

**Research article**

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# Alice Ekka and the question of authenticity in Hindi Adivasi<sup>1</sup> literature

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates the question of authenticity developed in the contemporary Adivasi literary discourse in light of some short stories of Alice Ekka, an until recently unknown Adivasi author active in the 1960s. The discovery of this author moves further back in time the beginning of Hindi Adivasi literature, previously believed to have emerged between the 1980s and 1990s following the rise of Dalit literature. As a forerunner, Alice Ekka manifests in her narrative some elements that are peculiar when analyzed in relation to the assumptions made in contemporary literary discourse on Adivasi writing. From her short stories, it becomes clear that besides her Adivasi background, she was also informed by the viewpoint of the educated, middle-class city dweller and drew inspiration without constraint from mainstream literary traditions such as the Hindi Chayavad and English Romanticism. The paper discusses how the presence of such elements contrasts with the assumption of Adivasi “authentic” literature based on Adivasi consciousness and tradition.

**Keywords:** Alice Ekka, Adivasi literature, authentic writing, romanticism

## Introduction

The emergence of Adivasi authors writing in Hindi is usually described as a phenomenon of the 1980s (compare G. S. Mina, 2017: 48 and R. C. Mina 2017: 45) coinciding with the works of writers such as Walter Bhengra “Tarun,” Peter Paul Ekka, Mangal Singh Munda and a few others.<sup>2</sup> However, sixty years ago, in August 1961, in an era when Adivasi identity politics and Adivasi self-representation as a people from the margins of Indian society were still very much in a formative stage, the journal *Ādivāsī* published what appears to be one of the first Hindi short stories representing Adivasi written by an Adivasi author (Tete 2015: 9). Alice Ekka, who published some additional short stories during the 1960s, seems to have been long forgotten by literary critics, which is why the recent rediscovery of her short stories is important, as it pushes the development of a fictional prose based on the themes of Adivasi life authored by Adivasis themselves further back in time. The merit of bringing this early Adivasi author to light goes to Vandana Tete who, through archival research in Ranchi, has been able to find six short stories and five translations of Kahlil Gibran and publish them as a collection in 2015 (see Tete 2015). Earlier, several authors had written about Adivasi communities, especially in novels,<sup>3</sup> but among these authors no Adivasi was to be found.

It is evident that the establishment of different mixed-content journals concerned with Adivasi topics in the area of what is now the Adivasi-dominated state of Jharkhand (back then southern Bi-

- 1 Adivasi (*Ādivāsī* in Hindi) is the term used as a self-designation by many communities in India who claim indigeneity in the subcontinent, particularly with respect to the arrival of the Aryans. The term roughly corresponds to what British ethnographers and administrators in colonial times labeled “hill and forest tribes.” In the Indian Constitution, they are officially recognized as “Scheduled Tribes” (*anusūcit janajāti* in Hindi).
- 2 This development concerns Hindi literature specifically, while, as Chatterji observed, Adivasi writers had already begun writing in non-Scheduled languages (1971: 34).
- 3 For a summary of the works dealing with Adivasi communities prior to the 1960s, see Vidyabhushan 2014, R. C. Mina 2017: 46–48 and Singh 2017.

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har) created a platform where Adivasis could express themselves. Such journals have a long history. In 1928, *Cāmdnī* was launched in Chaibasa by Devendr Nath Samad (Tete 2017: 14). *Ādivāsī* was founded in 1932 (Bara 2016: 13), and in 1940 Jaypal Singh Munda founded the *Ādivāsī Sakam*, replaced in 1947 by *Abuā Jhārkhāṇḍ* (Tete 2017: 16). However, prior to the work of Vandana Tete, not much attention had been devoted to these journals, which remained unnoticed in the depth of the archives. Consequently, no Adivasi writer was known to have published short stories before the 1980s.<sup>4</sup> Much archival research still needs to be done and it is possible that in the future, other Adivasi authors will be discovered and, perhaps, other writings by Alice Ekka as well. In this article, I address the short stories of Alice Ekka in light of the discussion about “authentic writing” that informs current Hindi Adivasi literary criticism.

At present, eight of her short stories have come into light, six of which are those retrieved by Vandana Tete: *Vankanyā* “Forest girl”<sup>5</sup> first published in August 1961 (*Ādivāsī*, Vol. 15, n. 28–29), *Durgī ke bacce aur Elmā ki kalpnāem* “Durgī’s children and Elma’s fantasies” (*Ādivāsī*, Vol. 15, n. 50–51, 1962), *Salgī, Jūgnī aur ambā gāch* “Salgi, Jugni and the mango tree” (*Ādivāsī*, Vol. 18, n. 28, 1964), *Koyal kī lārī Sumarī* “The dear Sumri of the Koyal river” (*Ādivāsī*, Vol. 18, n. 51, 1965), *15 agast, Bilco aur Rāmū* “15<sup>th</sup> August, Bilcho and Ramu” (*Ādivāsī*, Vol. 19, n. 27–28, 1965) and *Dhartī lahrāyegī... Jhālo nācegī... gāyegī* “The earth will wave... Jhalo will dance... and sing” (*Ādivāsī*, Vol. 22, n. 29, 1967). Two more short stories should be added: *Chabbīs janvarī aur pyārī dīdī* “The 26<sup>th</sup> of January and the beloved sister” (*Ādivāsī*, Vol. 17, n. ?, 1963)<sup>6</sup> and *Koil [sic] nadī ke āmcal mem* “In a strip of land on the Koyal river” (*Ādivāsī*, Vol. 19, n. 59, 1966/7). In the twentieth volume of *Ādivāsī* there is mention of yet another one: “as in the short story *Jhariyo* (by Alice Ekka)”<sup>8</sup> (*Ādivāsī*, Vol. 20, n. ?, 1966). Unfortunately, this one is still lost in the archives.

The sudden emergence of several Adivasi authors writing in Hindi that occurred in the 1980s might be ascribed to several factors. One might be the process of “becoming mainstream” (compare Wessler 2020: 11) where writing in Hindi becomes a pragmatic choice of writers in order to reach further audiences. This is the case of Rose Kerketta who began her literary career writing in Kharia while switching to Hindi only later in life (Tete 2019: 102). The cases of Walter Bhengra and Peter Paul Ekka seem to be different as they, writing in Hindi alone, had already published some works prior to the 1980s, although not dealing with Adivasis (Jain 2019). Thus, Alice Ekka’s *Vankanyā* moves the beginning of Adivasi authorship back by twenty years. The finding was much welcomed in the sphere of Adivasi literary criticism, and it was officially celebrated in 2017 with a conference held in Ranchi on the occasion of Alice Ekka’s birth centenary, where more than fifty female tribal writers from all over the country participated (All India Tribal 2017). This is not surprising since in Adivasi literary criticism, authorship is a crucial matter. In recent years, much discussion has been

4 Through deeper archival research, additional short stories authored by Adivasis have only very recently been retrieved (see Tete and Pankaj 2020). These, which are just as forgotten as Alice Ekka’s, were published in yet another journal, *Niṣkalaṅkā*, in a period of time that stretches from the 1920s until 1970. In large part, these short stories rely on Christian themes while others are humorous or moral in their contents, especially the early ones. Four of them also present the themes of exploitation and poverty intermingling with the Christian message, and only two mention some Adivasi communities. These stories are interesting as they reveal the main concern of these early authors (i.e., the propagation of Christianity in Bihar and what is now Jharkhand). The humorous and moral tales might have served a purely entertaining purpose. The fact that they only to a limited degree touch upon themes that in more recent times have become the tropes of Adivasi writing, such as the exploitation the lands and the suffering of their inhabitants, and that only very few of them seem to deal with Adivasis, speaks for a still embryonal stage of modern Adivasi literature. For reasons of space, these short stories cannot be addressed here.

