

# Life In Forest: A Study Of The Representation Of The Invisible Boundaries In The Collection Of Short Stories The Adivasi Will Not Dance By Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar

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DOI: 10.47750/pnr.2022.13.509.889

## Abstract

The basic human needs for survival include food, clothing and shelter from time immemorial. Yet world in its growing disparity deprived these fundamental needs from certain class of people. Even in the rapidly developing society where the majority has access to everything, there are still some people who cannot afford fundamental human privilege. The book 'Adivasi Will Not Dance' authored by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, is a collection of short stories portraying the pitiful existence of tribes in the state of Jharkhand. The modern world continues to hallucinate by emphasising the idea that livelihood of every sect of people in the world are uplifted and progressing towards developed society. A pragmatic approach is made to reflect the suffering of the Tribes who are constantly ignored by the world. This paper aims to highlight the differences between the lives of a section of tribal people who have access to riches and knowledge with the other part who lacks access to even the most basic necessities.

## Introduction

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar is an Adivasi from the Santhal ethnic group in India, and his fictions are associated with the ancestry of Santhals. His narratives expose to us a world humans have selectively overlooked and are abundant in fine details that add to the deepest dimensions and feature an excess of insight that emerges from a compassionate dweller in the community. In fact, he described his first manuscript as "the first holistic Santhal fiction produced in English and released by a major publishing company. Shekhar was raised in Ghatshila and Chakulia and attended school in Musabani. He was brought up in Ranchi. In Ghatshila, his parents were working in Hindustan Copper. He is a physician and presently working for the state of Jharkhand as a medical officer in Pakur.

A collection of short stories is entitled *The Adivasi Will Not Dance: Stories*. The book by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar was listed by *Frontline* (magazine) in August 2022 as one of 25 novels "that light up the path to appreciating post-Independence Indian new writing" and was listed for *The Hindu Literary Prize* in 2016. The translations of this book into Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Gujarati and Bengali were completed as of April 2021; Malayalam and Austrian German languages are in progress. Especially with regard to Indian coal mining, the Santhal community in the Indian state of Jharkhand contributes the majority of the tales, characters and situations. The status of women in a misogynistic culture, starvation, plain folks of Santhals, the predicament of the Tribal people, organised crime, ongoing conflicts between beliefs and modernity, and the destruction brought to society by quarrying and sex work are among the key themes.

## Suffering Of the Tribes in the Developing World

For a country to advance, development initiatives are essential. To improve the flow of the economy, post-colonial India implemented LPG (liberalization, privatisation, and globalisation) programs. People were frequently relocated as a result of these projects. Due to economic policies, this displacement has been worse recently. The marginalised section end up as the victims always. The indigenous peoples are forcibly evicted from their homes and lands in the name of economic development, yet no real or futile efforts are made to rehabilitate them or integrate them into the contemporary development process (Mathur, 2008). The globalisation of commerce has eased the transfer money and goods around the globe. However, it has also widened the space between the rich and the poor. The wealthy get richer while the less fortunate pushed to poverty. The projects ignore the long-term ill effects upon the victims, their livelihood and the environment focussing on the immediate benefits. The advancement of the populace does not either directly or indirectly contribute to the entire nation's development. Most of the times, the people displaced become the most vulnerable due to their class, caste, gender, or age (Kaushal,2009). Even though the projects help many people in developed or developing states, the displaced victims suffer the untold consequences which come as a disaster.

