

Santal Writers in English: Examining Indigenous Discourses of Vulnerability in the Writings of Rejina Marandi and Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar

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Abstract

This paper examines the evolving landscape of Indigenous literary expression through the select works of Santal writers including Rejina Marandi and Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar. By analyzing Marandi's *Becoming Me* (2014) and Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015) the paper foregrounds how these texts reveal the intersection of gender, marginality, and socio-political oppression within Indigenous lived realities. Through a critical engagement with postcolonial Indigenous theory, the study examines how vulnerability emerges not merely as a marker of suffering but also as a powerful mode of resistance and cultural assertion. The paper argues that their works offer vital insights into the politics of voice, authenticity, and survival in contemporary India. Despite this, the research contributes to broader conversations on Santal's contemporary crises and the politics of representation in Indigenous literatures of South Asian writings.

Introduction

The Santal community is one of India's largest Indigenous groups and has historically resisted land encroachment, forced displacement, women exploitation, and exploitative forms of capitalist development. Such struggles continue in contemporary India, particularly in response to large-scale mining projects such as the Deucha-Pachami coal block in West Bengal and the Hasdeo Arand coal mining project in Chhattisgarh (Kumar 2022: 45). Supported by state-corporate alliances, these projects threaten not only forest ecosystems but also the socio-cultural foundations of Adivasi life (Dutta 2021: 29). In Deucha-Pachami, Santal women have played a leading role in resisting displacement, highlighting the dimensions of ecological violence (Roy 2019: 58). Similarly, resistance in Hasdeo Arand challenges dominant notions of development based on extractivist policies and emphasizes Indigenous relationships with land, forest, and community (Banerjee 2021: 37). These struggles reveal that Santal resistance is both a defence of ancestral land and a critique of the structural violence embedded in contemporary development paradigms (Devy 2011: 32).

The emergence of Indigenous voices in English-language literature has created new possibilities for engaging with questions of representation, identity, and resistance (Smith 2012: 22). Among these voices, Rejina Marandi and Hansda Sowvendra

Shekhar have established an important place within contemporary Indian literary discourse. Their writings foreground the lived realities of the Santal community and articulate narratives of resilience, marginalization, and resistance (Deo 2019: 45). This paper examines how Marandi and Shekhar address contemporary Santal concerns and contribute to broader discussions of tribal, ecological, and cultural expression.

Tribal self-representation remains a contested issue, particularly because Indigenous communities have long been silenced or misrepresented within colonial and postcolonial literary traditions (Spivak 1988: 66). By writing in English, Marandi and Shekhar intervene in dominant literary spaces and assert narrative agency from the margins (Kumar 2022: 18). Their works document the socio-political and cultural realities of Santal life while challenging romanticized and homogenizing representations of tribal identity (Xaxa 2008: 103).

Marandi's *Becoming Me* (2014) offers a semi-autobiographical account of Santal marginalization within both tribal and non-tribal social structures. Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015), by contrast, explores themes of sexual politics, economic dispossession, ecological destruction, and cultural erasure. Together, these texts reveal how powerlessness operates through personal, communal, and structural experiences, while also illuminating diverse forms of resistance (Simpson 2014:38).

Writing from within the Santal community, both authors critically engage with its socio-political realities. Their narratives reveal that helplessness is not merely a condition of suffering but also a site of political agency and cultural assertion (Simpson 2014: 40). Their use of English is not a departure from Indigenous knowledge systems but a strategic means of inscribing Santal voices within wider literary and academic conversations (Grande 2004: 89). Consequently, these texts function as counter-narratives that resist erasure, challenge male dominance, and confront systems of domination including state violence, extractive capitalism, and caste hegemony (Chakrabarty 2000: 58).

The writings of Marandi and Shekhar also contribute to larger debates on decolonization and epistemic justice. By foregrounding displacement, violence, and identity politics, they underscore the need to recognize tribal epistemologies and challenge the epistemic violence perpetuated by state, caste, and capitalist structures (Tuck and Yang 2012: 2; Grande 2004: 71; Chakrabarty 2000: 53).

