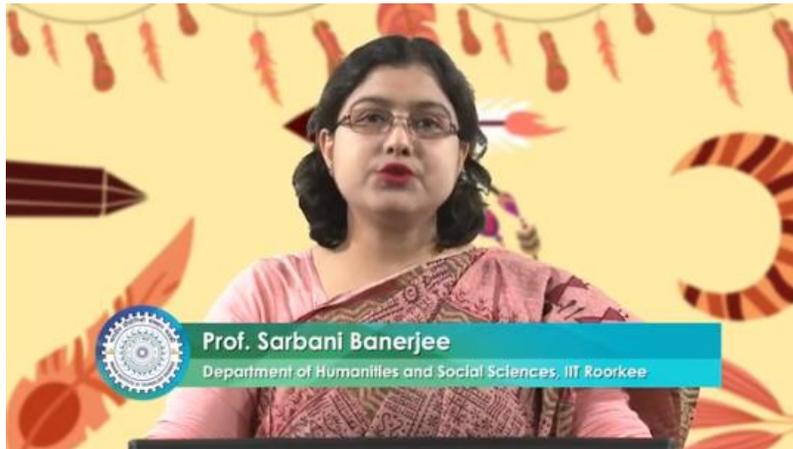
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Lecture51

## Lecture 51: Tribal Literature in India: Part-II

Thank you. Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Tribal Studies in India: Interdisciplinary Approaches and Perspectives. Today, we are going to continue our discussion on tribal literature. According to scholars and critics Priyanka Jangir and Dr. Anupam Kumar, the distinct experiences and viewpoints of tribal communities are often captured in tribal literature.



They are reflected through tribal literature. Thus, tribal literature becomes a mirror for providing valuable insights into the tribal people's struggles, traditions, as well as spiritual beliefs. By bringing these narratives to the forefront, tribal literature challenges mainstream discourse and offers a counter-narrative and alternative viewpoint to the dominant cultural representations, thereby leading to a greater appreciation of cultural diversity and a more comprehensive and well-rounded literary canon.

## Introduction

- According to Priyanka Jangir and Anupam Kumar (2023), the distinct **experiences and viewpoints of tribal communities are often captured in tribal literature**, providing valuable insights into their struggles, traditions, and spiritual beliefs.
- By bringing these narratives to the forefront, tribal literature challenges mainstream discourse and offers a counter-narrative to dominant cultural representations, leading to a **greater appreciation of cultural diversity and a more comprehensive literary canon.**



So, the literary canon through these representations becomes more inclusive, also looking into and taking into consideration the tribal way of life, the challenges and everyday experiences of the tribal people, and thereby also recognizing their counter-narratives, their different versions, their different side of the story, a different side of discourse that does not always accord with or resonate with the mainstream discourse. A central feature of contemporary tribal literature is the emergence of transformative narratives. Such narratives offer an engaging analysis of how tribal communities adapt and maintain their identity and resilience in response to contemporary influences. Further, in addition to safeguarding their cultural legacy, tribal literature functions as a tool for understanding the social, political, and economic realities of tribal communities.

It enables an examination of the effects of modernization, globalization, and socio-political changes, and how these changes affect their societies and their organic lifestyle. So, talking about literature on and by the tribals, we cannot not mention Mamang Dai. Mamang Dai, who is one of the foremost and most acclaimed Indian poets, is a novelist, a poet, as well as a journalist, residing in Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh.

## Introduction

- A central feature of contemporary tribal literature is the emergence of transformative narratives. These narratives offer an engaging analysis of how tribal communities **adapt and maintain their identity and resilience in response to contemporary influences.**
- In addition to safeguarding their cultural legacy, tribal literature functions as a **tool for understanding the social, political, and economic realities** of tribal communities. It allows for an examination of the **effects of modernization, globalization, and socio-political changes** in their societies.



Mamang Dai has been honored with the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2017 for her novel, *The Black Hill*, which was published in 2014. She also received the Verrier Elwin Award in 2003 for her book *Arunachal Pradesh: The Hidden Land*, which came out in 2002. This book explores the culture, folklore, as well as the customs of Arunachal's diverse communities. Her most recent publication is the poetry collection titled *The White Shirts of Summer*, which came out in 2023. So, talking about one of her prominent works, *The Legends of Pensam*.

