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SSLC is a peer-reviewed journal and listed in the UGC approved list of journals. It is published annually by the Department of English, Sambalpur University. This journal invites full-length scholarly essays on the topics relating to culture, society, art and literature as well as Translation Studies. It insists on analytical rigour and insightfulness of the essays. It also invites book reviews and interviews. Essays must be sent in soft copy format subject to the following conditions:

1. Essays typed in double-space, from 3000 to 6000 words in text-file format, should be sent by e-mail.
2. Reviews must be between 1500 and 2000 words.
3. Essays and reviews must be original and must not have been either accepted for publication or published anywhere else in any form.
4. Essays should conform to the 9th edition of *MLA* style manual.
5. Essays should be accompanied by the academic details and mailing address by the contributors separately to facilitate confidential peer-reading.

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Editorial

Over the years, a belief has grown stronger that the text is an open-ended system of writing, a dynamic body of representations and an economy of meaning. It is no longer a self-contained repository of determinate authorial meaning. At the same time, another belief that the literary text is not self-evidently 'literary' has also gained ground. Both beliefs have combined to give a culturalist turn to literary studies. For its part, literary studies has fashioned itself as critical humanities in a bid to hold its grounds against the challenges of science, technology and all those disciplines directly linked with money-making, health and material benefits. We situate ourselves with greater rigour of analytic theory than ever before as subjectivities in society and history while reading the texts. While we acknowledge the importance of form and beauty as ethos and structural principle of art, we still want to break out of the self-validating models of aesthetics in trying to understand why certain representations and ideas appear more significant at the expense of others at certain times and places. We also study how the various forms of legitimacy are fashioned and maintained. With these new objectives of enquiry, we go beyond traditional literary studies and look around for social and cultural texts. We do not just marvel at the beauty and affective power of art, we also emphasize ethics and empathy in our study of history and society.

The essays contained in the present series of *SSLC* reflect the culturalist objectives stated above. With a wide swathe of issues and concerns like ethnography, materialist reading of popular culture, visual arts and film studies and environment studies, the journal also contains studies of literary texts. For special features, it contains an interview with Jacinta Kerketta, a young tribal poet, and a book review.

Ashok K Mohapatra

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INTERVIEW

A Voice in the Wilderness:* An Interview with the Adivasi Woman Poet Jacinta Kerketta

Ajit Kumar Kullu

Jacinta Kerketta is a young upcoming poet, writer and free-lance journalist. She belongs to the Oraon indigenous community of West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. Her writings reflect the culture and society of indigenous people and raise various issues of economic exploitation and social injustice suffered by them. Two bi-lingual volumes of her poetry, namely *Angor* (Embers) and *Jaron Ki Zameen* (Land of the Roots) have already brought considerable fame. I met Jacinta in a literary programme at Sundargarh, Odisha, organised for the release of a book by some of the budding tribal writers of Odisha. It was a simple event meant to encourage the tribals to write. I had not realised how great a poet she was until her introduction was read out and testified by her German publisher Johannes Laping. I immediately got back to two of her poetry collections *Angor* and *Land of the Roots* and handed them to her for her autograph. She promptly obliged. Her first poem “An Evening in the Village” from *Angor* immediately caught my imagination. I got down to read both the books and found that she is a tradition in herself. Reading them was getting reintroduced to the tribal world – the land, the forest, the flowers and the filial bond man shares with nature. Her poems have been published both in Hindi and English simultaneously. She is also well received by her German and Italian readers. This is a rare feat achieved by a young tribal woman from a far away corner of West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. She here talks to us about her poetic journey.

Ajit Kumar Kullu: How did Jacinta become a poet? A tribal woman poet, and how does this recognition define you as a poet? Does it limit your identity? Where does your poetry come from? What indeed is poetry for you?

