

## **Dismantling the Hegemonic Structure through the War of Manoeuvre: Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's 'The Adivasi Will Not Dance' as a Dogma of Adivasis**

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### **Abstract**

The paper discusses Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015) that takes forth the voice of the culturally marginalised, politically subjugated, economically challenged community, Santhal tribe, deprived of their land, person and protection. In the premise of his short story, Shekhar erudite on the cultural integrity of the SanthalWat of Jharkhand exploited and exiled in the same measure. Shekhar paints a poignant tale of a community struggling and at war with the State, which is both indifferent and unforthcoming in identifying with their understanding of life and manner. *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* recites the tale of a man, in whom resonates the utter despair of the whole community and also their strong resistance to the State that continually fails to identify with their ethos.

**Keywords-** Hegemony, Margins, Resistance, Dominant Ideology

*The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015) is Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's distinct call to rediscover the very discourse of tribal subject matter in its most deliberate articulation. The concept of Adivasi, conceived in the backdrop of hegemonic power structure is that of marginalised other, subverted in a coupe of minor narrative structures that are placed in the convenience of social, political and geographical vulnerability. The placement of the superior over the inferior coloured the discourse of the heterogeneous ethnicity of the adivasi's which in turn deliberated their course of a constant state of dismissal from the elite State of power. Their voices submerged into a muffled silence in the course of history, where the elite pronounced the way, manner and civility of discourse dismantling the idea of third space enunciation. Gayathri Spivak in her *Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography* (1987) argues that the attempt to retrieve the voices of the adivasi is futile because the subaltern cannot appear without the thought of the elite. The elite, particularly political strata and those at their service wield discursive power which enables them to misrepresent the dalit and the

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adivasi and the later is rendered silent due to the absence of this very discursive power. This hegemonic construct within the dictate of a culture pronouncing the finites of high or accepted culture in contrast to the condemnation of the indigenous ways of adivasis, may be easily understood by Stephen Duncombe's understanding of the dominant power structures;

The power of cultural hegemony lies in its invisibility. Unlike a soldier with a gun or a political system backed up by a written constitution, culture resides within us. It doesn't seem "political," it's just what we like, or what we think is beautiful, or what feels comfortable. Wrapped in stories and images and figures of speech, culture is a politics that doesn't look like politics and is therefore a lot harder to notice, much less resist. When a culture becomes hegemonic, it becomes "common sense" for the majority of the population.

The cultural construct of the Santhal tribal community, like any collective association, is established on its premeditated understanding of its demographical identity reciprocated in the geographic, social, economic, political and religious front. The ethnical identity of the Santhal tribe can be derived from its passionate dance forms and songs composed in their vernacular, Santhali. The text makes reference on how this culturally significant community is de-emphasized in history through the politics of power and dominion. The State, and in this case the President of India, manipulate their innocence to tame them into compliant agents of entertainment. Their cultural adherence to innate forms of ethnical understanding has been transcribed as culturally inept by the states, which, in its neo liberal franchise, exile them from their traditions, customs and homeland and isolate them from the concept of a national and their indigenous identity. Gramsci's concept of hegemony where a class exerts influence over other classes in such a way that they follow its political and economic project, find its parallel in the text where Shekhar depicts how the majority superstructure comprising of the elite political and economic minority subjugates and exploits the ethnically sufficient culturally independent Santhals.

The author deliberates on the corporate and religious bifurcation of the Santhal communities of the grounds of development and education. "For education, our children are at the mercy of... those Kiristan missionary schools where our children are asked to stop worshipping our Bonga-Buru" (172) etches the cultural remodelling that is premeditated through the facade of education that prompts the Santhals to delineate their native ideology and sanctity. Gramsci's insights about how power is constituted in the realm of ideas and knowledge – expressed through consent rather than force find its expression in the interaction between the Santhal and the Christian missionaries. Shekhar presents Christian missionary as agents of forced change and domination. The natives are strategically placed in a position to concur to the ideas of Christianity, which is reflected in the text as an act of survival if not a 'manufacture of consent'. This spiritual re-modification of an ethnically modified society of the Santhals corresponds to Gramsci's concept of domination through position without force

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or revolt. Gramsci in his understanding of ‘*Christianity and Enlightenment*’ deliberates that by the elaboration on the image of a new world, the religious structures gain supreme power without actual force or revolution, by simply playing the messenger. Shekhar enunciates this idea of domination disguised as subtle suggestions through the musings of the narrator “Sathal names- Hopna, Som, Singrai- are not good enough. They are renamed David and Mikail and Kiristopher” (172).

Shekhar employs the text to develop the importance of dance, music and songs in the cultural spectrum of the Santhals. With the State looking up to these adivasi with the vested interest of a corporate, these cultural intermediaries of the Santhaladivasi community is reduced to a mere market of merchandise to explore, exploit and export, if possible. The rumination of the narrator; “We Santhal can sing and dance. We are good at our art. Yet, what has our art given us?” (178) reflect on how corporate understanding of art, deliver the indigenous artisans in a state of unrequited misery. Shekhar paints the picture of the natives helpless at the hands of the bureaucrats, who are less than compassionate about the forced displacement of the Santhaladivasis so as to establish the coal mines that will bring in numbers to the State. As the paramilitary forces, “control the situation” of people demonstrating their agitation against the forceful acquisition of land, the member of the bureaucratic superstructure proposes to conduct an entertaining session for the President of India who will lay the foundation stone for the constructions instigated in their lands. Homogenization and nationalisation are hence mere words with no girth of reality to these adivasis. The festivities of the President’s arrival commingle in state appointed members of power chanting “Bharat Mahaan”, the Santhal find no sense of homogeneity with the cause of a state that deemed them, the adivasi to a life of suffering and struggle.

