

Migration, Displacement, And Marginalisation Of The Santals In Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015)

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Abstract

*This paper explores migration, displacement, and marginalization of the Santals in Jharkhand. The study highlights their hardships, discrimination, and exploitation regardless of their own land and forest rights. The paper approaches illegal land acquisition, forceful migration, and mainstream domination against the marginalized community. The paper reflects on the contemporary circumstances of the Santal through the study of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's book *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015). The book signifies an important understanding of the present socio-political context of the Santals. Moreover, the paper is focused on providing the psycho-social impact of land dispossession and rehabilitation with The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities Act) 1989. The finding of the paper aims at the perspective of peripheral voices of the Santal community against the mainstream inequality and exclusion in tribal writing in English.*

Keywords: Santal, poverty, migration, exclusion, marginalization, atrocities, resistance.

Introduction

Article 366(25) of the Constitution of India defines “Scheduled Tribes” mean such tribes or tribal communities as are recognized under Article 342 of the Constitution. Indigenous people are the original inhabitants of India. They have their distinct languages, culture, and identity. The indigenous inhabitants live close to nature. The Indigenous people are forest-dependent communities. They are determined to preserve the land and the forest. They also always want to preserve their tradition, culture, and costume. However, the capitalist exploitation of the forests and the plunder of mineral resources for industrialization brought ecological imbalance and destitution of the indigenous inhabitants. The underlying central argument of the paper is based on the exploitation of forests and by governmental development projects. The large-scale

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encroachment of forests evicted the tribal communities from their original habitats. The paper discusses both the degradation of the forest and the displacement of the Santals in Jharkhand.

The Santhals are the third largest indigenous community in India followed by Bhil and Gond. Speaking the Austroasiatic language, the Santhal also called the Santal, are a Munda ethnic group on the Indian subcontinent. In addition to Bihar, Assam, Tripura, and Odisha, the Santals are the most numerous tribes in Jharkhand and West Bengal. In Jharkhand, the Santhals are found in Santhal Pargana, Ramgarh, Pakur, Singhbhum, Hazaribagh, Dhanbad, and Giridih districts. They speak Santali as their primary language. They write in the script called Ol-Chiki. The Script was invented by Pandit Raghunath Murmu in 1925.

Jharkhand developed into a multicultural community like other various culturally diverse societies. Regional issues of caste discrimination and ethnic erosion created socio-political instability in the state. Jharkhand is one of the most impoverished states in the nation, with a stark disparity between rural and urban poverty, according to a 2007 World Bank research titled "Jharkhand: Addressing the Challenges of Inclusive Development." Compared with the national average of 26%, the state's poverty rate is 44%. The wide gap between poverty in rural and urban areas was emphasized in the report. Of all the Indian states, Orissa had the highest rate of rural poverty (49 % in 1999), followed by Bihar (44%), Assam (40 %), and Madhya Pradesh (37 %).

The Jharkhand-origin Santal writer Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar has written a total of six primary texts in English. He is professionally a doctor. But he has a taste for literature and a passion for writing. His *Mysterious Ailment of Rupī Baskey* (2014), *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015), *Jwala Kumar and the Gift of Fire: Adventures in Champakbagh* (2018), *My Father's Garden* (2018), *Who's There?* (2020), *Sumi Budhi and Sugi* (2020) are the important works. His novels and stories have been translated into different Indian languages such as Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, Gujarati, Marathi, Telegu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Nepali. He translated many Santali poems, and Hindi and Bengali stories. He translated Manoj Rupda's Hindi original novel *Kaale Adhyaay* (2015) into English titled *I Named My Sister Silence* in 2023.

The writings of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar deal with indigenous issues of the Santals. Primarily the socio-political issues like poverty, injustice, casteism, mainstream domination and marginalization, adversities of modernization, dispossession of land, Santal women exploitation, superstition among Santals, and gendered stereotypes are found in his writings. His *Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015) remained a controversial novel that dealt with profanity,

and sensual and violent images. The novel had been banned, and the Jharkhand government took anti-intellectual action against him. The novel had a positive and negative impact on the Santal community. In the novel, he depicted the impact of modernity and the disintegration of tribal society. He portrayed tribal resistance through the character Mangal Murmu. He questioned the problems of integration of the Santals into mainstream society. He even raised issues of girl child trafficking and sexual objectification. This novel is a mirror of the social realities of caste, class, and poverty. The novel questions the cost of development and amenities that the administration promises us. The book provides a staunch critique of the modern concept of development.

