



TRIBAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN SELECT GONDI, KORKU, HALBI, KOLAMI AND BHILLI POEMS

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Abstract

Gond, Korku, Bhill, Pardhan, Madia are some tribal communities settled in the hills and forest of Maharashtra. The area called Gondwan has the largest number of Gond and Pardhan communities and once they had their territory there. During the course of time, they lost their script but they were able to preserve their dialects and culture which is rich and erotic. There are several folk songs that they sing on the festivities and cultural gatherings. Now, due to the spread of education and facilities many talented poets and writers from the communities have come forward and produced a lot of literature, particularly poetry. They used Marathi script for their poetic expressions. The poets like Vitthalsing Dhurve, Prof. Kannake, Vaharu Sonawane, Dadaji Kusram and Shri Tulsidas Bhojar are some of the gems whose poems in their respective dialects edited by Dr Vinayk Tumram have been taken for the study as a part of a project on translating tribal literature into English. This research article is an attempt to bring fore the tribal consciousness expressed by some tribal poets in Gondi, Kolami, Korku, Bhilli and Halbi dialects by translating them into English. Hopefully, it will provide an international platform to these tribal sense and sensibilities and bring before the developed world community the richness of rebellious thoughts and beautiful cadence of content essential in their short but simple compositions.

Key words: Consciousness, dialects, tribal, aboriginal, primitive.

i) Introduction:

Tribal people in India have had a history, culture and literature of their own irrespective of the area where they first settled and where they were later forced to migrate. Since they had a typical culture, they also had their languages and picture script since the beginning of the human civilization. They were the primitive and aboriginal communities in the Indian sub- continent. Hence, the tribal people are found in almost all the South -Asian countries. Several tribes like Bhill, Korku, Munda, Santhal, Nag, Kol, Khasi, Khond, Korwa, Madra, Dhangar, Kathodi, Katkari have survived in various parts of India and were once in prosperous state competing with the Aryans. But, later due to dominance of the Aryans, they were pushed

into the forest to survive and thus were alienated from the main stream. With their life in the deep forest and caves they somehow preserved their culture which is rich and typical of the area and community.

The history and culture of these tribes have been developed and accepted by all. When we accept their culture, we also accept that it cannot be without a language. Out of these tribal communities Gond is the tribe that has lived and still living in an area called Gondwan, located in the east of Maharashtra. The district of Gadchiroli boasts of having most of its tribal population of Gond and Pardhan community and their dialect is Gondi. Each of these tribes has its own rich folk literature, songs and culture. Since they lost their script in the course of time due to foreign aggressions and resentment, their literature has remained in oral tradition and handed down from generation to generation.

Tribal dialects fall in the Dravidian group of languages. Late Vyanktesh Atram, tribal research scholar, has studied the Aryan script and concluded that it was Gondi script originally and not the Aryan script (Reference to Gondi Culture, 2001). At present, many tribal and non-tribal linguists and researchers are engaged in reviving the script and literature written in it. G.A. Grierson's seminal work, 'Linguistic Survey of India' (1906) includes Gondi dialect in the Dravidian Languages in the fourth volume of the work. (Munda and Dravidian Languages- Vol. 4)

It helps to reveal that the tribal languages are ancient, rich in vocabulary and impressive. In order to keep up the permanent existence of these languages several writers and researchers have made a lot of efforts and implemented many projects. By means of Tribal Literature Movement, the first generation of new tribal poets started writing in the 1980s. It was this generation who brought with it a lot of self-respect, burning consciousness, inspiration, pain, rebellion and innovation. Vynkatesh Atram, Bhujang Meshram, Vahru Sonwane, Chamulal Rathwa, Dr Dhongde, Dr Vinayalk Tumram, Dr Nilkanth Kulsange, Ushakiran Atram, L. S. Rajgadkar and Vitthalsing Dhurve are the revolutionary representatives of this generation. With the poetic achievements of all of them, the tribal poetry blossomed like a palas flower with the radiance of rebellion. As these poets have different experiences from different tribal tribes, they have effectively presented the transparency of life through their poetry.