*The Legends of Pensam* came out in 2006 and presents a series of interconnected stories across four sections entitled *A Diary of the World*, *Song of the Rhapsodist*, *Daughters of the Village*, and *A Matter of Time*. So, these are the four sections into which this book has been divided. The work is unconventional, and each of these sections lacks any kind of strict continuity among themselves. We just see that there are some shared characters, but apart from that, the sections are not strictly connected.

Or in continuum with one another. The first four stories in the first section, titled *The Diary of the World*, are independent narratives. They are all independent narratives. They are logically incoherent. They seem unreal in terms of the real-world standards that we, as readers, have and bring toward reading these unconventional, alternative tribal works.

**The Legends of Pensam**

- *The Legends of Pensam* (2006) presents a series of interconnected stories across four sections: "a diary of the world", "song of the rhapsodist", "daughters of the village", and "a matter of time".
- Unconventional in their lack of strict continuity (beyond shared characters), the first four stories in the first section are **independent narratives**. They are logically incoherent, unreal, and deliberately **open-ended**, resisting any attempt at rational explanation.



Source: bookandconversations.wordpress.com

So, in terms of our real-world standards, these works seem logically incoherent, unreal, and deliberately left open-ended. Such narratives resist any attempt at rational explanation. It leaves much for the reader to surmise and imagine in his or her own terms. So, the community's unshakable belief in these stories—that Mamang Dai talks about in *The Legends of Pensam*—and the stories' role in shaping the reader's understanding of the world is what sustains the narrative. *Songs of the Rhapsodist*, which is the second section, consists of four parts.

Travel the Road, The Hurt of the Insect, The Case of the Traveling Vessel, and finally, The Farewell to Jules and Mona. The first three of these narrate ancestors' lives through myth and memory. Echoing the form of the ponan dancers' ritualistic song and dance performances. They echo the form of the ponan dancers' song and dance performances that they do for rituals. Then we see that the daughters of the village—this section has five parts.

**The Legends of Pensam**

- The community's unshakeable belief in these stories and their role in shaping their understanding of the world is what sustains them.
- "Songs of the rhapsodist", the second section, consists of four parts: "travel the road", "the heart of the insect", "the case of the travelling vessel", and "farewell to Jules and Mona".
- The first three of these narrate ancestors' lives through myth and memory, echoing the form of the ponung dancers' ritualistic song and dance performances.



The slide features a blue header with the title "The Legends of Pensam". Below the title is a bulleted list of three points. The third point includes a small video inset of a woman in a pink shirt speaking. The slide has a dark blue footer with some small icons and text.

The first two, namely the words of women and a homecoming, describe the narrator's return and settlement in the Gurudwara town after living elsewhere, exploring her relationship with her mother, her love life, as well as the lives of the village women. The remaining three stories, titled River Woman, The Scent of Orange Blossom, and The Rites of Love, all focus on the story of Nenem and her daughter Losi. The final section, titled A Matter of Time, which comprises five parts, discusses the effects of change on individuals as well as on the community. The road is presented as a symbol of encroachment on untouched lands in the name of progress and development. And it represents a deep injury, a deep wound that is being inflicted on the land, the land of the ancestors of the tribals.

### The Legends of Pensam

- The “daughters of the village” section has five parts. The first two, “the words of women” and “a homecoming,” describe the **narrator’s return** and settlement in Gurdum town after living elsewhere, **exploring her relationship with her mother, her love life, and the lives of village women.**
- The remaining three stories – “river woman”, “the scent of orange blossom”, and “rites of love” – **focus on the story of Nenem and her daughter Losi.**
- The final section, “a matter of time,” with its five parts, discusses the **effects of change on individuals and the community.** The road is presented as a **symbol of encroachment on untouched lands in the name of progress,** representing an injury to the land.



So when we build a road, a bridge, or a dam in the name of progress and development, that is necessarily from the lens of the mainstream society. We also ought to acknowledge what Mamang Dai presents from her perspective, which is also the shared perspective of the tribal people. Such intuitions, such interventions, are largely seen as negative, and they are hurting nature, they are hurting the natural resources in Arunachal Pradesh. So through its four sections, The Legends of Pensam chronicles the historical evolution of the Gautam town.

