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OUTLINE

TEXT

Introduction

1 The Chotanagpur plateau, situated in the east of the Indian peninsula, lies between the fertile Indo-Gangetic plain in the north and east and the Mahanadi River in the south with the Damodar River Valley, the largest repository for coal in India, running across its center. Besides being the largest producer of coal in the country, the plateau harbors some of the richest iron-ore belts in the world, the largest deposits of copper and uranium in India, and mammoth reserves of mica, limestone, bauxite, and manganese. However, the mineral wealth of Chotanagpur is in stark contrast to the material poverty of its Indigenous people called the Adivasi (literally “original inhabitants”), constituting 85 to 90% of the total population of the region, who suffer from the large-scale exploitation of natural resources, gargantuan mining projects, and commercial deforestation.[1] Yet, the ecocide of Chotanagpur and the consequent displacement and dispossession of the Adivasi have systematically been ignored by

mainstream Indian media. In *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1994), Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's propaganda model identifies the economic role of large corporate advertisers on television who "will rarely sponsor programs that engage in serious criticisms of corporate activities, such as the problem of environmental degradation." [2] Thus, as multi-million-dollar mining projects ravage the ecosystems that support millions of Indigenous people, this slow-burn tragedy hardly ever translates to a breaking news story.

2 Rob Nixon coined the term "slow violence" for such attritional calamities "that occu[r] gradually and out of sight." [3] They are "neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales." [4] Nixon argues that the relative amnesia for slow violence stems from the nature of its casualties which become "light-weight, disposable casualties." [5] The marginalization of the environmentally dispossessed does not limit itself to mass media. Scholars like Amitayu Chakraborty, Debasree De, Rashmi Varma, Prathama Banerjee, and Anshul Avijit, among others, question the misrepresentation of the Adivasi in Indian cinema and Indian English literature, largely produced by urban intellectuals. [6] Understanding the representational challenges of narrating violence that remains unseen, Nixon highlights the role of the writer-activist who may, through their writing, offer us "a different kind of witnessing: of sights unseen." [7] Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's novel *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2013) and his collection of short stories *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2017) offer such a defamiliarized perspective on post-colonial India's development, where readers witness the slow violence, inflicted over generations, on the land and the centuries-old inhabitants of Chotanagpur. This paper critically analyzes the narrative strategies that Hansda employs in his fiction to represent the Adivasi's imperceptible environmental vulnerability.

"Humanizing" the Adivasi and Somatic Landscapes

3 Born in the Santhal [8] community, [9] the largest Indigenous tribe of Jharkhand (i.e. the Indian state where the bulk of the Chotanagpur

plateau is situated), Hansda [10] had an English-medium education and grew up to be a medical officer. He has become a "highly motivated translator" of the environmental struggles of his community from which he has recently emerged but with which he remains bonded through memory. [11] His fictional works expose institutionalized silences that enshroud the Adivasi in oblivion. Indeed, his short story, "The Adivasi Will Not Dance," begins with the state police using brute force to muffle the cries of the Santhal narrator, Mangal Murmu: "They pinned me to the ground. They did not let me speak, they did not let me protest, they did not even let me raise my head." [12] Speaking in the context of the United States, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky found US mass media's definitions of worth meeting the expectations of a propaganda model where "worthy victims" may elicit a propaganda outburst by the mass media while victims deemed "unworthy" will not generate sustained coverage. [13] Such differential treatment of tragedy transcends the United States to become characteristic of the propaganda model of Indian mass media. The Indian bourgeoisie never hear of the oppressed as the media tirelessly promotes the dominant discourse of neoliberal development.

4 In the short story "The Adivasi Will Not Dance," as the whole Santhal population of Godda gets forcefully displaced to make way for a thermal power plant, Mangal Murmu narrates that "the papers carried glowing reports, along with pictures, of the roads which were being repaired or rebuilt in Ranchi and Dumka." [14] In this context of a collusively manufactured unseeing, Nixon demonstrates how imaginative writing "can help make the unapparent appear, making it accessible and tangible by humanizing drawn-out threats inaccessible to the immediate senses." [15] Indigenous communities have been dehumanized in popular imagination into being "the global residuum" [16] of neoliberal urban development. In India, the dehumanization of the Adivasi is rooted in a postcolonial reinforcing of colonial stereotypes of Indigenous primitivism. Dominant literary, anthropological, sociological, and political discourses have constructed the Adivasi as an exotic Other. Abin Chakraborty draws attention to the literature produced by urban intellectuals where the Adivasi largely operate as "objects of urban elite male lust." [17] Debasree De identifies Bhanmati, one of the female characters in

Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Aranyak*, as emblematic of the mainstream literary representation of "a tribal woman replete with an unbound sexuality and passion."[18] Against such dehumanizing discourses, Hansda's fiction releases the Adivasi's trauma as an affective force that urges the readers into an ethical confrontation with the Other.

