



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## Resistance And Resilience Of Adivasis Living In Jharkhand: Inspecting Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*

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### ABSTRACT

Indigenous communities are often marginalised due to a lack of recognition of their rights, culture and traditional living standards. Adivasis have been socially discriminated and excluded from the mainstream society. The social biasness prevailing in the society not only offends human dignity but also in breach the human right of living as an equal citizen. This paper focuses on the Adivasis resistance of forced displacement in the context of development. The paper tries to voice the angst of indigenous people of Jharkhand against the social bigotry. Through the short story collection of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* the consignment of Adivasis to a lower social strata will be discussed. Adivasis have withstand the social and economic adversities and are now acclaiming their presence in the mainstream society. The selected stories of this collection describe the Adivasi resistance against exploitation and also present Adivasis remarkable resilience despite all adversities.

### Key Words

Indigenous, marginalised, displacement, resistance, resilience.

### Introduction

The state of Jharkhand abounds in tribal community. It is endowed with heterogeneous landscape, rich natural resources and dominance of aboriginal's habitat. Jharkhand is the repository of minerals and forest resources. It is the richest state in terms of mineral resources and plays a pivotal role in the economic development of the country. It also contributes a major part in production of forest products.

There are 30 different tribes inhabiting the region, the tribal population accounts for 26.21% of the total population of the state. (Sinha, Singh and Kumar.2003) These autochthonous people occupy almost all the terrain. They largely speak their own language and follow their unique socio-cultural tradition. In recent years the accelerated production of minerals, construction of dams, power stations and roads have played pivotal role in improving economic state and multi-faceted development.

Developmental projects are essential for the economic development of any state but simultaneously people are subjected to involuntary displacement. In recent years the state of Jharkhand has witnessed mass displacement and most of the times the displaced people are the tribals. The Adivasis are forcibly displaced from their ancestral land. Though there are rehabilitation programs run by the government but they prove to be lacking. The victims of these mega development programs are always the marginalised. In long terms the Adivasis have to face multidimensional exploitation. With the loss of habitat, they also face the challenges of re-establishing their identity. They face many derogatory remarks and are mostly socially exempted from the mainstream society of the educated elite.

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *"The Adivasi will not Dance"* pictures the other side of development. This novella depicts the pathetic condition of Adivasis who are drastically displaced in the name of development. The selected stories depict the plight of the Santhals who are displaced from their land and home. The stories describe the unrecognised resistance of Adivasis in opposing the inevitable displacement. The Adivasis face a cultural loss due to this uprootedness. The marginalised are intruded and invaded by the other, the government or other social communities. The Adivasis are deprived of their rights and their protest goes unnoticed.

Writing by Adivasis has become a powerful tool for upward socio-cultural mobility. The recent Writings by Adivasi writers have become a platform for the Adivasis to propagate and bring forth the Adivasi consciousness. They are using the new Adivasi Writing for voicing their resistance and are using it as a tool for telling their own story in their own voice and on their own terms.

The novella of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar *The Adivasi will not Dance* is used as the primary source of the research study. *The Adivasi will not Dance* is a collection of ten short stories. The stories give a vivid description of the basic issues of compelled displacement, acculturation, exploitation of Santhals, impoverished health conditions of Santhals and impact of coal mines on the health of local inhabitants. The stories urge to reclaim the lost identity of Adivasis as farmers. The title story *Adivasi will not dance* raises the voice of resistance against the developmental projects. The protagonist of the story introspects the Adivasi identity and social negligence towards exploitation of Adivasis.

Tribal groups (Adivasis) in India have often been excluded, marginalised and oppressed by 'mainstream' society. In many this exclusion, marginalisation and oppression is fostered by the way in which 'mainstream' society looks at the Adivasis – as exotic, dangerous, or 'primitive' others. (Devy 2006)

### Resistance of Local inhabitants

Resistance literature is a politicized literature that actively critiques and interrogates oppressive institutions and ideologies. Barbara Harlow explains the origin of the phrase "resistance literature" in her book *The Literature of Resistance* (1987). "The term 'resistance' (muqawama) was first applied in a description of Palestinian literature in 1966 by the Palestinian writer and critic Ghassan Kanafani in his study *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948-1966*" (Harlow 1987). Harlow asserted that literature itself has the calibre to resist particular ideological oppressions, she established a category of literature and a phrase for literary criticism that has persisted into the present.

