



Echoes of the Ancestors: Postcolonial Refractions of Tradition and Modernity in Indigenous Hindi Literature of Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract

This paper explores the dialectic between tradition and modernity in the indigenous Hindi literature of Arunachal Pradesh, offering a postcolonial interpretation of how cultural memory, resistance, and adaptation manifest in the region's literary narratives. Situated at the interstice of orality and textuality, these works grapple with the encroachment of hegemonic structures—be it in the form of linguistic homogenisation, developmentalism, or post-independence nation-building—while also reclaiming rooted epistemologies through literary expression. Employing postcolonial frameworks such as Bhabha's hybridity, Spivak's subalternity, and Fanon's psychological decolonisation, this study analyses selected literary voices that articulate the region's complex negotiation with identity, temporality, and sovereignty. Rather than romanticising indigenous stasis or promoting cultural essentialism, the paper situates the literature as a site of resistance, where tradition is not a relic but a dynamic interlocutor in the discourse of modernity.

Keywords: Indigenous literature, Arunachal Pradesh, postcolonial theory, tradition and modernity, subaltern voice

Introduction: Locating the Question

The state of Arunachal Pradesh, nestled in the easternmost reaches of the Indian subcontinent, presents a paradox in the national imagination. Despite its rich plurality of cultures, languages, and oral traditions, it has long remained on the margins of both mainstream historiography and literary scholarship. Often stereotyped as a geographical periphery or an anthropological curiosity, Arunachal Pradesh and its people have struggled for discursive visibility in the Indian nation-state's narrative. This marginality, however, is not merely cartographic but epistemic. It involves a systemic neglect of indigenous knowledge systems,

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cultural memories, and literary voices that resist the homogenising ideologies of progress and nationhood. Within this context, the emergence of indigenous Hindi literature in Arunachal Pradesh assumes remarkable significance.

To situate this literature within the postcolonial debate on tradition and modernity is to unearth a layered struggle: one that is simultaneously cultural, linguistic, political, and philosophical. Writing in Hindi—India's most widely spoken language—tribal authors from Arunachal Pradesh occupy a peculiar double-bind. On one hand, they gain access to a broader national readership and institutional legitimacy; on the other, they risk diluting the linguistic and cultural specificity of their native traditions. Yet, rather than viewing this ambivalence as a limitation, it is more productive to interpret it as a space of negotiation—a space where literary expression becomes an act of reclamation as well as reinvention.

The emergence of Hindi as a medium of literary expression in the region was not merely a cultural evolution but a politically mediated project. Governmental institutions, including the Arunachal Pradesh Sahitya Akademi and centralised curricular bodies such as NCERT, encouraged the adoption of Hindi to bridge regional differences and integrate diverse communities under a unified national framework (Bharali, 2019, p. 112). This imposition, however, also paved the way for a counter-hegemonic discourse, where Hindi was appropriated to serve indigenous ends. Writers like Dr. Nida Ahmed, Tani Talom, and Gomia Ete began to deploy the very language of the state to critique its developmental paradigms, ecological violence, and epistemic erasures (Kashyap, 2020, p. 144).

These literary interventions foreground a deep tension between the ancestral and the aspirational. The former represents a rooted cosmology, based on reciprocal relationships between land, language, and community; the latter invokes a forward-looking ideology rooted in modernisation, often tethered to extractive economies, individual mobility, and cultural dislocation. This dialectic between tradition and modernity is not unique to Arunachal Pradesh, but its articulation through indigenous Hindi literature adds a complex valence. It raises fundamental questions: Can modernity be indigenised without cultural rupture? Can the language of the 'centre' voice the experiences of the 'periphery'? And perhaps most crucially, can literature act as a medium through which these tensions are not merely represented but also reimagined?

From a postcolonial perspective, the use of Hindi by tribal writers is both an act of strategic subversion and cultural negotiation. These authors repurpose Hindi—not as a symbol of cultural hegemony but as a pliable medium through which to channel oral narratives, tribal philosophies,

ecological ethics, and collective memory. This practice aligns with what Homi Bhabha terms the “third space of enunciation” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 113), where the encounter between dominant and marginal cultures produces new, hybrid forms of identity and articulation. These hybridities are not diluted imitations but creative sites of resistance, where tradition converses with modernity in a language that is neither entirely native nor entirely foreign.

