

Resistance in Jacinta Kerketta's *Land of the Roots***¹Shushrut Ranjan Pattanayak**

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Article Received: 02/09/2025**Article Accepted:** 01/10/2025**Published Online:** 02/10/2025**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.10.22**Abstract**

This paper analyses resistance in Jacinta Kerketta's poetry collection *Land of the Roots*. The paper argues that her poems are a multifront “war of position,” in a Gramscian sense, waged against dominant narratives of capitalist society. Deriving from Antonio Gramsci's definition of hegemony and Michel Foucault's analytics of power, this paper illuminates her poems as a counter-hegemonic project in constructing a new collective consciousness. Through close reading of her work, the analysis identifies four interconnected sites of resistance: ecological, cultural, linguistic, and gendered. The essay argues that Kerketta's poems are not protest, as such, but a deliberate political intervention to deconstruct dominant narratives of “development” and construct a new consciousness based in *Jal*, *Jungle*, *Jameen*, promoting the Adivasi worldview.

Keywords- Resistance, Adivasi, Language, Culture, Gender**Introduction**

Resistance broadly refers to actions, expressions and narratives through which marginalized groups confront and challenge power structures. Rebecca Raby defines resistance, in its active and collective form, as “an overt and collective action against the dominant group, with a clear goal towards societal change” (153). James C. Scott narrows down the meaning of resistance to everyday actions and emphasizes that everyday actions of often an individual or a small group that oppose dominance (Hidden Transcripts) are also a form of resistance (See in Raby 159). Emphasizing the relational nature of power, Michel Foucault argues that resistance stands against power: “Where there is power, there is resistance” (95). Similarly, Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony frames dominance as the supremacy of a social group which manifests itself in two ways, as ‘domination’ and as ‘intellectual and moral leadership’ (Gramsci 151). So, resistance can also be defined as a counter hegemonic apparatus to confront and disrupt dominance.

Tribal (Adivasi) resistance in India has taken many forms: from armed revolts like the Santhal and Munda rebellions to nonviolent movements defending forests and their culture. Adivasi resistance is frequently intertwined with the protection of *Jal, Jungle, Jameen* (“water, forest, and land”); these elements are closely associated with the existence of Adivasi communities and central to their struggle framing them as “Ecological Warriors” (Singh 2). Scholars note that tribal women often play major roles in these struggles. As Ilina Sen observes, “the strong participation of Adivasi women in tribal resistance struggles in history conveys an impression of women’s agency” (94). Even if that agency is complex and under-recognized. Adivasi women have not only contributed to sustaining ecological knowledge and community life but have also joined and led protests.

Jacinta Kerketta (born in 1992) is an Oraon Adivasi poet and journalist from Jharkhand, one of the poorest Indian states with a majority tribal population. This paper examines resistance in Jacinta Kerketta’s poetry collection *Land of the Roots* (Hindi *Jadon Ki Zameen*, 2018). Critics describe her as poet of resistance and protest, giving voice to the historical injustices faced by the tribal community (Soni and Ashrafi 155). Her work embodies multiple forms of resistance: ecological (defending forests, rivers, and land), cultural (resisting globalization and cultural erosion), and gendered (reflecting Adivasi women’s perspectives). This paper outlines the concept of resistance in context of Adivasis, then analyses the themes of ecological, cultural lingual and gendered resistance in *Land of the Roots*, drawing on theorists and critics and quoting Kerketta’s poems. It involves the close reading and examination of the poems along with integration of relevant scholarly materials.

The Concept of Resistance and Jacinta Kerketta

To understand the political significance of Jacinta Kerketta's poetry, it requires moving beyond interpreting resistance only as protest. Her poetry needs a sophisticated thought process that can better account for how power operates in contemporary societies. Through a synthesis between Antonio Gramsci's and Michel Foucault's ideas, we can create a powerful method to analyze her work. This will demonstrate that Kerketta's poetry is an intelligent act of resistance in favor of weaker sections both in tactics and strategy.

