# Plural Representations of Democratic Dissenters and Plight of Minority Voices

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## The Problem

Argument may be open up with questions:

1. Whether democratic activities accommodate plural voices?
2. Whether democrats accommodate marginal voices?

This discussion will examine literary records to understand deeper realities related to the "plural" and "marginal" voices in democracy. Inclusive approach of democracy idealizes accommodation of plural voices. But how plural is "plural"? What are the processes democratic dissenters follow to include all voices? Traditional tribal political systems are referred to as democratic but exclude women's voices. That means women's voices are formally and formally unheard voices. In India, numerically or economically dominant voices are heard in caste villages' socio-political systems. In such a situation voices from Dalit castes and women across castes boundaries are unheard. Indeed unheard voices are layered, whether they represent rural-space or urban-space across geographical, social, and cultural boundaries.

## Objectives of the Study

1. To locate nature of isolation of intellectual(s) who were concerned with minority issues

## Methods of the Study

This paper refers both secondary and primary sources of data to discuss the nature of democratic practices. Books and newspaper articles are referred to understand contemporary realities. Selected articles of Visvanathan (6 January 2018: 8), Kham Khan Suan Housing (December 29, 2017, The Hindu, P-7) cited concerns for marginal voices at the presence of the dominant democratic dissenters. Select articles of Pankaj (2017), Guha (2016) Munda, and Basu Mallick (2012) spoke about the unheard voice of intellectual, who struggled to establish rights of the minority people in India. These are too problematic issues, because the Western idea of rationalism, field research methodologies hardly challenge dominant thoughts and voices or for that matter, like practicing democracy. At this background literary references selected here created a scope to understand marginal positions of intellectuals from minority community backgrounds. Fieldwork experience on the centenary celebration of Pasighat is referred here.

## Democrats and Dominant Castes

Amartya Sen (1991) argued in his article "Democracy as a Universal Value" that probably democratic practices not yet able to establish universal values that means the value which will be considered valuable to everybody. Visvanathan quoted Ananthamurthy as saying that in India past, present and future being enacted simultaneously. (on 6 January 2018: 8). This particular comment of Ananthamurty as referred to is thought provoking. Because, colonial rulers perceived people of oral traditions as people without history. Colonial literature hardly studied political systems of non-state societies because they thought that,

that is non-existent (Mishra). India entered the age of democracy with all these legacies. Thoroughly hierarchical Indian caste communities' practice of democracy hardly incorporate different dimensions of a reality. Two examples are cited here to discuss this matter.

Within less than a month between December 2017and January 2018, *The Hindu* reported two articles on the attempt of hegemonic dominant caste communities' to null and void historical contribution of the minority people and Dalit in two separate States of India. Both the articles wrote engagements of the dominant caste communities to appropriate history by ignoring other versions from Dalits and the minority people of the past. In one incident dominant upper castes are opposing Dalit history in Maharastra and that led to riot. Visvanathan (Ibid) writes, "It all begun with a pillar, a little war memorial commemorating what history books antiseptically (acting or protecting like an antiseptic) called the third Anglo-Maratha war. The British had established it in Bhima Koregaon village to commemorate the British East India Company soldiers, who fell in the battle of January 1, 1818. In that war (Mahars join British army and) along with a few British soldiers, many Mahar soldiers also died". "For Marathas and for our history textbooks, the narrative was a battle between imperialism and nationalism."  But the Mahars' oral narrative was different. History textbooks focused on the Marathas version and ignored Mahars' presence in that battle with opponance of the Maratha. Class struggle within caste communities as a perspective was ignored as a subject in academic exercise. "The history inscribed in textbooks did not take their (the Mahars') memories seriously. That is the Mahars' service as soldiers

of Baji Rao II and the Peswa(Maratha Minister) spurned them. This pushed the Mahars to seek out the British in the next war." For the next generations of the Mahar warriors, "[T]he battle of Bhima Koregaon is thus read differently. It is not seen as a battle in which the British with 834 infantry men, of which over 500 were Mahar, defeated a numerically stronger Peshwa army." It marked the end of Peswa rule (Ibid). Since then "For Mahar memory, and it becomes a story of Mahar courage and valour, a testimony of Mahar martial values in their struggle for equality against Peshwas. The Koregaon Ranstambh (Victory pillar) represents a different kind of solidarity. It is now part of a new genealogy, not part of a battle between Indians and the British, but a struggle for equality." Visvanathan refers to another event of January 1927, Ambedkar visited the site and gave the new legitimacy to this victory of the Mahar soldiers. The Mahar articulated history of Koregaon Ranastambh over a period of more than a century, in which the heroism of their ancestors was remembered. Koregaaon Ranastambh became a relic of Caste struggle between Marathas and Mahars in post-colonial India.

