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ADIVASI WILL NOT DANCE: A REALISTIC ACCOUNT OF SANTHAL DISPLACEMENT IN JHARKHAND

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Abstract

The indigenous people of Jharkhand are the easy target of displacement by the state agencies. The identity of being indigenous aims to give any inhabitants the status of original settlers of the specified land. The Santhal tribal community of Jharkhand forms one among other original settlers who settled down years back. Santhali English writer, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, in his epoch-making short story collection *Adivasi Will Not Dance* raises an issue of despondency and injustice over his Santhal people. Development and Advancement are the tools used to displace innocent settlers all around Jharkhand. The present paper makes a foray into analysing that such colonial aspects aiming to bring development to any society also tend to enslave the mind and is a threat to the free will of any citizen. This results in the alienation of the Santhal people, arising both in physical and mental forms. The research methodology used here is the post-colonial theory. The state agencies and the bureaucrats involved in such acts of displacement are criticized through the lens of an artist's well-crafted plot and the helplessness of the deracinated tribe is projected from an insider's vision. The present research paper evolves in the light of victimization and resistance, thereby bringing forth the transformation of the subaltern from meek to rebel.

Keywords: Alienation, Displacement, Political Injustice, Santhal, State Agencies, Subaltern, Tribe

INTRODUCTION

The industrialization of any place leads to expansion and development in the nation as it happened in Jharkhand where "A new phase emerged when the country started the liberalisation and privatisation process" (Sarangi, 1649). The interaction, notwithstanding, required the ideal

usage of assets. It incorporates significantly the utilization of land. Then again, land assumes a significant part as the asset of presence as well as the personality of native individuals. Here native individuals allude to the first pilgrims whose relationship with the land is more profoundly established than the ones who have settled as

migrants. The first pilgrims have a place with a flawless society and the occupants of such a general public feel that the human relationship with the land isn't simply monetary alone yet additionally physical and profound. "On the contrary, the stratified society, based on greed and individualism, competition and exploitation of man and women by man has reduced physical nature into a subject of exploitation. The land has been made a commodity. It is privatized and alienable. It has been made merely the subject of the economic pursuit of man isolated from other social and spiritual considerations" (Chatterjee and Mullick, 2). The Santhals have always given befitting reply to such exploitation and they had come up with the slogan of "jal, jungle aur zameen". It all started during a pre-independence era when the zamindars and the Britishers forcibly occupied the lands belonging to the Santhals. According to SPTA (Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act, 1949), any transfer of Adivasi land is illegal. However, little has been done in favour of the Santhals. They remained to be displaced by the bureaucrats. The present paper aims to show how Hansda presents a realistic depiction of the land displacement, followed by the alienation of the displaced Santhals with no rehabilitation policies by the state agencies.

ADIVASI WILL NOT DANCE

The story *Adivasi Will Not Dance* is an immersing story of the influence and the weakness, the middle and the edge, the rich and poor people. The setting of the story is in the region of Pakur in Jharkhand. The hero is a sure Mangal Murmu who will not give execution before the greatest power in the Country leader of India. The president is welcome to establish the framework stone of a nuclear energy station. The land on which the power plant should be set up had a place with Santhal towns. The occupants are expelled as well as their farmlands are being removed by the mining organization. The repercussion of this was straightforwardly projected by the demonstrations of Mangal Murmu in his forswearing to giving his presentation. They were not restored and that emerged the draft of the uprooted Santhals. Notwithstanding, the predicament is reacted

through fight where Mangal Murmu helps us to remember the Santhal soul of Birsa Munda and Arjun Munda. He is certainly gotten by the police, pounded, and put behind the bars.

The eviction of the indigenous people from their original settlement by the state agencies to bring about the developmental projects is termed as tribal displacement. Let us have a look at the certain reasons for the displacement of the Santhals in Jharkhand:

Tribal Land grabbed for housing purpose: The government of Bihar had legally and illegally acquired the lands of the Adivasis in and around Ranchi. The land was handed over to the non-tribals. "The State Government acquired about 500 acres of first-class agricultural land, mostly of the Adivasis, and handed it over to the Bihar State Housing Board against the will of the owners" (Chatterjee and Mullick, 25). However, the Adivasis tried to protest against such land acquisition, the Bihar government forcibly acquired the agricultural lands declaring them as barren. The other state agencies were involved in such acquisition. The IPS, IAS and "others who got their share in the loot were physicians, engineers, Block Development Officers, Circle Officers" (Chatterjee and Mullick, 26).

Displacement owing to Coal Mining: Natural resources is often considered as the boon of a developing nation that can take a nation a step further in terms of industrialization. This boon has turned out to be a bane for the tribal people of Jharkhand. The region is enriched with mines of iron, coal, copper, bauxite, mica, limestone, chromite, manganese, and uranium. The largest among all is the coal mining that has taken the state to its heights. The development process includes steps like deforestation, mining, power generation, industrialization, and urbanization.