Many talented poets of this generation had to bear the pain of poverty, negligence and casteism. The poetry of the first generation of the tribal has been written by experiencing painful life and seeing the great agitation in the outside world, such as running behind the hunt for the sake of the sick stomach. Therefore, it is not surprising if tribal poetry is different in terms of experience, content, subject language words and style. But because of the pride of native language or the concern about the existence of mother tongue, the talented poets like Bhujang Meshram, Vitthalsing Dhurve, and Vahru Sonwane were able to give a touch of native language to the reality of life. Some of their compositions are cultured with native language. The rebellious attitude of the poets is seen in these compositions.

The present brief study is an attempt to produce some of the compositions written in Gondi, Korku, Klami, Halbi, and Bhilli dialects in English with their critical appreciation and message to the tribal people. This would be a novel attempts to justify the tribal literary contribution by bringing them into English language and make them known to the world like the black and dalit literature. The selected poems are transcribed and translated into English.

ii) Analysis and Translation of Gondri Poems

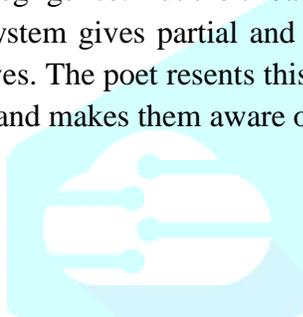
Vitthalsing Dhurve has written in Hindi, Marathi along with Gondri dialect. He has been successful in doing this. He has ably bourn the responsibility of bringing heyday to his tribal dialect. His poems bathed in the uniqueness of language can equally intoxicate the readers. Seeing the poverty stricken condition of his tribal, forest-bound brothers, Dhurve asks,

‘Bacchovari e bhola ima dangude,
Trishul yechi teda, udma inga dangunde!’

Means

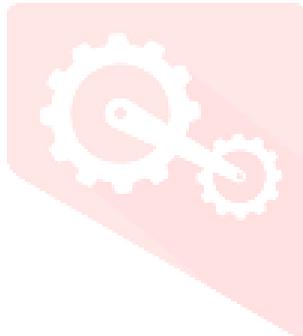
‘How long will you sit in the forest? (from the poem” Bachho vari e bhola)
Get up, innocent man, get up, and don’t stay in the forest.’

The poet knows the assumptions of other people about the tribal people lost in sorrow, poverty and negligence. But the tribal people are still unaware of them, and this is their plight. The poet knows how the system gives partial and inferior treatment to the tribal people and uses them smartly for their selfish motives. The poet resents this attitude and condemns it. He awakens them from the oppressed and neglected state and makes them aware of their human rights when he writes...



“Dangudene man sadaye, hide chahe manta duniya,
Vaibhav bhoge mayale, putal bhahun shadele!

Kalk dohchikunne mava, spardhat bate kintok,
Rasta parembi vartork,tatok bahut mendude!!



Mante bati erintok, todde bati entork,
Kan khole kisi hula, hulintork bad njude!!”

It means that

‘You stay in forest forever, this the world want,
You can’t’ enjoy glory and bliss of the city!

They bind your leg, and speak of competition,
Came on street, how did it come to the body?

Something in the mind and something in the mouth,
Open your eyes and see how they see you.’

The poet gives serious warning to them in this storm of existence and asks his tribal people, “ Damru Niva Nekusa” means to “ Blow the Horn’ and also makes decisive statement in “ Yetat robas shikshan, bhalehi tin savode” means “ Seek education now, though eat with salt.’

There is a saying in Sanskrit that says- ‘man has got superiority because of knowledge and education’. Mahatma Jyotiba Fule also reiterated its importance in one of his verses and Krantijyoti Savitrbai Fule also gave the chant to the oppressed and downtrodden ‘Education is the way to tell the shudras, it can bring humanity and wipe out animalism.’ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar also talks about the importance of education when he says, ‘Education is like the milk of tigrress, and whoever drinks it will not remain without purring’.

The tribal people have trapped for ages in the dilemma of ignorance and non-education. They have clung to traditional values. But, he does not seem to be able to solve the problems of his ignorance and non-education with collective strength. Probably, his natural instincts may prohibit him from doing so. The poet Dhurve wishes them to change the equation of living life. He has genuine internal urge for the tribal people to come together, give up the slavery, keep away from divisiveness and lit up with the torch of unity. He does not want to see the picture of inactiveness. He has put many such questions before them in his other poems. Among them “Gyanta Tech Mashal” which is transcribed and translated below, is most talkative and brings out the poet’s introverted real thoughts.