5 All translations of short story titles are my own.

6 Although individuated, this short story still has to be retrieved.

7 Usually spelled *koyal*. It is only spelled as *koil* and *koil* in this short story (Ekka 1966: 59).

8 *Jaise kahānī ‘jharīo’ (Alice Ekkā ki)*.

raised in regard to what constitutes “authentic” Adivasi literature, and there is now a strong convergence, even among non-Adivasis, that Adivasi literature is literature written by Adivasis alone (Singh and Mina 2014: 112–114, Mina 2017: 40–44). The argument draws on the idea that only those who write on the basis of *anubhūti* or *svānubhūti* (terms translatable as self-perception, self-feeling or self-experience) can produce a truthful representation of Adivasis, while those who write through what is called *sahānubhūti* (translatable as sympathy, empathy or even compassion)<sup>9</sup> misrepresent the Adivasis. Compare the following lines:

Today the discussion on sympathy and self-experience is continuously ongoing. Also the authors writing through sympathy believe in the question of self-experience. They give much importance to writers who compose on the basis of a suffered reality, as they have learnt quite a lot about that literature. The Adivasi authors insist that literature written by non-Adivasis on the life of Adivasis is literature of Adivasi sympathy and not literature of Adivasi consciousness (Singh and Mina 2014: 112).<sup>10</sup>

Sympathy-driven literature is said to be incapable of representing the sufferings of the Adivasis in an authentic way:

[...] they [Adivasi writers/critics] dismiss the literature written by non-Adivasis calling it “Adivasi consciousness” or Adivasi sympathy. Their argument is that the sufferings, the sorrow and pain of the Adivasi can only be known by themselves (Singh and Mina 2014: 113).<sup>11</sup>

The stress on the concept of authenticity (*prāmāṅiktā*) and the idea that only the insiders of a category can represent that category in a truthful way is not isolated to Adivasi literature, nor to Dalit literature (where similar claims are also made),<sup>12</sup> but it has become a major stance in the humanities and social sciences, beginning with the field of anthropology and sociology. In fact, the idea of a “group-based truth” has existed at least since the debates around “black studies” emerged in the 1960s in the United States. According to Merton:

In its strong version, the argument holds that, as a matter of social epistemology, *only* black historians can truly understand black history, *only* black ethnologists can understand black culture, *only* black sociologists can understand the social life of blacks, and so on (1972: 13).

Merton consciously limited his observations to the debates taking place at his time in the United States, and in fact it should be added that claims for an “own writing” had already been put forward earlier in other contexts as well. For instance, in colonial India, Bengali intellectuals argued for the

9 The Hindi terms *anubhūti* and *svānubhūti* are used interchangeably. The second, displaying the prefix *sv-* “one’s own, self-” perhaps more explicitly emphasizes the sense of an *own* perception or experience. The term *sahānubhūti* is constructed with the prefix *sah-* “with, together with” thus literally “with perception/experience.” It is debatable which English terms better translate the Hindi ones, as on a philosophical level, it might be debatable what such terms really mean, both in Hindi and English. A proper analysis of these terms exceeds the purpose of this article. Throughout this paper *anubhūti* and *svānubhūti* have been translated as “self-experience” while *sahānubhūti* has been translated as “sympathy.”

10 *āj sahānubhūti aur svānubhūti ke savāl par bhī lagātār bahas jāri hai. sahānubhūti ke taur par likhne vāle lekhak bhī svānubhūti ke savāl ko mānte haiṁ. ve bhoge hue yathārtha kā sṛjan karne vāle ko is kāraṅ bhī zyāda mahattva dete haiṁ kyomki sāhitya-racnā ke lie unhomne kāfī kuch sikhā hai. ādivāsī racnākārom kā āgrah itnā hī hotā hai ki gair-ādivāsī racnākārom kā ādivāsī-jīvan par likhā gayā sāhitya ādivāsī-sahānubhūti kā sāhitya hotā hai, ādivāsī cetnā kā nahīṁ.*

11 [...] *gair-ādivāsī dvārā race sāhitya ko ve ‘ādivāsī cetnā’ yā ādivāsī sahānubhūti kā sāhityā kahkar khārij kar dete haiṁ. unkā tark hai ki ādivāsī kī piṛā, dukh-dard ke keval vah svayam hī jān saktā hai.* However, the use of the term Adivasi consciousness (*ādivāsī cetnā*) seems out of place here, as Adivasi consciousness is a quality normally attributed to the literature written by Adivasis (compare Gupta 2014: 35–37).

12 In the context of Dalit literature, it might be useful to recall how Dalit writers such as Omprakash Valmiki and Kanval Bharti criticized Premchand’s short story *Kafan* for misrepresenting the Dalits (see Beth 2014: 237, 238). Limbale 2004 presents an overview of this discussion. For a discussion about the authenticity of literary works in relation to authorship, see Gates 1991.

need for alternative history writings based on the perspective of the colonized and dismissed what they considered to be the distortions of Western historians (see Gottlob 2003: 29–30, 142–144). In more recent times, the stance of black intellectuals quoted above inspired other groups (women, homosexuals, ethnic and religious minorities, etc.), and the idea of a “group-based truth” gave rise to a doctrine that Merton 1972 called “Insiderism” or “insider doctrine.”<sup>13</sup> Reworded in more general terms the argument is that:

In its strong form, the claim is put forward as a matter of epistemological principle that particular groups in each moment of history have *monopolistic access* to particular kinds of knowledge. In the weaker, more empirical form, the claim holds that some groups have *privileged access* with other groups also being able to acquire that knowledge for themselves but at greater risk and cost (1972: 11).

During the 1970s and 1980s, politics of identity, gender and representation ended up at the center of intellectual discourses. At the same time, post-modernist tendencies lead the theoretical approaches away from the structuralist and functionalist pursuit for objective truths (compare Poppi 1997: 286) in favor of subjective “readings” of social phenomena (Geertz 1973), later reinforced by the idea that the text itself is a “cultural text” implicated in the culture of who is writing (Clifford & Markus 1986). With such premises then: “The product of such a reading was an interpretation, not an explanation” (Kuper 1994: 541), and if each reading was reduced to a subjective interpretation, it followed that:

There could be no single true account of a cultural event or a social process. No objective summary was possible. The post-modernists preferred the image of a cacophony of voices, commenting upon each other and as they say, somewhat mysteriously, ironicizing (Kuper 1994: 542).

