

Contested Modernity in Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's Fictions

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled “**Contested Modernity in Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar’s Fictions**” submitted by me towards the partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy (Arts) in English** of Jadavpur University, Kolkata is based upon my own original work carried out under the supervision of **Dr Nilanjana Gupta**, Professor, Department of English and that there is no plagiarism. This is also to certify that the work has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree/diploma of the same Institution where the work is carried out, or to any other Institution. A paper out of this dissertation has also been presented by me at a conference at the Department of English, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, thereby fulfilling the criteria for submission, as per the M.Phil. Regulations (2017) of Jadavpur University.

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On the basis of academic merit and satisfying all the criteria as declared above, the dissertation of Ms **Sunanda Roy** entitled “**Contested Modernity in Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar’s Fictions**” is now ready for submission towards the partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Philosophy (Arts) in English** of Jadavpur University.

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Contents

Title Page

Certificate

Acknowledgement

Contents

Synopsis 5 - 7

Introduction 8 - 11

Chapter I 12 - 35

Chapter II 36 - 53

Chapter III 54 - 79

Conclusion

Bibliography

Synopsis

Multifarious narratives are to be found on different tribal communities of India. These narratives attract attention because of their varied perceptions and receptions about these tribal communities. For instance, on one hand, some orientalist/colonial scholars like Louis Jacolliot and H. S. Risley have shown tribes from India as ‘regressive’, lacking in a ‘proper civilization’, ‘superstitious’; while on the other, scholars and novelists like Mahasweta Devi, Hansda Sowendra Shekhar and Gladson Dungdung have presented the tribal people and their society in a completely different light. Among the latter group of scholars, Hansda Sowendra Shekhar, a Santhal (one of the Adivasi communities in India) by birth, has written novels and short stories collection like *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, *My Fathers Garden* and *The Adivasi will not Dance* that reflect his sense of belonging to and proximity with the Santhal community. His stories are rich in ‘fine details that add to the deep dimensions’ of santhal lives and ‘open to us a world we have deliberately missed’ and contain ‘a surplus of understanding that comes from a kind of insider-outsider’ perspective. His novels can be considered to be called the first full-fledged Santhal narratives to be published in English by a ‘mainstream’ publisher. This is why his layered, thought provoking weaving of narratives about the lives of Santhal call for further study and examination.

My work also hastily engages with a cloud of controversy that hovered around his authorial identity. In August 2017, his book of short stories *The Adivasi will not Dance* had been banned by the then Jharkhand Government and the author was summarily suspended from his position as a medical officer with the Jharkhand Government. He was accused of portraying Santhal women in a ‘bad light’ by the ruling Bharatiya Janta party, the opposition party Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and an academic at Jamia Milia Islamia. His works had been tagged as ‘cheap porn’ and along with that, his eligibility to write novels and short stories on Santhal community had been questioned. Such censorship and anti-intellectual action of the government was widely criticized in the civil society and eventually the ban on *The Adivasi*

will not Dance was removed in December 2017 and he was reinstated in his job in 2018. In my dissertation, I exploit this incident as a point of departure to explore questions like these by taking such accusations and events at a face value: Why is it that a text like *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* became a text that needed to be banned or condemned (that is also two years after its publication)? How far Hansda's interstitial or liminal position qualifies him as a 'legitimate' author who simultaneously belongs to the dominant, 'mainstream' discourse of literary world of English and the marginalized *Santhal* community?

In my dissertation, my primary focus will be on Hansda Sowendra Shekhar's works as these form my primary research archive. However, my references to and explorations of his works as nuanced and informed documentations of the miserable condition of santhal people from Jharkhand, are punctuated by some references to Dungdung and Devi. Hansda's texts depict their 'superstitious' beliefs in witches, witchcraft in interestingly different ways as well as depict a multi-layered deprivation, oppression on the santhal people that play major roles in causing their marginalized position in our society. While on one hand scholars like Mahasweta devi, Sanatan Bhowal, Gladson Dungdung state that deterioration of tribal people from all over the country begins in the post-independent India as these indigenous people had been uprooted from their inhabited spaces and got deprived of certain constitutional privileges that other non-tribal people in India used to enjoy; on the other hand, scholars like P.O. Bodding, David Hardiman show that deprivation of the tribal people started way before the country had been declared as an independent nation. They argue that the miseries of tribal people are rooted in the time of British colonial era. Extreme oppression and plunder of the tribal people in British colonial India predominantly in Jharkhand resulted into the uprising in Chotonagpur in 1857. While the reasons and the beginning of santhal's socio-economic-political crisis are debatable issues, one common feature that is found in almost every work of scholarship on santhals, is the scholars' interest in and concern with the issues of 'superstitions', witches, witch-hunt among the tribal people of these territories. This is an unavoidable fact that a majority of Santhal people believed in witchcraft and have practiced witch-hunt which has been respectively declared as a superstitious belief and an act of crime by the British government of colonial India. In my

dissertation, I am exploring and extending how these references to ‘superstitions’, traditional healing practices, witches, witchcraft and witch-hunt that are intersected with the colonial ‘modern’ medicinal discourses in the texts mentioned above.

Taking Hansda as a primary focal point and simultaneously looking into other sociological, anthropological and historical literatures, my dissertation will try to see if the British government found it necessary to declare indigenous knowledge of healing as ‘superstitious’ in order to establish, professionalize, monopolize western medical system as supreme. Moreover, I will also see if those strategic measures taken by the British government (land acquisition, charity work of healing by the Christian missionaries, religious conversions of the tribal) eventually destroyed the indigenous knowledge system of healing within the Santhal community. Lastly, one also needs to evaluate if their socio-political and economic crises led them to embrace various superstitious beliefs or is it that their already existing internal ‘superstitions’ had been stimulated to further embracement of superstitions in order to preserve themselves and fight against the enemy that was way more powerful than they were.

Introduction

My dissertation engages with the fictional works written by Hansda Sowendra Shekhar (born in 1983) who is an Indian author of Santhali origin. His debut novel *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupī Baskey* (Aleph, 2014) gave him prominence among a wide range of readers across the English speaking readership of the sub-continent and beyond. Born in Ranchi, the capital city of Jharkhand, the author grew up in major small townships of the state like Ghatshila and Chakulia and went to school in Musabani.- a place that finds continuous references in his semi-autobiographical novel *My Father's Garden*. His parents used to work with the Hindustan Copper in Ghatshila. Hansda is presently a medical officer with the Government of Jharkhand. The author happens to be arguably the first santhal writer who writes fictional works originally in the English language. Literary works by santhals can be found in their regional vernacular languages but not so much in English. Hansda's fictions are to be considered as the first full-fledged literary works by a santhal in English language to get published by 'mainstream' publishing houses like Aleph and Speaking Tiger. His major fictional works include his collection of short stories *The Adivasi Will not Dance* (2015), his first novel *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupī Baskey* (2014), a short fictional work for children and young adolescents *Jwala Kumar and the Gift of Fire: Adventures in Champakbagh* (2018) and his semi-autobiographical novel *My Father's Garden* (2018). His stories are rich in nuances that add to the different dimensions of santhal everyday life and his narratives reveal a world that had been missed, excluded for a long time. His fictional works are loaded with the nuances of understanding that can only be possible from an 'insider-outsider perspective' - a bifurcated perspective that I have analyzed and explored in the second chapter. His fictional works usually discuss and portray the lives of santhals, their hardships, emotions, their helplessness as well as their moments of hope. His novels resonate with the discourses of past in giving a fictionalized shape to the societal position and concomitant experiences of the santhals in their present and contemporary

hardships. It seems Hansda writes himself and his identity as a santhal into his fictions even while he writes on the behalf of his people or about the people he closely knows.

Hansda's book *The Adivasi will not Dance*, a collection of short stories, delves deep into the quotidian lives of santhals within the broader discourse of subaltern struggles against brahminical hegemony as well as bureaucratic exploitation and its apparent developmental rhetoric. The first story in this collection, "They Eat Meat!" foregrounds this Santhali struggle and effort to survive in societies where Santhali people are perceived as 'polluted'. We come across such depictions through the author's portrayal of Soren family whose members are directly or indirectly forced to leave their 'own' food habits and deny their own santhal identity in order to survive with dignity in the 'mainstream' caste Hindu dominated city-space of Ahmedabad in Gujarat. This text has provoked me to create a space for social analysis of how the 'santhal' community is perceived in terms of their flexible, fluid, non-patriarchal social structures as compared to the patriarchal 'mainstream' society. The socio-cultural as well as political analysis of such perceptions about the santhals among the urban, 'mainstream', 'elite' sections of people further lead me to analyze why, Talamai, another representative woman of the santhal community in the story "November is the month of Migration", has been perceived as merely a sexual object who can be sexually violated as santhals women are believed to be 'morally loose' and 'easily available' for sexual consummation. This aforementioned short story allegedly created a controversy where allegations were brought against Hansda by stating how he has apparently shown the Santhali women in a 'bad light' despite his sincere efforts to portray the exploitations of santhal woman with utmost empathy. Apart from the political right wing, even some of his 'own' people thought that Hansda is not 'santhal enough' or eligible enough to write about santhal people because his fictions are written in 'English' and not in their regional language. Thus, Hansda's hyphenated, fractured identity as an English educated, middle class, medical practitioner and his authorial position as an 'insider-outsider' gives me an opportunity to see how Hansda and his fictions can be brought into the discourse of 'heresy' and 'heretical text' through the lens of Bourdieu's concepts of 'orthodoxy' and 'heterodoxy'.

Hansda's major literary achievement is his debut novel *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* that has won him several accolades. He won the 2015 Yuva Puraskar and was shortlisted for the 2014 Crossroad Book Award, shortlisted for the 2014 Hindu Literary Prize, long listed for the 2016 International Dublin Literary Award, and has jointly won the 2015 Muse India Young Writer Award. This novel has also been translated into Tamil and Bengali. The story revolves around a central theme i.e. the mysterious ailment of Rupi Baskey and around the central theme hovers a socio-economic and politico-cultural equations that cut across the broader discourses of identity politics. The protagonist in the novel Rupi, around whom the plot starts to unravel itself, is the wife of Sido. He is the eldest son of Khorda Haram, who is the sole person to be able to hold the village and its inhabitants together. Soon after Rupi gives birth to her first child, she falls ill. Her neighbors try to warn her about Gurubari who is allegedly having an affair with Sido and they try to tell her that Gurubari and her secret black magic might be the cause for her illness. Her neighbors seem to be sure that Rupi's illness is a result of performed black magic, although her husband Sido perceives such views as superstitious and irrational. Being an educated man and a school teacher, Sido keeps his faith on allopathic medicines and therefore took Rupi to several doctors. But to his utmost surprise, those doctors do not find anything wrong in Rupi's health. Doctors still give her some medicine to recover but the condition of Rupi's health start to get worse with every passing day. This novel of Hansda is rich with the contradictions of belief system of the so-called 'West' and 'Non-West' and intellectually provokes his readers to engage in these complex negotiations between the 'modernist' view of 'universal' history and the contingent alternative narratives of everyday santhali life. Hansda's position resonates with the doubling of voice of Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe or Kenyan author Jomo Kentyatta (the native-turned anthropologist) as their bifurcated realities constitute what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls the 'contingent' history- something that counters the dominant understanding of history as singular, universal, rational. In my dissertation, I take this opportunity to put Dipesh's take on the clash between the 'universal' and the 'contingent' histories in conversation with Hansda's fictions that, as narratives, contest modernity by establishing his authentic, empathetic authorial

position. I do so with references to the debate of 'lived experience' between A.Raghuramaraju, Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai.

His most recent novel *My Father's Garden* can be considered to be a Bildungsroman. This novel, in Hansda Sowendra Shekhar word, is a semi-auto biographical novel. The novel is set in three parts: 'Lover', 'Friend' and 'Father'. Throughout the novel, contemporary issues, histories of political struggle of the tribal people within the dominant structures of society, their deprivation within the structures of bureaucratic governmentality, deprivation and exploitation, 'racialism' are explored by Hansda Sowendra Shekhar. The novel shows us how the first person narrator becomes a medical officer with the Jharkhand Government by overcoming financial crisis and social discrimination. In that sense, this looks like a liberal tale of rags to riches. The story line also makes us aware of the fact that the first person narrator's father is stubborn to educate his son in the medical discipline against his son's preference for studying law. His father's unequivocal faith in Western medical science and a competitive mentality can be cited as symptoms of how modern society has imposed its characteristics on a society that perhaps never knew what aggressive and competitive pursuit means. In the third chapter of my dissertation, I comment on characters like the narrator's father in *My Father's Garden*, Sido's (Rupi's husband in the novel) embracement of modern allopathic medicine and the enigmatic, incomprehensible, undiagnosed disease of Rupi in *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, in order to offer a genealogy of modern medical education in India and its various encounters with societies like that of the santhals. Here, I have explored how these indigenous societies that two apparently dissimilar characters like the father in *My Father's Garden* and Rupi in the other novel inhabit, offer us possibilities to undertake what can be roughly characterized as medical humanities in order to see santhals' variegated negotiations with both colonial and post-colonial modernity.

Chapter I

Hansda's Texts as instances of heretical discourse: Book ban and Santhal

Subalternity in Handa's fictions

Hansda's Texts as instances of heretical discourse: Book ban and Santhal Subalternity in Handa's fictions

This chapter of my thesis revolves around the text called *The Adivasi will Not Dance*¹ - a collection of short stories by Hansda Sowendra Shekhar. The text was banned by the Jharkhand government in August, 2017² because his stories allegedly depicted Santhal women in a negative manner. *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* consists of ten stories. These stories have a wide range of Santhal and non-Santhal characters like doctors, daily wage earners, sex workers, hooligans, home makers and these characters belong to the different planes of socio-economic structures in our society. Some of the stories from this collection e.g. “They Eat Meat!”, “November is the Month of Migration” and “The Adivasi will not Dance”, stand out as uniquely realistic depictions of the plight of Santhal people in our neo-liberal, developmentalist times.

The story “They Eat Meat!” is about a Santhal family that had to move to Vadodara, Gujarat in 2000. As the story unravels, we come to know that the Soren family is told by their landlord not to reveal their identity. Sorens are Santhals from Odisha and tribal people are considered to be ‘impure’ in the locality of Vadodara, Gujarat. They had to give away their own non-vegetarian food habits because eating meat will definitely hurt the ‘sentiments’ of upper caste Hindus. Sacrifice of one’s food habit is embroidered in this narrative by the recurring theme of Pamuni-jhi’s ardent love for the food she used to eat in her native land. The undercurrent of communal hatred and violence hovers throughout the story.

¹ Hansda Sowendra Shekhar, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, 2017).

² Sanjay Srivastava, “What the ban on *The Adivasi Will not Dance* tells about India’s political life”, *Hindustan Times*, August 14, 2017. Accessed April 12, 2019, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/what-the-ban-on-the-ativasi-will-not-dance-tells-us-about-india-s-political-life/story-gPtXIRpKwDcwl0zTEgEdVN.html>

When the communal riot of Godhra hits the city, the Soren family along with other families in their neighborhood lock themselves up in their apartments. In one particular night, a mob of Hindu rioters enter the neighborhood to kill the only Muslim family that lives there. Surprisingly, in a turn of events, the women in the neighborhood start throwing kitchen utensils in order to save the Muslim family and eventually men too join them. This counter attack made the rioters leave the Muslim family. On one hand, this story of communal tension, caste consciousness and concomitant food practices, offers a frame illustrating how minority communities in the country have to submit to the Brahminical socio-cultural hegemony in order to be 'accepted' in caste-Hindu dominated society ; while on the other, the story also points out that common people do not hold on to immense sense of hatred or enmity against each other in their everyday , quotidian existence. It is the hierarchical social structure legitimized by the institutionalized religion that has always played a role in creating discrimination on the basis of communal identity, caste, class, gender. This story "They Eat Meat!" makes an aesthetic appeal of realism among its readers because it captures these layers and make them manifest in the narrative. Perhaps this is why, in an interview with *The Telegraph*, the author says, "every story is scoured out of real life" in this anthology.³

However, it is the third story in this the collection- "November is the Month of Migration"- that proves to be one of the most important stories in the collection to have brought about the ban against Hansda . It is the story of Talamai, a Santhal girl who is migrating from Santhal Pargana, along with forty other Santhal men and women, to the Bardhaman (Burdwan) district of West Bengal. In Bardhaman, they expect to find work in farms owned by the zaminders .On their way to Bardhaman, near the railway headquarters, Talamai was called out by a man. This man, a *jawan* (soldier) from the Railway Protection Force exploited her sexually in exchange for two cold bread pakoras and fifty rupees. The depiction of the mentioned sexual act is apparently made in a 'callous and crude' way which leaves the readers shocked

³ Nolina Minj, "The Adivasi Will Not Dance:Why Should The Truth Be White Washed?", *Feminism in India:intersectional Feminism-Desi Style!*, April 17, 2018. Accessed March 12, 2019 [.https://feminisminindia.com/2018/04/17/book-review-the-adviasi-will-not-dance/](https://feminisminindia.com/2018/04/17/book-review-the-adviasi-will-not-dance/)

and uncomfortable. It is this harsh and unaffected tone in depiction of sexual exploitation that has invited various complaints against Hansda. The author has been accused of showing Santhal women in a ‘bad light’. The accusers stated that the author is denigrating the ‘honor’ of Santhal women and his stories got banned as ‘pornographic stories’. Four months after the book was banned, the Parliamentary Affairs minister, Saryu Roy said that the investigating team has presented their report and the report states that the author had not denigrated tribal way of life or Santhali women in his short story. Roy also said that “we ordered an inquiry to ward off unwanted controversies [....].Authors and artists do have the right to express their feelings in their own way. During inquiries it was found that his expressions did not aim at hurting anyone and his writing could not be dubbed pornography.⁴ This series of events invite curiosity, provoke us to pause and ponder as to why authors like Hansda is needed to be ‘restricted’? What exactly is there in the content that hurt the ‘sentiment’ of accusers as well as some sections of the society?

