

The Language of the Drum as a Metaphor to Subaltern Speech: A Critical Reading of Shivaram Karanth's *Choma's Drum*

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Abstract

The Jnanpith awardee Shivaram Karanth wrote *Chomana Dudi* in the Kannada language in 1933; it was translated into English as *Choma's Drum* by U R Kalkur in 1978. Many critics have grappled with practice of untouchability and the plight of Choma in the novel. But the existing scholarship undermines the symbiotic affiliation between Choma and the inanimate drum. Choma—the protagonist in the novel does not speak but his drum speaks, and he seems to express his anxieties through the object. Drum becomes part and parcel of his life. The paper tries to map the fictional trajectory of narratives that free the drum from the domestic context and modify the drum as a metaphor to the subaltern assertion. In the process of understanding the drum as an agency of the representation of unspeakable assertions of Choma, myriad plights of untouchables are disclosed. The novel contains 'subaltern' perspectives. Choma's tragic life is a result of the caste system and the exploitation of Belli and other labourers in the coffee plantation is the black face of capitalism. The novel seems to see parallel lines between the two oppressive powers.

Keywords: Kannada modernity; Metaphor; Subaltern; Untouchability.

Speaking of the Unspoken: Transcription of Subaltern Perspectives in the Novel

"I read a book one day, and my whole life was changed" (1)— the opening line of the novel *The New Life* by Orhan Pamuk reveals to us the value and strength of literature in the life of an individual. A work of art can contribute to the social changes also. Upon seeing Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in a party he threw after being elected as

the President of USA, Abraham Lincoln exclaimed: "So this is the little lady who started the great-war" (Canada 636). His reaction underlines the impact of her path-breaking novel in mobilizing a social reformation during the Civil War in America. These two lines are exemplary achievements of literature in materializing changes in an individual and a social order.

An individual and society can also inspire a work of art. That is why the world has seen the most celebrated painters, writers, singers, and musicians. They created a definite sense of humanity in their mimetic representation that could not be located in reality. In the context of literature, many writers are remembered under the second category: inspired by the experience of society. Under this argument, I am contextualizing the novel *Choma's Drum*. The narrative matrix of the text unfolds the trajectory of oppressive social reality being depicted by an upper-class writer (Karanth). The humans are not mere living beings; they are a constellation of myriad experiences of a society. Karanth's interest in the anthropological pitches of local communities has strengthened the narratives of his literary works. Being one of the Kannada modern writers, he developed a keen observation of the world around. He points out the motivations behind writing this novel thus:

...there are four classes of untouchables: Meras, Bairas, Ajils and Maris, in South Canara District. Mari Periahs lowest among them are not given importance in the society. Even their shadow is treated as untouchable. They have to survive by eating left-over of their masters and eating dead animals or by doing any lowest profession in the society. Till now they are not entitled to do the work of coolie as well. Choma is the creature of this class. (2007 vii)

He further says that Choma is rejected by god-Panjurli and society. His pain is double-edged. The author shares his ethnographic observations in the novel thus: "I have observed the life of holeyas (Harijans) in my village. I also saw them work in coffee plantations. My observations shaped themselves into *Chomana Dudi* in five days".

These experiences enthused Karanth into writing *Choma's Drum* — one of his masterpieces. The novel deals with the oppressive social structure, the rigid caste prejudices and the inhuman practice of untouchability. Hence, the testimonial observations and narratives of Karanth are in accordance with Pramod Nayar's view on Baby Kamble's life: "accurate historical witnessing of a social structure of traumatic oppression" (2008 109). As a writer from the higher class, Karanth wrote this

novel about an untouchable's life that raised new waves in the Kannada literature and marked as the abolitionist literature.

