

Athabasca University  Master of Arts - Integrated Studies

PUBLISHING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE:
TARA BOOKS, DEMOCRACY, AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

By

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ABSTRACT

Publishing For Social Change: Tara Books, Democracy, And Social Transformation

A qualitative case-study analysis of Tara Books, this paper reviews the mission, activities, organization and profit structure of this independent publisher and worker collective in Chennai, India within the context of contemporary Indian publishing. The research finds that Tara works towards democratic social, and economic relations, social justice, fair representation and inclusion, and thus social leadership. Tara's activities go beyond an alternative business publishing model towards a new model for social change.



Tara's Rickshaw, Chennai, India (Photo: Heather Parsons)

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“...There's something very similar between a book and a house, and sometimes entering a book is like entering a house: you can smell the smells, notice the dark corners, and the light areas, the moods of the person who lives in the house...Just like a house, a book is a whole world.”

From *The Book Book* (Tara Books)



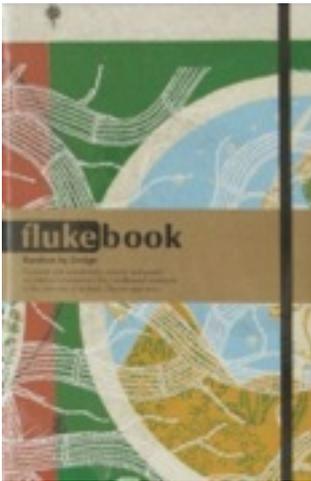
(Photo: Heather Parsons)

Introduction

Bumping in the back of a rickety auto-rickshaw in a leafy South Indian suburb of Chennai, I was sticky from the heat when the driver stopped abruptly. He gestured to a house with a pile of shoes at the entrance and an iron gate stamped AMM Screens. I had finally arrived. This was Tara's handmade book workshop in Chennai, South India.

PUBLISHING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: TARA BOOKS

I entered the building and padded barefoot into a cleanly swept room. Five women in bright saris sat at small wooden platforms, elegantly cross-legged. Their regal posture belied quick hands, like butterfly wings, transforming stacks of handmade paper into Flukebooks, small notebooks with recycled covers.



Above: Flukebook with random recycled cover (Photo: Tara Books)

Left: Flukebooks on the pressing machine (Photo: Heather Parsons)

The women looked up at me in surprise. Simultaneously, like nesting waterfowl leaping into the sky, they began to giggle, and suddenly I was giggling as well. My first cross-cultural exchange was through the international language of giggles. It was a good way to start my research. I was here to look at book publishing as a cultural and economic activity and ask questions: What are the links between social development and books? How can publishers be agents of social transformation?

Many publishers in my homeland of Canada and in India strive for social aims, some more than others: at one end the spectrum are those explicit in social justice or transformative goals, such as New Society Press who publish pragmatic books for a sustainable and democratic society (newsociety.com); or non-profits like Me to We who run African community programs with women (metowe.com), or publishers with aesthetic

aims like McSweeney's (mcsweeneys.net). On the spectrum's other end are publishers who create books as commercial goods without questioning broader social or cultural implications. I was in India to learn about a publisher at the social and aesthetic end of this spectrum: Tara Books¹. As an illustrated book publisher in Chennai, Tara is a tiny



business that remains grounded locally while marketing globally. Tara Books is a feminist (non-hierarchical) worker-owned and worker-run collective, producing children's and art books mainly in English, with some books in Tamil.² Most of Tara's twelve to eighteen books per year are generated in-house (Byspalko, 2009, p. 21). Approximately 35 percent of their books are handcrafted at AMM Screens, where I giggled with the women

workers. The remainder are offset-printed at a vetted printer in China (personal communication, Mr. A., Production, and Mr. M., Sales).

1 Originally "Tara Publishing," the name was changed in 2008.

2 Tamil is the official state language and the oldest South Indian language.

Tara relates to capitalist market pressures on its own terms and somehow they have succeeded by resisting the dominant discourse in economic development models that dominate in industries like publishing. These models often leads to community problems such as exclusion of the marginalized, atomization and competition among individuals, exploitation of the community for the profit of a few, and environmental destruction. Tara organizes around sustainability, collaboration, inclusion, democracy, localism and experiential knowing. As such they are a positive model for publishers and businesses everywhere.

Research Aims, Design and Methodology

My research is qualitative to explore Tara's values, organizational structures, and practices. Methods employed: in-depth qualitative interviews³, archival analysis, and document review. My personal bias and privilege as a white, western woman in mid-career in the Canadian publishing industry, and working on a master's degree, shapes the data I've collected and my interpretation of it. The research was limited to interviewing the internal members of Tara's team, and no artists nor people in the community were included, so any predictions of Tara's effects in their communities are my own interpretations.

Part 1: Context: Contemporary Indian Publishing

India's population and economy is booming. At 1.236 billion people in 2012 and annual economic growth at 5 percent, India's economy could surpass the US by 2025 (Baensch, 2007, p. 262; UNICEF, 2012). The growth in many sectors, especially the

3 Interviews were conducted in December 2013, in Chennai, India, with six Tara book employees.

Information Technology (IT) sector, means that a new 300 million-strong Indian middle class has the means and desire for information and lifestyle products such as movies, and adult and children's books (Baensch, 2007, p. 267; Frankfurt Book Fair, 2013; Kanda, 2007, p. 270; Roy, 2012, p. 2). This makes up the third-largest English-language market in the world, one of the only growing markets (Baensch, 2007, p. 267; Frankfurt Book Fair, 2013).

Many English-language publishers market print and digital books in India. Information and communication technologies (ICT) are highly developed here, even reaching into rural areas that lack other basic services⁴ (Choudbary, 2012, p. 2), and printed books are difficult to get to these areas, so e-books are seen as a solution for these issues, predicted to eventually surpass books and increase access to information in rural areas. At present E-book sales are still relatively small and heavily academic (Frankfurt, 2013; Subramaniam, 2013, p. 33) however the trade market will grow in future: Amazon's Kindle entered India in 2012, and Penguin initially offered 240 English e-books and has continually added to this initial list (Frankfurt, 2013). At present, Tara Books does not react to the pressure to digitize, and they do not publish e-books (personal communication, V. Geetha and G. Wolf).

Economics is the major barrier to ebooks; pervasive poverty prevents most Indians from purchasing an e-reader, and 32 percent of Indians live on \$1.25 per day or less (UNICEF, 2012). Smartphones and e-readers are not widely used and cellphones⁵ are not ideal for reading books. Visual or children's picture books require a colour device, an

⁴ Cellphones are used in 99 percent of Indian villages at approximately 893 Million devices, or 68.7 cellphones per 100 population; it is said there are more cellphones than toilets (Frankfurt, 2013; Subramaniam, 2013, p. 33; UNICEF, 2012; UNDP, 2012)

even more expensive proposition. The printed book remains a relatively affordable, portable, easy, and recognizable technology with no ongoing costs for batteries, electricity, or Internet access. Power blackouts, lack of WiFi, and few home computers⁶ are serious limitations. This study looks at print books as this is what Tara engages with at present and is print technology that is most broadly associated with publishing in India.

Publishing and Bookselling in India

The Indian book publishing industry is estimated at \$2 billion USD annually (Frankfurt, 2012; Subramaniam, 2013). Dominated by global multinationals like Penguin, and Scholastic, and Indian conglomerates like Tata Group⁷, India is an “open market” with no limitations on foreign ownership, no import duties, and low overheads (e.g., Frankfurt, 2013; Ghai, 2012, p. 44; Kanda, 2007; Karthika, 2007; Ulrike, 2010). There are three independent publishing sectors: the school market (primary and secondary) is approximately 30 percent of total national sales; academic (post-secondary) makes up 50 percent. Trade publishing is the smallest at 20 percent, and many printed trade books are lucky to sell only 5000 copies (Frankfurt, 2013; Karthika, 2007, p. 142; Wolf “Chaos,” 2013). Tara Books is primarily a trade publisher, with some of their books going to schools.

Book publishing in modern India is a remnant of colonialism, with dominant companies from overseas still importing and exporting and old stalwart families controlling the trade (Feather, 2006, p. 193). However, there are 16,000-19,000 entrepreneurial domestic publishers, including newer start-ups like Tara Books,

⁶ only 12.6 percent have Internet access at home (UNICEF, 2012)

⁷ Tata is over 100 companies including mining and Tetley Tea, they own a publishing firm and a bookstore chain (Roy, 2012, p. 3)

simultaneously publishing in English, Hindi, and the twenty-four regional languages. (Altbach, 1997; Baensch, 2007; Feather, 2006; Frankfurt, 2013; Ghai, 2012; Ghosh, 2006; Kanda, 2007; Karthika, 2007; Pathak, 2011; Rose, 2011; Subramaniam, 2013; Wolf, A. 2013). Each language has its own distinct distribution system (BBC, 2013; Frankfurt, 2013; Kanda, 2007, p. 270; Ulrike, 2010, p. 189; Wolf, "Chaos", 2013). There are six general publishing activities (see Table 1). The book trade is growing at 15 percent annually, resulting in more books being made available and at higher quality for readers (Frankfurt, 2013, p. 3; Karthika, 2007, p. 142; Pathak, 2011). This has paralleled the development of shopping malls in urban centres and the development of massive bookstore chains: The Landmark chain recently opened a 30,000 square-foot store in Bangalore; others like Crossword, Odyssey, and Sapna Book House are all expanding. Online retail is growing but remains minor: major players are Flipkart, with over six million users, and InfiBeam (Frankfurt, 2013, p. 3; Kanda, 2007, p. 274; Pathak, 2011).

Yet the bookstore chains in India are not a major outlet for Tara's books, and they offer relatively little shelf space to Indian children's titles (Chadwick-Dobson, 2011, p. 7). When they do buy Tara's books, the chains require larger quantities per book to cover multiple locations creating inventory dilemmas, with longer payment terms that stretch this small publisher's resources, increased book returns and damages: all this equals substantial financial risk (personal communication, Mr. C., Sales).

