



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

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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.

Introduction

We resist because we are exactly who we are, and no amount of warring, genocide, propaganda in the name of education or preaching will turn us into anyone other than who we are...we are resisting being imagined out of existence. (Harjo & Winder, 2011, p. 125)

The idea of self-fashioning while being engaged in a politico-cultural discourse immediately corresponds to the politics of representation. It relates to the structures of power within a state and production of literature in constructing and continuing the state ideology. The predicament of the individual, in such contexts, is to identify the conventions that fashion his or her self and to strive to re-fashion it in opposition to power and power-deployed conventions. The act of self-fashioning, in that sense, may be recognized as a form of ongoing performance that attempts to balance the underlying evasive tension with a compelling sense of self-cognizance.

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

It entails understanding the complex relation between the role of human agency in constructing his or her identity and the interdependence of social structures of power at play in a society. It presupposes a space to showcase the re-fashioned image of the self and an availability of alternative proprieties for the said re-fashioning to occur. This necessitates not to limit the act of fashioning the self solely to a sense of re-action but associating the variety of enterprises undertaken by the refashioning individual to a form of, in the Sartrean sense of the term, a politically ‘engaged’ⁱ activity. This evokes the individual’s freedom (and necessity) in making conscious choices towards re-forming his or her self and in being responsible for those choices made, the individual remains engaged critically and politically to his or her community as well as society.

In a repressive social structure, repeated representation(s) of an assumed homogenous self is coveted as it ensures singularity of identification and a supposed unity of the image that the society constructs of itself. Invisibility of pluralistic notions of a state’s purported selfhood assures an absolute conformism from its subjects to and consolidation of its meaning and the power invested in it. This involves state-sponsored violence at multiple levels, such as, physical, psychological, cultural and epistemic. In such contexts, self-identification becomes important for communities pushed at the periphery of the state. By repressing the fundamental right of self-representation of these marginalized communities, the state tends to solidify its position at the centre and retain its hold at power. Postcolonial discourse offers us enough space to critically explore this asymmetry of power and culture relations between the centre and margin of a hegemonic colonized state. However, under the influence of nationalism, this archetype creates its own ironical paradox as and when postcolonial nation-state(s) becomes a colonizing power itself. By making use of the same colonial institutions of power, it seeks to establish a monolithic continuity of territorial identity and prevent representations of actual lived experiences of marginalized subaltern subjectivities within its boundary. This leads the neo-colonial nation-state to exercise power to achieve an identity, to construct an antithesis of the values that it allegedly stands for – a repulsive and chaotic Other – and to erase images/identities that cannot be contained within the dominant ideology of its ‘civilized’/ordered society.

Histories of contact: (Mis)fashioning the Indigenous/Tribal Other

Indigenous communities across nations have long faced the practice of dehumanization and dehistoricization at the hands of the non-indigenous population. They have been subjected to dispossession, disenfranchisement and marginalization for centuries. Much of this have been executed in two complementary forms, namely, through territorial displacement with destruction of lives and cultures, and production of literature by the non-indigenous (largely European) colonizing powers. The body of literature produced by such colonizing powers constructed an image of the ‘indigenous’ who is primitive, without/before civilization, situated at the present but characterized/separated by the past. The tenets of fashioning/understanding the ‘indigenous’ were, therefore, closely related to evolutionist beliefs. The colonization of indigenous lands started in around 16th century and lasted well into the 20th century. This included land conquests and numerous treaties ratified between the settler-colonial powers and indigenous communities. According to records, between 1778 and 1871, the U.S. government and Native American tribes entered into more than 800 treaties. (Wiessner, 1999, p.62) These treaties largely contained formal cessation of territorial sovereignty and transfer of ownership of indigenous lands to the colonial powers. From 18th century onwards, however, the colonial attitude towards such treaties began to change. Indigenous communities gradually came to be viewed as subjects incapable of having territorial independence and distinct social, political and economic organization. From this perspective, indigenous communities were regarded as

