

Portrayal Of Tribal Life In Indian Movie And Indian Novel: An Ecocritical Study

Harini V.¹, Dr.Sonu Joseph²

¹Department of Languages, Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science, Chennai, India.
ORCID ID: 0000 0002 1481 8773.

²Department of Languages, Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science, Chennai, India.
ORCID ID: 0000 0002 8736 4215.
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Abstract

This paper is devoted to understand how literature (as in novel) and cinema (as in movie) portray tribal communities as the people who live in synchronization with nature. Indian cinema and Indian literature has become a tool to showcase the tribal life to the outer world through their performances and words. This helps the world to understand the life of the tribes through the modern man's choice of leisure like watching movie and reading books. The people of the urban society does not make an attempt to know and understand the lives of the tribal people. Movie and literature help in explaining the tribal lives in a reachable way and make the urban man aware of it. This paper discusses about the movie Jai Bhim and novel The Immortals of Meluha as instances. In the movie Jai Bhim, the basic life of Irula tribe is very well portrayed. Also, the movie shows how well the tribal community respect nature and all beings of nature. This movie is one good example to explain the tribal life through a visual mode to the audience. When talking about literature's portrayal of tribal life, the novel The Immortals of Meluha is used to showcase the tribal life portrayal in words. In the novel, the key character 'Shiva' is presented as a tribal community man who can only live life with nature and finds it hard to adapt the changing modernity and so called upper class comfort. The paper takes an ecocritical view of both the works to bring out its tribal life touch presented in them and this paper explains how the tribes live their life in oneness with nature.

Index Words--ecocriticism, tribal life, nature, tribal literature, ecocentric

I. INTRODUCTION

Nature is superior to everything that exists on earth. Nature is the root of all civilizations and also a significant part of every process of life. Tribal people are considered to be first settlements of any civilization. Before man moved to proper settlements, forests were their shelter. Nature was the source of their living. They have a special connection with earth and all lives in it. Tribal people were led to cultivate regard, humility, and reciprocity as a result of their deep spiritual connection to Mother Earth. It is also built on thousands of years of subsistence requirements and values. Hunting, collecting, and fishing for sustenance involves gathering food for oneself, family, the elderly, the community, and for ceremonial purposes. Everything is taken and utilised with the notion that we only take what we need, and we must take great care and be mindful of how much we take and how much we use so that future generations are not imperilled. Recording such lives in literature took a while to happen. Earlier it was not considered so great to be recorded. The importance of their existence was not understood. Soon people from such tribal communities came out as their own representatives to record and bring out their legends for their future generations which was all oral before that. Those were the tribal literatures. Tribal literature comprises of oral stories, poems and folklores of the tribal community. These literatures can be found in two forms. One is orature and other one is modern written literature. The 'Orature' is nothing but the literature of oral tradition. In India, more than hundred works of tribal literature are published in English and other important Indian languages. However, the development of tribal literature began as a search for identity, exposing the past and present from outsider exploitation and dangers to tribal identity and crises. It is a way of resistance on their part.

Tribes are indigenous communities that coexist with nature causing little to no harm. Tribal people in India have evolved their identity in close proximity to the natural resources that have shaped their cultural traditions, economics, social life, religious stories, and production skills. They have established a symbiotic relationship with their native habitat throughout time. According to the tribes, land is a representation of cultural identity and existence other than just being source of livelihood. However, as the Indian economy adapted to liberalisation, open markets brought in manufacturers, resulting in an abundant demand for the primary sources of the tribes like water, forest, and land. This resulted in displacement of tribal communities from one place to another as the companies were in great demand for the sources. Indigenous people have suffered greatly even in post-colonial India, they have been excluded not just from development processes, but also from their own homes. These companies took away the resources by evacuating the tribes from their lands. Tribal tribes have been marginalised in nearly every sector of social life as the primary developmental processes have created social zones of inequity. This way the tribes lost their identity and livelihood. Therefore, tribal literature is an attempt to safeguard tribal identity and existence in the face of increased exploitation, not merely to present their songs and poetry.