Gyanta Tech Mashal

Bali nalungatene khak,
Agyanta manda andhar !

Bali nalungatene khak
Daridrita manda andhar!

Gyanta yechi mashal
Himmane wata munne kal !

Ektatayate mashal yechinkune da munne, da munne ro d munne!

Sanghathantaye mashale yechikune da munne, da munne ro da munne...!!

Niwaye sathi zopdi, niwaye sathi mazdoori ,
Niwaye sathi dasta hid, niwayesathi majboori!

Adhigita yechi mashal, himmatne wata munne kal...(1)

Da munne ro.....

Kal niwwa sari niwa, unde bhatke matuni,
Majboori te manva he, jindotene satuni

Swabhimanta yechi mashal, tahachi talla wata kal (2)

Da munno re..... !! Da Munno re..... !!

The Torch of Knowledge

Why the darkness of ignorance all around you?

Why the bazar of poverty surrounds you?

Take the torch of knowledge,

And move forward with courage.

Carrying the torch of unity, go ahead..go ahead..

Taking the torch of union, go ahead.... go ahead..(1)

Why a hut for you, and why a wage for you?

Why is slavery in your fate?

Is it your helpless state?

Carrying the torch of diligence,

And keeping up your resolution,

Yes, go ahead, go ahead....

Path is yours, legs are yours,

Then, how did you go astray?

Getting drunk, how you died while alive?

With torch of self-respect, you lad, go ahead.. go ahead....(2)

The poet Vitthal Dhurve has put decisive opinion that there is welfare and prosperity of tribal people only in going ahead with a torch of knowledge. The poet suggests that prosperity without knowledge is the farthest dream. In other words, they have only one way of taking education, become knowledgeable and develop society. Because thoughts of great men that knowledge is power are not false. He exhorts them to be united, educated for their welfare. He asks them several rhetorical questions to make them introvert and realize their fate. It's neither their helplessness nor slavery. If they give up drinking, be united and industrious, they can propel their ways forward through the darkness. This will help them to earn self-respect.

iii) Analysis and Translation of Korku Poems

Dadaji Kusram is another poet of the same galaxy, who gives verbal form to his burning sensations in his poetry. His poems like Mavore Maku Debba Kitor, Pahitatu Pak Dohachi, Eda Gutang Velyi Toro, Mava Vikastang Kittang Baga Dastang and Gotul are a few of them. In 'Mavore Maku Debba Kitor' he gives a different indication. The poet Kusram knows it well, what is there in their mind, who cuts their necks with hair, still he does not take their name. They have many complaints against evil principles. The poet knows how feelings of innocent tribal people wallow them in the pit and how their long cherished dreams are shattered. Due to his residence in the womb of the trembling forest, the poet Kusram has a deep understanding of the painful suffering and the thrill that came to the share of tribal as under.

(Transcription- 'Mavore Maku Debba Kitor')

Mavore maku debba kitor,
Nik tidita, mati pedir
Poukin bona....

Mavasange kalyisi rela-rilo enditor,

Ora fasekiyanad mitatle
Mavor fasem ator...

Hitapollona matu bharosa
Tasim vellange chitting hital
Ot mat mava samjen atal

Mati Osss mankal mava wedang
Dehtog ... mavore maku....

Munehata tuppaki pake molkotga badga

Niku dira hewan askisi
Niku kal umchad pota tayar
Kitr walna niwa te watang
Parpa-badang maor maku?