Jacinta Kerketta: It is difficult to say how someone becomes a poet. I don't exactly know when and how I began to write. I can only tell you that it is an experience which suddenly flashes in one's inner being like a lightening in the sky. And with that experience you begin by scribbling on the paper. The origin of poetry can be discerned when one sees and listens to the self in the depth of the inner being. Poetry cannot be written without being aware of the self. Because no sooner does it disappear than it occurs to the mind, and hardly does it descend on to the sheet of paper.

- **The interview which was conducted in Hindi has been translated by me into English**

I think it was possible to write poems because of being aware of my emotions. Battered by good and bad times, life taught me the hard way how to be conscious of myself. When you have no way out you begin to run into your inner being. And there began the transformation.

Since childhood I have been reading one thing or the other and therefore expressions for the emotions emerge on their own. But I never try to write poems. Whenever something stirs from within, I always take care and try the words and expressions to approximate the said feeling. Thereafter I compose the poem. Poetry accords one an opportunity to work on herself. Unless one works consciously, faithfully and continually every day on oneself from within, one cannot become a true poet.

Like all other poets, I also always go through this process to be a poet. Being from a tribal background, I have never felt my frontiers are limited. In fact these have been expanding a bit more everyday. The background of every poet makes it different and special. My tribal background also makes me different and it makes me aware of my responsibility towards our society. My identity always insists that I write down what I am. I must write the truth, what I really I feel and see. The truth could be harsh and bitter at times but I must write. The truth and honesty in my poetry is certainly due to my tribal background.

AKK: Is a tribal woman poet different from other women poets?

JK: There will always be a slight difference between a tribal poet and other women poets. The society I am from is very different from the ones inhabited by other women poets coming from other societies. My struggle is different and my story is unique. There is pain in the poems of other women poets as well but the backgrounds and their effects differ. The poems coming from diverse settings speak of various societies and peoples, with their respective social milues and personal backdrops, and individual takes on various social issues. This diversity makes them powerful because they ultimately talk of humanities. Thus the poems always reach out to every human being, bring them together and help them understand one other.

AKK: Who is first in you, the woman, the tribal identity or the poet?

JK: While writing poems the human being comes first. The background and gender catch up later. In the end the background, the identity of being a male or female becomes immaterial. S/he becomes a mere witness; s/he feels everyone and everything together and writes. This is what happens to me.

AKK: Is there a difference about non-tribals writing about the tribals and tribals writing about themselves?

JK: There have been so many works on the tribals by the non-tribals. It is relatively easy in fiction because it is mostly dependent on external events and happenings. Poetry comes from the depths of the soul. Without reaching to that depth one cannot speak of the intensity of the sentiments of a people in their poetry. Many a time, a number of things are written on the *adivasis* based on some superficial experiences quite far from the depth of the soul. This could be a mere concern the others have for the *adivasis*. It does not necessarily reflect the *adivasi* spirit. But yes, there are a few non-tribal poets who have wonderfully captured the *adivasi* spirit in their poems because they have lived in their midst.

Further, it doesn't mean that only an *adivasi* poet can better engage in topics related to the community. It depends on how s/he views his/her society; how sincerely s/he feels, understands and how deep s/he can see into the matters concerning the society; how much s/he gets influenced by *adivasi* life and philosophy. That's how comes the difference in writings on the *adivasis* by the *adivasis* and non-*adivasis*.

AKK: Do you have a target audience in mind when you write?

JK: (There is) no fixed readers' community in mind. I write poems for all. As I write I try to ensure that even the commoner should be able to read, understand and relate to the poems.

AKK: You are a tribal activist and you have journeyed from journalism to poetry. How was the journey? Whose voice is more credible, a poet's or journalist's? Does journalism help poetry? How? Please share your experience.

JK: I began to write poems first in my school. Then I started writing stories. I wrote stories for periodicals and magazine from my class eight to undergraduate days. During my graduation at St. Xavier College, Ranchi my stories and poems were published in newspapers too. I started writing articles later. While doing my under graduation in journalism I began to write reports and articles as an independent freelancer. After a course in Mass Communication I started working as a journalist in the newspapers. I had a new beginning only after I had decided to quit my job in newspapers and went back to freelancing.