Tribal literature, apart from talking about tribal identity and existence, it also talks about the tribes' life in synchronisation with nature. Such a relationship of tribes with nature has been portrayed through various written, oral and visual media. Cinema and novel are also the important medium that showcases tribal way of living. This paper is an attempt to bring out how cinema and novel help in speaking out the indigenous people life and their oneness with mother earth.

II. TRIBAL LIFE PORTRAYED IN CINEMA

Cinema is a platform which appeals to the masses and is a reflection to the social, economic, cultural and the trends. It is not the entertainment which is the desired outcome but it also nurtures a rational perspective to all the inequality and injustice that the society is experiencing at that point of time. Indian film is one of the most prominent and effective tool in addressing different social concerns via the medium of a screenplay. Since its start in 1913, cinema have served as a significant medium for communicating social ideas and situations, as well as an important mode of leisure for the general public. It is often difficult to understand if it is the films that are influencing the society or vice versa. Tribal and caste-based films have given the oppressed community a platform to present their sufferings and difficulties. Films have always sought to blur the lines between the oppressed and the oppressors. Indian film has experimented with many genres in order to craft out a viable formula that appeals to people while also making a profit at the box office. Ecology and environment based films are also one among those genres. Cinema is the only art form that has brought Indians of all classes and castes together on one platform when talking about eco-based films, it also includes the tribe's life who are in great connection with nature. Tribal existence is inextricably linked to nature.

This research paper studies the tribal apartheid which forms the central theme in the movie *Jai Bhim*. Though the movie mainly focuses on the social issues faced by the tribes, the paper highlights the life of Irula tribe portrayed in the movie. This paper mainly discusses aspects like how the tribes pay their respects to nature in various possible ways and their dependence on nature for livelihood.

Jai Bhim is a Tamil drama film from South India with a 9.5 IMDb rating that explores the topic of the Tamil tribal group. Based on a true event, this film depicts the Irula tribes' daily challenges. It was released on the OTT platform Amazon Prime Video on November 2, 2021, and was directed by T.J. Gnanavel and produced by Suriya and Jyotika under the banner of 2D Entertainment. It was also co-produced by Rajsekar Karpoora Sundarapandian, with actor Suriya playing the role of a lawyer who combats against all challenges for the indigenous community members. Prakash Raj, Rao Ramesh, Rajisha Vijayan, and Lijo Mol Jose are among the cast members. Sean Roldan is the music director and composer of the movie. SR Kathir was cinematographer and Philomin Raj was editor of the movie. The film not only discusses the true issue that took place in 1993, but it also depicts the domestic lives of the Irula tribes. On November 2, 2021, the film was available on Amazon Prime Video in other languages like Telugu, Hindi, Malayalam, and Kannada. This study focuses on the movie's ecocritical component as well as Irula's real life. The inspiration for the film *Jai Bhim* is taken from real-life case that took place in the year 1993. The case was fought by a senior advocate, Chandru who handled many human rights cases for the poor people and never charged anything for handling those cases. In 1995, Chandru battled for the tribal community's justice. This film is based on the true story of a tribal lady from the Irular group. According to reports, her spouse

died in police custody who was arrested for the falsely accused theft case. Advocate Chandru fought for the case and brought the truth in front of the court. This case formed the base of the movie 'Jai Bhim'.

In the title of the film 'Jai Bhim', Jai means "long live!" and Bhim refers to Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar who was a social reformer and drafted the Indian constitution. Dr. Ambedkar fought for an independent India which would not have any caste discrimination. He belonged to an "untouchable" community during his time. He was committed to end caste prejudice and bringing about social revolution in India's developing democracy.

