



The Thundering *Tamak*: Reading Autochthony in Hansda Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*

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Abstract:

The Adivasi Will Not Dance presents a story of deliberate obliteration of a people to give way to development projects that promise capital rewards to a select few while burdening the ecosystem with unsustainable demands. Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, through his narrative, foregrounds the plight of the Santhals who suffer a loss of their traditional way of life in the face of profit-driven power structures. The state of Jharkhand, engendered on the promise of better representation and fairer allocation of economic resources, conveniently forgets its Adivasis who are forced away from their homes for the “development” project. In a macabre, ironic scenario, the Santhals are expected to dance at the inauguration of the very plant that led to their homelessness. This paper is a reading of autochthony in Shekhar's story to explore how it is being systematically erased, signifying a loss of tribal identity, culture, heritage, and indigenous living. It attempts to study how the short story underlines the alliance between State power and industrial interests with its “extraction-driven” outlook, which degrades the environment and departs, leaving the indigenous people to deal with the ecological aftermath. It further enquires into the modes of resistance, both cultural and ecological, penned by Shekhar and examines the narrative as a counter-discourse to elite environmentalism by highlighting the voices of those most affected by environmental degradation.

Keywords: Environmental Justice, Slow Violence, Santhals, Displacement, Indigeneity.

Introduction

The Adivasi Will Not Dance is a collection of short stories published in 2015 by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, a writer and government doctor from Jharkhand. Ethnically, he belongs to the Santhal tribe which is reflected in the tapestry of his works. This is the author's second

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book after his critically acclaimed debut novel *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2014), both his works portraying the lived realities of tribal communities and thus play a significant role in the representation of indigenous voices within the Indian literary scene. He is the winner of the 2015 Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar. *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* is the eponymous story within the collection that, through the narrative voice of Mangal Murmu, a sexagenarian Adivasi, voices out tales of state neglect, displacement, loss of cultural wealth, and the sorrows coal mining has brought for the Santhals.

The Adivasis are most often found on the frontlines of ecological violence, which in the context of Jharkhand takes the form of deforestation, coal mining, and stone quarrying. As Shekhar pens in his story, the struggles of the Santhals of Matiajore are not only for their land and ecology, but also for their identity, culture, and heritage. Ecocriticism offers a powerful lens to look at these stories from the heartlands of India, in particular the one under discussion, Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*. With its investigative focus centered around the interconnections between nature and culture, ecocriticism brings an eco-conscious approach to the field of literary studies: "In most literary theory 'the world' is synonymous with society – the social sphere. Ecocriticism expands the notion of 'the world' to include the entire ecosphere" (Glotfelty, 1996, p. 9).

The environmental crisis characteristic of contemporary times indicates that "we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems" (Glotfelty, 1996, p.10). In an age of growing environmental concerns, literary studies have redrawn their boundaries to include ecocritical approaches to the study of literary texts, starting from the mid-eighties and catching pace in the following decade. Environmental justice is one of the investigative torches ecocriticism uses, dealing with the issues of environmental degradation, particularly when they directly or indirectly influence the communities at the margins. Land, for the Santhals (and many other tribal communities of Jharkhand), is not merely a natural resource but the ground that shapes their social, spiritual, and cultural identity. The displacement that the tribal population in *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* faces engenders a crisis threatening their geopolitical space, leading to the erasure of their culture and identity. Scholars like Rob Nixon underscore the importance of "environmentalism of the poor" in delineating the idea of slow violence: "In the global resource wars, the environmentalism of the poor is frequently triggered when an official landscape is forcibly imposed on a vernacular one" (Nixon, 2018, p. 17). The vernacular landscape is one of affective mapping, historically shaped and cognizant of the salient geographical and ecological features, woven into the ecocultural fabric of the tribal communities. When this vernacular mapping is threatened by bureaucratic forces that treat land as an external and "extraction-driven" resource in a manner which is callously utilitarian, an often-inevitable fallout is tribal rebellions as the "short-termers", whose goals are immediate and profit-driven clash with the "long-termers" who are left to pay the price of an ecology that is stripped bare (Nixon, 2018, p. 17).