(English Translation)

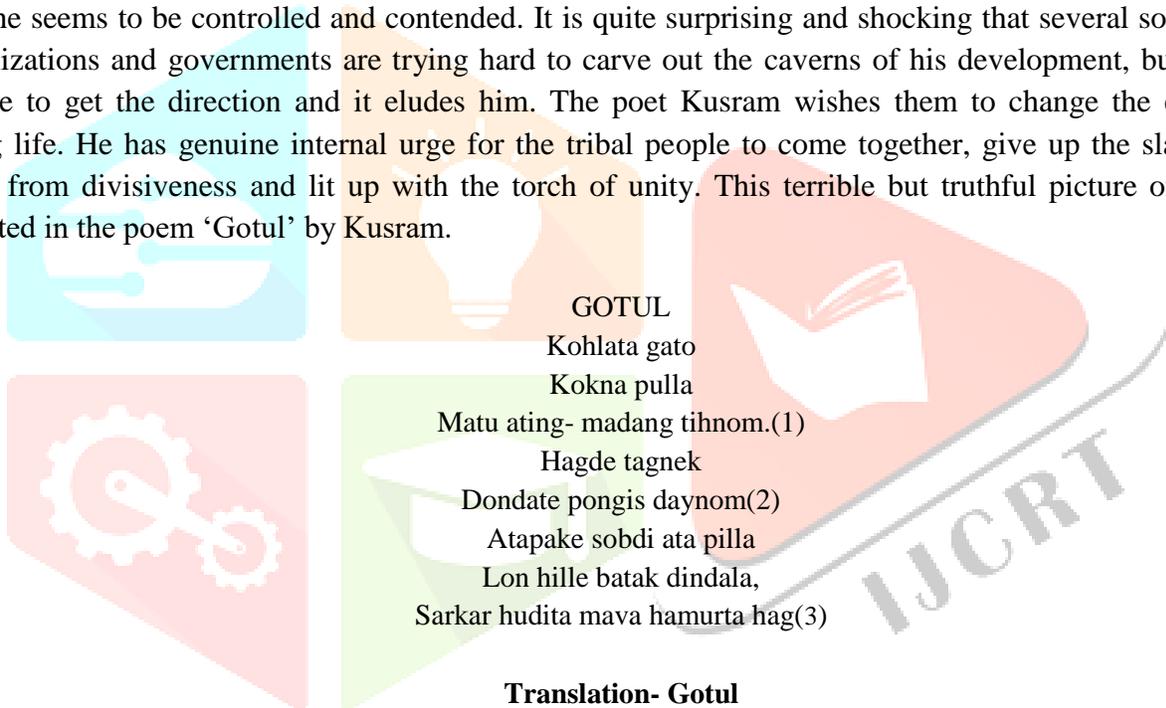
Wound by Our People

It is you who gave us wound
Whose name will you take when you found?
You mix and dance among us – 'Rela – relo.'

The sweetness of their hypocrisy did us deceive,
 Their false promises on which we did live.
 Votes were given, and the shelter too,
 When your neck was cut, you know who.
 Whose name would you take, you better knew?

With a gun in front, and in the back a stick,
 They did break the pot and made it lick.
 He cut your support and made you lame
 You doomed to your stones, who then blame?
 You knew how they outplayed a game.

By adapting with the nature, and approximating the atmosphere the tribal people are living their life by keeping up their cultural stock. But the real question is when the sadness will die out. Still, they are unable to fathom the extremity of their development. The open and necked shadow is still chasing them. Yet, he seems to be controlled and contended. It is quite surprising and shocking that several social service organizations and governments are trying hard to carve out the caverns of his development, but still he is unable to get the direction and it eludes him. The poet Kusram wishes them to change the equation of living life. He has genuine internal urge for the tribal people to come together, give up the slavery, keep away from divisiveness and lit up with the torch of unity. This terrible but truthful picture of his life is depicted in the poem 'Gotul' by Kusram.



Translation- Gotul

Rice of 'kosari', veges of 'vastya',
 We eat roots and tuber,
 While walking along the road and on foot,
 Away we swept in the river.
 A famished baby on the back,
 Wounded for years,
 The government, waiting for us to die.
 Still, drag us near.

Glossary:

Kosari= a variety of rice

Vastya= a type of forest vegetable and root

Gotul= a cultural place of tribal people, in which they feel protected and rejoice.