Firstly, The strategic Hinduisation of santhals by dominant social, cultural (later in my dissertation I speak of M. N. Srinivas and Pierre Bourdieu to make sense of such social processes) as well as the marginalization caused by the developmentalist programs of the governmental apparatus is erasing away the existence of their own religion ‘Sarna’. ‘Sarna’ is different from the established three major religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and etc. in India and South Asia. Within Santhal community (followers of ‘Sarna’), women are not stigmatized if they establish romantic relations before marriage. Purity of a woman, in such socio-religious imagination, does not reside only in her body. A woman’s acceptability, respectability, chastity in the Santhali society ,unlike in the Hindu, ‘mainstream’, patriarchal society, are not reduced to her state of ‘virginity’. Unlike the predominant consensus among Hindus, to be precise among the ‘mainstream’ population, santhals do not believe that a woman’s agency

⁴ Scroll Staff, “Four months after ban, Jharkhand finds nothing objectionable in Hansda Shekhar’s book on Adivasis”, *Scroll.in* , December 13,2017. Accessed March 12, 2019. <https://scroll.in/latest/861308/four-months-after-ban-jharkhand-finds-nothing-objectionable-in-hansda-shekhars-book-on-adivasis>).

to love or to have sexual encounters should be restricted in order to protect the ‘honor’ of their family and religion. In an interview with the *Indian Express*, Hansda was asked about his perception of sexual relationship of Santhal community. To this he responded by saying, “we santhals, I think, are comfortable with our bodies and the relationships we make before marriage is acceptable among the santhals; Santhal men and women are known to have married one after they have had a child from relationship between them; a woman who is not married to a man but is in a relationship with him can reject that man if she believes that she cannot continue that relationship. Relationship wise” he adds, “I think, Santhal women and men have freedom that most other communities do not have”.⁵ Santhals’ idea of freedom in choosing sexual partners and sexual liberation has been shown explicitly in Hansda’s novel *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*: “it soon became clear that Putki had chosen a man for herself...when Della and Tira Chose each other, Putki, too, chose the best friend of her best friend’s lover.”⁶ It is this sexual liberty, especially sexual liberty of women, in Hansda’s novel that offended the fundamentalist Hindu belief of chastity⁷. As a result, mobs in different places burned down effigy of Hansda along with copies of two of his books, *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* and *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*.

Secondly, in the story “November Is the Month Of Migration”, the storyline of Talamai saying ‘yes’ to the jawan’s proposition has been read as her ‘consent’ to sell her body in exchange of money and food. The accusation made on the basis of the story’s style and content revolve around the female character in the story. It is important to note that every time the idea of sexual dignity is invoked, our society tends to portray the female members as focal points of discussion. This association of sexual dignity and honor with the women asks one to ponder about how the society/we perceive sexual violation and sexual violence. It is often concluded that if one gives sexual consent to a person then there must not

⁵ Ishita Sengupta, “I feel crippled but I am emboldened’ says author of *Adivasi Will Not Dance* on dissent and the ban on his book”, *The Indian Express*, March 17,2018. Accessed January 14,2019. <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/books/i-feel-crippled-but-i-am-emboldened-says-author-of-ativasi-will-not-dance-on-dissent-and-the-ban-on-his-book-5042467/>

⁶ Hansda Sovendra Sekhar, *Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, (New Delhi: Aleph, 2014), 55.

⁷ Anonymous, “Dubbed ‘Porn’, Book on Tribals Banned in Jharkhand” , *The Times Of India*, August 13,2017. Accessed January 14,2019.. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ranchi/dubbed-porn-book-on-tribals-banned-in-jharkhand/articleshow/60041186.cms>

be any doubt about the question of sexual violation. It is just because one who has consented to the sexual proposition and did not run away shouting and crying or attacking the other person, the woman, it is assumed, must have made a choice. This is the most perceived and dominant idea regarding the notion of consent and sexual violation across the world. In this context of sexual violence and violation within a world where misogyny, male dominance is predominant, Sohaila Abdulali- allegedly the first Indian survivor to speak out about rape and a writer, counselor and activist- in her recently published book *What We Talk about When We Talk About Rape*, looks at how the society (men, women, sex workers, lawyers, activists, politicians, media, feminists, sages, victims, families, teachers) think and talk about sexual violation. She also explores what we don't talk about when issues like rape, molestation, sexual exploitation are concerned e.g. the body of the rapist.⁸ The story of Hansda makes us think that Talamai is not giving her consent to the jawan; rather she is choosing between sexual violation and starvation. In Talamai's case her 'choice' does not imply her agency to choose what is right for her. The exploitative structures deprive the minorities and leave them with hardly any other choice but bare survival. They are left helpless in that claustrophobic structure and ironically left with options that are none the less exploitative. In addition to this we must note, as Sohaila Abdulali questions, why it is always the woman's consent that we talk about and we never even think about the man's choice between 'decency and dominance'. Similarly the objection of the story never was made because the man had 'lured' Talamai into selling her body. Not a single person has objected over the man's lack of 'decency'. Because of patriarchal society's take on male dominance, masculine aggression is not only made *normal* but it has also come to be perceived as *natural*. Hansda's text dissects open the illnesses of our society in various registers like patriarchy, capitalism, racism, casteism, feudal mentality, religious fundamentalism etc. He, with his ability of weaving a tapestry of marginalization in such nuanced ways, has shown the glaring truth of oppressive structures that encourage and propagate oppression, misogyny and violation of human rights.

⁸ Sohaila Abdulali, "Yes,no,maybe", *What We Talk About When We Talk About Rape*, (Gurgaon: Penguin Random House India, 2018) ,40-49.

In the eponymous story of the book is “The Adivasi Will Not Dance”, the first person narrator, Mangal Murmu is the head of a music-dance performing troop. The story opens with a scene in police custody. With the deployment of delayed decoding method in the text, the reader comes to know why and how Mangal ended up in the police custody. As the text starts unlocking itself, we get to know that Mangal is a Santhal from of Matiajore (a village in Amrapara block of Pakur district). He was a farmer once when they had their lands. Now the mining company has taken away their land forcefully and these santhals, who had nothing but their holly ancestral land, are left with nothing to survive on. They fought against land acquisition, but nothing happened. The politicians and the Christian missionaries came with their own interests. In this situation of political turmoil, one of the Christian missionaries died and the blame came to the innocent Santhal boys who had been fighting for the lands. Thus, the corporate authority was successful in removing obstacles that came in their way. These santhals have no more land of their own. Hence, the only way they could survive was by selling what is auspicious to them i.e. their different forms of art and crafts. Their art is used as a token to display what is ‘unique’ and ‘exotic’ in Indian culture. They are invited in ceremonies organized for rich, powerful, distinguished personalities. They are even given prestigious tokenistic awards. But their deprived, oppressed, plundered situation didn’t change. In the story, Mangal Murmu was invited to perform at the inaugural ceremony of a power plant. He agreed to perform with a hope of earning some money to ward off their hunger. Ironically, later, he came to know that the ceremony is organized to celebrate the inaugural of that power plant project that is the sole reason for causing misery to his own people. In the name of the developmental project, people, including his own relatives, are driven away from their land, their home, illegally . When someone at the ceremony shouted “Bharat Mata ki Jai”, Murmu dismantles the deceptive take on patriotism. He comments:

“which great nation displaces thousands of its people from their homes and livelihoods to produce electricity for cites and factories?[...]an Adivasi farmer’s job is to farm. Which other job should he be

made to do? Become a servant in some billionaire's factory built on land that used to belong to that very Adivasi just a week earlier?"⁹

Santhals are people with their distinct and unique philosophy of life. They are often the easy scapegoats of the 'modern', capitalist, greedy, selfish, opportunist moneymakers. Their simple nature has been reiterated by Murmu's words, "we santhals are fools, aren't we? All of us adivasis are fools. Down the years, down generations, the diku have taken advantage of our foolishness.." ¹⁰ This story is a multi-layered story of exploitation of the santhals by the bureaucratic establishment, capitalist forces, corrupt politicians, corrupt governmental officials, the Christian missionaries, upper caste Hindus, Muslims and even by lower caste Hindus (upwardly mobile *sanskritised* Dalits?). Hansda's story pleads for people's awareness. His story, as he himself told, is based on real events. His heart shattering narratives enable people to look into how Santhals living in India are exploited in the name of development. They are easy to make 'fools' out of themselves for they do not subscribe to the rhetoric of modernity. They have yet not mastered the cunning prescriptions of how the 'modern' establishments operate. They don't need much to survive as a community. What they have only demanded, pleaded since the time of British Raj is what is rightful to them i.e. their land. But since the time of British Colonization to the postcolonial time of Independent India, exploitation of santhals has not stopped. Even, seventy two years after the independence, the malignant attitude toward these Adivasis has remained the same. There are laws to protect them and their lands. Various policies have been made by the government at different times to 'look after', 'uplift' them from their 'backward' status and yet, ironically most of these policies, and laws have never been manifested because of the structural corruption and ill attitude, perception toward this community.

⁹ Hansda Sowendra Shekhar, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, 2017), 185.

¹⁰ Hansda, *Adivasi*, 173.

So far, I have discussed how Hansda's texts exhibit 'liberal' attitudes toward sexuality that is otherwise unacceptable, unimaginable as well as morally degrading in the eyes of the 'mainstream' Hindu section of the society and have tried to juxtapose this with references to his realistic depictions of exploitation of tribal people even in independent India. As in the title 'The Adivasi will not dance', the Adivasi 'will not' shows a resistance toward the exploitation implying a remarkable deviance from the usual practice of succumbing to the pressures of a normative hierarchical structure. There is a sense of 'radicalism' in the way he has narrated his stories. It is, as if, he has dared to speak what should not have been spoken; he has disclosed what should have remained hidden under the veil of the rhetoric of development, women emancipation, cultural diversity and heritage. People engage in similar issues in newspapers, interviews, television channels. Although they face obstacles in their ways, they still discuss these issues that are directly related to influential people. Still they have a scope of continuing with their work as they have support systems of significant people operating these businesses. As a lone fighter depicting social realities in novels and stories, Hansda's case is radically different. Moreover, his novels are the first full-fledged novel about santhals to be published from a mainstream publishing house that too in English. What are the factors at work that had enabled the text to come to public's notice? What are the elements to provide the text with the validation of truth to stir the Jharkhand government to take immediate step to ban it? In order to address these and other related questions, we need to look at the corresponding empirical data, other factual yet not official narratives of how santhals have been exploited over the years and then see if the claims to realistic representation of santhal social and political struggles that Hansda banks upon, find any validity. We also need to engage with Hansda's own precarious position as an English educated medical practitioner who tries to speak about the plight of his own community that has been historically kept away from these avenues of social mobility.

Historical/empirical data of exploitation on the Santhal community in the Jharkhand belt:

Hansda, in his various interviews has remarked that, everything that he writes are curved out of real events. His Santhal identity is significant in a sense that he has been in proximity with his community as a participant observer. At the same time, his profession as a medical officer has given him the scope to know the ‘mainstream’ cultural production. His awareness of both of these structures has helped him to analyze local structures as well as national structures. His ‘insider-outsider’ position in between the ‘pre-modern’ and ‘modern’ perspectives of two different societies lets him to be empathetic as well as distant from his subject. Hence, he cannot be biased and he is able to see how bigger forces decide the fate of structures. Although fictional elements have been added in order to enhance the shades of the narration, there is this atmosphere of sheer truth, harsh reality hovering over plots he has curved out. Non-fictional writings by Mahasweta Devi, Gladson Dungdung, Sanatan Bhowal etc. provide with sheer evidence of how the Adivasis of Indian territory had been deprived of their fundamental rights since the time of British colonization.

Defining the nature and scope of his book *Whose Country Is It Anyway?: Untold Stories of the Indigenous Peoples of India*, Gladson Dungdung says: “ This book is an outcome of my tireless, humiliated and painful work of 15 years in search of human dignity, rights and justice guaranteed by the Indian constitution to each one of us”¹¹. Dungdung, a Santhal by birth, has seen his people getting killed, denied justice with immense poverty that is constantly augmented and how resources are held back from them. He had been struggling for years to bring forth these voices, to bring justice to what wrong had been done to the indigenous people. This book comes out of his personal experiences as he himself has been a sufferer and a witness to the unjust structural corruption, capitalist oppression, feudal torture and political deception. To continue with his words:

¹¹ Gladson Dungdung, *Whose Country Is It Anyway? Untold Stories of the Indigenous Peoples of India*. Gladson Dungdung, Adivaani, 2013, Kolkata

‘Over the period of time, I have seen my people being discriminated against, exploited, subjugated, alienated and displaced across the country. In fact, I have undergone this ordeal myself. In 1980, my family was alienated from our prime agricultural land in the name of growth and development, and we were pushed to the forest for survival but my father was booked in allegation of cutting trees and finally, in 1990 my parents were brutally assassinated while they were fighting for justice but the perpetrators were not brought to justice... I had to work as a child laborer but managed to complete matriculation. However, I had no choice but to desert my studies for two years because I was not able to secure Rs.250 to pay the admission fees in college in 1993-1994. I resumed my studies and after a long struggle when I became the state programme officer in a project sponsored by the European union, two men belonging to the so called upper caste(one is an Indian Administrative Services officer and another the editor of a newspaper) shamelessly questioned me, ‘ being an Adivasi how did I get this post?’ Similarly, in 2008 when I joined a funding organization in Kolkata I was discriminated there too. I was put in the last rung of organization though I was well qualified to hold the manager’s post. According to the prescribed requirement of the organization, one needs to have the experience of 5 years of experience with all documentary evidence. Was this not radical discrimination against me?...when I started to exposing the foul play of corporate sharks i.e. Tata Company, Mittal, Bhushan Steel, etc. there was unrest in the organization against me. Finally, I decided to quit and work for my people till I manage to survive. Since then, I have been exposing the state and corporate sponsored crimes against the Adivasis in India through writings, facts finding missions and multiple interventions. Consequently, the Indian rulers charge me saying that I have been battling for the Maoists, the biggest security threat to the nation according to the Prime Minister’s information in the parliament of 2009’.¹²

Back then when Dungdung was collecting his required data of multifarious oppressions against adivasis, it was the Congress government that was in the power. Time has changed now, the government has changed, but the oppressive structures have not changed. For instance, in very recent past the

¹² Dungdung, *Whose Country*, p.11-12.

Supreme Court has given legal (ironically what is illegal in the constitution is used as legit by the state apparatuses) instructions to vacate a vast land of areas inhabited by the Adivasis and the Jharkhand BJP government remained silent in order to secure the corporate sharks' interest¹³. Dungdung has been able to collect data that needed to be exposed, distributed in order to realize how the state sponsored crimes not only violate the law and order, the constitution of India but also, most importantly, the state machineries have been misused and this has eventually resulted into the collective doom of Adivasis. The Adivasis are deprived, oppressed in every possible way. Dungdung exposes how Adivasis are deprived of their fundamental rights and this can further strengthen Hansda's position as a radical and an ethical author who, perhaps for the first time, has put an effort to write on the santhals and publish from a mainstream English publishing house.

Hansda, in his stories has kept providing his readers with the bitter realities of santhals starting with the Santhal rebellion of 1855 against the British, evils of Zamindari system, establishment of permanent settlement and the subsequent tenancy acts restricting the transfer of forest lands. Hansda is making his readers coming face to face with these realities through the medium of fictional genre where the realities are fabricated with fictional characters that often gives the stories a quality of universal truth even if missing out on the tag of non-fictional documentation with verifiable statistics and data. However, his fictional characters often speak the language of such empirical data in the way Dungdung speaks.

