



A Reflection on Cultural Dislocation in Jamuna Bini's *When an Adivasi Sings*

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Abstract— The present paper will try to understand the social, cultural, philosophical and political stand of Adivasis. How do they lead their life? How does intrusion affect their culture? How their culture should be addressed? The paper will adhere to the MLA 7th edition and will also follow 8th and 9th edition. Jamuna Bini, born in a Nyishi Adivasi family in Arunachal, North East India, is well acclaimed poet and literary figure. Her popular work, *When an Adivasi Sings*, is a collection of thirty-seven poems. Most of her poems delve deep into the tapestry of Adivasi faith, culture, and values. In her poems she knits her lived experiences amidst forest and mountain. Through her poems, she draws the attention of readers towards the challenges of protecting forest, water, land, Adivasi language, culture, identity, habitat, and existence. Adivasis are offered development and modern amenities at the cost of losing water, forest, land, mountain, culture, language, and identity.

Keywords— Cultural dislocation, development, urbanization, deceptive policies, aesthetic beauty, morality.



I. INTRODUCTION

I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me...When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves or figments of their imagination, indeed everything and anything except me... That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality (Elison 03).

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, culture stands for the customs, beliefs, art, way of life, and social organization of a particular country or group. Cultural conflict shows or represents the differences between two communities or people.

The term 'cultural conflict' is the main anchor to measure the objective of this paper. The term 'Adivasi' refers to the self-claimed identity of the people who are known as 'Tribals,' or 'Scheduled Tribes' in the *Constitution of India*. They are indigenous people and spread across our country. The term also denotes that they are the original or first inhabitants of the nation. Jamuna

Bini's collection of poems, *When an Adivasi Sings* depicts the intrusion on their culture, language, inhabitant, forest, land, and mountain. The collection also helps to understand the rich Adivasi culture and their conflict with growing modernization, development projects, and globalization. The present Adivasi generation is facing cultural dislocation, flawed policies of government to extract natural resources, blind and uncontrolled mining and exploitation of natural resources, migration to cities, and urbanization.

II. ANALYSIS

Adivasis are struggling to pass their culture to the next generation or to retain it in its original form. Basic features of Adivasi life are collectiveness, co-existence, symbiotic relationship with nature, denial of anthropocentric values of life, sense of equality among all creations in the cosmos, reverence forest, nature and mountain, friendly relationship between man and woman, etc. but the blow of modernity and globalization is uprooting and dismantling everything. In the very first poem, "Those Days of Leisure," the poet is nostalgic and recalls her childhood days eating "Muku-Mabla," (Bini 37) chasing goats, and cropping ragi paddy.

She used to enjoy leisure lying, catching butterfly while her parents were entangled in the humdrum of daily life. In the evening all used to sit together beside the fireplace, and each member used to narrate the incidents of the day. They used to go to bed early and wake up early. Now the poetess is grown up and states that “furnaces have broken,” (Bini 41), people do not stay together anymore. They have migrated to different cities in search of livelihood. Their houses are made of concrete. People do not sit together, do not share stories, sleep late and wake up late, and remain busy on social media. Urbanization brought the misery of loneliness, frustration, fake virtual friends and hollow life. Explaining the present situation of Adivasis in the age of scientific revolution, she writes:

We remain engaged in
T.V. mobile phones
And laptop
Now,
MMS, Facebook,
And WhatsApp
Get us connected. (Bini 42)

Industrialization and economic liberalization have been used as by the governments as tools to displace Adivasis from their land by usurping their fields fraudulently. “An Interesting Story” deals with farmers and their precious happy days until they transferred their farmland to capitalists to open companies. They were allured by a handsome amount of money, and when their money was spent, they “visited the office of the company” and “scuffle with the employees of the company” (Bini 45). They had lost the battle and ground both. They were at their wit's end and have turned from owners to “Hooliganism” (Bini 45).

A corporate company
entered this village
It offered an enticement
of compensation
in exchange of
Land acquisition. (Bini 44)

Language is maker of one's identity and a tool for acquiring hegemony. Mrs. Campbell Praed's nineteenth-century Australian novel, *Policy and Passion* sums up, “Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' becomes established” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 07)

Robert J. C. Young in his *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* notes, “The colonial language becomes culturally more powerful, devaluing the native language as it is brought into its domain, domesticated and accommodated!” (140). The third poem, “When an Adivasi

Sings,” points out the capitalist and urban people stereotype which categorises Adivasi language as limited, semi developed, coarse and full of flaws. The poet voices the importance of regional languages/dialects and culture. The dominant class blames that Adivasi languages lack “sophistry,” “logic,” “coarse,” “illogical sentence construction, shallow, semi-developed and only lullabies can be sing” (Bini 47). However, the poet, with her acute vision, advocates and convinces the readers that the Adivasi language is a matter of pride, celebration, and confidence. It is most natural, musical, and affable. Adivasi language is the song of the river, tree, birds, sun/moon, mountain, rain, and every corner of nature. Moreover, the people need to change their aesthetic behaviour and perspective towards Adivasis and their language and culture.

