

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 12

Special Issue: 3

Month: April

Year: 2025

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

Citation:

Subha, P., and K. Prem Kumar. "Resistance of the Aborigines and the Adivasis: A Comparative Analysis of the Selective Poems of Judith Wright and Indian Adivasi Poets." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 12, no. S3, 2025, pp. 57–62.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v12iS3-Apr.9053>

Resistance of the Aborigines and the Adivasis: A Comparative Analysis of the Selective Poems of Judith Wright and Indian Adivasi Poets

P. Subha

*Doctoral Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English
Bishop Heber College (Autonomous), Trichy
Affiliated to Bharathidasan University*

Dr. K. Prem Kumar

*Research Supervisor & Associate Professor
PG & Research Department of English
Bishop Heber College (Autonomous), Trichy
Affiliated to Bharathidasan University*

Abstract

The primitive people used poetry as a tool to express their feelings, emotions, victories, agonies for administrative power and convey their bravery stories, puzzles, riddles. It also encompassed the creation myths of the universe, planets, flora, fauna, and humankind, which were orally transmitted across generations. Adivasi or Aboriginal communities utilized storytelling, folklore, dances, and traditional tattoos to communicate their cultural identity, rituals, customs, and traditions. These narratives included descriptions of landscapes, seasonal cycles, and traditional ecological management of the five natural elements: air, water, fire, sky, and land. The arrival of White Settlers led to the displacement of many Aboriginal peoples, who were often forced into slavery in foreign lands. This colonization resulted in significant impacts, including the loss of land, identity, culture, traditions, ancestral worship, and sacred sites, as well as experiences of humiliation and marginalization, even in the post-colonial era, and conversion to Christianity. Few poets, both nationally and internationally, have vocally opposed colonialism, emphasizing the importance of recognizing Aboriginal communities' identities, rights, and the preservation of their artistic, cultural, and linguistic heritage. This paper critically examines the portrayal of Aborigines' connection to their native land, the disappearance of traditional rituals, the anguish of losing loved ones, and the scars and horrors of war through the poetic works of Judith Wright, Susheela Samad, Shanmuga Chettiyar, Arivu, and Jacinda Kerketta.

Keywords: Aborigines, Adivasis, Belongingness, Colonialism, Identity, Preservation

Introduction

The human being has learned to think and create things innovatively from the primitive ancestors who were intertwined with the natural elements. Gradually, mankind begins to adopt certain technologies for spreading capitalism and industrialism; they occupied the forest areas to construct giant industries and displaced the indigenous

people who were fighting for their native land. The Aboriginal people maintained a peculiar, socially structured group and sacred sites where they were intermingled with their ancestral spirits in the native land. The imperialist countries used marginalization as a tool to dislocate the native Adivasi people and sold them as slaves to the foreigners. This is the main reason for decreasing the number of indigenous populations in the world. As per the World Bank’s report, there are a total of 476 million indigenous people worldwide, but they used to speak more than 4000 languages among the 7000 languages in the world. This shows how they adhere to their distinctive practice of language in order to revitalize their cultural identity and traditional knowledge.

The rest of the indigenous people used to communicate in the official language of their inhabiting region, which is a gift of colonialism because the white settlers displaced the Aboriginal people and relocated them in the alien territories. The usage of a foreign language is the best illustration of neocolonialism in the Aboriginal communities. After Ghana became an independent country from the British colonizers, the President of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, coined the term ‘neocolonialism’ after World War II because he clearly understood that the British colonizers indirectly influenced the newly (in)dependent countries through socio-economic and cultural relationships.

Fanon, a Martinique psychoanalyst, analyzed the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized in his book “The Wretched of the Earth” (1961). Fanon psychologically encompassed the themes of binary opposition of the colonizers and the colonized and micro and macro ramifications of colonialism. Furthermore, he stressed that the colonized people have to find out the path of overthrowing the intrusion of alien rule within the territories and regions as well as from the minds and bodies and endeavoring recognition from the (neo)colonizers in terms of granting the genuine freedom from the clutch of colonizers. This article tries to examine ecopoets on the aspect of their quest for decolonial potentials on the themes of exposures of liberation, transformation, dismantling the colonial structures that exist within the indigenous territories, decolonial thinking and practices, and opposition to imperial knowledge and power. So the researcher has chosen Judith Wright, Susheela Samad, Shanmuga Chettiyar, Arivu, and Jacinda Kerketta as decolonial poets.

Objectives of the Study

The research aims to investigate the selective poems from (neo) colonial and decolonial perspectives.

- To comprehend the misconceptions of indigenous communities exacerbated by White invaders in India and Australia.
- To understand the quest of genuine liberation and freedom from the grip of colonized knowledge and power.
- To feel the agony of indigenous communities in the colonial structure.
- To depict the colonial thinking and practices existing in the transformed indigenous people.

Discussion and Findings

After the Second World War, many countries became independent countries from the clutch of the British Empire, but its imperialism, rooted in the colonized countries in the form of English as an official language, Christianity as a religion, a structured educational system, and the development of capitalism, also impacted socio-political institutions. Due to this advanced development, many indigenous communities were dislocated, converted into Christianity, forgot their ritual customs and traditions, failed to adhere to their traditional ecological knowledge and practices, and lost their distinctive indigenous language.