However, on 6th January 2018, Koregaon Ranstambh was in news again for the reasons that the dominant castes' representatives opposed the activities of the Mahars by reaching the venue of celebration. Similar occurrence happened in Manipur and Kham Khan Suan Housing (December 29, 2017, The Hindu, P-7) wrote:

Unmindful of History" on the events of inauguration of Chandrakirti Memorial Park at Chibu (locally known as Chivu) and Zou Gal Memorial Cemetery on December 19, 2017 in Manipur. In 1871-1872 the British expedition team with the help of soldiers of Chandrakirti (the then Meitei king of Manipur) defeated tribes. Tribal narratives

never gave this credit to the Meitei king rather they perceived that as a victory of the British army. Now in December 2017,

In a distortion of historical facts, the Chibu stone inscription claims the credit of King Chandrakirti who defeated the tribal chiefs, while that Meitei king was never able to extend their territory beyond Moirang town before he sought help of the British soldiers. Still today the Zo tribal people of Manipur never admitted the act of King Chandrakirti as heroic. This idea is even better understood, while K.K.S. Housing says that Zo and tribal people of the State in general felt that State political leaders did not respect tribal history rather an integrative/ assimilation(ist) approach fulfilling aspirations of dominant people of that State.

The common issue in both the cases is that the contribution of marginal section of people in history has been evaded. Whether, it was inter-ethnic or inter-caste conflict, in the democratic atmosphere dominant group of people did not accept the history critically and by taking an inclusive approach. So, here, history of the Mahar and the Zo people were ignored by democrats belonging to dominant group of people.

Victories of colonial ruler and its incorporation in the national history is a point of debate in other tribal State also. In Arunachal Pradesh (AP), this was revealed on the issue of celebration of birth centenary of the town : Pasighat. In 2011, while tourism department of that State Arunachal Pradesh to attract tourists wished to celebrate birth centenary of the town Pasighat, a section of intellectuals there were critical about the celebration. Community elders as well as young generations were critical about the event and the date of celebrations. While they knew that their

ancestors despite giving strong fight against the British soldiers were defeated. So their own cultural territory was owned by the British in1911. In 1911, the British Army was able to defeat the Adi people and established the first political post in Pasighat.  State tourism department's objective was to popularise Pasighat as a tourist spot and for that matter they decided to celebrate birth centenary of that town by being completely unmindful of the history of the Adi. For the Adi that was the year (1911) of defeat of their ancestors, who despite  all efforts and heroic acts were  unsuccessful in protecting their land.

What is common in these above mentioned three examples? All three represent history of marginal people "tribes" and "Dalits". These are examples of community and caste struggles that happened one hundred years back within the ambit of colonial aggression. In cases of Maharastra and Manipur, kings were not friendly and so while Peshwa suppressed the Mahars, and Mahars preferred to support the British colonial ruler's enemy king Baji Rao. In the other case, the Meitei king not being protactor of the Zo people sought help of the British colonial rulers and defeated Zo chief. Therefore, Baji Rao and Chandrakirti are projected as icon for commemorating history, and in which other historical version of oppressed people like the Mahar, Zo, and Adi are bipassed. Incidents of Koregaon of Maharastra and Manipur, after more than a hundred years, appropriated the version of history of higher caste  people in democratic nation of India.

## Democracy and Marginal Voices

Selection of text to focus minority voices is a challenge. There are influences of "colonization" and "internal colonization" (Munda and Basu Mullick 2003: ii). Such

influences in academics, politics, and everyday living created very complex social situation. Ideological and theoretical parameters may not be adequate for researcher to avoid biasness. Therefore, the Field is a complex site, where researchers have to constantly put a vigil on self. Because the dominant voices of researcher (as self) as well as of others in field may keep minority voices unheard[1].

