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Tribal Voices in Transition: A Comparative Study of *Tatvamasi* and *Reva*

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Abstract: 'India is a land of old immigrants'- claims the judgement of Supreme court (2011) that further declares India a multicultural country legally and recognizes various tribal communities as indigenous polity of India. In modern age of science and technology, the social behaviour and traditional knowledge system of tribal communities are at the edge of extinction and several attempts are made to record the unheard voices of the tribal communities. The herculean task of recording the tribal discourse has evolved various methods and modes of recording: transcription, translation, textualization and film adaptation. This paper proposes to study the process of textualization and film adaptation of tribal discourse through a comparative study of *TATVAMASI* – a Gujarati fiction written by Dhruv Bhatt and the adapted film version of the same text with the title *REVA*.

Key Words: tribal discourse, transcription, translation, textualization, film adaptation

Introduction

For a long time, there has existed an interrelationship and mutual influence between literature and other forms of artistic expressions. This has resulted in painting and music based on works of fiction, drama and poetry, as well as literary works emulating pictorial styles and musical structures. The creative exchange between literature and film was initiated in the last decade of the 19th Century. Initially, film was most related to photography and painting.

Literature shares with film the ability to employ the structures and devices of narrative. Sequence of images on screen told a story and this is equivalent to the sequence of words on page. The use of language in film established firmly the connections to literature.

Film draws from the tradition of live theatre which includes techniques of staging, lighting, movement and gestures. From the novel, film draws from structure, characterization, theme and point of view. From poetry it



draws from an understanding of metaphor, symbolism and other literary tropes. Film can extend into areas of the innermost privacy and consciousness just like poetry does.

An analogy stands out for film and literature. The basic structural units of the novel were replicated in film. In the novel we have: the word, sentence, paragraph, chapter and the entire novel. In film we have the frame, shot scene and sequence. The word in literature and the image in film were similar in so far as they are visual phenomena, both perceived with the eye.

By and large, therefore, film is considered as a branch of literature. Filmmakers are indebted to literature in a wide variety of ways. Since literature is a narrative art intent upon creating images and sounds in the reader's mind, then film is obviously literary- an extension of the older narrative arts.

Film adaptation is a derivative work of transferring literary text into a feature film. From earliest days of cinema, adaptation has been as common as the development of the original play. In society as well if analyze, audience accept films more than text because the common class does not possess the ability to enjoy the text. The Film adaptation can be divided into three different phases: Transliteration, Transformation and Transcreation. Film adaptation, just as translation process, can be classified at three various levels: transliteration, transformation and transcreation; denoting the same concepts as that of associated with literary translations. Film in comparison to literary written text and adaptation are, like translated texts, considered sub-text, less than the main one. Transcreated film adaptations of famous literary texts are, arguably, evident of creative transformation of main text that enriches the literary experience of the viewers; hence, such film adaptations ought to be judged as separate valuable text.

Number of studies have examined the portrayal of tribal communities in literature and film, highlighting the significance of narrative voice and authenticity. Key texts explore the socio-political contexts surrounding tribal discourse, emphasizing how these narratives shape public perception and understanding of tribal cultures. Works by anthropologists and cultural theorists provide foundational insights into the complexities of tribal identity, often contrasting traditional representations with contemporary interpretations.

Scholars such as G.N. Devy (1992) have emphasized the importance of "subaltern" literary traditions, urging a recognition of Adivasi and tribal expressions as legitimate forms of literature, rather than oral fragments of a pre-modern past. His work has catalysed a broader academic movement to locate tribal narratives within the



larger framework of Indian literature. Similarly, Mahasweta Devi's writings and activism have underscored the importance of authentic representation of tribal communities, often focusing on their resistance to state violence, economic exploitation, and cultural erasure.

In this broader intellectual backdrop, both the text *Tatvamasi* and the film *Reva* emerge as texts deeply embedded in the landscape of tribal life and spirituality. They portray tribal characters not as peripheral figures but as carriers of deep philosophical insight, ecological wisdom, and cultural resilience. In both texts, the Narmada river functions as more than a setting it becomes a metaphor for continuity, transformation, and the sacred connection between tribal communities and their environment. Existing critical literature on *Reva* tends to highlight its spiritual journey motif, with less focus on its embedded tribal elements. Critics often interpret it through the lens of self-realization and modern alienation, overlooking the subtle ways in which tribal cosmologies and ways of life shape the protagonist's transformation. *Tatvamasi*, by contrast, leans more explicitly into tribal worldviews, drawing upon oral traditions, ecological ethics, and collective identity to construct its narrative.