India and Australia’s indigenous communities are two among the colonized territories. In India, tribes are called “Adivasi” and in Australia, they are called “Aborigines.” The British Empire wanted to find a new colony to settle their convicts, and as a result, a penal colony was found to settle their convicts as a punishment in an alien territory in 1788. In order to do that, the Aboriginals

were dislocated; their children were stolen and massacred for creating penal colonies. Gradually the White settlers captured and seized the Aboriginal women to learn the Aboriginal language and give birth to hybrid children for spreading Christianity on the seashore of Australian islands. In India, the tribes were marginalized for their identity, race, and superstitious traditions because they ferociously fought against the British administrators who expanded their colonial industries in the dwellings of the Adivasi communities.

Though many anti-colonialism movements took part in the history, very few activists and writers convened campaigns for the Aboriginals rights and recognition. Australian writer, activist, and environmentalist Judith Wright is well known for her decolonial and eco poems. This article compares and analyzes the decolonial poems of Judith Wright with decolonial Indian poets.

Land and Identity

Aboriginal communities are interwoven with their native land and dwelling forest, which comprises the presence of their ancestral spirits, sacred sites where their customs and rituals have to be done, community gathering spots, sports activities, and learning about traditional ecological management. So the Adivasis' soul is the nature and the forest where they have learned to maintain the balanced biodiversity, and the same nature and the forest enable them to be proud of their art and aesthetics, handicrafts exhibited as a part of their identity.

After being a decolonial land, the Aboriginal people forget to follow their primitive ritual for men performed within circular stone monuments. Judith Wright described it in her poem "Bora Ring" as

*The song is gone; the dance
is secret with the dancers in the earth,
the ritual useless, and the tribal story
lost in an alien tale.*

Bora Ring is the Aboriginal ritual that was lost in the foreign culture of the White settlers' religion. The first line depicts the sense of loss of the Aboriginal song, dancers with painted bodies, native musical instruments, and their connection with land in the ritual monument after the invasion of the White convicts. Due to the Western modernized system, the Aboriginal children and the youngsters forget their native rituals in the alien (White Settlers) stories.

Shanmugam Chettiyar, a Tamil Nadu tribal poet who depicts the same situation in his poem "We are the Adivasis" as

*We are the Adivasis
Who by Hindu Aryans
Were polluted
And by Christian intruders
Were diluted in our values and principle ("We are the Adivasis")*

Shanmugam Chettiyar clearly stated that the Adivasis were contaminated by the invaders of Hindu Aryans and the Christians with their tribal values and cultures. The Hindu Aryans intruded into the dwelling of the tribes and marginalized them upon their race and tribal identity. In the name of civilization, the British missionaries occupied the forest areas where the tribal people had lived over the generations with their distinctive culture, beliefs, social structure, and traditional ecological knowledge. After the intruders, both Hindu Aryans and Christians marginalized their basic ecological knowledge and Ayurveda knowledge as superstitious blind beliefs. So the educated, civilized generations forget their native herbal concoction could cure any disease without any adverse reactions.

Colonial Violence and Historical Memory

The title of “Niggers Leap, New England” alone suggested that the primitive inhabitants formed a new nation, but the majority of Judith Wright’s poems show the connection of indigenous people with the natural environment, ancestral spirits, the beauty of the native land, and the nostalgic moments of history. The first title, “Niggers Leap,” depicts the native tribes, while the second part depicts the whitecolonists’ assault of an isolated island in order to build New England. In the poem’s opening, Wright uses the sun setting in the east to represent the bad things that could befall the Indigenous people. During the invasion in 1788, white colonists brought criminals and jailers from Britain to establish a penal colony.

*The eastward spurs tip backward from the sun.
Nights runs an obscure tide round cape and bay
And beats with boats of cloud up from the sea
against this sheer and limelit granite head.(1-4)
Night buoys no warning
Over the rocks that wait our keels; no bells
Sound for the mariners. Now must we measure
Our days by nights, our tropics by their poles,
Love by its end and all our speech by silence.(10-14)*

They brought convicts and sophisticated weapons to the Aboriginal beach without warning. The native tribe’s wooden and rustic weaponry was insufficient to defend their clan group against the white colonizers. Due to their ineffectiveness, the Black Aboriginal tribes fell off the cliff and submitted to the new invaders’ orders. In the end, the colonial victims’ peaceful lives were lost in silence, their tropical fields were measured by the invaders’ poles, their lovely home became useless, and they were imprisoned in the sea.

