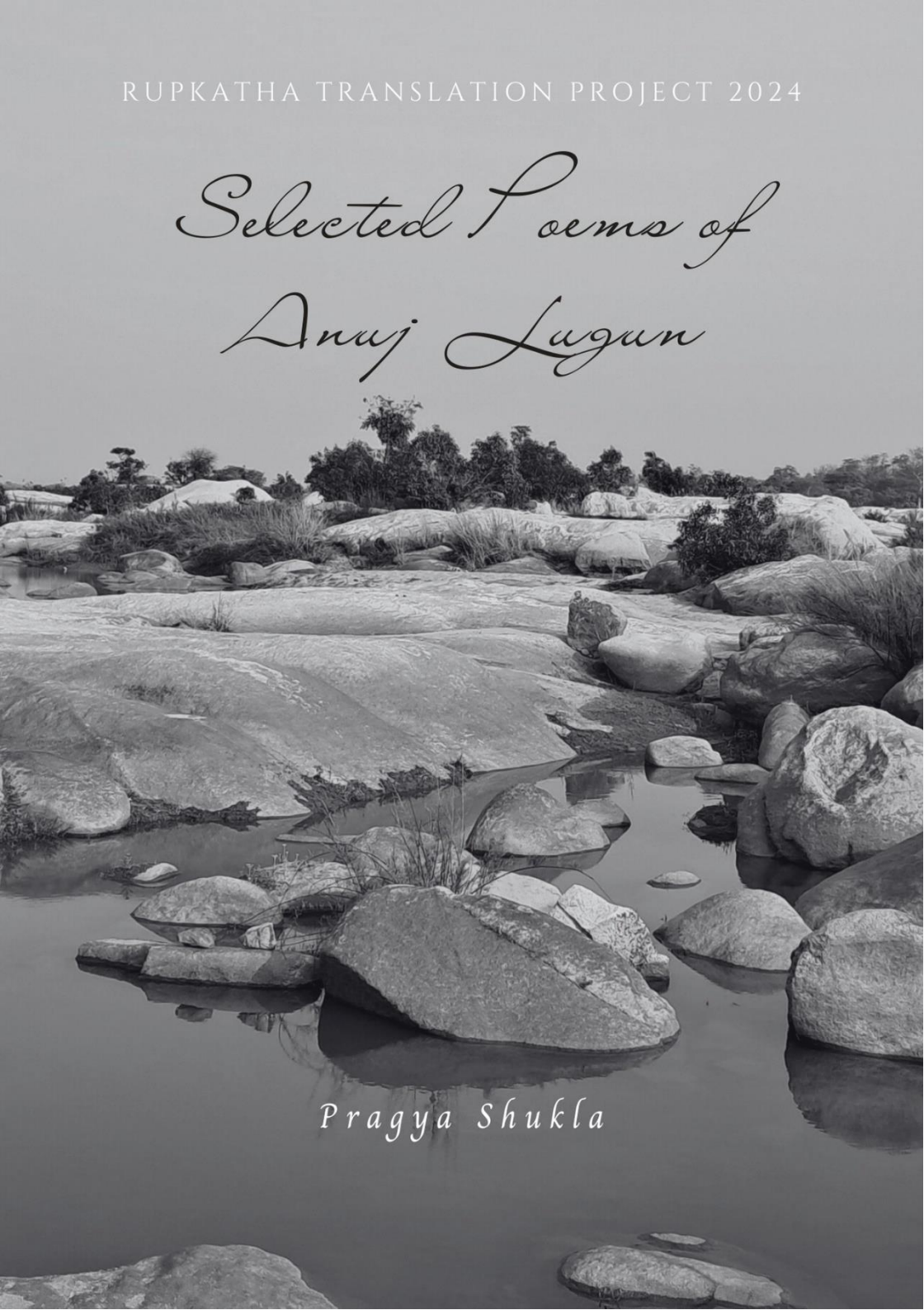


RUPKATHA TRANSLATION PROJECT 2024

*Selected Poems of
Anuj Lagun*

Pragya Shukla



RUPKATHA BOOKS

SELECTED POEMS OF ANUJ LUGUN

Anuj Lugun was born into a Munda family on January 10, 1986, in Jaldega Pahan Toli, Simdega district. He graduated from Ranchi University and pursued his PhD at Banaras Hindu University. He is currently working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Indian Languages at the Central University of South Bihar. Dr Lugun is regarded as a prominent poet who represents tribal concerns among the younger generation. He has received the Savitri Tripathi Award, the Young Award from the Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad in Kolkata, and the Sahitya Akademi Yuva Award in 2019 for his long poem "Bagh Aur Sugna Munda Ki Beti." In addition to poetry, he has written several short stories and published research articles. Email: anujlugun@cub.ac.in