Theoretical frameworks from postcolonial studies and indigenous literary criticism are also instructive for this research. Scholars like Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) have called for decolonizing research methodologies, arguing that indigenous knowledge systems must not be viewed through Western academic paradigms alone. Applying such a framework allows for a nuanced reading of *Tatvamasi* and *Reva* that respects the epistemological grounding of tribal discourse, rather than merely using it as an aesthetic or symbolic device. Furthermore, tribal discourse is inherently transitional caught between the pressures of modernity, globalization, and environmental degradation on one hand, and the desire to maintain cultural heritage and autonomy on the other. The protagonists in both texts embody this tension, acting as bridges between two worlds. Their journeys are not just personal but emblematic of larger shifts occurring in tribal spaces today, where identity, tradition, and survival are being renegotiated constantly.

In analyzing the text *Tatvamasi*, scholars have noted its nuanced approach to depicting tribal life, focusing on the interplay between tradition and modernity. The text serves as a critical lens through which readers can understand the lived experiences of tribal communities. Similarly, the film *Reva* has been praised for its visual storytelling, which captures the essence of tribal existence while addressing broader societal issues. Film



analyses emphasize the importance of cinematography and narrative structure in conveying the emotional depth of tribal stories.

This literature review underscores the need for a comparative analysis between *Tatvamasi* and *Reva*, as both works contribute uniquely to the discourse surrounding tribal identities. By examining these texts together, this research aims to illuminate how different mediums can shape and challenge perceptions of tribal life, ultimately fostering a deeper understanding of their cultural significance. The existing body of work not only validates the relevance of this study but also highlights the potential for interdisciplinary approaches in exploring tribal narratives.

Tribal Discourse and the Significance of Comparative Study

The study of tribal discourse and history through a comparative lens offers profound insights into the diverse way communities articulate their identities, beliefs, and social structures. By examining various tribal narratives, we can uncover the unique cultural contexts that shape their histories and worldviews. Tribal discourse is not merely a collection of stories; it serves as a vital means of preserving traditions, passing down knowledge, and fostering a sense of belonging among community members. When we compare these discourses across different tribes, we can identify common themes and divergent practices that highlight the richness of human experience.

This comparative study allows us to appreciate the complexities of tribal histories, revealing how external factors like colonization, globalization, and environmental changes have influenced their development. It also emphasizes the importance of recognizing and respecting the voices of indigenous peoples in historical narratives often dominated by mainstream perspectives.

Engaging with tribal discourse through a comparative approach not only enriches our understanding of specific cultures but also challenges us to rethink our assumptions about history itself. It encourages a more inclusive dialogue that honors the contributions of all communities, fostering greater empathy and connection in our increasingly interconnected world.

Interpretation of the text *Tatvamasi*

A novel centring tribe from Madhya Pradesh is written by renowned Gujarati author Dhruv Bhatt. The novel revolves around the tribal people living near the bank of river Narmada into deep jungles somewhere



near Bhopal. There is a particular tribe called *Sathsali* are the people focused upon in the novel. The novel starts with a person lying amidst the rocks partially unconscious, offering food by a random young girl saying, *Le Khai le*. That person is supposed to be the protagonist of the novel. In the beginning of the novel, the protagonist resides in the foreign land, studying in some University. Prof. Rudolf assigns him a project in which he is expected to go to India, his native land for the study of tribal life style and experiences living among them. By nature he does not find himself attached or even inclined towards his motherland. He tries to retaliate; however, he is forced to take the assignment. Further, he is shown travelling in the train towards Bhopal. His journey starts from that very moment. He observes people considering or rather believing river Narmada as Goddess. He also happens to meet the tribal people in the train, they get down together. Reaching the ashram situated on the bank of Narmada, the place mesmerises him. We are introduced with few main characters, Supriya, Guptaji, Puriya, Bittubagga and Ganesh Shastriji. Supriya, a young girl who has devoted her life for the welfare of tribal people is the major character of the novel. She walks with the protagonist throughout the novel. The novel revolves around the life in ashram amidst jungle. The protagonist in the beginning feels disgusted with the tribal people, their life style as well as mentality. He opens a school in order to 'correct' them and educate them but ends up understanding the real worth of life. Simultaneously, the protagonist indulges into old memories of his childhood when he lost his mother and was taken care of by his maternal grandmother. How his life used to be, living with them considering few important incidents. Back in ashram there is an episode of him going to Jabalpur for some government work and meets with an accident. He stays at Ganesh Shastriji's place for the time he gets recover. The he learns about Supriya's parents, father has passed away and mother has left her of unknown reasons. When he returns to the ashram, he meets the '*Parkammavasi*', the people who opt for Narmada Parikrama. People who live near bank of Narmada have very high opinion about the *Parkammavasi*. They try there level best to comfort them. They consider it to be their duty to do so. It is their strong belief that Narmada takes human form and gives *Parkammavasi* her *darshan*.

The beliefs of tribal people come on forth with the episode of Puriya turning into witch. It so happens that Puriya's niece is found killed and eaten by some animal and Puriya sitting near proves her eating the baby. The news is spread across the community by "*Puriya dakan bhai re...*" She has to die now as she will



harm others as well. Supriya and the protagonist save her somehow. Meanwhile, the protagonist, who had disgust for the tribal people and mocked at their disbelief, starts understanding them and believing their ways. The qualities of tribal people like selflessness, ever helping nature, the innocence touches him.