Where Tara sells more books is through small Indian fair-trade and NGO shops in the organized retail sector (personal communication, Mr. M., Sales). Unlike Canada, India's organized retail sector sells only about 7 percent of national sales of books (Frankfurt, 2013, p. 3; Karthika, 2007, p. 142). The majority of book sales occur through the

“unorganized” sector in India: family supermarkets, bookstalls, vendors at traffic lights, footpath stalls, railway stations, and door-to-door sales (Karthika, 2007, p. 142; Subramaniam, 2013, p. 26). Of the approximately 30,000 bookselling shops, only 50 exceed 5,000 square feet (Karthika, 2007, p.142). This is a major challenge for offshore publishers to penetrate this market and provides independent local presses with an opportunity.

To handle national distribution, some publishers hire a distributor who is in regular contact with the various retailers. Distributors are expensive: they take 45 to 50 percent and do not guarantee sales (Karthika, 2007, p. 144). Such conditions work best for publishers who do not employ sales staff or are not on Indian soil. Together these issues, with transportation and infrastructure obstacles, are called a “vertical chain barrier,” to effective sales, marketing, planning, and financial development for publishers (Altbach and Hoshino, 1995, p. 285; Chadwick-Dobson, 2011, p. 7; Ulrike, 2010, p. 189; Wolf, A., 2013). Most of the literature agrees that it is easier to access a British book than an Indian one (Altbach and Hoshino, 1995, p. 278; Subramaniam, 2013, p. 28 and 33; Ulrike, 2010, p. 189).

All these challenges mean that many small presses do not use distributors or are shut out because of closed contract arrangements. It is estimated that only 25 percent of publishers attain adequate national distribution (Frankfurt, 2013, p. 4; Ulrike, 2010, p. 189; Wolf, “Chaos,” 2013; Karthika, 2007, p. 144). Tara ended their relationship with their distributor in 2013 as their books were being marginalized in comparison to the distributor’s other competing lines. Tara now handles its own domestic sales with good

results: the previous quarter's sales had already exceeded the entire previous year's (personal communication, Mr. C., Sales, and Mr. H., Finance).



A bookseller on College St., Calcutta (Source: Arun Wolf)

The English Book Market

Tara publishes mostly in English, with some books for the educational market in Tamil.⁸ Publishing in English was both a strategic and pragmatic decision: Tara Books' original proprietor, Gita Wolf, was schooled in English, the growth area is in English and for two centuries imported English material has been flooding the Indian reading market (Altbach and Hoshino, 1995, p. 278; Feather, 2006, 192; Kanda, 2007, p. 276; Karthika,

⁸ The Tamil Program is run under Tara's TERS non-profit activities (see section 2).

2007, p.142; Ulrike, 2010, p.188). English books are primarily read by college-educated, middle-class Indians and their children, who are the market for Tara's Books (approximately 5 percent of Indians read in English--Frankfurt, 2013; Kanda, 2007, p. 270; Karthika, 2007, p. 14). V. Geetha pointed out in our interview that the long history English has in India makes it essentially "an Indian language". Recently English material has increased, the majority originated overseas. Imported books seen on global bestseller lists, like *Men are From Mars, and The World Is Flat*, are bestsellers in India as well. This English language market is treated by international publishers as the same as anywhere. *Twilight* sold 17,000 copies in one month, while domestic books may only have a print run of 1,000 copies (Karthika, 2007, p. 143; Ulrike, 2010, p. 189).

In children's publishing the storm of overseas bestsellers is even more relentless. Subramaniam, (2013) analyzed the top 1,000 children's bestsellers in March 2012, using Neilson Bookscan numbers.⁹ He found that only one Indian title, *Swami and Friends*, a 1935 classic, made the list of top 1,000 bestsellers at #151. Four of the top titles were from Scholastic's *Diary of A Wimpy Kid* series. The first picture book on the list was *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* a Puffin book that sold 30 million worldwide at #402. A full year (2009) found that *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* made up 18 percent of overall sales of all books sold (Subramaniam, 2013, p. 29). Subramaniam concludes that contemporary Indian children's content is completely excluded from bestseller lists (Pathak, 2011, p. 1). Booknet numbers largely reflect the bookstore chains and their buying patterns as these are the stores that submit sales data, so it is not surprising that Indian titles are not there, given that they focus on multinational titles. However, these bestseller lists are published

⁹ This US data collection technology was introduced to India in 2011 to track sales (Pathak, 2011, p. 1).

in the national media and these influence the behavior of the reading public. This makes the successes for Tara's Indian titles even more admirable.

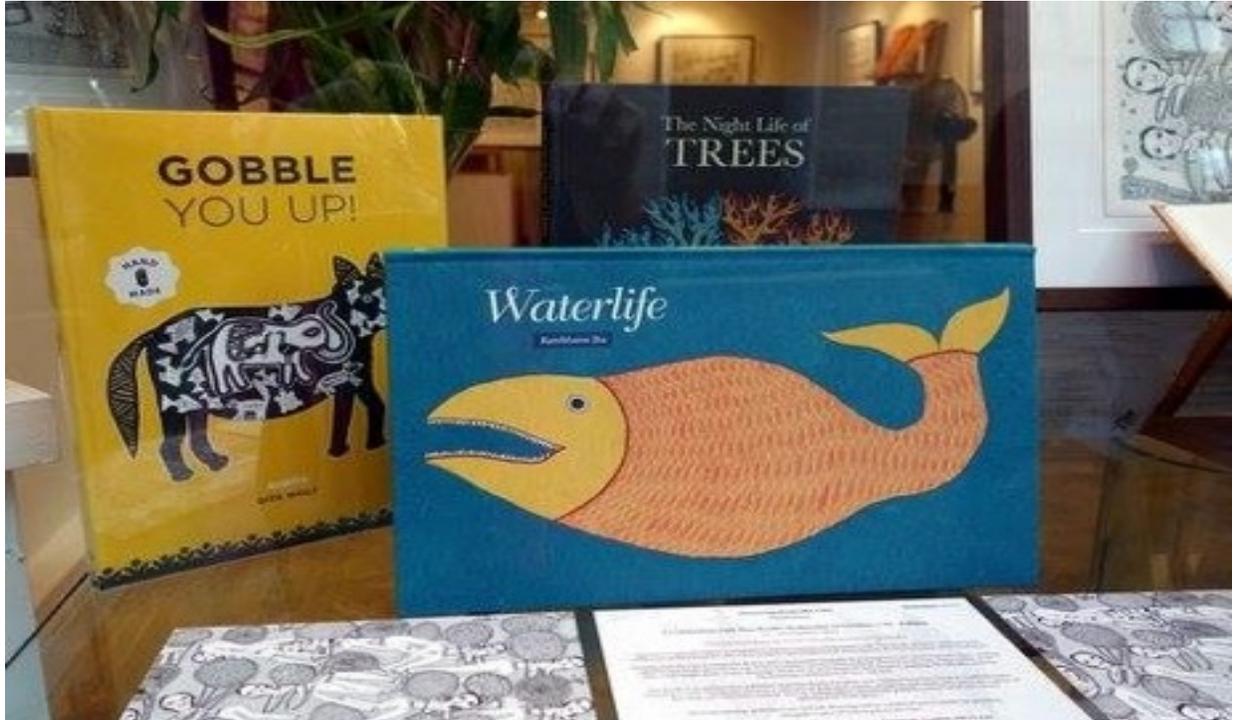
Indian Children's Publishing

Since the 1990s, independent children's publishers like Tara, Katha, and Karadi Tales have been growing even as more multinationals have flooded the market (Frankfurt, 2013; Subramaniam, 2013, p. 32). Subramaniam (2013) estimates Indian children's publishing constitutes 90,000 titles per year across twenty languages, with growth at 30 percent per year. A children's reading culture is only a recent development, from national collaborations between the Children's Book Trust, The National Book Trust, NGOs, publishers, teachers, booksellers, and government (Ghai, 2009, p. 264). New children's book festivals are huge annual events: Bookaroo in New Delhi has grown into a four-day annual event for over 3,000 children with readings and workshops organized by publishers, the British Council, the German Book Office, and corporate sponsors (Ghai, 2009, p. 269). Literacy rates are at an all-time high of 88.4 percent (male) and 74.4 percent (female). Recent compulsory universal education aims to take literacy in children to 100 percent by 2015 (Pathak, 2011; UNICEF, 2012). A 2010 study found that one-quarter of youth now identify themselves as book readers (Frankfurt, 2012, p. 2). South India, where Tara is based, has the strongest reading tradition in India, from a strong people's library movement and mass literacy programs (Ghai, 2009, p. 266–7). Chennai is a major centre for South Indian publishing, especially in regional languages.¹⁰

¹⁰ South Indian major domestic publishers: Andhra Pradesh Literacy House, EMESCO Books, Vishal Andhra Book House in Telugu; DC Books, Current Books in Malayam; Tulika Books, New Century Book House, Vanathia Pathipagam, Palaniyappa Bros., Children's Books World, Chandamam Comics, and Ramakrishna Math in Tamil (Ghai, 2009, p. 266).

Children's books

Other than English classics like those by Enid Blyton, and now Harry Potter, many of the books available to Indian children until recently have been didactic retellings of



A selection Tara Books at a London Book event (Source: Tara Books)

Indian folk myths or “moral stories” (Subramaniam, 2013, p. 32). Newer high quality writing that is adventurous and non-homogenous tends to come from independent houses run by women and independent-multinational collaborations (Subramaniam, 2013, p. 32). Tara’s books are quite different from other publishers in that they are mainly fictional picture books, always with an Indian flavor, and presented from an entirely different perspective. They are high-quality and yet reasonably priced.

