



**(Re)fashioning the Tribal Self-image: Reading Contemporary Tribal
Writings from India in Translation**

Rishav Dutta

Abstract

Tribal voices are perennially absent in the domains of disciplinary knowledges. Contemporary indigenous writings from different parts of the world contest this archival and textual invisibility of the indigenous subject by documenting the unremitting pain and anguish these communities undergo due to systematic territorial displacement and cultural dislocations. Literary narratives originating within these indigenous communities transcend paradigms of literature by offering a dynamic repertoire of indigenous epistemic practices and lived experiences. Keeping this understanding broadly in the background and contemporary tribal literature(s) from India at the focal point, this paper proposes to argue that critical readings of such texts problematize predominant discourses of ‘indigeneity.’ Embedded within the (neo)colonial ethnic stereotypes is the reductionist understanding of ‘indigeneity’ which puts forward a dualistic image of the tribal subject who is either an innocent, vulnerable relic of the past requiring preservation or a savage primitive needing subdual. Contemporary tribal writings from India offer a critical departure from rigid one-dimensional reading of the tribal character/person. By getting further translated into multiple Indian languages and in English, these narratives carry the potential to respond to contexts of suffering, displacement and persecution far removed from the spatiotemporal boundaries of the local context in which they originate. Hence, the act of translation not only ensures mobility to such texts but creates new space(s) for similar narratives of indigenous resistance to engage with each other and also extend the practice of tribal self-fashioning.

Keywords: Indigeneity, Tribal Resistance, Tribal Writings, Identity, Translation.