The first section portrays the generation before colonization. The second section outlines the arrival of colonizers and the ensuing changes. Further, the third section depicts the experiences of the generation that is growing up after the Migloons arrived in the land, thereby gaining access to education and professions. Here, the term Migloon refers to outsiders or foreigners, specifically in the context of Arunachal Pradesh.

And this term 'Migloon' has often been used in the writings of Mamang Dai to describe any kind of non-tribal populace, which includes the British colonizers. So, in the final part of 'The Legends of Pensam,' we see that Mamang Dai examines modernity's effect on contemporary society. She observes the sweeping changes taking place in tribal societies. The traditional way of living has drastically changed over time.

### The Legends of Pensam

- The final part examines modernity's effect on contemporary society. Observing the sweeping changes in traditional tribal societies, the author expresses concern about the future, acknowledging that these reflections might not lead to clear conclusions.



And so, the author expresses concern about the future and acknowledges that these reflections might not lead to any clear conclusions. We don't know what the future holds for local people in Arunachal Pradesh with progress and development in the name of technological advancement. Where are we heading for? Are we heading for something positive or something that is self-destructive and almost suicidal?

Right. This is a kind of unsure tone, a kind of uncertainty with which the final part of this work leaves the readers. So, from Mamang Dai, we will move on to our next tribal writer, Jacinta Kerketta. Even before I start discussing Kerketta's work, here is a famous quotation from her. She has written, and I quote, 'They are waiting for us to become civilized, and we are waiting for them to become human.'

### Jacinta Kerketta

"They are waiting for us to become civilized  
And we are waiting for them to become human."

— Jacinta Kerketta (Translated by Richa Nagar)

- Jacinta Kerketta (b. 1983) is an Indian journalist, poet, and activist who writes in Hindi. She has **effectively articulated the existential fears and chaos experienced by the Oraon adivasi community**, to which she belongs.
- Her poetry and journalism address the **Adivasi identity of young people, protests against the systemic oppression of Adivasis in India, gender-based violence** (particularly against women), displacement, and questions the state's lack of concern in governance.




So this is the kind of polemics, this is the kind of problematics associated with the two different perspectives that define the tribal and the non-tribal societies or worldviews. So they, the non-tribals, are waiting for us, tribals, to become civilized. And we, the tribals,

are waiting for them, the non-tribals, to become human first. Right. Just like I was born in 1983, she's, you know, from a relatively younger generation.

She is an Indian journalist, poet and activist who writes mainly in Hindi. She has effectively articulated the existential fears and chaos that are experienced by the Orao Adivasi community. And she is an Orao herself. She belongs to the Orao community. Kerketta's poetry and journalism address the Adivasi identity of young people, protests against the systemic oppression of the Adivasis that take place in India and that are very often naturalized, normalized.

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Source: x.com/jacintakerkett2



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She also talks about the gender-based violence, particularly against women. And she raises her voice against the tribal's displacement and questions the state's apathy or lack of concern in these matters, how the governance can overlook the plight of the tribal people. Her collections, such as *Angor* and *Land of the Roots*, are key eco-centered writings that also powerfully narrate the epic struggles of the socially excluded and displaced tribals. According to Shri Lakshmi M, Kerkatta posits that humans are but one element of the larger nature and the larger schemes of nature and so they should only take their allocated share of its resources. Kerketta's observation is reminiscent of the tribal philosophy that has a biocentric rather than homocentric approach.

So the tribal philosophy believes in a biocentric order that should define the world, that should define our way of looking at the world and treating the world. And so, a biocentric loop celebrates empathy, sharing, the culture of sharing, and compassion over egotism, hierarchy, and control. So, Kerketta's poem titled 'In the Navel of Mother' powerfully represents the intertwined existence of humans and nature. I'll read. Earth, I seek that place where my umbilical cord had been buried.

This small piece resonates with her community's tradition, shared by many tribal groups, of burying a newborn's umbilical cord at the main entrance of the house, which roots the child to their birthplace. So, the tribal symbolic act of placing the cord within Mother Earth establishes a deep and lasting connection between the child and the place of birth, which serves as a metaphor for humanity's innate belonging and desire to return to the native land. It is discerning to recognize that green spaces are becoming increasingly unfamiliar to future generations, especially those inhabiting urban environments, as is reflected through Kerketta's poem titled 'The River, the Mountain, and the Bazaar.' I will read from the poem. Little posterity ran on.