Yet, to valorise hybridity alone would be reductive. Many indigenous Hindi writers in Arunachal Pradesh also engage critically with the risks of modernity—particularly when it arrives as state-driven ‘development.’ Their narratives often expose the dislocation caused by infrastructural expansion, the commodification of land and labour, and the cultural alienation of the youth. These stories do not romanticise tradition but instead explore its potential to offer ethical alternatives to capitalist logic and bureaucratic rationalities. In Gomia Ete’s short stories, for instance, rivers are not just sources of irrigation but entities imbued with ancestral memory and sacred temporality. Their damming, therefore, is not merely an environmental event but a cultural amputation (Ete, 2018).

It is within this fraught space that the indigenous Hindi literature of Arunachal Pradesh makes its intervention. It critiques modernity not in a reactionary mode but through a decolonial re-imagining of community, time, and identity. At the same time, it resists the ossification of tradition into a monolithic, untouchable past. Rather, it reanimates traditional knowledge systems, rituals, and worldviews as living archives—archives capable of speaking back to modernity with both urgency and dignity.

The present study attempts to engage with this complex entanglement of tradition and modernity as represented in indigenous Hindi literary texts. Drawing upon postcolonial theorists such as Spivak, Bhabha, and Fanon, and contextualising the literature within the sociopolitical realities of Arunachal Pradesh, this paper contends that these narratives offer a unique template for indigenous resistance, linguistic hybridity, and epistemic decolonisation. They reframe tradition not as static heritage but as a dynamic, evolving force—capable of adapting without surrendering, resisting without isolation, and transforming without losing its soul.

Theoretical Framework: Postcolonialism and the Indigenous Subject

To understand the indigenous Hindi literature of Arunachal Pradesh through the prism of postcolonial studies is to acknowledge the complex historical legacies and cultural asymmetries that define the region’s encounter with the modern Indian nation-state. Postcolonial theory

offers a robust critical apparatus to interrogate the tensions between tradition and modernity, marginality and centrality, orality and textuality, and voice and voicelessness. However, applying such a framework to Arunachal Pradesh necessitates contextual nuance, for the region's colonial experience was unlike the classical models of colonisation seen in mainland India. Rather than direct economic exploitation or settler occupation, the Northeast—and particularly Arunachal—was subjected to epistemic neglect, anthropological essentialism, and a systematic denial of political subjectivity.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's foundational essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" becomes particularly resonant in this context. Spivak argues that the subaltern, positioned outside the circuits of hegemonic power and language, cannot be authentically represented within dominant epistemologies (Spivak, 1988, p. 271). In the case of Arunachal's tribal writers, the adoption of Hindi may appear as an act of assimilation into the dominant linguistic order. However, a closer reading reveals a strategic repositioning: the subaltern is not merely speaking in the master's tongue but is reshaping it to accommodate indigenous grammar, metaphors, and epistemes. The appropriation of Hindi becomes a nuanced gesture—simultaneously a mode of participation and a site of resistance.

This duality is further illuminated by Homi K. Bhabha's notion of the "third space." In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha contends that cultural identity is not a fixed essence but a product of ongoing negotiation within a hybrid space of translation and difference (Bhabha, 1994, p. 113). For indigenous writers in Arunachal Pradesh, writing in Hindi opens up this third space where they can enunciate their experiences without being confined to either their tribal vernaculars or the homogenising assumptions of mainstream Hindi literature. It is a space of critical hybridity, where new subjectivities are forged through the interplay of the traditional and the modern, the native and the national.

Hybridity, however, should not be understood merely as a celebratory mingling of influences. Bhabha himself cautions that hybridity entails anxiety, ambivalence, and risk. In the case of Arunachali literature, the risk lies in cultural dilution and misrecognition—where indigenous voices, though visible, may still be misread through dominant tropes of exoticism, backwardness, or primitivism. Therefore, the task of postcolonial criticism is not to romanticise hybridity but to examine the power dynamics that structure it.