Challenges and realities for Indian children’s publishers

As shown, great opportunities face Indian children’s publishers: the changing nature of the Indian economy and consumer patterns, growing literacy and an expanding

children's reading culture, and the impending popularity of ebooks. Challenges also abound, from the obstacle of the “vertical chain barrier”, the changing nature of retailing and new retailer’s preference for Western content, the challenge of reaching rural markets, economic barriers for the majority of Indians and especially rural readers, literacy issues for parents, an open-market for foreign publishers which created an onslaught of multinationals with larger reach and budgets, persisting in developing demand for Western oriented books.

How do these factors affect Tara Books? First, children are flooded with material that is not representative of Indian life while Tara is providing literature steeped in Indian realities. Yet the demand for such content must be created through education and outreach to offset the onslaught of US and UK cultural materials, Tara undertakes this mission without government support. Although the government supports literacy programs and provides support for festivals, there are no institutional subsidies for domestic publishing to offset the effects of neoliberal policy that opens up the market without restrictions to foreign content. Second, children’s Indian originated book quality is uneven. Many low-cost children's books that originated in India, had poor-quality text and clipart pictures (Subramaniam, 2013, p. 27; Wolf, 2013). Tara has the challenge in shaping perception around the consistency and quality of an Indian children’s literature tradition, again without government support. Language divisions, access to books, and wealth disparity means that print runs are small, usually less than 2,000 per title, not generating much income and thus make it difficult to sustain a viable publishing operation (Subramaniam, 2013, p. 30). Government subsidies and support could go a long way in assisting with these Indian-originated publishing programs.

In some ways, Tara and other local publishers have an advantage over multinationals, because they are “context-driven”: they are connected directly to their readers and artists, keeping them small, innovative, flexible, and responsive to Indian daily realities over their larger and more bureaucratic competitors, particularly those with distal head offices with little understanding of the communities where they are marketing books (Wolf, “Chaos”, 2013). For example, Tara attends bookfairs to connect directly with teachers and operates its own retail shop to meet and sell books to its customers. Tara also goes into rural communities to directly meet with artists and writers. Their size and scope means that Tara has little advantage against economies of scale for distribution or access to national chains; but this is precisely why their model is a case for community development: it is context-oriented, human-scaled, and culturally sensitive.

PART 2: Case Study: Tara Books

Existing literature

There are two previous academic studies on Tara in English. Byspalko (2009) analyzed their publishing model using a business approach, the “4 Ps of marketing”: Product, Pricing, Placement, and Promotion, concluding that they are “democratic” in blending high-market products while keeping pricing low by way of a commercial distribution model in the context of art book publishing history (p. 3, 20). Oseen (2010) conducted onsite research into the ownership (shared), management (flat), and communication processes (open). What she found was that shared ownership and nonhierarchical decision-making in practice did not mean decisions were based on vote, as is normally believed, nor by attributed positional power, as in many organizations, but executed by those actors with the experience to make the decision (p. 12-14). She found

high employee engagement through their connection to outcomes of their labour (p. 14). She concludes that Tara follows a “contiguous” model consistent with underlying feminist principles, without an imposition of sameness, in a fully participatory and nonhierarchical manner (2010).

Byspalko (2009) looked at Tara in the business of publishing, while Oseen (2010) looked at Tara as a feminist organizational model. This study’s focus is on how Tara uses publishing as a means to social and cultural change.

Tara Books: Overview

“It may seem at first glance that the majority is the dominant force in every society, but those who dramatically change the world, now and throughout history, always belong to the minority.” International Books for Young People Board (IBBY) comments about Tara Books

It started in 1994. Responding to a lack of “quality” literature, Gita Wolf, an Indian feminist and former professor, created Tara with five employees in an economic downturn (“A Brief History,” 2012, p. 2). In twenty years the company has grown to almost two dozen global employees, garnered major industry awards, such as Best Children’s Publisher in both Bologna and London Book Fairs (“All About”, 2013, p. 1; Tara Facebook update, 2014), and its books are regularly reviewed by major publications like *School Library Journal*, *The Globe and Mail*, *People*, and *The Wall Street Journal* (“A Brief History”, 2012). Although Tara began as a sole-proprietorship, in 2008, changed to a worker-owned collective (Tara Catalogue, 2013, p. 2)¹¹.

11 Major awards for Tara Books: Winner, London Book Fair April 2014, Best Children’s and Young Adult Publisher of the year; Winner BOP Bologna Prize for Best Children’s Publisher in the Asia Region 2013; Long-listed Publisher of the Year, 3: AM magazine, UK 2012; IBBY Honour list and annual USBBY for Outstanding International Books 2010. For AMM Screen Book Craft Workshop: Johannes Gutenberg Award for Excellence in printing, Madras printers and Lithographers Association, 2007; Winner, Alcuin book design award for excellence in printing for A Very Hungry Lion 1996; MPLA Award for Excellence in Printing; FESPA Award.

In the context of consolidating multinationals, 19,000 fellow independent publishers in India, tiny print runs, massive vertical chain barriers, shrinking media attention to books, and the arrival of e-books, how has this tiny South Indian handmade press captured the imagination of people around the world? One clue is in Tara's commitment to their values of high quality, equal collaboration, open dialogue, and fair representation. This commitment goes beyond the content in their books, to pervade every facet of their work, from the work space, organization, human relationships, supply chain standards, and, ultimately, to their influence on culture and readership.

Tara's mission

Tara's mission is to "genuinely change the perspective from which stories are told" (*Tara Catalogue*, 2013, p. 2; also *All About*, 2013; Chadwick-Dobson, 2010). This means that they are aiming for inclusion of voices of the culturally marginalized into the main body of literature. The books are genre- and age-defying, either stories or information, exploring themes of peace, justice, and gender equality; they are usually set in India, and most are illustrated by marginalized community artists (*All About*, 2013, p.1; Dedina, 2013, p. 3). (See appendix A for a list of art styles and relevant books). Using highest-quality production for their books, open collaboration in their processes, as well as fair-trade principles in production, Tara aims for representation, dialogue, and communication through publishing (Chadwick-Dobson, 2010; Oseen, 2010). Their bestselling title is *Nightlife of Trees*, selling over 20,000 worldwide (personal communication, Mr. A., Production).



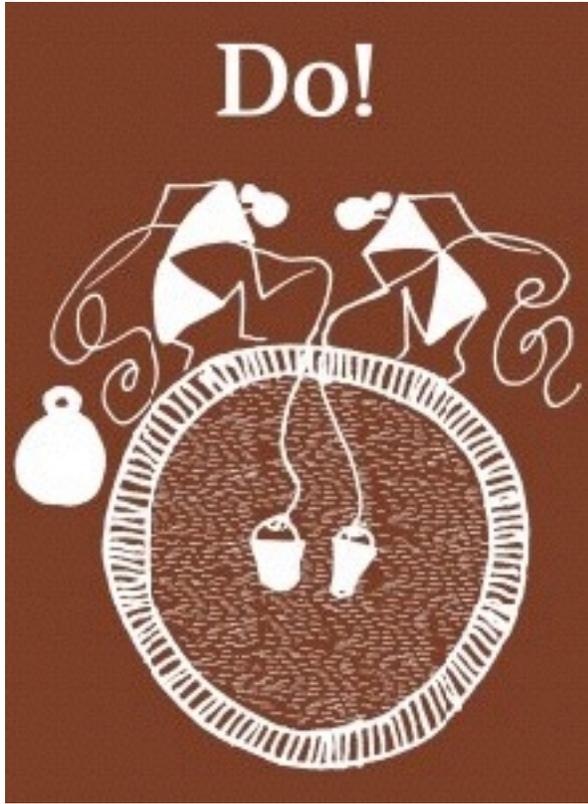
Detail from *Nightlife of Trees* (Photo: Popova)

Chadwick-Dobson, a co-owner, found three patterns in the origin of Tara's books. There are books that come from a gallery-like curatorial process, combining different art forms around a theme, e.g., the book *Beasts of India*, blends various tribal- and folk-style illustrations to show how different traditions visualize the same animal.



Pages from *Beasts of India* comparing different traditional art styles (Photo: Heather Parsons)

The second type of books depict a single traditional art form with a novel twist; e.g., *Do!* reworks traditional Warli art to teach verbs.



[Do! \(Photo: Tara Blog\)](#)

The third pattern is seen in books that emerged from collaborations (Chadwick-Dobson, 2011, p. 4), e.g., *I See the Promised Land* arose when Gita recounted Martin Luther King Jr.'s story at a workshop and one of the artists began drawing Gita's words. Tara worked these into a graphic novel, with text written by American blues singer Arthur Flowers (Wolf, 2013).



Detail from *I See the Promised Land* (Photo: Tara Books)

I would add a fourth category: those books that combine Indian and non-Indian elements, and twist on the traditional-modern dichotomy. Each result is distinctive and challenging, always with an Indian flavour, that both promotes Indian traditional culture while contemporizing and challenging stereotypes around it.

An example is *I Saw a Peacock with a Fiery Tail*, an eighteenth-century traditional English trick poem illustrated with black-and-white Indian non-traditional art, challenging conceptual opposites, such as traditional and modern, or English and Indian. Particularly fascinating is the way specially placed die cuts reveal the poem in small pieces, continually changing its meaning, thereby using design and visual language to challenge the reader's understanding of the text.



Detail from *I Saw A Peacock with a Fiery Tail* (Photo: Popova)

Design and reader pleasure

To Tara, “design ... is not an embellishment but an integral part of how a book works, the final voice in the dialogue between text, image and production” (*Tara Catalogue*, 2013, p. 8). Each book is created with the utmost care and attention to the reader’s experience (Edinger, 2013, p. 2). Imagining the book as a perfect union of images and words, Tara encourages an “alternative culture of the book” as a most worthy cultural object and source of pleasure (Tara Presentation, 2013, p. 8). “Pleasure is a concept that we have evolved. (B)ooks need not be useful in helping you pass an exam or making you smarter,” but can be a vehicle for the pleasure “of look(ing) at the world with fresh eyes” (personal communication, V. Geetha and G. Wolf). The senses are a huge part of the reading experience with Tara’s philosophy. The handmade books especially look, feel, and smell different; they are physically enjoyed as much as for the stories they contain (Chadwick-Dobson “Speech,” 2011, p. 1; Dedina, 2013, p. 3). As a

result, Tara's books are like nothing else: "Your mouth hangs open in awe" (Higgins, 2013); they are a very "special cultural object" (Kleinman, 2013) with "creative bravery" (Popova, "Gobble," 2013). In 2000, Tara curated an exhibition themed "bringing the senses back to the book" (personal communication, V. Geetha).