At this background I wish to remember contributions of Mr. Jaipal Singh Munda, known as Hockey player, and a Parliamentarian at the national level. He was fondly referred to as Marang Gomke (Great Leader by the people of Chottangpur, presently known as Jharkhand). This Adivasi leader put his all efforts to draw attention of Indian political leaders during Independence of India so that Adivasis of India can enjoy equal rights during post-Independent situation. (Guha 2016 and Pankaj 2017). Pankaj (2017) compiled a few writings of Jaipal Singh Munda and which is a testimony of the fact that being an intellectual and the leader of marginal voices Jaipal could not be able to draw attention of his contemporary leaders and policy makers of non-tribal background and remained unheard in the democratic nation of India. National leaders and policy

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[1] Here as a researcher, I wish to share one such experiment I did on myself and later considered it as a technique for locating unheard voices. Before I was proceeding for fieldwork as a Ph. D Research scholar, received very important lessons from my supervisor Prof. T.B.Subba, of NEHU. He made me aware of my dominant identity and how such identity can be an impediment to a fieldwork in North-east India's situation. I shall submit here that it was a thought provoking lesson that created a conscious self within me. That control my voice being a member of dominant community of India, so that I do not miss voices at margin during interview. I won't claim that I am hundred per cent successful but I must claim that I became aware of my dominant identity.

makers hardly took pride on parliamentarian Jaipal Singh Munda's comments on the integrated relationship of forest and the Adivasi living and his suggestion to parliament to accept 'forest and tribal relation' as a mainstream issue (Munda and Basu Mallick 2012) remained unheard. Despite Nehru being a democrat was too sensitive to solve Tribal problems and assigned Elwin to look into the matter of the then NEFA, presently known as Arunachal Pradesh[2], Jaipal Singh Munda remained unheard. Surprisingly, the then great leaders of India missed voices of Jaipal Singh Munda! Jaipal Singh Munda was critical about the word 'Tribe' and preferred the word 'Adivasi'.

His definition of Adivasi was inclusive in nature and included people of minority status. His idea was parallel with ideas of Ambedkar, who was a critique of dominance of Hindu castes. Both of them found hierarchically dominant caste system as impediment for establishing people's equal relations in India. Jaipal Singh Munda was too critical about dominance of caste societies in decision making process. For decades Jaipal Singh Munda was sidelined in references of democrats and intellectuals. Ramchandra Guha's article 'Tribal Tragedies in Independent India' began with the quotation of Jaipal Singh's lecture, which he delivered in the Constituent Assembly meeting held on 13 December 1946, in presence of Jawaharlal Nehru. That meeting moved the objectives Resolution in the Constituent Assembly and proclaimed that India shall be born as Independent Sovereign Republic and Constitution of India guarantee citizens "justice, social, economic, and political; equality of status…". (Guha 104). Guha says, "The debate on the

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[2] The outcome was the book of the book, was written by Elwin, entitled, *Philosophy for NEFA*. This was a must read to administrators.

Objectives Resolution went on for a whole week. Jaipal Singh Munda spoke to this meeting. In his speech he mentions, (as it is quoted by Guha 2016 : 105 from Constituent Assembly Debates, vol. I, pp. 143-144)

"I am not expected to understand the legal intricacies of the Resolution. But my common sense tells me that every one of us should march in that road to freedom and fight together. Sir, if there is any group of Indian people that has been shabbily treated, it is my people. They have been disgracefully treated, neglected for last 6000 years. ... The whole history of my people was of continuous exploitation and dispossession by the non-aboriginals of India ... , and yet I take Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru at his word. I take you all at your words that we are going to start a new chapter, a new chapter of independent India where there is equality of opportunity, where no one would be neglected."(pp.104-105)". Among the speakers present there were "the conservative Hindu Purusottom Das Tandon, the right-wing Hindu Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the liberal lawyer M.R. Jayakar, the socialist M.R. Masani, the leading women activist Hansa Mehta, the communist Somnath Lahiri"(Guha Ibid 105).

After seven decades of deliberations of Jaipal Singh Munda in the Constituent Assembly and after the birth of the State of Jharkhand, Ramchandra Guha (2016:104-128) does a comparative study on the "adivasi" and "Dalit" situation.