too primitive to be holding sovereign power. Motivated by a misplaced sense of duty to 'civilize' the indigenous communities who were unilaterally defined as barbaric, conquest of indigenous lands by colonial powers and policies of assimilating these communities into non-indigenous 'mainstream' society came to be considered as justified. (Byrne, 2017, p.6) Under the *terra nullius* – i.e., no man's land – doctrine, existence of indigenous communities was completely ignored and lands which were ancestrally inhabited by these communities were forcefully taken by settler (European) communities. This was the case, for example, in Australia, western frontiers of North America, Alaska, the northern regions of Canada and in Greenland. (Göcke, 2013, p.24) With a steady decrease in number of indigenous inhabitants on these lands due to repeated attacks and introduction of diseases, and settlement of territorial claims between rivalling European empires, indigenous communities came to be considered less as strong political opponents of colonial rule and more as obstacles in the way to development, modernization and prosperity of the state.

The history of contact between the tribal communities and non-tribal population in India might have run a different course but the issue of representation of the tribal communities have been equally unilateral, fragmentary and reductionist. Beginning from the ancient Sanskrit texts from the Vedic period to the ethnographic writings during the British rule, the non-tribal constructs of tribes have largely revolved around the images of groups of people who were inherently primitive, wild, savage and 'anachronistic'. (Skaria, Aug. 1997, p.727) In the Sanskritic representation(s), tribal communities have been described largely in demonic and servile proportions. Professor SC Roy in *The Mundas and Their Country* (1970) outlines the wide range of designations available in Sanskrit texts to designate tribes, such as, *das* (slave), *dasyu* (robbers), *rakshasa*, *asura*, *daitya*, *danava*, *savara* and *pulinda* (demon). (Sen, 2018, p.16) In addition to identifying tribes as being ethnically different, certain derogatory remarks, made on their physical features, have also been recorded in Vedic texts. This includes describing these communities as inferior based on their dark skin colour, different physical and facial appearance, with emphases on height, structure and colour of nose and eyes respectively, food habits, attire, religion, and technology. (Sen, 2018, p.16) Sanskritic misrepresentations of the ethnic groups largely influenced the later colonial administrator-ethnographers. They depended heavily upon the readings of Vedic literature by orientalist scholars who considered these texts to be important and authentic sources of information regarding the country and its people. Coupled with the imperialistic agenda, colonial understandings of the communities, variously termed as autochthon, tribe and aborigine, came to be characterized as savage, sensuous, body-centric, irrational, presentist, stateless, historyless, 'vile, rebellious and intriguing,' 'most refractory and turbulent,' 'notorious,' and so on. (Sen, 2018, p.20-23) Colonial ethnographers constructed the image of the ethnic Other in India by broadly assessing the Indian demographic against the ethnocentric scales of having statehood, literacy and a history. (Sen, 2018, p.37) Accordingly, tribes were identified as belonging to pre-state/pre-political society without any notion of a centralized regulating body. They were further classified as pre-literate communities as most of these communities were primarily oral societies having no distinct script of their own. This led the ethnographers to believe that these communities had no sense of history as well. Thus, tribes were rendered to be a people who were essentially stateless, historyless and inferior. The absolute neglect and continual failure in recording the tribal voice(s) of their past justifies the present necessity of tribal self-fashioning in India.

The steady dispossession of tribes from control over and access to natural resources, which began during the colonial rule in India, continues to plague the communities till date. Access to natural resources is crucially important for tribal communities since it not only ensures them economic sustenance but also plays an essential role in forming emotive-cognitive and affective ties to their physical environment around. This offers the philosophical

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

foundation towards formation of a tribal group's collective cultural identity. The British rule in India introduced extensive socio-political and economic changes in India that cleaved the Indian society into sections with unequal access to opportunities for socio-economic development and mobility. From this perspective, tribes were the most affected group during the colonial period. Having existed usually as self-governing units in geographically secluded areas, prior to British arrival, tribal communities kept their distance from the larger non-tribal Indian society and were never a part of it. With the gradual expanse and consolidation of colonial power into tribal areas, tribes came under the same politico-administrative system as the larger Indian population for the first time in history. (Xaxa, Fall/Winter 2016, p.227) In this new structure, tribal communities were methodically deprived from accessing natural resources by force and/or fraud at the hands of both the colonial administration and a section of non-tribal upper-caste wealthy Indians who were mostly merchants, moneylenders and landowners. Hence, the series of resistance movements launched by the tribal communities in colonial India against so-called 'outsiders,' right from the Paharia revolt of 1772 to the Munda rebellion of 1895 led by Birsa Munda, were directed against both the British colonial rule and the local non-tribal Indians at authorial positions.