**Jacinta Kerketta**

- This symbolic act of placing the cord within Mother Earth establishes a deep and lasting connection between the child and that specific place, serving as a metaphor for humanity's innate belonging and desire to return to the native land.
- It is disheartening to recognize that green spaces are becoming increasingly unfamiliar to future generations, especially the ones inhabiting the urban environments, as in Kerketta's poem "The River, The Mountain and The Bazaar":

**Little Posterity ran on- we are here at the Bazaar!  
What would you like to buy, the shopkeeper asked.  
Brother a little rain, a handful wet earth,  
A bottle of river and that mountain preserved  
There hanging on the wall, a piece of nature as well. (1-5)**



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We are here at the bazaar. What would you like to buy? The shopkeeper asked. Brother, a little rain, a handful of wet earth, a bottle of river, and that mountain preserved. They're hanging on the wall, a piece of nature as well.

In the poem, the sarcasm is resounding. It's very strongly present. And we see that what we could not preserve naturally. You know, in reality, it is hanging as a decorative piece on the wall. So nature becomes a decorative piece.

The river is, you know, bottled up, and we can just get a handful of wet earth for sale. for money. So everything has been commodified; everything has been transformed and reduced in terms of its worth—in monetary terms, in terms of what the non-tribals, the urban people, can pay for nature. So can nature be bought? Can water and earth and mountains be bought? So that is the kind of, you know, danger that the natural aspects, the different aspects of nature, are facing—that they can be just sealed into a bottle and sold. They can be just kind of reduced and packed into a scenery and hung up on the wall, right? So this desire to buy everything with money is the urban desire.

### Jacinta Kerketta

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It's the modern people's desire. They don't value nature. And that's what the poem reflects. That's what the poem mourns and laments. So, Sri Lakshmi further writes that Kerkatta's writing transcends the specific issue of Jharkhand's forests, thereby addressing the widespread destruction of similar rich heritage sites across the globe.

From Karkata, we will now move on to Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, another prolific poet. Writer from a tribal community. Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar was born in 1983. He is an Indian author of Santali origin who achieved prominence with his debut novel, *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, which came out in 2014. He thereafter reached a significant English-speaking readership across the Indian subcontinent and beyond.

### Hansda Sowendra Sekhar

- Hansda Sowendra Shekhar (b. 1983), an Indian author of Santhali origin, achieved prominence with his debut novel, *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2014), reaching a significant English-speaking readership across the Indian subcontinent and beyond.
- Presently a medical officer with the Government of Jharkhand, Shekhar is a pioneering Santhal writer, among the first to write original fictional works directly in English, as Santhal literature is more typically found in the community's regional languages.



Source: [speakinginbooks.com](https://speakinginbooks.com)



Shekhar is presently a medical officer with the government of Jharkhand and also a pioneering Santal writer, among the first to write original fictional works directly in English. In this sense, he is a trendsetter because most Santali literature is typically found in the community's regional languages. It's a good move to write in English by a tribal person, someone from one of the indigenous communities, because the experiences then

reach a larger audience. We see younger-generation authors like Shekhar and Regina Marandi.

writing directly in English. We also have Kerkatta being translated widely. All these writings are reaching a larger audience, and there are more scholarly interventions into their works. Shekhar's works are arguably the first full-fledged literary works by a Santal in English, published by mainstream publishing houses such as Aleph and Speaking Tiger. His major works include the novel titled *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, which came out in 2014.

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Source: speakingtigerbooks.com



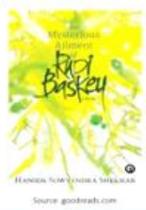
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The short story collection titled *Adivasi Will Not Dance*, which came out in 2015. The children's novels titled *Jwala Kumar* and the *Gift of the Fire Adventures in Champak Bagh*, which came out in 2018. And the semi-autobiographical novel *My Father's Garden*, which came out in 2018 itself. Talking about the mysterious ailment of Rupi Bhasky Shekhar's novel, we see that some of the topics mentioned that become the central discussion in the mysterious ailment are the occult practices, especially the topic of *dynabidya* or witchcraft.

