SP Publications
International Journal Of English and Studies (IJOES)
An International Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Journal; **Impact Factor:** 8.175 (SJIF)
ISSN: 2581-8333|**Volume 7, Issue 7 July, 2025**

GUARDIANS OF THE LAND: TRIBAL LORE AS A RESPONSE TO DISPLACEMENT AND ECOLOGICAL DISRUPTION

Dr. Balamurugan C[1]
Assistant Professor of English, Sri Ramakrishna College of Arts & Science (Autonomous), Nava India, Coimbatore

Mr. Abishek M[2]
Research Scholar in English, Sri Ramakrishna College of Arts & Science (Autonomous), Nava India, Coimbatore

Article Received: 02/06/2025
Article Accepted: 03/07/2025
Published Online: 03/07/2025
DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2025.18.07.80

Abstract: The tribal communities of the Western Ghats—including the Irulas, Kurumbas, Kattunayakans, Malekudiyas, and Siddis—possess rich oral and performative literary traditions that serve as vital systems of knowledge, resistance, and identity preservation. This paper explores how their oral literature, transmitted through songs, myths, rituals, and storytelling, critiques mainstream assimilation, ecological exploitation, and political marginalization. These narratives, often misunderstood as mere folklore, encode ecological trauma, historical memory, and ethical codes grounded in coexistence with nature. Storytelling in endangered native languages becomes an act of resistance, preserving cultural and spiritual worldviews that challenge dominant narratives of development and civilization. Identity is performatively rooted in land, ancestry, and community, expressed through oral epics, chants, and rituals. Employing an interdisciplinary approach from literary criticism, ecological humanities, anthropology, and postcolonial studies, this study analyzes selected narratives from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka. It emphasizes oral literature's aesthetics and its role in resisting power structures and affirming tribal cosmologies and belonging.

Key words: Tribal Literature, Oral Traditions, Cultural Resistance, Ecological Humanities, Identity Preservation

Introduction: The Western Ghats, a UNESCO World Heritage site, are not only ecologically rich but also home to diverse tribal communities like the Irulas, Kurumbas, and Todas. These tribes possess distinct oral literary traditions encompassing folktales, chants, myths, and ecological metaphors that serve as repositories of knowledge, resistance, and identity. This paper explores how such literature resists cultural assimilation, political marginalization, and ecological exploitation, while affirming tribal identity rooted in land, kinship, and ritual. Oral narratives, dynamic and adaptive, function both as cultural memory and

political expression. Using an interdisciplinary, qualitative methodology, the study draws on literary analysis and ethnographic sources to interpret selected tribal texts. It emphasizes the need to recognize these oral traditions as vital contributions to Indian literary discourse. By foregrounding tribal voices, the paper calls for an inclusive literary historiography and highlights the importance of indigenous knowledge in addressing contemporary challenges like environmental degradation and cultural erasure.

2. Historical and Cultural Context: The history of the tribal communities in the Western Ghats is marked by resilience, adaptation, and deep-rooted connection with the land, but also by systemic marginalization and cultural invisibility. Understanding the literature of these communities requires situating it within a broader historical framework of colonization, forest control policies, land alienation, and the more recent incursions of globalization and environmental degradation.

Colonial Interventions and Dispossession: The arrival of British colonial rule in South India drastically altered the relationship between tribal communities and their environment. Traditional forest-dwelling communities such as the Kattunayakans, Kurumbas, and Irulas had long practiced sustainable forest-based livelihoods: shifting cultivation, honey gathering, herbal medicine collection, and animal tracking—activities rooted in intimate ecological knowledge. However, colonial authorities viewed such practices as "primitive" and unproductive. Through forest laws such as the Indian Forest Act of 1865 (and later 1878 and 1927), vast tracts of forest were declared government property, and tribal access was severely restricted.

The imposition of forest bureaucracy and scientific forestry marginalized traditional forest management systems, turning forest dwellers into trespassers on their own land. Simultaneously, the colonial ethnographic project labelled these communities as "tribes" or "aboriginals," reinforcing an image of backwardness and cultural stagnation. The oral traditions of these communities, rich in ecological insight and mythic imagination, were either ignored or misrepresented in colonial texts.