III. TRIBAL LIFE PORTRAYED IN NOVEL

The majority of tribal populations in India share cultural traits that is similar to most of the tribal communities across the world. They live united and in harmony. They are uninterested in generating income or in employing labour as a means of collecting interest and capital. They believe in the human ability to understand or comprehend truth and they accept a worldview in which nature, humans, and God are inextricably intertwined. They believe in intuition rather than running behind reason. They see their surroundings as holy rather than secular and their concept of time is subjective rather than objective. As a result, the reality of tribal imagination is vastly different from that of modern Indian civilization. Imaginative transactions take on a self-conscious shape once a culture embraces a secular paradigm of creativity in which the creative replaces God. The tribal psyche, on the other hand, is still dreamy and hallucinogenic to a significant extent. It allows for seamless union between multiple planes of reality and levels of time. Oceans fly through the sky like birds, mountains swim through the sea like fish, animals communicate like humans, and stars bloom like plants in tribal legends. The story is not bounded by spatial or temporal order. This is not to argue that tribal works lack standards or rules; rather, they acknowledge the concept of emotional identification with the story motif. Stars, oceans, mountains, plants, mankind, and animals may all be enraged, sad, or delighted in this way.

As a process of recording their culture, tribal people started drawing tribal arts. As a realisation of preserving their culture, tradition and custom, tribal people took a leap from oral tradition to tribal arts. One of the most distinguishing features of tribal arts is their unique way of structuring space and images, which has been described as "transcendental." Tribal artists appear to understand verbal or pictorial space as defined by a very variable 'frame' in both narrative and visual forms of expression. The difference between art and non-art has nearly vanished. A tribal epic can start with an ordinary everyday incident, tribal artwork and living spaces blend together as if they were one and the same. And there is no purposeful attempt to follow a chronology within the story or the painted picture. The narrated stories and visuals take on the seemingly chaotic forms of dreams.

To preserve tribal songs and stories for future generations, they are being translated into English which is a worldwide language. Although translation cannot replicate the original delicacy and rhythm, it serves a huge service by making tribal music accessible, legible, and pleasurable. Without translation, these priceless gems of tribal literature would have perished forever.

Other than recording the tribal songs and stories, novelists have started writing about tribes in their fiction. Those fictions have the tribal life description as a part of their story. It talks about how tribal people live their life with nature. This paper deals with one such Indian novel 'The Immortals of Meluha'. The Immortals of Meluha is an Indian mythological fiction by Amish Tripathy. The Immortals of Meluha is the first book in Amish Tripathi's Shiva trilogy series. The narrative begins with the arrival of the Tibetan tribe Shiva in the region of Meluha.

Amish Tripathi is a well-known modern Indian fiction author who is well known for his The Shiva Trilogy. Immortals of Meluha, his debut novel, broke sales records within weeks of its release, establishing him as an internationally famous Indian novelist. Tripathi was born on October 18, 1974, in Mumbai, India, into a pious family. His grandpa was a Pandit and a professor at the Hindu University of Banaras. He grew up in a middle-class household that valued religious and worldly education. He had always been an avid reader since he was a child. History was one of his favourite subjects. He had to choose a professional option that would sustain his family in the long term because he came from a conventional bourgeois background. He had a strong interest in history and aspired to be a historian, but he did not pursue his desire due to the constant financial difficulties that such a career would involve.

His creative career started with a philosophical conversation sparked by a fascinating fact he and his family learned from a television show. They discovered a disagreement between Indian and Persian religious stories, since Indian gods were referred to as devas and devils as asuras. The pre-Islamic Zoroastrian Persian myth, on the other hand,