For instance, Dungdung makes us aware of how strategically the forests were captured since the time of British colonization:

“ after taking control over the land, the Britishers eyed the forests. In 1855, the British Indian government declared forests as government property therefore individuals cannot have any right or claim over it. The Santhal Hul of 1855 was an organized community response to the Britishers resource grab practice.

However, the Britishers continued their job of snatching community resources in various ways and by

¹³Asish Aryan, “Supreme court stays its earlier order to evict forest dwelling tribes”, *Business Standards*, February 28.2019. Accessed April 15 https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/supreme-court-stays-its-earlier-order-to-evict-forest-dwelling-tribes-119022800811_1.html

varied means. In 1865 the first Forest act was enforced, an avalanche of regulations followed this act. .. The Forest Act, 1927 enabled the government to take over any piece of land by simply declaring it as forestland. After India's independence, the situation of the adivasis turned for the worse....the Government of India constantly empowered its control over the forests by enacting numerous polices in the name of protection, preservation and conservation of forests and wildlife. The people's access to the forest and de-reservation of the reserved forests were completely ceased by the Forest Conservation Act 1980 and access to forests was also denied to the community by the wildlife protection Act 1972. after several protests, the government of India introduced a new policy 1988, which advocates for the protection of Adivasis' rights and concessions, but is seldom used.”¹⁴

In twenty-first century this oppression of Adivasis has reached almost its pinnacle. Dungdung informs us that the Adivasis have often been depicted as the 'encroachers of the forest' on the basis of orders by the Government of India, followed by the verdict of the Supreme Court of India. The verdict says illegal encroachers must be evicted from the forest areas. Almost 25000 Adivasis were evicted from their land. These policies deprived the adivasis from their livelihood resources. Deprivation of Adivasi has also happened in multifaceted forms like land alienation. The state of Jharkhand is the best example to understand land alienations of the Adivasis. The British Indian government, under Lord Cornwallis, introduced the zamindari land tenure system by enforcing the Permanent Settlement act (in 1793) which resulted into series of tribal uprisings. These upsurges caused the enforcement of three legislations i.e. Wilkinson's Rules 1837, Chotonagpur Tenancy Act 1908, and Santhal Pargana Tenancy act 1949. According to the provision of Chotonagpur Tenancy Act and the Santhal Pargana tenancy act, the land of the adivasis cannot be sold or transferred to the non-adivasis. However, in reality, this act has always been violated. But, what interests us in this present context is how these empirical data on Santhal oppression have found their places in the utterances of Hansda's characters and how such reality is mediated in literatures of Hansda's character Mangal Murmu:

¹⁴ Dungdung, *Whose Country*, 18-19.

“Didn’t we have the Tenancy Act to protect us?... Yet, later, police were sent to the villages. They came with written orders from the district administration. The villages would have to be vacated to make room for a thermal power plant the villagers refused outright. Santhals, low-caste Hindus, Paharias, everyone began fighting for their land. The District administration fought back. The agitators were all beaten up and thrown into police lock-ups.”¹⁵

Just as it happens in the aforementioned text, these laws have often been vehemently misinterpreted, misused and violated by the policy makers, bureaucrats, and corporate sharks. As a result, 22 acres of Adivasi lands were illegally transferred in the last 65 years. Even after the enforcement of the Bihar Scheduled Areas Regulation Act (to prevent the illegal transfer of land), the law was violated. Out of 60,464 cases that were filed regarding 85,777.22 acres of illegal transfer of land in 2001-2002, more than half of the cases have not been registered and moved in the court. Out of the remaining cases, after the hearing process was completed only 29,829.7 acres of land were given possession to their original owners. In 1947, the amendment of the chotonagpur Tenancy act has caused further deprivation of the Adivasis in the name of industrialization, urbanization and development. Contradiction between the veiled developmental rhetoric and evictions of people from their traditionally inhabited land is therefore highly ironical. People are displaced in the name of development but as was promised, people have not been given rehabilitation. For instance, in 1951, 50 millions of people were displaced. Forty percentage of this total numbers of people belongs to the Adivasi community. In the State of Jharkhand, 24,15,698 acres of adivasi land were acquired for setting up power-plants, irrigation projects, mining companies, steel companies and other development projects. Benefits of the development projects were enjoyed by the landlords, bureaucrats, engineers, project officials, politicians and those who were forced to vacate their land are still struggling for rehabilitation, bare necessities, minimum resources to survive. In addition to the struggle for survival, their culture, tradition, language, religion are not recognized by the ‘mainstream’ population of the nation. Behind such non-recognition, there might be interesting reasons.

¹⁵ Hansda, *Adivasi*, 181-182.

In 1993, a representative of India, Mr. Jayant Prasad clearly stated in front of the United Nations Working Group in Geneva that there is nothing called the ‘indigenous people’ in India. Later in 2011, the apex court has recognized the tribal people of Indian territories as ‘indigenous people’. Prejudices against the tribes have been internalized so strongly that even in 21st century, the attitude and perception about the tribes have remained malicious. Our enlightened, prejudiced minds have become so ignorant and arrogant that we are not at all aware of their involvement in the independence movement or any history for that matter. The ‘mainstream’ history of the Indian freedom movement does not incorporate the history of the Adivasi uprisings against the British rulers. Adivasis have their own traditional methods, wisdom and techniques of preserving their knowledge system (socio-economic-cultural) and bequeathing this preserved knowledge system to the next generation. Their methods of education are different from that of our valued ‘western’ mode of education system. Their various forms of art for example, their art of music, dancing, hunting is unique and adivasis learn these from their parents and these eventually become their primary resources for living within an autonomous atmosphere. Adivasis believe in collectivism, equality, autonomy, non-profit ethos and indigenous democracy which is close to the nature. Their political system is based on autonomy, self-rule and self-determination. Their economy is based on agro-forest which does not recognize money as the crux of the principle of the system. Their need-based economic system is disrupted the moment capitalist market economy (along with the extended Panchayat Raj) systems are imposed on them. Moreover, their own religion ‘sarna’ is not at all recognized. The Hindutva groups strategically depicted them as ‘Hindus’ as is evident in the text “Adivasi will not Dance”:

“They, too, want to make us forget our Sarna religion, convert us [...] and swell their numbers to become more valuable vote banks”.¹⁶

Eventually they lost what was their own, their identity, culture, economic system, ethical codes of living as well as their indigenous political system. The enforcement of systems that were unknown to them leads them to a situation of crisis which further brought enmity between tribal communities. In 1871, the

¹⁶ Hansda, *Adivasi*, 173.

British government of India declared them as criminals and passed the criminal tribes act of 1871.¹⁷

What strategy could have been better to suppress those who had been fighting against the British ruler?

What act could have been a better policy to grab the lands of indigenous? Although the act was repealed in 1947, the common perception about the tribal communities as criminals remained the same as it was back in colonial India. How can a community be called a ‘criminal community’ while they do not even get a full plate of meal every day? They are dying in starvation and nobody is there to listen to their misery and to come up with a solution. They are deprived of minimum facilities along with the basic minimum education. What else are they left with if not resentment and violence? Can their violence match with the violence of military violence? What else can they do? Who will speak up on behalf of the deprived? It is with these perturbing questions with their strong emotive undercurrent, we need to revisit how these perceptions and prejudices are played out in the political economy that these people are forced to inhabit and how these perceptions are ruptured by the cultural salvaging that Hansda undertakes in his fictional narratives. In order to do so I take recourse to the French thinker and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas like doxa, heterodoxy and orthodoxy and argue how Hansda’s narratives have what Bourdieu calls ‘heretical’ significance. In effect, this turn to Bourdieu also partly explains why his fictions often result in controversy, perhaps because of their potential for capturing counter-intuitive portrayals of santhal social reality that otherwise go missing from the visible public sphere of our country.

Hansda’s position within the social milieu of *doxa*, *orthodoxy* and *heterodoxy*:

Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) reconceptualised the concepts of ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘heterodoxy’ and introduced these concepts as the methodological principles in order to analyze social behavior. The concepts of orthodoxy and heterodoxy have been accompanied by a third concept, doxa. In his classic work *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), he describes orthodoxy as a system of euphemisms, of

¹⁷ Dungdung, *Whose Country*, 1-76.

acceptable ways of thinking and speaking the natural and social world, which rejects heretical remarks as blasphemies. Then, within the realm of social discourses, orthodoxy is to be considered as a socially constructed fiction and socially established convention. Doxa, on the other hand is the pre-verbal, pre-analytical taken-for-granted perception of the world that flows from practical sense. According to Bourdieu these three concepts structures the map of a system of domination. The arbitrariness of society that establish itself as the universal, objective and neutral is what constitutes, in sociological terminology, doxa. Doxa is the viewpoint of the dominant hence; the dominant finds their urgency to defend their point of view. As opposed to this, there is a tendency of the dominated to push the limits of doxa in a hope to expose the disguised dominant attitude under the veil of universalism, objectivity and neutrality. Doxa is a stronger tool of domination because it incorporates the fundamental beliefs. Hence, there is no necessity to prove the internal dogma explicitly.¹⁸ That creates the hegemony where orthodoxy can be used synonymously with hegemony. Heresy, is then the prophet who breaks into that domain of doxa, revealing the constituted hegemony in order to make vocal the concept of heterodoxy. Utilizing Bourdieu's three concepts constituting the system of dominance, it can be concluded that the narratives/ 'alternative histories' of Adivasis are to be perceived as the heterodoxy, i.e. the *adivasi* societies used to be self-sufficient in nature and they used to remain independent of the dominant societies since time immemorial. Their societies were considered as 'pre-modern' because they do not qualify those criteria that we believe to be called as 'modern'. According to both of these authors, tagging them as uncivilized is nothing but an assumptive fallacy because tribal society has always been non patriarchal, flexible in terms of gender identity, morality where women enjoy certain amount of freedom that women from urban caste Hindu societies could not even think of. Ownership of land and property did not exist in the tribal societies the way it exists in capitalist and patriarchal society and this tribal commune ownership of property, in a way, resembles the Marxian understanding of collective land in lieu of private property. Rape is considered as the most heinous crime among the tribes. Their living relied on nature which

¹⁸ Bourdieu, *Outline Of A Theory Of practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1977) Translated by Richard Nice

natured provided them with food, shelter and security. In a sense, they were living in harmony with their own set of rules and philosophies. Problems occurred since the British Colonization and became more problematic in the post independent India when in the name of nation building and development, these indigenous people got uprooted from their traditionally inhabited space, deprived of certain privileges and rights that dominant population, mainly the caste Hindu peoples of India enjoy. Such developmental rhetoric and orientalist understanding of indigenous people as 'uncivilized' could be traced back to the European Enlightenment philosophy. A vast amount of money had been allotted in order to 'uplift' them from their 'uncivilized state' but ironically these people were not at all benefited because of the structural corruption which forced them to become bonded laborer. This only increased further exploitation. In the name of industrial development capitalist powers bought their land and promised them adequate compensation for their land, government jobs and rehabilitation with all facilities including hospitals, schools, drinking water, pitch road and electricity; but none of these promises have been executed or realised. On one hand, the post independent India promised development and security for each and every member of the nation, created this illusion of one national identity while on the other hand, certain sections got excluded from the larger discourse of constitutional rights. There had been made numbers of policies, promises in order to secure vote banks which at the end of the day had never been implemented properly. Unaware of such internal exploitation, the dominant section of population held these hegemonic perception that in spite of such so called humanitarian efforts from the government, tribal people are creating chaos for they are by 'instinct' and 'nature' 'violent', 'regressive', 'criminals'. Among such (mis)conceptions Hansda's texts often act as what Bourdieu has termed 'heretical discourse'. Bourdieu's 'heretical discourse' can be roughly defined as :

[a] 'language which breaks with the legitimate language of the social world and of the common sense that it implies. Of course such heresy is as present in the language of deviancy as it is in that of the artistic or literary avant-garde (indeed by the same processes, the operations of these fields are almost identical). New language, heretical language implies the construction of a new common sense, a new legitimacy. For such to occur, the field group must lend its recognition and acknowledge it and by doing so endow it with the authority of the group. The efficacy of such heretical texts does not reside in the world themselves or as

Bourdieu points out in the charisma of the author but in the dialectic between authorizing and authorized texts and the dispositions of the group which authorizes itself to use it. In other words heretical texts could become authorized but only through the assent of the group'.¹⁹

Michael Grenfell's book *Bourdieu, Language and Linguistics* also goes on to elaborate this idea of 'labor of enunciation' as:

[Something to be] 'performed by naming the unnamed and externalizing the internal and in doing so objectifying the pre-verbal and pre-reflexive in ways which render them common and communicable. Such utterances always have to be sanctioned and one must remember that a process of naming may challenge and break with the established *doxa*. Naming the unnamable could therefore involve the breaking with systems of censorship- both institutional and internal' – which prevent what Bourdieu calls the 'return of the repressed'.²⁰

Similarly Hansda's text is a manifestation of Bourdieu's 'return of the repressed'. Dominant discourses had always tried to find a comfortable space while narrating about these downtrodden, marginalized, deprived people in the field of cultural production. For instance, while discussing nationalism, our national poet Rabindranath Tagore confronted the question of caste based discrimination within a national territory, by justifying the system as merely a system for distributing labor even when he admitted that the system had stifled spontaneous growth of individuals and society.²¹ This rhetoric that had been perpetrated by the dominant figures of literary field had overshadowed narratives of suffering of marginalized indigenous people and other 'lower castes'. It is in this context that a text like *The Adivasi Will not Dance* is important in order to dismantle the dominant practice of exploitation, deprivation of tribal people at the level of perceptions. Once a heretical text is produced, it becomes a threat or a

¹⁹ Grenfell, Michael, ed. *Bourdieu, Language and Linguistics*, (UK. Bloomsbury, 2010), 62.

²⁰ Grenfell, Michael, ed., *Bourdieu, Language and Linguistics*, (UK. Bloomsbury, 2010), 63.

²¹ Tagore, Rabindranath, "Nationalism in India:", *Nationalism*, (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2012).

challenge to the dominant perspective and as a ‘dismantling tool’ against oppressive power structures. That is why the governments feel the desperate need to destroy a *disruptive heresy* of this sort even before it could reach a wider number of people. This is exactly the logic that Bourdieu analyzed regarding the heretical texts where, according to him, the dominant literary discourses respond to heretical texts in two ways- one is, by simply ignoring the existence of heretical texts and in doing so, eventually wiping off the legitimacy of a new challenging discourse. Another response is that the dominant discourses try to impose certain restrictions by implementing strategic methods to attack heretical texts in an intention to disqualify the legitimacy of texts. As far as the controversial case of banning *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* is concerned, the Government of Jharkhand perhaps adopted the second strategy which, in retrospect, can only further strengthen the heretical language of this sort.