Postcolonial State and Continued Marginalization: Independence in 1947 did not substantially improve the conditions of tribal communities. In fact, nation-building efforts and developmental projects such as large dams, mining operations, and monoculture plantations resulted in further displacement and cultural erosion. The construction of the Idukki and Silent Valley dams in Kerala and the promotion of cash crops like tea, eucalyptus, and rubber across the Western Ghats led to widespread deforestation and loss of access to ancestral lands.

The tribal communities were often relocated without consent or adequate rehabilitation. This economic and spatial marginalization was accompanied by cultural assimilation pressures, including the imposition of mainstream education, language, and religion. Consequently, oral traditions began to fade, as younger generations were pushed to

adopt dominant languages like Malayalam, Kannada, and Tamil, often at the cost of their indigenous languages.

These transformations are not just historical facts; they are encoded and responded to in tribal narratives. Myths of exodus, forest loss, or angered nature spirits often reflect real socio-political traumas. Ritual performances in many communities continue to reenact ancient struggles over land and sovereignty, thus preserving a subaltern memory that mainstream historiography has largely erased.

Cultural and Literary Invisibility: Tribal literature, especially oral narratives, has historically been excluded from the Indian literary canon, which has privileged classical Sanskrit texts, elite vernacular literatures, and modern print literature. Tribal oral stories were either considered anthropological curiosities or relegated to the status of "folklore" without literary merit. This marginalization reflects a broader epistemic violence, where tribal ways of knowing, remembering, and expressing are rendered illegible within dominant frameworks.

Furthermore, the lack of script for many tribal languages has made preservation difficult. The Irulas and Kurumbas, for example, traditionally used oral memory and ritual performance for transmission. Their stories were rarely recorded until the late 20th century, and even then, mostly by non-tribal researchers who often missed cultural nuances or interpreted them through outsider frameworks. This has resulted in partial documentation and, in some cases, distortion.

Contemporary Challenges and Cultural Assertion: Today, the challenges faced by tribal communities are both old and new. Deforestation, climate change, tourism, and extractive industries continue to threaten their lands and livelihoods. Simultaneously, evangelization, political appropriation, and identity dilution risk further eroding indigenous belief systems and traditions.

However, there has also been a growing movement of cultural self-representation, with tribal intellectuals, artists, and writers reclaiming their narratives. Projects like oral history documentation, community-based archives, and tribal language revitalization programs are helping to assert indigenous identities. Literature, once only an oral performance, is also emerging in written, recorded, and visual forms, offering new modes of resistance and resilience.

This historical and cultural backdrop is crucial to understanding how tribal literature of the Western Ghats functions not just as a cultural artifact but as a living, resistant archive. Through myth, ritual, and story, tribal communities preserve memory, articulate identity, and resist the systemic forces that seek to silence them.

3. Forms of Tribal Literature: The tribal communities of the Western Ghats possess a wide range of oral and performative literary forms that are integral to their cultural identity and social cohesion. Far from being static or purely symbolic, these forms are dynamic, lived, and participatory, continually shaped by interaction with nature, community memory, and ancestral legacy. This section explores the key genres and formats through which tribal literature is expressed, preserved, and performed.

3.1 Oral Traditions: Myths, Folktales, and Songs: At the heart of tribal literature lies the oral tradition. Among tribes such as the Kattunayakans, Kurumbas, Paniyas, and Irulas, stories are passed down from elders to the younger generations through spoken word, song, and ritual narration. These stories often explain the origin of the tribe, the sacredness of certain landscapes, the behavior of animals, or the consequences of violating natural or spiritual laws.

For example, the Kurumbas have myths about forest spirits who guard sacred groves and punish those who cut trees without ritual consent. The Irulas sing narrative songs during funerals and hunting rituals that reflect cosmological beliefs and tribal histories. Many of these tales function as moral and ecological instruction, warning against greed, dishonesty, and disrespect toward nature. What is often labelled as "folklore" by outsiders is, in fact, a moral code—a form of education rooted in community life.