had it reserved, ahuras were their gods, and daivas were their devils. The conflict between good and evil in these mythology grabbed his attention, and he set out to figure out what really is evil. He brought down his philosophical theory on paper with the help of his family. The thesis was quickly converted into a Hindu deity Shiva adventure narrative. The Immortals of Meluha, his debut novel, was released in 2010. Tripathi spent approximately five years to complete the novel. The story is set in Meluha, a reimagining of the Shiva tale. The plot progresses with the entrance of the protagonist, who aids the Meluhans in their fight against evil powers. Shiva's mission offers him a crucial lesson while also revealing his fate. The Secret of the Nagas and The Oath of the Vayuputras are the sequels to The Immortals of Meluha, which earned amazing reviews from reviewers all over India. The Shiva Trilogy was a big financial success, and it became the fastest-selling book in Indian history. The trilogy has also been translated into 14 languages so far. In addition, the film rights of The Immortals of Meluha were recently purchased by Dharma Productions of India.

IV. ECOCRITICISM

Ecocriticism is the interdisciplinary approach to the study of literature and the environment, in which all sciences join together to assess the environment and generate new ideas for resolving the current environmental condition. The word "ecocriticism" is said to have been developed by William Rueckert in 1978, and he describes it as "the application of ecology and ecological principles to the study of literature. The books that initiated ecocriticism are The Ecocriticism Reader, edited by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, and The Environmental Imagination, by Lawrence Buell, were both published in the mid-1990s. In literature, ecocriticism examines the relationship between people and the natural environment. It examines how environmental concerns, environmental culture issues, and perspectives towards nature are expressed and examined. The study of how people in the society act and respond in regard to nature and environmental circumstances is one of the fundamental aims of ecocriticism. Due to rising social emphasis on environmental degradation and greater technology, this type of critique has got a lot of attention in recent years. As a result, it is a novel approach to study and interpret literary works that adds new aspects to the field of literary and conceptual studies. "Green (cultural) studies," "ecopoetics," and "environmental literary criticism" are all terms used to describe ecocriticism, which is a deliberately wide approach. Nature has always been viewed as more or less utilitarian in Western thought—nature exists to serve human needs. However, following the seventeenth century, numerous voices advocated a reassessment of man's connection with the environment, as well as man's perception of nature. Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher, coined the term "Deep Ecology," which highlights the fundamental interdependence of all living forms and environmental characteristics, and provides a symbiotic and holistic rather than anthropocentric worldview. Prior literary and cultural theories focused on issues of class, race, gender, and area as criteria and "subjects" of critical study. A new hazard has emerged in the late twentieth century: ecological calamity. Nuclear war, depletion of vast natural resources, rising population, expansion of exploitative technologies, conquest of space in preparation for use as a garbage dump, pollution, and loss of habitat (though not a human problem) are among the most serious environmental issues that humanity faces. Contemporary literary theory has begun to address the topic as part of academic debate in this setting. Green movements have sprouted up all across the world, with some even gaining representation in government.

V. ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF THE MOVIE JAI BHIM

Cinema is a platform which appeals to the masses and is a reflection to the social, economic, cultural and the trends. It is not the entertainment which is the desired outcome but it also nurtures a rational perspective to all the inequality and injustice that the society is experiencing at that point of time. Cinema is the only art form that has brought Indians of all classes and castes together on one platform. Films have always sought to blur the lines between the oppressed and the oppressors. Tribal and caste-based films on their difficulties have given the oppressed community a platform to present their sufferings. Jai Bhim is one such a tribal community based movie that attempts to bring out the reality.

With a superb combination of mystery and drama, Jai Bhim delves into the lives of Sengeni and Rajakannu, a tribal couple. Rajakannu (Manikandan) and Sengani (Lijomol Jose), a married couple from a tribal town who live in love and contentment despite their poverty. Things change, however, when the police arrest Rajakannu and a

few others on accusation of robbery and torture them cruelly. The cops then informed that the accused had eluded them and that their whereabouts remained unknown. Sengani, who is expecting their second child, enlists the help of a skilled lawyer named Advocate Chandru (Suriya) to uncover the mystery surrounding her husband's and others' disappearances.