Dr. Pragya Shukla is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English Studies at the Central University of Jharkhand. Her areas of interest include Gender Studies and Tribal Literature. Her doctoral thesis focused on "A Comparative Study of the Fictional Works of Githa Hariharan and Shashi Deshpande." In addition to research papers, she is also involved in translation and writing poetry and short stories. Email: pragya.shukla@cuja.ac.in

‘The lost civilisations of the tribal ancestors come alive in the tribal people’s songs, struggles, and solidarities. They can warn the imperialists about the strength of the marginalised and alert the capitalists about the power of nature. If Anuj Lugun’s poetry is a reclamation of the tribal civilisation, Pragya Shukla’s translation is the re-creation of tribal civilisation in English. This poetry echoes the resurgence of voices that question the elimination of people and the exploitation of nature. It celebrates, but does not exoticise, the resilience that can never be suppressed by any force.’

—K. Suneetha Rani, University of Hyderabad, India

“Flickering signifiers” attract us to look through the fissures of language to glance at the unconscious kaleidoscope. Likewise, poems are catalysts to ignite our interactions to delve into the underlying cosmos. Dr Anuj Lugun’s exquisitely composed poems epitomize such an admirable exploration. Translating these untranslatable messages is an arduous task. Dr Pragya Shukla has amazingly captured the essence of these poems, especially in two aspects: emotional repercussions and philosophical contemplation. “Ma sometimes prepared *Lakhtho* at home”. When they learned about the “borrowed flour/sugar/oil,” “Maa always made home/And never Lakhtho.” The poem strikes the deepest chord of our hearts, with its widening ripples. “Lines” in the map are “drawn by merciless rulers.” Rulers’ insatiable lust for territories bends the upright head of peace, “tilts” the neck of “the globe,” and throws us into contemplation.

—Quan Wang, Beihang University, Beijing, China.

While I cannot comment on translation techniques employed for this particular translation project, I feel privileged to share how this translation resonates with me at the personal, human level. I enjoyed a particular abundance, as poems show humans mixing with the luxuriant environment around them. Each poem appears to end on an inspiring moral note, inviting the reader to reflect and reconsider their own existential path. The poet is obviously preoccupied with what happens around him, as well as with the undeniable imprint left by the past. The melodic line of each poem punctuates the theme selected by the poet, taking the reader further on to the point he/she plunges deeply into this space. Nature is generous and warm, so should people be! The poet is, therefore, not an isolated presence but feels closely linked to those he lives with. I am not far away from Anuj Lugun and Pragya Shukla; I am there with them, touched by their voices, enthusiasm, generosity, and humanity!

—Dana Radler, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania.

RUPKATHA TRANSLATION PROJECT 2024

Selected Poems of Anuj Lugun

Translated by
Pragya Shukla



Rupkatha Books
A Rupkatha Journal Initiative

Selected Poems of Anuj Lugun
Translated by Pragya Shukla

Primarily translated from *Pathalgadhi*, originally published in Hindi by Vani Prakashan, New Delhi, in 2021. Some of the poems have been taken from www.hindwi.org/poets/anuj-lugun

Published under
Rupkatha Translation Project 2024
In collaboration with
Belarusian State Economic University, Belarus
Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania
Siksha 'O' Anusandhan (Deemed to be University), Odisha, India
Université d'Artois, France
Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium
www.rupkatha.com/rtp

Published by
Rupkatha Books
Raghnathganj, Murshidabad, West Bengal, India.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21659/rtp01>

ISBN 978-81-975130-7-7

First published in digital format in India in 2024
Copyright © 2024 Aesthetix Media Services (OPC) Private Limited
Distributed digitally under Creative Commons Noncommercial 4.0
International License

Cover design by Tarun Tapas Mukherjee. Photograph from
Kanhakund (stone-bedded river), Balishankara, Sundargarh, Odisha.

Printed digitally in India by Aesthetix Media Services (OPC) Private
Limited
www.aesthetixms.com
Typeset in Garamond

CONTENTS

- Introduction
- Poet's Preface
- Translator's Preface

Poems

1. Women of Ulugulan	1
2. The Moon Waiting for a Woman	3
3. I Wish to Sing One Last Song for My Land	5
4. World of Hearths	8
5. Preparing Lakhtho at Home	10
6. Should You Decide to Come	11
7. Adivasi	13
8. Their Symbols	14
9. Bhima Koregaon: Khunti	16
10. Bhima Koregaon: History	17
11. Environment	18
12. Woodcutter's Back	19
13. Oxygen	20
14. Our Love	22
15. Mainstream	23
16. Nature	24
17. Globe	25
18. Complacency	26
19. Picture	27
20. Dedicated	29

21. About Jatangi Fields	30
22. Smell of Mahua	31
23. Journey of Love: Rourkela	32
24. Happy Girls	34

INTRODUCTION

We are thrilled to publish our maiden translation work under the Rupkatha Translation Project 2024. This initiative transcends mere linguistic conversion of cultural manuscripts; it involves our conscious approach to dealing with pervasive global challenges associated with human rights, linguistic diversity, cultural dynamics, and preserving indigenous knowledge systems. It is a significant step towards fulfilling the global goals set forth in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Literary translation involves, fundamentally speaking, providing a voice to a complete or partial silence caused by the medium, the politics of silence, and the lack of recognition. Translation has the unique capacity to dismantle the circuits of the centre and expose artifices built as truths.