Notes: Here the poet used it in a negative sense. It is used here as a symbol of their open naked unprotected life.

iv) **Analysis and Translation of Kolami Poems:**

There are many tribal communities and their individual languages. It should be kept in mind that though the languages, costumes, religious rituals, eating habits are different; they are original owners and primitive tribes. They all are bound together with a thread of culture. The reference of their history binds their relationship together. They indicate that they are all one and warn about the ill effects of emotional and caste based differences. However, we find these people discriminating on the ground of caste and it is seen and visible through their transactions. The ladder of social discrimination, that affected the Indian social system, also intruded in the tribal communities paving ways to the issues of higher and lower caste. This rottenness has divided the tribal communities too. It has opened a new era of reformation and reorientation. The tribal poets and writers have ventured to wage a war against this rotten thought. Prof. Vasant Kannake is a poet from the revolutionary descent and the mood conveyed by him is supportive of tribal unity and is so broad and comprehensive. He writes in his Kolami dialect in his poem Gotti (Language)

Gotti

Mulekad jat benmapaytun

Vel waha totoe

Pradeshnet velekad

Mulkad gondi Dravidian kolawar

Pradesh kolam gondwana

Gond pardhan

Kolam pardhi

Okdi divenot praksh adnet agodrta itihās.

Language

‘Language cannot be made in caste,
Nor demand for territory.

All are the light of a single lamp,
And have a primitive history.’

Gondi, Pardhan, Pardhi or Kolami,

In Gondwan they all reside.

Descended from the same family,

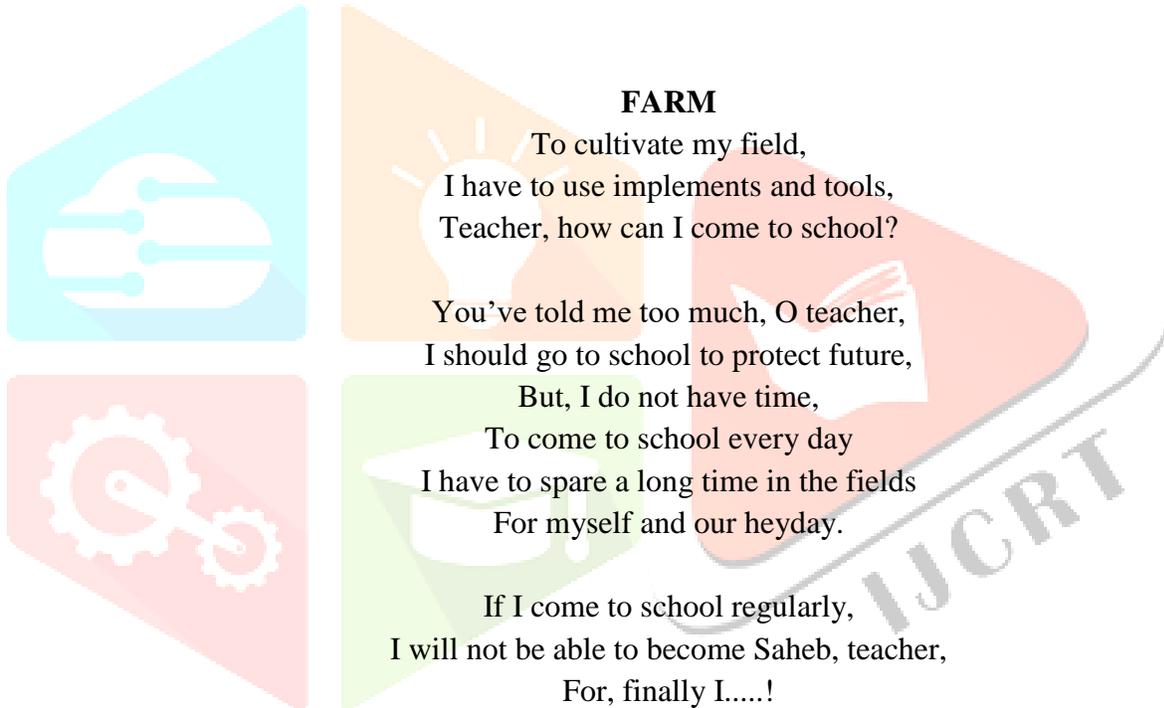
Why should they all fight?

In this poem rejecting the bitter traditional sense of casteism, the poet Prof. Vasant Kannake has given a clear opinion that all the tribes like Gond, Pardhan, Kolam and Pardhi are not different but the rays of same tribal light, citing history. Just as there are seven colours in the white light of the sun, so is the equation of the many tribes of tribal. Their languages belong to one Dravidian group.

