



Book Review

Lesson from Forest and Mountain (2020), Mahadev Toppo

Translated from Hindi by Santosh Kumar Sonkar

Hare Krishna Kuiry

Lesson from Forest and Mountain is a collection of forty-four poems translated by Santosh Kumar Sonkar in 2020. This is an English translation of the original Hindi poetry collection, *Jungle Pahad ke Path* that written by Mahadev Toppo was first published in 2017 by Anuugya Books, Delhi- 110032. Nature's whimpering is carved into rhythmic words in this book, *Lesson from Forest and Mountain*. It has a powerful voice against many social, political and cultural issues like deforestation, the peripheral status of *Adivasi* culture, tradition, and philosophy, identity crisis, urbanization and unemployment. So, at the end of the book, empathetic sense would arise with a lot of questions of responsibilities. *Lesson from Forest and Mountain* is a series of lessons that one should take from Mother Nature. Poet Mahadev Toppo tries to observe nature very closely and shares its pain with us. Nature and its other entities like, trees, hills, rivers, water, forest and land are not just an object or they don't need any personification because they are also living phenomena and that's why water spirits, hill spirits or forest spirits are worshipped in tribal culture.

In the very first poem "A Song to Sharpen Rusted Arrows", the poet can hear the poignant pain of the rivers of Jharkhand, Subarnarejha, Mayurakshi, Koel, Karo, Kanhar Damodar. Natural flows of the rivers are stagnated by the construction of the dams, industries and other so-called development projects. Tribal people and nature are compliments to each other so the poet can feel that all rivers are not participating at their festival and they can't dance at the beats of *Nagada*, *Dhol* and *Mandar* because their legs and hands are tied with chains of rods and cement. They can't even swing their body listing the sweet *Jadur* song of the *Sarhul* festival. Therefore, poet requests through the poem to their community to wake up, remember your root, raise voice up and if needed then don't be afraid to sharpen your rusted arrows. It is the highest time to protect your Mother Nature.

There are forty-four poems in the book and all poems of *Lesson from Forest and Mountain* get a touchy power that would ask about our responsibilities towards nature after going through its poetic woven words. Mahadev Toppo (1954, Ranchi) is a Hindi writer from Jharkhand. Mainly his mighty pen talks about the *Adivasi* issues. He himself belongs to the Oraon tribe. He has written many poems, short stories, plays etc in Hindi and Kurukh language. Mahadev Toppo's bestselling books are *Jungle Pahad ke Path* and *Sabhyonke Beech Adivasi*. Dr Santosh Kumar Sonkar (1983, Prayagraj) is an Assistant Professor, Department of English, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh. He has a specialization in Indian English Drama, Dalit Literature. He is an academician, writer and actor. He has translated Mahadev Toppo's Hindi poetry book, *Jungle Pahad ke Path* which is popular as *Lesson from Forest and Mountain*. *Lesson from Forest and Mountain* has been written in a simple language. There is no usage of bombarding words but it caters to strong voices. This book will make you think about tribal issues and helps you to become more sensitive towards our nature. Tribal people are very close to nature and they live from nature and live for nature. Therefore, it's our primary duty to prioritise the tribal issues first. In this book, the poet becomes the representative voice of his own tribal community, mountains, rivers, birds, butterflies, forests and common people of Jharkhand.

There are so many colloquial words, like *Jadur*, *Gungu*, *Borsi*, *Sasandiri*, *Masna* and so on. All these words are explained in the footnote section of the book. Poet, Mahadev Toppo's poems tell about the harsh truth about the identity crisis and the battle for *Jal* (water), *Jungle* (forest) and *Jamin* (land) of the tribal people. There are many possibilities of theories that can be applied in these poems like eco-critical, eco-feminism, and eco-sophical perspectives. This book would create huge space in tribal literature and the heart of the readers as well. Poet's words and translator's beautiful translation shows a ray of hope remembering the words of Dr Ramdayal Munda from the preface part his book *Adi-dharm* "The *Adivasi* are going to play a historical role in presenting an alternative way of life and belief that is capable of protecting the planet and the people from the impending threat of anthropogenic disaster."

All Poems have their own approaches and messages. Here some of these are

1. "A Song to Sharpen Rusted Arrows"
2. "From the Eyes of Mountain"
3. "Question of Identity"
4. "Intelligent Butterflies"
5. "Lesson of the Mountain"

Lesson from Forest and Mountain is one of the best collection *Adivasi* poems that I have ever gone through. It will give you a different perspective to look the tribal culture, tribal issues and nature. The harrowing gist of the poems would force you to think about your surroundings. Literature has a broader arena and it reflects the present scenario of the society also. Here this book, *Lesson from Forest and Mountain* helps readers really to learn from forests and mountains and helps to be better human beings.

Bio-note

Hare Krishna Kuiry is an independent researcher. He has completed his master degree in English Studies in 2020 from Central University of Jharkhand, Ranchi, India. His area of interest is tribal Issues, culture and festivals. His topic of the dissertation is "Tribal Festival Celebrating Nature in Jharkhand: An Eco-Critical Study of the Rituals and Lok kathas of Tussu and Sarhul". He has also presented paper "Life of Adivasis during Pandemic" at e-Co Exist 2020, two-day international conference on Coping with Covid-19: Sustainable Living in the Era of Pandemic, organized by IQAC, Belda College. Research article, "Death to Deification: Reading the Many Tales of Goddess Tusu" in Journal of the Department of English, Vidyasagar University, Midnapore, Vol 14 is written by Bhattacharji, Shreya and Hare Krishna Kuiry. He has also presented documentary on *Murma Mela* at Birsa Munda Language and Cultural Festival 2020.

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