Materials and Methods

Literature Review

The socio-economic and cultural marginalization of India's Adivasi communities has been a critical area of study in postcolonial and indigenous discourse. Scholars like Virginius Xaxa (2005) have emphasized the historical processes that have systematically excluded Adivasis from the mainstream socio-political and economic frameworks of the nation-state. Xaxa argues that development policies often fail to recognize Adivasi epistemologies and instead impose exploitative structures, leading to widespread displacement and cultural erosion.

The Santal community, one of the largest Adivasi groups in India, has experienced intense forms of marginalization due to industrialization, mining, and forest policies. According to Bhangya Bhukya (2010), the colonial and postcolonial state has consistently treated tribal populations as objects of administration and assimilation rather than as communities with autonomous traditions and rights. This perspective is echoed in Munda and Mullick's (2003) assertion that development-induced displacement disproportionately affects Adivasis, forcing them into precarious livelihoods and urban migration.

Literature has emerged as a powerful medium for expressing Adivasi voices, contesting dominant narratives, and reclaiming indigenous identities. In this context, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015) stands as a significant intervention. Scholars such as Sanhita Ghosh (2018) argue that Shekhar's stories provide "raw, unfiltered glimpses" into the lived realities of the Santals, offering an insider's critique of state violence, capitalist exploitation, and patriarchal oppression. The title story, in particular, has sparked considerable

debate for its bold critique of how cultural identity is commodified in state-sponsored development events (Ghosh, 2018).

Furthermore, Archana Soreng (2019) highlights the importance of indigenous authors like Shekhar in creating “knowledge from within the community.” She stresses the role of storytelling as resistance—where personal narratives of pain and resilience challenge the erasures perpetrated by state discourse and mainstream media. This aligns with Spivak’s (1988) question of whether the subaltern can speak; in Shekhar’s stories, the subaltern does speak, but often at great personal and political cost.

From a literary point of view, Aparna Sharma (2020) points out that Shekhar’s use of local dialects, cultural references, and non-linear storytelling resists the conventions of dominant literary traditions. These stylistic choices function as a form of cultural assertion and preservation. Sharma further argues that Shekhar’s writing contributes to a growing body of Adivasi literature that challenges both Brahmanical and Western representations of tribal life.

The theme of migration is recurrent in Adivasi narratives and is intricately linked with issues of land alienation and livelihood loss. As Sundar (2016) notes, “displacement is not merely geographical—it is existential,” a sentiment that reverberates throughout Shekhar’s collection. His characters often migrate to cities in search of work but face exploitation, discrimination, and cultural dislocation, reinforcing their marginal status even within new spaces.

In sum, existing scholarship on Adivasi displacement and literary representation provides a robust foundation for analyzing *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*. The collection stands as a literary manifestation of what Ranajit Guha (1982) termed “the politics of the subaltern,” where the peripheries speak back to the center through acts of narrative and cultural resistance.

The urban life of the Santals in *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015) is depicted as a crisis for their tribal identity (Marandi, 2). Their migration to cities resulted in social injustice, exploitation, and discrimination. Their tradition and identity witnessed a kind of threat in the city. The Santals in the crowd of the mainstream and globalisation risked their cultural history, religion, and language. They faced sexual violence, poverty, and atrocities. The challenges of socio-cultural and economic issues by the hegemonic forces changed their understanding of traditional life and practices.

The Santals remained deprived of some constitutional privileges (Roy, 6). They are oppressed by the corporate capitalist who made them miserable and dispossessed from their inhabited

places. The marginalized Santal community was uprooted and overpowered by mainstream society. Subalternity of the Santals amidst the urban and elite sections created discrimination. Immense poverty made a female character, Talamai Kisku in the book *Adivasi Will Not Dance* vulnerable to being sexually exploited by a police officer.

