

Cultural Representation and Tribal Identity in Dang ni Duniya (The World of the Dangs): A Literary and Anthropological Study

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Abstract:

This research paper examines the cultural landscape, tribal identity, and socio-ecological consciousness presented in Dang ni Duniya (The World of the Dangs) by Manu Fuletra. The study aims to explore how the narrative portrays the customs, beliefs, rituals, and everyday struggles of the Adivasi communities inhabiting the Dang region of Gujarat. Positioned at the intersection of literature, anthropology, and cultural studies, the paper analyzes themes such as oral tradition, ecology, community relationships, gender roles, spirituality, and the effects of modernity on indigenous life. Using textual analysis and theoretical frameworks derived from Subaltern Studies, Ecocriticism, and Indigenous Literary Studies, the research uncovers the deeper literary strategies used to depict tribal worldviews. The study finds that Dang ni Duniya not only documents Adivasi life but also challenges mainstream narratives, thus contributing significantly to Indian regional and tribal literature. The research concludes that the text is a powerful cultural archive preserving the ethos of Gujarat's tribal world while questioning dominant epistemologies that have historically marginalized these narratives.

Keywords: Dang Literature, Adivasi Culture, Tribal Identity, Cultural Representation, Oral Tradition and Tribal Narrative.

Introduction:

The diverse literary traditions of India possess a rich reservoir of cultural expressions, among which the tribal literature of Gujarat holds a distinctive position. The tribal communities of the Dang region primarily Bhils, Kunbis, Warlis, and Gamits have historically maintained vibrant traditions that reflect their relationship with nature, community organization, myths, rituals, and spirituality. Yet, for centuries, mainstream literary discourse rarely documented their voices. In this context, *Dang ni Duniya (The World of the Dangs)* by Manu Fuletra emerges as an essential work that foregrounds the indigenous worldview of the tribal people of southern Gujarat. The text not only functions as a literary narrative but also as an ethnographic account, bridging the gap between creative writing and anthropological observation. The significance of this work increases manifold in the field of English literature when viewed through cultural, postcolonial, and subaltern lenses. Literature is not merely an artistic expression; it is a vehicle through which marginalized communities articulate their histories, identities, and cultural epistemologies.

The Adivasi population in India, though large and diverse, has often been misrepresented or underrepresented in literary and historical accounts. Adivasi texts, therefore, contribute to an alternative knowledge system that challenges dominant ideologies, colonial representations, and urban narratives. *Dang ni Duniya* provides an intimate portrayal of tribal life, written with cultural sensitivity and a deep understanding of indigenous experiences. This makes the text particularly relevant for literary study, where representation, identity, and narrative structures form the basis of cultural analysis.

The Dangs, a forested region located in the southern tip of Gujarat, is known for its hilly terrain, dense vegetation, and rich biodiversity. The ecological landscape is inseparable from the cultural existence of the tribal communities, who rely on forest resources for sustenance and cultural practices. This interdependence between nature and human life forms the central motif of Fuletra's narrative. The text highlights the close-knit bond the tribal people share with their environment, demonstrating how the forest is not merely a physical space but a cultural and spiritual force. This ecological sensibility aligns with modern ecocritical approaches that seek to understand literature's relationship with nature. Moreover, *Dang ni Duniya* explores oral traditions, folk songs, festivals, belief systems, and social norms that have shaped the ethos of the tribal communities. In doing so, the text functions as a cultural repository that preserves indigenous narratives threatened by modernity, migration, and socio-economic changes. For scholars of English literature, such a study allows the application of interdisciplinary frameworks indigenism, orality studies, cultural anthropology, and postcolonial ecocriticism to analyze how non-mainstream voices are represented and interpreted. The novel also interrogates the socio-political challenges faced by tribal communities, including issues of poverty, land rights, displacement, marginalization, and cultural erosion. These issues resonate with subaltern studies, which focus on communities whose voices have been silenced or overshadowed by dominant narratives. Through realistic portrayal and empathetic narration, the text underscores that the Adivasi identity is not static but dynamically shaped by both internal traditions and external pressures.