E-books and P-books

Gita and V. Geetha said they eschew e-books but not as an active resistance practice. Asked whether they are concerned that e-books are consuming the attention of other publishers, they replied, "What we are interested is in exploring (our own subjects), regardless of what is happening in the world ... it is not that we are closed to things changing, but we take the book for granted because it is a much loved object" (personal communication, V. Geetha and G. Wolf). This reflects Tara's desire not to grow too big or too fast (Gita) and to focus on its core values (V. Geetha).

Given their love of the book as a sensual object, it makes a sort of sense that Tara does not publish e-books. Their books are tactile with rough, smelly, earthy and inky pages; they engage the senses and the emotions beyond the intellect (Dedina, 2013, p. 3). The Cartesian mind-body dualism is challenged; one is not just a reader with a disconnected brain but engaged with her body, as a whole person experiencing the book and finding knowledge within a field of conscious experience. For readers, these books are a welcome reprieve from a dematerialized world where kinesthetic disengagement is the norm.

Organization: The companies

Tara Books maintains three distinct organizations, each play unique roles in carrying out its mandate.

i. Tara Books

Tara Books is the main publishing and book-selling business and the one that most people know Tara by. It serves as creator and project manager between the artist, author, designers, and production, before marketing the books. Tara Books operates out of “Book Building”, a breezy three-story, multifunctional space built by Gita Wolf and local architect Mahesh Radhakrishnan¹², partly funded by a Dutch funding organization grant.¹³ Besides design, editorial, marketing/sales, accounting, and shipping departments, its offices have an in-house gallery and bookstore that allows for vertical distribution and direct contact with consumers and simultaneously serves as educational/meeting space, and guest apartment (Ashik, 2012, p. 1; Chandrasekaran, 2012). The space is gorgeous. The clean walls are decorated with bright Indian tribal and folk art, including a 25 x 15 foot peepal tree by Gond artist Bhajju Shyam (Ashik, 2012, p. 1, Chandrasekaran, 2012). The building is 80 percent solar-powered and a welcome respite from a cacophonous streetscape of cycles, cars, bullock carts, banana vendors, and jasmine garland sellers (Chandrasekaran, 2012). Tara also coordinates a year-long designer internship program.¹⁴

12 HIVOS (Humanist Institute for Cooperation in full, Dutch: Humanistisch Instituut voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking) is a Dutch funding agency that provides resources and funds to organizations in the global south, for the purposes of cultural development, sustainability, and citizen engagement (see www.hivos.org). Tara (under TERS, see below) received a ten year grant from HIVOS that ended in 2013.

13 The space is owned by Gita and leased to Tara Books.

14 Tara provides food and lodging to budding and experienced international designers, who have the opportunity to work and live at Tara Books for a period up to a year. While I was at Tara, there were two female designers, from Japan and Scotland, who shared the upstairs apartment.



The design and editorial loft (Photo: Heather Parsons)

Tara Book's income

Tara's sales income is from multiple sources:

1. Foreign sales through international book fairs (Frankfurt, London, Bologna). Tara was one of the first Indian children's publishers to sell foreign rights (Subramiam, 2013).¹⁵

¹⁵ Tara has sold the rights to twenty books internationally, with 163 contracts so far (personal communication, Mr. H., Finance).

Tara sells books to foreign publishers for the rights to exclusive distribution in a particular country. Either a digital file is transferred for 50 percent against advance royalties for the partner to print, or Tara is contracted as printer, and ships the book (personal communication, Mr. H., Finance). These books may be produced in English or in other languages.¹⁶ Low upfront costs, favourable exchange rates, good brand recognition, and overseas response have made this important for brand-building and as a major income stream. Tara's first book, *The Very Hungry Lion*, was sold, screen-printed and shipped to Annick Press in Toronto under similar arrangements.

2. Exports through international distribution networks in countries like the UK, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Japan, Korea, the US and Canada¹⁷ (All About, 2013, p. 1).

These two foreign sales streams make up 65 percent of their gross revenue (Interview, Mr. H., Finance).

3. Exports to foreign retailers in countries with no prior distributor arrangement; this revenue stream equals 10 percent of their sales.

4. Domestic sales -- 25 percent of revenue. Tara sells directly to Indian retail shops, saving approximately 20 percent margin and receiving funds faster than through a distributor (ninety days down from 120) (personal communication, Mr. H., Finance).

Indian book chains purchase some titles, but Tara often short-ships orders as a means to manage thin inventory, especially for handmade books (personal communication,

¹⁶ The third edition of *Night Life of Trees* was being printed in Japanese (1,000 copies) while I was visiting the production facility (personal communication, Mr. A, Production)

¹⁷ Publishers Group West (PGW) is Tara's distributor in the US and Canada. I worked as a sales representative for PGW in Alberta, Canada, from 2001 to 2013, which is how I came to Tara Books.

Mr. H., Finance). Books are sold to most retailers on a returnable basis,¹⁸ with a 30 percent cap on returns, but as of our interview they'd had none; some retailers even



The peepal tree at Tara's Book Building (Photo: Heather Parsons)

sold their books on consignment.¹⁹ Books are shipped from the offices (stock is hidden in the walls of Book Building), with a dedicated staff member managing shipping and receiving (personal communication, Mr. H., Finance). Domestic sales to consumers are also a part of this income category, sold

either through the bookstore/gallery or online are at full retail price²⁰ (personal communication, Mr. H., Finance). Their gallery bookstore was featured recently in the latest edition of *Lonely Planet*, and this has increased attention.

18 Accounts are given credit if the book is returned within six months.

19 On consignment means the account pays for only the books that sell after they are sold through the till.

20 In Indian rupees; this works to about 40 percent of the US retail price.

Another domestic market is the Indian educators at the “new schools” , the Montessori, creative education, and international schools paid for by the new middle class, who are hearing about Tara books through word of mouth and school book fairs²¹(personal communication, Mr. H., Finance and Mr. M. Sales).

Tara intends to remain small, to maintain quality and focus, but its challenge is to keep up with growing demand, especially for the handmade titles (personal communication, Mr. C., Sales). Multiple income streams creates a steady foundation for Tara to do its work; Tara is reaching many markets and benefitting from global exchange rates, for this reason they are self sustaining while they continue to create their books on a handmade scale. Their stable base and increasing brand attention has allows for the fostering of more relationships with community artists, while simultaneously expanding their readership in new markets.

Profits, Salaries, and Royalty structure

Although Tara Books is technically a for-profit business, profits have never been distributed to owners/workers; instead, they are reinvested into the company (personal communication, Mr. H., Finance). Tara pays fair wages, plus an extra month’s pay each year to all employees, provides family medical insurance, and a voluntary pension fund²² (personal communication, Mr. H., Finance). Concerning royalties, Tara gives small advances to authors and artists when a contract is signed, against future sales. A typical

21 The sales manager Mr. M was going a book fair in Bangalore the day after I interviewed him.

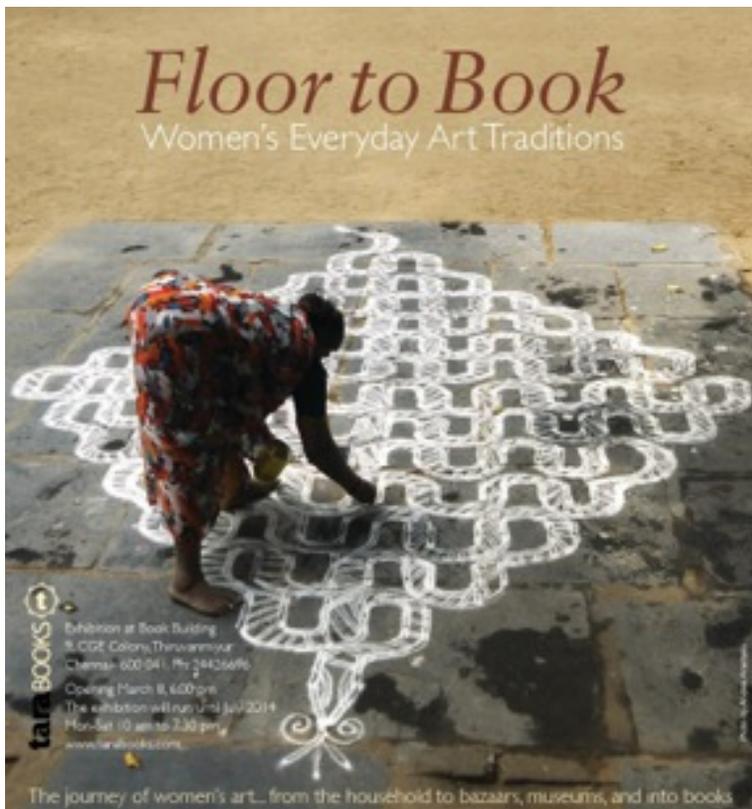
22 To which Tara contributes at about 24 percent of its employees’ salaries.

