

SCHOLARLY ARTICLE

The Adivasi Will Not Dance: A Saga of Unremitting Exploitation and Expatriation of the Santhals through the Microscope of Institutional Racism

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Abstract

This paper is a humble approach to probe into the spiral of institutional tyranny unleashed upon the marginalized people, here, as depicted in Hansda's short story collection, the Santhal men, women or even children working in different spheres of the society and how society conforms to perpetuate the tyranny in manifold ways. From this perspective, the paper tries to demonstrate how culture is created in terms of race, sex and class and is used as a tool to show off the all-engulfing supremacy of the money-minded, opportunistic and power-craving big guns and policy-makers. The margins, on the contrary, when fight back, fork into two approaches-individually and collectively. So, the hit of the hammer cannot produce the equal reaction which it is expected to produce. In this paper, the focus is both on the vibrancy of the action and reaction, the centre and the periphery and most importantly the medium with which the subaltern people try to fend off the cultural, ideological and economic onslaught by the power-mongers.

Keywords: Institutional racism, State apparatus, Ideology, Identity, Discourse.

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's collection of short stories *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* has been a seminal book upon cultural orientation and cultural disintegration through ideological deracination. A medical officer of Jharkhand government, Shekar, in this book, has fearlessly come up with certain intensely political issues directly involving the life and culture of the Santhals in particular, and millions of the tribal people living in the eastern part of India in general. Unlike a well-established writer like Mahashweta Debi who focused extensively on the tribal communities, Shekhar himself belongs to this subaltern group of people and is, therefore, probes into myriads of autobiographical elements in this collection of short stories. His powerful, passionate and mature voice often becomes poignant in depicting the social, cultural, economic and political injustice that the Santhals have made a subject to. This present paper aims at foregrounding how 'institutional racism' oozes out in the collection of short stories.

¹The term 'institutional racism' was first coined by Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton in their book *Black Power: the Politics of Liberation* (1967) where they write:

Institutional racism originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society, and thus receives for less public condemnation than [individual racism]...It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behavior which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudices, ignorance or thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people. (Carmichael and Hamilton 4)

As opposed to individual racism, institutional racism operates as a repressive state apparatus because a whole group, led by transduced reasoning, is engaged here in demolishing the individual identity and entailing a parasitic embodiment which is neither fully approved nor disregarded at all and thereby strengthens host entity. Joe R. Feagin in *Systematic Racism: a Theory of Oppression* (2006) has mentioned two types of institutional racism. One is direct

and the other is indirect. Direct institutional racism is led by overt actions, whereas indirect racism is covert, more manipulating and more convincing in its nature. However, these two mechanisms maintain and enhance institutional practices of racism by creating an anthology of supremacist ideology. Like a tapeworm, it grasps the whole system under its umbrella and poses unquestionable power to gibe at the individual power whoever tries to pierce it. Say, for example, it embeds the qualities like stereotyping a race or caste, no matter, the subject and the object may live together; the tendency of setting them apart from the main body; imposing upon them an anxiety of cultural difference and thereby treating them as strangers. And in order to achieve this goal emotional segregation is coerced along with intellectual incarceration.

The offshoots of institutional racism works through ideological agendas like religion, sex and gender. Religion, according to Karl Marx, 'the opiate of the masses' (vol. 3) operates as an ideology throughout social organism and functions so discreetly at all levels that people find it a heresy to say anything against religion. Therefore, religious galvanization works as a magic bum removing all sorts of difficulties of the 'have's' and creating a mirage for the 'have not's'. Be it Shekhar's story "November Is the Month of Migrations" or "The Adivasi Will Not Dance," or Mahashweta Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar*, the aborigines are portrayed as landless in an atrocious and inimical society. And this landlessness forces them into migrations, slackness, underemployment and religious conversion. So, instead of farming, in "The Adivasi Will Not Dance" the aborigines are compelled to take up something else which does not go far along with them: "My name is Mangal Murmu. I am a Musician. No wait... I am a farmer. Or...was a farmer. Was a farmer is right. Because I don't farm anymore...only a few of us still have farmland, most of it has been acquired by a mining company" (Shekhar 170). And where land is connected, politics and policymakers obviously conjoin to create a matrix of hallucinations. The missionaries come to fabricate the matter further under the guise to soothe them by bringing them in the true religious path because only Jesus can redeem poor souls. In order to