Before going further, it is essential to know the multi-faceted Karanth who stands along with Rabindranath Tagore, R.K Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk raj Anand. The connecting commonality among all these writers is the visibility of the Gandhian ideologies. They were all motivated by the personality of Mahatma Gandhi and grappled with social issues. Consequently, Karanth wrote not for the sake of writing but to 'educate' people. He contributed to not only literature but also, as Guha observes, to:

nationalism, social reform, commerce, journalism, photography, acting, dance, painting, music, cinema, experiments in education, rural uplift, the popularization of science ... the writing of novels (as many as forty-five), the writing of plays (not less than ninety), and environmentalism." (2004 201)

Bhabani Bhattacharya joins the chorus of writers who depict social realism in their work and says: "I hold that a novel must have a social purpose. It must place before the reader something from the society's point of view" (Sharma 145). A writer must pen on social problems that are still alive in the social order. These testimonies of intellectuals corroborate the necessity of providing what Gayatri Spivak observes the 'voice' to the unspoken.

Set in a village named Bhogana Halli, Karanth's work accesses the social reality of Choma with a keen anthropological eye. A brief introduction of Choma's family discloses the intensity of anthropological coherence developed by the novelist. The subaltern Choma has four sons—Chaniya, Guruva, Neela, Kala and the only daughter Belli. He has a few pet animals: a dog (Baadu), two oxen. The keen observation of the performative and ritualistic structure of such communities allows Karanth to see an inanimate thing, i.e., drum as an integral part of the novel. The drum is seen as Choma's companion after the death of his wife; the drum speaks on behalf of the unspoken, tongue-tied slave. Choma's family stays in a small hut which metaphorically represents slums in contemporary rural-urban India. As the author points out: "the hut was his own-when not claimed by rains and storms" (17). The author's description shows how Choma's condition resembles homeless slum dwellers and poor quality of living in villages. The author illustrates Choma's life with biting irony "there was nothing extraordinary either in Choma's drum or in his life. He had remained backward even among the holeyas, the untouchables" (12), and

Karanth goes further to explain the deplorable state of Choma that “wife is probably too dignified a word for a lowly untouchable” (ibid) like Choma. These third-person omniscient narratives replicate the social conditions of Holeyas and stereotypical views towards the subaltern castes.

The fictionalization of the everyday life of his family is narrativized thus: “The dinner would be before dark, for no lamp had even been lit in Choma’s hut, what precious thing did they have to do at night to need a lamp?” (16) The line invites the realization of the ignored status of the life of an untouchable. The narration of the author on Choma’s life consists of biting-irony.

Choma has a dream of earning his bread. He wants to become a small independent farmer and lead a dignified life. Everyone dreams, but some of us dream of achieving what we could not do in wakefulness. Many great personalities dream of achieving in wakefulness, and they do it in mental consciousness. Many times what we see in the dream is materialized in real life only when we put in the effort. Choma puts efforts, but his ideas are not materialized. Choma’s life is tragic. Is Choma’s dream ‘mega-motivated’? Choma dreams of owning a small piece of land. He has dexterity in agriculture. Choma has an intense desire to become a farmer like Wang Lung, the farmer protagonist in Pearl S Buck’s novel *The Good Earth* (1931). His effort to possess his bread replicates with the struggles of Santiago in *The Old Man and The Sea*. Strikingly, Choma’s only source of consolation seems to be the drum. His attachment with the drum can be better understood in parallel with the case of Oskar Matzerath’ in *The Tin Drum*. Being a bonded labour to Sankampayya, his sincerity can be compared with Uncle Tom’s commitment to his master in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Despite all these capabilities, Choma’s dream to have a little land on lease remains an only dream.