The impact of modernization encountered by the Santals threatened their identity for survival (Nilofer, 89). The capitalist power led them to displacement of their lands and impoverishment. The damaging conditions of development collapsed their livelihood and Indigenous identity. They struggled to cope after losing lands and natural resources. The book *Adibasi Will Not Dance* elucidated the exploitation of the mining companies.

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar in the book tried to empower the tribal women in the context of characterization (Ghosh & Challa, 2). He asserted voices for the marginalized tribal women in *Adibasi Will Not Dance*. He represented the contemporary socio-economic condition of the Santhal community. His dynamic storytelling technique expressed the indigenous identity of the Santals realistically. He portrayed the submerged voices of the tribal woman character through Talamai Tudu. The subjugated position of Santhal women highlighted precariousness and submissiveness in mainstream society.

The book explored the miserable conditions of tribals in Jharkhand (Khan, 2022). The indigenous Santal culture is depicted through unresolved problems of poverty, displacement, and discrimination. With the rapid growth of industrialization and urbanization the lives of the Santal community have been affected immensely. The control over the natural resources by the capitalist government and private agencies resulted in deforestation and displacement of the Adivasi people. The corporate exploitation of both the land and tribals increased in the name of development.

Hansda's ethnographic understanding of the Santal tribe encourages him to be a representative of his community (Ghosh, 2022). His vision marked an impact on the literary field to find out the plight of the Santals in Jharkhand. His experimentation with this book *Adivasi Will Not Dance* recognized him as an innovative writer. His works incorporated the study of Santal's religion, black magic, and child abuse.

The capitalistic economic system has been seen as a cultural and traditional change of the Santals (Lulekar, 2022). They were alienated from their land and some converted to Christianity. They lost traditional occupations on account of the emergence of industrial growth

and urban expansion. They protested corporate exploitation but in contrast they got beaten up. The material exploitation of the mining companies has driven them to poverty and hunger.

The Adivasis's assertion at the national and international level has some historical and representational issues (Rycroft, 2014). A new form of resistance emerged from the abuse of their lands and cultural rights. Their Indigenous rights in the context of postcolonial India are denied by the state and civil society. The re-assertion of Adivasi identities or rights is an important contemporary discourse. Adivasi as 'Indigenous and Tribal peoples' emphasizes a scope in both regional and international forums.

The Santal women suffer more marginalization than men within their community (Kumar. T& Padmanabhan, 2020). The Santal women are harassed and assaulted by the upper-class 'diku'. They experience also inequality and social exclusion around their existing group. The Santals in Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's novel *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* are portrayed realistically. The book depicted how they struggled with poverty, unemployment, landlessness, and gender inequality. They remained insecure about their ethnic identity because of capitalistic oppression. The government agencies illegally encroached lands of the Santals and displaced them from their lands. The rapid change from a tribal village into an urbanized city stood as a cultural crisis for the Santals.

Objective of the Study

- To analyse the Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's text *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015)
- To explore the current socio-political issues of the Santals
- To highlight the contemporary challenges such as migration, displacement, and marginalization of the Santals
- To identify their present situation in terms of various government policies and schemes for sustainable development

Delimitation of the Study

- The study has been limited to the selected author's writing
- The study has been completed within the Santal community of Jharkhand, India

Methodology

The paper primarily identifies the socio-political issues of the Santals in Jharkhand. For this paper, descriptive data has been used to analyze the selected text *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015) by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar. The current challenges of the Santal in Jharkhand have been described in the paper through qualitative data and textual analysis methods. The research design of the paper is based on observing the socio-political problems of the Santals. The study has been developed with observational techniques and content analysis. The data has been collected through selected secondary sources including books, theses, reports, journals, and articles.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in the interdisciplinary frameworks of postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, and indigenous theory, drawing attention to the systemic marginalization, socio-economic displacement, and cultural alienation experienced by the Santal community in India. These frameworks help to critically analyze the literary portrayal of the Santals in Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015), a collection that foregrounds voices from a community often excluded from dominant socio-political narratives.

1. Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory, particularly the works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, and Frantz Fanon, provides a lens to explore how colonial and neo-colonial systems continue to affect indigenous communities like the Santals. Spivak's concept of the "subaltern" is especially relevant in understanding how Santal voices are silenced or distorted in mainstream discourse. The Santals, as represented in Shekhar's stories, are caught between state-led development projects and cultural erasure, echoing Bhabha's notion of hybridity and displacement, where identity becomes a site of struggle.

2. Subaltern Studies

Rooted in postcolonial theory, the Subaltern Studies Group (notably Ranajit Guha) sought to write history from below, challenging elitist narratives. This perspective is vital in understanding the Santal experience as one of structural marginalization. The subaltern framework emphasizes the importance of recovering silenced voices and recognizing the agency of oppressed communities. In Shekhar's work, the Santal characters speak from the

margins, offering a counter-narrative to dominant representations of tribal life and development.

3. Indigenous and Adivasi Theory

Drawing on indigenous studies and Adivasi criticism, particularly the works of scholars like Archana Soreng, Ganesh N. Devy, and Virginius Xaxa, the paper contextualizes the Santal experience within the broader discourse on indigeneity, land rights, and cultural survival. Indigenous theory challenges Western universalism and asserts the importance of land, tradition, and community in Adivasi worldviews. It also critiques the extractive policies and market-driven "progress" that lead to migration and displacement, themes deeply embedded in *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*.

4. Theories of Migration and Displacement

The paper also draws from migration studies and displacement theory, especially the work of Saskia Sassen and Edward Said, to examine how global and national economic forces compel involuntary migration and socio-cultural dislocation. The concept of internal colonization is employed to explain how Adivasi lands are appropriated in the name of development, leading to the erosion of traditional livelihoods, forced mobility, and alienation.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study aims to unravel the layers of exploitation and resistance that define the Santal experience in Shekhar's narrative. The framework supports a critical examination of how literature can bear witness to historical trauma, cultural resilience, and political injustice.

Results and Discussion

Poverty, Malnutrition, And Migration of The Santals In Jharkhand

The migration of the Santals resulted from several socio-political factors in Jharkhand. Santal emigration happens due to industrialization, urbanization, and relentless extraction of natural resources. The socio-economic inequalities led to the cause of emigration of Santals. Their root cause of impoverishment is exploitation of the land and natural resources by the government's development projects and policies. The Santals in Santhal Paragana are vulnerable to industrial and mining projects. They have been confronting insecure livelihoods due to underpaid manual jobs. The low education literacy rate, unskilled labourers and unemployability are key plights of the Santal in Jharkhand. Dams, industries, and mines by governmental projects damaged

agricultural resources and irrigation systems. The lands of the tribals were illegally encroached by the capitalistic exploiters. The Santals seasonally relocate themselves to Bardhaman (West Bengal) for crop harvesting. The Santals in Santhal Paragana are vulnerable to losing lands and property for industrial and mining projects.

Nitya Rao's article "Displacement from Land" in Indra Munshi's book *The Adivasi Question: The Issues of Land Forest and Livelihood* (2012) depicts the issues of displacement from the land of the Santal tribal in the Santhal Parganas. The article exemplifies the causes of losses of their land due to the Masanjore Dam construction (1955) and mining activities in Ghatsila. The article also raises issues on air pollution and negative health impacts on the survival of forest dwellers and wildlife habitation.

Land Displacement, Rehabilitation, and Psycho-Social Alienation

Jharkhand became known as "the land of the destitute," including all of the underprivileged segments of Indian states. Despite having rich natural and mineral resources the state failed to uplift the Santal community towards economic inclusivity. The deforestation in Jharkhand has been impacted on the Santal's livelihood. The large-scale eviction has been done by the Jharkhand government from 2002 to 2004. The Santals have been exploited for commercial gains. The *Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015) focuses on the struggle of Santals for justice and resistance to displacement in the name of capitalistic development.