5 In his analysis of Hansda's first novel, *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, Amitayu Chakraborty argues that, running counter to stereotypes of pre-modern egalitarianism, Hansda sheds light on the rigid and discriminatory clan hierarchy and the oppression of women in the Santhal community of fictional Kadamdihi. Debunking myths of forest people deliberately practicing a lifestyle of isolation, Hansda places his Santhal characters amidst continuous interaction with other communities like the low-caste Hindus or Dalits, namely the Kunkals and Kamars.[19] Hansda's art of characterization in his collection of short stories *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* liberates Indigenous people from monolithic molds. Santhal men like Mangal Murmu in the title story are not mute dancers but protestors with agency. Mangal argues before the President of India: "We will sing and dance before you but you tell us, do we have a reason to be happy?"[20] The Santhal sex-worker Sona in the story "Merely a Whore" defies a culture of sexual objectification with the question: "Why don't you kiss me on the lips?"[21] Panmuni Soren has dietary concerns when she shifts with her husband to the West Indian state of Gujarat where the majority follows a vegetarian diet: "'What are we going to eat there?' she wondered aloud. 'They don't eat *jill-haku*[22] in Gujarat, do they?'"[23] In Hansda's fiction, the Adivasi become recognized as humans, embodied with the fears and desires that characterize the residents of high-rise buildings in urban India.

6 Hansda brings the plight of the environmentally dispossessed into focus through a narrative strategy that this paper identifies as "somatic landscapes." Somatic landscapes give figurative shape to the formless threat of ecocides as the body of the Adivasi transmutes into a geographical space on which Hansda maps the ecological degradation of Chotanagpur. The inextricability of body and space is not simply poetic and allegorical in his fiction but visceral, rooted in Adivasi myth and tradition. Mathew Areeparampil elaborates on this intimate bond between the Indigenous body and land:

> The Indigenous people have a special relationship with their land. To them land is not simply a factor of production as it is for other people, but a source of spirituality as well. […] [F]or the Indigenous people land and blood are homologous. Their society, culture, religion, identity and their very existence are intimately linked to the land they hold. To separate the Indigenous people from their land is tantamount to tearing them apart from their life-giving source. [24]

7 It is important to note that *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* opens with a picture of Rupi “squatting in the middle of a rice paddy, shin-deep in slush,” [25] birthing her eldest son. Her body appears as an ineradicable topographical feature. As Indigenous body-maps in Hansda’s fiction narrate stories of ecological trauma, an affective encounter with these somatic scars urges readers to witness the geographies of slow violence.

Residue of Development

8 In “The Adivasi Will Not Dance,” Mangal Murmu describes the inauguration ceremony of a thermal power plant as characterized by a complacent denial of the plight of thousands of Indigenous people displaced by its construction:

> All very happy with the progress, the development. The Santhal Pargana would now fly to the moon. The Santhal Pargana would now turn into *Dilli* [26] and Bombay. The businessman was grinning widely. Patriotic songs in Hindi were playing from loudspeakers placed at all corners of the field. “*Bharat mahaan*” [27] someone was shouting from the stage, trying to rouse the audience, his voice amplified by numerous loudspeakers. [28]

9 The relation between the construction of a power plant and the patriotic chant of “*Bharat Mahaan*” reminds me of Nixon’s theory which associates ambitious, haphazard development in the global South with postcolonial rivalry, “whatever our old colonial masters can do, we can do as well.” [29] Coal mining was a crucial enterprise for bolstering nationalist pride. The postcolonial Indian state has equated coal with “national development, energy security and hence strategic sovereignty.” [30] However, this infrastructural development