So witchcraft is a central discussion in the mysterious ailment of Rupi Baskey and this practice has been normalized within the village that has been depicted. In the novel alongside the practice of exclusion of such women who practice witchcraft by the men. So headman of the village named Somai Haram highlights this unspoken acceptance of women the practice of witchcraft. He is quoted saying, Santal men drink Hadi, Santal women practice Jaini Vidya and no one speaks about it.

### The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey

- Occult practices, specifically *dahni-bidya*, are central to the women in *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, a practice normalized within the village alongside the exclusion of women by men.
- Headman Somai Haram highlights this unspoken acceptance: "Santhal men drink *haandi*, Santhal women practice *dahni-bidya*, and no one speaks about it. It is as natural as the wind blowing through the trees in a *sarjom* grove, as water flowing in the Kadamdihi stream" (37).




Source: goodreads.com

It is as natural as the wind blowing through the trees in a Sarjam grove as water flowing in the Kadamdihi stream." So it is as normal for Santali women to practice witchcraft as it is for Santali men to drink the rice beer. It's part and parcel of their everyday lives and people don't talk about it. But in practice, if we look at the community, there is a patriarchal attitude

There has been a patriarchal attitude, you know, trying to dominate and suppress Dinah with witchcraft, the knowledge of witchcraft. And some of the critics would go on to say that because women do not have many roles or because there is a lot of censorship, And women are kept away from the holy practices or the holy rituals of the tribals, such as the invoking of God, the invocation of God, the sacrificial practices. And they are not allowed to touch those, you know, religious objects or the holy objects and places. They try to create their alternate, you know.

Alternate forum or alternate conclave, a secretive conclave where women can gather. So it can be seen as a feminist counter-narrative that is trying to get even with the larger patriarchal operations within the tribal society that does not allow a woman to touch everything or participate in everything equally or become a priest in the same right as a man can. Become in a community. So, they have their own, you know, agential position through the practice of witchcraft, and there have always been these tendencies to have a witch doctor who is typically a male. We see this kind of dialogue where the witch doctor

has a gendered, you know, connotation. The witch is usually a female, whereas the witch doctor is a male who tries to oppress the woman, often forcibly through physical coercion. So that kind of, you know, gender dynamic has always been there, which is not seen so much, you know, naturally or so much even positively, you know. Typically speaking, she is someone who is seen as a root cause of harm, and there needs to be the

intervention of an Ojha or a witch doctor to curb her power, to limit her power, right? So coming back to the mysterious ailment of Rupi Baski, from being one of the strongest women in the village who delivered her first child Squatting in a muddy paddy field, we see that this character of Rupi suddenly becomes, by and by, a frail woman from being a very strong woman, a very independent, strong woman.

She transforms into a frail, weak woman, spending her days lying on a cot in her backyard, watching her life simply fall apart. Rupi's mysterious ailment is widely attributed to a character called Gurubari. Gurubari's powerful occult skills. So that's where this question of Daini Biddha or witchcraft comes in. And Gurubari supposedly employs her witchcraft knowledge to establish her claim over Rupi's husband and sons.

**The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey**

- From being one of the strongest women in the village, who delivered her first child squatting in a muddy paddy field, Rupi becomes a frail woman spending her days on a cot in her backyard, watching her life fall apart.
- Rupi's mysterious ailment is widely attributed to Gurubari's powerful occult skills, which she supposedly employs to establish her claim over Rupi's husband and sons.
- Due to her poor family background, Dulari's marriage to Doso is a convenient setup for him to maintain his affair. While Dulari initially accepts her assigned roles without protest, she eventually loses her tolerance and employs witchcraft to win back what she rightfully deserves.



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So, on the other hand, we see another character called Dulari, and due to her poor family background, Dulari's marriage to Doso is a convenient setup for Doso to maintain his affair. So, while Dulari initially accepts her assigned roles without any protest, within the framework of marriage, eventually she loses her tolerance and starts employing witchcraft to win back what she rightfully deserves. So, while witchcraft has traditionally had a very negative connotation associated with it within tribal society, if we see it through the lens of the tribal woman, we would see it as a device to empower the tribal woman or give her what she is normally not sanctioned by society.