Location of Literature in between Theory and Empirical Data:

While responding to Guru’s article ‘How egalitarian are social sciences in India?’ and Sundar Sarukkai’s ‘Dalit experience and Theory’, A Raghuramaraju in his article “Problematizing Lived Dalit Experience”²² has made a point that unlike documents consisting of detailed empirical data and abstract theoretical discourses, it is literature that poses as a far more effective, radical stance for literature is, at the same time, political and ethical. It is not theoretically arrogant as it happens in social sciences. Also literature has the capacity of capturing the immediate and ground realities that the readers can relate to. However, the usage of the term and idea ‘theory’ should not be perceived in a derogatory sense within the context of this discussion ; rather theory must be considered to be an extremely important phenomenon to understand the already practiced structures as well as the other possible structures that is yet to be imagined. Theory is required to collect the aphorisms, symbols, metaphors, sign systems of structures without which dissection, analysis, diagnosis is impossible. Theoretical tools are needed to further formulate possible practices that could bring forth new structures (somewhat akin to mathematics where

²² A. Raghuramaraju. “Problematizing lived Dalit Experience”, *Economic and Political Weekly*. vol. xlv. No 29 (2010).

theories are built on the basis of collected practical knowledge). Established mathematical equations, theories help in physical manifestation of these theories into scientific inventions. As well as scientific theories act as a language or medium to explain what is otherwise or seemingly unexplainable. Social theories, if not in its entirety, quite resemble how scientific theories operate. But one must be enough responsible to be aware of the fact that in a country where more than half of the people take education only as means to acquire job ; where anti-intellectual sentiment is quite predominant; where poverty, hunger, diseases haunt the living; where emancipation of woman is still an unimaginable idea and where honor killing is normal, the language of social theory is unknown to them. (They cannot even afford to be bothered as well as concerned about the social theories). Such statement does not even need any documental, referential substantiation. It will be lucid and clear if one gets to ask random people in the street about distinguished social theorists and their works, one will get to know that the general consensus among the common people about theory is that theory is ‘irrelevant’ in practical life or that theory uses confusing language, ‘jargon’ that only confuses without providing with any sense of reality. Moreover, theory is often (mis)understood as to be ‘bourgeois’ in nature. According to this popular mindset, their perception is a ‘partial truth’, if not entirely ‘false’ and inconsiderable. For instance, within the national territory, there are very few institutions that encourage and engage people to think, to analyze and to formulate. And within the domain of academic institutions, the disciplines of social sciences have not been able to be egalitarian and inclusive enough. As Guru comments, the domain of social science is divided into the ‘theoretical Brahmins’ and the ‘empirical Sudras’. Participation in social science and theory demands possession of what Bourdieu calls ‘cultural capital’. In India where casteism and exclusion of tribals is predominant , the affirmative action or positive discriminatory policies may have helped the deprived lower castes and Adivasis to get into educational institutes legally, but prejudices are still there even if implicit, unsaid ways (which comes out in gestures and doubts regarding the academic credentials of the Sudras).²³ When the few elitist educational institutions have been unable to come out of

²³ Gopal Guru, Sundar Sarukai. “Egalitarianism and Social Sciences in India”, *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 9-29.

their social prejudices regarding ‘talent’ and ‘merit’, could not come out completely from their ignorance about how cultural capital helps cultivating talent, merit, the expectation of common people equipped with the theoretical language is stupidity. Social science, theoretical language, social, political, economic theories have their limitations when circulation of these theories in the mainstream population is concerned. As I remember when I was undergoing a coursework in the Seagull publishing house, I came to know that the number of published texts on social theories, theoretical work is unimaginably poor in comparison to other fictional works. That is because the demand of theoretical works is not as much as the demand of fictional works of literature. Taking this logic further, it is to be concluded that not a great number of theoretical texts can reach the common mass. Accidentally and surprisingly, if one or two copies of rigorous theoretical texts reach the common people, should one expect the majority of common mass to comprehend the text as theoretically as a trained social science scholar would comprehend the same work? Had Hansda’s works been like that of Bourdieu’s or Marx’s there would have been no need to ban Hansda’s text because theoretical works might be in its nature explicit about structural operations of hierarchical social exploitation, but they are not as direct and as explicit as Hansda’s works where he is attacking the normative system and established faith or ‘orthodoxy’.

As opposed to theoretical works, Dungdung and Devi in their non-fictional work have elaborately collected empirical data about how the marginalized people have been/are oppressed. Their works meticulously show how the governments, officials, laws cause misery to the minorities as well as how these aforementioned structures do not bother to rectify, or resist factors that cause misery of the downtrodden. Then why is it that their books did not stir up controversies and resistances from the *orthodoxy* in the way Hansda’s texts did? Firstly, just like theoretical works, they are published in such a poor number that they cannot reach a great number of masses. So most of the people are not at all aware of how exploitative structure had been doing their works and how people are deprived in the name of institutional development. A very few number of people aware of these facts are negligible in number and that cannot stir the excepted perceptions in the society. Secondly, they are written in a matter of fact tone

that hinders the space where one can empathize with the 'other' radically. These facts are documented in the same manner how news is documented in newspapers. We are likely to sympathize it is rare to empathize with the other while reading out events from a newspaper. They are mostly written to keep one updated about affairs worldwide. Had empirical documentation been able to bring forth radical wave, they would have been needed for reconsideration. Derrida, Marx, Bourdieu: all of them more or less talked about structures, talked on how they operate and how they are the reasons of people's misery. It is only that there is a qualitative difference in their approach of writing and formulating. Literature comes in between the space of theory and experience. Literature operates in a more political and ethical way. And I take literature here in a broader sense that incorporates theoretical works, empirical data as well as the fictional creation of literature. The term fiction although demands a proper discussion on how a fiction too comes out of reality. Similarly, non-fictional work too require fictional aspects of narratorial quality. Fictional and non-fictional characteristics are always present in any kind of literary work be it theory, empirical essay, story or novel. They are considered to be both sides of the same coin. Hence, while writing a fiction work containing fictional characters, (even if the space, props, locations are fictional) the story juxtaposes in a broader sense both fiction and non-fiction. There is always a foundation of some sort of reality in a literary fictional text. They allow us the space where we can think. They make us capable of thinking the (un)thinkable. The approach of fictional stories allow us into the private spaces of the 'other' i.e. the characters, allow us that space where we can relate to them and translate the 'other' into 'self'. It is only possible in the discipline of literature that allows to read a text within the context of socio-politico-economic-cultural milieu through the lenses of theories. It is only the domain of literature that makes us capable of thinking in counter-intuitive perspectives and empathize with others. That is the reason why people tend to read fictional works more than theoretical work or empirical data on experiences. Hansda's work is a literary creation and that too is published by a 'mainstream' publisher (Speaking Tiger and Aleph). He already have proved himself to be a great craftsman in weaving his narratives. so there is no doubt that a large number of people have read him, liked his radical, political stories, have empathized with those stories. Moreover, when the book was banned, the author was

suspended from his job, a large number of people stood by him in the time of his crisis, protested the ban, supported his cause and finally the mass support had been able to restore what is rightful. It is only because of its literary aspect that made the text capable of challenging the orthodoxy as according to Bourdieu must be restricted or must be declared invalid.

Chapter II

**Locating Santhals at modernity's cultural crossroads: Hansda's
lived experiences and his liminal characters**

Locating Santhals at modernity's cultural crossroads: Hansda's lived experiences and his liminal characters

Lived Experience and Hansda's authorship:

Whenever we talk about any marginalized community, writing and theorizing about that particular community raises questions regarding the author's eligibility to do so. In such anxious articulations one sees the connections between a politics of representation and the author's identity. Consequently, the question of eligibility and legitimacy of an author revolves around issues like authenticity of the narrative and we are expected to look for the possible elements that establish the legitimacy of an author or the lack of it. In a slightly different but related context Gopal Guru, the Indian social scientist and philosopher Sundar Sarukkai raise similar concerns vis-à-vis one's authority to theorize on a subaltern constituency. It is 'moral stamina', in Gopal Guru's term,²⁴ that one must possess in order to engage in theorizing on issues concerning that marginalized community. As we have seen in the entire fiasco about Hansda's book ban, this debate on authenticity is not limited to the domain of theorization (in social sciences) alone. It is also raised in issues related to literary and fictional representation of reality of the said community. Guru's context for discussing 'lived experience' as a ticket for theorization by historically marginalized communities is different from the domain of literature or literary representation that Hansda belongs to. However, in this chapter, I try to extend the debate Guru raised in order to see how Guru's idea of 'lived experience' is or can be brought into the domain of literary representation of a marginalized constituency like santhals by an author who himself is a Santhal- Hansda Sowvendra Sekhar. In this

²⁴ Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai, *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012).

chapter I try to see if his santhali identity is relevant for the kinds of fictional characters he creates or if his santhal identity (notwithstanding its hyphenated status due to his proximity towards the ‘mainstream’) or its ambivalent position is capable of adding nuances that might be otherwise missing in narratives by authors without any access to santhali lived experience whatsoever. However, it is important to remind us that Hansda’s identity and claims on ‘lived experience’ as a santhal is hyphenated and ‘questionable’ because he is neither an example of a ‘quintessential’ santhal / tribal man who has not encountered modernity in any form nor is he a writer/person who is fully assimilated into the so called mainstream urban English speaking social milieu. Therefore the question is – on what ground do we , as readers of Hansda’s fictions, consider his literary representations worthy to be ‘unique’ ? Do we have to consider his hyphenated, fractured santhal identity as a handicap? Or is it an enabling factor in his texts? In other words, through the idea of lived experience, I get back to some of the concerns that got raised in the previous chapter. Because of his medical profession, his English education, his preference for English as a medium of literary expression and so on, he is perceived by his ‘own’ people as not entirely an insider. Therefore, we need to see how far his autobiographical texts/fictions help us engage with such a cultural crossroad that Hansda inhabits as he is a santhal and yet not quite a santhal. It is in this context that we need to understand the ‘moral stamina’ and ‘lived experience’ that Guru speaks of in order to theorize and in this case, represent characters in one’s fictional universe.

According to Guru, an ethical and moral stance is required while theorizing on a deprived community. This is not at all about whether those theories are very pleasing or not to the nation’s or community’s pride and in such ethical representation one must be prepared to consistently unlearn what one had learned as established view to not offer a one-sided view. One must start to read a community from an unbiased point of view. And this is not an issue that is only limited to Guru’s concern about ‘theoretical exploitation’ of the marginalized and their experiences. Rather, this is an issue that is relevant in all disciplines in recent times. Hansda Sowendra Shekhar too had to face similar allegations that he is not at all eligible to write about the Santhals because of his interstitial, liminal position in the society. He

belongs to the Santhal community and at the same time, he is an educated medical practitioner. He happened to be privileged in comparison to others of that same community and got the opportunity to get an education that enabled him with the dominant international language i.e. English. His education paved his way to enter into the domain of dominant field of literary production and he has been able to publish his novels and short stories from 'mainstream' publishing houses like Aleph and Speaking Tiger. Hansda's fictions are perhaps the first full-fledged literary works on Santhal life in English that got published from a 'mainstream' publishing house. The fact that he is published in English also further alienates him from his santhal identity as the Indian literature produced in English has often been described as distant from the lived realities of Indian society. These works are dismissed on the ground that just because these are written in English and most of the Indians are not English speakers, they are not authentic enough in terms of lived experience. Perumal Murugal's *One Part Woman*, a distinguished work of literature too had faced a similar fate and response once it was translated in English and was published.²⁵

So, it can be said that lived experience is mistakenly equated with lived language. In order to refute the allegations that are often made to doubt the integrity and eligibility of an author, Gopal Guru does take the common yet a significant way of legitimizing the moral right to theorize by taking recourse to the idea of lived experience. Although Guru has never made any claim to consider somebody to be an ineligible person if he is lacking in lived experience while engaging herself/himself in theorizing on any marginal community, he does not subscribe to the Habermasian take on theory. According to Habermas, one's objective study of a situation or a community must be 'legitimized by its distance from experience'.²⁶ What shapes Guru's primary concern is that, unless and until one can empathize with a particular community, there is a risk to misunderstand a community's way of life and perceptions and

²⁵ Gautam Bhatia, "The Fault in Our Speech", *The Hindu* July 7, 2016. Accessed 14th May, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/perumal-murugan-book-controversy-and-madras-high-court/article14476037.ece>

²⁶²⁶ Sundar Sarukkai, "Dalit Experience and Theory", *Economic and Political Weekly* XLII, 40 (October 2007): 4043-8.

eventually of misrepresenting the community. Moreover when a scholar is trained in the ‘western’ mode of perceiving histories in a ‘historicist’ or ‘rationalistic’ way and is appointed to theorize about communities that the enlightenment philosophy otherwise has perceived to be as ‘primitive’, ‘irrational’, ‘pre-modern’, there is a high possibility of misinterpretation leading toward prejudices such as ‘racialism’, ‘orientalist representation’. Thus it endangers the alternative histories by essentializing a particular community without considering the heterogeneous aspects of that particular community. Unless and until one learns to question the ‘Hegelian’ universalist understanding of history or worldview, the ethical component of ‘literature’ (or theorization) will be at stake. Hansda’s novel *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*²⁷ is an appropriate example in order to understand the incomprehensible, inexplicable dimensions one has to confront in the process of decoding various signs and belief systems of Santhal communities that the Habermasian understanding of theorization maintains its distance from. This is the incomprehensibility that pervades Rupi’s everyday experiences:

In time, she saw through her tears a figure rising from shadows in a far corner of the room[...] the figure came closer. From its long, untied hair, she could see that the figure was that of a woman’s. The faint fragrance of jasmine oil reached Rupi. Before she could react, the woman opened the door. The glow of the setting sun came in a blinding flash. When Rupi looked around, she found herself alone[...] Had this been Kadamdihi, the non-santhal housewives would have started preparing for the evening, lighting the dhuna and blowing the conches. Kaal-sandhya, they call it; the in-between period between sunset and darkness. The time of the spirits.’²⁸

The ‘Hegelian’ mode of modern history does not recognize the contingent local histories as is explored in Hansda’s texts like *The Adivasi Will Not dance*, *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* and *My Father’s Garden* that might not necessarily be ‘universal’, ‘rational’ in terms of describing or mediating quotidian practices, perceptions and belief systems. Such exclusion of alternative histories creates distance between the ‘dominant’ narratives and the alternative narratives and this in effect ends

²⁷ Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Publishing, 2017).

²⁸ Hansda, *Rupi Baskey*, 125.

up forming a structure of inequality in terms of their subscription to modernist principles. This is why Dipesh Chakrabarty opines:

This tendency of identifying reason and rational argumentation as a modernist weapon against “pre-modern” superstition ends up overdrawing the boundary between the modern and the pre-modern. For the question of pitting ‘reason’ against that which seems irrational was not just an issue in battle between the educated and the peasant classes [...] Reason has found other objects of domination besides the peasant.²⁹

As ‘reason’ becomes the differentiating factor between ‘modern’ and pre-modern’, Dipesh Chakrabarty, in order to show how unquestioned faith on ‘reason’ can bring forth the death of reason itself, recounts the story of a Bengali intellectual Dilip Kumar Ray :

In his personal reminiscences, the Bengali intellectual Dilip Kumar Ray recounts the story of his conversion to rationalism in his youth early in this century. The story is common enough—many of my own generation went through similar stages in their conversion to a rationalist and atheist Marxism—but it is also a sad and a comic story. As in the lives of many Bengali men before him, Ray’s conversion to rationalism and atheism in his teens was accompanied by his immediate discovery that the women of the household—his aunt and his grandmother in particular—were the “irrational” people whose company he needed to avoid. Ray’s misogyny is typical of the history of the “scientific temper” in modern Bengal.³⁰

While the ‘modernist’ conception of history (which is premised on rationality in order to avoid the entrapment of prejudices) as mentioned in the above paragraph gives birth to new prejudices, the idea of lived experience theorized by Gadamer or reflected in Hansda’s narratives based on his lived experience, enable us to see the contradictions of such ‘modernity’ and what Henry Georg Gadamer calls modernity’s ‘prejudice against prejudices’. Hansda’s narratives offer us these contradictions and thus enable us to see santhal/tribal negotiations with such modernity.

²⁹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe : Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, (Princeton, New Jersey : Princeton University Press, 2006), 238.

³⁰ Dipesh, *Provincializing*, 238.

As lived experience can be an enabling epistemological tool to counter the modernist, Habermasian approach toward theory, lived experience can also enable the ethical dimension of the method of theorization/representation. But in order to understand how lived experience can facilitate the ethical dimension of theorization or representation, one must delve deep into questions that are asked by Sundar Sarukkai such as ³¹: What is lived experience? What are the elements that constitute lived experience? What is the direct relationship between lived experience and moral right to theorize the lived experience?