Choma had been a ‘bonded-laborer’ to Sankappayya’s family since his ancestors. Henceforth he wants to become a farmer. His desire to become a farmer is a natural desire, not the motivated desire by materialist interest. His unconditional service to his master makes him dream for a piece of land on lease. He humbly requests Sankappayya: “Master, you have so many tenants. If you could lease me a piece of land, even barren land, I shall revere your name for the rest of my life” (28). Moreover, he is asking for a barren land that is not used by Sankappayya. Sankappayya’s sarcastic reply unfolds the caste prejudices used to justify discrimination thus: “one must stretch one’s legs just as much as one’s bed allows” (28) Abraham Maslow’s words – “What a man can be, he must be” (46) – underlines the importance of equal opportunities in the progress of civilization. Contrari-

ly, Choma is not allowed to till the land for his grains. His enthusiasm, interest and ability are undermined. Sankappayya seems to divert Choma's request by putting this riddle based on Choma's caste and untouchability, but not based on his expertise in tilling the land. The necessity to think about Choma arises in the reader's mind because "a musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself." (Maslow 28)

What I observe in the novel is that Choma's desire is not to gain *power* but to gain 'grain of his own' — a symbol of dignity and self-fulfillment. He strives to come out from the clutches of his master for life long. Choma's desire to till the land is supported by his "sense of belongingness," which avoids the feeling of an unsettled life. The assertion to a sense of denial can be understood better with reference to Yank from O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*. As Yank asserts when he is manacled from his work, his anxiety of being reduced to a mere living being is articulated thus: "I'm a busted Ingersoll, dat's what. Steel was me, and I owned de woild. Now I ain't steel, and de woild owns me. Aw, hell! I can't see—it's all dark, get me? It's all wrong!" (272). Akin to Yank, Choma's unconditional loyalty and hardship are undermined by the caste prejudices. Choma eventually slows down his nature of work without any hope of fulfilling his dream. Choma loses his optimism and sense of belongingness; hence he lands in a vacuum of uncertainty.

Basic needs such as food, water, love, friendship, belongingness, and security needs are the essential requirements. Choma is never met with security needs. To live in a society, we need to achieve economic sources. Choma strongly believes that land could serve the purpose of his life and provide food to his family. Security of resources like food, shelter, cloth, family, respect, and the property is as necessary as breath, sex, sleep, homeostasis, etc. Psychology says when the "deficiency needs" are not met, the man feels anxious and tense. When Choma is not allowed to meet these needs by the hegemony of society, he expresses traumatic feelings and the unsettled life through the drum. Choma's wishes are neither "meta-motivated" (going beyond his limits) nor "mega-motivated" (over-expectation of materialist life). Having strength, experience, skill and positive attitudes to till the land, he wants to be a respectable and simple farmer.

The narratives of the novel seem to gain empathic meaning while disclosing the social reality of the Independent India. Further, the constitutional rights have also not reached the lowest among the lower section of the social order in contemporary times. The inferiority complexity among the

marginal sections further causes self-destruction. The story raises serious questions on the subject of social discrimination from multiple perspectives. For instance, Choma solicits suggestions from his daughter Belli on means of approaching his master to get a piece of land for lease. She gives a discouraging reply: "now, you don't make any such demand and be snubbed!" (18) Her words unveil the ambiguity and dilemmas that have weakened the socio-psychological structure of the lower caste. Adding to it, Karanth fascinatingly puts his opinion on the possible reaction from the upper echelon society: "they will consider if Holeyaholds land disaster will happen" (11). The author's statement stands testimonial to the act of othering and the dehumanizing treatment of Holeyas in a society dominated by the Brahminical and hegemonic castes.

The native dominant castes, according to the narratives, have constructed a set of moral codes that are followed by the marginal castes. The social obligation curtails the freedom of thought. For instance, Choma is made to be extremely sincere to his master, but he goes through a great deal of difficulty in expressing his wish to lease land. The unconditional sincerity to his landlord stops him from finding alternative means of a dignified survival. When Choma needs to go to the plantation to clear his debt, he gets into the labyrinth of duty and sincerity: "Should he slip away without informing the landlord? That would be an act of treachery" (21). This expression unveils an ethical sense of Choma; whereas, Sankappayya prioritizes the social status over the unconditional commitment of Choma. The master upholds the structure of feudal tradition that undermines the ability of Choma.

