

An Account of Santhal Tribulation in *My Father's Garden*: a Subaltern Writes Back

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Abstract

The absorption of the outcast into mainstream society is still considered a myth and stands as implausible to receive actual implementation. Though they get access into the broader society, sometimes as a peasant and certain other times as a part of the reservation quota. Therefore, they are entangled in the subaltern functionary in the complex colonial hierarchy, caught between stratified superiors and feared natives. The research paper deals with the Santhal ethnic group that has undergone severe challenges of displacement, alienation, and reservation. The eviction of the Santhal families to give space to new projects leads to their perpetual alienation. The reservation rights enshrined in laws remain a factor in how far they are educated to recognize them. However, the resistance of the subalterns has a remarkable evolution from the war field to literary development. Helming through the subtle nuances of subaltern theories and criticism, the paper moves through the discourses of Antonio Gramsci, Prof. Ranjit Guha, and mainly Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak to analyze Subaltern positions and perspectives of Santhals in Hansda Sowvendra Sekhar's epoch-making novel *My Father's Garden*. An interesting issue discussed in the present article is the issue of homosexuality which is incorporated into the protagonist's character. This eventually alights on to make his subaltern spirit more emphatic and troublesome.

Introduction

The Santhal is one of the largest ethnic groups in India, after Gond and Bhil, numbering about 4 million, and is the most discussed ethnicity in India. The Santhal Community in India spreads mainly in the States of Jharkhand, Bihar, Assam, Tripura, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, and West Bengal. Since the publication of his collection of short stories *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar has emerged as a unique and original voice in the scenario of Indian-English fiction. The present author of *My Father's Garden* is the sole Santhali writer in English. A Santhal by birth, he does not hide his subaltern identity under the mask of erudition and professional success and makes his prime characters proud of this ethnic identity too. He received criticism from academicians and critics when his titular short story 'Adivasi Will Not Dance' was banned owing to his objectification of the Santhal women. A medical practitioner by profession, he was held back from practicing until the ban was lifted. During his days of banishment, he spent his days authoring this masculine novel where no female character is introduced. The reason for the same could be his caution to avoid any further controversies. The contemporary Anglophone author depicts the Santhali culture and their indignity at the hands of mainstream society. In addition to this usual quest for the identity of the subaltern community, the Sahitya Academy Award-winning author incorporates an unusual theme of homosexuality. Therefore, infused together are two different issues, cultural identity, and homosexuality, that embed the novel with an underlining tone of subalternity. The research paper analyses how the Santhal protagonist is a subject of subaltern crises in three aspects – homosexuality, displacement, and alienation and gradually moves on to portray reservation and assertion of the subaltern power. His protagonists and many of his characters envisage life from the unique perspective of the subaltern.

Theoretical Grounding

The term 'Subaltern' had its inception in the seminal work of the Italian writer Antonio Gramsci. In 'Notes on the Italian History' which emerged as a rendition of the profound insight, he wrote around 1934-35, Gramsci discusses the economic divide of the Italian society, in the now-proverbial first section, which he called 'History of the Subaltern Classes: Methodological Criteria'. He emphasizes immensely on cultural hegemony as the key through which capitalism maintains order in society, rather than by violence. It is a

commonsensical approach through which capitalism automatically knows how to minimize protest and resistance. It is from these contexts that the concept of subaltern automatically springs forth. He used the term subaltern as a code to describe the have-nots of society. They mainly consist of the working class, agriculturists, artisans, laborers, and others, who represent the societal ethos, other than the ruling class. Technically, it indicates economically and socially inferior classes—the ruled, as opposed to the ruler. According to Gramsci, subalterns are those groups of society that the upper classes and ruling classes attempt to silence, segregate, ostracize, and marginalize, to deny the emergence of their voices and existence. The ethnic existence has become vulnerable to interference and patronization from the center. With the realization of being at the margin and the reductivism faced by the mainstream society, the tribal have preferred to get absorbed into the broader society:

A large number of anthropological works of the post-independence era still points to phenomenon such as tribes being absorbed or assimilated into Hindu society or tribes becoming castes. Tribes are said to have accepted the ethos of caste structure and to have got absorbed within it. Hence, they are treated as hardly differentiable from neighboring Hindu peasantry. (Xaxa, 1999, p. 1520).

