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Decoloniality, Indigenous Resistance, and Environmental Justice in *Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C.K Janu*

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ABSTRACT

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This study explores the connection between indigenous resistance, decoloniality and environmental justice through *Mother Forest: An Unfinished Story of C.K. Janu.* The fight for land rights issues by the Adivasi community started in India right after Independence. This controversial and sensitive realm, worsened initially by the British and sustained by successive governments through Forest Policies, requires critical examination. Resistance voices were always raised against such inhumane deeds of expropriation. The inseparability of land from their existence reinforced their struggle to be rooted in indigenous ontologies. Resistance battles were against the governmental bodies that stripped them of their autonomy, sovereignty, and self-determination. They were able to question bigger structures with colonial origins, highlighting the colonial nature of contemporary forest policies. Indigenous Adivasi resistance struggles, thereby, turn out to be decolonial in nature, as they contest colonial ideas that persist today. *Mother Forest: An Unfinished Story of C.K. Janu*, is one such tale of indigenous insurgence against unjust land expropriation. Examining the text from a decolonial perspective unveils the potential of indigenous uprisings to question bigger structures of injustice.

Keywords: decoloniality, tribal life-narratives, intersectionality, zones of anomaly, indigenous resistance, environmental justice

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(I)

One of the major landmarks among the marginalized after the colonial period, in general and the post-neoliberal period, in particular, is the proliferation of indigenous life narratives and resistance narratives which gave voice to the voiceless. These narratives showcased the life and struggles of indigenous people from their point of view and how they were subjected to never ending exploitation at the hands of the colonizers and even after the time of colonization. The history of the third world is often defined in relation to the marginalization and subjugation those people had to endure at the hands of the colonizers. The resistance narratives are a way of removing coloniality from all walks of their lives and to create a novel "cultural and discursive identity" (Murdoch, 1992, p. 8). Even after the end of colonial period, the havoc created by the colonial forces continued to affect the colonized, especially the marginalized. So, in a way the fights of the indigenous people are inadvertently against both the colonial regimes and the governmental bodies (post-colonial period) which refused to show justice to their needs. The indigenous people had to fight multiple agents at the same time for basic survival, sovereignty, and self-determination. Women, who were culturally and historically marginalized had to bear the brunt of all the exploitation unleashed at the indigenous people. They were doubly marginalized at the hands of the colonial regimes and was internally colonized by the deeds of the non-indigenous communities. But there are exceptional stories about the bravery and strength of woman tribal warriors who fought against all the oppression creating new beacon of hope for the oppressed communities. One such story is the focal point of this paper, C.K. Janu a tribal eco-warrior who single-handedly fought the oppressors and brought justice to her people.

In January 2003, the Adiyar tribe led by C.K. Janu occupied a part of Muthanga wildlife sanctuary, Kerala. This move was against a forced displacement by the governmental bodies in the name of development. Her battles which were rooted in indigenous ways of being and knowing, had the potential to critique and divert the dominant narratives put forward by the government and was fostered by the non-indigenous communities in post-independent India. Indigenous ways of being and knowing encapsulate a wide range of methods and lifestyle practices that are rooted in the indigenous ways of living, such as those cultural practices, traditions, spiritual beliefs, ecological knowledge which were generational. Their holistic ties and deep statures of interconnections to the land they inhabit nourished this bond. By staying afoot in the cultural counter-narratives of the indigenous ways of being, they (indigenous people) were able to create counter-hegemonic narratives against eurocentrism and coloniality. Forest policies that exist today in India are mostly colonial in nature. Forest policies are centralized in nature and managed by the state, often sidelining the rights and knowledge of indigenous and local communities who have traditionally managed these forests. Policies may prioritize the extraction of resources for economic gain, like colonial practices where forests were exploited for timber, minerals, and other resources

without considering the ecological and social impacts. Indigenous and local communities may be excluded from decision-making processes and denied access to forest resources, perpetuating a legacy of marginalization and dispossession that began during colonial times. Some conservation strategies may still follow a fortress conservation model, which involves creating protected areas that exclude human activity, rather than integrating sustainable use practices that involve local communities. Decolonization should start with the forest policies, as they are inherently colonial in nature. Immediate actions were necessary to prevent already burgeoning cultural erasure and appropriation leading to a mixed-up cultural exchange in which the submissive (the indigenous people) will have to accept the epistemologies and ontologies of the dominant (the colonizers). This will be the right orientation towards decolonization, which already welcomed by the indigenous communities even though the term 'decolonization' is not that old in the academia (Sium and Ritskes, 2013, p. 45).