3.2 Ritual and Performative Literature: Tribal literature is often performed, not merely recited or read. Dance, music, masks, costumes, and drumming are essential elements in the performance of epics and spiritual stories. The Bhootha Aradhane (spirit worship) in Karnataka and the Theyyam traditions of northern Kerala, though now popularized for tourism, have deep tribal roots. These performances are not merely theatrical acts—they are spiritual interventions, in which performers enter a trance and become mediums for ancestral or divine voices.

Ritual chants, often uttered during seasonal festivals, births, marriages, and deaths, carry sacred language and encoded history. These oral performances reaffirm kinship ties, mark ecological cycles, and renew the relationship between humans and the natural world. They also act as archives of collective memory, preserving stories of resistance, displacement, and survival.

Importantly, these performances are collective and participatory. Unlike the individual authorship seen in mainstream literature, tribal literature is owned and shared by the community. This reflects a more communal epistemology, where knowledge and art are not commodities but relational acts.

3.3 Proverbs, Riddles, and Everyday Speech: In addition to grand myths and rituals, tribal literary expression includes proverbs, riddles, and storytelling in everyday life. These often carry layers of cultural wisdom and social commentary. For example, a Paniya proverb might

highlight the importance of waiting for the right season to plant, blending agricultural insight with ethical patience. Riddles and children's songs serve both entertainment and pedagogical roles, introducing values and ecological understanding from an early age.

These "smaller" literary forms are especially important in daily interactions, making them central to the way identity and resistance are communicated on a micro-social level. They also allow for subtle critiques of power—mocking corrupt officials, landlords, or cultural outsiders—without inviting direct conflict.

3.4 Emergence of Written and Recorded Literature: In recent decades, there has been a gradual shift toward written and digital documentation of tribal literature. This has occurred due to a combination of factors: increased literacy, support from non-governmental organizations, tribal activists seeking to preserve their languages, and the rise of digital platforms.

Some tribal writers have begun composing poems, memoirs, and short stories in their own languages or in dominant regional languages. Notable efforts have come from the Toda and Irula communities in Tamil Nadu, where youth are engaging in self-representation through written word. This marks a shift from outsider-documented folklore to insider-authored literature, with an emphasis on reclaiming voice and authorship.

Digital media has also enabled the recording of chants, songs, and performances that were once considered ephemeral. Projects supported by universities, linguistic departments, and cultural preservation groups have led to the archiving of endangered oral traditions. While this introduces challenges related to interpretation and authenticity, it also offers a way to keep traditions alive amid language extinction and cultural disintegration.

3.5 Linguistic Diversity and Literary Expression: Many of the Western Ghats tribes speak languages that are either Dravidian in origin (e.g., Irula, Toda) or unclassified tribal dialects with no standardized script. This has limited the visibility of their literature but has also contributed to its richness. Language itself becomes an act of resistance, refusing the erasure caused by linguistic homogenization under dominant state languages like Tamil, Kannada, or Malayalam.

In tribal literature, certain words are untranslatable; they carry ecological, spiritual, and emotional meanings that cannot be rendered fully in other tongues. This makes tribal literature both linguistically unique and culturally embedded.

4. Themes of Resistance In Tribal Literature: The tribal literature of the Western Ghats is deeply embedded in a context of historical struggle, cultural marginalization, and ecological loss. While often framed as folklore or cultural tradition by outsiders, these narratives are in fact rich sites of resistance—not necessarily through overt political protest, but through symbolic storytelling, myth-making, and ritual performance that assert tribal worldviews in

the face of erasure. Resistance in tribal literature is not merely reactive; it is proactive, strategic, and embedded in narrative, language, and cosmology. This section explores how resistance manifests in tribal literature through various interwoven themes.

4.1 Resistance to Cultural Assimilation: Tribal communities in the Western Ghats have long faced pressures to assimilate into dominant social, religious, and linguistic systems. However, their stories resist this absorption by reaffirming tribal identity, values, and cosmologies. Through creation myths, ancestral tales, and clan histories, communities such as the Kurumbas, Kattunayakans, and Irulas preserve and promote worldviews that challenge mainstream hierarchies and definitions of "civilization."

