



# REVIEW OF RESEARCH

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## WARLI SOCIAL HISTORY

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### ABSTRACT:

*The Overwhelming motif of this study that stretches across three periods of Warli History – The pre-British period the colonial era and the post-independence era, is the depiction of the 'outsider' as exploiter. However an, increasing devolution of self-assertion in-recent years has provided such hitherto marginalized groups a new opportunity to claim their rights and reaffirm their identities in a new context. But Self-rule needs a history and a reconstruction of Warli history can only begin with a relook at their oral traditions.*



**KEYWORDS:** colonial era , Warli history.

### INTRODUCTION

When the colonialists first discover oral cultures, they rather patronisingly assumed that if language distinguished men from beasts, it was often the "others" who wrote about them and seldom in their own language. This could not but alienate them further from an authentic self-representation. Recording the oral history of such people, where they will speak for themselves, is but a small attempt to redress this huge dis-advantage.

The underlying ethnocentrism and chauvinism of such a presumption served the political purposes of the dominant colonizers to the dominant colonizers to the point where their treatment of such preliterate peoples, mostly tribals, would make one wonder, as Montaigne

did in his Essays – who really are the more barbarous, the colonized or the colonizers But what is more significant is why writing gave such an overwhelming advantage in this clash of cultures. Why could not an oral tradition cope with this encounter as effectively as the literate one did ? This is surely a pertinent question for any venture in oral history.

Writing has always marked a quantum jump in the history of human community. Todorov commenting on the clash of cultures in the New World concludes that the absence of writing an important element of the situation, perhaps the important"

(Todorov 1984:80)

Interestingly the absence of writing did not lead so much to

'a loss of past', for the formal discourse in an oral culture was in fact dominated by memory. It was 'rather a fatal loss of manipulative power in the present... The culture that possessed writing could accurately represent to itself (and hence strategically manipulate) the culture without writing, but the reverse was not true'

(Greenblaft 1991:11)

Too easily have tribal societies been considered as societies without a history. Such recollections as they do have of their past are recorded in their oral traditions that is groped together under the over-riding rubric of myth and legend. What would quality as their history is by and large what has been recorded by other communities

and that in relation to the others', i.e these others. Certainly this is a great cultural deprivation since we know how important historical memories are in the construction of community identities. Such an understating of history deprives tribal societies of an important cultural resource namely the mobilization of their past to cope with the present.

But tribal societies do have a rich oral tradition in which their collective memories are recorded. It is a living tradition and a changing one precisely because it is a living tradition and a changing one precisely because it is alive. However, if historical constructions are to privilege written documents and dismiss oral history, then these oral traditions stand devalued.

Any yet we know that every 'text' whether written or oral, must be read in its 'context'. And it is precisely this dialectic between text and context that can authenticate a social history. A narrow positivist understanding of history in search of 'objective facts' does not recognise this. In such a perspective oral traditions can yield merely a 'mythic history' with only a tenuous grounding in objective fact. This perspective obviously privileges literate society over oral ones, and all too readily condemns the latter to the eternal return of the seasonal cycle, without a chance of development and progress through time.

Once such a self understanding is internalized by a community, it cannot but lead to its progressive marginalization in the larger society in which it is placed, being left behind by the progress and development of other communities around. However, if we contextualize oral traditions within the tribal societies that have given rise to them, then we can use them to make an authentic reconstruction of their past. In distancing ourselves from the positivist prejudice that privileges the objectivity of written documentation. We do not want to fall subjectivism of an oral tradition. Rather the more sources we can use to set the context, the richer will be the interpretation and understanding of the text, whether this be oral or written.