Nevertheless, in the cacophony of voices, it was implied that the truth was that of the one speaking for his category (i.e., the insider or native).<sup>14</sup> The “speaking for oneself,” often naturally coinciding with disadvantaged groups, also entailed a political argument on the democratic right to speak (Marcus and Fischer 1986) against a traditional and historical impossibility of doing so (Spivak 1988).

In this context, many new actors emerged. If the 1960s and 1970s had been the time of ethnicities<sup>15</sup> and socially marginalized groups, in the 1980s, a new and global movement known as “indigenism,” with the support of the UN (compare Merlan 2009 and Niezen 2003), set “social groups and networks apart from others in a global ‘we they’ dichotomy” (Niezen 2003: 9). The common identity of indigenous people combined the experiences of land exploitation, economic marginalization and cultural destruction (features already shared by many ethnic groups) with the assertion of being the original inhabitants of their lands.<sup>16</sup>

Exponents of the various indigenous communities embraced postmodern and postcolonial theories. This resulted in a massive scholarly production of articles and monographs (authored by both indigenous and non-indigenous scholars and writers) devoted to indigenous methodologies and aesthetics, stressing the need for different parameters for the study of the indigenous.<sup>17</sup> Adivasi writers and activists asserting their indigeneity in the Indian subcontinent<sup>18</sup> have thus insisted on the idea that the literature written by Adivasi authors is different from that written by non-Adivasis.<sup>19</sup> In their view, this is given by the worldview (*viśvadr̥ṣṭikōṇ*) and tradition (*paramparā*) that Adivasi authors

<sup>13</sup> A counterpart to that also existed, with “Outsiderism” proposing the opposite idea.

<sup>14</sup> The question of the privileged access ascribed to insiders/natives has been debated to a great extent by anthropologists who have pointed to both the advantages and disadvantages of doing native anthropology. Kuper 1994: 552 provides several examples of “insiders” who criticized the idea of privileged access.

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion on the emergence of ethnicities and its relation to globalization, see Poppi 1997.

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion on the definition(s) of “indigenous,” see Niezen 2003: 18–23.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Leuthold 1998, Kelsey 2010, Smith 2012 and Andersen and O’Brien 2017.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion on the adequacy of the term “indigenous” in regard to Adivasis, see Bétéille 1998 and Karlsson 2003.

write through (Tete 2015: 21) and the consciousness (*cetnā*) arisen in them (Gupta 2014: 35–37), which differentiate them from mainstream<sup>20</sup> (*mukhyadhārā*) authors. It is further argued that non-Adivasi authors produce a stereotyped image of the Adivasis focusing on certain physical characteristics, especially in regard to women (see Tete 2015: 21, 27). In this article, I argue that a careful reading of Alice Ekka's short stories reveals that her representation of the Adivasis, although being tied to her Munda identity, is also informed by the viewpoint of the urban, educated middle-class author and mainstream literary traditions. This puts her at odds with the assumptions made about literary authenticity and reveals the complexities behind the terms *sahānubhūti* and *anubhūti*.

## Biography

Alice Ekka was born on September 8, 1917, as Alice Khristyani Purti by Mary Purti and Nuas Purti. She was a Purti Munda Adivasi by birth and she may in some way have been related to the famous Munda leader Birsa Munda (Tete 2015: 10). Although born in Ranchi, her family came from Khunti Toli (Simdega) where her grandfather had settled after leaving Ulihatu. She first studied in Ranchi, and later, thanks to an aboriginal fellowship, she went to Calcutta and graduated in English literature. After her teacher training in Patna, she obtained her postgraduate degree in Ranchi (1963–64) and became an English teacher. She was Christian (her grandfather Jonas Munda had converted to Christianity) and followed the Church of North India. Her family belonged to the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church. In 1947 she married Solomon Ekka, an Oraon Adivasi director of the Agriculture Department. They had three children: Rekha Toppo, Nila and Siddharth Ekka. She published short stories and translations from English in the journal *Ādivāsī*. According to her granddaughter, she also translated Boris Pasternak's famous novel *Doctor Zhivago* to Hindi. This was apparently serialized in the newspaper *Ranchi Express* (Tete 2015: 13, 14). Again according to her granddaughter, at a young age, Alice Ekka fell in love with a Munda Adivasi professor. Vandana Tete suggests that this incident might have been elaborated upon in some of her short stories (2015: 12). She died on July 5, 1978, in Gungu Toli.

## Romanticism and the outsider's perspective<sup>21</sup>

*Vankanyā*, by now the first known short story by Alice Ekka, opens with a group of Adivasi girls who, walking in the jungle, find a young man lying unconscious on the ground. He is not Adivasi, he is a “*sāhar kā rahnevālā*,” a city dweller fond of forests and interested in forest literature (*van sāhitya*), who went into the jungle to admire its beauty and take pictures. He had a fight with a practitioner of *oṅgā* “human sacrifice,” and although he managed to defend himself and the attacker ran away, he was severely wounded. The Adivasi girls take him to the village and one of them (Feco) heals him. They fall in love with each other, and when the young man is recovered, he asks Feco to follow him

19 Although the discussion is now returning to fictional literature, all the arguments expressed in the last paragraphs are by no means less relevant. Fictional writing entails the same problem bound to the representation of the “Other,” and the discussion on the fictional representation with which this article began is itself a manifestation of the same phenomenon in the sociology of knowledge applicable to the field of humanities at large.

20 In the context of Adivasi criticism, the term “mainstream” (*mukhyadhārā*) is used as a synonym of *gair-ādivāsī*; in other words, “non-Adivasi” (compare Mina 2014: 20 and Singh and Mina 2014: 111). The differentiation of Adivasis from “mainstream society or civilization” was developed under colonialism (Xaxa 1999: 3591) and it has been replicated in postcolonial discourse to reaffirm the distinction between Adivasis and non-Adivasis (compare Chatterjee 2016: 9–10). Therefore, it involves a slightly different sense of the word than that of Wessler 2020, where “mainstream” indicates the center of the focus of modern Hindi literature.

21 For simplicity, citations of the short stories included in the collection edited by Vandana Tete are indicated by page number alone.

to the city. Feco sobs and cries, letting it be understood that she will not go, and the young man leaves the village alone.