A productive framework for reading these texts is offered by Sofia Ahlberg's concept of crisis. Ahlberg proposes a mode of slow and affective reading that remains attentive to uncertainty and discomfort rather than seeking closure (Ahlberg 2021:12). This perspective is particularly relevant to *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, which refuses to resolve the crises of dispossession, ecological degradation, and cultural humiliation. Instead, Shekhar situates readers within their ongoing effects, foregrounding the emotional and political dimensions of Indigenous precarity. Similarly, Marandi's work explores everyday experiences of helplessness through themes of women labour, ecological fragility, and cultural erasure. These narratives function as records of intersecting social and ecological crises while also creating spaces for alternative forms of care, resistance, and relationality.

Postcolonial discussions of subalternity provide another useful framework for understanding Santal writing in English. As pioneering Santal authors, Marandi and

Shekhar make Indigenous lives visible within literary spaces that have historically marginalized tribal voices. Their narratives transform storytelling into a form of ethical witnessing. Shekhar exposes the structural violence associated with development and displacement, while Marandi highlights the interconnected realities of gender exploitation and ecological proneness. Rather than merely documenting suffering, both writers use literature as a political tool to challenge dominant narratives and reclaim Indigenous agency.

The ecological concerns central to these texts can also be read through contemporary environmental criticism. Shekhar's work portrays the loss of land, identity, and cultural continuity caused by extractive industries and state-supported development projects. His stories expose how alliances between industrial interests and political power generate environmental degradation while disproportionately affecting Indigenous communities. This ecological consciousness resonates with Amitav Ghosh's critique of the failure of literary imagination to adequately address climate catastrophe (Ghosh 2016: 30). Both Marandi and Shekhar present environmental disruption as a lived reality rather than an abstract crisis. Their narratives demonstrate how ecological perilousness is inseparable from political economy, colonial legacies, and Indigenous struggles for survival (Mukherjee 2010: 77).

The writings of Marandi and Shekhar also engage with questions of gender and social marginalization. Their representations of Santal women invite comparison with texts such as Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* (2000) and Bama's *Karukku* (1992), both of which foreground experiences excluded from dominant historical and social narratives. Like these works, Santal writing in English emphasizes memory, testimony, and storytelling as modes of survival and resistance. Together, these texts reveal how powerlessness is shaped by intersecting structures of gender, caste, indigeneity, and history.

For the Santals, land is not merely a material resource but the foundation of cultural, spiritual, and social life. The experiences of displacement represented in *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* illustrate how the loss of land threatens collective identity and cultural continuity. Such concerns provide an important framework for reading the works of Marandi and Shekhar, where silence, erasure, and suffering become narrative strategies for exposing structural violence. Their texts transform individual experiences into collective testimony and establish Santal writing in English as a significant mode of resistance, cultural preservation, and Indigenous self-representation.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative and interpretive research methodology grounded in literary analysis, postcolonial Indigenous theory, and eco-critical frameworks. The research focuses on close textual readings of selected English-language works by Santal writers, particularly *Becoming Me* (2014) by Rejina Marandi and *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015) by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar. These texts are examined for their representations of powerlessness, resistance, and identity within the context of Indigenous lifeworlds threatened by capitalist expansion and state violence.

In addition to literary texts, the study draws upon secondary sources such as peer-reviewed journal articles, edited volumes, and theoretical monographs that engage with

South Asian ecocriticism, Indigenous studies, and women resistance. The research is further enriched by incorporating documented reports, journalistic sources, and ethnographic accounts relating to the Deucha-Pachami and Hasdeo incidents, which serve as critical case studies for understanding contemporary tribal resistance movements in India.

Moreover, the study integrates discourse analysis to interpret the socio-political dimensions of the narratives and intertextual analysis to connect the literary representations with broader Indigenous struggles. Concepts from scholars such as Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh, and Arundhati Roy are used to frame the crisis of environmental dispossession and its entanglement with gender, development, and identity. This interdisciplinary approach enables the research to situate Santal writings in English within a wider matrix of South Asian vulnerability studies. It focuses on how literature acts as both a site of cultural memory and a tool of resistance against hegemonic forces.