Literature provides us an access to spaces far beyond our intellectual excavation. This space provides us the opportunity to express our numbness, our subjugation in an act of resistance. The subaltern writers voice the angst of the marginalised. They portray the marginalised personalities in their own works and take the initiative to resist the empirical exclusion of the marginal personalities by giving them representation in their literary genre. Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar is an insider writing from the margin.

The title story *The Adivasi will not Dance* talks about the abject deprivation of Santhals of Pakur district. The protagonist Mangal Murmu enumerates the circumstances that lead the Santhal farmers turn into farm labourers. He is beaten and locked in the prison for showing protest against government. He questions the utility of the power plant for the Santhal farmers. He asks what the local inhabitants will get for their lands which has been acquired by a rich mining company. It was planned to put a thermal power plant in Godda. Mangal Murmu unravel the underlying reality. He asserts that the plant would run on coal from the mines in Pakur and Sahebganj. That businessman, in fact, needed electricity for the iron and steel plants he was planning to set up in Jharkhand. The plant was to be set up for his own selfish needs; but if he were to be believed, the whole Jharkhand would receive electricity from this plant. Whole towns would be lit up non-stop, factories would never stop working for lack of power. There would be development and jobs and happiness all over. (184)

Mangal Murmu ventriloquise the voice of Santhals at Pakur and Godda. He resists to dance and reflect his happiness towards the multidimensional exploitation. He questions the indifference of government officials towards their displacement.

How can all of you be so indifferent? How can you expect us to sing and dance when our families are being uprooted from their villages? You are making us Santhals dance in Pakur, and you are displacing Santhals from their villages in Godda? (183)

The Santhals are mostly peaceful people, very hardworking and they profoundly admire mother earth. He laments for the loss of their land and their identity as farmers. He complains that their voice is not heard, neither before the outset of any developmental project nor after completion of the project. He not only questions the conspicuous differences but also resist this encroachment of land. "We foolish Santhals can see what damage is happening around us. Doesn't your VIP see all that?" (183)

It is disconcerting that most of the anthropologists and sociologists have either remained indifferent to such developments or have passively supported the 'Adivasi' terminology and thus jeopardised the legitimate rights and interests of the tribes dwelling in the regions beyond the Hindi heartland. (Burman 2009)

The Adivasi will not dance is a story that strongly resist the lopsided development. The story brings forth the irony of the picture of development. The developmental projects undertaken by evacuating the indigenous people not often care for their proper resettlement, they are totally indifferent to the Adivasis basic needs of education, health and hygiene.

Ministers from Dilli and Ranchi, all dressed in their best neta clothes, laughing and chatting among themselves. All very happy with the progress, the development. The Santhal Pargana would now fly to the moon. (185)

Mangal confronts this skewed progress. He voices the indigenous angst for the limited development and opposes the idea of 'Bharat mahaan'

What mahaan? I wondered. Which great nation displaces thousands of its people from their homes and livelihoods to produce electricity for cities and factories? And jobs? What jobs? Become a servant in some billionaire's factory built on land that used to that very Adivasi just a week earlier? (185)

Mangal Murmu strongly resist to give any stage performance. He talks about the disillusionment of the Adivasis. He questions the value and significance of the accolades they had for preserving and exhibiting the rich Adivasi culture.

All our certificates and shields, what did they give us? Diku children go to schools and colleges, get education, jobs. What do we Santhals get? We Santhals can sing and dance, and we are good at our art. Yet, what has our art given us? Displacement, tuberculosis. (178 )

The resistance is not only towards the materialistic loss it is also against the cultural loss, the ultimate loss of their identity associated with their dance and language. For Adivasis their dance and their culture is religious. The social performances are consecrated to him and all Santhals "But hunger and poverty has driven us to sell what is sacred to us." He says that "Diku are quick to call Jharkhand their own. But when it comes to displaying Jharkhandi culture the onus of singing and dancing is upon the Adivasi alone." (179)

These days, no festival or utsav is considered complete without some sort of folk music or dance. The idea of presenting the music and dance traditions of the Adivasis in a public forum is generally well-meaning—to create general awareness among the urban/rural public about Adivasi lives and to generate a sustainable development of Adivasi art forms. Unfortunately, these good intentions are far removed from reality. (Banerjee 2003)

Murmu's resentment against the inability of government Tenancy act and other rehabilitation programs in settling the issue of vagrants from the eleven villages is strongly felt in his words.

