

Resisting the Forces of Stagnation as Reflected in K.J.Baby's *Nadugadhika*

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Nadugadhika is a post-colonial play in which K.J.Baby deals with the culture of Adiya tribes. Through this play K.J. Baby shows the pathetic condition of Adiya tribes who could never escape from the grip of colonization by landlords. In Malayalam literature, one would come to know of Adivasis from the writings of others, especially from the settlers. No one rises as a writer from any of the tribes because of lack of education. Many writers speak about the beauty of Wayanad. But only few of them wrote about the marginalized condition of tribal people. They are physically exploited by others. K.J.Baby's play *Nadugadhika* is written to create an insight into their status in the contemporary society. To achieve this he uses their language. He selects actors from among the Adivasis and dramatizes their condition. *Nadugadhika* speaks about the downtrodden or marginalized condition of Adivasis especially the lifestyle of Adiya tribes.

Cultural criticism developed first in Great Britain and later in European continent. Cultural critics accentuate on the practice of the routine life. They analyse human subjectivity as an artefact of culture. They try to realise the social context in which a literary work has been written. As Peter Berry states, "the study of historical material within a politicised framework, this frame work including the present which those literary texts have in some way helped to shape" (176). This paper is an attempt to evaluate the play *Nadugadhika*, as a cultural artefact which could be read in association with the social context such as economic, political and education system.

The hills of Wayanad are on the borders of Kerala, Karnataka and Tamilnadu. There are many tribes of aborigines in Wayanad. Adiyas, Paniyas, Naykas, Kurichias, Kurumas, Pulayas and Kanaladees are some of them. These different tribes have distinct dialects, customs and clothing. Most of them live in colonies made up of small huts huddling together. The Paniyas and Adiyas are the two of these tribes considered the lowest of the lot by themselves and others. They

own no land. In olden days, masters would allot a small plot for each colony on the border of their plantation or paddy field. After a year or two when the surroundings are cleared enough, the masters will ask them to move on to another plot. Thus they are always on the move forever dependent on the masters for food and shelter. Even today a plot of few cents is crowded with as many huts as possible. It is helpless permanence.

Adiyas and Paniyas have their own languages, but these have no alphabets or written symbols. They have their own customs, rituals, songs and legends. A small drum called ‘Thudi’ is a part of all these rituals. Each ritual calls for a different rhythm from this thudi. And like all languages these too are the results of the evolution of their collective thinking through centuries. The Paniyas were caught and made slaves at the very primitive stage. But the Adiyas were transformed into slaves, not by physical subjugation but by spiritual enslavement. It was a cultural taming. Being a trusting simple people, they were vulnerable to tricks and intellectual eye-washes. But once enslaved both went through the same slow stagnation. Their vast world once spread over hills, valleys and forest shrunk into the patches of each master’s field and farm. The evolution of their dreams stagnated within the master’s petty demands. The slaves lost everything-their relationship with nature, their concept of life, love and death and their dreams.

Writer-activist K.J.Baby had always empathised with the tribal who had lost their identities when the ‘civilised world’ encroached. Baby moved to Wayanad district in Kerala in the early 1970s. Living among the tribal and experiencing their rich repository of songs, myths and art forms, awoke the writer in him. He wrote his first play, *Apoorna* in late 70s followed by *Nadugadhika* in 1982. His first novel *Mavelimantram* won him the Sahitya Academy award. ‘Kanavu’ (dream), the school he set up, is helping them rise above oppression and marginalisation to assert their individuality.

Nadugadhika is a ritual conducted to exorcise the evil spirit of the land. The Moopans or the chiefs of certain area get together and conduct and visit each house and exorcise evil spirits and they offer rice and coconut and fowls. They get dressed in the Gadhika attire and visit every Adiya house in that area. The whole village follow them and reach by the side of a river and sacrifice the fowls. Thus all the evil spirit causing diseases in the land are bought and exorcises in the river. In the play this particular ritual is metaphorically used to do away with the evil ways of their landlords. The religious ritual transformed in to a historical one. In this ethnic play, Gadhikakaran acts as the mouth piece of the author. A sequential presentation of the history of the tribes is undertaken by the Gadhikakaran through the ritual. The history of Wayanad since some

two hundred years has been unravelled by the dramatist with the help of this character, Gadhikakaran. The dramatist tries to provoke the memory of the native with a detailed enactment of history up to their present condition-from vague legends to the dreary present. Gadhikakaran persuades the native people to fight against the landlords, the middle men and, tribal officers who were exploiting them.

The stage is filled with darkness and silence except the sound of 'Thudi'(an instrument). Tamburan or the master arrives and surveys the group of dancers. The master drags Lakshmanam, an Adiyar, who bear the marks of having undergone a stretch of formal education, to the forestage. Tamburan or the master tries to deposit upon him a bit of his own wisdom.

TAMBURAN: Do you know what that means? Ah means Brahma (with an expression of awe) Brahma the Creator.

He created this universe. Then he created the four caste from his forehead, his mouth, his chest and his limbs respectively. And then, all the rest was created for our sake-even you, the outcast! Do you realise that? (*Nadugadhika*, 41) Here the master is the personification of the master evil spirit exploiting these people, keeping them enslaved through the ages. The Tamburan literally means 'god'. In each period of history the manifestations are different, yet the spirit is the same.