World Heritage Site: North Karanpura valley in Jharkhand has the "remains of two civilisational epochs before the Mauryan empire lie buried under the valley floor littered with traces of the Mesolithic dolmens, Megalithic burial sites, rock art and cave shelters" (Chatterjee and Mullick, 42). As a result of that INTACH (Indian national Trust for Art and

Cultural Heritage) has declared the area a protected area by the Ministry of Environment and Forest. This drove to displace the tribals from their settlement making them alienated.

Irrigation Project: Numerous irrigation projects had started all over Jharkhand which led the tribals to lose their land. However, in return, they were deprived of any sort of facilities as promised by the authority when the minor irrigation projects failed due to a lack of administrative policies, poor financial planning, lack of proper conception, and faulty techniques. In most cases when the children grew up, they did not have precise information regarding the exact amount of land usurped or the compensation amount the family had received.

Field Firing Range: The indigenous people of Jharkhand received another blow of displacement when Netharhat Field Firing Range evicted 245 villages and approximately 2, 24,940 people landless and homeless. "For Field Firing and Artillery brigade the Indian Army is going to occupy the ancestral land of the indigenous people where not a soul without the uniform would be allowed to move" (Chatterjee and Mullick, 47). A certain area of the district of Palamau and Gumla was taken by Army as a field firing range.

In the short story *Adivasi Will Not Dance*, Hansda portrays one of the above mentioned as the reason for the displacement of the Santhals. The coal merchants seized the lands of the ignorant Santhals, leaving them jobless and homeless. The farming land was snatched and the poor farmers were clueless regarding the fact that what the government would do with so much land. Eleven villages were under the purview of vacating process. Initially, they thought that the Tenancy Act could protect their land. They made several rounds to the police station and block office but only to realize that these state agencies lied to them every time, assuring that their lands and villages were safe. Finally, the police came with written orders from the district administration to make room for a thermal power plant. "These indigenous groups comprising 85 – 90 percent of the total population of Jharkhand have been the worst hit by the large-scale

exploitation of the natural resources of the region through the development of mines, industries and commercial exploitation of forests (Aripampel, 1524). Hence in the name of development, their entire human existence gets faltered and their well-bonded communities get dispossessed in the name of political autonomy and national interest. These new modernization policies of the government open up a whole new world of colonization by the state agencies on the tribals. The latter not only lost their ownership of the land but also the products that they yielded from these lands. Accompanied by that is the occurrence of the spiritual loss that manifests with the dispossession of the land. They lose their society, culture, identity, religion, and existence with displacement. The paper would further move on to present how these factors work on the loss in the chosen short story.

Displaced from a well-knit Society: The bonding among the tribals is quite riveting and they are always found in collective presence. With the sudden eviction, the tribal society loses its own charm and beauty. It was a strange scene to witness as Mangal Murmu observes, "the district administration had asked the inhabitants of all the villages to vacate their land – their village, farms, everything. Eleven Villages! Can you imagine?" (Hansda, 181). Their well-knit society fell apart and centre cannot hold it. The centre on the contrary worked on dispossessing them of their own land and making them homeless.

Loss of Cultural Atavism: The existence of the indigenous people is closely knitted to the surrounding, natural resources and environment. "They had developed cultural traditions and economy, social control mechanism, religious myths and techniques of production geared to retain this close link. Their cultural systems ensured that the resources continued to be their livelihood for several generations" (Chatterjee and Mullick, 3). The protagonist clearly states in past tense that once upon a time he used to compose songs and still he tries to maintain his dance troupe. But his outburst of ire owing to the eviction leads him to give up on his performance and he denies his very cultural root.

“Our music, our dance, our songs are sacred to us Santhals” (Hansda, 179)

Loss of identity: The identity of the Santhals is closely related to the land where they live because they are the original settlers of any region. “Land has been the main source of livelihood for tribals. So, its deprivation by any means like transfer, sale, mortgage etc, or acquisition by the government for the development purpose has caused great resentment among them. This has also raised the question of indigenous identity among the tribals in Jharkhand” (Shille and Shaille, 75). It was strange and quite unacceptable for the Santhals that they were being vacated from their own land in the Santhal Pargana because it means the loss of their identity which is rooted in the very land.

Loss of existence: The loss of land leads not only to eviction but also to the very loss of their existence of being the Santhals. They lose their livelihood and “quite often had their habitats and homelands fragmented, their cultures disrupted, their communities shattered, and have been converted from owners of the resources within well-knit contented communities to individual wage earners in urban agglomerates with uncertain futures and threatened existence” (Narashima and Subbarao, 193). Their self-respect and very existence is reduced to almost nothing.

