



By G.N. Devy

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Understanding the Text

1. Identify the common characteristics shared by tribal communities all over the world.

Answer: The essayist identifies some common characteristics shared by tribal communities all over the world. The tribals live in groups that are cohesive and organically unified. They show very little interest in accumulating wealth or in using labour as a device to gather interest and capital. The tribals accept a world view in which nature, human beings and God are intimately linked and they believe in the human ability to spell and interpret truth. They live more by intuition than reason, they consider the space around them more sacred than secular, and their sense of time is personal rather than objective.

2. What distinguishes the tribal imagination from the secular imagination?

Answer: The tribal imagination is, according to the author, dreamlike and hallucinatory. It admits fusion between various planes of existence and levels of time in a natural way. These characteristics distinguish the tribal imagination from the secular imagination. In tribal stories, oceans fly in the sky as birds, mountains swim in the water as fish, animals speak as humans and stars grow like plants. In tribal imagination, stars, seas, mountains, trees, men and animals, can be angry, sad or happy.

3. How does G. N. Devy bring out the importance of the oral literary tradition?

Answer: G. N. Devy brings out the importance of the oral literary tradition by referring to the richness of the works of the tribals that have been handed down from one generation to the other orally. He tries to bring home the point that though the literary compositions have been transmitted orally yet thematically and ornamentally they are very rich. The stories and songs that have come down to the tribals through oral tradition are unique. These compositions present the exclusive world view of the tribals. He points out that the wealth and variety of these works is very enormous. In order to show the importance of the oral literary tradition, Devy throws light on the various characteristics of the tribal arts. He shows that one of the main characteristics of tribal arts is their distinct manner of constructing space and imagery, which might be described as hallucinatory. Playfulness is another dimension of this tradition. Devy advocates that proper recognition should be given to the oral literary tradition in view of its variety and richness.

4. List the distinctive features of the tribal arts.

Answer: According to the essayist G. N. Devy, the tribal arts display many distinctive features.

1. One of the distinctive features of tribal arts is their distinct manner of constructing space and imagery, which might be

described as 'hallucinatory'. In both oral and visual forms of representation, tribal artists seem to interpret verbal or pictorial space as demarcated by an extremely flexible 'frame'. The boundaries between art and non art become almost invisible. In a tribal Ramayana, an episode from the Mahabharata makes a sudden and surprising appearance; tribal paintings contain a curious mixture of traditional and modern imagery.

2. The tribal arts follow strict convention. Every tribal performance and creation has, at its back, another such performance or creation belonging to a previous occasion. The creativity of the tribal artist lies in adhering to the past while, at the same time, slightly subverting it.
3. Playfulness is the soul of tribal arts. The tribal arts rarely assume a serious or pretentious tone.
4. The tribal arts are relaxed and never tense.
5. The tribal oral stories and songs employ bilingualism in a complex manner.

5. 'New Literature' is a misnomer for the wealth of the Indian Literary tradition. How does G. N. Devy explain this?

Answer: According to the essayist, the tribal Literature should not be called 'New Literature' as this has been in existence for many years. The songs and stories of the tribals have been transmitted orally and as these have not been written down so many people have been unaware of them. The essayist contradicts the views of the western literary critics who have termed tribal literature as 'New Literature'. He says that there is nothing new in this, what might be new is the present attempt to see imaginative expression in tribal language not as folklore but as literature and to hear tribal speech not as a dialect but as a language.

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