

# 'It's time we document and share our cultural values'

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WHAT PARVATI Tirkey, an Adivasi poet who's the recipient of this year's Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar, remembers most about her childhood is storytelling sessions with her grandfather. Every year during the tribal festival of Sarhul festival, she would sit at her grandfather's feet as he sang songs of old.

The songs taught her everything she needed to hear about her Kurukh culture, their traditional way of life and legends and myths — things she could never learn in textbooks. It's through these that she learnt the significance of her surname, Tirkey.

"Tirkey, which means a wild bird found in forests. In the same way, the tiger (Lakra) is a totem animal for those with the Lakra surname. Totem for us Adivasis, simply means a deep sense of guardianship and kinship with a particular species," she says.

For years, Tirkey was trying to encapsulate her learnings through the tradition of 'oral libraries' in her poetry. Earlier this week, her commitment to this vital cultural reclamation was officially recognised: she was named the recipient of the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar 2025 (Hindi) for her poignant poetry collection '*Phir Uzna*'. Translated as 'To Spring Again' it is a collection of Kurukh poetry.

"These poems are rooted in



**Parvati Tirkey  
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Puraskar**

the Kurukh lifestyle and their ancestral knowledge systems like the Parha system of self-governance, the totem culture, and more," Tirkey says.

From a village in Jharkhand's Gumla district, Tirkey completed her schooling in Gumla and went on to earn her graduation, post graduation, and PhD in Hindi Literature from the Banaras Hindu University (BHU).

During her research at BHU, Parvati made the decision to bring these 'oral libraries' into Hindi lit-

erature. "Our elders had libraries too, hidden ones, oral ones. Why weren't they adopted? Why weren't they given space?" Tirkey, who teaches Hindi literature at Ram Lakhan College in Ranchi, asks. Her choice of language — Hindi — was a carefully thought out one, selected to bridge the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous languages. Through this, she wanted to explain the systemic neglect of the Kurukh language and knowledge within academic and cultural institutions.

"Hindi literature has long been dominated by non-indigenous writers. Since our voices have been missing for generations, it's time we document and share our cultural values, those that were passed down orally and

never written. We owe this to future generations. Let it be part of the current syllabus," she says.

Among the poems in her collection is '*Lakra Kavita*' (tiger poetry). She says it as a conversation between a tiger and a Kurukh tribal with the surname 'Lakra'.

For Tirkey, writing poetry and entering the world of literature is her response to cultural displacement — an issue she feels remains under-discussed. She believes that any effort to preserve Adivasi culture and language is a small but significant step toward revival and inclusion in mainstream consciousness. "These cultural systems now need to be preserved. That's what the title '*Phir Uzna*' means — to spring again."