that grows on the backs and the lands of Indigenous people categorically ousts them from its benefits. Hansda defamiliarizes the chant of national progress from the perspective of the subaltern as the narrator demands: "What *mahaan*? I wondered. Which great nation displaces thousands of its people from their homes and livelihoods to produce electricity for cities and factories?" [31] Arundhati Roy also questions the injustice of making the poorest communities pay for infrastructural benefits they never enjoy: "The ethnic 'otherness' of their victims takes some of the pressure off the Nation Builders. It's like having an expense account. Someone else pays the bills. People from another country. Another world. India's poorest people are subsidising the lifestyles of her richest." [32] In Hansda's fiction, the Adivasi pay a somatic price as the ecosystem that sustains them undergoes a slow death. While the diseased bodies of Indigenous people mirror the toxic landscape, the sexually exploited bodies of Indigenous women reflect the ravaged plateau, exploited for its mineral riches. The dispensable body of the Adivasi, turned lifeless under speeding trucks, resembles the delicate biodiversity of Chotanagpur, doomed to be crushed under the speeding wheels of progress.

10 In "The Adivasi Will Not Dance," Mangal Murmu represents the choking residue of national development as he complains: "What do we Santhals get in return? Tatters to wear. Barely enough food. Such diseases that we can't breathe properly, we cough blood and forever remain bare bones." [33] The impoverished Adivasi use their "nails, fingers, hands, and whatever tools [they] can manage" [34] to steal and sell coal. The physiological deterioration of the Adivasi and the topographical degradation of the plateau become indistinguishable in Mangal's description of the coal that, on the one hand, is irreversibly damaging the landscape and, on the other hand, is "gobbling us up bit by bit." [35] The blackened earth mirrors the somatic landscape of the Santhal community:

> There is blackness – deep, indelible – all along the *Koyla* [36] Road. The trees and shrubs in our village bear black leaves. Our ochre earth has become black. The stones, the rocks, the sand, all black. The tiles on the roofs of our huts have lost their fire-burnt red. The vines and flowers and peacocks we Santhals draw on the outer walls of our

> houses are black. Our children – dark-skinned as they are – are forever covered with fine black dust. [37]

11 The tears of the crying Santhal children flow like the coal-ridden Damodar River “cutting across a drought-stricken land.” [38] In *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, Rupi, once the strongest woman of the Kadamdihi village, sinks into an inexplicable illness like “a bar of soap” [39] in the industrial town of Nitra under the charms of Gurubari’s witchcraft. Rupi’s illness becomes an extended metaphor for the once flourishing land and cultures of the Adivasi, now corroded under heavy industrialization. Like Gurubari who sucks Rupi’s life out like the poisonous *alakjari* vine, leaving her to lie ailing in a cot in the backyard, Satyen K. Bordoloi argues that the city-settlers give the Indigenous people an illness that reduces their life to incomprehensible ruin, relegating them to the backyard of human consciousness. [40] Much like urban India that basks in the glow of uneven development, Gurubari, the witch flourishes as Rupi wastes away. [41]

Gender-Based Violence, Subaltern Studies, and Extractive Capitalism

12 Adivasi women as the gendered subaltern pay a grimmer somatic price for urban development. The association “Women Against Sexual Violence and State Repression” (WSS) reports that the systematic sexual violence against Adivasi women aims to batter the Indigenous people “into submission to corporate-led industrialization.” [42] In the story “Merely a Whore,” Hansda juxtaposes the sexual exploitation of Adivasi women with the exploitation of the mineral riches of Chotanagpur. The transition of Lakkhipur to a coal-mining town parallels the transformation of the colony of displaced outcasts into a red-light district: “Mud houses fell, concrete ones mushroomed. Roads, police outposts, a railway station, a bus depot, shops, market, a slum and the busiest red-light area in the whole of the mining zone.” [43] While men “shirtless, sweaty, black with coal-dust” [44] dig like automatons for coal underground, “women, too, eat out of their sweat and labor. Only, it is mixed with the semen and the sweat

of men."[45] The story climaxes when the protagonist sex worker of the story, Sona, asks her regular *diku*[46] client, Nirmal, to kiss her on the lips during sexual intercourse. Nirmal, enraged at the impunity of the sex worker, rapes her to show Sona her place. He says: "Kiss? I don't kiss a *rendi*[47] on the lips."[48] Nirmal represents the material greed of extractive capitalism, a symbol for the corporate industrialists who exploit Chotanagpur for its mineral riches but never invest in its sustainable development.