The poem “In A Waiting for the Return” deals with ideological clash and the sufferings of innocent people. According to Marxist analysis, culture becomes an arena through which the dominant class seeks to propagate the ideas that are conducive to its own growth and prosperity following the logic of class antagonism; this necessarily requires the exploitation of another culture thus becomes an expression of dominant ideology or “false consciousness” (Chakraborty 39). Wangpan's mother is terribly old and desperately needs her family members around her. However, she asks Wangpan to go away to city from village so that he may not either be taken away by the “people of the forest” to join their gang, or become a target of Indian Army's bullets. Undoubtedly, she loves her son and has a great wish to meet him, but she does not want to put her son's life in danger. That's why she wants her son to stay away and consoles herself from his memory:

No! No!
Ask him,
Of the two,
The People of the Forest
And
Indian Army,
Whose Bullets
Does he like
The taste of? (Bini 52)

The poem “Relationship with Soil” deals with the innocence of Adivasis and the deceptive policies of the capitalists. She states that the Adivasis of Arunachal sell their land for their greed, need, and laziness and later they are forced to live a pitiable life. The money they receive is spent; the job they get do not procure enough for their survival. Their dream of a better future and pride is crushed and ultimately, they surrender to the circumstances and to the system. They have broken their relationship from their soil, hence uprooted and cursed to bear the agony of separation and humiliation:

A big dam
 Would be constructed here
 After demolishing this village...
 The handsome amount of money
 Received as compensation
 Was spent by them
 Long ago.
 And
 The salary
 Of the peon
 Is insufficient
 To satisfy
 Hungry stomach
 Of the family members. (Bini 62-63)

"A Fairy Tale" discusses cultural dislocation and exploitation of Adivasis. Capitalists as well as the government both are responsible for the exploitation and pitiable plight of both men and women. These agencies show day dreams to the Adivasi girls through their "pomp-show" (Bini 58). The innocent girls are trapped in their glittery promises and migrate to the cities for employment/dream fulfilment. Moreover, these fairies are mentally as well as physically tortured and harassed by the "main-stream" demons (Bini 58). They are physically molested and exploited. The chimera of good life, employment, and fashionable life is drained out. Disappointed they either return to their native land or become slave of conditions. Those who return heartbroken and exploited lack courage and tell their experiences "in bits and pieces" (Bini 59). Explaining deception which the Adivasi girls meet, Jamuna Bini writes:

Showing
 Dreams
 Of employment
 These demons
 Imprison
 Those fairies
 In the fake golden cage...
 When a fairy Molested
 And physically exploited,
 Return home,
 She shared
 Some experiences
 In bits and pieces
 With her sister fairy... (Bini, 58-59)

Robert J. C. Young opines that "Indigenous culture is being opened up for appropriation by the conquering culture" (141). Similarly, Adivasis are forced to adopt the path of their cultural and linguistic appropriation. Bini notes that influence of acculturation has damaged cultural pride in Adivasi youths and they do not feel pride in speaking their dialect. Arunachal Pradesh is not untouched of it.

Arunachali youth speak English and Hindi and give more respect to them. They do not like the stories of their warriors and deities. Moreover, they like cartoon serials of "Doremon, Pokemon" (Bini 66). They do not eat local food like "Hiku-Huyup, Honyor" instead, they prefer "Pizza and Noodles" (Bini 66). Hence, the "consumerist culture" is snatching away their language, music, habitat, food, stories, and way of living, thinking and controlling their behaviour (Bini 67).

The dominant culture has declared itself as mainstream which tries to maintain its dominance upon the subaltern through hegemony. It writes history, makes policies, and controls the narrative. It controls the process of creating knowledge through multiple strata of society. In postcolonial India, multiple voices and narrations have found a place in literature, history, and other documents. Accordingly, a shift in the concept of power and the parading of social strata has been witnessed. The best example of the mainstream-colonial narrative and subaltern is uprising of 1857. English historian and colonial narrators John Kaye and G. B. Mallison have called it "Sepoy War" and "Indian Mutiny," while Indian historians, authors, and poets have called it the "war of independence." Talapatra Observes, "While mainstream historiography highlights the major events led by elitist-political ideologies, subaltern studies unearth local events headed by the masses" (45).

Jamuna Bini, in her poem "The So-Called," depicts pain and disappointment of Adivasis being ignored from mainstream history and literature. Ania Loomba, in her celebrated book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* observes "Various tribal peoples, historically repressed by the upper castes and already relegated to the margins of Hindu society, were also regarded by the British authorities as less sophisticated, more warlike, childlike, and gullible" (86). Bini observes that in narration of history, story, and literature, people are cognizant about "Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev," but nobody mentions "Matmur Jamoh and Moji Riba" (Bini 68). She states that Adivasis know cow is a sacred animal of the mainstream, but mainstream does not know about "Mithun" (Bini 69). Adivasis give due importance to the mainstream warriors, culture, rituals, food, faith and literature but Adivasi warriors, patriots, culture, tradition, fashion, faith, food, and literature do not get enough space and attention in mainstream literature, narration, and history.