"We have nowhere to go, nowhere to grow crops. How can this powerplant be good for us? And how can we Adivasis dance and be happy? Unless we are given back our homes and land, we will not sing and dance. We Adivasis will not dance, The Adivasi will not-"(187)

### **Construction of a resilient Adivasi identity**

Resilience discourse has become a global phenomenon, infiltrating the natural and social sciences, but has rarely been an object of study in the humanities. Resilience theory argues that it is not the nature of adversity that is most important, but how we deal with it. Resilience is the ability to bounce back it is the passion for life. It helps us survive and recover in the face and wake of adversities.

Joyce Strand and Robert Peacock propounded the concept of resilience to discuss the resilience of Indigenous people in North America. This approach "proposes the use of traditional life-ways to overcome the negative influences of oppression, abuse, poverty, violence and discrimination . . . in American Indian families, schools, and communities" (Strand and Peacock,2003).

The story *They Eat Meat* narrates the story of Biram Soren and his family. After the transfer of Biram Soren, director with the Gramin Vidyut Nigam, to Vadodara they realised how the Hindus have a low perception for Tribals and other low caste hindus. When he is directly asked about his tribal identity, he felt disgraced but has to maintain his composure. Mr. Soren is bewildered by the fact that purity of a person is measured by his food habits. Biram's wife Panmuni is further outrageous to know that they can't cook their traditional Santhal meal- daka and sim-jill. She questions 'How can people dislike those who eat meat?'(8)

The Sorens gradually abstain themselves from eating meats but they felt constricted. "In Odisha, Panmuni-jhi could be a Santhal, an Odia, a Bengali. In Gujrat, she had to be only a Gujrati.'(14)

But the family had to behave accordingly, they accepted the social norms of the hindu colony. They assimilated the new parameters of purity.

And while it was now well known that the Sorens were of Adivasi origin, they conformed to the norms – they went to mandirs, celebrated Hindu festivals, fasted on certain days, lit dhoop-batti in their house- and were accepted. (15)

In the story November is the month of Migrations, migration can be seen as the prerequisite to survive. It becomes obligatory for the Santhals of Santhal Pargana to abandon their land and move to Bardhaman to work in the farms owned by zamindars. It further become indispensable for Talamai Kisku, a twenty-year-old Santhal girl, to resist the offer of a bread pakora. Hunger constrains her to accept the food and the work.

She knows many girls who do that work with truck drivers and other men. And she knows that on their way to Namal, Santhal women do this work for food and money at the railway station, too. (40)

The story Getting Even tells the escape of a Santhal girl from being sold by Santhal-Kiristans. She married a Hindu man, left her family and became Hindu but this betrayal is not accepted by her family. Her elder daughter is sold and her ten years old son is accused of raping a little girl.

My wife is also from that family, but she did not like what they do. She married me and left that family. She has become a Hindu now, sir. She is not Kiristan anymore. (55)

Even Mangal Murmu of the Adivasi will not dance endure the exploitation and still holds his Santhal identity. He remembers his old days when he used to have a splendid dance troupe and the young men and women of his troupe would bring life to his songs.

I used to compose songs. I still do. And I still maintain a dance troupe. (177)

Mangal is happy to be called for a musical performance and the assurance of being paid nicely further pleased him. He is so excited that he travelled twenty kilometres to post his letter of acceptance. He was not even worried of being blackened by the dust of the koyla road.

What does a hungry man need? Food. What does a poor man need? Money. So, here I was, needing both. (180)

## Conclusion

The manifold exploitation of the indigenous people has resulted in a shift in their lifestyle and cultural beliefs. The imposed ideologies and values of the mainstream society and disruption of their ancestral land has drastically affected the Adivasi psychology. The expression of Adivasi consciousness has gained considerable attention.

The Adivasis have responded to the loss of identity, loss of habitat, acculturation and assimilation by employing resistance and resilience in their life that ultimately paves the way for their survival. So, resistance and resilience become the key factors to endure the psychological impact, foster tribal identity and to sustain economic development.

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