Apart from the story line where a great injustice is made to the tribal couple, there are lots of other ecocritical evidences to be noted in the movie. There are scenes in the movie where the tribe's synchronization with nature is very evident. This aspect of the movie will be deeply analysed to bring to light the ecocritical sense of their life portrayed. Along with the movie's fictional evidences, many of the real life practices of the Irula tribes will be discussed to prove the stand.

In the beginning of the movie *Jai Bhim*, the tribal community people are asked to catch rats which were disturbing the field that belongs to the village president. Sengani, Rajakannu and others make holes through the field to blow smoke using hot smoke pots to bring the rats out of the holes. Sengani sits ready with a sack in the other end of the hole to catch the rats that comes running out of the holes. She catches many rats in her sack. Out of them, she finds a baby rat in her sack. She takes it out and sets it free back into the field. When Rajakannu asks about it she says that it was so small to die and they need not kill such tiny lives. Respecting the life of a little rat, Rajakannu accepts to what she said and set the baby rat free. Through this scene of the movie we understand their respect towards every life on Earth irrespective of their size and species. This can also be seen as their interdependence with nature as nature let them live and they let the nature to live. In another instance in the same scene mentioned earlier where Rajakannu's little daughter is feeding grains to the small birds in the field. This scene shows even the younger ones of them had their connection and humanity towards different lives other than humans. On the same night of the scene it rains heavily. Despite getting drenched in the pouring rain, a woman takes the goats to their shed to tie them and to keep them out of rain. She is so concerned about the animals that she just put a sack on her head and take the goats to their shed. On the next day Kathirvel's (Ramapuram President) wife Subbulakshmi witnesses a snake under the cupboard where she keeps her jewels and valuables. So Rajakannu is called to president's house to catch the snake. Rajakannu suddenly asks for a medicine to Sengani. As Rajakannu asks, Sengani brings the medicine, prays to their goddess and gives the medicine to him. With that Rajakannu rushes to the president's house with the man who came to call him. After reaching president's house he makes a short prayer and puts the medicine in his mouth. He starts to find the presence of the snake with its smell. He smells all over and finds it between the huge rice loads in the store room of the house. He catches the snake without harming it anyways. He carries it and releases it into the woods. He is well aware that only the nature is giving them livelihood and also understands that it is not the fault of the snake to have venom in its tongue. It is the way it was made into the Earth. So he does not complaint about the venomous nature of the snake. In another scene Sengani teaches the fellow villagers about the different nature medicine for different snake bites. She has excellent knowledge about different medicinal leaves and their uses. She shares her oral knowledge with other villagers for free. She just wanted to make her people aware of the medicinal uses of different leaves and plants in the woods and did not wanted to make money out of it. These are evidences from the movie that shows that the Irula tribes always had their interconnectedness with nature. They took resources from nature and proper respects back to nature.

In general, Irulas are one among the six primitive tribal groups in Tamil Nadu, India. The Irula live in Tamil Nadu's northern districts, in southern India. Irulas are common in the Cheyyar area, and they may be found in every hamlet. The term Irulas comes from the Tamil word "Irul," which means "black," and alludes to their skin colour. Irula is a name that denotes "people of darkness." This might be a reference to their dark complexion or the fact that all key ceremonies were typically held at night. The Irulas are native speakers of the Irula language. It is closely linked to Tamil, Yerukala, Sholaga, and other Tamil languages as a member of the Dravidian family. The script used is Tamil. They used to hunt and gather forest materials while living in shelters. Following that, people began to live in bamboo huts and gradually learned the technique of farming. Because bamboos were scarce, people began to construct homes out of sand and stones. Natives began to enter into their settlements. Rice was previously exclusively consumed during festivals. Rice has now become their staple meal due to a shortage of agriculture. The major source of revenue is cattle breeding. Honey, firewood, and other natural resources were also harvested. The Irulas' primary activity has been catching snakes and rats. During the sowing and harvesting seasons, they also work as labourers (coolies) on the landlords' fields. Fishing is also one of their occupation as well. These people's original employment was rat and snake trapping. The clan had to quit their nomadic lifestyle