Janu's passionate account of her struggle unfolds against the backdrop of her childhood and life within the forest. As a party worker in the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM- a major political party in Kerala), she experienced political awakening but grew disillusioned with the party, feeling it had betrayed the tribals. Her break from the CPI (M) marked a pivotal moment in her journey, as she sought to reclaim agency and resist the oppressive forces that perpetuated dispossession and marginalization. The narrative is a testimony of how the tribals transformed this 'zones of anomaly' into 'zones of resistance' using their indigenous worldviews and cosmologies. This is a testimony of how certain power structures are maintained through the social reproduction of physical landscapes (Christy K.J., 2020, p. 24). This narrative uplifted and revealed the tribal affective ties with the forest, which becomes not just a backdrop for their resistance, but also a repository of memory, identity, resilience and self-determination.

By foregrounding the decolonial intention and exploring the variegated ways of her battle, Janu's story invites us to question vantage points, challenge colonial legacies, and envision alternative futures. To some degree, one could view this journey of triumph as a crucial step in decolonization endeavours. Because without decolonization there will be no social and environmental justice for the indigenous people. Revitalization of their lost culture, revival of the indigenous epistemologies and removal of all impacts of colonization is needed to eliminate colonization and its aftermath from the lives of the indigenous people. As Sium & Ritskes (2013) asserts, "indigenous communities are the loci of the decolonization theory" (p. III). 'Mother Forest' is one such a decolonial endeavour where C.K Janu presents a compelling narrative that challenges colonial narratives and supports indigenous resistance. This study employs decolonial theory to analyse the zones of anomaly within the text, offering insights into the intricate dynamics of identity and cultural survival.

(II)

The methodology used in this study focuses on the comprehensive analysis of *Mother Forest: An Unfinished Autobiography of C.K Janu* (2004) from a decolonial perspective. *Mother Forest* is the autobiography of C.K. Janu, the authenticity an autobiography renders will be worthy and valuable, more than an in-person interview. While the latter is strictly a format-ridden framework, where the interviewee will have to confide inside this framework and answer the questions raised. Life writing on the other hand is exclusive of such a rigid framework and thus the writer doesn't have to follow any of such limiting framework and could express in their own ways irrespective of any conventions. The rise of Dalit and indigenous life writings dismantled the dominant writing conventions which existed in India at that time. Canonical language which preferred texts which are Sanskrit-rich, adhering to a standard form and often celebrated narrative and stylistic techniques.

Close reading and textual analysis are undertaken for this study since the source chosen for the study is a tribal life narrative of an eco-activist. The concept used in this study is called 'zones of anomaly' coined by Sivaramakrishnan, which are those interstitial spaces in between nature and culture. By applying a decolonial lens, the researcher tries to convey how the colonial ideologies are challenged by C.K. Janu, thereby enabling a transition from 'zones of anomaly' to 'zones of resistance'. Application of intersectionality framework aids in unravelling the multi-layered nature of oppression and struggles. How these overlapping layers of injustices shaped and continues to shape the Adivasi life experiences is another aspect this study dwells on.

The study employs decolonial theory proposed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), which tries to dismantle the lingering effect of colonialism on indigenous ways of being, knowledge productions, cultural practices and other social structures. By challenging the dominant Eurocentric worldview, it upholds indigenous cosmologies and ontologies. Employment of concepts such as 'colonial gaze' and 'zones of anomaly' adds further depth to the decolonial lens. Moreover, the study dwells into what could be termed as decolonial intersectionality, which encapsulates and explicates that decoloniality is more than the physical reclamation of land, it is also about critiquing the underlying structures of oppression such as caste, class and gender. As Gupta (2020) rightly states, "the struggle of indigenous populations against environmental injustice is not purely a civil or environmental concern, but instead a complex interplay of self-determination, colonialism, racism, sovereignty and environmental destruction" (P. 45).

