

SYNOPSIS

Adivasi settlements are mostly situated in those areas of India that are rich in mineral resources and hence the ground for setting up heavy industries in the name of development. Such development projects had caused massive adivasi displacements which endangered their livelihoods and adivasi ways of living. The general degradation in the qualities of living after development-induced displacements from their ancestral landscapes has led the adivasi communities to choose *jal-jangal-jameen* over mainstream development projects. To the pro-development groups of people, the dissensions of Adivasis against economic development projects appear as the dissents of intellectually inferior people who should be tamed to accept the collateral damages of economic development for the sake of the larger interest of human progress through various government institutions.

Ironically in the twenty-first century, when the issues like global warming, climate change, and ecological preservation have gained prominence in the urban social sphere, the adivasi demand for safeguarding *jal-jangal-jameen* can no longer be denigrated as the irrational demands of the primitive, hence technologically and intellectually backward, people.

The grey area of the man-made climate crisis has put the non-advasi, urban, technology-dependent people in dilemma regarding the idea of progress. In other words, it appears that modern human civilisation is at the crossroads of two choices. It neither can ignore the imperatives of ecological sustainability nor can it part ways with technological progress.

My research has begun right at this crossroads. Instead of looking at the adivasi resistance movements against development projects as the struggles between

ecology dependent primitive indigenous communities and technology-oriented civilised people, I argue that it is imperative to introspect the meanings of development from the adivasi perspectives. If we interpret adivasi resistance movements against mainstream development projects as the conflict between eco-centric and technology-centric people, we would fail to see the dynamism hidden within adivasi existences and how the dynamism poses a challenge (which is not denigration) to the dominant interpretation of development.

My research engages with the narratives of four (three adivasi resistance movements of Jharkhand and one Kānaka Māoli resistance movements against eviction in Hawai'i) indigenous resistance movements against development-induced displacements. The three narrators from Jharkhand are three adivasi women leaders who belong to three agrarian adivasi communities of Jharkhand namely Munda, Santhal, and Uraon.

Dayamani Barla – a renowned indigenous activist, belongs to the Munda community. She started her life as an activist in the Koel-Karo movement in 1995. She played a decisive role in the indigenous actions against the Arcelor-Mittal Integrated Steel Project in the Khunti-Gumla area of Jharkhand. Munni Hansda was in front of the Kathikund movement against the RPG group's (Ram Prasad Goenka) proposed thermal power plants in the Dumka district of Jharkhand. She belongs to the Santhal community. The third narrator from Jharkhand is Nandi Kachhap. She represents the Uraon community of Nagri village. Nandi Kachhap took the forefront of the Nagri movement when the state government tried to encroach on the agricultural lands of the Nagri village to build three premier universities. Based on their personal experiences as participants in the resistance movements and as adivasi

women, these three activist leaders have addressed the issues of adivasi dissensions against mainstream development projects.

The fourth narrative in my research is the Mākua movement of Hawai'i (1995-1996). During the movement, Nā Mākā O Kā Āina (“The Eyes of the Land”)- which is “an independent video production team” that has been video documenting Hawai’ian traditional and contemporary Hawaiian culture, history, language, art, music, environment and politics of independence and sovereignty from the perspectives of Kānaka Māoli- made a documentary namely *Mākua: To Heal The nation* registering “the faces and the voices” of the Mākua villagers in 1996. I have tried to engage with the Mākua Movement of 1995-1996 from the perspectives of the villagers registered in the above-mentioned documentary. Besides that, the oral narrative of Sparky Rodrigues who was a prominent member of the Mākua Beach Council during the movement and acted as the public correspondent on behalf of Mākua villagers is also chosen by me as the primary text of my research. All the oral narratives are collected by me between 2015 and 2017.

The logic of reading the Jharkhandi adivasi movements against development-induced displacements in tandem with one of the Hawaiian indigenous movements is to show the incapacibilities of economic development to serve economic, social, emotional, and spiritual justice to the local indigenous communities. Besides, the Mākua movement points out how the metaphysical ethos present in the indigenous ways of living can provide the economically marginal people with alternative meanings of well being and better life. Finally, this research aims to explore the universal leverage of the indigenous communities to proliferate and extend the boundaries of varied indigenous knowledge systems through the mutual exchange of their experiences, ideas, and perspectives.

My research primarily focuses on – the indigenous ways of cognising connections to the local landscapes as the basis of indigenous identities, indigenous understandings of sovereignty, histories, and perceptions of wellbeing in the context of resistance movements against development-induced displacements. Hence the primary research questions that act as the mainstays of the following four chapters are:

- i) What is the relationship between the landscape and indigenous identity?
- ii) How does the dynamism that is existing within indigenous identity structure indigenous understandings of freedom and agency?
- iii) How the activists of the indigenous resistance movements sensibly cognised their agency by rediscovering the meanings of the indigenous ways of living and thereby recognised their agency in transforming the meanings attached to development/wellbeing/ better life in relation to their multidimensional and multiple connections to communities and the local surroundings?