As enunciated by Dominic Strinati in his *Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture* (1995)-

Hegemony operates culturally and ideologically through the institutions of civil society which characterises mature liberal-democratic, capitalist societies. These institutions include education, the family, the church, the mass media, popular culture, etc (168-169)

The author realises and asserts this hegemonic construct of Strinati’s perception, by depicting how the agents of media, missionary and the market abuse the adivasi art and struggle to assemble both monetary and social advantage. In the text, echelon of governance is pictured in its absolute indifference where the Santhal are concerned.

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar identifies with the domination over identity and livelihood of the Santhals by the superstructures through the institutionalisation of religion, bureaucracy and the system of education. The text exemplifies on how a tribal uprising will be easily undermined as it is a struggle of the ethnic minority against a majority, with the benefits of monetary and political power. Louis Althusser’s *Ideology and Ideological State*

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*Apparatuses* establishes that the adivasis and other ethnical minorities, in this case the Santhal community, is suppressed through the medium of repressive state apparatuses which in turn leads to the formation of an ideological state apparatus, which is nothing but an artificial, pretentious social construct. It is this ideological state apparatus that manipulates certain ethnicities into subjugation and the apparent dominant authority to maintain its status as the superstructure of power dominion.

*The Adivasi Will Not Dance* is set in a premise where the Santhals are forced into a phantom of artificial social construct that ensures the dominant state to ensue all control over the adivasi by creating an ideological state of insignificance. The hegemonic construct thus developed enunciates on the idea of dominance-resistance relationship which may be analysed through Dominic Strinati's conclusions in *Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*

...Dominant groups in society, including fundamentally but not exclusively the ruling class, maintain their dominance by securing the 'spontaneous consent' of subordinate groups, including the working class, through the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups (165).

The text confronts the various corporate explorations into the Santhal villages that deprive them of their rights to native lands and livelihood. National feeling thus is a concept that is so very alien to them, a much distorted impression where there is the Santhal and the State, both at the different end of the political tug of war. Through decades of misinterpretation and marginalisation, the third largest group of ethnical community have been reduced in the country to an insignificant existence of cultural minority. The stratified social order where the superstructures on the apex; wields unquestioned liberty through power and politics; vitalises a re-modification as the socially subjugated threatens this political order of the hegemonic identity. The individuals branched out in this social hierarchy, are all free agents, according to Louis Althusser. As free agents the individuals possess the dimension to intellectually process and restructure the historic power blocs maintained by the super structures. Antonio Gramsci in his deliberations on hegemonic constructs and strategic distinction formulated that hegemony and domination of superstructures is re-negotiated and re-structured continually. He identifies the act of revolt against the historical blocs materialised by the superstructures in the class struggle, as war of position and war of manoeuvre. Where the war of position deliberates a gradual metamorphosis in its challenge of social structure resulting into a re-designed system of power, the war of manoeuvre distorts the system radically through a rather direct clash rendering in the desired re-modelling of power structure. *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* is a comprehensive approach of resistance towards a dominant super structure of the State.

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Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar has constructed the cultural intermediary of dance, in the text, as an act of resistance.

We have nowhere to go, nowhere to grow our crops. How can this power plant 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 adivasi will not dance. (187)

Through this absolute refusal to concur, the Adivasi community presents its resistance and unequivocal conflict with the dominant power structure of the state, corporate and the elite.

The act of resistance resonated in the narrator of '*The Adivasi Will Not Dance*', deliberates on Gramsci's counter hegemonic movement actuated through the war of manoeuvre facilitating in the representation of the voice of the adivasi, or the minor classes of the social hierarchy, akin to being suppressed. The superstructure of the state is threatened by the intellectual and moral leadership exhibited by the adivasi in the narrator. The hegemonic structure of the state is challenged and is subjected to change in the text as conceived by Gramsci in his '*Prison Notebooks*',

That no social formation disappears as long as the productive forces which have developed within it still find room for further forward movement and... that a society does not set itself tasks for whose solution the necessary conditions have not already been incubated (106)

The self consciousness in Shekhar's narrator, pronounce the act of resistance against subjugation that the tribal community of the Santhal endured under the dominance of the State.

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar through the medium of his short story elucidated the life and manner of the Santhal community who in the due course of time was monopolised by the economic superstructures of power. The text draws attention to the religious and cultural articulations that made its progressive root into the adivasi settlements to unsettle their indigenous cultural orientation. The narrator in the text progresses from the complacent adivasi exploited by the historic blocs to the representation of resistance and revolution within the adivasi tribes. The text adheres to Gramsci in its political and cultural understanding and revolution of position. The text through its strong rendering of the cultural intricacies of the Santhal community establish the uniqueness of the tribe as a foil to the concept of altering identities of the factual nuances of a superior cultural context. The tribal subject matter of the text delivers the idea of hegemonic dominance in the pretext of power politics and social establishment that fail to identify with the identity of the adivasis as free agents of the society. The community of the Santhals are deliberated as pawns in a struggle of cultural dominance. The text explores on the faculty of tribal concept as conceived by the State in power. The text is a deliberate attempt from the part of the author to analyse and accord a resistance towards the constant negligence of the Santhal community. As the central

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character in text proceeds from subjugated silence to the act of war of manoeuvre, the text gains importance as voice of the silenced.

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