Another key theorist, Frantz Fanon, provides insight into the psychological dimensions of colonial subjugation and resistance. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon discusses how colonised

subjects often internalise feelings of inferiority, which manifest in mimicry, shame, or cultural abandonment (Fanon, 1963, p. 170). Although Arunachal Pradesh was not colonised in the classic sense, its tribes have long been subjected to epistemic violence—from being categorised as ‘primitive’ in colonial ethnographies to being excluded from mainstream educational, cultural, and media institutions in independent India. Literature thus becomes an emancipatory praxis—a means through which tribal writers assert the dignity of their heritage and reject the pathology of inferiority.

Postcolonial ecocriticism also offers a valuable entry point into the literary imaginaries of Arunachal’s indigenous authors. Writers frequently foreground the interconnectedness of humans, animals, forests, and rivers—reflecting a worldview that radically contrasts with the anthropocentric assumptions of modernity. As scholars like Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin argue, postcolonial ecocriticism challenges both imperial environmentalism and capitalist development models, privileging indigenous cosmologies that see the land not as property but as kin (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010, p. 5). This perspective allows for a more nuanced reading of literary works where natural elements are not symbolic backdrops but active participants in cultural meaning-making.

Additionally, Walter D. Mignolo’s concept of “epistemic disobedience” is particularly relevant here. Mignolo suggests that coloniality survives through knowledge systems that marginalise non-Western ways of knowing. He advocates for “border thinking”—a decolonial praxis rooted in local histories and epistemologies (Mignolo, 2009, p. 163). When tribal writers in Arunachal Pradesh incorporate ritual chants, mythic structures, and seasonal rhythms into modern Hindi prose, they enact a form of epistemic disobedience. They refuse to write solely within the codes of metropolitan modernism and instead forge literary forms that are both rooted and radical.

The framework of indigenous postcoloniality also compels us to reconsider the role of orality in literary production. Many of the themes and structures within Arunachali Hindi literature are deeply indebted to oral traditions—be they folk songs, clan histories, or seasonal epics. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o notes, oral literature is not pre-literary but coeval with written culture; it contains its own modes of narrativity, temporality, and truth-claims (Ngũgĩ, 1986, p. 28). The interweaving of oral aesthetics into Hindi texts constitutes a form of literary sovereignty—asserting that modern writing need not forsake ancestral forms to be relevant.

Finally, the ethics of representation must also be addressed. Postcolonial theory warns against the ventriloquisation of the subaltern—that is, the tendency of elite or urban intellectuals to

“speak for” the marginalised. In this regard, indigenous Hindi writers from Arunachal Pradesh defy the paradigm of dependency. They are not being represented by others; they are representing themselves. Their literature is not a derivative account of tribal life, but an authoritative inscription of tribal worldviews in a modern literary register.

In sum, a postcolonial theoretical framework—inflected with insights from Spivak, Bhabha, Fanon, Ngũgĩ, Mignolo, and contemporary ecocriticism—provides a robust lens to examine the indigenous Hindi literature of Arunachal Pradesh. It allows us to see this literature not as an anomaly within Indian writing in Hindi, but as a vibrant, critical intervention that challenges received notions of tradition, modernity, language, and identity. The authors in question are not passive inheritors of culture; they are active re-creators of meaning, working at the intersections of history, resistance, and aesthetic innovation.

Literary Landscapes: Representing Tradition in Modern Forms

In indigenous Hindi literature from Arunachal Pradesh, tradition is often represented through folkloric devices—oral narratives, ancestral myths, tribal songs, and ritualised memory. Tani Talom’s poem *"Bana Ka Raag"* invokes the primal relationship between the tribal self and the forest, portraying nature as animate, divine, and maternal. The motif of the forest here is not just ecological but ontological—a spatial metaphor for tribal beings (Talom, 2016).

