

## Protest: Its Personal, Social and Literary Implications

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### Abstract

The nomadic tribes in India fall under the category of have-nots in Indian hierarchical social structure and hence are found getting exploited at the hands of the powerful and rich upper caste people. Dhangar community in Maharashtra is a nomadic tribe that is involved into its traditional sheepherding profession that forces it to move all the time in search of fodder for the sheep. This movement dislocates them from their native place thereby making them soft targets for their exploiters. It is in this context that the present research paper attempts to study the life of Raghu Karhe that is depicted in the Marathi film named, *Khwada* and see how the migration affects Raghu and his family socially, psychologically and financially.

**Key Words:** Migration, Dhangar, exploitation, *Khwada*, Raghu Karhe

It is well-known fact that human society is and has been for ages a structured entity where some groups / communities get upper hand in controlling the means of production, which they use for the oppression of the 'other'. In India itself, there have been numerous communities, who were never allowed by the privileged communities to share the resources of production on equal terms. In fact, Indian socio-cultural history itself is the proof of the fact that upper caste Indians not only deprived the lower castes from their very basic human rights but even they denied considering them human beings at all. And that's the reason why lower caste people used to get equated with and treated like the four-footed animals. The upper caste Indians usually considered the lower castes less than human, lacking in basic human qualities and feelings like honesty, dedication, hard work, love, compassion, etc. Hindu scriptures have full of references to such partial inhuman practices, which are observed strictly by

their proponents. That might be the reason why even today there are some temples in India wherein women and lower caste people are not allowed to enter.

And shockingly, it does not happen only with the poor and the weak people, it also happens with the rich and strong people who belong to the lower castes. For example a casual look at the statistics provided by the personnel departments of central and state governments indicates that more than 95% key positions are occupied by the officers belonging to upper castes in the offices of the President, Prime Minister, High Courts, and the Supreme Court. It is only in the Social Welfare Department that the number of low caste officials is comparatively more. The same can be seen with reference to the appointments of Chancellors, Vice Chancellors and Pro-Vice Chancellors. Not only this even the same thing happens when it comes to the portfolio allotment: the key ministries are given to the upper caste leaders and social welfare, minority affairs,

etc are given to the leaders belonging to lower castes... and it is also true of the progressive state like Maharashtra ... surprisingly very few speak about it.

However, it doesn't mean that the things are still the same. They have changed and are still changing slowly but gradually. There was a time when lower caste people were not allowed in temples, schools, and other public places like parks and streets. People belonging to former untouchable communities were forced to tie earthen pots around their necks to spit in and a broom around their waists so that their foot-prints get erased as they walk. Even they were strictly prohibited to be on the roads in the mornings and evenings as the shadows fall longer during these hours, which might pollute the upper castes. But now these customs have changed due to the enormous contribution of the social reformers like Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, Savitribai Phule, Rajarshi Chh. Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur, Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad of Baroda, founder of Rayat Shikshan Sanstha, Dr. Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil, and few others.

The hard work of these social reformers was further supplemented by 1) The efforts of the then British Government that passed laws against the inhuman social practices in Indian society; 2) The rise of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in socio-political fields of India, who sacrificed his entire life and energy to transform the lives of the untouchables including women; and 3) The political independence of India in 1947, which brought in the Constitution according to which all are equal. The pious works of all these great people made the lower castes aware of the abject conditions of their lives and slowly they started to raise their voice

and protest against those unjust conditions. This protest took different forms...their literature being one of the most powerful forms their protest.

A close analysis of the literature of protest shows that it is the creation of specific period and it is influenced by the economic, social, political and cultural conditions prevalent during that period. The study shows that instead of blindly following the traditional rules of mainstream literature, these writers have evolved their own rules. With the change in life and society, it has changed in respect of its form, content and style. As the literature of these oppressed people is an expression of the newly awakened sensibilities of its author and so naturally it takes quite a new form, making it difficult for the critics to apply the traditional literary and critical canons to it. African American literature, feminist literature, tribal literature and Dalit literature in India are such forms of literature in which the traditions of mainstream literature are found to be discarded because the experiences and emotions expressed here are so unique and strange that it is very difficult for such literatures to follow the aesthetic norms of mainstream literature.