For instance, many origin myths explicitly contrast tribal ancestors with outsiders who brought destruction, greed, or disease. These narratives often elevate tribal ancestors as first dwellers or forest protectors, subtly countering dominant narratives that frame them as backward or dependent on modern systems. These stories become cultural assertions of indigeneity, reminding both the community and outsiders of their original relationship with the land.

Songs performed during festivals and rituals, often in native dialects, further reinforce group identity. The use of tribal languages, even if endangered, functions as a form of resistance to linguistic homogenization. Each act of storytelling, chanting, or ritual singing reclaims space for tribal voices in a landscape dominated by national, regional, and religious narratives.

4.2 Resistance to Political and Social Marginalization: Tribal literature also addresses, albeit allegorically, the injustices of political and social exclusion. Stories may reference unjust rulers, exploitative outsiders, or forest spirits that punish those who disrespect tribal boundaries. In these tales, resistance is enacted not through direct political rebellion, but through spiritual and symbolic justice.

For example, in many Irula and Kattunayakan tales, outsiders (e.g., landlords, forest officers, traders) who exploit the land or disrespect tribal customs suffer curses or misfortunes. These narrative patterns act as symbolic correctives, turning the tables on real-world power structures. By encoding justice in myth, the community affirms its own moral order and questions the legitimacy of imposed systems.

Other tales revolve around the wisdom and cunning of tribal heroes, who outwit more powerful outsiders, thus asserting tribal intelligence and sovereignty in contexts where they are often treated as naïve or inferior. These trickster figures become symbols of subversive resistance, using wit rather than confrontation to challenge hierarchies.

4.3 Ecological Resistance: Forest as Sanctuary and Spirit: Perhaps the most powerful theme of resistance in tribal literature is ecological. For the tribal communities of the Western

Ghats, the forest is not just a resource but a sacred, animate space inhabited by spirits, ancestors, and divine forces. In this worldview, any exploitation of the land is not merely economic violence but cosmic transgression.

Narratives abound in which logging, mining, or the destruction of sacred groves results in ecological imbalance, illness, or divine retribution. Such stories encode traditional ecological knowledge as well as spiritual resistance to capitalist exploitation. The forest is cast not as a passive victim, but as an active agent of resistance—one that protects itself through supernatural means.

For example, in Kurumba mythology, the forest goddess is both nurturing and wrathful—she blesses those who live in harmony but punishes those who seek domination. These stories serve to legitimize tribal resistance to development projects, asserting that the land has its own rights and powers.

Moreover, tribal chants and rituals often coincide with ecological events—harvests, animal migrations, changes in seasons—emphasizing cyclical, reciprocal relationships with nature, as opposed to linear, extraction-based models. In this sense, tribal literature acts as an environmental manifesto, affirming the tribe's ecological ethics and resisting the commodification of nature.

4.4 Resistance through Women's Voices and Gender Roles: Tribal literature often presents a more balanced, if not matriarchal, perspective on gender roles compared to the patriarchal structures of mainstream society. Women appear as wise healers, spirit mediums, hunters, and land protectors in many tribal tales. In communities like the Paniyas and Todas, women have ritual and narrative roles that affirm their central place in social and ecological life.

Stories about female deities or human women who transform into powerful forest spirits reflect both the sacralization of femininity and resistance to gender subjugation. These figures protect their communities, avenge injustice, and often embody the voice of the forest itself. In this way, tribal literature subtly critiques not only cultural and political domination, but also gendered hierarchies introduced or intensified by outside religions and institutions.

Such narratives become a dual form of resistance: asserting both tribal and female agency in a world that often denies both.

4.5 Ritual as Performative Resistance: Rituals and performative storytelling—such as the Theyyam dances in Kerala or shamanic chants among the Kurumbas—are not just cultural displays, but acts of resistance in motion. They reaffirm tribal worldviews, challenge state-religious orthodoxy, and maintain sacred relationships with the land.

