



Being Outsiders in ‘The Inside’: A Diasporic Evolution Ensued to the Subjects In Sara Joseph’s Novel *Budhini*

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Abstract:

This paper analyses the major characters of the Malayalam novel *Budhini* , which is as matured as the other creations of the writer Sara Joseph. The novel is a commentary of the life of Budhini Mehjan who was a victim of the Post Independent India’s developmental strategies. Diaspora is a term related to the migrated lot from Israel after losing their homeland, and currently the it denotes those who are alienated from their homeland. This novel records the life of a group of people who were forced to discard their native lands for a greedy authority. This paper aims at identifying the diasporic evolutions in the novel.

Keywords : Diaspora, Dislocation, Displacement, Multiculturalism

‘Independence’ is a key word that decorates the name India, as a crown to a pretty princess. But it is merely a word that cannot be practised properly. Indians got freedom in 15 August 1947. In reality, freedom and liberty are words meant for a minority in the social, political, economic context of India. Neo-colonialism is the prevailing practice in the present Indian scenario. The British Raj is recreated by the so called ones in the Upper social strata. The result will be the ceaseless sufferings of the so called minorities in the lower strata. The absurdity and ambiguity is that the number of the supposed minorities is double or triple as that of the majorities. As agriculture cannot afford a sufficient share to the Indian treasury, the post-Independent India witnessed a giant number of developmental programmes as a part of the industrialisation and urbanization. The creation of many storeyed buildings, factories, etc. are for ‘development’. Progress without proper notice to the environment will not attain a chronic success. Production of dams is the major developmental strategy of our first Prime Minister, who called them ‘temples’. Sardar Sarovar dam is one such dam to tame the river Narmada. Rivers have a natural way of flowing and in rainy seasons there might be flood. But dams are not an ultimate way to prevent flood. The authorities are ignorant of the poor people, especially the tribal or Adivasis who consider rivers, forests, animals, birds, and everything natural as a part of their soul. In the name of development, they are forced to sacrifice everything they regard as precious. Dislocation and displacement denote the present condition of tribal people in India. Without their mistake, they have to say good bye to their motherland within a short span of time. The entire land is under the control of the authorities. So they want to move to a strange land and are made ‘others’ within their homeland.

Budhini, a recent celebrated novel in Malayalam literature by Sara Joseph, depicts the traumatic life of the titular character Budhini Mehjan. It is an account of the pathetic womanhood among the ab origins ; compel the female to suffer both physically and mentally in the name of superstitions and false beliefs. But, the novel cannot be identified completely as a feminist novel. More than that, it is a clear-cut commentary of the

diasporic lot of Indian aborigines in the transitional period of independence. The Nigerian art critic Okwui Enwezor says “The formation of a diaspora could be articulated as the quintessential journey into becoming; a process marked by incessant regroupings, recreations, and reiteration. Together these stressed actions strive to open up new spaces of discursive and performative postcolonial consciousness.” In *Budhini*, such a diasporic formation is evident throughout the novel.

The novel begins like this;

band is there, beat is there
 song is there, dance is there
 but no land for dancing

These lines of a folk song suggest the lack of a space to do what somebody needs to do. In the primary reading, the reader cannot identify the first character appears is the heroine. She calls her daughter Ratni to accompany her in a hurry in order to catch a jeep taxi to reach the Paancheth dam in search of a job. The first chapter ends with a suspicion that the mother and daughter attempted suicide by jumping into the dam due to despair.

The second chapter reveals the real frame work of the novel.

‘Our people likes to believe that she had attempted suicide. Before many years.’ says Roopi Murmu, a distant relative of Budhini to her friend and free-lance photographer, Suchithra. Roopi was not familiar with Budhini and had not even seen her. Her grandpa or Dadu gave her a clear picture of Budhini which led her to take the subject of Budhini and her villages as her research topic. Dadu, Jagdeep Murmu is a Saanthaal, a tribal group prominent in Bihar, Jharghand, Bengal etc. Murmu, Mehjan, Marandi, Soren etc. are different sur names of Saanthaals.

Dadu was one against the modernisation and urbanisation of Nehru government. Paanchet dam was one such plan to tame the river Deodar. Nehru calls dams ‘temples of India’. His attempt was to reduce the disasters of flood. But the tribals opposed that idea because of their instinctual knowledge of nature. The dam was built. Starvation was a major issue of Kaarbona village of Budhini. Saanthaali people liked to live within the rhythm of nature. They couldn’t even imagine an earning without the help of the mother earth. But they eventually accept jobs in DVC. Budhini was an employee in Damodar Valley cop. At the inauguration, the PM decked Budhini with the garland meant for him and gave her the opportunity to inaugurate the function. Her tragedy begins here. Because of Nehru’s decking her with the garland she was declared as his wife by the village elders. She was exiled from her community and village because of her marriage with a Diku or a non saanthaal.

Again in the sixth chapter Roopi Murmu appears as a Delhi based girl brought up as the daughter of a Railway official Baba Joseph Jobon Murmu. Jobon compelled his children to speak English fluently. Dadu restricted his grandchildren to speak Saanthaali in their home affairs. He calls English as ‘the language of the white devils’. He hesitates to call a glass , a glass but a Lotta, a Saanthaali term. Shalni, Roopi’s mother supports her father in law in such cases and wears the typical Saanthaali dress Panchi and Parhana as a memoir of their precious culture. Hassasakkams or Sand bangles are a symbol of Saanthaal’s relation with nature, a strict ornament for a Saanthaal woman. In his *Imaginary Homeland*, Salman Rushdie says :

Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools.