The novella "The Adivasi will not dance" by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar explores the situation of the Santhal tribe, who are the direct victims of a mining enterprise. The author, himself being the member of the Santhal community takes on the role of the community's voice. Ten short stories are included in the collection "The Adivasi will not dance." Veteran Adivasi Mangal Murmu tells the story of the title in his narration. Tribes called 'Santhals' used to be farmers. They have art training as well. Mangal Murmu is the director of a dancing group that frequently participates in cultural events. The indigenous people's feelings are rarely taken into consideration in the developmental projects that include evacuating them. Before or after projects are finished, their voices are never heard and sometimes muted. The majority of the tribes are peaceful, and they have an unparalleled devotion to the land, which has historically been used for either dwelling or farming. They have bravely resisted incursions into their land, and occasionally they have retaliated violently against those who had taken advantage of them, primarily moneylenders, contractors, booze dealers, Zamindars, and representatives of the government from the departments of forest, excise, police, and revenue (Verma 1990). All around the nation, various development initiatives including industrial centres, dams, and mines were started. The modus of these enterprises is that in the guise of development, they target and exploit locations frequently which have high concentration of natural resources, including forests, river systems, mineral deposits, and those terrains naturally were housed by the indigenous tribal people. The government acquired regions being rich in natural resources, frequently at the expense of disrupting the local and indigenous communities' lives, livelihoods, and houses (Hemadri and Mander 1999). Santhals derived their primary income from farming. Santhals provided accommodated and provided means of subsistence to four Jolha families who pleaded for refuge despite their precarious condition. Jolhas labour in the fields belonging to Santhal. Four huts are built by the four families in a remote area of the community. "That small cluster of four huts has grown into a tola of more than a hundred houses. Houses not huts". (p.175). However, Santhals continue to live in mud huts. Jolha homes, in contrast, feature concrete yards and brick walls. Refugee-related Jolhas have risen to prominence. Santhals relocate to various locations in pursuit of work, often as farm labourers. This is one of the overt effects of development and relocation. Peasants and tribe members lose their land in huge mining projects not just to the project authorities but also to wealthy non-agricultural strangers who swarm to such places acquiring both land and new economic prospects (Fernandes, 1994). Few people still own farms. A mining corporation has bought the majority of it. They at first raise hell against the mining corporation with little backing from Christian missionaries and government officials. But it's all for nothing. The crowd goes back to its own place. They were deprived of their land. The public and the government seldom respond to their protest but no remedial measures are opted. Santhals were held accountable for the murder of a Christian sister who supported them in their protest in order to put an end to it. Santhals are double-cornered by unfounded charges. Nobody would dare provide assistance to them in the future. They are portrayed as being ungrateful and barbaric as well. They are unsuccessful in getting the public's attention. Most media are guided by the prominent class. Social impact assessment is a challenging task due to the examination of several project sites (Mathur,2011). Murmu reflects the community's incapacity to draw people's attention to the situation as it actually is: "They said that despite the Kristian sister defending our rights, our lads killed her. Nobody seemed to notice

that even before that Kristian's sister arrived, our lads were defending our territory and rights. Why would they kill her? Just because our boys did not have reporter friends, their fight went unseen... now that our boys are in jail on false charges of murder, who will fight for us?" (p.171) A portion of their estates has been taken up by coal and stone traders, respectively. They become poor when their source of income is lost. Job switching is not a cakewalk. "An Adivasi farmer's job is to farm. Which other job should he be made to do? Become a servant in some billionaire's factory built on land that used to belong to that very Adivasi just a week earlier?"(p.185). They turn to theft as a result of the situation. "It's the coal and the stone, sir; they are making us lazy"(p.173). "After all, they already have our land, they are stealing our coal, they don't want to snatch away from us our right to re-steal it" (p.174). When compared to the massive exploitation by mining firms, the percentage of minerals that are stolen is negligible. Just to meet their bare necessities, they steal the minerals. Jolhas profit from the circumstance by taking advantage of it. According to Tripathi (1998), the tribal people occasionally lose access to their lone fertile areas and become the victim of harsh exploitation by the invading people, leading to living in greater wildness. Mangal Murmu is the director of a dance group that includes musicians, dancers, and vocalists. He once wrote songs and put music to them. His group used to sing and dance to his tunes, bringing them to life. The show's flavour was enhanced by the tamak and tumdak musical instruments. They once gave performances at various events. They received meager compensation, medals, and diplomas. Even though he did not develop from his art, Mangal Murmu is passionate about it. He cries out in agony, "What have all these credentials and shields given us?" "Diku Children attend schools and universities, receive an education, and find employment. 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." (p.178) Santhals conduct their dances as a means of displaying their culture. Others in the state think their dancing and music are inferior. "They call their culture and music and dance superior to those of Adivasi. Why don't they get their women to sing and dance in open grounds in the name of Jharkhandi culture?" (p.179). Santhals, who hold the arts in high regard, are compelled to sell them owing to hunger and poverty. To gratify their hungry tummies, they often perform at weddings. Instead of money, artists are ravenous for approval and recognition. The so-called refugees, or Jolhas, initially took advantage of the Santhals. They have obstacles to make a living. Second, to build mines, the mining merchants seize the majority of the farmlands. Thirdly, the stone traders also profit by seizing the lands. The thermal power plant projects, in the end, uproot the population. Santhals are often used by a variety of sources. Approximately eight dangers associated with displacement are mentioned by Cernea (1999). Lack of access to necessities like property, homelessness, unemployment, marginalisation, hunger, rise in sickness and death, and social disintegration continued to prevail with Santhals. Along with various forms of exploitation, the tribes faced persecution because of their religion. Conversion attempts were made by Christian missionaries. According to the Santhal, "our children are constantly asked to stop worshipping our Bonga-Buru and start revering Jisu and Mariam"(p.172). The wealthy Hindus are adamant about converting the Santhals to Safa-Hor "We are losing our Sarna faith, our identities and our roots. We are becoming people from nowhere." (p.173). Pollution is one of the immediate effects of development initiatives. Before starting the project, the corporations obtain the necessary license from the pollution control board. The project's implementation mostly ignores the mandates and recommendations. The Tribes become the victims facing the backlash from the project. The whole Mangal Murmu village is tainted with black paint. Every day, the mining firm hauls tonnes of coal away, keeping the community in a shroud of darkness. The bushes and trees have dark green foliage. Everything, including the sand, stones, and roof tiles, bear the black shade. Children appear even darker. As dark-skinned as they are, "Our children are eternally smeared in fine black dust. "Our children- dark-skinned as they are- are forever covered with fine black dust. When they cry and tears stream down their faces, it seems as if a river is coming across a drought-stricken land" (p.175). Santhals suffer both physical and emotional assault. Their complaints are not only ignored, but also harshly rebuked. Anyone who backs them in their demonstrations is cut-off, just like the Christian nun and eventually they were held responsible for the murder of the missionary. "The agitators were all beaten up and thrown into police lock-ups." (p.181) Mangal Murmu thinks that the outside world, particularly the media, doesn't even bother about his community. The story of the Christian nun's murder is distorted in the press. The publication had a small section devoted to the displacement issue. The thermal power plant's foundation stone-laying ceremony will be attended by the nation's leaders. There would be swarms of reporters with cameras everywhere. Murmu bemoans the fact that the media is too preoccupied to pay attention to them. "I wondered if any of its reporters had visited the place where the villagers were being detained by the police" (p.186). The Santhal family is impoverished. They are ruined by the