The story is about the impossible love between the two characters, impossible due to the strict social norms regarding intermarriage between different communities and castes, and in this specific case, also the gap between the two worlds (the city and the rural village) to which they belong. What is the most interesting to observe, however, is that the perspective of the young man, the outsider, rather than that of Feco, is what guides the narration, and from this a quite romantic representation of the Adivasi girls arises. Consider the lines where the young man, lying on the bed in Feco's hut, scrutinizes the Adivasi girls who have helped him:

The young man was looking hypnotized towards the girls. They had attractive bodies with a dark complexion and athletic arms. He was peeking at their healthy bodies. At those smiling faces, those simple glances full of sympathy. Their thick, red pariya sari crossed at the knees, decorated with jungle flowers and shoots, their developed breasts covered by just the edge of the sari, the garlands made of coins on their necks, earrings on their lobes and lac bangles on their hands. To the young man it seemed as if jungle goddesses had manifested to look after him (40).<sup>22</sup>

The reciprocity of a physical attraction between the two characters is revealed at several points throughout the story, and Feco is actually the first to manifest her like for the stranger when she finds him wounded in the forest: "What a handsome boy"<sup>23</sup> (38) she exclaims looking at him. However, it is the young man's thoughts that the narration mostly lingers on. Moreover, although both characters are surely attracted by each other, the exoticization of the "Other" occurs more, if not entirely, with regard to the Adivasi girl. In fact, it cannot be grasped whether, in Feco's eyes, the young man is beautiful just as any other man might be, or whether his beauty derives exactly from his being *different* from Adivasi men, for example, due to a lighter skin complexion. On the contrary, in his eyes, the Adivasi girls are beautiful just because of the contrast they create in relation to non-Adivasi girls. The excerpt above indicates the elements that contribute to this exoticization and eroticization of the Adivasi women: dark complexion, athletic arms and developed breasts, their glances and their clothes and decorations. In this passage, the outsider's impression puts forward a stereotyped representation concerning both the body and the mind of the Adivasi women. While, on the one side, the physical description entails an aesthetic value, exerting a leverage on a rather male expectation (body shape and breast size), while on the other side, the "simple" glances involve a romanticization of the Adivasis' mind.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the Adivasi girls undergo stereotyping both for their being "women" and for their being "Adivasi." Such exoticization can be attributed to the impression of the outsider (the young man), and it might arguably have been conceived by the author for the very purpose of showing *his* outsidersness.

It is interesting that the author focuses more on the experience of the outsider rather than on that of the Adivasi. In this way, the short story bears a resemblance to the writings of certain non-Adivasi authors who assume their own perspective as the view point of narration. For instance, in the short

22 *Yuvak mantramugdh-sā un laṛkiyoṃ kī or dekh rahā thā. Sāṃvlā-suhāvanā-salonā sugaṭhit śarīr, baliṣṭ bhujāem. Unke aṅg-aṅg se svāsthya jhām̄k rahā thā. Saral sahānubhūtipūrṇ citvan, haṃsmukh mukhṛe. Van pallavori aur phūlori se saṛāe hue tīrche, jūre, ghuṇnorī tak kī moṭī lāl pariya sārī, unnat vakṣasthal par sirf sārī kā āṃcal, gale meṃ pot kī māḷāem, kānorī meṃ tarpat aur hāth meṃ lāh ke kaṅgan. Yuvak ko aisā lag rahā thā māno sāṅṣāt van-deviyām̄ hī uskī sevā ke lie ā gaī horī.*

23 *kaisan sundar chorīra āhe.*

24 The adjective "saral," as shown below, is used several times in regard to the Adivasi characters. The term, translated as "simple," should not be understood in the sense of "lacking intelligence." Rather, the "simplicity" entailed in it wants to stand in opposition to the complex urban world of the outsiders. Thus, although not used in a derogatory sense, the term "saral" contributes to the stereotyped image of the Adivasi characters. This, in turn, contributes to the dichotomization of the village and the city and of Adivasis and non-Adivasis (compare below).

stories *Karkī* by Vinod Kumar, the Adivasi woman scrutinized from afar by a non-Adivasi man undergoes a similar exoticized representation. Compare the following lines.

The color of her skin did not have any impact on her beauty. Fair is not synonym of beautiful, the same way as black is not a synonym for ugly. Karkī was black, but full of charm. Mother of two kids. But her body, bathing in the sweat of hard work, was perfectly shaped (Kumar 2017: 62).

The plot of *Vankanyā* bears a strong resemblance to Kipling's *Lispeth*, a short story published in the collection *Plain Tales from the Hills* (originally published in 1888, republished in 1920) that also presents an impossible love of a "native" (Lispeth, the "hill girl") for an outsider (an Englishman). In Kipling's short story as well as in *Vankanyā*, the native girl finds the wounded and helpless outsider by chance and takes him to her village (Kotgarh in Shimla district), where he is being taken care of (at the chaplain house, where Lispeth works as a servant). However, here only the native girl is in love with the outsider, a love whose impracticability and unsuitability is clear throughout the whole story. The inappropriateness of a hypothetical relation between the two is first stated by the chaplain's wife who, hearing about Lispeth's desire to marry the stranger, "shrieked with horror" (1888/1920: 4). Later both the chaplain and his wife are said to have "lectured her severely on the impropriety of her conduct" (1888/1920: 4). Lispeth seems to completely lack inhibition in regard to her feelings and intentions. As soon as she reaches home with the man in her lap, she declares him her husband: "This is my husband. I found him on the Bagi road. He has hurt himself. We will nurse him, and when he is well your husband [the chaplain] shall marry him to me" (1888/1920: 3). The stereotype of the "emotional savage" is made even more explicit by the author by the line: "Being a savage by birth, she took no trouble to hide her feelings, and the Englishman was amused" (1888/1920: 5). Lispeth is obsessed with the Englishman to the point that, once he has gone (for good but promising to come back to marry her), she starts to go every day to Narkunda (a near locality) to see whether he has come back. After Lispeth is told that the Englishman will not come back for her, she leaves the chaplain's house rejecting her English education to return to "her own people." The story ends with Lispeth marrying a woodcutter who beats her "after the manner of the *paharis*" (1888/1920: 9). She is said to have died very old and that when sufficiently drunk, she could be induced to tell the story of her first love affair.

The parallel between the stories is all too obvious. The relation of "difference" between the two characters is essentially the same but transposed, showing a "native" (i.e., Indian) vs. non-native dichotomy in Kipling's story whereas in *Vankanyā* the opposition is between the Adivasi and the non-Adivasi. The stereotyping of Lispeth is more accentuated than that of the Adivasi women, especially regarding her behavior, whereas the romanticization of her beauty is comparable to that seen in *Vankanyā*. Lispeth is described as having "a Greek face—one of those faces people paint so often, and see so seldom" and being "of a pale, ivory colour, and, for her race extremely tall" with "eyes that were wonderful" grown "beautiful, like the Princesses of fairy tales" (1888/1920: 2-3). Then, in Kipling's short story as well, the stereotyping occurs on two levels, touching both physical and psychological qualities, with the latter being more exaggerated than in *Vankanyā*. On the opposite, Feco, despite her "simplicity" does show traits of maturity (lacked by the outsider) in terms of being conscious of the impracticability of their love.