Indians have plural identities (Danda 1991). Apart from national identity, a person's identities include caste/tribal identity, regional/language identity, State / Provincial identity, religious identity, political identity, dominant/ marginal community identity, clan and lineage identities

within community levels. Within tribes, there are ST[3] PVTG[4]. The legacy of colonial construction of 'tribe' in India contested post-colonial constructions like 'Adivasi' and 'Indigenous' people as well. Therefore, most of the democrats and intellectual consciously or unconsciously bear any one or other identities and many of them are humanist too. Now the most important question arose whether Indians as democrats can ignore all identities? I know each one of us present in this august gathering be acquainted with the people of India, who accommodates multiple identities to maintain democracy. Nation India and its provinces accommodate all these identities of citizens. Guha's (2016) comparative study to discuss state, society and people's relations at the background of democracy open up a horizon of scholars like Tegore, Habsbawm, Thompson, Benedict Anderson, Jaipal Singh Munda, Jay Prakash Narayan, and many others. All these intellectuals worked as pillars to establish democratic rights through writings and actions. Guha on Habsbawm says while he was popular in other parts of the world, intellectuals of Habsbawm's own nation were critical about political ideological connection and weakness of this democrat. Guha appreciated upbringing of Thompson and Anderson. Their upbringing in colonial geographies influenced their understanding on social realities. Guha maintains that upbringing and identities influence scholars. For example Habsbawm is better understood at the background of his Jewish identity and his migration to England with parents.

Despite wonderful dissections of persons, institutions, political parties and religious organizations in India as torch

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[3] Scheduled Tribes.

[4] Particularly Vulnerable Tribal group.

bearer of democracy, Guha identifies so many threats to Indian democracy. He identifies reasons behind tragedies of Indian Tribes. One of those, Guha opines that Indian tribes did not have a leader like Ambedkar. If so, then the tribes of Northeast India would not have progressed without an Adivasi Ambedkar? Here, Guha referes "Tribes" (Northeast India) and "Adivasi" (central India) situations separately. Scholars might have argued in support of Guha by saying that social, economic, geographical and demographic realities of so-called "Adivasi" and "Tribes" were not the same. And none received an Ambedkar. If North east India had leaders like Babu Nicolous Roy, Gopinath Bordoloi and others, central India also had leaders like Jaipal Singh Munda, Ignes Kujur and others. This is a fact that Gopinath Bordoloi stood for tribal rights of North east India and Ambedkar stood for this cause. Literature on Chottanagpur not yet reveal that which national leader from Congress or State of the then Bihar stood by Jaipal Singh Munda, except social worker Thakkar! So, despite of winning of 32 seats in Assembly election by Jharkhand Party[5] and Jaipal Singh Munda maintained popularity of this party in three consecutive elections. But why he decided to join the National Congress in 1960s? Is it so, that they required a larger platform? Asha Mishra said that Jaipal Singh Munda was a moderate leader. But how his moderate democratic approach could not achieve the goal. Basu Mallick said that Jharkhand Party was the pioneer among all Indian tribal political parties who demanded autonomy for the minority people and tribes.

Guha (Ibid) finds media paid comparatively less attention to Adivasi/tribal issues in contrast to Dalit and Muslim

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[5] This party was established in 1950. AdivasiMahashabha the platform for the tribal of the then Chottanagpur open its membership to the non-tribal population of Jharkhand. This larger platform aimed at demanding a full-fledged state Jharkhand.

minority issues. This comments of Guha (2016) and joining of Jaipal Singh Munda to Congress reminds me, as Pankaj (2017) compiles that while Ambedkar was busy in drafting the Indian Constitution, Jaipal Singh Munda was one of his associates. Jaipal Singh Munda preferred the word 'Adivasi' not "tribe". His definition for 'Adivasi' was inclusive of backward people of India. Guha quoted excerpts of Jaipal Singh's lecture in the Constituent Assembly in which Jaipal Singh clearly delineated the 'Adivasi' struggle that happened for centuries. Jaipal Singh since late 1930s, was speaking against the politics in census reports and dominance of nontribal people of the State of Bihar on tribes. His writings were published in Newspapers of Bihar. He suspected that the population size of Adivasis' in Bihar was intentionally shown less than non –Adivasis in census reports (Pankaj Ibid). But all these contribution of Jaipal Singh Munda was not convincing points to his contemporary democratic leaders.

Dalits of India might have established comparatively strong political base and received media attention but how many Indians know about Ambedkar's highly radical view for abolition of caste system? How many Indian universities' Sociology and Anthropology departments taught Ambedkar's analysis on 'Indian Caste System' and 'Annihilation of Caste'?