Land as resistance: narrating displacement and dispossession

The long history of Santal resistance to land dispossession started with the Santal Hul of 1855-56. The struggle for land remains central to the Santal community's resistance against capitalist development and state encroachment. Baba Tilka Majhi, Sidhu Murmu, Kanhu Murmu, Chand Murmu, Bhairav Murmu, Phoolo Murmu and Jhano Murmu are the notable Santal freedom fighters who fought against colonial land oppression. In *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015), Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar depicts characters whose relationship with land is not just economic but spiritual and ancestral. The titular story's protagonist, Mangal Murmu, refuses to dance for dignitaries at a mining inauguration, declaring, 'We have nowhere to go, nowhere to grow our crops. How can this power plant be good for us? And can we Adivasis dance and be happy?' (Shekhar 2015: 187). The narrator Mangal Murmu refuses to perform for dignitaries inaugurating a thermal power plant built on lands taken from Santals. He positions their dispossession as part of a broader capitalist development model that uproots communities and erodes cultural life. This fictional act mirrors real-world opposition at Deucha-Pachami, where Santals have resisted the government's attempt to displace them for coal mining projects. Similarly, the Hasdeo Arand conflict in Chhattisgarh illustrates how Indigenous communities are resisting environmental destruction in defense of sacred forests. These narratives expose the violence embedded in 'development' projects. It treats tribal lands as extractive zones and ignores the tribal cosmology that sees land as kin (Tsing 2005: 6).

Indra Munshi's intervention in *The Adivasi Question: Issues of Land, Forest and Livelihood* (2012) provides a sociological anchor for reading land as a site of resistance in the writings of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar and Rejina Marandi. Munshi foregrounds the intimate ties between territory, identity, and Indigenous continuity. This perspective resonates strongly with Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*. In the text dispossession unfolds as an ongoing process rather than a single rupture. It is visible in narratives of forced displacement, cultural humiliation, and the erosion of subsistence practices under state-led industrial projects. The main story, 'Adivasi will not Dance,' the character, Mangal Murmu, declines to dance in front of the President Pranab

Mukherjee's 2013 visit to Jharkhand to launch an ambitious thermal plant project. The project hinted that Santals would be uprooted from their lands and become 'homeless'. Mangal Murmu declares, 'We Adivasis will not dance anymore – what is wrong with that? We are like toys – someone presses our 'ON' button, or turns a key in our backsides, and we Santhals start beating rhythms on our tamak and tumdak, or start blowing tunes on our tiriyo while someone snatches away our very dancing grounds. Tell me, am I wrong?' (Shekhar 2015: 170).

Similarly, Rejina Marandi's *Becoming Me* (2014) articulates land as memory, ancestry, and survival. It demonstrates how Santal women's bodies and labour are disproportionately affected by communal riots and land displacement. The novel aims to depict the collective Santal worries and experiences, particularly in Assam. The Bodo-Adivasi ethnic conflicts that occurred in the BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Area District) region of Lower Assam during 1993 and 1994 are mentioned at the beginning of the novel. Over time, hundreds of thousands of Santals and Bodo people were displaced from their homes as a result of these ethnic conflicts, which also claimed thousands of Santhal lives. Marandi crafts the novel's plot around these repeated fights, testifying to the atrocities, and the numerous forms of violence Santals are exposed to. The brutality and horror of the violence against the Santals in the four districts of Bodoland and other tribal-dominated territories is depicted in the novel. Together, these texts narrate land not only as a material loss but as a contested terrain of resistance. Both these texts expose how bureaucratic development regimes perpetuate historical patterns of exclusion. Santal writers like Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar and Rejina Marandi, writing for the representations of present Santal realities, struggle, and survival. Their narratives expose displacement as a continuous and structural condition produced by colonial land alienation. It has been sustaining through postcolonial regimes of capitalist development. By examining Santal experiences of loss, ecological rupture, and cultural erasure, these texts transform powerlessness into a mode of resistance. Writing in English itself becomes a strategic intervention. It allows Santal voices to contest dominant development discourses and reclaim land as an ethical, cultural, and political claim.

Gendered vulnerability and Santal women's voices

The Santhal women's body has long formed an object of oppression. They are treated as a target of fulfillment. The *dikus* used predatory agencies to pounce in order to satisfy their lust. 'These Santhal girls are cheap...just say a few words in Santali...just say a few words in Santali...buy them some paan...promise them some jalebi...after that they'll let you to do whatever you want with them' (Hembram and Hansdak, 2013: 112). It reflects the stereotypes and sexual exploitation faced by Santal women at the hands of the *dikus* (non-tribal outsiders). The statement does not represent the reality of Santal women; rather, it exposes the prejudiced and objectifying attitudes through which dominant communities view Indigenous women. The speaker reduces Santal women to objects of sexual gratification and assumes that they can be easily manipulated with small gifts and superficial gestures. This perception arises from colonial and caste-based notions that tribal women are sexually available, socially inferior, and lacking agency.