13 Similarly, as the twenty-year-old Talamai in the story "November is the Month of Migrations" submits to the lust of a policeman on the Koyla Road, the latter says: "you Santhal women are made for this only,"[49] referring to a violent and phallocentric sexual encounter, devoid of the formalities of consent, passion, or care. Hansda's narratorial strategy of somatic landscapes transmutes the girl's raped body into the ravaged landscape that fails to articulate protest: "She just lies – passive, unthinking, unblinking – as cold as the paved ground she can feel through the thin fabric of the *gamcha*[50], as still as an inert earthen bowl into which a dark cloud empties itself."[51] Hansda further highlights the dispensability of Adivasi life pulverized under coal-carrying trucks. Mangal Murmu narrates:

> They are so rough, these truck-drivers, they can run down any vehicle that comes in their way. They can't help it, it's their job. The more rounds they make, the more money they earn. And what if they kill? The coal company can't afford to have its business slowed down by a few deaths.[52]

14 Like the disappearing species of animals, birds, and plants of Chotanagpur, a capitalist state disposes of the Adivasi as a non-lucrative impediment on the road to profit.

Displacement of a Devalued Culture

15 Nixon argues that the massive displacement of millions of Indigenous people in the Global South goes largely unquestioned because, although they may be generationally attached to the land, the land does not legally belong to them.[53] In "The Adivasi Will Not Dance,"

the tenacity of Mangal Murmu's memory struggles against state-sponsored promotion of oblivion: "This tola is now called the Jolha [54] tola of Matiajore. Once Matiajore used to be an exclusively Santhal village. Today, it has a Santhal tola and a Jolha tola, with the latter being the bigger." [55] While the state disregards the Adivasi's right to reside on their own land, Hansda points to an inimitable bond in *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* where the psychological trauma of displacement from rural Kadamdihi to the coal-mining town of Nitra finds its somatic reflection in Rupi's inexplicable illness. While Rupi often failed to cook a meal out of exhaustion in Nitra, in Kadamdihi; "Rupi was a part of everything – planting during the months of Ashadh and Saan, harvesting in the month of Aghan and threshing during Posh." [56] In the coal town, Rupi is subject to what Rob Nixon calls "a temporal violence," surviving in "a truncated, severed present, torn by involuntary displacement from the numinous fabric that had woven extended meaning from time-in-place." [57]

16 Nitya Rao cites the loss of cultivable land due to their submergence by dam projects as a major indirect pressure causing the displacement of the Adivasi. [58] In the story "November is the Month of Migrations," Hansda portrays Santhal clans making "long, snaking processions as they abandon their lands and farms to take the train to Namal, the Bardhaman district of West Bengal and the paddy fields there." [59] As Talamai submits to the lust of a police officer on Koyla Road, giving up her sense of dignity for "a fifty-rupee note and two bread pakoras," [60] her body stands for the land that the Adivasi are forced to give up and migrate from in order to quench their hunger. While families like those of Talamai's manage to escape, millions remain subject to "displacement without moving": "a loss that leaves families stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable." [61] Such a stationary displaced population crowds the coal town in "The Adivasi Will Not Dance." Meanwhile, the President of India, dissociated from ground reality, exercises the freedom of movement to arrive in a helicopter to inaugurate a thermal power plant in Godda. [62]

17 The widespread displacement and dispossession of Indigenous people receive social sanction through a majoritarian understanding that systematically devalues Adivasi cultures. Jason Moore critiques the Cartesian dualism of Man versus Nature that fuels the

Anthropocene argument and argues in favor of the term "Capitalocene" to describe the climate change crisis:

> For the story of Humanity and Nature conceals a dirty secret of modern world history. That secret is how capitalism was built on excluding most "humans" from Humanity – Indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, nearly all women, and even many white-skinned men (Slavs, Jews, the Irish). From the perspective of imperial administrators, merchants, planters, and *conquistadores*, these humans were not Human at all. They were regarded as part of Nature, along with trees and soils and rivers – and treated accordingly. [63]

18 In "The Adivasi Will Not Dance," Mangal argues that, although the Adivasi are proselytized from their animist Sarna faith to Hinduism to boost vote banks during election cycles, the "pure people, the clean people" [64] never really include them in the rigid caste hierarchy of Orthodox Hinduism. Similarly, in *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, lower-caste Hindus of Kadamdihi like Kamars and Kunkals practice untouchability against the Santhals who "ate cow and pig meat, drank *haandi* and *paura* [65] and practised polygamy." [66] Hansda attempts a metaphorical depiction of the cultural patronization of the Adivasi by the city-settlers in the relationship between Rupi and Gurubari, as Rupi is manipulated to relinquish control of her entire household to Gurubari: "No one questioned Rupi's abilities as a mother or in the fields. It was only Gurubari who always demonstrated that she knew more than her." [67]