The dancers started chanting with a begging bowl, first slowly and then loudly. It is a yell of hunger and it is the key note of a slave's half-starved existence. Then the Gadhikakaran enters and chants about the life situation of the slaves,

GADHIKAKARAN: There at Thamburan's gate, bowl in hand, begging. His old eyes search past the lands, past the paddy fields. Those lands and this fields he toiled in during all his able years. His eyes roam over the hills and the plains, the saplings he planted, the fields he made. (*Nadugadhika*, 43)

As generations of slavery followed one after the other, here is no doubt that slavery was one's lot and it would go on till death. A slave is a slave for ever and ever. Every birth of the slave belongs to a master. In the past, the present and the future births slave is a slave. They believe that even after death their work begins there, of keeping watch over the crop. He is still the lowest and slave, but deathless. Thus any sanguine hopes, at least about a life after death, were dashed to the grounds. And this conditioning by the masters was probably effected through the moopans, (the chief)-the moopans who had been appointed by the master and thus become the double agents of the tribal gods and the masters.

Gadikakaran tries to flash up their past. Instead of speaking to them, he tries to make them speak. When they came forward with the description of their daily lives, realisation dawned on them: there is no much difference between the description on one day and the next! The monotony of it really stuck them for the first time. A faint restlessness at the state of affairs began to annoy them –a restlessness that is the first awakening of a thinking being. K.J.Baby brings forth the importance of a common goal too for once Indians stood united-freedom. And the trust of this unity created many a fissure in the rigid caste system. The freedom movement pervaded all walks of life and it gave rise to a new genre of literature and art.

Even in a furious situation, when slaves refuse to obey his orders, Tamburan makes all sorts of accusations,

TAMBURAN: Who is Gandhi? Gandhi, Gandhi!(scorns)

Hey can that upstart come anywhere near the British

Now what's wrong with the British?

Quit India? Let's see who quits India

Temple Entry Proclamation? What's that now, who wants to enter the temple?

With real sincerity, some workers of communist parties tried to awaken these people to political realities of the age. But no one of these echoes reached Adiyas and Paniyas. Not even the shreds of Land Reforms. They were still smouldered in dreamless darkness and in burnt up tears. Gadhiakaran compelled the slaves to ask questions to their lords reigning over them. He supported them in asking on small issues which may lead the ways to bigger things. They marked the beginning of changing by asking the lord to use a standard litre instead of bamboo piece.

Realising that the things are not too pleasant as before, the lord decided to give in and agreed to replace the bamboo measure with the standard litre. The lord tried to act as a comrade and informed them about his post in the coming election, carrying a flag with him. Gadhiakaran took away the flag and the slaves helped him to overpower the Tamburan.

GADHIKAKARAN: His truth, his ethics, his wealth, his life! Our life don't seems to matter! (looks at the flags) These flags are imbued with the colours of blood, sweat and tears. They symbolises the characteristics of the different stages of history, their unique aspirations. Let us hold them with humble hearts and vow to fulfil those aspirations (*Nadugadhika*, 70)

The tribes were in a state of trance when they could decipher the reality. A wind fall of a day's work and its wages goes for liquor. Drunk with the stuff, they fight among themselves and breaks

off the last links of love and the last links of kinship in their tribe. With him the educated Lakshmanan joins the movement. He glared down the Tamburan and asked him to pull off his shoes and touch the mother Earth with reverence. At the end of the play every one joined the group and each of them questions Tamburan that has been tormenting them for ages, the questions they never could voice before.

GADHIKAKARAN: We are going to complete it, to exorcise this land of evil spirit of your sort. Let us take this evil spirit along. Let us take it for a spiritual procession among our kith and kin. Let us take it to the 'Gadhika thara' below the hills where the dreams of our ancestors buries, by the stream along which flow the tears and tales of our ancestors. (*Nadugadhika* 79)

Thus they complete their ritual by exorcising the land of evil spirit like their lord.

Nadugadhika is the lament of the marginalised people. The aim of this play would be the same as that of a Nadugadhika-to exorcise the spirit of disease, of ignorance. The religious ritual is transformed in to a historical one. It deals with the history of Wayanad some two hundred years ago and about the people who have completely forgotten their past. K.J.Baby wanted to provoke their memories- from the vague legends repeated so unconcernedly at their rituals, through the different stages of history, up to the dreary present. This musical drama, tries to analysis the reasons that led to their present conditions-a present that seems to hold no future unless their creative energy resurrected in an insurgence against the forces that hold them in the perpetual darkness of ignorance and slavery. This symbolic enactment of resurrection should, at least for those few hours, unleash their creative energy. This gave them the possibility of resisting the forces of stagnation and recommencing their once stunted cultural growth.

While looking the current scenario one can see that the exploitation of Adivasis continues. They have no land to live. Their struggle for land shows their pathetic condition even in 21st century. It is high time to wake up to the realisation of their rights and duties and experience what is to be real being fighting to be free.

Works Cited

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