In these performances, the boundaries between story and action blur. The storyteller or performer may become a medium through which ancestral or divine resistance is channeled. This collapse of subject and spirit, story and struggle, is a powerful form of resistance that eludes the rational, linear frameworks of modern governance or academic categorization. Resistance in tribal literature is multi-layered and deeply encoded—symbolic, spiritual, ecological, linguistic, and gendered. It does not always take the form of overt protest but is embedded in the rhythms, metaphors, and performance styles of the communities themselves. By reclaiming and continuing these traditions, tribal communities of the Western Ghats continue to speak back to power, asserting not only their survival but their sovereignty, cosmology, and moral vision.

5. Identity Assertion In Tribal Narratives: While resistance in tribal literature often responds to external threats, an equally powerful and enduring theme is the affirmation of identity. For the tribal communities of the Western Ghats, literature is not only a site of defiance but also a medium through which collective identity—rooted in ancestry, land, ritual, and memory—is affirmed, performed, and transmitted. In an age of homogenizing globalization and cultural assimilation, tribal narratives play a vital role in maintaining the distinctiveness of indigenous worldviews, values, and social structures.

5.1 Identity Rooted in Land and Sacred Geography: In tribal narratives, identity is inseparable from land and geography. The forest is not just a setting for stories; it is a central character, a source of identity, and often a divine presence. Many tribal myths begin by explaining how a mountain, river, or grove came into being—often as the result of a divine act, a sacrifice, or an ancestral journey. These narratives imbue the land with spiritual and historical meaning, making it a living archive of tribal memory.

For instance, the Irulas and Kurumbas have origin stories tied to specific hillocks or groves, which are considered sacred. These sacred spaces are integral to the tribe's sense of self; they are totemic landscapes that symbolize clan history, ecological wisdom, and spiritual responsibility. Even when displaced from their ancestral land, tribal communities maintain emotional and ritual links to these spaces, often returning to perform ceremonies or commemorate myths. In doing so, they assert a territorial identity rooted not in land ownership, but in ancestral belonging.

5.2 Oral Narratives as Cultural Genealogy: Oral literature also functions as a form of cultural genealogy, mapping lineage, clan structures, and historical memory. Many tribal communities lack written historical records but maintain intricate oral histories that trace ancestry, migrations, inter-clan marriages, and pivotal events like wars, famines, or spiritual revelations.

These stories are not only about the past; they shape the present. They help the younger generation understand their place within the community and the wider cosmology. For example, initiation rituals or coming-of-age ceremonies often include storytelling

sessions where elders recount clan myths and heroic tales. This passing down of stories is a crucial rite of identity transmission, affirming a person's role in the community and the responsibilities that come with it.

Such practices directly counter the alienation that tribal youth often face in modern educational systems, where their histories and languages are ignored. In asserting their cultural identity through narrative, tribal communities offer alternative histories that challenge dominant narratives of civilization and development.

5.3 Language as Identity: Language is one of the most profound carriers of identity, and tribal narratives are deeply intertwined with endangered tribal languages. The Western Ghats is home to several tribal dialects—many without standardized scripts or formal recognition—which exist primarily in oral form. These languages often contain ecological and spiritual terms that are untranslatable into mainstream languages like Tamil, Malayalam, or Kannada.

Each oral narrative performed in a tribal tongue is therefore an act of linguistic identity. It affirms the value and vitality of a language that may be endangered but remains alive in story, ritual, and song. Even when younger generations are educated in state languages, the continued use of native languages in oral traditions keeps cultural identity alive.

Furthermore, many tribal languages use metaphor, rhythm, and repetition in ways that encode community values—hospitality, respect for elders, harmony with nature. These stylistic choices are not merely aesthetic; they are deeply cultural, reflecting a worldview that privileges relationship and interconnectedness.

5.4 Totemism and Animal Symbolism as Identity Markers: Animal totems are another important feature of tribal identity in the Western Ghats. Many tribes, such as the Paniyas and Kurumbas, associate themselves with specific animals—tigers, snakes, elephants—not just as symbols, but as ancestral or spiritual relatives. These animals often appear in origin myths and are considered protectors or reincarnations of ancestors.

Narratives involving totem animals reinforce community boundaries and obligations. For instance, a tribe that considers the tiger its totem may have taboos against hunting or harming tigers. This is not just ecological respect—it is identity-based ethics, and stories that reinforce these codes are a form of both moral and cultural affirmation.