The master makes a perpetual strategy to remain in power. The powerless may opt-out a simple life, but the dominant finds ploys to sustain hegemony. The dominant seems to make perpetual treacheries to retain his position of domination and power. Sankamppayya makes alternative ways to divert the mind of Choma. Let me explain the psychology of Sankappayya in the light of a philosophical story: "Three in the Morning" by Chuang Tzu. A monkey trainer went to his monkeys and told them: "As regards your chestnuts: you are going to have three measures in the morning and four in the afternoon."

At this, they all became angry. So he said: "All right, in that case I will give you four in the morning and three in the afternoon." This time they were satisfied.

The two arrangements were the same and the number of chestnuts did not change. But in one case the animals were displeased, and in the oth-

er, they were satisfied. The keeper had been willing to change his personal arrangement in order to meet objective conditions. He lost nothing.

Similarly, Sankappayya assures Choma of giving land while on the other hand, he asks Choma to wait until his mother dies. He brings his mother as a reason to escape from responsibility. He says to Choma, "you will have to wait until my mother dies." Dramatically, Choma passes away early. Though Sankappayya tends to respond to Choma's requests, his replies seem to be a form of 'master morality' – Nietzsche's elucidation on the way master defends himself from his actions in the name of impartiality and a hold on his slave for his existence. By this, he protects his mother's order: "not to offer Brahminhood to an untouchable." Choma's character picturizes the way masters have a hold on subalterns and keep them as subalterns by pretending as if they are helping the subordinate.

The novelist also equates the caste hegemony with capitalism. The progress of capitalism also affected the coolies who primarily belong to the marginal section of the society. The darker side of capitalism and its echoes in the caste system is projected through the narration of the life of workers in the coffee plantations. Workers are not given basic amenities and needs. Capitalism and the plantation environment exploited the coolies as well as Belli. Manuel manipulated accounts and foisted fraudulent loans done by innocent workers. In the name of paying their debts, Manuel made workers for walking to the plantation. Belli gets sexually abused by Manuel and plantation lord Michael. To pay their debts, which was made in crucial conditions, many coolies have to work in plantations for low wages until their debts are cleared.

The coolies' condition at the plantation is so pathetic. Living rooms are like cattle sheds. One has to bend while entering into the rooms. No ventilation, floors are very rough. Staying in the rooms creates a suffocating situation. Food and water provided to workers are unbearable. As this line speaks, "the water was so muddy that even thirsty cattle would have been hesitant to drink it" (36).

In the plantation, struggling life makes subalterns forget even how to enjoy the natural life. They cannot also sense what they have around them. On the way to plantations, they pass by a picturesque landscape but fail to enjoy the aesthetics of the Hirimuruguppe range which "lifted its peaks into a cloud-dapped sky" (38) The range was accompanied by the limpid stream. Karanth narrates: "It was a place where poets would have loved to linger, but to the hard life of these tired travelers it communicated nothing." (38) Meanwhile, the death of Pomma's granddaughter reminds

us of the ugly faces of capitalist society. Manuel's reply—"it was a great thing it had survived all these years" (42) – evokes any sensible reader to criticize capitalist arrogance towards the lives of workers. The testimonial narratives help us in grappling with various forms of exploitation prevalent in the society of Independent India and the creation of subalterns based on religion and capitalism.

Language of the Unspoken: The Cacophony of The Drum as the Voice of the Voiceless

Life of the denied communities is full of struggles and tragedies. Their existence is not acknowledged unless they resist oppressive hegemonic practices. Subalterns find various means of resistance that James Scott observes "everyday weapons of weak." But Scott's idea has limitations because he mentions "foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth" (1985 : 29). The tragic hero broadens the horizon of resistance by using the drum as a weapon of the weak. The image of the inanimate drum is filled with anthropological importance. The drum is being used by various communities in the Indian cultural contexts for ritualistic purposes. The role of the drum in the novel transcends its ritualistic context and becomes an agency of expression. The expression of Choma seems to pour out his unspeakable anxieties. Literary genre (poem, story, play, etc.), an art form (music, dance, etc.) speech, etc. have become an agency of anxieties and articulations. Choma's drum becomes an expression of the inner feelings of Choma, hence the drum becomes a metaphor to his language which bespeaks the unspoken anxieties.