Whether it is lower literacy rate of tribes or aspirations of padre, sant or sadhu, and Maoist[6]it is revealed that nation building process divided democratic leaders. So, Ambedkar remained leader of Dalits, and ideas of progress of Jaipal Singh Munda was under rated. Because, in his lecture, "Jai

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[6] "The padre or nun hopes to make the tribal a Christian; the sant or sadhu hopes to make the tribal a Hindu; the comrade or party secretary hopes to make him a Maoist..." Guha 2016.

Jharkhand! Jai Adivasi! Jai Hind!" he memorised that Dinabandhu Charlie Andrews said to Jaipal Singh Munda in West Africa that Gandhiji had launched a nation-wide reconstruction plan. JPM thought that 30 million Adivasis will be benefitted in Gandhi's activity. But after Jaipal Singh Munda came back to India, he found that Gandhi became the leader of Harijans, whom he described as depressed classes of Hindu. Therefore, it won't be out of place to claim that all democrats in the Indian nation since independence represented one or other class or creed.

This reminds me a statement of two friends. Both of them are Christian and belong to small tribes of Northeast India. During their conversation they referred to self as children of God to analyse position of minority tribes, who need big umbrella that accommodates all minority children(of God).

Jaipal Singh Munda fought for democratic rights for the 'Adivasi' people in India, and set a different dimension to know the Adivasi issues. Jaipal Singh Munda received less attention as democrat in modern India. Relentless battle of Jaipal Singh Munda to establish 'Adivasi and forest relations', as a mainstream Adivasi issues was sid lined as the issue of marginal people.

In seven decades, this was not a national issue to know, "How many Adivasi have lost their homes and lands as a result of state policy for development? The estimates vary- they range from a few million to as many as twenty million. Even if we cannot come up with a precise number to the question 'How many tribals have been involuntarily displaced by the policies of the government of India? The answer surely be: 'too many'. The sociologist Walter Fernandes estimates that about 40 per cent of all these

displaced by government projects are of tribal origin. The Adivasis constitute roughly eight per cent of India's population, this means that a tribal is five times as likely as a non-tribal to be forced to sacrifice his or her home or hearth by the claims and demands of development and / or conservation'.(as Guha quotes Walter Fernandes 2016:108-109)"

"Adivasis were displaced from their lands and villages when the State occupied the commanding heights of the economy. And they continue to be displaced under auspices of liberalization and globalization. The opening up of Indian economy had benign outcomes in parts of the country, where the availability of an educated work force allows for the export of high-end products such as software. On the other hand, where it has led to an increasing exploitation of unprocessed raw materials, globalization has presented a more brutal face. Such is the case with the tribal district of Odisha and Chattisgarh, where the largely non-tribal leadership of the States  has signed a series of  leases with mining companies, both Indian and foreign. These leases permit, in fact encourage, these companies to dispossess tribals of the land they own or cultivate, but under which lay rich veins of iron ore or bauxite." (Guha, 2016:109)

## Discussion

All social events are referred to in this paper are connected to history of marginal, minority people, and tribes. Democratic leaders of post-colonial India divided them into Dalit, Harijan, Tribe, and Adivasi. All these social categories are relic of inequality, which is a covert feature in Indian society. Across languages and community boundaries, inequality persists. Day by day democratic

issues are compartmentalized. Thus Ramchandra Guha searches an 'Adivasi Ambedkar' and identifies reasons of tragedies in the Adivasi life. Dominant and privileged castes and class of people appropriating, redefining resources and history of marginal, minority people and tribes in post-colonial situation. All issues do not receive nation's attention or so to say not are the mainstream issue. The mainstream voice(s) is usually dominant voices like mainstream issues. This circumstance hardly accommodates tribal and minority voices and issues and history. Democratic leaders of the first generation in independent India represented the minority, marginal people, and tribes. At the same time, such leaders remain isolated to fulfil their political aims, ideologies, and goals. A few of them remain unnoticed un-heard, as it is the same in case of recognizing different dimensions of history. Whether, thick descriptions will accommodate different historical dimensions of privileged, under privileged marginal and minorities and tribes. Whether, privileged class will accept it as formal history! Otherwise, it will be a world of unsung democratic heroes and protestors, who will be referred as rioters in media!

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