In another occasion, A B Chaudhuri writes:

By the time the permanent settlement was clamped on Bengal, the Santhals had attuned themselves to clearing the forest and bring the land under cultivation. This developed faculty had led to their migration to various places for agricultural operations...the Santhals came in closer contact with the alien Hindu culture out of economic necessity (Chaudhuri, 2013, p. 10).

Scholars and academicians have made their foray to prove the amalgamation of the tribal society into mainstream society and it is said that “In general the relation between tribes and non-tribes has been described as one of mutual coexistence rather than one of subjugation and domination at least until the advent of British rule” (Xaxa, 1999, p. 3592) However, “there is still a third term of reference in terms of which tribes in India have been studied, and this is social differentiation”. (Xaxa, 1999, p. 1523) The point of concern remains pertinent that this differentiation is closely related to Spivak’s “subaltern” notion that stands as a relation of power-subordinate though not consenting to the rule of the former. This relation between center and margin is that of power and subordinate and definitely not one of assimilation. El

Habib Louai in his article ‘Retracing the Concept of the Subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak: Historical Developments and new applications’ writes:

The subaltern classes refer fundamentally in Gramsci’s words to any “low rank” person or group of people in a particular society suffering from hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them basic rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same nation. ..In order to study the history of the subaltern groups, Gramsci designated a plan composed of six steps...firstly, their objective formation by changes taking place in economic production; secondly, their active or passive affirmation to the dominant political formations and their attempts to influence their programs; thirdly, the birth of new parties and dominant groups, which are mainly created for the subjugation and maintenance of the subaltern; fourthly, the formation of the subaltern group themselves made to vindicate limited rights; fifthly, new formations which maintain the subaltern groups autonomy within old frameworks; sixthly, those formations which may help to affirm the entire autonomy.(Louai, 2012, p. 4)

Significantly enough, Gramsci uses the term ‘Subaltern’ throughout as ‘Subalterns’. This is probably because he believed in the ever-expanding connotation and significance of the term, as well as its capacity of adding to its gamut. He strongly believed that unless all subalterns all over the world are united, the full realization of their power and potential would never surface, as evident in his following observation, ‘The subaltern classes by definition, are not united and cannot unite until they are able to become a “State”: their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of the civil society, and thereby with the history of states and groups of States...Subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up: “permanent” victory breaks their subordination and that not immediately.’(Gramsci, 1971, p. 51 55). The typical discrimination that the Santhal community withstood finds its clear way into Hansda’s works where he mentions “Santhals were looked down upon by the members of the higher castes and classes as uncivilized people and given all kind of insulting and humiliating names. However, what angered Dadu

most was the humiliation of the Santhal women. They were teased and molested on the streets. There were even incidents of Santhal women being abducted by the sons of rich Bhumiar landlords” (Hansda, 2018, p. 134)The present research paper makes an attempt to take the readers on an analytical journey that the tribal society is distinct from the mainstream society and this is well brought out with special reference to Santhal tribe.

Methods

This study is analytical and exploratory. The method includes close reading of the text and analyzing the subaltern issues through theoretical aspects. The theory applied here is the Subaltern theory of Gramsci, Ranajit Guha, and Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak. The paper contradicts the Tribal theory of Virginia Xaxa where he claims that tribes have been accepted and amalgamated into the mainstream society. The subaltern theory serves as a tool that the tribes in general and particularly the Santhal tribe have the facets of subalternity that of the broader society. The issue of homosexuality gets a new dimension and gets double-folded murkiness when incorporated with the subaltern spirit. The research paper further deals with the social injustice of land dispossession which is weaved unusually in the novel with the illegal land possession, resulting in alienation. The tribal reservation that the former Prime Minister Pt Jawahar Lal Nehru had imposed is further dealt with in the paper and is used as a tool to critique the reservation issues in the novel.