Since Indian forest policies are still colonial in nature, decolonial approach is needed to dismantle fangs of colonial residues. Seemingly diminutive presence of such colonial policies increases the need for a comprehensive justice framework which will address all the injustices followed. Sensitiveness of the indigenous land

rights issues make it impossible to locate it in isolation. Intersection of variegated layers of oppression renders them a marginalized lived experience. Redressal of such sundry exploitations require in-depth study respecting their dignity and not reductionist in nature. Subjugation of the indigenous people have a history of violence rooted in casteist, classist traditions as far as Kerala is considered. Kerala had a history of land rights insurgencies right after the independence of India. The Land Reforms Acts were introduced to stop the feudal ways of landownership that existed in Kerala. However, even these historic Land Reforms Acts couldn't rescue the indigenous people and Dalits, who belong to the outliers of the entrenched caste society. C.K. Janu's fight is one of the many insurgencies from the marginalized to reclaim their lost land.

Unjust forest policies aimed at generating profit compromising the livelihood of the indigenous people are colonial in nature. Majority of the forest policies are of colonial origin such as the Indian Forest Act (1865), Indian Forest Act (1878) and Indian Forest Act (1927). This implies that the indigenous resistance acts are, in a way against colonial agendas of exploitation. Indirect confrontation of the deleterious policies formulated by the British is the initial step towards decolonization. Thus stated, the fight for their homestead and land is very much a decolonial project for the indigenous people. It represents a fight against the historical and ongoing exploitation and marginalization imposed by colonial and postcolonial policies. Through these acts of resistance, indigenous people are working towards a future where their rights, cultures, and ways of life are respected and preserved.

(III)

Mother Forest is written in two parts, the first part deals with the harmonious existence of the Adivasi (means original inhabitants, mostly addressing the indigenous people of India). The second part stands as a testimony of the Adivasi struggle and hardships at the hands of the settler population. *Mother Forest* is a coming-of-age life narrative which deals with the life of C.K. Janu and her tribe people, the Adiya tribe. The story unfolds the events pertaining to the forced removal of the Adiya tribe from their ancestral land. The narrative is a testament of the Adivasi struggles for their rights and the developmental policies of the government which were harmful for both the environment and the indigenous people (Das, 2022, p.110). Sreejith Varma (2023) states, "In *Mother Forest*, nature does not appear as a pristine wilderness untouched by human presence. The forest, instead, is presented as a provider of resources that are vital for human sustenance as well as a place of human/more-than-human cohabitation" (p. 35).

How did this local struggle for the reclamation of their land became a tale of resilience and resurgence? How this regional struggle for land rights pertains to bigger structures of decoloniality? These are some of the problems this study tries to unfold. The Britishers in the initial days undertook a sub-standard treatment of

the natural world overlooking its financial possibilities. Once they understood it more than just a wasteland, they started their profiteering efforts to subdue both the nature and the people. This led to forced displacement, land dispossession, loss of cultural ties and so forth for the indigenous people. Resistance was the only way forward for the indigenous people since they came to a position where 'personal is political'. Forced displacement was same as death to the tribal community, because of their communion and intimate living with the natural world. Land was everything to the indigenous people, more than their livelihood and identity, as Sreerekha (2010) remarks, "These movements see land as the only path towards a long-term survival of the community; [sic] as the solution. In today's context, a demand for ownership to land by any marginalised community inevitably faces severe forms of state repression" (p. 56).

A resistance method deeply rooted in indigenous traditions was most necessary since the harm done by the colonizers to the indigenous people were more than material exploitation. As Elen Turner (2012) rightly stated, the colonizers were interested in either "primitivizing or romanticising the Adivasis" deliberately to bring forth a hierarchical order to Indian society (p. 330). Thereby, they could drag the Adivasis to the bottom position of the hierarchy and picture the tribal populace as barbaric and uncivilized. This kind of marginalization will legitimize their atrocities such as deforestation and illegal encroachment of forestscapes. This forced imposition will invite rebellions from the people and therefore needed to be controlled.