On the other hand, Rejina Marandi's *Becoming Me* (2014) offers an intimate exploration of Santal women within Santal society. Liya's journey toward selfhood is marked by systemic silencing, poverty, and patriarchal oppression. Yet, powerlessness becomes a mode of self-awareness and resistance. This aligns with Judith Butler's formulation of 'precarity' as a politically charged condition that demands visibility and solidarity (Butler 2004: 43). In real-life protests such as those at Deucha-Pachami, Santal women have stood at the forefront, asserting both their right to land and to bodily autonomy. Santal women such as Chami Murmu and JamunaTudu have emerged as powerful symbols of grassroots environmental activism against ecological threat in eastern India. They both mobilized village women to protect forests from illegal logging, asserting collective stewardship over ancestral land. Their activism presenting them as agents of socio-ecological defense. Marandi's literary portrayal and these on-the-ground resistances together emphasize that Santal women bodies and voices are critical sites of both exploitation and empowerment.

Santal women occupy a complex position at the crossroad of gender, indigeneity, and marginality. In Rejina Marandi's *Becoming Me* and Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, the representation of Santal women is not confined to narratives of victimhood. Instead, they represent through nuanced portrayals of lived resistance in the face of structural violence. These texts highlight how Santal women experience multilayered forms of powerlessness. And it stems from patriarchal norms, developmental displacement, and ecological degradation.

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* is a crucial text to understand gender and identity of the Santals. Shekhar's portrayal of Talamai Kisku, Subhashini, Gita, Jharna-di, Sona, Baso-jhi, Panmuni-jhi, Sulochona, Mugli, and Mohini by patriarchal structures. Her displacement caused by industrial and state-led interventions in Santal regions (Shekhar 2015: 79). Talamai and other female characters thus emerge at the intersection of gender, ecology, and political economy. It reflects the 'accumulation by dispossession', where Santal women bear a disproportionate burden due to their intimate dependence on land, forests, and subsistence-based livelihoods.

Becoming Me (2014) shows where the protagonist's struggles for autonomy are shaped by both her gender and her indigeneity. The protagonist Liya's lived and embodied experience of violence affects her social interactions, behavior, and connections with others. The dehumanizing experiences such as seeking safety in a cow shed, spending the night with the animals, eating in the midst of the intolerable stink of cow pee, and being treated like an animal at the refugee camp, are embodied experiences that have a significant psychological impact. These terrible incidents are still deeply ingrained in her mind and form an essential aspect of her life as a Santal girl. Liya's personal trauma, aspirations, and silences are positioned within a broader critique of the social and environmental structures. The cultural and ecological degradation of tribal lands, communal riots, and patriarchal stereotype shape the feminine contours of her existence.

Through the intersectional and decolonial lenses these two texts reveal that women dehumanization in the Santal contexts is neither ahistorical nor apolitical. Rather, it is embedded in the legacies of colonial land dispossession. It is reinforced by neoliberal

developmental agendas. It is actively contested by the narrative agency of Santal women both in fiction and in lived resistance.

Cultural survival of the Santals in the face of bureaucratic developments

In *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar presents religious conversion to Christianity among the Santals. They chose to convert themselves for education of their children. But it led to forget their own cultural identity. They started worshipping Jesus and Mariam. The Santal names Hopna, Som, and Singrai changed into 'David', 'Mikail', and 'Kiristofer' (Shekhar 2015: 172). Shekhar's fiction frequently returns to the question of how cultural memory survives amid aggressive capitalist development. In stories like 'November is the Month of Migrations', the Santal community's seasonal labour migrations are depicted not just as economic necessity but as cultural disintegration. The Santals traditions erode under the weight of survival (Shekhar 173). The Hasdeo Arand conflict similarly shows how mining destroys forests. It also threatens the intangible heritage of storytelling, worship, and ecological knowledge embedded in Santal Indigenous life. As Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee argues, postcolonial ecocriticism must examine the 'network of human and non-human material existence' under capital's regime (Mukherjee 2010:15). The Santal narratives foreground this network. It also illustrates that cultural resistance is inseparable from environmental and economic survival.