Results and Discussion

The novel “My Father’s Garden” is a story divided into three sections about an unnamed protagonist who happens to be a Santhal gay doctor. The three sections namely, Lover, Friend, and Father deal with the exploration of sexuality, politics, and identity. In the first section, we find that the protagonist gets involved in multiple love relationships with gay partners and quenches carnal gratifications. To meet his unfortunate end, he is left barren without a partner at the end of this section. He completes his education and heads to his home. Section two gives an insight into his professional life in Pakur, Jharkhand. There he befriends Bada Babu and becomes a regular visitor to his family. Bada Babu is a man of misconduct who stays in an illegally constructed house and tries to evade tax. This aspect of his character, however, remains in disguise to the protagonist and is revealed to him only during the demolition of the encroached buildings. Bada Babu is the representative of the immoral world that exists in our society. The sordid political tale of apathy and exploitation is

uncovered which leaves the protagonist in awe. The third section is about the young doctor's redemption from nature. He is an alienated self, due to his homosexuality. This gives rise to his unnatural distance from his parents. The narration of his father being the failed politician and the quest for identity as weaved through the incidents of his grandfather and father marks the story with a well-knit plot. This section also highlights the plight of a tribal man, the father of the protagonist, to fill his nomination for MLA candidature. The novel ends with the subsequent resort to nature, the garden set up by the father.

Homosexuality

It is pertinent in this context that the first part of the fiction observes Queer Studies that it had initiated with the forcibly imposed concept of “compulsory heterosexuality” of our society and culture:

Every person who comes to a queer self-understanding knows in one way or another that stigmatization is connected with gender, the family, notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive policies, racial and national fantasy, class identity, truth, and trust, censorship, intimate life, and social display, terror and violence, healthcare and deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body (Greene, 2002, p. 532-533).

Queer Studies question the prolonged and perilous silence of previous critics and commentators on this issue. We are now aware that the gay and lesbian experience had indeed been expressed in the previous novels and works of art but in a camouflaged and codified way. The open discussion on such sensitive issues was avoided. Lesser number of books have been authored on homosexuality to keep such discussions under wrap.

However, Hansda attempts to delve deep and present a straightforward image without aiming to present a pacifying picture of society. The unnamed protagonist speaks a little later that his lover Samir called him pet names, which were four lettered words, in the time of sodomy, and this made him feel quite elated because he had “learned to find pleasure in self-abasement.” (Hansda, 2018, p. 11). The four-letter word here is a derogatory remark addressed to the narrator. However, humiliation and degradation are an integral part of the subaltern life, received from the higher, more-moneyed monoliths of the society. The aristocrats and people of the higher castes have always laughed at or jeered the Santhals all

through their lives as village bumpkin, a tribal with weird practices and rituals. However, Hansda makes his successful attempt to present the passionate love between the protagonist and his gay partners. His craftsmanship ignites the reader's stimulation to understand the erotic pleasure that the unnamed protagonist extracts at being addressed in vituperative names. The humiliating words of his lover Samir, therefore, appear sweet and titillating to his ears

Another obvious question may also be asked—is homoerotic pleasure-seeking an option, or a compulsion for the protagonist? Even if we consider it the protagonist's prerogative and the option of a liberated body and mind, many observers may prefer to make a different perspective study. They may argue that the protagonist is incapable of finding any girl and opt for a heterosexual relationship because of his subaltern identity. No girl or woman above him in class and caste would prefer to establish a sexual relationship with him, to be the object of satire among the friends and acquaintances of her class and creed. Finding a sex partner in a Santhal girl, from the same subaltern background, is difficult simply because few are found around, even in the girl's hostel. Even if there are, they are too conservative to give themselves up in the hands of a male before marriage. Pre-marital sex is a big taboo to them, and also absolutely forbidden to them. Accordingly, the biological propensities of the body have to be met and addressed not through fornication of a girl or a woman, but through giving and receiving of sodomy. Pointing out his ineffaceable identity, and his subaltern otherness, the unnamed protagonist confesses, "I am an Adivasi" (Hansda, 11, 2018). Adivasi as he refers to are the indigenous people of the Indian sub-continent. They are considered the original settlers of the country. The tone in which he utters the words appears a bit ambivalent. At one level there is the subaltern's pride in his ethnic identity. This is something that gives him a sense of belonging which he will carry to the grave along with him. At another level, there also seems to be hesitancy. It is, as if, to indicate that it takes time and stamina to find pride in this identity. For lesser talented people than him, it had not been so easy an identity to accept - living in the periphery, far from the center. It is the same periphery where their settlement itself is vulnerable. The possibility of eviction has become high with the rise in developmental projects.