multinational corporations and even by their fellow humans. Santhals, who once supported a large number of people, are currently in severe need of employment. To provide for their families, they perform their dances. Their living conditions are worse. Murmu likens their existence to the horses owned by the proprietor of the power plant. He believes horses have a higher quality of life. “We also heard that he liked polo-some game played with horses-and that his horses were far better off than all the Santhals of the whole of the Santhal Pargana”(p.182). During the performance, Mangal Murmu attempts to seize the chance to air his complaints. He declares he won't dance as a sign of protest. He claims that the Adivasi would all perish if the power plant is built. “Which great nation displaces thousands of its people from their homes and livelihoods to produce electricity for cities and factories?”(p.185). the initiative may illuminate mine factories, which wouldn't cease operating for lack of power. However, Santhals and their lives are permanently plagued with darkness. They were evicted from their homes and communities because of the project. Obtaining restrictions on these natural resource systems can make it difficult for displaced individuals to survive, requiring them to rely on whatever resources they can access in their new location or develop new income-generating skills. The immediate result of whichever course they take is a loss of income (Pandey 1998). Resettlement entails removing individuals from the surroundings in which the overwhelming majority of their significant activities were cultured and on which most of their conceptualization of life is built. They could be transferred to a new location where they have no personal experience or understanding. (2010) Oliver-Smith “We doesn't have anywhere to go or a place to produce vegetables. How is this power station beneficial to us? How then can we Adivasis dance and enjoy ourselves? We won't sing and dance till our houses and land are returned. Adivasis like me won't dance. Adivasi people won't.” (p.187). He was forbidden to talk by the police. He is neither heard nor noticed when he speaks. He receives a beating from the police. He is gagged by the cops, who place their hands over his lips. The entire group has been assaulted. He begs for his comrades as he stands there defenceless. His face of silence captures the anguish of the oppressed.

## CONCLUSION:

The advancement of a nation depends on development initiatives for every citizen. It improves a country's economy and livelihood of the people. But these programs frequently disregard their victims who become scapegoats for such developments. The most vulnerable community subjected to the negative effects of projects always remains out of focus. Their pleas go ignored as they seldom speak up. A novella called *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* expresses the suffering of the marginalised and uprooted. The voiceless victims require a venue to express their suffering and advocate the implementation for a just resettlement policy. And there are people who just see this development not the sufferings of the people who get affected directly or indirectly because of such things. They purposefully ignore the fact that the glorious side of the world does have this kind of ugly side too.

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