To grasp the concept of resistance one needs to understand the concept of power in entirety. Foucault's thought makes us perceive resistance side by side with power. He does not define power as a possession but rather a relational and diffused power; hence, resistance is not merely against power in a manner but is inscribed within it (Foucault 95). For Michel Foucault, resistance is not a mere act of protest of monolithic repressive authority, but a much more complex and diffused phenomenon. It is essentially determined in respect to power, which Foucault theorizes not as a downward force but a productive network of relations “exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations” (Foucault, qtd. in Raby 161). Therefore, resistance is comprehended as being immanent to and extending to that network; as Foucault declares, “Where there is power, there is resistance” (95). Resistance is not some large, monolithic revolution but a “plurality of resistances” (Foucault 96). What Foucault recommends is “to refuse what we are” since we

have been constituted through power (Foucault 785). Such refusal can be performed within several different strategic modalities such as an “insurrection of subjugated knowledge” which discovers disqualified histories and epistemologies or within ethical “technologies of the self” where people proactively construct new identities and modes of existing (Foucault, qtd. in Raby 162). This structure is highly applicable to making sense of the Adivasi condition. The colonial and post-colonial state has established the Adivasi identity by a “régime du savoir” (regime of knowledge) (Foucault 781) that labels them with terms such as “primitive”, “savage”, and “backward” and implies that they must be “civilized” or “developed” (Singh 2). This classification is merely descriptive; it is also a mode of exercising power that provides grounds for intervention, control, and the taking away of land. Kerketta’s poetry showcases such a resistance that indicates a “refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries” (Foucault 785). Her poetry resists the identity assigned to the Adivasi by the powers that seeks to “promote new forms of subjectivity” promoting an independent Adivasi consciousness (Foucault 785).

Gramsci similarly highlights the cultural dimensions of power. He argues that modern states rule not just by force but through hegemony: the pervasive influence of the ruling class’s ideas and values, which become “common sense” (Gramsci, qtd. in James). In this view, cultural production – literature, folklore, education – is a battleground of ideology. Subordinate groups must develop *counter-hegemonic* narratives to contest the dominant worldview. Gramsci believes that the working-class intelligentsia should generate a new ideology to counter the worldview (cultural hegemony) of the dominant class (Im 145). Kerketta’s work can be seen exactly as such a counter-hegemonic effort. By foregrounding Adivasi terms (like *Jal*, *jameen*, *jangal*) and worldviews, and by documenting the violence of so-called development, her poems refuse to accept the mainstream narrative that frames tribal land as empty or primitive. Instead, they assert an Adivasi common sense in which forests have rights and tribal culture is valid. In this sense, *Land of the Roots* works to unmask and undermine the hegemony of the nation-state’s material growth-oriented ideology.

Resistance against Anthropocentric Attitude

Kerketta often depicts ecological resistance as one of the core tenets in her works. Her works function as a powerful testimony against ecocide, documenting the violence of extraction and so-called development with visceral imagery. A central pillar of Adivasi resistance is ecological concern: tribes have historically seen themselves as part of nature rather than separate from it. Kerketta’s poems consistently portray humans and nature in intimate unity and depict the ecosystem as under siege by modern “progress.” In *Land of the Roots*, water, forests, and earth are alive, sentient entities whose desecration is a severe injustice. Kerketta writes from a biocentric worldview, emphasizing a “discourse of tribal worldview where humans identify themselves with the non-human world” (Malwika 92). This aesthetic expression mirrors traditional beliefs of Adivasis. Singh is justified when she observes that “*Jal*, *Jungle*, *Jameen*” are not commodities for Adivasis but sacred, “existential spaces” (Singh 2).

The city, in her poetry, is a site of profound loss, a place that issues a death sentence for rivers, even as it “keeps them alive in memories” for a future generation that will never know them physically (Kerketta 17). In her poem “Somewhere in this City” she writes:

“The disappearing sparrow sees at the hands of a crowded city The death of butterfly and the children watch Playground turn into cemeteries...” (Kerketta 17, 19)

This imagery of ecological death is witnessed by the innocent non-human beings and are not neutral descriptions; they are charged metaphors of oppression that symbolize the destruction of nature. The city in her poetry is a symbol of alienation, displacement, where vital connections are severed. Her poem “The city and the Cow” functions as a powerful allegory for this destructive process. Lured by the lie that the city has means for growing grass, a herd of cows travels to the city from the pastures, only to find their illusions shattered. Depicting their despair, she writes:

“In Search for grass, they set forth Big and Small As their illusions are punctured By the pointed horns of hunger And they begin to look for The roads back to their home...” (Kerketta 47)

The cows think of returning to the village due to lack of food in the city but they can't. Hence, they sit in the middle of the road silently which explicates that they make the city as a site of silent protest. This imagery of displaced animals staging a protest in the heart of the city shows repercussions of the profound ecological and spiritual damage caused by urbanization. Another poetic strategy Kerketta uses is the consistent personification of nature. In the poem “Return” presenting a resilient “Mother Earth”, she writes:

“And she shall set herself free

From your rules and regulations

Her wounds she herself heal,

Cover naked lands once more with green.”

(Kerketta 143)

By Personifying nature with the abilities of action, emotion, and the potential of suffering and healing, the poetry of Kerketta resists the anthropocentric view of the world that believes in its exploitation. It is not just a literary trope; it is the assertion of indigenous epistemology that reflects the Adivasi belief of the world as alive and sentient. In doing so, she aligns Adivasis with the figure of the “ecological warrior,” who resists not just for human survival but for the protection of the entire ecosystem (Singh 2).

Cultural Resistance

The environmental defence of Kerketta goes hand-in-hand with a cultural resistance against the erasure of Adivasi history, memory, and identity. In a globalized world that pushes towards cultural homogenization, Adivasi literature becomes a political act of remembering, a resistance against the imposition of a “tabula rasa” by dominant cultures (Dutta 86). Tabula Rasa basically refers to a clean slate, which is forced upon Adivasis crushing their belief system and clears it from their memory (Dutta 86). G.N. Devy calls it “Imposed Aphasia” (Qtd in Dutta 86). Kerketta's poetry is a powerful archive of this memory. The title of her volume itself, *Land of the Roots (Jadon Ki Zameen)*, reminds us of its central theme. The “roots” not just denote the literal forest trees but, more profoundly, figuratively, refer to ancestral inheritance, cultural memory, and the sacral, physical

connection with the land. Association of Adivasis with their cultural roots is powerfully symbolized by the ritual of the Oraon community planting the umbilical cord of a child at the entrance of the home. This act of planting the umbilical cord grounds the person's identity, as it were, in his/her place of birth (M 204). In her poetry, Kerketta laments over the violent severing of such roots. She writes in her poem "In the Navel of Mother Earth":

"I seek that place where had been buried My umbilical cord Which when cut I was severed From mother the very first time And was lost all of a sudden." (Kerketta 25)

Kerketta's resistance extends to critiquing globalization and deceitful "development" that threatens tribal ways of life. The current economy has accelerated displacement, the pillage of resources, and cultural homogenization in India. Consolaro notes that writers like Kerketta see their work as preserving "indigenous/tribal identities in the globalized world" (Consolaro 479). This involves rejecting global slogans of progress that justify land grabs. This cultural resistance also involves a direct challenge to the hegemonic narrative of "progress" and the nation-state. Kerketta's work exposes the state's and corporations' promises of development as a destructive force that annihilates Adivasi lives for the profit of outsiders (M 207). This critique is significant as Adivasis are "increasingly marginalized and silenced in the dominant and hegemonic discourse of the nation-state itself" (Consolaro 480). In her poem "I Need an Occasion" she writes:

"For from the seat in Delhi His backyard appears rather blurry I shall have the jungle cleared, For it comes in the way Of my reaching there straight away. I shall free his hand Of ploughs and weapons And then on his fields plant My own factories, my own arms I shall celebrate both His freedom and his martyrdom-All I need is the right occasion." (Kerketta 29)

It depicts how this coerced submission robs the Adivasi person of the power to act, illustrating how the nation-state is an "agent of fear and violence" (Consolaro 482). By depicting "development" and nationalism from the perspective of those the nation-state silences and displaces, her poetry plays an invaluable counter-hegemonic role. It contributes to the construction of a new "common sense" among its readers, such that the normal notion of progress is not understood as a universal good but as a violent act. This is a critical movement in the Gramscian "war of position," which questions the fundamental assumptions of those in power (Im 143-144). It does not advocate for a nostalgic return to the past, but lays claim to a different type of modernity, one grounded in Adivasi principles of community, sustainability, and reverence for the land, rather than the notion of limitless extraction of natural resources and accumulation of material goods while destroying Adivasi values.