fortify their own purpose the innocent Santhals are manipulated so skillfully by the promise of sufficient foods, clothes and shelter, that they prefer it right to be proselytized into another religion; because existence is first. But once the chief purpose is served, the promise turns into an empty cry paying no heed to their urgencies. But where necessity is the sought-most thing in life, compartmentalization of religion proves to be ineffective. So, the whole clan, instead of pursuing (or rather wasting) the issue of religion, migrate to Bardhaaman for paddy cultivation. Not only the Santhals but also the African aborigine Uncle Tom in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is also lured at the ideological thought of heavenly happiness after death:

Tom's whole life was filled with thoughts of eternity; and while he ministered around the lifeless clay, he did not once think that the sudden stroke had left him in hopeless slavery. He felt at peace about his masters for in that hour, and when he had poured his prayer into the bosom of his Father. He had found an answer of quietness and assurance springing up within himself. (20)

But this religious assurance cannot rescue Tom from savage treatment of slavery. And he does not protest because Christianity provides him a lesson of tolerance and forgiveness.

Now the question looms large—why is this hypocrisy? Why religion becomes an agenda of repressive ideology again and again? The answer is that religion has been used as a commodity and the missionaries advertise its 'use value' and operates through 'exchange value' of foods and shelter. Shakespeare's Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* may say "What's in a name?" (2. ii). But it is the name which shows off class and standard at a glance which the tribes are pushed to understand that they have no charisma in their original name until a new name is thrust upon them through conversion. New name means a new identity a new birth and God will be their own as it is evident in "The Adivasi Will Not Dance":

For education, our children are at the mercy of either those free government schools where teachers come only to cook the midday meal, or those kiristan

missionary schools where our children are constantly asked to stop worshipping our Bonga-Buru and start revering Jisu and Mariam. If our children refuse, the sisters and the fathers tell our boys their Santhal names- Hopna, Som, Singrai are not good enough. They are renamed David and Mikhail and Kiristopher and what not. (Shekhar 172)

So the real identity and originality are flipped under a heavy make-over of ideology. But that makeover does not last long and is shattered. And if the master class makes them bend to the powerful paradigm of ideology, the subject also resist them in unique way as *Aranyer Adhikar* does tell us: “Mundari life means a life full of thousand of dictums and beliefs...today’s Mundari will be tomorrow’s Christian again. But whatever your name may be –Suguna, Komta, Donka, Bharami or Dhani today, and Polus, Dous, Mothy, Yohan or Abraham tomorrow, in your blood it is the rule of Sing-bonga” (my trans.; Devi 40).

According to Foucault, Power and resistance to power are interlinked as he claims in *The History of Sexuality*: “Where there is power, there is resistance and yet or rather consequently this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. Should it be said that one is always inside power, there is no ‘escaping’ it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned because one is subject to the law in any case”(95). Power gets disrupted when a micro-power structure is just befallen but another power structure immediately stands by in a more chameleonic appearance and begins to act like a spider-web because there is no escape from this details of structures. Accordingly, the Adivasi dance group denies the blindfolded obedience to the authority, when Mangal Murmu asserts his ‘Adivasi’ entity in front of the President in “The Adivasi Will Not Dance”:

We, Santhals can sing and dance, and we are good at our art, yet what has our art given us? Displacement, tuberculosis...Do we have a reason to sing and dance?... These men sitting beside you have told you that this power plant will

change our fortunes, but these same men have forced us of our homes and villages. We have nowhere to go, nowhere to grow our crops. How can we Adivasis dance and be happy? (178-187)

The casualty happens as it is expected. Where ideologies fail to hypnotize, the repressive apparatuses, the tools of ideology come forward and wipe their existence altogether and once again the victory chariot begins to roll on, but this time more vibrant than before. And the pre-metaphors are strangled. Such happenings are sordid indeed! Therefore, the attention shifts from main course to discourse, from revitalizing religion to poisonous portmanteau. But the portfolio does not change.