It is difficult to establish whether or not the resemblance between the two stories is accidental. It is highly plausible that due to her literary background, Alice Ekka knew Kipling's short story. Speculating further on the possibility that Alice Ekka based her story on Kipling's, it is interesting to notice that if *Vankanyā* were to be considered a kind of "re-writing of the story from the perspective of the native," the re-writing does not really aspire to remove all stereotypes in the description of Adivasis and their relation to others. However, while in Lispeth's case, the stereotyping of the native girl is certainly imputable to the author himself, as suggested above it might be that Alice Ekka "played"

with the perspective of the male character, mirroring the eroticized view of the Adivasi girls that is ascribable to a young man coming from the city.<sup>25</sup>

Nonetheless, there are also passages where the exotic image of the Adivasi girls seems to be directly conveyed by the author's eyes, without being adapted for the purpose of elaborating on a *different* perspective. This seems to be the case in the short story *Koil nadī ke āmcal mem*. Here, the author describes the Adivasi girls in the act of dancing.

Mangri was leading the dance. In her right hand the branch of a flower. All young girls were wearing red pariya and flowered jackets. Flowers on the obliquely coiled hair, on their necks garlands made of shoots, earrings on their lobes, on their hands lac or nickel bangles. Their hair smoothed with oil. All were well-formed, healthy and smiling (Ekka 1966: 59).<sup>26</sup>

The passage, initially rather descriptive, culminates in a sentence reflecting an image similar to the one analyzed above. However, in this case, it does not represent the view of an outsider (there are no outsiders in the story) but can only represent the author's own image of the Adivasi girls being "well-formed," "healthy," and "smiling."

Similar is the case of *15 agast, Bilco aur Rāmū*. This story is another telling of love between an Adivasi girl, Bilco, and the son of a *baniyā*,<sup>27</sup> Ramu, intertwined with patriotism. The two characters share the patriotic dream of serving their country, and although their love remains unfulfilled, both of them will succeed: Ramu joining the army and, Bilco teaching in the village. Once again, the narration indulges in the Adivasi character's physical details.

15 August, 1952. Bilco is now a healthy five-year-old girl. Dark complexion. Round face. Black curly hair suspended until the shoulders. On her waist nothing but her girdle (62).<sup>28</sup>

In this case as well, the particularization of the Adivasi girl is based on certain physical traits that convey a difference between Adivasis and non-Adivasis. In fact, such physical traits cannot stand by themselves but only make sense in relation to their opposite. In other words: a dark complexion is dark in comparison to a fair one, curly hair in comparison to straight hair, etc. The round face contributes to signal an overall healthy appearance. Nor in this case can the description represent the impression of a non-Adivasi mesmerized by the Adivasi girl's beauty, since, as the story goes, Bilco and Ramu live close by each other and have grown up playing together. Therefore, the love/attraction that Ramu feels for Bilco does not arise from the exoticization of the latter. His outsideness is merely formal as he belongs to a different caste or ethnic group but is a resident of the same village. Consequently, he is not an "outsider" in the same sense as the young man in *Vankanyā*.

In *Koyal kī lārli Sumarī*, Sumari (an Adivasi girl) is not only described by the narrative voice as healthy, simple and spontaneous (*ek svasth, saral aur svacchand bālikā hai vah*), far from the artificiality of the world (*samsār kī kṛtrimatā se dūr*) and likened to a jungle flower (*vanya puṣp*), she is even compared to Williams Wordsworth's famous Lucy Gray: "just as Wordsworth's Lucy Gray" (57).<sup>29</sup> Be-

25 Playing with perspectives and stereotypes is a common device in literature in general, often encountered in post-colonial writers. In *Baumgartner's Bombay*, for example, Anita Desai uses the same technique when adopting the point of view of the German character. However, *Baumgartner's Bombay* is the product of a mature writer who also being half-German was definitely conscious about her writing process, while in the case of Alice Ekka it remains unclear.

26 *Maṅgri aguvā nāc rahī thī. Uske dāhine hāth mem ek phūl kī dāli thī. Sab yuvatiyām lāl pāriyā aur phūldār jākeṭ pahane thīr. Tirche jūrōn par phūl, gale mem pot kī mālāerī, kān mem tarpat hāthorī mem lahaṭhī yā gilaṭ kī cūriyām. Bāl tel se cikne samvāre hue. Sab sugaṭhit, svasth aur hāmsmukh.*

27 *Baniyā* is an Indian caste usually consisting of merchants and moneylenders. Based on this, it can be inferred that he is not an Adivasi.

28 *5 agast, 1952. Bilco ab pām̄c sāl kī svasth kanyā hai. Sām̄valā raṅg. Gol mūmh. Kāle-kāle ghūmgharāle bāl kandhe tak laṭakte hue. Kamar mem kardhanī ke sivā aur kuch nahīm.*

29 *bilkul bard̄svarth [sic] kī 'lūsī gre' kī tarah.*

yond the use of such an interesting simile that once again puts forward a romanticized image of the character, here the description more clearly conveys a dichotomy between the simple, “non-artificial” Adivasi in opposition to the artificiality of the outside world.

In some passages, the narrative voice is sympathetic, if not paternalistic, in reference to the Adivasi. In *Koil nadī ke āmcal mem*, there are a couple of instances where the author describes them as being innocent (*bhole*): “Close to the river a settlement. Here and there some dispersed houses made of clay. In those houses lived innocent villagers”<sup>30</sup> and later again, alluding to the self-destruction resulting from the habit of drinking alcohol: “Oh innocent Adivasi! Certainly you push away the tiredness of everyday life with alcohol. But you don’t know that this brings you to the edge of destruction” (Ekka 1966: 59).<sup>31</sup> In contrast to the previous case where the ingenuousness assigned to the Adivasi could be ascribed to the outsider’s perception, here it originates directly from the author. Once again, it is possible to discern a gap between the Adivasi represented in the narration and the author who addresses them almost as if she was not one of them: “Oh innocent Adivasi! [...] you don’t know...” (Emphasis added).

Not only the Adivasi characters, but also the landscapes are romanticized, producing an idyllic description of the jungle. Compare the opening lines of *Vankanyā* and *Koil nadī ke āmcal mem*:

The jungle surrounded the village as if it was keeping it in its bosom. There, the trees were so high that, as umbrellas, they would not let the sunrays reach the earth. Peace and coolness lie everywhere (37).<sup>32</sup>

Koyal River. Its thin stream and zig-zag pattern. In between black rocks and sand. On all sides of the rocks pure water. In it, small fish and water insects. An autumnal full moon. The round moon is shining in the sky like a silver sphere. Its light is sprinkling everywhere on the surface of the river Koyal. Light is everywhere, a smooth light. Rocks, sand, water and river grass are all perfectly visible in the radiance of the moon. Yes, also the image of the moon falls in the water of the river. The moon is dancing in the water (Ekka 1966: 59).<sup>33</sup>

Although without romantic representations, in *Salgī, Jugnī aur ambā gāch* as well it is the perspective of the non-Adivasi boy that dominates over that of the Adivasi girl. The story is about two kids, Salgi and Raju, who spend their time playing together (they are particularly fond of catching fireflies). A social distance between the two is still perceivable since Salgi is not allowed to go to Raju’s house (Salgi is probably Adivasi and Raju is not). Eventually, Salgi falls sick and dies, as she does not receive medicines in time. The story ends fifteen years later, with Raju still looking at the mango tree where they used to catch fireflies together, thinking melancholically about Salgi.<sup>34</sup>