19 Pointing to a dichotomy between official and vernacular landscapes, Nixon argues that "a vernacular landscape is shaped by the historically textured maps that communities have devised over generations, maps replete with names and routes, maps alive to significant ecological and surface geological features." [68] On the other hand, an official landscape, oblivious to such earlier maps, "writes the land in a bureaucratic, externalizing, and extraction-driven manner that is often pitilessly instrumental." [69] Rooted in an animist interpretation of nature, Santhal villages are often named after the trees and the animals that populate the areas. For instance, the village of Kadamdihi was named after the *kadam* trees that grew there while the village of Horoghutu derived its name from the *horo*

(tortoises) that used to frequent its ponds. These places lose their etymological significance as the *kadam* trees get wiped out of Kadamdihi and the tortoises stop visiting the ponds of Horoghutu. Similarly, the Adivasi lose their cultural identity as generationally woven webs of cultural intimacy with the land get severed with the erasure of the original verdure of Chotanagpur. Mangal's self-introduction in "The Adivasi Will Not Dance" reveals him grappling for a stable sense of identity as new corporate meanings get encrypted into his vernacular landscape:

> My name is Mangal Murmu. I am a musician. No, wait… I am a farmer. Or… Was a farmer. Was a farmer is right. Because I don't farm anymore. In my village of Matiajore, in Amrapara block of the Pakur district, not many Santhals farm anymore. Only a few of us still have farmland; most of it has been acquired by a mining company. [70]

20 As the Santhal family of Sorens in "They Eat Meat" move to an Orthodox Hindu community in the Indian state of Gujarat, they gave up eating meat and eggs, "they conformed to the norms – they went to *mandirs*, [71] celebrated Hindu festivals, fasted on certain days, lit *dhoop-batti* [72] in their house – and were accepted." [73] As the Santhals migrate from their ancestral lands, they lose their cultural identity and are assimilated into mainstream society much like the land that becomes unrecognizable after a heavy industrial makeover.

21 The marginalization of Adivasi cultures runs parallel to their exoticization through a tokenistic inclusion of Adivasi dance, important to neoliberal India's image as a democratic, multicultural nation. Mangal Murmu highlights the irony of such selective inclusion: "For every benefit, in job, in education, in whatever, the *Diku* are quick to call Jharkhand their own – let the Adivasi go to hell. But when it comes to displaying Jharkhandi culture, the onus of singing and dancing is upon the Adivasi alone." [74] Mangal highlights the Adivasi's dehumanization as they dance like museum exhibits of "primitives" stuck in time: "We are like toys – someone presses our 'ON' button, or turns a key in our backsides, and we Santhals start beating rhythms on our *tamak* and *tumdak*, or start blowing on our *tiriyo* [75] while someone snatches away our very dancing grounds." [76] Making the Adivasi dance is as much a violent subjection of the Indigenous body to the whims of the neoliberal nation state as is its

subjection to sexual and physical violence. Like the police officer who uses Talamai's body or like Nirmal who uses Sona's body to satisfy their lust, the urban elite use the dancing body of the Adivasi to satisfy their neocolonial and consumerist urge for an escape from the hustle and bustle of corporate India to reconnect with a fantasized wilderness. Of course, in such a superficial encounter with the Adivasi, the urban elite remain disinterested in the plight of the dancers.

Conclusion

22 Amitayu Chakraborty observes that Hansda's works are "more than a postcolonial allegory of victimhood of an oppressed ethnic group in India"[77] as the fight and endurance of the Adivasi become indicative of "a subaltern resistance."[78] While Hansda's fiction is a memoir of the slow violence inflicted on Santhals, it is also a testament to what Nixon calls "the environmentalism of the poor."[79] Embedded in social, cultural, political, and economic struggles, the poor can never be single-issue activists,[80] forced by their material realities to have an intersectional approach to environmental justice. In the texts chosen for study, the Adivasi's struggle to reclaim the autonomy of their land and renew their original relationship with nature is interwoven with the struggle to reclaim their bodily autonomy. While both Rupi and Mangal's bodies become the site of their subjugation, it is also the site of their resistance. As Rupi constantly struggles to return to the workforce despite her ailing health, it is important to consider the link between her struggle to regain somatic control and her urge for a renewed connection to the fields she grew up working in.[81] Similarly, Mangal's corporeal reclamation in his refusal to dance remains tied to the struggle to reclaim the ancestral land of his clan: "Unless we are given back our homes and land, we will not sing and dance. We Adivasis will not dance."[82]