Displacement

The development of the tribal land into dams, mines, industries, and various other projects has led to the eviction of the tribal people. Such displacement has impacted their lives at

large. It is true that “Ever since the birth of “civilization” it has been snatching away the land belonging to the pristine society by invasion, subjugation, and colonization of the members of the latter” (Mullick and Chatterjee, 1997, p. 2). The displacement of the indigenous people, however, led to the eventual rehabilitation. Unfortunately, the stark reality of the so-called development of the tribal land reveals itself as a grim and disastrous process resulting in various resettlement policies for the displaced, which often turn out to be unfruitful. Casually, to denote the social reality in which the subalterns live, the protagonist says, “Yet, in those first years in Jamshedpur I felt liberated...Jamshedpur is connected to my hometown of Ghatsila by train, a distance of about forty kilometers” (Hansda, 2018, p. 14, 53). Whereas, the overtly Muslim culture in Lucknow made him feel claustrophobic due to its absolute unfamiliarity. Jamshedpur is his state and not extremely far from his rural home, liberated him and re-kindled the nomad in his blood that took him out for long rides in bikes to far-flung places. The subaltern’s sense of belonging and not-belonging is very well brought out by the psychic graph of the protagonist. Brought under the job-reservation category in the country, the Santhal boys, girls, and youths take them to studies, with labor and seriousness, to procure a job, which proper education alone ensures. They are averse to moving away from their village pockets, going to towns, cities, or metropolis to study or receive professional education but are not left with any options. There is a lot of pressure upon various educational and training institutions all over India to accommodate the Santhal students in particular, who stay in hostels or student messes for continuing their studies, where separate wings have to be opened altogether for them.

The protagonist becomes a regular invitee to Bada Babu’s house in an alien land away from his abode. Learning abruptly that the houses surrounding a pond called Rani Dighi Patal were being demolished by the Local Civic Authorities, including that of Bara Babu, who was nothing but encroachers to government land, the protagonist rushes out to help him in this grave crisis. The unnamed protagonist finds the place thick with male and female police as well as people from the Indian Reserve Battalion, playing their share in the process of the evacuation. What pained the protagonist is seeing so many houses being bulldozed, which would turn all these poor subalterns into the streets. He felt that robbing them of the only roof they had over their heads, without any kind of rehabilitation, is blatant injustice. They should have been given some time to work out an alternative arrangement, to at least create sheds for themselves and their families. One question that baffled the protagonist was, “Here, while the population was primarily Hindu—mostly Dalits – and some Muslim families, the question

remained: Why are the people not resisting?" (Hansda, 2018, p. 103). Gradually, it dawned upon the protagonist that the assembled people, including Bada Babu, knew very well that they were living illegally upon encroached land that the government would take back, sooner or later. That is why they had not built permanent edifices, and roofed their houses with nothing more than tin or asbestos. Yet the manner these subalterns were robbed of their only claim to belonging profoundly touched and saddened the protagonist. When the protagonist meets an aged woman, who had worked as a maidservant in his rented house and asked her where she would live after this, "at this, Maasi's smile vanished, her face crumpled, and she broke down weeping." (Hansda, 2018, p.106).

The Maidservant rues the truth that some fake land-seller had grabbed Rs 60,000/ from her to make her purchase the land, which she never knew that it belongs to the government and that the entire deal was a pilferage and a scam. This indicates how the simple-minded Subalterns are unable to recognize the cheats and swindlers of the city and lose all their money to them, simply because of their simplicity to trust everyone and every word they hear. It later hurt the protagonist when he learned that even Bada Babu was in the team of swindlers and knew beforehand that the government would evict the illegal residents from land soon, and had grabbed all the money he could, through shady means, to build another house at a safer place. In that way, Bada Babu had lived among the subalterns, but cheated them, hobnobbed with the local political party to display himself as a leader and decision-maker, won the trust of the ordinary and poor people, and cunningly decamped with a part of the money he had procured from them to build his own house elsewhere. He did not leave out of his home immediately and started to pretend that he too was one of the evicted, suffering people, and tried to win the sympathy of all the other subalterns living in that area, who were turned out from their houses as aliens.