Linguistic Resistance

Struggle to maintain culture is deeply linked to language. Kerketta's poetry eloquently demonstrates how indigenous languages suffer against more powerful national languages. Adivasi languages contain special knowledge, culture, and common memory; loss of these languages means a serious loss of culture (M 206). Kerketta's poetry specifically confronts a loss of languages. She treats language as an individual treasure that is being lost due to migration and assimilation. This concept is made evident in her poem "Death of the

Mother Tongue," in which she describes a mother who, "in search of the mirage of being able to assure her children access to an improvement of living conditions by means of homogenization in the culture of domination, surrenders involuntarily every characteristic feature of her own culture, first and foremost the language" (Consolaro 484). This loss of culture makes the mother an "involuntary accomplice" in destroying her own culture, a tragedy Kerketta seeks to prevent. she writes:

Kerketta employs the predominant culture's primary language, Hindi, for her resistance and not her own mother tongue, Kurukh (M 207). This decision is not to fit in but to do a bold and intelligent act of resistance. Kerketta's words reflect this: "I write in Hindi because I want to speak to the perpetrators of injustice and violence on my community in their own language" (qtd. in M 207). By using such an approach, it ensures that a message of resistance reaches those in authority and can easily be promoted throughout the country, and such a compromise is a worthwhile one to resist on the primary ideological battlegr

Gendered Resistance

Kerketta's resistance draws deeply on her Adivasi female identity, and in her poetry, she offers a critique of overlapping oppressions. Her poetry gives a voice to the specific challenges and talents of Adivasi women, who undergo the devastating impact of patriarchal society, capitalist exploitation, and colonial violence. Her poems correlate well with scholarly literature such as that of Ilina Sen, showing how "mainstreaming" and globalization have imposed new patterns of patriarchy on Adivasi society, and how women have a special vulnerability to conflict and displacement-based systemic violence, including violent sexual abuse by state security forces (105-106). Sen explicitly mentions the horrors Adivasi girls go through in the name of "Control" and order. (Sen 105). In her poem, "Sahib! Pray, how will you dismiss?" she writes:

Kerketta's poetry establishes how damage to the land relates to damage to women. She frequently refers to the earth as a mother who provides life which connotes co-existence with nature and symbiotic relationship with mother earth. When she describes damaged and poisoned rivers and mountains, she hints at violence against women. The struggle against such damage goes along with the land's well-being and the well-being of its women. This perspective demonstrates how Kerketta's critique relates various issues. Her poetry acknowledges how the subjection of Adivasi people is tied to patriarchy and capitalism. The same power arrangement that views land as an object to utilize also views women's bodies and labour as something to exploit. Kerketta's resistance isn't limited to a particular issue. It is a whole critique of an interrelated system of domination that's capitalist, colonial and patriarchal simultaneously. By articulating pain of land and women in conjunction, she makes evident how these issues are interconnected and provides a resistance that's similarly whole and significant.

Conclusion

Jacinta Kerketta's *Land of the Roots* is not just about sadness; it is a smart effort in a Gramscian "war of position." This reading shows how it fights against powerful ideas on four connected fronts. Ecologically, it protects a sacred, living environment from harmful

development by promoting an indigenous, nature-based way of thinking. Culturally, it gives voice to memories, supporting Adivasi identity against being forgotten and the forces of globalization that make everything the same. Linguistically, it uses everyday speech to share the wisdom of marginalized voices but feeling sad about the loss of the mother tongue. Finally, by looking at gender and ecofeminism, it connects the harm done to the land and Adivasi women both, and it criticizes a system that is capitalist, colonial, and masculine at the same time. Adivasi authors like Jacinta Kerketta play an important role today in politics, environmentalism, and culture. As climate crises deepen and global inequalities mount, her poetry does not dwell on the past but imagines an alternative future. It insists upon the "roots" of Adivasi culture and the essential, organic, and spiritual connection to the land, the language, and the community. Her poems supply a ground for an alternative way of life, against anthropocentric worldview, which so-called main-stream society appreciates as a gateway for development.

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