23 About \$373 CDN at current rates (1:53.599)

advance is 20,000 rupees²³ (personal communication, Mr. H., Finance). These small advances allow Tara to commit without extended financial risk.

ii. Tara Educational Research Society (TERS)

A second arm of the business is Tara's non-profit educational trust, Tara Educational Research Society (TERS). Started by Gita Wolf and coordinated by V. Geetha, TERS was initiated with a ten-year grant from HIVOS in 2003 (interview, G.Wolf and V.Geetha; also TERS website). TERS undertakes experiments in printing, such as the development of Tamil curriculum materials at low-or no-cost for schools (exhibit, Tara Books onsite, 2013; personal communication, Mr. H. Finance and V. Geetha; "Tara Presentation", 2013, p. 7). TERS conducts surveys and field research into indigenous art as the basis for book projects. TERS also hosts gallery exhibits and educational sessions at Book Building, such as the Women's Art "Floor to Book" gallery exhibit. TERS is the



means by which Tara reaches into communities and does its non-profit work, but rather than it being merely an afterthought to the business, it is a core component. It encourages literacy and local connections to schools, works to educate the public about community art, while supplying Tara Books with the intelligence and networks that

are the groundwork for bookmaking projects.

iii. AMM Screens

My bumpy rickshaw ride was my introduction to AMM Screens, the handmade book workshop. AMM is a separate entity from Tara (Tara is their only customer) (personal communication, Mr. A., Production, Mr. H., Finance). A social enterprise and communal living space six kilometers south of Book Building, AMM is a workshop owned by Tara's production manager Mr. A, employing a crew of seventeen highly skilled, men²⁴ The shop is set up to maximize production without sacrificing quality nor the men's connection to their work. Unlike a factory that automates tasks or and breaks them into meaningless components controlled under a management hierarchy, this is a handcraft workshop where workers are skilled in all or most of the craft's steps: quality control, setting up screens, cutting, printing, stitching, binding, even palletizing and shipping ²⁵. All the men work together on the entire product run from beginning to end. A rotation option gives each man the option develop his talents in a variety of jobs (personal communication, Mr. A., Production). Each book is quality checked and rejected pages are recycled into covers of Flukebook journals, the ones the women were binding in my moment of giggles. The women are the men's spouses and they assist in busy times. As of 2014, AMM has successfully printed and bound 250,000 books in fifteen languages.

24 The men all over eighteen years of age and are all long-term (twelve years or more).

25 Books destined for international ports are sent directly from AMM by way of truck (recently they still used bull-carts) (personal communication, Mr. A., Production).

The silkscreen process

Silkscreening is a technology requiring great care. Each silkscreen must be exposed to light to create a reversed image, then washed, and then coloured ink is applied separately in layers. Each page is dried between colour applications; a book that has five colours requires five passes, and, if double-sided, ten passes (personal communication, Mr. A., Production; YouTube video). Men screen in a team of three. In harmonic coordination, one man aligns the page, another squeezes the ink through the silkscreen, while the aligner removes the page and passes it back to the dryer, who places it on wooden drying racks. It is careful and steady work. After these steps are completed, the men will move the sheets to begin the shared work of binding and sewing. Pages are individually scrutinized for accuracy and quality. It is a slow process and a 3,000-copy print run takes four months (*A Brief History*, 2012, p. 4). The result is that the final pages have a paint-like texture, each is a piece of art. Workers witness the entire process and product, thus they feel more connected to the outcome of their labour (interview, Mr. A, Production).

Workshop conditions

AMM Screens is ecologically sustainable, using local materials such as non toxic ink and rice or cloth papers²⁶ (*A Brief History*, 2012, p. 4; *Tara Catalogue*, 2013, p. 4). It is also fair trade: employees are paid 25 percent above the going rate and work in clean, indoor, open-window conditions, six days per week,²⁷ with medical benefits and paid vacations. Many of the employees were recruited by Mr. A. from two underemployed villages (personal communication, Mr. A., Production). Mr. A envisioned a community that lives,

26 E.g., all papers are handmade and sourced in South India and all glues and inks are nontoxic.

27 This is standard in India.



The

[silkscreen print process](#) (Photo: Heather Parsons)

eats, works, and plays together communally as in a theatre community, and he built that at AMM. He provides all workers and their families' housing²⁸ and covers all costs of living. Everyone has the chance for input at biweekly meetings (personal communication, Mr. A., Production). Employees with more experience earn higher salaries, but everyone is valued equally (personal communication, Mr. A., Production).

This is the first year female workers have worked at AMM. Mr. A. expressed great happiness with this arrangement. The women indeed seemed satisfied, each smiled and

²⁸ The men live communally next door in a separate building; married men live with their spouses in nearby housing, also provided by AMM (interview, Mr. A.).

laughed, and they chatted quietly as they worked together in a group. “No one is watching them ... children can come in too and sit with them if they want...they can leave as they like, each are paid regular wages with vacation benefits”²⁹ (personal communication, Mr. A., Production). I saw the women leave when their children began filtering in after school around 4 p.m.



Pages drying in the book workshop (Photo: Heather Parsons)

For mass-printed books, Tara relies on an offset printer in China that has been vetted for its fair-labour practices (personal communication, Mr. A., Production).

²⁹ Mr. A. mentioned that some men get teased as being “bad providers” for their spouses because they allow their spouses to work, but that this is only in fun; I saw this as an example of the gender norms being challenged here at this workshop

The future for Tara Books

Beyond the external changes in India's economy and in the global world of publishing, Tara is navigating a time of change internally as well. Its HIVOS grant expired in 2013, cutting a major portion of TERS' funding. Tara Books will have to fund its own research and workshops. A key representative has also left Tara to manage the US distributor directly. As noted, the company severed its contract with its domestic distributor and sells directly to Indian stores. However, Tara is deftly adapting to change: the recent London Book Fair (2014) award for Best Children's Publisher (April 2014) will bring even more international recognition and additional foreign rights income. The catalogue also announces an expansion of Tara's stationery and Flukebooks lines, all will provide additional income with little upfront strain on resources. Another catalogue announcement is their recent decision to release their prized backlist hardcovers into paperback editions; this will broaden their reader base and reinvigorate stale titles, again bringing in another fresh batch of healthy income (2014 catalogue). With these successes and changes on the horizon, Tara is well poised to continue to grow at a healthy, sustainable pace and furnish us with creative and beautiful books for years to come.

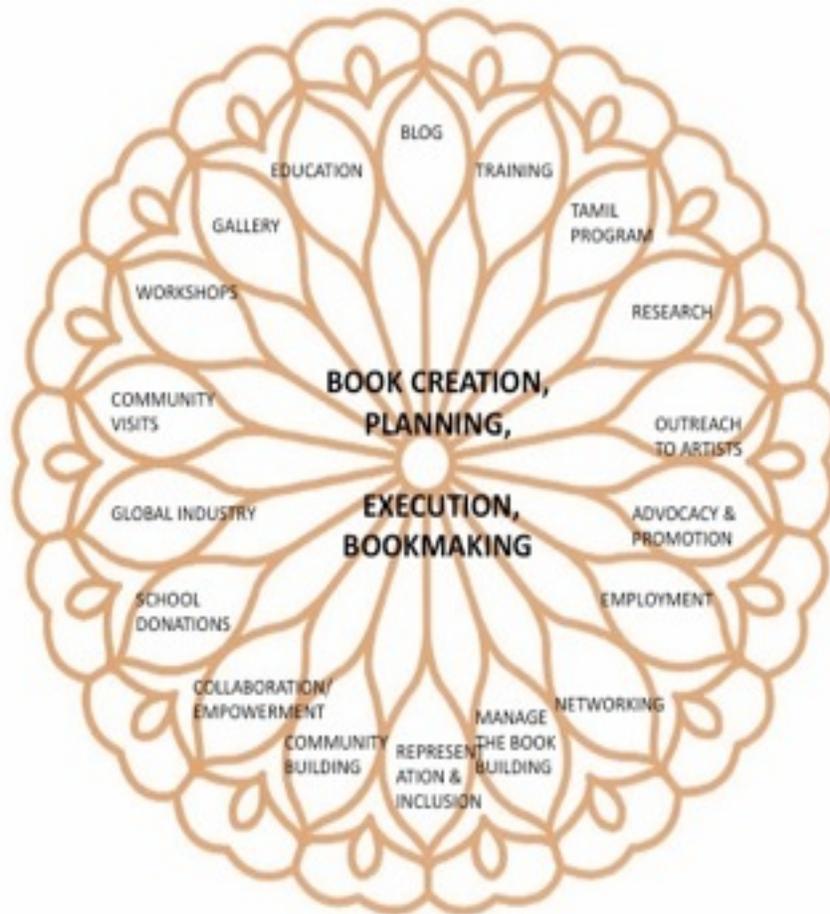
Part 3: Analysis

Emergent Themes Linking Tara to Sustainable Community Development for Social Change

From a social transformation perspective, Tara is practicing an entire range of activities that extend the business of making and selling books. Tara's roles span from content developer, networker (across caste, class, linguistic, geographic lines), to advocate, educator for the marginalized (e.g., holding workshops on design, increasing access and thus economic rights), and in educating the readership about indigenous and

folk art (through the books, videos on youtube, gallery exhibits, networking and book talks).

Like the petals of a mandala, each of Tara's activities are oriented to a larger pattern of book making, but through each of these activities, Tara models transformative actions through collaborative, open, democratic, experiential and inclusive values and action. The following section explores some of these specific links to community development themes around social transformation.



The Mandala: An alternate model of publishing and social transformation

1. Sustainability and community development

Usually development is equated with economic growth under a the dominant “free market” paradigm. Ideas of progress, competition, development, and consumption are like “cultural mantras” ringing in our ears (O’Sullivan, 1999, p. 1). Yet there is tension between these ideas and the realities of “progress”: rather than “trickle-down” effects on communities, Arundati Roy calls these effects “gush up” capitalism (Roy, 2012).

Economic growth models privatize profit and socialize costs, and often end in environmental devastation, social destruction, and economic disparity in communities in India, at levels not seen in Western countries (e.g., see Roy, 2012; Shiva, 2011; SinghaRoy, 2004). Sustainable, community-oriented models are a preferred alternative; they encourage development at a sustainable pace and in an environmentally sensitive manner, benefitting communities on their own terms, not creating dependency but self-sufficiency (Campfens, 1997; Singh, 1997; Shiva, 2011).