The aim of this paper is not to get into all the minute features of the literature and culture of these people because it is so vast and so strange that it is almost impossible to touch upon all of them in its brief canvas. So the paper confines itself to tribal literature with a special focus on the life and literature of the Nomadic Tribes in general and the community of the shepherds in particular with further specific references to the 2015 Marathi film, *Khwada*.

But before getting into the lives of the family members of Raghoba Karhe, the protagonist of *Khwada*, it would be worthwhile to understand the concepts of movement and migration as they play a key role in the lives of these Nomadic people as their suffering is the direct result of their physical movement from one place to the other in search of livelihood. And there have been many effects of their constant 'movements' on their lives and literature. In this post-globalized era, many people believe that it has become comparatively easier for people to 'move' from their native 'place' to any foreign land of their choice for different purposes like getting higher education, job opportunities, business, conference like this or just as tourists.

So this element of movement, whether voluntary or involuntary, and within one's own region, state, country or outside, is usually there that definitely affects the 'place/position/status/ of the mover, the migrants in their family, community, and society and further complicates the issues of their physical, mental and social 'health' thereby affecting their culture and literature.

Movement in simple terms 'is the state of changing something's position', i.e. the place of a person is changed when that person moves. Though overtly, it seems simple to change a 'place' during the course of 'movement', in reality, there are many complex aspects related to the idea of 'movement'.

Movement of human beings is termed as 'migration' which is, in fact, 'the movement by people from one place to another with the intention of settling, permanently or temporarily in a new location... often over long distances and

from one country to another'. In this sense, the migrants move from their native land to some foreign country with an intention of getting settled there. It is called 'international migration'. International migrants are further classified as legal immigrants, illegal immigrants, and refugees. Legal immigrants are those who move with the legal permission of the receiver nation, illegal immigrants are those who move without legal permission, and refugees are those who cross international boundary to escape persecution. These migrants are referred with different names like refugees, displaced persons, asylum seekers, etc. on the basis of the reason of their migration.

The scholars in the area of 'migration' also accept that internal migration is also possible as the people may move within their own country and get settled in a new place temporarily or permanently. This type of migration refers to the movement of the migrants within the national boundaries, like from one state to the other, or one region to the other and even one city to the other. Jay Weinstein and Vijayan Pillai opine that there is also a third type of migration called 'forced migration' that 'exists when a person is moved against their will (slaves), or when the move is initiated because of external factors (natural disaster or civil war.)' Besides these there are also certain seasonal movements particularly of the people belonging to Nomadic tribes (which is not considered as 'migration' by some scholars as the intention behind the movement of the Nomads is not getting settled temporarily or permanently in the new place).

With reference to the causes of migration, they are multiple depending upon the purpose or intention of the migrants. The migration has proved beneficial for poor people particularly in developing countries as it has increased their income thereby enhancing their social status and life style. As per the 2011 census, in India 'marriage' is the primary cause of migration of women as they are required to migrate to their husbands' places after marriage. The other causes of migration are employment, education, housing, social, political or health related problems. Theorists classify these causes as 'Pull' and 'Push' factors.

Whatever may be the differences in the opinions and views of the demographers so far as the movements of the people and their causes are concerned, all of them broadly seem to agree with the fact that these movements definitely affect the concerned people at individual, psychological, educational, familial, social, and political level. These dramatic effects in the lives of migrants have attracted many writers who have attempted to pen down them in various literary forms like drama, novel, and autobiography.