Similarly, in Gomia Ete’s short story *"Dhoru Gaon Ka Sapna"*, the tale of a young boy witnessing the transformation of his village under the banner of "development" exposes the epistemic violence of modernity. The construction of a hydro-electric dam is shown not merely as an economic shift but as a symbolic rupture—detaching the people from their rivers, gods, and stories (Ete, 2018).

These texts operate not in opposition to modernity per se, but against its uncritical imposition. They advocate for a relational modernity—one that acknowledges indigenous agency and cultural continuity.

Literary Landscapes: Representing Tradition in Modern Forms

In the indigenous Hindi literature emerging from Arunachal Pradesh, the notion of “tradition” is not a static inheritance but a dynamic force—interwoven with the lived experiences, ritual practices, and environmental consciousness of tribal communities. Rather than being relegated to the past, tradition is reanimated through literary devices that evoke the oral, the sacred, and the

communal. Writers from the region employ a repertoire of folkloric forms—ancestral myths, tribal songs, communal rituals, and memoryscapes—to assert the validity and vitality of indigenous epistemologies in the face of accelerating modernisation.

Tani Talom's widely regarded poem *Bana Ka Raag* serves as an evocative entry point into this discourse. The poem resounds with the echoes of a deeply ingrained tribal cosmology, wherein the forest is not merely a backdrop to human activity but a sentient, maternal entity. Talom does not anthropomorphise nature in a romantic sense; rather, he restores its ontological status as a being-within-being—alive, divine, and agential. The term “raag” in the title resonates both musically and spiritually, signalling not only a tune but an elemental mood that binds the tribal subject with the wilderness in a relation of kinship and reverence. The forest, in this context, is a symbolic extension of the self, inseparable from the community's rituals, taboos, and oral histories (Talom, 2016). The poetics of the poem thus transcends aesthetic beauty and becomes a political act—asserting the forest as a sovereign space against the extractivist logic of developmentalism.

This sensibility is echoed, albeit in a different register, in Gomia Ete's poignant short story *Dhoru Gaon Ka Sapna*. The story traces the gradual transformation of a remote village through the eyes of a young boy, whose dreams of an idyllic future are soon clouded by the spectre of "development." The construction of a hydroelectric dam—framed as a mark of progress by external agents—ushers in not just environmental dislocation, but cultural disintegration. The sacred river, once a source of livelihood and legend, becomes a fenced-off zone of technical surveillance. Ete's narrative illuminates the deeper implications of such infrastructural projects, exposing what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak might term "epistemic violence"—a forceful imposition of modernist rationality that erases indigenous modes of knowing and being (Ete, 2018; Spivak, 1994).

Crucially, these literary texts do not reject modernity wholesale. They resist its uncritical importation into contexts where cultural frameworks remain radically different. This resistance is not nostalgic but dialogic. Both Talom and Ete advocate for what can be termed *relational modernity*—a vision of progress that engages with indigenous knowledge systems rather than overriding them. Such a vision underscores the importance of cultural continuity, where modern technologies and indigenous traditions co-exist in mutual respect rather than hierarchical antagonism.

This hybrid narrative strategy aligns with Homi K. Bhabha's theorisation of "cultural hybridity," where the interstitial space between coloniser and colonised becomes a site of negotiation rather than subordination (Bhabha, 1994). In the works of contemporary tribal writers from Arunachal Pradesh, this hybridity is manifested not through passive assimilation but through conscious refashioning. The narratives are deeply aware of their intertextuality with orality and their role in preserving endangered linguistic and ecological worlds.

Further examples strengthen this observation. For instance, in Duyu Peña's lyrical prose poem *Apne Aadmi Ki Yaad*, the lament of an elder remembering lost tribal rituals is juxtaposed against the advent of mobile towers and television sets. What emerges is not a linear tale of loss but a layered account of selective retention and reinvention. Traditional practices are not museumised but creatively repurposed. Peña draws on ancestral idioms while adapting his narrative for a contemporary readership. His work serves as a bridge between generations, acting as a literary morung—a space of intergenerational learning.