Publishing has an added responsibility to support sustainable development models because books are so important for development in a nation like India; they are essential for advancing literacy, for mass communication, and dissemination of knowledge and culture (Altbach and Hoshino, 1995, p. 278; Subramaniam, 2013, p. 37). They both spread and multiply the effects of development and are an essential element of social planning (Braid, in Choudhary, 2012, p. 1; Subramaniam, 2013, p. 37). Haval has pointed out that growing a strong democracy requires an empowered civil society (1993, p. 3), and books shape culture and the future, thus publishers have a unique responsibility to citizens and cultural life (Altbach and Hoshino, 1995, p. 278).

However, Roy (2012) shows large media conglomerates that use corporate philanthropy and foundations and grants to support literature and the arts in India have

“replaced missionary activity as capitalism’s (and imperialism’s) road opening and systems maintenance patrol”³⁰ (p. 7). By the subtle imposition of western capitalist values of progress and development, many multinationals, including publishers, knowingly or unknowingly use their cultural privilege to perpetuate an exploitative economic system. Publishers who attempt to do business without recognizing their role in the politics of economic activity are not neutral; as Paulo Friere said, “washing one’s hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral” (1991, p. 32).

Tara’s approach is conscious of these tensions and sides with the less powerful; they remain community-focused and supportive of the marginalized, ecologically sustainable, and economically sensitive, supporting the building of local economies and local jobs. Tara rejects the dominant industrial growth paradigm: “Growth is a scary prospect, kind of like riding a tiger for publishers” (personal communication, G. Wolf) (also Byspalko, 2009, p. 28). Tara’s operations are consistent with the anti-industrial, green paradigm of moderation, sustainability, and long-term commitment (Galtung, 1990, p. 238), consistent with sustainable community development.

2. Democracy, Participation and Representation

Social change requires democratic transformation of everyday social relations (Banks, 1999; Bodley, 1982; Campfens, 1997; McMurtry, 2010). Adapting non-hierarchical pluralistic “values and principles to a range of social phenomena” are central concerns in social change work (Campfens, 1999, p. 23; also Rubins and Rubins, 2008).

30 Such as foundations, grant systems for NGOs, including academic grants.

Byspalko called Tara's form of publishing "democratic" because the company makes high culture (art objects) accessible to a general audience³¹ (2009).



Detail from *Waterlife* (Photo: Popova)

However Tara is inclusive and democratic in a second sense. They work with storytellers and artists from marginalized communities who suffer exploitation, whose art is discounted as women's work or domestic craft, e.g., the designs on walls and floors done by women from the Meena tribe in villages in Rajasthan (*Tara Catalogue*, 2013, p. 20). Tara assists with capacity-building by educating many of these artists on royalties and economic rights in the market system, while communicating with them as equals. They offer economic agency to artists who may have been dependent on the state. Tara assists them in training in technique and design, networks them with other artists, and assists with costs of travelling, all of which which begets more work (Tara Presentation, 2013, p. 14). By featuring marginalized art in their books, Tara are insisting upon its

31 Albeit a middle-class one.

artistic value, transforming those artists' relationship to their own work and themselves as contributive and a form of viable economic labour. *The London Jungle Book* and *Drawing from the City* were both created as a result of artists going through this process. As well, they are educating others on the value of this art. This is transformative work.



An artist creating her work (Photo: Tara Books)

Third, in turning this art into book form in a way that respects the feeling of the original art, Tara “provides a space from which a marginalized community can speak in (their) own voice, rather than merely documenting the tradition” (Chadwick-Dobson, 2010, p. 4). It does this by emulating the original intent of the art in context, an important distinction between art and kitsch that the company’s representatives were careful to point out (personal communication, V. Geetha & G. Wolf). For example, Tara may use brown textured paper to emulate the sense of mud walls for wall art to give readers a sense of the experience of the original art. Since expression in visual forms is a form of language

and “voice,” Tara is bringing these voices and unique perspectives into the cacophony.

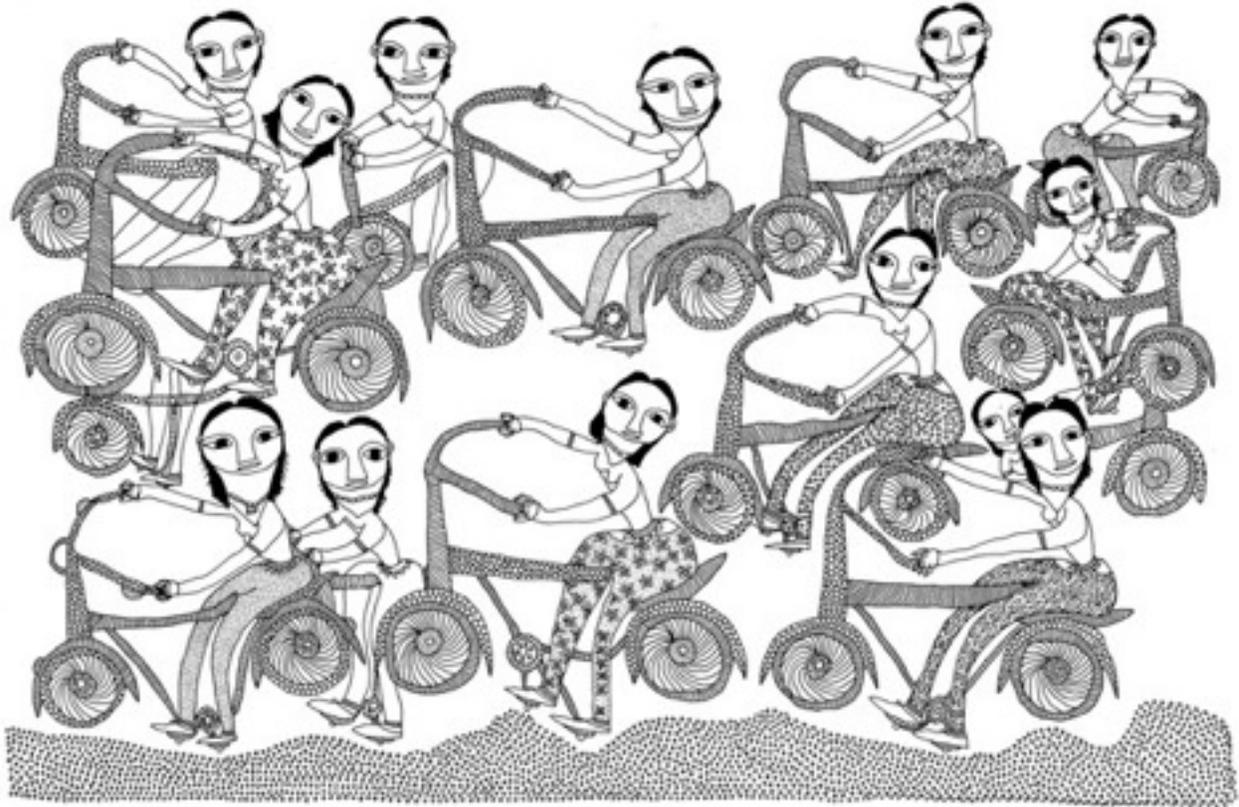
“This work gives us a chance to work with people who ...



Tejubehan drawing her experience of the city for *Drawings from the City* (Photo: Tara Books)

are very different, don't look like us, speak like us, think like us ... and to communicate their point of view to a wider audience, even if it is a middle class audience; it is good for (readers) to know there is another point of view and it doesn't come from what we think about them, but what they have said about themselves ... we feel it is a political act to put as many voices (out) there as possible because there are too few voices that are dominating us” (personal communication, V. Geetha and G. Wolf). This meets their

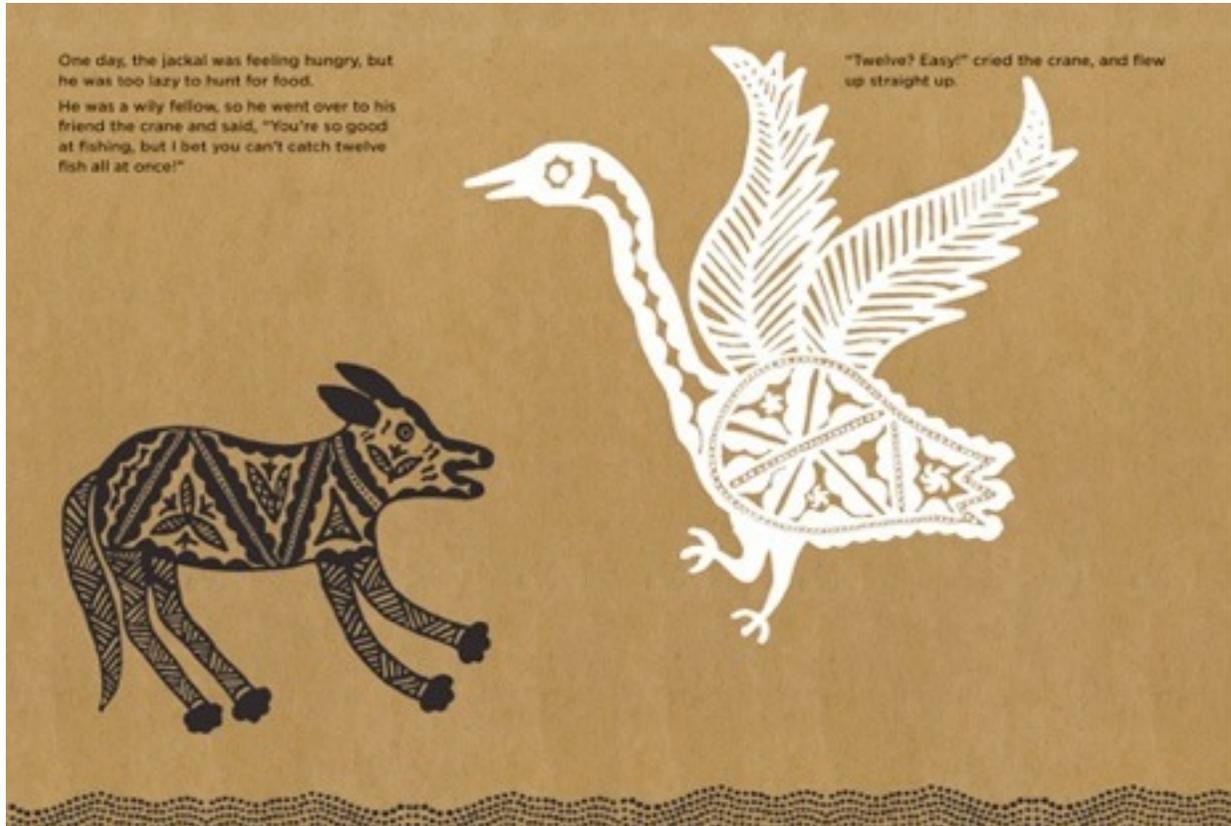
vision, to provide stories from a different perspective to increase the noise of those stories in the literature, again a democratic and inclusive vision and one of social transformation.