So it's a way of getting equal, getting even with some of the unfair patriarchal norms that traditionally tend to suppress or oppress women. It's a way of asserting their rights, and their choice, their charge in society, in the community. So women are depicted in this novel as both instigating and suffering from witchcraft, often driven by issues concerning men or children. The villagers' strong belief in natural justice prevents them from harming the known witches, fearing their own downfall.

### The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey

- From being one of the strongest women in the village, who delivered her first child squatting in a muddy paddy field, Rupi becomes a frail woman spending her days on a cot in her backyard, watching her life fall apart.
- Rupi's mysterious ailment is widely attributed to Gurubari's powerful occult skills, which she supposedly employs to establish her claim over Rupi's husband and sons.
- Due to her poor family background, Dulari's marriage to Doso is a convenient setup for him to maintain his affair. While Dulari initially accepts her assigned roles without protest, she eventually loses her tolerance and employs witchcraft to win back what she rightfully deserves.



The narrative probes the extent of a woman's actions to achieve her goals rather than the reality of witchcraft itself. The contrasting fates of the fading Rupi Bhasky and the thriving parasitic Gurubari are apparent to this community. Unlike Dulari's decisive handling of her husband's affair, we see that Rupi takes no measures to regain her husband's affection, which she has lost. Next, we move on to Shekhar's other collection called *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, a rather prominent intervention—a work that is equally famous today. Highly discussed and, to some extent, also controversial.

It's a collection of short stories that delves into the daily lives of Santals within the wider struggle of subalterns against Brahminical dominance as well as bureaucratic exploitation disguised as development. According to Sunanda Roy, the first story in this collection, titled *They Eat Meat*, foregrounds the Santhali struggle for survival in societies where they are seen as supposedly polluted people, as illustrated by the Soren family's forced abandonment of their food. Their food habits and denial of their Santal identity when they have to live with dignity alongside the caste-Hindu-dominated people in the city of Ahmedabad. So the jeopardy of a Santal family, the Soren family, when they move to Ahmedabad for work. And the larger community is practicing, you know, a vegetarian diet, and they are tabooed—you know, they are identified as people who eat meat.

### The Adivasi Will Not Dance

- Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, a collection of short stories, delves into the daily lives of Santhals within the wider struggle of subalterns against Brahminical dominance and bureaucratic exploitation disguised as development.
- Sunanda Roy (2019) -- The first story, "They Eat Meat!" foregrounds the Santhali struggle for survival in societies where they are seen as "polluted," as illustrated by the Soren family's **forced abandonment of their food habits and denial of their Santhal identity** to live with dignity in the caste Hindu-dominated city of Ahmedabad.



So they have to abandon their natural food habits and deny their, you know, traditional practices. In fact, their Santal identity in order to be able to live, coexist with the larger Gujarati community in Ahmedabad. Next, in the same collection, *Adivasi Will Not Dance*, we have the story titled *November Is the Month of Migration*. It's a story of the seasonal migration of a tribal family from their village in Santal Pargana to Namal, which is in the Bardhaman district of West Bengal, in order to plant rice and other crops in the fields owned by the Zamindars. This story revolves around a 20-year-old girl named Talamai Kisku, who is traveling with her family members and other people from her village. Like her parents, Talamai lacks basic education, which was promised by the missionaries in exchange for religious conversion. So we see that she has come to work in Bardhaman as a migrant worker, and after the planting season, she is going back to her native place. She has been accosted while waiting for the train on the railway platform.

She is signaled by a jawan of the Railway Protection Force to follow him around the corner. She is signaled to come around the corner. Upon reaching there, she is taken into the policeman's quarters, where he asks her to do some work—some favor—in exchange for two pieces of cold bread pakora and a 50-rupee note. So she is sexually exploited by this jawan.

**November is the Month of Migration**

- "November is the Month of Migrations" is a story of the seasonal migration of a tribal family from their village in Santhal Pargana to Namal, the Bardhaman district in West Bengal, to plant rice and other crops in the fields owned by the Zamindars. The story revolves around a twenty-year-old Talamai Kisku, who is travelling with her family members and other people from her village.
- She, like her parents, lacks basic education, which was promised by the missionaries in exchange of religious conversion. While waiting for the train on the railway platform, she is signalled by a jawan of the Railway Protection Force to follow him around the corner.
- On reaching there, she is taken into the policeman's quarter and asked to do "some work" in exchange for "two pieces of cold bread pakora and a fifty-rupee note".