For the welfare and development of tribal, many committees were appointed and schemes were also implemented. The constitution provided many facilities and concessions to them. Ashram schools were opened for tribal resident students. They were given political representation by providing reservation in jobs. Scholarships were made available for the convenience of education. Taking advantage of all these facilities, some stubborn young men and women from the tribal community came forward, got educated and got jobs after fighting against the situation. Yet, despite the availability of educational resources, they are not fully inclined to education. Science education is a big bow for them, which cannot be achieved in the present. If the teacher comes to ask others for absenteeism in the school, what will be his answer? The poet Prof. Vasant Kannake in his another Kolami poem ‘Vegal’(Farm) underlines this fact.

VEGAL

Bhalipekad kesra pentakad annen
 Dube davral tirtote
 Shalng yenan vandunn guruji
 Nir ley iddur guruji
 Roj shalang vareng sathi
 Annen vegata pandingsathi
 Aan man yepud shidun
 Guruji yenangeri shalang vattena
 Aan sahib benadalat thodi
 Akhari auti summing pada
 Guruji tanay sanjipner nir
 Tote shalaten tanay fikir
 Zoli babalnet hirkil
 Adung yete lepdun kapdal

**FARM**

To cultivate my field,
 I have to use implements and tools,
 Teacher, how can I come to school?
 You've told me too much, O teacher,
 I should go to school to protect future,
 But, I do not have time,
 To come to school every day
 I have to spare a long time in the fields
 For myself and our heyday.
 If I come to school regularly,
 I will not be able to become Saheb, teacher,
 For, finally I.....!
 I have to work in the field,
 Now, don't tell me anything teacher,
 Now, I don't feel worried about school,
 The condition of my father is very awful,
 Let me look after both -the field and the school!

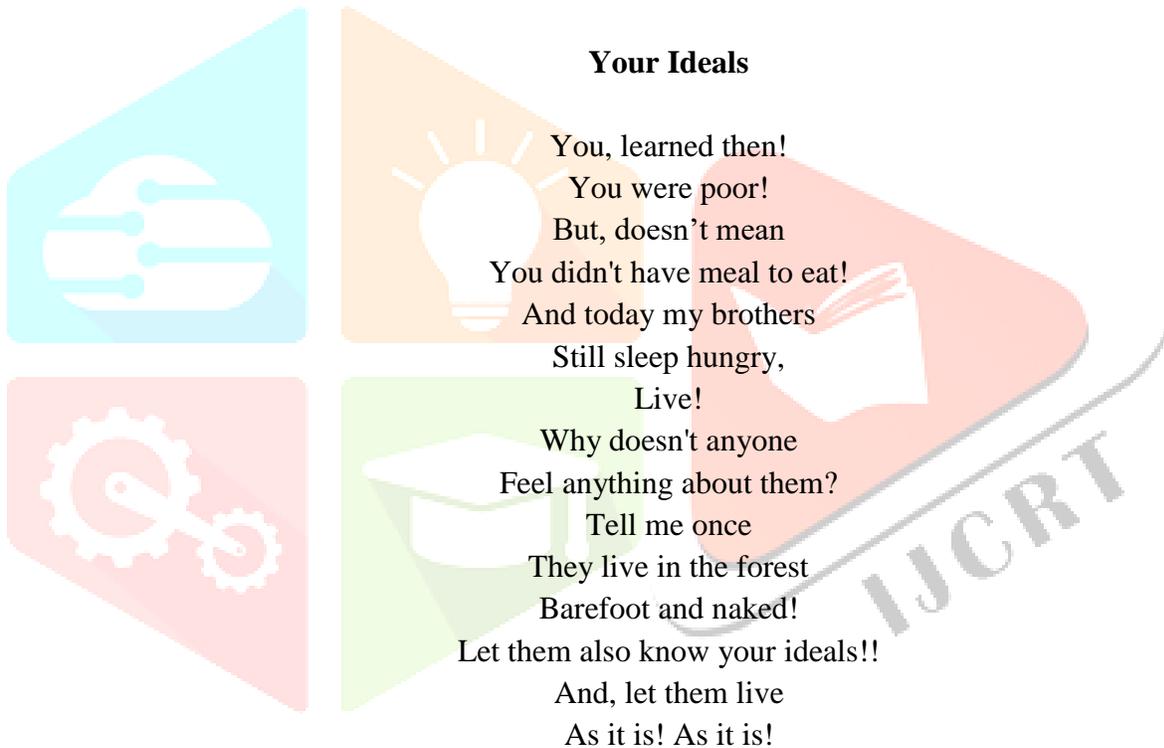
v) Analysis and Translation of Halbi poems