The short story not only presents the displacement trauma undergone by the Santhals in Jharkhand but also lays bare their marginalization. Mangal Murmu clearly mentions that “Diku children go to schools and colleges, get an education, jobs. What do we Santhals get? We Santhals sing and dance, we are good at our art. Yet, what has our art given us? Displacement, tuberculosis” (Hansda, 178). The commodification of their art and culture leads to the commercialization of this entire tribal community which fetches them no respect in society but tags them as mere performers and entertainers. Their art gains no desired value and their culture remains mystic. The mysticism is rather a bane for the community where their ethnicity and culture is sold as a colonial aspect of entertainment. This is quite common as colonial India was a matter-of-fact

source of riveting amusement where the occidental `delves into the tricks of black magic and snake charmers. The ignorant Santhals always gave their performance despite the fact they were paid meager and their art has “become an object ... exploited and commoditized, a means of speculation and merchandise” (Pouchepadass, 2061).

The state agencies like the bureaucrats, the policemen, the missionaries, and the legal system are all a façade and they work more on exploitation than to savour the tribal rights. The subalterns remain forever colonized, unable to assert their rights. These state agencies pretend to secure the subaltern liberalization but on the contrary, they conspire to rule and repress. The farmlands are acquired by the bureaucrats leaving the Santhals in distraught. The intervention of the political leaders and missionaries proves futile and the Santhal boys were arrested on false charges of killing a nun and blamed that though the ‘sister’ was fighting for ‘their’ rights yet the boys killed her. They are truly hapless and “without an active organization, the life and livelihood of the marginal farmers and the Adivasis are under threat from law, policy, and practice” (Vasan, 4448). The Tenancy Act proves bootless and the irony is laid bare by the author when he mentions that the Santhals are displaced from Santhal Pargana. The displaced Santhals are lured with mendacious rehabilitation policies which are never fulfilled. They were allured with uninterrupted electricity for cities and factories. The assurance of jobs appears a farce to Mangal Murmu where he clearly shoots that “an Adivasi farmer’s job is to farm, what other job should he be made to do”. (Hansda. 185) To unravel even the gruesome tale of concoctions is that more often these Santhals are not met with their due rehabilitation policies. As Government lays down the rehabilitation policies, the following criteria are clearly to be fulfilled:

Land Assessment: As per rehabilitation policies the land is to be assessed and distributed in the same proportionate as a means of rehabilitation to only such displaced persons who were dependent on agriculture.

Grants and Amenities: As per the rehabilitation draft it was decided that the displaced families would be resettled with a fixed sum of money of thirty thousand rupees that would include the resettlement process of the displaced families.

Job Planning: The employment that was available with the job profile of an unskilled. Semi-skilled and clerical categories could not be filled by the displaced people because they did not meet up to the required qualifications.

Technical Education and Training: The Project Authorities responsible for displacement should shoulder the responsibility of imparting technical skills to the displaced people to make them employable.

Self-Employment: The displaced people who do not meet up to the requisite criteria to qualify for direct employment are left with the only option of 'self-employment'

Rehabilitation Site: The Rehabilitation Site for resettlement is usually decided adjacent to the displaced area as that would lead to the retainment of the previous socio-cultural, linguistic, and economical characteristics of the family.

Civic Amenities: The prerequisite civic amenities to be decided for the displaced people include, a primary school, panchayat, dispensary, seed bank, children's park, pond, drinking water source, road facilities, shops, and government buildings, so as to provide a life that would sound better than the previous. This would in turn help to overcome the trauma of displacement by the evicted families.

However, Hansda presents the unfulfillment of the rehabilitation policies leading to the consequence of the protest. Gramsci's "hegemonic subaltern" transforms themselves to "irrepressible subalterns" and thus "the subalterns continually make its voice heard and its presence felt in contradictory and complex cultural, social and political forms" (Thomas, 864). Not only Mangal Murmu but also the evicted Santhals too protested against their ill fate. Not to mention that they were resisted by the police but the Santhal protest marks as a road to map the remembrance of the legacy of

great Santhal warriors like Arjun Munda and Birsu Munda. The Santhal resistance aligns with Gramsci's cultural and historical analyses and harps on the fact that 'subalterns can speak' when repressed to the extreme.

CONCLUSION

Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak theorises that that subaltern loses its ability to speak or voice their thoughts unless they are allowed to speak for themselves. The protests are the tools of survival for the otherwise ever-subjugated Santhal community. Postcolonial arrangements lead to the spaces of social utilization where it is available to examine far past the polemical and apparent sensitivity of an individual or a State. A few occurrences in the artistic custom of India obviously show that at whatever point the weak voice of the edges has developed further to the point of being heard in the middle, the middle is left with no other choice except for to 'listen'.

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