Dr Pragya Shukla has undertaken a very complex task of translating twenty-four poems written in Hindi by Anuj Lugun about “a civilization of water, forest, and land.” The civilization that Dr Lugun speaks about has been created over a vast space of the Chhotanagpur plateau region of Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand and the western part of West Bengal. The region itself emerged out of cosmic events in the early years of the earth. This big geological drama can still be perceived in the open theatre of nature—rugged hills, tables, swift rivers and waterfalls, red soil, unique flora and fauna. In this primordial landscape, another drama unfolds with the humans occupying their place since time immemorial. The past of the ‘civilization’ can still be perceived in the rock paintings, megaliths, and cupules scattered throughout the region. At the same time, the present tries to keep up the traditions adoringly in the face of death, destruction and development.

In these regions blessed with abundant natural resources, the tale of exploitation began with the enforcement of the Brahminical ideology of segregation and marginalization. This exploitation evolved into a systematic dehumanization and criminalization during the era of British colonialism. Today, this troubling legacy persists as development models implemented post-Independence have continued to perpetuate exploitation and inequality in these lands. Interestingly, *Pathalgadhi*, the original Hindi poetry book, bears a symbolically significant cover by presenting a megalith with inscriptions. The megaliths of the region are

originally silent with no inscriptions. Inscribing the stone artistically on the cover turns out to be a conscious act of reclaiming history.

The struggle never entered the historical record, resulting in prolonged trauma for the Adivasis of the region. These suppressed histories were assimilated in various cultural acts of resistance like the performing arts. Oral and visual in communication, the arts have gone to the collective cultural memory of the Adivasis. Dr Anuj Lugun has drawn on these traditions; with this, his poetry has become polyphonic and multi-layered. Many voices—ancestors, male and female, nature, flora and fauna—speak through his art. The poet collects his materials from deep memory, transmitted orally and kinetically. When he puts them into poetic expressions, they turn into profound poetic messages. In some places, Lugun seems to enter a shamanic trance, uttering words of wisdom unknown to others.

Perhaps because of the profound nature of the messages, the translator felt like “partaking in a sacred act” while translating the poems. Philosophers from Plato to Coleridge talked about the shaping power of imagination, transforming an experience into an understanding. Lugun’s poetry follows the same line of the creative process in transforming into filtered expressions of “human experiences: from the strength of the resilient, the vulnerability of the marginalized, the laughter of the lively, to the despair of the victims.” Lugun’s art also seems to have been influenced by the rhythm of the Adivasi music with all its simplicity, brevity and starkness—sometimes lively and sometimes sombre.

Translation is not merely a linguistic endeavour but a cultural bridge connecting diverse readerships of different cultures in the international context. We hope that the translated poems here will bestow upon the readers a dual gift: the aesthetic pleasure inherent in art and the critical insights into socioeconomic and cultural problems raised by the poet. We believe that the translated works will retain the beauty and meanings of the original works, providing an immersive experience that transcends the mere act of reading.

Dr Swayam Prabha Satpathy
Chief Editor

Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities
Email: chiefeditor@rupkatha.com

POET'S PREFACE

The inspiration for my poems is the Civilization created by the tribal ancestors—a civilization of water, forest, and land. The tribals never adopted the philosophy of subjugating any other living being; rather, they made symbiosis their philosophy of life. Such a philosophy of life in which all living beings of the universe can establish their existence. However, the civilization that created the colonial power of dominance conspired to degrade the tribal society by calling them uncivilized, wild, and barbaric and launched a campaign to capture their resources. The tribal society has continuously tried to preserve its symbiotic civilization by resisting domination.

In today's globalized world, where even the most basic elements of life like air, water, sunlight, and soil are commodified, the tribal society is waging a battle to safeguard them, recognizing them as fundamental necessities for every living being. In this arduous struggle, the knowledge tradition passed down by their ancestors serves as their guiding light. Regrettably, the so-called civilized people have yet to accord the tribal civilization, its life-view, and its expression recorded in its mother tongues, the importance and respect they rightfully deserve. It is from this sentiment and direction that my poems find their voice.

I am delighted that Dr. Pragya Shuklaji has translated my poems into English. She has approached the task with great sensitivity, making every effort to preserve their original meaning. Her translation work is not just a mere act, but a significant cultural intervention. She has done a historic job of expanding tribal cultural expression by translating poems into English. I express my deepest gratitude to her. Now, the poems are in front of English readers. I eagerly await their reactions. Johar!