After the return of Lucy, the protagonist himself decides to take Parikrama as much as he can. He is been looted by few tribal people in the mid way. He starves of food and the novel reaches to the juncture it began, “*Le Khai le...*”. It is believed or is unspoken said in the novel that the Narmada herself takes the form of a young girl and offering food to the protagonist.

Comparative Study of the Film Adaptation *Reva*

Transcreated from Gujarati author Dhruv Bhatt’s 1998 novel *Tatvamasi*, the film *Reva* articulates a spiritual journey of the protagonist who embarks his journey from USA to a remote Ashram with a view to fulfil the legal demand mentioned in the will that he has to produce signatures of the trustee members of the Ashram if he wants to claim the property after the death of his father. An epitome of an argumentative westerner, Karan, who assumes the futility of the eastern philosophy considering it myth, encounters and interacts with certain characters that change his belief system. The pivotal belief of worshiping the entity of Nature in human form is argued throughout the movie as Karan mocks at the assumptions of the local people that river appears in human form to one who instils his faith in it and he gradually changes his perceptions after experiencing the same assumption towards the end of the movie. The female lead character articulates the basic philosophical argument that assumptions remain only assumptions until they are actualized through concrete experience; and such assumptions ought to be respected mutually.

In a way, the film captures the same philosophical arguments of intuitive belief system that is articulated in the text. The next section of the paper compares and analyzes the process of film adaptations that popularizes the philosophy for the mass which has been intellectualized in the novel for the class.

The text as well as the film narrativizes tribal discourse through a distinct tribe ‘*Sathsali*’, a mysterious community. It is the tribe far away, disconnected with society which is not easily approachable. In the film, protagonist has to reach the *Sathsali* with the help of Bittubagga-the predecessors of *Sathsali*. Describing the genesis of *Sathsali*, the text observes that a star being the origin of the entire tribe. This Star has the time slot of 60 Years to revolve, hence, its named ‘*Sathsali*’ and so the tribe is named so. They are strongly and closely



knit people who do not allow the outsider to peep into their lives. They are highly creative, efficient and intellectual people. The best instance is Bittubagga creating *Galsantta*, a small dam to stop the over flow of water. The film exaggeratingly describes highly skilled 'Bittubagga' shooting arrow across the river with a view to cover it with Saree. They have a godmother called '*Kalewali Ma*' whom they follow and believe blindly. Later in the novel '*Kalewali Ma*' turns out to be Supriya's mother. Supriya knows the fact yet keeps it to her only.

The episode of tiger confrontation and death of Bagga is startling incident in text. Whereas, in the film, Bittu perceives it as a part of nature's connection and reaction to one another.

The text introduces another tribe, '*Bhilada*', which is engaged in the skill of collecting honey at the risk of their life. There is the common belief that no other person can fetch the honey except the *Bhilada* tribe or the Devi Ma gets angry with them. Further the text introduces Laxman Sharma who wants to spread the awareness of Honey business among the tribal people. The protagonist joins him for the same and gets new experiences with it.

The text also articulates the negative aspect of the superstitions of tribes. The protagonist's reaction to the victimization of Puriya in the name of belief of her becoming witch justifies that text does not merely celebrates the tribal rituals but also records a critique on it. Found with a dead body of animal beaten child, Puriya is believed to have possessed with evil spirit and is declared a witch to be burnt alive. The protagonist protests against the entire community and successfully saves Puriya with the help of '*Sathsali*'. The figure of mother of *Sathsali* tribe is displayed as a saviour to such victims, who represents a feminist epitome in the film.

In the novel, the local tribe considers the huge tree '*Saagban*' as alive and believes that every passer has to bow down to it. Moreover, it is believed that the instantly recognises the hidden malicious will of human mind and punishes the concerned person.

Conclusion

In conclusion, exploring tribal discourse and history through comparative study is essential for appreciating the depth and diversity of human cultures. It empowers us to learn from one another and build a more equitable future that recognizes the value of every voice in the tapestry of history. Furthermore, in



attempt of textualization as well as film adaptation of tribal discourse, the creator unconsciously categorizes the tribal discourse in two peculiar process of intellectualization and popularization of the tribal discourse. The novel intellectualizes the philosophy, rituals of sathsaali tribes; for instance, at a juncture the entire genesis of Saathsali tribe is described philosophically through citing the reference of a star with the same name, which justifies the high skilled members of the tribe. In comparison, the film popularize the skill of Bittubanga by depicting them shooting arrow across the river while offering saree to the river. In a way, text intellectualizes the tribal discourse that requires a literacy to understand the tribal life; the film popularize the tribal discourse that is for mass who can enjoy the film without any literacy.

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