These animal-linked identities serve to distinguish tribal communities not just from outsiders, but from one another. They reflect complex systems of clan affiliation, spiritual belief, and ecological integration that resist the flattening pressures of mainstream identity categories like caste, religion, or ethnicity.

5.5 Storytelling as Everyday Identity Practice: Finally, storytelling itself is a daily act of identity. Whether through lullabies, proverbs, seasonal songs, or public performances, tribal communities engage in storytelling as a way of remembering who they are. These practices are not confined to festivals or rituals; they are part of everyday life—told while farming, gathering honey, cooking, or sitting by the fire.

The continued practice of storytelling, especially in intergenerational spaces, affirms a living, breathing identity that cannot be erased by displacement or marginalization. In this way, tribal literature becomes a mode of cultural continuity, resisting the forgetting that so often accompanies economic hardship, land loss, and linguistic assimilation.

6. Ecology and Environmental Justice In Tribal Literature: The tribal literature of the Western Ghats is inextricably linked to the region's unique ecological landscape. For the tribes who inhabit this biodiverse and ecologically sensitive mountain range, the forest is more than a resource; it is a spiritual entity, a life-giver, and a repository of ancestral memory. Unlike modern environmental discourses, which often separate humans from nature or frame nature as a commodity, tribal narratives offer an integrated ecological worldview in which land, water, plants, animals, and spirits exist in reciprocal relationship with human communities. This section explores how tribal literature functions as a form of environmental ethics and ecological justice, often in resistance to extractive and destructive external forces.

6.1 The Forest as Sacred Space: One of the defining ecological motifs in tribal narratives is the sacralization of the forest. Stories often portray forests not merely as settings but as animate and conscious spaces guarded by deities, ancestral spirits, or powerful non-human entities. These forests are seen as living beings with agency, capable of responding to human action—rewarding harmony and punishing exploitation.

For example, in Kattunayakan oral traditions, specific groves are believed to be inhabited by guardian spirits (called *vanadevatas*) who protect the community and must be honoured through rituals and offerings. Destruction of these groves is believed to invite misfortune, illness, or crop failure. Such stories embed ecological stewardship in spiritual obligation, making sustainable living a sacred duty rather than a utilitarian concern. This contrasts sharply with modern environmental policies that treat forests as "natural resources" to be regulated, exploited, or conserved, often excluding tribal people from decision-making. In this context, tribal literature becomes a form of ecological counter-narrative, insisting that the forest is not to be managed but to be respected and related to.

6.2 Ecological Memory and Environmental History: Tribal stories act as ecological memory systems, preserving ancestral knowledge of environmental shifts, species behavior, and climate patterns. Irula myths, for example, recount ecological collapse following violations of nature's codes, offering moral lessons on sustainability. These narratives pass down intergenerational wisdom, rooted in observation and respect for nature. In the Anthropocene, where dominant histories often overlook local insights, such stories provide

vital alternative environmental histories based on relational ethics and lived ecological experience.

6.3 Resistance to Ecological Exploitation: Many tribal narratives serve as symbolic critiques of ecological exploitation, particularly in relation to deforestation, mining, plantation agriculture, and large-scale development projects. While tribal communities rarely have institutional power to resist such incursions, their literature encodes modes of protest and warning.

These critiques often take the form of allegorical stories, in which greedy outsiders (traders, kings, or officials) disrupt sacred landscapes and suffer supernatural consequences. In one Kurumba tale, for example, a foreign merchant cuts down a sacred tree and is haunted by spirits until he makes reparations. Such narratives not only affirm tribal moral codes but also offer environmental justice through myth—where justice may be denied by the state, it is administered by nature itself.

By embedding ecological resistance in myth, these stories endure across generations, even when legal avenues for protest are denied. In this sense, tribal literature becomes a sustainable form of ecological dissent, expressing solidarity with the forest and opposition to its commodification.

6.4 Human-Nature Reciprocity and Ecocentric Ethics: A key philosophical aspect of tribal literature is its ecocentric ethic—one that does not place humans at the center of the universe, but as one part of a reciprocal web of life. In these narratives, animals speak, trees have emotions, rivers remember, and spirits dwell in stones. This animistic worldview challenges anthropocentric ideologies and offers a radically inclusive conception of personhood.