In search of these answers what we come across is how Sarukkai is reading Guru's take on theory and is taking a further step to explore answers that might provide 'theory' with a new understanding. Taking cue from Guru and Sarukkai, we can conceive of lived experience to be constituted on the fundamental notion of lack of choice or freedom. The lack of choice is what gives validity to lived experience. Sarukkai has given an illustrative example to make it easier to comprehend how the idea of 'lived experience' can be understood in comparison with a 'mere experience':

"There are now restaurants whose theme is rural ambience. This experience, which is now accessible to a customer of such a restaurant, is presumed to be similar to the experience of a rural person. The kind of food, the earthiness of the surroundings, lack of what is seen as urban sophistication, and so on, are supposed to recreate the experience of eating in rural places. Let us say I go to such a place and eat ragi balls, a staple rural food in Karnataka. What is it that I am experiencing? What is it that I am supposed to experience? And what is the relation between this experience and the 'authentic' experience of a rural person who eats ragi balls? [.....] The first point to note is that a naïve view of experience is based on the belief that an experience can be replicated—not the experience of the subject but the materiality that constitutes the experience, that which is thought to be 'disassociated' from the total experience. Thus, in principle, we usually believe that we can simulate all and any experience. The possibility of simulating all and any experience is based on the belief that there is no *necessary* connection between the experiencer and the experience. For example, I don't have to travel to the moon but I can, if I train to be an astronaut, get the experience of walking on the moon in anti-gravity chambers. Almost any experience can be

³¹ Sarukkai, "Dalit Experience", 4043-8.

duplicated in some sense. Any experience that is commodifiable can be replicated. What this view of experience does is to remove the subject as an essential component of experience. All experience is thus similar to the experience of fun fairs and anybody who pays can participate in the experience. Thus, what is experienced is to be seen to be independent of the subject who experiences. Such a view of experience influences our common beliefs about the nature of experience. But can experience really be materialized, commodified, and transferred without taking the subject of experience into account?'³²

These are the questions that we are left with and these then provoke us to further put in effort to understand lived experience. In these illustrative examples given by Sarukkai, we can see replicated experiences carry with them the idea of 'agency' of the experiencer. It is the subject's will to decide whether the subject wants to participate in that replicated experience or not. Also, if that experience is not desired by the subject, that subject can at that moment come out of the duplicate experience. So in a mere experience, there is always the presence of agency. Hence, it is the absence of agency that is what distinguishes lived experience from a mere experience. According to Sarukkai we can conclude that lived experience always comes with three unavoidable characteristics: the freedom to be part of an experience is missing, the freedom to leave one experience is absent as well as the freedom to modify an experience is absent. Hence, lived experience is not about a matter of choice; rather it is a matter of necessity. Even if the experience is unpleasant to the person experiencing a particular experience, the person has to live with it because there is no other option left with person to choose. The absence of choice defines a lived experience and makes a lived experience different from a mere experience. In order to understand the structure of lived experience, one must acknowledge the unbreakable relationship between the subject and the context, content of that experience. Mere experience can be duplicated but a lived experience cannot be opened out to the eager participants to experience. Then the prerequisite for an experience to be called a lived experience is that it should be 'the experience of being a subject and not an

³² Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai, *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 35-36.

experience by a subject or about a subject.’³³ Texts like *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, *My Fathers Garden*, and *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* are manifestations of Hansda’s documented form of lived experience as a Santhal. He was born a Santhal. He was brought up as a Santhal. So the marks of his identity, the traces of his lived experiences are explicit in his works. The prerequisite for an experience which is ‘the experience of being a subject’³⁴ is to be found in the major santhal characters in Hansda’s *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* and *My Father’s Garden* that resonate with the author’s own ‘experience of being a subject’. For example, Hansda in his own life had to overcome financial problems, social discriminations and prejudices in order to become a middle class medical practitioner. We find the direct reflection of this narrative of upward mobility in most of his semi- autobiographical fictional narratives like the story “Sons”:

‘Yet, as years went by, Raghu [...] from a Santhal village, grew up virtually on alms yet made the best of his limited recourses, cleared his exams on time, cracked the entrance test and gained admission into the medical college in Rachi, the biggest one in all of Jharkhand. After studying for six years he would come out with the venerable title, Doctor, before his.’³⁵

Moreover, Hansda’s lived experience as a santhal makes him a keen observer of the rituals, customs , community habits and practices. His position at the cultural crossroad enables him to have a distanced and yet a proximate view of these cultural attributes of santhal people. This is reflected in the novel, *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* where the alternative cultural registers are foregrounded. These are otherwise hidden away or detached from the ‘mainstream’ acceptability. For instance, in his novel *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*:

[...] the naikay’s wife—was getting worried about the step her daughter was going to take. She needed a successor, someone to carry her witchery forward. According to her , it should only be a matter of time before Della followed

³³ Sarukkai, “Dalit Experience”, 4043-8.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 4046.

³⁵ Sowvendra Shekhar, Hansda. *The Adivasi will not Dance* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company,2014), 37.

in her footsteps and roamed naked on the banks of the Kadamdihi stream, looking for maanmi-gurji to eat. Although all she had to do was to whisper the adhai-koli monstro into Della's ears, or trace the monstro on her open, unsuspecting palm, she could not manage to. And Della seemed to be slipping out of her hands. ³⁶

Hence, Hansda, the person/author, his lived experiences, his stories of everyday lives of the santhal people, and the characters inhabiting the space created in his fictions make their appearances as inevitable. His santhal identity looms so largely on the narratives that we are reminded of how Guru-Sarukkai define 'lived experience'. Just as 'lived experience' of marginality does not allow one to leave that spatiality, Hansda's tribal identity's inevitable presence in these descriptions symbolize his compulsive descriptions of life habits and beliefs that are non-modern and particular. Although, Guru and Sarukkai raise this debate in the context of theorization in social sciences and in dealing with dalit subalternity, such analysis speaks to Hansda's predicament as well:

'Lived experience should be seen as the experience of the *being* a subject and not an experience *by* a subject or about a subject. That is, the first requisite for an experience to be considered as lived experience is that there is an experience of what it means to *be* the subject who experiences. This automatically places an element of no choice—there is indeed no choice in whether I want to be the subject of experience, although I may have choice about particular aspects of what I experience. You cannot have a Dalit experience unless you are a Dalit yourself or at least experience what it means to be a Dalit subject with no *choice to be otherwise*. Thus, participant observation would also not constitute lived experience as long as the observer, who may otherwise live in and like the community, has a choice to leave when the going gets tough or when the observer decides to leave...lived experience of Dalits is not about sharing their lifestyles, living with them, and being like them, but *being them* in the sense that you *cannot* be anything else. Or in other words, to be a Dalit is not to share all they have but to share what they cannot have. Lived

³⁶ Sowvendra Shekhar, Hansda. *The Mysterious ailment of Rupi Baskey* (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Publishing, 2017), 55.

experience is not about what *there* is but is about what there is not. *Lived experience is not about freedom of experience but about the lack of experience in a freedom.*³⁷

Thus, as opposed to the Habermasian approach to the relation between theory and practice, Guru and Hansda both emphasize on lived experience and the resultant mediated representation, either through theory or through fiction. Because of this enormous fissure between theory and lived experience, there is this risk of falling back into the trope that uses theory as a distanced engagement in order to distribute the guilt that Sarukkai traces in Habermas. In this process of distribution of guilt, the ethical stance that is to be conceived as one of the primary components in the context of theorization and representation, starts to fade away. So Hansda's narratives resonate with the Levinasian take on theory where theory is not be devoid of emotions. Emotions are part of lived experiences and thus it can be concluded that lived experience enables one to counter the dominant dichotomy of feeling/knowing within the binary discourse of empirical/theoretical. Taking resort to M.N. Srinivas' ³⁸ idea of autobiographies as a legitimate tool to understand society that helps in further theorizing, Sarukkai has claimed that fiction based on lived experience can be seen as a legitimate mode to theorize. Being a Santhal and being an owner of Santhal experience, Hansda qualifies in all capacity to be a more authentic author who writes about the Santhal lived experience. Only proximity with one's community can come out in such nuanced, layered stories of Santhal life and that is exactly the reason why the author has been able to criticize the external oppressive forces as well as has been able to question the lack of or constantly decreasing internal Santhal integrity in some cases. Most importantly, Hansda has been able to fuse what we call 'empirical' with the 'theoretical' in constructing narrative voices that vacillate between subjective proximity and objective distance. His works have challenged the binary of emotion/reason. His mode of writing counters the dominant logic of empirical/theoretical dichotomy in generating epistemological knowledge. Following Aristotle, the Greek philosophers believed that there is no place for emotion in the

³⁷ Guru and Sarukkai, *Cracked Mirror*, 36.

³⁸ M. N. Srinivas, "Indian Anthropologists and the Study of Indian Culture", *Economic and Political Weekly* XXXI NO. 11 (1996), 656-7

domain of theory. Unlike such western conception, most branches of Indian philosophy on theorization or representation insisted that inferences and mediations have to be based on the empirical and the experiential. Reason (which is considered to be devoid of emotion) is required to constitute theory whereas emotion is fundamental in order to realize the empirical. Hansda counters such a modernistic discourse of reason/emotion, theoretical/empirical dichotomy. In his works, it is apparent that these bipolar discourses have been yoked together and this becomes a junction where many nuanced, multifarious representations of santhal lives get mediated. That is the moment that emerges as the ethical component in his literary representation. This ethics enables one's ability to empathize with the 'other', to translate, in Spivak's words, the 'other' into 'self'³⁹.

Hansda's interstitial position and his liminal characters:

Hansda's liminal identity has stirred doubts among the people questioning his eligibility to write on behalf of the santhals as well as about the Santhal community. He is a Santhal by birth and has grown up among them. Hence, by default he owns his lived experiences that constitute an epistemological knowledge of Santhal lives. Later in his life, he had his opportunity to get an education that paved his path into the 'mainstream' world of cultural hegemony. His training as a medical student brought him the privilege that let him into the 'European' medical discourse. Interestingly, the introduction to western hegemonic discourse of medical science made him realize how the discourse of modernity recognizes his community as a part of what Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests as 'history 2': that is the non-Hegelian and non-normative, non-universal, 'irrational', 'primitive', non-western mode of history. The dominant 'western' idea of history that Hegel thought about is rational, universal. History 2 or the alternative histories, according to Chakrabarty, 'in practice, always modify and interrupt the totalizing thrusts of history 1'. The clashes between 'history 1' and 'history 2' that Chakrabarty suggests are resonated in

³⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "'Draupadi'" by Mahasweta Devi" *Critical Inquiry* vol.8 no. 2 *Writing and Sexual Difference* (winter 1981), 381-402.

Hansda's novel through portraying how Sido, husband of Rupi, himself a santhal and school master (trained to think 'rationally') looks down upon santhali belief systems as outright 'superstitious' and 'irrational' as is quoted in the novel *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*:

'What is happening to your wife?' a man asked Sido.

He was perplexed as everyone else. 'What do I tell you?' he said, 'she is fine one day and the next she must lie down all day.'

'Haven't you taken her to a doctor?'

Sido bristled. 'Haven't I? We've been to three doctors so far. In Rakha and in Mosaboni. I took her to one in Jhargram as well. Everyone said she is fine. There's nothing wrong with her.'

Nervous about stating what should have been obvious to Sido, and wary of his short temper, the man asked haltingly, 'Have you er.....thought of other possibilities?'

'What possibilities?' Sido asked.

'An evil eye, perhaps.....' The suggestor paused for a moment before rushing on, 'You live in a village. You never know, in a village.....'

Sido cut the man short. 'What do you want to say? That some dahni is responsible for my wife's bad health? Is that what you want to suggest?'

'No, I wasn't saying that.....' The suggestor began before Sido interrupted again, this time in anger.'

'Look! My wife's health is no one's business. She was sick and I took her to a doctor. I did not take her to an *ojha* [exorcist], the way many of would have done with your wives'.⁴⁰

There remains a permanent tension between the two bi-polar understanding of Hegelian and non-Hegelian modes of history and ways of being. This is the contradiction that emerged with the emergence of 'modernity' and 'the enlightenment promise of an abstract, universal but never-to-be-realized

⁴⁰ Hansda, *Rupi Baskey*, 153.

humanity'. On one hand, the universal discourse of modernity and enlightenment brought forth the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity while on the other, the same discourses had dismissed any narrative that does not fit into their structure of modernity as 'anachronism (things perceived to be the part of past, not belonging to the present which means their existence is perceived as anomaly)'. In Dipesh Chakrabarty's words:

Reason becomes elitist whenever we allow unreason and superstition to stand in for backwardness, that is to say when reason colludes with the logic of historicist thought. For then we see our "superstitious" contemporaries as examples of "earlier type", as human embodiments of the principle of anachronism. In the awakening of this sense of anachronism lies the beginning of modern historical consciousness. Indeed, anachronism is regarded as the hallmark of such a consciousness.'⁴¹

Because of this non-negotiable contradiction, there is always a clash between 'history 1' and 'history 2'. People like Hansda and his characters who belong to the non-western structures of living and being (even in Europe, because what is seen as European is a template of the hegemonic discourse for Chakrabarty) are bound to live with these contradiction structuring a bifurcated reality. Similarly, Hansda and his characters like Sido reside in between these two realities. He is identified both as in Heidegger's language, the 'participant' and the 'observer'. His intimate relationship with the 'pre-modern', Santhali ways of life in early life (pre-analytical) is classified by his later training on 'western mode of medical discourse' as 'superstitious' and 'primitive'. Hansda's interstitial position resembles with the dual identity of Jomo Kenyatta, the Kenyan nationalist leader and an anthropologist whose classic book *Facing Mount Kenya* is famous for its tussle between subjective and object points of view. As an 'apprentice' and a 'witness', Kenyatta writes:

As for magic, I have witnessed the performance of magic rites in my own home and elsewhere. My grandfather was a seer and a magician, and in travelling about with him and in carrying his bag of equipment I served as a kind of apprenticeship in the principles of the art [.....] From Personal experience...in various branches of magical

⁴¹ Dipesh, *Provincialising Europe*, 238.

treatment, it can be safely said that this is one way of transmitting thoughts telepathically from one mind to another [...] [T]he magician's suggestions are easily transmitted by means of vibrations to the brain, and thence to the mind. If the functions and the methods of magic are studied carefully and scientifically, it will most probably be proved that there is something in it which can be classified as occultism, and as such, cannot be dismissed as mere superstition.⁴²

Hansda's interstitial position resembles with the liminal position of Kenyatta. Hansda's female characters often portray such habitations in a 'pre-modern' world of magic, charm, spell and inexplicable events. Starting from the 'mysterious' ailment from which Rupi suffers to the recurring expressions of santhal belief systems and myths that are otherwise considered to be 'pre-modern', Hansda amplifies his own fractured identity as well as his characters' negotiations with modernity. This, for example, becomes evident when he describes Rupi as she was:

sitting at a distance from the chatting women, Rupi caught a whiff of jasmine oil. When she turned around, she caught a very old woman in a white sari sharing her cot. The woman had rough white hair, of the texture of jute fiber, which she kept untied. It was her hair which gave off the fragrance of jasmine. Rupi wondered how she could have been so busy listening to gossip that she didn't hear the parkom creak when the woman took her seat [.....] 'Who are you talking to?' Gurubari turned around to ask Rupi. This broke the spell. But when Rupi turned to face Gurubari, she had no idea what Gurubari was asking. The fragrance of jasmine oil vanished.⁴³

Kenyatta's previously mentioned narrative representing the doubling of the narratorial voice resembles the above mentioned overview of Hansda's interstitial position between the 'pre-analytical'/pre-modern and the 'modernist' domains of thought processes. These negotiations and contradictions that modernity imposes on the 'pre-modern' thought processes thus create a fractured identity that can neither be a 'quintessential tribal identity'(irrespective of nebulous and exoticised that sounds) nor can be assimilated into the modernist viewpoint and such instances often cause embarrassment to people like the famous anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (a quintessential representative of 'modernist' worldview)

⁴² Dipesh, *Provincialising*, 240.

⁴³ Hansda, *Rupi Baskey*, 98

who happened to be Kenyatta's professor in London. Kenyatta invited him to write an introduction for his book where Malinowski writes in a tone of disapproval:

some anthropologists, may question here the reinterpretation of the real processes which underlie magic...Mr. Kenyatta would still have to supply some evidence as to how these 'vibrations' are produced, how they act on the brain, and thence on the mind.⁴⁴

So the doubling voice of Kenyatta (the native-turned-anthropologist) and Hansda (the tribal-turned-doctor) contrast with the singular voice of Malinowski (anthropologist with no lived experience with the 'object' of study). Just like Kenyatta, Hansda's pre-analytical involvement with the world of santhals, the 'primitive' and 'superstitious' community intersects with his objectifying gaze as a medical officer. At this point of intersection is produced a consciousness that is double and contradictory to each other. This is also reflected in the father of the first person narrator in Hansda's *My Father's Garden*. He actively participates in the statist politics and tries his best to carve out the independent state of Jharkhand. His participation in statist political modernity, however, does not stop him from worshipping the santhal deity Marang Boru and Jaher Ayo at *jaher* or sacred space in Kessorepur. During the *baha* festival the first person narrator's father participates in the rituals of Marang Buru and Jaher Ayo for the protection of the villagers from malevolent spirits.

His proximity to his community as a participant and on later life, his distance from his community as an observer qualifies him to be a relatively neutral, unbiased analyzer who is dwelling between the contradictory discourses of 'history 1' and 'history 2'. He becomes a voice that constantly counters the historicist attitude of dismissing alternative narratives. His narratives comprise of the contradictions of modernity that have been successful in contesting the generalizing, essentializing tendencies of modernity.