This paper probes into the narrative of *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* to bring forth how the author critiques State-sponsored development projects that despoil the environment, departing with the profits, leaving the Adivasis to deal with the ecological aftermath. The mining projects, stone quarrying activities, and the resultant displacement of the indigenous people are tragic realities of Jharkhand, a state birthed on the promise of equitable resource distribution and better representation in polity and governance. The paper explores how Santhal lives are inexplicably tied to the land, their livelihood woven around the surrounding ecology that is threatened by the machineries of development that impose unsustainable calculations on the biosphere for material gains. The ecocritical theories focusing on environmental justice and slow violence form the analytical lens to unearth the modes of resistance, both ecological and cultural, that Shekhar draws on to portray who bears the real cost of progress.

1. Margins that Speak

The narrative of development comes at a heavy cost; the irony that Shekhar wants to delineate being the cost that is inequitably paid, with the Adivasis having to shoulder the brunt of the degradation of the environment. The Santhals in the village of Matiajore are a microcosm reflecting the ground reality of progress in a rapidly developing world of technology and advancement. Mangal Murmu's words are telling when he says, "I am a farmer. Or... Was a farmer... Only a few of us still have farmland, most of it has been acquired by the mining company. It is a rich company" (Shekhar, 2015, p.113). This coal, Murmu later asserts, "is gobbling us up" (Shekhar, 2017, p.115) as the blackness is enduring and all-encompassing, painting everything black. The trees, shrubs, stones, roof-tiles, the earth, their art, and their children: nothing and none escapes. Rob Nixon's idea of slow violence draws attention to our collective disregard of this kind of violence which is neither "spectacular" nor "immediate" but plays out over an extended temporal plain, gradually accumulative in its monstrosity: "By slow violence I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon, 2018, p. 2).

Slow violence poses a strategic challenge in its relative invisibility, causing a dearth of representation in media and literature. These catastrophes are then reduced in their significance, both in the memory of the policymakers and the common people. "Slow violence is underrepresented in strategic planning, in human rights law, and in the media, where the long-term ramifications of degraded environments rarely receive the coverage they warrant" (Nixon, 2018, p.7). Literature can play a vital role in bringing such narratives to the forefront, dramatizing the unseen effects of slow violence: an exposé of the calamities it invokes. Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar has picked up this heavy mantle, using his art of storytelling to bring to us the tales of Mangal, his daughter Mugli, and many other Santhals of Jharkhand who are the first casualties under the axe of "development." The effects of ecological destruction are felt foremost by the indigenous people, mostly poor and marginalized, whose lives are shaped in close communion with the nature that surrounds them. Shekhar gives voice to the crisis faced by numerous natives of Jharkhand, whose fight is for clean air and water, and most importantly, the right to their own land. Storytelling itself is an act of protest in *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, giving voice to the tribal population and their rage and anger at the *Dikus*, the outsiders comprising Sindhis, Marwaris, Muslims, Mandals, and other merchants who have stolen their land, and the riches that nature has bestowed in abundance in the state of Jharkhand.

This coal company and these quarry owners, they earn so much money from our land. They have built big houses for themselves in town; they wear nice clothes; they send their children to good schools in faraway places; when sick, they get themselves treated by the best doctors in Ranchi, Patna, Bhagalpur, Malda, Bardhaman, Kolkata. What do we Santhals get in return? Tatters to wear. Barely enough food. Such diseases that we can't breathe properly, we cough blood and forever remain bare bones. (Shekhar, 2015, pp.113-114)

The ecological concerns of Shekhar stand in stark contrast to the elite environmentalism focused on preserving pristine nature, which is exclusionary in practice, disregarding the symbiotic relationship that tribal and rural communities build with nature.

...the environmental justice movement is beginning to achieve a more forceful presence within the greening of the humanities, a development that has immense consequences for our ability to engage, across multiple temporal and geographical scales, the politics of slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor. (Nixon, 2018, p. 255)

What Nixon calls the environmentalism of the poor is often driven by the desire to secure clean air, water, and soil on which their livelihoods depend. The activism in Shekhar's story arises from a necessity for survival. Their survival necessitates them to fight: through protests, but also using their literature, art, and oral traditions. Mangal Murmu and his fellow villagers fought against the acquisition of their land, and at the peak of this spectacle they were joined by "this political leader," "that political leader," "this Kiristan sister," "that Kiristan father" but no one stayed when they lost (Shekhar, 2015, p.113). Rather, some Santhal boys were implicated in the murder of a Christian sister, and Mangal marvels at the way both, the missionaries and Santhal boys, were removed from the protests in a tactical move.