and make a livelihood amid the distrustful mainstream culture after the Indian government banned snake trapping. The population has established itself on the outskirts of numerous settlements, attempting to make a living as field labourers and bonded labourers in rice mills. They are illiterate and lack necessary livelihood skills. To conclude, *Jai bhim* movie is a typical portrayal of the life of Irulas and their life struggles. Though they face so much difficulties they have never mistreated nature in anyways and they have always lived one with nature.

VI. ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF THE NOVEL THE IMMORTALS OF MELUHA

In the novel *The Immortals of Meluha*, the narrative begins with the arrival of the Tibetan tribe Shiva in the region of Meluha. When Shiva swallows the Somras, a mythical healing elixir that colours his neck blue, the

Meluhan conviction that Shiva is their mythical saviour Neelkanth is reaffirmed. Shiva resolves to aid the Meluhans in their struggle against the Chandravanshis, who have allied with a cursed tribe known as the Nagas; but, throughout his journey and the ensuing battle, Shiva discovers how his decisions represent who he wishes to be and how they have led to disastrous results.

Meluha is a near-perfect empire built by Lord Ram, one of the greatest rulers of all time, many years ago. However, the formerly mighty kingdom and its Suryavanshi rulers were facing a serious dilemma as the venerated Saraswati, the empire's main river, was rapidly drying up. They also confront severe terrorist assaults from the east, where the Chandravanshis have allied with the Nagas, a cursed race with physical abnormalities, to create the Nagas. Daksha, the current ruler of Meluha, sent ambassadors to Tibet in North India to welcome the tribes that reside there to Meluha. The leader of the Guna tribe, Shiva is a valiant warrior and protector, is one of those invited. Shiva accepts the proposition and joins his tribal group in Meluha. When they arrive in Srinagar, they are greeted by Ayurvati, the Meluhans' Chief of Medicine. The Meluhan manner of life amazes Shiva and his tribe. The Gunas wake up with a high temperature and sweating on their first night in Srinagar. Under Ayurvati's directions, the Meluhans continue the healing procedure. Ayurvati, on the other hand, discovers that Shiva is the only one who is free of these symptoms, and that his neck has become blue. Shiva is announced by the Meluhans as the Neelkanth, their mythical saviour.

The story begins in Tibet, in Manasarovar, where Shiva and his tribes are fighting for survival. As a result, they go to Meluha as immigrants. They offered Shiva the restorative drink Somras, which left Shiva's neck blue. He was known as Neelkanth by the Meluhans, who saw him as their saviour. After that, he was sent to Devagiri, Meluha's capital. Prakriti, usually referred to as Nature's mother and guardian of all humans, is mentioned throughout the novel. Shiva and his tribes' journey across Manasarovar Lake, Srinagar, Kashmir, with its exquisite beauty of valleys, sceneries, snow-capped mountain ranges, colours and fragrances of flowers, singing birds, river flow, and so on. The reader is mesmerised by all of this. Meluha's major mode of transportation is via water. Punjab is crossed by the rivers Indus, Ravi, Beas, Chenab, and Satlaj (the land of five rivers). "The vast valley was covered by a lush green canvas of grass. On it was painted the masterpiece that was Kashmir. Rows upon rows of flowers arranged all of God's colours, their brilliance broken only by the soaring Chinar trees, offering a majestic, yet warm Kashmiri welcome. The melodious singing of the birds calmed the exhausted ears of Shiva's tribe, accustomed only to the rude howling of icy mountain winds" (Tripathi, 2010). During this travel, Nandi informs Shiva about the rigorous rules against animal mistreatment. All lives are cherished in Meluha. It is compared to paradise by Meluhan. In Indian law, all lives are treated equally. The hunting of wild animals is prohibited by law. Meluha's ruler Daksha is a descendent of the Sun from the Suryavanshis dynasty who is solar calendar follower. They were noted for their candour, courage, devotion, and honesty. The Sun, like the Sun, is ever a source of energy. They want to live as perfect a life as possible. Chandravanshis are descended from the moon and observe the lunar calendar. The majority of the jewellery worn by Meluhans represents natural items, such as birds for Brahmins, animals for Kshatriyas, flowers for Vaishyas, and fish for Shudras. Even the Nagas' sign Om is a symbol. Om's half circle represents the crescent of the Moon, while the whole circle represents the Sun. "Aum is the holiest word in our religion. It is considered the primeval sound of nature. The hymn of the universe. It was so holy that for many millennia, most people would not insult it by putting down in written form" (Tripathi, 2010). Shiva proceeds to Mount Mandar, the location of the big Somras production facility, where he meets Brahaspathi, Meluha's head scientist. Shiva has used daivyastra to revenge the fight against Chandravanshis after the destruction of Mount Mandar. Then he learned Chandravanshis weren't wicked, but they were different from Suryavanshis in several ways. He determined to find out who was behind the actual evil because of his remorse.