Post-Independence, the biggest source of systematic and aggressive tribal deprivation, in terms of land and forest rights, has been the state itself as it has not only retained the colonial laws of land acquisition in India but also strengthened it. As a part of nation rebuilding process, India during the latter half of the 20th century undertook rapid economic development projects by establishing heavy industrial and mining projects, accompanied by mega civil infrastructure development projects. These projects, aimed towards 'national development,' ensured upliftment of the economic status of the country but had had deep impacts in the tribal socio-economic and cultural life. With these projects coming up in the resource-rich central Indian tribal hinterlands, with better availability of resources, fewer transportation cost and even negligible civil resistance, the tribal communities residing in such parts were robbed of their ancestral lands, resulting in a disintegration of their traditional practices of economic sustenance and distinct cultural identities. The generalized image that has been constructed of tribals as groups of inferior, primitive people waiting extinction or transformation through necessary assimilation, reflects the blatant ignorance and condescension non-tribal populations carry in their collective psyche towards tribals. This concoction has given rise to the impression that tribal communities lack the cognitive maturity to realize the 'importance' of national development projects and hence, instead of having a dialogue with regarding the same, need careful convincement. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime minister of India, who claimed development projects to be temples of secular India, while laying the foundation stone for India's first major river valley project, the Hirakud Dam in Orissa in 1948, famously said, "If you have to suffer, you should do so in the interest of the country". (Singh, 2020, p. 283) And it has been likewise for the last 75 years. In these years, more than 50 million people have been displaced from their lands in India in the name of 'national interest,' of which around 40% are estimated to be tribals. (Singh, 2020, p.285) The grim picture such reports paint blurs the line between 'national interest' and individual right to life and livelihood. At the same time, these incidents glaringly outline the present situation of tribal communities in India who are continually subjected to crimes without any criminal(s) to be accounted for. (Dubey, 2018, p.245) In such contexts, violence inflicted upon the identity of tribal groups, direct, cultural or structural, is normalized and treated with indifference.

Contemporary Tribal Writings: Moving beyond Literature

Such an extensive foregrounding of the tribal situation in India was necessary in this discussion to contextualize the absolute necessity of critically engaging with contemporary tribal writings

coming up in recent years. They not only rebut the mainstream perception of tribal writings being limited only to the scope of ‘folk’ but also critique the perennial absence of tribal voice(s) in the domains of disciplinary knowledge. Contemporary writings by writers from tribal communities contest the archival and textual invisibility of the tribal subject by documenting the unremitting pain and anguish of these communities due to systematic territorial displacement and cultural dislocations. Prathama Banerjee in exploring the possibilities of carving out a new field of adivasi/tribal research studies, succinctly addresses this concern:

One of the challenges of doing adivasi/tribal studies is that tribes and adivasis are almost always invisible in modern state archives, where they surface only as objects of counter-insurgency and/or policy. Adivasis and tribes also do not figure as subjects of archaeology and textual exegesis. While this is true for most subaltern subjects—the fact that it is difficult to write their stories because of their archival, archaeological and textual invisibility- adivasis and tribes are doubly disadvantaged, because they have not been able to claim alternative archives and alternative histories of their own, unlike some other subaltern subjects such as Dalits. (Banerjee, 2016, p.1)