The Santhals are no match for the "rich" company, and the blackness along the Koyla Road is "deep, indelible," seeping into the lived realities of the villagers (Shekhar, 2015, p.115). In a system that does not allow them control over their own land and resources, the Santhals have taken to stealing coal from the trucks ferrying coal for the company. This act of rebellion is "allowed" by the company officials to keep their operational procedures running, keeping at bay a bigger rebellion by the tribal community. It is not a great sacrifice for the company, "What is a few stolen quintals when tons of coal are mined by the company regularly?" filling up the coffers of the already rich *Diku* merchants. The irony of the situation is not lost on Mangal either: "After all, they already have our land, they are already stealing our coal, they don't want to snatch away from us our right to re-steal it" (Shekhar, 2015, p.115).

Shekhar links ecological exploitation with the oppression of the Santhal women in the story, where loss of land relates to loss of dignity. In *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, this is especially true in the portrayal of the Adivasi women who are often raped and resort to prostitution when no other ways remain to fill their bellies. "Our women are raped, some sell their bodies on Koyla Road. Most of us are fleeing our places of birth" (Shekhar, 2015, p.116). Neoliberal capitalism is responsible for the destruction of the environment as well as the oppression of women. The development projects in the story could be viewed as masculine forces that marginalize the tribal women and the surrounding ecosystem, othering them in the grand scheme of things to continue exploiting the resources they have to offer. "This violence is not accidental, it is the structural necessity, the mechanism by which Nature, women and other colonized parts are separated from the 'whole,' that is, the living interconnectedness or symbiosis, and made into an object, or the 'other'" (Mies and Shiva, 2014, pp.144-45). Women, like nature, have to become victims of the patriarchal forces of development, bearing the first cut on their lived bodies. In both cases, gendered labor and natural resources are devalued and rendered invisible to further the causes of capitalism.

The narratives of struggle and exploitation are evident in the commodification of the tribal art forms, their music, dance, and songs, which "are sacred to us Santhals. But hunger and poverty have driven us to sell what is sacred to us" (Shekhar, 2015, p.115). The present Mangal Murmu maintains a dance troupe in the manner he has done for the last two decades, though, unlike the past, it is a group that constantly sees its members changing; the regular troupe has lost its members to death, migration, and infirmity. The ones remaining are disillusioned, for all their shields and medals have not been able to secure their children, education, and food. "Development projects that displace communities in the name of progress are frequently accompanied by ecological and cultural erasure" (Nixon, 2018. p.30). The loss of cultural heritage is linked temporally to the project of development that saw a geopolitical redistribution in Jharkhand.

At that time, our Santhal Pargana was not broken up into so many districts. Today, all Diku, Bihari and all, they have broken up our Santhal Pargana for their own benefits.... Yet, there used to be so much hope. We used to perform in our village, in neighbouring villages, in Pakur, in Dumka, in Sahebganj, in Deoghar, in Jamtara, in

Patna, in Ranchi, even in Kolkata, and in Bhubaneswar, where we were taken to see the sea at Puri... We used to be paid money. We used to be given good food, awarded medals and shields and certificates. We used to be written about in the papers. (Shekhar, 2015, p.117)

The rapidly developing world has only taken from these Santhals, even the carving out of the state of Jharkhand from erstwhile Bihar has not delivered on its promise of economic gains, political representation, and cultural preservation for the tribal populace that lies at the root of the division.

In this increasingly bleak socio-political landscape, Mangal Murmu still dances with his troupe, for “it brings us some money...so we perform” (Shekhar, 2015, p. 118). At sixty, he is, thus, ecstatic to have been invited to perform with his troupe at an important event by the government of Jharkhand. Mere weeks before the function, the absurdity of the situation dawns on Murmu and others when they realize they would be performing for the President of India during the inauguration of a thermal power plant in Godda, which has caused many Santhal villages to be erased from the map. The villagers have been evicted from their homes, one of them being Mugli's marital family, Mangal's daughter. The climactic act of resistance is when Mangal refuses to dance, believing he was speaking to “the best man of India, our President” (Shekhar 112). His defiance stems from years of anger at the cruelty meted out to the Adivasis even when they are expected to grace every occasion with their songs and dances, fulfilling their roles as heritage-dolls. “What can I do? I cannot help it. I am sixty years old and, sitting in this lock-up after being beaten black and blue, I have no patience anymore. Only anger” (Shekhar, 2015, p.116). The climactic scene of the story raises significant questions on the validity of industrial progress at the cost of tribal lives, asking us to re-evaluate our policies on the economic, social, and political fronts.