Dr Anuj Lugun
Email: anujlugun@cub.ac.in

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

I had heard and read about translatability and untranslatability of poetry. I understood that poetry's compact and condensed state, with all its aesthetics and music, differentiated it from other genres. When I heard Dr Anuj Lugun recite his poems at a gathering, I instantly felt that I had to take this up—I knew I would try my hand at translation and take these little masterpieces to a wider audience. These small investments on my part would broaden their horizon and enrich other cultures. I was worried about the output quality and the emotional responses that would be evoked. Filled with excitement, I sought Dr Anuj Lugun's permission before venturing into the translation process.

Dr. Anuj Lugun's poetry, with its meticulous construction, was very similar to mathematical equations. His compositions left me mesmerized and I was in awe of the poet. His poems reverberate with the precision of symbols, sounds, and scenes from rustic life, each element meticulously arranged to evoke strong emotions hidden beneath the surface. The depth of his works continues to overwhelm me and I am often forced to question my capability as a translator.

While translating Anuj Lugun's poems, I encountered moments of uncertainty when the complexities of tribal life eluded me and seemed vague. Then, I took help from texts on tribal culture, which served as a bridge between understanding the poems and Lugun's lived experiences. However, interactions with the author proved most helpful and offered invaluable insights into the nuances embedded within his poetry.

Lugun's verses celebrate the full spectrum of human experiences: from the strength of the resilient, the vulnerability of the marginalised, the laughter of the lively, to the despair of the victims. While translating his poems, I was blessed with the opportunity to understand the poet's belief system and ideology. I drew inspiration from his ability to capture life's complexities with clarity and poignancy.

Poets serve as vessels for messages from the divine, channelling profound truths to the reading groups. Translating Lugun's poetry felt like partaking in a sacred act, cherishing a message from heaven and passing it on to those who speak a different language. I desperately hoped and wondered if my translations would also ignite souls with the same divine spark that moves the readers of the target language.

While reading the verses of Anuj Lugun, I took a dip in the poetic world of Anuj Lugun—the extraordinary poet, deeply rooted in reverence for ancestors and culture. I experienced an urge to share the poet's artistry with a wider audience and to bridge the linguistic chasm. Linguistic and cultural barriers should never be the reason to deprive humanity of exquisite poetic compositions. Lugun's poems are adorned with intricate details and diverse themes that captivate the senses. He honours both the resilient women of Ulgulan and the alluring women who carry the captivating scent of *mabua*. He celebrates the valour of ancient warriors and inspires today's generation to emulate their noble deeds. Readers can discern a Wordsworthian reverence for nature, a genuine devotee, singing songs to appreciate nature's beauty and majesty. He documents the pivotal historical moments of tribal communities in his poems, safeguarding them from potential erasure. Through his poetry, he offers tribal communities the chance to reconnect with and reflect upon their rich heritage.

I often experienced a profound connection unfurling within me during the translation process. These experiences changed me somewhere and left an indelible impression as I lingered upon them. I found myself dwelling within these essences for extended moments. The journey of translating Anuj Lugun's poetry was not merely a linguistic challenge but also a test of my language skills. Reading and re-reading the original texts allowed the interplay of critical analysis and creative expression. I strove to maintain and preserve the inherent dynamism while fervently restraining personal influence. It was clear to me from the onset that my role was to remain a silent conduit, channelling the essence of Anuj Lugun's style while remaining invisible in the translation process.

To truly grasp the nuances embedded within Lugun's work, I read his biography and tried to understand the man behind the verses. Through meticulous research and personal interaction with the poet, I endeavoured to absorb the nuances of his cultural heritage. This helped me in infusing each translated poem with authenticity and resonance.

In poetic translation, linguistic equivalence reigns supreme, and I was constantly worried about the linguistic chasm between English and Hindi, which presented a formidable challenge. Opting for a connotative translation over a literal one, I embarked on a journey fuelled by imagination. I closely examined the syntactic structures of the original texts and meticulously restructured their essence in the target language.

Throughout, I endeavoured to preserve the central meaning and the artistic aura evoked by Lugun's compositions.

When I embarked on the translation journey, I realized that the compact nature of Lugun's verses facilitated a certain ease in translation. Yet complete fidelity was unimaginable. Each translated line was like a canvas upon which the essence of Lugun's artistry was faithfully preserved. These efforts to combat the power of cross-linguistic communication were significant milestones in this breathtaking journey of mine. In the pursuit of maintaining artistic integrity, vigilance was necessary. I was mindful of straying too far from Lugun's intended message. Each word and line bore the weight of preserving the cultural tradition woven within his poetry. While the process demanded meticulous attention to detail, it also afforded moments of revelation, as the beauty of Lugun's verses transcended linguistic boundaries and filled the readers anew with fervour through the veil of translation.