Therefore, this paper attempts to attract the readers' attention towards the effects of migration or 'movement' of a family belonging to Nomadic Tribe on the personal, familial, educational and political lives of its members who are forced to move from place to place in search of fodder for their sheep which in turn are the source of their own livelihood. At the centre of this discussion, as mentioned earlier, is a 2015 Marathi film *Khwada* (obstacle) written and directed by Bhaurao Karhade. *Khwada* "is a story of shepherds who suffer from land

acquisition by the forest department and how their dreams of a settlement get shattered by different obstacles, leading them to migrate permanently'. In the 62nd National Award Ceremony, the film received two awards namely 'Special Jury Mention' and 'Sync Sound'. This film has also won 5 state awards for Best Debut Film Production, Best Rural Film, Best Costume Design, Best Rural Director and Best Make-Up. In 2015's edition of Pune International Film Festival, Karhade won the award as Best Director. The film also won Best Film, Best Director, Best Debutant Actor, and Best Actor in a Negative Role at Prabhat Film Awards."

As the film deals with the life of a family that falls in NT category and is called Dhangar, it would be worthwhile to see who the shepherds are in Indian context. Shepherd or Dhangar is a community in India that is primarily engaged in its traditional profession of shepherding. In the state of Maharashtra where the film is set, the population of Dhangars is over 15 million as per 2011 census. Though Dhangars have rich history, 'today they are still a highly disorganized community and are socially, educationally, economically and politically backward. They lived a socially isolated life due to their occupation, wandering mainly in forests, hills and mountains.'

This community is known for its constant movement along with their sheep. They literally carry everything with them. The film, *Khwada* is the story of Raghu Karhe, an old man in his sixties and his family who have left behind their home and relatives and moved out in search of livelihood. It is observed that literally

everything happens in the lives of these people when they are on a move. In *Khwada*, Raghu is seen arranging the marriage of his youngest son, Balu when the party was moving towards its next destination. It was literally in the street that Balu's would-be father-in-law offers his daughter in marriage to Balu. It was actually for the first time that they were meeting. But it does not deter anyone of them from getting into a very intimate conversation that ends with the promise of bride-seeing ceremony.

It might seem strange for the educated, urban people, who try to keep to themselves minding their own business; but it was quite natural for Raghu and Handa as they come from a very different social background. As Raghu easily accepts Handa's proposal of getting his daughter married to Balu, similarly, he also cancels the engagement because he feels deceived by Handa as he had purchased a piece of land in which Raghu himself was interested. When he comes to know about Handa's treachery, he immediately declares that engagement is broken; not only this, the next moment he fixes Balu's marriage with another girl, even if he had not seen that girl. This kind of behaviour on his part presents him as a person having some psychological problem. Actually, Handa had not deceived him. He was trying to strike the purchase deal of the land for quite some time but had failed. So now when he got an opportunity, he did not miss it. He tried to explain the matter to Raghu but he did not listen to him.

Raghu's behaviour is a matter of concern for the psychiatrists and also for the sociologists. One wonders how he can get easily upset for a trivial matter like this. And

the reason for his behaviour is found in his constant 'movement' during the course of which, people like Raghu have to overcome a number of obstacles in order to survive in the hostile circumstances in Indian hierarchical society. His reaction can be termed as his way of protesting against the circumstances.

It is seen in the film that the most important task for the shepherds is procure enough fodder for their sheep. In fact, they are found to be moving only because their sheep are required to have enough grazing land. So all the time they are seen worrying about it. There are many scenes in the film wherein Raghu and his sons are found discussing the non-availability of grazing land. It is so because in the post-independence India, particularly in a state like Maharashtra, the percentage of irrigated land is increased on large scale due to the rivers like Koyna, Krishna, Godawari, Panchganga and Warna that flow all the year round. There have been large dams built on these rivers, which supply water to nearby industries and farms. This irrigation has proved beneficial for the farmers as it has made them possible to have multiple crops in a year. But this has adversely affected the profession of shepherding as the land available for sheep-grazing is decreased thereby making it difficult for the shepherds to face this new changed atmosphere.