Contemporary tribal literature in India frequently interrogates the developmental paradigm that threatens the cultural survival of Indigenous communities. In the face of rapid industrialization, mining, and infrastructural expansion, tribal ways of life are increasingly marginalised. It often depicted as impediments to national progress. The state-led developmental efforts such as dams, mining, and industrial projects that have historically resulted in forced displacement, cultural erosion, and social disempowerment of tribal groups. This process is not only economic but also epistemic. And, tribal worldviews are sidelined in favor of modernist narratives of growth and civilization.

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* starkly critiques this developmentalist violence. He shows through its portrayal of Santal communities in Jharkhand, whose land and dignity are sacrificed for so-called progress. In the titular story 'The Adivasi Will Not Dance,' the protagonist Mangal Murmu resists dancing before political dignitaries. The capitalists are inaugurating a coal project, signaling a rejection of the spectacle that masks dispossession. His refusal is emblematic of cultural resistance. It is a refusal to celebrate a development that leads to cultural erasure and environmental devastation (Shekhar: 41). This literary moment directly corresponds with the observation that development has often come at the cost of tribal culture. The capitalistic development always threatens traditional knowledge systems of the Santals and hampers ecological symbiosis.

Similarly, Rejina Marandi's *Becoming Me* (2014) addresses cultural survival from the lens of gender and individual identity within a tribal framework. The protagonist Liya navigates the tension between education, personal autonomy, and tribal expectations. She reflects the broader struggles faced by Santal youths caught between tradition and modernity. Therefore, Liya's character bears witness to the collective

experience of extreme helplessness and crisis that tear apart the ‘human’ status from a significant portion of the Santal population. It is turning them into a subaltern category devoid of the basic conditions, rights, and dignity necessary to shape the concept of the human being. The fifth chapter ‘Layers of Identity’ in which Liya examines how the Santals there are more eager to act and behave like the *dikus* or the mainstream majority. The Santals express an innate desire to be assimilated with them, rather than anxious or possessive about their identity. The sixth chapter ‘New City, Old Aspirations’, Liya experienced cultural violence, which leaves her open to racist insults and humiliation. Due to her incapacity to speak Assamese at her college, she has frequently been called ‘bagania’, a mocking name used to describe members of the teagarden tribes. She has also been made fun of and ridiculed by her teacher and fellow students.

Marandi’s narrative does not reject development policies. She questions the ways in which it often alienates tribal individuals from their roots. The educational journey of Liya is empowering. On the other hand, she involves a cultural dislocation. Her character explores Santal integration into the mainstream often resulting in loss of language, tradition, and ecological ethos. Both Marandi and Shekhar highlighted that cultural survival is not static preservation but active negotiation. Their narratives portray contemporary concerns of the Santal individuals and community. The Santals adapt, resist, and reinterpret their identities within changing socio-political landscapes. For instance, Santal women characters in both texts negotiate their roles within patriarchal and capitalist structures. They reclaim their voices amidst systematic marginalization. This dynamic reflects cultural assertion. The Santal community mobilise folklore, memory, and everyday practices as tools of resilience and continuity.

Ultimately, the confrontation between development and Santal cultural survival is about land, memory, religion, and livelihoods. ‘We are losing our Sarna faith, our identities, and our roots. We are becoming people from nowhere’ (Shekhar 2015: 173). They urge for tribal epistemologies, worldviews, and belonging. Literary counter-narratives of Marandi and Shekhar assert Santal subjectivities from the margins of the Indian nation-state. Their narratives emphasise that true development must be inclusive and accountable to the cultural autonomy of the Santal peoples.

Literary resistance and the politics of representation

The Santal community has never had a more extensive textual representation of their women in English. Marandi and Hansda are writing in English to connect out to the wide network of readership. In an interview, Hansda says, ‘I think storytelling is often an assertion of one's identity. This assertion can either be in-your-face or subtle, but in whichever way it is done, this assertion is a good thing’ (Meghani 2019: 1). They both reclaim narrative authority by telling Santal stories in English. It is a language that historically associated with colonial domination. This act of writing itself becomes resistance. They challenge mainstream stereotypical and anthropological portrayals of tribals. Through fragmented narration, interior monologue, and linguistic hybridity, these texts resist narrative closure. They mirror the ongoing struggles of the Santal community. Their literary interventions highlight the crisis of the present Santals, and they also create space for Santal Indigenous future rooted in dignity, land, and shared memory.