In the book, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar depicted the causes of displacement in Jharkhand due to mining activities and mineral exploitation. The illegal encroachment of lands made the Santal people landless and their livelihood was affected severely. The non-tribal members of the higher caste committed plunder and depredation of the forest and lands. As a result, the Santal people started to rebel and resist against their exploitation. The destitution of the Santal people for natural wealth like coal, iron ore, mica, bauxite, copper, and limestone is the result of their dispossession from their habitation. The Santals of Jharkhand suffered from poverty and starvation due to the extensive exploitation of natural resources. The acquisition of huge lands by Indian coal mining companies like ECL(Eastern Coalfields Limited), CCL(Central Coalfields Limited), BCCL(Bharat Coking Coal Limited) and the enlargement of the manufacturing city sector causes migration, alienation, and displacement for the Santal people. The socio-ecological impact of relocation, living standards, and livelihood affected the community severely.

Socio-Political Marginalization of The Santals In Jharkhand

The Santal tribe has faced marginalization in Indian society due to historical practices of discrimination and socio-economic factors. This marginalization has negatively impacted their culture, livelihood, and mental health. Some causes of their marginalization are such as dispossession, urbanization, subordination of women, loss of identity, mental alienation, and cultural extinction.

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar in his book *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015) how the exploitative power of capitalists has taken away the land, culture, and livelihood of the Santhal through fraud, force, and deceit of land acquisition. The Santhal have struggled to adjust to the changes brought about by urbanization. They have faced challenges like land loss, environmental deterioration, and clashes with other communities. The Santhal have endured emotions of displacement, loneliness, and loss of identity as they adjust to city life. The Santhal's mental health and well-being have been impacted by the marginalization they have faced. The Santhal's distinct cultural legacy is at risk of extinction,

In the book Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar portrayed the subordinate position of women in Santal society through the character Talamai Kisku of Santhal Paragana. Hansda realistically presented how patriarchal power sexually subordinated Talamai by a policeman. Hansda critically provided gender-based marginalization of the Santal women through the character of Talamai. The misery of marginalized Santals is combined in the book through economic exploitation, educational challenges, cultural and linguistic barriers, political and media representation, and urban migration.

In other words, the marginalization of the Santal community is addressed in the book *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015) with several issues in the mainstream society including socio-economic inequality, cultural threat, and socio-political exclusion through the characters like Mangal Murmu, Panmuni, and Biram Soren, and Baso-jhi. These contemporary issues needed inclusive policies for their socio-political promotion and upliftment, to secure cultural identities, and to provide unbiased access to natural resources and socio-economic opportunities for the Santal community.

The Constitutional Rights of the Santals

The contemporary issues needed inclusive policies for their socio-political promotion and upliftment to secure their cultural identities, and to provide unbiased access to natural resources

and socio-economic opportunities for the Santal community. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar ensured social, political, and economic rights to the Indian indigenous groups. Indian tribes have some Constitutional Provisions in the Fifth and Sixth Schedule and Article 46, Article 164, Article 243D, Article 243T, Article 330, Article 332, and Article 338A. The Santhal Paragana Act of 1876 prohibits the transfer of tribal lands to non-tribals. The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989 was enacted to prevent inhuman brutality and violence against the tribal communities. The Forest Rights Act of 2006 provides the rights of land and resources to marginalised forest dwellers. The tribals also have other constitutional rights related to education in Article 15(4) and the rights of employment in Article 335.

Apart from those several constitutional rights, the social injustices and exploitation against the Santals have been increasing little by little. Their rights have been consciously overlooked by the state, governments, and administrative authorities. The systematic deprivation of human rights can lead to the socio-political backwardness of any tribals. The Santal as well as other tribal communities should be aware of their constitutional rights so that they take legal action against any discrimination and injustices.

Conclusion

The pivotal issues raised in the book such as migration of the Santal, problems with rehabilitation, capitalist exploitation of the natural resources, poverty, and starvation. The globalisation, urbanization, and capitalism made the gradual degradation of forest and its impact on the Santal community. Jharkhand's socio-political conflicts hindered employment opportunities and sustainable development of the Santals. Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar throughout the book *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015) questioned the protection of rights and legal provisions for the landlessness situation of the Santals in Jharkhand. He criticised the cultural commodity of the Santals in front of the ministers. Hansda realistically highlighted Santal's migration, economic instability, land dispossession, capitalistic exploitation, and gender-based marginalization in the book.

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