Translating Dr Anuj Lugun's poetry became more than a linguistic pursuit; it was an adventurous journey of transcending barriers and forging connections across time and space. With unwavering dedication, I endeavoured to honour the craftsmanship of Dr Anuj Lugun—an extraordinary poet who always permits his words to echo across linguistic landscapes, weaving a web of beauty and truth.

I express my heartfelt gratitude to the Board Members of the Rupkatha Translation Project 2024 for considering my proposal. I am deeply indebted to Dr Swayam Prabha Satpathy, Project Director of the RTP, for the illuminating introduction to the translation. I feel enriched by the insightful comments of Dr K. Suneetha Rani, Dr Quan Wang and Dr Dana Radler. My sincere thanks go to Tarun Tapas Mukherjee, Project Supervisor, for his diligence in crafting the book and bringing it to life. I am deeply thankful to Pragati Das, in charge of academic relations of the RTP, for her prompt responses and reassurances. I also thank the Honourable Vice Chancellor of the Central University of Jharkhand, Prof. Kshiti Bhusan Dash, for motivating me to undertake translation projects. Lastly, I thank my family for believing in me and my friends, students, and colleagues for their constant support.

Dr Pragya Shukla
Assistant Professor, Dept of English Studies, Central University of
Jharkhand. Email: pragya.shukla@cuj.ac.in

Women of Ulugulan

Ferocious—
Like their commanders
More dangerous than beautiful
Their buns decked
Not with *echa-ba*
But blossoms of courage
And hope as ear-rings
Grace their ears
In their fight for Rights
They planted seeds of self-respect

Roots burrow deeper
Creepers sprawl around
Across villages
And towns
In all directions
The sidewalks
Outside the narrow lanes
In courtyards—
Mothers pat cow- dung cakes

After ages
Crossing the school's threshold, my sisters

Jump off the local trains
Wives reach offices
And at the crack of dawn
Run towards the fields
Towards the square

Elevating voices
Hundreds of women unite in unarmed solidarity
Seem to threaten
ominous aspirations
Their buns decked
Not with *echa-ba*
But blossoms of courage
And hope as ear-rings
Grace their ears

Balancing the Earth like water vessels on their heads
Rhythmically, moving in sync
Women of revolution
To lovers of Earth
Appear beautiful—
And Formidable
To the enemies of Nature

echa ba: flower of sal tree

The Moon Waiting for a Woman

That night gazing at the Moon
Lying on the floor with her children and husband
She looked at the sky
Contemplating the tranquil and profound
She pondered for a while
Her bangles, *bindi* and bit of kohl
She tacked
On to the sky
And the sky
Took on an even more exquisite beauty

At midnight, deep within the forest
Where tranquillity embraced the foothills
The winds softly caressed the villages
As she gazed at her children and husband
The Moon silently drew near
And said...
“Listen it has been a thousand years and more
Sitting-rising-walking
Drinking-eating-talking
your talents will manifest in novel ways
adorn and breathe life anew
-- recreate me, please.”

The woman gazed upon her children and husband
And said---
“I have just returned with my husband
From the fields
And put my husband and children to sleep
They are asleep now and I am on guard
Once I am free
I will attend to your work
Please go for now
The moon departed, awaiting the woman
The moon continues to wait for her.

I Wish to Sing One Last Song for My Land

I am an injured hunter
Gone are my friends, all killed
We undertook daring raids
When our crops were ruined
by the onslaught of animals
We lodged complaints against them
They turned away
Denied our toil in fields--
Fields we had ploughed and sowed
We shared
Difficulties in transforming barren lands
About blood wasted and effort invested--
We requested and pleaded
To tears unmoved—
They claimed our crops
And our sweat-soaked fields, too
Said we should be grateful for their kindness
In guerrilla warfare, our skills are well-known
Yet, we first sang a song
Amidst the beat of *mandar* and *nagada*
We showcased how
The roots of crops are intertwined with our existence

Prayers were offered then to Singabonga
To purify their minds –
We shared how our blood had nurtured the crops
And when we reached their highest court of justice
Our crops had been ruined
My son wedded under the full moon's glow
Ventured with friends into the forests for *sendera*
Before the *sendera*
We prayed to the God of hunting
But dark forces reigned supreme
Our friends continued to die
Upon a hillock, I perch on a rock
And gaze upon the crops
Now in ruin
Blood trickles down my body
Night is near
Children and women
Await at home
I behold my friends, lifeless and cold—

I behold my hungry children and women
Sans regret—

They will, in pursuit of me—
Tread the rock on this hillock
I yearn to restore my crop's lost grace

Restore nests
To the returning birds on the branches
Our homes of straw, Earth's straw
For this land, I seek sacrifices grand—
The Earth that
Bore trees and never complained
Rivers flow on her, unharmed
She taught us
The songs of birds and forests are no one's foe
I am an aged hunter
Weathered and worn
My unwavering spirit in my clenched fists endures
And hope imbued in each assault,
I wish to sing
One last song for my land

Mandar and *nagada*: musical instruments. *Sendera*: ritual hunt: The Mundas of Jharkhand observe two yearly hunts.