In recent years, there has been growing academic interest in regional and tribal literature within English departments, reflecting the global shift toward inclusivity and cultural diversity. The choice to analyze *Dang ni Duniya* in an English literature context is therefore timely and academically appropriate. It broadens the scope of literary studies by including indigenous perspectives, thereby enriching the understanding of Indian literature beyond conventional canons. This research paper aims to analyze the representation of tribal culture in *Dang ni Duniya*, focusing on themes of identity, ecology, orality, spirituality, and socio-economic challenges. Using literary and anthropological frameworks, the study seeks to highlight the cultural significance of the text and its contribution to the discourse on indigenous literature. Through detailed analysis, the paper argues that *Dang ni Duniya* is not only a literary work but also a socio-cultural document that preserves the legacy of Gujarat's tribal world while inviting readers to engage with its complexities and richness.

Literature review:

Tribal literature in India has increasingly drawn scholarly interest due to its cultural depth and alternative perspectives. Scholars such as G.N. Devy have emphasized the importance of indigenous narratives in understanding India's linguistic and cultural diversity. His work on the People's Linguistic Survey of India acknowledges tribal languages and oral traditions as crucial sites of knowledge production. This perspective creates a foundational framework for analyzing works like *Dang ni Duniya*, which emerges from indigenous contexts and articulates tribal epistemology.

Academic studies on Gujarati tribal literature often highlight the ethnographic contributions of writers such as Zaverchand Meghani, who documented Bhil folklore, songs, and stories. Meghani's work provides early textual material that affirms the cultural richness of Gujarat's tribal communities. Scholars researching these works frequently discuss the oral nature of Adivasi storytelling and its intrinsic connection with collective memory. This becomes relevant when reviewing *Dang ni Duniya*, as the narrative borrows heavily from oral traditions and folk sensibilities.

Recent studies in Indian English literature have explored tribal themes primarily through the works of writers such as Mahasweta Devi, who portrayed the struggles of tribal communities in central and eastern India. Although geographically distinct from Gujarat, Devi's works open discussions about subalternity, land struggle, exploitation, and identity formation—issues that also surface in *Dang ni Duniya*. Scholars who analyze Devi's texts often use subaltern studies and postcolonial theory, which similarly apply to the study of Fuletra's narrative. Another field relevant to the review is ecocriticism. Tribes around the world have historically shared a close relationship with nature, which contemporary ecocriticism tries to understand through literature. Scholars like Ramachandra Guha have argued that indigenous communities sustain ecological balance and possess deep environmental wisdom. In the context of Gujarat's tribal regions, studies show that the Dangs' ecological significance has long been embedded in the cultural practices of its inhabitants. *Dang ni Duniya* supports this scholarly view by depicting forests as central to tribal life.

Additionally, anthropological studies on the Dangs particularly those focusing on the Bhil, Kunbi, and Warli tribes provide valuable insights into their rituals, social structures, economic activities, and belief systems. These studies note that despite the arrival of modernity, Adivasi communities retain distinctive cultural elements. Researchers describe their social organization as community-based and egalitarian, notions that are accurately reflected in Fuletra's text. Comparative analyses of tribal literature also show global parallels between indigenous writing in India and that of Native American, Australian Aboriginal, and African tribal communities. Scholars point out common themes such as land displacement, cultural erosion, and resistance to dominant cultures. These parallels help situate *Dang ni Duniya* within a broader international discourse on indigenous identity. Finally, translation studies shed light on the challenges of representing indigenous narratives in broader literary spaces.

Tribal literature often relies on cultural idioms, folk expressions, and symbolic language, which pose challenges during translation. Although *Dang ni Duniya* is originally a Gujarati text, its cultural significance extends to English literature through translation and interdisciplinary analysis. Thus, the literature reviewed establishes a strong scholarly context for analyzing *Dang ni Duniya*. The text can be studied through multiple lenses subaltern studies, ecocriticism, indigenous frameworks, oral tradition analysis, and socio-cultural anthropology making it a valuable contribution to academic discourse.

