



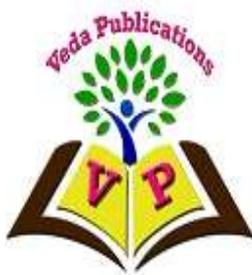
## **VOICES FROM THE MARGINS: A READING OF K.J BABY'S NADUGADHIKA**

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### **ABSTRACT**



Tribals are perceived as a distinct segment of the Indian society. Though socially backward, they have a rich tradition and culture. Time has not much told about these people and there has been a strong tendency to marginalize them and they were even considered as uncultured. Though tribals possess rich tradition and culture they were not given proper recognition. Often they were relegated or marginalized in discourses and practices. But now that things have changed; these groups who were once considered as marginalized began fighting for de-centering the so called "center" by voicing their problems through literature. The present paper entitled Voices from the margins: A Reading of *Nadugadhika* tries to delineate the pathetic lament of adiya tribes who were relegated to the fringes of the society by the colonizers.

**Keywords:** *Colonization, Marginalisation, Nadugadhika, Tribals.*

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The cultural evolution theory formulated by Morgan had affected the pattern of thought all over the world which had serious repercussions on the tribal society. As a result they have been considered as a primitive society and uncultured. In spite of having their own history, culture and language, tribals were marginalized in discourses. The ongoing process of globalization has opened up serious debates and deliberations on the endangered cultures of the world. Indigenous communities today are seeking innovative ways to heal what Yellow Horse Brave Heart has termed "historical trauma". This injury is both individual and collective, and is transmitted across generations. Many indigenous writers believe in the power of language to heal natives from those bitter experiences.

The history of tribals in India is filled with stories of forced slavery, displacement, land-alienation and marginalization. Each state in India has its own stories of the colonial experience and marginalization of the tribals. Considering the terrible violence leashed on the tribals against which they have been fighting, it is nothing short of a miracle that they have still managed to preserve their culture and languages. As far as the tribals are concerned, they do not have written literature. In order to regulate the system of the social and political life of the people, what predominantly exists is the oral tradition. In recent years tribals have taken to writing. Tribal literature, earlier dismissed by the main stream writers as insignificant has now embraced complex genres like novel and drama, carving out its space in the world literature.

Kerala, the small state in the southern tip of the Indian peninsula is homeland to numerous tribal communities. In Malayalam Literature some writers have tried to give voice to them. K.J Baby, though a non-native writer, his contribution to revive the tribals is unparalleled. Baby's play *Nadugadhika* is written to create an insight into their present status in the society. The play delineates the life of adiya tribes, inhabiting in the panoramic hilly regions of Wayanad, a southern district in Kerala. *Nadugadhika*, while dealing with the exploited condition of the Adiya tribes also tries to provoke the memory of the natives of their glorious past when they were liberated souls. Baby unravels before the audience

the inhuman attitude that the colonizers adopt towards the tribals thereby presenting an in-depth criticism on colonization.

In the play *Gadhikaran*, who acts as the spokesperson of the author performs a ritual *Nadugadhika* and presents the detailed history of adiyas upto their present situation. *Nadugadhika* is a ritual conducted to exorcise evil spirits from their land. Traditionally, this ritual played a central role in the religious culture of the adiya tribes. The *moopans* of tribal settlements gets dressed up in the *gadhika* attire and visits tribal huts to exorcise evil spirits. There is a popular belief among adiyas that this ritual conducted at home will bring them prosperity and cure diseases. *Gadhikaran* wears the *gadhika* dress with a red band and goes to each house to collect offerings. In between people gather and sacrifice fowls in order to cure the misfortunes and calamities of the land. *Gadhikaran* says: "Let's take this evil spirit along. Let us take it for a ritual procession among our kith and kin. Let us take it to the *Gadhikathara* below the hills where the dreams of our ancestors lie buried, by the stream along which flow the tears and tales of our ancestors" (Baby 1983).

The ritual *Nadugadhika* in the play is metaphorically used to make the tribals aware of the exploitation of their *tamburan* on them. While doing so he also makes them understand that the means of the exploitation is constructed by those in power. Through a series of historical enactments *Gadhikaran* unveils before them the root cause of their marginalization, which is nothing but a self-inflicted one. Like the Greek chorus, *Gadhikaran* narrates some incidents in their life that accounts to their present pathetic situation. From this it is revealed that adiyas were people who had a rich past and a well-developed sensibility. *Gadhikaran* remembers a time when the *Mavelimantatheyyam* lived, an age of innocence devoid of inequalities and slavery. Being vulnerable to tricks, their physical and mental subjugation was an easy task for *Tamburans*. Counter narratives were built on this myth and they were made to believe that their ancestors *Melorichan* and *keyyerothi* were caught as captives by god who sends them to the *tampurans* to become their slaves. Whenever they planned an escape



fromsalvery god sent 'Mali', a female deity to trace them and to bring them back. Tamburans tactically used Mali as an effective weapon to frighten adivasis into subjugation. Thus begin their woeful tale of exploitation; losing all rights they exercised over their land. Adiyas were thus relegated to small patches of their master's field.