Before going further, it is essential to grapple with the ideology of the oppressor. The social history of exploitation can be better understood with reference to many perspectives. The translator and literary critic C.R. Yravintelimath rightly observes the trajectory of caste discrimination in the Indian social order thus:

In India, the colonial situation... seems to have prevailed even long before the foreigners—the Muslims and the British came to India, but there is no gainsaying that the colonial situation- the domination of the superior over the weaker ones-worsened when the British cast their shadow on India. The pre-colonial situation, which seems to be peculiar to India, was a result of Varnavyavastha-the caste system-which was worse than imperialism because it led to the concentration of political power in one particular caste-the Kshatriya and that of the religious and spiritu-

al power in the Brahmins. By and large this system was known as the Brahminical order. From time immemorial the Brahminical order prevailed in India and in this order the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas together dominated over the Shudras. When the British came to India, the highly privileged superior castes joined force with the British in tyrannizing over the Shudras.

Through the ages, Shudras and the oppressed communities, as the author mentions in his preface to the novel, have been subjected to inferior jobs and remain in the lower echelons of society. Having been denied access to basic needs under the grips of the caste system, they have remained subalterns.

The upper echelon of the society had put many efforts in an attempt to remain in the dominant status and maintain cultural domination, what Antonio Gramsci pointed as "the hegemony," over Shudras. It does not mean that there was no resistance to these imperialist attitudes through the ages and times. Right from the beginning of civilizations, one could see the various avatars of resistance: wars, movements, agitations, etc. Several undocumented social reformations have happened while encountering the cultural hegemony in colonial and post-colonial times.

Literary narratives of the novel imagine the struggle of an individual towards creating a metaphorical resistance to oppressive social order. An individual like Choma can speak through the only language of drum against the humiliating hegemony of the society. The rhetoric of resistance he uses also becomes the form and weapon of resistance and leads to his self-satisfaction. In everyday life, Choma is treated as a domestic animal; contrarily, an inanimate object, i.e., the drum, becomes a means of resistance against dominancy. This struggle for existence becomes a source of inspiration and raw material for 'work of art' through which the author speaks of the unspoken – neglected and oppressed.

In the textual context, Karanth satisfied himself with his concern about marginalized by writing this book. He dedicated this book to Devanna Subraya Pi, who came from the poor class. On the other hand, Choma satisfies himself and meets his emotions and inner self by beating the drum. The beating of the drum is full of pathos. It is his language to express merries and miseries.

The drum transcends its ritualistic context and symbolizes ideologies, subaltern assertions and resistance against social rejection. Choma is helpless on several grounds: the denial to become farmer, the untimely death of his son, sexual exploitation of his daughter, etc. The groundless Choma

finds relief, reconciliation, hope, and a sense of belongingness in the drum.

“Dama-dhamma, dakadhakka” –the voice of drum– grabs the attention of people in the village. The villagers could not understand and hear the inner voice of Choma, so he selected the drum. The drum appears to give him recognition: “All of a sudden that sound damadhamma dakadhakka hits his [Sankappayya] ears like a clap of thunder and stopped him in his tracks. Those behind him also stopped, puzzled by that sound” (11). While returning from the village fair near Bhoganahalli, the drum beatings of Choma grabbed their attention and made them stand for a while. Choma, who had arrived before them from the festival, started expressing his pent-up feelings through his drum at his thatched hut. Having been affected by drum beats, one of the villagers in the company of Sankappayya exclaimed that “this is our Choma’s drum. I don’t know at what auspicious moment was this fellow born. To him birth and death are alike, night and day are alike drinking and beating the drum” (10). This speech awakes the reader to understand the pathos in Choma and his attachment to the drum.