World of Hearths

We hail from the world of hearths
Fire aplenty for the hearths
Wood aplenty for the fire
Trees aplenty for the wood
Forests aplenty for the wood
Birds thrived in the forests
And nests aplenty for the birds
Synergy and harmony
Thrived in families.
When hearths were divided
Families parted ways
Not people
But the aroma from the hearths
Wafted across neighbourhoods
People effortlessly grasped
The discourse of the hearth
And hence—
In temples, mosques—anywhere
Loudspeakers disseminating rumours
Never sowed discord
The talk of the hearth
Was always

Mouth-watering—delectable
And shrunken noses
Never irked Gods
The talk of the hearth
Drew people to the streets
In a mob
Gunfire echoed
Instead of chimney smoke
Workers punctured holes in the sky
Farmers amidst fields
Sang folk songs
To quell their anger
Those whose hearths
Were deemed unclean
In their hearths
Simmered dreams
The world of hearths for everyone
Signified the same— taste and warmth
That world is here, not in the past
The key to this world is not with others
The key resides within
And can be unlocked with resolute fists.

Preparing Lakhtho at Home

Sometimes wheat flour found its way home
Sometimes sugar graced our kitchen
Sometimes there was oil in stock
Ma sometimes prepared Lakhtho at home
My sister danced with joy
And brothers fought
Maa would quietly prepare the batter
Deftly rolling and cutting
We would look at mother's fingers at work
Father picking up the hadiya mug would remark
'No one can ever prepare like her— '
Back then, we believed Maa was preparing Lakhtho
But only Maa knew that
With borrowed flour
And borrowed sugar
And borrowed oil
She was making home
We were unaware then

Now the truth is out
Maa always made home
And never *Lakhtho*

Lakhtho: indigenous sweet dish. *Hadiya*: rice beer

Should You Decide to Come

Should you decide to visit
 You are welcome
Ascend one step at a time
 Like the ascending sun
 On the mountains
 And spread
Positive affordable energy similar to cowdung
 If you desire to come
 Welcome
 To our forests
 Like the spring winds
Breathe life into the dry branches, tender buds

Should you come—
 You are welcome
 To our rivers—
 Like doves
 Let your voice
Gift a melody to the flowing rivers

If all these do not happen
 On your arrival

Then—
From the mountains will descend
Our Gods
To rain fire
Our pure-hearted ancestors
Will awaken
Holding the rocks that rest upon their chest
If these don't transpire
Our mothers and sisters—you will find
Standing—
Armed with bows, arrows and axes
In our culture
Deception for wealth is an art we lack.

Adivasi

Materialists,
Or opportunists,
Advocates of reservation
Those pursuing votes
Label us as Adivasis—
Missionaries
Call us
Adivasi savages
those who perceive us as natives of the land
declare us forest dwellers.

Those who tread barefoot
in quiet procession towards the forests
never proclaim
themselves as Adivasis
They know to heal with herbs
can prophesy by observing animals
weather patterns, and potential outcomes.
Every tree, plant, mountain, hill
rivers-waterfalls know
their identity

Their Symbols

We were never tasked
With venerating cows
Never instructed
To raise awareness
Of the cross's sanctity
Never informed
That moon and stars held religious significance
We neither perused the Bible
Nor did we ever
Recite the Quran's verses
Never from our shoulders
Did we shrug off responsibilities—
And burdened ourselves with Gita?
People called us untamed
And uncivilized
Our ancestors were called demons
We never uttered a word
Never in return did we
Tarnish the adjectives of our language
We remained engrossed
Pulling mandal strings
Or steadying bows

We composed our songs
We struggled to comprehend
Their reverend utterances
Overflowing with divine splendour
Affirming the supremacy of the Almighty
Those voices, to safeguard the Divine
Demand our offerings
Service for them
Are secret gateways for asserting dominance
And in the forests
They introduced symbols

Mandak: musical instrument

Bhima Koregaon: Khunti

Questions were raised by a village
Stone markers were raised by another
All were branded as traitors
All were labelled as missionaries
Once again, a village became 'Bhima Koregaon'

Bhima Koregaon: History

Powerful can be defeated
Weak can rise to power
History says so
Not all chroniclers of History
Were rulers
Those who opposed and rebelled
Against rulers
Too etched their mark
Those who will voice brave opinions
Will become martyrs
Their stories will reveal
That the powerful, too, become fearful—
--Powerful, too, can be defeated.