Similarly, in Loma Tado's *Chalo Gaon Laut Chalein*, the journey motif is inverted: the protagonist, a bureaucrat stationed in a metropolitan city, returns to his ancestral village not out of necessity but a longing for rootedness. The tale does not demonise the city, nor does it idealise the village. Instead, it draws attention to the subtle reconstitution of identity when one carries tribal memory into urban life. Tado's story is emblematic of what Arjun Appadurai describes as "the capacity to aspire" within the framework of cultural traditions (Appadurai, 2004). The protagonist's aspiration is not to escape the village but to reclaim it on his own terms.

Another notable trend in such literature is the prominence of gendered perspectives in preserving tradition. Women, often portrayed as custodians of ritual knowledge and oral lore, are given voice and agency. In Seno Moyong's *Nadi Ki Beti*, the central female character, Amoya, becomes a metaphorical river herself—fluid yet grounded. Her refusal to marry a settler-engineer symbolises a broader refusal to capitulate to modernity's allure without negotiation. Moyong's work brings to the fore the intersections of gender, ecology, and resistance—complicating the notion of tradition as patriarchal or regressive.

Moreover, the language of these texts itself becomes a site of resistance. By choosing to write in Hindi—albeit infused with tribal syntax, idioms, and proverbs—the authors challenge both the linguistic hegemony of dominant Hindi literature and the marginalisation of tribal tongues. This translational act is not a compromise but a strategy of visibility. It allows tribal stories to reach a wider audience while retaining their unique semantic texture. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has argued,

the politics of language is central to decolonising the mind (Ngũgĩ, 1986). The literature of Arunachal Pradesh's Hindi writers subtly enacts this decolonisation.

Lastly, these works are in active conversation with ecological thought. Whether depicting sacred groves, river deities, or agricultural festivals, they foreground an ethos of symbiosis. This ecological consciousness is not a modern addition but a cultural constant, resonant with the tribal worldview that sees no dichotomy between nature and culture. The forest, river, and sky are not resources to be exploited but relatives to be honoured. The literature thus becomes a vehicle for what Vandana Shiva calls "earth democracy"—a vision of participatory coexistence and ecological justice (Shiva, 2005).

In sum, indigenous Hindi literature from Arunachal Pradesh reclaims tradition not as a relic but as a reservoir of wisdom. Through nuanced portrayals of landscape, ritual, memory, and resistance, these texts challenge the teleology of modernity and offer alternative blueprints for progress. Writers like Talom, Ete, Penya, Tado, and Moyong illuminate the possibility of literary modernism that is not derivative but dialogic—rooted in place, yet open to the world. Their work invites us to rethink modernity as a plural, porous process, capable of accommodating the many ways of being that define India's tribal frontiers.

Gender, Land, and Cosmology

The intersectionality of gender, land, and cosmology in indigenous Hindi literature from Arunachal Pradesh opens a nuanced interpretive space, where tradition is neither passively inherited nor monolithically structured, but actively negotiated through complex, embodied experiences. The literary works emanating from this region do not view gender as a secondary social concern but treat it as intrinsic to the articulation of identity, memory, and ecology. In such representations, tribal women are neither silent figures nor archetypes; they are, rather, cultural interlocutors who transmit, question, and transform traditions through everyday acts of resilience, storytelling, and ritual participation.

Malini Tayeng's poem *Aai Ki Kahani* ("The Mother's Tale") emerges as a deeply evocative testimony to this layered role of the tribal woman. The mother figure in the poem is not merely a familial caretaker; she is cast as a guardian of the community's oral heritage and its ecological wisdom. Her tale is not framed within the binaries of public and private, or sacred and profane, but unfolds as a continuum where lullabies become legends, domestic routines morph into mythic enactments, and speech carries the weight of generational memory. Tayeng crafts the

mother as a mnemonic device—a living archive that carries in her voice the cartography of the tribe’s cosmological and historical imagination (Tayeng, 2019).