I began to write poems again. Now I am writing stories and also travelogues, essays and reports, in addition. I am active in social work as well. This has been like

a journey, going back and forth to pick up the things which were left behind. Poetry flows from my heart. Report writings are shaped by mind. Now I am trying to write reports both after the heart and the mind. So that they don't merely make people think but also feel in their hearts. I can see the two blending in my reporting. This has been possible because of my poetry. The poet's point of view has proved to be immensely helpful in writing a good news report. Now it's a pleasure because I can write a report from my heart.

AKK: What language do you use as a poet? And how do you judge the poetry of our time?

JK: A poet possesses the language of the heart, a language which can be understood by all, even by the mute and the dumb. It always calls upon the mind-driven society to be a little sensitive. Thus, there will be equilibrium between the head and the heart. It is needed for all sections of the society; it speaks to each individual directly especially to those who are responsible for the happenings and drives home its message. So many poems are being written in the present time. Many from the *adivasi* society are also writing poems. But it is important to know how a poem touches and wakes up both the commoners and the administrators. It is important to know how it moves the insensate society and inspires it to wake up to new affective initiatives. Therefore it is a kind of responsibility for poetry as well as the poets.

AKK: Why did you choose Hindi to express yourself? Is it because of its literary acceptance? Are Kurukh or Sadri incapable of expressing your thoughts and imaginations?

JK: I use the language I have. Hindi is the sole language I know therefore I write in it. It is difficult for me to write in Kurukh because I didn't have an environment in which I could learn it. If I knew Kurukh, I would definitely write in it. I didn't begin to write in a particular language looking at its acceptance or reception. But I have a strong desire to learn my mother tongue. I am learning it. Once I have mastery of it, I will definitely write poems in it.

AKK: Your poems have been simultaneously published in Hindi, English and German? I have read the English translations. The translators have certainly done a wonderful job. But what is your opinion on these kinds of publications?

JK: Translation widens the frontier of readership. It is an extension which reaches out to a great number of human beings. In translation the poems crosses over the territories of its home, villages, states and countries. Therefore it is necessary. But it has its own issues: the original idea may get diluted and feelings and emotions

may get lost. I am grateful to my English, German and Italian translators as they ensured that the poems remain true to the original. Of course it has been pointed out that the English translation has certain differences with the original. It depends on the disposition of the translators. When the translator does not undergo the same experience as the poet the differences are bound to occur. You can imagine the difficulties because even for a poet it is impossible to dwell on a poetic mood all the time. Nevertheless in translation message gets delivered and the purpose of writing gets fulfilled, and therefore it is necessary.

AKK: The nature has been quite often personified in the poems. Tell us something about this.

JK: If you try to understand nature through your head, you will see only the flowers and leaves, and observe their age and colours. Nature is more than these. You have to see through all these to find its beauty, its soul. When you can establish an intimate bond with this you feel one with the nature. You can hardly differentiate yourself and the nature. I often begin my poems with “I” but that’s hardly my “I” always. Most of the times, it is others’ “I”. And every one/readers can feel that it is her/his “I”.

AKK: How was *Angor* born? The poems are on fire and blood is the colour they put on. “A rebellion slayed,” “Blood Stained River,” “The weapons in my hands,” “A Madua sprout on the grave,” “The call of the Dombari Hill,” “Why is the earth on fire,” “Stirring embers into flames,” “Closed doors,” “The Vermilion Bond,” “The age of Motherhood,” “The hero in you,” “Unprofessed” and “Angor,” all of them speak of some kind of purgation. Has the world been pushed into some kind of purgation like in “The Ties of Time Unfolding”? Your poems call for revolution. They are full of images and symbols of anger and protest. The ravaged nature is whimpering but giving birth to warriors. You clearly state that a war is on between nature and humans, between people for and of the nature and people against it. What’s the role of a pen in this situation? Your pen, as I found in your poems has already become a two edged sword. Your comments!