Environment

Some sorrows
Linger still, at the roots
Some feelings
Remain hung still, on the branches
Some blessings
Abide still, on the boughs
Some prayers
Lie still, on the branches
Some people
Still revere the trees

Woodcutter's Back

The burning twigs
Lie on my back
And you
Wish to embrace me
I caution—
You, too, shall scorch
With my flesh and bone

Oxygen

Deprived of oxygen
Everything halts
Trains, for instance
ships
even kingdoms
With asphyxiation
Young lives extinguish

When children begin to die
Tests ought to be conducted
It's plausible
That the adults are already afflicted
And suffocating within temporal dimensions
Reports of a child's demise
On roads
In potholes
In schools
Even in hospitals
These cumulative deaths
Are never referred to as 'murder'
Nation's leaders
Express no remorse

This only implies
That perhaps
During their governance, the prospect of life diminishes

Interrupted oxygen supply
Its dwindling availability
Infants succumb due to scarcity of oxygen
These narratives
Demonstrate that our existence
Is determined by others
As if on this planet
Oxygen is rare
For those who aspire to live

We often hear that oxygen is life-giving
We are taught that oxygen imparts immortality
What remains undisclosed is—
Oxygen could be a narrative of control.

Our Love

Those who do not understand the river
Will experience thirst
Those unfamiliar with birds
Will forfeit their rhythm
Those who fail to hear the trees
Will go naked
And those who love you
Will engage in strife
Over these issues

Mainstream

Speaking little
Is meekness to them
Silence is deemed
Weakness
Throaty laughter
Is immodest
Dancing
Is an insult and
Living in the wilderness
A regression
For us
It is simplicity
We know it as humanity
May they find contentment
In their realm
Their world reeks of conceit

Nature

Desires never die
Ceaselessly they drift into the air
Inhaled by newborn babies
They waft in stealthily
And infants weep,
With the birth of infants
The cycle of sorrows unfurls
Time passes
And after their demise
Desires live on
We can say that
Histories mature thus
A king dies
And his desire to rule
Lives on—
A man dies
And his zeal to battle
Lives on.

Globe

I held a pen in my hand
And surveyed the Map
I began to search the writings
Of revered philosophers
And poets
Whose verses I could sing
But all that unfolded
Were lines drawn by merciless rulers
Traced with ink steeped in human blood
Lines on this side
And with the blood of people on this side
Lines on the other side
From the intricate web of intersecting lines
Upon Maps
I could trace no human visage
My neck tilted like a globe—
Tears welled in my eyes

Setting aside
All debates and discussions
I learned today
Why the globe's neck is tilted

Complacency

When editors requested write-ups,
Verses flowed from his pen.
When poetry was required
Prose emerged, standing tall.

In processions where they sought a learned guide,
He donned scholarly robes and in a library did abide.
Yet, for debates, he roamed the streets wide,
Strolled, aimless yet nothing to hide.

It wasn't anarchy but a quest for tranquil space,
Never endangered identity or institutions' grace.
He simply aspired to be a Hindi poet, his soul's chase.

Picture

This is my picture
In the open skies
I intently stare
Majestic mountains, resolute
Like a steadfast wall

A roof is in the making here
Towering Sal forests proudly rise
Near the *Karo* river
Winds through, carving the sand apart.
This is my homeland
And within its borders, I make my home.

I have been told
As far as visible—
That my eyes perceive
I should not look beyond
A boundary ends there
And a new begins
I worry about the harvest
And look up towards the sky
Not looking for rain clouds

Not even whispered prayers
I look at the soaring birds
I seek boundaries above
And inform
Of gunpowder-laced tunnels,
Artillery, tankers and armed forces.

But they, oblivious of it all
Fly as they obliterate all boundaries
Outlined by my eyes and
I immortalise this moment
With ink
The picture comforts me—
These birds—
In Palestine or Israel
Turkey or Syria
Korea or Ladakh
Anywhere—
Someday—
Will surely land.

Dedicated

For those who nourished the birds,
I will sing a song of gratitude.
For caretakers of the ailing,
In my hands, their sorrows will find sanctuary.

Whose language greeted like water stalls by the road,
I'll reserve my tears for their parched throats.
The steadfast who stood through the night,
I'll pilfer their weariness, leaving mine unclaimed.

Life's undulating currents,
Sometimes made me a bird,
Sometimes the sick
Or companion of war-trekking wayfarers,
And, sometimes,
Mourning for kin rendered me poor.

To the shroud, the world is insignificant
And in the grave, wealth holds no sway.
Those who joined in singing songs of mourning
found their essence by embracing humanity--
Will be celebrated as a martyr
And be bestowed with each strand of language.