Choma is a physically powerful man, but his low caste and treatment made him weak. These solitary and traumatic conditions of Choma make him find a way to express his frustrated feelings, and the drum stands as a beacon to his life. It gives him the strength to bear immense sadness and takes part in giving him solace. The drum seems to create an organic relation with the everyday life of Choma.

One day when the family members of Choma came back from the fair without eating anything, younger ones Neela and Kala felt very much hungry; both of them could not control themselves and started crying. They did not have anything but thrashes and beatings from their father, and they slept. Choma was not much disturbed by this, but being a father, he could not forget it easily. So to get relief from the incident, he took his drum and started beating it with greater stress and emotions. Belli started singing (“Le Le Le”) with steps along with rhythmical beatings of the drum to accompany her deserted father. He does not speak with anyone while beating the drum, but the drum speaks to a sensible reader to feel the unheard voice of visionary Choma. In the novel, except Belli, nobody knows the purpose of beating the drum. She knows that the drum is an agency through which her father articulates anger, happiness, excitement, suffering, and hope.

Upon expressing his wish to get a piece of land for lease, Belli asked him not to keep his hope of having a portion of the land alive, Choma’s

angry doubled. He wept a lot and uttered:

I had hoped to be a farmer during my wife's life-time, but it was not given to her to see me so. Since her death, I have been hoping that my children will see me realise my dream. Should you now try to kill my hopes? (20).

Bewildered by her father's cries, she picked the drum and began to strike it. The anxiety-ridden Choma "snatched it and began to beat it. Belli felt relieved." (20) Mediator between Choma and Belli is the drum, and ultimately drum is a spokesman of Choma feelings.

One day Choma went to Sankappayya as usual and sat in the courtyard like a caged bird. All coolies went to their homes with the wages of the day. Choma neither moved from his place nor spoke to his master. He intends to talk about something, but he is in a dilemma to speak or not to speak. Sankappayya, his master guessed through gestures of Choma that he wanted to ask something. Sankappayya told Choma to ask anything without hesitation. Then Choma asked a piece of wasteland that he could survive independently while cultivating the ground in the name of Sankappayya. This request was the question of the existence of hegemony. It shocks the ontological structure of Sankappayya's feudal ideology. As it is mentioned earlier, a small touch of the subordinate can alter the entire foundation of power. Choma's humble request seems unacceptable to his landlord. Sankappayya did not expect it, and he was shocked. He started brooding his head whether an untouchable could become a farmer. Unwilling to give the land, Sankappayya seeks his mother's suggestions. The mother did not allow him to consider Choma's proposal positively. She exclaimed how these (Holeyas) untouchables dare to ask a piece of land. His mother's utterance "abba, the insolence of these holeyas!" (29) speaks rigidness of caste hierarchy. Choma became speechless and left for the toddy shop with his heavy heart. He came back to his home when everyone except Belli was in sound sleep. He started beating the drum until he lost a sense of bitter humiliation and angst.

The ambition of Choma to call himself a farmer is shattered, but the picture of the plough is still in his eyes. The author narrates the inner thoughts of Choma as "if he was not to wield a plough as a farmer, he thought at times, why should he plough someone else's field? If he was not fated to cultivate his own field he saw no point in toiling in someone else's field." (43) A battle of thoughts started in his mind. He wanted to lead his life with a work of weaving baskets and selling them in the village. It is also not possible to him because it is a tradition that Choma

cannot go to work anywhere except Sankappayya's land. He cannot work for others. The whole of Choma's family became bonded laborers. As per the tradition of a higher caste, an untouchable should be bonded to his master until he dies. Therefore Sankappayya is responsible for Choma's well being. But the master's patronization justifies caste hegemony, which ought to be accepted by the slave. Without slaves, the status of the master does not survive. For the sake of its survival, the feudal patronization takes care of Choma's family. The well-being of his family remains a dream. His children died; some of them suffer from malaria; they struggle for food and clothing. There are many holes in the thatched roof of his hut. In the rainy season, rain falls into the shelter as heavy as it falls outside. Choma takes his drum and beats on it for hours together. Choma became humble, helpless, and voiceless. Belli also could not speak anything against her master; Choma started beating the drum throughout the night, forced his two small children and Belli to step according to the rhythm of the drum.