One talented poet from Halbi tribal community Shri Tulsidas Bhojar has directly made a complaint to Dr. Ambedkar. Looking upon Dr Ambedkar as his role model and ideal he put his mental agonies before him in one of his poems 'Tucho Adarsha'(Your Ideal)

Tucho Adarsha

Tuy, te be
 Shiklas
 Garb rehis
 Her khauke tuke
 Bhat nihaun ise nihi
 Fer.
 Aaj macho sangwari
 Abevale upwas sowsot, jagtos!
 Techo kakelange kaich kay samjey nihi!
 Sang ekber bale
 Hon jagun zalasot banme
 Khali paicho-bina kapalacho!
 Tihankeau januk des tucho adarsh!!
 Ani jaguk des!
 Jisech huse!

Your Ideals



We must understand this emotional appeal of the poet. He appeals all his brothers to follow the ideals of Dr Ambedkar.

The suicide of farmers has become a topic of discussion today. They are constantly being discussed in newspapers. Farmer is a nature dependent factor. From the time they sow, until the harvest is in hand, he is restless. There is no telling when nature will be hostile and evoke threats. He gets frustrated. The life of the farmers due to barrenness and indebtedness becomes a depot of problems and challenges leading to premature old age. Besides, education, marriage and worldly affairs of children are present. What will the poor farmers do? The problem of suicide cannot be solved by means of sympathy. The government policies have failed to solve their problems. The farmers should also not rely on the government nor the incidents of suicide are going to solve their problems. When the poet Bhoyar witnesses that "I was the first to see the cart of the agricultural country by placing the yoke of wrong planning on the shoulders of the farmers..." He notes this observation in his poem 'Dakley Macho Duware' (I Saw at the Door).

The poet Bhoyar has given an accurate sketch of how a farmer who works continuously in an agrarian country like India has become a victim of the manipulations of the rulers. What is the misfortune of this country than that the son of soil, who quenches the fire of another's stomach by growing food, should sleep hungry?

Dakley Macho Duware'

Deshache jughey kilokata
Upnalo bharlo biti dakley mey!
Krushimulyache fer chukicho
Kilokata maptoy dakley mey....
Desme krushi sanshodhan kendra ani
Krushi vidhyapithcho bihan dakley mey....!
Fer, sabkelang bhat pakanyamanke
'upas' sovtome dakley mey....!!

'I Saw at the Door...'

Many scales in the country
I have seen it full.
I have seen the agricultural value
Being weighed in the wrong rules!
Agricultural Research Center and University
Seen by me in its prime time
Flourishing in the same country.
But, those who grow food for all,
Were seen sleeping by me 'hungry'!!

(Note- **scales and rules** are used in the sense of balance)

vi) Analysis and Translation in Bhilli Languages

Bhill is one of the largest tribal communities residing in the Sahyadri region of Maharashtra. Vahru sonwane, born in the same community, is the poet of first generation with warlike consciousness. Bhilli or Bhillori is his mother tongue. He has composed poems in Marathi and Bhilli languages.

Food, clothes and shelter are the fundamental needs of man. Man constantly struggles for that only. It is a fact that many evenings and mornings some people's stoves do not light. There is no grain of food in the house. Let alone good food, but there is no dearth of souls struggling for bread these days. In the nectar jubilee year of independence, the issue of bread is a burning issue. A poor tribal mother is so helpless that she cannot prepare a single loaf of bread for her son. Food is thrown on one side, while on the other; hungry stomachs yearn for a piece of bread. The poem **Suklyani Bhakar** (Suklya's Dry Bread) by Vahru Sonwane highlights the insight of a forced tribal mother.

