

IN RESONANCE WITH NATURE: EMOTIONS OF SELF TRANSCENDENCE - A SUBALTERN READING OF C. K. JANU'S *MOTHER FOREST: THE UNFINISHED STORY*

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ABSTRACT

The translation from vernacular enables the readers at the national and international level to read and reread the saga of communities known and unknown. Human rights have a deep historical significance. *Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of CK Janu* translated into English from Malayalam by Bhaskaran questions the place of tribals in the independent India. The history of the adivasies, their struggle for survival, attachment towards the forest and attempts to restore the land finds significance in the work. This paper purports to explore marginalization of tribals, lack of agency and conflicts to resolve, the text is a dossier of cultural value and has gained momentum as an ethnic subaltern text.

Key words: Translation, Adivasies, cultural value, ethnic, subaltern

Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C.K. Janu is a powerful testimony on dissolving the borders and accrediting Dalit tribes in India along the pathway of development. The life story of C.K. Janu written in Malayalam and translated into English is an oral text that speaks of the displaced communities struggling for an identity amidst chaos that thwart their existence. The Government of India uses the term 'Scheduled Tribes' but adivasis and tribals are used in common parlance.

In her autobiographical narration, Janu gives a passionate account of her struggle to win back the lands which they possessed. C. K. Janu, the tribal leader spearheaded the very sensational Muthanga struggle that lasted for forty seven day strike in front of the State Secretariat and waged success without the intervention of any political party. With no formal education, she took part actively in the literacy campaign in Kerala and in course of time emerged as their leader. A peaceful activist, she defended human rights and demanded the landless tribal people of Kerala their sole right to possess the land.

Sharing her own struggle for existence, her piece of work is a site of constructing and reconstructing the identity of a community. Though her experience is universal, her voice is distinct as it discloses the marginal existence of tribal people. Displaced at the periphery and viewed as primitives, uncultured and uncivilized, the book is a revelation on how history erases the very sense of being. The ancient hegemony of caste and gender enforces subordination and reflects the shadow of imperialism at the very apex of the country.

Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C. K. Janu is fifty six paged and is divided into two parts. Janu's childhood in the lap of deepwoods, lullaby of birds, warmth of the trees and the

second part features Janu's emergence as a warrior, her politically awakened career as a tribal activist raising concerns on the emergence of migrants appearing on the land.

Born into an Adiyar community in 1966 at Checkotte, Thrissileri in Wynad district, Janu's schooling commenced with lessons from nature. With no initiation into formal education, Janu uses the word 'nammal' that stands collectively as 'we' in Malyalam. Unravelling her narration with the description of work, Janu alters the nature of cultivation and the infiltration of migrants to the forests. Plantation and paddy farming are vividly sketched. There is a tinge of ecofeminism in the manner in which she narrates the process of clearing the woods for cultivation:

When the virgin earth catches fire it gives out a
strange smell... in the night it looks as if human being
is burnt alive... when it rains, the hills looks like a woman
with her shorn, the wild water, all blood – red gushing
angrily.

Janu's life has ever been in constant communion with the forest providing them ample food such as fish and crab” in the forests one never knew what hunger was” (2). With woods around the huts, the fields supplying millets and vegetables, the forest proves to be a granary store for her people. Even the small children had a role in cultivation, scaring away pigs and elephants by using makeshift drums from erumadam, a small hut on tree top. The attachment to nature and symbiosis produced is marked in the following words:

No one knows the forest like we do. She is mother
to us. More than a mother because she never abandons us (5).

The manifestation is deeply rooted with forest giving reassurance and security at every turn and twists of life. The forest is perceived not as an inanimate object rather as a human being, a kaleidoscope of emotions. The forest is a tentacle holding the tribal communities together in perfect resonance and symphony. Resplendent in the lyre of nature, her seasonal shifts merge with the rhythm of lives of the tribals. Life is an extension of mother nature herself.

The intrusion of migrants or traders were forever viewed with apprehension. The engulfing gap between the tribal community and the mainstream community relegated the tribal community to the periphery. The formula which tribal children learnt right from the toddler period was to shun themselves away from the sight of strangers, “if strangers came we just melted into the forest” (5).

Lured at the prospects of developing profitable fertile land, the government and migrants took possession of the land. Power and Pelf proved the cause for the eviction of tribals from their own land. As power hungry men devoured land, tribesmen were alienated from the roots. The dispossession from their lands caused havoc and misery and thwarted the very essence of their well belong. The loss of land meant loss of honour, heritage and hermitage. It meant the need for a clarion call to repossess the land, for repossession meant reinstating the very breath of life.

C.K. Janu's work colours the hues of identity politics. The vigour with which Janu and her community preserve themselves is in stoic stance of claiming an identity. Sonia Kruks aptly remarks:

What makes identity politics a significant departure from earlier, pre – identarian forms of the politics of recognition is its demand for recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has previously been denied : it is qua women, qua blacks, qua lesbians that groups demand recognition.(85)

Extreme poverty and hunger drives the tribes to slog like slaves where inhuman treatment is melted out by plantation of jenmi:

When we worked in jenmi's fields, we had to do whatever the jenmi's men ordered. Since the jenmi was the only provider of work, our people were quite frightened of him... at noon after work we got some kanji... when it rained we just stood and got wet in the fields. (13)

The tribes are viewed as outcastes, the marginalized community. The powers that enforce hegemony in society makes it a point to choke them with their identity of subjugation. The tribals unconsciously reiterate a weak identity which is assimilated into the very vein linking the emotional inscape with the physical landscape. Evicted from forests, the tribal children are taken to hostels to make a new living. Colonies emerge with no water and proper sanitation. The society stamped them as unclean people when epidemics broke out. "Real colonies are created in this way" (51).

Cultural Resistance incites deference when the instinct of survival is questioned. The life and experiences of tribals marks the depths of subjugation. The Party encroaches in the name of development and leaves them helpless:

The Party saw us a vote bank only. Therefore issues related to our agricultural lands or better conditions of life hardly found their way into Party circles. They tried their best not to let us speak. (34)

The history of tribals gives ample lessons on tribals resisting and rebelling against oppression. The new politics of difference and deference marks celebration of decentredness and fragmentation. The flaunting resistance to the Party and to the powers that encroach the livelihood, the tribals muster energy from their closely knit community. The struggle to retrieve the burial ground was to ensure protection of the fundamental rights of the people of the community. The streaks of resistance and strands to resolve emerge from the palettes of women:

In our case, unity in everything originates from our women. They have something in common that shelters us from meaninglessly adopting the ways of civil society... Theirs is a resolve that is hardened by the wind and the rain forest And in the face of other difficulties. (53)

Articulating real life experiences, raising voice and not succumbing as mere commodities



in the hands of encroachers and the Party, the tribals / Adivasies paint their lives with the most beautiful shades to preserve their indigenous culture. The pulsation of the country is felt at its best in the encompassing aura of Adivasies, the live wire of the nation

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