23 Hansda's choice of a global language like English for his fiction ensures that the story of the plight of the Santhals reaches a global audience. As his stories transcend Chotanagpur to attain transnational visibility, the slow violence inflicted on the plateau and its Indigenous people ceases to be a problem of the Global South,

demanding global corporate accountability for the ecocide. Mathew Areeparampil observes that as the deposits of minerals in the developed countries get gradually depleted, mining multinationals turn their eyes to India which has huge reserves of cheap labor and a vast potential for mineral exploitation. As the same companies are involved in the violation of Indigenous people's rights in several countries in the global South, including Papua New Guinea, and other countries in South America and South-East Asia, [83] they become involved in "global crimes of environmental racism (that treat certain communities as more expendable than others)." [84] Resonating with the struggles of Indigenous people across the world, Mangal Murmu's speech puts a stake at universality:

> For they too suffer, the same as I. They would have stood by me and, together, our voices would have rung out loud. They would have travelled out of our Santhal Pargana, out of our Jharkhand, all the way to Dilli and all of Bharat-disom; [85] the world itself would have come to know of our suffering. Then, perhaps, something would have been done for us. [86]

24 These words become an expression of solidarity for the victims of slow violence in different parts of the globe, encouraging a pan-international alliance of the dispossessed that would stand strong and someday emerge victorious against the mighty bulldozers of the global corporate.

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NOTES

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3 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and The Environmentalism of the Poor*, Cambridge (Ma.), Harvard University Press, 2011, p. 2.

4 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 2.

5 Ibid., p. 13.

6 See Amitayu Chakraborty, "Problematising 'Indigeneity' Through Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*," *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, vol. 11, No. 3, 2019, pp. 1-15; Debasree De, A *History of Adivasi Women in Post-Independence Eastern India: The Margins of the Marginals*, New Delhi, SAGE Publishing India, 2018; Anshul Avijit, "From 'Savages' to 'Saviours': Genealogy of Santhal Portrayal in Colonial Modernity," in Leïla Choukroune and Parul Bhandari (eds.), *Exploring Indian Modernities: Ideas and Practices*, Singapore, Springer, 2018, pp. 303-334; Prathama Banerjee, "Culture/Politics: The Irresolute Double-Bind of the Indian Adivasi," *Indian Historical Review*, vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 99-126; Rashmi Varma, "Representing the Adivasi: Limits and Possibilities of Postcolonial Theory," in Alf Gunwald Nielsen and Srila Roy (eds.), *New Subaltern Politics: Reconceptualising Hegemony and Resistance in Contemporary India*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 103-125.

7 Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 15.

8 This added note is from the guest editor: in this article, "Santhal" is spelled with an h to abide by Hansda's spelling of this word.

9 The Santhals are one of the largest ethnic groups of Eastern India, largely inhabiting the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Orissa. The Santhal community is one of the various Adivasi or Indigenous communities of the Indian subcontinent. In 1950, the Adivasi communities were listed in the Indian Constitution with an aim to bring about their social and economic development. In this catalogue, all the Adivasi groups came to be officially recognized as "Scheduled Tribes." The Santhals are one of the Scheduled Tribes in the Constitution of India.

10 Hansda is a surname associated with a clan within the Santhal community, one of the largest Indigenous communities of India. In his novel *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (New Delhi, Aleph Book Company, 2013, p. 13), Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar elaborates on the origin of his surname: "Hansdas, for instance, are said to have hatched from the eggs of the mythical swans, Hans and Hansli." In response to an interview question that inquired how Hansda came to be the author's first name despite it being a family name, the author replies: "My father wanted me to have an impressive name, so he gave me a long name with my surname placed at the beginning" (see Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar and Michelle D'costa, "Interview 9 – Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar," 25 March 2017). Adhering to the tradition of addressing authors by their last names in research articles, I refer to the author as "Hansda" in this article.

11 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 27.

12 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, New Delhi, Speaking Tiger Books LLP, 2017, p. 169.

13 Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing*, pp. 37-38.

14 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 184.

15 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 15.

16 Mike Davis, *Planet of the Slums*, New York, Verso, 2006, p. 72.

17 Abin Chakraborty, "Examining Subalterneity in Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's 'The Adivasi Will Not Dance'," *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 12, No. 1, 2017, p. 3.