From 1988 to 2007, Temsüla Ao, an Ao Naga tribal poet and ethnographer who focused on oral histories, wrote a great deal of poetry. She clarified the meaning of the word “song” in all of her titles, highlighting the importance of poems in tribal song culture and voicing the opinions of her people against cultural and land alienation. The poet refers to the violence in the valley by saying

*But to - day
I no longer know my hill,
The bird song is gone
Replaced by the staccato
Of sophisticated weaponry (My Hills, 19-23)
The poet bemoans the loss of peace and greenery in her area.*

Resistance and Assertion of Voice

Mostly the non-Aboriginal people misperceived that the Adivasis should be tattooed on their bodies, wear handmade ornaments, live in a hut with wall-decorated paintings, hunt animals, and few of them were cannibals, indulge in superstitious beliefs, and have non-civilized and barbaric manners, and so on. They forget that the indigenous communities are like other humans, and they too have emotions, feelings, and self-respect. So Adivasi freelance journalist cum poetess Jacinta Kerketta addressed these matters in her poem ‘My Being An Adivasi’ as

*No sari, no braids in the hair,
No tattoos, no jewellery.
None of that you wear.
What kind of Adivasi we have there?
A question people ask me often.*

*This is what I would like to tell them:
To be with the Earth in close connection,
To live with mother nature in harmony and unison,
To flow like a river
And remain natural, pure, innocent,
To be in revolt against all fetters, without and within,
And, while wearing all symbols of beauty,
To be more human,
That is what it means to be an Adivasi.*

Being an Oraon Adivasi community poet, Jacinta Kerketta informed us that the non-indigenous people's misperceptions about the Adivasi are that the Adivasi are not closely connected with Mother Nature, wander like a river without any restrictions in the forest, always remain with the community's social structure, follow their customs, rituals, and regulations, and maintain cordial kinship among them without any contamination of greediness and ambitiousness. They are feeling very proud to be an Adivasi and to be a human and pure soul in the world. Through this poem, Jacinta tries to decolonize the concept of Adivasi in the other's mind. Additionally, she wants the non-indigenous people to comprehend the struggles of being Adivasi, especially when they are humiliated, subjugated, and discriminated against based on their race and community.

On the other hand, Judith Wright expressed her deep regret for the world being unable to recognize the Aboriginals' invaluable presence in maintaining the sustainable biodiversity through her eco-poems. When the indigenous communities were dislocated, they were unable to protect some endangered animals because they worshipped certain flora and fauna as the presence of their ancestral spirits. In her poem "Country Town," Judith portrays the psyche of the Aboriginals and how they regretted losing their lovable native Mother Nature.

*This is not ours, not ours the flowering tree.
What is it we have lost and left behind?
Where do the roads lead? It is not where we expected. (22-24)*

While travelling to the new masters' houses, the chained Aboriginals couldn't sleep restlessly and began to sing because this land and flowering tree were not theirs because they had lost their native land and inhabitant in the forest. Being slaves, they didn't know where the roads led and didn't know about their beloved ones.

*The gold is mined and safe, and where is the profit?
The church is built, the bishop is ordained,
And this is where we live: where do we live?
And how should we rebel? The chain are stronger. (25-28)*

The Black slaves hardly worked in the gold mine, but the white masters enjoyed profit. The missionaries built churches to mislead the indigenous people to adhere to the European culture and tradition through providing equality and offering food. To educate the indigenous people, the Christian missionaries spread Christianity and Western culture. The Aboriginal chief expressed that they didn't know where they were living. They wished to rebel against the white masters for their native land and tradition, but they couldn't because they were chained strongly.

Conclusion

In a few chosen poems, the poets concisely describe the predicament of the native people who are being taken advantage of by the colonists, who, in an effort to civilize the colonized, have destroyed their identity and culture. However, the colonized desire to reestablish their cultural values and beliefs from the imitation culture that the invaders created. On a historical scale, there

is also a thin line separating the initial colonizer from the colonized. As a result, the idea of a postcolonial age is also questioned because colonialism is still happening today. Forms, nature, and names are transformed into etymological categories, like neo-colonialism. The parallels between these poems show sadness over the Aboriginals' loss of identity and their wish to restore their lost culture by decolonial thinking back on the past in both Australia and India.

References

1. Ahmad, S Anas. The Aborigines and The Adivasis: Sharing a Common Voice; Analyzing Judith Wright's Bora Ring and Shanmugam Chettiar's We are the Adivasis, International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences, 2022, Vol.7:4.https://ijels.com/upload_document/issue_files/15IJELS-107202213-TheAborigines.pdf
2. Goodwin, Kenneth. "A History of Australian Literature", 1986, Macmillan Education Ltd, pp. 1-7.
3. Indigenous People overview – World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/indigenouspeoples>
4. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/neocolonialism>
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neocolonialism>
6. Life Worlds, Struggles and Resistances of Indigenous People of India Through Poetry, <https://humanitiesinstitute.osu.edu/events/life-worlds-struggles-and-resistances-indigenous-people-india-through-poetry>
7. Muthuswamy, Anushri . The Power of Poetry in Politics and Indigenous People of India, 2022, <https://www.thepeninsula.org.in/2022/01/25/the-power-of-poetry-in-politics-and-indigenous-people-of-india/>
8. Wright, Judith. Collected Poems 1942 to 1985. London: Agnus and Roberston Publishers, 1994, pp. (7, 14, 15 -16).