And if the hungry sheep enter into any farmer's crop, the shepherds are abused and even some times beaten up. Such kind of humiliating treatment at the hands of the farmers adversely affects the minds and the hearts of the shepherds resulting in their abnormal behaviour. It is observed in *Khwada* that Raghu is all the time cursing

the people around him. His wife and sons are soft targets for his anger whom he is seen insulting and abusing at his will. It is so probably because he is unable to vent out his anger at the powerful upper caste people with the fear of getting destroyed. A deep peep into the mind of Raghu's character makes it clear for the audience that his is a case of mental illness. He is under tremendous psychological pressure of the circumstances of his life that have shaped his character. So what Raghu does is that he gets angry and abuses his own near and dear ones. If Raghu would have been at his native place, surely he would have been in better mental health. As he was known to all at his native village, nobody would insult him without some serious reason. But it was not to be. He had to move out of his village as the government had forcefully acquired his land and he was left with no permanent and fixed source of income. So he had lodged a law-suit against the injustice of the government and for the last ten years was attending the hearing sessions in the court with little hope of getting his land back. All this has led Raghu to express his frustration at the members of his family.

The film shows that Raghu's movement has left him with no any other alternative but to endure the atrocities at the hands of upper caste landlords who were the natives of the new place. This exploitation is physical, mental and financial. On multiple occasions Ashok Dada, the local heavyweight, is seen taking away the sheep from the herd without paying their due price. Initially Raghu objects but when he comes to know that it is useless to argue with Ashok, he meekly submits to his atrocities. The goons like Ashokdada are found in almost every village in Maharashtra

who take disadvantage of the circumstances of the weak people and victimize them for their own benefit. It is also seen that these people are not in the habit of accepting that India is a democratic country and there are equal rights and opportunities to all the sections of the society. So if anybody refuses to obey their orders or expresses displeasure with their unjust behaviour, they are sure to face the music for it. That is what happens with Ashokdada, when Balu defeats the wrestler from Ashokdada's party in the wrestling competition, it enrages Ashokdada, who determines to take revenge of this insult. And so he tries to satisfy his revenge when one day Balu visits him to collect the money that Ashok owes him on account of the sheep he had purchased. At that time Ashok forces Balu to play a round of wrestling with the most seasoned wrestler of his gang. Initially, Balu fails to understand his intention. But when he realizes that if he did not retaliate, he would be killed. So with all his strength, he breaks the spines of his opponent and runs away from the place that further enrages Ashokdada.

This was taken as a personal insult by Ashokdada and he avows to teach Balu a lesson. So he picks up the first opportunity and drives all the sheep to the confinement as they had damaged his crop. The repeated pleas on the part of Raghu and others fall on deaf ears.

Ashokdada feels that what the poor migratory shepherd can do even if he sells all his sheep to a butcher. It is his over-confidence in his own worth and under-estimation of the person who was away from his home and relatives that brings his downfall as at the end Balu with some other

members of his community attacks Ashokdada and his gang and kills some of them including Ashokdada. Though this scene of the film follows the set trend of poetic justice, gives rise to so many questions like why did Balu retaliate; what would happen to him as he was guilty of murder; was it not possible for Raghu to lodge a police complaint against the atrocities of Ashok; why did the government agencies fail to help the people like Raghu; and what will be the future of Indian democracy if the similar things keep happening even after seventy-five years of independence.

For the author of this paper, all these questions are of secondary importance as they tend to forget the basic problem of the people like Raghu who are forced to move out of their villages in search of food even after 70 years of independence – either for them or for their sheep. The problem lies with the ‘movement’ which makes Raghu do

all kinds of compromises with his life and environment as he knows it well that if he fails to do so, it would be impossible for him to survive. The kind of life he leads is not a balanced life of a normal human being, but it is full of turbulences and compromises that many a time make him abnormal. It is also equally true of the character of Balu. Though for the time being the audience supports his act of violent retaliation, they should not forget that such a violent act on Balu’s part will spoil his talent and will ultimately affect the health of the society. If everybody started to behave either like Ashok or Balu, the civilized structure of the society will get damaged and crumble down. Hence, there is an urgent need of paying serious attention towards the issues faced by the members of Nomadic communities about which nowadays they have started to write and come up with certain strategies and policies that will take care of the personal and social lives of all the stakeholders.

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**Web Resources:**

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