Now let us con “November Is the Month of Migration” and “Merely a Whore” in the purviews of sex and gender issues which coalesce in the agenda of institutional racism because they are the earliest ways to establish the inferiority of women by manipulating and creating falsified ideologies of ‘second sex’ who are counted second in coming also. “November Is the Month of Migration” elaborates the same. When the migratory work of the Santhals are done, they wait for train, an excited ‘prepared’ railway policeman contracts with Talamai a sex in exchange of 50 rupees and two cold bread *pakodas*. The spectrum of complying sex is conformed when Talamai knows that many women of her clan are compelled to do this for food and money: “She knows many women who do not 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). In a dangerously gendered world, she remains passive because she knows sex is a man’s act in the arena of sexual gratification. Through she remains ‘calm’, she is delicate enough to ‘feel the thin fabric gamchha’. Accordingly, he determines the posture, at times ‘grimaces’, at times ‘smiles’ and never bothers about her gratification. Out of excitement and fulfillment, the policeman says: “Saali, you Santhal women are made for this only. You are good!”(41). Noticeably, the two oxymoron ‘saali’ and ‘good’ are erotically

receptive for providing the twisting effect of a sexual loveless physicality as it is imposed upon Santhal women after years. So, anyone can stereotype her as a 'prostitute'. But, she does the work of a prostitute on a rate basis. But Talamai does not even ask him how much she will be given, as if she knows the usualness of the Santhal women, thus making the policemen more profitable.

The story "Merely a Whore" again focuses whoredom in a different arena. In the red-light district of Lakhipur, Sona is the honeybee of Jharna-di's cubicle. Everyone pays high for high because 'she knows the art of making a man happy, the art of satisfying a customer'. But contrary to prostitution service and even after her mentor Jharna-di's warning, she falls in love with Nirmal, a regular customer who pays for her generously. A red house which provides gratification to the sex-starved people has no space of women's gratification: "Sona expected Nirmal to kiss her on her lips. But he didn't. He never did, and left Sona yearning to feel his lips upon hers"(153). So, she has to comply to loveless sex but who will comply to her if she demands something more than just mere sex? And when she repeatedly requests Nirmal to kiss her on lips, a desperate Nirmal replies in an arrogant way and makes a difference between a 'whore' and a 'wife':

"Are you happy?" Nirmal asked. "Am I not making you happy?"

Tell me, saali."

"No, do not do that"- Sona pulled his head away from her breasts- "Why don't you kiss on the lips?"

"Madarchod! Mood kharab kar diya!" Nirmal pulled himself out.

"Kiss? I don't kiss a randi on the lips." (165-166)

The traditional men always count a prostitute a free vagina, but a wife means something more than that. She is socially approved ever-giver of both vagina and lips. And in this case vagina is always regarded as a gateway to keep going on the lineages which are unacceptable

for prostitute. So, lips make a difference to a man between a 'whore' and a 'wife'. Surprisingly, our society has not created any male gender of 'rendi'. Nirmal gets married and Sona has to continue her job because she belongs to another world where everything is critically judged under the name of status. And the ideologies always count women, be she a wife or a whore, as a part, not as a whole.

Now, if the question of institutionalizing of the gender rises, the stories also create a space an ecology of selfness by de-institutionalizing top-down exercise power in which stimulus is related to motivation and consequently to response. Talamai and Sona remove all the typical hollowness of sexual boundaries and emerge to be sexually autonomous. So, Talamai 'spreads her legs,' 'lies quiet' and does nothing but lets the man do his act. This nothingness becomes something when she does not have to answer anything to anyone, because her clan is her passport. So is the case with Sona. At the end of the story "Merely a Whore" we find her setting aside her emotional weakness and embracing a new customer. The same notion of selfness and indifference are noticeable in Lucy after being raped by three black people in *Disgrace* by J. M. Coetzee. She becomes pregnant by one of the rapists but still ignores to terminate pregnancy and thereby establishes a positive attitude embedded in negativity. Lucy, Talamai, Sona- they all appear to be the owner of their selves.

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