18 Debasree De, *History*, p. 240.

19 Amitayu Chakraborty, "Problematising 'Indigeneity'," p. 8.

20 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 187.

21 Ibid., p. 165.

22 *Jill-Haku* is a colloquial Santhali expression for “non-vegetarian food.” Brahmins, who are at the top of the caste hierarchy in Orthodox Hinduism consider non-vegetarian food to be ritually impure.

23 Ibid., p. 2.

24 Mathew Areeparampil, “Displacement,” p. 1526.

25 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Mysterious Ailment*, p. 1.

26 *Dilli* (দিল্লি/दिल्ली) is the vernacular Bengali and Hindi pronunciation of New Delhi, the capital of India.

27 My own translation from Hindi *Bharat mahaan*: “India is great!” (भारत महान).

28 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 185.

29 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 166.

30 Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt et al., “Land Acquisition and Dispossession: Private Coal Companies in Jharkhand,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 47, No. 6, 2012, p. 40.

31 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 185.

32 Arundhati Roy, “The Greater Common Good,” *Frontline*, vol. 16, No. 11, 1999, p. 6.

33 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 17.

34 Ibid., p. 174.

35 Ibid., p. 174.

36 *Koyla* is a Bengali word for “coal” (কয়লা).

37 Ibid., pp. 174-175.

38 Ibid., p. 175.

39 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Mysterious Ailment*, p. 151.

40 Amitayu Chakraborty, “Problematising ‘Indigeneity’,” p. 6.

41 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Mysterious Ailment*, p. 6.

42 Jo Woodman (ed.), *Brutalized for Resistance: The Assault on Indigenous Women in Modi’s India*, Berlin, Survival International, 2022, p. 12.

43 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 147.

44 Ibid., p. 144.

45 Ibid., p. 144.

46 *Diku* is a colloquial Santhali expression for "outsider."

47 Abusive Hindi colloquialism for "whore."

48 Ibid., p. 166.

49 Ibid., p. 41.

50 *Gamcha* is a Bengali word for "towel" (গামছা).

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., pp. 173-174.

53 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 164.

54 *Jolha* is a colloquial Santhali word for "Muslims." The term originally referred to the Muslim weavers of the Chotanagpur region.

55 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, pp. 175-176.

56 Id., *Mysterious Ailment*, p. 108.

57 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 162.

58 Nitya Rao, "Displacement From Land: Case of Santhal Parganas," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 40, No. 41, p. 4440.

59 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 39.

60 Ibid., p. 42.

61 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 19.

62 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 186.

63 Jason W. Moore, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, Michigan, Kairos PM, 2016, p. 79.

64 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 173.

65 *Haandi* and *Paura* are rice-based fermented beverages brewed in central India in the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar as well as parts of north-east India such as West Bengal and Assam. Consumption of alcohol is considered ritually impure among the upper castes in Orthodox Hinduism.

66 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Mysterious Ailment*, p. 14.

67 Ibid., p. 109.

68 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 17.

69 Ibid., p. 17.

70 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, pp. 170-171.

71 *Mandir* is a Hindi word for "temple" (मंदिर).

72 *Dhoop-batti* is a Hindi word for "incense sticks" (धूप-बत्ती) used in the ritualistic worship of Hindu gods.

73 Ibid., p. 15.

74 Ibid., p. 179.

75 *Tamak* and *Tumdak* are percussion instruments while *Tiriyo* is a wind instrument used in Santhal music and dance.

76 Ibid., p. 170.

77 Amitayu Chakraborty, "Problematising 'Indigeneity'," p. 7.

78 Ibid.

79 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 4.

80 Ibid.

81 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Mysterious Ailment*, p. 151.

82 Id., *Adivasi*, p. 187.

83 Mathew Areeparampil, "Displacement Due to Mining in Jharkhand," pp. 1527-1528.

84 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 59.

85 *Bharat-disom* refers to India in the Santhali language.

86 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 169.