Page from *Drawing from the City* (Photo: Tara Books)

This is all political work. But they are performing it not through riots, protests, or letter-writing. Instead, these are acts of resistance against a dominant system that floods the masses via the media, including books, with a consistent message, and Tara are providing a stream of content that alters the chemistry of the larger stream. In this way, Tara is both radical and truly democratic in advocating “for the equal right for self-

expression and meaning- making” for socially and economically marginalized people (ibid.) and educating the middle-class reader on the value of these alternative viewpoints.



Page from *Gobble You Up* (Photo: Tara Books)

A fourth way that Tara is embodying democracy is in its flat organizational style and dialogical openness, as noted above.”³² (Ms. G.H. and Ms. G. in Oseen, 2010, p. 15). Continually, the themes of openness and collaboration came up in my own interviews and observations, even in how Tara dealt with my requests; for example, when I asked for access to the company’s financial information, the response was a strong yes, with full permission to ask the finance manager anything I liked.

3. The social economy

The social economy is an international, alternate, democratic economy not controlled by the state. It is multi-local and rejects the mainstream profit-incentive, instead prioritizing ethics, social goals, ecological concerns, and community well-being (McMurtry, 2010, p. 4; also Affolderback, Gismondi, and Soots, 2008, p. 8; Restakis, 2006). Unlike governments, or some social movements, the social economy works for social change within the market, rather than from without, and participants range from non-profits, to social businesses, to cooperatives.³³ Each of these different economic entities have different mandates and organizational styles, but each always serve social needs first.



Another artist creating her work (Photo: Tara Books)

³³ Tara's three arms: TERS, AMM Screens, and Tara Books represent each of these three types of entities in the social economy and each are fair trade.

For some, the co-operative is the preferred model for social change (e.g., Restakis). Co-operatives have a particular ownership structure: they are democratic enterprises that resist authoritarian power, with proceeds accruing to members (Restakis, 2010, 12). Like Marxism, co-operatives are socialist in nature, meaning they are built upon solidarity rather than individualism. Unlike Marxism, co-operatives do not reject the market system but use it in a multi-local framework for social good (philanthropy, responsible purchasing practices, and investment in the community). The existence of co-operatives illustrates that democracy can be introduced beyond politics and into the economy, and that “free-market” neoliberal economics are antithetical to democracy; co-operatives are thus inherently political (Restakis, 2010, p. 28).

Tara takes the cooperative a step further as a collective. Besides the shared-ownership model of cooperatives, collectives adopt non-hierarchical management structures in which no one person has decision-making power over another, which alters workers relations (Cultivate Coop, 2012). In addition as noted, Tara defines themselves as fair trade, both in their employment terms, royalty structure, and supplier relations (Oseen, 2010; also personal communication, V. Geetha and G. Wolf). By structuring its business as a collective, Tara is resisting the dominant neoliberal model that atomizes individuals in competitive relationships, a model that frames the concentration of wealth as neutral and natural, and sees this as a more pressing social concern than mass poverty or environmental destruction.

Obviously framing Tara Books as merely an ordinary publishing “business” is putting their social goals, ethical outcomes, and human relationships into a narrow framework

that oversimplifies them and pigeonholes them into a capitalist framework that discounts all the non-economic and social activity that occurs in their everyday activities.

4. Diversity, Challenging Stereotypes, and Cultural Intervention

Diversity in children's publishing is especially important for social transformation for future generations. Harmful stereotypes, unrealistic utopias, and homogenous worlds represented in books perpetuate social norms and do little to instill the values for change in youngsters. "The best books break down borders. They do not make children feel self-conscious or underrepresented. They offer a mirror and a window—a mirror that reflects the child's own world and a window that leads to the world outside" (Subramaniam, 2013, p. 40). Children exposed to pluralism are better able to express empathy and research also shows that reading stories about their own ethnic group improves children's self-esteem, encouraging a sense of belonging to a wider society (Subramaniam, 2013, p. 38). Values instilled in childhood from formative experiences, including books, are basis for adulthood (ibid., p. 38).

Tara considers its work a form of "cultural intervention" (All About, 2013, p. 1; personal communication, V. Geetha and G. Wolf). The company acts as a privileged cultural actor intervening in the margins, mirroring a community empowerment approach (such as in Rubin and Rubin, 2008). Tara embodies the understanding that marginalized groups are not to blame for their status, and the solution is not simply in personal transformation, but that these problems are structural and require emancipatory practice from both sides of the divide. This includes educating the middle class towards a more inclusive attitude for future generations as many unconscious and conscious psychological, social, and political structures exclude individuals from democratic participation and social inclusion (Banks, 1999, p. 19). As a feminist organization, Tara understands the links between

subtle forms of exclusion, whether male or female, class or race, as part of a larger hierarchical system and promotes pluralism, diversity, and equality.

Tara also performs cultural intervention by using books to teach about and advocate for these communities, while exposing mainstream assumptions about them, thereby connecting children to the diversity within India (Catalogue, 2012; Chadwick-Dobson, 2010, p. 4; Tara Presentation, 2013; personal communication, V. Geetha and G. Wolf). For example, the company's educational workshops teach the public about indigenous realities and the link to culture and politics and children learn about different indigenous ways of seeing the world.

Tara's work can be considered revolutionary because it contributes to a broad cultural reframing, which is commonly used as a resistance tactic in social movements (Canning and Reinsborough, 2013, p. 168). Reframing involves looking at truth narratives and relating them to power structures, replacing old stories with new ones, thereby exposing underlying faulty assumptions and broadening the frame of reference. For example, faulty assumptions about women's roles or assumptions about tribal or indigenous people's lives (ibid., p. 168). Tara recognizes that the knowledge we consider to be "true" comes from a very narrow field, and by introducing a broader range, it will change what is counted as truth. This basic recognition of the social construction of knowledge is fundamental for social transformation and community development (Rubin and Rubin, 2008). For social change, the inclusion of diverse areas of art and knowledge in the discourse, (note: or in this case, the body of children's literature) is thought to enlarge the cognitive field, this make the space for social change possible (e.g., see Eyerman and Jamison, 1991).

Tara encourages the questioning of assumptions found in traditions while simultaneously exploring the power inherent in tradition and narrative. For example, Tara's book *The Mahabharatha* is a feminist twist on a classic Indian text, written by a child. Tara publishes this as a means to promote the classic text but simultaneously encourages questioning of the taken-for-granted perspectives in it that dictate roles in Indian society; all this while including the voice of one of the most marginalized groups: children (Arni, 2011). Tara also challenges gender norms in India by offering girls books about grown women who engage in non-traditional work such as *Following My Paintbrush*, which describes the life of a female artist growing up in a poor community and becoming a self-sufficient artist.

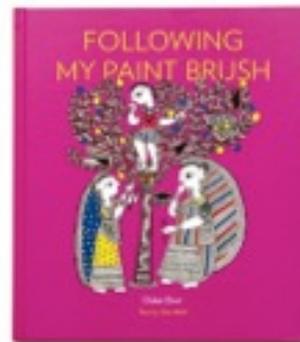
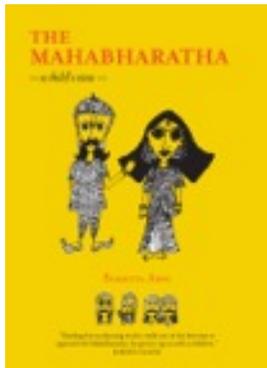


Photo: Tara Books

Themes of social justice, challenging stereotypes, encouraging alternative perspectives, promoting Indian quotidian life and culture, and peace and conservation are in many of their books. See Appendix B for a list of books and their social transformation themes.

*Art, Culture
& Politics*

**Indigenous History
& Activism in Australia**

Talk by Heather Goodall, Professor of History
at University of Technology in Sydney

HEATHER GOODALL has researched
and published in three major areas:
indigenous histories and relationships in
Australia; environmental history, focused on
water, rivers and oceans; and shared histories
of decolonization of the mid-20th century
in India, Indonesia and Australia.

LEFT *Isabel Flick*, by Isabel Flick and Heather Goodall

Tuesday,
January 28, '14
7pm

taraBOOKS

AT BOOK BUILDING
Plot No. 9, CGE Colony,
Off Kuppam Beach Road,
Thiruvanmiyur, Chennai 41
+91 44 42601033
www.tarabooks.com

Poster: Tara Books

5. Connecting as a dialogical community

Dialogue is essential for capacity-building and solidarity in community-change work, essential components of Friere's "critical consciousness" that allows individuals to connect their immediate circumstances to larger social structures (Rubins and Rubins,

2008, p. 72; Friere, 1991). The Book Building is an important space for designers, storytellers, and artists to meet and dialogue, sharing experiences across languages, religions, castes, and geography (Chadwick-Dobson, 2011, p. 3). Such dialogue shows them that they are not alone in their struggles. For example, Tara hosted a workshop with women from different tribes and art traditions (Gond, Meena, Mihtila) from all over India. Many languages were represented, yet because of the approach and openness of sharing, the women were openly sharing and teaching each other, finding non-linguistic means to engage in cross-cultural dialogue (Chadwick-Dobson, 2011, p. 5).