JK: Nature has its own laws. It treats everyone equally, gives freedom and also codifies the natural justice. It gives an equal share of light, sunshine and rain to each individual. The struggle begins when an individual tries to grab the shares of other individuals. I strongly believe in the ways of natural justice. Human beings who are in control of things and run the world can very well take care of it but because of their greed and selfishness they cause injustice to themselves and everyone. This is the struggle.

The *adivasi* society is governed by a unique ideology. It is in accordance with the laws of nature. Their philosophy has been ‘Live and let live’; and if you have more,

share it with others. All religions speak of this. But the *adivasi* society has lived this message even in the absence of an organised (*adivasi*) religion. This philosophy has been a point of difference and struggle between the *adivasis* and non-*adivasis*. *Adivasis*, though quite unwilling, are in the middle of a war. If they don't fight back they would perish because the aggressors are not going to stop.

Meanwhile what is my pen doing! People can tell this from their experience. But I can feel that it is also trying to communicate to the ancestors about oppressors who have always attacked. Let their descendants realise what history has done to us and how the same thing gets repeated over the periods of time. My pen is not only trying to capture the external struggle of *adivasi* society but also its thoughts, feelings and emotions. So that the people can come out of the shackles of caste and religion and give way to natural justice for the *adivasis* and the downtrodden; the good ones can unite to fight against the bad and the ugly.

AKK: Where is the root of the land of the roots? The poems ask hundreds of questions on human ways of handling the nature (which includes humans).

How convinced are you while saying that nature will one day redeem itself from the artificial rules created by human hands? Like in "A smouldering piece of Wood" and "Return"?

JK: It's clear that if you leave the earth alone and it has its own way growing things on it. Wild grass, flowers, plants and shrubs churn out of a fallow ground. Many kinds of creatures are born there. Each organism has its own tongue, tune and nature. The way humans are destroying each other to extinction, it is certain to create a void in future. But nature has its own way of replenishing the vacuum created by men. It will grow trees and forest for itself. New languages would emerge/evolve. The earth is certainly capable of a new creation.

AKK: Will there be an end to struggle between the urban and the rural world? Man has always tried to subdue nature. In the struggle between nature and man you also talk about the struggle between two men, one from the city and another from the village. How long will this struggle be? Will there be an end to it? Who will win the war, the city man or the village man or the nature?

JK: One day every man will come towards tribal philosophy and life. Apart from this, people will not have any choice. This is my faith. We are just a part of nature. Our intellect puts us in this illusion that man is ahead of nature too. He has won everything. He can build a new man. He can create anew the world. But even after doing all this, one day he dies and in this earth he has to settle down. This is true. And no man can run away from this truth.

The real happiness of life lies in being close to nature. The *adivasis* have been already doing this. The rest who are crushed by the system are either feeling empty or going crazy. Everybody is slave to his/her immediate needs. The world has learnt a lot from *adivasi* lifestyle. But it is too cunning to acknowledge that and it always boastfully proclaims them as its findings. The Adivasi philosophy either accepted or not, is slowly going to work out its way and get everyone closer to the nature.

It might take years but it is bound to happen. The developed countries are already headed in this endeavour. The developing countries are also going to feel its importance soon. As far as conflict is concerned it will continue till man has won over his greed. The struggle will continue. This is more about winning over self than others. And the so called civilised world is constantly losing and increasing its days of struggle against nature. The struggle will be less acute when the civilisation wins back itself. Since the *adivasi* society is caught up in this crossfire it has always got to be cautious and alert. It has to work on its weaknesses, protect its soul and safeguard its existence.

The *adivasis* practise and develop safety measures against the wild elephants, tigers, bears and wolves in the forest and mountains. Their situation is the same in the world outside. They must learn other languages, cultures and philosophy, but it must not be at the cost of their own. They must know themselves well before going out to understand others. They must go in search of the sky on the strength of their roots. This is the need and demand of the changing times.