The short story *Durgī ke bacce aur Elmā kī kalpnām* provides another interesting, yet different, case. The plot revolves around the troublesome life of Durgī, whom Vandana Tete identifies as a Dalit woman (Tete 2015: 28). Durgī and Elma are old friends who meet each other after many years. Durgī works as a sweeper and is sent to Elma’s district to replace another worker. The two start chatting and Durgī talks about all the accidents having occurred in the last twenty years. She was married but

30 *Nadī se saṭī huī ek bastī. Usmem idhar-udhar chīṭpuṭ kuch miṭṭī ke ghar. In gharom mem rahnevāle bhole grāmīn.*

31 *Hāy re bhole ādivāsī! Hamḍiyām se din-bhar kī thakābaṭ [sic] to dūr hotī avāśya hai; par tum nahīm jānte yah tumherm vinās kī or le jātā hai.*

32 *Jaṅgal ne māno us bastī ko cārom or se gherkar jaise use god mem le rakhā ho. Peṛ vahām itne unce, aise chatnār ki sūraj kī kiraṅom bhī jaṅgal kī dhartī par nahīm pahumc pātīr. Sarvatr sānti aur śitaltā birājatī hai.*

33 *Koil [sic] nadī. Uskī theṛhī-meṛhī patlī dhārā. Bīc-bīc mem kālī caṭṭān aur bālū. Caṭṭānom ke cārom aur svacch jal. Usmem choṭī-choṭī machliyām aur pānī ke kīre. śaratkāḷ pūrṅamāsī. Gol candramā cāmḍī ke golā jaisā āsmān mem camak rahā hai. Uskī cāmḍnī koil nadī ke āmcal mem sarvatr chīṭak rahī hai. Cārom or rośnī hai—snigdh rośnī. Nadī kī caṭṭān, bālū, jal, aur sevār candramā kī jyoti mem spaṣṭ dikhāī de rahe haiṅ. Hām, nadī ke jal par cāmḍ kā pratibimb bhī paṛ rahā hai. Kabhī yahām, kabhī vahām. Candramā jal mem nāc rahā hai.*

34 Again, similarities with non-Adivasi authors are all too obvious. Compare the ending of Vinod Kumar’s *Bhaginī* with the protagonist being absorbed, also quite melancholically, in the thought about the Adivasi girl.

her husband left her with her one-month-old baby. She lived with another man for some years until this man too left her for another woman. Now she has four children. Elma tries to cheer her up and helps her with some food, clothes and money. Elma's mother rebukes her for bringing home a sweeper. At the end, Elma remains pondering about Durgi's situation and the inequalities between people.

If Vandana Tete is right in establishing that Durgi is a Dalit, that would make it the earliest case of modern Dalit literature written by an outcaste, preceding even the modern Dalit literature in Marathi.<sup>35</sup> Vandana Tete does not specify what exactly makes her believe that Durgi is a Dalit, but there are two characteristics that possibly point in that direction. First, the occupation of Durgi gives her a low status. However, being a sweeper does not necessarily mean that she belongs to a Dalit caste, but the rebuke of Elma's mother might be symptomatic of the observance of some caste-related taboo. Similarly, the fact that Durgi expresses herself in Nagpuri while Elma and her mother speak standard Hindi is also significant; however, taken alone, it is not enough to declare Durgi a Dalit by caste. Often in Alice Ekka's short stories, it is the Adivasi characters who speak local languages while the speech of the non-Adivasis conforms to standard Hindi (see section "The Language"). Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that Durgi is either Adivasi or Dalit, in the latter case, if not by caste at least by function. Vandana Tete also suggests that Elma must be Adivasi (Tete 2015: 28). Her name indicates that she is probably Christian. If this is the case, then Elma belongs to a family of converted middle-class Adivasis, bearing a resemblance to the figure of the author. Yet, she speaks standard Hindi. In this case then, the language would acquire a different significance, meaning that it would not represent an Adivasi/non-Adivasi dichotomy but rather a low status vs. high status dichotomy. Both of Vandana Tete's assumptions, although plausible, remain speculative.

If Alice Ekka really intended to write about a Dalit (rather than about an Adivasi), that would be interesting in the light of the discourse on authenticity briefly described above. In that case, it could be argued that, strictly speaking, Alice Ekka transcended the limits of what is normally considered the literary space of authentic writing. On the contrary, Vandana Tete suggests that since Adivasi and Dalit share a collective experience, it cannot be considered a story based on sympathy. In her own words:

At first glance and based on the notion of Dalit literature, this might seem like a short story of sympathy. But our Adivasi perspective tells us that this is neither sympathy nor self-experience, this is a short story based on the collective experience, in which the narrator and the narrative stand on the same foundation, in a relation of equality (Tete 2015: 29).<sup>36</sup>

This might be a possible interpretation since Adivasis, just as Dalits, fall outside the caste system. Nevertheless, it is very rare to find an Adivasi writing about Dalits, or the reverse, pointing to the strong focus of Adivasi and Dalit authors on their own communities in contemporary literature. Whether or not Elma is really an Adivasi, is perhaps a secondary concern since the focus is evidently on Durgi's experience.

Among all the short stories by Alice Ekka retrieved so far, *Dhartī lahrāyegī... Jhālo nācegī... gāyegī* is probably the crudest account of the exploitation of Adivasis, and the only one to truly reflect the expectation of the literary discourse briefly discussed above. The story is about the shortage of water and food in an unspecified area. Jhalo, Jharo, Jeraku and Nanaku are all gathered close to a dry river. Jhalo is worried. Twenty years have passed since Independence, but the situation has not improved in the area. Nanaku is confident that the new government will bring a better management of the wells.

<sup>35</sup> The short story was published in 1962, one year before Bāburāv Bāgul's famous first short story collection *When I Hid My Caste* (*Jevhā mī jāt corlī hotī!*).

<sup>36</sup> *Pahlī nazar meṁ aur dalit sāhityā ke vicār se yah sahānubhūti kī kahānī lag saktī hai. Lekin hamārā ādivāsī dr̥ṣṭikon̄ kahtā hai ki yah na sahānubhūti hai na svānubhūti, balkī yah sāmūhik anubhūti kī kahānī hai. Jismē kahnevālī aur jiskī kahānī hai donom̄ ek tal par̄ khare haiṁ, ek barābarī ke sāth.*

They all start singing a song but Jhalo is still sad, she knows that singing songs will not satiate their hunger. The following day, Nanaku brings positive news: in a nearby village the government is offering food to everybody. They rush there and eat their fill. When they return to the village, they start singing and dancing, but Jhalo is still sad. She knows that this will fill their stomachs only temporarily, but it will not solve the problem at its root. The story, with its pessimistic realism, does not leave any space for the romanticism seen elsewhere, and the narration is totally focused on the thoughts of the Adivasi characters, coming closer to the expectations of the critics.