Indians followed this treatment of the Adivasis even after the 'post-colonial' period. In the context of Kerala, the casteist and classist mindset prevalent among the people of Kerala reinforced the social inequalities and hierarchies. These deeply ingrained attitudes often shape the interactions, access to resources, opportunities within the community. Addressing these biases is crucial for fostering a more equitable and inclusive society. Mallard et al. state in their article "Global Challenges - Decolonisation: A Past That Keeps Questioning Us" (n.d):

> Many voices now emphasise the need to develop an intersectional approach to research methodologies that takes into consideration how race, gender, nation or class interplay in granting legitimacy (or not) to a variety of knowing subjects and knowing practices, so as to avoid reproducing asymmetries of power that are too often left unquestioned even by progressive ideologies. (n.p)

And the most feasible way to fight this was social resistance movements, Bisht (2020) claims that social resistance movements are the apt way to fight and to act as mediators to bring in justice, morality and identity. This reinforces the idea that there is no social justice without environmental justice (p.130). The most common and vital problem faced by the Adivasis across India is the that of land, they were deprived of land to live. Even if they have some land, the governmental agencies or the state might take it away from them in the name of development or

economic fortification. Despite the recent surge in the number of issues concerning the indigenous people, the civil society deliberately ignores these issues, as if they are peripheral to the broader national discourse.

Sivaramakrishnan (1999) coined the concept 'zones of anomaly' in his book *Modern Forests: Statemaking and Environmental Change in Colonial Eastern India.* He defines zones of anomaly "as a special place defined by the unique combination of tribal people and forest landscape" (p.45). He coined this concept in the context of Eastern Indian tribal land which were deemed invaluable by the British colonizers during the time of their regime. Sivaramakrishnan further stated since the Britishers devalued and completely neglected the space, it exists as an interstitial space in between nature and culture. This idea highlights how certain areas, characterized by a unique blend of indigenous peoples and their natural surroundings, became sites of both ecological and cultural significance, yet were simultaneously marginalized and overlooked by colonial authorities.

The forestscape detailed in *Mother Forest* (2004) can be termed as a 'zone of anomaly' since it lodges all the necessary aspects ascribed by Sivaramakrishnan. But the indigenous awakening against the illegal encroachment made the transition from 'zones of anomaly' to 'zones of resistance' easy (p.35). This indigenous awakening happened as a result of the resurgence in awareness and activism among the tribal people. Recognizing these ancestral lands serve much more than just a material property, rather having inevitable ties to their identity and existence. As the community-based mobilizations were on the move, these zones begin shifting from passive sites of existence (zones of anomaly) into active zones of resistance. This transition can be understood as a reclaiming of agency, where community members assert their rights to their land and resources against external exploitation. The interstitial space in between nature and culture undergoes a radical transformation because of the Adiya community's deep-rooted connection with the land.

The protestors wilfully choose the non-forested areas of the plantation in leaving the natural forests (Narayanan, 2019, p. 45). They choose this seemingly wasteland to 'humanise' those spaces with the love and nurture they have for their land. Humanising means to give meaning to a space which was otherwise null and insignificant. As a resistance strategy, they encroached those forestscapes which were deemed invaluable. They started living there and started cultivating crops. Separation of the tribal identity from their land was impossible, since they heavily depended on the land for livelihood. The interconnection and interdependence the indigenous people share with their land was narrated in *Mother Forest* by Janu in the most compelling way. Contrasting the hills to a woman, narrating the water in the river to 'blood-red', the bending of giant trees during rain to infants and so on. Janu's compelling narrative weaves together historical processes, cultural practices

and personal anecdotes to portray the land as not a mere entity to own and disown but a seminal aspect of their identity.

Therefore, once this land was lost, there was nothing in front of them rather than resistance. Thereby their resistance takes on a holistic appearance, because they were fighting not just against the exterior factors which grabbed their land away from them, it was to protect the symbiotic relationship the people had with the land. They reclaimed that land, which was taken away from them and they humanised those spaces by cultivating crops and other edible food crops. Pavithra Narayanan (2019) recollects this instance thus:

> Making a conscious decision to avoid natural forests, the group chose to live in a degraded part of the plantation. . . .The families built huts, dug wells, raised cattle, and built playgrounds for children. For 45 days, they encountered no problems. On the 46th day, someone set fire to the forests and the Adivasis were accused of the act. Alleging that the community was destroying the forest, on February 19, 2003, the Kerala police launched a brutal attack against the Adivasis. (p. 258)