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The story underlines the exploitation of migrant women from tribal groups who are subjected to sexual harassment or exploitation due to their poor economic conditions. So we see that there are multiple layers of exploitation of these poor migrants. Besides highlighting the issue of religious conversion of these tribals by the Christian missionaries on the pretext of providing education, Shekhar also presents the vulnerability of tribal women, particularly the migrant girls who are exploited by those who are supposed to safeguard their rights and honor.

So the same police and Jawan who are in charge of protecting these girls are actually taking advantage of their vulnerability, of their being, you know, being naive and being gullible. The Jawan here, like other men, uses his socioeconomic position and privileges to sexually exploit this young tribal woman, Talamai. The story therefore highlights the need for education and the improvement of socioeconomic conditions of the tribals to overcome the vicious cycle of exploitation by their social counterparts that they are forever trapped in. So, according to Sunanda Roy, a sociocultural and political analysis of the urban mainstream and elite perceptions of Santals reveals why this protagonist in this particular story, Talamai, who is a representative Santal woman, is reduced to a sexual object.

**November is the Month of Migration**

- The story underlies the exploitations that the migrant women from tribal groups are subjected to due to their economic conditions. There are multiple layers of exploitation of these poor migrants.
- Besides highlighting the issue of religious conversion of these tribals by the Christian missionaries on the pretext of providing education, Sekhar also presents the vulnerability of tribal women, particularly the migrant girls, who are being exploited by those who are supposed to safeguard their rights and honour.
- The jawan (policeman), like other men, uses his socio-economic position and privileges to sexually exploit young tribal women. The story underscores the need for education and the improvement of socioeconomic conditions of the tribals to overcome the vicious cycle of exploitation by their social counterparts.



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Why is it that women like her, young women like her, are often targets? She is considered as easily violable based on the stereotype that Santal women are morally loose and readily available for sexual consumption. So this story generated controversy with accusations that Shekhar has portrayed the Santal women negatively despite his seemingly empathetic depiction of their exploitation. Shekhar's narrative forces us to question and ponder whether Talamai consents to the soldier's advances, suggesting instead a desperate choice between sexual violation and starvation. So does she even have a choice is what we need to think, what we need to deliberate.

**November is the Month of Migration**

- According to Roy (2019), a socio-cultural and political analysis of the urban, "mainstream," and "elite" perceptions of Santhals reveals why **Talamai**, a representative Santhal woman in "**November is the month of Migration**," is **reduced to a sexual object**, considered easily violable based on the stereotype that Santhal women are "**morally loose**" and readily available for sexual consumption.
- This story generated controversy, with accusations that Shekhar portrayed Santhal women negatively, despite his seemingly empathetic depiction of their exploitation.



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Talamai's choice, so-called choice, if she at all has any, underscores a lack of genuine agency or charge as exploitative systems leave such marginalized communities with very few options beyond mere survival. To conclude therefore, Contemporary tribal literature in India powerfully voices the unique experiences, struggles, and cultural heritage of tribal communities, thereby challenging mainstream narratives and offering critical counter perspectives on issues such as displacement, exploitation, and identity. Writers like Mahashweta Devi, Gopinath Mohanty, Mamang Dai, Jacinta Kerketta, and Hansda

Sowendra Shekhar, as well as Regina Marandi, through their diverse narratives and styles, bring forth the evolving realities of tribal life in the face of modernization and societal prejudices. And these works, therefore, enrich the Indian literary landscape with previously marginalized voices and foster a deeper understanding of cultural diversity and social justice.

### Conclusion

- Contemporary tribal literature in India powerfully voices the unique experiences, struggles, and cultural heritage of tribal communities, challenging mainstream narratives and offering critical perspectives on issues like displacement, exploitation, and identity.
- Writers like Mahasweta Devi, Gopinath Mohanty, Mamang Dai, Jacinta Kerketta, and Hansda Sowendra Shekhar, through their diverse narratives and styles, bring forth the evolving realities of tribal life in the face of modernization and societal prejudices, enriching the Indian literary landscape with previously marginalized voices and fostering a deeper understanding of cultural diversity and social justice.



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So with this, we come to the end of our lecture today. Let's meet for another round of discussions and a new topic in our next lecture. Thank you.

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