In an instance when he is at the palace, Shiva finds it impossible to sleep on a cotton bed. He's never had anything like this before. He tries a few various positions, but none of them work. Finally, he gets off, places the sheet on the floor, and lies down. He slept on the floor all of the time. The fluffy bed initially thrilled him, but it soon became a source of discomfort and annoyance, transforming light into the symbolic knowledge of all sophisticated cultures.

The Immortals of Meluha not only displays a natural spectacle, but also an artistic environment that emphasises the importance of man's interaction with nature. The art might be seen as a facade that hides a general desire to admire nature for its physicality, but it is actually critical of prevailing cultural understanding about nature.

VII. CONCLUSION

Literature has an important part in preserving and protecting our environment. Literature should both celebrate and sensitise the beauty of the environment. An Ecocritical study of tribal life is a need to focus on their basic enriched lifestyle rather than focussing on the issues they are dealing with. In present scenario there are various means to showcase the life of the tribal communities. Among them film and fictions are playing an important role. Because both are a means of entertainment and hobby to many people and it easily reaches the general audience through these means. Thus movie and novel play a main role in bringing out the life of the tribal communities. Also an ecocritical study gives a better understanding of their oneness with nature.

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Harini V., A Full-Time Research Scholar at Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science, Chennai. She obtained her Under Graduation in English Literature from Shri Krishnaswamy College for Women, Chennai in the year 2018. Further she did her master degree in English Literature at Ethiraj Collge for Women, Chennai in the year 2020. Completed a Post Graduate Diploma in English Language Teaching at Annamalai University in the year 2021. Currently She is pursuing her Ph.D in English literature at Hindustan Institute of Technology

and Science, Chennai. Her area of interest includes Ecocritical Studies, Indigenous studies and Indian literature. She has also presented papers in different conferences that dealt with indigenous studies and ecocriticism.



Dr. Sonu Joseph is currently working as an Assistant Professor (S.G) at HITS, Chennai in the Department of English. Ten years as a High School teacher and thirteen years in a Technical University has given her insight and perspective of how education is in its age of metamorphosis. The teaching experience and research has opened a wide spectrum of ideas in terms of curriculum building, student's psychology and constructive work environment. She has done graduation in Triple Majors with English Literature, History and Political Science in Sophia College, Ajmer in the year 1997. Majored in English Literature in Post-Graduation Degree in the year 2001 from Government College, Ajmer. Teaching has been her vocational calling and took hands on teaching experience with B.Ed. Degree in the year 2020 from Jailal Institute of Teaching, Ajmer. She pursued M.Phil and Ph.D in English Language Teaching from Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science in the year 2010 and 2020 respectively.