And finally,

- iv) How have the experiences of the indigenous resistance movements helped the resisting villagers to evolve as critically conscious change-makers by establishing new connections to their landscapes and also to the people existing beyond the boundaries of their village spaces based on equality, dignity and empathy?

As mentioned above, the primary aim of this research is to analyse the narratives from the perspectives of indigenous ways of perceiving communities' connections to the landscapes. The ways these connections have influenced the narrators' understandings of indigenous existence in relation to the economic development projects are discussed in my thesis to show that indigenous

epistemologies with their distinctness have never ceased to evolve and have capabilities to envisage alternative interpretations of progress through the synthesis of the diverse streams of knowledge.

In this research, I have engaged with the indigenous narrators' understandings of indigenous cultural identity, indigenous ways of understanding landscapes and development-induced displacements. Following the perspective of comparative literature, I aim to understand how the narrators' experience-generated perceptions based on connections to the various aspects of indigenous existence and also to the socio-economic institutions have found their way into the narrative structures. The close reading of the texts (oral narratives) in relation to the "forces of history" (historiography), cultures (as the semiotic frame of reference), and sensible cognition of individuals (aesthetics), I argue, point out that narratives of the indigenous resistance movements exist at the intersections of indigenous pedagogies, histories of indigenous resistances, histories of the displaced indigenous communities, aesthetics of the movements, indigenous sovereignty discourse, and post-development theories which emphasise on ethics, justice, gender, political ecology and many more. This approach toward the primary texts is essentially based on the principles of comparative literature (Zepetnek 1998, 13-20).

One of the general principles of comparative literature, according to Zepetnek, is "to move and to dialogue between cultures, languages, literatures, and disciplines (Zepetnek 1998, 16). As the fundamental aim of this discipline is to establish dialogic relationships with the "excluded other" from the aspects of literary study based on "non-hierarchical and liberal ethics" it looks at the literary creations as the part of an integrated bio-organic system that changes/evolves with time and open for new interpretations. In other words, approaches of comparative literature

acknowledge that the process of engaging with a text means interacting with the pluralities, complexities, ambiguities, and dynamism present in that literary communication. Hence, the inter/intradisciplinary approach of comparative literature is more of relating the experiential world of the text to multiple theoretical lenses that are required for finding pragmatic interpretations of the text. By pragmatic interpretation, I mean the interpretation that observes knowledge as an ongoing process that involves experiences, impacts, reflections, understandings, value-addition and making choices by humans who are part of the earth's interdependent network of relationships. Therefore, to a student of comparative literature, narratives of the indigenous resistance movements appear as the narrators' "patterns of thoughts" (Bandyopadhyay 2004, 12) represented through linguistic signs in a given context. Thus, the comparative literary approach (which is multidimensional and multidirectional) focuses on the relational existence of the text, the interplays between these relations, the subjective reflections on those relationships and "the life-force" existing within texts. In other words, this discipline of literature refuses to see texts as the embodiments of the empirical data of the objective world. The text from the perspective of comparative literature represents the interactions between the narrator's subjectivity and the exterior world that changes with time. The moral and functional responsibilities of the researcher/student are to see the texts as the intrinsic part of the world which embodies continuous transitions of the living elements within a complex interdependent network. The holistic approach that is intrinsic to comparative literary study, I argue, is more suitable to study indigenous perspectives present in the narratives of indigenous resistance movements.

According to Kovach, one of the ways to engage with indigenous epistemologies is the consideration of the 'holistic quality of indigenous ways of

living.’ The ‘holistic quality’ can be understood if one considers indigenous knowledge as a nodal plane holding varied relationships (from the Great Spirit to the world of ancestors, from Creation myth to village histories, from celebrating rituals to everyday practices, from the human capabilities to the dependence of humans on the multifarious functions that are performed by the various elements of nature) within a single plane of equality. (Kovach 2012 reprint, 56) In the light of Kovach’s argument, the inclusive and integrated approach of the comparative literature toward any text appears as one of the compatible approaches while engaging with the indigenous resistance movements in relation to indigenous epistemologies and indigenous epistemic knowers.