Rather than turning to violence or vandalism as most protesters might commence, the indigenous people chose to nourish the land with agriculture. This act is not a product of some wilful ignorance on their part, they know that the land no longer belongs to them. They choose to transform their resistance into meaningful one and that in the same they are born and brought up. Thereby, initiating the transformation of this, once devalued space into spaces of resistance. Beyond serving as a mere form of resistance, this lifestyle becomes intrinsic to their existence; a way of being intricately linked to their intimate relationship with nature." This was their answer to both the structural and systemic violence they endured at the hands of the governmental bodies. Though they were fighting the governmental bodies apparently, their fight indirectly aimed at dismantling the colonial legacies which downgraded their land into a material to be own and sold. Their fight, confronted layers of injustice at once.

On the 46th day of their protest, someone torched the forest, and the police accused Adivasis of the crime. What followed, was bloody reconciliation from the part of police and the government and the oppositional parties stayed silent supporting all the havocs. Many Adivasi lives were lost on that influx of police to the protest panthal (protest site), but the government seem to trivialize the attack and hide the number of lives lost and people missing. Even the government hesitated to initiate any judicial enquiry regarding such a brutal damage (Narayanan, 2019, p. 256). But the consequences the Adivasis had to go through were pathetic. The government of Kerala charged many cases against the Adivasis such as illegal encroachment to public property, destruction of forest and many more. They had to face such allegations just because they fought for their rights. The media, governmental agencies and the masses all turned against the Adivasis

on this issue. Fight for their land and other deviant actions were a hindrance to the kind of developmental narrative put forward by the Kerala government.

C.K Janus's life writing came out as a testimony for the injustices faced by the Adivasis. Till the publication of this book, the blame was on the Adivasis for illegal encroachment and destroying the forestscapes. By focussing on C.K. Janu's narrative, her single-handed resistance against all forms of oppression, Janu in turn becomes an unassailable agent embodying the essence of indigenous resistance. Her personal anecdote stands as evidence to the strength stemmed from deep-rooted bonds to her land, this strength proliferates her activism and challenges the historical injustices faced by her community. The findings from her narrative underscores the abundance of indigenous resistance, progressing away from the point of view of mere resistance, cultural pride and unending pursuit of justice. Indigenous narratives such as *Mother Forest* is the apt way to dismantle the "colonial order of things" and to challenge the narratives of superiority and purity upheld by the colonizers (Sium & Ritskes, 2013, p. III). These narratives are not just subjective outcries of the subaltern rather a collective tale of resilience and the agency of the marginalized.

By unfolding these untold narratives, they could challenge the centre occupied by the British and at the same time disassemble burdens of decolonial expedition by focusing on their being (Sium and Ritskes, 2013, p. 4). These indigenous narratives are quite important to both their resistance struggles and the decolonial project at hand. The reason is that these alternative voices should be there to replace the dominant voices that was established by the colonizers and legitimized through their literature and writings. As Sium and Ritskes (2012) argue, decolonization cannot be taken as an outright rejection of colonialism, "rather replacing these dominant with marginalized narratives through imagining and rearticulating a multiplicity of ontologies, epistemologies and axiologies" (p. IX).

Mother Forest shows how indigenous resistance, when rooted in holistic connection to their land have the potential to transform spaces of marginalization into dynamic spaces of cultural resilience, empowerment and resurgence. As P.T. George (2014) asserted, "while the entrenched casteism traditionally prohibited land ownership rights to the Dalits, the Adivasis were alienated from their lands due to 'encroachments, land grabbing, forest notifications and the formation of private plantation companies" (p. 2). The land and its primacy are quintessential to both indigenous resistance and decolonization methods. For a relatively short of time, decolonization focused more on the mental, abstract aspects than the material, physical realities such as the land. As Sium and Ritskes (2012) hold, colonization is a loud, visible phenomenon which goes beyond the constraints set by mental phenomenon as such (p. 67). Decolonization is a mental phenomenon, but moreover it is a physical reality established in years of plunder and exploitation.

As they proceed to state, it is a skewed reality which has grounding in air, water and land, without this physical grounding it will be of diminished concern.