## The Language

It has already been pointed out how, in some instances, the use of certain words rendered a romanticized representation of the Adivasis. Such a representation is nourished by a certain vocabulary adopted by the author to describe Adivasi characters, especially female ones. Thus, the Adivasi women encountered in the short stories shared determined physical traits (e.g., being healthy, attractive, dark, well-formed, etc.) as well as some inherent qualities, such as being *saral* “simple,” and *bhole* “innocent.” In general, the style of the language requires a few words. The Hindi of Alice Ekka stretches from a rather plain Hindustani to a more Sanskritized register, the latter quite in line with the code established in the 1950s and 1960s by the *Nai Kahānī* writers. However, the use of a more refined code along with idyllic descriptions of nature and romanticized images of some characters reminds of the Sanskritized vocabulary used by the poets of the *Chāyāvād* movement.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, it is evident that even English literature, and in particular Victorian romantic literature, have influenced her writing, as testified by the simile with Wordsworth’s Lucy Gray. Consider again the following passage (Sanskrit loanwords are highlighted):

*yuvak mantramugdh-sā un lar̥kiyom̄ kī or dekh rahā thā. Sāmvalā-suhāvanā-salonā sugaṭhit śarīr, baliṣṭ bhujāem̄. Unke aṅg-aṅg se svāsthya jhām̄k rahā thā. Saral sahānuhūtipūrṇ citvan, haṁsmukh mukhre* (40).

The passage is abundant with Sanskrit loanwords, while the others are *tadbhav*<sup>38</sup> words, which sometimes are used together with Sanskrit ones such as in the phrase: *saral sahānuhūtipūrṇ citvan*. Elsewhere, sentences packed with Sanskrit words occur in passages otherwise poor in Sanskrit loanwords, see below.

*Jaṅgal ne māno us bastī ko cārom̄ or se gherkar jaise use god meṁ le rakhā ho. Peṛ vahām̄ itne ūm̄ce, aise chatnār ki sūraj kī kiraṇem̄ bhī jaṅgal kī dhartī par nahīm̄ pahum̄c pātīm̄. Sarvatr śānti aur śī-taltā birājī hai* (37).

Here, only the last sentence shows a Sanskritized style through the *tatsam* words *sarvatr* (everywhere), *śānti* (peace) and *śī-taltā* (coolness). Not all Sanskrit *tatsam* necessarily signal a higher register. *Jaṅgal*, *kiraṇ*, *dhartī*, *śānti* and *śī-taltā* are common words in Hindi, even in the plainest Hindustani register, while *sarvatr* would normally be substituted by *cārom̄ or*, and, in fact, the first line of this passage does say *cārom̄ or se* (from everywhere/from all sides). It then follows that the style itself contributes in to the molding of a romanticized representation of the Adivasis and their environment.

However, this is not all. Sanskrit loanwords are also preferred when the narration reaches some lyrical moment. This is the case in *15 agast, Bilco aur Rāmū* when Ramu replies to Bilco saying that: *tvacā meṁ prem kā māp nahīm̄ hotā* (64) “the measure of love does not reside in the skin,” where the lyricism of the line is partly conveyed by *tvacā*, which is a rather unusual Sanskrit *tatsam* in Modern Standard Hindi (*kharī bolī*). Similarly, when Bilco is still an infant, her mother’s heart is said to be

<sup>37</sup> For a discussion on Sanskritized Hindi and the poetical codes of *chāyāvād* style, see Schomer (1983: 70–75).

<sup>38</sup> The vocabulary of Hindi is composed of *tatsam* (literally “same as that”) words (i.e., Sanskrit loanwords), *tadbhav* words (i.e., evolved from Sanskrit), *videśī* (i.e., foreign word) and *deśī* (i.e., words indigenous to the subcontinent).

“filled with parental affection,” which in the original it sounds like: *uskā māṭṛ hṛday vātsalya se bhar uṭhā* (62). When Ramu is moved by Bilco’s patriotic values, his eyes are overflowed by “tears of bliss” (*ānandāśru*) (65). *Māṭṛ hṛday*, *vātsalya* and *ānandāśru* all belong to an elevated code of literary Hindi. Indeed, the Sanskritized style also occurs in relation to patriotism. Bilco says to Ramu: *Aise hī suputrom se to deś kā uddhār hogā* (66), which can be translated as “these virtuous sons will bring emancipation to the country.” When Bilco talks to Ramu she calls the village *grām* rather than *gāmv* and at the end of the story, she uses the terms *raṅ-kṣetr* (battle field) and *grām-kṣetr* (countryside) to define the different paths their lives will follow (66), thus bringing an association to the *dharmkṣetr* and *kurukṣetr* of the opening verse of Bhagavad Gita (compare Chapple 2009: 39).

Furthermore, in some of the short stories, the language also serves as an indicator of who is speaking. In fact, although the narrative voice is always in Modern Standard Hindi, there are fluctuations in regard to the speech of the characters. Adivasi characters sometimes speak local languages, which, according to Vandana Tete (2015: 30), are Nagpuri, Magahi and Khortha, while non-Adivasi characters speak Hindi. Thus, the Adivasi girls who find the wounded young man in *Vankanyā* speak Nagpuri among themselves, while Feco communicates with the stranger in Hindi. Feco is elected to talk to the stranger correctly because she knows the “speech of the city” (*śaharī bolī*) (39). The same pattern is followed in *Salgī, Jugnī aur ambā gāch* where Raju speaks standard Hindi and Salgi the local language. In *15 agast, Bilco aur Rāmū* this pattern is not observed as both characters speak standard Hindi. In fact, it is only when Bilco addresses her mother or is addressed by an Adivasi that the language switches to the local one. In both cases, the reason behind this choice is not completely evident as both Raju and Ramu, although non-Adivasis, are themselves villagers, probably *sadan*,<sup>39</sup> and would certainly know the local language. This seems to be rather an over-particularization in order to stress the ethnic or social distinction between the characters. The case of *Durgī ke bacce aur Elmā kī kalpnāem* has already been discussed above. Compare the following exchange of words between Elma and Durgī, with the former speaking in standard Hindi and the latter replying in Nagpuri:

[Durgī] – “*ī apne ghar hai didī?*”

*Elmā ne kahā—“hām re, yahīm to merā ghar hai. Vah jo pīlā-pīlā phāṭak dikhlāi de rahā hai na, vahī. Dotīn dinom se yahām kī jamādārin nahīm ā rahī hai. Kyā tū uske evaj mem āī hai?”*

*Durgī ne kahā—“hām didī, hamhī okar evaj mem aile hī. Ū pīlā phaṭakvālā gharvā se to ham akhanīe mailā uṭhā ke ailī rahe.”* (46)

[Durgī]: “Is this your house, sister?”

Elma said: “Yes, here is my house. The one with the yellow gate, that one. For some days, the sweeper has not come. Have you come to replace her?”