*Nadughadika* presents the history of adivasis for over two centuries. And for the people living on the edge, Baby emerges as the revolutionary leader:

Here were a people who had completely forgotten their past. I wanted to provoke their memories from the vague legends repeated so unconcernly at their rituals, through the different stages of history, up to the dreary present. 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. (1983)

The fragmented memories of Yachan, a character in the play takes us to the distant past of the tribals. He says: "I remember *Valliyorkavu* where reigns Mali, the goddess who kept us in leash kept us imprisoned to the lords of the hills" (1983). Gadhikakaran, through his sequential presentation of the history not only tries to provoke memories of their past but also tries to throw light on their deliberately distorted history.

Baby, delineates with anger and protest the instances of economic exploitation committed by the people in power. Upto six decades ago adiyas used to assemble in front of the *valliyorkkavu* temple during annual festival in March. Although there aren't any historical documents supporting the existence of slave market, *valliyorkkavu* was the centre of power in the feudal system. They have to pledge before the deity that they would serve a particular employer till the next festival. Each adiya tribe scared of the wrath of the goddess 'Mali, pledges not to escape from the bondage of their tamburan for a year. Thus bonded labour condemns tribals to a series of life sentences of enslavement and hard work.

*Kambalam* is another ritual conducted by the Tamburans, performed at the time of harvesting in paddy fields where both men and women participated. It was customary for big farmers to arrange *kambalam* during harvest season. In fact this was a strategy employed by the tamburans to speed up their work to get better yields; which is yet another instance of physical exploitation leashed on the tribals. Tamburans would send their slaves to nearby settlements to invite more of them to join for *kambalam*. Some men and women sang and dance with their traditional musical instruments *thudi* and *kuzhal* while others danced rhythmically with graceful movements forgetting their work load resulting in the exploitation of their time and energy.

Exploitation of the tribals both physical and psycholocial doesn't end with death. They are doomed to suffer in the afterworld as well. The myth of *Keeyuloka*, the nether world is constructed by the Tamburans which crushes their only hope to meet their ancestors in the nether world. *Keeyuloka* is the replica of this world where slaves in this world remain slaves forever to their masters. Tamburan says: "You are bound for *Keeyuloka*, the nether world. And it belongs to us. Here and hereafter, in this world or the next, obey us that you may get along. And mind you no tricks. Kalankoranan is the task master there. Any tricks one grab by the feet and a dash into the sea" (1983). Gadhikakaran deconstructs this myth proving that *keeyuloka* is a constructed one: "When we are dead we reach *Keeyuloka*, the nether world. It is the replica of this world with the same lords and the same slaves. Once this position is injected into our hearts, our ancestors lost all hope, even to run away, to escape. Darkness descended on them, in this world and the next" (1983).

Like most traditional indigenous people, the religion of Adiya tribes is animistic. Mali, a fierce goddess who is the construction of those in power becomes an effective weapon for tamburans to gain control over tribals. Thus adiyas are denied the right to enjoy freedom and eventually they lose their cultural identity as well. Baby here tries to deconstruct the mythical constructions of tamburans thereby unveiling the ignorance about their true history distorted by their masters.



Even though the changing political scenario offers fresh hopes for tribals, tamburan moves swiftly with the tides and crushes the dreams of tribals and their exploitation thus becomes a never ending process. Land reforms that were implemented by the government didn't do any good for tribals. Tribals were evicted from their land, depriving them of their natural resources. 'Payyikkinto', the pathetic lament of velly keeps echoing throughout the novel.

Even the faltering attempts of a people's government to bring about reforms never reached us. Not even the shreds of the Land reform Act. Even the idea of an elected government and what the people could expect of it remains alien to us. In this world and the next we smouldered in dreamless darkness, in burnt up tears. (1983)

Baby portrays tamburans as the most cunning and dangerous, one that tribals were supposed to watch for. He also expresses his anger throughout the play against tamburan for threatening adiyas' independence while also suggesting that tribals had the physical and mental strength to break the shackles of slavery imposed on them. Gadhikakaransheds light on the ways in which adiyas were enslaved and persuades them into fighting their enemy who exploited them. By making an emotion appeal to involve tribals in organizing protest, Gadhikarakaran instills hope in them that the day is not far where they can reclaim their past in its full glory and their enemy shall cease to exit.

The significance of the play *Nadugadhikalies* in its subtle subversion of many myths that have been constructed about tribals. Baby uses their myth, history and language and selects actors from among tribals to dramatize their marginalized condition; foregrounding the dilemma of the physical exploitation and economic oppression of adiya tribes. *Nadugadhika*, though penned by a non-native writer faithfully represents the life of adiyas giving voice for them to speak back to the powers that exploited them.

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