About Jatangi Fields

Who knows the laughter of
Adivasi women better than *Jatangi* seeds
Dusky laughter slips through their palms
And the fields become resplendent with *Sohrai* tunes
Who knows about the magic of Adivasi Women
Better than the *Jatangi* fields
Milk for their children comes from these fields
They anoint their cattle
Before joining festivities
Their sorrow gets stuck in their rough palms
They chase wolves out of village borders
Who knows
Adivasi women better than *Jatangi* seeds

Jatangi: Oilseeds. Sohrai: Harvest festival

Smell of Mahua

My beloved enchanting wife
Fragrance of mahua douses off your hair
The smell of mahua in your hair—
Brings me to my native village
Amidst the city grime,
My sweating body's sheen
Brings you to the mahua shelter
O My captivating wife
Your friends argue,
claiming the fragrance in mahua fruits rest
Yet I know in your locks the essence abides
And that fragrance you in my sweat find
Dear intoxicating wife of mine
Ignore their words,
They all know deep within
The aroma of mahua from our love emanates.

Mahua: Butter tree/ tropical plant

Journey of Love: Rourkela

While listening to Nagpuri tunes
Rising from the river Shankh
I could hear your heartbeat
Then Rourkela for me was a city of unlimited fantasies
China rose blossomed only here I believed
And people travelled across the world to reach here
I glance back to gaze at River Shankh
And feel that on some bank
I will spot you washing clothes
The China rose, I believed, bloomed only here
And people traverse the earth
To reach here
I turn around to see River Shankh even now
I still believe that on some bank
I will spot you washing clothes
And believe china roses must be blooming still
Occasionally, deep inside, I hear
Those songs of 'tribal production'
Not approved by elders
Which they considered vulgar
I hum once in a while—
'I came to Rourkela and I swear you stole my heart'

As I travel past River Shankh, I ruminatē
With love's few words
Rourkela anywhere on Earth can be built
Any place can be a city of red China roses
And those separated from the river
May be allowed to visit it once.

Happy Girls

When I see happy girls
At gol-gappa stalls
Relishing chaat in a fair

Witnessing a world adorning itself
It appears as though an artist
Has crafted an image with some effort
On the canvas of life
Setting aside his masculinity when
Immersed in this creative process

Happy girls—
When engaging with men
Sans their masculinity
Often while establishing connections
Utter words
As delectable as mouth-watering *golgappas*

It is a normal thing
For a girl to enjoy appetising *golgappas*
As normal as cultivating happiness
But it becomes difficult
Around men garbed in their masculinity

Within modest hamlets
And semi-urban towns
Girls seldom
Yearn for *golgappas*
They seek
A space to breathe unrestrictedly
They dream of knitting
Wings with the firmament

News of happy girls teach us
To seek happiness from the mundane
And the commonplace

Dr Pragya Shukla has undertaken a very complex task of translating twenty-four poems written in Hindi by Anuj Lugun about "a civilization of water, forest, and land." The civilization that Dr Lugun speaks about has been created over a vast space of the Chhotanagpur plateau region of Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand and the western part of West Bengal. The region itself emerged out of cosmic events in the early years of the earth. This big geological drama can still be perceived in the open theatre of nature—rugged hills, tables, swift rivers and waterfalls, red soil, unique flora and fauna. In this primordial landscape, another drama unfolds with the humans occupying their place since time immemorial. The past of the 'civilization' can still be perceived in the rock paintings, megaliths, and cupules scattered throughout the region. At the same time, the present tries to keep up the traditions adoringly in the face of death, destruction and development. In these regions blessed with abundant natural resources, the tale of exploitation began with the enforcement of the Brahminical ideology of segregation and marginalization. This exploitation evolved into a systematic dehumanization and criminalization during the era of British colonialism. Today, this troubling legacy persists as development models implemented post-Independence have continued to perpetuate exploitation and inequality in these lands.



Anuj Lugun was born on January 10, 1986, in Jaldega Pahan Toli, Simdega district, into a Munda family. He graduated from Ranchi University and pursued his PhD at Banaras Hindu University. He is currently working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Indian Languages at the Central University of South Bihar. Lugun is regarded as a prominent poet representing tribal concerns among the younger generation. He has received the Savitri Tripathi Award, the Young Award from the Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad in Kolkata, and the Sahitya Akademi Yuva Award in 2019 for his long poem "Bagh Aur Sugna Munda Ki Beti." In addition to poetry, he has written several short stories, published research articles, and presented papers at various national and international conferences.
Email: anujlugun@cub.ac.in



Dr. Pragya Shukla is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English Studies at the Central University of Jharkhand. Her areas of interest include Gender Studies and Tribal Literature. Her doctoral thesis focused on "A Comparative Study of the Fictional Works of Githa Hariharan and Shashi Deshpande." In addition to research papers, she is also involved in translation and writing poetry and short stories.
Email: pragya.shukla@cuj.ac.in

ISBN 978-81-975130-7-7



9 788197 513077

Price: Free under CCNC