The narrative fabric of *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* highlights the deprivation meted out to the Santhals, focusing on their helplessness in the face of mightier forces wielding political and financial power. The onus of displaying the Jharkhandi culture being placed on the Adivasis when they hold no claim to the resources the land offers is subversive in essence, countering the dominant discourse of development that takes up the pages and screen time in national media. This eponymous collection of short stories was banned by the Jharkhand government and Shekhar was suspended from his government job because it was found to be “offensive to the dignity of Santhal women” (Srivastava, 2017, para.1). Though the ban had been lifted in 2017, Shekhar was reinstated subsequently; the attempt to silence voices that are already marginalized and feeble is telling. Returning to Rob Nixon, who places immense importance on the role of literature and other narrative arts in bringing to the public eye the threats of violence dispersed in time and space: “The art of storytelling can help us apprehend threats that are scientifically urgent but emotionally elusive” (Nixon, 2018, p.263). Shekhar's story brings to us a community's fight against cultural and ecological erasure and a lone man's bravery in the face of authoritative State power, invoking in us a need to recognize the politics behind the distribution of ecological resources and the real casualties of environmental degeneration.

2. *Bhoomiputra*: The Native of the Land

The Santhal protagonist of the text is pinned to the ground at the beginning of the short story. Following an act of defiance, he is found as close to the ground of his homeland as one can be outside the grave. The reader is introduced to the homeland of the Santhals, the Santhal Pargana, from where they would have departed to the administrative capitals to voice their resistance against the systemic oppression they were being subjected to in the garb of progress by the state and capitalist forces. Succinctly portraying the embezzlement of their lands,

Shekhar(2015) writes: "...we Santhals start beating rhythms on our tamak and tumdak...while someone snatches away our very dancing grounds. (p.1)" Land and people are intimately connected in this short story, and this connection is made apparent from the very beginning of the text. Dance, an integral part of the indigenous community's cultural identity, cannot be without the dancing grounds that are threatened by the capitalist, neo-colonialist occupation by the coal mining and stone quarrying industrialists. The narrator's recollection that the President of India ancestrally belonged to the neighboring village of Birbhum and his expectation that this lineal tie would make him sympathetic towards their plight displays the Santhali association of land with identity and heritage: "His ancestral house is still there" (Shekhar, 2015, p.112). Once the cultural shock subsides, Murmu chastises himself for having thought that the Santhali morality and decency could be expected universally.

As the *medias res* narration becomes *ab ovo*, Murmu gives a detailed address for his village: "...village of Matiajore, in Amrapara block of the Pakur district" (Shekhar, 2015, p.113). This introduction displays regional pride with the confidence that the locality is easily identifiable for anybody. This is suffixed by the narrator's introduction of his occupation as a musician and a farmer. This vocational re-introduction again signals the eco-cultural nature of Santhals' indigeneity. Their (agri)cultural occupation plays a great role in the formulation of their identity. This is a fact that is increasingly gaining cognizance amongst the academics dealing with Adivasi literature. *Multiple worlds of the Adivasi. An introduction* records the "contemporary articulations of Adivasi identity... assume particular importance (of) the context of the displacement of communities rooted in land and the destruction of ecosystems"(Damodaran and Dasgupta). Murmu bemoans the loss of the farmlands and the pastoral livelihoods of the Santhals to mining. The land is personified in the emotive sentence: "But our land did not come back to us" (Shekhar, 2015, p.113). As if the failure to protect their way of life resulted in the land getting up and walking away; a conscious desertion. Through this depiction, personal agency is granted to the land. Commenting on the *modus operandi* of the mining companies, Murmu comments that they would dig out all the coal and stones by turning earth upside down and inside out with their heavy machines. This is a vivid description of the mechanistic violence that is inflicted upon an agentive land: bringing to mind the images of violation of a society through rape and plunder. These images are described more forthrightly in the next paragraph with the account of Santhal women being raped, their husbands ousted from their beds, by outsiders who barge into their homes as they have into their village.