The ethical systems embedded in such literature emphasize balance, gratitude, and humility. For instance, hunters in many communities offer chants or gifts to the forest before taking a life, acknowledging the cost and requesting forgiveness. Harvesting rituals are timed to natural cycles, with taboos on overexploitation. These practices are not superstition but deeply ecological behaviors, rooted in long-term sustainability.

Such narratives and rituals amount to an alternative environmental philosophy—not of conservation imposed from outside, but of coexistence enacted from within.

6.5 Environmental Justice Through Storytelling: In contemporary contexts, as tribal communities confront displacement due to hydropower projects, eco-tourism, or forest "conservation" efforts, storytelling becomes a powerful tool for asserting environmental justice. Oral histories documenting displacement, ecological loss, and spiritual trauma now circulate through audio archives, films, and community publications.

These stories do more than preserve culture; they challenge dominant narratives of development and insist on justice not only for people but for the forest itself. When tribal elders speak of a lake that dried up after a road was built, or a hill that stopped "speaking" after a mining blast, they are invoking an ecological consciousness that demands ethical reckoning.

Through storytelling, tribal communities in the Western Ghats assert that environmental justice must include spiritual, cultural, and ecological dimensions—not just legal or economic ones.

7. Concluaion and Recommendations: Tribal literature of the Western Ghats is a living archive of resistance, identity, and ecological wisdom. This study highlights how oral narratives challenge dominant ideas of development and civilization through myths, chants, and ecological symbolism. Resistance emerges through language preservation, sacred geographies, and collective memory. These stories promote an ecocentric philosophy rooted in sustainability. Tribal identity is dynamic and enacted through ritual and storytelling, deeply connected to land and nature—urging urgent action against deforestation and cultural loss.

Recommendations:

1. **Documentation and Archiving:** Government and academic institutions must collaborate with tribal communities to record, translate, and archive oral traditions with cultural sensitivity and community consent. Such efforts must prioritize tribal authorship and agency rather than outsider interpretations.
2. **Inclusion in Curriculum:** Tribal literature and environmental philosophy should be integrated into school and university curricula, especially in states where these tribes reside. This would promote recognition, respect, and preservation of indigenous knowledge systems.
3. **Support for Tribal sWriters and Performers:** Cultural bodies and NGOs should support tribal artists, storytellers, and writers by providing platforms for performance and publication in tribal languages and regional scripts. Literary festivals, digital archives, and anthologies can amplify these voices.
4. **Policy Reorientation Toward Indigenous Knowledge:** Environmental and cultural policy must be informed by indigenous ecological ethics, treating tribal knowledge as valid and essential—not as folklore or superstition. Consultation with tribal elders and spiritual leaders should be institutionalized in development and conservation projects.
5. **Promotion of Intergenerational Transmission:** Programs to encourage elder-young interaction within tribal communities through storytelling workshops, language preservation initiatives, and ritual education are critical to the survival of oral literature.

Works Cited:

Baviskar, Amita. *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

Chandra, Uday. "Beyond Subalternity: Land, Community, and the State in Contemporary Jharkhand." *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2015, pp. 1–17.

Gadgil, Madhav, and Ramachandra Guha. *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*. Oxford University Press, 1992.

Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs. *Report on the Forest Rights Act Implementation*, 2020.

Gurukkal, Rajan. *Social Formations of Early South India*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

Interview materials and oral archives from Irula and Kurumba communities (collected via secondary sources including tribal research centers and ethnographic studies).

Murmu, Mahasweta Devi. *Imaginary Maps*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Routledge, 1995.

Nair, Janaki. "Tribal Literature and Identity in Kerala." *Indian Literature*, vol. 55, no. 4, 2011, pp. 120–134.

Rycroft, Daniel, and Sangeeta Dasgupta (eds.). *The Politics of Belonging in India: Becoming Adivasi*. Routledge India, 2011.

Singh, K. S. *People of India: An Introduction.* Anthropological Survey of India, 1992.