Contemporary Santal writers in Indian tribal literature act as agents of literary resistance against dominant cultural narratives and stereotypical representations. Santal writings from West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha highlight rich tradition, social realities, and women's experiences of the Santals. Sadhu Ramchand Murmu's *Sari Dharam Sereng Puthi* (1972), Pandit Raghunath Murmu's *Hor Serenj* (1936), Doman Hansda's *Galang Gele* (1956), Raghunath Tudu's *Edre Arang* (1963) and Haraprasad Murmu's *Jiyar Jharna* (1991) are notable writings in Santali literature. Tribal literature challenges the centuries-old marginalisation and distortion of tribal voices by engaging with the lived realities and cultural consciousness of Indigenous peoples (Sinha 2022: 8). This form of resistance is not only political but deeply epistemological. It attempts to rewrite history and reclaim narrative agency. It also subverts sexotized representations perpetuated by mainstream Indian literary traditions. Shekhar's stories through a vivid depiction of Santhal women dismantle long-held stereotypes about passivity and marginal contribution in tribal literary discourse (Ghosh and Challa 2022: 96). The lived experiences, agency, and internal conflicts of Santal women resists colonial and mainstream literary paradigms. They also rewrite the very framework through which Santal identity is understood and portrayed.

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* serves as a vivid illustration of this resistance. The text critiques the appropriation of Santal culture as folklore. It systematically reveals the violence of neglect and exploitation that Santals face in modern India. Characters like Mangal Murmu, who refuses to perform for the political elite. He becomes the symbol of a tribal consciousness that refuses to be commodified or silenced. Shekhar's narrative strategy challenges state-led multiculturalism that tolerates tribal identity only as a performative gesture. Conversely, systematic commercialization of their culture erodes their material and cultural foundations.

Rejina Marandi's *Becoming Me*, on the other hand, offers a lens to the politics of representation of Santal women in the context of Assam. Marandi's novel does not merely a Santal girl's coming-of-age narrative. Instead, the text situates within a broader critique of patriarchal and cultural expectations. Liya's internal conflict is between asserting her individuality and conforming to communal norms. It mirrors her tension between modernity and tradition, assimilation and authenticity. Tribal writers attempt to evolve literary forms that communicate cultural hybridity without compromising the rootedness of tribal identity (Sinha 2022: 10). Likewise, Marandi's text is quiet yet resolute and engages with these very negotiations through the lens of female subjectivity. Tribal writers are not merely producing ethnographic narratives but are consciously politicizing the act of storytelling as a means of resistance. Both Shekhar and Marandi, through their use of English, reclaim space in the global literary landscape and critique the politics of linguistic hegemony.

In this context, literary resistance becomes a method of decolonisation. These Santal narratives in English resist the idea that tribal communities are passive recipients of modernity or victims of development. Instead, they foreground agency, voice, and survival. Tribal literature is not merely about protest, but about preservation, transformation, and the politics of cultural memory (Sinha 2022: 11). In both *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015) and *Becoming Me* (2014) this resistance manifests

through silence, speech, and subversive narrative structures. Hence, both the texts decenter hegemonic frames and re-center tribal epistemologies.

Conclusion

The literary representations of Santal helplessness in the works of Rejina Marandi and Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar explore the complex realities of Santal life in contemporary India. Through their narratives, both writers highlight the experiences of marginalization, displacement, ecological degradation, and women oppression that shape the lives of the Santal community. Their works challenge dominant cultural narratives and stereotypical representations by presenting Santals, particularly Santal women, as active agents of resistance, survival, and self-articulation.

The analysis of Rejina Marandi's *Becoming Me* (2014) and Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015) demonstrates how literary storytelling becomes a powerful medium for documenting lived experiences and asserting Indigenous perspectives. The Santal voices that have long remained marginalized within mainstream literary and political discourse, Marandi and Shekhar contribute to the visibility and recognition of Santal concerns. Their writings not only expose structures of inequality and exclusion but also affirm the resilience and cultural strength of the community.

Finally, these texts emphasize the significance of Santal writing in English as a mode of cultural expression, resistance, and identity formation. They offer important insights into tribal experiences of powerlessness while contributing to broader discussions on gender, social justice, and Indigenous representation in contemporary Indian literature.

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