The immigration of outsiders with different religions has led to an irreversible alteration of the social topography of the Santhal Pargana. Santhals have become the minority in their homeland, with the *Jolha* immigrant community living in better houses occupying more space than they do. The upper caste *Safa Hor* live in Pakur town and only visit them to try and procure their land or to harangue them about dietary purity. Murmu bemoans that people from no organized religion are their allies and only associate with them for their cultural and natural riches. The Santhals understand that outsiders are only interested in their coal and stone, but are compelled by their piteous circumstances to allow themselves to be drawn into the extortionist mechanism of these industries. The construction of the *Koyla* road through the village changes more than its topography. The coal hauling trucks that run through the village on this road care little about the safety of pedestrians. They often mow people down who are in their way, and the mining company pays the family off to not make a ruckus. The monopoly of the mining company on the road through the village and the villagers' inaccessibility to it is a microcosmic portrayal of the greater displacement. Their act of stealing small quantities of the coal being ferried is a small act of "taking back." Beyond the human occupants of Santhal Pargana, the flora and fauna are also alienated from their natural identity. Trees, shrubs, vines, flowers, and peacocks have been discolored and lost their individual colorful identities to a blackness. Murmu serves as the mouthpiece for the sentiments of the Santhals when he laments

the fragmentation of Santhal Pargana into several districts with the immigration of the *Dikus*. Santhals are nostalgic for a time when they were the inhabitants of a larger estate that was as prolifically spread in territory as the influence and popularity of their culture. The past practice of visiting neighboring states for performances is contrasted against the contemporary practice of seasonal and perennial migration of the Santhal youth. The narrator's observation that the troupe that used to perform earlier on stages now restricts itself to humming in private is analogous to the contraction of the cultural influence and territorial ownership of the tribe. Rashmi Varma(2020) succinctly frames this idea of cultural commodification and resultant territorial alienation:

...the politics of the accumulation of tribal/primitive art in India (and its related commodification and consumption) offers a critical perspective on Marx's discussion of primitive accumulation in the pre-history of capital in which the producer is violently separated from the means of production and dispossessed from his or her land and labour, from life itself. (p.751)

Displacement continues to be an important element in the story with the forceful vacating of eleven villages in the Godda district. The villages are cleared of their inhabitants by the police using force when political leaders had assured them that such a thing would never happen. This eviction forces the villagers to seek refuge in the neighboring villages as they are confounded about the purpose such an enormous stretch of land would serve. Letters written by allies to administrators in state capitals serve no purpose as all pleas fall on deaf ears. The administrators easily skirt this issue as they keep an eye on the troupe members from the villages to ensure meticulous practice for the cultural performance in front of the President. The narrator highlights the irony of the situation by affirming that it cannot be expected of an Adivasi to work as a laborer in a factory that had been built upon land he recently owned. The physical displacement of the indigenous community from its homeland is the smallest attribute of a much larger economic, cultural, and existential plight:

"Displacement" has been used as an omnibus term to cover a range of phenomena in the literature on displaced peoples, including loss of access or restrictions on livelihood opportunities or future income related to environmental resources. Such an expansive meaning actually obscures the plight of those who are physically separated from their land and homes. (Agrawal and Redford, 2009, p. 2)

3. Propaganda of Progress

Before the adoption of polemical and coercive tools for enforcing displacement, a propaganda of progress is instituted that desires to attain dubious consent and cooperation from the indigenous people of the land towards their own destitution. Roads, seen as one of the primary indicators of civilizational progress in the remotest corners of any country, are presented as tools of propaganda in the Santhal Pargana. The Koyla road doesn't promise progress. It is almost exclusively used by the ferrying trucks for faster transport of the mined coal by rowdy drivers who speed up, unbothered by accidents that kill pedestrians, to prioritize the company's profits. Political promises of progress fall flat in front of the harsher realities of capitalist profiteering. Industrialists, bureaucrats, and the police are part of the same agenda of progress that does not benefit the Santhals; rather is carried out at an extortionist cost to the community and its resources. Other than the occupation of their land by coal miners, Santhals have also lost land to stone quarries and immigrants. Although this may paint a cosmopolitan picture of tolerance, inclusivity, and the advent of opportunities for employment, the land and socio-political majority of the Santhals have been depleted due to these entrants. With no official claim to land rights, members of the community are reduced from farmers to thieves, stealing small amounts of coal from the trucks ferrying it. The Santhal Pargana of Matiajore is reduced