Since inception, humans have opted for an anthropocentric attitude toward nature. Instead of considering themselves a part of nature, a companion, they see it as 'other' just for exploitation to satisfy their unruly desires. Exploitation of nature by the civilized main-stream has been ravishing, irreparable and cause of immense

calamities in the world. Aldo Leopold in his book, *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) states, "Humans are required to show respect and consideration for the fellow members of the extended community rather than compete with it" (Qtd. Rangarajan 51). "Memory of the Village" and "Scene" describe the ravaging and conquering attitude of men who are exploiting nature and polluting the environment. In "Memory of the Village" Yama goes to the city with her aunt. Her eyes search for trees but fail to find them; she looks for the blue sky and finds it smoky. She searches for the river, and her aunt responds, "Here the rivers have become a dumping ground" (Bini 74). She goes to the crowded market, and on returning, she feels an etching in her nose. She "cleans her nose, and her finger turns black" (Bini 75). Her aunt tells:

Air is polluted here;
Next time,
Wear a mask necessarily
When you go out. (Bini 75)

Yama misses fresh air, green trees, her dialect, and river. She has become a victim of globalization, urbanization, capitalism, power, and powerlessness. She is enslaved by the urban ecosystem, either to survive or get destroyed. Her father is helpless and suggests:

Staying with your uncle and aunt
Study with complete attention;
Get some job
And
Help your brothers and sisters also.

(Bini 77)

Whenever Jamuna Bini finds green trees, mountain and birds, she is reminded of human greed, cruelty, emotionlessness and his indifference towards nature. Humans build tall buildings, showrooms, hotels, offices, apartments, malls, markets, and play grounds by chopping off thousands and thousands of trees. The poem "Scene" describes Bini's trauma as she imagines trees to be green waving corpse, where "Tall buildings have been constructed" (Bini 82). She longs for the existence of mountain, forest and birds. She weeps for the natural beauty that is wiped out. Hotels are built on them. The trees, pasture fields, mountains, and flowing rivers have become a matter of the past:

One day
Sitting
In the dining hall
of a luxurious hotel
I was eating
But something stuck in my throat
That here below
There happened to be
A river. (Bini 83)

Robert J. C. Young, in his *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* observes, "They made war and called it peace" (37). Young's comment is relational to government statutes which prefer capitalism, urbanization, and modernity that dominate, restructure, and impose a materialistic culture and authority on the Adivasis. Bini is very disappointed and observes that the Adivasis are helpless and hopeless in the present situation. Their population is dwindling; how can they have a bright future? Urbanization and capitalism are looking to exploit their resources; land is being occupied to build big dams, hotels, and factories. They are uprooted simultaneously from their root under multiple external intrusion and circumstances.

In "Mother", the poet is concerned about regionalism, corrupt leaders, terrorism and urges the natives to unite, stand and fight to safeguard the mother country. In "Modern Education", Bini advocates for the stories of Adivasi ancestors, its humour, mourning, happiness of birth, lamentation of death, victory and wars. However, she expresses her disappointment that the Adivasi youth is unable to see or feel pride in it. They call "primitive faith" "hypocrisy" and move towards modern education and "give logic for logic sake" (Bini 101). The poem "They and We" shows the perspective of outsiders and of natives. The outsiders call the natives insolent, rigid, ignorant, afraid of change, uneducated, nomads, hunters, and savage. They outsiders want to change the Adivasis for the sake of development, modern education, to clean their dirty villages, to save them from cannibalistic animals, for their benefit. However, Bini observes that the Adivasis do not want all this on the cost of their culture, land, forest and mountain. Therefore, she appeals the intruders to leave the Adivasis on their own.

In "Being a Woman" she observes that Adivasi culture gives freedom to women. But women lack it in the so called developed and modern society and inclusive society. They are repressed and if any woman makes any comment on God or religion, it is taken as a "blunder," a "slap" on the cheek of religion (Bini 113). They are awarded public shaming like calling "witch," chaining her "with shackles, cruelly crushing her to death, or throwing her into the fire (Bini 113).

III. CONCLUSION

The collection also comprises poems those deal with love, laughter, memory, democracy, sky, emotion, fear, machine, rain, and waves. However, these poems do not romanticize but visualise the concern, and pang of the poet for depleting culture, wiping out forest, mountain, land, and pasture. Jamuna Bini is well aware about the root and uprooting, culture and cultural dislocation, their ease and unease. She is also well informed about their greed and

innocence. She does not fail to observe the ideologies and cunningness that is being imposed upon them in the name of modernity, urbanization, development, religion, employment and cultural superiority. She also observes that the Adivasi youth is losing pride in their root, language, culture, faith, food, music and belief. They are easily influenced by majority culture, language, music, song, food and fashion. The diction is simple and realistic. The tone of the poetry is nostalgic, sarcastic and appealing. Commenting upon the poems, Padmashree Yeshe Dorjee writes, "The poems are simple in tone but very deep and impressive in effect. The most burning issue which Adivasis are facing is separation from their cultural roots" (Bini 13).

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