However, the poem also subtly critiques the gendered exclusions entrenched in both traditional patriarchy and modern bureaucratic institutions. In one powerful stanza, the mother is seen weaving bamboo baskets—a symbolic act of nourishment and craftsmanship—only to be told by a local official that such work has “no economic value.” Here, Tayeng exposes the epistemic gap between indigenous value systems and the commodified logic of modern governance. The traditional act of weaving is not simply artisanal; it encodes rituals, environmental knowledge, and gendered labour ethics that are rendered invisible by developmental discourses. The poem’s quiet insistence on the mother’s cultural labour offers a feminist intervention into how knowledge, land, and history are curated and controlled.

This feminist lens is further reinforced through the motif of resistance. While the mother transmits ancestral knowledge, she also subtly disrupts it. Her narratives are not mechanical recitations of inherited lore; they are interpolations, adaptations, and at times, rejections of customs that perpetuate gender hierarchies. In doing so, Tayeng offers a postcolonial feminist perspective reminiscent of Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s assertion that “third-world women” are not passive victims but active agents shaping their own narratives within culturally specific contexts (Mohanty, 2003). The mother in *Aai Ki Kahani* is such an agent—both a custodian and a critic of tradition.

This gendered engagement with tradition also reveals itself in the terrain of tribal cosmology. Often rooted in cyclical time, animism, and seasonal attunement, indigenous cosmology presents a radical departure from the linear, extractionist temporality of capitalist modernity. In Soki Puro’s acclaimed play *Ritu Chakra* (“Seasonal Cycle”), this dissonance becomes the central dramatic conflict. The play revolves around a young tribal man, Rana, who takes up a government job in the city, thereby disengaging from the seasonal rituals and agrarian duties of his village. Over time, his inability to align with the cycles of planting, harvesting, and communal festivals leads to a growing sense of psychological and spiritual alienation.

Puro deftly uses the device of the disrupted *ritu chakra* (seasonal cycle) as a metaphor for a broader ontological dislocation. The protagonist’s severance from the land and its cosmological rhythm becomes a metaphor for the larger fracture experienced by indigenous communities as they are thrust into the machinery of modern statehood and capitalist labour. Time, in the tribal worldview, is not a commodity but a lived experience—marked by the monsoon’s arrival, the

moon's waxing, the blooming of orchids, and the rituals performed in their honour. When Rana loses touch with this temporal system, he also loses his ontological bearings. His psychological breakdown is not individual but emblematic of a cultural trauma imposed by external models of life and work (Puro, 2020).

What is particularly compelling in *Ritu Chakra* is the way Puro connects the protagonist's inner fragmentation with a collective loss. The village elders, unable to perform rituals due to the absence of younger participants, lament the "dying songs" and "silenced drums." These are not sentimental laments but profound articulations of epistemicide—the death of knowledge systems. The play resonates with the warnings of scholars such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who argue that modernity often commits "cognitive injustice" by privileging one form of knowing over others (Santos, 2007). In this context, tribal cosmology is not a mythic residue but an alternative epistemology—one that is cyclical, relational, and rooted in environmental harmony.

Land, in this literary landscape, is not abstract territory but sensuous geography. It holds memory, ritual, and affect. In both Tayeng's and Puro's texts, the land is feminised not in a reductive way but in a sacred, generative sense. The earth is addressed as *mata* (mother), not as property to be owned but as kin to be honoured. This worldview contests the extractivist ethos of modern land acquisition, where forests, rivers, and hills are reduced to economic metrics. Instead, the land in these writings is active—it listens, it mourns, it retaliates. The protagonist in *Ritu Chakra*, when he returns to his ancestral home, is haunted by dreams of a "weeping hill" and a "withered forest"—powerful images that embody the landscape's response to cultural abandonment.

The significance of gender in negotiating this ecological loss cannot be overstated. Women, especially in tribal societies, often serve as ritual specialists, herbal healers, and oral historians. Their roles are deeply tied to the cosmological understanding of time and land. The literary depiction of women as cosmological mediators reclaims their centrality in shaping not only cultural but environmental sustainability. In *Aai Ki Kahani*, the mother's stories begin and end with references to rain, seed, and soil. She becomes a human conduit through which land speaks.