Cultural Representation, Tribal Identity, and Literary Significance in the novel:

Dang ni Duniya occupies a significant place within Gujarati tribal literature and offers rich material for qualitative literary research. The narrative is an exploration of the cultural world of the Dangs, depicting the tribal communities living in a close-knit relationship with forests, land, rituals, and oral traditions. From a literary perspective, the text reflects the intersection of ethnographic detail, narrative storytelling, and cultural symbolism, making it a unique work for English literary analysis. This section investigates the major literary elements of the text through qualitative textual interpretation and theoretical frameworks such as ecocriticism, subaltern studies, and indigenous literary theory.

One of the core concerns of the text is the representation of Adivasi identity. Rather than depicting tribal communities through stereotypes, Fuletra situates them as agents with complex emotional and cultural lives. The narrative challenges mainstream assumptions that often portray tribal societies as primitive, backward, or isolated. Instead, it foregrounds their indigenous knowledge systems, collective social structures, and deep ecological wisdom. Identity in the text emerges through everyday life festivals, food habits, livelihood practices, kinship, and spiritual systems. Through descriptive passages, the text paints a picture of how these communities perceive themselves and their environment. The characters embody a sense of pride in their customs, dances, songs, and communal gatherings. These elements, when analyzed through a literary lens, reveal the richness of indigenous subjectivity. The text thus serves as counter-narrative literature, asserting the cultural autonomy of tribal communities.

Ecocriticism is particularly relevant to the study of the novel, as the narrative consistently foregrounds the forest as a character in itself. The Dang region, rich with teak forests, rivers, and wildlife, forms the ecological backbone of the text. The forest is not merely a setting; it shapes the rhythm of life, rituals, and survival strategies of the tribal population. The literary portrayal of nature in the text is not romanticized in a conventional sense; instead, it reflects an indigenous worldview in which humans and nature exist in a reciprocal relationship. The community's dependence on forest resources such as honey, herbs, wood, and fruits is depicted alongside rituals that honor nature spirits and ancestral forces. The ecological harmony represented in the narrative aligns with global indigenous literature, which often portrays nature as sacred and integral to identity formation.

The natural environment in the novel functions metaphorically. It symbolizes continuity, resilience, and cultural memory. The destruction of forests due to external forces logging, development, migration reflects the erosion of cultural values. Such themes resonate strongly with ecocritical theories that highlight the interconnectedness of environment, culture, and narrative. Orality plays a central role in tribal literature, and *Dang ni Duniya* captures this through descriptions of songs, folktales, proverbs, and communal storytelling sessions. Oral traditions are considered an archive of collective memory and cultural continuity. In literary analysis, these oral forms reveal stylistic features unique to tribal narratives repetition, rhythm, communal voice, and performative storytelling. Fuletra's narrative technique incorporates elements of orality, such as descriptions of night gatherings where elders narrate stories of ancestors, spirits, and mythic figures. These sections convey how knowledge is transmitted through generations. For English literature study, orality underscores alternative narrative structures that differ from mainstream written forms. It challenges the dominance of written literature by emphasizing performative, community-based storytelling.

The depiction of social organization in the text reveals a community characterized by cooperation, mutual aid, and egalitarian values. Labor is shared, and cultural norms encourage collective participation in farming, festivals, and rituals. The communal structure contrasts with hierarchical systems found in non-tribal societies. Gender roles in the Dang tribal communities are portrayed with nuance. While some responsibilities are gender-specific, the text reveals that women play significant roles in agriculture, household work, rituals, and decision-making. Their participation in folklore, dances, and cultural ceremonies highlights their importance in maintaining cultural continuity. A qualitative reading reveals how the literary representation of gender in tribal contexts differs from mainstream narratives of patriarchy or domination. The text suggests that gender relations, although not fully egalitarian, are shaped by mutual dependence and shared cultural responsibilities.