6. Social leadership in publishing

An important aspect of social change is to not only work for change, but also provide a model for others, what the Rubins called “spreading the narrative of the possible” (2008, p. 31) by demonstrating that social change is technically and organizationally achievable. Tara, through its technical understanding of the publishing business and its organizational capacity, models an alternative that is not only possible but also incredibly successful, so much so that the publishing world is taking notice.

Tara’s work performs three actions toward change, creating what Joanna Macy calls “the new story of our time”: first, it carries out “holding actions” that mitigate damages from the current unjust and harmful political economy, for example, by allowing marginalized people a chance to tell their stories as equals. Second, it creates “new life-sustaining systems” by supporting healthy, local community work in an ecologically, psychologically, and economically sustainable manner, for example by the manner under which Tara produces books. Third, as a social leader, Tara is “consciousness shifting” and fostering connectedness across divisions and boundaries, in a way that envisions a more socially just world (Macy and Johnstone, 2012, p. 31-32). Tara achieves this shift

through its values, practices, and organization, and the content and quality of its books.

Tara acts as social leaders by providing a new example of how publishers can engage in ethical and responsible publishing, and, hopefully, this study will help make its successes more widely known and appreciated.

Conclusion

Choudhary notes there are two roles for publishers in India: socializing, or reproducing established values, and transformative, which is engaging in social change for a higher quality of life (Choudhary, 2012, p. 1). Tara's role is undoubtedly transformative: with a critical and democratic stance it remains responsive and responsible to its communities. It takes its commitment to diversity, pluralism, democracy, collaboration, and dialogue to a new level that is consistent across its organization, its social relations, and the content of its books. By encouraging the finest local craftsmanship in art-making, storytelling, and bookmaking, and by using sustainable and democratic approaches to publishing, Tara embodies a new model for publishing and social change that shares resistance practices, values and principles from various social movements, and resistance traditions in India and abroad: from Indian craft and peasant movements, including Gandhi's handicraft and independence movement,³⁴; borrows from Indian feminism and socialism³⁵ and overlaps with values from the green movement.³⁶

34 E.g., see Chaterjee (2009) for a review of the connection of the independence movement in India to handicrafts.

35 See SinghaRoy (2004) for an excellent summary of feminist, Marxist and peasant social movements in postcolonial India.

36 See Galtung (1999) for an excellent overview of the international Green/Peace movement and its fundamental principles, including the rejection of an industrial model and embracing of the handicraft/artisan movement.

Tara's books, by means of association, connects readers to these principles whenever they read them.

Massive global changes are forever altering book publishing: the Internet, self-publishing, e-books, changes in retailing, media consolidation and slimmer margins are giving many publishers cause to rethink their business models. As this study shows, Tara faces the same challenges but is approaching the future entirely differently. Despite massive challenges such as marketing / distribution among a sea of multinationals, and working for culture and change within a country with vast disparity of wealth and literacy, within a confusing multitude of languages, Tara is unique and is enjoying huge success. Although its daily concerns revolve around bookmaking, its entire orientation and grounding is built upon a conscious understanding of the world that fits a social-transformation model. Tara is not just publishing books but they are committed to a broader vision that orients its entire operations and productive legacy towards social good.

The purpose of this research was to gain qualitative insight into this unusual book publisher and relate its activities to social change. Tara Books, with its sustainable, community-oriented model and transformative politics, serves as an innovative model of a new kind of business that should be included in social-transformation work, as it might just lead us toward a more just and inclusive society.

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Table 1: Forms of publishing activities in contemporary India

(from Parsons, 2013)

Ownership	Activity	Example
Foreign	selling imported editions in India, either on their own or by partnerships with local distribution networks	PGW (from the US) selling imported editions of English language books via their New Delhi associate office.
Foreign	partnering with local companies to publish Indian titles for domestic markets, plus may include some export markets	co-publishing arrangements of Scholastic titles with India Book House (Ghai, 2011). Tara also engages in a small way with this, for example copublishing museum titles with the Getty Museum for distribution in India.
Foreign	local offices produce Indian originated content for the Indian market, plus may include some export markets	Harper Collins India produces original Indian titles and increasingly sells licenses or exports around the world, particularly fiction set in India (Ulrike, 2010, p.192).
Domestic	publish for Indian market in either English, or local languages, or both	ACK Media of Mumbai publishes children's books in English and regional languages (Karthika, 2007, p.143). Tara Books engages in this.
Domestic	export their titles internationally	This is a major area for Tara Books (Chennai) who produces domestic market titles and sell approx. <u>30% of their list internationally</u> (Oseen, 2010) <u>does this match my data?</u>

PUBLISHING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: TARA BOOKS

Domestic	purchase licensing/ translation rights to English or non-English international titles to produce local editions for distribution in the Indian market	Seagull books: purchasing translation rights of German originated books.
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Appendix A: Key art styles recreated in Tara's Books

Warli, Western India

The Warli are a tribal community in Maharashtra, India. This art is a woman's tradition reserved for on festive occasions, but now that the art is beginning to be recognized as commercially viable, men also produce art. Most comes on doilies, and bedding in white with decorative yellow dots in yellow of images of everyday activities and landscapes (TERS, n.d. p. 42)

Book examples:

The Very Hungry Lion

Do!

Gond, Madhya Pradesh

Gond people live across several states in India, mainly in Andhra Pradesh. The art is usually describing life in the jungle forest, using lines, dots and animals in 4 colours (red, ochre yellow, white and black). This art is individually stylized even though the themes are universal (TERS, n.d., p.42).

e.g.,

Night Life of Trees

Signature

London Jungle Book

I Saw a Peacock

Alone in the Forest

Churki-Burki Book of Rhyme

One, Two, Tree!

Old Animal's Forest Band

Meena, Rajasthan

The Meena tribe, from Rajasthan in the North, are the largest tribe in this region and the art is painted, always by women, on surfaces inside or outside the house (TERS, n.d.).

Usually they describe scenes from daily life or celebrations. All art washes away, but is a main feature of any home. (TERS, n.d., p.44).

e.g., Gobble You Up

Patua, West Bengal

A West Bengali tradition, these are bright colourful panels painted on paper or cloth scrolls that evolved as a means for visual presentation to accompany performances of travelling heralds: musicians who spread the news and fictional modern and ancient stories, from village to village (TERS, n.d.). Recognized widely, there is a large market for commercial art sales (TERS, n.d., p. 44)

e.g.,

Sita's Ramayana
I See the Promised Land
The Enduring Ark
Monkey Photo

Patachitra, Orissa

Traditionally this was a form of worship produced by temple residents who created art as devotional offerings to Gods. In former times, kingdoms supported these artists through the temple system; when this system collapsed they resorted to commercially selling their art (TERS, n.d, p.44.).

e.g.,
Circle of Fate

Appendix B: Key Social and community oriented themes evident in Tara's Books

Classic folk stories or mythology, retold with new perspectives

Very Hungry Lion
Night Life of Trees
Oedipus the King
Monkey's Drum
The Great Race
Gobble You Up
Sita's Ramayana
Circle of Fate
Sacred Banana Leaf
The Bacchae
Hippolytus
Four Heroes and a Green Bean
Mangoes and Bananas
Old Animals Forest Band

Community Life/ Indian life & culture

One, Two, Tree
Do!
To Market, To Market!
Excuse Me, Is this India?
Matchbook
The 9 Emotions of Indian Cinema Hoardings
I Love my India
The Flag

Connection to nature/conservation

Night Life of Trees
One, Two, Tree
Alone in the Forest
Waterlife
Circle of Fate
Sacred Banana Leaf
Flukebooks
Tiger on a Tree

SSS Snake

Old Animals Forest Band

Catch that Crocodile

Politics/Resistance

Fingerprint

In the Land of Punctuation

Revolution

Art/Folk/ Tribal art

Following My Paint Brush

Child Art with Everyday Materials

Waterlife

I Like Cats

Beasts of India

Nurturing Walls

SSS Snake

London Jungle Book

Apon Katha

Alphabets are Amazing Animals

Signature: Patterns in Gond Art

Toys and Talks With Everyday Materials

Human Rights/Rights of Children/Value of children's perspective

We are All Born Free (Amnesty International copub)

Mahabharatha

Catch that Crocodile

The value of art/new conceptualizations of art

The Book Book

The Colour Book

Ten

Anything but a Grabooberry

I Like Cats

Beasts of India

Alternate perspectives/voices of the margins/valuing the undervalued

Monkey Photo

Following My Paint Brush
Drawing from the City
Alone in the Forest
Sita's Ramayana
Do!
Mahabharatha
London Jungle Book
Current Show
Old Animals' Forest Band
Churki Burki Book of Rhymes
Trash! On Ragpicker Children and Recycling
Flight of the Mermaid

Egalitarianism/Challenging Gender norms

Following My Paint Brush
Drawing from the City
Enduring Ark
Nurturing Walls
Hope is a Girl Selling Fruit

Exploring Social Issues

Drawing from the City
I See the Promised Land

Social Leadership

I See the Promised Land
The Ideal Boy

Peace/Justice

Gobble You Up
Sita's Ramayana
Enduring Ark
Mahabharatha
To-Let House
I is for Imagine
Barefoot Gen

Identity/Integration

Elephants never forget

Rethinking relationships to visual art as language

I Saw a Peacock with a Fiery Tale

Tara's complete catalogue is available at this link:

<https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/15741134/Catalogue%202013%2014.pdf>