Alienation

Time and advancement have failed to bring drastic betterment to the lives of Santhals, even in the course of a few centuries. It is not merely the dearth of action plans on the part of the Government to uplift them, but multiple factors that have coupled to deny them the advancements they are meant for. The tug of war between primitivism and progressiveness continues among the multiple generations of the Santals, causing generation gaps that cannot easily be bridged. Once they came face to face with the urban culture, they are treated as outcasts, "School wasn't a happy place for Ruby Hembrom. No one looked like me. Being

Adivasi means your features, your face, they tell your story. Her classmates would ask her if she polished her face when she polished her shoes. When she said she was an Adivasi from Jharkhand, she was asked if she ate humans or lived on trees.” (Shah, 2019). This would lay bare her attitude towards her culture and language; sometimes they also reveal the tendency to hide their past or background and consequently attempt to pass as ultra-modern or excessively progressive in the eyes of society by erasing their pasts and adopting a new identity altogether.

Open disdain for one’s own cultural, traditional, and linguistic dimensions is not unfamiliar among the Santals. This has also resulted in the alienation of the so-called learned and employed Santals from their community. As it happens in the novel, the protagonist leaves his home and sets off to Pakur on procuring his first job. He is posted in a new place far away from his known habitat and has to make this new place his own. This rampant migration had been one of the prime causes of the slow but long-drawn and overwhelming changes that the Santal society had been undergoing. He had to adapt himself to new cultural changes. He is found to have been a part of the Mahashivaratri celebration and has sacred food of God. He also works

on the language of the place to fit in. He understands that he must learn the prevailing language in the new place, and the official language in his new workplace, to make himself or herself be understood. As a result, he or she slowly loses touch with his mother tongue and learns a new language, so much so that, with time, he or she starts speaking in a mixed language, fusing Santhali expressions with the local dialects and even English language. This not only gives birth to new linguistic variations like the creole but gradually makes a Santhal bereft of the original dialect in which he or she once spoke. Now the once-Santhali person has elevated himself or herself so much that he or she can no longer revert to his original indigenous culture and language, even if he or she tries their level best to return to the roots. In the third part of the novel when the protagonist retreats to his home, he finds himself lost. He feels alienated from his parents. He is unable to pour his heart out when he is torn apart from within– the one that his parents expect him to be and the other that his parents are not yet aware of his character. While ripped between his two selves, he has another issue that remains unaddressed to his family – quitting his job as a medical practitioner. It takes a lot of endeavor to be one with the sensibilities of his roots. Here, roots not only refer to his Santhali

identity in a broader aspect but also his existence as a son that has sprung forth from his parents. Consequently, such a Santhal person becomes a perpetual outsider to his own family, neither being able to withdraw himself or herself wholeheartedly nor being able to belong to it, with absolutism.

Prof. Ranjit Guha thinks that Subaltern issues infiltrate into Gender, Caste, and Class to make it more complicated. Regarding the purpose of subaltern studies in the Indian context, Prof. Guha opines that it attempts “to rectify the elitist bias... dominated by elitism—colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism.” (Guha, 1993, p. 73) Just as the centre-periphery binary opposition exists among the bourgeoisie and the subalterns, ironically enough, the same binary oppositions exist between the district hospitals and the main hospitals in the state capital or metropolises. The protagonist narrates “...the patients we got were mostly accident victims or people injured in maar peet clashes...We were often forced to refer the serious cases to hospitals either in Malda or Rampurhat in nearby West Bengal because the hospital didn't even have a functional X-ray machine.” (Hansda, 2018, p. 67). Ironically enough, the hospital that the protagonist served was in one sense a ‘Subaltern’ hospital, with not even the basic amenities available for treating the ordinary patients, who came not with complicated ailments, but with small complications, and yet had to be referred to in bigger and better hospitals, sometimes out of State. The protagonist rents a room with the aid of the head clerk of his hospital, popularly known as Bada Babu. This place, where poor people lived, has the perfect rendering of a subaltern habitat, where privacy is thrown to the wind, and community living thrives:

“Looking out of my window, I could see many houses which seemed like they had been transplanted from the Bengal of the sixties: built of mud, double-storied but squat, their walls punctured by small windows with vertical iron bars in them, topped by sloping roof and awnings made of tin. ...At all hours of the day, housewives in nighties would sit outside on the road, chopping vegetables, cleaning rice, combing their hair, quarreling, or gossiping... Young girls and old women would wash clothes and dishes at some of these taps when the municipality supplied water. Men would squat with buckets and mugs on the roadside, morning and evening, for baths.” (Hansda, 2018, p. 71-72).

Guha in his seminal work entitled *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* finds fault with the subaltern historiographers of India, as it had blatantly neglected the true representation of the subaltern, from its true socio-cultural perspectives. According to

him, the true history of the agriculturists has never properly represented Indian history, simply because the people who wrote about them were never subalterns themselves. Academic, political, nationalist, and elitist perspectives have always studied the agriculturists and the working class and had not succeeded in putting forth their true problems and voices in pen and paper. However, Hansda does justice in his seminal presentation of the subalterns in the Indian context. The narration of the Santhal distraught arises from the Santhal author with his mouthpiece as the Santhal protagonist. The clarity in the portrayal of the binary opposition between the subalterns and the elites comes bare to us undented with the apt revelation of reality. The fact that the protagonist's father is denied of securing an MLA ticket, despite being a deserving candidate is evidence enough to present the existing disparity in the mainstream society. Government has, however, tried its best by laying down a set of rules and laws for the eradication of such discrimination.

Reservation

The legal and constitutional provisions of providing reservation to the tribal community aim at not only securing jobs but also being a part of the decision-making process of the state. "The persistence of constitutionally sanctioned privileges to the scheduled castes and tribes by way of job reservations and preferential treatment in educational institutes beyond the period originally specified by the Constitution has divided Indians into two divisive camps - pro and anti-reservationists. The latter argue that merit has often taken second place as a result of such policies that anyway benefit only a certain section, already privileged, among the disadvantaged" (Louis, 2003, p. 2475). We come to know that the protagonist was studying Chemistry at a University in Lucknow, when his Father, one of the important politicians and the prime face of the Adivasi community, asked him to return home to join a Medical College at Jamshedpur. Without any solipsism, the unnamed protagonist says, "And all I could understand was that I had been accepted into the medical college on a quota." (Hansda, 2018, p. 13). There is no feeling of extreme elation on the part of the protagonist at the prospect of becoming a doctor in the future, so lucrative for most Indians. Most students, finding admission to a Medical College, on the ground of 'reservation', will never confess it in public. This is because, to the student, this indicates the lack of merit or talent, as well as lesser striving and labor than the students of the 'non-reserved category'. The reason for the same is that since immemorial times, the Santals had lived on the peripheries of the forests, and largely depended on it as their source of sustenance. However, there is an argument on

the imposition of such reservations on the tribes that date back to the 1960s. They were compelled to perform duties that were considered inferior because of their economic backwardness and illiteracy. In general, “They have poor economic status as their income is low due to constraints in agricultural production. It is not sufficient for them to lead a healthy life and prosperous life and does not fulfill their basic needs” (Maharana and Patel, 2018, p. 99). Since these people were ill-treated and were not enjoying equal status with other people guaranteed to all the citizens of India by Article 14 of the constitution of India. The tribal people were laid down with special provisions as per our constitution. But the then prime minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru opined that they deserved help not reservation, more particularly in service because that would lead the country to be of second-rate standards. He wanted to provide privilege in education only with free elementary education, and scholarship for bright boys and girls. The former prime minister dreamt of making India a first-rate country by using the reservoirs of talent, which can happen only when opportunities are used wisely.