‘Suklyani Bhakar’

Pore angmana ravvat
 Naryani hatma bhakar
 Chidani gat tochi khay
 Suklya tinigam dekhtach rhay.
 Suklya dekhi dekhi bhag na
 Gharma daudich jay.
 :ma bhakar dey.... Va’
 :kay naha beta, randhni naha
 : mag randh ta... va, bhukh lagni san!
 Sakyala bi kayna randhni
 Narhyachi may ta Narhyala
 Bhakar randhi deni
 Tu kajya naha randhi deti... na maa....!
 Sangta sangata Sukalya radi dena
 Sukalyani may
 Suklyanni agdima tani leni
 Kay naha beta,
 Khawatri naha miy
 Kaldin tuna baba
 Dana livi ta mang
 Pahili bhakar tulach desu, haa!
 May Suklyana samjadt rhani
 Suklya bhakar bhakar Karin
 Kawku lugun ri ri karta an
 Mayni mandip doka thovin Suklya
 Niji gaya.
 Suklyachi Bhakar gayi kaha?

Suklya’s Dry Bread

Children play in the yard
 Bread in Narya's hand
 It eats like a bird.
 Suklya kept looking at him.
 He sees and sees..
 Runs into the house
 : Give me bread, Mother.
 : No bread, lad.
 : Then, cook! I’m very hungry.
 It was not cooked in the morning
 Narya's mother cooked the bread
 Don't you cook the bread, mother?
 Suklya started to cry
 Suklya's mother
 She drags Suklya into her arms

‘No food, lad, no ration at home’
 Tomorrow your Father
 Will bring grain
 Let me give you the first bread then!
 Mother continues to explain to Suklya.
 Suklya kept on saying ‘bread, bread
 For a long time, he continued to ask for
 And at last Suklya fell asleep
 With his head on his mother's lap
 Where did the dried bread go?’

After weeping for a long time for bread Suklya with his head on his mother’s lap fell asleep. Then, where did his bread go? From this one can feel the dark color of sadness and utter poverty spread in the house. What a dire poverty that the mother cannot fulfill the simple request of the child for bread! It is so irritating! Then, what if we break down on pain, injustice and inequality like bees?

In another poem entitled “**Battle**” the poet Vahru Sonwane puts decisive and fearless opinion that we need battle to bring about change.



Ladhai

Ek gham gay
 Ek gadip loy
 Ek has ek rad
 Jaa bhed taa lut sa
 Jaa lutn taa dukha sa
 Manus manus na bairi gaya sa.

Battle

One breaks out sweat
 One rolls on the mattress
 One laughs, and
 One cries at fate.

Where there is distinction there is loot
 Where there is booty, there is gloom
 The world is shocked in pain
 Men have become the enemy of men.

The poet says that unless and until human transactions are ruined with discrimination, inequality, loot and oppression, then battles and struggles are inevitable. This poem keeps up this tone from beginning to the end. Only a battle can bring about a change and nothing else.

Conclusion: The poets and poems discussed here seem to echo the black and dalit voices. The tribal people have also gone through the partial, unequal, unjust and discriminative treatment due to their physical stature and incomprehensive languages. To whatever tribe they belong to or whatever dialect they speak in but one thread that binds them together is their common tribal consciousness stimulated by the social and economic conditioning. The issues related to their survival have evoked the feeling of struggle and fight. Their poetry echoes these feelings. The poet Dhurve wishes them to change the equation of living life. He has genuine internal urge for the tribal people to come together, give up the slavery, keep away from

divisiveness and lit up with the torch of unity. Similarly, the poet Dadaji Kusram has given verbal form to his burning sensations in his poetry. He has a deep understanding of the painful suffering and the thrill that came to the share of tribal. Prof. Vasant Kannake is a poet from the revolutionary descent and the mood conveyed by him is supportive of tribal unity and is so broad and comprehensive. He appeals the tribal people to be united and not to observe discrimination among the tribes. Shri Tulsidas Bhojar, the Halbi poet, has directly made a complaint to Dr. Ambedkar and asks not only his people but all to look upon Dr. Ambedkar as a role model in order to rise in life's ladder. The Bhilli poet Vahru Sonwane has depicted the plight and predicament in the life of his people. He depicts their yearning for dry bread. These are the voices of the sensitive minds and hearts that with the passing of time have become wise and expect all to awake. Their poetry is an awakening call to the tribal people and also to those who trod their soul and spirit.

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