Contemporary tribal writings offer us a space that claims to address this unavailability of an archive of lived experiences of tribes and an alternative history of their own. By virtue, it stands against the repeated practice of reproducing the ethnocentric anthropological proclivity for culturizing the tribal into a non-modern collective figure, and denying them selfhood and subjectivity. Works produced by leading contemporary writers, such as, Mahadev Toppo, Anuj Lugun, Jacinta Kerketta, Ushakiran Atram, Temsula Ao, Mamang Dai, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, Nirmala Putul, Parimal Hembram and others individuate the tribal problem. Their works demand readings that problematize the mainstream perception of ‘indigeneity’ by countering the misplaced notion of the ‘indigenous’ viewed as without a historically grounded practice of self-fashioning. In documenting the challenges and obstacles that the indigenous tribal society continues to face daily, in accounting the inequality and injustice meted out to the people from tribal communities in the name of progress and development, in addressing the cultural nescience nurtured by mainstream non-tribal society, in recording the individual tribal voices, in their strives to find a place for itself and in their remembrance of the ancestral past, tribal writings can be regarded as a relevant archive for initiating a re-reading of ‘indigeneity’ and rewriting the history of tribal communities in India.

Indigenous worldviews have been shaped by the intimate relation indigenous people have had with environment across centuries. One of the key differences between the indigenous and non-indigenous worldviews is that human beings do not feature at the focal centre of the universe in the indigenous perspective of the world. Instead, it believes in a respectful harmony between different aspects of life of which human beings hold as much significance as any other. The focus in this worldview is on the human-nature relationship where both human and non-human entities have “a role to perform to ensure balance and harmony and the overall well-being of life; (since) all things are an extension of the grand design, and, as such, contain the same essence as the source from which it flows...which links all things to each other and to Creation”. (Hart, 2010, p.3) In the indigenous relational worldview, the ‘self’ is positioned both at the levels of individual and community. The community is a space to which the indigenous individual feels a filial commitment. As a result of which, the individual functions keeping the interest of the community before his or her own. The sense of relatedness the indigenous individual feels towards his or her community, ancestors, ancestral history, land and cultural roots is at the very base of the indigenous value system that informs traditions of the indigenous family life. (McCubbin, et al. 2013, p.356) In turn, the individual and the community’s schemata are etched by their values and traditions. Natural resources, like, land, therefore, is not something outside the indigenous being but the very extension of the same. It is considered

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

to be a repository of the individual's and community's identity and meaning.

To further discuss on these lines, the present paper would primarily study selected works of Jacinta Kerketta from her collection of poems titled *Angor*ⁱⁱ (2016). Kerketta is one of the prominent contemporary poet-activists from Jharkhand and comes from the Kurukh community. The study will also draw occasional references from works of two other leading tribal voices of recent times, also from Jharkhand, namely, Nirmala Putul and Mahadev Toppo. In one of Kerketta's poems originally titled "Pahari Banso ka Rahasya" (The Mystery of the Forest Bamboos), she voices her concern against the onslaught of man and machine at the cost of erosion of indigenous life and identity.

As I lay in the *kuruwā* field in sweet slumber
I felt the earth beneath quake and tremor,
And I saw
On the sweeping claws of an excavator
My field from its very roots severed.
On that machine hung
Not just that piece of land, but I as well,
And I realised then
The agony of being uprooted from one's soil. (Kerketta, 2016, p. 87)

In her familiar powerful tone, Kerketta critiques the dominant discourse of human progress through industrialization. Ever since the Industrial Revolution took its course in 19th century Europe, rapid industrialization has been the primary policy of ensuring economic growth, urbanization, development and modernization of society around the globe. Jharkhand, one of the states from eastern India and rich in mineral resources, has witnessed large-scale unplanned deforestation, exhaustive mining to extract minerals, extensive industrialization and human displacement in the name of 'national development.' The "sweeping claws of an excavator" not only sever the connection one develops with the land he or she inhabits but also sweeps one off from the routes to his or her history fostered through generations. Kerketta goes on to write:

The body of my ancestors
Was being rent and dismembered,
And I watched the pieces sell for millions.
The crowd of buyers
Turned into a teeming multitude,
And I felt as if my own body
Were torn into a million pieces and sold. (Kerketta, 2016, p. 87)