The narratives verbalize an inanimate drum and humanize the object by establishing an organic affiliation with Choma. The observation of the translator of the book is worth referring to here. According to Kalkur, the *dudi* (drum) gives expression to Choma's overwhelming emotions, joyous or sorrow. Finally, the *dudi* empowers Choma. He dies as if all his life he was preparing for a sudden departure. But the beating of the *dudi* is still heard. Jason Kahn, one of the most excellent contemporary musicians, gives a striking opinion that "the life and energy of the drummer live half within the drummer's soul, and half within the drum he plays." The novel seems to bespeak a symbiotic affiliation between the protagonist and the drum.

Though the relationship between the drum and Choma cannot be substantiated scientifically, a matter of feeling and sense lends a metaphorical ground to it. Relations are felt, understood and sensed. Similarly, the connection between Choma and the drum, and the inspirations and reliefs he gets from it are also left to readers' thoughts, sensitivity, and creativity. In a nutshell, Choma's drum resembles the shaman's drum that mediates between one's reality and a spiritual world.

In the trajectory of civilization, musical instruments have been symbols for revolution, assertion, and expression of angst. Karanth narrates, "the drum was to him (Choma) what *damaru* was to Lord Shiva." (14) In Indian myths, the lord Shiva uses the *damaru* whenever he gets angry. Damaru is used as an expression of anger against demonic forces. The sound of *damaru* signifies the infinite energy of Shiva in destroying evils.

In Indian popular culture, especially in movies and revolutionary songs, the drum is used as a medium of frustrations, exploitations, happiness, sorrow, etc. In the African continent also, tribes are very much attached to musical instruments like flute and predominantly the drums of various shapes. The noticeable point is that even Choma's condition is also akin to Africans. Culturally and anthropologically tribes coming in this continent are not an exception from Choma's predicaments.

The so-called civilized countries have also not been spared from using the drum. For instance, the drums were used in the day-to-day life of the soldiers during the American Civil war; they played a significant role in getting rid of boredom with hectic activities in war camps. Through the performance of several drum bands, soldiers were given entertainment and refilled the spirit in their life. Studies reveal the role of drum bands in rejuvenating the spirit of soldiers: "During the Civil War military musicians dramatically affected the lives of both soldiers and civilians" (Manjerovic and Budds 130). Mainly speaking about the drum band, Manjerovic and Budds point out the function of the drum band thus:

...to soothe the anxieties of homesickness, the miseries of campaigning, and the tragedies of war...the very sound of a wind band played a significant role in caring for the soul and spirits of officers, soldieries and villains. (130)

The drum is a language, mediator of the spiritual world, source of inspiration, and voice of wounded one. It also does the job of a weapon of the weak to resist the trauma, chaos in the society that originates by the lust of human beings in an attempt to sustain the feudal structure. Similarly, Choma cannot live without the drum because it is a weapon and a language of resistance against hegemony, which undermined his existence.

Conclusion

The novel narrates myriad tragedies of Choma: the death of his son, disowning his elder son, alienation from his daughter Belli, rejection to become a farmer, finally, his death. Despite his humiliating life, Choma's identity exists in the form of the drum. The drum remains in the novel as an identity of subaltern speech. The cacophony of the drum becomes a social signature for the traumatic life of the subaltern. Choma's drum annihilates all calamities. The echoes of the drum are audible across every chapter. The sound of the drum wakes up the soul of any sensible reader to understand the trauma of Choma. The drum accompanies Choma in every walk of his; the fury of the drum – "damadhamma dakadhakka," joins

the last breath of Choma. The novel starts with the drum beating and ends with the drum beating. Symbolically, the author seems to suggest that the echo of the drum will remain in the minds of readers until characters like Choma exists in society.

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