Moreover, a narrator’s pattern of thoughts is intrinsically related to the culture she belongs to. Hence, if the indigenous narrator uses non-indigenous dominant language as the communication medium, her interpretations¹ follow the semiotic codes of her culture. By culture, I mean a particular way of living that a group of people chose to follow. Therefore, culture encompasses every aspect of life, including artistic and intellectual activity (Seabrook 2004, 5). Culture is seen by this researcher as a connecting medium that helps an indigenous individual to maintain the connections between the traditional indigenous values and the flux of time. Therefore, the narratives of indigenous movements bear cultural standpoints (which is also part of indigenous epistemologies) of the narrators and their perceptions of lived experiences in a given time. A comparative literary approach to the indigenous resistance narratives would see what cultural codes are appearing as the dominant cultural signs in the narratives and how the narrators cognise their transformative values in relation to their cultures and everyday worlds.

¹ During the interviews , the adivasi women of Jharkhand have communicated in Hindi which is neither their mother tongues nor part of their everyday living.

In addition to the above argument, I argue that the cultural codes of an indigenous community are the symbolic representations of the community members' choices of following certain ways of living. These choices are made by the community members after sensibly cognising the efficacies of the cultural codes in maintaining an optimum balance between the community's metaphysical ethos and transformative forces of time. The continuous interactions among metaphysical, experiential, and reflective realms shape the sense of agency of an individual of an indigenous community.

From the perspective of aesthetics, an indigenous narrator's understanding of agency can be read as her sensible cognition of the connections that evolve out of the individual's sensuous cognition of her world. The living body is not merely a vessel that registers experiences and surrenders those to the disposal of the mind for reflection in the long run. The body is a "sense-making system" that is highly adaptive to continuous structural and functional changes. It maintains the coherence and meaningful patterns of activity through its adaptability. In other words, an individual's reflexivities are deeply related to her ever-growing experiential realm that embodies an individual's varied connections to her surroundings.

That is why I propose what I call the 'aesthetics of connection' as a theoretical approach for understanding how oral narratives of resistance movements reflect the transformative powers of physical, emotional, and spiritual connections that the community members individually as well as collectively share with the landscape. An individual's multifarious relationships with the local ecology build the cornerstone of the 'aesthetics of connection'. The sense of self-reliance enmeshed with the notion of well-being that a person ascertains in relation to her association with the surroundings (in the case of the adivasi populace precisely for the women it is their relationships

with *jal-jangal-jameen*) form the structure of this category. The fabric of the 'aesthetic of connection' follows the organic design of the earth system. It acknowledges the interconnection of humans with the other species as well as non-living elements of the local ecology. Thus 'aesthetics of connection', in my opinion, as a theoretical approach, holds possibilities of realising (hence exploring in the long run) that aesthetics response is neither absolute nor static. The realm of sensible cognition of a person is likely to shift with every minor or major change that affects her existence.

As 'aesthetics of connection' focuses on the narratives from the perspectives of sensible cognition of interrelationships by the indigenous narrators, it becomes imperative to inquire about the features of relationships from the relevant theoretical concepts. The need for engaging with the theoretical concepts of different disciplines rises at this point.

In the context of this research, therefore, engaging with the theoretical concepts that focus on various dimensions of indigenous existence like epistemology, identity, culture, ecology, sovereignty, subjectivity and aesthetics becomes necessary. At the same time, to understand the need for alternative interpretations of development, the issues of justice and ethics in relation to development discourse are brought into the theoretical perspectives.

The awareness of the relational network's value sustains human existence and encourages conscious people to structure their ethos and culture around the care norms. These cognizant groups of people become careful about maintaining the delicate balance of the relational existence. They also become active participants in the acts of caring for those relationships that they value. Those two axioms of ecocentric culture build the foundation of ecological activism.

Indigenous women have expressed their dissension of the economic development projects strongly because of their awareness regarding the values of biodiversities available in the forests, common lands, farmlands, and waterways, as well as the village kinship structures in providing food shelter and personal security. Their narratives of resistance movements communicate their sense of care towards those valued relationships.

Hence, every endeavour to get the alternative meanings of development needs to understand how the addressers deliver their sense of care in their messages. Unlike the ethnographers, the researchers, thinkers, and activists who want to rebuild development discourse around the imperatives of sustainability and equal opportunity of exercising freedom of choices for all must focus on why and how people have structured their value system and sense of care in relation to their local ecological relationships. Simultaneously, there is a need to register how the adaptations of new ideas in the traditional value systems encourage community members to restructure and reinterpret their sense of care.

The challenge is to understand that dynamism is part of ecological evolution. Hence every alternative development strategy would need to structure and restructure itself according to the demands of time, place, and local communities. That is why the imperative of nurturing the networks of dialogues seems the only static principle in the quest for the alternative discourse of development.

Thereby, I claim that reading resistance movements from the perspective of aesthetics of connection does not end with the inclusion of unheard voices but serves as the means of coevolution necessary to address and work continuously on the issues like ecological unsustainability, unequal distribution of welfare and justice which are absent in the dominant discourse of development.