Spiritual beliefs in the text are intertwined with the natural environment. Deities are associated with trees, hills, rivers, and ancestral spirits. Rituals and festivals often involve invoking nature spirits for protection, rainfall, and agricultural prosperity. The representation of spirituality in *Dang ni Duniya* challenges institutionalized religions by presenting a worldview rooted in eco-spirituality. Indigenous spirituality can be understood as a form of epistemology a way of knowing the world. The text suggests that tribal knowledge is not primitive superstition but a sophisticated system of interpreting natural phenomena and maintaining ecological balance. Such representations align with global indigenous literatures that emphasize harmony, responsibility, and spiritual ecology. A major theme in the text is the impact of external forces on tribal life. Modernity enters the Dang region through urbanization, deforestation, wage labor, and political interventions. Fuletra portrays the psychological and cultural disruptions caused by these changes. Young people migrate to cities for work, leading to loss of traditional skills and weakening of communal bonds. Land rights issues and displacement threaten their survival. From a subaltern studies perspective, the narrative exposes how tribal voices remain marginalized in broader socio-political structures.

The text serves as a critique of development policies that overlook indigenous rights. Literary analysis reveals how Fuletra represents the tensions between tradition and modernity, creating a narrative of cultural resilience as well as vulnerability.

The analysis of *Dang ni Duniya* reveals five major findings that contribute to the understanding of tribal culture within English literary studies. First, the text offers a culturally authentic portrayal of Adivasi identity, emphasizing collective traditions, ecological harmony, and strong communal structures. The representation challenges stereotypes of tribal communities as primitive or uncivilized. Instead, the narrative highlights indigenous knowledge systems that have sustained these communities for generations.

Second, the ecocritical significance of the text stands out as a major finding. The forest is depicted not merely as a physical environment but as a cultural and spiritual space integral to tribal identity. The narrative underscores the interdependence between humans and nature, offering alternative ecological perspectives often absent in mainstream literature. This finding situates the text within global indigenous ecocritical discourse.

Third, the prominence of oral tradition in the narrative reinforces its literary uniqueness. Orality serves as a cultural archive, preserving collective memory, myths, and values. The incorporation of songs, folktales, and proverbs becomes a literary technique that enriches the narrative and challenges written literary norms. This finding reveals the importance of studying oral literature within English disciplines, expanding the definition of “text.”

Fourth, the text sheds light on the socio-political marginalization of tribal communities. Issues such as deforestation, cultural erosion, migration, and land displacement emerge as pressing concerns. The narrative demonstrates that modernity, while promising development, often disrupts indigenous ways of life. This finding aligns with subaltern studies and postcolonial criticism, revealing how tribal voices are historically silenced or ignored.

Finally, the study finds that *Dang ni Duniya* contributes significantly to Indian indigenous literature by providing a platform for underrepresented communities. The text bridges literature, culture, and anthropology, offering insights valuable to English literary scholarship. It expands literary discourse by introducing alternative narratives, aesthetics, and epistemologies rooted in indigenous worldviews.

Conclusion:

Dang ni Duniya stands as an important literary document that captures the cultural richness and lived experiences of the tribal communities of the Dangs. Through a qualitative literary approach, this research demonstrates that the text transcends ethnographic description to become a culturally embedded narrative with significant literary value. It contributes to English literature by introducing indigenous perspectives that challenge dominant narratives and expand the scope of literary studies.

The study reveals that the novel's portrayal of Adivasi identity is multi-dimensional, rooted in ecological harmony, communal bonding, and strong oral traditions. Its exploration of ecological themes aligns with ecocritical theories, while its representation of marginalized voices resonates with subaltern and postcolonial frameworks. The text not only documents cultural practices but also critiques the socio-political forces that threaten indigenous existence.

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