⁴⁴ Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe*, 241

If deprivation and exclusion from basic constitutional rights is one form of discrimination, then unequal distribution of 'cultural capital' (a term borrowed from Bourdieu) is another form of discrimination eventually resulting into another set of discriminations. Cultural capital comprising of pedagogic practice, institutional exposure, upbringing, mastery on dominant linguistic structure gets internalized within a member of society which provides the member with a sense of position in the cultural hemisphere. Due to the unequal distribution of cultural capital the downtrodden, marginalized people lack their sense of identity and position in a given society that is marked heavily by modernity. They do not have any access to dominant discourses that get transformed into other symbolic capitals. Acquiring cultural capital and transmission, reproduction of cultural capital is a long term process which is passively inherited in society resulting into the creation of middle class bourgeois section of society. They might be aware of the hegemonic cultural aspects and internal relationships within the same domain of cultural production without even knowing they exclude other cultural aspects, systems of knowledge that are believed to be 'insignificant' with respect to the dominant field of cultural production. . Hence, apparently what might seem to be a handicapped social position for Hansda (his liminal, interstitial position in social structure as he belongs to the *santhal* community and its experiences while at the same time he had been partially fortunate to get away from the shackles of deprivation as a marginalized individual) actually works as a privileged position because of his association with *santhal* community (by default he is aware of and sensitive about the struggles of his marginalized community than any other superficial, orientalist scholar or colonial anthropologist). In a word, his interstitial subject position occupies him with the weapon to break into the world of hegemony as well as to expose untold miseries of the marginalized people that had been strategically put outside the privileged spaces of modernity. In his highly autobiographical novels and short stories Hansda shows on one hand shows how his characters juggle between two competing life worlds of 'history 1' and 'history 2' and at the same time his portrayals do not miss out on representing the violence that occurs regularly to his people because of developmentalist schemes of neo-colonial governments of independent India. Hansda, in this sense, resembles Chinua Achebe . Achebe was an Igbo person of Western Nigeria. His family got converted to

Christianity and he got exposed to modernity through his education at the ‘prestigious’ University of Ibadan. This resulted in a liminal space that Achebe inhabited throughout his life. But instead of considering it as his handicap, Achebe saw enormous creative strength in such liminality or this place at the ‘cultural crossroads’⁴⁵. Achebe’s novels like *Things Fall Apart* and Hansda’s texts exemplify these complex contours of being that precarious communities experience in negotiating with modernity’s overarching presence.

⁴⁵ Carey Snyder, “The Possibilities and Pitfalls of Ethnographic Readings: Narrative Complexity in *Things Fall Apart*”, *College Literature*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Spring, 2008), pp. 154-174.

Chapter III

**Magic, modernity and medicine: Reconfiguring ‘superstitions’ in
Santhal Traditions of healing in Hansda’s fictions**

Magic, modernity and medicine: Reconfiguring ‘superstitions’ in Santhal Traditions of healing in Hansda’s fictions

In my previous chapters, I have argued that Hansda Sowendra Shekhar’s texts play their role as signposts of a heretical discourse and breaks into the protected domain of what Bourdieu calls ‘orthodoxy’. His texts foreground the contradictions modernity has imposed upon us advertently or inadvertently. For instance, his semi-autobiographical novel, *My Father’s Garden*⁴⁶ carries traces of how the educational system is dominated by the caste Hindus and how difficult it is for a person who belongs to a tribal community to establish an identity within that dominant structure. That the Western mode of education system is prioritized and perceived as a superior structure for training minds and evaluating merit is resonated throughout this novel. The first person narrator’s father in the novel seems to celebrate western mode of medical science and training as superior to other indigenous knowledge systems. Like most of his texts, the characters are mostly Santhali people in this novel. The narrator’s father wants his son to follow the path of his mother who happens to be a doctor in a medical hospital. In the novel, this man is also quite determined to educate his son in none other than medical discipline. Also, in order to empower themselves, a large number of ‘backward’, ‘downtrodden’ people often dream of taking admission mostly into either medical colleges or engineering colleges as there is a greater opportunity of employment immediately after the completion of these courses. Moreover, modern medical science has been able to secure its superior position in society with comparison to other non-western medical practices and doctors trained in this system of education naturally prescribe allopathic medicines as opposed to traditional, indigenous medicines used by ‘healers’ of the tribal society. The text provokes one to explore how the hegemony of Western Medicinal discourse came to be manifested with the cultivation of underlying discourses of ‘empowerment’ for tribal people. While, the father in Hansda’s autobiographical novel *My Father’s Garden* celebrates the supremacy of allopathic medicine and western

⁴⁶ Hansda, Sowvendra Sekhar, *My Father’s Garden* (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, 2019).

discourse, his collection of short stories, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* seems to be carrying a different rhetoric. In stories like “November Is the Month of Migration” and “The Adivasi Will Not Dance”, it is noticed that the adivasis have a strong sense of resentment toward the Christian missionaries and the modern western forms and methods of treatment and education that came with them. This resentment is born out of the fundamental chasm between the grand promises of empowerment and liberation that Christian missionaries and colonial education (medical discourse in this context) made and the realities of exclusion that adivasis experienced in their everyday existence. This often resulted in a scenario quite different from the father of Hansda’s narrator in *My Father’s Gardens*. Such a tribal voice of resistance towards modern medicine and education is amply evident in the following two utterances in “November is the Month of Migration” and “The Adivasi will not Dance” respectively:

‘Talamai’s family is Christian. One would have expected Talamai’s parents to be learned enough to think of a nice, creative name for their daughter. Yet, despite the promises of education the missionaries made, Talamai’s parents never got to see the inside of a school and neither did she. They either gathered coal or worked in the farms of Bardhaman.’⁴⁷

And in the eponymous story we come across this :

‘For education, our children are at the mercy of either those free Government schools where teacher comes only to cook the midday meal, or those Kiristian missionary schools where our Children are constantly asked to stop worshipping our Bonga-Buru and start revering Jisu and Mariam. If our children refuse, the sisters and the fathers tell our boys that their Santhal names—hopna, Som, Singrai—are not good enough. They are renamed David and Mikail and Kiristofer and what not’.⁴⁸

Christian missionaries were perceived to be a potential agency to popularize, monopolize the western medicinal practices and allopathic medicine in British Colonial Period. Apart from the

⁴⁷ Hansda, Sowvendra Sekhar, “November is the Month of Migration”, *The Adivasi will not Dance* (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, 2017), 39-40.

⁴⁸ Hansda, Sowvendra Sekhar, “ The Adivasi will not Dance”, *The Adivasi will not Dance* (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, 2017), 172.

government colleges, the 'medical missionaries' played the most significant role to professionalize and popularize the western medical discourses among Indians. The only difference between the missionaries and the colonial secular education is that the missionaries usually worked in the name of their Lord, Jesus. While, the purpose of both these institutions was to popularize, monopolize the western medicinal discourses, we need ask why is it that the missionaries are resented even though the santhals welcome the same medicinal discourse in different educational institutions. This chapter also explores how religion has come to play its part in creating a contradiction within the same discourse. The British colonizers came to perceive the tribal communities of India as 'primitive', 'superstitious'. Their civilization project intended to 'uplift' these 'backward' people from their 'dark' state. Taking Hansda as a primary focal point and simultaneously looking into other sociological, anthropological and historical literatures, this chapter will try to see how and why the British government found it necessary to declare indigenous knowledge of healing as 'superstitious' in order to establish, professionalize, monopolize western medical system as supreme. Moreover, I will also see if those strategic measures taken by the British government (land acquisition, charity work of healing by the Christian missionaries, religious conversions of the tribal) eventually destroyed the indigenous knowledge system of healing within the Santhal community. Lastly, one also needs to evaluate if their socio-political and economic crises led them to embrace various 'superstitious beliefs' or is it that their already existing internal 'superstitions' had been stimulated to further embracement of superstitions in order to preserve themselves and fight against the enemy that was way more powerful than they were? In order to find tentative answers to these questions it is important to delve into the history of western science and medicine in the Indian subcontinent and how that interacted with the tribal communities, particularly the Santhals in our present context.

In order to uphold the project of British imperialism, it was more than important for them to instill the imperialistic superiority among the psyche of colonized people, along with other political, legal policies that the colonial establishment put in place. The British government has been successful in doing so, by manufacturing strategic and tactical methods and policies in colonial India. While on one hand,

English language and science have been used as markers of modernity introduced by the British masters in a country otherwise perceived as the habitat of ‘primitives’; on the other hand, religion, charity, missionary works have also played their roles in order to spread the epistemological domain of imperial superiority. The western mode of educational system and popularization of science have been able to absorb particular sections of native population (that includes mostly the caste Hindus) who by negotiating with the imperial system eventually ended up, although not without resisting the colonial discourse, subscribing to the structure colonial masters wanted to establish⁴⁹. British colonial project and missionaries also tried to convert the ‘high born’ and well educated into the Christian fold but it was not so easy as upper class and landed Muslims and caste Hindus of India already had an established religious theology. Hence, the missionaries assumed that the medical mission could be one of the most important and effective avenues to reach the minds of the rural poor - the lower caste people and different tribes of India. Along with their ‘humanitarian’ approach of medical treatments, these were believed to be institutions that will be able to preach Christian gospels for establishing Christianity as a ‘superior’ humanitarian religion.⁵⁰ Established Medical Colleges in the British presidencies and the educational curriculum therein were able to convince the educated elite, middle class Indians that their Western procedures of treatment were way more advanced than the Islamic *Unani* medicinal practices and Hindu *Ayurveda* for that matter.⁵¹ But as far as the tribal communities were concerned, it became quite difficult for the British to persuade them to believe in the superiority of western medicinal practices in terms of an essentially scientific rationale. The medical missionaries often expressed that the prevalence of ‘superstitions’ and ‘irrational’ faith on ‘quack’ medicinal remedies and practices have been responsible for the heavy loss of lives in various parts of India. For instance, sociologists and anthropologists like Louis Jaccoliot, H.S. Risley have shown tribal communities in different parts of India as ‘primitive’,

⁴⁹ Deepak Kumar, *Science and the Raj :1857-1905* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁵⁰ Raj Sekhar Basu, Deepak Kumar ,ed., “Healing the Sick and the Destitute”, *Medical Encounters in British India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 187-190.

⁵¹ Raj Sekhar Basu, Deepak Kumar ,ed , “ Probing History of Medicine and Public Health in India: A Study of Encounters at Multiple Sites”, *Medical Encounters in British India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013),28-32.

‘savage’. According to these colonial scholars, India resembles the ‘dark’ continent of Africa where people are ‘ignorant’ and ‘backward’. It was only the Aryans, they thought, had a proper sense of civilization and that too was damaged and went in a regressive stage with the medieval period conquered by Muslims. So the broad cultural terrain of India came to be perceived in two major divisions: ‘the cultured people’ and the ‘savages’. In their analysis, Christian missionaries, sociologists, anthropologists, colonial ethnographers shared the common view that overpopulation, poor diet, superstitions, underdeveloped sanitary facilities were the reasons for the high mortality rate in India, resulting often from malaria, small pox and other tropical diseases. Such portrayal of India reverberating with ‘mysteries’, ‘superstitions’, mysterious diseases, ‘primitivism’, deaths and horrors justified the logic of ‘enlightenment project’ that colonial discourse was based upon. Moreover, social Darwinism that came out of a distortion of Darwinian theory for ‘survival of the fittest’ lent more strength to ‘racism’ or ‘racialism’ that furthermore justified the colonial mission.

It took a long time for the colonizers to establish the hegemony of western supremacy within the psyche of Indians for India has never been a monolith. Early colonizers soon realized that they have to be very cautious in their project in order to maintain their superiority as masters. Although, they too, like the Muslims, borrowed knowledge from various indigenous texts and practices, they had to maintain their cultural, epistemological distance from the natives. Hence, they had to act subtly. The colonizers, on one hand, praised, borrowed, incorporated the native episteme into their domain of knowledge system, while on the other, they started to dismiss, in a gradual process, those same structures they had once borrowed to enhance their knowledge system⁵². Soon, they realized that it is necessary to dismiss and delegitimize the immediate past structures, institutions in order to make their hold strong on the colonized. It became necessary to condemn the natives as ‘unscientific’, ‘irrational’, and ‘superstitious’. Thus, these natives were often declared as people reluctant to change. India was associated with dirt and disease. The orientalist and the Anglicists soon came to believe and subscribe to this view. India soon came to be

⁵² Deepak Kumar, “Probing History”, *Medical Encounters*, 32.

identified as a country that is lurking behind in the dark. Such portrayal paved the colonizer's enlightenment project and consequently, the imperial project became at the same time paternalistic and dismissive. So they started to replace structures which came to be portrayed by the rationalist, historicists as 'pre-modern'⁵³. In the earlier period, many Brahmins were recruited in order to popularize western method of vaccination which encouraged and boosted the egos of Brahmins to enlist their names in the educational institutions established by the Brahmins in order to produce a clan of 'mimic men': 'Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in moral and in intellect'....and ironically the new mimic man 'would be the same but not quite'.⁵⁴

Thus it seems quite obvious the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized is not as simple as it appears to be rather it was quite a complicated one, especially in the context of science education. Although there was a strong sense of animosity between them regarding their perceptions about each other, there was at the same time a relationship that was based on negotiations. In this process of negotiation, they consciously or unconsciously ended up providing with gaps for re-negotiations. In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said gave us a map of how the various structures for instance, the texts (possessed by the colonizers and the colonized), representational aspect of other cultures, orientalist theories established by scholars intersect with each other in order to make a relation between these structures with the larger structure of colonial power and knowledge dyadic relationship. Perpetuation of an orientalist mindset is manufactured in the colonized land in a paternalistic approach which, behind the veil, has always been repressive. Following Foucault, one can say that the colonizers had utilized their knowledge about the 'east' in order to understand the 'east' more than the 'east' could ever get to know itself.⁵⁵

⁵³ Kumar, *Science and the Raj*, 1-31.

⁵⁴ Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse", 28th Oct, Spring 1984, 126-33).

⁵⁵ Deepak Kumar, "Exploration and Encounter: The Early Phase", *Science and the Raj*, 32-70.

There epistemological understanding enabled them to take pragmatic policies (at the same time, benevolent and malevolent) to destroy the past knowledge domains as something full of fallacies. Bhaba used to believe that the colonial power does not reside only with the colonizers ; rather, in the process of colonizing the psyche, making a crowd with a taste of British, understanding of ethics, morality, perceptions, the colonial power started to disseminate in the process that Bhaba called ‘ambivalence’, ‘hybridization’ and ‘mimicry’ (Homi Bhaba, Nation and Narration). Hence, the colonial power is shared by both the colonizers and the colonized.

In turn, the mimic men who happened to be in majority the caste Hindus, started to perceive the lower caste people, the untouchables and tribal people as ‘inferior’ to them. In the eyes of these ‘go-between’ ‘mimic men’, the tribal people of the colonized India came to be identified as ‘primitive’ and ‘savage’ even by these native elites . In the process of responding to the British modernity, discourse of modern science and simultaneously, in order to resist the domination of the British, the educated neo-elite started to formulate a counter narrative of nationalism which often worked as a cultural self-defense, self-assertion. An effort was made by the Indian neo-elites to revitalize their national proud by claiming that scientific advancement was always there in India. The Hindu scriptures were presented as representing *jnana* (knowledge). A weak process of secularization was made in the domain of education system but ironically the education system became Hindu dominated :

‘the Indians, especially the neo-elites, were worried about what the British thought of them. So efforts were made right from the days of Raja Rammohun to project certain Indian traditions and ideas as fully compatible and not opposed to modern science. The early orientalist found it easier to propagate the new astronomical truths by citing the *Siddhantas*. Wilkinson rightly exclaimed: ‘what can be more flattering to the vanity of the hindu nation, than to see their own great and revered masters quoted by us with respect, to prove and illustrate the truths we propound.’ Master Ramchandra looked to a twelfth-century text (Bhaskara’s *Bija Ganita*) as the starting point for his work on

differential calculus. Bankim Chandra found Darwinism closer to the Hindu concept of Trinity and declared the philosophy of *Karma* and *Maya* as ‘far more consistent with science’.⁵⁶

However, the encounter between the oppressed sections of the native population and colonial discourse offer a somewhat different story. Since the early phase of British Raj till the post-colonial India, it was the lower caste people and the tribal communities, who were not given the opportunity by the British as well as the dominated caste Hindus to enter the space of modern education. Later, efforts were made to incorporate these ‘backward’ people with the introduction of the ‘affirmative discrimination’ policies in our constitution. Still, it became hard for these downtrodden, most importantly for the tribal communities, to break into these structures that still are dominated by the neo-elites that British India once had produced. Although the laws have been able to provide the tribal people with the opportunity to enter these structures, the lack of social reformation is the reason why these spaces still holds on to prejudices like ‘racism’, casteism and ‘merit’. This is why it became necessary for the tribal people to fight against such discrimination in order to earn their validation through the process of getting educated in institutions that the West introduced as the hegemonic structure of power. Hansda’s partially autobiographical novel, *My Father’s Garden* also resonates with this kind of anxiety of earning validation within a society where discrimination on the basis of identity is predominant. Since the time of British colonization, medical science has always been considered as a marker of ‘modernity’, marker of ‘merit’ and ‘supremacy’:

‘My father had always wanted me to follow in my mother’s footsteps and become a doctor. And, in the matter of my higher education and career, he put in the same single-minded energy with which he had once entered politics and which he now lavished on his garden, he would control this aspect of my life to the last detail [...] while I focused on the final exams, he collected information about pre-medical entrance tests and had me apply to each one all over India[...] I did not make it to any medical college[...] ‘you are not going to study law. Wait for some time. You will surely make it in some other entrance exam’ [...] I studied in Lucknow for a year and then, quite abruptly, my

⁵⁶ Deepak Kumar, “Conclusion”, *Science and the Raj*, 236-237.

father called. 'Medical mein tumhara ho gaya hai,' he said, 'your medical admission is through. Pack your bags and come home.' I had gotten admission into a college in Jamshedpur.'⁵⁷

Medical missions in various Adivasi areas and popularization of western, Christian medicine:

This section examines how the Christian missionaries have played a significant role as agents to promote western medicine and therapies, alongside their teachings of Biblical lessons to the natives. The British Raj realized the potential of the healthcare activities or medical missions undertaken by Christian missionaries in perpetuating the supremacy of the colonial civilization. Scholars and historians like David Hardiman, Raj Sekhar Basu, Deepak Kumar have examined the complex equations of these encounters and the genealogy of how western medicinal practices gained entrance into various tribal territories while intersecting with the complex processes of Christianization in India. In addition to that, they have also examined how these equations have given rise to tensions and social conflicts. Taking a cue from these scholars, we become aware of the fact that the medical missionaries mostly worked amongst the poorest of peoples, untouchables and the Adivasi peoples in India. The scattered communities of tribes were considered by their British counter part as 'primitive'. The indigenous people were believed to share a religion that was seen as 'animistic'. Their medical therapies were considered to be 'backward', 'primitive' and full of 'superstitions'. They were also described in terms of their habitat as 'jungle tribes'. Hence they were given the bureaucratic label of 'scheduled tribes'. Being racist and prejudiced about their idea of modernity, the British thought that it was their moral duty to 'civilize' these 'uncivilized'. In order to do so, they brought forth laws in the forest, hill areas to maintain law and order in those areas. The age old practices of these communities were declared 'superstitious' and were further banned by implementing colonial laws. These indigenous people were crushed even further by the heavy burden of taxes enforced upon them by the British officials and local native landlords. During the earlier part of nineteenth century, the tribal communities from various part of colonial India started to revolt against this colonial exploitation and the British military force was successful in suppressing these revolts. The

⁵⁷ Hansda, *Father's Garden*, 177-179.

Adivasis were excluded from large parts of the forest that they had inhabited so that the state foresters could exploit the natural resources of those forest areas. And those, who (militants, usurers, landlords, liquor dealers) exploited and plundered the tribes were protected by the British colonial government and princely states. Thus, the white colonizers were perceived by the indigenous people as their adversaries who have taken away from them their land, wealth, identity, value and moreover they have, in order to suppress tribal revolts, killed innumerable tribal people.

Indigenous medical practices:

P.O. Bodding (1865-1938), a Norwegian missionary, linguist and folklorist, had thoroughly traveled the places inhabited by the santhals in the subcontinent. He served in India for 44 years and mainly operated from the small town of Dumka situated in the present state of Jharkhand and the then Bengal Presidency. He is still remembered by the santhals living in the state of Jharkhand, Bihar, Assam. He had observed and studied the santhal ways of life, their attitude towards various diseases and their treatment with diseases. He had gathered details of various rituals in order to understand how the santhals use these rituals to ward off malevolent spirits that they believed to be the causes for various ailments. Similar instances of rituals used to tame the malevolent spirit(Sima-Bonga) practiced by the Santhals are to be found throughout Hansda's novel *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* :

'While the other gods represent positive energy, Sima-Bonga symbolizes the negative forces. It causes disease, infirmity, poverty, doom and, finally death. In order to keep the village safe from its evil influence, Sima-Bonga, too must be paid obeisance along with the other deities'.⁵⁸

They were not aware of the 'germ theory'; rather they used to believe in malevolent spirits (Sima-Bonga) responsible for causing diseases. Although the historicist understanding of such perceptions often read these practices as 'superstitious', Bodding's research and study on santhal community guide us to read their 'superstitious' practices in a different light. In his stay at Dumka, he gathered the santhali

⁵⁸ Hansda Sowvendra Sekhar, *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2014),26.

understanding and knowledge on various diseases and their indigenous medicines and this is what he found out of his archive and experiences of living with the santhal people:

‘At Mohulpahari where the writer has spent most of his time in India and has his home, a santal, living in the village of the same name was regularly practicing. He was one of the most sensible of his class that I have come across. His remedies were all herbs, roots, barks and fruits of sorts, never a large conglomeration of all kinds of stuff (some of them next to impossible to procure, a method offering an easy expedient, although perhaps not often resorted to, of putting the blame for failure on the absence of some of the stuff enumerated). I also saw this man setting a fractured bone very nicely and doing other things which one would not think an uncivilized Santal capable of, and which they, for the matter of that, also generally are unable to do properly [...] I prevailed upon this man to sell me his knowledge. He came when he “remembered” something, and some three scores of the “prescriptions” recorded are due to him [...] This man did not believe in *ojhaism*, but I have been told that in order not to lose his practice, and to please his patients he had to affect appeasing the *bongas* by offering sacrifices to them, a significant feature both as regards himself and as regards his patients [...] another santhal from whom I have got a large number of prescriptions is one of our mission-workers now in the Dinajpur district. He had been practicing both in the district and in Dinajpur long before he became a Christian, and has continued, although perhaps not to such an extent as formerly. Having heard of his reputation I asked him to write down his “knowledge”[.....] he has given also some of the symptoms of the diseases. He apparently has a very strong belief in the efficacy of his medicines. This man is the most “learned” santal “physician” I have come across’.⁵⁹

Bodding’s meticulous study of Santhali rituals and practices gives us an idea of how their medicines are complimented by the rituals they practice while treating their patients. Some of the Santhali medicines are borrowed from the Hindus and the remaining are discovered by their community members and traditional healers. Since they do not have any written prescription for their treatment, those who possess such knowledge either share and bequeath their knowledge to the next generation through everyday practices or their knowledge systems often fade away with their death. Hence it is difficult for

⁵⁹ P.O.Bodding, *Studies in Santal Medicine and Connected Folklore* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House,2017)135.

the tribal community to follow only one way of treatment. In most cases there are risks of making distorted version of herbal mixtures. Interestingly, as Bodding puts it, the tribes are very good observers of nature and they hardly forget the roots, barks, leaves of medicinal plants and their locations in dense forests . They treat people mostly on the basis of their reliance on traditionally acquired practical experiences and rituals. Simply providing the santhals with some herbal medicines are very unlikely to convince the santhals of the usefulness of their remedies, unless these medicines are aided by performance of some rituals. Hence, rituals which can arouse an awe is needed for those who give treatment to the Adivasis and that is exactly the reason for the Christian missionary for evoking the benevolent God in order to convince the Adivasis on the power of Christian god whose blessings are the sole reason to cause healing in the diseased. Hence, while the rhetoric of the Christian missionaries was to civilize the uncivilized i.e. the Adivasis of India and bring them into the light of science from their indigenous faith in spirits (*Bongas*) and ‘superstitions’, the Christian healer ironically themselves were relying on the omnipotent healing power of God rather than their medicines and surgeries:

‘Medical missionaries were also distinctive in being evangelical Christians who saw their form of medicine as being blessed by God. Healing was, they believed, brought about in part through their medical skill and knowledge, and in part through prayer. They saw no contradiction in this, for medical science was but one expression of God’s great power. As Christians, they had a duty to apply the benefits of Western science, which was God-given, to alleviate misery, wretchedness, pain and disease. They recognized that people were often cured as much through faith as by the doctor’s skill. The medical missionary Arthur Neve thus recognized that even the best medical knowledge applied by the ablest of physicians was inadequate to the task of curing many ailments. He argued that: ‘it is God who heals, but He works through means, and where the means fail He may work in other not understood ways’.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ David Hardiman, ed., *Healing Bodies, Saving Souls : Medical Missions in Asia and Africa*(Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi , 2006), 151.

On the part of the Christian missionaries, this is the assumptive fallacy that tends to create an ‘orientalist’ understanding about the santhal medical practices as over-determined by rituals. While commenting on how the santhals collect their medicines and the Santhali methods and compositions of medicines, Bodding describes that these processes do not always incorporate any social or religious rituals as the primary healing factor. It is only at the moment of transferring the medicine to the patient, the medicine man performs a ritual in order to create a spectacle. While the performative aspects are needed to create an ambience to give rays of hope to the patient and his/her family, it is the medicines that actually play the role as means to cure the disease. Their treatments are not solely premised on the rituals that the medicine man performs. Hence, Bodding’s text provides us with a space where a line between ‘rituals’ as a performativity and ‘superstition’ can be drawn. And in order to substantiate that distinction between ‘ritual’ and ‘superstition’, one needs to take recourse to how Bodding is describing the Santhali method of collecting ingredients with medicinal value:

‘There are no special ceremonies or religious observances connected with the collecting of the different ingredients, so far as the work of the ordinary medicine-men is concerned. *Ojhas* might be thought to try to copy Hindu medicine-men; but it is explicitly denied that they use *mantras* or invocations. The ‘religious’ side of their work comes in, when they are going to apply their remedies [.....] if some of the ingredients are commonly known and no mistake is possible, or they are of the kind that has to be bought in the bazar, the medicine-man may ask those who have called him in, to fetch, or as the case may be, to buy the stuff wanted. As a rule he will bring all himself; as might be expected, he will not give much concrete information regarding the stuff he uses, or concerning his way of finding it. It is unnecessary to say more on this point [.....] an *ojha* or medicine-man will generally procure and keep with him a supply of ingredients that are not easily procurable. Thus, if he happens to come across a rare medicinal tree, shrub or plant he will take some of the bark, or whatever may be used, home with him, and in any case keep in remembrance the exact spot where he has seen it. A santhal is naturally observant of details; they do not soon forget what they have seen with their own eyes.’⁶¹

⁶¹ Bodding, *Santal Medicine*, 148.

The above mentioned passage demonstrates the fact the santhals used natural resources as medicines. Their awareness of various medicinal aspects of different plants, herbs, roots, barks etc. constitutes their knowledge system. As They were the inhabitants of the forestlands which constitute their archive for medical knowledge, it was easier for them to memorize and to collect the required medicinal ingredients:

[...]the bulk of the santhals has up to the present time been living in the parts of the country more or less covered by the jungle or forest; they have generally not far to go to find what they want [...] the medicine employed are mostly part of trees, shrubs or plants. Sometimes the leaves or the fruits are used; frequently it is the bark; or the roots, or the bark of the roots.⁶²

As oppose to their easy access to the needed natural herbs of medicinal value, the preservation of their knowledge for healing is difficult as well as limited. There is no tradition of written text within the santhal community hence, the bequeathing of medical knowledge is done when, and ‘the ojha shows his disciples some of the most common root medicines’⁶³. this is only for the first time in Bodding’s documentation on Santhal lives, written descriptions and evidences are to be found about the composition of medicinal remedies and for instance:

‘Some stuff may be given in its natural form without any special preparation, outside what may be done with foodstuffs or drinks, but will in such cases, if taken in, scarcely be classified as medicine, any more with the santals than with others.an example of this is the use of *sinjo*,the bael fruit (*Aegle Marmelos*, correa)[...] only in chronic cases, or in diseases that are recognized and known to take some time to run their natural course, will they resort to a mode of preparation that requires any length of time. The general custom is to prepare the medicine on the spot for immediate use.’⁶⁴

Bodding’s ethnological study leads us to gather some points regarding the santhals and their knowledge system. Firstly, there is no tradition within the santhal community of writing down their mythologies, their songs, chants or for that matter their knowledge of medicinal plants, roots, herbs, fruits

⁶² *Ibid*, 148-49.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 149.

⁶⁴ Bodding, *Santhal Medicine*, 149.

that they used for treating diseases. It was P.O.Bodding, who during his stay in India for 44 years in proximity with the santhals, had documented these Santhali medicinal practices and prescriptions by communicating and taking interviews. Bodding was also the first person to create the first alphabet and grammar for the Santhali speaking native people in eastern India. Hence, it could be concluded that there were no way to preserve the Santhali knowledge system apart from its transition in an oral form. And for the transition of their knowledge they were dependent on the person who possesses the knowledge along with the natural habitation where they could be introduced to (as well as remember) all those medicinal ingredients for medical practice. Secondly, Bodding's documentation of santhal lives paved our way to critique the orientalist understanding of tribal people as nothing but 'savage' and 'primitive' who rely on 'superstitious' practices in order to deal with diseases that they thought are caused by malevolent spirits. Their method of collecting medicinal ingredients and preparation of medicine with the help of those collected ingredient counters the orientalist way of looking at tribal people as merely a 'superstitious' community. Bodding's text provides us with the narrative that counters the historicist perception of tribal communities in India. Thirdly and most importantly, the deprivation of tribal people from their fundamental rights in colonial India gradually started to deprive them from their forest land that is the sole domain for their natural resources and their knowledge of nature. They were debarred from the forests in order to preserve forest lands in India since the British raj. The state government forest officials indulged into corruption, they started to earn money by selling the age old trees from forest areas. In post-colonial India too, in the name of modernity, the forests were cut down to build structures that have come to be perceived as the marker of modernity and a progressive country at the cost of the fundamental right and various sources of knowledge of the Santhali people. And finally, on one hand, the lack of organized and institutional transference of medical knowledge between the tribal medicine men and the lack of written texts position the Santhali domain of knowledge in a vulnerable condition that can easily get erased from the collective memory and on the other hand, their deprivation from their land along with massive deforestation distanced the santhals from gathering and establishing their natural knowledge domain which eventually have destroyed their connection with nature and their knowledge system of

healing that use natural ingredients. These are the risks toward which the santhals were dragged into. Although the Christian missionaries had assumed and believed that they could bring the ‘savages’ into the light of civilization, they were, in most cases, only concerned about converting the tribal people into Christianity. Through charity and the process of healing the destitute, the missionaries were determined in their effort to establish the Western medicine as supreme but in turn, the enlightenment project of British colonialism has rather pushed these people into a further regressive state. When we read Hansda’s texts like “Adivasi will not Dance” or encounter Talamai’s utterances I have cited before or read into the enigmatic illness of Rupi Baskey it is this history of colonial encounter with tribal medicine practices that we come across.

This enormous gap between the theory and practice of British enlightenment project provokes us to reconsider the tribal communities in India as ‘superstitious’ and redefine what we understand as ‘superstition’. There is no doubt that evidences have been found about various rituals and practices of adivasis that are otherwise understood as ‘superstitious’. They are read through the lenses of ‘modernity’ as ‘superstitious’, ‘irrational’, ‘non-utilitarian’. But ironically, in cases where the Christian missionaries failed to cure diseases they too just like the santhals used to take recourse to prayer and reading of the Bible. This double standard in the understanding of ‘superstition’ and ‘irrationality’, instigates one to look back how Bodding in his prolonged stay among the santhals have read their ‘superstitions’:

‘There will always be room for departure from the commonly accepted or practiced course. In connection with disease many considerations of a personal will make themselves felt, combined with the feeling of difficulties caused by their lack of ability and knowledge, by fear and superstition, both with the patient and with the medicine-man. Religion will naturally come in, not to appeal to the goodness or the mercy of the spirit world, but to attempt to or appease or satisfy the supposed enemies, and to induce some special spirit-powers to keep the supposed acting inimical powers away, or to drive these away, if they are at all able to affect this; also these spirits have to be ‘paid’ for their services’.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Bodding, *Santhal Medicine*, 153.

This aforementioned paragraph of Bodding suggests that fear, lack of knowledge regarding the treatment of disease or lack in any kind of knowledge for dealing with specific crisis situations, ‘superstitions’ are intertwined with each other. These expressions get triggered whenever they find themselves in difficult situation that obstructs the wellbeing of family or society, be it disease (epidemic, and other regular diseases) or natural disaster. In cases where the medicine-men are sure of how treatment of a particular disease can be done, they perform certain rituals while passing the medicine to the patient in order to create a spectacle. This coupling of treatment with rituals was seen as more effective for the patient. These kinds of performativity of rituals are to be found in our everyday life that we have internalized as very normal. From a historicist perspective they can be called ‘anachronism’ (belonging to the past, hence they carry aspects of everyday life from the past)’ but not entirely an act of ‘superstition’. Subscribing to this colonial logic of superstition, one wonders how our everyday practices that ‘modernity’ has imbibed within us can be looked at. For instance, in bureaucratic spaces, whenever a person of authority who is superior in term of power hierarchy, enters a room; we usually stand up in order to show respect or in order to respect her/his power position within that sphere of bureaucracy. There are never ending examples, for instance ,in wedding ceremonies, in wine parties we usually cheer ourselves and wish our wellbeing before taking a sip of wine. Are we then, to conclude that we are utterly superstitious or primitive? Our everyday life revolves around rituals that provides with meaning to our existence, provides us with hope to deal with the future that is uncertain. Similarly, the santhal lives are too revolved around rituals that give meaning to their lives by creating spectacles, awe and wonder. But while events like witchcraft, witch-hunt are concerned, as Bodding puts it, comes from their naivety about matters that hinders the community’s wellbeing.