The utilitarian approach to non-human elements of nature does not acknowledge the individual subjectivity that indigenous psycho-spirituality lends to them. It oversteps considering the fact that lands that "were torn into a million pieces and sold" were deeply invested in generational memory. An onslaught on the physical integrity of the landscape naturally extends the rupture to the relational subject hood it has developed with the inhabitants. Denying attachment to land, therefore, is a denial of attachment to culture, history and identity. Similar feelings get reiterated in the following lines by Nirmala Putul from her poem titled "Pahadi Purush"ⁱⁱⁱ (Mountain Man):

Sitting brooding on the mountain
The face of the mountain man shows
The geography of the mountain

Within him hushed sits
 The history of the mountain
 When there's a fire on the mountain
 Then, from his flute springs
 The pain of the mountains.
 When a mountain somewhere is torn apart
 His mountain-like chest shudders
 He speaks to the mountain in mountain language... (IGNOU, 2019, p.8)

Realising the fact that one's history "sits" within his or her self and is not something outside his or her being brings one closer to the environment around since it also forms a part of the same history. That humanity and nature imprints one another in their actions, emotions, feelings, movements and choices is evident in the above quoted lines from Putul. In one of her other compelling works, "Adivasi Gaanv" (An Adivasi Village), Kerketta addresses the physical and cultural dislocation a tribal youth experiences once the person is removed from his locale. She writes,

What goes through the mind
 Of that educated Adivasi boy,
 Returned from the city for the *karam* festivity,
 Listening enraptured to the tunes?
 ...
 Sitting atop a hill in the village
 That Adivasi boy now asks himself,
 How in these raging floodtides
 Will he manage to survive?
 No ark of ancient treatise or text
 He has with him to protect
 His existence, his being.
 How will be preserved his nature, his essence?
 How will be secured his entity and existence? (Kerketta, 2016, p.115)

The lines succinctly address the disillusionment of the educated tribal youth who travels from his village to the urban centres with dreams of employment and possibilities of a better life but is pitted against an unfamiliar exploitative system that keeps him from it. This poem is an example of how Kerketta through her poetry has explored, along with the migration that is forcefully induced due to developmental projects ensued by the government and transnational companies, the dynamics of voluntary migration of the tribal population towards urban centres. It follows the plight of the tribal youth who comes back to his birthplace to celebrate a festival with his community but is faced against a loss of identity. The metropolis might have accommodated him and provided him with means to survive financially but the issue of survival of his being, identity and 'essence' keeps him occupied. However, the question of his being and becoming is immediately answered by a floating "*jawā* blossom/ And a bough of *karam*" (Kerketta, 2016, p.115) on the drifting waters. A single flower and a branch of a tree succeed in connecting him to his ancestors, his place, his people and his history. His existence disappears into an omnipresence where memories do not have solitary existence in past, present and future but are interweaved through which one can traverse spatiotemporal distance. Joy Harjo, an internationally acclaimed poet, activist, academic of the Mvskoke (Creek) Nation, makes a similar observation regarding the alienation of the Native American in the modern American society. She believes that the native American survives as an alien in the modern American metropolis, but one truly lives within memories of the land and the ancestors. (Gohar, 2018, p.82) "Adivasi Gaanv" by Kerketta, however, can be read parallelly with the following

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

lines from a poem by Mahadev Toppo titled “Jungle ka Kavi”^{iv} (Poet of the Forest):

He will pick his bow
On the bow-string he will put a pen
With that flute and drum too
He will pick to save
Greenery of the forest
The poet of the forest
Will beat the drum
Play the flute
After putting a pen on the bow-string. (IGNOU, 2019, p.14)

Unlike the youth in Kerketta’s poem, the titular poet of Toppo is educated yet deeply aware of his roots. In his commitment to protect his abode and resist the onslaught of destructive forces of human progress, he never forgets his being and ‘essence.’ Instead of the popularized image of the tribal as an indoctrinated insurgent, Toppo refashions the ‘poet of the forest’ as a politically conscious human who knocks his pen on his bow to register his resistance. The poem in its limited scope not only offers a powerful image of tribal resistance through creative endeavours but in implying an absent arrow in the context also provides an alternative reading of the common English adage, ‘The pen is mightier than the sword.’