Durgī said: “Yes didi, I have come as a replacement. I have come to wash the dirt from the house with the yellow gate.”

In *Dhartī lahrāyegī... Jhālo nācegi... gāyegī* Jhalo, Jharo and Jeraku all speak a local dialect while Nanaku speaks standard Hindi. The reason for this is unclear. In *Koil nadī ke āmcal mem*, there is a brief exchange of words in standard Hindi between the protagonist and a friend whereas all dialogues between the main characters are in a local dialect. Again, the use of standard Hindi limited to a single exchange of words seems quite random.

It should be said that although the Adivasi characters will speak Nagpuri or Magahi in reality, this is not sufficient for explaining why they do so in the narration. The reader would certainly understand that a dialogue in Modern Standard Hindi between villagers of a remote area on the banks of the Koyal River would be a translation, just as anybody can guess that the speech of Dhaniya and

<sup>39</sup> *Sadan* are long-time-resident communities that share a common culture with the Adivasis (Tillin 2013: 84).

Hori in Premchand's *Godān* cannot be anything but a translation of some Bhojpuri dialect. The reason might be related to the regional character of these short stories.<sup>40</sup> Although *Ādivāsī* was a (mainly) Hindi journal,<sup>41</sup> its reach was probably localized in the area of former Bihar, if not only in the area of what is today Jharkhand, or perhaps Ranchi alone, where Nagpuri and Magahi served and still serve as *linguae francae* among many Adivasi and non-Adivasi communities and were thus intelligible to any reader. However, this type of writing (Hindi with dialogues in local dialects) is sometimes also used by contemporary authors along with other strategies, such as using standard Hindi throughout with the addition of specific words in other languages, sometimes with a translation written between brackets (compare, for instance, Kerketta 2017).<sup>42</sup>

## Conclusions – Digging into *Anubhūti*

The reasons behind the implementation of the elements discussed in the previous sections, today ascribed to the writing of non-Adivasis, can be traced in the author's biography and in the historical context where the short stories were composed. Alice Ekka belonged to a first generation of middle-class, educated Adivasi intellectuals residing in cities. Consequently, she was geographically and also culturally very far away from most of the Adivasis of her short stories. In a sense, Alice Ekka was herself an outsider in the rural world that she represented, and such romanticized images come from her urban, middle-class background.<sup>43</sup> In addition, she was influenced by, and evidently drew upon, the literary trends that she was the most familiar with, including the Hindi Chayavad and the English literature of the romantic period. Therefore, it is not strange that she could formulate a simile with *Lucy Gray*. However, from the standpoint of someone who reads the short story today, it will seem peculiar that she chose to adopt such a simile. At the same time, the comparison with Kipling's short story shows how the stereotype of the Adivasis in Alice Ekka is essentially a positive one, while in *Lispeth* the representation of the native girl is quite negative, conforming to a fundamentally colonial view.

It is evident that the dynamics surrounding the production of Adivasi literature at play today are different from those at play when Alice Ekka was writing. Back then, the intellectual discourse on literary authenticity was not yet established, and postcolonial literature itself had not yet emerged. Being the terms and historical circumstances upon which her literature was produced, different, Alice Ekka could, without any concern about literary authenticity, engage in the point of view of an outsider who has sympathy for the Adivasis, and did not feel compelled to eschew romantic descriptions that put forward a stereotyped representation of the Adivasis. In this way, her short stories resemble those of some non-Adivasi writers and differ from those written by the Adivasi authors emerged later. A more limited use of similar romanticized images and the implementation of an "Adivasi per-

40 In fact, some of the short stories published in the journal *Ādivāsī* are labeled *āñcalik kahānī* (regional story).

41 Some poems are also presented in Mundari or Santali accompanied by a Hindi translation.

42 Yet different was the strategy used by Phanishwarnath Renu, the most well-known writer of regional literature and a contemporary of Alice Ekka. As thoroughly described by Kathryn Hansen, Renu in his *Mailā āñcal* (1954) did not adopt any other languages than Hindi but distorted the phonetics of words (especially Sanskrit *tatsam* and English loanwords) to render the pronunciation of Hindi in the eastern region (Hansen 1981: 276–277), which, together with other elements, gives the "illusion of authenticity" (Gaeffke 1978: 66).

43 For further evidence, it is sufficient to compare her short stories with the traditional oral Adivasi literature where no trace of romanticism is to be found. The folklore narrative collected by Paul Olaf Bodding in Bompas 1909 provides an ample stock of Santal stories. In these stories the idealization of the Adivasi characters as well as that of the village and jungle is completely missing, as is the kind of dichotomy between Adivasi and non-Adivasi visible in Alice Ekka's short stories and Adivasi literature altogether missing. After all, it could not have been any other way since the strengthening of ethnic boundaries due to modernity or in reaction to it (compare Eriksen 2010: 13) and the correlated dynamics, which are also expressed in literature, were not in place back then.

spective” in the literature emerged starting from 1980s<sup>44</sup>, written by authors who share her ambivalent position towards the rural and the urban, can thus be understood as the result of a more or less conscious distancing from the received idea of the non-Adivasi author, where, in the search for an own literary identity, some literary elements are selected while others are discarded.<sup>45</sup> It is through this exclusion that the “difference” between the literature written by Adivasis on the basis of *anubhūti* (and therefore “authentic”) and that written by non-Adivasis on the basis of *sahānubhūti* (and therefore “non-authentic”) is formed.

The dissonance of Alice Ekka’s short stories with the assumptions often made regarding Adivasi literary identity shows that the literary qualities inherently associated with ontological categories are themselves the product of historical circumstances. Moreover, her case in particular (although this is shared by other writers as well) shows how the Adivasi identity does not contrapose but can be integrated into other forms of identity, as being part of an educated urban middle class. The formation of an educated urban Adivasi middle class inevitably created parallels with the non-Adivasi middle class, with which certain characteristics, such as access to particular literary traditions, a certain distance from and view on the rural villages, are shared. That is why the short stories of Alice Ekka (and for that matter all the modern Hindi Adivasi literature) resemble more those of non-Adivasis mainstream writers than the Adivasi traditional oral literature. Therefore, the doctrine of a “monopolistic or privileged access to knowledge” to once again quote Merton 1972, accredited to membership to a group and the discourse on literary authenticity obscure the internal complexities of identity and do not provide a particularly useful analytical tool.

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<sup>44</sup> A major exception is the literary production of Peter Paul Ekka, whose short stories in many cases present an abundant use of romantic elements and stereotypes.

<sup>45</sup> This dynamic might work in a similar way to, and be a part of, the broader process of ethnic formation that the Adivasi identity has been going through. In fact, in the process of ethnic formation, difference: “can be defined as the process by which structural features of the system of cultural and sociological diversities (selected *elements* of which come to constitute ‘ethnicity’), emerging under specific historical circumstances, are historically negotiated to become the common ground for negotiating further trans-specific differences in the contemporary lifeworld” (Poppi, 1997: 293).

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