C.K. Janu's story made the visibility of the intersectional nature of life narratives, cultural identity and the interconnectedness of indigenous communities with their land. The narrative unfolds the intersectionality of indigenous resistance interweaving gender, indigenous identity, and environmental activism. *Mother Forest* unfolds the gendered ways of marginalization faced by the Adivasi women. They are doubly marginalized—both as members of indigenous communities and as women within those communities. Her activism brings to the fore, the gendered nature of oppression, lack of access to education and economic marginalization. Janu's fights are deeply rooted in her indigenous identity and critiques the erasure and marginalization of indigenous culture and traditions by colonial and postcolonial policies. By asserting her identity and reclaiming her community's land, Janu challenges the dominant narratives that have historically devalued and oppressed indigenous peoples. Her activism emphasizes the importance of cultural preservation and the right of indigenous communities to maintain their way of life. These narratives have the power to deconstruct entrenched colonial norms and will function as potential launch pads to initiate societal changes. In this way the individual resistance struggle takes on a different form and it represents a collective identity to challenge the entrenched ideologies. Her struggle shows the multi-dimensional nature of their protest, as it lodges a wider spectrum of challenges faced by the tribal people, especially the women.

In *Mother Forest,* C.K. Janu posits that the women folk are the breadwinners and the real stewards of their habitat. Men do not care about their living or their land, the settlers tricked their men and grabbed their land in exchange for a bottle of liquor or at times for nothing at all (Bhaskaran, 2004, p. 35). Women have to face the consequences of the mishaps brought in by men. Women had to endure many forms of oppressions such as physical and mental abuse, denial of the basic rights, etc. Janu recollects how the settler population came to their land as migrants slowly becoming the landowners and the real inhabitants, and how the Adiya community was displaced from their land to distant spaces where they had no connections. The migrants took the girls from Adiya community in the name of educating them and those girls were not given any sort of formal education. Moreover, they were subjected to physical and sexual abuse by the non-indigenous community (Bhaskaran, 2004, p. 46). The repercussions this deed brought was immeasurable, because the new generation lost all the ties to their land and culture. They went to the urban spaces and "grasped the wrong aspects of civil society" (Bhaskaran, 2004, p. 67).

Janu's storytelling in *Mother Forest* serves as a potential tool to prevent the ongoing cultural erosion started as a part of their forced displacement. Janu narrates the historical ties, the cultural abundance and the wisdom and self-determination of her community. This acts as a reminder of how their land and identity were torn apart by the external forces and pushed the new generations into

labyrinths of oblivion, historical erasure, and other difficulties. This is a testimony of how Janu and her people treat their natural habitat, and how their affective ties take them so close to their physical environment.

Janu's autobiography was quite different from the Savarna (upper caste) autobiographies of the time. Those Savarna autobiographies were linear in the way their narratives proceed with regular chapter division and length. And mostly, the usages of Sanskrit terms to showcase their superiority and purity is yet another hallmark of their autobiographies. *Mother Forest (*and most of the Dalit and Adivasi autobiographies) broke all these celebrated normative assumptions upheld by the Savarna literary tradition. The non-linear storytelling, irregular chapter length and division, usages of regional dialect and words (in this case the language used by the Adiya tribe) are the distinguishing feature of this autobiography.

In the second section of *Mother Forest,* Janu recollects how the governmental agencies intruded and declared their land as 'reserve forest', so thereafter Janu and her tribal members could not use those reserved areas which they previously used for livelihood. The second section of *Mother Forest* starts in a way completely different from the way she narrates the first section of the narrative. Second section starts in a way echoing their disillusionment caused by the encroachment, "Mother Forest had turned into the Departmental Forest. It had barbed wire fences and guards. Our children had begun to be frightened of a forest that could no longer accommodate them. All the land belonged to the migrants" (Bhaskaran, 2004, p.45). This reserve forest project was the leftover of the two forest policies implemented by the Britishers in the 19th century, that is the Forest Policy of 1865 and 1894. In 1952, after the independence of India, the government of India came with the National Forest policy, which delineated the forests into Protected Forest areas, National Forests, Village Forests and Tree lands Common Trees Between living laces of people (Turner, 2012, p. 324).