These representations challenge Western ecofeminist binaries that too easily associate women with nature and men with culture. Instead, they offer a more layered indigenous feminism where both men and women are entangled in the cycles of the earth, albeit in gendered ways shaped by custom and cosmology. It is not enough, these texts seem to suggest, to acknowledge the

environmental crisis; one must also listen to the gendered voices who have lived in ecological intimacy for generations.

In conclusion, the intersection of gender, land, and cosmology in Arunachali Hindi literature presents a rich terrain for critical engagement. Through works like Tayeng's *Aai Ki Kahani* and Puro's *Ritu Chakra*, we see how tradition is not preserved in ossified form but reinterpreted through the lived experiences of women and men negotiating cultural change. These texts foreground indigenous epistemologies that challenge the epistemic violence of modern temporality and capitalist development, while asserting the indispensable role of women as narrators, stewards, and transformers of culture. In their hands, tradition becomes not a cage but a canvas—painted with memory, struggle, and cyclical hope.

Conclusion: Towards a Decolonial Literary Praxis

The indigenous Hindi literature of Arunachal Pradesh presents a rich, nuanced corpus that resists simplistic binaries of tradition versus modernity, past versus progress, or oral versus textual. Rather than conforming to pre-defined literary categories or paradigms, it forges a critical space of cultural negotiation—where indigenous knowledge systems, ritual practices, environmental ethics, and collective memory are re-asserted, re-interpreted, and re-inscribed through the act of storytelling. These texts speak not from the margins but from complex interstices, challenging dominant frameworks of literary modernity, nationhood, and epistemology.

Rather than retreating into a static traditionalism or embracing modernity in uncritical ways, the literature foregrounds the lived reality of tribal communities negotiating change while honouring their cultural roots. This is not a nostalgic return to a mythologised past, nor is it a linear narrative of assimilation into the globalised world. Instead, it is an ongoing, ethical, and aesthetic engagement with history, identity, and place. Whether through the voice of a mother weaving memory into bamboo in *Aai Ki Kahani*, or the psychic rupture experienced by an uprooted protagonist in *Ritu Chakra*, these narratives capture the texture of indigenous life-worlds as evolving, dialogic, and resilient.

Postcolonial theory undoubtedly provides valuable tools for interpreting such texts, especially through its critiques of colonial epistemology, representation, and subjectivity. Yet, as the literary works of Arunachal Pradesh demonstrate, postcolonial theory itself must be stretched and re-situated to account for the distinct ontologies and cosmologies of tribal societies. The

frameworks developed to analyse colonial relations in urban or elite contexts often overlook the unique historical trajectories and knowledge systems of indigenous communities. Here, Walter Mignolo's call for a "pluriversal" epistemology becomes particularly pertinent. Mignolo argues that rather than assuming a universal mode of knowledge or critique, we must attend to the "coexistence of multiple epistemologies"—each grounded in different histories, geographies, and cosmologies (Mignolo, 2009, p. 163).

Indeed, the literature discussed throughout this paper is not merely reflective of indigenous life; it is *generative*—it creates new ontologies, new idioms of agency, and new ways of relating to the land, the self, and the community. Through the hybrid use of Hindi interlaced with tribal idioms, the texts perform acts of linguistic resistance and cultural assertion. Through their cyclical narratives and gendered cosmologies, they offer alternatives to linear, extractivist models of development. Through their portrayal of ritual, memory, and landscape, they recuperate a relational mode of being that challenges the atomism of neoliberal modernity.

In this regard, these literary works enact a *decolonial literary praxis*—not only by resisting colonial residues but by building literary futures rooted in indigenous ethics and plural epistemologies. They affirm the dignity of tribal lives not as romanticised relics but as vital, ethical engagements with a fractured but possible world. Such a praxis calls upon readers, scholars, and institutions alike to de-centre the metropolitan canon and listen to the quiet, powerful voices emanating from the forested frontiers of the Indian literary landscape.

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