The metropolis, therefore, in Kerketta’s poems is the symbolic space that privileges dominant values of the colonial western world and threatens the core values that forms the tribal identity. It moves beyond the territoriality and occupies a space in the psyche of an individual that dislocates her from her physicality and memory, exoticizes and exhibits her and judges her in her existential crisis. In a short but pertinent poem consisting only six lines, titled “O Shahar!” (O, City!), Kerketta’s sums up the underlying conceptual irony of cities as cosmopolitan ‘homes’ to people which depend upon the homelessness of people for its very existence:

Leaving behind their homes,
Their soil, their bales of straw,
Fleeing the roof over their heads, they often ask,
O, city!
Are you ever wrenched by the very roots
In the name of so-called progress? (Kerketta, 2016, p.31)

The epistemological footing of a particular community’s past largely informs the ontological questions of its present. Contemporary tribal writings, in such contexts, become conduits connecting individuals to their memories. In its refusal to forget and initiate a spiritual communication to the collective voice of the past, it transcends the paradigms of mere literature. By surrendering the individual identifiers, writers like Toppo, Kerketta and Putul cease to be persons and become overseers of the communal voice – a collective sensibility – acting as supports to individuals in their times of crises. (Chaturvedi, 2021, p.14)

Translating tribal writings: Observations and propositions

Apart from proper documentation and wider circulation, the most recurrent factor that hinders the exposure of tribal writings to a greater readership is certainly the linguistic one. Readers are yet to discover the rich archive of literature that is available and to a certain extent limited within the tribal communities. However, few contemporary writers, like Gladston Dungdung,

Jacinta Kerketta, Shankar Lal Meena, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar and others seem to be preferring to write in mainstream Indian languages, like Hindi, and in English. On being asked why she chooses to write in Hindi instead of her mother tongue, Jacinta opines,

There is a need here to write in a language that will be understood by those who are responsible for the conditions which the Adivasi society has to endure, and the reasons for which there is so much conflict. And these are the people who are able to understand what I have to say in Hindi as well as in English. (GroundXero, 2018, para. 26)

Kerketta's reply adds to the argument that contemporary tribal literature is essentially a literature of commitment. The writer remains critically and politically engaged to her community in her choice of the genre, subject matter as well as the language. It is thoroughly political at every level. In a conversation with Sujit Prasad, available on the interweb, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, in the context of reconciling Santhal imagination with English language, candidly mentions,

I think that it is a good thing that a Santhal story has been written in English. And why only English, I think it will be wonderful if Santhal stories are written in as many languages as possible, so that Santhal stories may go out to as wide a readership as possible... There should be more Santhal stories told in English now. (Antiserious, 2017, para. 7)

This indeed is a timely suggestion on the matters of tribal writings and translation. With a rich cultural environment and tradition of translation already existent in India, it would not be too ambitious here to propose a dedicated practice of translating tribal narratives in, apart from English, as many local Indian languages as possible. Although lately English, as a language of emancipation and empowerment, has been in favour of historically marginalised communities fighting for their rights, such as, Dalits, this is to argue that getting too preoccupied with translating these texts only in English still keeps a considerable number of readers out. Professor Pramod K Nayar in his article "Subalternity and Translation: The Cultural Apparatus of Human Rights" argues for forging a cultural apparatus of human rights that requires activist translation and offers primacy to English language. (Nayar, 2011, p.23) The author of the present paper would like to add to the argument by proposing an urgency in making contemporary tribal writings available more in local Indian languages. As translating in English would amplify the tribal voice and enable these narratives to get embedded within the global discourse of violation of rights, ensuring wider visibility of these texts in multiple local Indian languages would facilitate addressing the cultural and historical amnesia larger Indian society suffers from with regard to tribal literature, aesthetics and epistemology.