to “Santhal Tola”: a diminutive of their original existence. As new industrial projects are unveiled with public-private partnerships, celebratory events are organized to mark a milestone of progress. Murmu’s troupe is enlisted to perform their cultural songs and dances to appease the crowd with a display of indigenous cultural heritage. It is not only the land but also the culture of the Santhals that is appropriated for a baser purpose: “...hunger and poverty has driven us to sell what is sacred to us” (Shekhar, 2015, p.118). They are invited to dance at the loss of their lands and livelihood. At the site of the ceremonial gathering, the performing troupe was kept in an “enclosure,” invoking the idea of circus animals kept ready to perform. The propaganda is unmasked and brought into the open with Murmu’s open interrogation of the President:

We will sing and dance before you but tell us, do we have a reason to sing and dance? Do we have a reason to be happy? These men sitting beside you have told you that this power plant will change our fortunes, but these same men have forced us out of our homes and villages. 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? (Shekhar, 2015, p.122)

The final realization of the extent of their exploitation, financial and cultural, dawns upon all Santhals with Murmu’s open address. The subservient act is immediately contained with the speaker’s physical restraining. The beginning of this cyclical narration continues the protagonist’s introspection of the outburst of the rebellious act, its consequences, and alternative methods of resistance that could have been more pragmatic. Murmu’s contemplation proves his statement that the Santhali is an (innocent) “fool” who doesn’t know the ways of the capitalist world: neither in defense nor in defiance. In contrast to Murmu’s harsh self-criticism, a collective tribal struggle for the protection of its rights and resources has stemmed from several such individual instances of micro-resistance. Studying tribal resistance in Kashipur, Skylab Sahu(2019) confirms:

Despite...its emphasis on favouring the underprivileged, in an overwhelming number of cases, most developmental projects have transgressed or violated the interests of politically and economically weaker sections of society. These development plans also hardly took into account the immense loss to nature and the environment that such programmes incurred. As these projects threatened the livelihood of indigenous people, their existing socio-economic conditions and culture with which they were familiar with several social movements emerged to counter and oppose these. (p.62)

Developmental projects that might be presented as avenues of employment and economic security for the indigenous population are often discovered to be the means for the slow poisoning and death of the culture and people of a geography. The “slow violence” of development deceptively procures and exhausts the natural riches of the land while using the indigenous people as manual labor.

4. Conclusion

To read autochthony in Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar’s novel is to be a witness to its systemic erasure. The way of life practiced in Santhal Pargana is gradually replaced by one promising modernity. The traditional life of the Santhals, that was centered around foraging, dignified labor, sustainable growth, and harmonious living with nature, is superseded by one of peripheral participation in the exploitative capitalist economy that treats nature as the storehouse of limitless resources to be harnessed for the “progress” of humankind. They are transformed from farmers ploughing the field to laborers digging up coal, thieves stealing it off moving trucks, and harried women forced into prostitution. Inclusive hospitality of the Santhals

leads to a demographic paradigm shift that marginalizes the indigenous tribe in the *pargana*. These changes are gradual, sometimes imperceptible, till they catch speed. The state machinery and the executive system work hand in glove with the industrialists to ensure mutual profiteering. The Santhals are kept in the dark with false assurances and bureaucratic blindfolding till the floodgates open. This ensures that the community has no time and warning to unionize and formulate a plan of action to mount a resistance. It is not only their land, but also their sacred culture that is appropriated and commodified for capitalistic gain. They are reduced from landowners to mere performers for the inaugural functions of projects being developed on land seized from them. The project of progress is also the project of cultural erasure: a slow but efficacious poison for the annihilation of a people, their history, and their way of life. Shekhar's brilliant short story ends (not) with a glimpse of the *Adivasi* refusing to dance: the cyclical nature of the narration echoing the never-ending and cyclical nature of oppression and resistance.

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