No society can ever be fully aware of the entire domain of knowledge scattered around the universe. So was the case with the tribal people. They too , like the people in ‘progressive’ first world countries, had those fissures in their domain of knowledge. But while apparently the mission of colonial project was to ‘enlighten’ the ‘heathen savages’, ironically, these white colonizers ended up worsening

the condition of native tribes. The British government imposed violence on the adivasis by forcefully taking their land, territory and resources. Moreover the British declared some of the tribes as criminal tribes. By realizing the enormous commercial potential of India's natural resources, they strategically and systematically gave effort to grab these resources from the inhabitants of forestland by capturing power, introducing legislations and using military force. Consequently, the adivasis revolted against the British force. In 1779, under baba Tilika Majhi's leadership, the tribal people of Jharkhand have fought against the British. The British was able to suppress the revolt by imposing military forces and cause lots of death from the tribal community. Finally in 1793, the British imposed the Permanent Settlement act on the people to get more revenue from the land and that too destroyed the tribal socio-economic- cultural structures of the adivasis. In 1855 the British government declared the forests as the government's property. Furthermore, the Britishers also brought the Land Acquisition act in 1894, which helped them to get claim of the forests lands and the natural resources and destroying the local people's claim over natural resources.⁶⁶ My references to Dungdung's empirical work in the first chapter of the dissertation and Hansda' fictions bear testimony to these complex histories.

Hence, these British policies did crush the knowledge system of the adivasis and aggravated their naivety about diseases and their cures which led them to further state of regression. Modernity has aggravated the superstitions among the santhals rather than alleviating them from their everyday superstitions that was due to their lack of knowledge on certain matters.

Hardiman, however, thinks that santhals and adivasis often go back to their conceptions of magic and other non-rational life practices to survive the complex encounters with the colonial establishment just as many of Rupi's neighbors often think that allopathic treatment cannot be relied upon to effectively eradicate her illness and it is some evil spirit that is causing this malaise. Such mindset can be best explained by engaging with statements by Hardiman like this:

⁶⁶ Gladson Dungdung, *Whose Country is it anyway: Untold stories of the Indigenous People of India* (Adivaani, 2013), 18-20.

‘In cases of non-epidemic diseases, witchcraft was often suspected as a cause. It was believed that the malevolent female spirits known as *joganis* haunted the forests. When they possessed an adivasi woman, she became a witch. She was able to harm people through spells or a malevolent glance of her ‘evil’ eye. Many adivasis wore charms to protect them from witches. When a person fell ill, the first remedy was often the use of the charm. It was for example, reported in 1907 that in cases of sore eyes, Bhils would take a string and tie knot in it while throwing salt on a fire. As the salt sputtered, the charm was believed to enter into the string. It was then worn around the neck. If such self-applied remedies against witchcraft failed and the person remained sick, an exorcist was called. His task was to use his power to identify the supposed witch. Once ‘discovered’ the woman was tortured so as to drive the spirit from her body. Frequently, the alleged witch died as a result. The missionary Arthur Birkett reported in 1914 that in the past three years three women had been done to death in such a manner in the area around Kotada: ‘one was killed with an axe and one had a red hot iron thrust into her...’(142-143) [.....] Exorcism was considered a great skill and exorcists enjoyed a high reputation in their society. The village elders, and even the local ruling elites, such as the Rajput gentry, normally supported their prescriptions, however vicious they may have been. In cases of alleged witchcraft, weaker members of the society tended to the ones accused, such as old women, widows, or in a few cases, subordinate males. There was a clear connection between local power and the resolution of such conflicts, the aim being to restore social stability that was seen to be threatened by disruption from within. In this way, illness and the anxieties that it gave rise to provide a means by which the local elders and the elites maintained control.’⁶⁷

Introduced western medical practices and the resultant complexities:

The British Government was successful in establishing the hegemony of ‘western’ medicine in the urban areas with their establishment of medical institutions in the three major presidencies. The education system was able to attract attention from the caste Hindus by giving them the opportunity to be equipped with the ‘superior’ form of education provided by the British government. The western mode of education

⁶⁷ David Hardiman, ed., *Healing Bodies, Saving Souls : Medical Missions in Asia and Africa* (Amsterdam & New York, 2006), 143.

,with its promise to employ the degree holders as British government employees, encouraged the caste Hindus. This has been greeted as an opportunity by the caste Hindu dominated sections of the population to acquire some sort of power in the British raj in terms of economy, 'cultural capital' and 'prestige'. Moreover, they thought by getting in different governmental institutions they will be able to be at par with the 'superior' race whereas racism was always at work as an external force to keep the caste Hindus as subordinate. This series of phenomena eventually gave birth to the caste Hindu educated neo-elite middle class who in the later part of British raj had submitted to the supremacy of western medicine by creating their own nationalist rhetoric. The British were able to gather interest of the caste Hindus. But there was still a huge population left and the rigidity of caste system in India became an obstacle in order to incorporate lower castes, the untouchables and the tribal community in this aforementioned structure. Disrespecting the sentiment of caste Hindus wound has meant the destruction of the policies and objectives of the colonial project and therefore the colonial masters did not show much interest in incorporating the lower masses who were often considered to be 'polluted'. In such a situation, the Christian missionaries were seen as a potential agent who can contact with the large population comprising of lower castes, untouchables, and the tribal communities. With their humanitarian mission of healing and promoting western medicine, they were also believed to be a powerful force in enlargement their territory of Christianity. It is because of this complex history that the first person narrator's father in Hansda' semi-autobiographical novel suffers from the anxiety to provide Hansda with the knowledge of modern medicine that is simultaneously seen as a marker of prestige and a tool of empowerment to negotiate with the caste Hindu dominated social elites in the post-colonial India.

In many cases, the Christian medical healing was premised on religious conversion which gave success in case of converting the lower caste Hindus and the untouchables because embracing Christianity often gave these downtrodden an opportunity to break free from the static oppressive structure of the caste system, but resistance came primarily from the tribal communities for they were outside of the domain of rigid caste structure and were more harmoniously aligned with their religion.

The missionary involvement for promoting western medicine and Christianity can be traced back to the early nineteenth century. In 1811, Rani Gauri Lakshmi Bai of Travancore gave permission to the missionaries to exercise their preventive health care measures against the growing incidents of small pox epidemics and that is resonated in the book *Medical Encounters in British India* that I have cited so often in this chapter:

‘Colonel Munro, the resident of Travancore, exercised a great deal of pressure on the Maharani to open a small vaccination unit under the supervision of a resident doctor. The Maharani finally yielded to Munro’s pressure and this marked the formal acceptance of western medicine within the territorial confines of her state. In the following decades, the spurt in mortality figure resulting from smallpox epidemics, forced the state to enhance its patronage and support for western medicine ⁶⁸

The sincerity and devotion displayed by the missionary doctor in the dispensaries and hospitals made them popular within the section of the lower castes. Their popularity is accounted for the conversion of a large number of outcaste, thus loosening the bonds of caste rigidities. Thus, by early 1930s, the medical missionaries were able to reveal the significance of Christian missionaries in the spread of the Gospel in a non-Christian land ⁶⁹ and that has its referential substantiation in Kumar’s words:

In the late 1860s, the ‘untouchable’, comprising mostly of the Pulayas, were the major beneficiaries of the LMS medical Mission work. The medical treatment provided to them in the branch dispensaries of Attur, Santhapuram, and Agastapuram, encouraged them to embrace Christianity. The medical missionaries realizing the potentials of medical work, particularly among the ‘untouchable’ communities, trained Indians in large numbers to serve as dressers. The Indian women converts were also provided training in midwifery. The medical facilities of maternity hospital at Trivandrum were improved to meet the demands of the socially and economically deprived sections of the society’ ⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Deepak Kumar, Raj Sekhar Basu ed., “Healing the Sick and the Destitute: Protestant Missionaries and Medical Missions In 19th and 20th Century Travancore “, *Medical Encounters in British India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press,2013),191.

⁶⁹ *ibid*, 190

⁷⁰ Deepak Kumar, *Medical Encounters*, 192

However, this history of spread of Christianity's proselytizing mission among lower castes such as Pulayas did not follow the same trajectory in its encounter with the santhals and other adivasis. While, the lower caste people easily converted in Christianity, the tribal communities of India showed a resistance towards such 'humanitarian' medical missions undertaken by the Christian missionaries. The Janus-faced strategies of the British Imperial project, on one hand, exploited and plundered the natural resources, while on the other, Christian Missionaries who often acted as another part of the imperial project tried to enhance the overall health of the 'destitute'. As, the healing process of those missionaries were premised on the logic of religious conversion, their project started to, in turn, affect their own objective i.e. religious conversion. Unlike the lower castes and untouchables, the tribal people used to enjoy an egalitarian religious society of their own and for most of them, conversion was considered to be a humiliation of their religious belief systems. David Hardiman shows us this complex contradiction in tribal negotiations with the missionaries:

Treatment could thus become a battlefield between the adivasi elders and the missionaries. The missionaries understood this very well, seeing this as a struggle that was not so much over the technology of healing as a confrontation between two conflicting systems of belief. They tended to depict this as a battle against 'idolatry' and 'superstition', or between God and Devil. In Birkett's words: "the prayer of faith, together with medicines and proper diet, won him back to life and health, and he promised the doctor that he would serve the Lord Jesus..." Time went by, and he failed to come forward for baptism. The reason, according to Birkett, was that his relatives had put pressure on him not to do so. There were, she said, many similar cases [...] in one case of 1906, Jane Birkett noticed on a visit to the house of a Christian convert that a 3-year-old girl had a knotted string around her neck. When she asked what it was, she was told it was a charm to cure her sore eyes. Birkett told them that the whole idea was absurd, and made them remove the string. Later in the day, the girl was brought to Birkett's tent for treatment. Many converts continued, nevertheless, to believe in the power of charms and exorcism, and resorted to them at times of crisis.⁷¹

⁷¹ Hardiman, *Healing Bodies*, 155.

While Hardiman is taking into account the Christian missionaries' otherwise 'humanitarian' and 'progressive' methods of medical treatment, he has overlooked the Janus-faced projects of the British government. Their projects of suppressing the tribal revolts by enforcing military power, land acquisition, exploitation of natural resources, and destruction of the socio-cultural and economic structures of the tribal communities were contradictory to the missionaries' effort of advancing the treatment procedures among the Santhal communities. Had the British Government not emphasized their 'racialism' and resentment toward the Santhali belief system and the Colonial laws not deprived the Santhal communities from their fundamental rights, there could be possibilities from within the santhal community in embracing the 'modern medicinal discourse'. But Hardiman is right in pointing out this extremely fraught relationship between these two parties:

'Despite all their efforts, the Christian missionaries won few adivasi converts during this period. There were no wave of mass conversion, as amongst the vankars of central Gujarat – a community classed as 'untouchable' – in the period 1890-1910. The mass movements amongst adivasis of those times were led by people such as Govind amongst the Bhills in 1913, and in south Gujarat, the Devi mediums of 1922-3. Compared to these movements for self-assertion, the impact of the missionaries was very slight indeed. The opposition from the community elders increased, if anything over time. In 1926 the leading Bhills of Lusadiya region even convened a meeting to discuss strategies for preventing the spread of Christianity in their community[...] the chief impediments to Christian therapy were, however, that the majority of adivasis continued to be convinced of the efficacy of, and indeed, imperative need for exorcism, and that the majority of adivasi elders believed that the missionaries' strictures against indigenous form of therapy posed a major threat to their own political and moral hegemony. It was for these two reasons that the community leaders did all they could to undermine the often dedicated and selfless medical work of the missionaries amongst the adivasis, for the most part with considerable success.'⁷²

Such tribal instances of resistance that David Hardiman traces and cites also often resonate with different experiences that are narrated by the characters in Hansda's fictions. At times, beyond the logic of

⁷² Hardiman, *Healing Bodies*, 156.

modernity and tribal resistance towards it, Rupi simply finds allopathic medicines to be extremely unpalatable and tasteless or bitter:

The [allopathic] medicines seemed to work. On their subsequent visit, the doctor remarked that the patient looked healthier than before. They collected the reports---all of which were normal---and returned home promising the doctor that Rupi would continue taking the medicines. But most of the pills and tonics Rupi had been prescribed were hideous to taste. She put all of them on a shelf and forgot about them. In less than a week, she was back to lying on a cot almost all day.⁷³

While such recalcitrance to take medicines can be attributed to any non-tribal or tribal person, her shelving of those allopathic medicines is encouraged by a set of tribal/santhali beliefs that told her not to take complete recourse to modern medicine. For instance, Romola, her neighbor informs her that behind her inexplicable disease there could be some ‘black magic’ and she should think of resisting that and should perhaps stop taking allopathic treatment. When one reads *My Father’s Garden* and notices the enormous emphasis on western medicine that the father puts and juxtapose that with these utterances one comes across the enormous complexity of how santhals in Hansda’s texts negotiate with modern medicine, colonial encounters as well as the developmentalist works of postcolonial governments. However, in such negotiations there is often an irreducibly non-rational and inexplicable part of tribal lives that is neither superstitious nor a marker of irrationality, but an instance of their predicament of negotiating modernity. In such instances there is always a sense of ‘something else’ that is leftover and untranslated in missionaries’ accounts, colonial narratives, bureaucratic discourses. It is this apparent enigma and mystery that haunts Hansd’a narratives like *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*:

“You look awful”, Romola said to her when they met next. “What’s happening to you?”

“Oh! I’m just feeling tired,” Rupi said, not wishing to speak. It took so much effort.

⁷³ Hansda, *Rupi Baskey*, 121.

Romola looked at her closely. 'Is this just fatigue? This seems to be *something else*. (my emphasis)⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Hansda, Rupi Baskey, 121.

Conclusion

In the first chapter of my dissertation, I have examined the social and political reception of Hansda Sowendra Shekhar's Works in order to understand why his works were dubbed pornography and how his works can be read as counter narratives for the dominant 'mainstream' political perceptions under the veil of developmentalist rhetoric. In this chapter I have also shown Hansda's text is a heretical discourse that breaks into the realm of 'doxa' in order to push the border line of 'orthodoxy' to help possibilities of 'heterodoxy' to come to view. I have also examined the location of literary fiction within the broader discourse of literature that is politically loaded. While in the second chapter of my dissertation, as opposed to the political right wing's claim about Hansda as an ineligible, inauthentic commentator of santhal lives, I have established Hansda as a nuanced author whose fictions capture various contradictions of modernity. I have done so by engaging with theories of lived experience that enables the author to empathize with the characters from his community. In addition to this, by engaging with the dialogue between the 'universal', 'rational' history and 'contingent', 'irrational' history, this chapter examined how Hansda's hyphenated, fractured, liminal identity and 'insider-outsider' position has enabled him to portray the nuances of contradictions and negotiations of the marginalized community with the hegemonic discourse of modernity in his works. The third chapter of this dissertation has traced the history of medicinal discourse in the colonial British period in order to show how the contradictions of modernity in British raj have led the santhal people to embrace 'superstitions' as a self-defense mechanism to counter the exploitation of British governmental policies that strategically have destroyed various indigenous knowledge systems of the santhal people.

Since, there are limitations of scope in any MPhil dissertation, other significant issues that Hansda's fictions foreground could not be entirely explored in this work. Hansda's works can be taken as a focal point to further study the broader discourses of gender and sexuality in relation to tribal encounters with various spaces of our political modernity. The domain of medical humanities as is

explored in the third chapter can be pushed further and that can bring forth a new understating of how the tribal communities in India have negotiated with the British enlightenment project and colonial modernity in contradistinction with how other 'native' constituencies embraced medical education in the time of colonial modernity. I believe this can open up contradictory and complex rhetoric within the discourse of enlightenment project as it was upheld and inserted by colonial modernity. There are also other opportunities to explore and thus analyze the rituals and worldviews of santhal community and that can foreground the santhal metaphysics in an entirely different light. However, given the discursive opportunities Hansda's fictions open up, it requires a greater and a much bigger scope to explore these issues at length.

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