Jagdeep’s family symbolises a similar condition of bestriding between the Saanthaal life and the neo- colonial Indian system.

Shalni likes to hear the past events from the life of Jagdeep who reminds of the arrival of the dam and its bad impact on his people. The dam can create flood thus the villagers are compelled to migrate from their homeland to nearby villages. The Maanjis or leaders and the village Elders assembled a meeting for taking decision. Bongas or spirits, Maraangburu or guard spirit of the village, etc. are worshipped inside the village. If the villagers desert the homeland they will also discard their belief which is the bedrock of their culture, and are forced to migrate due to a disastrous flood.

Jagdeep's family migrated to Chatisgarh after losing all their properties and belongings. They were treated as beggars by the people of their newly inhabited area. They had to work in iron mines. The character of Gopichand Thakkoor symbolises the hypocrisy towards the ignorant diasporic lot. While searching for the lost son Surjan, Somnita, Jagdeep's wife, wanted to sacrifice both her chastity and life. A second migration to Jharia in Dhanbad, a land which is burning inside without a pause. It is a coalfield. As Sudarshan a villager of Jharia says 'it has been burning for centuries'. Here he lost his son Jola who disappeared to the burning centre of the earth. Stuart Hall of the view that people dispersed from their homeland belong to one and several homes. This fact is vividly seen in *Budhini*.

Budhini was excommunicated from Karbona all on a sudden and without a trial. She left without a second pair of dress. The most pathetic condition of a woman to be without a piece of cloth to prevent her menstrual blood. She got a refuge in the DVC building and was easily caught. She took shelter in the forest but forced to run forward. In the nineteenth chapter she reached her final destination. She was rescued by Dathaji, a Brahmin who wanted to be exiled from his native street for that deed. At first Budhini lived with Janbhari, who worked in a coalfield. Her past stories were spread there and she with Dathaji fled over to Puruliya and made a 'humble hut' in a slum. They had to work in a coal field in Ranipur. Ratni was born. They wanted to leave there to many other places. In order to get a job Budhini and Ratni visited DVC which is the opening of the novel.

At the end of the tenth chapter Jagdeep was reconciled by a Christian nun who inspires him to 'believe in Jesus'. But he couldn't completely discard his Maraangbaru and Bongas. Even though he allows his son Jobon to lead a pious Christian life. Multiculturalism is one of the features of diasporic writing which doesn't demolish one culture but make a bridge between the two. Christianity and modernisation made a tremendous change in the life of Jagdeep Murmu and family.

When Jagdeep lost Surjan, there was not even a single photograph of him remains. Same was the case of Jola. With the migration they lost their properties and mainly their identity. Quest for identity plays an important role in diasporic writing. Immigrants struggle to adapt the host culture with a nostalgia towards their homeland and its culture. We get the clear picture of Saanthaali youngsters who are playing flutes by sitting on a saal tree. Both Jagdeep and Budhini recollect such nostalgic events. There are a series of traditional Saanthaali folk songs included in the novel. It is a deliberate attempt from the part of the author to blend the plot with a real Saanthaali background.

Dislocation and displacement are not only an external process but it has an internal range. Internal displacement is comparatively of a higher degree than the external dislocation or displacement. If one can overcome the external changes can also resist its internal result. Charles Darwins' theories of 'struggle for the existance' and 'the survival of the fittest' is universally applicable to the so called 'others'. The only way to survive is re habitation. Re habitation only gives a shelter. There emerges 'existential crisis.' One is adapted to his or her surroundings cannot easily get a way to earning. Thus they are compelled to leave their hereditary jobs and practices. Thus they are made into a novel being- between a past and a present without thinking or knowing the future.

Dislocation is seen everywhere in the novel. Budhini and family had to flee at last to the house of Hissy in Aasansol. Hissy a drunkard mother, addicted to drugs give up the responsibility of her children to Budhini as a rent to live in her house. After they fled from there, Budhini is appeared at the final part as a successful woman. Jagdeep's case is not different. He also fled like a bird from place to place. Every new location makes them strangers or aliens. In Dathaji's street Budhini was alienated due to her cast. Where ever she reached she wanted to face some degree of alienation. Similarly, Jagdeep and family alienated from their host lands because of their class, caste and customs.

The term diaspora is ambiguous in nature. In literature it means the writings of authors who are migrated from their home lands and search for a new identity in their present surrounding. Sara Joseph is not a diasporic writer intentionally. But in *Budhini* the reader can identify a series of diasporic attributes vividly. The major traits of diasporic writings are homelessness, multiculturalism, nostalgia, dislocation, alienation and quest for identity. *Budhini* is a reservoir of all these aspects. Nenia Campbell in her celebrated work *Escape* says,

Identities were like teeth: hard to maintain and easy to lose, but people tended to look at you funny when you were missing one.

Like this the novel beings lost their identity. They are dubious to practice their normal rituals. They like the tamed river cannot move a bit of their own. Identity crisis slowly develops into a kind of inferiority. These people have to suffer for the comforts of the other people. Beyond the suffering, they are become outsiders-being outsiders in 'the inside'.

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