As for transformation of zones of anomaly into zones of resistance, Janu critiques historical misrepresentation of their people as a part of the colonial rule. Even after the colonial period the misrepresentation continued. Following the colonial rhetoric of progress and modernity, the government considered the tribal spaces as uncivilized and barbaric. To maintain the ongoing power imbalances, this misrepresentation played a crucial role. Distortion of such a narrative was required to take away the autonomy, previously owned by the Adivasis. Real representation of the tribal people will prove their capabilities of sovereignty, thereby the colonizers could not continue with the cultural, social and economic onslaught. The possibilities of such a transformation goes beyond her personal struggles, thus becoming the epicenter of indigenous resistance against those narratives which long subjugated and exploited the indigenous people and their culture. Her resistance, deep-rooted in her connection to the land, points fingers to more than a battle for survival and existence.

In February 2003, the tribal population lead by C.K. Janu on behalf of the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha (AGMS) entered the forest land in Muthanga, a place in the Wayanad district of Kerala, which was taken away from the tribal as reserve forests. The protest was so huge that there were 820 Adivasi families that entered the eucalyptus plantation in Wayanad (Narayanan, 2019, p.259). The Indian National Congress-led government hesitated to provide the promised land for the tribals as a compensation for the grabbing of their land. The protest turned out to be bloody, as the police opened fire, and five tribal folks lost their lives. But the ruling congress party and the non-indigenous population of Kerala didn't realize that their battle was more than just a battle for their lost land.

This incident was not enough to settle the fire that was instilled in them; they continued their protests even stronger. They put refugee camps in front of the official residence of the then Chief Minister of Kerala, A.K. Antony. Such resistance attempts paved the way for a shift in the power dynamics to regain their lost agency and inherent connection with their land. Their ventures rooted in local ways reached global levels as it challenged those dominant paradigms which propagate colonial ideologies. Moreover, it critiqued the power imbalances that existed during those times of pre-colonial period and influenced certain dialogues for the equitable distribution of land rights, environmental protection, and the preservation of indigenous culture.

In addition to that, zones of resistance expose the dynamic nature of decolonization as opposed to a static one. Through Janu's personal anecdote, the significance of actively engaging with and reshaping spaces both, material and discursive, to move away from the ideological bondages of colonial regimes. Sreejith Varma (2024) asserts, "conjunction of the self and the environment in the subaltern environmentalisms of Janu, Leelakumariamma, Mayilamma, and Pokkudan, by contrast, is never about self-actualisation and transcendence, but rather very much grounded in the material issues of livelihood and survival" (p. 34). They had no choice other than to fight for their rights, because unlike the Savarna people, the indigenous people were deprived of such privileges. Moreover, caste and religion were always a traumatizing experience for the people other than a uniting factor for them. They were always disorganized, and these resistance movements always helped them to unite and battle the inequalities imposed on them.

Christy K.J. (2020) states that post 1990's saw a hike in the number of Dalit autobiographies and life writings, and this helped people more than anything (p. 34). Social resistance movements emerge when grievances remain unacknowledged or are inadequately addressed by the governing authorities (Bisht, 2020, p. 55). They understood the importance of writings and the role they play in resisting hegemonic interventions from the mainstream society. Resistance writings always gave voice to the voiceless and are deemed one of the finest ways to resist the cultural appropriation from the other sections of society.

The Adivasi autobiographies or life writings never tried to imitate the language used by the mainstream writers; they used their own terminologies and used their own ways of expressing self rather than using the mainstream language and expressions. Other Dalit and Adivasi people such as Seleena Prakkanam, Mayilamma, Kallen Pokkuden used the same strategy used by the C.K. Janu to express their dissent and dissatisfaction. These autobiographies and life-writings helped deploy their restricted presence in the public discourses, thereby making their voices heard and resistance visible (Christy K.J., 2020, p. 43). That visibility made them fight for their rights more profoundly and in ways that are deemed barbaric by the civil society. These counter-narratives helped the Adivasis to further mobilizations and uprisings against all injustices. These narratives presented the Adivasis as people having agencies and self-determination, unlike the other narratives which treated them as subjects deemed to face the atrocities of the upper caste people. Adivasi resistance movements have often achieved significant changes in extractive practices and have advocated for legislation that recognizes the rights of indigenous communities to forests and ecosystems (Bisht, 2020). The deviance from the mainstream lot is quite evident throughout the narrative as Janu never uses the pronoun I, anywhere in the narrative. Sreejith Varma (2024) states that, "The personal self, in these life writings, is always presented as immersed in the larger metaphysical and sacred physical environment" (p. 140).