Life spins a new yarn for the protagonist when he heeds his father's advice and appears for an examination in the government Department of Health to become a government doctor. He gets selected, and finally posted in the government *Sadar* Hospital in the district called Pakur, located in the east of the newly-formed Jharkhand State. The slow spread of education is gradually changing the dynamics of the Santhal people, and even opening up opportunities in the job market for them, but the progress has been really slow and not at all remarkable. Even fifty years before, there were just a handful of youths in a Santhal village, who had managed to complete school education, thinking it essential for survival. Those who had gone up for college education, and completed graduation were not more than one or two per village. At the same time, the Santhals went by the retrogressive principle that education is exclusively for males; females do not need education at all. Even if it can be accorded as a dispensable luxury to a female, going to school for a season or two, then becoming a drop-out is perfectly alright, and would probably enhance the prospect of a better marriage. With the Santhals seeping in within the gamut of reservation in jobs for the backward classes, it has now dawned upon the females that education can procure a job and henceforth, economic freedom. With aptitude changing too, the receipt of education is now on the rise, primarily for economic equations, and lesser competition among the reserved categories for procuring a covetable job, with a commendable salary. This silently dons the assertion of subaltern power.

Asserting Subaltern Power

Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, the famed Indian-American literary critic, is another front-ranking critic of Subaltern Studies, particularly after the publication of her seminal essay—‘*Can the Subaltern Speak?*’, published in 1988. Spivak envisages the problem of the Subaltern first from a new historical perspective. She is of the opinion that the Subaltern springs forth, particularly when feudalism and capitalism attempt to subjugate the voices of protest and revolution, from the marginalized classes of the society. Spivak further argues that the Subaltern loses their ability to speak or voice their thoughts unless they are allowed to speak for themselves. The grandfather of the protagonist takes the rein of subaltern pride and becomes the voice of his Santhal community’s subjugation. In his school days, grandfather was the only Adivasi in his class. In those days the fortune of attending schools and colleges was destined to only the privileged group in the society. As a result, he was considered an untouchable in his class. The teachers and students spoke to him from a distance, did not come into any physical contact with him, and did not even look at him while speaking. On one such ill-fated day, the teacher accidentally dropped the duster on the floor and the grandfather handed him after picking it up from the floor. The furious teacher responded, “Insolent Boy! How dare you touch that? Now I can’t use it again.” (Hansda, 2018, p. 132). and threw a piece of chalk at him. To this, the protagonist’s grandfather stood up and shoved the teacher to the floor. He was thrashed and expelled from the class but he voiced not only for his subjugation but also as a spokesperson of his entire community. In another incident, the assertion of subaltern power is presented through the act of the protagonist’s grandfather. The incident that happened in school was a meager part of the entire scenario of Bihar. There were usual cases of violations of chastity of Santhal women and their triple marginalization leads to their deprivation at the hierarchical order of gender, race, and class. Spivak observes: ‘[if], in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow...If you are poor, black, and female you get it in three ways.’ (Spivak, 1988, p. 287, 294). To raise a protest against this, the grandfather and his friends from the Santhal community formed a group arming them with stout sticks, and “whenever they heard that Santhal women were being exploited somewhere, they would fight with the men who had exploited them” (Hansda, 2018, p. 134).

Conclusion

The research paper gives us an insight into the Santhal world to prove the existence of otherness. The ethnic identity of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar helps in digging into the realistic presentation of displacement, and alienation. The protagonist, his father, and his grandfather are typecast subalterns who have been presented as the mouthpiece to lay bare the common affairs of suffering. The article also investigated that educated professionals of ethnic communities still come under the radar of speculation of reservation. They are accountable for criticism as they snap into education and profession through the gateway of reservation. Their hard-earned educational degree and rigorous effort to establish themselves in the professional domain are often overlooked. This makes an impact on the mental well-being of the Santhals as they are judged with the parameter of category and not quality. Also, the issue of homosexuality is subtly touched to show the double effect of subjugation. The question of human existence and the feeling of nothingness drives human existence to the non-existent transcendent forces. However, the paper makes a closure with the proven discussion that the Santhals have endeavored resistance against external indulgence and subjugation. This hostility towards mainstream society dates back to the historical Santhal Rebellion of 1855 through various movements and rights. The Santhal Subalterns living at the periphery of civilization for ages truly need the establishment of their identity to don their existence without absorption in the mainstream society.

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