ABSTRACTS

English

The most mineral-rich zone of India, the Chotanagpur plateau has been the center of a scramble for coal, iron ore, bauxite, and manganese since the country's independence in 1947. Thousands of Indigenous people or "Adivasi" have been displaced by mining operations in the region. In his theorization of "slow violence," Rob Nixon highlights the challenges of representing ecocides that are made invisible under capitalism. The role of the writer-activist, he says, is instrumental to bringing these ecocides into imaginative focus. This paper uses Nixon's theoretical framework to focus on Indian Indigenous author Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's narrative

strategy of "somatic landscapes" in his dramatization of slow violence in Chotanagpur.
Giving figurative shape to the imperceptible threat of ecocide, Hansda turns the Indigenous body into his theater of violence. In the short story collection, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2017), and the novel, *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2013), the Adivasi body becomes the site on which Hansda inscribes the ecological destruction of Chotanagpur. But Hansda also thinks of the Adivasi body as a site of political/personal resistance that involves the reclamation of their relationship with the land. Attempts to reestablish this connection are closely related to their struggle for somatic dignity and autonomy. Hansda's narrative of slow violence transcends Chotanagpur to lay bare transnational networks of structural violence and the global politics of (in)visibility that dispose of delicate ecosystems and Indigenous lives to make way for neoliberal development.

Français
Le plateau de Chotanagpur est la zone la plus riche en minéraux de l'Inde. Il a été l'objet d'une ruée vers le charbon, le minerai de fer, la bauxite et le manganèse depuis l'indépendance de ce pays en 1947. Des milliers d'Indigènes, aussi appelés « Adivasi », ont été déplacés par les opérations minières organisées dans cette région. Lorsqu'il théorise la « violence lente », Rob Nixon souligne les défis rencontrés pour représenter les écocides qui sont rendus invisibles par le capitalisme. Le rôle des auteurs-activistes, affirme-t-il, est instrumental pour mettre en avant ces écocides dans l'imaginaire. Cet article utilise le cadre théorique de Nixon pour se focaliser sur la stratégie narrative des « paysages somatiques » développée par l'auteur autochtone indien Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar dans sa dramatisation de la violence lente au Chotanagpur.
En donnant une forme figurative à la menace imperceptible des écocides, Hansda transforme le corps autochtone en théâtre de violence. Dans le recueil de nouvelles, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2017), comme dans le roman, *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2013), le corps des Adivasi devient le lieu sur lequel Hansda inscrit la destruction écologique du Chotanagpur. Mais Hansda pense aussi que le corps des Adivasi est le lieu d'une résistance politique et personnelle qui implique la réclamation de leur relation particulière à la terre. Les tentatives pour ré-établir ce lien sont fortement reliées à leur lutte pour une autonomie et une dignité somatique. La narration de la violence lente par Hansda transcende le Chotanagpur pour mettre à nu les réseaux transnationaux de la violence structurelle ainsi que la politique internationale de l'(in)visibilité qui dispose d'écosystèmes délicats et des vies autochtones pour laisser place au développement néo-libéral.

Español
La meseta de Chotanagpur es la zona más rica en minerales en India. Desde la independencia del país en 1947, ha sido objeto de una estampida hacia el carbón, el mineral de hierro, la bauxita y el magnesio. Miles de indígenas de

la región, también llamados Adivasi, fueron desplazados por unas operaciones mineras organizadas en esta región. Al teorizar sobre la "violencia lenta", Rob Nixon subraya los desafíos con los que se topa para representar los ecocidas que el capitalismo invisibiliza. El papel de los autores-activistas, afirma, es instrumental para mostrar estos ecocidas en el imaginario. Este artículo utiliza el marco teórico de Nixon para focalizarse en la estrategia narrativa de los «paisajes somáticos» desarrollada por el autor autóctono indio Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar en su dramatización de la violencia lenta en Chotanagpur.
Al dar una forma figurativa a la amenaza imperceptible de los ecocidas, Hansda transforma el cuerpo autóctono en teatro de violencia. En el conjunto de novelas, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2017), como en la novela, *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2013), el cuerpo de los Adivasi se convierte en el lugar sobre el cual Hansda inscribe la destrucción ecológica del Chotanagpur. Pero Hansda piensa también que el cuerpo de los Adivasi es el lugar de una resistencia política y personal que implica la reclamación de su relación con la tierra. Las tentativas para restablecer este lazo están fuertemente relacionadas a su lucha por una autonomía y una dignidad somática. La narración de la violencia lenta por Hansda transciende el Chotanagpur para poner a la vista de todas las redes transnacionales de la violencia estructural así como la política internacional de la (in)visibilidad de que dispone de ecosistemas frágiles y vidas autóctonas para dejar sitio al desarrollo neo-liberal.

INDEX

Mots-clés
Adivasi, Santhal, violence lente, Hansda, écocide, Chotanagpur, secteur minier

Keywords
Adivasi, Santhal, slow violence, Hansda, ecocide, Chotanagpur, mining

Palabras claves
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