(IV)

The tribal resistance struggles rooted in a decolonial, indigenous ways have the potential to question and challenge the entrenched discourses of colonial regimes. Those spaces which the colonizers deemed as invaluable, encapsulated by Sivaramakrishnan as zones of anomaly. These physical spaces, through activism and advocacy, have turned into zones of resistance, with a deep connection to the land. The colonial gaze and the dominant Eurocentric narratives render these zones of anomaly as situating neither in nature nor in culture. 'A devalued and unwanted space where all the primitives reside', but with ample resistance movements and mobilizations, the indigenous people were able to humanize those lost, unwanted spaces. Humanising those spaces points not just towards the cultivation of those unwanted spaces; it also means giving meaning and value to those spaces. Rendering those spaces inhabitable and the people uncivilised is overturned by the resistance that paved way for homing their ancestral lands.

The narratives as executed in *Mother Forest,* critique, challenge, and contribute to the ongoing discourse on decolonization. Every indigenous resistance act in one way or the other is a decolonial endeavour, as they are still struggling from the inequities started by the British and continued by the successive governments. Britishers introduced private property ownership for the tribal forest land and that started the expropriation of tribal lands. The narrative resonates Janu's agency, the intersectional nature of the tribal resistance and the

transformative capacity rooted in indigenous cosmologies. These resistance narratives further fortify the depth of the indigenous identity which has deep connections with land, cultural preservation and environmental justice. *Mother Forest* (2004) is a testimony to understand the significance of questioning the grand narrative established by the oppressors as it perpetuates historical injustices and marginalization (p. 45). Even though the resistance is rooted in indigenous local cosmologies, it becomes global when questioning the roots of the problem, other than the symptoms the problem envisages. It may explore parallels with other indigenous resistance movements around the globe and grab attention to the shared struggles and invite possibilities for a cross-cultural solidarity. The narrative deconstructs the residue of the colonial legacies and develops a wider understanding of the relationship between indigenous communities, their land, and socio-cultural aspects. Such resistance movements rooted in indigenous spaces are one way to bring visibility to the imperceptible problems faced by the indigenous communities in India. For the non-indigenous community, the problems and the hardships faced by the tribals are not a matter of concern.

Mother Forest (2004) also showcases the importance of preserving oral histories which act as a cultural bridge connecting various generations, thus fortifying the indigenous identity and a sense of continuity. This is evident from the instances where Janu talks about the new generation of Adiya community who have quite a few connections with their cosmologies and culture.

In conclusion, this paper attempts to illustrate how resistance narratives can contest and subvert the oppressive norms and epistemologies that have historically marginalized and exploited the indigenous people and their cosmologies. Through an examination of C.K. Janu's life narrative, *Mother Forest: An Unfinished Story of C.K. Janu* (2004), a tribal eco-activist who strived for her community, this paper has demonstrated how indigenous ways of knowing and being can offer different viewpoints and solutions to issues caused by colonialism and its aftermath. Though a single solution for this pervasive problem cannot be achieved that easily, one suggestion, as Pavithra Narayanan (2019) has rightfully observed, is "by dissolving colonial laws, upholding land acts and treaties, including indigenous people in decision-making processes and negotiations, sharing profits among stakeholders, and providing adequate compensation and rehabilitation" (p. 256).

The significance of decolonial studies that emphasise the intersectionality of oppression and resistance as well as the richness and diversity of indigenous cultures and worldviews has also been emphasised in this paper. Knowing one's own ancestral roots is the single most effective way in regaining the lost privileges of any community. Hence, a struggle rooted in local cosmologies, yet questioning bigger structures of injustice within its limited reach. Policymakers should prioritize the needs of the indigenous people over monetary interests. Moreover, fair participation from the part of indigenous people should be mandatory while formulating Forest policies.

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