Such a proposition invites challenges indeed which might be too profound to address at once. There is a serious dearth of translators who are proficient enough in tribal languages to engage in translating activities. Besides, there is always the risk of cultural appropriation and reiterating the misrepresentations of the tribal through translation. But the scope such an activity offers is invested with too many possibilities to be ignored. Existing scholarship on the relation between contemporary literatures from the margins and translation has already addressed the issues of intentionality, representation, discovery and recovery, politics of inclusions and exclusions, inadequacy of language, (im)possibility of translating subaltern identities and claims of experience. Hence, there is ample scope to extend works of research further on similar lines with keeping tribal writings in translations at the focal point. But that requires ensuring availability of these texts to the readers and scholars first. This is to suggest that with the human, cultural, political and monetary resources available, there is a copious scope available in India to formally extend the cause of tribal literature of engagement which

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

in itself is an extension of tribal activism and self-fashioning. This necessitates having an ecosystem consisting of writers, translators and publishers who would be committed in ensuring wider visibility of tribal writings. Prominent publishing houses, like, Sahitya Akademi, National Book Trust, Bhasha Research and Publication Centre, Ramnika Foundation and so on, have long been contributing towards documenting and publishing tribal writings and tribal folk literature. Of late, newer publishing houses, like, Navayana, Zubaan, Speaking Tiger, and especially, Adivaani, the publishing and archiving house of publisher-activist Ruby Hembrom, have been promisingly working towards a re-discovery and re-production of tribal artistic productions and experiences. Such endeavours in participating in the cause of extending tribal activism, in re-fashioning the perceived notion of 'indigeneity,' also contributes to the practice of decolonizing the processes of knowledge making and distribution.

Conclusion

A message features on the website of the Adivasi Academy at Tejgadh, Gujarat, established by the Bhasha Research and Publication Centre on 1999, saying, "anything that will improve the lives of Adivasis in India, anything that will increase the awareness of the distinctiveness of Adivasi culture in the country, and create respect for the difference, is a contribution to the Adivasi Academy" (Adivasi Academy, n.d., para. 1). Borrowing, rather extending the message, the author would like to conclude the paper with this note that any enterprise that ensures greater awareness of the distinctiveness of tribal culture and greater respect towards the difference, contributes to the recognition of tribal self-fashioning in India. This involves translating tribal literary texts, publishing, critiquing, reviewing, retelling, conducting research and any related practice as all of these begin with the very act of intimate reading and familiarizing oneself with tribal writings and the writers. Until and unless these narratives reach the readers, engagement with the larger tribal discourse, scholastic or otherwise, will remain unfulfilled. A wider availability provides greater possibility of inclusion of these texts into the academic curricula which furthers broadens the scope of mobility. The movement of narratives need not always be local-to-global but can certainly be local-to-local. Facilitated by the act of translation, such movements of narratives of tribal self-fashioning opens up a newer space for dialogue between locales on a wide array of contexts, such as, relating the singularity of local experience to the broader discourse on self-articulation, challenging the projected homogeneity of tribal positions, reshaping a polyphonic dimension of tribal selfhood, moving beyond the interpretative framework of revolt and resistance in reading tribal literature, recognizing diverse means of creative expression and everyday aesthetics, and reterritorialization of the lost space and place. In these senses, an engaged reading of tribal self-fashioning in India can possibly add a fresh chapter to postcolonial literature and the critical discourse of Indian literature(s) in translation!

ⁱ French existentialist thinkers, particularly Jean-Paul Sartre, promoted the concept of *littérature engagée* (engaged literature or literature of commitment) during the mid-twentieth century post-World War II Europe to refer to writers' serious responsibility to society. In his work *What Is Literature?* (1947), Sartre emphasized that an engaged writer bears a civic and ethical obligation to comment upon the political injustices in society in his or her writings. In so doing, the writer makes the readers aware of their situation in society and challenges the status quo which is likely to involve implicit measures of discrimination and subdual.

ⁱⁱ A collection of 41 poems by Jacinta Kerketta, the book contains both the original Hindi and translated English versions the poems in a side-by-side manner. Translations are done jointly by Ms. Bhumika Chawla-d'Souza, Mr. Vijay K Chhabra and Fr. Cyprian Ekka. The book is published by Adivaani.

ⁱⁱⁱ The poem is translated by Aruna Sitesh and Arlene Zide in consultation with the poet and PK Tiwari. The poem can be found in Nirmala Putul's first collections of poems, titled *Nagade ki Tarah Bajte Shabd* (Words that Resound like Drums), published in 2005.

^{iv} The poem is translated by Ivy Hansdak.

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